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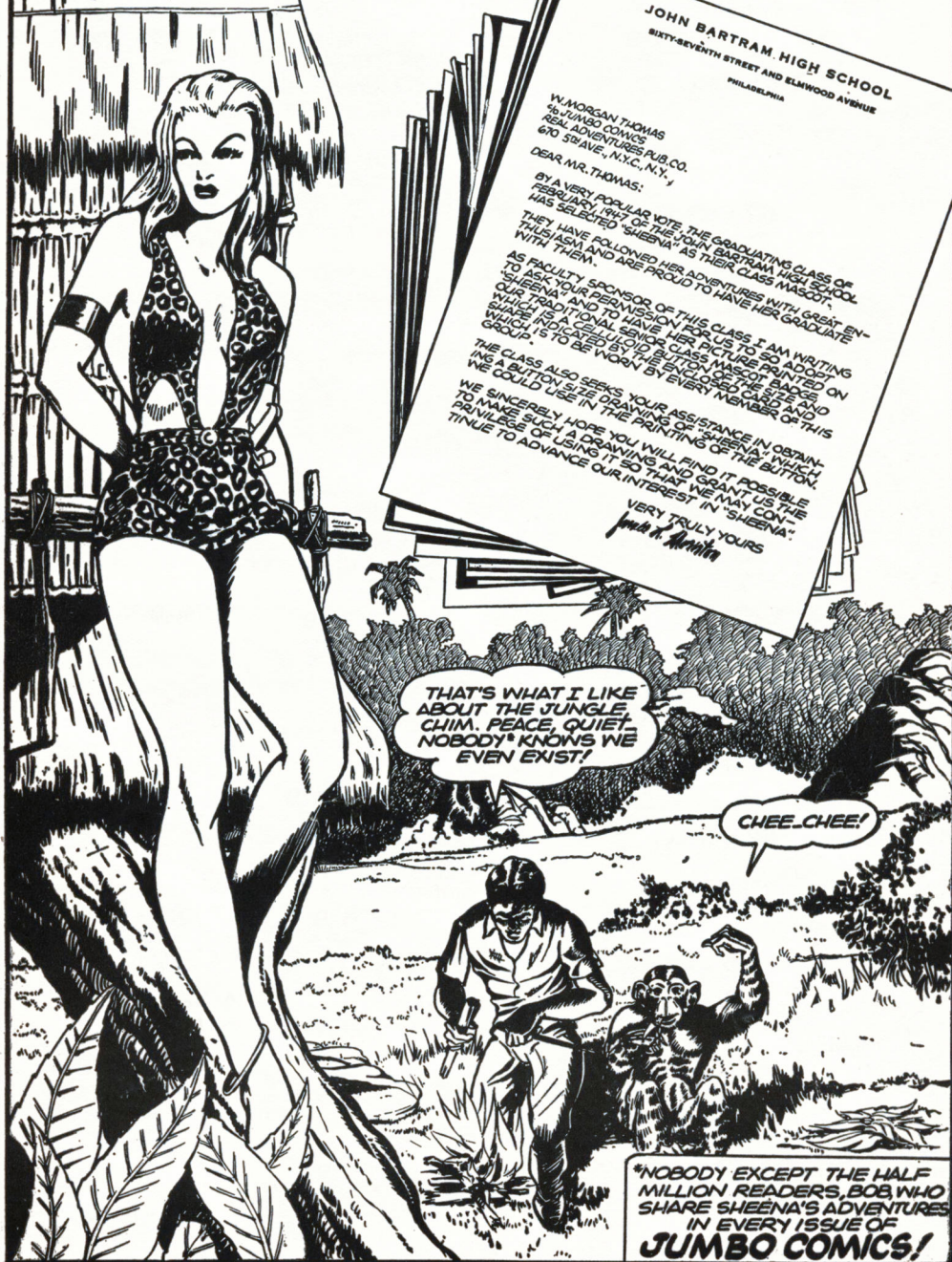
KI-GOR

—WHITE LORD OF THE CONGO WILDS
IN A BIG NEW ADVENTURE NOVEL—

WHERE MAN-BEASTS PROWL

SHEENA

QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE...



JOHN BARTRAM HIGH SCHOOL
SIXTY-SEVENTH STREET AND ELWOOD AVENUE
PHILADELPHIA

W. MORGAN THOMAS
670 5TH AVE., N.Y.C., N.Y.
DEAR MR. THOMAS:

BY A VERY POPULAR VOTE, THE GRADUATING CLASS OF FEBRUARY, 1947 OF THE JOHN BARTRAM HIGH SCHOOL HAS SELECTED "SHEENA" AS THEIR CLASS MASCOT. THEY HAVE FOLLOWED HER ADVENTURES WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM AND ARE PROUD TO HAVE HER GRADUATE WITH THEM.

AS FACULTY SPONSOR OF THIS CLASS I AM WRITING TO ASK YOUR PERMISSION FOR US TO SO ADAPT "SHEENA" AND TO HAVE HER PICTURE PRINTED ON OUR TRADITIONAL FORMER CLASS MASCOT BADGE WHICH IS A CIRCULAR BADGE WITH THE CLASS AND WHICH IS WORN BY THE ENTIRE CLASS AND GROUP.

THE CLASS ALSO SEEKS YOUR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING A BUTTON SIZE DRAWING OF "SHEENA" WHICH WE COULD USE IN THE PRINTING OF THE BUTTON.

WE SINCELY HOPE YOU WILL FIND IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE SUCH A DRAWING AND GRANT US THE PRIVILEGE OF USING IT SO THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO ADVANCE OUR INTEREST IN "SHEENA".

VERY TRULY YOURS
John H. Bartram

*NOBODY EXCEPT THE HALF MILLION READERS, BOB, WHO SHARE SHEENA'S ADVENTURES IN EVERY ISSUE OF JUMBO COMICS!

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JUNGLE STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, President

MALCOLM REISS, General Manager

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Where Man-Beasts Prowl

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Sebastiano, King of Portugal, was four-hundred years dead. Yet now he walked the Congo—a mighty-sinewed blond giant, ruling whites and blacks alike with terror fists. And for flame-haired Helene, who dared to call him Ki-Gor, the sentence of His Majesty's madness was—death by torture.



THE LITTLE BUCK moved down the game trail to the river's edge with nervous mincing steps. For a half second it stood still in the pelting rain. Then it shot up in the air as if its legs were steel springs and came down swinging its head wildly from side to side. It took five steps forward, then jittered back five steps. It lowered its head quickly as if to snatch a drink from the

swift water, but a second later the head jerked upward and the little animal flung itself to one side to escape the charge of an imaginary enemy.

A hundred feet down the river bank, Ki-Gor sighted along an arrow and curled his upper lip in disgust. The buck, made doubly nervous by the ceaseless rain, would not stay still long enough to present a target. And Ki-Gor wanted that buck.



The Haussas charged forward, halberds raised. Ki-Gor flexed his spear arm and waited calmly.

For the last four days of their long journey through the torrential rains, he and Helene had been existing on berries and nuts. The hunting had been very bad and Ki-Gor was hungry for meat.

Finally, the buck seemed ready to drink and Ki-Gor drew back the soggy bow-string. For half a heart beat the buck stood still and Ki-Gor let the arrow go.

The buck could not have heard the buzz of the bow-string—the flight of the arrow was too swift for that—but some unknown caprice made it rear back just as the arrow streaked for its heart.

"Wah!" Ki-Gor spat disgustedly as the arrow shivered harmlessly into the fleshy dewlap of the little buck. Hunter and quarry moved at the same instant. The buck shot up into the air and came down legs churning and started back up the trail away from the river bank. Ki-Gor burst out of his cover and tore up the sandy shore. It was just possible that the arrow, fixed transversely across the buck's fore-legs, would hinder its running enough for Ki-Gor to overtake it.

The jungle man rounded the turn into the trail at a furious pace and saw the buck ahead of him, plunging and bounding. Ki-Gor thought of Helene waiting for him and he told himself that this buck must not get away. His powerful legs propelled him along the muddy trail at incredible speed. The treacherous black surface mud of the trail was an added handicap. Twice his feet slipped and he nearly fell. Could he maintain enough speed on this greasy footing to catch the antelope?

But the mud handicapped the antelope too, and Ki-Gor could still see it a hundred feet ahead of him on the trail, bounding and slipping and sliding. Ki-Gor shortened his strides and stepped up his pace. His eyes fixed on the buck, he had one idea only and that was to catch it.

Under ordinary circumstances, Ki-Gor's vigilant eyes would have unfailingly noticed the slender vine stretched taut across the trail scarcely four inches above the mud. But in his single-minded, headlong pursuit of the antelope, he did not see the simple trap until too late. He tried to skip over it, but his foot slipped, the other foot caught in the vine and in a confused split-second, the huge jungle man crashed to the ground.

As he went down, he tried to twist his body to take the fall on his shoulder. But there was not time. He was down almost before he knew it, and he had taken the full weight of his hurtling body on his left wrist.

Prodigious and massive as Ki-Gor's wrists were, even they could not take such a sudden strain. The jungle man picked himself up with an infuriated snort and squeezed the wrist with his right hand, trying to stop the excruciating pain that was shooting through it.

He could not be sure for a minute whether he had broken the wrist or sprained it badly. Except that a sprain would heal sooner, it did not make much difference which it was. For the time being, he could not use the left hand. That meant he would not be able to use his bow for hunting, and he would be seriously handicapped in wielding his spear.

