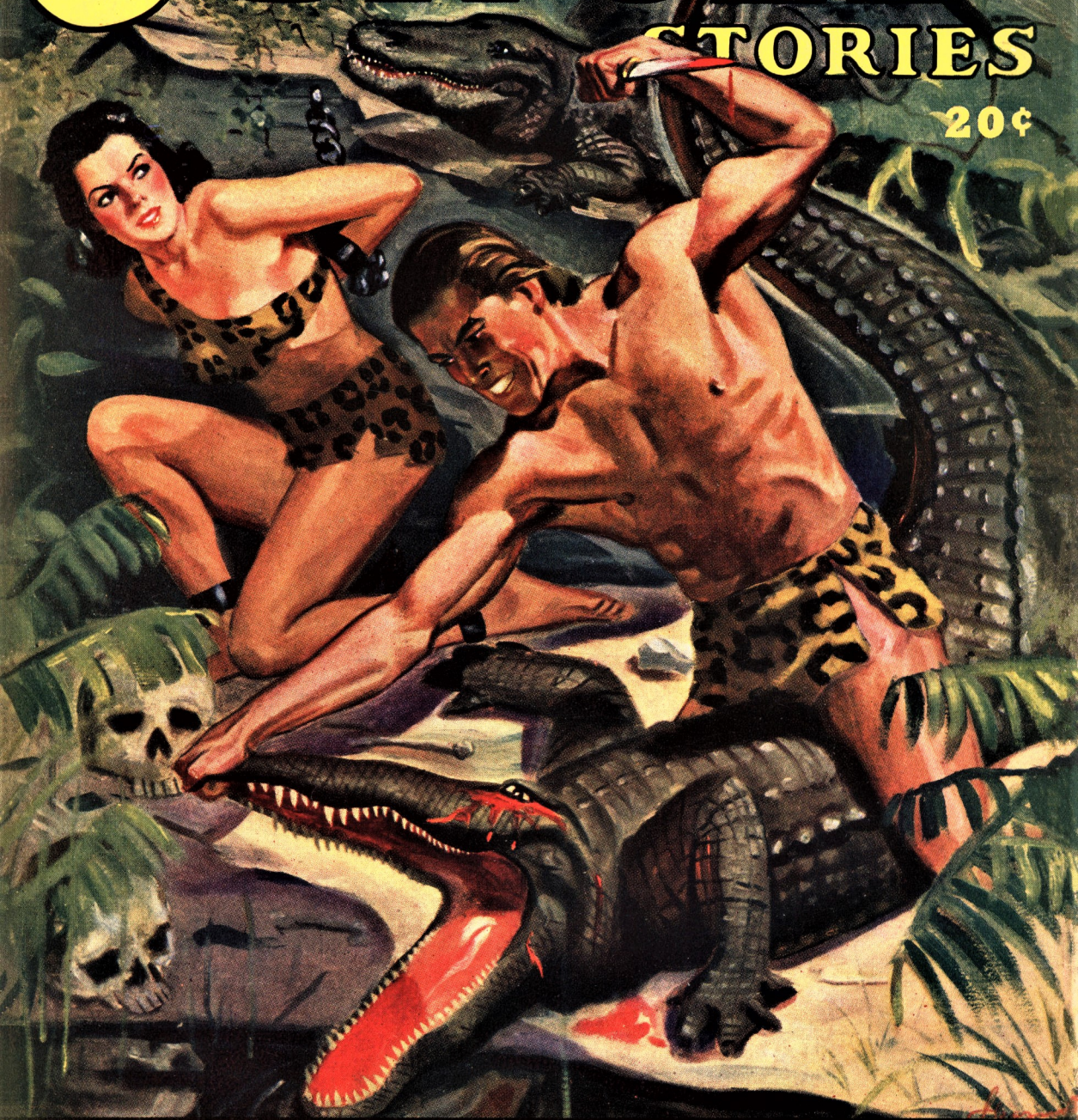




JUNGLE

STORIES

20¢



KI-GOR—AND THE TEMPLE OF THE MOON-GOD
by JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

GHOST SAFARI
by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

DAUGHTER OF SHEBA
by ARMAND BRIGAUD

MAN-EATER!
by ALEXANDER LAKE

FRONTIER STORIES—*Spring Issue****

The Devil must have split his sides

when lank Cole Frame joined the Forbes caravan—a Cain-branded plainsman tying his luck to those hoodooed Conestogas.—*A novel of the Overland Trail by M. Howard Lane.*



THE WOLVES OF EMPIRE

OTHER

Novelets and Short Stories

Doom Caravan

by Bill Cook

The Broken Arrow

by Jack Sterrett

No-Gun Marshal of Abilene

by Harry F. Olmsted

Caught between Two Loyalties . . .

Redskin friends and Army Blue, Texas Tom Service pits his own brand of thunder against the long knife commander of Damnation Point.—*A tale of Buffalo Days by Tom Roan.*

Honor Among Thieves?

And those thieves the toughest train robbers in the raw and golden West—the ill-famed, hard-riding Evans and Sontag . . . *A Frontier true-fact story by Buck Ringoe.*

SOLDIER IN BUCKSKIN

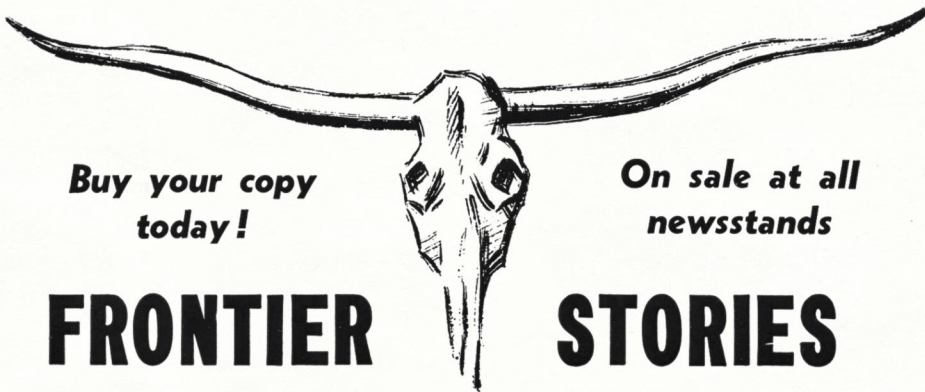
THE IRON HORSE GUN-HERDERS

**Buy your copy
today!**

**On sale at all
newsstands**

FRONTIER

STORIES



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 BOOKLENGTH KI-GOR NOVEL

Ki-Gor—And The Temple of The Moon-God

John Peter Drummond

3

"Let Ki-Gor at high noon look upon the sun and feel its rays cold upon him . . . let him find the star that shines as brilliantly at high noon as it does at midnight!" These were the fateful Conditions of Dera Daga—if the white jungle-man failed, lovely Helene would be thrown to the crocodiles!

TWO BIG JUNGLE NOVELETS

MAN-EATER! . . . Alexander Lake 60
Soon the tawny lion pack would taste human blood—unless Chuck Lane won through!

DAUGHTER OF SHEBA . . . Armand Brigaud 86
Wah! The jungle boy must die at the hand of the Lost Tribe's high-priestess!

FOUR EXCITING SHORT STORIES

GHOST SAFARI . . . Wilbur S. Peacock 44
The bush drums pulse: "Umbula is dead . . . and a white man shall die!"

CODE OF THE VELDT . . . Clyde Irvine 54
If Trooper Theodore Niklaus did his plain duty, an innocent man would hang!

KHMER DRUMS . . . Usis 70
"Death!" thundered the devil-drum under the bloody hand of a chuckling madman.

RIVER DEVIL . . . Francis Gerard 78
Captain Hamilton flouted the horned god—and paid the ju ju price.

Summer Issue, 1941
Vol. 1, No. 10



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, 1941. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted 1941 by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc. All rights reserved. For advertising rates address: THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Printed in U. S. A.

*The Kids Eat It Up...
and You'll Go for It, Too!*

64
pages



in
full
color

NOTHING you've ever read will intrigue you as much as **JUNGLE COMICS**, the bright, lively picture-story magazine, teeming with exciting African adventures.

KAÄNGA, King of the Jungle, bare-handed battles wild animals and even wilder men . . . **TABU**, mystery-man of the Dark Continent, pits his weird powers against the spoilers of the bush . . . **CAMILLA**, Queen of the Lost Empire, leads her tall, blond warriors, descendants of the ancient Vikings, in a centuries-old search for the promised land . . . **WAMBI**, jungle boy, who speaks the lion and the elephant tongues, dispenses rough jungle justice with a small but iron hand.

Also numerous other exciting features—**THE RED PANTHER**, masked wizard man; **ROY LANCE**, swaggering Africa adventurer; **FANTOMAH**, protectress of the bush-born; **CAPTAIN TERRY THUNDER**, two-fisted officer of the African Legion.

Don't miss the big May issue—on sale at all newsstands

10¢ JUNGLE COMICS 10¢

Published by **FICTION HOUSE**, 461 Eighth Ave., New York City

OR
HE
LE
HE
OD

KI-GOR—
AND THE TEMPLE
OF THE
MOON-GOD



By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

KI-GOR—and the Temple of the Moon-God

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND



"Let Ki-Gor at high noon look upon the sun and feel its rays cold upon him . . . let him find the star that shines as brilliantly at high noon as it does at midnight!" These were the Conditions of Dera Daga—if the jungle-man failed, Helene would be thrown to the crocodiles!



The next moment Ki-Gor was never to forget for the rest of his life. Datu flung himself squarely in the path of the charging beast. At the same instant, Ki-Gor's arrow hurtled into Datu's back.

KI-GOR looked at young Prince Datu as if he had not heard him aright.

"A leopard, didst thou say?" Ki-Gor demanded in the Lunanda dialect.

"Surely a leopard is hardly big game for a great hunter like thee."

"Ah, but there are leopards and leopards," Prince Datu laughed, "and this is such a leopard as thou hast never seen or heard of, Ki-Gor. It is as big as a lioness, and as crafty as an elephant. Do I speak truth or not, Father?"

Mboko, King of the Lunanda, nodded his head soberly.

"It is indeed so, O Ki-Gor," Mboko affirmed. "Six people from our village has this monster borne off and eaten. And two of our best hunters who went out to destroy him fell victims instead to his supernatural guile. If thou, Ki-Gor, and my son, can seek out and destroy this monster, it will be a blessed deliverance for my Lunanda."

The old king's face was solemn by the flickering light of the cooking-fire. His wife, Queen Goli, sat impassively at his side. Ki-Gor's gaze swept past her to Datu's handsome, expectant face, and finally came to rest on the beloved form of his own beautiful Helene who was sitting silently beside him.

An almost-full moon began to push up over the tree tops, sending a soft, yellow light over the little group around the fire, and revealing the massive stone ruins which crouched all about them in the gloomy Congo jungle.

"What are they talking about, Ki-Gor?" Helene asked. It was her first visit to the Lunanda and she did not speak or understand their dialect. Ki-Gor told her briefly about the man-eating leopard.

"What a terrible thing!" Helene murmured. "Oh, by all means, Ki-Gor, you must help Datu kill that leopard! These Lunanda are such sweet people and they seem to be such good friends of yours—It's the least you could do."

Ki-Gor smiled down at her. It was characteristic of Helene now that she never for a moment questioned his ability to wage successful war on any creature, man or beast, no matter how dangerous or formidable.

"I think so, too," Ki-Gor nodded his shaggy head. "I will tell them so."

"There's only one condition," Helene warned him, "the usual one. You've got to let me come along."

Ki-Gor frowned.

"Oh, yes," Helene maintained stoutly. "I always have to share your danger with you."

Ki-Gor knew it was useless to argue with her. He shrugged and addressed Prince Datu.

"I will be glad to hunt the leopard with thee, O Datu," he said, "whenever it suits thee."

"Spoken like Ki-Gor!" Datu exclaimed, eyes shining. His face fell when Ki-Gor went on to tell him that Helene insisted on coming along with them. But Ki-Gor reassured him.

"She is as quick and alert as a Pygmy, this Red-Haired One," Ki-Gor said proudly. "She will be no hindrance."

Finally Prince Datu agreed, though there was doubt in his handsome face.

"Very well, then," he said. "Shall we start out at dawn?"

"At the stroke of dawn," Ki-Gor assented.

King Mboko stood up.

"Thou art a good friend of the Lunanda, Ki-Gor," the old king said. "Go, now, to thy lodging and sleep soundly, that thou wilt be fresh and strong for the hunt tomorrow."

Ki-Gor stood up with a smile. But before he could open his mouth to answer the king, a sudden commotion broke out in the main village of the Lunanda, a hundred yards to the eastward.

"The leopard!" Prince Datu exclaimed and jumped to his feet. He seized one end of a long stick whose other end was burning in the fire. Raising the blazing end as a torch, the young prince ran toward the village. Ki-Gor ran silently at his heels.

They found the Lunanda crowding around the still form of a man lying sprawled on the ground before one of the huts. The man was dead, but evidently he had not been killed by a leopard. Another man was screaming and struggling in the grip of several villagers.

A few moments later, King Mboko arrived. Gradually the true story of what happened was told.

IT was the dead man's wife who gave the main facts. There had been an altercation of some kind between her husband and the other man. The argument had grown more and more heated until the other man had struck her husband on the head with a stick. The angry blow had landed on her husband's temple and killed him instantly.

"It was unintentional!" the wretched culprit cried. "I never meant to kill him! It was an accident, I swear to it!"

Prince Datu, standing beside Ki-Gor, shook his head and murmured, "It makes no difference. By the ancient Code of Dera Daga, he who kills another, whether intentionally or unintentionally, shall be adjudged of his crime by the King and the Tribe. And his sentence shall be set by the Priestess of the Moon."

The back of Ki-Gor's neck prickled a little and he threw a glance over his shoul-

der at the great crumbling ruins that brooded under the light of the moon. The ground sloped upward behind him and far up that slope, great square columns and massive monolithic slabs stood in scarred majesty among the trees. At the very crest of the height, a huge mass of stone gleamed dimly white in the moonlight.

Ki-Gor had once stood beneath that mass of stone. It was an enormous truncated pyramid with uneven eroded steps mounting one face to the broad flat top.

That was the Temple of the Moon.

King Mboko quickly called his people together and a long procession started up the hill through the ruins. The Lunanda wasted no time in bringing their criminals to book.

They were, Ki-Gor reflected, the most civilized of all the jungle people he knew. Ki-Gor had often marveled at the Lunanda's intricate code of manners. They were a simple, warm-hearted people in spite of their formality, however, fond of hunting and like sports. When a messenger from Mboko had come some weeks before with an invitation, Ki-Gor, having some time on his hands and anxious to show the Lunanda to Helene, had decided to pay his old friend a visit.

Ki-Gor and Helene stood at the doorway of the house which they had been assigned, and watched the procession winding its way toward the Temple of the Moon. Prince Datu had told them that they could attend the trial if they wanted to, but that it was not obligatory. Ki-Gor had declined with thanks. For one thing, he wanted to get some sleep. For another, he knew that the ceremonies at the Temple would make him distressingly uneasy.

"Are the Lunanda Bantu?" Helene asked. "They're so quiet—so unlike any Bantu I've seen, so far."

"Yes, they are Bantu," Ki-Gor replied, "but their religion and their Law are not. The cult of Moon-worship and the strict Code is something from the Dera Daga alone."

"Then the ancestors of the Lunanda weren't the men who built these ruins in the beginning?" Helene asked.

"The Lunanda say not," Ki-Gor replied.

"Their tribal songs all say that the Lunanda originally came from the North somewhere. And that the ruins were just as they are now. Who did build the Temple of the Moon, and who did put up these great stones, they don't know. And they don't know how they came to be Moon-worshippers, or how they took up the Code of Dera Daga."

"It's very interesting," Helene commented, "and it's a little spooky. But I must say that the Lunanda are just about the gentlest and most charming tribe I've ever seen."

"They are," Ki-Gor agreed. "I've known them a long time and I've never seen a tribe that obeyed its laws so faithfully. This thing that happened tonight is very unusual. I'm quite sure it was an accident, and that the poor man didn't intend to kill his neighbor."

"What do you think will happen to him?" Helene asked.

"I'm not sure," Ki-Gor replied. "I never learned the Code of Dera Daga. But," the jungle man concluded, "I'd guess that it may go hard with that man. We'll find out in the morning."

Ki-Gor stretched his mighty bare arms upward, then relaxed with a sigh. He smoothed the long yellow hair back off his bronzed forehead and looked down with a smile at Helene.

"We'll find out in the morning," he repeated. "Now, let us get sleep."

PRINCE DATU'S eyes were bloodshot and his face puffy when he called for Ki-Gor and Helene the next morning. Nevertheless, he smiled cheerily and waved a hand toward the dozen or so Lunanda hunters who stood behind him blinking sleepily in the cold grey light of dawn.

"We are ready, O Ki-Gor!" he proclaimed, "ready to seek out and destroy the great leopard!"

"We, too, are ready!" Ki-Gor responded. "Hast thou worked out a plan, O Datu?"

"That I have," said Datu, "and here it is. I think the leopard is pretty sure to be at one or another of a series of water-holes not far from here. If we do not actually find him beside a kill, we will certainly pick up his spoor somewhere

along the way. We will search for him in a body—bunched together. He would not dare attack fifteen people, but would run away. So then, as soon as we find him or his spoor, we will spread out in a thin line on either side of the spoor—each man about three yards from the next—and work down the spoor until he turns to make a stand.”

Ki-Gor nodded. “That seems to me a good plan,” he said. “I notice thy men are carrying throwing-sticks.”

“Instead of beating the bush and shouting,” Datu explained, “I thought we would advance quietly, using the throwing-sticks to make him show himself. He is a very devil for back-trailing, this leopard. That is how he killed our two hunters before. When he discovered them following him, he circled back on his trail and lay in wait beside it. When the hunters came along, he let them go by and then sprang out at their backs. We will avoid such a thing happening to us by spreading out on either side of his spoor. And by advancing quietly, we will not frighten him too much to run away.”

“Good,” said Ki-Gor and stepped forward. His left arm was bent and in the crook of the elbow, he carried a long shovel-headed Masai spear and his six-foot hunting bow. Slung on a rope over his left shoulder was a quiver full of formidable arrows, three feet long and made of baked hardwood and iron-tipped. On his left hip rested the huge hunting-knife in a leather scabbard sewn on the outside of the leopard-skin breech-clout which was Ki-Gor’s sole garment.

Helene stepped daintily beside him in her brief leopard-skin tunic. Except for the hunting-knife at her slender waist, her only weapons were a pair of matched throwing-sticks of Zulu pattern. Prince Datu grinned good-naturedly at her and swung his long assegai down in salute.

“Glad am I, O Wife of Ki-Gor,” he said, “that thou carryest no spear. Else, thou mightest step in and cheat us men of the honor of killing the leopard.”

Helene acknowledged the extravagant compliment with a smile and a nod—although she had not understood one word of Prince Datu’s Lunanda speech. But she had long ago learned to follow Ki-Gor’s custom in similar situations. Ki-Gor

never betrayed ignorance of another person’s language if he could help it. She had been amazed at how much one can understand when spoken to in a foreign tongue—simply by the expression and attitude of the speaker. Also, she had found, it made for generally smoother relations between strangers if the barrier of language were ignored.

In this particular instance, Datu led the hunting-party off in high good humor, though he had slept very little. He had completely forgotten that Helene did not understand Lunanda, and Helene’s warm smile had seemed to indicate that she understood his compliment perfectly.

Then Ki-Gor asked a question of him, casually, and Datu’s cheeriness vanished.

“By the way,” Ki-Gor said, “what happened last night?”

Datu’s face fell, and he said in a changed voice, “It was too bad. The man was found guilty of murder.”

“Ah,” said Ki-Gor.

“There was nothing to be done,” Datu went on. “I spoke for the man’s life. I am convinced that he killed unintentionally. But under the Code of Dera Daga, a blow struck in anger which causes death is considered an act of murder. So this man was adjudged a murderer—for whom no mercy could be recommended.”

“And the penalty?” Ki-Gor murmured.

“The Priestess of the Moon-God sentenced him to the Crocodile Pool.”

“H’m,” Ki-Gor mused. “There is no escape from the Pool, is there?”

“Not the slightest chance of it,” Datu replied. “The walls are ten feet high and are faced with slippery mud.”

Ki-Gor walked several paces before he spoke. Then he said, “It is a harsh penalty for an act which carried no intent to kill.”

Datu shook his head slowly.

“We be law-abiding men,” he answered, “and we obey the Code of Dera Daga.”

Ki-Gor understood that the subject was closed.

DATU had said that the water holes were not far from the village. Nevertheless, it was nearly two hours before the little safari came within sight of the series of thickly wooded dongas where the water holes were located. These dongas were gulleys running parallel to each

other for a mile or so, separated one from another by low wooded ridges. The bottoms of the dongas were quaggy underfoot with good-sized waterholes, mud-rimmed, every fifty yards or so.

Ki-Gor frowned a little as Data prepared to lead his little party down into the nearest of the dongas. The ground around each water-hole was clear, having been trampled and beaten down by thousands of four-footed animals of all kinds. But in between the water-holes the undergrowth was lush and dense. Only up on the sides of the donga did the vegetation thin out enough so that a man could see twenty feet around him. Along the bottom of the donga, a man could blunder right into a great cat without seeing it.

Nevertheless, Prince Datu was leading the way straight down to the bottom of the gully.

Ki-Gor moved reluctantly after him. Then he shook his head and stopped.

"O Datu!" he called. "Thou art the leader here, and I will follow thee wherever thou goest. But permit me a word of caution, as an old lion-hunter. It is extremely dangerous to proceed along the bottom of this donga—even for a party as big as this one."

Datu turned around, incredulous astonishment on his young face.

"What sayest thou, O Ki-Gor?" he gasped. "Thou—of all people—afraid of danger? I never would have believed it!"

"I said naught of being afraid," Ki-Gor answered, a little testily. "Nevertheless, prudence is not unbecoming in a wise hunter."

"I never would have believed it," Datu repeated slowly.

"Oh, come, Prince Datu!" Ki-Gor exclaimed. "Call me not a coward! I have hunted a great many cats—aye, and hunted them alone. But I always bore in mind the old Mballa proverb, and that is why I am still alive and hale."

"What proverb is that?" Datu inquired coldly.

"In the Mballa tongue, it goes, '*Semlon hia dangu ko simba, hia nakan ek*,' and it means, 'Put thy spear in the lion's mouth, not thy head'."

Datu's eyes flashed, and he bit his lip in vexation. "Thou art making fun of me, now!" he accused.

"No, no, my friend!" Ki-Gor said with a friendly chuckle, "I am only telling thee how I would hunt this donga—and I am quite wrong to do it. Thou art the leader. Lead the way and I will follow."

Datu looked a little mollified, but he did not smile. He turned his head and looked down into the donga, then along the clearer sides. Then he faced Ki-Gor again.

"No, Ki-Gor," he said, "*thou* art right, and I am wrong. I accept thy caution with thanks."

The young prince wheeled about without another word and headed along the side of the donga. Ki-Gor felt a warm glow. It took a lot of character to make an admission like that—especially in a headstrong young Bantu prince with twelve of his own men within earshot. Assuredly, Ki-Gor told himself, Datu was made of good stuff.

THE young prince now proceeded to modify his original tactics admirably. The safari kept on the high ground until it came abreast of the first water-hole. Then it descended to the cleared ground around the pool, and investigated the maze of tracks for leopard-spoor.

They found none at the first water-hole. Whereupon Datu led them back up the slope out of the dense brush and proceeded in the same fashion to the next water-hole.

There were no leopard-tracks near that one, either. Nor were there any at the one beyond. Eventually, the safari worked its way to the far end of the donga without finding any trace of its quarry. They had found leopard tracks, but Datu said they were too small to have been left by the huge beast they were hunting.

"Well," said Datu, as the party gathered around him, "certain it is that our leopard is not this donga—although this is the one where he was last seen. However, he might just as well be in any of the other ones around here. Let us go over the ridge and try our luck in the next donga to the east. That is—" he paused and looked at Ki-Gor—"unless thou hast a suggestion, my friend?"

Ki-Gor hesitated for a split second before answering. He did have a suggestion. And that was that the party back-

track and investigate one of the water-holes they had already looked at. It was entirely possible, Ki-Gor reasoned, that a beast as cunning as this one was reputed to be might have followed the safari into the donga, keeping skilfully behind them and well-hidden. But, for the present, the jungle man decided not to offer any more suggestions.

"Nay, Datu," he smiled, "I have no more ideas to offer. Lead on."

However, as the party climbed up the slope in ragged line abreast, Ki-Gor managed to lag behind, little by little. He was the last one to reach the bare ledges at the crest of the ridge, and as he did, he paused for a moment and looked back. His quick scrutiny turned up nothing to justify his suspicions. The donga lay below him in beautiful serenity. The slight breeze produced a gentle movement of the trees and tall bushes, and there was no sign of an animal of any kind.

Ki-Gor glanced off in the other direction where the ridges sloped down to an open rolling veldt, dotted here and there by good-sized copses. A scattered herd of gazelle grazed peacefully less than a mile away, and nearer at hand a small troop of baboons pursued an erratic course across the open.

Ki-Gor sighed and started down the slope after the safari.

But after he had gone about ten paces he stopped again. Then he went down on his hands and knees and crawled back to the crest of the ridge. Cautiously, he raised his head behind a sheltering spur of rock and once more peered down into the donga.

He sucked in his breath sharply. It seemed to him that a dark shape had drifted into the brush near the next-to-last water-hole. He squinted a long moment at the spot. But he saw nothing more.

He twisted his head around and looked up into the sky. The sun had mounted high by now and beat down fiercely on his bare back. There was a tiny cloud almost in the path of the sun's rays. Ki-Gor wondered whether he had merely seen the shadow of that cloud.

He looked back again at that water-hole. There was no dark shape there, now. There was nothing but the gentle, rhythmic

waving of the bush tops in the breeze.

Ah, but *was* that the breeze moving those bushes!

Ki-Gor stiffened, blue eyes gleaming. The bushes wavered and shivered. Something, some sizable body was moving through them, forcing a passage through the dense growth. And whatever it was, was moving up out of the donga, up the ridge—straight toward Ki-Gor.

In a moment, Ki-Gor saw the dark shape coming on through the thinning vegetation. It was no shadow of a cloud. It was an enormous black leopard.

THE beast came rapidly up the slope. It came in short rushes, dragging its belly on the ground. Between rushes, it would stop for a second, motionless, then dart forward again. It could not be doubted that the leopard had seen the safari disappear over the brow of the ridge and was now following it.

Ki-Gor smiled grimly as he slid his bow away from his body and reached back into the quiver for an arrow. He was turning the leopard's own backtrailing tactics back on it. Instead of his blundering on to the leopard, the leopard was going to blunder on to him.

Ki-Gor notched the arrow, and set himself to spring upright with bent bow and let fly the arrow before the leopard had a chance to turn and run. The brute would soon be in range now. Ki-Gor's upper lip lifted off his clenched teeth in a triumphant smile.

Certainly, it was the biggest leopard he had ever seen in his life. And a creature which combined the size of a lion with the ferocity and treacherous cunning of a leopard would be, next to a wild elephant, the most dangerous antagonist in all Africa.

A few seconds more, now, and— Suddenly, Ki-Gor heard his name called. He threw a hasty glance behind him and saw the safari halted a hundred yards below him.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor!" Datu's voice floated up to him. "What art thou doing? Come on!"

Ki-Gor grunted with dismay and gestured frantically with his left arm. But Datu kept on calling, and the Lunanda hunters joined in with gay shouts.

With a muttered imprecation, Ki-Gor whipped his head around to look at the leopard. Just as he did, the beast seemed to hear the shouts. It swerved sharply to its left without relaxing speed and shot off across the face of the slope away from Ki-Gor.

The jungle man leaped to his feet and sent a despairing arrow after the flying form of the leopard. But the beast was bounding away at an incredible speed, and the arrow tell short. Ki-Gor swiftly notched another arrow and aimed it. Then he relaxed his bow-arm and let it fall to his side without shooting. The leopard was out of range.

But curiously enough, the flying creature was not going back into the undergrowth of the donga. Instead it kept on in plain sight out toward the veldt. A quick hope crossed Ki-Gor's mind. He waved his hand and shouted down to the safari.

"The leopard!" he cried. "Its gone out on the veldt! Follow me!"

With that he leaped down off the edge and set off in hot pursuit. He had not taken a dozen paces when he realized that he had left his Masai spear behind on the ledge. He debated with himself for a split second whether to stop and go back for it. Then he decided against it. He must not lose sight of the leopard.

The great cat was now down on the veldt, still running at top speed. The troop of baboons caught sight of it and galvanized into action, scrambling away in terror. A moment later, the gazelles flung themselves into full flight and stampeded thunderously toward the horizon.

Meanwhile, Ki-Gor was sweeping down the end of the ridge, swiftly but effortlessly. He was not running at top speed. He knew that he could not overtake the leopard in a sprint. All the big cats are capable of tremendous speed for short distances only. But sooner or later, they must stop to rest. Ki-Gor's prime purpose now was to keep in sight of the leopard. In a prolonged chase, he knew he could overhaul the brute and bring it within effective arrow shot.

Already Ki-Gor saw that the leopard was tiring after its long sprint. It was slowing down to a lazy canter. Suddenly it veered and made straight for a good-

sized copse. A moment later it disappeared among the shadows of the trees.

This suited Ki-Gor perfectly. The grove of trees was probably no bigger than half an acre, and it did not offer such good cover as the dongas. It would be simple enough to surround it, after which it would be merely a question of time before the huge leopard would be slain.

Only one thing now could go wrong. The leopard might sneak out of the copse on the far side and run unseen to the next grove before the rest of the safari could come up. Ki-Gor decided that it was up to him to get around to the far side of the copse as fast as possible and prevent anything like that from happening. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Datu and Helene and two hunters just coming over the brow of the ridge. He gave them a hasty wave and then sped out on to the veldt.

This time Ki-Gor sprinted, and it was as well he did. Just as he rounded the grove, he saw a dark form slink back into the shadows. The leopard had almost managed to slip out of the copse.

KI-GOR now began to wish that he had gone back for his Masai spear. Lacking that formidable weapon, he would have time to shoot at least one arrow, and possibly two. Acting on the thought, he noticed one arrow, and stuck a second point downward in the ground in front of him. He had now but to wait until the safari came up.

The jungle man wondered whether Datu really thought he had been cowardly because he had offered cautious advice, and whether Datu would consider him cowardly for waiting like this for help, rather than going into the grove after the leopard single-handed. Ki-Gor smiled. He had killed many leopards armed only with his knife, and once he had killed a leopard barehanded, choking the brute to death. But on all those occasions he had had no choice, and on all those occasions he had been badly clawed. No one, Ki-Gor reflected, but an impetuous boy would risk close quarters with a huge black leopard, except in case of direst necessity.

He began to hear shouts from the other side of the grove, and he increased his watchfulness lest the leopard try to make

a break on his side. Then there came a nearer shout, and a moment later Datu and Helene came trotting around the copse to his right. They shouted and waved their hands in triumph at him, but Ki-Gor did not answer for a second. For sudden alarm had caught him by the throat.

They were both much too close to the trees

They were running almost abreast, Datu slightly in the lead and on the inside between Helene and the grove.

But they were scarcely ten feet away from the wall of trees and brush in which the black leopard might that very moment be lurking.

Ki-Gor waved frantically. "Get away from the trees!" he cried in English.

Helene slowed up reluctantly as if puzzled.

"Thou too, Datu!" Ki-Gor shouted in Lunanda. "Thou art too close to the trees!"

The young prince stopped and stared into the grove. He shook his head and shouted back.

"There is no danger, Ki-Gor! He is deep in the grove, somewhere. We will have to—"

Just then, there was a terrific roar, and Ki-Gor went cold all over. A huge black form came bounding around the corner of the grove *behind Helene and straight toward her!*

"Helene!" Ki-Gor's voice was agonized. "Drop! Drop to the ground!"

She whirled around and saw the Black Death rushing at her. Promptly she flung herself to the ground.

Ki-Gor's bow was bent, and he said a private prayer as he sighted along the arrow. This shot he could not miss. Datu stood paralyzed ten feet away from Helene. Ki-Gor's arrow alone could save his beautiful wife.

The leopard was two bounds away from her when Ki-Gor let go the arrow. At the same instant, Datu came to life. With a wild yell he lunged toward Helene, his spear tilted upward from his hips. The next moment Ki-Gor was never to forget for the rest of his life.

Datu flung himself squarely in the path of the charging beast. His spear-point caught the leopard just under the wide-open jaws, snicked through flesh and hide,

and came out between his shoulder blades.

At the same instant, Ki-Gor's arrow hurtled into Datu's back.

KI-GOR had seen Datu throw himself into the path of the arrow. He had seen the arrow bury itself deep into the young prince's back. But the few seconds that followed were a blank in Ki-Gor's memory. He did not remember running forward, a tiny growl deep in his throat.

The next thing he remembered was bending over Datu's still form on the ground. Helene picked herself up quite unhurt.

Prince Datu and the leopard were both stone dead.

Sick with horror, Ki-Gor stood up and faced the Lunanda hunters who were just now swarming around the corner of the grove.

"What has happened!" the foremost of them shouted. Then he gave an agonized cry and threw himself on the ground beside the body of Datu. Suddenly, he seemed to see Ki-Gor's arrow sticking up from Datu's back. He recoiled in horror, one knee still on the ground. The rest of the hunters quickly clustered in a little knot behind him. A low moan went over them, and then a fearful silence hung on the air.

"Did—did none of you see what happened?" Ki-Gor asked quietly.

There was not a word of answer from the little group of Lunanda.

"Then I will tell you," Ki-Gor went on. "Prince Datu sacrificed his life to save my woman. He charged the leopard and slew him. Unhappily—he stepped between me and the leopard. And I had already shot an arrow. The arrow has gone into Prince Datu's heart, and it—killed him instantly."

Ki-Gor heard his own words as if someone else were speaking. And he was so numb from the shock of what had happened that he hardly noticed that his words were greeted with stony silence by the Lunanda hunters. But an instinct for action prompted him to do something—anything.

"Come," he said, "we will go along, now. We will take Prince Datu back to his father and mother."

He bent over the boy's still form, took

hold of the feathered butt of his arrow and gently pulled it out. He stared at the bloody shaft for a second, then deliberately broke it across his knee. Tenderly, then he picked up the inert body of Prince Datu and bore it sorrowfully toward Dera Daga. Helene walked beside him, and the Lunanda hunters fell in behind them silently.

II

DATU'S body lay on the ground in front of Mboko's house where Ki-Gor had reverently placed it. Mboko and Goli stood on the threshold stunned and incredulous, while Ki-Gor told them what had happened. Helene stood beside him holding his hand, and glancing now and then uneasily at the Lunanda who were massed behind them.

"And thus your son died," Ki-Gor concluded, "valiantly sacrificing himself to save Helene's life. I would give my right arm rather than my arrow should kill him. But he jumped in the way of it after I had released it. There is nothing I can do now—no power on earth can restore your son to you. All I can say, my old and dear friends, is—he was my friend. And my grief approaches yours. And if there is aught I can do to ease your pain, tell me—and it shall be done."

King Mboko lifted sorrowful eyes to Ki-Gor.

"There is naught thou canst do, O Ki-Gor," the king said in a broken voice. "I know well enough that thou wouldst never willingly harm a hair of Datu's head. I would be ungenerous if I did not say that I hold thee in no way accountable for my son's death."

Ki-Gor breathed easier. He had not been unmindful of the hostile silence of the Lunanda villagers behind him. But King Mboko had not finished.

"I speak for myself only," he said, "but I feel sure that the tribe will agree with me, and that when thou art tried tonight, according to the Code of Dera Daga, thou wilt be acquitted of any crime."

An uneasy little fear lurked at the back of Ki-Gor's brain. So he was to be tried for manslaughter, and by these very Lunanda who stood ominously quiet behind him.

"I will not put thee to the shame and discomfort of arrest," Mboko said. "Simply give me thy word that thou nor thy wife will not leave Dera Daga before the trial tonight."

Ki-Gor hesitated. Something told him that he and Helene should go away at once from those mysterious ruins of Dera Daga and those quiet Lunanda who dwelt there and lived in blind obedience to their ancient Code. Ki-Gor's word was his bond. If he gave it, he could not go away. If he refused to give it, it might make a very bad impression on the Lunanda people. It was a hard decision to make.

However, in spite of a strong subconscious warning within himself to evade the trial, Ki-Gor saw no other way out.

"Thou hast my word, O King," he said simply.

DATU was buried that afternoon with full pomp and ceremony. Unlike such occasions among other Bantu tribes, there was no demonstration of grief by the Lunanda or their bereaved king and queen. In a way, Ki-Gor wished there had been. The silence of these people moving among the timeless ruins of Dera Daga oppressed him more and more as the afternoon passed and the day drew to a close. More and more Ki-Gor felt that he should take Helene and escape while there was yet time. Yet there was nothing to be done about it now. He had given his word, and he could not go back on it.

Although he tried to hide his apprehensions from Helene, she knew him too well for him to do it successfully. She finally made him tell her what was worrying him. He found it hard to put into words, and finally he had to fall back on his old expression.

"It's just that I smell danger about here," he said. "I feel that we ought to get away as fast as we can."

"Oh," that's nonsense!" Helene scolded. "You've got nothing to fear from the trial. You yourself told me that the Lunanda are the most law-abiding people you know. The trial is just a formality. After all, you didn't murder Datu—it was a complete and unavoidable accident."

"Yes, Helene," the jungle man smiled.

"You're quite right. I won't worry any more."

But with the coming of darkness and later, the rising of the full moon, Ki-Gor's apprehensions returned to him in full force. And, finally, when he found himself standing on the flat top of the pyramid, staring down at the sea of uplifted faces, he felt for all the world like a trapped lion.

During the course of his wandering life, Ki-Gor had watched many tribal ceremonies. From Nigerra to Mashonaland, from Benguela to Lake Rudolph, he had seen dancers strutting and leaping to the booming rhythms of giant drums; he had seen witch-doctors shrieking incantations and slaughtering sacrificial victims; he had seen whole tribes whip themselves into maniacal frenzies.

But this one was completely different. There were no torches, no great bonfires hurling great flame toward the sky. There were no dancers, there were no giant drums thumping. The Lunanda huddled in sullen silence around the base of the pyramid, their only illumination the eerie blue-white light of the full moon. And this ceremony, in which Ki-Gor as central figure awaited the verdict of the implacable Code of Dera Daga, exceeded all the others he had ever seen for sheer brooding terror.

He stood at one corner of the flat top of the pyramid beside King Mboko. At the next corner were Helene and Queen Goli. Halfway between them the Priestess of the Moon crouched over a tiny fire of smoldering embers. Ranged behind her were the twelve hunters who had accompanied Prince Datu on his last safari.

After all had taken their places there was an interminable pause before the Priestess finally rose from behind her little fire to begin the trial. She was a tall, thin, incredibly old woman, dressed in a long white skirt of cloth, and a shoulder-cape of long white feathers. No head-dress at all covered her short white woolly hair.

She stepped slowly around the little smudge fire and stood at the very edge of the pyramid-top. For an appalling moment she stood motionless. Then long scrawny arms appeared from under the feather cape. She lifted them high in the

air over her head and began a chanting invocation in a sad, harsh voice.

"O Moon-God, who sends his beneficent rays downward to destroy the darkness and light the night for his grateful people—listen, we pray thee! Listen to this trial we are about to hold, according to thine ancient and invariable Code! Guide our minds, we beseech thee, along the paths of righteousness, and help us do strictest justice in thy holy name! So be it!"

The Priestess let her arms fall slowly to her sides, and stood with head bowed for a moment. Then she turned and went majestically back to the little fire, and squatted down behind it.

KING MBOKO now stepped forward and quietly addressed the tribe.

"We are gathered here tonight, O Lunanda," he said, in a voice that shook a little, "to consider the unfortunate death of my son, Prince Datu. His death was caused by an arrow discharged by a dear friend of his and mine, Ki-Gor. There were no witnesses to the happening except the Red-Haired One, who is Ki-Gor's wife and who, therefore, cannot testify. So the only account of the accident we have is Ki-Gor's. But Ki-Gor's words, as you all well know, can be believed. According to him, this is what happened."

And the king related the account of Datu's death just as Ki-Gor had told it to him.

"And thus did the tragedy happen," he concluded. "For my part, I can see no possible reason for holding Ki-Gor guilty even of negligence in this matter. The arrow had been released before Datu moved, therefore Ki-Gor had no control over the instrument of death."

Mboko paused amid a dead silence.

"Is there anyone," he said, "who wishes to speak before we go on?"

"Aye, here is one, O King, who wishes to speak."

The voice came from the hunters grouped behind the Priestess. Mboko turned around in surprise. One of the hunters stepped forward.

"It is I, Aku the Hunter," the man said. "I was the first of Datu's own people to kneel by his side after he had been done to death."

"Speak thy mind, Aku," said the king patiently.

"It is a question I would ask, O King," said Aku. "I would ask why this Ki-Gor did not tell of the dispute between him and our young master, Datu."

"Dispute?" Mboko repeated slowly, and a chill breeze blew gently on the base of Ki-Gor's neck.

"Aye, a dispute," Aku insisted. "There are at least twelve of us who remember how the words flew back and forth—even if Ki-Gor and his Red-Haired One do not."

Mboko swung around and looked at Ki-Gor.

"You told me of no such happening," the king said.

"I deemed it not worth the telling," Ki-Gor answered quietly. "Datu and I differed on a point—as good friends will. It was over in a moment and forgotten."

There was a murmur from the crowd below the pyramid, and Mboko instantly stilled it with a gesture. Then he turned back to Aku, the hunter.

"What was thy purpose, Aku, in asking that question?" the king said.

"We are asked to believe Ki-Gor's story," the hunter replied. "And yet Ki-Gor did not tell you that Datu called him a coward. Maybe the dispute was over and forgotten in a minute—and maybe it was not. But our young master died with Ki-Gor's arrow in his back—at a time when no one but his wife was present."

Again the murmur rose from the Lunanda, and again Mboko waved it down. Quickly he turned again to Ki-Gor.

"Can this man be answered, Ki-Gor?" he said.

Ki-Gor thought for a moment and then said, "It is hard to answer a man who speaks from a bitter heart and who talks of what might have happened—as if Ki-Gor were a liar. But there is this to be said. If I planned to kill any man, friend or enemy, it is not likely that I would choose a moment to kill him when he was engaged in saving the life of the woman I love."

"Well and truly spoken," Mboko observed. Then to the hunter, he said, "It is unseemly and unjust of thee to raise suspicions without basis. Because thy mind is clouded with grief, do not accuse

someone of murdering Prince Datu—someone who is as full of grief as thou art. Stand back, Aku."

The restless muttering increased in the crowd, and Mboko whirled to face them.

"The words of Aku, the hunter, were unjust and improper," he thundered. "Make up your minds without regard to those words. Before I call for a vote, I must say this—that I cannot see how you can do else than acquit Ki-Gor. And if we could hear the voice of my son now, I am sure he would say the same thing. In a moment, we will vote. According to our Code, you will shout 'Aye' or 'Nay' as I put the questions to you."

THE king paused and stared down at the massed faces of his people. Ki-Gor, his heart pounding uncomfortably, looked down too at the people who were to decide his fate. Somehow, he was not encouraged.

"Here is the first question," said the king. "Is Ki-Gor accountable in any way for the death of Prince Datu? Answer 'Aye' or 'Nay'."

Ki-Gor held his breath. Then he let it out slowly.

There was not a sound from the Lunanda.

An incredulous smile broke out on Ki-Gor's face, and he took a step toward Mboko. The king raised a warning hand.

"We have not finished yet, Ki-Gor," he said. Then, lifting his voice to the crowd, he said, "I give you the converse of the question, now. Do you acquit Ki-Gor of all responsibility for the death of Prince Datu? Answer 'Aye' or 'Nay'."

There was a stony silence.

Ki-Gor stared in consternation at Mboko. The king's face was grave.

"According to the Code of Dera Daga," he announced, "if the Tribe neither convicts nor acquits, then the Priestess of the Moon shall decide the question by mystic means."

A great sigh went over the Lunanda massed around the base of the Pyramid. Ki-Gor tried to hide the dismay in his heart. He realized now that the Lunanda in their grief demanded a victim, a scapegoat, to punish for the death of their prince. Yet their instinct for impartial justice would not permit them to convict

Ki-Gor on the evidence that was presented to them. They had, therefore, begged the issue and passed the decision on to the old Priestess with the hope that she would find Ki-Gor guilty.

Ki-Gor watched her now. She gave no sign that she had heard Mboko's words, but squatted motionless for a long moment gazing into the glowing embers of her little fire. Then she reached out a scrawny hand toward an indistinct object beside her. She lifted it up and held it over the fire. Ki-Gor perceived then that it was a pouch, and that she was pouring a dust out of it on to the fire.

Thick smoke began to roll upwards, and the Priestess got to her feet. She raised her arms and bent her head forward into the smoke. From where he stood, Ki-Gor caught a faint pungent whiff of narcotics.

The Priestess coughed once or twice, and then began to sway. She leaned back out of the smoke momentarily, but then thrust her face back into it again. She repeated this two times more, and finally shuffled backward unsteadily for several feet.

Arms still upraised, she lurched around the fire with a low moan and came to the edge of the pyramid-top. Here she swayed drunkenly, her hands fluttering rhythmically above her head, and her moans grew louder.

Eventually the words of her incantation could be distinguished.

"Come! Come, O Lord of the Moon!" the croaking voice intoned. "From out the clouds—come and render judgment! Speak! Through the ancient mouth of thy priestess—speak!"

KI-GOR watched her with a horrid fascination as she retreated from the edge of the pyramid-top, and slowly circled the smoking fire three times. And as she tottered around, her arms undulated and a ceaseless muttering came from her seamed old face. Suddenly she stopped and her lean figure became rigid.

"A-a-a-ah!" she exclaimed in a voice that was a wail. "The Moon-God speaks! Hear ye all the Judgment of the Moon! Datu is dead—killed at high noon by the arrow of Ki-Gor! Witness to the deed there was none save Ki-Gor's other half, his wife! Truth needs a witness!"

There was a pause, and then the wailing voice rose again.

"Ki-Gor can prove his innocence!"

The jungle man's heart bounded.

"Let Ki-Gor find the star that shines as brilliantly at high noon as it does at midnight!"

A shock of dismay went through Ki-Gor.

"After that, let Ki-Gor at high noon look upon the sun and feel its rays cold upon him!"

Cold despair began to settle over Ki-Gor.

"Then let Ki-Gor return to Dera Daga when next the Moon is full. At that time he must satisfy a third condition which will not be revealed until then."

Ki-Gor's mind set to work trying to interpret the Priestess's words.

"When Ki-Gor has successfully performed this threefold task, then shall he be considered completely guiltless of the death of Datu. If he fail—then shall he be adjudged a murderer. While he is gone on his missions, his wife shall be held for his return. If he does not come back by the next full Moon, then she will be punished in his place. And the punishment will be the punishment of a murderer—the Crocodile Pool!"

A low gasp swept the Lunanda as the fateful voice rose to a shriek.

"Thus speaks the Moon-God! So be it!"

And the old Priestess tottered back and collapsed beside the smoking fire.

A gust of rage swept over Ki-Gor. Why should he, Lord of the Jungle, be victimized by the perverse whim of an old crone, stupefied with narcotics? He shot a wary glance at the twelve hunters to his right. Then he swiftly measured the distance between himself and Helene. A desperate plan formed in his mind to dash over to her side, sweep her into his arms and run down the steps of the pyramid. The very boldness of such an action might take the Lunanda by surprise, and he might somehow escape into the night with Helene.

But as he looked across the pyramid top at Helene, his back began to crawl. One of the great paving-stones beside her was tilting up. Two white-robed blacks sprang up from underneath it and seized

Helene. Ki-Gor gave a hoarse cry and bounded toward her.

But he knew he could not reach her side in time to save her. In a flash, the two white-robed blacks had borne her down into the hole. And just as Ki-Gor made a last despairing leap, the huge paving block banged shut. He knelt and clawed vainly at the smooth stone.

The twelve hunters swarmed after him shouting, and the Lunanda below were thrown into an uproar. Ki-Gor sprang up whirling to face the hunters, teeth bared and eyes blazing. In another second he would have hurled himself at them.

But King Mboko suddenly came in front of him, hand upraised in a compassionate gesture.

"Nay, Ki-Gor!" he cried, "violence can avail thee nothing, now. Be calm, I pray thee!"

"What have you done to the Red-Haired One?" Ki-Gor raged. "Give her back to me before you ask me to be calm!"

"She is safe, I promise thee," Mboko answered, "and she will be unharmed until thou return from thy missions."

"How can I believe you?" Ki-Gor shouted, "when you have done a thing like this to me?"

"I have done nothing, Ki-Gor," the king said patiently. "It is the Code—the Code of Dera Daga. Everything that has happened has been done in accordance with its rulings. Come with me calmly to my house and I will explain anything that needs to be explained."

Ki-Gor looked wearily at the ring of hostile faced hunters, then looked down at the great block of stone which had closed over the head of his beloved Helene.

"Very well, Mboko," he said listlessly, "I will come."

III

SOME two hours later, Ki-Gor walked slowly out of Mboko's house. The situation he and Helene were in was now all too clearly in his mind. He must somehow accomplish the seemingly impossible feats of discovering a star that shone visibly at high noon, and of finding a place where the sun's rays at high noon

felt cold. And he had twenty-eight days to locate these paradoxes.

In the meantime, Helene would be a closely guarded hostage. Mboko had warned against any attempts to rescue her.

"If thou returnest with an army," the king had said, "and wipe out the Lunanda, it will avail thee nothing. For Helene will be cast into the Crocodile Pool at the first hostile sign from thee. And no amount of dead Lunanda would bring Helene back to life."

As to the self-contradictory phenomena which the Priestess had commanded Ki-Gor to find—Mboko could not say whether they were to be taken literally or figuratively. But if they were figures of speech, the king had no interpretation for them.

For perhaps the first time in his adventurous life, Ki-Gor felt completely trapped and helpless. He walked into the house which he and Helene had occupied, felt his way around in the darkness and picked up his bow and quiver of arrows. Then he stepped outside again into the moonlight, thinking desperately.

There was manifestly no place on earth where a star shines at mid-day. Nor was there a place where at mid-day the sun's rays are cold. And yet, to save Helene, he had to find those places. But how to go about it, he had not the faintest idea.

Suddenly an idea crossed his mind. He thought of one man in Africa who might possibly be able to help him. That man was old Tsempala, the M'Fang witch-doctor.

He had once saved Tsempala's life and earned the old man's everlasting gratitude. For shrewd, clear-eyed thinking Tsempala was far above the run of witch-doctors, and he had, moreover, an amazing fund of obscure knowledge. If anyone could interpret the commands of the Priestess of the Moon, Tsempala could.

Ki-Gor threw a quick glance upwards and saw that the moon had begun to slide downwards toward the west. The Lunanda village lay sleeping. No one moved among the houses, and there was no sound.

Twenty-eight days, Ki-Gor reflected. There was no time to be lost. Silently he walked through the village and into the jungle.

His route was the same one which Datu had taken at the head of the ill-fated

safari less than twenty hours before. Ki-Gor considered that he was entering upon a long journey, and he wanted the Masai spear which he had left on the top of the ridge between the dongas.

Ki-Gor covered the distance to the dongas in quick time, but the moon was hanging low in the western sky as he climbed to the crest of the ridge. However, streaks of dawn were appearing in the east and there was sufficient light for him to locate the bare ledge where he had hidden the day before. Indeed he found the very spot where he had lain watching the black leopard, and where he had left the spear when he sprang up to discharge his arrows.

The jungle man stood at that spot now, and looked down thoughtfully.

The Masai spear was not there.

