
FICTION HOUSE INC.
JUNGLE STORIES
KI-GOR AND THE CANNIBAL KINGDOM
A NEW NOVEL OF THE WHITE LORD OF HIDDEN AFRICA
by JOHN PETER DRUMMOND
20¢
COBRA DEATH
by MAJOR E. L. DYER
QUEEN OF THE CONGO SPEARMEN
by ARMAND BRIGAUD
PAUL ANNIXTER
WILLIAM H. COOK

Your credit is OK

I'm going to send you your choice of these selected FEATURES

1/4 CARAT DIAMOND $42.50

A173 – Greatest diamond value in our history – a brilliant 1/4 carat diamond attractively set in 14K yellow gold Engagement Ring. A remarkable value at our low price.

$4.15 a month

BULOVA'S $33.75

Miss America

R231 – Newest Bulova feature; 17 jewels; tiny 10K yellow gold filled case. Gorgeous creation priced low. Complete in gift box.

$3.28 a month

YOUR CHOICE KENT WATCHES $15.95

P200–Ladies' Kent Heart Watch with bracelet to match. K152–Man's Kent round watch with sweep-second hand. Both 7 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate cases.

$1.50 a month

SEND ME $1

and I'll send your choice of these selected VALUES for 10 DAY TRIAL and 10 MONTHS TO PAY. Money back if not Satisfied . . .

Yes – your credit is OK with me – I'LL TRUST YOU. Tell me what you want–put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address, occupation and a few other facts about yourself–I'll send your choice of these select values for your approval and 10 day trial. If you are not satisfied that you have received good, honest dollar for dollar value, send it back and I'll promptly return your dollar. If satisfied, you'll pay in 10 small monthly amounts you'll never miss.

Jim Feeney

Sales Mgr.

FREE TO ADULTS . . .

A Postcard brings my complete 48-Page Catalog showing hundreds of diamonds, watches, jewelry and silverware, all offered on my 10-Months-to-Pay Plan.

BRIDAL SET $29.75

A87/C81 – 3 diamond Engagement Ring; 7 diamond Wedding Ring; both 14K yellow gold.

$2.88 a month

BENRUS Signet Watches—Choice $19.75

T561 – Ladies' Watch. 0563 – Man's Watch. Initials set in cases. 10K yellow rolled gold plate; 7 jewels. Mention number and initials.

$1.88 a month

MAN'S Initial RING $16.95

I202 – Massive Ring with 2 diamonds and initial on black onyx. 10K yellow gold.

$1.60 a month

Carnelian Cameo HEART LOCKET $4.50

W722 – Genuine carnelian cameo in yellow gold filled Heart Locket. With chain.

$1 a month

BULOVA'S *New Senator* $33.75

M222–Bulova's newest feature for men–a 17 jewel watch with 10K yellow rolled gold plate case. A new 1940 feature.

$3.28 a month

L.W. Sweet

MAIL ORDER DIVISION of FINLAY STRAUS

Dept. 830-S 1670 BROADWAY·NEW YORK

THIS IS A MAGAZINE OF FICTION. THE CHARACTERS NAMED AND INCIDENTS DESCRIBED DO NOT REFER TO ANY ACTUAL PERSON

JUNGLE STORIES

T. T. SCOTT, President and General Manager — MALCOLM REISS, Editor

A THRILLING KI-GOR NOVEL

THREE BIG JUNGLE NOVELETS

THREE EXCITING SHORT STORIES

Summer Issue, 1940
Vol. I, No. 6

FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

20c per copy

THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

JUNGLE STORIES: Published quarterly by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc., 461 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. This issue dated April 15, 1940. For advertising rates address: THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Printed in U. S. A.

Ki-Gor—and the Cannibal Kingdom

By John Peter Drummond

THE rain came down in sheets in that part of the East Congo region. Along the north bank of the upper Uele River, a huge elephant moved slowly over the sodden earth traveling eastward. On the elephant's broad neck crouched a giant white man and a dainty, red-haired girl. Their heads were bowed to the tempest and

The jungle seethed with terror. Devilish rumors flew the vine-route: Ki-Gor was doomed! The vile Wandarobo, hordes of stunted beastmen, had trapped the blond stalker. . . . And copper-haired Helene, the tree-telegraph whispered, would die beneath the cannibal moon!

their hands shielded their eyes from the pelting rain. The girl pushed a dank auburn strand of hair off her white forehead and sighed.

"Oh! Ki-Gor!" she said, "I'm so sick of the rain. I can't seem to remember when it wasn't just pouring."

Ki-Gor grinned tolerantly at the beauti-

ful pampered daughter of civilization beside him. How long ago had it been that her little red monoplane had crashed in the heart of the Dark Continent? When he had rescued her from the savage beasts, animal and human, of the trackless jungle.

"Never mind, Helene," he said, "Pretty soon we will leave the rain behind us. We should come to some mountains tomorrow, and on the other side of them, it will not be so rainy."

At that Helene smiled back. Her eyes caressed his mighty torso and shoulders that gleamed so wetly, and came to rest on his fine head where the blond hair was plastered down and was the color of wet chalk.

"And can we rest there a little while before we push on and try to find George?" she asked. Before she was answered she looked around quickly and said, "What's the matter with Marmo? Why is he stopping?"

"I don't know," Ki-Gor replied, peering ahead and trying to pierce with his eyes the gray curtain of rain. Then he bent down and spoke to the great trained elephant in the Swahali tongue.

"What now, Marmo?" he said, "thou great gray sluggard! Why dost thou stand in thy tracks like a nervous horse? Proceed, thou lazy one, and carry us out of this steaming shower bath!"

Ki-Gor reached out a long muscular leg and heeled the elephant gently behind a great flapping ear. The elephant, however, did not move, but stood where he was. His trunk flew up and writhed like a wet black python as the delicate nostrils at the far end explored the atmosphere. Suddenly the huge leathery ears flared, and slowly, deliberately, the elephant began to sidle closer to the river bank.

"What is it?" Helene whispered.

Ki-Gor shook his head and stared toward the jungle to the left. The elephant now moved cautiously forward right along the edge of the deep, swift-flowing waters of the Uele. The tip of his trunk crooked forward and moved restlessly from side to side.

Then Helene felt the muscles of Ki-Gor's back tighten, and saw the knuckles of his right hand go white as he gripped the stout spear.

"Crawl back quietly," he whispered, "and stretch out on Marmo's back. Hold tight to the rope I tied around his middle."

"Can you see something?" Helene whispered as she obeyed his command.

"Yes," was the laconic answer. "Wild elephants."

As Helene flattened herself on her stomach along Marmo's broad back, she could begin to make out vague monstrous shapes over toward the jungle. One, two, three, she counted, six, seven, ten—a whole herd!

Silently, Marmo drifted along the river's edge while Ki-Gor poised watchfully on his neck. There might be no trouble from Marmo's wild cousins—and then again, there might. If these elephants had learned to hate humans, and caught a whiff of the man-smell from Marmo— Or even if they did not, but were merely irritated by the presence of a strange elephant, there might well be serious trouble.

Minutes passed and the numberless gray forms to the left were motionless as Marmo went noiselessly on his way. Ki-Gor had counted at least sixty wild elephants, and began to breathe easier, thinking that any danger would soon be left behind. Then the thing happened.

A LITTLE black baby elephant had left its mother's side with all the foolhardiness of youth and was frolicking all by itself on the river bank, right in Marmo's path. The little calf was facing away and was completely unaware of Marmo's presence until a chance gambolling leap swung him around looking squarely at the tame elephant's enormous legs. The calf was startled out of its wits. He gave a terrified shriek and rushed for the jungle.

There was an answering trumpet and another and another. Marmo began to shuffle forward rapidly as here and there a gray shape detached itself from the herd and hurried toward the river, ears flared. An angry cow—doubtless the frightened baby's mother—scurried after Marmo, trumpeting shrilly. Two bulls took up the cry and followed her. Marmo went faster and faster, his huge bulk moving at an astonishing rate of speed along the river bank.

But the younger of the two bulls outstripped the rest and began to overtake the onrushing Marmo. Ki-Gor watched the young bull keenly over his shoulder.

Although he gripped his assegai in readiness, he knew in his heart that there was little he could do if it came to a fight. He could not hope to kill the strange elephant with the assegai. All he could do would be to wound it, and a wounded elephant is the most dangerous, vindictive enemy in the world. Ki-Gor was thankful that Marmo had passed the main body of the herd before the alarm went up.

But the young bull kept coming on. Behind him was the older, larger bull. Their rage lent speed to their flying legs. In a few moments, the younger bull's head was abreast of Marmo's hind quarters. He tossed his head viciously and grazed Marmo's rump with one of his short tusks. Marmo squealed angrily and slackened his pace.

"Hold tight!" Ki-Gor yelled to Helene.

As the girl gripped the life-rope, Marmo flung his hind quarters around like a Bangongo dancer. The careening weight crashed into the shoulders of the smaller elephant and sent him hurtling off balance. The ground shook as the young bull went down, and Marmo resumed his headlong dash along the river bank. The older bull, the cow and three other pursuers stopped for a moment to inspect the young bull who was struggling and screaming on the ground. Ki-Gor balanced himself on Marmo's swaying neck and heaved a sigh of relief.

All the danger was by no means passed, but by the time the pursuit was resumed, Marmo was a hundred yards ahead of the wild elephants and traveling fast. Ki-Gor cast a quick glance toward the river and noted that they were abreast of a section of rapids. The river-bed here led down a gentle but easily perceptible slope. Through the centuries freshet-water had piled up huge boulders and carved a hundred little channels among them. In dry times the river would be easily fordable at that point, and even now an intelligent elephant might be directed safely through the swift but comparatively shallow currents.

"Slow down, Marmo!" Ki-Gor chanted in Swahali, "relax thy pace, thou flying mountain! To our right lies escape from thy ugly relatives, therefore, turn right!"

He heeled the great pachyderm vigorously behind the left ear. Marmo trumpeted a protest, but swung his head to the right and slowed down to a halt. The ground shook under the plunging pads of the pursuers and a chorus of menacing squeals went up. Marmo twisted his head and stared at the phalanx of wild elephants charging toward him.

"Hesitate not, O son of a timid father!" Ki-Gor exhorted, "but go straight across, treading carefully lest thou endanger thy precious burden!"

Marmo obediently stepped off the bank and took a few gingerly paces into the rushing water. The wild elephants, trumpeting triumphantly, were almost up to him.

"Marmo!" cried Ki-Gor, "forward!"

He slapped the leathery neck, and once more Marmo set his bulk into motion. The water crept up the great pillars which were his legs, and piled up on the upstream side. In a few moments he was twenty yards out into the stream and the water was brushing his pendulous belly. Ki-Gor stared back at the bank. Marmo had just barely left it in time. Six wild elephants were tramping up and down, ears flared, fuming, and trumpeting. But none of them made any move to follow Marmo into the rapids.

Ki-Gor turned his attention back to guiding Marmo through the piled up boulders.

THE water was getting alarmingly deep. Before they arrived at midstream, it had crept high up on the sides of the tall elephant. And progress was necessarily slow as the pull of the water of the elephant's great bulk was enormous. But Ki-Gor's keen eyes picked out what looked to be the shallowest channels, and he guided Marmo toward those.

In that way they proceeded safely almost all the way across the river. Ki-Gor glanced at Helene to see if she was safe, and sent a derisive yell back at the line of wild elephants fuming impotently on the farther side of the rapids.

Suddenly Marmo's head seemed to fall from under him. Ki-Gor slid forward and downward. Evidently the elephant had stepped into a deep pot-hole. Ki-Gor clutched wildly at the ridged skin on Marmo's cheeks. But he was sliding so swiftly that he could not find a hand-hole.

With a despairing shout he fell into the turbulent waters. Before his head went

under, he had a flash of the huge elephant floundering to preserve its footing, and Helene partially thrown off his back. She was hanging down one side of Marmo, her fingers clinging for dear life to the rope, and her feet dangling in the water. Then the river laid hold of Ki-Gor with invisible, invincible arms and dragged him under the surface.

The force of the current tumbled him over and over and sent him caroming against rocks with bruising violence. But through it all, he kept a tight grip on his assegai, and somehow fought his way to the surface. He had already been carried fifty feet. A momentary glimpse showed him that Marmo had regained his feet and was thrashing downstream after him. Helene was crawling back up the slippery wet side. Then the current pulled him down under again.

Is this the end? Ki-Gor asked himself, as he was rolled head over heels along the rocky bottom of the rapids. Is this the way mighty Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle, is to die? Like a squirrel fallen out of a tree into a whirlpool?

Just then he felt himself sucked into a whirlpool and one last thought recurred dimly in his battered head. What will become of Helene?

A few seconds later, he was hurled, dizzy, gasping, and choking, into some slack water. He floated for a moment toward a wide flat rock. Then he felt some fingers of current plucking at his bruised body. He was being carried out into the main stream again.

With a supreme effort, he jackknifed himself, and then straightened out. His feet hit rock bottom, and his shoulders emerged from the surface. The current started to topple him off his feet again, but again Ki-Gor made a supreme effort. He was still holding the assegai in a grip of death. He plunged the point of it downstream from him and braced himself against the stout haft.

THE current tugged relentlessly at his body, but after a few moments, he grunted in triumph. He could hold his own!

Carefully, he moved the point of the assegai a few inches. The river rushed at him and clawed him. But the assegai held at its new anchorage and Ki-Gor again braced himself successfully. Again he moved the life-saving assegai, and the current seemed to slacken.

Inch by inch, Ki-Gor fought his way into slower water toward the wide flat rock. The last few feet were easier, and he drew himself on to the rock and lay down exhausted.

Less than a minute later, he opened his eyes as he heard Helene's voice.

"Are you all right, Ki-Gor?"

Marmo was standing beside the flat rock, his trunk waving anxiously over him. Helene was clinging to the elephant's back and peering down with anxious eyes.

Ki-Gor got to his feet slowly. He felt his arms and legs and ribs. Nothing broken, although there were multiple bruises. He spoke to Marmo, and the elephant offered his trunk. Ki-Gor walked up it to the elephant's broad head.

"Ki-or!" Helene's voice broke and she fell into his arms crying. "I—I thought —thought you were going to be—drowned!"

It always embarrassed Ki-Gor to have Helene show emotion like that. He patted her shoulder awkwardly and stared at the rapids. It *had* been a near thing, he knew that. But great heavens! He came out of it safely, so why make such a fuss?"

"I'm all right, Helene," he said, plaintively, "don't cry. I would never drown. That wouldn't be a suitable way for Ki-Gor to die."

Helene smiled up at him through her tears. His bronzed face showed serene conviction. He really meant what he had just said!

"Come, Marmo, faithful friend!" he intoned in Swahili, "there remains a trifling distance to go till we reach the bank and pull ourselves out of this treacherous element. Forward, Marmo! And watch thy step, dear clumsy oaf!"

Marmo waved his trunk—it seemed to Helene that he all but chuckled—and set forth across the powerful current.

From there on, there were no more potholes, or if there were, Marmo avoided them. And in a short time, he heaved his glistening bulk up on to the south bank of the River Uele. At the same time, the rain which had been slackening, stopped altogether. And as Marmo paused on the

river bank, the sky lightened in the west, a rift grew in the piled-up clouds and spread, and a moment later, the afternoon sun poured through and shone benignly on the steaming but washed clean East Congo jungle.

Marmo turned his back to the sun and found an elephant trail. In the three hours that remained before sunset, he traveled fast and covered a prodigious distance. The country the travelers passed through gave them a foretaste of the great mountains that lay before them. It was still jungle but it differed from the flat, alluvial jungle that they had been passing through. The footing was firmer even after the heavy rain, and the terrain was quite undulating. Here and there, Marmo broke out into patches of open veldt.

IN one of these, Ki-Gor called out to Marmo to halt, and the travelers sat for several minutes looking around them at the countryside. The low-hanging clouds of the rainstorm were dissipating rapidly and rising. They revealed a series of low round hills that seemed to line the narrow valley up which Marmo had been going. The hills were well-wooded with here and there bare spots showing, of grass or in some cases rock. Ki-Gor nodded his head with a satisfied air.

"Good country," he observed, "if we find a good tree or cave, we can stay here a few days to rest."

Helene glanced around nervously. Even though she had spent considerable time in Africa with Ki-Gor, she still found it difficult at times to feel entirely comfortable among the hidden dangers which lurked in the shadows of the jungle—dangers which Ki-Gor took completely for granted. As she looked over to the edge of the forest, some indistinct object moved slightly. Her skin prickled as she stared at the object. It was tawny-colored and dappled with shadows. In a minute she could see it more clearly, and her heart bounded into her mouth.

"Ki-Gor!" she whispered, and her hand clutched his wrist convulsively, "is—is that a—a lion—over there?"

"Yes," the jungle man answered calmly without looking, "there's two of them, I think."

"Well—" Helene hesitated—"do—do you think we ought to stay here, if—if there are lions around?"

"Yes, why not?" Ki-Gor replied, staring at a hill in the opposite direction from the lions. "Lions are a good sign—plenty of game around. They won't hurt you."

Helene stared at him with eyes rounded in awe. He said no more but continued to stare at this hill. He had dismissed the subject of lions.

"Look," he said finally, and pointed at the hill, "up there, it looks like some kind of a cave. We'll go and see."

As Marmo moved off, Helene cast a last look at her lions. They were both plainly visible now, outlined against the dark forest. They were sitting on their haunches like house cats, staring uncuriously at the elephant and his two passengers.

It was nearly sunset by the time they had climbed the wooded hillside to the spot where Ki-Gor's extraordinary vision had noted "some kind of a cave." In reality, it was not a cave but merely a wide horizontal fissure in a large bare ledge. The upper edge of this crack or gash in the rock was perhaps eight or nine feet above the lower edge at the outside, and then it sloped down gradually toward the rear, joining the floor about twenty-five feet back. It was as if some gigantic woodsman had come along and with two mighty blows of his ax hewn a great wedge-shaped chip out of the face of the ledge.

The floor of this curious rock shelter was level and dry, and was about fifteen feet above the ground, or level with Marmo's back. It was this circumstance that decided Ki-Gor to occupy the place for a short time, although he would have preferred a cave less open to the weather.

He debarked Helene from the elephant's back and left her to explore what there was of the cave to explore while he went off in search of some food. He was back in a short time with some firewood, a pile of moss, and the body of a dwarf antelope which he had with great good luck intercepted and killed. As the abrupt African night chased away the brief African twilight, he and Helene piled the moss in the back of the cave and built a small fire near the outer edge. And as the predatory jungle came to life, they roasted their antelope-flesh over the flames, and felt safe and snug in their rock shelter.

HELENE woke up at dawn feeling refreshed and cheerful. Ki-Gor was not only awake, he had already been abroad and gathered some delicious fruit for breakfast. The two travelers sat contentedly at the outer edge of the cave and watched the sun come up behind a gigantic range of mountains to the eastward.

"Ruwenzori," said Ki-Gor, pointing a fruit-stained finger at the mountain range. "It isn't far—maybe fifty miles. Somewhere over there is our friend George, Chief of the M'balla."

"Oh, it's perfectly beautiful!" said Helene, staring off at the serrated peaks that pointed sharp fingers up toward the sky. "I like this place, and this lovely view. Let's just stay here for a while, Ki-Gor. Say, for a couple of weeks."

"We haven't left the rain behind us yet," Ki-Gor pointed out, "and the reason we came on this journey was because of the —the all-the-time rain—"

"Continuous," Helene corrected.

"What?" said KiGor.

"Continuous rain."

"Continuous rain," Ki-Gor repeated obediently. Then he looked sharply at Helene. "Do you think my English is getting better?"

"I certainly do," Helene responded emphatically.

"Good," said Ki-Gor with a roguish glance, "maybe—maybe that is because I have a—a continuous teacher!"

A rumbling chuckle rolled up out of the tremendous chest, and Helene slapped him playfully.

"Tell me something," Ki-Gor said after a minute, "you say I belong to the tribe called English. And you belong to the tribe called American. And the two tribes are related."

"Yes."

"But our friend George," said Ki-Gor, brow crinkled in concentration, "and he is our friend—he has helped us greatly twice. He is Chief of a Masai tribe called the M'balla, and yet he says he is truly an American, like you. How can that be? His skin is black like a Bantu."

"George is an American," Helene began, trying her best to explain as simply as possible, "he is an American Negro. He is descended from African Bantu who were carried away to America as slaves."

"Oh!" Understanding began to dawn in Ki-Gor's light blue eyes.

"But then the Americans freed their slaves," Helene went on, "and their children became free Americans."

"That is good," Ki-Gor approved. "Slaves! Wah!" he shook his tawny mane. "If you have slaves to do everything for you, you do nothing for yourself and you grow soft."

Helene smiled. The nice thing about Africa was the simplicity with which the most complex human social problems could be solved.

"Well then," she continued, "George made a journey to Africa on a big boat." She hesitated, wondering how she could explain to Ki-Gor that an American Negro ship's cook had jumped ship in Mombasa and had gone vagabonding into Uganda. Then she realized that journeys need not be explained to Ki-Gor; one journeyed in Africa without any special purpose, but just for the fun of journeying.

"I see," Ki-Gor nodded, "and George journeyed through the M'balla country and they made him their chief because he was so big."

He stood up and stretched. All his questions were answered.

"Well," he said, "if you want to stay here and rest a few days, we will. But I smell rain. I think we'll have some this afternoon. We'd better go out and gather plenty of fire wood and maybe kill some food—ahee!" He stopped and stared off to the north.

Helene followed the direction of his eyes and saw a thin column of smoke rising from behind some low, round hills.

"I think we'd better go scouting over there," Ki-Gor observed quietly, "and see what manner of people those are." He whistled shrilly for Marmo.

SOME hours later, the great elephant hovered like a great gray shadow in the trees near a clearing. Ki-Gor and Helene on his back peered through a green screen of undergrowth at a small Bantu village perched on a river bank. There were few signs of life. Three or four pot-bellied children played in the shadows of the conical huts, and now and then some spindly-legged woman walked back and forth.

"The men are away," Ki-Gor commented in a whisper, "hunting or making war. I think we will pick up their trail and see what they look like. From the looks of their women I don't think they are warriors."

Silently the elephant circled to the east of the village and then back toward the river. There was a broad path running along the edge of the river and Ki-Gor decided to head eastward along this path. Marmo covered several miles in a fast shuffle and then slowed down as a distant clamor of shouting rose on the still air. Ki-Gor directed the elephant into the woods beside the path and then urged him forward. A few minutes of stealthy progress brought the sound of shouting nearer, and in a short time Ki-Gor and Helene were staring down at a tragic scene.

An incredibly tall, gaunt black warrior was standing at bay, his back to a tree trunk, holding off a score of smaller, spindly-legged blacks. They were ringed around him, screaming in triumph. At odd moments, one of them would dash in, jab at the lone warrior with his spear, and then jump backward to safety. It was evident that in spite of the warrior's great size—and he was close to seven feet tall —he was badly wounded and on the point of exhaustion. In a few more minutes, he would no longer be able to thrust with his great spear. And then he would totter and fall as his numerous assailants closed in and dragged him down like a pack of wild dogs pulling down a wounded eland.

The warrior's proudly held head was long and narrow as was his face. His blood-soaked garment was a wide strip of cloth wrapped around his thighs, and one end was drawn up over his left shoulder in what Ki-Gor recognized was the Masai fashion.

"Jackals!" Ki-Gor muttered, "cowardly jackals! They wouldn't dare come near the Masai if he were not badly hurt!"

He watched the scene with critical eyes for a few more moments. Then he snorted in wrath, and slid down Marmo's trunk to the ground. He slipped through the undergrowth and came out in the rear of the milling mass of villagers.

"Arrgh!" roared Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle, and waded into the melee. Gripping his six-foot assegai in both hands like a quarter-staff, he slashed from left to right and back again. Consternation swept over the hysterical villagers at this sudden eruption into their midst. Their shouts of triumph changed to cries of dismay and terror. They came of a breed that had no stomach for fighting an able-bodied enemy. Before they really realized what was happening, Ki-Gor had stretched six of them on the ground. The rest then broke and ran down the path in headlong flight.

Ki-Gor bounded after them and knocked over two more jibbering, abject creatures, before turning to go back to the lone warrior. The tall Masai's head was bowed now, and he was leaning heavily on his great spear. He swayed as Ki-Gor approached him and suddenly toppled to the ground.

"Greetings—Bwana—Ki-Gor!"

Ki-Gor barely heard the whispered words as he bent over the fallen Masai. A few more mumbled words were unintelligible, and then the warrior closed his eyes in resignation. A faint heart beat showed that a tiny spark of life still flickered within the battered frame. Marmo moved out of the trees at Ki-Gor's whistle and knelt down. With infinite care, the giant white man picked up the giant black man and placed him on Marmo's back.

Helene looked questioningly at Ki-Gor.

"He spoke my name," he said a little guiltily as if he should apologize for showing kindness to a strange African.

"Who is he?" Helene asked.

"I don't know," Ki-Gor replied, "but he is Masai, and if he knows me he must be of the M'balla. But then I don't understand why he is all alone away from his own country."

MARMO trod the distance back to the cave gently, stopping now and then while Ki-Gor got down and gathered some healing herbs and plants. Once at the cave, the Masai warrior was placed tenderly on the pile of moss, and Ki-Gor set about staunching his many wounds. In the course of his self-upbringing, the jungle man had acquired an astonishing skill in rough medical methods. He had had to, to survive some of the maulings he had suffered from jungle cats or from human enemies. He put these methods to the test now, working by firelight through half the

night. Helene helped him heat water in containers improvised from banana leaves, and he carefully bathed the long inert form of the Masai. Then he applied a styptic ointment which he brewed from a compound of certain roots and bark.

After a while, the unconscious African began to toss feebly and mutter incoherently. Whereupon Ki-Gor set about to keep down the mounting fever by bathing his patient's face with a weak solution of plant acids. Toward midnight, his careful nursing was rewarded. The Masai's delirium seemed to diminish and he lay quiet. After a while his eyes opened and he stared fixedly at the fire. Ki-Gor went across the cave and stood over him. The Masai's lips moved and a few all but inarticulate words came out in a whisper.

"Conserve your strength, O Fallen Tree," Ki-Gor said in Swahili, "I speak no Masai and for you to make me understand you now would be taxing your powers overmuch. Sleep, then, Son of the Brave, and we will hold our indaba by tomorrow's sunlight."

A look of pain crossed the Masai's long ebony face. Laboriously he spoke in broken Swahili:

"Me—dying—tomorrow—not alive—you—go—Tembo George—"

He *was* an M'balla, then. Tembo, meaning elephant, was the descriptive nickname affectionately bestowed on the burly American Negro by his adoring tribesmen.

"You will not die," Ki-Gor said firmly, "I have worked healing ju-ju on you and my ju-ju is all-powerful. You have but to sleep now, and tomorrow your wounds will have begun to heal."

A pathetic half-hope lighted the M'balla's face for a moment, then died away.

"I—hear—O Ki-Gor—but—"

"Then believe," Ki-Gor interrupted gruffly. "You have called me by name. Then you must know that I am Lord of the Jungle and what I say is—is, and what I say will be—will be. Sleep, your life is my affair."

The look of hope returned to the warrior's face, and he closed his eyes with a happy sigh. Ki-Gor turned away with a smile. He knew his Africans. This one would have died for sheer lack of hope of living. Now he would live because he was convinced he would not die.

With the daylight came a misty drizzle and Ki-Gor gazed sourly out at the gray landscape. His eyes were redrimmed as a consequence of having slept lightly for only a few hours. Helene and the M'balla warrior were still asleep. Ki-Gor scattered the smoldering campfire lest its smoke betray the cave to inquisitive humans, and then called Marmo. A very short excursion on the elephant's back sufficed to gather fruit for a cold breakfast. Then he returned to the cave and dismissed Marmo.

Helene woke up then, dewy-eyed, and stretched drowsily. Ki-Gor went over and looked down at the wounded M'balla. The tall warrior was sleeping heavily, his respiration somewhat weak, but regular and rhythmic. Then Ki-Gor walked to the outer edge of the cave and looked out.

A moment later a short spear floated up from below and clattered on the floor of the cave beside Ki-Gor's feet. Helene gave a startled cry, but Ki-Gor did not move. He did not so much as look down at the spear.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene whispered fearfully, "who is it?"

"Nobody dangerous," Ki-Gor answered contemptuously, "those fools of villagers have tracked us here. But they can't hurt us because they can't climb up here, and they're so weak they can't even throw their spears up here with much force."

Just as he spoke, three more spears flew up from the bushes below. Ki-Gor stepped easily to one side, avoiding two of them, and caught the third in mid-flight with his right hand. He stood for a moment looking down into the undergrowth, eyes narrowed. Here and there he could see a black form crouching, but for the most part, the attackers were well hidden. A crooked smile formed on Ki-Gor's bronzed face.

"O Puny Ones!" he called out, "Cease playing with fire! Go away from here quickly lest you suffer the fate of your mates yesterday. I am slow to anger but be warned! If you continue to annoy me, I shall wreak a terrible punishment on you!"

There were shrill cries of anger from below, and a shower of spears came up out of the bushes. Not one of the sharp spearheads touched Ki-Gor. Some of them fell short of the cave mouth entirely—others he

dodged easily—and three he knocked down with his left hand.

"So be it, O Puny Ones!" Ki-Gor snarled, "I warned you and you heeded not my warnings!"

With that, Ki-Gor poised the spear he had caught in his right hand and flung it with terrific force downward. Immediately, there was a hideous shriek and one of the blacks fell forward out of the undergrowth, his chest transfixed with the spear. Ki-Gor picked up five more spears that had landed on the cave floor and hurled them downward in rapid succession. Only one of these found its mark, but cries of terror rang out from below. Ki-Gor whistled shrilly and a moment later, Marmo came crashing up the hill to the cave. The Jungle man leaped on his back and heeled him vigorously behind the right ear. The elephant thundered off in the same direction that Ki-Gor had sent him the morning before.

WITHOUT ever having read about the campaigns of the great generals of history, Ki-Gor knew that an excellent way of getting rid of an annoying enemy was to destroy his base of operations. He, therefore, headed Marmo straight for the village by the river. He felt perfectly safe in leaving Helene behind at the cave, because its height off the ground was sufficient defense against such a weak and unimaginative tribe. At the same time, he felt that a strong rearward thrust was the most effective method of removing the nuisance of the treacherous little spearmen.

In a short time, Marmo thundered down on the village, and Ki-Gor halted him beside one of the conical huts and uttered a blood-curdling yell. Thirty or forty skinny blacks, women and children dashed out of the huts and stood transfixed with horror.

"O Ugly Ones!" Ki-Gor roared, "take your children and your old men and run for safety! Your husbands—foolish insects—have incurred the wrath of Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle! They will return soon from their foolhardy excursion, and you can tell them that, hereafter, they should be more careful about what they hunt! Tell them to pursue the ferocious forest-mouse, if they wish, or the man-eating junglecock—*but to leave Ki-Gor alone!* Now, go, Ugly Ones! Clear out! Run for safety!"

The villagers needed no added urging. In desperate silence, they swarmed among their huts, seized their children and old men, and streamed away in all directions. A pack of baboons in front of a grass-fire never ran faster. In less time than it takes to tell, the village was completely deserted. Then Ki-Gor gave the word, and Marmo methodically demolished every one of the conical huts.

When the destruction was complete, Ki-Gor turned the elephant's head homeward toward the cave. He felt no compunction for what he had done. He had harmed no innocent persons, and as for the dwellings he had flattened out, he knew that the tribe could construct a new hut-village somewhere else in a very short time. But "somewhere else" would be at a safe distance away from the white-skinned avenger on the huge elephant. Ki-Gor permitted himself a grim smile as he thought of the tongue-lashing the men of the tribe were in for when they rejoined their women. No, he reflected, those particular tribesmen would not bother him any more.

NOT far from the cave, the way led across a narrow strip of veldt, and as Marmo approached this strip, Ki-Gor heard the drumming of hundreds of hooves. Then as the trees before him thinned out, he could see that a good-sized herd of small gazelles was stampeding through the open space toward his left. The jungle man glanced to his right to discover if he could see the cause of the stampede. Back among the stragglers of the herd, he could see a lithe, tawny form bounding forward with amazing speed. It was a lone lioness.

Ki-Gor halted the elephant and watched the great cat knock down two of the gazelles with powerful swipes of her great forepaws. Apparently, however, the lioness did not realize what she had done, or else she was gripped by such a hunting-lust that she could not stop. At any rate, she kept right on after the rest of the flying herd. But like all lions, she was capable of maintaining running speed for only a short distance at a time, and shortly, the gazelles began to draw away.

As he watched this performance, an idea struck Ki-Gor. He thought of the wounded Masai back at the cave, and remembered the curious dietary habits of all Masai.

They were strictly flesh-eaters, flesh—cooked or raw, and they were especially fond of drinking raw beef-blood. A gazelle was not a bull, but it would suffice. Ki-Gor set the elephant in motion toward the two fallen gazelles out on the strip of veldt.

The lioness was lying panting on the grass a hundred yards away. Ki-Gor kept a wary eye on her as the elephant drew near the first gazelle. The gazelle was dead, its neck a bloody pulp where the great claws had raked sideways.

The second gazelle, lying thirty feet away, was also dead. But it was unmarked. Apparently, the lioness's paw had hit its horns, the blow breaking the gazelle's neck, but not drawing any blood. Ki-Gor glanced around and saw that the lioness was standing up, staring at him and Marmo. Quickly, he slid down the elephant's trunk to the ground, assegai in hand. He reached down and seized the gazelle by the hind legs and slung it over his shoulder. As he straightened up, he saw the lioness bounding toward him. Aided by the elephant's trunk, he swiftly got his burden up on to Marmo's back, and then turned his attention to the approaching lioness.

She stopped a short distance, eyed the elephant and the man malevolently for a moment. Then she lifted her head in a roar of displeasure and defiance. In the meantime, Marmo edged himself around so that he faced her squarely and flared his huge ears. Ki-Gor stood astride of the gazelle and glared back at the lioness.

"Ohe, Miss Lion!" he called derisively, "You are young and flighty, and you don't know when you have killed! Why pay attention to me? You have another kill—see, over there? There is food enough even for you for two days."

The lioness still glared dangerously. Ki-Gor glanced about him on the back of the elephant, saw a good-sized clod clinging to one of the gazelle's hooves. He reached down, detached the clod and shouted again at the lioness. Her answer was a horrible growl, and Ki-Gor laughed. Then he tossed the clod in the direction of the other dead gazelle. The lioness halted her growling abruptly and without a moment's hesitation leaped after the clod. She could no more have resisted chasing it than a kitten could have resisted going after a rolling ball.

The clod landed two feet away from the bleeding carcass of the other gazelle. The lioness landed with her fore-paws on the clod. Suddenly she tensed. Her head went up and she began to sniff the air wonderingly. She took two steps forward and placed her front paws on the gazelle. Then she swung her head around at Ki-Gor and uttered a great roar of mingled defiance and satisfaction.

Ki-Gor gave a mighty laugh.

"We can go now safely, Marmo," he laughed, "Miss Lion has finally discovered her other kill—after we all but rubbed her nose in it!"

The elephant turned deliberately, and shuffled majestically off toward the cave.

KI-GOR directed the elephant on a criss-cross, zig-zag path up the little hill to the cave. This was done in order to beat the brush for the enemy spearmen. But apparently they had gone, as there was no sign of them anywhere. This was corroborated by the joyous cry from Helene as she caught sight of the elephant. She stood boldly on the outer edge of the cave and waved a hand fearlessly.

The Masai warrior was awake. He was weak and drawn from loss of blood, but his eyes were bright, and he was leaning on one elbow slowly munching on some wild fruit. Ki-Gor's eyes twinkled as he stepped off the elephant's back.

"Greetings, O Fallen Tree!" he said, in Swahili, "I see you are better—well enough to eat some delicious fruit."

"Greetings, O Ki-Gor!" the Masai returned, "thanks to your ju-ju, I am better." Then he made a wry face and flung the half-eaten fruit away. "Wah! Monkey's food!"

Ki-Gor turned with a chuckle and dragged the gazelle off Marmo's back on to the cave floor.

"Hah!" exclaimed the Masai, eyes shining.

Quickly, Ki-Gor skinned a portion of the gazelle and cut a tender steak from a flank. This he handed raw and dripping to the Masai, who received it gratefully and proceeded to eat it with great gusto. In a few minutes the steak was gone, and the Masai sank back with a happy sigh. He muttered a Masai blessing, closed his eyes, and promptly went to sleep again.

During the next hour, Ki-Gor collected

some dry wood and built a fire. Then he leisurely cut strips from the gazelle's hindquarters, and he and Helene made a hearty breakfast off them. About the time they had finished, Ki-Gor looked around and saw that the Masai's eyes were open. He walked over and sat down beside the warrior.

"Tell me," he said, "Who are you that know my name? And why are you, a Masai, traveling alone through strange country?"

A thunderstruck look came into the Masai's face. He struck his forehead guiltily with an open palm, and then dragged himself up to a sitting position.

"Ai!" he wailed, "Bad trouble—Tembo George! Must go now—help him—must hurry!"

"Be calm," Ki-Gor ordered, "You can't go now, not until your wounds begin to heal."

"No! No!" the Masai answered in his broken Swahili, "Must go! Tembo George—bad trouble! My name Lesolio—he send me—find you, Ki-Gor—come quick—help him, Tembo George!"

Then the warrior relapsed into the M'balla dialect of Masai, a language Ki-Gor did not understand.

"Wait, wait!" Ki-Gor commanded, "You say you are Lesolio and Tembo George sent you to find me?"

"Yes," the M'balla nodded his head vigorously, "Tembo George—bad trouble—big danger—"

"What danger? Who is he in danger from?"

"Wandarobo."

"The Wandarobo!" Ki-Gor echoed incredulously.

The Wandarobo, as he well remembered from previous trips to East Africa, were an extremely primitive Bantu tribe, near neighbors of the M'balla. They were undersized, cowardly, and depraved. In battle they could never be a match for the gigantic M'balla tribesmen. The latter, being an offshoot of the Masai, were not true Bantu, but were descended from fierce invaders from Abyssinia and the Sudan. Then how, Ki-Gor wondered, could the Wandarobo have become dangerous to the M'balla?

He went back to questioning Lesolio, but the M'balla was so agitated, and his Swahili was so poor, that Ki-Gor could make very little sense out of his answers. Gradually, out of the confused fragments of Lesolio's Swahili, Ki-Gor pieced together some sort of a picture of George's misfortune. An Evil Spirit, so Lesolio said, had visited the M'balla and killed many of them, and then the Wandarobo had killed others, and finally, George was now at bay, surrounded by overwhelming numbers.

Knowing George and the M'balla as he did, Ki-Gor found the whole story highly improbable. And yet, there was no questioning Lesolio's sincerity. The long, lean warrior was becoming increasingly agitated. He repeated that he had been sent to find Ki-Gor—that he had left his own country to travel alone among strange Bantu so that he could fetch the great white hunter to the aid of George. Well, now he had found him, and therefore, they must set off at once.

WHEN Ki-Gor told Lesolio that he was in no condition yet to travel, the M'balla warrior became almost frantic. He insisted that he was able to travel, and sruggled to his feet in an effort to prove it. Ki-Gor held out a steadying hand, or Lesolio would have crashed down again.

At length, Ki-Gor gave in and agreed to start immediately. He realized that Lesolio would recover faster resting quietly on Marmo's back, than fretting in the cave. Ki-Gor wished he could get a clearer picture of George's trouble. He still could not understand how George could be in any way menaced by the Wandarobo, when he commanded up to a hundred stalwart M'balla spearmen.

Briefly, Ki-Gor explained the situation to Helene, who promptly raised objections.

"I don't like the sound of that," she said, "If George, with a hundred good fighting men is in trouble, I don't see what you can do to help him—single-handed." Then, seeing the hurt look in his eyes, she added quickly, "Oh, I know you're strong, Ki-Gor, stronger than ten men, and cunning. But what can you do against odds that are too much for George and his tribe? I think if you try to help George now, you will accomplish nothing but to put yourself in the same danger he's in."

Ki-Gor looked into her lovely face.

"I remember," he said slowly, "when you were captured by the Gorilla-men. There were hundreds of them, and even the M'balla would not go down to fight them. But when I went down after you, George came with me. He didn't have to. But he did."

Ki-Gor had her there, and she knew it. She shivered at the memory of that narrow escape in the valley called Nirvana. On that occasion, the big American Negro, so curiously transplanted to the land of his ancestors, had unhesitatingly thrown his lot in with Ki-Gor in the desperate expedition to rescue her.

"Yes, Ki-Gor, he did"—Helene realized she had to take another tack—"and if George is really in danger, you must go to his help. But," she thought a moment, "have you thought of this? Have you thought of the possibility that this wounded warrior may not be telling the truth? How can you be sure that George *is* in danger? Suppose George never sent him at all, and this all may be just a trap? You have many enemies, Ki-Gor, and maybe some of them have sent this man with a lying story to lure you into an ambush of some kind."

Ki-Gor looked at her steadily for a moment, and then shook his head with an indulgent smile.

"No," he said, "Lesolio is no liar. He says George is in great danger and I believe him. We must go. Don't be afraid."

Helene knew when she was beaten.

PREPARATIONS for the departure were simple. Ki-Gor cut several strips of meat off the gazelle's ribs, wrapped them in a banana leaf, and entrusted the package to Helene. Then he gathered up the half-dozen spears which the hostile villagers had thrown up into the cave and bound them with some lengths of vine. Then he whistled for Marmo, and as the elephant's broad back appeared beside the edge of the cave, he assisted the tall M'balla warrior to a position of relative security. Helene got on behind Lesolio, and Ki-Gor took his place on the elephant's neck. A short word of command set Marmo in motion, and he shuffled forward toward Ruwenzori.

Just as Ki-Gor had guessed, Lesolio's spirits mounted as soon as the journey to succor Tembo George began. Heedless of his wounds, and in spite of a natural weakness from loss of blood, the tall Masai maintained an excited flow of conversation. Unfortunately, it was in his own tongue, and Ki-Gor could make very little out of it. Questions put in Swahili to Lesolio brought forth little more knowledge of the situation that lay in wait for Ki-Gor than he had already gained from the Masai. Lesolio's Swahili was simply not adequate to the task of telling a connected story.

Ki-Gor sent Marmo toward the southeast as Lesolio's long forefinger indicated. The M'balla warrior's directions were, however, extremely general. He couldn't seem to remember any especial route that he had come over when he had traveled westward. This made progress rather slow, as Ki-Gor frequently went off the course to take advantage of patches of open veldt. Consequently, when night fell, the northern shoulder of the mighty Ruwenzori Range which was their destination was still far away.

As they made camp for the night, Ki-Gor noticed that the wounded Lesolio was astonishingly ignorant of elementary points of woodcraft. Then he remembered that in general that was true of all the M'balla. They were essentially plainsmen—their not so remote ancestors having come down from the arid North—and they were still not at home in the jungle which they had wrested away from the aboriginal Bantu.

Then Ki-Gor remembered another thing, and that was that the Wandarobo, one of the expelled Bantu tribes, were exceptionally skilled forest hunters, adept in the arts of woodcraft. They were expert trackers, they could travel the tree-route, and they could stalk their prey with the silent ease of a jungle python. In open combat they could never stand up to the gigantic Masai, who fought and killed for the love of fighting and killing. However, Ki-Gor reflected, it might be possible for the Wandarobo to wage a successful war against the Masai M'balla by luring them into the deepest forests and ambushing them. But to Ki-Gor's knowledge that had never happened, and the haughty M'balla roamed the forest-clad slopes of Ruwenzori without the slightest fear of the sly Wandarobo. In fact, the M'balla had nothing but

good-natured contempt for their primitive neighbors. A few of the Wandarobo lived among the M'balla in a servile condition, performing certain menial tasks which the conquering race considered too undignified for themselves to have anything to do with. Ki-Gor remembered hearing a white man say once that the Masai were "the gentlemen of Africa."

The next morning Lesolio, due no doubt to his implicit faith in Ki-Gor's healing magic, appeared to be much stronger and, indeed, to be mending rapidly. He managed to get on Marmo's back without assistance, to Helene's amazement, and the expedition to Ruwenzori got under way again.

IT was a bright sunny morning for a change, and as Marmo climbed to the top of a long grassy slope, a magnificent vista stretched out before the eyes of his passengers.

Ruwenzori!

The air was so clear that the mighty crags rearing up from the broad foothills seemed so close that they could be touched, even though they were almost thirty miles away. One great coned-shaped peak was hooded in clouds which broke apart at intervals to display the dazzling snow-covered summit. Beyond it to the south, other majestic peaks stood like gray ominous sentinels.

Lesolio pointed excitedly at the huge range, but Ki-Gor had difficulty in finding out exactly what he was pointing at. At length, it appeared that the M'balla was indicating the middle one of three deep ravines that ran parallel down the north face of the range into the dark foothills. There, apparently was where Tembo George was. But as to knowing any particular route to get there, Lesolio was of no help. After some deliberation, Ki-Gor decided that there was nothing to do but to travel on a course that was as direct as possible.

For several miles the travelers passed through open parkland with scattered trees. Then gradually, the trees grew more numerous and closer together. At the same time, the ground began to slope down. Evidently, they were descending into some sort of valley. By degrees, the vegetation got thicker and thicker, and after two or three miles, the surroundings became almost like a jungle.

Not wishing to press through the dense forest blindly, Ki-Gor spent some time exploring. Eventually, he found a broad elephant trail. He checked its general direction by the sun, and saw that the trail went roughly southeastwards. He decided to follow it.

The trail seemed to lead for miles through the thick, gloomy, sunless forest. Without the sun to guide him, Ki-Gor had more or less to guess at his direction. But his intuition told him comfortingly that the trail would not bring him out far wide of his objective.

Once or twice he looked around at Lesolio and was shocked at the expression on the warrior's face. Lesolio was showing fear!

THE tall M'balla kept staring about at the wilderness around him. His eyes betrayed a quaking uneasiness, and his thin lips moved soundlessly. Ki-Gor did not ask Lesolio what he was afraid of. It would have been too great a blow to the pride of the supposedly fearless Masai.

After hours of this jungle passage, the trail ended abruptly at the edge of a lake. It was a long, narrow lake, its waters still and oily in the quiet early-afternoon air. To the north it stretched away several miles and then appeared to curve out of sight. The south end of the lake was perhaps a half a mile to Ki-Gor's right, and he decided that the shortest route around this water barrier was that way. Accordingly, he turned Marmo in that direction.

As they neared that end of the lake, Ki-Gor gasped. On the lake shore and extending for miles farther in was a great army of flamingoes—fantastic rose-plumed birds with stilt-like legs and beaks shaped like cutlasses. There seemed to be millions of them. Ki-Gor realized then, that beyond the lake there must be a vast marsh. The very numbers of the flamingoes indicated the probable extent of the marsh. Ki-Gor well knew that it might reach for ten miles. Such a marsh would be dangerous or even impossible to cross, even for Marmo. Ki-Gor halted the elephant to consider the situation.

The lake was extremely narrow, but was probably too deep for Marmo to

wade across, and Ki-Gor was not willing to risk finding out whether it was or not. While he sat thinking, Lesolio started talking and pointing excitedly. Ki-Gor gazed upward following the direction of the warrior's finger. Evidently the direction of the elephant trail they had followed through the jungle had remained true. They were only about four miles away from their objective.

"See?" said Lesolio, "Rocks there. Bare place. Middle furrow."

The Masai indicated a rocky place halfway up the middle ravine of the three that cut down the mountain slope. At a distance of four miles, it looked like a small landslide.

"Tembo George—there," said Lesolio, pointing.

Ki-Gor stared at the place. It was directly across the lake. If they tried to find a way around the lake and marsh barrier that lay squarely across their path, they might have to go ten, twenty miles or more out of their way. Ki-Gor scrambled off the elephant's back with a muttered ejaculation.

He went to the edge of the water, looked down at it and shook his head. It was too deep for fording. He walked a few yards along the shore and was about to turn back when something caught his eye, just ahead. A moment later, he dived into the underbrush with a shout, reappearing dragging a crude dugout.

It was merely a great log, hollowed out very roughly. It was nothing like as well made as the log canoes made by the river tribes of the Lower Congo. But for all that, it would, Ki-Gor thought, carry Helene, Lesolio, and himself across the narrow lake. He hated the idea of leaving Marmo behind but there was nothing else to do. He dragged the dugout to the water's edge and called to his companions to join him.

Lesolio was dumb with fright as he climbed off the elephant.

"Wandarobo!" he whispered, eyes rolling, "Bad! They see—you-me-her—they kill!"

"But you're not afraid of Wandarobo, are you?" said Ki-Gor in Swahili, "The M'balla are not afraid of those little jungle-fleas!"

"Not—afraid—" Lesolio's face belied his words—"but Wandarobo—too many—they kill!"

Ki-Gor glanced over at the opposite shore of the lake, where a grimly impenetrable wall of trees and undergrowth hid Heaven knew what dark secrets. "Wandarobo—too many—" And Lesolio, the proud Masai, was frightened of them. That must mean that the little forest hunters were gathered against the M'balla in overwhelming numbers. It didn't seem possible! At any rate, Ki-Gor thought, there was no time to be lost. He must get to George and find out exactly what was the situation. And the first thing to do was to get across the lake, Wandarobo or no Wandarobo. He looked kindly at the M'balla warrior.

"Come, Lesolio, come," he said, "I am Ki-Gor and I fear no amount of enemies. Your life is my affair. We will get in this canoe and cross the lake."

Marmo, the elephant, watched the precariously balanced craft go slowly over the placid water and hit the opposite shore with a slight bump. The three passengers got out and stood for a minute in front of the trees. Then Ki-Gor waved an arm, and disappeared from sight. Marmo turned and went slowly toward the great marsh.

AS Ki-Gor led the way up the slope, he found that the undergrowth was by no means as thick as it had looked from across the lake. He was able to go straight up the rising ground without looking for any trails. Even so, the gradient was steep enough so that Helene and the recently wounded Lesolio made heavy going of it. Ki-Gor, therefore, stopped frequently, and while his companions rested, he scouted the vicinity carefully. Nowhere could he find signs of recent human presence.

They traveled uphill this way for about a mile, but as they climbed higher, the undergrowth grew thicker. Finally, Ki-Gor realized that they would have to find some sort of trail. He put his companions up a safe tree and then went scouting.

He went along the hillside for nearly half a mile, spotting a couple of small game trails but rejecting them as being too meandering to serve his purpose. All of a sudden a little south breeze cooled his face, and at the same time, his nostrils twitched. Ki-Gor smelled Bantu.

The next minute he came upon a broad path going straight up the hill. A glance showed Ki-Gor that hundreds of splay-toed bare feet had passed and repassed on the trail—recently. The Bantu smell seemed to be growing stronger, and Ki-Gor could hear voices in the distance.

Silently, the jungle man swung himself up into a tree and quickly found a position which, though screened by leaves, gave him a clear view of a section of the path. He had not long to wait.

A column of the most sinister-looking savages Ki-Gor had ever seen came trotting along the path uphill. They were small and slight, though not so small as Pygmies, and they were absolutely naked. Their filthy bodies were caked with bright-colored clay. Around their necks were necklaces of small white bones, and their woolly heads were partially shaven in fantastic patterns. They were well armed, each man being equipped with a light spear, a long knife, a short bow and a quiver of arrows. As they jogged up the trail, they laughed and chattered, their brutish faces crinkling with depraved glee.

The Wandarobo!

Instinctively, Ki-Gor's upper lip curled up, showing his powerful teeth in a primordial snarl. The bestial little men down below were repeating to each other the phrase, "M'balla nyama." Ki-Gor knew that in Bantu-Swahili, "nyama" meant "wild animals," or "game," or simply, "meat." So, when the Wandarobo said "*M'balla* nyama," they could mean only one thing. Ki-Gor remembered, then, that when he had last been in East Africa, he had heard that the Wandarobo were suspected of practicing cannibalism.

Ki-Gor counted about three hundred in the file below him—an amazingly large number of these sly forest-hunters to gather in one group. Perhaps Lesolio's fears were better justified than Ki-Gor had realized at first. Eventually, the trail was deserted, or at least, the section of it that Ki-Gor could see. He waited for a few minutes in case there might be a rearguard coming up the trail, but when none appeared, he climbed silently higher up the tree. Then, with one last look, he was off swinging through the trees in the direction of Helene and Lesolio.

