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by **EDGAR WALLACE**
KRAAL OF THE WALKING DEAD
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KI-GOR-

Jungle
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IN THE GOLDEN CLAWS OF RAA

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JUNGLE STORIES



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A BIG COMPLETE KI-GOR NOVEL

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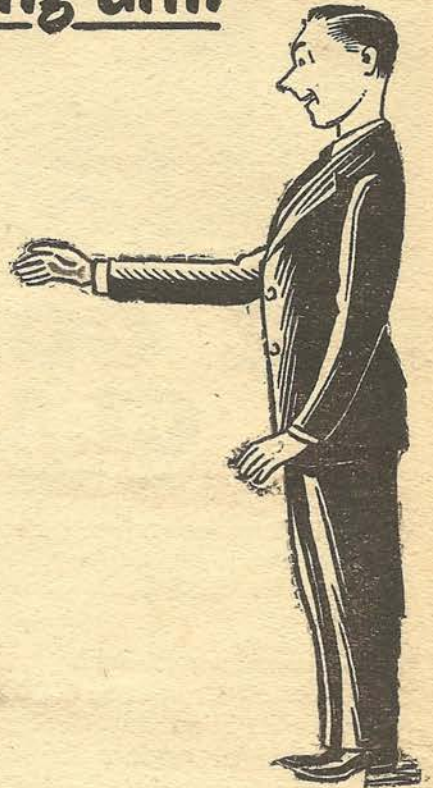
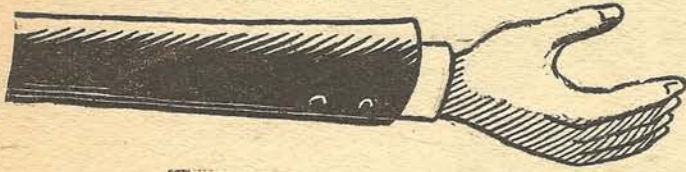


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THE GOLDEN CLAWS OF RAA

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Sam Slaker, cobra-eyed merchant in warrior-flesh; Mog, the gorilla with human blood on his dagger-like teeth; Raa, golden queen of the ape legions—these were Ki-Gor's enemies in a battle that only the voodoo of Destiny could decide.

THE woman was dead. Her small, coffee-colored body lay crumpled in an attitude of prayer, her forehead pressed against the base of a tree, her hands gripping the bark.

Across the pygmy woman's naked back a whip had torn deep, ugly gashes. But the gaping wound between her shoulder blades told that a sudden, vicious spear thrust had ended her torture.

Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, leaned over the dead pygmy, traced a slow, accusing finger over the inch-wide circle of flesh rubbed raw about the woman's neck.

No spoken word was needed for the Masai warriors clustered about the body to understand Ki-Gor's meaning. That raw circle was the grim mark of a slaver's iron neckband. Chained neck to neck in single file, slaves can be driven like helpless cattle.

The huge, bull-chested Masai chieftain, Tembu George, drew a slow, deep breath, looked from the woman to the warriors about him. He spoke to his men, but his words were a promise to Ki-Gor.

"This small one will be avenged," he rumbled. "This evil done to the people of my blood-brother, N'Geeso, is an evil done to the Masai."

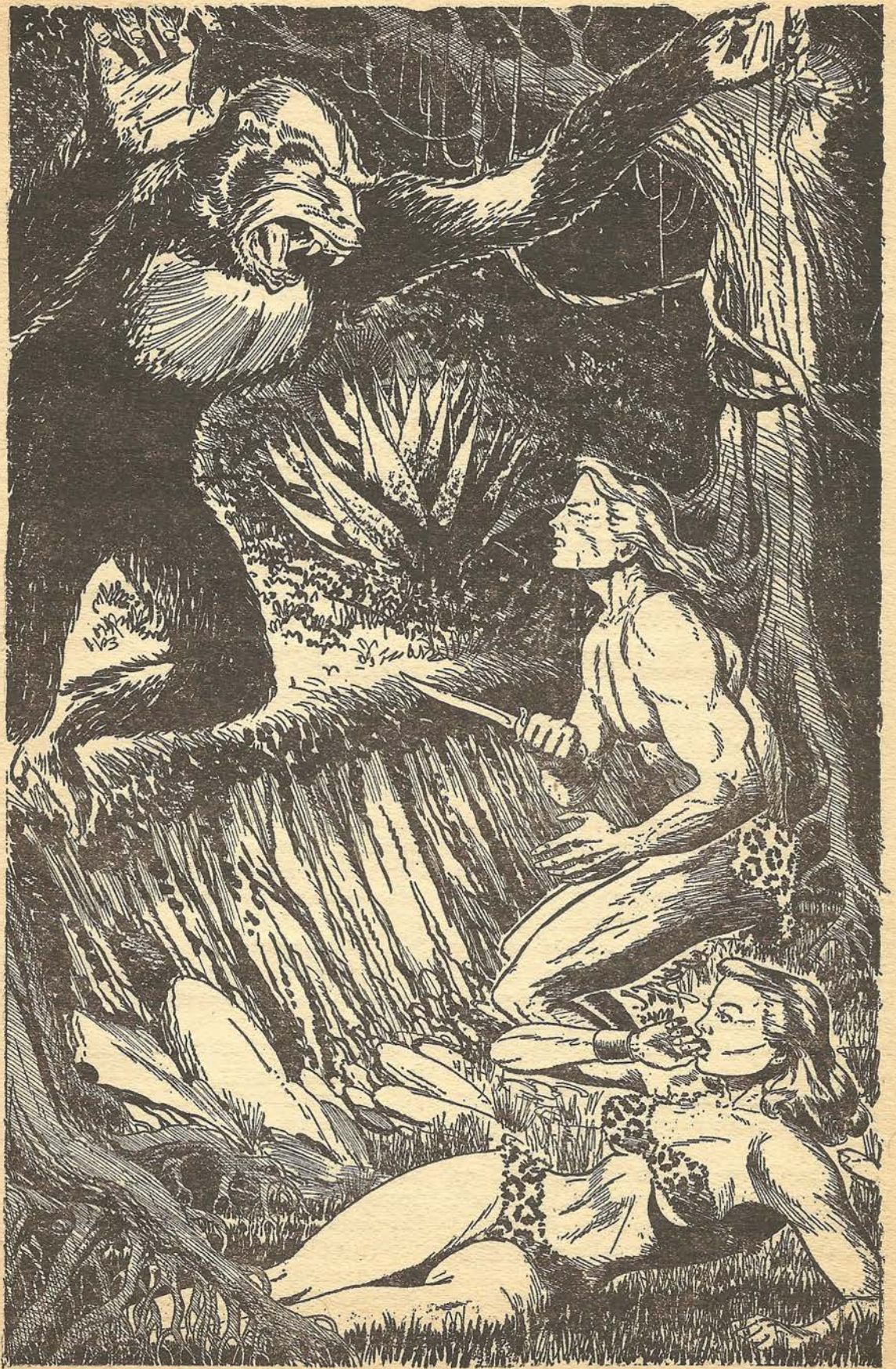
Ki-Gor stood up, his face grown harsh. Even among the tall, powerfully-built Masai, the great-thewed White Lord was a commanding figure. He wore only a leopard-skin breech-clout caught tight about his lean, hard loins. With a toss of his head, he threw his blonde mane of hair back out of smouldering grey eyes. His right hand twisted with restless strength along the shaft of his war spear.

"Aye!" he said with ominous softness. "She will be avenged!" But though a thousand die, this small one will never know her father's hut again." His lips twisted with swift bitterness. "Will the jungle never be rid of these human jackals?"

Tembu George motioned to two of his men. They quietly lifted the corpse, carried it off into the jungle to be covered with stones.

Ten yards away, the White Lord's mate, Helene, watched with troubled eyes as the two Masai carried their pitiful burden from view. After an absence of two moons arbitrating differences between the Kamizuli and the Bambala, the looked-for happiness of their return to their home in the pygmy lands immediately was shattered.

The fact that the woman was being bur-



ied instead of taken to the pygmy kraal told Helene Ki-Gor judged he could overtake the killers.

She ran to the White Lord, saying anxiously, "With only twenty-five Masai, it would be suicide to attack armed slave-traders!"

Her slim fingers caught pleadingly at Ki-Gor's arm. The sun reached through the ceiling of branches above to strike glints of fire from her long, red hair. The lithe, curved beauty of this woman was a legend endlessly related wherever men gathered in the jungle.

Ki-Gor's grey eyes softened. "There are chances one must sometimes take," he said gravely. "It would take a sun to reach the pygmy kraal, another sun to return here with N'Geeso and his warriors."

"And if we give those *aasvoels* two suns lead, we'll never find them," added the deep-voiced Tembu George. "For all we know, N'Geeso may be one of those taken by the raiders!"

"But what if . . .?" began Helene, thinking of what could happen to her mate. Then abruptly she stopped, biting her soft, full underlip. Her fingers tightened on Ki-Gor's muscled forearm. "Of course!" she said. "It's the only thing to do." And her voice was steady, utterly sincere.

WHAT other way could there be for a man such as her mate? That was the thought that stopped her even as the sick gnaw of worry caught her heart. He was the "jungle protector" to the black men, regarded almost as a god by half-a-hundred tribes, beloved and trusted by those who walked the paths of peace and justice, fanatically feared and hated by those who followed the ways of evil and injustice.

"Their spoor is fresh," said Ki-Gor. "Perhaps we can overtake them by night-fall."

Tembu George grinned savagely. "They knew you were busy elsewhere. This raid is some coward's cruel way of getting back at you. No slaver really wants pygmy slaves."

"Wah!" rasped Ki-Gor in agreement. "It's like caging wild birds. They quickly die, and the most brutal master can't make them submit."

The two warriors returned from the

bush. Sweat gleamed on their stern faces. They recovered their spears, stood staring down the path. There was no doubting their desire to come to grips as soon as possible with the slavers.

"I'll go ahead by the tree-paths," Ki-Gor told Tembu George, "learn their strength and work out a plan of attack. Their spoor will be easy for you to follow."

He handed the Masai chieftain his spear. His bow and quiver of arrows he could carry on his back without difficulty, but the spear would hamper his movements in the trees.

"Shall I go with you, or with Tembu George?" asked Helene.

Ki-Gor's glance avoided her, his manner grown uneasy.

"Neither," he declared with unnatural curtness. "You will go through the trees to N'Geeso's kraal. Wait for us there."

He anticipated difficulty with Helene. She would want to go with them. It would be awkward having her argue with him before the Masai. Natives did not understand the freedom of tongue and action which the wives of white men possessed.

But Helene had no intention of making her husband lose face before the blacks. She modestly lowered her eyes before her husband, as a proper wife should, but in truth the gesture was more to hide from him their sudden flare of inspiration rather than to indicate submission.

"Your wish is my command, O Husband," she said meekly, using the Masai language rather than English. She backed away as though meaning to go immediately.

Ki-Gor looked startled. Then recovering himself, he gave a relieved sigh.

But after a few steps Helene halted. The angular, heavy-thewed bodies of the blacks behind her provided a striking frame for her provocatively feminine beauty, a beauty displayed rather than concealed by her narrow halter and brief shorts.

Her voice was soft, almost apologetic, as she asked: "And if I find the kraal destroyed by the slavers and the pygmies gone elsewhere, should I remain there, anyway?" Her blue eyes moved hesitantly over the group, somehow evoking in those male minds the picture of her

alone, unprotected, in a ruined village.

"That's true!" exclaimed Tembu George. "The raiders may have burned the kraal." Several of his warriors gave grunts of agreement, glanced questioning-ly at Ki-Gor. With a single mild question Helene had won the sympathy of the Masai.

"Ummm," said Ki-Gor. Whether well founded or not, she had planted a worry in both his and the warriors' minds which would make them keep her with them.

He frowned at her. "All right, go with the Masai," he sighed. "But remember . . ."

"Oh, I promise not to be in the way," Helene declared. "I'll do everything you say."

Ki-Gor, the frown still on his face, started toward an ankle-thick length of liana hanging from a branch. Helene ran to stop him, and raising on tiptoe, brushed his lips with hers. He received the kiss sternly.

Then abruptly he swept her up in his arms, kissed her resoundingly to the delight of the warriors, and holding her feet off the ground, shook her gently.

"Witch!" he said, and his teeth flashed white in a laugh. "Beautiful, cunning witch!"

He put her down, took three running steps and caught the liana. Great, writhing cords of muscle ridged out over his arms and shoulders. With a prodigious bound, he hurled himself upward.

At the very height of his swing, Ki-Gor released the vine, drove free through the air. Up, up, he went in arcing flight, his suddenly relaxed body twisting slowly so that his arms came straight before him.

THEN there was the leaping bulge of muscles across his back as he braced. His momentum was nearly spent. But at the very moment he would have begun to drop, his spread fingers came against a limb. He caught the support, whipped his body under it like a pendulum.

He shot away from the limb, feet-first, angling horizontally across ten yards of open space for another branch. In mid-leap, he curled into a ball, snapped his legs straight again, and once more his arms were before him in position to grasp the limb.

Though the Masai had witnessed the White Lord's hurtling flight through the tree-routes countless times, always they watched with awed, astonished expressions.

It was a reminder that he was linked as closely to the savage, primeval animal world as he was to the world of men. He had known the animal world first, had started life as fierce and wild as any beast, removed from the society of men, hardly identifying his kinship with them. But he had gradually come to know the natives, and through his unusual physical and mental powers had won their respect.

His gloss of civilization, though deeper since Helene had become his wife, was still barely more than skin-deep. The red-haired American girl, who had been plummeted into his life by the crash of her airplane in the jungle, had wrought many



changes in the White Lord. But he had changed her even more, for finding love and happiness with Ki-Gor, she had abandoned her whole way of existence, changed from a wealthy social butterfly to a fitting mate for the jungle lord.

But now as Ki-Gor ranged alone through the tree-paths in search of the slavers, he became a true jungle denizen again. The changing forest breezes brought him many sounds and scents, and as instinctively as any animal his ears and nose deciphered these subtle messages.

He knew that a lion lay couched in the still Wassa grass beside a waterhole. He knew that for a time a leopard silently kept pace with him off to his right when he dropped low to check on the spoor. He followed by sound the flight of a *klipvard* antelope.

An ever-altering variety of sounds and smells he identified, all helping him know what went on about him, what enemies were near.

But a persistent scent which puzzled and interested him most was the harsh Ingagi smell, the gorilla smell, which lay heavy along the way he travelled.

This was not the country of the Ingagi. The fierce great apes lived further west in a dense, unpopulated section of the jungle. The natives only entered that dark land in armed force, for the murderous strength and almost man-like cunning of the great beasts made them fearful adversaries for hunters armed with only spears and bows.

Three hours after leaving Helene, Ki-Gor caught his first glimpse of the great apes he scented. Moving silently through the leafy heights, he saw four of the huge beasts passing through a clearing on the jungle floor below him.

They went in single file, in a shambling sort of trot, knuckling the ground with their long arms at every step. They kept parallel with the path, turning and circling with it, but not once in the several minutes the White Lord watched them did they ever actually set foot on it. Instead, they chose the much more difficult going of the underbrush.

Another strange thing was their sustained fast pace. The Ingagi is usually an unhurried traveller, stopping often to browse for choice green shoots or over-

turn a fallen rotted limb in search of grubs.

Ki-Gor, though intrigued, had no time to waste on idle curiosity. Without ever drawing abreast of the apes, he turned off to the right, circled around them and came back to the path. They might not take kindly to the sight of a hairless white ape swinging over them.

But to Ki-Gor's surprise, he no more than got around the first group, when he found himself over six more of the beasts. They behaved in the same manner, keeping well away from the path, yet following its windings exactly. And they were all bull apes, not a single female.

He tried again to avoid discovery, but a sudden downcurrent of air carried his man-scent to the brutes. The creatures abruptly halted, uttering low, rumbling growls while their bloodshot, beady eyes searched for the human who dared come near them.

THE APE that sighted Ki-Gor first gave a roar of rage, thrust up on his hind legs and hammered his chest thunderously with giant, knotted fists. The beast allowed himself only this single, surging outburst of wrath, then he raced to a low-hanging limb, leaped high to grasp it. Within seconds he was swinging and leaping upward through the branches toward the White Lord.

Ki-Gor didn't want trouble, but he was unwilling to engage in a grim game of hide and seek with six raging bull apes. In order to lose them, he would have to swerve far off his course, uselessly wasting both time and energy.

So instead of running, he swung his bow from his back, snatched a long barbed arrow from his quiver and fitted it to the bowstring. He was drawing a bead on the rapidly climbing ape, when the largest of the beasts on the ground broke into furious barks and snarls.

The outburst apparently was directed at the bull going after Ki-Gor, for the shaggy giant immediately stopped climbing. He glared fiercely at the White Lord, baring his fangs. Then slowly, reluctantly, the ugly beast started down toward his fellows.

Ki-Gor lowered his bow, a faint frown coming over his taut features.

He studied with new interest the ape-leader who had called back the bull. The gorilla was fully six feet tall, but his chest and shoulders were of such tremendous breadth that he had an almost squat look.

But the gorilla's most awesome feature was his face. In some past battle, the whole left side of it had been torn open. A hideous, many-tongued scar ran from temple to jaw, lifting the beast's huge lips in a perpetual snarl.

To Ki-Gor's added astonishment, as soon as the tree-climber reached the ground, the six apes wheeled about, set off in single file through the brush without wasting another glance on the jungle man.

With all his knowledge of animals, the White Lord could find no possible explanation of the behavior of the Ingagi. Apes simply didn't act that way. He proceeded more warily than before, and though he avoided further trouble, he passed six more groups before the harsh gorilla scent disappeared, telling him he was ahead of the strange migration.

An hour later, he caught up with the slave caravan and all thought of the apes was thrust from his mind.

Though he kept well away from the cruel procession, he could still hear the steady crack of whips, the sudden agonized screams of tortured men and women. And a few times through breaks in the wall of foliage he kept between himself and the slavers he caught glimpses of the long shuffling lines of shackled prisoners.

From the slow pace of the caravan and the large number of captives who fell and had to be whipped to their feet, Ki-Gor saw that even the most brutal taskmasters wouldn't be able to keep the slaves moving much longer.

The blacks were exhausted, having been driven mercilessly the past two days while the slavers sought to get away from the scene of the attack. Ki-Gor was acquainted with the habits of slave-traders, knew from grim experience that the unfortunate natives in their hands had had little food or water since their capture.

Ki-Gor made a circle, putting him ahead of the caravan. He dropped down into the lower branches, and keeping directly over the trail, began to travel fast. Within thirty minutes, he found what he

was searching for, a sizeable river crossing the path.

II

THE SUN was low in the west. The slavers would have to make camp before darkness. Even terrorized men have a point beyond which they can't be driven. The site by the river was the logical place for the caravan to halt.

Ki-Gor studied the area carefully, mapping the terrain in his mind. He dropped to the ground, tested the depth of the stream and trotted up the bank a hundred yards. Then he took to the trees again, coursed about slowly, observing the many small game trails in the neighborhood of the stream crossing. Once he stopped to pick several handfuls of brown, strongly scented berries from a vine with pale, whitish leaves. He wrapped these berries in a huge leaf, and returning to the river hid them beneath a rock.

By the time the caravan's advance guard arrived, the White Lord was posted high in a tree in a vantage point which he had carefully camouflaged with vines.

Four armed Bantus came down the trail at a weary, dogged trot. Sweat cut glistening rivulets down their dusty bodies.



They went straight to the stream, drank thirstily for a few minutes. Then after a brief, low-voiced conference, one of their number turned back toward the caravan while the others splashed across the stream to investigate the other bank.

The black who had gone back with news about the campsite returned with a tall, broad-shouldered Arab and ten Bantu warriors. Ki-Gor's eyes glittered from slitted lids as he followed every movement made by the burnoose-clad man.

The man's arrogant stance, his swift, hawk-like movements faintly stirred Ki-Gor's memory. But try as he might, Ki-Gor could not go beyond that slight feeling that he had seen the slaver before. Except for a narrow strip for his eyes, the Arab's face was veiled, and the loose robe hanging to the ground was undistinguishable from the soiled garments worn by uncounted true believers.

The slaver stared about. "It will do!" he snapped in Bantu, managing to sound displeased that the blacks could find him no better place to camp. Then he growled, "Well, don't stand about! Clear out the brush!"

He leaned against a tree, stared into the water while his men worked. He apparently was oblivious of the blacks, but his hands lingered always near the brace of ornate, long-barreled pistols shoved into his girdle.

That single detail was highly significant to Ki-Gor. The Arab didn't trust his own servants. If he was as harsh a master as that, the Bantus would desert like jackals any time the tide of battle went against him.

The slaver didn't rouse until the straggling lines of chained men and women began dragging into the clearing. He shoved away from the tree, stood poised like some evil bird of prey. As though impelled to cruelty by the very sight of their master, the guards strung out along the weary files began to wield their whips, cursing and threatening the prisoners. Ki-Gor noted there were two more Arabs in the caravan, both armed with rifles. The furtive manner in which they kept glancing at the burnoose-clad figure by the stream indicated they feared their leader as much as the Bantus.

The captives were chained in groups of

twenty. Studying them, Ki-Gor knew the slavers had moved swiftly over a wide area, making quick strikes against every unguarded kraal they encountered, rather than risking an all-out attack against any single people.

In addition to about eighty pygmy prisoners, they had snared some fifty Obanti, ninety Wasuli, and sixty Watussi. The fact that nearly two-thirds of the captives were young women told Ki-Gor another insavory truth about the slavers.

Angered and sickened by the spectacle, Ki-Gor was watching the final group driven into the clearing with senseless whippings, when a totally unexpected sight made him start.

Ten paces behind the last of the black captives came a single woman closely guarded by four Bantus. She was a white woman, young and strikingly beautiful. She was blonde and her long, abundant hair streamed free to her waist. So well proportioned was her lithe, curved body that it took a second glance for one to realize how much larger and stronger she was than most women.

STRANGELY, she was clad in a crudely fashioned halter and a wrap-around breechclout of monkey-skin. The firm set of her red mouth, the quick way her grey eyes lashed her guards told of a seething anger. And there was no doubt that the slavers had failed to break her will. She walked firmly, even arrogantly, and her straight-held shoulders betrayed no weariness.

Her hands were tied behind her, and in addition to the steel circlet around her neck, another band of steel had been locked about her naked waist. Two guards held rawhide thongs attached to the neckband, while the other two Bantus held thongs tied to the waistband. By keeping these ropes taut, they forced the girl to walk between them and were easily able to control her.

Although there were whip-welts on practically every one of the black slaves, the blonde girl's honey-colored skin was unmarked. She was the Arab leader's prize. He took no chances of marring that fair, smooth body. If he managed things properly, she could bring him her weight in gold.

The captives were taken to the stream, one group at a time, and briefly allowed to drink. The tall leader stood unmoving until the blacks were finished and the blonde girl was brought up. He stepped close as she knelt to drink, tensely watched her.

When she stood up, the Arab's hand went out to touch her bare shoulder. His hand was on her for no more than a second, but there was a lingering ugliness in the gesture. As the blacks led the girl away, the man followed her with his glance.

"I could rid the jungle of him with a single arrow," thought Ki-Gor.

But he gritted his teeth and lay quiet on the limb until dusk fell. He watched the Bantus build a high thorn wall against animal prowlers on the forest side of the camp, smiled grimly when he saw that they left the river side open. Then he slipped quietly down the tree, wormed away from the camp through the underbrush and made his way back to the trail. He trotted about a mile along the path, then climbed into the fork of a tree and made himself comfortable.

The late moon was rising when he sat up, tested the breeze and listened. After a time, he gave an odd, warbling whistle. Among the myriad night noises that bird-like call would pass unnoticed by any but the Masai.

Tembu George's answering whistle was not long in coming. Ki-Gor dropped to the trail and hurried to meet Helene and his friends. In the faint mist of moonlight sifting through the trees, the Masai were drifting shadows clustered protectingly about Helene.

"We come at last, O Ki-Gor," hoarsely whispered Tembu George, "You've found where the dogs are bedded?"

"Aye," answered Ki-Gor, quickly explaining what he had learned.

"Lead us swiftly, O White Lord!" demanded a Masai warrior. "Yes!" clamored another. "My blood boils."

"You've travelled far," the White Lord reminded them. "Perhaps you should rest and eat."

"We need no rest!" indignantly put in one of the warriors.

"Our blades alone are hungry," declared another hotly.



Ki-Gor smiled thinly in the darkness. The Masai's eagerness was no pose. Battle was the principal end of life, the ultimate fulfillment for these savage warriors. A Masai counted himself as worth ten warriors of any other tribe, and on many occasions Ki-Gor had seen it proved that he was not far wrong in his estimate. Before Ki-Gor had channeled their warlike energies into policing the jungle, the fierce Masai had been the Congo's greatest troublemakers.

"So be it," Ki-Gor said, and in contrast to the warriors' tones his voice was slow, tinged with regret.

Though he knew it must be, he hated leading these men into battle. He had no love of war, only an abiding hatred for it and for those who were its cause. And yet even the dread Masai themselves hailed Ki-Gor as the greatest of warriors.

The darkness was no hindrance to the White Lord in leading the Masai into position. He had photographed the area and its paths in his mind before sunset, and now like a night-prowling animal he led them quietly along tiny game trails, circling the camp and coming out on the bank of the river a hundred yards above the sleeping caravan.

Except for a few quivering pools of quicksilver where the moon fought through breaks in the overhanging branches, the stream ran in eerie blackness.

"There's plenty of driftwood along the bank here," Ki-Gor said. "We'll float down the river and then rush in upon them."

The slavers naturally would expect any trouble to come from the forest side of their camp. The river was broad enough to bar any animal prowlers from coming in behind them.

"But the darkness out there may be swarming with crocodiles," pointed out an alarmed Helene. "You could all be torn to pieces."

That same thought was in every warrior's mind, but not one of them had protested Ki-Gor's orders. Crocodiles abounded in these sluggish, muddy rivers.

"They won't bother us, thanks to a pygmy trick N'Geeso taught me," Ki-Gor assured her.

He leaned down, lifted the rock at his feet, retrieved the berries he had cached earlier. He began distributing a few to each warrior.

"Smash these in your hands and smear the pulp over you," he ordered. "They are M'tika berries. The Long-noses won't come near a man with that smell on him."

THE MASAI dragged dead limbs, remnants of the last flood, into the water. They waded out, hip-deep, three or four men to each piece of driftwood, lining up parallel to the shore. Ki-Gor took Helene with him out to the first group.

"After we leave you," he told her, "stay with the log. In this slow current, you can keep within sight of the camp with very little paddling. You'll be safer in the water than anywhere else."

She stood close against him, trying to see his face. His strong, blunt fingers were very gentle on her arm.

"If anything goes wrong," he said quietly, "you are to drift on downstream. You musn't do anything foolish, because I would rather die a thousand times than think of your being captured by these men."

"Oh, my dear," she murmured unhappily, pressing her cheek against him, "please be careful. Please don't take chances."

He patted her head with awkward gentleness. "The Masai will take care of me. They always do." He turned her away from him, put her arm on the log.

Then he was calling softly to the warriors behind him. Group by group they pushed off into deep water, began drifting down toward the slave caravan. From the forest on their right came a hyena's crazed laughter, twice repeated. There was no sound from the men in the water except their tense, quick breathing.

THE SMELL of woodsmoke reached them first. Then like yellow blooms among the black trees they saw the slavers' fires. With nerve-rendering slowness, they drifted abreast of the camp.

The exhausted prisoners, still chained together, lay in three long rows along the river bank. Wary guards paced slowly down the aisles between the lines of sleeping natives, watchful of every suspicious movement. The whole area was illuminated by fires.

The Masai needed only to see the high thorn boma extending in a solid, U-shaped wall about the camp to appreciate Ki-Gor's wisdom in choosing to attack from the river side. Just within that wall, armed Bantus stood vigil, kept alert against any danger from the jungle by the presence of one of the Arabs.

Ki-Gor estimated that about twenty-five Bantus, a third of the slavers' whole force, were on guard, while the others slept. When a quick glance failed to locate either the head slaver or his other Arab lieutenant, Ki-Gor knew they were both slumbering in the single tent which had been raised.

The blonde girl was chained to a tree outside the tent. She sat with her back against the trunk, her head dropped forward in sleep. She looked as though the least sound would bring her leaping to her feet.

To offset superior odds, Ki-Gor and his men had only the slender weapon of surprise. They had to hit so hard and fast that they would shatter the men on guard in their first rush. If the guards held them for any time at all, the sleeping Bantus would have a chance to arm and organize.

Ki-Gor felt the muddy bottom come under his feet. He set his strength against the log, drifted it in closer to the bank. He counted the moments, waiting for the Masai to come into position. On shore, one of the Bantus patrolling between the rows of slaves glanced idly at the river. Ki-Gor's heart skipped a beat. But the black went on with his pacing, his bored eyes seeing nothing unusual in a few drifting logs, if the dim hulks registered on his consciousness at all.

Ki-Gor knew he could wait no longer. His men were coming within reach of the firelight. He didn't worry about signalling the Masai. They would be straining their eyes, watching for his white body when he started for shore.

He said nothing to Helene, but she seemed to sense his decision. He knew she turned her face toward him. As he took his hand from the log, he touched her chin, her throat. Then he lifted his spear from the water, where, like the Masai, he had trailed it a few inches beneath the surface so no gleam of its shovel-bladed point wouldn't betray them.

The water was only to his chest now. He stepped around the log and started toward the camp. From the corner of his eye he saw the long, uneven line of shadows surge outward from the driftwood.

There was the faint wash of disturbed water, the glimmer of wet spear points. But so quietly did that desperate band of warriors advance, they were in ankle-deep water before the first Bantu sensed their presence. He was the same guard who had glanced out at the river before.

The man was almost directly in front of Ki-Gor when he suddenly ceased his pacing, spun toward the river. He stood close enough to a fire for the White Lord to see the astonished look which exploded over his face.

The black's eyes bulged, his mouth dropped open. Then he leaped backwards, his features wildly working as he fought to throw off the effects of shock and cry out to his fellows.

But even as the Bantu lunged backwards, the White Lord's right arm whirled high, then drove forward with explosive power. The heavy war spear leaped toward the beach like a ray of dark light.

Full in the face the huge, shovel-bladed weapon caught the native. His ebony features shattered apart, his head cleft completely through. He leaped high like a great frog, somersaulted backwards and fell kicking into the wash of his own blood.

And as the Bantu died, the huge, glistening figures of the Masai gained the bank. They were like great black cats, drifting out of the darkness in long, reaching bounds. It seemed impossible that men could move with such terrible speed,



in such chilling silence.

Over the first row of sleeping prisoners they swept, engulfing three startled guards. The Bantus saw them now. Shrieking, frightened cries broke out over the camp. The Masai swept over the rousing prisoners in a swift wave and the still-warm bodies of eleven Bantu dead marked the way they passed.

Like a cornered mongrel, the Arab lieutenant made little senseless runs back and forth, yapping confused orders in a thin, hysterical voice. But the hurtling spears of the Masai cut black furrows in the firelight even as he cried his first command. Under the hammer blows of these deadly shafts the bulk of his force melted away within seconds.

In desperation, the Arab flung up his rifle. Yellow fire streaked from its trembling barrel. The blasting echoes *caroomed* out through the jungle. And a Masai running beside Tembu George twisted sideways and fell, his throat torn away.

TEMBU GEORGE'S fury burst out of his throat in roaring madness. He seemed to spurt ahead of his men. His long, broad-bladed knife was a burst of gleaming light as he swung it high. In four incredible, lashing bounds he was on the Arab.

All the brute power in his giant shoulders was in that flickering knife-blow.

The Arab literally exploded into death, his body rent apart with the stunning swiftness of a tree split by lightning. Tembu George whirled away from the

thing that had been a man, tearing his knife free as he turned.

He stabbed the red-dripping blade toward the sky and from his lips roared the dread Masai war-cry. Until that moment the attackers had fought in silence. Now in concert the huge chieftain's war-dogs chorused their chilling battle challenge, and wheeling behind their leader, raced toward the Arab tent and the Bantus who had been sleeping about it.

Tembu George knew the demoralizing effect that welling battle-cry would have on the groggy Bantus. It warned the scrambling blacks that the jungle's deadliest warriors were loose in their midst.

The sleep-dazed Bantus in those first minutes could not guess how small was the force opposed to them. They awoke to noise and confusion, the screams of frightened slaves, the clash of steel, the pound of running feet. And their first reaction was naturally that a vast force was flooding out of the jungle to destroy them.

Cat-swift, across the camp came the charging Masai. But yards ahead of them the Bantus saw a figure more dread than even the giant Tembu George. Seconds before the Masai turned toward the tent, Ki-Gor had cut away from his fellows and sprinted for the haven of the two sleeping Arabs.

"Aaaiiiee!! *The White Lord!*" shrieked a dozen blacks. Their master had assured them Ki-Gor was too far from the scene of their raids to interfere.

"Fight for your lives!" shouted a Bantu, braver than the rest, and darting forward, he cast his spear at the White Lord.

Ki-Gor veered, dodging like a broken-field runner, and the hasty throw skimmed past him. But the grey-faced Bantu, lashed by desperation, flung at the white man, sword in hand. A Masai spear took him in the belly, flung him sprawling in agony.

The White Lord flashed past the screaming, bucking black. Intent as he was on his objective, he yet noticed that the blonde girl stood wide-legged against the tree, her body taut with excitement, no sign of fear etching her face. Her grey eyes glowed with an electric brilliance as they whirled over the battle scene. Her reaction was certainly not what one would expect of a civilized woman bound help-

lessly in the midst of a death-struggle between savages.

Ki-Gor meant to call to her a word of hope, of reassurance. But before he could speak, the tent flap was ripped open and the Arab leader burst out. He apparently had been sleeping fully dressed, for he wore his white robes and had even taken time to hood his face. In his hand was a gun, not one of the ornate, long-barrelled pistols he had worn earlier in his belt, but a squat, ugly German Luger.

Coming so suddenly out of the dark interior of the tent, the Arab blinked rapidly, narrowing his eyes against the hurt of the light. That brief moment of blindness saved Ki-Gor's life.

Going at full tilt, the White Lord dove for the man's legs.

He hit him like a football tackler and at the impact the Luger went off in a series of rapid shots. The slugs sprayed harmlessly upward as the Arab careened against his tent, carried by the jungle man's driving weight. As the two of them went down, Ki-Gor caught the gun with one hand, the man's throat with the other.

WITH a mighty wrench, the White Lord tore the Luger from the Arab's grasp, hurled it away. The whole side of the tent collapsed, billowing down over the struggling men. The Arab fought like a maniac, writhing and twisting, gouging and kicking as he sought to free himself from both Ki-Gor and the smothering folds of the tent.

He was a powerful man, and as Ki-Gor quickly learned, an accomplished rough and tumble fighter. He managed to rip the White Lord's merciless fingers from his throat and hammered his knees into the pit of the jungle man's stomach.

Momentarily numbed by the blow, Ki-Gor lost his grip. The Arab plunged upward, throwing off the folds of tent. He didn't try to run. Instead, he turned, balancing himself to deliver a kick which would knock his opponent senseless.

Ki-Gor whirled in against the Arab like a rolling barrel, knocking his legs from under him before he could get set. And when he fell this time, there was no hope of again escaping the jungle man. Ki-Gor was a pouncing leopard, mauling and rocking the man with lightning blows.

The White Lord hit in the manner of the great apes, never knotting his fists, but using the rock-hard lower edge of each hand like a club. Tough and hard as the Arab was, no human could long survive such a beating. With his own blows seeming to have no more effect against Ki-Gor's muscle-padded bulk than rocks against armor plate, the Arab's nerve broke and he squawled for help.

And to the White Lord's surprise, the man in his fright cried out in English instead of Arabic.

"Carl—Carl! Help me! Shoot!" he yelled.

But the lieutenant was in no position to offer him immediate help. Slower to act than his master, he had been caught in the collapse of the tent. He was plunging about like a netted bird, trying to free himself. He heard the tremendous uproar as the Masai ripped into the Bantus, heard his leader's terrified screams, and his resulting panic made him even clumsier than before.

Despite the chief slaver's certainty that Ki-Gor meant to beat him to death, the White Lord had intended from the first to take him alive. Otherwise, he would have buried his knife in him in the opening seconds of the struggle.

The Arab's stiff resistance took Ki-Gor off-guard. Ordinarily, his race, though bitter fighters with sword or gun, had little skill in an out and out slugging match. But, finally, Ki-Gor twisted the man's head back, slammed him twice across the temple, finished him with a pile-driving blow full on the chin.

As the man went rubbery beneath him, Ki-Gor sprang up, intent on reaching the lieutenant before he could bring his gun into play. He would have gotten to him, too, had not a Bantu broken out of the melee of fighting men and come sprinting around the tent chased by a Masai.

In his frantic attempt to escape his pursuer, the Bantu headed straight into Ki-Gor. Too late the Bantu realized he was getting into the reach of another enemy. He tried to veer, slashing with his sword in an effort to keep the White Lord away. But his foot caught on one of the tent pegs and he dove face-first into the ground.

Ki-Gor was on the black before he



stopped skidding, twisting the sword from his hand. Then as easily as he would lift a rag doll, he heaved the native to his feet, and standing behind him, snaked his right arm about the man's face, forced his head back.

The Bantu, with the bones of his neck ready to snap under the pressure, was abruptly motionless, all thought of fight gone. The Masai braked to a stop, disappointment in his fierce features as he realized Ki-Gor didn't mean to kill the native.

But instead of wasting time trying to argue the White Lord out of taking a prisoner, with a snort of disapproval, the Masai whirled and started back for the main battle. At the moment the warrior turned, the Arab lieutenant managed to get free of the tent.

The two men stood face to face, no more than five paces apart. The Masai reacted first. With a wild yell, he leaped for the Arab, swinging his heavy knife like a cleaver.

The Arab threw himself to the side, triggering two pistol shots at point blank range. The warrior was flung half about by the slugs, his whole body shuddering under the impact. His legs started to give at the knees and his knife fell from his fingers.

But gathering the last broken fragments of life in him, the Masai somehow righted himself and took another full step toward the Arab. With his last conscious thought, the warrior tried to fling himself on the robed killer, hamper him long enough to give Ki-Gor a chance to reach them. But the Masai's fantastic courage went for naught. A third shot deliberately aimed this time, tore away the black's forehead.

KI-GOR knew he was trapped. He was farther away from the Arab than the Masai had been. The gun would cut him down before he took two steps. The Bantu he held before him was no protection, for the slaver would gladly sacrifice the black, knowing the same slugs which killed him would also tear out Ki-Gor's life.

As the Masai collapsed, the Arab jerked his attention to the White Lord. But even as he did, Ki-Gor tried a last desperate measure of defense. He caught the Bantu by the throat and the thigh, lifted him bodily overhead and hurled him at the Arab.

All his phenomenal strength was in that throw. A less wary enemy would have been knocked kicking. But in the Arab's case, Ki-Gor only bought himself a few extra moments of life. With a startled lizard's speed, the gunman darted aside, firing as he dodged.

The slug burned past Ki-Gor's arm. Ki-Gor's racing hand caught his knife from its sheath, swung it up with straining speed for a throw. But the White Lord knew as he lifted the knife that it was a futile action, that he could never beat that next shot.

Then suddenly, as though an invisible hand had reached out of the dark heavens to strike him, the gunman gave a queer backward jump, his gun blasting far wide of the jungle man.

The Arab staggered drunkenly, cursing in a voice edged with pain. The hand holding the pistol sank to his side. And unexpectedly, as Ki-Gor raced toward him, the man sat down heavily. His voice trailed off vaguely, and when Ki-Gor got to him, he had dropped over on his side and lay quiet.

The White Lord reached down, took the gun from the Arab's dead fingers, rolled him on his back. Then he saw what had saved his life. An arrow was driven through the center of the man's chest, a small, light arrow tipped with yellow feathers.

Ki-Gor grunted in surprise, glanced narrowly at the dark trees about him. Then as the battle-clamor bore in on him, he dropped his eye abruptly to the head slaver and the Bantu. Neither man showed any signs of life, so the White

Lord snatched up the broad-bladed knife which the Masai warrior had dropped and ran toward the main fighting.

He found the Bantus had never recovered from the Masai's initial onslaught. When they reeled back from that charge, they left a score of dead and wounded behind. Now, with machine-like efficiency, the Masai were hemming them against one corner of the thorn wall, attacking with a concerted savagery which kept the Bantus from ever getting off the defense.

The White Lord's sudden appearance beside the giant Tembu George was the final straw needed to break the Bantus' crumbling morale. He had slain their masters and now he came to direct personally their own destruction.

IV

UNDER any other circumstances, natives in their position would have thrown down their arms and surrendered. But having been caught red-handed trafficking in slaves, the Bantus were afraid to surrender. If the Masai didn't kill them immediately, they would be marched to the white man's gallows on the coast.

Therefore, when they realized all was lost, a wild panic burst over them. The one urge in every Bantu's mind was to save his own skin. It happened with amazing swiftness. A black suddenly wheeled from the line of battle, darted for the thorn wall, tore frantically at it with his bare hands.

That started the rout. Instead of closing up the gap behind the deserter, his fellows needed only his example to set them off. Immediately, they were clawing at the thorn all about him, screeching and hitting in an insane effort to be the first to get away.

The Masai swayed in, clubbing the insane Bantus, determined none of them would get away. In that scene, the orderly precision with which Tembu George usually handled his men was impossible. He was helpless, therefore, when fifty yards away he saw four Bantus tear through the mass of struggling men and flee for the river.

He pulled Ki-Gor out of the fray, pointed to the running blacks. "Come! We

must stop them!" he exclaimed in alarm. "They'll run head-on into Helene in crossing the river. They'll kill her out of spite!"

Before Ki-Gor could speak, the upset chieftain was sprinting after the Bantus at top speed. Ki-Gor leaped after him, straining every nerve to overtake the big man. He caught up with Tembu George just as they came abreast of the crumpled tent.

He shouted to make himself heard above the din. "Wait!" he cried, putting his hand on the chieftain's shoulder. "They won't find her there."

Tembu George turned on him excitedly. "But they might! They'll kill her, I tell you."

"She's perfectly safe, Tembu George," Ki-Gor assured him.

"You can't be sure."

"No?" the jungle man snapped. "Look at the arrow in that Arab beside the tent."

The tension left the Masai leader's face as he saw the arrow. There was no mistaking it. It was one of a set he made especially for Helene.

Ki-Gor's glance combed the dark branches of the trees about them. "It was well, for once, that she disobeyed me," he said with a grim smile. "She saved my life!"

Tembu George laughed hugely. "And now she is afraid to show herself."

He started back at a run with Ki-Gor to help his men, but saw there was no need for haste. The fight was over. A sudden stillness came to the camp. The last fear-crazed Bantu had been subdued. Not more than seven of the entire number had managed to reach the safety of the dark jungle.

Several of his men came toward him. "What about those who got away?" they asked.

"You've done enough for one day," Tembu George declared. "Morning will be soon enough to worry about them."

Pride shone in his usually stern, unreadable face.

Ki-Gor's eyes touched each man in turn, halting last on Tembu George. "I know now what it is to run with lions," he said and pleasure at the compliment rose strong and quick in the Masai.



The files of men and women who a few minutes before had been doomed to slavery were on their feet, still too dazed to fully comprehend what had occurred.

"Free them," Ki-Gor ordered.

"But lest their chains grow rusty," added Tembu George, "lock the Bantus in their place."

Ki-Gor frowned, but offered no objection. He walked to the head slaver, took a ring of keys from his belt. The slaver was beginning to stir and moan.

"Let's look at this Arab dango," he said angrily, and reaching down, ripped away the folds of cloth covering the man's face.

"Wah!" exclaimed Tembu George in astonishment.

"By all the gods," said the White Lord, and with eyes suddenly grown bleak and cold, he stared at the man's long, narrow face.

It was not a face one would easily forget. Beneath the high, white forehead, close-set eyes hugged a thin, long nose. Except for a few coarse, reddish hairs, the man had no pretense of eyebrows. His mouth was a crooked gash, like a narrow ridge of scar tissue set in a receding chin.

"Sam Slaker!" Ki-Gor gritted. "No wonder he hid his rotten face and body behind Arab robes."

Tembu George chopped the air viciously with his great knife.

"Stand aside," he growled. "One blow and we'll be rid of this evil dog."

Ki-Gor raised a protecting arm.

"No," he said. "He must be returned to prison. This time they'll put a noose about his neck."

"We thought that last time," argued the Masai leader. "Instead, he was sentenced

to work his life out in a rock pit. I knew he'd escape. He's too clever for them."

STILL Ki-Gor stood between Tembu George and the slaver. He hated Sam Slaker as much as his friend, but he realized that the formal execution of the blackbirder by the government would carry much more weight with others of his kind than his slaying by a native war party. And it might help convince certain lethargic officials that, as Ki-Gor warned, slavers were again becoming a serious problem in the Congo.

"I want him alive," Ki-Gor declared firmly, without explanation. "Chain him with the Bantus."

For a tense moment, Tembu George didn't move.

Then he shrugged his massive shoulders and stepped back.

"It shall be as you say," he granted. "You do nothing without good reason"—he hesitated—"but I ask you to remember that this dango lives only for the day he can kill you. So long as he breathes, you are in peril. He has the devil's own cunning."

Ki-Gor's grey eyes softened as he realized it was his own safety Tembu George was concerned about. Then abruptly he remembered the white girl.

"Ho!" he exclaimed. "The girl will think us mad, chattering like monkeys and not raising a hand to free her. We are fine rescuers."

He walked with his lithe, easy stride toward her, apologizing for his thick-headedness. He felt even more badly when he saw how tensely she stood, her long legs wide-spaced, her back pressed hard against the tree. The way she was turned, her face was too much in shadow for him to read her expression.

"You're safe now," he said soothingly. "Everything's going to be all right. We'll get you back to your people in quick order."

He raised his right hand to show her he held the key to her iron neckband. The moment he moved his arm, her foot lashed out at him. It was a lightning kick, aimed at his groin.

Purely by luck, he started to turn as she kicked, meaning to go behind her and untie her hands before he unlocked the neck-

band, so the blow landed on his thigh. As it was, it staggered him.

With a surprised grunt, he caught his balance and jumped out of her reach. The girl immediately pressed against the tree, poised to deliver a kick with either leg if he started at her. She had moved enough so that the firelight touched her features.

Her jaw was gritted, her eyes as watchful and apprehensive as a cornered animal's. He could see the quick, nervous flare of her nostrils as she breathed.

Ki-Gor frowned, unconsciously rubbing the red mark on his leg as he studied her. It hadn't occurred to him before that a brawny half-naked white man leading a band of tall, black warriors might look far from reassuring to the girl. Instead of realizing she was saved, she thought she had exchanged a bad master for a worse one.

"Look," he said, pointing to where the Masai were releasing the jubilant prisoners from their chains. "I've come to free you. I'm Ki-Gor. Surely, you don't think I'm a slaver."

She gave no sign she heard him. If anything, she grew more wary, as though she believed his pointing was only a trick to distract her attention long enough for him to reach her.

"What's wrong with you?" asked the puzzled jungle man. "Can't you understand me? No one is going to harm you."

Tembu George had remained by the tent while his warriors went to free the prisoners, not wishing to divert any of the praise from the fighting men. He used part of Slaker's robe to tie the slaver's hands and feet, before he went to Ki-Gor's side.

"Perhaps mistreatment has shaken her mind," he offered sympathetically.

"It is something strange," agreed the White Lord.

There was a movement in the lower branches of a tree near them. A white figure showed vaguely against the dark foliage. Then Helene dropped lithely to the ground.

"Oh, you men," she said disgustedly, her very tone betraying that she had been eavesdropping on them. "Just look at yourselves and you'll see why no stranger would trust you. Bloody knives in your hands, blood stains all over you, frowning



like you were going to eat the poor thing up."

She came toward the two speechless men, waving her hand for them to stand back. With slow, deliberate actions, she divested herself of her own weapons, dropped them on the ground. She took the key from her husband.

Then talking softly, reassuringly, she approached the girl. The blonde stirred nervously, her nostrils flaring, her eyes bright in the dim light. But, gradually, as Helene advanced she began to relax.

Making no sudden movements, Helen untied the girl's wrists, unlocked the cruel iron band about her neck. From the way the blonde handled her hands, Helene knew they were without feeling from the tight bonds, so she massaged them gently.

THE BLONDE gingerly submitted to her ministrations, but for all Helene's talking, the girl never uttered a word. Most of the time she kept her glance fixed on Ki-Gor, studying minutely the man she sensed was in control of the war party.

When circulation had been restored to her hands, she abruptly pulled them away from Helene. She flexed her fingers, moved her arms, trying them. She seemed to change, confidence coming into her.

She pushed past Helene, and no longer showing any apprehensiveness, walked up to Ki-Gor. Her movements had a cat's smooth, flowing grace. And there was a cat-like intensity to the unblinking gaze with which she scrutinized the White Lord at close range. She appeared unaware of Tembu George's existence, so utterly did she ignore him.