KI-GOR kicked the muddy trail in disgust and glared around at the undergrowth. Something told him that whoever had set the silly trap which had tripped him was no nowhere near. And if he had been, Ki-Gor would not have feared him. It was such a stupid, amateurish deadfall that the author of it could not possibly be anyone very formidable. The vine itself was half-rotted, showing that it had been set there some time ago. Without bothering to look for tracks, Ki-Gor turned and went down the trail to the river. He squatted there for a long time holding his rapidly swelling wrist in the water and fuming at his ill luck.

It had been a year of petty annoyances for him and his beautiful red-headed mate, a year climaxed by tremendously heavy rains. They had been all but washed out of their snug island home when the usually placid river had been transformed into a raging torrent many feet above its normal high-water level. For a while they had lived in an improvised tree dwelling, but the ceaseless rain had eventually decided them on taking a long trip northward in search of dryer country.

Years before, Ki-Gor and Helene had trekked across the Congo and through Ubangi-Shari toward the Tchad country. There were ranges of mountains there which blocked off the rain-bearing southerly

winds and which would provide a dry refuge to the north. The jungle man and his mate had decided to go to that refuge. They were now within sight of those mountains after a long and arduous journey, and Ki-Gor had hoped to relax after a good meal of antelope meat before undertaking the last stage of their trip. But fate and the unknown idiot who had set that childish deadfall had intervened.

The jungle man rose to his feet shaking his head and went down the shore of the river toward the place where Helene was waiting for him. On the way, he plucked a quantity of broad-leaf palms and some lengths of slender but tough vines. Helene saw the broad leaves in his arms—jungle first-aid equipment—and hurried out to meet him.

"Ki-Gor!" she exclaimed, "You're hurt! What happened?"

The jungle lord told her what had happened and his understanding mate refrained from comment. Together they went quickly to work binding the swollen wrist with the leaves and vines. Finally, Helene removed the broad shoulder thong from Ki-Gor's quiver of arrows and improvised a sling with it.

"There," Helene said, looking at their handiwork. "That should hold it firm. You heal so quickly, Ki-Gor—you'll probably be able to use that wrist in five or six days."

"I hope so," Ki-Gor grunted. "This is no time for me to be a one-armed man. I wanted meat — well, N'geeso will join us tomorrow. He will hunt us some ground-fowl."

"We don't have to wait for N'geeso," Helene said. "I've brought home meat before now. Why don't I go out and try my luck now, before the day is too well advanced?"

"Well—all right," Ki-Gor said, "but don't go too far away."

"I'll stay within calling distance," Helene agreed, "in case I run into trouble. I thought I might go up that little stream that comes into the river just above the game trail."

Ki-Gor nodded, then added with a frown, "Be careful. I saw sign of river-hog along there. They are very dangerous if they catch you in the open—"

"I'll stay close to the trees," Helene

smiled. "Don't worry."

A few minutes later she clambered out of the little tributary stream and stood on the edge of a considerable field. It extended two or three hundred yards along the stream's edge and some hundred yards straight back from it to a border of woods. From Helene to the woods the field stretched smooth and green with only an occasional shrub or rock showing.

Halfway across the field, there was a small clump of low bushes. A short distance away from it, there was something that looked like a low broad rock or ant-mound. Helene could barely see the reddish rounded top of the object as the wind bent the grass down around it. Suddenly, she noticed that the grass to the left of the mound was bending *against* the wind. Something was moving in that grass.

HELENE notched an arrow in her bow, never taking her eyes off the moving grass. Then she saw the animal. It scrambled out of the grass and up on to the mound. It was a small piglet, probably not more than six weeks old. Helene drew in her breath with excitement, aimed and shot. She watched the speeding arrow anxiously. The piglet would furnish the finest, tenderest meat in the jungle.

The piglet saw death winging toward him and began squealing. A split-second later, the arrow smacked hard into its ribs. The little creature shot up into the air with a despairing shriek that ended in a ghastly wail. Helene gave a triumphant shout and bounded across the grass to seize her prize. But she had hardly gone four steps when she checked herself with a thrill of horror.

As the piglet fell back on the mound, the mound itself suddenly rose up out of the grass and Helene found herself staring into the blazing red eyes of a huge river-hog.

The bristles stood in a dark ridge along the reddish back of the beast. It gave a squealing roar, bounded forward two paces and stopped to roar again. Helene fought off a numbing terror and brought up the bow. Frantically, she plucked an arrow out of the quiver on her back and notched it. But even as she did it, she knew it was a futile gesture. The rain-soaked bow was

not powerful enough to stop an enraged river-hog. She glanced wildly behind her and saw that she had come too far out into the open field. She could never get back to the safety of the trees before the hog overtook her.

As she stood there holding the pitifully inadequate bow, she saw the river-hog whirl and bound back to the piglet. There, it swung down its be-tusked snout and rooted at the arrow-pierced body of its young. Helene shot a glance off to her right, and desperate hope flamed within her. The little clump of bushes was not more than a hundred feet away, and she was closer to it than the river-hog was. While the brute was still rooting at the body of the piglet, Helene dropped the bow and ran. The river-hog roared and immediately gave chase. With every pounding step, the clump of bushes looked smaller and more inadequate. It could not possibly, Helene realized, offer real cover. It was just a minor obstacle for her to dodge around until she could think of something else to do.

Just before she reached the bushes she flung a glance back over her shoulder. Hope almost died, then. The river-hog, rolling over the grass at unbelievable velocity, was almost upon her. The infuriated beast's muzzle was wide open, the upper lips drawn up in a fearsome sneer baring tusks like yellow sabres. In a matter of seconds, those tusks and the razor sharp hooves would be slashing her legs and body to ribbons.

Something snapped in Helen's brain. Her terror vanished and she instantly became a cool alert animal with mind and muscles coordinated for survival. She flew two steps past the clump of bushes then dug her right heel into the soft ground. Whirling, she flung herself to her left and dived headfirst in the wet grass behind the clump.

Instantly she was up again, her hunting knife ready. The river-hog was turning exactly where she had turned. But the river-hog was unprepared for the lightning shift in direction. The hard hooves skidded on the grass and for a split-second the huge pig lay sprawled in front of her. And in the split-second that the thick hind legs trailed out behind the powerful body, Helene acted. Her knife hand slashed

downward at the vulnerable tendon on the nearest hindleg. The sharp blade bit deep and Helene heard the tendon snap as she hurled herself past the writhing beast.

SHE CUT to her right to keep the protection of the bushes and heard the river-hog's roar change to an anguished scream of pain. Helene stopped then and waited. And in a moment she saw that her life was no longer in danger.

The river hog tottered around the bush on three legs, and suddenly collapsed, bellowing. Helene ran out across the grass to the spot where she had dropped the bow. Then she returned to the brute, fitting an arrow to the string. She tempted the great pig into another futile charge, and as the animal lay panting she stepped up within six feet of it and pumped an arrow into a wicked red eye.

The river-hog's great head flopped on the grass and the stubby legs twitched for a few seconds, then it was all over. Helene began to tremble violently with the nervous reaction. She looked about the field apprehensively but saw no signs of other dangers. Fitting a new arrow to the bow, she hurried back across the grass toward the line of trees at the edge of the stream.

She had gone half the distance before she remembered the piglet. A luscious suckling pig! She might as well retrieve it, having nearly lost her life in getting it. At the same time she felt as if she were pushing her luck a little. But a quick glance around the field reassured her, and once more she moved rapidly across the wet grass.

It was a matter of less than a minute to get to the piglet, sling it over her shoulder and race back to the trees. And yet Helene felt a vague foreboding the whole time, as if she were being stupidly foolhardy. So that when she finally stood under a tree, she shivered from head to foot out of sheer relief.

She had one hand on a tough liana hanging down from the tree, wondering how she was going to manage to carry the piglet, when there was a mighty splash at the stream's edge, and a huge red form erupted from the bushes and came hurtling at her. It was a river-hog, a boar—probably the mate of the one Helene had just killed.

Without thinking, Helene flung the piglet straight at the gaping muzzle and then leaped desperately upwards on the liana. Frantically she struggled upward, hand over hand on the vine. She did not even look down at the roaring boar, but concentrating on getting her feet out of reach of those cruel tusks. Something grazed her left heel, and Helene gasped and fought for altitude.

In another few seconds she was safe. Even without looking down at the squealing brute below her, she knew she must be swinging at least fifteen feet above him and well out of his reach. She gripped the vine tightly with her ankles and relaxed her handhold and laid her head on one shoulder with a sigh. Her premonition of the second danger had been only too correct.

The boar had changed its roaring to a curious rhythmic gargling now, and Helene wondered why. She started to move the position of her arms, so that she could look down to see what was happening when she felt the vine jump slightly. She shot a glance upward and saw with a thrill of horror that the vine was just beginning to tear loose from the bough of the tree.

FOR A second she was transfixed with terror. What should she do? She was about ten feet below the bough. If she tried to scramble up quickly, she might rip the vine loose all the sooner. If she stayed where she was quietly, doing nothing, the vine might tear loose anyway and drop her down to the ground in front of the roaring river-hog.

But wait! The river-hog was no longer roaring. There was dead silence below her. Once again Helene spread her elbows and looked downwards. She could scarcely believe her eyes.

The river-hog was still there, but it was lying on its side dead. And squatting beside it was Ki-Gor.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene exclaimed in a voice choked with relief, "Where did you come from?"

The jungle man looked up at her with a sober smile. "I should have arrived sooner," he said, "but I had trouble with the tree-route, trying to manage with the spear."

Just then the vine tore loose from the

tree completely and dumped Helene in a heap at Ki-Gor's feet. She picked herself up shakily and looked at him.

"Whew!" she exclaimed. "Well, you couldn't have been much later—and found me in one piece."

She looked down at the second river-hog and shivered. "Not just one of the beasts!" she muttered, "but two! And with that vine tearing loose, this one certainly would have got me—if you hadn't come along."

