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# JUNGLE

## STORIES

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**KI-GOR**—a broken Sampson, falls  
**SLAVE OF THE  
JACKAL-PRIESTESS**



A "SANDERS OF THE RIVER" STORY  
**MAGIC OF FEAR** by EDGAR WALLACE

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# JUNGLE STORIES



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## A NEW FULL-LENGTH KI-GOR NOVEL

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Spring Issue 1948

(Feb.-April)

Vol. 4, No. 2



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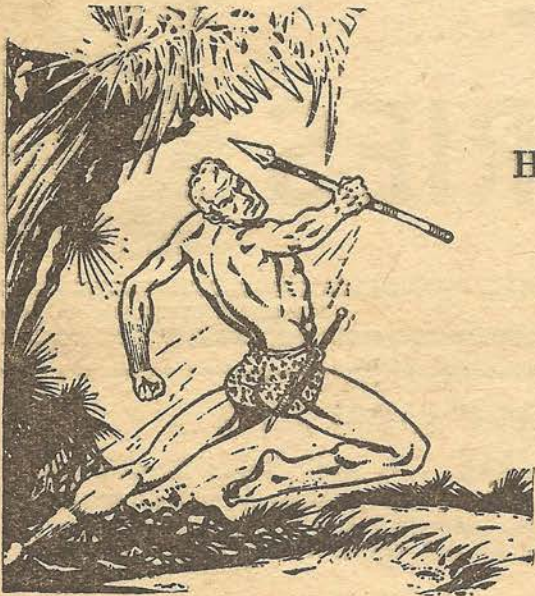


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# Who is **KI-GOR?**



When was he crowned  
**JUNGLE LORD?**

How did he find his beautiful  
mate **HELENE?**

in

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Summer, 1948 . . .

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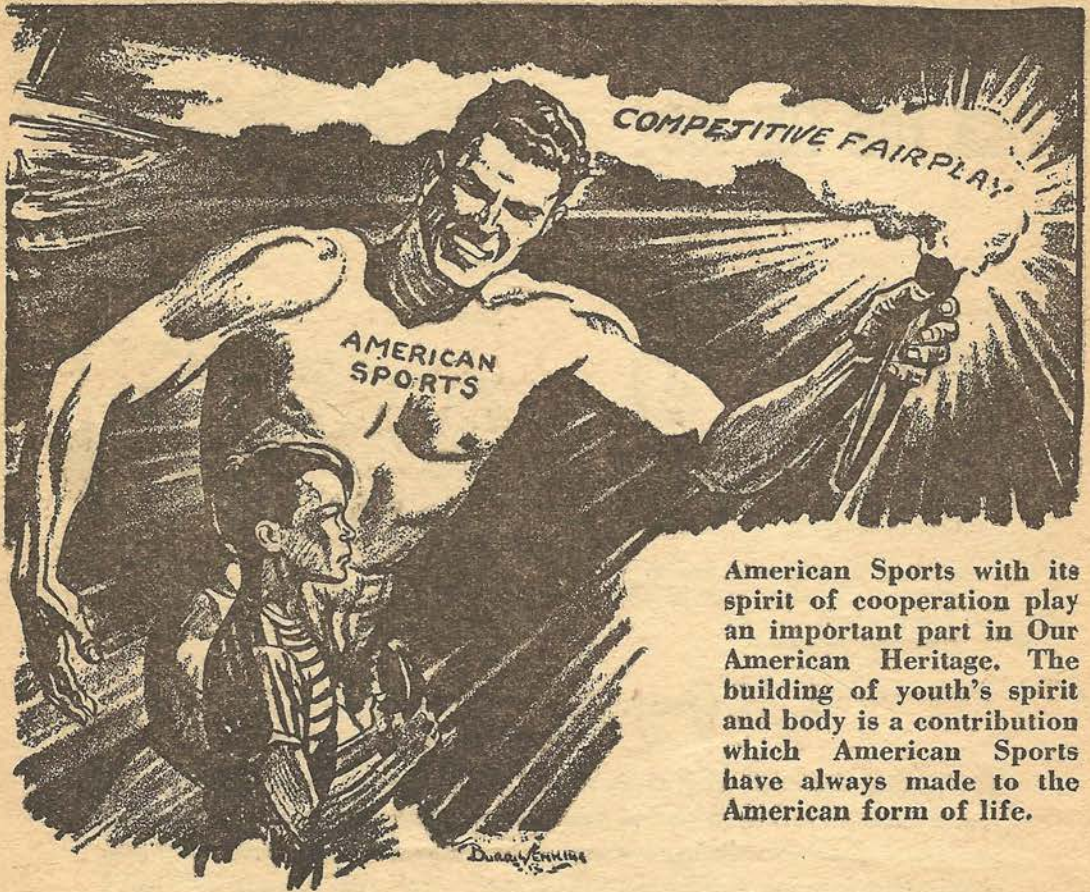
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State of New York, County of New York, ss.:

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared T. T. Scott, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the JUNGLE STORIES and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Glen-Kel Publishing Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y.; Editor, none; Managing editor, none; Business manager, T. T. Scott, 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y.

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(Signed) T. T. Scott,  
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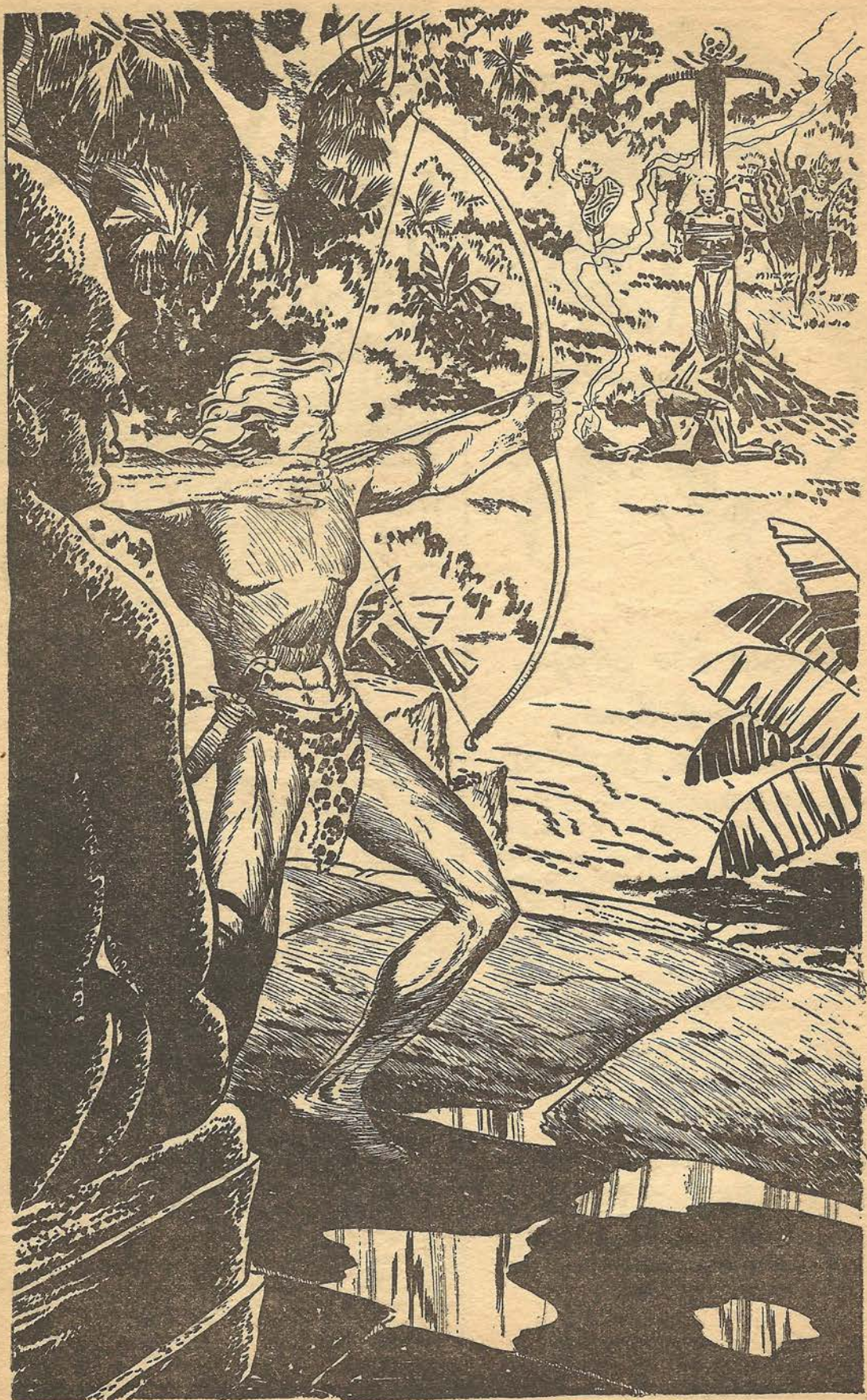
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*Ki-Gor sprang forward with bow drawn!*

# Slave of the Jackal Priestess

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

**"Death to Helene!"** The voice of Momba N'gar, Keeper of Uncounted Sorrows, thundered across the swamp where Ki-Gor struggled in helpless agony. The awful words were hot darts prodding him forward. But where? The great White Lord was blind!

**T**HE SUN RODE UP OVER THE flame-tipped, distant hills, sullen and red among the water-heavy clouds. The Tatoga drums, which throughout the night had proclaimed the approaching celebration to the fearsome diety Momba-N'gar, faltered and died away. The dawn for a moment was hollow with silence and then from out on the veldt came the thunder of stampeding rhinos disturbed at their morning feeding.

Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, stirred restlessly on his bed of grasses, awakening to the soft pressure of Helene's body cuddled close against him. He tried to draw away without disturbing her, but

she drowsily held him, her softly pouting lips telling that she was awake. He bent and kissed her.

An immensely exaggerated sigh, conveying infinite pity, drew Ki-Gor's head up. N'Geeso, chieftain of the pygmies, stood ten strides away, watching the jungle couple with a pained expression.

"Wah! Always it is the same," the little man sputtered, "the larger the man, the greater fool a woman can make of him."

He stared moodily down the thinly wooded slope and off across the veldt which stretched away from the edge of the timber.



"It would be useless, no doubt, to mention that the morning flees away, that the bellies of my men writhe and growl with hunger. Hai! Sometimes I wonder if we will ever reach the Tatoga kraal."

Ki-Gor smiled at the note of hopelessness which his small friend managed to inject into his voice. Actually, as the White Lord well knew, the only reason N'Geeso was up and about was that he had chosen the dawn watch for himself. His three hands of warriors still slept on the slope just beyond the White Lord's sight.

"Aye, it would be useless," smiled Helene, wriggling closer to Ki-Gor to inspire a new outburst from N'Geeso.

But the expected jest died in the pygmy leader's throat. The easy manner dropped away from him. He bent forward, hawklike, his keen, quick glance stabbing far out on the plain.

"Swiftly, Ki-Gor! What is this thing the sun reveals?" exclaimed the pygmy.

Two gunshots in the distance lent urgent emphasis to N'Geeso's words. Ki-Gor's spear came to his hand as he vaulted up, sprinted to his small friend's side.

He located in the grey morning light black dots cutting straight, unvarying furrows through the grass as they headed toward the slope on which he stood.

Ki-Gor drew his breath in sharply. A white man, naked to the waist, whipped a lurching, exhausted mount through the tall grass. On either side of him ran two black retainers, stumbling and reeling as they fought to keep their balance by holding to their master's saddle.

But the three ran a losing race, for behind them like a hunger maddened dog-pack, eight black warriors coursed with furious, unflinching speed. A glance at the warriors, oiled and painted for battle, with their yellow-plumed headdresses bobbing and leaping, told Ki-Gor that they were Ochari from far south of the veldt. It was unusual for so small a raiding party to penetrate this far from its own lands.

N'Geeso roused his sleeping warriors with a shout, but there was no longer alarm in his voice or manner. The eight Ochari didn't live who would dare come against the deadly blowguns of sixteen pygmies. As his men flung upward from

their sleeping mats, weapons tight-gripped and ready in their hands, a thin smile of approval touched N'Geeso's lips.

He pointed toward the veldt. "The dangos will catch their prey before they get this far," he explained, "but it is well to let them see our numbers in case this easy kill gives them false ideas of courage."

"We must aid them," Ki-Gor declared, for his code was not that of the black men.

N'Geeso's tone was utterly calm. "It's no use. The horse is done. We can't reach them in time."

"We can try!" Ki-Gor said, and without waiting for the pygmy's agreement, he sprinted down the slope.

N'Geeso looked at his men, giving his shoulders a helpless shrug as though to say, "It is foolish, but we must honor Ki-Gor." They grinned, not at all displeased by the chance to throw a scare into the boastful Ochari.

Then with a rallying cry, N'Geeso suddenly darted into action, skittering down the slope like a thrown stone. Pell mell behind him came the fierce little demons who called him leader and their high, wavering yells reached out over the veldt.

THE white man lashing toward the slope heard them and his head shot up in alarm. His first thought obviously, was that a band of Ochari had gotten in front of him. But when he saw that the newcomers were pygmies led by a bronzed giant of his own race his whip rose and fell across his horse with renewed vigor.

The Ochari heard, too, and realizing that the pygmies intended to snatch their prey from them, they spurted forward in a desperate drive to make their kill before N'Geeso's men could interfere. Close they came, until two of them were running almost within spear throw of the horse's flanks. The white man seemed to go wild with fear at the thought of being dragged down so near to safety.

Ki-Gor saw him suddenly, shockingly, raise his whip and beat at one of his retainers hanging to his saddle. He rained blows over the native, trying to free his horse of the exhausted man's weight. But though the black screamed with pain he held on, stumbling and dragging as the careening mount pulled him along.



In an excess of rage, the rider leaned in the saddle and pounded the black with his fists. The horseman was a huge man, with tremendous shoulders and arms, and even from a distance, Ki-Gor could see the native shudder under the powerful blows. Abruptly, the black collapsed, knocked senseless by the beating.

His legs dragged for a moment and then his hand came away from the saddle. He tumbled over and over, his course traced by tossing grass. The Ochari flung onto the fallen black, their spears hammering a savage rhythm as they ripped out his life.

Ki-Gor's lips tightened as he sprinted down the last of the grade. He couldn't understand how any man, even to save himself, could so brutally throw away the life of another. But his personal feelings did not lessen his resolve to drive off the Ochari.

He was on flat ground now, the flashing beat of his long, steel-muscled legs rising to an ever higher pitch. In all the jungle, no man had ever been able to equal the White Lord's speed in a foot race. He was close to the white man then, able to see clearly the contorted, fear-torn face pressed low over the foam-flecked horse's head.

"Pull up!" Ki-Gor cried. "Together we can stand them off!"

If the man heard, he gave no sign. If anything, the brutal rise and fall of his lash speeded up. Ki-Gor felt a spurt of anger as he realized the man meant to spur past and leave him to face the blacks alone. The White Lord sheered off, his steps slowing.

"Pull up," he roared, "or by the gods, I'll let them have you!"

With the pygmies coming up behind them, Ki-Gor knew that a brief show of fight would suffice to turn the Ochari. Ki-Gor's threat inspired a strange and unexpected reaction in the horseman. A babble of incoherent curses ripped from his lips, and he swung his horse straight at the White Lord.

Ki-Gor's eyes were ice-grey slits as he saw the madman meant to ride him down. The White Lord swayed as he ran, his right arm whipping back and up, the shovel-bladed Masai war spear poised for a cast which would tumble the horse.

But the spent animal saved Ki-Gor the trouble. As it tried to make the abrupt turn dictated by its master, its trembling legs gave way. Horse and rider came down in a turning, twisting heap. And the black who had been running with one arm gripped to the saddle screamed in a high, feminine voice and was thrown off to the side.

Ki-Gor in that moment received a double shock. As the huge-shouldered rider dove through the air, the jungle man saw the whole of his body for the first time. The high grass had previously blocked off a view of any more than his chest and head. The strange horseman was legless. His massive torso ended in two leather stumps.

And the black who screamed was a young girl, her slim, naked body red-slashed where grass and thorn had torn her during her flight.

When the horseman hit the ground, he mowed through the grass head first for a good ten yards, grating to a halt almost at Ki-Gor's feet. He lay still, his face a mass of small cuts, blood streaming from his nose and mouth. His eyes rolled back in his head and he breathed in hard, convulsive gasps. His whip remained tightly gripped in his hand.

The girl was lost to view in the grass, but her weak whinnies of fear told Ki-Gor she lived. The horse threshed twice and lay still, its neck broken in the fall. Ki-Gor instantly regretted his harsh words to the man. A helpless cripple, choking with fear, couldn't be held as accountable as a normal man.

A yell of triumph went up from the Ochari. Like bounding cats they moved in to strike.

They had caught glimpses of the fair-skinned warrior who ran ahead of the pygmies, but this area was far from Ki-Gor's usual range, and it did not occur to them that it was the White Lord who opposed them. The two leading blacks split apart, one turning to block away Ki-Gor, while the other raced on to slay the unconscious horseman.

The White Lord wasted no time on words. The Ochari were a lawless crew, forever raiding and plundering weaker tribes, heeding no authority but their own fierce chieftain.



As the painted warrior came leaping over the dead horse, his spear raised for the cast, he got a clear view of the bronzed giant hurtling toward him. The black's eyes widened as he recognized his foe and surprise stayed his hand a fraction too long. Ki-Gor was in against him with the speed of a striking cobra.

The White Lord was merciful even in his wrath. Instead of stabbing with his razor-sharp Masai spear, he swung it like a club, smashing it flat against the side of the man's head. The native gave a queer burbling grunt and fell backward on the stiffening horse.

Ki-Gor whirled, grim-faced and cold, judging as he turned the distance and speed of the other native. The great spear was a dark blur in his hand so swiftly did he whip it high, and send it knifing across the top of the tall grass.

The black was within two paces of the legless man, his weapon raised for the death blow, when Ki-Gor's spear caught him in the right shoulder. It lifted him off his feet and whirled him head over heels.

**T**HE jungle man did not wait to watch the effect of his cast. Two natives he could handle, but now that he had only his knife, the six warriors coming up would make short work of him. He raced to the unconscious white man, lifted him in his arms and headed back toward the pygmies. The man was unexpectedly heavy, his thick body roped and swollen with muscles, his arms as large as the average man's thigh.

Even in his haste, Ki-Gor was struck by the man's ugliness. Every visible inch of his body except for his face was covered with tattooing, and his face was twisted and brutish. His over-sized head was shaved, revealing an oddly pointed skull. His nose was a predatory beak and his eyes were close-set beneath beetling brows.

Ki-Gor heard the crunch of dry grass and the hurt, exhausted whimpering of the girl and ran toward the sounds. He came on her so suddenly he almost tripped. She was crawling through the grass to the white man's aid. Ki-Gor was amazed that the ugly brute in his arms could command such loyalty from the girl.

When he saw her, he knew she was too

weak to run. Since Ki-Gor could not carry them both, he decided to stand and try to protect them, though he knew how hopeless his efforts would be if the Ochari continued their mad rush. There was no sound now from the pygmies, and since the grass completely swallowed their small bodies, he could not judge whether they were close enough to reach him in time.

The White Lord dropped the man beside the girl. "Lie still and I'll try to draw the Ochari away from you," he said quickly.

Then he spun and drew his long knife. He ran toward the Ochari, cutting off at an angle to pull them away from the couple. Ki-Gor was ordinarily silent in battle, but now he spat insults at the warriors as loudly and scornfully as any native.

"Dangos! Sons of dangos! Foul eaters of carrions!"

He baited the Ochari with all the choice invective gathered in a lifetime of association with those masters of the insult, the pygmies. Shrilling their rage, the blacks swung toward him. A spear plunged past his ear, the whirr of its passage a thin whisper of death.

A black, his face hideously distorted with hate, came at Ki-Gor with long, reaching bounds. The warrior gripped his spear with both hands, braced for the shock of the cruel point ripping upward to disembowel the White Lord. For an instant, it appeared the jungle man would fling himself directly on the point. He looked like a sure target for the black.

But the White Lord, as soon as the man lunged, twisted wraith-like before the blow. He slid past the spear, a quick, side chop of his knife helping to send the shaft grating harmlessly past his hip. Before the black was aware he had missed, Ki-Gor rocketed against him.

The impact lifted the heavy warrior like a rag doll and threw him back against the spear of the man behind him. By the time the black screamed, Ki-Gor had cut away to the side, using the bodies of the two entangled men to block the other four natives. Only his phenomenal speed and agility kept him from death.

The blacks sprayed on either side of him and as their spears lifted he knew at least one of the four casts would be good.



He had occupied them, led them away from the hidden couple, but now his life was to be forfeited.

"He is mine!" snarled a lean, tall warrior, his eyes gleaming with the knowledge that he could not miss. The other three held back their spears, waiting.

"Haiiee!" he screamed in an ecstasy of hate, and the muscles of his back were wriggling eels beneath the ebony skin. His throwing arm tensed, the wrist tight-swollen as he started the deadly throw.

Then he gave a queer, rigid leap, reeling sideways in the air. His spear drooped unthrown in a hand that no longer had any strength. His legs carried on with their running motion. He fell jerkily into the grass. The only sound he made was an eerie gurgling.

A pygmy war cry splintered the air as the Ochari leader went down. From every side spurted the small black warriors, their terrible blowguns pressed to their lips. The Ochari had delayed too long, tricked by the utter silence with which the pygmies had made their approach.

The tall warriors had no need to see N'Geeso's men to know they were lost. More than the most deadly poisonous snake, they feared the venom-tipped darts of the pygmies.

"Mercy!" pleaded a grey-faced native, dropping to his knees, his spear falling forgotten to the ground.

A dik-dik deer could not have passed through that ring of trigger-tense pygmies and lived.

"Peace! Mercy!" echoed the wavering cries.

At N'Geeso's harsh command the pygmies froze where they stood, their lips cupped about their blowguns, their breathing cautious and shallow so that at every moment they were ready to puff the darts on their way.

"For those who would kill Ki-Gor, there is no mercy," N'Geeso spat in contempt. "You had fair warning to turn away. Now you shall die the death you willed for the White Lord and your stinking bodies will lie here to feed your brothers, the scavengers."

"Believe us, O Great Ones," quavered one of the Ochari, "we did not know him for the White Lord."

"Faugh," the disgusted N'Geeso snorted

at the weak lie.

"Let us live," begged another. "We will be your slaves. We will serve you faithfully."

"My people keep no slaves," the pygmy leader declared. "But enough of this sniveling. The time of your death is come!"

His lips went to his blowgun. The pygmy code was hard and unyielding. He had purposely delayed slaying the men for a few moments so they might taste remorse to the fullest for their attempt on his friend's life. There was no softness in N'Geese where Ki-Gor was concerned.

**B**UT now the White Lord, who also had been netted by the circle of pygmies, spoke up. "Wait," he ordered. "Dead men give little information. I would know how these cowards come to be so far from home, and why they would murder a legless man and his servants."

N'Geeso hesitated, and then reluctantly lowered his blowgun. He plucked a knife from the rawhide strand which supported his breechclout, balanced it in his hand. It was his way of submitting to Ki-Gor's wishes without losing face.

"You heard the White Lord," he said fiercely. "I will split the tongue of the first who lies."

The Ochari were terrified of N'Geeso, and realizing that their slender chance to live depended on winning Ki-Gor's favor, they talked freely. The White Lord was known to be merciful to prisoners.

"The Legless One broke faith with us," stuttered the warrior who had been the first to surrender. "He came to us with many presents, saying if we would heed his counsel, we could all be rich in cattle, ivory and slaves. But when our chief refused to agree to his demands for warriors and authority, he grew sullen and would not go on with the plan. Then one morning we awoke to find that he had fled, taking five of our Tatoga slaves with him. Our chief commanded that we find and kill him, and so we have come many marches on his trail. We have cut down all except the girl and him."

Ki-Gor questioned the blacks further on the supposed plan which would have made them rich, but they said they knew none of the details.

Ki-Gor smiled bleakly. "It is the Tato-



ga's place, not ours, to pass judgment on them. Send two hands of your men on with them to the Tatoga kraal. Have them tell Chief Nonooko we will bring the girl and the white man later after their hurts have been given treatment at Tom Parson's post."

The chief would be pleased to get the Ochari prisoners and Ki-Gor was anxious to gain the goodwill of the old man. The Tatoga were a large and vigorous tribe and the whole purpose of Ki-Gor's trek was to bind them to the pact of peace into which he gradually was drawing all the larger tribes.

The Tatoga had many legends of a time long ago when they had ruled a vast territory, and this vague memory of former greatness made them hold aloof from their neighbors.

Ki-Gor knew that this pride would someday cause trouble.

The White Lord had never been friendly with the Tatoga. Messengers he sent inviting Nonooko to peace councils with the Masai and pygmies returned with polite evasions from the wary old chifetai. So now Ki-Gor came himself at the time of the Tatoga's most important occasion, the celebration in honor of the dread god, Momba-N'gar.

"This will put Nanooko in our debt," Ki-Gor explained to N'Geeso. "It will guarantee us a hearing."

He pointed out where the pygmies would find the two wounded Ochari and the one he had knocked senseless with his spear. The only casualty was the leader. The other three would recover. As the prisoners carrying their wounded were herded off toward the kraal, Ki-Gor reclaimed his spear and strode back to his two new charges.

He found Helene had come down from the slope with a gourd of water and was washing the dirt from the girl's cuts. The ugly man was still unconscious.

**Y**OU won't let him die?" pleaded the native girl when she saw Ki-Gor.

She possessed unusual beauty for a native, beauty according to the white man's standards. She was slim, with firm, delicately formed breasts, a long, tapering waist and the sensuous hips of a dancer. Her legs were long and straight. But it

was her color that was most unusual; it was a deep golden brown like richly creamed coffee.

She lay on her side, her body glistening from the water with which Helene had washed her. There was more in her voice than a mere plea for a man who had been kind to her.

Again Ki-Gor was struck with wonder that this ugly, helpless man could inspire such feelings in the girl.

"It may be serious," warned Helene. "He hasn't stirred."

"We'll do our best for him," promised Ki-Gor. "Tom Parson runs a trading post a few miles from here. He understands such things and has many medicines. We'll take him there."

He prepared to start.

"The saddle," the girl said urgently. "We must take it. He can do nothing without it." She rose painfully to her feet and struggled toward the dead horse.

Ki-Gor took over the job from the sore-muscled girl and uncinched the saddle. It was an oddly made leather affair with a kind of harness which fitted about the lower part of the legless man's body. One of the straps had broken when the horse fell, enabling the fellow to get clear.

But Ki-Gor was most intrigued by the curved, highly-polished piece of wood fastened to the saddle.

"What's this," he asked the girl as he examined the implement.

"A throwing stick," she replied. "It is much finer than the ones used by my people. This stick, if it misses, comes back to its user's hand. He had more, but he used them up as he did his bullets trying to keep the Ochari away."

Her face hardened, her eyes like murky flame as she spoke of the long chase.

"They were like a pack of dingos hanging on our heels night and day," she remembered. "This morning they knew we had little left to fight with. They attacked at dawn and only three of us got away alive."

Her tawny face was cold, cruel.

Ki-Gor thought then of the black the white man had beaten away from the horse and left to die. How did the girl feel about that?

"It was better he should die than the White One," she replied coldly.



## II

FOR EVEN AN ECCENTRIC MAN, Tom Parson acted queerly when the sweating pygmies laid their burden on the warped table in his trading room. He stared fixedly at the vast, tattooed bulk of the legless man, not moving a muscle for the space of a minute. Then, gone suddenly white, he whirled on Ki-Gor.

"Why bring him to me?" he cried angrily. "What do you expect me to do?"

He could have been drunk because a half empty bottle of gin and a fly-rimmed glass stood beside the chair he had been occupying. But night or day a similar bottle and glass usually was within arm's reach of Parson. It's hard to judge the degree of a man's sobriety when you've never really seen him sober.

"He was hurt trying to help five Tatoga slaves escape their Ochari masters," Ki-Gor said quietly, knowing the trader was dependent on the goodwill of the Tatoga.

Parson walked to the door, spat out into the dust. He was a small, thin man, stooped and frail. He was garbed in a loose pair of white duck pants, bunched in large folds at the waist by a tightly buckled belt. He was barefooted and he wore no shirt.

"Take him downriver to the settlement," he said tautly, making an effort to control himself. "They'll know there how to treat him."

"But that's a week's trip by fast canoe," protested Helene. "He might never survive it."

"No matter," said Parson in a clipped, unsympathetic tone. Then as though he abruptly realized how callous he sounded, he turned, half-pleading. "I can treat cuts, maybe a broken leg, but I don't know anything about internal injuries. He's probably crushed some way. He'll be sure to die if you depend on me to treat him."

He turned his head, his glance stealing back to the injured man, furtive and guilty.

The White Lord's face grew expressionless, but a new watchfulness came into his manner as though his senses were exploring, feeling for a hidden thing which hovered in the room.

"What kind of a man are you to refuse even to see whether you can do any-

thing," Helene said angrily. "Certainly, you can look at him. We don't expect miracles, only ordinary decency. Then if he dies, no one will blame you."

Parson brushed a hand nervously through his thin, faded remnants of hair. He appeared to be undergoing some inner struggle.

"I guess you're right," he said, after a long hesitation. "No one can blame me." There were pale blotches in his drink-mottled face.

He went slowly toward the legless man, his tongue nervously flicking his dry lips. His hands hovered uncertainly for a second, then he bent over the man, began to go over him inch by inch. To Ki-Gor and the pygmies there was nothing unusual in the way Parson checked the fellow. They took it for granted that he had a skill above theirs in such matters.

But Helene saw that Parson's fingers, awkward and fumbling at first, gradually seemed to gain an intelligence of their own. Fascinated, she moved close behind the trader. She had seen trained doctors at work before, and there was no denying





the trained, intent way in which Parson checked the patient who had been forced on him.

This odd, frail man who had lost himself in the Congo had all the earmarks of a trained physician. She looked more closely at his face, seeing the fine features lying blurred beneath the mottled skin.

What upheaval in his life could cause him to voluntarily bury himself in this sun-baked post, eking out an existence by trading cheap cloth and trinkets for the few marketable objects brought to him by the black men?

Standing so near, Helene could not help but see the legless man's eyes flutter open and stare up at the person working over him. His lids fluttered weakly as he fought to hold them open and focus his gaze.

Abruptly his mouth quirked faintly. His lips curled as though trying to form a word, but the effort was too much for him. He slid back into unconsciousness.

Parson stood looking down at the hurt man. His hands were still, held as they had been when the man's eyes first opened. The trader's body blocked away Ki-Gor and N'Geeso's view so that they hadn't witnessed the flicker of life displayed by the patient.

"What do you think?" asked Ki-Gor, understanding from the trader's attitude that he was finished.

"I don't know. I'm not sure," answered Parson hollowly. "He'd be a tough one to kill, I'd say, but that fall may do it."

Helene had moved away by the time Parson turned and walked over to his chair. He let himself down on the edge of the chair gingerly, his hand groping for the gin bottle. There were beads of sweat on his forehead. He tilted the bottle, then let it run down his throat in great gulps, his puckered face showing no pleasure in the taste.

"Leave him here with me a few days," he said. "I'll do what I can."

"Good," Ki-Gor declared warmly. "We'll stay around, too. We're several days early for the Tatoga celebration."

Parson wiped his hands on his pants, staring at the legless man.

"The God of Death," he murmured huskily, "the Dark God, Keeper of Un-counted Sorrows, Fountain of All Evil."

"What's that?" asked Ki-Gor, wonder-

ing at the cause of this strange outburst. Parson looked up and blinked as though he hadn't realized he had spoken aloud.

"I was thinking of the Tatoga celebration," he hastily explained. "Apparently you don't know the real reason it is held. In typically human fashion, instead of giving thanks to one of the gods who do good things for them, the Tatoga hold their greatest celebration to pay homage—and thereby to impress and placate—their worst god, Momba-N'gar. I was merely remembering a few of his many titles."

He tilted the bottle and drank again. Helene glanced questioningly at the White Lord. Was a man whose mind moved so irrationally capable of giving medical care to anyone?

"Shouldn't you be doing something for him?" Helene ventured uncertainly, gesturing toward the patient.

"Eh?" Parson roused momentarily from his moody reflections. "Oh, yes, but I've got to think what the proper thing is I should do." Then his mind reverted to the Tatoga celebration again.

"Momba-N'gar!" he repeated the name several times to himself, and on his tongue it had an ugly sound. "You know, Ki-Gor, I've heard it said that men fashion their gods in their own likenesses. I don't believe that. I think scholars have got the cart before the horse."

He squinted at Ki-Gor, his expression deadly serious.

"The gods are the unchanging quantity and I think they do all the fashioning," he declared. "And occasionally it suits their fancy to fashion a man in their exact likeness and to bestow on him certain of their powers."

Ki-Gor tried to smile, but his manner betrayed his impatience.

"You doubt that, don't you, Ki-Gor?" said Parson. "Well, after you get a look at the image of Momba-N'gar you won't. That man on the table is his exact likeness." He clucked his tongue. "The god who has no need of legs because all men in their time will seek him out of their own accord."

Parson got up, shaking his head to emphasize the importance of what he had said.

"Yes, sir," he continued, "and it's the furthest thing in the world from a coin-



vidence, which most fools would call it. It's a carefully planned fact." He walked toward the room where he slept. "But there's one thing a god will never duplicate in his likeness. That's the god's own immortality. The god won't ever carry his little joke, whether good or bad, that far, and we can damn well be thankful for that selfish reservation."

THEY could hear him muttering to himself in the next room as he gathered up the materials he needed for the legless man. Helene shook her head and whispered to her Ki-Gor.

"It's a shame to see him talk like a fool," she said, "when you realize what he must have been at one time. He still shows evidences of great skill, despite what he's done to himself."

The White Lord fingered his chin thoughtfully. "He uses too many words," he said simply. "I get lost before I can find his meaning."

The only pygmy who understood any English at all was N'Geeso and he knew just a smattering of simple words. He had listened admiringly, but without understanding, to Parson's flow of language.

"He is a great wizard," he commented in an awed voice, "to drink so much of the burning water and walk without staggering."

Apparently the Tatoga girl was also both impressed and frightened by Parson. Not until he left the room did she creep forward to stare at the legless man. The moment Parson reappeared, she retreated to a corner again. And during the next three days and nights, while Parson drank ever larger quantities of gin and minis-



tered to his patient, the girl hovered always in the room, silent and increasingly distressed, for the legless man failed to come out of his coma.

Late the third night, the girl slipped from the room without a word and disappeared. When her absence was discovered, it was found the legless man's saddle was also gone.

"She has given him up," muttered N'Geeso, "and small wonder, with him growing more limp every day. He's finished."

But if Parson thought the same thing, he gave no evidence of it. He continued to sit in his chair, drinking and muttering, seldom stirring except to work over the patient. Hunched there, bearded and dirty from his unceasing vigil, he waved away anyone who came in and tried to relieve him.

But by the fifth night, though he insisted everyone else go to bed, he was so exhausted he dozed constantly. Ki-Gor slept in the next room and twice before midnight he awakened and went in to find the trader snoring. The patient's condition was unchanged, so the jungle Lord didn't disturb Parson. Then, toward dawn, Ki-Gor awakened a third time, roused from his light sleep by a noise in the trading room.

He started to get up, but after listening a bit, he decided it was only the trader shuffling about and relaxed. At daybreak, he was brought leaping from his bed by a hoarse cry from Parson. Running into the room, he found the trader almost





hysterical, pointing with a shaking hand to the empty table.

"He's gone!" he cried. "Do you hear me, he's gone—disappeared!"

Parson tried to take a step toward the door, but his legs gave under him, and he would have fallen but for Ki-Gor. The White Lord could feel how violently the man was trembling.

"I tried to keep awake," he wailed, "but I must have dozed. It's my fault. I failed."

Ki-Gor was bewildered at the way Parson took on. He helped him to sit down, and gently but firmly held him in the chair.

"You've nothing to blame yourself about," he explained. "He can't have gone far. He probably roused enough to get off the table, and being dazed and sick, he crawled out of the room without knowing what he was doing."

Ki-Gor's words fell on deaf ears. Parson was inconsolable. Helene had come up by then, and she tried to explain that if the fellow could actually get away from the house, it proved the trader's treatment was successful.

"Why, you know a man in his condition couldn't get many yards away," she stated. "Ki-Gor and the pygmies will find him within a few minutes."

"There's no use to search, I tell you," moaned Parson. "He's gone, completely gone. This is the finish for me."

Seeing that the only way he could quiet the trader was to quickly produce the legless man, Ki-Gor called the pygmies from their encampment a hundred yards away from the house and set them to searching. The hard-packed earth about the post, trodden solid by countless bare feet, gave no hint of the direction the hurt man had taken, but the pygmies were so confident they would find him close by that they were unworried about the lack of spoor.

Like nervous, brown dogs they circled through the brush. They were the jungle's best trackers and Ki-Gor did not think it even necessary to join them. He stood by the post, waiting for the cry which would tell of the legless man's discovery. But as the minutes drained away, the noise of the searching pygmies receded further and further into the jungle and

a puzzled frown grew on the White Lord's face.

Ki-Gor joined the search, combing the area with the care of a hunting leopard. A grimness was in his manner, for where the pygmies had searched for a man, the White Lord searched for the track of a flesh-eating animal powerful enough to carry off a man. He was convinced that a jungle prowler had come on the dazed patient.

After a fruitless day-long search, he returned to the post without a single definite clue. To all appearances, the sick man had disappeared into thin air, but Ki-Gor knew how devilishly clever a python or a hungry cat could be.

"The killer will come back," Ki-Gor warned. "You must have walls about the post. Animals grow bold after an easy kill." He was thinking how often Parson was alone, his senses fogged with drink.

"Yes, he will come back," the trader said listlessly.

"To repay you for your trouble," the White Lord offered, "we'll put up a stockade for you tomorrow."

Parson looked away into the deepening night. Across the jungle came the angry trumpeting of an elephant. Near at hand a lion belligerently answered the challenge.

"Why trouble?" he muttered. "Against Momba-N'gar there is no defense, except what's in a man himself. Who should know that better than me?" His bloodshot eyes swept the empty table. "And after today, I don't really care any more."

Instead of sobering him, Ki-Gor thought, the tragedy had had the opposite effect. It was peculiar that he should take so hard the death of a man whom he had callously refused to treat in the beginning, but then Parson hadn't acted very rationally in any regard.

"Look," Ki-Gor pointed out, "we feel as badly as you do about losing that fellow. But it's done now and the best we can do is see that the same thing isn't repeated again. How about your getting some sleep and we'll save the talking for tomorrow."

"You mean well, Ki-Gor," Parson said thickly, "but sleep is no protection either. Neither sleep nor walls nor anything a



man can build. You see, there's a weakness in men which makes them go out to Momba-N'gar of their own accord. No matter what defenses they build, they always leave a secret door through which they can one day slip out to him." He rubbed his hand across his sweat-dampened face. "That's why he doesn't have to have any legs. He doesn't have to hunt down men. In time, they'll search him out themselves."

He stared for a moment at Ki-Gor in dead seriousness, and then his lids closed and he crumpled slowly back in his chair. When Ki-Gor lifted him, he was snoring. He didn't awaken all night, but the White Lord several times was tempted to rouse him, for Parson rolled and turned unceasingly, moaning and crying out in his sleep. Ki-Gor couldn't help but wonder at the terror which stalked his dreams. The effects of his heavy drinking and the shock of losing his patient had so shaken him mentally that he apparently confused the legless man and Momba-N'gar, the Tatoga god, as being one and the same.

### III

CHIEF Nanooko had been a tall, powerful warrior in his youth, but age had eaten the flesh from his bones and bent his once straight back. In a land where men die young, he had seen the great rains come and go so many times that even he long since had lost the measure of his years.

He received Ki-Gor in the great council house, with the faded shields and grinning skulls of Tatoga enemies he had vanquished in his youth cluttering the circular thatch walls. The men of his personal guard, with their tailed shields of lion-skin and their zebra-skin capes stood like rooted trees every four yards about the single large room. A score of his young wives, their plump bodies gleaming with oil, sat about him.

And to his right, apart from the other women, knelt the young woman Ki-Gor had rescued from the Ochari. She was to the others as a great tawny butterfly to drab moths. She was motionless, her head bowed respectfully, but the effect was that of the butterfly consciously dis-



playing its beauty. Her sensuousness reached out through the room.

Nanooko looked asleep as Ki-Gor approached him. He slumped deep in a huge bamboo chair, his chin dropped on his sunken chest, his breathing so shallow as to be hardly noticeable. Ki-Gor intoned the customary flowery greetings and praises, and then in the lengthening silence waited uncomfortably.

At last the lids slid upward in the wrinkled face. Like charred points of wood the old eyes watched him.

"So you are the man who thought to chain Momba-N'gar in sleep," Nanooko suddenly accused.

Ki-Gor was too astonished to speak. He had come expecting a warm welcome, even gratitude, for taking the Tatoga's part against the Ochari. Then out of thin air he was stabbed with this ridiculous charge.

"Hai! You are surprised, I know," declared the chieftain. "Fool, to think you could hide your guilt! Greater fool, to think that when time after time without end Momba-N'gar chooses to come among his people that any man, let alone a white man, could best him."

The primitive black men, especially aged leaders like Nanooko who had known unlimited authority throughout their lives, were often unpredictable. Ki-Gor tried to gather his wits. This might be the tortured attempt at humor of a ruler whose most feeble sally invariably brought roars of laughter from his subjects.

"This is some joke of the mighty Bull Elephant?" Ki-Gor inquired.

"I never joke when I am about to sentence a man to die," the old one snapped.

The guards held their places as before, their eyes blank and unseeing, but the White Lord's trained glance saw how



their leg muscles stood out in stronger relief, how their fingers on the spears whitened with tension. They were ready to spring at the faintest signal from their chieftain.

Something was wrong, badly wrong. Ki-Gor was in real danger and his only hope was to spar for time until he could find out what this was all about. He thought of Helene and the pygmies waiting in the guest huts with no suspicion of Nanooko's hostility. The chieftain had been clever. His emissaries had welcomed them in the friendliest manner, swamping them with food and gifts.

"Perhaps you do not know me, Nanooko," Ki-Gor said boldly, and he attached no titles now to the chieftain's name. "I do not die so easily. I came in friendship, expecting to meet a chieftain of great wisdom and honor."

He raised a slow, accusing finger at the old man.

"Instead, I find a talking bird imprisoned in a fine cage, repeating with no mind of its own the ridiculous words taught it by others. Let me speak to the real ruler of the Tatoga. Let me speak to the one who teaches the bird to utter its words."

The lash of Ki-Gor's words wrapped around the shrunken frame, stung it upright. Anger comes quick and hot to men long accustomed to meek, unquestioning submission.

"By the gods," he quavered, "I alone rule here! No man dares call me a talking bird. I add torture to your sentence of death."

Ki-Gor's laugh was harsh and mocking.

"You speak threats, old man," he cried, "but you are afraid to speak your false charges, to say out plainly what lying thing it is you accuse me of doing. Aaaaa-eee, it would never do for your wives and warriors to see how easily Ki-Gor punctures with the truth this puffed-up bladder of lies which someone has thrust into your hand."

Nanooko tottered to his feet, shaking with rage.

As he rose, his warriors swayed forward to smother the White Lord with their great numbers.

And so perfectly composed was the jungle man that not one of those within

the council house guessed that within his heart he was certain he had lost.

"Women and warriors," Ki-Gor called, "remember this day when Nanooko was called a weakling led by the nose into injustice and he could not prove it otherwise!"

"Hold, hold!" shrilled the frothing old leader to his guards. "Bring in the wizards, the elders and my captains. This dango shall get more than he bargained for, and when he crawls on his belly in fear at the things I know against him, then shall he be given over to the ants to be eaten until his bare bones gleam in the sun."

Nanooko fell back in his chair, gasping for breath. He fluttered a hand weakly at one of his wives and she pressed a gourd of beer to his lips. He drank long, sucking draughts, oblivious of the twin streams which foamed from the corners of his mouth and splashed upon his skinny chest. By the time he was finished, those he had summoned stood in their appointed places.

"Where is Gita, my chief wizard?" demanded the old man.

A squat man with the face of a cheetah leaped forward. His rattling strings of amulets and bones were disarranged from the haste with which he had come. He held by the wrong end the wand he used for smelling out wrong-doers.

"What were the portents you spoke of to me concerning Momba-N'gar?" demanded Nanooko of the wizard.

Gita's eyes flicked the White Lord, rested a moment on the serene face of the girl who knelt to the right of the chieftain, and then he bowed low.

"Three dawns the sun rose like a wash of blood," he said without hesitation, "and I came to you saying there were strange voices in the wind, voices of the long-dead crying the name of Momba-N'gar."

"And you thought on my words awhile and then you bade me go to my hut and call on the fathers of Nanooko to tell the meaning of this thing.

"And lo, it was as you said, for your fathers came to me in the night saying Momba-N'gar came abroad in the land, smelling out the enemies of the Tatoga"—his glance touched the White Lord



meaningfully—"whether black or white. And your fathers said Momba-N'gar would no longer be a stone image enshrined in the Cave of Death, but would be a god of flesh and blood come down among us to lead us to glory and riches."

Gita's voice dropped away, and he stepped back as though finished. Nanooko leaned forward impatiently.

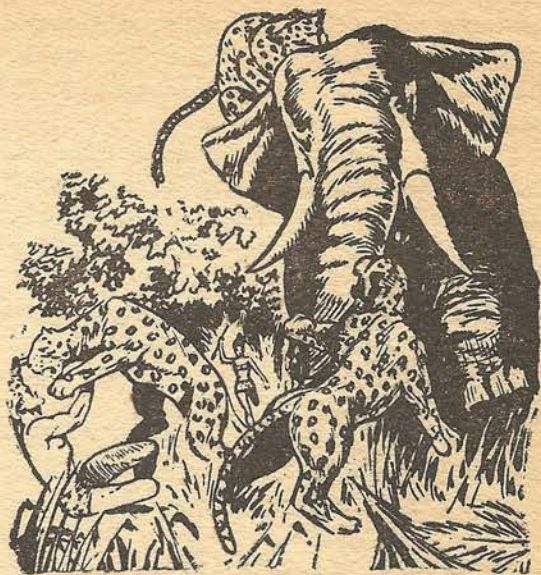
"Yes, yes," he said irritably, "but what about Ki-Gor?"

The wizard expelled his breath slowly as though reluctant to speak. But the White Lord did not miss the slyness in his face. There was no doubting Gita had a role in some shrewd game against the jungle man.

"Your fathers said a white man known as Ki-Gor was trying even then to keep Momba-N'gar from the Tatoga," Gita said softly. "They said he was the god's sworn enemy, and that to gain the good will of the god, we should not let him leave our kraal alive. They said Momba-N'gar watched to see whether this Ki-Gor deceived us with his false tongue."

As Ki-Gor listened, his mind darted back to Tom Parson mumbling drunkenly about Momba-N'gar and he thought he saw his first clue to the origin of this foolish mumbo-jumbo. What alcohol had done for Parson, childish superstition and the excitement of their coming celebration had done for the Tatoga. The jungle man had seen it happen before. A tale based on a true happening flew through the jungle, stretched and distorted by every retelling, until it lost all semblance of truth.

Blacks had seen him bring the legless man to the trading post. Unseen eyes



were often watching in the jungle, and a man without legs was novelty enough to set native tongues to wagging. After that, it had taken only the malice of the wizard, Gita, to twist the tale to Ki-Gor's disadvantage.

The witchdoctors in every part of the Congo hated the White Lord, because he laughed at their vaunted magic and tried to lighten the yoke of superstition they fastened on the black men. Like some evil guild, they worked constantly to discredit him.

Now that he understood, Ki-Gor's tension eased. The truth had been kept from the old chieftain. Since the White Lord could prove his story by the pygmies, Parson, the Ochari prisoners and the Tatoga girl who had been so loyal to the legless man, he could easily show up the witchdoctor. To save his own face before his subjects, Nanooko would deal severely with Gita.

"Hai!" cried the old man triumphantly. "What say you now, white man?"