Ki-Gor proceeded to search the whole ledge carefully, although he was pretty sure he would not find the missing weapon. It was possible, he reasoned, that some member of the safari the day before had picked it up. Yet he did not remember seeing any of the hunters carrying it during the Trial Ceremony on the pyramid-top.

He returned to the spot where he had left the spear, and dropped to all fours. He put his head close to the ground and sniffed. His extraordinary sense of smell should enable him to find tracks where none could be seen.

Almost immediately, his sensitive nostrils caught a strong scent of Bantu. So strong it was that Ki-Gor knew it was quite fresh. The Bantu who had been at that spot had been there less than an hour before.

Ki-Gor stood up grim-faced. He wanted that Masai spear but he did not want to spend precious hours hunting down the man who had picked it up. He sent one last regretful look back in the direction of Dera Daga, and then turned his face resolutely northward and set off at a tireless, ground-covering lope.

MILES of more or less open veldt stretched before him, dotted by small copses and groves. The grass was short and the footing sure, and by the time the sun had climbed high enough in the heavens to have become unbearably

hot, Ki-Gor had traveled an astonishing distance from Dera Daga. He began to think about stopping for a rest through the heat of mid-day, when he saw some distance ahead of him a row of tall trees.

That was an indication of a stream or a narrow lake, and Ki-Gor increased his pace toward the trees. A stream it turned out to be, or rather a small river flowing quietly between two rows of graceful sycamores. The river was not large enough to contain crocodiles, yet was sufficiently deep to swim in. Ki-Gor dropped his bow and quiver on the bank and plunged in.

The cool water felt grateful to his parched skin and he swam in a lazy circle, dipping his head under luxuriously. Arrived back at the bank beside his weapons, he stood up waist deep in the water, and gazed downstream. It seemed to him that about a half a mile away, the fringe of sycamores broadened out into a grove. It would be shady and cool down there. Promptly Ki-Gor picked up the bow and quiver, held them high in his right hand, and half-waded, half swam downstream until he arrived at the grove.

It was indeed cool and shady under those spreading trees. A great bough bent low over the stream, and Ki-Gor hauled himself up on to it without bothering to step ashore. Forty or fifty feet up the tree there was a wide hospitable crotch. Ki-Gor curled himself up in it and speedily went to sleep.

It seemed but a moment later that he woke up, tense and sharp-eyed. What woke him up, he did not know. He drew himself up to a sitting position and peered around him, listening intently. He heard nothing suspicious, nor could he see any danger of any kind. The sun had not yet climbed to the zenith. There were still more than three hours of intense heat left, and Ki-Gor still felt the effects of not having slept at all the night before. He curled up again and went to sleep.

When he woke up again, he saw that there were only about three hours left before sunset. But he felt strong and refreshed and so he did not grudge himself the prolonged rest. He swung himself easily through the trees to the edge of the grove and slid down to the ground.

Remembering that something had awak-

ened him earlier in the day, he spent a few minutes reconnoitering the grass at the border of the grove. In a very short time, he came across a spoor which he quickly identified as human. A lone Bantu had evidently come along the bank of the river from somewhere upstream. He had circled the grove, then entered it, crossed once and then departed across the veldt.

Ki-Gor looked thoughtful. It was possible that this Bantu had picked up his spoor, and followed it. Losing it where Ki-Gor had plunged into the stream, he had tried to pick it up again along the river bank. Finally baffled, the strange Bantu had gone on his way.

Who was that Bantu? Ki-Gor wondered. And had he followed Ki-Gor's trail by pure chance?

The spoor of the strange Bantu angled off northward—the very direction Ki-Gor was going. He decided to follow it, for a time anyway, and see if he could catch up with the man who left it. It would be extremely interesting, Ki-Gor thought, if the unknown Bantu turned out to be a Lunanda.

IN the short grass of the veldt the spoor was not over-distant, and but for one thing Ki-Gor would have probably not continued to follow it, because it would have slowed him down too much. However, that one thing was that the trail, faint as it was, went straight as an arrow northwards across the veldt in Ki-Gor's own direction. And by the time night fell Ki-Gor was still on the track of the Bantu who had tracked him.

By this time, however, the veldt had begun to give way to more closely wooded country. And as the last of the brief twilight deepened into the gloom of the African night, Ki-Gor saw that his man had entered a well-defined travel-trail that traversed the ever-thickening forest.

Ki-Gor was not afraid of traveling in pitch darkness. But most Bantu are mortally afraid of venturing away from their camp-fires at night. The jungle man plunged up the narrow trail, confident that he would soon catch up with the Bantu whose spoor had led him in this direction.

It was, however, several hours before Ki-Gor caught the faint flicker of a camp-

fire through the trees ahead of him. He slowed down abruptly and glided noiselessly toward the patch of light. Silent as a cat he worked his way to a great tree beside the trail, and peered out from behind its broad trunk.

Less than ten feet away a lone black man squatted beside the little fire. Ki-Gor saw at a glance that the man was not a Lunanda. He had the broad face and thick limbs that characterized the dreamy tribes who inhabited the steaming forests along the Gulf of Guinea. The man had extremely primitive features, flat nose, heavy recessive chin, and excessively thick, curled lips. But for all that, his expression was that of a man of peace.

Blissfully unconscious of Ki-Gor's unwavering eyes on him, the man sighed gustily, reached out a hand and tossed some faggots on the little fire. For a moment, the fire light shone on the inside of the man's wrist and disclosed there a small circular tattoo-mark. Ki-Gor smiled knowingly to himself.

Although he could not see the tattoo-mark distinctly, he knew perfectly well what it was. It was a crude representation of the head of a dog—a wolfish dog with stand-up ears, and pointed muzzle. And that tattoo mark showed that this strange black belonged to the Brethren of the Dog.

OF all the numerous secret societies which cut across tribal and geographical lines in Africa, the Brotherhood of the Dog is by far the oldest. No one can go back far enough through the timeless centuries to find the origins of this mighty society. But it is suspected that the Brotherhood existed ages ago in the Pre-historic Dawn, when Europe and Africa were connected by a land-bridge, and the men of Europe as well as the men of Africa lived in gloomy caves with their only domesticated animal—the Dog.

Unlike most of the other societies of the jungle, the Leopard and the various Snake cults, the Brotherhood of the Dog was purely benevolent and had no hidden and hideous practices of torture and bloody sacrifice. Ki-Gor was, in a sense, an honorary member of the Brethren, having once helped them and accepted help from them.

However, Brotherhood of the Dog or not, Ki-Gor was disinclined to walk into any possible trap. He decided to prepare the way before he showed himself to this strange black. To that end, he spoke in a gentle voice, using the M'Pongwe trade dialect of the Guinea Coast.

"Do not turn around, O Little Brother of the Dog," he said softly, "in fact, do not move a muscle. But announce thy name, tell whence thou comest, and whither thou goest."

The black jumped in terror at Ki-Gor's first words, but as the ghostly voice smoothly went on, he subsided trembling. Obediently he did not move. When Ki-Gor finished, the stranger paused. Then he said in a shaky voice, "My name is Lebo, and I am a student returning to my home in the north from a pilgrimage to a wise man. If thou who speaks to me art a man, then show thyself—for I am a man of peace. If thou art a disembodied ju-ju, be warned: I am a student of ju-ju myself, and I will cast a mighty spell against thee!"

Ki-Gor could hardly restrain a chuckle. These last brave words of Lebo the Student were uttered in a tone that carried very little conviction.

"To what wise man hast thou made a pilgrimage?" Ki-Gor said, in the same gentle voice.

"To Tsempala, the medicine-man," Lebo replied.

"To Tsempala!" Ki-Gor exclaimed in astonishment. "Then we are well met!" He stepped out from behind the tree trunk. "I, myself, am journeying to see Tsempala."

Lebo peeped furtively over his shoulder. His eyes were round with awe as they beheld Ki-Gor, yet there was relief in them.

"Ah!" he breathed. "Undoubtedly, thou art he who is called Ki-Gor."

"I am he," Ki-Gor replied, sitting down beside the little fire. "But tell me about my friend Tsempala. You hast seen him and yet thou art headed north. How is that? Does Tsempala himself no longer dwell in the north?"

"Nay," Lebo replied. "Recently he moved from his own people to a retreat which is but two days' journey from here up the great river."

"The river?"

"It is not far from here," Lebo said. "I came up the trail to make camp a safe distance from any crocodiles. Possibly, I can be of service to thee, Ki-Gor. I am leaving the river here. It bends southward, and my way is the opposite direction. If thou wish, use the canoe which I came down the river in. It is a good light canoe, and I have left it drawn up on the river bank. Thou canst make good time even upstream, because the current is sluggish."

"That is welcome news," Ki-Gor said slowly. "I will use thy canoe most gratefully."

He paused a moment and thought. So this Lebo had come by water. In that case, he could not be the same man who had trekked across the veldt, first behind, then ahead of Ki-Gor.

Who was that man? And where was he now?

A TINY moonbeam fought its way down through the leaves of the forest and lighted Ki-Gor's knee. He was reminded that the night was advancing. He had no time to speculate on the unseen Bantu. His chance meeting with Lebo had been indeed fortunate in that he had not only discovered that Tsempala was much nearer than he had expected, but he had acquired a swift means of transportation to him.

He determined to resume his journey immediately and received minute instructions from Lebo as to how to find Tsempala. Then, in spite of Lebo's warnings that traveling on the river by night would be extremely dangerous because of the crocodiles, he got up and took leave of the student.

"Farewell, and long life, O Ki-Gor!" Lebo cried.

"Long life to thee," Ki-Gor replied, "and may thy ju-ju become all-powerful."

He set off down the trail swiftly toward the river and the canoe. The moonbeams dancing in the trail lighted the way, and showed him the canoe drawn up on the river bank. Deftly, he pushed off from shore, pointed the nose of the canoe upstream, and dug the paddle deep into the oily water of the river. Full in his face shone the almost-round moon.

There were twenty-seven days left in which to perform the feats commanded by the Priestess of the Moon.

TSEMPALA looked grave. Ki-Gor regarded him anxiously. All through Ki-Gor's recital of the events at Dera Daga, old Tsempala's face had grown increasingly serious.

"Tell me, O Wise One," Ki-Gor urged, "what is the interpretation? What is the hidden meaning behind this gibberish about stars that shine at mid-day?"

The old medicine-man shook his head slowly.

"I fear me," he said at length, "that there is no hidden meaning. I have heard before now of the Priestess of Dera Daga and her fearful Errands. Those commands of hers are not figures of speech. The things she sends men to find are real, or she believes they are real. They exist at least in her dope-crazed brain."

Ki-Gor's great shoulders sagged and a stupendous weariness came over him. He had been counting more than he realized on Tsempala's being able to shed some light on his extraordinary missions. He had hoped that there was some trick about the old Priestess's commands that Tsempala could solve.

"Some years back," the old man went on, "a man came to me for help. He was a Lunanda and he had somehow killed his wife. The Priestess had sent him on just such a pair of Errands as she has done to thee. Only in his case, I was able to help."

"What were his missions?" Ki-Gor asked.

"He had to find the Black Rocks Which Burn," Tsempala said.

"Rocks?" said Ki-Gor. "Rocks do not burn."

"You are wrong," the witch doctor said. "There *are* some rocks that burn. And they are black. If they are placed on a hot bed of embers, they will presently catch fire themselves and give out a great heat—as well as much smoke and a very unpleasant odor."

"Oh, yes, yes!" Ki-Gor exclaimed. "Come to think of it, I have seen them. Helene has an English name for them—it is 'Coal!'"

"Precisely," Tsempala nodded. "Then

this poor wretch of a Lunanda also had to find the river which ran backward."

"That runs backward?" Ki-Gor repeated. Then his face lightened. "Oh, that's easy!"

"Surely, it is easy," Tsempala said, "for those like thee and me who have followed a river to its mouth at the sea, and seen the tide wash it back upstream. But those Errands illustrate what I mean about the Priestess of Dera Daga. If she has sent thee to find a star that shines in the middle of the day, she means thee to look for exactly that."

"But where, then—" Ki-Gor cried despairingly—"where in the name of goodness will I find such a thing? And where in all Africa will I ever find cold sun's rays?"

"That," said Tsempala, "I don't know. It may be that someone would know. Stay with me for a while, and I will make a Sending. I will make several Sendings of various kinds—with the drums and in other ways. I cannot promise any real help, but it will do no harm to ask in various directions. Just by chance, we might hear of some clue to these things thou seekest."

The medicine-man paused and looked inquiringly at Ki-Gor. His wrinkled old face wore a solicitous expression.

Ki-Gor stared at his great hands. Such powerful competent hands they were. They could choke a raging leopard to death, or they could weave fine reeds into a basket so closely that it would hold water. Yet what good were they now?

"How long can I stay?" Ki-Gor said simply. "How long can I afford to stay? Time is flowing like blood from a severed artery."

"I wish, dear friend," Tsempala said sorrowfully, "that I could promise swift aid. Yet I cannot. I can only try. In a few minutes, I will set the drums to talking. And soon, the Brotherhood of the Dog will set to work furiously, asking and looking. If at the end of three days, we have heard of nothing which might possibly be of help—"

The witch doctor waved an expressive hand.

"Then thou canst do nothing," he finished, "but go forth and trust to thy good fortune."

FOR three days thereafter, Tsempala's drums spoke. Distant drums sounded faintly—acknowledging the question. And other drums far out of earshot were relaying the message from Tsempala, and these in turn sent the message ever farther away.

In the meantime, Tsempala employed other means of communication—means which were less easily understood than the booming drums sending their ancient code. The old man spent hours by himself squatting on his heels, arms straight out in front of him resting on his bony knees, his hands dangling limply from the thin wrists. His eyes at this time were lack-lustre and unseeing, and he was perfectly oblivious of everything that went on about him.

Ki-Gor tried to keep himself occupied by fashioning a spear out of a young ironwood sapling. Although he had to be content to tip it with a small iron hunting tip given him by one of Tsempala's students, the wood was heavy and strong, and by the end of the third day, Ki-Gor had a satisfactory weapon.

For three days Tsempala's drums spoke. But at the end of each day, the witch doctor shook his head gloomily in answer to Ki-Gor's questioning glance. There had been answers to Tsempala's broadcast query, but none of them had presented any strong clues for Ki-Gor to go by.

On the evening of the third day, Tsempala laid his gnarled hand on Ki-Gor's knee.

"Great is my sorrow, O Friend," he said. "I have failed thee. I have called on all my resources to try and solve the riddles of the Priestess of Dera Daga. Far and wide have my questions gone, and yet there has been no one who has answered with definite information. Here and there, voices have been raised whispering that they have heard of the cold sun, or the mid-day star, but where they can be found no one really knows. I am afraid thy three day wait has been in vain."

Ki-Gor let his breath out slowly. So it had come to the worst! He had been hoping against hope that Tsempala's wisdom would somehow find the answer to the riddles. Now he had to face the brutal fact that even Tsempala was helpless in

the face of the narcotic-inspired commands of the Priestess of the Moon.

And if Tsempala could not find the answer, how could he, Ki-Gor, hope to do better?

"Thanks to thee, O Tsempala," he said quietly. "Thou hast done thy best, and no man could ask more of a friend. But I have only twenty-two days left to perform these miracles, so I had best be on my way."

"Which way do you go?" said the witch doctor.

"Reason fails to point the direction," Ki-Gor shrugged. "One must fall back on blind chance. I will go straight east—if for no other reason than the sacred moon of the Lunanda rises in the east."

"It is as good a direction as any other," Tsempala observed. "Also, this mighty river at my doorstep comes from that direction, and in a fairly straight line at that. Its current is slow, and thou couldst make good time on it. Among my students there are two Kroo boys from the North. Excellent canoemen they are. They will be glad to lend the strength of their broad shoulders to help thee speed eastward up the river."

"I will accept their aid with thanks," Ki-Gor said. "Although why I choose to breast the current, I do not really know. As thou hast said, one way is as good as another. But, somehow"—he stared off into the darkness—"somehow, I have a feeling that east is best. It is what Helene would call in English a 'hunch.'"

IV

FOR the past several hours, the current had been getting increasingly swifter. Already the little dugout containing the three paddlers, one white and two black, had breasted several small rapids. And now, a distant roar told Ki-Gor that somewhere not far ahead there was a mighty waterfall.

He cast a glance toward shore and saw that the progress of the canoe had been slowed down to a walking pace. It was time for him to leave the river and proceed on foot. He had traveled through this country before, and knew that once he crossed a narrow belt of jungle, a vast highland veldt stretched to the eastward—

easy country to make fast time through.

However, he was not dissatisfied with his progress thus far. The two Kroo boys had indeed been mighty canoemen. For four days the dugout had never stopped, or even slowed down. Sometimes, three paddles had dipped and flashed in the muddy water, but always there had been two. One of the three would stop now and then to sleep for a short time, or to drop a hook and line overside to catch the fish which had constituted their only food.

This furious, unrelaxing pace had carried Ki-Gor a prodigious distance in those four days. However, it was time now to leave the river, when he could go faster on foot. He directed the Kroo boys to head for the bank at their right.

"Farewell, O Rivermen," he said, as he stepped ashore. "I can never thank you for this. I only hope that one day, if you should need help of any kind, that Ki-Gor will be nearby to provide that help."

The Kroo boys grinned toothily and wagged their heads in deprecation. They stood still beside the canoe until Ki-Gor disappeared into the jungle.

It was shortly after noon, and the sun was still high in the sky, flaming fiercely. Ki-Gor found it advisable to stick to the shade of the jungle trails as long as possible, waiting until the evening before he took to the open veldt.

This circumstance had rather an important bearing on Ki-Gor's fortunes. For if he had left the jungle sooner, he would not have passed through the small Gwembi village which was ruled by King Makaka.

The first intimation Ki-Gor had that there were any humans near was when he heard a series of agonized shrieks off in the distance. It sounded as if a woman were being horribly tortured.

Ordinarily, Ki-Gor was prone to mind his own business. He viewed dispassionately the jungle spectacle of one beast or human killing another beast or human—it was the Law of Tooth and Claw, the survival of the fittest. But something in the quality of those persistent screams stirred something in him. Thus would Helene scream, he reflected, in the Crocodile Pool, unless he was able to do something to prevent it in the next eighteen days.

He began to run in the direction of the shrieks.

In a short while, he came upon a gruesome spectacle.

A small tribe was gathered in the clearing in the middle of their village. They were ringed around a gibbet-like structure, gazing with sadistic pleasure at a pitiable object in the center.

A young human—a boy of about thirteen—was suspended by one ankle on a rope that hung down from the gibbet. His head was some five feet from the ground. And on the ground, right under his head, was a good-sized pile of twigs and faggots.

While the miserable boy twisted and screamed, a fat, grotesque black danced slowly around him, brandishing a flaming torch. With every other step, the fat man swept the torch downward as if to ignite the bonfire under the boy's head.

Ki-Gor was used to death. Death left him unmoved. But useless, wanton cruelty was another thing. He gripped his spear and moved forward with sudden decision.

He charged across the clearing at a dead run toward the ring of blacks. Without slackening pace, he smacked into the rear rank, knocking several spindly blacks spinning, and hurtled through. The others in his path flung themselves aside with frightened yelps, and when the fat man with the torch turned around, Ki-Gor was standing in the middle of the ring six feet away from him.

THE cries of the blacks died away into a shocked silence as Ki-Gor leveled his spear-point at the fat man's pendulous belly.

"What contemptible cruelty is this?" Ki-Gor spat out. "What tribe is this which has nothing better to do than to torture its children?"

The fat man stared at Ki-Gor for a moment, pop-eyed. Then a gurgling, wrathful sound rolled up from his fat neck and out between his thick lips.

"Who calls the Gwembi people to account! Who so arrogantly questions the mighty King Makaka, Ruler of Gwembi, Master of the World!"

"I see no king before me," Ki-Gor snarled. "I see only a petty chieftain, a fat hog of a man whose lips slobber with pleasure at the sound of a harmless child's agony!"

The Gwembi moaned aghast, and the fat

man stepped back a pace, his jowls quivering with incredulous rage.

"Know ye all!" Ki-Gor shouted. "Know ye that I am Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle! I am displeased with this spectacle, and I intend to make swift end to it! I am going to cut this child down. . . . Let no man try to interfere with me!"

King Makaka suddenly found his voice again.

"Death!" he shrieked. "Death to this insolent braggart! Kill! Kill him! Kill—"

Ki-Gor moved forward so swiftly, the Gwembi hardly saw him move. His spear point stopped a half inch away from Makaka's belly.

"Let a hand be lifted," he warned, "and I will puncture your chief like a fish-bladder!"

Makaka jerked his trembling bulk backward in a terrified spasm, and he half turned, as if to flee. The next instant, Ki-Gor's brown arm had whipped around the fat neck, and a moment later Makaka, Ruler of the Gwembi and Master of the World, lay squalling outstretched on the ground. Ki-Gor stepped up on the heaving mound of flesh, and whipped out his hunting knife. The knife flashed against the rope that suspended the young boy by the ankle, and severed it. Ki-Gor's other arm went around the youth's slim body and eased it gently to the ground.

The boy picked himself up and stood looking around dizzily. Ki-Gor stepped beside him and took one hand in his. Meanwhile, the Gwembi were milling around in a shrill uproar. Their chief rolled on the ground, alternately commanding them to kill Ki-Gor, and then imploring them not to, lest the jungle man make swift reprisals on his own fat person. Truth to tell, the Gwembi were a puny breed, and none of them had the slightest desire to come within arm's length of the formidable-looking white man.

So when Ki-Gor waved his spear menacingly and started to walk away from the gibbet holding the hand of the youth he had just rescued, the Gwembi in his path broke and ran in all directions. Ki-Gor stalked slowly out of the village with the boy, while Makaka, still lying on the ground, hurled imprecations after him.

As soon as he had left the village and re-entered the jungle, Ki-Gor began to re-

gret the impulse which had led him to save the life of the boy who now stumbled along at his side. He realized that, having taken on the obligation of the youth's life, he had to take him with him to some place where he would be safe from the Gwembi.

Ki-Gor tried to reconstruct a map of the region in his mind's eye so as to recall the location of the nearest friendly tribe. Soon, he remembered that there was a considerable colony of river-blacks who dwelt only a few miles above the falls on the river which he had ascended with the Kroo boys. Once with those river-blacks, this youth shivering at his side would never have to fear the Gwembi, and Ki-Gor felt sure the boy would be treated well. Those river-blacks had once been loyal allies of Ki-Gor's.

The jungle man decided to take the boy with him for two or three miles along the trail they were on, until it came out of the forest onto the veldt. He would then direct the boy to cut over northward, which would eventually land him on the river-bank. From there the boy should have no difficulty locating Ki-Gor's friendly tribe.

NEITHER Ki-Gor nor the youth had said a word to each other since they left the village of the Gwembi. Ki-Gor looked down at him curiously. He was a slim, slight boy, undernourished-looking as all forest blacks are. Yet he did not look like a Gwembi. His head was narrower, and his features finer than the Gwembi type, and his expression was sharper, more alert. Ki-Gor wondered vaguely what the boy's history was, and in particular, what had led Makaka, the Chief of the Gwembi, to stage such a cruel punishment.

The boy evidently felt Ki-Gor's eyes on him, for he suddenly cocked his head to one side and looked up.

"Thou art quite a man," the boy said in Swahili.

Ki-Gor looked away and frowned.

"Quite a man," the boy repeated. "Art thou truly a white man? Thou hast a look of it around the eyes, but I never before saw such clothes on a white man, and I have seen many of them. And thy name—Ki-Gor, is it? I never heard of a white bwana with such a name."

"Just a minute, O child!" Ki-Gor snapped. "People do not use 'thee' and 'thou' to me unless they are my friends. Keep a respectful tongue in your head for your elders."

"But thou art manifestly my friend," the boy chirped impudently, "or else thou wouldst never have saved my life."

"Think again," Ki-Gor growled. "I am not your friend, and I truly do not know why I bothered to save your life."

"Ah!" the youth said brightly, "that was spoken like a white bwana. Perhaps, after all, thou art really a white bwana. Although that name—"

The boy broke off and shook his head. Ki-Gor felt suddenly furiously angry at the boy. He had not expected any expression of gratitude from him. The Bantu are curiously lacking in expressions of gratitude. But he had not expected such cavalier treatment from an emaciated black boy who could hardly be fourteen years old.

"Quite a man," the boy said again. "And thou really camest in the nick. Although, it would have been better if thou hadst arrived somewhat earlier, before those brutes strung me up like a spring-bok."

By this time, Ki-Gor was aghast. Such a complete young egoist he had never in his life come up against.

"However," the boy went on judicially, "thou camest in time, and that is all that matters. Thou wilt not regret it, Ki-Gor. Ekka is a good friend to have."

By now, Ki-Gor was beginning to recover from his rage and his astonishment, and was able to see the funny side of the situation.

"Are you," he asked gravely, "Ekka?"

"Certainly," the boy answered, with a surprised look.

"Ekka," Ki-Gor repeated, as if to himself. "It does not sound like a Gwembi name."

"Certainly not!" Ekka cried. "Of course it is not a Gwembi name! Do I look like a jungle fool of a Gwembi?"

"What are you then?" Ki-Gor asked. "Of what tribe?"

The boy thought for a moment, and said, "I don't know. I have been everywhere, but where I came from originally I don't know. I may be a Kikuyu, or a Kavi-

rondo, or I may be something entirely different. I have wandered all my life. I have been to Mombasa, to Dar-es-salaam. I have been in Mozambique, in Nairobi. I have been through Entebbe and Niangara. I have been everywhere."

In spite of himself, Ki-Gor felt a curiosity about this loud-mouthed, impudent stripling. It was highly improbable that Ekka had ever been in all the places that be named. But it was highly remarkable that a thirteen-year-old Congo boy would even have heard of such places as Mombasa and Mozambique, seaports on the Indian Ocean.

"H M," Ki-Gor mused. "You traveled with your father and mother?"

"I traveled alone," Ekka declared. "I have no father and mother. I don't think I ever had a father or mother."

"That is very distressing," Ki-Gor observed.

"Not at all," Ekka retorted. "It is far better to be unburdened with ignorant parents. No man wants a pair of interfering busybodies telling him what to do and what not to do, and when to do it, and 'now you have to go to bed Ekka!' and 'you are smoking too many cheroots, Ekka!'—no man wants that sort of thing."

"No, I can see that," Ki-Gor said, smothering a smile. "It is much nicer when you are on your own."

"Manifestly," Ekka said, with a lordly inclination of his head. "That reminds me, give me a cheroot, wilt thou, Ki-Gor?"

"I'm sorry," Ki-Gor said, "but I have none to give you."

"No cheroots!" Ekka cried. "Why, all white bwanas carry cheroots! What do you mean you have none?"

"I have no cheroots," Ki-Gor repeated patiently.

"By the gods!" Ekka said bitterly, "I don't believe you are a white bwana after all!"

"I never said I was," Ki-Gor replied, blue eyes twinkling. "If you must know, I am really a great white ape."

"An ape!" Ekka exclaimed with a startled glance.

"You don't believe me?"

Ki-Gor suddenly sprang straight up in the air, seized a low-hanging bow with his left hand, and swung his body up in a

twisting arc. A moment later, he stood on the bow and looked down at the astonished black youth with a chuckle.

"By the gods!" Ekka cried. "That takes some doing! I believe thou hast some ape in thee, at that!"

Then he darted backward in a panic as Ki-Gor leaped down to the ground. The boy's foot slipped and he fell ignominiously into the undergrowth beside the trail. Instantly, he let out a terrified howl.

"Hush, hush!" Ki-Gor admonished, "Don't you know better than to proclaim your presence to the jungle like that? Get up. We must keep moving. I am in a hurry."

Ekka picked himself up gingerly, shot an awed glance at Ki-Gor, and trotted clumsily by his side. Ki-Gor began to wonder if Ekka's stories about himself might not be true. The boy was not at all at home in the jungle. It was quite possible that he was town-bred.

"That was truly remarkable," Ekka said. "I saw some Persian acrobats in Dar-es-salaam once, but none of them was half so clever as thee. Ai! not so fast, thou great ape!" he shouted breathlessly, "I can't keep up!"

"You had better keep up," Ki-Gor said. "I have no time to loose."

"Where art thou going in such a hurry?" Ekka demanded.

"I am on a pilgrimage," Ki-Gor replied, "and my time is short."

"What kind of a pilgrimage, and where to?"

"That does not concern you, my precious young whelp," Ki-Gor said, and then looked around him swiftly. The trail had at last broken out of the jungle on to open veldt. He pointed to a hill a half mile ahead.

"When we get to the top of that hill," Ki-Gor said, "our paths separate. Off to the left, you will see a river about three miles away. It will be safe, open country and you will be able to strike across it until you come to that river. A very short distance up the bank, you will come to a village. Find the head man and tell him that Ki-Gor sent you. He will treat you kindly for my sake, and he will protect you from Makaka and the Gwembi."

"Wait a minute!" Ekka puffed as he scrambled along beside Ki-Gor's long legs.

"What is all this nonsense about our paths separating? Art thou not coming to the river with me?"

"No. I shall be veering southward," Ki-Gor answered.

"Then, I too will be veering southward," Ekka declared.

"Do as you please," Ki-Gor shrugged. "But you will not be coming with me."

To Ki-Gor's consternation, this last statement brought forth a howl of dismay from Ekka.

"BUT of course I am coming with thee!" the boy screamed, "and why shouldn't I?"

"Softly, softly," Ki-Gor admonished. "Let us get this matter straight. You cannot go with me. There are many reasons why you cannot go with me, but one reason is enough—I am in a great hurry and you cannot keep pace with me."

"I will keep pace with thee, Ki-Gor!" Ekka cried. "I will keep up! I will run my legs off!"

"No, no!" Ki-Gor exclaimed impatiently, "you don't understand!"

"Look at me!" Ekka gasped, running furiously beside Ki-Gor. "Look at me—I am easily keeping pace with thee!"

"Yes, and hard put to it," Ki-Gor said, ironically, "when I am merely strolling along at a third my usual pace. Come now—we are almost at the top of the hill. You can cut over to the left, there, and go straight to the river—"

"No, no, no!" Ekka stopped dead, and burst into a paroxysm of sobbing. "Unfeeling brute! Thick skinned ape! Of what use to save me from the torture of the Gwembi, and then leave me alone on the veldt for the lions to eat!"

Ki-Gor stopped and glared exasperatedly at the boy. What spasm of the devil had he rescued who turned on him and plagued him for his pains? And how was one to treat such a wilful, maddening child?

"Look here, you," Ki-Gor said firmly. "There are no lions about. Between here and my friends over on the river, you will probably run into not so much as a dik-dik. You have four hours of daylight left to complete your journey, and you need only two, if you will but stir those spindly legs of yours a little. Now, let us have no more nonsense. You go on

your way, and I will go mine. I can afford to waste no more time on cry-babies. Farewell."

With that the jungle man turned on his heel and strode up the hill. Ekka stared after him unbelievably and then burst out into a flood of insults.

"Pig!" Ekka screamed. "Ugly wart hog! Go ahead! Desert a helpless child in the middle of a wilderness! I hope the Gwembi come after me and take me again! Then thou wilt be sorry!"

That last despairing suggestion startled Ki-Gor, although he did not slacken his pace. He had overlooked the possibility of the Gwembi wrathfully following on behind. And yet the possibility remained. He turned it over in his mind as he ascended swiftly to the top of the hill. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that he had made Ekka's life his affair, and that he could not go off and leave the boy if he was still in some danger.

Ki-Gor sighed as he reached the top of the hill. There were two courses open. Either he escorted Ekka to the friendly river tribe, or he allowed the boy to come with him for another day. If he went with Ekka to the village on the river, it would mean that he would be going at least eight miles out of his way. On the other hand, if he took Ekka with him on his direct route eastward, there would be other friendly tribes he could leave him with.

Of the two alternatives, the latter would probably lose him less time, although it carried the disadvantage of Ekka's noisy and tiresome company. Ki-Gor had already become thoroughly sick of the boy's unceasing, impertinent chatter. However, there was nothing for it. Ki-Gor halted and looked back down the hill.

Ekka was standing where Ki-Gor had left him, and a shrill stream of vituperation continued to come from the boy's mouth. Ki-Gor waved a beckoning arm, impatiently.

There was a moment of silence. Then with a triumphant shout, Ekka broke into an awkward, knock-kneed trot up the slope. Almost at the same instant, Ki-Gor looked over the boy's head and was glad he had not deserted him.

For his startled eyes beheld a party of

naked blacks pouring out of the jungle three hundred yards along the trail behind the boy.

Ki-Gor calmly trust his spear point down into the ground, unslung his bow and fitted an arrow. The party of blacks broke out into shrill cries as they caught sight of him on the hill top. Ekka threw a startled glance over his shoulder, and immediately redoubled his pace.

"The Gwembi!" he shrieked, as he neared Ki-Gor. "I told thee they would come after me!"

"Have no fear," Ki-Gor answered. "I won't let them touch you."

"But they are so many!" Ekka cried, gasping for breath, "and all in full war kit!"

"Sit down beside me," Ki-Gor commanded, "and don't worry. The Gwembi are no warriors."

HE watched the oncoming blacks with a contemptuous smile on his bronzed face. There were twenty-five or thirty of them leaping along the trail, shouting and brandishing their spears. They began to slow down a little at the foot of the hill. Evidently their warlike spirits were a little chilled by the grim, uncompromising figure of the jungle man. Their progress became slower and slower until they reached a point about fifty yards down the slope from Ki-Gor. Then they came to a full stop, and huddled together uneasily. A large globular figure hovering safely in the rear, Ki-Gor recognized as "King" Makaka.

There followed a few moments of confused muttering. Then a querulous voice floated up to Ki-Gor.

"We have no quarrel with thee, Ki-Gor. Do but give up the boy—he belongs to us—and go thy way in peace."

Ki-Gor made no answer.

After a long silence the voice came again, even more querulous.

"The boy, Ki-Gor—he is appointed to die. Turn him over to us, and we will not harm thee."

Ki-Gor let out a gusty laugh, and the Gwembi jumped nervously.

"You chicken-hearts!" Ki-Gor cried. "You could not hurt Ki-Gor! Go back to your village quickly before you get hurt! Ki-Gor is quick to anger and terrible in

war, a mighty killer—cross him not!”

A resentful murmur went up from the Gwembi, and once more Makaka's voice croaked forth.

“Be warned, Ki Gor! We are many against thee!”

“Silence, O Fat Caterpillar!” Ki-Gor spat out. “Do not try my patience too far! I intend to waste no more time here. Go now and do not try to follow me farther, or I will bring fearful disaster on your heads. I will count three and when I have finished, if you have not started home, one of you is a dead man already! I will begin the counting now—One! Two—”

He lifted the great bow.

But that was enough for the Gwembi. With shrieks of terror, they broke and ran down the hill, led by their peerless warrior, Makaka. Ki-Gor watched them rush out of arrow-shot, a grim smile on his face. Then he turned to Ekka, who was looking at him with an awe-stricken face.

“Come,” he said, “we must be on our way. We will not be troubled by Makaka again.”

Ekka shook his head wisely. “I hope thou art not wrong,” he said.

V

TWO days later, Ki-Gor sat on a rock and stared morosely at the rising sun. Beside him Ekka was juggling three pebbles and carrying on a rapid-fire though entirely one-sided conversation. Finally Ki-Gor could stand it no more.

“Silence!” he roared. “Will that tongue of yours never cease clacking in your empty head—not for one moment?”

He glared at the boy, and anybody but Ekka would have been warned by such an expression. But not Ekka. He laughed gaily.

“Ohee, Ki-Gor!” he cried delightedly. “Thou art such a lovable jungle-ish lout of a fellow! What wouldst thou do without Ekka to lighten the brutish darkness of thy days with gay quips and witty jokes?”

Ki-Gor groaned inwardly. Ekka's idea of a witty joke was to run off the trail and hide. Four times he had done that already, and on two of the occasions the

city-bred boy had blundered on to feeding lions. Ki-Gor did not dare count up the precious hours the boy had cost him while he went to his rescue. Each time the boy took the rescue completely for granted.

In fact, Ekka seemed to take Ki-Gor completely for granted. He was irresponsible and irrepressible. He talked incessantly, his mind being as agile as his body was unco-ordinated and clumsy. Ki-Gor was beginning to loathe the child, and yet for the life or fin he could not get rid of him. Ekka clung to him like a leech.

Ki-Gor had tried to abandon him twice, but each time the boy set up such a howl that there was nothing to be done but wait for him to catch up.

But now Ki-Gor was getting desperate. He saw no reason why he should be saddled with Ekka any longer—especially when the boy was such a drag on him, at a time when every day counted. There were but sixteen days left to fulfill the commands of the Priestess of the Moon.

The worst of it was that Ki-Gor still had no idea of how to go about finding the star at mid-day or the cold ray of the sun. He had built up one forlorn hope within himself, and that was to find his old friend Tembu George.

Tembu George had been born George Spelvin in Cincinnati, U. S. A. He was a giant Negro who had been a Pullman porter and ship's cook, among other things. One day he had jumped ship at Mombasa, walked inland and had been enthusiastically adopted by a Masai tribe. Ki-Gor had met George soon after Helene had dropped into his life, as a result of the crack-up of the plane she had been solo-flying across Africa. And the huge American Negro had proved to be a staunch friend and genial companion of Ki-Gor's and his lovely red-haired wife.

After the failure of Tsempala to help him, Ki-Gor had drifted eastward without conscious thought that in that direction lay the country of the Masai and Tembu George. But gradually the realization dawned on him that he was drawing nearer the home of his friend, and that the colored man might be able to help him. For George, in spite of an indolent, good-natured exterior, had a sharp alert mind. Moreover, he had traveled over a good deal

of the earth's surface. Decidedly, Ki-Gor thought, he should get to George as fast as he could.

However, he was still a good three day's journey from George's stamping grounds—three days of hard, fast traveling, alone. But with Ekka on his hands, there was no telling how long it would take.

Somehow or other, he had to get rid of Ekka.

Gloomily, Ki-Gor swept the eastern horizon with his eyes. To the southeast, great mountain peaks raised silvery heads against the sky. The northeast was less rugged, although it was wooded, rolling country. Suddenly, Ki-Gor got an idea.

He remembered that his friends the Banda people lived toward the northeast, and not too far away—perhaps fifteen miles. He would take the pestiferous Ekka to the Banda and make them keep the boy prisoner for two or three days. Long enough, at any rate, to allow Ki-Gor to get a good safe distance away, too far for the boy to be able to catch up with him.

This trip would be off Ki-Gor's route, but in the long run it would pay to make the thirty-mile extra trip. Ekka would be off his hands for good, and he could travel swiftly to the country of the Masai.

"COME, O Chatterbox," he commanded, rising to his feet, "we must be on our way."

"Restless lion of a man," Ekka complained, "Must every day be a headlong rush to somewhere? Can we not take our time one day?"

"One more day we must hurry," Ki-Gor said amiably. "Tomorrow will be easier for you."

Already Ki-Gor felt better, just at the prospect of finally getting rid of the exasperating boy. Good-naturedly he parried the boy's suspicious questions concerning the change of direction to the northeast. And good-naturedly, he prodded the boy into maintaining a brisk gait. By paying attention to Ekka more than he had ever done, thus flattering the child's enormous ego, he managed to keep him going at a remarkably fast pace. For four consecutive hours, Ekka trotted by Ki-Gor's side. Only once did he express any great desire to stop. That was when he caught sight

of a small spitting cobra beside the trail. Ekka wanted to stop and tease the cobra for a while. But Ki-Gor swiftly killed the snake, and Ekka, after one bitter exclamation of regret, picked up the pace again.

By early afternoon, they reached the village of the Banda.

Not long ago, Ki-Gor had rescued the daughter of the Chief from a gang of Arab slave-dealers. This daughter, a crippled girl named Luma, was among the first of the Banda to catch sight of Ki-Gor and his young charge. She uttered a glad cry of welcome and immediately gave orders to prepare a feast in honor of Ki-Gor's visit. The jungle man was loath to spend any more time than he had to in the Banda village, but he realized that it would be discourteous of him to decline the feast. So he resigned himself to staying on until after sundown.

The one consolation was that once he had left the Banda village, he would have left Ekka behind. He sought the earliest opportunity to get Luma aside and ask her to have Ekka gently but firmly confined for a day or two—long enough so that Ki-Gor could be far away by the time the boy was released. This, Luma readily agreed to do, and Ki-Gor sighed with relief. Already he felt as if a tremendous burden had been lifted off his back.

The Banda village presented a scene of bustling activity as preparations for the feast went on. But, about an hour before sundown, the preparations were suddenly interrupted when a terrified villager came tumbling down the trail from the east.

"Invaders!" the villager cried. "A war party! Huge men—Gallas or Somalis! What will we do!"

There was a rush for weapons. Ki-Gor seized his spear and bow and ran out the trail to the eastward, accompanied by a half dozen Banda youths. They had not gone far when from a ridge top they described the strangers. It was a formidable party of sixty or seventy immensely tall men dressed in tight white robes. But they were not Gallas, nor were they Somalis.

They were Masai. And at their head was Tembu George.

The big American Negro's eyes widened

in astonishment as he beheld Ki-Gor bounding down the trail toward him.

"Ki-Gor!" he shouted, in his deep musical voice. "My gravy, wheah did you come f'om?"

"I was on my way to your country," the jungle man explained.

"Well, I was on muh way to find *you*!" said George.

"To find me?" said Ki-Gor with a sharp glance.

"Yeah, I heard you was in bad trouble."

"You heard I was in trouble?" Ki-Gor said, puzzled.

"I sho' did." George threw a glance behind him, and lowered his voice, even though the conversation was in English. "Th'ough the Brotherhood of the Dog!"

"Ah," Ki-Gor murmured, remembering Tsempala's drums.

"But," George went on, "I heard you was a long ways away—to the west. I didn't rightly get jest whut yo' trouble was, but jest's quick's I could, I gathered up these yere Morani and came 'long fast."

"You're a true friend," Ki-Gor said sadly, "but I'm afraid your Morani warriors will be of no use in this situation. However, I did want to see you and tell you what has happened. It might be that you would have some ideas. Come, let's go back to the Banda village and I will tell you everything."

A curious, seemingly irrelevant thought crossed Ki-Gor's mind. And that was: if he had not come out of his way to leave Ekka at the Banda village he would have missed George altogether. So, for once, Ekka had in a sense brought him luck. He dismissed the thought from his mind and started in to tell George everything that had happened beginning with the ill-fated safari with Prince Datu.

"**M**AN, tha's awful!" George said, when Ki-Gor had finished. "I don't know any place wheah the stahs shine in the middle of the day, any more'n I know a place wheah the sun's rays is cold—mid-day or any othuh time. Looky yere, Ki-Gor, don't you think the best thing would be jest to go on ovuh to Dera Daga with my Masai and clean up on them Lunanda?"

"No," George," Ki-Gor shook his head,

wearily. He explained what King Mboko had said regarding any attempt to rescue Helene.

"Lordy!" George ran a huge hand over his head. "Whut we-all goin' to do, Ki-Gor?"

"I hoped you would have an idea," Ki-Gor said.

"Well, I ain't. Not right now, anyways," George said, unhappily. "But it looks like I bettuh git one—quick."

By this time, they had reached the gates of the Banda village. Reluctantly, George dismissed his faithful Masai warriors and sent them back to their homes. Then, deep in thought, he accompanied Ki-Gor to the house of the old Chief, where he was soon invited to attend the feast in Ki-Gor's honor.

Throughout the feast, George remained deep in thought, saying only a few words now and then, when good manners demanded. However, young Ekka was very much in evidence, full of brash conversation, and playing mischievous practical jokes at the expense of the hospitable Banda.

"I see what you mean about that kid, Ki-Gor," George was once moved to say. "He is really a pesky brat, an' I'm sho' glad you're gettin' rid of him tonight."

By pre-arrangement, Luma, the Chief's daughter, lured Ekka away when the feast was nearly over. She came back presently with an enigmatic smile on her face.

"Ekka does not know it yet," she whispered to Ki-Gor, "but he is a prisoner. We will keep him confined for two days. After that, I think he will be glad to stay with us. As a matter of fact, he is not a bad boy, really. He is very bright for his age. I think I will adopt him."

Ki-Gor smiled dubiously. "Very well," he said, "but I am glad he is to be your responsibility and not mine."

Shortly after that, Ki-Gor noticed George's eyes on him.

"Have you an idea, George?" he asked, half smilingly.

"Not much of a one," the big Negro admitted, "but mebbe it's enough to go on."

A wave of hope went over Ki-Gor and he stood up and began to make his farewells to the Chief of the Banda and his daughter.

VI

AS the campfires of the Banda village began to disappear behind them in the darkness, George told Ki-Gor what was on his mind.

"Now, I don't really know nothin' 'bout these yere cold rays of the sun," he said. "But the only thing I c'n figger is—if you want the sun to be cold, you jest bettuh go somewheres wheah the climate is cold. If ever'thing else is plumb cold, seem to me that ol' sun got to be cold, too."

"It's reasonable," Ki-Gor said. "I had thought a little bit along those lines, myself."

"It's the only thing I c'n think of," George went on. "Now—I reckon the coldest place on earth is the No'th Pole. But we ain't got time to go up theah. *But*—jest southeast of heah, two days journey—they is some plenty high mountains. The snow nevuh leaves the top of them. Mebbe it's cold enough up on top o' them to cool off the sun."

"It's worth trying," Ki-Gor agreed. "Now, what about the stars at mid-day?"

"Tha's one that's got me buffaloed, Ki-Gor," George admitted. "But let's see if we cain't find that cold sun, first. Aftuh that, we c'n staht figgerin' about them stahs."

"The Priestess of the Moon," Ki-Gor recalled, frowning, "stated the problems the other way around. The stars first, then the sun."

"I don't reckon it make much difference," George said, "Long's you find 'em both, sometime."

The giant pair were going at a swift pace through the pitch dark African night. Fortunately, a small but swift river ran in a southeasterly direction from the Banda village—exactly the direction George had indicated that the tall mountains lay. And guided by this stream, the two friends traveled all night long.

By sun-up they had put a safe distance between themselves and the pestiferous Ekka. They stopped to eat a little breakfast.

"Ovuh theah is yo' mountains," George stated, pointing at a mass of tumbled snow-capped peaks to the southeast. "Now, they's two ways of gittin' to 'em. We c'n bear off heah to the south for a

while and then circle eastwards—that way is good goin' all the way. Or, we c'd cut straight across this yere desert ahead of us. That would be shorter, but it would be almighty hot!"

Ki-Gor gazed out across the great arid depression that lay like a huge dry moat between him and the mountains. It was a true desert. The tumbling stream beside him cascaded down from the veldt into it, and after a few miles thinned out and disappeared.

"If it is shorter," Ki-Gor said, "let us go across the desert, no matter how hot it is. George, it is just fifteen days before the next full moon."

George made no answer, but stood up and looked gloomily back up the little river in the direction from which they had come. Something back there appeared to catch his eye, for he kept on staring, and a little frown gathered on his forehead. Ki-Gor followed his gaze. Some distance up the river, a dark object was bobbing in the current.

"Are you looking at that log?" Ki-Gor queried.

"Yeah," George answered slowly. "But it ain't jest a log. Look like somepin' is hangin' on to it. Some kind of animal or—no! By gravy, it's a human!"

A dreadful premonition crept into Ki-Gor's mind. It was a human, all right—a small human. And as the log came nearer and nearer, borne along on the breast of the swift current, it became only too apparent who that small human was. Ki-Gor blew through his teeth angrily and waded out into the river. As the log careened past him, he reached out and snatched off the limp figure clinging to the rear end.

With a happy sigh Ekka collapsed into Ki-Gor's arms.

With a stunned look, George watched Ki-Gor wade ashore and lay the child on the bank.

"Man," George breathed. "Tha's really a problem-chile you got there an' no mistake!"

Ki-Gor glared down at the unconscious boy as if he'd like to kill him. Presently Ekka's eyes fluttered open.

"Try to desert Ekka, would you?" he whispered weakly. "Leave him behind with a pack of jungle yokels, would you?"

Well, I showed you! I'm half drowned, and every bone in my body has been smashed by the rocks—but I showed you you can't desert Ekka!"

Ki-Gor let his hands fall helplessly to his sides.

"Mm-mn!" George murmured. "Whut kin you do with somebody like that!"

IT was an hour before Ekka was fully revived from his hair-raising journey on the log. He was a mass of bruises, but he had broken no bones. And his triumph at out-witting Ki-Gor and the Banda acted like a tonic on him. He declared himself ready to go anywhere, although he swayed on his feet when he said it.

Ki-Gor was at his wit's end. He could not afford to slow down his rate of travel to accommodate the boy. At the same time, he could not bring himself to abandon him on the great veldt. Finally, he reached out and seized Ekka by the nape of the neck.

"Look you, little fiend!" he snarled, "I ought to leave you here for the lions to eat! For some reason I cannot. So we will take you with us. We are going straight across that desert down there, and George and I will take turns carrying you on our shoulders. But you behave yourself from now, or by the gods I will give you such a thrashing that you will wish you had never left the Banda people. Do you understand?"

"Hooray!" Ekka cried, completely unabashed. "The big black elephant"—pointing at George—"shall carry me first!"

Ekka was not much of a burden to men of such extraordinary strength and endurance as Ki-Gor and George. However, even without Ekka to carry, the journey across the desert would have been arduous enough. And Ki-Gor drew a sigh of relief when, toward the end of the afternoon, the ground began to slope upward consistently and the shaly gravel underfoot began to give way to short grass.

The late afternoon sun still beat unmercifully on their backs, however, and Ki-Gor longed for a shady spot to rest for a few minutes. But the country they were entering now offered little promise of relief from that blistering sun. It was a wide belt of treeless foothills where

shade of any kind was at a premium. Ki-Gor resigned himself to endure the next two hours as best he could. The sweat poured down his brown body in rivers as he trudged uphill, and even Ekka lay limp and silent on his back.

"Man! It sho' is warm, hereabouts!" George exclaimed. "Heah, lemme carry that brat for a while now, Ki-Gor."

"No, he's all right," Ki-Gor said, looking at George with a wry smile. "It's very warm, but tomorrow we will probably wish for some of this heat."

His eyes swept the bare foothills and lifted toward the giant snow-capped peaks beyond. Then they flicked back to a point in the foothills again. Something had caught his attention. It was a round black spot.

"George," the jungle man said sharply. "Over there a little to the right—what is that?"

"Whut is whut?" George said, staring. "Oh, you mean that black patch—hey! Wait a minute! Look like it might be the mouth of a cave! That whut you mean?"

"Yes!" Ki-Gor cried. "That's what I thought! A shady place to rest!"

"Man, that would sho' be a treat!" George rumbled delightedly. "Don' let's waste no time gittin' ovuh theah!"

Without any question it was a cave mouth and a very curious one. It was a fairly wide opening, perhaps six feet in diameter. But it looked as if it had once been much taller and wider.

"Say, you know somepin'?" George said, as they stood in front of the opening. "This yere ain't no natural cave, I don't think. It look to me like someone dug a hole in the side of this yere hill—and dug it a good time ago!"

George was manifestly right, Ki-Gor thought as he scrutinized the spot. It certainly looked like a man-made opening in the base of the hill, which Nature had encroached upon during the course of years.

"Yep! That's whut it is, all right!" George exclaimed. "See, they's another one ovuh thataway—only that one's most filled in! Say, you know somepin', Ki-Gor? I think we found ourselves an ol' deserted mine!"

Ekka slipped off Ki-Gor's back, then, and trotted to the cave mouth, where he stood for a moment peering inside.

"Hail!" the boy shouted delightedly. "This looks like fun! I bet I could hide in here, Ki-Gor, and you would never find me—never in the world!"

Ki-Gor gave a warning shout and lunged toward the boy. But he was too late. With a gleeful shriek, Ekka dodged into the black hole and disappeared.