Despite the air of strangeness about her,

word nor expression did she give any evi-Ki-Gor could not help but be struck with her unusual beauty. She would have brought a fortune to Slaker. Among the dusky-skinned races, a blonde woman was particularly esteemed, and one as fair and young as this would have set any slave mart into an uproar.

He smiled at her. "I'm sorry we startled you," he said. "We'll get you back to your people as soon as we can. Tell me, what is your name and where are you from?"

She watched his lips, tilting her head a little to listen as he spoke. But by neither word nor expression did she give any evidence she understood him.

Instead, she stepped close to him, touched his hair with her hand, dropped her fingers to his shoulder and traced them slowly down his arm. Then she ran the flat of her palm across the rock-like pads of muscle which ridged out across Ki-Gor's broad chest.

There was neither boldness nor affection in the gesture. She seemed to act purely from curiosity, like a child inspecting some strange object.

Ki-Gor's eyes momentarily widened in surprise. She acted as though she had never seen a man before, anyway a white man. And at her touch there rose unbidden to his mind an almost forgotten incident of his youth. He had carelessly fallen asleep on a grassy plot beside a stream, only to be awakened by a velvety touch exploring his bare skin. He found a lioness curiously snuffling his body. He had kept perfectly still, expecting death at any moment, but for some inexplicable reason the cat had padded off into the



jungle once its curiosity was satisfied.

"Helene, I don't believe this girl understands a word we say," he declared.

Helene's answer was drowned out by the blonde's shrill, alarmed cry. Looking past the White Lord, the girl had seen Sam Slaker inching on belly toward a knife dropped by some warrior during the battle. The slaver had regained consciousness and was trying to take advantage of Ki-Gor's preoccupation with the girl to free himself.

Before Ki-Gor could turn, the blonde was racing for Slaker. Hearing her scream, the slaver writhed about into a sitting position just in time to see her literally dive at him. His distorted face, growing swollen and bruised from the beating Ki-Gor had given him, jerked toward the White Lord.

"No! No!" he shrieked. "Keep her away. No!"

And then the hurtling weight of her body chopped off his voice, and you could hear her snarl with the berserk rage of an animal. In her attack there was none of the aimless clawing and flailing with which most women fight.

She rained blows on Slaker much as Ki-Gor had, hitting with deadly strength and accuracy. But where the White Lord's object had been merely to knock the slaver out, it was clear she meant to beat the man to death. Bound as he was, he was absolutely helpless.

He managed once to cry Ki-Gor's name, appealing for help. But the sound of his voice so enraged the girl that she clamped her fingers about his throat. He bucked wildly, making a hideous rattling noise as his breath choked off.

V

NEITHER Ki-Gor nor Tembu George had moved, so spellbound were they by the girl's savagery. But the spectacle shocked Helene into speech.

"Stop her, Ki-Gor!" she shouted. "She's killing him!"

Ki-Gor roused then, reached the blonde in four quick steps. He caught her hands, pried them from Slaker's throat, and it took his full strength to do so. She fought to get back at the slaver, and failing in that, she switched her attack on the White

Lord. It finally required the combined efforts of Tembu George and Ki-Gor both to drag her away.

With the same swiftness with which she had attacked Slaker, she suddenly quieted. With smouldering eyes, she glared at the men holding her and at the crowd of blacks which had gathered.

"Wah!" exclaimed Tembu George. "This is no woman from the settlements. By all the gods, she's the spawn of jungle devils."

"She's a strange one, all right," Ki-Gor said, "but I don't blame her for wanting to settle scores with Slaker."

Tembu George shook his head wonderingly.

"What do we do with her?" he asked.

"Let her go," directed the White Lord. "I want her to understand she must leave Slaker alone, but I don't want her to think we're taking his part or are angry with her. Right now, she looks like she thinks we're allies of his and that we might punish her."

He released his grip on the girl, patted her reassuringly on the shoulder. Then he pointed at Slaker, wagged a forbidding finger and repeated the word "no" several times. He was certain she understood his meaning, but there was no sign she agreed to obey.

"Patch Slaker up as well as you can," Ki-Gor told Tembu George. "I wanted to question him, but from his looks, he won't have his senses about him before morning. Meanwhile, I'll see what I can learn about the girl from the Bantus."

But Ki-Gor found that the prisoners knew practically nothing about how Slaker had gotten hold of the girl. Four days before the raid on the pygmy kraal, the slaver had left them in camp and gone ahead with two warriors to scout the area.

When he returned he had the girl with him and was in a high rage because of the trouble he had had in making her walk to the camp. The two warriors weren't with him, and when the Bantus asked about them, he merely snarled that they had been slain capturing the girl and gave no details.

The day had been a strenuous one for Ki-Gor, so he decided to get what sleep he could and leave the solution of the blonde's identity for morning. Before he

lay down, however, he stood at a distance and watched her. Twice he saw her leave Helene, stride nervously to the edge of the camp and stare off into the darkness. After a time, she would return, her face thoughtful, sit down beside Helene and resume staring at Slaker. She took no notice of anyone but the slaver, coolly repulsing all friendly overtures.

Perhaps she is worried that the Bantus who escaped will return and try to kill or capture her, thought Ki-Gor. He posted a larger detail of guards than he would have otherwise, thinking the sight of them would relieve her mind.

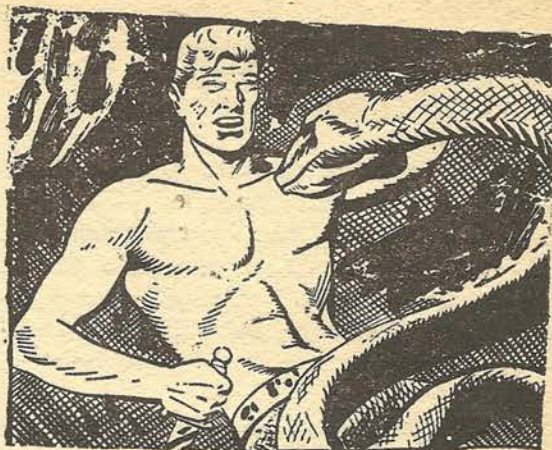
But because of the way she watched Slaker, he also instructed the guards to keep an eye on her. In her condition, he wouldn't put it by her to get up, once everyone was asleep, and try to finish off the slaver.

Ki-Gor made a last inspection of Slaker, found that Tembu George was taking no chances on his escaping. The battered man was not only tied hand and foot, but also was chained by the neck to a line of Bantu prisoners. Ki-Gor didn't approve of such severe measures, but knowing how the natives hated and feared the slaver, he thought it best not to interfere.

Ki-Gor appropriated for himself and Helene one of the comfortable sleeping mats in Slaker's tent, gave another to the blonde. The night passed without incident, except that several times along toward dawn Ki-Gor was stirred from sleep by the wierd, roaring challenge of a bull ape. There are few more blood-chilling sounds than an angry gorilla's cry, but Ki-Gor wasn't alarmed, because he knew from experience the great tree-people seldom caused trouble unless they were molested.

With the first grey light, the camp began to awaken. Slaker's erstwhile captives were too overjoyed at their miraculous rescue to lie sleeping. Freedom brought renewed vigor to their exhausted bodies, made their hurts seem unimportant.

But as Ki-Gor had noticed, about the first person other than himself to awaken was the blonde. When the gorilla's reverberating roar disturbed him, he saw her sit up suddenly and listen. Daylight found her still sitting there, an air of tenseness about her despite the apparent composure of her face, the utter quietness of her



hands. Without appearing to watch her, he noted the too-quick rise and fall of her full, firm breasts beneath the narrow halter, the constant movement of her eyes along the ramparts of the thorn boma.

Could it be she is afraid, he wondered? Perhaps her apparent bold self-reliance was only a pose. That would be woman-like to face up without flinching to a danger she could see and yet worry herself sick about an imagined threat.

Ki-Gor awakened Helene. "Sit with the girl," he said, "and I'll see what I can find for us in the way of food."

KI-GOR took Helene's light bow and quiver of arrows and left the camp. He moved quietly along the stream, searching out fruit and berry bushes where birds clustered to feed. With his unerring aim, it was only the work of a few minutes before he had enough plump birds for breakfast.

Then he cut the top from a dried gourd, jammed it with blue vastoy pears, a variety of nuts and berries, and kava. Another gourd he filled with cool, clear water which bubbled out of the river bank. When he returned to camp, Helene helped him clean the birds, slice the kava, and cook them over hot coals.

The meal unexpectedly was made more sumptuous when Tembu George sent one of his warriors with a roasted piece of antelope, and a grinning pygmy contributed a large white-fleshed fish which he had speared in the river and broiled to savory tenderness.

Ki-Gor got small gourds for drinking cups and large, dew-wet leaves for plates.

The blonde watched the preparations with a blend of curiosity and suspicion. She held herself aloof as the jungle couple sat down, served her and helped themselves to portions.

"This looks more like a feast than breakfast," laughed Helene.

Ki-Gor smacked his lips appreciatively. "A warrior's meal, as our little friend N'Geeso, would say." He had eaten sparingly the day before, so with an enthusiasm befitting his size, he plunged into the food.

But he had taken no more than a few mouthfuls when Helene, sitting cross-legged beside him, nudged his foot meaningfully with her toe.

The blonde had bolted the berries and fruit but hadn't touched anything else. Ki-Gor knew she must be hungry and he couldn't understand her reluctance to eat. By gestures, he tried to assure her the meal was perfectly all right.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked Helene. "Does she think we might poison her?"

"No," answered Helene, "she acts more like she isn't familiar with cooked food. I begin to think there really is a deep mystery about this girl."

Do what they would, they couldn't get the blonde to taste either the meat or fish. She did sample grudgingly a bit of the crisp, savory kava, but almost immediately she screwed her face up in distaste and would take no more. But when they gave her their portions of fruit, she set to eating with a will.

Ki-Gor waited until she was finished, then set out to learn whether the girl spoke any of the many dialects he knew. Over and over, using a different tongue each time, he asked what her name was. In her odd, unblinking way she watched his mouth, with only her eyes betraying the fact that she had any interest in his actions. Her face remained wooden, revealing nothing.

When he had exhausted his fund of dialects, Ki-Gor sighed hopelessly. "I just don't know," he said. "I was beginning to feel that, perhaps, she was a white girl captured and brought up by some African tribe. There is the feel of the jungle about her, but not a single tongue registered with her."

"I had the same feeling about her," Helene agreed. "We must be wrong, though. I guess she's a European of some kind. If she'd only talk, I might guess at her nationality."

They attempted to elicit talk of any kind from her, even going so far as to pick up various objects, pointing to them and calling their names in an attempt to get her to say something. Except for an occasional quick glance about the camp, she gave them her undivided attention, but not once did she utter a sound.

"Could she be deaf and dumb?" muttered Helene exasperated.

"No," said Ki-Gor definitely. "Maybe she wants us to think so, but you watch, the next time she glances away."

Near his right hand lay a large, flat rock. The instant the blonde's attention was diverted from him, his fingers closed over the rock. With a flick of his powerful wrist muscles, he tossed the stone into the air behind the girl, sending it high enough to hit among the tree branches.

He acted so quickly and silently that she suspected nothing. As she turned her glance back to him, the rock smacked against a limb with a loud report, splintered downward through leaves and twigs.

At the first noise, the blonde shot to her feet with incredible speed, her stolid mask replaced by a strange, wild expression. Her eyes seemed to flame with light and a queer, low cry broke from her lips.

The white stone dropped from the lower branches, hit the ground and rolled with slowly decreasing speed toward her. Taut-drawn as a war-bow, the girl stared for the space of three heart beats at the rock.

Then with narrowed eyes, she turned to face Ki-Gor's amused smile. There was no doubt but that she understood the purpose of his trick. For a bit, it looked as if she might leap at him, but gradually her rigid muscles relaxed and the anger melted from her face.

"Haaiiiee!" chuckled Ki-Gor. "I would say both ears and tongue work very well. Now we will begin again."

THE WHITE LORD pointed to himself. "Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor!" he said. He gestured at his mate, repeated her name three times. Then he pointed at the girl, his face asking a question.

The blonde watched him sullenly. Slowly, her grey eyes smouldering, she touched her breast with her hand.

"Raa!" she said. "Raa!"

"At last!" exclaimed Helene. "She does understand! But what an unusual name."

Before Ki-Gor could go any further, Tembu George called him. The Masai chieftain had assembled representatives from each of the various tribal groups for a council meeting the White Lord had requested. Ki-Gor wanted to learn the details of Sam Slaker's raids, the number of men and women slain on the march, and then he wanted to plan for the return of his charges to their own kraals. Organization was necessary to transport the sick and wounded, and there were many details to be handled such as sending runners ahead, assigning certain men as guards, others to hunt or gather healing herbs.

"I must go," Ki-Gor said, rising, "but keep working with her until I get back. Now that she has melted a little, maybe we can learn something about her."

The council was gathered on the river bank. To reach the circle of blacks, he had to pass Slaker and the Bantu prisoners. They were chained together in a single line guarded by four Masai warriors.

The white man was fastened at the end of the line, chained by the neck to a hulking native next to him. Slaker was too weak to stand, so he slumped in a sitting position, his face swollen and discolored, one eye completely closed. He was a far cry from the arrogant master of the slave caravan Ki-Gor had observed striding into the clearing the evening before. He was completely cowed.

Slaker dropped his head when he saw the White Lord, but Ki-Gor went past him without a word. "Let him squirm, wondering what I'm going to do to him," Ki-Gor thought. "When he's wrought up enough, he'll babble his head off for fear I'm going to give him some of his own medicine."

Ki-Gor sat down with the natives, began to deal calmly and efficiently with the problems before them. He gave his full attention to the council, paying little heed to the camp noises. With so many



men about him, his usual wariness was relaxed.

Thus, when the shattering roar sounded from the middle of the camp, his shock was as complete as was that of the others.

It was a tremendous eruption of sound, which literally engulfed a man, hammering instinctive terror into every nerve and fiber. Deep it was, like a booming roar erupting from some deep cavern, tearing the eardrums with its reverberations, swelling with unbelievable intensity.

Ki-Gor heard it, and for a moment the mindless terror inspired by that fearful blasting challenge held even him motionless. Then his mind conquered sheer animal impulse and he drove to his feet.

"*Ingagi! Ingagi!*" rose the shrill, frightened cry from a score of trembling throats.

Ki-Gor's startled eyes knifed over the camp. Giant hairy forms were plummeting from the trees into the very center of the enclosure. Seemingly insane with rage, the gorillas drummed their monstrous chests and roared defiance as soon as they struck the ground.

And the two persons nearest to them were Helene and the blonde girl!

Never knowing he spoke, he cried Helene's name. Then he was racing toward her, straining with all his magnificent strength to reach her side before one of the ravening bulls should charge down on her. There was real fear in Ki-Gor then, fear for Helene. A score of times he had seen men's bodies hammered to pulp or literally ripped apart by a gorilla's awful attack. He sprinted past a stack of captured Bantu spears and leaned in full stride to snatch one up.

On all sides, blacks were running for safety, a great ring of fleeing natives sweeping outward from the dark cluster

of apes. But the two women stood as though paralyzed.

"Run!" screamed the White Lord, but his voice was a tiny splinter of sound against the roaring madness of the gorillas.

He saw how Helene suddenly seemed to awaken, and though he couldn't hear her, he knew by the way her lips worked that she was shrieking. Helene reached for the blonde girl's arm, and leaped away from the apes. She was trying to save the blonde.

But even as his mate acted, a tremendous beast plowed out of the growing horde of gorillas. The bull shoved fully erect, lashed the vast length of his arm overhead and plunged snarling at the two girls.

Ki-Gor saw the animal's hideous face, the whole left side of it permanently distorted by a many-tongued scar which ran from temple to jaw. He saw also that in height, in breadth of shoulders, in sheer bulk, the beast was larger by far than any of his fellows.

This was the gorilla he had seen in the forest the day before, the leader of the first migrating band he had stumbled on.

At the moment he recognized the giant, Ki-Gor saw the blonde girl tear loose from Helene's grip. An agonized curse broke from his lips. In her panic, the girl had lost her head and in jerking away from Helene's guiding hand, she spun squarely in the path of the charging ape.

The huge beast caught her up like a doll and flung her over his shoulder. His triumphant roar blasted up through the din. His head swung about jerkily, surveying the camp. The line of Bantus caught his attention. Being chained, the blacks couldn't flee.

Clutching the girl with one arm, the bull started for the Bantus, apparently choosing to charge a group rather than pursue Helene alone. He scuttled over the ground at great speed, knuckling the earth with his free arm to give himself added balance. Following his lead, all the other apes except one rushed in a solid mass toward the prisoners. That one burst after Helene, his immense fangs bared in hate.

Ki-Gor saw the beast gain on his mate and his legs drove faster. Helene's eyes were wide with fear as she fled. She realized that she ran a losing race. Giving

more attention to the monster behind her than to the course she followed, she failed to see the dead limb lying half-hidden in the short grass dead ahead of her.

Her right foot struck the limb. With no chance to catch herself, she went sprawling head first into the grass. The gorilla, when he saw his quarry fall, raised himself in a great leap to clear the branch and reach Helene. He was intent on the girl and paid no heed to the bronzed jungle man who flashed in on him from the left.

Arrow-straight, Ki-Gor catapulted at the hairy giant, the war-spear gripped level before him with both hands. If the beast thought to destroy the girl and still have time to turn and dispose of the man, he misjudged Ki-Gor's lightning speed. The White Lord struck just as the ape leaped the fallen branch and was still in the air.

He hammered the spear into the bull's side, used his driving weight to plunge the shaft half its length through the creature. The shock of the blow and the plunging, upward shove Ki-Gor gave the shaft just before he released it served to pitch the gorilla off-course and make him miss Helene in his spring.

VI

THE APE bellowed in pain, whirled to confront the puny man-thing who had dared attack him. The beast grimaced horribly and in a spasm of pain reached down and clawed the wooden shaft protruding from his side. A bloody froth gushed from his mouth, dripped over the hairy black skin of his chest.

The ape suddenly flung himself at Ki-Gor, but swift as he was, the jungle man was swifter. The White Lord danced away, knife in hand, forcing the beast to whirl and charge again. Continuing these dangerous tactics, Ki-Gor enticed the animal away from Helene.

Blood was flooding from the ape's mouth and wound when the White Lord decided to risk an aggressive move himself. As the animal charged him, he suddenly leaped straight in on the beast instead of dancing out of reach.

He slashed his knife across the ape's right forearm as the creature struck at

him and then he leaped away. The gorilla was weakening, growing unsteady as blood gushed from the great tear in its chest. Ki-Gor circled rapidly, keeping always on the side of the injured arm.

Then a second time he leaped in. His knife churned twice into the beast's throat. When he spun away this time, the ape didn't follow. Instead, the monster swayed crazily, his good hand clawing at his severed jugular vein.

Like a toppling tree, the gorilla abruptly collapsed. Without another glance at the beast, Ki-Gor ran to where Helene was dazedly trying to rise. He helped her up, heard her assurance she was only jarred and bruised.

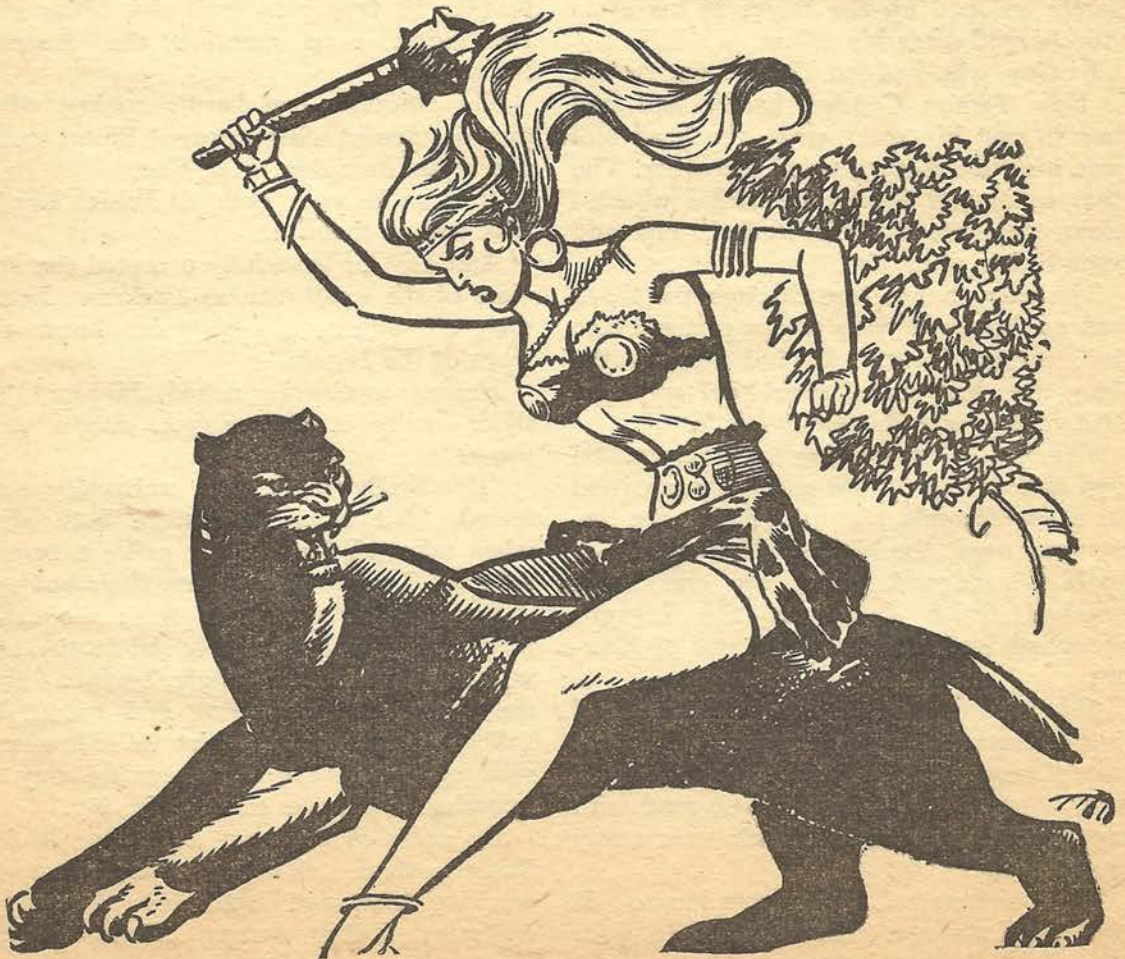
In the interval while the White Lord struggled with the ape, Tembu George managed to gather his Masai and a scattering of other blacks. He rushed these men forward, thinking a shower of spears and arrows would turn the Ingagi away from the Bantus.

As he hoped, many of the Ingagi swung to face the advancing men. Others, more knowing about spears and arrows, shied away and went rampaging through the camp.

But the scarred Ingagi leader and two followers charged into the Bantus. With fists and fangs they laid about them, tearing four blacks apart in the space of seconds. Then they swung toward the end of the terror-stricken line where Sam Slaker was insanely lunging and throwing himself about in an effort to break his chains and run.

One of the three killers staggered and went down under a whistling flight of arrows from Tembu George's men, but the Masai were afraid to shoot at the leader for fear of killing the blonde girl. As the two berserk apes reached Slaker, the unencumbered one reached out and grasped the chain about the neck of the black next to the slaver.

Seemingly with no more effort than if



he were tearing a leaf, the beast jerked the chain and ripped the Bantu's head from his body. Disregarding the blood fountaining over him, the animal fastened his hands more firmly on the blood-wet chain, and with a second tug, snapped its iron links apart.

Slaker, suddenly freed by the breaking of the chain, fell backwards. He tried so desperately to get on his feet and run before the apes should kill him that he literally flailed the ground with his arms and legs. Finally, he shot up, legs pumping, his face wrenched with horror.

But before he had gone six steps, the gorilla leader smashed a club-like arm down on his head and shoulders, knocked him rolling. The other ape bounded to the senseless slaver on all-fours, snarled over the still body. For a moment, it seemed the animal would bury his fangs in Slaker's back.

But just then the scarred leader reared to his full height, gave a thundering roar and started running toward the jungle. The animal crouching over Slaker immediately scooped up the slaver in his arms and charged after his fellow.

Ki-Gor, who had left Helene and rushed to help Tembu George, barely had had time to cast his spear when the head bull gave his roar and trampled for cover. The mass of Ingagi facing the Masai wheeled when they heard their leader's cry and went racing after him.

The hairy horde tore through the thorn wall as though it were paper, plunged into the shadowy forest. Behind them in the camp they left six of their kind sprawled dead of arrow and spear wounds.

The crazed screeching of the excited men and women in the enclosure persisted for a few seconds. Then realizing the terror was over, the blacks fell silent. The crash of snapped limbs, the crackle of smashed brush faded as the Ingagi's trampling rush carried them out of hearing.

"May a hundred devils rend my soul," swore Tembu George fervently, "if ever I saw a more fearful sight! What could have happened to drive them so mad with rage that they would attack this many armed men?"

Ki-Gor frowned. "I don't know. It was very strange. But thanks to your

quick thinking, our losses were small."

Ki-Gor shifted nervously, his lips set hard. Tembu George studied him knowingly.

"You think of Slaker and the girl," the chieftain quickly said. "You wish to go after them, but you hesitate to ask men to follow you."

With their almost man-like cunning, their insane courage and prodigious strength, no beasts are more dangerous to hunt than gorillas.

Tembu George tapped the knuckles of his left hand against the jungle man's chest. "Gimshai, the Stealer of Souls, has in his mind the exact time and place and way every man will die. He will not be hurried by any decisions we make. We Masai understand that, so lead on!"

Ki-Gor looked sharply at his friend. "Gimshai has never failed to welcome anyone who wanted to hurry matters."

Tembu George appeared not to hear him. In a voice which rang through the camp, he told his warriors that any who wished to do so could accompany him and Ki-Gor in trying to trail the white girl. He didn't even mention the despised Slaker.

The chieftain had hardly spoken when pygmies armed with captured Bantu weapons began hurrying to Ki-Gor.

"Let us be your eyes, O White Lord," said one of them.

And Ki-Gor gratefully accepted the services of the small men as trackers. Better than all others, the pygmies knew the ways of the Ingagi.

Helene anxiously asked Ki-Gor, "Is there really a chance you might save them?"

"Practically none," he unhappily confessed, "but since they were both alive when taken, I feel I must make a search. At least, I can find and bury their bodies."

But Ki-Gor wasn't to have the satisfaction of giving decent burial to the two whites. Once in the jungle, he found that the Ingagi had scattered, and except by following each spoor, which he didn't have men enough to do, there was no way of knowing where the torn bodies lay.

By noon of the next day, after having flushed three wounded apes intensely working back and forth over the jungle following fading spoor, Ki-Gor finally



resigned himself to the fact that his search was hopeless.

AN OLDER soldier would have been cursing the day he had asked for foreign service, but Lt. Philip Arnsdale, assigned only three weeks before straight from military school to His Majesty's Third Fusiliers, only mopped hopelessly at the sweat streaming from his face and tried to hide his nervousness. He felt very alone in the pygmy kraal despite the eight Somali regulars under his command.

This Ki-Gor he was to meet, the lieutenant understood, was quite an extraordinary fellow. Went about unclothed, fighting animals, living like a savage. Arnsdale closed his eyes against the sun, tried to picture Ki-Gor.

He was anxious to get on well with the fellow, because since this was his first solo assignment, a kind of test run given him by his commanding officers, he wanted nothing to mar it. Made him uneasy, though. The man was surely a bit on the balmy side, and the way Arnsdale pictured him, he would be a hulking, hairy-chested type, one of those low-forehead boys with a battered face and an ugly disposition.

The commanding officer in sending him to get the Bantus which Ki-Gor had captured said that the blacks had been taken three weeks previously, but because of the knocking about they had gotten only now were able to travel.

With a start, Arnsdale realized that the pygmy chieftain, N'Geeso, somehow had materialized without a sound beside him.

That meant Ki-Gor would appear out of the jungle soon. Curious how these fierce little beggars seemed to know the exact moment anything was to happen, yet they had no more idea of time than the man in the moon. He had come up to the kraal quiet as a mouse yesterday with his men, yet there N'Geeso had been at the gate with a welcome party waiting for him.

Arnsdale turned to the Somali corporal who acted as his interpreter with the pygmies. "Ask N'Geeso," he told the interpreter, "if it would be wise for me to give Ki-Gor anything—you know—a present as I would an important native chieftain."

Except for a faint play of muscles in his cheek, N'Geeso didn't change expression as the interpreter dutifully relayed the message to him.

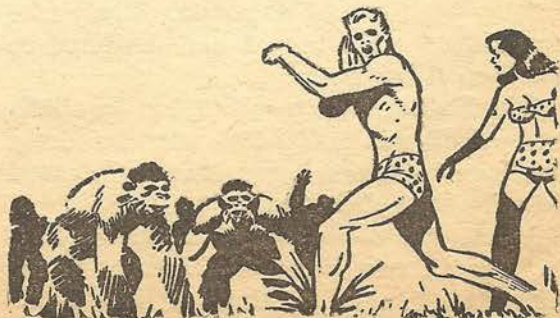
"One feels too insignificant," declared N'Geeso solemnly to the Somali, "to advise the Lord of Many Guns."

The lieutenant brightened at the phrase "Lord of Many Guns." He must remember that phrase in his letters home.

"But if I may humbly suggest," relayed N'Geeso, "this Ki-Gor is most fond of these objects." His index finger touched two of the buttons on Arnsdale's shirt. "He used them to make bracelets and necklaces. No doubt he would receive a handful of them with great joy."

By N'Geeso's careful estimate, a handful would strip the lieutenant and his eight men of every gleaming button on their blouses.

Before Arnsdale could settle down, he received another shock. Several pygmies jabbered, pointed toward some trees. Staring apprehensively through the gate into the jungle, he saw a running figure appear on a high branch. He caught his breath. It was a man going at full tilt on that narrow, swaying perch.



He forgot his dignity. "Great Scot!" he cried. "He'll fall!"

The man swerved from the branch, dove out into thin air, hurtled at a sharp angle toward the ground. Then just when Arnsdale's face screwed up in horror, the plummeting figure caught a vine, swung twenty yards and dropped free again, only to grasp another vine and skim to earth in a long, safe arc.

This wasn't at all the physical type the lieutenant expected. Despite his massive build, Ki-Gor was a clean-cut, intelligent, even an impressive looking man. But there was no getting around the fact that no normal person would be flinging around trees and living like a savage.

Remembering his position, Arnsdale managed an order to his eight men in a strained voice. The Somali obediently drew themselves up in their idea of attention. They were splendid fighting men, but hardly the European conception of military spit and polish.

The lieutenant had expected this flourish to please Ki-Gor, appeal to his childish nature. But the White Lord seemed not even to notice the salute. Instead, he came straight up to Arnsdale, his ice-grey eyes made a quick appraisal.

Ki-Gor halted, his face devoid of expression, and after a long hesitation, silently extended his hand. The lieutenant could not know that Ki-Gor's sudden woodenness of manner was shyness and reserve. The white man's custom of shaking hands was always awkward to the jungle lord.

"Er—how do you do," gasped Arnsdale.

"Welcome," the White Lord said.

"Great honor, and all that, to meet you," declared Arnsdale unsteadily, with a glance at N'Geeso. "I—I would like to offer you a sort of present."

"Oh?" said Ki-Gor, his brows arching.

"Ah, yes," gulped Arnsdale. "Only take a moment." He turned and muttered to the Somali corporal.

The black looked troubled, but he obediently drew his knife, and starting down the line of soldiers, began cutting the metal buttons from their tunics.

When the corporal was finished, having cut his own and the lieutenant's buttons also, he tumbled them all into Arns-

dale's cupped hands. With a strained smile, the lieutenant held the buttons out to Ki-Gor.

"Here," he said. "I'm sorry there aren't more. They aren't much of a gift, but perhaps they will be of use to you."

Ki-Gor fell back a step, his mouth dropped open. The lieutenant followed him, his smile grown more strained as he jerkily encouraged Ki-Gor to take the buttons.

Had the lieutenant had too much sun, wondered Ki-Gor, or had he been foolish enough to drink some of the pygmy beer which N'Geeso pressed on guests? This was the strangest thing he'd ever had happen to him.

Not knowing what else to do, he finally allowed Arnsdale to press the buttons into his hands. He was still holding them foolishly, trying to think of anything in the world to say, when N'Geeso hoarsely invited the two white men to his hut.

THE MOMENT he heard N'Geeso's voice, Ki-Gor's head shot up, suspicion flaring in his eyes. The little chieftain had swiftly turned and started for his hut, entirely too swiftly. Ki-Gor saw how the pygmy leader's shoulders were quaking and heaving.

"N'Geeso!" he snapped accusingly. "I see your handprint in this! Speak up now, you little devil and tell the truth!"

With that, N'Geeso could contain himself no longer. He burst into gales of laughter, and bending double, reeled weakly about, finally falling to the ground in utter collapse.

Ki-Gor gave a violent roar, assailed the pygmy with a storm of native invective. Then chopping off in mid-sentence, he suddenly began to laugh himself, his scowl swept away by delight. He was as convulsed as N'Geeso by the ridiculous prank.

The mass of pygmies quickly took in the situation and also began to laugh, and for a moment, the Somali joined them. Only Arnsdale, who had understood nothing of Ki-Gor's remarks in the pygmy tongue, failed to understand what was going on. He looked about him wildly, thinking over and over to himself that if he ever got home he would never set foot out of England again, no matter if it meant facing a firing squad.

Ki-Gor eventually got hold of himself, and with tears streaming down his face, went over and put both hands on Arnsdale's shoulders in the friendliest fashion.

"That little imp, N'Geeso, made fools of us both," he chuckled.

Arnsdale began to sputter angrily.

"Don't be angry with him," said Ki-Gor. "Apparently, the opportunity to joke me was just too good for him to pass up. He'd sell his soul to make a fool of either me or Tembu George."

"You—you mean he deliberately led me to make an ass of myself?" exclaimed the embarrassed officer.

"I'm afraid so," chuckled the White Lord. "Just what was I supposed to do with your buttons?"

"Why, make bracelets and necklaces out of them," indignantly exploded Arnsdale. "He said you loved them. He made you out a roaring wild man who would be angered beyond words if you didn't get your beloved ornaments."

Ki-Gor's great shoulders shook uncontrollably at the advantage N'Geeso had taken of the green young soldier.

Arnsdale turned to confront his eight Somali. They stiffened to attention, suddenly fearful because they had dared laugh at a white officer. But instead of an angry denunciation, the lieutenant smiled at them.

"It was a wonderful prank on me, Corporal," he said. "I've got lots to learn. Do what you can about getting those buttons back on. And Corporal, when pygmies start giving me advice again, don't be afraid to speak your own mind."

The corporal saluted, his dark eyes beaming approval of his officer. He took the buttons from Ki-Gor, and swinging about, began redistributing them.

VII

WHILE a feast was being prepared, Ki-Gor explained how his friends the Masai had captured the slavers. Arnsdale tried to write the facts down so he could make a full report, but having never heard a gun fired in anger, he grew so engrossed, he kept forgetting to make notes.

"But you make no mention of yourself," he stated, when Ki-Gor finished describ-

ing the night attack. "You took part, didn't you?"

"You can mention me in connection with what happened the next morning," directed the White Lord, and he told of the gorilla raid. "Slaker and the blonde girl were lost. The responsibility for their deaths rests on me, not on the Masai. I was in charge of the camp then, and I was unable to save them."

Arnsdale winced. "Horrible way to die," he muttered.

"I don't mind so much about Slaker," Ki-Gor said. "He'd earned an evil death. But I can't forget that girl. She's on my conscience. It was my duty to protect her and I failed."

Arnsdale was quick to try to console him, pointing out how fortunate he was to have suffered as few casualties as he did. Now that he knew why the Bantus had been so long in getting well enough to trek, he was too ashamed to tell Ki-Gor how he had thought the White Lord guilty of mistreating them.

After the noonday feast, Arnsdale made his farewells. The more time he spent with Ki-Gor, the less he was able to reconcile the White Lord's quiet, almost gentle manner with his warlike reputation.

"I'm sorry I can't go part of the way with you," apologized the jungle man. "You'll travel fairly close to where the Masai are waiting for me, but I can't go



until the pygmies finish brewing some poison for us."

"Poison?" said the officer, raising his eyebrows.

"For tipping spears and arrows," explained Ki-Gor. "We're going into gorilla country."

Arnsdale shook his head slowly.

"After what you told me," he fervently declared, "I don't think I'd want any part of such a hunt."

Ki-Gor smiled.

"We're not hunting apes," he said. "My pet elephant, Marmo, wandered off while I was away and a pygmy hunter saw his tracks near the Ingagi territory the other day. The bush is pretty thick in there, so we may be a long time running him down. I want my men to be ready in case the apes cause trouble."

Arnsdale glanced skeptically at the bow strung across Ki-Gor's back.

"What you need is a rifle," he advised, "and a high powered one at that."

"I'll choose the poison," the White Lord told him. "No matter where you hit a gorilla with a poison-tipped arrow, he's finished. But if you miss a vital spot with a rifle, you're finished."

"It works that fast?" asked the lieutenant in surprise.

"It does the way N'Geeso makes it," answered the jungle man.

He saw the question come into the officer's eyes. "Don't ask me what he mixes up," he went on. "I don't know. That's one secret the pygmies won't let out. It's been their protection against big fellows like us for hundreds of years."

Arnsdale glanced at the small figures about him with new respect.

"Jove!" he said. "No wonder the little beggars are so cocky." He stared at the masai with wonder.

N'Geeso came up then, had the Bantus marched up and turned over to the Somali troops. The chieftain spoke rapidly to Ki-Gor, his glance flicking repeatedly to the officer.

"What is it?" asked Arnsdale when the jungle man was slow to translate.

"N'Geeso says there has been at least one ape near his kraal every day for a whole moon," explained Ki-Gor. "He warns you to be careful. He thinks the tree-people have a grudge against the Ban-

tus and are waiting for them to be moved from the kraal."

The lieutenant appeared bewildered. "Eh?" he mumbled.

"He's giving you advice in good faith," Ki-Gor said, warning him to guard his expression. "The natives look on the Ingagi as being considerable more than dumb beasts. I might say, it is rather puzzling for them to stay around the kraal. Wouldn't hurt to be a little careful."

"Uh, yes, yes," said Arnsdale hastily. "Thank him for me."

But his tone betrayed the fact he thought N'Geeso's warning ridiculous. Why, any schoolboy knew a maneuver of that kind was beyond the capabilities of any species of animal.

As he marched away down the trail at the head of his men, he smiled to himself. It was somehow reassuring to find, that for all their supposed knowledge of the jungle, the pygmies were really a naive and simple people. Imagine apes maintaining a month's vigil over a kraal, watching for an opportunity to attack a few Bantu prisoners.

But had he possessed Ki-Gor's animal keen senses, he would have known that even as he smiled, a great hairy figure was crouched in the underbrush not a knife-throw from him, peering with beady eyes at the line of marching men.

Hardly were the men out of sight when the gorilla rose silently, its black, wet nostrils working. A sliver of sunlight reaching down through the branches illuminated its brutish features. The whole left side of the brute's face was distorted into a permanent snarl by a hideous, many-tongued scar. The beast turned with a low, angry growl, and hurried away through the forest.

VIII

HELENE strolled idly down the winding game trail. Until Ki-Gor returned from the pygmy kraal, she had little to occupy her. The Masai, in typical native fashion, were content to eat and sleep away the hours, but time hung heavily on Helene's hands. It was always so when her bronzed mate was absent.

She came to a M'tondo tree, occupied herself like a bored child by prodding its

rubbery bulbs with her spear-point to let the white sap drain out. When that task was diligently attended to, she moved on to a bed of Maheena blossoms in a sun-splashed glen.

Helene pored over the clusters of blue, crimson and yellow flowers, trying to make up her mind which blooms she should select for a garland. Finally, she rejected them all, deciding she would wait and find a single orchid for her hair. Without leaving the path, she rejected a score of blooms before selecting a pure white one.

She paused to munch a few berries, debating whether she should turn back to the camp. A vanka lizard darted out of the Wassa grass not four feet from her, snared a green fly with a single dart of its forked tongue. The lizard froze for a few seconds, watching her with its cold, gem-like eyes.

Helene had half-turned to retrace her steps when a blue and orange kingfisher swooped down in its brusque, quick way to perch on a Rapphia palm. The red-haired girl looked at the bird and smiled with sudden inspiration.

She set off along the trail at a trot. The kingfisher had reminded her of a deep, clear pool of water about a mile away.

Tembu George would be furious if he knew she had strayed so far from camp, but what better way was there to pass the time than with a cool, refreshing swim.

The fern-splashed banks of the pool lay in shade, but the sun drove its white brilliance into the center of the water, flood-lighting the clean gravel of the bottom and the darting shapes of gaudy-colored fish.

Helene gave a contented sigh, leaned her spear against a tree, quickly dropped her bow and quiver of arrows beside it. She had been foolish not to think of the place before. With impatient fingers, she untied her scanty halter, dropped it to the ground. Then, with considerable wriggling, she slid out of the tight leopard-skin shorts.

She took a deep, happy breath as though she had just rid herself of many cloying layers of clothing. As she speculated on where she would plunge into the water, her hands in the immemorial way of women explored the curve of her hips, the smooth flatness of her stomach, the swell of her bosom.

Then taking two quick steps forward, she sprang lightly out over the water, knifed down in a long, slanting dive. For



more than an hour she entertained herself by splashing about in the pool, swimming and floating, diving deep to chase blue and red nuhana fish or retrieve some odd-shaped pebble.

When a pleasant weariness began to permeate her healthy young body, she reluctantly left the water. Her hair had come unbound while she swam, and standing nude on the bank, she ran her fingers through it, fluffing it loosely over her bare shoulders and back. She brushed half-heartedly at the drops of water which clung like jewels to the soft gold of her skin, as she looked about for a place to rest and sunbathe.

She chose a low-hanging limb. She picked up her halter and shorts, and holding them in her teeth, climbed easily the slanting trunk of the tree. She walked out along the broad limb to the point where it was dappled with sunlight filtered through a protective screen of leaves in the higher branches.

Helene stretched out on her stomach on the warm bark, resting her head on her arms. She relaxed, lulled by the warmth and the faint sway of the limb. She lay so still, two purple and gold virini birds came to rest on a branch a few yards away. While Helene listened to the liquid music of their song, she drifted into sleep.

She awakened with a start, every muscle suddenly tense, her heart racing. There was no mistaking the sound which had lashed her awake. That angry, rumbling burst of noise could come only from a gorilla's throat. And the beast sounded as though he were directly below her.

Helene stifled the instinctive impulse to leap up and flee. She tried desperately to remember Ki-Gor's teachings. Keeping her body motionless, she raised her head with agonizing slowness until she could take in the whole scene about the pool.

THE GORILLA hadn't seen her. She was certain of that, for the brute stood at the edge of the water, looking away from her. He kept shifting and turning, angling his head as though listening intently. He apparently had come swiftly out of the forest, passed directly beneath her.

The ape was clearly wrought up about something, but with a certain measure of relief, Helene realized she wasn't the cause. He hadn't discovered her presence. It was difficult to know what she should do next.

Both courses of action open to her were fraught with danger. The least sound or movement was certain to attract the gorilla's attention, so despite her almost overwhelming urge to flee, Helene would take a long chance if she got up and tried to run back along the limb and lose herself in the forest.

Her only other course was to lie still and gamble that, agitated as he was, the ape would storm off before a vagrant breeze carried her scent to him. The safest plan, she finally decided, was to do as the average defenseless jungle creature would and "play dead."

Her blue eyes never left the bull. Taut-limbed, she endured the creeping seconds, and it seemed she had chosen rightly, for the beast showed no intimation that he suspected a human was within a hundred miles.

But to her disappointment he made no move to leave. Instead, he prowled nervously about the bank, stopping ever so often to listen. Then at last he reared up on his squat, enormously muscled legs, and pounding his chest, sent a shattering roar reverberating out over the trees.

As he finished, he gave a few deep, guttural growls like a man talking to himself, and for the first time wheeled about so Helene could see his face. Her breath caught in her throat. The whole left side of the beast's face was rent by a jagged scar.

The gorilla was the same one who had borne off the blonde girl!

A sick weakness gathered in Helene's stomach. Was she to be the second woman murdered by the vicious beast? It was apparent by the gorilla's looks that he had travelled long and fast. His breath came in quick, hard heaves. His hairy body was matted with burrs and mud.

"He's turned killer," Helene thought.

Then abruptly, the bull threw himself down on the bank, began to noisily gulp water. Lying as he was, there was no chance for him to see Helene.



"I'd be a fool to stay here longer," Helene told herself. "I musn't let this opportunity pass."

Quickly, yet with infinite caution, she raised on hands and knees. The gorilla hesitated in his drinking. Helene froze. The gleam of the sun on her naked body would be certain to attract his eye if he turned.

But after a few explosive snuffles to clear his nostrils of water, the ape returned to sating his thirst. Helene picked up her halter and shorts in her right hand. She was on her feet then, the pulse throbbing in her throat as she turned her back to the beast, started for the tree trunk.

She judged it would take her fifteen steps to reach the trunk. Then she must swing around the bole of the tree, run out along another low branch about ten steps before she could leap to the limb of the nearest tree. Once in that second tree, the dense jungle growth would begin to close around her, hide her from view.

In that moment, Helene was deaf to every sound except the ape's sucking of the water, for so long as that sound continued she was safe. In the same manner, she was momentarily blind to everything except the branch along which she ran. It might mean her life to stumble or to strike against a dry twig.

And being oblivious for that fleeting interval to what went on around her, she didn't discover the line of gorillas threading out of the forest until she had reached the trunk and was starting to swing around it. Her eyes couldn't fail, then, to see the dark, rapidly moving line of beasts.

3—Jungle—Fall

THE PATH they followed led directly under her tree and the leading animal was almost beneath her. Helen's face went white. Her fingers dug into the bark and her breathing stopped. She squeezed against the trunk, drawing back so for a brief instant at least, she wouldn't be exposed to the view of the whole group.

The lead ape gave a harsh, short bark. The scar-faced gorilla by the pool immediately leaped up and answered with a barrage of guttural sounds. Stunned as she was, the swift hope drove up in Helene that the newcomers would charge the surly beast by the pool. If they fought, there was yet a small chance she might get away while the whole pack's attention was focused on the battle.

As the Ingagi poured past beneath her, the great brute by the pool gave a sudden roar. Helene turned her head, her glance darting to see how many of the newcomers were closing in on him. And as she looked, all hope died within her.

The scarred male was pointing one huge arm directly at her. As he had turned to confront the line of apes, the naked girl had come directly in his line of vision. And to Helene's horror, she saw that instead of attacking him, every one of the newcomers was whirling to search for her.

"It's now or never!" thought Helene, and grasping her clothes in her teeth, she started scrambling up the tree trunk, reaching for the higher branches before she made her break for the forest.

But even as she moved, the scarred brute was roaring again. A vast clamor broke from the throats of the apes as he

spoke and they began to rush about in apparent confusion. Helene had barely reached the middle branches, though, when she learned there was a deadly method in their wild scrambling.

The Ingagi fanned out in all directions, some leaping into the trees, some running through the brush, while others gathered around the trunk beneath her. She knew then that her hope of their fighting the scarred ape had been vain from the first. They actually were following his orders to surround her, blocking off every avenue of escape.

The great brute had summoned them to the pool. That had been the purpose of his thunderous calls. That had been the reason for his rapt listening.

Helene suddenly had no place to go except to climb higher. Apes stood guard in the branches of every tree around her. Another loose circle of the creatures ringed her perch on the ground. She cursed the moment when she had selected practically the only tree around the pool which stood so nearly by itself that it could be easily blockaded.

Conquering her first feeling of panic, she realized the apes were making no attempt to move in on her. None were even climbing the tree she was in. They merely held the positions they had taken in the first scramble, warily watching her.

Like a treed animal, she stopped climbing, her head constantly moving as she tried to keep all her tormentors in view. The barking and growling of the Ingagi died away and in the silence she could hear her own quick, labored breathing. It gave her a strange, awful feeling to have those black, glittering eyes staring at her from every side.

She backed against the trunk, raised a hand to take from her mouth the clothing which she had been gripping with her teeth. She held the halter and shorts for a time, and then suddenly looking at them, seemed surprised to find them in her hand. It was as though for the first time she was conscious she was unclothed. Mechanically, Helene donned the two brief garments, keeping her attention fixed on the silent brutes.

She bit her lower lip, looked at the ground far below. That was the better way, down there. Their fangs and brutal,

tearing paws would never close on her alive, she resolved. She only needed to step off the branch and it would be all over.

"Oh, Ki-Gor, Ki-Gor," she murmured, and her voice broke.