"I say I can see the serpent who poisons your thoughts," returned the White Lord. "Hear the truth that you may judge where the forked tongue lies!"

And Ki-Gor told in full how he had rescued the legless man, acting out the story in the native fashion. The old chieftain motioned for his warriors to listen, so there was no interruption. Gita ostentatiously looked at the ceiling, a doubting smirk on his face.

As he finished, the jungle man spread





his arms wide. "Any of those who were with me can tell that this is the truth. I saved the life of that girl. Give her leave to speak."

Nanooko's chuckle was the rustle of dead leaves in the wind. He looked around the room to see whether any present yet appreciated how cleverly he was handling the white man.

"Ah!" he said. "It is not the custom for a mere woman to be heard in Tatoga councils, but Nanooko is a generous man, so I will make an exception."

He crooked a finger at the girl. She crawled forward on hands and knees. His old eyes ran over her lissome body, not without appreciation.

"Sepah was the wife of my favorite son, the one who would have ruled after me if the sleeping fever had not come upon him," he said. "A raiding party of Ochari captured her while she was still mourning him. Her word I believe as though it were my son's." He touched the girl's head with a bony finger. "Speak, my daughter," he commanded gently.

Sepah raised her head and looked into the old man's face. Then Ki-Gor learned the unexpected venom that lay buried in her beauty.

"IT was Momba-N'gar himself who saved me, O Lord," she said loudly. "He toyed with the Ochari, leading them on so they would fall into your hands. When he saw this Ki-Gor coming to interfere, he said, 'There is a false one, an enemy who would keep me from the Tatoga, and I will prove it to you.'"

She trembled and began to weep as though overcome with emotion. She raised herself up, so the old man could see the whole of her beauty. Astounded by her lies, Ki-Gor could only listen open-mouthed.

"The god told me," she continued, "that Ki-Gor would try with white man's juju to cast a sleep upon him and thus keep him a prisoner. So I would know this for the truth, he let the white man think he had triumphed and he played that he was senseless and let himself be carried to the trader's house. There, the trader put further poison in his veins to deepen his sleep. But just when they thought they had the god in their power, he

laughed at them and disappeared into the night."

Ki-Gor's face flushed with anger. "She lies," he accused. "Bring the Ochari prisoners I sent you! They will tell how close they were to killing this girl and the legless man. Bring the pygmies without telling them what transpires here and ask them about their part in saving this worthless woman."

Nanooko's eyelids were closed. He spoke without opening them, spoke in his dry, dead voice.

"You apparently know that the Ochari are safely dead," he intoned. Had he been less confused, Ki-Gor would have guessed before he spoke that the secret plotters would have silenced the prisoners. Nanooko went on: "They died in agony soon after their arrival, slain by the unseen hand of Momba-N'gar. And the pygmies, of course, are in league with you, so their words are nothing."

Ki-Gor was trapped by lies. And desperately as he squirmed, the trap grew tighter. Suddenly, he remembered Parson. The Tatoga had known the trader for many years and would believe him. He knew he could count on Parson to tell the truth.

"You have traded with Parson for many, many moons," he hurriedly told Nanooko. "No one has ever known him to say an untrue thing. Bring him and let him disprove this girl's story."

"You make a harder death for yourself with every delay," Nanooko promised grimly, "but it shall be as you ask." He nodded at Gita. "Bring in the man who trades."

Ki-Gor immediately sensed another trick, and he was right. The witchdoctor had planned too carefully for him. Gita had taken the precaution of bringing Parson secretly to the kraal under armed guard and had seen that he was given more than enough to drink. He had two of his assistants lead the trader in, supporting him to keep him from falling. Parson was blind drunk.

"The girl saw you stick shining poison darts into the Legless One and each time his sleep grew deeper," said Nanooko to the trader. "You meant to keep him chained in sleep! Is this not so?"

Parson swayed unsteadily in the grip



of the two blacks, his face a dull grey. "With such abruptness that he almost pitched forward, he shook his head up and down in assent.

"I don't deny it," he said thickly. "Sure, I shot 'im full of the stuff. He's full of evil. When Ki-Gor brought 'im in unconscious, I thought I could do it, but like a fool I let 'im get away."

His voice died away to a murmur as he went on talking to himself. Ki-Gor confronted Parson, thinking he might reach into that fogged mind long enough to make the trader realize that by his statement he also was condemning himself to death.

"Think what you're saying, Parson," he warned. "Tell them the truth. Tell them that you were treating him—trying to make him well."

Parson studied him blearily. "I fooled you because you trusted me," he muttered. "But the girl, she didn't trust me. She saw how every time I punched 'im with the hyperdermic, he sank lower. I thought she was too dumb to understand, but they fool you, these blacks, about what they know. Sure, I meant to kill 'im. My mistake was in trying to be clever, in trying to do it so gradual no one would catch on."

Ki-Gor dropped his hands from Parson, shocked to think that the mild little trader would have deliberately tried to kill a helpless man. Then as he remembered that actually Parson hadn't killed the fellow, he tried once more to rally the trader's wits.

"But you didn't kill him," he cried. "Tell them the truth, that you dozed off and some animal got him."

Parson wagged his hand in disagreement, sagging back against the two natives.

"No animal got 'im," he declared. "He's the devil himself. Somehow he got outta there under his own power and he's lying around in the bush somewhere right now, gathering his strength and laughing at me. You'll see! He'll be back to taunt me."

Nanooko motioned to the guards and they led Parson out of the council house.

"I've been more than just with you, Ki-Gor," said Nanooko. "I've given you every chance you asked to prove your



innocence and in every instance you've failed. I've done this because your name in the jungle is great and I wish all men to know that you were given justice."

He paused, his lips pursed over his almost toothless gums. Nanooko's anger had faded. He was pleased with his show of benevolence now that he had been so thoroughly proved right in his accusations.

"Are you ready to admit your crime against Momba-N'gar?" he questioned.

Ki-Gor was silent so long that the spectators waited breathlessly, feeling at last he meant to make a clean breast of his deed. But he did not answer the question directly.

"**Y**OU are above all other chieftains in shrewdness," Ki-Gor said quietly. "You are indeed a just man." The compliments guaranteed that Nanooko would not interrupt him. "To your credit also I would say that more times than any man in the tribe have you looked in worship upon Momba-N'gar in the Cave of Death. Your legends say that one day Momba-N'gar will turn back into flesh and blood to lead the Tatoga and on every visit you have looked to see if the change has come."

Softened by the flattery, Nanooko nodded approvingly. "I have done that," he said proudly. "I know his look better than that of my sons."



Ki-Gor drew a long breath. He was at the end of his rope. This was a last blind gamble he took in the hope of saving himself. The wizard, Gita, seemed to sense that the White Lord was up to some stratagem and his bird-bright eyes grew watchful.

"Is it not true, then, O Wise Ruler," Ki-Gor demanded loudly, "that if Momba-N'gar has turned himself to flesh and blood he will no longer sit as a stone image in the Cave of Death." The question caught the old man unprepared. "Momba-N'gar cannot walk the jungle as your wizard claims and yet at the same time sit unchanged in the cave! Is this not true?"

"Why, yes, that is true," the old man frowningly admitted, stroking his chin thoughtfully, "but what has that to do with you?"

"Just this," snapped Ki-Gor, before Gita could understand what he was about. "If the stone god still sits in the cave, then he has not come back as flesh and blood, and if he has not come back, then I could not have tried to slay him."

He paused an instant for the old man to digest his words. Then he darted a finger straight at the wizard. He didn't know for sure whether Gita had removed the stone god, but from the expression on the witchdoctor's face, he surmised he hadn't.

"Let us all go together to the Cave of Death," he proposed. "If the image is not there, then I will confess my guilt."

Gita leaped before the chieftain, crying that the white man was trying to blind them with his deceptions. Ki-Gor was very close to the wizard and his right arm snaked out and closed about the man's neck before a single guard could move.

"What do you fear, Gita?" he roared. "Either Momba-N'gar is alive or he isn't! You say he lives, so let us go and see."

His steel fingers, in the brief interval they circled Gita's throat, managed to exert enough pressure to insure the witchdoctor's silence for a time. Gita choked and gasped, but he could not manage a word after Ki-Gor released him.

The network of wrinkles on Nanooko's forehead deepened, and he sucked nervously at his lower lip. He motioned a wife to hold another gourd of beer to

his mouth and while he drank his sunken eyes peered over the rim, first at Ki-Gor and then at his chief wizard. All the while his frown deepened.

Then abruptly he pushed the beer gourd away. "We will go and see," he said softly. "Yes, when the noonday heat is passed, we will go."

#### IV

NANOOKO traveled as a great lord should. A beat of drums went before him so the jungle should know of his coming. Shoulder to shoulder about him massed the tall men of his guard, fierce, hard warriors who would have stood and died before a rhino's sudden charge to protect their chieftain.

The bush about the procession quivered with the passage of disturbed animals. Brilliant-hued birds cried harsh protests and spun away to safer haunts. And in the trees above the marching men bands of monkeys kept pace like profane urchins.

But to all these barbaric trappings Nanooko was oblivious. He lay sleeping, his head rolling with the sway of the litter on which he was carried. He saw nothing of the broad, worn path which led to the Cave of Death. The effort of the primitive trial had exhausted him.

This sight emphasized to Ki-Gor how feeble was Nanooko's grasp on the reins of power. Other hands were reaching, slyly but with stern resolution, for those reins. That was what lay behind the ridiculous charges saddled on him. Those who sought the power knew Ki-Gor's reputation and feared that he would interfere.

The path wound through a grey, ancient grove of baobab trees and opened into a broad, damp clearing. On the far side of the clearing rose the moss and fern-covered face of a bluff. From unnumbered places on the cliff started small springs.

But from the top of the cliff in the very center flung a shimmering sheet of water a hundred feet across. It hurtled down to shatter into spray on a great flat rock and then gush off on either side into a deep, clear pool which protected the bluff like a moat. The flat rock lay over the pool, joining cliff and clearing as would a lowered drawbridge.

The roar of the water awakened Nanoo-



ko. He raised his hand and the procession halted. He was helped from his litter, and together with all his men, knelt facing the cliff. By their actions, Ki-Gor knew this must be the place holy to Momba-N'gar, but his eyes could discover no cave holding the god's image.

While he was puzzling, the wizard, Gita, crawled forward on his knees to the edge of the fall. Above the sound of the water Ki-Gor could catch faint snatches of his chanting. To his surprise, Gita's voice began to grow clearer, and then Ki-Gor saw the reason.

The flow of water was lessening as the man chanted. As though his words were drying up the fall, it began to lose force, dwindling until only a few dying streams spattered from the cliff. And revealed where it had been covered by the waterfall was the Cave of Death, the dread place of Momba-N'gar.

One by one, the heads of the kneeling warriors came up and they stared at that cold, perpetually wet place in the rock. Each of them saw, but they held their tongues. Gita turned nervously to steal a look at Nanooko. But of all that crowd the old chieftain alone as yet had seen nothing. His eyes were too dim to make out objects at any distance.

Nanooko got painfully to his feet, and steadying himself on the arm of a guard, walked out to the slab of rock which bridged the way to the cavern. He squinted a few moments and then spoke without turning.

"This is very strange, Gita," he said in his slow, dead voice. "What have you to say?"

The wizard's mouth opened and closed, but his mind had no word to put in his throat. A greyness seeped into his face and he grew increasingly disturbed.

Limned against the darkness of the cavern was the image of the legless god. He sat there life-sized, carved of a queer brown stone traced over with tiny veins of color. The image was only vaguely seen, for besides the greenish patches of fungus which mottled its body, the whole figure was wreathed in twisting veils of mist which rolled from the cavern.

There was undeniable evil in every line, in the very posture, of the squat, huge-shouldered image, and its eerie setting

lent added power to the effect. Ki-Gor better understood now the grasp which Momba-N'gar had on the Tatoga, and he saw, too, how with the use of very little imagination Parson could compare the legless man to this savage deity in looks.

But with his own life at stake, Ki-Gor quickly turned his thoughts from the idol to Nanooko. "How, O Great Bull of the Tatoga," he demanded, "can I be guilty of offending a god come to life, when you see with your own eyes that Momba-N'gar sits unchanged as he has since the world was young?"

Nanooko was trapped by Ki-Gor's simple logic. Because of his whole-hearted faith in Gita and Sepah, he had allowed his captains, his chief officials and most of his bodyguard to come out to witness his humbling of Ki-Gor. Had he brought only a few trusted men, he could have gotten out of his embarrassing position by dispatching Ki-Gor and hushing up the whole matter. But his boast of being the most just of chieftains was at test before too many of his people, and he would lose face if he gave the White Lord anything but justice.

He growled deep in his throat and stared at Gita, his expression plainly saying, "You got me into this, now get me out!" The wizard began to sweat, and for all his cunning, he could only sputter vague nothings.

"I—I know not what to say," the old chieftain finally began to Ki-Gor, and there was the look of death in his eyes as he peered at Gita. "My word is my word, and . . ."

**B**UT before he could finish the statement setting Ki-Gor free, Sepah's slim, full-breasted figure broke from the mass of warriors and sped up on the rock beside him.

"The god rouses!" she shouted hysterically. Then she flung herself down on her belly on the wet stone, shrilling aloud the name, "Momba-N'gar". Frenziedly, she began to wriggle forward toward the mist-wreathed image.

Nanooko reeled around unsteadily and tottered after her, straining his blurred eyes to learn what it was she saw. An awed, fearful murmur went up from the crowd. And Ki-Gor, with a muffled ex-



climation of disbelief, saw his last chance for life snatched away.

In the heart of the mists, the stone image stirred, raising high its heavy arms. The eyes had opened and stared, yellow and luminous, at the cowering black men. The ugly bullet-head turned with slow deliberation first to one side and then to the other.

"Go down on your face, Nanooko," thundered the image, "when you approach the God of Death!"

Struck through with fright, the old man gave a high, wavering whinny and threw his brittle bones into the wet. He was so overcome by the magnitude of the thing he was witnessing that he could only lie gasping. As one man, the Tatoga warriors followed their chieftain's example.

"Momba-N'gar is come back to lead the Tatoga!" rumbled the voice from the cavern.

Ki-Gor was as startled as the blacks for a moment. For all of his scorn of native juju, queer prickles ran up and down his spine. Reason told him it could not be, but his eyes saw the stone figure come to life. But when the god spoke, Ki-Gor immediately knew the truth.

The god spoke the Tatoga tongue with a white man's accents, the same accents which had tinged the wild curses of the legless horseman on the veldt when he tried to ride the White Lord down. The legless man himself was Ki-Gor's enemy, this man whose life the White Lord had tried to save, whom he had thought tragically dead.

Ki-Gor made no effort then to pierce the web of treachery spun by the white man and his assistants. That could come later. A cold, deadly anger shook him. He swore to himself that he would live to smash whatever plan his loathsome opponent sought to execute.

He tore his eyes away from the cavern. All about him the Tatoga warriors lay prostrate, moaning and stealing glances at the awful deity which spoke to them. For generations, the tribe had looked forward to the god's awakening and now they were awe-struck.

For the first moment since he had entered the council house that morning, the White Lord was unguarded. In his desire to impress and frighten the old

chieftain, the legless man had commanded him to fall on his face, not realizing that Nanooko's followers would hasten to follow suit.

Before the legless man grasped his mistake, Ki-Gor leaped over the bodies of his guards and sped straight through the whole pack of grovelling blacks, heading for the jungle. He moved like an antelope, his feet barely seeming to touch the ground as he strained to gain every last particle of advantage from the surprise of his move.

"Ki-Gor escapes!" shrieked the legless man in an abrupt departure from his god-like demeanor. "Up dangos! Stop him or every one of you dies!"

Like maniacal ants the blacks swarmed up from the ground. Ki-Gor counted on the confusion to protect him a second longer. He didn't deviate from his chosen path an inch. As the blacks came up around him, he lowered his head and plowed straight through them. He was near the outer fringe of the crowd and since he bent low, only those warriors close by could see him.

An enraged water buffalo would have struck with no more devastation. He put his head and shoulders into men in all attitudes of rising, the shivering power of his charge scattering them to either side. Sprawling and kicking as they fell, not knowing what had hit them. He was through all of them then, except for two blacks who had lingered behind their fellows.

The two managed to stand upright in time to see the great-thewed giant hurtling at them. But before they could collect their senses enough to raise their spears, he dove at knee level at the nearest man. The fellow beat downward with his doubled fists, but the leopard swiftness of the jungle man brought him in too fast for the black's slower reflexes.

Ki-Gor hit solidly, swinging his body broadside as a football blocker does. The native's legs held firm for a fraction, then he spun high, screaming in pain as bone and tendon ripped loose. The White Lord hit flat on the ground, but the layers of muscle encasing his chest and belly absorbed the rocking blow like shock absorbers.

His spread fingers caught the earth



before he had ceased sliding. They dug deep, and he whirled himself about, lashing out with his feet at the second black. The man was coming in on him when Ki-Gor's heels exploded in his face. The warrior's neck snapped with the sudden, explosive break of dry bamboo.

The native catapulted backward, his legs making loose, wild motions. By the time he fell, Ki-Gor had leaped past him and was driving for the trees thirty yards away. But brief as the delay had been, it was long enough for the mass of warriors to shed their confusion. They came in long, bounding leaps across the clearing, whipped by their of Momba-N'gar.

**K**I-GOR didn't look back. His ears told him how close was the race he ran with death. He poured his whole strength into the effort of running. A spear ripped past him, then two more. The first arrow sped dangerously close, its passage a hot burn against his arm.

Then the trees were dead ahead and the barbs were spanging into the wood, throwing splinters of bark. Fire touched him twice against his thigh and he knew his luck was running out as bowmen got the range. He gathered himself in a final volcanic surge, bounded over the nearest cluster of baobab roots, straining to get around the monster tree so the trunk would briefly shield him.

He cursed the blacks who had cut away the brush about their holy place. The wall of liana, bamboo and bramble which ordinarily would have grown there would have given him safety. Missiles whipped the air about him, rattled against the branches and still he lived to run.

Then he was past the giant cluster of roots. He spun to the left, turning to bring the baobab tree at his back until he could pierce deeper into the forest. With an exultant thrill, he knew that another step and he would be safe, for once in the jungle no man among the Tatoga could hope to catch him.

He lifted in the final bound which would place him beyond reach of the missiles, and in that fleeting interval, Fate turned its face away from him. A heavy spear caromed against the baobab tree. Traveling at full tilt, it ricocheted, turning sideways in the air.

The haft of the spear, just below the point, hit Ki-Gor across the forehead. It hit him with the force of a club, ripped viciously for a yard of its smooth-surfaced length, and still had force enough to spin off at a crazy angle.

Ki-Gor never knew what hit him. The sky exploded in his face, disintegrated in a dazzling burst of light like a thousand bursting comets. Then abruptly total darkness engulfed him and he went down in the nerveless drop of a poled ox. He lay in a limp huddle, not hearing the fierce, elated cry with which the Tatoga marked his fall.

But his was the instinct of a wild creature, and it was this instinct, this impulse welling out of bone and heart and flesh, which came to the fore now when all other senses were dormant. As a buck felled by a bullet will come to its feet to run again, so did Ki-Gor suddenly claw drunkenly to his hands and knees. His mind had no part in the action.

Instinct cried to him to flee, ripped through the pain and darkness with a terrible urgency. He reeled up, staggered forward on rubbery legs. He ran against a tree and fell. He wanted fervently to lie still, to give way to the aching sickness which engulfed him, but that inner lash beat him upright.

He staggered into a run, sobbing with effort, his glassy eyes seeing only vague blurs. He drove into and over things, but the very act of moving pumped new strength into him. It was like a nightmare of some horrible, unending chase.

Afterward, Ki-Gor was never to know how long he had kept on nor by what paths he had gone. He had been a wounded animal blindly seeking escape. His feet had thought for him. There was a blank in his memory from the time he spun to get behind the baobab tree until the next morning when he awakened to find himself huddled under a thorn bush in a narrow, deep ravine.

He awoke to the dull throb of pain in his head. He lay face down, and his body was a mass of bruises and aches. He crawled from beneath the bush, and anxious to know where he was, climbed the precipitous, difficult wall of the ravine. When he reached the top, he was winded and flung himself down to rest. A heavy



mist that alternately cleared and deepened seemed to lay over the area about him. He blinked his eyes, trying to probe through the fog and identify his surroundings.

He raised a hand to his aching forehead. His fingers touched a great blood-crusted welt. It came back then, the scene in the clearing, his break for freedom and the sudden, crushing blow which had blotted out everything. Where was he? How had he gotten here?

He strained to penetrate the dancing mist. And abruptly he realized the truth.

There was no mist! It was his eyes! The blurred greyness lay entirely within his own vision!

Ki-Gor sat stone still, and the steady, powerful beat of his heart faltered. Drop by drop, the poison of fear gathered in his throat, trickled with acid hotness into his tight-cramped stomach. For the first time in his life, the White Lord knew what it was to be afraid.

Blindness to him meant helplessness, and in the jungle the helpless swiftly died. It was not the thought of his own fate that made him afraid. It was thought of his beloved mate, Helene, of his pygmy friends, and of the countless humble black men who would know death and torture if he did not survive.

Without his sight he could not hope to outwit for long the fanged killers of the forest, let alone deal with the unprincipled adventurer who called himself Momba-N'gar. By now Helene was held prisoner by the legless man, and knowing of Ki-Gor's escape, she would be waiting for her husband to come to her aid. N'Geeso, too, if he still lived, would be watching for him, placing his trust in the White Lord who had never been known to fail a friend.

The thought of all that depended on him brought Ki-Gor to his feet. Perhaps if he treated the wound on his head that grey curtain before his eyes would dissipate. He started in search of herbs with which to dress the wound, but panic grew in his heart as he stumbled over roots, walked into shrubs, moved time after time into blind alleys of foliage.

And as the panic grew, he exerted himself all the more, using sheer physical strength to bull his way through the under-

brush. He was like an animal mad with pain. He forgot the reason of his search. He tore and smashed at every obstacle, the sweat pouring from him and his heart pounding. And steadily the greyness about him thickened, shading deeper until suddenly he was in utter darkness.

The shock of that stygian blackness brought him to his senses. He stopped, his hands going over his eyes. He stood like that for long, dreadful minutes. Then without a sound he slowly sank down on the forest floor, burying his face in his arms.

Ki-Gor was completely blind.

## V

**R**UNNERS had gone ahead to prepare the Tatoga for the god's coming. George Duran, for such was one of the legless man's better known names, waited until dusk to make his entry into the kraal. Then, preceded by booming drums, he was borne out of the jungle on Chief Nanooko's litter.

Sepah and the chief wizard had done their work well. Duran's last fears of failure were swept away by the sight that greeted him. The silent, frightened throng of blacks took one look at him in the half-light and flung themselves moaning to the ground.

A wild, brutal joy gripped Duran. This was the power he had always dreamed of, the power of a god, and to think that a mere chance meeting with that greedy, ambitious black wench Sepah had opened the door to all this. He had seen her in the Ochari kraal and by a judicious use of gifts had arranged with her master to have her sent for his entertainment.

By all the devils, she had entertained him all right, but more than that she had proposed this venture at the very time his bargaining with the Ochari had reached an impasse. He had thought it preposterous at first, but the unscrupulous little baggage had proved her point by taking him out to the pens where the male slaves were kept. The Tatoga men, when he played the part Sepah had coached him in, hailed him as the god, Momba-N'gar, come to deliver them from the Ochari. Since the last of his funds had gone for the gifts wasted on the Ochari and he



couldn't risk showing his face in any of the port towns, he had decided to take the gamble proposed by the girl.

He could thank the girl for everything, if he were the "thanking kind". But Duran was under no delusions as to the reason for Sepah's loyalty. She thought she had him fooled, but he knew they were two of a kind. He was the instrument through which she could gain the wealth and power for which she hungered, and to gain her ends she would passionately embrace the devil himself.

His eyes sought out Sepah where she walked ahead of his litter, hungrily followed the sensual sway of hips. The day would come, he knew, when she would become dangerous, but until she found out that he didn't mean to be a mere stepping-stone for a black wench, he could count on her devotion.

Duran's mouth thinned cruelly. She had gotten him out of Tom Parson's hands in the nick of time. Another couple of days and that hypodermic needle would have finished him. He gave an angry grunt. Who'd ever think that spineless yellowbelly would have the guts to try to kill him. Well, that was another little matter he would take pleasure in settling.

Yeah, the girl had been right on every count except one. She had promised him that they could sew Ki-Gor up quick. He'd heard of that white ape's reputation and knew what trouble he could cause. It beat anything how the jungle man had gotten clean away, but the blacks said there was no doubt but what he was badly hurt, and Sepah already had put the best Tatoga trackers on his spoor.

It was that crockhead Nanooko's fault, anyway. If the old fool had killed him immediately as Sepah and Gita had advised, everything would have been all right. It would be best to get the fumbling old man out of the way at the earliest opportunity.

The reception he was getting eased some of the tension in his belly. Sepah had barely gotten the wizard's assistants to the cavern in time to remove the stone image and make him up for his role as a god. He had wanted to recover a little more strength before making his advent as Momba-N'gar, but necessity had left him no choice. That one close call was

enough to prove how dangerous Ki-Gor could be. If it hadn't been for Nanooko's nap, the game would have been over before it began.

Duran's attention was brought back to the immediate scene when his litter bearers mounted the steps of a platform built that afternoon before the council house. They lowered him so that he sat on the edge of the platform looking out over the prostrate blacks. He wet his lips nervously, knowing he must address his new subjects. Then Sepah was bowing low beside him, whispering the words he must say, and his feeling of confidence returned.

He spoke out to the Tatoga, reminding them of their warrior past, telling them he had returned to make them masters of the Congo. He painted glowing pictures of the food, gold and ivory which would be theirs, of the countless slaves who would take over every family's work.

"With Momba-N'gar to lead you, you are invincible," he shouted. "And for all this which I shall give you, I ask only one small thing in return: unquestioning obedience. From chieftain to child, all must obey."

Duran paused, expecting the crowd to break into approving cries. He was greeted with utter silence. His face paled. What was wrong with them? He threw a distressed look at Sepah.

"Bid them rise, master, and speak their hearts," she said softly. Her lips curved in a faintly mocking smile. "In the presence of a god, they dare make no sound without permission."

He did as she instructed. Immediately, a deafening tumult was unloosed. The blacks leaped and yelled, deliriously saluting Duran. If the god said they were to be lords of the jungle, then, of course, they wholeheartedly approved. When there was no danger of failure, no chance they might have to pay for what they did, right or wrong no longer worried them.

**A**FTER ordering the feasting to begin, Duran had himself carried into the council house which he had chosen for his quarters. He quickly got rid of Nanooko and the elders. It took longer with Gita, for he looked on himself as an equal partner in the venture. Sepah had taken the wizard into her confidence the night



she left Parson's, and his help had actually effected the scheme.

"Hai, white man, you see I handle things well," boasted Gita, speaking as an equal. "From the time I slipped into the trading post with one of my men and carried you out of the hands of death, I have successfully guided us."

Duran hid his anger at the man's familiar tone and nodded agreement. The wizard was a slippery fish and could still bring about his downfall.

"In all the days ahead, you will be my right arm," Duran said, thinking the florid native compliment would satisfy Gita.

The wizard spat on the dirt floor, and putting his arms behind his back, stared at Duran with his cheetah's face.

"Let us begin by understanding each other, white man," he said coolly. "It is you who will be *my* right arm. I do not abandon a master I can easily control to take on one I do not know. It is Gita who will be the master between the three of us."

The legless man had lived his life among dangerous, double-dealing criminals. Though the pulse-beat in his bull-like neck quickened, he maintained a remarkable outward calm. His glance shifted slowly to Sepah, but he saw by her surprise that she was not a party to Gita's cool scheme.

"And suppose I don't agree?" asked Duran, quietly studying his broad, square fingers.

"You will remember that only my assistants and I know the mysteries of the cavern," reminded Gita. "At any time I can produce the stone image in its old place and discover that you are, after all, an imposter. The fate of a man who makes mock of Momba-N'gar isn't pleasant."

From outside came the rising din of the celebration, graphically reminding Duran how easily swayed the savage black men were. The natives were accustomed to looking on Gita as their go-between with Momba-N'gar. It would take time to loosen his grip on them.

"You're no warrior, Gita," protested Sepah. "The Lord Duran understands war and looting as the white men practice it. Without his leadership, our plans are doomed."

Gita stiffened under this prick to his

boundless self-esteem. He half-turned toward the door.

"Either I lead," he threatened, "or the Tatoga hear now how you two have tricked them."

"I'm glad to follow you," Duran lied smoothly. "So long as I get my share of the loot, I don't care who gives the orders. The main thing is that we must stick together."

Gita studied Duran doubtfully.

"To prove I mean what I say," the legless man went on, "just tell me what you would like done first."

Sepah looked from one to the other of the men. She was puzzled by Duran's swift capitulation. She knew something of Gita's habits, and the thought of having to shift her allegiance to him wasn't pleasant, but if he was to be master, then she must be certain of his favor. That ugly devil of a white man wouldn't be so calm later on when he discovered he had given her away along with his power.

"Why, uh," began Gita slowly, still feeling out Duran, "I want first to get Nanooko out of the way. He's a sly old jackal and the people love him, which makes him too dangerous to have around."

"You're absolutely right," Duran swiftly agreed. He knew how to handle this savage. "Now I know you don't want to be blamed for his death, so I'll take the responsibility. Tomorrow I'll begin to complain of feeling an enemy near me. Then in a few days I'll order you to smell out this man working against me. Naturally, you'll pick out Nanooko. I'll dispose of him myself with my throwing stick."

Gita beamed. The white man had knuckled under more easily than he had expected. He had hated Nanooko all the years he had served him and he had an ingrained fear of the old man. With the chieftain dead, he would have no one to oppose his influence.

"Anything else you want?" asked Duran eagerly. He could tell the wizard had another matter in his mind which he was hesitant about revealing.

"Yes," Gita admitted, "there is." Then he launched into a long talk on the importance of his gaining face with the other tribes, of doing something striking which would impress upon them that he was a man to be reckoned with. His eyes



kept sliding past Duran's. Finally, he could delay the issue no longer.

"I want to take the White Lord's mate as my wife," he blurted. "We will have a great ceremony, and Momba-N'gar himself will perform the marriage rites. Hai!" he cried excitedly, "Every tongue in the jungle will wag when it's known I have taken Ki-Gor's woman."

Duran pulled at his lower lip, his yellow eyes drawing to thoughtful slits. According to native beliefs, the ultimate humiliation a conqueror could visit on an humbled chieftain was to take over his wives. In Ki-Gor's case, the matter would have even greater meaning, for the jungle man's fierce devotion to his red-haired mate was known throughout the Congo.

Sepah caught her breath. She wanted no rivals, especially not that golden-skinned, blue-eyed woman. With that body of hers, Helene would have both Gita and Duran around her little finger if she wished. Sepah judged all women by her own standards, and she knew from experience what a compliant slave girl could do to influence a master.

"You forget the White Lord still lives," she objected hastily. "Remember what has happened to others who desired the red-haired woman."

But Gita's quick rise in the world filled him with bravado. His lips twisted scornfully.

"So much the better that he lives," he snarled. "It will show my contempt for him."

Then he glanced narrowly at Duran, suspicious that his silence meant opposition. He half-expected that the white man would oppose his taking a woman of his race. But Duran surprised him.

"You're a clever man," rumbled Duran. "It's a wonderful idea and we'll make something big out of it." He hesitated. "But how do we get our hands on this woman?"

Gita blinked in surprise. "Why, she's a prisoner now! We caught her with Ki-Gor."

"Ohhh!" Duran murmured, cutting his eyes at Sepah. The cunning wench had neglected to tell him about Helene. He smiled inwardly. He'd show both these sly blacks a trick or so before he was through.

"Let me see," he mused. "We must do this right. Let's send messengers to every neighboring tribe informing them Momba-N'gar has returned to life and that five days hence the god will wed his favorite son, Gita, to Helene. We'll invite all the chieftains to attend. After the ceremony, we'll grab the whole bunch and hold them as hostages."

ANGRY concern was written in Sepah's expression. She saw herself being completely thrown aside. The legless man had let himself be shorn of power without a struggle and now Gita was planning to take a woman of another race.

"Yes, yes!" Gita hissed delightedly. "That's it—a big ceremony." Then he frowned. "We mustn't hold the chieftains, though. We would be shamed in the eyes of others. A guest can't be harmed unless he wrongs his host."

Duran made a deprecatory gesture. "Look, wouldn't you like to have twenty tribes calling you king? Well, you can do that if you move fast and forget about rules. What do you care about customs, so long as you win. Let the other fellows play fair and we'll play to win."

He went on to explain that with the chieftains in their hands, the leaderless tribes wouldn't dare attack them.

"We'll pick the tribes off one by one, keeping them from organizing by tying them up with long-winded conferences, promises that we're about to release their chieftains, threats about what will happen if they make a hostile move."

The small-minded wizard hadn't envisioned conquest on such magnitude. He would be a king of kings. His qualms of honor quickly succumbed to greed.

"By the gods, you're right!" he cried grandly, "what have rules to do with one such as Gita."

His eyes were glittering black beads. On dreams alone, the wizard was drunk already.

"I go to arrange for messengers, to prepare the drummers to sound the news of my marriage to the jungle." His tongue flicked over his lips. "Yes, and I will amuse myself by visiting the girl."

Duran threw up his hands in immediate disapproval.

"Remember, we must act carefully until



Nanooko is gone," he cautioned. "Show no interest in the girl. Tomorrow, before the whole tribe, I will inform her of the honor which is to be hers."

Gita hesitated and then nodded reluctant agreement. Nanooko would be furious if the wizard of his own accord molested Helene, but if Momba-N'gar suggested the marriage, the old man would have to give his approval. Gita left, muttering because for a few more days he must bend to the chieftain's desires.

A smile gathered on the legless man's ugly features as he watched the wizard go. He scratched down his hairy chest and across his paunchy stomach. He looked well pleased with himself as he turned his glance on Sepah.

"You gonna stand around posing all night," he growled. "C'mere you little filly. Why do you think I've been trying to get rid of all these apes?"

The room was illuminated with torches stuck in the dirt floor. Sepah's skin was burnished copper in the yellow light. Her only covering was a small leather apron held by a thong twisted low about her hips. Her jutting breasts rose and fell with the hard, fast sweep of her breathing.

But the emotion revealed in her face was rage. She was so angry that she was momentarily speechless. This white man had cheated her of everything she had worked for and now he thought she would come to him, wriggling with happiness.

"You filthy dango," she burst out, crawling on your belly before that weakling, Gita. So he is to be a great king, and you are to be his servant? So he is to marry that red-haired wench?" Her teeth beneath her curved lips were a cat's white fangs. "And Sepah is forgotten!"

She whirled with feline liteness and sprang toward the nearest torch. She snatched the length of wood from the ground and raised it like a club.

"I'll pay you back for this," she cried. She leaped in at him, meaning to crush his bullet head with the flaming torch.

Sepah didn't realize Duran deliberately had goaded her, curious to know how she would react. Despite his apparent absorption in Gita, he had been slyly watching her, guessing the thoughts in her mind all the while he talked with the wizard.

Duran was slightly surprised at the vio-

lence of outburst, but he wasn't caught unprepared. As the nearly-naked girl flung at him, he waited, his head hunched deep in his beefy shoulders, his huge arms spread wide to the floor. He didn't move a muscle until she was almost on him.

Then he spun himself like a great crab, pivoting his trunk by a swift, scuttling motion of his hands. He moved with an amazing agility, whipping out of the girl's way, then whirling back to grasp her slim ankle in his thick fingers. As many others had discovered too late, Sepah learned Duran was not so helpless as he looked.

She tried to turn and aim a second blow at him, but he jerked her legs from under her. The girl hit flat on her stomach, the torch rolling out of her fingers. Duran watched her lie stunned, struggling for breath. He gave an ugly chuckle and pulled her through the dirt toward him.

He ran his hand up the glossy firmness of her leg. She tried to struggle, but his rough fingers closed about her waist and he pulled her into his arms.

"So you'd kill old Duran, eh?" he taunted. Sepah was rigid with fear, not knowing what the brutish white man would do to her. "Well, my pretty cat, you must learn I'm not as stupid as you think. Here all day I've been thinking of being alone with you and in the very first minute you try to bash in my head."

"But your promises to me," she whimpered, her eyes wide with fright, "you didn't keep them. You said I was to have everything I wanted and then you let Gita bluff you. He and that cursed Helene will have everything, and I'll be no more than dirt beneath their feet."

Again the hoarse, unpleasant chuckle rose in Duran's throat.

"The only thing I'm going to give that brush-rat, Gita, is a broken neck," he growled. "You're dumb as he is. Can't you see what I'm using him for?"

Anger lashed up in Sepah, making her forget caution.

"You lie!" she accused. "I heard you promise to marry him to Helene. You'll be nothing and he'll be a king."

Duran crushed her closer, flickering lights beginning to burn in his yellow eyes.

"You said yourself the one man who could beat us was Ki-Gor," he reminded



her. "Well, I'm baiting a trap to catch him before he has time to cause trouble. He'll come out of that jungle roaring like a lion when he hears that Gita means to take his woman."

The rigidity went out of Sepah. With pleased surprise, and then open admiration, she viewed the plan.

"That will keep him from leaving the area to go get the Masai and the pygmies," she exclaimed breathlessly, "and we'll have all the local chieftains here so that he can't stir up any of the nearby tribes."

"Right!" he said. "He's fool enough to try to save her, even if he has to go it alone—and we'll be ready for him."

A question returned to Sepah's face. "What about Gita?"

Duran buried his thick lips in the softness of her shoulder. Then he raised his head, showing his stained teeth in a triumphant smile.

"I hope to let Ki-Gor kill Gita for us," he said. "That way we'll be finished with both of them at the same time. Gita is the bait, and you always let the fish swallow the bait before you pull it in."

Sepah giggled and nuzzled against him, her arms slipping about his neck. She was suddenly like a hot devouring flame. Duran allowed himself a moment of amusement at her falseness, but his half-sneer melted under her knowing attentions.

"And this Helene," she murmured in his ear, "you'll slay her, too?"

"Just trust old Duran to take care of everything and everybody," he said, grinning at the wall behind her. She gave a shrill little cry of contentment at his promise. It was well she couldn't read what was in his mind.

## VI

KI-GOR lay with his eyes tightly closed, his head buried in his arms, for more than an hour. The throbbing beat of pain through his head seemed to say with endless repetition, "*blind, blind, blind.*" At first he was unconscious of the world about him, his mind turned inward with shock.

He was cut off from everything!

But gradually the sounds and smells of the jungle crept in on him, and each one brought a picture of another small, accus-

tomed thing which he would never see again.

He smelled the subtly-sweet fragrance of the grass on which he lay, with the damp, warm odor of the brown earth pressing in behind it. He heard the darting, irregular rustle of a lizard stalking insects not a hand's reach away. Never before had the bird calls been so clear, so liquidly perfect, each carving a quick-winged image on his tightly-closed lids. In endless procession the catalogue of ordinary, but suddenly precious, jungle life continued in his mind's eye.

Vaguely, he became aware that in the far distance a signal drum had begun to talk. It was only another sound among many, touching him, evoking a picture, but stirring no thought processes. He held the drum-throb for an instant and then thrust it away to go on to the chattering exchange of two grey-ruffed monkeys and the ill-tempered, explosive grunts of a wild hog marching his family through the brush.

He drifted in a half-dream, consciously resisting real thought. The drum finished and was silent. He noted the gap it left in the pattern of noise and then forgot it. But the jungle telegraph, because of tricks played by forest and wind and distance, often is uncertain and black men must repeat important messages over and over until there can be no mistake in meaning.

Gradually the drumming bored into his hurt stupor and from sheer habit he caught occasional words and phrases, not willing it, but piecing the drum-taps automatically into meaning. Like an electric shock one of these disconnected words blasted him out of his lethargy. He swept aside all other noises, reached with straining ears for the drum-talk.

His face twisted with hate as he listened. He leaped to his feet, the great muscles of his body taut with his fury. It was Helene the drum spoke of!

The Tatoga drummer boasted to the jungle that the living god, Momba-N'gar, would give Helene in marriage to the wizard, Gita, five suns hence. Gita had beaten the cowardly White Lord, had run him trembling into the forest, the drummer said, and the marriage was a sign to all that Ki-Gor's power was forever broken.

In his wrath, Ki-Gor forget himself. His eyes were wide-open, staring at the



lanes of trees, the thick-banked, teeming greenery of the undergrowth. He started running toward the drum, his one thought being to find Gita and kill him with his bare hands. And he wasn't blundering and falling now. He sped with his old sureness down tiny game trails, searching out passages through the jungle where another man would have been helplessly blocked.

He didn't realize he was seeing again, seeing with normal clarity, until suddenly the light about him flickered and went grey. Mist seemed to leap up out of the jungle floor, wavering clouds of it, smothering out the sun. Then the grey deepened and Ki-Gor reeled to a stop, slamming against a tree just as utter darkness swallowed the world.

He gave a sick, agonized cry against this thing he could not fight. Even his anger could not hold against the tortured wretchedness that gripped him as he realized anew that he was too helpless to even reach his mate, let alone save her. Then as his mind steadied, he saw that for a time his eyes had been all right. The blindness had been gone when he leaped up under the lash of the drum message. Why could he see one minute and the next be totally blind?

He forced himself to be calm while step by step he went back to the time he had awakened that morning. The first hint of trouble was when he climbed out of the ravine. He grew panicky and tried to push his way through the jungle. Then was when he went totally blind. After that, he rested quietly until he heard the drum, and leaping up he found he could see as well as ever, yet after running a few hundred yards he was once more plunged into blackness.

The answer sprang out at him: so long as his mind and body were at rest, his eyes functioned all right, but physical exertion combined with mental turmoil somehow blacked out his vision.

And before another hour passed, Ki-Gor proved this surmise true. After he rested, his eyes cleared. He found that by going at a cautious walk, only the faintest mist danced before him. A trot thickened the mist and the exertion of running swiftly brought full blindness.

Beside a stream, he found the herbs he wanted and made a poultice for his head.

Then he set out for the Tatoga kraal. The journey, which tree-travel would have allowed him to make in a half day, took him until noon of the next day. Tatoga warriors prowled ever path near the kraal, keeping a look-out for Ki-Gor. It required all his rich jungle lore to worm his way past these blacks. But at last the job was done and he climbed into the cover of a tree near the village.

He could hear a babble of excited native voices, the plunging beat of hooves and the legless man's roaring laugh. He climbed higher in the branches until he could see into the central clearing. The sight that greeted him broke the iron control which he had maintained for hours, sent the angry blood plunging through his veins with such violence that the blindness struck him again.

UNDER the cool shade of a thatch pavilion sat the legless man drinking native beer with Tom Parson. By their look and by the number of gourds scattered around them, they had been busy for a long time with the bitter, potent brew. Sepah tended their wants, purring about the legless man like a well-fed cat.

But Duran wasted no attention on Sepah. His eyes were riveted delightedly on the clearing, where he was staging some brutal show for his twisted pleasure. On one side, N'Geeso and his pygmies were held at spear point by Nanooko's giant guards, whom Duran had taken over for his own, while across the clearing more guards held seven zebra. Duran was forcing the pygmies to ride bare-backed and without even a halter to aid them, he was screeching with glee as the wild ponies threw the small men and tried to trample them.

The Tatoga fancied the taste of zebra meat and often journeyed to the veldt to trap them alive. In a tour of the kraal that morning, Duran spotted the ponies in their pen. It occurred to him that if he could break one of the stubborn little animals, he would be able to get about for himself instead of having to be carried on the litter. From that idea to making the pygmies risk their lives on the ponies had been an easy, natural step for Duran.

All of the pygmies except N'Geeso had been forced to ride when Ki-Gor climbed



into his vantage point. Duran had saved the pygmy chieftain for the last, and had taken a sadistic pleasure in taunting the little man every time one of his warriors was thrown. Though N'Geeso was seething inside, he never deigned to show the least emotion at Duran's insults.

"Let's see the little rooster keep his dignity on that largest pony," cried the legless man.

Six guards, hanging on desperately, led the wildest of the zebras to the center of the clearing. The tatoga warriors pressed closer, anxious to see the rock-hard pygmy leader's nerve broken.

"Get up there, you little dango," roared Duran.

N'Geeso stared unflinchingly at his tormentor. He folded his arms across his chest and spat disdainfully in the dust.

"Offal of a jackal," he said coldly, "the sun will never rise on the day when N'Geeso dances to your music."

A dead silence slammed over the watching blacks. It was unthinkable that a mere man should so address Momba-N'gar. They were stunned, waiting for their dread god to splinter N'Geeso with lightning. Duran blinked dully, caught off-guard by this unexpected show of resistance from a man completely at his mercy.

He noted how the crowd froze, realized that they watched to see how he acquitted himself. He could have the pygmy slain, but then he felt the little man would die the victor, for he openly invited death rather than submit to Duran's order. To save his face, he must bring N'Geeso to his knees.

"Have you lost your voice?" sneered N'Geeso. "Go on and order these cowardly women you call warriors to use their spears. This is the only kind of killing they are capable of doing, a hundred spears against an unarmed man." He snorted with contempt. "Aaaieee!! They will need to learn how a man should die, because for this day's work, Ki-Gor's blade will take a terrible toll of this soft-bellied pack."

Duran's face purpled, the veins of his tremendous neck swelling with rage. His eye fell on Gita, and seeing the wizard, he had a sudden inspiration. He'd show the Tatoga how Duran could bring this barking terrier to heel.

"Bring out the red-haired woman," he ordered, concealing his true feelings with a silken tone. "We will let her ride until N'Geeso changes his mind about amusing us."

He saw the quick look of fear which came over N'Geeso, and he bellowed with delight. Ha! He'd caught the pygmy in his soft place. The little chieftain would eat dirt now, because he could never bear to see Helene mistreated. Though at first Duran had meant only to bluff N'Geeso into riding, he was so pleased at seeing his victim squirm, that he decided to actually make the girl ride.

Gita, who had been enjoying the sadistic proceedings immensely, abruptly changed his tack when he saw his soon-to-be property endangered. He rushed to Duran's side, a mixture of anger and concern on his features.

"This cannot be!" he hissed into Duran's ear. "The girl will be killed, or at very best, badly injured!"

But Duran had had enough to drink so that he didn't care what the wizard said or did. He waved Gita away, "Stop worrying me, you faker," he snarled. "I'm running this show. Fool with me and I'll put you on a zebra."

**G**ITA stumbled back aghast. He was a coward by nature. With Duran's slapping him out of the way so unhesitatingly and with the crowd excitedly acclaiming the spectacle decreed by their master, he didn't have the nerve to protest further. In contrast to the wizard, Sepah was beside herself with glee. Nothing would please her more than to see the white woman's hateful beauty shredded under the zebra's hooves.

And strangely enough, the one person in that whole turbulent crowd who was wholly calm, wholly self-possessed, was the slim, long-limbed girl who was the cause of the whole storm. She strode into the clearing with her head held high, her cool blue eyes looking neither to right nor left. Judging by her manner, the guards clustered about her were an escort of honor.

Duran was disappointed if he thought to see fear on her face. Though she was paler than normal, she stared off toward the jungle while the legless man told her



she must ride the maddened zebra.

"You have your great and good friend N'Geeso to thank for this," he added venomously.

N'Geeso's control broke. No physical torture could have shaken him. He would have died under the whip before asking for mercy, but he could not bear to see the White Lord's mate mistreated on his account.

"Wait!" he cried. "Leave Helene alone, and I'll do whatever you say."

Duran pounded one great fist delightfully into his palm, his harsh laugh echoing over the kraal.

"So you change your tune, do you?" he gibed. "Well, we'll see about your riding later—after we're through with the wench!"

N'Geeso, trembling with the desire to smash Duran with his bare fists, fought to regain his voice. Helene saw that the pygmy meant to degrade himself further in an attempt to save her.

"Enough, old friend," she called to him. "Am I not the wife of Ki-Gor? No matter what happens, I forbid you to beg before that aasvoel on my account! After all, is not the zebra preferable to that greasy Gita?"