HIS uncanny sense of direction led him straight to them. With a few brief words he told them of what he had seen, and then the three of them picked their way through the undergrowth to the path. Ki-Gor's intention was to follow the trail up the hill as far as seemed safe, trusting to luck that their tracks would not be noticed among all the other footprints made by the Wandarobo. There would be some risk of detection by the sharp-eyed Wandarobo, but Ki-Gor decided to take it.

However, just as Helene stepped out on the path, a sixth sense warned the jungle man to reconnoiter first. Silently he dragged Helene and Lesolio back into the undergrowth while he hid behind a banana bush close to the path. His precaution was taken not a moment too soon.

Two Wandarobo came hurrying up the trail from below. There was an air of silent haste about them, as if they meant to catch up with the main body ahead of them. But they were none the less alert, for all their haste.

As they passed by the crouching form of Ki-Gor, one of them stopped dead and sniffed the air. The other one halted after a few steps and looked curiously at his companion. They exchanged a few muttered words and then both bent over and inspected the muddy ground of the path. In a very short time, one of them uttered an excited exclamation and squatted down over the incriminating footprint that Helene had left. Both cannibals, then, investigated the slight imprint, smelled it, and discussed it. The original discoverer raised his head and sniffed the air again and stared all around into the forest. He looked almost into Ki-Gor's watching eyes without seeing him.

The two Wandarobo again fell into discussion. Evidently, the first one wanted to explore the ground beside the path to try and find the person who belonged to the mysterious footprint. But the other cannibal kept pointing up the path, arguing that they could not stop. In the end, they parted company. The first one stayed on to make his investigation, and the second one trotted on up the path.

Ki-Gor gathered his muscles as the Wandarobo, eyes glittering and nostrils flared like a gorilla, stepped off the path into the undergrowth. The bestial little

creature could not fail to see the evidence that not one, but two or even more people had been through the closely grown bushes. A cruel smile of triumph spread over his depraved features. For some unknown reason he hesitated before calling out to his companion. That hesitation was his ruin.

From the shadow of the banana bush Ki-Gor sprang.

The Wandarobo dodged desperately to one side with a scream of terror. But the scream was quickly pinched out into a gurgling squeak, as Ki-Gor's right arm snaked down. The prodigious fingers closed on the cannibal's throat and squeezed the life out of him.

Lesolio stood beside Ki-Gor with admiring eyes, as the latter methodically stripped the verminous little Wandarobo of bow, quiver, and knife. 'Helene peered over her mate's shoulder with an expression of disgust on her face. There was a time when Helene would have felt pity for a victim of Ki-Gor's strength. But by now she had become reconciled to his prompt and merciless action. She had learned the Lesson of Africa: Kill lest ye be killed.

Ki-Gor seized the dead Wandarobo by the ankles and dragged him through the undergrowth some twenty feet farther away from the trail. Then he walked lightly back to his companions. It would be safe now, he felt, to travel up the trail.

Even now, however, Ki-Gor was not one to relax his caution. Before he stepped out on the path, he stood stock still for a moment and took a long look all around him. A throbbing silence hung over the jungle.

But from somewhere, came a tiny rustle —barely audible. Ki-Gor's head jerked around, and his eyes flew upward.

ACROSS the trail, in the lower branches of a great tree, some leaves trembled. Ki-Gor cleared the path in one bound and was up the trunk of the tree like a panther. A clay-daubed black figure scrambled up the tree ahead of him. Evidently, the second Wandarobo had been overcome with curiosity and had come back by the tree route to see what his companion was doing. If the little savage was surprised to see a white giant come plunging up the tree after him, he did not let his astonishment paralyze his movements. With a mocking laugh, he scurried like a squirrel along a high limb, took off in a daring leap and landed safely on a lower branch of the next tree.

But he had reckoned without Ki-Gor.

With a promptness equalling the Wandarobo's, the White Lord of the Jungle swung his long legs up on a broad limb and with one continuous motion arc-ed his body upward and forward. By the time the Wandarobo jumped, Ki-Gor was running along the limb in the same direction. And before the Wandarobo landed in the other tree, Ki-Gor had leaped. In mid-air, his fingers closed over a thick vine trailing from the bough he had just left. His forward motion carried him through the air to a point where he let go the vine and dropped lightly on a bough ten feet below the one the Wandarobo had landed on.

There was no mocking laughter from the Wandarobo now, only the silence of desperation as he flung himself upward to the top of the tree. But fast as he climbed, Ki-Gor below him climbed faster. Twice a great hand almost closed over a frantic black ankle. Once Ki-Gor just missed seizing his prey as the savage threw himself to the other side of the narrowing tree-trunk.

With such a panicky upward flight and such a relentless pursuit, there could be only one ultimate result. The Wandarobo reached a point on the top of the tree where there was no place to go but down. With a squeal, the Wandarobo tried a suicidal leap.

But Ki-Gor was ready for him. As the black body started to hurtle downward, Ki-Gor was braced. He whipped out an arm, grabbed the naked savage under one armpit and held him bleating and squalling. Promptly Ki-Gor's left hand cuffed the clay-daubed chin, and the Wandarobo went limp. Ki-Gor had decided that this enemy might be more useful alive than dead.

HE carefully carried the inert form down to the ground and called to Helene and Lesolio to join him. In a short while, the Wandarobo recovered consciousness, and Ki-Gor spoke to him in Swahili.

"Listen with all your ears, Monkey-Man," he said sternly. "You will live or die according to my wish. If you behave

discreetly and answer truly the questions I am going to put to you, you will live. Otherwise—"

Ki-Gor balanced his knife suggestively in his hand. The Wandarobo blinked upward without answering.

"First, then," said Ki-Gor, "Tell me what is the situation with Tembo George and the M'balla. Where are they?"

The Wandarobo remained silent and continued to stare at his captor.

"Speak!" Ki-Gor barked, "and quickly!" The blade glittered in his hand.

"Ayee! Bwana!" the Wandarobo said suddenly, "I will tell! Tembo George and his followers, what is left of them, are up the hill two miles. They have taken refuge in a pile of rocks, where they are safe for the moment. But they are trapped. There is no escape for them. The Wandarobo are as numerous as bees, and we hold the M'balla in a tight ring."

"How many of you Wandarobo are daring to war against Tembo George?" Ki-Gor demanded. At least he was getting the information which Lesolio had been unable to give him.

"I could not count them," the savage answered, "I truly could not. But when the Evil Spirit came among the M'balla and struck them down, the Wandarobo gathered from far and wide to drive them out of our ancient hunting grounds."

Ki-Gor was silent for a moment. There was no question in his mind but that the Wandarobo was telling the truth. But he still could not quite understand how the M'balla could have been reduced to such straits by the depraved little Wandarobo. And *what* was the Evil Spirt?

"Answer me," he said abruptly, "Are *all* ways in and out of this pile of rocks, as you call it, closed off?"

"Every way is guarded. Soon they will surrender or starve. We would have swarmed over them like locusts before now except that Tembo George has a fire-stick."

"But some of the defenders broke out. Here is one beside me."

Ki-Gor did not look away from the Wandarobo, but the Wandarobo glanced up curiously, at the great M'balla, leaning on his spear.

"That may be," the little savage replied, "Some of the defenders tried to get out but they did not go far before they were riddled with spear-wounds. There are many of us."

Ki-Gor began to understand why Lesolio had shown fear of the Wandarobo. He looked shrewdly at the little savage while a plan formed in his mind.

"Look you, Monkey-Man," Ki-Gor said finally, "I am Tembo George's friend. I and my woman, and this M'balla man, must get to Tembo George. I will leave it to you to find a way. Guide us by some safe route to the rocks where George is, and I will give you your life and your freedom. Play us false by leading us into an ambush, or by raising an outcry to your fellows, and you will die swiftly. I will have a grip on your arm, and the minute I suspect anything wrong I will twist you with these two hands and snap your backbone like a twig."

The Wandarobo licked his lips and said nothing for a long moment.

"The minute I caught you spying on me," Ki-Gor went on, "your life was forfeit. And I would kill you this moment, as I killed your mate, if it were not for the possibility that you could be of use to me alive."

The savage held up an imploring hand.

"Nay, Bwana. What you ask I cannot do," he said. "There are hundreds and hundreds of my people surrounding Tembo George. How can I lead three people unnoticed through that throng?"

"It is for you to devise a way," Ki-Gor replied stonily.

There was a long silence. Then the savage looked fearfully up at Ki-Gor, looked away, and finally sighed gustily.

"There might be a way," he admitted at last.

"There *must* be a way," said Ki-Gor calmly. "It is your only chance to live this day out."

"There is to be a council held at sunset," the savage said slowly. "We are going to the Sacred Grove of our ancestors, high up the mountain. Only a few will stay behind and give the alarm if the M'balla tried to escape from their trap."

Ki-Gor nodded with a knowing smile.

"So much the better for you, Monkey-Man," he said, "You guide us safely past those few guards and I will release you in time for you to attend the council yourself. You can tell your mates that Ki-Gor has arrived to help his friend Tembo George.

I will take your arm now, and you will stand up."

"Ki-Gor?" said the Wandarobo, obediently getting to his feet, "I don't know the name."

"All Ruwenzori will know that name," Ki-Gor said grimly, "if the Wandarobo do not immediately stop their war against Tembo George. Now—which way do we go?"

"The path here leads up to the foot of the open space in front of Tembo George's stronghold."

Ki-Gor looked at Lesolio and said, "Did you understand that? Is it true?"

"I understand—yes," said Lesolio in Swahili. "Yes—true."

"Very well," Ki-Gor said and turned back to the savage. "Lead on, Monkey-Man."

THE sun had long since left the northern slope of Ruwenzori when the Wandarobo guide indicated silently to Ki-Gor that they were nearly at the head of the trail. Although it was not yet actually sunset, as measured on the plains to the north-east, it had been twilight for a long time on this shaded face of the mountain—a gloomy, chilly half-light, accentuated by the tall, spreading trees through which the trail wound uphill. A cold wind from the remote snow-capped peak above blew down unpleasantly on Ki-Gor's bare torso as he followed the Wandarobo off the trail into the underbrush.

So far, the trip had been without incident. The hostage-guide had apparently kept his end of the bargain faithfully, but Ki-Gor was glad the end was in sight. He was tired of keeping an unrelaxing grip on the Wandarobo's arm, and the body-smell of the unwashed savage was also getting very tiresome.

A few careful yards through the underbrush, and the Wandarobo pointed with his free hand. Ki-Gor frowned quickly at Lesolio who, behind Helene, was making a noisy passage through the undergrowth, and then ducking his head peered forward through the bushes.

He saw an open space about fifty yards wide before him, covered with gravel, rubble, and small boulders. Once upon a time, evidently, there had been a small landslide in that ravine which had come no farther than where he was standing. Higher up, perhaps a hundred yards above, the landslide had been split in two by a series of prominent ledges. These ledges had withstood the pressure of sliding rubble and divided it into two streams which had then rejoined some yards below. The effect of the ledges was to create a small oasis with one or two trees below them surrounded on three sides by a protecting redoubt of loose rock and gravel. That was Tembo George's stronghold.

"If you wait until darkness," the savage whispered, "Tembo George will not know who you are and will kill you with his firestick. If you go across the open space now, you will be seen by our watchers, but they are few—too few to do you any harm."

Ki-Gor looked at the little savage coldly. So far, he had been reliable.

"Why not go now?" the Wandarobo urged, "You can run all the way up—it is not too far."

Ki-Gor decided to chance it. The forest that fringed the opening was silent—almost too silent. But Ki-Gor wanted to get free of the trees which were the natural element of the besieging Wandarobo and get up to George's fortress.

"How many watchers are there?" he asked the savage.

"Three or four, no more," the Wandarobo shrugged, his beady eyes glittering. "You promised to release me at the head of the trail."

"I will release you," Ki-Gor returned, "but only when I am convinced you have acted in good faith."

Then he instructed Helene and Lesolio to step out into the open and start walking up toward the oasis-redoubt. He, himself, would stand at the endge of the trees holding on to the hostage-guide until the truth of his statment was proven.

Helene's face was calm as she moved to obey Ki-Gor. She was well aware of the potential danger, but in situations like this, she trusted Ki-Gor implicitly. Lesolio, on the other hand, was tense, and his face was a dark-gray. The M'balla and the white girl stepped out on to the rubble and began to walk uphill.

There was not a sound from the dark trees.

Five paces—ten paces—the couple

walked, as Ki-Gor gripped the Wandarobo's arm.

Fifteen paces—twenty—twenty-five. Almost a quarter of the distance to the ledges, and still there was no outcry.

Ki-Gor released the Wandarobo's arm, and sprang out into the open. Instantly, he cursed himself.

"Ai! Ai! Ai!"

It was his late captive, streaking away through the underbrush, screaming at the top of his lungs. Immediately, the cry was taken up all around the opening. From the cover of the trees, a horde of naked blacks poured out yelling. An icy rage settled over Ki-Gor as he sprang uphill, his mighty legs driving like pistons into the soft gravel underfoot.

FOR a split-second, the situation looked hopeless. There must have been fifty or sixty Wandarobo streaming out from the trees. They must inevitably cut off Helene and Lesolio from the redoubt above.

Helene was running now, slipping and stumbling on the rubble, and Lesolio was running behind her, brandishing his great spear and yelling defiance.

Then a shot rang out from above, and another and another. A flash of hope streaked through Ki-Gor's brain, and he pumped his legs faster to try and make up the distance between him and Helene.

Three of the Wandarobo were down, and the group from the left-hand side of the opening were running back to the trees. But a little knot of savages to the right kept right on. They were within a few yards of Helene now.

Suddenly, Lesolio veered to his right. Spear-arm upraised, he gave a tremendous yell and made straight for the Wandarobo. A second later, he was in the midst of them, stabbing and hacking. A quick glow of admiration went over Ki-Gor, as he plunged up the slope. Although Lesolio was vastly out-numbered, the shock of his attack halted the Wandarobo. Helene, running nimbly, was within fifteen yards of safety.

Ki-Gor knocked down two Wandarobo dancing in his path, then swept to his right to go to the aid of the hard-pressed Lesolio. At one and the same time, he saw two things happen. He saw Helene stumble and fall, and he saw a short spear plunged into Lesolio's neck.

Blood spouted, and the tall warrior wavered like a tall tree in the middle of the yammering Wandarobo. Ki-Gor flung himself into the melee, although he knew in his heart he was too late. A second later, the Wandarobo swarmed over him.

A crimson veil seemed to drop over Ki-Gor's eyes. He was conscious of nothing except slashing at the wall of brutish faces around him.

Then, dimly, as if from a great distance, he heard a deep-throated roar. Giant figures, one of them in a white shirt, rose out of the red haze, and huge, two-foot-long spear blades dipped and thrust near him. The Wandarobo faded and in a minute were in full flight.

As the red mist cleared out of Ki-Gor's eyes, he saw four M'balla warriors panting on their spears, and Tembo George standing in front of him with hand outstretched.

"My gravy, Ki-Gor!" said a rolling bass voice, "Whut you-all doin' in this neck o' the woods!"

In the confusion of the moment, Ki-Gor did not grasp the implication that his arrival was unexpected. There was Helene to be attended to, for one thing. In that last mad dash, her foot had rolled on a loose rock, and she had suffered a badly sprained ankle in consequence. Ki-Gor carried her the rest of the distance to the stronghold below the ledges, and bound her ankle tightly with some strips of cloth that George gave him. Then, at the far end of the enclosure, a small fire was built against the solid rock, and Ki-Gor and Helene settled themselves beside it and ate the modest meal provided for them by the man they had come to save from his trouble.

THE immense Negro, bull-necked, broad-shouldered, and genial-faced—once George Spelvin of Cincinnati, U.S.A., Pullman porter and ship's cook, now Tembo George, Chief of the M'balla—sat down beside them. After they had finished, he spoke in his rich, musical, bass voice.

"Now, will you-all please tell me how you evuh found me? An' will you tell me *why* in th' name of the good Lawd—you-all evuh *come* at all?"

Ki-Gor raised his head slowly and stared at the Negro.

"You sent for us, George," he said deliberately, "so we came."

"*I* sent for you!" George exclaimed. "I nevuh did no such thing! This yere is th' last place in the world I'd want you an' Miss Helene to be! I wouldn't wish muh worst enemy in th' position I'm in, right now!"

"But Lesolio said you had sent him out to find us," Ki-Gor persisted.

"No *suh!*" said George flatly, "I nevuh said nuthin' about you-all to Lesolio. He voluntee'd to cut his way out and try and get he'p from the Ngombi-Masai down on the plains no'th-east of th' mountain."

Ki-Gor then related the circumstances of their meeting Lesolio to the westward, near the Uele River. When he finished, George groaned.

"Oh, my Lawd! I guess whut must have happened, he couldn't get th'ough to the east, so he went in th' opposite direction, an' ran into you-all by accident. He reco'nized you from those days when we-all fought 'longside each othuh, an' figured he'd just bring you-all back with him. Crazy fool! To make sure you'd come, he made up that there story 'bout how I sent him out lookin' fo' you."

"Lesolio was a brave man," Ki-Gor said gently, "and he is dead, now"

"Yeah, he was brave, all right," said George shaking his head, "but he was almighty dumb! Honest, Ki-Gor, I'm just sick that he brought you and Miss Helene up yere. Because, I've got to tell y'awl somethin'. Ever' one of us yere in this place is strictly a goner!"

Ki-Gor looked from him to Helene and then back again.

"What is a goner?" he asked quietly, although in his heart, he had fair idea of what George meant.

"I mean," George replied, "that they ain't a chance that a single person in this yere place will evuh get out alive. They's ovah two thousan' of the slickest, meanest, blood-thirstiest cannibals in Africa ringed around us, waitin' fer the moment when they c'n rush us an' carry us off to their stew-pots!"

"But I don't understand," said Ki-Gor, "Where is the rest of the M'balla?"

George pointed at the eight silent warriors squatting behind him, and the four tall, beautiful girls just beyond.

"There is my tribe of the M'balla—all that's left of it."

"Great heavens!" Helene exclaimed, "What happened, George?"

"It's a long story, Miss Helene," George said, soberly, "an' a sad one. It all started one day when some boys of the Ngombi-Masai came by on a hunting trip. They're kind of ouah cousins like. They live down on the plains and raise cattle. Now an' then some of the youngsters will go out lookin' fer adventure. Well, this party of young Ngombi-Masai passed ouah village, like I said, an' one of 'em was sick, an' they asked could they leave him behind till he got bettah."

"The boy was sick, all right, but I didn't find out whut ailed him till it was too late. If'n I'd knowed whut he had, I nevah would have kept him in the village wheah all ma people could go in an' see him and talk to him and touch him."

"Why?" said Helene, "Did he have a contagious disease?"

"Miss Helene," said George, "that boy had the small-pox."

"Oh! How dreadful!" said Helene, and explained briefly to Ki-Gor the nature of small-pox.

"I see," said Ki-Gor, when she had finished, "Lesolio called it an Evil Spirit."

"That's whut it seemed like to ma people," said George. "As soon as I reelized that it was small-pox, I did ma best to stop it spreadin' by separatin' the sick ones, but it was just too late. I nevuh got it, because I was vaccinated only a couple a years back, but ma poor M'balla—"

THE great Negro broke off and shook his head. After a moment, he continued.

"They was four hundred an' fifty in the tribe befo' that sick Masai boy put up with us. When the small-pox got through, they wasn't seventy-five able-bodied men, women and children left. I used to have a hundred Morani—bachelor warriors—and I had anothuh hundred married men I could call out as a kind of reserve. But that turrible disease carried 'em all off, exceptin' twenty-seven of 'em. Twenty-seven out of two hundred."

"I'm sorry, George," Ki-Gor said simply. "Then I suppose the Wandarobo saw your weakness."

"They sho' did," the Negro replied, "They was one of 'em used to work in our village makin' spear-blades fer us. His name's Krukra an' he's a devil. He seen whut was goin' on and he right away sent out a call to all the Wandarobo fo' miles around. This yere country around yere used to b'long to th' Wandarobo years ago, until the M'balla come and took it away from 'em. An' th' Wandarobo under this fella, Krukra, figured heah was their chance to get their territory back. So, one day, hundreds of them little brutes just dropped down on us from the trees and started killin'. It was awful. By nightfall, they was just eighteen of us left, an' we sneaked out, an' I led 'em up to this spot."

Ki-Gor looked around the little enclosure, noting some boxes stacked up several feet from the fire.

"This yere's a funny kind of place," George said, "It's a natural fort, on account of th' ledges up theah are too steep to climb, an' on th' other three sides it's all open ground from heah to th' trees. No place for an enemy to take covuh whiles he sneak up on you. You just sit behind these yere rocks and shoot him down. I spotted it quite some time ago, an' stocked it up with food an' ammunition an' a couple o' guns. My idea was that I'd have a place to go in case the M'balla evuh decided to have a revolution against Tembo George.

"Well, bless theah po' hearts, the M'balla nevuh had no revolution, but this yere spot come in handy just the same. Only trouble is, the food is runnin' low. If I had mo' food, I could hold out indefinitely, because they's a little spring o' water yere, an' I got plenty of ammunition. But I just figured out today, we only got food fer about two-three mo' days—five days at the outside. An' when the food is gone—well, I guess *we* is gone. So, you c'n see, Ki-Gor, why I feel so bad about that Lesolio bringin' you up yere. He just the same as put the noose 'round yo' neck."

But Ki-Gor was deep in thought.

"How is it, George," he said after an interval, "that the Ngombi-Masai have not come to your help?"

"I suppose they don't know about our trouble," the Negro answered. "Lesolio an' fo' othuh boys voluntee'd to cut their way out an' try to get to Ngombi-Masai. But Lesolio is the only one I know of that actually got out, an' he went west 'stead of east. I guess the othuh fo' boys were killed."

"How far away from here are these Ngombi-Masai?" Ki-Gor asked.

"About sixty miles the shortest way—ovah the side of the mountain. But it's tough goin', that-a-way. Much easier to go down hill a ways an' then around, but it would put on another twenty miles."

"They are friendly to you, the Ngombi-Masai?" Ki-Gor pursued.

"Sho', they is friendly. They kind of like *good* relatives."

Ki-Gor asked a final question.

"You say you have plenty of ammunition? Enough to hold off the Wandarobo for five more days?"

"Yes, I have—say, whut you figurin' on doin', Ki-Gor?"

The jungle man stood up.

"Helene," he said, in a perfectly matter-of-fact voice, "you will not be able to walk on that ankle for two or three days, so you will have to stay here. But you will be perfectly safe. I will be back in five days with help from the Ngombi-Masai."

"Are you crazy!" gasped George, "you'll nevuh get th'ough that mess o' Wandarobo alive!"

"Yes," said Ki-Gor calmly, "I will."

It was a calm statement of fact.

"The Wandarobo are Bantu," Ki-Gor went on, casually, "and Bantu are afraid of the dark. I will go out now, and they will not even see me. By morning, I will be far away. George, hold out and don't be afraid. I will be back no later than the evening of the fifth day from now."

"But Ki-Gor!" Helene appealed with her voice, "how can you go a hundred and twenty miles in five days?"

"It's all right, Helene," Ki-Gor said with a smile. "Don't be afraid."

He stepped to her side, stooped, and picked up her right hand in his and held it for a moment. Then, bending over her, he swung her hand from side to side and smiled down into her eyes. Helene felt a little catch in her throat. That was the most intimate gesture that Ki-Gor knew of. That child-like swinging of her hand meant that he was pouring his heart out to her.

"Good-bye, Ki-Gor," she said softly, "be careful. Come back in five days, and I'll be waiting for you."

George walked to the edge of the enclosure with Ki-Gor, talking earnestly to him. Finally, he helped him up the rock parapet, and climbed up after him. The two friends stood there for a few more moments, the African white man, and the American black man. George pointed north-east, and Ki-Gor gazed up into the brilliant star-lit sky and got a bearing. Then, a last word and handshake, and Ki-Gor stepped out into the darkness across the face of the landslide.

A HUNDRED little campfires winked among the trees that bordered the opening. Ki-Gor smiled to himself at the Wandarobo—brave and cunning men of the forest that they were, they found it necessary to huddle around a fire when night came, not daring to wander far from the area of firelight. To be sure, there was a sound basis for this caution. Night was the time for the great jungle cats to go hunting, and, therefore, not a healthy time for puny humans to be abroad. But Ki-Gor felt such supreme confidence in himself—in his colossal strength and his lightning wits, that he felt no fear of traveling like this in the dark—only a stimulating awareness of increased danger.

At the moment, the series of campfires presented a little problem. They were not quite continuous along the edge of the woods, but many of them were close enough to their neighbors so that the light from one fire all but overlapped the area lighted by the next. Farther down the slope the gaps between fires were wider. It would perhaps be safer to go down there to enter the forest and pass the ring of besiegers, but Ki-Gor was in a hurry. He held to a straight line across the open rubble and slipped silently into the underbrush not fifty feet from a dozen Wandarobo nodding beside a small blaze. Seventy-five feet on the other side of him was a similar group.

Years before now, Ki-Gor had trained himself—of necessity, if he was to survive in the implacable jungle—to handle his great body like an eel. He twisted and sidled through undergrowth with scarcely a rustle to betray his passing. His body had somehow learned to gauge the pressure of branches against it without any conscious working of his brain. His feet, too, instinctively, sought sure, safe ground, automatically rejecting dry twigs, or entangling vines.

Now, he took a grim pleasure in drifting so silently, so skilfully past the wary Wandarobo. A nasal, whining song lifted up on the still air, over the night hum of the jungle. Ki-Gor smiled to himself, a crooked smile. If all went well, that singer would be singing a different song five days hence.

He was well past the ring of campfires and in the total darkness of the forest when the little dog started to bark. Evidently, a small breeze was carrying his scent back to the Wandarobo. Ki-Gor stood still and listened. The dog kept on barking. It was that unmistakable insistent barking interspersed with short growls which means to any dog owner that there is danger lurking near by. A low mutter of voices rose from the Wandarobo, and the nearest campfire blazed up bright and high as somebody threw fresh dry wood on it.

The dog kept on barking, and he began to sound nearer as if he were coming up wind toward Ki-Gor. That would not do, at all. The dog might pick up his spoor and lead his Wandarobo master straight to him. That in itself would not be serious, as Ki-Gor could swing off the ground into a tree by the nearest vine. But if the Wandarobo ever realized that someone was escaping from Tembo George's fort, they would come out in full cry with torches blazing. The dog would show them his fresh tracks, and while they might not be able to read them by torchlight, they could certainly smell them and know that they were made by no Wandarobo.

Ki-Gor cursed the little dog for his silly yapping. He cursed his owner, too, and devoutly wished that the man who owned such an ill-trained dog should lose him one night chasing a leopard. Suddenly, an idea struck Ki-Gor. He threw back his head and gave the shivering, spine-tingling hunting call of a leopard.

The savage barking abruptly changed to a frightened yelping, fading off as the dog beat a hasty retreat back to its owner. There was a chorus of nervous laughter

from the Wandarobo, and Ki-Gor smiled grimly to himself as he padded off through the inky forest.

FOLLOWING George's directions, Ki-Gor bore straight east. This way carried him across and slightly up the north face of Ruwenzori. At first, it was a steep uphill pull as he climbed out of the ravine. Then he went downhill—though still slanting eastward, and up again out of the next ravine. As he gained the next ridge, he was considerably higher up the mountain. He was beginning to leave the forest behind and coming into the region of the giant junipers and lobelias that grow nowhere else in the world except high on the slopes of Ruwenzori.

A late waning moon rose in front of Ki-Gor and hung red and menacing over the horizon of Uganda. He halted for a moment and gazed around at the awesome scene that the moon so dimly lighted. He was standing on a desolate moorland that stretched upward on his right hand to the distant cloud-capped peak. There were no trees on this eerie slope, but here and there stood a number of gaunt, menacing shapes, well separated from one another. Gloomy and foreboding, they looked like tall, narrow Masai sentinels watching over the vast Ruwenzori Range. They were the giant lobelia.

It is hard to realize that here, on this mountainous waste that lies squarely across the Equator, a plant which in English flower gardens produces a blossom a few inches long, sends spurs straight up toward the sky twenty feet tall! A mind and soul less staunch than Ki-Gor's might well have fled in terror from those forbidding shapes in the dim moonlight. But George had advised him to go over the shoulder of the mountain to make quicker time.

"And, man," George had said, "up theah, you *got* to keep movin', or else just freeze up to an icicle. That wind is powerful cold!"

Ki-Gor kept moving. With no clothing but the leopard skin around his loins, the keen wind bade fair to congeal the blood in his veins. He set off in a dog-trot, slighly uphill, but keeping the moon in his face. He maintained this pace for more than two hours, never stopping, never even slowing down. At length, he came, as George had told him he would, upon a small, round, and very ghostly lake.

As he came over a lobelia-guarded spur, he could see the lake below him. Swathed in midst, it looked like the beautiful upturned face of a young girl lying in her burial clothes.

With scarcely a pause, Ki-Gor plunged down the steep slope to the lake. Still following George's directions, he skirted the lake shore until at the lower end he came upon a little stream, the lake's outlet. This stream was to be his guide which would lead him without fail straight down the mountain to the country of the Ngombi-Masai. Without halting, Ki-Gor propelled his great body tirelessly downhill beside the stream.

In one way, it was easier to maintain his dog-trot going downhill, this way. Certainly it was easier on his tortured lungs and heart. But in another way, the constant braking of his speed took a terrific toll of the muscles in the back of his thighs, and as the earth continually fell away from under his flying feet, his whole body was jolted and jarred with every other step.

HE was still in the open country of the giant lobelia and junipers when the yellow moon disappeared behind Ruwenzori. But not long after that, he hit the timber line, and it was then that he realized the tremendous value of the guiding stream —by now grown into a small, rushing river. Through the night gloom of the mountain forest Ki-Gor pounded, never relaxing his pace, and never having to stop to take his bearings.

When the impenetrable blackness of the forest began to give way to a murky gray, and individual objects could be indistinctly made out, Ki-Gor slowed down. When he came to a comparatively open patch in the forest, he selected a big tree and climbed up into its upper branches. Finding a comfortable crotch which commanded a view of the eastern horizon, he curled up and went sound asleep. The comparative warmth of the lower ground felt grateful to his battered body, and he didn't wake up until he felt the direct rays of the early morning sun pouring full on him.

Ki-Gor felt amazingly refreshed after his scant two hours sleep. His body was always in such magnificent condition

that he was able to recuperate from fatigue in a remarkably short time. However, as he clambered down the tree to resume his headlong downhill journey, he had to admit to himself that he felt a little light-headed. There was an unpleasant air of unreality to the world. To clear his head he decided to take a quick dip in the swift waters of the little river.

The water of the stream was deceptively clear. As he waded in, he suddenly found himself, to his astonishment, up to his neck. The current promptly knocked him off his feet, and he was carried down the icy rapids for a considerable distance before he was able to pull himself up on the bank. He lay there panting for a moment, his whole body deliciously aglow. The cold bath had done the job—his head was clear.

The unexpected depth of the river and the swiftness of its current gave Ki-Gor an idea. As he hurried down the river bank he kept an eye out for dead trees. He had not far to go. Just below a steep rapids—almost a series of small falls—the river hit a small shelf on the mountain side where it ran level for perhaps an eighth of a mile, broadening its banks.

Here Ki-Gor found what he wanted, several tall trees whose roots had been drowned long ago by the overflowing river. They stood now in a foot of calm water, naked of leaves and bark and rotting at the base. It did not take long to push over four of these trees and break off the tops and branches. Then Ki-Gor reeved several thick vines around the four trunks, and presently had a serviceable raft.

To be sure it would not last more than a few hours, as the rotten, porous wood would eventually get waterlogged, and the vines would disintegrate. But, as it was, the raft would carry him down the mountain as fast as if not faster than he could go on foot stumbling through the underbrush. He whittled a ten-foot steering pole from a tough green sapling, got on board his frail craft and pushed it out into the main current.

In the beginning, Ki-Gor found some difficulty in keeping the raft properly headed downstream. It had a tendency to yaw to one side and hang up on the bank. But, after that problem was solved, the raft went bobbing down the current gaily enough, maintaining a good six miles an hour in the calm stretches and much more in rapids. The rapids presented a problem, and three times Ki-Gor had to beach the raft for fear it would fall apart under him, and perform some quick repairs.

On the whole, however, the raft was a success. Especially, did Ki-Gor appreciate this when the river flowed through a great bamboo forest. George had warned Ki-Gor of this forest, telling him that the trees grew so close together that they were practically impassable. If Ki-Gor had been on foot, he would have had to crawl slowly around the trees along the river bank, and would have lost a great deal of valuable time. As it was, he floated grandly down the river at a fine rate of speed.

The bamboo forest went by and was replaced by a hard-wood jungle, which in turn, gave way to open rolling veldt. About this time, the raft became so water-logged as to be of little further usefulness, so Ki-Gor abandoned it and swam to shore. Once there, he set off down the river bank at his old dog-trot.

He felt well rested from his hours on the raft, and was generally not unsatisfied with his progress. He judged that he was not far from his destination, and the sun still lacked an hour of its noon position at the zenith. That meant that he had come almost sixty tortuous miles in about fifteen hours — including the two hours he spent asleep in the tree. At that rate, he exulted, he would be back with help for Tembo George in much less than five days.

In a little while he came to a sharp bend in the river, and as he loped around the curving bank he had to come to a sudden halt. His way was blocked by a great herd of cattle. They were beautiful beasts with small delicate hoofs and enormous horns that grew from a thick heavy base straight up to a long tapering tip. The famous big-horned cattle of the Masai!

FAR over on the other side of the herd, were two herdsmen, and Ki-Gor was starting around to talk to them, when he heard a hail to his right. He looked up and saw a man standing on a knoll overlooking the river.

It was the tallest man Ki-Gor had ever

seen in his life. A tall feather head-dress accentuated the man's height, and his clothing accentuated his slenderness. It consisted of a length of white cloth drawn tight around his lower body and legs right down to the ankles, the other end being looped over the left shoulder. He was holding a prodigious spear with a broad blade at least two feet long, a stout wooden haft, and at the end of that, a long metal spindle. The man's chiseled black features were very much like those of the M'balla, except that his lips were even thinner, his nose more hooked and higher-bridged, and his head even longer and narrower.

"Jambo!" Ki-Gor called out—the conventional Swahili greeting.

The man spoke a phrase of Masai, and when Ki-Gor did not answer, he came slowly down off the knoll, muttering to himself, his narrow hips swaying with exquisite insolence. As he approached Ki-Gor he stared over his head and raised his voice in Swahili.

"I would prefer," he said, loftily, "to use the more sonorous language of my fathers, but if you speak only the trade dialect, I suppose I shall have to put up with it. Answer my questions quickly and briefly. First, by what right do you dare to pass through our lands?"

With that he planted himself six feet in front of Ki-Gor, and deigned to look for the first time at the travel-stained figure. As he did, his eyes flew open in astonishment.

"In the name of Heaven!" he gasped, "are you a—a white man?"

"Yes, I am a white man," Ki-Gor answered, smothering a smile, "and I will willingly answer your questions provided you will answer some questions which I will put to you."

"But if you are a white man," exclaimed the slender giant with great agitation, "where is your safari? I saw a white man once, and he had a safari a mile long of Kikuyus and Kavirondo boys. He had a Moslem gun-bearer, too, and a white hat, and he wore tubes on his thighs. You are not wearing tubes, you are wearing a leopard skin."

"I am a different kind of white man," Ki-Gor answered patiently, "those others are foreigners. I am a native African white man."

"I never heard of such a thing," the giant retorted.

"Well, you will, Tall Tree," said Ki-Gor, a little nettled by the man's arrogance, "I am Ki-Gor and I am looking for the Ngombi-Masai. I have an important message for the Headman and the War-Chief. Tell me, do you know these Masai? Do they dwell far from here?"

Ki-Gor asked the last two questions out of pure malice, knowing full well that the insolent warrior was a Masai of the Masai. However, the warrior did not rise to the bait. He merely squinted his eyes and sauntered forward a few steps.

"No," said the warrior, as if talking to himself, "I cannot make you out. You are powerfully built, but ugly. Your shoulders and arms are so thick, and your chest is like a barrel. It is true you are fairly tall—I'd say not quite six feet five, but, of course, that isn't tall compared to me. I'm seven feet even. Are you really white?"

Ki-Gor's temper was rising swiftly with the Masai's impudent words. Then when the towering giant reached out a careless hand and pinched the skin over Ki-Gor's ribs, there was a brief and inevitable explosion. Ki-Gor's right hand whipped down, seized the offending black fingers in a grip of iron. Then he stepped back quickly and jerked. Before the astounded Masai knew what was happening, he was whipped off his long legs and sent crashing to the ground where he lay flat on his face.

Ki-Gor backed off a few paces and sat down as the warrior slowly picked himself up.

"I hope you are not hurt. Tall Tree," Ki-Gor said pleasantly—he was quite cooled off, "but it was necessary to teach you that no one touches Ki-Gor uninvited. Now, I have no time to be bandying words, so tell me which way your village lies."

The Masai did not answer for a moment, but stood motionless with an expression of utmost hate on his handsome face. Then he slowly swung the blade of his spear so that it pointed at Ki-Gor.

"For that insult," he said in a choked voice, "you will pay with your unworthy life."

Then he leaped forward.

KI-GOR had a split-second decision to make. The surest way of saving his life was to kill the charging Masai. On the other hand, he belonged to the tribe whose help Ki-Gor desperately needed. One does not kill a potential ally. So, as the maddened Masai lunged at him thrusting the huge spear downward, Ki-Gor flung his body to one side. The two-foot blade just missed his shoulder and hissed into the earth. Ki-Gor rolled over once, gathering his legs under him. He came out of the roll on his feet. Without a moment's hesitation, he hurled himself at the Masai's long brittle legs. Once again, the Masai was slammed to the ground.

This time Ki-Gor gave his adversary no time to recover. He half rose and threw himself on to the Masai's chest, planting a knee on each black shoulder.

"Listen to me, O Hot-Tempered One," he hissed down into the contorted black face, "there is no time for this childish nonsense. I am Ki-Gor, and I come from Tembo George, Chief of the M'balla. They have been all but wiped out by the Wandarobo, and I have come to get help for them. I must see Shafara, Headman of the Ngombi-Masai, and the War-Chief, Merishu, and I must see them at once."

At Ki-Gor's words, the Masai relaxed and an expression of open wonder replaced the fierce hatred in his face.

"That is altogether different!" he exclaimed, "why didn't you tell me in the first place that you came from Tembo George!"

"You gave me very little chance," Ki-Gor observed, dryly, "now, if I release you, will you get up peaceably and lead me to Shafara and Merishu?"

"Most certainly," the Masai replied, "in fact, *I* am Merishu."

Ki-Gor stood up quickly with a short laugh, and held out his hand to the Masai.

"This has been very unfortunate," he declared, "and I hope—"

"No, no," Merishu interrupted, climbing to his feet, "it was all my fault. Not knowing who you were, I was very discourteous to you. I'm extremely glad now that I didn't kill you. You move very fast, do you use magic?"

There was deep respect in Merishu's face, but also deep mortification at his recent defeat. Ki-Gor tactfuly replied yes, that he did use a little magic on occasion.

"I thought so," said Merishu, much relieved, "because I really am a very good fighter. But come, tell me more about this misfortune that has struck the M'balla. First, though, let us exchange spears in token of friendship."

Solemnly, Ki-Gor and the seven-foot War-Chief handed each other their spears. Merishu looked over his new weapon curiously.

"Hmm. Congo type," he remarked, "very small tip. But it has a good balance."

"Yes, it throws well," Ki-Gor offered, "good for distance work."

"Yes, I can see that," said Merishu, still staring at Ki-Gor's assegai. "But, of course, we Masai don't go in much for distance work. We like to close in. Come on, our village is just over the ridge. We'll go and find Shafara. You see, I have no authority until Shafara declares a state of war. And Shafara can't declare war until he has consulted the Sacred Bull. That all takes time, of course, so if Tembo George is really hard pressed, we'd better hurry along. Tell me, how on earth could the Wandarobo ever get up the courage to attack the M'bala?"

As the two men hurried toward the village, Ki-Gor recounted the tragedy that had overtaken Tembo George's people, and told of the desperate situation he was now in with his handful of survivors in the rock fort. When Ki-Gor had finished, Merishu shook his head gravely, and intoned a sentence in Masai.

"That is an old proverb of our people," he added in Swahili. "The translation of it would be, 'We are as the guinea-fowl who never knows what moment the hawk wil devour her.'"

"Truly spoken," said Ki-Gor grimly, "except that in this case, it will be the Wandarobo who do the devouring."

"Ugh!" Merishu shuddered. "Detestable little cannibals! But don't fear. That's Shafara's house over there across the enclosure. We'll get him to speak to the Sacred Bull right away and get permission to declare war. And as soon as that's done, I'll call out the Morani and hold the War-Feast. How many Wandarobo do you think there are up the mountain?"

"Tembo George thinks two thousand."

"Well, I have two hundred Morani and I think that will be enough. But just to be on the safe side, we can call for a few volunteers from the married men. They ought to be glad of a trip away from their wives."

THE village of the Ngombi-Masai consisted of a quantity of woven-reed huts arranged in a wide circle around a large patch of bare ground. The ring of huts backed up to a high, circular stockade, which had but one gateway. Merishu led Ki-Gor straight across the enclosure to the headman's hut, and a moment later Shafara stood in his doorway.

The headman was not quite so tall as Merishu, and he was some years older, but he had the same lithe elegance and aristocratic manner. He listened gravely while Ki-Gor told his story—with frequent interjections by Merishu—and at the end of the recital his eyes flashed and he made a sweeping gesture with his right arm.

"The M'balla are blood-kin to us," he declaimed in a deep voice, "they shall be revenged! And we will save Tembo George and your woman who is with him. I will go immediately and gain the consent of tthe Sacred Bull."

With that, he strode off across the enclosure. Merishu looked after him and gave a satisfied sigh.

"Splendid!" Merishu said, "that's even prompter than I thought he would be. You know, Ki-Gor, I'm really very sad about the M'balla, but I can't deny I'm excited over the prospect of a campaign. We haven't had a decent war around here since the Nandi raided our cattle, nearly a year ago. Of course, the Wandarobo are nothing like the fighters that the Nandi are, but there will be enough of the dirty little cannibals this trip to make it interesting."

"Yes," said Ki-Gor absently. His mind was not on Merishu's conversation, and his eyes were anxiously following Shafara. Then he turned to Merishu with a frown.

"Tell me, Merishu, about your Sacred Bull. How do you mean that you have to get his consent before you go to war? How can a bull give consent, or even know anything at all concerning the activities of men?"

"Shh! That's sacrilege! This is no ordinary bull, it's a Sacred Bull. It is blessed by God and through it, God speaks to us."

"Speaks to you!" Ki-Gor was even more puzzled. "You mean the bull talks?"

"Certainly."

"But animals can't talk," protested Ki-Gor, "that is, not in any human language."

"That's true," Merishu said tolerantly, "You see, the bull himself, doesn't actually talk—although he appears to be talking pure Masai, I suppose it's God talking through him. It's a Divine matter. Every year, we sacrifice the current Sacred Bull and eat him. Then, immediately, the little priest goes out to the herd and touches another bull. We bring *that* one in and install him in the Sacred Stable. The next day the new Sacred Bull is talking just as freely as the old one did. It's a wonderful thing for us, because in that way, we get good advice straight from God, and we would never think of going against it."

Ki-Gor looked at the War-Chief keenly. The young man appeared to be absolutely sincere.

"Thats amazing," Ki-Gor said slowly, "I never heard of anything like that before."

"Nor have I," Merishu answered comfortably, "I don't know that there's another Sacred Bull anywhere in the world. Naturally, we're very proud and very grateful for it—it obviously gives us a tremendous advantage over our enemies. Oh! Here comes Shafara back. I wonder what happened—he's walking very slowly."

Shafara's steps were dragging, and his face was averted. Ki-Gor felt a dreadful misgiving.

"What's the matter?" cried Merishu, "what did the Sacred Bull say?"

"The Sacred Bull said that we should on no account go to war with the Wandarobo at this time." The headman looked sadly at Ki-Gor and added, "It makes me very sad, and I'm triply sorry for Tembo George."

"BUT I can't understand that at all," Merishu exclaimed, "Why? Why? Were there any reasons?"

"Yes," Shafara replied, "the reason given was that we were dangerously weakened by our war with the Nandi, and that we should not go into another war until we had recovered from the last one."

"But that's not true!" Merishu cried excitedly, "we only lost thirty men in that war and we crippled the Nandi for another five years!"

"Merishu! Merishu!" Shafara's voice held gentle reproof. "Do you dare contradict God?"

"No, of course not," said Merishu hastily, "but I say there's something wrong somewhere. How about that silly old priest? He might have forgotten to feed the bull properly today, and that's put the bull in a bad mood. You know, I think something should be done about the priest. He's getting so old. I think he's going a little wrong in the head. He's a foreigner of some kind, anyway, and he makes me nervous the way he never says a word."

"No, Merishu," said Shafara, "you must not talk that way. The priest has always been afflicted with dumbness, and we need him. No one else would be able to discover the new Sacred Bull each year."

DURING all this discussion, Ki-Gor stood stunned and incredulous. He had left Helene with George in a place of great danger, but he had been confident that if he could only win through to the Ngombi-Masai, that war-like and invincible tribe would promptly return with him and rescue her from the Wandarobo. And, for a time, events had borne out his confidence.

He had skilfully eluded the cannibals, and had made fast time down to the plains. And, once the initial misunderstanding with Merishu had been cleared up, he had found the young War-Chief enthusiastic about taking an expedition up the mountain. Shafara had immediately approved the idea. Everything pointed to a swift and successful conclusion of his errand.

And then had come this unexplainable pronouncement—this forbidding of the expedition by the tribal god through the fantastic and improbable medium of a Talking Bull! Ki-Gor's jaw hardened. He was not accustomed to this kind of defeat. He well realized, however, that he must be tactful.

"Shafara," he began, "so much depends on this matter—not only the life of my woman, but the life of my friend, Tembo George, and the lives of twelve remaining M'balla, your kinsmen. Will you appeal again to the bull? And may I come with you to add strength to your plea?"

"I don't think I could permit that," Shafara said cautiously, "you are not a Masai and our God may be displeased—"

"Oh! take him with you," the impetuous Merishu exclaimed, "after all, the priest himself is not a Masai. Come on, we'll all three go."

Eventually, Shafara gave in, and presently Ki-Gor found himself in the stable of the Sacred Bull. This proved to be a large bare hut, one side of which was stacked high with green fodder. Near the door, a sleek hunting-cheetah sprawled and watched the visitors with slit eyes. In the middle of the hut, a large, beautiful, brown bull was tethered to a post driven into the dirt floor. A little, gnomish, old man was sitting on a three-legged stool by the bull's head feeding him handfuls of grass. The bull chewed the grass complacently and stared vacantly at the three tall men as they entered, but the priest paid no attention to them beyond a furtive glance or two. Shafara bowed.

"A-man Ngai-ai," he intoned in Masai, "I pray to God. I pray that He will listen again to the plight of our kinsmen, the M'balla, and that He will reconsider His decision and permit us to go to their aid and chastise the detestable Wandarobo."

There was a long silence.

The bull continued to chew grass and stare. Once or twice the old priest looked at the three men with lack-luster eyes, then he stood up and faced the bull. And then Ki-Gor's spine suddenly crawled as the bull spoke!

The bull spoke in Masai, so Ki-Gor had no idea of what he was saying, but just the very idea of a human voice issuing from an animal was enough to make him want to get out of the hut as fast as he could. Yet he dug his nails into his palms and forced himself to stand motionless, as the curiously soft, hollow voice filled the hut. It was terrifying and Ki-Gor needed all the raw courage in his character to keep his self-control.

As the bull spoke, he appeared to be chewing, but the rhythmic Masai syllables sounded exactly in time with the moist jaws. Ki-Gor shifted his eyes to the priest. The little old man appeared to be supremely bored. For the most part he

watched the bull, but now and then he looked down at the floor or at the wisp of grass in his hand.

The soft, muffled voice went on in Masai for several minutes, and before it finished the terror had left Ki-Gor. With deliberate rudeness, he turned around and squatted before the cheetah. Ki-Gor had a way with cheetahs. He had trained a half dozen of them and had a knack of handling the great dog-like cats. Behind him, now, the voice of the bull rose shrilly, and muttered exclamations came from the two Masai. But Ki-Gor serenely disregarded them and reached out a hand toward the cheetah.

The hunting cat sucked in its breath and growled. Ki-Gor held his hand a foot away from its nose. The cheetah, still growling, stretched its muzzle forward and sniffed Ki-Gor's knuckles. The voice of the bull stopped abruptly and Shafara and Merishu stood on either side of Ki-Gor in great agitation.

"Come, Ki-Gor!" the headman whispered, "you must leave this stable at once!"

KI-GOR got up unhurriedly, cast a last glance at the cud-chewing bull and stalked out of the hut. He noted that the old priest had been glaring venemously at him.

Out in the open air, the two Masai faced him with stern expressions.

"The bull repeated the words forbidding us to make war," Shafara said, "and told us we did wrong to bring you in there. He warned us to send you away quickly because you are a spy sent by the English to find out our secrets."

Ki-Gor stared at the headman in amazement.

"What nonsense is this?" he demanded, "I am not a spy!"

"We believe our God," said Shafara stonily. "It is best that you leave our country immediately."

"Wha!" Ki-Gor exploded, "I had always heard that the Masai were a fierce, proud nation, afraid of nothing on earth! I was sure that they would leap to arms to aid their blood-kin against the primitive Bantu! But what do I find? A race of timorous women, talkative and gullible! Frightened by a Talking Bull, which in itself is nothing but some crude kind of magic! I will go and try to save my woman single-handed, and I hope that after the Cannibal Wandarobo have fattened on the flesh and blood of your cousins, the M'balla, they will come down and do the same to you!"

The two Masai stood silent for a moment, their faces stiff with rage. Then Shafara spoke in a low voice.

"So be it, Ki-Gor. You have spoken, and being our guest, we cannot harm you. Merishu will go out with you and will kill a steer so that you may eat before your journey. Then he will take you to our boundaries and see you away. And, if for any reason, you ever return, Ki-Gor, you will no longer be a guest, and I will myself take pleasure in killing you for the mortal insults you have heaped on us!"

An hour and a half later on the river bank, Ki-Gor and Merishu finished their meal of raw beef beside the carcass of a fat steer. Neither one had spoken a word since they left the village. Ki-Gor's mouth was set in a thin line as his mind churned with a hundred different plans—all equally desperate—for saving Helene from the cannibals.

But Merishu's expression had gradually been softening. From outraged pride it had changed to extreme regret. Finally he broke the appalling silence.

"You know you shouldn't have said that, Ki-Gor," he offered, "I mean about our being timid and gullible, and that our God was just a piece of crude magic. I'd give much if you hadn't said that. I was hoping to go on this campaign with you. In fact, I thought a lot of you—still do. But you can't expect to attack a man's God and have him thank you for it."

Ki-Gor made no answer.

"What do you mean a piece of crude magic?" Merishu persisted, "how can the Sacred Bull be a piece of crude magic? It's God talking to us."

Merishu's efforts at conciliation were too generous for Ki-Gor to ignore any longer.

"It is quite fitting, Merishu," he replied at length, "that men should believe in God. But you cannot tell me that God speaks to men through dumb animals. There is some trick about your Talking Bull. I don't know what it is, I can't explain it, I don't know how it works—but there's a trick just the same. As for calling you

cowards, I take it back. I know you are not. I spoke hastily, in a rage. But I am desperate. My wife and my best friend are in terrible danger, and right now, I don't know how I'm going to get them out of it."

"I sympathize with you," said Merishu, "and there is nothing I would rather do than come and help you, but my hands are tied. That second hill over there is our boundary. I'll trust you to go along by yourself. It looks like rain and I want to get back to the village. Here, take some steaks with you to eat on the way. Go with God!"

The Masai jumped up and held out his hand impulsively. The two men shook hands and walked off in opposite directions without a backward look.