"**C**OME back!" Ki-Gor shouted wrathfully, running after the boy. But a cascade of impudent laughter floating back was Ekka's answer. Ki-Gor ran about ten steps and stopped. The transition from the brilliant sunlight into the darkness of the shaft had temporarily blinded him. George came stumbling along the passageway behind him, cursing.

"Man, if you evuh git yo' hands on that kid," George rumbled, "I hope you break his neck!"

And Ki-Gor, standing in that black cave, felt he would like to do just that. For as his eyes became adjusted to the darkness, he was able to see that the passageway divided just in front of him—divided into three separate shafts.

Which shaft had Ekka taken?

Just then, a faint cry floated through the caverns, as if from a tremendous distance.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor! Come and get me! I've lost my way! I don't know where I am!"

That was merely the introduction to a night of trouble. Ki-Gor recognized immediately the fact that there existed a maze of caverns in the heart of that hill. And that to go very far along one of those shafts without leaving a trail of some kind to follow back, was to invite getting lost himself. With Ekka's cries growing fainter and fainter in their ears, Ki-Gor and George went out to the mouth of the cave to discuss ways and means.

In the end it was decided that Ki-Gor would utilize the hours of daylight left to climb to the wooded slopes above them and bring back some resinous sticks for torches, and, if possible, some vines. George would stay behind at the cave mouth in case Ekka located the cave-mouth without help.

Night had fallen by the time Ki-Gor returned, and Ekka had not found his

way out. But the jungle man had torch-sticks, and also yards and yards of slender vines in great thick coils. With these instruments he and George set to work exploring the shafts. With flickering torches lighting the way, they proceeded through the caverns, uncoiling the vines as they went, so that they could always retrace their steps.

Hour after hour, they searched without success. Now, they heard Ekka no more. Whether the child had gone to sleep, or whether something had happened to him, Ki-Gor did not dare speculate.

At daybreak, the two friends, haggard and red-eyed, were still searching. By this time they had run out of torches and vines both. Ki-Gor toiled up the mountain side again for a fresh supply, getting back to the cave about an hour before noon.

"Well, the kid's still alive," George grunted. "He's squawkin' his head off, somewhere's in theah."

With Ekka's shrill voice echoing through the shafts, Ki-Gor searched with renewed hope. And, sure enough, within an hour, he and George turned a corner and came upon the child.

He was squatting on his heels in the middle of good-sized rock-hewn chamber. He blinked contemptuously at the torches.

"Well," said Ekka, "it took you two great boobies long enough to find me!"

It was all Ki-Gor could do to keep from cuffing the child's impudent face.

"I could have gotten out by myself," Ekka went on, "but it's still night time outside, and I thought I was safer down here."

"You have lost track of time, little chattering monkey," Ki-Gor said, with considerable restraint. "It is not night time, but the middle of the day. And how could you have gotten out by yourself?"

"See that hole halfway up the wall?" Ekka demanded triumphantly, "It goes outside. And it is, too, night time. You can see the stars shining."

The skin on Ki-Gor's back began to prickle. What was the boy saying?

Less than an hour before, Ki-Gor had observed the sun nearly overhead. Without a word, he handed his torch to George and stepped over to the shaft that Ekka had indicated.

The opening was about four feet above

the cave floor. Ki-Gor bent down and peered into it. For a moment he could see nothing. Then, like a revelation, he could see the opening at the other end. The shaft led steeply upwards at a forty-five degree angle. At the other end, there seemed to be a small deep blue disk.

Ki-Gor's heart pounded in his ears as he realized that the deep blue disk was a patch of sky.

Then he saw three stars winking.

VII

A FEW minutes later, he and George and Ekka burst out of the main cave mouth. They winced and blinked from the brassy glare about them.

The sun was exactly overhead.

Ki-Gor felt a little dizzy. "George," he said. "Was it true? Did I see some stars back there in the cave? Or was I dreaming?"

"Oh, no, you saw 'em, all right," George replied emphatically. "An', come to think of it, I ought to of known 'bout that. Sho', pop! I remember when I was a li'l bitty kid I heard someone say that ef you went way down to th' bottom of a deep well, you c'd look up and see the stahs shinin' in the middle of th' day. That theah shaft back in theah is kind of like a well—deep enough so it shut off the sunlight an' let you see the stahs."

"Yes," Ki-Gor said, deep in thought. "The Priestess of Dera Daga sent me to find the stars at mid-day. I did not know they existed. Now, I find they do. So, George, that means that somewhere—somewhere the sun's rays are cold at high noon."

"Tha's right," George said heartily, "an' I think we goin' to find that place up yon-duh on the mountain. Whut do you say we git goin'?"

"Yes," Ki-Gor said. His eyes fell on Ekka. The boy had a stick and was prodding a large, crab-like creature in front of the cave mouth. Ki-Gor strode over and swept the boy up in his arms.

"Come, O Child," he said, gently, "leave that venomous beast alone. It is a black scorpion, and if it should sting you with its upraised tail, it would hurt you badly, and you might die."

"Wah!" Ekka exclaimed impatiently.

"What a big, overgrown booby thou art, Ki-Gor! Forever frightened at thine own shadow!"

Ki-Gor made no answer. His mind was too full of the unexplainable fact that this infuriating child had been the unconscious instrument of fate. Without his devilish prank, Ki-Gor would never have discovered the stars that shine at mid-day.

Ekka wriggled his way around on to Ki-Gor's back, and a moment later the jungle man with his friend George at his side started climbing toward the snow-covered peaks up ahead.

They had gone several hundred yards when Ki-Gor swung around for a last look at the cave mouth. He gave a startled grunt. For a moment he thought he saw a lone black man standing there looking up toward them. It was only for a fleeting moment, though. Ki-Gor blinked and then the black man had disappeared.

"George," Ki-Gor said, "didn't you send all your Masai Morani home?"

"I sho' did," George replied promptly. "Why?"

"Because I thought I saw one of them just now—down below by the caves."

"Tha's funny," George said. "It couldn't have been any of my boys, I'd be pretty sure."

"Well, I only caught a quick flash of him," Ki-Gor admitted. "But he was carrying a long spear. It looked like a Masai spear."

A CRUEL wind whistled down the wild, rocky gorge, blowing great clouds of fine, stinging snow. The three wayfarers bent their heads away from the cutting particles. Behind them, a huge red sun was swiftly dropping below the western horizon.

"My gravy, Ki-Gor!" George shouted. "I b'lieve we're on the right track. It's almighty cold, already, an' we still got a long ways to climb!"

The giant Negro's teeth were chattering in spite of the fact that he, like his two companions, was covered with sheep skins from top to toe. It was fortunate, Ki-Gor reflected, that they had found the tribe of shepherders, high up on the mountain side, and had purchased the skins to keep them warm on their expedition up the great mountain.

"Yes, *suh!*" George shouted. "Ef it's cold right yere, whut's it go' be like when we git to the top o' that big baby up yonduh!"

George waved a great hand toward the huge peak that towered above them in frigid majesty. The last slanting rays of the dying sun were casting an unspeakably beautiful rosy glow on the spire-like summit.

Ki-Gor gazed silently at the beautiful spectacle. It would be cold up there—colder than anything he had ever experienced. But he was prepared to endure it. He was prepared to endure anything which would save Helene from the Crocodile Pool.

And there were just twelve days left to fulfill the commands of the Priestess of Dera Daga.

"Come on," Ki-Gor said. "Let's go as far as we can before it gets too dark to see our way."

"Right with you," George responded. "I think mebbe we c'n make the top by noon tomorrow."

There came a piteous wail from Ekka as he saw the two rise up. The cold and the altitude were too much for the scrawny little Bantu child. Ki-Gor picked him up with a sigh, and labored up the gorge after George.

Later, Ki-Gor wondered how they ever survived that night. The cold was unbelievable. They had climbed far above the timber line, and there was nothing to build a fire with. So the three huddled together in a sheltered spot and somehow lasted out the long hours of darkness.

As soon as it became light enough to distinguish objects, even vaguely, the climb was resumed. More than anything, Ki-Gor wanted to reach the summit of that mountain by high noon. There, he was confident, the sun's rays would be cold, and the second command of the Priestess would be fulfilled. After that, it would remain only to dash back the long distance to Dera Daga in time to arrive before the next full moon.

It was brutally cold going up that west slope of the great mountain. For most of the morning the trio were in the shade of the peak, alternately trudging through deep snow and traversing rough, bare rock. It was George who pointed out an easier

route to the top. To their right the mountain fell away to the south with a more gradual slope.

Ki-Gor quickly decided that George was right, and that the long way around might prove in the end to be the shortest route to the summit. Immediately, the party turned to their right and crossed the steep west face toward the south. Relieved from the gruelling test of climbing, the trio made good time. Even Ekka stopped whimpering and danced along ahead of his two guardians. In a short time they had nearly left the shadow of the peak. Before them lay a dazzling sunlit snow-field. Ekka dashed ahead out into the sunlight. There he stopped and raised his arms.

"Hai!" he shouted joyously. "The good sun! For the first time in two days I am warm!"

A thrill of horror went through Ki-Gor. Did the child say the sun was *warm*?

A moment later he stepped out into the sunlight. George stepped up beside him. The two old friends looked at each other mutely, tragically.

The sun had about two hours to go before it would reach the zenith. But its rays slanted down on the shoulders of the travelers and suffused them with an all-pervading warmth.

KI-GOR stood in stunned silence as the heat poured down on him. Already his sheepskin clothes were almost too warm. George broke the silence.

"I'm sorry, Ki-Gor," he said in a low voice. "I gave you a real bad steer. Why, I sweah, the sun up heah is 'most hotter'n it was down on that desert."

Ki-Gor stood motionless, without answering.

"Whut we goin' to do?" George asked humbly. "I ain't got anothuh i-dea."

When the jungle man raised his head, a ferocious scowl contorted his brow.

"I have tried," he said in a flat, dangerous voice, "and I have failed. If, up here, the sun is hot—then there is nowhere on earth where it is cold. There is no time left to search for these cold rays of the sun. We have barely time as it is to get back to Dera Daga before the full moon. Come, let's start right now. Somewhere on the way, we will try to work out some plan to rescue Helene."

"All right, Ki-Gor," George said slowly. "I'm with you. But f'om whut you already told me about them Lunanda, I reckon we'll have a job on our hands."

"We'll do it somehow," Ki-Gor said grimly. Then he called to Ekka in Swahili. "Come, Little One. We climb no longer, but instead we go down the mountain as fast as we can go."

"If we stay right on this ridge," George offered, "and go south for a while—then curve around west, I think we'll make bettuh time. Don't look to me like the snow is so deep, that way."

"Good," said Ki-Gor. "Now, let's go."

Ekka was delighted with this manner of travel. He found it much more enjoyable to go running and sliding down a sunny slope than to toil upward in deep shady snow. It was swift, easy going, and much more exciting than toilsome climbing.

Within half an hour, the trio had come to the bottom of the main peak. A great snow-field now led off to the westward at a much gentler declivity. It was like a great white road, a mile wide, that swept downward toward the first scrub trees that indicated the timber line. Without hesitation, Ki-Gor led his companions down this route with long swinging strides.

It was George who first noticed that there was solid ice under the thin coating of snow.

"Hey, Ki-Gor!" he shouted, "wait a minute!"

The jungle man halted and looked around impatiently.

"This yere field of snow," George said. "It's layin' on top of a lot of ice. This yere is really a kind of *river* of ice. They's a word for it in English—now, whut is it? Oh, yeah, I remember, now. It's called a *glacier*."

"A glacier?" Ki-Gor repeated. "Well, what does it matter?"

"Well, seem to me," George went on, "that these yere glaciers is kind of dangerous to go walkin' round on. Mebbe we bettuh kind of take it easy along yere."

Before Ki-Gor could reply, there came a delighted cry from Ekka, who had wandered away some distance.

"Come quickly!" the child shouted. "It is so beautiful! It is like a cave, but so beautiful!"

A moment later, George and Ki-Gor

peered over Ekka's shoulder at a great crevasse. It was a slanting crack about six feet wide that sliced downward through the blue ice at an angle.

"It is so beautiful!" Ekka said again and crept nearer to the edge.

"Be careful, O Child," Ki-Gor growled, and reached out a hand toward the fascinated boy.

Then, suddenly, without any warning, Ekka's feet flew out from under him. Ki-Gor grabbed at him frantically—and missed.

There was a despairing shriek, and Ekka plunged down into the crevasse.

The two men stood transfixed with horror as the agonized scream rang in their ears for a long moment, faded a little, and then—abruptly stopped.

A HIDEOUS silence hung over the glacier as Ki-Gor stretched out his full length, drew himself carefully forward, and peered over the lip of the crevasse. Because the crack was not vertical and slanted off at an angle, he was able to see along it for about twenty feet. Beyond that was a blue-black vagueness. How far down the crevasse went, there was no way of telling.

Ki-Gor twisted his head around and looked up at George.

"I am sick at heart," he said. "His life was my affair. I should not have let him go so close to the edge."

"Now, come on, Ki-Gor," George said, "that ain't right! You warned him and you tried to grab him. You cain't take—"

"Now he is dead," Ki-Gor said woodenly, "and it is my fault."

George hesitated, groping for the most comforting word he could think of, when suddenly there came a faint sound which made both of them stiffen.

"Whut—whut was that?" George whispered. Both men strained their ears.

Then the sound came again—a faint, distant wail.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor! Come and get me!"

"Oh, my lawd!" George exploded. "He ain't dead! Hey!—whut you fixin' to do, Ki-Gor?"

But the jungle man made no answer. He had whipped out his great hunting knife and was busily chipping a great

niche in the ice of the crevasse.

"Man! you're crazy!" George shouted. "You cain't possibly go down theah!"

"He is still alive!" Ki-Gor said through clenched teeth, "and I must get him!"

George fell silent then, knowing that no power on earth could dissuade Ki-Gor from the task he had set for himself. But the next half hour graved some new lines on the big Negro's broad face. There was nothing for him to do but stand by helplessly while his friend set out to do the impossible.

Swiftly and surely, Ki-Gor chipped handholds in the ice as far down as he could reach with his long arms. Then, he got up, turned around, slipped one leg down the crevasse until the foot reached the lowest of the niches he had cut. Slowly, then, he lowered the other leg and finally his whole body.

Clenching the knife between his teeth, he dug both hands into niches and carefully released his feet. In a moment, he was stretched full length against the cold, sleek ice. His two hands alone held him steady and kept him from sliding down the precipitous ice-wall after Ekka.

Now came the test.

With George's anguished eyes on him, he lifted his right hand, took the knife from his mouth with it, and began to chip a new handhold lower down. While he did this, he was supporting his entire weight on the fingers of his left hand.

Presently, the new handhold was finished. The knife was returned to his mouth, and his right hand got a grip on the new niche. Gently, he shifted his weight to the right hand, and released the left hand.

With infinite care, he let his body slide downward until his right arm was quite straight. And then, with his left hand, he cut a new handhold.

In this manner, alternating handholds, did Ki-Gor slowly cut a ladder down the bleak face of the crevasse wall. George watched him in silence until he disappeared in the shadows of the great crack in the ice.

For a while after that—after he lost sight of Ki-Gor—George Spelvin lost track of time. He lay in a sort of horrified stupor, his head at the edge of the crevasse, his eyes glued to the shadows below.

Actually, measured by minutes and

hours, Ki-Gor was not gone long. But it seemed like an eternity to the big American Negro, before his searching eyes made out a vague shape down in the crevasse. His heart began to beat a wild, joyous rhythm as the shape grew clearer.

Ki-Gor came up his ladder much faster than he went down, even though Ekka's limp form was draped over one shoulder.

"He is all right, I think!" Ki-Gor shouted cheerily. "Just badly frightened. The crack gets narrow gradually, and he must have been able to slow himself down before he hit bottom."

Ekka was crying softly as Ki-Gor bore him upward. He stopped crying when they came to a spot ten feet below the top of the crevasse, and looked upward with a tear-stained smile. George watched the pair fascinated as the pale sunlight filtered through the ice-roof above them.

"Ah! Ki-Gor!" Ekka said, squinting his eyes, "I never thought Ekka would see the sun again."

Involuntarily, Ki-Gor twisted his head around to look up at the ice wall that hung over his head. And then suddenly he began to tremble so violently that he nearly lost his grip on the fresh niches.

He was looking straight up at the ice overhang. A blinding glare of diffused light made him close his eyes.

"George!" he whispered. "The sun! Is it overhead?"

"Why—why, yes!" George answered with a quick upward glance.

"Ah!" said Ki-Gor, and rested a moment against the ice. "I can see it, George! I am looking at the sun at high noon! And its—its rays are cold!"

VIII

LATE the next morning, Ki-Gor and his companions halted, gaunt and footsore, beside the old deserted mine where the stars had shone at mid-day. The trio had not stopped to eat or sleep since they had left the crevasse in the glacier. But now George insisted that they rest in the shade of the caves for a few hours. Ki-Gor gave in eventually, knowing that they were in no shape to traverse the desert during the heat of the day. Ekka was far too exhausted to get himself lost in the caverns again, so Ki-Gor told himself that

they would not have to worry about that.

After a few hours of slumber, Ki-Gor went outside the cave and searched the ground for tracks. He did not have to look far. There were two sets, one fresher than the others, but both left by the same man. Moreover, Ki-Gor found several small punctures in the turf here and there beside the foot marks. A Masai spear has a two-foot long slender metal spindle embedded in the butt end. These punctures could have been made by a spindle like that.

Ki-Gor could make nothing of this unseen lurking stranger, but he did not waste much time looking for him. There was no time to waste. Instead, he went into the cave and awakened George and Ekka. There was nothing to eat, but Ki-Gor knew they would find food on the other side of the strip of desert if they set out right away.

The jungle man's plan was to make a bee-line for the big west-flowing river which he had come up with Tsempala's two Kroo boys. If possible he hoped to strike the river above the great falls, and locate the friendly river-tribe that lived there. They would give him a boat and perhaps some paddlers. Once the falls were past, they could make swift time downstream to the point where the man called Lebo, the Dog Brother, had given Ki-Gor his boat. From there, they would cut across the veldt due south, retracing Ki-Gor's steps back to Dera Daga.

It was by far the quickest route, and its only drawback lay in that it went close to the Gwembi village where Ki-Gor had rescued Ekka. It was conceivable that the fat chieftain who called himself King Makaka might make an effort to recapture Ekka. But Ki-Gor had scant respect for such frail, rickety forest-blacks as the Gwembi.

However, as these thoughts went through his mind, Ki-Gor realized that the first consideration was to get started across the desert before them. Ekka was about to set up a clamor at resuming the journey thus, without food to assuage the gnawing hunger in his stomach. But he somehow caught the urgency of the occasion and followed his two guardians quietly down the bare hillside to the gravel of the desert.

They reached the veldt on the other side just after sundown, and Ki-Gor stalked some sleepy ground-hens, bearing them back in triumph to serve as the first meal the trio had eaten in more than twenty-four hours. After the meal Ki-Gor allowed his companions to stretch and loll back luxuriously for just one hour. Then, although it was pitch dark, he announced that they would resume the dash toward Dera Daga.

All during that night march, George marveled at how Ki-Gor could find his way with no landmarks to guide him—nothing but the brilliant tropical stars overhead. Yet when day broke, Ki-Gor seemed to know exactly where he was.

There was only the briefest stop made for a hasty breakfast of fruit and nuts. Then Ki-Gor led his friends onward, promising them that they could sleep during the heat of the day, when the blazing sun made travel more arduous.

They soon struck a well-worn trail which Ki-Gor remembered following in the opposite direction. It led ultimately to the Gwembi village, through it, and to the river. As he led his companions along it now, he inspected the wind-blown dust of the trail for tracks. For miles there were none, or what spoors there were, were so old as to be nearly obliterated.

BUT about three hours before noon, a fresh track appeared in the dust, a splay-toed Bantu spoor. And every now and then, a slight puncture appeared beside the foot-marks, a puncture that might have been made by the spindle of a Masai spear.

This single spoor carried along the trail for some two miles, and then suddenly turned off into the short new grass of the veldt. Without stopping, Ki-Gor threw a shrewd glance around, and noticed a small clump of trees and bushes not far away on the crest of a small rise of the ground.

"George," he murmured, "we will go on for a little distance, and then I drop off to one side. You keep on going until you are out of sight of that grove. Then stop and wait for me. I will not be long."

Five minutes later, Ki-Gor was crawling silently on his belly toward the clump of trees. The grass was too short to afford

any great cover, yet the jungle man's movements were so skilled that only an alert, expectant pair of eyes could have distinguished his tawny form.

He reached the grove unchallenged and wormed his way noiselessly into the protecting undergrowth. Then he began a silent but thorough investigation of the grove.

He had not far to go to find what he was seeking.

A tall black was sound asleep under an ironwood tree. A Masai spear lay beside him, but the man was not a Masai. He was dressed like a Lunanda.

Ki-Gor studied the slumbering face, and tried to recall who this Lunanda was. Then he remembered. It was Aku, the hunter who had shown his malice toward Ki-Gor by speaking up during the trial on the top of the pyramid at Dera Daga. Ki-Gor looked at the Masai spear again. It looked familiar.

It was his own.

For several minutes, Ki-Gor regarded the sleeping Lunanda hunter. At last, he had found the explanation to several matters. Who had stolen his spear—the identity of the strange Bantu who had trailed him from Dera Daga all the way to the old deserted mines.

For a brief moment, the jungle man considered waking up the hunter, and at the point of his spear, demanding his business. On second thought, he decided against it. It would take precious time. Also, if Aku slept on while Ki-Gor continued his way, he would never know that his prey had slipped past him. Ki-Gor was not afraid of the man, but he did not want to waste any precious time on his account. Quiet as a ghost, he slipped out of the grove and rejoined his waiting companions.

"Don't talk yet," he murmured in answer to their inquiring looks. "We must keep going—faster than ever."

After they had gone several miles, Ki-Gor was faced with a decision to make as regards their route. Their trail took them, he knew, ultimately to the river near the village of the friendly river-blacks. But it did not go in a straight line. Instead it curved around in a wide sweep through the Gwembi village. It would be miles shorter to cut across country to the river.

However, there was a reason for the trail making such a wide detour. The country between them and the river was an impassable jungle swamp. By himself, Ki-Gor could easily have negotiated it, merely by taking to the trees. But George and the city-bred Ekka could not travel the tree route.

Therefore, they would have to stick to the path, even though it was longer, and even though it led right through the village of the hostile Gwembi and their vengeful chieftain, "King" Makaka. Ki-Gor did not anticipate any real trouble from the Gwembi, no matter how hostile they were. Furthermore, if the trio were able to maintain the pace they had been going, they would pass through the Gwembi just before dawn, the next morning.

THIS, however, was a problem. Ki-Gor now wanted to push on without stopping for a mid-day nap. Having overtaken and passed the mysterious Lunanda hunter, he wanted to keep his advantage. But, Ekka was already querulous from fatigue, and even huge George was getting dull-eyed. Ki-Gor took the child up on his back, and persuaded his giant friend to keep going as long as he could.

So they pounded along the trail through the broiling heat of the day into the comparative coolness of late afternoon. But when the sun went down, George suddenly wilted.

"I sho' am sorry, Ki-Gor," he said in a muffled voice, "but I don' guess I c'n go nothuh step without a little shut-eye."

That was that, and Ki-Gor hunted out a safe place for his exhausted companions to sleep. Even his own iron stamina was weakening somewhat, but he planned to stay awake and watch the trail. If Aku, the hunter, came by, Ki-Gor wanted to know it.

An early moon, now more than half full, lighted the trail perfectly, and Ki-Gor found a spot where he could command the path without being seen. He sat down with his back resting against a rock, and settled down to waiting.

But fatigue and the monotony of watching a deserted trail had its effect. Before the moon had climbed to its highest point in the sky, Ki-Gor's head drooped for-

ward until it lay on his knees, and he went sound asleep.

It was pitch black when he woke up. The moon had gone, and by that fact he realized that he had slept many hours. He rose up, inwardly raging at himself, and woke his companions. Silently, the three groped their way back on to the trail and resumed their journey.

Ki-Gor was out of patience with himself. Not only had he lost precious hours in getting back to Dera Daga, but he had delayed long enough so that he and his friends would have to go through or by the Gwembi village in broad daylight. Furthermore, he now did not know whether Aku, the hunter, was still behind him, or had passed by during Ki-Gor's lapse into slumber.

On an impulse, he dropped to his knees and sniffed the dew-dampened dust of the trail. There was an unmistakable scent of Bantu. It was a single Bantu, at that.

There was no way of knowing, of course, whether that Bantu had been Aku. But, considering that most Bantu will not travel by night, Ki-Gor judged that the spoor had been left by a man fired with determination and driven by a purpose. That description might fit Aku. Ki-Gor decided that it would be safest to assume that Aku was now somewhere ahead of them along the trail.

It was almost time for the sun to rise, but the wayfarers on the trail were still in comparative darkness. The reason for this was that the trail had long since left the veldt to plunge into thick jungle. It was not many miles now to the Gwembi village.

As time went on, Ki-Gor strode along, growing more and more tense. Any moment, now, he might expect the bushes on either side of the trail to erupt a shouting black brandishing a great broad-bladed spear.

THE trail now began to veer to the right, and Ki-Gor knew that shortly they would come upon the squalid huts of the Gwembi. Suddenly Ki-Gor realized that there was a complete absence of the ordinary sounds one expects to hear from human settlements. In fact, an abnormal stillness was hanging over the jungle.

In a flash, Ki-Gor guessed what was

about to happen. Aku would not be lying in ambush alone. He would have prepared the Gwembi.

"George," he murmured, "I think we are going to have a little trouble. Keep Ekka between us, and protect the rear—"

Before he could finish, the forest around them sprang into life. A hideous concerted yell went up and Gwembi leaped out of the bushes from all sides.

Ki-Gor's taut nerves relaxed. Action was always better than waiting. He uttered a glad shout, slipped his hand down to the butt of his eight-foot spear. Then he slashed it horizontally across the path in front of him. Three Gwembi tribesmen went crashing to the earth under the impact of the ironwood rod.

"Give 'em hell, Ki-Gor!" George shouted gaily behind him. "This'll be easy! These boys ain't the champs!"

It was not precisely easy, but as George observed, the Gwembi were not champion warriors. Moreover, they had sacrificed the value of their numbers by attacking in the close quarters of the trail. Ki-Gor moved forward slashing them down with his tough spear-haft, as if they were so many canes of bamboo. Behind him, big George was coolly battering down more Gwembi, while in between, little Ekka screamed with delight and triumph.

Once, his voice was raised in terror as one of the Gwembi wriggled through and seized one leg. But Ki-Gor spun around and felled the black with a swift battering blow.

In a few moments, the Gwembi began to falter. When their first rush did not succeed they began to lose taste for the whole affair. Ki-Gor seized the opportunity.

"Come on, George!" he shouted, and started to trot forward into the village itself.

There came an enraged cry from in front of him, and another party of Gwembi poured out from behind the huts. Leading them was a tall figure carrying a Masai spear—Aku the hunter.

At once, Ki-Gor realized that this would not be so easy. Unlike the Gwembi, Aku was a resolute man. Furthermore, he was armed with a splendid weapon, a spear that was four feet longer than the ironwood spear in Ki-Gor's hands.

The Lunanda warrior was shouting commands to the Gwembi, ordering them to encircle their prey while he engaged Ki-Gor in front. And Ki-Gor knew then that he had to dispose of Aku quickly, before the Gwembi behind him on the trail could take heart and rally. If he got Aku, the Gwembi would collapse.

Trusting George to protect himself and Ekka for the moment, Ki-Gor suddenly sprinted forward. Aku fell back a pace, the great spear leveled. Ki-Gor feinted with his own spear, but Aku was not to be fooled. The huge Masai blade licked out at Ki-Gor's bare stomach.

Ki-Gor swiftly twisted away. But the thrust barely missed. Like a flash Ki-Gor cut downward with his spear haft. The Masai spear was battered downward momentarily. But before Ki-Gor could spring forward, the great blade swung up again.

For a moment, the jungle man was off balance. A triumphant snarl contorted Aku's black face and he lunged forward, spear leveled.

Ki-Gor's own spear was point down in the ground. There was no time to lift it. But he still gripped the butt end. With a grunt, he heaved upward with it. The stout haft engaged the hissing Masai blade and deflected it six inches from its course. Four inches would have been enough.

Now Ki-Gor leaped. This time it was Aku who was off balance. Ki-Gor's left fist hooked around like a sickle, caught the Lunanda in front of the right ear with a crunch. Aku toppled forward with a groan, and Ki-Gor seized the Masai spear from his nerveless fingers.

He was not a moment too soon. A half dozen Gwembi flung themselves on top of him. But he shook them off with one motion and then sent his two-foot blade sizzling through an unhappy warrior in front of him.

That was enough for the Gwembi. With shrieks of terror, they dodged back to the shelter of their huts. Ki-Gor glared down at Aku.

The hunter had drawn himself up to his hands and knees. For a second, Ki-Gor was tempted to snuff out his life with one twisting spear-thrust. Then he changed his mind. There had been enough killing. Ki-Gor hesitated a moment. Then he

prodded the groggy hunter contemptuously.

"Get up, O Murderous One!" he growled. "You are returning to Dera Daga with us!"

IX

LIKE a great ghostly lantern the full moon hung in the sky. Its cold beams shone palely on the dark, mysterious ruins of Dera Daga. They reflected whitely from the decaying sides of the Pyramid and revealed the silent crowd of Lunanda massed around its base.

But those moonbeams could not penetrate the black, oily waters of the Crocodile Pool that yawned evilly before Helene, wife of Ki-Gor. She stood calm on the awful brink, a length of thin chain about one wrist, while a dozen black shadows crouched behind her.

Up on the top of the Pyramid, the harsh voice of the Priestess broke the brooding silence.

"O Moon-God! Listen to thy people! We are gathered here to await the arrival of one who was sent away to prove his innocence of a crime. Full twenty-eight days hath he been gone. It is declared that if he doth not appear in that time, then shall he be judged guilty of murder, and his hostage thrown into the Pool!"

The Priestess stopped and bowed her head amidst an awful silence.

Then, raising her face to the moon like one drugged, she intoned stiffly:

"Hostage of Ki-Gor, prepare to meet thy fate."

A thrill of horror shot through Helene. Could this happen to her, to be mangled by loathsome crocodiles, while Ki-Gor wandered helplessly in some far-off region—trying to fulfil the ridiculous demands of that dope-crazed old woman?

But before she had time even to cry out, two husky warriors grasped her and started down a rope ladder into the Crocodile Pool. They carried Helene to a little rocky promontory, all the while casting nervous glances at the hideous reptiles which lay sleepily on the farther bank of the Pool.

Fear lent speed to their hands as they fastened Helene's chains to a staple fastened into one of the rocks on the promontory. Then, as one of the sleepy crocodiles

stirred lazily, they scampered for the safety of the rope ladder.

The wife of Ki-Gor was left alone.

Helene began to breathe faster. Yet it was a purely physical, purely automatic reaction within herself. Her mind was singularly clear, and what was more, her mind was unafraid. Something of the fatality of Dera Daga had communicated itself to the beautiful wife of Ki-Gor. She stared impersonally at the evil waters of the Pool.

What was to be, would be.

As in a dream, she saw the eyes of a crocodile blink open, fasten in brute wonderment on her. Heavily, the beast lumbered to its feet and slid like a great log into the black waters of the Pool.

Helene closed her eyes.

Suddenly, the silence of the night was broken by a mighty shout:

"Ki-Gor comes, O Priestess!"

At the sound of that beloved voice, Helene's calm left her. She had to fight to keep from laughing hysterically. Twenty-eight days Ki-Gor had been gone. And while she had never doubted that he would return in time to save her—

"Here, Ki-Gor!" she screamed. "In the Pool! Help me, Ki-Gor!"

The scaly snout of the crocodile appeared at the edge of the Pool. On short legs it pulled itself upon dry land and commenced to slither toward her.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene screamed again.

There was a terrific roar, scarcely human, emanating from the foot of the Pyramid. Then Helene's straining eyes saw the great figure of her mate bounding to the edge of the Crocodile Pool, and throwing himself down the sheer, slippery walls.

The crocodile's snapping jaws were almost within arm's reach now. But Ki-Gor's racing form came hurtling. He flung himself on the crocodile's back and his hunting knife rose and dipped with great, lethal strokes. The hideous saurian writhed furiously, its tail threshing dangerously near Helene. Ki-Gor's knife sought out the crocodile's tiny brain. The brute threshed once, convulsively, then subsided in a limp heap.

Ki-Gor hurried to Helene's side.

"I'm caught, Ki-Gor," Helene sobbed. Over her shoulder she saw the other crocodiles, aroused now, and starting to swim

toward them. "Oh, Ki-Gor, what shall we do?"

Without a word, Ki-Gor bent to the chain holding Helene. His bronzed face was stern as his great hands took hold of the chain close to the staple. Helene was watching his face; she saw it tense as Ki-Gor's mighty muscles contracted. There was a grating sound and suddenly Helene was free, the length of chain dangling from her wrist. Ki-Gor lifted her, chain and all, and carried her in his arms to the wall of the Pool.

"O Priestess, I have returned within the twenty-eight days allotted . . . although barely in time, it is true. Let down thy rope, that I may inform thee of my discoveries."

There was a stir upon the brink of the Pool. Suddenly, a rope slithered down the wall, and Ki-Gor grasped hold of it. Helene put her arms around his neck and Ki-Gor mounted hand over hand.

Gently, Ki-Gor carried her to where George Spelvin and a small Negro youth stood. Then, handing her over to George, he turned and started climbing the stairs to the top of the Pyramid.

The moment of Ki-Gor's inquisition had arrived!

KI-GOR advanced steadily toward the Priestess, and came to a stop ten paces from her. He folded his arms across his chest, then addressed her:

"I have returned, O Priestess, having fulfilled your commands. I bring with me two friends who will corroborate my words."

"Thy friends are useless, O Ki-Gor," the Priestess croaked. "Describe what thou sawest, and we will judge from thy words whether thou truly fulfilled the Missions. First, didst thou see the stars shining at mid-day?"

"I did."

A murmur went up from the crowd.

In measured words, Ki-Gor described precisely the place and the conditions under which he saw the noon-day stars. When he finished there was a long pause. Then the Priestess spoke.

"Well and truly hast thou spoken, Ki-Gor! There is no doubt of the truth of thy words. Tell us now of the second Mission."

Carefully, Ki-Gor detailed the scene on the glacier.

Again the pause. And again the Priestess spoke.

"Clear enough it is, Ki-Gor, that thou witnessed the sun at high noon when its rays fell cold on thee. No one living of the Lunanda hath seen solid water as thou hast described it. Yet there is such a thing, as the ancient songs of our people do testify."

The Priestess paused again with bent head.

Now, Ki-Gor awaited the Third Condition, which had not been named. He wondered what it would be.

The Priestess spread her arms wide.

"**N**OW, Ki-Gor," she chanted, "forasmuch as thou hast well and truly performed the tasks set before thee in order to prove thy innocence, it remains for thee to satisfy the Third Condition. Thou shalt answer a question regarding thyself. Thou hast killed a fellow-man—whether by accident, negligence, or design—thou killed him. Now, thou askest that thy life be spared. Tell us, O Ki-Gor—hast thou ever shown mercy to an enemy and spared his life? Answer, Ki-Gor, and answer truly!"

Ki-Gor stared at the old Priestess. How strange was Fate! He marveled at the inexplicable chance which had furnished this denouement.

He said measuredly, "Do not take my word for it, O Priestess. The man whose life I spared is here. Let him step forward and admit it. Aku! Aku, the hunter!"

An astonished murmur broke over the Lunanda, as a figure broke through the crowd and came slowly up the stairs to the top of the Pyramid.

"It is true, O Priestess!" Aku the hunter said in a flat voice. "I followed Ki-Gor, believing him guilty of murdering Datu. I planned to kill him in revenge. But he defeated me in battle, and even as he held my life in forfeit, he spared me—"

"Enough!" the Priestess cried. "Thou hast satisfied the Third Condition, Ki-Gor! I now pronounce thee not guilty and not accountable in any way for the death of Prince Datu!"

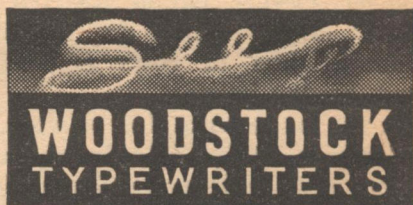
INSIDE King Mboko's royal guest-house, Ki-Gor, Helene, and George sat facing Ekka. The youth stood before them, eyes fixed on Ki-Gor.

"How couldst thou think I'd ever desert thee, Ki-Gor?" Ekka said finally.

"I would consider it no desertion," Ki-Gor said patiently. "But this is something which you must choose for yourself. You may come with me if you wish. Without you, I might never have discovered the cold sun and the mid-day stars. For that I am deeply grateful and I will grant any wish of yours."

"Suppose then," Ekka said, "that I wish to stay with thee?"

"Then stay with me you may," Ki-Gor said promptly. "But King Mboko and Queen Goli have lost their only son, and the Lunanda have lost a future king. Mboko is taken with you and has asked me



to give you to him. He will adopt you and bring you up as his own child and as heir to the throne of Dera Daga. That is more than I could ever offer you, and it would be wrong of me to stand in your way if you wished to accept King Mboko's offer."

Ekka flung himself into Ki-Gor's arms.

"Ah, thou great booby!" he cried affectionately. "How thou must love Ekka! Yet, how can I turn down an opportunity to be a king?"

"You cannot," Ki-Gor said simply.

"You are right," Ekka said, getting to his feet. "If Fate has thrust a future kingdom upon me, I fear I must accept. Although"—Ekka shook his head dubiously—"how thou wilt ever get along without me to help thee, I don't know."

George Spelvin smothered a smile and said in English, "Man, he sho' is goin' to make a wonderful king!"

GHOST SAFARI

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

The jungle drums pulse: "Umbula is dead. The great king of all the kings is dead by the white man's thunder. Umbula is dead . . . and a white man shall die!"

THE village of Kindu squatted at the bend of the Congo, just as it had done for hundreds of years, almost untainted by the inroad of the whites on the Belgian Congo. Squat, thatched huts sprang up from the ground without any set pattern, but all facing toward the juju house of the witch doctor.

Old Keever Trent sucked slowly, absently at the aged pipe in his horny hand in which the coals had long since died. His piercing grey eyes were veiled as he listened to the huge man at his side. He felt an instinctive dislike and distrust of the sloven speaker, but he reserved final judgment in the manner that the jungle had taught him in years of trekking through its dim interior.

"It's not in my usual line of work," he said slowly, carefully. "Mostly, my jungle work has to do with prospecting, or hunting, or government mapping. This playing as guide to a bunch of men doesn't appeal to me at all, especially when government agents are on your trail."

Fear flamed instantly in the close eyes of the huge man, and one heavy hand darted for the gun holstered low on his right hip.

"Who told you that?" he asked, and his voice was but a whisper.

Keever Trent knocked the dottle from his cold pipe, answered without turning his head, his even tone unruffled.

"Drums out of Tanganyika," he said succinctly. "The Obanti's drums have been following you for more than a week."

The huge man cursed softly. "Listen, Trent," he said sharply, "if you'll guide us to Brazzaville, we'll pay you more than you can earn all season."

Keever Trent slapped absently at a blue mosquito. "No," he said finally. "I've got plenty to do here. Taking you back would cost me two months' time. Anyway, I can't afford to get in a jam with

the authorities. But I'll get you a native guide."

The gun glinted dully in the heavy hand, and the muzzle came close to Trent's unmoving body.

"And if we decide you should guide us—then what?"

Sardonic amusement lay in Keever Trent's eyes. He scraped at the bowl of his pipe with a twig, looked over the huge man's shoulder.

"That gun play was foolish," he said evenly. "This is my country, and these blacks are my friends. Even now, two of them have assegais ready to plunge into your back."

The other turned slowly, his face whitening beneath his sunburn at sight of the two blacks poised behind him, ready for a signal from the calmly speaking trader. Trent made a swift movement with his hand.

"Put up your gun, Graber," he said. "And leave it in its sheath every minute you're within this village."

Otto Graber watched the blacks fade into shadows, before he turned. The gun rasped a bit as he returned it to the holster. Sweat stood in tiny drops on his fleshy face.

"Sorry," he apologized reluctantly, "but this is damned serious. Me and my men have to get out of the Congo and to the safety of Brazzaville or Leopoldville. I admit it was a fool stunt to threaten you, but our necessity made it seem the only way."

Somewhere in the night, a drum began to sound, its rhythm a brisk staccato noting that pulsed through the air with almost tangible force. Keever Trent lifted his eyes at the sounds, ignoring his companion, his face hardening as he interpreted the savage rhythm.

"You actually know what that nigger is pounding out?" Graber asked.

Keever Trent nodded his grizzled head.



Graber flung back, his eyes distending in a chalky face. "It's a human head," he gasped. "Gott im Himmel, it's Farquier!"

"You learn a lot in thirty years in the jungle," he said. "And I have many friends among the natives to teach me what I want to know."

"What is the drum saying?"

Keever Trent's eyes flickered momentarily to the face of Graber, then swung back to his pipe.

"Umbula is dead," he interpreted tonelessly. "The great king of all kings is

dead by the white man's thunder. Umbula the mighty is fallen, and there is wailing in his many huts. Umbula is dead, and his father of fathers is stolen."

Otto Graber was silent for a moment, only the sound of his breathing to show his agitation. He lit a cigarette with shaking fingers, laughed harshly.

"Sounds crazy," he said, "it doesn't make sense."

"On the contrary," Keever Trent said slowly, "it makes a lot of sense. It tells me why you are in such a hurry to get to Brazzaville. It tells me that you're a pack of murderers, and that you have with you what is probably the most valuable object in all Africa!"

THERE was fear in Graber's face at the coldly indicting words, fear and something else. He whirled toward the trader, his lips tight, his eyes filled with shock and calculating greed.

"Good Lord, Trent," he said hoarsely, "just because some nigger is dead doesn't prove we killed him. And as to that thing you say is valuable—hell, I haven't any idea what you're talking about!"

"No!" Keever Trent's voice was non-committal. "Then let me explain. Among all of the tribes of the Congo Basin and the Tanganyika Territory is a king whose power is supreme. All other tribal kings are subordinate to him and his wishes. However, he exerts his power only in times of drouth, famine or war. Umbula has been that king for more than thirty years, and I have been lucky enough to be considered by him as a friend."

Graber sneered. "A nigger king for a friend, bah," he snorted. "He'd probably cut your throat for the fun of it."

Trent nodded. "Yes," he admitted, "he would—if I merited such swift justice."

Graber ground out his cigarette. "Then what are you getting so hot about?" he asked, "hell, you don't owe anything to a black!"

"Color doesn't mean a thing in friendship," the trader said softly, "and when you've lived as long as I have you'll appreciate that fact."

"All right, all right," Otto Graber snapped impatiently.

"Well," Keever Trent's gaze sharpened, "as king of this district, Umbula had a talisman that had been handed down to him through generation after generation of his father's people—the mummified figure of the first king, which is called the Father of Fathers. This shrunken man is about twenty inches tall, and tribal witch doctors have vested in it the powers of good and evil. As long as it is in the proper hands, it will bring good hunting and good luck to all this territory; but in the wrong

hands it can bring only evil to everyone concerned."

"Nigger superstition!" Otto Graber said skeptically, but a tiny film of perspiration beads dotted his low forehead.

Keever Trent nodded. "Maybe," he admitted, "I wouldn't know. But I've seen things happen in Africa that can't be explained by science or cold logic."

The words trailed into silence, and for a long moment there was something in the African night, a brooding watchfulness that was almost tangible in its waiting force. Otto Graber shivered in voluntary reflex.

"Well," he declared belligerently, "I don't know anything about this nigger king or the mummy, so let's drop the subject. Now, for the last time, will you act as our guide to Brazzaville?"

Keever Trent finished loading his pipe, held it unlighted in his strong teeth. After a bit, he nodded slowly.

"I'll guide you out," he agreed. "We'll get a safari together tomorrow and leave the next sunup. I'll hear your full story later, in regard to your reasons for escaping. But let me give you a final warning. If you murdered Umbula and stole the Father of Fathers, you haven't one chance in ten thousand in escaping the Obantis. And if they take you, your death won't be pleasant, for they are head-hunters."

Otto Graber laughed mockingly, patted the twin holsters at his hips. "I've got plenty of arguments against head-hunters," he said, "and I'll be only too glad to use them."

He rose, bowed ironically, stumped away across the clearing, his footsteps sounding padded and irregular because of the round and heavy wooden leg that served in the place of his right leg, from the knee down.

Keever Trent watched the German go across the clearing, and he shook his head slightly. He knew that a murderer walked loose, and he wondered just how long it would be before retribution would arrive.

He lit his pipe, walked toward the witch doctor's hut. Crouching low, he entered, talked for minutes. Within a half hour, a drum began to beat in the nearby jungle, its message traveling miles to the next drummer, then was relayed again and again to its destination.

Keever Trent, awake on the cot in his

thatched hut, listened to the message winging through the night. He made a silent prayer for the soul of a murdered black man, remembering a vow of friendship that hadn't known the limitations of color or race. Then rolling over onto his side, he drifted into dreamless slumber.

II

KEEVER TRENT handled the bush knife with a casual dexterity that came from years of such work. Creeping vine and intertwined lianas parted before the razor edge of the knife, and slowly he led the safari through the matted jungle.

Behind him, the safari stretched for more than two hundred yards; three white men following close upon the trader's heels, and behind them the twisting queue of Bantu porters came without the usual chatter of the jungle men.

Keever Trent made a final slash, pushed his way into a small clearing. He noted its every detail, then turned slowly to Otto Graber.

"We make camp here," he said.

Otto Graber wiped sweat from his flushed face, sank to the scaly surface of an ironwood log. He had been having hard going for the past few days because of his wooden leg, but the gnawing fear within him had kept him going forward.

"You think we'll be safe?" he asked.

Keever Trent smiled without humor, glanced around the clearing's edge.

"I wouldn't know," he said slowly. "We could be entirely surrounded by hostile natives or our pursuers and not know it until they attacked. No, keep your hand off your gun; if we have watchers, we do not want them to think that we know they are there."

"To hell with them," Graber said savagely. "This continual trekking, without knowing a thing of what's going on about us, is driving me crazy!"

"Easy, Otto. . . ." Grimstead, the second of the fugitives, laid a conciliatory hand upon the German's shoulders. "Trent won't let us down."

Farquier, the third member of the party, nodded soberly. "This thing is out of our hands now," he said. "We've got to be smart and not make further enemies on this trek."

Otto Graber nodded slowly, but his hot eyes never left Kever Trent's expressionless face. "All right," he agreed reluctantly. "But let me tell you this, Trent: If we are attacked, I'll put a bullet in you before they get me."

A tiny muscle twitched in Kever Trent's jaw, then he turned slowly away. A second later, his steady voice raised its tone as he gave quick instructions in Bantu to the porters. He watched carefully as camp was made and the light tents set up. Then, satisfied that he had done all that was humanly possible, he threw himself upon the cot until the meal was cooked and served by his number one boy.

He thought as he lay there, and the thoughts that raced with quicksilver-like speed through his mind were not pleasant. His original judgment of the three fugitives had not changed in the slightest in the days of trekking, but rather had intensified from his close association with them.

Before the safari had left Kindu, he had made a personal search of the equipment of the three men, knowing that his search would be futile, but hoping against hope that Graber might have been foolish enough to have carried the shrunken mummy with him. He had found nothing, and felt instinctively that the German had sent the Father of Fathers on ahead, so that in case of capture he would have the means with which to buy his life.

The German's story, verified by questioning of his two companions, had been horribly simple. The three of them had sold out the French and British in the Italian invasion of Africa, by ruining and sabotaging equipment and by acting as spies for the enemy. But not satisfied with the money taken from the Black Shirts, they had tried to double cross their employers by selling information to the French and British.

Upon their successful invasion, the Black Shirts had called the three renegades for an accounting, and the three had escaped only by shooting down the four soldiers sent to place them under arrest.

Umbula, the undisputed ruler of his territory in Africa, had come to the Italian conquerors to make a peace treaty and to make terms under which his people would live. He had been slain while sleeping one night, and his sacred talisman stolen.

The murder had not been discovered for almost twenty-four hours, a full day of trekking for the three renegades. And it was another two days before full suspicion of murder fell upon the fugitives. When the court of King Umbula finally agreed that Graber and his companions had slain their king, the jungle drums had started their weird signal-making.

"Food, Bwana," Lamu, the number one boy, said from outside the tent.

Trent rolled to a sitting position, forgetting the problem for the moment, suddenly ravenous for the first cooked food of the day. He stepped from the tent, seated himself on the camp stool, placed knife to the antelope steak on the plate before him on the tiny table.

NIGHT had come with incredible swiftness in those few minutes he had lain on the cot, a swift blotting out of all sunlight that was characteristic of the Congo. The moon had not yet risen, and except for the tiny glows of cooking fires, there was no light anywhere. Even the clearing's edge could not be discerned.

And then a lantern glowed at the touch of a match in Lamu's hand. He set the lantern a few yards away, so that night-flying insects would not bother the white men.

Keever Trent ate slowly, conscious of the glowering glances of Otto Graber at the table at which he and Grimstead sat. He ignored them, intent on his thoughts, plotting the route to follow for the remaining days of the safari.

"Where's Farquier?" he heard Graber ask ill-temperedly.

Grimstead shrugged. "I left him in the tent; he said he was too tired to eat."

"Well, get him out here. If he doesn't take his quinine, we'll have him sick on our hands from fever."

Grimstead shoved back his stool, strode toward the tent across the end of the clearing. He lifted the oiled-silk flap, ducked within. For a moment there was silence.

Then with a strangled shout of horror, Grimstead burst from the tent stumbled toward Graber.

"He's dead!" he gasped horrifiedly. "He's lying there, dead!"

Keever Trent was on his feet instantly, feeling a premonition of disaster plucking

at his heart with icy fingers. He leaped forward, whirled the terrified man toward him with steady hands.

"Dead?" he snapped. "Are you sure of that?"

Grimstead nodded, his face ashen, his eyes seeking Graber's. "Hell yes," he half-screamed, "he's dead! Somebody's cut off his head!"

Keever Trent turned slowly to Otto Graber, his eyes flashing with silent condemnation.

"Obantis," he said succinctly.

There was the slightest whisper in the air, then the light thud of something hitting the table. The three men dropped their gaze, their faces tight with emotion as they saw the tiny, monkey-furred, coup arrow quivering gently in the plywood of the table.

"Banyuto a' ke'uk a' lenaun." The words were almost a whisper, the harsh syllables muted as though by distance.

"Banyuto takes a head for his father," Kever Trent translated slowly, aloud.

Somewhere in the brooding night, a lion coughed rumblingly, and the obscene cackle of an hyena broke on mid-note. And at that cough of the prowling lion, all noises ceased, and the velvety blackness of the night was tinged with presence of an unseen menace that struck with such casual swiftness.

III

BANYUTO glided through the almost impenetrable jungle like a wraith, barely disturbing the fronds and vines with his superbly proportioned six feet of muscular body.

There was the fire of triumph in his eyes, and a faint smile upon his mobile lips, as he raced toward his companions a few miles to the North. He had counted coup, and in the strong clutch of his right hand was the grisly reward of his quiet foray into the camp of his father's murderers.

He remembered the exultation that had been in his heart when his keen knife had slit the rear wall of the tent and he had found the sleeping Farquier within. There was something poetic in the swift justice he had meted out to one of the men he followed, killing him in his sleep as he had.

He had crept into the tent without the slightest rustle of sound, held the man absolutely motionless with one steely-muscled hand, and then removed the victim's head with a beheading slash that had been taught him the day he reached manhood.

Two minutes, it had taken; and then he was safely back into the jungle, his coup arrow and his mocking whisper stabbing fear into the hearts of the three whites. He chuckled deep in his chest as he sped through the night, forced his features into immobility as he burst silently into the clearing in which his companions waited.

