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JUNGLE STORIES



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Ki-Gor twisted and his knife ripped into the belly of the beast.

Death Seeks for Congo Treasure

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

The blood-cries of the "Mad Ones" filled the jungle with savage terror . . . and Ki-Gor, hunted as a criminal, follows a trail of lust and black murder to the cavern of the Golden Birds.

N'GEESO, chief of the pygmies, glanced warily around the circle of elders. His face, sharp-featured and wise, was relaxed, but worry tugged at his vitals. He had delayed this moment as long as possible, but now at last the issue must be met.

He shifted uneasily as his eyes fell on Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle. The huge, bronzed Ki-Gor, made doubly large by contrast with the pygmies, sat cross-legged in the circle of wrinkled old men. It was not good that a man's best friend should be present at such a time.



And the golden Helene, the White Lord's mate, waited in the kraal with the women. She, too, would know of his disgrace, his failure as chief of the tribe. Why, N'Geeso wondered sorrowfully, had the jungle couple picked this of all times to visit him?

A cough, twice repeated, cut through N'Geeso's flow of thought. Anger flared in him, but he caused a smile to play on his lips. The witch doctor, Konoï, that shrewd frightener of women, coughed to signify he knew N'Geeso was delaying. Konoï was a vulture waiting and eager for the feast.

N'Geeso's eyes rested on the witch doctor, appeared to amiably study the lean features of the Seer of Mysteries. Konoï twitched his head nervously, looked away. He was not deceived as to the pygmy chief's feelings toward him.

"Let us begin," N'Geeso said abruptly, and shifted his attention to the oldest of the tribe's elders who sat at his right.

Nuangaa, most ancient of the elders, waited for the chief's nod. It was his right to speak first. But Nuangaa was filled with years and his voice and mind grown weak and hesitant. He was an easy one to influence.

"Konoï speaks for me," he said in his high, thin tones, thus relegating to the witch doctor the stating of the serious problem before the pygmy council.

Ki-Gor, in his place, sat toying with a small white stone. He gave no undue attention to the proceedings, yet behind the expressionless planes of his strong face, thoughts moved swiftly. The talk he had heard was correct. He saw now it was good he had come.

The witch doctor rose. He spat vigorously in the opening manner of a pygmy speechmaker. Then in jerky, explosive phrases, he poured out his warning.

"Death comes along the trails and still we squat here talking. A moon ago—aaaiiee—two moons ago I warned that the "mad ones," the blood-hungry dog packs from the veldt, would come. Yet at the command of our great chief, we sit here still."

Konoï spat again. His thin flanks trembled with the violence of his feeling. Quick and birdlike, he darted a look at the elders. They shifted uneasily, thought of

the dog packs stabbing fear into their old bellies.

"The mad ones come. They race along the trails, hungering for the flesh of our people. The drums from the South tell us so. Yet our great chief delays, saying always he will have a plan."

The maker of magic waved his arms in nervous exasperation. For the first time he looked directly at N'Geeso and scowled.

Ki-Gor kept his attention focussed on the white stone, spun it with his fingers. Full understanding began to come to him. Konoï played a clever game.

FOR the second time within a hand of years, drought seared the great veldt which lay far to the South. As the game died or was driven by hunger to new pastures, the wild dogs, famished and maddened by the burning heat, poured north in a ravening flood. The crazed dogs, moving in vast packs, spread a trail of blood through the jungle, killed every living thing in their path.

Konoï used this opportunity to discredit N'Geeso. Possessing scant respect for witch doctors, N'Geeso long had held tight rein on Konoï. The maker of magic thought with one stroke to weaken the chief, win first place for himself in the tribe.

Konoï spoke on, growing ever more heated and venomous. Finally, he concluded with the statement:

"We must trek to the rich valley at the foot of the Mountains of the Cloud. There the wild dogs never run. There we will be safe. This place is cursed and if we stay, we die!"

As Konoï flung himself down, the elders by their silence gave him support for now was the time to offer objections. When none spoke, N'Geeso saw that he must stand alone.

N'Geeso spoke slowly, almost softly, but the steel in his voice carried easily to every ear. He did not stand.

"So you would flee the dogs to war against the Bambilli. The valley, as Konoï knows, belongs to the Bambilli and was their fathers' land before them."

"Aaaiiee! And is our blood so thin we fear the Bambilli," flung Konoï scornfully. "The whole jungle feared our fathers. Let it fear us also. Let us once more

be great warriors and take what we want!"

"We have pledged the peace," replied N'Geeso.

Once more Konoi spat, and this time the gesture verged on insult.

"Have you a better plan, N'Geeso?" stabbed the witch doctor. "Or shall we let the dogs tear our women and children to bits because we are afraid to war on the Bambilli. Long have you promised a plan! Let us hear it—or if you have none," he taunted, "let the tribe follow one who protects them."

A glance told Ki-Gor that N'Geeso had no plan. This was the moment the little chief had tried to defer. The pygmies were not bound to follow a hereditary chieftain. They named the chief they thought strongest and wisest, and if he failed, then he must give way to another.

Forgotten by the pygmies in the heat of their discussion, the White Lord of the Jungle knew it was time for him to take a hand. He spun the round stone into the center of the circle with a swift twist of his fingers. The tense pygmies roused to his presence.

This bronzed giant with the look of a stalking lion about him, this gray-eyed, blond-maned man without fear was the one who made and kept the jungle peace. And forgetting him, they had spoken of war. Nervously the elders shifted, feeling the cold stare of the jungle man sweeping them.

N'Geeso, on the verge of admitting his failure, glanced with surprise at Ki-Gor, choked back his words. The White Lord stirred and made to speak. What was it the big man was saying?

"O Chief N'Geeso, may I speak now of the plan which we made?"

N'Geeso gulped. They had discussed no plan. Not finding his voice, he quickly nodded assent to the jungle man's question. Any delay was welcome at this point.

"I sit here at your chief's invitation," Ki-Gor told the elders. His voice was a barbed arrow. "War is a fool's plan. Why sacrifice young warriors to win land you do not need? It is a simple thing to stop the dog packs! In the South, I have seen it done many times."

N'Geeso leaned forward, intent on Ki-Gor's words. He was ever amazed at this white giant, but his miraculous interven-

tion today was especially bewildering. He remembered, however, to nod his head sagely, so all might see this was no new thing to him.

"As N'Geeso asked, I will help set up the defense. First, we raise a high thorn boma around the *kraal*. Beyond it we place a lower thorn wall with bow and arrow traps every few paces. The bows we fasten to trip ropes scattered across every approach.

"The bows will discharge flaming arrows into piles of dry wood smeared with the black grease that seeps from the ground near your *kraal*. Fire is the one thing the wild dogs fear. The sudden burst of flame will send them racing back into the jungle."

The pygmy chief beamed with delight.

"Oho! Oho! Has anyone ever heard a better plan," he chortled. His quick mind seized on Ki-Gor's words. "Night and day we will be guarded. And by putting a raised platform at each side of the *kraal* our warriors can shoot down among the mad ones," he improvised. "It will be sport for our warriors."

THE elders obviously were taken with the plan. They bobbed their grizzled heads in approval. They were old men and a long trek with bloodshed at the end did not attract them except as a last resort.

"And for those who yet fear the dogs," added Ki-Gor, carefully ending any objection from Konoi, "I can arrange for them to camp in the Bambilli district until the packs are gone. The Bambilli are good men and will welcome friends, though they will fight to the death against enemies."

Konoi for once was speechless. His shrewdly laid plot shattered to bits by Ki-Gor, he writhed in a discomfort that was more than mental. He felt N'Geeso's hard eyes burning holes in him. He was the one who stood discredited instead of the chief.

"It is agreed then," said N'Geeso as the elders voted for the project. He stood up on his bandy legs, a small, yet powerful man, gravely accepting the compliments of the elders for being so wise and foresighted a leader.

Ki-Gor stood apart, his face composed, yet humor lurked in his eyes. When

N'Geeso came to face him, he stared blandly at the far sky.

"Aaaiieeee! Of what trickery are you not capable on friend and enemy alike," muttered the pygmy chief admiringly.

"One is a friend, or one is not," said Ki-Gor simply, signifying he wanted no thanks for help it was only proper to give. "Let us begin the bow and arrow traps. The "mad ones" may come at any time."

Spurred by their terror of the ravening dogs, the pygmies threw their full energy into building the defense. The sharp-witted little men needed scant instruction once the plan was told them. Parties bustled into the jungle to gather thorn, while others with their keen-edged bush knives chopped away the underbrush close to the *kraal*.

Men and women worked side by side. Helene moved among the busy women, helping and instructing. Ki-Gor paused from time to time to proudly watch his clean-limbed mate, noting the soft ripple of her laughter, her diplomatic way of ordering the proud pygmies, her ability to keep the work moving efficiently.

But his eyes dwelled also on the slim, fresh beauty of the red-haired girl and he was filled with wonder that she should be his. N'Geeso, following the White Lord's gaze, clucked his tongue, murmured as though to himself:

"Wah! These many moons now, and still he looks at her like a youth hurrying with a hand of goats to buy his first wife."

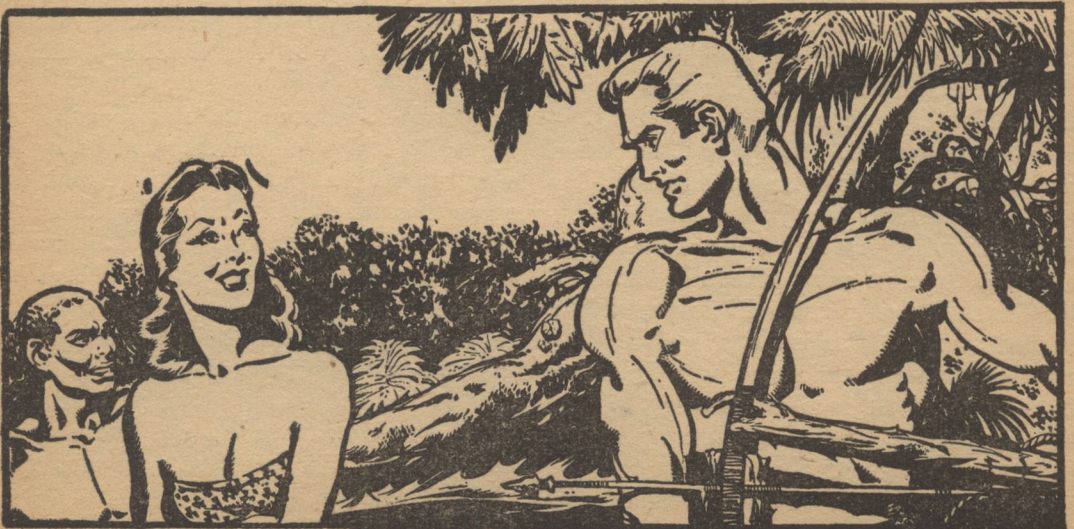
Ki-Gor grinned, turned back to rigging a bow and arrow trap. He aimed the powerful bow down the main path to the village, fastened a thin, wire-strong vine to the primitive trigger which held back the bowstring. The vine ran down the path to a point at far bow range where it connected with a trip release criss-crossing the trail. A touch of a wild dog's foot would release the heavy bow, send the arrow hurtling down the path. The dogs traveled in packs, racing down the trails in closely knit groups, abandoning caution in their madness and in the knowledge of their numbers.

"We will release a few arrows to locate the right spot for the fire wood," Ki-Gor explained, after a preliminary check of the simple apparatus. "When the wood is arranged so that the pitch-smeared arrow will plunge into it, the trap is finished. A torch in front of the bow will light the pitch as the arrow is fired."

With the arrow in place, and the bow ready for discharge, N'Geeso called in his men to study the trap so they could build others covering every approach to the *kraal*. The wily pygmies, long accustomed to employing such jungle trickery to overthrow their larger enemies, easily understood Ki-Gor's scheme. They crowded close behind the bow, complimenting the White Lord's handiwork.

But swift as a darting hawk, horror tore the gladness from their voices.

It happened so suddenly they stood there



Ki-Gor began rigging the bow and arrow trap.

shocked and dazed, unable to grasp what occurred. Even as they chattered, the vine jerked, released the trigger on the taut bow. The trap was claiming its first victim.

The long arrow drove down the shadowed path, sped with terrific power toward its unseen mark. The force of its impact came back to them, a clear, sharp crack.

And then pain-filled and hysterical came a woman's shrill scream. There was a trample of hoofs, the tearing of underbrush and an animal's frightened snorts.

The pygmies stood trance-like in their surprise. The speed of the tragedy overwhelmed them. A woman had blundered into the dog trap.

RECOVERING first from the stabbing shock, Ki-Gor spun toward the screams, raced along the trail to reach the victim. Worry about what had been done tortured him. Certainly, it was no pygmy woman, for they knew the site of the trap. In fact, it was unbelievable any native would stumble into so clearly visible a set of trip cords.

Behind him he heard the rush of men as they followed him. But he ran far ahead, the steel-muscled drive of his legs allowing him to easily outdistance the pygmies. Unconsciously, he still carried a bow which he had just finished stringing when the woman screamed.

The cries were stilled now. Perhaps already death had struck. Then he burst on the scene, his face paling as he saw the thing that had happened.

Face down, a girl sprawled limply on the hard ground—a white girl. She lay in the odd, disjointed way of those without life. She was a stranger to Ki-Gor, a girl he had never seen before. He looked at her odd clothing, not knowing she was dressed in carefully correct riding habit.

Then, after this initial cursory glance, the crackle of breaking shrubs jerked his attention farther down the path. A horse, its reins caught on a bush, pranced nervously twenty paces from the girl. She had ridden into the trap and as the arrow struck, the frightened horse had reared and thrown her.

N'Geeso then was at Ki-Gor's side, grunting in dismay at the sight. A white woman's death, however accidental, would

mean trouble for the pygmies. As other warriors arrived, this thought was clearly in every mind.

Yet no man spoke, except Konoï. His mean tongue was quick to lash home the meaning, quick to empty the bitterness in his soul on N'Geeso.

"So! You and your traps—aaaiiiee—now you see what you've done! It was your doing, N'Geeso. You must answer to the white men! You are the one. I did not want it!"

But N'Geeso did not show for a moment that he heard. His restless eyes roved over the scene, fastened on a gashed baobab tree. A smile darted over his face, and he breathed with relief.

"The arrow missed," he cried, stabbing his finger at the baobab tree to show Ki-Gor. "There it is, driven half its length in the wood, and too high to have hit the girl."

With lightning eyes, Ki-Gor saw N'Geeso spoke the truth. His glance traveled back to the girl, and he saw her stir. The fall from the horse had only stunned her. Tight muscles in his stomach relaxed.

He moved to help her, was halted by the wild hubbub which broke out behind him. Ki-Gor turned in time to see N'Geeso's calloused hands snap around the witch doctor's throat, see the little chief's savage, happy smile as he shook the yellow-faced Konoï until the man's eyes rolled back in his head.

Then, as N'Geeso threw the frightened witch doctor aside in disgust, Ki-Gor gave his attention to the girl again. She was on her feet now, standing there with her neat clothes disheveled, long black hair tumbled about her shoulders, her dark eyes wide with fear and desperation.

She was obviously new to the jungle. Her fair skin was still untanned, her clothes bright and unworn. No woman accustomed to dangers of the Congo would ride alone through this lion-infested country, let alone stumble into a trap any native child could spot.

Looking at the girl, thinking how close she had come to death, Ki-Gor unconsciously frowned. He walked toward her.

"You're not hurt?" he asked. "Come. I will carry you to the *kraal*," he offered, thinking Helene could check her over, make sure she was uninjured.

Her dark eyes were abruptly those of a cornered animal. After a fleeting moment of hesitation, her hand dove to the small holster at her waist. Her fingers clawed awkwardly, finally closed over the pistol. She held the gun on Ki-Gor, her face drained of color.

"No, you don't," she cried breathlessly. "You had your chance to kill me and you failed."

The White Lord halted, cocked his head questioningly at these strange words. N'Geeso's mouth gaped open. Had the fall addled the girl?

"I'm glad this happened," she went on. "It makes a lot of things clear. Now we know whom we're fighting."

Her lips were bloodless, trembling, but she managed to keep her voice under control.

"It was a lot of fun, wasn't it, when we didn't know who you were? And it was clever to try to kill me, to try to strike the finishing blow through me." She grew almost hoarse with anger. "Yes, that would have finished it. But it didn't end that way."

The White Lord was thunderstruck at the girl's torrent of accusation. The whole thing was beyond him. The gun didn't frighten him because he knew he could knock its wavering barrel away with one quick movement. It was doubtful she had ever fired a pistol.

But to the pygmies a gun meant death. Ki-Gor sensed the careful movements behind him. The jungle-wise little men farthest back in the crowd were melting into the underbrush. His keen ears traced them as they drifted like shadows to get behind the girl, leap out soundlessly to disarm her.

"Stay away," he commanded sharply, speaking in the guttural pygmy tongue.

Instantly, the girl tensed, her eyes sweeping the savage looking crew before her. All she knew was that this half-naked white giant had flung an order to his men. She couldn't understand what he said, but she drew her own conclusions.

"I'll kill you if a man moves," she said, hysteria edging her voice. "I should anyway! But I don't like to kill like you do."

She began to back down the trail, never suspecting that pygmies crouched in hiding on either side of her. Ki-Gor watched

her reach her horse, gather up the reins and mount.

"Don't think you'll go free, though," she called. "Even in Africa you can't steal and kill. When I get to the mine, Pieters and Tull will know how to make you pay for the things you've done!"

She turned the horse, galloped away.

THE puzzled frown on Ki-Gor's face deepened. He listened to the hoofbeats slow at the point where the trail grew too narrow and twisting for speed. He hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about, but he did know that a crazy, upset girl riding through the jungle alone was inviting trouble.

With a sigh, he turned to N'Geeso. "Send the men back to work," he said. "We must see that this odd one gets wherever she is going safely."

N'Geeso, pygmy-like, was entranced at the mystery the girl presented. He was eager for any opportunity to learn more about her. No one can match a pygmy's curiosity and N'Geeso was intrigued by this pale-skinned woman who threw insults at the White Lord.

The two men went down the trail with the swift, effortless pace of the jungle-born. They kept the muffled clop-clop of the horses within easy sound. The tangled creepers and twisting baobab roots made a poor bridle path for any rider.

Where had the girl come from, Ki-Gor puzzled. There were few places in this district where even a stranger would attempt to ride. The nearest thing to a road was the dry river bed used by the occasional traders who brought their ox-wagons this far into the interior. But what about the mine she mentioned? Ki-Gor knew of no mine in operation close by.

Though Ki-Gor's mind turned over the problem of the girl as he ran, his senses were alert to the teeming, unseen jungle life about him. Living always with danger as he did, he was constantly alert to his surroundings, to every scent the wind brought him, to every slight modulation of sound.

The shrilling of brightly plumaged birds, the staccato of the tree toads, the monkeys' ill-tempered chattering, these and a host of other hum-drum sounds were Ki-Gor's key to what went on around him.

The pattern of jungle noise, discord and confusion to the untutored ear, was ever a rich source of information to the White Lord.

Now he read no threat of lurking killer-cats along the girl's way and was relieved. Yet in the savage forest death waited in many forms, in a python's cold, quick coils, in a rhino's splintering charge, in a renegade's poisoned dart. Always death waited in a thousand disguises for the weak or unwary. Through the trap, he had unintentionally endangered the careless girl's life, so he was impelled to guard her safely to her destination.

"You don't know the girl?" Ki-Gor asked his companion.

"No—and may it never be," replied N'Geeso, his mouth twisting in an expression of distaste.

Ki-Gor ran quietly for another minute, considering. N'Geeso did not talk as freely as was his custom. Ki-Gor glanced sideways at the shrewd black man, read nothing in his face.

"And the mine. Do N'Geeso's eyes grow so feeble that men dig in his lands and he does not know it?"

The sly question brought a grimace from the little chief.

"Wah! You should wear Kono's bone necklace and belt of charms. One's soul is not safe from your eyes," N'Geeso complained in mock bitterness.

Ki-Gor's blind stab brought results. N'Geeso kept something back. "One should talk with a friend," the jungle man said reproachfully.

"I meant to speak," the pygmy explained. "The mine is bad. The men are bad. I knew you would go there, and I waited until I, too, could go." He glanced at the broad-shouldered, towering White Lord. "You need N'Geeso by your side at such a place."

Ki-Gor smiled at the black man's words. N'Geeso had held back the information purposely, knowing he could not leave the village until the defenses against the wild dogs were finished. If Ki-Gor got in any excitement, N'Geeso wanted to be certain he was on hand.

Then the trail abruptly opened upon the broad, rocky bed of a dry river, and their conversation lapsed at the scene before them.

THEY saw two wagons drawn by oxen halted in the center of the bed. The heavily laden wagons, driven by natives, pulled up as the girl rode from the forest. They waited now as she spurred her horse toward them.

The White Lord heard the blacks hail the girl in friendly, worried voices. He could tell by the rise and fall of her tone that she was relating her experience to them. She gestured back toward the trail, and as the men followed her pointing finger, they spied Ki-Gor and N'Geeso. She wheeled her horse and stared for a moment.

Then in a sudden burst of activity, the native drivers and guards ducked into their places on the wagons, shouted to the oxen. A man ran along beside each long span of oxen, his whip cracking. The heavy conveyances slowly gained speed, began to travel at a pace much faster than was suited to the uneven ground.

The girl rode alongside, and from the fearful glances which she and the natives cast back, Ki-Gor knew they were fleeing from him.

"Strange, they should be afraid of me," he mused.

The girl had said she was from the mine, so the wagons must carry supplies brought from the coast. She had probably been riding ahead, bored by the slow pace of the wagons, when she blundered into the dog trap.

N'Geeso looked seriously at his friend. "Is it strange that evil men should fear the White Lord of the Jungle?"

"But, N'Geeso, she thought I was the bad one," declared the puzzled Ki-Gor.

The pygmy chief looked after the departing wagons. "I do not know her meaning, but I talked with a man who escaped from the mine. Men who go there to work are chained in the earth and beaten with whips." N'Geeso's eyes grew hard. "There are evil things there, and the white men are cruel devils!"

Remembering the frightened girl's face, Ki-Gor thought it hardly plausible that she would have anything to do with a slave mine. There must be trouble of some kind at the place, though, else why would the girl speak of murder and stealing. The White Lord mercilessly fought all who tried to enslave and mistreat the

natives, and if N'Geeso thought the mine a trouble spot, then Ki-Gor knew he must investigate.

He watched the wagons out of sight, thinking bitterly of the cruelties he had seen perpetrated on black men. Time and again he had driven slavers and renegade whites from the district, yet always more came to take their place. His shoulders came back and his mouth grew stern.

The girl had warned him: "Pieters and Tull will know how to make you pay for the things you've done."

Ki-Gor's decision was made. Tomorrow he would visit the mine.

II

MARIE SEYMOUR rode close to the lumbering wagons long after the bleak, ugly hills where the mine was located came in sight. Though the scene of her meeting with the white savage and his fierce little followers lay many miles behind, she remained badly shaken by the incident.

She wanted to cry, but felt she must not break down in front of the native drivers. Marie hated Africa and its endless, choking jungle, its barbaric people, and its strange, cruel way of life. Her longing to be back in America was overpowering. She longed for the familiar college campus, for her friends and her own language, for tall buildings, smooth streets, people like herself crowding the sidewalks.

Marie started, as far off a lion uttered a sharp warning cough. A hartebeeste broke from cover, sped across an open patch of ground with incredible swiftness. She rode nearer the wagons, picked up her thoughts again.

In school, she had never given a thought to money, and only now did she realize how desperately her father must have struggled those last few years to give her the things she wanted, keeping the knowledge of his difficulties from her. But on graduation, he could hide his situation no longer, so he had written her to come to him in Africa. She still remembered how shocked she had been to find him so old and broken. And it had been heartbreaking when he confessed he was nearly penniless and too old to make a new start.

The mine ahead was the last hope of an

old man. His title to it dated back more than forty years to the time when on his first trip to Africa he stumbled across the abandoned native workings. But as new and brighter ventures opened, he never got around to the mining project. Four decades later, pressed for money, he returned.

Financing the operation had been difficult. Everyone laughed at him, told him he was crazy to think even modern mining methods would recover enough gold to make the project pay. Everyone laughed, that is, until he met Karl Pieters and Nick Tull. They studied his samples with interest.

At first, Charles Seymour hadn't liked the men but then the old timers seldom liked the new breed of men coming to Africa. And Pieters and Tull appeared to have plenty of money and were willing to gamble. After a visit to the mine, they agreed to finance the project, furnish necessary supplies and equipment, in return for a fifty per cent interest in the project.

Marie knew the story well, remembered the high hopes with which the venture began. But trouble dogged their steps. Their machinery broke down and they could not get replacements. From a start of two-hundred native laborers, their force dropped to fifty. Every night men disappeared, deserted, and the others muttered about evil spirits in the mine. And there were too many accidents, some of them looking like murders.

It was the way Pieters and Tull stuck with them and fought the trouble that changed Marie's opinion of them. They certainly pitched in and did their best to keep the mine operating. In recent weeks, her father, despondent, half ill with worry, had come to rely more and more on the two men.

THE wagons groaned and creaked as they left the river bed, strained up the rocky grade to the loud urging of the drivers. There was a clanging, metallic ring as the heavy wheels rolled over the frequent outcroppings of flint and a muddy, black kind of rock.

Marie noted her surroundings with distaste. The camp lay just ahead in the protection of a horse-shoe-shaped hill which jutted sternly above the smaller hills flanking it. She saw faintly the black

opening of the mine mouth, half-way up the hill, with tiny figures moving along the ledge to the lift. That antiquated lift was a constant source of trouble and accident, its engine worn and unreliable, yet it was their only way of reaching the mine opening.

The lift was typical of all their machinery. It was not the fault of Pieters and Tull. They had money to buy better equipment, and were anxious to use modern methods, but if there was no machinery to be obtained, what could they do? It was one more unforeseen difficulty which had risen to plague them.

And now she must tell her father that her trip to the coast was a wild-goose chase. The letter to Pieters stated plainly that engine parts would be waiting for her, but the man at the import company said the ship left no replacements. Four weeks wasted on the long trek, when she could better have spent her time caring for her father. But Pieters and Tull were needed to keep the mine going, and there was no one else to go.

Marie sighed, then straightened her shoulders. She touched the horse's flanks lightly with her heels, pulled away from the wagons. Nearing the camp, she saw with surprise that a high fence, more of a stockade, stretched from one side of the hill to the other, enclosing the horse-shoe where the camp lay.

The barrier had gone up since her departure. Unconsciously she tried to estimate the number of men required for the job, men taken from their labors in the mine. Another delay. More time lost. But the need for the stockade must connect up with what her father's servant, Nuyuda, told her after he slipped away from the camp to follow her to the coast.

"Come back quick, Missy," Nuyuda had said. He had been with her father for years, felt Charles Seymour was his personal responsibility. All the men had urged her to stay on the coast a few more weeks, send the wagons back alone with the equipment.

"It will be a better place for you, until we get our troubles ironed out here," they told her.

But Nuyuda's story was different. "Your father bad sick," he said fearfully. "He need you. Much trouble since you leave."

He had come secretly, telling Seymour he went to visit one of his sons. "No tell I come here," the old native warned, and then he was gone, making the long return trek on foot to reach the camp before Marie arrived with the slow wagons. She was puzzled by his evident fear, his insistence on secrecy.

A huge black swung the stockade gate open as she rode up. He was a giant, scarred man, one of the hard-faced coastal natives grown cunning through their contact with the motley breed of whites which crowd a port town. A long, curved blade, shaped something like a kriss, hung at his side. Pieters had hired him as an overseer.

"Hello, Natu," Marie said, her eyes hunting for her father.

The overseer nodded his head in the faint beginnings of a bow, his unvarying recognition of any remark or order addressed him by a white. His thick lips smiled, the broken, uneven smile of one whose cheek has been slashed open from temple to mouth. The scar was a white welt on his ebony skin.

Charles Seymour was not in sight. "Where's my father?" Marie asked, wondering why he was not there to greet her. "Doesn't he know I'm here?"

"He not know," rumbled the overseer. His mouth was still smiling crookedly, but his eyes were expressionless as an idol's. Marie had never seen him smile with his eyes.

A dart of anger started in her. Was he being deliberately insolent in telling no one of her approach? But there was nothing in his manner you could put your finger on. There never was, it occurred to her. It was his way always to keep a thin but distinct line between him and flat insult. You were never sure.

"Natu not know it you 'til open gate," he continued after a pause. "Natu think you on coast."

She was being silly again. Of course, he hadn't expected her. He had heard horse's hoofs, opened the gate and there she was. There was no time to call her father.

"Thank you, Natu," she said, and dismounting, led her horse toward her father's house.

The black gravely inclined his head, but

his eyes were already fastened on the approaching wagons.

THE thatch house with its wooden floor was quiet as she approached. The uneven porch, fashioned of makeshift lumber, creaked under her step. Then she was inside, her eyes softening as they went to the hand-made chair by the window. Her father sat in the chair, his head slumped forward in sleep.

His thin grey hair was carefully combed, his lean chin clean-shaven. She studied the patrician features, noting the circles traced beneath his eyes. Charles Seymour had been a big man once, but age and hardship had eaten the fat and muscle from his body, gnawed away his vigor, left him worn and shrunken.

In his time, Seymour had had more than his share both of success and trouble. He had made money in a score of ventures, but he was one of those restless men who must always be seeking for the new, the unknown. It was that restlessness that had brought him to Africa, kept him there. But Africa does not give ungrudgingly to the white man, as now at long last Seymour was learning.

Seymour opened his eyes, blinked for a moment at the dark-haired girl. He smiled, a quick, glad smile. Then as he gathered his thoughts, the light went out of his face and he was solemn.

"Marie! What on earth . . . ?" he began.

"Now, Dad, don't fuss at me," she said beguilingly. "I was lonesome without you and I wanted to come back."

He groped for words. Clearly, he hadn't foreseen her return with the wagons.

"But this is no place for you," he protested. "In a few weeks it may be more endurable. With the new equipment, we'll get the work going and won't have to depend so much on those blasted natives. You should have stayed on the coast until then."

There was a touch of hope in his voice, the first Marie had heard in more days than she cared to remember. And she must tell him the grim truth and destroy that hope.

"Dad," she said, hesitatingly. He looked at her in that too sudden way, the way which meant he sensed trouble.

"The equipment didn't come." Her voice was low, almost as if she thought it would soften the blow.

He leaned back in the chair. His face tightened. But that was all. He had taken so much, another disappointment hardly seemed to matter.

Marie leaned over him, kissed him affectionately. "It was some stupid clerk's mistake. No telling where they sent it. But the next boat will bring it, I know."

"Yes," he said, and by his voice she knew he was thinking it would be three months before the next boat touched land. "Pieters is a good man with the machinery, and if he knows he must, then he will keep it running somehow." He patted her cheek. "We'll make out. Don't worry."

She took off her hat, fluffed her long, dark hair with her hands.

"Why the big fence out there all of a sudden?" she asked.

"It was Pieters' idea," her father replied absentmindedly. "He thought it would make it easier to protect the mine, keep the prowlers out, and he didn't say so, but I think he had in mind keeping our men in."

Then they were still deserting. The laborers had flocked in at first, and a happier, more willing group of men she had seen nowhere. But when the accidents started, they began to sulk, and every morning some of them were gone.

"Pieters persists in the idea that someone has got it in for us," Seymour added moodily. "He says if he didn't have so much money sunk in the mine, he'd leave. I'm about convinced he's right—and strictly speaking, I haven't got any money in it."

The old man, forgetting himself, had dropped his guard completely and was talking straight to Marie.

"After all, why should we stay with it? It isn't paying off. Hardly a sign of gold so far and I'm beginning to doubt there ever will be. The old hands were right when they laughed at me. The mine is dead."

He was looking out the window and his voice was tired. His hands on the arms of the chair were thin, relaxed. The fight was almost gone in Seymour.

The girl stared at her father. She felt what he said was true. But she knew she

must not let him leave. After all, it wasn't his money being lost, and as long as Pieters and Tull were willing to stay, then she must keep him at the mine.

If Seymour left the mine now, it would mean his finish. She must keep him fighting. Maybe through some miracle the mine would begin to pay. But most important, he must stay until some of his spirit, some of the old Seymour was recovered. Something had gone out of him these last few years, and with her to help, maybe it could be regained.

HEAVY footsteps sounded on the rickety front porch, but Seymour, his eyes narrowed in thought, hardly heard them. Two booted white men stamped into the room.

"Hello! I'm back," Marie greeted her father's partners.

"And a good sight you are," answered Nick Tull, his quick glance running over her appreciatively.

Tull was a tall, wiry man, with long, narrow face and restless black eyes. His easy, lounging manner belied the swift certainty with which he moved in an emergency. His face was spared from coldness by his ready smile, a smile which came often to his thin lips whenever Marie was in evidence. His admiration for her was no secret.

Karl Pieters was an older man, heavy-set, bald-headed, with an expressionless Teutonic face. He had little to say except about business. He was tireless, methodical, interested in nothing but the mine. And as Seymour often remarked, it was amazing the precise work Pieters could achieve with his thick, square fingers. His faded green eyes peered now through thick spectacles at Marie.

"You did not bring the machine parts!" Pieters rumbled, getting straight to the point that interested him.

Marie realized he had gone to the wagons first, before coming to the house. Pieters, in spite of his fat, slow-moving body, really was a work horse.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Pieters," she said regretfully, "The parts didn't come."

He shook his round, plump head. "Bad. It is very bad," he said. "I counted on them. Now—I just don't know."

The girl's face was strained, frightened.

Suppose Pieters called it quits. Tull was watching her.

"Oh, well," Tull said lightly. "She brought us some honest food and those nice square bottles I wanted. Why worry? I want the mine to go as much as anybody, but if it just won't, then why cry about spilled milk."

The thick spectacles magnified Pieters' green eyes, made them large and staring.

"This is serious, Nick," Pieters said, his lips shaping the words thickly. "I cannot joke about it. With the machinery, we might have scraped by." He shrugged his shoulders resignedly. "Now it is impossible. I believe Seymour sees that, even if you don't."

In the silence which followed his frank statement, all attention turned to Seymour. The old man in the chair had not moved. Now he expelled his breath heavily, nodded his agreement.

"I'm afraid Pieters is right," he said.

Marie bit her lip at the dull, beaten tone of her father's voice. The suddenness of the crisis bewildered her. If only she could have time to think. She mustn't let this happen.

"You mean you don't think the mine is going to pay off at all?" Tull addressed his question to Pieters.

"Oh, maybe one man could eventually dribble a living out of it by burying himself here, bullying the natives into working, closing his eyes to accidents, living from hand to mouth."

The corners of Pieters' mouth drew down in distaste. He obviously wanted no part of such an existence.

"That is, if he isn't killed," he continued. "The natives don't want this mine worked. Somebody has stirred them up against us. I think half those accidents are murders."

He planted his feet firmly, squared his heavy shoulders. There was a stolid immovability about the man. His decision, one which had been crystallizing for weeks, was finally made.

"If there was a chance for money here, all hell couldn't drive me out," he declared. "But if there is hardly a bare living for one, certainly there is nothing for the four of us."

"Yes," Seymour agreed. "It would be pouring good money after bad."

Tull's face was thoughtful. "I don't know. I'd like to stay with it, myself."

The German laughed harshly.

"You're a fool, Tull," he said flatly. "Seymour and I have had more experience than you with these things. We know it's no good. Let's try to sell the whole thing out to some newcomer. May recover a few thousand apiece, if we handle it right."

Tull plunged his hand in his pockets, hunched his shoulders, studied the floor for a full minute. You could see him counting the risks, balancing the slim opportunity against the obvious danger.

"No! I want to hold on," he said at last. "I'm in too deep to let go."

"But we want out," rasped Pieters with a cold definiteness, motioning toward Seymour, "and together we own seventy-five per cent of the mine. You know where that puts you."

The seriousness went out of his manner as an idea struck him, an idea that made the stocky German laugh until his paunch shook.

"Unless, of course, you're crazy enough to want to buy us out."

Tull studied Pieters' joking remark, his expression serious.

"Why not?" he asked suddenly. "I haven't much left, but if you fellows will be reasonable, sure I'll buy you out."

The German's uproarious laughter chopped off abruptly. His mouth dropped in amazement. He recovered quickly, his face again becoming a stolid mask.

"Business is business," he said apologetically. "You can have my share for five-thousand dollars, and you know to the penny how much money I'm kissing goodbye."

"I'll give you exactly twenty-five hundred," Tull declared with utter finality, "and Seymour, I pay you exactly double that. But the deal depends on both of you selling."

Pieters started to protect the price, then he caught himself. A look at Tull was convincing proof he would pay no more.

"It's a deal whenever you're ready to hand me the check," the stout man agreed. "What about you, Seymour?"

Marie knew what her father was thinking. After all, he had come to the mine without a cent. He could be taking \$5,000 away, thanks to Tull's foolishness. And

yet, it was a hard decision to make. The mine was all he had left in Africa.

"Well . . .," Seymour started in hesitant agreement.

The girl knew she had no right to interfere, but something impelled her to speak, to fight for time.

"Give us a little time, Tull," she said. "Another day won't matter. Let Dad think it over."

Pieters' faded green eyes came slowly around to her. He frowned. But Tull looked at her understandingly, the easy smile on his lips.

"Sure," he told her. "There's no hurry on my part." He moved toward the door. "Come on, Pieters, those blacks will be dead asleep by now. You're still a partner, so let's get back to work."

MARIE and her father sat in silence for a long time after they were gone. She relaxed for the first time in many hours, utter weariness creeping over her. A narrow steel band seemed to bind her mind as she desperately sought a means to convince her father he must not sell his share.

As though they had been arguing the matter, Seymour suddenly spoke. "You can see, Marie, it's the only thing I can do."

She moved in the hard chair, seeking a more comfortable position. She caught her breath as pain darted through the back muscles strained when her horse threw her. With a rush, she remembered.

"No, Dad, if someone else wants the mine enough to try to drive you out," she said grimly, "then it must be valuable enough to fight for!"

Seymour swung around to face her, searching for her meaning.

"It's just the natives," he pointed out. "Long ago they worked this mine and they probably resent our puttering around here."

She jumped to her feet, her hands clinched angrily.

"A white man is fighting you. I know," she cried. "He tried to kill me with an arrow!"

Seymour's face grew taut with anger as he heard how a half-naked white giant had tried to ambush Marie. She told how, choking with fear, she faced him, pistol in

hand, holding off the hideous crew of savages he commanded.

"He stood there angrily," she explained, her voice shaking, "holding the bow in his hand, making no effort to hide what he had tried to do. He was going to pick me up when I pulled the gun on him. Even then he followed me clear to the wagons. He didn't deny a word I said."

And there the whole problem lay explained. The troubled old man, eager for a way to continue, seized on this as the solution. Seymour saw how devilishly clever the white man had been in keeping always in the background. Marie's death would have been his final stroke to drive them away from the mine.

"We'll fight him, Marie," he declared, a new firmness in his voice. "We'll keep the mine going." Eyes flashing, he stood up. "This puts a different complexion on everything. Let's go tell Pieters and Tull."

Seymour was possessed with a new strength. He rose aggressively, strode from the house. Marie scrambled to her feet and ran after him, fatigue swept away by her happiness.

It was late afternoon, but the rocky camp still steamed in the brilliant sunlight. The thatch huts used by the natives looked tumbled-down and dismal in the light of day, almost every one of them badly in need of repair. The dissatisfied men wasted no strength on their homes.

They picked their way through the cluster of houses without seeing a person. The blacks were all at work in the mine. Seymour was struck for the first time with the gloom and unhappiness which hovered over the place. It was as though he were seeing the camp for the first time.

The workers should be allowed to bring their families to the mine. That was only one of many details to which he must attend. He had been negligent, asleep. He had whipped big problems before and he would whip this one.

The old man and his daughter went up a flinty slope, circled through a patch of huge boulders and paused to survey the mine. Long sheds, mere roofs supported by rickety timbers, provided the shelters where rock from the mine was crushed, separated and treated. Ancient, wheezing engines filled the air with their irregular

beat. Water seeped from rusted pipes, gathered in hot pools under the feet of the workers.

Up the face of the cliff ran a wooden chute devised by Pieters so rock from the mine could be easily transported to the work sheds. The creaking, precariously balanced chute was intended as a fill-in until they could get delivery of their equipment. A line of blacks, bent under the weight of bulging sacks, approached the upper end of the chute. As each load of rock was dumped, it slid with a grating roar down the trembling structure, raising a line of dust in the hot air. The noisy descent of rock should have sounded from early morning until nightfall, but short-handed as they were, the loads were dumped only at irregular intervals.

On the right of the chute was the lift. It had a flat bed, roughly four yards square, with no protecting rail around the edges. A heavy cable, attached to another wheezing engine, hoisted it up to the ledge. Except for dangerous handholds cut long ago in the rock face by natives, this primitive elevator provided the only way to reach the mine.

Seymour ran his glance critically over the equipment. In forty years in Africa, he had never seen white men operate with a more shabby set-up. There was no permanence about anything within his line of vision except for the huge rock oven built by Tull and Pieters to generate a white heat and the massive cauldron which fitted into the oven.

When they purchased the mine equipment, the two said the cauldron and the great pulley which swung it in and out of the oven were thrown in with the other machinery. They insisted on bringing them along, pointing out they could be used to melt down the harder, more metallic veins of rock. It hadn't been brought into use yet, but Tull said he would experiment with it as soon as he had time.

Seymour gave Marie his hand to help her on the lift. Then he stepped up beside her, signaled to the wizened black who handled the simple controls. The motor raced into frantic life, and swaying and jerking, the unwieldy elevator started its slow climb. Once the exhausted engine cut out, leaving them teetering back and forth half way up the cliff face, but finally

it coughed back into operation, pulled them to the top.

Seymour led the way along the ledge, realizing guiltily this was the first time in ten days he had visited the mine proper. As they neared the mine mouth, they heard Tull's voice. He was angry and his tone, whip-sharp and burning, was one they had never heard him use. They hurried their steps, curious to learn the cause of the disturbance.

TWENTY paces within the mine, Tull stood with his back toward them, facing a nervous group of natives. He raged at the blacks in their own tongue. Ranged beside him was the huge Natu, standing wide-legged, hand on his curved knife as though daring any worker to move. The smoky, yellow light of the wall torches, gave an air of unreality to the whole scene.

Marie's wide eyes flicked over the group, caught suddenly on the dark object at Natu's feet. A man, horribly mutilated, lay there, his head and shoulders crushed and torn. Involuntarily, Marie gave a low cry at the gruesome sight.

Tull swung about with deadly swiftness. Gone was his lounging, lazy manner. His lips were a thin, harsh line and his eyes seething wells of anger. "He's like a cobra coiled to spring," Marie thought. Then recognition came to Tull.

"What . . . ?" he started. Then he choked off the exclamation, straightened himself. With a curt command, he sent the natives back to work, all but Natu.

"Take care of that," he told the overseer, motioning to the dead man with a jerk of his thumb.

Natu picked up a burlap bag beside the body, wrapping it around the disfigured form. Bunched muscles rippled and hardened across his broad back as he lifted the native. He stood indecisively for a moment, then started into the cave with his burden.

"Natu, you fool," called Tull, "take it outside, not in there! That's no place for a body!"

Wordlessly, Natu turned, strode toward the mine mouth. His eyes slid off Tull's face as he passed, and he inclined his head in that faint suggestion of a bow.

"Stupid natives," Tull muttered, giving his full attention to Seymour and Marie.

"You came at an awkward moment," he said, his voice slowing to its natural tone. "Sorry. But you should have let me know."

"What was it all about?" Seymour asked, greatly disturbed. "I've never seen you that worked up."

Tull paused, took a deep breath. His watchful manner faded. You could see him relax, lose the angry tension.

"Same old thing again," he said. "One of the old mine sections caved in, killed that man. The others got scared, tried to stampede. I had to get a little hard to bring them under control."

Seymour was plainly troubled. "I don't like working these men against their will. Their blood is on our hands."

"Funny thing," put in Tull, "but these cave-ins never happen when Pieters and I are about. I think they are deliberate, which makes someone else responsible. In any case, if these dumbbells would follow our safety instructions, they wouldn't have any trouble, but the moment our eyes are off of them, the accidents start."

He hitched up his belt, slid the holstered pistol at his side into a better position. Tull and Pieters both were carrying guns lately.

"In any case," he added, "I'm about ready to forget my offer to you and Pieters. One more mess like this today and I'm going to call off the deal."

The only effect the words had on Seymour was to remind him of the reason for his visit. The old man was no longer concerned with Tull's \$5,000 offer. His manner was abruptly firm and purposeful. He saw the solution to all their troubles now.

"None of us will have to quit," Seymour declared. "Thanks to Marie, I think we finally know what it's all about. That is why I came here to talk to you and Pieters."

Tull stared hard at the white-haired man. He obviously was surprised at Seymour's statement.

Before he could speak, a call sounded hollowly down the corridor. Pieters had heard they were in the mine and hurried to greet them. Seymour waited until the heavy-set man joined them before starting his explanation.

"Seymour says he knows the cause of our trouble," Tull said quickly.



Seymour was possessed with a new strength.

Pieters responded differently from Tull. He swung around to face the older partner, moved close so his weak eyes could better see Seymour in the dim light.

"Yes?" he questioned, drawing the word out. That one word revealed even this stolid man's excitement.

"He's a white man, a half-naked savage who leads a bunch of pygmies," Seymour declared. "He tried to kill Marie. Thought it would be the straw that broke our back."

PIETERS and Tull were dumb-founded. Their manner made it clear. They looked from Seymour to his daughter. Tull found his tongue first.

"Uh. Well, come on, man! Tell us about it."

Then Seymour, with Marie's help, related the whole story in detail, concluding, "The fight's in the open now. We stop this man and then get down to mining. And to think we were almost ready to give it up!"

"Strange. Very strange," rasped Pieters. He considered briefly. "If only we had known sooner. It will be like hunting

a needle in a haystack," he cautioned, "and we're almost licked already. I just don't know."

"Bosh," exclaimed Seymour sharply. "It's open and shut. He tried to kill Marie with an arrow. I'll send a note to the authorities by Nuyuda and they'll detail a force to pick him up."

Tull moved protectingly toward Marie. He was frowning and his right hand patted the pistol at his side.

"Why fool with the authorities?" he asked. "Let's get him ourselves. I'd like to shoot the rat in cold blood myself!"

Seymour smiled understandingly.

"No, Tull! We mustn't harm him," he warned. "We'd only get in worse trouble. The British have their way of doing things, and they don't want white men taking the law in their own hands. If we enforce our own law, then there's no reason why the natives shouldn't. It's a bad example."

Pieters nodded agreement.

"That's right," he put in. "We mustn't touch him. Seymour's way is best." His eyes met Tull's and their glance fastened for a moment. Then begrudgingly, the younger man acceded.

"Well, Marie and I will take a look around and then I'll fix up that note," Seymour said, starting down the corridor.

Pieters called to him, asking him to wait until the debris was cleared up and the natives quieted down. But the old man was adamant and walked on without replying. Before he had gone far, Pieters started after him, his quick steps ringing hollowly.

"I'll keep you company, then," Pieters declared when he caught up. "Tull had to go down to the sheds."

They walked along, chatting about the work until they came to a point where the tunnel forked. Seymour took the right corridor, but after a few steps was stopped by a mass of fallen rock which extended from wall to wall, except for a narrow opening on one side. "You see, this tunnel is in worse shape than the other one," Pieters explained. "With so few men, we've just forgotten it for the time being and are working in the other one. Until we get some braces up, it would be worth your life to go in there."

He turned and led them back the way they had come, turned down the left-hand corridor. The air was dank and stale when they reached the workers. Seymour stood thoughtfully, watching the long, silent files of natives hard at work in the uneven light from the sputtering torches.

The blacks neither paused nor looked at the visitors. Their skin was grey with the heavy dust which covered their sweating bodies. There was a dull, unhappy, mechanical manner about them. Contrary to the vast majority of natives Seymour had worked, these men did not sing or chatter among themselves. Depressed by the sight, the old man watched only briefly, then silently turned and started for the mine mouth.

Pieters accompanied them to the lift, steadying the swaying platform until they were settled. Saying he would see them at dinner, he waved good-bye, signaled for the lift to be lowered. It settled even more jerkily than when it was being raised, and the two passengers gave their attention to clinging to the iron support which curved up to fasten to the hoist rope.

At almost precisely the same spot where the lift stalled on the upward journey, the ancient engine choked into silence again.

With a jolt, the platform stopped its descent, the suddenness of the halt making it swing dangerously to the side.

But the protest that rose to Seymour's lips was swept away by a quick prayer of thanks. The whim of the ancient machine at that precise instant saved his life.

When the platform whipped sideways at the sudden jolt, an arrow aimed for his chest ripped through his shirt sleeve, sped on to dig into the cliff. Had the lift continued downward, the hidden marksman would have struck his aged target dead center. Seymour whitened at the narrowness of his escape, but instead of crouching on the floor where he would be safe, he straightened, his eyes searching the ground for his assailant.

The search was to no avail. The arrow could have come from a half a hundred sheltered spots. And below, the men went about their tasks, unconscious of the near tragedy above them.

"It's the white savage," Marie gritted, her face contorted with hate. "This time he tried to kill you!"

With her words, understanding filled Seymour's eyes, hardened them. Marie was correct. Growing impatient, the white renegade was becoming bolder, more merciless.

And Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, at that moment laughing happily with his golden mate in a sunlit glen miles away across the green jungle, once more stood condemned as a ruthless, brutal criminal.

III

HELENE stood close to Ki-Kor, blue eyes teasing, her arms lifted as she fastened a white flower in her hair. A colobus monkey swung to a low-hanging branch, studied the smiling pair closely, clucked disparagingly at the curious, two-legged beings. Helene's red lips pouted.

"Ho," she taunted! "Even a monkey mocks Ki-Gor because he does not know to kiss a woman."

Through the scent of the flower, Ki-Gor caught the soft fragrance of the woman, his own beloved woman. The labor at the pygmy village was finished, the defense against the wild dogs completed. Helene and he were temporarily free of responsibility, free to romp along the jungle ways,

to search out the secrets, pleasures and beauties of their primitive world.

Ki-Gor scowled at the monkey, sent it scampering with a realistic growl. At the same moment, his arms darted out to encircle Helene's waist. But she was too quick for him. With a throaty laugh, she twisted away, ran down the path.

He smiled then, lips parting to show strong, white teeth. His grey eyes followed the lithe, curved figure, admired the easy grace of the girl's movements. When Helene did not hear him follow, she stopped, turned to face him. Sunlight splashed through a break in the jungle roof to pour over her in a warm, yellow river.

She posed haughtily, elaborately unmindful of her husband. The light struck golden glints in her auburn hair, shone on her honey-colored skin, brought alive the color in her brief leopard-skin halter and shorts. There was breath-taking beauty in every curve of her young body.

"Perhaps I can find a younger man," she said to no one in particular, but quite loudly. "One who is not too old and fat to move quickly. One who can still run and climb and hunt."