Abruptly, her jaw hardened and she blinked back the tears which threatened to start in her wide eyes. She waited then, almost calmly poised for the death-fall she planned.

A full minute, and then another, passed before she heard the expected flurry of movement, the burst of snarls from the beasts. That was the signal she awaited. She took a quick, shallow breath and looked down.

IX

NOT UNTIL the next afternoon following Lt. Arnsdale's departure did Ki-Gor get back to the Masai camp. Two things delayed him, the first was the long period required to brew the strong poison he needed; the second, N'Geeso's insistence on returning with the White Lord.

"Tembu George is no more than a helpless child," N'Geeso had scoffed. "It is well to have a man such as myself along in case of trouble."

Ki-Gor had smothered a smile behind his hand. "A rather large child, though," he said.

"Wah!" N'Geeso sniffed, and from his expression no one could have guessed of his great affection for Tembu George. "And what good is size? The more blubber and belly for the mind to push around, the less chance it has to work on important things!"

So N'Geeso came along, blithely disregarding the fact that his company made Ki-Gor's trip many hours longer. When alone, the White Lord could travel the tree paths, but with the small black he had to keep to the winding, difficult ground routes.

As they trotted into the camp, Tembu George rose, mock dismay clouding his face. "I see you, O Ki-Gor," he boomed in the standard native welcome. "But what is that strange creature trailing at your heels? It is too small and ugly to be a monkey."

N'Geeso drew to a stop before the mas-

sive Masai chieftain, his glance running disdainfully over the big warrior. He spat in the dust at Tembu George's feet.

"Always the same," he observed to Ki-Gor. "Find a smell-ridden place piled high with gnawed bones and you can be sure it is either a jackal's den or a Masai camp."

He appeared for the first time to notice Tembu George.

"The White Lord begged me to leave my duties," he carelessly confided, "because he needed at least one warrior along on the trek." He squinted at Tembu George's grinning warriors. "After seeing these great-bellied beasts, I can understand his concern. Ho! The Masai women are indeed long-suffering to put up with such sluggish cattle for husbands."

Tembu George grimaced in pain, threw out his hands appealingly to Ki-Gor.

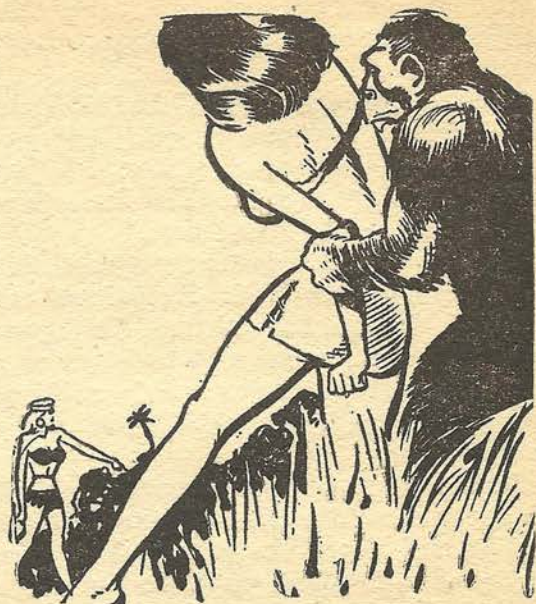
"O, Ki-Gor, my people bear not even the sun a greater love than they hold for you," the big man said. "Knowing this, why must you inflict such cruel punishment on us? Test our friendship by tying us naked across anthills, chain us and let hawks tear at our bellies, but please don't make us endure this demented rooster."

Ki-Gor, who was occupied in looking about the camp for Helene, chuckled and shook his head helplessly at the Masai warriors. He had witnessed a thousand variations of this act. Except in battle, when they fought side by side like twin demons, N'Geeso and Tembu George spent most of their time fanning the flames of their mock feud.

"Watch your tongue, great elephant!" the pygmy snapped, his hand darting to the gleaming blade dangling from a thong at his waist. "Seek not protection in my rule of not slaying inferiors! For a grain of sand, I'd spill your insides out on the earth before you."

"With your clumsy handling of a blade," taunted Tembu George, "it's more likely you'd impale yourself and cry for me to save you." He waved a hand commandingly at his men. "Put all food and belongings under constant guard until our unwelcome visitor is gone."

With a wild sputtering, N'Geeso whirled his long knife free, poised it for instant use.



"No pleading will save you now!" he screeched. "Arm yourself! By all the gods, now I teach you your last lesson."

Tembu George calmly, thoughtfully regarded the prancing, leaping little man. He raised his eyebrows at one of his warriors.

"Moka," he said, "bring me a stick—only a small stick. It would be unfair to use anything else against his unskilled blade."

Ki-Gor cut N'Geeso's tirade short by stepping between the two men.

"Since Tembu George is to die," he laughed, "let me first ask what has become of my mate."

Tembu George was abruptly serious. He pointed to the sky.

"The sun was there when she left for a walk," he said, indicating an interval of about two hours. "She has been restless ever since you left, but this is the longest she has been away. She promised not to go far."

His frown revealed all too clearly, though, that he had begun to worry about her.

"I'll take a few men and hunt for her," Tembu George said casually. Actually, he had been organizing such a search when the White Lord arrived.

Ki-Gor stroked his chin, considering. Helene was like a child when she went out alone, wandering from one bright, new object to another, losing all idea of time. She often roamed much further afield

than she planned, but she knew the jungle's dangers and was never really careless.

"She's probably all right," he told Tembu George. "Instead of everybody going out and embarrassing her, I'll just hunt her up by myself. You know how she is about being fussed over."

Tembu George reluctantly agreed that Ki-Gor's idea was best. He pointed out the path Helene had taken. Her spoor was as simple for one man to follow as a dozen, and since she was merely strolling, the fleet-footed jungle lord could easily overtake her.

Ki-Gor took a drink of water, picked his spear out of the pile of Masai weapons and started down the path. Before he had gone a hundred yards, he heard the pad of bare feet behind him. When he looked back, N'Geeso grinned pleasantly at him.

He grunted as though he disapproved. Actually he was pleased by the pygmy's unsolicited company. Ki-Gor set a fast pace, but despite N'Geeso's short legs, he hung effortlessly at the white man's heels. Like all pygmies, he was a swift-moving ghost in the thick bush. The two men had trekked together so much that they seldom had need for words, working a trail with the smooth efficiency of two hunting dogs.

They had trekked for an hour when they passed the sun-swept glen where Helene paused to admire the thick patch of Maheena blossoms. A short way further on they startled a vanka lizard stalking flies which buzzed over some crushed berries she had dropped. Then the path widened, began to follow the bank of a rambling, water-lily choked stream.

To give Ki-Gor's eyes a rest from straining after Helene's spoor, N'Geeso wordlessly took the lead. The White Lord fell back without objection. The pygmy was an expert tracker, and by taking turns, neither would grow weary.

THE TRAIL made an abrupt bend following a turn of the stream. With his attention centered on the ground, N'Geeso didn't see the leopard crouched in the fork of a tree not ten yards ahead when he came around the curve.

But Ki-Gor, running just behind the

pygmy caught the strong, warm leopard scent the moment he turned. It was in such situations that his close kinship with the wild became strikingly apparent. His nostrils were keen as any animals, and where N'Geeso, for all his jungle cunning, suspected nothing, that odor was like a jangling alarm to the White Lord.

His eyes, sudden slits of light, flashed over the trail even as the word *leopard* formed in his mind. He saw the tawny blur of movement against the brown bark of the tree.

The yellow-eyed killer had crouched above the trail for more than an hour while the hunger cramps in its belly grew more severe.

Now as N'Geeso reached five strides past the bend, the deadly jungle assassin gave a single slithering movement to gather its strength. Then like molten metal flung from a catapult, it shot in a rippling mass at the pygmy.

Ki-Gor caught the cat's swift, nervous gathering of muscles. "*Devil-cat!*" he screamed in warning, and he was bounding forward, his right arm whipping in a blur of motion as he cast his spear.

N'Geeso was without means to fend off the unexpected attack. He hadn't brought his spear, choosing to rely on blowgun and darts for protection. And there was no time for him to free his blowgun, fumble a dart from the pouch at his waist, fit it to his lips and puff.

At Ki-Gor's cry, the pygmy looked up, his face blank with surprise as he saw the leopard lunging down upon him. Shock held him immobile for a moment, and then too late, he tried to leap back.

That leap was never begun. More than two hundred pounds of solid bone and muscle slammed into him from the side. The White Lord had cast his spear, and then dropping his left shoulder, crashed against N'Geeso with every bit of driving power he could summon.

Not realizing what had happened, the pygmy chieftain was hammered off his feet, flung whirling through the air to land ten feet out into the stream. Ki-Gor kept his balance as he hit, utilized the recoil from the collision to hurl himself to the furthest inner edge of the path.

His spear rammed into the leopard's chest just as Ki-Gor struck N'Geeso. The

cat screamed with pain, lashing wildly with its claws. It was jolted off-balance, but such was the angle of its leap, that the weight of its body alone would have carried the animal to the spot at which it had aimed.

But thanks to Ki-Gor's lightning quick action the lashing cat struck bare ground. Neither man was within its reach, N'Geeso landing in the water and the White Lord bringing up at the edge of the path.

The leopard reared, screaming and coughing blood. Spinning away from the man in the stream, it came at the White Lord. Luring the beast away from his small friend, Ki-Gor leaped into the bush, bulled his way for a few steps into the mass of vines and bush, then made an abrupt right turn and shoved straight ahead another six steps.

A violent threshing broke out behind him. The leopard, trying to charge after him with four feet of spear protruding from its body, had become enmeshed. The shaft had tangled in the undergrowth, as Ki-Gor hoped, and every movement the cat made helped tear out its life.

Ki-Gor watched the cat grow weaker. Suddenly, seeing his chance, he dove at it, knife in hand. The swift churn of his blade ended the killer's struggles. Without pausing to wipe the knife clean, the jungle man leaped over the beast and ran back to the trail.

N'Geeso stood waist deep in the expanse of water lilies, dazedly shaking his head and wiping wet hands over his face. The unexpected impact of Ki-Gor's driving body had saved the pygmy's life, but it had nearly knocked him senseless.

"Are you hurt?" asked Ki-Gor in concern.

N'Geeso groaned, tried to focus his eyes on the White Lord.

"What happened?" muttered the black.

"I hit you," explained Ki-Gor. "There wasn't anything else to do. You didn't have a chance to escape the leopard."

N'Geeso stiffened. Mention of the cat cleared the fog from his brain.

"It—it's gone?" he asked.

"Dead!" answered the jungle man.

N'Geeso relaxed, rubbed his bruised side. He squinted at Ki-Gor, grumbled, "Wah! I believe the cat got the best of



it. At least, he died quickly. I'll probably linger on for many suns."

"Stop fooling," smilingly ordered Ki-Gor. "Are any bones broken?"

The pygmy grunted miserably. "After all," he said, "what's a crushed chest? And no man needs more than one arm. Only next time, just leave me to the leopard."

Ki-Gor knew then N'Geeso wasn't hurt. If he had suffered anything more than bruises, he wouldn't be taking on so.

"You little fake," laughed the White Lord. "You'll get no sympathy from me. You're not harmed yet, but keep standing in those water lilies and snakes or crocodiles will change that."

"Bah!" N'Geeso scoffed. "Impossible! Have not three wizards foretold that N'Geeso need fear only beer and women?"

But all the same, he began trying to pull his feet from the mud. He wriggled and strained and slowly a queer look came over his face. He looked down at himself. The water had advanced half-way up his chest.

"Ki-Gor!" he cried in alarm. "The mud swallows me."

With surprise the White Lord realized that in the brief time they had talked that the pygmy had sunk deeper. He wasn't upset for there was plenty of time to pull N'Geeso free. He glanced around for something to hold out to the little man. The only thing he saw was the blowgun which had been knocked from N'Geeso's belt in the collision. The gun proved too short, though, when he tried it.

"By all the gods," exploded the pygmy, "don't just stand there! Do something!"

"Don't get excited," Ki-Gor said. "I'll get my spear and have you out of there in no time."

He crossed the path and started into

the underbrush. A low, chilling snarl froze him in his tracks. Two leopards, one of them coal black, the other spotted, stared at him over the body of the animal he had killed.

THE SPOTTED BEAST'S hind-quarters were bunched, the muscles of its long body drawn tight as steel cables, one forepaw lifted for the spring. The other cat stood behind it, utterly motionless, its yellow eyes burning into Ki-Gor.

The White Lord's mind raced like the flickering leap of lightning. He had a fighting chance to cope with one leopard. But against the fearful speed and strength of two of the killers he had no hope. There was no time for him to reach the bow slung on his back. The faintest movement would bring them catapulting at him.

Had they not been standing almost on top of him, he could have used his old trick of escaping into the trees. But with the cat a mere six yards away, they could rip him apart before he hardly swung his feet off the ground. He was as much cornered as if he had been backed against the wall.

The knife in his hand, still wet with the blood of the other leopard, seemed puny and useless.

Terror would have exploded in the minds of most men, made them try to turn and run. And death would have brought them down from behind. But Ki-Gor was the jungle's own, and like any beast at bay, he kept his face to the enemy, meaning to fight to his last breath since there was no hope of escape.

Even as the rumbling growls lashed from the leopard's throats, his own lips sheared apart in a snarl of hate. Then, swift as a darting gleam of sunlight, the spotted cat flashed at him. As though triggered by the movement of its fellow, the black leopard sprang a fraction later.

Instead of going to pieces in what he accepted as the last, black moment of his life, Ki-Gor's whole being galvanized in a final, supreme effort. Never before had he achieved such sure and terrible speed.

Exactly as the spotted cat left the ground, the White Lord flung back, crouching. The sun sparked red from his

lifted blade. He moved back just far enough to ruin the cat's leap.

Already off the earth, the leopard couldn't lengthen its spring. Yet the man was so close, the hurtling cat instinctively strained out with its forepaws in the hope of reaching him. But Ki-Gor had planned the dangerous maneuver well. The leopard had to touch the ground before reaching him.

The raking claws missed him by inches. And then there was the merest fraction of time in which the jungle killer had to jerk its forelegs to the earth before rearing for the death-blow. That fleeting interval was Ki-Gor's one and only opportunity to strike. Before he could ever find another opening, the black leopard would also be on him.

Too fast for the eye to follow, he was against the spotted beast. His knife outraced the reaching fangs, hammered into the animal's neck. His legs flashed over the leopard's back, locked tight about its belly. He was gripping the creature's neck then with his left hand, hammering and slashing the blade with his right.

He fought in the wildest frenzy, riding the leaping, twisting leopard, expecting any instant to feel the fangs and claws of the black leopard tear out his back. The berserk screams of the cat were deafening. He could see nothing except a whirling blur.

Once he thought he heard shouts, perhaps some frantic warning from N'Geeso, but in that moment of supreme effort, nothing but the leopard actually registered on his consciousness.

The strength went out of his insane mount with startling abruptness. The leopard staggered, bowing its back. Its snarls died as it gave a great bloody cough. Then its legs collapsed.

The White Lord leaped away as the killer fell, his slitted eyes searching for the black devil. The lunging cat had carried him twenty yards down the path by the stream. He was a fearful figure crouched there on the trail, his arms thrown wide, wrath surging over him like the play of flame, the great, blood-streaked drum of his chest swollen with writhing muscles.

For the space of seconds, Ki-Gor stood utterly motionless, staring. A queer, un-

believing look crept over his features. His arms dropped slowly to his sides then, the tense muscles of his body loosening.

"It cannot be!" he said, and again he repeated it.

Stunned, he tore his eyes away, looked at N'Geeso in the stream for confirmation.

"It is true," N'Geeso said. "I saw it happen." And the pygmy was so completely confounded himself that momentarily he had forgotten his own danger.

The black leopard lay dead on the path, its skull crushed to a bloody pulp. And standing wide-legged over the cat was a strikingly beautiful white woman clad in a crudely-fashioned halter and breechclout made of money-skin. She had long blonde hair reaching to her waist. And in her hand she held a long, knobbed club from which fresh blood dripped.

It was Raa!

X

IT WAS the woman taken by the In-gagi, the strange woman Ki-Gor had believed dead these many weeks! And no wound or scar marred her honey-colored skin.

She stood there utterly poised, her grey eyes brilliant with excitement as she surveyed the jungle man's bronzed figure. "Ah!" she declared in an odd, low voice. "Ki-Gor—not—hurt." One could feel her searching for each word, framing her mouth to pronounce it.

The White Lord blinked. Not only had the girl come back from the dead, but now she could speak. Before he could gather his wits, she had turned and disappeared into the underbrush.

Ki-Gor darted forward, thinking she meant to disappear as mysteriously as she had come. "Raa, wait!" he cried. But when he got to where he could see her, he found she was only drawing his spear from the leopard he had killed in the bush.

She walked out on the path with the spear, handed it to him with the merest hint of a smile. She pointed to N'Geeso.

"By all the gods!" exclaimed Ki-Gor. "I had forgotten N'Geeso in my surprise."

He reached the spear shaft out to the pygmy, and then bracing himself, tugged



the little man free of the quicksand, drew him up on the bank. N'Geeso was beside himself with excitement, but not because of his rescue.

"She killed that devil-cat like a tame goat," he babbled. "I was watching you as the spotted one struck."

N'Geeso stabbed a finger at the blonde girl.

"The next thing I knew a black leopard burst out of the bush with her astride it. She killed it with two blows!"

The woman watched N'Geeso curiously. "What—talk—that?" she asked. "Not Ing-less."

"That's pygmy," said Ki-Gor hurriedly. "But tell me, where'd you come from? How is it you're alive and unhurt?" Then he caught himself. "But first let me thank you for saving my life. You took a terrible risk to do it. For a woman—well—I never heard of such courage."

She leaned down, pulled a handful of grass, wiped her knobbed club clean.

"Raa—pay—back!" she said deliberately. She concentrated a moment. "You—save—Raa—once."

What a queer thing to say, thought Ki-Gor.

"Why, you owed me nothing," he objected. "I'm the one to be grateful."

She smiled, waved away his thanks.

"But, please," Ki-Gor pleaded, "tell me how in the world you escaped the apes, how you've managed to keep alive since then. I just can't believe it!"

Then slowly, with many hesitations as she groped for words, she explained.

"Apes not try kill Raa. Make go long walk to where live. All time watch and hit Raa if not like. No can go away. Bad. All time, bad."

"You mean they kept you prisoner?" Ki-Gor exclaimed in amazement.

There were legends of such things among the blacks, of course, but Ki-Gor had been around the great apes all of his life and had never found the least substance to such stories.

She nodded gravely. "Long time Raa watch and wait. Be very good. Then get time to run away. Raa come here."

Ki-Gor puzzled over her words. Then suddenly another thought struck him.

"How does it come you can talk now?" he questioned, "when you didn't seem to understand a word in camp?"

Her red lips curved in a pleased smile.

"Other man teach Raa," she said.

"What other man?" demanded Ki-Gor quickly.

"Su-laa-kur," she answered with difficulty.

Ki-Gor's face hardened. "Sam Slaker!" he cried. "Then they kept that dango alive, too." His mind raced. "Where is he? Did he escape with you?"

She told him "no," that she had fled alone. Slaker was still in the hands of the apes. The jungle man relaxed.

"I should leave him there," muttered Ki-Gor, half to himself. Then he frowned. "But tell me about you. Who are you? What are you?" And the long stored up questions about the strange girl poured from Ki-Gor's lips.

She regarded him hesitantly.

"Not time talk now," she said. "You come! Your woman need!"

"What?" he cried. "Who do you mean?"

"Haa-lane," she pronounced with difficulty. "Apes have her."

Ki-Gor's face went pale. His barrage of questions fell with such violence that the blonde blinked dumbly, confused by the rain of words.

Realizing finally what was happening, he got hold of himself.

RAA explained that Helene had strayed into the apes' feeding area and that they had surprised and captured her. She didn't think Helene had been badly hurt,

but she wasn't sure, because Raa had taken advantage of the excitement while the apes were cornering Helene to make her escape. Raa said she had followed the same path along which Helene had come, knowing that Ki-Gor must be near.

"Raa came you," she said, "so can save woman." Her expression was deeply serious. "Raa know way. Raa show you. In night, can save."

A small measure of relief came to Ki-Gor.

With Raa's help, he could at least free Helene within a few hours.

N'Geeso, who had understood enough of their talk not to need an explanation in his language, immediately offered, "I go swiftly to get the Masai!"

Raa looked from the pygmy to Ki-Gor. "What small one say?"

When Ki-Gor explained, she shook her head, pointed toward the late afternoon sun. She declared there would be no need for additional men if they started immediately. At dark, the prisoners were put in a cave and one gorilla left to guard them, while the other apes wandered off to their favorite sleeping spots to nap until moonrise.

She said she could lead Ki-Gor and N'Geeso directly to the cave. They could surprise the ape, easily finish him with their weapons.

But if they waited to get the Masai, she explained, they wouldn't reach the cave until after the moon rose. She pointed out that when the moon was full, as it would be tonight, the whole tribe would be out in force. She added that they could wait until the next night, if Ki-Gor wished, though it was always possible for the tribe to suddenly shift to another area.

But neither Ki-Gor nor N'Geeso could bear the thought of leaving Helene in the beasts' hands throughout the night, let alone through the following day. They immediately decided to forget the Masai and handle the rescue together.

"Good!" approved Raa. "No dan-ger," she assured.

She patted Ki-Gor's spear and smiled faintly. "Kill easy."

Then she turned and set off at a trot along the path. In single file, the two grim-faced men followed her.

HELENE had expected the end to come suddenly. The unnatural immobility, the eerie silence of the great apes couldn't continue long. She was certain, therefore, that the outburst of noise from the apes on the ground signaled the beginning of their rush to kill her.

Like a taut-drawn bow, her lithe, curved body poised for the dive that would smash her life out on the hard earth far below. Better to meet death that way than at the hands of the beasts. Her glance stabbed down, picked the path she would follow, then swept to judge the progress of the climbing apes.

To Helene's amazement, not a single bull was moving up the trunk. The rush of the beasts had been past the tree toward the edge of the jungle.

And there, surrounded by the leaping, bellowing creatures, stood Raa and Sam Slaker, they were flanked by a guard of six burly apes who kept their milling fellows at a distance. From their expressions, they were almost as surprised to see Helene as she was them.

Then over Slaker's thin, ugly face slid a cruel smile. He half-turned to the blonde girl, his lips seeming to move quickly, but in the uproar no sound of his words reached Helene.

Helene was utterly bewildered. She long since had accepted the two as dead, and yet here they were, somehow yet alive, prisoners of the Ingagi. The iron slaver's neckband was still locked about Slaker's neck, a length of broken chain dangling from it. Helene remembered how to kidnap him a gorilla had broken that chain with his bare hands, tearing away in the process the head of the Bantu to whom Slaker had been fastened.

At a roar from their scarred leader, the Ingagi again fell silent.

Slaker's taunting voice broke the quiet, "Well, my dear, so we meet again! How very, very delightful!"

The blonde girl gave Slaker an angry glare. Then she looked up at Helene, beckoned with her hand. "Come!" she said. "Not hurt." She pointed at the apes, repeated, "Not hurt."

The girl was telling her to climb down, that the Ingagi wouldn't kill her.

"What will they do with me?" Helene asked uneasily,



"Nothing," gruffly answered Slaker, "if you don't give them any trouble. They just herd us around like a couple of pet goats and that's all there is to it."

"But—but I don't understand," Helene declared, bewildered.

Slaker spat disinterestedly.

"Who does?" he growled. "If you want to live, come on down and join the happy family. Otherwise, dive on off and break your fool neck. I'm sure I don't care one way or the other."

The blonde beckoned again, frowning as though she couldn't understand Helene's hesitation.

It would be foolish, thought Helene, not to give herself up, when she could see that both Slaker and Raa were unharmed. The idea of being completely at the beasts' mercy frightened her, but she consoled herself that she wouldn't be a captive long, Ki-Gor would find and free her. She might escape within a few hours.

She started slowly down the tree, lowering herself from branch to branch. As though struck with abrupt misgivings, she halted once, looked searchingly at Raa. The blonde smiled and nodded encouragement, and, after a moment, Helene continued to the ground.

She waited uncertainly at the base of the tree, apprehensively watching the hairy giants. They had formed a ragged circle about the trunk while she descended. The scarred leader knuckled forward, glowering. Seeing his fearful face at such close range, her heart almost stopped.

He snuffed her scent, pawed curiously at her halter first and then at her red hair. Then his huge fingers clamped over her shoulder, held her so tightly she winced.

As he caught her, he turned his head, barked gutturally at Raa. To Helene's shock, the blonde girl responded with a swift flow of the same harsh, guttural sounds. *Raa was talking to the brute in his own sub-human language of snarls and grunts.* For a full three minutes, they talked, oblivious of either Helene or Slaker.

But Slaker registered impatience rather than surprise at Raa's actions. "What's he saying," he finally demanded of Raa.

"Bantus coming," she answered. "Mog say these white men." She held up one finger, "And these black men." She held up eight fingers. "Guns!" she added meaningfully.

"Oh, don't worry about a few soldiers," said Slaker scoffingly. "Do what I've told you and they'll never have a chance to use those guns."

She considered his words, her eyes moving thoughtfully over the mass of apes.

"We go," she agreed. She pointed to Helene. "Tie!" she ordered.

"That's right," Slaker said. "Give her half a chance and she'd go skipping through the trees. I'll tie her hands with a long vine and you tell one of these monkeys to hold onto to it all the time."

Helene looked from one to the other in consternation.

"What—what is this?" she asked haltingly.

SLAKER laughed uglily, walked away to get a vine without answering. Helene noticed that a gorilla trailed behind Slaker every step he took. Raa stared at her impassively. Gone was the apparent friendliness the blonde had displayed to lure Helene down from the tree.

Not until after the slaver had tied her wrists did he speak. "It's quite simple, my dear," he said. "Yesterday your husband turned over his Bantu prisoners to a white officer and eight troops. In a short while, though he doesn't know it yet, this white officer will turn the Bantus over to me—uh—or rather to my friends here. We mean to waylay him on the trail. You

see, we plan to gather quite a few slaves, and, of course, my Bantus will come in very handy in such work."

Helene heard what he said, but the whole matter was too fantastic for her mind to accept. Surely, this must be some nightmare that she would laugh about when she awakened.

Slaker savored her expression. "Why, I believe you're almost as stupid as your husband, my dear. Can't you understand that our blonde friend rules these apes. She's one of them. They reared her."

"But that can't be true," protested Helene. "You're both their prisoners. I saw them capture you." With her chin, she gestured at the chain Slaker wore. "You wouldn't be wearing that if you were free."

Slaker's eyes grew mean. But he attempted to mask his anger with a false, unpleasant smile. He seemed acutely conscious that Raa was watching him.

"I am merely Raa's faithful servant, her teacher and advisor," he declared. "I am her friend."

Raa grunted disdainfully. "He slave, like you," she said. The least smile curled the corner of her lips. "He slave like try make Raa."

And then the whole incredible picture came clear to Helene. Raa was the ruler of the ape tribe. That explained the Ingagi attack on the camp. They came to rescue her, and she had turned the tables on Slaker, by making him her prisoner.

Helene's face lighted triumphantly. "She's making you serve her," she cried to Slaker. "So the great Sam Slaker has become the mousy servant of a bunch of apes." Helene actually laughed aloud.

The slaver shook with anger, knotting his fists as though to strike Helene. But at a word from Raa, the ape guarding him reached out and grasped the chain dangling from his neck, tugged it just firmly enough to remind him not to cause trouble.

"You'll laugh a different tune before I'm through with you," snarled Slaker. "Maybe I did make a mistake in capturing Raa. I didn't know who she was. But she's learning who her good friend is. I taught her to talk. Now I'm going to teach her to let slaves make life easy for

her. Yeah, I'm going to teach her a lot of things, and then we'll see who does the laughing."

He was breathing hard. "I promise it won't be Ki-Gor."

Helene disregarded the slaver, turned her attention to the blonde.

"This man is bad, Raa!" she said. "You know that. You mustn't do what he says."

Raa wasn't impressed. "He bring back man-talk to Raa. That good!" She spoke gutturally to an ape standing away from the mass. The brute came forward and Helene saw he was carrying a knobbed club. Raa took it. "He make Raa club," she said. "That good!"

"He did those things just so he could use you," Helene told her. "He's trying now to get you to kill men and you know that's bad."

Slater cursed Helene and began to talk rapidly in his defense.

Raa waved him to silence. "Men kill my people," she said, gesturing to the apes. "Now we able kill men. Men catch my people. Now we catch men."

Helene was shocked.

"Men are your people, not these apes," she said. "You must have memories of your parents, because you just said that Slaker had brought back to your mind the man-talk you'd forgotten. You can't kill your own kind."

Raa stared impassively at Helene. "These my people," she said belligerently. "They fight for Raa. Now Raa fight for them. Make weak, coward men serve them."

The strained, tense look vanished from Slaker's face. He could be sure of the blonde girl. Helene's words hadn't touched her. Raa was as much a wild animal as any of her apes, as dangerous and devoid of feeling—and as simple, if one knew how to handle her.

"You mustn't listen to Slaker, pleaded Helene. "You know you can't trust him. Look at what he tried to do to you. He'll bring ruin and death to you and the apes."

"Raa strong," said the blonde, balancing the club significantly. "He slave Raa. Do bad, he die." In her naive self-confidence, she was contemptuous of Slaker's ability to harm her.

Helene bit her lip, distressed because she couldn't break through the girl's child-

ish ego. How could she make her see the truth?

"I don't mean he'll beat your head in with a club or choke you to death," she tried to explain. "He'll talk you into destroying yourself. Like killing these soldiers. If you do that, men will hate you as they do Slaker and they'll hunt you down and kill your whole tribe. You can't win against their numbers and their weapons!"

Raa's smile was amused, superior. Taking his cue from the blonde, Slaker laughed, not meaning to overlook this opportunity to flatter Raa and torture Helene.

"You underestimate us, my dear," he said tauntingly. "We've worked it out very carefully, and by dropping so nicely into our hands, you've saved us the trouble of kidnapping you."

He dry-washed his hands, his close-set eyes gloating.

"Before anyone suspects a thing," he continued, "Ki-Gor, Tembu George, N'Geeso and a few other trouble-makers will walk oh-so-innocently into a trap for which you are the bait. And Raa, who your stupid husband and his friends will never suspect of being an enemy, will be the one to tell them the pitiful story of how you are held prisoner by savage apes. She will lead them into our hands!"

He triumphantly threw up his hands, highly pleased with his own cunning in devising such an excellent plan.

"And once we hold the jungle's key leaders," he gloated, "we hold a whip-hand on the blacks. We'll move swift and fast after that. Ah, it's amazing what a really clever person can do if he sets his mind to a thing. And my dear friend,



Ki-Gor, what a pleasant surprise this will be to him."

FEAR touched a cold finger to Helene's heart. "Raa!" she cried. "Surely you wouldn't harm the man who saved you from this mad dango? Ki-Gor helped you, yet here you are plotting against him."

"Raa's people save her," snapped the blonde. "Not need or want Ki-Gor's help. One man all same another. All weak, coward, bad." She grunted in disgust, spun on her heel and walked off. "We go!" she said.

The Ingagi hurriedly cleared a path for her, then fell into file behind, except for the scarred ape. He shoved up to the head of the line, pushed ahead of her. She patted his hurly shoulder affectionately as he took the lead.

Two hours later, a horror-stricken Helene, after being gagged by Slaker, was forced to watch helplessly while the gorillas swarmed out of ambush to overwhelm Lt. Arnsdale and his eight native troops. It happened with such suddenness that the troops had no chance to defend themselves.

Great hairy forms swinging on vine ropes smashed down from trees on the blacks. Other apes charged out of thick brush on either side of the trail. Five Somali literally were torn apart in the first rush. The other three were wounded and knocked senseless after firing a few wild shots.

Lt. Arnsdale, the young officer who had never fired a shot in anger, proved in those few tumultuous moments of battle that, as N'Geeso had predicted, he had the makings of a real fighting man.

He was the novice, yet his gun was the first to speak. He triggered three shots into the brute swinging down on him. The animal roared with pain, turned loose of the vine to soon and missed its leap. An ape sprang on a Somali within a yard of the lieutenant, fastened his fangs in the man's throat. Arnsdale shoved his pistol against the back of the ape's skull, fired twice.

The white officer spun, his face paper-white, but his gun steady. The thought of flight seemed not to occur to him, though he must have believed death was certain.

He blasted his last shot into one of three beasts charging in on him.

Helene shuddered and turned away as she saw him go down. But to her surprise, a minute later the scarred ape, still surley with battle, brought the white man up and threw him on the ground before Raa. Arnsdale was unconscious, but before the attack Raa had given orders not to slay him. White hostages, she was learning, were far more valuable than natives.

The Bantus, hysterical with fear, tried to stampede when the attack started. The charging apes bowled them over almost as they did the Somali, roughly collaring them. By the time Slaker appeared to quiet the Bantus, two of them were dead and several unconscious.

As soon as the battle was over, Slaker began picking up the soldier's guns. At a word from Raa, Mog went down, knocked them out of his arms. Then the giant brute began methodically breaking and twisting the rifles.

Slaker appealed to Raa to stop Mog. "We need them," he pleaded. "Guns mean power. We can handle the blacks with them."

Raa wordlessly waited until the scarred ape had destroyed the final rifle. Then she calmly turned her back on Slaker. Only the slaver and his men knew how to handle those deadly firesticks, and naive though Raa was, she wasn't fool enough to entrust such power to them.

The blonde assessed her losses. Arnsdale had killed one gorilla, badly wounded another. Two others were hurt, but not seriously.

"You won fairly easy this time," Helene said angrily as her gag was removed. "But enjoy yourself while you can, because from now on the days of you and your apes are numbered. Next time you may be one of those to die."

A faint, derisive smile curled Raa's lips. Any unspoken doubts the blonde had about Slaker's evil plans were swept away by this first swift triumph.

"Raa go now get Ki-Gor," she said. "You see who die."

And leaving Mog to direct the Ingagi trek back to their home area, the strange jungle girl sped away to backtrack Helene's trail. Slaker had impressed her with the

importance of capturing the White Lord.

RAA set a swift pace, too swift to permit such conversation. But though Ki-Gor and N'Gesso were puzzled about the girl, they didn't mistrust her. After all, she had slain a leopard to save Ki-Gor, and now risking her life to help them free Helene.

Dusk was blotting out the jungle when Raa halted beside a tiny spring. Ki-Gor could sense a growing nervousness in the girl.

"We are nearly there?" he asked.

She replied, "Soon."

"You're very brave, he said, "to do this."

"Raa not forget you save her from bad ones," she panted.

She dropped to one knee by the spring, drank slowly and sparingly. When she was finished, she stood back as though to give the two men room.

"Drink!" she urged. "Cool. Good."

The hot, thirsty men needed no urging. Ki-Gor let N'Gesso drink first. Then as the small black scrambled up, the White Lord dropped his spear on the ground, dropped on all-fours and lowered his face to the water.

As Ki-Gor took his initial swallow, he heard a thud behind him, followed by a gasp and the sudden thump of something heavy hitting the ground. He whirled, straining to get to his feet, sensing some sudden danger.

Raa's club caught him just back of the ear as he spun up. He lay crumpled on his face.

"Weak, stupid fools!" she gritted. How easy it had been. And these were two the whole jungle was supposed to fear.

Raa stepped back, raised her face to the dark sky. A weird, bestial cry burst from her lips. Twice more in the next ten minutes she repeated the cry. Then, out of the night, her brutish followers came to crowd curiously around the unconscious men. Ki-Gor and N'Gesso didn't stir when the apes lifted them.

When Ki-Gor regained his senses, he was lying on a broad, heavy wooden table in a dark room. Moonlight streamed in a narrow column through a barred window beside him, sifted through a score of breaks in the roof above.

He blinked dully at the two shadowy figures standing by him. They were Helene and Lt. Arnsdale, but for a moment he couldn't understand why they should be there together, or, for that matter, why he was there himself. He stirred weakly, tried to raise himself.

Helene's hand pressed him back. "Don't try to get up yet, darling," she said, and it came to him vaguely that she had been crying.

Then abruptly he remembered. He had had a single fleeting glimpse of the knobbed club hurtling at him, with Raa's contorted face behind it.

"Raa!" he snarled, and despite his swirling senses, despite Helene's restraining hand, he plunged up. "She did it! But why? She was helping. "He broke off. "N'Gesso?" he demanded. "What about N'Gesso?"

From a corner of the room, a shaky voice answered, "I am alive. Think you a woman could succeed where a hundred men have failed?"

Ki-Gor gave a relieved grunt, raised a cautious hand to his throbbing head. "What trickery is this, Helene?" he demanded. "My mind reels so, I can make no sense of it."

But when Helene, with Arnsdale's help, had finished the incredible story, Ki-Gor's brain had been shocked into chill clarity.

"But the idea of using apes for slave raids, isn't all," Arnsdale told him, "We learned something else!"

"It was still daylight when they put us in here," explained the lieutenant. "Though most everything is in ruin, we found a lot of letters and papers in some cabinets and trunks. We wondered why we were put here, why the house looked like the owner had just gotten up one day and walked out."

Arnsdale's voice was trembling with excitement.

"We found this was a Dr. August Montgomery's place, a kind of experimental station. Seems he was carrying on some complicated study of gorillas. His wife and five year old daughter were with him. The way we figure it, Raa is that daughter."

"Yes!" broke in Helene. "Her name was Roberta. Some sudden tragedy must have happened, a native raid or an out-

break of the gorillas he kept for study—there's a big row of steel cages outside. Anyway, everyone except the child must have been wiped out suddenly."

Though a bit unsteady on his legs, N'Gesso had come up to listen. Ki-Gor pursed his lips, and in the moonlight you could see his eyes narrow in thought.

"It could happen, I suppose," he said slowly." Some of the very young apes were probably treated like pets. Left alone, the child would turn to them for companionship. And there would have been food enough stored here to keep her alive until the older apes took her in or she learned to forage herself.

His musing was interrupted by the practical-minded N'Gesso.

"One would rather speak of escape," sourly advised, "instead of how that she-devil was spawned. My knife, blowgun, darts, all are gone."

Helene moved closer to Ki-Gor.

"Slaker had your weapons taken," she said angrily, "and he was the one who wanted us put in here. The door is bolted, the windows barred and there are apes on guard all around the walls."

Though he felt terrible, Ki-Gor prowled and probed over the room for an hour, trying to find or think of some way out of their predicament. But his efforts were useless.

"We may as well sleep," he said finally.

"Sleep?" declared the astounded Arnsdale. "Who could sleep at a time like this?"

"We're safe until morning at least," said the White Lord matter-of-factly. "Raa was careful to capture, not kill us. She may change her mind tomorrow, and if so, we'll need our strength and wits."

HE STRETCHED out on the table. Without a word, Helene climbed up beside him, nestled her head in the crook of his arm. It seemed to Arnsdale that the White Lord fell asleep almost immediately. And like a nervous child, calmed by the presence of a parent, Helene dropped off a short while later.

The lieutenant turned to look for N'Gesso. The pygmy was sprawled on the floor, his arms thrown wide, snoring softly. Arnsdale was both distressed and disappointed. He had expected swift

deeds, some miracle of high adventure from Ki-Gor, yet here the supposed jungle hero slept away the hours like a dullard unable to realize they might be his last ones.

"Jove!" he thought. "I've overestimated them all. They've just given up like whipped dogs."

Ki-Gor lounged by the window, looking idly out the window. His complete immobility exasperated the lieutenant. Neither his face nor his manner showed any sign of worry, and from Arnsdale's viewpoint, there was certainly little sense, or for that matter coherence, in the few remarks the White Lord did make.

"That scarred ape is pretty much the boss after Raa, isn't he?" Ki-Gor asked Helene.

"Yes," answered Helene. "They all jump when he growls. She's the queen, but he's definitely the prime minister. Why?"

The jungle man shrugged. "Nothing. I was just thinking how odd it was for them to follow a female. The strongest bull usually leads the tribe."

Helene watched him, frowning thoughtfully. He kept staring out the window and after a time she returned to her conversation with N'Gesso. It was a full five minutes later before Ki-Gor spoke again.

"That poison pellet you have hidden on you, N'Gesso," he said idly, "is it from the new supply you mixed yesterday?"

"Poison hidden on me!" indignantly exclaimed the pygmy. "You know they searched me, took everything. Why, the idea!"

Ki-Gor smiled faintly. "I know a few things, Little Lion. You and everyone of your cutthroats carry a hidden pellet. For yourselves, if the wrong persons capture you. And sometimes for an unsuspecting enemy's food, after you've lulled him by putting aside your weapons."

N'Gesso grunted, glared swiftly at Helene and Arnsdale.

"It's new," he muttered.

More minutes passed while Ki-Gor gazed at the green world outside the barred window. Then he turned around and walked over to Arnsdale.

"Could I see that ring you wear?" he asked Arnsdale.

The lieutenant sighed, disgustedly thrust

his hand out. What a time to be looking at a ring, he thought. To his surprise, instead of bending to see it, Ki-Gor reached and slipped it from his finger.

"It's merely a good luck ring my girl gave me," he said testily. "Has little value other than for sentiment. That rat-faced fighter would have taken it, otherwise."

Ki-Gor inspected it closely, even testing with his fingernail the tightness of the four metal prongs which held the stone setting in the ring.

"I can use it," Ki-Gor said, after trying it on his little finger.

The lieutenant choked back a caustic question as to what possible use a worthless ring would be. After all, he considered, what difference did it make. The jungle man was too childish to argue with if he thought he could bribe one of the Bantus with the ring. Arnsdale wearily nodded he could have it.

To his dismay, he saw that Ki-Gor immediately pried the prongs open and took out the stone. Before he could protest, the White Lord called N'Geeso to produce the poison pellet. The poison was thick like resin, and using a splinter of wood, Ki-Gor carefully covered each of the prongs with it, smeared the remainder on the mounting. When he was finished, he dropped the ring into his empty knife scabbard.

A disturbance outside interrupted them. The door flung open and a group of apes led by Mog, pressed into the room. Slaker appeared in the doorway behind the beasts. His little, rat-like eyes darted to Ki-Gor, ignoring the others.

"I'm about ready to begin on you, smart boy," he grated venomously. "I'm gonna make you wish you'd never been born. Sam Slaker's gonna have his inning now, and what an inning it'll be." The pale scar of his mouth broke apart in a wolfish grin.

XI

KI-GOR gave no sign he knew the klaver was in the room. The White Lord's whole attention was centered on Mog. He walked slowly three paces past the ape, looking him up and down. A thorough-going change had altered the

jungle man, transforming his very features.

Arnsdale studied him queerly, an odd sensation pricking his skin. There was something suddenly menacing about Ki-Gor. He seemed to have grown larger, and beneath his bronzed skin the great muscles had come alive, swelling into writhing prominence.

In his slow, stiff-legged walk, in the taut set of his body was an animal beligerance. "That's it!" realized Arnsdale. "I've seen dogs bristle that way when they were about to fight." And he was certain of his interpretation when Ki-Gor's lips sheared abruptly back over his white teeth and a deep, rumbling snarl ripped from his throat.

Mog had stood motionless, only his red-rimmed, glittering eyes alive, as he watched the White Lord parade before him. But though not a muscle on his giant frame moved, so abnormally quiet was he, the stiff short hairs along his neck rose stiffly. One could feel, rather than see, an electric tension build up in the bull.

Brutish though he was, Mog recognized and did not like the insulting challenge offered by this hairless man-thing. He was Mog, the Feared One! Never in his life had he given ground before any animal.

He had mauled every bull in the tribe into submission. He had fought Kra, the Leopard, and won. He had broken Tar, the Lion, in his great hands like a rotten stick. When he roared his anger, all jungle creatures fled from his path, for they knew and feared him.

Raa had said not to slay this Hairless One, but Raa did not know of this insult. Mog heard how quiet the other bulls had become. They sensed, too, that this strange man-thing was challenging Mog alone, challenging him as another bull-ape would do. And they waited for their leader to crush the Hairless One as he did all who dared oppose him.

Mog's anger grew, building up until when Ki-Gor snarled, the giant brute's control snapped. He gave a thunderous roar, and shoving fully erect, pounded the vast expanse of his chest with knotted fists.

"No, Ki-Gor!" screamed Helene. "He's going to charge!"

Slaker, realizing too late what Ki-Gor

had precipitated, cried shrilly, "You fool! He'll tear you to bits!" And then as the thought struck him that Ki-Gor was deliberately committing suicide to escape torture, Slaker cursed vilely.

Neither Arnsdale nor N'Geeso spoke, the officer because he was too bewildered, N'Geeso because, guessing Ki-Gor's purpose, he was too awed by the jungle man's nerve to think of his own safety.

But before Mog could charge, Raa burst through the door and leaped in front of him. She spoke rapidly to the ape, patting and smoothing him, and gradually she edged him out of the door. He went with her, but his angry growls told that his anger was far from being quenched.

As soon as she got Mog away, Raa returned. "You—do—that!" she rasped at Slaker, apparently believing he had tried to goad Mog into killing the prisoners. Then, her lips curled with contempt, she smashed him in the face with her hand. He staggered back, cowering before her.

She gave a guttural command to the apes and immediately the beasts seized the prisoners, began roughly dragging them from the house. Raa stalked ahead of them, leading the way past rotted, collapsing buildings to what had been a broad, open field.

In the center of this field were gathered nearly a hundred Ingagi, both bulls and she's. Raa sat down on a raised mound of dirt and the prisoners were brought before her. Mog came out of the crowd, walking stiff-legged, and stood by the mound. His red little eyes glittered at Ki-Gor.

"Suu-laa-kur!" summoned Raa. The slaver, who had been sulking in the background because he feared the girl's wrath, hesitantly came forward. "Talk them," she commanded. "Say what Raa do."

The hangdog air dropped from the slaver. He saw she wasn't angry at him. She meant to go ahead with the plan he so cunningly had sold her on. He wet his pale lips with his tongue.

"Raa and I are going to call on the pygmies," he began silkily. "And do you know why? Well, we're going to make a nice, fair bargain with them. We're going to tell them that if they capture two

hundred strong, young slaves for us we'll give them back their precious N'Geeso, Ki-Gor and Tembu George."

His lips slid back over yellowed teeth in a cruel grin. "No comment?" he said in mock surprise.

"N'Geeso spat in the dust, looked away disinterestedly.

"So you've decided your hairy brothers aren't such wonderful slave-gatherers after all," taunted Helene.

"It isn't that, my dear," said Slater hatefully. "Pygmies are no good as slaves themselves, but they can catch slaves. We'll save the apes for other jobs, things like going in and finishing off the little devils when they've weakened themselves enough warring on other tribes."

The loud trumpeting of an elephant sounded from the jungle off to Ki-Gor's left. As the sound ended, the sharp clear crack of breaking branches could be clearly heard. An elephant herd was on the move, foraging for tender leaves and shoots as it moved unhurriedly through the forest.

The apes stirred restively, muttering among themselves. They didn't like the elephants being so close.

SLAKER turned to Raa. "Tell them it's the same herd," he said impatiently, "that's been tramping back and forth around here for days. The elephants mean them no harm. Great Scot, they throw a fit every time they hear an elephant.

Following his instructions, Raa quieted the Ingagi. What Slaker said was true. The tuskers never sought trouble. It had to be forced on them.

"You're the smart boy, Ki-Gor," the slaver resumed. "What do you think of our plan? A great man like you should be worth two hundred slaves by himself."

Ki-Gor looked at him with distaste.

"You're a fool as well as a coward," he he said evenly, "if you think the pygmies would believe your promise to free us. And as to Tembu George—well—I think he'll have his own ideas on this prisoner's business."

The elephant herd had come considerably nearer. As he talked, one part of Ki-Gor's mind followed the beasts, gauging their distance and their number.

"Tembu George is no brighter than

you," sneered Slaker. "We're going to take him with the same trick." He explained that Raa had left two apes the night before at the spring. "Whenever he gets that far, the apes will hurry here and tell Raa. She'll go into her act and lead the lambs into a foolproof ambush of certain death."

That was why so many Ingagi were assembled. Raa was going to throw the whole tribe against the Masai. Though Ki-Gor gave no outward sign, worry gathered in him.

"And as to the pygmies, they'll do our bidding, all right," continued Slaker. His face had grown more evil, and hate was a hot madness in his eyes. "You see we're going to show them two realistic examples of what will happen to N'Geeso, Tembu George, and you if they don't get the slaves and quick."

He turned and pointed across the open field toward three fresh mounds of dirt.

"There are three holes dug," he explained. "We're going to put Helen and this baby-faced soldier in two of them, bury them up to the neck. And then on a zebra I taught her to ride, Raa is going to give a demonstration of her skill with a club." He glanced around. "You follow me?"

He chuckled gleefully. That had made them all sit up and take notice, even that damnable Ki-Gor. Their faces were shocked, unbelieving.