AS he headed toward the grim pile of Ruwenzori, Ki-Gor cudgeled his brain for an explanation of the phenomenal Talking Bull. He went over every detail that he could remember of the visit to the Sacred Stable. He had watched everyone in the hut while the bull talked, and no one had opened his mouth—or as much as moved his lips. It was a flesh-and-blood bull, there could be no doubt of that. So the mysterious voice could not have come from a man hiding within it.

Yet Ki-Gor was too hard-headed and practical to believe in a supernatural origin for the voice. Ki-Gor's self-upbringing among the rigors of the jungle had trained him to look for a natural cause for any puzzling phenomenon, no matter how baffling it appeared on the surface. A drop of rain on his nose brought Ki-Gor back to his immediate surrounding.

Merishu's remark that it looked like rain proved to be well founded. Standing on the hill that the Masai had indicated as the boundary, Ki-Gor looked back eastwards and saw a wall of rain approaching from that direction. A tiny speck on the veldt far away he recognized as the carcass of the steer Merishu had killed. In a moment the rain swept over it and blotted it from sight. Ki-Gor sat down resigned to a wetting. Where had that voice come from?

Somebody might have been hiding just outside the hut. But Ki-Gor rejected the idea regretfully. The voice had sounded too close. Then, far back in his brain, a tiny idea, a minute observation he had made earlier in that hut struggled for recollection. What was it now? Something about the priest. Oh yes! The cords on the priest's scrawny neck had stood out when the bull talked. What made them do that? Ki-Gor contracted the muscles of his own neck, now, experimentally. The cords did not stand out. He tried closing his lips and then working his lower jaw. That seemed to make the cords stand out a little. He said a few words out loud with his mouth closed. Ki-Gor's eyes widened in astonishment.

By this time, the rain hit him. It came down in buckets full. But Ki-Gor sat on the hill top absorbed in his new idea, and never even felt wet.

Two hours later, the sun set prematurely behind a bank of black clouds, and Ki-Gor rose up with sudden decision. He thrust Merishu's great spear into the earth by the spindle, felt the knife at his waist, and started back toward the village of the Ngombi-Masai. It was almost dark when he paused by the carcass of the steer and cut out the liver, and it was totally dark by the time he arrived outside the stockade of the village.

There were comfortable evening sounds from within, murmuring voices and the spasmodic lowing of cattle. Evidently the Masai drove their cattle within the stockade at night to protect them from the lions. Ki-Gor tried to guess the location of the Sacred Stable from outside, and after prowling twice around the village selected the section of wall he thought was closest to it. Through a chink in the stockade he could see one or two small fires that were obviously going out. The village was going to bed.

Although the stockade was tall, it offered no particular problem to Ki-Gor. He reached up as high as possible and sunk the strong blade of his knife deep into a log paling. Gripping the haft, he drew himself up until his other hand reached the top of the stockade. Noiselessly, he slipped over the top and dropped down on the other side, his knife blade in his teeth.

Looking about him swiftly, he saw that he was not far wrong in his calculations. The Sacred Stable was only two huts away. Ki-Gor moved stealthily toward it. Even

though it was too dark to tell, he guessed that there was no back entrance, having seen no indication of one earlier that afternoon. He crept slowly along the reed wall of the hut toward the front. Moving two paces out he saw a small dying fire of red coals a few feet in front of the door, and beside the fire a small pile of faggots.

Just then a chain clinked within, and a moment later, a sinuous form slunk out of the doorway and moved toward him. Just as the cheetah started to growl, Ki-Gor pulled the beef's liver out from under his belt and lobbed it deftly toward the beast. The cheetah pounced on the delicacy and growled no more. Ki-Gor circled him, flipped several faggots on the fire, and slipped through the doorway into the Sacred Stable.

He stepped to one side quickly and then stood motionless. There was no sound of any kind. Then the faggots outside began to catch flame, and a flickering light outlined the great horns of the bull. As the fire burned higher, Ki-Gor made out a slight form lying on the ground close to the wall. In two strides Ki-Gor was standing over the old priest, his knife blade glinting in the firelight. The priest looked upward calmly.

"SO you *were* an English agent, after all," the priest said—in English. "I realy didn't think you were. I thought you were some sort of white savage trying to call the Masai out to war against the Wandarobo. I knew the British authorities at Entebbe were watching this region and might get curious enough to investigate us if we went to war. And if they did that, they would most certainly discover in the person of the mute priest of the Sacred Bull, Professor Albert Burton, who in 1914 was England's greatest ventriloquist, and in 1916 was a deserter from the British Army in German East Africa.

"Well, I suppose it's all over now. Anyway, I've had twenty-four years of supreme authority over a tribe of African giants. Really, their sublime confidence in the Deity that I have created for them has been a deeply gratifying testimony to my art. I was a little nervous of you this afternoon—I could see you watching me like a hawk, although you pretended not to—but even so, I think I gave one of my greatest performances. Tell me, could you detect the slightest movement of my lips?"

If Ki-Gor was unable to grasp half the significance of the priest's unexpected and complete confession, he tried not to show it. The word, "ventriloquist" meant nothing to him, but he did perceive that his guess concerning the origin of the voice had turned out to be amazingly accurate. The thing which he had never suspected and which astounded him so now, was that the old man was English. He answered the old man's question, which, happily, he had understood.

"No," he said in English, "I did not see your lips move. But your neck—"

"Of course!" cut in the old man, bitterly, "I'm getting old, and my neck muscles must show as I talk down in my throat. Well, what do you intend doing? Fetch me along to Entebbe? It might be rather a ticklish job taking me away from the Masai, you know. The Sacred Bull merely has to say a few words and they'd tear you to pieces."

"Yes, but you would have to be standing near the bull," said Ki-Gor shrewdly, "or he could not talk."

"Quite," the old man admitted, "but somebody else near me—Shafara for instance—could talk, and talk with the familiar voice of God."

"There is no need for you to try and fight me," Ki-Gor said, a plan forming rapidly in his mind. "I am not going to take you away from here."

"You aren't!" the old man cried with pathetic eagerness, "you mean—I can stay on—as priest of the Sacred Bull?"

"Yes. The Masai believe in their God, and it would be bad to destroy their faith."

"That is true!" the ventriloquist said with quiet dignity. Ki-Gor could see the gratefulness glowing in his eyes.

"But if I let you stay," said Ki-Gor, "you must do something for me."

"Ah-ha!" said the priest dryly, "here it comes. What do you want, gold? I have plenty."

"No," said Ki-Gor, "I want the Sacred Bull to tell the Masai to go back with me and rescue my friends from the Wandarobo."

There was a long pause. Then the old man said slowly, "What's the good of that

to me? I told you first off the reason I didn't want the Masai at war with anybody because it might start an investigation by the British."

"The British will not hear of this war," Ki-Gor replied promptly. "The Wandarobo are sixty miles west of here up on Ruwenzori."

"Oh! I see!" said the old man, "Belgian territory, eh?"

Ki-Gor had not the slightest idea whether it was Belgian territory or not, but as he was running a colossal bluff, he remained silent.

"Well then, it might be all right," the priest went on. He glanced up at Ki-Gor's shaggy head. "Look here, are you a British agent?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply, "I am. But I am—" Ki-Gor searched his mind for the phrase—"not on official business."

"I see," the old man said doubtfully. "When do you want me to do this?"

"Now," said Ki-Gor, "and there must be no mistakes. I will call Shafara and Merishu, and then I will stand beside you. The point of my knife will touch your back. You will speak Swahili and say exactly what I tell you and no more. If you say one word in Masai, or one word against me, I will kill you swiftly. If you play fair with me, no harm will come to you."

After another long pause, the former Professor Albert Burton, vaudeville ventriloquist, and now priest of the Sacred Bull, said, "I suppose if I don't agree to your plan, you would kill me here and now."

"Yes," said Ki-Gor with commendable simplicity.

"Very well, then, call Shafara and Merishu."

AT sunset of the next day, Merishu gave the order to halt and camp for the night. Two hundred Morani of the Ngombi-Masai scattered over the veldt, some to hunt small game, others to collect firewood and thorn bushes for bomas. Merishu estimated that the little army had covered more than half the eighty miles around the foot of Ruwenzori to the village of the M'balla, and he felt well satisfied. He looked around for Ki-Gor and saw him stretched out under a tree, a beautiful cheetah lying protectively beside him.

"You are tired, Ki-Gor," said Merishu, approaching the jungle man. "Well, you can have a long sleep tonight."

Ki-Gor sat up unsteadily. He was stupefied from lack of sleep, but he knew he must stay awake a little while longer out of politeness to the War-Chief.

"You know, this has been a very strange affair," Merishu began, sitting down. "Never before has the Sacred Bull contradicted its own statement. Never before has the bull spoken in Swahili. Never before have I led the Morani out to a campaign before dawn with no feast and no long sleep to prepare them for the journey. It is curious, too, that the old priest should have given you his cheetah."

"It is a very good cheetah," Ki-Gor remarked, stroking the beast's muzzle, "and beautifully trained."

"Ki-Gor!" Merishu fixed his eyes meaningfully on the jungle man, "you said yesterday you thought the Talking Bull was a piece of crude magic. Did you find out that it was magic, and overcome it with your own magic?"

"No, Merishu," Ki-Gor answered with a smile, "there is no magic about the bull, and I used no magic. And now, my friend, let me sleep, for I am very tired. If we can start off before dawn again tomorrow, I would like it. That would make it possible for us to reach Tembo George before nightfall, and his food supply will not hold out much longer than that."

The jungle man slept soundly for nine solid hours, and woke up feeling refreshed and ravenously hungry. It was still dark but Merishu was on the job and was already routing out his Morani. They breakfasted quickly on cold antelope meat and set out for Ruwenzori.

Ki-Gor set the pace, and a terrific one it was. The longest Masai legs were hard put to it to keep up with him. But Merishu and all his command were well aware of the need for haste and there were no complaints all day until two hours before sunset when the little army climbed into the foothills and struck the bottom of the broad trail that led up to the landslide. Here some of the Morani balked. They argued that on top of a thirty-mile march, they could not make a stiff climb of four miles on empty stomachs and then be ex-

pected to fight well against a numerous and elusive enemy in his own element, a thick forest.

Ki-Gor answered the argument by saying that it was unlikely that there would be much fighting—that it would be near dark by the time the force arrived at the landslide. His plan was to camp on the landslide overnight, and the next morning lift the seige on George, Helene, and the M'balla survivors.

The more the Morani balked, the harder Ki-Gor pressed them to go forward. His stongest reason for pushing ahead he did not mention—that was, that he could not bear the thought of being separated another night from Helene, when he was this close to her. He wanted fiercely to run to her side, to touch her again and assure himself that she was safe. Eventually, Merishu, seeing Ki-Gor's agitation, came to his help and ordered the Morani to march.

The trail was broad enough for two men to walk abreast on it and Merishu formed his column in that manner. The tall, spoon-shaped, bull-hide shields were slipped on left arms in battle position, and the murderous broad-bladed spears gripped point upward ready for instant action. Before he took his position at the head of the column with Merishu, Ki-Gor gazed approvingly at the little army. There were only two hundred of them, but they were strapping fighting men, absolutely fearless and invincible in battle.

They came of a race which not many generations back had swept down from the North like wolves into East Africa where they had overrun and terrorized a huge territory far out of proportion to their numbers. The weight and headlong ferocity of the Masai attack had almost invariably prevailed over the far more numerous Bantu tribes they came up against.

Ki-Gor went up and stood beside Merishu at the head of the column, and the march was resumed.

IT was a fearsome, armored snake more than a hundred yards long that wound up the mountain side toward the landslide. Talking had been forbidden, so there was no sound except the heavy breathing of two hundred men climbing a steep incline, and now and then a hollow boom as two shields accidentaliy collided. By mutual consent, Ki-Gor and Merishu had taken back their own spears, and Ki-Gor held his point forward as he pressed up the trail, his eyes searching the surrounding jungle for signs of the enemy. The last barbaric touch to the scene was supplied by the cheetah stalking silently at Ki-Gor's side.

Nerves taut, Ki-Gor never for a moment relaxed his vigilant scrutiny of the forest about him. The afternoon twilight of the shaded north face of Ruwenzori had long since set in, making the visibility poor. But the jungle man was alert for any suspicious movement of tree branches or bushes. He did not really expect to encounter any Wandarobo until the landslide was fairly near, yet it was possible that the tree-men might attack at any moment.

However, the first two miles were covered without incident, and the third. But when three-quarters of the last mile were traversed without a sign of the Wandarobo, a tiny lurking fear began to grow bigger in the back of Ki-Gor's mind. Unconsciously, he began to travel faster. Merishu threw him an anxious glance.

"Where are the Wandarobo?" the War-Chief whispered.

Ki-Gor shook his head dumbly, but the knuckles of his spearhand showed white.

For the last quarter of that last mile, Ki-Gor threw caution to the winds and hastened forward without regard for the possibility of ambush. The Masai panted and strained after him without complaint. The excitement of impending battle began to grip them, and a feeling that at last they were entering on the climax of their journey.

When Ki-Gor turned the last corner in the trail and saw beyond the arch of the trees the open space of the landslide, he sprinted forward alone. He burst out of the mouth of the path and halted on the loose gravel.

"George! Helene!" he shouted, "it is Ki-Gor! I am back with the Masai! Don't shoot at us!"

His voice echoed eerily up the ravine, then died away. Ki-Gor strained his ears for the answer, although the ledge was only a hundred yards away.

There was no answer.

"George!" Ki-Gor shouted, "Tembo George! Answer me! It is Ki-Gor!"

After the mocking echoes died away again, there was dead silence. A frightful, cold fear clutched at Ki-Gor's heart. He stood rooted to the spot for a dreadful moment, not daring to interpret that hideous silence. Behind him the Masai were pouring out of the mouth of the trail and fanning out efficiently on either side of him. Ki-Gor uttered a ghastly cry and sprang forward. Straight up to George's fort below the ledge he ran, the cheetah bounding along beside him.

A minute later the sweating, panting Masai gathered around him as he stood transfixed in a scene of desolation.

The ground of the enclosure was strewn with the bodies of more than forty Wandaroo. Blood was spattered everywhere, over the corpses, on the rocks, over an opened case of cartridges. There had been a furious fight to the death. Some of the bodies were still warm, indicating that the battle had taken place not long ago. The tears streamed down Ki-Gor's face and in a strangled voice he cursed the priest of the Sacred Bull for delaying the rescue party more than half a day. He cursed himself for agreeing to stop and camp along the way the night before. The Masai stood back and gazed at him in shocked awe. Merishu, face miserable, touched his arm and tried to speak words of consolation.

"The Wandarobo will pay for this, Ki-Gor," he mumbled. "We will find them and slaughter them every one."

"That will not bring Helene back to life!" Ki-Gor said wildly. "Where is her body?"

HE sprang into sudden action and began searching the enclosure. In a few moments it became clearly evident that Helene's body was not there. Another minute's search turned up no trace of George or the twelve M'balla men and women. A thrill of hope electrified Ki-Gor.

"Could they have escaped, Merishu?" he cried, clutching the War-Chief's wrist. "Are they safe somewhere on the mountain?"

Merishu shook his head miserably.

"I don't see how they could have escaped," he said. "Don't forget, the Wandarobo are cannibals."

A groan of agony left Ki-Gor.

"A-a-ah!" he moaned, "that is true. They have taken the bodies away—to eat them!"

There was a low growl from the ring of Masai, and Ki-Gor swung around on them.

"Somewhere up the mountain is a Sacred Grove, the ancient gathering-place of the Wandarobo. I am going to find it because I think the filthy man-eaters will be there now. Follow me as best you can. I can go much faster through the forest than you plainsmen can. If you lose me, you will soon be able to locate me again by the sounds of battle. I am going to seek out the Wandarobo and drown my grief in their blood. If Helene is dead, then Ki-Gor must die, too."

A thick, appalling silence reigned for a few seconds. Then, like an omen, from far off somewhere came the savage thumping of Bantu drums.

KI-GOR gave a wild yell and leaped out of the enclosure. The Masai snarled in unison and streamed after him as he sprinted across the loose gravel in the direction of the drums.

He entered the forest slightly uphill from the death-strewn fort and quickly picked up Wandarobo tracks, quantities of them. Evidently, the cannibals, after storming the fort, had poured back into the forest this way. Ki-Gor raced uphill through underbrush that had been broken and trampled down by hundreds of victorious feet. Close behind him, the cheetah followed in a sinuous lope.

As Ki-Gor plunged up the mountain side, he could hear the Masai below him, thrashing noisily through the bushes. He was quickly outstripping them but he did not care. His one desire was to find the Wandarobo as quickly as possible and kill as many of them as he could. He knew, too, that as long as there was light to see, that the Masai would have no difficulty following such a broad trail as the Wandarobo had left. And there was, Ki-Gor estimated, almost an hour of daylight left.

The Wandarobo drums were throbbing louder and faster now, and Ki-Gor increased his pace. Curiously, it was hard to tell exactly from what direction the sound of the drums was coming, now. Ki-Gor made a swift guess that the reason for that was that the drums were not

straight up the mountain from him but over the ridge in the next ravine to the west.

In a few minutes his guess was confirmed, as the drums sounded suddenly much louder and now seemed to come from below him. Almost at the same moment, he discovered that he had reached the narrow top of the ridge which separated the two ravines. He barely hesitated to make sure of the direction of the Wandarobo tracks, then plunged downhill in their wake.

This ravine—the westernmost of the three on the north face of Ruwenzori—was much less densely wooded than the other two, and Ki-Gor went down the steep slope at the speed of a charging rhino, the faithful cheetah stretching its long legs beside him. In a very short while, he could catch glimpses of leaping flames through the tree-trunks ahead of him.

Then the ground began to level off a little, and almost before he realized it, Ki-Gor was running out of the trees out onto the edge of an open pasture. He halted to take stock.

This grassy field sloped gently on three sides to a flat center on which grew five or six majestic baobab trees in a rough circle. In and around these trees some two thousand frenzied Wandarobo were massed. Although it was not yet dark, a dozen camp-fires were alight here and there on the field. But the largest and brightest fire was within the circle of trees, and the cannibals were themselves gathered in a thick black ring around this fire.

Ki-Gor was perhaps an eighth of a mile from the screaming, milling savages and somewhat above them, so he could look right down on the most horrible scene he had ever seen in his life. His eyes only caught a few salient details before he was off, running straight down toward the grove of baobabs. But he saw the immense black cauldron suspended over the roaring central bonfire. He saw the black figure in a feather head-dress seated high up on a crude throne of stone. Below the throne were six or seven drummers flailing at the huge tom-toms. In front of them a dozen feather-skirted dancers leaped and whirled in a savage frenzy.

But the center of interest for that swaying, moaning, shrieking black ring of onlookers was the great black block of stone halfway between the throne and the bonfire. And the thing which had sent Ki-Gor flying down the slope was the vision of a slim white body stretched out on the frightful sacrificial altar of black stone.

One thought alone filled Ki-Gor's mind as he sped across the grass, and that was a sort of dumb gratitude to the fates that permitted him to arrive before the Wandarobo had killed Helene. Now, at least, that could not happen while he was alive. And it was his fierce resolve to sweep as many of the cannibals to hell before he finally went down under pressure of numbers. The sight of Helene stretched out on the stone drove the last vestige of sanity from Ki-Gor, and made of him a fiendish fighting-machine.

The noise in the grove was deafening as two thousand savages whipped themselves into a barbaric ecstasy for the approaching climax of their ceremony. The dancers had given way to a hideously painted witch-doctor who was approaching the pathetic white body on the altar in a series of grotesque leaps and posturings. High above his head he waved a long, curved knife.

AS Ki-Gor thundered down on the ring of heaving, shouting onlookers, he did not relax his pace. Six feet away from the outermost rank, he took off from the ground, feet first. The momentum of his leap carried him over five rows of black heads. He struck downward viciously with his feet as he landed and felt bones crack. Then he leaped again and cleared the remaining three rows into the inside of the ring.

The next few seconds seemed to Ki-Gor to last an hour.

As from a distance, he heard the savage chant around him change to shrieks of rage. The ring of black faces seemed to disintegrate slowly. Everything seemed to go in slow motion. He himself, as he ran past the bonfire toward the altar, seemed to be moving unbelievably slowly. Even the witch-doctor, when he whirled to face him, seemed to whirl deliberately.

Then three warriors ran at Ki-Gor with their short spears. He killed them each with one blow of the knife in his left hand. After that, the slow motion was over, and the action stepped up to its normal pace.

The witch-doctor dropped his knife and started to run in the opposite direction. From nowhere then appeared Ki-Gor's cheetah. The spotted hunter flashed after the scrambling witch-doctor. One blow of the powerful fore-paw knocked the hideous creature down and raked his back into bloody shreds.

By now the whole grove was in the wildest confusion. Most of the blacks on the inside of the ring wanted to get away as fast as they could, while others farther away, seeing a lone enemy, shouted to each other to attack. A handful who rushed at Ki-Gor to bar him from the altar were instantly cut down by the murderous fury of his onset. He leaped over their bodies and stood beside the altar, looking down at Helene's beautiful face. Except for a slight bruise on her temple, there were no signs of wounds, though her eyes were closed. Disregarding the tumult around him, with terrible fear in his heart, he touched Helene's bare arm.

Helene's eyes opened, mirroring a great fear. She saw Ki-Gor. She blinked once, unbelievingly. Then smiled. Ki-Gor's knees trembled and he suddenly felt oddly weak. Never, since the day at Fort Lamy, when he and Helene had stepped out of the Residence man and wife, to the skirling of Black Watch bagpipes, had Ki-Gor felt such an overwhelming rush of tenderness toward his lovely mate. But his mind, trained to instant action, forced him to act now. He threw a quick glance around the grove and saw that among some of the Wandarobo the panic was subsiding. Ki-Gor's next glance showed him the reason.

The thickset black figure in the feather head-dress had clambered halfway down from his throne, and was screaming commands. Without hesitation, Ki-Gor drew back his right hand, balanced the spear, and threw it hard and accurately. The Wandarobo leader saw the spear but saw it too late. Ki-Gor's winged vengeance bit deep into the black chest, and the leader slowly toppled off the pedestal to the ground.

Ki-Gor rapidly shifted the knife to his right hand, and with his left arm picked Helene off the altar.

"Ki-Gor!" she murmured. "Don't forget George."

George! Was he there, too? Then Ki-Gor saw on the other side of the bonfire the ten M'balla corpses. And beyond them, tied up but very much alive, were George and an M'balla man and woman.

"Can you walk, Helene?" Ki-Gor asked swiftly.

"Yes," she answered. "I'll follow you."

"Stay behind me," he commanded.

The attack which the Wandarobo leader had started to organize bogged down when Ki-Gor's assegai struck the leader down. Shock and superstitious terror rendered most of the cannibals inert. But some, braver than the rest, charged Ki-Gor as he advanced around the bonfire ahead of Helene. Others, noticing that Ki-Gor was armed with only a knife, rushed at him from another direction.

"Waghrrr!" Ki-Gor roared in ferocious joy. The nearest Wandarobo thrust faintly, dropped his spear and ran. Like a flash, Ki-Gor picked up the spear by the butt and flailed about him. But at a scream from Helene he whirled. A band of ugly painted savages had crept up behind. They broke and fled as the cheetah suddenly appeared, his jaws dripping blood.

With his rear temporarily safeguarded, Ki-Gor turned again and reached George's side. Cutting the bonds of the three prisoners was the work of a moment.

"Golly! Ki-Gor!" George shouted. "You is crazy! Where-at is the Masai? We'll never make it outa yere alive! Of co'se we c'n try mighty hahd!"

As if to answer George's agonized question, a shrill, terrible war-cry rose above the confused shouts and screaming of the Wandarobo. And from the trees that bordered the field a column of white-cloaked figures poured out, streaming down the slope. In the waning light, the Masai looked more gigantic than ever.

Desperation seized the Wandarobo. The majority melted out of the grove. But some of them gathered in bunches and started furiously for their recently freed captives. Ki-Gor gathered his little band and fought his way toward the ancient throne. There, he and George and the lone M'balla made a stand, Helene and the M'balla girl protected by their spears.

It soon became apparent that Merishu and the Masai had not come a minute too soon. The enraged Wandarobo swarmed over the defenders, cutting and jabbing with all their might, the three men could

not have lasted half a minute more if Merishu and a score of his giants had not cut their way through to aid them. After that, the battle was just a question of how many of the cannibals the Masai could catch and kill. There was no organized resistance.

Ironically, the Wandarobo could have put up a much better fight if they remained in the forest back at the landslide. The forest was properly their element, and they could have wielded a tremendous advantage over the long column of Masai coming up the trail. But as it was, the Masai caught them in a broad field with no trees except the half dozen baobabs of the Sacred Grove.

The warriors from the plains recognized their advantage full well and pushed it to the bitter end. A few of the Wandarobo had been able to escape across the field to the trees on the far wall of the ravine but not many. The Masai, being efficient fighting men, had promptly encircled the sacrificial grove with its milling horde of cannibals. And as soon as they had established their thin cordon, they started driving inward, slaughtering as they went.

Such was the terror of the Masai name that the under-sized Wandarobo quickly abandoned hope in spite of their enormous advantage in numbers. Given the right conditions, such as obtained now, Merishu was quite justified in believing that two hundred Masai could take care of ten times that number of Bantu—even such dangerous Bantu as the Wandarobo. The cannibals fought hopelessly, now, when they fought at all, and the relentless cordon of Masai came closer and closer toward the center of the grove.

As soon as Merishu and his flying squad had penetrated to the pedestal where Ki-Gor, Tembo George and the remaining M'balla warriors were fighting, they surrounded the three exhausted men and their two women, and then calmly proceeded to hack their way back to the outside. By the time they had accomplished that, the daylight was fast fading and the slaughter was slowing down for lack of victims. But Merishu took his five charges to a safe place on the field, set a squad of his warriors to guard them, and then rushed back to the fray himself. But it was too late for him to gain much more personal glory. The surviving Wandarobo, numbering no more than two hundred, were offering no resistance.

MERISHU called a halt to the killing, thriftily reminding his bloody-handed warriors that the Wandarobo made fine slaves, and those that they did not need they could sell to the Somalis. So the battle ended with each Masai Morani taking himself a terrified slave and withdrawing to the east wall of the ravine where Merishu was ordering a camp to be set up.

The Masai had suffered a loss of five men killed. Four were seriously wounded, and eleven others carried light wounds. It would be impossible to compute the Wandarobo losses until the next morning. But that night around the Masai campfires, the Morani bragged to each other about how many of the cannibals they had individually killed.

The conversation around Merishu's campfire, however, was slow and quiet, much to the young War-Chief's disappointment. Ki-Gor and Helene were content to sit silently holding hands and stare into the fire. The young M'balla couple were also silent—almost dazed, as anyone is likely to be who had so narrowly escaped such a dreadful fate. After a while Tembo George began to talk a little to Merishu in Masai, and answer some of the War-Chief's bubbling questions. In the middle of this conversation, the burly American Negro turned to Ki-Gor.

"I reck'n I kinda owe you an explanation' bout whut-all happened ovah at the landslide, Ki-Gor," he said. "I feel kinda shamed the way I was caught nappin'."

"Don't blame yourself, George," Ki-Gor said quietly, "you are a brave man, and if you could not stop the Wandarobo from taking you, nobody else could."

"Well, that is real generous of you, Ki-Gor, I feel bad 'bout it just the same. Anyways, here's whut happened.

"From the time you skipped out three nights ago, up ontil this mawnin', them Wandarobo was very quiet. They just hung 'round in the woods round the landslide, an' hahdly showed their ugly faces. But early this mawnin' they begins to get awful noisy, 'specially down at the lower end of the landslide, by the head of the trail. They'd run out of th' trees's, whole

bunches of 'em, an' yell an' then run right back again. I had both guns all loaded up, an' I give one to Miss Helene an' took th' othuh musse'f. An' we kep' a shahp eye on 'em all mawnin'. We wasn't ter-r'ble worried. They seemed to be keepin' their distance. But we was ready fo' them if'n they should evuh try to rush across the gravel. The eight M'balla boys was standin' ready with their speahs, an' I watched one side of the fort an' Miss Helene watched th' othuh."

"But," said Ki-Gor, "you didn't watch the ledge."

"No suh, tha's the whole point. You guessed it right away, Ki-Gor. Well, you see, we didn' see no reason fo' watchin' the ledge. I knew it was too steep and too slick fo' anyone to go climbin' up theah. I figgered that ledge was ouah strongest point. Anyways, this yere noisy business kep' up all mawnin' clear th'ough ontil early aftuhnoon. An' I kep' tryin' to figger out whut-all their i-dea was. Aftuh a while, I believe I has guessed it. I figgered that they was just cryin' 'Wolf,' an' tryin' to kid us into a feelin' of false security. Seemed to me they was makin' them quick rushes, an' then runnin' back, just delib'rate, so's we'd get the i-dea they was always bluffin'. An' then aftuh we was all relaxed, they'd make a rush, an' instead of runnin' away again, they'd keep on comin'."

"Well, tha's how I figgered it, Ki-Gor, an' I was all wrong. It nevuh once occurred to me that they might be tryin' to draw ouah attention away from somewhere's else. All this time we was watchin' them boys down hill from us, they was a little gang sneakin' down from the othuh direction out of sight behind the ledge. An' they was totin' some fo'ty-foot poles with notches cut in them. They sat these yere poles up against the othuh side of the ledge an' climbed right up. Give them Wandarobo their due—they is smaht babies. They was about a dozen of 'em got up on top of the ledge wheah they could look down on us, an' we nevuh even seen 'em ontil it was too late."

"What happened then?" Ki-Gor asked, "Did they throw their spears down on you?"

"Oh, no!" said George bitterly, "they was smahter'n that. They had bird nets."

"Bird-nets!" Ki-Gor exclaimed in amazement.

"Yassuh! Light and strong, and fine-mesh, an' about fifteen or twenty feet across. They use 'em to trap birds with in the jungle. Well, they trapped some mighty big birds this aftuhnoon. All around the landslide they stahted whoopin' an' hollerin' an' then they rushed across the gravel. Well, Miss Helene an' I, we was all ready for 'em. I stahted pumpin' bullets into that black mess, when all of a sudden somethin' falls down around my head an' shoulders. For a minute, I couldn' figger out wut it was, or wheah it come from. The net settles all ovuh me down to the ground before I make out whut's goin' on. Then they pull the draw-string, an' I'm caught like a guinea-fowl.

"Some of the M'balla boys didn't get netted, an' they put up a whale of a fight. But it was no use. Miss Helene an' I was trussed up with the two M'ballas that was left alive, the boy an' the girl, an they dragged us off ovuh to that gove."

Ki-Gor nodded his head and smiled sympathetically.

"Don't blame yourself, George," he said, "Everything has come out all right."

"Yes," George admitted, "I had feelin' all along that you'd come back in time to save us. Although the time I *reely* lost hope was when that witch-doctor hit Miss Helene on the head an' knocked her out, an' then cut the ropes off her an' laid her out on that slab o' stone. I said to musse'f, 'C'mon, Ki-Gor, if'n you evuh comin'!"

THE next morning Ki-Gor, George, and Merishu, after a brief conference, decided to get away from the ghastly scene of the battle, and go down the mountain immediately. Accordingly, the Masai gathered up their wounded and their newly taken slaves and trooped down into the middle ravine. They paused at the fort in the landslide long enough for George to recover one of his rifles and some ammunition and then proceeded down the four-mile trail. Ki-Gor, Helene, and George shared with Merishu the place of honor at the head of the column.

The young War-Chief was in high spirits even though he had not yet breakfasted, and was full of anticipation of the triumphal return of his expedition to the

village of the Ngombi-Masai. Ki-Gor, he predicted with disarming generosity, would be the hero of the day. But to Merishu's dismay, Ki-Gor announced that he and Helene would not be journeying back to the plains, but would part company with him at the foot of the trail and push on westward into the Congo. In spite of all Merishu's arguments, Ki-Gor held to his dicision.

At the bottom of the trail up Ruwenzori, then, Merishu halted the expedition to make elaborate farewells to Ki-Gor and Helene. George was going on with the Masai with his lone M'balla couple—"Adam and Eve," he called them—until he made up his mind as to the future. The Masai all cheered Ki-Gor with their shrill war-cry, and clashed their spears against their shields with noisy approval.

In the midst of these farewells, there was a sudden commotion. From the north, the direction the Masai were to go on their homeward journey, there appeared a score or so Ngombi-Masai—a group of elders, headed by Shafara. They pushed their way angrily through the Morani to Merishu's side. Then Shafara pointed a denunciatory finger at Ki-Gor and poured out a torrent of Masai. Merishu stared at the Headman in astonishment, and George, understanding Masai, eased forward a few steps and cocked his rifle.

Finally Merishu turned to Ki-Gor with an expression of complete bewilderment.

"Shafara says that he came to stop us from making war on the Wandarobo, but we marched so fast, he could not catch up with us until now. He says that as soon as we left the village, he went into the Sacred Stable, and the Bull talked again. I cannot understand this, Ki-Gor, but Shafara says that the Bull had a terrible story to tell. The Bull said you forced it to make a false statement by threatening to cut its throat with your knife. And so the Bull, in fear of its life, gave permission for the war, but against its will. Shafara says that the Bull is terribly angry, and that the only way it can be appeased is for us to kill you."

For the second time since he left the Masai village, Ki-Gor privately cursed the sly, intriguing priest of the Bull. He stalled for time, while he tried to think of a way out.

"Well, Merishu," he said, "What is to happen? Is *your* hand to kill me? Just yesterday you saved my life."

"No!" cried Merishu, and turned back to Shafara with a flood of passionate Masai. Shafara listened coldly, and slowly brought the point of his great spear to bear on Ki-Gor's chest.

Just then, there was a faint rustle in the underbrush behind Ki-Gor. He turned quickly to stare into the shadows of the forest. A great light suddenly dawned in his mind.

"Merishu!" he cried, "Tell Shafara that to kill Ki-Gor would be sacrilege. There is magic going on, more than he or you ever dreamed of."

Merishu's eyes rolled as he explained to the Headman. Shafara looked at him sharply and lowered the point of the spear doubtfully. Then Ki-Gor gave a long shrill whistle. Instantly, a great grey shape loomed up in the jungle behind *Ki-Gor,* and a moment later, an elephant's head poked itself over the bushes. The Masai gave ground with excited cries, but Ki-Gor held up his hand and called on them to stay.

"You see here," he shouted, "a wild elephant. Behold how the magic of Ki-Gor subdues this elephant."

HE barked a command to Marmo. Marmo obediently came forward a few steps, and at another command went down on his knees. A shocked gasp went over the Masai. There were no metal anklets on Marmo to show that he was not a wild elephant, and they thought they were witnessing powerful magic. Ki-Gor muttered a word to Helene, and she quickly mounted to Marmo's back. Ki-Gor stepped back a pace but kept his face turned to the elephant presenting less than his profile to most of the Masai.

"Now, O Wise One," Ki-Gor declaimed, "these friends of mine, the Ngombi-Masai, peerless warriors and splendid cattle-breeders, have one fault. They are so gullible that they have allowed themselves to be duped by a lygon—a magician. This cunning old man bewitches cattle and makes them talk. Speak to these poor deluded people, O Wise One, and tell them of their folly."

Another gasp of awe came from the Masai.

"You *can* speak, can you not, O Wise One?" Ki-Gor urged.

After a brief but nerve-wracking pause, a strange voice was heard. The words were muffled, the diction imperfect, but the voice itself was high and thin and had something of the quality of an elephant's trumpeting.

"Aye, Ki-Gor, your magic gives me the power of words."

The Masai craned their necks incredulously. The voice continued:

"It is well known that ani'als do not s'eak the words of God, but talk only by the magic of a lygon."

Ki-Gor was having the time of his life. Ever since he had stumbled on the secret of the priest-ventriloquist, he had been fascinated with the idea. But already the Masai had had enough of the terrifying experience of hearing a wild elephant talk. An unobtrusive but none the less determined movement away from the scene began. It gained momentum with astonishing rapidity. The Masai first edged away, then took longer strides and in a very short time were moving just about as fast as they could go. Almost the last to go was Merishu, mingled fear and admiration in his handsome black face. And then Tembo George. The American Negro's huge shoulders were shaking with mirth as he waved his rifle in farewell.

Ki-Gor got up beside Helene on Marmo's neck and swung the faithful elephant around so that his great bulk was pointing westward in the direction of the Congo.

"Helene," he said with a little frown, "there is a word for someone who speaks with his lips closed and pretends that the words come from someone else. What is that word?"

"Ven-tri-lo-quist," Helene articulated slowly, her eyes twinkling.

"Ven-tri-lo-quist," the jungle man repeated carefully.

And the blazing African sun on his back was no brighter than the smile on Ki-Gor's face as he looked at Helene.

ELEPHANT LAW

By PAUL ANNIXTER

"A life for a life" . . . the elephant law. When the Rogue One broke it, retribution was swift and terrible!

THE low, persistent rubbing of snake-skin drums in the near-by Karen-Laos village roused the camp at dawn that Sunday morning. In the squat teak-and-bamboo thatch which served as head-quarters for the road-building crew, John Loring, chief engineer of the new jungle road, groaned wearily as he turned over in his hammock and pulled the square of matting from the doorway.

In the greenish-yellow dawn the picket lines of the elephants stood with fidgeting trunks and faintly tinkling bells, the growing light from the east playing over them in dull red reflections until their phantom bulks appeared to be glowing. The langu-

rous breath of flowering *stic-lac* and *serai* vines came in at the open door, and just outside the bamboos chafed and rustled their feathery leaves in the faint dawn breeze.

Loring dropped from his hammock to the earthen floor. He did not clap his hands as usual to summon his personal boy in the adjoining tent, but slipped quietly into his jungle kit. He ached with fatigue in body and brain. He had put in a trying night and now faced a still more trying day. Elephant trouble had broken out in camp—that complex, exasperating malady that becomes the bane of the white overseer in Burma and India.

The average Asiatic working elephant is a common Meerga, or low-caste animal, but sometimes it happens that the head of a labor crew is of a higher breed. Old Chundra, king of the road camp, was a huge Koomeriah of the upper-class elephants from Moulmein. Although a far more trustworthy worker than the runty Meergas and Dwasalas, Chundra was of a proud, headstrong and battling breed. He possessed a mind that had been made up on most matters some seventy-five years before, and it had remained made. For one thing, he was strict for union labor. He had become the walking anachronism of the camp; he began the day at seven in the morning with a shrill trumpet blast; he punctuated it at mid-day with another; and he quit promptly at six, whistle or no whistle, after which not even a donkey engine could move him outside the picket lines. He had also developed an uncanny nose for a Sabbath calm.

Thus the trouble had started, for this was a high-pressure job, necessitating continual overtime work, for the season of monsoons was close at hand. From the first, therefore, Loring had been up against the changeless law of the East, of which an undeviating elephant code is ever a reckonable part. Lately there had been added to the complication a case of definite bad blood between Old Chundra and the Sacred Albino elephant of the Karen village. This nine-foot monster, also a Koomeriah, had achieved a violent hatred for the stranger bull since the day the road crew had first camped in the vicinity, though neither bull had been closer than a thousand yards of the other. That hatred old Chundra returned with such heat that his trumpet note broke into a berserk squeal of rage whenever he heard the White One's distant voice.

Jealousy was at the bottom of it, Loring believed. It had started over an entirely worthless, foolish little female elephant named Dundora, who had been used as one of Loring's camp carriers. This creature was an incurable coquette who never lost an opportunity of exercising her wiles. On learning of the trouble Loring had promptly sent her down river, but the trouble had been sown and now by day and by night Chundra and the White One rocked and rumbled, blaring their challenges back and forth. And although Chundra was shackled and double-chained each night for safety's sake, Loring knew and the mahouts knew that no power of man could hold the great bull once he had decided in his own deeply law-abiding nature to throw off the shackles of restraint. It was very much like living over a powder magazine.

LORING stood in the hut door for a space listening to the ceaseless village drums. The hollow notes, though muffled, carried the indescribable sense of some barbaric activity in progress. On each of the five days the Government road crew had been camped here, they had heard the same hubbub in the early morning. Quite evidently some manner of native rite was being performed and Loring had a burning desire to learn its nature.

Quietly he moved away through the dakua grove behind the hut, having decided to investigate a bit. In the distant village half the population seemed to be marching in a procession after a file of about twenty young women, nude to the waist. Presently Loring, moving warily, came in view of the strangest spectacle he had ever witnessed.

In a great half circle about a raised platform, the villagers were prostrate in homage, all but the twenty young women, who stood on the platform before the gnarled and ancient figure of the village sorcerer. Loring thought it was he who was calling forth this obeisance, until his eye fell on the White One. This was the Sacred Albino elephant, who for many years had been the high god of the Karen village. It

was Loring's first glimpse of the creature. It stood in the background under a great pavilion, having seven roofs which dwindled in size toward the top, each of them elaborately carved and decorated. Now even Moung-ka-pah, chief of all the Karen-Laos, had only six roofs over his dwelling, but Moung-ka-pah, it was said, ruled only with the approval of the White One.

The interior of the Sacred Pavilion was hung with gorgeous trappings and colored lanterns which lit the place at night. A red silk canopy was stretched over the White One's head and all his trappings, even the tips of his tusks and the chains which held him to the tie-posts were plated with gold. A look of incalculable age and wisdom about the head of the beast struck Loring with a touch of awe.

He was of the Koomeriah, mightier even than Chundra, but there was something horrifying about the whiteness of the huge bulk. It was the bleached whiteness of age and it was tinted with pink. It seemed as if hair should cover that wrinkled hide, yet there was none, nor were there any lashes over the little pig-like eyes that glowed redly, giving the uncanny effect of evil that has increased with age.

In his forty years, Loring had seen much worshiping of strange gods during his ten years of knocking about the hidden corners of Burma and India. He knew the Siva worshipers and their fanatical cruelties. He had seen the magnificent temples of Bramah and of Vishnu, the Protector. He had visited the little brown hill tribes along the Thoungyeen River, who worshiped the Naga, or sacred serpents. But never before had he seen the worship of elephants.

So this was the creature whose jealous enmity was disrupting the routine of his camp. Loring could sense the cause. Confined for years in an unnatural life of enforced celibacy, the great bull's temper had become as precarious as heated dynamite. The mere sight of Dundora, practicing her coquettish tricks, had roused in him a mindless fury against every other elephant in the road crew.

A feeling of restless uneasiness assailed Loring as he turned back toward camp. Should anything unforeseen occur to rouse either Chundra or the albino before the camp moved on, no chains or shackles would suffice to hold them. The result would be a battle such as never had been known before in that section of Burma. And which of the two would be conqueror, he wondered. Impossible to surmise, for they were wonderfully matched. Though the White One stood slightly taller, Chundra made up for it in added girth and weight. The albino had the longer, heavier tusks, but Chundra possessed a far more powerful trunk, strengthened as it was by years of labor in the teak forests. The force of their charges, when it came to smashing power, would be equal.

Loring knew well what the result of such a battle would be. Neither beast would prove the victor, and the struggle would go on till each had slain the other and the Company would have lost its finest herd leader, close to ten thousand ticals in elephant flesh. He dared not conjecture what further loss there might be, should the white god of the Karen-Laos also die. In such case the religious fanaticism of the tribe would be roused to fever pitch, reprisals would be certain and the very work on the road-bed might come to a stop.

Here was a grave problem for Loring. The latest word from the Government at Rangoon had been one stereotyped order, to push the spur of roadbed well up into the hill country before the rains set in. The heads of the Rangoon office were Scots and their orders were blunt and concise. Loring had brushed up against them before. If the work were not pushed forward with all speed he would incur disfavor in Rangoon. Yet there was far graver danger in this risk he had been taking in elephant affairs.

FOR some minutes after returning to his tent, Loring sat pondering the matter, his brow knit with trouble. The jungle morning was now alive with sounds. Weaver birds tweeked in the dakua grove behind the tent. From afar in the bush came the whooping lament of a band of black-faced gibbons, that ringing, mellifluous call which more than any other thing fills the one-time jungle traveler with nostalgia.

Other sounds also cut through the jungle noises: squeakings, rumblings, rappings, horn-like blastings, and the lashing of foliage. These came from the picket-

lines—elephant-talk, a continual uneasy undercurrent of signaling and communication, as Loring knew, which had gone on night and day for the past week. It was like an electricity in the air. Now and then a blare of hate from old Chundra was answered from afar by the White One, and in his mind's eye Loring could picture the two, rocking and straining at their shackles, their little pig-like eyes gleaming redly—vast juggernauts only temporarily restrained by chains.

He arose finally and summoned his head boy and a few minutes later Tim Riley, engineer on the caterpillar tractor, blew his eight o'clock whistle as usual. That was the signal for coolies and elephants to begin the day's work Just as Loring had expected, within five minutes his head man appeared at the tent door to offer a tactful protest, and a few minutes later the three Assamese mahouts appeared and likewise protested, explaining gravely that all of the Company's elephants being trained six-day workers, would rebel at breaking the Sabbath of their long-ago trainers.

"In that case," said Loring, smiling, "use your goads."

"Besides which, O Shway, we fear for the life of Chundra and the White One," persisted the mahouts.

"What will be, will be," answered Loring. "Upon me rests the entire blame. And now, on with the work."

"As the Shway wills," said the oldest mahout and salaamed.

Very shortly the air was filled with screams, whistles and trumpetings of wrath and consternation from the elephant lines, for goads had been brought into play as Loring ordered. Also Genghis, the camp executioner-elephant, was busy for a time with his cruel, punishing chain. The result was a towering rage and rebellion on the part of Chundra which, as leader of the work crew, affected every other elephant in camp. For some minutes the vast bull seemed on the verge of running amuck, and every Meerga and Dwasala in camp, with trunk raised as if in salute, turned head toward him and squealed a unanimous protest of sympathy—all, that is, but Genghis, the runty killer, who had long since become utterly and hopelessly a tool of man.

But this was not the worst. The hubbub had aroused the albino god of the Karen-Laos to a frenzy. In the village opposite much massing of people was in evidence about the Sacred Pavilion, where a circle of natives had prostrated themselves in an endeavor to pacify their god. The structure shook with his efforts to break away and the entire village brewed and murmured in the early morning light.

No one knew better than Loring the risk he ran during those first two hours in which the giant Chundra rebelled at every order that was given. He watched proceedings with a calmness he did not feel, and finally after considerable hesitation, he had ordered Genghis to go into action. That was the pivotal moment. Loring banked all on the deeply law-abiding strain of old Chundra's nature. Many and many a time in the past he had left the disciplining of recalcitrant members of the work crew entirely up to the old leader. That faith was not misplaced now. At the introduction of the punishing chain, the old bull seemed to rally; by degrees his anger died away in low rumblings and was lost in the stress of responsibility that devolved upon him. Loring drew a deep sigh of relief and mopped away the nervous sweat that had stood out on his face and brow.

Although Chundra looked sullen and in evil temper throughout the day, and continued to voice an angry trumpeting to the challenges of his enemy, he remained mindful of his position of trust and authority. In the heaving and shifting of the rocks and vast timbers that made the foundation of the road-bed, his efforts were unflagging. By the end of the day more than three hundred feet of new roadway had been cleared and leveled—a record day's work. But not until the light began to fail did Loring order his elephants to dismiss.

AS Chundra heaved his great bulk up the bank and moved off slowly and majestically toward the picket lines, Loring followed to order an extra bundle of the youngest, juiciest cane-tips to be cut for the old burden-bearer, also sugar and extra rations for every elephant in the crew. He stood by until he had made sure that the order was obeyed. As the bull stood rocking and ruckling with pleasure over the sweets, Loring took the swinging trunk in the curve of his arm and patted it

while he spoke softly to the Great One in the flowery metaphor the mahouts use. There is an actual elephant talk—almost a language—as any master mahout will tell you. Its words are neither of Hindustani nor Sikh nor Burmese, nor any other known tongue, and it is older than man's memory. Loring had learned many words of it in ten years in the East. He called upon them now, thanking the Great One for his keeping of the faith that day, and when he turned to go to his tent he had a definite sense of a contact understood.

Another day, he reflected, as he sat at his evening meal, and the base camp could be moved five miles upriver, out of the region of danger. He had cause for real satisfaction tonight, yet in spite of the good progress made a recurrent uneasiness filled his mind. Though the hour was late, the heat was still suffocating. The sky, instead of being pollened with stars, was lowering. and overcast and the still air within the tent breathed like cotton wool.

Presently Loring sought his hammock to get what rest he could, though sleep, he saw, was but a remote possibility. Soon he found himself listening into the stillness, but for what, he hardly knew. Utter silence lay over the jungle; not even a night bird called. Even the elephants in the picket lines were quiet as death. Now and then great Atlas moths with a six-inch wing-spread spatted softly against the tent top.

In spite of the utter weariness that enveloped him, the white man felt it imperative somehow to keep awake as one on guard. Exhaustion must finally have overcome him, however, for the next thing that impressed his senses was an earth-shaking crash of thunder, followed by a roaring as of cataracts unleashed. For a space it seemed but a part of his troubled dreams, then he shook off the illusion and sat upright in his cot.

As he did so a blinding flash of lightning whitened the interior of the tent, and the night without was shattered into a thousand fragments of stupendous, jagged-edged sound. In the wake of the thunder came the rain in torrents, and the sides of the tent bellied and snapped in the suck of a sudden wind.

Loring knew the violence of these sudden jungle storms. He rose and slipped quickly into his clothes. For the next ten minutes it was touch and go whether the tent would stand or not, as the world without was rent and tossed and torn with the storm's cannonade. Then a new note cut through the diapason of sound. It was the shrill trumpeting of an elephant, followed closely by another, in different key, from a different throat! A series of screaming bellows and a mighty thudding followed, drowning out for the moment the fury of the tempest. Followed splintering crashes as of trees being broken off by the impact of gigantic straining bodies. Then all was obscured once more by the sound of wind and thunder.

Loring looked outside. Dawn was close at hand, he saw, and already the first fury of the storm was somewhat abated. He shouted for Li Po, his little head man. As the Burman came in at the tent flap, he shouted above the tumult of the wind: "Lord, it is Chundra; he has broken away."

"And the White One?"

"I do not know, but I fear," answered Li Po.

Loring looked at his watch by the light of an electric flash. It was nearly five o'clock in the morning.

"Call Sufi and Riley," he ordered. "And get out the rifles. We must follow."

Once more in a lull in the wind, trumpetings reached their ears. The battle, if battle it was, was rolling away into the deep jungle. All that Loring had feared most had evidently come to pass, and in the midst of the storm he was practically powerless to intervene. However, when Riley and the two Burmese arrived, the four set out into the bush, armed with rifles and torches, to do all that was humanly possible to avert catastrophe.

AT the two trees at the end of the picket lines where Chundra had been secured, they saw what had occurred. Two of the heavy chains that had held him where broken short off at the shackles. The other two had been torn out of their fastenings in the tree trunk by a power that was unbelievable in any creature of flesh and blood.

As Loring stood looking at the chains, Sufi raised a shout. Fifty feet down the picket line he had come upon Poo Ten, one of the younger bulls of the work crew,

lying dead in a welter of his own blood. The body was horribly gored, battered and trampled into the mud, quite evidently by the murderous attack of a mightier bull.

Riley swore fervently at the sight. Li Po pronounced a single word: "Must!"

And indeed there seemed no other explanation than that old Chundra had become obsessed with the madness to which male elephants, at certain times under certain conditions, are subject.

They pressed forward again, soaked and buffeted by the storm, and cut by thorns and branches. The flaring torches of the natives soon sputtered and went out and they went on by the aid of Loring's small electric flash.

Some twenty minutes later, as suddenly as it had broken, the storm passed, and almost immediately the dawn light broke through a rent in the clouds. In the dripping stillness the sounds of combat ahead in the jungle became audible once more, terrible sounds that filled the jungle dawn as the four stumbled onward through the drenched thickets, following a trail marked by occasional splintered trees and flattened bushes.

As they circled the Karen village, shouts reached them and they saw the milling of many torches about the Sacred Pavilion. That proved the worst to Loring. Somewhere ahead in the jungle the White One himself was doubtless locked in mortal combat with old Chundra.

The crashing and bellowing ahead grew louder and more awe-inspiring as they advanced. There were threshings amid vines and bamboo thickets and the splintering sound of trees being snapped off; now and then a wild, insensate trumpeting, between a whistle and the neigh of a horse. A shiver went through Loring's frame that had nothing to do with his soaked garments as they hurried onward through the dripping foliage. No power of man, he knew, could stem the tide of that struggle. Whichever elephant was being vanquished, it mattered little now—the result would be almost equally drastic.