Ki-Gor's deep laugh rolled through the forest. He was a big man, big as few men are. He stood well over six feet, with huge shoulders and a deep chest sloping to a lean, hard-muscled waist and slim hips. His arms and legs, his powerful back were cabled with long, clean, rippling muscles.

Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, greatest warrior of a war-like land, a blond giant whose cat-like tread would have turned the heads of men and women in any land, stood and watched his mate and laughed.

Then with the flickering leap of lightning, he catapulted at Helene, raced toward her with all the sudden, dazzling speed in his driving legs. She gasped in real astonishment at the savage, bursting power with which he launched himself. He was half-way to her before she could gather her wits, move to elude him.

Desperately, Helene grasped a dangling length of liana, took three running steps and flung herself upward in a twisting arc, her feet reaching for the support of a nearby limb. Every ounce of strength in

her slim body went into the effort for she was determined Ki-Gor should not trap her so easily. She felt the solid footing of the limb, and without pausing, she loosened her grip on the liana, reached high with her hands to catch a small, swaying branch.

Then, with the deft certainty Ki-Gor had taught her, she swung herself upward and outward again, riding the elastic sway of the limb to its farthest point before letting it go.

Across an open space she sped like a trapeze artist, twisting in the air to thrust her arms forward. With split-second timing, her hands snapped about a vine, and tugging hard, she again flung upward, landing this time on a branch high above the ground.

Only then did she give way to her curiosity, turn to see Ki-Gor's progress. Her lips were ready with another playful jibe. But Ki-Gor was nowhere in evidence.

Astonished, she searched the point far below where she had expected him to be. The ground evidently had swallowed him up. A perplexed frown touched her smooth features, and she glanced around warily. What new trick was he up to now?

A faint sound above drew her attention. She glanced up, uttered a feminine cry of disgust. Ki-Gor sprawled lazily on a limb, his grey eyes blandly regarding her, giving every appearance of having lain there for hours. Despite her lead, with his amazing skill and strength, he had launched himself into the trees when she tried to elude him, had climbed higher and faster. He restrained a delightful grin at her surprise.

"Wah!" he grunted. "Women are for cooking and sweeping huts. A man grows weary waiting for them."

"No such thing," she said with a toss of her head. "Anyway, if your stomach is beginning to worry you, you had better find us something to eat and a place to sleep tonight."

KI-GOR glanced at the sun, judging the time until night-fall. He and Helene had left the pygmy village when the work was completed, preferring to sleep in the open rather than occupy one

of the hot, small and usually none-too-fragrant pygmy huts. Also, they treasured above everything these happy, carefree hours together in the jungle.

Today, the hours were particularly sweet for always in the back of their minds were the savage dog packs which at any time would come ravenging through the area, bringing with them in their blood-craze the ever-constant presence of danger and death. Despite every precaution, men and women would die under their fangs, others would be maimed and torn.

Ki-Gor rose, faced to the south. His bow was fastened on his back with the arrow-filled quiver, leaving his hands and arms unencumbered. His ever-present knife was tucked securely at his waist. The heavy Masai war-spear he had left at the pygmy *kraal*.

The White Lord and his mate moved leisurely along the tree paths, talking of the small things which entertain lovers, stopping to watch the play of lion cubs far below them, circling out of their way to go laughing through a cloud of yellow butterflies. They did not move without purpose, however, for Ki-Gor with his instinctive sense of direction kept them traveling toward the headwaters of one of the district's small streams. It was an ideal place to spend the night, and both he and Helene would welcome a swim after their busy day.

The jungle through which they moved was dense, choking, primeval. Age-old trees reared up through the tangle of creepers, reached high above the smothering blanket of lesser shrubs which swarmed over the earth in a ruthless battle for existence. Here Nature still was master of its own domain, and man an humble, struggling intruder. Along the jungle ways uncounted beasts, better fitted for survival than man by every physical standard, fought and killed and fed. Weak, fangless, with fading senses of smell and hearing and only a whisper of instinctive knowledge remaining, man had only his wits, his peculiar ability to think logically and plan, as a combination weapon and shield in this wild land. And his wits gave him but a precarious living.

There was one exception and, strangely, he was a white man. Ki-Gor, born to

the jungle, grew up to know the ways of animals long before he learned the ways of men. By an accident of birth and the whim of fate, there was gathered in him the cunning, talents and attributes of both man and animal. His nostrils and his ears were keen as a reedbuck's, his knife more deadly than any claw, his speed and strength equal to a charging leopard's. Yet he was endowed with a superb mind and an intuitive knowledge surprising in its scope.

Now, as the White Lord led his mate through the trees, an increasing watchfulness came into his manner, the watchfulness of a great hunting cat. He began to talk less and less, and, unconsciously following his lead, Helene found herself lapsing into silence, treading with caution. At a wave of his hand, she halted, watched his soundless descent to a branch over a narrow game trail.

Slipping his bow from his shoulder, Ki-Gor tested the string, slid into a position which gave him a clear avenue of fire down the trail. The faint breeze, soft against his face, told him an eland approached and Helene fancied the tender, tasty meat of the big, ox-like animal. But as the breeze eddied and shifted, Ki-Gor caught the scent of another hunter. A lion, rousing before dark, also stalked the eland.

A twig snapped down the trail as the quarry, sensing a vague danger, nervously lifted its head. Weighing the situation, Ki-Gor judged the lion still to be some distance away. There was meat enough for both, and though risk was involved, he did not intend to give way to the stalking cat.

The White Lord notched an arrow, crouched on the limb. The eland was a faint shadow as it halted warily behind a thorn bush. Then with a quick movement the creature broke into view. The bow arched to its farthest point in Ki-Gor's hands, and then with a twang of the bow-string, he sent the whirring arrow on its way.

The arrow drove full-length into the base of the creature's throat. The eland reared in pain, gathered its bulk for a leap. Ki-Gor's second arrow smashed into its ribs, probed for the heart. The beast made three great, frenzied bounds, then

with blood fountaining from its mouth, it staggered blindly, fell kicking.

Ki-Gor slid the bow over his shoulder, dropped free of the tree. He cushioned his fall with feline skill. Swiftly, he reached the eland and his knife gleamed red as he began severing a choice piece of the still-warm meat. The momentary quiet that followed the eland's death struggle was shattered by the lions' enraged roar. Scenting blood, the killer-cat realized he was being cheated of his prey.

The White Lord moved with incredible speed, seeing in his mind's eye the hunger-goaded lion racing to reach the scene. With a final slash, he cut the meat loose, came smoothly to his feet. A vicious snarl greeted his action, brought him whirling to face the sound. Evil incarnate, the huge male cat crouched in the trail, yellow eyes aglow, its jaws opening as it braced for the spring.

KI-GOR stared at the brute, an answering snarl rising in his throat. Cautiously, he slid his knife back into its sheath, shifted the meat to his left hand. Then, with another growl, he suddenly leaped to the side, ran four short steps and jumped upward with all the explosive power in his powerful legs. His right hand caught the branch above, and he swept up, whipping his legs over the limb.

The lion launched its express-train charge as Ki-Gor scrambled upright, but the White Lord wasted no time in glancing at the cat. He had planned his maneuver carefully and properly executed, it could not fail.

He caught a trailing vine, ran down the branch a few steps, then levered himself across an open space and onto a higher branch. Behind him, he heard the lion's claws rake and tear the limb he had just left.

Without looking back, the White Lord climbed higher to rejoin Helene. She waited where he had left her. Although she had made no outcry, her face showed traces of strain at his action.

"Ki-Gor, you shouldn't take such chances," she reproved him.

He looked at her in mild surprise. "I knew what he would do and what I would do. I took no chances."

She shook her head, smiled at the

blond-headed giant. She knew he spoke the truth. The incident was not dangerous to him. His feelings paralleled those of an alert city dweller crossing a crowded street that he had negotiated every day for ten years. Sure there was traffic, but nothing to get excited about.

Ki-Gor wrapped the meat in cool leaves after permitting Helene an admiring look, and they headed for the clear springs where they would spend the night. Along the way, at Helene's insistence, he occasionally paused to pick a particularly select piece of fruit, gather a handful of choice nuts or berries. He protested in husbandly fashion that she was weighting him down, but in the lordly manner of a shopping housewife, she paid him small attention.

The springs bubbled from the earth at half a hundred points, the crystal-clear streams of water converging in a circular rock depression. With a glad cry, Helene surveyed this perfect swimming pool, started to wriggle from her brief shorts. Ki-Gor frowned ferociously, placed the ingredients for the evening meal firmly in her arms.

"Beater of women!" she pouted, and with a twist of her hips turned to her household duties.

Ki-Gor started the fire, fashioned a spit for the meat, while she busied herself gathering large green leaves for plates, placed the vastoy pears and purple plums in one of the springs to chill, sliced the meat. Next, the White Lord studied the nearby trees, selected one with a large forked branch. He scaled the tree, began cutting lengths of liana. Below, Helene gathered a stack of soft, sweet-scented grass.

Deft fingers moving rapidly, Ki-Gor tied the wire-strong vines between the forked limbs, weaving a close-knit platform or hammock. He floored the hammock with a layer of large leaves, then brought up the grass to place over them. He completed the job by tying on the outer side of the tree house a vine which would reach the ground when tossed down, for even in so high and secure a refuge Ki-Gor made certain a marauder could not corner him.

Their simple preparations for dinner and sleeping completed, except for the actual

cooking of the meat, Helene hastily divested herself of halter and shorts and ran to the pool. Ki-Gor, climbing down from the tree house, paused to watch her race to the bank, test the water's temperature with her toe. Her red-gold hair fell over her shoulders in a loose cloud, accentuating the smooth perfection of her throat-catching beauty, as she balanced to dive. Then voicing happy shrieks of anticipation, she cleft the water with hardly a splash, set out across the pool using a long, smooth stroke.

Ki-Gor watched his mate reach the other shore, turn back swimming strongly. Anxious to join her, he started to descend, but was halted by a sudden anguished scream. The cry, though thin and faint, carried unmistakable terror in it. It was the choked-off cry of a native in mortal fear.

Ki-Gor instantly was alert, unconsciously judging the direction and distance of the native. Could it be that the first wild dogs, running far ahead of the main packs, had cornered a native? In any case, he sensed fear of death in the man's scream. Perhaps he could reach him in time to be of help.

HE dropped to the ground, swept up his bow and quiver. When he pointed to the jungle, Helene waved that she understood. Then he was gone, a wraith fading into the forest, racing soundlessly along the tree paths. He exerted his utmost strength and skill, hurtled through the green heights at a dizzy speed which even the agile tree folks could not match. He raced against time for the sudden African night would come soon.

After a short time, he sped over a broad, well-defined trail. It was an elephant track, packed deep by the feet of countless generations of the huge creatures. He checked his swinging flight, considered the path.

This was the approximate area from which the terror-ridden cry had come. Dense jungle lay on either side of the trail so it was likely the native traveled the elephant track. Ki-Gor hesitated, wondering which direction to take on the path. He heard it then—the second cry. It was a breathless, tortured, exhausted attempt to call for help. There were sounds of

a scuffle. The noise was nearby and as Ki-Gor moved toward it he heard a second voice, harsh and snarling.

The light failed quickly as the sun dipped low. Shadows reached up from the trail, crawled like dark mist along the tree trunks. Forced to keep to the upper branches where the light was still sufficient to give him sure footing, Ki-Gor maintained as much speed as possible, straining to see on the darkening trail what he now knew to be a struggle between two or more men.

A knife gleamed silver in the murkiness. There was a terrible rattling cough ending in an eerie gasp. Ki-Gor's battle-trained ears told him a man was dying below him. He threw off his usual caution, hoping to save the unknown victim.

With a reverberating roar, he caught a liana, swooped straight toward the two dim outlines below. He announced his presence, hoping to startle the assailant from his grim work. And he was successful. A huge figure jerked erect, stared briefly, sped away down the dark path.

Ki-Gor started to give pursuit, but the wounded man's tortured breathing made him abandon the idea. He knelt, and holding his face close to the native in the growing darkness, saw the man arch his body in final torment, then collapse lifeless.

The dead black's chest and stomach were laid open with knife wounds. Studying him further, Ki-Gor saw arrows driven through his right shoulder and left thigh and the blood around the arrow wounds was thick and drying. This gave him a clue to what had happened.

The black was ambushed he deduced, but the Bowman with miserable marksmanship, missed a vital part. Desperation gave the wounded man strength to keep running, to try to hide along the murky trail. In the interval between his first anguished cry and Ki-Gor's arrival on the scene, the killer caught up with the native, cut him to pieces with a knife.

But why? This was plainly not a feud between two warriors and it had not the look of a tribal dispute. The victim was an old man, unarmed except for a bush knife and possessing the soft muscles of a white man's house servant. Furthermore, the natives in this region would not butcher a man in this fashion for they were trained from youth in the science of

killing quickly and silently. The greenest pygmy warrior would be ashamed of a job such as this.

Ki-Gor lifted the body, placed it between the roots of a baobab tree. Only then did he notice the forked stick clutched firmly in the dead man's hand. Tied in the fork was a white piece of paper. The man had been delivering a message, carrying it in the traditional manner of African runners. Ki-Gor took the note, stuffed it into his breechclout. Then he gathered rocks, placed them over the body.

BACK at the camp, he told Helene of the murder, how in the darkness there was no chance to follow the knife wielder. He handed Helene the note, suggesting it might shed light on the whole matter. Unable to read the odd scratch marks which white men used in place of the picture writing, Ki-Gor studied Helene's face as she silently ran through the letter.

She was clearly upset. "This is a letter to the district commissioner from a man named Charles Seymour. He says a white savage leading a band of pygmies has tried to kill both him and his daughter, and also has made trouble at his mine. He asks that troops be sent to arrest the man."

Ki-Gor said nothing, but his brow wrinkled in thought.

"Don't you understand?" Helene said. "He means you, Ki-Gor!"

"I understand," Ki-Gor replied softly, as though hushing her fears.

"I'm glad you found the note," Helene continued. "I don't want you to get in trouble and now it won't be delivered."

Ki-Gor looked at her and smiled. "It will be delivered! In the morning we will take it to N'Geeso and have him send it to the commissioner." He patted her hand. "Then N'Geeso and I will visit this Seymour."

Helene started to protest, but knowing Ki-Gor's mind was made up and that his stern code would not permit him to interfere with the note's delivery, she bit back her words. That night her sleep was troubled, and rousing several times, she marveled at her mate's undisturbed slumber. The White Lord had an animal's gift of complete relaxation, and, a thorough-going fatalist, he crossed his bridges only when he came to them.

By mid-morning of the next day, Ki-Gor and N'Geeso reached the mine. They trotted slowly up the rocky terrain before the stockade. The idea of such a wall struck Ki-Gor as odd, but the pygmy suggested it was built as a protection against the dogs. The jungle man felt they were being watched, and as they approached the gate, he saw a face at a small window disappear.

He waited, thinking either the gate would be opened or he would be asked what he wanted. Instead, he heard the soft plop of the gateman's bare feet as he hurried away. Ki-Gor waited a time and when still nothing happened, he called out. Another minute passed, and his gray eyes hardening at this cool reception, he called again. N'Geeso, standing a little way behind him, said nothing, but shifted his blowgun into the convenient crook of his arm.

Now the White Lord's ears caught the faint sound of a man approaching. There was the rattle of a bar being lifted and the gate swung outward about two feet. A huge black stood in the narrow opening, his eyes boring insolently into Ki-Gor. A jagged scar ran the full length of one cheek, giving a cruel lift to his mouth. At his waist was a long knife, its curved blade mirroring the sun in its sharpness. This was the man the gatekeeper hurried to summon. This was Natu.

The eyes of the two men locked and fought, and Ki-Gor felt a strange, unreasoning anger against this burly black sweep up within him. Yet he held himself in check.

"I am Ki-Gor. I come to see Charles Seymour," he said, keeping any sign of hostility from his voice.

Natu's lips twisted ugly, the long scar distorting his face when he sneered.

"You see no one, white man!" he spat. "Go, before my blade lets the sunlight into a *dango's* belly."

The planes of Ki-Gor's face were abruptly granite, but his gray eyes flamed with molten fury. Natu reached to pull the gate closed, muttering, "Sneaking killer of women and old men!"

Ki-Gor erupted into action. Natu was the more massive of the two men, but there was a lion's terrible, flowing power in the White Lord's rippling movement. Ki-Gor

bounded forward, caught the heavy gate with one hand. In the same instant, he ripped it from Natu's grasp, flung it wide with a shuddering crash.

The black, accustomed to cowing men by his very size, was taken off guard, but he recovered quickly. Natu leaped backward two quick paces, and infinite evil poured into his face as though the white man's action tore away a restraint under which he labored. Natu's hand flashed for the wicked knife, dove for his waist with a speed that more than revealed his intent.

He meant to kill Ki-Gor for his affront and it was clear he took pleasure in the thing he planned.

BUT Natu forgot he was not dealing with a half-starved dock worker or a frightened laborer. Natu had been too long in the coastal cities to remember the terror of primitive male anger, the unrelenting will to battle of the jungle people. He forgot, if he ever knew, the savage breed of men who have no fear of odds or weapons or death, once the decision of battle is forced.

Natu forgot, but N'Geeso did not. The squat chieftain slid aside, took up a place just within the gate. He made no move to intervene for he knew Ki-Gor would disapprove, but the pygmy stood ready to fend off any who might try to help the big black. N'Geeso had fought too long at Ki-Gor's side to have misgivings about the outcome of the struggle.

And within the camp four people looked up startled as the gate swung open with a crash. Seymour and Marie stood on their porch, and fifty yards away, in the shadow of a tree, waited Tull and Pieters. Natu had gone to the gate with their permission, with their orders to turn the White Lord away. They had not bargained on anyone opposing the gigantic Natu, and being unable to hear his slurring remarks to Ki-Gor, they were astonished at the sudden turn of events.

Ki-Gor saw Natu leap back, claw for his knife. The White Lord's powerful legs set hard on the earth, his knees bent slightly, and then with sudden bursting strength, he threw himself forward in a dive. He smashed the full weight of his body against Natu just as the knife came

free. Ki-Gor's hands closed about Natu's wrist as his shoulder drove into the black's stomach.

The native toppled backward, fell with Ki-Gor on top of him, and the White Lord, still utilizing the momentum of his lunge, jammed the knife to its hilt in the ground as they fell. Then with a shove of Natu's wrist, Ki-Gor snapped the blade, left the native holding the useless hilt.

Natu pounded at Ki-Gor with his other hand, heaved his huge shoulders up from the ground. The White Lord spun off the struggling native, landed in a crouch. As the black man rose and started for him, Ki-Gor straightened with blinding speed and his right arm shot up and out. The rock-hard heel of his hand crashed flush against Natu's jaw.

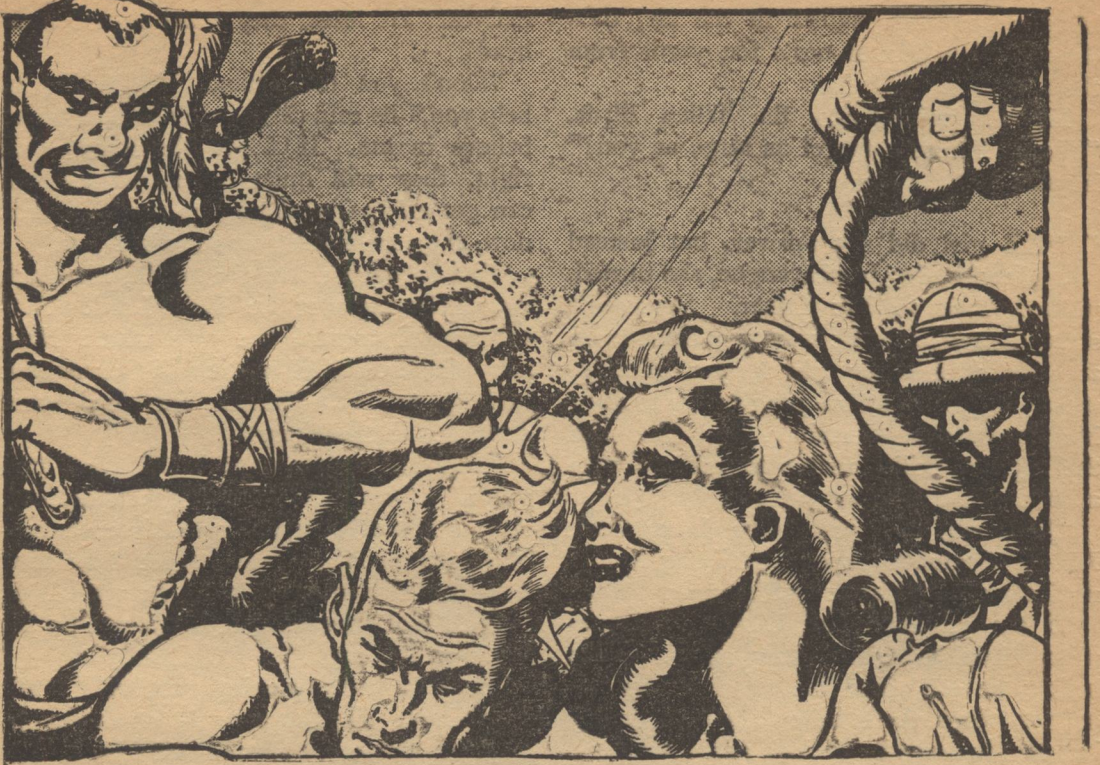
The black seemed to hang in the air for a moment, his body absolutely rigid, every muscle taut. His eyes were wide and staring, the sight gone from them. Then with a grunt, his mouth fell open, the air rushed from his lungs in a pain-wracked sigh. He sagged, suddenly becoming a rubbery, unresisting heap. When he collapsed on the ground there was no flicker of consciousness in his now half-closed eyes. Ki-Gor watched the fallen man briefly, relaxed as N'Geeso walked up beside him. The pygmy spat in the ultimate of admiration.

"Why one who fights so well should always talk of peace, I do not know," he blurted in all sincerity. "But let us go deal with those surprised ones standing over there. N'Geeso will take the fat fellow with the shining eyes," the pygmy said, typically selecting the largest opponent in sight, the barrel-chested Pieters.

"Don't start any trouble," Ki-Gor ordered, his eyes running over the white onlookers.

N'Geeso, who was happily raising a poisoned dart to place in his blowgun, muttered under his breath in disappointment. But Ki-Gor did not give his usual smile at the pygmy's frustrated mumbling. The White Lord's eyes and thoughts were fastened on the dark-haired girl and the elderly man at her side. He strode toward the two, trusting N'Geeso to keep a watchful eye on the others.

Marie Seymour gave Ki-Gor no opportunity to speak first. She stepped in-



The length of wood crashed down on Ki-Gor

dignantly from the porch, went to meet him.

"You—you savage!" she flung at him. "How can you dare show your face here." She was very small standing before Ki-Gor, her hands knotted into tiny fists. "Do you think after missing both my father and me, it will be easier to walk in here and kill us?"

"You are sure this is the man who fired the arrows?" Seymour asked, sternly regarding the White Lord.

"How could I forget him," said Marie, "and he's even brought one of his awful creatures." She indicated N'Geeso.

Ki-Gor looked at the girl gravely. He was convinced she believed he had tried to murder both her father and herself, and realizing this, he was not as angry as before. Surely, such a mistake could be easily solved.

"You are wrong," he said. "That's why I came here. Your horse hit a trap and set the arrow off. No one shot at you, and as to your father, I have not been around the mine."

His words made no impression on the girl. Casting about for a further means

to convince her, he saw a bird's swift shadow flicker on her white dress. Ki-Gor glanced up, saw two more birds flying toward them.

"Watch," he said. Then, before any could guess his purpose, Ki-Gor whipped his bow from his shoulder, fitted an arrow to it and aimed it at the sky. For the merest fraction, his narrowed eyes judged the flight of the doves, their height and speed.

His arm muscles rippled and held as he drew the bowstring taut. Then the string twanged and the arrow drove upwards, a thin black streak against the blue, a tiny death-dealing line that slit the air. And so quickly did Ki-Gor move, a second arrow sped on its way before the first was half-way to its mark.

His dramatic, unexpected action held the four mine people in a hypnotic spell. With a strange fascination, they watched this lithe, great-muscled jungle man whip the two arrows into the air, saw the feathered barbs flash at the fast-flying birds. It was a feat of skill such as no one of them had ever seen.

Guided by Ki-Gor's unerring aim, the

arrows struck their targets, sent them tumbling a few feet higher in the air, then dropped them like stones a few yards from the porch.

Ki-Gor pointed to the fallen birds. "Would I miss a target as large as you?" he asked.

THE girl did not answer, but instead of continuing her harangue, she turned, walked back to her father. Seymour's stern expression gave way to a faint smile at this primitively direct, yet effective means employed by the jungle man to show his innocence. Certainly, the man had the highest skill possible to achieve with a bow.

"Just why do you come here, then, Mr.—" Seymour paused, realizing he did not know this strange man's name.

"I am Ki-Gor," the White Lord supplied, shouldering the bow again. Then briefly he explained his mission was not only to show them he was not an enemy but also to learn conditions at the mine.

"What do you mean?" asked Seymour.

"The natives say this is a bad place," Ki-Gor explained. "They say your workers are held like slaves, are beaten and killed. They are war-like men and their anger grows as they hear these things. I came to learn the truth so there can be no trouble."

Seymour showed anger for the first time. Spots of color burned in his cheeks and he glared at Ki-Gor.

"Who are you to poke your nose into our business?" he shouted. "This mine is no concern of your—or is it? Men have been hurt in the mine. There have been too many accidents, some of them looking like plain murders. And despite your little shooting trick to lull our suspicions, I think you are the man who is probably responsible. Is this some new trick to run us off?"

The old man's jaw jutted out. He shook his finger at Ki-Gor. "No, conditions aren't perfect," he continued, "but we aren't running a slave mine. Heaven knows, we started out with two hundred men and all but fifty have been scared away."

Ki-Gor could not understand these people and their continual attempt to blame him for matters of which he had no knowl-

edge. It was much easier to deal with natives. At least, they tried to use their heads.

"Don't you understand, I'm trying to help you," he said disgustedly. "The tribes believe in me. If I say the mine is all right, they will quiet down. Then you can get all the workers you want. Right now, they are talking war against you."

Tull lounged up to the porch, his black eyes flickering over the White Lord. Pieters walked toward the gate where Natsu sat dazedly. The name Ki-Gor meant nothing to these people for they were strangers to the Congo.

"Don't show him anything, I say," Tull put in. "We're not running a sideshow. And if there is anything to his cock-and-bull story about the natives, let them start a fight. We've got these," he patted his pistol, "and there are soldiers with a lot more on the coast."

Marie looked approvingly at Tull. "Tull's right, Dad. He has no right on our property. I think we should tell him to get out and stay out."

Seeing that the girl was with him, Tull's hand closed on his pistol. "Yeah! Let's get him out of here!"

Tull's attention was focused on Ki-Gor. He did not see N'Geeso quietly shift position, raise the blowgun to dead-center aim on him. The lean white man balanced on the brink of death, so close that one puff of breath by the watchful pygmy would push him over. Although N'Geeso failed to understand the full conversation, he understood a threatening gesture toward the White Lord.

But Pieters, older and more cautious, remembered to keep his eye on the pygmy. He appeared to know how terrible a weapon a blowgun could be. He approached hurriedly, attracting the attention of the group and momentarily easing the tension.

"I have a word to say," he began, his thick glasses glittering as he nodded his head. "We must not be foolish. Why shouldn't this Ki-Gor see the mine? What will it hurt?"

He shifted his bulky body around to face Tull. "We have few enough visitors, Tull. Show him anything he wants to see." He gave a dry chuckle. "Give him a job if he wants it. We could use

quite a few good strong backs like his."

Pieters chuckled again, but there was no humor in his pale eyes as he looked first at Tull, then at Seymour.

"As usual, Pieters is right," Seymour conceded. He was over the rush of anger, and remembering the note to the commissioner, he was mollified.

"All right," Tull said, shrugging his shoulders. "If that's what you want, come on." He walked past Ki-Gor toward the mine.

THE White Lord smiled tightly, followed Tull without a word. As he walked, his eyes for the first time took in the place, automatically photographing every detail. N'Geeso trotted at his heels, unhappily replacing the unused poison dart again in the pouch at his waist.

Ki-Gor noted many of the native huts were in disrepair, but remembering that Seymour said most of the workers were gone, he could understand the run-down look. There were some signs of normal life about the village. A few men lounged in the shade, while others squatted in small groups chatting, all of them taking it easy.

Most of the men had the look of local blacks, but a small proportion evidently were coastal natives, big, muscled fellows. The natives showed signs of hard, sustained labor, but the way they chatted and laughed, certainly indicated no unhappiness with their lot.

Tull did not slacken his pace to give Ki-Gor a chance to chat with the men, but appeared intent on getting the tour over as quickly as possible. He walked briskly, took Ki-Gor and N'Geeso past the rickety work sheds. The sheds were deserted, though they gave evidence men had worked there not too long before.

"Some pipes burst," the lean man explained curtly, pointing to the muddy pools of water standing under the sheds, "so we took the men off until the place could be cleaned up."

Ki-Gor nodded approvingly for no employer could expect his men to work willingly under such conditions. He glanced curiously at the huge cauldron, wondering what part it played in the mine operation. "The lift was stopped above them at the ledge and they had to wait while it was lowered. Since Tull showed no inclina-

tion to talk, Ki-Gor employed the time in a casual study of the cliff face, his eyes automatically searching out the crude handholds which formed the only other means to enter or leave the mine. Years of danger had taught Ki-Gor to unthinkingly search out every possible avenue from a place before he entered, and this animal caution more than once had saved his life.

When the lift came down, Tull motioned Ki-Gor to get on, but told N'Geeso to remain below. "That motor will have enough trouble trying to pull us up," he said.

The squat pygmy chieftain gave no indication of complying, until Ki-Gor asked him to stay behind. N'Geeso, leader of warriors, took no orders from any man but the White Lord. When the lift started, Tull looked down at the pygmy and it was as though he saw N'Geeso for the first time. He was disconcerted by the thrust of N'Geeso's unwavering stare, by an abrupt realization of the terrible strength and will and intelligence housed in the squat native. Tull moved uncomfortably.

Ki-Gor walked along the mine corridor, scenting the ancientness of the shaft. His soft tread contrasted strangely with Tull's booted, ringing step for the White Lord was by far the larger man. When they came to the point where the tunnel forked, he followed Tull along the left corridor, his nostrils tightening as the air grew stale and bad. The torches burned yellow, their flames standing straight in the still atmosphere.

How many men, long since dead and buried, had hacked and dug in the semi-gloom of this mine, Ki-Gor wondered. As always, he felt a kind of pity at the thing that impelled men to burrow away in the earth for yellow metal or shining stones. It was a kind of sickness, a feverish madness which he could not comprehend.

The corridor opened into a wider room, a long gallery where perhaps twenty-five men were at work. Natu stood at the entrance. Ki-Gor's eyes narrowed imperceptibly at the sight of the huge-thewed black, but Natu evidenced no enmity. For all the emotion the man revealed, he was a giant ebony idol, his face expressionless, standing stiffly to his full height. Only

his eyes were alive and in the uneven torch-light they revealed nothing.

"Natu is our overseer," Tull said, "and there are your mistreated natives." His voice was dry and biting. He swung on his heel and started walking back out of the room.

The workmen apparently had not seen Tull and Ki-Gor for they dug some distance away from the entrance. Ki-Gor listened to the slow, deep-throated chant the men sang as they worked. It was a happy song about a legendary warrior who journeyed to the edge of the world and dug the greatest pit ever known in which to catch the moon, and of the adventures which befell him. Men who chanted the age-old working songs were not mistreated.

The White Lord made a tentative move to go over to the men. But Tull, waiting impatiently behind him, quite plainly wanted to dally with this intruder no longer.

"Great scot, haven't you taken up enough of my time with this foolishness," he growled. "Let's go!"

KI-GOR, wanting to impose on these touchy white men no more than necessary, turned and followed Tull down the corridor. When they came to the tunnel fork again, Ki-Gor hesitated, indicating he wondered what lay down the right-hand shaft. Tull swung down it with a mutter, halted at the cave-in.

"This part is closed off, as you can see," he explained brusquely. "It's unsafe until we can get enough men to clear it and bring in some new timbers."

Ki-Gor's eyes went to the narrow opening which led past the cave-in. Footprints showed men had gone past the debris into the unsafe section.

"I've been in with a crew to estimate what must be done," Tull said, following Ki-Gor's glance. Then he was heading out of the mine again, leaving Ki-Gor to follow. The White Lord leaned down, picked up a handful of crushed rock which lay where some native had dropped a sack. He carried it with him to study in the sunlight.

As the White Lord walked along the ledge to the lift, he rubbed the rock between his palms, probed it with his gray eyes. Then he cast it aside, stepped on

the lift. On the way down, he spoke suddenly.

"What do you dig for in the mine?" he asked.

Tull's dangerous temper flared at the question. "Why, gold, of course," he snapped.

Ki-Gor pursued the subject no further. These men must be greater fools than he thought. The White Lord had come up against man's greed for the yellow metal too many times and in too many parts of the Congo not to have picked up some knowledge of the subject. It was apparent to him that the rock being taken from this mine had only the barest trace of metal.

But it was no concern of his if these tense, unfriendly people wanted to sweat their souls out in a mine even the natives gave up as worthless. Perhaps the Fates were dealing justice wisely, he thought, studying Tull's thin, suspicious face.

They returned to Seymour's house by a different path, N'Geeso taking up a post away from Ki-Gor where he could watch the entire group. Despite Ki-Gor's assurance that the mine was all right, N'Geeso grunted he did not like the smell of these outlanders.

In simple words, the White Lord thanked Seymour for letting him go through the mine. Then he paused, and though his expression did not alter, every person present was conscious of a change in the jungle man when he spoke again. There was a biting scorn somehow conveyed in what he said.

"Before I go, I will tell you one more thing to blame me for. I found one of your men, Seymour, slashed to pieces with a knife."

Briefly, Ki-Gor described the grizzled native whose body he found along the elephant trail.

"Nuyuda! Killed!" The exclamations were wrenched from Seymour for there was no mistaking the man Ki-Gor described. "By the saints, this is too much."

Marie's hand went to her mouth. She was too shocked to speak. Pieters jerked erect at the White Lord's revelation, his faded eyes wide behind the glasses. Tull's long face screwed tighter and his jaws set, his eyes slid over Marie and her father, settled on Pieters.

"So?" In Pieters' one word was deadly

accusation. In the way he planted stocky legs, lowered his round head, he resembled a sluggish bull aroused at long last by a tormentor. But Ki-Gor cut off the accusation with the deft stroke of a fencer.

"And your letter to the district commissioner," he continued as though no one had spoken, "is on its way as safely as if your own man carried it. I found it and sent it on by one of N'Geeso's men."

His strange words upset and confused the group. Each in his own way was prepared to accuse him of killing Nuyuda and destroying the letter. What manner of man was this white savage to send on a letter which plainly condemned him and would bring troops to arrest him? For the first time a change came in Seymour's manner. Doubt that Ki-Gor was a wanton killer stirred in the old man.

But Pieters and Tull did not alter their attitude. If anything, the slow-moving Pieters' anger and resentment only now was becoming apparent.

"The troops will not come for many days," Ki-Gor cautioned, "because soon the wild dogs, the 'mad ones' as the natives call them, will start their run through the forest. But when the dogs are gone, I will still be here. Do not worry!"

With that, the White Lord spun on his heel, stalked away. In the easy, cat-like carriage with which the big man walked, in the proud, free way with which he held himself, was more than adequate evidence that he was a respected, honored man, no skulking killer of gray-haired runners. Seymour watched Ki-Gor go and then declared flatly he no longer thought the mine troubles lay with the jungle man.

"I know men," Seymour said, "at least, plain, honest men of his type. That man is no enemy! He could be a powerful friend."

Pieters, too, watched Ki-Gor go, and his green eyes held a venomous, burning stare. He wanted no part of friendship with this arrogant white savage.

"Wild dogs will keep the troops away many days, but he will still be here. Do not worry, he says!" Pieters' thick mouth was harsh. "I think, Tull, that we have worried too much already. I think now we need to act instead of worry!"

Savage pleasure leaped into Tull's expression, and like a chameleon's swift change

of color, his manner and mood changed. From a lazy, controlled man he was abruptly a hard-faced, nervous human dynamo whose right hand went with clawing swiftness for his gun. He took a long step to follow Ki-Gor.

"You misunderstand me, Tull," Pieters rasped.

Down the hillslope where the rock-strewn soil merged with the jungle, a hunting leopard screamed. Its chilling, dreadful cry soared and climbed with spine-tingling intensity on the hot air, stabbed at the heavens like a blood-stained sword. Then as the cry died suddenly, quiet rushed in again, washed in an aching flood over the mining camp.

When Tull turned, there was comprehension on his face.

IV

THE dawn splashed silver in the Congo sky. Along dim trails gray light rolled back the shadows, probed into pools of darkness. Stands of age-old trees took shape. And the bedlam that fills the African night faltered, writhed in a last agony, choked away. The night creatures slid away into their unnumbered hiding places, and in the lightening jungle the softer symphony of daytime life began.

With a flaring dawn came the first pulsing notes of the jungle telegraph. Drums talked across the distances. From beleaguered *kraals* in the far veldt, over the green reaches of the jungle, across the valleys and into the hills, the throbbing reached with nervous insistence.

The drums spoke with quick fear, and black men in a hundred *kraals* listened tensely. Even white men, knowing nothing of the drum talk, heard the irregular yet rhythmic beat and stirred uneasily.

For the drums told of death, death that poured in a ravening gray flood out of the burned and dying veldt, raced with slaverings fangs into the lush jungle. The wild dogs, untold thousands of them, crazed with hunger and thirst had launched their migration.

Huge, gaunt creatures, maddened with the lust to kill, drunk with numbers and an instinctive drive which spewed them forth from their breeding grounds, swept through the forest in a tidal wave of fury.

And where they passed, the earth was soaked with blood, spread with the torn carcasses of their victims, for they lost all fear in their frenzy and attacked every creature, large or small. They themselves died by the hundreds in their orgy of death, died under the rain of spears and arrows, under the claws of their victims and under the crazed attacks of their fellows, but always there were more to take the place of those who fell.

In the *kraal* of the pygmies, N'Geeso and the White Lord heard the drums trace the course and progress of the "mad ones," knew before another sun the vanguard of the dogs would reach them. Before, there was always the faint hope the horde might choose some alternate run and pass by the district, but now that slight hope shattered and a grim tension fell over the *kraal*.

N'Geeso made a final check of food stores while there was still time to remedy any shortages. Ki-Gor went carefully over the defenses, ordered several points in the thorn wall strengthened, then sat down to share a morning meal with Helene. As the White Lord ate, he related his experience of the previous day to the girl, talking slowly, with half an ear turned to the drum-talk which kept pouring in reports on the dog-packs.

Helene saw Ki-Gor stiffen. His words trailed off; ended in mid-sentence. He gave his full attention to the message being spelled out by a distant drummer.

"Two bands of Masai warriors," he translated tensely, "led by Tembu George passed the Wasuli *kraal* at dawn, trekking this way. They were only a short way ahead of the dogs and were worn with travel."

WORRY was in Ki-Gor's face. Helene recognized and shared the concern he felt for their great friend, Tembu George, huge-thewed chieftain of the Masai. All the tremendous strength and battle knowledge of those tall, proud warriors and their fabulous leader would be of no avail against the furred killers on their heels.

N'Geeso, who also had heard the message, hurried up, attempting unsuccessfully to hide his excitement. The pygmy leader and the Masai chieftain, drawn together by their love for Ki-Gor, were fast friends,

each willing to lay his life down for the other. Yet, in their tongue-in-cheek rivalry for Ki-Gor's admiration, each affected a scorn for the other's abilities.

"Ho! The great elephant blunders through the jungle like a mindless one," N'Geeso greeted Ki-Gor, masking his anxiety. "These big men are always dull. Now, since I do not like to see men die because of a poor leader, I must take my warriors and save these Masai oxen."

And Ki-Gor knew N'Geeso actually entertained the idea of sallying forth against the feared dogs to protect the Masai. He knew, too, that if the little man lost his life in such a venture, he would die without rancor, and if he successfully pulled Tembu George to safety, instead of crowing about the exploit, he would never mention it.

It was necessary to understand the Masai's contempt of danger, their love of extraordinary exploits and their iron-willed determination to complete any venture they once began in order to comprehend this trek led by Tembu George. It was the sort of thing that caught the admiration of a primitive people, bound them tightly to the huge black chieftain.

The White Lord could picture Tembu George casually announcing he would visit the pygmies as though the sweeping horde of wild dogs were beneath a Masai's notice. He could see the hard-fibered warriors, bred to battle and forever restive in peace, choke back delighted grins, and clamor to accompany their leader. They reveled in excitement and hardship, and in passing close to villages along the way, they had the added pleasure of proving once more that the Masai are a race apart.

When he considered it, Ki-Gor saw there was a reason for Tembu George's exploit. It was not a foolhardy venture, and no doubt, he had figured an ample margin of safety. Ki-Gor was acquainted with the grinding treks which the Masai undertook as a kind of martial exercise.

With his mind made up, he glanced at N'Geeso. "No, don't take your men away from their work. Helene and I will go to Tembu George and if he is really in danger, then we will come and get you."

It was the wise course, because the *kraal's* protection was of first importance. The jungle couple could travel fast along

the tree trails, thus spare the pygmies a long, perhaps unnecessary trip. In his heart, N'Geeso knew, too, that Tembu George would have stopped his men at the Wasuli *kraal* if he thought the last lap could not be completed.

"Let it be as you say," the pygmy agreed. "Wah! Doubtless, even the 'mad ones' would refuse to chew Masai flesh." He wrinkled his nose as at a bad smell.

KI-GOR and Helene immediately began their journey. They moved at a fast, steady pace along the general route they had traveled two days before, heading toward the elephant trail. Since this broad trail formed the most easily traveled avenue through the thick jungle, they felt certain Tembu George would lead his warriors along it.

They promptly noted a difference in the jungle. For one thing, there was more open movement among the ordinarily shy animals. On every hand, animals were stirring, from tiny dik-dik deer to bush bucks. Hartebeste trotted in open view and an occasional ill-tempered wild boar bored through the underbrush with his retinue of wives and children following.

But the strangest of all was the action of the killer-cats, the towney-maned lions and sleek, cruel leopards. These great cats, snarling and blinking their yellow eyes, paced, nervously before their lairs, making no move to molest the lesser creatures that passed within a few yards of them.

In some way beyond the knowledge of man, Nature warned these animals of the red death which flowed toward them, and in their growing agitation, the eternal strife between hunter and hunted, between weak and strong was forgotten. The weak already trekked northward, seeking escape from the threat rolling toward them from the South. The beasts of prey, however, fought against the instinctive fear which rose in them, still refused to flee areas where they had for so long held dominion. But eventually, they too, would pad northward.

Ki-Gor and Helene traveled above the elephant trail for a long time, anticipating every minute that they would sight Tembu George. Then, as they dropped to a branch low over the path, they saw approaching a double file of warriors, led by

one man who ran ahead of the others. They were tall, stalwart men with the look of hawks in their faces. The Masai traveled at a monotonous, ground-eating pace which did not vary a hair's breath in timing in the space of many miles. Each warrior carried the long, muscle-wrenching bow of the Masai, a tremendous shovel-bladed spear and a stout ox-hide shield.

The man who ran in the lead set the pace for the others. He was large, even in contrast to the raw-boned men who followed him. He ran with an animal's free-moving grace, his muscle-girded chest rising and falling in easy, natural breathing. Ki-Gor's eyes lighted at sight of Tembu George.

The jungle couple dropped to the trail, waved to the approaching Masai. A chorus of pleased shouts greeted their appearance, and in another minute, smiling warriors surrounded them.

"Ho! A friend comes, indeed," the men called, employing the usual native welcome.

"It is a fine trekking day," Ki-Gor exclaimed, making no mention of the dogs.

"Is it not so, is it not so!" they replied in a chorus, broad grins showing they knew what was in his mind.

Ki-Gor glanced at Tembu George. "N'Geeso spoke of dogs on the trail, worried he might have to leave his wives and come to protect you. Would you know of such dogs?"

Tembu George looked questioningly at his men. Their faces were elaborately blank. He shrugged his shoulders, as at a matter of no consequence, but his eyes twinkled.

"It could be," he admitted, "but then there are always many worries in the minds of the little men, worries others do not notice." Easily he slid to another subject. "Come, let us go see what new tales of battle and hunting N'Geeso has dreamed up to tell. Aaaaieee, already my ears ring with his talking."

Ki-Gor grinned, explained he would meet them later at the *kraal*, then he set off with Helene to see for himself how far the dogs had advanced. They left the trail, and a short time later, passed near the springs where two days before they had camped. Helene, wearying of

travel, eyed the inviting hammock swinging high above the water's edge.

"Let's rest a little," she urged.

The tireless White Lord, though anxious to be on his way, agreed to her request, sat beside her while she stretched full-length on the gently swaying platform of vines. Sunlight dappled Helene's skin, drew from her a sigh of contentment.

Ki-Gor, however, did not relax. He listened intently as an elephant trumpeted in the distance, blasted again and again in a blend of desperation and fury. The point of the trumpeting did not vary, and the challenge of no other bull rent the air.

It was a troublesome sound to Ki-Gor, as was always the voice of one of the great beasts in distress. It bored into him, would not let him rest. The White Lord had a great respect and affection for the huge, intelligent creatures, who for all their tremendous power, live and let live. To him, they were the true rulers of the jungle.

He stood up, finally. "Helene, I go to see what troubles the great one. You may stay, if you promise not to leave the tree house until I return." She drowsily agreed.

KI-GOR found the elephant easily. It had fallen into one of the pygmy traps. The little men valued elephant flesh highly, and used the ivory tusks in trading with other tribes. Viewing the trap from a tree, Ki-Gor was puzzled. The pit was newly cleaned and deepened, yet the long, pointed stakes which usually stud the floor of such an excavation were removed. Ki-Gor recalled no talk of elephants in the pygmy village and the little men did not take elephants alive.

He watched the vast gray bulk fretting and heaving against the earth walls which hemmed it in, trumpeting its growing distress. Obviously, the pygmies could not visit their trap for days, so the elephant would be left as an easy prey for the wild dogs, or even worse, a victim of slow starvation. There was a side of Ki-Gor which would not permit him to be a party to that kind of cruelty and waste.

The White Lord slid down a vine, walked slowly around the pit, seeking the most practical means to free the beast. His presence first threw the elephant into a greater frenzy, but he talked to it in a

calm, reassuring voice, made no threatening motion, and soon the creature grew quieter. It sensed there was something different about this man, that strangely he meant no harm as did most of his kind.

At one end of the pit, Ki-Gor noted a series of wide cracks in the dry earth. He cut a long stake, sharpened it to a point, and placing it in the crack nearest the edge of the trap, flung his weight against the wedge. The earth gave, tumbled about the elephant's feet in a miniature landslide. Ki-Gor moved back to the next crack, repeated the procedure.

Ki-Gor worked on in the hot sun, sweat coursing down his face and chest, his muscles writhing and cording as he threw all his vast strength into the task. Gradually, he cut back the bank of the pit, piled more and more dirt under the feet of the elephant, building an incline which the beast could negotiate.

And the great creature, watching the side of the pit melt away under Ki-Gor's efforts, understood what he did, trumpeted its excitement in a tone which was no longer distressed.

When Ki-Gor paused, the elephant came slowly forward and with the deliberate caution of its kind, attempted to clamber from its prison. But the grade was still too steep, so Ki-Gor went back to work. He took the precaution of glancing around him occasionally, because the elephant's heavy smell clogged his nostrils and its constant shifting and moving interfered with his keen hearing.

Lacking the customary protection of his senses of smell and hearing, the White Lord failed to detect the stealthy figure that worked its way through the tangle of bushes, crouched close behind him. He was straightening up to encourage the elephant in another attempt to climb free, when the figure slid from hiding, took three quick steps to reach him.

A sixth sense shot a tingling warning along his nerves. But the feeling that something was wrong came too late. As he started to spin around, the terrible blow fell. The sun exploded in his brain, burst in a thousand searing, raking particles. He fought to retain consciousness, to turn and grasp his attacker, to keep moving. All his will and tremendous vitality drove against the paralyzing shock

of the blow, but dark mists shuttled down to blank out the world.

His mind wavered and he reeled backward into a smothering well of darkness, fell under the elephant's feet. The last sound he heard was the fierce, maddened trumpeting of the monster.

KI-GOR came to slowly. Pain throbbed in his head with a rocking sickness. He knew only of the hurt at first. Then he felt the rough earth against his back. Abruptly, as his senses returned, he was conscious of the elephant smell, fresh and over-poweringly strong. He forced his eyes open, waited while the wavering mist cleared.

He wondered vaguely what the strange gray covering was above him. It was creased and mud spattered, and swayed with a steady, regular rhythm. Then his mind began to function and he realized with a shock that he lay under the belly of an elephant. With a rush, the events leading to the blow on his head came back.

He had tumbled into the pit and the huge beast somehow had not trampled him. Had he known it, actually the fall saved his life, for it put him out of the reach of the person who tried to kill him. The killer left feeling the White Lord would be battered to a pulp under the creature's giant feet.

Ki-Gor came cautiously to his hands and knees, crawled to the side of the pit, raised himself flat against the rough wall. He barely permitted himself to breathe, trying to decide what his next move should be, whether the beast's temper might abruptly change now that he showed signs of life. Dizzy and weak, he stood there with sweat beading his forehead, feeling the slow drip of blood from the scalp wound. The only avenue of escape lay in passing along the elephant's side, walking directly in front of it, and then climbing up the incline he had fashioned.

While he girded himself for the desperate try, he heard a sudden tumult outside the pit. A storm of terror broke over the jungle above. There was the frightened trample of hoofs as herds of animals swept by in a frenzied stampede. Close by a lion roared and a few seconds later came at a dead run to leap completely over the

corner of the trap. The earth shook with a rhino's thundering charge. In the trees, birds set up a raucous screaming.

Then it came! Blood chilling and terrible rose the cry of the packs. Thin at first, then with a growing volume that swelled and grew into a hideous nightmare of sound.

The giant elephant shifted restively. That chorus of death evoked old memories. In its decades of life, the elephant had seen the packs come many times. Now the ancient creature grew anxious to get clear of the trap, into the open where it could defend itself.

Then a strange thing happened, a thing Ki-Gor would remember always. The elephant turned its head deliberately so that one small, red eye fastened on him. What went on in that massive head the White Lord could not know, but it seemed the beast measured the jungle man, carefully placed his position. Pinned helpless against the wall, Ki-Gor stared back, hardly daring to breathe.

As the White Lord tensed himself for the crushing weight to smash against him in a moment, the elephant rolled his trunk up safely and turning his head back, heaved up and out of the trap with ponderous yet deft strength. Dirt shredded and cascaded into the pit as the monster's powerful hind legs dug deep in the incline which Ki-Gor had dug. With a final supreme effort, the elephant plunged onto the hard ground above and was free. Ki-Gor was left untouched, not even brushed against by the creature.