"To make it sporting," he giped, "she'll ride at a gallop. That may make her miss quite a few times. Going fast like that it isn't easy to crush a skull."

He babbled on, complimenting himself on thinking up the fiendish idea. N'Geeso would be put in the third hole, he explained, to get an idea of what was in store for him if his people failed to become slaves.

"But when we dump Helene and the soldier's bodies before them," declared Slaker, "they won't fail you. I think, though, you may want to send them a little order, just as a guarantee, after you've seen this work."

"Does he mean that?" Arnsdale asked wildly.

"Yes, he meant it," Helene answered, white-faced but in complete control of

herself. "He's an insane killer and Raa is no more than an animal."

In that moment, Ki-Gor knew the greatest agony of his life. Gripped by three massive brutes, he was held helpless as a child. Helene was to be brutally slain before his eyes and he could do nothing to prevent it. He felt his own sanity reeling as Raa barked the order for the three prisoners to be buried.

The ape-guards lifted the victims, started at a run toward the freshly-dug holes.

"Get zee-bra," the blonde told Slaker, and he hurried away toward one of the tumble-down buildings, she strolled over to supervise the placing of the prisoners.

There was a rend of breaking wood, and a small dead tree at the edge of the field toppled over. A grey bulk appeared in the opening where the tree had been. Lazily, the elephant ambled onto the field, and with no more than a glance at the apes, turned westward.

OTHER huge beasts appeared behind the first elephant, until the whole herd of twelve, three of them young ones, was grazing a leisurely path to the west along the edge of the field. Mog snarled at this intrusion and the apes holding Ki-Gor bristled angrily though the unconcerned elephants were fully two hundred yards distant and moving further away with every step.

But Ki-Gor had grown more rigid than his captors. He recognized the vast beast leading the herd as his own half-wild pet, Marmo. Though the great bull ordinarily remained near Ki-Gor's camp, he had grown restive in the long absence of his master and had sought companionship with his own kind.

A desperate idea exploded in the White Lord's mind. If only he could attract Marmo, he might have a fighting chance to help Helene. He shouted with all his might, "*Marmo! To Me!*" startling the apes holding him.

The giant bull's trunk hesitated on its way to pluck a mouthful of grass, the tremendous ears shifted. Ki-Gor cried his name again and the bull slowed, turning his head. The apes had no inkling of what their prisoner was attempting, but they shoved him roughly, not liking his actions.

Raa spun and stared hard at the jungle

man, but she didn't suspect his motives any more than the brutes. Despite the treatment given him, Ki-Gor kept crying to Marmo, and gradually the elephant swung about. The giant would come forward a few yards, then stop as though puzzled, peer about nervously until Ki-Gor called again.

The strong Ingagi smell smothered Ki-Gor's scent, and the tusker couldn't understand why his master's familiar tones summoned him, when he could neither smell nor see the White Lord. But by fits and starts, the giant came on until he was within an easy spear throw of the apes.

The Ingagi grew terribly disturbed. Females knuckled about locating their young, while the bulls, thinking they were threatened by the elephant, grew belligerent. One ape released his hold on Ki-Gor, lumbered about, bellowing.

Slaker arrived at a gallop on Raa's zebra. From a distance, he had heard Ki-Gor's cries, seen the huge elephant draw closer. He understood instantly what the jungle man was about.

"Can't you see he's calling that blasted monster?" he burst out at Raa.

Her brow creased in surprise. To her an elephant was a creature to be given wide berth. It hadn't occurred to her that Ki-Gor could call a beast out of a wild herd. With a swift, wrathful command, she told one of Ki-Gor's guards to clap a paw over the jungle man's mouth.

Deeply concerned, she appealed to Slaker for some way to drive off the tusker. She explained that the apes were growing so angry they might try to attack the elephant and many would be slain.

Slaker pointed to where club-wielding gorillas guarded his Bantus. The suspicious Raa took no more chances with the blacks than she did with Slaker.

"Free my men and let them use those clubs," he demanded. "That devil is just tame enough not to hurt men, yet he's wild enough not to trust strangers. We'll get rid of him!"

As soon as Raa complied with his wishes, Slaker leaped off the zebra, rushed his men between the apes and Marmo. No longer hearing Ki-Gor's voice, the tusker had halted and was eyeing the angry mass of apes in puzzlement.

Marmo was confused. The men sound-

ed angry and shook weapons at him. Was this some kind of trap? Had he only thought he heard Ki-Gor? Marmo trumpeted again, but he was only bluffing. Marmo was too wise to risk wounds from a white man's fire stick for no better reason than to display his power.

If Ki-Gor came to him and commanded that he scatter the men, then he would trample them into the earth, show them what Marmo's awful fury would accomplish.

With anguish, the helpless White Lord guessed what went on in Marmo's brain. He saw the great beast shift uncertainly, then turn and retreat fifty yards across the field. But as soon as Marmo got a safe distance from the men, he stopped and looked back, waiting to see if Ki-Gor would call once more.

The ape-guard on his right clasped one paw about Ki-Gor's upper arm, held the other over his mouth. As the ape shifted his weight so he could better follow what was going on in the field the White Lord's fingers brushed his empty knife-scabard.

"But it isn't empty!" he remembered.

Slowly, so the fumbling of his fingers wouldn't attract attention, he drew the sheath up, tilted it until Arnsdale's good luck ring slid into his palm.

He maneuvered the ring until he could grasp it between the thumb and forefinger. Then cautiously, he pressed the pin-like prongs of the ring against the ape-guard's hip. He held his breath, pushed the ring hard enough to pierce the brute's thick skin.

The ape flinched, instinctively jerked his paw away from Ki-Gor's mouth to slap at what he thought was some stinging insect. The instant his mouth was uncovered, Ki-Gor was shouting to Marmo, knowing his voice would halt the elephant's retreat.

THE APE ROARED with fury, swung its club-like hand up for a blow that would batter his tricky prisoner senseless. But that blow never landed. The brute's arm faltered in mid-air, his huge lips jerking and twitching. He staggered, his roar abruptly changed into a queer agonized croaking.

His chest leaped and heaved like huge bellows trying to force air through a clogged pipe. Then his finger slid from Ki-

Gor's upper right arm and the beast toppled backwards.

Ki-Gor's other guard stared thunderstruck at his fellow. He barked excitedly at the sprawled figure. He shoved the jungle man out of his path, bent over the dead animal as his slow mind tried to probe this mystery.

Though the bull retained his grip on the prisoner's left shoulder, Ki-Gor's right hand was free. The White Lord stabbed the pronged ring into the guard's arm with a swift movement. The ape started, turned his head so quickly that he caught Ki-Gor's movement.

He glared suspiciously, straightened with slow menace. He reached out and pushed Ki-Gor angrily in the face. He snarled, slapped hard again. Suddenly, an agonized look contorted his face, and seconds later he was dead.

Marmo had swung about at the White Lord's call, and there was a more dangerous note in his trumpeting this time when he faced the line of Bantus. If only Ki-Gor could get to him, he might yet scatter the Ingagi long enough to save his wife and friends. But what chance did the jungle man have to reach the elephant?

Apes were all about him, blocking every avenue of escape. The nearest beast was the huge Mog who had turned in time to see the second ape-guard fall. Raa, too, momentarily speechless with surprise, was staring at the jungle man. In another instant, the blonde girl's lashing voice would send the whole tribe leaping in on Ki-Gor.

For any other man it would have been the end. But with his knowledge of the wild, Ki-Gor had one last thin thread of hope, a thread so slender that only extreme desperation could have driven even him to grasp it. It was a stratagem for which he had laid the groundwork when Slaker and Mog first came to take him from the room.

Ki-Gor had deliberately goaded Mog to battle fury in the room. He had challenged the ape leader as another bull would do. He had done it because he realized that it was Mog's brawn that actually ruled the tribe. Perhaps Mog was one of the pets Raa had grown up with. In any case, he was the weapon she used to keep the Ingagi in line.

And if Ki-Gor could trick Mog into accepting individual battle and could de-

feat him, then by ape standards the jungle man would have won for himself the scarred ape's place and standing in the tribe. After all, it was not a far step from accepting Raa as one of their own kind to accepting the White Lord. But the main trick was to make Mog and the tribe look on him as a challenger seeking to supplant the scarred ape in the tribe, rather than a man fighting for his life.

That plan had been in Ki-Gor's mind when he left the room. That was why he had prepared the poisoned ring, because without the deadly pygmy poison he couldn't hope to defeat Mog. But the way Slaker had guided matters Ki-Gor never had an opportunity to put his plan in action.

Now when he had to fight Mog or die under the rush of the whole tribe, the ring already had been used twice and the further effectiveness of its poison was doubtful. Ki-Gor knew how terrible was the gamble he took, but his only other alternative was worse.

Ki-Gor slid the ring on the little finger of his right hand. He swelled his chest to its fullest expansion, battered it with his open palms, and with perfect mimicry, roared the challenge of an angry ape.

He took three quick steps toward Mog, stopped to repeat the roaring and chest beating. Mog bristled, a cavernous rumble rolling from his throat. Ki-Gor turned and strode arrogantly back to the two dead apes. He put his foot on one of them, giving the wierd, chilling gorilla cry.

Mog could not mistake his purpose. The Hairless One was boasting that he had slain the two guards and that he would slay Mog as easily. Like searing volcanic flame, rage burst up in the scarred ape. He watched Ki-Gor make another short rush toward him snarling and scowling.

Raa was shouting then for the tribe to swarm at the White Lord. But she was too late. With a single shattering scream, Mog rooted them where they stood. Twice had this puny man-thing dared affront him. Twice had this two-legged white grub faced him with an arrogance no other jungle denizen would have the courage to assume.

Now, no power on earth would keep Mog from taking the Hairless One in his

great arms and crush him to a pulp. Forgotten in the red swirl of his anger were Raa and her vaguely understood scheme of holding men in bondage. Forgotten were the elephant and Slaker and the mysterious ease with which the man-thing had killed the two guards. Mog bellowed his wrath to the tribe, signalling his intention of personally destroying this challenger. And then, snarling steadily, he edged forward, wanting to get close enough to take Ki-Gor with a single rush.

But as the hideous giant knuckled forward, the White Lord suddenly streaked in, smashing his right fist against the scarred cheek and spun away. Mog shook the ground with his roars. He was outraged that the man should be the first to attack, but he wasn't hurt. A score of such blows landing simultaneously wouldn't have shaken his muscled bulk.

He raised to his full height, his tremendous arms outstretched. His beady red-streaked eyes watched his quarry for a moment. Then abruptly he charged.

But Ki-Gor had known how Mog would react and he was ready. As the bull thundered down on him he waited until the last possible second, then ducked low, avoided the giant paw that hammered at him. As he slid under the upraised arm, he raked the ring across the brute's belly and side.

But before the jungle man could get set again, Mog had spun and was rushing at him. Ki-Gor summoned every bit of his speed, tried once more to avoid the clubbing arms and dive past the beast. The raging gorilla wasn't to be caught by the same trick twice.

Mog whirled with him, handling his immense weight with cat-like quickness and balance. And as he whirled, the bull connected a round house blow with Ki-Gor's shoulder. It was his forearm, not the granite like mass of his paw that connected.

The White Lord was torn from his feet, sent twisting ten feet through the air, his whole left side paralyzed by the blast of pain. He fell hard, rolling to a stop on his stomach. Mog thundered toward him gone utterly berserk.

Ki-Gor fought to get up, knowing death rushed upon him. But for once in his life his magnificent body couldn't respond

to his commands. His nerves and muscles needed time to recover from the awful power of that blow. Yet there was no time.

More by sheer will than strength Ki-Gor scrambled his way to his knees. He knew he could never make it. There was no chance to escape the beast, and Mog's scream of triumph showed he realized, too his victim couldn't get away.

XII

BUT KI-GOR, dazed as he was, meant to die trying. He gathered his numb, quivering muscles, and then abruptly, like a startled frog, he threw himself sideways at the charging ape's ankles. He barely flung beneath the reaching paw, but he hit his target squarely.

The gorilla's feet shot from under him. His vast bulk, going at full tilt, suddenly reversed its whole position, with his heels going high and his head whipping toward the ground. He drove face first into the earth, striking with the force of a falling tree.

Despite the terrible fall, Mog was on his feet almost as soon as the White Lord. Though he was slightly shaken, the brute's greatest annoyance came from the dirt he had plowed into his eyes and mouth. Spitting and roaring, he pawed at his eyes, his squat, stump-thick legs already braced for another rush.

The watching apes were silent. It was obvious to them the end was near. Though by their standards the battle had hardly begun, they saw the White Lord was plainly unsteady on his legs, his lungs laboring to pump oxygen into a body shaken by the two collisions. Mog would get him on his next lunge.

To their amazement, however, it was Ki-Gor who drove forward first. Any expectation they had of seeing him actually make a fight quickly faded. The jungle man swung a disappointingly ineffectual over hand-blow at Mog's face, missing by fully two feet, and then jumped back.

What the Ingagi didn't know was that Ki-Gor had slid his ring from his finger, darted forward just as Mog bellowed. Not enough poison was left on the pointed prongs to harm the bull when Ki-Gor hit or scratched him, but a glance had

told the jungle man that there was still some of the death-dealing resin caked on the actual mounting. He had taken advantage of Mog's momentary blindness to cast the entire ring into the beast's mouth, throwing it hard enough to lodge it in his throat for an instant.

Mog choked, struggling to dislodge the ring. With a tremendous cough, he raked it from his throat, caught it with his tongue and furiously spat it out. Then he raged forward at the jungle man, running erect, his long arms extended to net his prey.

Ki-Gor tried to dodge him, weaving and back-pedaling desperately, but like a steel clamp one great paw slammed closed over his shoulder. With that single hand, Mog lifted the White Lord and jerked him against his chest. The ape lashed his other arm about Ki-Gor's back, and applying bone-breaking pressure, he bared his fangs and bent to tear out the jungle man's throat.

Ki-Gor squirmed and fought, but against such brute power he was utterly helpless. He saw the cruel mouth open wide for the death bite. And then as the hideous head bent for his throat, a violent spasm wrenched Mog's face.

Ki-Gor felt the arms about him jerk wildly and suddenly the crushing pressure about him was gone. The ape was sagging against him, making odd croaking noises in his throat. The poison had taken effect.

Ki-Gor braced himself against the beast, began battering with his hands and uttering blood-curdling snarls. When the full weight of the gorilla came against him, he couldn't support it, so he caught the hairy body and made it seem he was throwing Mog.

He went down with the dead ape, continuing his play-acting by mauling and choking until it should seem that he had slain Mog with his bare hands.

Then he sprang away from the still form, hammered his chest and roared a victory cry. He swung slowly about, glancing at the astounded Ingagi. Raa was staring at him, dumb-founded by his swift and utterly unexpected victory.

Ki-Gor stalked beligerantly a few paces back and forth past the body, and then growling, he walked directly toward the massed apes. To his well-hidden relief, the wall of hairy bodies split apart before

him. He sidled at a snail's pace, growling and turning his head as though searching for some bull who thought like Mog to challenge his might.

Then he was past the apes, his heart racing with the strain of the bluff he had successfully carried out. He put his hands to his mouth and called Marmo. A muttering broke out among the Ingagi behind him. Ki-Gor paid it no heed. He leaped forward, sprinted toward the elephant.

Slaker and his Bantus lay between the White Lord and Marmo, but the tusker recognized his master and trumpeting excitedly, he started to meet him. The slaver and his men tried furiously to turn the grey giant, but Marmo was certain now of his master's wishes and he plunged directly at the blacks.

ARMED with no more than clubs, the Bantus scattered out of his path, despite Slaker's profane efforts to hold them. Once the elephant got past, the slaver turned his attention to Raa, shouting for her to send the Ingagi at Ki-Gor from the front while he and the Bantus attacked from the rear.

Judging by what he would have done in his place, Slaker thought the White Lord was merely trying to save his own skin. Not until Marmo swung the jungle man onto his head and then raced directly toward where the prisoners were buried did the slaver realize what Ki-Gor intended.

"Kill them!" shrieked the running slaver to Raa. "Don't let him reach them! You kill them, while the apes get Ki-Gor!"

But Raa needed no instructions. When the first shock of seeing a man slay Mog had passed, she went insane with rage and grief. She was more intelligent than her followers, and one look at the body had told her that Ki-Gor had won by some evil man's trickery.

She pointed to the White Lord on the elephant, told the apes that he would use the huge beast to slay them all unless they dragged him from his perch.

And roused by the lash of her fury, the tribe surged out across the grass to intercept Ki-Gor. Raa waited only long enough to get them started, then she grabbed up her club and leaped astride the zebra.

Ki-Gor saw her mount the animal, knew

she meant to gallop down on Helene and the two helpless men, batter in their skulls before he could intercept her. But the zebra was half-wild, and frightened by the noise, it bucked, throwing Raa.

The blonde twisted cat-like and landed on her feet, still holding the halter. She fought the zebra savagely, and finally mounted it again. The fall, though, had given Ki-Gor the time he needed to smash through the Ingagi, beat off the beasts that tried to clamber up the elephant.

Raa used her heels to spur the zebra into a gallop, straining to outrun the White Lord. She would have beat him to the prisoners by seconds had she been a better rider. But in her anxiety, she failed to control the zebra properly.

Ki-Gor rode Marmo in at an angle, meaning to block off from Helene. An experienced horsewoman would have swerved abruptly, cutting behind the running elephant and reached her objective. The blonde girl turned the other way, trying to outrun and cross in front of Marmo.

The White Lord simply veered the huge tusker suddenly, smashed into Raa. The zebra crashed down with its rider. They both fell directly in Marmo's path and the elephant's great feet pounded over them. As Ki-Gor glanced back at the bloody pulp pounded into the ground, his face tightened, but he could feel no real remorse.

In maneuvering to stop Raa, Ki-Gor had given the pursuing Ingagi time to draw near. He had to drive them off long enough for him to dig out Helene and the two men. He headed Marmo toward the apes, then slid from the elephant's back. Marmo was aroused now and ready to do battle with or without Ki-Gor's direction, so he could rely on the mammoth beast to scatter the gorillas.

The earth was soft about the taut-faced prisoners, and by clearing their shoulders, Ki-Gor was able to pull them out of the holes. As he freed Arnsdale, the last one, Ki-Gor heard Slaker exhorting his Bantus to close in.

The White Lord looked for Marmo, saw there was no chance to use the elephant either to battle or outrun the Bantus. The tusker had the Ingagi in headlong flight across the field and was taking a bloody toll of the slower bulls. In his

battle frenzy, Marmo was definitely beyond recall.

Ki-Gor had known Slaker would come in from the field to try to stop their escape, but he had counted on having Marmo's help. Even had he, N'Geeso and Arnsdale been armed, they would have been unable to fight the slaver's force. The odds were too great.

There was no choice but to make a run for the forest. They sprinted toward the path along which Raa had brought them as prisoners the previous day. But the four were worn by their cruel experience, and the Bantus steadily moved up behind them.

If Slaker's men had had spears, they would have cut them down a hundred yards from the trees. As it was, the blacks and their savage leader were no more than twenty paces back when Ki-Gor's little group entered the jungle. Like a pack closing in, the Bantus gave cry.

"My—strength's—gone," gasped Helene. "Can't—run—more."

"You must!" commanded Ki-Gor, though in his heart he knew it was useless.

N'GEESO didn't speak, but his face was grey with effort. Arnsdale was beginning to lurch drunkenly, every breath a quick, pained sob. Twice Ki-Gor's steadying hand had kept the young officer from falling.

The White Lord knew but one way to buy Helene and his friends a little more time. He lagged back, careful not to let them guess his intention. He was the game Slaker wanted most. By suddenly turning and charging into the club-wielding blacks, he could delay them for a time—for as long as he lived.

Ki-Gor gritted his teeth, steeled himself to turn. Then a fierce, wild clamor erupted all about him. Massive ebony figures yelling like devils burst out of the underbrush and engulfed the startled Bantus. With spear and sword, Tembu George and his Masai charged into the men they mistakenly had shown mercy to once before, and it was clear the same mistake was not to be repeated again.

When he heard the Masai war-cry, Slaker, leaped off the path, hoping to hide in the underbrush. The sight of the Masai chieftain, Tembu George, racing down on

him was enough to turn Slaker, send him fleeing back onto the path.

In his fright, the slaver got turned around so that he burst out of the bush almost on top of Ki-Gor instead of returning to his men. He screamed in fear when he saw the White Lord, lashed out awkwardly with his club. Ki-Gor ducked the clumsy blow, plowed his right hand into the slaver's belly.

Slaker doubled over, and as he did, the White Lord locked his fingers around the hated man's neck just above the iron slave collar. His fingers bit deep, choking off the shriek which rose in the slaver's throat. In another minute the crazed, cowardly killer was dead, and Ki-Gor, still holding him by the neck, lifted his body as he would a dango's carcass and threw him off the trail.

When Ki-Gor looked around, the Masai had finished their work, and Tembu George was hurrying to him, sorrowfully apologizing for not having reached them before.

"You came in time," Ki-Gor said, putting his hand on the Masai chieftain's shoulder. "Had you come earlier, you'd have walked into an ambush." He explained about Raa and the apes. "Two bulls were supposed to notify Raa of your approach, but you must have slipped past them, because they never did show up."

Tembu George smiled thinly.

"Those two Ingagi lie dead by the spring," he declared. "We saw them watching us, and thanks to N'Geeso's poison on our arrows, we killed them. We meant

to slay every one we saw, because after reading the spoor around the spring, we thought the tree-people had slain both you and N'Geeso."

Arnsdale, slightly awed by the tall, granite-faced Masai, edged his way up to the White Lord. He waited, his face troubled, until Tembu George finished talking.

"About that ring, Ki-Gor..." he began hesitantly.

Ki-Gor frowned, "Oh, yes," he said, "That was your good luck ring!" All I know for us to do is go back and get it."

"No, no!" exclaimed Arnsdale, missing the twinkle in the jungle man's eyes. "You misunderstand me. I want to tell you I'm sorry for acting rude when you asked to use it. I'll probably lose my commission for failing so miserably to carry out my orders, but because of you I've lived through a whole, exciting lifetime today. I believe it will be worth the disgrace."

Kindliness was in Ki-Gor's smile as he looked down at Arnsdale's serious face.

"You won't lose any commission, I promise you," he said. "You've acquitted yourself with honor and I mean to go to the coast with you to tell your commanding officer that very fact. Actually, you'll have an impressive report to make."

"Jove!" said Arnsdale, as he watched Ki-Gor walk away. "What an amazing fellow."

There was a low, merry laugh beside him. Helene had heard the words he had unconsciously spoken aloud.

"You're right," she said, "he really is an amazing fellow. I'm quite proud of him."

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WITCH'S MOON

By WILTON HAZZARD

In the green mists of miasmatic Kaokoveld two haughty warriors fought for the glittering treasure in Lotumbe's Tomb. Nkoi the Leopard and Losako the Whip—which would yield to the power of the Witch's Moon?

GORDON Quinton rode into Dom Luis in the late afternoon. Native laborers, Ovambos for the most part, were streaming through the town on their way to the mines in Damaraland and Namqualand. On the way out the poor devils usually lost their pay for a year, all of five pounds. Much of the money jingled across the counters of the sharp-eyed Orientals whose shops lined the red, dusty road. And some of it never got that far.

Quinton was thinking of this as he rode toward *Ike's Place*. His job was to organize and manage gangs of native labor and he was good at it. He was loved by the Ovambos as much as he was hated and

feared by the cutthroat gang that made *Ike's Place* a veritable den of thieves.

The hum of voices and snatches of a bawdy song came to Quinton's ears as he drew rein before the latticed door of the saloon. His lips tightened. It sounded as if the gang were already drinking his boys' money. He rode around to the bar at the back of the hotel.

"*Jambo, Membe!*" he greeted the black stable boy. "Rub her down good and look after these." He swung out of the saddle. From his saddle horn he took a coiled whip of giraffe hide with a carved, ivory handle and a wrist loop.

"Ah-h-h!" breathed Membe, with his wide eyes fixed on the whip. He remem-



bered the last time Losako, *The Whip*, had come to Dom Luis.

When Quinton walked into the saloon a tense silence came over the room. Then there was a rustle of movement as the men lining the bar turned to face him, their eyes drawn to the whip coiled in his hand.

At one of the tables close to a window sat a stranger. He was well built, an elderly man with grey hair that contrasted nicely with the brown of his skin. His topee, resting on the table, and white suit stood out among the battered felt hats and dirty shirts, like a mink coat in an East Side pawn shop.

"Go on with your drinking, boys," said Quinton. "The man I'm looking for isn't here yet." On an impulse he walked over to the stranger's table and sat down, shifting his chair so that he faced the doorway.

"Are you the law or some kind of a disease?" asked the other.

Quinton smiled: "We've got all the diseases known to science but damn little law, Mister."

"I'm John Raymer. An American."

"Well, I'm glad to meet a countryman!" said Quinton. "At least I was born there. Folks brought me here when I was an infant. Always wanted to go back but somehow . . ." He finished with an expressive shrug.

"I know how it is," Raymer chuckled. "A man sweats for years in the jungle, building up a stake. He makes it and decides to go home. Gets as far as Cape Town, maybe, and finds a lot of attractive, fluffy things, the kind he dreamed of in the bush—amazin' how the money goes!"

"You're no stranger!" Quinton laughed. He liked the other's deep voice—the faint Southern drawl in it and the twinkle in his steady, blue eyes.

"I'm a stranger to these parts," explained Raymer. "But I've worked in the Camaroons—construction engineer. And I had a missionary brother—"

"Excuse me!" Quinton interrupted. "Here comes my man." He arose, transferring the coiled lash of his whip to his left hand.

A HUGE man with a face like a baboon came stomping in. His open shirt showed a mass of ginger hair and a thick,

bull's neck growing out of bunched shoulder muscles. He brought his ponderous bulk to an abrupt stop as he caught sight of Quinton.

"Maddon, you stuck up six of my boys and took thirty pounds from them. They worked hard for their money, Maddon. I want it!" Quinton accused sharply.

The big fellow stood hesitant and fingered his thick, protuding lips. Then, something in his eyes hardened.

"I've 'eard about you an' yer bloody whip!" his voice boomed. "If y'try usin' it on me y'cocky blaggard I'll . . ."

The lash of the whip uncoiled as if it were alive. There was a crack as loud as a pistol shot. Maddon screamed and blood oozed from between the fingers of the hand he held to his left cheek. His eyes bulged. He let loose a string of vile oaths while his right hand clawed at the holster under his coat.

Crack! The gun was wrenched from his hand as soon as it was clear of its holster; and, like a resilient spring, the lash seemed to coil itself back into Quinton's hand. Freeing his hand of the loop, Quinton tucked the whip into his belt.

"I want the money, that's all!" he said calmly. "Hand it over, Maddon."

Maddon was sweating and breathing hard, working up his nerve. Suddenly he aimed a vicious kick at Quinton's groin: "Take that, you—ah-h-a!" he finished with a yelp of agony.

Quinton had side-stepped in a flash and had caught the other's hob-nailed boot in his hand. A quick twist and Maddon was sprawling on his face. When he got up he went limping around the circle, his face twisted with pain.

"Aw, come horf hit, Bull!" Cock Biles' voice suddenly piped up. "Bash 'im!" he pleaded. "Y'can do hit! 'E ain't 'arf yer size!"

As Maddon walked around Quinton circled with him, his grey eyes wary. Then he half-stumbled over an out-thrust foot. Maddon rushed him. Quinton went down with his knees doubled up and he drove both his feet into Maddon's stomach. Maddon rolled over, gasping for breath. As Quinton got to his feet the report of a gun thundered in his ears, followed by the tinkle of shattered glass.

Cock Biles was staring foolishly at

Raymer, the neck of a broken bottle still clutched in his up-raised hand. Raymer sat at the table without rising, but there was a smoking gun in his hand.

"Nice shooting! Thanks." Quinton grinned at him and went to stand over Maddon who was seated on the floor, holding his stomach with both hands. Quinton uncoiled his whip.

"I don't like to use this, Maddon," he said. "But I want that money and—"

Before he could finish Portuguese policemen were swarming into the saloon, flourishing their long bayonetes.

"Who bang ze gun?" demanded their sergeant, looking around the room nervously. "It is not permitted to bang ze gun. Who?"

Raymer stood up: "I did!"

"Ha!! Arrest him!" ordered the sergeant.

"Sargento," Quinto caught his arm. "One moment, please!"

The sergeant tore himself loose with a squeal of fright: "Seize him!" he yelled at his troop.

Quinton and Raymer were soon hemmed in by a ring of steel. The two men exchanged glances.

"It was the gun," Quinton explained. "They'll stand for anything but shooting."

THE SQUAD of policemen marched them out and down the dusty road toward the Barracoon, as the Portuguese called the barbed-wire compound and collection of lousy huts on the outskirts of the town.

"How long will they keep us?" Raymer said, after the police had escorted them into a stinking, mud-walled cell which boasted only one bench and a pile of mouldy straw on the floor.

Quinton fished in his pocket, pulled out a few pound notes and thumbed them with a wry smile.

"How much money have you got?" Quinton asked. "It might cost us twenty-five pounds to get out before morning. It depends on the state of his Excellency's pocket book."

Raymer chuckled: "We'll do all right," said he. "We're stayin' at the Mendos Bungalow. I'll bet my daughter is working on 'em right now. It won't be the first time she's bailed the old man out."

Quinton's feet hit the floor: "Your what?" he exclaimed.

"My daughter. We've been stayin' with Mendos for about a week now."

"Well, I'm damned! You shouldn't have brought a girl here."

"I didn't want to."

"She's the boss, eh?"

"Well—wait till you meet her!"

Quinton rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully: "Usually we don't ask questions in this town. But I'm wondering what brought you here."

"Ever hear of Lotumbe's Tomb?"

"Oh, good Lord! Don't tell me you're after Lotumbe's treasure! Why, there isn't a man in this country who hasn't wasted a couple of years of his life on account of that yarn!"

"It's not a fairy tale," said Raymer gravely. "Let's check your version with mine. As I have it, Lotumbe was chief of the Ovambos in Paul Kruger's day. He collected a sort of tax from all the Ovambos who went to work in the mines. Before a young Ovambo could return to his kraal and settle down, he had to give Lotumbe something—a diamond, maybe, gold dust or a Kruger sovereign. In the course of years the old boy collected a sizeable fortune and when he died, it was buried with him. Where, only a couple of witch doctors knew."

"Check!" said Quinton with a broad grin. "I don't question the yarn. It's known that Lotumbe did collect that tax. But listen, his tomb is somewhere in the Kaokovelds, that means you'd have to comb a mountain range and about ten thousand square miles of jungle for it. And another thing, the chief in that country is a particular friend of mine. Bogenbwe is his name. Went to the coast and got himself an education. Well, he wants Lotumbe's gold to finance an irrigation project but he hasn't found it yet. D'you really think you've got a better chance than he has?"

"I know I have, son. As I was goin' to say before you started the fight back there, I've got a missionary brother. He worked in the Kaokovelds for ten years. He converted a witch doctor. Now that witch doctor knew where Latombe was buried."

"Sure, but it's *one* witch doctor you'll

have to worry about. That's Nkoi, *The Leopard*. He's a ju-ju. Scares the hell out of the other natives."

"Sure, I know," replied Raymer calmly. "Nkoi is the witch doctor Brother Joe converted."

"Converted!" Quinton's face flushed with anger. "What are you trying to sell me, Raymer?"

"Well, son, I understand you've just finished a job. I like your style an' you know the country. Now, my proposition is, a half share for Bogembwe, the remainder we'll split between us, providin' the chief is willin'—I don't aim to start trouble. If we don't find the gold, I'll pay wages. How about it?"

Before Quinton could answer the chain on the outside of their door was rattling. The door swung open:

"'Umble apology, Senhoreta," the turnkey's voice came to them. "Dis plaze make great steenk."

A girl with a mass of red-gold hair stood framed in the doorway. She was tall and the jodhpurs she wore emphasized the slenderness of her build. She had her father's eyes, but at the moment there were sparks of anger in them, and her compressed lips spoiled the softness of her mouth. Her gaze passed over Quinton and flashed at Raymer.

"Father! How could you? After what you promised!"

"M'dear," said Raymer. "I didn't have more than an eyeful! Quinton will vouch for me."

She looked at Quinton in a way that made him feel like something crawling on the floor: "Doubtless! I imagine Mr. Quinton is not particular—"

"Cut that, Jean!" Raymer interposed sharply.

QUINTON was amused to see the change that came over the girl's face. Her eyes moistened and her lips pouted. A tricky wench, he judged, who would have her way by fair means or foul.

"I have been so worried," she said with a faint smile. "Senhor Mendos has been kind enough to arrange for your release. And yours," she added, turning to Quinton. "And since *you* started the fight, I think that it is only right you pay for the damage done."

"How much did you give him?" asked Quinton, with dismay in his voice.

"One hundred pounds."

"Good Lord!" Quinton gasped. "A hundred quid for a broken bottle!"

"A broken bottle!" she echoed staring.

"That's right, Jean," drawled Raymer. "Fellow was going to hit Quinton on the head with it. I shot it out of his hand. I guess we're stuck for the hundred, my girl."

"Oh, why did you?" she cried. Why didn't you—"

"Let the fellow smash it on my head, Miss Raymer?" suggested Quinton with a grin.

"Well, it would have been cheaper, and I don't think it could have hurt you much, Mr. Quinton."

The two men walked out into the brilliant star-light. A guard gave them a sleepy: "Boa noite, senhores!" as they passed through the gates of the compound. Thirst urged them down the deserted road in the direction of Ike's Place. The road zig-zagged along the bank of a vlei and followed down into a cluster of mopani trees among which the dying banana fronds showed splashes of red.

As they entered the inky blackness of the grove an owl hooted. The drumming of the bromvoels drowned the sound of their footsteps. After they had covered a short distance, an owl hooted again, so close and so suddenly that Quinton leaped backward, dragging Raymer with him. Suddenly black figures dropped from the trees, rustling as they passed through the leafy branches. In a moment the grove seemed alive with shadowy figures.

Quinton's whip cracked as a naked form leaped toward them. A yelp of pain rang through the grove. Again and again the lash whistled and cracked, beating back their half-seen assailants.

"Run for it!" Quinton yelled at Raymer. "Keep to the trail!"

He led the way, opening a path through an amorphous blur that clawed at him. He left his coat behind him and plunged on through. Raymer came next, whooping and lashing out with his hands and feet to right and left. In a moment they were clear and racing for the open road. They gained it and when they looked back along the trail, there was no sign of pursuit.

Raymer sat down on the road bank, panting:

"Not as good as I used to be," he gasped.

"Hope I'm as good at fifty," Quinton grinned. Then he said with a frown: "You must have told somebody else what you're after."

"Not me, son! Even Jean doesn't know. But somebody sure meant to take us apart and I'll bet that ape Maddon knows who."

Quinton shook his head: "If he wants me that bad, he can take a shot at me from behind a rock any time. No, sir, somebody wants you. And believe me, if any of the gang at Ike's Place have got wind of what you told me, you'll have trouble. Plenty of trouble."

"Ike's Place—well, I'm still thirsty," drawled Raymer, getting to his feet. "Let's go!"

The saloon was crowded and murky with tobacco smoke and the stench of paraffine oil that came from the blackened lamp. Fat, slovenly Ike found them a table in a corner.

"Maddon and Cock Biles treked out," he announced, when he came back with four bottles of cool beer.

After the first bottle Raymer said, "What about Biles and Maddon?"

Quinton shrugged: "Don't know much about Maddon; he's a new man here. But Cock Biles is an old-timer. I don't know what he does for a living. He comes and goes and he's always got money. A lot of people would like to know where he gets it, including Senhor Mendos, but nobody has caught up with him yet. Now, about that hundred pounds, Mr. Raymer. I've only got a month's pay coming to me—"

"Glad to hear it! You'll have to work for me."

"Well, I'm bound to say that I think you're wasting good money. But if you're set on it, I'll take you into the Kaokovelds, and you can talk it over with Chief Bogembwe."

"Good! When can we start?"

"Tomorrow at sunset, if you want to."

"I want to."

"Good! I'll ride over to the Ovambo village right now. Should be back with the boys about noon."

They went outside. Quinton led his horse around to the front.

"By the way," he said as he mounted, "You're not thinking of taking Jean with us?"

Raymer shook his head: "She doesn't know it yet, but we're going to leave her at Indaba on the British side. I've written to the District Commissioner about it. She can argue with him."

"Hm-m." said Quinton. "For a stranger you know your way around."

"Brother's friend. Joe built up quite a reputation for himself."

QUINTON was back before noon but he had no boys with him. The first time the Ovambos had refused to work for him. If his best friend had robbed him of his last dollar, he would not have felt it more keenly.

Raymer came out to meet him as he dismounted before the Mendos bungalow.

"Are you sure you didn't mention the Kaokoveld to anyone?" Quinton asked.

"Dammit, no!" Raymer swore. "I'm old enough to know when to keep my mouth shut!"

"Well, I'm damned if I can understand why my Ovambos turned me down!"

"Maybe Maddon and Biles have got something to do with it."

Quinton shook his head: "They couldn't turn the Ovambos against me. No, I know the symptoms. My boys are scared. There's something wrong and I don't like it, Raymer."

"You're under no obligation to me. You don't owe me a plugged dime."

"That's a matter of opinion," Quinton grinned. "I want you to make it known that we're headed for Indaba. You're working for a Cape Town mining syndicate, understand?"

"Sure! I got the idea."

"Good! We'll detour South of Indaba; slip into the Kaokoveld by the back door. I'll get porters. I'll have to use any of the riff-raff I can pick up in the native quarters. But get some sleep; we'll trek at sundown."

Two days later Quinton was riding beside Jean Raymer. Their road was the dry bed of a river, with high banks covered with tall, burned grass on either hand. Behind them the safari straggled

out in a broken line, the porters picking their way over the boulders and loose gravel. Away to the north-east the Kaokovelds brooded over a stretch of green jungle, their peaks wrapped in a mysterious veil of mist. Indaba was about a day's march South-east.

The girl had Quinton's whip in her hand, examining the finely carved handle: "Losako, The Whip," said she "What a name! How did you get it?"

"The Ovambos gave it to me," Quinton replied with a slight frown.

"I suppose it's because you punished them with this." She returned the whip to Quinton.

Quinton flushed. Why did she have to think the worst of him? "No, quite the contrary, in fact. I took it from a Boer who was whaling an Ovambo with it, and I gave him some of his own medicine. Suddenly one of the Ovambos who were watching, jumped up and pointing at me, shouted: 'Losako!' There you have it. And once they give you a name, it sticks."

Suddenly Quinton's horse reared. A shot rang out, and before it had echoed, the crackle of small arms sounded all along the left bank of the river bed. Quinton sprang clear of his mount as the stricken beast sank under him. He caught the bridle of the girl's plunging horse, and dragging her from the saddle, forced her down behind the quivering belly of his dying mount.

In a moment the deep channel was a chaos of screaming blacks and bursts of musketry. The porters had dropped their loads and were trying to scramble up the steep right bank. They rushed at the bank, clawed their way a few feet upwards and then slid down again. Mad with fear, they surged towards a spot where one of their fellows had found a good foothold and in a moment a melee swirled around the spot. Quinton knew that nothing could stem the panic.

A pall of smoke drifted along the right bank. Grim-faced, gun in hand, Quinton crouched and waited for a head to show above the tall grass.

Raymer came galloping up from the rear, riding low in his saddle. Quinton watched his progress with a puzzled frown. Slugs were buzzing overhead like bees, but no one had been hit.

"Get Jean on my horse!" Raymer shouted as he vaulted from the saddle.

A high-pitched twang like that of a plucked steel string sounded above the loud reports of the muskets. Raymer's horse whinnied and rolled over.

"That," observed Quinton, "was a Mauser. And the guy behind it can shoot!"

"Shootin' at our horses but not at us, eh?" said Raymer with quick comprehension. "Guess we're kind of fenced in, son."

The firing stopped suddenly. Quinton pointed to where the grass bent and swayed as if disturbed by an under current.

Then he said: "They're creeping up on us!"

A HORN blared on their left. The unwarriors answered it in a thunderous shout. As their battle-cry rolled across the veldt, painted shields flared above the yellow grass and the sun flashed on steel. Like a black wave, the massed warriors swept down on them, their white plumes tossing like spindrift whipped up by the wind.

Jean screamed and covered her face with her hands. Raymer raised his rifle, but Quinton caught his arm.

"That wouldn't do us any good right now," he explained coolly.

In silence they watched their porters herded together. A line of warriors advanced upon them; then fanned out into a circle, crouching behind their shields with out-thrust spears, and closed in slowly.

"They're Ovambos!" muttered Quinton. "Ovambos!" he repeated incredulously.

"You've been keepin' bad company," drawled Raymer. "I don't like the look of your friends."

Quinton was pointing to a spot above the heads of the warriors. A white man was scrambling down the bank.

"Maddon!" Quinton said.

Raymer gave him a quick, understanding look: "You're in real trouble, son."

The circle opened and Maddon stood before them, his rifle ready.

"Drop your guns!" his voice boomed.

Quinton obeyed. With a shrug Raymer also flung down his rifle.

Four Ovambos jumped forward. They

bound the wrists of both men behind their backs.

"What's on your mind, Maddon?" Quinton asked.

"I'll show yer!" Maddon took a pace forward and kicked Quinton's feet from under him. Then he walked over to Quinton's horse and came back with the whip in his hand.

Quinton gritted his teeth as the lash fell across his shoulders. When the blood spurted, Maddon's hatred became a frenzy. Bestial grunts came from between his thick, slobbering lips. Soon Quinton's shirt was in ribbons; his back a mass of raw flesh.

"You beast! You coward!" The girl's voice came to Quinton's ears. You wouldn't dare face him—" She screamed as the lash struck her.

Quinton struggled to his knees: "Maddon, I'll kill you for that!" he gasped.

"Ain't 'ad enough yet, heh!" Maddon gloated. "I'll lift your bleedin' 'ide, I will!"

He pushed Quinton over with his foot and raised the whip to strike again. But the lash was caught in a strong, black hand and jerked with a force that toppled Maddon over.

"Another lash and you die!" said a deep voice in English.

Maddon faced about with an oath but backed away as the new-comer advanced upon him.

Through eyes glazed with agony, Quinton saw a tall, muscular Ovambo come to a stand in the centre of the ring. He wore the head dress of a chief.

"Bogembwe—you!" muttered Quinton. "Why—" The circle of faces whirled around him. He shook his head and gasped with the pain that came with movement.

With a cry the girl ran to him and dropped to her knees beside him. She pillowed his head on her lap.

"Want to say," Quinton whispered clinging desperately to consciousness, "You have the prettiest legs—ah!" He fainted.

Quinton spent the next few days in a kind of coma. The fever had come to add to his misery, but it was the normal kind: recurrent shakes and temperatures. He lay on his stomach in a litter when they were on the march and the chant of the porters and swaying of the hammock be-

came a rhythm of agony. Vaguely he knew that his life was in the hands of Jean Raymer. She was always beside him, to shield his lacerated back from the sun and to brush off the flies. When they made camp, she was there to dress his wounds and quench his thirst.

Years of clean, hard living made him an easy patient. Once the danger of infection was past, the fever left him and he healed rapidly. On the fourth day of their march he declared himself able to go on foot.

They were half a day's march behind the main column. Twenty young Ovambos formed their guard. From Jean, Quinton learned that her father and Maddon were with the main column. Just before starting on the following morning, the head man of the guard came to Quinton: "Losako," said he. "It is Bogembwe's will that you go unbound. But it is death for me if you escape."

"I will not disgrace you, warrior," said Quinton. "When Bogembwe was my friend, he would not have killed a man for so small a thing."

"Perhaps he would not do so now, Losako. Nkoi wills it."

"Nkoi! So, it is the Leopard's claws you fear, warrior! How is that? Is Nkoi chief in the Kaokoveld?"

The head man's face froze: "I have spoken," said he.

AN HOUR later they were winding across the veldt toward a brooding, tangled mass of jungle. They followed the line of least resistance, a river bed which would become a torrent when lightning rent the black clouds gathering over the Kaokovelds. They passed marshy pools from which the egrets, disturbed by their approach, rose like feathers shaken from a pillow in the wind. The ground was strewn with hippo dung and the grey, ghostly forms of baboons glided among the rocks.

Quinton and the girl were trudging along side by side, when she suddenly asked: "Where are they taking us?"

"Bogembwe's kraal would be a good guess," he replied, "It's in the Kaokoveld foot-hills. We should make it by sundown tomorrow."

"But why? What have we done?"

Quinton answered her with a question: "Do you know what your father came here for?"

"Oh, it's about something Uncle Joe told him. He's always going off somewhere to build dams and bridges and leaving me behind. He didn't want to bring me along this time, but I changed his mind."

"Uncle Joe—a missionary?"

"Yes." She laughed. "Knowing father, that hardly seems possible, does it? The funny part is they *look* so much alike. There's only a year between them and if Uncle Joe were to shave his beard, you couldn't tell them apart."

"Ah!" exclaimed Quinton, and stopped short, as understanding came to him. Some Ovambo had recognized Raymer, mistaken him for his missionary brother, perhaps. And The Leopard, a back-sliding convert, remembering the secret he had once divulged, had pounced upon them. Now he could understand why his Ovambos had refused to go on safari with him and why Bogembwe had come so far from his own territory to ambush them. But what connection could there be between Maddon, Cock Biles and Nkoi? And then the realization that the knowledge Raymer possessed was likely to cost their lives, struck him with the force of a blow. The Leopard would use his claws; silence the tongue.

He glanced up as the head man strode up to him:

"Why do you stand here, Losako?" the man asked with a suspicious frown.

"The woman wished to rest, warrior."

"So soon?" the head man looked disgusted. "Do not take her to wife, Losako," he advised. "She is lazy and could raise but a sorry crop. March, Losako!"

"What did he say?" asked the girl.

"Well, he said that I'd be a lucky man if I got you for a wife."

"Oh, really!" She flashed a happy smile at the dour-faced head man.

Quinton lapsed into gloomy silence and trudged on.

Before noon they entered the shade of the forest, a hot-house shade, damp and sultry. Streamlets linked the pools in the river-bed, and as they forced their way deeper into the jungle, the linked pools became a sluggish river fed by the mists that shrouded the mountains.

Then the trail they followed began an abrupt ascent. The noise of the river increased in volume. By sunset they were up on a plateau with miles of parkland stretching out before them, and rolling up to the foothills like a green tide.

Instead of making camp, they rested for only an hour. Just before night came, they marched into Bogembwe's kraal called Totumbe, after Bogembwe's grandfather, the fabled Croesus of Ovamboland.

The village was more than the usual haphazard collection of bee-hive huts surrounded by a mud wall. It was a small, well-built town, with cultivated ground on all sides. On one side it was bounded by the river and on the other, by a rocky krantz and steep cliffs, the deep shadows of their abrupt descent contrasting with the burned grass of the plateau above. Everywhere there were signs of planning. Quinton, who knew the town well, saw in it the symbol of one man's bitter struggle to lift himself and his people above the dark, bloody rule of witchcraft.

As they marched down the broad, well-kept road that ran through the centre of the town, their guards broke up into two squads and separated Quinton from the girl. They were led away to separate huts.

Food was brought to Quinton by a firm-breasted Ovambo girl. She giggled and talked, flirted with him scandalously but would answer no questions. Anxious as Quinton was to learn what had become of Raymer and Madden, he did not press for answers. Patience was the highest wisdom in Ovamboland and apparent unconcern, the surest way to knowledge.

WEARY after the long trek, and still sore where the lash had bruised his ribs, Quinton lay down on the hide couch as soon as the girl left him. But worry stayed with him. It pursued him through his dreams in the form of a gigantic leopard with flaming eyes—through mud that clung to his feet and through a jungle of lianas that reached out to check his flight like so many vibrating tentacles.

Quinton awoke with the roll of the drums in his ears. A shaft of sunlight stabbed into the blackness of the hut through its low doorway. Everywhere there was the rustle of movement. Splay feet padded along the road past his door-

way. The drums kept up their incessant clamor, calling the Ovambos to the large, open space before their chief's house where the ceremonial dances were held and judgments given.

Presently Quinton was called out into the sunlight. He walked briskly towards Bogembwe's house with two armed Ovambos following closely at his heels.

All the villagers, men, women and children, were packed into the square. A path opened for Quinton as he approached and he came to stand in a pool of sunlight hemmed in by black, sweating bodies. Raymer and his daughter stood facing the chief's house.

Bogembwe sat on a stool under the sloping eaves of his house, backed up by the Elders of the clan. His body guard of young warriors made an imposing array; their white plumes contrasting nicely with the black sheen of their muscular bodies. Their long bladed spears butted to the ground, painted shields resting against them.

The witch doctors stood apart—a weird group, grotesque, a composite of all the evil that could befall an Ovambo. Their hideous masks smelled of fresh pigment, attesting to the importance of the occasion. Their necklets of human bones rattled when they moved. Quinton's eyes passed over them and came to rest on the young chief.