THE first pale light of the breaking day was filtering through the jungle roof as the four came out on a rise of ground but a hundred yards from the scene of conflict. Vaguely they could make out a vast white bulk looming through the distant trees. The Sacred Albino beyond doubt. Then the rapidly increasing light showed up a scene such as few men have ever had opportunity to witness—the most awe-inspiring spectacle in all nature, the prolonged test of strength and endurance of the real monarchs of all the animal world. The solid earth echoed like a drum beneath the great trampling feet as the combatants lunged and parried, colliding tusk to tusk, skull to skull, with a sound as of great boulders crashing together in a landslide. Again and again young trees were snapped off at their bases as the heavy bodies lunged against them, the thickets were crushed and ground beneath their feet, and moisture fell from the nearby trees at that mighty vibration of unleashed power.

Lorings orders were crisp, staccato:

"Rifles ready, men. There's only one thing to do and that's tunnel old Chundra to save the Albino. I hate to do it, but the Company comes first and the road's got to go on. Get up close and put the bead on him, all of you—make it quick and painless, understand?"

Cautiously they maneuvered to a point of vantage so close that they could plainly hear the rasp and scrape of wrinkled hide against hide and the great windy breaths of the battlers as they heaved and strained. Suddenly Riley's hand gripped Loring by the arm. "Chief, that's not our bull! Look—only one tusk on him, and them eyes! . . . By Heaven, there's three of them fighting!"

It was true. From beyond the locked pair in the foreground another bull was boring into the fight. The gaunt dark-colored bull locked with the Albino had but a single tusk and the little eyes flashed redly like the glow of an electric globe struggling against a super charge. He was quite as vast as Chundra, but that mad and evil gleam of the sunken eyes was the stamp of the rogue and the renegade. His gaunt back had a piggy downward slope.

"Wait. Hold those guns. Hold them, I say!" Loring called. He was on his knees now, peering beneath the legs of the foremost fighters at the third bull beyond. His heart gave a sudden surge. That was old Chundra beyond a doubt, closing in from the farther side, it seemed, joining

forces, by all that was miraculous, with his erstwhile enemy against the stranger.

At that very moment the tide of the battle took a definite turn. There was an elemental bellowing of mortal agony and the one-tusked bull was almost flung to the ground by the combined assault of the other two. He staggered, went momentarily to his knees, blood gushing from his mouth from some deep internal wound; then wheeled and fled into the forest, pursued by both his foes. From afar the men heard the dreadful finish of the battle. It was followed shortly by the prolonged blaring of another bull that shattered out like a thunderclap over the jungle—that victorious trumpet note known to elephant men as the "salute." Old Chundra's voice; Loring would have recognized it anywhere.

"Come on," he ordered, and slipping and stumbling over vines and creepers the four followed on along an almost impassable trail broken through dense cane and bamboo thickets. At the end of the trail lay the body of the gigantic wild tusker, where he had been done to death violently by one or both of his opponents. Loring stared long at the great carcass. Neither Chundra nor the Albino were in sight, but from a distance came sounds of a tremendous whooshing, grunting and blasting. Still worried and anxious, the party hastened on in the direction of the sounds. Not far away a small stream wound through the jungle and in the middle of the stream-bed, old Chundra and the Sacred Albino, god of the Karen-Laos, lay on their sides, close together and in perfect amity, squirting trunkfuls of water over their numerous wounds of battle.

THE breath left Loring's lungs in a great sigh of sheer relief. Instead of battling one another the two titans had spent their strength and ire in vanquishing a common foe; the red light had gone from their little eyes and their great bodies rolled and lolled in the water in sheer blissful enjoyment. Dundora, the trouble-maker, was evidently entirely forgotten.

Suddenly Loring laughed aloud. He had not noticed it till that moment, but the Sacred One was still decked out in all the mummeries of his god-hood. His red and gold-plated trappings were soaked and draggled in mud and water, the resplendent jewels were still intact in his head-piece, but the golden balls that had tipped his tusks had been lost in battle. The great bull, however, was happy for perhaps the first time in his tampered life.

But that happiness was short-lived, for through the early sunlight a score of natives came trotting from the Karen village.

Li Po had stepped forward to have words with the Karen and presently he turned to Loring.

"Lord," he said gravely, "all is now plain. That dead elephant was a wild rogue which the village has known for years. Three times he has killed peaceful work elephants in the nearby forest. For many days he lie up in the thick jungle near camp and only the elephants know he is there. That why they keep trumpeting all day; they know that any time the madness will come upon this rogue again and he will kill tame elephants because they are chained and cannot fight. Last night the madness come on him again and under cover of the storm he come in and kill Poo Ten. Both these bulls break their chains and together follow and kill the rogue, the way elephants do in the jungle.

"Furthermore, O Shway," continued Li Po, "these people think it a great and favorable sign that our elephant is friendly with the white god and help him in battle. For this they wish to show thanks—by the loan of twenty of their elephants and men to help us in the work. It would appear that the road may yet be finished before the rains—"

"It would indeed, Li Po," chuckled Loring. "Tell the people we accept the offer—and how!"

JUNGLE SLAVE

A Novelet of the Congo Jungle

By BILL COOK

Hate kept Morgan alive. Gold Coast raiders had slaughtered his safari, slaved him out to a tribe of ju-ju Blacks. They'd forgotten, though, to purge his soul of the hate-that-kills.

EVER since he had left the Uganda border and plunged into the deep Congo jungle with his five black boys Buck Morgan felt that he was being followed. At the village on the banks of Lake Kivu he had first sensed the scrutiny of curious eyes; somebody was hounding him as he slid along in the strangely silent

river in quest of a "needle in a haystack."

Being followed was no new experience to Morgan. For a half dozen years, countless men had tried to cut him down and gain for themselves the fame of the killer clan. His very name had become a taunt, a challenge from Cape Town to Bangui. Morgan—none knew his given name or even if he ever had one.

Once, long ago, an admiring Portugese trader in Mozambique, in a warning to a half drunken drifter on the beach, had expressed himself tersely on the subject of the man and his talents: "Better you not buck Morgan, my friend, if you want to stay healthy. He is one four-square man an' he sails a straight course. I have seen, with my own eyes, what happens when a big *mozo* dare to accuse him of crookedness when money was divided. He is an American devil. Take my advice; do not try to buck Morgan."

Those who heard the Portugese warning gave the man his name. From that time he was known as "Buck" Morgan. Gradually the nickname spread and Morgan accepted it. It was as good as any other. His given name was nobody's business; for all his occasional cronies knew, Morgan might not even be his name at all. But what did it matter"? A hard man, a square man, a devil in a fight, Buck Morgan was a good one to tie to—or to let alone.

Sitting amidship in the dugout as his native boys paddled the clumsy craft down the steaming Congo, Morgan tried to shake off the feeling that persisted. He had actually seen no one, nothing definite to warn him of a danger. Still the idea remained with him, awake and asleep; some sixth sense which had served him in the past told him now that menacing eyes were watching him.

Every now and then, as the awkward canoe entered a fairly long straightaway stretch in the winding Congo's course, Morgan shifted in his seat and glanced over his shoulder, hand under his eyes to shut out the reflected glare of the blazing sun on the river. He saw not a sign on the water; no craft of any kind was following. The thick, tangled jungle crowded both banks. A hot, stifling silence smothered it all, except for the crying of strange birds, and the occasional splash of a "croc" in the green shadows that overhung the shore.

"Must be my conscience," Morgan mumbled to himself, tilting his cork helmet against the burning equatorial sun. "I'm damned if I breathed a word to anybody."

At the sound of his voice, the coal black headman of his small party turned his head quickly: *"Ndiyo, Bwana?"*

Morgan grinned, squinting, his gray eyes narrowed: "Nothing Anga," he said, with a shake of his head. "I talk to myself."

The black grunted and continued his paddling until Morgan noted that the craft was being pushed out nearer to mid-stream. He glanced ahead, and mechanically fingered the bolt of the rifle which lay across the gunwales near his knees. A small herd of hippopottami were bathing ahead of them and the natives were giving them a wide, safe berth. Morgan was not hunting jungle beasts this time and he was not the type of traveler who kills for the mere joy of watching his victim kick out its life blood. No, this was no animal hunt—Buck Morgan was hunting a man, one lone man somewhere in the vast wilderess of the African jungle.

WHEN the first of the islands came in sight, Morgan called to his paddlers to find a landing and make camp. For the past two days and nights he had begun to feel some doubts about ever finding islands in this jungle river. But here indeed was the first, and there were others, for Morgan could make out their vague shapes beyond, like the backs of crocodiles and hippopottami, standing motionless in the swirling cool of the water. On one of these islands, so the tale went, lived the ancient Ahmed Bey.

"Cut bamboo," ordered Morgan, gesturing to his porters as soon as they had beaten a clearing and hauled the supplies out on shore. "Four, tall ones." He held up four fingers and indicated the bamboo thicket near the center of the small island.

When the blacks returned dragging the long bamboo trunks, Morgan showed them how to lash the four together at one end and erect a tall frame much like the skeleton of a western Indian tepee. This done, he instructed Anga, who seemed to possess the clearest understanding of the

white man's requirements, to shin up one of the poles to the top.

From there Anga was to search the river back of them for sign of either natives or white men. The negro, perched like a shining monkey at the top, stared up river and shook his head.

"No—*bwana*—see no one," he called down.

"Look other way, Anga," said Morgan, relieved. "See other islands. You see hema—see boma?"

Anga peered into the sun and clung grimly, his black hand hooding his eyes, then shook his head. He called down shaking his head. He could see nothing of any huts or stockades, no native kraal anywhere. Morgan motioned him to come down. They were apparently the only humans in the section. However, there was some hope now; they had at last found islands. Buck Morgan did not know, nor do many other men, that there are some four thousand islands, of various size, scattered along the devious course of the giant Congo.

While the porters prepared supper, Morgan set up his tiny net tent, and when the meal was finished he retired to its comparative security. Rolling a cigarette, he blew thick smoke through the gauze at the clouds of mosquitoes whose buzzing filled the night like millions of saw-blades cutting through huge teak logs. Beyond the firelight the black night walled them in snugly, the steamy vapor along the island's bank rising like smoke from a smudge. Back of him in the thicket he heard the tumultuous tiny sounds that make up the strangely enchanting, fearsome jungle night.

For a long time Morgan sat smoking, watching the fire, listening. The natives had long since crawled into the shelter of their hastily erected grass huts. Morgan's thoughts brought a half smile to his square-jawed face, and he drew from his pocket an object which he turned over idly in the faint light of the fire. It was smooth, and yellowed with age, and once it had been the tip of a jungle mammoth's tusk. Pure African ivory. Someone, some patient primitive artisan, in the days of the once notorious African slavers, had carved this piece of ivory with crude tools to make a whistle. To Morgan it was something more than a curio, it was a token. Reflecting there in his tent on the Congo island, Morgan re-traced his trail to the spot where the thing had been placed in his hand and he had started on this strange journey.

"Maybe," he mused solemnly as he put the ivory whistle back into his pocket, "maybe—I'm being a plain damn fool. Then again, maybe any man will take a chance for a shot at a fortune. If—"

His musings were cut short by a sound, a soft whisper, that stiffened him, half risen behind his netting. Tense, grimly alert, he gathered his feet under him, one hand closing over the grip of his revolver. Above the incessant humming of the insects he hard the noise again, nearer.

Creeping silently from his tent, Buck Morgan crawled to the shadow of a giant fern which hid his muscular frame from the light of the fire. Crouched motionless, he waited, listening, a savage smile of satisfaction playing about the corners of his mouth. He was right about someone following him.

Peering through the lacy ferns he could see the paling light of the fire flickering on the surface of the Congo, and as he watched he saw the vague shape of a huge war-canoe slide slowly past his camp going down the river. It was not light enough to count the occupants or to distinguish faces, but he could make out the paler faces of at least two white men among the invisible black paddlers.

Like a monstrous jungle giant on cushioned paws the craft crept past. Not a word was spoken. Buck Morgan stared, more curious now than before, his grip on the gun relaxed. Only the faint ripple of the water, the dripping of the paddles. Then they were gone.

MORGAN decided that, whoever these men were, he must be on his guard. Slipping past a lighted camp fire on the Congo at night was suspicious in itself. White men in the jungle seldom avoid other white men, seldom even avoid native villages, especially when they are accompanied porters. With a glance toward the squat huts of his own porters, Morgan started toward his tent, brushing a swarm of mosquitoes from his path.

His natural caution, perhaps, saved his

life. He saw the thick, sinuous shape slithering over the trampled grass before his tent. His brain flashed the warning and Morgan froze, one foot half raised, as a huge rock-python slid across his rooted boot-toe.

"Anga!" he called softly. "Quick, Anga, make—"

Instantly the big reptile's body writhed. Morgan felt the weight and strength of the snake as it lashed itself about his leg, coiling like a giant steel spring, wrapping itself up, up, upward along his thigh and tight about his middle. In a flash Morgan saw his hope for using the revolver gone, and his hard hands fought desperately for a grip on the whipping, struggling reptile. He found a slippery, squirming grip on the creature just behind the jaws, and even tottering, he knew that he must fall toward his fire, away from the one tree nearby.

As he fell, battling viciously, he knew that his black boys were awake, chattering excitedly. If he could keep the python's tail from catching a grip on the tree—if—he felt the sweat breaking out on his body, the cold, steely scales of the snake clinching tighter and tighter. Then he saw the flames leap high as a boy flung fuel on the fire, and he heard the cries of his porters "Bwana be brave! Bwana make fight!"

Anga was leaping about him a gleaming bush knife flickering in the firelight, darting here, there, garbling a confusion of strange sounds. Morgan felt himself weakening, his breath being squeezed horribly from his lungs, the torture burning him alive one moment, chilling his brain the next. Still he held with a furious grip to the neck of the creature, his body thumped and bumped with its lashing and squirming.

It seemed like hours to his frantic brain, but the half blind rage that had carried him through brawls in years gone by served him now for he struggled like an animal himself, unaware of the jabbering and hacking about him, until, at last, he felt the coils loosen. The splashing of blood across his face, roused him. He tore himself, free, stumbling dizzily out into the air to half fall into the arms of one of his black boys.

"Bwana make big fight," chattered the negroes gathering about him. "See—okuri—he is dead!"

Buck Morgan drew a deep, very painful breath and removed his gun belt to rub the badly bruised spot where the python had had pressed the weapon into the flesh of his thigh.

"Good boys," he said as he got his breath and looked around. The python, a specimen measuring perhaps fourteen or fifteen feet, lay in two pieces, cut apart by Anga's bush knife, the tail still whipping feebly. "Tomorrow—" panted Morgan, while two of the negroes rubbed his arms and legs briskly to restore circulation, "I will—reward—you—all. Just—help me—to my—tent."

For a long while Morgan sprawled in his tent. When his fingers stopped trembling sufficiently so that he could roll a cigarette, he made himself a smoke, smiling as he listened to the low voices of his porters as they recounted the thrilling fight by the campfire.

Perhaps what they said about Buck Morgan in the outposts of Africa was true after all.

FOR two days Morgan suffered the tortures of hell as a result of his fight with the python. The first morning, as he bathed, his entire body bruised, stiff and sore to the touch, he experienced a nosebleed. All that day he lay on the bottom of the canoe as it slid down the Congo, shaded by a crude canopy of palm leaves.

Despite his condition, he kept a sharp watch for the canoe of the night before, searching both shores of the river, as well as the islands they passed. These islands, of course, were Morgan's chief concern. They made frequent stops as the formation of an island permitted, and Anga climbed the improvised bamboo ladder which they towed behind the canoe.

Then, on the evening of the second day following his battle with the python, Anga called down from his perch that he could see smoke down the river.

"A cook fire, huh, mebbe?" questioned Morgan. "On an island?"

"Yes, bwana," nodded the black. "One smoke on island."

The news at first aroused Morgan to enthusiasm, and he decided to push on through the dusk to reach the island. As they slipped along through the river, however, it occurred to him that, perhaps, this

smoke might be the camp fire of the party who had passed him in the night. He had nothing to fear, of course, but he did have a definite purpose here in the jungle and did not want to waste time. He wanted to find Ahmed Bey.

As they drew near the island and could determine the location of the column of smoke towering against the darkening sky, he warned his negroes against unnecessary sound, directing the canoe silently under the deep shadows of the foliage on the shore.

As he and his porters paused, arming themselves, Morgan whispered suddenly, motioning with a finger to his lips. The soft, muffled beating of a native drum reached their ears, accompanied by the subdued chanting of native voices.

"This may be a bad village," cautioned Morgan as they began moving carefully through the tangle of high, dense brush. "Be ready to stand off a possible rush. Remember—don't separate. Keep together—with me. My revolver will stop them."

As they drew nearer to the sound the tempo of the drum increased and the rumble seemed to reach out through the African night until it filled the eardrums of Morgan like the beating of a giant heart. Its throbbing meter rose, again and again, saturating the clinging damp of the air until it seemed to Morgan that he had to wave it from his path as he crept forward.

"Shhhh!" he put out a hand and touched Anga's moist arm. "Look!"

They had come to a break in the foliage. Before them, perhaps twenty yards away, stood the spiked wall of a strong stockade. Through a slit here and there, and from over its pickets, came the wavering light of a fire. Morgan listened, but the rising thunder of the native drum let him hear nothing; nothing but the persistent monotonous chant. His negro porters stod trembling, their spears half raised.

And suddenly, from a point to their right, through the shadows, came a shrill cry. The drum stopped as if at a signal. The negro voices hushed. Once more deadly, mysterious silence spread over the blackness of the night.

Morgan's spine tingled to the challenge of a white man's inherent courage. He motioned to Anga, stepped out of the brush, and saw with a turn of his head to the right, that a wide gate stood open. Light from within painted the peeled logs a glaring orange. And in the full gleam of the light stood a giant negro, spear in hand, naked but for a cockade of large feathers fixed to his shaven head.

Morgan took a step forward, was about to call out. His finger tensed on his revolver trigger. "Follow me, boys," he said softly, halting even before he started, for the voice of the giant black man blasted the sudden silence.

"The gate is open," cried the big negro, "for the white traveler to enter. My royal master bids you welcome."

Feeling strangely exposed and guessing rightly that he and his boys must have been observed, Buck Morgan marched up to the gate with his porters at his back. The big savage grinned and bowed, motioning with a hand, which Morgan estimated was on an arm more than a yard long. "See, my master," said the negro in a very acceptable English, "he waits."

A glance through the gate showed Morgan a sizable village centered around a broad plaza. In the center of this was a great blazing fire tended by two shining blacks. Some distance from the fire and to the right, but plainly visible in its light, sat a figure in a large throne-like chair.

A VOICE came from this figure as Morton hesitated. "Come in, my cautious American friend. Come in. My poor fare is yours. Welcome."

"Thanks," replied Morgan, starting at once across the space toward his mysterious host. He could see that the little shriveled man was very dark, swarthy, but even in the flickering light he was certain that he was not a negro. As he reached the chair the old man straightened up and extended a scrawny, mahogany-hued hand that looked like the talon of an eagle. "Thank you, sir," said Morgan taking the hand, shooting a swift glance about him at the circle of gleaming, painted blacks. "This must be some kind of black magic, I guess," laughed Morgan. "This reception and—"

"My lookouts," crowed the old leathery man. "They reported your canoe. Saw you making for my shore."

"I see," acknowledged Morgan, feeling a trifle foolish. "But how could you know that I'm an American?"

"My employees have met all nations on this river, my boy. When you whispered to your boys as you landed, you gave yourself away. Sit down and rest, we shall have—I guess you call it dinner back home—if I remember. Getting pretty old now. Sometimes I forget."

"My name's Morgan, sir," put in Buck impulsively, "and I haven't had a home in a dozen years. Kind of a drifter, you'd say. But if I can have everything under control like you have when I reach your age I'll call it a good day."

The old man's beard twitched, his watery, rusty black eyes twinkled merrily, and his lips parted in a broad grin. Buck noted that the old eagle had a good mouthful of teeth, too. For a moment the old fellow studied his guests, motioning for a nearby negro to make the visiting blacks comfortable.

"Buck Morgan?" queried the strange oldster.

"Yeah," gasped Buck in bewilderment. "Some people call me Buck Morgan. Why? How'd you guess it?"

"Oh, some fellow came through here a year or so back," explained the old man. "He was looking for rubber. We got talking about tough men we'd known around the coast. He told me about a Buck Morgan being the toughest character on the Indian Ocean. Said he saw him break loose in a dive in Mozambique and wipe up the place."

Buck's face grew crimson in the firelight. "Takes a man a while to build himself a reputation," he said, grinning, "and a lifetime to live it down, I guess. Anyway, I've reformed and I'm a little off my trail. Do you happen to know an old timer along this river called Ahmed Bey?"

"Ahmed Bey," repeated his host slowly, deliberately, as if reflecting. "You are in search of Ahmed Bey, my boy?"

"Yes," declared Buck, "do you know him, by chance?"

The old man's smile faded swiftly and his smallish eyes bored into the face of his visitor. For a moment Buck Morgan wished the circle of blacks would do something, make some sound, beat their drum or sing. The patriarch was studying his face, scrutinizing it minutely.

At last he spoke, measuring his words, weighing them carefully for effect on his hearer. "By more than chance, I know him," he said adding gravely, "I am Ahmed Bey!"

WHEN Buck Morgan had recovered somewhat from his surprise he drew the tip of the elephant tusk from his pocket, holding the yellowing whistle toward his host. The Bey turned it over in his withered hand, almost fondly, a strange, faraway look in his piercing eyes.

"You got this—"

"From a fellow called Muto," nodded Buck, "I just happened to save his—well, there was a little trouble. It was in Tarkwa on the Gold Coast and a pair of gentlemen were at Muto's throat. I was shooting pretty well that night. Do you remember Muto?"

The Bey nodded, his expression softened. "Does a man ever forget his own—?"

Like a fierce clap of thunder the roar of rifles cut off the old man's words. Through the gate had dashed a trio of hard-faced white men followed by a crowd of yelling blacks. In a flash the jungle village was a battle ground. Bullets whined and spears whistled through the air.

Shouting commands in his high cracked voice the old Bey tried desperately to recover order among his people. But the shock of the surprise had been too complete. Only a very few of his retainers held their ground, flinging spears, backing off, their eyes wide with fear.

Morgan swore angrily and dragged his revolver, shouting for the old fellow to throw himself down. As he called, Morgan hurled himself flat behind a heap of fire-logs and shot with cool deliberation. The attacking party was creeping forward from the gate where the guard had been their first victim. They came crouched low, shooting into the black mass of fleeing negroes.

"Everybody out!" bellowed the big leader in dirty white linens. He dashed to the fire and snatched out a blazing brand. Morgan inched forward in his position, and saw the old Bey start to totter toward a large mud shack. The other saw him too, and snapped a quick shot at the old man. Then Morgan fired, leaping from his hiding place with a shout of rage.

The fellow in the dirty whites dropped the burning brand and fell sprawling on

the hard clay, blood spurting from his throat, his body twisting and threshing in agony.

A fierce yell broke from Buck's throat. It was like a signal. His own black boys poured out from hiding, and in a second the little plaza was a vivid inferno of struggling men. Blacks and whites clashed hand to hand. Gun shots thundered and reverberated. Wild bullets and spears thudded and ricocheted. Scattered sparks flew like spray from the fire, and over it all rose the shrieks of the terror-stricken and the dying.

Buck fought with a fierce singleness of purpose, smashing about with his already emptied revolver, lashing out with his fist, battering down the blacks with an unholy relish, kicking their sprawling forms from his path, determined to get his hands on the two remaining white raiders. Like the changing winds of a mountain storm the tide of battle changed. Buck plunged after the nearest white man, smashed at the man's jaw with his gun, tripped over the kicking legs of a dying black, and fell headlong.

"Upesi!" he cried to his own porters. "Quick. See—they escape!"

Scrambling to his feet, cut, bleeding and dazed, Buck Morgan staggered toward the gate through which the panic-stricken remnants of the robber gang were fleeing. With a hoarse cry of balked anger, he threw his empty revolver at the head of the second white renegade. He saw it miss its mark, strike the paint-striped neck of a negro, heard the crack, saw the fellow fall limply.

As he reached the gate he saw in the pale night light outside, that a large canoe was already shoved out from shore. He could see it vaguely against the black Congo, could hear the howls of agony, the frantic splash of paddles and the oaths of the two fleeing white men.

Buck wished that he had brought his own rifle from their craft. It would have been different with a rifle. He could have killed all three of the leaders. The rising death chant of the natives behind him in the village aroused him. He wondered how the old Bey had fared in the fighting.

Weaving unsteadily past the scattered fire he went to find his host. The place was a shambles.

"Ahmed Bey," he called. "Where are you?"

He heard a feeble groan from the shadow of a hut.

A glance showed him that the old fellow had stopped a heavy slug. He was breathing with difficulty. Buck dropped to his knees beside him, feeling strangely weary and beaten. He realized with a pang of honest self pity that his long trek across the African jungle had been in all probability for nothing.

FEW living men knew the story of Ahmed Bey. None lived who knew his secret. Buck Morgan, sitting beside the old man's couch, listened patiently to the halting tale from the Bey's fevered lips.

A semblance of order had been restored to the kraal, guards had been placed and new fires lighted. In the thick mud-and-wattle palace of the Bey, Buck smoked innumerable cigarettes, while the old slaver gasped a story of days that were gone, days when the dark continent was the trapping ground of a fierce clan dealing in black bodies.

"Sometimes — we — took our — pay," wheezed Ahmed Bey, "in—gold. Sometimes—goods. Sometimes—some of—each. We took—diamonds, boy. Uncut—princely —stones— smuggled out—of—" He was weakening fast and Buck nodded, cautioned him to rest. But there was a light of determination in the old slaver's eyes. "You are—a—fighting man—Morgan. You risked—your life—for an old—worthless—devil—and you—once—saved my—son's life." Buck heard this disclosure calmly though he noted the effect of the admission on the dying man. "My son." He stared hard at Buck, and went on; "There was a —a—battle in the north—where the—desert—a gang of—Arabs. I alone—escaped. For fifty—years I—have held the —secret of—our cache. I alone." He rolled his eyes, furtively and called a name to which a big negro answered, appearing like magic at the Bey's bedside. There were words in a strange tongue. The negro went away and returned almost at once with a molding, leather kit bag, which he held open at the old fellow's side. The Bey groped inside with a trembling hand.

"Do you know—" he asked Buck Morgan, "—the mountains—of the—Moon?"

Buck nodded, his interest keyed up. "I know where they are, sir."

"The falls—of—the Allaman?"

"I've heard of them, it seems," confessed Buck, puzzled at the excited gleam in the other's eyes.

Ahmed Bey lifted something from the bag and held it out to Morgan. Buck took it in his hand more to humor the old fellow than through any curiosity. Then he glanced sharply at the thing, realizing that it was the rib bone of a man, a human being who had once lived and breathed. And on it, in spite of the years, he could see a lot of mysterious markings. Hieroglyphics of some sort, Arabic, perhaps. He did not know and he looked up at the Bey.

"Take this—my boy—" whispered Ahmed Bey. "It is the—key—to the—the—world's great-est—fortune. Plunder it—at your ease—but tell—no—" The Bey's little eyes widened as if in terror. His mouth agape, he gasped with a harrowing rasp.

Buck Morgan sat for some minutes beside the dead man, trying to classify the emotions he was feeling, wondering how he was to fill in the blanks the old man had either omitted—or never reached. He put the strangely inscribed rib bone in his pocket and walked outside the hut.

"Somewhere in Africa," he mumbled thoughtfully, "I've got a fortune waiting for me, but how am I going to find it?"

AHMED BEY'S body was buried with simple ceremony and Morgan decided that the sooner he left the Congo and returned to civilization, the quicker he could find out what the mysterious markings on the rib-bone meant. Just where to go to learn this and how he could do it without possibly sharing his secret with another, was the problem that occupied his thoughts as he prepared to leave.

Eleven men had been killed in the fighting of the night before. Many more had been wounded. Of the dead, Buck Morgan was concerned chiefly with the white man. One look at the dead face in the daylight showed Buck that he had been right in his assumption that he was followed into the jungle. The corpse was that of a burly brute known as Yellow Jack Boyne, whose ugly jaundiced face was fixed in a vicious snarl as the bodies were tossed into the Congo. The jungle would take care of them.

"Panga," called Morgan, motioning to the lithe headman of his little safari. "We go to Stanleyville. Catch supplies."

Buck did not tell Panga that he knew Yellow Jack or had guessed who the dead man's companions were. Natives lived under a pall of fear at best and Morgan did not want to wake up some morning to find himself alone in the jungle. Porters had been known to sneak away.

But at their first camp up river from the island Buck learned something from Panga. There had been no sign of their recent attackers, still Morgan was determined to keep on the alert so he posted one of his porters to watch the river, as darkness descended. Panga, his belly filled and a vile pipe lighted, surprised his master at the fireside by recounting an almost unbelievable story which he said he had heard from a very, very old toothless woman on the Bey's island, that night after the fighting.

Buck let the negro chatter on to the end, uninterrupted. When the man had finished Buck continued to sit and smoke thoughtfully, marvelling at the manner in which Ahmed Bey had nursed his wealth those many years. He chuckled softly to himself. The Bey was an old he-jackal.

"Every year, for the devil knows how long," Buck thought to himself, "he took two blacks on a journey, eh? And every time he returned, he was alone. Nobody ever saw the darkies again."

According to Panga, all those negroes at the village were virtually slaves of Ahmed Bey. And nary a one knew the whereabouts of the old man's source of wealth. So he sneaked off once a year and tapped the treasure cache. Then did away with two porters somewhere in the jungle so no one shared his secret.

The chattering of monkeys and cries of strange birds in the mass of jungle around them filled Morgan's ears as he crawled into his tent that night. "Sleep with one eye open," he called to his porters, stretching his aching body on his blanket.

For some time he lay wide awake but as he began to doze off he fixed his pistol near him, felt of the priceless rib bone in his pocket. He could not afford to lose that now; the key to his everlasting for-

tune. He felt the thick blackness of the night-shrouded jungle shore creep down on him snugly, heard the soft murmuring of the tireless river, the snoring of one of his boys.

Boyne was dead and good riddance. But Boyne's side-kick was likely one of the two white scum who escaped. Boyne and Cleaver. Two of the lowest thugs along the East Coast. Kill a man for a drink. So they'd trailed him into the interior, playing a hunch that he was after something good, eh. Well, Yellow Jack was crocodile feed now. One of these days Buck Morgan would come up with Mister Cleaver. Chimp Cleaver, the limey tramp with the monkey face. Morgan's dreaming carried him far away, down the trail across British East to the coast, through the Portuguese dives.

The thick, hot silence under the ghostly black roof of the jungle rose and fell with the rhythmic breathing of the sleeping camp. Morgan's "one eye" warning was forgotten, his own vow lost under the weight of fatigue, the grip of the stillness. Not a muscle of the white man nor his blacks registered consciousness of the soft, faint movement among the vine and moss-draped trunks of the great trees.

BRUSHING their dank path through the jungle soundlessly, a step at a time, their goal marked by the pale light of Morgan's smouldering fire, the figures moved like hunting beasts of the wilderness. Slowly, with infinite caution, they converged on the unsuspecting sleepers.

Into the little clearing they crept, each footfall tested for a snapping twig, peering eyes probing the indigo night.

Not until they were within arm's reach of their prey did the marauders make a sound. Then, like charging lions they flung themselves on the sleepers. The silence crupted in a fierce clamor of surprise and shouting, the struggling Morgan and his servants borne down again as they fought to rise. Morgan fought savagely against the foul-smelling man-pack at his throat, tried to reach his pistol, felt the bewildering entanglement of what seemed a hundred ropes.

Quickly he was dragged toward the fire, fighting like a wild creature to break free. But it was no use. He realized in grim silence that he was in the tightest corner of his life.

Buck Morgan looked up into the fire-lit face of Chimp Cleaver.

"Yuh don't look so tough now, Buck," grinned the ape-faced thug. "Now you're goin' ter pay double for Yeller Jack."

At a word from Cleaver, Morgan, who refused to open his lips, was bound hand and foot despite his struggles. They had him this time, all right. Cleaver motioned to Morgan's middle, and the other white man, a swarthy black-browed husky called "Hitch," tore open Buck's shirt and jerked out his money belt.

"We're goin' ter teach yer, Buck," sneered Cleaver, "that it don't pay no man to interfere with Cleaver no more. Yuh 'member that night in the Turk's joint?"

Morgan chuckled. "And I'll remember this night—and so will you, you baboon. Come on—get it over with, and on your way before I get loose and take you apart."

Cleaver kicked Morgan heartily in the side for answer, as Hitch handed him something he had dragged from Morgan's pocket. "Here Chimp, looks like his luck charm."

Chimp Cleaver took the bone to the fire-light and studied it, grinning evilly. "Fancy, eh?" he chuckled. "Well, Buck, I'm takin' your luck now. You won't need it where you're goin'."

Buck ignored Cleaver, saving his wind. He had to do some heavy thinking, find some way to get loose. They had his boys trussed up, too, and it looked like the end of his roving trail. A fellow like Cleaver would stoop to anything.

When dawn came he found out what Cleaver meant for he heard the two white men talking as their negroes prepared to move. They were taking Morgan and his porters, tied like animals, through the jungle to the village of a fierce cannibal tribe that dealt in slaves.

Buck Morgan, a jungle slave, to a savage black king!

BRUISED, beaten almost to a plup, bleeding from thorns and the clutching twigs, Buck was driven, dragged and carried at times, for two days. Deep into the darkening jungle the negro headman led the way. Chimp Cleaver and his companion, Hitch, staggered stubbornly along.

taunting Morgan frequently, cutting his body and face with thin switches of bamboo when he tried to fight back. By noon of the third day the party marched into a village of mud-walled huts, with Morgan trussed like a tiger, lashed along a pole carried on the shoulders of two tall negroes.

Through puffed eyes, Buck could see the savages swarming out of the huts. A great drum began to beat with the volume of a thunder storm. He saw a score or more scrawny blacks dragging heavy chains ironed to their legs, others chained together by their necks, their flesh raw where the iron collars rubbed to the bone.

There was much excitement at sight of the visitors, and Buck saw Cleaver make a sign to their guide; heard his words. "Tell the chief we got some prime slaves for sale."

Amid a riot of chanting, shouting natives, Morgan and his fellow captives were borne to a smooth area before the largest hut. Here sat a hideously painted figure wearing a voluminous wig of some animal hair dyed green. Then the crowd surrounded Morgan. Natives poked him with their bare toes, jabbed at him with sticks, laughed at his struggles.

A flaming, all-powerful rage kept Buck Morgan from succumbing to the tortures that followed during that day. Cleaver and Hitch, with their porters had long since departed, the Chimp spitting on Buck as he departed. "So long, Buck," were his farewell words. "See you in hell, you Yankee bum."

Buck and his whimpering porters were dragged to a nearby cattle kraal as evening approached. Here they were fastened to stakes to await the chief's celebration after dark. As each was tied fast, a leering, smeared juju man, feathered fantastically, moved from one to another of the prisoners, shaking a gourd rattle over them as if he was sprinkling them with an evil powder.

As darkness slid down over the surrounding jungle Buck peered cautiously about in the graying light. He could hear the gabble of voices beyond the palings, but could see no one.

Buck sucked in a deep, painful lungful of filth tainted air. Somehow he felt no hatred for these howling heathens, but he swore softly to get free, free to catch that treacherous renegade from his own race, Cleaver, a white man who had sold him like a dog to black devils.

The beating of the drums began now anew and a chilling wave of savage voices started a chant that filled the night like the yelping of a hyena pack. Buck heard, below the bedlam, the sound of approaching feet.

"It's now or never," he told himself, straining against his bonds.

The juju man, a sort of witch doctor, entered the kraal with two stalwart blacks who carried something. Buck watched them build a fire; saw one of the three drag a stone near to it, then place what looked like bars of iron into the heart of the growing flames. They were going to grill him as if he were a hamburger.

With each step of the work the jigging juju doctor shook his rattle; over the flames, over the stone, on a sledge, then above the iron bars. Sweat began to ooze from Morgan's body as he watched. The noise of the king's dancers outside made the very ground tremble and Buck felt himself shudder as he saw the red glow spreading the length of the iron bars. It was as if he could almost smell his burning flesh.

The juju man flitted about now, like an animated scarecrow, and Buck wondered; would he get a white man's fighting chance for his life? His jaws clamped tight and his muscles tightened as he saw his answer. The gesticulating medicine man shouted a command. Immediately the two big blacks strode to the prone white man, slashed the ropes which tied him to the stake, dragged him nearer the fire, halting beside the sledge.

Buck's eyes bulged in horror. His time was come.

"Hey, Smoky!" he snarled at the rattle-waver as one of the negroes cut the heavy ropes which bound him. The Juju's head came forward like that of a jungle fowl and he stared at the white man, puzzled. Buck knew his moment was at hand; a sportsman's choice. The juju grunted and Buck Morgan exploded like a case of dynamite. His feigned weakness had been a smart trick. With a spring he hurled himself clear of the falling ropes, broke from the astonished grasp of the native black-

smiths and rushed straight at the witch doctor.

The next ten seconds were so many flashes of white lightning. The frightened, angry juju paused a moment, a shout broke from his filed teeth. He saw the released white hellion charging at him and with a cry he hurled his rattle. Morgan never paused; with one hand he caught the rattle and with the other he smashed the greasy negro flush in the face, crashing him backward like a felled ox. Caught flat-footed, the two other blacks stared in bewilderment, fell back as Morgan snatched up a heavy blazing chunk of wood and flung it with all his strength over the stockade wall to the grass roof of the king's palace.

In a moment the tinder-dry hut was ablaze, wild shouting arose. Buck raced for the farther wall, scaled it like a leopard, and ran. He forgot the agony of his muscles, the pain of his bruises. He was free and the night that was black as the bowels of the earth would hold the tribe from his trail.

THE pale green aura of mid-day beneath the interlaced tree tops of the jungle found Buck still plodding wearily onward. The all-consuming hatred for the vile Cleaver kept him moving, but the distance seemed to grow instead of lessen; time meant nothing to his clouded brain. By evening of that day he had covered the miles it had taken his captors more than two days to cover with their human prizes. He had reached the Congo.

Staring about him crazily, he looked on the silent river banks. His enemies were gone. Madness threatened to start him off like a maniac through the choked tangle of the brush along the shore. But his own hoarse voice, raised in futile rage, checked the impulse.

"I've got to keep my head," he reminded himself, knowing that men trapped in the jungle had more than once gone stark, staring mad. "He'll go up river, sure as shootin'. And I'll find him if I have to crawl the last mile."

Calmed by his lonely reflections, he gathered large leaves from ground palms and laid himself down, spreading the leaves over his body carefully. In a moment he was sleeping as if dead.

Six long days of tramping, encouraged by traces of camp-fires and guided by an instinct strange even to himself, found Buck Morgan once more following the distinct sound of voices. This time it was broad day, and he was crossing a fantastic region of winding streams, hills and jungle, running one into another. Soon he smelled smoke.

With the stalking tread of a prowling lion, he crept through the bush, his bearded face set in a rocky mask, his eyes boring the intermittent light and shadow. Foot by foot he approached. He saw the gray-blue ribbon of smoke clearly; a few more steps and he was peering through the branches at the man called Hitch. A half dozen porters were setting up the camp, one tending the fire.

Morgan stared, trembling, the fingers of both hands twitching. He felt in the pocket of his ragged canvas jacket for his knife, found the juju rattle sticking from the other pocket. Then he froze. Hitch was coming almost straight at him, in his hands, outstretched in a manner that hid Buck's place of concealment, he was unfolding Buck's own tent.

"My dice, Mister Hitch," breathed Buck, silently, as he sent a swift glance toward the negroes. A misstep and he was a goner, but it was the real chance.

Two more steps and Hitch paused. The silent, wraith-like form that slid from the foliage moved like a cat creature, its eyes fixed hard on a six-shooter hanging in Hitch's belt. There was blood in Buck's glare as he reached out, batting the tent folds aside, his other hand clamping on the gun-butt which he snatched from its holster.

"Don't make a sound, Hitch," whispered Buck, "and don't—"

Hitch's teeth chattered and his eyes bulged horribly as if he was facing a ghost. "Chchchch—Cripes—Buck—don't—" he stammered, trembling, "—don't shoot!"

The gun in his hand made Morgan another man. His eyes blazed with a fierce resolve and his weary shoulders straightened.

"Where's that monkey-faced Cleaver?" he demanded. "Where is that—" Buck caught a move of Hitch, saw from a side-long glance that the porters had discovered him. "Don't try—" he started when

Hitch flung himself sideways, shouting to his porters.

The blacks grabbed for their spears, and Hitch, screaming "Chimp, hey, Chimp!" began running. Buck heard Cleaver's voice through the forest, raised the weapon and aimed coolly for the broad back of the fleeing Hitch. The brittle bark of the gun startled the silence, brought a frightened screeching of birds and monkeys in the forest. Hitch pitched forward on his face, his thick body jerking.

"The game's open, eight balls," Buck cried, turning on the approaching negroes. "Dig your graves." He dodged the first of the thrown spears, and deliberately shot the thrower dead. Then he turned the smoking muzzle into the charging sepia devils and slam-banged slugs into them until the gun was empty and he knew that the unscathed were fleeing into the bush as if the devil was after them. Their howls of fear and pain trailed after them, leaving Buck Morgan trembling. Smoke drifted through the hot sunlight like dancing funeral wreaths. The shocking kick of the big gun in his hand had acted like a tonic to his ragged nerves.

Stepping over to the body of Hitch, he turned the man over with his foot. One slug had been Hitch's ticket to hell. Now for Chimp Cleaver. He had to get Cleaver and that priceless rib bone.

Glancing up, his eyes traveling across the suddenly abandoned camp, he searched for a sign of the dead man's pardner. Framed in the sradow of a narrow jungle path opposite him, he discerned the poised figure of a man.

It was Chimp Cleaver. And the Chimp was staring, his simian face turned toward Morgan, a look of mingled rage and unbelief in his small, piercing eyes.

"Yeah, it's me, Chimy," assured Buck. "I told you I'd see you again, remember?"

CHIMP CLEAVER rubbed a grimy hand across his furtive eyes as if he half expected the thing he saw would disappear. He shook his head and blinked. Buck saw his mouth half open, the man's tongue licking his lips.

"Come on out, Chimp," urged Buck. "I want to have a little talk with you." He began walking slowly, straight toward Cleaver, his own gray eyes fixed intently and meaningly on the other's face.

"No, you don't!" shrieked Cleaver suddenly. "Keep away from me, damn yuh. Yuh ain't human." He crouched like a cornered animal, a snarl baring his ragged teeth.

Then, with a curse, he jerked a revolver from his belt, fired a couple of wild shots at Morgan, turned and ran like a terror-stricken child, a whimpering stream of oaths dribbling from his lips as he disappeared into the forest.

This unexpected turn of events held Buck riveted to the ground for a moment. Then he set out in pursuit of the fleeing thug. As he dashed into the jungle he noted subconsciously that it was a narrow footpath he was traversing. Some old game trail perhaps. Ahead of him, some distance now but still traceable by his blubbering cries, he could hear Cleaver running. Straining his ears to keep track of his quarry, Buck Morgan settled down to a careful pace. He could hear the slap, slap, of Cleaver's feet, and the sounds of small creatures scurrying from their path into the thickets beside the trail. Birds and countless tiny monkey folk screamed and chattered in the tree branches over their heads as they raced on through the jungle.

The trail dipped into a shallow glade. Buck heard the splash of Cleaver's feet, and soon after he, himself, came to a narrow trickle of water half hidden by dark knee-high grasses.

"He'll run up against a wall somewhere," panted Buck, assuring himself, "or we'll come to a river or something."

A quarter of a mile or more farther on, Cleaver, with Morgan close behind now, emerged from the jungle trail and ran staggeringly across t deep grassy veldt, like a large bowl sprawling in the heart of the forest. Midway across, Cleaver stumbled, caught himself, turned and fired his last cartridge. Buck felt the rip of the slug tearing the flapping collar of his jacket. He heard the death-shriek of the missile as it whistled by his throat, and his ears were filled with the echoing blast of the shot even while he stumbled after his foe.

The waving grass tugged at their feet, and the fierce furnace heat arose from the earth to almost smother them as they ran, gasping for air, with the ruthless African sun blinding them in a yellow green haze

that made the land shimmer and twist like the painting of some distorted brain.

Into the cool of the jungle they plunged again, the darkened, drafty corridors whispering of mystery. Buck saw Cleaver stumble, heard his rasping voice cursing his maker, caught a brief glimpse of the man as he flung his empty pistol into the thicket and, as if relieved by loss of its weight, make a new spurt forward.

The sound of rushing water began to fill the path. Buck felt the air change. It was cooler. He sucked it deep into his chest. He saw that the path they followed was joined by another, a wider path running off to the right through the deepr forest. Still Cleaver went on, and Morgan caught another glimpse of him. The path turned sharply to the right. Suddenly the padding footfalls ahead had halted. Buck paused, his own breath a rumble in his ears. What had happened to Cleaver? Had he finally decided to turn and fight it out, hand to hand? There was no sound, other than the whispering rush of water and Buck's own breathing.

Suspecting a trick of Cleaver's, Morgan crept forward cautiously, his eyes and ears alert, the empty gun gripped in a stiff fist. He came to the turn in the path, peered through the edges of the undergrowth. A strange sight met his gaze.

Not fifty feet away he saw Chimp Cleaver. And Cleaver was half crouched, balancing himself a third of the distance across a native grass-vine bridge that stretched across a deep gorge. Beneath him rushed the river, and in the shallows of its banks were the horny studded backs of hundreds of giant crocodiles.

Cleaver's body faced the opposite end of the treacherous, swaying bridge, but his sweat-streaked, reddened face was bent over one shoulder, his horror-stricken eyes meeting those of Buck Morgan. He saw the revolver, still in Buck's fist, and fllinched.

A STRANGE, hollow croak broke from his parted lips. Buck saw the hand on the one hand-rail slide ahead tremblingly, as he crawled along the swaying footbridge.

"Don't shoot me, Buck," pleaded the Chimp. "We kin talk this all out—neat as a pin." His teeth began to chatter and he cast a fearful glance beneath him toward the stream. The mere movement of his head made the fragile bridge shiver.

"Where's that—" Buck paused, his alert brain warning him against disclosing the real character of the property he sought. "Where's my luck charm, Chimp? What'd you do with it?"

"I got it, Buck," whined Cleaver, motioning to his pocket. "It's safe an' snug. Listen—you fling that gun away an' I'll—"

Buck laughed in Cleaver's face, cutting him short. A clever duck, eh, and he thought the gun was loaded. "Come off there, Chimp," he said, "and let's stop this bluffing."

"Think I'm a chump?" demanded Cleaver, gaining time. "You fling away the shooter an' I'll get together with yuh."

Buck raised the weapon slowly, saw Chimp's hand start toward his pocket. "Don't, Buck. Nix. You take a shot at me an' I'll toss your luck piece to hell an' gawn down with them crocs."

Morgan lowered the gun and started to edge out onto the treacherously swinging bridge. It had but one hand-rail. The right side was open to the water and the reptiles beneath. Cleaver, mumbling with terror, began to edge farther out on the crude structure, calling to Morgan to stay away from him.

With one hand grasping the woven rail, Buck tested the lacing of the foothpath. Deliberately he jerked the rail, made a dodging movement with his whole weight. The bridge began to sway and tremble, swinging now, and Cleaver, crying aloud, clutched madly with both hands on the rail. In that moment Buck saw his chance. Whipping the gun up, he threw it at Cleaver. He heard the thug cry out, try to dodge, saw the missile strike him under the arm. Morgan followed the weapon with a swift recklessness that threatened to hurl them both to the depths below. He made a savage grab, one arm around Cleaver's squirming body, the other hand clamped on the rail.

Cleaver poured broken curses into his face, but Buck held on like a grappling hook. He'd been on swinging bridges before and he knew what he was about. Cleaver, in raving terror, flung an arm about Buck's throat in a grip of steel, and Buck, feeling his footing, brought a scream

of horror from his foe as he deliberately let himself fall, pulling Cleaver down with him, fighting fiercely.

But Buck did not leave the bridge. He had dropped, like a man drops into a saddle from a tree branch, his legs straddling the crude footpath, his quick feet locked beneath, around the twisted vines. It left him two hands free, and he was battling now for the treasure—the Ahmed's key to the slavers' cache. His free hand dug into Cleaver's clothes, tearing into the pockets, the struggle tossing the bridge back and forth like a swinging hammock. Cleaver's half-muffled cries echoed over the ravine.

Buck, smothered in the other's grasp, at last felt the thing he searched for. His hand tore it from Cleaver's pocket, and, with a superhuman effort, he jerked himself half free of the stranglehold. A glance back of him showed terra firma. He threw the bone to safety, as Cleaver fastened his teeth in his arm like a tiger.

The pain maddened Buck. He loosened his grip, grabbed for the tie-line that held the rail and bridge equa-distant apart across its length. With this for support, he drew up a knee and crashed it into Cleaver's belly. The thug's grip was broken and he fell backward with a yell, clutching frantically at the footpath.

Another instant and Cleaver had whipped out a knife from his waistband. With a cry of rage, he reached for Morgan, slashing viciously.

Buck kicked his arm away, jockeyed for a firmer grip on the bridge as it bucked and swayed dizzily over the chasm. For a moment they faced each other like two warring tigers, sweat-streaked, panting from their struggle, next they were locked in a death clash that knew no quarter.

There was a sweep of Cleaver's arm, the horrifying slash and severing of the hand-rail. The bridge sagged suddenly, snapped with a noise like a whiplash, and Cleaver, one hand fastened in Morgan's shirt collar, tried to drag himself closer, ripping at Buck's legs with the gleaming knifeblade.

They fought silently now, each man consigning the other to death, each resigned to what the Fates had marked against his name. In the fringe of trees along the edge of the ravine, hairy little faces clung to the tall branches and watched the struggle, until Cleaver, gone berserk, drove his knife edge into one of the key strands of the bridge. Brittle, crackling sounds exploded under the two men. A series of ripping, snapping noises crackled in the ravine below like the swift tearing of coarse canvas.

Buck jerked back from Cleaver, lashing his limbs around the thicker vines, grabbing with steel fingers. He got one quick look at the parting bridge strands, saw a gleam of stark terror in Cleaver's little eyes. The Chimp had slashed the bridge through between them. He was on the long end.

"So long, Chimp," grinned Buck through his battered eyes. "See you in hell—mebbe."

CLEAVER seemed to hang there, suspended in mid-air for an eternity, one hand fastened on the ragged end of a broken vine, like a man astride a diving board. Then, with a scream, he went swinging downward, his hand loosened in fright. Buck Morgan, clinging to the very short end of the severed bridge, held tight, felt his body slam against the steep, brush-clad slope.

For a few moments he clung there, regaining his breath, keeping his eyes purposely away from the scene in the river-bed below. But he could not shut out the sound that filled his ears as the horny snouts of the crocodiles shot swiftly through the water to the spot beneath the broken bridge.

When he felt his strength returning, Buck dragged himself up along the firmly rooted vines to the solid ground above. He sighed with relief as he recovered the carved rib bone. With this safely in his pocket, he turned to the foot trail and began walking.

He was still Buck Morgan, untamed, and he grinned stiffly to himself as he followed the path back to the camp which he found, as he had expected, deserted.

"I'll just take my stuff," he mumbled, contentedly, "and I'll appropriate enough of Cleaver's chop to keep me going to Ponthierville."

One of the Chimp's canoes, a small one, was found a few hundred yards away from the camp, on the river bank. In this, the following day, Buck loaded his supplies

and set off. He was still alone in the jungle, but he was ready for anything that turned up, for he had a rifle, ammunition and grub to see him through.

When he finally arrived at Ponthierville, where the Lualaba runs into the Congo, he marched into the one weather-beaten hostelry, had his bath prepared, wrote "Buck Morgan, U.S.A.," on the fly-specked register, and climbed the rickety staircase to his low-ceilinged room.