Ki-Gor gulped air into his lungs, shook the cramp from his shoulders. His strength was flowing back rapidly as his perfectly conditioned body threw off the effects of the blow. Years of clean, hard, strenuous life gave him amazing recuperative powers, an ability to bounce back quickly where a civilized man would be incapacitated for days.

He heard the elephant's furious challenge thunder out above the wild dogs' snarling medley, and crouching low, Ki-Gor worked his way up the incline. He saw the lean, gray shapes bound in two's and three's from the tangled undergrowth.

The dogs stood tall, tapering from heavy-jawed, blunt-nosed heads to deep, narrow chests, long, gaunt-ribbed bodies

and thin flanks. Their thick necks had the jackal's obscene, too-long look and further kinship was proclaimed by their cruel yellow eyes and pointed ears.

It would be suicide to show himself in the open. The dogs would drag him down before he got half-way to the trees. He flattened against the dirt so the banks of the incline concealed him. Ki-Gor reached back, loosened the bow which was still tied firmly to his back. He nocked an arrow, raised cautiously. His first barb drove through one of the running dogs. Calmly, he sent two more dogs kicking in their death agonies.

The three bleeding, pawing dogs reacted on the maddened pack as Ki-Gor knew they would. The sight threw the others into a killing lust, sent them lunging at their dying fellows and leaping frenziedly at the pawing elephant. The huge beast trumpeted its contempt, charged with a speed phenomenal for so large a creature. It smashed out right and left with its tusks, turned and wheeled so that every pounding step left a dog's bloody pulp ground into the dirt.

As the elephant's dreadful carnage mounted, the frothing, insane "mad ones" had no time for lesser quarry. This was the moment Ki-Gor awaited. He leaped to his feet, raced with long, reaching strides for the nearest tree. His steel-corded leg muscles strained out in bold relief, propelled him with whip-lash drive past the fringe of the circling pack. He was beyond them so quickly, that by the time the outer dogs gave cry, the White Lord was safe.

He catapulted into the tree, swept up into the middle branches. He caught his breath, rested before starting the journey to Helene. His head ached and his full strength had not yet returned. Now that he had extricated himself both from the pit and the dogs, he had his first opportunity to think about the murder attempt made on him. He angrily searched his mind for some clue to the attacker, but the mystery was beyond him. Ordinarily, he could have searched out the killer's spoor and tracked him down, but with the wild dogs milling over the area, this was impossible. The track of one man was difficult enough to follow under ideal conditions.

HELENE, disturbed by his long absence, was anxiously awaiting him. She hurried to him, her eyes swiftly searching out his head gash. He answered her flood of questions absently, turning over and over in his thoughts the incident at the trap. Why would anyone in this district want to kill him? Could it have any relation to the murder of Seymour's messenger?

"Let me bathe that cut," Helene said. "There will be time before the dogs come, won't there?"

"Yes," he answered, "but they'll be here soon."

As she tended the cut, suddenly she caught her breath. In her concern for Ki-Gor, she had forgotten. Now talk of the dogs brought back the memory with a rush.

"Oh, Ki-Gor! Those two men. The dogs will get them surely."

His thoughts chopped off. He listened attentively, his own problems temporarily forgotten.

"They were white men," Helene explained, "a tall, long-faced man and a heavy-set one who wore thick glasses. I saw them from the tree house, walking slowly toward the east. I was half asleep, but I remember wondering what they were doing out at a time like this."

From her description, Ki-Gor knew the men could be only Tull and Pieters. It was an action typical of the two bull-headed white men. He was irritated to see how little faith they had placed in his warning about the dog packs.

Helene saw his lips tighten, the ice gather in his eyes. For a moment the civilized veneer was stripped away and revealed was the granite-hard face of a primitive man. She thought at first he meant to leave the men to their fate. White men such as these with their arrogant faith in themselves and their firearms had caused him trouble and suffering times without number.

But he swallowed his disgust at the blundering outlanders. They were strangers, and he felt responsible for them. With an abrupt change of mood, he smiled, gave Helene a quick kiss to dispel her easily-read fears.

The jungle couple moved hurriedly along the route the men had taken. Game stam-

peded below them as the wave of dogs moved close. Looking down with a blend of fascination and horror, Helene saw a lean gray shape spring at a reed buck, hamstringing it with a crunch of its jaws. As the buck fell, whistling in terror, dogs sprang from every side, tore it apart while it still lived.

"We'll never reach them in time," she said hoarsely, seeing the men in the reed buck's place.

Ki-Gor said nothing, but grimly increased the pace. Then to their left, they heard a pistol crack. In the gathering din, they headed for that familiar sound. There were no other shots for a time, and they began to imagine the dogs had taken the men by surprise.

But after the pause, a medley of shots sounded. The firing was nearby now, and both Pieters and Tull had their guns in play. The reports rolled one after another, proclaiming how desperate was the men's situation.

The pack was closing in, darting at its quarry with growing fury. They could hear the snarls of the attacking dogs, the yelps of wounded beasts. A man cried out in stark fear.

THEN the jungle couple saw the cornered men. They were backed against a tree trunk, wild-eyed, their faces chalk-white. The small cleared space before them was littered with dead and dying dogs, but from the cover of the brush, gaunt shapes hurtled in constant, twisting attacks. The blood-cry of the milling pack rose in a marrow-chilling bedlam.

And in Tull's and Pieters' expression was the knowledge that there was no escape. Death in its most naked and horrible form clawed to reach them, and these products of civilization, these super-animals, babbled unintelligibly, while their insides dissolved in white-hot, liquid fear. A glance showed their cartridge belts nearly empty. There was no place for them to turn or hide, and always the dogs pressed closer. The pack knew with cruel instinct that its quarry was at bay.

"We're too late, Ki-Gor," Helene moaned. "We can't save them. It would be suicide to go down there."

Ki-Gor did not feel Helene's despair. In times of crisis, his mind excluded every-

thing except the problem to be solved, and his icy, single-minded calm had brought him through many a tight place. Now, even as he thought, he acted.

"That tree fork above them," he cried. "Come!"

Then he was plummeting down through the branches with dizzy speed to land on the low-hanging branch. He ran along the branch, leaped into the fork formed where the trunk separated into three huge branches. Twelve feet below him stood Pieters and Tull.

Ki-Gor called to them above the howls of the pack. Then, almost before they realized the jungle man was there, he stepped clear of the tree, dropped down in front of them. The White Lord glanced up, saw Helene waiting in the tree fork.

"How—how did you get there?" babbled Tull. He was drenched with sweat, trembling so he could barely speak. He fired at a dog and missed. "Can't die! Mustn't die now, but we're cornered. Thousands of them!" He moaned, then jerked erect, fired wildly again.

Pieters, though his face was the color of a fish's stomach, held up better than his partner. The burly man was deathly afraid, so concerned with his fate, that he never left off watching the dogs to glance at Ki-Gor. Spittle and thick, Teutonic curses dribbled from his lips, but the crisis showed he was the more deadly of the two. When Pieters' pistol spoke, it did not miss. He was intent on killing up to the end, fighting to the last to save his precious skin.

Ki-Gor decided he must get Tull to safety first. The man was near a total crack-up. "You're all right," Ki-Gor said. "Here, I'll lift you into the tree."

He bent to grasp Tull around the legs, toss him high so he could catch the tree fork. Helene was ready to help above.

Pieters' bloodshot eyes stabbed at Ki-Gor. For the first time, he realized what the White Lord meant to do. Then the utter selfishness of the man, the callous nature which lay buried under his stolid exterior, made itself known.

"Nein," he barked gutturally. "I go first, not that one."

He moved toward Ki-Gor, his gun leveling at the White Lord to enforce his

demand. The jungle man's face was immobile, only his eyes alive as he stared at Pieters. Disgust lay thick in Ki-Gor's stomach.

"You go when I say," the White Lord snapped harshly, "or the dogs can pick your bones! Ki-Gor, not that gun, is the only one who can help you!"

Pieters blinked. The gun in his hand wavered. His bluff had failed, and despite his desperation, he knew he must wait his turn. Profanely, he shifted his attention to the dogs, knowing his fate still depended on making every shot count.

The White Lord caught hold of Tull, braced his legs, and raising with an effortless thrust of his whole body, tossed the man high. Tull clawed at the rough bark, grabbed feverishly for a hand-hold, and Helene jerked him into the security of the tree.

Pieters hurriedly took his place in front of Ki-Gor, facing the trunk so he could grasp at the fork as he was thrown high. He was a large man, weighing easily over two-hundred pounds. But Ki-Gor moving with incredible swiftness before the dogs attacked again, did not hesitate. He leaned down, caught Pieters about the thighs, braced a shoulder against the man's rump.

The muscles girding Ki-Gor's broad back ridged hard against his bronzed skin, rippled in a wave of power as he pressed upward. The great muscles of his arms writhed in solid cables. His legs were two huge steel springs, levering up in an immense release of power.

"Ki-Gor! Look out!" Helene cried the warning with awful urgency, for as Ki-Gor turned his back on the dogs, one of them streaked forward.

BUT Ki-Gor already was lifting Pieters, and though he knew the risk he took, he did not stop. He threw his utmost strength into the effort. There could be no second try. The dogs would see to that. Pieters' bulky figure shot into the air as Ki-Gor's straining body snapped erect.

The White Lord was spinning then, twisting to face the fanged beast. He moved not as a man, but as a leopard cornered by its enemies. His lips curled back over white teeth in a snarl, and his

right hand was a speeding blur that rigged free his knife.

The wild dog leaped as the jungle man turned, its slaving jaws yawning, yellow eyes agleam with the death lust. And Ki-Gor, still moving with blinding speed, drove straight into the dog. Steel crunched against bone, seared through flesh and tendon. Impaled by the force of its own leap on Ki-Gor's knife, the beast gave one agonized howl as the jungle man laid open its whole chest and belly with a brutal lunge. The dog fell away in a twisting welter of blood.

His amazed watchers saw Ki-Gor keep straight on toward the pack. They did not breathe as they saw him run five, seven, ten steps. A wild dog drove at him. He twisted with a wrenching spin, and the red streak of his knife found the beast in the neck, ripped through its throat with a brutal tug. The jerking impact threw the White Lord to one knee.

Helene's muscles tightened to the point of agony. Ki-Gor was throwing away his life. What was wrong with him? Had he gone berserk as an animal will when there is no escape and its attackers press for the kill? She screamed at him, pleaded with him to come back.

He came to his feet, strangely sheathing the knife. He put away his only weapon, although a dozen "mad ones" lunged at him. He was turning then, showing his back to the dogs. But as the pack closed in, Ki-Gor launched himself with the lightning speed which no man in the jungle could match. Ki-Gor raced with all the bouyant, lifting power of his great body for the tree where the others waited.

He had taken the only means possible to reach the tree fork. There was no one to help him up the height as he had helped Pieters and Tull. The distance was too great for even Ki-Gor to make a standing jump, so he had been forced to go out toward the dogs far enough to achieve a running start.

It was a jump few men could make under ideal conditions, when they were rested and practiced, with no danger to deter them. Yet, with no single factor to favor him, Ki-Gor knew he must make the jump, must make it successfully or die. The frenzied pack swept close on his heels, and summoning the last ounce of strength,

Ki-Gor threw himself forward in a supreme effort.

He ran straight at the tree, and leaping high as he reached it, he utilized his driving momentum in plunging strides which carried him, still in a running position, up the face of the trunk. His speed and strength for fleeting seconds overcame the earth's tug. Up and up he went, while below him the dogs dashed themselves in pawing fury against the rough bark.

Then, as his upward drive was abruptly spent, the White Lord flung himself forward against the tree, his toes and fingers chiseling for holds on the bark. He clawed a precarious foot higher, while his life hung in teetering balance. Then he drove a forearm into the fork. Helene sprang to help him, gave him the leverage necessary to climb the last feet to safety.

KI-GOR leaned against a branch, calmly resting, saying nothing for a long time. Pieters and Tull, who seemed paralyzed by their experience, crouched in the tree, their breath still coming in hard gasps. Eventually, Tull found his voice.

"You saved our lives," he said, as though it were a fact he found hard to believe. "When I think what would have happened if you hadn't come!" His voice trailed off.

"We are grateful," Pieters said. He hesitated, his tongue running over his dry lips, fumbling awkwardly for what he must say. "Ahhh, down there, we were not just right. We were not ourselves. You—you will understand, won't you?"

He was apologizing for threatening Ki-Gor with the gun, but he did not come out openly and take the blame. He said "we", not "I". Either Tull had been so frightened, he failed to notice Pieters' cowardly act on the ground, or now that they were safe, he thought it best not to bring up the matter. Ki-Gor sensed a change in their relationship since his last meeting with them. Pieters was very plainly the dominant partner now.

"Looks like we're stuck here," Pieters commented unhappily.

"These are only the first scattered packs," Ki-Gor explained. "When they move on, we may be able to reach the mine."

When the dogs finally turned to other quarry, Ki-Gor helped the two men down.

Then taking the lead, he guided them along back trails and short cuts, with Helene ranging ahead of them in the trees to scout out wandering dog packs. Several times the winded Tull and Pieters were forced to clumsily crawl into the trees, wait for dogs to pass. But, eventually, Ki-Gor brought them to the mine, their clothes torn, their muscles trembling with exertion.

In the shade of a tree near Seymour's house, a table and four chairs were arranged. The men flung themselves into the chairs, shouted for Natu. The giant black quickly appeared. Except for one strange, almost startled glance at Ki-Gor, the native seemed to notice nothing unusual about their appearance.

"Sit down," Pieters urged Helene and Ki-Gor. "The least we can do is offer you something to eat and drink." He gave Natu brusque instructions.

When the table was laid with food, the jungle couple ate the civilized fare with enjoyment, for it had been many hours since their last meal. The two partners, however, barely touched the food. They were too upset by their experience to be hungry, and they devoted their attention to a bottle of whiskey which Natu brought.

"Where are Seymour and the dark-haired girl?" asked Ki-Gor.

Pieters set down his glass, twisted it in his fingers. He smiled awkwardly, a blend of frankness and embarrassment.

"Understand, he is an old man, and she too young to know better," Pieters confided. "I do not want to say it, but I will be truthful. They do not like you, so they stay out of sight."

Ki-Gor grunted at such childishness. Certainly the partners were doing their best to be friendly, especially Pieters. He became quite talkative, giving the closest attention to their wants. He obviously was taken with Helene's beauty and gave her numerous clumsy compliments. Tull was friendly, but the more he drank, the quieter he became.

THEY were finishing their meal when the gate rattled and a spear banked against it. A man's voice called to those inside to open up. The jungle couple instantly recognized N'Geeso's tones. The little man slid past Natu when the gate opened.

"Ho!" Ki-Gor cried, surprised to see the pygmy traveling the dangerous jungle trails. "Something is wrong to bring him out at such a time," he told Helene.

N'Geeso hurried to the jungle couple. He had run far and his breath came in tortured gasps. Only Ki-Gor, knowing how deep-laid was the natives' fear of the "mad ones," could appreciate N'Geeso's daring and nerve. But the pygmy had good reason for facing the jungle perils.

"The Masai are gone," he exclaimed. "Warriors with guns and spears lay in wait for them." He rushed on, telling how one Masai, left for dead, stumbled into the pygmy *kraal* with a bloody story of ambush.

"Tembu George is gone, swallowed up as by demons," he lamented. "My men are useless to help. You are the only one who can travel the jungle with the dogs running. I had to find you."

Then Ki-Gor understood. N'Geeso came at the risk of his life because Ki-Gor alone, among all men, could still follow the spoor before it grew cold. Even from the trees the track of twenty men, many of them wounded, could be followed. And but for that one iron-willed warrior wounded in the first rush made by the attackers on the tired Masai, Tembu George and his men would have vanished, their deaths attributed to the "mad ones."

Pieters and Tull saw a lightning change in Ki-Gor. They saw the leap of anger in his face, the deadly grimness in his manner. For the first time, they realized how dangerous this primitive blonde giant could be, and watching him they felt a chill in their hearts.

"You mean such things happen," put in Tull uneasily. "Men killed and kidnapped within a few miles of us."

"It's terrible," snorted Pieters. "Can't we help you?"

Ki-Gor's glance flickered over N'Geeso. The pygmy chief's luck might not hold good on a second solitary trip through the jungle.

"You can do one thing for me," the White Lord said. "Let N'Geeso stay here until I return."

"Gladly," Pieters said, and he looked at Helene. "Don't you want your wife to stay, too? That jungle's no place for a girl now."

But Helene quickly objected, that she wanted to go with Ki-Gor. Tembu George, also was her friend. The White Lord did not object, because he knew she would be safe in the trees. And, despite the friendliness of the partners, somehow Ki-Gor did not want to leave his mate at the mine. He could not fully accept this sudden friendliness they exhibited.

Ki-Gor's hand went to N'Geeso's shoulder. "I will find the Masai," he said, and his words were a grim pledge. Then he was gone, not knowing the price in bloodshed and pain which must be paid to make good his pledge. But had the White Lord known the price, he would have gone with the same grim haste.

Pieters watched the gate long after the White Lord disappeared, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, his pale-green eyes cold.

"Shall we drink to his success?" Tull asked his partner, and the lean man's laughter rose ugly and uncontrolled.

V

N'GEESO stood watchfully after Ki-Gor was gone. The smell of these white men was not good to him. Instinctively, he disliked them.

After a time, Pieters noticed the pygmy. His manner was no longer friendly and jovial. He was a totally different man from the one who had laughed with Ki-Gor.

"Get that murderous-looking creature out from under foot," Pieters ordered roughly. "I've got some thinking to do."

Tull motioned to N'Geeso, led the way to an abandoned hut. "Stay here! Don't be walking around in the way," he said.

From his association with Helene and the White Lord, N'Geeso had picked up enough English to make out any conversation in which he was really interested. But if he had not understood a word said, still there would be no misunderstanding Tull's emphatic and contemptuous gestures.

The pygmy chief gave no indication he understood Tull. He watched the white man with an expressionless face, weighing the pleasure of killing Tull against the difficulty of bearing Ki-Gor's anger. At last, Tull turned away, thoroughly exasperated, and strode back to his partner.

Being a chieftain, N'Geeso was used to giving orders rather than taking them. Furthermore, if a visitor came to his village he would be made welcome, given the run of the *kraal*, not treated as an unwanted burden. N'Geeso resented Tull's attitude, and the more he thought about it, the more he boiled.

Finally, his temper and the prying curiosity native to a pygmy would allow him to remain still no longer. He began to prowling about the mining camp. N'Geeso padded through the village without meeting a person. Keeping out of sight, he worked his way down to the mine.

In contrast to the day when he and Ki-Gor visited the mine, the sheds were a beehive of activity. Natives worked furiously, and watching them were hard-faced, burly blacks who shouted at any man who slackened his pace. The whole business had an odd look to N'Geeso.

The pygmy saw a number of other differences. Two elephants had been put to work, replacing worn-out motors with their tremendous strength. One elephant circled around and around a huge wooden drum, furnishing power to hoist the lift, while the other one dragged heavy loads of crushed rock. Most interesting to N'Geeso was the immense cauldron which was in use. It rested over the oven on a heavy cable, its molten contents seething and bubbling at white heat. At intervals, the cauldron was shifted over low, flat rock tables where the fiery metal was poured into small, rectangular forms.

N'Geeso was viewing the cauldron with fascinated eyes when he sighted Tull and Pieters approaching. Natu hung at their heels. N'Geeso automatically drew back behind a rock, crouched out of sight. The men stopped within a few feet of his hiding place.

"Looks good to see the mine going," Pieters commented.

"Yeah," answered Tull, "I'm glad to be through with that play-acting with old Seymour. We almost got him fair and square, at that, though. If that crazy girl hadn't got the notion Ki-Gor was making the trouble, he'd have given up and sold out to us for sure." He chuckled. "Funny how the old geezer got his back up and was going to fight Ki-Gor to the finish."

Pieters shouted an order to the man tending the oven, then picked up the conversation.

"I'm sorry we wasted so much time," he said. "We should have cracked down on him at first, told him we were here for uranium, not gold. No one would have missed Seymour and the girl any more then, than they will now."

As they talked, the story of their treachery unfolded. They knew from the first there was no gold in the mine, but Seymour's rock samples showed rich traces of uranium-bearing ore. That was the prize the two unscrupulous adventurers were after, uranium, the source of atomic power. The nation they dealt with would pay them a fortune for the ore,



The giant elephant lunged forward.

with no questions asked on either side.

As the easiest way to get legal title to the mine, they made everything possible go wrong with what Seymour thought was a gold-mining venture. They installed the most primitive equipment possible, pleading they could obtain no better, although all the time modern machinery was stored in a warehouse against the day when Seymour would quit.

They sent Marie on a "wild-goose chase" to the coast, both to get her out from underfoot and also to provide a reason for their climactic ruse. When she returned, as they knew she would, without machinery, they staged the scene where Tull offered to buy the mine. It would have worked, except that Marie convinced her father that Ki-Gor was the villain, and seeing a foe he could fight, he roused up and refused to sell.

After Marie and Seymour paid the surprise visit to the mine, walked in just after Natu had beaten a rebellious worker to death, Pieters decided to finish the business once and for all. He had Natu try to kill Seymour with an arrow as the old man descended from the mine, knowing Marie would blame Ki-Gor. Tull wanted Marie, and with the old man dead, he assured Pieters he could win the girl over. But Natu missed and Seymour sent the note to the district commissioner accusing Ki-Gor of the murder attempt.

Natu followed Nuyuda, killed him in cold blood in order to stop the note, for Pieters did not want to attract the commissioner's attention. But Ki-Gor again innocently upset their plans by finding the note, sending it on to the coast. When the White Lord visited the mine and Pieters learned the note would be delivered, he threw off his mask, and as soon as Ki-Gor left, imprisoned Marie and Seymour in the mine.

"We haven't entirely wasted our time," Tull pointed out. "Those natives that Seymour thought deserted have done plenty of work. That was a good stunt closing off the shaft containing the uranium ore and chaining those monkeys in there. They've dug a small fortune for us already."

TULL reached down, plucked a blade of grass, chewed it reflectively. He

cocked an inquiring eye at Pieters.

"How come you let Ki-Gor go? You know he'll follow the trail of those Masai straight to the mine."

N'Geeso stiffened behind the rock. This part of the conversation he understood completely. Pieters and Tull were back of Tembu George's disappearance. The pygmy chieftain's hand went to his knife, but he restrained himself, waiting to hear more.

"That's another mistake I can thank you for," Pieters declared roughly. "I told you to make sure all the wounded were killed, so there could be no slip-up. Those Masai are tough as horses. That's why I wanted them for the mine. No one would have ever suspected what happened to them if you had followed orders."

"But I tell you I shot every one of those devils in the chest before we left," Tull protested. "I don't see how that one ever got to the pygmy *kraal*."

N'Geeso's lips thinned in anger as he remembered the terribly wounded Masai warrior crawling from the jungle. The man was dying even as N'Geeso left the *kraal*, but he had lived long enough to start the hunt for his fellows.

"Anyway," Tull continued, defending himself, "you made just as bad a mistake. Look how you flubbed that job on Ki-Gor at the elephant pit!"

"You should thank me for that," Pieters growled. "I don't know how he did it, because I hit him hard enough to kill an ordinary man. And he fell right under that elephant's feet!"

Tull chuckled. Behind the rock, N'Geeso fought to contain himself as the full extent of the partners' evil-doing was revealed.

"That was really something," Tull sneered, "his saving us after we tried to kill him. He sure got us out of a tight spot. But I still don't understand why you let him walk out of here, knowing he'd follow that trail right back." His voice took on a mocking tone. "Surely, you're not getting so soft you feel a thing like gratitude."

Pieters gave a snort at his partner's words. A tense, strangely hungry look came in his face. His pale eyes dared the other man to laugh at what he was going to say.

"I want the girl," he blurted. "It will be easier if she does not know how he dies. It must be rigged to look like an accident."

Only because of Helene had he let Ki-Gor walk away from the mine. He needed time to figure a way in which to kill Ki-Gor without having Helene involve him in the murder.

"That's too much trouble for any woman," Tull told him. "They're all like these blasted natives. Use a whip on them and they'll come crawling to you. You don't see me going out of my way for this Marie, but after a few days in the mine, see if she won't be glad enough to come to me no matter what happens to the old man!"

Blind with rage, N'Geeso straightened from his crouching position. He meant to kill these men and his mind raced as he sought the best way to do it. As he stood up, his foot struck a small stone, sent it rattling against the boulder which concealed him. He held his breath at the noise, fearful of discovery, but evidently the engrossed men noted nothing.

"Maybe you're right," Pieters conceded. "In any case I mean to have Helene." His voice was feverish. "Never have I seen such a woman!"

WHILE Pieters rushed on his praise of Helene's beauty, the stolid Natu slowly walked off. The overseer disappeared from view behind the rocks. N'Geeso saw the black leave and breathed easier, for now, with surprise on his side, he knew he could dispose of the two white men.

The pygmy's hand went to his knife. He started to edge around the boulder, moving with utmost caution, his entire attention centered on the hated partners. With infinite care, N'Geeso slid the knife from its sheath.

Then, as N'Geeso tensed to spring, a tremendous weight struck him, bore him down. The wily Natu had heard the pygmy, circled to take him from behind. The huge black flailed at the little man, battered him about the neck and shoulders with a heavy club.

N'Geeso fought like a mad man. So great was his fury that the blows were hardly felt. Anger sealed his nerve ends, made him impervious to pain. But Tull

and Pieters heard the disturbance, heeded Natu's bull-like cries, and plunged forward to throw themselves on the sturdy chieftain.

With all his wild strength, N'Geeso could not stand against the three of them. Knife in hand, still struggling to turn the blade against these villainous men, he went down under their combined weight. Other natives hurriedly brought ropes, and N'Geeso, incoherent with rage, was tightly bound.

Pieters sent the other men away then, with Tull and Natu he stood over the pygmy. Tull drew back his foot, kicked the prisoner viciously. He had not forgotten the look N'Geeso gave on that first meeting when he ordered the warrior to stay off the lift.

"Eavesdropping were you?" Tull said, kicking the helpless man again. "Couldn't understand English a minute ago. Well, maybe you can understand a bullet in your belly." He drew his gun, sadistic pleasure lighting his face.

Pieters intervened. "No! Don't kill him. He will die just as surely in the mines, and every additional man means money for us."

Reluctantly, Tull bowed to the cold-blooded logic in his partner's words. But left to his own devices, he would have shot the pygmy. Somehow he feared this man, and in fearing, he hated him with a deadly venom.

With Natu carrying N'Geeso, the partners led the way to the lift. A native climbed atop the shackled elephant, started the beast in its endless circle around the drum, and as the hoist line tightened, the swaying platform started its journey up the cliff face. Until the wild dog run was over and the new machinery could be delivered, Pieters and Tull were doing everything possible to make the mine produce, and one of their opening moves was to press the elephants into service.

Into the section of the mine which they had claimed was closed off by cave-ins, they carried the pygmy. This shaft was narrow and winding, boring deep into the hill. In the torch light, it was clear the shaft was very old, the labor of endless generations of natives who had followed a once-rich gold vein through the hard rock.

The shaft finally began to widen, merging into a natural cavern. The cavern broadened and grew until the men stepped into an immense, cathedral-like room. Countless torches blazed in the vast, rectangular cavity, but they lighted only the floor, leaving the great heights of the room lost in darkness.

In this eerie, frightening place, more than two-hundred natives were driven to labor like cattle. Cracking whips laid open the back of any man who slackened, and the pace was one no human long could keep and live. Dust rose thick and choking in the dead place, blinding the workers, torturing their throats and lungs. Chains rattled and clanked above the bite of the picks on the rock. The men were shackled together in gangs of twenty by long chains fastened to leg irons.

"Put him with that big buck they call Tembu George," Pieters told Natu. "We'll keep Ki-Gor's friends together so they can get special attention."

N'Geeso was dragged to the group of laboring Masai, chained beside Tembu George. Only when the shackles were safely locked did Natu untie the pygmy's ropes. Then the overseer backed away, jerked a whip from a guard's hands.

"Son of a *dango*," Natu snarled. "This will teach you to crawl."

And the giant black lashed the pygmy mercilessly, beat him in a maddened frenzy. N'Geeso stood without flinching under the blows, and when he did not cry out, did not beg for mercy, Natu redoubled his efforts. N'Geeso was weaving on his feet when Pieters called a stop to the torture, but though his back was wet with blood, not a word had passed the tough, proud chieftain's lips.

"I will kill him for that," Tembu promised hoarsely. "I will kill him slowly, with infinite care!"

And N'Geeso, fighting against the blackness that gathered in his brain looked at his friend, saw the marks of torture on his back. He drew his lips into the semblance of a smile. "Wah! It will be too great a pleasure for one man! We will share it."

TULL and Pieters were disgruntled at the small amount of ore dug by the Masai. They compared their work with

that of the other gangs, found it hardly half as much as the smaller, weaker men produced. When the guards protested the Masai would work no harder despite constant beatings and threats, Pieters told them either to make the warriors produce or he would put the guards in chains themselves.

Then Pieters stamped to the next gang where Seymour and Helene were at work. The old man and his daughter were a pitiful sight, though they had been spared beatings.

"How is the mine owner today?" the burly partner jeered. "About ready to sign that paper giving me title to the place? You know you'll never see the light of day until you do."

Seymour's white hair was tangled, his face seamed and worn. But he held his thin shoulders erect, looked with contemptuous, unwavering eyes at the two men who had betrayed him.

"I'll never sign that paper," he said with slow distinctness. "Putting my name to that would be signing my death warrant. It's the only thing I have left that you need."

"Not entirely," put in Tull, his eyes running over Marie. "I'd think you'd want to get your little girl out of this place."

Marie kept her back to the two men. The experience of the past few days had changed her greatly. Her face and eyes, her very manner were different. She had been plunged into a world of cruelty and greed which she had not dreamed existed, and the very roots of her thinking were wrenched asunder.

"Don't forget my note to the commissioner," Seymour reminded Pieters, totally disregarding Tull's remark. "It did go through! The troops will be coming to see me. Then your little game will be up."

Pieters' answer came cruel and sudden, crushing the old man's final hope.

"When they come," he taunted, "you and Marie will be dead—killed by Ki-Gor, as I will tell them. Tull and I will be very sad, but then your note said he was trying to get you. And Ki-Gor will have been killed by the wild dogs, so the troops will make out their reports, and that will be that."

Seymour clenched his fists, knowing he was at the sadistic bully's mercy. The old man fought to control himself, to keep from giving the pair the pleasure of seeing him prodded beyond endurance.

But Pieters had one last slap. "Don't really worry about dying, though. We're going to keep you alive until you beg to sign that paper. Much as you may want to, you're not going to die until I own this mine legally."

Seymour's control snapped. Pieters had stopped near as he spoke, and now the white-haired man leaped for him. With strength born of desperation, he clenched his fingers around Pieters' throat, hanging on like a leech as the younger man tried to tear him loose. Pieters' face was purple before Natu dragged Seymour away.

The heavy-set man staggered back, startled by the violence of the attack. Then as he recovered, anger came, ugly and uncontrolled. He jerked the whip from Natu, beat Seymour to the ground with the butt. With loud curses, he lashed the old man with all the strength in his gross body.

Then he tossed the whip aside, glared around him. Tull laughed, as he always did when his partner's composure was broken. The lean man's eyes went again to Marie. She was looking at him, but instead of hate, there was a strained, oddly blank expression on her face.

"You don't have to stay in this hole," he said, studying her. "Say the word and you can come with me. Rotting here won't help him," he continued, indicating Seymour, "but maybe if you wanted to be smart, you might do him some good."

Slyly, he watched her, dangling the bait before the inexperienced, distraught girl, playing on her desire to help her father. That queer expression was still on her face. Then as Pieters watched in amazement, Marie nodded woodenly.

Tull's lips split in a contemptuous smile. With a wave of his hand, he motioned a guard to undo her leg irons. Quickly, Marie was free. She passed her father without a glance, went to Tull with the slow steps of a sleep-walker.

the girl. His glance went to Seymour, a cruel glitter growing in his eyes. The old man was getting to his knees, dazed and broken as he saw his daughter leave with Tull.

"Bring him along, Natu," Pieters said suddenly, rubbing his throat where Seymour had choked him. "I wouldn't want him to miss this love feast."

He told the black to bind and gag the father, carry him to his house. Tull would take the girl to the table under the tree, and from his window Seymour could see, yet not be observed himself. Pieters was obsessed with the desire to get full title to the mine and this was a further move to make his former partner sign it over.

"When you've seen enough and are ready to talk business, I'll stop Tull," he promised glibly.

Pleased by his triumph, Tull brought out a fresh bottle of whiskey, advised Marie they were due a celebration. He lounged under the tree, his voice growing louder and more boastful with every drink. He told Marie she was a smart girl to cast her lot with him.

Pieters sat by smirking, taking little part in the conversation, but savoring the knowledge that Seymour, guarded by Natu, was being forced to watch his daughter make up to her new-found friends.

Marie's thin dress had been ripped and torn in the mine. Her white skin showed in a half-dozen places. Her black hair fell free about her shoulders, framing the youthful beauty of her face.

Tull's eyes devoured her hungrily. He edged his chair closer, his restraint slipping away. As though in a hypnotic state, she sat very still under the lean partner's lustful scrutiny.

Pieters drank silently, toyed with a native bush knife he had picked up in Seymour's house. He was savoring the scene with a pig-like enjoyment. He smiled as he conceived of a way to heighten Seymour's torture and humiliation.

"Why not dance for us, Marie?" he asked. "Let's make a real party of this, and Tull's a great one for watching a pretty girl dance."

"Say, that's a good idea," Tull put in thickly. "Come on, Marie, give us a little entertainment."

PIETERS remained behind as his partner swaggered from the cavern with

Unsmilingly, she looked at Pieters. Was it disgust that stirred in the depths of her black eyes? If so, the feeling was quickly masked.

"I don't know anything about dancing," she said. "The only dance I ever did was a kind of sword dance in a college play once."

"That's good," Pieters urged. "Go ahead and do it."

Her cheeks reddened at the way the men's glances followed her. She had an embarrassed awkwardness as she backed a few yards away from Tull. She took off her shoes, smoothed the torn dress over her hips, but she made no effort to repair the gaping rent which exposed her right leg, the ripped bodice which fell low over her breasts. Her breath came fast.

Then slowly her hips began to move. Marie's full lips parted and gradually the undulating motion of her body quickened. Her arms came into play, and she began to move, twisting and turning about an imaginary sword driven in the ground.

Tull was fascinated. This was a side of the girl he had not suspected. He squirmed in his chair, his face darkening with the pound of blood. And Pieters, too, edged forward, wetting his thick lips with the tip of his tongue. His pale eyes behind the thick spectacles were gross with his feelings.

But Marie stopped abruptly. Her arms fell to her side. The men protested, disappointed that she should stop just as she really got into the dance.

"I can't do it without a sword," she said, frowning. "The dance is built around the way you handle the sword." She started to return to her chair.

"Wait, Marie!" Tull pleaded, unwilling to let her stop. He glanced about, seeking a way to coax her to resume. His eyes fell on the long bush knife which Pieters held. He took the knife from his partner, pressed it into her hands. "Here," he said. "You can make this do."

She took the knife, drove it into the ground, began her dance again. This time greater abandon was in her movements. She swayed and crouched and spun like a temple wanton. Her eyes grew unnaturally bright and she was possessed with a wild excitement. She drew the knife from the ground, spun it in a glit-

tering arc around her beautiful head.

She whirled in a widening circle, the knife singing with the speed of its passage. Every line of her lithe, firm body was revealed. The men leaned forward tensely, devouring her with their eyes.

Then, with stunning suddenness, Marie halted before Tull. He did not understand for a moment. Both he and Pieters were too tightly held in the spell of the dance to realize how completely they had been trapped.

Marie's face was a blazing mask of hatred. She swung the knife high overhead, bracing for a two-handed blow which would split Tull's skull. This was the opportunity she had played for from the moment she left the mine. For this, she had willingly degraded herself, borne the insults of these men, paraded her beauty to blind them.

These men, in their brutal move to ruin and kill her father, had protected themselves against every contingency except the desperate cunning born of a girl's despair. Only by killing was there hope that her father might live. And the partners, stunned and paralyzed, were helpless to stop her.

The sun gleamed on the raised knife. Marie lunged forward, threw the weight of her whole body into the downward blow. Tull saw the blade drive toward him. He threw his arms up, screamed in craven terror.

And Pieters, immobilized by shock and fear, gaped in horror, unable to move in this moment of bloody accounting.

VI

SILENT and unseen as the wind, the jungle couple worked their way up the rock and bush-covered slope to the wooden stockade around the mine.

Ki-Gor returned, and this time he meant his arrival to be unannounced. The track he and Helene followed led straight to the mine. The Masai warriors, those who survived the ambush, were held prisoners somewhere within the stockade.

Grimly, he faced the truth. Seymour, Pieters and Tull had tricked him from the first. Even now, Tembu George and N'Geeso might be dead because he had swallowed the lies of these treacherous

white men. He was still vague as to the full extent of the outlanders' crime, but that blood-spattered trail told him enough.

Ki-Gor carried a vine looped at one end. He came silently to the wall, threw the loop over the top of one of the upright logs. He listened briefly, then climbed with easy grace. Helene caught the vine and he drew her up after him. They dropped to the ground unobserved.

Ki-Gor's whole person was altered. He was dangerous as a stalking lion, a fearful, hair-trigger mechanism geared to kill with lightning speed. Every sense was attuned to danger, for he had not only himself, but also Helene to protect.

Searching for the mine owners, he headed for Seymour's house. He circled behind the house, treading softly. Helene padded at his side. Hearing voices, he looked beyond the structure, saw Tull and Pieters at the table, with Marie dancing before them.

The girl's full attention was given to the dance and the two fascinated men were oblivious to everything except her. It would be simple to surprise them, and since he regarded the younger partners as more dangerous than Seymour, he veered away from the house. The men sat sidewise to him, with Marie facing them.

Ki-Gor moved swiftly toward them, knowing any moment Seymour might spot him from the house. He was only a few paces from them, running with long, gliding steps, when he saw Marie break off her dance, wheel the long knife high overhead. He saw her lunge toward Tull, with amazement realized she meant to kill the man.

The White Lord wanted no jackals' quarrel to cheat him. He wanted to wring the truth from these people, then see that proper justice was done. Furthermore, in case of attack by their followers, Tull and Pieters would be valuable hostages.

The knife was driving for Tull's head when Ki-Gor struck. With a hawk's darting speed, he flashed across the cleared space, struck Marie aside. The blade chopped deep into the table beside Tull. Then Ki-Gor jerked the girl away, disarmed her.

"Let me alone!" she cried hysterically. "Let me kill them! They are evil men!

You don't know what you're doing."

His grey eyes surveyed the partners. His appearance snapped the paralysis which held them. Tull trembled with the nearness of his escape, sweat drenching his brow. Pieters breathed like a man who has run a long distance.

"Thank heavens," Tull said shakily. "That crazy girl almost killed me. You saved my life."

Marie struggled to break away from Ki-Gor. She raged at him, screaming incoherently that they were madmen, that now her father would die.

"She's out of her head," Pieters said. "She—she had too much to drink. Always drives her crazy."

He struggled to draw his addled wits together, explain away the girl's actions. Natu was watching from the window and if only he could stall Ki-Gor for a few minutes they would be safe. The White Lord's chill eyes made him uneasy and he noted the careful watch the jungle man kept on them.

Ki-Gor held Marie with his left hand balanced the bush knife in his right. Tull and Pieters were uncertain how much he knew, but something in the way he gripped the knife told them not to move a finger toward their guns. They remained seated, playing for time.

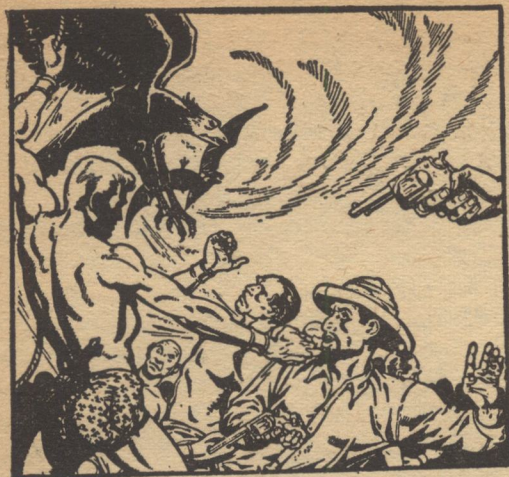
"Where are the Masai?" Ki-Gor's voice was a grating file. "Talk! And the one who lies chokes in his own blood!"

Pieters licked his lips, his pale eyes refusing to meet Ki-Gor's steely glance. "It was a mistake. Some of our men got in a fight with them, brought them here without our knowledge."

Ki-Gor flicked the blade up so the point was level with the burly man's throat. The jungle man's mouth thinned. Pieters was very near to death.

But Pieters saw Natu creeping forward with infinite stealth, gliding up behind Ki-Gor and Helene. If he could occupy the White Lord a little longer, he would be safe. He summoned his nerve, spoke in a louder voice.

"All right," he said, "if you must know, we did grab those blacks and bring them here. What is there to get excited about? What difference do a few of these blacks make? If they mean so much to you, why, of course, we'll turn them loose."



He was talking rapidly, his voice beligerent.

Natu was behind Ki-Gor then, his approach covered by Pieters' loud talk. He remembered the humiliating beating Ki-Gor had given him and he leaped for the White Lord with a deadly, personal hate. The length of wood he held crashed down on Ki-Gor, drove twice more against the jungle man's head.

The White Lord pitched forward, dragging Marie with him in his fall. He lay sprawled on his face, utterly limp.

HELENE saw Ki-Gor fall under Natu's onslaught, saw the huge native lean to batter her mate again. The fierce, wild fury of a lioness protecting her own swept the golden girl. She gave no thought to herself, to the calamity that had befallen. The world in that instant contained only the fallen blond giant and the black who crouched over him.

Savage emotions borne in the dawn of the world exploded from her subconscious. In an instinctive reflex, she flung herself at Natu. There was strength in her firm, slim body, the flaring, volcanic strength of a deadly female animal. She struck Natu with her full weight, drove her small fists into his face, her knees bunching to crash into his chest.

The surprised black was thrown over, fell away from Ki-Gor. Helene rolled with him, her nails raking his face, and as they slid over the ground, a rock came under her hand. Her fingers closed on a stone and she lifted it, smashed at Natu's skull.

But the black had recovered, began to

fight back. He wrenched aside desperately, and the blow thudded on the ground within an inch of his head. Helene fought to kill him before he could bring his superior strength into play. She was a writhing fury astride him, striving to bring the rock down on his hateful face.

And with her frenzied strength she might well have killed Natu except for Pieters' intervention. Pieters rushed to them, caught the jungle girl's arms, pulled her away enough for the native to twist free. Then Tull hurriedly brought ropes and bound both Helene and Ki-Gor. Marie sat on the ground, sobbing. He did not trouble to tie her up.

Pieters surveyed the three prisoners, breathed a sigh of relief and satisfaction. The last obstacle in his path was removed. He had everything he wanted and no one remained to oppose him. He threw back his head and laughed.

Helene lay bound at his feet. In his conceit, he had hoped somehow to trick her, bring her to him willingly. Now her eyes spoke her hate and contempt, but in his triumph, he was untroubled that she knew the truth. His glance lingered over her curved body.

"She's as primitive as that white ape," he said. "I think I'll enjoy a woman like that for a change." There was cruel pleasure in his voice.

"You'd better carry a club and whip if you're going to keep her around," commented Tull dryly.

Pieters chuckled, prodded Helene in the side with his toe.

"A few lessons will take that out of her," he said. "And the first example can be her husband. He's too dangerous to have around, and, anyway, I want his death to look like an accident."

Then he detailed a scheme as cunning as it was inhuman. He told Natu to take Ki-Gor into the jungle, suspend him from a tree so that he would hang a few yards above the ground. He cautioned Natu to tie him securely so he could not escape when he revived.

Helene bit her lip until it bled, struggled to hold back the cry that wrenched her throat. Pieters meant to feed Ki-Gor to the wild dogs, and so that he would die slowly and painfully, he wanted him suspended above the ground so the dogs would

have to leap to reach him. She sickened at such sadism.

"We'll cut him down in a day or two and show his remains to the pygmies," Pieters boastfully explain. "They'll think the dogs got Ki-Gor, Helene and their chief, and no one will suspect us."

Natu beamed admiringly at his master. He lifted Ki-Gor and hurriedly set off, anxious to execute the plan. He threaded the jungle warily, afraid to venture too far. The dogs were pouring over an ever-widening region and already the first packs penetrated as far as the mine. Soon no man might set foot in the forest and live.

Before Natu hoisted the jungle man above the trail, he slapped him into consciousness. Then he pulled the White Lord up, mocked him with the horrible torture he would undergo as the leaping dogs ripped away his flesh. But Ki-Gor hardly heard the taunts, and Natu had gone before the White Lord's mind began to function.

The howl of the dog pack, distant at first but sweeping ever closer, actually roused him. It seeped into him, twisting and growing insistently until it splashed in a chill flood over his sick and dizzy brain. He came alive then to find himself dangling helplessly in mid-air.

And as the knowledge of his utter failure rose in him, he went mad with fury. Ki-Gor strained and tore at his bonds, twisted and fought with insane strength. He struggled until he choked for breath, until blood ran from his raw wrists and his body shivered with weakness. Only then did sanity return to him. Natu had done his work well. There was no escape for Ki-Gor.

THOUGHTS came to him as he hung there waiting for the gaunt, grey dogs, thoughts of N'Geeso and Tembu George, of the trails he had known, of the countless good things of his life. But mostly he thought of Helene, of their life together, of her soft, yielding beauty. She was the substance of his existence, and now because of his failure, he left her in the brutal hands of two renegades.

A snarl caught Ki-Gor's attention. He saw a leopard stalk into the open, stare with yellow eyes. The beast crouched, tail lashing, its cruel mouth opening. The



venomous eyes measured for the spring.

The baying of the pack rose very close. An animal screamed as it went down under the dogs. The leopard snapped erect, its ears reading the sound. It snarled nervously, paced a step closer to Ki-Gor, crouched again.

Three antelope burst down the trail, darted aside as they saw the cat. Terror rode the jungle on every side. The underbrush whipped under the passage of fleeing animals. The leopard spun, nerves wire-taut as it caught the dog scent, and with a liquid bound the cat was gone.

Ki-Gor knew the end was near. Within seconds, four dogs drove under him, sped on down the trail. They failed to see or smell him in their frenzy. Soon two more came stealthily from a patch of reeds to his right, stood watching him. Their jaws were red with fresh blood. The main pack was near.

One dog growled at the hated man-scent, flung to the attack. It raced at Ki-Gor, lifted in a tremendous leap. The White Lord twisted aside, drew his legs up, kicked at the blunt-nosed head. It was the only defensive measure his bonds would allow him. He knew he must die, but even without hope, he was impelled to fight.

His kick landed, sent the dog whirling away. Then the other one was catapulting upward, and Ki-Gor lunged his dangling weight away from the reaching fangs. He had a chance to elude them when they

came singly, but soon they would leap together. The dogs gathered themselves for another leap, one crouching on either side of the White Lord.

A lion's shattering roar ripped at Ki-Gor's ears. The huge, golden beast materialized suddenly. It was a male in the prime of life, great-muscled and sublimely confident of its power. A sleek lioness padded at its heels. This most powerful of the killer-cats refused to be routed by the wild dogs, and in the confusion it grew ill-tempered and dangerous.

The lion charged as soon as it sighted the two dogs. The express-train charge put it on top of the dogs before they could dodge. A massive paw ripped the belly from one and then the lion was tumbling the other in a bloody heap.

As the great male raged over the ground, tumbled its prey yards beyond Ki-Gor, a man stumbled along the trail. Charles Seymour gave a relieved cry when he saw Ki-Gor. He was so intent on reaching the jungle man, he gave not a glance to the lion which had been joined by its mate a short way down the path. He held a bush knife in his hand, carried another stuck in his belt.

The old man awkwardly cut the White Lord down, slashed the ropes at his wrists and ankles. Excruciating pain flared through Ki-Gor's numbed arms and legs as circulation was restored. He was unable to rise for a minute, and Seymour knelt beside him, begged his forgiveness.

The mine owner hurriedly explained how he was forced to watch his daughter from his window. When Natu left him to attack Ki-Gor, the old man escaped, and picking up two knives slipped out of the stockade.

"I hid in the jungle and followed Natu when he carried you here," Seymour explained, tears bright in his eyes.

"Wah!" exclaimed Ki-Gor. "The mad ones come!"

The White Lord rose unsteadily, took the extra knife from Seymour. More than twenty dogs cascaded into view, erupted at the two men. Ki-Gor stepped slightly in front of the white-haired man, and then as the dogs struck, his knife wove a silver wall before them.

The cramp went out of his body as he fought. Seymour's eyes widened at the

blonde giant's cold ferocity, at his utter lack of fear. But gradually the pack pressed close and only Ki-Gor's lightning speed and unusual skill with the blade kept them from going down. New dogs were joining the leaping mass and the attack grew more furious.

Ki-Gor could have eluded the dogs had he been alone, but he was unwilling to desert Seymour, so he fought on, watching the odds building dangerously against them. Then, suddenly, two strange allies tipped the scale of battle in favor of the men.

The great golden lion and his mate watched the fray begin from a place of concealment. The huge male was unable to stomach these creatures that desecrated his hunting ground. He pounced into the pack with cyclonic fury, his mate following him to battle. The raging thrusts of the killer-cats took an awesome toll, and abruptly the wild dogs scattered.

The lion's unblinking eyes blazed at Ki-Gor across dead and dying dogs. Then the golden beast threw back its head, roared its victory to the world. It made no move to attack the White Lord. For the first time in hours, a smile touched Ki-Gor's lips, a salute to brave allies.

SWIFTLY, he led Seymour toward the mine. Larger dog packs would wash down the path, fierce masses which even the killer-cats could not master. As they walked, Seymour told Ki-Gor the full story of his partners, explained about the secret cavern.

"But how can we go back?" Seymour asked. "What can two men do against so many?"

"There must be a way to reach Pieters and Tull," Ki-Gor answered grimly, "and I will find it. If only I could free the Masai, they would make short work of the guards."

Seymour knew it would be suicide to try to pass the stockade. If only there were a way to enter the mine without going through the camp. The thought stirred his memory, reached back through the years to when he first found the abandoned mine.

"I may have a way to do it!" he exclaimed. He vaguely remembered a half-choked shaft at the rear of the hill. "I

remember following it quite a way into the hill, but I was alone that day, so I turned back."

Ki-Gor wanted to wait until dark before trying to scale the stockade, and since he was restless, he welcomed Seymour's suggestion that they investigate the old shaft. When they finally found the place, they had to clear away stones and brush in order to wedge through the entrance. Carrying torches, they set out down the corridor. The shaft was small and as they followed it deep into the hill, it began to open on a succession of square rooms. The rooms were bare, thick with the dust of countless years.