Heartbroken because he was so helpless, the pygmy blinked back tears and nodded acquiescence. Helene spoke the cold truth when she said that it was better for Ki-Gor's woman to die this way than to fall into Gita's hands.

Helene shrugged away the guards eagerly thrusting her toward the zebra. Her gesture spoke both her personal courage and her contempt for the thronging spectators. She strode to the knot of blacks straining to hold the maddened pony. Without the least hesitation, she leaped astride the animal, dug her heels into its belly.

Crouched on a limb, the White Lord fought to still the hot blood thundering in his head, building a dark curtain before his eyes. His sharp ears had caught every word spoken by the legless man and he knew now by the tense muttering of the crowd that his beloved mate must be walking toward the zebra.

With five hundred men at his back, it would have been debatable whether he could smash into the kraal and reach

Helene in time to save her. Alone and unarmed as he was, what chance was there for him to cause even a momentary distraction? But all this he kept from his mind as he prayed that he might see, for to one such as Ki-Gor it was unthinkable that he should not interfere.

And gradually, indistinctly, the kraal swam back into view. He could make out the dark clots of watching natives, the yellow burn of sunlight on the hard earth. Though none of her features was distinguishable, he knew the white figure moving across the clearing was Helene. He watched her reach the swaying group, which could only be warriors hanging to the zebra.

There was a terrible, long-enduring moment in which nothing moved, no sound was uttered. Then it happened. To Ki-Gor's dim eyes it was like the swift opening of some monstrous flower. Black petals sprayed outward as the natives leaped to safety, and revealed like an exquisite, richly colored center was the poised figure of rider and mount.

Ki-Gor's heart caught in mid-beat and he gave an agonized groan. He had hesitated too long, waiting for his vision to clear. And even as he groaned, the savage blood-cry of the natives exploded the silence. The zebra reared high on two legs, and insane from the noise and the feel of the woman's thighs locked about it, gave a great, reaching leap.

The White Lord no longer knew nor cared what he did. He came upright on the limb. A heavy branch was in his hand. With a wrenching tug, he tore it free of the tree. In the absence of any other weapon, he sought a bludgeon as instinctively as would have a Stone Age man.

He was abruptly kill-crazy, berserk with the desire to batter into pulp those men who tortured his mate.

In a crackling break of twigs, he scrambled down through the tree until he reached a long limb extending over the kraal wall. He ran out over the limb, careless of the white haze through which he moved. The sense of balance and the surefootedness acquired through years of tree-travel managed to supplement his blurred eyes enough to get him beyond the wall. Then as the branch sagged under his weight, he



leaned and caught it with his left hand and swung into the kraal.

Ki-Gor hit the ground running, darted down an aisle of huts toward the clearing. He heard the cry of the mob suddenly alter. There were shrieks of warning and then of fear.

Then he reached the edge of the clearing and learned the reason.

The zebra, instead of spinning and bucking as had the others in the center of open space until he had rid himself of his burden, reared high with Helene and then drove at a wild gallop straight for the guards holding the pygmies. Bent low on the pony's back, her fingers twisted into its mane, Helene held on with all her strength.

The guards at first thought the animal would turn. Helene, alone, realized the crazed beast was beyond controlling. Yelling and waving their hands, the guards held their ground, conscious of the ridicule which would be heaped on them if they ran before it was certain the zebra wouldn't swerve.

TOO late they tried to get clear. In a tangle of writhing bodies they fought to run. Ki-Gor arrived on the scene just as the front rank of warriors broke in panic. The spark of their fear leaped to the crowd on either side and in two whole walls of screaming, falling bodies the crowd splintered apart.

Into this mass catapulted the zebra. The shock of its running weight flung men aside, sheared them like saplings crushed by a battering ram. Then the feel of bodies against and beneath it made the zebra turn and fight to get away. In a plunging ball of madness, the animal leaped and kicked, whirling first in one direction and then another.

In one of its first arcing bucks, Helene was thrown. She was pitched over the zebra's head and fell into a group of warriors. Their clawing hands tore at her hysterically, and she slid through their mass to the ground. Heedlessly, they trampled over Helene in their rush to get away from the zebra.

The pygmies were swept back with the







crowd, jammed into a tight knot by the pressure of the larger warriors about them. Their guards were concerned with themselves, not their charges. N'Geeso kept his head about him, crying to his men to stand together so by their combined efforts they could keep from being trampled.

Ki-Gor heard N'Geeso's shrill, clear voice and headed toward it. It was a point to steer by in the fog through which he moved. Because of the confusion, he reached the very flanks of the crowd before being discovered. A shocked black, tearing free of his fellows, turned to confront him. The black clawed for his knife.

Ki-Gor pulverized the man's head with a single blow. A berserk lion would have struck with no more ferocity. With all his terrible strength, the White Lord laid about him with the club. He had come to kill and now be killed. The utter darkness could come on him at any time, and knowing this, he was one possessed, trying to wreak the greatest possible havoc in the brief time that remained to him.

Never before had men seen the White Lord utterly without mercy, without feeling. His wrath was a white-hot flame sweeping out to engulf everything in its path. Men died hardly knowing what new terror had come upon them. He beat them down, splintering their bodies to red pulp and leaped on to new victims whose first warning of his presence was the spattering wash of their fellows' blood.

The attention of the shouting, cursing crowd was still fastened on the zebra so the White Lord battered his way to the pygmies before his presence could become generally known. The cries of those who fell before him merged with the shrieks of those hurt by the zebra or trampled by their fellows.

But N'Geeso, trying to lead his men out of the disorder, saw the White Lord's red-smear bulk wildly laying about with the huge club as he ripped a path through the Tatoga. For the barest fraction of time, the little chieftain was stunned, unbelieving. It was impossible that Ki-Gor could materialize here in the very center of the enemy's kraal!

But it was the White Lord, and seeing the awesome madness that lay on his great friend, N'Geeso was shaken with the realization that alone and without hope of success Ki-Gor had come to fight for his wife and friends. This was a courage, a loyalty, beyond any code of honor, a deed to stir any primitive fighting man.

A Tatoga guard stumbled against N'Geeso. Cobra-quick, the pygmy leader's hand snaked to the warrior's sword-like knife. The blade came free in one swift tug. The warrior reached for him, but N'Geeso twisted in his grasp, jammed the knife upward nearly its full length under the rib bones and cut the core out of the man.

He swayed back, pulling the steel clear, and straightening his arm, ran through a second warrior. Before the man was down, N'Geeso had opened the throat of a third. And with each sword stroke the







battle fervor whipped higher in him.

"Ki-Gor!" he shrilled, and the name was a battle cry. "Ki-Gor is here!"

Then did the hard-faced little men about him see the jungle's most fabled warrior literally tearing a path through the Tatoga to reach them. They saw, too, the bloody example being set them by their chieftain. In the hot lands of the dark-skinned peoples where passions go uncloaked by civilization, the proper spark can change a man in a twinkling from meekness to suicidal mania.

"Shall it be known that we covered like dogs," screamed N'Geeso, "while the White Lord fought and died for us?"

"Aaaiiee!" burst out a pygmy. "To him, while there is time!"

"Kill, kill!" roared another, and suddenly all care of life was gone from them.

With explosive fury, the pygmies ran amok. They grabbed up the arms of the men N'Geeso had slain. They dragged down the bewildered blacks about them. With the automatic precision of men long trained to battle, they shaped themselves into a wedge with N'Geeso at the point, and plowed toward the White Lord in a resistless surge.

They were about him, then, with wild cries of triumph, shielding him with their steel. They saw his face with the crusted wound, the staring eyes, the mouth sheered wide for his hot breath to pass, and the sight flogged them to great efforts. They did not guess his blindness, but knew only he had endured much at the hands of the Tatoga.

THE crowd broke apart, splintering before this new terror. The men nearest the pygmies flung back and their fear was communicated to those unable to see what was occurring. The zebra had at last been

felled and there was nothing to restrain the mob's flight. Because they were in their own kraal, few of the warriors except Nanooko's guard were fully armed. This fact gave the pygmies a fleeting advantage, for most of the guards in their area had been concentrated around them and in their first rush the little men had cut them down.

As the crowd raced away, leaving the ground about them clear except for the bodies of the dead and wounded, Ki-Gor turned fumblingly to find N'Geeso.

"Helene," he gasped, "Where is she?"

N'Geeso did not think the question strange, nor in the excitement did he notice Ki-Gor's actions. He started to answer that he did not know what had become of her, but before he could speak a keen-eyed pygmy spotted her white body sprawled among several Tatoga.

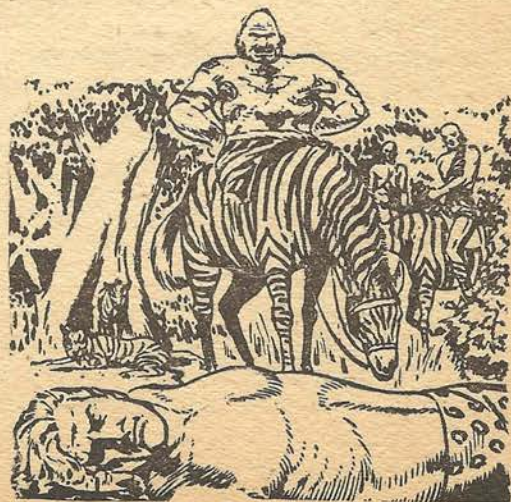
"The Golden One lies there!" the man exclaimed in fury. "The jackals have slain her."

Ki-Gor reached toward the sound of the man's voice, caught him with fingers of steel. "Where?" he demanded. "Quick! Take me to her!"

"Only there, Ki-Gor," the pygmy said, shaken by the jungle man's strange manner. But his pointing finger did not bring a relaxation of that torturing grip.

"Take me to her!" thundered Ki-Gor. "By the gods, must I blunder around blindly trying to find her? Have I no friends to help me?"

N'Geeso and the man held by Ki-Gor exchanged a queer look. What was wrong with the White Lord? But there was no





time to waste, no time for thought. The pygmy led the jungle man at a run to Helene, and Ki-Gor bent awkwardly, reaching for her.

A single choked, inarticulate sound escaped Ki-Gor's lips and then he lifted her in his arms. "N'Geeso," he called, "put one hand upon me and head for the gate. She must have the dignity of burial. Though the rest of us die, one at least must get through with her."

N'Geeso's mouth dropped at his friend's request. He could no longer mistake what was wrong. He looked at Ki-Gor's staring, blood-streaked eyes, moved his hands swiftly before them. They did not flicker. The great white warrior was blind.

Stunned though he was by the discovery within seconds of a double tragedy, the pygmy chifetaïn kept his presence of mind. His men were keyed to their highest fighting pitch, inspired by Ki-Gor's presence to dare anything. But if they knew Ki-Gor was blind, that flaming courage might desert them.

Without a word, N'Geeso spun and started at a run out of the clearing, leading Ki-Gor by the touch of his hand. The twin advantages of confusion and surprise which had first favored the pygmies was now gone. The Tatoga knew that there were no men at Ki-Gor's back and scrambling from every hut came warriors with their arms.

The excitement also had swept the alcoholic haze from Duran's mind. He realized that only the isolated group of pygmies were back of the trouble and he sent the guards about him into action with dire threats as to what would happen to them if every last pygmy weren't immediately cut to pieces.

The pygmies went streaking between the huts. Their actions were completely without thought of self. Already in their hectic adventure they had lived far longer than they had first expected. They were so possessed with the ecstasy of conflict, of extreme danger that death no longer held any fears for them.

Though the bulk of the Tatoga pounded behind them, small groups of warriors leaped out in their path trying to turn or hold them. The little men paused long enough to send them reeling out of the way, then, heedless of wounds or fatigue,

they sprinted ahead to catch up with N'Geeso, so that shifting relays of men were always on guard about Ki-Gor.

Due to the many Tatoga women and children running helter skelter in their path as they twisted between the huts, the legless man's guards were unable to use either spears or arrows for fear of slaying their own people. Cold steel alone could bring down the fugitives and at no point could the Tatoga gather strength enough to withstand the murderous pygmy charge.

At full tilt, the pygmies reached the four guards gathered at the gate. Ki-Gor's protectors had not run that deadly gauntlet unscathed. Six of the brave little men lay lifeless in the dust along the way and every one of those still on their feet bled from a dozen wounds. Yet they were ravening lions as they came against the gate guards. They literally hacked the four Tatoga to bits, flung them aside and throwing up the crossbar, burst open the gates and darted into the forest.

"Scatter," commanded N'Geeso, knowing that the more spoors the Tatoga had to follow, the more chance there was that a few of his men might come through alive. If the pygmies kept in a body, eventually the legless man would run them to earth.

"At dusk tomorrow, gather at the trading post," he told them, naming the first place occurring to him that all the men would know.

As the pygmies fanned out away from him into the underbrush, N'Geeso's face was bitter, strained. How many of his brave ones would live to see the trading post? But the Tatoga were pouring out of the kraal now and his thoughts were jerked back to the immediate problem of getting Ki-Gor into hiding.

Ki-Gor was the prey the Tatoga wanted worst of all and the hottest pursuit would be on his trail.

## VII

**N**EAR the Tatoga kraal where the paths were broad and hard-packed with much travel, N'Geeso and Ki-Gor managed to draw ahead of their pursuers. As soon as possible, however, N'Geeso led them away from the beaten ways into the maze of tiny game trails where lay their



only chance of actually losing Duran's warriors.

He twisted, back-tracked, exercised all the guile of a hunted antelope. But it was to no avail. The Tatoga clung to their spoor and began to gain. The blind, grief-numbed Ki-Gor left a trail even a white man could have followed. Despite N'Geeso's guiding hand, the White Lord was like a sleep-walker, reeling and stumbling with Helene clasped tightly in his arms.

It was a heart-breaking decision for the pygmy to make, but he realized unless he could get Ki-Gor to put Helene down, escape would be impossible. At the edge of a stream, he stopped. He turned almost fiercely, resolved to say what he must. Yet his courage failed him when he saw Ki-Gor's sightless eyes wet with the only tears any man had ever known him to shed.

"Let me try to carry her awhile," N'Geeso said, swallowing his intended words.

Ki-Gor gave no sign he heard. Dumb with grief, he stood swaying before the pygmy. Twice more N'Geeso repeated his offer before the jungle man reluctantly gave up his burden.

As the pygmy took Helene, his eyes remained fastened on Ki-Gor. For all the time they had been on the trail, he purposely had kept from looking at the dirt and blood-caked figure. "The Golden One" was what he and his people had called her. He did not want to look on her in death, to carry ever after the memory of what the Tatoga had done to her.

But as she came into his arms, he stiffened, a strange look crossing his face. Helene's body was limp and pliable. Her skin was cool, but it lacked the cold, clay-like touch of the dead. He knelt quickly and stretched Helene on the ground. Had there still been life in her when they picked her up in the clearing and had she died in Ki-Gor's arms while they fled? Or was there still some tiny flicker of life in her?

N'Geeso's trembling fingers detected a faint, extremely irregular pulse in Helene's throat. Her breathing was so slight and infrequent as to be practically unnoticeable. Frantically, he worked over her.

It was a full minute before the blind White Lord became aware of N'Geeso's

activity. "What is it you do?" he demanded suspiciously.

The pygmy had not wanted to raise false hopes in his friend. Ki-Gor had been too dazed to recognize the small symptoms of life. He would never forgive himself if he thought Helene had died because of any carelessness on his part. But it was not in N'Geeso to lie to Ki-Gor.

"The Golden One's spirit fights to stay in her body," he said. "She is not dead as we thought, but I fear she is so near to death, there is nothing we can do."

A spasm caught Ki-Gor's drawn features. His great fists clenched until it seemed the very flesh must break beneath the pressure. In every line of his body was expressed the unbearable sense of helplessness which tortured him. Then he caught hold of himself, came forward until he touched N'Geeso.

He dropped to his knees, awkwardly found her pulse. By feel, he guided his own mouth against hers, tried to force the breath of his body into her lungs. But for all his effort, the pulse beneath his fingers ebbed.

"Think of something," he pleaded. "She can't die! We mustn't let her die!"

And N'Geeso, hearing that appeal, slowly, haltingly, put his fingers to the upper edge of his breechclout. They rested on a tiny bulge in the smooth face of the leather.

"There is only one thing I know of," he declared, "but whether or not to try it, is a decision you alone must make." He did not mention that he broke a vow of secrecy.

He hurriedly explained that like each of his warriors, he carried a pellet of the same poison used on the pygmy blowgun darts. The pellet was carried in a slit made in the edge of his leather breechclout. It was reserved for extreme emergencies, such as in war when a captured pygmy was being tortured to make him betray his people.

Suicide was honorable if it was to the benefit of the tribe.

"Yes, yes," impatiently interrupted Ki-Gor, "but what has poison to do with saving Helene?"

"Just this," said N'Geeso. "A full pellet, of course, will kill a man before he can draw a breath. But I have seen a tiny portion stir the heart of a dying man, send





his blood charging through his veins again."

He glanced at Helene, drew a quick breath.

"A hand of times I've seen a dying man live again. Many more times than that, however," he confessed, "I've seen them killed instantly by the poison, or even worse, roused to a few days of torment."

The pygmy's hand touched Ki-Gor's forearm.

"I hold out no hope, for on every person the poison acts differently," he explained. "I only say what I have seen. Better she should die now, than live on in an agonized half-life for a day or so. The poison is cruel to those whose blood cannot withstand it."

**L**IKE tiny drops of ice-water the sweat came out on Ki-Gor's white face. He knew the power of the poison, and that very power which could explode the heart into action again, also could tear away the vitals of a person after reviving them.

His lips trembled. "Use it!" he said, abruptly.

Once the word was given, N'Geeso moved swiftly. He leaped up, found a small gourd on a vine and slashed it in two with his sword. With a twist of the blade, he cleaned the lower half of the gourd. He split open the small bulge in his breechclout where the poison was hidden.

From the pellet, he shaved a minute quantity of powder into the gourd. He estimated the amount, his hands hovering indecisively an instant, and then he added a bit more of the drug. He added to the powder no more than a single swallow of water from the stream and stirred the mixture with a twig.

He knelt, slid an arm beneath Helene's

shoulders and raised her to a sitting position. Her head was tipped back limply, her mouth half-open. N'Geeso's lips moved soundlessly in a prayer to a pagan god of whom Helene would never have approved. He trickled the liquid into her throat very slowly, and after a minute, laid her back on the ground. He watched her solemnly.

"Tell me," Ki-Gor whispered.

"It will take awhile," soothed the chieftain. "She must rest quietly."

Ki-Gor frowned. He cocked his head and listened, his preter-naturally sensitive ears hearing faint sounds which escaped N'Geeso.

"They come!" he warned cryptically, mentioning the unspoken fear which had been between them for so long. The persistent Tatoga trackers were bringing Duran's warriors ever closer.

Ki-Gor shook off the dullness which had held him. He could not let Helene down while there was the faintest hope for her survival. No matter what his own condition was, he must gather his shaken mind and frayed nerves for yet another effort.

"By its sound, the stream runs both swift and deep," he commented.

"It does that," muttered N'Geeso disinterestedly, his thoughts directed toward the important matter of keeping Helene and Ki-Gor from being trapped.

"Is there driftwood on the banks, left from the last flood?" Ki-Gor persisted.

N'Geeso grunted in the affirmative, wondering to himself how Ki-Gor could occupy himself with foolish questions at such a time. Then Ki-Gor's meaning struck him. He bounced to his feet.

"A raft, of course," he cried. "We can float her downstream and it will give you a chance to get your strength back." He didn't mention Ki-Gor's eyes.

The little man rolled three long logs together, lashed them with vines. He cut a green pole to use in keeping the raft from the banks. He pushed the raft into shallow water, laid Helene on it, tying her securely enough to keep her from sliding into the water, but not so tightly that she couldn't be pulled free if the logs overturned.

When Ki-Gor was settled in place, N'Geeso pushed the raft into the current. He was panting with tension rather than exertion. Though Ki-Gor hadn't again



mentioned the approaching Tatoga, they were so near that the pygmy himself could plainly hear them.

Slowly the current caught the raft, edging it lazily out of the shallows. N'Geeso strained at the pole. Then they were in the center of the stream, and the power of the water gripped them, hurled them forward with sudden momentum.

A cry sounded on the bank behind them. A spear slapped hard on the logs beside N'Geeso, tearing a white gash in the wood. Running men pounded out of the jungle, tore through the underbrush along the stream. Bedlam broke loose as the Tatoga sighted their quarry.

Had N'Geeso relented in his efforts for a few moments their flight would have been ended with bloody swiftness. But N'Geeso was the son of chieftains, born and bred to war, and not a muscle flinched in that critical interval. He laid his back into the pole, steadying the logs, sending them straight on their course.

The raft cut straight down the stream with gathering speed, outdistancing the runners and making their casts fall short. Not once did N'Geeso turn a backward look to them. His only recognition of their presence was a thin, bitter smile toward the river ahead when he was certain they had won free.

An hour later he brought the raft skillfully beneath the cover of a limb which fell low over the water. He leaped into the shallows, anchored the raft in the mud. After Helene was carried ashore, he and Ki-Gor broke the raft apart, sent each log downstream separately. N'Geeso erased their sign from the bank, and they burrowed into the underbrush, flung themselves down to rest.

For the first time since administering the drug, the two men now had an opportunity to give their whole attention to Helene.

Her face had a bluish pallor which frightened N'Geeso, but Ki-Gor in his blindness couldn't see this and he sat with his finger on her pulse.

Suddenly, Helene made a queer rattling sound in her throat. The pygmy was unable to choke back a gasp. He thought that the noise was a death rattle. But Ki-Gor sat frozen, seemingly oblivious to any change in his mate.



N'Geeso groped for words to console Ki-Gor, to express his own feelings. "Hear me, Ki-Gor! My heart breaks that it should end this way. I hoped and prayed we could save her. Her blood is on my hands, for if it had not been for my stubborn pride before the legless man, she might never have been made to ride."

He got grimly to his feet, his right hand gripped vise-like on his blade.

"I have done this thing, Ki-Gor, but I pledge you she shall not go into the shadows alone," he swore. "So soon as I have given you over to my men, I shall return to the Tatoga kraal to kill and die. I will wash out this crime with blood, and I swear my spirit will walk ever beside Helene, serving her in the unknown darkness."

The White Lord tardily turned his thoughts to what N'Geeso was saying, and not until the pygmy was nearly finished did the jungle man actually gather his meaning. Then his face softened.

"Hush, little lion," he said hoarsely. "Helene lives, not dies! It is her first full breath you hear, not her last. The poison has stirred her heart."

N'Geeso grasped Helene's wrist. With a glad cry, he saw that it was true. Her erratic pulse grew stronger with every heart beat. Quickly, though, he sobered.

"We can travel now," he said. "We must get her to the post before she regains consciousness." He hesitated, and Ki-Gor finished for him.

"I know," the White Lord admitted. "If she wakes to pain, we can care for her better there." It was a way of saying that he realized the drug which had stirred her to life could still kill her.



They reached the trading post two hours after dusk. They entered and placed Helene on Parson's bed. She awoke for brief intervals during the night, but each time lost consciousness without recognizing either Ki-Gor or N'Geeso. Her condition was little changed throughout the next day, and Ki-Gor's increasingly haggard look showed the rapid dwindling of his hope for her recovery.

There were no bad wounds on her body from weapons, but she had been brutally trampled by the stampeding Tatoga. Ki-Gor and N'Geeso knew how to treat wounds they could see, but they were baffled by internal hurts. And from her restlessness, the fear grew in them that the poison ate at her vitals.

When the dragging march of the sun ended that day, the remainder of N'Geeso's warrior band began to slip into the post. They were a ragged, broken remnant. Only five had come through alive and they stumbled with exhaustion and wounds. Each one's arrival heightened the whole group's danger of capture, for it meant another possible spoor for the Tatoga to follow.

Ki-Gor and N'Geeso began to share watches around the clock. The White Lord was unable to rest either mentally or physically, and because of this, his vision never cleared. He moved either in total darkness or in a blurred mist where he could only vaguely make out objects. His abnormally keen senses of smell and hearing helped to make his vigils more than an empty pose, especially at night, when sight was of little value, and he maneuvered it so that most of the night duty fell to him.

Ki-Gor grew adept at fooling even N'Geeso as to his true condition, and he constantly assured the pygmy leader that his sight was returning, when actually he was merely learning to make his way about the post without stumbling into obstacles. When the Tatoga drums began to send the face-saving tale that Momba-N'gar had postponed the marriage of Gita and Helene to a more propitious time fourteen days hence, Ki-Gor couldn't derive even the bitterest satisfaction from the message.

The legless man's embarrassment because neighboring chieftains were due to begin arriving for the ceremony meant that the search for Helene would be inten-

sified. Never had Ki-Gor hated anyone as he did Duran. His desire to kill the man was like a wild bodily hunger, a hunger that gnawed more savagely as Helene grew weaker and more feverish.

On the third night, soon after Ki-Gor had climbed to the small watchtower on the stockade about the post, he caught the scent of Tatoga warriors. There was no mistaking their identity for along with their body smell the breeze carried the pungent odor of the particular oil with which they smeared their bodies. Ki-Gor couldn't guess their number accurately, but he knew there were not more than five or six.

He slid out of the watchtower, dropped to the ground and hurried into the house to rouse N'Geeso. "They may go past, but it is well to be ready," he said calmly.

N'Geeso sucked at his underlip thoughtfully. "These few won't have to stomach to attack even if they find we're in here, but they'll go yapping back for the rest of the pack."

"Let us see that they don't get back," the White Lord declared.

"But how?" asked the pygmy. "At the first spear we loose, they'll flee like frightened dik-dik deer."

"They won't have a chance," Ki-Gor grimly pointed out. "We'll leave the gate ajar as though the place were deserted. They won't pass up the chance to spend the night indoors and once they're all inside, we'll close the gate. Three of your pygmies are still able to make a few passes with a knife despite their wounds. It won't take any real fighting, since the advantage of surprise will be on our side."

N'Geeso's black eyes glittered approvingly at the plan. He roused the three men Ki-Gor had indicated, started them hobbling toward the gate. Ki-Gor took one of Parson's covered cooking pots, and squinting his eyes to see, opened the small iron stove and scooped out coals from the banked fire. He took the trader's thatch broom, soaked it with kerosene which the trader used in his prized lantern.

Then the jungle man went swiftly to the gate, gave the broom and covered pot of coals to one of the pygmies along with whispered instructions. The men fell back into the darkness along the wall as he opened the gate. Satisfied that all was as



he wished, Ki-Gor climbed cautiously into the watchtower.

The Tatoga were much nearer now. He could follow their progress by the sudden break in a night bird's song, by the faint snap of a twig, or the abrupt silence of frightened tree toads. These differences in the hum of jungle life would have gone unnoticed by the average man, but Ki-Gor knew their meaning.

AND THEN for the first time beneath the harsh scent of the Tatoga he distinguished a smell which made his face go hard and cold. A white man traveled with the natives! It could be either the legless man or Parson. It didn't matter which it was, because both in their own way had betrayed him, and he remembered how the two of them had sat together drinking beer while the pygmies and Helene were tortured.

Parson's participation he didn't understand, but it was clear that he had worked hand in glove with the legless man to discredit Ki-Gor. The drunken act before Chief Nanooko had been nothing more than an act.

Otherwise, why would Parson be sitting as a friend with Duran while the other prisoners were misused?

Ki-Gor whispered the new information to the pygmies and then crouched down in the tower. As he expected, the Tatoga halted where the brush was cleared back from the trading post and sent one man crawling forward to reconnoiter. The black was careful, coming with a snake's silence, circling away from the watchtower and working his way flat along the wall to the gate.

Though for a time the native hesitated, staring into the blackness of the post, the open gate quieted any suspicions he held. He came ten steps inside the stockade and stopped to listen. The pygmies were within easy reach of him, but to all appearances they had melted into the ground. The black gave a satisfied grunt, and turning back outside, called in normal tones to his companions that the place was deserted.

They came forward in a relieved group, grumbling together of their weariness and hunger. One man kept stumbling as though he could hardly force his feet to move those last few yards. Ki-Gor stayed down

so they wouldn't see his white skin, but he kept tabs on them with his ears.

When they were all within the stockade and gathered almost below him, he raised silently, gripped the balustrade around the watchtower with one hand, while with the other he held a knife taken from Parson's trade stock. It was time for the pygmies to go into action.

With a sudden crash, the gate slammed closed. In the same instant, the kerosene soaked broom burst into flame. With lightning precision, the pygmies sprang the trap. They bounded out of the darkness with drawn blades.

But swift as the pygmies were, Ki-Gor was swifter. With a snarl of pure animal rage, he leaped from the tower, landed on widespread legs before the white man. His hand shot up for a knife stroke that would decapitate his enemy. He realized it was Parson, not the legless man, who trailed them.

"You slimy snake," he growled, swaying in for the kill.

"No!" shrieked Parson. "You're wrong, Ki-Gor! Listen to us. We're friends."

Parson was no worse terrified than the others. There was no fight in them. With screams for mercy four of the blacks threw themselves on their knees. Parson staggered back in an effort to get away from the jungle man and sprawled flat on his back. Not a single Tatoga warrior tried to raise a weapon.

But there was one of the blacks who kept his feet. Even in that moment when death rushed in upon him he kept his dignity. That one was the aged Chief Nanooko himself. He raised his right palm in the Tatoga gesture of peace.

"Be more just than I was, O, Ki-Gor," he said in his old man's voice.

Ki-Gor had purposely leaped as close to the group as possible so that in the bright, flaring light of the reeds his dim eyes would be able to distinguish his enemies. He recognized Nanooko's tones, made out indistinctly the thin, frail body which alone did not shrink from him. And the light blur against the chieftain's black body was unmistakably his palm raised in peace.

Nanooko's calm dignity sheered through the White Lord's armor of hate. It was



not in Ki-Gor to kill an old, defenseless man or warriors who groveled like sheep.

"Hold, my pygmies!" he shouted. "Let the dangos live!"

He spoke in the bare nick of time, and with less disciplined men than N'Geeso's picked warriors it would have still been too late. The pygmies crashed into their intended victims, straining to divert blows already launched. And in truth, they drew blood on two of the Tatoga, able to avoid fatal injuries, but not flesh wounds.

Then the small men leaped back, ringing in the Tatoga, their faces fierce with disappointment. An enemy was an enemy to them, and the sooner he was slain, the better.

"Your guards are not so brave when they face a few blades instead of a helpless girl," spat Ki-Gor bitterly.

Nanooko's voice broke in sorrow as he answered. "We wish to join you, not fight you. That's why they don't give battle."

N'Geeso gave a harsh laugh. "What lie is this?" he asked. Ki-Gor's expression reflected the same attitude.

"I've learned the truth about the one who calls himself Momba-N'gar," confessed Nanooko. His eyes dropped in shame. "And I've learned that Sepah is a shameless she-animal who would prey on her dead husband's father."

He shook his head, and there was even yet a broken bewilderment about him, as though it were unbelievable that he could be the victim of such treachery.

"THESE four guards are of my blood," he explained. "Not knowing this, the legless man assigned them to guard him in the night. They were curious about the habits of a god and they crept close to his hut and made small holes in the thatch that they might see how he conducted himself."

Nanooko bit his lips, gathering his courage to say the thing.

"They saw the false Sepah at play with him," he went on, "heard the gross talk between them, their laughter at what fools they had made of the Tatoga." A spark of anger strengthened his voice. "They heard her wheedling him to hurry and slay both me and that jackal, Gita."

Parson got to his feet, his face ashen

and his hands trembling uncontrollably. His gaze showed he was still fearful of what the White Lord would do. But Ki-Gor's attention was riveted on the old chieftain.

"If you learned the truth, why didn't you rouse your people?" snapped Ki-Gor. "Has age filled your belly with water so that you run rather than fight for your rights?"

Nanooko drew himself up. "I was not afraid! I confronted the legless devil and Sepah like the chieftain I am."

He hesitated and the pride had gone out of him when he resumed.

"Like the fool I am, would be more like it," he muttered. "When one holds power as long as I have, he forgets that he isn't invincible. Instead of first getting my warriors on my side, I burst into the council house and shouted that I knew he was no god but only a thieving white man."

He put his hands across his eyes at the memory.

"The devil saw that I had found him out and before I could speak another word, he plucked a curved throwing stick from his belt and knocked me senseless."

Nanooko explained that he came to in a hut, bound and gagged, with Gita's assistants guarding him.

"My people thought I had gone mad," he confessed. "They believed his lies about me, even as I had believed the lies about you. I had no part in torturing your wife and friends. I was a prisoner in the hut and would still be there, if Parson hadn't taken advantage of the confusion you caused to come and free me."

Scorn was a whip in Ki-Gor's voice. "Parson, eh? What caused him to change sides so quickly?"

The trader's adam's apple levered up and down in his throat as he grappled for his voice.

"I didn't change sides," he said nervously. "I was with you all the time."

"Your good words on my behalf before Nanooko sounded like it," Ki-Gor told him sarcastically, "and I suppose, too, that the legless man entertains most of his prisoners — unshackled — with beer and food."

Parson was shaking as with cold.

"I'm a weak man, Ki-Gor, but not as



bad as you think," he said pleadingly. "I can explain everything, but for heaven sakes, let me get inside and have a drink. That's the main reason we came to the post. I've been three days without a drop and it's killing me."

The light from the torch was beginning to falter and in its unsteady gleam Ki-Gor's face was bleak and forbidding as granite.

"Take them all in," he commanded the pygmies. "We'll decide about them later."

The four disarmed Tatoga warriors were locked in one of Parson's store-rooms. Nanooko and the trader were allowed to remain in the main room. Parson's first move was to bring a bottle out of a cabinet and gulp at it thirstily. It was half empty before he took it from his lips.

He sat hunched up for several minutes, his eyes tightly closed. Then as though a sudden ease came over him, his tense body relaxed and he lay back in his chair. He opened his eyes and looked about him as if he were seeing the room and its occupants for the first time.

"These pygmies are in bad shape," he said in surprise. "They need treatment. By all that's holy, I don't see how they're able to keep their feet, let alone put on a show like they just did outside."

He gave a puzzled snort and pulled himself out of the chair.

"I'll get my medicine bag and see if I can't help them," he offered. "Shouldn't delay on things like this."

Ki-Gor faced him stonily.

"You don't think they'd trust you to tend their wounds, do you?" asked Ki-Gor. "They remember what you tried to do to the legless man."

A queer, hurt look spattered Parson's features. The briskness went out of him.

"Oh—that!" he muttered. He sank down in the chair. "Believe me, that's the only time in my life I ever did such a thing. I did it because I knew him before, knew him for a long time—and I was drunk enough to have the courage to try what I should have done years ago."

He picked up the bottle, turned it slowly between his palms, staring into it.

"He's all bad, Ki-Gor. All bad. I didn't know what he meant to do here, but I

knew it would be something rotten and evil. Everything he touches, he corrupts."

Parson took a long, uneven breath.

"He's my stepbrother," he admitted wearily. "You'd never know to look at the two of us that we shared the same room, ate at the same table. I studied to be a doctor. He studied to be exactly what he is. His first victim was his own father, believe it or not. His father made him his partner in a firm he owned, and he stole the old man blind, drove him to bankruptcy and suicide."

He uncapped the bottle, raised it to his mouth. Then he hesitated and lowered it without taking a drink. Ki-Gor came closer to him, his brow furrowed.

"He went on to bigger things, then. The next I knew of him a couple of thugs brought him to my home. His legs had been shattered by gun-fire. The police wanted him. He was dying and he knew it. He begged me to save him, promised to go straight if I did."

His fingers tightened around the bottle and with sudden haste he swigged down a huge drink. When he finished gasping, he resumed in a harder tone.

"I figured he'd gotten his lesson. Besides, his legs were beyond saving and I thought a legless man was a poor bet for a life of violence. I fixed him up, hid him, nursed him back to life—and he repaid me by stealing my prescription blanks, forging my name to them and making a big haul of narcotics.

**H**E used the money he got to leave the country. Naturally, it wasn't long before the police were on me about all those forged blanks. It came out that I had concealed him from the law. By the time the publicity died down, I was finished as a doctor. The general idea was that I had worked in partnership with him. After all, he was my brother.

"I lost my license to practice. Medicine had been my one love, my only interest. I went to pieces fast and the bottle got to be my only friend. One day I came out of a drunken haze to find myself on board a vessel with Duran grinning at me. He was running guns and smuggling drugs and he needed someone to patch up his men. It amused him to have me around as a whipping boy. Whenever I



tried to fight back, he'd nearly kill me. He took a perverse pleasure in having me around him. But one night a gunboat blew us out of the water off the Congo coast. I managed to get ashore and in an effort to hide, I worked my way inland and eventually landed here. I had to live, so drifted into trading."

Parson fell silent, his head bowed, turning the bottle slowly in his fingers. He looked small and shrunken.

"Not a very pretty story, is it?" he said when Ki-Gor failed to comment. "But maybe now you'll understand why I said what I did before Nanooko and why it pleased Duran to make me drink beer with him. He forgot about me in the confusion, though, and when the kraal emptied of warriors, Nanooko's four kinsmen and I were able to free the chief."

Ki-Gor stood over the trader, the harshness gone from his face.

"Fix up the pygmies, Parson," he said quietly, "and then maybe you'll be good enough to look at Helene. She needs your help badly."

The trader raised his glance to the White Lord.

"As badly as you do?" Parson asked in a voice so soft it reached Ki-Gor's ears alone. His trained eyes hadn't missed the jungle man's condition.

Caught off-guard, Ki-Gor was at a loss for words for several seconds. Then through set lips he said, "Unless Helene can be saved, it won't matter about me."

## VIII

ALMOST from the first day under Parson's care, Helene began to improve. The discredited doctor seemed to reach back into the past and recover for a brief period all the skill which had once been his. He poured everything in him into the effort to make her well. Fortunately, N'Geeso's haphazard application of the drug was as excellent an immediate treatment as any physician could have given her.

It was shock, more than serious injury, which had brought her so close to death. With much the same effect as adrenalin, the poison had kept her heart going. Parson dosed her with an antidote which nullified the poisonous elements which had

been undoing the good work of the drug.

Within a week, Helene was sitting up. Her strenuous, outdoor life with Ki-Gor had kept her in splendid physical condition. The lithe, strong jungle girl swiftly recovered her vigor. And she kept improving, despite the fact that increasing danger of discovery made it necessary for the small band to leave the post and hide in the jungle, shifting position every night.

But Parson didn't meet with the same success with Ki-Gor. Daily the darkness gathered deeper about the jungle man and the brief periods in which he could see grew fewer.

"I won't mislead you," Parson said. "That blow you took on the head apparently jarred the delicate optic nerves. Perhaps with rest your eyes will adjust themselves of their own accord. Then again, it may require a surgeon far more skilled than I am to correct the trouble."

He stopped uneasily, his manner indicating there was more he wanted to say. Ki-Gor finished for him.

"But it's possible, I may never see at all," the White Lord declared. "That's really what you're trying to tell me, isn't it?"

"Now don't jump to conclusions," Parson soothed unconvincingly, guessing how disturbed Ki-Gor was behind his mask of calmness. "I actually don't know how serious it is. This is out of my field, and I just have to feel my way along."

But to Helene, the two chieftains and their warriors, Parson was franker.

"We've got to keep Ki-Gor quiet," he warned. "It's my belief that his extreme exertions after his head injury greatly harmed him. If he gets in another brush with the Tatoga or tries to make the fast, hard trek necessary to get us out of the Tatoga area, it may make him permanently blind."

N'Geeso listened soberly. His own warriors weren't in proper condition to run the Tatoga gauntlet, but the small chieftain had been scouting their immediate locality and he knew that Duran suddenly was pouring more and more men into the jungle around them.

"It means certain death if we don't leave now," protested one of Nanooko's men who had scouted with N'Geeso. "We



can't evade that devil's trackers forever. I say we should make a run for it."

"We stay with Ki-Gor!" Nanooko said, fastening the man with a cold look. "Let no more be said about it."

"Well spoken," commended N'Geeso. "You have a lion's heart, old one."

The warrior subsided under Nanooko's stern glance, lowered his eyes sullenly. Though he didn't dare argue further, it was obvious the chieftain's words didn't sit well with him.

"As good steel will rust if constantly exposed to dampness," mused N'Geeso to himself, "so at times will a man's courage crumble if exposed for too long a period to danger. I must keep an eye on that warrior."

But too many other matters demanded N'Geeso's attention for him to constantly watch one man. Because of Nanooko's age, it was up to the pygmy to direct the party, keep it hidden and try to secure enough food. Twice Tatoga patrols almost stumbled on them and it was clear from the searchers' manner that they knew their quarry was close.

Steadily, the tension gripping the fugitives grew.

The pygmies had replaced their lost blowguns and brewed a new supply of poison, and Parson had brought along his rifle from the trading post, but they couldn't hope to offer more than a brief show of resistance against the swarming Tatoga.

It was the second afternoon after the conference that N'Geeso discovered that Nanooko's kinsman disappeared. A glance at their meager stores of food and water showed that the man had taken all he could carry.

The shocked Nanooko stormed about in a rage, feeling it was a personal disgrace that a man of his blood should play the coward.

Parson was not so harsh in his judgment as the two chieftains. "Fear rots many a man," he said, looking at the ground. "Anyway, one person more or less won't make any difference in our chances if we're attacked. And the fact he took supplies shows he isn't going over to the enemy."

N'Geeso looked across to the place where Ki-Gor lay with his eyes bandaged.

No explanation Parson could make would soften his opinion of the deserter.

"It's not as easily dismissed as that," N'Geeso said grimly. "In trying to save his own worthless life, he's thrown away all our chances. A snake couldn't wriggle past the Tatoga, let alone that blundering fool. Two days ago he might have made it, but not now. And once he's captured, the legless man will learn our position."

Nanooko nodded unhappy agreement and suggested that they move immediately.

"We're probably too late already," judged N'Geeso, "but it's the only thing we have left to do."

Before N'Geeso could finish giving the men their orders, Helene came up, saying the White Lord wished to speak with him.

"What's wrong?" Ki-Gor abruptly questioned.

Though N'Geeso had tried to shield Ki-Gor from as much worry as possible, in this instance he didn't try to hide the seriousness of their situation.

"One of Nanooko's men has deserted," he explained. "I thought it wise for us to move in case he is captured."

"No, it isn't that," Ki-Gor said. "Something's wrong in the jungle. Listen to that troop of baboons going full speed through the trees. And off to the right, hear those bush buck crashing through the undergrowth?"

**A**BSORBED in getting the party ready to travel, N'Geeso hadn't paid any attention to the growing animal noises about the camp. But now that he listened, he noted that a kind of panic seemed to be spreading among the jungle's denizens. Flocks of birds passed above them and in the distance came the repeated roars of disturbed jungle rats.

No number of men milling about could so disturb the forest," he said, with a baffled air, "it's very strange."

Ki-Gor stood up, first listening, then sniffing the sluggish, humid air. He made no effort to remove the thick bandage from his eyes. He accepted the fact that if N'Geeso could see nothing wrong, then his own dim vision certainly would be of no value in finding a solution.

"This is the wrong time of year for



the dingo packs," he said, referring to the vicious wild dogs which ran amok during the dry season. "And the noise is too widespread to be caused by driver ants." A muscle worked in his cheek and his voice suddenly quickened. "It can be but one thing!"

"Eh?" grunted N'Geeso, still puzzled.

"The forest is aflame!" Ki-Gor said. "That's what's driving the animals in upon us from so many directions. The fire still is far off, but we must be ringed in by it."

Consternation gripped N'Geeso. This was a terror he hadn't expected, and it was a moment before he could rally his thoughts. "How could that be?" he asked.

"The legless man is taking no further chances on our eluding him," said the White Lord. "He's learned our approximate location from the deserter and means to drive us from hiding. It's an old trick. We'll find one avenue left open through the ring of fire. That's where he'll be waiting to scoop us in."

And within two hours, Ki-Gor's prediction proved true. N'Geeso scouted the area with four men and found solid walls of flame advancing in upon them from every side. Only a narrow corridor to the south wasn't burning. This one avenue was a rocky, treeless canyon, broad enough to leave a safe path even though the jungle on either side of it was an inferno. Not one of Duran's warriors remained within the fire-encircled area, which was added proof that the trap was his carefully prepared handiwork.

By morning the flames were so close that the small band was forced to retreat toward the canyon. Over and over N'Geeso tried to find some break in those burning walls, but each time he returned red-eyed and coughing to throw himself down in a weary, discouraged heap. When he caught his breath, he would move the party nearer the corridor where Duran waited and then set out once again on his hopeless tour.

But finally even the indomitable little chieftain had to give up hope. Always before in tight places he had been able to look to the White Lord for leadership. This time the full burden had fallen to him, and he felt his failure to get the party to safety was a mark of personal

inadequacy. He felt he had betrayed his friends.

With drooping shoulders, he stood apart from his companions, watching the rolling curtain of smoke advance toward them, seeing behind the murky clouds the red burst of flame where trees and bushes caught fire in intense heat. Helene guessed N'Geeso's feelings and left her mate to go and stand beside the little man.

When he became aware of her presence, he raised his tired, lined face. "The White Lord would have found a way out for us," he said in bitter self-condemnation.

"If you couldn't, no one could," Helene told him. "You've done everything possible. Ki-Gor knows that."

Her words were no balm to N'Geeso. "Were he able to see, even now he could think of something, yet I stand like a clod, helpless, worthless, waiting for death to take us all."

Helene was silent for a bit. She closed her eyes, clenched her small fists tightly. There were flecks of fear in her blue eyes when she opened them and her lips trembled.

"Perhaps there is yet a way," she said huskily. "Wait here until I see. After all, I'm the one the legless man wants to capture most, and he wants me alive."

She took a long look at Ki-Gor and then started at a run down the canyon. Immersed in his own thoughts, N'Geeso dully watched her. Then abruptly her words struck into his mind.

Too late her meaning dawned on him. Helene went to bargain with Duran, offer to give herself up if he would let Ki-Gor and her black friends pass through his lines unharmed. Knowing her pride and will, Duran would realize that if he refused her offer, he would never take her alive.

"No, Helene!" shouted N'Geeso. "Come back!"

He shouted again and again.

But Helene only sped faster. She reasoned that in their present position all would die, but if she could bargain with Duran, then perhaps her life alone would be forfeited. She meant to die in either case, for she had no intention of going through with the great marriage ceremony which the legless man had promised the jungle. As soon as her party was safe,





she meant to kill herself rather than become Gita's bride.

Ki-Gor heard N'Geeso's frightened cry, was told by the men about him that Helene had raced down the canyon with N'Geeso sprinting in pursuit. He didn't understand what she intended, but he knew Duran waited in that direction.

**H**E tore the bandage from his eyes, wincing with the sudden pain of the light and smoke. He could see dimly for a distance of about ten feet, but beyond that the grey mist blotted out everything.

"After them," he roared, angry that the stunned men hadn't rushed to investigate. "Run ahead of me, one of you, so I'll know which way to go!"

"But your eyes . . ." began Parson.

"Never mind!" thundered the White Lord. "Something's wrong with Helene!"

Parson argued no further. After all, they had little time left to live, so what did it matter. He flipped the safety catch off his rifle and leaped ahead of Ki-Gor himself. This would be a better way for them to go than to sit and wait for the fire.

With Parson and Ki-Gor in the lead, the handful of warriors ran after Helene. It was easy going at first, but after about two hundred yards they came up against a dense, swirling cloud of smoke.

The fire had advanced to that point along the upper rims of the canyon, and though the rocky canyon was free of burning brush, the thick smoke poured down into the hollow place, bridged it with a moving black wall which kept pace with the flames above.

Stumbling and choking, they managed to get through the pall. As they entered fresh air again, they almost ran over N'Geeso. He was on his knees, gripped in an agony of coughing. His long efforts to find a way out of the trap that day had exposed him to the flame and smoke so much that his lungs and eyes were terribly irritated.

In trying to follow Helene, he had run against a rock and had fallen in the smoke cloud. A coughing fit had seized him and he had gotten turned around, losing her completely and barely finding his own way to the open air. Still ill, he got up and went on with the group.

Helene's voice came echoing down the canyon to them before they could see her. She was telling Duran she would give herself up if he would let the others through to safety, whereas if he refused, she would throw herself in the flames.