Ki-Gor shook his head with a smile. "He was almost dead when I killed him," he said. "You didn't know how well-protected you were."

He pointed down at the river-hog's huge head. Comprehension dawned on Helene as she saw the tiny arrow imbedded in the hollow behind one of the pig's stiff pointed ears.

"N'geeso!" she gasped and looked up quickly, searching the trees with her eyes. A high-pitched cackle of laughter sounded from the tree right above them and the brittle clicks of the Batwa pygmy language floated down to them.

"Ai—ee! Big Sister! But thou hast a comic face! Surprised thou art that old N'geeso should have pricked the pig with his poison, unbeknownst to thee!"

"Come down out of there, you little wretch!" Helene cried wrathfully, "and stop making fun of a poor woman who has had too much adventure for one afternoon."

Her words provoked another burst of falsetto giggles, and a moment later, she could see the little old man descending the tree, his grey-black leathery hide wrinkling like an elephant's at elbows and knees. Shortly, he stood beside the jungle couple on the ground and looked triumphantly at the dead boar.

"Who but N'geeso," he said proudly, "could have placed that arrow so cunningly. It had to go behind the ear. Anywhere else on the brute and the bristles would not have allowed the deadly tip to penetrate."

"Aye, Little Brother," Ki-Gor said, smiling, "thou hast a right to be proud of thy handiwork. And fear not—thou shalt receive thy just reward."

The tawny giant in the leopardskin breechclout strode over to the stream's edge and picked up the suckling pig. "Meat,"

he announced, holding the piglet high, "Tender, succulent meat."

It was Helene's turn to laugh at the pygmy as he stood goggling at the piglet, quite visibly drooling at the mouth. And so, in high good humor, the three set off downstream toward the tree which Ki-Gor had selected for a temporary home.

II

WHILE HELENE had been off hunting, Ki-Gor had gathered a quantity of straight young saplings and trimmed them into poles. With N'geeso's skilled help, the jungle man and his mate carried the poles up to a high crotch in the tree and constructed an enclosed shelter. That night, the couple and their pygmy friend slept deeply, undisturbed by the rain, with their stomachs happily full of barbecued suckling pig.

The next morning, when the jungle trio aroused themselves, the pygmy chieftain was full of plans.

"Buck, Big Brother," he said. "What we need is a fine fat buck. And we will take the best way to get one."

"The hunting is bad," Ki-Gor commented, "the rain gets into the bows, the ground is soft and slippery..."

"Aye, and soft ground is easy to dig in," N'geeso interrupted. "Let us construct a deadfall, Big Brother. A deep pit in a game trail, covered with brush and leaves and earth—we should catch a buck."

"Good idea," Ki-Gor observed. "Thou wilt supervise the laying of the cover—thou being an expert in such matters."

"It is so and so be it," the pygmy said, accepting the compliment matter-of-factly.

"For instruments we will use coconuts cut in halves and scooped out," Ki-Gor said. "Go thou, Little Brother, and collect a few for us."

"Nay, I can do better than that," N'geeso said, "I stole some big gourds from some Mabas yesterday. Cut in halves or quarters, they will collect twice as much dirt as coconut shells."

The gourds, in fact, made excellent digging instruments and by mid-afternoon of that same day the trio had made such satisfactory progress with the deadfall that they decided to stop work for the day and finish the task on the morrow. A little dis-

tance from the river on the game trail, not far from the spot where Ki-Gor had met with his accident, they had excavated a depression nearly four feet deep, three feet wide and six feet long.

The jungle trio stood beside their handiwork and eyed it with satisfaction.

"It will serve," N'geeso asserted, wagging his head. "We can finish tomorrow, and by tomorrow night perhaps we will catch a fine buck."

The three now went back to the shelter-tree and there agreed to separate for a little while, Helene and N'geeso to look for nuts and berries, and Ki-Gor to try his luck at getting a fish from the river.

Helene and her small companion headed downstream toward a promising clearing that N'geeso remembered. They had only gone about three hundred yards when Helene's eye was caught by a white object gleaming within a thicket. She stopped mechanically, pulled aside the undergrowth to peer within. She soon discovered, with a disagreeable sensation, that the white object was the bleached skull of what was once a man. The sight of a human skeleton is by no means uncommon in the jungle, but Helene had never quite got used to it in all the eight years she had been married to Ki-Gor. Skeletons still made her feel uncomfortable. She stood for a moment and stared at this one.

N'geeso was calling and Helene was just about to turn away when her eye was attracted to a small rectangular object lying under the cage formed by the white ribs. With a little grimace of disgust, Helene leaned down and picked it up.

It was a flat metal box or case, a large cigarette case, perhaps, heavily tarnished.

"What is that in thy hand?" N'geeso said, coming down the bank toward her.

"I don't know," Helene replied, and pointed at the thicket. "I found it in there where a man died."

N'geeso moved swiftly and peered through the bushes. "A buffalo of a man," the pygmy observed dryly. "And he left something in that box."

But Helene had picked up some gritty dirt and was rubbing at the tarnished metal. A moment later, she looked at the scoured silver surface of the case and felt rewarded. Someone had scratched a message in the soft metal with a sharp object.

To Whom It May Concern: This contains news of J. Ussher and how I may be rescued. J. Ussher.

THAT was all. The carefully printed letters were evidence of the precise hand and mind of the Englishman or American who had inscribed them.

Who was J. Ussher?

Helene pondered. She had never heard the name in Africa. She cast back in her memory to the days when she was a spoiled debutante shuttling about the cocktail parties in New York and the capitals of Europe. But she could remember no J. Ussher.

There was a button catch on the case which was stuck or broken, but by inserting the stout tip of her hunting-knife at the point of the catch, Helene was able to force the case open. Her trouble was in vain. The tiny ants and termites of the jungle had long ago swarmed inside and chewed the paper there into a grey dust.

Helene inspected the skeleton once more. There was no other identifying object which had survived the cleansing action of nature as the silver case had. Helene wondered momentarily whether the skeleton had been J. Ussher, then decided that the small narrow skull was typically Negro. It was more likely that J. Ussher had sent this unfortunate creature out with news of himself. She decided to take the case back to Ki-Gor and ask his opinion on the matter.

When the two friends arrived back at the shelter-tree, they found the jungle man squatting on the bank trying to clean a fish he had just speared. It was a beautiful carp-like fish that weighed about ten pounds. Ki-Gor was not having an easy time dressing the slippery fish with his left hand immobilized, and he was glad to relinquish the job to N'geeso. He showed no surprise or interest in the story of the skeleton as Helene recounted it. And when he glanced carelessly at the silver case and handed it back to her without comment, Helene felt nettled.

"Aren't you interested in this man?" she exclaimed.

"No," said Ki-Gor without emotion. "How can you be interested in someone you don't know. We don't know who he is, where he is, and what his trouble is.

We don't even know if he is still alive."

"But we're not sure he's dead," Helene countered. "He is a white man, an Englishman or an American. Hes probably a prisoner..."

"I love white men no better than black men," Ki-Gor retorted. "You know that perfectly well. Very few white men have been my friends, and none of them have been better friends to me than N'geeso, or Tembu George, or Dingazi, or the thousands of black men in the Brotherhood of the Dog."

Helene sighed. She understood perfectly the logic of Ki-Gor's attitude. At the same time she felt disappointment in his complete lack of interest in what to her seemed an intriguing mystery.

"Very well," she said resignedly. "If that's the way you feel about it, I guess there's nothing to be done. But the message on that case was a call for help—and I can't help feeling a little sense of responsibility toward J. Ussher."

N'geeso had finished the job of dressing the fish and was standing waist-deep in the river with it clutched in his arms trying to wash it. The fish looked as big as the pygmy and Helene could not suppress a giggle.

"Come, Ki-Gor," she said, her good humor restored. "Let's light a fire. N'geeso may like raw fish but I don't."

The rain had finally stopped falling, leaving the air still and sultry. So that after the meal, Ki-Gor and Helene climbed up to the treeshelter to take a short nap, while N'geeso trotted off.

IT SEEMED to Helene that she had hardly closed her eyes when she felt someone shaking her by the shoulder. She sat up quickly feeling slightly dazed as N'geeso babbled at her in an urgent whisper. The yellow daylight of late afternoon was filtering into the shelter.

"It is time ye waked!" N'geeso hissed. "Curious things are happening about us. A small army of big blacks is tramping around here, and we've caught a man in our trap."

"One of the blacks fell into the trap?" Ki-Gor asked, rousing himself quickly.

"Nay," N'geeso replied. "The man in the trap is a white man."

"A white man!" Helene gasped.

"Aye—the leader of the blacks, it would appear," N'geeso said disgustedly. "And a funnier looking white man I never saw."

"How — funny looking?" Ki-Gor demanded.

"He is small—hardly bigger than I—and he wears a black coat and a hat made of metal and he carries a knife half as long as he is."

"Are you making this up, N'geeso?" Helene said. "I never heard of a white man dressed like that."

"If thou believe me not, come and see for thyself."

"Then he is still in the pit?" Ki-Gor said.

"Aye, the imbecile!" N'geeso sputtered. "He stands there bawling out words in some gibberish. He could get out unaided had he but the wit to try it."

"Let us have a look at this creature," Ki-Gor said, grimly, and started down the tree. He paused and asked, "Where are all the blacks?"

"They went down the river along the bank," N'geeso reported. "They all—with the white man—stopped and looked at the skeleton Little Sister found. Then the blacks went on downstream and the white came this way."

"They were looking at the skeleton!" Helene said, startled, "They must have known it was there."

"Such blind buffaloes would only find it by tripping over it," N'geeso growled.

"Why then..." Helene began, as an idea struck her. "Oh, Ki-Gor! Let's hurry! Maybe the white man in our pit is J. Ussher!"