The tunnel ended abruptly in a round chamber. Seymour held his torch high, showing that the shaft came to a dead end. The light flickered on a rock projection directly across from him. Seymour sighed in dejection, leaned wearily against the wall. But Ki-Gor's eyes were caught by the rock figure, and curious to know why the walls of this room were not like the others, he walked nearer.

It was a crude idol, tall as a man, resting on a circular base. The idol's arms were outstretched, and holding his torch low, Ki-Gor, brushed from them the deep layer of dust. The arm glowed yellow. It was gold. Inspection showed the whole idol was made of the precious metal.

Seymour was immediately interested. He thumped the arm with his knuckles, trying to judge whether it was hollow. He caught hold of the arm, pushed it as a further test of its solidity.

"Why, it's solid gold, I believe," he declared, turning to the White Lord.

But Ki-Gor's attention was not fastened on the idol. He looked at the crack which had appeared in the wall when Seymour shoved the arm. The idol had given ever so slightly, moved a little to the left.

"It moved," Ki-Gor said thoughtfully. "It fits into a passageway like a door." He threw his weight against the idol, and stone ground against stone as it swung outward, revealing a corridor.

The White Lord went first along the narrow way. Hardly twenty paces further on he stepped into another room, a large, round one with a high arched ceiling. He saw quickly this great hidden



room had been a place of worship or a treasure room of the long-dead tribe which originally worked the mine. A passage led out of this room also, so their hopes of reaching the mine rose.

Seymour stared wide-eyed at the objects crowding the walls. There were idols, human and animal figures, weapons, vessels, a thousand different implements and figurines. And everything before their eyes were fashioned of gold.

"We've found treasure beyond price," he exclaimed, his voice trembling with excitement. "In a hundred years, I couldn't get one-tenth this much gold out of the mine. I can't believe it."

He hurried about inspecting the various objects, while Ki-Gor watched him wonderingly. The jungle man never ceased to marvel at the fever which gold started in white men. Glancing idly about, Ki-Gor saw on a high rock shelf a long line of objects which did catch his attention. They were strange golden birds with great wings.

He took one of these curious bird figures down, expecting it to be heavy, but found it extremely light. It was made of skin stretched taut over a frame and painted with gold solution. Ki-Gor admired the perfect workmanship of the bird, realizing it had played some part in religious rites.

"Wah! Here is something to see," he said, handing the bird to Seymour.

The old man took the object, surveyed it inattentively since he felt for Ki-Gor's benefit he must show interest. He was anxious to get back to the figures of real

gold, so after a cursory glance, he nodded, pitched it away.

But instead of falling straight to the ground, the bird glided gracefully across the room, landed upright. Its light and perfectly balanced weight and its broad wingspread made the bird a veritable glider.

Ki-Gor was deeply interested, sent the bird gliding across the room several times. He was anxious, however, to move on, and he dragged Seymour away from the treasure room. They continued a short way along the passage, gradually feeling the movement of air against their faces.

The White Lord grew more cautious. Faint on the stale air was the scent of men. He sensed, rather than saw, a vast abyss before them. He stopped Seymour, stood listening to thin, far-away voices.

"Wait here!" Ki-Gor said, handing the torch to his companion.

He went forward out of the circle of light, waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. A deeper blackness began twenty paces in front of him. He wondered if it were a crevasse which would bar their progress now that he knew they were so very close to the mine.

He covered the few remaining steps and looked down. He caught his breath at the spectacle. Far below him labored the slave gangs of Pieters and Tull. He was on a rock balcony overlooking the huge cavern where the prisoners dug the uranium ore.

SOFTLY, he called Seymour, but to his surprise, the whisper was amplified many times, rolled out louder in the balcony than normally spoken words. The rock formation acted as a vast megaphone. He had Seymour put down the torches before approaching so there would be no chance for the guards to spy them.

"We can never reach them," Seymour stated, disappointed that they should be stopped within sight of their goal. "Anyway," he consoled himself, "we'd be helpless against so many guards."

Ki-Gor did not give up so easily. He reasoned that the builders of the treasure room would have fashioned a way to reach the cavern floor. He searched along the balcony edge, found grooved steps chipped in the rock at one point. He swung out in the darkness, climbed down the rock

face far enough to satisfy himself the steps continued to the floor. Then he returned to the balcony.

He picked out Tembu George's massive figure, saw the pygmy chieftain chained beside him. Helene and Marie were not among the workers, so apparently Tull and Pieters kept the girls with them in the camp. Ki-Gor's blood boiled with anger. Civilized restraints ripped away, and like the golden lion who fought beside him in the forest, he wanted to leap among these mongrel guards and kill without mercy.

He was savage and primitive in that moment, and in his overwhelming desire to have done with delay, his mind raced faster, drew on the jungle cunning which had kept him alive through countless dangers. He thought then of the superstition ever alive in the black men, the dread, dark fears that followed them from birth to death.

And of all the shadowy terrors that haunted them none was greater than Gimshai, the Eater of Souls, the dread Walker in Darkness whom no man could propitiate, who no man could oppose.

Ki-Gor thought of Gimshai and a plan came to him, a plan to so frighten the guards that he would have time to climb down the rock face, reach and free the Masai. With those great warriors at his side, he would confidently face all the power Pieters and Tull could throw against him. Swift as the thought, he led Seymour back to the treasure room.

"The great birds," he said pointing, "bring them all to the cavern."

Together they carried over fifty of the fierce-beaked golden birds to the balcony, their labors speeded by the crack of whips below them.

"Sail them out over the cavern," Ki-Gor told Seymour. "Then stay here until it is safe for you to climb down. If I fail, try to reach the pygmy village. You will be safe there, and when the dogs are gone, they will deal with Pieters and Tull."

What foolish scheme was this with which the jungle man thought to free the prisoners? Seymour wondered if hardship and disappointment had sapped the White Lord's judgment, but obediently he began to glide the broad-winged birds into the darkness of the upper cavern. The White

Lord launched two hands of birds, then stood up and cupped his hands around his mouth. His words when he spoke rolled out like the voice of doom. Tremendously amplified, his deep tone was an eerie thunder reaching down through the darkness.

Fear reached quick hands into the hearts of the listening men. Workers and guards alike froze in their tracks. What was this thing that happened? What horror beyond the knowledge of men hovered in the blackness above, filled the cavern with its monstrous voice?

"Hear me, men of evil! Hear, servants of the cruel white men, and let terror fill you in the little time you live!"

Ki-Gor's voice was the measured, hollow sound of death.

"I, Gimshai, the Eater of Souls, curse you. I grow sick with your foulness. Now as you listen, I send the Ghost Birds to gather your rotting souls. From the darkness I send them that you may know endless, sucking torment."

And as Ki-Gor spoke, the great birds came on silent wings, came in long, swooping glides, floated and circled in the upper level of light.

THE natives saw the gleaming wings and bedlam broke out among them. Men fell to the ground, gripped by convulsions. Others screamed, covered their eyes against the gleaming apparitions. But most of the natives were obsessed with a desire to flee. The prisoners, hobbled together with chains, thrashed about wildly, growing ever more twisted.

And the guards, the ones to whom Gimshai had spoken directly, went mad with terror. They threw away their weapons, fought to get through the struggling mass of prisoners, reach the corridor and escape.

Only the Masai stood firm. These iron men were touched with fright, but even in the face of the Eater of Souls they refused to be routed. Like huge, deep-rooted trees they waited for whatever fate Gimshai might decree.

Yet two among that struggling horde were not afraid. They were Tembu George and N'Geeso. The great White Lord and his mate had told them time and again that Gimshai was but a word in the mouths of men, and knowing the jungle couple did not lie, they believed them.



This strange thing that happened they did not understand. How it was done or who did it, they did not know. But somehow it was the work of men like themselves, and the men did not live that they feared. And calmly they listened and waited while the blacks around them went mad.

The moment he spoke the last words, Ki-Gor swung over the balcony, went with a monkey's agility down the cavern wall. Seymour continued to launch the golden birds at regular intervals, hoping to maintain the confusion until the White Lord reached the floor. Down through the darkness Ki-Gor climbed, down into the light of the torches, and then he dropped the last few feet to the ground.

The long knife was free in his hand as he ran toward the group of Masai. He saw a guard fighting to get through the group of prisoners which enmeshed him. Ki-Gor plowed into the mass of men, flinging them aside like dolls. Then his left hand went to the guard's shoulder, spun him about, and he struck the flat of his blade against the man's skull. The White Lord caught the guard as he sagged, ripped the keys from his waist. He plunged on toward his friends, and for the first time fear-crazed men began to see his towering figure.

When he had come to the mine before many of them had seen him and hope had risen in them. But Pieters had outwitted Ki-Gor, had sent Natu ahead to make the men laugh and sing so the White Lord would not suspect their slavery.

Mysteriously, now, this greatest of war-

riors appeared in their midst, appeared at the very time Gimshai dipped low to strike the guards. The prisoners saw him and like a prayer of salvation the cry swept through the cavern: "The White Lord! Ki-Gor comes!"

And Natu, fleeing toward the corridor heard the cry and stopped. He turned to see the White Lord reach the Masai, heard Tembu George shout joyously, "Aaaiieeee! I see now the face of Gimshai. Free us quickly and indeed the guards will ride the canoe down the River of Death."

Shackles fell from the legs of the Masai. The battle lust was on them. The invincible White Lord was at their head and beside him strode N'Geeso and Tembu George, mightiest warriors of the Congo. Shrill and piercing rose the Masai blood cry, and they leaped forward, terrible in their anger, awesome in their joy of battle.

Natu saw what the White Lord had done, knew then the trickery by which the guards were deceived. But it was too late to undo the damage Ki-Gor wrought. Already the Masai hefted weapons discarded when the guards fled. Shackles of the other prisoners were being unlocked.

The huge black felt the rot of fear in his belly, and he raced to reach the mine mouth. If he could get down the cliff face, warn Pieters and Tull, there might yet be hope. By trapping the prisoners on the ledge, they could starve them into surrender.

Ki-Gor saw Natu dart into the corridor. With a cry he rallied the Masai and they swept in a body after the overseers and his men, snatching torches from the walls as they ran. A few guards who still had weapons turned at Natu's order to fight, but the renegade was wrong when he thought they could hold the narrow corridor.

Three abreast, the White Lord, N'Geeso and Tembu George struck them, and in the dark shaft the guards died, fell in a choking rush of blood under steel that would not be denied. And before their jerking bodies were stilled, Ki-Gor was speeding after Natu again.

He ran with huge, reaching strides, poured the full measure of his strength into the pursuit, straining to catch Natu before he could warn the mine owners. Nearer and nearer he drew to the fleeing

overseer, but before he could reach him, daylight shone on the black man and Natu raced out on the ledge.

KI-GOR heard Natu and the handful of guards with him screaming to arouse the camp. Then the White Lord was on the ledge and he saw with a sinking heart that the lift was raised. He had outdistanced Tembu George and N'Geeso, and now if he waited for them, Natu would escape, taking the lift down. Ki-Gor launched himself at the six black men, meaning somehow to hold them until the Masai arrived.

With a jackal's cunning, Natu saw his purpose. The overseer in a surprise move, shoved his men away, jumped on the lift, screamed to the operator to lower it. Calmly, he left his men to their fate, hoping they would delay Ki-Gor while he escaped.

Ki-Gor drove into the guards with a bull-like rush. He chopped half through one man's body, ripped open the belly of a second. He spun to parry the thrust of a third guard, met the attack with a furious clash of steel. But his blade gave under the battering, snapped at the hilt. With a cry of triumph, the men rushed to slaughter him.

Natu, ten feet below on the swiftly dropping lift, heard the victorious shouts and lifted his head, a cruel smile lighting his face. But the smile changed to gaping astonishment. The White Lord when his blade broke, turned and dove from the cliff, hurtled straight down at the swaying platform.

The least misjudgment and Ki-Gor would crash to his death on the rocks below. His hands reached for the crossbar, great muscles ridged across his back, tensed for the shock. Then with an agility born of years of tree travel, he caught the bar, dropped lightly to the platform facing Natu.

Natu crouched like an ape, long arms dangling at his side. Hatred ripped his face into an inhuman mask. His final ruse had failed. He must kill now or be killed. There was no escape from the platform.

Ki-Gor met the black's vicious lunge, and the two men locked in a death struggle. They fought chest to chest, two giants who strained and battered on the

precarious square of wood. There was no room for Ki-Gor to maneuver, no space to match his speed against the black's brute strength.

In the first test of strength, Natu's confidence rose, and his ugly mouth sneered.

"I am strong, white man," he jeered. "You cannot match me!"

He heaved his weight hard against Ki-Gor, battered the jungle man's stomach with his right hand. This was the maneuver Ki-Gor wanted. The White Lord gave suddenly before the black, fell backwards on the platform. As he fell, he jerked hard at Natu's left arm, drove his knee into the overseer's paunch. Carried by his own lunge, the black hurtled over Ki-Gor, went screaming and clawing through the air. Natu shot head first over the edge of the platform, plummeted toward the rocks.

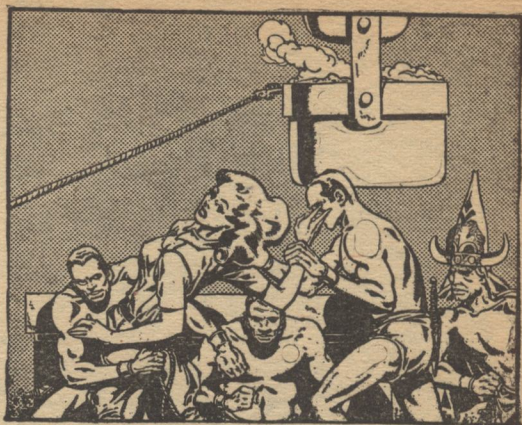
PIETERS and Tull, aroused by the noise, rushed on the scene just as Natu toppled to his death. The partners shoved Helene and Marie, their hands tied, before them. They saw the prisoners swarming on the ledge above, and with shocked, unbelieving curses, recognized Ki-Gor on the lift.

Pieters turned to the man who operated the lift. The native sat on the elephant, driving the great beast slowly around, continuing to lower the lift as Natu had ordered. The burly partner shouted to him to raise the lift, pull it up to the ledge again.

The elephant was not yet well trained, and since it was easier to lower than to raise the heavy platform, the beast did not willingly stop. While the operator prodded and kicked the elephant, trying to turn him, the lift continued to drop.

Tembu George on the cliff above saw the elephant finally stop. In another minute Ki-Gor would be low enough to drop to the ground. The Masai chieftain raised a bow taken from a guard, sighted an arrow at the man on the elephant. It was a long shot, but Tembu George knew how much depended on his accuracy, and the knowledge steadied his hand. Calmly, the Masai leader released the arrow and the native dropped.

As the man toppled from his perch, the elephant stood stock still. The sharp hook



no longer urged it to pull against the lift's weight. Slowly, the elephant took the easiest course, began to lower the platform again. Pieters and Tull knew that Ki-Gor would be on them in seconds, and also they saw the Masai had found the steps leading down the cliff face. The big fighting men led by the tiny N'Geeso, were swarming down the cliff.

Pieters then played his last desperate card. He picked up Helene, carried her to one of the flat rock tables where hot metal was poured into bars. He threw her roughly across the stone, then quickly grabbed up Marie, ranged her beside Helene.

Tull tried to delay the Masai while his partner worked. The lean partner began firing at the descending men. He was unable to shoot at Ki-Gor, because the jungle man lay flat on the platform.

The cauldron rested over the oven, glowing redly in the terrific heat. It was filled to the brim with molten metal. Pieters wheeled the simmering cauldron along the overhead cable until it was directly above the two girls. Tull grasped the smaller cable attached to the side of the cauldron. This second line was used to tip the huge container and pour the fiery metal onto the table. Tull pulled the line taut, stood ready to splash the white-hot flood on Helene and Marie.

"Hear me, Ki-Gor!" bellowed Pieters. "Stop your men and surrender to me or the girls die!"

But the White Lord had dared too much to let victory slip from his hands now. The platform hovered close above the evil partners. The White Lord came erect with a speed too fast to follow, catapulted



dropping his gun as he strove to throw the bloody corpse from himself.

The White Lord reached the stone table. With swift, steel-strong fingers, he snapped the cords around the girls' wrists and ankles. He jerked them up, shoved them away out of danger, spun to finish Pieters. He smiled grimly, hearing the ringing shouts of the Masai as they pounded in pursuit of the guards.

But Pieters was climbing to his feet and he held in his shaking hand the loaded pistol taken from his dead partner's holster. He knew death raced at him as the Masai closed in, that this time there was no escape, yet Pieters aimed deliberately at the man who had caused his downfall.

And Ki-Gor saw the gun raise, realized in making certain the girls were safe, he had sacrificed his life. He could never reach Pieters in time. In winning, he lost. Pieters' finger tightened on the trigger.

ABRUPTLY, a pygmy war cry split the air. A knife hurtled past Ki-Gor, sank to its hilt in the burly partner's chest. Pieters jerked with pain and his shot whipped harmlessly past Ki-Gor's ear. Then the jungle man jumped at the renegade, but Pieters side-stepped, and the White Lord drove past him. N'Geeso, his only weapon gone in the attempt to save his friend, watched helplessly.

Ki-Gor pivoted, struck a crushing blow in the man's face before he could shoot. Pieters reeled backwards, fell on the stone table. Blood ran from his mouth, but desire to kill the jungle man sustained him, kept him alive. He raised to his elbow to shoot.

Marie watched this cruel man struggle

from the lift. The prodigious leap threw him straight down at Tull and as the White Lord dove he gave a shattering cry.

Tull jerked his head up, saw the blond giant hurtling down on him. The urge for self-preservation was too strong. He failed to pull the cable. Instead, he dropped the line, staggered back fighting to draw his pistol.

Pieters saw Ki-Gor strike his partner with crushing force, smash the gun from Tull's hand. His face worked spasmodically as he watched the two struggle in wild, fierce combat. In another moment, Ki-Gor would finish Tull, would come for him. Pieters looked about him, saw that his guards were deserting, already running as the first Masai reached the base of the cliff.

Pieters clawed his gun from its holster, the light of madness flared in his pale green eyes. Ki-Gor was choking Tull to his knees, holding the lean man as a shield before him. Pieters leveled his pistol, fired wildly at the two men, knowing certainly he would kill his partner, but hoping that one bullet would find the jungle man.

Ki-Gor felt Tull's body jerk as the slugs struck him. Then Pieters' gun clicked on an empty chamber and he was fumbling to reload. Ki-Gor raised Tull's lifeless body, threw it with terrific force at the crouching renegade. Pieters fell under the blow, slid over the rocky earth,



back from the shadows of death to kill once more. She saw Pieters raised to his elbow, and then she ran forward, raced to grasp the small cable lying where Tull had dropped it. She swung her weight on the line, tugging at it with all her strength.

The huge cauldron above Pieters tilted, spilling a thin stream of liquid into his face. He screamed in agony. Then the whole cauldron flipped over. Flaming metal flooded from the container, cascading over the table. There was one horrible, reaching shriek—and then the thing left on the table no longer had flesh or substance.

Ki-Gor went to the sobbing Marie. He touched her arm gently, looked down at her without speaking. His eyes spoke silently, though, of his gratitude, and of his admiration for her courage, and recognizing these thoughts of the jungle man chased the lines of horror from the girl's face.

Then Ki-Gor turned from her and pointed to the nearby cliff. Standing there, high above them, silhouetted against the sky, was Marie's father. The old man waved to them, and the girl, her face en-

tirely clear now, her eyes alive with happiness, waved back and ran to meet him.

Ki-Gor smiled as he watched the reunion. Then he became aware of someone approaching. He turned, and saw Helene hurrying forward. She came into his arms, holding him closely, telling him she had thought he was lost to her forever.

The White Lord kissed his golden mate tenderly, and placing his arm about her, began to walk toward the stockade.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor!" The cry swelled and grew until the air shook with it. The natives swarming on the cliff and on the ground shouted the name. "Ki-Gor, greatest of warriors!" they cried in grateful recognition of the man who saved them.

"Come," he said sternly to N'Geeso, "we must stop Tembu George and his Masai before they tear the place apart. I think Seymour will want to use it again."

N'Geeso grinned, knowing the true reason Ki-Gor hurried away was to avoid the natives who crowded close to thank him. The White Lord, though he stood fast in the face of any danger, went to any length to avoid thanks and praise. Happiness in the faces of these men he had freed was thanks enough for him,





Even the dark held terrors for Takut.

Reluctant Warrior

By DUNCAN ZERR

Takut was fathered by a Chinese and mothered by an ape, and therefore should have been a ferocious warrior. But Takut's heart was a rabbit's, and even the dark filled him with terror—and now he was alone in the forest, surrounded by female orang outangs and *Kachins* with square-edged knives.

THE heat of Burma's late afternoon sun pressed heavily upon Indok and the surrounding jungle, stilling even the jungle birds, yet Takut's thin brown body shivered from icy fear as he reached

the edge of the village. Wet mud from the rice fields, splattered by his racing feet, clung in lumps from his turban to his toes. A swarm of half-starved mongrels fought for offal thrown into the trail from

one of the huts, so he forced himself to a walk as he skirted the snarling *melée*. His heart pounded madly against his ribs while he fought the overwhelming desire to look back over his shoulder to see if the Great Tiger had decided to pursue him.

Breathing in short, painful gasps, he passed the sacred *bo* tree under which Butah, the one-eyed hunter, sprawled in sleep. Takut eyed him warily and hurried on. An ancient buffalo suddenly snorted the flies out of its nostrils, and the explosive noise sent Takut into a spasm of renewed terror. With a shriek, he fled down the trail with the swarm of mongrels following at his heels in full cry.

The chief's hut, squatting impressively on its stilts, arose before him. At the same instant, a ponderous bulk stepped into his path. His brain screamed a warning as he tried to swerve, but it was too late. He struck a mountain of flesh, bounced back and fell sprawling in the dust.

"Pig! Filth!" a voice thundered with rage. "Offal of a jackal!"

Nyemdong, the chief! Takut groveled, paralyzed with fear. He, a lowly Kachin and a slave, had violated the person of Nyemdong! Allah be merciful! Allah, may the death be a quick one!

The chief sat in the trail, a huge lump of flesh and fat in white jacket and shorts. His nostrils quivered with uncontrolled rage, while the gold crescents in the lobes of his thick ears rattled with his panting breath. He lumbered to his feet, his face black with rage.

"Kachin dog!" he squealed. "Take thyself to Butah, my brother, and tell him I send another Kachin dog for the Great Tiger to feast upon. Go, before I kill you and feed you to the dogs."

With a wail, Takut struggled to his knees. "Mercy, Blessed One," he implored, sobbing in horror. "Thy mercy! Thy mercy!"

Nyemdong's flaming eyes reflected no mercy. "May he have better fortune with you tied at the stake than he had with the other Kachin dog," he rasped. "Anyhow, it will cost less to use you for tiger bait than to lose another buffalo when Butah hunts tomorrow."

Praying fervently that Allah would open up the earth and swallow him, Takut saw himself tied to the stake while Butah and

the villagers lay ready to despatch the beast with sharpened bamboo poles and *parangs*. The Great Tiger was wary and very wise. When Butah used Kum Gaw, the Kachin who was covered with yaws and coughed very much, the tiger broke the slave's neck with a blow and returned swiftly to the jungle. Takut's entrails crawled at the memory. He and Kum Gaw had been stolen at the same time from Kachin mountain tribes and grew up together as slaves for Nyemdong. Nyemdong's toes thudded against his ribs.

"Get up, spawn of a toad," the chief hissed. "Get up!"

Takut cowered lower in the trail, whimpering like a beaten mongrel. Then, he remembered. "Your buffalo, Blessed One," he pleaded; "it is dead. The Great Tiger has killed it."

Nyemdong's squeal of anguish was ear-shattering. "You pig! Why did you not offer yourself to the Great Tiger?"

"But, Blessed One, I did not wait," Takut blubbered. "I ran to tell you."

"*Aiyah!* I am a poor man!" Nyemdong wailed, clasping his big head between his hands and rocking it from side to side. "*Ya Allah!*"

"Be merciful, Master," Takut wailed in turn, but Nyemdong had forgotten him. The chief was staring toward the far side of the village.

TAKUT looked and promptly forgot his master's rage. A buffalo charged toward the village, weaving from side to side and bawling in fear and pain. One long sweeping horn was torn from its head, leaving a bloody socket. Streamers of torn flesh whipped about while a blanket of hide, ripped loose to reveal its ribs, hung almost to the ground. Takut whispered. It was the buffalo that the Great Tiger had attacked!

"Stop it!" screamed Nyemdong to the village at large, but the chief's voice was drowned in the swelling uproar of the village.

Takut saw Butah, the one-eyed hunter, leap to his feet with his *parang* bared, but the hunter took himself and his weapon to safety by leaping for the lower branches of the sacred *bo* tree. The buffalo suddenly stumbled and fell to its knees, then rolled over and leaped to its feet. At that

moment, Butah fell out of the tree in front of the wounded animal. For a brief moment, it faced the one-eyed hunter. Then, with a renewed outburst of bawling and bellowing, the buffalo twisted about and plunged forward, heading straight for Takut and Nyemdong.

Before the Kachin could move, the buffalo was upon him, its massive shoulder hurling him aside. Nyemdong's wild cry rang in his ears just as the chief's hut crashed and splintered. Takut picked himself up and, after one terrified look, raced through the village with the buffalo in pursuit.

Butah reared in his path, and they both crashed to the ground with the buffalo's hoofs missing them by inches. Takut twisted and squirmed frantically under the hunter's evil-smelling body, then lashed out with both hands and feet and was rewarded by Butah's howl of pain. He scrambled to his feet and raced between two huts for the jungle. Butah was two strides behind him, screaming curses and swinging at Takut's head with his *parang*. A mongrel settled the issue by darting between Butah's legs and upsetting him.

The matted vines and undergrowth closed about Takut, but not for long. Smashing frantically through them, he burst into a little-used trail leading northward and raced along it. When he dared looked behind him, there was no sign of the hunter. He tried to force himself to a slower pace, but fear drove him on. When the trail skirted the mangrove swamps, he fled headlong, for he remembered that the Great Tiger frequented the tall reeds and grasses in search of stray buffalo.

When the trail took a sudden turn to the east and threatened to become a slow climb, the thought of new dangers set Takut's heart thudding against the walls of his chest. Towering over the jungles around Indok were the mountains, and mountains meant green-clad tribesmen who killed for sport. The men of Indok spoke of them with awe, how they killed with a square-edged knife that they called a *dah*, and how their women, who were female *orang outang*, fought along with their men. They spoke of these ferocious tribesmen as being Kachin who were fathered by a Chinese and mothered by an ape.

Takut halted in his flight as his trembling legs suddenly grew weak. He was Kachin, he remembered, but doubt sprang into his mind. He had never been ferocious. Even the dark held terrors for him, while the dogs and the children of Indok pursued him to frighten him. Terror mounted within him once more as he stumbled blindly on. It was better to die by a Kachin's *dah*, he moaned to himself, than return to Indok and Nyemdong's wrath.

After a few steps, Takut jerked erect at the snap of a branch. Panic gripped his vitals with an icy grasp. Then a peal of laughter rang in his ears. A woman! A female *orang outang*! *Ya Allah!*

"*Hai, tuan!*"

Takut's tongue was glued to the roof of his mouth as he turned to look into a pair of large, brown eyes—eyes like those of a mouse-deer. His staring eyes flicked to her feet, then back to her face. This was no female ape, his stricken mind told him. She was dressed like a man, but silver ornaments decorated her jacket and she wore a silver lotus blossom at her throat. There was no hair upon her face, while her lips were full and red. Two heavy braids of hair, into which silver wire had been woven, hung down over her shoulders.

Takut's jaw sagged and freed his tongue. "Hullo!"

She laughed until the clusters of silver rings in her ears rattled. "Why do you run?" she asked after a while. "Does a tiger chase you?"

Takut tried to answer while her eyes began mocking him, but only a croak issued from his throat.

"Answer her, pig," a voice roared from behind him, and a big hand twisted him about. "Answer, or do I slit your throat and give you another mouth?"

HIS knees suddenly turned to water, but the hand kept him from falling. He stared in horror at the face before him and tried hard to speak. The green turban told him that this was a Kachin, but beyond that he couldn't think. The Kachin had a split nose that smeared across both cheeks, while the scar ran down his upper lip, halving it to reveal two huge teeth.

"Who are you?" the leering Kachin

shouted, digging his fingers into Takut's shoulder. "Why are you running? Talk before I run my *dah* into your belly."

"I—I am Takut," he half-whispered. "I run from Nyemdong and Butah." The fingers loosened. "They would use me for tiger bait."

"Ha!" the Kachin bellowed. "So! It is true what I have heard! A Kaw trader tells us that this Nyemdong used a Kachin for tiger bait. Good! Tomorrow, I kill Nyemdong and this Butah."

The girl spoke up. "It is getting dark, Zingh Taw. Better to eat now." She turned to Takut. "My brother looks fierce and makes loud noises. I am Amai. Eat with us."

Takut's face brightened, for he remembered he had just a handful of cooked rice when the sun was high. With Zingh Taw at his heels, he needed little urging to follow the girl.

They burst into a small clearing that seemed to over-flow with green-clad Kachin, many of them horribly scarred from fighting. Takut's heart skipped a beat when Zingh Taw gave him a push that sent him sprawling into their midst. Instead of leaping upon him, as he expected, they scowled with annoyance and ignored him. An old woman stirred a cooking pot that gave off odors which made his mouth water and his stomach growl. He sat back upon his haunches and gazed hungrily at the pot.

They ate, scooping food from the pot with their fingers as they squatted about. Trembling from both hunger and fear, Takut fought for a place at the pot squeezing in between the girl and an old warrior who was too busy to notice him. Once Amai found a choice piece of meat and held it out for him. With a snort, Zingh Taw snatched it from her fingers and thrust it into his own mouth. Takut cringed under her unspoken scorn. When the pot was emptied, he was glad to move to the edge of the clearing and lick his fingers. It mean he wouldn't be within range of her mocking eyes as she moved from Kachin to Kachin, joking about their bravery.

Zingh Taw wasn't done with him. "Now, with your belly full, you can tell us about Kum Gaw," he growled.

Takut stammered through his story, tell-

ing about the Great Tiger. When he related how the other Kachin slave met his death, the Kachin warriors howled for revenge. The old woman wailed.

"Kum Gaw was her son," Zingh Taw grunted. He stared hard at Takut for a long moment. "So you are a Kachin, eh? Takut!"

Fear was a cold hand that gripped Takut's heart. He bit his lip to keep from whimpering, for he knew what the gruesome-looking Kachin was thinking. A man could call another Takut in the same breath he called him a dog. A cowardly one!

Zingh Taw fingered his halved lip, thinking hard. Then his eyes brightened. "So you are a Kachin! Well, tomorrow we shall see."

A sudden chill swept Takut. "Tomorrow?" he half-whispered.

The Kachin leered. "Yes, tomorrow. First, we hunt down the Great Tiger. Then we go to Indok to kill this Butah and that fat Nyemdong. *You* will kill Butah. Look! Here is my *dah*—I have another. If you fail—" He snicked a forefinger across his throat. "*K-k-k-k!*"

The night was almost gone when Takut dared to lift his head and look about. For hours he had lain upon the ground while his body cried for sleep, but stark fear kept him awake. In the dim light, he could make out the Kachin curled up in sleep. He tried to identify Zingh Taw among them, carefully at first, then frantically. He broke into a cold sweat when a sleeping Kachin turned and groaned. Then his mind screamed a command. *Escape!* it commanded. *Escape!*

Bathed in cold sweat, he arose with chattering teeth. His toes struck the *dah* and, instinctively, he reached down to make certain. He heard a man's cough back in the direction of the trail and his fingers closed convulsively about the knife's hilt. The sentry! He had forgotten that even the Kachin guard against prowling tigers.

"Allah, guide me," he implored wordlessly as he took the first step toward the jungle. Another sleeper muttered and tossed. Takut bit his tongue to check the gurgling scream in his throat. "Ya Allah!"

The trees closed mercifully behind him as he fled.

Dawn found him crouching in the tall grass at the upper limits of the mangrove swamps, stiffening with alarm every time a swamp bird took flight. He tried to think, to plan, but there was always the vivid picture of the leering Zingh Taw ready to cut him down. Once he looked down at the *dah* in his hand and vaguely wondered why it was still with him. Suddenly a burst of wild chattering shattered the stillness—monkeys in flight, he told himself—and the jungle birds added to the din by screaming. *Allah!* A man was near! Or the Great Tiger!

SWEAT poured down his cheeks as he fought the desire to flee, but terror took command. He leaped erect and saw a Kachin standing just a few yards away. A long-legged bird croaked and took wing nearby, and the flapping sound of its wings lent speed to his legs as he fled through the tall grass.

The Kachin's blood-curdling yells followed him as he plunged wildly through the grass and in among the mangrove. Vines tripped him and whipped his body while thorns slashed his arms and legs. His fear-maddened mind told him that he must be heading for Indok, but his legs carried him on. A low-hanging branch suddenly appeared before his sweat-blurred eyes as he plunged against it. A sharp pain, followed by a great flash of lights, exploded within his head.

When Takut opened his eyes, he was on his back with the sun shining down from directly overhead. He moaned, for he knew he had lost all the distance that he had gained. Zingh Taw must surely be behind the next bush, he thought hysterically as he picked up his *dah*. Whimpering in terror he resumed his stumbling flight.

His chest burned while his swollen tongue seemed to choke him. He knew he was almost to Indok now, for the mangrove suddenly thinned out and he collided with the dyke of the first rice field. Takut turned to the west and stumbled toward the reeds between the fields and the jungle. The reeds were but a few yards away when he saw a goat tied to a stake. His brain screamed a warning, but it was too late. Men from the village of Indok leaped into the open, screaming

their fury and waving sharpened bamboo poles. Tiger hunters!

"Kill the Kachin dog!" one shouted, but a rasping voice roared for silence.

Takut stared without feeling while Butah, the one-eyed hunter, approached with his *parang* held menacingly. "Better a Kachin than a goat for tiger food," he gloated. "Stand—"

The jungle blasted a throaty scream. "*Darah!* Blood! Blood for a Kachin!"

Zingh Taw! Takut squealed and would have run, but the one-eyed hunter stood in his path. Butah swung his *parang* in a chopping stroke just as Takut threw up his arm to ward off the blow. There was a clang of metal against metal, and a numbing shock traveled down his arm to his elbow. His *dah!* He glanced at it, then looked up in time. Butah was raising his arm in preparation for another blow. His black features twisted with fierce hate.

Zingh Taw howled once more, almost at Takut's heels. Frantically, the Kachin slave swung his *dah* upward, aiming it for Butah's blade. The square-edged chopping knife struck solidly, but not with a clang. The hunter took two backward steps and collapsed with a fountain of blood spurting from between his shoulders where his head should be. There was no head! Fear-stricken voices took up a cry. "Amok!"

Takut was conscious of fleeing men streaming past him. Safety from Zingh Taw lay even in Indok, his terror-stricken brain told him, and he raced after them. A mountain of flesh waddled into his path and squealed. Takut tried to thrust him aside and Indok's chief rolled to the ground like a wounded buffalo. A hopeless whimper welled up in Takut's throat as he stumbled to a halt. His *dah* was half-buried in Nyemdong's fat belly. With a moan, he slipped to the ground as a swift darkness stole over him.

The buzzing in Takut's brain became Kachin voices, while the pounding drum was his heart. He stirred painfully and moaned. Rough hands quickly hauled him to his feet as he tried to think of a prayer to Allah for a merciful and swift death. Kachin tribesmen ringed him and tried to out-shout each other, while the fierce light of battle still blazed in their eyes.

Fingers of iron dug into his shoulder and spun him about.

"*Hai, Kachin!*" Zingh Taw roared, and slapped Takut upon the back with a blow that staggered him. The split-nosed Kachin turned to the tribesmen. "Silence, dogs! Look upon a *real* Kachin and weep, for he has killed two of our enemies while you would lie in wait to cut them down from behind." He pounded Takut's back once more. "Speak up, little rooster, and tell them how you killed Butah and Nyem-dong."

Takut's knees were turning to water until he glanced down to see the *dah* still clutched in his hand. Gore covered the blade and his hand. More smeared the length of his arm and was liberally splashed upon his chest and the shreds of his jacket and shorts. His stomach surged, stinging his throat with gall. He swallowed hard.

Zingh Taw gave a bellow of pleasure.

"See! A *real* Kachin! He brags not about his brave deeds."

The grinning Kachin tribesmen howled their approval just as Amai, the girl, pushed her way through them to stand before Takut. For a moment she eyed him disdainfully, but Zingh Taw took a hand. Striding quickly to her side, he cuffed her out of the way.

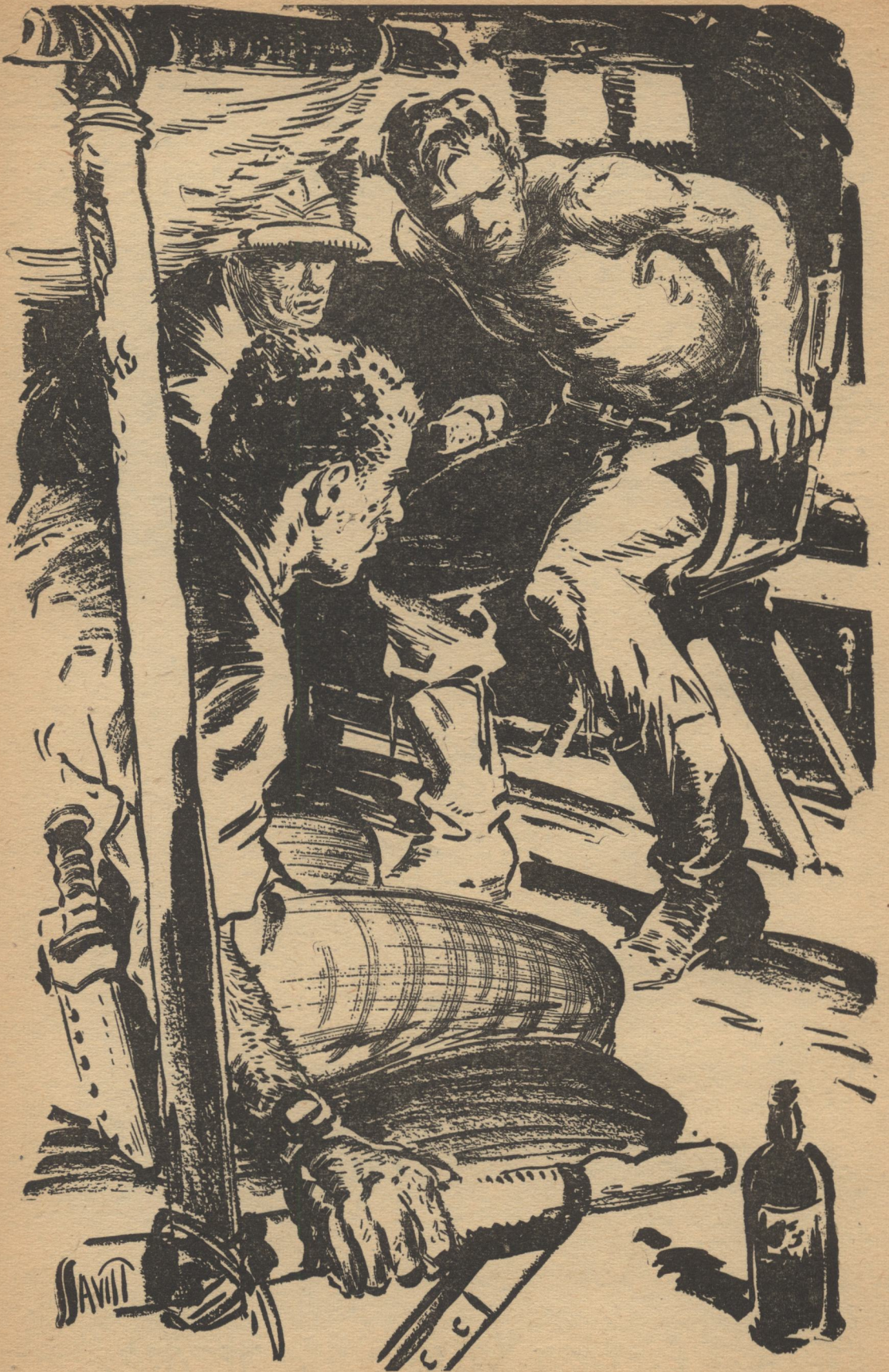
"Now to find the Great Tiger," he roared. "But save him for our little rooster. *Bangun! March!*"

Takut opened his mouth to protest. But then he looked around the circle of fierce fighters, and noted the awed respect in every face. It was a strangely exhilarating feeling—a warrior among warriors! He saw Amai, but her eyes no longer mocked him. They were like those of a mouse-deer—wide in breathless wonder. He shut his lips tightly, threw out his chest, and strode manfully after Zingh Taw,



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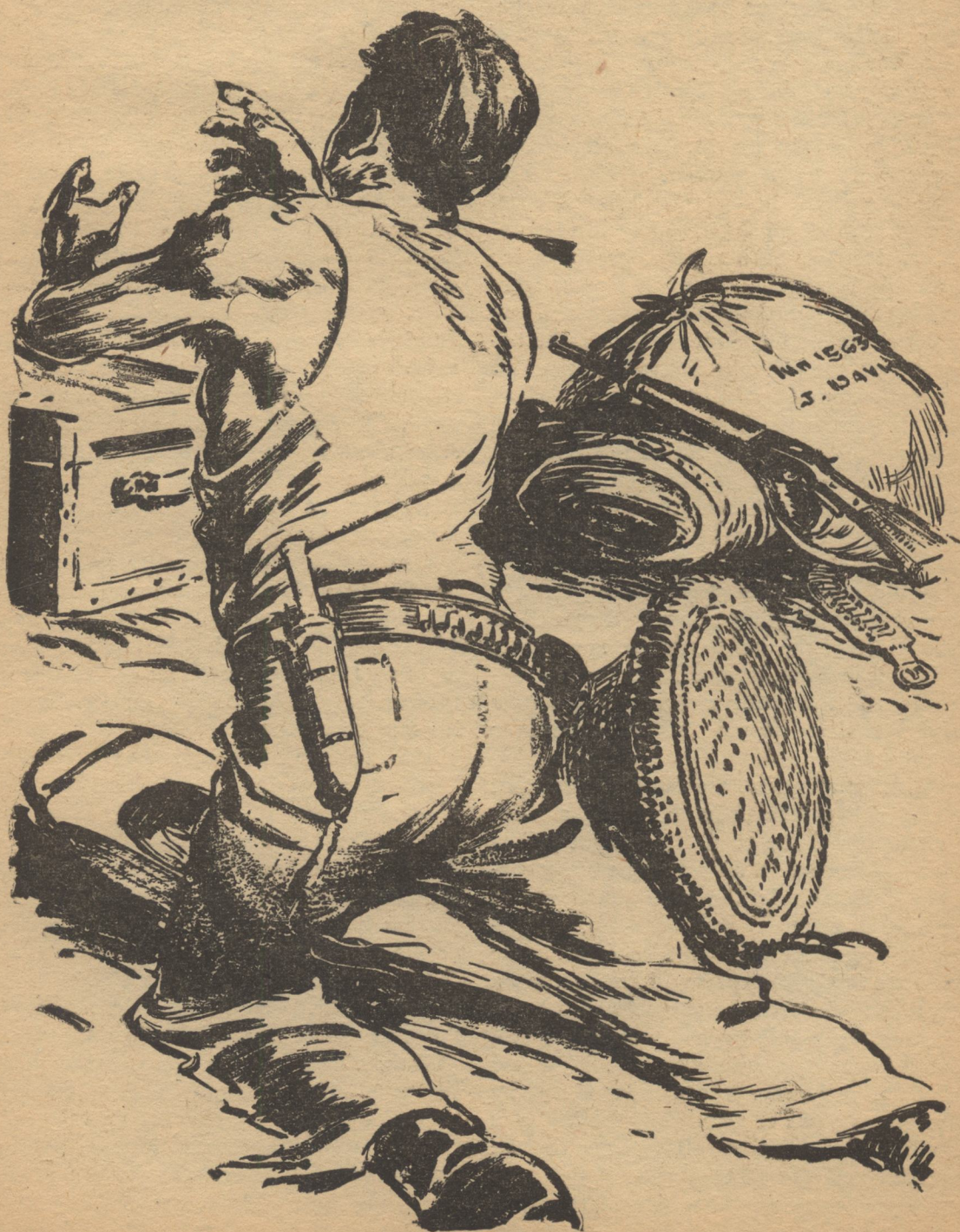


He fell face-forward in the dirt at Huley's feet.

JUNGLE JINX

By JOHN C. ROPKE

Walt Davis had come to the steaming, insect-ridden jungles of Africa to lose a hoodoo. And there, fighting invisible leopards and a witch-doctor's taboo, he found . . . the greatest jinx of all.



IT was a long, drawn-out cry of a native in agonizing pain that brought work to a stop on the road. The busy snorts of bulldozer motors ceased suddenly. Mobile cranes, their cables taut, chugged to soft silence, leaving great buckets of Congo earth poised in mid-air. Sweating natives dropped their shovels, grabbed for their long spears, and ran in the direction of the sound.

The new cinder road under construction, a ten foot slice through the heart of the jungle, came to an abrupt halt at the wall of intertwining brush. It was here that the natives gathered, milling about, standing on tip toe to peer suspiciously over each other's shoulder.

A low chant brought Walt Davis from his tent. His long legs moving in that unhurried stride of his, he approached the swaying groups. Most of his crew were coast boys, with their khaki shorts and gay colored vests. But Walt noticed, as he approached, the powerful figures of some two dozen bushmen grouped together a short distance from the rest of the crew. There was no vestige of civilization to these wild blacks. Naked, except for their loin skins of hammered bark and the monkey tails hanging from above the calves of their muscular legs, they led the eerie chant.

Walt pushed his way quietly through the ring of chanting blacks and paused at the fringe of the jungle. At his appearance the native chant lowered, then ceased entirely, and the gently swaying bodies grew still. A deep hanging silence stole over the brush.

Walt saw it then, the big bulldozer that stood half concealed in the brush a short distance from the road. The bright yellow paint of the pusher's steel frame was clearly visible even in the semi-gloom of the jungle. But even more noticeable, in contrast, were the ugly red stains in the driver's cab, and the flow of fresh crimson that trickled down the gay colored sides.

A native boy hung half out of the cab, head down, limp arms dangling. Walt saw that the body was torn almost in half by the angry claws of a prowling leopard. He studied the scene carefully, sensing the watchfulness of the blacks. One false move, he knew, the least sign of repulsion or fear, and the blacks would take to the brush. He would have to make a show of

it, he realized, or he'd be left alone to build thirty miles of jungle road by himself.

HE turned as a big native pushed from the brush and stood beside him. It was Koloba, Walt's gang boss. Solemn faced, the powerful black waited patiently for the white master to speak. Walt indicated the dead body of the black with a casual nod of his head.

"Leopard?" he asked quietly.

The big black shook his head slowly. "There are no marks, *Bwana*. No sign that a *chuu*, a jungle cat, has been here."

Walt chuckled and pointed to the heavy tangle of limbs that was part of the thick canopy overhead. But Koloba, without bothering to look up, shook his head again slowly. "No, *Bwana*," he said respectfully, "no *chuu* would attack one who rode in the spitting metal monster. None—but one. That is an *impa*, *Bwana*, a demon of the forest who can change himself into any animal of the brush and move unseen."

Walt smiled. "Surely," he said in amusement, "surely you don't believe this nonsense about an unseen leopard that attacks at will. You are a chief, Koloba. This tale is for the minds of children, not for one as great as you."

Usually Koloba responded to flattery, but this time his face remained unchanged. "It does not matter what I think, *Bwana*. My people believe this tale is true. They say that Moongu, the forest god, is angry because they help the white man destroy his forest kingdom."

Walt shrugged and smiled cynically. Without answering, he approached the bulldozer casually. Indifferently then, he pushed the black body from the cab. It landed with a dull thud on the spongy jungle floor, sightless eyes staring vacantly at the lonely shafts of sunlight that fingered through the green canopy overhead. Walt climbed into the cab, faced Koloba.

"Tell your people," he said seriously, "that the white man thinks they are right. Tell them he too thinks this is the work of Moongu. The forest god is angry because the work on the road goes too slow."

Without waiting for Koloba to deliver his message, Walt brought the big motor to pulsing life and drove the steel nose forward. Underbrush parted and small trees came out by the roots. For an hour he

worked, until the sound of engines started on the road again, then he relaxed.

Walt frowned then, and with good reason. It was three weeks since the rainy season had ended and he had graded but one mile of road bed. One mile when it should have been five or six.

It was always the same story. Some leopard, attracted by the noise of the machines on the road, had come to investigate and had attacked one of the blacks. This was the third man he had lost in as many weeks, and each death delayed work for two or three days while the blacks mourned the passing of their dead brother. Native banana beer was drunk, and the praises of the dead man were sung. Then the dead man would be forgotten and the blacks would return to the road.

Walt had invested every cent he owned in the contract for this road. It had to go through. Walt didn't believe in jungle demons, but he did believe in luck. And it began to look, he realized dully, that the Davis jinx, as he called it, hadn't left. It had been this jinx that had ruined his career in the states, and had followed him with his commission into the Seabees. That's why he had come to Africa, where nobody knew him, where he might possibly lose the hoodoo that had haunted him since leaving college.

But now, as he climbed wearily from the cab, he knew the jinx was still following him. One more death and the blacks would desert. Walt pushed through the brush and jumped back in surprise as a red breasted touraçon flew from the brush at his feet.

The bird fluttered its great wings and screamed its defiance. "Go away," it shrilled, "go away." Then it was gone, leaving a trail of falling leaves to mark its excited passage through the brush.

"Go away, hell!" Walt snapped. "This time I'm sticking. Jinx or no jinx."

IT was hot in the small tent that was the field office of Walt's Congo Construction Company. Walt, his lanky frame sprawled in a camp chair, idly watched the erratic course of a small horned chameleon as it raced across the blueprints on the table before him. It disappeared over the end of the table and Walt heard the muffled *plop* as the lizard hit the hard packed

earth of the tent floor. He settled back.

It had rained that morning and the crew had gone to one of the villages in the brush. They had not come back as yet.

Now, above the inane chatter of colobus monkeys, Walt heard the hum of a car motor. Just a faint hum at first, but from the way the sound increased Walt knew the car was traveling. Somebody sure was in a hurry.

He waited until the car stopped before his tent with a loud squealing of brakes before he rose slowly and strode to the entrance. Three white men were dragging their gear from the back of a light bodied truck, and a fourth man, at the wheel, grinned broadly and waved. Walt nodded. He gave no other sign of greeting, no other indication that he hadn't talked with a white man for over three weeks.