"Are we no longer friends, Bogembwe?" Quinton asked in English.

"You have brought enemies into my country, Losako," the chief answered in his own tongue.

Quinton pointed to Raymer and the girl: "What harm can these two do to the Ovambos? One man and a woman? What of the other? I do not see him here. Is he your friend? Did he not steal from the Ovambos? Who punished him? You saw with your own eyes how he—"

"I see with the eyes of The Leopard!" the other cut him short.

"Ha-a-ah!" the witch doctors chorused their approval.

Quinton's eyes widened. Bogembwe, bending his proud spirit to the will of a wizard! He couldn't believe it.

"Does Nkoi say that I am your enemy?" he asked.

"He said so, Losaka. But I and the Elders would not believe it. We said that if you brought enemies into our country, you did so, without knowing it. And we sent Nkoi's messenger back to the mountain yonder. You will do well to leave Lotumbe before he returns, Losako."

"And what will be done with my friends?" demanded Quinton.

"They must die!"

Quinton looked at Raymer and Jean and felt a tumult of sudden fear.

"Have you gone crazy, Chief?" he cried in anger. "You're under British rule. *You* know what will happen if you allow these two to be killed!"

Bogembwe rose, scowling at him. He pointed to Raymer: "Why did he come here, Losako? I will tell you. He came to steal. Did we ask him to do this? No. But because of it, Nkoi says, *kill*. The witchmen say, *kill, kill!* And my young men sharpen their spears. If the English come, there will be fighting. I cannot help it!"

Quinton turned to face the witch doctors. His face twisted into a grimace of disgust.

"Ah-a-ah!" A sharp gasp ran through the ranks of the warriors and ended in an angry growl.

But Quinton's anger had carried him beyond fear: "Who is this Nkoi?" he demanded, his voice ringing clearly. "How is it that no man has seen his face? It is because he is a cheat and a fool. And he will destroy the Ovambos!"

Bogembwe strode up to him, his eyes flashing with anger.

"Be quiet, you fool!" Then his deep voice addressed the Elders: "Losako is angry with us because he cannot help his friends. Could he be otherwise and be the Losako the Ovambos know as a true friend?"

The Elders jabbered among themselves for a few moments. Then a white-haired fellow, their spokesman, stepped forward:

"It could not be otherwise, O, Chief." He announced their decision. "But let the truth be shown to Losako, so that his anger will be turned from us."

"Let it be so, Wise Ones!" Bogembwe affirmed. "I will talk with him later." He turned to Quinton: "Go in peace, Losako! I give you my hand."

AS THEY clasped hands Quinton felt a piece of paper pressed against his palm. He closed his hand upon it. Raymer and the girl were staring at him. Jean gave him a faint smile. Raymer's expression was enigmatical. They couldn't know, he thought, that he held their chances of life in the palm of his hand. Perhaps Jean thought he was leaving them to their fate. He wanted to talk to them, but Bogembwe's eyes warned him away.

As soon as Quinton reached the seclusion of his hut, he opened the note Bogembwe had given him. All it said was "Walk East through the village at moon-rise."

Quinton put a match to the paper and frowned as he watched it burn. At least it was clear that witchcraft had undermined Bogembwe's authority and he dared not openly oppose the verdict of his witch doctor. What could he do in secret? Quinton jumped to his feet and ground the charred paper under his heel in sudden, impotent anger. It was incredible that seven words could spell out the only hope he had of saving Jean Raymer—the girl he would marry if she would have him. But it was so. There was nothing he could do without Bogembwe's help—without it, Raymer and his daughter would die before sun-rise. Nor was it likely that he, a witness, would be allowed to live to tell the tale. Poison in his food, or a bullet from Maddon's Mauser, perhaps.

For a long time Quinton sat on the hide couch revolving plans. The mumble of the drums broke in on his thoughts. He went out. The Ovambos were leaving the square. From behind the trunk of a tree, he watched Raymer and Jean led away, hemmed in by young warriors whose spears flashed above the heads of a pack of women and children who cursed and spat upon the condemned pair.

Quinton made no attempt to follow them. The less concern he showed the better for Bogembwe's plan—if he had a plan.

Slowly the sun inclined from its zenith, climbing down through an eternity to the crest of the kranz that brooded over the town, and where, in some rocky cavern, Nkoi, The Leopard, watched and flexed his claws.

At moon-rise the ritual drums began to

throb. Soon the deep bass voices of the warriors were chanting tonelessly, while the women kept time by clapping their hands. The leaping figures of dancers circled the fire that blazed in the centre of the square. Coming from his hut, Quinton glanced up and down the straight road. It was deserted. Bogembwe had chosen a good time for their tryst.

Quinton sauntered down the road and reached the Eastern outskirts of the town. He was about to retrace his steps when he heard his name called softly. Bogembwe was standing in the shadow of a tree. He whispered:

"We have two hours, perhaps three. Follow me." Without a word of explanation he started to run down a trail that twisted between the boles of great trees.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the outskirts of the village, they came to a clearing surrounded by a stockade of sharpened stakes as thick as a man's thigh and interwoven with thorn lianas.

"The man and woman are here," announced Bogembwe as they came to a stand before a narrow gate of thorn bush. "Guards?" asked Quinton tensely.

The Chief smiled grimly: "Who enters here needs no guard, Losako. The fence guards *him* against the lion and the leopard."

The stakes enclosed a circle of ground, a flat arena. A row of saplings, stripped of their lower branches, stood in the centre like slender flag poles. Two of them were bent over bow-like with their tips lashed to stakes driven into the ground. On their knees, bound to these same stakes, were the drooping figures of Raymer and his daughter. Quinton knew that when the hour of execution came, the saplings would be lashed to the hair of the victims. And when their necks were stretched taut, a fellow with a machete would take a swing at it—the spring of the sapling would finish the job.

With a cry he ran toward them, his knife flashing in his hand. While he slashed the girl's bonds, Bogembwe freed Raymer. Raymer swayed to his feet but Jean lay very still in Quinton's arms, her face white in the moonlight, her breathing scarcely audible.

"How long have they been here?" Quinton asked anxiously.

"Since an hour before noon."

"Without water?"

"Give her a little." Bogembwe thrust a skin bag into his hand.

Quinton forced a few drops between the girl's bloodless lips. She moaned but did not open her eyes. Raymer knelt beside Quinton, forcing back the girl's eyelids as he said: "She'll be out for an hour at least."

Quinton noticed that Raymer's hand shook: "You all right?" he asked.

"Never mind me, son. Just get her out. You can have anything I've got. I've been through hell, watching her suffer. These black devils—"

"There's one standing beside you, Raymer," Quinton interrupted him coldly. "We're a long way from out yet. If we do get out, you'll have him to thank for it."

Raymer got to his feet: "Chief," he began, offering his hand.

But Bogembwe stood with folded arms and his eyes flashed in the moonlight: "I do nothing for you," he said bitterly. "What I do, I do for my own people. If they killed you, soldiers would come. My people would not understand it. They would think that the soldiers had come, as you have come, to steal and spit upon the things they honor. They would throw themselves against the soldiers' guns and they would die. Your brother was a better man than you, Gold-seeker. He knew where the gold of my fathers was hidden, but he would not touch it. Nor would he betray the trust black devils had in him. He kept their secret. But you—"

"Anger is before your eyes, Bogembwe," interposed Quinton quietly. "You cannot see my friend as he is. He would have taken nothing without your consent. It was agreed between us—"

Raymer checked him with a touch on his arm: "I had that comin' to me," said he, and turned away.

"We must go," urged Bogembwe. "If the woman cannot walk, carry her." He turned and strode off toward the gate.

RAYMER and Quinton lifted the girl between them and followed in his wake. They skirted the village and came out on a trail that ran along the bank of the river. After they had gone some distance, Jean

declared herself able to walk with the help of her father. Quinton moved ahead and fell into step beside Bogembwe. "What became of the other white man, Maddon?"

Bogembwe pointed to the krantz that loomed out above them: "He is Nkoi's friend. He went to the lair of The Leopard and that is where we are going, Losako, because my young men dare not follow us there."

"True," Quinton agreed. "They would catch us before sunrise. How many are up yonder?"

Bogembwe shrugged. "Who knows? As you know Nkoi dwells there with his servants. He shows himself to no man and he speaks with the mouth of his messengers. He is a shadow. The tricks of the witch doctors I understand, and I know how to deal with them. But this Nkoi, I do not understand him and I fear him, Losako. How can a man fight a shadow?"

"He is more cunning than the others, that is all, Bogembwe. He knows that the greatest fear is of the thing unseen."

"It may be so, Losako. Well, because of what I have done this night, I am a doomed man. But I am not eager to die. If we are to live, we must root out this wizard."

"True, Bogembwe!" Quinton approved with a grim smile. "We get the wizard or the wizard gets us!"

An hour later they were toiling upward among the red rocks and dwarf aloes ascending the hill by a series of terraces like a gigantic stairway. There were stretches of narrow-leafed grass and scattered patches of bush lurking among the huge sand-stone boulders. The spoor of a lioness and two cubs crossed their trail and a mountain reibok stood out in silhouette on a pedestal of eroded red rock. Vast cloud masses hovered over the crags of the Kaokovelds, the bright moon was behind them and drew an outline of dazzling light along their black edges. A flash of lightning illuminated their interior with a fitful transparency. The crash of distant thunder shook the solid hill.

Quinton and Bogembwe reached the plateau before Raymer and the girl. They stood looking about, dwarfed by the huge boulders and slabs of sand stone which were fretted into weird shapes by wind and rain. A few hundred yards ahead of them the sheer face of a cliff loomed and

seemed to present an impassable barrier.

Quinton was thinking of Maddon and his rifle. But Bogembwe troubled by less tangible fears, touched his arm and said:

"It is an evil place to come to at night."

"A man with a rifle among the rocks would be more dangerous in daylight, Bogembwe. Is there a path beyond the cliff?"

"Only the witch doctors know. Who but wizards and men doomed as we are, would come to this place?"

"A white man in search of gold, Bogembwe."

"Ah, but he is Nkoi's friend."

Quinton smiled grimly. "If Nkoi can keep his friendship when once he has seen the gold, even I will believe that Nkoi is a wizard."

Raymer's voice called to them as he came up over the rim of the escarpment. Jean clambered up beside him. White skin showed through, revealing rents in her shirt and jodhpurs and blood where the thorns had torn her flesh. She was too exhausted by the climb to talk and stretched herself out with a groan under a thorn bush.

"This is it!" said Raymer. "It's just as Joe described it."

Quinton was chewing on the biltong Bogembwe had produced from his bag and did not speak. But at length he said: "Bogembwe and I will go on. You'll have to stay here with Jean."

Raymer started to protest but Quinton cut him short: "She can't go on. Besides, your white shirts would show like a light among the rocks, and Maddon can shoot too damn straight!!"

A FEW yards beyond their starting point, they left the trail and worked their way toward the face of the cliff in swift rushes from rock to rock. Quinton cursed as the moon came out from behind clouds. It was a witch's moon—a moon to make the jackals howl.

Soon the black shadow of the cliff spread over them. Bogembwe pointed silently as Quinton came to stand beside him. The face of the rock reflected the flickering light of a fire. Without exchanging a word they crouched and crawled toward it.

They had covered another twenty yards when the orange flames showed

between gaps in the rocks. The outlines of two figures were seated before the fire. The skin of one showed white and Quinton recognized Maddon's burly torso. The other was a small weazened person, wearing a leopard skin, the head and claws hanging loosely from his shoulders.

"Nkoi!" breathed Bogembwe.

As they watched, another figure emerged from the mouth of the cave and crept toward them, his black skin almost invisible in the shadow of the cliff. Quinton watched his approach with a puzzled frown. Evidently the fellow was trying to pass the fire without being seen.

As the black approached the circle of fire-light, he sprang upright and made a dash for the cover of the rock. Quinton saw Maddon spring to his feet. The black was within ten yards of them when a spurt of flame flashed before Quinton's eyes. The runner coughed, turned a somersault and lay still. The jackals stopped their howling. The report of the rifle re-echoed along the face of the cliff and was swallowed in the breathless silence of the night.

Maddon was advancing upon them, his rifle held at the ready, evidently coming to see the effect of his shot. The wizard, Nkoi, remained by the fire, peering out into the shadows.

A grim smile came to Quinton's face as he watched Maddon's cautious approach. Nkoi and Maddon's rifle were the things that worried him most and he saw that luck was offering him a chance to rid himself of both.

"They do not know *we* are here, Bogembwe," he whispered tensely. "The white man is mine; the wizard is yours!"

"Ah-h!" Bogembwe sighed and faded into the shadows.

Quinton crawled forward on his belly and crouched behind a rock a few feet from the spot where the black had fallen. The crunching of Maddon's boots on the loose gravel stopped. Quinton heard him grunt as he bent over his victim; then the crunching started again as he turned away. Quinton slid around the rock and sprang at his back.

The force of his rush knocked Maddon off his feet. He dropped his rifle as he pitched forward and uttered a hoarse croak of fear. Unable to check his mo-

mentum, Quinton tripped over the other's legs and sprawled on top of him. Maddon yelped and writhed in a frenzy of terror, evidently believing himself attacked by some beast. With a roar he struggled to his feet, lifting Quinton with him. Quinton jumped clear.

Maddon gasped in relief as he stared at Quinton. "I thought you was a leopard!"

"It might add up to the same thing, Maddon."

"You ain't got your bleedin' whip, Mister!" Maddon's teeth showed in an ugly, confident grin. His hand slid down to his holster. But he was built like an ox and as slow as one. The gun was kicked from his hand as soon as he got it clear of the leather, and Quinton had hit him twice while he mouthed an oath. Swift and sure-footed, Quinton circled the other's huge bulk, avoiding the powerful arms that clutched at him and striking hard blows whenever the other passed from shadow into moonlight. Inside of a few minutes he had the hairy, baboon face mashed into bloody pulp. But it was man versus gorilla. Maddon was still on his feet and Quinton realized with a thrill of dismay that Maddon was taking all he could give, deliberately wearing him down, waiting for a chance to close and crush him in a bear-like hug.

Suddenly Maddon sprang at him. Quinton struck desperately. He felt the other's huge hand clutch his shoulder and twisted away, leaving his coat behind him. Maddon lurched after him, the steel of a hunting knife flashed in his hand. Instinctively, Quinton drew his own knife from its sheath.

FOR a moment the two men looked at each other and the light in their eyes was as cold as the glint of moonlight on the steel in their hands. It was an instinctive pause such as comes when the warm, pulsing heart feel the approach of death.

Maddon's snarl broke the spell. He flung himself at Quinton, his knife sweeping upward in a murderous arc, aimed at his stomach. Quinto felt the blade burn his flesh as, in one swift movement, he parried the stroke with his left arm and sidestepped. He drove his knife at the other's body, but Maddon caught his wrist in his

hand, twisting the knife from his grasp. In a last despairing effort Quinton crashed his free fist into Maddon's face. He felt the shock of the blow up to his shoulder and it stopped Maddon. He staggered back a pace and Quinton rushed in, striking with right and left. Suddenly Maddon doubled up, sat down and then rolled over on his stomach.

Dazed and gasping for breath, Quinton turned away, vaguely wondering what had happened to Bogembwe. As he stumbled in the direction of the fire, something whizzed past his ear. He faced about with a startled cry. He heard Maddon gasp and saw him fall back with the shaft of a spear sticking out of his chest.

Bogembwe stepped out of the shadow: "Losako," said he, with a reproachful shake of his head, "Did he knock the wits out of you? In another moment his knife would have been in your back."

"It was stupid, but thanks, Bogembwe." Quinton leaned back against a rock, breathing deeply: "What of Nkoi?" he asked.

Deep laughter mumbled up from Bogembwe's stomach: "Oh-ah, The Leopard! Come, Lasako," he said, still chuckling: "Come and look upon Nkoi!"

Quinton followed him out into the circle of fire-light. The crumpled, painted body of Nkoi lay before the fire, his hands were bound. Bogembwe ran forward and picked up the scrawny body by the neck and buttocks, showing the face to Quinton.

"Behold! The Leopard!" said he.

"Cock Biles!" Quinton stared with his mouth open. Then he asked: "Is he dead?"

"No. But I think he all but died of fright when he saw me, Losako." He shook the little cockney as a terrier shakes a rat, as he bellowed: "Ho, Wizard! Awake!"

"Blimey!" gasped Biles from between chattering teeth.

"Truly," observed Bogembwe, "Fear is an evil thing. I, Chief of the Ovambos, have feared this thing. Aie! All the Ovambos have feared him and we dared not disobey the commands his messenger gave us. Ho! What will the Elders say? What will the witch doctors say when I show them this?"

Quinton chuckled: "You are wise, Bogembwe. Show The Leopard to them just as he is and witchcraft will die in the

Kaakovelds. Shame and laughter will kill it. But put him down, there may be others."

"There were others, Losako."

"Maddon done it!" whined Biles. "They was in the cave—six of 'em. Shot 'em down like dawgs, 'e did, as they tried to sneak hout. Wot did I 'ave against 'em? They was me pals. I tried to stop 'im. I takes houth on hit, guv'nor!"

Disgust twisted the corners of Quinton's mouth as he looked down on the snivelling Cockney. He was thinking of the mysterious trips Biles had made out of Dom Luis, always returning with money.

"He's been bringing the gold out in small lots for years," he said to Bogembwe. "Then for some reason he decided to bring it all out and he brought Maddon in to do what he didn't have the guts to do himself. But what happened to Nkoi? And where did he get the nerve to play the part—"

"Right, guv'nor!" Biles' voice cut in eagerly. "I knows where the gold is 'id! And if yer keeps yer mouth shut about—"

"You'll talk, Biles," said Quinton coldly. "Or I'll leave you to the Ovambos."

"No!" Biles pleaded.

"Let's have it then."

"I only did wot any bloke as 'ad the chawnce would 'ave done," Biles began. "It 'appened ten years ago. I wus workin' fer a parson at the mission 'ouse what used to be near 'ere before it was burned hout. Joe Raymer wus the parson's nyme.

"One day this 'ere Nkoi comes to us. And, one night I 'ears Nkoi talkin' to the parson. Tellin' 'im abowt Lotumbe's gold, 'e were. The parson 'e don't want hit! Hit belongs to the Hovambos, 'e says.

"Well, I sees me chawnce. I makes a pal orf Nkoi. I shows 'im 'ow to do a few tricks with the chem'cals in the dispens'ry. So 'e offers to tayke me hup the mountain. But that ain't sayfe, an' I don't like hit. Then I 'its upon the hidea orf dressin' meself hup like 'im."

"What happened to Nkoi?"

"When we was comin' hup 'ere one night, 'e fell down an' broke 'is bleedin' neck, that's wot!"

"I see," commented Quinton dryly.

"No yer don't! 'E wus 'elpin' me get the gold hout right under the ruddy wizards' noses. D'yer think I wanted ter risk me 'ead doin' orf hit alone?"

"And what about Maddon?"

"I got 'im to get rid 'o Raymer, the bloke I saw at Ike's Playce."

"So you set the Ovambos onto us," Quinton finished.

"No!" squealed Biles. "Hit wus Maddon. Hit wus 'is hidea, so 'elp me!"

Bogembwe and Quinton both faced about quickly as the crunch of a boot sounded on the gravel. Raymer's white shirt showed in the darkness. He had Maddon's rifle in his hand. The girl came into sight a few paces behind him.

"Ha!" said Bogembwe. "Here is another with a nose for gold!"

Raymer smiled and handed the rifle to Quinton as he said: "Heard a shot and came over. Been listenin' for the last five minutes."

Quinton waited until the girl came up to them, then stooped and took a burning brand from the fire. "We'll take a look inside the cave."

"Up, Wizard!" Bogembwe heaved Biles to his feet. "Show us the way."

They followed Biles and Bogembwe, each each with a burning brand in his hand. Quinton saw the dead forms of two of the witch doctors who had fallen to Maddon's rifle and steered the girl past them. The stench of tom-cats stung his nostrils as they filed into the damp blackness of the cave. Quinton thought of lions and moved up abreast of Bogembwe.

The flickering light of the torches revealed soot-blackened walls. There were patches of color which, on closer inspection, proved to be crude drawings of animal life, the work of ancient cave-dwellers.

"'Ere hit is!" Biles' voice brought them to a stop. He pointed down to a number of hide bags stacked against the rock wall.

As they gathered around the hoard, Quinton slashed one of the bags with his knife. Gold poured out of the slit, Kruger sovereigns, Portuguese milreis and among them a few rhombic stones that burned with an inward fire.

Quinton gave Raymer a quizzical look: "Well, this is the end of the trail, Mr. Raymer. I waive my share and my wages."

"White man," Bogembwe's deep voice addressed Raymer: "If you had not come, I would have lost it all. Also, because of

your coming, my people will be free from the evil of witchcraft. Take what you can carry, white man. I give it to you."

"Well," said Raymer, "I sure came a long way to get it and I don't figure to go back empty-handed. Maybe we can talk business, Chief. Our friend, Losako, told me that you wanted to do some irrigatin'. You'll need a dam and a reservoir. Well, that's my job. I'll stay and build it."

Quinton was examining a golden sov-

ereign with an absent smile. It reminded him of Jean's hair and he was thinking that it would take Raymer a long time to build a dam—long enough for the witchery of African moonlight to work its magic during the nights that would follow, when he would walk with her down the forest trails and across the sweet-smelling veldt. He looked up at the girl. Her lips parted and she smiled. Somehow he knew that she had been thinking of the same thing.



The Clean Sweeper

By EDGAR WALLACE

The dark voodoo world of K'salugu-M'pobo screamed with the exultant, fiendish tittering of ghouls when Sanders of the River dared challenge the great Ochori king.

THE soldiers of the old king who lives beyond the mountains came down into the Ochori country and took back with them ten women and forty goats—and this was the year of the sickness, when goats were very valuable. And a week later they came again, and in yet another week they repeated the raid.

Mr. Commissioner Sanders sent an urgent message into the old king's country and journeyed to the Ochori to meet the old man's envoy. . . .

On a certain day, over the northern hills came Buliki, chief minister of the great king K'salugu-M'pobo, and he came with great hauteur, with four and sixty spearmen for his escort, and each spearman wore the leopard skin of the royal service—that is to say, a leopard skin with three monkey tails, signifying the swiftness, the ferocity, and the agility of these men. He boasted that he was the fortieth of his house who had sat in the royal kraal and had given the law.

Sanders, with a more modest escort, waited in the city of the Ochori for the coming of this mission, which was two days late and was even now arriving, not at dawn as had been faithfully promised, but in the heat of the day. Sanders sat cross-legged on his canvas chair, chewing an unsmoked cigar and drawing little patterns with his ebony stick on the sand.

Behind him, tall and straight, his bare, brown back rippling with muscles with every movement, was Bosambo, chief and king of the Ochori folk north and south.

Behind the shelter which had been erected to serve as a palaver house was a section of Houssas, brown-faced men in blue tunics, handling their rifles with an easy familiarity which was very awe-inspiring to the dense mob of the Ochori people who had come to witness this memorable meeting.

Sanders said no word, realizing that this was not the moment for confidences, and that in all probability Bosambo was quite as wise as he himself on the matter of the great king's delinquencies. For north of the hills was territory which was as yet independent, and acknowledged no government and no king beside its own.

Whether this was to remain so did not depend entirely upon the result of the interview, for no man knew better than Sanders that nothing short of four battalions could force the passes of the great mountains, and war was very unpopular with the British Government just about then.

The royal guard which the king had sent as escort to his minister wheeled onto the big square and formed a line facing Sanders, and the Houssas regarded them with the peculiar interest which soldiers have for possible casualties. Buliki was a big man, broad, tall, and stout. He swaggered up to the palaver house without any evidence that he was impressed by the importance of the man he was to meet.

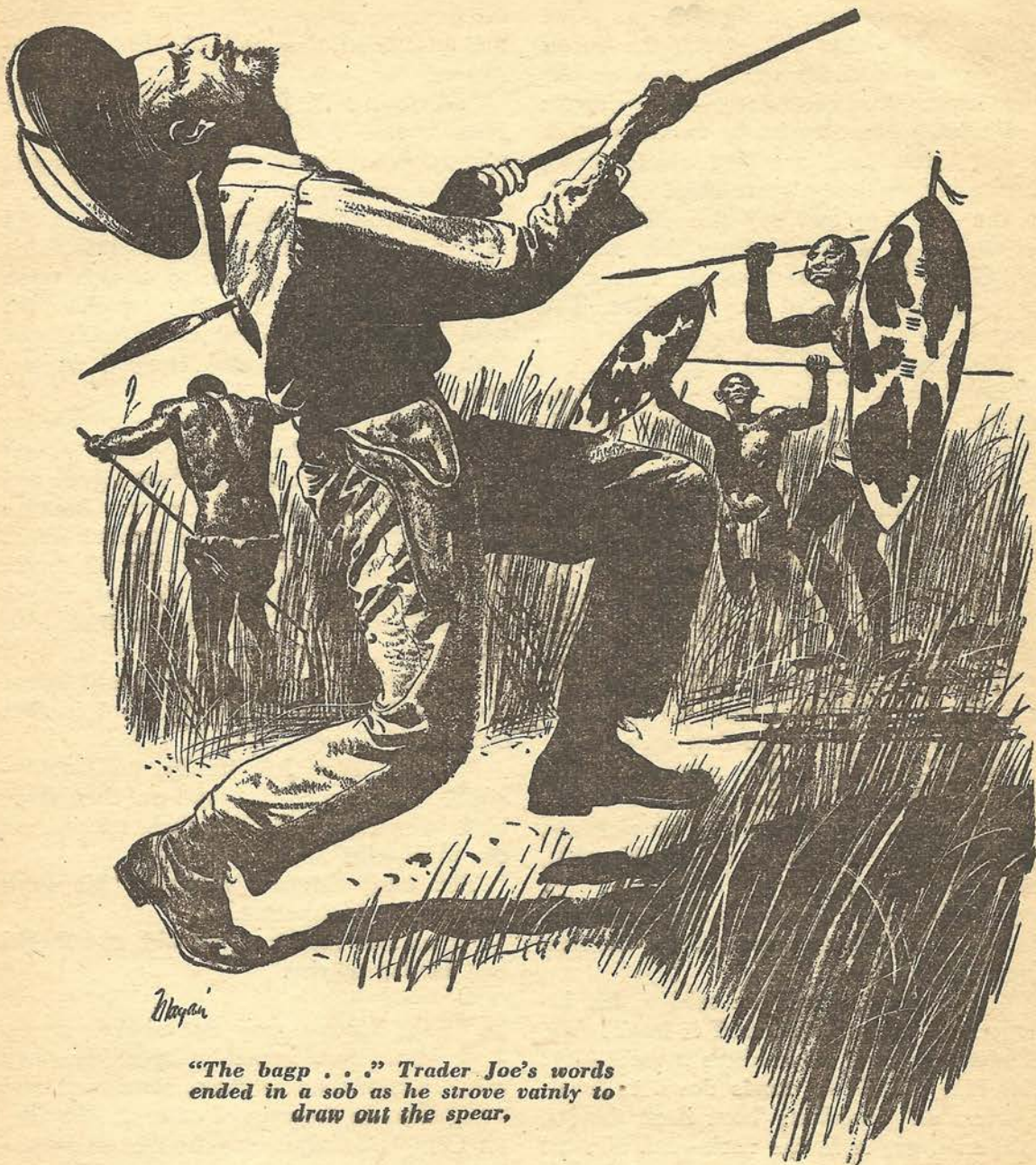
"I see you, white man," he said in the Bomongo tongue, which runs for six hundred miles to the north and the west of the Territories.

"I see you, black man," replied Sanders. "What message do you bring from your master?"

"Lord," said the man insolently, "my master has no message for you, only this: that whilst he rules his land he knows no other king than his own beautiful impulse and has no other law but the law he gives."

"Oh ko!" said Sanders sardonically. "He must have a very powerful ju-ju to talk so boldly, and you, Buliki, have surely the stomach of a lion—for hereabouts I am the law, and men who speak to me in the tone of a master I hang out of hand."

His tone was bleak and cold, and his



Hayes

"The bagp . . ." Trader Joe's words ended in a sob as he strove vainly to draw out the spear,

blue eyes strayed unconsciously to the high tree before the palaver place.

Buliki, who knew nothing of the sacred character of an embassy, went gray under his tawny skin and shuffled his feet.

"Lord," he pleaded, in a different voice, "I am a tired man, having come this day across the Mountain of the Cold White Powder that Melts. Therefore be gentle to me, a poor chief, who does not know the ways of white men."

"Go back to your master, Buliki, and speak this way: Sandi, who sits for his king on the great river, desires that no soldiers may come again from the king's territory to raid the women and goats of the Ochori. For I am a man quick to kill, and no respecter of kings or chiefs. I have ploughed little kings into the ground and the crops of my people have flourished on the bones of princes. Where is M'balagini, who brought his spears against me?"

He is dead and his house has rotted with the rains. Where is Kobolo, the N'gombi warrior who took his young men into battle against me? You will search the forest for his city, and his spirit weeps on the great mountain. Little kings are my meat: how mighty are they in the house of their wives! How small are they when I bring them in irons to my great ship! Go back to the old king and say this: The chief or soldier of his who comes this side of the Ghost Mountains shall be slaves for my people and be glad they are alive. The palaver is finished."

After the embassy had departed . . .

"Dam' nigger!" said Bosambo, who was blacker than a spade suit but had the advantage of a Christian education. "Silly ass! . . ."

Then, in his own language, for Sanders did not favor Coast English:

"Lord, this old king is very cunning, and there sits in the shadow of his hut a white man who knows the ways of white lords."

"The devil there is!" said Sanders in surprise, for this was news to him that Joe the Trader had gone that way.

Up in the old king's country Buliki, prostrate and on his face before the wizened old man, told the story of his embassy, and the king listened, stroking his thin, frizzly beard.

Joe the Trader (he had no other name) listened too, and had parts of the message translated to him.

"Tell the old man," he said to his interpreter, "that all that stuff is bunk! Say, Sanders ain't got no soldiers more'n fifty! Tell him that if he sends down to headquarters an' complains 'bout these threats, Sanders'll get it in the neck—not allowed to do that sort of thing."

Joe, in his semi-sober moments, was an authority on what may be described as the unwritten laws of the wild. He had tramped up and down Africa from the Zambesi to the Lado, and he had learned a lot. There wasn't a lock-up from Charter to Dakka that had not housed him. He had traded arms and gin for ivory in the days of Bula Matadi, and had drifted now to the one sanctuary where the right arm of any law could not reach him.

Of all the men in the world he hated best Mr. Sanders, and had good reason for

his antipathy, for Sanders flogged the sellers of gin, and hanged even white gentlemen who purveyed Belgian firearms to the unsophisticated and bloodthirsty aborigines.

"Here! . . ." Joe was excited at the idea. "Tell him to send for Sanders to a great palaver—somewhere up the Ghosts—you'd get him coming up that road. . . ."

This plan was duly translated. The old king's dull eyes lit up and he rubbed his hands, for he had sworn to stretch upon his new war-drum the skin of the man who harassed him—and the drum's case had grown warped and cracked in the years of waiting.

"That is good talk," said a counsellor unfavorable to the king's white guest; "but it is well known that Sandi goes unharmed through terrible dangers because of M'shimba-M'shamba, the fearful spirit. They say that great regiments of devils march with him shrieking so that, where he has passed, the leopards lie dead with fright."

The old king was impressed, and licked the four fingers of his right hand so that no evil could touch him.

"Stuff!" said Joe loudly. "Ghosts—stuff! You'll get him good an' then these birds won't come stickin' their noses over the mountains no more. . . ."

The king listened, straining his neck toward the interpreter.

"Man, this shall be," he said, and Buliki was bidden to rise.

NEW brooms may not always sweep clean, but, generally speaking, they raise enough dust to choke some men and bring tears to the eyes of others. Macalister Campbell-Cairns was the newest broom that was ever landed from a surf-boat to agitate the fever-bitten back-blocks and bring to the surface the murder urge which lies so close to the skin of the most law-abiding.

This man was an Excellency, had on the lapel of his coat miniature noughts and crosses that glittered at the end of variegated ribbons; wore, as his right on such occasions, a radiant paste star over his pancreas, and could put a string of letters after his name as long as the name itself. He fell from the surf-boat into the arms of a sergeant of King's Houssas, fell from

the tawdry little horse carriage which brought him to Government House, into the presence of a second and third secretary, a Chief Staff Officer, and the Master of his Household; and eventually fell into the thickly padded chair which was his by right of his high office. And almost immediately the new broom began to move around the dusty places, and there was issued from Administrative Headquarters an Order of the Day which was, to all intents and purposes, an Address of Welcome to Sir Macalister Campbell-Cairns, written by Sir Macalister Campbell-Cairns and signed in his indecipherable hand. He had come (he said) to bring Light into Dark Places; to do justice to white and black alike; to offer an Inspiration and a Hope to the most Debased; to establish Centralization and curb the undesirable tendencies of officials to usurp the functions of the Law. (He did not exactly say this, but he meant this.) And last, but not least, he Intended Making Himself Acquainted with every Frontier Post of Civilization for which he was responsible. And if anybody had grievances would they kindly keep them until he came along.

"O my Lord!" gasped thirty-three commissioners, inspectors, officers commanding troops and the like when this reached them.

Attached to the address of welcome was a "Very Secret and Highly Confidential" note for the more important of his subordinates.

It has been brought to the administrator's attention that judgment of death is frequently given and executed by subordinate officials, particularly in Reserved Territories. This practice must cease. All inquiries into cases of murder, treason, and incitement to rebellion must be remitted to A. H. Q., accompanied by a report of the evidence in triplicate, depositions (in duplicate), and a report of the findings of the court.

A month after this order was issued, Lieutenant Tibbetts, whose other name was Bones, chased a man who had murdered H'kema, the woodman and stolen his wife, caught him on the borders of the old king's country, and hanged him within an hour of his arrest.

Thereupon was Hell let Loose at Administrative Headquarters, and the musical career of Lieutenant Tibbetts was threatened with extinguishment.

A VISIT to any Administrator is a solemn and unnerving business. To a new Administrator such a call is to be obeyed with trembling knees. But when Bones, otherwise known as Lt. Tibbetts, received the imperial summons to the headquarters of Sir Macalister Campbell, he did not cringe; he did not flinch a bit from what was obviously a severe duty. He took it all with an amazing lightness of heart.

Sir Campbell had not been in office more than five minutes before he gave to the world his System of Responsible Control, which was roughly as follows: Every administrative unit was to be divided into as many districts as there were European officers. Each officer was to control a district and be responsible for its well-being and good conduct. The fact that he did not have his dwelling within three hundred miles of the country made little or no difference. He might be a subaltern officer acting as tutor to wild Houssa men who were being moulded into military shape and learning for the first time that a rifle was not an instrument designed to frighten people to death, but an arm of precision which performed certain functions with mathematical exactness; that, in fact, the bullet and not the "bang!" was the real cause of all fatalities which followed its discharge.

Macalister believed in machine-guns, correspondence in triplicate, and confidence in the Man on the Spot. This latter belief originated when he found that he was the man. He hated all foreign wines and foreign dishes, had a passion for Scottish mutton and whiskey, and possessed no faith whatever in the rising generation. When he was a boy, things were different. The people who went into the Diplomatic Service were gentlemen; women were modest and knew their place; children never spoke until they were spoken to.

He was a tallish, broadish man, with shoulders like an ox and a very red face that had seen a lot of hard wear. It appeared to have been originally modelled in red wax and to have been carelessly left in the sun.

"HIS EXCELLENCY will see you at once," said the third secretary, and looked at his watch. "You are ten minutes late." He shook his head.

"The boat was a day late, sir," said Bones.

The third secretary shook his head again, took off his white helmet and peered into its depths with half-closed eyes, his lips moving. He seemed to be praying. Then:

"This way, Mr. Tibbetts," he said, and walked rapidly down a corridor.

Bones, who had all a military gentleman's loathing and contempt for the Civil Service, followed at a slower pace to express his independence.

Sir Macalister was pacing up and down his large room, his hands clasped behind him, all the weight and burden of empire on his clouded brow. He shot a glance at the newcomer but did not pause in his exercise.

"Mr. Tibbetts, Your Excellency," said the third secretary, in the tone of one who had caught the visitor after a hard chase.

"Huh," said his Excellency.

The secretary withdrew reluctantly: he would have liked to hear all that the Administrator had to say.

"So—you—are—Mr.—Tibbetts!"

"Yes, sir."

"Your Excellency," snapped Sir Macalister. "No relation to the late—er—Sir John Tibbetts?"

"Yes, sir—my father."

"Oh!"

The Administrator was at a disadvantage: Sir John was the greatest official that had ever come to the coast.

"Indeed? Now, sir: will you tell me why—will you please tell me *why*, when you were policing the Chimbiri district, you *ex-ecuted*, without judge or jury, one Talaki? You will say that you were in a perilous position. You will say that you were five hundred miles from the nearest magistrate. You will say that you have precedents. You will say that the other miscreant escaped because you were understaffed." He stopped and glared at Bones.

"No, sir," said Bones politely. "None of these cute little ideas occurred to me."

"No, sir! Oh, indeed, sir! Now, sir—understand, sir! From this moment, sir!—and you may take this back to your Commissioner, sir!—no man is to die in the Territories until his death warrant is signed and sealed, sir, by me, sir—the Administrator, sir! Or my authorized deputy, sir. Tell Mr. Sanders that, sir!"

Bones was not in any degree ruffled.

"Yes, sir," he said, "And when Mr. Sanders resigns, perhaps Your Excellency will tell his successor?"

"Resigns?" Sir Macalister grew purple. Sanders was a tradition at the Foreign Office. The last time he resigned, a most important administrator was recalled. He was told when he reached home that it was so much easier to find a new administrator than a substitute for the Commissioner of the river territories.

"Do you think he will resign, Mr. Tibbetts?"

"Certain, sir: most unprofessional to send that kind of message by a jolly old subaltern." Bones shook his head reproachfully and added: "I might have to resign too."

The effect of this threat was not apparent. Bones afterwards said that Ruddy reeled. At any rate he resumed his walking.

"I'll go down and see him myself," he said. "It is shockingly unhealthy, but I must go. Why did you hang this fellow, sir?"

"Because, sir," said Bones, "he killed another fellow, sir, an' took his jolly old lady wife. . . ."

He explained how. Sir Macalister, who was not accustomed to the raw of life, shuddered and stopped him halfway through his narrative.

"Dreadful . . . you'd better come to dinner and talk it over, Tibbetts—seven-thirty sharp. Don't keep me waiting or I'll have you cashiered. And by the way, before I forget it, there is, I understand, some trouble in the old king's country. Ticklish business . . . wants tact. Tell Sanders I'll come down by the next boat and ask him to arrange a palaver with the old man. Eh? No, no, I shan't want Sanders there. I'll fix the boundary question—seven-thirty sharp, and if you're a minute late, by . . . I'll—I'll have you hoofed out of the Army, I will, by gad!"

SANDERS really did not mind—the presence of an Administrator in his area worried rather than awed him. He went down to the little concrete quay to say farewell to his Excellency, and since he had thoughtfully added certain comforts to the furnishings of the *Zaire* and

reinforced the poverty-stricken cellar of the big white boat, Sir Macalister was almost friendly.

"Sorry to have given you so much trouble, Mr. Sanders," he said affably, "but I'm going to make this an annual visit . . . previous administrators have been a bit too slack."

"I should be very careful of the old king, sir, if I were you," said Sanders. "Personally, I should not have held the palaver—the mere fact that he asked for it so soon after the last little talk I had with his chief looks very suspicious to me. You quite understand that this palaver was called by the king and not by me? He anticipated your message by twenty-four hours."

"So much the better, Mr. Sanders!" beamed his Excellency. "I shall find him in a conciliatory mood!"

The wheel of the *Zaire* began threshing astern. Bones, in spotless white, stood on the forward deck and saluted stiffly and magnificently, and the *Zaire*, backing slowly to midstream, turned her nose to the black waters and, her stern wheel whirling excitedly, she passed the bend of the river out of sight.

Sir Macalister, his sun helmet on the back of his head, paced up and down the awning-covered forebridge.

AT the Ochori city Bosambo awaited his guests, and when he discovered that Sanders had not come his face fell.

"Lord, this is a bad palaver," he said, and for Bosambo he was serious. "For my spies have brought word that two of the old king's regiments are sitting on the far side of the mountain. And because of this I have gathered all my spears and have sent throughout the land for my young fighting men."

Bones pulled at his long nose.

"Oh, ko! You tell me bad news," he said dismally, "for this man is a King's man and a very high One."

Bosambo surveyed the unconscious Macalister, busy at that moment, through his interpreter, in speaking to the head men gathered to meet him.

"To me he looks like a fat cow," he said, without offense, "and this is a wonder to me, that all your high Ones are fat and old."

All that evening Bones spent in a vain endeavor to dissuade the great man from making the journey. They had with them an escort of twenty Houssas, and the road to the mountains led through dense thicket in which riflemen would be practically useless.

"Mr. Tibbetts," said his Excellency tremendously, "a British official never shirks his duty. That sacred word should be written in gold and placed above his head, so that sleeping or waking he can see it!"

"Personally, dear old sir," murmured Bones, "I never sleep with my jolly old eyes open. The point is, dear old Excellency—"

"Mr. Tibbetts, you are growing familiar," said Macalister haughtily.

AT DAYBREAK they started, ten Houssas and a hundred and fifty picked spears, and came to the foot of the mountain as the last rays of the sun fell athwart the low bush-trees.

"We'll rest here a bit, and finish the march tonight—in the cool of evening," said Macalister, who had been carried the last twelve miles.

Bones wiped his hot and grimy forehead.

"Better wait till the morning, sir," he suggested. "The men are all in."

Sir Macalister smiled.

"Keep you fit, my boy," he said jovially. "I know the music to bring 'em along. I shall have a little practice on my bagpipes."

In that great cleft of the Ghost Mountains which M'shimba-M'shamba had bitten in a night of terrible storm, a score of spears awaited in the dark. The old king, wrapped in his rug of fur, crouched in the cover of the high cliffs, a hot bowl of glowing wood beneath his robe to give him warmth. Squatting at his feet, Joe the Trader sucked at a short, foul pipe.

". . . tell him that when this Sanders goes out he can go down into the Ochori when he dam' pleases. . . ."

One of the attendant counsellors had been lying flat and motionless on the rocky road, his ear pressed to the ground. Now he rose.

"They come," he said, and hissed.

The score of spears became a hundred. Form after form flitted past, the waning moon reflected from their broad spear-blades . . . flitted past and disappeared.

Hereabouts the ground is littered with boulders and there was cover for three men behind each.

"Let no man strike until they are a spear-length from me," coughed the king. "*Sandi you shall bring me alive, also the young man with the silvery eye. . . .*"

The counsellor by his side turned uneasily.

"If the terrible spirits come—" he began, and Joe recognized the words.

"Stuff!" he muttered. "Say, tell him he can have my skin if that happens . . . spirits! Come on, Sanders, you beauty!"

They heard the tramp of feet, caught fugitive glimpses of a swaying lantern. Behind the boulders men grew tense and gripped their killing spears hotly.

Out of the bush that encumbered the lower slopes of the big hill, the lantern came into uninterrupted view.

"Kill!" whispered the king.

But, even as he spoke, there came from the advancing column a strange and horrible sound. It was the shriek of a wounded soul—the scream of a man tortured beyond endurance—a savage and exultant howl amidst the fiendish titterings of ghouls. . . . Sir Campbell's pipes!

For a second the king stood erect, paralyzed, his face working; and then, with

screams of fear, the hidden spearmen began to run, blinded by terror, throwing spear and shield as they fled.

Trader Joe shouted, "Tell him . . . only the bagp . . ."

Joe's words ended in a sob, and he fell to his knees, striving vainly to draw out the spear that transfixed him; for the counsellor of the old king had struck as he ran.

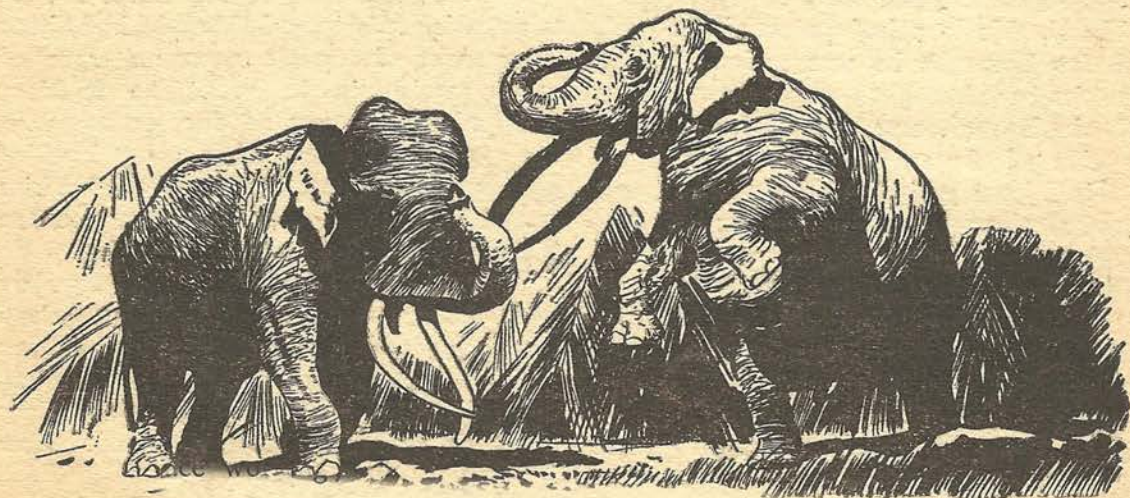
YES, dear old sir," said Bones, as they tramped back to Ochori city in the light of day: "Terribly discourteous and all that sort of thing. If a johnny makes an appointment a johnny ought to keep it."

"It was ambush, by gad!" quivered his Excellency, bumping up and down as the palanquin-bearers negotiated a rough bit of track.

"It is no use, my dear man, telling me that it wasn't ambush . . . that horrible white man with the spear sticking in him. Good heavens . . . awful!"

"It may have been an ambush, dear old Excellency," admitted Bones; "but if it was, why did the jolly old sinners run away?"

Bones smiled contentedly at the triumph of his logic.



Mask Of The Snake

By BRYCE WALTON

The Drums of the Living Heart would beat with a new rhythm when the Serpent-Lords of N'Gowa sank their fangs into the fear-taut skin of beautiful Jean McWilliams.

DU SK crawled over the Ivory Hut in Stanleyville, but the smoky gloom of the gin mill remained hot and humid from the rains. A drunken Belgian clerk lurched past Mike Burack's table where he sat alone and brooding in the shadows. From behind bamboo bead curtains, a native clarionet, a *somari*, sobbed. Sudden rain beat a morbid accompaniment on the tin roof.

Mike Burack leaned his lean, burned length back in the rattan chair and frowned with worry into the cognac glass. It shook a little bit in his hand. He'd tried about every legal way to make his stake. And the steam and failure of the Congo had about drained him. The spirit of adventure and hope was ragged. And he was beginning to worry about never 'going out', of becoming a shambling river tramp.

Kersten roared with terror, pulled out his Luger and began to fire wildly.



Everything depended now on that little drunken safari graybeard, Old Matt Conklin, who was supposed to be here to meet him. Conklin had some big deal cooking, but you never knew when Old Matt was having a gin-dream.

Conklin still demanded a lot of respect as one of the greatest of the old time safari men, but he had been hitting the bottle pretty heavy. Conklin had a mad idea about sacking the Treasure Tombs of the N'gowa, but what Burack wanted to know was where the money was coming from to knock together a safari. It was a long rough trek into the N'gowa country. Conklin claimed that the savage part Kinyamwesi, part Bantu tribe, half way between Kindu and Uvira, the gorilla country, had a fortune in jewels, gems, gold, buried in their tombs in appreciation of dead ancestors. All you had to do was to get there. Burack smiled, a little grimly.

The insect-proof door of the Ivory Hut opened, and the little grizzled, bandy-legged entrepreneur of the Congo, dogged inside. His canvas shoes slushed mud and water, his dirty white ducks clung to a wizened brown body as tough as twisted rawhide.

His pale blue eyes lighted as he saw Burack, and guided him to a chair opposite the cedrelas table. He sat down and ordered rum from the cotton-robed Sudanese waiter. He didn't talk until he'd poured a stiff drink down his wrinkled throat.

"It's all fixed, Son," he said, his voice was like wind rattling a bean pod. "Those Memorial Huts of the Kinyamwesi are leaded with enough riches to put us on easy street for the rest of our unnatural lives. And I about got it figured out how we're going to get up there. But, Son, there's going to be trouble."

Burack had learned patience. "How do you know, Matt?"