As the three companions slipped down the tree to the ground and made their way to the game trail and their trap, Helene felt a wonderful excitement. The unknown white captive had excited her imagination and the possibility now that she might find the man and help him to escape was a thrilling one.

But as she neared the pit, the shouts she heard from it were not in English. It was a high-pitched, indignant voice and its owner apparently was more insulted than injured. Ki-Gor flung a wondering look at Helene who was hastening along at his side.

"Some of those words are Maba dialect," he said, "but what are the others?"

"Sounds almost French, but it isn't."

Helene thought she was prepared for almost anything they might find. But the sight that met her gaze when she finally reached the edge of the pit and looked down was so mystifying that she could hardly believe her eyes. It was a very odd-looking victim that they had caught in their trap.

The first thing the little man reminded Helene of, was a masquerade ball in New York City. Then she thought of a movie extra in a historical picture. The man was dressed in a costume that might have been worn by Sir Walter Raleigh or Philip the Second of Spain.

The soft jack boots belled out above the knees and seemed to support the bulging black breeches on the little man's thighs. He wore a black puff-sleeved shirt, and over that a sleeveless leather doublet, and over that a light metal cuirass. Finally, a black cloak fastened at the neck hung down his back. On the little man's head was a metal helmet of the type Helene remembered seeing in the history books on Columbus's soldiers.

THE MAN who wore all this in the heat of Africa was small and swarthy with a hooked nose and large brown eyes. He had a dainty black moustache and a small pointed chin beard. As Ki-Gor and his two companions peered down at him, he appeared to be as astonished and bewildered as they. For a moment, he goggled up at them in astounded silence, then he found his voice and began shouting imprecations and brandishing a slender sword. It was too much for N'geeso. The pygmy began to giggle.

"What manner of man is it, Big Brother?" he asked.

Ki-Gor shook his head, and Helene answered N'geeso.

"He is a white man, as you can see," she said, "but he is like no white man I ever saw. He is dressed in clothes that people ceased wearing nearly four hundred years ago."

As Helene spoke, the little man in the pit stopped shouting and stared at her hard. Then he shifted his gaze to Ki-Gor and an expression of half-recognition mixed with awe came into his eyes. When he spoke again his voice was quiet and

respectful. Helene still could not place the language he was speaking, although there was a haunting familiarity about some of the syllables. It was not Spanish, although it seemed to have elements of Spanish. It was not French, although it sounded a little like French.

"Can you understand him?" Ki-Gor asked Helene. "What language is he speaking?"

"I don't know," Helene confessed, "but from his attitude he seems to know who you are, or thinks he knows."

"He couldn't know me," Ki-Gor returned. "I'm not well-known in this region."

"Well, the whole thing beats me," Helene said. "Say—I wonder whether he knows anything about the mysterious Mr. Ussher."

She looked down into the pit again, and the little man fell silent.

"Ussher," she said, enunciating very clearly. "Ussher. Ussher."

On the third repetition of the name, the little man got it. "Ah-sha," he said, and nodded his head slowly. "Ah-sha," he repeated, and drew his forefinger significantly across his throat.

Helene felt a little chill. What did the gesture mean? Had he captured J. Ussher and then cut his throat? But the man in the pit now repeated his gesture and followed it by pointing at Ki-Gor. Then he began to repeat another word.

"Sebbustia'o," it sounded like—as if the man were trying to say, "Sebastiano," but could not pronounce the "n" clearly.

"Sebbustia'o," the man repeated and kept pointing at the jungle man. Finally, Helene thought she got it.

"Ki-Gor!" she exclaimed, "he thinks you are somebody called Sebastiano."

"Eh! Eh!" the little man shouted excitedly. "Sebbustia'o!"

"I don't understand this," Ki-Gor said. "I think we'd better go away and leave him before his army of blacks comes back."

"Oh, don't do that!" Helene wailed. "He knows something about J. Ussher. This is our chance to find out who J. Ussher is, and what has happened to him."

"But we have nothing to do with J. Ussher," Ki-Gor said, frowning, "And besides, they have probably killed him."

"They may not have," Helene said. "This

man seems to connect you with Ussher. He made that throat-cutting gesture and then pointed to you."

Ki-Gor stood for a moment irresolute. Finally he gave in to Helene's urging. He reversed his spear and held it butt-end down to the little man in the pit. The prisoner grasped the end and by dint of scrambling finally clambered out. Then, unexpectedly, he knelt in front of Ki-Gor with head bowed and intoned a long declaration in his strange tongue, in which the word "Sebbustia'o" occurred frequently.

Ki-Gor was puzzled, embarrassed, and suspicious but he masked his feelings and watched the strange little man through narrowed eyes. He inclined his head slightly toward Helene and murmured,

"I still think this is a mistake. I think we should leave him and go quickly back to the tree, until he and his blacks go away."

"Oh, no!" Helene whispered frantically. "Please let's see it through."

The jungle man made no reply but his eyes grew more watchful.

The little man finally came to the end of his speech and got to his feet with a triumphant smile. He pointed a finger at himself and repeated a name several times, obviously trying to tell his own name. Suddenly, comprehension dawned on Helene and she realized what language he was speaking.

"Ki-Gor!" she cried. "It's Portuguese he is speaking! Apparently his name is Enrique de Braga."

III

THE PRISONER was delighted to hear his name pronounced, but Ki-Gor's frown deepened.

"We are hundreds of miles from any Portuguese territory," he said. "What is this man doing up here in the north?"

"That's what we've got to find out," Helene said excitedly. "Oh, I wish I knew a little Portuguese, or Spanish so that I could talk to him..."

She was interrupted by an ear-splitting sound. Unnoticed, the prisoner had placed a small hunting-horn to his lips and was blowing a prolonged blast on it. Ki-Gor started to snatch the horn from the little man's mouth, but stayed his hand as he

realized he had agreed to Helene's desire to stay with his prisoner and solve the mystery of J. Ussher. The little Portuguese blew two long, winding blasts, but evidently his men were far away, for there were no answering horns or shouts. The little Portuguese looked chagrined.

"Curse those stupid Haussas!" he muttered, and Ki-Gor jerked to attention. The little man had spoken, not in his own strange tongue, but in the Hausa dialect which Ki-Gor understood and spoke. The little man continued to mutter.

"Foolish Haussas!" he complained. "I told them not to go far, but they probably found some Mabas to fight and have gone out of earshot."

He lifted the horn to his lips again and blew until his face grew purple. Ki-Gor smiled and began to speak in the Hausa dialect.

"Why do you call me 'Sebbustia'o'?" he said quietly. The little man jumped and an ecstatic expression came over his face.

"Ah! You speak Hausa!" he cried. "I should have tried that, O King. I should have known that long residence..."

"Why do you call me 'King'?" Ki-Gor interrupted with a frown.

"Because you are King Sebbustia'o," Braga said. "You have come back, just as the Prophecy said you would, bearing the wounds of battle..."

"Wounds?" Ki-Gor interrupted.

"Your arm," Braga pointed out. "Your shield arm. History records that the Saracens were hacking at your shield, as you stood to the last, defending the Royal Standard."

"When did this happen?" Ki-Gor asked sharply.

"Ah, beloved King, you know better than we," the Portuguese said, with a flashing smile. "We do not know for certain. We cannot agree among ourselves whether it was three hundred and sixty years ago, or three hundred and seventy. We are waiting for you, O King, to tell us exactly."

"Wait a minute," Ki-Gor said, "You say, I was in a battle which took place three hundred and sixty years ago?"

"Or three hundred and seventy," Braga said, nodding his head eagerly.

"Were you there?" Ki-Gor interrogated.

"Of course not, Sire," the little man

said, "but my ancestor, Dimiz de Braga was one of the survivors."

"How did I survive?" Ki-Gor asked.

"That," said Enrique de Braga, "is what we are eager to hear from your own lips. It is said that the angels saved you."

"The angels," Ki-Gor said, casting a glance at Helene.

"Yes. The Saracens had killed all your bodyguard and were about to kill you, when a Heavenly Host appeared with fiery swords and the Saracens shrank back afraid. And the angels conducted you to a cave."

Ki-Gor turned to his mate. "Did you follow what he was saying?"

"I think I got it all," Helene answered in English, "but it sounded as if he said 'three hundred and seventy years ago'. That can't be right..."

"That's what he said," Ki-Gor cut in. "The little man must be out of his mind."

"**W**HAT was this about a prophecy?" Helene said, and Ki-Gor turned back to Enrique de Braga.

"Tell me of the prophecy," he demanded.

"Simply this," Braga responded, "you would remain asleep in your cave, guarded by the angels, until one glorious day you would wake up and return to us bearing the wounds of battle. You would put yourself at the head of us and lead us to victory over our enemies and then back to Portugal."

"I see," Ki-Gor said, thoughtfully. "What about my queen," he said, indicating Helene. "What does the prophecy say about her?"

"The Prophecy said nothing about her," Braga replied promptly. "Therefore she cannot be your queen. I have been trying to think who she is, this tall, red-headed savage."

"She is my queen," Ki-Gor said firmly.

"I humbly beg to differ, Sire," Braga said, sturdily. "She is nowhere mentioned in the Prophecy. I can only explain her presence with you this way—she is some scheming adventuress who has taken advantage of your infinite chivalrousness..."

"That is nonsense," Ki-Gor said sharply. "If I am King Sebbustia'o, then I tell you that this woman is my queen."

"Spoken like a true knight, Sire," Braga

said, admiringly, "Like the First Knight of Europe. But we, your devoted subjects live to protect you from such cynical attacks on your purity. The woman will be punished for her insolence, Sire, and you will pick a queen from among your court beauties. You will probably wish the Lady Ysabel do Castello Branco, she is considered the most beautiful of all..."