The driver was out from behind the wheel now, slamming the door heavily and coming around the front of the truck. He was the biggest of the four, a burly giant with the map of Ireland for a face. He staggered slightly as he approached and Walt frowned in annoyance. The big man caught the sudden frown, sobered suddenly, and slipped a half empty bottle of rum into the side pocket of his light corduroy jacket. He shot a warning glance at the rest of the men, smiled pleasantly and came closer to Walt.

"My name's O'Brien," he said suddenly as he stepped forward. "I guess you're Davis?"

Walt nodded curtly and O'Brien chuckled. "It's been a damn hot trip from Mobaye," he said warmly. "Me and the boys have been taking a little nip to make things easier. Hope you don't mind?"

Without waiting for an answer O'Brien chuckled and continued. "That sure is a lulu of a road coming in here. A few times there I thought . . ."

"Sorry about the road," Walt interrupted suddenly, "but it's not half bad if you ride under forty miles an hour. And you certainly didn't ride seventy miles through the jungle just to tell me about the road—or did you?"

O'Brien's grin faded suddenly and he eyed Walt coldly. "Look chum," he said flatly, "we came all the way from New York to work on that new airport over at Nairobi, British East. But we didn't like

the set-up. So we heard about this road job and we moseyed to Mobaye to have a look-see. Now—do we start to work or do I punch you in the nose?"

Walt looked his new crew over carefully. All of them showed signs of drink and Walt began to understand why they had come to Africa to work on construction. They were probably habitual drunks and had been black-balled by every outfit in the States.

"You're hired," he said slowly. He began to remove his light flannel shirt as he spoke, revealing a hard, flat chest and muscular arms. "But that punch in the nose interests me, O'Brien," he added with a wry smile. "Personally I don't think you'll be quite able to manage it. Would you like to try?"

O'Brien seemed startled for a second and looked back at the other three men as though for confirmation of what he had heard. One of the men, a short, stocky man with a swarthy complexion nodded easily. "Go ahead, O'Bee," he urged quietly, "the guy's askin' for it, ain't he?"

O'Brien grinned and nodded. "Yeah," he admitted, "yeah, that's right. The chump is asking for it." He began to strip off his light jacket as he turned to Walt. "You're a man after me own heart," he admitted heartily. "It will be a pleasure to . . ."

He had his jacket off now and Walt got a better look at the big sloping shoulders of the man, shoulders that spoke of immense strength. Walt forced himself to relax as he waited. O'Brien doubled his ham-like fists and even as he took his first step forward he stopped dead in his tracks.

A long, heavy Masai spear grazed O'Brien's red head and struck the tent a foot from Walt's side. For a full five seconds no one moved, then Walt leaped for the tent. He was out in a flash, automatic in his hand as he raced across the cinder road, firing at the still moving brush on the far side of the road.

BEFORE O'Brien and his men knew what was happening Walt had plunged headlong into the jungle. O'Brien started to follow but the sharp voice of the stocky man stopped him in his tracks.

"Hold it, boy!" the man snapped. "Don't be a damn fool all your life. What

do you know about that tangled hell? You'd be lost in five minutes."

"Yeah," agreed a slim blond man with an ugly scar under his left eye, "it's the big guy's play, O'Bee. Let's sit this hand out."

All watched the spot where Walt had disappeared. The brush had become still again. Heat waves rose from the cinder road, making the surrounding jungle dance to the tune of the noonday sun. And deep in the jungle the high squeal of an old bull elephant came back to the silent men.

Johnny Huley, the youngest of the group, a dark, curly-haired chap of about thirty, spoke aloud to no one in particular. "This is one hell of a place to build a concrete road," he said. "Bloody road won't last a year in this heat. But just the same I think I'm gonna like working for this guy Davis. I always like a boss that don't talk too much."

He rubbed his chin with the back of his hand and looked at O'Brien from the corner of his eye. "You want to know something, O'Bee? I think you might have had trouble punching that Davis guy in the nose at that."

O'Brien nodded slowly in agreement. "You ain't kiddin', pal," he said half aloud, "you ain't kiddin'."

It was a good half hour before Walt returned to the road. He approached the tent in that easy stride of his and passed his new crew without a word. His naked torso was covered with bites and scratches and his pants were ripped to ribbons by sharp underbrush. It was evident, by his actions, that he had had little success in trailing the unseen spear caster.

He said nothing as he entered his field office and after a few seconds hesitation O'Brien and his men followed. When they were all ranged in front of Walt's table desk, Walt spoke.

"In the near future," he began "an airfield will be built west of Bangui. That's why we're building this road." Walt took his eyes off the men and stared unseeing at the blueprints before him. "This road must be finished before the contract for that airport is released. That means it must be in the next three months, before the next rainy season."

He looked up again and smiled wryly.

"That means a lot of work, ten and twelve hours a day. We have about a hundred blacks on the payroll, but I'm afraid you'll get little help from them. So I'll expect you men to do most of the work. The heat will beat you down, the leopards will get your men, and, as you've just seen, you'll have to dodge an occasional spear."

Walt sat back in his camp chair, relaxed, and grinned. "Lastly—there is the Davis jinx. If the jungle don't get you, chances are the jinx will."

Walt's new crew digested this news in silence. Then O'Brien indicated himself with a jab of his thumb. "I'm O'Brien," he said smiling, "your field super." He pointed to the short, stocky gent. "This is Tony, the best damn engineer in the business. He can run anything with a handle on it."

O'Brien winked at Davis as he introduced Johnny Huley, the youngest of the group. "This guy," O'Brien grinned, "calls himself a concrete specialist. He..."

Walt leaned forward slowly, carefully studying the young man. "I've seen you somewhere, haven't I Huley?"

Johnny nodded. "Yes sir. I've been in Mobaye for some time trying to get work."

Walt nodded slowly in understanding. "The sour puss'd gent next to Huley," O'Brien continued, "the guy near the tent entrance, is Polack Zebrowski, our jack of all trades. He's a timekeeper, draftsman, blacksmith and wire lather. He's from Brooklyn."

Polack fingered the scar under his left eye and nodded. Then slowly his body bent at the waist—and he kept leaning forward until he fell face forward in the dirt at Huley's feet.

Davis half rose, then he settled back wearily when he saw the small arrow in the back of the man's neck. "Blow gun," he said flatly. "Stand away from the tent opening."

AS though pushed by a giant hand the three men crowded to the far side of the tent. They were construction men, men who knew the cold ring of steel and the heavy boom-boom of pile drivers. Men who were used to seeing others of their kind killed on the job. They were used to it, expected it. But this was different.

The little three-inch arrow was more terrifying than the fall of heavy steel, more deadly than the wild charge of a ten-ton truck whose brakes had suddenly given way. Those things they understood, they could be seen and dodged. This arrow had the look of something beyond their ken.

Walt's cynical voice brought them back to reality. "That's the first time anything like that has happened. It might have been a passing warrior with a grudge against all white men. Or it might be just another example of the Davis jinx—take your pick."

Walt sent Mike and Toney, his new crane operator, back to Mobaye that afternoon with the body of the dead Zebrowski. There were forms to fill out, information regarding the death, and Walt also inclosed the report on the black that the leopard had killed. Walt was sure the authorities would send someone out to investigate. Nor was he wrong.

When Mike and Tony returned just before sunset in the light-bodied truck, they brought a visitor. Walt recognized the slim, dapper figure of Steve Carter, a quiet, mild-mannered man in his early fifties. He greeted Walt with a slow smile.

"Hello, Davis," he said quietly, "it's good to see you again. I understand that you've been having your trouble out here."

Carter, Walt remembered, was not a man who wasted words. When he spoke it was because he had something worthwhile to say. Now, as he accepted Walt's invitation to a drink in the field office, he accepted with a curt nod of his grey head. It was not until he had finished his drink that he explained his presence.

Sitting on the corner of Walt's desk he studied the tip of his heavy mosquito boots and spoke. "I was at the district commissioner's office when your men brought in your report. The authorities don't like it, Davis. Four men in three weeks is serious even in the jungle."

Walt nodded. "Yeah," he agreed readily, "I know. But..."

"Understand," Carter interrupted, "I'm not here officially. As you know I'm just a hunter and guide in this district. I'm here professionally. I'm offering my services, at a fee, of course, to help you if you want help."

Walt nodded in complete understanding. With Carter, hunting was a business, whether it was jungle game or running down murdering blacks. He had often hired his gun to the district commissioner to track down a native criminal. He knew the district well, knew every trail, every village, every tree. For twenty years he had been a hunter, trader and guide in this portion of the Congo. Now he was offering his services to help Walt Davis build his road.

Walt accepted the proposition quickly. Here was a man who could stop these killings, a man who knew the native mind. It was long after darkness before Walt had finished telling Carter of his trouble.

Carter listened in silence, never asking a question, never interrupting. When Walt finished Carter rose lazily and walked to the tent entrance. "I think I understand the situation, Davis," he said quietly. "I'll go to work on it in the morning."

He was gone then, the soft glow of his pipe bowl melting into the brush at the side of the road. Walt watched him go, marveling at the silent tread of the man, feeling free of tension for the first time in weeks.

A WEEK later Walt wasn't so sure of the position of O'Brien or his crew. He had figured them to be members of that outlawed gang of construction workers from the States that were always on the wing. Heavy drinkers, with the wanderlust, who never stayed on one job more than a few months.

Generally these men were efficient workers, but could never be counted on for a full week's work. Yet O'Brien and his crew were proving themselves exceptions to the rule. Walt had to admit that they were double what he had hoped for, and in two weeks not one man had missed a day. Even young Huley, the concrete specialist, refused to stay in bed although he had a bad case of fever. He had taken over the job of running the bulldozer and the machine was in constant motion from dawn until sunset.

Tony was, indeed, as O'Brien had claimed, the best damned operator in the business. He operated his two-yard bucket as though it weighed but a few ounces, and with no wasted motions.

O'Brien bossed the blacks. He bullied them, he used his bull voice like a whip to scare hell out of them, but they worked. They worked harder than any blacks ever worked before in Africa. And O'Brien had become a God to them. A God they feared, and therefore loved. For fear was the only emotion the blacks knew, and respected.

Koloba, the chief of the district, seemed glad that O'Brien had relieved him of his job as gang boss on the road. He was rarely in camp anymore, spending most of his time in the jungle with Carter. Both of them were in the brush at dawn, sometimes alone, sometimes with a few bushmen. They set traps for the leopards, with live goats as bait.

Carter gave in no reports as to his luck, nor did Walt ask him for any information. Things were quiet now, the work was going ahead smoothly, and that was enough for Walt. For the first time in long years he was beating his jinx.

Then it happened!

Walt was leaning over his blueprints when he heard his new crew approaching the tent. O'Brien's voice was, as usual, the loudest, and in the sudden hush before sunset Walt heard a strange voice that was vaguely familiar. At the far side of the field the blacks were filing into the jungle on their way to their villages in the brush. Their low chanting trailed off as the last man left the road. O'Brien entered the tent first and a slim, dapper man, in a form-fitting tropical suit, followed.

Walt struck a match and lit the kerosene lamp hanging over the table. Even as he raised the wick and light flooded the tent, the clearing outside plunged suddenly into darkness. Night was swift in the Congo. The shift from day to night was not the lengthy process it was in the west. Darkness swooped down like a preying falcon and the day was gone.

In the tent Walt faced O'Brien without a trace of expression, fighting down the tenseness in his body, forcing himself to relax.

"Evenin', Walt," O'Brien smiled. "We got another man for our crew. His name's Hugh Jackson. He came out on one of the trucks from Mobaye. I think. . ."

O'Brien stopped as he saw that Walt

was paying no heed to what he was saying. For a full minute there was silence in the big tent, then Walt nodded.

"Yes, Hughie," he said to the stranger, "it's me alright."

Hugh Jackson stepped nearer the table and stared. Then, without a word, he threw himself forward, fingers clawing for Walt's face. Animal sounds came from his throat and the fingernails of his right hand raked the left side of Walt's neck.

Walt never moved. He turned his head aside slightly to avoid Jackson's left hand as it flashed toward his eyes, but he made no effort at defense. Then O'Brien had moved and Hugh Jackson was lifted bodily from Walt and pulled back across the table.

Jackson squirmed in O'Brien's grasp and his closed fist struck O'Brien in the mouth. O'Brien grunted and held the man out at arms length, shaking him like a terrier shakes a rat. Gradually the man's efforts to get at O'Brien ceased, and he let himself go limp.

O'Brien grinned at Walt. "He's a scrapper fer a little guy, ain't he? But what in hell brought this on?"

A pained look came into Walt's eyes. "I killed his son, O'Bee."

O'BRIEN released Jackson and the smile faded from his face. He looked from Walt to Jackson, then to the other two members of the crew who stood at the entrance of the tent. The noise had attracted them, and from the looks on their faces they, too, had heard what Walt said.

There was a dull silence and in that moment Hugh Jackson regained possession of himself. His Panama hat was on the floor somewhere behind him and he brushed the thick, grey hair back from his face.

"Tell them about the others," he urged Walt in a sullen voice. "Tell them about the dozens you've killed through your carelessness."

Walt stared at the lamp. "He's right," he said flatly, "there have been many. Too many."

Hugh Jackson smiled at the agony in Walt's eyes. The sight eased his own pain somewhat and he was driven to plunge the knife of memory deeper.

"Walt Davis," he said slowly, deliberately, "son of Matt Davis, the big shot. You didn't even have the decency to change your name, and your father one of the squarest shooters in the construction racket."

He turned to O'Brien and the rest of the crew. "Men," he said, "there isn't a man in the construction game that would work under Walt Davis for all the tea in China. He's a hoodoo, a jinx, a killer! Every job he's ever worked on he's killed men through carelessness."

Jackson turned to Walt again. "Remember that job in the navy yard, Davis? The steel form you designed for the dry docks collapsed and killed four men. Just a slip of the slide rule, huh Davis? A slip that made four widows. Then there was the Hudson tunnel, and the Rockaway Bridge. That's where my Frankie got it. Remember Davis?"

Jackson's face clouded in anger and he shook as he glanced at O'Brien. "It had rained during the night," he continued, "and in the morning every bit of steel was covered with ice. The men wanted to knock off but Davis ordered them up. Two men went over the side that day, one of them was my Frankie."

When Jackson stopped talking a dead silence fell over the room. A silence broken by Walt's tired voice.

"I lost half my outfit in the Pacific during the war. Lost, because I ordered them to work on a temporary airfield although Japs had been reported seen on the island." Walt looked up suddenly and faced his men. "We were ambushed, picked off like ducks on a pond."

He stood up wearily and his knuckles were white against the blueprints on the table. There was regret in his voice when he spoke to Jackson.

"I'm sorry as hell, Hughie, sorry about your boy. I know it doesn't help any to say that, but it's all I can offer. I was brought up with the idea that the construction game was a man's job. If you weren't a man, if you were afraid to take your chances, you'd stayed out of the racket. Remember, I was up on that high steel with Frankie. It could have been me, or my father."

Walt rubbed his bony hand across his wire-thin lips. "We all have to go some

day, Hughie. I don't think it matters much how a man goes, as long as he's doing the job he likes." Walt turned and left the tent then. His last words drifted back over his shoulder. "Take care of Mr. Jackson, O'Bee. See that he gets a place to sleep and a ride back to Mobaye in the morning." His back disappeared into the African night and there was silence for a long time after he had gone. . . .

The African moon had turned from a bright orange to a radiant silver, throwing its metal cloak over the jungle. Great horned owls hooted across the clearing, and the small fry of the brush left their by-day hiding places. Far to the west the high shrill whistle of an old bull elephant could be heard, and for an instant, it seemed to Walt, the drone of insects ceased.

A scant two hours of the night were left and as yet Walt had not slept. Moonbeams fingered through his bamboo screen, dimly lighting the room, revealing scenes he had hoped to forget. Over and over he kept seeing the look of horror on Frankie Jackson's face the day he fell from the bridge. Walt had been on the steel girder above him, and now, when the memory of the sight was dimming, Hugh Jackson had appeared to revive it.

Walt had seen Frankie walking below him. The happy-go-lucky kid ignored the guard line that was strung from column to column. Even as Walt opened his mouth to call a warning, Frankie slipped and disappeared over the side.

Walt groaned aloud, and even as he groaned he heard the furtive scrape of feet outside his window. He was out of bed in an instant, silent as a jungle cat, moving soundlessly into the deep shadows in the corner of his room.

Slowly the bamboo screen across the window moved, letting a thin stream of moonlight flash into the room and across the bed. The screen flapped back into place and Walt heard the rip as his bed net jumped. There was a faint thud and Walt knew the knife that had flashed through the window was imbedded in the center of his bed.

HE moved then, racing silently across the room and pushing out onto the small veranda that fronted the bungalow.

Scaling the rail at the side of the house he plunged headlong into the shrubbery and raced ahead. But the moonlight intruder was gone.

Walt made his way back around the shadowed part of the house and approached the barracks where O'Brien and his crew had their quarters. He stood at the open doorway for a few minutes, listening to the heavy breathing within, then he slipped silently into the room.

Two men were missing from the room. Hugh Jackson and Johnny Huley, the young kid who ran the bulldozer. Walt left the room as silently as he had entered and made his way back to his bungalow. He slept soundly until dawn.

Hugh Jackson didn't join the men at the breakfast table. But Johnny Huley was there and he looked as if he hadn't gotten a minute of sleep all night.

Walt frowned. "What's the matter, Johnny, doesn't the quiet of our African night agree with you?"

Johnny, tight lipped, shook his head. "It isn't that, Mr. Davis," he said slowly; "it's just that I've—well—I was up most of the night thinking. Thinking about what you said last night, and I guess you're right. You see. . . ."

"Do any walking around, Johnny," Walt was anxious to interrupt any reference to his conversation of the previous night. But there was something in his voice as he asked the question that made the others at the table look up.

Johnny frowned and nodded. "Yes," he said easily, "yes, I did quite a bit of walking." He smiled suddenly. "I went walking down the cinder road. Walked halfway to Mobaye, I guess."

"See anyone in your travels?" Walt's voice was flat and Johnny looked startled. Eating stopped at the table.

"No," Johnny said just as flatly. "Why?"

Walt shrugged. "Somebody was throwing knives last night. One had my name on it but. . . ."

O'Brien almost upset the table as he rose to his feet and towered over the group. "Jackson!" he growled, "the dirty little punk!"

Then he was gone, lumbering out of the small mess hall. Walt called, but O'Brien disappeared in the direction of the bar-

rack quarters. As one, the others left the table and followed. When they stepped into the open Walt saw O'Brien rush into the barracks.

Walt followed Tony through the barrack door—and almost fell over him as the little Italian stopped short. Then Johnny Huley was in the room, knocking into Walt in the abrupt change of pace. All three stood bunched together near the doorway, held there, unmoving, staring at the blood-stained body of Hugh Jackson sprawled in the center of the room.

Jackson's throat had been cut, a deep, horrible gash, and the head lay in a queer, twisted position. The wound was new, only seconds old, for the blood was still pulsing from it—and O'Brien was not in the room. The rear barracks door was swinging, and it was evident which way he had gone.

Walt came suddenly to life. He reached the rear door in time to see O'Brien plunge into the tangle of jungle a hundred yards away. Walt cursed under his breath and sped after the big man.

A FEW feet from the spot where O'Brien disappeared, Walt halted suddenly. He had caught the slight rustle of brush, and knew that someone was a few feet from the jungle rim. And even as he halted O'Brien pushed back an elephant-ear leaf and faced Walt.

There was an ugly looking German luger in his big right fist and the pistol was held steadily in front of him. For a split second his eyes studied Walt, then the sound of running feet came to them both and O'Brien let his gaze drift over Walt's shoulder.

Slowly, then, O'Brien shook his head, his big chest heaving from his run across the clearing. "No luck, men," he panted heavily. "The black beggar just seemed to disappear into them bushes."

"Black beggar?" Walt's voice was a lazy drawl.

O'Brien nodded. "Yea, Walt," he said hastily, "the one I caught puttin' the finishin' touches on that Jackson feller. He beat it out the back and skedaddled into the danged bushes here. I followed him but as soon as I hit the bushes I was stumped. He just seemed to disappear into. . . ."

Walt nodded casually. "I see," he said slowly, "but tell me, O'Bee, where did you get the luger?"

O'Brien looked down slowly at the luger, as though seeing it for the first time. "Oh, this," he said casually, "I took it from Jackson's grip last night. Thought it would be a lot safer if he stayed unarmed. The danged fool was pretty hot last night, you know. He might have done something foolish."

O'Brien grinned and slipped the pistol into the top of his khaki pants. But the grin did little to conceal the look in his eyes. Walt knew O'Brien was lying.

Walt went to his field office and waited impatiently for Carter. The camp's guide and watchman, as it were, had gone to Mobaye earlier the previous day for supplies and some new road equipment that was expected. He intended to remain the night and return early this morning.

But it was nearly noon before Carter pulled up in front of Walt's tent. Walt poured the man his customary drink and after Carter had lighted his pipe and relaxed, Walt told him of the happenings of the night before and the murder of Hugh Jackson.

For long seconds Carter sucked his dead pipe in silence. Then he spoke in that soft voice of his. "This man Huley," he asked quietly, "you say he was up most of the night? Surely he must have seen, or heard something?"

Walt shrugged. "He says not."

Carter nodded in understanding and rose. He knocked the dottle from his pipe and refilled the bowl before he spoke again.

"I don't like this, Davis. It smells of a white man's work. But if it's a native I'll find him."

He turned to go and then hesitated. "By the way," he said as an afterthought, "I wouldn't turn in a report about Jackson just yet. The authorities might stop work on your road. Bury him somewhere in the brush and forget about him until I straighten things out."

A week later Walt started to pour concrete in the portion of the road already graded. The Congo had no facilities for ready mixed concrete and the heat made asphalt impractical, so plain mortar was placed over the cinder bed of the road-

way. That meant the cement and sand had to be trucked from Mobaye.

Walt and Johnny Huley made the trip to make arrangements for delivery. Huley had requested that he be taken, claiming he needed some parts for his pusher. But Walt knew that Huley had something on his mind.

Huley had made several attempts to talk, but it wasn't until the trip back to field headquarters that he got around to voicing his suspicions. Eyes kept rigidly on the uneven cinder road before him, Huley spoke. "That gun," he said seriously, "that gun O'Brien said he took from Jackson's baggage. He lied about that. That was *my* gun. It's been missing since the first day I came to camp."

Walt studied the dense jungle at the side of the road. He knew Huley had more to say and was unwilling to voice any comment until the young man had finished.

"Perhaps I'm out of order, Mr. Davis," Huley continued, "but I don't like the way O'Brien's been acting lately. He's too friendly with the blacks and a lot of his evenings are spent at the native village. I may be wrong, sir, but if were you I'd watch him a little more carefully."

Walt smiled and nodded. "Thanks, Johnny," he said gratefully, "I knew O'Brien lied about the gun. But I wasn't aware he was on a friendly social basis with the blacks. Thanks again."

THEY rode in silence the rest of the trip. It was nearing sundown, and the heat that had been a physical force closing in on them from the jungle, lessened suddenly. Huley pushed the light truck as fast as it would go in an effort to reach camp before sundown. Jungle fronds nodded gently as they hurried by and Walt sensed the strange silence of the brush.

Then above the low purr of the racing motor, Walt heard the first distant beat of a tribal drum. The beat was low, muffled, pulsing languidly through the semi-gloom of the brush. The message was picked up by a village behind them and relayed along. In minutes, it seemed, the jungle was alive with throbbing sound. Peeper frogs ceased their croaking, bird life paused its sundown serenade to listen,

and the small game of the brush sought the deeper shadows. The drums halted as suddenly as they had begun, and over all hung a sinister sense of dark evil.

Walt's jungle senses picked it up, and from the way Johnny Huley gripped the steering wheel Walt knew that he, too, was aware of the feeling of impending disaster. As the truck came in sight of the field headquarters the sun dipped suddenly below the green canopy in the west and it was night.

Huley snapped the head lights on and Walt's field office came into view. Before the tent's entrance O'Brien and Tony waited, and from the looks on their faces Walt knew there had been trouble.

"It's come, boss," Tony said as Walt stepped from the truck. "Those damn bush boys have been festerin' fer days, now they all quit. Every damn one of 'em quit cold."

O'Brien nodded in agreement. "He's right, Walt. They all quit the field right after you left for Mobaye. I tried to talk 'em out of it but it was no dice."

O'Brien grinned. "Some local witch doctor is giving them the needle. They say the road is taboo. They think every one of them will die if they stay here. It's a tough break."

Walt took the information calmly, too calmly. He nodded casually and entered the field office. There were no lights there, no prying eyes, and Walt dropped his habitual air of cold indifference. His shoulders slumped and he sat in his chair heavily, his long face a picture of dejection.

Suddenly he was tired of fighting this jinx. Even here in the jungle hard luck refused to relinquish its possessive hold over him. There was always something that prevented him from finishing a job. It was always the same. He had never finished a job he started. Yet this time he suspected that his jinx had received a helping hand. And he was pretty sure who that one party was.

He knew enough about the blacks to realize they would never be persuaded to return to the road. When a native witch doctor called a land taboo—it was taboo. And before enough riff-raff whites could be scraped together the rainy season would arrive, and with it the termina-

tion of the contract. That meant Walt was through, finished in Africa. A complete flop in the only work he ever wanted to do. The coast boys wouldn't do a thing now that the bush men had deserted.

He rose suddenly and swung his foot in the darkness. His toe connected solidly with the long table and the following crash gave him a savage satisfaction. He left the tent and strode eagerly for the barracks where O'Brien and his crew had their quarters. Before he wrote *finis* to this last job there was one thing he intended doing.

O'Brien and Tony were sitting at the single table in the room, playing cribbage with a dirty deck of dog-eared cards. Huley was lying on his bunk, his pith helmet pushed well forward over his eyes.

Walt paused at the door and studied O'Brien's coarse features. "About that punch in the nose, O'Brien," he said carefully. "Remember? I think I'd like you to try it—now."

O'BRIEN laid his cards down slowly and sat erect. For a second he studied the still form of Johnny Huley, then he nodded to Tony and Tony pushed back from the table and moved over toward the apparently sleeping youngster.

O'Brien studied Walt in silence, then he nodded in satisfaction at what he saw on his boss's face. He shrugged and grinned happily. Without a word he rose and lumbered forward, his fists coming up slowly like square sledge hammers. His beefy face suddenly became deadly serious and Walt stepped forward, waiting for the big man in the unsteady glow of the hanging kerosene lamp.

O'Brien walked to within two feet of Walt before he uncorked a clumsy round-house right. There was no science in the blow, but it had the power of a steam shovel. Walt shifted slightly and pushed his left hand forward, palm open, to catch the blow—and it nearly tore his hand from his arm. He grunted with the sharp pain as his wrist snapped back, then he drove his own right into O'Brien's grinning face.

O'Brien stopped suddenly, and Walt had the satisfaction of seeing crimson flow down O'Brien's shirt front. The grin left O'Brien's face and he became serious again. He stepped back, shook his great

head and wiped his face with the back of his hairy fist.

Then he was moving forward again, left arm extended, big right fist cocked beside his right shoulder. He looked immense as he lumbered forward and Walt shuffled back. Then suddenly he changed his mind and waited for O'Brien to close in.

They met in the center of the room and Walt stepped forward suddenly. His arms began working like well-oiled pistons and O'Brien grunted and stumbled back. Walt drove him across the room with the savage fury of his attack, but O'Brien kept his feet.

When they reached the dark shadows in the far corner of the room, Walt dropped his hands suddenly and moved back into the circle of light. O'Brien's face looked like a piece of raw meat, and as he came forward his big frame swayed unsteadily. But still he came forward in that lumbering stride of his, hands uplifted.

Walt grunted in admiration of the man's guts and waited for O'Brien to come within range again. He waited a split second too long. Dropping his King Kong approach O'Brien moved forward with amazing speed. His foot work had the rhythm of a professional and his right hand exploded high on Walt's head. Walt went back and dropped into a heap beside the open barracks door.

Walt came to his knees slowly, fighting the desire to fall forward on his face and sleep. After what seemed hours he found strength to stand erect. He only knew that this was one job he had started and intended to finish.

But as far as O'Brien was concerned the fight was already finished. He stood in the center of the room staring foolishly at his swelling right hand. Even as Walt looked the hand began swelling like an angry puff adder. That blow high on Walt's head had broken something. Walt turned and staggered from the room.

It was well after dawn when he came from his tent. The coast boys were still gathered around their cooking fires and Walt knew they were merely waiting for their final pay before leaving. Koloba rose suddenly from one of the fires and came toward the field office.

"Men no work today, *Bwana*," he said solemnly. "Witch doctor say road taboo—men no stay here."

Walt nodded wearily and then forgot Koloba as he saw Tony coming down the road at a trot. The little Italian nodded for Walt to follow him and he entered Walt's tent. It was evident that the stocky man was stirred from his usual unconcerned manner.

"It's Huley," he said when Walt entered the tent. "He's been killed. I just found him in the mud 'below the bridge down the road. Someone knifed him, ripped him wide open."

WALT cursed savagely. He had come to like the kid. "Where's O'Brien?" he snapped.

Tony shrugged his thick shoulders. "I don't know, boss. He left the barracks before dawn and ain't nobody seen him since."

Koloba was still outside, and Walt went to him. "This witch doctor that calls the road taboo. I want to see him, Koloba. Take me to him—now."

Koloba studied Walt for several seconds in silence. "Yes, *Bwana*," he said finally, "we go."

Walt followed him into the brush. He had made up his mind not to give the road up until every possibility for saving it had been exhausted. His main problem was keeping the blacks working. And to do that the witch doctor would have to remove his taboo.

Huley's death was clear proof now that O'Brien was behind all this. What his reasons were for wanting the road stopped Walt couldn't understand. But it was clear that he knew Johnny Huley suspected him, possibly even knew something. And O'Brien was the reason for the witch doctor's sudden taboo on the road. The big Irishman had probably paid plenty of ivory to swing that deal. It was up to Walt now to bribe the witch doctor to remove his curse.

For two hours Walt followed the powerful frame of Koloba through narrow jungle trails. Then suddenly the brush fell away and Walt found himself in a small clearing. A single hut was in the center, and from the weird markings on the dried mud of the hut's walls, he knew

whose place this was.

Koloba motioned for him to wait and the big black approached the small hut's entrance on hands and knees. He kept his head down, inches from the earth, and his low chant filled the clearing. For long minutes he remained prone, then he raised his head slowly.

Instantly he was on his feet, his blood-shot eyes rolling in fear. Then he was gone, racing across the far side of the clearing and disappearing into the brush. Walt drew his automatic and ran to the hut. He froze! There on a dirty grass mat just inside the small entrance, he saw the witch doctor, the head blown from the wizened body.

For a second Walt hesitated, then he raced across the clearing and entered the jungle at the same spot Koloba had entered a minute before.

It was always the same in the brush—the semi-gloom, pierced by golden shafts of sunlight that fingered through the canopy overhead—the fetid smell of rotting vegetation, the monotonous drone of insects—and over all the hot blanket that pulsed with unseen life in the invisible steam fog.

Walt followed the narrow trail slowly. Further ahead on the trail he heard the inane chatter of colobus monkeys and he knew they were scolding Koloba for disturbing their rest.

Several times in the next few hours he had similar signs that he was still on Koloba's trail. But it was almost sundown before he reached the clearing of a deserted village. Smoke came from a smudge fire in one of the huts and Walt hunkered down in the brush at the fringe of the clearing and waited for darkness.

It came finally, and Walt removed his heavy shoes. At a low crouch he approached the hut, slowly, silently.

Halfway across the deserted field of maize and cane that was the clearing, the light from the hut winked out suddenly. Walt froze, and then as the light reappeared again, he realized what had happened. Someone else was in the clearing, someone between Walt and the hut. It had been a man's broad frame, passing between Walt and the hut that had blocked the fire light for one second.

Automatic at the ready, Walt went for-

ward slowly. His stocking feet soundless on the sun-dried earth, he was only fifty yards from the hut when he caught the slight movement of a huge body crouched beside the entrance of the hut.

THEN Walt saw Carter. Sitting cross-legged before the small fire, elephant rifle resting across his knees. Carter smoked his pipe and stared dreamily at the embers. And even as the black body beside the entrance sprang into the hut, Walt fired.

Carter's attacker staggered in mid-stride, and Walt's second shot knocked him on his face, long arms reaching for the slim form of Carter even in death. Walt called a warning to Carter not to fire and he raced for the hut.

Bending his head to enter Walt saw the black he had just killed. Powerful muscles relaxed in death, Koloba lay on the hard-packed earth, outstretched hands reaching to the ring of stones that circled the fire.

Walt suddenly knew he had killed the phantom leopard of the road. For on each of Koloba's hands, fitting like a pair of brass knuckles, Koloba wore steel claws, razor sharp and curved to resemble a leopard's tearing claws. The *impa*, the jungle demon, was none other than Koloba.

Walt cursed savagely and turned to Carter, who was on his feet now and coming forward. And even as Walt turned, he tried to spin away and raise his automatic. He fired, but he knew the shot was hurried, wild. And the barrel of Carter's elephant rifle crashed against the side of his head. A pool opened at Walt's feet and he dove in. It had no bottom. . . .

The moon was hours old when Walt regained consciousness. Through a blur of pain he saw Carter sitting beside the fire and he tried to get up. The sudden movement did things to his stomach and he leaned to one side and was sick.

When he finished, his head throbbed like the beat of a pile driver. He realized dully that his hands were tied behind him and he lay back, weak and exhausted. There was a movement beside the fire and then Carter was standing above him. The guide still smoked his pipe in that lazy way of his, his face relaxed, expressionless.

"I wish to hell I knew what to do with

you, Davis," he said quietly. "If you hadn't saved my neck from Koloba, the decision would be easy." He shrugged and shook his head. "Still," he said half aloud, "you know too much. There's really no alternative."

Walt sat up again, shaking the cob webs from his brain, trying to figure just what Carter's words meant. All he got from his confusion of thoughts was the fact that Carter thought he knew more than he really knew.

It was plain that Koloba was the one who killed the coast boys on the road crew. The reason was plain now that Walt knew the facts. The construction of the road was destroying his power over his people. His little empire was being knocked from under him. The bushmen were realizing the power of the white man's money and the many wives and luxuries it could bring. Koloba was fast becoming a chief in name only.

But Koloba had too much fear of the authorities at Mobaye to attempt killing a white man. Yet Zebrowski, and Hugh Jackson, and Johnny Huley had been killed. It didn't seem likely that Carter would do these things. What would be his reason? And where did O'Brien fit into the picture?

Carter strode to the dead body of Koloba and studied him in silence. "Crazy fool," he said slowly, "I suppose he thought every demon of the jungle would be on him because I killed that witch doctor. But there was no choice in the matter. I promised him plenty to put that taboo on the road. When I didn't pay him he'd have spilled the works."

Surprise and confusion was wearing off now and Walt knew fear. This slim jungle man was a killer. Walt forgot his jinx now, forgot his despair at being unable to finish the road. His sole thought now was to save himself from what he knew must come.

He forced a low chuckle from his suddenly dry lips and smiled at Carter. He was stalling for time now, although he knew there was no hope.

"You sure had me fooled, Carter," he admitted, "but I still can't figure what you expect to gain by stopping the road."

"Money, Davis," Carter said wearily. "I need money. Tourists won't pay for

a guide to show them over a concrete road." He shrugged and shifted his elephant rifle to cover Walt. "Still," he added, "I'm sorry I joined up with Koloba. He promised me plenty of ivory if I'd help. Now he's dead and I have to go on killing."

He laughed suddenly and Walt caught the cold hysteria behind the sound. This was it, Carter would blast him in a minute.

"It's funny," Carter smiled, "how one rolling pebble can start an avalanche. When I killed that Zebrowski fellow, I thought that would be enough to scare you all off the job. Then I threw that knife at you the night you thought I had gone to Mobaye. I wanted to scare you, but you wouldn't scare. Hugh Jackson saw me that night and I had Koloba kill him the next morning. Then this morning that Huley boy caught me setting a dynamite charge under the bridge."

Carter threw his head back suddenly and filled the hut with his hysterical laughter. He stopped abruptly and got control of himself.

"You see the way it is?" he explained. "I can't stop now. I've got to. . . ."

FROM across the clearing a great horned owl hooted in fear and Carter hesitated. Then, quickly, he pulled a gourd of water from the side of the fire and doused the flame. A loud hizz, a billow of steamy smoke and the hut was plunged in darkness.

Carter knelt beside the hut entrance and studied the moonlit clearing. And in the stream of moonlight that came into the darkened hut, Walt saw Koloba's body, the sharp claws on his hands reflecting the moon's soft glow.

Sprawling full length Walt inched his bound wrists toward the claws. Carter knelt like a marble statue, every sense alert for some movement in the clearing. Then Carter raised his heavy rifle slowly, intent on something beyond Walt's vision.

Walt knew there was no time now to complete his plan. Staggering to his feet he threw himself bodily at Carter. Carter's gun went off and both of them hit the side of the hut solidly. The agile guide was up first, and Walt caught a glitter of steel as the hunter jumped forward.

Walt kicked blindly, savagely, hoping to catch Carter in the groin. They caught the man high on the chest and Carter spun around and landed face down beside the fire. Walt tried to get to his feet, and groaned in sudden pain. He realized suddenly that Carter's knife was driven to the hilt into his thigh. Grabbing the bloody knife handle he pulled savagely, and he felt himself falling—falling. . . .

Walt didn't go completely out. Vaguely he sensed a form bending over him and he fought to remain conscious. His body tensed, expecting another stab of the knife. Then the film of pain left his eyes and he was staring at the grinning face of Mike O'Brien. The face was still bruised and swollen from Walt's pounding of the night before, but to Walt that grinning homely face was beautiful.

Then Mike was ripping away Walt's trouser leg and applying a tourniquet to the bleeding thigh. Walt forced himself to sit up, bracing himself with his arms behind him. And over Mike's shoulder he saw Carter, his slim body sprawled face down beside the fire.

It was several seconds before Walt realized what had happened. When the guide had fallen from Walt's blow high on the chest, he had turned in mid air landing face down on Koloba's outstretched hand. And the steel claws had embedded themselves in the killer's throat.

Then O'Brien's thick voice broke the silence of the hut. "Carter got the Huley kid, Davis. He was just finishing the job when I went to look the bridge over. He saw me and took to the brush. I tried to trail him but I got lost in the damned jungle."

He chuckled suddenly and smiled up at Walt. "I was plenty scared when night came. I climbed a tree and decided to wait till dawn. Then I heard shots, and when the moon came up I headed in this direction."

He ran a hand over his swollen features and indicated the dead bodies of Koloba and Carter with a curt nod.

"Hell," he grunted, "you're really tough when you get started. Ain't ya?"

For the first time in weeks Walt Davis really smiled. He knew finally that he had beaten the Davis jinx.

PHANTASMA

By R. A. EMBERG

The mysteries of the jungle are deep. The weird intrigues many. McCord learned that, when the gold and amber woman cast her spell . . .



The python freed a coil. Its great head lunged forward.

THE *Java Queen*, Antwerp-bound from Mombasa, was steaming through the Red Sea. The opaque mass to starboard was the Arabian Penin-

sula, while on the port side the coast of Eritrea floated in silver moonlight.

There was something about the night that got into one's blood. The monsoon

laden with pungent smells stirred deeply, arousing an indefinable nostalgia—something akin to a home-coming.

The passengers on deck felt the spell of the moonlight and monsoon. There was little conversation from the deck chairs.

Three men whose chairs were close together smoked contentedly. The first was Bert Allison, Standard Oil geologist, returning to America after three years in Arabia and on the African East Coast. The second was Donald McCord of the United States Bureau of Plant Industry, likewise bound for home. The other member of the trio was Frank Schroeder, an American also, a manufacturer's representative on a hop-skip-and-jump world tour. Schroeder alone of the three had the breezy, sometimes disagreeable, cockiness of the successful American go-getter.

Total strangers only a week before, the three had been more or less together since leaving Mombasa; perhaps it was because they were Americans and had been assigned to the same table.

Allison and McCord were inclined to smoke in silence. But Schroeder wanted to talk, even with little or no encouragement from his companions.

"This eastern stuff," he finally snorted, "is the raspberries. There's more mystery in a San Francisco Chinatown joss house than there is in the whole African continent.

"And the tall tales a guy hears back home, sees in the movies," Schroeder continued. "Nuts! From Cape Town north I saw nothing but flies, mosquitoes, sand, dirt and filthy natives. I might say the same thing of the whole damn East, Hong Kong, Singapore, Calcutta. And as for mystery, glamour and that sort of thing, bah! I spent a whole week in India looking for that rope and boy stunt. Did I find it? I did not!"

"I knew a fellow once who saw it—" Allison ventured mildly.

"Did you ever see it?"

"N-no—, but—"

"I'm from Missouri." Schroeder pulled deep on his cigarette. "About ninety per cent of this stuff is plain bunk—to bring in tourists. Why these boys could teach things to a Los Angeles booster club. Well, here's one guy who has been debunked!"

"Being a scientist," McCord said quietly, "I'd probably agree with you. But at times, for instance on a night such as this, reason, common-sense and education all go by the board. One can very well believe that this old continent may have something all the test-tubes and text-books in the world can't explain. You see, gentlemen, not so long ago I witnessed, participated in, if you like, a very strange occurrence, inexplicable by any known test to us."

"You mean you've fallen for this stuff?" Schroeder snickered.

"No. I simply mean that there may be certain things we of the Occident cannot comprehend, yet those same things may be common-place logic to those born and bred here. What I'm really trying to say is that I am admitting frankly that we Americans and Europeans *don't know everything*."

"You'll have to show me!" Schroeder grunted.

"It was my intention to say nothing of this to a living soul," McCord replied. "But the night—and—pardon me, your skepticism, moves me to tell it just as it happened. I'll be objective. You may draw your own conclusions."

TWO years ago (McCord began) a full and definitive report came to my department at Washington, that after years of experimentation in both the Philippines and Hawaii, the ethyl esters of Chaulmoogric and Hydnocarpic acids had proven of great benefit in the treatment of leprosy. The Chaulmoogra tree, so far as we knew, was scarce, its habitat confined to only two or three regions in the world, Siam and upper Burma, with probably an allied species in Uganda or in the environs of the Ituri Forest here in Africa. I'll not bore you with irrelevant details. Suffice it to say that the Department dispatched two expeditions, one to Burma, the other in my charge, to Africa, with the objective of studying the tree and obtaining slips and seeds for introduction into our island possessions.

I took with me an assistant, Guy Dunlap, a youngster fresh from college and a newcomer in the service. He was tickled pink and on the strength of the new assignment did what many youngsters madly

in love would do, wired the girl back home in a midwestern town, asking her to come to Washington and marry him.

She did. He brought her to my office right after the ceremony. Pretty as a picture, the sort that makes a home, and after it's made, sees to it that her man stays in it. By this I mean that she was the kind of a woman you seldom see in the divorce courts.

You could easily understand why she'd married Dunlap. He was the sort girls go daffy about: tall, slim, good jaw and chin, and maned with a shock of yellow hair that would have put a Norse god in the shade.

Dunlap was a one-woman man. If he hadn't been I wouldn't be telling this yarn, and I might have agreed with Schroeder. Well, he set up his bride in an inexpensive little apartment to wait. We headed across the Atlantic.

Not once in the crossing did Dunlap so much as glance at the bevy of "women-on-the-make" aboard the steamer, you know the kind I mean, gold-diggers, thrill-hunters, you'll find them on every steamer, every train. Most of the time he spent writing letters to be mailed at the first port we touched.

In England and Belgium I had conferences with various colonial officials and then one day we boarded another steamer which in due time landed us at Mombasa. Within three weeks we'd organized our safari and were heading for Uganda.

Again I'll pass up the details of the trek. We spent considerable time in the country of the Alulus combing wide expanses of papyrus swamp and jungle without discovering anything which remotely resembled the tree we sought. But we did get some promising leads. From the description given by several sub-chiefs we were inclined to think that we might find the tree in the northern reaches of the Ituri Forest in the area between Uganda and the Belgian Congo. We headed that way. At Aru we presented our credentials to the Belgian official in charge of the district and he provided us with an interpreter and guides as well as a rough map of the territory.

We traversed the lands of the Pygmies without incident, bearing eastward again toward the Nile, and nowhere did we find a Chaulmoogra. But now the natives ap-

parently recognized our descriptions of the tree and continued to point north.

One mid-morning several days away from the last tiki-tiki dwelling, we finally entered one of the most unusual forests I have ever been in. Bananas, pawpaws, mango and pineapple grew in profusion. And in between were lush-stalked plants with leaves a yard long. Pale ochre and vermilion blossoms flaunted unhealthy colors in the filtered gloom. Ferns, mosses, creepers, parasitic vines, toadstools a foot across, a multitude of jungle growth of all kinds, struggled for life in an almost sunless existence. It was a phantasmal forest where nothing moved.

At noon our porters refused to go on. Nor were the Momvu guides and interpreter furnished by the Belgian administrator enthusiastic about going on, despite the hippo-hide whip which awaited them at Aru should we report their insubordination. The long and short of it was that we were approaching a fearful place, "*baya sana* place, *bwana*," the place of the demons!

It took a lot of persuasion, including the promise of triple pay to make the boys take up their packs. Reluctantly the Momvu boys agreed to come, too.

THE sinking sun made the perpetual twilight darker while we still plodded through a sea of vegetation. No breeze blew in the gloomy silence and the air was humid and suffocating. The sweat poured from our bodies and the heavy smell of rotten growth, the stench of moist earth a-crawl with fecund life, was in our nostrils. That forest was a laboratory of life.

It was almost too dark to proceed further when the trees thinned out and we emerged into a small village. But what a village! The towns of the Pygmies, if indeed they could be called towns, were collections of primitive shacks, skeletons of poles thatched with leaves and grass. The huts of the Belgian Congo and Uganda were not much better, but here was a village of substantial houses, constructed not of thatch, but of what seemed to be whip-sawed or hewn timbers.

Almost in the center of the town was a larger, more pretentious building with something of the appearance of a Chinese pagoda.

The beat of a tom-tom announced our arrival and within a few minutes we were surrounded by the populace. Again I got a surprise. The natives of Uganda and the Congo are true negroids, but these people were red-brown in color, with fine-textured skins, beautifully formed with pleasing Arabic or Semitic appearing faces.

I talked through the interpreter to a man who seemed to be a chief. He understood a little Swahili and after several minutes he nodded vigorously and pointed at the pagoda-like house.

"*Bwana*," the interpreter muttered, "*bwana mazuri sana*," pointing in the same direction, "him number one chief over there. Much better you make palaver along him."

Ordering the men to remain where they were, the interpreter, Dunlap and I followed the man to the pagoda.

Our guide ushered us through an arch, salaamed low and stood waiting. The shock almost knocked me off my feet. The person who stood in the room illuminated by burning tapers stuck in niches on the walls was a woman! But not an ordinary native woman. Imagine if you can, a girl of twenty-four, with skin the color of beaten gold and a figure that might have been chiseled by Praxiteles even though that master sculptor could not have commenced to give it the warmth and life that radiated from the curved softness of her gleaming body.

Save for a narrow girdle of cloth about her loins she was as nude as the day of her birth. But it was not the nudeness of exhibitionism.

It was her eyes, however, that sent cold chills up my spine. They were amber-colored, almost lidless, full of expression, yet cold, and they reminded me of the eyes of a big tree-python we had stumbled on earlier in the day. But if her eyes were serpentine, so was every move of her body, her arms, her hands, the sinuous swaying dance of a cobra, a sinister, mysterious adagio of death.

I heard Dunlap gasp. Her eyes were on him, focused, penetrating, hypnotizing. Then with an effort I came out of the daze that possessed me. The girl was speaking, melodious, liquid words. There was imperious interrogation in her voice.

Once more I was a plant explorer, not a moonstruck idiot, and I snapped words at

the interpreter. He passed them on. She replied in a throaty contralto, using the Swahili tongue. Yes, we might explore her domains for a tree. And there was a guest house in which we might rest after our long journey.

Although she talked to the interpreter her eyes were on, yes, you've guessed it, Dunlap. You've seen a kid outside a store-window just before Christmas. Or perhaps a tiger in the zoo just before feeding time. If you have, you'll know what sort of a look was in those amber, lidless eyes. Right there I had a premonition of trouble.

Then she moved lithely, sinuously, serpentine, toward Dunlap. She paused in front of him, her beautiful breasts rising and falling with the tempo of a gathering storm. He stood close to me, huddled if you will, as if for protection. I could hear his breathing, feel his trembling.

With her eyes still fixed on Dunlap she gave orders to the sub-chief. He backed out of the room and beckoned for us to follow.

"Whewwww," the pent-up breath burst from Dunlap when he got outside. He wiped a sweaty forehead, sweaty not from the heat either, for the sun had now gone down and a cool breeze blew over the clearing.

We followed the subchief to the guest house, and that night for the first time since leaving Washington, Dunlap was not himself. His usual cheeriness and good humor had evaporated like dew under a hot sun.

THE next day a mile or so north of the village, we discovered what appeared to be, by every test known to us, a species of the *Taraktogenos Kurzii* or Chaulmoogra tree. They were in fruit and for a week or more we were busy harvesting and packing both nuts and joints for shipment. This was a very meticulous job as we had to preserve the germinating power for the long trip ahead.

Every evening the golden woman came to see us, ostensibly to inquire after the treatment we were getting from her subjects, but always her eyes were on Dunlap, and always that look was in them. I might have been non-existent for all the attention she showed me.

Try as I might I could discover nothing

about her and her people. They were a strange tribal islet of some kind surrounded by Pygmies, Alulus and Momvus from whom they held superciliously aloof. The tribesmen held their queen in great awe, shutting up like clams when questioned about her. Finally the interpreter refused to pass on inquiries regarding her, saying that it was very dangerous.

I could hardly believe that she was of the same blood-strain as the rest of the tribe. She was a reincarnation of an ancient sun-goddess, or Rider Haggard's *She*. Or if she was of the same tribal stock, then she was a biological anachronism. Or an Englishman, a Frenchman or a Belgian had passed a night in her mother's house. No, that wasn't the answer. It was something deeper, incomprehensible.

Dunlap was moody and silent now, working at a furious pace, gulping his food, snapping at me short-temperedly, and otherwise showing all the signs a jackass usually shows when he has woman-trouble. Then one afternoon while I was on a short exploration of the adjacent forest he disappeared.

"Him there," said the head porter, pointing to the pagoda-house, "three—four hours ago."

Far be it from me to interfere in any man's affairs of the heart. But I was responsible in this case. I had brought Dunlap to Africa. I couldn't get that fluffy-haired girl back in Washington out of my mind.

He came back about midnight. I was waiting for him. He took it without resentment. "You're right, Doc," he groaned, "I'm a louse. When can we get away?"

"Easy," I told him, "we've got to finish our work."

"I'll go crazy if we don't get away."

"Are you in love with this—this savage?" I asked.

"No—" he almost screamed. "I don't know what it is, but I can't resist it; it pulls and pulls!"

The next morning his cot was empty, nor had it been slept in. He'd slipped out apparently right after I'd talked to him.

I went to the pagoda-house. Four of the queen's soldiers with broad-bladed spears jabbed me away. And the jabs were not lacking in emphasis.