"I seen it, Son. Took a safari up into the Uvira gorilla land once for a hunter. Got side-tracked by the N'gowa. It was a village of death then. They got a wall around a big *kraal* made out of human skulls. A native told me about a bloody custom they got, sacrifice. He called it Drums of the Living Hearts."

"What about it," sighed Burack.

"The N'gowa believe their drums must

have living hearts beating inside of them, to give them a real living rhythm. They sacrifice people by sealing their bodies up alive in the big war drums and lettin' them die in there. They use three big war drums and there's a human skeleton in each." Conklin's toothless gums grinned. "Every year they replace the living hearts."

"Fine," said Burack. "But there's one little thing, Matt. How do we get up there?"

A giant black edged through the door, stood like a gigantic basalt image inside against the wall. Conklin nodded. "That's Wara. You ain't never met Wara have you, Son? He's pure Masai, an aristocrat. He started out as my gun-carrier fifteen years ago, and he's still with me. Faithful as a royal dog. Picked him up in the bazaars of Zanzibar. Finest bushman in Africa."

Burack swore and gulped the warm cognac. "Listen, Matt. You said——"

Conklin's eyes were almost closed, his voice softer. "Good old Wara. He insists we gotta go on one last big trek together. Sentimental cuss. Says a great hunter should die on the trail. Says I must go *njia ya Wakatwa*. Means the Milky Way, trail great hunter takes when he's killed in battle."

Burack shuddered as a strain of off-key music rose from the Mombasan band. "Matt——you started to say something about a way to——"

Conklin grinned. "So I agreed with Wara, and maybe I can help you get a stake, too, Son. So I got it all fixed. We're gonna hire ourselves out as guides."

"To who," growled Burack.

"Couple of crazy ethnologists who just holed up in the Ponthierville Hotel. They want guides, but they'll never get legal guides."

"Why?"

"Cause they're going to visit the N'gowa too. And that territory's *verboden*. The Belgians have got it fenced off as a native reservation. Made some kind of pact with a big Kinyamwesi king. And if white men go tramping around in there, it'll raise a bloody mess, and hell will pay."

"What the devil do a couple of ethnologists want up there?" Burack asked.

"They're tenderfeet scientists from a London Museum. They're going to try to

make plaster of Paris face masks of the N'gowa warriors."

BURACK stared. "You're crazy, Matt. What the hell do they wanta make face masks for?"

"Because of the N'gowa's importance to history or something. Interesting migrant background. That's the girl. She's the one who's after the masks."

"Girl," Burack's eyes opened, then narrowed again. He sighed. "The devil with it. She's probably a refuge from a Ladies' Aid tea-party."

Conklin's faded eyes twinkled. "Son, she is like an untrammelled flower bloomin' in the heather. The man's name is Jonathan McWilliams. But he's got a different racket. He hunts snakes."

Burack lighted up an Abdulla import, and swore. "It's crazy, Matt. We'd be damn fools to go into the bush with crazy people like that."

"These young chillun don't know a baboon from a baobab, but they have many francs to spend, and they want guides. And they'll pay our way right into those N'gowan's treasure tombs. McWilliams wants to catch snakes, and that country's crawling with ever kind of surpented God cursed the earth with. In fact, the Kinyamwesi are snake worshipers. Their Gods are all snakes."

Burack gulped. "Anything else, Matt? And by the way, how do you know all this stuff about the McWilliams?"

"Old habit, boasted Conklin. "Read the *Afrique Belge* like my Grandma read the Bible. Well, Son, will you take the job with me and Wara?"

Burack said he would, and then wondered what he had said.

"Bravo," shouted Conklin. "Now—we gotta move fast. "I got the inside information that that big bushmaster over there at the end of the bar is going to try and land that job as guide himself."

Burack had noticed the big German. He was as big as a water buffalo and apparently just as dangerous.

"In case you ain't never met up with Jobi Kersten before, your luck's at an end." Conklin really sounded worried. "He's poison, Son. He's a bloated Black Mamba that walks like a man."

Kersten was staring straight at Burack from a florid bullet headed face sat down deep in a wide expanse of slabbed shoulder space. He was a giant, and he was bad. In sweat-stained ducks and rubber-soled shoes he started toward Burack's table.

"Watch yourself," whispered Conklin. "That kraut's up to no good. He's a murderin' bushwacker."

"Jawohl, mine friends," roared Kersten. Burack gazed in awed fascination at the rattan chair, wondering how it held up so much flesh. "I could not help hearing you talk about der N'gowa. Very unhealthy talk."

"Listen, Jobi," Conklin said softly. "Get the hell away from our table. Whenever I want to keep company with a water buffalo I'll send out a formal invite."

Kersten's face darkened. "Donnerwetter! I haf enough of your drunken insults, Conklin! You vill not safari the McWilliams to the N'gowa country. Der flies vill be eatink you!"

"No flies will ever eat you, Jobi, and live." Conklin said.

Kersten roared something obscene. He heaved Conklin into the air. Burack stiffened in the rattan chair. Every sound in the Ivory Hut was chopped dead. Even the Mombasan band.

"So you would take job away from me, eh, Conklin. I laugh. You won't be fit to guide anybody tomorrow."

Conklin squirmed, his feet a yard from the tamped earth floor. "If you guide 'em in there," Conklin yelled wildly, "none of 'em'll come out alive. You murderin' son!"

Before Burack could act, Kersten slammed a wall of fist into Conklin's face. Conklin flew back against the wall, dropped groaning. Burack put his two hundred pounds behind a long blow that came clear up from the floor.

Flame spurted up his arm, into his eyes. Kersten only roared, stepped back, shaking his shaven head. Kersten had a heavy German Luger from canvas holster. Burack grabbed, struck a sweating wrist just as the black hole bellowed out of a blast of fire.

Burack kicked upward, felt the gun fly out of Kersten's hand. Burack ran to Conklin, picked him up and dived for the door. Glancing back, Burack saw a big black wall between himself and Kersten.

It was Wara the Masai. He was holding a big curved blade in his hand as broad as a canoe paddle.

The blade flashed. Kersten roared, fell back, stumbled and his body sprawled out on the floor. He leaped back to his feet with amazing agility for a big man, stood shaking a bloody head like the maddened buffalo from which he had gotten his name.

A roar filled the Ivory Hut. Every white in the place was after the black man. After his head. A white stream flowed over booths and tables. A Belgian policeman was blocking the door, so Burack dived for the open windows leading onto a verandah. Two native policemen were clubbing rifles. A brilliantly uniformed N.C.O. was firing a Luger.

Burack yelled. "Run for it, Wara!" The big Masai grinned and made for the opposite side of the room, swinging the big Masai sword like a scythe. He went headfirst through a side window like a stream of obsidian. A barrage of shots followed him.

The doorway was clear. And Burack crashed through it into the sticky rain with Conklin still unconscious in his arms. He plunged into a mass of *monoloto* bushes, and lay there in a puddle of mud.

His pursuers spilled out after him and the Masai, yelling and shooting. He heard a policeman's wild whistle. Then the horde disappeared like yammering savages down Ponthierville Avenue toward the 'black section.'

Burack dragged Conklin down side-streets to his 'hotel' room, a stinking sump-hole with a vermin-infested bed. He poured water into a clay pitcher, washed Conklin off and put him to bed. Then he got a service Colt out of his one-piece of canvas luggage and checked it.

He had the gun gripped in his hand as he lay down across the insect-proof door and waited for Conklin to come back out of the dark. The rain hissed steadily on the thatch roof.

II

THE OLD MAN woke up early, swearing a blue streak. Before Burack could shake his sleep-starved brain into action, Conklin had dragged him into the early morning steam of Stanleyville's

sweltering heat and was heading at a half run toward the Ponthierville Hotel.

Conklin was swinging a long elaborate swizzle stick like a hurrying Commissioner as they went inside the delapidated building. He still swore darkly, nursing his swollen jaw. "I'll make that kraut pay, the dirty son," Conklin repeated. "That mud-crawler's after blood. He's up to dirty business."

The Hotel was pushed up beside the English Consulate. Two Hamitic negroes with brilliant red and blue turbans and flowing robes served as bored doormen. The McWilliams had a two-roomed 'suite' on the first floor. Conklin paused in the dim hall long enough to swill deeply from a bottle of gin, before they knocked and were admitted.

Burack did two double-takes, then stared at the girl. McWilliams introduced her as Jean. In white linen, with an open midriff and brief shorts, she was so beautiful that Burack's stomach began to ache. She was deeply tanned with a golden color that softened sinuous curves. Her hair was the kind of blonde that so strikingly goes with bronzed skin, but of which most blondes are only jealous. There was something very businesslike, capable and efficient about her, in contrast to McWilliams who Burack finally managed to look at.

McWilliams was pale, attenuated. He wore thick-lensed glasses. His face was thin with an upturned prudish nose, and pale wet hands that motioned lamely as he talked. Neither of them belonged within a thousand miles of the Congo.

Burack breathed a long sigh when she was introduced as Jonathon's sister.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Conklin," said McWilliams with precise tones. "But a certain Jobi Kersten has already been engaged to guide us into the jungle. Ah—it will be a most interesting trip. The N'gowa represent a dying type of classical facial sculpture. Descendant of the Hamitic Solomon migrants. But Jean will tell you. Now my interest, of course, is snakes——"

Conklin's leathery face was twisting with rage. "Damn the snakes," he howled in McWilliams' shocked face. "That buffalo'll lead you to hell 'fore he's through."

"Buffalo? Really," McWilliams stuttered. "We're very grateful to this Mr. Jobi.

We expected to get immediate permission to go into the N'gowa area from the Provincial Vice-Governor, or even by the Comite Regional. But do you know, they flatly refused! Beastly of them. But thank Heaven this Jobi chap offered us his services last night. He has ways of overcoming any—ah—legal difficulties he assures us."

"He has ways all right," yelled Conklin. "He's a black murderin' renegade who's wanted for every crime in the book."

"I simply can't believe it," said McWilliams, frowning. "Can you, Jean?" he added, looking at her.

Her blue eyes sparkled. "Who knows? He certainly didn't look like a gentleman." Burack grinned.

He liked her. He winked at her and she flushed a lovely pink.

"You'd better believe it," Conklin was almost dancing with rage. "Drop that buffalo like you would a Black Mamba. He's workin' for one of the Colonial powers that's tryin' to edge out the Belgians. I know that. And he'll do anything to get paid off by the right party. He ain't taking you up there just to be polite!"

"Frankly," said the girl, eyeing Burack carefully. "I don't trust this Jobi very much."

"That's hardly fair, Jean," whined McWilliams.

Burack sneered openly at McWilliams' clothing. His brand-new, heavily-starched khaki shorts, probably bought within the week at Drysdale's which boasted being the special outfitter of His Royal Highnesses' Safaris. It stuck out like a baby's rompers.

"Jean, these jungle men must, of necessity, be of a hardy calibre."

"Yeah," howled Conklin. "But he's up to dirty work. And it ain't the treasure either. It's somebody's head. I'm bein' honest with you, Mr. McWilliams. Kersten's one of the worst characters in the bush. He was a leg man for the *Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie*. He was also with the *Union Miniere du Haut Katanga* mining gang when they was running in slave labor from the Bantu tribe up Tanganyiki way. He was in the cage for sabotage, and a thousand other crimes. Besides, he's no safari man. He don't know anything

about the bush. Now Mike here, and myself, we can help you."

"I'm afraid one guide is sufficient," said McWilliams. "Mr. Kersten is over at the *Huileries du Congo Belge* right now, negotiating for a boat."

Burack winked at Conklin. It took plenty of francs to rent a boat from that outfit. He looked hopefully at Jean Williams.

"Why not take them along too." She peered sidewise at Burack. "We may need them. If this N'gowa territory is as dangerous as a few hints imply that it might be. Anyway, the Foundation can spare the extra expense."

McWilliams sighed. But he didn't argue, and Burack didn't blame him for that. "Oh, all right. We plan to leave in the morning for the upper Lualaba. Mr. Kersten is arranging everything. He has a crew chosen. Equipment being loaded this afternoon. Good day."

"Ah—er—" began Conklin without changing color. "How about a little advance on our salaries. Had a little recent difficulty with a black mahogany project and—"

McWilliams shrugged. And he made out a check on the Banque Belge d'Afrique while chatting enthusiastically about snakes. Burack shivered. He didn't like snakes. Jean flashed him a frank smile, and he returned it. After that, thinking about her, Burack was in a trance as Conklin practically ran to the bank. They came out of the bank with the equivalent of a hundred American dollars in Belgian paper.

They bought some equipment at a subsidiary of the famous *Konrad Schauer's*, and then, his toothless mouth drooling, Conklin headed at a run for David Marton & Son, Ltd. His purchase: Three quart cases of Gordon's Gin. "Straight from London. The whitest, purest, and best."

Everything was to be delivered at the last minute to the boat landing. Then they started for the Ivory Hall for a few highballs.

"Not bad is she, Matt," said Burack dreamily.

Conklin groaned. "A female'll jinx a safari every time."

"But without Jean," Burack said. "We wouldn't have any safari."

CONKLIN didn't answer, for just then a black arm reached out of a bush beside the fungus-eaten boardwalk. Burack reared back, but Conklin laughed at the black beggar crawling in the mud, his dirty rags spotted with flies and ticks. And then a familiar voice whispered from beneath a dirty burnoose-covered head.

"Bwana Conklin, Burack. 'Tis thy servant. Wara of the Masai." Conklin whispered to Burack. "Stand like he's a beggar. Laugh at 'em. They'll string 'em up if they catch him."

Wara whispered. "I find out much from black section where I hide during night. Two despised *Muri* have hired out to serve big buffalo Kersten. They say no whites come back from safari. Say Kersten start big blood wind blowing from Tanganyiki."

Conklin said. "Good job, Wara. Now listen. Get canoe and start tonight. Travel day and night. Meet our boat at the mouth of the *Tega*, that damn stream called the Blood River, that leads from the Lualaba to the *kraal* of the N'gowa. Follow our boat upstream to N'gowa's village. Remain hidden. Be ready."

They went to the winehouse.

A BROKEN *Galla*, groveling with a tired soul, served them gin. "How the devil can Wara get to the *Tega* river before we do, him just in a canoe," asked Burack.

"He'll be there, son," Conklin grinned.

"What did Wara mean about that Blood wind blowing from Tanganyiki?"

"Dunno, Son. If Kersten wants to start a big uprising up there, what does he want to do it for? A native uprising would end the most peaceful stretch we've had around here for a long time. Kersten's got some reason for wanting blood to run in the Lualaba."

At sunrise they were approaching the landing where the side-wheeler sagged in the silt-heavy water of the River. Scrawny chickens ran out from under their feet with drooping wings. The sound of a distant riverboat whistle floated through the sultry morning steam hanging over the river.

A bunch of black laborers from the helot tribes of the *Dorobo*, *Wasanye*, and *Yibars* were lazily beginning to load the last equipment aboard. Including Conklin's

three quart cases of imported gin.

Conklin took a long swill from the pint in his pocket, and began fiercely exhorting the natives in blistering *Swahili*. The blacks leaped to life, and Burack stared in admiration at Conklin's power. These blacks knew an old-league bushman when they saw one. Conklin's heavy swizzle stick waved wildly in the air.

But the first big *Yibar* who staggered up the gangplank with a case of Conklin's gin balanced on his enkata-padded head was stopped at the rail by a grotesque ape-like, spidery-legged Hamite with slanted green eyes and a hair-lip that made his face grin constantly like a monstrous toad.

His twisted body wore only a breechcloth with a string of tiger-fangs around the thick neck. He held an old Webbley rifle crossed before the frightened *Yibar* whose white eyeballs rolled.

"That's *The Toad*," said Conklin grimly. "One of Kersten's men. Part East Indian, drifted in from British East Africa. Come on, Burack. If I go aboard, that gin's goin' with me."

They edged up the gangplank past the cowering *Yibar*. Conklin was dwarfed by the grinning Toad. "Go tell Bwana McWilliams that we're comin' aboard," he said.

The Toad kept on grinning. Burack felt a cold shiver go up and down his neck. The Toad raised the Webbley, not to fire, but as a bludgeon. Conklin raised the swizzle stick. Burack heard the sliding click, saw the shining blade leap out of the end of the stick, stop flush against the Toad's neck. The yellow skin turned a wet corpse-grey. His slanted eyes glazed.

"Drop that cannon," yelled Conklin, "and tell McWilliams we're comin' aboard. Unless you want your neck slit like a rotten pomegranite."

The Toad turned, and Burack, Conklin and *Yibar* came aboard.

Jean, her brother, and Kersten were sitting beneath a dirty awning at the stern. Jean's face was calm and cool looking as she smiled at Burack. Jean's bare legs were crossed, and her knee was dimpled nicely, thought Burack who wasn't noticing Kersten.

"We must all cooperate," whined McWilliams rather desperately.

"Gewiss," roared Kersten. "Ve must get along. As long as I am der leader of dis expedition, I will see there iss no troubles."

"You mean as long as my brother is leader, and you're working for him," corrected Jean McWilliams.

Kersten stared. "Dat iss vat I mean," he mumbled. Burack watched him turn, waddle over to a bunch of the toughest characters he had ever seen. Two evil looking Muri warriors with raised scar-patterns all over faces and chests, The Toad, and a small, dope-ridden renegade called Hans.

Things settled down as the boat moved up river. Burack haunted the presence of Jean McWilliams much to Conklin's disgust. Conklin sipped Gordon's gin. And McWilliams began working over a pile of cages made of bamboo with screen tops.

Kersten and his bunch whispered among themselves.

III

A WEEK SLID down stream without trouble. River craft had thinned out to almost nothing half way to Kongolo. A little while after that, Conklin directed the pilot to stop the side-wheeler at the narrow miasmic south of a sluggish tributary that emptied in.

"That's it," said Conklin. "We have to go up that pest hole. You may notice," he added to McWilliams, "that our boat won't go through that jungle-choked mouth. I told Kersten that, but he wouldn't listen."

"Donnerwetter!" roared Kersten. "You insult me. I know Tega river mouth too small for our boat!"

McWilliams looked accusingly at the big German. "Why didn't you tell us if you knew?"

Jean lighted a cigarette. Her long fingers trembled slightly. Burack admired her, waited for a big blow-up in the strained relations of the party. They stood on the bow facing the wall of fetid jungle, a vast expanse of almost impenetrable rain-forest. A small cloud of sunbirds flashed like colored arrows after noisy metallic flies. Chimpanzees hooted derision at the idiot white apes. A civet cat's icy scream came from far up river. Absurdly

short-legged Hippos charged snorting into the water from mud banks, and crocodiles slid after them.

And the sun was beginning to set above the jungle heights in a riotous steam of color.

Burack moved over and stood beside the girl. Her high strong brows and solid little jaw looked a little fearfully at the jungle, and Burack couldn't blame her for that.

"Just take it easy now, Jean," he said softly. "We'll get out all right. Conklin's the finest guide in the Congo."

She smiled, but it was a thin smile now. "I'm beginning to realize now what a hell this place really is. And we haven't even gotten into it yet."

Conklin was yelling at McWilliams. "I told you that damn kraut didn't know beans about the jungle didn't I? Don't trust him any further than you could throw him. I happen to know that he intends for us all to die back there in that bush."

"Ridiculous," gasped McWilliams, waving his hands weakly.

But Kersten had held himself back too long. He dived for Conklin, roaring like a wounded bison. One hand slid his heavy Luger its canvas sheath. He'd forgotten Burack. Jean cried out as Burack brought the barrel of his own .45 down across Kersten's forearm. Kersten howled as the gun spun across the deck. Swinging on around with the momentum of his dive, Kersten's clubbing fist caught Burack above the right ear.

Fireworks put on a beautiful and painful display for him as he went staggering blindly across the deck and bounced off a rusted metal post.

"Kersten!" Dully, Burack was aware that it was Jean's voice that had sliced the air like a shrill knife. He fought against nauseous blackness and gradually his vision cleared enough to see Kersten drop Conklin's battered body to the deck.

"Der next time I kill," he growled. "Dat iss promise."

Burack got to his feet, stood swaying. He thought of Jean's amazing courage as he watched her. Coolness with warmth underneath. Slender body strung together with steel strands. With a woman like that—Burack swore at himself softly.

"What the hell, Burack," he said. "Maybe if you got hold of some of that N'gowa treasurer you'd have a chance. Maybe."

A deadly, brooding kind of strained waiting existed between all of them after that. Kersten and his crew went ashore to hire native canoes and paddlers from a local village downstream.

Early the next morning in 20-paddle canoes, they went up the oily tributary of the Tega, Blood River. In five days they had reached the crude canoe landing of the N'gowa.

Burack was behind Conklin. Conklin stretched out a claw-like hand, pointed. Burack felt a cold chill on the nape of his neck. He stared. He ran his tongue back and forth along his dry lips. Sweat trickled down his ribs.

Back from the canoe landing, was a huge *kraal*. Around it was a high wall, a white shining wall, gleaming like death's final song in the sunlight.

It was a wall built entirely of *human skulls!*

THE N'GOWA, with Conklin's expert help, received them with a kind of silent, mysterious acceptance. It was a deadly thing, and no one expected it to last. Kersten and his crew got one part of the village for huts, Conklin and Burack McWilliams and Jean another section.

Jean went about the crazy business of making plaster of Paris face masks of the few whom she could persuade to submit to this indignity. And McWilliams, like a boy-scout on an over-night hike, went bounding about in the jungle catching snakes.

It was all very jolly, thought Burack grimly. Except that it's only a damn prelude to bloody murder. And it was.

Trying to siesta in the afternoon, after failing to figure out a way to rob the memorial huts and tombs of their treasure without endangering Jean and her brother, Conklin and Burack were awakened by a long terrible scream. It was gibbering terror, and pain.

"This is it, son," rattled Conklin, grabbing up his gun and running for the *kraal* gate. Burack trailed him, keeping an eye on the sides of the jungle trail.

They stopped quickly. Burack mopped

his eyes, and tried to keep his hand steady on the butt of his .45.

A ring of motionless giant N'gowa warriors with assegais and battle axes ready, stood around a dead body.

A very dead N'gowa warrior was sprawled out in the oozing trail half a mile from the *kraal* wall of human skulls. The leopard skin had been torn from his body. He lay on his back, huge blue flies crawling over him. It wouldn't have been so bad, except that Burack saw that the dead man—*had no face*.

The face had been ripped away, leaving a weltering bloody mask that bubbled and frothed as the flies settled.

Burack held back violent sickness. He backed away. Conklin twisted a corpse-white face, and muttered. "This—my Lord—this is really it, Burack," Conklin choked. "It's that damn Kersten's work. And now we're getting the blame. I told you he was getting in too good with that two-faced witch-doctor. Listen to what little shaman's howling now. Listen to that damn little *neri-neri!*"

Burack listened. And as he listened, he slowly slid the .45 out of its holster. It was hot and sweating in his palm.

Kersten was clever. Clever as hell. Clever like a devil.

Seeing those huge fierce warriors reduced to children by Jean's persuasion, letting themselves be lain out on their backs while plaster of Paris hardened on their faces, that had been a little funny for a while. Conklin had said at the time that the blacks had acted scared, as though they had been victimized by some kind of ju-ju.

McWilliams had been oblivious to everything but his snakes. He had a number of them captured and in their boxes lined up in back of his hut. There were a number of Black Mambas, one of the world's deadliest snakes, including other deadly cobras and vipers.

Now, none of it seemed funny, because now Burack understood what had happened. He tensed as the ugly little *Mwitangala*, or medicine man, made counter magic signs over the terribly defaced corpse. He was a wizened black shell in blood-saked feathers, a sly, evil little man, with sharp darting eyes.

"*Borfin!*" He turned, spat at Conklin

and Burack suddenly. "The face is gone! See! Thou art black magicians, even as thy big white companion hath warned us."

Burack snarled in his throat. Kersten had fixed it all right.

"All of thee white magicians are here to steal away the souls of the N'gowa. With the second faces thou hast made of this dead warrior, thou hast slain him. Those rock faces were black juju."

The witch doctor made magic motions with his clawing hands. "Go ye," he shrieked to the warriors ringing the corpse. "Make thy Death Drums speak. Make thyself ready. The Drums of the Living Hearts will beat again. The white man who hath stolen souls of our warriors, shall become living hearts for the drums."

Burack fell back in a crouch with Conklin beside him. But miraculously, the two of them were suddenly alone. Except for the black corpse without a face.

The others had melted into the vaporous green wall.

A tribe of colobus monkeys rustled the overhead *euphorbia* tree. Tiny clouds of insects rose and fell like mist. Parrakeets chattered in rage at the disturbance.

The dead black who had lost both his face and his soul heard nothing.

BONKLIN LET OUT a long sick sigh and then drained half a pint of gin at one long-drawn gesture. Burack finished it.

"Listen, Son," gasped Conklin. "It's up to us now. Kersten's got in the first and big punch. He found out enough about these N'gowa's superstitions to know his plan would work."

Burack tried to take his eyes off the bloody horror of the corpse's faceless head.

Conklin said. "This dead black is the first one Jean made a plaster of Paris face mask of ain't he? Now his face is gone. Get the connection?"

Burack did.

"The witch-doctor had the bug planted in his bonnet by Kersten. He thinks we're all black magicians. That we made the masks so we could kill off the warriors at a distance with juju—like devil dolls they stick pins in. I'll bet my last case of gin that that mask made from this poor

devil's face is smashed up right now, broken. Smashing the mask kills the warrior it was made from, and we get the blame for smashing it. Kersten or one of his monkeys probably did it. If the N'gowa don't slaughter us for this, then there'll be another face mask broken, and another warrior killed and his face ripped off.

"Anyway, we don't have much chance of getting out of here with our hearts.

"We'll be the sacrifice victims, Son. We'll be put alive in those drums, and allowed to die in there. Come on. Let's sneak back to the *Kraal*. We gotta warn the McWilliams that it's high time to trek out of here!"

A faint queer whistle sounded. Burack wouldn't have noticed it except that it didn't sound quite natural. Then Conklin repeated the whistle.

"Now what the devil goes on," growled Burack, his skin tingling.

"That," grinned Conklin, "was Wara the Masai."

As they rounded a turn in the trail, the wall of skulls blazed in whiny white relief. Beyond it, in a clearing, were the tombs of the ancient N'gowa. A special stoned roadway led directly from a towering baobab tree in the center of the kraal into the weird place of tombs. There must have been hundreds of tombs there, each with a small memorial hut built over it. All kinds of fetiches, sacred signs, oungas, and packets hung on the huts to ward off evil spirits.

Treasure, symbolic of centuries of ancestor worship.

And inside those huts were fortunes in crude gold ornaments, jewels, diamonds, uncut emeralds, blood rubies. Or so the story went. Burack hadn't been inside one of them. Giant N'gowa guards were spotted at strategic points. Ancient people, Jean had said. Come from the Nile Delta centuries ago.

He had talked of the treasure to Jean, but she had only smiled as though such things were childish, and maybe they were. But getting your hands on a million dollars wasn't childish. Or was it, Burack thought?

He blinked at the wall of skulls. His eyes burned, and his throat was dry. Row on row of bleached skulls composed the

high walls. Skulls of enemies killed in centuries of warfare. The Chief's hut was made of skulls, as were his footstools. And his throne was made of skulls.

They edged through the entrance, and along the wall. N'gowa guards didn't seem to notice them, or rather, ignored them. Conklin swore. "They know they've got us," he said. He entered his own and Burack's bee-hive hut first, turned and ran back out, yelling wildly, waving his swizzle stick, his mouth contorted.

"The gin! Burack, my last case of gin! They stole it, either the blacks or that damn kraut!"

"Take it easy," shouted Burack. "We gotta find Jean and—"

Conklin stood trembling with rage. He was still standing that way when a dozen huge silent N'gowa warriors popped up out of nowhere that Burack could see, and surrounded them. "Don't fight clear, don't even try it," Conklin said. "We wouldn't have a chance. They've probably already got the girl. There's still a chance that I can talk to the Chief. If he's got a brain in his skull, he'll know better than to throw in with Kersten—"

Burack watched the blacks take away all of their weapons and ammunition. They left Conklin his swizzle stick, though what he could do with one sword cane against the giant N'gowa, Burack couldn't figure.

They dragged the two men to a big hut by the towering baobab in the center of the *kraal*.

"Sacrificial hut," groaned Conklin as they were thrown inside.

Jean and her brother were inside, sitting dejectedly in the gloom. The girl's face was white and drawn. McWilliams was standing against the wall, lips twitching like a lost child.

Kersten was there, too. With a Luger in his hand, and the Toad standing beside him.

The Toad's mouth was parted in a betel-stained grin.

"Vell," said Kersten. "Der game is about played out. None of you vill get out alive. Maybe Jean here vill go out alive, with me, maybe."

Burack lunged, but Conklin held him.

Kersten said. "Listen, mine friends, was gib't's! Der drums of sacrifice. They haf already started!"

THE INSIDIOUS throbbing of the drums ate quickly into Burack's nerves. McWilliams sighed. "I simply do not understand what is happening."

Kersten said. "You must know dat it dos not matter. You vill die here. But I shall tell you der idea. Chust listen. This N'gowa country is onë of the biggest unexploited mineral regions, ach so! Dhere iss much copper, tin, gold. But der foolish Congo Association and der Belgian government let the blacks keep it, and dat is no goot. White men have come in, and made trouble. N'gowas will go on war trail. Big uprising start now and blacks will be reported to authorities for killing big English explorer, and scientists. White fraulien chust disappear. War, much blood, and this place vill be taken away from the blacks. Der territory made free for mining. And I haf got der job as manager for der Compnay what vill take over der mining projects."

Conklin swore in five dialects. "And plenty of slave labor again, too, eh Kersten. This other company's national backer will ship helpless Bantus in here by the thousands to work the mines. And they'll die off like flies."

Kersten laughed. He turned, pointed to the row of plaster of Paris face masks lined up along the wall. Kersten motioned to the Toad. "Break up three more of the masks."

The Toad hopped across the dim interior of the hut. A single blow for each did the trick. "Now," said Kersten, "like you did with the first one." The Toad grinned, his hand gripping a long curved knife. Then he darted outside the hut.

Conklin looked at McWilliams. "Three more N'gowa warriors who let your sis make masks of their faces are going to be butchered by the Toad, Mac. Their faces mutilated."

"What do you mean," McWilliams stared owlshly.

"They think you and Jean and all of us except Kersten's cutthroats, are black magicians, using the face masks for juju. So now we're going to be put alive in the Drums of the Living Hearts unless we can either escape, or talk our way out."

Burack took quick advantage of Ker-

sten's attention being on Conklin. He made a flying tackle into Kersten's groin. Together they hurtled back into the flimsy woven thatch of the hut wall. There was a splintering crash. A choking cloud of dust rose around them. Startled vermin scuttled for cover.

Kersten hit flat on his back with an outrush of air. Burack had an elbow in his neck as they hit. Then he was pounding desperately with his fists into that bullet-headed face. He felt bone crunch, blood ripped from nostrils. He saw Conklin dive through the hole of the hut and disappear. And then, from somewhere, a hand appeared clutching a heavy revolver. Burack tried to dodge, but the barrel descended, hard, and repeatedly.

He was hearing a long scream from Jean as he rolled over, feeling the in-rushing darkness shattered with brilliant lights.

FULLY, layer by agonized layer, consciousness returned to Burack.

He raised his head. He opened his eyes and was looking at a black writhing sea of contorted bodies. He blinked his eyes, they burned. Cold sweat streamed down his naked chest. He was tied to the big baobob tree.

The ritual fires reached up hungry yellow tongues in the night toward the moon-filled sky. Monstrous shadows swayed and twitched as the crazed N'gowans danced and stomped to the rhythm of blood sacrifice.

He turned his head weakly. Blood dripped down his sides. His hands were tied tightly behind him to the tree in the center of the *kraal*.

And Jean was bound too, beside him. Her clothing was ripped to shreds, her soft bronzed flesh gleamed in the fire-light.

"Jean," he whispered. "The hell with them. Say that. They're going to torture us, so we've got to determine that we're not going to feel it. You understand that."

Her voice was stiff and dry. "The hell with them," she said.

Burack straightened. On the other side of him, McWilliams also bound, sagged limply. His glasses were gone. His pale eyes watered as he stared wildly. His

breath came in sharp painful gasps. Only when he turned and looked directly at Burack, did Burack see what kind of a man McWilliams really was. He was delicate, sensitive, but he was not the coward he had seemed to be. He had guts. There was a grim dark determination under that soft face.

Barely audible beneath the roaring of the drums and the blacks, Burack heard McWilliams say:

"The hell with them!"

Conklin had mentioned it to Burack. This was called The Tree of Pain. Three drums were placed in a row before the victims. Three drums. Three victims. A living body entombed in each drum to die a slow death of torture. But that wasn't enough for the blacks. On the Tree of Pain you suffered unspeakable preliminary torture.

The Witch-doctor, masked now and leering, made cabalistic signs over the three drums. Then the leaping dancers began the last stage of the ritual dance.

They leaped around and around the tree, leopard skins glinting, rare animal tails hanging from skins encircling waists, swinging and jerking. Crowns of brilliant feathered plumes bobbing, swaying.

Screaming pain. It went on and on through blurred sweating mist. Torture. He let his fevered eyes drop. Saw the many tiny wounds dotting his naked sweating body. Again and again assegais licked out, points breaking the skins of the three.

He didn't want to look at Jean's body now. He couldn't have, even if he had wanted to. His head lolled on his chest.

Only living hearts placed within the drums could give them the true rhythm of battle. Faster the dance swung. Assegais glinted in the flames. "Where," thought Burack through foggy wet pain, "is Conklin?"

Beyond the dancers the Chief, the Mwanangwa, sat on his throne of skulls. The gigantic black joss outline watched the torture with eager eyes. Three hundred fat pounds of flesh, he sat chewing a kilakilola root which caused his body to exude a body-odor like cedar-wood. A cord around his neck dangled five crimson wing-feathers of the kuri-kuri bird. Badges of distinction.

Kersten stood on the Chief's left. On his right crouched the Toad. Behind stood the white renegade, Hans. His mousy eyes were wet with fascination as they watched the torture.

The witch-doctor was leaping now in a fantastic, stiff-legged dance. Burack dimly knew that this was the end of the ritual.

And then something like hell exploded. The witch-doctor let out a long broken scream of sheer terror.

Something—something ghastly and inhuman—was coming toward them from the tombs.

Or rather, it was raising up out of the tomb nearest the big baobob tree. It was near the rock road that led from the tombs to the tree. The blacks froze. From the apparition rising out of the tomb, came a moan of hollow-sounding horror. A weird sonorous chanting. The sound died and rose again, ululating in tomb-thrown echoes.

The tomb had been that of a former village Chief. And out of that tomb, stalking toward them, was a gleaming white skeleton.

THE PALE outline writhed toward them, closer, emitting its ghastly moans.

The witch-doctor was the first to run. He yelled orders as he ran, for the blacks to bring the sacred drums with them, or the ghostly skeleton would contaminate them. In a matter of seconds, the kraal was empty, the drums gone. Even the ponderous outline of the Mwanangwa, the Chief, had managed to roll down from his throne and waddle out of the kraal into the dark jungle night.

Only Kersten, the Toad, and Hans remained. And even they were crouched in fear, as the weirdly glowing apparition approached. Only when the ghostly outline had come within a few feet of Burack did he recognize it.

It was Conklin. And he was drunk. He was naked except for his shorts, and he had painted a skeleton outline on his body with phosphorescent paint. Though where he had gotten it, Burack couldn't figure out.

But Kersten had also recognized Conklin. He roared with dark rage, pulled up his Luger and began firing. Conklin

ducked behind the tree. The swizzle stick lengthened into silver steel, licked across the bonds of the bound three. Tonga bark cord fell away, and Burack dropped into the dust. He managed to crawl behind the trunk of the baobob, to join Jean, McWilliams and Conklin. Bullets whined around them.

McWilliams was babbling wildly. Suddenly, before they could stop him, he leaped up, yelling. Jean screamed as her brother ran into the open, and kept on running. Dust spurted around him as bullets followed. Jean started after him, but Burack held her.

McWilliams was a mad figure, leaping and bounding across the kraal, torn clothes flapping like a frightened scarecrow. His lanky length galloped out of the kraal and disappeared into the wall of dark jungle.

"We gotta get out of here," said Conklin. "Those blacks'll be back. Kersten don't know whether to rush us here or not. He may think I pack a gun. You guys sneak through those bushes, around the edge of the skull wall. I'll stay here and bluff them for a while."

"You were in the tomb," said Burack. "How'd you get that skeleton disguise?"

Conklin grinned drunkenly. "I couldn't find my gun, so I had to have some liquor, son. I knew I could get it in the Chief's tomb."

"What? Gin?"

"No, you idiot. Beer. Those tombs are provided with *sacred beer*. A number of big gourds are kept above the tombs, filled with strong native millet beer, son. It's made by three appointed virgins that know their business. They have long reeds running from the gourds down into the buried blacks' bones. To feed his lingering spirit with spirit. It was a simple matter to transfer that reed to my own mouth. That millet beer's *strong!*"

Burack wanted to laugh, but his slashed face was too sore. "But the phosphorescent paint!"

"Hell, can't you figure that out! That tomb was full of bones, wetted down by centuries of rain. The tomb was full of phosphorescence, so I just painted a skeleton on myself. Now you two vamoose out of here."

He started to argue with Conklin about

that, but he didn't get the chance. Jean screamed as the big savage Muri warriors of Kersten's charged around the tree. Kersten came in fast behind them.

A kind of blind suicidal rage filled Burack with a strength he could never otherwise have had under the circumstances.

He saw Conklin slash out with the swizzle stick, saw a big Muri pick up Jean and run with her, then he grabbed Kersten's running foot and brought him down on his face. Burack was swearing insanely as he got to his feet, kicked Kersten in the face.

Kersten still gripped the Luger. He swung it upward.

"I only got my bare hands, Kersten," Burack screamed.

He wasn't surprised when Kersten obliged. Burack couldn't see anything else. Jean, Conklin, the Muris, anything. All he could see was Kersten's bulk rising to his feet.

Burack charged, fists flailing. Kersten roared, met the charge head-on. They were standing close together, exchanging blows. And then the Toad and Hans dragged Burack away. Hans let him have it across the head with a revolver barrel. Burack weaved, his legs wide apart to hold him up, blood running into his eyes.

"Donnerwetter," roared Kersten.

"Don't do it," whined Hans. Mousy eyes glittered. "Don't fight him now, Jobi. Let the blacks slaughter him. Who cares now about what we came up here to do originally? Conklin told us about them tombs bein' loaded with treasure didn't he? I don't know why he told us, but that sample—"

Burack wondered vaguely why Conklin might have told them, then he knew, or thought he knew, part of it. If Kersten got interested in getting some of the treasure for himself, then he'd forget any other plans he might have had. Not that his main plan wasn't busted up already. Not that anything could matter much now. The big Muri black was still holding Jean's limp body in his arms.

"All right," agreed Kersten. "Tie them up, leave them on the tree again. Let der natifs have dem. While the natifs are putting them inside der drums, ve vill get the stuff from der tombs, and head down river."

So Burack and Jean were tied again to the tree. Burack watched Kersten and his men edge out of the kraal in the direction of the tombs. Sometime later, the blacks returned. Their fright had partly cooled, and it got cold when they saw their victims tied, and helpless. They started sacrificial rites, but Burack knew that this time it would be short. Jean was still unconscious and he was glad of that. Conklin's skeleton painted body sagged lifelessly.

V

NOW, BURACK was beyond pain. Jean sagged in her bonds. Through a wet mist, he saw the three drums again, brought back by the sweating blacks. Again the N'gowa danced stiff-legged around the drums.

Now the witch-doctor and his apprentices were removing the thongs holding the bull-hide drum heads. With silent awe, the three apprentices threw aside the stiff drum heads into the dust. They made gestures. Then they reached inside the drums. They were going to take out the old bones of former sacrificial victims, Burack mused foggily, then replace them with us. Jean and Matt and me. Me, Burack, the young man who wanted adventure. He managed a dusty chuckle.

The apprentices fell back, shivering with horror. Three quaverous cries burst from them. Those weren't bones rising up from the drums.

They were snakes! Spitting, venomous heads darted out. Each drum was a pit of angry, deadly cobras, mambas and vipers!

Erectile heads on both sides of the malignant eyes were outstretched. Loose plastic skin elevated by movable ribs stretched in poisonous hunger. Sharp, groove fangs struck. Struck with invisible speed. Struck and struck again. Deadly contents of venom-glands shot into the three howling apprentices. Enough neuro-toxin in each stab to kill a man in half a minute.

Burack's eyes bulged in incredulous horror. There were spitting cobras, too, squirting venom from fangs that swung forward when they spread yawning white mouths, menacing hoods opening. Their bodies' foreparts rose up like flexible foils

from coiled spring-steel muscles beneath.

The three apprentices died quickly. Conklin, conscious again, let out a long joyous yell. Otherwise, a terrible silence had descended over the kraal. Every native was frozen stiff with terror and horror.

Conklin said, "That McWilliams must have pulled this trick, Burack. He dumped those snakes into the drums when they took them away just now and went on into the jungle. He took off the warheads and put in the snakes, then put the heads back on. If he didn't then who the hell did? He's the only one who can handle them serpents."

Hearing the sudden silence, Kersten and his boys could be seen edging through the shadows from the tombs, staring in bugged eyed fright at the snakes plopping out of the drums into the dust, and into the flickering firelight.

"They didn't know which tombs to rifle," said Conklin. "You got to know which ones have the treasure. Only a chosen few——"

Conklin was struggling against his bonds. "If I can only get free, I got an idea that'll make them blacks crawl for sure. We got 'em scared right now. If those snakes don't get us first. The blacks can run but we can't."

Most of the snakes were out of the drums. Their flat evil heads were weaying to and fro, eyes gleaming. Spotted hides shown iridescent.

A terrible frozen silence still clutched the blacks. Their white eyes stared. They breathed hoarsely through dialating nostrils. The Witchdoctor had fallen on his knees, was beating his head in the dust. Several snakes slithered toward the Chief frozen on his throne of skulls. The witchdoctor was crawling back like a scuttling crab, hands writhing as he frantically tried to create big counter juju.

Kersten yelled. "It iss anudder trick!" His answer was a tasseled assegai that streaked the air above the blazing sacrificial fire missing the big German by inches.

Kersten jerked out his Luger, crouched with his eyes glaring like a cornered ape's. Hans and the Toad flanked him back in the shadows behind the Chief's throne of skulls.

A huge black man bounded past the fire, following up the assegai he had thrown.

"Wara!" Conklin cried out hoarsely. "Where you been hidin'."

Wara's teeth gleamed white. The broad iron Masai sword in his hand slashed Conklin's bonds free. Then he quickly freed Burack and Jean. The girl was coming around now and Burack supported her somehow as he kept his eye on the nearer snakes, and wondered what Conklin was going to do.

THE SNAKES weaved toward him, flattened heads pulsing. Conklin somehow managed to outwardly ignore them, seeming almost contemptuous. Kersten had that Luger raised, but he was hesitating about using it. He knew that the N'gowa were against him now, too. And he didn't want to try to escape without a crack at the treasure in the tombs. He evidently saw that Conklin was going to pull something, and he was intending to hang around long enough to see what it was.

When Conklin spoke, standing there waving his arms, his body glowing like a part-skeleton, part-fleshly fiend, his voice sounded like wind rattling through dried reeds.

"In his selfish greed and jealousy," said Conklin in Kinyamwesi tongue, "this white juju man has made great insult and blasphemy to Yakamfwa, the Snake of Death." He pointed an accusing skeleton arm at Kersten.

The sea of blacks sank to their knees. They gave out a cry of tortuous fear. Women wailed. Men shrieked.

Conklin elaborated. "I am the fleshly form of Limsasi, the Avenger, Messenger of Yakamfwa. We were sent to find the truth about ye N'Gowa, and we have found it. Ye were given this land to call your own, free from white man's meddling. But ye have betrayed that trust. Ye have insulted the *Snake God*. HE has changed your living hearts within the drums to living serpents."

Burack watched Kersten raise the Luger, his face working with suppressed rage. The snakes wriggled nearer Conklin. Jean was staring now with horrified eyes.

"As soon as we can, start walking back away from the snakes," Burack whispered to her. She nodded.

The blacks were babbling woe and terror. Dark fear of retribution.

"You have tortured with your assegais none other than the human forms of Swila, the Spitting Cobra, and of Ninabo, the Snake Mother. The Gods of the Snake are enraged at this sacrilege!"

Burack watched the snakes fearfully. Conklin might be convincing the blacks that he was Swila, the Spitting Cobra god, but those cobras there in the dust didn't seem convinced. He remembered that Conklin had told him earlier that the Kinyamwesi were Snake Worshipers, and now Conklin was having a field day.

The N'gowa Chief managed to roll into the dust. A ten foot cobra swayed its head a scant yard from the Chief's face.

Conklin was saying. "Mutemi, Emperor of the Snake People, and Ruler of all Wakaioka, Empire of the Snakes, is enraged at your devotion to the black juju charms of the big buffalo. There shall be no more sacrifice of humans to give the Drums the Beat of Life. From this night, you must put live snakes in the drums for your sacrifice. This is the command of the Great Msamba."

Kersten saw that Conklin had convinced the blacks. He bellowed in a high harsh voice that sounded mad to Burack. Then he ran forward, blasting wildly with his Luger. Little geysers of dust were kicked up by the heavy slugs striking among the snakes. He was going to get Conklin. Burack could see that. No matter what else happened to Kersten, he was going to get Conklin. And Burack was the only one in a position to save the old man.

"Relax," he said to Jean McWilliams, then he started dodging through the pool of snakes to head Kersten off. His breath came harshly in his throat. His lungs burned. Straining, he saw that he would be too late to save Conklin unless—

He turned, crashed straight through a barrier of cobra heads. He hardly felt the slapping sting as the Black Mamba struck into his thigh. His only thought

was that he would have to hurry, if he saved Conklin. Hurry and get Kersten.

As he intercepted Kersten's charge, Kersten swore and hurled the empty Luger at Burack. He dodged. Kersten came on in with a long, lunging dive.

Burack sidestepped. He tripped Kersten who went headlong into the dust. Burack lifted high on his toes, clenched both hands tightly together. He brought his body weight down, the heels of his hands crashed down into the back of Kersten's thick neck. The neck cracked. And Kersten stiffened, twitching. And died.

Burack sank down slowly into the dust beside him, to also die.

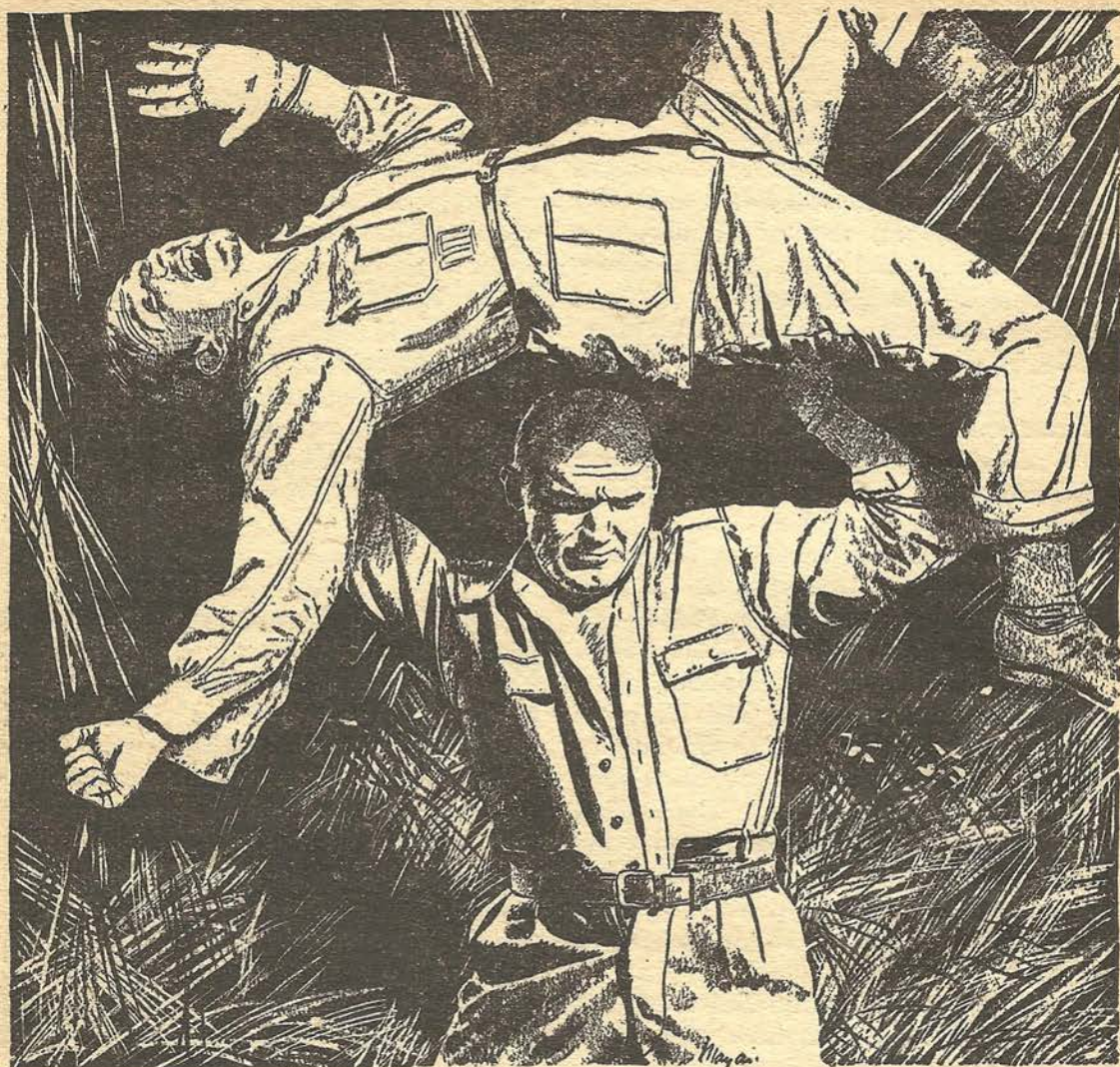
THE SNAKES had been confused, pushed from the firelight by the gunfire. But Burack didn't really much care anymore as he lay beside the dead Kersten. The poison was a crawling mist in his head. Through a shifting blur, he watched the Toad and Hans running frantically across the *kraal* toward the boma entrance.