"Doesn't she realize, he'll promise anything to get his hands on her," swore Parson bitterly. "His word means nothing. He wouldn't let us go under any circumstances."

And in immediate confirmation of the



trader's words, Duran spoke from the place where his warriors were entrenched.

"Now that's what I call real sensible of you, honey," he said in his oily, taunting accents. "Sure, I'll let the others go free. Just walk right on over here and the bargain's sealed. The rest of the bunch don't mean anything to me."

Helene was accustomed to the fact that the most savage and cunning black man would keep his word to the letter once he gave it. She expected Duran to keep his promise, but since his men were bound to be on edge after days of pursuit, she wanted to take no chances of a sudden incident flaring between the two rival groups.

"Pull your men out of the canyon," Helene directed. "Have them stand up and start walking toward the mouth. I'll follow, keeping this same distance. When we get outside, I'll give up."

This second stipulation didn't sit well with Duran, but Helene obstinately insisted. There was a long silence from the Tatoga line and then abruptly the legless man agreed.

He appeared from behind a huge rock. He was mounted on one of the zebra. From other points four more mounted men rode. They turned up the canyon at a walk. As they rode, black men crawled out of holes, and from behind rocks to follow them on foot.

After a bit, Duran turned his head, saw that Helene hadn't moved. "Well, come on," he said harshly. "What more do you want?"

She started forward, matching her pace to that of the retreating warriors so she would keep exactly the same safe distance from them until they were out of the canyon.

Helene had advanced two-thirds of the way to the position just vacated by Duran's warriors when Ki-Gor and Parson rounded a turn in the canyon behind her and came in sight. They had heard the exchange between the girl and Duran, and now Parson told Ki-Gor that she was following the Tatoga.

"Come back here, Helene!" shouted the White Lord. "You're insane to think you can trust that jackal."

Like a reaching hand, her husband's words caught and turned Helene. It was

because of her unselfish love for the straight, tall jungle man that she did this thing. She had gambled that he wouldn't learn her intent until it was too late for him to interfere. Now fear of what he would do deep-carved her face.

"Leave me alone," she sobbed. "I'm doing what's right. It's one life paid to save many, and just because I'm a woman is no reason my life should be more valuable than yours."

Parson and Ki-Gor came on at a dead run, paying no heed to her.

"Stop him, Parson," she pleaded. "This is the only way. The legless man is pulling out his warriors. There won't be any fighting if you keep away!"

But even as she spoke, the fact that Duran had never intended to keep his word became clearly apparent. From the supposedly deserted Tatoga entrenchment leaped the wizard, Gita, and two of his assistants. Duran had left them there to capture the trusting girl. His apparent withdrawal was for the sole purpose of bringing her within the witch-doctor's reach.

The three blacks, fearful that Ki-Gor would keep them from trapping Helene, darted from concealment and sped up behind the girl. In the confusion, Helene failed to hear the quick spatter of their bare feet. But Parson saw his brother's expected treachery and snarled the news to Ki-Gor.

"Can we reach her before they do?" asked Ki-Gor, unable to see his mate.

"We can't," declared Parson, "but bullets can."

With that, he slid to a stop, raised his rifle and fired. The first shot whined harmlessly up the canyon. Duran began screaming to his warriors to turn and charge. Then the legless man whirled his zebra, and followed by his four mounted guards, came racing back toward Helene.

PARSON was steadier on his second shot, and sent one of the witchdoctors to his knees with his face blasted away. That was enough for the cowardly Gita. He spun around, deserting his assistant, and fled. Parson wasted valuable moments trying to draw a certain bead on the chief wizard. But in his nervousness he missed the moving target. Before he



could throw another cartridge in the chamber, Ki-Gor's powerful body sprinted between him and Gita.

The White Lord had kept running when the trader stopped.

Gita's assistant reached the red-haired girl, unaware that his chief had turned tail. Helene fought him with all the strength in her slim body, scratching and kicking to keep him from lifting her from her feet.

The assistant struck at Helene, trying to knock her senseless so he could get her away before the White Lord reached them. But Helene was like an eel in his grasp. She twisted around, locked a leg behind his, and sent them both tumbling to the ground. She kept crying out to Ki-Gor, knowing he could find her only by the sound of her voice.

Abruptly realizing that Gita had left him alone to face Ki-Gor, the black's courage evaporated. He beat Helene away in panic and scrambled to his knees, meaning to run for it. The White Lord was plunging in upon them, bent forward as he ran, his eyes wide and staring as he sought to see.

Into Ki-Gor's fading range of vision came the sight of the black man hitting Helene. A deep animal growl of rage burst from his throat and his great hands reached to scoop the black from the ground. Oblivious of the charging Tatoga, or the enraged Duran spurring ahead of his forces, Ki-Gor caught the man by throat and crotch and jerked him into the air.

Then just as he would break a piece of kindling, the White Lord brought the shrilly screaming black crashing down on his leg. With one blow, he splintered the witchdoctor's spine. Then he straightened, raised the jerking body high overhead and hurled it to the ground with bone-crushing force.

Parson reached Ki-Gor, firing as he ran. "I'll get him! I'll get that murdering devil!" he kept muttering hysterically. But the trader's hands were jerking and trembling, and he shot wilder with every bullet.

In utter scorn of the trader's gun, Duran came on at a gallop. One of the odd-shaped throwing sticks was in his right hand. Helene caught at Ki-Gor's arm,

crying to him in the rising din to try to escape back down the canyon. Her eyes glistened with tears as she realized that actually there was no hope of his getting away. In trying to save him, she had only succeeded in hastening his death.

"It's my fault, Ki-Gor," she mourned. "I wanted to save you. I love you so." Her voice broke.

Ki-Gor felt for her blindly. His exertions had once more plunged him into blackness. He caught her against him and his mouth found hers. Then he shoved her away behind him, and turned toward the sound of the Tatoga.

Ki-Gor's pitiful handful of followers had faltered at the sight of the thronging Tatoga. N'Geeso frenziedly cursed them, trying to force them to close ranks around Helene. But it made no difference that they never reached her.

Duran gave a savage yell and threw his curved stick with deadly accuracy. The heavy piece of wood smashed against Parson's throat, spun the mortally injured trader over in a jerking heap. The first throwing stick was hardly launched, before Duran caught another in his hairy fist and sent it hurtling at the blind White Lord.

Helene screamed, knowing Ki-Gor without his sight had no chance to escape the missile. Ki-Gor whirled at the sound of her voice, thinking a Tatoga had reached his mate. He didn't move in time to wholly escape the blow, but he did turn just enough so that the stick hit glancingly, tearing open the old wound on his forehead. Had the curved wood struck as Duran intended, it would have sheared off the upper part of his skull.

Ki-Gor staggered, his hands starting to reach toward his face. Then his arms dropped leadenly and he fell in his tracks, a wash of scarlet covering his features. Helene's tortured scream mingled with Duran's roar of triumph.

He clung atop his mount like a grotesque monster, his lips sheered back with animal viciousness, as he thundered down on the helpless girl. He leaned in the saddle and reaching with one huge arm, swept Helene from her feet at a full gallop. Then he turned the zebra expertly, cutting away to avoid N'Geeso's men.

His four mounted guards drove straight



on, crashing at full tilt into the pygmies and Nanooko's men. Before the small group could recover, the Tatoga footmen were on them. In one swift, swirling minute it was over. The flood of warriors closed over the tiny band and when it was finished, only N'Geeso and Nanooko still lived. They emerged with their lives merely because Duran had ordered them saved for a more spectacular execution at the time of the wedding ceremony.

THE legless man refused to let Helene go to Ki-Gor. He had guards hold her. Then he rode over to where the body of his step brother lay. His brutal face didn't change expression as he stared down at the frail, broken figure of the man he actually had destroyed long before this day.

He turned the zebra so he could see Ki-Gor. His loose mouth twisted in a cruel smile. His victory was complete.

"The cur still breathes," he announced. "He'll make a pretty sight burning on a stake before the Cave of Death. That should be a worthwhile lesson to others who think to oppose Momba-N'gar."

The pygmies had slain three of Duran's mounted guards with their poison darts, so the legless man had Ki-Gor tied across one of the riderless zebra. On another, he had Helene placed with her hands tied behind her.

"You look worn down, honey," he sneered. "I want to take good care of you. After all, pretty soon we'll be the only two whites left among these savages, so we better start sticking together." He guffawed at his sadistic joke.

Helene had borne all she could stand. Maddened with grief, she staggered with a kick the black who held her zebra's reins. She dug her heels into the pony's sides. The half-wild animal gave two leaps and crashed against Duran's mount.

Struck broadside, the legless man's pony was knocked from its feet and fell hard. Duran was catapulted from the saddle and went rolling and bouncing across the ground like a great barrel. It happened so quickly and unexpectedly that not one of his men had a chance to interfere.

When she first acted, Helene's sole object was to hurt or maim Duran. The legless man had been holding the reins to Ki-

Gor's zebra, but he turned these loose as his pony went down. The animal on which Ki-Gor was tied whirled in fright, scattering the men who stood around it. Helene instantly saw an opportunity to cheat Duran of his triumph.

Her animal, shaken by the collision, reeled back on its haunches. Helene kicked it into motion, started up the canyon towards the fire. She swept past Ki-Gor's mount, and as she knew it would, it stampeded after her. With a ringing clatter of hooves, the two striped beasts tore a way through the loose crowd and broke into the open.

"Stop them!" came Duran's infuriated roar. "Shoot down those zebra, you gaping fools!"

Arrows were flung into a score of bows, but before a single Bowman could fire, a brawny black took two great running leaps and cast his spear. The black shaft cut a thin, quick arc through the air and slashed into the right hind leg of Helene's pony.

The hamstrung zebra toppled as its leg gave way. Helene went diving from its back, twisting in mid-air to land sitting down in a patch of sand. The other zebra drove past within two feet of her, going at a full gallop.

The air was suddenly full of whirring arrows as the Tatoga sought to bring down the second animal before it got out of range. An arrow dug into the creature's haunches, serving only to whip it to greater speed. Three more barbs struck almost together. One digging into its side inches from Ki-Gor's head. The zebra faltered for a second, then recovered its stride, and disappeared around the bend.

"After him," commanded Duran. "That wounded zebra can't carry him long."

Helene sank down on her face in the sand. She was too exhausted and beaten to fight any more. Whether the frightened zebra carried Ki-Gor into the flames or whether Duran recaptured him, the White Lord was forever lost to her.

## IX

KI-GOR swam up through darkness. A vague, worrisome murmuring of voices stirred him to try to gather his senses. Then the sharp pain in his head



struck him, held him paralyzed for an interval.

By the time the pain eased, he was wholly conscious. There was the taste of blood in his mouth and he could feel it streaming over his face. He recognized Duran's voice, but before he could wholly understand what had happened, a sudden commotion broke around him. He heard the swift clatter of hooves, the impact of two heavy bodies colliding, and felt the animal under him give a surging leap.

He clung desperately with arms and legs to the heaving zebra as it bucked twice and then broke into a run. The pounding, heaving motion brought a wave of sickness. His head seemed about to burst. Then he lost consciousness again.

When Ki-Gor came to the second time, smoke seared his nostrils. The zebra had stopped running. It stood wide-legged, its head down, slowly dying from the arrow wounds inflicted by the Tatoga. The animal had run through the canyon and kept going until it spent the last of its waning strength trying to find a way through the flames.

Great, rasping breaths shook the zebra. Its muscles trembled violently. The forelegs gave way first, and seconds later the hind legs collapsed. With an almost gentle motion, the zebra rolled over on its side, pinning Ki-Gor in a near sitting position, with the weight of the creature's midsection on his lap.

That crushing weight on his legs shocked Ki-Gor alert. He had to free his bonds soon or he was finished.

Without thinking, he pressed his face against the zebra to wipe the blood from his eyes. Then he raised his head and looked about him. Thick smoke lay everywhere and a roaring, crackling line of fire moved in toward him. The zebra had carried him back into the fire trap.

He was estimating how much time he had before the fire reached him, when suddenly he realized he was seeing the smoking, heat-ravaged forest with utmost clarity. His sight more nearly normal than it had been at any time since the original head injury. But remembering how swiftly and completely the blindness could overtake him, he tried not to waste a single precious moment.

"I must hurry," he kept telling himself

in desperation. "If the blindness comes before I get free, I'll never get away."

He strained to break the bonds on his wrists, only to learn the true extent of his weakness. His powerful body had absorbed punishment which would have killed even most strong men, but he had driven it to its outermost limit and it could go no further. He gasped for breath, while the feeling of a trapped animal pressed in upon him.

When he started to resume the struggles which he knew beforehand were useless, his eye fell on the feathered shaft of one of the arrows buried in the zebra. It had stabbed low in the pony's belly and by working his hands and feet as far to the left as possible, he brought his fingers to the shaft. With infinite difficulty, he tugged the barb out of the flesh. Then he reversed it, pressing the feathered end back into the wound so that the point stuck upward in the air.

He held the thongs binding his wrists against the sharp edges of the arrow-heading, sawing them up and down. Sweat ran off his face and shoulders in rivulets. It was agonizingly slow work, for the arrow kept turning under the pressure. A burning tree came crashing down, its flaming branches reaching to within fifteen yards of the White Lord. The fire ran outward from the tree like a yellow stream, lighting the surrounding brush.

Ki-Gor kept himself at his task and finally the bonds shredded apart. He tore the thongs from his wrists, braced his hands against the inert zebra and worked his feet free. Sparks had set the grass about him to smouldering, so with his ankles still bound, he had to crawl to a safer point before he could stop to untie the last of the knots.

He tried to think where he might find haven from both the flames and the Tatoga. At the rate it was going, the fire would reach the canyon within a few more hours. Surely, if there was any safe place for a man to hide, N'Geeso would have found it. He thought of how delighted Duran would be to see him driven back into the canyon, and he swore to himself that he'd die before letting himself go back and surrender.

Unable to arrive at any plan, he stumbled haphazardly through the smoke-filled



jungle, putting as much distance as possible between him and the dead zebra. The Tatoga would follow the zebra's tracks in the hope of recapturing him. His mouth and throat were parched, and with every passing minute his thirst grew more unendurable.

"This thirst is one torment I don't have to suffer," he told himself. There had been a small spring near their camp. "At least, I can drink my fill a last time."

Twice he had to hide to avoid Tatoga searching parties and he was almost done for when he finally stumbled through the abandoned camp and went on a hundred yards to locate the spring. He fell on his stomach and buried his face in the cold, fresh water. When he had drunk his fill, he plunged his arms full length into the coolness. Then he sat up, put his legs into the spring and gradually slid his whole body into the small, clear basin.

TO his surprise the water came up to his chin. He hadn't thought the spring was more than three feet deep. He found also that the basin was shaped like a small-necked bottle, with the area beneath the surface mushrooming out into a roomy chamber where the water had worn a softer strata of rock away.

He climbed out of the spring, stood lost in deep thought for a moment. A man might survive the fire if he could manage to stay at the bottom of that cold water until the timber around the place was burned out. The spring flowed enough to keep the water from boiling.

Ki-Gor's lips set in a hard, determined line. He hurried back to the camp, picked up three extra blowguns left by the pygmies, found a Tatoga knife which one of them had carried as a souvenir, and gathered up the remains of their food stock. Then he hid in the brush near the spring and waited.

Within an hour the fire had crept so close he had to get in the water. He watched the trees and brush about him begin to burn, and then closing his lips tightly about the mouthpiece of a blowgun, he sat down on the bottom of the spring, leaving the other end of the hollow, reedlike blowgun protruding about

an inch above the water. By breathing slowly enough to give the hot air time to cool slightly before reaching his lungs, he would be able to survive.

His body grew cold and cramped in the chill water at first, but as the heat of the forest fire grew more intense, the spring became lukewarm. He lost track of time, giving his whole attention to getting sufficient oxygen into his aching lungs. When the air he breathed no longer burned his throat and the water about him began to grow chill, he thrust his head above the surface.

Two hours later he was able to wet down the bank, climb out and lie down. About him on every side were smouldering fires, beds of hot coals and acres of white ash. Despite the heat, the exhausted White Lord fell into a deep sleep as soon as he stretched out.

It was mid-morning of the next day before he awakened. He was entirely alone in that eerie sea of desolation. He breakfasted on the food which he had placed in the spring, opening with his knife two cans which had come from Parson's stock and rounding out the meal with fruit and nuts.

He ate not because he was hungry, but to regain his strength. He sat dejectedly for a long time, trying to figure out what he should do. He wasn't certain whether N'Geeso had survived the Tatoga charge, but he knew Duran wouldn't kill Helene. It seemed hopeless for him to go alone to the Tatoga kraal, but he could think of no other course to follow.

A single item brightened his dark outlook: the blindness hadn't returned. His eyes smarted from the exposure to smoke and water and his head wound pained him badly, but his sight remained clear. Parson's treatment might have taken effect or, perhaps, just as the former doctor said could happen, Ki-Gor's eyes had finally readjusted themselves. But the White Lord felt the second blow on the head actually was what had restored his sight.

He moved cautiously at first, but he found no sign of the Tatoga. It was natural they should believe he had perished in the fire. His anxiety about Helene pushed him to greater boldness, and he began to travel openly instead of slowly



creeping from the cover of one rock to another.

When he reached the site of the battle, he halted, surprised. The bodies of his dead friends had been placed in a neat line and covered with rocks. It was a gesture one wouldn't expect from Duran. Ki-Gor stood by the graves, gripped by sorrow.

Behind him sounded the faint rattle of loose gravel stirred by a footstep. Jerked from his reverie, his face went abruptly savage as he spun, knife in hand, to meet his stalkers. The Tatoga had set a clever trap, but they would learn how dear was the cost of closing it.

He was a murderous, ravening killer in that moment. As he turned with that incredible speed of his, he saw the line of tall, powerfully built warriors standing like statues. He snarled, and leaped straight at them, knowing he must strike quickly before he was overwhelmed.

Then abruptly his heels dug into the earth. He stopped, a queer, shaken look coming over him. He blinked dully, his knife arm slowly sinking to his side.

The men were Masai warriors!

They were his friends from the far jungle. They were the Congo's most feared warriors, whose steel legions had broken every tribe that had ever stood against them.

And standing like an ebony giant among them was the greatest of the Masai war-dogs, their almost legendary leader, the huge-thewed Tembu George.

Ki-Gor was stunned speechless for a moment. Times without number during past weeks he had wished for these men about him. Now, like an incredible dream come true, they stood before him.

"How did you know to come?" he cried, his voice hoarse with sudden feeling.

He saw Tembu George's eyes widen, saw how tense and strained were the men's faces. They watched him with a strange fascination, but not one of them made a move toward him, not one of them spoke.

"What's wrong?" Ki-Gor asked, perturbed. "Why do you look at me so queerly? Don't you know me?"

**T**EMBU George swallowed hard. There was a nervous tremor in his deep bass as he finally spoke. "Aye, we

know you, O Ghost-of-the-White Lord. We captured a prisoner who told us how you were burned in the fire and how these brave ones were slain by the legless man. That is how we knew to come and bury them. We had just finished when we heard your footsteps. We hid and saw you coming from your death-place in the embers."

Comprehension dawned on Ki-Gor. He looked down at himself. Every inch of his body was covered with fine, white ash.

"Go to your rest, O Ghost-of-the-White Lord," continued Tembu George. "We have come with our little brothers, the pygmies, to avenge you."

Not one of those black men doubted that he looked upon Ki-Gor's ghost. This white-shrouded figure had come out of the smoking desolation, come straight to the graves of his dead fellows. The Masai were unnerved, but a combination of love and curiosity had brought them out of hiding to stare at the spirit of their departed friend.

A relieved grin touched Ki-Gor's dusty features. "Hai!" he exclaimed. "So it takes a ghost to frighten a good word out of you about Ki-Gor? Well, wipe away those crocodile tears, you great-footed children, because whether you like it or not, I'm not a ghost."

He strode up to the tense Tembu George, caught the big black in his arms and hugged him.

"Is a ghost's body warm and solid?" he chuckled. "Does a spirit wipe ashes all over you and nearly break your weak back with his grasp?"

Tembu George's jaw dropped. Then he bellowed for joy. He caught Ki-Gor and mauled him with elephantine roughness, shouting all the while to his warriors, "He lives! By all the gods, Ki-Gor lives!"

Before he could get a word out of them about themselves, he had to explain the seeming miracle of his survival. Then they dragged out of him the whole grim tale of his struggle with the legless man. Finally, they explained their own presence.

"The white devil and the wizard, Gita, overplayed themselves," grimly rumbled Tembu George, "when they had their drums boast to the jungle how they had defeated you, how as a sign of contempt



Gita would take your woman in marriage."

Another Masai tapped Ki-Gor's chest with his knuckles, said meaningfully, "They forgot the power of your name!" He meant that any other drum message would have died after it reached its intended listeners, which in this case were the Tatoga's neighboring tribes.

Interrupting each other, the warriors explained how the message had leaped from kraal to kraal, speeding out over the Congo, covering in hours, distances requiring days to travel on foot. Duran's ignorance of the jungle and Gita's bursting vanity had served to make the mistake. The message had gone far beyond the tribes the two criminals sought to impress.

"We heard," Tembu George said simply, "and before the drums had finished talking our boats were on the river."

He did not see fit to explain that they had left a trail of fear-paralyzed peoples behind them, for the Masai and the pygmies had moved like lightning, keeping as much as possible to the rivers and threatening every tribe along the way with utter devastation if they allowed news of the invasion to leak out. That had served to keep the drums quiet, and they had moved too fast for word of mouth gossip to get ahead of them.

"We traveled all last night, using the forest fire as a beacon," the Masai chieftain revealed. "When we arrived this morning, most of the Tatoga were gone. We caught several prisoners, one of them an assistant of Gita's. He claims the marriage will be held this afternoon. My men prepare to attack when the Tatoga gather for the ceremony."

By the time they reached the pygmy and Masai army, Ki-Gor and Tembu George had worked out a detailed plan of attack. The White Lord went among the warriors, selecting four hundred men, half pygmies and half Masai. Then taking along Gita's assistant, he led this picked force on ahead of the main body.

He had the Tatoga prisoner lead them to the bluff overlooking the ceremonial grounds. A scowl from Tembu George had sufficed to make the man reveal the secret of the waterfall, a huge earthen dam with an outlet which could be closed

to shut off the flow of water. There also was an opening into the Cave of Death descending from the bluff.

They captured three more of Gita's men at the bluff. They were the assistants entrusted with cutting off the waterfall when the chief wizard went into his mumbo-jumbo act before the cave mouth. Ki-Gor left three of his own men to operate the dam and led the others down into the cave.

He made the witchdoctors show him where Gita had hidden the stone image of Momba-N'gar. Then he had his warriors drag it back to the front of the cave, replace it on its pedestal.

They waited restively behind the thundering curtain of water until afternoon. Then as their first signal that the ceremony was beginning outside, they heard the sound of the falls decrease, Ki-Gor drew the men back far enough so that the darkness and swirling mists would hide them from view. He lined them up in regular ranks, ten abreast.

Ki-Gor's hands gripped tight on his borrowed Masai bow as he strained to see through the dwindling waters to the open space beyond. At last the fall stopped. He saw the black, swarming mass of the Tatoga lit by bright sunshine. They formed a huge semi-circle before the cave mouth, and in the hollow space in front of them was a sight which sent hot rage burning through the White Lord's veins.

Two stakes surrounded with dry firewood had been set up fifty yards apart. N'Geeso was tied to one of the stakes, Nanooko to the other. A witchdoctor with a flaming torch stood by each pile of wood.

Between the stakes stood Helene and Gita. Helen's ankles and wrists were bound by silver chains, and as an added indignity a silver collar had been placed around her neck joined to another chain which the pompous Gita held in his hand.

**F**ACING the huge throng, with his back to the cave, was the legless man mounted on a zebra. Sepah stood beside him with arrogant pride, reveling in her prominence. By the very set of Duran's shoulders, Ki-Gor could see how he savored this moment of triumph. The neighboring chieftains were in the forefront of



the crowd, and their frightened faces showed that already they were awed by the dread leader of the Tatoga.

"Light the fires!" roared Duran. "Let the cries of these two as they roast be a warning to those who would oppose Momba-N'gar. And when they have shrieked their last, then shall the marriage of Gita and this woman who once belonged to the weakling, Ki-Gor, be considered sealed."

The White Lord strode out of the darkness of the cave into the bright glare of sunlight on the wet rock. He raised his bow, and with swift deadliness lashed an arrow at the black who bent to light N'Geeso's pyre. The missile caught the man in the side, threw him over on his back. The torch fell on the native's chest and he bucked wildly trying to get out from under the flame.

Before the first man fell, Ki-Gor turned his attention to the witchdoctor leaning to fire the wood about Nanooko. He drove an arrow through the black's skull, so that his body fell forward on the exact place where he had held his torch.

Ki-Gor slid a third arrow into his bow. The whole attention of the crowd had been so fixed on the legless man that hardly a black had previously glanced at the cave. But now like a giant, dull-witted monster with unnumbered eyes, the vast throng saw Ki-Gor and momentarily froze. Not a tongue seemed to move.

"Look you on the true image of Momba-N'gar behind me," shouted Ki-Gor, "and know you have turned against your chieftain, your friends and yourselves for a rotten, evil killer who is no more a god than the mangiest dango!"

Gita stood with bulging eyes, staring at the unbelievable sight of a dead man appearing out of nowhere to strike down men with his bow. Then he made a leap, trying to get behind Helene. But for all his strange, unearthly calm, the White Lord was too fast for the wizard. He spitted Gita on an arrow like the pig he was, twirled him over as he leaped so that he died beside the girl he thought to possess.

Duran had turned in his saddle, as thunderstruck as the others. His face went hideous with hate when he saw the White Lord. Once more Ki-Gor had

wriggled through his hands, returned to shake the belief of the natives in him. Duran didn't suspect that Ki-Gor had allies, but thought this was only one more example of his audacity.

"He lies," screamed the furious Duran. "This is another sneaking trick by which he tries to cheat you of glory and riches. Forward, guards! This time we will slay the cur before the eyes of the crowd and make certain he is dead."

A confused uproar broke from the Tatoga. Some among them perhaps had sudden doubts about the legless man, but few could think straight in that moment. They had grown used to obeying the legless man, and he had cunningly cast his spell of evil over them, buying their loyalty with his promises of the greatness which was to be theirs. In a choice between Ki-Gor and Duran, it was Duran alone who offered them tangible benefits for following him.

The legless man swung his zebra and spurred at Ki-Gor, tearing a throwing stick from the belt at his waist as he rode. He crouched low so the zebra's head and neck would protect him from Ki-Gor's arrows. Behind him his personal guard rushed forward at a run, and warriors broke out of the crowd to follow them.

Seeing this vast mass of men rushing in upon the White Lord, Helene screamed to him to get away. She, too, thought her beloved mate had come alone.

If Ki-Gor heard Helene's voice, he gave no sign. Unmoving, he waited, his narrowed eyes fastened on the zebra. The bow in his hands was bent to its furthest point, the arrow straining for release.

He saw the legless man suddenly rear up, his right hand flung high for the cast. This time Duran wasn't pitted against a blind man. Ki-Gor shot so swiftly he hardly seemed to aim. He easily could have killed Duran, but he didn't. Only the feel of his fingers around the legless man's throat would satisfy the White Lord. Instead of inflicting a fatal wound, he shattered Duran's wrist so that the throwing stick fell harmlessly to the ground.

Duran was almost on Ki-Gor then, spurring the zebra with insane rage. Ki-Gor held the bow like a club. He hammered the pony across the head, causing



it to swerve slightly. Then he came up with a great bound, caught Duran in his arms and dragged him from the saddle.

They rolled over and over on the wet, slippery rock, beating and tearing at each other with insensate fury. The grotesque, brutish Duran fought with the strength of a bull ape, but there was no denying the stored-up rage which fired the White Lord with superhuman strength.

Ki-Gor hammered the man's hideous bullet head with rocking blows, gouging away skin and flesh each time he struck. Then with the speed of a cobra, his hands shot around Duran's thick neck. Ki-Gor rolled to his knees, the tremendous muscles of his back and shoulders swelling with the killing pressure he exerted.

Duran's guards sprinted across the rock bridge, racing to break the White Lord's death-hold. They dared not throw their spears for fear of killing their master. Then out of the mist-shrouded darkness of the cave charged Ki-Gor's men.

The bluff shook with their thunderous battle-cry as they smashed into the startled Tatoga guards. And like a tremendous, earth-shattering echo, from the far end of the clearing came the answering battle-cry of the main force of pygmy and Masai warriors.

Like a grain field whipped by storm, the Tatoga shuddered under the impact of that coordinated attack. They had no chance to rally or make a stand against those wild, cheering warriors pouring in upon them. The Tatoga horde splintered apart, and into every avenue that opened drove the huge, fierce Masai and the deadly pygmies.

SO fierce an onslaught could not long be endured. Those Tatoga fortunate enough to get away, fled for their lives into the forest, but the great bulk of them threw down their arms and surrendered.

Ki-Gor stood wide-legged at the edge of the cave, watching the finish of the battle. His muscles trembled with weakness now that his rage had died out. At his feet lay the body of the legless man, devoid at last of the evil spirit which had brought ruin and death to so many. The blue, distorted face and protruding tongue proclaimed the manner of his dying.

A squad of the men who had been in the cave with Ki-Gor stood guard around Helene. Similar squads had released N'Geeso and Nanooko from the stakes.

Ki-Gor raised his hands over his head and his allies prodded the beaten Tatoga into silence.

"You have paid for your greed," he told them. "Now each of you shall look upon this rotten thing you called a god, and when you are finished, this corpse and the image of your false god Momba-N'gar shall both be cast into the water and be forgotten. I give you into the care of your true chieftain, Nanooko, knowing he will exact proper punishment of those who supported the legless man's evil reign."

He waved to the guards around Nanooko and they cleared away for the old man so he could reach Ki-Gor. As Nanooko clasped his hand, the nearly-nude figure of a girl slipped out of the crowd and ran towards them. Masai and pygmy warriors moved to intercept her, but Ki-Gor called to them to let her pass.

She flung herself down before Ki-Gor, ringing his knees with her arms. It was Sepah. "The legless man made me help him," she said, weeping. "I was against everything he did. I meant to kill him when I had the chance."

She flung her arms wide, crawling backward a few feet on her knees. She had used her beauty before on men.

"Protect me, Ki-Gor, and I will be your slave," she begged, her sly eyes assessing him. "There are some who will tell you lies about me. Protect me and you will never regret your generosity."

Ki-Gor studied her coldly. "It is Nanooko's generosity you must ask, not mine," he said. "He will judge all wrongdoers."

Fear flicked in her eyes. She looked quickly towards the old chieftain. Nanooko gave Sepah no chance to speak.

"You will be tied hand and foot against the legless man," Nanooko grimly decreed, "and cast with him into the water. And if you dare speak another lying word, you shameless wench, I'll have you flayed and rubbed with salt before drowning you with your lover!"

"Oh, no!" wailed Sepah. "Save me, Ki-Gor! Don't let him kill me."



The sentence was harsh, but Sepah's crimes were many and great, and in the jungle the yardstick of justice is "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth". Ki-Gor had given all judgment over to N'Geeso and it was not his place nor his wish to interfere. He walked past Sepah, crossed the rock bridge to the clearing.

N'Geeso ran to meet him, clasped his hand joyously.

"If I myself, buried you," the pygmy swore fervently, "never would I take an oath that you were actually dead."

Ki-Gor grinned. "One owes you debts it will take a lifetime to pay," he said, acknowledging the loyalty N'Geeso had displayed.

"Bah!" snapped N'Geeso, suddenly embarrassed. "Utter no more such talk."

Then the White Lord strode on to where

Helene waited. Tembu George had just freed her from the silver chains. The Masai chieftain watched fondly as the jungle couple embraced.

"Oh, Ki-Gor," murmured Helene joyously, "I never thought the time would be again when I would feel your arms about me." She looked into his face. "And your eyes are well again. I know it by the way you walk and act."

"You should know it from the way I look at you," he told her softly.

Helene let Ki-Gor kiss her, then she pulled away from him, held up a warning finger.

"But let me tell you one thing, Ki-Gor," she said emphatically. "I'll go to war with you any time you say, but this is absolutely the last time you'll ever see me going with you on a mission of peace."

**AND IT'S A JOB FOR ALL OF US**

Let's Do It Together

Let's Help Mr. & Mrs. U.S.A. (140,000,000 of us)

Live Together • Work Together • Strive Together

To Build A Great and Happy Nation

**IN A WORLD OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

• *American Brotherhood* •  
FOR JUSTICE, AMITY, UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION  
AMONG PROTESTANTS, CATHOLICS AND JEWS



# "Slayer by Stealth"

By WILTON HAZZARD

**Two men followed that spoor of blood into the forbidden veldt. But only one was coming back. Only one could escape the Headless Vultures of Umzinto!**

THE CLOCK IN THE TOWN OF Laurencio Marques was just striking midnight at the moment Dan Turcan stepped from the gloom of the arches flanking the Avenida Aquila and hurried toward the plaza. He gained the shadow of the palmetto trees, then came to an abrupt halt, looking keenly about him. Someone had been shadowing him up from the wharf but there was no sign of him now. Reassured, he made his way more leisurely toward the Governor's residence through the Vasco da Gama gardens.

The familiar odors of the jungle—the pleasant ones, were all around him. The heavy sweetness of orchids; of the dusty hibiscus and the sharper fragrance of the red clover blossom. Below the town, with its flat-roofed, white and pink-washed houses, the waters of the bay shone like dull gold under the rusting muzzles of the old fort's cannon—guns that once had bloomed Portugal's maritime supremacy in the ears of the world and the claim to the riches of the fever-sodden hinterland beyond the town.

But times had changed. Portuguese authority was weak even on the coast. Cetshwayo's impis were flashing along the borders. White renegades and black upstarts clutched at rich territories laid waste by massacre. In the chancelleries of Europe calculating eyes studied the map of Africa, and in Africa, men slept with a hand on their rifles. Da Cunha, governor of Mozambique, watched uneasily the rapid growth of colonies and republics on his long, vague frontier.

It was like Da Cunha, Turcan thought, to call him to a secret conference at midnight. Everything he did, he did secretly. It was not that he was unscrupulous, he had an hidalgo's pride in blood and honor. It was just consciousness of his country's weakness that made him prefer intrigue

where an overt move would provoke a powerful rival. Nor was he entirely wrong in this case, Turcan conceded. If there was a treaty to be signed with a powerful chief, Turcan, the supposedly disinterested American, the poor white hunter, could act for his adopted country without causing so much as the lifting of a political eyebrow. Yes, da Cunha had his points, and that he paid well was not the least of them in Turcan's opinion.

But it wasn't money that had brought him to Laurencio in answer to da Cunha's summons after two years of exile. He wanted to see Ines da Cunha again before she married the noble de Cabral. It would be opening an old wound. He should have ignored the summons, stayed away. But he was a sucker for punishment and—

Turcan lifted his head, a faint metallic sound, dissonant amid the pulsing rhythm of insect throats had reached his ears. He walked on for a few strides, then faced about quickly.

The leaves of an ilex bush bordering on the path rustled and quivered. No white man could have gone to cover so swiftly and silently unless, like Turcan, he had spent half his life in the jungle. The shadows were an invisible cloak for a black skin. Turcan was unarmed but he advanced on the bush, knowing that it was safer to force the black to attack or run.

Moonlight flashed on steel as he neared the bush. Turcan dived at a pair of black, muscular legs and brought his assailant crashing down on the stone path where he lay with the breath knocked out of him.

Turcan got to his feet, picking up his broad-brimmed hat and a short, stabbing assegai that had been aimed at his throat. He recognized Makua's workmanship and looked down on the warrior, his mind probing for a motive for the attack.

His steamer had anchored in the Bay at





*De Cabral came at him with the club, kicking and flailing.*



noon but da Cunha had asked for secrecy and he had remained aboard until a little before midnight. Only someone close to da Cunha could have known of his arrival.

The Makua warrior was getting to his feet. Muscles rippled under his oiled skin and the moonlight glinted on his metal head ring and bangles. Turcan's face was in the shadow of his hat.

"Are you ready to die, O Slayer by stealth?" he asked in the Makua tongue.

The warrior faced him without flinching: "I have no weapon. Otherwise you would die, White man," he boasted.

Turcan snapped the shaft of the assegai across his knee and flung the pieces from him: "What now, warrior?" he challenged.

**T**HE Makua sprang at him. Turcan met his rush with his shoulder. His arms twined around the other's waist like flexible bands of steel. The Makua gasped and clawed at Turcan's face as he felt his ribs bend. In the next moment he was lifted and thrown into a flower bed.

He got to his feet slowly and stood with folded arms. Turcan had lost his hat in the brief encounter and the warrior's impassive gaze dwelt on his blond curls.

"It is enough! I know you now, lord," said he.

Turcan's eyes searched the other's face: "So! You did not know me but yet you stalked me as the hunter stalks his quarry. How is that, liar?"

"It is true, lord. Your back was shown to me and I followed as I was told to do. But perchance I would not have done so if I had known that it was *you*, whose deeds are praised throughout the jungle."

"Who thirsts for my blood?" demanded Turcan.

"His name may not be spoken, lord." And Turcan knew that neither threat nor torture would drag it from the grim-faced warrior.

"This you may answer with honor, warrior," said he. "Is his skin white or black?"

The Makua's teeth showed in a grin: "He is neither white nor black and do not try to smell him out, lord. For if your paths should cross, you would surely die!"

A half-caste? Turcan knew that he had dangerous enemies among the few who knew or guessed that he was da Cunha's agent, but none he could think of that would

answer the Makua's enigma. And the warrior's set features told him that further questioning would be met with stubborn silence.

"Return to your master," said he. "Say to him that I pluck out evil at the roots. I will smell him out! I punish the master not the slave. Go, and be witness to my words."

At the Residencia Turcan was conducted down a long hall to da Cunha's study. The bare, flat feet of his white-coated Swahili guide padded over the polished floor of yellow wood. Turcan's footsteps echoed hollowly behind him. He heard voices as the house-boy opened a door to announce him.

Two men rose as he entered. Da Cunha was adjusting his blue tunic which was liberally laced with gold. It fitted his plump figure tightly and his fingers fumbled with the buttons. The other man was as tall as Turcan and dressed in immaculate white. His black hair curled crisply; his lower lip showed full and red above his pointed beard. It was a handsome face but for the eyes which, though large and widely spaced, had a cold, tawny glint in them, an aloofness that robbed the regular features of their charm.

Da Cunha came from behind his desk and extended his hand to Turcan with an affable smile: "Senhor," said he, "I feared that you would not come. When I sent you away, you were angry and your anger is a thing to remember. Perhaps you see now that it was for your own good as well as that of my niece, Senhorita da Cunha."

"Some things are seen better at a distance, Excellency."

"I agree, if you include my niece among those things."

Turcan's eyes flashed: "Excellency, I say again that I made no advances towards your niece."

Da Cunha waved his hand: "No, no! We will not start again!" He settled himself behind his desk. "You know the Senhor de Costa Cabral," he went on. "And since this is as much his business as mine, he will remain with us."

As Turcan's gaze came to rest on de Cabral, there was a noticeable stiffening in the poise of both men.

Lopes Bermudo de Costa Cabral was gall and wormwood for Turcan. It was not wholly because de Cabral was to marry



Ines da Cunha. De Cabral lived by the prazzo system—a system by which the districts or prazzos were auctioned off to the highest bidder, the right to levy taxes going with them. De Cabral had an Oriental conception of "squeeze" and he sucked money from his prazzos as a leech sucks blood. Turcan hated the vicious system the other stood for, and he wore his colors on his sleeve.

"I regret it, Excellency," said he. "But I'll have no part of anything de Cabral's mixed up in."

De Cabral's eyes burned, but his lips smiled: "Your Excellency would do well to acquaint Senhor Turcan with the nature of our mission." His white teeth showed in an insinuating smile, as he turned to Turcan: "You forget, senhor, that we have one thing in common."

Da Cunha looked from one to the other: "So?" said he. "Very well, I shall be brief. Senhor Turcan, my niece has been abducted; she has vanished like—like a puff of smoke. The holy Saints know how and where!"

**I**NES DA CUNHA—Turcan's cheeks burned as the significance of de Cabral's words rubbed salt into his still raw memory of the girl. As he saw her now she was a coquette with seductive lines and dazzling eyes. She had accompanied her uncle on safaris that Turcan had organized and led. No man with red blood in his veins could share the easy companionship of the camp with her and come out unscathed. Turcan had not. But the bluest blood of Portugal flowed in her veins and he had kept his feelings to himself, or fancied he had, nursing his pride in silence.

Feeling the mockery in de Cabral's eyes, he stifled the exclamation that had come to his lips. When he spoke it was with studied calm:

"My condolences, Excellency. When did it happen?"

Da Cunha wiped sweat from his bald head:

"The devil, you take it coolly! Two months ago, Senhor!"

"Two months!" Turcan was incredulous.

"Yes, senhor. I have sent troops to search. What good is a regiment—an army in this stinking wilderness? Moreover, I have had to recall my soldiers—the moment of

troops is apt to be misunderstood in these times. Senhor de Cabral has just returned from a long unsuccessful search. I am at my wits' end. You know the country and the tribes as few men do, I ask you to serve me again, Senhor. Do you accept?"

"Of course, Excellency. But let us start at the beginning."

"Good! My niece vanished on the eve of her nuptials. She was to have married de Cabral on the following day and—"

"One moment, Excellency," Turcan interposed with a gleam in his eye. De Cabral was da Cunha's choice, not the girl's. She was high-spirited and if she had made up her mind to defy her uncle—"What makes you sure that the Senhorita was abducted, Excellency?"

"The devil! What else?" Da Cunha spread his hands.

Turcan smiled: "Is it not conceivable that a woman as used to the jungle as the Senhorita is might prefer its dangers to marriage with de Cabral?"

"Holy Mother—!" De Cabral's anger choked him as he sprang to his feet. Turcan was up in the same instant.

But da Cunha brought his fist down on his desk with a crash.

"Senhors, you forget my presence!" Then, as the two young men returned to their seats and sat glaring at each other, he went on:

"Senhor Turcan, you will guard your tongue because de Cabral has my commission in his pocket. He will accompany you on this safari."

"The devil you say" Turcan gasped.

"The devil does not say it, senhor! I, Dom Pedro da Cunha, Governor of Mozambique, say it! I am not concerned with your rivalry. If you are true gentlemen you will set it aside until my niece is found." He rose, adjusting his tight tunic with a decisive jerk.

"Now, Senhors, I shall leave you to discuss your plans and, by the Holy Saints, if I hear any more of your quarreling I'll clap you both in irons!"

After Da Cunha had left them there was a long silence. Turcan was the first to speak.

"I ran into a little trouble in the gardens on my way here" said he. "A Makua with a sticker. Was he a pal of yours?"

"A pal of mine! A Makua? What the



devil—"De Cabral's surprise was genuine.

"Never mind," said Turcan. He considered the other with a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"You know that I hate your guts, but you want to go on safari with me where you'll have to sweat, eat and sleep with me, Why?"

De Cabral brought the tips of his white fingers together and eyed Turcan solemnly. Said he:

"When I learned that his Excellency had sent for you, it occurred to me that women are emotional creatures, apt to be swept off their feet by the enthusiasm of the moment—by such a sentiment as gratitude, for instance. And that this was as true of Senhorita da Cunha as it was of the others. Do you agree, senhor?"

"Your experience makes me the pupil. Go on."

"Well, I think you are a very competent fellow. If Ines da Cunha is alive, you will find her. And now, I ask you frankly, is that fair competition, senhor?"

Turcan laughed: "I see what you're driving at. You think I'll find the girl and, out of gratitude, she'll throw herself in my arms. Not Ines da Cunha!"

"Nevertheless, I do not feel that I can take the risk. Now I propose that we make a truce until the Senhorita is found. After that, may the better man win! You Americans boast of your sportsmanship. Is mine not a sporting proposition, senhor?"

"It sounds like one, de Cabral." Turcan rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "The way the old man has things fixed, we haven't much choice. Well, if you're still of the same mind tomorrow, all right. We'll go up river as far as the Carmelite mission at Umzinto. We'll organize the safari there, if necessary."

"If necessary?" De Cabral's eyebrows arched.

Turcan grinned. "I still think the Senhorita ran out on you, de Cabral. If she did, my guess is that she'd go to Umzinto and ask for the protection of the good friars until the old man cooled off. If it wasn't for vanity, you might have thought of that."

De Cabral's tawny eyes glowed; the knuckles of his clenched hands showed white.

"Your tongue has a sting in it, Turcan.

When our truce is over, it will be a pleasure to extract it."

"Whenever you feel disposed to try, senhor," said Turcan.

## II

FIFTY miles above Laurence Marques the course of the Komati was blocked by an incomprehensible accumulation of black boulders like the moraine of a glacier. Turcan paid off his Swahili boatmen after unloading their kit on the left bank.

The mission, a station of Carmelite Friars, lay a dozen miles up-stream beside a deep pool shaded by monstrous, spreading, cotton-silk trees. There were traces of a trail following the river's bank up to the mission, but the good Friars had waged a losing battle against the prolific jungle growth and native indolence. Turcan and de Cabral were forced to hack their way slowly forward.

Toward evening they came out into a clearing. Columns of smoke curled skyward above the cotton trees. Turcan, walking at some distance ahead of de Cabral, was the first to catch sight of it. He stopped in his tracks looking at the smoke for a moment; then he unslung his rifle; the bolt rattled ominously as he slipped a cartridge into its breach.

De Cabral came to him and touched his arm. "What is it, senhor? The smoke?"

Turcan's eyes were sweeping the clearing: "That and the damned quiet," he replied. "It's about sunset. Shouldn't the mission bells be ringing for vespers, de Cabral?"

"The devil—that is true!" De Cabral looked up at the smoke with his mouth open. "What does it mean?"

"It could mean that the impi has passed this way," Turcan answered. "Ammunition handy, de Cabral?" he asked with a look at the other's face. "There might be a few of 'em still skulking around."

De Cabral loosened his colt in its holster and unslung his rifle: "Ready, senhor," said he, and led the way toward the hill under which the mission stood.

The silence of death was upon Umzinto, the Kraal of Achievement; so-called by the Makua because of the sweat and blood it had cost them to erect its stone walls—stone imported from a sanctuary in Por-



tugal and carried block by block through the jungle. Fire had destroyed the roof of the main building. Its walls were a blackened ruin. The huts that had formed a square facing onto the pool, where the lily and feathery papyrus had grown, were ashes. The giant trunks of the cotton trees were still smouldering. The stench of decay was in the fitful, shifting wind. Vultures rose in flight as the two White men approached and perched like medieval gargoyles in the bare, charred branches of the trees. The hyena and jackal fled to cover.

The two white men surveyed the desolation, their eyes cold, their lips bloodless.

De Cabral was the first to speak: "Mother of—!" he swore. "Could *she* be among that carrion?"

Turcan winced. For him a man was a man, alive or dead; black or white. It flashed through his mind that Ines de Cunha would not be carrion—no, the fact that Lopes le Costa Cabral loved her, made her more than mortal flesh. His eyes flashed with anger, then a vision of Ines da Cunha as he had last seen her, smiling, vividly alive, rose before his eyes. His throat tightened and he swallowed hard.

"We'll make a search," said he.

The two separated, de Cabral moving off toward the rear of the ruined main building; Turcan toward the front, picking his way slowly along the path to the pool. As he went, his eyes explored the debris. He saw no discarded weapons. The people of the mission had little warning. The dead lay close to where the doors of their huts had been, as if struck down as they rushed out at the first alarm. He paused, looking down upon the body of a dead Makua, apparently the only loss suffered by the raiding impi. The warrior had died of strangulation; strong hands had throttled the life out of him. Turcan thought of Father Furtado, the powerful chaplain of the station. His eyes scanned the ground.

A TRAIL like that made by a body dragged over the ground, led them toward the pool. A white-robed figure lay face down among the reeds at the margin of the pond, its lower half submerged in the water. Turcan dropped on his knees beside the body. Blood had soaked through the white habit. It was still wet. Gently

Turcan turned the body over. As he did so, the monk groaned. In the mud-caked features Turcan recognized Father Furtado. The monk's eyes opened and fixed on Turcan's face in a glassy stare.