"This'll be a good enough place to lay up in an' rest for a month 'r so," he mumbled to himself. "And one of these days I'm going to find out what the carving on that bone means. Then it'll be Morgan on the trail again. But now—" He began undressing for his bath. He drew the treasured rib bone from his pocket and looked at it, shaking his head. Sticking it inside his pillow case, he drew off his frayed canvas jacket. The rattle of something made him look in a pocket. He drew out the almost forgotten juju doctor's rattle. It was the first time he had looked at the curious thing in the daylight. Taking it nearer the single window, Buck shook it, looked into the slotted opening of the rattle end.

"Holy Jumbo!" he whistled, shooting a quick look toward his door. For a moment he stood listening. Then he went and turned the key in the lock. Bending over, he placed the painted gourd on the floor and hammered it carefully with his boot heel until it cracked enough to let him get a finger hold inside.

Tearing away the broken edge of the slot, he let the contents sprinkle out on the bed, counting them. Nine! Buck stared at them in smiling fascination. All the agony, all the conflict that had strewn his path since he entered the jungle on a gambler's chance, were amply repaid. And Buck not guessing. He knew genuine high-class uncut diamonds when he saw them. The smallest of them would polish up to at least twenty karats.

COBRA DEATH

By MAJOR E. L. DYER

Cobra! . . . hideous, hooded death. When Red Sager, tough jungle bully, killed the dreaded "rhingal," he forgot a second poison-fanged avenger—the cobra's mate.

RED SAGER, known as the hardest, toughest white man from the Diamond Fields to the Congo, paused a moment, the blood-moist rhinoceros hide whip poised in air. Incongruously enough, it was a bit of desert beauty that arrested his brutal blows.

The sullen, almost naked black giant at

his feet, whom he had been lashing, got up without a whimper, avoided the spot where Sager was looking, and stole noiselessly away toward the Safari camp.

There, Olga, if she dared, would wash clean the marks of the lash, and rub on some healing lotion to numb the pain. The devoted natives called the white woman *U-Bala Tyatyamba,* the Desert Lily. Sager called her other things.

It was a small cluster of flowers that had caught the trader's eye. "Lord!" he exclaimed, forgetting the disappearing native as he gazed at the gorgeous, tulip-like blossoms that recent rains had conjured forth on the rock-strewn Angola desert.

The only soft spot left in an otherwise brutal nature was the faint memory of a dying mother, back in England, taken away when her children needed her the most—and she had loved flowers.

"I'll grab a few of these for Olga," he mused. "Maybe the shock will kill the wench, or at least dry up her damned tears. This blasted heat is getting her. Why in hell did I ever mix up with a woman?"

His reflections, perhaps rather the swish of his whip, had dulled his ears to another sound, somewhat similar, even more menacing.

One flower only he plucked when, suddenly, he sensed danger. With an agility bred of jungle life, he sprang back like an animal recoiling from the snap of a steel trap. He barely escaped the fatal fangs of the hooded black death that loomed above the blossoms, but before he could protect his face the stinging, searing venom had spattered into his eyes.

Yanking out his pistol, he aimed through burning, blurring eyelids and fired. The black hood jerked down convulsively, splashing spurting blood on the delicately tinted flowers.

He fumbled his gun into the holster, for he could no longer see, and the pain in his eyes was excruciating.

He tried to grope his way along the path, but a thorny branch jabbed him in the neck—too suggestively. He recoiled, swore horribly, and yelled for the black man he had just beaten. There was no answer.

Then, in an altered tone, he called, "Olga, Olga."

A soft, resigned voice answered from across a narrow wadi. Then a tall, light-haired woman in khaki and sun helmet, young in years, and with a beauty that neither the enervating tropics nor the drug of bitterness could quite efface, hastened down the rough trail.

She caught his arm timidly, then exclaimed with deep concern, "Oh, you are hurt! Let me help you? What—"

"It was one of those infernal ringhals, a damned spitting cobra! I was picking you some flowers. Hell and damnation, I can't see. I shot him, but he'd already squirted me! Look out for his mate. Quick, lead me to the tent—the medical chest—some water to wash out the fire burning into my brain. Take my pistol before I shoot myself, and look out for the safari. If I go blind, shoot me anyway. Red-hot hellions!"

SHE took the big holstered gun and slipped it on her belt. Then she carefully wiped his red and streaming eyes with a kerchief. "It must smart terribly, but it will be all right in a few days. Were you really picking flowers for me? Weren't you rather lashing Glubi again? It is too dangerous. He's a chief, a powerful witch doctor in his own country."

Her eyes dropped to the ground, then dilated with astonishment, as she saw the flower at his feet. Passionately she snatched for it, a glowing symbol of hope and love, though her hand almost had to touch the gory coils of the cobra, writhing in its death struggle.

"To hell with the niggers!" Sager bellowed. "My eyes are on fire! Damn you, get me to the tent!"

Despite his curses, she drew his arm impulsively over her shoulder, put her own arm around his waist, and guided him along the rough trail.

Suddenly she stopped. The huge black man with the bleeding back, an upraised spear in his hand, loomed threateningly before them. He made a significant gesture toward the blinded trader.

A moment she hesitated, but the flower in her hand seemed to persuade her. Silently she signaled disapproval, and placed her own slim body like a shield in front of the white man.

"Hop along, damn you, what the devil's the matter?" growled Sager.

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking of

the Voodoo curse," the woman replied.

"Silly rot. Hurry up!"

"We go on—together," she replied softly.

The giant Glubi had lowered the spear reluctantly, and disappeared noiselessly among the hot rocks and withered trees.

As soon as she got Sager to his cot under the tent fly, the woman deftly prepared a solution from the medical kit, and bathed his inflamed eyes.

Then she gazed a moment at her precious flower, red and white, delicately hued. A tear, dropping in its velvet corolla, glistened like a jewel. Then, with sudden decision, she pinned the blossom to her khaki shirt.

Someone was approaching the tent. Her eyes slipped to the big pistol at her hip. It was dark gun metal, the color of the cobra, symbolizing death. With a little tremor her hand grasped the weapon. Then she turned to see Glubi, without his spear and smiling mysteriously, at the entrance to the tent.

He did not speak, but laid before her some leaves, touched his eyes, then pointed to Sager. Medicine for the man who had lashed him. A grateful smile was her acknowledgment.

With the leaves she quickly made a poultice, and placed it on Sager's eyes. Then motioning the big Kaffir to lie down, she bathed his back with an antiseptic solution, and applied a healing lotion.

When that was done, she made signs for the devoted black to stay on guard at the tent while she slipped off to supervise the camp work; three sacks of rice and an eland shot that morning for the evening meal; a tenderloin to be saved for Sager; the water boiled for the morrow; a guard for the ivory and reserve rations. Then she hastened back, for she realized how helpless and hated Segar was.

"How do you feel now?" Her cool hand touched his fevered face.

The pain in his eyes had diminished. He was over his scare, felt better, and so, as was his custom, acted worse. Furthermore, his helpless dependence on a despised woman irritated him.

"Feel?" he snapped back. "How the hell do you think I feel? I smell a lousy Kaffir carcass. What you been doing?"

For a moment her hand crept to the pistol, but twitched back, trembling. The fine lines of her face became haggard. "One of the bearers is injured," she replied wearily. "Surely I may dress his wounds."

"Kick the lazy swine into the veldt, and give the hyenas a feed. A good lesson for the rest."

Glubi's large eyes rolled ominously, as he watched the woman intently. Like a hypnotist he seemed to be suggesting, "May I not kill him for you? May I not avenge you, who are better far without him—so easy—no trace or tale-bearer. Glubi you may trust as far—as long as the Congo flows."

She pondered a moment, raised the fragrant desert flower to her nostrils, then shook her head.

To Sager she replied with a far-away voice, "A little kindness, a little ointment, a little balm might conjure away the Voodoo curse—and a serpent coiling round a woman's heart. Hyenas like white meat, too."

"And you, you damned wench, like black meat, it's plain to see. Hell, I'll cure you," he roared, "There's a heap big chief beyond Brazzaville in the French Congo; black as a bat, fat as a hippo, and lousy witht francs. Damned if I don't think I'll sell you to him, to the greasy, pot-bellied heathen."

THE rash words stuck in his throat. Close to his ear he heard the click—of his own pistol! He shook with a sudden spasm as though Olga had placed the muzzle against his temple and fired.

He clawed wildly with his hands but caught nothing. His helplessness, the horrible uncertainty, again the dread imminence of death, shattered his nerve, effected a strange revulsion of feeling.

"Good God, what have I been saying?" he stammered. "Olga! Olga!" But there was no response.

She had cocked the pistol, almost fired the fatal shot, then shrunk from the deed, recoiling from the blinded man's groping arm. But the expression on her face was not pleasant to see.

With a gesture for Glubi to remain where he was, she dove through the tent entrance and fled down the trail.

Only Glubi remained to hear the white man's contrition, scowling fiercely as

though he himself, with his own twitching fingers, might strangle the man who had tortured the woman's soul.

This was no ordinary Kaffir. In the fastness of the upper Congo, Glubi's word was law; and to disobey him meant death, or worse, his sorcery. It was said that when angry he could turn into a leopard, that he communed with the wild elephants to learn wisdom, and that he could handle the deadliest jungle creatures without harm.

Yet all his arts had not been able to cure his favorite son, stricken with jungle fever. Olga had saved the lad's life with quinine and good nursing, so the lord of a thousand black warriors was her grateful slave.

Sager had half cajoled, half kidnaped Olga from a bankrupt circus in Capetown, to be his companion on the lonely ivory trails. With him she had hoped for a better life, but he had soon tired of her, and his brutal, malicious, churlishness drove her deeper in despair.

Then when she became a mother, far back in the murky wilderness, how angry, how despicable he had been. When the baby died, all the pain, all the sorrow were hers. He got drunk.

But Glubi and the Kaffirs mourned as though it were their own child. The chief, with mystic Kaffir rites, strangely weird yet consoling, buried the pitiful little soul deep among the roots of their "Tree of Life," while tomtoms beat the mournful cadence of the tribal lamentations. Then the chief's wives nursed their *U-Bala Tyatyamba,* their drooping white desert lily, back to health.

When the safari had been ready to depart, there were sinister mutterings against the white trader who was heartily disliked. Only at the end of the first day's march did Olga suddenly recognize Glubi, stripped of his chieftain's grandeur, among the long file of porters, bearing a burden with the rest.

It was not hard to guess that it was another gesture of gratitude, a guarantee of safe conduct through the Kaffir country for the safari and for her.

At first Sager was only too glad to have Glubi's assistance, but after the safari had passed the dangerous belt where Glubi was supreme, and commenced the trek over the Angola desert, the trader seemed to become jealous of the black giant's devotion to Olga, and of his unquestioned authority over the other natives, who obeyed him implicitly.

With fiendish resentment, Sager tortured the woman with abuse and insults, even as he recklessly lashed the loyal Kaffir. Now the tables were turned, and he writhed impotently as he realized he was completely at their mercy.

WHEN Olga made no reply to Sager's pleading, he reverted to a torrent of oaths, and stormed wildly in helpless rage.

He got a sudden and unexpected response that sounded to his frenzied senses like the crack of doom . . . the crack of his own heavy whip so close to his ears that he bounded off the cot, tripped and fell heavily on the floor.

He knew that none but Glubi was wielding that vicious lash, and that the big chief could flay him alive. Cringing and strangely meek, he crawled back on the cot. The poultice, askew and oozing, gave a ghastly green tint to his haggard face.

All around the tent he could hear a babble of voices, sullen, hostile, waxing more bold. A pack of wolves closing in for the kill. Glubi, again adorned in his Voodoo trumpery, preparing to immolate a white sacrifice with all the rites of Black Magic, while the fanatical Kaffirs would crowd around to lap up his life-blood. Too well the white man knew the horrible and devious sacrificial orgies of the Congo voodoo-masters.

A deep command like a knell from Glubi, and the blacks were awed to silence. Then the sound of footsteps approaching in haste.

Suddenly a chorus of shrieks and frightened yells: *"Lumkela I-Pimpoi I-Pimpoi Unyeni!* Beware! The Cobra! The cobra's mate!"

The eyes of the Kaffirs showed white with terror. Some fled screaming. Others backed away fascinated to make way for the white woman, returning breathless, shuddering, stark horror stamped on her face; her hands in frenzy clasped about the neck of the deadliest, most dreaded of all jungle creatures, dangling, writhing about her.

Straight she made for the tent, as all re-

coiled before her except Glubi, master of witchcraft. He showed no surprise, but like an actor playing his part, he leaned close to the trader's face. His cheeks expanded grotesquely. His tongue flashed back and forth. He hissed like a veritable serpent.

Sager, nerve-wracked and jumpy, screamed in stark terror, and his helplessness drove him to frenzy. Sobbing like a child afraid of the dark, he pulled a blanket over his face, but unseen hands tore it from his trembling fingers. Again that awful hissing! Cringing and screaming, he recoiled from the dread and fearful avenger he could not see except in the lurid crazed phantasms of his imagination. Floundering on his hands and knees, he would have hurled himself bodily through the tent walls. But it was too late.

A sharp, pricking pain stung the back of his shoulder. The hissing abruptly stopped; instead, the weird death wail of the Kaffirs, *'Owu Uku Sweleka—"* rose wailingly from the hypnotized natives.

With a mad shriek Sager slapped a hand on his stinging shoulder, and his reason tottered as he clutched a long, writhing scaly body.

Glubi, his huge body swaying in cadence with his undulations, and grim-eyed Olga retreated through the tent flap. Beyond, the quivering circle of blacks took up the ominous death chant.

With a frenzied, bellowing curse, Sager sprang from his cot, then snapped and lashed around with the ghastly thing in his hands.

Then he clutched the dread writhing streak in both hands, and tore it asunder with the strength of a maniac, flinging the gory segments hurtling through the tent fly. One caught for a moment on the woman's dishevelled hair, and seemed to transform her haggard features into a Medusa's head. The other, spinning far, stampeded the nearer porters.

Red blotches showed on the tent canvas, on the ghastly pitiless face of the woman, and gave a lurid tinge to the ghostly eyeballs of the black giant, whose sweat-shining body and weaving arms did not cease to sway rhythmically to the unearthly cadence of his blood-curdling wail.

Then a new theme, now plaintive in a minor key, now high-pitched like a lost child crying for his parents, tremuloed above the deep-toned dirge.

The woman could not keep back the tears. Her voice was like a soft moan as she murmured, "He does not hear, for he is crazed. The venom is reaching his brain. The Voodoo curse. He must die."

A sickly pallor streaked with the green smudge of the poultice under the red of Sager's hair. Staggering, groping unsteadily with none to lend a hand, suddenly his legs collapsed. He fell sobbing on the ground.

AS though by signal the wailing and chanting ceased. There was an awed silence except for the groaning soul of Red Sager, and far off where the bare kopjes touched the burning red rim of the setting sun, a hyena laughing, mockingly, exultingly.

Grovelling in the dirt, he sobbed in a voice that none could recognize, "O God, Olga, Olga! The cobra's mate has bitten me! There is no cure, no hope."

Then a calm resignation suddenly replaced the agony of his face and voice. He rose to his feet with dignity, stretched his arms toward the woman, and spoke softly, "I have lived like a beast, Olga. Like a damned filthy beast, but I'll die like a man. God knows it is late to repent, Olga, but can you forgive me? That's all I care."

The woman's blood-freckled face softened. She took his hand and helped him back to the cot. He clung to her, pressed her fingers to his lips like a dying man adoring the crucifix.

The Kaffirs stood as silent as carved ebony, listening for the flight of their master's soul.

Like a voice from the dead, Sager continued, "I was good once, Olga, and I had a damned fine mother—she loved flowers—like you—but—but it got me—this putrid, scalding, heathen Africa! And one of its slimiest, rottenest vermin finished me—like it should be. I've tortured you—lashed your white soul like I've lashed the poor craven blacks. I would have killed you, and bawled a drunken toast on your grave.

"But I can't torment you much longer. I've seen you for the last time, Olga, but God knows I want to square up with you what little I can. My belt, heavy with gold, the ivory, the whole safari is yours. But

one last service—kill me when the convulsions come. It shouldn't be hard for you—but with my finish so near, God, how I love you, Olga!"

"Love me?" Her tone was incredulous. She stared at him in surprise, yet the bitter lines in her face melted away, and a film dimmed her wondering eyes. "You love me late—love at last sight, but—do you really love me—love me enough to withhold your lash from the Kaffir's backs?"

"Dead men tell no lies, Olga and I'm deader than a gutted goat. I love you more than anything else in this damned, rotten world! Funny, I should know this now—now that I'm dying—"

His solemn voice dwindled into plaintive regret.

She clasped him tight in her hungry arms, and her hot tears fell like balm on his ghastly face.

Glubi, with a mystical smile, touched her lightly on the arm as though giving her a cue.

"No, my man," she whispered to Sager, "if you truly give me your love, I shall give you back—your life."

"Give you my love! Say, after the last water hole is dried up in Hell, I'll still be loving you, Olga! Just forgive me, and stick with me like this till I've gone. I don't deserve to live, and you can't save my life. Whoever is marked by the fangs of the collared ringhals is tagged for his grave. I've seen too many die—"

"But there is black magic of the Kaffirs that no white man can understand. Glubi says—"

He smiled. "I'm not afraid of death. I don't give a damn, except leaving you."

"Love me, Red Sager, love me with a love stronger than the deadliest poison, and it shall save you. Listen to the sorcery, breathe the magic incense, of Glubi, great witch doctor of the Kaffirs. Go to sleep."

The woman made Sager relax on his cot, wiped his face with her kerchief, and straightened his bandage.

Then the weird incantations of Glubi, sonorous, compelling, intoned hypnotically on his ears, and into his nostrils was wafted a peculiar aroma, pleasant, and soothing.

He guessed Olga had told Glubi to put him mercifully to sleep, and he relaxed with a sigh.

The last things he remembered were the rhythmical chanting of the Kaffirs, his flower on Olga's breast and her hand clasped tightly in his own. . . . Going out. . . .

RED SAGER opened his eyes, and a red glare stunned him. A wild shout. This must be Hell and a thousand demons roaring for his soul! What the devil—a woman! And the smell of whiskey, musty and mellowed.

But there was something incongruous. He dared to peep again through cautiously slitted eyelids. Olga, smiling, all in white, an angel. His own clothes immaculate, as though freshly starched. Good God! Glubi, grinning from ear to ear! Sager's eyes slipped back to Olga. How beautiful she was. Over her heart she wore that flower! Why did it not fade? More Voodoo magic? It somehow conjured up dim reminiscences of a terrible nightmare. His eyes felt a bit queer. He was hungry.

But before he could clear his thoughts Olga beamed, "My lord, you have slept long and well. Drink this."

He took the glass and gulped down the highball. Then his tongue found strength to speak. "Where am I? What the devil is going on?"

"This is our wedding night, my man. Take my arm. The high priest is waiting. You may kiss me and say, 'I do!'"

"How beautiful you are," exclaimed Sager, clasping her in his arms. "But—am I really alive? I had a terrible—"

"Just a terrible dream of long ago—but love dispelled it."

A DIFFERENT Sager, in his best white linen—like a man reborn—stood beside *U-Bala Tyatyamba,* the Desert Lily, by the light of a huge bonfire and flickering torches, as Glubi, resplendent in his chieftain's robes and plumes performed the Kaffir marriage ceremony. Then followed dancing, singing, feasting.

And when Sager picked up his rhinoceros hide whip and threw it in the flames, a roar of approval shook the rock ledges of the desert. A moment later, as though dropping from the stars a spear plunged into the flames, soon to become but ashes, like the whip.

Then Glubi, war chief of the Kaffirs, powerful witch doctor of the Upper Congo, approached the two sitting by the tent, and

spoke earnestly in his native tongue with the trader.

Sager, greatly moved, felt the chills creep up his spine. He took gold from his purse, but the chief refused it, pointing to Olga as though to say that hers should be the reward.

Then the chief bowed very reverently to the white woman, and waved farewell, *Sala, Sala,* as is the Kaffir custom for those who start a long journey. For a moment his gigantic shadow swept across the tent, then he was swallowed up in the gloom of the desert.

Sager felt Olga tremble in his arms, saw tears in her eyes as she watched the great black vanish. Timidly she asked, "What did Glubi say?"

"Nothing for you to worry about, my Olga, but he said plenty. It was like a poem. You saw him point to the sky. He said the stars of this wonderful African night reflected your utter happiness, and your heavenly beauty, and he rejoiced as one who had paid a great debt."

"And he said more?"

"Yes, a strange story. He said I had died from snake bite, but he had gone to the Snake God's cavern, down so deep—I guess we call it Hell, and he'd asked for my life back. Because of your great love for me, the Snake God consented. He gave Glubi a magic herb that brought me back to life. But the venom is still in my veins, and if I cease loving you, I die.

"But don't you worry about that, Olga. I'm a different kind of a bird after the taste I've had of Hell. If I'm the rotter to chuck you, after you've seen me through this mess, I damned well ought to be bumped off. There must be something to this Voodoo stuff. I seem to remember being bitten by a cobra and dying, yet here I am, feeling a little woozy, but strangely enough, still alive and kicking. I don't understand—"

"You understand you love me, and that is enough," the woman said softly.

The loyal Glubi would never tell, and why should she explain to Sager that the prick in his shoulder, back where he could not see it, was only the mark of her hunting knife, and the "cobra's mate" was the dead, but still wriggling ringhals that Sager had shot. She had snatched it up and thrust it into his madly clutching fingers. Then the oblivion of Glubi's hashish fumes that Sager believed was the prelude to death.

On the moonlit kopje across a wadi from the flickering glow of the safari campfires, Red Sager gazed at *U-Bala, Tyaty-amba,* so slim and white beside him. He wondered why he, too, like the Kaffirs had not worshipped her long ago as the Desert Lily, a flower to be loved. And almost with awe he beheld on her breast the same magic flower that he had plucked for her, that somehow had shielded him from death, had revealed a new life.

The 200-year-hidden city was doomed. Plunder-drunk raiders from across the Senegal beat on its shaded gates. Allah alone could save the gray-eyed Queen and her shattered cohorts. Allah—or the Koran-quoting white stranger from out of the Sun.

Queen of the Congo Spearmen

By Armand Brigaud

IT was two p. m., and the office of Colonel Lepic, chief of aviation for French Northern Africa, was as hot as the breath of a furnace.

The colonel had partaken of a Gargantuan lunch and would have liked very much to snatch a nap in his capacious armchair; but three brisk American scientists

sat around his desk: the renowned Professor Smithson, short, thick-set, with his famous bristle of uncombed gray hair; the lanky and ruddy Dr. Hale; and Phil Drake, a stalwart and handsome Princeton graduate who was rapidly forging ahead in the scientific world.

Colonel Lepic passed a big, sunbrowned hand over his massive face and stifled a yawn. For a fleeting instant his close-cropped mustache quivered peevishly under his flaring nostrils; then his mouth froze in a conventional smile and he hissed:

"Mais, nom d'un nom. . . . Do you realize that the second world war is on? Is it absolutely necessary that you go to study tribes in Senegal?"

"Monsieur the Minister of Colonies assured me that the fighting will not spread to Africa. And he granted me the permit that I needed." Professor Smithson bristled.

Lepic's eyes became as hard as glittering ice.

"I bow to the decision of the Minister of Colonies," he said with affected calm, pressing a button. "The fact that Senegal is in Western Africa, out of my jurisdiction, isn't an obstacle, in your case. Unfortunately, all the best airplanes and aviators are mustered for military emergencies!"

Presently, a sergeant strode into the office. Colonel Lepic smiled at his smart salute, purred: "Get hold of Duturneau and send him here."

Ten minutes later, Pilot Duturneau shuffled into the office. He was a tall, stooped man of indefinable age. His bloated drunkard's face was a forerunner of disaster.

Dr. Hale wriggled uneasily on his chair. Drake snapped:

"Without offense to this man, Colonel, could you not give us another aviator?"

"Not for the next fourteen days," Colonel Lepic pleasantly answered.

Professor Smithson leaned forward, clutching his knees.

"When can we start?" he impatiently asked.

"Colonel," Duturneau stammered, "my old flying crate can make it. But it would be better if you gave me a newer avion."

"I explained before to the American scientists that, unfortunately, I can't possibly do anything of the sort," Lepic snarled.

"A la bonneheure. . . ." Duturneau scratched the stubble covering his chin. "I'll overhaul the old airplane. . . . And we'll take off at five p. m. Night flying above the desert isn't bad. . . . We'll refuel and sleep in Tindouf . . . and, with luck, we'll reach Dakar tomorrow, before sunset."

HOWEVER, sand storms, upper-air currents and air pockets buffeted the ancient Breguet piloted by Duturneau, so that, at six o'clock of the next day they were only in sight of the wood and jungle zone of the basin of the Senegal river between Salde and Podor, when Drake yelled above the roar of the laboring motor:

"How large is that big patch of vegetation below us?"

"There's several hundred square miles of it, and about half of it is still unexplored," Duturneau shouted back.

Suddenly the airplane shook from stem to rudder. Duturneau's twisted nose nearly touched his ear in a prodigious grimace. His hands feverishly fumbled with the controls.

The airplane steadied and everything went well for the next few minutes. Then the engine began sputtering. Drake stared at the winding river, shining like a succession of loops of molten silver in the very middle of the borderless green expanse below, and yelled:

"What can it be?"

"Anything." Duturneau shrugged fatalistically. "This machine is as old as your chief's pet fossils."

The engine stopped. Duturneau cursed and spat from between clenched teeth:

"I see a few clearings on the opposite shore. If I could only get the old crate across the river, I would make a forced landing without danger of breaking my fool neck."

From the corner of his eye, Drake saw that Hale was scared. His cheeks had turned ash-gray, his hands clutched his seat. Professor Smithson, stony-faced and unruffled, fingered the straps of the parachute tied to his back.

Drake grasped with both hands his belt, from which hung a holstered automatic and a hunting knife. In a split second, he thought that it would be fine if he could get hold of a rifle and some cans of food-

stuffs, when Duturneau became as pale as a ghost and screeched:

"Mort de ma vie! The rudder doesn't work any longer!" Then, like peals of doom, sounds like pistol shots reached their ears. Drake saw two lengths of cylindrical bars, and the rudder, flying out of the tail of the diving airplane. The harsh buffeting of the desert winds had done its grim work. The ancient flying machine was breaking to pieces.

Drake caught a glimpse of running water, which seemed to swell and spout from below, hurtling toward them at an amazing rate of speed, when the tailless airplane began spinning.

Smithson frenziedly shouted: "Out, Hale!"

But the bewildered Dr. Hale remained rooted to his seat. Suddenly one of the cockpit's doors flew open. The bulky figure of Smithson blotted it for a fleeting instant and was gone.

"Your turn! Go!" Duturneau shouted.

The open door was again under Drake. He leaped through it, caught a glimpse of the ballooning parachute of Professor Smithson to his left. Then his own parachute flew open.

The falling airplane streaked beside them. Duturneau was pinned to its side. The straps of his parachute had been caught in a crack of the flapping door and he was doomed.

THE waters of the Senegal River, into which Drake was falling, didn't look silvery any more, but muddy and sinister. Their rumbling sound had a savage ring when the crippled airplane struck them with a mighty splash, was bowled over in a flurry of lifted foam and sank from sight. Then a wet spray drenched Drake's legs, hit his cheeks and, streaming through the collar of his flying suit, drenched his chest. Quickly the young scientist unbuckled the harness of his parachute, and struggled free.

Drake plunged into the river and sank. For an instant, the whirling water closed above his head. But he was a good swimmer, and with a frenzied stroke he shot to the surface and saw, some twenty yards downcurrent, Smithson struggling in the folds of his collapsed parachute.

Drake's flying suit was full of water; his shoes were heavy bricks encasing his feet. Nevertheless, he managed to reach Smithson; and pulling out his hunting knife, he slashed at the parachute and harness of the veteran scientist and finally succeeded in freeing him. Then a fit of exhaustion overcame him, and he would have sunk if the freed Smithson, who was a good swimmer too, had not caught him by the collar and kept his head above water.

A few minutes—an age of terror and savage struggle—passed. Suddenly they were in comparatively calm water and only a few score yards separated them from the jutting tongue of wooded land.

Drake inhaled a lungful of reviving air. The surety that they had cheated death elated him, and a new strength flowed into his limbs.

"A few strokes more, Professor, and we'll be safe," he gurgled happily.

But Smithson's eyes were dilated and an expression of terror, of utter helplessness, was in them. Following the direction of their fixed stare, Drake caught a glimpse of five or six scaly logs coming as speedily as torpedoes. Suddenly an acrid scent of musk filled his nostrils and he clearly saw the knotty muzzle of the foremost crocodile.

AFTER freeing Professor Smithson of the parachute, Drake had sheathed his hunting knife. Now he pulled it out and dived. The next instant a long, whitish shape—the crocodile's belly—sped above him.

Drake struck savagely. His arm was almost wrenched from his shoulder by the impact of the leathery hide and muscles of the crocodile's stomach on his knife. Then the razor-edged blade slashed deeply. His lungs bursting, Drake, with his head down, kicked savagely and dived deeper, avoiding the murderous thrashing of the crocodile's tail.

A few yards farther he shot to the surface and spasmodically inhaled a lungful of blessed air. Then he looked wildly all around.

Attracted by the scent of blood, three medium-sized crocodiles were converging on the giant one which he had fatally wounded. But another ugly saurian was attacking Professor Smithson, who was

frenziedly attempting to scare it off by beating the water all around him into a foam.

Then Drake heard a yell that was more beastly than human in its heartrending pathos of pain and wild horror.

Long jaws as hard as iron had closed on one of Smithson's arms, rows of cruel teeth were crushing his muscles and bones. Attracted by the clamor and by the scent of blood, the crocodile which had brushed by Drake darted toward that easier kill.

In that supreme moment, Smithson realized that he was done for, and his great soul was convulsed by the thought that there was no reason why Drake should share his doom. "Phil!" he screeched. "It is no use! Save yourself! I order it!" Then, agony and shock destroyed at a stroke his thinking faculties, and he struggled like a cornered beast against the crocodile which was tearing his arm off, and against the second saurian which was biting one of his hips.

Drake went almost insane at the sight of his venerable friend, spread-eagled between the clamped jaws, arching scaly backs and lashing long tails of the two crocodiles. When, at the climax of the uneven struggle, the horrid group leaped out of the water, he yelled madly and swam to the impossible rescue. But, the next instant, Smithson and the two crocodiles splashed back into the river, sank out of sight.

Drake shuddered. All strength left his body, and he had to steel himself into a supreme effort to avoid losing his senses.

Smithson's shout: "Save yourself! I order it!" kept on ringing in his ears. The wind, the rushing waters of the river repeated it, endlessly. "He's gone. And I'll never see him any more!" Drake repeated dully.

Then he closed his eyes and swam toward the shore.

A few minutes later his feet struck ground; instinctively he turned his head toward the spot where Smithson had disappeared, and saw the double row of long yellow teeth and the red throat of a giant crocodile.

"You killed my friend! And now you are after me, you devil!" Drake sobbed insanely. Three or four yards separated him from the saurian who had unexpectedly appeared out of the muddy waters of the river. Sheer instinct of preservation catapulted Drake on like a speeding bullet, and none too soon; because, with a prodigious leap, the crocodile overtook him.

Drake heard a snap, like that of a giant box slamming shut, felt a tug at his back; then the whole back of his torn flying suit was wrenched away from his tensing body, and the crocodile fell back into shallow water.

Drake kept on looking at it over his shoulder as he climbed a short bank. Then the green tangle of the jungle was before him. His mind swimming, he stumbled into it, and didn't even feel the pricks of the thorns of the clustered thickets through which he smashed his way. At length he reached a clearing and sank into the soft grass.

It was already dark when Drake recovered from his nervous and emotional exhaustion.

His knowledge of Africa was all book-learning. He knew a smattering of Bedouin Makil and Ouoloff, but he had never conversed with a tribesman. But his very exhaustion dulled his imagination. Thus, blissfully unable to realize the full extent of his predicament, he located a big, overhanging rock and heaped a prodigious mound of dry branches before it. He had no matches; but his cigarette lighter had not suffered from his forced swim. Thus, at last, Drake stretched himself over a matting of heaped moss, in a hollow of the ground under the overhanging rock. In spite of the vivid glare of the camp-fire, which protected him from the marauding beasts of prey, he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

THE sun was high when he came out of his agitated slumbers. But what an awakening it was! A long and painful welter seared one of his sides. His body was covered with bruises. But, worst of all, was the realization that he had no magnetic needle, nothing that could help him to find his way out of the wilderness into which he had been marooned by a cruel fate; and he had to use all his willpower to blot out of his mind the memory of the terrorized Hale, of the screeching Duturneau hurtling to death locked to the crippled airplane, and the nerve-shattering

vision of Smithson, shaken and torn limb from limb by the two crocodiles.

However, Drake was husky and healthy. Hunger, that most undeniable of all primordial needs, soon harassed him, drove all morbid thoughts from his mind and saved him from a nervous breakdown.

He found nothing in the clearing; but, deeper in the jungle, he recognized several trees which he had studied in various texts on African plants before sailing from America. Some of them were Balamites Aegypticas, loaded with almonds called Toughas by the tribesmen, others were the jujubes that are called Seder in Mauritanian dialect and on which grow edible fruits.

Toughas almonds, jujube fruits and spring water made up his fare for the next few days; but eventually the craving of the white man for meat gnawed at him. Only the realization that he had to keep the six bullets left in his automatic for an emergency restrained him from taking a pot shot at some grazing antelope.

However, one morning a well-fed, lusty grass-eater suddenly loomed close to him, on the other side of a bush.

It was a fine beast with a dark body and white legs—one of the antelopes called "Emir Trarza" by the tribesmen of Mauritania and Senegal because, in the lands of Trarza only the all-powerful Emir can wear white trousers.

The antelope trotted away and Drake heaved a disappointed sigh. But the breeze blew toward him and the antelope, which was unable to get his scent, soon turned about and, grazing, returned toward the bushes that were screening him.

Drake lifted his automatic. With his heart beating wildly, and luscious visions of savory slabs of fresh meat roasting over the embers of a camp-fire, he watched the antelope coming nearer and nearer. . . . Finally only three or four yards and a screen of leaves separated him from the graceful, horned head of the unwary beast. His finger pressed the trigger.

Drilled through the skull, the antelope leaped into the air and fell, convulsively kicking. Its death throes were hardly over when the young scientist pounced on it, pulling out his hunting knife.

At whirlwind speed Drake slashed out great slabs of tender flesh, and began roasting them over a hastily assembled camp-fire.

He had gorged himself so that his belly was stretched to the bursting point, and he lay on his back in a drowsy stupor, when a thunderous roar filled the air.

Drake jumped on his feet, turned about and saw a lion coming toward him out of a thicket.

In that tense moment he was unable to make out the details of the huge body of the big beast of prey; he only realized that the scent of the antelope's blood had attracted it and aroused its savage temper. By sheer instinct, he sought refuge with a quick leap behind the trunk of a jujube tree.

The next second he aimed a quick bullet at the maned throat of the tawny, catapulting lion. Immediately after, some six hundred pounds of leathery lion's muscles and bones hit the tree. Drake got a glimpse of a huge clawing paw and an enormous head coming around the trunk; the bared fangs of the lion glittered, but a gusher of blood spurted out of its throat. . . .

Drake fired again, at the wide space between the lion's blazing eyes; the claws of the collapsing beast, lashing out in a last convulsive throe, missed his leg by a fraction of an inch.

"Whew!" Drake choked. "What a hell of a close call! And I'm lucky at that! If it had been a leopard, it would have jumped on me without making any noise or roaring challenges. . . ." The mess of undigested meat filling his stomach mounted to his throat and he felt desperately sick.

THAT same afternoon the jittery Drake took stock of his predicament. His clothes hung in shreds, his ungreased shoes were getting painfully hard and had cracked in several spots. Only three bullets remained in his automatic.

But the hides of the lion and the antelope proffered a solution for his predicament.

At sunset he had them nicely stretched over a makeshift trellis. Then he built a repair of stones, heaped a ring of branches all around the trellis and his tiny fort. When evening came, he put his cigarette lighter to work.

That night he slept surrounded by a ring of flames and burning embers, like a pagan

god of old, while, a hundred yards or so farther, a swarm of beasts of prey fought over the skinned carcasses of the antelope and the lion.

Late in the afternoon of the following day, the hides were getting dry and stiff. Drake greased them with the fat drippings of the antelope steaks, which he had collected in an emptied gourd. Then he selected some sturdy, straight branches and hacked at them with his hunting knife until he fashioned a spear, a bow and several arrows.

The bow, reinforced with antelope's tendons, proved somewhat hard to bend but of great power. To the tips of the spear and of the arrows he fastened points of polished stone.

The next day he came upon a dami, or hornless deer, drinking at a water trough, and pierced with an arrow a leg of the unfortunate beast, which ineffectually attempted to hop away.

Drake ran after it, lifting his spear; but, when he struck, he hit only empty air; because, with a sudden pirouette, the dami darted under the stabbing spear point, butted him and threw him down with such a force that he remained stunned on the ground for several moments.

When he attempted to arise, he felt an agonizing pain in his left leg, and was horrified by the thought that he had to face the dangers of the unknown African wilderness with a broken limb.

Luckily, he had suffered only a very, large and painful bruise, and was soon able to follow after the tracks left by the wounded dami. A few hours later he overtook it and ended its sufferings with two other arrows.

EXACTLY a week had passed since his catastrophic arrival in the Salde-Podor basin of the Senegal River, when Drake, wearing a tunic of rough leather and with moccasins of antelope's hide on his feet, attempted to find his way toward the fort and post of Podor. His spear was in his hand. Slung across his shoulders, by means of supporting leather straps, were his bow, a crude quiver full of arrows, and a leather satchel containing a few salvaged belongings. Of his attire of civilized man he had preserved only his belt, from which hung his hunting knife and his holstered gun with its four remaining cartridges.

Drake planned to use as landmarks the moss that's supposed to grow on the northern side of the trunks of the trees. He hoped also to discover at night where the north lay by gazing at the northern star. However, every night a dense mist covered the damp jungle; and, in the African jungle, moss grows where the shade is thickest.

Eventually, Drake realized that he was irreparably lost. To make matters worse, the strain of the endless watching for leopards, for snakes, and for the terror of the crocodiles lurking in every stream, began to affect his nerves.

Finally he decided that his only chance of survival lay in reaching open ground as soon as possible, and he wandered at random, crossing stretches of jungle where the vegetation seemed to thin out.

But strong and healthy human beings are endowed with extraordinary powers of adaptability. After five weeks of struggle for survival in the jungle, Drake reacquired his self-confidence and realized that hard living in the open was increasing the power of his already well-developed muscles.

Thus a morning came when, with his mind at peace and steeled by a new hope, he strode over the top of a hill and saw a flat, sparsely wooded country below the opposite slope.

For several moments Drake leaned on his spear, with his face brushed by a soft wind. The clean air, so different from the stench of decay of the jungle, filled his lungs. The glare of the sun, though, dazzled his eyes, which had grown accustomed to keep a sharp lookout for all kinds of unexpected danger in the semi-darkness.

Some time later, when his vision readjusted itself to the stronger light, he saw an elephant grazing in the plain below.

Few sights are more imposing than that of a full-grown African elephant in its habitat. Imposing strength and crushing power are indicated in the big trunk and gleaming tusks, and in the massive cupola of the head, which looks immense on account of its umbrella-like waving ears. All the motions of the towering body of the majestic beast are unhurried, calm with an

assurance of size that no other animal dares to challenge.

Phil Drake, who knew that the appearance of his only redoubtable enemy, man, often turns the African elephant into a raging mammoth bent on murder and destruction, decided to remain where he was until the big fellow departed. Sitting on a boulder, he pulled out of his satchel a few toughas nuts and chewed at them.

Suddenly he felt as if his heart were leaping in his throat; for, some thirty paces behind the elephant, three humans had emerged out of a thicket. They were tribesmen, in tan, flowing garments of camel hair; but, after his long period of loneliness, Drake would have gladly embraced them.

Soon, in spite of the distance, he perceived that a bearded and gray-haired man was the leader of the three. Next to him came a girl. The last of the party was a wide-shouldered fellow of medium size, with a short, round beard and a great mop of black hair

The old man carried a mokhala, a heavy, long-barreled gun of Arabian make. Crouching, he came toward the enormous crop of the elephant, and Drake marveled at his temerity. However, the old man had a wide margin of safety in the fact that the wind blew against him, and thus neither his scent nor the cautious rustling of his feet reached the elephant.

Finally gray-beard made a short sidewise run like a crab, brought the round butt of his long-barreled gun to his shoulder and aimed at the elephant's belly. A tremendous explosion broke the stillness of the quiet morning.

The elephant didn't fall or turn to attack the foolhardy humans who were attempting to kill it. Terrorized by the earsplitting noise, he trumpeted dismally and catapulted away with the speed of an express train.

Drake was opening his mouth in a good-natured laugh when his throat contracted in a startled gasp; for the fading of the cloud of smoke of the burned gun-powder revealed that the head of the collapsing old man had been shattered into a topless and shapeless red lump by the explosion of his overloaded gun.

The desperate screech of the girl reached the summit of the hill and Drake instinctively raced down the slope to meet her when the young tribesman, without deigning a glance at the maimed body of his leader, pounced on the terror-stricken and grieving girl and pressed her to his breast.

For a fleeting instant, the bewildered young woman remained limp and unresisting in his grasp; but, as his lips brushed her neck, a savage flaring of rage turned her into a scratching and biting wildcat. The tribesman attempted to throw her down and to overpower her; but her firm teeth closed on one of his hands. With a pained yelp, the native released his grasp and slunk away from her.

When again he attempted to get hold of her, it was too late. Throwing away her mantle, and with her loose tunic ballooning in the wind, the girl was sprinting toward a ravine on the side of the hill

"I'll knock your block off if it is the last thing I do, you black-bearded swine!" Drake rasped, and sprinted to intercept the young tribesman, when, suddenly, the rascal turned and fled toward a distant thicket.

PUZZLED by that maneuver, Drake slackened his speed. The next instant he saw an enormous black lion, coming like a streak of lightning.

"Hell!" Drake swore, and ran as fast as he was able to after the girl, who was just reaching the ravine's mouth. A thunderous snarl, growing louder and louder behind him with the passing of every instant, warned him that he had not a chance to get away from the hungry beast of prey without a fight.

In a few desperate leaps he reached the ravine's entrance; turned about and shot two arrows in quick succession.

They both found their mark, his stone-tipped arrows, but they failed to reach any vital organ. For a moment they quivered, stuck into one of the mighty shoulders of the lion, which stopped in its track, whirled around and snapped the shafts off with two angry bites.

Drake, appalled by the unusual size and terrifying appearance of the black lion, realized that both his spear and his automatic could not have stopped it. A shout of the girl—it sounded like a call—reached his ears. He turned his head and saw a light tunic, far up the steep bottom of the ra-

vine. Nearer to him, close to the ravine's mouth, he caught a glimpse of two creatures out of a nightmare: two long-nosed, giant ant-eaters, busily shattering an ants' nest. In the back of his mind, a confused memory raced of the uncanny fighting power of an aroused ant-eater. . . . With a grim certainty that only a miracle could save him from the lion's rending claws, he sped into the ravine.

A deafening roar drowned his mind in a spasm of fear and he could almost feel the impact of enormous paw, the rending crunch of long-fanged jaws, crushing his neck Then the humped backs of the ant-eaters loomed before him.

From nearby, the two set-backs of a bygone era of animal life seemed as big as middle-sized kangaroos. Drake had read about the terrific power of their razor-sharp, steely curved claws, which easily shatter the hardest boulders. Gambling his life on a daring stroke, he hit with the butt of his spear an eye of the smaller ant-eater, which gave forth an outraged squeal. Then, as he sped past, he struck a resounding blow on the side of the male ant-eater.

He could have as well whacked a mound of metal. But the pain lingered in the eye of the female ant-eater, unprotected by the plates of amazingly thick and tough hide and hard muscles, which covered the remainder of her body. Her sustained squeals were whipping her larger mate into a fighting frenzy when the impact of the charging lion bowled both of them over.

The narrow head of the female ant-eater, with her long snout and narrow tube of a mouth, crashed into one of the boulders lining the sides of the gully, and her neck was broken. But, in falling, the male ant-eater lashed out with its long forelegs; it dug stealy claws in the lion's sides and clutched its big, furry black body in a deathly embrace.

Drake reached the end of the ravine and clambered hand over hand an almost vertical length of hillside. From the corner of his eye he saw the chaotic ball formed by the entwined bodies of the two beasts, pounding the bottom of the ravine, revolving and smashing into the walls of loose dirt and stones. Big drops of blood, tufts of hair flew in all directions. The clamor of the roars and pained growls of the lion was deafening.

Drake reached the slope above, and safety, in the very moment when the forelegs of the giant ant-eater shattered the lion's ribs, and its long, hooked claws tore into the vital organs of the maned beast of prey But, in that same instant, the mouth of the lion closed on the top of the ant-eater's head. Its claws had just superficially slashed the extremely tough hide of the ant-eater; but its jaws, in a paroxysm of savage rage and maddening pain, crushed hide, bone, and the small, sluggish brain of the ant-eater.

However, it was characteristic of the long-nosed beast, survival of a bygone past, that for several seconds it literally didn't know that it had been killed; for it is peculiar of its kind that the urgings transmitted from very rudimentary brain to limbs and vice versa, are about one hundred times slower than those of all other four-legged animals.

Thus the lion had already collapsed in death when the almost headless ant-eater still heaved and clutched.

WITH an effort, Drake tore his glance from that morbid sight and saw the girl at his side; and instantly he forgot all about the two beasts clamped in a deadly embrace in the ravine below.

The face of the young tribeswoman was childlike and solemn. Dainty of features, it had a soft red mouth, pearly teeth and gorgeous dark-blue eyes. But it was more than beauty. The tenderness, the glow of intense life emanating from her shapely and slender body stirred in him a longing that was almost heartbreaking in its intensity; and he, the western man crafty with the wisdom of civilization, remained rooted on that forlorn African hill, with a wild rushing of blood in his veins and his mind awhirl.

Then the girl spoke. Her voice was harmonious and a trifle husky. The enchanted Drake listened, without understanding a single word, until he realized that she expected him to answer.

Being unable to reply in her own language, which was a mixture of ancient dialects of Northwestern Africa, he stammered a few words in the Hassane or Bedouin Makil dialect, which he had learned from the late Professor Smithson.

The effect was instantaneous, but none

too happy. Wrinkling her exquisite nose with evident distaste, the barbaric beauty answered in the same Hassane language:

"I would have never thought that you belonged to the race of diseased dogs that the Arab marauders are!"

"I'm not a Hassane!" Drake hastened to explain "I come from a land beyond an ocean thousands of times wider than the Senegal River. But, who are you?"

"Hadous oult Horeteig, daughter of the last King of the Ida Tachma," the girl replied with infinite pride. "But, O my savior from such a distant country, what brought you here in my hour of need?"

Drake attempted to explain. But the scent of fresh flowers emanating from her hair, and the smoothness of her skin interfered with his thoughts and turned the poor Hassane that he spoke into a meaningless jabbering.

As a result, the horrified Hadous made out only that he had fallen from the sky. "Merciful Allah!" she gasped. "Only the angels, who never manifest themselves to women, and the evil spirits fly through the air. You must be a djinn—an evil shiatin—disguised as a comely young man. Did you save me from the lion to subject me to a worse death?"

Drake remained dumbfounded. He feverishly tried to think of a fitting answer when he realized that no amount of explaining could have overcome the superstitious fears of the girl. Then he remembered that he had learned by mind the first chapter of the Koran and intoned the Basmala invocation: "In the name of Allah, the clement . . ."

It worked like a charm. A light of joyous understanding spread over Hadous' face. As soon as Drake was through speaking, she whispered: "No evil spirit could recite a sacred text."

Encouraged, and using clear, well-spoken terms, Drake protested that he was a stranded Rumi carried across the sea by a special wish of Allah.

Hadous knitted her shapely brows in deep thought. After a while she breathed:

"There's no element of chance in the dispositions of fate and Allah never leaves his plans undone. It was written that you had to save me from the lion. You must be the one who'll save me from Kerim."

"Who's Kerim?" Drake wanted to know.

"The coward who tried to possess me and ran when the lion put up an appearance." Hadous' pearly teeth flashed. Her beautiful face contracted. Her rage and exasperation were so great that she shook from head to foot. Drake felt at once a mad urge to crush Kerim's windpipe between his hands.

"To understand what my predicament is, you must hear first the unhappy story of my people. Sit down and listen," Hadous ordered.

Drake smiled a little but complied promptly enough. He watched Hadous, a mist of tears still in her eyes, trace a wide ring in the ground.

"This is Trarza, and Guidimaka, where, in the remote past, the forefathers of my people lived.

"Many persecuted races sought refuge among them. The first to come were some fair warriors, disbanded mercenaries of a great sea-trading town of the North."

"Probably Gauls, survivors of the army who revolted against Carthage during the second Punic war and were driven into the wilderness," Drake mused.

"The next to arrive," Hadous continued, "were Hebrews. Industrious people who abode by many wise laws.

"Centuries rolled by. Then the Sohaba, the companions of the Prophet, entered Trarza and Guidimaka and preached the creed of Allah. But they didn't interfere with the age-old customs of the Tachma.

"The sands of time flowed on. Then the curse struck. All was destroyed, all became dust flying in the wind!" Hadous concluded, effacing the marks in the sod. "Fierce Senhadja Berbers from Maghreb conquered Trarza and Guidimaka, reached the shores of the Senegal River and gave it their name after turning its waters red with the blood of the slain. Then a more ferocious invader—the Hassane Bedouins—enslaved the whole of ravaged Mauritania and also the Senhadja. Reduced to a pitiful few hundreds, the Tachma sought a refuge into the impenetrable jungle where I shall presently lead you, O Rumi who fell from the sky."

Drake stared at the overwrought face of the girl and could not help thinking that man's lust for destruction haunted the footsteps of humanity through the ages.

It was like the recurrence of an inexorable law. Man built, achieved a modicum of prosperity and happiness, and then other men destroyed.

"Now hear what my trouble is." Hadous' voice shook him from his reverie. "My Uncle Fader stole a woman in the land of the Oulad en Naccur, cruelest of all Moors, and brought her among us. A son was born to them: the wily and worthless Kerim, whom my father feared and disliked.

"On his death bed my father nominated me queen and ruled that I was free to choose whichever husband I liked. But, lured by the golden promises of Kerim, Jadaly, the chief Marabout, nearly drove me crazy pleading his cause.

"Jadaly's last ruse to bring us together was the elephant hunt, to which he invited me without telling me that Kerim was going to join us. But he foolishly crammed his gun up to the muzzle with powder and scraps of iron. He wanted a charge strong enough to knock down an elephant; but he only succeeded in blowing his foolish head off."

"I'll help you to get rid of Kerim. Then I shall return to my people," Drake said impulsively. Then he wondered how he was going to keep his promise and cursed himself for a fool.

AN hour later, coming out of a winding valley, Drake saw an apparently unbroken wall of dense jungle vegetation. Hadous, however, walked straight to it and lifted a thick festoon of hanging growths. A dark passage stood thus revealed.

Pulling the young scientist by the hand, the girl strode into it. The hanging branches fell down behind them and Drake had the strange sensation that a jungle nymph was carrying him into her lair. The next instant, his foot caught into a hooked root and he fell over the soft shoulders of the girl. Quick as a flash Hadous turned and caught him into her arms. Her laughter rippled close to his ears.

The skin of her arms felt warm and smooth as silk on his bare shoulders. A scent of flowers, wafting out of her curly hair, mounted to his nostrils. Then Hadous gently pushed him away and the charm was broken.

A few minutes later they reached the edge of a vast expanse covered by thick grass.

With a strength unsuspected in her slim arms, Hadous picked up a big piece of rotting wood and threw it. There was a splash; then the chunk of wood sank out of sight, and the grass immediately closed over it.

"This big prairie is all quicksand, and only we Tachmas know the narrow paths crossing it," Hadous explained.

They came next upon more jungle and, Hadous leading, they crossed it, following a labyrinth of narrow paths. A couple of hours later they walked out of the dense growths and the city of the Tachma stood suddenly revealed before them.

From a distance of about a mile, it presented an imposing and graceful sight. Drake stared wide-eyed at the terraced houses, at the stately minarets and exquisite domes. Well-tilled fields spread all around that hidden community of an ancient people who had stubbornly preserved their age-old civilization.