"Wallah!" Okayi came sinuously to his feet, his dark face splitting in a wide grin. "It is a good head."

"Good enough," Banyuto said slowly, his breathing barely strained by the swift run.

"Come," Neepah gestured toward the red smudge of glowing coals to one side. "All is ready."

There was almost utter silence from the three as they squatted around the glowing coals. The tiny reddish light from the embers highlighted the flat planes of their painted faces, deepened nose and eye shadows, made the three seem even more savage than they were.

Banyuto did the real work. With the aid of a small keen knife, he flayed the skin from the head, splitting it down the back, then peeling it from the skull with one deft movement.

He handled his gruesome trophy with the casual skill of long familiarity, kneading hot oil into it with long sinewy fingers. From time to time, he balanced it on a long stick, roasted it over the coals, watching critically as it gradually became more shrunken.

Neepah molded clay into the rough shape of a man's head time and again, each time making a smaller one, silently critical as Banyuto fitted the skin and worked more oil into it.

Slowly the hours passed, the three working alternately on the intricate shrinking and mummifying process, grunting in quiet monosyllables to each other as their deft fingers finished their tasks.

Then, just an hour before dawn, they finished their task. It was not the perfect job that they had done in the past, but it was more than was necessary to strike

terror into the men for whom it was intended.

Banyuto held the mummified head between his knees, laced a sinew up the back, tightening the skin over the clay form. Then he laced three loops of sinew through the lips, closing them tightly so that the murdered man's soul might not speak against his murderer.

One final moment he held the tiny head in his hand, cynically admiring the work. The head was less in size than the girth of his fist. It was an oily black, and the skin had been tanned into leather. Fitting two white stones into the eyesockets, Banyuto rose.

"We leave this for a warning," he said slowly, portentously. "My Father of Fathers must not leave our country."

Okayi shifted, indecision in his eyes. "I do not know," he said shortly, "that we are doing right. The grey-man-who-trades told us to wait for another drum signal from him. He said he would recover the Father of Fathers for us without bloodshed."

"Wah!" Neepah spat disgustedly. "His skin is white; he lies to protect his white friends."

"He has never lied before!" Okayi said hotly, "Never that I can remember."

Banyuto shook his head, held up a hand for silence. "He does not lie," he said. "But he is one, and we are three. Too, he is gentle like a woman when it comes to torture. This is the best way."

He nodded silently toward the jungle wall, and the three savages seemed to fade into its tangled depth.

Behind them, because of their jungle skill, there was not the slightest token to betray the fact that three men had camped there over-night.

And already a long way from the clearing, the three Obantis raced toward the camp of the fugitive white men.

IV

THE round stump of Otto Graber's wooden leg made a sucking sound in the mud, as he shifted impatiently beneath Keever Trent's gaze.

"Why the hell aren't we already on our way?" Graber snarled. "We could have been five miles along by now."

Keever Trent finished his tea, set the tin cup onto the table. "You don't know these natives, Graber," he said slowly. "They won't set a foot into the jungle while it is still dark; they seem to think that the ghosts of the dead wait in darkness to suck their life from them."

Graber laughed harshly. "Hell, all they need is the touch of a whip on their backs. They'll move plenty fast then."

Keever Trent moved then, coming to his feet with a suddenness that startled the fat German so he moved back a step.

"Touch one of my men with a whip," Keever Trent said tightly, "and I'll take the whip to you. You're not dealing with coast natives now; these are bush men, and they hunt heads for the fun of it."

Graber licked dry lips, glanced around the awakening safari. "All right," he growled, "Only get them to moving. Hell, we don't know but what we'll be attacked any moment."

A tiny black ball curved from the jungle wall, rolled almost to the men's feet.

"Banyuto keaubo a t'opo. Ma'len ko' supo." The flat mocking words bounced from the jungle, the sound slowly dwindling into silence.

Graber stepped back, his eyes distending in a chalky face.

"It's a human head," he gasped, "Gott im Himmel, it's Farquier!" He clutched at Trent's sleeve. "What were those words?" he asked, "What did they say?"

"Banyuto demands the guilty one confess," the trader translated, "otherwise, all shall die."

Otto Graber dropped slackly onto the camp stool, shaking a bit as he watched Keever Trent pick up the shrunken head. His heavy lips moved once or twice as he saw the trader hide the head from the sight of any of the awakened bearers.

"Gott im Himmel, Trent," he swore, "I know nothing of this native murder, nor of this Father of Fathers talisman. Can't you make those niggers believe that?"

Keever Trent lit his pipe before answering, his usually mild eyes suddenly flat and shiny.

"I'll not tell them a damned thing," he snapped. "I'm morally certain that you murdered Umbula and stole the talisman. I think I know why you're keeping it, too. You think that by using it as a threat, by

saying you will destroy it, that you will force the natives to bring you rough diamonds, and skins, and whatever else of value they can wring from the jungle. You've brought a civilized ransom business to the jungle, and I don't like it."

OTTO GRABER sneered, his right hand fondling the gun at his waist. "All right," he said. "Suppose I did do all that you say, what will you do about it—turn me over to the niggers?"

Keever Trent shook his head. "No," he said, "for the simple reason that you're a white man. But I'll tell you this: I'm the least of the factors against you. If our bearers mutiny, both of us will end up as trophies in a head-hunt."

Otto Graber's attitude instantly changed, became whining. "Listen, Trent," he said, "you can tell everybody that I haven't got this mummy. Hell, you searched every bit of luggage I've got; you know I haven't got it!"

Keever Trent nodded. "I can tell them that," he said, "But it won't do any good; they would just torture the information out of you."

Grimstead shoved through the flaps of his tent, his face tight and drawn from a partially sleepless night.

"Morning," he grunted, slumped into a camp chair, reached for the steaming tea pot.

He poured the tea, drank it slowly, then set the cup back on the table. His eyes roved over the encampment, but he didn't speak. He sat silently, giving no attention to the sudden silence of the other men. He grinned suddenly, his jaw falling slackly open, his smile a set grimace that irritated the huge German.

"Shut your mouth," Grimstead," Graber barked, "and wipe that damned smile from your face."

Grimstead head sank a bit, but his grin did not change. He stared out of unseeing eyes at the tin cup before him, not hearing Graber's low words.

Otto Graber leaned forward, and the sound of his hand against Grimstead's cheek was loud in the early morning silence.

Then Otto Graber froze motionless, an inarticulate cry of fear straining his heavy throat. For Grimstead folded slowly, then

slid very slackly to the muddy ground.

Keever Trent moved suddenly, bent over the slack body. He reached out a suddenly unsteady hand, plucked a thin, cotton tipped sliver of wood from the back of Grimstead's neck. He held the dart up for a second in silent contemplation.

"He's dead," he said slowly. "This is an Abanti, poisoned blow gun-dart."

And for the third time within twelve hours, Banyuto's mocking hate-filled voice hissed forth from the jungle.

"Confess, fat man, and return my Father of Fathers; before my vengeance reaches out for you!" he said in Bantu.

There was the glitter of fast motion, and quivering in the table top was the second coup arrow.

V

"WE gain nothing this way," Neepah said slowly. "Let us attack, and force the truth from the fat one."

Banyuto sat silent for a moment, his broad back resting comfortably against the bole of an ebony tree, his thumb testing the edge of his knife. He spat finally, tucked crude snuff into his lower lip.

"Our friend, the-grey-man-who-trades, called to me this morning that such violence could not succeed."

"Wah!" Okayi snapped disgustedly. "I still say he plays with the fat man. I say we capture the man with one leg and find the Father of Fathers by fire and knife."

Banyuto nodded slowly. "It seems the best," he admitted, "but first, we must rid ourselves of the safari men. There are but three of us, and we have no chance against so many thundersticks."

They made plans then, plotting with a jungle strategy that came from many forays, Neepah and Okayi finally agreeing to Banyuto's plan. Then as the sun made its final swing toward the horizon, they came to their feet, drifted into the jungle.

"BWANA? Bwana Tren'," Lamu called quietly into the tent of the trader. "Wake and listen."

Keever Trent rolled slowly to his side, his hand grasping the revolver in automatic reflex. Perspiration made his heavy clothes cling to his lean body, and the afternoon heat dulled his senses.

"Huh? Oh, it's you, Lamu. Well, what do you want?" he said sleepily.

"They're gone, bwana, gone like shadows."

"Who's gone?" Trent snapped. "What the devil are you talking about?"

The sleepiness vanished instantly from Kever Trent's grey eyes. He rolled from the cot, stepped from the tent, his gun ready for action in his hand. Lamu hovered fearfully at his side.

The clearing was empty, every native bearer gone. Kever Trent whirled toward the German's tent, halted at the sound of heavy snoring. He turned, his keen eyes taking in every detail.

Supplies had been taken to the extent that only a few boxes were left. Small fires still smoked lightly, as though the men around them had left them on a sudden whim.

"Banyuto called from the jungle," Lamu said, "and told all to leave or feel his wrath."

"Banyuto!" Kever Trent's eyes followed the edge of the clearing. "And you stayed?"

Lamu spat disdainfully. "Wah!" he said. "A man does not desert his number one bwana."

For a moment Kever Trent's eyes were misty, and his hand touched the black's shoulder. "Good boy," he said. "But you know what it means: Banyuto and his men will attack within minutes."

Lamu nodded, lifted a Krag rifle in a steady hand. "I know," he said softly, then jerked a bit.

He fell, his sentence still unfinished, the white fuzz of the blow-gun dart equidistant between his shoulders.

Kever Trent whirled, lifted his gun. But before he could line on any target, he felt the pin-prick bite of a dart in the biceps of his left arm.

He swore suddenly, turned to call a warning to the sleeping German. But the poison was swift, and before he could call, he could feel a dreadful numbness paralyzing his entire body.

He crumpled then, twisting slightly as he fell, still trying to shout a warning, the gun dropping from his nerveless hand.

He saw the three Obantis hurtle from the jungle, saw them race silently, with a horrible intentness, toward Otto Graber's

Some Like it Hot . . .

and some like it cold; but no matter what your taste is, ACTION STORIES is right. Every thrill-packed issue of this magazine contains not one, but FOUR types of action fiction:

Fantastic - - -

Adventure on other planets by such authors as Eando Binder, Ray Cummings and Nelson S. Bond.

Adventure - - -

Follow the horizon trail to darkest Africa and the South Seas with Albert Richard Wetjen, Ted Roscoe and others.

Western - - - -

Top-hand writers, the cream of Western fictioneers, Coburn, Cunningham, Karth, Starr and others.

Mystery - - - -

Streamlined, hard-hitting detective-action for the modern crime-fiction fan.

All in the current issue of

Action Stories

on sale at all newsstands

tent. He heard the startled, fearful shriek of the doomed man. And then a pall of utter darkness closed over every sense.

Had he retained consciousness one second longer, he would have seen the three warriors emerging from the tent, carrying Otto Graber's body in rough hands.

Banyuto paused one moment over Keever Trent's body, his knife gleaming in his hand. Then he returned to his companions, and the three of them, with their limp burden faded into the jungle.

Somewhere a macaw chattered raucously. A dik-dik deer peered into the clearing, then vanished without a rustle. A huge red ant found Keever Trent's body, was joined by another and another. Slowly, then with blinding speed, the African night sped blackness over the rank jungle.

VI

THE white man staggered into Mbopa, his clothes in rags, his body swollen and poisoned by the bites of jungle ants and the venomous stings of insects. He beat at the half-wild dogs with a short club of wood, laughing a bit hysterically as they ran with yelps of pain.

Women and warriors followed him at a safe distance, as he walked toward the chief's hut, strangely silenced by the blazing fire in the white man's eyes.

The pain-wracked and weakened man halted before the hut, raised his voice.

"Banyuto," he called hoarsely, "come from within, and hear."

There was a stir of movement, and Banyuto's stately figure moved out into the intense sunlight. He stood imperiously for a moment, sudden recognition flaring in his eyes.

"I am here," he said simply.

Keever Trent felt an insane desire to laugh, but held his face expressionless. He straightened his shoulders, trying to forget the three horrible weeks that he had fought his way through the unfriendly jungle.

"First," he said, "I wish to thank you for sparing my life. That dart could have been one with a death poison, instead of a sleep."

Banyuto nodded slowly, forcing any sympathy or friendliness from his face, knowing that neither was wanted.

"I did what I thought was best for my friend," he said.

Keever Trent sagged a bit, straightened. "You gained what you seeked?" he asked.

Inner pain flared in Banyuto's eyes. "Wah!" he said shortly. "He was a hyena; he died before the torture had but commenced."

Keever Trent nodded. "I thought as much," he said, "when you did not return. Therefore, I came to you."

"You are welcome," Banyuto said gravely. "But there is much sadness in the village, for the Father of Fathers is gone forever."

Keever Trent moved a pace forward. "I am a man of my word with my friends and enemies," he said slowly, speaking so that all might hear. "I promised that the Father of Fathers would be returned."

Banyuto was silent, but his nostrils flared with inner excitement.

Keever Trent twisted a cloth plug from the cylinder of wood he carried. Slowly, with infinite care, he removed a shrunken mummified figure of a man from within, held it toward Banyuto.

"He was clever," he said, "for he knew that no one would look within the length of limb he used for a leg. I found it where it had been torn loose in your struggle with him."

Banyuto lifted the mummy, pride and happiness in his face, as he showed it to his people.

There were low cries of awe and thanksgiving at the sight of the sacred talisman in the king's hand; then all of the watchers made deep obeisances toward it.

Keever Trent made his voice ring. "Never," he said, "let there be doubt of me again."

And in the sudden solicitude of the Obantis, as he fell, half-fainting, he knew that he had nothing more to fear. Too, he knew that he had brought a great and final end to the ghost safari that had started so long before.

He was smiling to himself, as he was lifted into the coolness of the chief's hut, and there was a great peace in his heart. For in the white man's handshake that Banyuto offered there was a silent pledge of friendship for him and all white men who would follow in the years to come.

You're in the Army Now ! You're Not Behind a Plow! You'll Never Get Rich

You're in the Army Now!

You'll enjoy the true-to-life story of young Matt Kilby, who gave up a blazing ring career to throw his punches for Uncle Sam.

A SOCK FOR UNCLE SAM

A novelet of U. S. Army life

By Bill Cook

PUNCHES ON PARADE

Fight-expert Doc McGee records the latest happenings in the World of Slug.

TOMMY LOUGHRAN—

Slashing Rapier of the Ring

The booklength life-story of the fastest, shiftiest fighter of our times.

Two Slam-Bang Novelets

COLD MEAT FOR THE CHAMP!

By Tom O'Neill

"They can't come back . . . they can't come back!" buzzed once-great Corky's battered brain.

CIRCUS FISTS

By Pat Stagg

Fate crossed Smokey Saunders and Bingo Dean with a sneak punch below the belt!

Three Hard-Hitting Stories

TOUGH GUY

By Jeff Dunn

They can't sidestep the door marked EXIT!

LEATHERNECK LIGHTNING

By Arthur J. Burks

McNamara had to fight the whole Corps.

THE BRUTE-SMASHER

By Ed DuPerrier

Roughhouse Grady ruled with cast-iron fists!

All in the current issue of

FIGHT STORIES

*On sale at all newsstands—
get your copy today.*

CODE OF THE VELDT

By CLYDE IRVINE

Trooper Niklaus, of the Rhodesian Mounted Police, knew that if he did his plain duty an innocent man would hang!

SWAYING wearily in the saddle, his body sore and aching after days of travel across the *veldt*, Trooper Theodore S. Niklaus of the Rhodesian Mounted Police observed with a sigh of relief the rising tide of green jungle grass on the horizon.

Somewhere in that bush country a man was hiding. There was a price of five hundred pounds on his head. And it was the particular job of the mountie to get that man—dead or alive.

Those were Reinecke's words—*dead or alive!*

Trooper Theodore Niklaus could have been forgiven for whatever vagrant thoughts the sum of five hundred pounds might inspire. But, although he had been giving it considerable thought, at the moment he was ruminating on a phrase which, despite his weariness, he was humming under his breath. It was a line from a comic opera. And it said, among other things, that a policeman's lot was not a happy one.

Trooper Niklaus believed it. In fact, there was every indication that a policeman's lot was mostly unhappy . . . both for himself and the fugitive he was pursuing.

Thinking thus, with his black tracker riding dutifully and respectfully ten paces behind him, he reflected that it was pretty tough to be chased mercilessly across Africa. Yes, sir—tough!

Undoubtedly it was pretty tough. But the man in hiding amid that green hell was also pretty tough, if all reports were accurate. Not only pretty tough to live, they said, but a chap who might prove just as tough to die.

For he had killed a man. A man named Polt Lesser, mysterious African figure, whose companions had been, until the moment of his untimely death, Ernst Van Reinecke and Diamond Harry Webster,

the latter now hidden in the jungle, seeking escape from the arm of the law. That arm was represented by the figure of Trooper Theodore S. Niklaus, now very tired, his eyes aching and his body saddle weary.

As he swayed in his saddle, Theodore speculated on the value set on Diamond Harry's head by the remaining figure of the trio, Van Reinecke. Five hundred pounds is quite a sum of money and is much more than most men are rated, dead or alive.

So far, the reward had not achieved its purpose. It had not succeeded in producing one person, white or native, who could with certainty deliver the body of Diamond Harry Webster. Only the matter-of-fact deductions of Captain "Brick" Houston, Theodore's commanding officer, had sent the young patrolman on this course.

"I'm not saying he's holing up there for sure, you understand!" Houston had barked. "But if I knew as much about Africa as Harry does—that's where I'd make for! If he's not actually inside the Belgian border he isn't far from it. Get around a bit and see what you can see. And—good luck!"

So Trooper Niklaus was seeing what he could see. He was also feeling devilish hungry when an unsuspecting guinea-hen arose, stayed long enough in his sights for aiming, and was shot.

There is usually very little of a guinea-hen left when a rifle bullet has connected with it but if the rifle is fired by a crack shot there is sometimes enough for a good meal. And a good meal was very important at just that minute.

Theodore noticed, with satisfaction, that the bird wheeled on one shattered wing like a disabled plane and then crashed amid the tall green grass at the edge of the jungle.



The man on the bed of boughs and grass lifted the gun and fired . . .

AT the instant the guinea-hen dived to its death the man whom Trooper Niklaus pursued was lying on his back, his face gray with fever except for the black tangled beard that had grown during his weeks of hiding. His eyes, fever-bright and restless, had opened widely as the dead bird landed a few feet from his almost invisible hut of wild-fig tree roots and festooned trailers. Footsteps outside decided his future actions.

"Here it is, at last," he murmured and groped blindly for his revolver. For Diamond Harry Webster had no illusions.

He had been listed as a murderer—and the British hang murderers.

Better to die, he thought, in fair fight than be carried in handcuffs to Salisbury and tried there by stony-faced judges, convicted by equally impassive jurymen and hanged by the neck until he was dead.

Especially as he was in no condition to travel, he thought, somewhat crazily delighted with his own wit. No, it was all stupid, this way of dying by rope and bell and black cap. Better the hot blast of a gun and then oblivion.

So, with his remaining energy, he

heaved the revolver upward, aimed it at the hanging leaves that constituted the door of his hideaway and the instant Trooper Niklaus stuck his young and inquisitive head through those leaves—*fired!*

Trooper Niklaus recoiled and the guinea-hen he had picked up with pleasant thoughts of dinner fell from his hand. The man on the bed of boughs and grass lifted the gun again and fired once more, but he was so weary, so ill and fever-ridden, that it exploded into the ground. And without more ado, Diamond Harry Webster fainted.

Now, on his weary journey, Trooper Niklaus had kept himself awake by imagining how pleasantly thrilling it would be if, by some unaccountable accident, he actually did discover the hunted outlaw and, by capturing him, received for his bravery and intrepid initiative the sum of five hundred pounds.

For he could do a lot with five hundred pounds. He could, for instance, marry Elsa Van Elst, the pretty Boer girl whom he had loved for many months. And he could buy a farm where he could see Elsa waiting for him on the *stoep* when the day's work was done and he was back from the fields or the *veldt*.

Naturally, he would no longer be a mountie. In fact he would resign at once and become what his forefathers had been for ages, a farmer who bred good cattle, tilled the fields and had a decent vineyard. There was nothing that anyone could wish for which could be better than that, especially if Elsa shared it with him.

So, seeing the sudden flash of Diamond Harry's gun and feeling its hot blast on his face, he congratulated himself on his luck.

It would have been so easy for this desperate hunted man to have killed him with that first shot! The gun, still smoking, lay on the ground where it had dropped from the nerveless, skeletal fingers of Diamond Harry. And, in a few quick steps, Trooper Niklaus had possession of it.

He broke it open, stared at it intently and sliding it into his belt, yelled for the tracker. On a leaf of his notebook he scribbled a few lines, barked a stream of Swahili and sent the native back on his tracks, not without an inward feeling that

he might have stopped him long enough to help cook the guinea-hen. Then he turned to the fever-weakened fugitive and began to rouse him from his stupor, forcing a drop or two of brandy down the unconscious man's throat.

HE had his hands full for about a week after that. Diamond Harry threatened to quit this vale of tears instantaneously. His frail body seemed suspended between the jungle and the unknown haven of all flesh, as a kite riding the wind. And only the trooper's background of native lore and farm remedies pulled the stricken man back from the yawning gates of Death.

Finally, when Trooper Niklaus expected his tracker report at any moment, the fugitive showed an unwonted energy and insisted on rising from his bed. As the hours passed he continued to improve. By nightfall he was almost his old self again, apart from the fact that he was worn as a blade of elephant-grass.

"I suppose I've to thank you for saving my life?" he said ungraciously. "Well, it was against my will, you can be sure of that. I've no wish to go back and be hanged for a murder I didn't commit!" He glared at the trooper angrily.

"I haven't arrested many men," Theodore said quietly, "But every man I did arrest said he was innocent. I used to believe that. Now I don't!"

"Of course you don't!" Diamond Harry growled, his green eyes slitted, as a leopard's eyes slit when it is peering into the light. "You damn cops never believe anybody. You wouldn't believe your mother if she got down on her bended knees and begged for mercy!"

"My mother died some years ago," the trooper remarked, just as quietly as the other was noisy. "But, taking it by and large, I'd sooner believe my mother than you!" He lit a cigarette thoughtfully. "The reward for you was posted by your pal—Ernst Van Reinecke! If *he* believes you guilty why shouldn't I?"

"*Reinecke?*" Diamond Harry's brows were thundery. "Reinecke is a rat!"

"Maybe," Trooper Niklaus admitted. "But he says he saw you shoot Polt Lesser. Apparently you and Van Reinecke had been arguing with Lesser. You accused Lesser of double-crossing you in a

diamond deal. Probably the usual IDB stuff? Reinecke says he was standing beside you when you fired and killed Lesser!"

"Was he?"

"Yes, or so he says. That will come out at the trial."

"There isn't going to be any trial," Webster said meaningly. "I'm not going back there. Nor—if I can help it—*are you!*"

"No?" The trooper's voice was disarmingly credulous. "I suppose you have a plan to prevent me—or *you* from going back?"

"I have," said Diamond Harry vindictively. "*This is it!*"

He had lifted the heavy jar in which Trooper Niklaus had been carrying water for him during his illness. Now, suiting the action to the word, he brought it down heavily on the young mountie's head.

And with no sound other than the shattering of the jar around his unsuspecting ears, Trooper Theodore S. Niklaus was forthwith ushered into a land in which darkness was the only color.

WHEN the tracker, silently ferocious at his enforced return, arrived with Trooper Niklaus's note Captain "Brick" Houston read it hurriedly, swore sulphurously and picked up a telephone. Into its black mouth he spoke words that should have melted it but, by a miracle, didn't.

Then he lit a black cheroot, leaned back in his chair, fastened his gimlet eyes on the native and said "Now, what's the rest of this? Where is he? Is he hurt? Did you see Diamond Harry? How soon can you get back there?"

To all of which the disgusted but temporarily subdued tracker gave intelligible answers, was dismissed and sought his bed, his bones a torture. And while he slept, telephones rang, stern-faced men barked orders, telegraph keys clicked and a man with a face like a stone ax sought out Ernst Van Reinecke to tell him that Theodore S. Niklaus, a trooper in the Rhodesian Mounted Police, had arrested the murderer of his friend, Polt Lesser.

"I will be delighted to pay the reward, inspector!" Reinecke said eagerly. "Is Webster dead?"

"No!" The inspector was gruff. "He

isn't dead! But—just as you told us—we got him with the murder-gun. The .32 you said he carried. Everything seems to check up. But . . ."

"If there is any way in which I can be of assistance—" Van Reinecke began. For some reason he seemed disappointed.

"Well, you might come down to headquarters with me," the inspector allowed. "There's one or two little things we don't quite understand. How soon can you be ready?"

"I'll come at once!" Reinecke said.

And in a moment or so later both men stepped into the police inspector's car. It started away silently and smoothly.

WHEN Trooper Niklaus, his head grinding a mass of metallic odds and ends that seemed to be imbued with devilish indestructibility, awoke, he perceived that Diamond Harry Webster was gone.

He expected that. He also expected to be tied up, as he was, but as he ruminated on the inhumanity of man, he tried with ever-increasing strength to release his bonds. It was a pretty hopeless struggle.

The hours sped as he tugged and tore at the skillfully-tied thongs of leather with which Diamond Harry had festooned him. And he grew tired and the blood spurted on his wrists while, in something approaching terror, he saw the lithe form of a mamba winding around the floor. He could not keep his fascinated eyes from it as a green lizard crossed his path. The snake struck.

There is a point at which the human constitution will collapse. And this point had been reached by the trooper, who now emulated his erstwhile prisoner and fainted dead away.

That probably saved his life, for there was no green and deadly mamba when the tracker arrived and found his master almost dead from lack of food and water and the pain of his bonds. In his pouch the messenger carried a letter.

Which, as soon as he had read it, made Trooper Niklaus swear as sulphurously as Captain "Brick" Houston had sworn. With every muscle in his aching body screaming with pain, he hoisted himself into the tracker's saddle. His own horse, he had noted, was gone, doubtless ridden by the escaping prisoner, Webster.

"You black-boy know *spoor*?" he demanded from the sullen native. Receiving a moody nod in answer, he ordered him to begin tracking. "I've to catch Diamond Harry," he muttered through his puffed-up lips. "And I'll get him if I've to follow him to China!"

Together they set out, searching the jungle for a man who was running for his life. And, as the trooper knew, a man's life was valuable to some people. In this case the sum of five hundred pounds, like a carrot dangled before a donkey's nose, was the sum mentioned. He and the tracker pressed onward.

The jungle here is a terror for horses and all hooved animals, for clouds of *tsetse* flies make the lives of the beasts short and their death is painful. It wasn't long before the tracker's horse succumbed to the attacks of the flies. After which, bitten and sweating, their clothes tattered from the gripping talons of thorns, the two men plunged deeper and deeper into the jungle.

It was days later when they stumbled into a native *kraal* and found Diamond Harry Webster raving like a lunatic. His body was wasted and his eyes were wildly feverish and there was the same look about him that Trooper Niklaus had fought successfully before.

But this time it was harder. There were no medicines. So it took a little longer before Diamond Harry opened his eyes with a sane look in their green depths and groaned aloud as he caught sight of his implacable enemy.

"I give up!" he muttered before Trooper Niklaus could speak. "You—you're not human!" He licked his dry lips and the trooper put a water-jar, extraordinarily like the one which Harry had biffed over his head, to the parched mouth.

"Drink this!" he said. "I'm taking you in!"

"Okay!" Diamond Harry surrendered, almost willingly it seemed. "I'll go quietly—this time!"

"You bet you will!" Trooper Niklaus declared firmly. "This is a helluva way to treat a man who wants to give you a Christmas dinner?"

"What?"

"You heard me! I've got a turkey, a plum-pudding—and a can of cranberry

sauce!" explained the policeman sharply. "I left it all in that hut, buried!"

"It'll spoil!" Diamond Harry said. He screwed his eyes up at Trooper Niklaus and asked weakly, "Am I dreaming? Did you say turkey—and plum-pudding—and—and—?"

"And a can of cranberry sauce," the trooper repeated patiently. "The turkey's in a can, too! So it won't spoil—not 'til we get back and eat it, anyhow!"

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand," the fugitive said in a very weak voice. "Tell me again—after I've had a sleep!"

He fell back wearily on the native bed of grass and thongs and Trooper Theodore S. Niklaus grinned down at him, rose to his feet and went out of the hut.

CAPTAIN "BRICK" HOUSTON smiled grimly at the bedraggled figure of Trooper Niklaus and the equally bedraggled and woefully weak figure of the hunted outlaw, Diamond Harry Webster.

"Well, you're here at last," he said bitterly. "It's been a helluva job keeping up with you, Webster, but young Niklaus got you—as we always get our men!"

"If you're all like him, there isn't an ant in Africa could get away from you," Harry admitted ruefully. "This limpet—!"

"Did you enjoy your Christmas dinner in the jungle?" asked Houston irrelevantly. "I thought it was the least we could do!"

Diamond Harry stared. "The least—?"

"Didn't Niklaus tell you?" He paused. "Oh, I forgot to mention that, Trooper. Have you got the note I sent you?"

"It's pretty dirty. Torn, too, it seems!" Niklaus handed it over.

Houston read it and grinned.

Ignoring Diamond Harry's lowering brows and tightened lips, Houston read out in a clear, emotionless voice:—

"Congratulations your arrest Webster. Good work. Under no circumstances must he escape. Vitally important you bring him in. Herewith authorized Christmas rations. Merry Christmas and good luck. Houston."

"So what?" Harry's voice was sour. "You've got me! What now?"

"Just this. We don't want you. Not for murder, anyhow!"

"Aw, the hell with it!" Harry exploded

disgustedly. "Then why did this bloke chase me half across Africa? Why did he scare me into bolting for the Belgian Congo? Why'd he stick to me like a damned tick? What was the idea?"

"A good one!" Brick assured him grimly. "I need you for the trial!"

"You mean, sir—?" Trooper Niklaus had been drinking it all in. His young face was excited.

"Reinecke killed Polt Lesser!" the captain said. "We pried it out of him after you gave us the clue, Niklaus!"

"What clue, sir?"

"You told us that Diamond Harry, with only a few feet separating him from you, singled your hair but didn't hit you?"

The trooper nodded.

"Well, with that and some other things we dug up about Mister Ernst Van Reinecke—plus that reward—we cracked him!"

Diamond Harry Webster's face showed his bewilderment.

"We put two and two together," the officer explained simply. "On hearing that you'd been pinched, Reinecke wanted to know if you were dead. No, you weren't dead, we told him. Then, when he heard that you'd fired at the trooper he wanted to know if Niklaus had fired back."

"Yes, sir?" Niklaus was impatient but tried to hide it.

The captain tapped the desk. "Polt Lesser was shot clean through the heart. A bull's-eye if ever I saw one!" He paused. "Did you know that, Webster?"

"No!" Harry said vaguely. "I don't remember anything about it. I was drunk. Lesser—well, I quarreled with him. I took my gun out and—I wanted to frighten him, that was all!" He licked his lips. "I never shot a man in my life—even though they say I'm a tough diamond buyer!"

"I know you didn't!" Brick grinned. "For the simple reason that you can't! You're a helluva rotten shot—and Trooper Niklaus reported just how rotten you were. You've him to thank for the fact that Van Reinecke's in jail and you're free!"

Harry wiped his brow. "I'm mighty glad it's all cleared up!" he said. But there was a faint shade of regret in his

voice when he turned to Trooper Niklaus.

"There goes your reward, kid!" he said. "Had you any plans? If you'd got the money, I mean?"

"I'd thought about buying a farm," Theodore said simply. "But I'm glad I can't. Not with blood-money!"

"I don't know how to thank you," Harry began. "If there's—?"

"It was nothing!" the trooper said stiffly, snapped a correct left turn, saluted Captain Brick Houston smartly and marched from the room.

Brick grinned as his tall figure went out of the door. "Nice chap, Niklaus," he suggested. "Did his name never suggest anything to you, Harry? Especially out there, in the jungle, when he cooked that turkey for you?"

"His name?" Harry was bewildered. "Oh, I see what you mean. Niklaus? *Nicholas*, isn't it? Saint Nicholas?" He grinned. "Santa Claus, eh? Well, he sure was my Santa Claus, no fooling!"

SOME time later Trooper Theodore S. Niklaus received a letter.

"*You said it was nothing,*" the letter ran, "*but to me it was everything. I'm going straight now. It's dull, but safer. And I hope you'll invite me to dinner next Christmas. I'd like to eat one of your turkeys—on the farm!*"

Enclosed with the letter were the deeds to a farm in the Eastern Highlands. Elsa cried with joy when he showed them to her.

"We'll give Mr. Webster the best Christmas dinner in the world," she declared. "I'll bet he never ate a turkey such as I'll cook for him!"

"Well, he ate one I cooked for him, once!" Teddy grinned. "But that was in the bush. Still, it was pretty good!"

"Oh, but mine will be much better!"

"I think it will," he agreed. "It'll be easier to eat!"

"More tender, you mean?" she asked archly.

"That's it!" he acknowledged, and kissed her. But on his way to tell Brick the news he grinned at a recollection and muttered, "That's one reason. The other is that Harry'll find it a lot easier to eat nowadays—without handcuffs!"

MAN-EATER!

By ALEXANDER LAKE

Africa's greatest hunter had fallen prey to the Lion-men. Soon the tawny devil-pack would taste human blood—unless young Chuck Lane could find a way to that guarded cave of sacrifice.

CHUCK LANE stood beside his low-winged monoplane exactly on the Tropic of Cancer, fifty miles east of the ocean in Southwest Africa. Dawn was breaking over the Awas Mountains, and Lane's hard, lean body, silhouetted against the faint brightness of the sky, was tense, strained. He was listening for a repetition of that ghastly cry.

Minutes passed. There wasn't a sound, not even a rustle from the *hakis*-thorn forest in front of him. The cry was not repeated. Lane cursed, and kicked a pig-nut into a century-old elephant wallow.

"That was a death cry," he said to Ubusuku, his gigantic Zulu flying partner, who squatted beside the ship. "Could it have been Nero Shore?"

"*Tkona*. It was not a white man, O Lane. But it comes to me that it was the death-shriek of one coming to us with news of *Baas Shore* and that thin one, Professor Skimpole. It also comes to me that the man who cried had been trailed by those spawn-of-hyenas, the Lion-men, and that they have run him through with an *assagai*. There is death on the breeze, O American."

"Yeah? Well, I'm worried. If Shore, the greatest hunter in Africa, couldn't stay out of the Lion-men's clutches, how the hell are we going to do any better? We've waited three days. We're not going to wait any longer. We're going looking for them."

"*Yebo*. We will go. I smell blood. My heart is glad. There is battle and gore and the kiss of spears in this adventure, O American."

"Nuts. But I wish there were twenty of us instead of . . ." Lane's words were slapped from his lips by a shrill wail from the edge of the trees. As if answering the cry, the sun hurled himself above the *kopjie* tops. At the same moment, a naked,

brown Damara staggered from the thorn trees. From the small of his back the handle of a short stabbing spear protruded. Its point stuck six inches out of his abdomen.

"Fly!" he gasped, and fell at Lane's feet. He curled up on his side, grasped the spear blade at his belly with both hands, and tried vainly to pull the *assagai* through himself. "They come," he panted, "the Lion-men of the Ovampo. They are upon my heels. They have captured *Baas Shore* and the Bug man, and are to feed them into the jaws of the lions." Blood choked his words.

Lane knelt beside him. "Where is *Baas Shore*?" he asked tensely.

"Pull this thing from my belly, O Man. My blood runs foaming within my bowels. I would let it spill upon the ground. The *Ngonyama*-men, who worship the lions, hold *Baas Shore*, and that other one, in the Cave of the Witches, which hides in the red *kopjie* called Noma. Four days journey among the *hagis*-thorns. But you must not try to save them. That is the word *Baas Shore* sends. You must get astride your Thunder Bird and leave this place. The Lion-men lust for blood."

"Ow!" boomed Ubusuku abruptly, grinned, and lifted his great *knobkerrie*. Lane jerked around. Five painted, scowling Ovampos hesitated at the forest edge. Lane snatched his Webley from its holster. The Ovampos charged in a body, their shrill yells sending a flock of black-and-white crows squawking into the air.

LANE'S revolver spat twice. An Ovampo leaped high, and crashed. Another knelt suddenly, grabbed at his neck, then flopped on his side. Ubusuku's *knobkerrie* arced swiftly about his head, and crushed a kaffir's skull with a resounding klunk. A spear flashed like black light



Lane's strength had ebbed too low. Grasping the fallen Ovampo, he sank to his knees directly in front of the plunging lion leader.

before Lane's eyes. He threw up his hand to fend it off. The wide blade burned through his forearm. His revolver spun from his hand. A thrown stone-ax plunked into Ubusuku's belly. He sat down, grunting like a butted buffalo—his breath knocked completely out of him.

Lane bent low to escape an opponent's spring, and the shrieking warrior went hurtling over his back. Lane ducked a vicious slash from the long, copper-bladed knife of the other Ovampo, and drove his

unwounded hand hard against the man's chin. The warrior slumped forward. Lane pushed him away, then hooked a jolting right against the jaw. The man crumpled.

Blood from his wounded arm soaked Lane's sleeve, and dripped from his fingers. The morning seemed suddenly hazy, and he shook his head. That slight movement saved his life, for the remaining Ovampo's *assagai* souged past his ear so closely that the blade kissed his cheek. Cursing, Lane whipped about, and hung

a wild, swinging left on the kaffir's temple, and he went down hard—on top of Ubusuku.

The Zulu, whose vanity had been sorely wounded when his breath was knocked from him, let out a roar like a turpentine bull, and still sitting, broke the man's neck.

While Ubusuku bandaged his arm, Lane spoke urgently to the dying Damara. "When will the Lion-men feed *Baas* Shore to the beasts?"

"At the full of the moon, O Rider-of-Birds. Twice seven nights from now. Pull this thing from my belly."

Ubusuku placed his tremendous foot on the Damara's chest, grabbed the spear blade, and jerked. Blood welled. The man's body relaxed.

"Go happily," Ubusuku said.

"Remain to fight," the Damara whispered, and lay still.

"Now what the hell did you do that for?" Lane demanded.

"Would you take the long journey into the Land-of-Purple-Thunders with a spear dangling behind you like a monkey's tail?"

The Ovampo that Lane had knocked cold now got groggily to his feet. Ubusuku tried to brain him, but Lane grabbed the Zulu's arm. "Let the poor devil go," he said.

The warrior looked at Lane enigmatically, mumbled something, and disappeared among the trees.

"What did that guy say?" Lane asked Ubusuku.

"He said that his *ehlose*, his guardian spirit-snake, would speak to your *ehlose*."

"What the hell did he mean by that?"

Ubusuku grinned. "It depends on what his snake tells yours, O American."

"Nuts," Lane growled.

NERO SHORE was seventy-five, small, compact, grizzled. For sixty years he had been a hunter of big game. From Tanganyika to the Cape he was respected by the kaffirs, and loved by the whites. During his years of adventure he had gathered tons of ivory, pounds of gold, and bags of precious stones. At sixty-five he had retired to his rose-covered cottage in Pretoria; and the sunset of his life was filled with the warmth of a thousand friendships.

Then Professor Horace Skimpole, of

the American Medical Foundation, succeeded after a lifetime of effort in evolving an anti-toxin that was a positive cure for sleeping sickness. The world acclaimed him. He had whipped the curse that had scourged Africa and many other parts of the Earth for centuries!

Professor Skimpole protested the publicity. "There is still one experiment to make," he said, "before the cure is a certainty. It must be made in Namaqualand. It will take three months."

The Medical Foundation would not let Professor Skimpole go alone. He had been infected too many times by the germ he had fought to destroy. He was a dying man. Nero Shore was persuaded to leave retirement and accompany him.

Three months after the two disappeared into the wilderness of Southwest Africa, a native runner arrived in Johannesburg with word that the experiment had been successful; that Skimpole was at the point of death, and that trouble with natives loomed. The message, from Shore, urged that Chuck Lane be sent with his plane to pick up the two at Buzzard Flats on the Old Elephant Trail west of Walvis Bay. "If we're not there on the appointed day," Shore's message had said, "Lane will know what to do."

It was natural that Shore should want Lane and Ubusuku. Lane was the flyingest, fightingest pilot in all of Africa. Ubusuku, a prince of the house of Zululand, flew almost as well. He had the courage of a buffalo, and the strength of a rhino.

Lane knew that Shore wouldn't have asked for help unless things looked desperate. Worried Medical Foundation officials gathered about the plane as he took off from Orange Grove airport at Johannesburg. "Bring them both back safely," one yelled.

"Sure," Lane said, "we'll bring 'em back."

The two had landed at Buzzard Flats three days ago. Shore had said that Lane would know what to do if he was not there to meet him. But Lane *didn't* know what to do. All he knew was that he was going to do *something*.

Now he said: "Okey, Ubusuku, let's go." They buried the dead, tied down the plane, covered it with a tarp, and turned

their faces toward the distant mountains.

UBUSUKU, stabbing *assagai* in one hand, his *knobkerrie* in the other, led the way through the vicious tangles of the hooked-thorn forest. Sunlight filtered through the almost leafless trees like drippings from a red-hot sieve, for the dry season was sizzling on the face of Southwest Africa. Save for the crackling of dry sticks under their feet, the forest was quiet. Not even a fly buzzed.

Lane, his pierced arm throbbing clear to his shoulder, carried a carbine. A bandolier of .303 cartridges hung heavily across his body. His belt of revolver ammunition sagged around his waist. His lips were salty with sweat that dried almost as fast as it beaded his face. A green spider fell inside his shirt, and nipped him near the armpit. He cursed.

They kept their eyes open for game for their evening meal, but not so much as *steinbok* crossed their path, so they ate *nara* gourds for supper. Under a *stamfrachte* tree, Lane, restless with the pain in his fevered wound, lay on his back and watched the red star in the Southern Cross wheel among the branches. Nearby a night ape whimpered. A jackal's yelps were silenced by the distant roar of a lion. A bush mouse squeaked angrily. A pair of bats made a game of seeing how close they could swoop to his face without hitting it.

Lane knew about the Lion-men of the Ovampo. Vicious renegades from a degenerate tribe, they had copied the tactics of the Leopard Men of the Ubangi country in the Congo. The chief difference was that the Lion-men fed their victims to the lions instead of tearing them to pieces with iron claws. It was from these fiends that he and Ubusuku must rescue Shore and the Professor. He sighed, and held his arm up to ease the pain.

Ubusuku's hand touched him warningly. "Someone approaches," he whispered. "Lie quietly until I return." Like a shadow, the big black disappeared into the night.

Revolver snuggled into his left hand, Lane lay tense, scarcely breathing. He had never ceased to marvel at Ubusuku's ability to awaken like a cat at the slightest sound. He hoped the noise had been made

by a prowling animal. He didn't feel like fighting, with agony pounding the length of his arm.

From behind him came a hippo-like grunting, then a spluttering of Zulu and Damara curses. Lane was on his knees, Webley leveled, when Ubusuku and another, spitting like leopards, cart-wheeled into the tiny clearing. Ubusuku subdued his opponent with a punch.

"It's that Damura pig you prevented me from killing this morning," he said. "He was lurking like a wild dog in the shadows waiting to pierce you with his spear."

"Ai!" the Damara wailed. "The Zulu *aardvark* lies. I am Indabazimbi, whose life you, O Man-from-the-Skies, spared when this black Offspring-of-a-Foundered-Cow would have slain me. I come in peace."

"Let me open his bowels, O Lane. He is a brown mamba, whose sting is death."

"Turn him loose. I want to talk to him," Lane ordered. Then to the warrior, "What do you want?"

"O White Man, me and my companions were sent by the men of *Ngonyama*, the lion, to slay you and yon-Spawn-of-a-Deformed-Crocodile. Instead, you slew us all save me. Now I may not return to my own people. I have talked to my spirit-snake this night and he told me to come to you, and that you would be my father. O *Baba*, I have come."

"You were one of the Lion-men?"

"Not so. I was their servant."

"You have seen *Baas* Shore, the ancient hunter of elephants?"

"He lies bound in the Cave of the Witches, for know, O *Baba*, though aged he fought well, killing tens of thousands of my people. . . ."

"How many?"

"Three, O Questioner, but had he not been beaten to the Earth with a stick from behind he would have slain. . . ."

"How about the thin *baas* who was with *Baas* Shore?"

"He lies stricken by a fever in his bones. He will die."

"And the lions are to be fed . . .?"

"On the night of the next full moon. In the cave with the old hunter and the sick white man are many prisoners. Truly, the lions will feast well!"

"Could you help me rescue *Baas* Shore

and that other, the thin *baas* who is sick?"

Indabazimbi went to his knees. "O *Baba*," he mourned, "such a rescue cannot be. Even the soldiers of your people who swarm like locusts, and whose guns slay with thunder, could not save them. Yet, O Bird-man, you are cunning. Perhaps, by craftiness and magic . . ."

"Yeh," Lane grunted, "perhaps. Go on. Tell me more about the Lion-men."

"Twice each moon during the wet season and the pig-nut season we, the servants of the Lion-men, slay many animals and feed them, still bleeding, to the lions. But in the dry season we do not feed them at all. Thus, when the last full moon of the dry season rises their bellies are empty, and their bones are filled with vast hunger. It is then they gorge on men."

"Go on."

"Two moons, O *Baba*, during which the lions are not fed. Nor do they hunt for themselves, for having been supplied much meat since they were cubs they have become lazy as ancient rhino cows. Instead of hunting they gather beneath the *moople* trees, and fill the world with angry roarings. A few hares and *duikerbok* are frightened into their maws. Thus, they do not starve. But when the prisoners are thrown to them, then, O Listener, do they gorge until . . ."

"Where do these lions live?"

"The pride lives among the rocks and grasses on the *kopjies*' knees, not far from the red *kopjie* called Noma, in which is the Cave of the Witches."

"And the *moople* tree where they feed?"

"At the *kopjies*' feet."

"Okey. Sleep now. I've got an idea."

"I do not understand."

"Never mind. Lie down by Ubusuku and have a nap."

"Ow!" Ubusuku snorted. "Never will it be said I lay at night beside this Scum-off-a-Green-Pool. It comes to me that . . ."

"Shut up," Lane snapped. "I want to think. I gotta hunch."

"**W**E'RE going to feed those lions," Lane told Ubusuku the next morning. "They'll be mighty hungry, if they haven't been fed for about six weeks. Each time we feed them we'll make a certain call. The lions will soon learn that

that call means food, and when they hear it they'll come a-running."

"And so will the Lion-men hear the call, O Lane, and come running with clubs to beat out your brains. To outwit a jackal, O Brother, you must have more brains than the jackal."

"The Lion-men won't hear the call, y' damned heathen."

Ubusuku furrowed his forehead. "You will call to the lions to come for fresh meat. That I can understand, for many times I have fed lions thus in order to slay them later. But the Lion-men of the Ovampo are as plentiful as leeches in a crocodile's mouth. Yet, you say they will not hear your bellowing. Truly, O Lane, your brains are frothing like foam on kaf-fir beer."

"Look," Lane said, "I know my scheme is crazy. It's *got* to be crazy. We can't fight these guys. We can't go for help. We've got to rescue Shore and the Professor, and we have to do it alone. My plan is a thousand-to-one shot. But it may work. Anyway, we're going to try it. We set out to fly those two back to Jo'burg. We're going to do it or . . ."

"Or what, O American?"

"Or else."

Ubusuku's white teeth flashed in a wide smile. "Death rides on the wings of your thoughts, O Brother. I like it much. And if this adventure ends in us taking the journey to the Land-of-Fat-Women then . . . but success loves the schemes of a madman. And you are mad, O Lane, for who but a madman would attempt to stop the ears of the worshipers of lions?"

"They won't hear a sound."

Ubusuku scratched his head. "You will call. The lions will hear, but the men will not. How will you do this magic?"

"You're so damn' cocky, I won't tell you. But, fellow, the more I think of it the nuttier it seems; and the nuttier it seems the more I think it might work." His face went suddenly grim. "By Heaven, it's got to work," he said.

THREE more days of travel through festering heat. Three days in which the *hakis*-thorns gave way gradually to elm-like wild-date trees. Three nights of worry-cursed sleep for Lane. For the closer came the moment for action, the

more fantastic his little scheme seemed.

On the night before he was to put the first steps of his plan into effect he spent hours whittling and shaping a piece of wood cut from the limb of a wild-date tree. At last he put the finger-like object to his lips, and blew lustily. Ubusuku watched him, puzzled. Lane blew once more. "By Heaven, it works!" he said.

"What have you made, O Keeper-of-Secrets?" Ubusuku asked.

"A whistle. A Galton whistle. Listen." He blew again.

Ubusuku scowled. "I hear nothing."

"Humans can't hear it. But dogs and cats can—and lions. You see, Ape, the sound made by this whistle is so high that it is beyond the range of the human ear. We'll feed the lions, blow this whistle, and the beasts will soon learn to look on it as their dinner bell. See? Inside of ten days when they hear this whistle they'll come a-humping."

"And then?"

"I'm not sure. But if we can call them to us at a critical moment, who knows what may happen? And, guy, we're going to create that critical moment."

Ubusuku turned away. "It is as I feared," he muttered, "your head has become filled with maggots." He walked over to Indabazimbi. "Maggots," he said, and kicked him.

AT noon the next day they arrived at the foot of Mount Noma. While Ubusuku scouted the slopes about the Witches' Cave, Indabazimbi hunted *steinbok* with which to feed the lions.

Lane went to look over the feeding place under an immense, elm-like *moople* tree on the edge of a small clearing. Veldt grass, waist high, stood brown and brittle under the scorching sun. Bleached bones, many of them human, were tumbled everywhere. Four or five human skulls leered hollow-eyed from grassy tufts.

A dark patch far up the *kopjie's* slopes. The Cave of the Witches. Little figures moving against the red rocks. Ovampo guards. Lane shifted uneasily. He knew that at any moment wandering natives might spot him. He stepped into the shadow of an upthrust rock, and was stiffened in his tracks by a deep-throated

growl. For a moment he saw nothing, and stood confused.

Then he saw it! A great shaggy head, jaws half open in a white-fanged snarl. Forelegs close to the ground. Hindquarters raised. Tufted tail erect, and waving angrily. Amber-yellow eyes glaring. And that continuous, throaty, sullen snarling!

As Lane stood one second from violent death, he saw his rescue plans collapse. He saw old Nero Shore's mangled body beneath the crouching forms of ravenous beasts. He saw Professor Skimpole's life work lost to the world. He saw himself bloody, broken, chewed unmercifully. He cursed himself as a careless fool.

But he knew lions, and stood motionless, his eyes fastened grimly on those fiery-maddened yellow ones.

He knew that under ordinary conditions few lions would attack a human unless frightened. Once before in Tanganyika he had come face to face with one of the tawny brutes, and had stood quaking inwardly, but unmoving until the animal had lost its fear, and stalked away.

But this was different. For one thing, this lion was a man-eater. He had been fed human flesh—human blood. And Lane knew that once they acquired that taste, they never lost it. Furthermore, the teeth of this hairy-headed beast were blunt and worn. That meant he was old. And an aged lion was too slow for the quick kill, so, always hungry—humans were easy prey.

Man and beast remained motionless. Even the twitching of the tufted tail had ceased. Lane's heart hammered against his chest. Something warm flooded over his head. He realized then that he had been clenching that hand until the forearm muscles were knotted hard. The wound had burst open. Blood dripped from his fingers.

And instantly, the great beast got the smell of gore. The glaring eyes widened, flamed suddenly. The tail stiffened like a rod over the raised rump. Muscles rippled along those scarred sides. Saliva drooled off the curled-up tongue. The animal's nostrils twitched. He shifted his eyes. He moved one immense paw a little forward, and turned his head—trying to locate the source of the blood smell.