"It is I, Turcan, Father." He pillowed the dying man's head on his knee.

A wan smile came to the monk's cracked lips; his big hand closed on Turcan's. He breathed deeply, marshalling his remaining strength. His lips moved. Turcan bent his head to catch the words:

"They came and were gone like a tempest, my son. Killing—killing——"

"There is one yonder who will slay no more, Father," said Turcan.

The monk shut his eyes. "God forgive me! But when I saw him lay hands on her——"

He coughed hollowly.

"The *Senorita da Cunha*?" prompted Turcan.

The monk nodded. "She came for protection from an unholy marriage. She feared——"

"She is not dead, Father?" Turcan was urgent. He knew the monk was near his end.

"They carried her off—many of the able-bodied men and women—into bondage. The half-caste Bosigo's impi from the prazzo Angoche——"

The grip on Turcan's hand tightened. Bloodless lips moved in silent prayer. Turcan stayed till the life left the monk's great body in a gasping sigh.

When Turcan got to his feet he saw de Cabral making his way toward him. He went to meet the other with cold eyes and tight lips.

"Did you discover anything?" de Cabral asked.

"I did," said Turcan with his eyes fixed on the other's face. "I learned that the impi was spewed out of Angoche, one of your prazzos, de Cabral."

The Portuguese leaned his weight on his rifle, studying Turcan's face: "So!" he said at length. "I gather that you hold me responsible for it."

"Impis were raiding before your time and mine, de Cabral. But if I was the law, I'd hang you for it, nevertheless. If you'd left them enough to live on, they might not have gone berserk."

De Cabral smiled coldly. "Let us leave



it at that, senhor. What of the senhorita de Cunha?"

"The good father said she was taken by the impi along with the able-bodied men and women."

"Then we follow the impi," said de Cabral.

Turcan smiled: "No amount of money would persuade the tribesmen hereabouts to follow it. Besides, have you thought what they would do to the tax collector of Angoche if they got their hands on him?"

De Cabral laughed: "Are you trying to frighten me, Turcan? Appearances have misled you. I can't be got rid of so easily. I have his Excellency's commission to act for him. We will send the first nigger we come across back to Laurengo Marques with news of the raid. To do otherwise would be to lose precious time. If we can't get porters, we follow the impi alone."

Turcan smiled inwardly. He wondered how long the Portuguese dandy would stand up to the fast gruelling trek that was ahead of them. Yet he recognized de Cabral's logic; Moreover he saw that he needed de Cabral since the raid had cut him off from the supplies he had hoped to obtain at Umzinto. He was another rifle; another back to carry a load, at least for a time. De Cabral had shown no weakness so far. He—Turcan glanced at his companion sharply. De Cabral's eyes were intent on his face and he felt uncomfortable, as if his thoughts had been read.

"All right," said he and, turning on his heel, led the way back up the hill.

They made camp in a glade on the other side of the *kopj*. As darkness came the vultures, hyenas—the whole scavenger pack of the jungle fought over their obscene feast. Over the red embers of their fire Turcan talked, more to shut his ears to the bedlam on the other side of the hill, than for the want of companionship.

"As I told you," he was saying, "I was attacked by a Makua at Laurengo. He said he was hired by a man whose skin was neither black nor white. Now Father Furtado spoke of a half-caste called Bosigo——"

"Holy Saints!" De Cabral slapped his thigh. "A half-caste—Bosigo!"

Turcan's eyes narrowed: "D'you happen to know the man, senhor?"

De Cabral looked surprised. "No," he

shrugged. "But I see a connection between your attacker and Bosigo. But go on, senhor. What other conclusion have you drawn? For instance, where is the impi heading?"

Turcan's lips twitched. De Cabral would have to do better than that if he wanted him to believe that he had never heard of Bosigo before.

"My guess is that the impi will trek north and West. Bosigo is doing a little slaving on his way. He'll raid more kraals. That will make his spoor easy to follow and it will delay him. We may catch up with him within three or four days. After that—well, we'll cross the bridge when we come to it."

"Hm-m," de Cabral mused. "I am inclined to agree, but for one thing. What would rouse the Government more than this attack upon Umzinto. It is a small station. He could not have hoped for many captives. It makes him a fool, senhor."

Turcan shook his head. "Not if he knew Ines da Cunha was there. His Excellency was ready to negotiate before he knew his enemy. Ines da Cunha is his safe conduct to wherever he's going. She's as good as a grant to settle wherever he pleases in Mozambique."

De Cabral was gazing into the fire, a frown between his eyes:

"Yes," he said slowly. "It does fit together. He sent one of his Makuas to attack you because he knew your reputation and was afraid." He spread his hands. "But how could he know of your coming?"

Turcan shrugged. "A house-boy at the Residency maybe. They get to know more than most Whites suspect."

De Cabral's smile was sardonic. "It is gratifying to know that you do not lay the fault at my feet, senhor."

"I'm giving you doubtful benefit," Turcan retorted. "If you'd known Ines da Cunha was here you'd have dragged her back to the altar with or without her consent."

De Cabral laughed softly. "By the Saints, you are right! That I would have done. And that I intend to do, senhor Turcan."

"Not if she doesn't want you!" said Turcan.

De Cabral unrolled his blankets and yawned: "That," said he. "Is another



bridge that we will cross when we come to it."

THEY made an early start on the following day. Turcan planned to follow the Impambanyoni. The stream joined with the Komati several miles below Komati Poort, a narrow pass through the mountains into the Transvaal. Above the fly and swamp country native kraals were more numerous. And since the population was correspondingly denser, it was the logical route for Bosigo and his slave column to follow. Moreover, in the Transvaal there was a ready market for slaves or apprentices, as the Boers called them.

They passed through the ruins of Umzinto. The vultures were still fighting over the bodies of the slain. De Cabral was in the lead. Turcan saw him stop suddenly. De Cabral's colt flashed from its holster. As Turcan ran up to him he fired twice.

"Ugly—!" said he. He gave Turcan a queer smile. "That makes two less of them," senhor," he added and walked on.

Turcan looked toward the spot from which the birds had risen in flight, measuring the distance with his eye. It was all of twenty paces. Curious, he walked over to the spot and looked down on two headless vultures. There was a grim smile on his lips when he turned to follow de Cabral. The Portuguese talked and dressed like a dandy, but there was nothing effeminate in the way he handled his weapons. Nor did he, Turcan felt sure, do anything without some dark purpose behind it. His demonstration of markmanship was more than mere braggadocio; it was a covert warning—his way of saying that two were going into the jungle, but only one was going to come out.

The first village they came to—a small one—was deserted. Its inhabitants had obviously fled into the bush. For Turcan it meant that they were on the right track. Evidently the villagers had been warned of Bosigo's approach and had scattered. The two white men searched the half dozen huts for food. Turcan was careful to leave payment in coin for what was taken on the hearth of the head man's hut. Then they began their march again, following a westerly bend of the river.

A dense cloud of smoke shot through with flames rolling up out of the forest,

warned them that they were close upon the heels of the impi. It was the third day of the trek and they had climbed to an eminence commanding a view of the valley of the Impambanyoni, where it made a sweeping bend Southward. They looked down upon the roof of the jungle sloping away to the East like a patchwork carpet. The burning kraal lay on the near side of the bend, about five miles distant. For a moment the two men watched the smoke in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. De Cabral broke the silence:

"Soon we must cross the bridge you spoke of, Senhor," said he.

Turcan nodded assent: "It looks like a fair-sized kraal. They could muster three or four hundred warriors. That means Bosigo's in strength."

"True, or he would not have attacked," de Cabral agreed. "And now we approach the end of our trek; I wonder what two men can do against an impi!"

Turcan smiled. "It's too late to think of that," said he. "We won't do anything the impi knows about, that's sure."

De Cabral looked at him curiously. "You have a plan, senhor?"

Turcan shook his head. "We'll go down to the kraal. If there's anyone alive we may learn something."

### III

THE village had been a strong one. It had occupied both banks of the river. Fire had destroyed the half on the Northern bank of the river. The other half still stood on the opposite bank upon a huge, flat outcrop of rock. The river, bursting full-born from its womb, in the Longwe Mountains, swept around it and leaped over the red rock in a crystal stream; the boulders that barred its impetuous dash to the sea, had been fretted into weird shapes and formed a natural ford of stepping stones.

A six-foot stockade of thorn bush woven between pointed stakes had encircled the village with the river flowing between. The fire had burned down to the edge of the water and had leaped across, but only that part near the banks had been destroyed. In places it looked as if it had been hacked down to prevent the spread of flames. Most of the huts were still intact.



Everywhere on the one side of the stream, was the debris of battle; a warrior's plume trampled in the dust; painted shields and assegais lay where they had fallen from the stricken warriors' hands. But there was not a body to be seen. This puzzled Turcan until his eye was caught by a white ostrich plume bobbing among the rocks in the river. A closer look showed the body of a Makua warrior wedged between the rocks. The story was not hard to read. Bosigo had stormed the North side of the village. The villagers had retreated to the South Side. Bosigo had attempted to pursue them but had met with a decisive check at the river. Bosigo would not have stopped to fling the bodies into the river; the villagers had done that for the same reason that they had stamped out the fire. They meant to return. They were still a tribe—a fighting unit.

As if to confirm his deductions, a tom-tom throbbed suddenly. Turcan listened, striving to localize the sound. He placed it about two miles up-stream on the South bank. He turned to de Cabral.

"These fellows have given Bosigo a bad mauling and they're not through with him yet. Maybe we've found the bridge we're looking for."

De Cabral's eyebrows arched: "Is reading the drums one of your accomplishments, senhor?"

Turcan ignored his sarcasm: "Bosigo is still on this side of the river; the villagers are on the other. I'm going to cross over and see what they're up to."

They crossed the river, jumping from stone to stone. A shaded path led along the bank between gigantic cotton woods and fragrant bedamier trees with mango-like flowers. There was a wild beauty about the place. Turcan had visited the kraal once before, years ago. As they pushed their way forward, he strove to recall its name. It did not occur to him until they came to a streamlet that fed a deep pool of clear water. The water-lily and lotus floated upon its surface and around its margin; among the reeds huge balls of amber and orange-colored blossoms scented the air. Then Turcan remembered Amanzimtoti, the Place of Sweet Waters.

A little way beyond the pool the beat of tom-toms burst upon them and presently the wild refrain of a war chant. Night

had come swiftly. Through the thinning trees they saw flashes of fire-light and black, laping figures. There was raw, naked beauty in the scene; a joyous play of muscles; a frenzy of savage exaltation. The two white men watched the dancers from behind a clump of bush; then Turcan led the way into the clearing.

No one noticed their approach until they came within the circle of fire-light. A woman pointed and screamed. Silence followed. The circle of dancers opened before them. On the far side of the ring a tall figure rose from among a group of white-plumed Indunas. He came toward them with lithe, swinging stride; his white plumes tossing and the tails of his leopard skin whipping about his muscular legs. He was young, in the first years of his manhood. He stood before the two white men, eyeing each of them closely. His gaze came to rest on Turcan. He raised his assegai:

"I know you," said he.

TURCAN studied the young chief's face, weaving the threads of memory: "I know you, chief," said he at last. "But when I knew you before your father wore the leopard-skin and the weapons you carried were toys."

"It is so, lord." His eyes flashed proudly. "But now I wear his *kroos*. I hold his weapons. It was not child's play at the river yesterday."

"My eyes saw that, Umbesi."

Umbesi's teeth showed in a wide grin: "Oh, you have not forgotten us, lord," said he.

"Are true men as the red berries on the vine, that they should be forgotten, chief?"

Umbesi's grin broadened: "It is true that they are not," said he.

"You did men's work at the ford, Umbesi."

The youngster needed no more prompting. He struck a savage blow at an imaginary foe: "Many died at the river," he boasted. "We drove them back like cattle. They did not know us!" His voice rose. "They did not know that we, the Zamaro, are the spawn of Chaka, the Elephant, the——"

Spears flashed in the moonlight. Young warriors pressed about their chief; their applause, a long-drawn "Aie-e-e" drowned his voice.



Umbesi swaggered: "We drove them back," he shouted. "They are hyenas! They skulk in the bush across the river——"

"And what does Umbesi do?" Turcan stemmed the torrent.

"He follows the hyena to see that he does not cross to his side of the river, lord."

Turcan's smile was disparaging: "Is that enough, O spawn of Chaka?"

Umbesi scowled. He looked crest-fallen: "What more could be done?"

Turcan moved close to him so that no other ears might catch his words. Said he softly: "I, too, am at war with Bosigo. He has slain Government people. Show me his camp and I will show you how to put your name in every man's mouth."

Umbesi blinked at him owlishly. He belated a command. The tom-toms began their rhythmic beating; Dust rose beneath stamping feet.

De Cabral caught Turcan's sleeve as he turned to follow Umbesi: "What is all this palaver?" he wanted to know. "Nigger gibberish has no meaning for me." He made it sound as if understanding was degrading.

Turcan shook his arm free: "Go find a place to sleep," said he. "You'll know soon enough."

Umbesi led Turcan to the bank of the river. At a point several hundred yards up-stream he pointed across the swift water. No more than a hundred yards separated them from Bosigo's outposts. The light of watch fires flickered among the trees, but it was a mile down stream that Turcan found what he was looking for—the slave train and the cattle. Evidently they were camped deeper in the jungle at some distance from the river's bank. No fires were visible.

Above the lowing of the cattle he heard snatches of a song sung in chorus—a plaintive air in which he thought he recognized the twenty-third Psalm. The singers would be the natives captured at Umzinto. Was Ines da Cunha among them? Or a mile up-stream with the impi? Perhaps no more than a few hundred yards separated him from the girl who, during the long trek through the jungle, had come to sweeten the day-dreams from which he had sought to banish her.

Turcan's eyes swept over the swift river. He thought of swimming it to reconnoître

the camp. But he could think of no disguise that could make an African out of a white man. Discovery would be certain. After a while he beckoned Umbesi to him. As the young chief squatted beside him he said:

"There are many cattle yonder, Umbesi. It is a pity that they should fill the bellies of Bosigo's warriors. He will grow strong on the meat."

Umbesi grunted: "Some of our cattle are among the herd, lord."

"If I were with Bosigo yonder," Turcan continued, "And you were with the cattle, Umbesi, could I see you?"

Umbesi laughed: "No, lord, a man could not see so far through the trees."

"True, Umbesi. And it is also true that if twenty warriors swam the river they could drive the cattle back to the ford and Bosigo would not see it."

The young chief sprang to his feet: "We would be swift and silent. He could not hear us!"

Turcan smiled: "We will make sure that he does not. You will gather your people. An induna will lead them up-stream. Bosigo will see them. He will follow them to learn the meaning of it. He will send a runner back to the herdsman to tell them to break camp and follow him. But we will be between Bosigo and the herd. We will catch the runner. The herdsman will not know that Bosigo is marching, and when the gap between them and Bosigo is wide, we will strike. Is it good, Umbesi?"

"Oh, it is good—good!" Umbesi stamped the ground in his excitement: The indunas will not whisper among themselves; saying that I am too young for the leopard-skin."

Turcan patted his shoulder: "Go, show them your wisdom!" he urged. "And when the council is over, come to me."

"I go, lord."

Turcan made his way back to the clearing. He found de Cabral snoring beside one of the fires, in spite of the uproar swirling about him. He shook the Portuguese awake.

De Cabral listened, bleary-eyed, while Turcan outlined the plan of attack. When Turcan had finished he sat scowling into the fire, evidently turning the plan over in his mind. Turcan was not surprised when he said:

"I do not approve of your plan, senhor."



"Show me a better," challenged Turcan.

De Cabral stroked his beard: "How far are we from Ressano Gareia, senhor?"

"Thirty or forty miles, south-east."

De Cabral nodded: "So I thought. I have his Excellency's commission. We will use it. You will go to Gareia and return with soldiers."

Turcan's eyes widened. "I'm damned if that doesn't sound like an order," said he.

"It is precisely that, senhor."

**TURCAN** threw his head back and laughed. "Oh, the devil, you say! Look, de Cabral. Innes da Cunha wouldn't live five minutes after Bosigo saw the first soldier. She's his safe conduct; his protection against the very thing you suggest. I thought you understood that."

De Cabral squinted at him. "That is your theory. But you speak of theory as if it were fact, you are so damned cock-sure! Perhaps your enthusiasm for the heroic role you have cast for yourself blinds you to who is in authority here."

Turcan's smile was provocative: "I hadn't thought of that," said he. "But now I wonder if it's your idea to send me to Gareia and act out the part yourself."

De Cabral got to his feet with an oath: He tapped his breast pocket: "Must I remind you of his Excellency's commission?"

"Both you and his Excellency can go plumb to hell! I'm crossing the river before morning."

De Cabral's eyes narrowed. His colt flashed from its holster:

"No, Senhor." The softness of his voice heightened the menace in it. "You have been insubordinate! You have outlived your usefulness!"

He broke off with a start. Umbesi returning from the council, had crept up behind him. The broad blade of his assegai pricked de Cabral's spine.

"What is your will, lord?" he asked over de Cabral's shoulder.

"Drop your gun, de Cabral," said Turcan.

De Cabral's eyes blazed. He bit his lips until the blood came. Umbesi's blade bored into his flesh. The gun dropped from his hand. Turcan kicked it from him. He smiled but his grey eyes were cold.

"Now, Senhor," said he, "You were saying?"

De Cabral folded his arms. "No," said he. "Men of my blood do not settle their differences by beating each other with their fists. We prefer cold steel."

"There's a good deal of that around," observed Turcan, and smiled as he saw the other's color change. "But I've no desire to kill you. I would rather have had you come with me tonight; but now, you'll understand, I couldn't risk showing you my back. You'll leave your weapons here and stay on this side of the river, under guard. If things go wrong, I'll answer for it."

De Cabral's face twisted into a grimace of hate: "My time will come, Turcan. Holy Saints! I swear I——" He choked with impotent rage as Umbesi's spear urged him away.

By midnight Umbesi's people were winding out along the river's bank. Turcan had asked for noise and Umbesi had taken him literally. The line of march was a tumult. Tom-toms throbbed; the voices of women and children shrilled above the bass of the warriors' chant and, as distance stretched the disorderly mass, the wild song lost its rhythm and broke up into toneless uproar.

#### IV

**HALF** a mile up-stream Turcan, Umbesi and twenty young Zamaros halted at a bend in the river where the current was not so swift. As the uproar of the marchers faded, Turcan led his little band down to the river. One warrior was posted as a guard. Turcan left his rifle and ammunition in his care; then he stripped and waded out into the cold stream. Umbesi and his warriors followed him, one by one.

Swimming on his back, with his clothes and a colt held over his head, made the going hard for Turcan. The current bore him down stream, and he gained the opposite bank far below his starting point. A halo of mist ringed a pale disc of a moon. Turcan shivered as he dressed. A damp fog was settling over the river; he could see only a few feet along the bank. The hoot of an owl told him that Umbesi had landed above him. He picked his way forward in the direction of the sound. Warriors appeared out of the surrounding gloom. Soon all were gathered about their chief and Turcan.

As had been arranged Umbesi and three



warriors went upstream to intercept Bosigo's runner. The remainder grouped themselves about Turcan, shivering in the chill night air. He directed them to start a fire in a hollow in the river's bank. He knew their fear of the jungle at night and he turned their minds from it with tales of hunting and war. While they talked he was able to snatch an hour's sleep.

Umbesi and his companions returned an hour before dawn.

"It is done, lord," said the young chief. "Bosigo marches up river as you said he would."

"Good!" said Turcan. "Bring the runner. I will talk with him."

Umbesi and the warriors looked at each other.

"Aie!" said Umbesi. "Only the witch men can talk with him now, lord."

Turcan shook his head reprovingly: "It was stupid to spear him, Umbesi. How will you learn your enemy's strength if you silence the tongue that would tell you?"

Umbesi hung his head and stood silent.

"Go now," said Turcan. "Make your men ready. See to it that they are silent when we come to the slave camp or I, too, will think that you are too young to wear the leopard-skin."

The light was better in the morning. The mist which had overcast the sky turned into a nimbus of clouds. Umbesi led the way back along the trail broken by Bosigo's impi. His Zamaros dogged his heels, gliding swiftly between the gnarled mopani and spiked clumpjies. The lowing of cattle and the thin spirals of smoke from dying fires warned of their near approach to the herd.

Looking down on the kraal, Turcan thought that there was a look of permanence about it. The herdsman's hut which stood in the centre was well built and he could see that the ground had been staked for more huts. But he counted only twelve Makua squatting about the fires. Against the bush wall on the far side thirty or more blacks, men and women, lay huddled together in sleep. The women were fully clad, a sure sign of missionary influence and Turcan had no doubt that they were the singers he had heard the night before. Was Ines da Cunha among them? Turcan's pulse quickened. If his luck was still with him, he'd have her safe on the other side

of the river in less than two hours. Then the military could deal with Bosigo and his impi.

The Zamaros, crouched behind clumps of thorn bush, were showing signs of restlessness. The muscles under their velvet skin tensed and their grim faces set into fierce lines as Turcan drew his colt and spun its cylinder.

He led them forward, bent double, dodging from bush to bush until the kraal's wall was between them and the dozing Makua. He waited until Umbesi had marshalled them into a compact group, then nodded to the young chief.

Umbesi led the dash across the gap that separated them from the thorny gate of the kraal. Their battle-cry: "Bu-la-la! Bu-la-la!" shattered the silence as they burst in and rushed upon the amazed herdsmen.

Several of the Makua with the wits scared out of them, broke and ran for the opposite gate with a dozen Zamaros yelling at their heels.

Turcan saw two Makua go down under Umbesi's flashing spear. The others flung down their weapons and waited passively for the death stroke.

"Let them live!" Turcan's voice rang out over the yells of the victors.

Umbesi looked shocked; he stared at Turcan with his assegai poised:

"Where is your wisdom, boy?" asked Turcan. He pointed to the Makuas. "There are hands to weed your meale patch. Spears to defend you if you treat them well."

Umbesi lowered his spear: "Makua dogs! Stir up the fires; prepare food!" he ordered.

Turcan smiled. Umbesi was a good type, he thought. He walked over to the group on the far side of the kraal. The hope of finding Ines da Cunha died still-born as Turcan's gaze swept over the full-bosomed native women. He singled out one he had seen at the mission:

"Mary Agu," said he. "I seek the Senhorita Cunha."

THE Negress shook her head: "She is not here, senhor. We have not seen her since we were taken from Umzinto. I think she is with Bosigo. May the devils of hell roast his yellow skin! What will be done with us now, senhor?"

"The Zamaros are your friends. They



will guide you to Ressano Gareia. Make ready to leave."

He turned away abruptly as the group fervently began to call down blessings on his head. He walked toward the central hut with his head bent. The gall of disappointment ran through his veins like a numbing drug. He felt suddenly, overwhelmingly tired.

Turcan looked up as Umbesi came running towards him: "A runner has come from my people," panted Umbesi.

"What does he say, Umbesi?"

"The White lord whom they guarded has gone."

"Gone! Where?" demanded Turcan.

"He broke from his guard and swam the river, lord."

Turcan's lethargy dropped from him like a cloak. It flashed across his mind instantly that de Cabral would not cross the river to reach Ressano Gareia. He had gone over to Bosigo! He had meant to do so from the beginning. There was some connection between the two. Turcan knew that de Cabral would do anything for money and power. He was convinced that the sneering young nobleman had sold himself over to Bosigo. Turcan caught Umbesi's arm in a hard grip.

"The White lord has betrayed us, Umbesi. Bosigo will turn back. We will be but twenty against him. See now, the women cannot swim the river. We must go back to the ford at Amanzimtoti. Call your warriors quickly, Umbesi. Quickly!"

"But the cattle, lord?"

"Leave them, Umbesi. If we are not across the river soon we will all be food for the hyenas!"

Despite Turcan's driving, an hour was lost before he got the Zamaros on the march. Bosigo, he reasoned, would not send the whole of his impi in pursuit. Fifty picked warriors, perhaps. It was all a question of time, and the time it had taken de Cabral to get to Bosigo was an indeterminate factor. Moreover, he had only a rough idea of the distance to the ford.

As the sun climbed over the trees Turcan scanned the trail with anxious eyes. The river seemed to wind interminably. Whenever he asked Umbesi how far they had still to go, the answer was the same: "Not far now, lord."

But a little before noon as they rounded

a sharp bend he recognized the clearing where Umbesi had camped. Looking down stream he saw the first of the women making her way cautiously across the causeway of stones.

It was slow work. Some of the women balked at the crossing and had to be carried over the slippery stones. There was a dip in the trail near the bend formed by a shoulder of rock. Turcan walked toward it. As he reached the top he saw white plumes tossing above the scrub. In a moment the first of the Makuas came into full view, swinging around the bend with a swift, running gait. Turcan dashed back to the ford. The last of the mission people were crossing over. He fired a shot from his colt to draw Umbesi's attention.

"Swim, Umbesi!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Swim for it!"

He saw the Zamaros dash for the river and plunge in. The first Makua came over the ridge and catching sight of Turcan, charged down with a wild yell. He pitched forward as Turcan began to shoot. His fall did not check the others. They swept down on Turcan like a wave. He emptied his gun into them, then ran for the river. An assegai whizzed past his ear. A knob-kerry thudded at the nape of his neck. A torrent roared in Turcan's ears and swept him into oblivion.

When Turcan first became conscious he noted the fetid stench of putrid flesh and the itching sting of vermin. He lay, bound hand and foot, upon the hide of an animal not long dead. Nothing was visible in the blackness, but as he writhed convulsively, he caught a glimpse of moonlight. Against its pale radiance he traced the vague outline of the curved roof above him.

For a time he lay still. Outside he could hear the river tumbling over the rocks and the murmur of many voices. From their number he judged he was in Bosigo's camp. He thought bitterly of de Cabral's treachery. Would he use da Cunha's authority—whitewash the blood spilled at Umzinto and sign a shameless treaty for the release of Ines da Cunha?

AS the rays of the sun slanted over the trees, two stalwart Makuas entered his hut. They dragged him out and slashed his bonds. They led him forward.

Everywhere about him there was fev-



erish activity. Axes rang on timber; machetes slashed out in the bush. A staked wall of unusual strength and construction was being built around the campsite. It was clear to Turcan that Bosigo contemplated permanent settlement on the banks of the Impambanyoni. Bosigo's house resembled a European bungalow more than a native hut. It had windows, cane doors and at least three separate compartments. Turcan was led into the central room.

Bosigo sat on a stool beside a crude table. A leopard skin was draped over his powerful, naked shoulders. He wore hide trousers and shoes. His white skin showed a yellowish tinge blotched with black, and behind his small black eyes lurked the bitter hatred of the outcast. Turcan's gaze turned from him, passed over de Cabral, standing at the other end of the table, and came to rest on the lovely face of the girl who stood by his side.

Turcan saluted her after the Portuguese fashion, with a stiff bow saying: "I had hoped to meet you under happier circumstances, Senhorita."

Except for the worn appearance of her clothes, Ines da Cunha looked none the worse for her long trek from Umzinto. She wore a bodice with puffed sleeves trimmed with lace that had once been white, and a long full skirt with a waist-line that Turcan could span with his both hands. She courtesied to him as sedately as if she were in the reception hall of the Residencia.

"You are not too late to be of service to us, if it pleases you, senhor," said she.

V

HER "us" sounded ominous in Turcan's ear. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the scowl on Bosigo's face. He had given the half-caste no more than a casual glance and guessed that Bosigo felt that more was his due. He would have gone on talking if the half-caste had not interrupted him.

"Senhor," said Bosigo in a booming voice and in good Portuguese: "You may wonder why you are alive."

"It is something to wonder at," answered Turcan, "With so many dead in your path."

Bosigo eyed him up and down, appraisingly. "So you are the great Turcan," he said, "Who plucks out evil at the roots.

I am ashamed to think that once I feared you."

"It was not I you feared," Turcan retorted. "But the hangman's noose I might string around your neck. You've still got reason to fear justice, Bosigo."

The half-caste's laugh seemed to come from the pit of his stomach. "I do not fear the justice you speak of. It is a thing to be bought and sold. Already I have reached an agreement with the Senhor de Costa Cabral, who is his Excellency's emissary and from whom I have bought justice before. Our agreement is set down on this paper." He handed a folded yellow sheet to Turcan.

"Do not scowl upon it, senhor," said he, as Turcan began to read with a frown between his eyes. "You owe your life to it. I have let you live so that you might carry it to the Excellency and, when he has signed it, return with it to me. As you will see, for the release of Ines da Cunha, I demand a grant of land here, and that I, Bosigo, be recognized as chief—paramount over the tribes within its bounds."

"For the release of the Senhorita Ines da Cunha and her betrothed husband, the Senhor Lopes Bermudo de Costa Cabral. . ."

Turcan read aloud. He glanced up, his eyes intent upon the girl's face: "Is this true, Senhorita?"

"Her signature is affixed to the document," de Cabral spoke for the first time and the triumph in his eyes made Turcan's spine bristle.

"The Senhorita can speak for herself," said Turcan curtly.

"That I am to marry the Senhor de Cabral has been known to you for some time, Senhor," said she.

"So it has!" said Turcan. "But it is also known that you fled to Umzinto on the eve of your marriage. Why?" he demanded.

Ines da Cunha's eye-brows arched: "Your question is indelicate, senhor. On the eve of marriage a woman may feel the need of spiritual guidance."

Turcan smiled: "You must have been in sore need of it, to stay two months, Senhorita," he commented dryly.

The girl's eyes flashed to de Cabral's face and back to Turcan. There was something tense and unnatural about her bearing.



"Is it your wish," asked Turcan, that I carry this paper to his Excellency, your uncle?"

The girl pouted her red lips: "It is my wish to return to civilization," she affirmed. "The filth and dirt of savages sickens one. I cannot sleep for the fear of wild beasts. The Senhor de Cabral has had the wit to arrange for my release. If you, senhor, have any feeling for my sex, you will hurry to my uncle and complete the good work which the Senhor de Cabral, because he is held hostage, cannot do for himself."

Turcan stared at the girl with a puzzled expression. He saw the face and form of Ines da Cunha, but it was as if he looked upon another person. When last he had known her, she had loved the freshness of the open veldt and the mysterious gloom of the great forest. He had seen her join in tribal ceremonies and nurse native children to health. Bosigo's voice recalled his thoughts.

"Are you satisfied?" demanded the half-caste.

Turcan smiled thinly: "That is not for me to say. His Excellency will accept or reject your terms as he sees fit."

"But you will take the treaty to him?"

Turcan shrugged: "I was hired to find his niece and to bring about her release. It is not the way I would have chosen, Bosigo."

"Good!" Bosigo grinned at him. "It would have been different but for the treachery of de Cabral, eh, senhor? But what is done, is done. I will give you today for rest. Tomorrow you leave. Do not think of escape; warriors will go with you. Say to his Excellency that I have spies. If he sends soldiers I shall know it almost as soon as he gives the order and the Senhorita da Cunha will die!"

As Turcan turned to leave he flashed a quick look at the girl's face. But she had turned to speak to de Cabral, her red lips smiling. His thoughts were profane as he marched out into the sunlight, between his guards.

**I**N the pulsing softness of the jungle night, Ines da Cunha made her way toward Turcan's hut. She looked more like a white savage than the first lady of Mozambique. She had discarded the voluminous dress and, for still greater free-

dom of movement and silence, she had ripped the silken frills from her underskirt and made a kilt of it. She wore veldschorn laced to her ankles; her long hair was braided and bound with a kerchief.

She made her way swiftly, gliding from shadow to shadow, sometimes crawling where the moonlight cut a swath of soft light between the huts or silhouetted the statusque form of a Makua guard.

A guard had been placed over Turcan; but his charge was deep in the sleep of near-exhaustion. With the natural slackness of his kind, he had wandered over to a nearby fire, drawn there by the savory smell of roasting buck and the laughter of his companions. The girl slipped through the hut's small opening and groped her way toward Turcan, guided by his deep breathing.

Turcan woke as cold steel touched his bound wrist.

"Hurry, senhor!" Ines whispered in his ear. "Before the guard returns."

A throb of relief—of heartfelt joy, made Turcan's voice husky. He caught her hand in the darkness: "If I doubted you for a while—"

The girl's fingers touched his lips lightly: "I take pride in my skill as an actress, senhor. But I think Lopes must be suspicious." Then she explained how she had permitted herself to become engaged to de Cabral, in order to provoke Turcan into proving to her uncle his real superiority as a man.

Turcan felt the convulsive quiver of her shoulders. After a pause, he said, "De Cabral's no fool. We had better be on our way, Senhorita."

"To Ressano Gareia? Is it far?" she asked.

"Across the river to Umbesi first. Without you, Bosigo loses the game, Senhorita. You don't know Umbesi, but Bosigo does. They met by the river a while ago and if they meet again it won't be by Bosigo's choice."

Turcan cautiously poked his head out of the hut's opening. The guard was squatting before a fire, gorging himself with meat. Others slept on the ground around him. Turcan called to the girl softly and they fled swiftly through the shadows. Circling the huts, they climbed the partially-built stockade and came out upon the bank of the



river. After a pause for breath, Turcan led the way down-stream.

He was worried. The girl slowed the pace and he did not know how far it was from Bosigo's kraal to the ford at Amanzimtoti. At any moment their escape might be discovered. Bosigo would guess that they would make for the ford and it would be easy for him to head them off there.

At a narrow bend in the river where the tall reeds grew out into the stream, he stopped and pointed to the opposite side: "We'd be safer on the other side," he said. "I know you can swim, Senhorita."

The girl looked across to the far bank; "The current is swift but it is not far," she observed.

Turcan looked at her doubtfully: "I'll make a float of reeds," said he. "We'll swim together."

The girl's eyes flashed at him in the darkness: "Very well, go make your float," said she.

Turcan was busy with his knife when a bundle fell at his side. Startled, he looked up quickly. A white, nymph-like form flashed across his line of vision. In an instant it disappeared among the reeds. Turcan stared with his mouth open. Then he saw her swimming strongly for the opposite bank. He grabbed up the bundle of clothes she had thrown to him and started for the bank. The snapping of a twig brought him face about with his nerves taut.

De Cabral stood a few paces from him. The two men stood silent for a moment, their eyes locked. De Cabral's face showed white about his jaws and Turcan knew that he was looking at death.

"We have come to the bridge that only one of us may cross, senhor." De Cabral's voice was vibrant. "You will stay on this side."

**TURCAN** did not answer for a moment. His face was expressionless but his pulse raced and the blood pounded in his ears. Impulse prompted him to fling himself upon de Cabral; to gamble on a miss. But a picture of the headless vultures at Umzinto flashed before his eyes. The fleeting seconds were like a bridge across oblivion, crumbling at his feet. De Cabral was gloating,

"I don't think we have come to that

bridge yet," said Turcan coolly. "If the Senhorita da Cunha has made her choice, I am not aware of it."

De Cabral smiled mockingly: "Am I to believe that you took her by force? I am not the fool she took me for. I saw what was in her mind. I watched and followed. It was never my plan that you should live; it was Bosigo's. He saw advantage in it, I can see none, senhor."

"What advantage do you see in shooting me, de Cabral, with a witness to the fact across the river?" asked Turcan.

De Cabral laughed softly. "You have always under-estimated me, Turcan. I do not intend to kill you and be hanged for murder. Bosigo will do the killing when I take you back."

"And the Senhorita da Cunha?" Turcan asked.

"A naked white woman in the jungle—she will not go far. Later, when I have made my escape from Bosigo, I will find her. A delightful discovery, eh, senhor?" He said it in a way that made Turcan bristle. But the muzzle of his colt was steady. De Cabral leered at him. "I owe much to your cleverness, but now I have no further need of it. Start walking back up the path, senhor."

Turcan stood his ground. There was a faint smile on his lips. "You talk too much, de Cabral," said he. "You made a mistake when you followed us alone. You should have brought your executioner along with you. I choose to die here, with a witness."

A look of surprised bewilderment made de Cabral's expression comical.

Turcan laughed, but his muscles were tense. He edged forward.

**DE CABRAL'S** face was bloodless. His eyes shifted nervously. Turcan did not give him time to think. He talked rapidly.

Turcan cut him short. "A man can choose to die, you forget that, de Cabral. You'd kill, but you haven't got the guts to face—"

De Cabral stooped suddenly and grabbed up a heavy branch at his feet. In the same moment Turcan leaped in and kicked the gun from his hand. With a yelp of pain and rage, de Cabral swung at Turcan with his club. The branch broke over Turcan's right shoulder, paralyzing his arm. De



Cabral came at him, kicking and flailing his fists. Turcan went down. Intent upon beating his victim into unconsciousness, de Cabral turned to look for his club. The numbness was leaving Turcan's arm. When de Cabral turned, he was getting to his feet unsteadily. The Portuguese rushed at him. Turcan ducked under a savage blow; his arms wound around the other's waist. They crashed to the ground and rolled toward the river's bank.

Once they broke apart and circled each other, gulping the cool air into their parched lungs. De Cabral was maneuvering to get Turcan into the path of moonlight, himself into the shadow. Turcan stalked him warily toward the river's bank. De Cabral sprang as Turcan's foot caught in a vine. He faked falling and his arms whipped around de Cabral's waist and lifted him bodily. As he braced himself to throw, the overhanging bank crumbled under his feet and they slid into the swift stream. Sinking rapidly, Turcan fought to break the strangle-hold de Cabral had about his neck. He felt a sickening jar as the current dashed him against a shelf of rock. The grip about his neck slackened as he came to the surface with bursting lungs. Then, he saw de Cabral's body roll over the shelf and go bobbing down stream.

**T**HE fighting madness left Turcan. He started to run down the bank with the vague idea of saving de Cabral. But his bruised legs stiffened. He fell. The muscles of his legs were knotted with cramp.

It was some time before Turcan felt able to swim the river. He walked back upstream, found the girl's scanty clothes, then he waded out into the icy water. When he reached the other bank, he stretched his aching limbs and rested. Then he thought of Ines da Cunha, huddled naked among the reeds. He went in search of her, calling her name softly.

A splash drew him toward the water's edge. A white arm parted the reeds and a pair of very angry eyes flashed up at him over the rim of the bank. "My clothes, if you please, senhor," she snapped.

Turcan grinned down at her. "I know

how you feel," said he. "I'll drink the damn river before I'll swim it again."

Turcan withdrew a bit. Evidently the girl had hidden herself so well that she had seen nothing of the struggle on the opposite bank. When she came out, shaking the water from her long black hair, she was still angry.

"It is the last time, senhor—" She broke off as she caught sight of Turcan's swollen face and his left eye that was all the colors of a jungle flower.

"The Senhor de Cabral," Turcan explained laconically.

The girl caught his arm, her eyes bright with alarm.

"Lopes! Where is he now?"

Turcan pointed to the river. Ines da Cunha looked at his set face and asked no more.

They reached Ressano Garcia just before dawn on the following day. Umbesi's boatmen had brought them to within ten miles of the settlement.

**I**T was a flustered young Commandant who came from his bed to greet them. Turcan smiled. The young fellow was finding it hard to reconcile the girl who stood before him in such brazen dishabille with the lady he had danced with at the Residencia.

"I remember you, Senhor Vincente," Ines said. "Do you recall dancing with me?"

He bent over her hand. "That is something a man could not forget, But I do not understand."

She interrupted him. "I am anxious to meet the women of your post, for obvious reasons, senhor. My future husband, the Senhor Turcan, will explain."

"Your future husband!—The Senhor Turcan!" stammered the Commandant. "But I—"

"Your surprise is natural, senhor," said she, smiling at Turcan. "Senhor Turcan, I believe, was not aware of it himself until this moment. Do you think he will refuse me, senhor?"

A gleam came into Turcan's eyes. "He definitely will not."

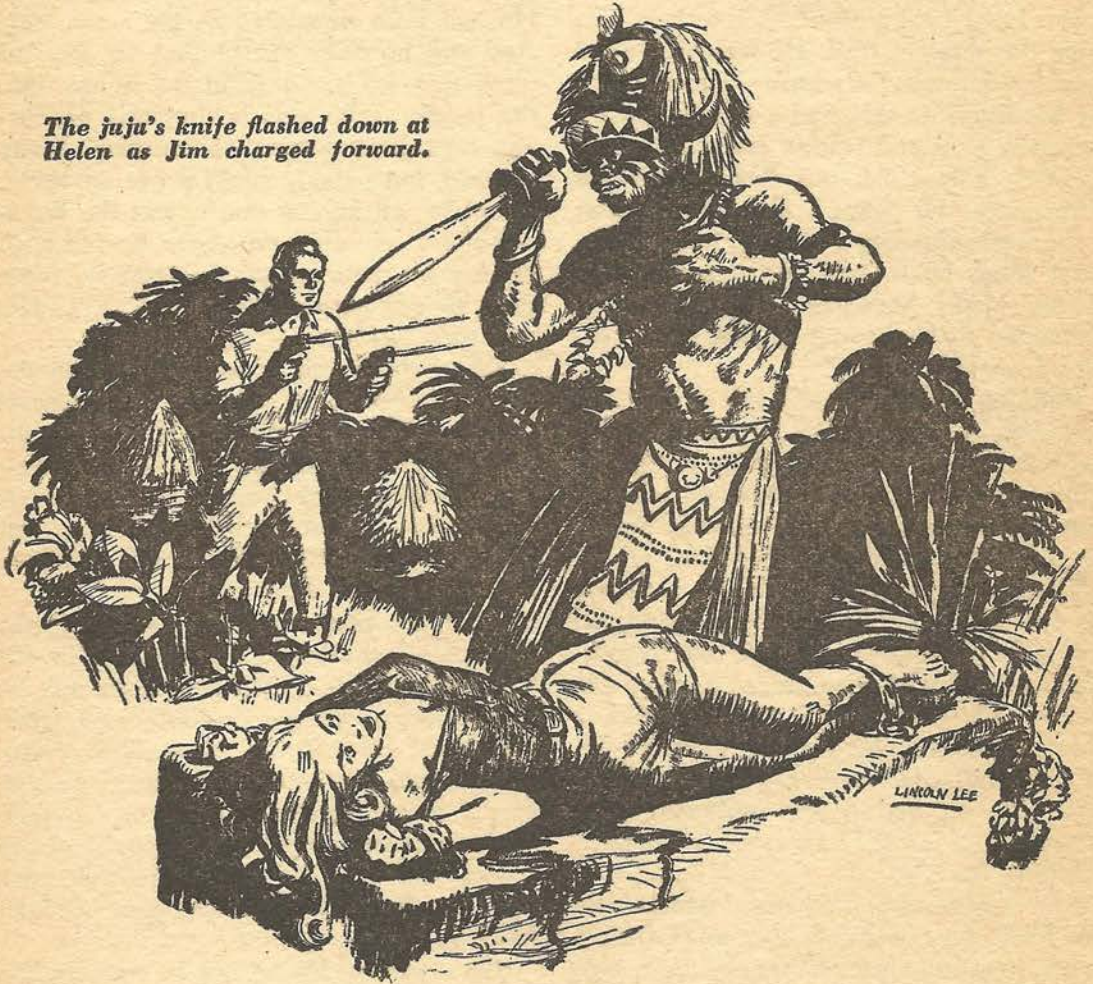


# Three Lion's Teeth

By CORDWELL STAPLES

Jim Ford's war safari tracked the White Fetish to the moaning veldt of the fire devils. But even his lion's teeth juju could not keep the drums of death from beating over Bwana Helen!

*The juju's knife flashed down at Helen as Jim charged forward.*



**T**HE LONG STRING OF GIANT Masai warriors in Jim Ford's war safari moved at a hurried jog-trot through twisting tongues of dank river fog that licked the lower terraces of the jungle. The fog smeared a dripping moisture over everything on the old slave trail that Jim followed. It made the footing wet and slippery but the warriors dug in their bare toes and didn't slacken pace as the safari hurried toward Bill White's coffee plantation, trying desperately to get there ahead of the brutal gang of Akesi, coming from the opposite direction, and bent on murdering Bill and his wife Alice. And

their beautiful nineteen year old daughter Helen.

Jim's spy, the furtive, clever little Wasuli hunch-back Ng Gamon had fallen exhausted at Jim's plantation, two days before and gasped out in his peculiar, high pitched voice, the warning that the killers would hit Bill White's coffee plantation soon; just when, the spy didn't know. Ng Gamon was a little man, less than five feet tall, but a fierce pride burned bright in his black eyes. He was a Wasuli. He wore nothing on his mis-shapen body but a breech clout and a belt.

The big black fighting men in the safari



were nearly naked, wore nothing but soft tanned antelope skin breech-clouts and wide belts of the same material. But each man carried a long, wide bladed spear, a war club and a bolo-like *pangas*. Their ebony-like powerful bodies glistened with sweat. They were Masai, the biggest and best fighting men on the Congo.

Jim Ford used a stout stick to help him along the slippery trail. He was big, broad shouldered, powerfully built—a good match for his warriors. He had a fighting man's blue-gray eyes and square jaw, and a lock of black hair stuck out from under his white topee. He wore a khaki shirt, open at the neck, showing a tanned, hairy chest. Stout laced boots came up over the legs of his khaki breeches. Two forty-five, automatic pistols swung in well worn holsters from his belt.

Hanging on Jim Ford's left breast was a special *gris-gris* made from three big lion's teeth, that had been given to him by a famous witch doctor. Jim would take his oath that he was not superstitious, but he was never seen without this fetish.

The big Masai, Chief M'Kada, standing six feet eight in his bare feet, naked except for a soft tanned antelope hide breech-clout and strips of long haired monkey fur around his elbows and knees, marched close on Jim's heels. He was true to type, big and tall like most all of the Masai tribe. The big fellow was muttering dark curses, his piercing black eyes always busy watching for sign.

And it was with good cause that he and Jim Ford were worried. For more than a month past, no white planter had been safe from a band of cold blooded killers who ravaged the coffee plantations, striking, killing where least expected, driving the black help away in superstitious fear, leaving the coffee to rot on the trees and in the bins.

No plantation owner could tell when his turn might come. There was a reign of terror in the Congo valley, where every white man went armed, ready to shoot at the drop of a hat. The first to get it had been little, easy going Jens Jensen, over on the Clopo River. Poor Jens and his wife Olga had been literally hacked to pieces in their plantation house, in the dark of the tropical night.

And there had been nothing to hint the

identity of the savage murderers but the spoor of a huge leopard, leading off into the jungle. It was the dread sign of the Akesi leopard men's murder society, those vicious killers who murdered for pay.

After Jens Jensen and his wife, had come big, powerful, domineering Pete Hawkins, clear down on the Lindi River. He had been murdered in the same way. And still no clues except that big leopard track that led away from the house, into the jungle. Who was behind this deliberate, organized system of murder? Many guessed, but nobody could prove anything. However, all agreed that it was the fiendish effort of some murderer to force all the big planters out of the country, force them to sell to somebody. But . . . who was that "somebody?"

All of this reign of terror had been going on, ever since the big Agricultural Convention at Stanleyville. Gathered at the Falls City were coffee planters from near and far. Jim Ford dropped in a day after it opened, and thus incurred the impatient wrath of the Right Honorable William Peters, who was chairman.

Half the planters were dozing in the close heat, showing little interest in the Right Honorable Peters' pompous talk on the subject of grating the coffee tree when Jim Ford entered the convention rooms. The minute Jim entered and stood waiting for a pause before looking for a seat, Peters stopped, fixed his monocle, glared for a moment. Then, "Well—well. An' who the bloody hell might you be?" he bawled.

Jim's temper blazed but he managed to say quietly, "Jim Ford, of Hapana-Simba plantation. Sorry I'm late, but . . ."

"Blawsted H'American! Of course you'd be late. By my rights I should deny you a seat at this convention. W'ot the bleedin' 'ell do you mean, interruptin' my spee . . . the work of this body of planters. I should . . ."

"Now, wait a minute, Peters. You can't bawl me out like that," Jim snapped. He was striding down the aisle toward the chair when a huge black looking Portuguese planter jumped up and yelled, "Shut up and sit down, Americano. I . . ."