For five days I waited the return of my assistant without a glimpse of him. The trill of some sort of a flute and the low tump-tump of a drum came from the pagoda-house. And also the reek of incense, a perfumed, sensuous stuff. God knows where she got it. For a moment it had me groggy, so sense-bogging was the odor. Men, civilized or savage, are still emotionally subject to smells.

Then Dunlap came back. You've seen a tramp dog sneak home after he's been gone a week, or a tom-cat after a prowling. He looked like both. I said nothing, just sat on my cot and gave him the once-over.

His face was lined, haggard, but he looked me squarely in the eye. "Go on, say it," he blurted out. "Tell me what a damned weakling I am; tell me I'm no good, but for God's sake say something! Don't sit there like a blinking owl."

"When you've knocked about this world as much as I have," I told him, "you'll learn not to condemn quickly. If you've had enough of the lady, let's get back to work. There is still a lot to be done."

"You mean you won't hold this against me?"

I shook my head. "No, why should I?"

Then he broke down and told me of the five days. She couldn't talk to him as she would have none of the interpreter, but a woman doesn't need a vocabulary when she's with *the* man. She'd made it obvious that she considered him hers, body and soul, that come what might, he'd never leave the village without her.

"I don't want her, McCord," he was almost weeping. "I never did want her. I want her less now."

He'd hardly been back an hour when she came for him again with a spear-armed escort. But Dunlap was deaf, dumb and blind. So far as he was concerned the affair was over. She might as well go back to the pagoda house and stay there. Her amber eyes slitted, her arms, her whole body, swayed after the manner of an angered snake. I could have been mistaken, but the sharp intake of her breath sounded like a serpent's hiss. She spoke to her escort and they followed her away.

My face must have shown my deep concern. This woman could, probably would, make things hot for us.

"It's my fault," Dunlap groaned.

"Don't worry," I tried to reassure both him and myself. "The Belgians have Askari garrisons all through the Congo region. This woman knows that she'll have to take the consequences if anything happens to us. Besides, we have our rifles."

We continued our packing, wearing cartridge-belts and keeping our Remingtons handy.

And that night the Python came!

WE neither saw nor heard the reptile, but it left an enormous spoor printed deep in the soft earth outside the guest-house and clearly recognizable were the marks of its spurs, the muted, atrophied hind legs and claws peculiar to this snake, a survival of ancient times when the creature had legs and crawled like a crocodile. The window bars were pushed aside and apparently the animal had come to the side of the house on which Dunlap slept and stuck its head inside.

I followed the wavy trail into the forest, but lost it in the dense growth. Now the appearance of a big snake in a snake country should not be alarming in itself, but down deep I had a feeling of unexplainable anxiety. And I noticed that the men were restless, too.

We worked like Trojans all day finishing our packing. With luck we would get away the next day. When we turned in for our last night in the village Dunlap was almost his old self. His words before he went to bed were a promise, half to himself, half to me, to tell all to the girl back home. And whether he kept it or not, it was good for his soul right then.

I crawled into the blankets, blew out the lantern and snugged down. But I couldn't go to sleep. The thought of that huge snake returned again and again to plague me. Regardless of how many times I told myself that my fears were groundless, I simply couldn't get it out of my mind. The night seemed normal. There were the usual noises, the calls of nocturnal birds, the rasping laughter of hyenas, and far off, the cough of a lion, the many manifestations of jungle life, love and death. Then suddenly as though I had gone deaf, the noises ceased.

I got up, went to the door and peered out. Seeing nothing I told myself that hard work and worry had given me a bad case

of nerves. I returned to bed, but not before making sure that my Remington was within easy reach. The feel of its stock was reassuring, and after some more tossing about I dropped off into a troubled sleep. . . .

I wakened to a horrible nightmare. The moon hanging low threw a filtered light into the room. Dunlap threshed under a mound of mottled coils, each as thick as a tree. The Python had returned. It had come in by way of the window, brushing aside the replaced bars like so many straws. It was my assistant's one and only scream that had aroused me. All I could hear now was the ominous rustling as the coils were pulled tighter and the gasping breath of Dunlap as slowly and inexorably his life was crushed out.

Dazed, frightened, I pawed for my rifle. The python heard me. Its coils relaxed for a moment and unwinding a section of its body from around its victim lunged a head the size of a horse's straight at me. I threw up the rifle—between me and a pair of amber, lidless eyes—to ward off the blow. The creature's muzzle hit the rifle, smashing it back hard and knocking me in a heap back of the cot.

I expected it to follow and throw some of those ample coils about me, but it didn't. Swaying sinuously, it looped back around Dunlap, hissing like a steam engine.

Again I grasped my rifle, threw it to cock and snapped the butt to my shoulder. The snake heard the metallic click. Once again it freed a coil and thrust its great head toward me. I knew that this time if it got me, well, I'd be done for.

I aimed at the head, between the amber, lidless eyes and squeezed the trigger. The gun roared. The coil came toward me, hissing, writhing. Not only one coil. As in a dream I saw the snake almost completely free Dunlap. It was after me. Then it was on me. I went down. My head crashed into something, a roll of thunder, a great hissing, lights, darkness, and I went out.

Vaguely I became aware of a babble of voices. I opened my eyes. The lantern had been lit. Our interpreter and head porter were bending over Dunlap at the other end of the room. The hut was filled with the rest of our boys. I struggled erect, pushed through the crowd and stood over my assistant.

He was bleeding like a stuck pig from fang punctures in the throat. My head cleared quickly and I snapped orders. Within a few minutes we had him bandaged and resting. The fang wounds were deep but not fatal. However, he had five broken ribs from the constriction and perhaps other internal injuries. It would be a long time before he would be up and around.

A touch on my arm and the head porter pointed to another body face downward on the floor.

I rubbed my eyes. Great God! The tribal queen, the gold and amber woman of the forest. The snake had got her too. But when? And what was she doing in the guest house?

I TURNED her over gently—and gasped at what I saw. No, not the fang-marks of a snake. Only a little round hole in the forehead, slightly above and between those amber eyes. A blue hole made by a rifle-bullet. And only I had fired a rifle that evening!

There are some things that can't be explained. This was one. I knew full well that my shot had hit the python, *but that we would never find its body*. We never did. There was no trace of it!

In the morning we explained things as well as we could to the subchiefs. They examined the evidence. And strange as it seems, they did not hold me responsible

for their queen's death, although we were prepared for this unpleasant eventuality.

We slung Dunlap into a hammock, shouldered our packs and in due time arrived back at Aru. I laid the circumstances before the Belgian official. I expected some sort of an inquiry. But nothing of the sort happened. He shrugged eloquent shoulders. 'Has Messieu' ever heard of hypnotism?' he asked, "mass hypnotism?"

Which was no explanation of my assistant's grievous wounds. . . .

A beam of light flashed across the water, the searchlight of an English destroyer heading in for the Eritrean Coast. The beam picked up the *Java Queen*, blinked, outlining the three men in deck-chairs, passed on.

The lean face of McCord was rigid and tense. It was easy to believe that the tale had not been for entertainment. His cigar was out. He lit it, the match flaring, then whipped it over the rail into darkness.

As for Schroeder, he knew for certain that he had not heard a Hollywood thriller. Nor could he speak for a time. When he did recover his voice he asked, "Dunlap—did—did he recover?"

"Yes," McCord said, "he's in the sick-bay aboard this steamer. You may remember the man brought aboard in a litter. Getting along very well. He should be completely recovered by the time we reach New York. And tomorrow, if you like, I'll take you down to see him."



TRIAL BY MAGIC

By TOM O'NEIL

Even Massu knew of no juju as potent as the Baas Wilberton's "Allie-charm."



The knife swept downward in a flashing arc.

GUANA, the Evil One, dwelt in the Zuga swamps. Any fool should know it. His breath stank; you felt but never saw him, and he could take possession of a body unguarded by *Annu*. The *Khoi-khoi* understood this, but the White men did not—they thought Guana

was in flies, and they fought him with white powder! Which was strange since they were not altogether fools. No, they had great wisdom for some things, but it was not of a kind that would help a man to live long here, in Bechuanaland at the headwaters of the Zuga river.

Massu, the Hottentot, squatted on his haunches and wagged his woolly head sagely. Were there not five graves with cross-sticks to mark the truth of these words? And in these graves, were there not five fair young warriors of the Bechuanaland Police? Massu had served them all at the lonely African out-post. But they would have none of Massu's wisdom, and so *Guana* had taken them. Aie! and he would take the blue-eyed Baas Sterne who raved and fought for his life on the white cot. So he would were it not that there was between the Baas and Massu that which made them blood brothers.

Massu laughed softly. It was well for the Baas that the Corporal had been away on patrol so long and would not return before sundown. The Blue-eyed One sweated and fought, like the young lion he was. It would not be easy for *Guana* this time—he had Massu, grandson of *T'Hasu*, famed wizard of the Khoi, to deal with now, not white powder!

To outwit *Guana* in the struggle for the sick man's soul, Massu had done what was meet and needful according to his craft. Every door and window in the thatched bungalow was tightly shut, so that the White man's soul might not sally forth, as the souls of men were wont to do when they slept. Here and there on the floor of the main room he had placed earthenware pots, baited with tidbits from his Master's favorite food so that if *Guana* should prove the victor and expel the Baas' soul from his body, even then it might be lured within one of the pots, caught, and later induced to return to its proper abode.

At sundown the Baas Sterne would turn his face to the wall and die, or he would speak with his own voice again and live. Confident in his skill, Massu settled to wait and watch. Yet he was troubled in spirit; at war with himself. The low brow, beneath his woolly hair, wrinkled and lent to his yellow, pock-marked face, a comically exaggerated expression of deep thought. In three years he had known a dozen masters, and from each he had stolen a little; a ring from one, a chain from another; a watch-fob, even a watch itself, when it was small enough. To be sure the Great Ones missed their trinkets, but it was in the hiding of his spoil that Massu

displayed a touch of genius. In the corner of the lean-to which served as a stable for the post and Massu's sleeping quarters, there stood a bamboo rod some five feet long, its hollow length half filled with a miscellany of glittering trinkets.

The bamboo had become the Hottentot's fetish. The capacity of its interior measured his conception of worldly opulence, and in idle moments he teased his immanization by trading its contents for wives and cattle. The ring with the red stone, flashing on Sterne's middle finger, provoked like fancies, and the blood-red of the ruby reminded Massu of other things, too.

Was it not the same Baas Sterne who had saved him from the lion? Were they not blood-brothers? It was so. He had performed those solemn rites which bound his fate to that of the young Baas forever. But did such vows embrace a brother's property as well as his person? It was this—this moral hair-splitting that made for Massu's spiritual unrest.

At length the Hottentot filled his wide nostrils with snuff and snorted derisively at the red stone. A pity to steal from this one; with him it was different. Lo, the voice within spoke good words. The red stone was *anu*, untouchable.

OUTSIDE the light failed rapidly. Up from the river came noises of jungle life, now rising to a babble of grunts and cacklings; now warned to breathless silence by the carnivore's throaty moan. Within Massu lighted his four lamps; one on the long table in the center of the square room; two hung from swinging brackets set in the wall. They were badly trimmed and the air was soon foul with their smoke. The sick man stirred restlessly; the mosquito netting about his cot billowed.

"Massu, boy! Water!"

"Baas," The Hottentot sprang upright. There was joy in his tone. The Baas spoke with his own voice again.

Sterne struggled to his elbow, all but snatched the cup from Massu's hand and drank greedily.

"Phew!" He rubbed his smarting eyes. "Open the windows, boy."

The chill of the African night sucked in through the openings. It caught the

yellow flame of the lamps and set the shadows dancing grotesquely about the walls.

Sterne shivered, drew the blankets about his shoulders and looked about him as if to make sure of his whereabouts. His eyes came to rest on the earthen jars: "Spellbinding, again, eh?" he commented jerkily.

Massu fidgeted and dropped his eyes. "Massu fix Baas," he affirmed defensively.

Jerry Sterne's blue eyes rested on the Hottentot's face quizzically. A smile turned the corners of his mouth.

"Thanks," said he. "Thanks a lot. Better get rid of 'em, though, before the Baas Corporal sees them or there'll be. . . ."

A heavy step, accompanied by a jingle of spurs sounded on the verandah outside. The Hottentot needed no second warning. He clutched wildly at his precious pots, faded through the door at the end of Sterne's cot and out of the window, as the Corporal entered from the outside.

A man of middle height and years, with heavy muscular legs showing beneath his khaki shorts, Corporal Thompson justified the sobriquet: "Tight." Dark, thin-lipped and somber-eyed, he typified the man who takes counsel only of himself, and finding there sufficient reason, acts. He strode straight to Sterne's cot and took the young man's wrist between finger and thumb.

"How's it coming, lad?"

"Burned out," Sterne grinned.

"Good! I was worried . . . couldn't make it back last night." He placed his pith-helmet on the long table and unbuckled the heavy service revolver from his belt.

"The Old Man is due up river tomorrow," he continued. "I'd like to see you on your feet."

"Why? Inspector Cameron's no slave-driver."

"I wasn't thinkin' of that—there's other reasons. We may be doin' some traveling in a day or two."

The young trooper started: "Where. . . . Why?"

"Man hunt," came the laconic response.

Sterne twisted about so that he could see the other's face. He eyed Thompson keenly.

"You've been playing the lone hand again, Tight. It'll catch up with you one of these days," he warned.

A frown came to Thompson's face. For a moment his eyes were troubled, then: "Talk doesn't get you anywhere. A man's got to be sure."

Sterne got himself into a sitting posture; his face was eager. "Out with it!" he urged. "You can't keep it from me!"

"Right!" Thompson smiled, "I like you, lad. There's promotion at the end of this. You get your cut." He fished his pipe from the pocket of his tunic and went on slowly: "You haven't been told, but the Old Man was sent up here with us to keep an eye on what they call foreign infiltration—fifth column stuff, see? Back at Francistown, Cameron hasn't got anywhere but when you get wise to the set-up that won't surprise you. I've been on to it for months—I've got to the bottom of it, or maybe I should say the top. Anyway," he tapped the bulging pocket of his tunic significantly. "I've got the goods! An' a nice piece of police work it is, too, if I do say so myself!"

"Why, you tight-mouthed . . . you . . . oyster!" exploded the boy, his cheeks flushed with excitement. "Who's lined up?" he demanded.

The Corporal's somber eyes glowed with unusual brightness:

"He'll be payin' us a visit before you're many hours older, or I'm a bad guesser," said he.

"Who," insisted Sterne.

"Wilberton." Thompson spoke the name slowly, with relish. "Mr. Joshua Wilberton."

STERNE gasped. "Wilberton!" he echoed and then burst into laughter. "Tight," he gasped. "You're crazy! Wilberton—the Empire Builder!"

Thompson's eyes flashed: "But whose Empire—Did you ever think of that, boy? I'm telling you we're in for it! An' when it breaks loose you'll find an enemy in your best friend!"

"The fever's got you, Tight—you're off your top! Wilberton—God's gift to Africa . . . Oh, Lord!" The cot shook with his laughter.

The Corporal looked quickly at Sterne's flushed face. His ear caught the high-

pitched note of hysteria in the boy's laughter.

"Here, cut that!" he ordered. "Get under the blankets." He reached into the cupboard beside the cot.

"Where's the quinine?—that damned Nigger! Well, it's sleep you need." He dropped two tablets from a little square bottle into a tumbler of water.

"Here," said he, pillowing Sterne's head in the crook of his arm, "Down this and sleep it off."

The effect of the drug was almost immediate. Sterne babbled foolishly for a time, then sank into deep, soothing sleep. Thompson watched beside the cot until the sick man's breathing was deep and regular then, with a grunt of satisfaction he rose, walked to the outside door and bellowed into the night: "Massu!"

The Hottentot's answer floated up from the river and presently his feet pattered across the verandah floor.

"White man come, Baas," he announced as he entered.

Thompson jerked his thumb over his shoulder: "From up river?"

Massu shook his head and swept his arm toward the west.

Thompson's eyes narrowed: "Through the swamps, eh?" he muttered. "It's him, then—an' he's takin' chances."

Massu nodded and grinned. He had not understood the significance of Thompson's words, but the Corporal had expressed his contempt for Massu's magic on more than one occasion, and in a manner that was too painful to be forgotten quickly. The white man's coming was a welcome diversion; it would turn the Baas Corporal's mind from the earthen pots and the white powder. Then, too, the hour was late; the white man would pass the night in the spare room, and doubtless he would have about his person that which would compensate Massu for the extra work.

Thompson strode across the room, picked up his belt and buckling it about his waist, loosened the gun in its holster. He seated himself behind the table so that he faced the outside door.

Minutes passed. Sterne's breathing seemed to fill the room. Thompson shifted uneasily in his chair. Suddenly, without

the warning creak of the verandah boards, a soft knocking sounded on the door.

"Come in," growled Thompson. His hand slid down to the butt of his gun.

The opening door revealed a tall man of some fifty years, dressed in a square-cut coat, breeches and high boots on which there were streaks of drying mud. As he entered, turning aside to close the door, the light fell on his profile. It was handsome with a brown, pointed beard streaked with grey. Such a head would not have looked out of place in a gallery depicting the Christian Martyrs. But, in contrast to the profile, his full face was something of a shock. The forehead was too narrow; the eyes too closely set. Seeing him from the different angles, one had the uncomfortable feeling of looking at two faces in one.

IT was not the first time that Corporal Thompson had met Joshua Wilberton. As head of the Bechuanaland Trading Company, Wilberton spent much of his time in travel from post to post. Because of his influence among the tribes, and his philanthropic activities, he was in high favor with the Commissioner. The facilities of Government were at his disposal and he availed himself of them freely. He had required the Corporal's hospitality on more than one occasion; nor had he been unwelcome. He was fond of talk and paid his way with well-told tales of the days when Chetahwayo's *impis* were flashing along the borders.

On this occasion, however, the Corporal greeted his visitor with cold, unfriendly eyes.

If Wilberton noticed the tenseness of the Corporal's attitude, he gave no sign of it. He smiled benignly, then let his gaze travel around the room. His close-set eyes narrowed a little as they came to rest on Sterne's figure outlined beneath the mosquito netting. Without waiting for an invitation he moved forward with easy unconcern and sank into the chair opposite Thompson's.

"Upon my soul, Corporal, the older I get, the more I have to do." He sighed and unbuttoned his coat. His white shirt was wet with perspiration. "If it's not a

meddling agent," he went on, "It's a tribe of improvident natives. However, I'll need the co-operation of your excellent chief in this matter. I understand he's due up with the relief tomorrow."

"Right," affirmed Thompson. "Go on."

"Oh, nothing more," returned the other carelessly. "Except that I'll throw down on the spare cot, if I may."

The Corporal favored his guest with a wooden stare. The reason for Wilberton's coming bulged in the pocket of his tunic. But evidently Wilberton wanted to play at make-believe or something deeper. Certainly Wilberton didn't intend to spend the night at the bungalow. He didn't intend to be anywhere near it when Cameron arrived. But there was something behind his pretense—something that rang an alarm in Thompson's brain. Playing with Wilberton was like playing with a cobra, but Thompson's dark nature accepted the risks. Besides, Wilberton was the leader but who were his following? If Wilberton could be goaded into bolting for it, panic would betray the others.

"You're more than welcome to the cot," said Thompson ironically and, turning to the Hottentot, he bade him bring a mug of coffee for the Baas Wilberton.

Wilberton eased himself in his chair and took snuff from a small iron box covered with a network of filigreed gold. On the lid was a woman's head done in cameo.

"You know," he said gravely, "This Africa—this magnificent country, is going to ruin. Incompetence, official stupidity is the reason for it. What's needed is vigor, organization, new blood." He paused and weighed the snuff box in the palm of his hand, as if he sought inspiration there.

Massu, in the act of pouring the coffee, eyed the box appraisingly. It caught the Corporal's eye, too. He leaned forward for a closer look. Wilberton thrust the box toward him with a smile:

"Have you fallen victim to the habit, Corporal?" he asked.

Thompson shook his head. "No, but the woman's head . . . it seems familiar."

"Of course," explained the other softly. "You knew my wife. The box was her last gift to me. I had her head worked on the lid on my last trip to the Cape.

Dear Allie!" His thumb caressed the cameo. "She gave me everything—love, beauty and luck."

THE yellow filigree of the iron box glittering in the oil lamps, fascinated Massu. He had understood but little of the white man's talk. English, Africander or Portuguese were all one tongue to the Hottentot. But luck—Massu comprehended that. The white man was forever cursing his luck. A thing of much evil, this luck, and therefore useful against one's enemies. And lo! Here was a box that contained its potency. Massu yearned to possess it. He would have traded the whole contents of the bamboo rod for this—this "Allie charm", as the white man had called it.

Thompson had listened attentively to Wilberton's talk of his wife, and by the time the other had finished, his face was a study in amazement, mingled with disgust. "Hell!" he exploded. "You didn't come here to talk sentiment."

Wilberton started and shot a fearful look at the cot on which Sterne slept.

"So, that's it!" observed the Corporal. "Scared he might hear something?"

Wilberton regarded the Corporal through narrowed eyes. He slipped the snuff box into the pocket of his coat and rose with deliberation. For a moment he stood, studying the figure on the cot, pulling at his beard; then he stripped off his coat, and walking to the door of the spare room, flung it on a chair within. The move brought him close to the head of Sterne's cot. With one hand on the door, he lifted the netting with the other, so that he could see the sleeper's face; then brought the door to with a sharp slam. Sterne never moved. A gleam came into Wilberton's eyes. He spun about to face the Corporal:

"Get the Nigger out," said he curtly. "We'll talk."

Massu obeyed with alacrity. It would be easy for him to slip through the spare-room window and get the "Allie charm" from the Baas Wilberton's coat.

The face Wilberton turned to the Corporal was stripped of its assured benevolence. He spoke rapidly in a low, husky voice. "You haven't had time to report to your superiors, Corporal."

"Oh, haven't I?" Thompson grinned.

The other rested his knuckles on the table and leaned toward Thompson: "No, my friend. I'll come straight to the point. We'll pay your own price for silence."

Thompson shook his head: "You can't. . . ."

But Wilberton interrupted him eagerly: "Don't be a fool. You're not dealing with petty criminals. There are men of position involved. . . ."

"That's good," interposed Thompson. "There's too many people asleep an' dreamin' around here. They need a jolt."

"It'll do no good, Thompson! By the time they wake up, Africa will be lost! They've slept too long. It's just common sense. . . ."

The Corporal's face was like granite. "I'd call that treason," he said.

Wilberton's eyes flashed. "We get the most from our mothers. Mine was German."

"I'm glad you told me—mine was English. *You* know what I'll do."

The two men faced each other across the table, each seeking to measure the other's strength. In the silent struggle that followed, Wilberton's gaze was the first to turn away. He took a quick turn about the room then came to face the Corporal again. His face was drawn and his voice had a queer timbre in it:

"It would be better for you—better for everyone. Listen! You want promotion. I'll promise a district—not this, of course, but . . ."

The Corporal came to his feet with a curse. "You—traitor!" He checked himself with a deep breath and, hitching up the belt about his waist, went on more calmly: "You're gettin' ahead of yourself, Wilberton. You won't be appointin' Commissioners nor handin' out slices of Africa, just yet a while. Right now you're as close to dancin' at the end of a rope as any connivin' rat I've known!"

An animal-like gurgle came from Wilberton's throat. His hands clenched; his face went white.

"Can't take it, eh?" The Corporal's eyes glinted cruelly. "You'll have about six hours' start. Better get going—trek fast, I won't be far behind." He smiled contemptuously into the other's distorted face, then half turned, bending to kick his chair back into place.

At that moment Wilberton struck. A thin blade slid from the belt under his shirt. His long body arched forward. The knife swept downward in a flashing arc, and striking the Corporal below the shoulder bone, it pierced his heart. Thompson uttered a gasping cry and, toppling over his chair, crashed to the floor.

The death cry reached Massu's ears as he sat astride the sill of the spare room window with the coveted snuff box clutched in his hand. It froze his blood for a full minute; with eyes goggling at the door, he sat, incapable of movement. No sound came from the inner room. The beating of Massu's heart lessened and he caught his breath with a gasp. Curiosity, the bane of all primitive creatures, drew him irresistibly toward the door. He dropped lightly to the floor within and crept silently along it. A chink in the heat-warped wood gave him a view of the inner room.

The Corporal's body lay where it had fallen. Wilberton knelt beside Sterne's cot, careful wiping the haft of his knife with a handkerchief. This done to his satisfaction, he took the sleeping Sterne's limp hand and pressed it gently about the handle of the blade; then rose and surveyed the room, tugging at his beard. Silently he darted to the cupboard above the cot and drew a whiskey bottle from its place. Some of the contents he sprinkled on the sick man's coverings; some he forced between the dead man's lips, then smashed the bottle against the corner of the table, and again stood back to survey his work. With a nod of his head, he moved swiftly to the Corporal's body, threw open the tunic and took from it a packet of papers.

All these things Massu saw, but comprehended not at all. Each move stood out as an isolated act, without significance—unless it be that the White man dealt in witchcraft. Massu's eyes bulged; his spine tingled. *Aie!* there was much evil afoot. Swiftly, silently, like a shadow, he fled the place of killing.

THE sun was up; a pale, yellow disc as seen through the mists rising from the Zuga swamps, before Massu deemed it prudent to return to the post. Fear—a fear of baleful lurking things had kept him a shivering, haunted creature all that



night out in the bush veldt. Even now, in daylight, Massu approached the bungalow with stealth and by a circuitous route, for the soul of the Baas Corporal would surely hover about the familiar trails and Massu had no desire to meet the ghost of one who, so potent in life, must be infinitely more violent after death.

Thus, forcing his way through the dense though stunted growth, he came suddenly into the clearing in which the bungalow stood. A curling column of smoke coming up from the river told him the police steamer had arrived. A figure in Khaki shorts and pith-helmet, standing stiffly by the door of the bungalow, warned him that the Khu-Khoe Cameron had also come.

The sight of the familiar uniform heartened Massu, yet he ducked and skirted the building. There was the matter of the "Allie charm" to be attended to. He reached his rickety hut at the edge of the clearing without being seen. The bamboo stood in its customary place. He wrenched the plug from its mouth and dropped the snuff box in, then returned the bamboo to its place and trotted across the clearing to the bungalow. The trooper on duty conducted him within.

Inspector Cameron was holding summary investigation into the circumstances of Corporal Thompson's death. The case was painfully clear to the Inspector. The disorder of the room; the broken whiskey

bottle; Sterne's stupor and the knife, told a silent yet eloquent story. Thirty years of police work on the borders of an Empire had made it an old story for Cameron. It was always the same: two white men alone, divorced from the natural, varied life of civilization, nerves taut with the monotony and bickering over petty things. Then the inevitable explosion, touched off by a little debauchery, which sometimes led to a deep and lasting friendship; sometimes to tragedy. Both actors in this version had Cameron's sympathy, but he kept that side of himself strictly to himself. He never wittingly allowed his sentiments to disturb the matter-of-fact calmness of his exterior.

Cameron's men were of his own choosing and the pride he took in their conduct was, for him, more than the vindication of his judgment; it went much deeper than that. No one would have guessed by looking at his lean, sun-burned face, the hurt he nursed—the wound that first sight of the disordered room had dealt him. His gaze rested coldly on Sterne who sat across the table from him with his head resting on his hands. Frequently the young man dared a glance at the figure covered with a blanket on the floor, and as many times as he did so, his fingers, threaded through the yellow curls, tightened spasmodically.

"You deny," Cameron was saying, "having seen this before?" He indicated the long-bladed knife which lay on the table.

"You say you were sick—you obviously were; that you can remember nothing more. Is that all you have to say, in face of the evidence?"

"God help me, that's all." Sterne's voice hardly rose above a whisper.

Cameron rapped the table with his fingers and frowned incredulously at the boy's bent head. At this moment Massu was ushered in. The Inspector scowled and immediately began to question the Hottentot in his own queer, clicking tongue.

The questions bewildered Massu. Where had he been? Massu answered with a vague gesture. Why had he gone? He feared the White man. Which of the White men? The Baas Wilberton. The Baas Wilberton had been at the post, then? Massu nodded his head vigorously. How could that be when it was known that the Baas Wilberton was at N'simbe more than a day's trek up the river? If the *Khu-Khoe* said the Baas was at N'simbe, it must be so. Perchance the Baas Wilberton had dispatched his other self to work the evil. A suggestion that brought a grunt of disgust from Cameron. He turned to the sergeant beside his chair:

"Get up river on the VESPA. Check up on Wilberton's movements. A mere matter of form; explain it as such. The Nigger's been having bad dreams."

The sergeant's heels clicked.

"One more thing, Sergeant." Cameron detained him at the door: "We start for Francistown as soon as you get back, with the VESPA. Waste no time." He turned to interrogate the Hottentot again.

Where had Massu been when the Baas Corporal had been killed? Massu caught his breath. Here was a snare for the unwary! All the Chieftain's talk was a snare; it was a spoor that led straight to the bamboo rod! A fool would answer his questions! Massu's gaze turned toward the windows; his face became vacant.

Cameron uttered a short laugh. Was it not true that Massu had been in the store room stealing gin and, after drinking much, had had bad dreams?

If the Chieftain chose to think so, it was well. The Hottentot lowered his gaze.

"That's it!" said Cameron to the trooper who had taken the sergeant's place. "Take him outside."

He turned his attention to young Sterne

and eyed the boy thoughtfully. "I think it would be better if you remembered what happened last night, Sterne," he said at last.

The boy groaned and lifted his haggard face. "Remember," said he, "That's all I've been trying to do—just remember!"

"It isn't my place to advise you," Cameron's voice was cold. "Your counsel will do that. The charge won't be first degree murder. Better tell the truth; plead temporary insanity and take what you get, like a man."

Sterne's chin jerked up; his blue eyes took fire: "Murder! You—fool!" he flared at Cameron. "I didn't—A knife in the back—my God! I—I couldn't!"

Cameron studied the young face before him; his voice softened. "You've got to convince a jury, boy. If you didn't do it, who did? There was no one within fifty miles of you."

"There was something about Wilberton—" Sterne half rose in his chair, his forehead wrinkled.

Cameron's eyes clouded: "Don't try that, Sterne! Don't try to make a case out of Massu's story. Believe me, boy, it would make matters worse for you—it would suggest collusion. And you've seen that Massu doesn't stick to it."

Sterne slid back into his chair with a hopeless gesture: "All right, Chief, I know when the dice are loaded. But I'll see them all in hell before I plead guilty!"

Cameron frowned into the boy's face. His scrutiny was quietly returned.

"As you will," snapped Cameron. "You're under arrest, of course. A formal charge will be made against you when we reach Francistown."

For Massu the hours dragged slowly. From early morning, through the blistering noonday and the chill of night, he squatted outside the room in which Sterne was captive. His spirit had left him. He took no food; obeyed no command. Of what avail were such things? The place was bewitched. A truly great wizard, this Baas Wilberton, who walked free and happy while his evil fell on the heads of better men.

Massu grunted; his finger traced the crude figure of a man in the dust, damp with the morning dew. "Thou, Baas Wilberton," he muttered. "Thou fortunate

one, may evil fall on you from the star of my grandfather!"

SUNRISE brought the VESPA back from her trip up the river. With her came Joshua Wilberton, accompanied by two Portuguese traders and a Mr. Dright, a pompous little fellow who held the position of agent over the Ngami country.

Wilberton did not come ashore. Standing apart from his companions under the awning over the little steamer's stern, he awaited Cameron's arrival. There were dark circles under his eyes and his hand twitched nervously as he stroked his beard. Worry was eating into his self-control like a cancer. It had started when he first missed his snuff-box; that had been on his return trip through the swamp, to N'simbe, and it had been too late to return in search of it. The loss of that characteristic trinket, Wilberton knew, could mean much or nothing. Incredible as it seemed, the patient work of years—even life itself, had come to depend on the possession of a mere bauble. Yet there it was. Massu had seen him at the post. If the snuff-box were found there it would strengthen the Hottentot's story—a story he had calculated to crush with his alibi, attested by three witnesses, one a government official. In face of this, no one he knew, would believe the Hottentot; nor would any one, except those whom he could trust, be able to say just when they had noticed the absence of the snuff-box from his person. He had been prepared to meet the probability of its discovery in or near the bungalow with the simple statement that he had lost the box on his trip up river, several days before Corporal Thompson's murder.

But the sergeant's arrival at N'simbe had shattered his confidence in the convincing simplicity of this plan. If the snuff-box had been found, Cameron was withholding knowledge of it. An involuntary shiver shook Wilberton's long body. He must know what was in the Inspector's mind. The long trip on the boat to Francistown would give him ample opportunity. Cameron was a fool—no imagination, but the least scrap of material evidence was enough to set him in motion, tirelessly sifting like a machine.

Young Sterne was the first to come aboard. He walked a little unsteadily be-

tween the two troopers that formed his guard. Close at his heels followed Massu, his roll of blankets swinging from the bamboo rod which he shouldered like a rifle. Inspector Cameron arrived some ten minutes later. He saw his prisoner and Massu—the Hottentot would not leave his master—safely under guard in the VESPA'S foreward deck-house, and then sought Wilberton on the after deck.

"It wasn't necessary for you to come, Wilberton," he said, as he joined the group under the awning. "Your statement signed by Mr. Dright, here, would have been sufficient. . . ."

"Surely, surely," interposed Dright. "I explained that to Mr. Wilberton, but he insisted."

"I felt that it was my duty," Wilberton explained. He linked his arm with Cameron's and led him aside to the rail. The VESPA'S stern wheel was churning up the muddy waters of the Zuga. Wilberton leaned close to his companion so that his voice might be heard above the groaning of the wheel.

"This ghastly affair must have come as a shock to you, Inspector. I should like to extend my sympathy."

"Right. And thank you," returned Cameron.

"You know," Wilberton went on, "I can't connect Sterne with this horrible business. Such a charming young fellow—it's incredible."

"That's what I'd like to believe," growled Cameron.

"But can you be sure? Was nothing found that would indicate the presence of another person at the post that night? I understand that men of your profession believe the culprit always leaves something incriminating behind."

Cameron made a wry face: "Yes, as a rule, they do. Sterne certainly did. You see the boy was still out—out cold, when I got there. He hadn't made any attempt to cover up. He claims he can't remember anything. I'm inclined to believe him. He'd taken a good deal of whiskey and dope, but he doesn't grasp how much that would help him."

"You mean—plead temporary insanity?"

"A man can't go wrong when he pleads the truth. He wouldn't get more than ten years."

"Ten years! To a young man like Sterne that's a lifetime, Inspector."

"It's better than twenty."

"True," Wilberton agreed. Then, carelessly: "What about Massu?"

Cameron replied with a short laugh: "You know Hottentots don't do that sort of thing. A Zulu or a Bechwana might."

Wilberton's eyes narrowed. "Just where was the Hottentot at the time, Inspector?"

"He was there. He claims your ghost frightened him away. I think our Hottentot was snooping around, after the gin in the spare room, as like as not. He heard something of the struggle going on inside—a yell, perhaps, and took to his heels."

"So-o-o," the word came slowly from Wilberton's lips; his eyes glowed with inward satisfaction. There was a moment's silence then he said slowly: "I wonder why Massu picked on me?"

"Oh, that!" Cameron's eyes twinkled. "Well, haven't you been trying to reform the benighted savage for years? You're the Big Don't that tells him he must not do what his instincts urge him to do. I'll wager you're on every Nigger's conscience between Francistown and N'simbe!"

Wilberton laughed good humoredly. "At least you admit that he *has* a conscience, Cameron. But this doesn't help that poor boy. Can you do nothing for him?"

Cameron's hands tightened on the rail. "You know damn well I can't. It's a—mess!" He swore, then turned abruptly and strode forward.

AT sundown the VESPA nosed into the river's muddy bank and was made fast to an ancient acacia. With more than a hundred miles to her credit, she eased her weight to her moorings and blew the surplus steam from her boiler in a long drawn sigh. The current was far too rapid; the channel too uncertain to risk her hull at night. And there was no need. By noon of the following day the swift stream would bear her down to where the Zuga curved sharply to the south. A mile or so below this point her passengers and the few bales of trade goods would be discharged, to continue their journey to Francistown by way of the Old Wagon Road.

About midnight Inspector Cameron woke with a start. He sat bolt upright and swore roundly as his head came in con-

tact with the low deck-head above. An urgent rapping sounded on the door.

"Come in," barked Cameron.

The door swung open and revealed Joshua Wilberton's tall figure wrapped in a bathrobe. His air was apologetic. "Sorry to wake you," he said. "But—but I've been robbed, Inspector!"

"Eh!" grunted Cameron, dazedly. "Robbed, you say? Who th' devil . . . of what?"

"My snuff-box. I woke about eleven. I heard someone moving outside. My door was open; I glanced out and saw Massu running forward. At least I think it was Massu. I didn't think anything of it at the time but later—perhaps half an hour ago—I missed my snuff-box. I've come straight to you. The Hottentot's probably the culprit."

"Impossible!" snapped Cameron, struggling into his shorts. "He's under guard with Sterne."

Wilberton, in the shadow, eyed Cameron warily. From his talk with the Inspector that morning he had gleaned the information he sought. His nimble wits had leaped to the conclusion that the Hottentot must have taken the snuff-box from his coat in the spare room and the chances were that Massu still had it in his possession. Moreover, Massu had lied when questioned. Wilberton guessed that this evasion was due in part to the Hottentot's fear of punishment for theft, but in greater part, to the simple fact that Massu could not, nor ever would, grasp the significance of the snuff-box as evidence. Yet there was too much at stake to risk the accidental discovery of the box in the Hottentot's possession.

After a little reflection those same nimble wits had pointed out to Wilberton the course he should follow. He had but to declare he had been robbed and center *suspicion on Massu*. The Hottentot would be searched, the snuff-box found. This would be virtual proof that Massu had stolen it *on board the ship*. The fact that Massu had been under guard was a difficulty but surely not an insurmountable one. Wilberton plucked his beard thoughtfully.

"Of course," he said, "One can't be sure of anything at night. But I felt certain. . . ."

"We'll make certain," interrupted Cam-

eron, and quickly led the way forward.

The guard lolling against the deck-house, came to attention with clicking heels, as Cameron and Wilberton came suddenly upon him.

"Anyone been out of there?" demanded Cameron, jerking his head toward the cabin door.

"Jerry . . . I mean the prisoner, sir, was out for an hour, about seven this evening. Under guard, accordin' to orders, sir."

"And the Hottentot?"

"At the same time, sir."

Cameron glanced at his watch and turned to Wilberton. "It was about an hour ago you heard this prowler. Massu must have been safely under guard at that time."

"Y—ee-es," Wilberton agreed reluctantly. "But may I point out that the deck-house has a window facing aft? I don't want to cast any reflection on your men, but—a comrade in trouble, you know—there may have been some laxity."

Cameron's yes widened. "Reflection? Laxity? the devil you say!" He turned to face the guard. "Get that Nigger out!" he ordered. "Search him."

"His baggage, too, may I suggest?" Wilberton smiled and pointed to Massu's roll of blankets, lashed to the bamboo rod, beside the steamer's tiny hatch.

"You may," snapped Cameron.

The Hottentot came forth, blinking. The whites of his eyes gleamed in the moonlight as they rested on Wilberton's face. The Baas Wilberton was scowling and Massu's instincts warned him that it boded him no good. He was scantily clad in one of Sterne's old tunics and a pair of shorts with tattered legs. The search of his person was as brief as it was alarming. He knew what the Great Ones sought! What would the Chieftain do when the bamboo disgorged its treasure? Fascinated, he watched the trooper approach his blankets. He struggled to recall an incantation appropriate to the circumstances. His lips silently formed the words, words known only to the Shades in the Black Kloof and to Massu.

The trooper stooped and, without touching the bamboo, slipped the blankets from it. In a moment he had shaken them and had turned inquiringly to his chief.

Wilberton stepped forward. His countenance wore a baffled expression. Care-

fully he ran the toe of his boot along the edges of the blankets, swore under his breath and turned a lowering scowl upon the Hottentot. But Massu's face revealed nothing of the triumph that swelled in his heart.

"You're satisfied, I hope, Mr. Wilberton?" commented the Inspector caustically.

Wilberton hesitated, he was loath to give up the search, yet saw danger in pressing it. "I must apologize," said he. "I'll not trouble you further."

"One moment," Cameron detained him. "You said you saw someone running forward."

"Oh," returned Wilberton carelessly, "one of the Bechwana boys, perhaps. The light was uncertain, you know."

Cameron watched the tall figure until it was lost in the shadow cast by the after awning. As he did so, he stroked the nape of his neck pensively. Presently he walked to the after end of the deck-house and stood frowning at what Wilberton had called a window. It was a small port, hardly large enough for a man to get his head through, much less his shoulders.

"So," muttered Cameron. "He loses his snuff-box; that's all right. But why Massu?"

"What's the trouble, sir?" ventured the trooper who had followed his chief.

Cameron turned on him. "Get back to your post," he snapped. "And for heavens sake, try to look as if I give you some time for sleep!"

FRANCISTOWN welcomed the travel-worn party with eager expectancy. In bar room and club the talk was all of the coming trial. Men weighed their opinions judiciously, outwardly thanking the fate that had made them simple miners or traders and not the judges of their fellow men. While, perhaps each secretly hoped that on him would fall the distinction of jury duty.

But the trial itself, from a dramatic point of view, was disappointing. Except for the defense's plea for mercy, an eloquent appeal that had its effect, there was little to stir the crowded courtroom. Blind justice coldly and inexorably demanded the conviction of Jerry Sterne.

Sterne stood for his sentence. His eyes were defiant and his "Not Guilty", spoken against his counsel's advice, was clear and

firm. Ten years of penal servitude was the sentence.

A murmur buzzed around the court room to center in the person of Joshua Wilberton, whose venerable mien and rich sympathetic voice gave full expression to the popular emotion.

"Poor boy! Poor boy! To be born and bred in this vast country, then caged for ten years—the best ten of his life!"

Dright and the Portuguese were there to echo this sentiment. After which Francis-town returned to its neglected industry, and the satisfied jurors, proudly to their wives.

But there was one who remained after all had gone. Massu had not been called to the witness stand; the defense had judged his story to be negligible, if not prejudicial. Forbidden to enter the court room, the Hottentot had dogged his master from jail to court house during the two days of the trial. Now he squatted near the rear exit, patiently awaiting the appearance of Sterne and his guards.

From the scraps of conversation that came his way he managed to understand enough to grasp the outcome. It was no surprise to Massu. To him the conviction of Sterne was but a natural result of Wilberton's sorcery, of the spell woven that night in the bungalow up river. At the back of his mind there lurked the idea that this spell might be broken; that he might save Sterne from Wilberton, even as he had saved him from *Guana*. It had crept into his thoughts after Wilberton had failed to secure his "Allie charm." Nourished by success, slowly the idea had grown until the search for a counter charm had come to dominate his waking hours.

When at last Sterne came out with his guards, Massu followed him the short distance to the stone building which was jail and headquarters for the police of the District. After Sterne had been conducted within, the Hottentot squatted before the gray stone doorway, a position he determined to hold for the remainder of the day, lest the Baas be moved without his knowing.

It was thus that Inspector Cameron came upon him. Cameron frowned at the unspoken plea in the Hottentot's upturned eyes and passed on into the building. However, he stopped abruptly between the door

to his office and the desk sergeant, and addressed that official brusquely.

"That Hottentot outside, Sergeant," said he. "Been hanging around here like a lost dog. Let him see Sterne for a while."

Jerry Sterne put aside the book he was reading as the Hottentot was ushered into his cell. Massu squatted with his back to the wall opposite his master. Neither spoke until Sterne swung his legs from the iron cot and, resting one arm on his knee, addressed Massu in his own tongue.

"Tomorrow, O Massu, I go south."

Massu bent his head: "It is not good, my brother."

"True. And tomorrow the servant must seek a new master."

Massu shook his head.

Sterne eyed the wrinkled face with something akin to affection. "Massu will return to his own people, then? It is good. He shall be rewarded. For the Baas has still the power to give, though he may not walk free. The Great ones have taken his freedom from him."

Again Massu shook his head. "Not the Great Ones, Baas. It is the Bearded One who has worked this evil. It is he who has stolen thy freedom."

"Would Massu lie to his brother?"

Massu filled his lungs; his chin tilted upward. "Massu speaks true words, O Slayer of Lions."

Sterne leaned toward the Hottentot, his blue eyes serious. "O Massu, the Baas' head has been sick, slowly it heals. Lo, I see faces, but they are in shadows. I hear voices, but it is like whispering. My brother spoke with the Bearded One at the police-house up river. The Baas Corporal who has gone to the Black Kloof, talked with the Bearded One. Can my Brother tell of their saying?"

Massu nodded his head understandingly: "True there was much talk. The Bearded One's talk was of Luck. Afterward he bade Massu go. There was more talk. The Baas Corporal spoke in anger."

Sterne's eyes half closed. "Where was my brother when these words were spoken?"

The Hottentot stiffened and shot a furtive look at the young man's face. "I heard, my brother. It is enough."

Sterne got to his feet and paced the cell. "I believe you did." He spoke aloud in

English: "Wilberton was there, and you saw him!" He paused, driving his fist into the palm of his hand. "A witness to the fact, but it can't do me a damned bit of good! Even if I got them to believe you—there'd still be Wilberton and his cast-iron alibi!"

Massu listened with his eyes fixed on Sterne's face, puzzling over the strange words and striving to catch their meaning from the expression of the speaker's face. At the last words he started. His head cocked to one side, birdlike.

"Allie-bi," he repeated them slowly: "Iron Allie-bi?" His forehead puckered with a thousand wrinkles then, with sudden eagerness: "It is by the Allie-charm that the Bearded One works his evil, O my brother?"

Sterne laughed shortly. It was hardly worthwhile to explain his meaning to the Hottentot. "Have it your way," he said. "You're not far wrong. At least if you've got a good one it works like a charm. This one has got me. . . ." He broke off to stare at the Hottentot curiously.

Massu was chuckling softly to himself; he mocked his own stupidity. It was the "Allie-charm" that bewitched men's tongues, made true words seem false. All the White doctor's power was in the little box and Massu, his enemy, was possessed of it! The White doctor was caught in his own snare. It was simple. He had but to hide the little box in the *daccha* about his neck, away from prying eyes, then go to the Chieftain Cameron. Because of the Allie-charm the Chieftain would know his words as true words. Aie, it was good!

"My brother has words for me?" prompted Sterne.

The Hottentot lifted his head, the movement was full of pride. He swept his hand toward the south. "The Baas will not go tomorrow. *Aie!* This is my saying, O my brother. Let it be regarded!"

A look of astonishment came to Sterne's face. "What th' devil . . ." he began in English.

But Massu was rattling the bars and calling the guard. His feet were pattering down the stone corridor before Sterne had recovered himself sufficiently to phrase his questions in the Hottentot's quaint tongue.

his mood. A half-finished report to the High Commissioner on the case of Jerry Sterne lay on the mahogany desk before him. Had the report been his own confession, its composition would not have been more distasteful. What he had written was more like a plea than a report, it was as if . . .

A shout and the sound of scuffling in the outer office broke in on Cameron's reflections. He rose with an impatient curse, strode to the door and flung it open. Massu was struggling in the brawny desk-sergeant's arms.

"What's all this fuss?" demanded Cameron.

Massu spread the palms of his hands supplicantly. His eyes pleaded. "Chieftain," he murmured.

"Better let him get it off his chest," sighed Cameron. "Come in yourself."

Cameron seated himself behind his desk and waited for the Hottentot to speak.

Massu had subjected himself to an intense preparation. He plunged into his subject with confidence:

"O Leader of Men," he began. "It is said among the *Khoi-Khoi* that the Great One over the Black Water is ever just. His eye flies to truth as the good huntsman's shaft flies to the quarry."

"They say truly, O Massu. The King's justice is good," approved Cameron.

"And yet, O Chieftain, even the shaft of the most skilled flies wide, if the Evil One wills it."

"Such words should not be spoken, O Massu."

"Yet they are true words. For, lo! the evil doer walks free and the good man is bound."

Astonishment checked the rebuke on Cameron's tongue. Before he had seen in Massu a witch-ridden creature, little better than an animal. Now he saw a man—a man defending his conviction and a friend. Of course it could be that he had been listening to agitators. . . .

"Say on," prompted Cameron coldly.

Massu did more. He made a pantomime of his story—struck for Wilberton and died comically for Thompson. When he had finished, Cameron turned to the Sergeant:

"You know," said he, "I'd be inclined to believe there was something behind all that, if he had picked on anyone else but

INSPECTOR CAMERON was gloomy, and the dim light of his office fitted

Wilberton. Anyway, there's absolutely nothing to support his yarn."

While the Inspector spoke Massu watched his face intently. His hand crept to the bag about his neck, his fingers slyly pressed the snuff-box within.

Cameron swung back in his chair, considering the Hottentot. He must, he concluded, put an end to this nightmarish yarn of Massu's. He made his tone severe.

"You lie, O Massu. Your saying is the chatter of old women. Trouble me no more. Go!"

Massu's mouth opened in consternation. His eyes bulged and his hands clutched the concealed snuff-box. What was this? Did the "allie-charm" defy him? It must be so; the Chieftain was scowling. The little box was a stubborn thing. It would not obey. Massu's face worked. He gave vent to sudden, uncontrollable rage. With a torrent of imprecations, tore the bag from his neck, dashed it to the floor and lifted his foot to crush it.

But the broken thong loosened the mouth of the bag and the force of its fall scattered its contents. The snuff-box spun and rolled, then came to rest. The white cameo head gleamed in the dim light, close to Cameron's chair.

The Inspector stared at it, his hands gripping the edge of his desk. Slowly he stooped and, picking it up, placed the snuff-box on the blotting pad before him. He fixed his eyes on the Hottentot's face. Massu grew restive under his scrutiny. Cameron's eyes narrowed.

"It is bad to steal!" said he. "Yet if Massu speaks true words now, I will forgive."

Massu stood hesitant: then, "True, my father. I took it from the coat of the Bearded One."

"When?"

"On the night of the slaying, my father."

"Ah-h-h!" exclaimed Cameron, after which there was silence.

Massu was quick to sense the change. It was well that he had treated the Allie-charm roughly. Stubborn charms like stubborn women, sometimes needed bad treatment before they could be brought to obedience.

Presently Cameron began to question the

Hottentot again. Massu's addled wits were driven remorselessly back and forth over the events leading to Corporal Thompson's death. Nor was he given any respite until Cameron had drawn the last detail from him.

When it was over Cameron leaned back in his chair with set face and cold eyes. With full knowledge had come a poignant sense of shame. Wilberton had played him for a fool; had pumped him dry of information, as a sharp-nosed gossip might pump a child!

"It's taken Thompson's life and a benighted Hottentot to pull the wool from my eyes," said he.

"You mean Wilberton did it, like the Nigger says?" stammered the sergeant. "Jerry's in the clear, sir?"

Cameron nodded. "We know where and how he lost his precious snuff-box—which is all we need to hang him, Sergeant!"