Slowly, Lane moved his hands behind

his back. Slight as the movement was, the lion noticed it, and growled. But, he didn't look at Lane. He twitched his whiskers against the wind.

Lane pulled the blood-soaked bandage with desperate fingers. Pain tore through his arm as the bandage came loose. He flipped the dripping rag into the lion's face, and jumped behind the nearby rock. The lion leaped straight up, turned end for end in the air, and landed crouched. Then, growling deep in his chest, he sank his teeth into the bandage, and carrying it in his mouth, trotted toward the hills like a cat carrying a kitten.

Lane stopped running a hundred yards away. He watched the brute disappear across the clearing. Then, sighing heavily, he sat under a tree, and tried to staunch the blood streaming from his newly opened wound.

He felt mighty low. The task he had set himself seemed more impossible than ever. Now his arm was in bad shape. He could feel fever boiling within him. If the wound should knock him out, Shore and Skimpole were doomed. The secret of Skimpole's anti-toxin would probably be lost to the world. Lane squeezed the flaring edges of the bloody gash together, and groaned.

Behind him a deep voice rumbled: "The lion had more dignity than you, O Lane. He walked away. You galloped like a frightened springbok."

Lane came to his feet cursing. "Damn you, Ubusuku," he growled, "I thought that lion was breathing down my neck. What did you find out? What chances have we of moving in on the Ovampos?"

"There are many warriors, O American. Too many for us to fight. They lie in groups about the Witches Cave drinking kaffir beer, and eating *biltong*. A few hunters, perhaps a score, are scattered along the *kopjies*' slopes. We can attack and slay many, but we will in turn be slain."

"Bind up this arm again, will you? It's giving me hell."

"Yebo. Do we fight, O Sufferer?"

"I guess so. But first we'll try my stunt with the lions. If it works—okey. If it doesn't"—Lane shrugged—"well, that's okey, too."

"At least we will die with the music of

crushed skulls in our ears, and the song of whispering *assagais*. It is fit, O Brother, that we two die with the smell of enemy blood strong in our nostrils. My heart is glad."

"Cripes! You sure talk a lot," Lane said peevishly.

NEAR sunset Indabazimbi showed up with six *steinbok* draped over his back. The little antelope were a bloody mess. Wearily, Lane watched the two natives throw the dead animals under the *moople* tree. Then the three retired across the clearing. Night came down on a carpet of lavender mist. Stars squirted abruptly out of nowhere and stuck against the sky. A white moth fluttered. A night-hawk flashed blackly across the dusk. The white moth had vanished.

The moon came out of the east, a thin, silver sliver. But the zodiacal light made the early night luminous. Far away a hyena laughed insanely. Nearby a lion roared. Others at the base of Mount Noma took up the bellowing. The earth seemed to tremble. The roaring died into coughing whoofs. Abruptly the world was still. Even the insects had ceased buzzing. Terror rode over the world of the animals.

Lane held his throbbing arm, and stared into the darkness. A vague shape, looming large in the uncertain light, moved slowly into the clearing.

"*Ngonyama!*" hissed Indabazimbi, and clutched Lane's arm in fright.

The lion froze in mid-stride, head up. For long minutes he stood motionless—ominous. Then, like a lumbering freight train, he rushed upon the *steinbok* under the *moople* tree. His growling as he tore at the newly killed antelope made Lane shiver.

Then the entire pride rushed across the clearing. Fifteen or sixteen, Lane estimated. All sizes, males and females. They tore into the *steinbok* ravenously—snarling, grunting, fighting until the night was hideous. Lane blew his Galton whistle. Apparently it made no sound. But the lions quieted and stood staring nervously into the darkness. Lane grinned with relief. The whistle worked. The lions had heard it!

"Come on, you two," he whispered. "Let's get the hell out of here."

FOR four days Lane fed the lions. While Ubusuku scouted for enemy Ovampos, Indabazimbi hunted game. Each time they threw the rabbits and antelope under the *moople* tree, Lane blew his whistle. As he had hoped, the pride soon associated the high-pitched sound with their rations, and at the fourth feeding they answered the whistle's blast with eager coughings and snortings, and came at a lope.

On the fifth day Lane had Indabazimbi throw the lions' food beneath a tree more than an eighth of a mile from the *moople*. In answer to the whistle the pride coursed about uncertainly for almost twenty minutes, then got the blood scent, and came to dinner at a gallop. On the sixth and seventh days Lane fed the animals at different spots. On the eighth day he hid the meat under a rock almost a mile from the *moople*. He blew the Galton whistle and continued to blow it until the pride found the food.

Satisfied that this part of his plan was working, he said to Ubusuku: "No more food for the lions for five days. Let them get really hungry. The Ovampos up there on the mountain seem to be working themselves up pretty well. Last night they danced and yowled all night."

"I know, O Lane. They drink much kaffir beer. It is but six nights until the feeding of the lions."

"We'll lie low for five days. On the sixth we'll let those guys know we're here."

"A hundred against three. Truly, a fight for men."

"Yeah," Lane said thoughtfully, "it will be a fight."

THE fifth day dawned in a blaze of crimson and purple. From the slopes of Mount Noma sounds of the all-night orgy still spilled in raucous spasms. The Ovampos, evidently excited, moved about like bewildered ants.

"Tomorrow is the full of the moon, O *Baba*," Indabazimbi said as he watched beside Lane from the shadow of the trees. "Tomorrow the lions feed. But today the Lion-men, dressed in their skins, will taste of the hearts, liver and toes of the prisoners."

Lane swung on the Damara. "Are you

trying to tell me the Lion-men kill and eat parts of their prisoners *before* the feeding of the lions—today?"

"It is true, O Father. Today the prisoners will be slain, their hearts and livers eaten by the chieftains; their toes by the soldiers. Then tomorrow the bodies will be fed to *Ngongyama*."

Lane spat a string of curses. "Why in hell didn't you tell me this before?" he asked angrily. Then, "Okey, fellows, get ready for a scrap." He began to yell.

The Ovampos on the hillside stared like startled bucks. Lane yelled again, and fired five rapid shots from his Webley. Ubusuku, suddenly afire with the lust to fight, roared tremendous Zulu insults. Indabazimbi, catching the excitement, shrieked like a trapped buzzard.

The Ovampos massed suddenly into a mob. A tall, brown, plumed figure leaped before them, gesticulated wildly, and pointed. With yells that shook the wilderness, the mob stormed with flashing spears down the slope.

Ubusuku watched the warriors sweeping nearer, his face shiny with happiness. His teeth gleamed. He adjusted the wrist-thong of his *knobkerrie*, and kissed the blade of his *assagai*.

"O Lane," he rumbled, "our day has come. Today we two take the journey into the Land-of-Many-*Mealies*. Rest assured, O Brother, that if you die first, I will not be far behind you. It comes to me that . . ."

"Nuts," Lane interrupted, "think we're going to stand here and wait for those guys? We're going up there where they came from, knock off the guards they left at the Cave, rescue Shore and Skimpole, and get the hell out of here. Come on."

With the Zulu on one side, and Indabazimbi on the other, Lane sped in a big arc toward the Cave of the Witches. The charging Ovampos passed them a quarter mile to the right, and swept shouting into the trees. Lane, the Zulu and the Damara angled sharply up the hill.

Five Ovampo guards poised like brown death, waited for them at the mouth of the Cave. One threw a *knobkerrie*. It took Indabazimbi in the middle of the forehead, and he went down like a stunned hippo. Ubusuku, swinging his *knobkerrie* about his head, leaped among the Ovam-

pos, a bellowing black demon. Lane dodged a vicious spear-thrust, stumbled, and took an *assagai* in the left shoulder. His left arm went dead and he dropped his carbine. He went for his Webley. A side-thrust knocked it from his hand. He grabbed his opponent's spear, slashed wildly, and laid the other's cheek open to the bone.

Now three were upon him. Half blinded by blood and sweat and pain, he thrust, parried, dodged and struck. Two went down. Behind him he heard the sickening crunch of a skull crushed by a blow. His heart missed a beat as he pictured Ubusuku brained. But the Zulu's hoarse shout told him an enemy had died.

His right arm, wounded days before, was yelping with pain. His heart battered at his chest walls, and his breathing became great gasps. His own blood mingled with the Ovampo's before him. He drove his *assagai* hard at the man's belly. The Ovampo parried, dropped his spear, and threw two mighty arms about Lane, crushing the last of his breath from his laboring lungs. Teeth sank into his wounded shoulder. As he struggled vainly to break the man's python-like grip, a brown hand clutched his throat. A red veil seemed to drop between his eyes and his brain. . . . Almost out, he threw himself upon the ground, dragging his enemy with him.

LANE was through. He knew it. Then dimly, he heard the sough of a blade as it sank home in human flesh. The death-grip on his throat relaxed. The red veil lifted. Rivers of air surged through his lungs. Abruptly, his strength returned, and he got to his knees.

Indabazimbi, smiling like a fiend, and with a lump the size of a baseball on his forehead, stood beside him, his *assagai* dripping redly. At the Damara's feet Lane's enemy of a moment ago lay dead.

"Thanks, Indabazimbi," Lane gasped. He started to his feet, but ducked as a spear whistled past his head. Indabazimbi sat down suddenly, looking with ludicrous surprise at the *assagai* handle sticking from his side.

Lane cursed and whirled just in time to see the Ovampo who had speared Indabazimbi rushing at him like an angry rhino. The same glance showed him Ubusuku down, gasping in a pool of blood.

His right hand cocked, Lane set himself for the Ovampo's rush. He let drive. The half-healed wound on his right forearm popped like a pea-pod. But the Ovampo, coming in fast, took the blow on the point of the chin. The back of his head hit the ground first. Lane pushed the prone figure with his foot. The man's head rolled loosely.

"Hell!" Lane breathed. "I busted his neck."

"A mighty blow," Ubusuku croaked.

"Cripes!" Lane jerked. "I thought you were dead."

"Not dead, O Lane. Just full of spears like a dog who seized a porcupine."

Lane knelt beside Indabazimbi. "Dog-gone," he said. "Doggone."

Indabazimbi bared his teeth in pain. "It is well, O *Baba*," he mumbled thickly. "My spirit-snake is happy." He gasped, sighed deeply, and lay still.

A yell from the trees brought Lane up-standing. An Ovampo danced excitedly, pointing at them from the base of the hill. Almost instantly he was surrounded by his companions. They shouted hoarsely, angrily, then, charged up the slope.

Lane blew his Galton whistle and ducked into the Cave of the Witches.

Nero Shore, chained to the wall, grinned a greeting. Professor Skimpole, fever-smitten, lay moaning on a litter of leaves. More than a score of other prisoners, Hottentots, Basutos, Damaras, and an ancient Arab croaked with delight. Lane released them all. Panic-stricken, they dashed from the cave, and scattered over the *kopjie's* face. Lane, Ubusuku, Shore and Skimpole were left alone to face the brown horde rushing up the hill.

Lane stepped into the open and blew his Galton whistle again. A roar from hungry lions answered him. Almost instantly, the lion pride burst into the clear directly behind the onrushing warriors. Again Lane blew the whistle, and waved his arms frantically. The lions heard, saw, and came on at a gallop.

THE Ovampos also saw. They hesitated, stopped, wailed dismally, and broke ranks like leaves before a gale. Throwing spears and *knobkerries* aside, they disappeared like panicked rabbits wherever they could find cover.

The lion pride halted uncertainly. The great, shaggy-maned leader faced the slight breeze, and sniffed. His tail went straight up. He shook his head and rumbled heavily. He got the blood-scent of the slain Ovampos, coughed, and broke into a gallop. Behind him loped his score of hungry beasts.

"Cripes!" Lane grunted abruptly, and raced toward the strewn dead. He arrived at the corpses ten jumps ahead of the thundering lion leader, grabbed Indabazimbi's body under the armpits, and tried to drag it clear of the ravenous animals. But his strength had ebbed too low. He went to his knees directly in front of the plunging lion leader. Then, Ubusuku, growling, was beside him. Together they pulled the dead Damar to the mouth of the cave.

"It's the least we can do for him," Lane said.

"Yebo, O Lane," Ubusuku said, "for once a Damara died like a man. We'll bury him deep."

Nero Shore stood blinking at the feasting lions. "What the hell's all this?" he asked.

Lane told him.

Shore swore an astonished oath. "By gosh," he said, "it's the craziest thing I ever heard of."

"Crazy as hell," Lane agreed.

An Ovampo stood on a rock and waved frantically. Ubusuku slipped around the lions and went to him. He came back, his black face split with a white-toothed grin.

"Well?" Lane queried.

"If the white wizard who rules the lions will spare their lives the Ovampos will return to their kraals and become women," he said.

"Tell 'em okey," Lane grinned. He turned to Shore. "You know," he confessed, "I really didn't have any hope my stunt would work. But damn it, I had to do something."

"Truly," Ubusuku grumbled, "the gods fight on the side of those whose brains are addled."

"Maybe you're right," Lane said, "but let's get going. I want to get back to Johannesburg. I got a craving for hamburger."

Do you belong to the hot-stove league?

If so, you're right in line for

BASEBALL STORIES

Gossip and dope, straight from the horsehide's mouth, by that canny, breezy commentator, Doc McGee.

A booklength baseball Novel— **THE PITCHER WITH ONLY A PRAYER**

by LIN DAVIES

Novelets—

THE FIRST BASE FIREMAN

by WILLIAM R. COX

and

DOUBLE TROUBLE

by CURTIS BISHOP

And

For the best laugh you've had this year, read the story of the Cincinnati Red rooter who nearly caused an international incident—

SLIDE, SAILOR, SLIDE!

by JACK WIGGIN

***And other baseball short stories
and features***



BASEBALL STORIES

Get your copy at the nearest newsstand

KHMER DRUMS

By USIS

"Death!" thundered the devil-drum under the bloody hand of a chuckling madman. And death stalked botanist Rodney Cole in the fabled pit of Buddha.

LEAVING his native assistant in the boat, Rodney Cole started up the leech-infested bank of the Sen River. Under his arm he pressed the breech of his rifle to shield it from the fine hot rain, for the southwest monsoon was blowing. In his pocket he carried a letter.

Through the small waterfall rushing off the brim of his helmet, the wiry botanist looked up toward the bamboo hut some fifty yards from the shore. On stilts almost as high as the nearby teaks, weathered walls and thatched roof blended into the enveloping jungle. Beneath the ungainly structure clustered large wooden boxes whose bright newness stood out against the bordering lush green.

Steadily Cole plodded up the muddy incline in the morning light. He scanned the rank Cambodian growth attentively; this assignment to bring back chaulmoogra seeds was the most important mission he had ever had in the United States Plant Bureau. Lives depended upon the success of this trip.

His white shirt was soon drenched. Several times he halted to tear leeches from his legs.

At length he reached the ladder that served as a stairway to the house and glanced up. The sight that met his eyes jolted him to a stop. A tall heavy-set man was framed in the lopsided doorway. His crop of flaming red hair stood out from his head like a copper-wire brush. To Rodney there were only two kinds of red hair—the right and the wrong, and the tangled mass that fell in uncontrolled jungle freedom around those beady and unblinking eyes was definitely wrong. A heavy rifle loomed large in the man's unsteady hands. The weapon pointed in readiness at him.

"The Khmer drums said you were coming!" The burly man mumbled out of

one side of his mouth. "What do you want?"

"Odd way for one white man to greet another in the jungle!" Rodney remarked. This turgid person, he reflected, must be Wesley Grover, who certainly lacked justification, and probably guts, to use the rifle he held so menacingly!

This was a greeting Rodney had never before experienced; he was not even offered the courtesy of shelter from the rain and the leeches. At the mention of drums Rodney again noticed the distant cadenced thrumming which had accompanied him up the river.

"In Pnom-Penh," the explorer proceeded, disregarding the rifle, "I called on Clifford Smedley-Cooke, the rubber man. I told him about my going up the Sen. He seemed to be a close friend of yours, and asked me to stop here, say 'hello' and give you this note."

Though the redhead deigned no comment, Rodney climbed the ladder and squeezed past the rifle and under the thatch.

He noted the rough features of the darkly tanned man, who certainly looked tough enough to battle even the northern Cambodian jungle.

Without a word Grover took the proffered note, and tore it open, keeping the rifle in his hand. He read the letter aloud:

"Dear Wes: This will introduce Rodney Cole, a real friend of mine. Met him in Rangoon four years ago. Did me a favor then I've never forgotten. He's looking for chaulmoogra seeds, and is going northwest of Melouprey, over the top through Khukhan, and down the Se Mun back to Pnom Penh. I should appreciate your helping him with any suggestions or courtesy. I'm looking forward to seeing you come down soon.—Cliff."



The twilight glinted on the bright steel. Cole seized Grover's wrist, slipped, and fell with the big man atop him.

Grover leaned his rifle against the wobbly bamboo table. His untrimmed hair bristled. His fixed grimace reminded Rodney of the dancing *devatas* he had seen in Saigon after he had debarked at Baria. Grover's face had shaded to white, like the chalked faces of the ballet dancers, and the reddish beard stubble stood out in sharp contrast. The corner of his mouth twitched.

"What kind of a lie is this?" he shouted. He crumpled the paper and threw it upon the roughly hewn floor.

RODNEY flushed angrily; his blue eyes met the challenge. He gripped his rifle solidly. "Are you crazy? Perhaps you can tell me what I am doing here!" He stepped closer. Behind Grover the water foamed off the edge of the thatched roof.

"I know what those trees are. The oil of the seeds is used in treating leprosy." Grover's tiny eyes glinted. "You didn't have to come way up here for 'em!" His fist was clenched, his knuckles white. "Did our mutual friend say what I was doin'?"

"Yes, Cliff told me."

The monsoon extended its downpour of rain. The drums lapsed to silence.

"Cliff told you!" Grover glanced at his rifle, then at Rodney. "And you came to pick seeds! Like hell you did!"

"Steady, you damn fool." Rodney brought his rifle up. "What's the matter with you?"

Grover staggered back. "You came here to horn in on a share, or to take my place." The words hissed out laden with venom.

The rain slowed to a mist, desolate and sinister.

"If I wanted to kill you, all I'd have to do is squeeze this trigger now. But I don't want anything of you or yours. I'm looking for those seeds from good specimen trees."

The burly redhead laughed. His voice was a taunt. "And you didn't come here to horn in on the emeralds, rubies and gold!" His laugh choked off with a gulp. "And Cliff didn't tell you about the Buddhist temple he and I found several weeks ago. The Vat drowned in the jungle."

"The Vat!" Even as Rodney kept Grover covered he thrilled at the word. He had not visited any of the centuries-old Buddhist temples in central Cambodia. None had happened to be on his route and the importance of his mission had set every other consideration aside.

"Yes, you want to cut me out!" His mocking laugh mounted shrilly. The botanist wished he had stayed clear of this lunatic, free as an ape and far more dangerous.

"Well, you decidedly have an imaginative mind." He tried to compose the man. "But I'm not interested in your adventure, whatever it is. Under other circumstances I should have asked to see this temple if it were close." He walked toward the door. "But in this case I'd better be on my way. Those seeds are my job."

"Wait a minute." The big man's face beamed and glowed as a light does when the current is increased gradually by the use of a rheostat. Rodney had never before witnessed such a transition from malice to hospitality. "I'm not so sure but maybe that's true." He laughed. "Let's have a drink! Sit down!" he boomed. The sudden mellowness and the friendly gesture as he turned to go into the second of the two rooms seemed false to Rodney.

THE botanist looked about him while he waited. The hut was constructed of the huge tropical timber bamboo; its stilts were high enough to allow for the heavy floods of the rainy season, which brought the river up some forty feet above its dry season low. The setting was a dense luxuriant growth of heavily buttressed bunya-bunyas and tall hardwood trees, interlaced by strongly climbing lianas. Bananas grew at the corners of the hut. Clumps of both timber and golden bamboo appeared along the river bank. From the distance, during a lull of the monsoon, came the trumpeting of elephants.

Grover returned with a bottle of whiskey, and glasses. "Why do you contemplate going over this range to find chaulmoogra oil seeds?" His eyes darted at Rodney and back to the glasses he was filling. He handed one to the botanist.

Rodney lowered his rifle but remained alert, and took the proffered glass. "I

understand the northern Cambodian trees are much more tolerant of shade than the two varieties we have transplanted from Siam to Molokai. We are trying to find trees that will bear more heavily."

"Umm," Grover mumbled reflectively. "And how did you happen to find my shack?"

"Cliff pointed out your general location with respect to Melouprey. You're right off the bank of the river and he said you'd have boxes stacked around for shipping your ore samples." He looked at Grover, "Anything else?"

"No. Only what would I be doin' diggin' rock during the rainy season, with its siege of dysentery and malaria?"

"I wouldn't know. Well, here's how." He raised his glass in salute and drank. He set the glass down. "And now, I'll take my leave and not bother you further."

"Guess I've been kinda hasty." Grover went over to a heap of stove wood. He picked up a small piece and handed it to the botanist. "Recognize this?"

Rodney's eyes dilated. "Why, that's the tree I'm looking for!" He was all excitement. "That's it!"

"Well, if you come with me I'll show you some growing in the shade of the temple."

"Shade-tolerant too?" He forgot the redhead as a madman. "That fills my requirement exactly."

Grover looked through the door toward the river. He jerked his thumb at the boat. "Leave him here. He might talk. And I expect you, of course, to keep mum." He walked to the head of the ladder. "If you take your rifle, I can leave mine here. Then I'll be able to bring a load of something back with me. I brought the *devatas* off the Buddha yesterday."

While Grover watched beside the ladder, Rodney walked down through the slush. The native, clad in flapping white shirt and loose trousers, was waiting rather anxiously. Rodney told him to moor the boat and stay on board. He rejoined the redhead. It ought to be safe to go along if he had his rifle and Grover went unarmed.

Rodney motioned for Grover to lead the way. The young man adjusted the small emergency kit in one pocket and a

clasp knife in another where they would not rub, and followed Grover. The restless monsoon followed their course; for five more months the wind and rain would drive monotonously in the same direction.

The trail, for the most part, was cut like a green tunnel through the interlacing growth of jungle brush. In the deeper gloom at the sides of the tunnel yellow and orange fungi clung to rotting logs. Branches and vines had been thrown in the center of the way to make a more solid footpath, but rain and constant use had churned them down into the sticky mud. A brilliant bird flashed across the path, but so swiftly that Rodney could glimpse only a momentary burst of bright red before it had disappeared. Methodically the botanist noted specimens—wild coffee, caoutchouc, a solid bamboo he knew for a variety of *dendrocalamus*.

They had advanced about four hundred yards when Rodney stopped to listen. The sound came again. "What was that I heard?" he asked vigilantly.

"Probably a tiger!" Grover grunted unconcernedly, as he kept up a steady stride.

Rodney tried to see through the dense screen around him. Not only his life but those of others who depended on him were at stake. He walked between a madman and a tiger. He knew where one was but not the other.

FIVE minutes passed and they halted. Before them, struggling with the elements, rose a bizarrely beautiful temple. Long ago it had begun its losing battle with the jungle. Tree roots intertwining with thick vines claimed as their prize the massive stones that composed the ancient structure. As they drew nearer elaborate carvings of *devatas* and fixed faces became distinguishable upon winging walls, and grotesque images took form upon the many-spired towers. Through the rank vegetation filtered the trumpeting of elephants, possible descendants of those which had moved these heavy stones into place. Leeches, always at their obnoxious worst in the rainy season, rose from the muck to annoy the botanist. Grover paid no attention to them. With a swift gesture to Rodney to follow he stepped between the mosaic columns of the entrance.

Upon the frescoed walls of the first

chamber lithe figures danced their peculiar ballet, all wearing the balanced high *mokot* headdress. In worn carvings files of docile elephants marched the walls.

Again, above the harsh chatter of a score of birds, Rodney heard a growl that was unmistakable. "That tiger is getting closer."

Then his eyes dilated. He forgot the tiger. He strode eagerly ahead, amazed. He even forgot Wesley Grover.

Grover cast a side glance at Rodney. "It'll not attack you up here. Don't show so much yellow!"

But the explorer had not heard him. He was moving excitedly forward.

There was plenty to see.

They traversed the many-cornered hall upon a floor tessellated with light brass. The encroaching roots of trees had cracked its surface but its delicate pattern remained. In the corners stood hideous guardian monsters of bronze, darkened by the ages, dirty green with oxidation, but intact. Near the center of the hall the ceiling was formed of light yellow tile bordered by tile of indigo blue. They emerged from the hall upon a square court into which through open archways the creeping forest reached greedily. Before them loomed a broad enclosure railed with stone. Over it rose a templed dome supported by regularly spaced pillars. Part of the stone railing had been torn away. It bordered a stone balcony which surrounded a square sunken pit. Beyond this inner court another entrance led into a second temple similar to the one they had just left. The design was symmetrical. Elaborately carved walls, relieved with arches, connected the two entrances.

They approached the broken portion of the railing and looked down into the pit. Some sixteen feet below them lay a court about thirty feet square. In the exact center of the court, an emerald Buddha glowed with the vivid brilliance of green fire. It rested majestically upon an exquisite throne of dark jade set on a high stone pedestal. The shrine rose from the floor of the pit to a height of fully twelve feet. Evidently Grover had removed a great number of images, for there remained in front of the Buddha only a single huge golden lotus.

And above it all branched the object of

Rodney's visit, a tree of the genus *Taraktogenos*.

Rodney's contemplation of the fabulous statue and his coveted tree was punctured disconcertingly. The tiger growled again, and this time the noise reverberated from beneath the entrance to the second temple. Disturbed, Rodney looked anxiously across the court and failed to see Grover's hands groping stealthily toward him.

SUDDENLY the botanist gasped for breath, as his rifle was wrenched from his hand. He was falling down the sixteen feet into the sunken court. He had tried to grip the railing, but the blow Grover had given him had been too unexpected and too heavy. Even before he struck the bottom he heard the jungle echo with Grover's jagged laugh.

"Was that an accident or a joke?" Rodney shouted, rising to his feet and rubbing his legs. "You might have made me break a bone."

Grover only laughed again. "Excuse me while I talk drum," he called mockingly. "I have to tell the natives that the man they saw come up the river defiled the sanctum of the Vat and was sacrificed to the gods!"

He moved to the far spire, and there Rodney saw a huge Khmer drum, long and tapered, with the skin stretched tightly and laced over the ends. Grover used his open hand and began his message. The drum's pulsating notes, irregular and distinct, sped into the dense forest that filled the extending valley.

"Have to scare the natives away from here until I get the treasure out!" Grover announced in a voice that wavered.

"That's no reason to try and scare me!" Rodney countered.

The explorer began to walk around the wall of the pit. It was vertical and too smooth to climb. He would have to have assistance to get out. Then he spied a door in the center of the wall at the Buddha's back. It stood open. As he approached it he saw that it was made of grated brass. To hell with that woods-ape! He'd get out, return to the river and move on. He started to enter the door, and stopped horrified. He stood face to face with the killer that is most dreaded in all Indo-China.

Rodney Cole knew that this was the test of his stability. He would have to keep cool. The darker room under the stone superstructure reflected the greenish cast of those hungry eyes. He backed slowly. He had no weapon. The Buddha was the only sanctuary. Grover would have to quit his jungle practical poking now. This tiger might mean his death.

"Wesley! I need help! That tiger's down here! Throw me a rope or something, a vine, so I can get out!"

"You're wrong, there are two cats down there, and there will be no rope!"

Grover's ringing laugh seemed to pierce Rodney's very skull. The man was crazy. With jungle fever or white man's lust!

RODNEY backed up. The huge cat followed him out, tossing its head back at an angle and baring its fangs in all their ferociousness. This one was a male. Its cheek hairs were long and spreading. Its rufous color and its markings of almost black transverse stripes showed that it was the worst enemy of man in the Cambodian fastnesses. The belly, the insides of its legs, the cheeks and a spot over each glaring eye flashed white as it crept closer. The cat's hair was very short and fine. At another time Rodney might have appreciated its rich color. He had got back fairly close to the Buddha when he noticed another tiger emerge from the solitary door with a bound.

Rodney turned and clambered as fast as he could up the slippery surface of the Buddha. He was grateful that the lotus was there. It kept his feet out of the tiger's jaws as he stepped upward. The wicked teeth dented the soft gold.

Grover stopped his drum talk and laughed. It was a hollow sound; a cloak hiding fear.

The male and the smaller female attacked, hurling themselves repeatedly into the air in their attempts to reach their cornered captive. The ribs of the animals stood out, crying for food.

"They haven't had anything to eat for three days." The big man peered into the pit. His ruddy beard glinted with sweat. "You can still see a few bones of the natives who came in here with me last. That, announced by my drum to the natives in the hills and forests, keeps the rest from

venturin' near the Vat. And," his voice grew shrill, "it's a trial to hang onto that slippery polished Buddha!"

RODNEY said nothing. He was afraid, not of the tigers, not of Grover, but of losing his head. There must be a way out. He had the determination to get free so that he could lambaste the devil out of that diseased mind.

"You were a clumsy meddler. This boodle is not goin' to be split two ways either, if Cliff should happen up here." Grover's laugh roared again, retreated, grew fainter in the distance, and ceased.

The botanist was alone to hang on to life as long as he could. His muscles already had that tingling sensation due to the restriction of blood-flow.

A branch that curved in through the arched open sides of the court, moved above the pit in a swift gust of wind. It was the *Taraktogenus*; an ironical trick of nature. A shot that cut the forest air made no impression on him.

His fingers were gripped around the smooth head of the Buddha, no doubt just like the others who had been sacrificed before him. They were wet with perspiration, and he feared they would soon grow numb and relax their hold. His legs were wrapped around the shoulders of the image. He would not be able to hold on much longer.

The claws of the tigers were swinging closer and closer as they struggled more desperately for the food that whetted their appetite. Would his bones soon join those others on the floor?

Although Rodney's body was almost ready to give up the fight, his mind was not. He thought of a plan. He utilized his waning endurance to get up a little higher, though he knew that he would have to exercise the greatest care not to lose his balance. He managed to lock his feet together and free his arms.

Carefully he removed his shirt, tore it into strips, and tied the pieces of cloth together as he used to do when making a tail for a kite. His undershirt came next, and now he calculated that he had enough. With infinite pains he removed the shoe from one foot, fastened the lace to one end of his homemade rope, and whirled it around his head. He let it fly upward,

keeping hold of the other end. It missed the *Taraktogetus* and fell into the pit. But it dropped on the side of the Buddha away from the tigers, and before they could seize the shoe Rodney had pulled his line up again. On the second try the shoe caught firmly in the branch. Using the cloth rope as a guide he drew the branch down to his grasp. With one hand he slipped his shoe back on his deadened foot, then gripped the branch with both hands. It was like a shot in the dark, but he would have to take the risk.

The slinking cats glided back and forth. He must try to distract them. He noticed that the branch had some seeds growing on it. These he tore off, throwing them into the corner furthest from the tree. The male trotted off to investigate the seed pods, but the female was more patient in waiting for tastier meat. Rodney reached up the branch as fast as he could, and loosed his numbed legs. He was depending on that branch. It had to hold its grip on the trunk of the mother tree. The male killer was out of reach but the female was too close!

Rodney's weight brought the branch almost to the floor of the court. Hand over hand he rushed upward but he was, even with his agility, too slow. At first the swinging man startled the tigress, but the shock was only momentary. It recognized food. It crouched to spring.

Rodney had seen the tigress crouch. He spurred himself on to greater effort up the branch that hung over the edge of the wall like a rope, but his muscles were too fatigued. The cat leaped. The botanist swung behind the branch as a shield. The impact was terrific but the branch was tough and strong. It did not break. The cat fell back to the floor, but it left five shallow gashes bleeding in his left thigh. Rodney kept going up and up, and before the cat could leap again he was out of its range.

Now his greatest enemy was his fast-shrinking strength. The top only two feet away seemed miles beyond his capabilities. Inch by inch he struggled up, in his mind reviewing his life and preparing for the death that appeared impossible of escape.

He had thrown his right leg over the stone railing when the repeated efforts of

the two tigers tore at the branch. With a loud crack the branch broke from the tree, ripping the bark, and fell into the court. His support gone, Rodney slipped and fell backward. Arms dangling, head hanging down, he stared at the snarling jaws and glistening sharp teeth.

BUT his leg held. With a final effort, he got his body up on the railing. At last he stood again in the upper court. The cloth rope he had constructed still hung from his shoe. He untied it and threw it into the pit. The tigers fell upon it and tore it in pieces, growling horribly.

The exhausted man crawled to the base of one of the spires out of the constant rain of the monsoon. With shaking fingers he unbuttoned his hip-pocket and withdrew his medicine kit. The small metal box was crushed but unbroken, and there was enough iodine to treat the five throbbing gashes. He swallowed the dose of quinine, and almost at once fell pantingly asleep.

He had slept for more than three hours when he was awakened. Again the drum was beating. Grover's senseless guffaws mingled with the resonant booming of the deep-throated Khmer drum. From time to time his voice rose in a chant, "Couldn't hold out long!"

It was turning dusk. The white cloth strips shining on the floor of the sunken court made it appear that Rodney had been devoured. "Almost made it! But the branch broke!" Peals of ugly laughter resounded in the naked building. The drum roared.

Rodney's pulse quickened. He was anxious to lay his hands on that red-headed monster. The rest had greatly restored him. He rose and limping only slightly walked down toward the stone balcony. The tread of his feet echoed in the hollow structure. The cats stalked along the floor beneath, noiselessly, missing no bet. Rodney made no effort to hide his presence. The drum fell silent. Grover stood stark still, his eyes stabbed along the walk.

"I'm going to knock hell out of you, Grover," Rodney stated quietly. "This time your idea didn't work. I had no intention of interfering with your enterprise, I didn't even know about it. But things will be different now. I'm turning you

out of here like a rat." His thigh ached a little, but the tramp of his feet was solid and strong.

Grover left the drum and rushed to meet Rodney. About ten feet apart they halted. Very little light remained. The redhead had no rifle. The forest noises were drowned in the increasing velocity of the monsoon.

From his belt Grover unsheathed a long, thin knife, bent forward at the waist, and slowly advanced on Rodney. Grover had the advantage of weight, the gashed thigh was a handicap to Rodney, but the younger man's furious determination to repay the vile trick played on him balanced the scales. Rodney saw the twilight glint from the bright steel as the blade dashed at him in the tight grip of his adversary. The botanist's footwork saved him. He seized Grover's wrist, slipped, fell with the big man atop him, but threw him off.

Again they faced each other. Rodney lunged with all his speed. But the big man was ready. He kicked. The botanist stumbled and fell against that part of the rail which still stood bordering the sunken court. Grover followed up his advantage. The younger man lay near the edge of the pit. A push and he would be back with the hungrily waiting tigers.

But Rodney took in the situation with the keenness of desperation. He jumped to his feet before Grover could attack and assumed the offensive. Twilight was fast disappearing. A left jab to Grover's jaw staggered the burly redhead. Rodney followed with a right hook that drove the big man back toward the temple entrance.

Then Grover lost both his judgment and his sense of direction. Holding his knife low before him as if to impale his foe upon it, and hurling himself with all his force, Grover rushed straight at Rodney.

LIKE lightning the young man sidestepped. Too late he realized that he had permitted Grover to feed himself to the cats.

With a hideous scream the redhead fell heavily into the pit. Cursing savagely, he fought for his life. His bitter cries were brief. The court lapsed to a silence that was broken only by the growls of the jungle cats as they divided their spoil. The

mocking sounds of the teeming forest answered them.

The botanist felt sick. He turned away to retrace his path to his boat, but he found that the pitch-black of the jungle would not permit him to traverse the covered trail. The last vestige of light had vanished. So he found a dry spot in the corridor to spend the night.

The purring, gorged cats woke him at the first blush of a rainless dawn. The realization of why the tigers purred brought back the whole memory of what had transpired the evening before. If those cats should be turned loose, having tasted so heavily of human flesh, they would very probably remain mankillers. Anyway, he would love the feel of those pelts lying quiet under his bare feet.

When he reached the boat his native had disappeared. Calling brought no response. As he picked up his rifle and examined it, he noticed one shell had been fired. "Grover used my rifle!" He looked for signs of blood in the boat and on the shore but he could find none.

The next day, and the day following, he lazily guided his boat down the Sen, listening to the lapping of the water and to the resonant cadenced drum talk.

The third afternoon, with Clifford Smedley-Cooke, he sat in the office of the Resident-General at Pnom-Penh.

"And so, after I found the entrance through which the cats had been enticed and trapped, I prepared their pelts. I have them with me, together with the damned drum."

Smedley-Cooke looked at the Resident-General. "I'm in the dog-house, as the Americans say. But this thing developed quite beyond my participation." He turned to the botanist. "Next time you go to Rangoon, Rod, look me up. I'll be there."

"Of course, Americans must always have a souvenir." Rodney's eyes twinkled. "I don't believe this government will miss this golden lotus that saved me."

"In due course, you will get a more substantial souvenir from Cambodia." The Resident-General smiled his thanks.

Rodney Cole laughed. "Here's the real prize!" He held out some of the chaulmoogra oil seeds he had gathered. "I'm naming the tree *Taraktogenus Vat Tigris*!"

RIVER DEVIL

A continuation of Edgar Wallace's great character, Sanders of the River

By FRANCIS GERARD

Stern are the gods of the River. Hamilton, Captain of Houssas, flouted the horned devil-devil with ribald laughter—and paid the ju ju price.

IT was at tiffin one day at the Residency that the secret of Bones' new hobby was divulged.

At the head of the table sat Mr. Commissioner Sanders, Hamilton on his right with Lieutenant Francis Augustus Tibbetts—Bones to his intimates—facing the Houssa captain. Abiboo had just placed the inevitable rice pudding on the table before the Commissioner, when Bones was observed to shake his head violently and make little clucking noises of protest.

"Got hiccups?" asked Hamilton amiably.

Bones clucked twice more and addressed himself to Sanders, "Chief, you're not goin' to eat that, are you?"

"Why not?" asked the astonished Commissioner, and added with unusual levity, "We have it every other day, don't we?"

Bones took out his monocle, polished it absent-mindedly on the edge of the tablecloth, screwed it back into his eye and looked profound.

"Watch him closely, everybody," urged Hamilton. "He's going to palm the loaf."

"Gentlemen," Bones stated, "I have here a book," he pulled a slim volume from his pocket and slapped it resoundingly, "a jolly old work which I might say has completely revolutionized my entire life. When I think that I have been shovelin' some perfectly fearful mixtures into my poor old inside, it makes me shudder."

"What are you talking about, Bones?" asked Sanders.

"Vitamins, sir," said Hamilton, peering across and reading the title of the book. "'*The Vital Vitamin*,'" he announced solemnly, "'by Professor Hiram Z. Zonks, University of Plattsville, Wisconsin.' Good Lord! Bones, you're not studying that muck?"

Bones turned a crimson face to his superior. "Muck!" he yelled, his voice cracking in his indignation. "This isn't

jolly old muck. Good gracious, no. This is die . . . die . . ." He consulted the book. "Dietetics. Don't you know, you—you ignorant self-poisoner, that that pudding is an absolute death-trap full of wrigglin' thingamies that ruin your jolly old inside?"

"You're making me ill, Bones," said Sanders, laying down his spoon. "Will you defer your lecture until after tiffin?"

Bones had no reply ready, so he saluted, thereby wounding himself slightly in the right ear with his fork.

The rice pudding was not a success.

FOR the next week or so Bones amused the Commissioner and exasperated Hamilton by insisting on sticking rigidly to the diet of nuts and goats' milk that the expert from Plattsville, Wis., recommended. While Sanders and the Houssa captain were enjoying an excellent curry, Bones would sit at the table with them drinking endless glasses of somewhat strong-smelling milk and dismally cracking nuts.

"You'll be able to swing by your tail soon," Hamilton suggested after one meal which had ended in Bones having a dreadful attack of indigestion, which he manfully strove to conceal.

But Bones was nothing if not thorough, though it is true that Hamilton, entering his hut one morning to consult him over a matter of company accounts, discovered Mr. Tibbetts hastily concealing a vast package of milk chocolate.

Bones' supply of goat milk became a problem at headquarters, and finally Sanders pointed out that if he intended to continue with this diet he would have to get his own goats. It happened that Bones was going up river in the *Zaire* that day, and he intended to return with a nanny-goat which should supply whatever milk he required.



Hamilton stood very still, for the full moonlight flickered along the great blade of a stabbing-spear not twelve inches from his throat. "I see you, Lamani," he replied evenly. "What folly is this?"

Once on the *Zaire* and out of sight of his superiors, Bones decided to drop his diet temporarily, satisfying his conscience with the argument that it was not good to do these things too suddenly. This decision probably accounted for everything that followed.

Having settled the marriage palaver which he had been sent up to the Akasava to untangle, Bones, on his way downriver, bethought himself of the she-goat he was to buy. Accordingly he stopped off at Bosambo's city.

To that sympathetic listener he explained his wants and Bosambo replied, "Bo . . . Tibbetti, here in my fine city is the great-grandmother of all goats, and she shall fill your stomach with her strong milk so that you grow fat and lusty."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Bones, appalled. "Will she do that?"

"That and more, Tibbetti."

"I hope not," said Bones doubtfully. "All right, Bosambo, old lad. Trot out your little goat."

Now, Bosambo was nothing if not an opportunist, and the fact that there was not a single suitable goat in the Ochori city at the time did not worry him at all. The truth was it was the season when the herds were driven north to the hill pastures on the Akasava border, and at the time of Bones' visit there was only one goat in Bosambo's city, and that did not belong to him. The animal in question was the property and pride of one S'Goni, Bosambo's headman, who was now away.

"Wait a while, Lord Bones," urged Bosambo, "and I will bring this grand goat to your lordship."

Bosambo then went into his hut and called his wife, Fatima, to him.

"Light of my soul," he said, "you shall go to S'Goni's hut and fetch me his great goat, for Tibbetti has need of it. And this you will do in secret, none seeing you, Desire-of-My-Life, for Tibbetti would practice certain magics."

"Lord," asked the slim brown girl, regarding him inquiringly, "S'Goni is gone upon a journey, as well you know. What payment shall I leave for this goat?"

"That we will arrange later," replied Bosambo hastily, "though it enters into my mind that we may well tell S'Goni that his fine goat has died of the sickness mongo."

"Bosambo," said Fatima, "that would be a lie."

"Is it not written in the Sura of the Cow that once in a man's lifetime it is permitted to prevaricate?"

"Lord, I do not think that is in the holy Koran."

"Then it is in the white man's Bible," said Bosambo outrageously, "which is a magic which you do not understand and filled with mysteries known only to Sandi and me."

BONES goggled through his monocle and opened his mouth wide in admiration when Bosambo reappeared leading the biggest goat the young officer had ever seen. It was jet-black and magnificent in every way.

"Tibbetti," said Bosambo blandly, "here is a very king—" he corrected himself hastily—"queen among goats, and one which shall do all things such as you require of her."

"How much?" said Bones.

"Five and five English shillings," suggested Bosambo anxiously.

"Done," said Bones so readily that Bosambo cursed himself under his breath that he had not made it twenty.

"It has large and beautiful horns," said Bones, stooping to examine his new possession.

"Do not touch it over-much, Tibbetti," said Bosambo urgently, "for it is a delicately nurtured beast and cares little for rough handling."

Bones stood upright again while the goat viewed him with a jaundiced eye and Bosambo breathed again.

"Fetch her to my fine ship, then, Bosambo," nodded Bones, but the chief shook his head and, indicating the collar about the goat's neck, said, "It is more fitting, Tibbetti, that you lead her yourself, thus will she grow to know you and think of you with loving thoughts."

"Think so?" said Bones, and extended his hand to the goat's collar.

It was at that moment that the goat disappeared. One moment it was standing there apparently quite meek and docile, the next minute it was twenty-five yards away going like a Derby winner with its head well down, and just ahead of it, but only just, went a sergeant of Houssas with

his mouth wide open and leaping like a stag.

"Hey!" yelled Bones. "Hey, come back here! Oh, damn! Bosambo, you've sold me a pup!"

"No, no, Tibbetti," replied the chief of the Ochori anxiously. "It is but her playful way."

"Well, I wish she wouldn't play so quickly," grumbled Bones, and went rapidly to the *Zaire*, on which he found his new charge in sole possession of the deck aft, since the crew had disappeared completely, leaving the goat to a contemplative meal of the little White Ensign which drooped at the stern.

"Juno," said Bones sternly, addressing the goat, "Juno, you're a naughty goat. Good gosh, I don't know what the Commissioner'll do to you for pouchin' the jolly old flag like that. Come here at once."

To Bones' complete consternation the goat came, and more quickly than he had thought, but the young officer side-stepped hurriedly, and, catching it by the collar, he roared for Yoka to cast off.

"**H**ERE comes the diet fiend, sir," said Hamilton to Sanders as the *Zaire* drew into the little dock near the Residency, "and, by Jove, he's brought his diet with him!"

Bones was walking toward the veranda leading Juno proudly by the collar. His face reflected an expression of intense pride. The goat's expression was completely saturnine.

"All present and correct, sir," said Bones, halting and saluting, "together with jolly old milk-giver, as commanded."

Sanders stared at the goat, half-rose from his chair and then chuckled. Hamilton stood up, walked down the steps and right round the goat. Bones eyed him suspiciously. So did the goat.

Then Hamilton gave a great bellow of laughter and doubled up with his head almost on his knees.

"Oh, Bones," he wailed, "where did you get that goat?"

"I fail," said Bones with great dignity, "I fail completely to understand the reason for your ribald behavior. I bought Juno from Bosambo."

"Juno," sobbed Hamilton, overcome by mirth. "He bought Juno from Bosambo, sir. Why, you poor dope, you've been stung. Juno isn't a goddess, but a god."

"Don't be profane, my dear fellow," said Bones, completely fogged.

"It's a billy-goat," said Hamilton, and doubled up again in helpless laughter.

Bones' jaw dropped. He stared with a horrified expression at the goat, which was eyeing Hamilton in a most peculiar manner.

"Good Lord!" gasped Bones. Then—"

It was at this moment that Juno once more did his disappearing act, only this time he did not go so far. One second he was standing with a thoughtful expression on his bearded face at Bones' side, and the next he had charged and caught Hamilton, still doubled up with laughter, in a certain tender place.

What happened after that nobody could remember clearly. There was a scene of riot and misrule during which the goat committed a second aggravated assault upon the outraged Houssa captain, drove Sanders back up the steps of the veranda, where he defeated an attack in flank with a deck-chair, and then, advancing determinedly upon Bones, thrust out its beard and made the most disgusting noise in his astonished and crimson face.

"Oh, dear," said Bones when once more he had a grip on the goat's collar. "Oh, I say, old man, forgive and forget. You wounded her, I mean him, in his tenderest feelings by laughing at him."

"Wounded him in . . . What about me?" snarled Hamilton.

"You," shouted Bones, completely insubordinate in defense of his possession, "you, my dear fellow, positively asked for it. No gentleman would have been so brusque and indelicate as you. I'm disappointed, Ham. I'm bitterly disappointed." With which he swung round and led the goat away, leaving his superior fuming.

BONES' diet went the way of all his enthusiasms, but Juno, rechristened Jupiter, remained and presented a problem. Hamilton repeatedly urged his subordinate to "get rid of that brute," but Bones was very possessive, and Jupiter was his property and, as such, to be defended to

the last ditch. For some reason or other the goat had taken to his master and also to Bones' servant, Ali Abid, the stout, black Coast-boy who, before entering Mr. Tibbetts' service had been boy for twenty years to a professor of bacteriology. Ali Abid possessed a wonderful English vocabulary, and his speech was that of a scientific lecturer. Bones appointed him goat-boy and left it at that.

It was about this time that Lamani the Strong discovered his strength.

Lamani was the headman of a little Isisi fishing-village. He was a person of no importance, though a great spearer of fish. Then one of his villagers married a wife, N'Keni, who was the daughter of a chief. Such a marriage could never have been arranged in the normal course of events, but N'Keni had been married three times to different husbands, and each time she had been divorced and brought back to her father, who had had the additional shame of being obliged to disgorge the brass rods he had received in payment for her. N'Keni was a famous dancer, and when her supple body moved, swaying in the Dance of the Three Lovers, men went mad and did things which later they regretted. Thus her father was only too glad to be rid of her once more, even if she went only as the wife of a poor Isisi fisherman.

But N'Keni had other views, and when her bold glance fell upon the splendidly proportioned figure of Lamani the Strong, she decided there and then that she would dance for him and that her dance should finish in his hut, for she cared little for her fourth husband, who was a sensible man and who took his whip to her when she danced instead of cleansing his cooking-pots.

The fatal fascination of the flesh is confined to no race or color, and when N'Keni danced before the chief, he became as wax in her slim hands and he took her into his hut, which was a shame and an abomination before the village of which he was the headman, appointed by Sandi the Law-Giver, himself.

N'Keni's husband strode to Lamani's hut, a pliant fishing-spear twirling significantly in a skilful hand. He was carried back to his own hut ignominiously—feet first with his broken spear thrust in deri-

sion through the fleshy part of his thigh.

ALL might have gone well for the illicit lovers, for Lamani was a great wielder of whips and the village went in fear of him, had it not been for a little microscopic thing of which the headman had never heard, a little microscopic thing which crept into the wound of N'Keni's husband so that it swelled and became a color wonderful to see . . . after which the husband died.

"Oko!" exclaimed Lamani when they brought him the news of the man's death. "Now Sandi will come, and his face will be unkind."

He summoned the village to a palaver before his hut and said, "Hear, O people, N'Keni's man has died. He has died of the sickness mogo."

There was some muttering, and Lamani came to his feet, a long hippopotamus whip in his big fist.

"N'Keni's man died of the Sickness Itself," he roared, "and if any man or woman say different, behold I will take them and light a fire upon their chests and afterward feed their bowels to the fishes. Tell me, my people, how did N'Keni's man die?"

"He died of the Sickness Itself," chanted the villagers, for, though Sandi was terrible, so, too, was Lamani, and he was closer at hand.

"Now you shall dance for me, N'Keni," said the chief happily, "and we will wait for the coming of Sandi."

But Sandi did not come, for the Commissioner was down with a bad go of malaria, and Captain Hamilton came in his place.

"I see you, Militini," said Lamani courteously, eyeing the Houssa captain's devilish blue eyes nervously. "Now I tell you, Militini, my heart expands within me at your coming and blossoms like a flower before your presence."

"I see you, Chief," said Hamilton, accepting the stool placed for him. "Now Sandi has sent me in his place, for he has heard through his spies of the death of one M'Foso, who was a fisherman in the river and who now fishes in hell. He has a widow, Lamani," went on Hamilton significantly and staring at the slim brown girl standing insolently behind the chief.

"He has a widow of whom men say so-and-so and such and such a thing, yet as I passed M'Foso's hut, I did not see that his cooking-pots were broken in memory nor the roof unthatched. Surely, Lamani, such a woman is without shame or piety?"

Hamilton stared directly at N'Keni and saw the fury in her face. He saw that he had provoked her, as he had desired.

"Why do you speak with a tongue that goes round corners, Militini?" she shrieked. "Do you fear a woman, that you do not name me to my face?"

"How now!" exclaimed Captain Hamilton in assumed surprise. "Does M'Foso's woman sleep in the shadow of your hut, Chief?"

"Peace, girl," snarled Lamani, frowning.

"Peace is it?" she sneered. "Do you fear this white man, or are you in very truth Lamani the Strong?"

"Strong enough, perchance," suggested Hamilton quickly, "to drive a spear through an unwanted husband."

Only by the sudden movement of the muscles over his diaphragm did Lamani betray himself. He turned a bewildered face to Hamilton and said, "Lord, your words are beyond my understanding. If certain evil tongues have twisted the truth in Sandi's ears, ask of any man in my village, and you shall hear the truth indeed."

"I wonder," said Hamilton, and proceeded to question the principal villagers.