"Helene," Ki-Gor said, cutting off the little man's words with a wave of his hand. "What do you make of this?"

"I don't know what to make of it," Helene said, wonderingly. "The man must be completely crazy. This nonsense about court beauties... What sort of court is he talking about?"

Ki-Gor swung around on the little Portuguese. "Where is the court?" he demanded in Hausa.

"At your city of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano," Braga said with a sweeping gesture. "Over the mountains north of here only about a day's march."

"How big is this city?"

"Not big, Sire, but comfortable. We knights of pure descent number four hundred and eighteen. Then there are some two thousand artisans of mixed blood, a thousand Hausa men-at-arms, and about four thousand Maba slaves. The Mabas, Sire, are a problem."

"How so?"

"They do not like to be slaves. They try to run away, and the free Mabas on the mainland give us trouble. We must go forth every so often with our Haussas to chastise them. Now—" the little man's eyes gleamed—"with you at our head, Sire, we can dispose of the Maba problem once and for all by enslaving the entire Maba Nation. Your military genius and knightly inspiration will lead us to swift victory over them. And that will be but the beginning of a series of glorious conquests. Once again the whole world will shiver with awe at the name of Sebastia'o the Conqueror."

"Slowly, slowly," Ki-Gor cautioned. "We have to consider many things first."

"Ask him about Ussher?" Helene put in.

"Ah-sha?" Braga replied. "He is a curious magician we captured. The Maba caught him first, and then we took him away from the Maba. A curious man with

a grey beard. He said he was English, but he was dressed like no English we had ever heard of. Of course, we have never seen Englishmen, but our legends tell us they dressed much the same as we do. When we took Ah-sha, he was wearing ugly tubes on his legs, and a baggy coat. That was unimportant, but what we couldn't stomach were his lies."

"What lies?" Ki-Gor demanded.

"He insisted on telling us the most fantastic stories of the world outside."

"And you did not believe the things that Ah-sha said?" Ki-Gor prompted.

"Of course not," said Braga scornfully. "We laughed at him. He is a fool. He tried to tell us that the Prophecy concerning you was not true. This, of course, was blasphemous, and we told him that when you finally came, you would have him executed for blasphemy. We can, perhaps, have a double execution." Braga's face lighted up and he pointed at Helene. "She, the adventuress, and Ah-sha, the liar-blasphemer, could burn at twin stakes in the amphitheatre. It would be a great public occasion."

KI-GOR turned swiftly and took Helene by the arm. "Let's get away from here, quickly," he murmured in English. "I believe this creature, and I believe you will be in terrible danger if we go with him. Where is N'geeso?"

But the pygmy had already disappeared, and Ki-Gor and Helene started down the game trail toward the river.

"Wait! Where are you going, O King!" Braga shouted after them.

But Ki-Gor made no answer. His one thought was to reach the shelter tree and get Helene and himself up into its covering leaves before Braga's blacks returned. They would be the Hausa "men-at-arms," and would be too numerous to cope with, especially now when his left arm was out of action.

The little Portuguese had started to run after them, waddling clumsily in his jack boots. Then he had stopped and blown his dismal call on the little hunting horn. Then another sound came to Ki-Gor's ears from a different direction—from in front of him. It was the shrill chattering of a green monkey, and Ki-Gor knew that N'geeso was warning him of danger ahead. The

jungle couple were just rounding the last curve in the game trail and could see the river scarcely thirty yards away.

And up the trail from the river's edge came a horde of bullet-headed blacks in fezzes and baggy red trousers. Haussas.

Pushing Helene off the trail, Ki-Gor stood with his spear lowered waiting for the onrushing men-at-arms.

"When you have found a tree and are safely up in it," he shouted to Helene, "call to me and I will follow. If they capture me, stay free so that you and N'geeso can wait your opportunity to set me free."

By that time the first two Haussas had reached him in the narrow trail, and Ki-Gor commenced his rearguard action with his left arm in a sling.

The Haussas were equipped with formidable eight-foot weapons of a type Ki-Gor had never seen before. Helene could have told him that they were mediaeval European infantry weapons called halberds. By any name, they posed a serious problem for Ki-Gor, because they outweighed if they did not over-reach his own great war spear.

The two Haussas in the lead charged at him holding their halberds diagonally upwards, the heavy spear-ax heads level with Ki-Gor's eyes. They were too high for him to bat down, so he did the only possible thing under the circumstances.

GRIPPING his own spear close to the head, he suddenly ducked under the halberds, flung himself forward in a crouch and stabbed quickly at the brown body of the Haussa on his right. With one continuous motion, he withdrew his dripping spear-blade and plunged it into the side of the other Haussa. It was the classic infighting technique of the Ama-zulu, who break their assegai hafts short as they close in on their enemies. In the crowded trail, the Haussas had not room to maneuver their long halberds, and Ki-Gor was in their midst like an infuriated panther, dodging, stabbing, and slashing.

Five strapping Haussas had fallen before his fanatical charge before the rest began to realize what was happening. Then the sixth giant negro dropped his unwieldy weapon and grappled with Ki-Gor just as the jungle man was turning upon

him. At the same moment, the two Haussas behind lowered the points of their halberds and jabbed at Ki-Gor's bronzed torso. The jungle man flung himself to one side just in time to escape the razor-sharp blades. At the same time, he sank his foreshortened spear into the throat of his immediate adversary.

Above the shouting and screaming of the blacks, he heard Helene call. He had won his rearguard action, and it was now time to break it off.

Still in the crouch, he wrenched his spearhead from the black throat and leaped off the trail into the undergrowth. Half-winded from his prodigious exertions, he plunged blindly through the undergrowth hoping to find a tree.

"Over here, Ki-Gor," came Helene's voice, and he turned in her direction. The Haussas were losing no time in coming after him. The woods re-echoed with their shouts and the bushes crackled under their feet as they swarmed after him in hot pursuit. It was actually a matter of seconds before Ki-Gor plunged into a small opening in the undergrowth in the center of which a vine-encased tree trunk towered upwards. But they were long seconds for Ki-Gor. He knew that without the benefit of surprise he could not hope to fight successfully so many burly Haussas, especially with a useless left arm.

Now, as he raced to the base of the tree trunk, he had sudden misgivings. One-handed, he could not climb fast. He could only hope that he could get far enough up the tree to be out of reach of those long halberds when the Haussas finally located him. With a swift unhurried motion, he tucked his spear under his ailing left arm and hugged it to his body. Then with his right hand free, he sprang up into the close network of vines.

Instinctively, his groping hand sought out a liana that was only loosely attached to the tree's bark. With a toe-hold three feet off the ground, the jungle man slid his hand up the smooth surface of the liana to the extent of his reach and hauled himself upward. Six feet off the ground!

The Haussas were filling the woods with a deafening racket and the crippled jungle man surged up the tree trunk with desperation in his heart. Nine feet up! He might make it, yet!

Just then, a hideous shout sounded right below him, and Ki-Gor's hopes all but died within him. He flung a glance upwards and saw Helene staring down at him, fear in her blue eyes, from the lower branches of the tree.

"Helene!" Ki-Gor shouted, with a sudden awful premonition, "Don't let them capture you!"

Something metallic hooked around his left ankle. He released his toe hold and kicked out furiously. At the same moment, his right hand stabbed upward for the handhold which would drag him to safety. But his clutching fingers missed their goal. And as his hand stabbed at the empty air, Ki-Gor realized grimly that he had lost his balance. For an agonized eternity, his huge body slowly swayed away from the tree. In a last desperate effort to regain his balance, the jungle man jerked back his left leg. But it was too late. They were pulling him back and down to the ground and Ki-Gor was falling, falling...

FOR HELENE, staring down horror-struck from her perch in the tree, time seemed to stand still. She saw the Haussas swarming out of the way as Ki-Gor's body hung suspended in mid-air and then crashed to the ground. And the fearful sound as he hit the earth seemed to echo in Helene's brain. All of a sudden, she was living in another world—a dreadful lonely world which contained no Ki-Gor.

His giant body lay in a crumpled heap on the ground and he did not move. Helene shut her eyes tight and pressed her fists into her temples. Was Ki-Gor dead?

She opened her eyes and stared at the scene below. The Haussas were standing in a circle around Ki-Gor's prone body and gazing down at it in awed silence. Just then, the little Portuguese broke noisily into the clearing, brandishing his absurd mediaeval rapier and clamoring in Haussa.

"Where is he? Where is he?" Enrique de Braga shouted. "Blundering fools, you did not let him escape you!"

"No, my lord," one of the soldiers said, "he is here."

"Where? Where?" the Portuguese cried, and bullied his way through the throng of Haussas. He stopped short as he caught sight of Ki-Gor. "What has happened?" he demanded, and swung around at the

men. "Did I not tell you to take him unharmed!" he shrieked. "Stupid apes! You will all burn for this! If you have killed him, you..."

"We did not harm him, my lord," the nearest Haussa protested. "He fell out of the tree. Look for yourself, my lord, and you will find no marks on him."

"He fell from the tree?" Braga repeated.

"Aye, my lord," said Haussa, "and in falling, he hit his head on a spear haft."

"Then perhaps he isn't dead," Braga declared, and Helene, listening above, felt hope surge over her like a great wind.

The little Portuguese knelt beside Ki-Gor's still body and lifted the great tawny head gently. He gave a low whistle and shook his head.

"Hit right on the shaft," he muttered, and Helene clenched her fists in agony. Then Braga pushed away the spear and laid Ki-Gor's head on the ground. With a brisk motion, he sprawled across the huge body and laid an ear against Ki-Gor's chest. He listened intently for a moment and then jerked himself erect.