"He framed Jerry! The dirty . . ." exploded the sergeant. "I'd like to bring him in, with your permission, sir."

Cameron shook his head with a grim smile. "I'll attend to that myself, Sergeant. You may arrest Dright and the two Portuguese. I want to know how far those gentlemen are involved. You understand."

"Right, sir!"

"Then get on with it!"

Cameron turned to Massu who stood grinning and shifting his weight from one foot to the other. The Inspector stroked the nape of his neck, groping for words. How was one to explain the significance of an alibi to a Hottentot—to a mind that accepted as commonplace the impossible feat of being in more than one place at the same time—particularly to one who had just seen the White man's logic go so far astray? How reproach him for a theft that had revealed a conspiracy and a crime? Cameron gave it up.

"Little man," said he. "You are small of body but big of heart. You have done well. You are a great Doctor. The Baas Sterne will walk free again, and he will reward his servant. I have spoken."

Massu dropped his eyes modestly and giggled like an embarrassed girl. Aie, it was well that the Baas should reward him. It had been very well for *him* that the servant understood these secret things so well.

Too Many Witch Doctors

By CORDWELL STAPLES

"You are a witch!" screamed the juju master of the Manyemas. But even with the *zimbamber* slowly slicing his head off, Burns refused to sign away his load of prime rubber.



TOM BURNS' long shock of red hair, sticking out from under his topee, bobbed along just above the level of the stunted six foot elephant grass that bordered the trail. There was an ex-

pression of complete satisfaction, almost happiness in his blue-gray eyes as his mind went back to the nightmare of the past three months in the Great Congo Forest.

For three months, not one ray of the

hot equatorial sun had touched that flaming thatch of his. Nothing day in and day out but the dense, constantly dripping half-light under the ancient satin woods, giant iron wood trees and the thousands of wild rubber trees.

He shuddered at the memory, raked a stream of sweat from his brow with a long forefinger as he thought of the Turkish bath atmosphere of the Great Forest. But now, he was out in the good clean sunshine, the warm breath of the afternoon breeze again, his mission all but accomplished. He was bound for the big rubber market at Stanleyville, and then on for the good old U. S. A., his bank account once more fat.

Forgetting the loss of his watch for a moment, Tom's hand dropped to his pocket. He wanted to see just how much more marching time he had before dark. The watch pocket was empty, and renewed anger boiled up within him against a mysterious black who had been dogging his safari, ever since it had left his rubber camp in the great forest, trying to steal something, anything, from Tom's pack of personal belongings.

Only that morning, just before dawn, something had awakened Tom. A strange, persistent force was pulling at his bed-size mosquito netting. Tom came awake quietly, opened his eyes. A huge, black gorilla-like shape hovered over him. Fetid breath puffed in his face. Two big eyes, reflecting the distant night fire seemed to glow down at him with a hypnotic power.

Rousing himself finally, Tom leaped up, snatched his forty-five automatic from under the pack that served him as a pillow. He threw back the mosquito bar and fired three shots at the thing as it tore away into the jungle. A brief glimpse told him that this had been a man, a powerfully built black, not a gorilla. None of his three shots had connected.

The camp was in an uproar immediately. A quick search showed that Tom Burns' gold watch was missing. Looked like the work of a sneak-thief. But his head men disagreed. Their eyes rolling with dread and fear in the dim light, they swore that the visitor must have supernatural powers to get by their guards. He might be a great witch doctor, have

great powers of magic. He maybe would use the *bwana's* watch to make magic among his people.

Then, to add to the already great fear of the dark jungle that gripped the porters, just before they turned in to sleep again, a bellow from the jungle brought them up in startled alarm. A voice sounded a weird, unearthly shriek of laughter that ended in a deep groan. The bellowing voice shouted, "I am Chilanga. I know all. Beware." The superstitious blacks were petrified with fear again.

THE rising sun helped some, and, breakfast over, Tom got his safari out on the trail for Nyangwe. Strung out behind him were a hundred and ten big, strong Manyema tribesmen. On each of their kinky black heads rested a sixty-four pound lump of prime rubber, the limit of weight any one porter may carry under the law in the Congo.

Tom Burns was a big fellow—big all over. His wide powerful shoulders swung strongly as he shoved through the heavy elephant grass and there was a whimsical, crooked grin on his rugged face as he thought of the glad welcome he would get from a certain girl when he got off the train at the little village station, back in the States. That crooked grin was as much a part of Tom Burns as his hands.

Big drums, the African bush telegraph, had been talking all afternoon from each village he passed through, and every black in Nyangwe, on the Lualaba River, would know that he was coming in with his big rubber safari. Already the breeze was bringing the stench of Nyangwe's ancient garbage heap to his nostrils. His porters increased their pace, anxious to be home, away from further fears of the strange phantom who had disturbed their nights.

An hour later, he strode by the hunchback Kindu's juju *shimbeck* on the eastern end of the big village of conical huts. Tom caught a brief glimpse of the ugly faced witch doctor, peering from a small window in the juju house as he passed.

Then, Chief Lubefu, old and wrinkled, rose from his squat before his *shimbeck* and came forward soberly. Usually the big black had an ingratiating grin on his thick lipped face. It made Tom wonder briefly. Something must be wrong. But

he was too happy about getting on the road home to let the chief's troubles bother him much.

He slackened his eager pace, but kept on toward the river where he had left his fleet of big canoes in Lubefu's care, three months before. Chief Lubefu strode at Tom's side, but the old man was silent. Usually talkative, he now kept his eyes averted, slouched along with his big shoulders slumped forward.

They came to the top of the slope that led down to the boat landing place on the Lualabe bank, beyond the village. Tom halted abruptly. The fleet of canoes he was counting on to carry his rubber to the market at Stanleyville was gone. Not a canoe was tied there. Not even a native fishing boat.

Tom's brow lowered in a troubled frown. Without those boats it would be nearly impossible to reach Stanleyville with his rubber. Almost five hundred miles of swamp and dense jungle lay between Nyangwe village and the market.

Tom turned to Chief Lubefu, stared accusingly for a minute. "This be too much bad," he growled in Pidgin English. "Me live for ask, where be them canoe, feller? Many moons gone, me give Chief Lubefu good *matabicho* for present for make fit keep canoe much good. Me live for ask, where got canoe?"

Chief Lubefu hung his head. With one big black foot he was carefully scraping sand into a little pile. "Much bad warrior live for make steal all boat," he muttered. "Me much good chief, good friend for white *bwana*. Me fit for make big fight, but . . ."

"All right. All right! Where stay warrior live for make steal canoe?"

The chief waved a hand toward the east. "Walk many moons," he muttered. "Much bad jungle. If *Bwana* Burns give Chief Lubefu half rubber, maybe-so me fit for go get canoe. Me fit for take many warrior for get canoe."

So that was it. A hold up. A deliberate, lying scheme to hi-jack half of the six thousand pounds of fine rubber that Tom had gone through the tortures of hell to gather. But what could he do? All of his Manyema porters were Chief Lubefu's men. Their families, their friends, their loyalty to their chief were here in

Nyangwe village. There was not a white man within five hundred miles, who might help him. Tom Burns' rosy dream of cashing in on the high price of rubber, and going back to the States and home, was fading rapidly away.

TOM knew that argument would bring only more lies. The chief was out to have the cash that all that rubber would bring. He turned away, started toward a huge *baobab* tree that spread a wide patch of shade on a rise near the river. His porters were coming in and he had to point out a place for them to dump their loads. Under the giant *baobab* would be as good a place as any.

"Me go for palaver with me feller," he flung over his shoulder at the chief as he strode away.

The black porters were eager to get home to their women, but Tom succeeded in holding his four head men long enough to make a good camp for him under the tree, gather a heap of dry wood for a night fire. Then these men hurried off to their harems.

There was no object in trying to guard the huge pile of rubber. Where could it go? There were no boats and the porters were scattered. And there was no place that Tom Burns could go, either. A white man would be a fool to try to hit the jungle trails to Stanleyville alone. It would be suicide. If a crocodile didn't make a meal of him, some prowling leopard would.

When he had tallied in his last load, Tom settled himself as comfortably as he could, lit a sweat stained cigar and put his mind to work trying to figure out some scheme to outwit the chief. But the more he thought, the more he realized his helplessness. He'd be lucky if he could salvage half his rubber. He couldn't see why the chief even took the trouble to lie to him. It wouldn't be hard to heave a spear into his back, in the dark. If he showed fight, alone, he'd probably get knocked on the head. Then maybe Chief Lubefu and his harem would feast on human meat. Tom's characteristic whimsical grin spread over his face, he shrugged his big shoulders.

Long shadows were reaching across the strongly flowing Lualabe from its western bank. In a few minutes the sudden

tropical night would close down. Already, millions of mosquitos were swarming under the *baobab*. The noise of their wings was like the hum of an electric motor, steady and rapidly growing louder.

Tom flung the butt of his cigar down and was making for his packs to get out his mosquito bars when his eyes caught movement in the jungle a hundred feet away, toward the east. A short, hunchbacked native was waving at him, motioning him to come that way. Kindu, the hunchback! Kindu, the witch doctor!

This little man was known and feared throughout the whole length of the Congo, by whites and blacks alike. And he was smart, out of all proportion to his size. There was not a trace of Pidgin in his speech. He talked like a white man, reasoned like one in that bushy black head of his that looked too big for his mis-shapen body. Tom strode toward him slowly.

The sun was already below the western jungle when he eased into the dense wall of growing things and faced the little hunchback. In the semi-darkness, Kindu's yellowish eyes seemed to glow like those of a big jungle cat. "I am Kindu. Maybe you have heard of me," the little man said, with a quiet dignity that was in ill accord with his appearance.

"Sure. Who in the Congo hasn't heard of the great witch doctor, Kindu?" Tom Burns said, grinning.

The trace of a smile fled over the witch doctor's crafty face. "I think that some of the things you have heard, have not always been said in praise," he purred, in his high pitched, smooth voice. "But I am not as bad as some try to make out. I am the good friend of the white *bwana*. And I know that you are in great trouble. I know that Chief Lubefu plans to kill you for your rubber. You will then be the best part of a great feast for Lubefu and his harem. He seems friendly, but already his women make ready with the cooking pots. I, Kindu, know all." He spoke with a quiet dignity, his words studied and carefully phrased.

"I am gifted by magic, far above these stupid, ignorant savages," he went on. "Lubefu will get your canoes from hiding and sell *all* of your rubber in the great market at Stanleyville where rubber now brings much money. I, Kindu, the great-

est witch doctor in the Congo, warn you, *Bwana Burns*. I am the friend of the white *bwana*."

Tom Burns did his utmost to look impressed by this long, slow speech. He bowed slightly, his face serious. "And how can I repay the great Kindu for saving my life?" he asked quietly. He wanted to probe further into this little ogre's schemes.

The witch doctor looked at Tom quickly, studied him for a moment with his glowing, yellowish eyes. There was suspicion, scheming in his sharp scrutiny. Then he relaxed. "I can see that you are a smart man," he said, in his soft purring voice. "As you say, I will have to be paid. I will be put to great trouble and danger. I will have to leave this Nyangwe village where Chief Lubefu rules. He would kill even me, the great Kindu, if I cheat him of his feast and the great money that your rubber will bring."

Darkness had come down over all the jungle by now. And then, as if it had been waiting for a pause in the talk between these two, a wild, almost insane sounding burst of laughter came from the depths of the jungle and a booming voice intoned, "I am Chilanga. I am all powerful. I have great magic."

Kindu's face grew livid. His breath hissed and he spat like a big cat. "Chilanga!" he snarled. "He is a great fool. I taught him all he knows, when he was my assistant. Some day soon, I will kill him. He thinks he is a greater witch doctor than I. Ha! I will show him that he cannot take my place. But, let us talk, like smart men. Pay no attention to that chimpanzee named Chilanga, who hides in a tree in the jungle. Now, here is my plan: I will see that you are secretly taken up the river to Ibfa Island. There, you will be safe from Chief Lubefu and his warriors. I will work my magic on the chief, and I will take your rubber to Stanleyville and sell it. Then I will meet you on the island and give you most of what I get for it. After that, we will go down the river by night, to Stanleyville."

Tom thought for a minute or two. So here was another schemer trying to cheat him out of the results of his hard labor. "But why not take me with you to Stanleyville when you sell the rubber?" he

asked. "If I give you my word to pay you well, you can depend on it."

"But that would be to act like the stupid Chimpanzee," Kindu purred. He was grinning ingratiatingly. "Chief Lubefu would attack our safari with all his fighting men as soon as he found out you were with me. He would kill us both and take all our rubber. I am saving your life. And I will give you most of the price of the rubber. Is your life worth that much to you?"

Tom turned away from the glowing, hypnotic eyes of the little hunchback. He stood, thinking deeply. He had heard a great deal about the crafty little witch doctor. He didn't believe for an instant, that he would ever see any part of the money for the rubber if he let Kindu work his witch doctor *juju* on the chief and take it to market alone.

His mind went back over the hell he had endured to get that rubber, his great plans for the future when he was back in the States, and the more he thought about it, the madder he became. Suddenly he wheeled. "Yes!" he snapped. "Your plan is good. I agree. I agree, but only on the condition that I go with you in the canoes to Stanleyville with the rubber."

Kindu started, drew back. His voice, his ugly face changed. He shot back, "White man! Liar! Cheater! You would give me nothing, once you are in Stanleyville. All white men are cheats and liars when they trade with the black man. Aghh! You are no wiser than the chimpanzee, after all. All right! Then you die. And maybe Chief Lubefu dies, too, under my *juju* magic. I, Kindu, will take all the rubber. I will see to that. Now!" He faded into the jungle like a ghost. And as he disappeared, that same weird burst of wild laughter came out of the deep jungle. Again that booming voice said, "I am Chilanga. Beware."

BACK in his camp, Tom kindled a big fire to keep away any prowling leopard that might be near. Then he put on his big mosquito head net and sat smoking a musty cigar while his mind went back over his talk with Kindu. There was no place that he could go, nothing that he could do . . . just wait and see what happened.

Everything outside the circle of light cast by his fire was completely dark. Twice he heard the spitting, snarling roar of a hunting leopard, and edged a bit closer to his fire.

Nothing happened until, abruptly, a black shape oozed soundlessly into the circle of light. It was Chief Lubefu. Behind him, two black warriors stepped into the light and stood glaring at Tom. They carried broad-bladed Masai spears. Heavy clubs swung at their belts. All three squatted near the fire, the warriors' faces unchanging.

Tom's crooked grin spread over his craggy face. "So here is the other thief," he thought. But his hand drifted to the butt of his automatic and he glanced quickly behind him. He still couldn't help wondering why the Chief went to all this trouble with him, instead of having one of his men chuck a spear into his back from the darkness. Maybe Kindu had something to do with that. Kindu knew the power of the white-man police much better than Lubefu did. And Lubefu held the witch doctor's magic in great dread. Maybe Lubefu was waiting the nod from Kindu, and that was the reason the warriors held back their spears.

The chief noted Tom's move to his gun. He grinned. "You feller live for great fool," he said quietly. "No make see in dark. Warrior out in dark see plenty good. One spear make fit for come, you die quick. But Chief Lubefu come here fit for make palaver. Mebbyso witch doctor Kindu like rubber. . . ."

"Tump—tump—tump." A long, ominous rolling roar of drums came from the village. Over and over it came, the opening beats loud and powerful, evenly spaced at about five seconds.

Chief Lubefu and his warriors leaped to their feet at the first beat of those fateful drums. It was the call for all men and women to come to the open space in the center of the village. Witch doctor Kindu was going to, "Smell out a witch."

Dismay, even a trace of fear showed on the Chief's face. Then a look of savage anger replaced all fear. It made Tom wonder. No man or woman within hearing of the drums dared disobey their summons.

Suddenly, at a motion from Lubefu, six brawny blacks leaped into the fire-light from behind Tom. They had him helpless before his hand could reach his gun. Chief Lubefu grabbed Tom's automatic and hid it in his gaudy sash, next his skin.

Evidently the Chief did not intend to leave the owner of all that rubber with any chance to escape and maybe get to the authorities in Stanleyville, frustrate his plans. Money would be a powerful inducement to some black, who might know where a canoe was hid.

Ten minutes later, his guard shoved Tom into the village square, stood around him, their spears at the "charge," to keep him from running. These men were quickly replaced by six of witch doctor Kindu's personal bodyguard, who ran the other warriors away with curt orders despite Chief Lubefu's furious protests.

Crafty, smart, cold-blooded, Kindu was losing no time in starting his scheme for revenge against Tom. The witch doctor wanted that rubber, and the life of one white man wasn't going to stand in his way. One lone white man, put down in his way in the trackless sea of jungle and swamp that was the Congo. That hurdle would be easy for him, with his great powers over the superstitious natives. And not one of them would dare tell any white man about what was to take place here tonight.

But Chief Lubefu wanted the rubber, too. He was just as determined to get it as Kindu was. The difference was that the chief could not wield Kindu's power over the natives, to keep them silent. If Lubefu murdered Tom and some talkative black of his village blabbed to a white provincial police officer from Stanleyville, who was curious about the disappearance of the American, well. . . .

Tom turned to look at the chief. He was surprised to see the old man's face wet with nervous sweat. He was trembling, his eyes darted about fearfully. Chief Lubefu was badly scared. He realized fully, the possibilities of this seance. This set a new train of thought moving in Tom's brain. What if Kindu declared that the Chief, too, was a witch? That would leave the witch doctor a clear field. Well, time would tell.

In the middle of the square a huge fire

burned. Black men and women were coming from all directions. Abject fear showed plainly in their faces. Their eyes rolled, the whites showing queerly in the fire-light. Their thick lips hung open, drooling. None of them knew who might be pointed out as a witch.

They had all seen this show countless times. They had all helped to execute "witches". Some of those unfortunate ones had been tied to a huge *baobab* tree which had very soft bark, six inches thick, by a long piece of incredibly tough, water-soaked *zimbamber* fiber that passed around the tree stump and through the innocent victim's open mouth. This piece of rough rattan-like fiber commenced to shrink immediately and, as it dried, the "witch" was slowly, very slowly, decapitated.

The poor, terror stricken natives did not know who might be pointed out for slaughter. But Tom Burns would have bet his entire pile of rubber that he could tell who would be tied to that *baobab* tree, when this witch hunt was over. No man, and especially no white man, could offend witch doctor Kindu, and not expect to pay the penalty. The question of finding the "witch" would be simple for Kindu tonight.

AN hour had passed, and still the witch doctor had not appeared. A low, moaning sound came constantly from the blacks, trembling in the crowd about the fire. Suspense, the unknown, mystery; these were the witch doctor's tools. He played them to the limit. But if Kindu put the finger on Chief Lubefu, would his men defend him? Or would the superstitious blacks tie him to a tree, execute him as they would any common native? It looked as if that question was about to be settled, once and for all.

Suddenly, Chief Lubefu leaped away from Tom Burns, shot his hands up over his head. He yelled, in a quavering, scared tone, "*Gung-gung, gung-gung, gung-gung!*" Instantly there was silence and as the Chief slunk back into the inner edge of the crowd, Kindu ran into view out of the darkness.

The blacks shivered, cringed in their terror. The witch doctor wore a huge head-dress of gaudy feathers, a painted mask of soft *baobab* bark covered his face.

His mis-shapen, hunch-backed body was painted in weird design. Brass bracelets and anklets jangled on his arms and legs. He circled the crowd, leaping, cavorting wildly. He looked more than ever like a gorilla. Suddenly, he fell flat, put his ear to the ground. He was talking to his God.

Then Kindu leaped to his feet, circled the crowd rapidly, stopped squarely in front of Tom Burns. Tom wasn't surprised when the witch doctor pointed a long, thin arm at him. "You are a witch," he shrilled, in the Manyema tongue. There was a sharp, vindictive snap to his tone.

The crowd went wild with relief. They shouted and danced. They were not to die! Somebody else had been selected. They surged toward Tom. But Kindu held up his hand. Silence settled over the blacks again, their worried looks returned. Once more Kindu "Talked with God," circled the crowd. Abruptly he stopped in front of Chief Lubefu, pointed. "You are a witch." A yell of astonishment burst from the natives.

Lubefu drew back, turned and held up a hand, shouted wildly to his warriors in the Manyema tongue. He argued frantically, threw off the hands that would have seized him. The warriors hesitated briefly. Then Kindu shrilled a sharp command. Instantly, men and women grabbed Tom and the Chief.

Their hands were bound in front of their bodies. They were hustled off into the jungle to a huge *baobab* tree. Their mouths were forced open, a rough, braided rope of *zimbamber* was jammed in and tied snugly about the tree. Their feet were bound to the trunk in a like manner. Lubefu was on one side of the huge trunk, Tom on the other. The blacks rushed back to their huts, glad to have this business over with. They left Tom and Chief Lubefu alone in their misery.

Tom felt that this was the finish. Nothing could save him now. For once, his crooked, whimsical grin was absent as he contemplated the horrible torture in store for him. Then his blood froze as the coughing, spitting roar of a leopard screamed from the jungle, close in front. But then, maybe the big spotted cat would be an angel of mercy in disguise. Death under its vicious fangs would be quicker,

more merciful than having his head cut in two, slowly, by the rapidly constricting *zimbamber*. Tom closed his eyes and waited the big cat's leap.

Then suddenly, in the star light, Kindu appeared out of the dark jungle, stood close in front of Tom Burns. Tom heard the snarling roar of the disappointed cat, off in the jungle. Kindu had removed his hideous mask. He was chuckling, deep in his throat. "You see, *bwana*, it is bad to cross Kindu," he said softly.

"All right. You win," Tom muttered, past the braided strip in his mouth. "Get me out of this, and you can take the damned rubber. I'll never complain to the District Inspector at Stanleyville. I'll let you go free." It was difficult to talk at all, but he managed to get it out. To himself, he was thinking, "Once I'm free, I'll tear that blasted gorilla apart. I'll tear his black heart out."

"Ah, no, *Bwana* Burns," Kindu purred, pleased. "Too late, now. Now, you must die. Very slowly, you will die. And Chief Lubefu will die, too. It will be safer for me, that way. And while you both are dying, I will be on my way to Stanleyville in your canoes, to sell your rubber. I will be rich, and neither you nor the Chief can interfere. Already my boat boys are coming down the river with your canoes, from where they were hidden by the Chief. They will quickly load your rubber and when I am in the leading boat, they will start for market. No, you had your chance. Now it is too late. You must die. You are a witch. Remember?" He laughed shrilly. The little ogre knew as well as Tom did, that this witch business was pure hokum.

Chief Lubefu was screaming in a half-choked tone at the witch doctor, from the other side of the tree. He was begging, pleading, promising Kindu everything he could think of, if he would only free him from that horrible, constricting, torturing rope of fiber. Kindu paid no attention.

Suddenly, he faded into the darkness like a ghost. Tom chewed desperately on the rope of *zimbamber*. He might as well have been chewing on iron wire. His teeth made absolutely no impression on the rope, which was steadily shrinking, getting tighter. It was cutting deeper and deeper into the corners of his mouth.

Blood was flowing, running down, dropping in a little stream from his chin. It looked as though this was the final curtain.

ON the other side of the tree he could hear Lubefu screaming as the *zim-bamber* cut into his thick lips. Tom set his mind to keep from yelling, in his agony and despair.

In frantic desperation, he gripped the rope between his back teeth, jerked his head from side to side. The *zim-bamber* slipped from side to side around the soft bark. Tom's hopes soared. The rope seemed to loosen slightly. Suddenly it was not so deep in his mouth. He worked desperately, jerking his head back and forth rapidly. The *zim-bamber* cut deeper into the soft bark. A half hour later, his head was free. Ducking down, he got the braided rope up over his forehead. Only his feet and hands were tied, now.

He stopped to rest and it was then that he heard plainly the thump of paddles on the sides of canoes, coming down the river. His boats, coming to load the rubber. That wouldn't take long. Then Kindu would be on his way to Stanleyville; Kindu and the rubber that Tom had gone through the hell of the Great Congo Forest to get. For a moment, he wondered idly what the little hunch-back would do with all that money. And the thought came back to him of what *he* had planned to do with the money from the sale of the rubber.

But the *zim-bamber* that bound his feet to the tree, was getting tighter. It was cutting into his ankles. Blood was commencing to flow. Big, ferocious black ants, attracted by the blood, were swarming over his legs and arms. They were coming in increasing numbers, wild with blood lust. They chewed into his flesh ravenously. He jerked with all his strength, trying not to fall away from the tree. But the *zim-bamber* was already too tight. He couldn't budge it.

Then suddenly he heard a stick snap, off in the darkness. Tom froze. He slipped the bark rope back down over his head, held it loosely in his mouth. Maybe Kindu had changed his mind, was coming back. Slowly, a form appeared before him in the star light, came closer. But this was not Kindu. This man was at

least six feet four, heavy, powerfully built. He wore a hideous painted mask, a huge feather head-dress. His body was painted in weird design. A long-bladed knife glinted in the faint light as he moved his right hand.

"I am Chilanga," the man grunted. "I have powers of magic, greater than that little monkey, Kindu. Maybe Kindu would rob you of your great pile of rubber after he murders you here. But I am the great friend of the white *bwanas*. I will help you. Now, you have much rubber. You want go Stanleyville. Mebyso me cut you feller loose. We go Stanleyville, my canoe. We catchum monkey Kindu there. Soldiers shoot him. Then I am greatest witch doctor in all the Congo." Tom was surprised to note that this big black spoke English almost as well as Kindu did. Evidently he had been an apt pupil of the hunch-back.

Tom tried to mutter convincingly, as though the *zim-bamber* still bound his head to the tree. "Sure. We go fast. When live for sellum rubber me make for give you feller plenty money. Me no lie," he muttered thickly.

The big witch doctor stooped, felt out the rope that bound Tom's ankles, cut it away. Then he cut his arms free. He stood up. "How much money you give me feller, if I cut face loose?"

Before Tom could answer, a heavy-bodied, short, hunch-backed form hurtled through the air, landed on the new witch doctor's back. A knife flashed. The big man screamed, his throat gurgled, he dropped his long-bladed knife. But he was not finished. He threw himself heavily backward to the ground on top of Kindu. The hunch-back grunted, tried to squirm free, swung his knife furiously. The big witch doctor rolled off him, tried to get up.

Tom slipped his head out of the *zim-bamber* rope, felt around frantically on the ground for the big fellow's knife. He touched cold steel. Then he was on his feet, the knife ready. Kindu scrambled up like a mis-shapen gorilla, started for the big witch doctor, snarling viciously.

Tom took one step forward, swung his long-bladed knife and sank it to the hilt, under Kindu's chest. Kindu's knife cut across in a last desperate effort and Tom

felt it slice lightly across his ribs. Then Kindu was falling, gasping, blood gurgling in his throat. He hit the ground limply, dead.

Tom wheeled to the big witch doctor. The man was lying on his face, motionless. He was gone. Then Tom saw the glint of bright metal at his middle. He investigated. It was the gold watch that had been stolen from him, during his trek from his rubber camp to Nyangwe. The big witch doctor had it tied to his breech cord, as a *juju* charm. This was one watch that would never be used to make magic, now. It proved beyond a doubt that the man who called himself Chilanga, was the black who had dogged him.

Tom Burns hesitated only an instant. Then he ran, limping, around the *baobab* tree to where Chief Lubefu was tied. His hand quickly searched the Chief's sash, came away with his forty-five automatic from where Lubefu had hidden it when his men grabbed Tom. That was one bet that Kindu had overlooked.

Tom stood close, looked steadily at the Chief. "Well, what do you say now?" he snapped. "Kindu is dead. I killed him." He knew he was going to need the Chief, to get to Stanleyville. So he was willing to parley.

"Yeh. Yeh," Lubefu gurgled, past the rope in his mouth. "You feller save life for Chief. Cut for save me feller. I am Chief. You go for save life."

"Okay! But you feller no go for crazy. Me got short gun now. If go crazy, me kill—boom—boom."

"Cut *zimbamber*! Cut *zimbamber*! Me no live for crazy. Me b'long slave for you, now."

One quick slash of Tom's keen blade and Chief Lubefu fell away from the tree, his jaws a bloody mess. Tom grabbed him, held him upright, cut his legs and arms free. The Chief held to his torn jaws with one hand, staggered for a moment. Then he started toward the canoe landing. "Canoe man make for go Stanleyville, sit in canoe sure. We make for go quick. Go far before light come." The Chief led the way so as to avoid the village.



them with their paddles in their hands. A yell of superstitious fear went up as they recognized Chief Lubefu and Tom Burns. Every one of them had seen these two branded as witches by Kindu, bound to the *baobab* tree to die. This, surely, was powerful *juju*.

But the Chief quickly quieted them. His jaws were still bleeding, but he got out, "My *juju* is stronger than Kindu's. His *zimbamber* could not hold me. I make *juju* and I am free. *Bwana* Tomburns free. Kindu is dead. *Bwana* Burns is good man. He give plenty money to all men in boats if go quick for Stanleyville. I am Chief!" Lubefu yelled in the manyema tongue.

The big canoes swept away from the shore, into the grip of the current, shot rapidly down-stream with it. Tom sat in the stern of the last boat with Chief Lubefu in front of him. At his belt, the forty-five automatic was pulled around between his knees, where it would be good and handy, in case the Chief changed his mind about being good. Tom's crooked, whimsical grin was spread over his face as if it had grown there, even if his jaws were sore and cut. Once more, the world was good.

AT the landing, Tom's big canoes were already loaded, their crews sitting in

BLACK DEVIL MADNESS

BY
JOE A. SMALL

In the miasmatic swamps of Black-Devil Lagoon, Manning lived as an animal—afraid to return to the civilization that had branded him a coward and a murderer . . . It took a scrappy lion cub to show him the way back.

JIM MANNING didn't notice the lazy ripple ahead and to the right of his slow-moving dugout. He didn't see two bulging eyes emerge noiselessly from the quiet depths. Jim Manning was watching a blood-red sun fire the matted swamp with flaming crimson needles, paint the dark surface of Black Devil Lagoon a glowing yellow-red. He was listening to the clear, ringing chitter of a swamp thrush as it flitted through the brush, seeking a roosting place for the night.



"It could be worse." Without looking at the dog, Jim Manning talked to the big airedale sitting in the bow of the boat. "Frog legs for my supper, squirrel for yours—we'll get along all right. I'm beginning to halfway like this jungle hell-hole. Don't look like they're ever gonna come in after us either."

The old dog turned his head sidewise. Drops of saliva fell from a red tongue as it shuttled slowly in a lazy pant. Old Double Ugly shuffled his big, clumsy front paws, thumped the boat with a stubby tail. It was the old dog's way of agreeing unanimously with his master's statement.

Jim Manning caught a glimpse of the black, log-like body then. He saw that powerful swinging motion of the huge tail. There was a sickening jar. Double Ugly yelped once in pain and terror. He hit the water then, and the rows of jagged, waiting teeth. Jim Manning heard that grinding snap as the powerful jaws whipped shut. It made him a little sick at the stomach.

The man was on his feet then. The great head had disappeared when he reached the fore end of the rocking dugout. Jim Manning swung the long oar over his shoulder, brought it down frantically on the disturbed water surface. It spanged dully. Quickly he raised it again, beat feverishly at a lazy roil in the dark water.

The man stopped then. He stood there,



shoulders drooped, dripping oar in his right hand, a hopeless look in his eyes. Jim Manning was watching a slow, crawling ripple on the quiet surface away from the boat. It slid ominously toward the matted folds of water grass, roots and dwarf bamboo that formed the lagoon's tiny floating island. Underneath this rank water growth, the great crocodile made his den. Here he was secure from the outside world.

"You devil," the man said, lips drawn tight. "You damned scaly, slinking black devil!"

Jim Manning sat down slowly. It would be lonesome now at the little cane-thatched hut. Old Double Ugly had been his only friend through the long hot days, the black eerie nights. The fore end of the boat would be empty on those long, gliding rides through the swamp. The man clamped sun-cracked hands over his face, closed tired eyes tight. Somehow that scene of the red lolling tongue, the thumping tail, and those smiling eyes wouldn't go out of his mind.

Jim Manning got up then and looked at the black encroaching darkness. He reached for the fat swamp squirrel, held it out over the water and let it sink slowly. . . .

THE nights were still, more fearful without old Double Ugly. Jim Manning had never lived entirely alone. He grew jumpy, sullen. He began to hate the green jungle, the weird calls of swamp-life at night, the hot, fetid stench of wet earth, decaying vegetation. He no longer liked to sit in his handmade chair on the little knoll in front of his tiny hut and listen to the noisy feeding chatter of the Crocodile birds. The man was fighting a foolish, unreasonable fear. He had begun to wonder if all other human beings in the world had died and left him alone in this dreary swamp. Thoughts like that were silly, the man told himself. But silly things can seem so real in the heart of a lonely African swamp.

It rained then. For two days and nights in a slow, beating downpour soaked into his cane-thatched hut. On the third day it stopped and Jim Manning headed out for another load of bamboo cane. That hut would have to be thatched tighter. It didn't

keep out the rain. Too, a trip up to higher ground would do him good.

Jim Manning had already broken off a load of cane when he decided to go back. The whole outside world would be waiting for him. No use for him to head for some distant city when he got out. They'd track him down before he got started. They'd all be waiting for the man whose fingerprints had been found on the knife that killed old Jake Goodall. Tige Johnson would already have seen to that.

But he'd have to take a chance. He'd rather face Tige Johnson himself than live out the rest of his life in this sink hole of biting insects and dank morass. Jim Manning threw down a stalk of the long cane with a sigh. He started walking. He was going back.

BROWN jungle shadows were already growing long. Giant swamp crickets lazily drummed their mid-afternoon chant. Jim Manning would have to walk fast. He'd have to get back to the hut, pile meager belongings into the dugout and leave soon in order to make Tambohorano River before dark. He stopped then. Suddenly. It came again.

The sounds sifted through thick swamp foliage, reached into the rich fern-cloaked forests, across long stretches of dank morass, down the quiet lagoons. Jim Manning started involuntarily. He wasn't afraid, exactly. The eager trail cry of a pack of jungle dogs didn't mean that he was in immediate danger. He was mostly surprised that hunters would penetrate the swamp this far. It wouldn't do for them to find his hut, even his tracks. But, hell, why would he care? He was leaving anyhow, wasn't he?

A little crimson-eared waxbill sailed by on listless wings, twisted a ruffed neck to look down his back trail. He flew on into the hopeless clutter of vines, teak and endless mire of the swamp. Birds left the tangles of jungle growth with startled notes of curiosity. Smaller wildlife scurried for cover.

Sounds of the running pack were getting closer now. Jim Manning stood on the grassy knoll at the head of a mud-bank seep and waited. Why, he didn't quite know. But he'd never been able to walk away from an impending fight between a

pack of hunting dogs and their quarry.

He waited three minutes. They were in the little clearing below him. The great swinging bulk of an old lioness and the frightened, jumpy ball of muddy energy that was her cub. The dogs were closing in. The lioness spun deftly and charged back to meet them. It took the two lead dogs unaware. A great paw slashed out with sickening force and one of the dogs somersaulted through the air with a howl of pain. The other wheeled in sudden surprise, ducked low and to the side as the animal's left paw swept down. It was a glancing blow, but the long needle-like claws that ripped through the dog's upper throat and shoulder were just as deadly as the hammer-like impact that had felled the first dog a moment before. The lioness looked around, snarling.

The three remaining dogs bore in then. They had seen the old lioness stagger as she swung at her second victim. The bloody bullet wound in her right side was beginning to tell. The dogs sensed this growing weakness and went blind with blood lust.

One lunged at the cub, got a throat hold. The other two closed in on the lioness. The weakened animal was game. She met their flank charge, fangs bared, long claws swinging out savagely. But she was weak now, a little dizzy. The lioness went down struggling blindly.

Jim Manning picked up a mangrove club and ran forward. He swung it down forcefully on the head of the dog that had a death hold on the lion cub's throat. The dog rolled over on his back, legs trembling. The cub rose shakily, looked at the man curiously. Then he turned. There was a swinging stagger to the little animal's walk as he made toward the old she-lion. One of the dogs had a hold on her throat now. The other was trying to widen the hole in her side.

The little cub growled once. It came from deep within his throat. He grabbed the leg of a snarling dog in his mouth and clamped down viciously. The big dog broke loose his hold, howled painfully. With a growl he ran at the cub. It seemed to give the lioness new heart. She rallied, rolled over on her stomach. The dog on her throat turned loose in sudden panic. The great rolling body had crushed the wind

from his lungs. He scrambled up shakily, swung out and to the side.

The move cost him his life. He hadn't seen the heavy snarl of wild grapevine laced so closely that even the body of a dog could not penetrate it. The lioness dashed at him on a short charge, eyes bright with revenge. It took two mighty rakes to tear him bodily from the encircling vines and leave the dog a limp mass of flesh and bone on the damp, marshy ground.

With a deep-throated growl, the old lion whirled and lunged for her one remaining tormentor. There was already a victory glint in the dog's eyes. He had effected a death hold on the little cub's throat. The cub struggled feebly. The old lioness was upon him, had his head between her great jaws, before the dog knew what had happened. There was the sound of crunching bone and the last of five great hunting dogs lay quivering on the ground. It was like a man crushing the life from a small bug.

The cub rose weakly, sucked great gulps of pure air into burning lungs. The lioness headed down a shallow creek then in a slow, shuffling walk. She swayed weakly. The great wound in her side continued to bleed. The little cub fell in behind her. It would not be safe to linger here. Hunters would come bogging through the deep swamp, mud sucking at their boots. They would finish what the dogs had started.

Jim Manning watched the wobbling form of the little cub as he followed his stricken mother down the shallow jungle stream.

"Damned little cub's got vinegar all right!" The man smiled. "Tied right into that dog after nearly bein' killed by one hisself. He's a real wampus cat, that little devil!" There was deep admiration in Jim Manning's voice. "Vinegar and wampus. That's him. Vinegar Wampus!"

Why Jim Manning had taken sides with the lions he didn't quite know. And why he now followed them down the shallow creek he was even more at a loss to explain. The hunters would turn back at the scene of that fight. Five dead hunting dogs worth a hundred apiece on the go, would be enough to cool their lion hunting ardor for some time to come.

He might as well walk down the creek, Jim Manning told himself. The lions were

heading his way, so why not follow. He'd taken an interest in that gritty little cub anyhow.

WHERE the limpid waters of the creek pushed back a sluggish scum in Black Devil Lagoon, the lions rested. That soft marsh mud was warm. The old lioness waded in reluctantly, brought her body to rest in the warm ooze. She disliked even partly submerging, but the lioness knew of the healing powers of lagoon mud. The cub stayed in shallow water near the bank.

Black Devil, as Jim Manning had come to call the great swamp Crocodile, had evidently been lying under a shallow covering of matted water hyacinth when the scent of blood reached him. Ordinarily, a crocodile, even a giant like Black Devil, would not attack a full grown lion. But the blood scent was strong and the big croc was desperately hungry.

When the weakened lioness snarled fiercely and turned terror-stricken eyes toward a great black hulk that pulled at her right hind leg, the cub raised up uneasily. As his mother slid slowly into deeper water on the oozy, slimy bottom, the little cub charged forward with a frantic whine. The great croc was twisting now. The victim's head went under. The lioness struggled feebly. But she was tired and weak from loss of blood. It wasn't a difficult battle for Black Devil. And it wasn't a long one.

Water streamed off Jim Manning as he stood on the bank and looked down at the wet ball of muddy fight at his feet. The tiny lion would have drowned in another minute if he hadn't gone in after the little scrapper. That wisp of short hair and flesh had headed for deep water, bent on saving his mother. Jim Manning smiled grimly. The little lion would need some patching up. That tear in his throat where the big dog's fangs had ripped through the flesh was still bleeding. Jim Manning picked up the cub and walked into the green jungle. It wasn't every day a man could save as much fight, grit and growl rolled up in one little old hide as he held there in his wet arms. Jim Manning reckoned he'd lend the little animal a hand.

He walked through the still jungle. It was getting late. Long festoons of fern

covered the dank ground in feather-like laces. Wild honeysuckle and grapevine snarls cloaked the forest in matted greenery. Mangrove trees towered up from the soft earth. They were still and beautiful in the languid air. The slanting red-gold rays of a setting sun found little holes in the forest wall and sewed threads of luminous crimson through the gloomy shadows.

Jim Manning would help the cub out, then he'd go back. He had to get out of this stinking hellhole. Besides, they'd be in after him any day now. He'd get a rope around his neck either way. Staying hid out would merely prolong it.

The cub stirred weakly. The man looked down at him and smiled. There was a good deal of similarity about their cases, Jim Manning thought. The cub was alone in the world now. He had been made motherless by ruthless man and a pack of blood-crazed lion dogs—odds too strong for a young cub to cope with.

Likewise, Jim Manning was alone—alone when he could have had this very moment the perfume of a woman's hair in his nostrils, the soft white arms of Gloria Goodall around his neck. And he had been made a recluse from society by a force also too strong to deny.

Tige Johnson was the law at Katanga Village. He ruled both black and white with an iron hand. He had damning proof that Jim Manning killed old Jake Goodall, powerful, jungle plantation owner. He was going to see that tall newcomer hung for it. Tige Johnson planned on marrying Gloria Goodall. And when Tige Johnson planned, he planned strong.

The cub was all right next morning. He looked with curious, beady little eyes at the plain interior of Jim Manning's cane-thatched hut.

"It ain't much, Vinegar Wampus," the man said. "It's made out of mangrove limbs and thatched with bamboo cane. But it keeps out most of the weather. You're welcome to call it home too for awhile, if you wanna. Leastwise, until you're old enough to kill your own snakes. Then we'll make you one of your own. Don't know as I'd want to sleep with a full grown jungle lion!"

Throughout the months that followed, the little cub grew fast. He soon became a constant companion to the man on all hunts

and forays into the swamp. He waxed fat on teeming swamp life. Bullfrogs, fish, the larger birds—Jim Manning had worked out crude tackle and weapons for taking them all. And after a few months, Vinegar Wampus helped his tall, blue-eyed friend in their quests for food. He learned to surge forward and strike ahead of a huge bullfrog so that his paw would catch the big croaker at the apex of a mighty leap for freedom.

Once, at the end of a long day in the swamp, Jim Manning stopped by the still waters of Black Devil Lagoon and looked at himself on the quiet surface. He bent swiftly to hands and knees then and leaned out over the water. A hairy-faced young giant looked up at him. The sun had burned his forehead a dirty brown. The once clean blue shirt, torn by biting claws of the jungle, clung to his shoulders in ragged strips. It was brown now, brown with the muddy stain of countless quagmires. And his hair was bushy. It hadn't felt the guiding teeth of a comb in months!

"Gawdomighty!" Jim Manning turned his head and smiled at the big cub. "Reckon what she'd think of me now?"

The cub looked at him curiously, right front paw paused. He resumed his game then of slapping at a circling, zooming snake-doctor. He reached out too far once and narrowly missed a ducking.

"Better stay 'way from the water in this damned hole, Vinegar!" The man's tone was serious now, a little grim. "Next to dog, old Black Devil likes lion meat best—weak defenseless lion. And the dirty son-of-Satan is always hungry. He's hungry and he's big. Damned big!"

VINEGAR WAMPUS was fully half grown when he wandered off into the swamp one day and failed to return to his comfortable bed of soft fern just outside the tiny shack. Jim Manning felt the old loneliness creep back that night. The cub had been a savior for him during the past long months. He'd kept putting off going back on account of that lion. A man just had no idea how much company even a blasted cub could be in a lonely swamp.

Seized by the old swamp madness, the tall blue-eyed man would have gone back that day of the dog-lion fight—back to civilization and a waiting noose. The cub had

given him a momentary purpose in life, something to do besides sit in the little chair made from a mangrove knee and listen to the maddening drone of swamp crickets.

But he wouldn't go back now. Jim Manning had learned to live in the swamp. Part of the time he loved it, sometime he hated it. But he wouldn't go back—unless that raving swamp madness returned. Jim Manning wished the lion cub hadn't gone.

There were times, when the still afterglow was fading slowly and encroaching gloom hovered over the endless stretches of mire and dank morass, that Jim Manning was uncertain. He would sit back dreamily in his little chair and fancy he heard the hushed voices of gay people coming to him through the fetid air from the quagmires. He could see the colored frocks the women wore, hear the monotonous rolling thump of the native drums. A woman's laughing voice would ring out above the lazy drone of the dance and then her white, smiling face would be there before him. The man thought that he even felt the soft touch of her hand on his arm.

Jim Manning sat upright, gripped the rough arms of his chair, his lips pulled tight. Then he relaxed. But the dreamy, wistful look lingered in his eyes. . . .

VINEGAR WAMPUS came back, but not for long. Perhaps some wild intuition told him that he was supposed to live separately from man. He grew a little wilder, eventually lived entirely apart from the little thatched hut on the grassy knoll. The savage swamp, perhaps, appealed to his wild nature. But the lion knew always that Jim Manning was his friend. He never forgot.

In nine more months Vinegar Wampus had grown from the wobbly prankish hulk of a tiny cub to the commanding grandeur of a full grown lion—a mighty specimen of his species. Jim Manning saw him often. The lion liked to drink his fill in Black Devil Lagoon, then lie up under the cool shade of a giant mangrove tree and watch the mating dragon flies spin through sunbeams that filtered down to the still water.

FOR over two years now Jim Manning had dreamed of the day when he might hear a human voice other than his own.

It was ironical that the realization of that dream, after those long, dreary, black months, should also be the wrecking of another dream—the never-ending hope in his heart for freedom.

"Vacation's over now!" The thick voice came from behind a growth of tangled grapevine. "You can raise your hands."

Tige Johnson stepped into the open. He held a short Luger in his hands. A huge bloodhound stood at the big man's side. There was victory in Tige Johnson's thick-lipped cross between a smile and a sneer. His eyes held all the gloat that two years of suppressed denial could muster.

"You were a long time finding me, Tige," Jim Manning said listlessly.

"Thought you'd come back," the big man said. "After six months I started hunting. Been into the swamp half a hundred times, got lost, nearly died once. But I've got you now!" There was a note of near madness in the man's voice. "It was simple after I found your tracks in the mud 'longside the lagoon. Redbone here is a good trailer." He nodded at the big bloodhound. "Damned good."

"Surprised at you coming alone," Jim Manning said. "I'd thought you'd have half the Territory police with you."

"I'm not the law any more." The big man talked slowly. "It's been over two years since you left, remember. Folks didn't much believe you killed Jake Goodall, but at a trial my witnesses would've convinced 'em. If you hadn't sobered up and broke out of jail, I wouldn't have had all this trouble. Gloria kept putting me off. She didn't much believe you killed her pa. But she wouldn't marry me until she was sure you wasn't coming back, or was dead.

"Well, you're coming back." The man's eyes were a little wild. He tied the light thong that held the huge bloodhound to a crawling grapevine. "You're coming back and your neck'll stretch just like it would've over two years ago. I still got my witnesses all set to go. I still got your knife with the dark blood stains. You'll hang all right!" The big man's short laugh carried a strange ring on the soft swamp air.

"Why'd you kill him, Tige?" Jim Manning asked. The big man laughed. "No harm in telling you," he said. "Nobody'd believe the word of a runaway coward.

Fact is, Jake Goodall crossed me once too often." The man's lips were tight. "He knew about something else that he hadn't ought to have known about, too. And, ah course, I wanted his daughter. You and him both stood in my way. I don't like people that stand in my way. . . ."

Jim Manning trembled slightly as he stood there. He had thought the whole Territory Police were on his trail. He'd thought Gloria Goodall hated him. He could still feel the hot, grief-stricken words she had hurled at him almost, as it were, over the dead body of her father. But now she didn't believe it. He had hid out for over two years in a steaming swamp jungle from the Territory Police, and the accusing eyes of the woman he loved when really all he had to do was settle the differences between himself and that leering hulk of swamp treachery that so confidently held a Luger on him now. Tige Johnson was the man who spiked Jim Manning's drink and made it appear that he had killed old Jake Goodall in a drunken stupor. They'd had words, he and Jake. The elderly rancher had stood between Gloria Goodall and Jim Manning getting married. The tall newcomer could have overcome Tige Johnson's competition, but he couldn't get Gloria Goodall to marry him without the consent of her father.

JIM MANNING made his play then. He'd always wondered if he would have the guts to charge a man holding a gun. He started straight in, dodged to the side, and ducked low. A bullet burned his ribs, ripped angrily at the damp grass-covered ground. Tige Johnson's knees buckled when the hurtling body hit him. The loose-held Luger slid to the ground.

The two men rose together. Jim Manning began to throw his fists into the big man, hard. He liked that. It was a measure of revenge for the long, lonely hours this man had thrown upon him. Tige Johnson's belly was the only soft spot about him. It got softer every time Jim Manning hit it. He hit it often.

The big man was hitting Jim Manning in the face now. His mouth was bleeding. His whole head felt like a spinning color top, with the circles getting wider and wider.

Tige Johnson was looking around for a club. He wanted to end the fight quick. That was Tige all over, Jim Manning thought. He never intentionally gave a man a chance. He hit the big man over the right ear. Tige Johnson went down. He tried to get up. His eyes were open, his mind seemed alive, but those big hairy arms and legs wouldn't lift him.

Jim Manning helped him up. There was a smile of revenge on his lips. Jim Manning was winning this fight. He smashed the big face with a hard right.

The bloodhound broke loose then. He had been lunging and growling fiercely as the two men fought. The big dog lunged forward with a deep growl. That initial charge carried Jim Manning off his feet. Then he was fighting, rolling, kicking—trying to keep the big dog away from his throat.

With a club he could have done it. With his bare hands he was helpless. The fangs were there now. The big dog was old. His teeth were worn to dull nubs. They did not slash and tear but they cut off the air. Jim Manning felt the gloom bear down. His head was swimming. He felt hot pain in his stomach and ribs. Tige Johnson was kicking him with the rock-hard toes of his big swamp brogans. . . .

THE solid, rapid fire hammering of a woodpecker came from a giant mangrove. A quarreling brush animal leaped in and out in a tangle of thick jungle growth, chattering fiercely. A soft whirr of flying insects drummed sleepily in the languid air.

Tige Johnson had not tarried. He had pulled the big dog off, bound his captive's hand, and now they were gliding silently across the dark bosom of Black Devil Lagoon. Jim Manning was going back at last. . . .

The big man sat behind, rowing, the dog on the rough seat beside him. Jim Manning sat on the middle strip of the tiny dugout. His head ached and his throat felt raw. It was dry too, dry and burning.

Tige Johnson dropped the heavy paddle suddenly and grabbed at his Luger.

"Biggest one I ever saw!" Jim Manning heard him say. The pistol cracked then.

Vinegar Wampus wheeled from his po-

sition on the oozy bank with a guttural sound of surprise and pain. The moist swamp air had carried the scent of his friend. He had not been afraid. But that was another man there with the gun.

In his hurry the big lion slipped. He scrambled feverishly. The slimy mud further down the bank would not hold his weight. He slid into the dark depths of Black Devil Lagoon with a soft "plop"!

Jim Manning had not seen the lion until the shot rang out. He had been watching something else. Following a tiny ripple across the green water scum of the bayou, a barely submerged, rusty form had been winding in and out among the snags.