It was hard to believe it, but then Burack recognized the red-dripping, scratched and utterly savage looking figure running after them as—*McWilliams*. There was little resemblance to the McWilliams who had come over from London a few weeks ago. A bounding bloody apparition chasing the renegades. He was carrying a small bore Winchester.

He knelt down, he aimed carefully and fired twice. Hans went down with a long cry. The Toad ran faster, long thin legs crawling like a spider's. He fled into the jungle as McWilliams sent a chamber of shots after him.

Then McWilliams disappeared into his hut, reappeared quickly, and then was crouching beside Burack. He had a leather pouch from which he was hastily extracting a hypo. "Anti-snakebite toxin," McWilliams chattered. "Always be prepared for everything in these beastly jungles, eh?"

Burack went to sleep with Jean kissing him, which was about as good a way as any.



KRAAL OF THE WALKING DEAD

By DAN CUSHMAN

Why would Mengbattu, the pale *girot*, never dance at the fetish fire? Even the well-known scientist, Dr. Sprague, dared not try to answer that question. For the ghastly death-secrets of ancient Tovodoun might contain truths too evil to know!

A VANETTE rattled loose fenders and disappeared in flamelike mirage where the road curved among thatch huts on its way to the cacao plantations along the Bosun Prah. For a long time after it was gone, dust hung apparently motionless in the morning air, caught like fine-ground kaffir flour where sun slatted through the palm fronds.

For a time it seemed that the vanette had taken with it the last living things in that town of Borkovo, the Gold Coast, British West Africa.

Then, unexpectedly, as things sometimes happen in the tropics, a white man appeared, apparently born of heat-wave and mirage.

He walked slowly past the A & G Vege-



table Oils warehouse and struck across Borkovo's wide street toward the two-three steps to the lower verandah, avoided a bit of broken flooring, and jerked the bell-pull.

A tinkle came from the deep interior. He waited, taking off his sun helmet for comfort.

He had perspired, and a wisp of burlap-brown hair stuck flat against his forehead. He was neither tall nor short, slim nor heavy, but he had a lean resilience that was uncommon among men who spent their years along the quinine and whiskey belt of the African tropics. He was about thirty-five. His face was not handsome—it was too long, his cheekbones too high so they seemed to press and narrow his blue-gray eyes.

He waited with utter resignation, and at long last there came a slap-slap of bare

feet on woven palm mattings, and a tall Aquapem boy with dusty coal skin came in sight, buttoning the front of his trousers.

"The District Commissioner is expecting me," the white man said.

The boy led him up a flight of cobwebby stairs to a copper-screened door. The shadow outline of a man could be seen moving inside.

"White man come see you," said the boy.

"He may come in," a nasal-metallic voice responded.

The man was seated in a rattan chair forearms resting on a cluttered, ebony-topped deck. He was a negro, small, wiry, dressed in ill-kept whites, his hair pomaded with an attempt at taking the kink out. The pomade was perfumed, and the perfume, with sweat, gave the sort of sickly-sweet odor one would expect at the

front door of a brothel. Behind him a white canvas hammock swung limply making it evident that he had been taking early siesta.

The spidery negro moved his rattan chair with just the right degree of courtesy, and said,

"Mr. Thebes. I say, this is a pleasure!"

He tried to accent his speech like a Britisher, and did a rather good job of it. The white man, Craig Thebes, looked down on him for a moment of thoughtful amusement. Then he shrugged,

"Well, maybe it will be a pleasure."

THEBES was not English. He was American, with an American's side-of-the-mouth carelessness of speech. He sat down, sliding to rest on shoulderblades and tail bone, stretching his legs out. He drew a long cigarette from the pocket of his linen coat and lighted it without offering one to the Commissioner.

"You call yourself Latham, don't you?"

"My name is Roger Latham."

There was reproof in the man's answer, but not too much reproof. Thebes blew cigarette smoke. It was Tangier tobacco smelling like a cigar. He took time to study Latham through the smoke. The fellow was mulatto, probably, maybe three-fourths black. Accra tribe. No ordinary natives, the Accras. Even the Armenians from Dakar had a time matching them for cleverness. It was a common joke that this "Latham" was once the District Commissioner's barber, and that he had merely taken over the affairs of state without anyone's consent when that gentleman resigned without warning to work for the Cocoa Combine. For the better part of a year thereafter the Governor let the fellow who signed his reports "Roger Latham" carry on, unaware that he was a native. Then, when the fact was brought before him, the august gentleman had saved face as best he could, uttering a resounding phrase on "African citizenship" and rushing a temporary appointment through the Legislative Assembly.

Latham seemed not in the least embarrassed by the quality of Thebes' gaze. He tapped black fingers on the black desk, whistling softly. The air was something from Pinafore. Everything he did was mimicry of his former master. Then, as

though to complete the caricature, he affixed a monacle in one eye.

Thebes laughed—a dry jerk of his shoulders, cigarette scissored in one corner of his mouth. The man was like some ghastly aspersion on Britain, a kick at the collapsing bones of her empire. Thebes spoke, talking to himself more than Latham.

"Praise God that Benjamin Disraeli is not around to see this!"

"Eh?" The negro was no fool, and though he recognized the contempt in Thebes words, he saw no reason to get angry. "You have some business to transact? Or were you paying your respect?"

"I could pay my respect from across the street. I have business to transact, as you damned well know." Thebes leaned back, inhaled, and talked smoke from his lungs. "As I told you on the phone, I am representative of Dexter Mahogany and Dye-woods, Limited. Our concern is at present expanding into the primary fields, either here or in the Malay Archipelago." With a careless movement, Thebes drew a billfold, opened to the identification windows, tossed it across.

"American?"

"Yes."

While Latham read, Thebes' eyes wandered the room. A dusty British flag stood in a brass holder behind the desk. There was a row of screened windows with bamboo jalousies that swung, making whispered rattles in the almost imperceptible breeze.

"I say, old fellow! Cawn't say that I ever heard of this Dexter Mahogany outfit," Latham remarked, sliding the billfold back.

"Next time I'll come representing Burma Shave," Thebes growled around his cigarette. "Or do you still use the old-fashioned shaving brush?"

"I use a brush, French oil soap, and a German razor. But my prices have gone up considerably. Furthermore I warn my customers not to talk to much while they are being shaved or else they might get their throats cut."

Thebes laughed. It wasn't often one found a native who could toss it like that in the white man's vernacular. He stopped, twisted his lips as though his Tangier cigarette left an unpleasant taste. "I told you what I wanted over the phone, and

I came here expecting to be clipped. How much do you want?"

"I'm a British official. Honor of the Empire, old man. Bribery is a——"

"All right, we'll be subtle about it, though it takes more time." He felt inside his pocket and drew out a heavy manila envelope. "If you've never heard of Dexter Ltd., you can tune in on the Takoradi wireless tonight at seven and get the London quotation. There's a big world outside the G-C and it isn't *all* run by the Royal Cocoa Combine and the Bank of B. W. A. My outfit's pretty big, too, as you'll find out some day."

He tossed the envelope over, and Latham opened it. It contained a stock certificate.

Thebes said, "That's made out for twelve shares of capital stock. We're not giving it to you, remember. No bribery! Not an official of the New Africa." Thebes spat his cigarette across the palm-matted floor. "No! We're giving you the opportunity to buy it. At par value. One pound sterling a share. The present market value is two-pounds-six, but what the hell? It's our policy to invite leading citizens of new districts to become part owners of our concern."

"You want me to pay——"

"Pay me anytime. Next Christmas will do."

"I believe I would rather have you advance me the money."

Thebes opened his billfold, tossed over a five-pound note. "I'll advance you this much and no more. Take it or leave it."

Latham laid the banknote inside the certificate, placed both in the top drawer of the desk, turned a key in the lock. He said,

"And now to this thing you wanted. The American explorers——"

"I want their permit temporarily suspended."

"But signed by the Governor himself——"

"The Governor's in England, and that permit was signed by his secretary. Anyhow, they're headed for Aggamba. Aggamba is dangerous. Too dangerous. Or have you forgotten about that representative for Gambon Mahogany. Stantina. He never came back. There's no reason why any white man would want to stay on

in a voodoo hell like Aggamba. He's dead."

"But I say! . . . there are so many things a man dies of in the jungle. The watersnake, the striped mosquito that lays the eggs in the blood . . ."

"That's what I was saying. It's too dangerous for three American scientists with no guide. A white guide, that's what they need. Get it, Latham?"

"Ah!" He exhaled through flattened nostrils, lifted his bony hands, let them fall. "You have convinced me."

"Sure," said Thebes, standing up.

"You were not clipped so close as to hurt, what-ho?" grinned Latham, lifting his monacle.

"Close enough."

Latham came around the desk, reaching to lay a friendly arm around Thebes' shoulder.

"Keep your hands off me!" barked Thebes. He turned toward the door, paused half way through. "By the way, if everything goes right, I'll advance you the rest of that *loan*. Just before I leave for Aggamba . . . with the American scientists."

II

A CONVERTED U. S. reconaissance car stood in front of the two-story Levisque hotel. The numbers and Army insignia had been obliterated by daubs of gray paint and across the side, in neat letters, was the inscription, "Columbia Ethnological Expedition." A young man with wavy yellow hair tossed a heavy bag through the rear opening and turned to grin as Thebes walked up.

"Hot!" he said.

Thebes stopped, giving more regard to the remark than it seemed to deserve. "By the way, Leskawitz, where were you raised?" he asked.

"Minnesota."

"Minnesota! Good God! Doesn't Columbia have an *Arctic* expedition? Did you know that the hottest spot on the face of the globe is Keyes, just five degrees north of here? I was there one day when it was 127 in the shade. At night it cooled off. One hundred two. You'd better knock off for the day, kid, or one of these noons you'll turn belly-up permanently at the ripe age of twenty-five."

"No rest today. The good doctor's in a hurry to beat the rains."

"You're going to Aggamba, aren't you?"

Leskawitz nodded, and Thebes spent a second or two looking at the inscription on the side of the truck.

"What the hell are you digging for up at Aggamba?"

"We're not diggers. We're from the Columbia department of Ethnology. I guess there's an endowment fund that was invested a little too well, so they sent us here to get rid of the accumulated interest."

"What do ethnologists study?"

"Races, customs, institutions."

"I should think you could have studied that in the Bronx."

"I know it sounds crazy, but this thing all started with a study of voodoo down in Haiti. Most of those Africans' ancestors were originally from the Gold Coast, so we came here to dig out the roots. The voodoo capital seems to be Aggamba. So—it's Aggamba for us. In this recon car—if we can beat the rains."

A second white man, about thirty-five, big and muscular with a deep red face walked down the hotel steps with a bundle. He nodded briefly to Thebes. The man was Dr. Owen Mason. He had more the appearance of a stevedore than a scientist.

"Better light-to, Leskawitz. There's an evil weather report on the wireless, and the chief's getting his bowels overheated."

"Right-o!" sang Leskawitz, still smiling.

Thebes followed them inside. The "chief"—Dr. Hilary Sprague—was at the desk talking to fat Madame Levique, the proprietress. He was fifty or fifty-five, good looking, with china-white hair making a striking contrast with his reddish-tanned skin.

"Oh, Thebes!" he said. It's a hell of a thing to turn down a fellow countryman the way I did you, but you can see for yourself how that car is loaded."

"Sure. Sure, Doc. Things work out that way sometimes."

"No hard feelings?"

"Why should there be? I'll take care of my end."

He climbed the stairs, circled the vine-shaded verandah. His black boy Boleh-kah, was curled up just outside the door of his room, asleep. He stepped over the

man's big body and went inside. The jar of his step awakened Boleh-kah who sat up, heavy shouldered, ugly, made to seem uglier by the tribal welts which puckered his skin and made ridges from forehead to navel. He made no sound. Boleh-kah's tongue had been removed by an Arab surgeon many years before on orders of the Sultan of Wadeai for carrying tales against the government, so he merely lifted his two hands in greeting.

Thebes pulled off his linen jacket, unbuckled the 9 M.M. Walther automatic leaving the wet print of its shoulder-strap on his shirt, and lay down on the stretched canvas cot. He closed his eyes while Boleh-kah made slow movements, stirring air with a hand-punkha.

When he woke up, clouds made a thick cover over the sun. Thebes stepped over Boleh-kah who had fallen asleep and walked to the verandah, making a hole to see through the kumasi vine. The recon car was still there.

Downstairs he found Mason and Leskawitz seated disconsolately inside a screened compartment of the lower verandah with empty sundowner glasses on the table between them.

"Still here?" Thebes sat down. "And with the big wet coming up from the west. This is the end of March, my buckos. The greater rains. They've been holding off two weeks, and that always makes it worse. Maybe you should have brought a meteorologist along."

A native boy came, spotless in new sengah-shifter and half-trousers making him look like a Hindu. Thebes ordered whiskey and water.

"Refill?" he asked, indicating the empty glasses.

"Might as well," grumbled Mason. "Personally, I think we might as well sit here and get stinking drunk."

"Now you're talking like a real T.T." said Thebes.

Dr. Sprague came from outside, mopping his face until his handkerchief became a damp ball.

"No use?" asked Mason.

Sprague shook his head.

"Commissioner revoke your permit?" asked Thebes.

Sprague peered at him, "You must be psychic."

"No, just experienced. The Trust doesn't like the idea of strangers who might carry stories out of the country. Folks might get the idea that the G-C isn't the black man's utopia it's been pictured."

Mason asked Sprague, "Did you try to buy the Commissioner off?"

"No."

"Don't!" Thebes leaned back, making room so the houseboy could put down his *stengah*. "Don't. Especially a black official. There's nothing he'd rather do than throw the lot of you in jail."

"But damn it, we can't just sit——"

"Of course not. You're going on to Aggamba."

There was a promise in Thebes' voice, and Sprague waited for more.

"I might be able to get your permit reinstated."

"Say, that would be——"

"Provided you'd agree to take me along, as Professor Thebes, your associate."

"Very well," Sprague said. He gave in that easily.

Mason rose to his feet. He bumped the table, making glasses jump. He looked down on Thebes, "Damn it, *you* pulled strings and got him to——"

"Mason!" Sprague spoke sharply, waving him to be quiet.

Mason remained standing a few seconds, anger thickening his shoulders and raising veins in his forehead. Then he sat down. Thebes watched him with an unlighted cigarette dangling between his lips. He struck a match on his thumb-nail.

"Go ahead and say it!" he said smoothly.

"Nothing," Mason muttered.

Sprague addressed Thebes, "When can you get us started?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"It just depends."

Thebes finished his *stengah* and left. A few minutes later, rain came in an abrupt deluge. The shower was over in ten minutes, leaving the town steamy-hot. Darkness came, and with it the thum-thumming voodoo drums of the native village. Thebes returned, finding the three scientists engaged in a desultory game of pinochle.

He tossed a paper on the table.

"Get it? asked Dr. Sprague.

"Yes. He'll let you go in the hands of a white guide."

Mason threw down his cards. "Why do you want to go up there?"

I'll tell you that, not because it's any of your damned business, but because you'd imagine something a hell of a lot more sinister. I'm with Dexter Mahogany and Dyewoods. One of the richest stands of mahogany and cabinet odum in the colony lies up there near an old concession that a certain George Clifton is operating. A couple of men went up there last dry season to do some timber-mapping. They never came back. I'm not accusing anyone. It might not even be significant that Clifton has already shipped out three times the amount of mahogany that was inside the limits of his concession. But I'd like to look around for my firm with an eye to cutting in on a good thing, and I'd just a little rather have Clifton think I was an ethnologist."

MASON twisted down his heavy lips, "In other words, you're using us as a screen so you can spy on a competitor and maybe steal his concession away from him."

"Why yes, that's one way of putting it."

There was no warning in Thebes' eyes. He turned. The movement brought him close to Mason. Thebes' fist swung in a sudden arc, connecting with Mason's meaty jaw.

Mason's head snapped to one side. His eyes were off-focus as he hit the floor sitting down with hands flung behind him. After a baffled moment he charged to his feet. Thebes sidestepped and tossed a chair so it tangled his feet and sent him to the floor again.

"Stop it!" Dr. Sprague was between them with Mason getting to his feet. "Both of you. Sit down, Mason." He turned to Thebes. "And you. I've agreed to take you, Thebes, but you're not running the show. Any more violence and you'll stay behind if it means all of us go back to Accra."

"Sure, Doc." Thebes kept opening and closing his right hand, looking at skinned and bleeding knuckles. "Mind spotting me a smear of sulfa? This is a hell of a country for infection. Almost as bad as

Aggamba." He looked over at Mason. "Know why I did that? Of course you do. Because you were getting too close to the truth, and nobody likes to be made out a heel.

Especially when he is one."

III

THE ROAD was not surfaced beyond Borkovo. It was reddish-brown dirt, and as rain fell it became slick and deep. By the second noon the car stood hub-deep and hopeless.

They left it mired there and walked, following a bush-track that tunnelled through jungle, and at last terminated at a plantation where cacao trees were planted in straight rows beneath protecting silk-cottons.

The plantation's negro operator directed them to a village of soggy thatch huts standing on a shoulder of ground overlooking the river.

It was evening, and smoke from damp cookfires pressed low and blue. Even the arrival of four white men, and Boleh-kah with his strange tribal markings brought inhabitants only as far as their doorways.

A pound note slipped between the knees of a Nass-how-wee fetisher brought forth a crew of boys and one of the long canoes of bombax wood that lay half swamped from rain at the edge of the river.

They returned to pick up the more valuable pieces from the bogged-down recon car, then pointed upstream through alternate deluge and sun.

For hours, as the native canoe boys sang in monotonous rhythm, Dr. Sprague questioned Thebes about voodoo, and little by little succeeded in breaking through the protective reticence of the man until he talked at length, alternately scoffing and serious, telling of fantastic rites, of human sacrifice, cannibalism and the strange, unknown depths of the subconscious mind that was tapped by hypnotism and faith in the black arts.

"You sound like you believed in all that," Mason said, barely smiling as he broke a silence maintained toward Thebes for three days.

"I believe what I see."

"Even that about the soul-less dead who walk around with the warmth of life

breathed through their nostrils by a witch doctor?"

"I've never seen that."

"But if you did see it, you'd believe it, wouldn't you?"

"No, I don't suppose I would. It destroys your self respect as a white man to believe such things. And in this country when a white man loses his self respect it's up to another white man to kill him." He gestured around, including Sprague and Leskawitz, "And you, too. You scientists talk about facts, about learning the truth. That's a pious lie that you try to make your own selves believe. Hell!—you have to look at everything in the light of your own learning. If you went back with an authenticated zombie, they'd laugh you out of the department."

"Maybe you're right," smiled Dr. Sprague. "But I don't think there's much chance of it, do you?"

"With your attitude, there's not a chance in the world!"

After four days along a river running bank-full, the jungle unexpectedly opened along the northern shore. There was gently rising land planted with yams and cassava, and beyond, the pointed thatch roofs of a native village.

"Aggamba?" Thebes asked of the capito boy.

"Aggamba!" the black answered in an awed tone.

Like Mecca to the Moslems, Aggamba was the capital of that intricate and mysterious African religion called variously "Voodoo," "Tovodoun," and "Fetisher." But aside from its reputation, first glance revealed nothing unusual about it. There were two rows of palm-thatched huts, one on each side of a footpath so ancient it had been worn down till it formed a gentlesided depression several feet lower than the surrounding land. From the village, just over the tops of feathery bamboo and heavy leafed banana, could be seen the boxwood steeple of a mission. A bush track wound down a gentle slope to the left and ended again at the river where some white man's houses were built on stilts to raise them a few feet above the dark, hot miasma of vast rainy season overflow.

"The resthouse must be down there," Thebes said.

Natives had gathered around them, jabbering a half-intelligible variety of Fanti. Men and women wore rags of calico as loin cloths. Pot-bellied children sported considerable fingers of umbilical cord, showing that the G-C's celebrated native improvement program had not extended so far as to furnish skilled midwifery in Aggamba.

Thebes pushed his way through the crowd and walked through mud toward the two-story veranda-fronted building he assumed to be the resthouse. He was tired, vaguely disturbed.

"Ach! Mynheer Thebes!"

A fat trader had waddled to the rounded front porch of his mud and bamboo store and stood, letting a smile find its way across the vast folds of his face.

"So, Thebes, I have maybe changed some? Vanderbosch. You remember me, ja?"

"Van! I didn't know you were here. The last time——"

"In Abakaliki. Before the war. Nine—maybe ten years." He watched Thebes climb the off-angle steps. They shook hands. "Ja. Ten years wiser, ten years fatter, ten years closer to death. So. Come in. And bring your white friends mit. *Schnapps*. Good, English *schnapps* I have. Vanderbosch, the trader of sixpence machete knives serves good *schnapps*!"

The whiskey was only fair, but it seemed good, after the long damp, to sit beneath a roof, to stretch the feet, and smoke a dry cigarette.

After a couple drinks around, Sprague led his two men away to examine the run-down resthouse, leaving Thebes alone with the Dutchman.

"Men of science?" asked Vanderbosch, watching them descend the porch steps. "They perhaps examine soil to see maybe about planting some new variety of cacao tree?"

Thebes shook his head.

"They're ethnologists. They study man and how the hell he got that way. Specifically in this case——voodoo."

"The Tovodoun?"

"Yeh."

"Perhaps they have heard stories about our walking dead?"

"They don't believe in it if that's what you mean."

"JA." Vanderbosch leaned forward, his weight creaking the rattan chair. His knees were bent, making his legs look short, like the legs of a toad with his fat belly above. "By daylight and with good *schnapps*, then you do not believe. But by night, that is different thing, eh, Thebes? When the eye cannot see, then the mind takes over. The black caves of the mind. Ja. I have seen the dead walk. By night. So have we all. But by daylight how many have seen this thing? You?—no? But I, Thebes. I have seen it. So much for that. It is not good that white men should talk of the black gods when seldom they meet. We must laugh at these things for that is the last thing that saves us from being natives ourselves. You are smart, Thebes. Smart enough to know that these ethnologists are fools, that nothing matters what is held in glass, or jingle in pocket, or take to bed. Why are you here mit these diggers?"

"I'm a guide."

Vanderbosch jerked his head.

"But I'd just as soon you'd call me Professor Thebes.

"So?" Vanderbosch poured two more drinks. "I am not man who asks questions. I am only old-time friend happy to pour *schnapps*. I will not tell George Clifton—anything."

Thebes jolted back, looking in the man's eyes. He was laughing, shaking his wattles.

"How did you know it was Clifton I was thinking of?" Thebes asked.

"I am not dull, *Mynheer*. You are not first white man who come and find out about Clifton. No. There was Portuguese, I forget his name. Thin, mit hawk nose."

"Stantina."

"Ja, Stantina."

"Clifton killed him, didn't he?"

Vanderbosch lifted his hands and let them fall. "He was a fool. He came——so. He tell me, everyone, 'I am Stantina. I am mit big mahogany firm. I perhaps cut mahogany here.' And so he is——gone. Tell me, are you perhaps acquainted mit George Clifton?"

"I have known him for a long time. Long, long time."

"Before Aggamba?"

"Long before Aggamba. In Nigeria, I know him there. And Dahomey. I tell

you, if ever was man mit body of gentleman and soul of swine, that man is George Clifton! So you must be careful. The knife in the back, the poison in the food, the cobra in bed. These things you must think of." Vanderbosch leaned across the table and pressed a thick forefinger against the Walther automatic concealed in the shoulder-grab beneath Thebes' coat. "Ja. Always the gun. You are old Thebes yet. I have heard the motto of your country. How you say it?—'Shoot first and talk afterward.' Perhaps you should shoot this Clifton and look afterward at mahogany riches."

"We'll see," Thebes said dryly. The *schnapps* didn't seem to have had the least effect on him. His face was as expressionless as ever. He let the long cigarette dangle in his lips, blue smoke stringing up past his eyes. "Van, what were you saying about the walking dead?"

"So you are interested in Tovodoun after all!"

"I just wanted to give the boys a lead. The husky fellow is a little unpleasant, but Doc and the yellow-haired kid are all right."

"Ja. So will I tell you, if you say nothing about hearing it from mine lips."

Thebes gestured him to go on.

"Clifton, he is great man. He will invite you to his house——"

"I was talking about the *tovodoun*."

"Wait. So am I talking of it. Clifton I say——he has big, fine house mit furniture from England. You will see it. While tasting first the food to make sure there is no poison, you will look around and see his house, *Mynheer*. And there, too will you see a *man*. Or what was once a man."

Thebes waited. Rain had started again, making a hissing sound as it fell on the thatch roof. It found its way through the thatch in several places and thudded to the floor mats forming puddles that lazily oozed away.

From nearby came the sound of hammering as Sprague and the others repaired something in the resthouse.

"Ja. There will you see Mengbattu, the *girot*. Mengbattu, who never dances at the voodoo fire. Mengbattu who no native will touch. Clifton's slave. A slave who will never leave him until Clifton does and then will stop breathing with him. I tell you

this because Mengbattu has been *dead these twenty years*."

Thebes barely smiled, and seeing him, Vanderbosch hurried to defend his statement.

"Hear me! Twenty years ago this *girot* named Mengbattu was hanged for killing an English officer at Yakuba, Nigeria. By the neck, and he was dead. Dead——they hauled him through the native village, and dead they buried him. Dead, and six feet underground, *Mynheer*. Only that night the ground was disturbed, and there were stories through the native village that the priest of the black fetish had dug the body up during the night and carried it to a hut, there to breathe through his nostrils and conjure life mitout soul into him. Understand, I was not there, in Yakuba, but it was told me by Kare Everwijn, a man of God, a holy missionary. So. For two nights, days, all the time boomed voodoo drums until *Mynheer* commander say, 'We will open the grave and show them his body so everybody go home.' And this they did. But behold me as I sit here, across the table from you, drinking *schnapps*!——the grave was empty. Ja. And five years later I saw this Mengbattu. Walking, breathing. And I thought he was alive. 'Oh-no! I say to myself, 'Vanderbosch, you should not be the fool. This man lives. And then I looked in his eyes. *His eyes. Mynheer Gott!! his eyes! Flat, dead, looking at me through dust of his grave!*'"

The effort had spent the trader. Sweat streaked down his cheeks so they glistened in the light which struck obliquely from outside. He lifted the *schnapps* bottle. It had been half full to start with, and now it was empty. He hurled it. It struck a hardwood pillar, shattering, spinning jagged pieces of glass across the dirt-clotted mattings.

"You think I am crazy mit quinine?"

"No, Van. You're not crazy."

Vanderbosch exhaled. Everything seemed burned out of him now. He reached and slapped palm on table. A moment later there was a jingle of ankle links, and an old houseboy with white woolly hair entered, drawing the cork from a fresh bottle.

"It was like yesterday, *Mynheer*. I see it. His eyes. You stay a while, *ja?* You

sit mit me an' talk. These native. Even my own black boys. Sometimes there is something far back in their eyes, and I fear them. Sometimes I wake up, late, dark. I sit up, and then I look back at bed for fear I am dead, *Mynheer*. I am not afraid to die. But I fear to be like Mengbattu, the *girot*. You know what I am talking about?"

Thebes nodded.

"Hear me. If you are near when I die, I would want my body burned." He poured *schnapps*, resting the elbow to keep his hand from shaking. He lifted the glass, and something like a smile touched his heavy lips. "I would perhaps burn good, *Mynheer*."

IV

THE RESTHOUSE was a dilapidated, two story building slithering with house-ghekkos and thatch snakes. It had been built twenty-odd years before when Aggamba had seemed like the logical terminus for the Huni Valley railroad, but the powers of cocoa and mining had decided otherwise, and so the big, new resthouse was left to the encroaching jungle.

The two rooms used when the District Commissioner made his twice-yearly visits were in fair repair, and with bronze screening and other supplies found at Vanderbosch's store, a couple other rooms were made fit for habitation.

Late in the next afternoon Reverend Heggrie waded down through mud from the Methodist mission with a barefoot Akem convert holding an oiled silk parasol.

Heggrie was an ample man, fifty, with the voice of a minister, but with the self-righteousness which is the blight of his profession softened by his twenty-five years in savage country where he had to be thankful for what white company came his way.

Heggrie invited them to dinner, and they returned with him through drizzle to his sheet-metal-covered dwelling inside the mission compound. Mrs. Heggrie, a sallow woman in a black dress, greeted them in the front room where a petrol lamp was already burning.

Dinner was delayed as darkness settled. Heggrie kept glancing at his watch, shak-

ing it to make sure the fungus had not corroded its fine gears. Finally he explained,

"I was waiting, hoping my ward would come along. But she seems to have been detained."

"Your ward?" asked Thebes.

"Willa. Poor Dr. Quilter's daughter. We've cared for her since he died."

"She teaches at the mission school, I suppose?"

"No." He said bitterly, "So-called bush schools are no longer encouraged by the colonial government."

A stormy, thick darkness had crept in from the jungle, and with it came the strong odor of fires burning damp grass. Tom-toms commenced muttering, muffled by rain. By degrees the tom-toms grew louder, asserting themselves.

"Week of the rain fetish," Reverend Heggrie remarked. "Then he smiled with a tinge of embarrassment. "You see, I've come to know the native religion almost as well as my own."

"How are the words of Israel competing with the fetishes these days?" Thebes asked.

Instead of answering directly, Heggrie said, "The fetish religion has held the souls of these poor people in bondage for thousands of years. You shouldn't expect too much of a missionary in one lifetime."

"Those drums aren't coming from the village."

"No. From the fetish town. You take a footpath through the bush two or three miles. Drums can be heard easily over that distance."

Mrs. Heggrie spoke in an unexpectedly loud voice, "If they would only send us a bell that was louder than those drums!"

"Yes," smiled Heggrie. "Mother and her bell."

"Ever since I came, I've tried to get them to send a bell so loud it would drown out the drums. Then I would ring it every night as long as their drums beat."

She had a habit of staring a few inches over a person's head when she talked. Quinine did things to a man, and more things to a woman after ten or fifteen years in that rotten climate.

"Is it safe to go over there?" Sprague asked.

"Eh?" Heggrie snapped his watch shut

and put it away. Oh, I think so. I've been there. Several years ago—to see one of my converts who had fallen into a fit. They accept Christ, you know, but they keep sneaking back to consult the *Vo* just the same. One of my boys ran here and said this fellow, his name was Ikoro, had fallen into a trance at the *sagbata* fetish hut.”

He paused, drawing in his breath.

“Of course I went over.”

“Did you get to see him?”

“Oh yes. I saw him. But it did no good. He was in a trance, and there was nothing I could do to awaken him. So I had to come back.”

“What kind of reception did the priests give you?”

Heggrie seemed to be listening for something. “Eh? Oh yes—the priests. They acted like I wasn't even there. Like I was invisible. I asked questions, and they wouldn't answer nor look at me. Very peculiar. I never went back.”

They finally sat down to dinner without Willa Quilter. The meal consisted of chicken prepared after the Arabian manner yellow with saffron, a rather hard and fibrous bread of pounded cassava, a papaya and banana salad drenched with avocado oil that had a fermented taste, and as a special treat, canned potatoes fried in palm oil.

Afterward the boy came with cups of coffee, prepared from extract and quite cold.

A loose board thumped on the porch, and the door opened.

A lean-faced man of thirty-five or forty paused just inside, holding the door open for the girl who followed him.

Heggrie hurried across the room, “Clifton! Thank God, she's with you.”

“It was quite all right,” Clifton said in a well-modulated, British voice. “Quite all right, old top. She was caught in a bit of rain, that was all, and had stopped under the verandah down by the resthouse. I came along there to visit the Americans, and found her. So we toddled along as soon as the wet eased off.”

His voice had a cold quality.

Clifton's back was turned, and he hung up his waterproofs as he talked. The girl had moved into the circle of light from the petrol lamp,

SHE was in her late teens, or maybe twenty. Her flushed loveliness was not at all what one expected in a country where European women became drab. Her eyes were dark with flecks of rust that gave them color; the brownness of her skin came only partially from sun. She was shorter than average, slim waisted, with womanly breasts like a young Gypsy's that her plain clothes tended to accentuate rather than conceal. She was really a beautiful girl.

Thebes smiled a tiny bit, and without taking his eyes off her, lifted his cup of bitter coffee.

She was looking at him, lips parted showing the tips of her teeth. Then, moving with what amounted to a toss of her head, she turned to look at Heggrie who was talking to her.

“My dear, you know very well how we worry about you. Why do you go away like this, with the dark coming on? You know it's not safe . . .”

She had stopped listening, so Heggrie let his sentence trail away. Clifton walked across, looking from one man's face to the next.

He was not bad looking, though his face was too long. His age showed around his mouth and at the outer corners of his eyes, otherwise one might have supposed him to be thirty rather than forty. He was thin, about five feet eleven, his skin turned deep reddish brown by many years of the tropics. Vanderbosch had described him as one possessing the body of a gentleman and the soul of a swine, but such a thing was hard to believe after once meeting his eyes.

“I dare say you're the American chaps,” he said.

Reverend Heggrie introduced them, and Clifton shook hands around. He mentioned the fact that he was a mahogany concessioner with a place up the river. He spoke with good accent, but one that was cultivated rather than natural, for now and then some brassy twist of a word would creep in indicating his Yorkshire origin.

He then accepted Mrs. Heggrie's invitation and sat down at table across from the girl.

“So you're Yankee scientists. Agronomists, I suppose.”

"Ethnologists," Sprague answered. "The voodoo."

"Oh I say!" Clifton laid down the bit of hard cassava bread he had been spreading with honey. "Oh I say!"

"You sound alarmed," Sprague smiled. He jerked his head, indicating the drums. "You think the fetishers are dangerous?"

"Inherently, my dear fellow. Not deliberately. Do you get my meaning?"

"I think I do. You believe there's some chance of our getting ourselves included among the human sacrifices."

Mason laughed in his stevedore voice, but Clifton did not even smile.

"Exactly!" he said, returning to the honey.

"If we only had a bell," Mrs. Heggrie said. "Clang! Clang! A bell that would drown out those heathen drums."

Clifton said, "I told you last week that on my next trip to Takoradai I would order a bell. The biggest, most brazen bell in all London."

Everyone smiled except Mrs. Heggrie. Her eyes were closed, her face a sallow mask, and her thin body weaved back and forth imagining the sound of her bell, clanging Christian defiance at the voodoo.

Willa kept moving her eager eyes around the room, looking at the newcomers, and always her eyes came back to rest on Thebes, the most unhandsome of the lot as though the craggy cruelty of his face fascinated her.

After an hour while talk jumped from one subject to another, Clifton stood up to go.

"You'll be here through the rains, and probably longer," he said to Sprague. "I dare say a project such as yours will take considerable time. The point is, we might as well take time to get acquainted. I'd like to have you visit me tomorrow. I'll send a launch down just after siesta. Dinner and a few whiskies. Reverend, I want you and your family, of course. Right-O?"

Clifton looked at the girl, "Good night, Willa." He only smiled when she did not seem to hear him.

"Willa!" cried Reverend Heggrie. "Willa, your guest!"

"Oh, I'm sorry." She stood, swinging her dark hair in coils around her shoulders. "I wasn't listening."

"Good night," Clifton said.

AFTER he was gone, handsome young Leskawitz struck up a conversation with the girl. He turned on the wireless, bringing a Dakar jazz-band over oceans of tropical static. The two danced, Leskawitz taking time to show her one of the current steps.

She was a pliant dancer, swinging easily with the movements of his body, following with feline ease although it was probable she had never danced before in all her life. She moved apparently without thinking, watching over his shoulder, her dark eyes on Thebes who sat rocked back in a hardwood chair, the inevitable Tangier cigarette between his lips.

"You must have it!" said Mason in his sour manner.

"Cassanova was no pretty boy either."

Unexpectedly Willa spun away from Leskawitz leaving him in empty-armed surprise, and walked softly in rope-soled slippers to Thebes.

"I'm Willa Quilter. I don't think you've spoken to me."

Thebes let his chair bang forward. He didn't bother to get up, but he did remove the cigarette from his lips.

"How do you do, Miss Quilter?"

"I've never smelled cigarettes like those."

Thebes drew the pack from his shirt pocket. It was a red package with yellow lettering in Arabic done in the thin-runny ink common to African lithography.

She took one of the cigarettes and bent over to let Thebes light it.

"Willa!" Reverend Heggrie strode across the room.

She turned and faced him, the cigarette looking out of place in her full, young lips.

"What's on your mind, girl?"

When she made no move to discard the cigarette, he seized it from her lips, started to hurl it down, then thought better of it and crushed the coal in an ash tray.

"You shouldn't have given it to her," he said to Thebes.

Thebes laughed with a single jerk of his shoulders. "There's a saying they have over in F. M. S.—'Beware the tamed tigress who first beholds her face in a mirror'."

"And you think that applies?"

"If I didn't, I wouldn't have repeated it."

"I'm asking no advice in bringing up my ward!"

"All right."

Willa's lips were twisted down, half pouting, half defiant. She started to say something and Heggrie turned on her, "I believe it's time for you to go to your room."

The girl had a way of languid, brooding thoughtfulness. Not affected. It was natural to her. She was not all European—there was a strain of Arabian or another of the Asiatic bloods in her. She climbed a set of mahogany steps to the second story.

"I'm sorry." Heggrie spoke to Thebes. "Really, I know it was nothing you did. It's just that Willa— And that remark of yours about the tamed tigress. It was somehow—so deft. Accidental, of course. It unnerved me. You don't understand about Willa, Professor Thebes."

There was silence, filled with machine-gun blasts of static from the wireless, and above it the inevitable *thum, thum, ta-ta-thum* of tom-toms. Still by the table, Mrs. Heggrie lifted her eyes and spoke.

"He said he would buy me a bell. A brass bell. I could drown them out if I had a bell!"

V

A TOWERING FOREST of bombax and mahogany arched the river beyond Aggamba, shutting the village from sight before the launch was a quarter-mile upstream. It was only a short trip to Clifton's concession, but the light of afternoon was fading in dull, rainy-season clouds by the time they got there. The Akim boat-boy laid the launch against the dock of heavy African teak and hopped over the side to make fast. A tall black who looked to be Senegalese prowled into sight with a semi-automatic rifle over his arm, and watched with professional suspicion as the passengers came ashore. There were Reverend and Mrs. Heggrie, Willa, the three scientists, and Thebes.

A path of fresh-painted cobbles led between straight rows of fan palms to a white plantation house. A *capito* houseboy in white jacket, shorts and *topi* saluted them and opened the front door, showing them inside. The house was big and ap-

parently unplanned, an assortment of large and small rooms, furnished with a hodge-podge of things European and African.

Clifton in crisp, blue-white linen came down the stairs to meet them. Darkness was then coming rapidly, so he called a boy to light the petrol lamps.

Clifton was saying, "I have an A-C plant at the mill, but I've never brought power up here. I haven't a wireless, either. I suppose if such things appealed to me I'd never have chosen to live here in the first place."

Table was set in the diningroom. Glasses, Scotch and bottled water stood on a Chinese laquer sideboard. Clifton poured whiskey to all except Heggrie and the women, whom he served first with plain soda. After a couple of drinks, they sat down to table while boys carried platters around, serving after the manner of Dutch *reistafel*.

Dinner had reached the port wine stage when a jingle of copper bracelets sounded and a heavy shouldered native entered.

He was a slow-moving man with a blunt, dull face, dressed in khaki shirt and shorts. He must have carried ten pounds of copper distributed on wrists, neck and ankles.

He paused at Clifton's right arm, waiting for the *Master* to finish his wine. Clifton did this slowly, touched his lips with a napkin, and signaled without turning.

Willa Quilter was seated at Clifton's right. Color had sunk from her face as she looked up and saw the native there. He leaned to say something close to Clifton's ear, and the movement accidentally brought the soot-black skin of one elbow against her bare arm.

Touch of him snapped her momentary paralysis. She sprang to her feet, recoiling, a scream tearing at her throat.

The black man moved away, not startled, hardly looking at her. In the momentary interval of startled silence following her scream, one could hear the clank of his bracelets.

Willa had moved around her chair. With an obvious effort, she pulled her eyes away from him. She rubbed the place on her arm where his elbow had touched.

Clifton got hold of her.

"Girl! What's the matter?"

She recovered herself quickly and spoke,

"I don't know. He touched me. I didn't expect——"

"Certainly. You were just startled. I shouldn't let a black come in dressed like a Zulu after heads." He turned to the black, "Mengbattu!"

Thebes moved forward with an involuntary jolt at sound of the native's name. He looked intently, trying to glimpse his eyes. The petrol lamps were old-fashioned wick burners and their reddish light fell uncertainly on his face.

Clifton asked the native what he wanted, and was answered in a mumbling Dahomey dialect as he backed away. He found a doorway without feeling, disappeared, leaving the strung bamboo drapes swinging behind him.

"Sorry he frightened you, my dear."

"It wasn't anything. I just didn't expect . . ."

Thebes drew a cigarette from his pocket. He did it with deliberation, placing it between his lips, lighting it. He took the match away and it trembled slightly. He blew it out and looked up to see Clifton's eyes on him.

Reverend Heggrie got hold of Willa's shoulder and said sternly, "You'll have to get hold of yourself, my dear!"

"Leave me alone!" She pulled herself away from him. "You act as though it were something——awful. Just for a person to be startled."

Heggrie watched her walk to the sideboard. She twisted the metal cap from the whiskey bottle and poured out a terrific slug. She stared at Heggrie defiantly, and downed it in four big gulps. After several desperate gasps she managed to get her breath.

"Willa!" Heggrie thundered.

"Oh I say, old man!" Clifton pulled him around. "Let her go. I know your feelings about liquor, but there's a time when it comes in handy, you know."

Willa was watching Heggrie. The whiskey had steadied her. Apparently Mengbattu was forgotten. She said.

"I'm tired of you shouting at me all the time, trying to tell me every move to make."

"Now, Willa," said Clifton gently.

"I'm tired of it! He wants to keep me locked up inside that dreary mission compound. He didnt.. even want to bring

me here tonight. And do you know why? Because I might meet *somebody* he doesn't approve of. He wants me to wait until the right man comes along. Some good, steady *English* man. He thinks I should sit inside, and take quinine, but never even listen to the dance bands on the wireless."

She stopped. She poured a second drink, gulped it. Heggrie started to remonstrate, but Clifton shook his head.

"Nothing like a bit of excitement to settle the digestion. I was going to serve brandy, but Willa seems to have overruled me. Better toddle over with that bottle. You wouldn't want to drink it all away from us."

AFTER A WHISKY, Clifton paused beside Thebes and said, "You've been giving too much credence to the stories that Dutch swine at the trading post must have told you. Believe me, there's nothing unusual about myself and my servants. Mengbattu is most certainly alive."

"How do you know that Mynheer Vanderbosch told me?"

"He tells everyone about Mengbattu. Jealousy. He used to be sort of a partner of mine. Maybe I'd have been the same way if *he'd* grown wealthy while I was rotting my life away in a jungle trade-store."

Somewhere in the big plantation house a woman was singing, pronouncing words in the Berber tongue, accompanying herself on a two-string lute. Her voice was husky but melodious and it moved easily, touching the unexpected minors that seem like discords to an ear unused to listening to music of Oriental origin. Vanderbosch had said something about Clifton's concubine, a Berber woman purchased from one of the slave caravans that still, after fifty years of French rule, run from Tombouctou to Ghazal. A woman named *Tuema*.

Willa was unnaturally flushed from the whiskey. She kept watching Thebes, trying to catch his eyes. Finally she strolled to the adjoining sitting room. She could be seen in the half-light beyond an arch, turning the crank of an old gramophone. She put the needle down, and opened the gramophone doors to let out a shallow, treble sound. Some jazz band



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of another era playing "Dardanella."

"My God!" said Sprague. "That takes me back to my youth!"

Everyone laughed except Heggrie. "Willa, why do you have to do these things?"

She went past him, dancing tip-toe one of the steps Leskawitz had taught her the night before, and continued across the room until she was near Thebes.

"Don't you know how to dance?" she asked him.

"It's not one of my accomplishments."

"I'll teach you."

He stood with one elbow resting shoulder-high on an okume sideboard, cigarette between his fingers, eyes meeting hers.

"You'd better take a couple more lessons yourself."

"All right, I will."

She turned away, giving her head a toss. Her hair had gloss and life, and the movement gave it a swing as though it were weighted by spun metal.

"Teach me!" she said to Leskawitz.

He hesitated, looking helplessly over at Sprague. He knew everyone was watching him, and it was embarrassing to be second choice to Thebes.

He put out his cigarette, turned. He seemed surprised how quickly the girl was in his arms, how firmly she moved against him.

Heggrie spoke her name again and started across. Clifton seized his arm, swinging him around.

"Oh I say, old fellow, a girl has to have her day to kick over the traces. Maybe a whiskey would do you a bit of good, what?"

"No thank you!"

The phonograph was spinning too fast, making the piece hard to keep up with. It came to an end, and the two left the room together. In a little while the strains of "Taxi!" came with an engaging, forgotten lilt.

Sprague said, "Do you realize I was a student in Stanford when *that* was popular?"

The phonograph spun its way to the end and struck the discard groove with a sandpaper effect and went on until Clifton walked through the arch to turn it off. He looked around for Willa and Leskawitz with muscles showing hard at the

sides of his lean jaw when he saw they had disappeared.

"Gone?" asked Heggrie edgily.

Clifton nodded, a smile barely breaking the hard lines of his face. Now that the phonograph had stopped they could once again hear the Berber woman and her lute. She made the jazz sound thin and futile. Unexpectedly Heggrie took the glass of whiskey Clifton was offering him, and drank it down with the dramatic flare of a ham actor making Dr. Faustus' compact with the devil.

He banged down the empty glass, faced Clifton. "Man! how can you stand there and let her show herself. You know very well—I've done my best. She shouldn't be out around——"

"It's quite all right inside the compound. You're worrying too much."

After the manner of polite men, neither Sprague nor Mason acted as though they heard this obviously private exchange but Thebes made no pretense at politeness. He looked at Heggrie with a thoughtful half-smile as he rubbed a cigarette between the palms of his hands, loosening the hard-packed tobacco.

"*Bangh*?" asked Clifton, shoving over a flat tin box.

It was not *bangh*, but a derivative, brownish hastish paste. Thebes made a tiny ball, removed a half-inch of shredded tobacco from the end of the cigarette, mixed in the paste, reinserted it.

"Try a pinch?" he asked Sprague.

"In the name of science!" Sprague answered cheerfully. "No rule against mixing it in a pipe?"

"It's your pipe," Clifton smiled.

"The same as marijuana, isn't it?" Mason asked, and Thebes nodded.

THE RESINOUS extract of hemp mixed with alcohol and just a little crude opium laid a pungent odor across the room. It was the opium one smelled more than anything.

Heggrie walked away—stood listening. He turned suddenly, noticing the odor.

"That stuff will kill a white man."

Sprague answered, "On the contrary, no one has ever proved that these depressants don't help a man live longer. I can't think of a better prescription for

thrice-weekly visits to a good, old-fashioned opium den."

No one spoke for a while. Rain had stopped, and the damp air, cool with evening, rustled the bamboo jalousies. Even the Berber woman had stopped singing. From the far distance came a thud-thud of drums.

"Professor Thebes!" Heggrie said unexpectedly. "She seems to have taken a fancy to you. Oh I know, it's none of your fault, but she has. I'd rather she wasn't outside. She'll listen to you. Would you mind? That is, just see she doesn't wander far?"

"Not at all." Thebes said, grinding out his cigarette.