Each and every man replied, with one eye on his chief, that M'Foso had died of the sickness *mongo*.

"I have heard," suggested Hamilton when his inquiries had led to nothing more than a complete alibi for the chief, "that you are a great wielder of whips, Lamani."

"Lord," replied the chief cautiously, "that is so."

"I, too, am a wielder of whips," replied Hamilton, "and it seems to me that there will be a flogging in this village tonight."

With that he went back to the *Zaire*.

WHEN dark had fallen Hamilton returned, and at his back were a half-dozen Houssas with rifles and fixed bayonets and three more who labored beneath the weight of a Maxim gun.

"This palaver is summoned," said Hamilton, "that you may witness the justice of Sandi. All this day I have listened

while you deafened me with your lies, and now Lamani is no more the headman of this village. He shall be as one of you, having no more authority nor power to say 'Go' or 'Come hither,' and," he ended significantly, "no power to wield whips."

The dumbfounded headman was brought before Hamilton by Abiboo and another Houssa.

"Tie him to that tree," nodded Hamilton.

"Lord," raged Lamani, "what would you do?"

The Houssa captain did not answer, but watched the displaced headman tied, face inward, to a tall sapling.

"Fetch me Lamani's own whip," he ordered, and when they brought it to him, he beckoned the woman N'Keni, who had been a fascinated spectator of the whole scene.

"They tell me, N'Keni, that you are a wonderful dancer."

"Militini," she said, her knuckles to her teeth in terror, "that is the truth."

"You are young and lithe and strong," went on Hamilton quietly, "and you shall take this whip which I give you, and you shall flog Lamani until I bid you cease. And be very sure that if you lay on lightly, I shall see, and there will be a second flogging."

"Lord," promised the terrified woman, "I will strike hard."

When the beating was over and Lamani had been released and crumpled up at the foot of the tree, he turned a sweat-streaked face to Hamilton and said thickly, "Lord, I think you will be sorry."

"I doubt it," said Hamilton cheerfully in English, and went back to the *Zaire*.

THE little stern-wheeler reached headquarters just before sun-up, and Hamilton stepped ashore from the gang-plank.

A few minutes later that stout man, Ali Abid, burst into Bones' hut, where the latter was sleeping, and in his agitation went so far as to shake Mr. Tibbetts by the shoulder.

"Sir," he panted in his pedantic English, "I pray you to elevate yourself from your couch of repose."

"Eh? What's that?" mumbled Bones, peering blearily at him. "Good Lord, Ali! Speak English, man!"

"Sir and highly respected employer, pray

forgive mutinous attitude of servant and humble subject, but horned ruminant quadruped has masticated tether-rope and is vamoosed."

"Ruminant. . . . Good Heavens, Ali, what are you talkin' about? Oh, the goat! Jupiter gone again?"

"Alas, I must report same," nodded Ali Abid. "Envanishment of goat complete, and when last seen was proceeding in a south-easterly direction at minimum rate of progress thirty miles per hour, led by short length only by respected superior officer of employer, Captain Hamilton."

"Oh, Lord!" said Bones, and got out of bed.

When Bones ultimately discovered his superior, Hamilton was limping back along the river path, his clothes in tatters, his face scratched and one wrist held tightly in the other hand.

Bones saluted, opened his mouth to speak, failed to find words to fit the occasion and, saluting again, remained dumb. Not so Hamilton.

"Of all the flaming, blistering bags of iniquity that ever went on four feet. . . ."

"Hooves," corrected Bones with maddening calm.

"I'll have it shot," roared Hamilton. "That's what I'll do. I'll have the perishing brute shot. I'm going straight to the Commissioner now."

Bones stared at him in dismay. "Shot?" the yelped. "Oh, have a heart, old man, have a heart. You can't shoot a poor in-offensive dumb beast."

"Inoffensive!" bellowed Hamilton. "And dumb! Why, after it had lifted me clean through the thorn hedge at the end of the compound, it stood there and blathered at me."

"Did he?" said Bones interestedly. "Good gracious me! But really, Ham, I am tryin' to instil some jolly old manners into him."

"Well, in a little while," replied Hamilton, "I'm going to instil some jolly old bullets into him. Or, if you don't like my doing it, you'll have to do it yourself."

"I'd as soon murder my innocent first-born," replied Bones with dignity.

"You haven't got one," snapped Hamilton, "so the point doesn't arise."

Later in the morning Sanders sent for Lieutenant Tibbetts and that young man

presented himself in the Commissioner's office with a woebegone face.

"Sit down, Bones," said Sanders kindly. "I expect you know why I've sent for you?"

"I expect so," replied Bones heavily.

"Precisely," nodded the Commissioner. "Bones, I'm sorry to have to say it, but Jupiter will have to be put down. No, no, it's no use, Bones. Every time he sees Hamilton he goes for him."

"Dammit all, sir," muttered Bones hoarsely, "the animal's like a child to me."

"I'm sorry, Bones," said Sanders finally, "dead or alive, Jupiter must be off the Residency tomorrow morning."

"Very good, sir," said Bones, rising to his feet and saluting. Sanders followed his exit with a regretful smile. There were some times when he regretted the demands of discipline.

LATER that afternoon, Hamilton said to the Commissioner, "Where's Bones? Sulking in his hut?"

Sanders shook his head. "He isn't sulking, Hamilton, he's grieving over that wretched goat of his. Bones has all the qualities of a nice child, and not least among them is a great love of animals."

"Oh, I know, sir, but we couldn't. . . ."

"No, we couldn't have Jupiter around any more. He was a pest."

"Still," said Hamilton doubtly, "if Bones really is cut up about it, I don't mind. . . ."

"No, no, Hamilton, I've settled it. He'll get over it."

They did not see Bones for the rest of the day, and at dinner-time Ali Abid presented himself and, bowing to the Commissioner, said, "Exalted sir, Francis Augustus Tibbetts, First Lieutenant of Houssas, bade me convey his profound regret at being unable to partake of evening meal with Excellencies. Said officer prostrated beneath acute attack of melancholia occasioned by severe, if just, finding of court-martial upon goat Jupiter."

"Very well, Ali," nodded Sanders. "Tell Mr. Tibbetts he is excused."

He frowned when the man had gone. "Bones'll have to be shaken out of this," he said.

"Would it do any good if I went over?" suggested Hamilton.

At ten o'clock that night Sanders, pre-

paring to turn in, saw Bones emerge from his hut leading Jupiter by his collar. The sagging shoulders of that dimly-seen figure told a tale all by themselves, and Sanders cursed irritably as he watched Bones tying up the goat in the little lean-to which had been built onto the side of his own hut.

IT seemed ridiculous, but Hamilton, too, was worried. Though he ragged him unmercifully, he was fond of his lank subordinate, and the idea of Bones miserably waiting to shoot his pet at dawn troubled him.

Lighting a cheroot, he went across the compound, hesitated before the door of Bones' hut, shrugged doubtfully and went on past the Houssa lines. Mechanically he returned the salute of the sentry and walked along the path leading to the river. By the water's edge he stood breathing in the comparative cool of the night air, the tip of his cheroot glowing and fading at irregular intervals. It was as he flicked the ash off it with a little hiss into the swiftly-running current that he heard a faint rustle behind him and swung round.

"I see you, white man," came a voice, and Hamilton stood very still, for the full moonlight flickered along the great blade of a stabbing-spear not twelve inches from his throat.

"I see you, Lamani," he replied evenly. "What folly is this?"

"No folly, white man," replied the other, "but justice. I told you, Militini, you would be sorry when you had me flogged and, by Ewa, it enters into my stomach that you are afraid."

Hamilton was unarmed. The nearest Houssa sentry was a couple of hundred yards away, and in the pit of his stomach was a cold, gnawing fear, but none of this showed in his face as he casually replaced the cheroot between his teeth and said, "I am a soldier, Lamani, and soldiers have no fear. What would you?"

"Your death, Militini, naught but your death, and that soon. But first I will tell you what is in my heart, and remember, Militini, move and you die before even I have finished speaking."

Hamilton stared at the evil blade of the spear. He recalled this man's reputation,

of how he was the quickest spearer of fish on the river, and he knew that nothing he could do would save his life.

Lamani poured out his hate and greedily watched the sweat gather on Hamilton's forehead.

Hamilton was flexing his knees a fraction of an inch at a time, getting ready to make that one desperate spring of which he had so little hope.

Lamani was still talking, but now he was getting to the end of his abuse and the spear was beginning to quiver in his grip, when suddenly there came a queer rumble of sound, and then in a split second Hamilton had disappeared. A loud splash told the would-be killer that his victim had vanished into the river, and his jaw dropped open as he saw that in his place was a horned and bearded devil which even now was swinging round on dancing hooves toward him.

"Oko!" exclaimed Lamani in stupefied dismay. "Here is witchcraft," and turned to fly, and in that moment Jupiter caught him full and his thigh snapped like a dried stick.

"OF course, Bones, after this there can be no question of having Jupiter destroyed because, whatever his intention, he undoubtedly saved Hamilton's life."

"And caught the bloody murderer," urged Bones exultantly.

"And caught the bloody murderer," nodded Hamilton as he limped with a stick into the room.

"I suggest," said Bones, "that we make him mascot of the Houssa Company."

"I suggest," said Sanders, "that you pay another visit to Bosambo and buy Jupiter a wife, only be a bit more careful this time, and then we can keep them penned somewhere. Jupiter must have his Juno, you know."

"Spoken like the father of his people," said Bones happily. "That's a jolly good idea, don't you know." He repeated, "Every Jupiter his Juno, what! Did you hear that, Ham?"

"My hearing is all that's left after your little pet's performance," said Hamilton dryly.



The rhinoceroses came on, hurtling like crazy trucks and tossing terrific blows with the long horns topping their snouts. . . .

Daughter of Sheba

A Gripping Novelet of Darkest Africa

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

The death drums rolled. Bi-lah, white lord of the jungle, must die at the hand of the Lost Tribe's high-priestess!

MRS. STEVENS' magnificent shoulders bent back. A dreamy expression softened her clean-cut features—the features of a Greek goddess of old.

"The wind is strong, ah, yes!" she

breathed. "Its gusts are scorching blasts blowing out of an immense and invisible furnace. They flatten the grass over the ground until it seems it will never arise again. But when the wind abates, the stubborn grass-blades spring up again; their



uniformly green tips close into a flat and unbroken verdant sea, stretching out in every direction, up to the jungle's edge."

The features of a Greek goddess relaxed into a merry smile, and Mrs. Stevens turned inquiringly toward one of the men around the camp-fire. "Well, Crosby—You're the scientific oracle of this crowd," she said lightly. "What moral do you draw from this natural fact?"

Dr. Crosby stared at her with patent admiration, as did Mrs. Stevens' husband, Wing Commander Stevens of His Majesty's Air Force, who now stood a short distance back of his wife.

A good-looking woman in her early thirties, Pamela Stevens had the added attraction to the archaeologist of being as much at home in the wastes of Africa as any man. With her husband, she had cheerfully faced the harsh climate and discomfort of several forlorn garrisons in Nigeria and the Sudan, until now she knew Africa as well as her native Northwestern England. Her courage and training had stood her in good stead a few weeks back, when the transport plane conveying her to upper Egypt had crashed after a few hours' flight from Nigeria and left her with the task of guiding her twelve-year-old daughter Lisbeth and her injured husband out of a savage wasteland.

Mrs. Stevens had fulfilled that task well. With the help of a compass and the stars, she had marched straight for the plateau of Tounio, where fortunately they had found the camp of an American archaeologist, a Mr. Colby, who was making a scientific investigation of the ancient African civilizations.

With the archaeologist was the strangest and most pitiful group of people that the Stevenses had ever seen. They were Professor Meyer, the famous Viennese cancer specialist, and Frau Meyer; Count von Anspach and Grafein von Anspach; Claes-sena, the industrialist from Prague; Mornay, a former Belgian Government employee and his wife; and finally, Captain and Madame Dufresne, who had made deadly enemies in their native France and been forced to seek a new life in the dark continent.

Some of these unfortunates had been driven from country to country by the totalitarian advance; all were attempting

to place hundreds of miles of wilderness between themselves and the secret police sent to track them down. But their stamina had been sorely taxed by the hardships of the savage African territories which they had crossed in their search for a sanctuary, and they had been on their last legs when they had stumbled into Crosby's plateau encampment.

"JUST let me think and I'll find some words of wisdom," Crosby chuckled as he glanced at the little group of children playing near-by. He saw that they were exploring an ant-heap and that his own fifteen-year-old son was their ring-leader.

Crosby had brought him along on his investigation trips after the death of his wife. He had never had occasion to regret his decision, as the boy had taken to the African wilderness like a duck does to water and was storing an amazing lot of knowledge in his handsome curly head. At the moment he was explaining the structure of the ant-heap to Mrs. Stevens' young daughter, Lisbeth, and she and the little refugee children were listening intently.

Crosby stood up. "Yes, the wind is strong, without a doubt. It sweeps all before it. And the gamut of political persecution runs in the same way. Drove of human beings are crushed or driven ruthlessly by the violence of governments. But the wind dies down; the moment inevitably comes when the conquerors meet their doom and their victims regain what they temporarily lost."

The male refugees smiled. Scientists, business men and soldiers, they all had plenty of courage in spite of their weariness, and they accepted Crosby's words for the encouragement they were intended. Their wives, on the contrary, barely managed to force polite smiles on their strained faces. Reared in comfort and accustomed to the gentle ways of civilization, they had followed the wanderings of their mates in growing bewilderment. Now they only knew that they were too exhausted in mind and body to get excited about anything.

Professor Meyer said smilingly, "Ach, if ve could only hope dot! But—"

He broke off. A wild shouting came from the porters' quarters. One of the porters screeched despairingly:

"Ahiee! Ahiee! The Ancient Ones! Death overtake us all!

The white men stared, amazed, at the sight that met their eyes.

A long file of bowmen, attired like archers of four thousand-year-old Egyptian frescoes, had popped out of the grass some hundred yards south of the tiny camp and were advancing slowly.

"Matoubo, Ngouro, Eideke, Gabassi!" Crosby roared. "Round up all our men, line them up with rifles and cartridge bandoleers!"

But, immediately after their single desperate scream of warning, all the porters had disappeared as effectively as if the ground had swallowed them. Only the white men of the camp, and Mrs. Stevens, were ready to open fire when the strange group of warriors came to a halt.

At a distance of less than fifty yards, Crosby examined them with the trained eyes of an anthropologist.

Their high, square shoulders and V-shaped waists were suggestive of the bodily structure of the ancient Egyptians. Also, their stiff, apron-like kilts, the shape of their striped headwear, and their red-painted bows were modern replicas of those used by the warriors of the Pharaohs.

A headman eventually detached himself from his companions and came onward, lifting an open hand in sign of peace. Abreast of Commander Stevens, who was the tallest and huskiest white man in the camp, the scowling headman stopped and rasped in a choppy mixture of Arabic and local-negro dialect:

"Seknakton, mightiest chief and warrior, sword-arm of the King, sends me! Surrender, and you may live—as slaves of the mighty Anubarris people! Oppose—and you will all die before our mighty arrows!"

Stevens, the British officer, was thinking hard. He remembered that some officers of the British and French Camel Corps had stamped out uprisings by challenging and killing nomadic chiefs in fierce duels. He was an excellent shot, had the fencing skill of the average officer and had once learned the use of a native dagger from his orderly, a former Sudanese cutthroat. Advancing to the forefront, he shouted contemptuously:

"Tell your chief, Seknaton, that he must

prove his invincibility by agreeing to fight me, after promising that my companions shall be allowed to leave undisturbed if I win."

It was a shot in the dark, the sort of thing any man was expected to do. But the reaction of the strange tribesmen surprised even the British officer. They burst into roars of villainous laughter, touched their heads meaningly, pointed at him and shouted that he was crazy.

Finally the headman said contemptuously:

"Seknaton could crush ten like you with a single hand. But have your own way, white man! Seknaton will come and tear you limb from limb, for your impudence!"

With a fiendish snarl the headman placed a broken arrow in Stevens' hand to signify that the Anubarris withdrew their offer of mercy, and with a shout the intruders retreated from sight.

SEVERAL hours after their departure, it became apparent that the terrorized porters had gone for good. No doubt they had been warned by the tribal grapevine of the presence of the Anubarris in the neighborhood, and also of the awesome end in store for them if they fought at their masters' sides against the ancient people of the jungles of Tounio.

Late in the afternoon, Anspach and Dufresne went to do some scouting, but everywhere beyond the edge of the plain they were met by angry cries to turn back. The white men bowed to discretion and returned to the camp.

Night came, dark and menacing. While the silvery crescent of the new moon climbed on the sky, the monotonous, droning tunes of a weird chant came from the jungle. In the surrounded camp, the children became hysterical. But there was nothing that their parents could do.

A little later, while the angry African stars and full moon bathed the plain with a silvery light, the chant subsided and drums began booming mournfully.

Shortly after, a throng of Anubarris came out of the jungle. Their ancient Egyptian headwear, stiff skirts and sashes contrasted oddly with the bandoleers slung across their shoulders and the guns in their hands. Fifty yards from the tents, they came to a halt. An awesome mountain of

a man strode out of their massed ranks.

Fully seven feet high, with an immense pair of high and thick shoulders, he had a barrel of a chest which was bumpy with cable-like muscles and a comparatively narrow waist. His legs were shapeless columns. His nose was big but not hooked, and his cheekbones stood out high and prominent above his wide and flat jaws. His mouth was large and snarling. But his eyes were the most disconcerting feature of his person. Jet-black and enormous, they seemed to radiate a yellow, baleful glow. He roared menacingly:

"I'm Seknaton! Where is this man who dares fight me?"

Mrs. Stevens' arms closed convulsively around her husband. Commander Stevens kissed her, then gently released her hold and pushed her away. He said in a conversational voice: "Don't disturb Lisbeth. She's asleep and I hope to Heaven she'll remain asleep while . . ."

Then he went forth to his death.

The British officer was big and strong. But he seemed as slender and puny as a child when he drew near Seknaton. A thunderous, insulting laughter boomed out of the mouth of the ferocious chieftain as he scanned him from head to foot. Then he made a sharp gesture. One of his men hastened to offer to Stevens a quadrangular shield of hippopotamus hide, a spear and a sword.

Seknaton took the same set of weapons from another Anubarris. Again his laughter boomed disdainfully when he saw that Stevens refused shield and spear and accepted only the sword.

The officer had hardly grasped the heavy Anubarris sword when, resolved to get the upper hand from the very start, he charged.

With an agility unsuspected in his trunk-like legs, Seknaton side-stepped to the right, threw Stevens off balance with a nudge of his shield and then, quick as a flash, he pivoted on one heel and struck with his spear.

Sheer instinct prompted Stevens to duck as he stumbled on. But he couldn't entirely avoid the spear point, which slashed a deep gash into the muscles of his left shoulder. Seknaton catapulted after him like a huge eagle plunging after a small, crippled hawk.

The next instant Stevens was down,

buffeted and dazed by two flapping blows of his enemy's shield, stabbed four times in quick succession by his spear. Luckily, none of the too quickly delivered strokes reached a vital point, and, suddenly, Stevens' sword stabbed upward, opening a long and painful gash in one of Seknaton's thighs.

The giant chieftain shrieked awesomely, leaped back, put all his strength and all the speed of his arm into a terrific stab. But Stevens sprang up parrying; the razor-sharp edge of his sword met the wood of the spear's shaft, cut through it as if it were butter.

Again Seknaton shrieked. Throwing the useless broken spear at Stevens' head, he grasped the sword which he had stuck into his belt and rushed forward.

OUTWEIGHED, much weaker, and spent by loss of blood, Stevens gave way. For the next two or three minutes he tried his best to parry. The impact of his enemy's blows almost tore the sword's hilt from his fist and sent numbing shivers up to his shoulder, but now and then he managed to bring home strokes and slashes which cut Seknaton's left arm and side with a dozen superficial wounds.

Suddenly Seknaton threw his broken shield away. Covering himself with a whirlwind of blows constituting in themselves an effective defense, he forced back the exhausted Englishman.

With a frenzied effort Stevens slammed his enemy's sword aside, stabbed and felt rending flesh under the point of his own weapon; then Seknaton grabbed Stevens' right wrist with his left hand and twisted it; at the same time he shoved the edge of his sword against the Englishman's face.

Mrs. Stevens cried out and collapsed; the other white men of the camp sobbed with helpless rage as they clutched their rifles.

But Wing-Commander Stevens was not done for as yet. Grimly he ducked and smashed at the pit of Seknaton's stomach with his left fist, kicked at the shapeless ankles of the giant. Seknaton howled, lost his balance and dragged him down.

They both fell hard, lost hold of their weapons at the same time and rolled on the ground tearing at each other. The white officer found that Seknaton's body was as

firm as thick leather wrapped around hardened concrete. No matter where he hit him, he hurt his hands but failed to draw a grunt out of Seknaton. The kicks of his hobnailed boots, however, kept on damaging Seknaton's legs, and his gouging thumbs nearly blinded one of the giant's eyes.

Suddenly Seknaton jumped up, with Stevens spasmodically clutching at him. Feeling, more than realizing, what was coming, the English officer quickly released his hold and made a dive for his sword, but one of Seknaton's fists shot out, knocking him far from his mark, and in his turn Seknaton stooped to retrieve the sword. Blindly, Stevens grabbed a big stone, threw it at his enemy. The stone rebounded off Seknaton's hard skull, but sent him reeling backward, with blood pouring from his torn scalp into his eyes.

At that point Seknaton ceased being a human being and became a raging ape. Foaming at the mouth, roaring, he no longer sought his fallen sword. He crouched, spread his clawing fingers wide and charged.

Stevens was too spent to circle around him and retrieve one of the weapons. He endeavored to stop him by throwing additional stones, but Seknaton didn't even seem to feel their impact. Stevens was attempting to lift a boulder which must have weighed more than a hundred pounds, in the hope of cracking his enemy's skull with it, when Seknaton overtook him.

Crosby swore and took a step onward. But instantly warning shouts rang from among the Anubarris of the escort, scores of rifles covered the American scientist.

"Don't, while there's hope!" Dufresne croaked, his eyes riveted on Stevens, now wriggling in Seknaton's grasp and punching frenziedly at his face. "We must think of the women, for whom poor Stevens is fighting. And look! He's getting the upper hand!" Dufresne shouted hoarsely, because a terrific uppercut had staggered Seknaton.

But the next instant, a giant hand closed on Stevens' throat, while an enormous forearm crushed the small of his back. Backward the body of the English officer bent and his friends saw his agonized features swelling, blood pouring copiously from his mouth. Then the huge strangling

hand of Seknaton pistoned forward and downward; his enormous left forearm crushed Stevens' body still further in the opposite direction, against his own giant frame.

"*Mon Dieu!* He's breaking him in two!" Dufresne snarled, and hastily fired. The next instant he fell, pierced by a hail of bullets and arrows.

Seknaton laughed insanely. Then his big muscles tensed. There was a horrible snap and Stevens went limp, his spine fractured.

Growling horribly, Seknaton kept on bending that poor shattered body, until the white man could stand it no longer.

"Stop, beast!" Crosby suddenly screamed. "Surrender and come with us to the camp as a hostage or we kill you!"

Growling like an enraged leopard, Seknaton lifted his head. A derisive burst of laughter hissed out of his battered lips.

Without warning, Seknaton threw himself flat on the ground. The four white men fired blindly and were instantly charged by packs of yelling Anubarris.

They were fighting for their very lives when they heard Seknaton's mocking voice, shouting orders from a distance in an unknown language. The Anubarris retreated.

When the cloud drifted in the sky and the silvery beams of the moon again fell on the plain, the four battered white men found themselves alone with the bodies of Stevens and Dufresne. The Anubarris, who could have easily overcome them and overrun the camp, were jogging back to the jungle, where their sinister chieftain had already disappeared.

THERE was no sleep that night for the cornered white men and women and their terrorized children. Most pitiful of all were the wails of little Lisbeth Stevens and the wide-eyed, silent agony of her mother.

Claessens' skull had been fractured during the short combat in the darkness. He died at dawn and was buried near Stevens and Dufresne. Through with that grim labor, Crosby, Meyer and Anspach speculated on the reason which had temporarily induced Seknaton to spare them. At length Crosby concluded: "I'm afraid the brute is merely trying to give us just a few hours

of suspense before delivering the last blow."

Meyer nodded and went to his medicinal bag. From it he drew some pellets which he had brought along with him. He had sworn with his wife that they never would return to a concentration camp alive. Later on, he distributed them among the women, with the warning: "I realize that you prefer a quick and painless end to the horror of a life of shame and suffering."

The red disk of the sun was appearing over the eastern brim of the horizon when the wind brought to them a scent of burning resin and hemp, and a cacophony of beating drums and blaring trumpets. Red-eyed and tight-lipped, Mrs. Stevens and Madame Dufresne joined the three surviving men with their husbands' guns in their hands. They had not yet got over the shock of their mates' death, but they were obsessed by a fierce determination to avenge them.

AS the minutes passed, the uproar of wildly beating drums and roaring trumpets drew nearer and nearer. Suddenly, in the scarlet glow of the rising sun, scores of huge, squat, gray shapes shot out of the jungle.

"*Gott im Himmel!* Rhinoceroses! *Vot* are dey doing?" Anspach roared.

Anubarris, carrying flaming torches fastened to the tips of four yards' long poles, ran in a wide semi-circle all around the galloping rhinoceros herd. Now and then, they poked the blazing torches into the sides of balky rhinoceroses, which immediately squealed and resumed their clumsy run.

Her face as hard as stone, Mrs. Stevens took aim and fired. A big bull rhinoceros hopped, stumbled and fell on its belly, flattening its muzzle into the ground. But dozens of other rhinoceroses kept on coming.

They came on, hurtling like crazy trucks and tossing terrific blows with the long horns topping their snouts. Anspach was hit in a knee by an Anubarris bullet and immediately after was split from stomach to throat, lifted high and thrown among the lower branches of a tree by the horn and tossing head of another rhino. Madame Dufresne lost her head, turned and ran. She was quickly singled out by a

wicked-eyed and enormous beast, pursued relentlessly and finally cornered and killed in the tangle of two upset tents and a tumbling heap of rocks.

Shortly after the air rang with the pitiful cries of Frau Meyer and her daughter Karola, gored and trampled to death. Professor Meyer ran to their help, but could not locate them in the thickly raised dust and the tempest of huge, massive beasts speeding by. In his frenzied efforts, he avoided the slashing horn of a squealing rhino by a fraction of an inch, killed another with a bullet fired right into its mouth. Struck by a javelin thrown by an Anubarris driver, he pulled it calmly out of his arm and shot the Anubarris through the stomach.

Eventually, like a particularly hideous nightmare, the herd of charging rhinoceroses passed on, leaving the camp a gory mess. But, shortly after, row after row of Anubarris spread all over the plain, howling, firing, shooting arrows.

Wounded in both legs, dragging himself pitifully with his hands over the trampled ground, Professor Meyer at last reached the bodies of his wife and daughter and fell sobbing over them. But he was able to pull himself up in a sitting position and began firing at top speed when the warriors of Seknaton invaded the shattered camp.

BY that time, Mrs. Stevens lay dead, with a bullet hole in her forehead. Grafein von Anspach had swallowed poison and succumbed to its effect. Her little boy Kurt had expired in the hollow of the ground where he had crawled after being trampled by a charging rhinoceros. But Lisbeth Stevens and Marise Dufresne crouched shivering, clasped in each other's arms, behind Dr. Crosby and his son Bill, who had picked up a gun and was firing at his father's side.

The avalanche of the half-breed tribesmen in ancient Egyptian attire halted for an instant, in spontaneous tribute to the two wounded men and the boy who still kept on resisting against such superior odds. But the barked orders of their headmen sent them onward. Meyer shot point-blank a last long-shanked fellow who came leaping against him, then was stunned by a blow of a heavy spear's shaft and dis-

armed. Dr. Crosby was knocked out by a glancing bullet which seared a bloody furrow into the side of his head. Bill was reloading as fast as he could, when a swarthy broken-nosed tribesman pounced on him, cuffed him dizzy and tore the gun out of his grasp.

The spell of a silence almost unreal after the previous orgy of sounds descended heavily on the plain as Seknaton strode through the dancing eddies of heat haze to inspect the trophies of his victory. The mangled remains of Frau Meyer and Madame Dufresne claimed only a cursory glance, but the beauty of Mrs. Stevens and Countess von Anspach, still outstanding in death, filled him with baffled longings and helpless rage. Here were two very desirable women who could have been his and death, against which there was no recourse, had robbed him of them! In that moment the chief of the rhinoceros drivers incautiously came to ask further instructions.

Seknaton turned on him, mouth contracted, eyes blazing with fury.

"Wretch!" he roared. "You should have been able to freeze these people into instant surrender with the terror of your charging beasts, but you drove them too leisurely! The white women fought to the last and died!" Quick as a flash, he unsheathed his sword and peeled off one of the ears of the crestfallen subchief with a deft slash.

"Two little white-shes are still alive. Take them and let them grow in your harem until they are big enough for your pleasure!" another sub-chief fawned, pointing at Lisbeth Stevens and Marise Dufresne.

Seknaton lumbered up to the cringing children, tore them apart, and sticking two fingers as big as sausages under Lisbeth's chin, lifted her head up and sneered:

"You are right. There's rare comeliness in this one. But as to the other," he spat at little Marise Dufresne, who, never attractive, looked very miserly with her scrawny limbs twitching and her angular little face twisted by fright, "I see in her only a proper offering for the god of battle. Onward, Harran!"

A spindle-legged old man with a leering, toothless mouth and enormously long arms came toward him expectantly. He was light-skinned and wore a curved cutlass of

ancient workmanship stuck into his sash, but from his neck and over his scrawny chest hung the necklaces of woven dry herbs, human hair, bird bones and desiccated monkey paws which are the stock in trade of the average African witch-doctor.

"Seknaton!" he croaked expectantly—"A sacrifice to Anubis, the father of our ancient people, the death god who guided them in their long trip from their crumbling homes to our city!"

Seknaton grabbed poor little Marise by the scruff of her neck and threw her at the cackling priest, who fastened his claw-like hands into her hair and dragged her toward the biggest flat-topped boulder in sight.

MARISE DUFRESNE was too paralyzed to fight back; but an ear-splitting scream issued from her mouth when she was thrown flat on her back on the hard stone, her dress was roughly torn from her and the old devil's dagger shone under the sun above her naked little breast.

With the hand of his captor still over his shoulder, Bill had witnessed the brutal seizure of the little French girl with abject terror and rage fighting in his child's heart. When he saw that the old hellion was about to stab her, something snapped in Bill's mind. He forgot his fear, all notion of danger. With a sudden lunge he wrenched himself free and tore a spear out of the careless grasp of another Anubarris, whose attention was fully captured by the sacrificial offering of the little captive maiden to a dimly remembered god of a bygone past.

The warning shout of several tribesmen warned the witch-doctor of the unexpected threat. Clumsily he leaped around, slashed wildly at the spear that was slashing at him. But quick as a flash Bill lowered the shaft and stuck its steel-embossed point into the ancient ruffian's groin.

Harran screeched like a stricken vulture and stumbled backward, with the spear hanging from his transfixed body; and Bill, all courage and fury oozing out of his heart, gaped at him, open-eyed, trembling from head to foot.

A score of blades darted toward the American boy. But, with a deafening roar, Seknaton ordered all warriors to step back. Then, immense and menacing, he

walked up to Bill and stood over him, leering, drinking in his agony of horror and fright with sadistic pleasure.

"White lion cub," he shouted at length in the choppy dialect of the negroes of the territory of Tounio, "do you understand me?"

Bill had a gift for languages and had easily mastered that very plain one. Fully aware that this was the awesome giant who had killed Stevens with his bare hands, he whispered that he did.

"That's well, by the shade of my ancestors!" Seknaton sneered. Then he roared: "I saw you fighting like a fully grown warrior at the side of a man who resembles you."

"He's my father!" The words incontinently poured from Bill's lips. "He was wounded—he's bleeding to death. Please let me look for Professor Meyer! If he's still alive he'll save my father. He's a great *toubib*—a great doctor!"

"We once had an Arab *toubib* . . . but he was no good, just spat on the ailing and called on the help of his God Allah. So we killed him," Seknaton reminisced. "But if this man Ma-er is a real healer we shall give him a house and all the food he needs."

Then a crafty grin contracted his harsh features. The intense mental suffering showing on the face of the boy had given him an idea.

"Pick up the cub's father!" he shouted to his followers.

A few minutes later, a pailful of the water was thrown over Dr. Crosby's face. He was dragged to the place where his son and Seknaton stood. There, with blood copiously flowing from his wounds, unable to stand and helpless in the grasp of two burly Anubarris, the American scientist stared affectionately at his boy.

"You are about to die, under his very eyes!" Seknaton snarled at him from between clenched teeth.

Dr. Crosby didn't reply. His eyes were on his handsome son, treasuring the last moments that he was allowed to spend with him on earth. Finally he murmured:

"Son, do you think you can forgive me for bringing you here?"

"That's all right, Daddy," the boy stammered. "You didn't know that we would meet these awful men."

"Always do the right thing, son." Neyer forget that physical pain and defeat are transitory and unimportant as long as one is at peace with one's conscience, as long as one does bravely the duty of an honest man."

He spoke in English; and Seknaton, who could not understand and who saw no cringing weakness on his exhausted and gory face, felt that he was being robbed. He had anticipated great pleasure out of gloating over the breakdown and useless pleadings of both father and son. Suddenly he grasped a dagger, and, cursing, struck it into Crosby's chest. When the head of the American scientist hung limply in death, he turned to revile Bill. But the sight of his father's murder had been too much for the boy, and he had collapsed.

"Are you going to kill him, too?" asked a sub-chief.

"Arghhhh! Why should I?" The giant shrugged. "He'll grow into a sturdy slave. He'll earn his daily bowl of millet."

"Beware!" a warrior shouted. "This cub has already proved how fierce he is already. He has Harran's blood on his hands, and some day he'll try to gain his revenge on you for killing his father."

"Who dares say that anyone's hatred can endanger me?" Seknaton's quickly inflamed and ruthless temper was aroused. With the bloody dagger that had killed Crosby in his hand, he went for the warrior who shrieking in abject terror threw his bow and spear down and fled toward the jungle.

When Bill reacquired his senses, little Marise had been slain. Professor Meyer had been spared. After Bill's declaration that he was indeed Ma-er, the Toubib, he was given his medicine chest and allowed to tend to his own wounds. Then he was placed on a makeshift stretcher.

Bill and Lisbeth became hysterical when the order of departure was given and they had to leave the remains of their parents. Seknaton silenced them with the threat that he would stick a spear butt into their mouths, smashing their lips and breaking their teeth, if they didn't still their cries.

TWO days later they reached Kifra, the hidden town of the Anubarris.

Young as he was, Bill had learned a smattering of ancient Egyptian history

from his father. Thus he had recognized the attire of his captors with awe. Thereafter, the extraordinary physical power and fiendish cruelty of Seknaton had disheartened him with the conviction that the Anubarris were a strange race led by supermen conjured out of an uncanny past.

But the sight of the Anubarris city destroyed that illusion so thoroughly that he was delivered at a stroke of the cobwebs of superstition which had begun to muddle his judgment. For it was just like any of the settlements of the half-breed races scattered over the immense territory between the basin of the Niger River and the wastelands east of Lake Tchad.

The surrounding wall was an ordinary rampart of mud-bricks. The gate through which the returning column marched would have disgraced any self-respecting African town. The alleys that Bill crossed on his way to the prisoners' pen were evil-smelling, unpaved, flanked by dwellings of sun-hardened clay which looked like clumsy mausoleums molded out of dough.

Forty-eight hours after their arrival, Professor Meyer, Lisbeth and Bill were brought to the presence of Tahus, last king of the Anubarris.

Outwardly, the king's residence differed from those of his subjects only in that it was as wide as twenty of them. Inside, it was gaudy with rugs, curtains, cured skins, vessels of hammered silver and panoplies of weapons of various modern makes and styles.

The main reception room had a stone-paved floor, great slabs of hardened clay jutting out of the walls which served as seats and looked like sarcophagi, and huge brass lamps hanging from the ceiling. At the end of it there was the only majestic thing in Kifra—a dais of graceful white limestone surmounted by an ebony throne inlaid with multi-colored semi-precious stones.

The man sitting on it was at once imposing and pitiful. His profile, with a smooth, sloping forehead, wide-set eyes, aquiline nose and firm, triangular chin, was indeed reminiscent of the statues of the Pharaohs of the glorious period of ancient Egyptian history. But his cheeks were sunken in, his scrawny neck stood over a pair of hunched and bony shoulders.

King Tahus was not only very old, but

also very ill. His right arm was a great festering sore, dotted with carbuncles.

BILL'S eerie impression that the beady eyes of the aged king were looking through him, Lisbeth and Professor Meyer, sitting on his stretcher, was dispelled by the arrogant arrival of Seknaton.

There was a brutal swagger in the stride of the war-chief as he came forward. For the occasion he wore a gorget and plated belt of solid gold. His green-striped white kilt hung as stiffly as a metal sheet.

At the foot of the dais Seknaton kneeled. However, there was no respect in the smile which wolfishly contracted his bowed face.

"Speak!" King Tahus commanded.

"The information brought by our black Salamat allies turned out to be true," Seknaton replied. "I found the camp of the white men. But they would not surrender. These three—the wounded and useless man, the bold boy and the pale girl-child—are the only survivors of the struggle.

"However, I seized some fine guns for your bodyguards, Tahus, and as a reward I ask for my own the man and the girl."

It was an age-old stratagem. Meyer, introduced as a much-needed physician, was likely to become a royal favorite without any special benefit for Seknaton. Presented later as a doctor of Seknaton's household, he would instead constitute a valuable asset for the war-chief—to be lent or bartered for conspicuous concessions.

Bill was too young to appreciate fully Seknaton's barbaric scheming. At the same time, he instinctively realized that the only hope of avoiding misfortune and death lay in gaining the king's favor. But how?

Anxiously the distracted boy stared at the forbidding figure sitting on the black throne. He noticed his emaciated and sickly appearance, his sore arm.

That was it. Professor Meyer could relieve the king's misery. Seknaton had failed to introduce him as a *toubib*, as a physician. But he, Bill, would.

Before Seknaton could interrupt, Bill stammered in the negro dialect of Tounio: "O King, the white man before you is a great *toubib*. He will cure you of your suffering if you will let him."

Convulsed with stark fury, Seknaton

jumped to his feet. But the sickly king had heard. With a burst of energy he sprang to his feet.

"Why did you try to keep the *toubib* from me?" he hissed irately. "The honor that you gained is forfeited! Leave my presence at once!"

Seknaton growled and clenching his fist he turned on Bill. But the youth stood his ground.

"O King!" he shouted desperately. "This man killed my father when he was wounded and helpless in the grasp of two warriors. Will you let him kill as well the *toubib* who could heal you, and myself, who warned you of his quality?"

Tahus was by this time fully aroused. Baring his yellow teeth, he howled an order. A swarm of warriors came from behind the dais and Seknaton sobered before the muzzles of their guns. Again he kneeled in abject obeisance. But Tahus was in a frenzy. With loud screeches he repeated the order for him to go, and kept on reviling him at the top of his lungs until he disappeared into an adjacent corridor.

After a pause he croaked, "Tell the *toubib* to cure me!" His beady eyes fastened on Bill expectantly.

Anxiously Bill translated for Meyer's benefit.

"Tell them that I need my medicine chest and some boiled water. Ask them to carry my stretcher to that dais," the physician replied. "And tell the king that he must not be too proud to come down from his throne and sit at my side. I can't arise. My wounded legs will not support me."

Again Bill translated. King Tahus gave the necessary orders. He himself perched on a stool close to Meyer, watching him closely all the while.

Slowly, mustering all his power to keep from collapsing, Meyer lanced boils, cleansed, disinfected. If Tahus felt any pain he didn't show it. As if fascinated, he followed the work of the physician's hands.

After bandaging his arm, Meyer examined him from head to foot, gave him some pills which he eagerly swallowed.

Followed several minutes of tense silence. Finally Tahus smiled crookedly.

"*Toubib*," he rasped, "you have done well. You shall be housed in this palace,

and, for your sake, I shall put the white girl in care of the priestesses of the moon, who are untouchable. If my health improves, she shall remain with them, enjoying their privileges, and in time become one of them."

Then he turned to Bill.

"But you, white boy, are the son of a man who fought my wishes. You asked nothing for yourself and you cannot expect my generosity to stretch too far. I'll order that Seknaton must not harm you—but I send you to the sulphur mine. And you shall be raised as a slave."

"But," the crestfallen boy stammered, "don't you need me as a translator between you and the white *toubib*?"

"No!" Tahus snapped. "We shall understand each other more and more with the passing of every day, the *toubib*, and I. I want you not."

A rough hand fell on Bill's shoulder, dragged him backward. As he reached the corridor he heard Meyer shouting angrily. In a sudden fear that the king might become incensed at him and give Lisbeth to Seknaton, Bill shouted in English:

"Please sir, play ball with him for Lisbeth's sake! Forget me, sir!"

Then he was thrown headlong onto the stone slabs paving the corridor. With his hands smarting and his knees painfully skinned, he was pulling himself up when a sound kick sent him sprawling in front of a soldier waiting in the corridor.

"Gumbar!" growled the bodyguard who had ejected him. "The son of the gods sends this white cur to shovel sulphur. Bring him to Barihan, who'll hammer all the foolishness out of him."

II

BARIHAN, superintendent of the sulphur and ore mines of the Anubarris, was a great hulk of a man second only to Seknaton in cruelty. His crews of slaves were composed of criminals; of debtors who failed to repay what was lent to them; of men who had met the disfavor of the king, of the priests or of the chiefs; and of captured negroes.

Barihan believed in breaking the spirit of the unfortunates placed under his orders with a terrific beating. Thus, the

first act with which he greeted Bill was to lash him within an inch of his life.

The next day the American boy was unable to move. Barihan attempted to arouse him with a few well-aimed kicks. Failing to do so, he mumbled callously: "He'll get up when he's hungry or thirsty."

Bill never knew when he gathered strength enough to drag himself to the vats of water of the mine. His first attempt to drink after the beating administered to him, however, almost killed him and was the cause of his recovery at the same time. For as he bent over a vat he lost his balance and fell into it in a fit of dizziness.

He was fished out at once by a burly negro whose motive was only that he didn't want his drink fouled by a corpse. Half drowned, the boy gasped painfully for a while in the mud at the foot of the vat. When he recovered, he found out that the unexpected bath had somehow refreshed him.

In such a way he managed to survive. But the poisonous powder arising from the sulphur which he was shoveling and carting for long hours at a stretch under the lash of the mine guards was beginning to sicken his young lungs when Princess Khera, the granddaughter and heir of King Tachus, came to make her annual visit to the mine.

ACCORDING to an age-old belief of the Anubarris, such visits of their Royal Princess to the places of punishment of Kifra were useful in order to foster in her a rightful horror of all wrongdoers, and also to stamp out all unbecoming weakness from her heart.

Unlike the other prisoners, Bill washed regularly and made a daily practice of combing his hair with his fingers. In spite of his suffering, he looked quite handsome against the murky background of a mine-wall, and the other bedraggled prisoners when the thirteen-year-old Khera walked into the mine, followed by armed guards and her personal nurse. Amazed and pleased, Khera stared at him. Then her pretty mouth opened in a smile which disclosed two rows of pearly teeth. Barihan, mumbling apologies but with murder written on his contracted features, sprang with his whip lifted to beat Bill down. An

angry shout of the little princess stopped him at mid-stride.

"Why is this white boy here?" she piped. "He must not be abused. I want to make one of my personal attendants out of him."

The woman escort mumbled severely to her. The little Khera shoved her back with an imperious push of her tiny hand:

"Did you hear what I said? I'm the king's heir! My wishes must be obeyed!"

Much to Barihan's chagrin Bill was released, and proudly walked behind the gold-embroidered tunic of the child-princess out of the mine and stepped a free boy on the main road leading to the rambling mansion of the king.

WITH Bill at her heels, Khera trotted along two successive corridors and finally swept into a room where, squatting on his heels over a pile of soft rugs, old Tachus was for the first time in months enjoying his food.

Thanks to Meyer's ministrations, he had recovered from both his stomach and his skin ailments and was as healthy as his age allowed. Consequently, his disposition had improved. But he looked very much the tribesman and very little the king in the accepted sense of the word, with his chin and breast spattered with gravy, and his greasy fingers alternately dipping into a bowl of stew, and stuffing great hunks of dripping meat through his smacking lips.

When he saw the white boy standing behind his beloved granddaughter, he was so amazed that he nearly choked.

Khera knew her grandfather too well to give him time to shout an angry order, which would have doomed her protégé. Quickly she threw her soft arms around Tachus' neck, and pleaded that the white boy was too handsome to work as a slave, that he would make a fitting human ornament in the retinue of every prince. When she saw that Tachus was relenting, she announced that she had ordered Bill's release from the mine and his assignment to her service, and protested that her beloved grandfather, Tachus, was too good to sadden her by overrunning her disposition.

Tachus blinked his eyes shrewdly. In spite of his fondness for his granddaughter he had no intention of freeing a slave because of her whim.

"Very well," he said. "He shall have his freedom. But first he must prove his right to freedom by killing two fighting baboons in the pit. If he is victorious he is yours."

The naïve Khera, who knew nothing of the dread fighting qualities of the baboons, readily agreed.

"That's well! Give the white boy spear, sword and shield, and he'll kill the bad monkeys. Then he'll serve me!"

In the center of the town was a huge pit surrounded by a wall, with a top wide enough to allow several score people to sit comfortably. In that pit the kept baboons, who were also the town's beastly executioners, were thrown against all runaway and recaptured slaves, who were given only short daggers to fight for their lives and therefore inevitably succumbed.

The duel was set for a month hence, and Khera succeeded in obtaining the services of a grizzled headman, who was the best swordsman in Kifra, to take the white boy under his wing.

The headman made a thorough job of it, as he hated Seknaton for having managed to become war-chief over his head.

Day after day he schooled Bill in practical fencing with the Anubarris sword and spear. He brought him on visits to the caged baboons in order to accustom him to their fearsome presence, and told him which were their ways of attacking and the best methods to circumvent them. Finally he found out for his young white charge a round Moorish shield of light steel, and a short spear with a shaft of exceptionally hard wood.

THE day of the combat came. Bill's first glance, on entering the arena, was directed to the place where his mentor had told him that the priestess of the moon with her charge would be. He had no difficulty in singling out the pretty red head of Lisbeth. Her scream of encouragement warned him. He glanced up at the box in which was seated Khera, and waved his sword in greeting.

The two monkeys destined to fight him were old males, with long canines strong enough to sever a leopard's throat with a single bite. They were brought in steel cages by a swarm of attendants wearing quilted tunics and armlets, and armed with

spears and heavy clubs. When the cages were open the baboons made a dive for the attendants, but the latter bunched together, beat them off and retreated compactly into the corridor leading from the arena. When they shut and barred the door, the baboons made useless leaps to scale the perpendicular walls and Bill noticed that one of the two beasts was slightly lame.

The next instant the baboons ran in opposite directions. Unhesitatingly, Bill tiptoed to meet the most formidable of the two.

He had covered a dozen yards when the ugly monkey saw him, cried out shrilly and charged.

Bill waited with his spear poised high, his shield thrust forward. His heart pumped up to his throat when the baboon leaped and he quickly stabbed and missed. Then he felt a fierce impact over the shield as the baboon landed on it. But, in the nick of time, he slid his left forearm out of the shield inner handles.

The baboon fell with the shield still grasped in his hairy hands. Before he could release its hold and jump up again, Bill stabbed him through, letting go of the spear and unsheathing his sword.

The transfixed baboon shrieked terribly. Twisting, he got hold of the shaft jutting from its side and tried to break it, but only increased his pain and enlarged his deadly wound. He had collapsed and was threshing in his death throes when the other baboon came running on all fours.

His right leg was the limping one, and to the right Bill leaped as the baboon charged. As he had hoped, the beast attempted to turn in midair to reach him with his powerful outstretched arms, landed on the lame leg and fell. As he was rebounding to his feet, Bill sprang to its right and slashed down, severing four fingers of the big monkey's right hand.

During the next three or four minutes he missed death by fractions of inches; but his constant tactic of turning to the right of the lame baboon enabled him also to bring home blows which, though superficial, caused the baboon to lose blood.

Then the tiring beast sat on his haunches, snarling, licking his wounds. He was terrible to look at, with his wicked red eyes and bared fangs. But Bill lost no time

looking at him. Instead, taking advantage of the respite, he ran to pull the spear out of the body of the first baboon.

He had hardly done so when the surviving and injured beast came hurtling against him. But, coolly, Bill leaped to the right for a last time. As the baboon attempted to turn on the run to reach him, he stabbed out and pinked him through the neck.

Again he had to leave the spear in his beastly foe, to avoid being reached by his left uninjured hand. But, after that, the big monkey fell. He pulled himself up when Bill came close to him, and the white boy hadn't the heart to deliver a sword stroke. But the next instant the baboon somehow managed to pull the hanging spear from the fleshy part of his neck and suddenly was at less than a yard from the white boy.

Bill saw the flash of its bare fangs; a sudden panic took all the springiness from his legs. He had only strength enough to lift his shield high and stab under it with the sword clenched firmly in his right hand. Then the shield was torn from his left arm with such a terrific tug that the bones of his wrist and shoulder almost snapped.

The baboon was falling backward. Bill, with his right arm still outstretched, saw his blade sliding red out of the hairy paunch of his beastly adversary. From the wall above came a deafening roar of applause.

Dazed with shock and exhaustion, Bill was still in the middle of the arena, holding the bloody sword limply in his hand when his fencing master, the old headman, ran into the arena to congratulate him.

"The monkey was done for when he attacked you for the last time. But his fangs could have sheared off your jugular just the same. It was very brave of you to stand and fight, instead of using to the last your clever tactics of hitting and running."

Thus his paralysis of fright and his lucky stroke, which had finished the exhausted baboon, had been interpreted as a deed of exceptional heroism and unerring skill! The honest Bill felt like a cheat. Then his glance fell on the dead baboons and he shivered with the realization of how powerful and ferocious they were.

The applause still roared. Bill waved joyously at the little Princess Khera. But his eyes sought only Lisbeth who, crying and laughing at the same time, was frenziedly clapping her hands.

BILL returned to the king's house as a personal attendant of Princess Khera. That evening he had his first good meal in weeks in her dining-room, between the stern-faced virago who never left her and an individual who looked as much as a stork as a human being can and covered the double function of Khera's scribe and tutor.

But in his turreted house Seknaton was consumed by rage and obscure forebodings. The rapid rise of Bill from doomed captive child in his own hands to favorite of the royal princess and future queen, and to the status of public hero, enraged the domineering and jealous nature of the war-chief. But that was not all. For Seknaton dreaded to think of what was bound to happen if Bill grew to manhood without forgetting that he, Seknaton, had killed his father. Obsessingly in his mind rang the words of the Anubarris warrior in the blood-soaked plain of Tounio: "Beware! There's an indomitable spirit in this white boy. Some day he'll have your blood on his hands, O Seknaton!"

"But that day will never come, because I shall kill him while he's still a fledgling hawk!" Seknaton furiously told himself.

Having reached that decision, he began to lay his plans carefully.

First of all, he heaped gifts on the warriors of the king's bodyguard, disarming their suspicions with fervent recommendations to keep on serving Tachus faithfully.

Then Seknaton tried to enlist the help of Khera's scribe and woman-companion. The scribe didn't get along badly with Bill, but he had recently attempted to make a display of what he called his learning before Professor Meyer, and had been highly insulted by a scornful burst of laughter from the great physician. Consequently, he readily accepted the gift of a comely slave-woman and of a bag of the leather rings used by the Anubarris as coins, and promised to do everything in his power to further Seknaton's schemes. The virago, instead, shrewdly made a show of listening to the advances of the giant war-chief,

then went to warn the king. When Tahus shrugged her fears away, answering that Seknaton wouldn't dare hurt a dog in the royal residence, she communicated her knowledge to Meyer.