Black Devil had maneuvered into position and was about to strike at the delicious canine morsel in the boat when the gun fired. It had frightened him. In his confusion he rose, half length showing.

Tige Johnson looked down. His mouth flew open in a startled curse. He dipped the gun quickly, pulled the trigger frantically.

A long jaw, lined with green-encrusted teeth, opened wide. A warning hiss came from the great white throat. Jim Manning sensed the heavy stench in his nostrils.

Black Devil went into frightened action. He whipped the great rusty tail around in a mighty arc. There was a crashing of flimsy timber as the boat cracked open. The great tail came back again, higher this time. The dog howled in frightened pain. He went overboard. Tige Johnson lost his balance and went over the side with the big bloodhound.

Jim Manning saw the great teeth-lined jaws snap shut on the struggling dog, crushing the life from his body. The black reptilian form turned on the man then. It was probably Black Devil's first hand-to-hand encounter with a human being. He didn't know that he was supposed to be afraid of man. Black Devil didn't know he was supposed to be afraid of anything. He had never lost a battle yet. The more things he attacked, the better chance his enormous appetite had of being satisfied. Jim Manning saw the great croc begin his twisting roll then. He heard Tige Johnson scream as the big man went under.

VINEGAR WAMPUS was swimming across the lagoon. Those slippery,

oozy banks by the big mangrove were too difficult. He could never work his heavy body back up. So the big lion had turned and was swimming slowly for the opposite shore. The banks were lower there.

He saw the huge croc then. The reptile was mad with kill lust. He had made short work of the first two adversaries and now he was ready for a third. Seldom did such opportunity for food in abundance present itself within his limited kingdom.

Thoroughly surprised, and startled, the lion jerked backward. With a quick spin the croc whipped his tail around and smashed the lion across the forehead. Powerful jaws reached out then for a wedge of flesh. The great, scaly tail lashed out again, landing with a sickening thump on the lion's ribs.

Breath knocked from him momentarily, blinded by the stinking mud, and strangled by this sudden attack, the big lion groped desperately with distended claws. He was at a great disadvantage here in the water. On solid ground it would have been different. The bullet hadn't hit a vital spot, but he was losing blood.

Coughing, gasping, squirming, the big lion lashed out feverishly. The croc had a hold on his leg now, was dragging him out into deeper water.

As the huge armored lizard rolled, seeking a death hold, the lion's claws found a soft spot. Instinctively he grabbed with both forelegs, encircling the tough, shield-like body. Eager fangs found the croc's throat—about the only vulnerable spot on the great reptile.

Again the crocodile bore down, dragging his antagonist with him. But the fighting lion held on. His lungs were filling slowly with mud and water. There was no footing for his wildly threshing hind legs and feet. Without a solid spot underfoot, the lion was unable to put full force into his attack.

Cold sweat stood out in tiny beads on Jim Manning's forehead. Water was running into the dugout slowly. It was already getting loggy. One more flip of the tail and Black Devil would have foundered the craft like an overloaded match box. When it moved, it rolled sluggishly. There was nothing left inside to row the frail craft with now. His hands were tied. And if the big lion lost this fight, a faster death would close in on Jim Manning. Stirred

now to blood-frenzy madness, the huge reptile would attack anything. It would be an easy matter for the big croc to tip over an already sinking boat. . . .

The croc worked deeper with feverish haste. The lion knew that he had a death hold, could finally bring the rolling reptile to grief—if he could only hold out.

But the burning, half-strangled feeling in his lungs intensified. When it seemed they would burst if he did not get air, the big lion broke his hold and made for the surface.

The reptile misinterpreted this move. He thought the lion was quitting, tucking tail, running for safety. This was more in line with his idea of a fight—to make a quick run at a retreating object. With a mighty rush he shot up after the disappearing animal.

The lion hit surface with a mighty snort. He blew brownish water from burning lungs, sucked in great quantities of pure air. The rush carried his shoulders up and out of the water. Great, live pinchers closed over his right back leg like a rusty vise. The lion glimpsed a whirling kaleidoscope of mangrove, water grass and a patch of blue sky as he was once more dragged beneath the sluggish surface of the water.

The great croc was weakening now. That gash in his throat emitted a steady stream of black blood. The Luger bullet had missed him entirely, but this scraping lion had done damage with that neck hold.

Never before in a long life of depredation had the old croc tangled with such an adversary. That other lion he feasted on long ago had been easy. That victory had given him confidence over anything with the lion appearance. Why was this one so different? Perhaps his only hope of a quick victory now would be to keep this powerful tornado of fang and claw under water—let the lagoon help win his fight. With great thrashing motions of his powerful tail, the huge croc worked steadily to the bottom.

That was king crocodile's greatest mistake. . . .

When his threshing feet found solid bottom, the great lion felt renewed confidence surge through him. With a quick twist he bowed himself into position to again work

on the croc's neck. He could brace himself now.

When his fangs found a new hold on the slimy neck, the lion brought the claws of his powerful hind feet down across the white belly. They left long, red slits of torn flesh. The big lion fought grimly now. Eagerly.

The croc thrashed frantically. His great tail raised fogs of muddy water as it sought solid flesh. He had turned loose of the leg hold, tried to find a weak spot. But there seemed to be no weakness in this biting, clawing, tearing, fighting body. Something was wrong here. Sudden fear gripped the big croc's heart and locked jaws twisted once more.

The lion's head was in a whirl. Pinwheels of stars shot up from his numbed brain. Strained lungs burned. He couldn't hold out much longer.

Then it came. That relaxing of muscles that could mean only one thing. King Croc was done for, whipped. . . .

In a semi-conscious condition, the big lion pulled himself to the surface. He took in great gulps of fresh air. Then the animal pulled slowly to shore, climbed out unsteadily and looked back. The great scourge of Black Devil Lagoon, grinning monster of death in the depths, was lying belly-up on the sluggish surface, his throat a bleeding mass of torn flesh. The big reptile sank slowly then, beneath the greenish surface scum of roiling water.

Jim Manning had used his bound hands as a paddle and worked the sluggish boat slowly to the bank. It sank from the jar his left foot effected as he jumped for shore. The big lion stood there looking at him, swaying slightly.

"They're wiped clean now, Vinegar, old boy," the man spoke slowly. There was a smile on his face. "You've paid back the old debts in full, to me—and to the croc. I'm much obliged, you old lumbering devil. Mucho damned blige!"

The lion lowered his head, shook the glistening water from his long mane, glanced briefly at a circling dragon fly. The sun was getting big behind the mangroves, big and dull red. It threw a crimson gloom on the swamp waters. Birds whipped in and out among the jungle



She was sleek. Very sleek.

growth, twittering uneasily, hunting a place to roost.

Great swamp bullfrogs started their serenade from the shadows of countless quagmires, from the remote depths of the deep morass.

"Yeah, the swamp's in your blood too," the man spoke softly. "Just like it's in mine. Your kind don't usually take to swamp country . . . just come in for water when it's dry on the veldt. But you've stayed too long. You grew up here and it's in your blood. I'm going now, but I'm coming back. I'm going to bring a woman back with me, Vinegar. You'll like her all right—anybody would! We'll spend a part of each year in the swamp here. We'll keep you from getting lonesome. Hey! Don't walk off while I'm talking to you. Wait. . . ."

He saw her then. She had eased out of the swamp jungles like a dark shadow. She stood standing now under the big mangrove tree. She was small and neat and sleek. Very sleek.

Vinegar Wampus walked over to the young lioness, nosed her possessively. Then the two animals turned and, striding shoulder to shoulder, walked into the swamp together.

Jim Manning watched until the two lions melted into the encroaching gloom of the great swamp. He turned then and walked slowly up the lagoon.

"He won't be lonesome," Jim Manning said aloud. The man smiled. "He, or I either, won't be lonesome from now on. . . ."

The Golden Assegai

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

Word of Chaka and the Golden Assegai swept like wildfire through the jungle . . . and, as the tribes gathered, only *Upantansi*, the Peacemaker, stood between them and total war in Africa.

THE sharp report of a one-pounder came down river, re-echoing between the wooded bluffs that flanked the swift Lujenda. The heat of the East African sun sung over the river in a blue, lethargic haze. A flock of flamingoes rose in ungainly flight, their brilliant plumage a flare of bright scarlet against the green that crowned the river's high banks.

Crack! At the second report a canoe, as if hurled from a catapult, swept around the bend where the Rovuma and Lujena join. Sixteen paddles wielded by black, muscular arms drove the clumsy craft forward at incredible speed. The sun glistened on the paddle blades as they rose and fell in short, stabbing strokes. In the stern sheets, a white man, conspicuous in a white shirt and wide-brimmed felt hat, swayed back and forth while he sang a weird, rhythmical chant in a deep, clear voice.

He was a lean man of some fifty years with deep-set blue eyes which, at the moment, were glowing with suppressed excitement. Still chanting, he turned to throw a keen glance up-river where a black column of smoke marked the gun-boat's position. The next moment she rounded the headland, her stern wheel churning the river to foam. The flag of Portugal fluttered at her masthead.

The white man broke his chant, laughed and thumbed his nose boyishly at the pursuing steamer. As if in answer, a spurt of flame leaped from the gun-boat's fore deck; a shell whined overhead. The canoe slanted toward the north bank of the river. When another fifty yards had been covered, a gap on the near bank opened before them and disclosed the cone-shaped huts of an Algoni village. The white man urged his boys toward a bamboo float jutting into the sheltered cove. The canoe shot alongside just as a final round from

the gun-boat splashed a couple of yards short of the float. A ragged burst of rifle-fire greeted this affront. A line of Algoni warriors concealed along the bank, were peppering the Portuguese with pot-legs and odd bits of metal—anything they could ram down the muzzles of their antiquated guns. The white man laughed as the tinkle of shattered glass reached his ears. Some of the Algoni marksmen had not missed their target.

For fear of further rough treatment, or to avoid complications—the north shore was British territory—the gun-boat stood off from the mouth of the Rovuma. The white man turned to walk up the bamboo float. He had covered but half the distance when a tall figure leaped down the bank and advanced to meet him, with lithe, swinging strides. The tails of a leopard-skin *karoos* swirled about his muscular legs; three ostrich plumes, the emblem of his chieftainship, danced above woolly hair as white as the feathers. He was unarmed and offered both hands to the white man, while a broad grin lighted his stern visage.

"Welcome, *Upantansi*!" said he, in a deep bass and in good English. "You see I knew of your coming."

The white man's hands slid into the chief's and tightened in a firm grip of friendship.

"Greetings, Sotobi!" he returned. "It's long since I've tasted your salt, but I know you sleep with your eyes open."

"When the lion sleeps, the jackal feeds, my brother. And I think you have not done with yonder jackal—see!" He pointed over the white man's shoulder.

UPANTANSI, otherwise David MacPhane, turned on his heel to follow the chief's finger.

The gun-boat was hove-to and a small



In one swift movement he rose and stabbed.

boat was lowered. Presently the splutter of a gasoline engine, muffled in the heavy air, reached their ears. The launch swung out from the gun-boat's side. A lone figure in a white pith-helmet set her nose for the bamboo float.

"Well!" commented MacPhane, "whatever Lemos lacks, it's not guts!"

Sotobi spat into the river. "With you here, he knows he is safe! Listen, my brother." The old warrior's voice became persuasive. "When we were boys at the mission house I read a wise man's book, Machiavelli . . ."

"When you should have been reading the Bible!" reproved MacPhane.

"I read that also, my brother. It says: 'The Lord hath delivered . . .'"

"Quiet, thou!" snapped MacPhane in Bantu. "If he comes in peace, he goes in peace."

Sotobi caught MacPhane's arm: "But I say he knows of the *Bana*, your son. He could tell whether the young *Bana* is alive or dead. And I could make him talk, *Upan-tansi*."

MacPhane's face was set in hard lines and in his eyes was the pain of old wounds, bared. For MacPhane had experienced Africa, and Africa had not left him scatheless. No man owed the country less; the deadly breath of its swamps had killed his wife. A marauding *impû* had carried off his son, but still he loved Africa! The call of the mountains flushed with the rose-light of dawn, and with gold at sunset. The smell of the veldt after rain, the flashing stampede of the zebras—all these things called him and made him want to live as one of them. Born an Africander, the son of an American missionary, his was the evangelist's spirit, without its bigotry. He saw little good in conversions; he served his God after his own fashion, and in such fashion that the best of his own kind respected him, as the worst feared him. But it was to his work as an emissary, as the self-appointed ambassador to the Bantu, that he owed his native name—*Upan-tansi*, The Peace-maker. And all the fame and glory that MacPhane hoped for was in that name.

It was the scent of war, strong in the surreptitious march of young warriors northward that had brought MacPhane to the *kraal* of his foster-brother, Sotobi.

Here, he knew, he would learn who and what was stirring the Bantu, for Sotobi, chief over the Algoni, kept a wary eye on African politics and was no man's fool. But the old chief's judgment was apt to go awry, MacPhane thought, when Lemos was involved. Pedro Lemos, Chief Factor of the Nyasa Company, was a power in Mozambique. He had been implicated in some shady trading and MacPhane had crossed his trail more than once. Their relations, MacPhane recalled with a wry smile, had never been amicable nor, up to the moment, had he thought them so strained as to warrant settlement with small cannon. As for his son—

"Sotobi," said he with finality. "You hate Lemos, and you would saddle him with every crime. If my son had lived, he would be a young man now—old enough to seek his own kind. It is folly to hope."

"Nevertheless," growled Sotobi, "there will come a day . . ." He broke off to steady himself as the launch jarred alongside the float.

SENHOR PEDRO LEMOS was a handsome man. A neat Vandyke beard set off his regular aquiline features and his straight figure and punctilios were reminiscent of a parade ground and the officers' mess. He came to stand before MacPhane with his hands resting on his hips, at ease; yet there was hauteur in his poise, a challenge in the tilt of his head. He looked what MacPhane judged him to be—one who asked no question of life, but fought it with his desires. He met the hostile silence that greeted him with a shrug and a smile. After looking from one to the other he finally spoke.

"*Senhor* MacPhane," said he, "one has but to wait for you. You always turn up, like the bad dollar."

"It's not that you haven't done your best to put me out of circulation," purred MacPhane.

"If you refer to the shooting, *Senhor*, believe me, there was no enmity in my part of it."

"Well—!" MacPhane's eyebrows arched, "a man might easily die of your friendship!"

"That is nonsense, MacPhane! At that range I could have blown you out of the river. I wanted to stop you—to save time.

I have news for you, and I have come out of my way to deliver it."

MacPhane smiled: "I'm not convinced. But have it your way. What d'you want with me?"

The Portuguese fumbled in a pocket of his white tunic and brought out a small leather-bound Bible.

"In the fly-leaf of this Book," said he, with his eyes fixed on MacPhane's face, "I read: 'To my son, David—' You may find your own handwriting more convincing, *Senhor*."

The hand MacPhane stretched out to receive the book shook in spite of himself. After years of searching—through the jungles and across the veldt, with never so much as a whisper to sustain a hope—his eager fingers sought the fly-leaf of the Bible. He saw his own cramped hand—more, a fleeting vision of a boy with candid blue eyes, standing to receive his gift, promising to read it daily—to keep it always with him. Resurgent hope, sternly repressed, was like a band of steel, squeezing his heart. He felt like a boxer who has been hit below the belt; he fought to steady himself. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Sotobi take a quick step toward Lemos. He caught the old warrior's arm, restraining him, and when he spoke his voice was calm:

"Where did you get this, Lemos?" he demanded.

Lemos was watching Sotobi, his black eyes wary.

"One of my headmen brought it in," he explained. "He had been trading along the Zambesi and picked it up in a Bokepi village. He was an intelligent fellow, and knowing your story, he asked questions. He says that the headman of the village admitted that a Zulu *impi* had passed through his village years ago and that they had a white child with them. I heard that you were in these parts; I knew you would be on the river, so I waited for you. That is all I can tell you, *Senhor*."

There was a subtle power in MacPhane's personality, when he chose to exert it—that few could resist. Lemos felt it in the silence that followed his explanation, and he sought to cover his malaise in speech:

"I am on my return trip to Lorenzo," said he. "If you care to accompany me, I

will give you my Arab as a guide to the Bokepi village."

"Thank you," said MacPhane coldly. "But the British owe me a favor or two. If I decide to go south, I'll beg a seat in one of their planes."

Lemos' eyes widened with astonishment. "If you decide—but I would have thought . . ."

"I can guess what you thought," said MacPhane; then as his pent-up feelings blazed in his eyes—"Get back to your boat and your pop-gun, Lemos; away with you, man, before I forget myself!"

For a moment Lemos stood hesitant, bewildered plainly showing in his bold eyes. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but thought better of it and climbed back into his launch.

MacPhane's eyes followed the boat's white wake, while Sotobi looked askance at his lean, sun-burned profile.

"So!" growled the old chief. "You have let him go. Even if he lied, he knows much. Else how would he have the little Book? I could make him talk!"

MacPhane shook his head: "Not Lemos, he'd die first. Besides, if I had the she-leopard but wanted her cubs, I wouldn't chain her and look for them in the jungle."

"True, she would lead you to them. But you will not follow this leopard south, my brother?"

"No," affirmed MacPhane. "I think that's what he wants me to do. His gunners weren't onto their job, or he would have blown me out of the river. Then he tried—I'm not clear as to how and why, but I'll find out!"

SOTOBOTO chuckled. "He points south, but we look toward the mountains—toward *Uandanda*."

MacPhane's eyes quickened with interest. "*Uandanda*—that means the Place of Meeting. There's more than gossip, then, in this yarn I've heard about Chaka's assegai and its Keeper?"

"True, there is blood in the wind, and work for you, Peace-maker!" Sotobi was grave.

Together they made their way up the steep path from the river. Beyond, they passed between a line of huts from the hole-like entrances of which little heads, with round, inquisitive eyes, were begin-

ning to peek like mice from their crannies. Sotobi led the way to a large enclosure in the center of which stood his thatched house surrounded by a number of lesser dwellings housing his wives and retainers.

Within the roomy structure MacPhane sat cross-legged upon a leopard-skin and took cool goat's milk from the hands of a Rantu girl with firm, young breasts.

"Another wife, old Pagan!" disapproved MacPhane.

"A daughter," sighed Sotobi. "Even the sap of the tallest tree dries with the years, my brother."

"The better for the peace of your house—and your soul," commented MacPhane, filling his pipe, and when it was drawing to his satisfaction: "Now," he demanded, "what's all this talk? Does it mean war?"

"Be sure of that, my brother! This tale of the Assegai and its Keeper spreads among the Bantu from *kraal* to *kraal* like whispering in the night. It has the magic of Chaka's name. Some of the young warriors hear it, and in the morning they are gone to *Uandanda*. Last night four of my own heard the call; tomorrow there will be more."

"Who calls them, Sotobi?"

"The Keeper of the Assegai, my brother."

"Who is he? Of what tribe?" MacPhane was impatient.

But Sotobi had evidently made up his mind to tell his story in his own time. He took snuff calmly, then went on, ignoring MacPhane's questions.

"As you know, my brother, it was Chaka who taught us to use the assegai. Before, when we fought, we used to throw our spears, which was foolish since it left the warrior without a weapon. It was Chaka who taught us to charge and stab with the short assegai. Now, so that this might not be forgotten, Chaka carried an assegai with a golden blade as the emblem of his kingship. It was a wondrous thing! It was fashioned in the Underworld and tempered by the Shades. It drank only the blood of the guilty; the good man it would not scratch, not even if driven against his breast by the arm of the strongest warrior! My brother knows that Chaka was slain by his brother who seized his power. What became of the Golden Assegai? It fell into

the hands of a faithful *induna* who fled with it to the mountains and thus became the first Keeper of the Assegai. From that day to this it has passed from the hand of one who shakes it aloft. He calls the young warriors to the Place of Meeting. The fools go. They think to make the Zulu power live again!"

A deep frown had settled on MacPhane's face. He took pride in his knowledge of African lore, but he could recall no legend of a Golden Assegai. It must be, he concluded, an invention—a mixture of truth and falsehood calculated to inflame hot, young blood.

"You are of Chaka's blood, Sotobi. What do you say of this tale?" he asked.

"I say that it is a lie. No Bantu could have thought of it!"

MACPHANE sat rapt in thought. Incidents apparently unrelated, flashed across his mind in vivid sequence. When he came to think of it, whenever he had started north, in the last few years, something had happened to turn him back. At Quilimane his passport had been turned down; at Mopea he had lost his whole equipment, mysteriously stolen, while Pedro Lemos entertained him. It had taken him a year to earn enough to replace his gear. At Lorenzo, there was a chapter of incidents the like of which he had never experienced outside of Mozambique. And finally, there was a gun-boat on the Rovuma—where she had no right to be—and Pedro Lemos, blazing away!

MacPhane got to his feet with an abruptness that startled Sotobi. "No Bantu could think of it," said he, "but a white man could. The British are fighting in Egypt with their backs to the wall. If a man had been planning—waiting for the opportunity, he could raise an army with that yarn and swoop down on Tanganyika. By thunder he could, Sotobi!" he finished with conviction. "We shall meet Lemos again—at *Uandanda*."

Sotobi's eyes widened: "Would you go *there*, my brother?"

MacPhane rested both his hands on the old warrior's shoulders with a persuasive squeeze: "If you will show me the way, old friend."

Sotobi shook his head: "It cannot be. I could not raise an *impii*—"

"I won't need one. My men and a dozen of yours to carry the loads. No more."

"You must be mad, *Upantansi*! The Bantu are in arms. . . ."

"Are you afraid?" wondered MacPhane.

"You know better," returned Sotobi, with quiet dignity. "I would not lead you to your death, but I see that you want to die. Well, I am old; I have lived. I can choose to die with you, *Upantansi*."

The eastern sky was but faintly flushed with crimson and the lions were still moaning amid the white-plumed spear grass beyond the *kraal* when MacPhane joined Sotobi and signified his readiness to march. They were through a dense, though narrow, strip of jungle and out upon the high-veldt by the time the sun was above the tree-tops. Sotobi and MacPhane led the van, closely followed by the bearers, and, as a rear guard, fifty lithe-limbed Algoni marched, chanting with the sun atwinkle on their spear-heads.

MacPhane's eyes were heavy. He had spent a bad night, one punctuated by periods of lucid thought and fitful sleep during which the past and the present had mingled in nightmarish visions. Even now, in the blaze of day, when he shut his eyes, the spectre that had haunted his dreams took shape in his fancy, and he saw again the image of his son with a golden assegai plunged into his heart.

The next three days were a series of prolonged marches. Sotobi had estimated the distance to *Uandanda* in five marches, but MacPhane had decided to cover it in four. He knew that he was driving his men. It was evident in their weariness when they made camp late at night, and in their reluctance when they broke it at dawn. Without Sotobi's authority, MacPhane knew they would have deserted before now. But he felt himself driven by a gnawing sense of urgency that gave him no rest. Now as he ate his evening meal in silence, revolving plans, he felt the reproach in Sotobi's eyes.

"You march as if the devil you talk of was at your heels," commented the old chief.

"He's sure to be ahead of me," said MacPhane, and lapsed into silence again.

An hour before sunset on the fourth day, after a steady climb, they reached the rim of the sparsely wooded high-veldt.

Leaving the safari to make camp below, MacPhane and Sotobi climbed to the top of the slope and took their first glimpse of the mountains.

They rose abruptly from a level tableland, a cluster of five cone-shaped colossi, standing in isolated grandeur, pencilled against the sunset like peaks drawn by a child. Close at hand a rock reared like a tower of a castle. Bidding Sotobi to follow him, MacPhane scrambled to its summit. With the aid of his binoculars he scanned the country.

From the base of the rock the ground fell away into a broad donga. The valley, a half-mile in width, was strewn with huge boulders and slabs of basalt rock, some lying flat, some standing like columns and resembling fallen masonry so strikingly that, at first sight, MacPhane thought he looked upon the site of a ruined city. Beyond, the ground rolled away in thinly-bushed undulations to the barren tableland out of which rose the massive cones.

Even as MacPhane gazed and marveled, the sun went down behind the peaks and left the scene to stand out in bold, rugged lines against the twilight. It was, he thought, like a glimpse into the gloom of primeval time, when the whole tableland must have been a vast, heaving cauldron of molten rock, spewing mountains of lava from its fiery bowels.

Sotobi touched his arm and pointed with his spear:

"See—yonder, where the smoke is—a Chelembwi village. Beyond it, at the foot of the mountain, is *Uandanda*."

MACPHANE turned his glasses to where a bluish haze floated above the opposite ridge of the valley. Suddenly he stiffened. His attitude became tense. Though the light was failing rapidly, he found the path leading up to the village, and on either side of it, amid the bush on the slope, he saw movement, and his eye was caught by the glint of steel. For a moment he studied the path—no more than a goat's trail, zig-zagging between huge boulders and clumps of bush; then:

"Sotobi," said he quietly, thrusting his glasses into the other's hand. "There is an ambush on that trail."

"Your eyes are young, I see no—ha!"

A bass chuckle rumbled up from Sotobi's chest. "I said you would need an *impü*."

"So you did. And if I had one, I suppose you'd be for storming the village."

"To get to *Uandanda* we must press through it, my brother."

"I see that," agreed MacPhane. "But at night two might go where an *impü* could not."

"So—we go to *Uandanda*, tonight, alone!" said Sotobi, and sat down with an air so expressive of patient resignation that MacPhane laughed.

The old warrior grinned up into his face: "It is good to hear you laugh again, my brother. For days and days you have marched like a man possessed. I think something is eating your heart." Then, as MacPhane did not answer, but turned his face to gaze toward the mountains, Sotobi went on:

"I see you do not want to talk of it. No matter. We go to *Uandanda*, but how will you make peace when you get there?"

"How to make peace when we get there!" MacPhane's lips twisted into a wry smile. He'd thought about that until his wits had curdled like sour milk. There was a shadow of a plan floating at the back of his brain, but it was too visionary—too elusive to be captured. He couldn't make common sense of it.

He sat down beside Sotobi, filling his pipe. Said he:

"I don't know how I'll send the Bantu back to their *kraals* in peace. I see the danger, old friend, but I *feel* there is a way and I must find it. Some would call it revelation, others intuition; a Bantu would say: 'My heart tells me . . .' and sometimes I think there's more sense in him than the others."

"True," agreed Sotobi. "A man *can* understand another's heart. And since I know yours better than you think, I'll follow it to *Uandanda*. It is two hours' march. . . ."

"Just a moment, old Fox!" interposed MacPhane. "I didn't say that a man couldn't understand revelation."

Sotobi's smile was bland: "No. You would not say it, my brother."

"The devil take you, man!" snapped MacPhane. "You'll die a heathen in spite of me!"

BACK at the camp over their evening meal, MacPhane gave his instructions:

"It's about five miles to the Mountains," said he. "Allowing for delays, we should make it in about two hours. Tell your headman to set a watch upon the ridge. Let them have a fire—show themselves, so that our friends across the valley will think we are settled for the night. We will rest until midnight."

An hour after midnight they were ready to start. Sotobi carried his assegai, its blade covered with dark cloth and a long coil of rope in place of his shield. MacPhane was unarmed. He had blackened his face and hands, and carried a day's ration, his binoculars and an electric torch in a knapsack slung at his back.

In silence they made the way down into the valley. The ground favored their stealthy advance upon the village; the huge rocks and clumps gave them good cover. Crawling where there was open ground, they crossed the valley and began to climb the opposite slope. A livid moon shadowed out the lurking figure of a sentry on the ambushed path. They circled to the right, striking the path again on the crest of the ridge.

Before them rose the bush-wood stockade which surrounded the village. Avoiding the gate, they followed the curve of the wall until Sotobi came to an abrupt halt with a whispered warning to MacPhane. Crawling forward to join his companion, MacPhane suddenly found himself upon the brink of a chasm. As from a great distance the sound of running water reached his ears.

"Lord!" breathed MacPhane. "It must be a mile deep!"

"The *kraal* is built to the edge of it. We must go through the village to cross it. The other gate leads out to a bridge." Sotobi informed him.

MacPhane's eyes traveled up the stockade. In a trice Sotobi had the bight of his rope over one of the sharpened stakes above his head. He was up and over in a matter of seconds. MacPhane followed him without difficulty. As his head came level with the top of the wall, he saw a fire burning in the center of the village. About it squatted several figures, dozing. MacPhane noted their neat, khaki shirts.

"Lemos is ahead of us, all right," said he, as he dropped to the ground beside Sotobi.

"The worse for us, my brother. He would gain a day by the river and. . ."

The yelp of a dog shattered the silence. The pair froze in the shadow of the stockade.

"If we're down wind—" muttered MacPhane.

A minute passed. In the silence MacPhane began to breathe again. The shadows lengthened in their path as the moon went down. They went forward swiftly. No guard had been posted at the gate leading out onto the plain. A natural arch spanned the chasm. They went across it in a swift dash and gained the cover of the rocks beyond.

Once clear of the village, Totobi set a hard pace and after half an hour of it the sweat was streaming from MacPhane's face. By this time they were close to the mountains; their colossal slopes blotted out the sky. The trail they followed, dipped and twisted between great slabs of volcanic rock, some standing on end like gigantic tombstones, others worn by erosion to fantastic shapes. How Sotobi kept to the trail was a puzzle to MacPhane; in the overhanging shadow of the mountains he could see no path. He was about to call a halt when the face of a cliff, looming black before them, barred further progress.

"Where away now?" MacPhane asked breathlessly, wiping the sweat from his eyes.

Sotobi's chest was heaving with deep-drawn breath. He shook his head. "I have never been beyond the village. Nor do I know of any who went beyond it and returned."

"Man, you're as full of gloomy forebodings as an old wizard!" growled MacPhane. "If you don't. . ."

He broke off as the beat of tom-toms burst suddenly upon them. To MacPhane's ears the rhythmic throbbing sounded hollow and strangely concentrated. This puzzled him and, after a moment's thought, he drew the electric torch from his knapsack.

The cliff's face reflected the powerful ray in a brilliant circle which MacPhane moved slowly from right to left. Sud-

denly the circle of light vanished, swallowed by impenetrable black. MacPhane snapped off the light quickly. He understood; there was an opening in the cliff—a passage; the sound of the tom-toms rolled down it from the far end. Struck by a sudden thought, he bade Sotobi follow him and felt his way along the cliff's face away from the passage, then he stopped to listen. The beat of the tom-toms still reached his ears, but the sound was fainter—more diffused, and seemed to float over his head.

"Our way is up the cliff," MacPhane explained. "Up with you man! It will be light in a couple of hours."

The climb was less difficult than he had anticipated. After a short wait Sotobi's rope fell at his feet.

The old Chief's eyes were bulging when MacPhane scrambled to his side.

"I think we have come to hell, *Upantansi!*" His deep voice quivered. "Behold the Place of Meeting!"

A FAINT red light like the afterglow of sunset hovered before MacPhane's eyes. The beat of the tom-toms, the chanting of many voices, the pungent odor of burning wood, seemed to be borne upward on its vague radiance. For a moment MacPhane stared. *Uandanda* was the crater of an extinct volcano! The rough curve of the near rim was visible when he looked for it. He scrambled forward and flung himself upon his belly at its edge.

The light of a hundred fires lit up the scene below. Before them squatted thousands of black forms, pigmy-like in the distance—row upon row in a great semicircle. Below, but somewhat to his right, MacPhane saw that a row of huts completed the circle about the fires. The tom-toms throbbed tonelessly, the chant rose and fell in monotonous cadences.

MacPhane fumbled for his binoculars. The scene leaped to his eyes as he brought them to focus; its details became clear. He began to pick out the tribes assembled. The Anu-Zulu, Angu, the Doni—others lost in the gloom. A small group stood detached from the crescent-shaped assemblage—*Indunas*, from their head-dress. A white pith-helmet showed among them—Lemos!

The chanting ceased abruptly. The silence startled MacPhane, so used had his ears become to the monotonous throbbing that welled up from the pit. His attention became fixed on a tall figure that had come suddenly to stand in a circle of the fire-light. The apparition wore the hideous head-dress of his calling and his body was covered from head to foot with the ritualistic white pigment. The assegai he carried gleamed in the fire-light.

MacPhane prodded Sotobi with his elbow:

"The Keeper of the Assegai," said he tersely.

For a moment the white figure stood motionless, midway between the horns of the crescent, then raised the glittering assegai above his head. A thunderous shout swelled in the depths below. . . .

"Ba—ye—tee! Ba—ye—tee!" rolled in dying echoes about the crater's walls.

"The Zulu's royal salute!" breathed Sotobi.

MacPhane shot a quick look at the old warrior's face. There had been reverence in that whispered comment; even Sotobi was wrought up. They had come to hell all right! And the devil's own brew was simmering in the pit below. In spite of himself MacPhane felt a grudging admiration for Lemos. The Portuguese's boldness and imagination plucked a responsive chord deep in his own nature. But Lemos, he thought, was but an instrument—so was he, for that matter. They were both actors in a sort of side-show, a part of the master drama called "*Geopolitik*"—German land-grabbing. Lemos had been lucky, too, in finding an accomplice intelligent enough and with the courage to put over the yarn of a Golden Assegai. What kind of man was he? MacPhane snorted. He'd give five years of his life for five minutes' talk with that white-washed Wizard!

The white figure was gesticulating, evidently haranguing the tribes. Several figures were gathered around one of the fires. The smell of roasting flesh reached MacPhane's nostrils. There was to be a feast—an orgy! The chances were that it would last the remainder of the night and the next day. MacPhane again turned his attention to the white wizard—saw him turn stalk toward the huts. His eyes

followed him until he disappeared in a hut. MacPhane marked the position of the hut carefully. It was the first in the row nearest to him. A slow smile turned the corners of his lips.

Said he suddenly: "What would the young men do if they lost their Wizard, Sotobi?"

Sotobi's eyes rolled. "Go mad! Be sure of it, my brother."

MacPhane drew himself forward and peered down into the black depths immediately below him. "Well," he said at length: "We'll pay this tale-teller a visit."

Sotobi thrust his face close to MacPhane's.

"Do you mean to carry him off?"

"Maybe," was the evasive reply.

THE long coil of rope made fast to an out-jutting rock made their descent easy. MacPhane, following Sotobi, found himself some fifteen feet from the bottom when he reached the end of the rope. He swung himself out and dropped to Sotobi's side.

The fires glowed several hundred feet before them. Their crackling was audible, but no light penetrated the sooty gloom that enveloped them. The floor of the crater was a carpet of ash and volcano sand in which hardy vines had taken root.

After a moment of whispered consultation they skirted the fire-light, aiming to come upon the line of huts from behind. The orgy was in full progress. Wild cries shrilled above the babble of voices. At intervals black figures dashed forward like attendant friends, to fling fuel upon the fires and send a shower of sparks skyward. The flames cut wide paths of light between the huts. MacPhane stole forward in the shadow of the first hut. Within ten yards of it he paused.

"Stay," he whispered, thrusting his electric torch into Sotobi's hand. "Guard the doorway. Give me light if I call."

"Let me go!" urged Sotobi. "I am more silent."

"Maybe," conceded MacPhane. "But you're too handy with that sticker of yours. It's knowledge I want, not blood." Without further argument he crawled forward.

To reach the opening he must come with-

in the glare of fires. He stretched himself full length and, worming his way over the soft loam, thrust his head into the low doorway of the hut. All was pitch black within; deep, regular breathing reached his ears. His quarry slept! He smiled inwardly and snaked his way into the interior. His groping hands came in contact with some loose objects which rattled. He caught his breath—the deep breathing had stopped! MacPhane rose, his muscles tightened for a spring; then fury leaped upon him! Strong fingers throttled the cry that rose to his lips as he went down, grappling a lithe, white-painted body. Limbs, like bands of steel, twined themselves about his waist and squeezed the breath from him. He fought back with sinews made hard by constant use; but it was useless, he couldn't break the leach-like hold. He put all his strength into a last effort and managed to get enough breath to gasp out: "Sotobi! Sotobi!"

"I came, *Upantansi*!"

Quite suddenly the pressure at MacPhane's throat ceased. A voice with a startled note of interrogation in it, repeated: "*Sotobi—Upantansi—*"

The light of the torch flared upon them. MacPhane gasped and stared up into eyes as blue as his own—into the face of his own image as it had been—

"My —" he choked. "You — you — David, my boy!"

Minutes later MacPhane, with his chin cupped in his hand, sat listening with rapt attention to the voice of his son. The house of the Assega was sacred, the young man had explained. For two hours—until the morning meal was brought, they might talk without fear of discovery. The light of the electric torch, so placed that its ray struck the concave roof, filled the hut with a dim light. The young man spoke in Bantu; there was a gap of eight years between him and his mother tongue and his speech was punctuated with rapid gestures of his foster-kin. Vague worries assailed MacPhane's mind, but he smiled when he thought of the crushing grip of the hands now laboring in explanations.

"Why should I seek out White men, my father?" He answered MacPhane's question. "I was told that White men had killed you and my Uncle Sotobi. I was a

child then and I believed what I was told. Besides, I saw White men shoot the Bokepi like dogs. They seized the young men and women and took them away in chains. They slew many, among them the old headman who had loved me as a son. Those of us who escaped fled to the mountains and there we built a strong *kraal*. As I grew to manhood I heard again the screams of the women and the weeping of the children when I slept. I feared and hated White men, my father, and I dreamed of a day when my people would be strong to take vengeance. That day came, a year ago. A slaver's safari passed near our *kraal*. I showed the young men how to trap it. We slew many and freed the chained ones. But their leader escaped and I was sad because of it, my father."

"*Aie!*" Sotobi approved. "Your cub has grown claws, *Upantansi*!"

MacPhane did not speak for a moment; his eyes were half-closed.

"Was it a White man who attacked the Bokepi village?" he asked.

"He was called Arab, my father. There were others with him."

MacPhane's eyes opened. "An Arab, eh!— When did you meet Lemos?"

"Soon after our attack on the safari, my father, he said that the Government people forced the Bantu into the mines to work. But his people, if they were the Government, would give the Bantu land, cattle and peace. He said this could not be done unless the Bantu gathered all their strength. His words seemed good to the old men and to me, my father. He taught me the story of Chaka. I saw how these things might come to pass and I followed him here."

"You say that your *kraal* was hidden in the mountains? How did Lemos find his way to it?"

"I cannot tell. He came alone."

"I can tell," said MacPhane. He fished the little Bible from his pocket. "When you fled from the Bokepi village, you left this behind. It's a safe guess that it was Lemos' Arab that fell upon your village. And it was this same Arab who was leader of the safari you attacked. That's how Lemos came by this book and how he knew where to find you. The Arab was his guide. In every lie that

sticks," he expounded, "There is a grain of truth. The trick is to sift the one from the other."

The young man frowned on the Bible, then:

"It must be so," said he. He got quietly to his feet.

MacPhane saw the purpose in his eyes. "Lemos will die when his time comes, my boy. Sit down!" he commanded.

A frown crossed the young man's face, evidently he was more accustomed to give them than to receive orders; yet he was impressed by the way his thought had been read and after a moment of hesitation he returned to his place.

"My brother," said Soboti. "We must be gone from here before sunrise."

"I think the young warriors would soon overtake us, Soboti," objected MacPhane.

"No matter, if we seize the village and make it strong. Many would die before they crossed the bridge!" Soboti urged.

"No!" The youth sprang to his feet. "I have lived a lie before the Bantu, and I will not see them killed for it!"

"That," said MacPhane, "was very well spoken, my son."

"They will kill us and the boy if they learn the truth!" Soboti warned.

But there was a half-smile on MacPhane's lips. He had picked up his son's assegai and was pricking his thumb with its gilded point:

"There is another way," said he. "But I must be obeyed without question. Is it agreed?"

"Let it be so, my father." The boy's quiet acceptance of his leadership thrilled MacPhane. He had feared—but the years had not broken the loving bonds between them.

"When you know him better, Bana," growled Sotobi, "You will not be so ready to do as he says when he smiles as he does now! There is some wild plan in his heart. Yet I would know what it is, even if it kills me!"

"Go, my boy," ordered MacPhane. "Persuade the *indunas* to marshal the tribes at sun-up. Say that you have words for them, but tell them nothing more."

"Must it be so soon, my father?"

"Yes," replied MacPhane softly. "Go now, before they drink themselves stupid." And without another word he stretched

himself upon the floor of the hut to snatch a few hours' rest.

DAYLIGHT had chilled the fires to white embers when MacPhane crawled forth from the hut. Though it was past seven o'clock the sun had not yet climbed above the crater's rim and he shivered in the grey light of the pit. The babble of voices reached his ears. He saw that the tribes had been marshalled in their great semi-circle in the center of which, attended by several *indunas*, stood his son, his golden assegai in his hand.

MacPhane knew that he faced the crisis of his life. Before him was marshalled an army, the best fighting blood in Africa, its passion for war inflamed by the magic of a dead king's name. Could one man restrain them? On the face of it, MacPhane thought any plan might seem absurd. But he had weighed his chances and he had made his peace with his God. It was the boy and Sotobi that made things difficult. He turned to Sotobi who stood with his folded arms resting on the butt of his spear, regarding him with steady eyes:

"Old friend," began MacPhane. "I may have brought you to your death—"

"No," Soboti interrupted him. "I came with my eyes open. I chose to follow you, *Upantansi*."

"Why?" demanded MacPhane.

Sotobi shrugged: "Perchance it is because I think it is better to die of a spear-thrust among men than to die of old age among women."

"You lie!" said MacPhane. "It is because you love me and you are the truest man I've ever known."

For a moment each looked deeply into each other's eyes. Then MacPhane hitched his belt and, leaving the shadow of the hut, strode out into full view of the multitude.

He saw Pedro Lemos jump to his feet as if something had stung him. There was a moment of silence. As his stride brought him close to the *indunas*, he heard his name come to a thousand tongues: "*Upantansi! Upantansi!*"

A thrill quickened MacPhane's pulse. He lifted his head in a conscious gesture of pride. Why not, he thought. If he made peace here there would not be a

man in Africa to say that he was not well named. He lifted his hands above his head; the gesture won immediate silence then, after a pause during which his eyes swept to a sea of faces confronting him, his stentorian voice rang out sharp and clear.

"Hear me, you Bantu! It is your father, *Upantansi*! You know me, my children. My hand has healed your sickness. My tongue has carried your weeping to the Great Ones. When wrong was done I pleaded for you. Is it so, my children?"

"It is so!" a chorus of voices answered him.

MacPhane went on: "You have talked much and your talk is of war. Are you eager to die that you think to make war on the White men? No! I see it in your hearts." He pointed to Lemos, dramatically. "It is because of that one! Hear me, my children! I say that he lies—" He broke off as Lemos came forward, waving his arms.

"Who is this White man?" thundered the Portuguese. "He calls you his children. Are you not the children of Chaka, the Elephant, the Earth Shaker? No need to hear this White man. He will tell you to go back to your *kraals*. The old men will point at you. Your women will jeer. Even the children will mock you. This White man has come to spy on you. He lies—"

A low, ominous growl came from the throats of the warriors. It drowned Lemos' speech. He waited for it to die and favored MacPhane with a sardonic smile. There was a stir amid the gathering, the more excitable were pressing forward. MacPhane saw the movement and knew that, urged on by Lemos, the young warriors would soon be howling for his blood. The time had come.

Four rapid strides brought him to the side of his son. In a flash he snatched the gilded Assegai from the astonished boy's hand and stood holding it, bar-like, above his head.

"Peace!" roared MacPhane, at the top of his voice. "The Bwana Lemos says that I lie. I say that he lies. If you would know the truth, my children, seek it in this!" He took a pace forward and turned slowly from right to left until the

silence assured him that all eyes were fixed on him; then he went on:

"Behold the Assegai—the spear of Chaka! What is the power of the Assegai? It drinks the blood of the evil-doer; the good man it cannot harm. Is it so, my children?"

"It is so," they answered.

"It is good to know the truth," continued MacPhane. "I will show it to you. Let the Bawana Lemos take Chaka's Assegai. Give me another. Let the Bawana Lemos meet me now—blade to blade; shield to shield. If my words are false the Assegai will kill me. If the Bawana Lemos is false he will die. Is it good, my children?"

Wild shouting greeted his proposal. Whether they approved or condemned, MacPhane could not tell. The *indunas* were jabbering excitedly. His son stood apart.

"Tell them, my boy!" MacPhane flung at him in English, taking advantage of the uproar. "Tell 'em I'm right! Get on with it!"

The young man who had been standing like one dumbfounded, came to his senses with a start. He leaped forward with his white arms raised; his voice rang out, high-pitched above the hubbub:

"Hear the words of *Upantansi*! Let the Assegai of Chaka seek out the evil. Let the White men fight. Hear the words of the one who is victor. I have spoken!"

A thunderous shout of acclaim sent the echoes reverberating about the crater's walls. MacPhane's eyes sought and challenged the Portuguese. Lemos flung back the gage with a burning oath. His lips were white and drawn, but it was not fear that blanched his haughty features—it was the choking wrath of a man who sees himself out-witted, entangled in his own wiles. He strode to within a pace of MacPhane, tugging at the buckle of his gun-belt as he came:

"Damn you!" he exploded, flinging the belt from him. "Dios, it will do me good to kill you, Preacher!"

THE horns of the semi-circle had closed, forming a ring about the combatants. The young warriors laughed and clapped their hands like children at a show. There was nothing in the world

they loved more than the spectacle that was about to be offered to them.

MacPhane received his weapons from an *induna*. Sotobi's voice boomed in his ear: "If I had guessed this, my brother—but if he kills you, he will not live to boast of it. I swear it, my brother!"

Lemos handled his gilded assegai like a sword and his swordsmanship was that of the trained duellist. He had been the best fencer in his regiment and often, in times past, his skill had stood the test of actual combat. So it was with exultant confidence that he faced MacPhane. The intent to kill showed plainly in his eyes. With savage joy he embraced the opportunity to settle his quarrel with the lean, preaching hunter whose presence in Mozambique had brought panic to his henchmen and to himself.

As agile as a cat in all his movements, and crouching a little as he fought, he advanced and retreated, testing MacPhane's guard and gaining better control of his awkward weapon.

Erect and poised easily, his body covered by his long shield, MacPhane turned Lemos' tentative thrusts with the corner of his shield. He was possessed of little skill other than that which comes with a cool head, a quick eye, and nimble feet. He pivoted slowly, keeping his shield in line with Lemos' point, waiting for the chance to close and stab.

For a space Lemos danced about MacPhane. Then evidently satisfied as to the proper mode of assault, he attacked viciously. A series of swift lunges drove MacPhane backward. Half a dozen times Lemos' blade grazed him as he twisted his lean body away from the driving steel. But Lemos redoubled his efforts. His point made a flashing circle of light. It bewildered MacPhane. Several blades appeared to leap at him at the same time; there was no escape from their terrible ubiquity and he gave ground until there was no more ground to give. His back was to the dense mass of spectators; their clamor filled his ears.

Lemos was upon him, his white teeth bared for the kill. He fainted twice. MacPhane parried wildly. Lemos stretched his body in a lunge, aimed at his opponent's throat. MacPhane owed his life to sinews

trained in the jungle; to nerves taught to dodge the leopard's spring. He saw the thrust coming; his muscles reacted by instinct—he dropped to his knees.

So confident had Lemos been of sending his thrust home that, meeting no resistance, he was thrown off balance. And startled by a trick no academic swordsman could have thought of, he was slow in his recovery. MacPhane saw his chance—his first in that unequal fight. In one swift movement he rose and stabbed. Lemos tried to twist his body away, but was too late. The hard-driven steel plunged into his left side. He staggered and fell. There was an outcry; then the awed silence that comes with death.

MacPhane stood erect and grim over his fallen opponent, wiping the sweat from his face with the sleeve of his shirt. He felt sick. It was the first time he had killed a man. But his face remained set and impassive. His voice rang out:

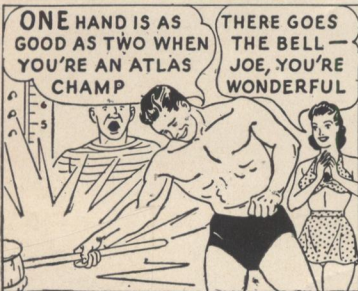
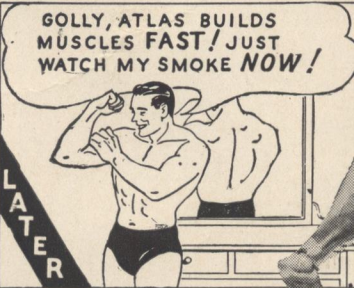
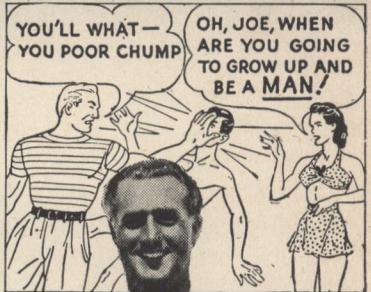
"You know the truth, my children."

AT sundown MacPhane sat before the smoldering embers of the fires. Sotobi and his son stood behind him. All but one of the tribes had filed through the narrow passage and out to the plains beyond. The Zulus were the last to leave and MacPhane was anxious to see them on their way. It had taken all his prestige, backed by his son's authority, to persuade them to go without striking a blow. At last he saw the *impi* ready to march. They came across the open space at a dog-trot and their white, tossing plumes were like the foam of the breaking sea. They came to a halt before him in compact order. Their *induna*, a splendid fellow, stepped from the ranks:

"We are the children of Chaka," he boasted. "We do not fear the White man nor his guns. At Ishsandawalda our fathers slew them. Let thy brothers remember that, Peacemaker! Let them know that between them and war is the wisdom of *Upantansi*. Let them be guided by his wisdom! I have spoken. Farewell!" He raised his assegai and a thousand more flashed upward:

"*Ba—ye—tee!*" Their salute thundered and died in a whispering echo that was like a sigh.

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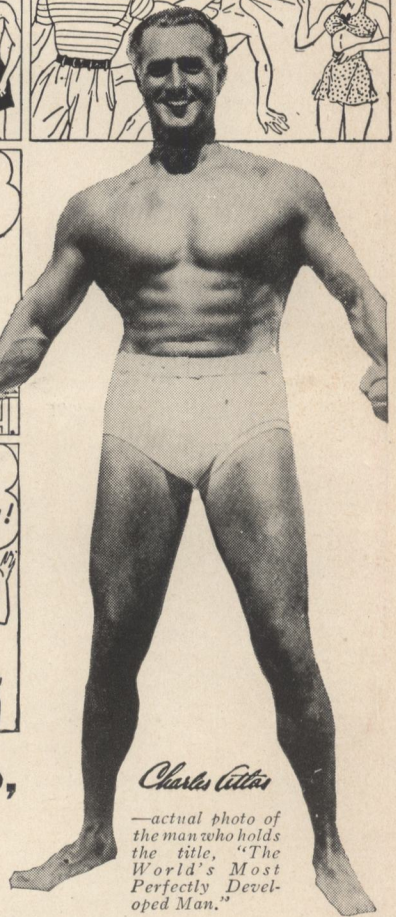
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