Clifton's jaw muscles had tightened up again, but there was no other visible anger on his long, British face.

Thebes walked through the sitting room to the *picinnin* room where the cloaks were hung. He looked for his oil silk rain hood. It was gone. He stepped on to the darkness of the lower verandah. Now and then a big drop of oozing wet gathering and growing fat on a bamboo rafter pole, thudded to the floor. Huts of native workers made pointed outlines against the night sky. Aside from those, there was only the jungle darkness, pressing in across the little clearing.

He walked around the verandah. A sort of patio had been built on that side—flagstones, with frangapani and dwarf ylang-ylang growing in wooden tubs. Onset of the rains had brought racemes of bloom to the ylang-ylang, and the fragrance hung sharp and unsatisfying, reminding a man of other nights, across the great bulge of the world in F.M.S., of brown women under the kanari trees, and things a man would like to live over, a little differently.

He caught movement. Willa and Leskawitz. They were just standing, talking quietly. The girl turned, catching sight of Thebes.

Instantly she was in against Leskawitz, arms around his neck.

"Kiss me!" she whispered.

Thebes laughed and walked away.

"You didn't see them?" Heggrie asked when Thebes re-entered the room.

"They're out on the patio."

Dr. Mason and Clifton had left the

room. Dr. Sprague, the hashish gone from his pipe, stood with eyes half closed, analyzing the effect of the drug as it laid hold of his nervous system.

"Another smoke?" asked Thebes.

"No thank you. I only hope it hasn't ruined my pipe."

"I was on a pearler once off the Malay Archipelago working some reserve shell when a Limey gunboat sighted us and we had to lie low in a jungle lagoon. Every time the wind and tide were right, that gunboat would come sniffing around, so we had to stay there the better part of a month. We had a Saigonese diver abroad who was a three-pipe chandu smoker, and he made out for a week by pounding up three old bamboo pipes, and smoking the pulp. That shows how the volatile stuff impregnates a piece of wood.

"How did you get out?" asked Sprague, putting the pipe away. "Past the gunboat?"

Thebes shrugged. "I'm here."

Rain was falling again with a soft patter.

Thebes asked, "Where's Clifton and the Doctor?"

"Up in Clifton's room. He had a bit of gold-quartz. Mason used to work—"

Sprague stopped. He listened.

"What was it?" Thebes asked.

"Nothing, I guess. I was saying that Mason used to work with the Geological Survey—"

The mosquito door slapped shut and footsteps approached, running. It was Willa. She stopped in the archway. She was ivory-pale. Her lips were open and she was trying to say something. Suddenly the words came,

"He just fell. He didn't say anything."

"Who?" cried Sprague.

She didn't answer. She was staring up the stairs at Clifton who had appeared with Dr. Mason standing back of him.

"Was it Leskawitz?" shouted Sprague. He seized her shoulders, shook her.

"Answer me!"

"Yes!" she whispered,

CLIFTON walked outside, around the verandah. The patio with flagstones glistening from rain was partially lighted from a side window. He could see a man's feet and legs.

The toes were crippled.

Thebes stood quite still, Walther automatic in his hand. He went across the wet stones, dropped to one knee. Leskawitz lay quite still, face down, only the curly blonde top of his head visible among the folds of the rain cape he had borrowed.

A heavy machete had been driven just beneath his left shoulderblade. He must have died instantly.

Feet made irregular sounds on the verandah floor as they hurried from inside.

"Who's that?" Mason cried.

"Me," Thebes said, standing up.

"What are you doing there?"

"He was inside with me when it happened," Sprague muttered in a tight voice, pushing past Mason down the steps.

"Dead," Thebes told him.

"Good God!" There was nothing Sprague could do. He tried to pull the machete free. It took all his strength. The machete was a big-bladed weapon, native-fabricated from a spring leaf, its horn handle riveted on with cooper. It had been driven with considerable force, for its blade had entered at an off-angle with the ribs and must have shattered a couple of them.

"My God," Sprague kept breathing. "My God . . ."

They carried Leskawitz inside.

"Tell just what happened," Clifton said gently to Willa.

"We were just standing there, and—"

Thebes broke in, "He was kissing you, and you'd been at it for quite a while."

"Yes."

"Let her tell it," Clifton said.

"Then I heard something. The sound of—that." She looked at the machete.

"I didn't see anyone. I ran inside. . ."

Clifton said, "The machete was thrown."

Thebes, "Which way was he facing?"

"That way." She indicated the front of the house.

Clifton, "He must have been standing among the frangapanis."

Mason had been on one knee beside poor Leskawitz. He stood. There was a bit of thickening blood on one forefinger. He pointed at the oil-silk hood.

"That's your hood, isn't it, Thebes?"

"Yes."

"Then it's obvious to me why he was

murdered. One of your enemies came and mistook him for you."

The muscles of Mason's shoulders had thickened and anger twitched at the corners of his mouth.

Clifton asked, "What enemies could Professor Thebes have?"

"Professor be damned! That man's no professor—"

"Mason!" Sprague cried. "This isn't doing any good."

"Oh, the hell with it. I'd never have played along with his scheme in the first place. And that kid wouldn't be lying, dead."

"That's enough, Mason!"

Mason clamped his mouth shut. Clifton, keeping the background, barely smiled as he looked at Thebes.

Mrs. Heggrie was speaking. She had been speaking for some time, but no one had been listening. Her voice now droned monotonously across the room,

" . . . A person should never go outside after night when the drums are playing. The drums can lay the curse of antichrist. I wish they would send us a bell. They couldn't play their drums with the bell of God ringing in their ears!"

VI

LESKAWITZ was buried next morning in the little, white-fenced mission cemetery. Later the sun came on, clear and hot, raising steam from earth and thatched roofs, cooling the interior of the resthouse.

Thebes sat on the upper verandah until Vanderbosch showed himself after siesta.

"Mynheer Thebes!" The Dutch trader smiled through the folds of his face when he saw Thebes coming. "So I have hear it. One of your scientist friends he is dead already. The voodoo darkness, it is not good for *bondele*."

"What do you make of it, Van?"

"Ho! What should I make of it? You see jungle growing there? Bib, dark. When I come to Aggamba it was millet field." He waved futile, fat fingers. "Life in the jungle it is like fever. So today they bury him, next month he is gone mit even his bones like chalk to crush in fingers. *Ja*. Death, life, every-

thing, spins fast. So today you die, tomorrow your blood makes green in growing tree leaf."

"Who'd want to put a knife through Leskawitz?"

"You heard drums? Last night they beat black rhythm—like-so. In bed I hear them and I know it was not good. Perhaps he was killed by no *man*, *Mynheer!*"

"You mean Clifton had Mengbattu do it?"

"*Ja*. Mengbattu. You saw him, Thebes? When knife come, you perhaps then could see soulless *girot*? And what but strong man like Mengbattu could drive knife sidewise through ribs?" He peered at Thebes with little, shrewd eyes. "You think it strange Vanderbosch knows mitout being there? I have ways of learning. *Ja*."

"Now will we have *schmapps*."

Sprague was waiting when Thebes went back.

"What did Vanderbosch think?" he asked.

Thebes shrugged. "What can you expect of a man who wants his body cremated so the black fetishers can't make a zombie of him?"

"He believes *that*?"

"Sure. And don't fool yourself about Van. He used to be level-headed. A big, rosy cheeked Dutchman, strong as a Clydesdale horse and just as stable mentally. We'll all be ordering ourselves brass bells before this country is through with us."

They both fell silent, watching the approach of a half-dozen men from the native village.

"The *onaheme*," said Thebes. "Headman. He'll probably want to chase you downstream."

"What should I tell him?"

"Tell him to go to hell."

Zandi-Tschai was a chocolate-brown native, portly and erect walking, and he wore white man's pants as befitted the *oneheme* who received a letter once each year from the governor himself. He came bare foot down the muddy path with two guards leading the way and a servant holding an umbrella over his head. He left his men and the umbrella on the lower verandah and went to Sprague's

room where he was regaled with cigars and blue beads.

"What did he say?" Thebes asked when he left.

"You were right. He wants me to light out for the downriver. The voodoo, he says, should not be disturbed, else we will have plague, flood, fire and the yams will rot in the ground. But I told him to go to hell. Diplomatically, of course. With cigars."

THE VOODOO VILLAGE looked drab and miserable by the light of gray mid-morning. Rain stood in grayish puddles across the central grounds with the huts of mud, thatch and laced bamboo forming a rough circle around. None of the huts were very large; none of them deserved being called a "temple." Some were dome-shaped affairs one learns to associate with the fetish beliefs, others were shaped outlandishly, one was writhing and tunnel-like made to symbolize *Danah* the snake fetish; others, composite heaps of mud and palm-thatched represented *Sabata* —the Smallpox, *Nesshue* —the River, and many more.

Three natives, naked save for loin cloths, stood beneath a rain-heavy bombax tree watching the approach of Thebes. Dr. Sprague and Dr. Mason. They showed neither alarm nor surprise, just passive curiosity. It was evident that whites violated no taboo by going there.

Thebes spoke, using the common Tshi dialect, and after a momentary hesitation one of the natives walked forward, mud oozing between bare toes, pronouncing words of the Krobo district. Sprague broke in, speaking fluently, asking for the chief fetisher.

The native pointed with an elongated lower lip, indicating one of the smaller huts.

The hut had a long, roofed-over entrance of ant-mound mud plastered over straw. The mud had hardened to something resembling concrete during the dry season, but it was now slowly absorbing water and washing out, leaving grayish palm fronds and grass blades exposed.

The entrance was repulsive with the stench of putrefaction. Heavy shadow lay at the far end. Thebes groped, and lifted a drape of antelope skin. A dome-

like room was visible in light from a smokehole in the roof.

A negro dressed only in a bark-cloth loinpiece sat crosslegged on a heap of palm mats, watching. He was well built. By grayish light his skin had the slaty black look of unfermented cacao beans. He gestured and surprised them by speaking English.

"Come. I know you come to see Houssa ever since you leave resthouse."

"You knew we were coming?" Sprague showed amazement to flatter him. "I heard no message drum."

"Houssa have drum here." He tapped his breast. "Ever since white men leave Borkovo, and before, I know they will visit me. Every day, every night in canoe, I see you approach."

"You know all that?"

"The mind of Avodoun is everywhere, and its eyes see through dark and wall of hut."

Mason spoke, "We had quite a time that second evening, didn't we?"

Houssa recognized the challenge and answered sharply, "Green water-snake of death splash in canoe." He pointed to Thebes. "You shoot."

The boatboys had visited the fetish town, and it would have been easy enough to have learned the snake episode from them.

Houssa went on, "Borkovo-boys no tell. Tovodoun tell!"

Mason tossed back his head with a statted look. It was like the man reading his mind. Houssa grinned. The middle teeth of his upper jaw were filed to points, and turned black from betel nut chewing. Round about other things became visible as a man's eyes grew accustomed to the dimness. Overhead, on strings of twisted raffia were clusters of bat's wings, dried monkey tails, bits of snake and the other things used as *gri-gri* charms. Among the rest was a black crucifix with a silver Christ on it. At Houssa's knees was a calabash, turned greasy and black from uncounted years of handling, and inside it was a handful of mottled pebbles. At one side of the calabash, pulled to a rough pyramid, was a patchwork robe of monkey skins, bald in spots where the short hair had fallen out.

"You answer many questions," said Sprague.

The fetisher waited, eyes on Sprague's face.

"I would have you answer me a question."

"You must make a *Vo*."

Sprague handed him a pound note, and Houssa smoothed it and slid it inside the waist of his loin cloth with a little exhalation of satisfaction. It was plain to see that he was used to working for copper and small silver, even from white men.

He slapped his palms, and after a minute's wait a long-legged native crawled in through a rear passage, carrying a rooster under his arm.

Houssa took the bird as it squawked and flapped its wings, lifting dust and bits of thatch from the floor. His fingers pressed the sides of its head, evidently finding a nerve center, for it slowly quieted and crouched with breast on the ground. Houssa, taking his time, lifted the bird high, feet up, and with a quick twist of his fingers, ripped its head off.

Blood shot in a sudden stream, splattering the earth between his knees. He bent forward, touched his tongue to one of the final drops, and sat back, hurling the rooster to a far corner.

Houssa's eyes were on Sprague. "The white man's brother was not killed by Avodoun, or what white men call voodoo. He was killed by one the white man has never seen. Ask the missionary of the two-stick fetish. He knows who it was killed the white man's young brother."

Sprague had not asked the question—the fetisher had read it in his thoughts. That, or he was a phenomenal guesser.

"Was that your question?" Thebes asked.

"Yes."

"Who killed him?" asked Mason, rising to one knee like a runner starting a race.

HOUSSA did not even answer. He went on speaking to Sprague, "You travel over the far salt water to learn about our *Fa*, our *Akovodoun*. But only the small spirits walk by daylight. At night—then must you return."

Thebes tossed the fetisher a cigarette and lighted one himself. "How about bringing Mengbattu along?"

The fetishist's fingers closed, crushing the cigarette so its blackish tobacco popped from the side. "Mengbattu does not dance at the fire."

"Why?"

"Ha! The wicked witch-doctors of Dahomey! There is a law here ordering prison for anyone breathing into the nostrils of the dead."

"Then Mengbattu is dead!"

Houssa pretended not to hear. He looked at the cigarette, and threw away the broken half. He fumbled for a match in the waist of his loin cloth, lighted it, inhaled. "Tell me, what is it the old white woman keep saying about bell?"

"She'll get you when they send her that bell."

"No. The drums of Tovodoun are long as the time of man, and they beat the rhythm of the heart. They will drive her bell into the earth."

It was hot with midday when the white men emerged, blinking, from the fetish hut. The village looked miserable as before. A native, blind from trachoma, walked along the footpath, carrying baskets of cane suspended from the ends of a spring-pole. He kept swinging to and fro, feeling his way by the touch of vine leaves which hung thick as pythons' bodies from the branches above.

Thebes jerked his head to indicate the fetish house, "The lad's good."

Mason snorted, "Nothing there that can't be explained. I've seen better shows in Haiti." He went on in a challenging voice, "And if you ask me, it was preposterous, bringing the name of Mengbattu into it. You never miss an opportunity to discredit Clifton, do you? Mengbattu is just as much alive as I am."

"That remains to be proved."

"Not to me!"

"You," said Thebes, "lack a scientific attitude."

Sprague said, "I think he tripped you up that time, Mason. If there's a dead man wandering around this jungle it's up to us to find out about it."

"You're joking."

"Oh am I!"

The three men took siesta and went back to the fetish town as evening settled through blue, throat-biting smoke of thatch fires to watch a slim, black girl of seven-

teen beat into a catalytic trance by repetitions of the drums. When they left she was sitting crosslegged on the ground next to the door of the cobra fetish hut, her eyeballs rolled back inside her skull, her body apparently retaining neither breath nor pulse. She was the "*Ma-deup*" of a sprcerer's dance.

"I've seen the same thing in Haiti," Mason remarked.

Sprague, "I'll go you one better. I saw it in Louisiana, and the *ma-deup* was a housemaid in one of the best homes of New Orleans."

The path was utterly black as it wound through jungle, and the men walked slowly, half feeling their way. Sprague paused when it emerged on the village clearing. A light was still burning at the mission house.

Sprague glanced at his watch. "One o'clock. Heggrie must be writing a sermon. What do you think about the Reverend? Suppose he knows more about that killing than he lets on? You remember what the fetishist said."

"Hell!" said Mason. "By the way, Thebes, how are you getting on with your work? Your spying on Clifton?"

"I'm not getting on—thanks to you. After you tipping Clifton I wasn't a scientist, he'll be likely to put a bullet between my shoulders the first move I make."

They had left a candle burning in the resthouse and it sent strips of reddish glow through the shutters. There was movement on the verandah. Boleh-kah. He sat crosslegged, letting the white men walk around him. He got up to pad barefoot after Thebes.

"It's all right," Thebes said.

VII

BOLEH-KAH stopped in the half darkness, watching as they climbed the stairs. Thebes paused for a moment before entering his room. He knew by Boleh-kah's mute hand-language that there was someone inside.

He opened the door. The room was dark. Perfume hung in the air. There was movement, a whisper of footstep.

"Willa," he said.

"Yes."

He closed the door. She was so close

he could feel the warmth of her breath.

He said in a voice that was almost casual, "I noticed a light at the mission. You're worrying Heggrie by running around this way."

"What do I care? He wants to lock me up, to—"

"It might be a good idea."

He started to go past her. She was closer than he expected. He stopped with the feel of her shoulder against his chest.

"What the hell do you see in me?" he asked.

"Take me away. Please! Tonight. You'll have to!"

The quick insistence of her voice left no doubt she was frightened.

He said, "You can hear through these bamboo walls like paper, and Mason probably has his ear glued."

"Please!" She held tight to his jacket. "One of the canoes! They'll never catch us."

"Where will I take you?"

"Anywhere?"

"What is it? Do you want me, or do you just want to get away?"

"Both!"

He stood still, feeling the press of her young body, smooth beneath her harsh, white dress.

"You will?" she asked.

"All right, kid. You're not what I came here looking for, but you'll do."

She wanted it, so he drew her close and kissed her. She had an eager strength. Her hair was filled with the odor of rain and ginger blossom.

"Tonight," he said. "All right. Now. Where are your things?"

"What?"

"Your clothes. You can't go downriver like that."

"Oh." She backed from him with the air of one awakening. "I'll go back to the house."

"I'd better go along."

"No. I don't want you to!" She said it with a force that surprised him. "Wait for me. Here, in front of the resthouse."

She located the door. Corroded hinges whined when it opened. She caught her breath and started back . . .

Thebes could see beyond her to the hall—a man with oily-brown naked skin was

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silhouetted against reflected light from the night-candle downstairs.

He was a native, but not negroid. Glimpsed by half-light he looked like one of those magnificent brownfellows from the islands of Polynesia. Perhaps he was a Fulbe tribesman from the north.

The brownfellow had hold of Willa's wrist. She drew back, and for a few seconds it was tense struggle, silent save for sharp exhalations of breath.

"Let me go!" she hissed through her teeth.

Thebes crowded past her to the hall. He could see the man then—young, finely muscled, his only clothing consisted of a green topi, flowered silk shorts, leather babooshi.

"All right!" Thebes growled. "Let her go, or would you rather have your teeth for supper?"

His words brought the fellow around. He was as tall as Thebes, beautifully muscled. For a second he seemed to be backing away. Instead he was setting himself. He muttered something in a tongue Thebes did not understand and his right hand darted, fingers flat, thumb aimed at the soft choke-hole of his throat.

Thebes weaved a little, shifted his feet, and smashed a right to the fellow's unprotected jaw.

He backpeddled, struck the wall, spun half way around. He caught his balance at the brink of the stairs and started back.

Light glimmered from the blade of a knife. It was held edge up, waist high.

The knife lashed, and Thebes could feel the burn of it along his forearm. He had the brown fellow's wrist then, ramming the blade down.

The brown fellow was unexpectedly strong. Thebes' back struck the bamboo wall, and it gave with a sound like a crushed basket. The air was filled with dust and drifting spiderweb.

The wall gave Thebes his balance. Still clutching the wrist, he bent double, went beneath, and came up again, whipping the arm over his back. The brown fellow cried sharply, and the knife flipped away.

Thebes let go. It would have been simple to just draw the Walther and kill him. Instead he booted him in the abdomen, and swung a left-right, smashing him down the stairs.

THE BROWN FELLOW struck on elbows and the back of his head, turning a complete backward somersault. He came to a crouching position at the foot of the stairs. Light from the candle struck obliquely across his face, the corners of his mouth glistening black from blood. Once he had been a handsome devil, but he was not handsome then.

He felt for his knife—a movement of habit. It was gone of course, lying on the mattings at Thebes' feet. Boleh-kah had come up in barefoot silence and the brown fellow didn't see him. There was a machete large as a short-sword in Boleh-kah's hand.

"No!" barked Thebes.

The brown fellow spun, saw Boleh-kah, flung himself aside, ran . . .

"Willa!" Thebes said. The girl was not in sight. Sprague and Mason were shouting questions. "Did you see where she went?" he asked.

Thebes went in his room. The screen was torn out. She'd escaped that way. Thebes stepped from window to verandah. He listened in the vine-shadowed darkness. Nothing but a flutter of bats in the corners.

"Who were you fighting with?" Sprague demanded, following.

"A brown fellow. Fulbe, I'd say. Never saw him before."

Mason came up, flashing the white beam of an electric torch.

"Your arm's bleeding," he said to Thebes.

The cut was shallow, about six inches long. A razor-clean cut. The knife was still lying on the floor. Thebes picked it up. It was an old weapon with a Damascus blade and a brass handle set with a mosaic of pearl shell and carnelian, a type one often sees in Near-East collections.

"Want it?" Thebes asked.

Sprague took it, and Thebes went on, "Probably *he's* the one who killed Leskawitz."

Mason spoke, "Certainly! It's like I said. He's an enemy of yours, and he mistook Leskawitz for you. He died because of your rotten—"

"I'm not in a mood to take much from you tonight!" Thebes barked.

Thebes stood by the torn screen of his

bedroom window, feeling the smart of his cut arm beneath the bandage Dr. Sprague had applied. He jerked straight, listened.

From far away had come the single, abrupt sound of a woman's scream.

Afterward there was silence as before—silence filled with a patter of rain that had started a quarter-hour before.

He felt to make sure of the Walther automatic, slipped on his rainhood, went downstairs, outside, paused while rain drip-dropped from the thatch ends.

"Boleh-kah!"

The native shuffled down.

"Come along," said Thebes.

The girl's footprints once slightly marked in the mud, were now dissolving in new rain. After fifty or sixty yards, Thebes let the native go ahead. Blacks sometimes have a nose for such things.

Boleh-kah went swiftly enough. After five minutes, he stopped. His bare toe pointed. There was an object on the ground. Copper. Thebes picked it up. It was a rude chain strung with brass and copper medals large as a child's hand. Thebes remembered seeing it before. On Mengbattu.

He held it toward Boleh-kah who shrank back, eyes rolling so their white showed. A laugh jerked Thebes' shoulders as he dropped the heavy necklace in his coat pocket.

"So you believe in the walking dead, too!"

Boleh-kah was letting his breath with a hissing sound, trying to talk despite the loss of his tongue. It wasn't often he was upset like that.

Thebes struck out at a swift jog for the river. He waited for the native, and they dumped rain from a small dugout. They paddled steadily through black arching jungle until there was a slight rift at their left, and light reflecting cold gray from the metal side of Clifton's launch.

Thebes guided the canoe past, and swung it toward shore through flooded cane grass and spongy masses of water-lemon. They waded thigh-deep, pushing up the gentle rise of the bank through vines like giant spiderweb.

The white cobble path looked vitreous beyond its edging of palm. A man was walking down, carrying a rifle over his

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arm. The Senegalese. He dropped from sight across the swell of ground by the dock.

Thebes gestured, and Boleh-kah followed him to the open. No one accosted them on their way to the house. Three steps led to the verandah shadow. The door was unbarred. He glanced back. Boleh-kah had stopped, refusing to put the roof over his head. Superstition. Inside, the house smelled stuffy, filled with odors of cheap perfume, burnt petrol, boiled lamb.

He stood for a while in the *picinin* room. No sound anywhere. He opened the door leading to the sittingroom. Light came dimly from deeper in the house. He walked slowly, making out furniture, the general features of the room.

He drew up at a voice, close to him—

"Well, Professor Thebes! I've been expecting you."

VIII

THEBES spun, hand stopping at the butt of his Walther. He saw Clifton then. The man was sitting quite still in a chair not four strides away. A Luger pistol in his hand. Not pointed—just resting there.

Thebes said, "I didn't think Mengbattu had dropped the necklace by accident."

"Quite! I wanted to see you." Clifton slapped his thigh, and the signal brought a sound of leg bracelets as Mengbattu came in. "Take his gun. It's in the shoulder holster."

The *girot* came close and reached inside Thebes' coat. Thebes stood rigid, feeling the Walther's two pounds leave his shoulder. He turned to look in Mengbattu's eyes. It was too dark . . .

Clifton laughed, "So you still believe the Dutchman!"

"After fifteen years in Africa, I'd believe anything."

"Then you admit not being an American professor."

"You know damned well why I'm here."

"Quite!" Clifton stood up. He gestured with the Luger, "We might as well go in the diningroom. It's more comfortable there."

A blackboy came without being called and lighted the petrol lamp, drawing it overhead by a string. Clifton seated him-

self behind a small table, laying the gun in easy reach, and Thebes sat down facing him.

"You brought the girl here, I suppose," Thebes said.

"Perhaps." His cheeks colored slightly. "She was in your room tonight, wasn't she?"

"Jealous?"

"I dare say you're quite proud of your conquest," Clifton said bitterly.

"That why you get me here?"

"No. I rarely let things like that interfere with my business of mahogany." Clifton showed the tips of his teeth in a smile. They had turned a little brownish, and were the single feature which detracted from his appearance as the perfect British colonial. "I have a good thing here. It must be that word of it is getting around."

"The officials merely think it's unusual that you have already cut a footage that exceeds the original resources of your concession."

"Indeed. And you're checking up. May I ask for your credentials?"

"Ask and be damned."

"Unpleasant rascal, aren't you?"

Thebes lighted a cigarette and blew smoke across. "It comes natural to me."

"Some men are considerably less unpleasant when dead."

"Go ahead and kill me." He jerked his head at the draped door. "I know you have your man over there with a gun on my back. If you want to kill me, I'm in no position to stop you. However, just one word—my disappearance will cause more notice than poor Stantina's did. It happens that the District Commissioner is financially interested in my success."

"I have no intention of killing you—if you cooperate." Clifton opened a portfolio, tossed out blank paper and a fountain pen. "Will you write a 'To whom it may concern' saying that after a complete investigation you have found my timber cuttings to be entirely within the concession boundaries."

"I can claim duress the minute I get outside."

"Of course, but I'll have the document."

"When I've written it—then what?"

"You may go, and take Miss Quilter with you."

The man was lying, of course. A bullet

would put an end to the matter, and there'd be no complications, there, at Aggamba, with a hundred miles of steaming jungle separating them from the colonial police.

Thebes picked up the pen and wrote "To whom it may concern" in a series of abrupt, half-legible strokes. He looked at Clifton, pen poised,

"By the way, do you know a handsome young brown fellow—Fulbe tribesman, I presume. Has a fancy for flowered silk shorts."

Furrows showed deeply at the sides of Clifton's mouth as his face hardened. "Why don't you ask who his sweetheart is, too!"

"Clifton! Fancy you having a touchy spot like that!"

"Did you ever have a woman refuse an offer of marriage and then prove that she preferred a brownfellow to you? Get to writing."

Thebes wrote slowly. The fine-pointed pen kept digging the surface of paper turned thick from rain. Breeze from outside carried perfume of ylang-ylang from the patio where Leskawitz had died.

The point dug on an upward strike, splattering ink. Thebes looked up. A blotter lay among the things in the portmanteau. He reached for it. Clifton saw Thebes' hand diverted at the final second. He tried to bring the Luger around. Thebes' hand clamped on his wrist. The gun's safety was off, and Clifton's finger was on the trigger, but the muzzle was pointed down at the table.

The men struggled, silent for two or three seconds. No advantage. Clifton hissed through brownish teeth,

"In chess we call this a drawn game and start over."

A slight superiority of weight was working in Thebes' favor. He slowly twisted the gun down, slid it from the table.

Thebes said, "Mengkattu's behind the drape, why don't you tell him to shoot?"

Clifton felt the balance going against him and twisted, trying to free the gun. Rough matting caught his heel. Thebes rammed forward, utilizing the advantage, bending Clifton over the table.

The table tilted on bamboo legs. Clifton let go the gun, and dived sidewise for the floor.

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"Battu!" he shouted.

FLAME and explosion burst from the ped doorway, but Thebes was already moving aside. The bullet kicked air by his cheek. He swung his left arm overhead, catching the petrol lamp, breaking it free of its drawstring. It sailed through air, crashed in a corner. Darkness.

At the final instant of light, Thebes glimpsed Mengbattu. He bent for the Luger, stopped on one knee, fired. Twice, three times at point-blank range.

No answering bullet. He rose and moved forward, expecting to find the man's body. It was not there. He turned back. Cordite fumes filled the air. He located the stairway.

"Battu! Is that you, Battu?" Clifton asked below in the dark.

Thebes climbed, turned along the darkened hall. Bare feet were running that way. A houseboy. Thebes shouldered him, and the surprised boy almost fell.

"I have a gun!" Thebes muttered.

"Ka'sa me!" the houseboy whimpered.

"Take me to the white girl."

"Yes. Me take."

He led Thebes to the verandah and unlocked a door to a plushy sitting room. The houseboy's eyes roved the room.

"She's gone!"

"Where?"

"Me no know, master. Me no——"

"Maybe she got away."

"No get away."

A cushion from one of the chairs had fallen to the floor.

Thebes asked, "Was it like that before?"

"Me don' know."

There was a second door. Thebes strode toward it. The houseboy leaped in front of him.

"No! No go Master's room!"

Thebes slammed him out of the way. He entered a small bedroom. A door led on. A dimly lit sitting room. He breathed air repugnant with civet perfume. A door at the far side had just closed, leaving the basket-weave bamboo wall still trembling.

In half-darkness it was a moment before he noticed Willa Quilter lying face up on the couch of Arabian cushions.

Her hair was tangled, her dress torn,

one foot kicked feebly. Around her throat was a strip of Baghdad satin twisted tight. Her face was red thickening to purple.

He jerked the silk free, pulled her to her feet, shook her until breath sucked in her tortured lungs. Then he started toward the door, balancing her over his left arm, the Luger still in his right.

Clifton appeared in the door, a bolt-action rifle in the crook of his arm.

"Drop it!" Thebes said.

"Don't be a fool. Do you think I'd have come here if——"

"Drop it!"

"All right." He let the rifle fall. "Oh, I say! The girl's face! What the devil?"

"Ask your Berber woman. Here, you'd better try your strength. I'll let you carry her to the dock. And when we get there, you can run us down in the petrol launch.

IX

MORNING appeared by degrees through a thick cover of clouds laying a white light across the sleeping girl's face. She'd been awake for a while on their way from the concession house, but once inside her room she had fallen into an exhausted sleep.

Sprague said something and snapped shut the case of his watch after taking her pulse. His gray eyebrows were drawn together as he looked around at Thebes. Reverend Heggrie was also in the room, so Sprague said nothing until he was downstairs, alone with Thebes.

"Peculiar. She shouldn't be sleeping the way she is."

"That's what I thought." He looked at Sprague's face. "Go ahead, Doctor. Say what you really think."

"Why, I suspect someone has put the eye on her."

"Tuema!"

"Peculiar. Yes, it's damned peculiar. I tried to rouse her, you know. There's no concussion. A little shock, perhaps. Tell me, just what was it that happened last night? What about that fellow, Clifton?"

"Oh, I suppose Clifton's as sane as any man of forty who falls in love with a girl of nineteen. He took her out there, knowing I'd follow. He intended to knock me off the way he did Stantina, and what he intended with the girl you can guess

as well as I. But Tuema, that Berber woman of his, got the silk garotte in. If there's a bit of sorcery involved, I suppose it's Tuema. Or that young Fulbe I knocked downstairs. But don't ask me who *he* is."

"Did you notice Willa's hair? Somebody lopped off a chunk of it."

The implication was plain enough. Any part of a person was equal to the whole in the laying of a voodoo spell.

The two men left the mission house together. Rain had stopped for the moment. A woman, hidden beneath the folds of a white djellaba was hurrying away from the trade-store.

"Who is it?" Sprague asked, and Thebes shook his head.

Vanderbosch was standing on a stool, hanging a cluster of foot-long papayas to a rafter. He climbed down, wheezing from effort.

"Thebes! I hear you have trouble last night. Some man try kill you?"

"A young Fulbe. Handsome devil in flowered shorts."

"Ja. Kenura."

"Is that his name?"

Vanderbosch nodded. "A no-good thief. Someday I kill that Kenura." He sat down, making the rattan chair creak sidewise. "If one thing I can't stand it's native who thinks he's good as white man."

Thebes sat down and told about Willa.

"Ja. Clifton. He perhaps hire wicked fetisher to put poor girl to sleep. Or Mengbattu! Ja—Mengbattu! That man mitout soul!"

"Maybe Tuema hired someone."

"Ha! You know her?" Vanderbosch hooked his thumb at the door. "She just now call on me. Woman in 'jellaba. Tuema. She came to buy sandalwood incense. But she is Moslem. Moslem do not drink wine, or lay curses. Only Christian or heathen do these things, *Mynheer*."

"What should I do? Hire drums and a *ma-deup*?"

"Pah!" Vanderbosch spat across the dirt-clotted mattings. "No. If it were me I would shoot that Clifton, *Mynheer*. I would kill him and that same shot would kill slave, too, for man mitout soul will die same second as master. You hear it?"

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"I'll think it over," Thebes said.

The girl slept through the day, and all night, and all the day following. She was already becoming thinner. Thebes left the mission and started toward the resthouse. Then he changed his mind and walked to the fetish town.

When he headed back two hours later the chief fetisher was wealthier by a five-pound note, and the drums were muttering the age-old rhythm of the sorcerer's dance. Later, that day or the next, their sound would assert itself and a woman would feel their call, and she would be pulled to them by an attraction stronger than any will to resist. And she would dance as long as the *Fa* willed her to, until she fell in a trance from which she would awaken with the knowledge of the sorcerer's identity burning in her soul. And she would hunt him out, and reveal him for what he was, by digging fingernails in his flesh.

He glanced at his watch as he entered the resthouse. It was a few minutes before twelve. Boleh-kah was sitting cross-legged at the foot of the stairs. He made a sign with his hands, and Thebes knew there was a visitor for him.

His room was dark. He heard voices coming from Sprague's room. Clifton. He lighted the candle and lay down inside the mosquito drape of his bed wishing for some hashish with which to spike his Tangier cigarette.

After a while he heard Clifton say good night. His feet thumped in the hall—paused. Thebes knew he was standing just outside the door.

"May I come in?" Clifton asked.

"Come along."

He paused in the door, the lines of his face looking unusually deep. "I've been listening to the drums."

"The hell you have. If you feel the urge, maybe they'd let you dance."

He came on in, closing the door. "I thought you were the one who set them going."

"Right!"

Thebes pronounced it after the British manner, but Clifton ignored its mockery.

"You think there's some voodoo involved in her sleeping this way?"

"Don't you?"

"Perhaps. Well, out with it!—who do you suspect?"

"What difference does it make who I suspect? I know there's only one way to combat voodoo, and that's with voodoo. We haven't a *ma-deup* yet, so there's no hurry, but when the time comes we'll have a gathering of the clans over there. I'll expect you to be on hand with that strangling Berber woman of yours."

Clifton raised his voice, "How could she do it? She hasn't been near the girl since——"

"You have."

"Oh the devil, Thebes. You can't believe such a thing about a white man."

Thebes shrugged.

CLIFTON went on, "Oh, I know how it looks to you. And to the scientists, too, only they didn't come right out and say it. I'll admit Tuema tried to strangle her. But that other! Damn it, man, I'd kill that Tuema if I thought she was playing around with the black fetish."

"Or perhaps it was someone else. Kenura, for instance. Why don't you tell what you know about that brownfellow. You've never done that."

"I promised Heggrie I'd tell nothing about Kenura and Willa."

"What are you talking about?" Thebes sat up suddenly, seizing Clifton's coat, ramming him to the wall. "Are you hinting there was something between Willa and him?"

"Get your hands off me!" Clifton moved away, grinning from one side of his mouth. "What's the matter? Does it nick your ego to find out she had a conqueror before you?"

"By God, that's a lie!"

"You sound like a poor scene out of Hall Caine. Yes, she had a fancy for dark skin! I should know. I'm the one who found them together. Have you ever stood and watched a damned nigger, or somebody not much better, pressing his fingers in a white woman's flesh? A woman like her? Pure, aloof, untouchable. That's what she was to me. And then I found that those kind of vines budded like the rest when the rains were near, that she liked to toss off that starched linen dress for a sarong and run in the moonlight. There

they were—she and the brownfellow. At the edge of the mission compound, and he was kissing her. Finally she got scared and tried to fight him away, but after you've stirred that dark blood too much you can't turn it off like the cold water tap in an Accra hotel. I'd have killed him, only he got away."

"She isn't in love with him, she's afraid of him."

"Sometimes you can't quite get a knife between love and fear."

THE DRUMS were still thum-thumping inside the smoky fetish hut when Sprague and Thebes went over next afternoon. Across the floor, thirty or forty blacks were sprawled, some with their bodies weaving in monotonous rhythm, others simply entranced and staring.

After half an hour, a priest of *Nesshue*, the river fetish, came in, barely able to walk beneath the weight of a mask of painted and stick-stretched antelope skin larger than the rest of his body. He seated himself crosslegged on a heap of uncured skins, the painted mask seeming to stare inflexibly at the entrance.

Without warning, a black girl came sinuously through the entrance, and, facing the drums, commenced to dance.

"*Ma-deup! Ma-deup!*" the blacks chanted.

Her movements were slow, impromptu. She apparently saw nothing—felt nothing. She danced with one hour stretching into the next through the length of the long night until dawn sent gray light through the smokehole. Imperceptibly there was a quickening of the tom-tom tempo.

She tossed off the robe of print calico she was wearing, leaving herself clothed only in a loin piece of dyed raffia and a necklace of cowrie shells that glistened white against the oily blackness of her skin.

She was a handsome wench, broad-hipped and slim-waisted. Once the tempo was broken, it increased rapidly with the girl responding, using every voluntary muscle of her body, arms and hips writhing, abdomen swung out of joint, bare feet slapping earth in rapid, intricate movements. At last, after she had exceeded all reasonable human endurance,

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she cried sharply and fell crosslegged, back to the drums. Her body stiffened, her lips peeled back showing clenched teeth. Tiny dribbles of spittle ran from the corners of her mouth. Her eyes were wide, but the eyeballs had rolled back inside her skull blank white.

"Anyway, we have a good *ma-deup*," Thebes said, turning to the door. "Clifton had better keep that Tuema woman a long way off if he doesn't want our black girl wetting fingernails in her blood."

"Do you think you can get him to bring her here?"

"Of course. He'll have to. Otherwise it will be an admission of guilt."

X

WILLA was the same as before, perhaps a trifle weaker, thinner. Her skin had turned white with tiny freckles showing across her forehead.

Sprague walked away, putting his stethoscope in his pocket.

"I'd feed her intravenously if I had the equipment."

Thebes gestured, indicating the fetish town where the drums were still beating. "Is Heggrie getting the old woman to come?"

"She'll go along to show her defiance of the drums if for no other reason. Foolish, though. Mrs. Heggrie——"

"No, it's not foolish. Anybody's suspect in a case like this. Even the two of us."

"And Clifton's coming with Tuema?"

"They'll be there. He actually seemed anxious this morning when I talked to him. Traded my Walther back for his Luger. Says he'll kill the sorcerer himself when he finds out who it is."

They waited on the lower verandah. It hadn't rained since morning, and the fetish drums had tightened, judging by their sound.

"We're likely to have a long wait," Sprague said. "I saw a girl in Haiti that was under for eight days. Died. The sorcerer they were after had hanged himself, and she had to go to him. It almost makes a man afraid to go out in the dark."

Heggrie came out in a few minutes, bringing his wife, and the four of them walked to the fetish village. Clifton and

Tuema were already there. Mason came along a while later.

The *Ma-deup* girl seemed to be the same as before, still stiffened, cords of her neck distended, eyeballs rolled. Drums kept the hut vibrating.

Tuema was crouched on the floor, completely hidden by her djellaba. Clifton stood behind her. The Luger was strapped around his waist.

With darkness the rain commenced again. Now and then a little spatter of it struck them as it bounded from something coming through the smokehole.

Heggrie said, "What heathen foolishness!"

Sprague smiled, and wiped perspiration.

Thebes said, "This should make good material for your report."

The men became suddenly silent as a tremble passed along *Ma-deup's* muscles. Tom-tom players, sensing the end, raised the tempo of their playing. *Ma-deup* sprang to her feet, and of a sudden the drums stopped.

There was something explosive and terrifying about silence coming after so many hours of drumbeat.

Ma-deup's eyes were no longer rolled in her skull. She looked around wildly. Tuema cried out in her native Arabic and sprang up, both arms flung across the hood of her djellaba. She was trying to escape, but Clifton anticipated the move. He held her from behind as she struggled.

Clifton got one hand free. He ripped the hood from her face, exposing it for *Ma-deup's* fingernails.

At other times the Berber woman might have been beautiful, but fear made her face repulsive.

Ma-deup paused in front of her, hands raised, nails standing out on her black fingers like pieces of clam shell in the light of greaselamps.

Then, instead of pouncing, she turned. Her eyes swept the hut. She ran, brushed between Thebes and Sprague, disappeared through the doorway.

Thebes started for the door, ramming Mason. Mason got out ahead of him, paused for a second, swinging the ray of an electric torch. *Ma-deup's* cowrie necklace gleamed white against her dark body as she ran, following the footpath toward

the village. Mason was fast, with strength and wind unimpaired by years of quinine, and he kept the lead, covering the distance in long strides.

He stopped and was cursing, unable to find the black girl in the rays of his torch. "Lost her!" he cried over his shoulder to Thebes.

Clifton was shouting, "Mengbattu! Damn you, follow her!"

They had not seen Mengbattu before that night. Perhaps he had been hiding in the jungle edge, not daring to enter the fetish town. He ran past with a jingle of copper ornaments, seeming to sense *Ma-deup's* direction.

Mason reached far past the running Mengbattu with his torch and again caught the gleam of her cowrie shells. She seemed headed for the resthouse.

Then she turned. The movement was so sudden she lost footing and fell in the mud. She sprang forward again, running up unpainted cobbles.

A candle was burning inside. The voice of Vanderbosch came, bellowing, almost unrecognizable from terror.

"No! *Gott!* Away, you she-cat!"

They caught sight of him momentarily, running down the verandah. The girl was clinging, trying to claw over his shoulders. He turned to fling her, but she clung to his arm. She struggled close, digging fingernails, ripping the skin of his fat face.

Suddenly all strength left her and she collapsed like wet cloth on the verandah. Vanderbosch stumbled over her, got up, came down the steps.

For the first time he realized there were others. He ran forward, a huge, stumbling beast of a man. The electric torch seemed to blind him. He had one massive arm over his eyes.

"Stop!" Thebes said. "Stop, Van, or I'll kill you."

Vanderbosch did not seem to hear. His eyes were beyond Thebes, fastened on Clifton.

Clifton had planted himself in the middle of the cobbles, Luger aimed, shoulder high.

It pounded—a flat sound deadened by rain. It pounded again, and again with the slugs slamming the Dutchman's huge body.

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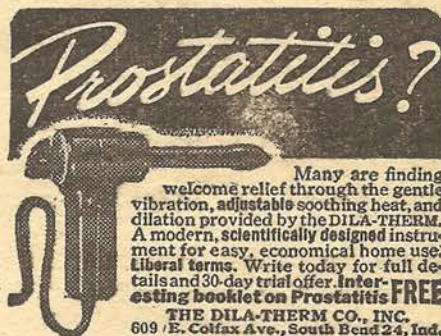
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But still Vanderbosch was on his feet, charging on.

THE LUGER snapped empty. Clifton cried out, hurled the gun in Vanderbosch's face. He tried at that last second to move aside. No time for that. Vanderbosch seized him, lifted him high, dashed him head and shoulder first to the ground.

For a moment Vanderbosch stood over him, his sweaty white shirt turning dark from blood. Life seemed to leave his big body by degrees. His knees bent and he fell forward, sliding one side of his short-roached head through mud. No one seeing him could doubt that he was dead.

Sprague started to lift Clifton. He paused, carefully laid him back. "Good God!" He touched Clifton's head, saw the loose roll of it. "Do you realize his neck's broken?"

Tuema had followed. She heard Sprague's words and flung herself over Clifton, covering him with the folds of her djellaba.

Thebes pulled at the Berber woman's shoulder, "You hired him didn't you? You hired Vanderbosch—brought him a piece of the girls' hair so he could lay a curse on her. And he agreed, knowing it would be most likely laid to Clifton, or the Girotte."

Tuema looked up, only half comprehending.

Heggrie ran down from the mission. "She's awake!" he was saying. "Awake. Asking for you, Thebes."

He laughed. "For me? Good God!"

He started away, paused, grabbed Heggrie's shoulder. "Isn't it about time you told what you know about Kenura—that Fulbe boy?"

"I know nothing about him!"

"You knew he was in love with Willa, and that she led him on. That's why you tried to keep her inside the house. And you had a pretty good idea it was Kenura who killed Leskawitz when he found the two of them making love."

"I had to think of the girl . . ."

"You might have got *mê* killed. Ever think what a tragedy *that* would be?"

"There are some people who live in spite of everything."

"Yes, I *have* been rather durable," The-

bes grinned from one side of his mouth as he hunted a dry match for his Tangier cigarette.

At the mission house he found Willa sitting up, looking thin, but with a flush of life once more riding her cheeks. She was hungrily finishing off some hard cassava bread spread with honey paste.

Thebes said, "You've changed your mind about wanting me to take you downriver, haven't you?"

"No!"

She started to get up, but his hand closed on her shoulder, keeping her in bed.

"Don't be afraid of Kenura, girl. The Colonials will run him down for Leskawitz's murder before the rains are over."

"I never cared for Kenura. Not after I saw you. That first night. You were standing down by the table . . ."

Mrs. Heggrie had heated powdered cacao and canned milk. She came up, putting the cup on a stand beside the bed.

"Mr. Thebes!" She looked at him, her eyes bright with inspiration. "If you're going downriver, I wonder if you could do something for me. If you had time, I wish you would look around in Accra and see if you could locate a rather large bell . . ."

LIGHTS were burning in the rest-house, and through rain its windows had a blurred, circular look. Someone was standing near a clump of palms at one side of the trade-store. An electric torch flicked on, catching Thebes in its ray.

"Mason?"

"Yes."

Thebes walked over. "By the way, I once promised Vanderbosch I'd burn his body. If we could find enough petrol—Foolish, of course."

Mason answered in a tight voice, "I don't know if it's foolish or not."

"What do you mean?"

Instead of answering, Mason directed light to the ground, revealing a dead native.

His body looked old, as thought he'd been dead a long time. His eyelids hung open, revealing strips of eyeball of a sort one might expect in a mummy. Only when Thebes saw the neckpiece of copper

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and iron medals did he recognize Mengbattu.

He turned and saw Sprague looking at him. "Well, Doctor, I dare say you intend to include a full account of this in your report to the Department of Ethnology."

"I have no desire," Sprague said though his teeth, "to become the laughing stock of my profession."

As Thebes walked away he could hear Mason's voice following, "It can all be explained. Psychosis has its materialistic aspects, and at times they are spectacularly

abrupt. Look at the findings of Winterood. This Mengbattu probably believed very strongly that he would die and wither at the same instant as his master. And believing it, of course he did. We all know the lymph glands have the power of drying the . . ."

Rain had started falling heavier than before. It ran in thin trickles from the fronds of palm trees, and formed an inch-deep stream along the footpath that wound through cassava and yam fields to the bank-full jungle river.



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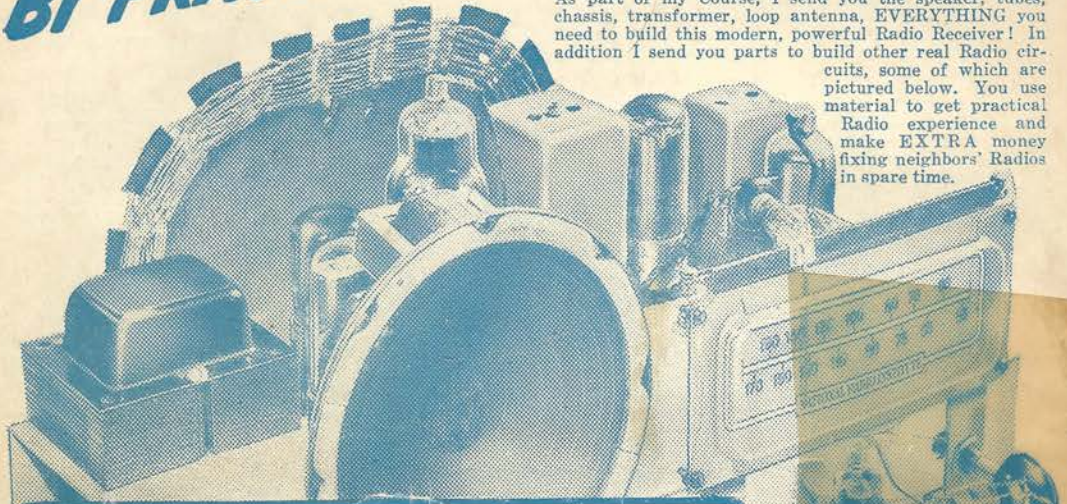
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