The latter was obtaining a privileged position. He could have become a real power in Kifra if he had met the advances of the chiefs midway and consented to marry one or two of their daughters. But Meyer couldn't forget the death screams of his wife and daughter on the plain of Tounio and he hated the Anubarris. He never ceased cursing his physician's oath, which forced him to cater to the health of men whom he would have liked to see destroyed.

However, he had cured the wives of two of the king's bodyguards of serious ailments, and put faith in their protests of gratitude. When he asked these men to help him they readily consented. They kept their promise because they found out who were the most rabid supporters of Seknaton among their companions and, thanks to information ferreted daily from them, they kept Meyer posted on the progress of Seknaton's plans.

BILL was blissfully unaware of all the scheming and counterscheming that was taking place around him. The days passed rapidly for him because he had found a great source of interest in the Anubarris' method of training rhinoceroses for war purposes.

They were rounded up when young and still manageable—and they were trained to obey early plain commands—go to the right, to the left, forward, or back—by the very simple expedient of a red-hot iron stuck a certain number of times in the opposite side of their ungainly anatomy.

After a year of that brutal training, the rhinos recognized the sound that went with each of the few commands and executed the move that went with it. They were burned only if they were too slow or unwilling to obey.

The third year of training included maneuvers singly, in the open, with special emphasis on the orders to start or to halt, followed by fearful scars inflicted on the beasts which tried to break free or to turn on their trainers.

In the fourth years the rhinos were made to maneuver in groups. But by that

time those with an indomitable temper had been eliminated. The remaining ones obeyed the voices of the guards, who, however, brandished flaming torches to keep present in the beasts' rudimentary brains the memory of the burns which they had suffered in their initial trainings; and, as a precautionary measure, the guards bearing the burning torches barred all directions to the rhinos excepting the one which they were ordered to follow.

THE day came when Meyer was informed by one of the bodyguards that Seknaton planned to kill Bill in Khera's rooms in the middle of that same night. In great worry the physician went to Tahus and asked him to place warriors in ambush to catch the war-chief red-handed; but the aged king retorted angrily that he didn't believe that Seknaton dared to insult him to such an extent, and ended by asking the names of those who had brought the accusation to Meyer.

"Will you believe them if I do?" the exasperated Meyer asked.

"No," Tahus replied. "I'll have their lying heads chopped off."

Meyer left the royal presence swearing under his breath. Tahus would have not tolerated that lack of manners in another man. But he allowed all breaches of etiquette to the *toubib* who kept him healthy. Accordingly, he followed his stormy retreat with jibes and guffaws of strident laughter, and let the matter go at that.

The baffled Meyer decided to take things in his own hands. He asked Nererti, the woman-companion of Khera, to keep a special eye on Bill, which that stout-hearted woman promised to do. Then he asked the two bodyguards who acted as his informers to mount guards for the night with him in Khera's quarters.

He had to argue a lot to obtain their consent. They didn't relish coming to close grips with Seknaton. But finally they remembered that the ministrations of Meyer had saved the lives of their mates. Their last reluctance was overcome by the bags of leather coins the well-paid physician placed in their hands.

Thanks to Tahus' protection, Meyer had recovered his automatic. After dinner he put it in the sash of the Egyptian attire which he had adopted and went to look for

the bodyguards. He found both of them fully armed in the courtyard near the quarters of the king's warrior. He wanted to bring them at once to Khera's room, but the two men declared that they would not go until everybody in the palace fell asleep. Meyer recognized the justice of their objection. But, fearing that Seknaton might anticipate the time of his attack, he went ahead alone to his destination and hid in a hall facing the room where Bill slept.

The hours passed not uncomfortably for Meyer, sprawled in a capacious armchair behind a hanging curtain. But, in spite of his worry, he eventually became drowsy. Closing his eyelids for what he thought was only a moment, he dozed off. He was awakened toward midnight by a sudden clanking of steel and the falling of a hard object on the floor. As he pulled himself up on the chair he heard a muffled curse.

Meyer inwardly cursed the two guards who had refused to come outright with him, because now he was unable to make out in the darkness if one of them or Seknaton had been responsible for the noises. At the same time he reflected that it was unwise to shout a challenge. He had still a box of matches with him. He struck one of them and lifted it high with his left hand while he pulled the gun out of his pocket with his right one.

He instantly saw Seknaton circling an upset stool, walking slowly toward Bill's room. Startled by the sudden glow of the lighted match, the war-chief turned his fierce head.

To recognize Professor Meyer and to leap on him was an instantaneous matter for the enraged Seknaton. The match suddenly went out. The jet of flame of Meyer's firing gun split the darkness; then there was an impact of two bodies which shook the whole apartment.

Khera's woman-companion suddenly came out of a nearby room, holding a lamp overhead. High, piercing cries issued from her mouth at the sight of Meyer, his face covered with blood, struggling feebly in the grasp of Seknaton. At the same time, the weapons of the royal bodyguards clanked in the nearby corridor; and behind them rang the challenges and call to arms of an aroused patrol.

Seknaton was unsheathing his sword to finish Meyer when it suddenly dawned on him that in so doing he would sign his own death warrant. He had already committed the crime of breaking at night into the royal princess' chambers, but the death of the royal physician on top of that was the very thing which Tachus wasn't likely to forgive.

In the next split second Seknaton lifted his left firearm in a futile attempt to hide his face, as if a man of his height and bulk could pass unrecognized within the confines of a room. Then from the corner of his eye he saw Bill, Princess Khera and the scribe who had unlocked the secondary door of the royal residence for him, all coming into the room from opposite doors.

Bill had in his hand the sword with which he had finished the second baboon, and Seknaton almost went insane with baffled rage at the thought that if Meyer hadn't interfered the white boy would be lying with his throat split from ear to ear in his darkened room, and nobody would think of blaming him, Seknaton, for the murder.

But the two bodyguards were already making an appearance; and behind them ran a bedlam of challenges and calls to arms.

Seknaton unsheathed his dagger also; with it in one hand and the sword in the other, he charged head-down for the corridor. The bodyguard dared not bar his way; they leaped aside to avoid the impact of his giant body and struck at it as it sped between them, their ill-aimed sword strokes slicing a bit of muscle out of one of Seknaton's shoulders, and opening a small gash in one of his thighs.

PRACTICALLY uninjured, Seknaton reached the point where the corridor met two other passages, one leading to Tachus' quarters, and the other to those of the servants. The first was ablaze with the torches of a detail of approaching guards; but the other was dark and buzzing only with the frightened queries of the awakening servants at its other end.

"From here, Seknaton . . ."

The war-chief turned his contracted face, saw Khera's scribe, pointing the way out.

"Why," he hissed, "are you coming with me?"

"Because I'm a coward! I couldn't stand up under an interrogation. I would inevitably tell that I was the one who let you in. Seknaton, as long as you live you can protect me. When you die, I shall be executed also."

Seknaton threw his ferocious head back and laughed. Cowardice, fear of a just punishment and not friendship were throwing that cringing but priceless guide at his feet! But what did he care, as long as the gods of luck favored him? Without another word he followed the scribe into the dark corridor, up to the servants' rooms, until he reached the door of the huge kitchen. Past the kitchen there was a courtyard full of baskets of food, then a low wall.

Seknaton lifted his face to look at the stars. He inhaled deeply. For a moment he stood thus, in the moonlight, an imposing figure of brutal strength. Then he ran up to the wall, leaped, caught its top and easily lifted himself over it.

"O invincible warrior! O beloved of the gods!" Sobbing, panting, the scribe was making futile jumps to reach the top of the wall also.

Seknaton coldly stared at the scribe until the panicky traitor succeeded in hooking his fingers on the wall's top and painfully began to lift himself up. When the straining and perspiring face of the scribe was on a level with his hands, Seknaton saw the desperate appeal of the dilated eyes of the wretch.

Suddenly the huge sandaled foot of the war-chief shot out, smashing into the scribe's face and fracturing his nose. The scribe was knocked from the wall and onto the ground below. As the unfortunate traitor collapsed in a heap, Seknaton snarled:

"I got all that I wanted from you. Why should I smear my hands any longer with your whining fear?"

Then he leaped down from the wall, to the bottom of the dusty alley on the rear of the royal residence, and he was gone.

MEANWHILE, the two guards knelt beside the crippled Meyer, moaning:

"We waited outside . . . we could not

see Seknaton coming in . . . we dared not enter without a word from you, a call!"

Kera's woman-companion forced them to get up and leave the room, shouting: "You are a pair of sluggish fools. This good man's blood is on your hands because you failed him in his hour of need. Begone, let him endure his suffering in peace!"

But her harsh voice became unexpectedly soft when she saw Bill kneeling at the side of the helpless physician.

"Bi-lah!" she breathed. "He did it for you!"

Most of Meyer's ribs were fractured, as was his right arm and one of his knees.

Symptoms utterly clear to him warned him that he had also suffered a ruptured liver, and that he was bleeding internally. Thus he had no doubt that his end was a matter of minutes. But Meyer was not afraid; he had suffered so much and for so long that he had come to consider death as a friend and a deliverer.

"Don't cry!" he smiled weakly to Bill, who was sobbing at his side. "Just . . . put something under my head. . . . I don't mind lying on the floor. I would feel just as badly in a bed. But my head is . . . too low."

Bill snatched a cushion, made him as comfortable as he was able to.

"Thank you!" Meyer said after a pause. "Now listen. Your father taught you how a fellow can struggle for his existence in the jungle and the bush. *Gut!* So, Bill, take some medicines from my physician's bag, and a good gun, and some ammunition, and get away from this town without telling anybody. Because in the jungle you have a chance of surviving, but here Seknaton will kill you, sooner or later. The king is too old, too weak. You can't count on his protection.

"And don't be worrying about Lisbeth, Bill. I don't think that Tachus will live long. But, even if he takes his place, Seknaton will need at least ten years to convince these stubborn ignorants of Anubarris that his wish is stronger than their traditions. Therefore, even if Tachus dies tomorrow, Lisbeth, as a priestess of the moon, will be safe from Seknaton for . . . the time that you need to grow into a strong man . . . into a man capable of rescuing her from this nest of brutal savagery."

Meyer gasped. His voice became weak, as if coming from a distance.

"So remember . . . Bill . . . try to live . . . all alone . . . in the jungle or the bush . . . until you find followers. . . . You have ample time to save Lisbeth . . . and don't fear, as she'll be safe until the day of your return."

Then he moved his head on the cushion weakly, muttered the names of his dead wife and daughter.

The overwrought and nerve-wracked boy had an eerie impression that the two dead women were with their respective husband and father, visible only to him. He saw him smiling through the blood covering his face, moving his lips as if he were carrying on a conversation in a world barred to the living.

"Good luck to you, Bill!" Meyer's words, his last, sounded clear. He was very still when Khera and her woman-companion pulled the crying Bill away from his side.

SHORTLY after an agitated squad-commander of bodyguards rushed into the room, sputtering:

"What is wrong with the *toubib*?"

Nererti, the woman-companion, pointed out to him the corpse of the physician. The squad-commander gave a glance at it and became ashy pale. After a pause he stammered:

"Tahus heard that the *toubib* was attacked and is coming himself to investigate, raving with rage and worry!"

The aged king came, limping, with his scrawny head cocked sideways and an anxious look on his twitching face. When he saw the dead physician he gasped and tore his necklace of semi-precious stones off his neck, wailing:

"They killed me when they slaughtered my healer, my friend! My sickness will return, and his wisdom will no longer subdue it! Who committed the crime? By the sun god, I shall have him quartered!"

Bill had ceased crying, was staring at him in a wild excitement of sorrow and despair.

"Tahus! Tahus!" he shouted wildly. "The accursed Seknaton broke into the rooms of your granddaughter and heir with foul intent to murder! The good doctor tried to stop him but Seknaton's cruel

hands broke all his bones—until he died! O Tahus! Who rules over the Anubarris, you or Seknaton? I'm only a child, I have not the wisdom of an experienced man! But even a child can see that Seknaton has already usurped your power of life and death, in your own palace! If you don't stop him now, he'll soon claim your throne, and destroy you and Khera for being in the way!"

Out of breath, Bill stopped speaking as Tahus swayed on his old legs. The aged king stared all around. He saw his grandniece nodding agreement. He read the same opinion and also uneasy expectation in the tense faces of the bodyguards. Then Nererti shouted shrilly:

"With my own eyes I saw Seknaton tearing the *toubib* limb from limb!"

And the squad-commander made a step forward, brought a scarred fist to his breast in salute and rasped:

"Your order, Tahus! If you want us to march on Seknaton's house, we are ready!"

The weakness of age and ill health chilled Tahus' bony joints. But now righteous anger gave him strength.

"To lead a conquering army for a last time! O gods of my ancestors, grant me this boon, for the sake of my little Khera!" Tahus fervently prayed. Then his deep-set eyes shone, his shoulders straightened and loomed wide and firm like in the by-gone days when the mere mention of his name caused the tribes of the jungle to kneel in submission.

"See that the trumpets blare the call to arms!" he ordered. "Seknaton will not surrender. He has friends who will fight for him. But I shall scatter them like leaves before a strong wind! And tomorrow Seknaton's severed head will hang over the main gate!"

SEKNATON was sulking in his big house when a bodyguard who was in his pay deserted to him, bringing the news that Tahus had ordered his capture.

For a few minutes Seknaton thought of running away. But soon he realized that in so doing he would only delay his doom. For more than a decade he had raided, killed, burned. The negro tribesmen of the jungle hated him more than anything else on earth. Their tribal grapevine would

soon warn them that he was wandering alone through their winding jungle trails.

His vicious craftiness came to the fore. He assembled the fighters in his command whom he felt he could trust and to them explained that being his trusted servants they would be persecuted and slain if he succumbed to Tahus' rage. Then he commanded:

"Go to those who have gained aught from my leadership and tell them to join me in the temple of the God of Death for a fight not against the king, but against his deranged guards, who would destroy in me the sword-arm of our people for the sake of an alien child born to ruin Kifra."

With that crafty tactic Seknaton eliminated the suspicion that he coveted the crown in opposition to the traditions and superstitious beliefs of the Anubarris; he also fanned their hatred of all outsiders and strove to turn his struggle to escape a deserved punishment into a community war against a hypothetical menace.

The servants went, fired by spirit of preservation and eager to play the part of public saviors, entitled to the respect and regards of the people.

Then Seknaton assembled the remainder of his menials and his personal retinue of warriors. With them he hurried to a secret passage connecting his house with a contiguous building, which was also the residence of the priesthood of the God of Death.

TURMA, arch-priest of the death-god Trudonou, was a tall hunchback with arms reaching down to his knees and a big flat head covered with thick gray hair falling down on his eyes, which were unusually large, round, and yellow like those of a leopard. The repulsive ugliness of Turma was enhanced by a crooked nose, a receding chin and a blotchy complexion. In his early youth, it had made of him an object of derision and contempt and, as a result, the resentful Turma had become an enemy of mankind. Then, as the years passed, the practices of his cult had stirred in him a cruel and murderous lust, for Trudonou was a modern jungle-replica of the Phoenician Moloch of old, and was worshiped not with prayers and exorcisms, but with the throwing of human victims into the mouth of an immense hollow statue

of brass, inside of which reared a huge fire.

Turma, in his old age, was so vitiated that he found pleasure only in the sufferings and death of other human beings. But he got along well with Seknaton because he admired his ruthlessness and found him useful in seducing human victims. On the contrary, he hated Tahus, who had favored his rival Barad, chief-priest of Raha, the sun-god, as long as Bacad had lived.

Turma had urged Seknaton to become the real ruler of Kifra for a long time. Now that he heard that the moment of the decisive struggle had come, he seized upon the foreign angle represented by poor young Bill Crosby with a shrewdness even greater than that of the crafty Seknaton. For, to enlist the favor of the artisans and peasants, who formed the majority of the population, he sent his subordinate priests to visit all houses with a tale that Bill was a malignant spirit who had assumed human form to bewitch King Tahus, to destroy Seknaton with his help, and to annihilate the entire Anubarris people as soon as they lost the leadership of the great war-chief.

TAHUS played into the hands of the conspirators by losing too much time before striking. The old king wanted to turn the defeat and capture of Seknaton into a pageantry that would remain forever in the memory of his people as a monument of his greatness.

Thus it was only in the afternoon of the next day that he left his residence on a gilded palanquin supported by eight powerful servants. The hundred bodyguards armed with guns and swords, as well as the bowmen and spearmen who came with them, were all bedecked with shiny bracelets and attired in multicolored tunics and sashes.

But instead of the applause that he expected, Tahus was rabidly hissed and cursed in every alley crossed by his gaudy cortege.

He found the deserted house of Seknaton silent as a tomb. Not only that, but a hubbub of angry voices came from the nearby clearing, which faced the temple of the death-god.

Deeply insulted, Tahus ordered the commander of his vanguard to march immedi-

ately on the scene of that disturbance.

A few minutes later the royal cortege rounded the bend of the alley hemmed in between Seknaton's house and the wall of the arsenal of Kifra, and marched into a short thoroughfare opening into the clearing dominated by the grim death temple, and there Tahus got such a shock that he nearly fell from the palanquin. The square was crowded with clamoring citizens, and behind them, through the open gate of the courtyard in which stood the colossal statue of Trudonou, it was possible to see a massed array of several score heavily armed men.

Tahus angrily asked where the members of the riotous gathering had got their weapons. A tall, bearded fanatic instantly replied that, at Seknaton's orders, they had broken into the arsenal, and seized all the weapons they needed in the true interests of the crown, and for the safety of Kifra; then he hysterically asked in the name of all true Anubarris the instant delivery of the fiend disguised as a white child to the God Trudonou, who alone was capable of destroying both the human and the devilish lives of the wretch.

A wiser leader would have ordered his warriors to stand by; but Tahus lost his head and ordered his bodyguards and soldiers to disperse the mob with a charge.

It was a mistake, because they were outnumbered five to one. To make matters worse, Seknaton and Turma recrossed the secret passage connecting the priests' house with that of the war leader at the head of a hundred picked men, emerged with them into the alley from which the king's men had come into the square, and attacked them from behind.

The result of that maneuver was decisive. A dozen royal spearmen and bodyguards were instantly killed. The palanquin was thrown down and Tahus with it. In the subsequent wild confusion, half of the remaining defenders of Tahus were wounded, or seized and disarmed. Another score broke through and ran back to the royal residence. But fifty succeeded in banding together and attempted to rescue their king.

Seknaton was no man to let victory slip from his grasp at the very last moment. Bellowing fiercely, he tore into the last group of royal defenders, slashing right

and left with his heavy sword, and after him catapulted scores of bloodthirsty ruffians who had fought at his side in countless raids.

The commander-in-chief of the bodyguards went down, cleft to the chin by a terrific stroke of Seknaton. The brave band who had rallied around him were split into smaller groups, tossed back and forth in a whirlwind of furiously fighting packs of maddened rebels. They went down, one after another, after killing and wounding droves of their aggressors.

Finally Seknaton strode up to Tahus who, half engulfed in the draperies of his palanquin, was making futile efforts to disengage himself and pull himself up.

“O LAST King of the Anubarris,” Seknaton bellowed in a voice of thunder, “you have broken the traditions of our people, you have consorted with the fiends who want to destroy your subjects; but we don't want to kill you; we don't want to deprive you of the crown. We only intend to protect you and Kifra.”

Behind him Turma intoned hypocritically:

“Admire, O people, the bravery of Seknaton, sword-arm of the Anubarris! Admire his generosity! He has Tahus at his mercy! But does he want to destroy him? Does he want to usurp his power? No, O people, he does not! He just asks the death of the evil white child! He wants only to shelter Tahus and Kifra from all dangers for the future!”

The subaltern priests of the death-god and Seknaton's most trusted assistants, scattered among the victorious mob, instantly shouted:

“Long live Seknaton! Give him authority and power, for the sake of Kifra!”

It proved like a match applied to a tinder-box. Artisans, peasants and rebel soldiers, wild-eyed children and women, all broke into an ear-splitting succession of shouts:

“Seknaton! Seknaton! We need you! Protector of the people.”

Seknaton dilated his nostrils, curled his ugly lips into a triumphant smile. With his huge head thrown back, and the muscles bunching on his swelled chest, he stared disdainfully at the poor travesty of a king at his feet. Finally he lifted a massive

arm to command silence. As the clamor respectfully abated, he roared:

"Live, O Tahus! Go back to your palace and to your throne! You have heard the people's verdict!"

And the frightened Tahus, who in that instant thought of nothing else but of clinging to the shred of life that still flickered in his sickly carcass, meekly replied:

"So be it! From now on you are my right arm, O Seknaton!"

MEANWHILE, some of the bodyguards who had succeeded in escaping through the mob reached the royal residence. Dazed and leaderless, they still clung to the prestige of that barbaric royalty they had served for so many years. All together they ran to Khera's rooms and threw themselves at the feet of the little princess, who began to scream at the sight of their wounds and the terror written on their livid faces.

But the indomitable Nererti preserved a steely calm amid the panic and confusion. With a few questions she found out what had happened and for a moment her heart sank when she realized that Seknaton had become the real ruler of Kifra.

Then a fierce determination formed in her heart.

She didn't believe that the white boy was a demon in human form. She had found him brave, generous and exceptionally intelligent for his age; and she had admired his civilized learning, so far above the barbarity of the Anubarris.

Therefore the death of Bill at the hands of the beastly Seknaton loomed to her like a challenge to the very skies above.

Resolved to preserve his life, no matter what the consequences, she called aside her most faithful maid and whispered some hurried instructions. Then she went to Bill's room and told him to collect as many weapons and provisions as he could and to follow her.

Bill understood that the moment to escape had come. But he was not afraid.

"Nererti," he said, "help me get the *toubib's* bag. I need it to grow big and strong, because I must return some day to annihilate Seknaton and make Khera queen not only in name, but also in fact."

"Come, young one!" Nererti said, smiling between her tears.

Together they ran to Tahus' rooms, retrieved the medicine bag of the late Professor Meyer. Then, with it, a rifle, an automatic, a serviceable light sword and a few bandoleers crammed with cartridges, they hastened to the stables, where the maid had already loaded a cart with a big mound of clothes and a few jugs of native beer.

With Nererti, the maid helped Bill to hide on the bottom of the cart under the mass of blankets and mantles; then she climbed on the front of the cart, took the halter in one hand and the long whip in the other. Nererti slapped the bullocks fastened to the clumsy carriage and they set in motion. Above the creaking of the axles and the scraping of the big, revolving wooden wheels, Bill heard her muffled voice saying:

"May luck assist you, white child. And may you return some day, not for my sake, but for the sake of my dear Khera."

Then the cart rolled out of the stables, into a deserted courtyard. Just as nobody had met Bill and Nererti during their hasty walk through the palace, no one challenged the maid at the service gate. The star of Tahus had faded forever, and all his menials—even the bodyguards who had hastened to Khera in a last surge of loyalty—had left his palace. Thus Nererti returned all alone to the room where Khera crouched trembling, waiting for the return of her discredited grandfather, and for the arrival of Seknaton.

AT the town's main gate, the maid was stopped by a band of watchmen. Their chief glanced at the mound of clothes and snarled:

"Woman, where are you bringing that load? Let me look at it! I might find in it something for that old harridan of my wife."

A stab of panic chilled Bill on the bottom of the carriage. But the maid quickly replied:

"Stop me and Urtu will tear you limb from limb. He's my lover and I'm going to him with all my belongings. . . . Tahus and his Khera have no need of so many servants now. The great Seknaton does all the ruling for them."

Urtu was a villainous half-breed who was the headman of a post of lookouts

located in a watch tower two miles south of the gate. He was known as a revengeful ruffian who took his toll in blood of all the slights inflicted upon him.

Consequently, all the men crowding the gate hastened to make way and pulled their chief back. Half stifled by the blankets heaped over him, Bill heard one of them croaking:

"Musumbi, what madness has come upon you? Do you wish to get all of us killed by picking a row with Urtu's woman?"

"But," Musumbi replied, "I don't believe these clothes are hers. Therefore she could as well give me some of them."

"Most likely she stole them in the palace," another rebel confirmed. "Just the same, it will do you no good if Urtu finds out that you took them from her."

Musumbi swore in his matted beard, but to Bill's intense relief he growled to the maid to go on. However, the next instant, a hard object tore through the clothes, stung Bill's arms and remained stuck into the cart's bottom. Repressing a scream of pain, Bill groped blindly for it and realized that he was fingering a javelin which had pierced the mound of clothes and failed to impale him only by a few inches. As the cart rolled by, the baffled Musumbi had been unable to control his temper and had thrown his short spear into the goods which he had not dared to seize.

A MILE farther, the maid led the bullocks into a ravine and helped Bill to get out. She gasped an exclamation of dismay at the sight of the bloodstained gash in his arm, but, reassured by Bill that it was only a superficial scratch, she told him that she must leave him.

"White boy, here we must part, because farther on there's indeed Urtu's tower, and he's not my lover, and no man to let anything go by without seizing it. From this point up to the jungle you must run faster than anyone who may go after you. But if you reach the jungle, you'll have a fair chance of eluding all pursuit—but may the health-giving Sun God save you from the beasts of prey!"

"But you! What will happen to you when Seknaton finds out that you aided me?" Bill exclaimed.

"I'm going to the Salamant, who are my

mother's people," the maid replied. "One of their headmen has wanted to marry me for a long time. I don't love him—but life with him will be better than death at Seknaton's hands."

Bill, reassured about her safety, slung the medicine bag across his shoulders by its strap, put on the bandoleer, buckled the supporting belt of the automatic around his waist, and stuck the sword into it. Then he grasped the rifle, mumbled a choked good-bye to the maid and cautiously went out of the ravine.

The green of the jungle loomed in the distance, to his left. There was safety, but the wide stretch of ground separating him from it was almost bare, dotted with sparse thickets and bushes.

With his heart beating wildly, and a fervent hope that the Anubarris attire would fool any Anubarris lookout who might spy him, Bill began his journey. But he had hardly covered some five hundred yards when he heard the crash of a report, immediately followed by the metallic bang of a bullet striking a stone behind him. By sheer instinct, he did not try to see who had fired, but dropped into a hole of the ground and waited.

A couple of minutes which seemed to him longer than an eternity went by. Then Bill heard a rumble of approaching voices. He lifted his head above the ditch's edge and saw two Anubarris warriors coming at a dog trot.

One of them was armed with a gun of ancient vintage and undoubtedly was the one who had fired the shot. The other had only a bow and was warning his companion that probably the white boy hadn't been killed outright and that they had better be careful.

Bill waited no longer. He lifted the barrel of his rifle over the ditch, took quick aim and pressed the trigger. The Anubarris with the rifle let go of his gun, and fell sideways.

Again the American boy fired. The second Anubarris yelped, brought a hand to his other arm; then he turned about and ran as fast as he was able to. Bill fired another two bullets after him and missed each time. Then he realized that to keep on firing was a way of attracting other roving Anubarris and springing to his feet he jogged toward the jungle.

BILL had traveled for a couple of miles through the jungle when he heard a furious baying, growing louder with the passing of every minute. For an instant he thought of wild dogs, but he soon remembered that his father had told him that wild dogs hunt only on open ground, keeping clear of the jungle, where they are no match for the sudden attacks of the leopards and the deadly ambush of the crushing pythons.

The logical deduction was that the Anubarris were tearing after him with a pack of bloodhounds. Bill realized that the scout who had escaped his shots had given the alarm.

A minute later, he suddenly reached a wide clearing and had to cross it, or go back. In a sudden panic he sprinted. For a moment he thought he was safe, but as he reached the opposite edge of the clearing a sudden shout broke out. The excited baying of hounds commenced afresh.

Bill faded from sight in a tangle of jungle growths, but he knew that now he had been seen, the fleet-footed hounds would be closing in.

The baying got quite near, in spite of his wild running. His face was torn by the buffeting of the spiky branches which he struck in his wild flight; his breath came in gasps from his aching lungs. Suddenly he saw tawny shapes in the thickets ahead of him. He thought vaguely of leopards—but compared to the danger of falling prey to the Anubarris and their fierce dogs the leopards didn't matter. He sped on, heard angry snarls to his left.

Then he was past the tawny forms and arrived at a tiny clearing in the midst of the great trees. Bill was exhausted. Unable to proceed any farther, he leaned against a tree and waited for the inevitable end. But suddenly, behind him, heard spitting snarls and hisses mixed with pained yelps and furious bayings, the sound of hurtling bodies striking the ground, then more yelps, growing weaker with the passing of every instant, and louder, triumphant snarls. The leopards—perhaps a couple or more of them—had been resting, gorged with the flesh of some devoured kill, as their kind do during the day. When Bill had come along, they had let him go by, but they had been irritated

by his noisy passage. The consequent arrival of the dogs had unleashed all their savage fury; and the dogs of the Anubarris were dying under their fangs and rending claws.

At last there was only silence in the jungle. Bill waited a few minutes, resting, and then took up his flight.

Anxious to put as much space as possible between himself and his enemies, he walked on until the sun almost reached the western brim of the horizon; then, realizing that at night and in the darkness he could not live for long in the jungle, he sought a clearing, collected a huge pile of dry branches, disposed them in a ring and, stepping into the middle of it, he put the branches on fire.

During the entire night he kept awake, feeding the fire, terrorized by the shiny eyes circling in the velvety black darkness beyond the leaping flames. But when the sun arose utter weariness overcame him. In a daze, he threw the remaining branches on the dying fire, stretched himself on the ground and fell asleep.

THE sun was high and was scorching his face unpleasantly when he was awakened by a subdued jabbering of guttural voices. Thinking that the Anubarris had finally overtaken him, he jumped wildly to his feet and was instantly confronted by the lifted spears of a ring of burly negroes.

Bill groped for words and found none. At length he lifted a hand in sign of peace. But the spears jerked lower, on a level with his breast. A scarred black, huskier than the rest—a chief, according to the elaborate bonnet of twigs and feathers stuck on his head—rumbled in a wild dialect similar to that spoken by the average negroes of the territory of Tounio:

"You wear dress of bad men who kill jungle warriors. We kill you!"

In a flash Bill understood that they believed that he was an Anubarris, and he proceeded to dispel the error. But he made little headway. Finally the chief rasped:

"You tell that you are friend. How do we know that, if we let you go, you will not call Anubarris to kill us? We are hungry. We have not killed game for days. But we will be happy if we destroy in you an enemy of all black men."

Bill glanced at their weapons. They were spears, war-clubs and short, clumsy bows. That explained why, with so much game in the jungle and the bush, they could not make a kill. It was not easy to come close enough to a fleet-footed antelope to send home an arrow launched by a weak bow. Therefore he protested, patting his rifle:

"With this I will kill game for you, eat the meat with you and accompany you to your village. If you meet Anubarris I will fight them at your side." And, to enforce his declaration, he tore off his Anubarris kilt and wrapped his sash around his body like a loin cloth.

The effect of that gesture was instantaneous. The child-like negroes lowered their spears and laughed happily. Then again they scowled, in a return of suspicion. But Bill quickly told them to let him pass and to follow. They did, muttering under their breath, until they sighted a fine antelope from a distance of some five hundred yards.

Clenching his teeth tightly, Bill stopped, took careful aim. The first bullet hit one of the antelope's legs, but the second pierced the base of its skull and it toppled over.

The negroes, their mouths watering, gave forth a joyous shout. With Bill they went to take possession of the slain antelope and proceeded to skin and quarter it. But it was only when, gorged like all of them, Bill again succumbed to weariness and complacently went to sleep in their midst, that their suspicions finally faded.

FROM that day, the white boy was tacitly accepted as a very welcome member of their tribe, which belonged to the Kameroon people. Bill was soon inducted into the higher councils of the tribe and his advice eagerly sought by the simple tribesmen.

Patiently he induced them to make better bows, to invite other tribesmen of their people to join them. Then he sent one of their hand to capture some Salamat smiths who, well treated, taught them to fashion swords, spear-points and arrow heads of good hammered steel.

Meanwhile Bill had not forgotten Lisbeth and his hatred for Seknaton. He remembered Meyer's words: "For ten years,

at the least, Seknaton will be unable to lay hands on Lisbeth. You have ample time." To gain the strength he would need to deliver the pretty little girl, to destroy the murderer of his father, of Stevens and Meyer, he exercised endlessly, and ate, as he had been told to do from childhood, fresh fruits as much as meat.

Two years later—in his seventeenth year of age—he was almost as tall as Burnu, the Kameroon chief, and the best warrior and hunter of the tribe; and—thanks to his effective leadership—his black companions had become a really prosperous and formidable people.

Then it was that Bill realized that in order to successfully fight the Anubarris he would need a rhinoceros herd of his own. He remembered the terrific smashing power of the trained beasts and knew that men alone could never stand up against their charge.

He called a council of the Kameroon chiefs. To them he explained his plan. But they listened with a wonder which soon turned into an amazed fright. Bill did not insist; he knew that his black companions could not be driven outright into the adoption of new ideas.

But the following month he killed a rhinoceros mare, captured her young and began training it in the Anubarris fashion—using a prodding spear, however, instead of the useless cruelty of the scorching fire. To the utter amazement of the Kameroons, after a while the baby rhino began to recognize his orders to go right and left, to advance and to stop.

Patiently, Bill managed to capture a second young rhino, made a success of its initial training, too, and understood that he finally had worked the trick. In the council that he called soon after, the plan of training a powerful herd of fighting rhinoceroses was unanimously approved.

By the time another two years had passed, Bill's rhinoceros herd had reached magnificent proportions. There were four hundred of them, all magnificent specimens, all much better trained than those of the Anubarris.

The Kameroons often remonstrated. The care and the painstaking training of the rhinoceroses took most of their time. But they had great faith in the young warlord. They had never gone hungry since

Bill had joined them, and they counted on his promise that after the defeat of Seknaton and his cohorts they would be forever free from attack by the brutal Anubarris.

III

BY his twentieth year, Bill had a herd of four hundred animal-war-tanks in four hundred rhinoceroses, trained to charge and counter-charge in massed formation. He had also a small army of six hundred negroes, composed of the best fighters of the tribe and by other Kameroons who had joined them at one time or another.

Bill's trigger-quick brain, and his natural ability as a leader, added to his tremendous muscular strength, enabled him to assume leadership over the native warriors.

One stifling hot day, one of the spies whom he regularly sent among the Salamat, servile allies of the Anubarris, returned breathlessly with disturbing news.

The good priestess of the moon, Lisbeth's patroness, had succumbed after a brief illness. A creature of Seknaton had been appointed in her place. And the decrepit and fearful Tachus had sanctioned the marriage of Seknaton with Khera and the transfer, to take place in a moon, of the beautiful white priestess Lisbeth to Seknaton's service.

The next day Bill and his Kameroon trainers drove the herd of fighting rhinoceroses into Anubarris territory; and after them the little army of free negroes eagerly marched, roaring their war songs and their challenge to the cruel masters of Kifra.

The elimination of the Salamat was the first blow that Bill inflicted on Seknaton's power. It was dictated by the consideration that the Salamat were in effect the advance guard of the Anubarris, and also by the fact that, had they been left alone, they would have been able to invade Kameroon territory, destroying their villages, while they were busy campaigning around Kifra.

But Bill did not utilize his rhinoceroses against the Salamat, saving them for an unsuspected blow on Seknaton's Anubarris warriors. Thus he attacked the Salamat villages one after another, without giving their able-bodied men time to band to-

gether. He seized their hoards of harvested millet, after capturing their chiefs, headmen and witch doctors; he offered a lasting peace on condition that they left the Anubarris territory while he annihilated Seknaton.

The news of the Salamat rout took Kifra entirely by surprise. When the Salamat tribes failed to follow the messengers whom they had sent early to Kifra, an uneasy wonder fell like a pall of gloom over the citizenry. But no Anubarris was as distracted as Turma, the arch-priest of Trudonou. Accustomed to preach the respect of the omens which he fabricated for the benefit of his ignorant and superstitious fellow citizens, and a believer in the signs and portents which he thought of seeing in every happening, he was terrified by that sudden turn of events for the very reason that he was unable of making head or tail of it. And Seknaton, faced by what seemed to him an uncanny threat to his own person, sent out his war-rhinoceroses and a portion of his forces under the command of his ablest lieutenants, waiting for developments in the gloomy palace of Tachus, which he had turned into his own seat of power.

BILL did not march to meet the enemy. Having found a battlefield that suited him near the deserted main Salamat village, he ordered his warriors to cut branches, to fashion sharp stakes out of them, and to plant them point upward in the grass of a wide, sloping pasture behind the untenanted Salamat houses. Narrow lanes, cut into the grass, marked the passages for his own men.

Two additional days passed—two days of rest for Bill's forces, of weary marching for the Anubarris. Then, in a serene morning, the Kameroon lookout perched on top of the immense baobab tree dominating the central square of the Salamat village saw a great cloud of dust mushrooming in the distance.

His warning shout sent Bill climbing up the tree with the speed of a marmoset. A quarter of an hour later the advancing Anubarris rhinoceroses were clearly visible. The rhinoceroses did not trot on meekly. Now and then those at the side of the advancing herd galloped against the cordon of guards and were driven back

with difficulty by means of long iron spears.

Bill took stock of that fact and congratulated himself. His rhinoceroses, well rested, well fed and watered, would prove easier to manage. He quickly came down from the tree, gave his last orders to the Kameroons in the village, then he ran through one of the passages of the stake-infested plain to the wooded knoll beyond it, where he had ambushed fifty of his men armed with passable rifles and plenty of ammunition.

The Anubarris came on confidently. Their supreme assurance, however, did not cause them to relax the real qualities of their warlike organization. A swarm of scouts detached themselves from their main body, ran onward to reconnoiter. They saw some of the wide pasture behind the village, the great sloping hill to its right, the spur of thick jungle to its left. But the only moving things on that serene landscape were the great pillars of heat haze, covering with a shimmering sheen the green bushes and the saffron earth, boiling against the brassy background of the sky.

Nearer and nearer the foremost group of huts the scouts came. When only a dozen yards separated them from the dusty fence of spiky branches which acted as a village boundary, they were already turning to signal to the main body that all was well when a volley of darts flew out of the doorless entrances of several huts. Three scouts fell, with barbed shafts jutting from their pierced bodies. The others stood long enough to discharge their guns and then rack back to the main body.

Although the range was entirely too far, the Kameroon bowmen kept on shooting arrows. Three or four muzzle-loaders joined them in their futile show of resistance, making a lot of noise but doing no other harm.

The chiefs of the Anubarris saw that poor performance and exchanged meaning glances.

"The fools gave themselves in our own hands," the oldest of them grinned. "They are hiding in and behind the huts, waiting for us to attack them there. Wah! Now they shall know, before they die, what is a rhinoceros charge! We'll mop up their entire breed."

The Anubarris drivers lighted their

torches. The beating of the drums and the blaring of the trumpets filled the countryside with an ear-splitting and discordant clamor.

FROM his wooded knoll, which made up an excellent observation point, Bill peered anxiously for a glimpse of his hated adversary, Seknaton. But, hard as he looked, he failed to make out the giant person of the war chief in the Anubarris ranks.

Bill shook his head. He had no time for personal revenge now. The battle was on! The Anubarris rhinoceroses catapulted on. The ground, for a wide radius, boomed and shook with the impact of their plunging hoofs.

As they had been instructed to do, the Kameroons posted in the village did not resist the attack. They ran out of the huts, to the passages through the pasture; and after them, urged by their guards, the rhinoceroses galloped.

Then something happened which bewildered and frightened the Anubarris drivers. In the middle of the plain, the compact front of the rhinoceros herd raised a fearful din of shrill squeals. Ludicrously rearing like immense toy-balloons, they attempted to stop and turn back, but were driven onward by the pressure of the rhinoceroses behind them.

A few minutes later, the pasture was jammed with maddened rhinoceroses. As the uproar was at its height, a deafening volley crashed from the knoll.

The first hail of bullets and those which followed it struck with terrific effect the compact and immense target presented by the milling rhinoceroses. Many of them fell, killed and wounded, maddening and bewildering the rest with the scent of freshly spilled blood.

Then a long file of negroes appeared on the knoll west of the pasture and poured in a hail of arrows, completing the rout.

The Anubarris chiefs had never before met such a maneuver, but they did not acknowledge defeat. They ordered the guards to bring the surviving rhinoceroses back, then dividing their five hundred-odd riflemen and bowmen into two columns, they sent one column toward the spur of jungle growths, advancing under the cover of its tangled vegetation against the knoll

from which had come the first volley. The other column they led to the conquest of the sloping hill.

This column advanced in orderly fashion, firing as they went. Some of them fell but their rifles also wreaked considerable havoc in the ranks of the Kameroons.

The sun was rising in the sky and the climb, after days of marching, was tiring the calf-muscles of the Anubarris warriors when, to their delight, the tribesmen above suddenly broke and fled in a westerly direction, carrying their wounded with them.

The Anubarris gave forth a weak shout of triumph, rejoicing at the thought that the combat was almost over when, like an avalanche coming out of nowhere, a solid wall of galloping rhinoceroses suddenly appeared on the top of the hill above them.

The Anubarris chiefs frenziedly shouted to change the direction of the smashing charge, but in utter panic, the Anubarris turned about and fled down slope in mortal terror.

The avalanche of rhinoceroses went after them with devastating speed, catching them as they reached the flat ground below. It was no longer a combat but a massacre. The rhinoceroses gored and trampled most of the unlucky column, then, leaving the gory poultice behind their fast thumping hind-hoofs, charged on the Anubarris rhinoceroses, with the howling of their Kameroon guards driving them on.

Of the mighty Anubarris herd of nine hundred rhinoceroses, more than two hundred had either been killed or heavily wounded on the pasture by the Kameroon bullets, and another odd hundred had been lacerated so sorely that they were practically unable to move. Several more score had broken away and scattered into the jungle.

But the remaining five hundred, urged onward by their guards, turned to meet the charging Kameroon rhinoceroses. They had no time to gather the momentum of a charge against the speeding war-tanks of the Kameroon beasts, so at first they were rolled back. But in increasing numbers other Anubarris rhinoceroses were sent into the combat by their fast-working Anubarris guards.

The inevitable moment came when Kameroon and Anubarris guards met and clashed, paralyzing the efforts of both

parties to keep their beasts under control. Less and less were heard the commands in both the Kameroon and the Anubarris language as the guns roared and the angry squealing and braying of the embattled beasts mixed with the howls and curses of their guards.

Meanwhile the other Anubarris column reached the jungle east of the pasture, and was instantly met by a charge of an auxiliary herd of rhinoceroses. After the rhinoceroses came the remainder of Bill's negro warriors, fired with the thrill of victory and seething with a revengeful blood-lust.

A quarter of an hour later, the entire second Anubarris column had ceased to exist as a fighting force. The second half of Bill's rhinoceroses, re-formed and brought under control by their guards, advanced toward the scene of the larger battle.

A few minutes later their charge struck home and again scattered the decimated Anubarris herd, but as they did so they were deafened by the babel of embattled Anubarris and Kameroon voices as the inevitable happened: All rhinoceroses of both sides lost that thin thread of hammered-in instinct which enabled them to make out friend from foe and turned on each other indiscriminately, and on all nearby men, regardless of color or language.

Bill, coming down from the knoll with his riflemen, realized with helpless desperation what was happening. To save his men from useless death and wounds, he called out for all of them to take cover. With mingled emotions he then was forced to see most of his own herd, put together at the cost of so much time and efforts, dying in a stupid animal combat which netted him nothing.

But in the afternoon, when the surviving animals on both sides gave up the struggle out of sheer exhaustion, Bill came out of the pasture with his followers and rounded up his few remaining rhinoceroses. Then he sent out his riflemen to shoot down all Anubarris rhinoceroses which refused to recognize them as masters.

LATE in the afternoon Bill made an inventory of his conquest. He found out that fully eight hundred and fifty Anubarris rhinoceroses had been killed during

the battle, or dispatched afterward by the Kameroons. Of the remaining fifty, thirty had gone to the wilderness which was their natural habitat. The other twenty had accepted captivity under the Kameroon guards.

Likewise, only two hundred prisoners, mostly wounded, remained of the force of five hundred Anubarris warriors. Some sixty Anubarris who had managed to escape at some time or another during the struggle, were easily overtaken and brought back by the Kameroon warriors.

On the other hand, Bill had lost only some fifty men, mostly rhinoceroses guards. But he had to detach at the least another fifty to act as captors of the Anubarris.

AS Bill had expected, Seknaton could not endure the knowledge that his crack legions had been defeated by the lowly Kameroons. Inside a week, the young white lord's spies reported that Seknaton with a thousand warriors had departed from the Anubarris capital, swearing that he would not return until the upstart Kameroons had been exterminated.

Bill's outposts reported faithfully on the progress of Seknaton. The great war chief was no novice in the art of warfare. He marched slowly and kept full complements of scouting parties continually on the lookout for an ambush. Bill knew that he could never attack Seknaton in an open plain; the Anubarris warriors were hardened veterans and more than a match for his Kameroon troops. Besides, the Anubarris would be able to observe the approaching dust clouds if Bill were to drive them across open ground.

On the other hand, if Bill elected to fight in the jungle, his animal war-tanks would be greatly hampered by the undergrowth.

After due consideration, Bill took up a position on the edge of a tiny plain that stood in the middle of the jungle. Here he would be able to maneuver his forces to full advantage, shuttling them in and out of the leafy forest thickets as he willed.

TOWARD noon of the fifth day after his great victory, Bill sat on a vantage point, hidden by the branches of a thicket. Right and left of him, the jungle vegeta-

tion screened fifty picked Kameroons, who had taken cover so well that no human being could have discovered their presence unless he stumbled on them.

The jungle-encased plain that Bill had chosen as a battlefield bore the uneffaced traces of his footprints and of those of the rhinoceros herd.

Bill sneered when he saw a dozen Anubarris scouts coming out of the thickets bordering the plain's opposite edge, and pointing out that trail of footprints to each other. But the unsuspecting Anubarris evidently thought that the tracks were several hours old and that consequently there was no harm in following them swiftly.

They did so, entered the stretch of jungle where the Kameroons crouched in ambush, and had no time of uttering a single cry when calloused black hands shot out of the foliage, clutched their mouths, choked their throats and tore the weapons out of their hands.

Safely tied and gagged, the Anubarris scouts had been carried to the place where the main Kameroon force stood, when Seknaton marched into the plain at the head of a thousand warriors.

The moment to spring the trap had come. Cupping his hands before his mouth, Bill gave a triple rendition of the screech of an enraged monkey.

The drivers of forty rhinoceroses, survivors of the herd, lighted their torches and with loud shouts drove their animal tanks on.

Seknaton's cohorts saw them coming out of the jungle to their left and thought at first that their companions sent in Kameroon territory were returning. Then they saw that the drivers were black men, and gave way in wild confusion.

When Seknaton and his captains shouted for them to hold firm and aim straight, they shot a thunderous volley at random and then attempted to flee. However, their mass formation forbade that. In a moment, they were only a compact mob of madmen, fighting each other in their blind urge to escape the advancing rhinoceroses. While the confusion was at its height, the latter lowered their horned snouts and charged.

During the following quarter of an hour it was more a massacre than a combat. Some bullets fired point-blank hit their

mark, and the heavy cutlasses of the veterans forming the backbone of the Anubarris horde hamstrung a few additional rhinoceroses. But the Anubarris forces were too unnerved to resist effectively, and when the Kameroons followed up with a smashing charge, the victory was complete.

But Bill knew better than to permit his men to scatter in a wild pursuit of the defeated Anubarris. Sooner or later the well-trained Anubarris would re-form their lines, and unless he handled his men carefully, Bill knew that he risked a fatal counter-attack by Seknaton. He shouted for the Kameroons to retire to the safety of the forest, where they could prepare for Bill's next stratagem.

THE Kameroons had strict orders to make no sound. But their scarred black faces showed their fierce elation as they squatted with their blood-stained weapons across their knees, into the thickets and under the jungle-roof of festooned growths binding tree to tree. Bill gathered the chieftains around him and plotted out his next move. The young white warrior's voice boomed out:

"Seknaton has six hundred men left. We would never be able to storm Kifra with four hundred Kameroons if he returned to direct the defense with his veterans! Here's what we'll do. We'll split our army. Half of them we'll send to harass Seknaton with a succession of guerrilla thrusts and rapid retreats which will draw him far into the jungle wilderness. With the other half we'll rapidly march into Kifra, where I will appeal to Khera, who will sympathize with me and accept my protection against the brutal Seknaton."

"The men of the leading Anubarris families will rally around Khera also if Seknaton is not at hand to stop their gathering," one of the Kameroon chieftains added. "I was a captive there. Seknaton browbeat and robbed them for years, took their most comely women whenever he pleased. They did not revolt only because the soldiery follows him blindly, and because there's not among them a man strong enough to come out as leader."

After a hasty meal of previously cooked meat and millet, half the Kameroons sal-

lied forth from the jungle with a great show of force, spouting derisively at the Anubarris in the distance. With howls of rage, the re-formed force of the Anubarris chased after them. The Kameroons retreated skilfully.

The messengers that they sent to Bill during the night, and late in the next day, confirmed that his plan was working. Forty-eight hours after the combat on the jungle clearing, Bill announced to his war council that they could safely enter Kifra.

SEKNATON had left the Anubarris capital in charge of fifty regular warriors and of the armed citizenry. But Bill and his Kameroons annihilated a post of Seknaton's lookouts before a startled audience of Anubarris farmers, who were soon after called by Bill and invited to join him, promising that half of all harvests would in the future belong to them. The result was that the delighted farmers spread over the countryside to bring the happy news to their fellow peasants, and later rushed with them under the town walls, to ask that the gates should be opened to the new white protector of Kifra.

The sight of their crude spears, hoes and scythes flashing under the sun, and of the grim Kameroons lined up behind Bill, convinced the artisans manning the walls that it was better to accept the freedom and welfare promised to them than to risk a dangerous defense for the sake of Seknaton. The fifty warriors left in defense of the city soon realized that they would be left alone to do all the fighting. Anxious to gain Bill's favor with a quick act of submission, they ran to open the gate and saluted him as their legitimate leader.

With the native Anubarris lining the streets and cheering his victorious entry, Bill strode along the street toward the palace of the king. He wanted to see Lisbeth but he knew it was more important for him to speak to Khera and through her to reach the aged Tachus. His meeting with the girl of his own race could wait.

At the palace, Bill ordered his Kameroon escort to wait for him, and went boldly into the palace. He remembered the way to Khera's apartments as though it were yesterday. Through the corridor he strode, watching warily for a hidden

attacker who might suddenly spring at him.

The room into which he stepped was as dark as pitch. Bill halted, and suddenly the curtain, which had screened the window and kept the room in Stygian darkness, was parted and the woman Nererti stood revealed in front of it with a dagger in her fist.

"Do not try to enter," she said. "None enters the Princess' apartments except that my body is stiffened in death."

Bill spoke softly: "Do you not recognize me, Nererti? It is Bi-lah."

With a gasp, the serving woman threw up her hand. "Come into the light of the moon. Let me look at your face!"

Bill complied. Nererti's great tragic black eyes searched his face intently for several moments, then suddenly she recognized his smile.

"May the gods bless you, Bi-lah!" she suddenly sobbed, and throwing the dagger away, she embraced him convulsively. "Lucky is this day of your return! Bi-lah, we have suffered all kinds of humiliations and sorrows! You are a man now, you are strong! Save my Khera as I saved you! Kill Seknaton, the evil spirit of Kifra!"

"It shall be done," Bill promised her.

A FEW minutes later he was with the Anubarris princess.

Khera, in her seventeenth year of age, had a disturbing dark-eyed beauty which sent his blood racing. The delicate aquiline of her nose, her red mouth, her apricot-hued skin and great, almond-shaped and long-lashed black eyes stood in magnificent relief over a fine, straight body. Against her soft white robe, her curly, raven hair had a luxuriant appeal.