The agricultors, whom they met on their way to the gates, looked like average Mauritanian Berbers. They had yellowish-ruddy complexions, round faces and bushy black hair. They were a meek, slow-footed lot who respectfully saluted Hadous and shot curious glances at Drake.

Soft grass grew on the lawns behind the gates. All over them slowly walked men of pontifical gait. Stocky fellows with unkempt beards, swathed in loose garments, who alternately puffed their cheeks and emitted strange sounds. Now and then they shook the thick mops of matted hair topping their heads and prodigiously rolled their eyes; then they halted and brought a hand to their foreheads in a conjuring gesture.

"Who are these unwashed lunatics?" Drake irreverently asked.

"Men who could strike you dead by simply pointing their fingers at you. Masters of magic conversant with the evil spirits," Hadous stiffly replied. "Their incantations protect our people," she fearfully added, "but there's no way of knowing when the djenounen succeed in seducing them."

Drake prudently kept his peace. That hodge-podge of memories of the wisdom of a past age, and more recent crass super-

stition, re-entrenched him in his scientific habit of looking carefully and drawing his own conclusions before committing himself.

But his heart sank when he inspected the town. For the beauty and majesty of the outline of the buildings was marred by the sad state of disrepair of their grimy walls. The spacious streets were rutted with mud holes. Patches of corrosion spotted the chipped high-reliefs and friezes of carved stones of the fountains.

The appearance of decaying mausoleum of a bygone grandeur of the city was matched by the disintegration of spirit of its inhabitants.

The Marabouts, making up the ruling cast, were overbearing gluttons with heavy digestions and sore tempers. Their ignorance was as appalling as their self-assurance and the flabbiness of the muscles of the warriors. The artisans never tired of carrying on feuds with the rival workers' cast of the agricultors.

"They are weak-willed folks without hope who work out their steam with petty quarrels to run away from their fears," Drake finally confided to Hadous. "Is there a single stout-hearted fellow among them?"

"Yes. Salofa, leader of the shopkeepers," Hadous unhesitatingly replied. "I want you to meet him."

They found the merchant in his store. She led him down a paved street which was primitive but clean and well kept. Tall, bony, brisk in his movements, Salofa had a great beak of a nose, piercing gray eyes and a crushing handclasp which amazed Drake.

Salofa had never left the narrow domain of his forefathers, but his keen intelligence was able to understand the outside world. Gifted with an observing turn of mind, he had gained a keen insight of human nature by studying his fellow tribesmen. When they left the shop Drake confided to Hadous:

"If a danger arises, you can rely on the judgment of this man."

"I knew that," Hadous replied. "Unfortunately, the real masters of Tachma are the soothsayers. All the other castes fear their conjurations and nobody knows what they may do from one day to the next."

A SQUAD of warriors brought back what the vultures and the beasts of prey had left of Jadaly's body. As soon as the Moslem ceremony of the burial was over, loud cries asked the installation of another Marabout.

For the next twenty-four hours cymbals clanged, drums were beaten and the howling kept on unabated. The arguing was universal and the deafened Drake thought that all Tachma was going insane. However, when everybody was on the verge of dropping with exhaustion, several raucous voices roared:

"Hezza! Allah blesses Hezza!"

At that, Kerim, who stood on a dais at the opposite end of the square, waved his arms in angry protest.

"I'm inclined to believe that this Hezza must be honest, because your crooked cousin doesn't act as if he liked him," Drake said to Hadous.

"Hezza was not blessed by Allah with a great brain," the young queen replied. "But he's unselfish and always tries to do the right thing."

In spite of Kerim's lone opposition, a few minutes later Hezza was elected by the thunderous acclamation of the populace. Beaming and shaking his big head from side to side, he came to recite the first Fatah of the Koran before Hadous.

"What a bull of a man!" Drake muttered. For the newly elected Chief Marabout had immense shoulders and a tremendous barrel of a chest. His heavy, bony face looked all the longer on account of a great fan of jet-black beard. His eyes were round and leering.

After paying homage to Allah, Hezza brought his hand to breast and mouth in salute and boomed:

"O Queen, how can I serve you?"

"Pass judgment on Kerim, who insulted me and left me alone in my hour of danger," Hadous quickly replied.

Hezza ponderously turned to face Kerim and thundered:

"You laid unclean hands on our queen. You deserted her when death threatened her and thus you forfeited your quality and privileges of prince of the Tachma Royal blood. Therefore I banish you for two moons, and I decide that you shall not be readmitted to our community unless you make a public testimonial of repentance."

Howling like a madman, Kerim tore the breast of his tunic. He beat his head and ground his teeth. Finally he screeched:

"Hadous, how can you tolerate this insult to your future husband?"

"Husband?" the young queen disdainfully exclaimed. "The Oulad en Naceur blood will never run in the veins of my sons."

Kerim gasped, as if struck by a physical blow. Suddenly his glance fell on Drake.

The young scientist had been shaven by an admiring menial with a moon-shaped razor of bronze. The stately proportions of his body were enhanced by a tunic of scarlet silk girded by a gold embossed belt. Gilded sandals were fastened to his calves by strips of soft red leather. Beside the gorgeous Hadous he cut a thoroughly kingly figure.

Kerim was convulsed by a fit of jealousy. Losing his head, he howled madly:

"Dog of a stranger! If I don't find you gone on my return I'll. . . ."

"If you want a fight, you can have it right now," Drake shouted above his screeches. "With bare hands, sword or spear."

The curses died in Kerim's throat. He was a coward, painfully aware of the weakness of his muscles. Nothing could have driven him to fight a duel with that powerful Rumi who had fearlessly stood his ground before a charging lion.

"Why don't you answer?" Drake goaded him.

But a bleak fear, far stronger than love, jealousy and lust for power had put an end to Kerim's ravings. Bowing his head, he jumped down from the dais and shouldered his way out of the crowd.

Subdued jibes and repressed laughter accompanied his retreat. But a few moments later his venomous voice came from a side street:

"Tell that son of Sheitan of a foreigner that the short, soft-bodied viper often kills the strongest buffalo."

"I hope that I'm wrong," Drake mumbled, "but that rat shouldn't have been left loose."

THE next day Drake visited the town. He suggested some sanitary measures which Hadous translated at once into orders, and he applied first aid remedies to a few ailing and injured tribesmen. The outcome of it was that a few cuts, which had festered helplessly, responded to a treatment of boiled, sterilized water and salt. Potions of herb juices healed stomachaches which had been attributed to mysterious ailments and were nothing more than indigestion.

Thus, a week later, Drake's popularity was insured. Hezza, who attributed his success to miracles, and thereby considered him as blessed by Allah, paid him a visit in his room in the chief's house, and gravely said:

"Hadous, who doesn't hide anything from me, her Marabout, told me that you don't belong as yet to the true faith. But you will, some day. For, otherwise, you shall be guilty of ingratitude to Allah who loves you. And after death, your fine qualities will not help you any."

Confronting the alternative of a dangerous denial, or of a confirmation that he didn't feel like giving, Drake kept his peace. Hezza interpreted his silence as a surrender to the justice of his proposal.

"Hadous cares for you," he whispered with a knowing smile, his firm white teeth flashing through his black beard.

"I'm honored," Drake replied.

The interview was ending in a blaze of mutual satisfaction when scientific curiosity prodded Drake to ask:

"I would like to see the antiques and documents which are, undoubtedly, secreted somewhere in your ancient city."

The gleam of enthusiasm faded from Hezza's bovine eyes.

"Inshallah!" he rasped. "We keep what you ask in the temple of the dead, which is contiguous to the Mosque and therefore on sacred ground. In my quality of Marabout I can't show anything to you until you embrace the true faith. But Hadous, being queen, may break the rule and bring you into the ancestral temple."

Hadous was evasive when Drake approached her with his request. But, upon his insistence, she relented and, taking him by the hand, led him through the weather-beaten portals of the temple of the dead.

The first hall that they crossed was bare and paved with slabs of marble which had originally been smooth and polished, but were now cracked and colorless. But, when Hadous pushed open a second door,

a multitude of strange sights confronted Drake.

An immense lattice of wrought metal, reproducing curling branches and festoons of leaves, made up the center of the roof, and threw an intricate pattern of vivid light and shade on the floor beneath, which was crowded with altar-like blocks of multi-colored marble inlaid with gold and mosaic, awe-inspiring mummified bodies in sitting and reclining positions, and weapons and precious objects of various ages.

With bated breath Drake tiptoed to a ghastly, sitting figure in rust-stained garments. The skin of the face was gone. Most of the teeth of the crumbling skull had fallen on the lap of the mummy. But, on the blackened bones of the forearm, Drake noticed big bracelets inlaid with emeralds.

When he asked Hadous who that regal personage had been, the girl replied that he was one of her ancestors; but she didn't know his name, or anything concerning his life. Then, her eyes flashing, she whispered that a further examination was an outrage to the sanctity of the dead, and Drake's scientific curiosity remained unappeased.

Another marble block bore vessels, jewels of fine, ancient Byzantine workmanship, an enormous golden breastplate and a horned helmet of Celtic make. However, the most awesome of all the relics was a giant body with negroid jaw bones, a great barrel of a chest hardened to the consistency of stone, and a big iron spear thrust into the pelvis.

"This one," Hadous whispered, "was a Negro king who dared to lift his eyes on a Tachma princess. He used to come under the walls of her town moaning songs of love and begging her to meet him. Finally his reason snapped and he led his tribesmen to a savage attack.

"There's an old song of ours which says that the howling of the wind was not louder than the hiss of the flying arrows, and that the clamor of the bugles of the defenders and of the tom-toms of the Negroes was drowned by the desperate cries of the wounded; but above all that ear-splitting clamor thundered the terrible voice of the giant Negro king.

"Then the plains and the hills were covered by a flowing carpet of tongues of flame—by thousands of spear tips flashing in the sun, for warriors from other Tachma towns and their allies were rushing to the rescue. All the attackers who didn't flee were slaughtered; but the giant king, at the head of his bodyguard of towering black spearmen, kept on fighting grimly for a long time.

"All his men lay dead when he was brought down by a spear—by that spear that you see stuck in his petrified body. And yet, louder than ever, he kept on howling the Tachma princess' name—until the blow of a battle-ax cleaved his head and finished him."

Drake stared at the grim skull. A wide gash seared it, enhancing its morbid look. Hadous' voice sounded faint, as if coming from a distance:

"The Tachma rulers of the time decided to preserve his body, as a tangible example that the laws of our race had to be respected by our people, and also by all outsiders.

"Henceforth, their sons and all their descendants carried along its giant embalmed frame in all their wanderings. In this forlorn community it finally found a lasting abode."

The light, seeping from the lattice of the roof, was gradually shifting. In the turning pattern of golden glow and shadows, that long-dead, petrified body seemed to seethe with an unwholesome ripple of life.

"In Allah's name, let's look at something else," Hadous whispered.

AFTER a while Drake grew accustomed to that grim survey. But that sight of the ancient deads brought back to his mind a more recent recollection of slaughter—Smithson, bleeding and torn, dragged under water by the crocodiles.

"What are you thinking, Da-Kar?" Hadous asked.

"Hezza told me that I can look at the ancient Tachma parchments without committing sacrilege. Can you lead me to them?"

The color returned quickly to Hadous' cheeks.

"Come!" she eagerly said; and, seizing that opportunity of dragging him away from the mummies' hall, she pushed him toward a darkened doorway.

The corridor beyond was long ceilinged

and musty. As soon as they entered it, Drake's nostrils were stung by a pungent scent. But Hadous explained:

"The Marabouts intrusted with the custody of this temple often burn aromatic herbs, as an offering to the shades of the dead. The smoke seeps through the cracks in the walls of the niches carved on the outer sides of this passage, but nobody was ever harmed by it. However, I warn you, O Dakar! Don't open the door at the end of the hallway next to the parchments' storeroom; because, behind it there's a room where is imprisoned a reproduction of a brass goddess of idol-worshipers, who is so evil that only the Marabouts can look upon her face without meeting disaster."

Drake opened his mouth to answer, but an invincible lassitude choked the words in his throat. All of a sudden, he felt an overpowering desire to lie down and to close his eyes. At the same time, a chaos of not unpleasant visions formed in his mind, a voluptuous feeling wafted through his whole system. When he turned his glance on Hadous, he hazily saw that she was smiling at him and swaying on her feet.

Then, through the eddies of thickening smoke and the enticing shapes that were beginning to flutter through it, he noticed the solid, crouching shape of a human body, a great bulk of black hair and a snarling, bearded face—the face of Kerim.

Drake heard a soft thud behind him and realized that Hadous had collapsed. But an irresistible feeling of impending danger kept his clouding eyes peering right ahead. Thus, when Kerim's head catapulted onward, and a dagger gleamed dully through the smoke, he sidestepped and struck with all his might.

His fist struck leathery flesh. But, carried by the momentum of his blow, he stumbled over the falling body of Kerim.

As a savage scream of rage broke the stillness of the corridor and partly shook him out of his daze, he dug his clawing fingers into the tangled hair of the swarthy head bobbing under him and banged it on the floor. Then he grasped the hand holding the dagger and twisted it.

The weapon flew out of Kerim's fist; but, with a sudden heave of his square shoulders, the treacherous chieftain rolled Drake over, and leaped on him. Snarling savagely, he dug a knee into his belly and clutched his throat.

Half strangled, with his lungs bursting and his eyes almost popping from their sockets, Drake lashed with both fists at the bearded face above him, and there was power in his thudding blows. For a fleeting instant he feared that he was going to lose his senses, and thought that death was a matter of instants; in a last outburst of fighting rage, he brought his knee up and put all his strength into a savage uppercut. Long nails of wrenched hands raked his throat as Kerim was lifted and thrown against the nearest wall with a sickening thud.

Drake remained flat on his back, painfully gasping. Luckily for him, the drugged smoke was rising toward the ceiling; a few inches above the ground the air was breatheable.

Kerim lay in a heap under him. Hadous seemed to sleep with her face cradled in her arms a few paces away.

Drake never knew how he managed to get hold of both of them, and to drag them out of the corridor, into the hall of the dead. But finally the smoke-filled passage was behind him and great gulps of fresh, reviving air were cleansing his blood and restoring his faculties.

HEZZA and the two Marabouts of a lower grade were before the portals of the temple when Drake, his tunic hanging in shreds, came out, carrying the still unconscious Hadous over a shoulder, and dragging the feebly kicking Kerim by the back of his neck.

"What happened? By the seven names of Allah, what happened?" Big as a barn, rolling his protruding eyes, Hezza, the chief Marabout, was rushing toward Drake, bowling over with mighty shoves all the Tachmas who didn't hasten to make way for him.

Drake related Kerim's treacherous attack. When he was through Hezza exploded:

"A weakening smoke overcame you? Why—it can't be anything else than kish-ashish! Accursed!" he thundered, swooping over Kerim who was coming out of his knockout, and shaking two big hams of fists in his face. "Not only have you again attempted to harm our queen, and

attacked her friend, but, may the flesh fall from your diseased bones! How did you dare to desecrate the temple with a burning, sinful drug?"

Kerim, terrified, howled like a frightened cur and fell to his knees. Hezza knocked him down with a kick and pressed on:

"Today Marabout Mahond was on duty in the temple of the dead. Was he your accomplice? Or what did you do with him?"

"Why don't you send someone to bring this Mahond out?" Drake interrupted.

Two burly Marabouts ran into the temple at a sign from Hezza. Followed several tense minutes, when the confused clamoring of the populace alternately arose and subsided, like the roaring lash of a surf. Eventually the Marabouts came out, carrying an inert body.

Drake stared at the greenish hue of the hanging, bobbing head, at the ruby drops of half-coagulated blood that fell from the tunic of the poor fellow, and said:

"That settles it. Kerim has not only attempted a murder. He has actually killed. He must die."

To his utter surprise, Hezza beat his head with both fists, hopped like a madman and finally roared:

"I wish I could tear him limb from limb with my own hands! But a curse will destroy our community if we break the ancient laws concerning the king's family. No Tachma can shed Kerim's blood. No Tachma can lock him up into a dungeon. The worst we can do to him is to banish him for life!"

"Are you crazy?" Drake exploded. "If you let this low-down criminal go, he'll stop at nothing to get even with all of us! Out of spite he'll even disclose the location of your hidden town to your enemies!"

"He wouldn't dare." Hezza's voice lacked conviction. "He knows that the curse is double edged. The worst tortures, the worst sufferings would mark the end of a Tachma princeling, betrayer of his people." Then, turning to Drake, he unexpectedly growled:

"You are not a Tachma! Why don't you kill him with your own hands?"

Drake slunk back. For Hadous' sake—and also to reacquire his peace of mind—he would have liked nothing better than to see Kerim executed—he would have given years of his own life for a chance of killing him in a fair fight. But he couldn't stand the idea of slaying in cold blood that unresisting, criminal coward. Then his eyes fell on the pale and drawn face of Hadous, who had just come out of her faint, and an idea flickered through his mind.

"I never slay unresisting men, regardless of their crimes. But, let me tie Kerim up. Let me place him in a room, behind a strong, locked door, and see that he remains there," he said. "When I leave," he inwardly thought, "I'll load him with spare provision and drive him before me at the point of my spear until I safely deliver him to the jailer of the Post of Podor."

Hezza made an angry gesture, as if to say: "You would do better if you stuck your knife through his ribs." Then, grudgingly, he gave his consent.

Drake dragged Kerim into the prison room of the temple, tied him hand and foot, and fastened the end of the rope to a big iron ring hanging from the wall. Then he inspected the single barred window, carefully locked the massive oaken door of the dungeon and stuck the foot-long key into his belt.

The next morning, when he went to see how Kerim had passed the night, he found the door open. Pieces of severed ropes were scattered on the floor. Some secret friend of the treacherous cousin of Hadous had set him free. And all attempts to pick up his trail were in vain.

MAURITANIA is a wide country where one finds the characteristics of all Africa: mountains, plains, rivers and fertile districts as well as deserts, woods, swamps and jungles. East of the Salde-Podor basin of the Senegal River, the western border of Mauritania consists of a succession of low, sloping hills where the game abounds. In that ideal country for horses, the Brakna and Trarza Moors, who own herds of camels and retinues of horses, use spirited Barbs to indulge in their favorite sport of ostrich hunting.

The Tachma were fond of that same pastime. They kept in the stables of their hidden city a few scores of Berber mounts. To reach the ostriches' grounds, they rode over a long crescent of firm ground which connected the eastern edge of their farm-

land with the boundary of their domain.

A fortnight after Kerim's escape, Hadous decided to stage a mounted hunt. Drake endeavored to change her mind, but it was no use; so, he finally agreed to join her.

They left with a retinue of twelve warriors. Four hours of leisurely riding brought them to the open country of the Mauritanian border, and the hunt was on.

Several ostriches had been downed. Hadous was galloping after the leader of the herd, a big, gorgeously feathered male, when Drake noticed a gleaming of steel behind a chain of boulders and shouted a warning. Quickly Hadous and the whole retinue of Tachma soldiers turned their mounts. A split second later a swarm of mounted Moors spurred at a breakneck gallop from behind their hiding place.

Thunderous yells of "Allah Akbar!" rent the air. Bullets whistled. The desperate shout of a Tachma rang: "Brakna! We are lost!"

A great devil of a fuzzy-headed Moor dug the sharp ends of his box-like stirrups into his horse's belly and overtook the last of the escaping Tachma warriors. A jet of fire and smoke darted out of the muzzle of the long-barreled mokhala gun which he held pistol-like in his right hand. Shot point-blank, the Tachma fell from the saddle.

The big Moor stuck his mokhala under a thigh. Unsheathing his sword, he catapulted his mount through the very midst of the Tachma retinue and slashed right and left.

Suddenly he was beside Drake. The young American had never fought in mounted combat. By sheer instinct he stabbed sideways with his javelin and ducked. Luck was with him, because the Moorish sword swished harmlessly above his head in the very moment when the sharp point of his javelin pierced the barrel chest of the tribesman.

The next instant the momentum of his horse tore the javelin's blade from its bloody furrow. When he lifted his head the Moor's horse still galloped beside his mount, but its saddle was empty.

The Tachma chargers, well cared for and fed, were outdistancing the scrawny and ill-kept horses of the Brakna.

"Our town will be lost if our enemies learn the location of the passages through our jungle boundaries. Follow me south, Tachmas!" Hadous shouted.

Drake bit his lips. He was convinced that Kerim was informed of all the movements of Hadous by the as yet unidentified henchman who had helped him to escape. That ambush of the Brakna was his handiwork and all efforts to keep the secret of the passages through the jungle and the quicksand were futile, because Kerim had already disclosed their location, or he surely would, as soon as he got tired of unsuccessfully trying to seize Hadous and curb her to his will. . . .

Nevertheless, Drake realized that Hadous was right. She was the queen, and her appearance at the town's gates a few hundred yards ahead of a pursuing pack of the Tachma's worst enemies would have branded her as a betrayer of her people.

"Spur on! To the south!" Hadous repeated at the top of her lungs.

But the retinue of cowardly Tachma warriors had lost their heads. Unheeding her orders, they rode straight for the jungle.

"Oh, Dakar, what shall I do?" Hadous sobbed.

"We must go also to the town. You must organize a defense before it's too late," Drake shouted over the galloping hoofs of their horses.

As they turned their mounts and urged them toward the jungle, the Tachma of the escort were already disappearing into its winding trails, and the Brakna were drawing dangerously near.

WHEN they came in sight of the town, bugles were blaring. A swarm of Tachma horsemen were cantering out of the gates. Encouraged by that timely help, the men of Hadous' escort turned their horses and joined the charge.

But the Brakna refused to be drawn into a decisive combat. They galloped away, holding the bridles in their left fists and their mokhala guns, stuck point backward, under their left armpits. Their right fingers pressed the trigger as soon as the Tachma drew close.

Several men tumbled from the saddle, killed or wounded by that volley. Drake's furious cries stopped the Tachma from giving up the charge. Loosening the bridles that they had pulled in in a moment of

panic, they rode hell for leather after the Brakna and managed to cut down several of them.

That pursuit lasted for a long time. But, when evening came, and the green wall of the jungle loomed before them, three Brakna rode unscathed into it; and thereafter, Drake and the Tachma warriors were unable to track them down on the darkened jungle trails and reluctantly returned to the city.

With leaden feet, Drake climbed a short stairway and entered the hall of the second floor which was Hadous' seat of power.

The young queen had only to look at his face to realize that he had not succeeded in his undertaking.

"Allah the merciful have pity on us! So they got away!" she stammered.

"Three of them did," Drake answered dully. Then his fighting grit asserted itself and steeled him. Forgetting his exhaustion, he straightened his body. His eyes shone like live coals under his scowling brows.

"Yes, three got away!" he repeated in a voice of thunder. "But, even if the very last one of them had been slain, the threat hovering above your town would not have been dispelled. For only a fool could believe that by now Kerim hasn't made a compact with your enemies, and betrayed the location of this community!"

To his horror and utter rage, a bearded and unkempt fellow, whom he recognized as one of the all-powerful soothsayers, arose and snarled from between clenched teeth:

"We called our familiar spirits, we, the masters of magic! But they refuse to tell us if we have reason to fear a treachery from Kerim or not! And only one thing is clear to us! You have brought ill luck to our town and Hadous is unworthy to rule. It is true that the fear of her craven escort, and not she, brought that pack of Brakna scouts up to our very gates! But, by the hand of the Prophet, why did that happen? Because Hadous is unable to curb her subjects to her will."

There was a tense silence. Suddenly Drake recognized Salofa among the squatting helders and shouted:

"In Salofa, the merchant, Tachma has a man of courage and wisdom! Let's hear what he has to say."

SALOFA arose. He was lank, ungainly and slightly stooped; but the magnetism of a superior intelligence emanated from him like a tangible aura and made him an arresting figure.

"I didn't speak before, because I felt that only Hadous would have listened to me," Salofa said, vibrantly. "And, even now, I don't know if the sense of my words shall be understood. But Dakar honors me by asking my opinion and here it is: I love our ancient town. I was born in it, and in it I happily pursued my trading activity, as my father and my grandfather did in their days. In our walled town I reared a family, and everything that I own is in it. But our lives and freedom are more important than houses and other possessions—which, anyhow, the Brakna would take away from us after their arrival with Kerim—because I agree with Dakar that Kerim made a common cause with them. Thereby, let's do what our ancestors did in similar circumstances! Let's leave, let's put miles of untracked wilderness between ourselves and our enemies. With the assistance of Allah, we'll contract alliances with the negro tribes of Senegal who also have suffered at the hands of the Brakna! And the day will come when we shall build another town, safe from the menace of our age-old enemies!"

An angry clamoring almost drowned the last words of Salofa. Hezza tugged furiously at his beard and boomed:

"By Allah, we don't want any of your medicine! We should run away! Leave the comforts of our homes for the bone-breaking life of the wanderer! Tchaah!

"What I think is that it is easy to defend the trails through the jungles, and the quicksands, and defend them we will!"

Followed by the other elders and by the soothsayers, the chief strode out of the hall without deigning Hadous and Drake a single glance.

Before noon, all the young men of Tachma went with Hezza and his lieutenants. Hadous didn't oppose their departure; but, after they were gone, she gambled all her remaining authority in an order that sent all the women, children and elderly men toward the lands of the west, where the black tribes, enemies of the Brakna, lived. The command of that sad column she intrusted to Salofa.

Only her personal male servants—ten men, in all—remained with her and Drake. As age-old custom dictated, she had to scatter all of them as respectful guards of the mosque, the temple, and the gates.

THREE days passed. Thrown as they were in the undisturbed company of each other, Hadous and Drake would have enjoyed them if it had not been for the uneasy threat that hung above them.

Then, in a listless morning, oven-hot with the blasts of a scorching Sirocco wind blowing from the far-away Sahara, the man on duty at the Mosque came at a run. Panting and wide-eyed, he threw open the door of Hadous' house. The howling of the wind and the swirling eddies of dust gave an eerie ring to his words when he stammered:

"I was on the platform of the minaret . . . and I saw . . . some of our men running toward the town . . . and a horde of accursed Moors, pursuing them . . . they'll soon be here, the Brakna, our bloodthirsty enemies!"

"Quick! From which direction are the Brakna coming?" Drake exclaimed.

"From everywhere! The town is surrounded!" the desperate servant cried.

"It is all my fault!" Drake cried. "I should have thought that the unknown traitor in our midst—the man who set Kerim loose—would inform the Brakna that, faithful to the laws of your people, you were going to remain in your house up to the last moment. . . . I should have sent some of your servants as far-flung lookouts. . . ."

"And what good would that have done, O Dakar?" Hadous softly replied. "Not even all the ten of them could have watched properly the approaches to my doomed city."

Her face was pale and drawn, but there was no fear in it.

"I don't care to live any longer," she said dully. "But I must try, to the very last, to save you, O Dakar, because I love you and because many are the times when you risked your own life for my sake.

"Let's go to the temple. The Marabouts, the soothsayers, the warriors, they all have failed me. But the shades of the dead may shelter us, and in the temple there are many hiding places."

"Which Kerim and his acolyte knows as well as you," Drake grunted.

"There's a door that Kerim never dared to cross: the door of the room of the evil pagan goddess," Hadous fearfully replied.

"It sounds like a drowning man casting a hand toward a floating stick, but, evil goddess or not, that room perhaps will give us a chance of dying of starvation, instead of being carved to pieces by the Brakna swords. Let's go, Hadous, and you also, poor frightened fool of a servant," Drake urged.

Breathlessly they ran through the deserted streets. But, when they reached the square confronting the temple, a mob of ferocious Brakna warriors in flowing garments poured into it from another thoroughfare; and, at their head, Drake recognized with a plunging of his heart the stocky figure of Kerim and the disheveled soothsayer who had attempted to bring about Hadous' removal from the kingly authority of her forefathers, at the last meeting of the elders of Tachma.

THEN Hadous lost her head. Sobbing pitifully, she ran toward the portals of the palace of the dead. Drake followed her, drawing his sword with one hand and pulling his automatic from the holster with the other. But, they had hardly reached the temple's threshold when a swarm of leaping and howling Brakna surged against them.

From the corner of his eye Drake saw the door, unlocked by the servant on duty, opening slowly. Quick as a flash he turned about, covering the Brakna with his aimed automatic.

"The first who moves a step onward, who lifts a gun, will get a bullet through his head!" he thundered in Hassane dialect.

The Brakna stopped. The stench of sour milk emanating from their filthy, flowing garments enveloped the young American like a disgusting mist.

A towering chief shouldered his way through the Brakna warriors. He had a wide pair of bony shoulders and long, muscular arms. His neck, straight like a corded column supported a narrow head with jutting jaws. His nose was long and square, his thin lips slanted cruelly at the corners. His beady, close-set eyes were as unblinking and devoid of human feeling as

those of a snake. "Dog of an unbeliever," his voice had a strident, nerve-racking sound, "kneel before Agmoutar, the descendant of the Sohaba companions of the Prophet, the chief of the Oulad Manssour tribe of the Brakna federation."

Hadous had not gone inside the temple. Her pleading voice rang pitifully:

"You are the winner! In the name of Allah the merciful, the compassionate, at whose side your glorious Sohaba ancestors fought, spare this Rumi, O Agmoutar. And I shall bow to destiny, I shall pay you tribute, ghafer. . . ."

"You can't bargain. You can't pay me what's mine for the taking," Agmoutar screeched. But that appeal in the name of his ancestors, of whom he was so proud, flattered him and took the edge out of his savage fury. His eyes scanned Hadous from head to foot and, gradually, a crafty look spread over his bony face. Jerking around his head, he snarled:

"Where's that Tachma dog of a Kerim? I made a compact with him, but he told me that this Hadous, this queen of a pack of fearful lizards, would never recognize my authority! Instead she does! That proves that Kerim is a liar! And since when was a descendant of the Sohaba obliged to keep faith with a liar?"

"The dirty swine!" Drake fiercely thought, seeing Kerim coming forward with his flat face pale and twisted in an agonized snarl of helpless desperation. "He brought ruin on his own people, but he'll be lucky if this human rattlesnake of Agmoutar will let him go free with his whole skin."

Before Kerim could voice his protests, the treacherous soothsayer shot out a big claw of a hand, pulled him back and stepped before the Brakna chieftain.

"Inshallah, you are right," he gloated. "He's unworthy to rule. But, by helping him, I enabled you to win. Make me chief of the Tachma, reduced to the condition of Zenaga, of semi-slave tributaries of the Brakna! Give to me, and not to Kerim, Hadous as a wife. And, conversant with the evil spirits as I am, I'll force them to serve you, always. . . ."

Agmoutar's laughter abruptly subsided. His big trap of a mouth clamped shut and his thin lips sank like an inverted semi-curve under his long square nose.

"You have the power of bringing good and evil, as you wish, by means of the jinns," he grated from between clenched teeth. "And you think that your blood is red enough and strong enough to justify your claim to the leadership of a tribe—even of a Zenaga tribe. . . . Then, by Allah, let me see if you are right! Let me see the color of your blood!"

Quick as a streak of lightning, his sword flashed in the air, slashed sideways. Half decapitated, the soothsayer tumbled down.

Drake saw the Brakna warriors stepping back, as if fearful that the feared jinns could come out of the dead soothsayer's horrible wound; then he heard Agmoutar screech:

"See, Kerim, his blood is not strong enough. . . . Are you . . ."

That was the moment, because nobody was looking at him and at Hadous. With a sudden lunge Drake turned, gathered Hadous in his arms, sprang into the temple and shut the door behind him. The servant on duty hastily slid the big bar of iron through the rings fastened to both panels.

The next instant guns fired, strong fists hammered on the barred door. The stentorian voice of Agmoutar, calling, threatening, came from the square.

"They'll break down the door, or climb through the windows. You got us only a respite from death. . . . Why don't you leave me to my destiny . . ." Hadous madly stammered.

"Shut up!" Drake savagely cried. "Let's run to the secret room of the goddess," and, seeing that stark terror was imparting an insane look to her face, he quickly added: "I have a special charm . . . no pagan goddesses can harm me and those who are with me. . . ."

Hadous suddenly collapsed. But the servant on duty in the temple, and the one who had come with Hadous and Drake, feared the Brakna so that, in their frenzied longing for a shelter, they were willing to believe the young American's promise of immunity. They hastily lifted the girl and fairly fled through the winding corridors, until they reached the forbidden door.

Drake examined the lock, saw that rust had reduced it to a crumbling shell. He catapulted against the door and threw it open.

THE room within was shaped like the interior of a mammoth egg, with a foot-wide hole at the top. The light that entered from that lofty opening fell on the enormous face of the statue below, which seemed a very crude reproduction of an ancient Greek goddess Juno.

As soon as he saw it, Drake realized that it was made of metal. In a remote time, it had been painted in bright colors; but now, most of the paint had faded, or was spotted with big greenish patches. Strange as it may seem, it was just that decay of its hue that gave the statue a sinister appearance of leperous life.

"Inshallah! Look at her eyes!" a servant awedly gasped.

But Drake thought only of searching for some other egress. He could find none on the walls. Out of desperation he ran behind the statue and saw that it was only an empty shell.

An elaborate system of levers and pulleys was fastened along the whole frame of its disjointed limbs. That explained how the statue moved eyes and arms. But what attracted Drake's joyous attention was a trap door, on the floor behind the empty statue's foundation.

Seething with excitement, he grabbed the iron ring fastened to one of its sides and pulled.

The trap door was heavy, but, after several efforts, he succeeded in lifting and shifting it, disclosing a stairway. At once, a waft of air and also a nauseating scent came up out of the dark recesses beneath.

The subterranean passage beneath the floor of the forbidden room led to some sort of opening; but, what lurked in it? What caused the hideous odor that struck his nostrils?

The answer to the last question appeared in the wriggling, thick black body of a viper on a stair.

"African vipers. Short, thick and soft of body, with ugly triangular heads, and as poisonous as rattlesnakes. For ages they must have nested and multiplied in that cellar," Drake thought. And his skin crawled.

Suddenly he remembered an assertion—was it Professor Smithson who had voiced it?—that vipers were unable to bite through wool.

The tunic and mantles of the two servants were woolen. Was that the solution of his problem? At any rate, he had little to choose. If the Brakna caught up with them, it was death for him and the two servants—and worse, it was death for Hadous.

Drake returned to the servants, and hastily ordered them to take off their garments and tear them into wide strips. When that was done he and the two men wrapped their feet and legs. Then, instructing the two men to carry Hadous high above their shoulders, he gingerly descended the stairway.

It was none too soon, because already the clamoring of the invading Brakna filled the temple.

But, shortly after, Drake's whole attention was captured by the horror of the slimy, soft and wriggling things, hardly visible in the semi-darkness, over which he was stepping. Then, for a long time, he was in pitch-black darkness, and, behind him, wheezed the horrified moaning of the two servants.

Finally the passage was bathed by a dim radiance, which became brighter and brighter as he advanced.

Drake was helping the two servants with Hadous, returning to consciousness, when a beastly howling and the crash of rifles came from the darkness that they had just left. With a shudder, the young American understood that, vipers or not, Agmoutar had pitilessly forced his men to pursue them through that cave of horror, and that many Brakna were struggling and dying underground, engulfed by the enraged scores of poisonous snakes.

As soon as his head cleared, Drake stared around and saw that he stood in a wide gully. Some five or six hundred yards farther, there was a wooded plain. An agonizing worry contracted his heart at the thought that he might soon meet a far-flung cordon of Brakna, thrown around the conquered city by Agamoutar.

Then, to his right, he saw a herd of grazing rhinoceroses. Lucky for him and Hadous, the wind came from the left, and there was no danger that their scent could warn the ill-tempered tanks of the African animal world of their presence.

Whispering to Hadous and to the two servants to walk lightly, without tumbling stones or uttering any sound, Drake led

them noiselessly toward the wood.

They reached it without trouble. A quarter of an hour later they climbed over a low ridge and saw tan dots—the garments of the Brakna who had succeeded in negotiating the secret passage, advancing along the bottom of the ravine.

Had the wind shifted, or was it because the nerve-wracked Brakna raised a clamor? At any rate, Drake soon noticed barrel-like gray shapes, lowering their snouts and charging with the speed of express trains.

A scattered tattoo of report crashed. Then only the rustle of the wind was audible. The Brakna, dazed by the sun after their prolonged stay in the darkness, unable with their slow-witted brains to cope adequately with the sudden attack, had been forced to pour back into the passage, or were being chased in all directions by the rhinoceroses, after leaving several of their own dead or maimed on the ground.

AFTER converging on the town from every side, the Brakna had entered it, spurred by the lure of pillage. Those who had been routed by the rhinoceroses had ceased constituting a menace for the time being. But Drake didn't underestimate the venomous rage of Agmoutar and the relentless treachery of Kerim. With the two servants and Hadous he drove on and on, putting as much distance as he could between his small party and the conquered town.

Shortly before sunset, he noticed the gleam of steel behind a mound. After ordering the servants and Hadous to crouch in a dense thicket, he cautiously took advantage of the unevenness of the ground to screen his advance, and circled the mound without being detected. But, as soon as he saw who the hiding men were, he sprang upright, returning his automatic to the holster. For, close to the mound, was a score of dazed Tachma warriors.

BEFORE night, they met a few more groups of runaways. From them, however, they learned that a band of about twenty roving Brakna were in the neighborhood.

"A victory—the smallest bit of a victory—is just what I need to stiffen the backbone of Hadous' subjects," Drake mused, gazing at the thirty-odd Tachmas who now made up his command. Therefore he ordered a halt, divided them in three squads and explained:

"If we meet the Brakna, the first and second squad shall take cover, at a distance of about fifty yards from each other. The third squad will go onward and fire a volley. Then they'll turn about and run, drawing their pursuers into the space between the first and second squad. That will be the moment to strike! I'll shout the order. The first and second squad will charge the Brakna from two sides. The third squad will execute a second turn about and attack frontally. There'll be no doubt about the issue. Not a single Brakna shall remain alive if we strike fast and hard."

"It is a good plan," the headman acknowledged.

Around midnight, they were carefully walking along the crest of a low hill, when they saw the fires of the bivouac on the plain below. The Brakna, swathed in their tan mantles, squatted around the burning embers. Only a couple of sentries were on duty. It was evident that the men of that far-flung detail of Agmoutar's horde didn't fear any attack.

Drake quickly deployed the men of the first and second squad on the two sides of a long strip of bare ground on the summit of the hill, and personally led the third squad down slope.

As soon as they reached the foot of the hill, he ordered his men to fire their guns of ancient vintage. The noise was deafening, but the Tachma didn't know how to aim straight. Only one of the Brakna fell.

His companions quickly scattered, threw themselves on their bellies facing the hill, and began firing.

Drake led his men onward, for another hundred yards or so. Then, on his suggestion, a Tachma screeched:

"It is no use! Most of our companions have already fallen! Let's escape while we can!"

It worked like magic. The victory-drunk Brakna jumped on their feet and charged after the retreating men of Drake's squad. A few minutes later they fell into the ambush.

Drake's order and Hadous' high-pitched urgings sent the three squads of Tachmas to the charge.

The stranded warriors of the conquered city lacked real courage and would have been routed by a strong resistance. But the Brakna had expected to run down a weak and leaderless band of defeated men; the devastating surprise of enemies charging from every side in the darkness paralyzed them.

Half of them were down, dead or wounded, when the rest began fighting back. But, by that time, the Tachma outnumbered them two to one.

A few minutes later it was all over. And a mad frenzy convulsed the Tachma, who had not suffered losses and were finding out for the first time in generations how intoxicating victory can be.

WHEN the happy shouting died out, Drake called the headmen to a council of war.

"Where did you send the women and children and old men of your people?" Drake asked.

"To the jungle villages of Soumamabes, Almamy or chief of a Sonnike tribe, who were driven away from their original habitat by the Brakna."

"Are the warriors of Soumamabes many?"

"Enough to fight the Oulad Manssour —if they would dare. Too few to cope with the whole Brakna federation."

"Is there some other tribe of blacks enemies of the Brakna near the territory of Soumamabes?" Drake insisted.

"The Toucouleurs of Tierno Mamadou," Hadous answered. "They are tall and powerful warriors and hate the Brakna, who defeated and killed Kebe Utobes, the brother of Tierno Mamadou, and sold the survivors of his tribe as slaves to the Oulad en Naceur. But the Brakna captured the skull of Outaba M'Salum, the ancestor of Tierno Mamadou and Kebe Utobes; and according to Toucouleur tradition, as long as they keep it no Toucouleur can prevail against them."

"This is what I propose," Drake announced after a pause. "A dozen men must go—to round up all the stranded Tachma warriors, and to warn them that the rally takes place in the territory of Soumamabes, the Sonnike Almamy. But we must go first to see if we can enlist the help of the Soumamabes."

TWO days later they reached the palisaded Sonnike village of Soumamabes and were greeted by Salofa, the Tachma merchant.

"Our women built huts," Salofa announced. "Our warriors—what remains of them—are arriving, group by group. The Almamy Soumamabes treats me as a friend and begins to listen to my advice."

It sounded very simple. But Drake could divine what tremendous obstacles the energetic merchant had surmounted.

"I knew that you were a man to be trusted," he exclaimed. And Salofa smiled, acknowledging that recognition.

Soumamabes was tall, slender and past his middle age. He towered above his tribesmen, who couldn't be compared in muscular strength and bulk to the big and brutal-looking Toucouleurs of Tierno Mamadou.

Soumamabes spoke the Hassane language, and from him Drake learned that his whole tribe was anxious to inflict on the Brakna nation some of the suffering that many generations of Sonnike had suffered from them.

"But," Soumamabes blurted, shaking his head from side to side and rolling his eyes to give more emphasis to his words, "my Sonnike have only a hundred guns. Another three hundred Sonnike," three of his long, blunt fingers tapped one of his bony knees, "could fight with spears. But what are four hundred Sonnike, and a few score Tachmas, before the eight hundred rifles that the Brakna federation can muster? If the eaters of raw meat—the buffalo-men of Tierno Mamadou—all five hundred of them—would join us—it would be great fighting. Much blood would run and perhaps Agmoutar would die together with the power of his people. But, Inshallah and by the spirit-ghosts of my people, be thankful if my jungles and the weapons of my men hold the Brakna away from your Tachma women and children."

A sudden idea, a daring plan, formed in Drake's mind.

"If I could get hold of the skull of Outaba N'Salum . . . if I would bring it to Tierno Mamadou . . ." the words poured out almost without his volition, "do you think that the Toucouleur Almamy would make common cause with us?"

"He would, because it would mean that

the Brakna are doomed!" Soumamabes rasped. Then a flash of understanding and mirth convulsed his long, rough features.

"Da-li!" he roared, shaking back and forth and slapping his thighs, "Outaba N'Salum's skull has been closed for scores of years in an iron cage, before the Mosque of the main Brakna ksour! And this lone Rumi wants to seize it! Hundreds of Brakna stand in his way, but, stronger than a bull elephant, and with a hide thicker than that of an elephant, because even elephants are vulnerable to bullets, this Rumi wants to fight his way to the very middle of the Brakna ksour! Oh, praised be the lame! Oh, glory to the blind! The world turned and a hare chased away a lion and his servant the jackal!"

In normal conditions, Drake would have not been enraged by that bit of barbaric teasing. But his African experiences had cracked his veneer of cosmopolitan sophistication, and worn his temper thin.

"Laugh as much as you wish!" he growled, "but, inside of a moon, I shall get hold of that skull. And if Tierno Mamadou refuses to buy it by making common cause with us, I'll smash it to bits before his black pumpkin of a face."

Soumamabes' laughter stopped as abruptly as the sound of a radio that is shut off. His jaw fell and his eyes almost burst their sockets as he gasped:

"Do Allah and the evil spirits render you insane? Or are you tired of living?"

Drake didn't hear him, because plans to make good his boast were already crowding his mind.

The next day the Tachma refugees began to train strenuously under the supervision of Drake. Puffing and gritting their teeth, they ran, jumped and wrestled, and the halos of thick hair topping their heads shook like dusting mops carried away by a hurricane. They stabbed with their spears and fenced. But the young American had all the trouble in the world when he tried to teach them to fire their long-barreled guns, taking careful aim. For, like the greater part of the tribesmen of western Mauritania, the Tachma were accustomed to hold their guns like spraying hoses, with butts pressed against their right hips, and to close their eyes before pressing the trigger.

In a fortnight the Tachmas began to shape up. They grew leaner, tougher, and, as their strength increased, their spirit rose accordingly. When Drake asked for volunteers to raid the Brakna, they all offered to come with him. But, the next morning, the Sonnike scouts brought warning that the warriors of Agmoutar were approaching their jungle.

Agmoutar was a wily chieftain. He didn't enter the Sonnike jungle, knowing that he might run into ambush. But he sent a deputation of shrewd, observing men with a flag of truce.

On Drake's suggestion, Soumamabes went to meet them midway. The wisdom of that provision was instantly proved by the disgruntled look of the faces of the Brakna messengers. Their leader, a graybeard with a big hammer-head and close-set eyes, angrily rasped:

"Inshallah! Why don't you admit us into your pigsty of a village?"

"Because, as this wise young Rumi pointed out to me, you would memorize its approaches and every particular of its stockade," Soumamabes bluntly replied.

The beams of the sun, falling on the middle of the glade, drew minute sparks from a big cone of tiny, flying insects. Scratching the gray stubble matting his cheeks, the Brakna headman pointed them out to Soumamabes:

"Look at these pests. The clumsy hand of a man could catch only a few of them. Put a fire built under them would destroy every one of the cursed things.

"Your men are like them, oh Soumamabes. The hand of Agmoutar, and the guns of his warriors, could not purge the world of their foul presence. But beware of the day when the whole might of the Brakna confederation will bring the fire of hundreds of belching guns into your stinking jungle!"

Soumamabes parried:

"Agmoutar will need time—much of it—to enlist the support of the other Brakna chiefs."

"And what of it, by the Prophet's beard!" the graybeard shouted. "You'll have a respite for a moon—perhaps for two. But, after that, nothing will save you. Would it not be better for you to listen to reason? Why don't you deliver Drake and Hadous, pay the ghafer, and hang onto life?"

"I see the gleaming of steel among the bushes behind this gray-haired father of all lies," Drake whispered to Soumamabes.

Without losing an instant, the latter blurted:

"Come with me to my village, to partake of a feast, oh messengers of the Brakna," and, followed by Drake and his retinue, he plunged into the jungle.

That swift retreat upset the slow wits of the baffled graybeard and his companions. For a few instants they gaped at the branches which had closed behind the shoulders of the Sonnike party. Then, cursing, they fired a volley. A hail of bullets, coming from the recesses of the jungle, killed two of them. The graybeard and the survivors ran for cover.

Agmoutar's horde advanced to the right and to the left of them, under the cover of the thickets encasing the glade. But bullets, throwing knives and javelins flew against them from every side.

The death of several more Brakna convinced Agmoutar that he was courting disaster. Revengeful hatred shone in his deep-set eyes when he bellowed the order to retreat.

AS soon as he reached Soumamabes' village, Drake hastily assembled the Tachma warriors and picked the fittest of them, thirty in all, sturdy of legs and excellent fighters. Soumamabes gave him another thirty black warriors, the best runners and scouts of his tribe.

With that force Drake instantly set on march by a circuitous route. His plan was simple: he wanted to strike by surprise at Agmoutar's ksour before the return of the Krakna chieftain and his forces.

Seven nights later, the small column cautiously approached the Brakna ksour.

It consisted of several houses of sun-baked clay, fields of vegetables and groves of fruit trees. Over the walls surrounding them, the tree tops loomed still and black against the starry blue of the sky. In the very middle of the ksour, the tall, slender column of the minaret of the mosque shone like molten silver under the beams of the moon.

The Brakna Mosque was nothing to boast about; just a squarish, muddy building, jutting out of the middle of a dusty stretch of ground. The skull of Ouataba N'Salum was in a roofed cage. It was secured to a monolith by big rings of iron. The monolith stood beside the portals of the Mosque.

Drake stared at the cage in a growing fit of desperation. It was too solid, too securely moored to be broken quickly. In the spur of a sudden inspiration, he whispered a few words to a Tachma who instantly darted toward the outlying sections of the ksour. He placed his remaining warriors in a semi-circle bristling with guns before the monolith. Then he instructed a Tachma, armed with a heavy, long-bladed battle-ax, to hack at the cage's bars.

The ringing sound of steel hammering on steel rang like a peal of thunder in the stillness of the night. The Mosque door flew open. A turbaned Marabout and his man-servant came out, lifting their hands and howling curses.

"Oh ill advised, oh demented . . ." the Marabout thundered. Then he saw that he was confronting strangers and turned to dart back into the Mosque. But Drake swiftly grasped his shoulder and pulled him into the middle of the Tachma array.

"If your Brakna try to stop us," he snarled into his ear. "Tell them to make way for us and to keep their weapons low. Otherwise you're a dead man."

A stream of tribesmen came out of houses, out of dark gardens and twisting alleys. They were mostly women, children and old men, with a sprinkling of overgrown boys. But Drake knew that African tribesmen are fierce fighters, regardless of sex or age.

"Tell them not to stay away from us, if you prize your life!" Drake shouted at the Marabout. To his men he commanded: "Remember what I taught you! Keep your ranks closed and shoot straight when I give the order!"

The bottom of the cage was crumpling at the very instant when long tongues of flame leaped from an outlying house on the edge of the ksour. Then reports of firing guns, muffled by the distance, crashed above the howling of the villagers.

Drake sprang to retrieve the skull of Outaba N'Salum, which had tumbled out of the dusty receptacle where it had rested for more than a score of years. He shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Form a flying wedge, Tachmas!"

At that moment the Marabout punched him on the side of his head.

"Jihad! Holy War! Don't let them get away!" he roared.

Drake's fist closed and he hooked a solid blow into the Marabout's ample stomach. The Marabout's shouts died into a pained ouff! as he doubled up. A Tachma grabbed him and dragged him forward.

A volley of ragged reports rang. Two Tachmas fell. Before Drake could shout an order, their comrades sent a hail of bullets into the crowd and then charged.

Drake, the dusty skull under his arm, was carried along in the crush, the Marabout beside him. In an alley, there in pitch-black darkness, the column piled up into a compact tangle of battling men. Eventually the Tachmas broke through. Drake felt the softness of the bodies of fallen human beings under his feet, saw eerie, distorted face flittering right and left of him. Then the massed Tachma array catapulted into another alley where the opposition proved negligible.

THE chief, Tierno Mamadou, forewarned of the arrival by his lookouts, had lined up his Toucouleur warriors in a compact square bristling with gun barrels, spears and broad-bladed axes.

When Drake came toward him with the recovered skull in his hands, a glow of intense interest showed in the little bloodshot eyes of Tierno. The young American announced: "The luck of Outaba N'Salum returns to his people!" And Tierno Mamadou eagerly outstretched a pair of thick, leathery hands to grasp the grim gift.

Drake's heart leaped wildly when, after inspecting the skull, Tierno brushed with a square fingernail some complex Arabic characters imbedded in its base and exclaimed:

"See these, Rumi? They mean: 'Outaba N'Salum was an Almamy blessed by Allah! My father carved them in the bone with his own hands, and filled them with precious metal that he had melted with his own hands!"

Surprise and reverence was on the faces of the whole Toucouleur tribe.

Tierno Mamadou muttered reverently: "It is a miracle! A sure sign that the hour of avenging our age-old wrongs has arrived."

THAT same day, howling their war songs, the Toucouleurs began their march toward the village where the Sonnike and his Tachma were hopefully waiting their arrival.

The tribesman greeted the victorious raiding party and the Toucouleurs with a feast. Whole goats were roasted. Milk by the pitcher was available to everybody. And finally, everybody got drunk on ginger beer.

While the allied warriors slept off the spree, their bellies stretched to the bursting point, Drake and Salofa worked out a plan of campaign.

It seemed better to wait for the Brakna, and not to go after them, because, out of the jungle, the Brakna fought horseback and had greater mobility and charging power.

The Brakna federation could put in the field eight hundred warriors. Drake had about one thousand jungle tribesmen; but only three-hundred-and-fifty of them were armed with guns. To overcome the inevitable inferiority of fire, Drake decided to fight the decisive combat in densely covered ground.

"Now, hear my plan," he said to the listening Tachma leader.