That was as far as he got before Jim Ford's hard fist sent him sprawling over a chair. The hall was in an uproar, every-



body yelling, cursing. One of Jim's friends took a swing at Peters. Jim had a host of friends here, and before things quieted down and the Right Honorable left, in a furious burst of outraged dignity, closely followed by the big Portugese, De Acosta, the provincial police came in to restore order.

At the door, Peters turned and bawled, "A gang of ill mannered swine. Some day, before long, I'll own all your silly little plantations. Then I'll kick you all out of Africa."

"Dat'sa right," yelled De Acosta. "And I helpa da honorable."

During all this racket and confusion, a tall, athletic looking man wearing a gold rimmed monocle had been leaning against a wall near a window, an amused, sarcastic grin on his face. He was a touring German named Kurt Von Stern, who was trying to buy some coffee plantations for his firm in Europe. He was making every effort to be agreeable to everyone, but a certain contempt, a kind of arrogance, cropped out in spite of his amiable efforts. He had been turned down on every hand.

AS JIM'S war safari rushed through the jungle, it was steadily getting lighter. Then suddenly, the hot tropical sun literally bounced up over the horizon. The shadows were swallowed by a white glare of light, and at once it was hot. The swamps drew in their searching tongues of cool fog and the jungles steamed and stank again after the cool of the night.

Even the animals shrank away from the all consuming heat of the sun. The big crocodiles left their hunting and crawled into the swirling waters of the mighty Congo, a quarter mile to Jim's left, and rolled over, just their sinister snouts and eyes showing. The jungle cats gave up their endless blood search and sought the deep, moist shade. Far up to the safari's right, elephants trumpeted in the deep shade as they rocked restlessly on their huge feet, swinging their trunks this way and that, ever searching the breeze for the scent of enemies, traces of danger.

With the coming of the bright glare of the sunlight Jim Ford's keen blue-gray eyes at once picked up a half dozen specks, high in the blue. They were diving earthward in wide swoops, with startling speed,

sounding their weird, skirling shrieks as they came.

Jim grunted at Chief M'Kada, gestured and the huge Masai warrior rumbled, "Wah! Death is here before us. But maybe *simba* live for make kill last night. Maybe vulture come for get meat *simba* not eat. Maybe . . ."

"Yeah. Maybe!" Jim cut in, that likeable grin that was so characteristic of him spreading over his smooth shaven, rugged features for a moment. He was hoping desperately that young Helen, Bill White's laughing, happy tom-boy daughter was all right. The last time he had seen the girl, she had been swinging swiftly through the jungle trees on the end of a long liana, like an ape, laughing and shouting with the sheer joy of living.

But there was doubt in Jim's tones as he answered M'Kada. And as if to justify his doubt, at that moment a wild chorus of dog-like howls that was taken up from all sides by scores of dangoes, broke the morning quiet. The safari glimpsed whole packs of the cowardly wild dogs, racing through the tangle, all going toward the same destination that Jim Ford sought. The animals smelled blood. Nothing else would excite them this way.

Chief M'Kada turned his head and growled a few short words, deep in his mighty chest, to the string of big Masai fighting men hurrying over the trail behind him. They shouted fierce, eager replies, lowered the points of their broad bladed spears, loosened war clubs in their slings, fingered the broad, sharp, bolo-like *pangas* hanging handy at their belts.

Chief M'Kada and these twenty big fighting men had marched on many a wild safari with Jim Ford—each had cause to remember the big planter with deep debts of gratitude for his many acts of friendliness toward them and their families. They were fiercely loyal to him. And so it was, that when Jim Ford took the chore on his own broad shoulders, to rid the valley of the mysterious murder menace that ravaged it, and held palaver with his old Masai friend, Chief M'Kada, these men, ever eager for battle, rushed to Jim's plantation to join him.

M'Kada and Jim Ford increased their pace. They were hoping against hope that they had been misinformed by their spies,



that the mysterious, deadly murderers who killed for a price had not struck again . . . this time, at Bill White's coffee plantation, now only about a mile away.

Then, Chief M'Kada, in his eagerness to find out if they had won in their race with death, broke away from his place behind Jim Ford and drove at a crouching run up the slope.

He covered the steep slope like most men would run on the level.

When he reached the crest of the low ridge that he climbed, the big Masai halted as though he had hit an invisible stone wall. His spear swung once around his head in a wide circle, he rammed the butt of the spear shaft into the soft ground, turned his back to the thirsty blade and his big shoulders bowed low. His gesture was eloquent of defeat, and a groan that was a strange mixture of regret and fierce rage ran over the warriors following Jim Ford. Jim cursed feelingly, paused for a moment, thoughtfully fingering the three lion's teeth hanging on his left breast, then hurried up the slope.

Once more the mysterious murder band had struck, despite the war safari's furious drive to reach Bill White's plantation ahead of it. This was not Jim Ford's first try at stopping this carnival of murder, but the result was the same—always, he and his Masai warriors had been just a little too late. But he had to find out for certain, just who was paying the Akesi, working them up to murder the white planters. The idea of quitting never entered his mind.

**T**HREE big disgusting vultures rode the ridge pole of Bill White's plantation house as Jim Ford's war safari tramped through the rows of young coffee trees, toward it. The smell of death was strong about the place and Jim snorted it from his nostrils violently. The huge black and gray feathered scavenger birds were the only evidence of life on the plantation. They sounded their wild, skirling shrieks and flopped clumsily away to the limbs of a bare, dead tree as the safari arrived.

All of the native help had disappeared, in superstitious fear of the Akesi, of their dead bwana and memsahib and unless they were brought back soon the jungle would reclaim its own; it would overrun all the

planted area. The work of years would be lost.

The inside of the comfortable plantation house was a bloody shambles when Jim Ford went in. Bill and his wife Alice had been hacked to pieces. Jim went fearfully from room to room, dreading what he might see behind each door. But he found no trace of young Helen. He yelled for M'Kada, started the warriors searching the plantation for sign of her.

Surprise had evidently been complete, for the Akesi, but even at that, Bill White had killed one of them with his pistol. His companions had left without bothering to take the dead savage with them. He was sprawled on the floor, a slender, medium sized muscular black shape of a man, his torso and head covered with a finely tanned leopard skin with the tail dangling behind. On his hands was a crude imitation of the claws of a leopard, done in sharp steel. Even in death, his features were a clear index to inborn cruelty, brutality.

A half hour later, Jim Ford was busy building a double coffin, directing a gang digging a grave in the plantation yard when one of his Masai warriors ran in with a story of some huge leopard tracks that he had found.

Jim merely grunted. He had seen those giant leopard tracks leading away into the jungle from Jens Jensen's house, and from Pete Hawkins' house after murder had been committed. And he had seen how all sign, all tracks had disappeared in the deep jungle within a half mile of the scene of the crime in each case. But he did not pause in his work until the last shovelful of earth had been heaped on the mound in Bill White's plantation yard. Then he hurried to the spot where the warrior had found the leopard tracks.

Chief M'Kada was already there. He was crouched low over a single imprint of a leopard's paw, an imprint half again as big as any that Jim had seen, in his many years in Africa.

The big Masai glanced up at Jim, a sarcastic grin on his black face. He grunted, "Dangoes! Fools! They think they can fool us." He jumped erect, stamped his big bare foot on the leopard's track. "That sign not fit for make by animal," he snarled, "Made by Akesi man." Then the big warrior's expression changed. He beck-



oned Jim and strode off through the jungle. A hundred yards farther back in the tangle he halted, glanced at his bwana, pointed at a small boot track in the damp ground. Jim tensed, turned white. "Helen," he whispered. M'Kada nodded solemnly. "Maybe-so Akesi take girl, give to man that pay for kill planters—make present. But maybe not gone yet. I look." He levelled his great spear, raced off yelling to his warriors.

Jim slumped to a seat on a fallen log. The worst had happened—the thing that he had dreaded most, ever since this reign of terror had started. Helen was very dear to him, and he was looking forward to the day when they could be married. They had been making plans, getting things in order at his Hapana Simba plantation house to receive the bride. And now . . .

When M'Kada came back to where Jim Ford still sat, his mind a chaos of depression, the big Masai had a puzzled frown on his face. "No more sign," he grumbled quickly. "Akesi leopard man not fit for fly like vulture. Girl no can fly. But no more track. No more sign on ground." He paused, looked at Jim, sympathy plain in his black eyes. Then he said, "I not tell before, but Akesi warriors got fire god for worship. Fire god priest there." He pointed at a distant line of small, half extinct volcanoes. "Maybe Akesi warrior give Memsahib White to fire priest, for kill, so fire god like Akesi warriors."

Jim Ford jumped to his feet, strode up and down for a minute. Then he got hold of himself with an effort, paused. Then suddenly he wheeled, his expression changed. He was remembering the last time he had seen auburn haired, brown eyed Helen. She had come swinging down from a big jungle limb, clinging to a stout liana, and landed beside him.

Jim pointed up at the trees and hanging lianas, overhead. "The monkeys do not run on the ground and risk being eaten by a leopard when they have trees to travel in," he said. "Maybe the Akesi leopard men do like their brothers, the monkeys, and travel for a time through the branches, leaving no sign for us." He grabbed a long liana, went back as far as he could, then took off with a run. His swing landed him on a thick branch, ten feet above the ground.

M'Kada's eyes lighted up. "Wah! My head is no better than the stupid chimpanzee's," he growled. He tossed his big spear to a warrior, seized a strong liana, took a quick run and landed beside Jim. His sharp eyes instantly noted a patch of scuffed, crushed moss on the limb.

The Chief growled, "It is as the bwana said. The Akesi move through the trees like their brothers, the monkeys, when they would hide their trail. Mebby-so they make the little memsahib go in trees like monkey, too." Then he was away through the jungle, swinging from branch to branch like a big black ape. Jim followed him, more carefully.

M'Kada travelled surely, steadily, as though following sign on the ground, for about a mile. Then one of his warriors on the ground below him shouted, stood pointing at human foot prints in the moist earth. M'Kada and Jim came swinging down out of the trees and landed at a run. Immediately, the Chief was off through the tangle, following sign like a bloodhound, a grim light in his black eyes, his warriors at his heels.

Jim Ford was right behind the Chief. As long as things were going well, they were closing the distance to the murderers, he said nothing. The sun was straight overhead, their trail leading up steeply into the mountains toward the line of volcanoes when he finally called a halt.

CHIEF M'KADA and his warriors were keyed up, excited and eager for battle. They were fiercely impatient at the delay. "While we sit on our heels, talking like old women, the Akesi get away," the Chief growled at Jim. "Must we rest and eat the meat and *manioc* that we carry, while they go on? Are the Akesi better men than the Masai. Can they go farther without food? Agh!"

"You talk like the chimpanzee again," Jim snapped. "Some white man pays the Akesi to kill the white planters. We have never had trouble here with the Akesi before. What good to kill the Akesi and not find the man who pays. He would only get other leopard men to kill for him. Maybe he will fix so he can buy up all the coffee plantations cheap when the planters are all killed or driven off. But this time his killers have taken my memsahib. This time I



will know who pays the Akesi, when we go back to our home kralls. This time he dies."

Chief M'Kada looked crestfallen. He turned away and hunkered down in the shade. "The white man must lead—the black man must follow," he muttered. "It has always been so. Black man made like white man, but black man live for think slow."

Jim hunkered among the warriors. "Let us hold palaver," he said quietly. "What town? What house?" he asked, pointing up at the high, craggy range toward which the Akesi sign had been leading them all morning, a range that had the smoking, inactive, small volcanoes scattered on it.

The Masai warriors shook their heads. Their eyes rolled wildly. One of them said, in the dialect, which M'Kada translated, "Agh! That high place is the land of fire. It is the land of bad juju. It is the land of devils who eat men alive. No man can go there and live for come away again. Better we catch Akesi before reach that devil's land."

Jim Ford saw, right there, that he was up against the greatest obstacle to progress in all the dark continent—superstitious fear. He thought for a moment, idly fingering that lion tooth fetish hanging on his chest. Then he said quietly, his blue-gray eyes steady on the warriors, "I am not afraid of the devils who eat men alive. I will make strong juju. My juju is stronger than the devils who eat men."

He stood up, checked his two forty-five automatics. "I will go to the land of fire, even, to catch the Akesi leopard men and find out who pays them," he said quietly. "Then, when I find that man, I will kill. Is it that the great and brave Masai fighting men are afraid to follow me? You have not seen these devils who eat men alive. Ha! It is of something that you have not seen, that you are afraid. Like little *totoes* in their mothers' arms." He started off, trailing the plain sign of footprints.

Instantly the Chief and his men were on their feet, strung out behind him. "Fighting men will follow, now," M'Kada said to Jim. "But when we reach the land of fire . . ." He left the rest hanging in the air. "But me; Chief M'Kada will go where bwana Jimford goes. Chief M'Kada will fight for his bwana."

Jim's friendly, slow grin spread over his face. "That's all I want to know, Chief. I knew I could bet on you. You are a great fighting man," he said. "We two will kill the man who pays the murdering Akesi."

And at that moment, a big blue *golokoto* sounded his booming, yet liquid, "Wh-o-o-o-wh-o-o-o," from the jungle near by. Every warrior stopped short in his tracks, listening, waiting for the call to be repeated. But the big blue pigeon remained silent. Several of the warriors grounded their spears. Even M'Kada halted. There was a look of fear in their eyes. It is well known by all, on the Congo, that if the *golokoto* calls but once as a safari is about to trek, some man of that safari will die before night if he ignores the warning, marches out.

Most of the warriors turned back to the palaver ground, just left. They were sullen, ashamed, for fear someone would think that they were cowards. But they were taking no chances, despite danger of this supreme insult.

Jim stood looking at them for a minute. Then, without a word he strode off up to the trail alone, despite the pleas of the warriors for him to turn back, wait until after midnight.

Jim had covered maybe a mile when a warrior closed up behind him with a panting rush. The big planter did not even look around. He knew that this would be Chief M'Kada, unable to stand his bwana's contempt, willing to risk death—anything, rather than that. Jim smiled his crooked, friendly smile, but said nothing. He was pleased . . . and relieved.

They had gone maybe a half mile together when Jim Ford stopped suddenly, his hands flashed to his automatics. Chief M'Kada leaped back, his spear levelled. Jim had caught a brief flash of a spotted yellow hide, in the jungle. "Maybe Akesi warriors," he snapped to M'Kada.

The Chief crouched low, took one look beneath the brush, grabbed Jim's shoulder and tore out, back down the trail at top speed. He didn't go far. A hundred yards and he checked, wheeled, his back against a rocky cliff. Then his weird war yell burst from his lips like the blast of a steam siren.

Jim spotted a black figure, partly covered by a leopard skin. His right forty-five blasted, the warrior hit the ground, rolled and slashed for a moment, then lay still.



A HALF dozen leopard skin clad warriors sifted through the jungle and came leaping to the attack. Chief M'Kada's spear cut and slashed and jabbed furiously. There was a grim smile on the big Masai's face. This was his business—fighting. It was the breath of life to him.

Jim didn't waste a shot. He fired steadily, his aim sure, deadly. The Akesi couldn't stand gun fire. Spears and knives were their weapons; not guns. They broke, ran swiftly for the jungle. The Chief leaped after them, brought the flat of his big spear blade around with terrific force and knocked the last of the Akesi flat. He crouched over the man, his spear point pricking the black skin over his heart. The two jabbered fiercely, back and forth. The Akesi warrior suddenly jerked his hand from under a pile of leaves, slashed at M'Kada's leg with a dagger, trying to hamstring him. The Chief leaped high, and without moving the point of his spear from the man's chest, threw his whole weight on the spear shaft. It was enough. The warrior wilted, lifeless.

There was a rush of bare feet on the trail and Chief M'Kada's warriors charged up. M'Kada stood, carefully cleaning his great spear blade. He did not even glance at his men. They took in the situation, turned and ran back to the palaver grounds. The curse of the *golokoto* had not yet ended. They were taking no chances.

"Chief M'Kada, what did you get out of that warrior?" Jim asked, swabbing sweat from his head and neck, reloading the magazines of his forty-fives.

M'Kada took his time about answering. But finally he said, "Akesi take little Memsahib White for give to white sahib, in land of fire. S'pose white sahib no want, then give to fire priest in land of fire. Wah!"

Jim Ford wasted no time in further questioning. "C'mon M'Kada," he growled. "We've got a job cut out for us. I've got a fire priest and a white man to kill. And I'm in a hell of a hurry to get it done." He led off up the trail at a jog-trot, Chief M'Kada close behind him. Once the Chief grunted, "More better run faster. Mebby-so no hurry, you lose you woman—fire priest cut heart out on big block of lava rock from land of fire."

Jim and the Chief moved swiftly climb-

ing, climbing steadily all afternoon. They were rapidly getting closer to the land of fire. They could even catch an occasional whiff of sulphurous smoke from the subterranean fires, up there. Sign of the Akesi was very fresh but they did not glimpse the warriors. Once, a half hour before dark they crossed a rushing stream. Both men drank, then returned a mouthful of water to the torrent. It was good juju and no man on safari neglected it.

At last, Jim Ford saw something that he had been watching for, for an hour. It was a thick clump of the dainty *casurian* trees that grew close to the ground, up a short slope from the trail that they followed. It was rapidly getting dark, and Jim turned in that direction. "Here, we camp," he announced simply to M'Kada. He knew that, under these *casurians*, they would not be bothered by the millions of mosquitoes that swarmed in the air, while they rested and slept. The odor of the trees, though not disagreeable, repelled the pests.

They would get lost from their trail in no time, in the dark, lose all trace of the Akesi they followed. Jim begrudged every second that they rested, but he knew that it would be folly to try to go on in the night. They opened the lunches that they carried, and ate.

From midnight on, Chief M'Kada watched and listened for the approach of his warriors, reasoning that they would come hurrying up the trail to overtake their Chief and their bwana, as soon as the curse of the *golokoto* should let them. He muttered to Jim once, "Those fools. They believe in what they can not see, what their spears will not kill. They are like little *to-toes*. But they are *not cowards*. No! They are Masai fighting men!"

Jim Ford knew that he was right. "No," he said. "They are all brave warriors. Luck is not with us, that's all."

Jim slept lightly, in short cat naps. He was up, prowling the camp several times during the night, impatient to be on the trail again, almost wild with fear for Helen. At about an hour before dawn he was brought full awake by a low sound of guttural talk, coming from the trail below. He laid his hand lightly on M'Kada's shoulder.

The Chief was awake instantly. But he made no sound, did not move. Jim whis-



pered to him, told him what he had heard. M'Kada asked, "My warriors?" But Jim shook his head, "It was not the Masai tongue. Too early for your men to get here yet. We came a long way."

The two crouched in the dense shadows of the *casurian* trees, all their senses alert, their weapons ready, for a few minutes. Then they crept silently down toward the trail and waited. The men who had passed down the trail were out of sight and hearing.

Jim and the Chief waited, listened for more than a half hour. Then they heard the men coming back up the trail. Jim held his forty-five automatic, cocked and ready. Chief M'Kada swung his mighty spear around, stood behind a clump of bushes. He was poised, set to attack.

Jim leaned close to the Chief. "Can you talk the language of the Akesi?" he whispered.

"Fit for talk it much good. Quick. They live for come close. What I say?" M'Kada answered.

"Ask them, 'Where is their white bwana tonight, Chief.' Maybe we will learn something."

"Wah!" They come. Now. Two Akesi."

Chief M'Kada muttered a string of guttural words.

**I**NSTANTLY, both of the Akesi warriors answered, each thinking probably, that the other had asked the question. One of them added, "Those cowardly Masai dangoes must have turned back. But I saw them following us yesterday. The fools are afraid of the land of fire and the empty stories of man eating devils there." He laughed shortly. It was the last sound that he ever made.

"Cowardly Masai dangoes!" That did it for the proud M'Kada. His heavy, keen spear blade flashed across in a vicious swinging slash. The leopard man's head all but left his shoulders. The other Akesi uttered a startled yell, commenced a bolt. Jim's forty-five shot a streak of orange colored flame and the man collapsed. Chief M'Kada bathed his spear point in the blood of this man. Again, it was good juju.

The chief turned to Jim. "Akesi dangoes say their white bwana fit for stay in his camp, much close to land of fire, much close to temple of fire priest," he said im-

portantly. "They say that palaver of man eating devils is *boori*—all lies."

"So!" Jim snapped. "I've thought all along, ever since the convention at Stanleyville that one of the white men who was there, was behind this; maybe the Limey; maybe the Portugese, De Acosta. That the murderous fool was using the Akesi as his tools—trying to drive us all to sell out cheap. So, maybe, he'd like to build a powerful coffee empire in the Congo, huh? I'll show him about that before I'm through. I'll teach him something about Africa that he never read in a book."

Jim Ford turned, hit the trail for the land of fire at once, even though it was still completely dark. Chief M'Kada followed close on the heels of his bwana. He was carefully cleaning the blade of his spear.

The jungle dropped away as they climbed. Great blocks of black lava forced them to wind about among them, climb over some, jump down to the trail again. Both were panting, sweating from the tough going, but they kept doggedly at the trek.

A half hour later the sudden tropical dawn bloomed full blown in the east and at once the air was warm, and the jungle came alive noisily. The huge blocks and lumps of lava through which the trail wound started to radiate heat. Then Jim stopped short at the edge of a huge bowl that was about a half mile in diameter. He sneaked closer, peered over the rim of the place carefully. The steady rumbling and roaring, the hiss of escaping steam in the old crater was deafening.

Below him the trail ran down steeply, winding about snake-like among steadily gurgling, boiling mud springs. Jets of live steam shot from these "paint pots" and there were wide cracks in the ground from which black smoke flowed. Pools of clear water, here and there, steamed and bubbled as they boiled. Out near the center of this old crater, a cone of dark lava stood up maybe a hundred feet high and a plume of black smoke drifted lazily from its peak. All the space inside the bowl was strewn with huge blocks and lumps of black lava.

Jim turned and glanced at M'Kada, a crooked, reckless grin on his face. The Chief squatted quietly on his heels, gazing at the fearful spectacle below them, his eyes unreadable, hard. But there was no



fear in those inscrutable black eyes. "I see no place can find fit for them dango white bwana and his Akesi can stop," he said. "It is fitting that they live on other side, on that high ground. There, not too hot like here. High. Maybe cool at night."

"Yeah," Jim said thoughtfully, fingering his lion tooth fetish. "Guess you're right, Chief. But that bowl is hot as hell. I can feel it from here. Maybe . . ."

"Wah! Too hot. Maybe can go around. I live for look-see." He was on his feet, moving furtively among the huge blocks of lava, heading to the right along the rim of the bowl. He was back in less than five minutes, perspiration running down his face. He shrugged his huge shoulders. "Too hot. No man can live for go that way," he grunted, as he started off to the left.

The Chief was back even sooner than before. He said no word, but shrugged and swiped a stream of sweat from his face.

Jim Ford was studying the heights across the bowl, carefully. He could see a column of lighter colored smoke—wood smoke—climbing up from behind a knife edged low ridge in the early morning air.

He pointed it out to Chief M'Kada.

"Up there's our man, Chief, or I'm badly fooled," he said. "I'm betting that his camp is under that wood smoke, behind that low, sharp ridge, out of the heat from the crater. Guess that light colored smoke would be from his breakfast fire, and maybe . . . Look! Look, M'Kada! Down below that light colored smoke, up on that big block of black lava. Can you see it, M'Kada?"

Chief M'Kada scrambled forward, stared. His eyes flared, he panted with excitement. Jim Ford and Chief M'Kada were gazing spellbound at the huge form of a Negro, robed from chin to heels in flowing, billowing white fabric, that swirled about his giant's form in the hot blast of air from the old crater. He held his arms out, level with the ground on each side, then swept them to their full height above his head. He bowed low, fell to his knees, pressed his forehead to the lava, time after time. Then abruptly, as Jim and the Chief stared fascinated, a cloud of black smoke belched from a hole in front of the block of lava where he stood. It hid the ghostly

form of the priest, and when it drifted away he was gone.

"That . . . fire priest!" M'Kada half whispered, his eyes wild. "He will kill—kill—kill on sacrifice block, to please his fire god. Much times I have heard . . . man or woman tied by hands and feet on big block, longer and wider than a Masai warrior—that fire priest in white cloth stand over man or woman, with big knife . . ."

He and Jim leaped to their feet. "I've got to get over there," Jim panted. "Maybe that devil is getting ready to kill Helen as a sacrifice to his blasted crazy god."

"Wah! But how we live for get there? Too hot," the big Masai growled, staring at the inferno below them. "Maybe better we live for go back, run, go around." He motioned to the right.

Jim Ford said nothing; just pointed at the row of small cones, all smoking steadily; like the one in front of them, and extending for miles in both directions.

The Chief thumped the ground angrily with the butt of his spear shaft. "Agh! For walk around, maybe fit for take two—three day. No good," he growled.

Jim rose to his feet. "Sign shows that Akesi walked *across* this old crater," Jim said excitedly. "What Akesi can do, we can do, Chief."

M'Kada jumped to his feet from his heel-squat. "Wah!" he bellowed. "We go now. Kill Akesi! Kill fool priest! If Akesi . . ." He wheeled suddenly, looked at Jim, held his hand over his mouth in warning. Then M'Kada slipped quietly back down the trail, his spear level.

He was out of sight among the huge blocks of lava almost immediately. Jim heard a shrill screech from down there where M'Kada had disappeared and a minute later the Chief came striding into view, lugging under his powerful right arm, the little Wasuli hunch-back Ng Gamon, whom they had left at Hapana Simba plantation, to rest up after he had reported that the Akesi were going to attack Bill White's plantation.

The Chief was laughing loudly. It was the way of the Negro. Already he had partly forgotten his awe at sight of the white robed priest . . . fear for the safety of Helen White. All that had almost been driven from his mind by the



capture of the little hunch-back. Now, he could laugh again.

NG GAMON was kicking, scowling, cursing shrilly in his high pitched voice. It all looked anything but funny to him. His immense dignity had been outraged.

M'Kada dropped the little man in front of Jim Ford. "I hear noise like small animal down there," he said. "I think maybe Akesi fit for come behind us, make fight. But I find little spit-cat." He was grinning broadly. He had very little respect for Ng Gamon as a fighting man. And, if a man couldn't fight, then what good was he? That was M'Kada's philosophy.

Ng Gamon stared at M'Kada for a moment, then deliberately ran over and spat on his shadow. The little hunch-back turned, hitched up his gazelle skin breech clout and faced Jim Ford. "Me make fit for come here for help you, bwana, quick, after rest make me fit for run trails again," he said, with a dignity that was impressive, despite his misshapen, undersized body. He stood less than five feet in his bare feet. "Two nights I live for sleep in Baobab tree, like the apes, so lions and leopards no eat me," he went on. "I fit for come here quick, like . . ."

M'Kada's laughter interrupted him. "Maybe the mother monkey hold you in her arms like little monkey *toto*, when you sleep in Baobab tree," he jeered. "How else you fit for not fall into lion's mouth?"

Ng Gamon, snarling, scurried around the big Masai and again deliberately spat on his shadow. M'Kada laughed loudly, made a playful pass at Ng Gamon with his big spear. Had a warrior been so imprudent as to spit on the Chief's shadow, one of them would have died suddenly.

Jim growled, "Let's hear what Ng Gamon has to tell us, Chief. After all, he has been here in the land of fire, as our spy. Come on now, Ng Gamon. How can I get to the other side of this damned crater quick?"

The little man strutted back and forth importantly for a moment. Then, with a sidewise glance of contempt at M'Kada, he said, "It is fitting that we cross the land of fire, from here. The Akesi leopard men live for go that way. They are not Wasuli. They are not even Masai," he sneered, to

the Chief. "But they live for walk through land of fire and no get burned up. I am only Wasuli, I am not big clumsy elephant—Masai, but I walk that trail. I not burn . . ." The little man suddenly pulled a wavy edged, twelve inch dagger from its scabbard where it was hung on a monkey fur belt around his waist, and started for the trail. "I will lead," he said importantly, in his high pitched voice. There was a bragging, aggressive swagger to his misshapen shoulders that brought a roar of laughter from Chief M'Kada.

But Jim Ford arose and at once stepped over the edge of the bowl, started the steep descent close behind Ng Gamon, who was as agile as an ape. Chief M'Kada followed.

They had nearly reached the bottom of the slope leading into the crater when a sharp, slapping report set echoes bouncing back and forth across the bowl, even above the roaring in that inferno, and a piece of lava within inches of Jim's head, fell in a cloud of dust.

All three ducked, ran for the place where the trail led in among the great blocks of lava.

Another shot, and a slug jolted into a block, whined and ricocheted away with a vicious snarl.

"He's got sentries out, whoever he is," Jim snapped. "He's got us spotted now. Come on. We'll clean this up quick."

Ng Gamon paused, uncertain. But Jim Ford immediately pushed by him, and with a forty-five automatic in his right hand he went at a crouching run, following the plain trail made by the many Akesi feet that had crossed the land of fire, on their way to murder. Chief M'Kada, with his great height, was bent nearly double to keep out of sight of the gunner on the knife edged ridge on the opposite side. But he had an eager gleam in his black eyes, there was an alertness in his movements that said much.

The ground was hot, the big blocks of lava on each side of the trail radiated a steady wave of heat. Smoke from open fissures in the ground hung in the dead atmosphere of the bowl like a fog. It was stifling, choking.

Then abruptly, Jim was brought to a halt by a circular pool of gently boiling water. The trail ended six feet short of the pool. Jim looked around uncertainly for a



moment, stood fingering that lion's tooth fetish hanging on his shirt.

Ng Gamon scurried forward from behind Chief M'Kada. He stood pointing at a huge block of lava to his left. "Trail fit for go over that way," he said in his high pitched tones. But the little man's voice quavered. It was plain that the threat of rifle fire had him uneasy.

Perspiration was running in streams from all three. The Chief and Ng Gamon, even with the quarter inch layer of callous on the soles of their feet, lifted one foot at a time, held it up away from the hot, lava flooded trail.

Jim growled, "That must have been a white man doing that shooting. Must have a telescopic sight on his rifle. We'll have to move fast to get up over that block of lava and down the other side without getting shot. I'll bet that devil has the range to every spot on this trail figured to a gnat's eyebrow."

He turned to Ng Gamon. "Where does this trail lead, from the top of that block of lava?" he asked.

The little man was already giddy from the great heat, but he piped up, "Fit for go across top—jump down on trail again over there." He was pointing.

"Follow me, one at a time," Jim ordered. He dropped his automatic into its holster, got a foothold on the side of the block of lava, leaped to the top and raced across.

A rifle slug tore into the lava, then another threw fragments into Jim's face before he could leap down to the trail. But he was not hit. When Ng Gamon came sliding down off the block backwards, Jim growled, "That blasted killer can shoot, all right. We'll have to look out, now."

"Is so," the little man muttered faintly. There was a queer, furtive look in his eyes. Being shot at, narrowly missed by a man who was nearly eight hundred yards away, was just about too much for Ng Gamon. His was not a reckless disposition.

**A**T THAT instant, Ng Gamon jumped wildly to one side, just in time to avoid being crushed by M'Kada as he hurtled down off the block, bellowing loudly. The Chief was rubbing a red streak along his side, over his ribs, striding around angrily.

"Chief! You hit?" Jim asked, stepping toward the big fellow anxiously.

"No. No hit. Burn!" M'Kada yelled, fingering a long graze mark where a high powered slug had passed. "But I fit for look, while up there." He waved a big hand at the top of the block of lava. "I see Akesi . . ." He held up his hands with seven fingers showing. "Akesi live for come, run much fast. They come for try kill us, for sure. Now! We fight! Kill!"

He searched the ground, found out where the trail led away and stepped out fast. The heat in the old crater was terrific, almost unendurable now. It was like a great oven. Everything—the ground, the blocks of lava, the air was a quivering mass of heat. Perspiration ran down the full length of M'Kada's great ebony body in streams. From time to time he dashed sweat from his eyes. But he was consumed by one great desire—to get the Akesi warriors within reach of his big spear.

Jim was close on his heels, an automatic gripped in each hand, the hammers cocked and ready. He, too, was bathed in perspiration; he could hear and feel the sweat squelching in his boots as he moved ahead at a crouching run. Once, he glanced behind for Ng Gamon. The little man was nowhere in sight. That likeable grin spread over Jim's rugged features. He didn't blame the little hunch-back too much. This would be no place for a man of his size when they met the Akesi.

It suddenly occurred to Jim that the leopard men knew this hell's playground better than he and M'Kada did. They were just skirting a deep, clear pool of gently boiling water, across a space fifty yards wide, that was clear of lava blocks, and Jim glanced down into its clear depths quickly. He was startled to see the complete skeleton of a man stretched full length on the bottom of the pool, maybe fifteen feet down. Shreds of a skin breech clout still clung to the bones, bleached white by the chemically charged water. Some black had evidently tried crossing here without a guide, at night maybe. The sight came as a shock to Jim, sobered him.

Jim turned his head, slowed his pace and was just opening his mouth to yell to the Chief that they had better look out for an ambush, when seven Akesi warriors burst from behind a big lump of lava and



came for them, fast, with a high, wild yell.

Before Jim could recover from his surprise and fire, the two warriors in the lead checked, hurled their spears. M'Kada neatly parried the one thrown at him. Jim ducked low and felt the wind of a spear as it passed over him, landed in the pool of boiling water.

Four of the spear men rushed M'Kada, at top speed. One came for Jim Ford. The charge was lightning fast. It all happened before he could get set, raise his pistols. Weight of numbers forced the Chief back. His great spear cut and slashed and jabbed furiously, but still, he had to give ground.

Four against one—killer's odds.

Two of the leopard men were wounded, bleeding freely, but they fought unchecked. They were crazed, fanatical with blood lust. In an instant, M'Kada was on the very edge of the pool of boiling water, about to be driven in to a horrible death.

Then Jim Ford's two automatics were blazing. His own attacker was down. He turned his slugs on Chief M'Kada's enemies. One went down from the terrific shock of a steel jacketed forty-five slug. Then another hit the burning hot trail. They were quick to see that their chances for a surprise victory were gone, that only death waited them here. They broke, started to run for the protection of the great lava blocks.

The two who had thrown their spears . . . and missed . . . swung past the big block of lava that had been the hiding place for their ambush. And as the last one ran by, a small hunch-backed demon with a twelve inch, wavy edged dagger, flung himself like a jungle cat from the top of the block of lava and landed on the Akesi's shoulders. The demon's long blade was slashing, cutting, stabbing in a perfect frenzy of destruction. In a matter of seconds, the Akesi warrior was partly decapitated, fell to the hot ground, Ng Gamon still slashing and stabbing in a good outlet of the killer's instinct that his size had, too long, kept pent up in his small, misshapen body.

M'Kada was in hot pursuit of the two Akesi warriors who had escaped Jim's slugs. They both carried wounds from the Chief's great spear, were weakening fast from loss of blood. But they were running

frantically, dodging, hiding, using their superior knowledge of the turns and twists, narrow places among the lava blocks. The Chief was implacable in his hunt for them, wouldn't rest until he had killed both.

And as Jim started out again on the trail to the fire temple alone, the last thing he saw was the little Wasuli hunch-back, Ng Gamon, still crouching over his victim, methodically plying his dagger. The little man's long pent up killer instinct, his desire to be considered a warrior among the men of his tribe, was not yet sated.

**J**IM FORD moved carefully, cautiously toward the knife edged, low ridge on the other side of the crater. He couldn't help thinking how lucky he and the Chief had been during the fight, that the rifleman with his telescopic sighted rifle could not see them, in among the giant lava blocks. The Chief especially loomed up over the smaller, more agile Akesi. His fear for Helen White had grown steadily, since he and the Chief had seen the fanatical fire priest at his devotions.

Now, Jim was in the shadows of that knife edged ridge. He had not exposed himself for an instant, in his careful advance. The lava blocks were lower now. He was well up on the side of the low ridge. The air was cooler. Jim had to crawl part of the time, to keep cover. He was thinking, "If I can only get into pistol range before that crazy fire priest sees me. Or that white man with the rifle, either."

Then abruptly, it happened. Jim made a turn in the trail, both his guns in their holsters. Fifty feet away, the German tourist who had been at the convention at Stanleyville hurried toward him, holding a high powered rifle with a telescopic sight, in both hands.

Surprise was complete, and disconcerting, for both of them. Kurt Von Stern's ridiculous monocle dropped from his eye. Jim was completely astounded to find out that this smooth, suave, seemingly intelligent gentleman, was the fiend who was hiring the Akesi killers. Jim snapped out of his spell of disconcerting surprise first, went for his automatics.

Von Stern, cursing luridly in his startled surprise, dove behind a block of lava, sent a shot from his rifle at Jim. His bullet went wild.



"What have you done with Helen White, you damned murderer?" Jim yelled. "Where is she? It'll do you no good to hide her. When I blast your guts out, it'll do you no good to hide her. Where is she?"

"Hell with you, swine. I know where she is, but you'll never find her . . . alive. You'll never find her," Von Stern yelled. "And when my Akesi soldiers have killed all of you miserable, ignorant swine—fools who think you know how to grow coffee, then I will be emperor of a big, powerful coffee empire."

Then suddenly Von Stern leaped out from behind the block of lava, fired a quick shot. In his excitement, he missed again. He jerked the rifle up, snapped the bolt action lock back and forward, started to turn the muzzle on Jim. And at that instant, a steel jacketed forty-five slug hit the lock of his rifle, in front of Kurt Von Stern's chest, completed shattering it.

One quick glance and Von Stern knew, flung the rifle from him and before Jim could fire again, darted into a lava crevasse and ran like a hare. He was over the top of the low ridge and off down a jungle trail beyond, before Jim Ford, tired from his long trek of that morning, could overtake him. But Jim kept doggedly after the man, following sign persistently. He was certain now, that Von Stern would lead him to Helen.

Nine o'clock came and passed and without pausing for rest, Jim ate what remained of the cooked meat and *manioc* that he carried in a small knapsack, as a sort of breakfast-lunch. Sign of the murderer that he chased was plain. Once he caught a brief glimpse of him through the jungle as he hurried desperately on.

Then a strange sound came to Jim Ford's ears, a sound that he couldn't place. But as he approached an open space in the tangle of growing things, it came to him. It was the squealing and grunting of an elephant.

This was elephant country, all right; he wasn't surprised to hear one of the beasts here. But it sounded as if the animal were in great pain.

Jim moved on more cautiously, studying every open space in the jungle carefully before moving out into it. He wanted no part of an angry rogue elephant, suffering from some injury. In that condition, the

great beasts were more dangerous than a lion.

Then Jim came to the edge of a large, grassy clear space with just a few small trees scattered in it. Half way across, following a game trail, he saw Kurt Von Stern staggering along, apparently nearly spent, too tired to try to break trail through the jungle, to one side or the other, out of sight of his pursuer.

But what caught Jim's eyes with a complete and horrified fascination was a big bull elephant, rocking from side to side near the farther edge of the clearing. He was grunting, squealing, occasionally blasting a short, agonized scream. A closer look showed that he had only one tusk, the left one. The other had been broken off short, maybe in a fight over some female. The base of the right tusk stuck out of an immense swelling, was dripping with pus. The animal was literally insane with his suffering.

A man who had lived in Africa at all, who knew anything about them, would go to any lengths to keep out of sight and scent of an elephant in the terrible condition that this bull was in. But the only elephants that Von Stern had ever seen, probably, had been in a zoo. He went carefully on toward the safety of the jungle, relying on the well known poor sight of an elephant, to escape detection.

**T**HEN suddenly everything changed. The great animal had been swinging his trunk, sampling the air, trying to locate something—anything alive—that he could vent his insane, unreasoning rage on, for his suffering. Abruptly, his trunk became rigid, steady. He was drawing great whistling breaths. Then he started to move—short, uncertain steps at first. But straight toward Von Stern. The elephant's steps quickened, he was suddenly moving with the speed of a locomotive. He was sure of his prey now—had the scent clearly.

Kurt Von Stern screamed his panic, started to run. The beast gained on him rapidly. The man was doomed. He couldn't hope to reach the jungle ahead of the great bull.

Jim emptied his automatic at the beast. He might as well have been firing at a ten ton tank.

Von Stern dodged, ran desperately for



the trees. But now the wounded elephant was close, could see him with his near sighted little eyes. He followed the man like a hound after a rabbit.

Then Von Stern was suddenly overwhelmed. He screamed, just once, and his career of murder was finished, irrevocably. He was rapidly being trampled into the earth by the great, pounding, crushing, pile driver feet of the insane beast.

Jim Ford turned away, sickened. There was nothing that he could do, now. His mission had been accomplished, completed, and he turned toward the crater to find M'Kada and Ng Gamon and pick up the rest of the Chief's warriors, search out the fire priest, try to find Helen White.

He had travelled only a few minutes on the back trail when he saw Chief M'Kada come over a low ridge, following sign at a half run. Twenty big Masai warriors were strung out behind him and a very proud, pompous little Wasuli hunch-back trotted with the column. The little man swaggered extravagantly, raced up to Jim and at once started to tell, in his high pitched voice, every minute detail of the story of how he had killed an Akesi warrior down in the land of fire. His tones were loud, so M'Kada's warriors would miss no part of his story. Ng Gamon was a warrior, now. He had killed his first man, in battle.

Jim cut Ng Gamon short to tell M'Kada about Von Stern and to ask the Chief, "Where would that fire temple be, M'Kada? See any sign?"

"Wah! Plenty sign. Sign point that way," he was holding his spear level, pointing.

"Von Stern said he knew where Helen was," Jim told the Chief. "He must have her hidden in some jungle camp. We'll find some of his Akesi—make them talk. But I want to check that temple first."

"Wah! I make Akesi talk plenty much," the big fellow said, rolling the words with relish. "But I think mebbly-so fire priest got memsahib. Maybe Von Stern make for lie."

Jim Ford was off at a jog-trot, M'Kada and his warriors at his heels. The trail wound about among scattered lava boulders on the slope, climbing steadily. Jim was coming to a turn in the winding trail, near the crest when a shrill, terror filled scream froze him in his tracks.

He paused only a moment, then started ahead at a fast run. But reason caught up with him short of the turn in the trail. He slowed. M'Kada joined him. They sneaked forward quietly, peered around the curve. And as they did so, Helen White screamed again, in that piercing, terror filled pitch. "Jim! Jim! Save me! Save me! Save me!" she shrieked.

The sight that met Jim Ford's horror stricken gaze as he peered around that turn in the trail froze him. He saw an old half ruined temple, its roof a low dome, its walls, column after column of carved lava.

And inside the old sun god temple, exactly under the center of the dome roof, was a big, waist high block of black lava, maybe ten feet long by five feet wide. Helen White, flat on her back, was bound to the top of this sacrificial stone, by ankles and wrists. She was motionless—evidently in a faint.

Standing on a low platform on the far side of the block was a giant black in a flowing white robe. He held a long, wide, gleaming knife in both hands, high above the fainting form of the girl below him.

The priest's head was tilted far back and his lips moved in a slow mumble of sound, monotonous, even toned, deep.

Before he could check himself, Jim Ford went at a fast run, around the turn. And as he did so, twelve Akesi warriors swarmed at him with shrill war yells, from his left. Plainly, they had been spectators at the sacrificial ceremonies.

The priest came out of his prayer-trance, ran toward Jim shouting orders to his Akesi warriors, in a deep bellowing bass, swinging that gleaming big knife.

Jim leaped to his right, put his back against the wall, blasted steady fire at the savages. A thrown spear gashed the flesh over his ribs on his left side. He could feel blood running down his leg. A thrown dagger struck him a glancing blow on the head, staggering him for a moment. He was working his automatics steadily, men were falling before the steel jacketed slugs. And at that instant Chief M'Kada and his giant Masai came around the turn, rushed the Akesi. Immediately half a dozen dog-fights commenced. Every warrior in the temple court yard was screeching his war yell. The uproar, racket was terrific.

Suddenly, the priest's deep bellowing



bass ceased. Jim leaped back, looked for him. He was crouching low, moving stealthily toward Helen, his big sacrificial knife raised. He was in a direct line between Jim and the girl.

Jim Ford steadied his hand with a mighty effort, held his breath, lined his sights, squeezed the trigger with a slow, steady pressure.

The forty-five whacked out its flat report, and the priest of the Sun God staggered. He was hit, falling, practically dead on his feet. He flung an agonized glare over his shoulder at Jim and weaved on toward the helpless, fainting girl on the sacrificial stone. The big, gleaming blade was still raised high, still ready to send Helen White's soul to his Sun God. Fanatical strength held him up, drove him on. He was a long stride from Helen. Then he stumbled, fell limply, motionless.

Jim looked around quickly and was just in time to see Chief M'Kada and his giant Masai fighting men in full pursuit of the last of the Akesi. He wheeled toward Helen once more . . . and beheld a sight that momentarily froze him with horror.

The priest to the Sun God was dragging himself up the side of the sacrificial stone, gripping its blood stained edge with both straining hands. His big knife was clenched between his jaws. His head was rolling back on his shoulders, he was throwing every remaining ounce of the strength of his great body into one final, desperate effort to finish his work, drive that gleaming blade into Helen White's heart.

As Jim Ford leaped forward to make his aim doubly certain, the girl raised her head. Her horror-filled eyes were within an arm's length of the Sun God Priest's contorted face.

A high, wild scream came from Helen's lips, she threw herself half over on her side away from the giant black, straining at her bonds frantically.

The priest surged erect, held himself up with one hand on the great stone, swaying dizzily, reached for his knife.

Then a stream of steel-jacketed slugs poured from Jim Ford's automatic pistols and their mighty impact literally flung the great black to the ground. This time he did not rise again.

Jim Ford snatched up the fallen priest's sacrificial knife, quickly slashed the leopard skin strips that bound Helen White's wrists and ankles to the big, blood stained block of stone, lifted her in his arms and ran outside the temple with her.

HELEN clung to him desperately. She was shaken, nerve wracked, almost in tears with relief at the sight of Jim Ford, her rescuer, the knowledge of her safety, at last.

"Oh Jim," she murmured. "I thought I was going to die and never see you again. That big half-crazed savage; he was so cruel, so cold . . ."

Jim pointed down the slope where the Chief and his warriors tramped back up the hill, their work done. "Look, Helen," he said. "It's good old Chief M'Kada. Everything will be all right now. And when we get back we can go over to my plantation to live—that is, as soon as the parson in Stanleyville has married us."

The girl looked up at him, smiled a brief smile. "It is you who has made everything—almost everything—all right, Jim," she said quietly. "But poor mother and dad . . ."

She was unable to go on. She buried her face in Jim's shoulders.

Then, abruptly she stood away from him, wiped her eyes, took a long quivering breath. Her sobbing ceased. Her chin came up and a brave smile spread over her face. "Forgive me Jim, dear," she said quietly. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm an awful sissy. And I'm not a sissy. I'm *not*."





# MURDER

**A killer's  
footsteps  
slithering  
softly in  
the gloom,  
moonlight  
glinting on  
a weapon  
—then the  
merciless  
stroke of  
murder!**



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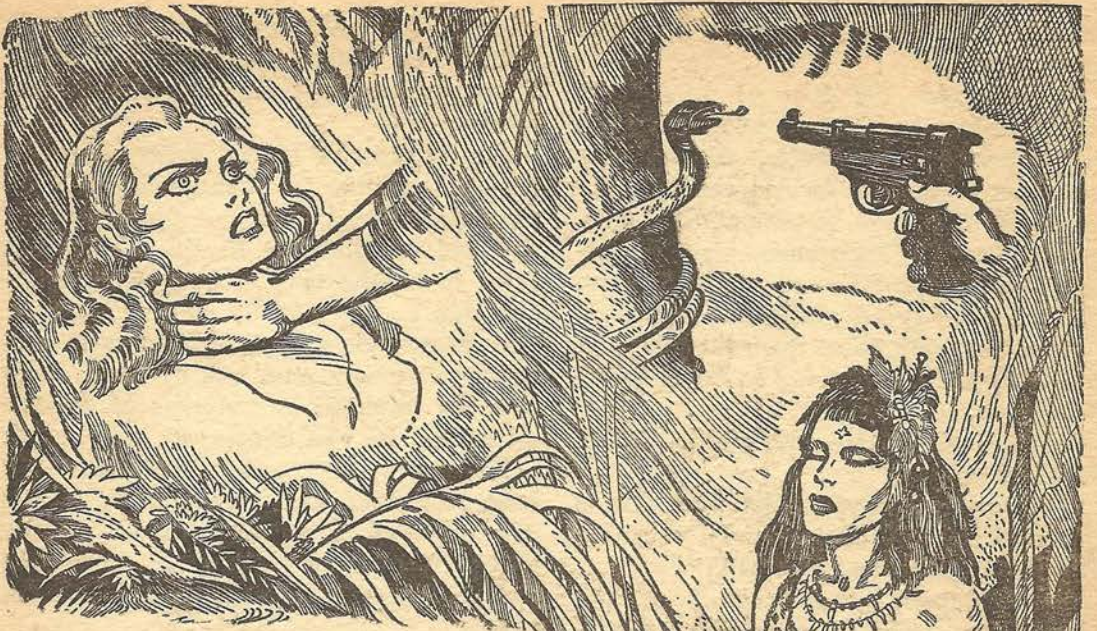
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# The Magic of Fear

By **EDGAR WALLACE**

Here is a strange and thrilling story of weird voodoo by one of the most popular jungle writers of all time.