"He lives!" shouted Enrique de Braga, and Helene's old world suddenly and gratefully returned to her. The little Portuguese stood up and started issuing orders, and the hulking Haussas hastened to carry them out. Helene stood up on her branch and walked in towards the trunk of the tree. She reached for the network of lianas and then stayed her hands as a whispered voice sounded above her.

"Where art thou going, Big Sister?"

"Down to my husband," Helene said.

"Dost thou forget his last orders?" N'geeso said.

"He is hurt," Helene said defiantly. "I must go and tend him."

"He said more than once that thou must stay free," N'geeso said.

"But he is hurt!" Helene wailed.

"But the strange little man will kill thee," N'geeso pointed out.

"When Ki-Gor gets better, he will save me from the strange little man," Helene argued.

"Ki-Gor was not sure that even he could save thee," N'geeso countered, "else he would not have given thee such strict orders."

"Oh—I suppose you're right," Helene said, with a sigh.

"Of course, I am right," N'geeso said, complacently. "Stay free, Ki-Gor said, and follow where he is taken so that thou can help free him."

"So be it," Helene said. "I will not go down."

"Aye, in fact, thou had better come up the tree," N'geeso advised, "so that thou wilt be concealed from the Haussas."

Scarcely had Helene reached a new perch higher up, when the wisdom of the pygmy's words was borne out.

"What became of the woman?" Enrique de Braga shouted.

"She disappeared," the Haussas answered. "She went up one of these trees like a monkey."

THE LITTLE Portuguese craned his neck and gazed up and around the high branches of the trees in the clearing. He looked straight at the spot where Helene was crouching, but apparently could not see past the covering leaves. He turned away and spoke regretfully.

"Fools, to let her get away," he told the hulking Haussa soldiery. "She would have been a great prize. We would have had a great day burning her and Ah-sha together. The King favored her, but he could do nothing against the decision of the Council, and there could be no doubt what the Council would have decided to do."

Helene heard the words and shivered. Ki-Gor had been more right than he knew. Her eyes went anxiously to his still form on the ground. Braga and his men had solicitously stretched him out in a comfortable position, but Ki-Gor had not opened his eyes. Apparently, he was still unconscious.

After many minutes of activity, a group of Haussas approached the prostrate jungle man with a crude litter they had improvised. They laid the litter beside him on the ground. The little Portuguese knight shouted orders, and a dozen pairs of black hands carefully lifted the fallen giant onto the litter.

"And now," Braga announced, "before we start on our way, you must swear allegiance to your real, undoubted, legitimate sovereign. Kneel down, all of you."

He glared around him, and when the Haussas had all dropped to their knees, he knelt also. Holding his sword up by the blade, its hilt forming a cross, Enrique intoned, "Even though he hear you not, men-at-arms of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano, swear to be loyal and true vassals of His Majesty Sebastiano, King of Portugal, Estremadura, and Algarve, Defender Of The Faith, Lord Sovereign of the Azores, of Madeira, of Africa, of India, of the Indies, and Brazil. Swear it."

"We swear," the Haussas murmured, and little Braga sprang to his feet.

"Come!" he shouted, "Let us bear our King to his city."

Eight burly Haussas lifted the litter to their shoulders and pushed through the undergrowth after their diminutive leader. The rest formed up, two by two, and followed the litter. In a matter of minutes, the clearing below was empty.

Helene stirred restlessly and looked up at N'geeso, curled up on a limb just above her. She stretched out one lovely leg as if to start down the tree. N'geeso clucked disapprovingly and shook a gnarled finger.

"But we must follow," Helene protested.

"We will follow," the little old man said, "but in good time. Those buffaloes will leave a trail a blind man could follow. In the meantime, it is safer to remain at a distance."

IV

THAT NIGHT seemed to last forever to Helene. The minutes dragged by on leaden feet as she sought the consolation of sleep. But the awful picture of Ki-Gor's crumpled body lying at the foot of the tree kept returning to her mind. She tried to tell herself that everything would come out all right. Ki-Gor had not broken his neck. He was alive, and that was what mattered. But he had certainly hurt his head. Helene prayed that he had not fractured his skull.

It was still dark when N'geeso waked her. "Let us be on our way," the pygmy urged. "We will try to overtake them before they break camp."

As they started out along the game trail, Helene could hardly see the scurrying little figure in front of her. But the pygmy

picked his way surely along the winding path, and as they journeyed northward, the advancing dawn began to outline the jungle around them. The game trail later merged with a larger, wider thoroughfare, almost as wide as a road. This was evidently a main route over the mountains and it very soon began perceptibly to climb. The country, too, began to be more uniformly forested, leaving behind the grassy swamps that dotted the flatlands.

Helene and N'geeso had gone about two miles on this new trail when the pygmy held up a warning hand and halted.

"We are getting close," he murmured, "I can hear them."

Helene listened for a moment but heard no human sounds. But N'geeso's highly developed senses could not be wrong, so she merely answered, "What now, Little Brother? The tree route?"

"Aye," the pygmy nodded. "Not that I fear the Haussa. But there might be some Mabas lurking. The Mabas are sharper witted than the Haussa."

They actually had not far to go—just up a short ridge and down the other side—before they came upon the encamped Haussas. Helene's heart was pounding furiously, not from the effort of travelling the tree-route, but from sheer excitement and the anticipation of seeing her mate.

The Haussas were up milling around noisily and apparently preparing breakfast. They had spread out on both sides of the broad path, and Helene searched the busy scene below anxiously with her eyes. Suddenly her heart leaped and she clutched N'geeso by the shoulder.

"I see him!" she whispered excitedly. "Oh! Little Brother, he seems to be all right! Look, he's sitting up on the litter!"

Far over to the left of the path, under a tree and away from the milling throng of black soldiers, Ki-Gor was sitting on his litter. His left leg was stretched out straight, his right leg bent upwards with his right arm resting negligently on the knee. Before him stood the little Portuguese knight.

"Oh, thank heavens!" Helene murmured gratefully, "He has recovered. You don't know how worried I've been, N'geeso."

"Who could blame thee?" N'geeso replied, staring down. "I too, had misgivings.

Look at him, the wily one!" The little man chuckled. "See how he simulates friendship with that little man. He is but awaiting an opportunity to escape. Come, Helene, let us move around and get into the tree above him."

"Yes," Helene agreed. "We've got to let him know we're here."

A FEW minutes later, the beautiful red-headed girl and the wrinkled pygmy were perched along a branch fifty feet directly above Ki-Gor. They were provided with a cover of leaves and dappled shadows which only the sharpest pair of eyes could have penetrated. N'geeso placed a gnarled hand partly over his mouth and began to make little soft squeaking noises, sounds that a green monkey makes when he is happy.

Enrique de Braga glanced upwards carelessly but made no break in the conversation. Ki-Gor reacted not at all. N'geeso stopped his monkey calls with a frown.

"He made no sign," the pygmy muttered. "Yet he must have heard—the little man did."

"Perhaps he thought it was unsafe to make a sign," Helene whispered.

"I don't see why," N'geeso said doubtfully. "Ah! the little one is moving away—I'll try again."

The long crooked fingers went up over his mouth again and the monkey sounds once more floated out of the tree. But Ki-Gor sat perfectly still, without so much as moving a finger.

"Wah!" said N'geeso disgustedly. "He must hear it. I wish he would signal."

"Perhaps he thinks it's unnecessary," Helene said.

"Perhaps," N'geeso admitted. "But how do we know that his hearing was not hurt by the blow on his head?"

Helene's heart slowed momentarily. "Wait a minute," she said suddenly, "I have an idea."

She whipped an arrow out of the quiver on her back, and swiftly snapped off the fire-hardened tip, rendering the missile harmless. Then she gently dropped the arrow. Its flight was lazy but true, and it fell on the ground about four feet from Ki-Gor's litter. The pair in the tree watched anxiously as Ki-Gor turned his head at the slight sound the arrow made when it

struck the ground. He looked at the arrow for a moment, then reached out casually and picked it up. He held it in his hand for a moment, looking at it intently, and then tossed it away.

"What's the matter with him!" N'geeso spluttered, and Helene put a warning hand on his shoulder. Just at that moment there was a sudden loud noise among the Haussas and the pair in the tree both turned their attention to it.

The Haussas were swarming along both sides of the path jabbering angrily at a large group of strange blacks who had approached unnoticed.

"Maba," N'geeso murmured. "All they want is to pass along the path. But these insolent Haussas—just because they are camped across the path—want to deny the Maba thoroughfare."

The argument was rising in sound and fury when Enrique de Braga took charge of the situation. He drew his dainty sword and held it high in the air. Then, rising on his toes, he began to shout what were obviously military commands. The Haussas instantly demonstrated their military discipline. They fell silent and moved quickly and efficiently into two double rows ranged on either side of the path. At a further command, the front ranks of each group knelt on one knee. One more shout from the little knight and the rows of halberds moved in unison to a ready position.

THE DIMINUTIVE Braga went out on the path and swaggered up between the rows of bristling halberds to the leader of the Maba. There, with his short legs spread wide, he delivered a long harangue while the Maba leader listened sullenly. As far as Helene could make out, Braga was laying down the conditions under which the Mabas could pass through the camp along the path. When he finished, the Maba leader looked at him a long moment in silence. Then the big black turned his head slightly and called out to his people behind him. With that he got down on his knees placing both hands on the ground at Braga's feet, and the rest of the Maba followed suit in the gesture of submission.

The little Portuguese knight nodded his head, waved his sword in the air and shouted a command. The Haussas as one man raised their halberds to a perpen-

dicular position and rested on them. The Mabas began to file sullenly along the path between the rows of soldiers.