"We'll offer a battle-front of six hundred men, with two concealed wings of one-hundred-and-fifty men each; but we'll keep a hundred men as a reserve. Our battle front will bend like a bow under the Brakna attack. But, as soon as the Brakna press home the final charge, our wings will envelop them and fall on their rear."

"It sounds good." Salofa said," but only our few scores Tachmas have had enough training to execute such a maneuver under fire. What will happen if the Sonnike and the Toucouleur lose their heads?"

"The Sonnike and the Toucouleurs will be taught. We'll rehearse the various phases of the combat every day. There's still a fair amount of time before the Brakna come," Drake replied.

EXACTLY a week later, the Sonnike scouts reported that a force of about seven hundred Brakna had left their

mounts at the edge of the jungle and were advancing on foot toward Soumamabes' village.

Drake instantly lined up his small army in the prearranged array. He sent one hundred picked Tachma and Sonnike warriors ahead to establish a contact with the Moors and to draw them into the trap.

A couple of hours later, the clamor of guns firing in the distance warned that the first skirmish was on.

Drake feared that his advance guard could surrender to panic and escape in the wrong direction instead of returning to the main body. But, after a few tense minutes, it became evident that the Tachma and the Sonnike had been turned into disciplined fighters by the long drills to which they had been subjected. For the roar of the volleys kept on growing louder. They came nearer and nearer with clock-like regularity.

The advance guard were not fleeing. They were doing their duty well. But Drake breathed easier when they finally fell back and lined up with the main body.

Soon after a tell-tale sound—the pattering of hundreds of running feet, as loud as the first blast of a strong wind—announced the arrival of the Brakna.

The moment to spring the ambush had come. All the pent-up excitement of Drake broke out in a strangled cry:

"Fire!"

Hell broke loose. A deafening volley rang. Javelins, throwing knives and short axes flew through the air. Scores of tom-toms pounded, gourds filled with pebbles rattled. The howls of the Toucouleurs, of the Sonnike warriors, and of the Sonnike women who stood behind them, rang as savagely as the full throated roars of a multitude of enraged beasts of prey.

Drake couldn't see how many Brakna were falling in the billows of smoke of the burning black gunpowder of the mokhala guns. He couldn't see how many dead and wounded sank into the welter of entwined vegetation.

But it was clear that the setback was firing the fierce temper of the Brakna instead of stopping them. Suddenly there was a wild catapulting of tan-clothed bodies against forepoint of the array of the Tachma and their black allies. The bend at the center of Drake's battle line became a whirlwind of ferocious hand to hand encounters.

Loud cries rang to Drake's left: "They're breaking through! Help, by Allah!" Then, from the same point, came Hadous' voice and Soumamabes' bellows, threatening, pleading.

The clamor at that danger point lessened. But a compact wedge of Brakna charged headlong toward the very point where Drake stood behind a double row of Sonnikes and Tachmas. Agmoutar led the moors. Drake caught a glimpse of the cruel, sunk-in mouth slanting at the corners, of the long nose and beady, close-set eyes of the chieftain. Agmoutar's long, leathery arms waved like windmills. His sword and clubbed gun struck right and left.

The double line of Tachmas and Sonnike caved in. Drake carefully sighted Agmoutar's wide, bony shoulders and pressed the trigger of his automatic. The gun lay dead in his hand. In his excitement, Drake had unknowingly fired his four cartridges.

Quick as a flash Drake threw the empty automatic in Agmoutar's face, leaped back and unsheathed his sword.

Agmoutar went after him, lunging, slashing down. Behind the chieftain loomed the flashing weapons and the snarling faces of a pack of charging Brakna. Drake parried an up-thrust of Agmoutar's blade, then, straightening his sword, lunged at the throat of the cruel Brakna chief.

Agmoutar's head snapped back and, in the split following second, Drake marvelled at the easy manner with which his blade was slashing into the sinewy column that was the neck of the conqueror of the Tachmas.

The impetus of the Brakna attack was spent. Desperate cries, triumphant shouts and the crash of volleys came from far in front.

"Your plan worked," Tierno raucously blurted, "We, of the reserves, we filled all the gaps in the main line. The warriors of the concealed wings ran around the Brakna and are falling on their rear. It is a victory, a mighty victory by Allah! But Hadous is gone!"

"Gone!" groaned Drake. "Where?"

Tierno rolled his eyes and shook his bullet head.

"I didn't see her die. but a short, stocky man and several Braknas seized her, carried her away before the combat turned to our advantage. . . ."

"A short, stocky man? Kerim!" Drake said savagely. "Come with me, any of you men who think you can take it."

Without turning his head to see how many were following him, without minding the bullets of friends and foes whistling all around, Drake sprang onward. Several times he came upon Tachmas, Negroes and Braknas locked in deathly hand to hand struggles, and ran on, without interfering in their ferocious duels. Several times his feet caught into holes and the vines covering the treacherous ground, and he sprawled down on his face and belly. But instantly he leaped up, tightening his grip on the hilt of his sword.

Eventually the clamor of the victorious combat was behind him, and he was following a trail of footprints and broken branches, well out of the deep tracks that had been carved by the advancing Brakna horde.

The breath came out of Drake's aching breast in pained gasps. The muscles of his calves felt as if grinding knives were stabbing into them. But, gritting his teeth, he ran on and on, until he saw big splashes of fresh blood over a stretch of trampled ground.

"Kerim, if you killed Hadous, I'll break every bone in your body." Drake fiercely thought. The rage that convulsed him effaced all weariness from his limbs.

A few moments later, a Toucouleur gasped:

"There! There's a body there, oh Rumi!"

Following the direction pointed by his outstretched arm, Drake saw a human shoulder covered by a white mantle, jutting out of a patch of thick grass.

With a plunge of his heart he remembered that Hadous had a white mantle at the beginning of the combat.

But the victim of Kerim's murderous temper was Salofa, and not Hadous.

There was still a spark of life in the body of the brave merchant when Drake turned him over and made a pillow of his folded mantle.

"I was unable to stop Kerim," Salofa gasped, his eyes glassy and his face already turning ghastly white. "I wanted to send men to the rescue but in the fury of the fighting nobody listened to me! So I followed. It was only a few paces back that I overtook them. They shot and stabbed me. I fell. I managed to get up. I caught up with them again here . . . and they finished me. But be careful! Kerim swears that he'll kill Hadous rather than give her up."

Suddenly Salofa's eyes rolled. His mouth opened wide. The heaving of his breast stopped.

"Gone to the Paradise of Allah!" a Toucouleur whispered.

There was an added fire of revenge in Drake's eyes when he leapt to his feet.

A short while after he perceived Hadous and her captors from the top of a ridge.

They were in the narrow valley below. The Brakna—three of them—were half dragging and half carrying the girl. Kerim stalked after them, holding a ready gun.

Drake frenziedly looked at the wooded slopes right and left of the valley. Then he turned and for the first time noticed that only two Toucouleurs had been able to stand the pace.

"You are brave men," he addressed them. "But I must beg one more great effort. Unless we recover the Tachma queen our victory will be a defeat.

"Our one chance is to ambush Kerim, otherwise he'll shoot the Queen. So we must reach the head of the valley and jump Kerim when he least expects it. How about it, can you make it, my warriors?"

"Yes, Inshallah!" one of the two towering blacks roared. "You restored to us the talisman-skull of Outaba N'Salum! You proved to us that Allah is with you! We'll gladly die for you."

"Then let's go!" Drake replied.

A FEW minutes later they were recovering their breath hidden in a bush, at the opposite entrance of the gorge. They couldn't lift their heads, for fear of showing themselves to the approaching Braknas. But soon they heard the pattering of their approaching feet, and a piteous wailing—Hadous' tortured cries.

Drake bit his lips so that blood flowed out of them when his keen ears were reached by the sound of a blow, and by the agonized screech of Hadous which fol-

lowed it. From the corner of his eye he saw powerful muscles balling on the shoulder of the huge black warrior nearest him.

Suddenly the bare calves and the edges of the tan tunics of the Brakna became visible through the shrubbery.

Drake and his warriors charged in. A Brakna turned to face them only to fall with his skull crushed. Drake, growling savagely, rushed straight for Kerim and struck aside the barrel of the traitor's mokhala with his sword.

It was only instinct that drove him to leap sideways in time to avoid the descending dagger of another Brakna. With a lightening lunge, Drake ran him through. Then he swung back to Kerim. But, blinded by fury, he struck wide. The blade of his sword banged a boulder and snapped at the hilt.

Kerim had fired his gun. He was pulling a dagger out of his sash just as Drake with all his strength and the weight of his catapulting body, hit him. Kerim's head jerked sideways under the impact of the terrific blow, the whole side of his skull caved in. Drake, gazing dully at the heavy hilt of the broken sword that he still held in his clenched fist, realized that he had killed a man with the fury of his weighted fist—that the traitor's days were over.

When he turned his head, the last Brakna lay dead in the grass. And Hadous, sobbing, was coming with outstretched arms.

A month later, the humming of a happy activity was in the reconstructed Tachma town. Hadous was supremely happy, and Drake had every reason to be pleased.

He had broken the power of the cruel Brakna and insured the peaceful welfare of hundreds of Tachmas, Sonnike and Toucouleurs. He had collected enough notes and data to compile several books which were bound to create a sensation in the scientific world.

Yet Drake's heart was heavy. In another moon or two he must be leaving the lovely Queen of the Tachmas. It was hard to do. The very qualities that made Hadous so dear for him—her great beauty, her kindness of heart and her sincere feeling for him—were so many vises that crushed his heart every time that he thought of the moment when he must go.

For their separation was inevitable. A chasm impossible to fill separated them: the spur of different needs and understandings, her unbreakable worship of traditions alien to him, and, more than anything else, his longing for the civilized world where he belonged, and where there was no room for a little barbarian queen like Hadous.

But Drake hated to think of the moment when, gathering all his courage, he would tell the beautiful girl that he was going away—add that perhaps never again would he return to the forlorn part of Africa where the ancient Tachma town reared its scarred walls.

CODE of the BUSH

BY HAL WHITE

Death whispered in young Bill Lockwood's ear, struck suddenly with invisible fangs. But in a hot, stinking night of pygmy siege, a shadow stood beside Lockwood and caught his murder-arrow out of the air!

THE smoke of the supper fire, with four half-naked black boys moving around it, rose straight into the air from the center of the little jungle clearing, and lost itself in the green of arching branches overhead. At one side, where the clearing was open to the narrow creek bed, picks, shovels, gold pans and sundry equip-

ment now lay abandoned after the day's work.

The scene looked peaceful enough, with the deep hush of approaching night lying over the African forest. And Bill Lockwood, washing up at the tin basin outside his hut, sniffed the mingled fragrance of meat, coffee and burning wood, and grinned as he ducked his lean, sun-tanned face into double handfuls of cool, soapy water.

He was too absorbed to notice the anxiety in the face of the black boy beside him. Mobo's dark, liquid eyes shifted worriedly from the prospector to the boys around the supper fire, and on to the other white man, Pete Meredith, who was splashing in his own basin at the hut on the far side of the clearing.

But Lockwood did not notice that. He was thinking with satisfaction of the day's take from the creek bed. The dust and nuggets were piling up. He and Meredith must have at least $60,000 between them now, and half of that ought to be enough for any reasonable man. They could be pulling out any time now, getting back to civilization. Meredith—

And then Lockwood got soap in his eyes, and, squinting and swearing, groped for a towel.

"Here, Master," a voice said, close, and the towel was thrust into his hands.

Lockwood said "Thanks, Mobo," and wiped the sting out of his eyes. And then he added with a chuckle, "Hang it, I'll blind myself some of these times, with this cheap soap. Be glad to get back to a better brand."

THE black boy stood, his muscular torso rising like a shapely ebony statue out of the strip of blanket cloth that wrapped his loins. Hesitantly, but with something in his mind that must be said, he spoke:

"Tuan, there are many kinds of blindness."

Leisurely drying face and neck and sinewy forearms, Lockwood quirked an eyebrow at his No. 1 boy. "Meaning what, Mobo?"

Mobo dug with an embarrassed toe in the dirt, and hitched at the leather thong that supported his breech clout. "There are things in the jungle that the white man does not see, Master."

Lockwood grinned. He flipped the towel onto a nail in the cane wall of the hut, reached for the comb that hung on its chain beside the mirror, and began to smooth his tousled brown hair.

"I'll grant you that, old son," he agreed. "Snakes, for instance, that match the color of the ground. I dang near stepped on a bushmaster this afternoon. And pygmies. You don't know they're within a mile till you get a poisoned arrow in your brisket. But they haven't bothered us, and won't, if we—"

"Men who hunt jungle gold are wary of those things, Tuan," the boy broke in earnestly. "Your danger is closer. As close as the gold that you and the Tuan Meredith have gathered."

Lockwood frowned, let the comb fall with a little rattle of the brass chain against the wall of the hut. "Look here, Mobo," he demanded, "just what are you getting at? You've hinted something of the sort before. You don't mean the Tuan Meredith, do you?"

THE black boy wriggled, the muscles flickering in his powerful shoulders. He shot a glance across the supper fire at Meredith, whose thin, saturnine face was buried in a towel, and swallowed nervously. "Yes, Master," he blurted.

"So!" The prospector's calm blue eyes were suddenly clouded with exasperation. "So that's it, is it? Mobo, listen to me. I know you believe what you're saying, and you're trying to help me. I appreciate it. But you're off on the wrong foot this time, and I'm telling you to forget it."

"I have seen it in his eyes, Tuan," the black boy protested desperately. "He means harm to you. He is planning always. At night I have heard him, tossing in his bed. He plans. And in the jungle there are many ways—"

"That's enough, Mobo," Lockwood cut him off curtly. "The Tuan Meredith is my partner, and completely to be trusted. Say no more. Now go help the boys with the supper. Hustle!"

The black boy hung his head with its kinky, woolly hair, and scuffed at the dirt with his toe. Then he looked up, affection for this big American mingling in his eyes with undisguised worry. He drew a deep breath, murmured "Yes, Master," and padded away.

Lockwood stared after him thoughtfully. He entered his hut, came out again directly, pulling his cork helmet over eyes that now showed concern. Braced on booted legs, he stood just outside the door and fished in the pocket of his khaki breeches for a cigarette. Lighting it, he inhaled deeply, let smoke drift slowly from mouth and nose, and gazed through the blue vapor at Pete Meredith approaching from across the clearing.

MEREDITH was tall, very thin, and he shambled when he walked. Not an attractive figure, this man, with his dirty blue dungarees, brown cotton shirt over sloping shoulders, and the same soiled pith helmet he had worn when Lockwood picked him up in Dar es Salaam, on the east coast.

But he was tough, wiry, a hard worker, and he knew the jungle. That was why Lockwood, fresh from the States with a modest sum of money and a yen for adventure and gold, had tied up with him. Meredith, flat broke and drifting, furnished the experience and Lockwood staked the expedition.

A fair arrangement, and it had worked out nicely, so far. They had trekked and portaged from Tanganyika Territory into the interior, and located these rich diggings. Now, any time now, they could stow their dunnage, themselves and their black boys into the dugout longboat that waited on the bank of the Uele, a half mile to the northeast, and return to the outside.

But Mobo had said that Meredith was dangerous, and, in spite of himself, he felt a stir of uneasiness as he watched the man's approach. These black boys had an uncanny faculty for judging people. They seemed to know, instinctively, as a child knows, or an animal, when a human is not to be trusted.

And then Meredith was near, and Lockwood met him with a slow, amiable grin and a cheerful "How's the old appetite, Pete?"

Meredith scrubbed at his stubbled chin with a calloused hand, and grinned back. "I could eat the hind quarters off a hyena, alive. Gettin' sick of jungle chow, though. Be glad when we get back to civilized grub."

"It won't be long now," Lockwood said.

"No, it won't be long now," Meredith drawled softly, and Lockwood probed the lean, saturnine face to read a possible sinister meaning in the words. But Meredith's eyes were shadowed under the helmet rim, and the last rays of daylight were fading.

The two men sat at supper in the clearing a few minutes later. The swift equatorial night had fallen, and with the dense jungle walls around them, and the wink of stars high above, it was as though they sat in the bottom of a deep, black well of darkness.

It was a blackness heightened, somehow, by the glow of the campfire, sending up clouds of smoke to fend off the persistent insects, and by the feeble flicker of a candle stuck on the rough board table between the two men. The light seemed to be pushing with fluttering, frightened hands against the creeping threat of the surrounding night.

Mobo and the four other black boys sat cross-legged around the fire, their bodies gleaming in the light as they consumed from tin plates a stew of meat and wild rice.

Lockwood noticed that Mobo was eating little. He dallied with his food, his troubled glance going often to the table and the two white men.

Meredith ate rapidly, and with keen appetite. But he talked, too. Usually he was rather dour and silent, but tonight he rattled on about this and that as the meal progressed. The prospect of an early return to civilization, with plenty of money to buy its comforts and luxuries, seemed to have exhilarated him.

The meal ended, and both men sat back. Meredith dug out an old briar pipe, filled and lighted it. In the glow of the match, Lockwood noticed that his lips smiled but his black eyes did not. Planning something, was he? Well, let him plan. What the devil could he do?

A CIGARETTE in his mouth, Lockwood had a lighted match poised when a glance at the black boys caused him to halt his hand. Their heads were turned, and they were listening alertly.

"What is it, Mobo?" Lockwood asked.

"Something comes, Master," the boy said uneasily. "The Great One, by the sound." He came to his feet, the others

with him, their eyes rolling in the fire-light.

And then the white men heard it, too. A crashing in the jungle, off to the north, growing swiftly louder. Meredith said "Jeez!" and sprang up, his pipe spilling a red glow as it clattered on the table. Lockwood kicked his camp stool backward, and both men dived for their huts, and the rifles therein.

When they came out, the noise had grown to a crashing tumult. It was headed straight for the clearing, and the black boys stood ready for flight. All but Mobo, who took his stand near Lockwood, a six-shooter in his fist.

"It *is* the Great One, Master," the boy breathed.

"Yeah," Lockwood nodded. "Though why an elephant should be barging around at this time of night is beyond me. Unless—"

And then there came a hoarse, trumpeting roar, the wall of the jungle bulged as though a locomotive were coming through, and a great gray beast burst into the clearing. He came staggering, stumbling, his mighty legs scarcely supporting his thousands of pounds of weight, but the white men did not notice that.

Their guns were roaring, bucking heavily against their shoulders, and smashing lead halted the giant intruder in mid-stride. He flung his head high, squealed shrilly. His momentum carried him briefly, then his knees buckled and he went down with an earth-shaking thud, close to the flickering campfire.

Mobo darted at once to the side of the dead beast, and stood looking at him and shaking his head. The white men looked, too, and Lockwood exclaimed angrily. The elephant's trunk had been nearly severed, and that job had been done by a knife, before the bullets ever came near him. There was blood all over everything, and it seemed clear that, even had they not shot, the animal must soon have dropped from weakness.

"Pygmies, Master," Mobo said. "They wait in the trees with knives. When the Great One comes near, perhaps to eat of the leaves, they cut his trunk."

"And then they follow the poor devil till he bleeds to death," Lockwood said grimly. "I've heard about that sweet little trick, but this is the first time I've seen it. Nice way to hunt."

"There is something else, Master," Mobo urged.

"I know," Lockwood said. "The pygmies will be right behind this fellow, and they'll want their elephant."

"Wherever an animal drops, that is the new camp of the little cusses, the whole tribe, till they've eaten the critter," Meredith put in.

"Far as I'm concerned, they can have him," Lockwood said. "He's taken over the camp, and we can't budge him. It's as good a time as any, Pete, to pull up stakes and—"

He broke off, staring across Meredith's shoulder at a small figure which had appeared suddenly at the edge of the clearing. A naked pygmy, sharply silhouetted in the fire-light against the green behind him. He stood warily, watching them, and his bow, with an arrow fitted to the string, was half raised.

MEREDITH whirled, saw. And instantly, with an oath, he raised his rifle and the shot rang out. The heavy bullet caught the victim squarely in the middle of his hairy chest, lifted him and hurled him backward in a crumpled, bloody heap.

Mobo exclaimed sharply, and looked about him with a momentary hesitation. But Lockwood acted instantly. In a flash he had picked up a water bucket standing near the fire, and dashed the entire contents on the flames.

The fire went out with a crackling sputter, and the darkness leaped at the three men. Mobo spoke swiftly.

"That was well, Tuan. They will fight now."

Lockwood said, "Damn right they will. We've got to get out of here, if we can, before they surround us. Pete, you fool, I thought you knew the jungle! Why did you shoot—?"

"Think I want a poisoned arrow in me? He was set to shoot."

"The hell he was. He was only—well, it's no good talking now. We've got to move—fast. Water bottles, the light rifles, ammunition. And the gold. It's in my hut. I'll get it."

Each went his own way. But Lock-

wood, running in the dark toward his hut, heard the whisper of an arrow close to him, and he cursed savagely. They had one chance in a million of getting to the boat.

The black boys, all but Mobo, had faded when the elephant entered the scene. And there were only three of them, a moment later, two white men and one loyal black, to try for escape. There was a narrow path leading from the east side of the clearing, and running to the river bank and the boat.

But that path was blocked now. They learned that before they had taken a dozen steps. Poisoned death came leaping at them from the jungle wall, and, as one man, they flung themselves down and crawled back to the middle of the clearing.

The huge bulk of the elephant lay there, but it was no protection against arrows that might come from any direction. Lockwood hissed in Meredith's ear, "Find some charred wood. Black your face. And chuck that helmet. Those fellows have eyes like cats." And then he added, sarcastically, bitterly, "I suppose you know that much."

Meredith said, "Smart, aren't you? Know all about the jungle, all of a sudden."

"I know what's just plain common sense," Lockwood retorted. "We'd better keep separated. Shoot, if you see anything to shoot at. And then move, and move fast, before they can drive an arrow at the flash of your gun!"

Meredith growled something inarticulate, then he was gone, wriggling over the ground like some huge land crab.

MOBO moved up beside Lockwood. "We must be very wary, Tuan. A touch of those arrows is instant death."

"I know," Lockwood nodded. "Wonder if the other boys went to the boat."

"Most likely, Tuan. They knew the little people would attack, when—"

"When Meredith shot, yes. The fool! The damned, blithering idiot! We could have walked quietly out of here, left the pygmies to their elephant, and headed down river. Now—"

"Now it is too late for that."

Their eyes were becoming accustomed to the blackness, but still they could see nothing more than a few yards distant. Mobo was better off in that respect than Lockwood, whose vision had never been trained to jungle nights.

"Stay flat," Lockwood whispered. "If we get up they'll see us against the green of the vines. Stay flat, and if they try to rush us we can pick them off."

"Master," the black boy whispered, "I heard something in that tree, to the north."

"Take a crack at it," Lockwood urged. "If we can kill a few of 'em, these firesticks of ours may put the fear of the Lord in the others."

Mobo moved away a few yards, to protect Lockwood from possible return fire. A moment of deep silence, broken by the faintest of rustling from the direction of the north. Then the clash and crash of Mobo's six-shooter.

There was an instant scream, and the sound of crackling wood as a limp body slid down through the branches. Lockwood grinned tightly. "One! Nice going, Mobo, old son!"

Mobo did not return at once. Lockwood lay alone, his nerves prickling in spite of himself. This was not like facing clean, honest bullets, or even knives. Those arrows struck like cobras out of the dark, and their lightest touch spelled horrible death.

Far off to the north a lion roared, and to the south another answered. Then there was silence again. The jungle crept, crawled, writhed with life, but white ears could not detect it.

Behind Lockwood a rifle shot ripped the night. Meredith trying to kill. But no sound followed the shot, and Lockwood said to himself, "Missed, probably. Well, if he's been scheming against me, as Mobo says, he can forget it now. We're in this thing together, back to back, or none of us will get out."

The big prospector's eyes fought the dark. And then he saw something. A flicker of movement in the jungle wall across the creek to the west. Then a creeping shadow barely visible against the gray sand of the creek bed. Lockwood laid his cheek against the stock of the rifle, aimed quickly and the 30-caliber darted a noisy red tongue. The shadow jerked, twisted briefly, then was still.

Arrows came hissing in response, almost

before Lockwood could vacate the position. They thudded softly in the dirt, and one came within inches of his cheek, causing him to gasp and then to swear between his teeth at this unholy warfare with whispering, invisible fangs.

And then Mobo was beside him again, and he asked quickly, "Where's Meredith?"

"Don't know, Master."

"The little devils don't scare worth a damn. How many do you suppose are out there?"

"Don't know, Tuan. They— Master, listen!"

"I don't have to listen to hear *that!*" Lockwood mutter dryly. And then, as the harsh, wailing cry drifted once more over the jungle, he said softly, "Black Panthers, eh?"

Mobo said "Yes," and Lockwood felt the slight shiver of the shoulder against his own. "They have maybe smelled the blood."

"Yeah." Lockwood gave vent to a silent, sardonic chuckle. "Light a fire, and the pygmies get you! Don't light it, and the panthers come in and chew your neck! What's your choice, Mobo, an arrow or a set of teeth in your tonsils?"

"Maybe," the black boy said, "it will be neither, Tuan."

Meredith took time out to fire at another shadow slinking across the creek bed. It crumpled beside the first, and he turned to Mobo. "What do you mean, neither? The panther convention is gathering from all of Africa. Hear that? And that?"

"The pygmies hear them, too," Mobo said. "And when panthers come, pygmies go, I think."

"You'd better be right, old son," Lockwood drawled. "They're closing in."

THE yelling of the dangerous jungle beasts was drawing near, and an uneasiness pervaded the jungle. It was something felt rather than heard. Just an anxious little pulse from the encircling walls that might have been the quickened heartbeat of forest folk to whom the black panther was a dread and a menace.

And then, silent and swift as a snake, Meredith crawled close, rifle gripped, breath harsh in his throat. "Panthers," he rasped. "Jeez, we gotta have a fire!"

"Pipe down, will you?" Lockwood hissed. "Mobo says the pygmies will be getting to hell out, with the beasts drawing in."

"He might be right, at that," Meredith muttered, and seemed to consider the matter, lying with his cheek in the dirt. After a moment he moved off, and Mobo, too, went out to reconnoiter. There was brief silence, then the wail of the big jungle cats again.

Mobo came back. "It is not sure, but I think the little people have gone, Master. I will build wood for a fire."

"The hell you will," Lockwood muttered. "You stay low, and keep your eyes peeled. If you see anything, let me know."

"But, Tuan—"

"Do as I tell you."

"Yes, Master."

Lockwood felt his way to the pile of wood already gathered, and cautiously got some of it to the middle of the clearing, where he piled it ready to light. He laid kindling and dry leaves to catch quickly, and then for a moment he squatted on his heels, reluctant to light the match.

If the pygmies had not gone, that match would almost surely bring their arrows, and they could hardly miss, in the light. He squatted, nerving himself. Then he drew a long breath, and ticked the match on his thumbnail.

It sputtered into light, and he cupped it, moving it toward the gathered leaves and kindling. And then the arrow came. Lockwood might have heard the hiss of it a fraction of a second before it reached him, and he did a desperate back flip to get clear.

The match went out. Lockwood rolled and scrambled to a new position, and then he sat cursing, cold sweat starting on his forehead as he extracted the deadly shaft from where it had entangled itself in the cloth of his left sleeve. He tossed it from him, and flung himself again out of the way as more arrows came. He grabbed up his rifle, and pumped several shots in the direction from which the arrows seemed to be coming.

There was a silence after that, then another arrow hit close to him as he moved. Mobo had disappeared, and there was no sign of Meredith. The panthers were silent now, ominous sign of their nearness.

And then a groaning began, on the north edge of clearing, and Lockwood's lips flattened against his teeth. That might be Mobo or it might be Meredith. At any rate, he had to find out, do something. He began to crawl in the direction of the sound.

THE groaning stopped. So did Lockwood, the blood curdling in his veins as a night bird wheeled up suddenly with a weird, almost human cry of warning.

Then the scratch of a match, and its light reflected in Mobo's wary eyes as he bent to touch flame to the heaped kindling. Nothing happened. No more arrows came. The fire caught, licked at the wood, roared up, beating back the dark.

"The little people have gone, Tuan," Mobo said, and rose to his feet.

"Someone was groaning," Lockwood answered, eyes sweeping the firelit space. "It must have been—yeah, it was!"

They stood together, the prospector and the black boy, looking down at the body of Pete Meredith. Meredith lay on his face, and there was a poisoned arrow sticking in his neck, on the left side. But neither Lockwood nor his No. 1 boy were looking at that arrow. For, tightly clutched in Meredith's left hand, outstretched above his head, was a pygmy bow, and beside him was a half-emptied quiver of arrows.

Lockwood turned his eyes slowly, all around. Two dead pygmies lay not far away. One was Meredith's victim, the little fellow shot at the beginning of the fight, and the other was the one Mobo had brought out of the tree. The first one was minus his bow and quiver. Meredith had them.

The picture was clear—too clear. And Lockwood's tones held bitterness and anger as he said slowly, "It seems you were right, Mobo."

The black boy nodded. "It was the chance he had waited for, Master."

"Another sixteenth of an inch, there at the fire, and he'd have had me," Lockwood went on, half to himself. "Then he'd have picked up his rifle again, and no one would ever have been the wiser. A nice scheme, but the pygmies spoiled it."

"We go now, Tuan?" Mobo asked.

"In the morning, Mobo. Crack of dawn. We'll take turn and turn about keeping the fire up tonight, and then we'll take what we need and get the hell out. We'll leave the pygmies to buck the panthers for their elephant. And I hope the pygmies win. One of 'em sure did us a service tonight when he stopped this Meredith person."

"Maybe we find the other boys at the boat," Mobo said. "Or maybe they will come back before the morning."

"I doubt if they'll come back," Lockwood grinned. "But it doesn't matter. You and I can handle it. And I'm setting you up in style for sticking tonight, old son. Now let's get this double-crossing gent under ground before the panthers reach in for him. Get a couple of shovels, will you?"

"Yes, Master." Mobo padded away to the creek bed, found the shovels, and straightened with them in his hands. He stood a moment, dark liquid eyes glowing in the light of the fire as he looked at Bill Lockwood.

It would be a great pleasure to pat dirt in the face of "the double-crossing gent" who had tried with poisoned arrows to take all the gold. But there was no use to tell the Tuan Lockwood of that *other* bow, borrowed briefly from a dead pygmy and then returned to the little man's side.

Let the pygmies have the credit for that arrow in Meredith's neck. In the jungle there were many ways of doing things. But the Tuan Lockwood lived by the white man's code, and he might not understand.

The Mountain of the Golden Mummies

By STANLEY FOSTER

All living things avoided that forbidden, cloud-veiled peak. For in its centuries-sealed caverns, the pagan gods of yesterday still kept their evil death-watch.

HEWES approached Morton as the latter was opening a tin of meat. "Keep your gun handy," Hewes said in a low voice. "Trouble brewing with the men."

Morton gave him a fleeting grin, and flung a sardonic look along the river bank toward the brown clump of natives gathered near the second canoe. "They'll skip out tonight," he said coolly. "I counted on that; let 'em go. They'll take that canoe."

Hewes stared at the older man.

"You're in earnest?"

"Sure. Tell Joan not to worry. The men won't hurt us; all they want is to get away. They thought we were going on, but this is our stopping place."

"You mean—this?" The quick gray eyes of Hewes lighted up. "Here?"

"You bet." Morton regarded him with the warm, comprehending smile that so drew men to him, the smile that had drawn Joan Corcoran to him. "That's my secret, pard. Those slopes reaching up from the river, those crags and jungles, this whole section of *massif*, is our goal. The Mountain of the Dead, the Indios call it. The Place of Walking Dead is the name that the river-men give it. As a matter of fact, it's Utatlan itself. Run along and get in the wood, like a good chap. Tell you and Joan about it later."

Hewes, who had intended bringing the men to heel, turned and returned to his job. Joan Corcoran was putting up the two tents on the sandy strip of shore, but he did not approach her. She might be better pleased, he thought bitterly, if Morton did his own talking. Sure enough, as he gathered wood, he presently saw the older man in talk with Joan.

He eyed Morton's strapping, wide-

shouldered figure and massive bearded features, and with a shrug continued his work. Well, there was no finer fellow alive, but he was rather superhuman in some ways. How could Steve Morton be so blind, so entirely absorbed in his job?

The Place of the Walking Dead, eh? Not a bad name, that, thought Hewes, as he glanced up at the savage slopes towering above. He wondered if there were any hint of fact behind that astonishing name, and rather suspected there might be. In this back-country of British Honduras, with Guatemala on one side and Yucatan on the other, he had discovered some very astonishing things since the New York Museum party left the coast behind.

And now, from that party, these three had separated on Morton's private quest. Morton had been here before, had spent a couple of years here upcountry. Calm, never hurried, rising with cool capability to every emergency, Morton was a born leader. Hewes was different, and knew it; more volatile, reckless, whimsically smashing his way through anything. Five years younger than Morton, yet devoted to him, and Morton repaid this devotion. Not even Joan Corcoran, nominally entomologist to the expedition but actually a partner in work and play, of every sort, could come between these two.

Hewes rejoined the others with the last of his garnered wood. Fifty feet from the fire, where Joan was now stooping at work, the six boatmen were making their own camp, clustered together, talking among themselves. Morton, who had gone to speak with them, came sauntering back.

"Scared stiff," he observed with a laugh. "They'll be gone by midnight."

"You seem glad of it," Joan Corcoran said, looking up at him. He nodded calmly.

"I am. We'll have our own canoe, with our luggage; better off without those beggars. We can always get downriver again. Utatlan, *compañeros!* Imagine it! On the plains to the north of these hills, Alvarado battled an army of a quarter-million of Indians, beat them, looted the Quiché cities —cities second only to Mexico and Peru in wealth and beauty! Well, we've half an hour to sunset, so make the most of it. I'll pull that canoe up a bit, just to make certain; we've no more use for it anyhow, in the next few days."

"I suppose you're going up to the top of the mountain?" Joan said ironically.

"Just about," said Morton, and stooped above the canoe. With scarcely an effort, it seemed, he lifted the massive, heavy dug-out and hauled it far up on the sand. Joan turned and made a grimace at Hewes, her laughing face reddened by the fire.

"I didn't sign up on this here cruise for mountain-climbing," she exclaimed. "What about you, matey?"

"Right you are!" Hewes said solemnly. "Especially among the Walking Dead."

"Eh? Walking Dead?" she repeated, startled. "What d'you mean by that?"

"Silence in the ranks!" snapped Morton. "Forget it, both of you. We'll do our talking after we've eaten, or rather, I'll do it. Jim, let's see that knee. Hurry up!"

WITH a subdued oath, Hewes bared his knee, and Morton dabbed fresh iodine on a scratch, already anointed. Morton took no chances on infection in this country, where it was only too apt to occur on the least excuse. At first Hewes had resented his thoughtful care, but by this time realized how often the older man had saved him from unpleasant experiences if nothing worse. Three months of Guatemala are an education.

Not that Hewes was a child by any means. One glance at his lean, powerful features would have banished that notion. He lacked the massive build of Morton, the almost superhuman strength of the older man, but made up for it in energy and driving force. If he did not know Guatemala so well, he knew other parts of the world better.

"Easy on the gab," said Morton, rising from his task. "Those men understand English, and I don't want to tell 'em too much. They'll be busy eating in a few minutes."

True. By the time the three were at their repast, the men down the shore were buzzing with excited talk, no doubt about the mountain above. To judge by their looks, they were in distinct uneasiness and fear. Then Morton began to talk, in a low voice.

"I was here two years ago," he said. "Camped right at this spot. Picked up a dying Indian, and he gave me the low-down on the mountain. He said the graves of the old rulers of Utatlan were up there, and described the place exactly, and the route to follow. He had a couple of gold dishes with him to prove his yarn, and a bullet through his spine. According to him, the Indians up there don't fight whites, but the ghosts of the old kings do. That's the gist of my facts, partners."

Joan Corcoran looked at him, astonished.

"Steve Morton! Do you mean to say that you got us here on the strength of such a yarn?"

Morton grinned. "You bet! We're going to open up those graves, take back our evidence, then bring the whole expedition here. It'll be the makings of you, Jim! Establish you reputation for good. That's why I chipped you in on it."

In his words, in the look he flung at Hewes, the whole heart of the man showed for one flashing instant. He was like those massive dead volcanoes that rimmed the horizon all about, serene and lofty, but touched by the sunset light to swift radiance and glory. The girl glanced from one to the other, and her wide eyes softened, warmed, glowed with understanding.

She knew full well what deep feeling existed between these two men, was perhaps more aware of it than they themselves.

"Oh, yeah?" drawled Hewes, and twirled his mustache. "Establish my reputation, eh? As an Indian fighter?"

Morton chuckled. "Maybe. I know we're taking a chance, but I figure chances make winnings."

"Yes, you would figure that way," cut in Joan. "Nothing venture, nothing win! But I don't admire your calm nerve, getting us here on a wild-goose chase!"

"Nonsense! You're tickled to death with it all," said Hewes, quick to defend the other. "Besides, it isn't so wild. There's all sorts of stuff in this back country and over the border in Yucatan and Mexico, that's never been touched. I know a man in Los Angeles who has the actual diagram and map to the graves of the Aztec kings, and has some of the treasure to prove it, but has to let it pass because of the Mexican government people."

"Well, get on with the yarn," retorted Joan, and pushed back her radiant mass of golden hair. Her eager face was alive with interest. "What about the Walking Dead, Steve?"

"Ghost story, I figure," said Morton calmly. "I'll guarantee to take you straight to the spot in two days. We may have trouble with the Indios, of course. All we want is to get absolute evidence, after which we can bring the whole expedition here and go to work. I'll admit the mountain has a bad name, but no one seems to know just why. Suit you?"

"Oh, I'll shoot the moon every time," said the girl quickly, and laughed. "Eh, Jim?"

"Agreed." And Hewes shrugged lightly.

LATER, pipe alight, Hewes strolled down the sandy beach, watching the darkening river, leaving the others talking together. So this was Morton's mysterious quest! Well, it was fascinating enough. Win or lose, it would be worth while. Hewes could not fasten his mind on the thought of treasure, however.

He wondered if Morton had any inkling of the truth, if he realized it in any way. Hardly possible, after all. Morton was a big brother to all the world, and would probably be vastly amazed and uneasy if he thought that a remarkably beautiful woman was interested in him.

"Old Steve just swings along," reflected Hewes, "and blows away all personal contacts with that big laugh of his, and is never aware that he's done anything. He doesn't see how she looks at him, how she feels toward him. Well, she hasn't broken us up, at least! She's not that sort. She's square, true blue, not the kind to play any tricks."

He could not blame her in the least for being fascinated. Morton had done things, was a man above other men, an impersonal sort of giant wholly wrapped up in his work and blind to everything else, in a way. Yes, Steve was quite unconscious of everything.

As for himself, Hewes realized bitterly that he had no kick coming. His love for Joan Corcoran was a thing locked in his own breast. None the less, he knew perfectly well that she was aware of it. She could not help being aware of it; until lately, he had even hoped that they were drawing closer together, liking the same things, doing much the same work, seeing eye to eye for life or death as two people must if they are to know love.

All changed now.

"There's nothing a woman hates so much," Hewes thought, as he puffed his dying pipe alight, "as having the wrong man say nice things to her and do nice things for her. She doesn't hear the one or receive the other. She's indifferent, which is the worst form of hate. So I'm not falling into that snare. I love her, and she knows it. But I'm damned if I'll so much as hint it to her again!"

With a laugh at his own half-bitter reflections, he knocked out his pipe and rejoined the others. Now as usual, he was cool, whimsical, laughing, a good comrade all through.

That night he turned in alone, for Morton insisted on sleeping in the canoe. That dugout meant life to them, meant a return downriver to civilization. They could take no chances on the halfbreed boatmen stealing it.

When Hewes wakened in the morning to a cheery greeting from Morton, he found the upper beach empty. The men, and the other canoe, had decamped during the night.

"Score one for you, Steve!" he exclaimed. "See anything of walking dead men last night?"

"Nary a sign," and Morton grinned. "But I heard something. Hello, Joan! You look ripping this morning. Cock your ear and listen, now."

All three remained motionless. Hewes caught the sound now. With a start, he realized that he must have been hearing it for a long while back, in a subconscious manner. It was a steady, monotonous, pulsating beat, slow and insistent as though carrying from a great distance and reaching the senses rather than the ear itself. Listening for it, one could scarce hear it.

"It's like seeing a dim star at night," Joan exclaimed suddenly. "You have to look away from it to see it, really. What is it, Steve? A drum?"

Morton nodded.

"Hollow log type. Sounds like nothing at all when you hit it, but carries for miles. Probably one of the walking dead men is beating the alarm, eh? We're liable to meet a reception committee of ancient kings up yonder." And his booming laugh rang out upon the sunlight.

Hewes did not join in that laugh, however. Something in the steady, slow, un-

deviating drum-note slackened and chilled his own pulse-beat.

"Damn the thing!" he muttered to himself.

II

AN hour saw everything arranged under Morton's swift but unhurried direction.

Packs were made up for four days. Then the canoe and tents were hidden away in the brush, most of the supplies were likewise cached, and they started. Joan Corcoran carried her own load. She was that kind, and both men admired her the more for it.

They were off shortly after sunrise. Morton and Hewes each carried a razor-edged machete, aside from rifles, for they would have to do some cutting. Joan Corcoran, new to the back country, bore only a light pistol. The two men had exchanged a glance at sight of it, but made no comment. She would discover for herself how useless such a weapon was in the jungle or on the mountain.

Morton had made a map, with his usual meticulous attention to every detail, according to the directions given him. As Utatlan had never been surveyed, he had only the words of the dying Indian to go on, but these instructions were coherent and clear. Once they gained a shoulder-knob of the mountain, which was in plain sight up above, they would find old trails or open going. Gaining that knob, however, was no simple matter, for the virgin jungle had to be pierced.

Here, luckily, was help from the runways of animals who sought the water. Hewes was now in his element. Hunting and trailing were second nature to him, and he had the uncanny faculty of being orientated in the deepest jungle, and of picking up a once-followed trail with unerring precision. Leaving Morton to follow with Joan, he led the way, hacking a clear path with his machete, atacking the thick vines, creepers, thorny brush, with a savage energy.

An hour, two hours of this. . . . Hewes, streaming with sweat and half exhausted, came out into a clear space. The knob rose above, seemingly as far as ever, and Morton now attacked the tangle ahead. Up into the sky ran Utatlan, with ancient volcanoes to right and left against the sky touched with fleecy clouds of vapor. The mountain-flanks were of every form, from bald naked rock to verdure-clad summits.

The jungle again closed in upon the three. At intervals, Hewes found himself listening with every nerve on edge. He was conscious of that monotonous vibration, and now and again could hear it. The sound, usually felt rather than heard, neither paused nor varied. It might have been mechanical, so steady, slow and pulsating was it.

Noon found them enjoying an hour's rest beside a precipitous torrent of icy water, and it was here that Joan Corcoran first commented on that drumbeat. Morton lay at one side, asleep, and she turned an oddly inquiring gaze to Hewes, who was beside her.

"I've been imagining something for a long while," she said. "Or do you hear it, too?"

Hewes nodded. "Indian drum. A long way off, I imagine."

"Anything to do with us?"

"Sure." Hewes met her gaze with his whimsical, twinkling laugh. "It's reiterating my firm conviction that two and two make four. There's something devilish odd about it, once you start to counting the beats. After every fourth beat there's an indefinite pause. It's there, only it's not there—"

"I don't like that, Jim," she broke in gravely, regarding him in her quiet, direct way. "You're not letting it get under your skin, I hope?"

His brows lifted. "Does it, then, with you?"

"Yes, unfortunately. That is to say, it would if I let it. Constant reiteration becomes pretty real nerve torture in the course of time, you know. Something about that drum-beat sinks in, penetrates! I don't fancy it a bit."

"Sorry we can't send a radio message to cut it out, then," he rejoined, and came to his feet. "I don't imagine that it concerns us in any way, however. May not be a drum at all, for that matter. See here, I'm going to explore a bit upstream. Looks to me as though we might follow the bed of that brook, in which case we'd save labor."

He returned in fifteen minutes to find Morton fully awake, and made his joyful report.

"Partners, it's what is academically known as a leadpipe cinch," he stated cheerfully. "We'll have to climb in spots, but if you don't mind wading and slipping, it's a lot easier than backing a road through the brush."

"Let's go," said Morton laconically.

BY mid-afternoon they reached the knob of the mountain flank above. Here they struck into a disused trail, apparently nothing more than a haphazard goat track. This led them across bare hillsides and rocky wastes, then plunged abruptly into a barren little canyon. In its turn, this brought them toward sunset out upon a high shoulder of the mountain.

All afternoon Morton had set a terrific pace. Now, flinging himself down, he pointed to the ever higher masses of rock ahead.

"Halfway there or better," he told them. "Exactly as the Indio said, too. We should make it by tomorrow afternoon or earlier."

"What gets me," observed Hewes, his eyes twinkling, "is that your dying Indio's yarn seems to be actually true! That's like Captain Kidd's treasure chart really being genuine, or the well-known Spanish prisoner having any existence."

"You'll see, scoffer," retorted Morton. "By George, though! Look out there—what a glorious view!"

Off to the south and west fell away the vast upland plains, jungle and hill and river all blended into one under the sunset glow, merging into the mountains that closed the horizon. The mute volcanic cones to right and left towered high as ever. The shaggy masses of Utatlan mounted, seemingly endless, toward the north.

"Absolute solitude," said Joan.

"Yes?" Morton uttered a sharp laugh. "But when Alvarado came here, the vanished cities below us put a quarter of a million warriors into the field on one day! The same warriors whose fathers had wiped out the Mayan cities of Yucatan, and whose cousins ruled in Mexico. Spanish swords slew them, their people fled, and now—solitude."

"Not quite," said Hewes dryly. "We'd better camp without fire tonight. Hear it?"

Joan nodded. Morton listened, frowning, to the insistent, pulsating beat that never cased or varied; one could hear it now, rather than feel it, but to place it from any given direction was impossible. Joan turned suddenly to Morton.

"Come, all cards down!" she exclaimed. "What's behind that name? The Walking Dead?"

"Eh?" Morton met her gaze with his calm, unruffled regard, and shrugged. "My dear, I know no more than you. Indian legend—fantastic stories—fancies! Perhaps they think the ghosts of the old kings walk here, where they were buried. Just as well not to make a fire, perhaps. Suppose we get on to those trees yonder, then settle down for a good night's rest. The moon's coming to full, but I need daylight to find the way. The landmarks are sure, however."

All this day they had seen not one indication of Indians. There was something horrible and unnatural in the utter absence of animal life; since getting out of the jungle, even the abundant bird-life had ceased to exist, as it were. This entire far-reaching mountain seemed abandoned of man or beast alike. No monkeys twirled and flashed among the trees ahead.

The night passed without incident. Joan, who took the last watch, wakened the others at the first streak of dawn. They were up and getting a bite to eat, and off long before the sun cleared the volcano peak to the east. But when it did, they halted suddenly, peering at what lay ahead.

"I wondered what that chap meant by the forest of death, and this is it," exclaimed Morton. "You'll run across stuff like this frequently, in these sierras. Well, let's at it! Look out for the ash. Won't feel good in your throat."

TO their astonishment, however, what appeared to be volcanic ash had hardened into solid earth and rock with the centuries. From it rose, all down the enormous slope ahead, the stark nakedness of an ancient and now half-buried forest, overwhelmed by an eruption of volcanic ash and lava in distant ages. Morton plunged straight at it, and presently Hewes found that they were pursuing an erratic trail that cut through the midst of this forest

cemetery. That dying Indian, he realized, must have given Morton specific directions. Probably had taken Morton, with his serene air and mighty beard, for some god. Down in the Amazon they had made the same mistake.

To Hewes, this was a ghastly place under the level rays of sunrise. These gaunt skeletons of once mighty trees leaned at crazy angles. Many had been half burned as though set afire by the lava and then buried quickly under the torrents of ash. There was no life in the soil. No green thing grew in all this stretch, which continued for two or three miles.

And now Hewes was conscious that the distant pulsations of the monotonous drum had slightly quickened. He said nothing of it. This unending and ominous drumbeat was getting on his nerves.

Ahead showed sudden green. With abrupt transition they rounded a shoulder of the hill and plunged into a canyon. The trail went straight to a bubbling, whirling mountain stream and ended. Morton laughed exultantly and waved a hand at the green walls up the canyon, as he stood ankle-deep in the shallow water.

"Almost the last stretch of road, *compañeros!*" rang out his voice. Only the singing water broke the silence here; even the drum-beats had lessened and died away, in this canyon. "We follow this to a large white rock, then another trail goes straight along the hillside and ends at the tomb of the kings. Simple enough, eh?"

"Too cursed simple to produce anything worth while," said Hewes skeptically. "If there were any tomb-treasure available, it'd have been gone long ago. Besides, ghosts don't make trails as a general thing."

"All correct, my son," returned Morton genially. "I'll admit the Indio said that the place was guarded by the dead, but I'm chancing that. Plenty of natives in these parts to make trails, too, but they're not warlike chaps. Well, Joan?" and he turned to her, laughing. "You look thoughtful, big-eyes! What's on your mind?"

"I'm afraid," she replied frankly, and came closer to him as though for protection. "Too much solitude, Steve. I don't like it."

Morton broke into a great laugh and clapped her heartily on the back.

"Buck up, comrade! If any walking dead men show up, we'll slap a bullet into them quick and watch results. Seriously, I think we'll find everything wide open. The natives will have some scary system of defense, of course; but remember, white men have probably never been up this way before. Nothing to come for. Wandering natives would be scared out. Well, let's hit the canyon! It's going to be a hot day up on those rock slopes."

"Right! I'll take the lead," said Hewes, and started off.

The canyon wound and twisted incredibly, but it was no trick following the bed of the stream. After a couple of miles the trees and thicker growths ended, and they had naked blasted rock ahead; the stream had become a mere trickle of water, gushing out from some source up above.

It was close to noon when they reached the spring. It came forth from under the gigantic white boulder Morton had mentioned. The end of the trail was in sight, almost literally.

III

THIS upper portion of the canyon, with the bare rocky hillsides beyond, was insufferably hot. The three had made their noon halt beneath a clump of stunted trees near the boulder. The perpendicular rays of the sun beat down upon the rocks like a fiery rain, pouring white heat into every crevice, and were radiated back a hundred fold. High on the mountain as they were, there was not a breath of air.

Hewes, who had strolled out for a look at the trail, came back and dropped down, feeling as though the heat had landed a physical blow.

"Don't try it," he advised. "Better rest an hour or two. We couldn't stick it out for a mile in this heat, Steve. It's awful!"

Morton nodded.

So they rested through the worst heat of the day. In the thin, high air Hewes was once again aware of the steady, ominous pulsations, now distinctly quicker in tempo than on the preceding night.

To himself he cursed that relentless sound-wave, trying vainly to ignore it. Certainly it was equal in torture with the continual falling of water, drop by drop, which drove medieval prisoners into extremes of agony. He was conscious that it permeated

his entire brain and set it throbbing. The sound seemed to gather and break, dying and swelling within his head, as though the constant reiteration had rendered his nerves raw and tender and doubly susceptible.

Deciding to spend the night here after investigating the tombs, if tombs there were, they agreed to leave the blankets and packs here, taking only their rifles. Hewes assumed the job of making the cache, off among the rocks, in case of unseen watchers. While he was at this, he realized that Morton and Joan were talking together very earnestly, and smiled to himself—a wry grimace that held no mirth. The heat half-sickened him.

When he rejoined them, Joan was on her feet, looking rather white and strained.

"Headache," she responded to his query. "Ah! Here—I know what to do!"

She caught out a handkerchief, stripped it up, divided it among the three of them. Five minutes later, ears plugged with the strips of linen, they set out. Hewes felt like a new man almost at once. With no little wonder, he realized the deadly effect that distant pulsating drum-beat must have had upon him. Now, however, it was all but shut out.

Morton, too, took the trail with new energy. It was a more distinct and obvious trail that they now followed, no longer meandering hither and thither, but striking straight across the naked rocky flanks, rising toward a high ridge rock which formed a crest to this section of the mountain.

As they approached, this crest of rock revealed itself as the precipitous face of a low cliff. Off to their left was a glorious view across fifty miles of lower country, but none of them regarded it, nor the forested slopes below. The fiery eagerness of Morton had gripped them in its spell. Even Joan gazed at the rock-face ahead with eyes wide, panting a little as she strode alone, seeking some sign of what Morton said was there.