**A**LL THIS HAPPENED IN THE interim between excellencies, or it could hardly have happened at all.

His Excellency, the retiring Administrator of the Reserved Territories, had departed amidst the banging of guns and the playing of the national anthem by a small band of near-white musicians, all of whom, and especially the cornet, had a tendency to play flat. The new Excellency was enduring the agony of gout at his house in Budleigh Salterton in Devon and his departure from home was indefinitely postponed.

A change of administration made little or no difference to the people of the big river, and Captain Hamilton of the King's Houssas, for one, was hardly conscious of the lacuna as he strode savagely towards

*Agasaka: She looked into the dark depths of men's souls.*



the hut which housed his youthful second in command.

Kicking open the door of Lieutenant Tibbetts's hut, he stepped in and snorted his disgust. Mr. Tibbetts, whose other name was Bones, lay face upwards on the top of his bed; and he was arrayed in a costume beyond forgiveness, for not Solomon in all his glory wore purple pajamas with alternate green and ochre stripes.

Hamilton flung down upon the table the paper he had been carrying as Bones opened one eye.

"Morning, sir," he said, slightly dazed. "Is it still raining?"

"Morning!" snapped Hamilton. "It is within an hour of dinner, and I've something to say to you, Bones!"

Bones relapsed into slumber.

"Wake up, and hide your hideous feet!"

The eyelids of the sleeper fluttered; he murmured something about not seeing the point—he had at least seen the newspaper, and recognized the Gothic title-piece.

"The point is, Bones," said Hamilton awfully, "nobody knows better than you that it is an offence for *any* officer to write to the newspapers on *any* subject! This"—he smacked the folded newspaper on the table—"this is an outrage!"

"*Surrey Star and Middlesex Plain Dealer*, sir," murmured Bones, his eyes closed, a picture of patience, forbearance, and resignation.

"The point is this," Hamilton pushed his junior off the bed. "You really must not write political articles, suggesting that the Secretary of State should come and 'see with his own eyes' — Hamilton sought for the offending paragraph and read it—" "...the work that is being carried out by young officers unknown and unhonoured..."—of all the rubbish!"

IT IS doubtful whether Mr. Nickerson Haben had even heard of the existence of that organ of public conscience, the *Surrey Star and Middlesex Plain Dealer*. He was not the type of man who gave a thought to any newspaper that had a circulation of less than half a million.

And yet, the appearance of this literary effort of Bones coincided with a peculiar moment of crisis in his life, and the sequel almost excused the subsequent jubilation

of the *Surrey Star* and went far to consolidate the editor's claim that "What the *Star* thinks to-day, the Government does to-morrow!"

For Nickerson Haben went almost at once to examine the Territories with his own eyes. He was in the middle thirties and had the globe at his feet. How this came to be the case, nobody troubled to consider.

A narrow-chested and pallid man with heavy raven hair, one lock of which hung over his forehead in moments of oratorical excess, he was deep-eyed, thin-lipped, hollow-faced, and had hands white and long. Nickerson was swept into the House of Commons in a whirlwind of oratory that blew down a phalanx of sober men and conservative citizens which stood between.

The new Government made him an under-secretary, first of Agriculture, then of Foreign Affairs. He had married the widow of Cornelius Beit, an American lady, fifteen years his senior—a clever woman with a violent temper and a complete knowledge of men. Their home life, though it was lived at Carlton House Terrace, was not happy. She knew him rather too well; his own temper was none of the sweetest. He had all the arrogance of a self-made man who had completed the process just a little too young. She once told a near friend that Nickerson had a streak of commonness which she found it difficult to endure, and there was even talk of a divorce.

That was just before her operation for appendicitis. The best surgeon in England performed; her recovery was never in doubt. Nickerson, under the spell of her recovery, went down to the House and delivered the best speech of his life on the subject of Baluchistan.

Three days later she was dead—there had occurred one of those curious relapses which are so inexplicable to the layman, so dreaded by the medical profession.

Haben was like a man stunned. Those who hated him—many—wondered what he would do now, with the principal source of income departed. They had time for no further than a brief speculation, the matter being decided when the will was read, leaving him everything—except for a legacy to a maid.



This tragedy occurred between excellencies, an opportunity seized upon by a sympathetic chief. Nickerson Haben went out on the first African mail-boat, to combine business with recreation; to find flaws and forgetfulness.

**L**INKED very closely with the life and fate of Mr. Nickerson Haben, Under-Secretary of State was that of Agasaka, the Chimbiri woman. Mr. Haben was dressed by the best tailor in Savile Row; Agasaka wore no clothes at all except for the kilt of dried grass which hung from her beautiful waist.

A tall maiden, very slim of body and very grave of eyes, no lover of any man, having a great love of something more imponderable than man; terribly wise, too, in ways of ghosts and devils; straight-backed, small-breasted, beloved of children, so strong in the arm and skilled in her strength that she could put a spear beyond the range of young men's throw—this was Agasaka, the Chimbiri woman, daughter of N'kma-n'kimi, the dead woodman.

She was elderly for a virgin, being seventeen; had been wooed by men in their every mood; had kindness for all, generosity for none.

She lived with her brother, M'suru, the hunting man; and his women hated her, for she never spoke a lie and was frank to her elderly brother on the matter of their numerous lovers. They would have beaten her, but that they knew the strength of her throwing arm. Where hands did not dare, tongues were more reckless, but none of their mud stuck. Few men were so poor in mind that they would admit others had succeeded where they had failed.

She had lived for many years with her father in the deep of the forest in the abiding place of M'shimba M'shamba, the fearfully boisterous devil who tears up trees with each hand, whilst his mouth drips molten fire; and other mighty ones dwelt near by. N'guro, the headless dog, and Chikalaka-m'bofunga, the eater of moons—indeed, all except the Fire Lizard, whose eyes talk death. And N'kema had taught her the mysteries of life and the beginning of life and the ground where life is sown. She knew men in their rawness and in their strength. N'kema taught

her the way in which she might be more wonderful than any other woman; the magic handed down from mouth to mouth—the magic which was old when they laid the first deep stones of the Pyramids. . . .

Men were afraid of her; even Oboro, the witch-doctor, avoided her.

For this was her strangest magic: that she had the power to bring before the eyes of men and women that which they desired least to see.

Once, a small chief stalked her by the river path where the grass is chin-high, having certain plans with her. And at the right and lonely moment he slipped from cover, dropping his spears in the grass, and caught her by the arms so that, strong as she was, she could not move.

"Agasaka," he said, "I have a hut in this forest that has never heard a woman's voice—"

He got so far and then, over her silken shoulder, he saw three black leopards walking flank by flank along the narrow path. Their heads hung low, their golden eyes shone hungrily.

In an instant he released her and fled to his spears.

When he turned again, leopards and woman were gone.

Aliki, the huntsman of her village, neither feared nor cared, for he was familiar with magics of all kinds and often walked in the woods communing with devils. One night he saw a vision in the fire, a great red lizard that blinked its heavy eyelids. Aliki looked round his family circle in a cold-blooded search for a victim. Calichi, the fire-lizard, is the most benevolent of devils and will accept a deputy for the man or woman to whom, with its red and blinking eyes, it has given its warning of death.

This Aliki saw his three wives and his father and an uncle who had come many days' journey on a hunting trip, and none of these, save the youngest wife, was well enough favoured for the purpose. Calichi is a fastidious devil; nothing short of the best and the most beautiful will please him. Beyond the group sitting about the red fire and eating from the big pot that stood in the embers, were other groups. The village street of Chimbiri-Isisi runs from the forest to the river, a broad avenue fringed with huts; and before each hut



burnt a fire, and about each fire squatted the men and women of the house.

Dark had come; above the tall gum trees the sky was encrusted with bright stars that winked and blinked as Calichi, but more rapidly.

Aliki saw the stars, and rubbed his palms in the dust for luck; and at that moment into his vision came the second wife of his neighbour, a tall woman of eighteen, a nymph carved in mahogany, straight and supple of back, naked to the waistline of her grass skirt. And Aliki knew that he had found a proper substitute and said her name under his breath as he caught the lizard's eyes. Thereupon the beast faded and died away, and Aliki knew that the fire-god approved his choice.

LATER that night, when Loka, the wife of M'suru the huntsman, went down to the river to draw water for the first wife's needs, Aliki intercepted her.

"There is nobody so beautiful as you, Loka," he said, "for you have the legs of a lion and the throat of a young deer."

He enumerated other physical perfections, and Loka laughed and listened. She had quarrelled that day with the first wife of her husband, and M'suru had beaten her. She was terribly receptive to flattery and ripe for such adventure as women enjoy.

"Have you no wives, Aliki?" she asked, pleased. "Now I will give you Agasaka, the sister of my husband, who is very beautiful and has never touched the shoulder of a man." This she said in spite, for she hated Agasaka, and it is a way of women to praise, to strangers, the qualities of the sisters they loathe.

"As to Agasaka—and wives"—he made a gesture of contempt—"there is no such wife as you, not even in the hut of the old king beyond the mountains, which are the end of the world," said Aliki, and Loka laughed again.

"Now I know that you are mad, as M'suru says. Also that you see strange sights which are not there to see," she said in her deep, gurgling voice. "And not M'suru alone, but all men, say that you have the sickness *mongo*."

It was true that Aliki was sick and had shooting pains in his head. He saw other things than lizards.

"M'suru is an old man and a fool," he said. "I have a ju-ju who gives me eyes to see wonders. Come with me into the forest, Loka, and I will tell you magic and give you love such as an old man cannot give."

She put down her gourd, hiding it in a patch of elephant grass near the river's edge, and walked behind him into the forest. There, eventually, he killed her. And he lit a fire and saw the lizard, who seemed satisfied. Aliki washed himself in the river and went back to his hut and to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning he was sorry he had killed Loka, for of all the women in the world she had been most beautiful in his eyes. The village was half empty, for Loka's gourd had been found and trackers had gone into the woods searching for her. Her they found; but nobody had seen her walking to death. Some people thought she had been taken by Ochori fishermen, others favoured a devil notorious for his amorous tricks. They brought the body back along the village street, and all the married women made skirts of green leaves and stamped the Death Dance, singing strangely.

Aliki, squatting before his fire, watched the procession with incurious eyes. He was sorry he had killed the Thing that was carried shoulder high, and, dropping his gaze to the dull fire, was even more sorry, for the hot lizard was leering up at him his bulging eyelids winking at a great rate.

So he had taken the wrong sacrifice.

His eyes rose, rested on the slim figure of a woman, one hand gripping the doorpost of her brother's hut. And there came to Aliki a tremendous conviction.

The lizard had vanished from the heart of the fire when he looked down.

No time was to be lost; he rose and went towards the virgin of Chimbiri.

"I see you, Agasaka," he said. "Now this is a terrible shame to come to your brother's house, for men say that this woman Loka had a lover who killed her."

She turned her big eyes slowly towards him. They were brown and filled with a marvellous luminosity that seemed to quiver as she looked.

"Loka died because she was a fool," she said, "but he who killed her was a bigger one. Her pain is past; his to come.



Soon Sandi *malaka* will come, the brown butcher bird, and he will pick the eyes of the man who did this thing."

Aliki hated her, but he was clever to nod his agreement.

"I am wise, Agasaka," he said. "I see wonders which no man sees. Now before Sandi comes with his soldiers, I will show you a magic that will bring this wicked man to the door of your brother's hut when the moon is so and the river is so."

Her grave eyes were on his; the sound of the singing women was a drone of sound at the far end of the village. A dog barked wheezily in the dark of the hut and all faces were turned towards the river where the body was being laid in a canoe before it was ferried to the little middle island where the dead lie in their shallow graves.

"Let us go," she said, and walked behind him through an uneven field of maize, gained the shelter of the wood behind the village, and by awkward paths reached the outliers of the forest, where there was no maize, for this place was too sad for the weaver birds and too near to the habitation of man for the little monkeys who have white beards. Still he walked on until they made a patch of yellow flowers growing in a clearing. Here the trees were very high, and ten men might have stood on one another's heads against the smooth boles, and the topmost alone could have touched the lowermost branch.

HE stopped and turned. At that second came an uneasy stirring of the tree tops, a cold wind.

"Let us sit down," he said. "First I will talk to you of women who loved me, and of how I would not walk before them because of my great thoughts for you. Then we will be lovers—"

"There is no magic in that, Aliki," she said, and he saw that she was against him and lifted his spear.

"You die, as Loka died, because of the word which the lizard of fire brought to me," he said, and his shoulder hunched back for the throw.

"I am Loka!" said the girl, and he looked and his jaw dropped. For she was truly Loka, the woman he had killed—

7—Jungle Stories—Spring

Loka with her sly eyes and long fingers. And she had Loka's way of putting a red flower behind her ear, and Loka's long, satiny legs.

"Oh ko!" he said in distress, and dropped his spear.

Agasaka bent in the middle and picked it up, and in that moment became herself again. There was no flower and her fingers were shorter, and where the sly smile had been was the gravity of death.

"This is my magic," she said. "Now walk before me, Aliki, killer of Loka, for I am not made for love, but for strange power."

Without a word the bemused man walked back the way he had come and Agasaka followed, and, following, felt the edge of the spear's broad blade. Though she touched lightly, there was a line of blood on her thumb where blade and skin had met. The wood was growing dark, the wind was alternately a shriek and a whimper of sound.

Near the pool at the edge of the forest she swung the spear backward over her left shoulder as a cavalry soldier would swing his sword, and he half turned at the sound of the whistle it made. . . .

The first wife of her brother was by the pool gathering manioc root from a place where it had been left to soak—the head of Aliki fell at her feet as the first flash of lightning lit the gloom of the world.

THE SUN was four hours old when a river gunboat, a white and glittering thing, came round the bluff which is called The Fish because of its shape. The black waters of the river were piled up around its bows, a glassy hillock of water, tinged red at its edges, for the *Zaire* was driving against a six-knot current.

Sanders stood by the steersman, a slim and dapper figure in spotless white, his pith helmet at a rakish angle.

"Lo'ba, ko'lo ka! A fathom of water by the mercy of God!"

The sleepy-eyed boy sitting in the bow of the boat drew up his wet sounding-rod.

Sanders' eyes sought the river-side path. He saw eight men walking two and two, and they carried on their shoulders a trussed figure.

"O men," said Sanders softly, "who



are you that you put the ghost mark on this woman's face?"

For the face of their passenger was daubed white with clay. None spoke: he saw their toes wriggling, all save those of one man, and him he addressed.

"M'suru, son of N'kema, what woman is this?"

M'suru cleared his throat.

"Lord, this woman is the daughter of my own mother; she killed Aliko, also she killed first my wife Loka."

"Who saw this?"

"Master, my first wife, who is a true woman to me since her lover was drowned, she saw the head of Aliko fall. Also she heard Agasaka say 'Go, man, where I sent Loka, as you know best, who saw me slay her.'"

Sanders was not impressed.

"Let loose this woman that she may stand in my eyes," he said, and they untied the girl and by his order wiped the joke of death from her face.

"Tell me," said Sanders.

She spoke very simply and her story was good. Yet—

"Bring me the woman who heard her say these evil things."

The wife was found in the tail of the procession and came forward frightened—for the cold eyes of Sanders were unnerving. But she was voluble when she had discovered her voice.

Agasaka, the slim woman, stood grave, unconscious of shame—the grass girdle had gone and she was as her mother had first seen her. Presently the first wife came to the end of her story.

"Sandi, this is the truth, and if I speak a lie may the *long ones* take me to the bottom of the river and feed me to the snakes!"

Sanders, watching her, saw the brown skin go dull and gray; saw the mouth open in shocking fear.

What he did not see was the "long one"—the yellow crocodile that was creeping through the grass towards the perjurer, his little eyes gleaming, his wet mouth open to show the cruel white spikes of teeth.

Only the first wife of M'suru saw this, and fell screaming and writhing at her husband's feet, clasping his knees.

Sanders said nothing, but heard much

that was in contradiction of the earlier story.

"Come with me, Agasaka, to my fine ship," he said, for he knew that trouble might follow if the girl stayed with her people. Wars have started for less cause.

He took her to the *Zaire*; she followed meekly at his heels, though meekness was not in her.

THE *Zaire* was steaming for home the next day when he sent for Abiboo, his orderly.

"Bring me this woman of Chimbiri," he said, and they brought her from the little store-cabin where she was both guest and prisoner.

"They tell me you have strange magic, Agasaka," he said.

"Lord, it is true," said Agasaka. "These things my father taught me, as his father taught him. For, lord, he was the son of M'kufusu, the son of Bonfongu-m'lini, the son of N'sambi. . . ."

She recited thirty generations before he stopped her—roughly four hundred years. Even Sanders was staggered, though he had once met an old man of the N'gombi who told him intimate details about a man who had lived in the days of Saladin.

"Show me your magic, woman," he said, and to his surprise she shook her head.

"Lord, this one magic only comes when I am afraid."

Sanders dropped his hand to his Browning and half drew it from its leather holster.

He was sitting under an awning spread over the bridge. The steersman was at the wheel, in the bow the *kano* boy with his long sounding-rod. Purposely he did not look at the woman, fixing his eyes on the steersman's back.

His hand had scarcely closed on the brown grip when, almost at his feet, he saw the one thing in all the world that he loathed—an English puff adder, mottled and swollen, its head thrown back to strike.

Twice his pistol banged—the steersman skipped to cover with a yell and left the *Zaire* yawing in the strong current.

There was nothing—nothing but two little holes in the deck, so close together that they overlapped. Sanders sprang to the wheel and straightened the boat, and



then, when the steersman had been called back and the sounding boy retrieved from the cover of the wood pile where he crouched and trembled, Sanders returned to his chair, waving away Abiboo, who had arrived, rifle in hand, to the rescue of his master.

"Woman," said Sanders quietly, "you may go back to your little house."

And Agasaka went without the evidence of triumph a lesser woman might have felt. He had not looked at her—there was no mesmerism here.

He stooped down and examined the bullet holes, too troubled to feel foolish.

That afternoon he sent for her again and gave her chocolate to eat, talking of her father. She was sitting on the deck at his feet, and once, when he thought he had gained her confidence, he dropped his hand lightly on her head as he had dropped his hand on so many young heads.

The puff adder was there—within striking distance, his spade head thrown back, his coils rigid.

Sanders stared at the thing and did not move his hand, and then, through the shining body, he saw the deck planks, and the soft bitumen where plank joined plank, and then the viper vanished.

"You do not fear?" he asked quietly.

"Lord... a little; but now I do not fear, for I know that you would not hurt women."

The *Zaire*, with its strange passenger, came alongside the residency wharf two hours before sundown on the third day.

"HIS pure swine," said Hamilton. "Nothing is good enough for him; he raised hell when he found you weren't here to meet him. Bones molified him a little. The silly ass had a guard of honour drawn up on the beach."

All this between wharf and residency garden. A figure in white stretched languidly in a deep chair turned his head but did not trouble to rise. Still less was he inclined to exchange the cool of the broad veranda for the furnace of space open to a red-hot sun.

Sanders saw a white face that looked oddly dirty in contrast with the spotless purity of a duck jacket. Two deep, suspicious eyes, a long, untidy wisp of hair

lying lankly on a high forehead—a pink, almost bloodless mouth.

"You're Sanders?"

Mr. Haben looked up at the trim figure.

"I am the Commissioner, sir," said Sanders.

"Why weren't you here to meet me; you knew that I was due?"

Sanders was more shocked than nettled by the tone. A coarse word in the mouth of a woman would have produced the same effect.

"Do you hear me, sir?" The man on the chair sat up impatiently.

Hamilton, standing by, was near to kicking him off the step.

"I heard you. I was on a visit to the Chimbiri country. No notice of your arrival or your pending arrival was received."

Sanders spoke very carefully; he was staring down at the scowling Haben.

Mr. Haben had it on the tip of his tongue to give him the lie. There was, as the late Mrs. Haben had said, a streak of commonness in him; but there was a broader streak of discretion. The gun still hung at the Commissioner's hip; the grip was shiny with use.

"H'm!" said Mr. Under-Secretary Haben, and allowed himself to relax in his chair.

He was clever enough, Sanders found; knew the inside story of the Territories; was keen for information. He thought the country was not well run. The system was wrong, the taxes fell short of the highest possible index. In all ways his attitude was antagonistic. Commissioners were lazy people, intent on having a good time and "their shooting." Sanders, who had never shot a wild beast in his life, save for the pot or to rid himself of a pressing danger, said nothing.

"A thoroughly nasty fellow," said Hamilton.

At dinner Haben touched the zenith of his boorishness. The dinner was bad; he hated palm-nut chop; sweet potatoes made him ill; the chicken was tough, the coffee vile. Happily he had brought his own cigars.

Only Sanders showed no sign of annoyance. Not a muscle of his face moved when Mr. Nickerson Haben made the most unforgivable of all suggestions. He



did this out of sheer ignorance and because of that streak of commonness which was his very own.

"A native woman is a native woman," said Sanders quietly. "Happily, I have only had gentlemen under my control, and that complication has never arisen."

Mr. Haben smiled sceptically; he was sourest when he smiled.

"Very noble," he said dryly, "and yet one has heard of such things happening."

Hamilton was white with rage. Bones stared open-mouthed, like a boy who only dimly understood. The pale man asked a question and, to the amazement of the others, Sanders nodded.

"Yes, I brought a girl down from Chimbiri," he said; "she is at present in the Houssa lines with the wife of Sergeant Abiboo. I hardly know what to do with her."

"I suppose not," more dryly yet. "A prisoner, I suppose?"

"N-no" — Sanders hesitated — seemed confused in Haben's eyes. "She has a peculiar brand of magic which rather confounds me—"

Here Mr. Nickerson Haben laughed.

"That stuff!" he said contemptuously. "Let me see your magician."

Bones was sent to fetch her—he swore loudly all the way across the dark square.

"That is what we complain about," said Mr. Haben in the time of waiting. "You fellows are in the country so long that you get niggerized." (Sanders winced. "Nigger" is a word you do not use in Africa.) "You absorb their philosophies and superstitions. Magic—good Heavens!"

He wagged his long head hopelessly.

"My poor wife believed in the same rubbish—she came from one of the Southern States—had a black mammy who did wonderful things with chicken bones!"

Sanders had not credited him with a wife. When he learnt that the poor lady had died he felt that worse things could happen to a woman.

"Appendicitis—an operation . . . fool of a doctor." Mr. Haben unbent so far as to scatter these personal items. "As I said before, you people—hum . . ."

Agasaka stood in the doorway, "mis-

sionary dressed" as they say. Her figure was concealed in a blue cotton "cloth" wrapped and pinned about her to the height of her breast.

"This is the lady, eh? Come here!" He beckoned her and she came to him. "Let us see her magic . . . speak to her!"

Sanders nodded.

"This man wishes to see your magic, Agasaka; he is a great chief amongst my people."

She did not answer.

"Not bad-looking," said Nickerson, and did a thing which amazed these men, for he rose and, putting his hand under her chin, raised her face to his. And there was something in his queer, hard eyes that she read, as we may read the printed word. The streak of commonness was abominably broad and raw-edged.

"You're not so bad for a nig . . ."

He dropped his hands suddenly; they saw his face pucker hideously. He was looking at a woman, a handsome woman with deep shadows under her eyes. It was the face he often saw and always tried to forget. A dead white face. She wore a silk nightdress, rather high to the throat . . .

And she spoke.

"Won't you wait until the nurse comes back, Nick? I don't think I ought to drink ice-water—the doctor says—"

"Damn the doctor!" said Nickerson Haben between his teeth, and the three men heard him, saw his hand go up, holding an imaginary glass, saw his eyes fall to the level of an imaginary pillow.

"I'm sick of you—sick of you! Make a new will, eh? Like hell!"

He stared and stared, and then slowly turned his drawn face to Sanders.

"My wife,"—he pointed to space and mumbled the words—"I—I killed her—"

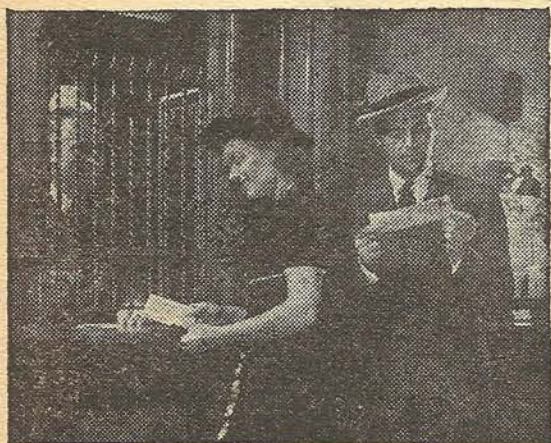
And then he realized that he was Nickerson Haben, Under-Secretary of State, and these were three very unimportant officials—and a black woman who was regarding him gravely. But this discovery of his was just the flash of a second too late.

"Go to your room, sir," said Sanders, and spent the greater part of the night composing a letter to the Foreign Secretary.



# PICTURE QUIZ: Which one of these people gives the right reason for buying U.S. Bonds?

( ANSWER BELOW )



**1. Easy to save!** "I'm putting my money into U.S. Bonds because it's the *easiest* way for me to save a regular amount each week. So far, I've saved \$500 without missing the money!"



**2. Plans for the future!** "Ten years from now, the money I'll get for my U.S. Bonds will help to send my kids to college, or buy our family a new home."



**3. Rainy day!** "Maybe a rainy day's coming for me. Maybe it isn't. But I am taking no chances. That's why I'm buying all the U.S. Bonds I can through my Payroll Savings Plan."

## THE ANSWER

Every one of these people gives the "right" reason—because there's more than one right reason for buying U.S. Bonds.

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*Starr took a quick step back and pumped a left to the jaw!*

## THE SORCERER OF KAMBARA

By DAN CUSHMAN

Could a trader-tramp like Johnny Starr save a queen like Paulette Payan from the curse of the Black Sorcerer? Maybe he could—when the stakes were Sheba's fortunes!

THE SUN WAS RED as a Kaffir orange as it sank through smoke haze which had drifted north on the dry-season wind from Angola. There was a tiny clearing, a footpath sloping sharply to a river bank. Johnny Starr issued a command to his twelve Kama porters and they came wearily to a stop. This was Bonde River, a northward-flowing tributary of the Congo, the evening goal he had set for his safari.

Johnny Starr's feet had been troubling him since mid-morning, but there was no sign of fatigue on his thin, mahogany-

tanned face as he stood, idly slapping one leg with his fly-whisk.

"*Bwana m'kubwa!*" intoned the ancient Nefunta, his *capito*. "The cloth house, *Bwana!*"

Johnny Starr walked to one side and then to the other, twanging the taut tent cords with his thumb. He indicated satisfaction with a crisp jerk of his head, and went inside. Only then, seated on a blanket roll beyond sight of his blacks, did his face show the suffering that his feet had caused him.

He pulled off his antelope hide *veldt-*





VESTAL



*schoen* and examined each large toe. Chiggers had found their way beneath the nails, they had deposited their egg-sacs, and now the eggs had hatched and were itching him like the very devil.

He scraped each toe carefully, smeared with merthiolate, and rubbed his feet with Tiger Balm. He felt better. He stretched his feet toward the tent flap, rolled a cigarette of native leaf adding a pinch of *bangh* as an evening luxury, and smoked slowly.

Johnny Starr was thirty or thirty-five. It's hard to guess a man's age after he's been burned and dehydrated by the sun and quinine of two tropical continents. He was medium in height, slim, but with a springsteel quality that indicated strength. His teeth were strong and white, a scar was partially hidden by a close moustache.

He inhaled, keeping the smoke down a long time to get all the comforting *bangh* out of it. Twenty or thirty paces away he could see his Kama tribesmen squatting on their elongated heelbones around a smoky fire where a kettle of mealie-meal was bubbling. Beyond them, through an opening in the jungle, the low and greenish Bonde moved among the brace roots of underwashed trees. At some distance, perhaps a half-dozen kilometers, he could hear the wavering, irregular sound of a tree-trunk drum.

He noticed that his porters had ceased watching their mealie-meal. They were rigid and large eyed, listening. After three or four minutes the drum became silent. He crawled through the tent flap and asked,

"What were the words of the drum?"

There was a lengthy silence before Nefunta, the *capito*, answered, "It was the Juma tongue and we did not understand all of it, *Bwana*."

"What were its words?"

A quality in Starr's voice made Nefunta hurry to say, "A woman escaped. The king of Lilula village will pay ten arm's lengths of copper wire for her capture."

"A slave woman?"

"A *bondele* woman," the *capito* answered in awed tones.

Starr twisted his lips—"The drums said that?"

"Yes, *Bwana*."

Starr laughed and turned abruptly,

striding back to the tent. The idea of a Lilua "king" offering a reward for a white woman was too ridiculous for consideration.

He awoke next morning before sunup with mist hanging over the river. He shaved, and wiped his face hurriedly with a damp towel when he heard the natives jabbering excitedly. He strode over in time to see someone coming up the bank from a small dugout canoe.

Starr drew up with abrupt surprise on seeing it was a white woman.

She saw Starr at the same second. She turned as though to run, a canvas-wrapped package clutched tightly to her breast, then she checked herself and stood quite still, her eyes very large and dark.

"You're just in time for breakfast," Starr said, pretending to notice nothing unusual about her arrival.

"You're—from Parhana?" she asked.

"From Kamakama."

"Oh."

SHE walked forward then, her eyes quickly roving the camp. She was no older than twenty-one, small, extremely slim waisted. Her complexion was browned rather than the sallow hue which most white women assume in the tropics. She had tried to stuff her hair beneath a *terai* sunhat, but most of it had escaped and hung in wavy dark masses to her shoulders. She wore a torn and soiled brown shirt, khaki shorts and knee-length stockings. She still clasped the small, canvas-wrapped package closely.

"You won't let them find me!" she whispered.

"You're running from something?" Starr asked, and when she did not answer he raised his voice, "Who are you running from?"

She answered, sounding short of breath, "I can't stop here. They're too close. I don't know how far. Maybe only a couple of kilometers. I haven't slept for two nights."

"Who's chasing you?"

"The tribesmen. From Kambara. They killed my father and sister. He was missionary there—"

He seized her shoulders and shook her, trying to snap the delirium that seemed to be holding her,



"You're trying to tell me that the natives have attacked Kambara?"

She nodded. "It was because of the fever. The *spirillum*. Six of them died. Three or four others went blind. Half the village was down. Father did what he could. They had a sorcerer's dance. Funza, he was the witch doctor. He always hated us. He said I was the sorceress. He said I'd brought the spirillum, that I'd put a curse on them. They believed him. They thought they'd have to kill me. Father tried to fight them off. They killed him. I saw them kill him..." She commenced to sob.

He shook her. "Get hold of yourself. They can't be after you now. They wouldn't follow you here from Kambara!"

"He was lying across the little, cobble path. I don't remember what I did—how I escaped the house. I hid in some jasmine bushes. They were all around, but they couldn't find me. Then I crawled to the river and found a canoe. After dark. I floated downstream. They had set fire to all the mission buildings..."

Starr went inside the tent, opened the uniform can and uncorked a last, precious bottle of scotch. He held it to her lips and she took a couple of gulps before realizing what it was. It strangled her first, and then steadied her.

Starr turned on Nefunta and demanded, "What else did those talking drums say?"

"They say king of Lilula village he pay ten lengths of copper wire for *bondele* woman."

"You already told me that. What else did it say?"

"Only that, *Bwana*."

Johnny Starr stood with hands on hips, muscles knotted at the sides of his jaw. His face looked hollow beneath his prominent cheekbones.

He kept opening and closing his hands rapidly.

"When was it?" he asked the girl.

She moved sharply, realizing he was speaking to her, "Night before last."

"You've been traveling two nights and a day without eating or sleeping?"

She nodded.

"You'd have to. You've covered lots of ground. What makes you think they're still following?"

She didn't answer his question. Instead

she said, "You won't let them find me here. You—"

"Of course not. You'll have to rest. I'll fix you some breakfast."

He led her to the tent. She crept through the flap and sat on the blankets which were still spread inside. Starr opened a can of bully-beef and brewed strong tea. His natives, finished with fingering thick, scalding mealie-meal into their mouths, stood at a distance, watching him.

Breakfast was ready, but she seemed to be sleeping, and he did not disturb her.

The sun was breaking through purplish mists. He twisted a cigarette from vile, native leaf and puffed it slowly.

A native spoke in startled alarm, and pointed downstream with an elongated lower lip. A dugout canoe had swung into sight and was pushing swiftly with a rhythmic flash of paddles.

Starr spun toward the tent, and saw that the girl had taken alarm at the native's words and was running toward him. The canvas-wrapped package was still in her arms.

He seized her wrist to stop her from escaping into the jungle.

"Get hold of yourself, girl!"

She forced herself to stand still.

He asked, "Are those the ones who were chasing you?"

She nodded. "But there are more. Three or four canoes..."

Starr went to the tent, lifted a heavy, bolt action express rifle from its scabbard, snapped off the safety. He stood on a high shoulder of the bank, appraising the gun's balance, then with a practiced movement tossed it to his shoulder, took quick aim and pulled the trigger.

The canoe was a good three hundred meters off, but he could see the slit of water where the .300 magnum slug cut barely right of the canoe's prow. The paddles instantly stopped their flashing and the canoe hung to the flat, still surface of the river. He fired again, and the paddles dug in desperately, all rhythm gone from their movements. The canoe swung broadside to him as it disappeared among vine-dripping trees along the jungle shore. There were seven or eight men in it—and the one in the prow wore a sun helmet.



He strode back to camp, ordering his porters into action.

"You'll go on without me," he said to Nefunta. "All except for Ngando and Bobiste." He scribbled a note as he talked, tearing it from his notebook and handing it to the *capito*. "Give this to Herr Glennthier at Ste. Helene. He'll pay you and store the packages. Wait for me one week. If I don't arrive, return to your people."

"Yes, *Bwana m'kubwa*," said Nefunta, asking no question.

The girl had retreated a dozen steps along the footpath, anxious to be away. Starr said,

"There's no trail through the jungle they can follow. It would take them an hour to chop their way along that shore with bush knives."

**N**GANDO and Bobiste worked rapidly, making two packs of tent, blankets and provisions. The others, led by Nefunta, had already shouldered their heavy packages. They set out at a swift half-jog on the down-river footpath.

"You're letting them go without you!" the girl cried.

"Sure. They'll probably decoy your Kambara natives into following. That ought to give us a bit of a start. We'll head up this footpath three or four kilos and then cut over to Kwilu. The Commissaire has his men in that country somewhere collecting the head tax, and they'll give you a safe passage back to Lusambo.

She shook her head, "I can't go to Kwilu!"

"Why?"

"I can't go to Kwilu! That's all—I can't go there. If you want I will go on alone—"

He seized her wrist, "There's a whole devil of a lot you haven't bothered to tell me!"

"I won't let you take me to Kwilu!"

"All right, where will you go?"

"To Bande-Moke."

Bande-Moke was a settlement lying three or four day's travel to the south, almost at the border of Portuguese Angola. From there it would only be a hundred and fifty kilometers to the railhead at Melange. So it wasn't an unreasonable destination.

"How did you happen to pick Bande?"

"My brother is there."

He looked into her eyes for a few seconds, then turned and made a signal to his blackboys.

For an hour they traveled through deep jungle, then, quite unexpectedly, the heavy forest ended and the path struck across an apparently limitless expanse of savannah. The country was slightly rolling, deep in yellow grass. Here and there, irregular as blots of spilt ink, lay dense areas of thorn and woodland. On a clear day one could see the broken outline of the Kamakama Hills, but this morning the horizon was a void turned grayish by grassfires.

After many hours of blind travel through the deep grass they reached the little, hoof-punched waterhole where the safari had taken siesta the day before. Starr looked at the girl. She seemed more rested than on her arrival that morning, so it had been fear rather than fatigue bothering her.

"We'll sleep a few hours," he said. "I don't think there's much danger of them following us here." He smiled with a slight twist of his scarred upper lip. "Not even for all those armslengths of copper wire that 'king' was offering."

"They'll still follow."

Starr had long been used to two meals a day, so the absence of a lunch did not occur to him. He settled back, shoulders against a wild fig tree, looking at the girl's face as she slept. The canvas-wrapped package was still in her arms. He kept thinking of the canoe that his rifle bullets had chased into the bush. He was certain it had been a white man in its prow.

He smoked—slept. He awoke suddenly. The girl was standing, looking down on him.

"Feel better?"

She nodded. He crooked his thumb at the canvas-wrapped package, "I see you brought something from the mission."

She moved in a startled manner, shifting the package from one arm to the other.

"It's—something father didn't want lost. I knew he'd want my brother to have it. I went back and got it—before they burned the mission."

He pretended to believe her. "Is there any reason a *white man* should be following you?"



"Why?"

"I was just wondering. *Is there?*"

"You saw Mutanda sitting in that canoe, didn't you?"

"I don't know. Who is Mutanda?"

"His father was a German trader. He always wears a sun helmet and white shirt. But he's sort of a fetish priest and the worst of them."

Her eyes were pleading for him to believe. He asked, "What did you say your father's name was?"

"The—Reverend Payen. I'm Paulette Payen."

"And you're sure you have a brother in Bande? It's not quite the place a girl goes to without someone waiting for her."

"Yes, my brother will be in Bande-Moke."

THAT evening they camped beside a stream which cut deeply through a considerable area of thorn. There was no apparent pursuit. Starr rolled up in a blanket just outside the door of the tent. He awoke next morning before the sun with a feeling that Paulette had left during the night hours. He opened the tent flap. It was still dark inside, but he heard her sudden movement, the soft sound of blankets as she sat up.

"What do you want?" she whispered.

"I thought you were gone."

He stood up, closing the flap. The dim, pre-dawn light had filtered through the tent leaving with him an impression of her eyes—and of the package clasped tightly to her breast.

He had opened the last can of bully-beef the night before, but there was still plenty of the hard, white-flour biscuits.

When they were eating breakfast, he said, "There's a Kama village we'll reach tonight. It used to be a police post called Fort Cachot. It still has a trade post run by a mulatto named Leclerc. We can get supplies there unless you'd rather not."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"I don't know. I just remembered that you didn't care much about the idea of going to Kwilu."

She munched a hard biscuit. It took her considerable time. Then she said, "You think I'm lying, don't you?"

Starr took some time, too. He rolled a cigarette, lighted it.

She demanded, "*Don't you?*"

"Why make me give you an answer? I'm taking you to Bande, isn't that enough?"

She stood up. He thought for a moment she was going to weep. She said, "I'm sorry. Really, I'm sorry. I appreciate all you're doing for me. I thought you realized I was telling the truth. I don't blame you for being suspicious, but—"

"Don't carry it too far, sister."

She stopped abruptly. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. Don't carry it too far. Otherwise I'll take that package away from you and find the real reason for you going to Bande."

"You're joking."

He laughed cigarette smoke from his lungs. "No, I'm not joking. I'm like every other man. I enjoy having a pretty woman make a fool of me. But I like to let her know I'm wise to what's going on."

"You're American, aren't you?"

"I don't know what that has to do with it, but I am."

"It just occurred to me, the way you talk..."

"You've been around Americans, haven't you? You're Flemish yourself, but you've been around Americans. That's where you learned to speak English. From Americans. There's a difference in the way an American and a bally bloody Britisher says things—"

"What difference does it make?"

"Did you have many Americans around your father's mission?"

She fumbled for an answer, and when none came, anger burned through her. "I could very easily learn to hate you!"

Starr threw his cigarette in the fire. "I read a book one time. Oh, don't look at me like that. It was a good many years ago and I was down with the fever. In this book there was a girl. A girl of mystery, like you. I think she even looked like you. And she went for three hundred and ninety nine pages hating a man from his bootheels right up to the clay he smeared on his helmet. And do you know what happened on page four hundred? She found out she was in love with him and had been in love with him all the time."



"It won't happen in my case."

"No? Well, don't make too much of a point of it before we get to Bande."

"Just exactly what do you mean?"

"This!" He seized her wrist as though to pull her to him. She was unexpectedly strong. She twisted away, her hand going beneath her loose khaki shirt. He made no movement to come after her, so her hand remained as it was.

He laughed and said in an easy voice, "Take it easy, darling. I just wondered whether you *did* have a little, flat automatic hiding out. Come to think of it, you managed to stagger out of that flaming mission house pretty well heeled, didn't you?"

"You're suggesting that—"

"I'm not suggesting a damned thing. I'll say it right out. I don't mind helping little girls escape a bunch of natives on the *ju-ju kill*. That's free. But if it turns out that the little girl has a canvas package filled with diamonds she's getting through to Angola without the slight formality of paying the government tarriff, that's a steed of a different color. In plain American English, which you seem to understand like a switchboard girl in Peoria, I'd like to pocket my cut!"

"There are no gems in this package!"

"That's the answer I expected." Johnny Starr walked to the tent and commenced kicking the stakes loose. "*Whether* there were any rocks in it or not!"

## II

FORT Cachot had a hundred-odd thatch huts, a trader's house of Kimberley brick, and some ruined government buildings where a detachment of native gendarmes had once been quartered.

A hook-nosed man with smoky skin and black, kinky hair came to the door of the trade-house to greet Starr as he walked up the unpainted cobbles.

"*Monsieur* Starr!—don't tell me those Kama boys of yours dumped your precious burdens and left you after all!"

Starr shook his head. "No, Leclerc. Damned sorry to disappoint you, but the packages will be delivered safe enough."

"You do not disappoint me, *Monsieur*! You are my friend!" He was talking to Starr, gesturing with his long, gold-ringed

fingers, but all the while his eyes kept shifting to Paulette who had seated herself beneath a clump of nut-palms. "It is only that you could so easily have traded your gem rock to me at fine advantage and then all the worry, all the—"

"I need some provisions. For cash."

The mention of cash made Leclerc stop gesturing and rub his hands together, "I am your servant, *Monsieur*."

Starr walked past him to the dark, ill-smelling interior.

Leclerc followed, saying, "The woman—she is very beautiful, *Monsieur*."

"I'm glad she pleases you."

"When you left here four days ago I did not know it was your plan to meet a woman."

Starr made no sign of hearing him. He looked at the shelves stocked with miserable Calcutta cottons, bits of ornament, patent medicines, ten-franc machetes and canned goods.

"I need bully-beef, white meal and bottled water."

"Bottled water and white meal! *Monsieur* is not in Leopoldville. I have bully-beef and mealie-meal." He got down several square cans and lifted a basket of meal to the counter. He did this, watching Starr intently. He spoke in a low, significant voice,

"Have you ever learned the language of the talking drums, *Monsieur*?"

"No."

"Night before last, *Monsieur*, a message was heard here and relayed to the hills by our Kama drummers. It seems that a woman escaped from Ngonde. Did you know anything about it?"

"No!" Starr growled.

"It would appear that this woman, whoever she is, had something so precious that the Commissioner of Lusambo Province would pay a reward. The drums said that the king of some village called Lilua would pay twenty kilograms of copper wire, and in addition there would be a remission of head tax for five years to the one who captured her. But you and I know that no village chief could promise a remission of head tax. No, that would come from the Commissioner. But if a white man captured her, what would copper wire and head tax mean to him? For a white man the reward would be much more,



*Monsieur*. Perhaps ten thousand francs, perhaps—”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“It is only because I am your friend. I thought perhaps you had met this woman not knowing who she was—”

Starr cut him off with a laugh, looking contemptuously into his eyes. “You say the woman escaped from Ngonde! How do you think she got this far in two days and a night—by flying carpet?”

“But I did not mean to suggest—”

He swung his hand, knocking the cans over the counter, “The bottoms are rotted from your cans, Leclerc, and your bully-beef smells like carrion. Were you fathered by a jackal and mothered by a swine that you offer such things for a white man to eat?”

Leclerc took no offense. He merely set the cans back on the shelf and hunted good ones. He spoke again, his voice more smoothly significant than ever,

“The message came night before last, it is true. But that is not saying when this woman left Ngonde. It might have been five days ago—a week. But if you say your woman’s not the one...” He shrugged, spreading his hands.

“What do they want her for?”

“The drums did not say.”

Starr dumped the bully-beef in a canvas bag and set the basket of mealie-meal on top of it. “Better send a couple of your boys over to clean the rest house.”

“It is clean, *Monsieur*. The District Administrator slept there only last week.”

Starr paused half way to the door. “I haven’t got the woman you’re talking about, Leclerc. But if I did have her, I’d collect the reward myself. Do you get that?—*myself*. Alone. And any scheming trader who tried to cut himself in would be paid off with a 9 MM. slug right in the guts.”

Leclerc’s eyes were small and shiny, close together over his beaked nose, watching Starr’s back as it disappeared through the unscreened door.

THE rest house, standing at one side of the old compound had been recently repaired and was still fairly substantial. It had two stories, both fronted by verandahs, but the lower floors had drawn dampness and were largely rotted away. A lad-

der led to the second story which was divided into four rooms with partitions of woven bamboo.

One of the front rooms, evidently used by the Administrator on his yearly visit, was furnished with an iron bedstead circled by a coarse textured mosquito net, a European rocker of a type popular fifty years before, a brass candle holder and wash stand with pitcher. A net of woven bamboo strips had been stretched to form a ceiling to mitigate the danger of a green mamba or cobra dropping on the great man.

Starr gave Paulette the Administrator’s room and took the one next to it himself. It was twilight when they finished preparing dinner on the tiny stove in the cook-kia out back.

Paulette had said little since their exchange that morning. She sat across from him, drinking tea and eating meal-cake and bully-beef. Unexpectedly she reached across and laid a hand on his forearm.

“You don’t really believe I’m trying to smuggle gems, do you?”

Instead of making a direct answer, he said, “A woman lit out from the town of Ngonde a few days back. Ngonde’s on that rickety rail line running down from Kambove. I don’t know whether you’re that woman or not, but if you are it might be a good idea to tell me so.”

She smiled a little, “You really do want to help me, don’t you?”

“Of course.”

“Wouldn’t it surprise you, Mr. Starr, if I really *were* telling the truth? If I *were* that missionary’s daughter, trying to escape from a *ju-ju* curse. Only that, and not involved in one of the ugly pieces of business you’ve identified me with.”

He watched her lift the fly-net door of the cook-kia and walk across the baked-clay earth to the front verandah ladder. When he went up half an hour later it was almost dark. The jalousies of her room were pulled, but he could see her moving against the candlelight inside.

He called his two Kama boys, telling them to sleep on the verandah near the door and notify him in the event she tried to leave during the night. He then spread his blanket on palm mattings and slept.

He awoke with a startled jerk. It was one of the soundless, black hours of night.



There had been something—a slight jar of the rickety structure—perhaps a sound. He wasn't sure. A dancing tom-tom had been thum-thumming at the far end of the native village, but it was silent now. He guessed that it was getting toward dawn for those Kama natives liked to dance the night out and sleep all day.

For a long time he lay on his back, staring at the black void of ceiling, ears tuned for any interruption of the night silence.

A slight glow from the vine-grown verandah marked the position of the door. It had been closed when he went to bed.