Helene felt sorry for them and felt indignant at the little game-cock of a man who put them to such a gratuitous indignity. Suddenly she gasped and looked quickly below her at the foot of the tree. This had been the perfect diversion, the perfect opportunity for Ki-Gor to escape. The Haussas and their leader had left him completely unguarded.

But to her consternation, Ki-Gor had not moved. He was still sitting listlessly on the litter, watching without apparent interest the scene along the path. Then Helene became conscious that N'geeso was no longer beside her.

Below her, he was climbing up the tree. Evidently, he had gone down to the ground, had accomplished nothing, and was now returning. What *was* the matter with Ki-Gor?

N'geeso's furrowed face wore a pre-occupied expression as he climbed on the branch beside her.

"What is the matter?" Helene whispered fiercely. "Why didn't he escape when he had the chance?"

N'geeso shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "Something is wrong. He has not entirely recovered yet. He appears to be in a daze."

"What do you mean, Little Brother?" she asked.

"He spoke in his normal voice," N'geeso said, his brow wrinkled discontentedly, "and yet—well, I went down to him and he turned his head and looked at me and there was no recognition in his eyes."

"No recognition!" Helene exclaimed.

"It was as if he were seeing me for the first time in his life," N'geeso declared. "And I said, 'Come! This is thy chance!', and he just stared at me. And he said, 'Come where?' and with that I knew that something was wrong with him and I came away."

"Oh, he hasn't recovered," Helene said, sorrowfully, "What shall we do, N'geeso?"

"There is nothing to do," the pygmy shrugged. "We can only wait and follow the Haussa wherever they take him."

"I don't understand it," Helene said, and she stared down at the ground where her gigantic husband lolled on his litter, It

was the beginning of a bitter and frightening day for Helene.

AS THE last slanting rays of the sun faded away, Helene and N'geeso watched Enrique de Braga's column of Haussas march into a small Maba village located on what appeared to be the backwater of a river. A stout pier extended out from the bank, and closely secured to it were two good-sized barges. It did not surprise Helene that the barges had high, bluff bows of the type that were in use in the centuries before steam replaced sails on the oceans.

The Haussa column, with Ki-Gor still on the litter, went straight to the barges. The litter was deposited tenderly in one of the boats and the Haussas distributed themselves between the two. A group of Mabas then got in, cast off the barges and manned long sweeps. With a sinking heart, Helene watched the two barges, one of them bearing her mate, slowly move across the still water toward a massive wall of mangroves that rose up black and menacing about two hundred yards distant. There was no wharf in sight anywhere along the line of those mangroves, nor even a beach of any kind.

The boats continued straight across the flat black water while Helene watched them. As they approached the opposite shore in the rapidly gathering dusk, Helene found it hard to see them against the dark mass of mangroves. Suddenly, she spoke sharply to N'geeso.

"I can only see one boat, Little Brother. Can you see them both?"

"No, I can only see one," the pygmy replied, squinting his eyes to see better in the failing light. "Wait! Now I can't see that one!"

"Neither can I!" Helene exclaimed in astonishment. "They've both disappeared!"

"*Juju boats!*" N'geeso muttered, with a little shiver.

"That's nonsense, Little Brother," Helene retorted. "Two big boats full of men can't just disappear. They must have gone somewhere—but where?"

N'geeso began to moan softly. "Ai-ee! My Big Brother, my protector, my friend—Ki-Gor is gone, swallowed up by a mangrove swamp!"

"There is only one thing to do," Helene

said decisively, "and that is to follow."

N'geeso gave a sudden yelp. "Big Sister!" he cried. "Thou knowest I am deathly afraid of water. Suppose there are crocodiles!"

"Quiet, Little Brother!" Helene admonished. "You don't want the Mabas to hear you. If you don't want to go, I'll go by myself."

"Ki-Gor would never forgive me," N'geeso whimpered, "if I let thee go by thyself."

"Do as you think best, Little Brother," Helene said. "In a little while, when it is completely dark, I am going to borrow one of those dugouts down by the wharf and paddle across the water."

"Whither thou goest, I go," N'geeso said, quoting unconsciously from a book he had never read.

Already the evening fires of the Maba were beginning to glow yellow and melancholy through the doorways of the huts in the village. Helene and the pygmy dropped down out of the tree which had been their observation post and made a leisurely circuit of the settlement. By the time they had stolen down to the beach beside the wharf, it was almost pitch dark. Helene looked around warily, but evidently the Maba did not fear thieves for there was no one in sight guarding the dugouts.

AFTER a swift inspection, she selected a canoe with two crude paddles in it and pushed it gently into the water. Obedient to her hiss, N'geeso hopped into the canoe, and the pair paddled off into the gloom of the tropical night. As the lights of the village receded behind them, Helene shivered, realizing the difficulties of the task she had set for herself. The two big barges had vanished inexplicably while there had still been some daylight to see them. She was proposing now to find out where they went and find out in complete and utter darkness.

The longer she paddled, the more she began to realize that the darkness was by no means total. She could make out the small shape that was N'geeso in the bow of the canoe. And farther away, she could even see where the dark mass of mangroves stopped and the lighter mass of night sky began. She glanced to her right and saw a distinct glow in the eastern sky.

Helene permitted herself a small hope. During the past weeks, heavy rain-laden clouds had blanketed the earth, and she had entirely lost track of the phases of the moon. Could it be possible that the clear sky this night would furnish some moonlight?

In about three minutes, her hope was fulfilled as a chink of yellow light appeared on the eastern horizon. By the time the canoe reached the long line of mangroves, a brilliant half moon lay on its back just above the line of the earth.

"Mother Moon is kind to us," observed N'geeso, manifestly cheered by the happening. Helene smiled and turned the canoe toward the left so that it lay parallel to the silent mangroves.

"Keep your eyes and ears busy, Little Brother," she said.

"Aye, I am watching," N'geeso returned. "and I think we are coming to it even now. Look! Just ahead—over there! The trees part there to let a narrow road of water pass through!"

"We found it!" Helene cried. "But, after all, there may be other openings."

"No, Big Sister!" N'geeso cried triumphantly. "I see a white stake over there. It is a marker—it could be nothing else."

HELENE turned the nose of the canoe into the dark opening in the mangroves, and hesitated while she accustomed her eyes to the inky blackness. Then she looked up and saw that the moonlight was silvering the tops of a line of trees above her. It was enough to indicate the course of the mysterious channel.

Helene pushed the dugout forward with strong strokes of the paddle. A few minutes later, however, her newly-born confidence was suddenly dashed. The line of moonlit tree tops came to an end, or rather seemed to break up into several new lines.

"Oh, Little Brother!" Helene moaned. "It looks as if the channel branches here. What shall we do? I don't know which branch to follow."

"Wait a minute, Big Sister," the pygmy replied, "and do not fear. N'geeso may be getting old, but he still has the night-seeing eyes of a black panther."

"That I know," Helene responded, "but what do they see?"

"A white stake," N'geeso said trium-

phantly. "A marker—our second marker. And without doubt we will find more markers along the way to guide us along the correct channel."

The next ten minutes were to prove N'geeso right as two more channel markers gleamed like lonely ghosts amidst the mangrove borders. Helene began to realize that she and the pygmy chieftain were plunging into an enormous swamp criss-crossed with myriads of narrow waterways. Without the white stakes, they would have been hopelessly lost.

As they paddled silently along in the ever-increasing light of the climbing moon, Helene strained her ears for some indication of the two barges containing the Haussas, the little Portuguese knight, and her husband. But the great swamp was curiously mute, in contrast to the nightly bedlam of the Congo forests. Here there was no shrill chittering of bats and night birds, or scolding of lemurs. The snarling cough of the hunting lion was not heard, nor the hopeless laughter of the hyena. There were not even the familiar clouds of nocturnal insects whining and singing. What few sounds reached Helen's taut ear drums were muffled, indeterminate, unidentifiable.

"I wonder," Helene murmured after a time, "how far we must travel on this road."

"Art thou tiring of paddling, Big Sister?" N'geeso inquired.

"Of course not," Helene retorted. "You know well that if it were necessary, I could paddle all night."

"Who knows but that it may be necessary this night?" the pygmy answered gloomily.

V

KI-GOR felt as if he had been dead for an unreckonable amount of time, and was now slowly coming back to life. It was a disagreeable sensation, this coming back to life. He would have preferred to stay dead. It was as if he were slowly rising from the bottom of some sea. For some unknown reason he felt he must reach the surface of that sea.

Every so often he became exhausted, and then he stopped struggling and rested, and he could feel himself slowly sinking

back down through the water, back to that blissful oblivion.

Yet, he could never quite return to those blissful depths. Subconsciously, he knew he must exert himself and toil upwards through that endless sea...

The sea which enveloped him ebbed and flowed and swirled and changed its texture oddly. One moment it was a sea of black faces, the next it became a sea of green leaves gently waving. Curious people came and went. A grotesque little man with hair on his upper lip and chin, sweating profusely because he was wearing too many clothes. There was another little man, a black man, who though a stranger was yet curiously familiar. He popped out of a tree beside him, and addressed him by a word—a word so familiar, yet so elusive that Ki-Gor could not remember it. The very act of trying to remember anything was so exhausting, so exhausting...

Now it was light, now it was dark. Sometimes it was quiet, and sometimes there were noisy voices. Then he was being carried through a strange village which was thronged with wildly excited people. They were waving smoking torches and shouting a name. It was the name which the little man had called him.

"Sebastiano! Sebastiano!" the people cried, and waved their smoking torches rhythmically.

Then other men appeared, white men with hair on their upper lips and chins, and these men were riding on horses. The men waved curiously ornate spears, with little flags at the heads. Some of them waved long knives. It was a strange scene, full of strange people, and Ki-Gor had never seen anything like it before.