They came upon it suddenly.

The trail swerved in sharply, and what had been a great fissure in the rock crest became visible. Morton halted and pointed to it exultantly.

"Masonry. You see? Joan, wait outside here. Stand guard. Come on, Jim!"

Hewes hurried forward beside him. The face of this high fissure that split the rock had been filled in with blocks of hewn stone, and as they came close to it and to the small opening in the center, Morton thrust his rifle up toward the stone blocks.

"Cement! You see? The same cement that the Quichés and Aztecs used! No doubt about it now, Jim. You've got the electric torch we fetched along?"

Hewes had it and passed it to the other. Morton's was the right of prior entry, by all rules of the game, nor did he begrudge it. He stepped close after Morton as the latter stooped and entered the opening, and threw up his rifle in case of need.

There was none, however.

The beam of the little pocket torch flitted about and showed a small, absolutely bare chamber, rock under foot, rock for walls, rock overhead. Then the finger of light settled upon the wall to the left.

Against this naked rock wall was a carved portal of stone. Once this had been closed by a door of wood, of which only fragments remained. Hewes glanced at the grotesque carving of the portal, and heard Morton's voice.

"Mayan work and Mayan inscription, or I'm a Dutchman! Looks safe enough, Jim. Call her in. We'll soon see if there's anything to it."

HEWES called quickly, and in response Joan came inside, blinking about. Morton advanced to the inner portal, which evidently gave access to a chamber carved in the solid rock. As the light struck through into it, his voice came to them, curiously calm.

"Better look at this, you two! Worth seeing."

They crowded together behind him. Hewes felt Joan's fingers close on his with a quick, convulsive pressure.

There, directly before them and facing this entrance, was the hideously carven figure of a god, four feet in height. It was one of those Quiché images with open mouth and hollowed out from below, so that when the palpitating heart was torn from the victim's body and thrust into the mouth of the god, it was apparently swallowed.

Neither Hewes nor Morton cast a second glance upon this image, although they

were to look upon it again ere long. Their whole attention was fastened upon what lay behind it, about the circular walls of this inner chamber.

IF treasure were all they sought, it was here for the taking. The light glittered on bars of gold piled high; upon dishes, vessels, implements, apparently all of gold. Here were great carven slabs of shimmering obsidian, covered with intricate designs; here were masks of jade and turquoise mosaic, half a dozen of them. All about were high woven baskets whose contents could not be perceived. One of them, overturned, had poured forth a heap of corn across the floor.

"Gold and gems, hidden away from the Spaniard," said Morton quite calmly. In this moment of dreams come true, when the wildest imaginings were translated into sharp reality, Morton never changed his unruffled mien, his aspect of benignant poise. "Food, in case of need. And looked as though that rocky scarp outside had been planned for defense. At one time this was probably a fortress. We can look into all that when the expedition gets here."

"Well, what's your program?" demanded Hewes.

Morton swung around, flashed the light into his face, then uttered a quiet laugh.

"You know how many of those turquoise mosaic masks exist in the world—yet here you see half a dozen of them, and you don't turn a hair! Doesn't gold set your pulses going, Jim?"

"Not with that damned drum throbbing in my temples," said Hewes. "What's your program?"

Morton did not reply for a moment. Again he swept the pencil of light hither and yon about the chamber. Hewes was conscious of the quick breathing of Joan beside him, of the cool sweetness of her body there in the darkness, but Morton was quite oblivious. All his attention was gripped on this place around.

"Ah! I thought so!" he exclaimed suddenly, and stepped away from them, to where baskets were piled high against one wall. "Here, Jim! Come hold the light, will you?"

Hewes hastened to join him and took the flashlight. Morton lifted down the baskets rapidly but carefully, and behind them was revealed an opening into still another chamber.

"Baskets, brittle but sound, and not a trace of dust," he commented. "This place has been used, Jim. Ought to find the old kings in yonder. Let's have a look—"

Hewes lowered the light to the opening, sent it into the next chamber. There, ranked against a circular wall, were dim covered objects. A sharp breath escaped Morton.

"Mummies! Same as in Peru! Wrapped up and left. We'll stop right here! This is for future investigation, eh? Here, let me pile those baskets back."

"What for?" exclaimed Joan eagerly from behind them.

"Safety's sake," said Morton calmly, as he began to repile the baskets. "Leave all those things *in situ*, old girl. Photographs and so forth, when the time comes. This is a big find. There! Now we've got everything in shape."

He straightened up, took the light, and flashed it around.

"We'll take some small stuff, nothing else," he said. "We want evidence, not loot. Take what we can pocket."

"I've no pockets, and I want to see these things!" spoke up Joan. Morton laughed indulgently and turned to her, as to a child.

"Of course! And see them you shall, my dear. Come along!"

They began the circuit of the walls, giving a brief examination to the various objects in sight, stopping longest before the array of mosaic masks. Hewes picked up one of the masks and pointed to thongs at the back.

"To hold 'em on," he said. "And supple hide thongs, Steve—not old, stiff leather. You're right about this place having been used, and not so long ago. These things are used, too, at least some of them."

"By the Walking Dead, no doubt," Morton chuckled. "Hello! What's this, now?"

He paused before a great heap of half-dried plants, which none of the three could identify. These were piled up high and held in place by one of the gold bars. With an exclamation of delight, Joan seized the light and directed it at a number of tiny gold images, none over two inches in height, made in the purest Mayan style.

"Here's your evidence!" she exclaimed. "Couldn't have anything better."

"Right."

The two men pocketed several of the tiny objects, when a flicker from the light warned them, and Morton switched it off instantly.

"Battery's about done," he said. "Well, suppose we move out."

IN five minutes they were outside the cave opening, finding to their astonishment that the sun was at the western horizon. Hewes looked down, and drew Morton's attention to the rock at their feet. It was blackened as though by fires.

"Signals, perhaps," said Morton. "This place must be visible within a circle of sixty or seventy miles, if a fire were lit. No matter! Let's get along and break out supper, before darkness closes down. Feel elated, you two?"

Hewes merely shrugged. Joan turned to Morton with shining eyes, and patted his arm.

"For your sake, yes! This means a tremendous lot to you, Steve. It means that you're made. The publicity—"

"Oh, that be damned!" said Morton calmly. "I'm afraid you miss the point, Joan. Discovery is the goal for its own sake, not for the alleged rewards of discovery. But look here; am I wrong about it, or is that drum really working faster?"

"It's been speeding up all day," returned Hewes, with a nod. "I've noticed it. Faster? Yes, a good deal. It's rather a relief to have the tempo changed. Well, we camp under the stars for the night; high and dry here, and delightful. Where's your rifle, Steve?"

Morton halted, blankly. "Upon my word! I knew that something was missing! Must have left the rifle in the first cave. I'll run back and get it. You two chase along and get the meal started."

He turned back and strode swiftly up the slopes again. Being a good halfway to the white boulder, Hewes and Joan continued their way across the sun-heated rocky waste, and upon reaching the boulder and spring, fell to work making camp for the night.

Hewes had no trouble picking up some perfectly dry wood, and decided to chance a fire behind the boulder. Joan, over this smokeless blaze, concocted a simple but appetizing meal, and Hewes stared out over the great vista below now gradually purpling as the sun passed from sight and shadows filled the valleys spread out below him.

No doubt about it, he thought; that cursed drum had quickened its beat. It must be worked by relays of men, for no slightest deviation had occurred. Or perhaps there were two or more drums instead of one. The pulsations had become more rapid now, louder and more penetrating. Then, even as he was trying to time them, and without warning, they ceased abruptly.

"Jim!" He turned, to see Joan rising from above the fire. "They've stopped! The drum isn't beating!"

"So I hear," he rejoined dryly. She looked around anxiously.

"But where's Steve? He should have been here long ago. Do you think anything has happened?"

"Not a thing," replied Hewes. "He's probably taking another look at the junk in that cave."

"But it's getting dark, and everything's ready!" she broke in. "Hurry him, will you?"

He nodded.

"Right. You'd better scatter that fire, too."

Catching up his rifle, Hewes turned and ascended the trail. From a point a hundred yards distant, he could sight the rocky crest and the cave, and had no doubt he would see Morton hurrying to rejoin them.

So, leisurely enough, he made his way upward. Along this westward face of the mountain the daylight lingered long after shadows had fallen below, and every detail was plain and distinct. Abruptly, Hewes started, and stared upward in astonishment. From somewhere ahead, a heavy thread of smoke was ascending into the sky.

Then, a moment later, he turned a rocky corner and came into full sight of the crest where lay the cave. And he stopped short, in consternation.

From the rocky terrace before the cave, was rising that smoke. And he saw the figure of Morton there—but Morton was not alone.

IV

IT all flashed over Hewes suddenly. The drum had ceased—a warning drum, perhaps. It had ceased because this smoke signal had been sighted from somewhere below.

He stood transfixed, staring. A number of Indians stood there before the cave. How many, he could not tell; they were in constant motion, entering or leaving the opening. Morton towered above them, but a cloth was over his head and his arms seemed tied. Even as Hewes looked, Morton was seized and forced into the opening.

A rifle cracked, and the bullet flattened on the rock beside him and went whistling off into space. At the sound, the figures on the terrace disappeared. Hewes was alone, standing there in full view.

He flung himself down, trying vainly to get some sight of the hidden enemy. No further shot rang out, however. No one was in sight. Leaping up, wondering if he were the victim of some halucination, Hewes started ahead once more.

The rifle cracked again. The bullet struck almost at his feet.

He halted, and drew back with a muttered oath. A warning, evidently! To press on across that open space, without cover, would be rank folly. That hidden marksman could strike him down at will. The man must be somewhere above, at the crest of the rocks. Queer, if he were an enemy, that he should waste bullets as a mere warning!

Hewes retraced his steps, saw Joan running toward him, and waved his hand to her swift call. There was no further shot. The smoke signal had thinned and lessened. Not a soul was in sight now, and shadows were enclosing the upper rocks.

"Who shot? What's happened? Where's Steve" panted Joan excitedly, as she approached.

"Indians, up there," Hewes said. "Drove me back with two shots; a warning evidently. Take a look if you like, but watch out. We're covered, and we can't fight back."

Her eyes widened on him. "But Steve! Where is he?"

"In the cave. They all went in there. He's a prisoner."

A dumb ache pierced the very soul of Hewes as he met her gaze, read in those distended eyes the fear and horror that had seized her, knew that in this instant her whole thought was for Steve Morton alone.

"Jim!" she burst out. "D'you mean to say he's a prisoner—and you're standing here, doing nothing? And Indians—"

She checked herself abruptly. Struggle showed in her face, then it cleared again as she banished the threat of hysteria and fell back upon her cool, quiet poise. She even managed a wan smile as she met the gaze of Hewes.

"It's a shock, you know," she said calmly. "Sorry I lost my head for a moment."

"Good girl," rejoined Hewes. "Nobody's suffered any damage so far, and . . . Good Lord! What was that?"

He whirled about, as something sang overhead. Sharp, staccato sounds came to them—the resonant voices of plucked bowstrings. A quick cry escaped Joan. Then arrows plunged down all around them, straight down, shattering on the rock, making a circle about them of broken shards and feathers and points. All became silent once more; and not a living creature had Hewes been able to make out.

"The plot grows clearer," he observed whimsically. "They gave us an exhibition of fancy shooting, merely to emphasize my words, as it were. Instead of riddling us, they sent the arrows straight up, and dropped 'em all around us. Not a scratch given or intended. Probably a dozen of those chaps are lying close by, and one of them is on the rocky crest with Steve's rifle, eh? We'd better take the hint, go back and get some supper."

"Do you think I can eat, knowing he's back there—somewhere?" she demanded. "Isn't there anything we can do, Jim?"

"Just what you're doing; keep cool and use our heads. Those redskins up there have grabbed Steve, and right now we can't do a thing about it. Later tonight I'll have to try for the place, but not now. He can handle their language a bit, and will do himself more good than I could, so come along. We've not been harmed, and apparently he's not been harmed either. As for eating, we must do that because we need the food."

"Right," she assented quietly.

HE strode away, and she followed in silence. Hewes, to tell the truth, was astounded and perplexed by the actions of the Indians. He recalled Morton's statement that they were not fighters. Still, they had captured Morton, had no doubt taken him completely by surprise, flinging that cloth over his head and getting him down by sheer weight of numbers. Either they desired no more prisoners, or else bore the whites no animosity. In the latter case Morton might be turned loose later.

And above all, Hewes wanted to resist any temptation to use his weapon, for he knew the danger of a rifle in the hands of a fool. One shot fired in haste, in panic, in mistaken judgment, has repeatedly caused needless massacre and savage retribution. Time enough to go gunning later on.

So he came back to camp, and thanked heaven that Joan was what she was. Another woman in her place might have given way to wild emotion, but now she was perfectly cool again, capable, setting her mind to work with his.

"You'll have to give the orders, Jim," she observed. "I'll do what you say."

"You're all right," he replied cheerfully. "Here, get outside some of this grub whether you feel like it or not. Do you good."

She accepted without protest. Then, after a little silence:

"Sorry I broke loose back there, Jim. You see, I remembered something he had said, only this morning. We were talking about the Indians around here. He said anyone was better off dead than taken alive by them, if rumors were true."

"What? That's all news to me," said Hewes thoughtfully. "Any details?"

"No. He went by reports alone, and knew nothing definite; I think he didn't take much stock in the rumors. But I remembered what he had said, and it unsettled me. Jim, you must get him out of it somehow!"

"He's more apt to get himself out of it, if I'm any judge."

"You seem made of steel sometimes, Jim! I thought you and he were friends?"

"What do you expect me to do, sit down and sob?" Hewes drawled. "Well, wait till the time comes. We're in a jam, if you want it straight. I've no intentions of going back on Steve, but just now you're the one that matters—"

She caught his arm in the darkness. "Nonsense! Never mind me; he's the one that really matters. We're all right, as you say. But he's so worth while, Jim! He means so much to—to all of us—"

Hewes settled himself for the thrust. Until now, through these days and weeks, the three of them had been strictly on a job; any mention of personal affairs was held resolutely aside. But now everything was altered. In a flash, the job had lessened.

"To you? Is that what you mean?" he probed relentlessly. "Are you in love with him?"

"Yes, I am!" she exclaimed quickly, defiantly. "If doing it would get him back here this minute, I'd cut off my right hand!"

"Shucks, Steve Morton's worth more than that," Hewes said lightly, to hide any hint of emotion. "Well, you listen to me, Joan. Nobody can think more of a man than I do of Steve Morton; get that in your head. If he can be helped, I'll help him. But you quit prodding me about it. This isn't any time for rush work."

"I know," she said quietly.

He ate in silence for a space, reflectively. After all, she was too high strung with the shock of it to get any sleep now. Give her practical, level-headed good sense a chance to get in its work, and she'd be all right. He wondered if she really loved Steve Morton, or whether she had just flashed out that defiant assent at him—well, no matter.

"Tell you what, Joan! You take the first watch. Go back up there where you can get sight of the cave, and see what goes on. If anything out of the way takes place, you call me. I'm about done up, to tell the truth, and need some sleep. If nothing happens, call me anyhow at midnight."

By then, he reflected, she would be ready for sleep herself.

"All right, Jim," she assented. "Sorry if I flew off the handle. You don't think I'm a silly fool?"

"I think you're the dearest girl in the world," said Hewes quietly. "You know perfectly well how I feel toward you, Joan. Right now, you need to get back your poise. I need to get in shape to go into action;

no telling what may happen, and sleep is valuable."

Her hand groped for his, and closed on his fingers.

"You're a tower of strength, Jim," she returned. "I'll watch. I have my pistol."

"Don't use it unless you must," he said, and then she was gone.

HEWES finished his meal, forcing himself to eat, keeping his grip with an effort. So she really did love Steve Morton! Well, he had guessed it a long while back. This decided, he tried to put the matter from his mind, resolutely, tried to think coherently about Morton.

The paramount thing now was to get Joan safe out of this sorry affair. But first he must have a try, at least, to give Morton a hand; that was imperative. He was still deeply puzzled over the lack of any definite attack from the Indians. He lit his pipe, then impatiently discarded it. Too dark to smoke with any pleasure.

Presently he stretched out and slept, his problems still unsettled, his thoughts in chaos.

It was after midnight when he roused, to the touch of Joan's palm on his forehead. He sat up, wide awake on the instant, and saw her beside him dimly.

"Well? How's everything?"

"All right," she returned, and from the timber of her voice he knew that she was herself again, cool, well-poised. "The moon's gone now—clouds. Nothing has happened. They've got a fire going in front of the cave. Occasionally a man puts wood on it and disappears. Nothing else. No drum-beats. No sign of Steve."

"Right," said Hewes. "I'll take a pasear up that way. Think it's safe to leave you here?"

"Of course, Jim," she replied. "I haven't seen or heard anyone close by. I'm dead tired now, too. You were absolutely right about it all; I'm really myself again. I'll try to be a good sport from now on. Why must you be so invariably right? Don't you know there's nothing a woman hates in a man so much as to find him always right?"

Her light laugh had a catch in it midway. Hewes pressed her fingers quickly, and rose.

"I'm wrong most of the time, and you know it. Well, see you later!"

He caught up his rifle, checked the magazine to see that it was full, and drew half a dozen spare cartridges from his bandolier, which he left lying on his blanket. He wanted no extra weight for the job ahead. Next moment he was striding out into the darkness.

The moon was hidden behind clouds banked up from the horizon, but enough stars blazed to give a faint light. At least, he could avoid obstacles. When he came within sight of the rocky crest, he halted. A fire was burning there, as Joan had said. He glanced back, irresolute. Thought of leaving her alone by the white boulder was disturbing, but he must chance that. He had no choice.

Abandoning the trail, he slipped carefully out across the naked rock flank of the hill. He had it well in mind, knew just what he was doing, and picked his way slowly, carefully, half expecting at every instant to hear the crack of a rifle or the patter of arrows. None came, and confidence swiftly surged back into his heart.

After all, there was nothing so very deadly about all this, he thought. The presence of these trails was now fully explained. Perhaps the Indians here had learned such bitter lessons that they hesitated to openly attack anyone invading Utatlan from motives of policy and fear combined. Superstition must have helped their cause mightily in times past.

An hour later, Hewes was fairly close to the terrace under the low cliff.

Closer, he dared not come now. The fire was being built up. Figures of Indians were coming and going, and ahead lay open space upon which he could not venture without great risk of being detected. As it was, he lay within two hundred feet of the terrace.

Another hour passed, and another. Impatient as he was, Hewes forced himself to bide quiet. The Indians were not asleep, certainly. Some were in the darkness on the upper cliff. He could hear them talking there. Only one aged, tottering figure now tended the fire. Then, suddenly, he heared a muffled sound of voices in unison, shouting out a name.

Next moment two grotesque figures appeared. Between them they bore the same

stone image with gaping mouth that had been at the entrance of the second chamber. This they set down to one side of the fire, and busied themselves, apparently moving embers and brands close to the image. Hewes stared at them, dumbfounded. They wore queer, awkward robes that glimmered in the light, and two of the turquoise masks hid their faces.

The old man withdrew. Two more mask-wearers appeared, and then a third pair, who led Steve. Morton between them, Morton's head was bare now. Hewes could see him glancing quickly to right and left, but his hands were firmly bound and a cord was about his neck. Two of the priests, if such they were, turned abruptly and seized Morton in their arms.

The meaning of it flashed over Hewes with appalling clarity. Sacrifice! They were about to tear out Morton's heart and thrust it into the open jaws of their god!

His rifle came up, steadily, surely.

V

HIS finger, trembling on the trigger, Hewes checked himself, trying to comprehend what was passing there before his eyes. After all, it was apparently no sacrifice.

Steve Morton had been forced to kneel, close to the stone image, so that his head was almost level with the stone face. From the mouth of the god was pouring a thin stream of smoke. One of the priests was thrusting handfuls of leaves on the embers below it. Hewes recalled the great heap of half-dried plants they had seen in the second chamber.

Motionless, ready to open fire, he waited and watched. Morton knelt there, and the six priests around him lifted their voices in a hoarse and unmusical chant. The main fire flickered ruddily, lighting every detail, and Hewes could see no sign of any weapon. He conjectured that his own puzzled wonder was matched by that of Morton, who moved his head about as though trying to escape the gray fumes poured into his face from the god's mouth.

Time and again Hewes felt impelled to open fire and chance everything, but cold reason stilled the impulse. Aside from being choked to death, which was highly improbable, Morton was in no apparent danger, and no weapon threatened him. If they had meant to kill him, they could have done it long since without any risk.

Suddenly the grotesque figures spread out, left Morton kneeling there alone. With a concerted movement, they flung themselves upon the fire. Brands were scattered out in every direction. In an instant, the blazing mass had disintegrated. To the sight of Hewes, everything there on the terrace was plunged into obscurity, darkness.

From this darkness rose a fearful scream —a hideous, raucous voice like that of a wild beast. It lifted the hair on Hewes' head. It brought him to his feet, shaking, horrified, staring vainly at the blackness. He had no idea what had happened, but that scream seemed to have come from Morton's throat. It was not repeated. No further voices reached him. A fearful silence descended with the dawn-darkness. No use trying any bullets now. He had no targets.

Hewes waited a space, then stumbled away, bitterly reproaching himself. If Steve Morton were dead, he had flung away the one chance of rescue, slim chance though it were.

A confused murmur of sounds, of voices and movement, reached him, and since he could make nothing definite of it, he retraced his steps under its cover. He realized that dawn was now at hand. He was stiff and cold from his long vigil, and the utter horror of that scream still rang in his ears.

"No use doing a thing now," he reflected bitterly. "I'll get Joan on her way as soon as the daylight increases. She can get started, at least, then I'll work back up yonder and see just what's happened. With her gone, I'll be able to take chances. If they've killed poor Steve, I'll unload a few rounds on those devils, at least! They'd probably be pursuing us, in such case, or at least following us. Perhaps they want merely to take prisoners, in the old Aztec style, and offer 'em up to their gods. Good Lord! Why didn't I open fire on those fiends when I had the chance!"

Nearly back to camp, he encountered Joan, picking her way toward him.

"What happened?" she cried out. "I heard a frightful scream—I dreamed that Steve was dying and cried out—"

"Sounded like him," said Hewes. "Come along back. I'll tell you about it."

Regaining the great boulder, he sank down on his blanket and recounted what had taken place, sparing himself no whit of blame. Joan Corcoran listened in silence until he had finished his story, the dawn-light slowly and gradually increasing around them. Then she leaned forward and touched his hand, and spoke gently.

"Don't reproach yourself, Jim; you did quite right. Even if you had shot down those Indians, the others would have reached Steve with bullet or arrow before he could get away. No, cheer up! I think we'll find he's all right. Things will seem more cheerful with daylight—"

Hewes broke in swiftly with his plan. To his delight, she offered no objection, but rose and began making up the packs.

"I'll get started, then," she said simply. "Tell me about the trail—"

Hewes did so, describing it in detail. Then he broke off, staring about.

"Where did you put my bandolier, Joan?"

"I've not touched it. Why?"

"Left it here on my blanket—" And his voice broke off suddenly.

SHE came close, staring down at the object he picked up. The bandolier was gone, and in its place had been left the small stone image of a god of the Quiché people. When he fully comprehended this, Hewes felt a cold hand at his heart, and whistled softly.

"I say, Joan, it's a bit thick! One of those devils was here last night while I was gone. He took the bandolier—with nearly all my cartridges—and left this visiting card. But he didn't hurt you; he didn't come to kill! I don't savvy this a bit. It isn't like these chaps to play little jokes on visitors. Looks fantastic, unreal, unless there's some devilish good explanation behind it!"

Startled, Joan inspected the image. "I heard nothing," she said slowly. "It's fantastic, certainly—not reasonable. Oh, I wish we had never come on this awful trip! It's as though these Indians were playing with us—"

"Playing with us!" Hewes repeated. "Upon my word, you may have hit it! Of course, if we could understand things right off, there'd be no mystery. But why was Steve made to kneel in front of that stone god? And why did they scatter the fire all at once?"

"Perhaps one of them saw you or caught a glint of your rifle."

"Right! Good for you. But the smoke coming from the god's mouth, those half-dried plants we saw in the cave—"

"It struck me right off," she exclaimed eagerly. "You know, all the Indians in this district are said to be experts in the use of drugs and herbs. That's well known. Do you suppose they were merely drugging Steve in some way? Perhaps he realized it and tried to break clear."

"That's possible, at any rate," Hewes assented, thoughtfully. "You know, there's a lot that Steve kept to himself about this place. He didn't even tell me his plans—for instance, how he deliberately figured on getting rid of those boatmen, or exactly where he was going. Did he mention drugs or herbs to you?"

"Once or twice. He spoke of the Indians having extensive knowledge of such things, and wanted to learn something about it if he could—"

She broke off, her eyes following Hewes as he rose slowly. The light had grown stronger now, full daylight was at hand. He was staring up at the rocks above.

"Careful, now!" came his voice, low and tense. "Get up. Look."

She rose beside him. The figure of Morton had come into sight and halted—the massive, tremendous figure they knew so well, bareheaded, rifle in hand, bandolier over shoulder. He stood there looking down, head shoved forward.

"Good Lord!" breathed Hewes. "Here, hold on—wait—"

She broke from him with an impulsive, wild cry.

"Steve! Steve! You've come back—"

Then the words died on her lips. She stood staring, white-faced, as Hewes himself, seeing now what Hewes had discerned so incredulously.

VI

MORTON was there, indeed, but not the Morton they had known. . . .

With ghastly clarity, the light from above struck his features, limned every detail of

them. His eyes were distended, wild, glaring horribly. His jaw hung pendulous, and a white froth flecked his beard. His head jerked from side to side, and from his lips burst another scream like that they had heard in the dawning—a raucous, bestial scream of insane fury that rang across the morning.

He whipped up his rifle—fired.

Barely in time, the hand of Hewes struck Joan aside. She lost balance, fell heavily. The bullet went under the arm of Hewes. Morton uttered a fearful peal of hideous laughter, and then hurled himself into shelter of a boulder beside the trail.

It had all passed in one swift and terrible moment—from the first comprehension wakening in Hewes, to the rifle-crack.

Leaning over, Hewes caught up his rifle, stood erect again beside the white boulder. Joan, crouching, fastened horrified eyes upon him.

"Jim! Don't shoot! Something's fearfully wrong. He's not himself—"

"Right," broke in Hewes. "I'll blow a bit of dust in his face to stop him—"

His rifle spoke out. Almost instantly, it was answered from above, and then came another of those frightful and unutterably inhuman screams. The sound of it chilled Hewes to the marrow.

"Stark, raving mad," he exclaimed. "That's their game, Joan—those Indian devils! That's what the smoke meant. They drove him mad with it. Turned his brain. Good God! They gave him his rifle and let him loose on us—"

The horror of it was stupefying, benumbing, but after an instant he rallied.

"Playing with us, as you said, eh? Joan, use your wits now, girl! If we can get down the trail again to the river, we'll get clear. Took us two days to get up here; we can return in one, easily, for the trail's made now."

"What about him, then?" she demanded. "Did you see his face, Jim? It's the face of a madman! Think of it—Steve Morton, of all people!" She shivered, then rose collectedly. "What about him? He'll not hesitate to kill us, but he doesn't know what he's doing. It's not his fault. They want us to kill each other, and we mustn't do it, Jim."

The drawn features of Hewes were streaming with sweat.

"I know, Joan, I know," he returned hoarsely, watching the rocks above. "Luckily, old Steve is the worst shot in creation. He can't hit anything. And I'm a fair one. If we get the chance to lure him on, if I can come hand to hand with him—"

"Careful! Jim, he's enormously strong—"

Hewes grunted. "Never mind that. I'll down him if I get the chance. Then we can take him with us. But I'm getting the hang of things now. Let's clear out of here first. I'll tell you what's in my mind later. You go on. I want to see if he'll follow us."

"You won't kill him?"

Hewes turned and flung her a glance.

"Not unless I'm forced to it, of course. Will you go?"

She turned and went, hurriedly, and an instant later Morton uprose with another of his frightful screeches, as though to pursue. Hewes aimed carefully. To the rifle-crack, Morton leaped high in air and then flung himself back to cover—the bullet had whistled perilously close to his ear. Hewes smiled grimly. Morton might be crazed, but not too much so to take cover from bullets.

TIME had passed. The sun was blazing overhead; it was three hours and more since the appearance of Morton.

Hewes quickened his pace through this ghastly stretch of dead and perished forest where no life grew. There was no further alarm. Of Morton he had occasional glimpses, but except for the tree-trunks there was no cover here, and Morton stayed well out of reach.

Hewes cast back over the ground they had passed, desperately making certain of what awaited them. At the bald knob where they had emerged from the jungle trail, he knew the Indians must end their cat-and-mouse game. Once the fugitives gained that trail, so laboriously hacked out of the jungle, they were comparatively safe, for not even the Indians could pierce that dense tangle of green except by traveled ways.

How he was to get hold of Morton, was something else again. He refused to grapple with this problem just yet.

Hewes twice caught definite sight of Morton before reaching the far edge of

the skeleton forest, but refrained from shooting. If the madman ever made a determined charge—if he came walking in with his gun smoking—it meant kill or be killed. And Hewes shrank from bringing about such a choice. He wanted only to stave off any such crisis, and as the two or three miles of ghastly trees gradually fell behind, hope was renewed within him.

The end of the charred, agonized tree-trunks came in sight. Now there were bare hillside slopes to cross, without cover, until the rocky bald knob was reached. Hewes halted near the last of the trees and surveyed everything with care. Not a sign of any Indians; perhaps they had gone around to reach the knob by a flank movement. Morton was coming on now, shouting out his frightful scream, and twice he fired at Hewes.

The latter waited, then deliberately opened fire. He drove Morton to cover, turned, and sprinted as fast as possible across the open.

As he ran, he got out the cartridges from his pocket and thrust them into the magazine. He had counted his shots carefully. When the last of the six were in, he realized that he had but seven cartridges in all. The infernal craft of the Indians who had taken his bandolier, while they might have killed the sleeping woman, was ominous. They seemed frightfully sure of themselves.

Hewes had a start now, had left Morton well behind, and was content to chance the bullets singing around him. The madman must have seen that, stopping to fire, he lost ground, for presently the shots ceased altogether. Looking back, Hewes saw the great figure plunging forward openly after him, covering the ground with tremendous strides.

Desperate, Hewes whirled, steadied, fired. Morton screamed in frantic rage, shook his fist, then flung himself flat and opened fire again. Hewes took to his heels, after a second shot. Five cartridges left.

A BULLET sang through his hair, but no others came near. He sprinted across the open, and ahead showed the bald knob, fringed by numbers of boulders strewn about, heaps of smaller rocks, jutting granite fragments that ran up the hillside. In the open, beyond these, he glimpsed the khaki-clad figure of Joan Corcoran.

As he ran, Hewes scanned the scattered rocks to right and left. Once he caught a moving object, and this settled any uncertainty. The Indians had come around in flank—were waiting here to cut off escape. Not many of them, perhaps, but enough with only five shots left in his rifle! They would wait, however, for Morton to make his kill and be killed in turn. Then they would have Joan at their mercy.

This thought wrenched at Hewes, tore at him, agonized him suddenly. Joan must be saved at all costs! Even if he had to put a bullet into the wretched madman who was now hurtling along on his trail. He turned, glanced back. The figure of Morton had completely disappeared. Startled, Hewes looked again. He could see nothing of the man.

"Scared him out, eh?" he thought. "So much the better, then. If we can gain time, if we can get into that stream and on down to the jungle trail—"

He was among the outstrewn rocks and boulders now, and slackened pace. The frightful unreality of the scene smote him abruptly. No enemy was in sight. There was Joan, standing calmly in the sunlight, smoking a cigaret. Hewes broke into a laugh, harsh and unmusical, as he came striding quickly up to her.

"Hello! If you've a cigaret to spare, I'd like one. Lost my pouch, and an empty pipe's no good. Thanks."

As she extended a cigaret, holding her own for a light, he saw how drawn and weary was her face. She spoke in a low voice.

"You're hurt? Where's Steve?"

"Oh, on the rampage, as usual." Hewes puffed gratefully. "Arrow skinned my arm a bit. No trouble?"

"None. But Indians are somewhere ahead of us."

"Eh? How d'you know that?" Hewes asked.

She pointed. There where the trail ran down to the stream and the jungle path, stood three feathered shafts in the ground, buried a third of their length. As Hewes looked at them, a fourth arrow came down from the zenith, joining the other three.

"They've got us, all right," he observed calmly. "The trail's closed."

VII

AS he spoke, Hewes eyed the ground ahead. He had the feeling now, as he had held it all along, that here on this tiny stretch of trail depended everything: life or death, success or failure, escape or—walking with the dead.

A scant hundred yards away was safety. From where he and Joan stood, the track dipped over a sharp little rise, dropping thence abruptly into the little canyon where the stream and its walls of tangled growth afforded safe passage down to their jungle path. To right and left stretched the outcrop of rocks and boulders, falling sharply away to the right, strewn over the hillside to the left.

Hewes could detect no sign of life here in the blazing sunlight. But in front of him were the four feathered shafts, mute warning and evidence that the path was indeed closed to them. The Indians had somehow worked around, outflanking them.

Suddenly the woman beside him caught her breath.

"Oh! Look there, Jim—look!"

A low whistle broke from Hewes. There at the rise of ground appeared a moving shape, grotesquely cloaked, masked in glittering mosaic of turquoise and jade—one of the priest-like figures he had seen by the fire during the night.

"What is it?" Joan clutched his arm.

"Injun chief," and Hewes smiled thinly. "All the trappings. There's another—hello! The whole gang is on hand, eh?"

Others had appeared. Hewes counted all six of the presumed priests, and with them were a dozen more Indians, these nearly naked, carrying long bows, standing motionless and watching the two whites. There were no more.

"Clever devils!" Hewes murmured. "They know damned well my cartridges are about done up. Now they've taken grandstand seats to see the finish. Where's Steve? See anything of him?"

He turned suddenly, scrutinized the scattered rocks to right and left. No sign of Morton was anywhere visible.

"They see or know something we don't, Jim," broke out Joan quickly. "See how intent they are? And they're off to one side of the trail—"

"Eighteen in all," said Hewes. "Blast it! With one rifle we'd have a fair show. With two we'd smash 'em before they got started! But I've only five shots left."

"I have my pistol," she exclaimed.

"Those bows are a blamed sight better than any pistol going," he retorted. "Look here, I don't like this! Something's up, sure enough. Morton's creeping up on us somewhere. Joan, looks to be as though we had no choice. If Steve jumps us, I've got to down him, grab his rifle, use it. Then we'd have—"

"Jim! That's cruel of you!"

She started, as he turned to her and she perceived the tortured lines of his face, the desperate light in his gray eyes.

"Cruel? Good God, girl!" he broke out. "Of us three, you're the one that matters most! If it'd save you, I'd shoot Steve in a minute, just as he'd shoot me for the same end. Don't you see?"

"No," she rejoined coolly. "Be yourself, Jim. If Steve does show up, I believe I can handle him. By this time, surely, the effects of the drug have worn away. When he hears me speak, when he realizes who I am—"

As though in overt reply to her words, the hideous screech of the madman suddenly broke out upon the blazing sunlight. So fiercely exultant was that shrill cry, so wildly inhuman, so ringing in its bestial ferocity, that a despairing oath was wrenched from Hewes as he swung around.

THE shape of Morton appeared, leaping forward from the left—not for them, however, but for the trail. He gained it, just this side the rise of ground, and stood facing them, brandishing his rifle, then uttered his frightful cry once more. Hewes said nothing, but his tensed features whitened, drew taut.

"He—he's not coming!" said Joan in a low voice.

"No, he's waiting for us to come, waiting to fire when we get close enough," Hewes said grimly. "He certainly circled around in a sane enough manner! Well, girl, we're up against it. If those redskins let fly, we're well within their range. Looks to me like we had one slim chance—a mighty slim one."

"Jim! You can't mean that!" she burst

out. "You couldn't shoot Steve—it would do no good anyhow! It wouldn't save us from them."

He gave her one savage look.

"It would if I got his gun and cartridges."

"But you can't do it!" she cried desperately. "There must be some other way! Even if killing him really would save us, you couldn't do it—I wouldn't let you do it, Jim. I couldn't buy my own life that way. I couldn't live and remember—"

"Snap out of it," broke in Hewes grimly. "All right. There is another way, another chance. You take my rifle and keep those devils covered. If they start forward, if they put any arrows on the string, you plug one of those chiefs and keep on plugging them. I'll take your pistol and walk out to meet Steve. You come behind me."

"Meet him?" she repeated.

"Just that," said Hewes, watching the motionless Indians and the figure of Morton, who stood rifle in hand. "I'll talk to him. My voice may reach through to his brain; he may recognize me again. If I walk right in on him, he may hesitate to shoot. Then I'll have a chance to rap him over the head with the pistol, understand? If I can drop him, get hold of his gun, and open up on those birds over there, you chip in with the other rifle. We'd clear the trail quick enough!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and sudden color leaped into her cheeks. "It might work, Jim—it might! But what—what if Steve didn't recognize you, and tried to shoot?"

"Then," said Hewes grimly, "he'll have to beat me to it, that's all. I'll plug him in the leg or the shoulder, try not to kill him—"

"No, no! Listen to me, please!" She caught at his arm roughly. "You must promise not to shoot him! I won't have it—"

"My Lord!" said Hewes, turning and looking into her eyes angrily. "Do you think I'll stand there and let him plug me?"

"Wait!" Her eyes blazed suddenly into his, giving him anger for anger. "Let me do it! I'm the one to talk to him. He'll know me. He won't shoot me, Jim!"

Hewes gestured impatiently.

"Don't you know that he's out of his head? Don't be a fool. He'll slam a bullet into you before you can say two words!"

"He'll not!" she cried, suddenly anxious, confident, imploring. "Listen to me, Jim! Let me try it! I'll walk up to him, speak to him—you'll see! By this time he'll recognize me. Look at him now, standing there watching us! He's not like he was—he's waiting, hesitating, not certain of himself! The drug's wearing off, Jim, and I can talk to him—"

Hewes flung off her restraining hand and turned upon her with a gust of fierce irritation.

"Stop this nonsense!" he exclaimed, provoked beyond measure by her attitude. His gray gaze was like cold steel; she was suddenly face to face with a new Jim Hewes, whose vibrant domination crushed her relentlessly.

"I tell you, he's mad! You're not going to walk in on him. I am. If he knows anyone, he'll know me. I'll have more effect on him than a dozen others—you or anyone else. If there's any risk, I'll take it and not you. I'm giving orders, understand? And you'll obey them."

"Oh!" she gasped, shrinking back from him, white-faced. "Damn you, Jim Hewes—"

"Give me that pistol," he snapped. Turned half away from her, he extended his hand for the weapon.

SHE fumbled at the buttoned holster of her automatic. Caught by a movement on the part of the Indians, Hewes scrutinized them intently, saw them spreading out a little more, as though to make sure that their prey would not escape.

Absorbed in watching them, he did not see the swift motions with which the woman emptied her pistol of its clip, and of the single cartridge in the breech.

"Where's that gun of yours?" he asked, still watching the grotesque chieftains, and the motionless Steve Morton.

"Here—here it is, Jim," she faltered.

"Grab the rifle, then," he ordered curtly, and released it as she took it from his grip.

His fingers settled about the butt of the pistol, and he flung it a contemptuous glance. "Hm! Light, useless little weapon, this! But all right at close quarters. Follow on, now, and keep your eye

on those Indians. If they bring out arrows, let 'em have it dead center. With that and the pistol, even, we can make 'em think twice. Come along!"

He started forward, pistol hanging at his side.

The woman opened her lips as though to cry desperately at him, then checked herself. Mingled emotions struggled in her face; fear for the man yonder whom she loved, resentment of the curt manner of Hewes, horror of those grim, menacing figures at the rise of ground—and sharp, quick regret for her own madly impulsive action. Yet there seemed no danger, and with renewed confidence she followed Hewes at a little distance, the rifle held ready.

Hewes walked straight forward, steadily, undeviating, his gaze fastened on Morton. The latter was glaring at them, half crouched as though to spring, then lifted a hand to dash sweat from his eyes, and glared anew.

"Steve—" Hewes lifted his voice composedly, coolly. "Steve, old chap! Look here, Steve, we want to talk things over. Don't make any mistake, now. Don't have any shooting. You keep that rifle down and listen to me."

Morton straightened up. His pendulous jaw opened and the wild, bestial scream hurtled at them; but not with its old force. The madman seemed hesitant, irresolute, as though the voice of Hewes had indeed penetrated to his befogged brain.

"Well, I shan't argue all that with you," went on Hewes quietly, striding quietly and swiftly along. "Know me, old chap? I'm Jim Hewes, sure—your partner. Get that, pard? And here's Joan, who wants to have a word with you. You've got no quarrel with us, so forget everything else and just remember you're Steve Morton. Look at me, Steve! Know me, do you? Remember your pard Jim?"

In all truth, it seemed for a moment that Hewes was gaining the desired result. Morton blinked at them, leaned forward as though to see them better, his wild gaze fastened upon the faces of Hewes.

"Oh, Steve, Steve!" leaped out the eager voice of Joan. "It's all right—"

A convulsion passed over Morton's face. Wild ferocity blazed suddenly in his eyes, his white teeth showed through his beard as a snarl contorted his lips. The two men were not twenty feet apart as his rifle swung up.

Hewes saw the deadly purpose in those eyes. No time now to temporize or hesitate! His pistol jerked forward; he pressed the trigger twice. Empty clicks sounded. A scream burst from Joan. It was drowned in the explosion of Morton's rifle.

Hewes, knocked backward by the bullet's impact, fell in a heap and lay quiet.

VIII

JOAN CORCORAN, after one incredulous instant of stupefaction, rushed forward with a low wailing cry. She dropped her rifle, and caught up the head of Jim Hewes, holding it against her breast, flinging her arms about him protectingly, gazing up at Morton with horrified, agonized eyes.

Then, suddenly, she caught up the rifle, thrust it forward. Desperation leaped into her face. She seemed on the point of shooting the man who stood there, staring down. Fearful realization of what she had done, wild impulse to protect the limp figure lying against her body, drew her features into a tense mask. Blood was dabbled over her hand and wrist.

But her finger did not press the trigger.

Morton had lowered his rifle, and stood like a man paralyzed. Perhaps it was the anguished cry of Joan that had reached into him. Perhaps the sight of her face, so wrung with conflicting emotions. Perhaps the splotch of crimson on her hand and wrist.

Then, as his gaze fell on the white, sagging features of Hewes, a frightful change passed over his whole face.

Morton straightened up, lost his crouch, became his usual erect self. In this instant he must have realized his own action and the terrific mental shock of it hurled him into clear sanity. He took a staggering step forward, then halted, shoved the tangle of hair out of his eyes, stared again at Hewes. A low groan was wrenched from him.

"Jim!" he cried hoarsely. "Jim! Wake up—speak to me! Jim!"

His eyes distended, in the horror of realization. Watching him, Joan perceived the wave of awful and indescribable remorse that surged up within his soul. Then something else caught her eye—a sudden movement behind. She gently let the body of Hewes sink to the ground and came to her feet, swinging up her rifle.

"Steve! Look out!" came her voice in urgent accents. Morton caught her gesture, and whirled about.

The Indians had caught out arrows, were lifting their bows. One of the priests was flinging a sharp order at them. Morton uttered a furious cry of rage and comprehension, that was drowned in the crack of Joan Corcoran's rifle. Then his own weapon began to speak.

SO close were those red bowmen that even Morton could not miss, and Joan was a dead shot. The sudden reversal of events took them completely by surprise. Bullets tore into them. Yells and shrieks arose. The priests slipped away and ran for it. An arrow sang past Morton, another shattered at his feet. And that was all. When Joan's five shots were expended, seven of the Indians were down and the rest were taking to their heels in wild panic. Morton's rifle clicked emptily, and he dropped the weapon as though it burned his hands.

"Jim" he gasped out.

He took a quick step and dropped on his knees beside Hewes. Joan joined him, watched with anxious eyes as Steve Morton laid bare the brown torso, explored the course of the bullet.

"Thank God!" he said deeply. "Missed his heart, glanced from a rib, passed on out. Nothing needed except bandages and rest. No antiseptics here, but the big medicine case is in the cache by the river—"

He tore strips from the shirt of Hewes, swiftly made a compress and bandage with deft fingers.

"We'll have to get to the trail," said Joan Corcoran, looking around. "He said we'd be safe if we could make it—"

"We'll make it," broke in Morton. "Get my rifle loaded—hurry! I'll carry Jim. You take the rifle. Eh? What's the matter?"

"Nothing." Joan smiled tremulously as she met his eyes. Then, leaning over, she pressed her lips to those of Hewes, pressed his head for an instant against her breast. Morton reached out and patted her hand.

"Does he know, Joan?" he asked awkwardly. Her face was suddenly transfigured.

"I—I didn't know myself until it was almost too late," she answered quietly. "No, Steve, he doesn't know. But he will, soon enough!"

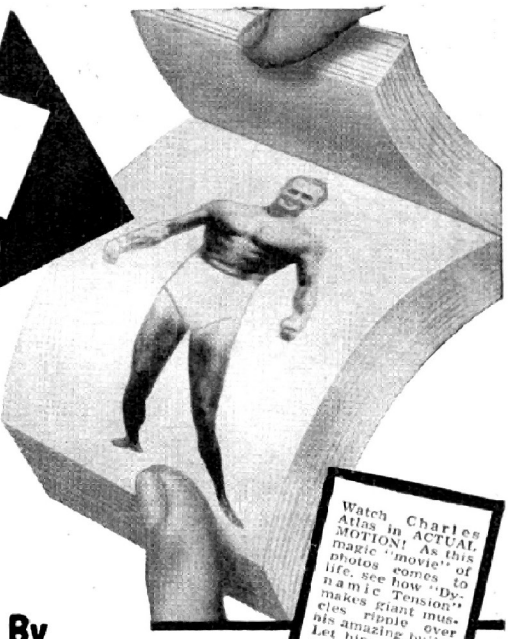
Morton stood up, and his deep laugh boomed out.

"Well, I don't understand all that's happened, but time enough to talk it over," he exclaimed. "Are you ready?"

"Ready," she said happily. "Let's go!"

FREE!

"MOVIE" showing how DYNAMIC TENSION works!



Watch Charles Atlas in ACTUAL MOTION! As this magic "movie" of photos comes to life, see how "Dynamic Tension" makes giant muscles ripple over his amazing build. Let him prove he can make YOU a new man of might and muscle. Mail coupon NOW!

I was a 97-lb. WEAKLING until I discovered DYNAMIC TENSION!

By Charles Atlas

YOU TOO CAN BE A NEW MAN!

SEE my famous body-building method, *"Dynamic Tension,"* actually *at work* on my own championship body! This special "moving picture" book shows how each muscle responds. When you "flick" the pages, my body comes to life! This movie book I will send you absolutely FREE, so that you may actually see beforehand what *"Dynamic Tension"* did for me.

Add INCHES of Muscles to Your Chest and Arms!

Once I was a skinny, 97-lb. weakling. Constantly self-conscious. Embarrassed. Felt only HALF ALIVE. But later I discovered the secret that turned me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Let me prove that the same system can make a NEW MAN of YOU!

"Dynamic Tension" is a natural method of developing you—right at home. Its purpose is not only to give you big, broad shoulders—deep, powerful chest—biceps like steel—strong legs and stomach muscles—a REAL BUILD . . . but also—for those with systems sluggish for lack of proper exercise—to help them tone up their bodies, inside and out.

7-DAY TRIAL OFFER

All I ask is a 7-DAY TRIAL. In even that short time you will FEEL and SEE your chest hardening, filling out with solid muscle—or the 7-Day Trial costs you nothing. I'll PROVE that continuing with "Dynamic Tension" can make you a NEW MAN—build your body into magnificent proportions, make you envied and respected.

Mail Coupon for FREE "Movie" and 48-Page FREE Book

It costs you only a stamp (even a postcard will do) to send for your FREE copy of my "Dynamic Tension" movie—and, ALSO free, my illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells all about my method. Shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils. Explains about my 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER. Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 85, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

ALSO GET THIS

48-PAGE BOOK FREE

CHARLES ATLAS

Actual photo every inch a man. The holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 1504,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want proof that "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body, big muscle development. Send FREE your book of "movies," and also free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," with full details of your 7-DAY Trial Offer.

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City.....State.....

A Sensational Offer to READERS OF JUNGLE STORIES

The Works of 25 Great Authors in 25 Giant Volumes

YOURS—practically for The Asking!

READY NOW
The Complete Works of WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
All 34 Plays, over 150 Poems and Sonnets

Every matchless play, every passionate poem, every gem-like sonnet that this immortal ever wrote! Discover a new Shakespeare in this volume of priceless beauty. Yet this is only the FIRST of Twenty-five volumes which can now be yours virtually for the asking! Be sure you make your reservation for this grand library NOW, while the limited quantity still lasts!

Send No Money—We Pay the Postage
Opportunity of a Lifetime to Own Huge, Handsome Books You Will Treasure, Your Friends Will Envy!

11,875,000 words
18,433 pages
Size: Each Vol. Height 8¼" Width 5¾" Thickness 2½"

NEVER before such an offer to readers of this magazine! Examine these beautiful books, **without a penny in advance.** Own a richly-bound Giant Library of important books of greatest authors—ALMOST AS A GIFT!

These 25 GIANT volumes bring you most fascinating, exciting reading known. Smash hits of stage, screen, radio! Owning them is mark of culture. These partial contents give only an inkling of all these books hold!

1. **SHAKESPEARE.** (See description at left.)
2. **HUGO.** 39 Complete Works.
3. **STEVENSON.** 144 novels, stories, poems.
4. **TOLSTOI.** 31 novels, stories, incl. Anna Karenina.
5. **POE.** All 128 tales, poems, of America's greatest writer.
6. **IBSEN.** Every one of his daring plays all complete.
7. **BALZAC.** 25 complete novelettes - - frank, fascinating.
8. **KIPLING.** 76 stories — 75 ballads, one complete novel, "The Light That Failed."
9. **DUMAS.** 175 stories.
10. **CONAN DOYLE.** The best of Sherlock Holmes plus other great works.

Other one-volume editions in this great library are:—11. Emerson. 12. Flaubert. 13. Oscar Wilde. 14. Voltaire. 15. Haggard. 16. Chekhov. 17. Dickens. 18. Hawthorne. 19. Cellini. 20. Rousseau. 21. Zola. 22. Daudet. 23. Boccaccio. 24. Gautier. 25. Arabian Nights.

Regular Edition bound in standard cloth. DE LUXE Edition in Royal Florentine binding: calf-grain material, in red and gold colors, embossed and waxed.

HOW TO GET YOUR BOOKS SEND NO MONEY

Readers Coupon and Reservation Certificate here, plus nominal sum of 89c for Regular Edition (or $1.39 for luxurious DE LUXE EDITION) entitle you to one Giant Volume in this series. To receive first book, Complete Works of Shakespeare, **send no money now.** Just mail READERS COUPON and Reservation and this volume will be shipped at our expense. With book will come special invoice for small sum indicated above, and complete instructions on how to get other volumes.

No other charges. President's Executive Order reducing postage rates for books enables us to prepay charges.

Send RESERVATION CERTIFICATE and READERS COUPON NOW! No "Reservation Fee"—no "Deposit." Your first book comes at once. Act NOW, before you mislay this page!

READERS' RESERVATION CERTIFICATE

BOOK COUPON EXCHANGE, 330 West 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Please reserve in my name the books listed in your generous offer to readers of this magazine. I prefer the edition checked below:

☐ De Luxe Embossed Edition ☐ Regular Cloth Edition

WE PAY POSTAGE ANYWHERE IN UNITED STATES

I enclose my READERS COUPON (printed at right) which entitles me at once to receive the first book, The Complete Works of Shakespeare, in the edition I have checked above, with NO MONEY IN ADVANCE. Within one week I will send you the correct payment (89c for the Regular Edition or $1.39 for the DE LUXE), and I will be entitled to receive each following volume, as it comes from the press, on the same generous no-money-in-advance plan.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE..... FH 440

Convenient PRIVILEGE form for future books will be sent with your Shakespeare.

IMPORTANT If under 18 reservation form must be filled in by parent.