"Bi-lah!" Her voice was a husky, soft drawl. "How handsome you are! I never saw a man like you."

Bill had grown to manhood in the jungle without being attracted in the least by the robust graces of the unwashed Kameroon women. Thus he was incapable of understanding the strange emotion that swept over him at Khera's words. He stared at the girl in mute wonder. Finally he stammered:

"Your grandfather— We must go to him at once. Seknaton will return as soon as he learns of the trick I have played on

him. Before that, we will have to convince your grandfather that his only chance to keep his throne is to declare Seknaton a traitor and name me as his protector."

Khera smiled at him. "It is as you wish, Bi-lah," she said happily.

They found Tachus in his room, in a peevish mood because he was suffering an attack of indigestion. Bill could not repress a grimace of disgust as he looked at him. Gone was the majestic bearing of the aged descendant of a long line of kings. Confinement, senility and systematic overfeeding had utterly demoralized Tachus. He had become a grimy skeleton with a disgusting swollen stomach, and his once firm voice had turned into a querulous cackle.

Tachus' bleary eyes brightened for a fleeting instant when he saw his grand-niece. Then his glance wandered over the majestic columns and draperies of the room, turned back to the bowl of unfinished food before him, and finally focused on Bill.

"Who is this stranger?" he croaked querulously. "Where did I see him before?" Khera took Bill aside.

"His mind is too weak to understand. It is doubtful if he will remember you. But he still remembers the good *toubib* who cured him of the pains in his joints—the man Ma-er who died at Seknaton's hands. So I'll tell my grandfather that you are Ma-er's assistant and that will gain you his favor."

Khera's explanation put Tachus in a good mood.

"Cure my stomach-ache," he cackled expectantly. And fretted while Bill sent for the Kameroon negro who carried the battered physician's bag that had once belonged to Meyer.

The bag was finally brought. Tachus' toothless mouth opened in a contented grin as he saw Bill pull a bicarbonate tablet out of a bottle, then it clamped satisfiedly as he swallowed the white pellet. A few minutes later the regularity of his digestion was re-established, and he was willing to do everything that Khera and Bill asked from him.

THE next day the town criers of Kifra chanted on all street corners:

"Listen to the orders of King Tachus, the Son of the Sun and the Brother of the

Stars, who has retaken the reins of power into his august hands. Seknaton sinned, before our ancient gods and in the face of the king. All Anubarris are ordered to attack him on sight and bring him back to Kifra, dead or alive. The mighty chief Bi-lah is the new war lord of Kifra. His black Kameroons are now regular warriors of the state. Turma and all priests of the god Trudonou are lowered in rank, since they are foul, treacherous, and deceivers. The priests of the sun take their place as religious leaders of Kifra."

The latter order was short of Bill's request that the priest Turma be seized for the security of the town. But both Tachus and Khera stuck by the unwritten Anubarris law stating that no priest could be placed in a dungeon. However, Bill obtained the authorization to place a cordon of Kameroons around the death temple, in order to isolate the crafty Turma from all contact with the populace.

Bill also got permission to visit the temple of the moon goddess and to regulate its internal affairs as he saw fit.

FOR the meeting with Lisbeth Stevens which he had dreamed of for so many years, Bill put on the most gorgeous clothes of an Anubarris war chief.

The velvety black eyes of Khera opened widely as she saw how martial his handsome face looked under a silver and gold helmet, how strong his muscular shoulders and arms looked against his sleeveless tunic, made out of fine white wool, and lavishly studded with red and gold embroideries. Then her slim fingers tapped with a possessive gesture the wide, gold-plated belt buckled around his slim waist, from which hung a long sword with a hilt of solid gold.

"Don't let the virgin priestesses cast sheep's eyes upon you," she warned. "You are my chief warrior. Don't forget that you belong only to me."

Bill hardly understood what she was saying. All his thoughts were focused on his meeting with the white girl who had been thrust, like him, into the harsh, cruel life of the jungle.

Bill made his way to the temple alone, and knocked at the portals. He sent in word that he wished to see the priestess Lisbeth.

A few minutes later Lisbeth came into the room and Bill saw that his former child-companion had become a tall girl with a wondrous willowy body and a lovely face blessed with a creamy complexion.

As far as she was concerned, Lisbeth was entranced by Bill's appearance. She had never ceased thinking of him with an intensity which was all the deeper because of the seclusion of her life, and she had never doubted that some day he would return. But she was not prepared to recognize the features of her former playmate of the wind-swept plains of Tounio in the magnificent young giant who now stood before her.

However, the very fact of their reunion rendered them speechless for several minutes. They didn't dare to move, for fear that the least noise would awaken them from their dream, dragging them back to the mental agony and bodily hardships which they had endured for so many years.

Then the memory of their dead parents brought tears to Lisbeth's eyes and broke the spell. Bill took her gently by the shoulders and in a moment Lisbeth was chattering away at a great rate.

At sundown, they were still talking happily when a messenger came, announcing that Khera required Bill's attention. When the messenger had gone, Lisbeth asked naively:

"Bill, why don't you bring me to the princess? If she is your friend, she'll also be mine. Let's tell her that you will help her until her rule and that of Tachus take sound roots, and then we'll leave, because we belong to the civilized world from which we originally came and we want nothing from Kifra."

"Dear Lisbeth," Bill gravely replied, "Khera likes me—but I don't trust her as far as you are concerned. Your beauty could stir her jealousy, even her hatred. You are right when you say that we don't belong in Kifra. But it will be safer for you to leave secretly for the country of my Kameroons, who'll take good care of you for my sake until I join you."

At dusk, Bill had an interview with Khera. The princess was restless. Her fidgety fingers, the darting of her clouded eyes revealed the nervousness and anger brewing in her mind. Finally, simulating great indifference, she purred:

"You spent a long time with the priestess Lisbeth. Is she so much more beautiful than I that I had to send for you to pry you loose from her side?"

"Lisbeth is an old friend of mine," Bill replied diplomatically. "But I assure the princess that her presence is not as dazzling as that of the future queen of Kifra."

Khera, who was, after all, a very young woman, accepted his words hungrily. A hysterical gaiety succeeded to her peevishness. Far into the evening she spoke to him, leaning on his arm, caressing him with her hungry eyes.

Bill nodded smilingly, but the lovely face of Lisbeth kept on dominating his thoughts.

At the opposite end of the room, Tahus grinned benevolently as he sprawled on a capacious armchair of a shape already old when Carthage ruled the Mediterranean sea. The aged king chewed fruits and sweets, with his toothless gums, jabbering endlessly of his bygone days of glory and of his quarrels with Seknaton.

The old man was completely gone in idiocy. When his granddaughter and his new war chief finally left, Tahus kept on talking in the mistaken belief that they were still in the room and listening to him.

As the gray of dawn spread on the sky, his skeleton nape fell back on the headrest of the chair, and he drifted into an agitated sleep. But even in his dreams he kept on imparting advices, and satisfied cackles mingled with his snoring.

IV

IT was five days later that Seknaton learned that his town had been wrested from him during his absence, and realized that the negroes who he had been chasing were only a detachment instructed to lead him on a wild goose chase.

But Seknaton was too crafty and war-wise to give free leeway to his passions when caution and speed of action were required. Angrily choking down his wrath, he detached a force from his decimated little army and ordered them to keep on chasing the negroes, in order to prevent them from knowing that he had seen through the ruse. Then, with five hundred fierce veterans, he hurried back to Kifra as fast as his men could march.

When they reached the vicinity of Kifra, Seknaton's warriors had the advantage of knowing every inch of the ground. Like creeping shadows, their scouts advanced on the Kameroon lookouts posted in front of the city. Silently, they struck.

Before they could be overwhelmed and slaughtered, though, some Kameroon lookouts succeeded in firing a few bullets. The reports, loud as peals of thunder in the stillness of the night, gave the alarm, but by this time Seknaton's men had reached the foot of the walls.

Seknaton's warriors took advantage of the fact that the Kameroons on the sentry-walks were too few, bombarding the top of the walls with crude wooden crosses, which stuck between the merlons; then they swarmed hand over hand up the ropes depending from the crosses.

When Bill rallied his Kameroons and a few score citizens, they met his counter-attacks with such a succession of savage charges in the maze of the darkened alleys that his men became bewildered.

The citizens who had fought under his orders thus far deserted to salvage their homes when fires broke all over the town. The moment inevitably came when Bill was completely surrounded by the swarming horde of Seknaton's cutthroats. Only a hundred of his Kameroons were left.

STRIKING right and left with sword and spear, Bill was hacking a bloody path at the head of his Kameroons when Seknaton joined the combat with the pick of his force.

As soon as he saw his hated enemy, Bill challenged him in a loud voice to personal combat. But Seknaton was too wise to compromise the victory already in his grasp. With a snarl he ordered his men to attack, shouting for them to capture the white warrior alive.

Supported by his jungle negroes, Bill held his ground for a few minutes against the fury of the outnumbering enemies. But one by one the Kameroons fell under the swords, spears and bullets of the Anubarris warriors.

Helpless rage convulsed Bill as the Anubarris pack closed in on him in a swirling tide of flashing steel and striking arms. When he was so closely pressed that he had no room to swing his weapons, he

shortened hold on the spear and stabbed dagger-like at close quarters. But scores of steely fingers grabbed his arms and shoulders; a brawny forearm wrapped itself around his throat.

Butting and kicking, the half-strangled Bill managed to break loose, and again slashed and stabbed at tremendous speed with his weapons. But finally a spear struck his helmet, tore it from his head and stunned him so that he fell helplessly on all fours.

Before he could recover his strength, the Anubarris pounced on him, flattening him on the ground with their cumulative weight and striking the back of his head with the pommels of their swords until consciousness left him.

SEKNATON personally directed the assault of the royal palace. Bill had left fifty entrusted with its defense. They were burly, battle-scarred men who barred its entrances—firing point blank at the attackers, swinging their heavy axes and spears.

For several minutes no charge could prevail against them. But finally Seknaton catapulted on over a mound of dead and wounded Anubarris and negroes. A leaden slug tore the miter like helmet from his head, arrows grazed his arms and shoulders, but the big club of solid iron whirled by his strong hands shattered the fence of thrusting spears and axe handles.

Into the breach thus made Seknaton hurtled his giant frame. Without room to swing their weapons, afraid to stab for fear of hitting each other, the Kameroons grabbed him. But they could as well have attempted to stop an express train. Seknaton rammed his immense shoulders right and left, knocking aside the negroes who attempted to drag him down, and after him charged his veteran cutthroats, finishing the wounded Kameroons who attempted to regain their feet.

Thus was slaughtered half of the forces left by Bill to defend Tahus and Khera. The remainder ran from the other points of the beleaguered palace, but after a brief scuffle they were forced to give way. The entrance hall, and the wide stairway leading to the royal apartments, became cluttered with hacked corpses and broken weapons.

LIKE an enormous tombstone was the dais of power supporting the ebony throne over which Tahus sat like a stiff-backed mummy swathed in the purple and gold trappings of a royalty as old as time.

The skeletal face of the old king was an expressionless dessicated mask; but at the bottom of their cavernous sockets, his eyes shone with a consuming fire.

The old king, far from being afraid, was consumed by a helpless fury. In the prime of his life he had lived to cater to his lust, and without ideals. When advanced age cooled his blood, he became a slave of his gluttony. Superseded by Seknaton when he had attempted to punish the war-chief after Meyer's murder, he had superstitiously seen in his own downfall a punishment for favoring foreigners, and had been mollified by the shred of authority, left to him by Seknaton.

Of late, though, Seknaton had lost whatever regard he still held for the decadent king and had humiliated him time and again before his mentals. Consequently, Tahus had welcomed a chance to disown Seknaton and a forgotten feeling of intense pride had flared anew in his breast when he was reinstated with all the attributes of his rank.

Now Seknaton was returning with a raging vengeance in his heart. Tahus knew that his last moment was near.

The terrorized Khera clung to his bony knees. But Tahus' scrawny neck was firm, and his stare unflinching, as the clamor of the combat drew nearer and nearer, magnified and distorted by the echoes of the sonorous halls and corridors. Without turning his head he finally wheezed:

"Sound, trumpet! Blow for the last time the king's call!"

But the trumpet bearer had deserted the rear of the dais and was now hiding in a cellar.

Suddenly Tahus' toothless mouth opened in a spasmodic gasp, for some ten negroes, covered with wounds and furiously fighting had backed into the hall. And past and above them the massive head and swinging arms of Seknaton towered like a vision out of a nightmare.

But Tahus' jaws were tightly shut and pride stiffened his skeletal face when, one by one, the Kameroon warriors fell. Like a peal of thunder, Seknaton's stentorian

voice rang out in the ancient throne room.

"You thought that I wouldn't come back, did you, Tahus? Where's your white defender? Where is the white-livered jungle god? Why don't you call to him for help, O Tahus, O gilded carrion of a king without subjects?"

At last Tahus' spectral head jerked up, but his eyes stared above and past the beastly body of Seknaton.

THAT demonstration of unflinching disdain from his former ruler, now helpless before him, blinded and paralyzed Seknaton with such a fit of rage that he reeled, on the verge of an apoplectic stroke. The bosses of his forehead, the crooked ridge of his nose, the square outline of his jutting jaw stood out scarlet under the flowing light of the ceiling lamps.

No man saw Tahus' hand stealing to a fold of his gold embroidered sash, bringing forth a bolus as big as a nut, which he stuck between his lips.

"Tahus!" Seknaton finally snarled. "Kneel, O degenerated king, and face your rightful end."

Lifting a massive arm, he lumbered toward the dais. But, as he reached it, his eyes opened widely. For no motion of breathing agitated Tahus' breast. The aged king was dead.

But even in death, Tahus seemed to sneer. And his old hand clung so firmly to his wand of power that Seknaton had to break its fingers to release its hold.

And when he turned, lifting high the royal staff to impress his victorious followers, the slender baton of ancient rotten ebony and gold folded, the longer piece of it hanging by a shred of wooden ligament from the smaller piece clutched in his ham-like fist.

"Seknaton," an Anubarris warrior moaned, "it is an evil omen! Beware of the ancient warning: 'The chief who breaks the king's staff dies soon! And no honored burial is granted to his remains!'"

"Whaah! Who said that? Pack of swines, who dared to curse me?" Seknaton instantly retorted at the top of his lungs.

They all gave way, his battle-stained followers, under the feral menace of his stare.

The crafty Seknaton knew that force would achieve him nothing here.

"Tahus," he announced, "died of fright.

He was the one who broke the staff, before giving up his craven soul—and not I."

The warriors below the dais nodded to acknowledge his explanation. But on their faces Seknaton read their disbelief that the weak king could have broken anything between his fingers before collapsing in death.

So, to regain face, Seknaton dug a hand in Khera's hair, jerked her away from the body of her grandfather, and thundered:

"Strumpet of a fallen princess! You have shamed your future husband by skulking in your apartments with an accursed foreigner! Why don't you greet me, O vile Khera?"

The pain that the poor girl suffered was excruciating, but horror and bleak fear paralyzed her throat and stifled her screams. But suddenly, like a panther who sees her young in the paws of a bear, Nererti ran snarling from behind the dais.

Seknaton's eyes bulged in astonishment when the woman whipped a razor-sharp dagger from under her mantle and stuck its point against his stomach with a lightning-like gesture, shrieking:

"Leave her alone, beast, or I kill you!"

"If you do," Seknaton threatened, "my men will tear both of you limb from limb." But he surrendered Khera to her and stood by without attempting further violence when she gathered the hysterical girl in her arms and massaged her aching scalp, crooning soothing words.

A few instants passed during which, from his ebony armchair, the dead Tahus seemed to dominate everybody with his wide-open, unseeing eyes and the frozen leer of his toothless mouth. Then Seknaton sneered:

"You also took Bi-lah's part, O Nererti! But see that Khera is prepared fittingly for her wedding with me. To cheer her up, tell her that I shall give her Bi-lah's severed head as a marriage present."

Seknaton turned to his soldiers. Their scarred faces still wore expressions of uncertainty and dread.

"What are you waiting for? Out! Out of here with you!"

Seknaton worked himself up into an outburst of rage because they didn't discard their crestfallen demeanor.

They clanked toward the door. Seknaton strode after them. But on the thresh-

hold his feet slipped on a pool of blood and he fell heavily.

That was another omen of disaster. As if Tachus' corpse were responsible for it, Seknaton retrieved the ax of a dead Kameroon, threw it against the ebony throne. But old Tachus continued to stare unblinkingly, his lips contracted in a hideous sardonic grin.

BILL reacquired his senses in a dungeon as a smith was fastening his wrists and ankles with heavy armlets of iron from which hung chains which in their turn were soldered to some huge iron rings hanging from a slimy wall.

When he opened his eyes he saw Seknaton gloating above him.

"Why don't you try to break loose?" the giant war chief sneered.

Bill bit his bruised lips but kept his peace. Annoyed, Seknaton snarled venomously:

"By Troudonou, I haven't killed you yet because I don't take my vengeance like a simple yokel. You are a stiff-necked foreigner, O Bi-lah, but the moment will come when with your mind and courage as broken as all the bones of your body you'll sob to me to have mercy, to put an end to your suffering with a dagger stroke through your heart."

Bill kept his head bowed and Seknaton did not see the hardening of his eyes, as grim resolution formed in the white boy's mind. The giant warrior thought his prisoner was sunk in despondency.

Then Seknaton kicked him and spat on him before leaving. Bill remained on his knees, with his head down. But as soon as the door of the dungeon clanked shut, he arose and grasped the iron rings from which his chains hung. His force was prodigious and desperation and rage doubled it. But the big rusty rings were solidly fastened to the wall. In spite of his efforts, not a single particle of the hard cement around their mooring pinions separated itself from the slimy surface of the wall.

WHEN evening came, the huge throne room was turned into a banqueting hall by order of Seknaton.

Couches were placed around the low tables, for the Anubarris took all their cere-

monial meals lying down, like all the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean basin. Festoons of flowers, gaudy draperies were hung on the walls and around the stately columns. But, to prove to his followers, and perhaps also to himself, that he had no fear of the dead, Seknaton ordered that the body of Tachus stripped of his royal mantel and crown and tied to the ebony armchair on which he had died, with a spear shaft stuck into the back of his sash and strapped to his neck to hold him upright.

The dead king's unblinking glassy eyes seemed to stare at the ribald revelry going on below the dais. In the hours since his death his emaciated cheeks had shrunk, pulling back the corners of his gaping mouth. Thus the spasmodic grin which had contracted his lips at the moment of his death had become a horrid grimace, all the more awesome because decay was already turning his gums black.

Seknaton's triumph was complete. A few score Kameroons, the survivors of Bill's jungle followers, had been disarmed and placed in a stockaded camp, guarded by a cordon of heavily armed Anubarris warriors. Their leader, the young white chieftain, was chained in a dungeon. And Turma, again spiritual chief of Kifra, had set his spies to work, so that nothing could happen in the conquered and cowed town that Seknaton wouldn't know at once.

But Seknaton, who would marry the princess Khera after the three propitiatory days prescribed by Anubarris custom, was in the grip of an unconquerable nervousness. The adverse omens which had followed Tachus' death had stirred the superstitious side of his brutal mind, and their memory kept on harassing him.

The surly Seknaton began to drink heavily. But as the highly alcoholic mixture of ginger beer and palm wine that he quaffed went to his head he mistook the blurring of the outline of the body of the dead king for a ghastly moving of his decaying limbs.

So Tachus had cursed him with evil omens after dying, and now his corpse was wriggling to deride him! Seknaton suddenly gave forth a roar which stopped all the coarse talking and laughing all around him. Then he arose. Swaying on his huge, unsteady legs, he went to the

dais with a full cup in his hand. Then he laboriously climbed beside the ebony chair and shrieked:

"Carrion, how dare you to challenge me still!" And, with a sudden move, he threw the content of the cup into the dead king's face.

Some of his brutal warriors cheered. The others and the women moaned, because that sacrilegious act was a direct insult to all Anubarris tradition, and to Trudonou, the feared god of death.

ALL the banqueters were in the morbid grip of a nameless worry, when a vision of dazzling loveliness suddenly appeared on the threshold of the desecrated throne hall.

"By Trudonou!" Seknaton exclaimed. "Can that goddess be my fiancée Khera?"

There was an ageless wisdom in the smile of the girl princess as she floated toward him. Prevailing over Nererti's fears, she had attired herself in a sheer, ankle-length tunic which had belong to her dead mother, and through which her shapely legs stood revealed. A cloth of striped silk was tightly wrapped around her slender waist and rounded hips and fell in a long, jewel-studded square from a fold under her breast down to her knees. A round collar-piece, also jewel-studded, brought into relief the soft apricot hue of her neck and fine, shapely arms. Her rouged cheeks and mouth, together with the *khol* skilfully darkening her eyelids and enhancing the beauty of her black, long-lashed eyes, gave her a look of glamour and sophistication that astonished the onlookers.

Both Seknaton and Turma could hardly believe their eyes. They were accustomed to see in Khera a pretty and quietly antagonistic child princess, and her sudden change to a young woman of dazzling charm left them amazed.

"Beware of whatever possesses her! Her honeyed smile could hide a poison aiming to devour us," Turma muttered, hastening to Seknaton's side.

But the drunken war chief shrugged away the fears of the crafty priest. His eyes were fixed greedily on the vision of loveliness before him.

Khera's languorously husky voice as she came abreast of them confirmed his belief

that they had nothing to fear from her.

"For years," she said, "Tahus sat and ate. But his mind was gone and so was his care for me. Is there any wonder that I felt no love for him, and that I am not saddened by his death? But, for my sake, for the sake of that princely authority which is mine, and which will be yours as my husband, have him removed from that chair and made ready for decent burial, O Seknaton!"

"And what do you want him to do with that accursed foreigner, that Bi-lah whom you cherished so greatly only yesterday?" snarled Turma, jutting his chinless head forward menacingly.

"I went unwillingly with Bi-lah. He came into my rooms and forced himself upon me at the point of the sword, and Nererti is ready to swear that such was the case," Khera exclaimed, with a show of indignation worthy of a seasoned actress.

"Instead of blaming me, O Seknaton, you should punish those soldiers who permitted him to enter Kifra unopposed and kidnap their princess! Who am I but a weak vessel of a woman, O mighty warlord?"

The precious perfumes with which she had drenched her sensuous body and which wafted tantalizing to his nostrils thrilled Seknaton and made him more receptive than ever to the lure of her young beauty. Besides, her explanation flattered his vanity and indirectly sanctioned his right to sit in the throne of the dead Tahus as her husband. Thus Seknaton, mellowed and inordinately proud, laid a protecting hand over her slim shoulder and shot a triumphal glance all around.

He saw his partisans smiling widely, nodding eagerly. They all readily believed Khera's explanation because it included a recognition of their status of new ruling cast of Kifra, with all the rich rewards that went with it. And only fear of the quick temper of their terrible chief restrained them from suggesting loudly that he should not lose time in accepting the proffered friendship of the princess.

But Turma insisted venomously:

"What do you plan to do with Bi-lah?"

Khera spat contemptuously. "O Seknaton, mighty is your sword-arm! Wipe out the disgrace of my capture by presenting

me with Bi-lah's head on a platter.

A ripple of approval went through the banquet hall. Seknaton boomed loudly: "By Trudonou, it shall be done! Khera, you please me greatly. Is there anything else you desire?"

Khera smiled at him. "Seknaton, you like that other accursed foreigner, Lisbeta, too much for your own good and mine," she said archly. "Therefore, she should be returned to the temple as a virgin priestess instead of being placed in your household."

Seknaton grinned wolfishly and inhaled a great gust of air. Khera's words appealed to his vanity. He ordered gruffly:

"Tahus' mistakes ended with his life. Untie his body, carry it to the room where he slept in life and tell his menials to prepare it for burial as the Princess Khera ordered."

"That's not enough," Khera urged. "Tell everybody, right now, that they must respect me as your bride to be!"

Seknaton did that willingly, while Tahus' remains were being borne away. As the cheering of the banqueters mounted to the rafters of the huge hall, Khera whispered in Turma's ear, to stop him from realizing that, according to Anubarris custom, Seknaton was actually ordering his men to obey her own wishes whenever he was absent or incapacitated to give orders:

"My lord is too fond of the accursed Lisbeta. Help me to find a way of bringing her into the temple before he can get his hands on her." And the grasping Turma gasped from the bottom of his foul heart:

"I swear by Trudonou that I will. You are right, great would be the danger if the brave but rash-minded Seknaton learned to like her too much!"

With a pompous show of dignity, Seknaton and Turma went to their table with Khera between them, and invited her to eat and drink in their company. Khera complied sparingly, with befitting modesty, and coyly warned them not to drink too much, because she had heard Nererti say that intoxication had killed as many men as the sword.

They both laughed away her fears, and to demonstrate, they gulped down cup after cup of strong wine. They were too drunk to see clearly when Khera, with a deft

move, poured some sleeping powder in their goblets, and simulated fright when they suddenly flopped on the couch in a leaden sleep.

But after a while she arose, and her demeanor had an inherited regality that compelled respect. Calmly, slowly, she commanded:

"Bring my bridegroom Seknaton to his rooms, in this palace, and Turma to his quarters in Trudonou's temple, so that they may rest undisturbed. But the banquet goes on. I preside over it."

They did as she asked, and after a while, without the restraint of the fear inspired by Seknaton and Turma, the revelry became noiser than ever. But, while everybody drank and caroused, Khera deftly found out who was the headman placed by Seknaton in charge of the dungeons and, quietly, she ordered him to follow her out of the room.

THE headman was a stout ruffian endowed with uncommon shrewdness. But drink had taken the edge from his wit and he was over-eager to please Khera.

Thus he was greatly flattered when Khera said shyly in the semi-darkness of a corridor:

"I lost prestige when Bi-lah dragged me out of town. Don't you think that everybody would applaud me if I had Bi-lah slain under my eyes, this very night, and if I presented his severed head to Seknaton, on his awakening?"

"Lovely Princess!" the headman rumbled after his coarse laughter had subsided, "I'm glad that Seknaton ordered all of us to obey you. I shall open Bi-lah's jail to you. But you must convince someone else to slay him. There are very few things than I would like more than cutting his accursed throat, but you know how Seknaton is. He could awake with a sour mouth and not like the jest, and my head would fall off, too."

"In my quarters I have a light sword, a woman's weapon it is, but its edge is keen and with it I can kill Bi-lah if you stand by with your own good sword drawn, ready to finish him if he attempts to brain me with his chains," Khera replied.

Louder than ever the laughter of the headman rang. Khera, his besotted brain reasoned, was going to be a queen accord-

ing to his own heart; and he was instantly confirmed in that belief by the well filled purse which Khera slipped into his hand.

The headman gloated at the thought of the booty that would fall into his possession as private executioner of the queen: The spoils of the victims of her disfavor—tolls wrested from wealthy prisoners—the private sale of remunerative positions. . . .

All, in his estimation, depended from doing well the first job given him by Khera. His enthusiasm was as great as his murderous zest when he ran to retrieve her light sword and, afterwards, led her through a succession of deserted courtyards and basements.

Before the door of Bill's jail they found a sentry, posted by Seknaton. The headman sent him to wait for his pleasure in a nearby cell, whispering:

"O Khera, it would have been unwise to let him see me killing Bi-lah!"

"You are wise!" Smoothly, Khera whispered back. "Not even a bribe can stop the wagging tongue of a plain soldier."

The headman snickered; then he selected a key from the bunch hanging from his belt and opened the dungeon door.

Bill, bruised and disheveled, pulled himself up from the slimy ground on which he had lain and stared wildly at Khera's loveliness. But instead of the kind words that he expected, a flow of abuse poured from her lips:

"By Trudonou, you look fouler than a carrion in a mud-pile! Is it that the hospitality granted to you by Seknaton doesn't suit your jungle taste? Very well! I'll put an end to it and to your foul life at the same time!"

Bill sought an unspoken message in her flashing black eyes, but he found them as hard as polished slate. Convinced that in order to save her own skin she had joined Seknaton, he slunk back, noisily dragging the heavy chains hanging from his wrists.

"Be careful! Loaded with chains as he is, he is still dangerous!" Khera hissed to the headman.

The latter laughed hoarsely:

"Do not fear for your servant, my princess! I know how to handle his kind of accursed vermin!" But he was too awed by the reputation of strength and savage bravery of Bill to charge headlong.

Crouching, he pranced carefully toward him, watching his balled fists, lowering his sword to strike at a vital spot—and, in so doing, he stepped unsuspecting in front of Khera.

The young princess stared disdainfully at the creases on the back of his leathery neck and at his wide back. Suddenly she lifted her keen-edged woman's weapon and stabbed him under his left shoulder.

The mouth of the headman opened so widely that all his teeth stood bared, but before he could utter a sound his pierced heart ceased functioning. Bill wondered if he was dreaming as the knees of his would-be murderer caved in and the sword, slipping from his lifeless fingers, clattered on the floor of the dungeon.

He was still staring at the sagging jaw and collapsing body of the head-jailer when Khera produced two files from under her mantel, gave one of them to him and, kneeling, attacked the iron rings fastened around his ankles.

A few moments later Bill tore the filed bracelets from his wrists and laid them gingerly on the floor, with the chains still attached to them. But Khera ignored his fervent thanks.

"Free your legs quickly," she urged. "The sentry may get tired of waiting and return at any moment."

After an anxious stare at the adjacent corridor, Bill set to work. He had just removed his last chain when he heard the heavy steps of the returning sentry.

THE sentry had hardly entered the corridor when a human tornado struck him. The bewildered soldier of Seknaton lowered his spear, but before he could stab or shout for help, Bill's sword pierced his throat through.

"At last! At last you can go!" Khera sobbed hysterically. "Put on the clothes of one of these two dead men, O Bi-lah! In the darkness of the night you can easily pass for an Anubarris soldier! Luck assisting, you'll make good your escape from Kifra!"

"If I go, what will happen to you, to Lisbeth, to my faithful negroes who were captured?" Bill growled. "No, Khera, I must stay! He who strikes the first blow wins here. I cannot flee into the jungle like a hunted beast."

"But . . . what is your plan? What can you do?" Khera moaned, twisting her hands.

Bill's face was harsh in the dim light of the dungeon. "Seknaton . . ." he said slowly. "I shall kill him—as he killed my father and my friends. You, Khera, return to your quarters, and if I fail, disclaim all knowledge of my escape from the dungeon!"

While he discarded his torn garments and put on those of the dead sentry, Khera argued feverishly that she didn't want him to risk his life any more. It was only when Bill repeated that his resolution was unshakable and that his chances of success diminished with every instant's delay, that the desperate Khera gave up her struggle and ran back to her rooms, sobbing a fervent prayer to the Anubarris gods to protect him.

DURING his few days of power in Kifra, Bill had inspected every nook and corner of the royal palace. Thus, all along his dangerous jaunt, he found convenient hiding places whenever he heard the coarse voices of approaching soldiers.

Finally he climbed out of the window of a darkened hall and, sure-footed as a cat, walked over a foot-wide cornice until he reached the windows of Seknaton's bedroom.

Cautiously, he lifted himself across the window-sill. Inside the room, his jungle trained eyes saw the giant sprawled on his capacious bed. Seknaton snored heavily in drugged slumber.

Bill's jaw hardened. He could not kill in cold blood. He bent over Seknaton's bed and lifted the war chief easily in his arms. The giant grunted in his sleep, but snored on. Bill thought rapidly: He would kidnap Seknaton, carry him outside the city and, when he awakened, defeat him in battle and use him as a hostage to release Lisbeth.

It was a long chance but one that he had to take.

Bill stepped out of the window, bowed under the weight of the drugged Seknaton. A wind was arising, rendering his foothold precarious. But there was a huge, flat-topped building close to the royal palace. Conscious of Seknaton's weight, Bill ran toward it.

THE moment came when he found himself over a jutting cornice. About a yard further and some five yards below, the roof which constituted his only avenue of escape shone under the beams of the moon. Bill eased Seknaton over his shoulders, got a sounder grip on an ankle and a wrist of the giant; then he flexed his legs and sprang.

The next instant he rolled with the still unconscious Seknaton over the providential roof top.

Bill ran swiftly across the wide roof, and found that it was connected on the opposite side with the roof of the mansion of a rich Anubarris.

All the larger buildings of the ancient town were thus clustered in a vast half moon, and the last of them was the grim temple of the priests of Trudonou, the God of Death. Running lightly under the burden of the huge Seknaton, Bill finally arrived at the temple.

A huge fire roared in the colossal hollow statue right beneath him. Flames leaped out of the empty crown of the head of Trudonou's likeness, out of its eyes, nostrils and mouth, while, alternately lifted and lowered by an ingenious system of pulleys and chains, Trudonou's disjointed arms of brass waved in the air.

The next day, according to the Anubarris ritual, a number of human victims were scheduled to be fed to the Moloch, and like early customers at a ball-game several scores of citizens were already assembled on the walled esplanade dominated by the statue.

They all howled when Bill, carrying Seknaton draped across his shoulders, suddenly appeared on the edge of the terrace above. Bill, desperate and out of breath, realized that his capture of the drugged Seknaton had fizzled out into a dismal failure.

Snarling, he started to step back, when two enormous hands clutched his throat, two giant legs wrapped themselves around his body.

Bill fell with the awakened Seknaton. Together they rolled over the flat roof, Seknaton snarling, Bill uttering choked sounds, struggling to free himself of the cruel hold which sought to crush the life out of him.

Almost strangled, and blinded by the

rush of blood in his head, Bill lost consciousness for a fleeting instant. But there was a lot of stamina in his jungle-hardened system. In a flurry of savage fighting instinct, he threshed like a trapped leopard. Then, gathering all his fading strength, he leaped with his giant enemy still clutching at him, executed a somersault, and fell so that Seknaton's skull hit first the roof with a booming sound. The head of an average man would have been fractured, but Seknaton was only stunned. However, his hands and legs loosened their hold and Bill was able to gulp a lungful of reviving air.

Quick as a flash, he came to his feet and whipped out the short dagger hanging from the soldier's belt which he was wearing. A dagger was stuck also in Seknaton's belt, but the war chief of Kifra didn't get hold of it. Instead, he wrenched a loose stone slab out of the roof's paving and went at Bill with it.

Bill side-stepped just in time. The stone slab hit the roof, broke. With the jagged stump still in his hands, Seknaton lunged sideways at Bill, ducking swiftly as the young American, whirling about on the balls of his feet, stabbed in his turn. But he couldn't avoid entirely Bill's dagger, which cut a bloody furrow into the muscles of his wide back.

Seknaton snarled with rage and pain. He drove wildly at Bill, ignoring stabs which cut him under the armpit and opened another wound on his upper breast. Again Bill felt the bite of searing steel, on the side of his head, on his already injured arm and on a hip. But he countered with upward slashes, which severed bone and flesh and sent spurts of blood from the giant's body and all over his own. Then they wrestled, straining, biting each other like wild animals.

Still clutching at each other, they fell, Bill underneath. The young man saw the dagger of Seknaton, red with his own blood, poised above him. His wounded left arm was unable to stand the pressure of the huge weight and strength of Seknaton, who soon wrenched his wrist free. But in that very instant, Bill's knee came up with the power and speed of a thumping piston, smashing Seknaton sickeningly in the belly.

The next moment Bill was up. He gave a single glance at Seknaton, spattered with

blood, lifting himself up painfully, and then leaped to finish him.

Seknaton screamed desperately as Bill's dagger stuck between his neck and his shoulder, but, gathering all his colossal strength, he threw his left arm around his younger enemy, dragged him down, managed to bring home a stroke of his own.

Then Seknaton's giant body was thrown on his back, and Bill, his face still a savage mask of battling fury, lifted himself on hands and knees and fiercely stared at the gasping mouth and glazed eyes of his dying enemy.

Handicapped as he was by the pain of his wounds, he was unable to lift the dying giant. Grasping one of his arms, he dragged him up to the roof's edge. There he lifted him.

THE Anubarris below became frozen with fear as they saw Seknaton limp in the grasp of the white jungle warrior. They slunk back as Bill roared:

"Behold, citizens of Kifra! Seknaton broke the law. He killed his king, your king. And now he's dying—struck by your own enraged gods of Kifra!"

No citizen dared reply. But a frantic priest had worked over the drugged Turma while Bill and Seknaton fought, and now, revived but still wobbly on his legs, Turma came out of the main door of his temple just in time to hear the end of Bill's speech.

"Accursed stranger!" he shrieked hysterically. "Trudonou is playing with you as a leopard plays with a mouse. Trudonou is going to revive Seknaton! And, for this sham of triumph, you'll pay with horrible sufferings!"

Bill's fiery eyes opened widely as they stared at the huge blaze in the hollow statue below. Suddenly he lifted the dead giant above his head and threw him into the flames.

Bedlam broke loose. Some priests of the sun-gods, Turma's enemies, were quick to seize that opportunity of regaining their supremacy by turning the tables on the rival priesthood of Trudonou. They shouted that Turma had lied, that the gods were with Khera and her champion Bi-lah.

Desperately, Turma and his subordinate priests endeavored to silence them. But like a peal of thunder, Bill's stentorian voice arose, dominating the tumult:

"Open the rear door of Trudonou's statue! Let everybody see what's happening to Seknaton! See if he can drag the charred husk of his treacherous ally from the fire!"

The mob rushed around the statue. But the frantic Turma barred their way. Lifting his scrawny arms high, he shrilled invocations and curses and held them spell-bound with the fascination of his snaky head, with his flashing yellow eyes, and with the feral notoriety of his baleful magic. But, in the mob, there was a citizen who had seen his wife and daughter carried out of his house, and dragged, crying, into the grim residence of Trudonou's priests. That citizen noticed a bemused soldier close by. With a sudden lunge he pulled a bow and an arrow from the quiver slung across the soldier's shoulder; then he bent the bow and shot the arrow into Turma's breast.

Turma's screams abruptly subsided. Pawing at the shaft jutting from his body, with a bloody foam pouring from his lips, he stumbled backward.

That sight broke the last restraint holding the mob at bay. They all sprang forward. Turma had collapsed and was kicking weakly in his death throes, when the rear door of Trudonou's statue was thrown open. What the citizens saw in the flames leaping within the giant metallic brazier convinced them that the power of the tyrants of Kifra was broken forever.

THE news of the death of Seknaton and Turma spread like wildfire. Before the brutal soldiers of Seknaton could rally their forces and attack him, Bill had acted. Hastening to the prisoner's camp, he found there only a few dazed guards who readily released the captive Kameroun negroes and made no opposition when Bill broke into a nearby arsenal-building and distributed the weapons kept in it among his black warriors.

A desperate plan had formed in Bill's mind. Seknaton's soldiery outnumbered his men three to one, and at the least a thousand citizens, mediocre fighters, but able to make a stand in their crooked native alleys, would eagerly join in combat against the scanty Kameroun force.

But in the mines, where Bill had been confined as an abused worker during the

first weeks of his arrival in Kifra, were hundreds of whip-scarred slaves and political prisoners.

Bill knew that long years of starved captivity and beatings had turned them into human beasts. But no matter how tortured, no matter how deranged, the man didn't live who wouldn't readily seize a chance of striking a blow for the blessing of freedom.

THE brutal guards near the entrances of the mines became panicky when they saw the blood-stained Bill coming at the head of scores of armed negroes. Lifting their cudgels they shouted that only Anubarris soldiers were allowed to enter. But when the negroes kept on coming, they threw down their cudgels and fled.

Into the main shaft a group of armed supervisors attempted to put up a resistance; but Bill and the foremost Kame-rooms overcame them without much trouble. Then, following Bill's orders, the Kame-rooms went among the prisoners and broke their chains with their own hammers and crowbars. Then they herded the rescued prisoners into the open.

Bill shook his head when he saw the men whom he had rescued. Some of them were blind of one eye, others had limbs which had mended crookedly after a fracture. Some, with their lungs half-eaten, lurched scrawny and bent. Not a single man in that grimy, disheveled and bearded mob was without a sore.

But the hate filling their hearts exuded from them like a tangible aura. Bill bit his lips at the thought of the ravages that they were bound to commit if they were let loose in the town. But the ingratitude and cruelty of the Anubarris soldiers deserved no regard.

"Listen to me, if you want freedom!" Bill snarled.

The freed prisoners met that challenge with a snarl. Hooking their knotted fingers, they surged forward, not awed in the least by the lowered spears of the Kame-rooms lined up right and left of Bill.

"You once were men," Bill told them. "You have suffered the tortures of the damned. You had no hope up to this moment. I offer you an opportunity to be free, to become true men again. I offer you revenge."

Clenched fists shook into the air. Beastly snarls and growls mixed into an ominous roar, like the rumble of an approaching hurricane.

"Do you know what I want in return?" Bill continued. "I'll tell you! I want the conquest of Kifra and the defeat of your cruel overlords! Because, unless their power is broken, I shall not be able to rescue a woman of my race, who's now a prisoner and who'll be slain if I don't get at her quickly!

"If we win, I'll leave Kifra with her—I'll return to the jungles, where my tribes have their huts. But I shall see first that you, the abused slaves, become the masters of Kifra! Do you care to avenge your destroyed houses, the families that you once had? Do you wish to avenge your long years of suffering? If you do—if you wish to become free again, to eat well and to conquer that security to which you are entitled, come with me and fight! Take your hammers, your crowbars, your picks and spades, and kill the cutthroat soldiers of Kifra! What have you to fear from death? Is not death better than the lot of an Anubarris slave miner?"

The murmurs that had met the beginning of Bill's speech gradually turned into a deep-throated roar as the words kept on pouring out of his mouth. When he was through, the howling became terrible, deafening.

Bill saw them grasping their working implements, the weapons discarded by the escaped guards.

He didn't attempt to muster them into any formation when they shouted that they were ready. It would have been a useless undertaking. He just put himself at their head and led them toward the town. But, after a few strides, the freed slaves lost patience and ran ahead of him.

INSIDE the town, the Anubarris heard the roar of the slaves with mingled rage and apprehension. Unaware that the slaves had been freed by Bill, they thought it was only an uprising.

The finely armed and attired Anubarris made a brave show as they poured out of the town. But their appearance acted on the freed slaves like a red flag waved before a mad bull. Howling savagely, they charged headlong.

The battlefront hastily formed by the Anubarris soldiers bent in several points after a few minutes' fighting, then it broke. And there was not the warlike strength and experience of Seknaton to turn the tide of the combat when Bill led his Kameroons in a compact body around a wing of the enemy and attacked them from the rear.

Houses were being broken in, and several buildings were on fire, when Bill entered the royal palace at the head of his Kameroons and was met by the sobbing Nererti, who instantly cried:

"I saved your woman for you. Come to get her, in my room. But for that, repay me by saving Khera. She has been kidnaped by the priests and taken with them as a hostage."

Bill didn't have to look far for Khera. For a deafening clamor coming from the square before the temple of the sun god was a clear warning that the Anubarris priests had been trapped there.

When he arrived at a run on the scene of the last combat, the square formed by the bodyguards had been broken and the slaves were dragging down one after another the wounded Anubarris priests who stood around Khera.

Shouting louder than the concerted din of screams and clashing weapons, Bill ordered the slaves to step back. But only a few of them obeyed. The rest, intoxicated with the smell of freshly spilled blood, kept on pouncing on the scattered bodyguards from every side.

Bill saw a burly fellow grasping the hair of Khera, who was too frozen by terror to oppose any resistance. Too far from stopping the slave, who was already lifting his sword to strike, Bill wrested a spear from the hands of one of his Kameroons and threw it. Quick as a streak of lightning the spear sped through the air. It struck and pierced the slave before he could bring his blow home, but, as he fell, his hand, still clutching Khera's hair, dragged her down also.

Another two slaves leaped on the prostrate princess but before they could reach her Bill tore through the crowd. He met the two maddened men right above Khera, bowled them over, stunned them with two blows with the flat of his sword. When he lifted Khera he saw that she was bleed-

ing from two wounds, one on her side, the other above her left elbow. He probed the cuts, saw that they were superficial and bandaged them with strips torn from her mantle. As he tightened the last knot, Khera looked at him and gasped:

"Thanks to your victory over Seknaton, I am queen in fact as well as name. How can I ever thank you, Bi-lah?"

All around them, the Kameroons were already disarming the most amenable slaves, and bringing down those who attempted to resist. But the horror of pillage and wholesale murder was already spreading to the other quarters of the town.

IT took Bill the remainder of the day and the entire night to restore order. The gray of the next dawn was in the sky when he returned to the royal palace. There he was greeted by Lisbeth and Nererti, who hastened to lead him to a specially prepared room where he could rest. For loss of blood and utter weariness had turned him into a scarecrow, vacant of stare and stumbling as if in a trance.

As soon as he fell on a soft couch, Bill smiled at Lisbeth, who bent worriedly over him. Then, the realization that Lisbeth was definitely out of danger relaxed the last of the nervous tension which had kept him going for days without an instant's rest. As in a dream he heard Nererti calling for water and bandages. Then he dropped into deep slumber as the two women and an attendant expert in medical lore got busy patching him up.

WHEN Bill awakened, the red of sunset shone on the roof tops, and Lisbeth's soft hand was brushing his hair back on his damp forehead.

"You slept more than thirty-seven hours," Lisbeth told him, smiling. "Khera is worse off than you. She was badly treated by the priests. They suspected that she had something to do with your escape. However, Nererti says she'll soon be well. And, Bill dear, you should see

how grateful Khera is! Look what she insisted on giving me! It is so much that I felt I was imposing on her by accepting—but Khera stormed so that even Nererti begged me to say yes, to save her beloved princess from a relapse!"

Lisbeth gracefully arose and went to retrieve a coiffer. When she placed it on a stool near Bill's bed and lifted the lid, he saw the coiffer was chock-full of priceless ancient jewels—uncut diamonds, rubies, emeralds, some loose, others encased in necklaces, bracelets and rings of hammered gold.

"Say . . ." Bill stammered. "I remember how much that stuff is worth, in the white man's world where we belong. When we return you'll be a very wealthy girl."

"You mean, Bill, it will make us very rich," Lisbeth gravely replied.

Bill grinned. "Okay. We'll have a house, bigger and richer than our parents had. We'll be able to give every luxury to our sons."

"Sons!" gasped Lisbeth, turning pink. Then she smiled. "Oh, Bill! I don't know what I'll do with you when we return to civilization! You're really a savage, in spite of your white skin."

The sun was fading fast and the darkness was enveloping the room when Nererti entered, bearing a great lighted lamp.

"So you are well!" she said gayly to Bill. "You slept like one of your jungle beasts—and that was enough to cure you! But listen, Bi-lah! Khera says . . . would you like to spend another season here in Kifra, perhaps taking Lisbeth as your wife?"

"We dearly thank Khera," Bill replied, "but we made a vow to our gods to leave tomorrow."

"We shall greatly miss you," Nererti regretted. "But it shall be as you wish."

A night bird suddenly began to sing under the window. Bill felt the pressure of Lisbeth's hand on his own, and a realization swept over him that their troubles were really over and the future reserved only happiness for them.



The Biggest and Best Buy on the newsstands

**These Top-Notch \$2.00 Mystery-Detective Books in the
current Two Complete Detective Books Magazine for 25¢**

THE NORTHS MEET MURDER

By FRANCES and RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

***Hailed by Jack Ketch, the N. Y. Herald Tribune's mystery specialist, as
one of the outstanding detective novels of the year.***

It was a dead man, stiff, stark and naked, that broke up charming Mrs. North's dance practically before the event was born. There he lay in the wintry grandeur of the Washington Square mansion. Who he was, how he got there, nobody seemed to know.

The shape and substance of this master-killer eluded Detective Weigand, as it eluded the delightful, brilliantly nit-witted Mrs. North. Eluded her, that is, until one dark afternoon when she twisted to catch a sound amid the waiting silence of that deserted party-room, and felt cold hands clutching her neck.

Regular edition published in book form by

FREDERICK A. STOKES
New York City

also

THE CORPSE WORE A WIG

By GEORGE BAGBY

The corpse wore a wig—odd indeed of the ex-Dr. Jeremy Bullock, for the wig merely duplicated his own abundant hair. But reason lurks behind the screwiest notions, according to tired-footed Inspector Schmidt. From Dr. Bullock's luxurious East Side apartment the grumbling inspector picks up the thread of suave racketeering mixed with murder.

Down to the Broadway theatre district it leads him, to a wig-and-costume shop where a dead man sprawls face downward on the floor. Upstairs to a beauty parlor where the luscious Miss Foley is frying in an electric permanent-wave machine. Onward to a sordid block alongside the El where, in a dingy room, an ex-Follies girl guards her dreadful secret. . . .
One of the famous Inspector Schmidt stories.

Regular edition published in book form by

CRIME CLUB, INC.
New York City

All in the current

**« TWO »
COMPLETE DETECTIVE BOOKS MAGAZINE**

25¢

Ask your newsdealer!

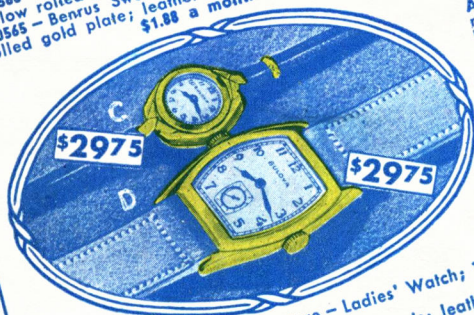
25¢

Let me help you give fine
I'll trust you - I'll give you
10 MONTHS to Pay

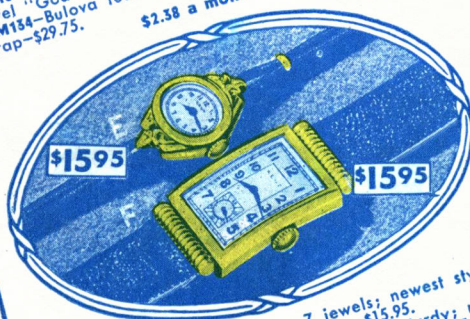
GIFTS



A-3566-Benrus Sweepsecond Watch for ladies; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; bracelet to match-\$19.75.
B-0565 - Benrus Sweepsecond for men; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; leather strap. \$19.75.
\$1.88 a month



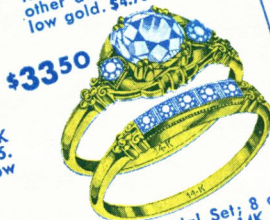
C-R154-Bulova's newest feature - Ladies' Watch; 17 jewel "Goddess of Time"-\$29.75.
D-M154-Bulova feature for men; 17 jewels; leather strap-\$29.75.
\$2.38 a month



E-P159-Ladies' Kent Watch; 7 jewels; newest style 10K yellow rolled gold plate case-\$15.95.
F-K190 - Man's Kent Watch; 7 jewels; sturdy; new style; 10K yellow rolled gold plate case-\$15.95.
\$1.50 a month



A265 - Engagement Ring; large diamond and 2 other diamonds; 14K yellow gold. \$4.75 a month



A84/C75-Bridal Set; 8 diamonds; both rings 14K yellow gold. \$5.15 a month



I154-Man's Initial Ring; diamond and 2 initials on Black Onyx; 10K yellow gold. \$1.60 a month



ELGIN
Railroad style; 17 jewel Elgin; yellow gold color case. \$2.88 a month

SEND ME \$1 - I'll send your choice of these Special Selections for 10 DAY TRIAL on my MONEY BACK Guarantee

I'll help you give fine gifts. 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 selection for approval and 10-day trial. If you are not satisfied that you have received good, honest value send it back and I'll promptly return your dollar. If satisfied pay in 10 small monthly payments.

Jim Feeley
Sales Mgr.

FREE TO ADULTS

Send for complete 48 page Catalog showing big selection diamonds, watches, jewelry, silverware - all on my 10 Months-To-Pay Plan.



L.W. Sweet

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS, Inc.
Dept. 831-S 1670 BROADWAY, NEW YORK