He pushed himself gradually to a sitting position. He half rose, pausing on one knee; his hand fumbled across the dried and brittle palm mattings and located the steel of his Walther automatic.

It was a heavy gun, the Walther, with a thick grip made to fit his hand. Its weight made him feel better. He did not snap the safety because of the slight click it would make.

There was still no sound, but he had become conscious of something else—an odor, a sweaty native odor. A man was standing inside the room. He had opened the door and was standing there, waiting for Starr to make some sound and reveal his position.

A shift of weight creaked the building. Nothing in the room, though. After a second he identified it as someone climbing a ladder to the verandah.

He rose with a sudden movement, shifting sidewise, expecting a flash of exploding powder—a bullet. He paused near the door, fearing to silhouette himself. Starlight reflected through the low-hanging vines of the verandah showing Paulette's door—closed.

He had the impression of movement close behind him. He spun, and collided with the man. The contact was a surprise to both of them, but Starr was on the move, and movement allowed him to catch his balance first. He swung the Walther automatic, barrel top foremost, and it connected.

He couldn't tell where it struck. On the man's neck, perhaps. It seemed to stun the fellow. A heavy object thudded to the floor mat. A gun. Starr could tell by its sound. He drove on, catching the man with

his shoulder and ramming him to the woven-bamboo partition.

"There's a gun on you!!!" Starr hissed, ramming the Walther into the soft of the man's bare abdomen.

The man stopped suddenly, and Starr moved back a little.

"Don't shoot, *Monsieur*. I don' mean no harm . . ."

"Leclerc!!" he hissed.

"Yes. It is me. Your good friend Leclerc." The man was almost sobbing from fear. "I come to warn you. The men. They—"

"What men?"

"Men of the Territorial Police. They ask for the woman. But I do not tell. I sneak up here to warn you that—"

Starr snarled, "You led them here for your reward! You told them she—"

"*Monsieur!* Do not kill me! You will not kill me—"

"We will see. Is she in her room?"

"Yes."

"Where are the police?"

"I theenk on the back verandah. One is hiding below. In front."

"There were only two?"

"They have four boys. But the boys—"

"Walk ahead of me!" He rammed Leclerc with the automatic, and the man walked stiffly ahead of its muzzle, treading the floor in barefoot silence.

Paulette's door had now opened, and the girl herself was standing there. The metal of a little, flat automatic reflected purplish black in her hand, the canvas-wrapped package was under her arm.

Starr spoke in a side-of-the-mouth whisper, "All right darling. Your *ju-ju* men have arrived. Are you ready to hit the bush?"

She stepped outside to the hall. She was dressed, ready for the trail.

He kept the gun on Leclerc's backbone and said to her, "Go in and find my *veldtschoen* and helmet."

She fumbled through the darkness of his room. A quarter-minute ticked by. She came out with the helmet and antelope shoes. He took time to put them on.

"How are we going to get out?" she asked.

"Leclerc, our *friend*, has volunteered to lead us to safety. That's what he came here for—to help us!!!"



"*Monsieur!*" Leclerc whimpered.

"*Marche*" Starr hissed.

Leclerc walked stiffly along the dark little hallway. Netting had been tacked across the door to the rear verandah, and he had to tear it to get outside. Its noise ripped explosively through the black silence.

"Halt!" the cry sounded close—a high-pitched European voice.

"It is me!" wailed Leclerc. He glanced around and noticed that Starr was no longer close behind him. He plunged face foremost on the verandah floor. His terrified voice rose pleading the man not to shoot as he beat the floor, crawling for concealment.

"Where are they?" the man barked.

"I do not know. They were here. By back door. Both of them. The gun, *Monsieur!* Do not point at me the gun. It was not my fault—"

Starr had seized the girl's wrist and was pulling her in the opposite direction. He found the verandah rail. Vines had grown from the earth below, spreading in masses over the floor to tangle their feet.

She still clutched the automatic, had the package under her other arm. He had to wait seconds while she put the gun away. He seized her wrists and bent over the rail, lowering her to the ground. There was a sharp cracking of vines, rendered sere by the long dry season.

**S**TARR dropped beside her. A few seconds later they reached beaten earth back of the house. Moon and stars were indistinct through smoke-hazy atmosphere, and what little light they gave was blotted up by a giant-arching tacula tree.

Starr drew up, sensing movement beside him. A man loomed up, revealed by his whites. It was still a fraction of time before he noticed Starr and the girl. He turned, grunting alarm.

Starr's left hand darted out, quick as the head of a cobra, seizing the man's gun hand, twisting it up.

Explosion and yellow powder flame whipped close above.

The man twisted to free himself. He was big and heavy muscled. He tore free. Starr could have killed him, of course. Instead he swung his pistol in a swift arc. It connected solidly. The man stumbled over

his toes and Starr had to move aside to let him fall.

"Paulette!"

Her voice answered quite close from the shadow. He seized her wrist.

"We'll circle the compound. The footpath leads straight north from the village street. I don't think they'll follow us tonight."

It was blind going through forest for a short distance, then the footpath wound across the hummocky ground of a cava patch. Beyond that there were millet fields, and then the seas of savannah grass.

Three or four kilometers south of Fort Cachot a series of felsite dikes broke through the gently sloping strata of shale and lime forming a series of escarpments with flat terraces between. At the crest of the first one Starr paused to look back at the village. Torches were burning here and there and a lamp lighted the corner of the rest house.

"Want to change your mind?" Starr asked.

"About what?"

"About going to Bonde. Those police will have a good idea you're headed there."

"Of course I'm not changing my mind!"

He said no more about it. They traveled steadily as dawn came up from the vast lowlands of the Congo. At mid-morning they paused in a little clump of thorn trees.

"Smoke?" Starr asked, offering her papers and native tobacco.

Paulette shook her head. She sat on the ground and removed her boots. There were holes in her dark, knee-length stockings.

She said, "I'm afraid you'd ask if I got the tobacco habit at the mission."

Starr laughed, "To hell with the mission."

She kept looking at him. "Who are you?"

"Me? You know me, don't you? Starr? Johnny Starr?"

"I know, but—"

"I'm what's known as a D.T. A determined tramp. I came from the capital of the United States—San Francisco. Private reasons. We won't go into that. I knocked around the Archipelago before the war. Had a sweet placer gem business in Nakorn, but the little brown fel-



lows from Nippon put an end to that. I managed to beat them to Singapore, threw one quick stengah into me and lit out for Calcutta. Anybody with an F.M.S. address is a rubber expert, so the Americans sent me here with the blessing of the Belgian government-in-exile to talk the natives into gathering wild rubber. If a black man won't gather rubber by free will he'll do it with a chain around his neck. We just hunted the vines down and chopped them off taking all the latex they would bleed. The old golden-egg treatment. Know how much latex the Congo Belge produced in '44? I was a hero then. Banquet in Leopoldville. Oh, the hell with it. One day the Nips tossed in the sponge and I was out of a job. So I took to the Kamakamas trading jackknives for blue-tone peridotite. That's what my safari was carrying out. Up in Elizabethville there are some Arab lapidaries who can take quartz crystals apart facet by facet and never chip one milligram off a piece of aquamarine. I'll make a nice blue bauble for you sometime, darling, provided those Kama boys of mine don't dump my rock and go home."

"You *did* make a sacrifice to help me."

"Don't forget it may cost you a little something. What's in that package, darling?"

She was very serious, her eyes sad as she looked at him. "There's nothing in this package that would be worth a cent to you. It's worth a great deal to him—to my brother. But not to anyone else."

Starr laughed and lighted a cigarette.

### III

**B**ANDE-MOKE was a town of fifty Europeans and three hundred or more Ba-fiot and Abunda tribesmen. It was situated at a thousand meters of altitude and fortunately somewhat beyond the domain the tsetse fly. For these reasons Julien Sibree, the District Administrator, had chosen it as his headquarters although his mail was officially addressed to Kikwit, a hundred kilometers to the northeast.

At first view Bande-Moke was not impressive. The footpath became a street, once cobbled but now mostly baked dirt with ruts left over from the last rainy season. The street wound for half a kilo through an amorphous assortment of na-

tive huts and graneries-on-stilts to the small cluster of white man's buildings which formed the core of the town. These included the two-story Maison Alfort, some grog-shops, a store, an Arab meat stall smelling to Allah's heaven, and a rust-encrusted sheet-metal warehouse and depot built to accommodate the railroad whose arrival had been momentarily expected ever since the passage of the Colonial Developments Act in 1928.

From the center of town one had a good view of the Administrator's house, a structure of sawed lumber and sheet metal, freshly coated with white paint from the government plant in Leopoldville, its broad double verandahs and palm shade giving it an air of cool detachment from the rest of the dusty town. A dry-season lorry road had been built by the Union Miniere for its Paillette diamond mine to Melange in Angola, but the road missed Bande by three kilometers, and that evening when Starr and Paulette arrived, the only vehicle in sight was a two-wheeled bush cart with a degenerate brown pony between the shafts.

"You know where to find him?" Starr asked.

"Paul?"

"Is that your brother's name?"

"He said something about the Maison Alfort."

Starr led her to the hotel. He had not been inside the building for three years, but he immediately saw that nothing had changed. There was the front door still in need of new netting, the little copper ant-trap just inside the sill, dry of creosote solution and no matter for ants had found a hundred means of access through the floor. The lobby was very dim, filled with dusty dwarf-oranges and frangapanis in wooden tubs. A tiny counter of varnished mahogany stood at one end of the lobby, and behind it, as always, was fat Madame Bovesse.

"Ah, Monsieur Starr!" she exclaimed shaking her wattles in effusive hospitality. "Our poor Maison! It is honored!"

Starr laughed and flipped open the mildewed guest book to sign his name, "I take it business is poorer than on my last visit."

"Indeed *Monsieur!*" Madame Bovesse wrang her chunky hands aglitter with second-quality diamonds. "It was unfortun-



ate, your last visit. How many times I have wept to think of it, *Monsieur*. But there were only so many rooms, and if the government mission should arrive at the very—”

“Sure. Forget it.”

Madame Bovesse beamed at Paulette, “Perhaps this is Madame Starr?”

He didn’t answer. Instead he asked, “Is Paul Payen staying here?”

“Paul Payen? No, Monsieur. I know no Paul Payen.”

Starr’s face was inscrutable. “Forgive me, Madame Bovesse, I should have introduced you.” He bowed, flourishing his stained sun helmet. “Madame Bovesse, Madame Starr.” Paulette stared at him, and Starr went on, “We will have two rooms. Adjoining, of course. Preferably on the front verandah.”

Madame Bovesse smirked shaking a fat forefinger, “Adjoining rooms, La! Now one would think you an old married couple—”

There were no keys to the rooms. Madame Bovesse merely recited their numbers and collected a night’s rent in advance. Once they were out of sight, climbing the rickety verandah stairs, Paulette hissed,

“Why did you call me Madame Starr?”

“Because it’s quite obvious you have no brother here, and unattended white women are always a point of concern for the Colonial Administration. I took it for granted you did not care to be investigated.”

“I *do* have a brother here.”

He paused, holding open the insect-proof door to her room. He was smiling, his scar twisting the close moustache out of kilter. “You heard what she said—no Paul Payen.”

“You might as well know it—he can’t use his real name. He is wanted by the police.”

Starr laughed, “What you missionary children don’t get yourselves into.”

She tossed her head and walked past him to the room.

Starr went below to the *piccinin kia* where he showered with water from the sun tank. He shaved, trimmed his moustache, and when he was finished a

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houseboy arrived with a fresh suit of whites from the Arab's tailor stall across the street. When he came out the sun had been down for an hour and it was deep twilight.

**PAULETTE'S** room was dark. He knocked without getting an answer. The dinner gong had sounded fifteen or twenty minutes before, so he went downstairs. There were six persons, all men, sitting in the stuffy dining room carrying on a dispirited conversation over their manioc and pineapple salad.

One of them, a spidery Portuguese named Delcampo, beamed when he saw Starr. He arose and wiped oil from his fingers before shaking hands.

Starr said, "Well, Delcampo, still growing rich in the palm oil business I suppose."

"I do well enough with the nuts selling at three-francs-seven. Even an Iberian can make money at such prices."

Starr sat down and helped himself to salad. It was too liberally drenched with brown, North African olive oil, but still palatable. Later there were tiny fried eggs covered with ashanti, and some rather good white-flour bread. The dinner was topped off with tiny cups of syrupy extract-coffee.

Starr said, "You haven't seen a young white woman? A stranger?"

"Indeed, *Senhor*, any white woman would be a stranger. Are you really serious?"

"Of course. She arrived with me, and—"

"And you have let her escape already!"

Starr smiled throwing his close-clipped moustache off kilter, "Is there any Don Juan around here except yourself? Perhaps a young fellow of Flemish blood from the Congo country?"

"Named Paul Durand?"

"His name might easily be Paul Durand. When did he get here?"

Delcampo shrugged, "He was here when I arrived last week. I never saw him before. Do you remember Pablo Albenese?"

"Of course."

"They seem to have something in common. I dare say that's no recommendation."

"Albenese. Is *he* here?"

"In this very hotel, *Senhor*. It appears

that his plantation runs itself quite well without supervision. You recall that southwest suite above—the one with the cross-ventilation where a man might almost sleep during the rains? Now, behold, these three rooms belong to our Albenese—or more exactly to Albenese and certain of his friends such as Paul Durand, and that dull ape Viga whom the French would like to execute. When a man succeeds he makes enemies, and Viga is his bodyguard no less, so you see how our Albenese is coming up in the world."

Starr stood up with an abrupt movement. "He takes his dinner in private, I suppose."

"On special occasions." Delcampo smiled, arching his eyebrows. "No doubt this is one of them. One does not entertain a strange young white woman every day in the year."

Starr went to the lobby. He remembered Pablo Albenese quite well. He had visited him at Jonzhe, his plantation, back in 1943 to negotiate the purchase of a dozen metric tons of crude rubber. A short time later it happened that Albenese was hauled before the Commissioner on a charge of chain-whipping one of his blacks. The business nearly cost Albenese his government concessions and afterward he falsely blamed Starr for reporting him.

Madame Bovesse was not behind her counter. He found her in a little incense-reeking parlor reading a month-old copy of *Le Petite Journal*.

"Is *Senhor* Albenese taking dinner in his rooms?" he asked.

She folded the paper and took off her horn-rimmed glasses. Her eyes were small and near-sighted in the midst of a puffy face.

"I will not have trouble in my house, *Monsieur*. I wish you to bear in mind that *Monsieur* Albenese is hot tempered, and moreover a man of substance who—"

"Who is a devil of a lot more valuable as a guest than I am. I asked you a question. Is he having dinner in his rooms?"

She cleared her throat, "It is my belief that he is."

"Dinner for how many?"

"I do not know."

"I'll learn from the cook-boy, so you might as well tell me."



"A dinner for three, though I cannot understand—"

"Thank you, Madame Bovesse. Your loyalty will be remembered in my semi-annual report."

He bowed with a crisp, official manner and went out, laughing after the door was closed. Lights burned in a row of windows at the south-west side of the verandah. The bamboo jalousies had been closed, but the windows were open and he could hear well enough. He paused.

Pablo Albenese suffered from some chronic obstruction of the sinuses, and his tone, coming through the open window, was unmistakable. He was speaking French with exaggerated fluency after the Latin manner, recounting some bit of cinema gossip picked up on the wireless. After a time he paused and there was polite laughter—two voices, a man's and a woman's. The woman was Paulette.

Someone came around the corner, and Starr struck a match pretending to light his already lighted cigarette. Over the flame he could see that the man was an African of some half-Arab Sahara tribe. Viga, Albenese's knifeman probably. Starr flipped the match and inhaled, letting smoke drift from his nostrils.

"What you want?" the man asked.

Starr was in no hurry to answer. He slowly appraised the man. Six feet, shoulders sloping with muscle. His eyes were dull-witted, his earlobes drooping beneath the weight of heavy gold rings. On his head was a small, red topi.

Starr said, "It's none of your damned business what I want. And after this remember to remove your topi when you speak to me."

The man's mind worked slowly, like a mechanism gummed in heavy oil. He stood quite still for three or four seconds, then he exhaled violently and started forward on flat, splayed feet as though intent on seizing Starr and hurling him over the verandah rail. He drew up suddenly with small eyes on the muzzle of the Walther automatic.

"Did you hear me?" Starr asked softly.

The native fell back a step. His hand brushed the top of his shaved head, removing the topi. "Yes Bwana."

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"And next time don't wait for me to draw the gun."

"Yes *Bwana*."

They had stopped talking inside. There was a padded sound of feet, and the door was opened. A slim, angular man stood silhouetted by lamplight.

"Hello, Pablo," Starr said, calling Albenese by his first name.

**I**T TOOK a few seconds for Albenese's sharp, protruding eyeballs to locate Starr in the half-darkness. He stepped on outside. Starr slid the Walther back in its holster.

"Ah, it is you, *Senhor* Starr. This is an unlooked for pleasure—"

"It's not unlooked for, and it's not a pleasure. Let's keep it honest, Pablo."

"Ah, you Americans! So abrupt!" Albenese was large boned but skinny, a trifle under six feet, about forty years old. His skin had a naturally deep pigment, and it had been turned almost black by years of equatorial sun. His eyes at first glance seemed crossed, but that was because they lay so close against his high and narrow-bridged nose.

"You may go now, *Viga*," Albenese said, keeping his voice soft.

The native backed away, his truculent eyes still on Starr.

"You must forgive him," Albenese went on. "He has—orders. My orders. He is naturally suspicious. Perhaps he thought you wished to eavesdrop. Ridiculous—no?"

"That's exactly what I was doing."

Albenese arched his eyebrows.

"I said I'd keep it honest. Come on down to my room. I'd like to have a few words with you."

A second man had come to the door. Light fell across the side of his face. He was about twenty-five, clean shaven except for his close moustache. The moustache gave him a resemblance to Starr—a superficial resemblance for there was a vacillating quality about his face, that or a handsome irresponsibility.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing wrong, Paul. Please tell the young lady I will return. My *friend* would have a word with me."

Starr led Albenese to his room. He struck a match and carried it to the petrol

lamp. The chimney was so deeply browned that even with the flame turned up there was little light.

He said, "You know that the girl—*Paulette*—wouldn't have got here without my help, don't you?"

"Indeed. I was not aware—"

"Well, you are now. We were alone out there in the bush, you know. There was nothing to stop me taking that package away from her if I'd wanted to."

"Ah!" breathed Albenese, watching him with his pointed eyeballs. "But you were restrained by your instincts as a gentleman."

"I have instincts, but none of them prompt me to be a gentleman."

Albenese laughed, showing teeth turned brownish from betel nut chewing.

"Very funny."

"To get to the point, Pablo, the package reached here through my efforts and I expect a cut of its contents."

"And what *are* its contents *Senhor*?" He watched Starr closely, smiling a little. "Gems, perhaps? Or at least a few balls of crude opium from the poppy fields of *Bahr el Arab*. Ah, no. I must disappoint you. It was nothing like that. Merely some papers of private interest to her brother, Paul. I thought of course she had already told you."

He shrugged inadvertently.

"Don't forget, Pablo, that it would be easy for me to walk up that hill and tell *Julien Sibree* that Paul Payen and his sister are stopping with you."

"You could do that. Perhaps you would—except that your own small part in effecting their reunion here would not be so easy to explain."

Albenese left, chuckling to himself with great complacency.

"To hell with it!" Starr growled. He blew out the petrol lamp, flung his fresh whites carelessly to one side, and lay on his back inside the mosquito nettings. He wanted to sleep, but instead he lay awake, listening for the sound of *Paulette's* voice. Drums beat with a regular *thum, thum, ta-ta-thum* somewhere in the native end of town. Downstairs a wireless brought in some jazz recordings over intermittent rattles of static. He fell asleep not knowing when she returned to her room next door.



## IV

HE AROSE at six o'clock, just as the sun came up through the smoky air. It was cool on the verandah. He paused to try her door latch. It was fastened on the inside. It made him feel better. He went down the verandah stairs and had an early breakfast of fried canned pork and cakes made to imitate scones, but yellow from saffron and strong of the unknown spices that make African cooking the most vile on earth.

He was sitting in a rattan chair with his feet on the verandah rail when Paulette came from her room.

She paused and spoke to him. He did not bother to get up. He said in his abrupt manner,

"Lacking more direct information, I would assume that your journey here has been a success."

She drew her eyebrows together over her small, well-formed nose,

"I'm sorry. I should have told you how much I appreciated all—"

"Forget the formality. A little of that stuff spreads a long way in this climate. Like oil on water. I just wanted to hear from your own sweet lips that Paul was your brother and that whatever you had in that package saved him from a fate worse than death."

His tone, even more than his words exasperated her. "Why do you act that way?" she burst out.

"What way?"

"Why are you so—crude?"

Starr laughed. "I don't, darling. I used to work with a mining geologist over in F.M.S. and he said it all came from an inferiority complex. I'm really tender and mild down inside—just like one of those hard-shelled kaffir oranges."

She turned and strode away, a light silk bathrobe pulled close around her throat. She turned unexpectedly and came part way back. He noticed she was was biting down hard on her lower lip.

"I really *do* appreciate everything you did for me. I've tried to thank you. I can't understand why you're so abrupt with me."

Her eyes were making Starr uncomfortable.

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"You'll forgive me for saying so," he growled, "but that brother of yours has all the earmarks of a grade B tramp. And Albenese—how much did you know about him when you came?" She didn't answer, so he asked, "Did you already know Albenese?"

She shook her head.

"He's a plantation owner. A big one. Jonzhe. Don't let those baggy pants and brown teeth fool you, chicken, he could sell out for plenty of pounds sterling. I went over to Jonzhe in '43. Rubber. It was like gold and so he had his native boys out tapping the wild stuff. He was paying a bonus to the one who smoked out the most in each week's time. Three or four francs—but that's lots of dough to a native. Are you interested?"

"Of course."

"Well, one of his boys, Ibenbou his name was, took the bonus on two successive weeks. Albenese got to noticing that the balls of crude measured small for their weight, so he cut one open and found some scrap iron in the middle. He tied Ibenbou up and whipped him with a length of chain. Hook half the skin off his ribs. Afterward he rubbed salt in the wounds and left him hung up in the sun. His family sneaked around and cut him down, but it was too late. It was just like he'd been broiled—that sun on cut flesh—"

"Keep quiet!"

"All right, darling. I just wanted to let you know the kind of company you've chosen."

"I don't believe it."

He laughed, showing his strong, white teeth, "The hell you don't!"

She ran down the stairs with the light robe floating behind her. He was still sitting there when she returned from the bath house with a towel wrapped around her shampooed hair.

He said, smiling, "Now I know what you had wrapped up in that package, darling. It was a silk robe and a set of those lacy things. You were just too modest to tell me, weren't you?"

She drew up, color rising beneath the deep tan of her cheeks.

He said, "Don't worry. I haven't got a peep-hole drilled through that grass wall. You just ran down the stairs a little faster than you intended, that's all."

She walked in her room, slamming the door.

The sun became hot, and the wind still came from the south-west. Paulette had breakfast with her brother in Albenese's apartments. They went someplace together. Starr remained in his chair, demanding that the houseboy bring him sundowners made with Scotch and ice, but each time getting tepid concoctions of synthetic cognac with water from the evaporation cooler.

The wind died as the close heat of meridian crept over the forty mark on the centigrade thermometer. He took siesta—a long one—and awoke when shadows of evening were darkening the reddish dirt of the street.

A negro militiaman in neat brown shorts and shirt climbed the stairs and saluted smartly with bare heels pressed together.

"*Monsieur* Starr?"

Starr nodded, drank the heel of his late-afternoon sundowner, and said, "I suppose His Excellency the Administrator sent for me?"

The militiaman looked surprised and nodded.

"Have the gentlemen of the Colonial Police arrived?"

"I do not know, *Monsieur*."

"You want my gun, I suppose." Starr held the Walther out, balanced across the palm of his hand, butt first.

"I am not arresting you, *Monsieur*. I have not the power to make arrests. Only to provide the escort. Arrests—"

"Did His Excellency happen to mention a young woman?"

"No, *Monsieur*."

It was a quarter-hour walk to the Government house. A blue-black layer of clouds had built up in the west, covering the sunset. Beyond Bande the forest country looked blue-black, accentuating the new painted whiteness of the big building.

The militiaman stopped at the lower steps, letting Starr walk on by himself.

"Starr, old fellow!" The voice came from above. It had an accent at once Flemish and British—like a Dutch Frenchman who has taken his degree at Oxford if one could imagine such a thing. "I'm up here, you know."

Starr backed until he could see heavy,



smiling Julien Sibree, the Administrator, standing by one of the large bamboo pillars which supported the upper verandah roof.

THERE was a stairway inside, but the servant's ladder was closer at hand, so Starr climbed it. Julian Sibree, a stocky and rather flabby man of about fifty walked over with wrinkled whites sticking to his legs and shook hands with him. Beyond, seated at a table, was a powerful and deeply bronzed man with a thick black moustache trained in a manner reminiscent of the late Kaiser's. A red welt ran from the edge of his oily hair down across his forehead. He'd had it bandaged recently, for the parallel marks of adhesive tape still clung to his skin. The man was watching intently, but Starr did not seem to notice.

Sibree led him to the table saying, "I delayed sending until after your siesta."

Sibree kept rubbing his hands together and clearing his throat. At last he went on, "Do you by any chance know why I sent for you?"

"I'd hoped it was to prove that you still use genuine ice in your sundowners."

Sibree struck a bell of native-cut nephrite and a black boy came in, buttoning his starched stengah-shifter. Sibree gestured at the glasses, and he gathered the empty ones, carrying them inside.

"This is Monsieur Grondon," Sibree said, tilting his head at the black-mustached man. "Monsieur Grondon is with the gendarmerie."

He had deliberately neglected to introduce them before, and he did so now in a manner which apologized to Starr for bringing him across the table from one not considered his cultural equal. Sibree sat down and drummed his fingers on the blackish okume table top. He was waiting for Grondon to carry on from there, and when that did not happen, when Grondon merely stared at Starr with unchanged truculence, he said,

"Monsieur of the police has an idea you are involved in a certain theft which took place at the town of Ngonde five days ago. I explained that seven days ago I knew from my Vice-commissioner's report that you were just leaving the Kamakamas

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with some gem rock. How you could reach Ngonde in two days has not been explained to me."

"I have a flying carpet," Starr said dryly. "I use it by daylight. When I travel at night I'm partial to the old-fashioned broomstick."

Grondon did not smile. He commenced to speak, pronouncing his words slowly.

"You left the Kamakamas as the Administrator says, seven days ago. Three days later you camped at Bonde River. Next morning you met a woman named Paulette Payen, whether by accident or prearrangement I do not know. She had with her a certain package. She had stolen it from the strong-files of Central Engineering Associates where she was employed. Sergeant Larue, myself, and six native paddlers tried to approach your camp and were fired on. You drove us ashore in the jungle, and it took us an hour to reach the campsite. By that time the girl and yourself were gone."

Starr asked, "What was in the package, by the way?"

"You are quite well aware what was in the package."

"No."

"But you don't deny meeting the woman."

Starr shrugged. "Of course I met her."

Sibree got half way to his feet and sat down again, "Oh, I say, old man! You didn't really!"

"You were never one who could resist a pretty face yourself," Starr grinned.

"But you must see that this places a new complexion on the matter."

The blackboy came, carrying the tinkling sundowners. No one spoke until he withdrew.

Starr said,

"Grondon, you still haven't told me what it was the girl stole."

"I do not know what it was."

Starr laughed. "That must complicate things for you—not even knowing what you're looking for."

"I know they were papers of great value, locked inside a leather portmanteau bearing the name Central Engineering Associates die-stamped in the leather. And I know that it must be returned." He slammed the table with the palm of his hand, "At all costs it must be returned!"

"Arresting me won't get it back—for I don't have it."

"But you know how you can get it."

"Do I?"

"Indeed, Monsieur, for your sake I hope you do. The girl—she is still at the Maison Alfort. You should be able to plan the rest."

"What if she's already passed it on to Albenese. He's wound up in this thing somehow you know."

Sibree cried, "Yes, Albenese! He's the swine we should get. That whipper of natives—"

"The portmanteau and its contents are what we must get, *Monsieur!*"

"How long will you give me?" Starr asked.

"Until morning. If you have succeeded in returning the portmanteau by then, the entire affair will be forgotten."

"Even to the bruise I gave you back at Fort Cachot?"

"Even to that!"

## V

THE cloud area was dense, purple-gray, bringing on early darkness when Starr left the Government house. A few big spatters of rain slanted in on the gusty wind. After the long dry season it was sharp and fresh to the nostrils. A Union Miniere vanette stood in front of a grog-shop, he could hear an accordion inside and four men's voices singing "Roll Out the Barrel" to French words.

Starr crossed the street, but he was wrong about one of the voices belonging to Paul Payen. He had never seen the men before.

The wind was growing stronger, bending the clustered palm trees by the Maison Alfort, stringing their fronds out in long streamers. He walked beneath them and inside the salon.

Dinner was being served in the little dining room. Seated were the same six men who had been there the night before. He went back outside and climbed the verandah stairs.

There was a light burning in one room on the west side. He tried Paulette's door. It opened, and he stepped inside. The room seemed close after the rainy wind outside, it was filled with odors of dried thatch



and mottings, of creosote from the ant cans in which the bed legs rested, and faintly, the modest perfume he had learned to associate with Paulette.

He struck a match. Her silk robe was hanging on one of the pegs. There was no closet or dresser. It took only a few seconds to make sure that the portmanteau was not there. The match burned his fingers.

Paulette's voice startled him.

"What were you looking for?"

He spun around. She had been standing in the protection of a porch pillar.

"You know well enough what I want."

"The package! I suppose you still think it's filled with diamonds."

"I have no idea what's in it. I know it came from the strong-files of Central Engineering Associates in Ngonde, and I know I'll very likely end up in that louse-crawling Leopoldville bastille unless I get it back by morning. Maybe you'll end up in the bastille too, darling. Wouldn't that be cozy?"

She came towards him. The damp wind whipped a strand of hair across her browned cheek.

"The gendarmes followed us here after all!"

"Of course. We couldn't lose them that easy. I just had a heart-to-heart chat with a greasy-moustached individual by the name of Grondon. Smart, that Grondon. Knew better than try to swoop down on the nest himself. He thought I could do it better, and so here I am." He patted her shoulder, "Come on. Tell me how your heart bleeds for me."

"I'll admit I took it. I worked there—for Central Engineering. My brother used to work for them too. He was a surveyor. He took something—at least they said he did. I don't believe it. Anyway, they would have sent him to prison. He found out that they had the evidence in a portfolio locked in the file cabinets. He asked me to get it for him. I was book-keeper and had access to the vault. I did it. I couldn't let them send him to prison. Not for something he didn't do."

"All right, that was a beautiful story. Only it doesn't hold water any better than a grass hat. If that portfolio had contained evidence, why didn't he have you take it

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and throw it in the river? Why did you have to deliver it here?"

He seized her shoulders and turned her so she had to look at him, "Answer me! You can't believe that."

"I don't know. I don't know why it had to be brought here. The portmanteau was locked. I didn't try to open it. I just wrapped it in canvas—"

"Besides, if they were trying to send him to the bastille, why did he stop on this side of the Angola border? No, your brother is just a tramp, and Albenese is a tramp. You know that as well as I do. They framed you into getting something that puts the Colonial Government right square behind that little black ball. We've got to get it back."

She stared at him without answering.

"We have to get it back!" he repeated.

She made a sudden movement. "Yes. I'll go to him. I'll tell him—"

"You'll tell him nothing. Does *he* have it, or does Albenese?"

"I don't know. I gave it to Paul. Last night. I didn't—"

"Where are they—Paul and Albenese?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen them since siesta. Paul said something about having a headache—"

"We'll look around."

The wind died some, and the rain was coming hard, striking with a hissing sound against the dry thatch overhead. Over the sound of rain and wind-whipping vines they could hear the thin babble of Madame Boveese's gramophone playing an old Parisien jazz hit.

He walked with Paulette to Albenese's apartment. No light shone through the closed shutters, and they did not try the door. Around the corner there was the single lighted window with the jalousies closed. She hesitated.

"His room?"

She nodded. "Yes. He must be there. Let me see him—alone."

He waited in the shadows. She rapped—waited. There was no answer. She tried the door. It opened. She stopped suddenly, a scream rising in her throat. Starr was at her side with a long stride. He saw Paul Payen standing against the far wall, a heavy automatic pistol in his hand.

Paul's eyes were bright and quick. He'd been smoking, and Starr recognized the

odor. The tobacco had been liberally spiked with hashish. It took Paul a moment to realize it was his sister in the door.

"Paul!" she went inside. She stopped and looked at an open carryall bag on the floor. "What are you doing?"

With a quick, nervous movement he thrust the automatic back in its shoulder holster.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" he snapped. Her expression of shock and disbelief seemed to exasperate him. "Do you expect me to stay here? in this town? There are gendarmes here—did you know that? Gendarmes *you* led here. They let you get away from them, knowing you'd lead them to me. And that fellow who came with you—that American. He's probably in with them." Paul's eyes suddenly focused on Starr, standing just outside the doorway. His hand raced under his coat . . .

"Don't go for your gun!" Starr said, striding inside.

PAUL tried to retreat but the bed was behind him. He moved aside, his shoulder catching the mosquito net and tearing it. There was a glimmer of lamp-light on metal as the automatic came out. Starr did not try to draw. His left fist traveled in a sharp hook, connecting with the young man's jaw.

Paul's head snapped; the gun spun from his fingers. He went down with the back of his head banging the floor. He pushed himself to a sitting position, his eyes baffled and out of focus. His dark hair strung over his forehead.

Paulette seized Starr's arm. He jerked away.

"Close the door," he said.

She did as he commanded.

Paul got to his feet, shaking the fog from his brain. He looked around and located the pistol, its flat side reflecting lamplight. It was too far away. He wailed at his sister,

"See? I told you he was—"

"Keep still!" growled Starr.

Starr glanced in the carryall case. It contained clothing, ammunition, a supply of tinned food.

"Going someplace?" he asked.

"That's none of your damned business. I'm going to get away from this hell-



spot in the jungle and don't you—"

"Why do you need to escape? Didn't the portmanteau hold all the evidence they had against you?"

For a second Paul failed to comprehend. Then he laughed, tossing his head to get the hair from his eyes, "That! You still think there really was such stuff in the package? If there had been I'd have had Sis burn it back in Ngonde."

"What was in the portmanteau?"

"You mean to say you've been bumbling around all this time and haven't found out? All right, I'll tell you. And you, too, Sis. I'll make a deal with you. You let me head for Portuguese territory, and I'll not only tell you what's in it, but I'll tell you where you can get it."

"All right, it's a deal."

"Maps! That's what in it—the most valuable maps on the African continent!"

Starr laughed, "Don't tell me. Let me guess. It's the map to the Queen of Sheba's mines!"

"They're the maps that Central Engineering got approved four months ago showing the route—"

"Paul!" The girl seized his sleeve, jerking him half way around. "Not that! You didn't get me to bring you—"

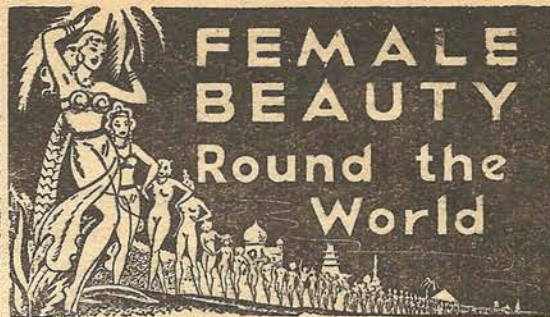
"Sure I did. I knew where they had the maps locked up, but they ran me out before I had a chance to get hold of them. I knew you could get them, but I knew you'd never stoop so low. So I told you it was evidence that would—"

"The maps to what?" Starr shouted.

"The surveyers maps showing the new rail line from Port Fracqui to Leopoldville, of course. And the branch they're running to Angola, too. They were keeping the route secret—that damned, scheming Colonial Administration. They wanted to go first, buying back concessions, gobbling every stinking, malaria-reeking plantation on the right of way knowing they could resell them for twenty times the value once there was transportation to market."

"And you're leaving for Angola without them?"

"What would they be worth to me? I have no money to go around buying plantations—not at one copper franc the hectare. Don't you think I've found out what



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Albenese's game is? Don't you think I know what he plans doing about me. Yes, and probably with Sis, too. He'll let us take the blame for everything and after that—"

"Where are they?" Starr barked.

"The maps? Albenese has them. They're locked in his room." Paul leaned forward, grasping the back of a rattan chair with long, sensitive fingers. His eyes were still intense from the hashish he'd smoked.

He said, "The maps are in his strong-box. It's a big chest of tacula wood with a padlock on it. It's in a little closet off the main room. Just beyond the bed. There's a bead drape in front of it. Albenese isn't there. He's over at the wine garden to hire a fellow that has a vanete. He wants them to haul him to Jonzhe. You can get in the window. The second from the corner. There's a catch on the shutter, but the screws are rotted out."

"How about that knife man—Viga?"

"He's with Albenese."

Starr picked up Paul's automatic. It was a Browning from the Belgian factory. He slid it in his belt and walked to the door. He paused just outside, nodding for Paulette to follow him.

He spoke softly from the side of his mouth, "We'll have to keep him here in case he's lying about the portmanteau. Yes, I know he's your brother and you'd do anything for him, but it means his neck as much as ours to get those maps back."

He handed her the Browning. "Keep him here."

"I couldn't. He knows I couldn't shoot. He'd—"

"Point it at him and do your best. Act mad. No man's ever sure whether a woman will pull a trigger."

## VI

**H**E LEFT her and walked around the corner. Albenese's rooms were still dark. He found the shutter and pulled hard. The screws were rotted out just as Paul had said. He stepped inside.

It was a corner room and the wind had carried away the heat of the afternoon, but he could smell the European perfume with which Albenese liked to anoint himself.

He stood still, listening. The rain was letting up, and he could hear the accordion from the grog-shop across the street. Inside the room was the insistent tick-tick of a small clock.

He walked carefully, feeling his way along the netting which circled the bed, around tables and chairs. His foot touched something. He recognized it instantly and started back—a revulsive movement. He bent over. It was the body of a man, vaguely discernible by the whites he wore.

The odor of perfume was strong. He seized the man's shoulder and turned him. He was dead, but still loose and disjointed. The back of his coat was turning stiff from blood.

Starr was still uncertain of the man's identity. He struck a match. The quick flame revealed Albenese's sharp-beaked face, the pointed eyeballs staring. He tried to shake out the match, but its chemical head blazed for what seemed like many seconds.

He left Albenese and walked to the bead drape. The tiny cubbyhole beyond was a well of darkness. He would need a light. He went back to the table, located the petrol lamp. The beaded drape was swinging, making a rattling sound in the dark behind him. He struck a match. It was a while before the mantle took hold, filling the room with pure, white light. He went from window to window, closing the jalousies.

Albenese's clothes hung on a rod along the middle of the closet. In the back was the large chest of tacula wood, oiled and rubbed to bring out its blood-red color. As Paul said, it was padlocked.

The lock was a heavy one of American manufacture. He drew his pistol, and reconsidered. He went to where Albenese was lying and hunted through his pockets. No key. He found a short, bronze bar, once part of some hand-operated punkahs. It was a foot in length and thick as his thumb. He fitted it in the lock staple and levered it out, the dry wood giving a sharp, ripping crash.

The chest contained a couple of old-style tommy-guns with pie-plate magazines, a quantity of dynamite with the nitro drained out leaving its oily discoloration on the bottom of the chest, a canvas money sack bearing the imprint



of the Banque Commerciale du Congo. He opened the sack and found an assortment of slum-quality gold and silver jewelry, a watch, a crude ivory crucifix.

He backed, rising and whirling around. There had been no sound—only the tremble of the termite-eaten floor. The front door was still closed. He sensed a movement to his right. Viga.

The huge, Saharah tribesman had let himself in silently by the rear door. He was crouched forward, arms hanging loose, a Luger pistol clutched in his right hand.

For the moment he did not seem to notice Starr. He was looking at the prone and silent form of Pablo Albenese.

Starr whirled away from the closet, his hand reaching for his automatic. The gun was half drawn when Viga, moving with unexpected quickness, swept up a chair and flung it, waist high.

It struck Starr, hammering the gun from his hand. He had no time to retrieve it. He dived, clutching Viga's wrist, forcing the Luger pistol high.

They reeled against the wall. Starr knew he was no match for the native in a test of strength. He let the hand go, took a quick back step, and pumped a right to the jaw.

Viga absorbed the blow with no change in his small, brute eyes. The Luger was still above his head. He did not try to aim it. He swung it down, driving its barrel to the left side of Starr's neck.

Starr clutched the barrel with both hands and bent forward, almost twisting it from Viga's grasp. The movement was unexpected. Viga struggled for the gun. His heel caught in loose matting and he staggered back. The calves of his legs struck the bed, the mosquito net was stretched tightly across his shoulders saving him from falling.

He let go the gun barrel, reached high seizing the net and tearing it from its pull-cord. It fell in filmy, tangling masses from which Viga fought to extricate himself.

Setting himself, Starr smashed another right. This one caught Viga on his half-opened jaw. He went to his haunches, one elbow resting on the bed. Starr seized the netting that tangled his head and

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jerked him to his feet. His right fist swung again. Viga went down, his eyes rolling white like a steer's under the mallet.

Starr dragged him across the room, leaning as he went to pick up his Walther pistol. Viga staggered up as Starr was dragging him. He fell and got up again. They reached the verandah where rain was still pounding. Viga kept muttering, fighting the net. Starr let him tear head and shoulders free, then shouldered him suddenly, knocking him sprawling over the verandah rail.

He struck the earth below on outstretched hands. He got up and splashed away across the street at a staggering, terrified gallop.

Starr noticed his lip was bleeding. He sponged blood with his sleeve while returning to Paul Payen's room.

**T**HE door was closed. He booted it open. Paulette was facing him with her little, black automatic aimed at his heart. "Come inside," she said.

He stood quite still, the Walther dangling at the floor. Her gun was only one of those little 7 MM's that women like to carry in their handbags, but it was held very steadily.

He walked inside. "Where's Paul?" he asked.

"On his way to Angola. Close the door."

He did so.

"Drop your gun."

The fingers of his left hand opened and the Walther thudded muzzle-first.

She said, "Don't come any closer."

"Mind if I sit down?"

"Go ahead."

He lowered himself to a chair—his movements very deliberate as though he feared he might jar the hair trigger of her automatic.

"Mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all."

He drew out papers and a pouch of dark native leaf. With practiced movements he twisted a cigarette. He struck a match.

"You knew the portmanteau was gone from Albenese's room all the time, didn't you? You knew he'd send Viga to finish me off as soon as I got there, too."

"Viga!"

"Don't act surprised. By the way, who was it that killed Albenese? Paul?"

She nodded. "But I didn't know. He didn't tell me till after you left."

"How long are we going to sit here?"

"Long enough."

He smoked the cigarette down to his fingers, ground out the stub on the floor matings, and rolled another. A trickle of water came through the slatted bamboo ceiling and struck the floor with a rapid thud-thud-thud.

"They'll have to thatch that roof before the rains," Starr remarked.

Her face looked drawn, but somehow younger than before.

"Nervous?" he asked. "Don't be, darling. I wouldn't harm you for the world. It just occurred to me what a fool you were for not leaving with him. He'll have to get out of this town—quick—like we got out of Fort Cachot. To Angola, and farther than that now that they have that extradition treaty. I haven't any desire to face Grondon without those maps. Or was that another lie?"

She didn't answer. She fumbled inside the neck of her blouse drawing out a tiny watch on a cord. She snapped open its cover and checked the time.

He said, "I can't quite figure you out. You're smart, and yet you send your brother on his way with a piece of paper worth a million francs while you stay here to take the rap."

With an unexpected movement she lowered the automatic.

Turning it in her hand, she offered it to him butt first.

"What's this?" he asked, taking it and hefting it.

"I thought maybe it would make you feel better."

He laughed, snapped on the safety, and tossed it on the table.

"I also thought you'd like to turn me over to the gendarmes."

She had suddenly started to tremble. She sat down in a chair as though all strength had that moment vanished from her muscles. She lowered her head in her hands and commenced to weep—weep soundlessly with convulsive movements of her shoulders.

Starr stamped out his cigarette and



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walked to her. He patted her on the shoulder,

"Listen, chicken, I don't get this. I'm not going to let those greasy gendarmes have you. We'll get out—both of us. Before morning. I have till sunup to get that portmanteau back, so—"

"The portmanteau isn't gone," she said, lifting her head. "I didn't let him take it with him. You'll find it over there, beside the bed."

They were maps — detailed contour maps showing the exact route chosen for the Port Francqui-Leopoldville rail line, a separate map for each ten kilometers of jungle, and a large master map showing all these as well as the branch route to Angola.

Starr gave a long whistle. "So he was telling the truth after all! Do you realize what these things would be worth"—he grinned—"to an unscrupulous person?"

She said, "I should have let them capture him!"

"That's all right, darling. You wanted to clear me, and yourself, and get the maps back to the owner. And you wanted to save your brother's neck, too. It was all right. But it wasn't necessary to hold that gun on me. Did Paul kill Albenese?"

"Paul was in there, trying to get the portfolio, I guess. Albenese must have caught him. I don't know what happened. I heard something. I hid out there on the verandah. I didn't have any idea Albenese was killed."

"It's all right. Albenese had it coming. Grondon will forgive everybody for everything when he gets these maps back. He promised as much in front of Sibree, and Sibree will hold him to it."

She had stopped crying and was looking up at him. A smile touched the corners of her lips.

"What's on your mind now?" Starr asked, still patting her shoulder.

"That's no way to comfort a lady!"

He drew her close, and she made no resistance.

"Give me time, darling," he said. "There's a long rainy season ahead of us—and tonight I have it in my mind to copy a few of those maps before turning them over to the gendarme."



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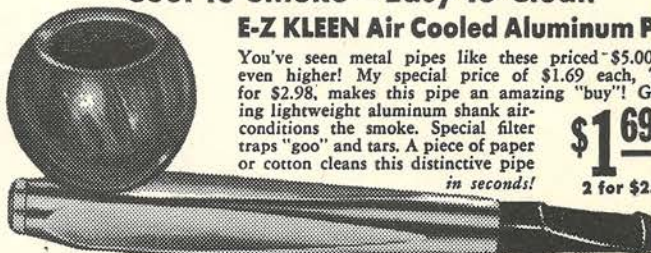
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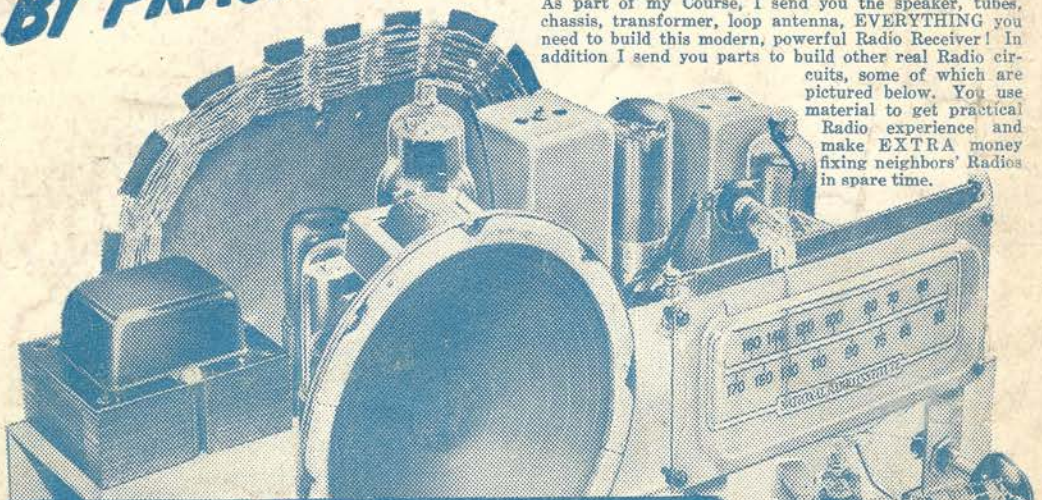
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