He wished vaguely that he were elsewhere, that he were... Suddenly, Ki-Gor wondered exactly where it was he wanted to be. There was some place where he belonged, which he called—But he couldn't remember what the place was or what it was called.

A little chill went down his back and his tired mind began to ask itself some questions. *What has happened to me? I am somebody—but who? I can't remember!*

A wave of nausea swept over the blond giant, and he sank back onto the litter as the torches flickered wildly around him. Gradually, he slipped back into oblivion.

ENRIQUE DE BRAGA lifted his eyes away from the recumbent giant on the huge bed and looked toward the narrow windows of the gloomy room. The daylight was fading swiftly, the end of another day was approaching and King Sebastiano still lay unconscious. The little Portuguese knight looked about him at the six other knights and ladies who had been keeping the vigil with him, looked especially at Ysabel do Castello Branco sitting next to him. Enrique de Braga gave a little sigh.

There had been a time when he had entertained some pleasant ideas about Ysabel, but now those ideas had to be put away from his mind. Ysabel was the most beautiful and highest-ranking lady in the city of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano, and the women of her family had been for generations hereditary Ladies-in-Waiting to the Throne. Now that the Prophecy had been fulfilled, and Sebastiano had returned to his people, Ysabel's office would become more than merely a title, and she would most probably — eventually — become Queen.

Enrique sighed again. The expression in Ysabel's luminous eyes as she watched the form on the bed revealed her mind. She not only wanted to be Queen. She wanted to be the queen of that magnificent bronzed man who lay unconscious under the gaudy canopies of the royal bed. Enrique turned toward an impassive black slave and signaled for torches to be brought in.

As the great room was suddenly filled with flickering yellow light, King Sebastiano stirred slightly and gave a brief groan. Enrique de Braga smiled and stood up. Finally, the King was about to awake. Never once had the little knight doubted that the King would awake. And now, at this moment, as if to reward the little knight's confidence, the huge figure on the bed rose up to a sitting position and surveyed the room with piercing blue eyes.

The seven knights and ladies rose to their feet, bowed and curtsied gravely and murmured, "*Viva, O Rei.*"

The bronzed giant glanced down at his left arm, now swathed in fine cloth and resting in a soft purple sling. With a deft movement, he slipped the arm out of the sling and bent the wrist back and forth cautiously. Then he raised his right hand

to the back of his head and explored a large soft lump at the base of his brain. Finally, he slipped off the bed and stood for a moment on legs that were not quite steady.

"Where am I?" he said in Hausa dialect.

"In your Royal Bed Chamber, Your Majesty," Enrique de Braga answered, "in the Citadel of your city of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano."

"You I seem to remember," said Ki-Gor, fixing his blue eyes on the little knight, "the others I do not."

Promptly, Enrique de Braga presented each of the others, beginning with Ysabel do Castello Branco. Ki-Gor's chiseled face was expressionless during the introductions, only his eyes moving to meet the eyes of each person introduced. Finally he said to Braga, "Where is it that I saw you before?"

"Surely, Your Majesty has not forgotten!" the little knight exclaimed excitedly.

"Your face and form are familiar," Ki-Gor returned, "and that is all."

"You do not remember rescuing me from the pit?" Braga said in astonishment. "And the red-headed jungle woman who persuaded you to run away?"

"Red-headed jungle woman," Ki-Gor repeated with a thoughtful frown. The phrase suggested something elusively familiar. He pondered for seconds and then gave up. He could not remember ever having seen a red-headed woman.

"Go on—tell me the rest," he commanded.

"Why then, you nearly did escape us," Braga went on. "But by God's wisdom, you fell out of the tree and lay unconscious. And we picked you up and brought you here—in fulfillment of the Prophecy."

"Prophecy?" said Ki-Gor.

"Yes, the Prophecy that foretold that you, King Sebastiano would return someday..."

"Oh yes," Ki-Gor dismissed further explanation, although his mind was reeling. At least he had discovered that he was King Sebastiano. In this memoryless sea that his mind was wandering in, it was important to find out some essential facts about himself. King Sebastiano. A curious name—hard for him to pronounce.

KI-GOR looked around him quickly and saw everyone's eyes upon him. He spoke with hard authority. "I am hungry," he said, "Bring me food."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Enrique de Braga replied hastily, and began babbling in Maba at the black slaves. Turning back to his king, he said, "Will you be served here, Majesty, or will you come into the Great Hall?"

"We will go to the Hall," Ki-Gor said, hoping the movement and bustle would give him an opportunity to think over his problem without being observed. As the torch-bearers filed out of the room, Ki-Gor followed them, his face impassive, but his mind in a turmoil.

Something had happened to cause him to lose his memory. Of this he was certain. His past was a confused, dimly-lit array of pictures, most of them laid against a background of dark jungle. He saw a boy swimming in a river, a bronzed young man spearing a leopard. He saw blacks—of all kinds, tall, short, skinny, burly. He saw the bronzed young man on the back of a huge elephant. He saw another figure which was so shadowy that he couldn't identify it, persistent though it was. The more he tried to pin down this figure, the more it eluded him. Why was it that the phrase, "red-headed woman", seemed to mean something to him? He frowned in concentration, but could make nothing of it.

The torch-bearers led the way into a high-vaulted room full of people. As Ki-Gor appeared, the room began to ring with shouts of "Viva, O Rei!"

The jungle man raised his right hand in acknowledgment and went toward the head of a long table where little Braga was standing beside a high-backed chair. As he sat down, Braga sat at one side of him and Ysabel do Castello Branco on the other. A bowl of hot soup was placed before him, and the jungle man gave up trying to recall his past for the moment.

It was something to know that he was King Sebastiano, even though the name sounded so unfamiliar. And certain it was that among the dark, confused images that flitted through his brain, there were none that remotely resembled these delicate handsome people in the extraordinary clothes who were now seating themselves

along either side of the long table.

It was good food, or so it tasted to Ki-Gor who could not remember when he had last eaten. With the food, the Portuguese also served a dark red liquid, bittersweet tasting, which at first warmed Ki-Gor's stomach agreeably and then later cloyed and made his mouth feel sticky. By the end of the meal, Ki-Gor felt a little dizzy and very drowsy.

He stood up suddenly and announced that he needed to sleep. The knights and ladies made a great commotion getting to their feet, and the torch-bearers hastened to form a line to precede their king back to the Royal Bed Chamber. And as Ki-Gor left the hall, Braga and the Lady Ysabel and the other five knights and ladies who had been presented to him, followed close behind. To Ki-Gor's annoyance, they all crowded into the bedroom. He felt suddenly oppressed and irritated by the lack of privacy.

"That is all," he said, standing in the middle of the room. "You may all go now. I am going to sleep."

Braga and Lady Ysabel looked at each other, then Braga said, "It is not customary for the King to sleep without watchers."

"Then I will change the custom," Ki-Gor said briefly. "Now, go—all of you."

The Lady Ysabel asked, "I, too, Your Majesty?"

Ki-Gor looked at her in astonishment. "Of course," he said, "I said all of you."

HER HUGE brown eyes held his for a long moment, then she sighed and turned toward the door. Ki-Gor followed her and was favored by a last languishing glance as she stepped across the threshold. A slight frown of puzzlement appeared on the jungle man's bronzed face as he drew the heavy metal bolt across the door to lock it.

Even without the torches, the room was still quite light. Ki-Gor turned and saw that moonlight was streaming in through the four narrow windows of the room. He went across and looked out at the moon-washed city of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano lying below him.

From his window high up in the Citadel which in turn was built on a rocky hill, he commanded a wide view. Directly below, half-hidden by crowding trees, in-

numerable tiny huts huddled around the base of the hill in no perceivable order. Here and there, larger huts stood in small clearings in the thick jungle which clothed the curious little city. There seemed to be no streets as such, only innumerable narrow alleys that wandered without direction among the huts and tree-trunks.

Off toward Ki-Gor's left, the city ended at the shore of what seemed like a considerable body of water. To his right, the grass roofs and the flickering lights thinned out and disappeared entirely in the jungle.

Satisfied with his survey and feeling his eyelids intolerably heavy, Ki-Gor left the window and went toward the bed. Just then, he heard a faint tapping sound. He stood still and listened. Someone was knocking gently at the door. Ki-Gor padded across the room, gently drew back the metal bolt, and opened the door.

A small figure flitted into the room and stood close beside Ki-Gor.

"Your Majesty is so exquisitely discreet. Not for nothing was he known as the First Knight of Europe," a voice murmured, and it was the voice of Ysabel do Castello Branco. "But I understood, as you see—and as you see, I am here."

"I see," Ki-Gor repeated and awaited the next move. Although the Lady Ysabel's costume, a light sheer robe, aroused some vague stirrings within him, he truly did not know what to expect next. He searched frantically in his darkened memories for a clue as to what he should do. But he could remember no situation like this one and he felt now only a great drowsiness and a vague intuition of danger.

The Lady Ysabel moved closer to him, her rapid breathing plainly audible. The sweeping lines of her figure were dimly outlined against a shaft of moonlight.

"Oh, sweet moment!" the Lady Ysabel exclaimed. "Your Majesty cannot possibly know the honor you do me."

With that, she flung both arms upward toward Ki-Gor's shoulders. Drowsy or not, Ki-Gor acted automatically and instantaneously. His hands shot out and gripped the woman's dainty wrists and held them in midair. Without knowing exactly why, he glanced at each hand. By the half light of the room, he could see that they were empty. He could not tell himself why, but

somehow he had expected to find a knife in one of those delicate hands.

"What is the matter, Majesty?" Ysabel whispered anxiously. "Why do you hold me like this?"

Ki-Gor released her wrists.

"Hold me like this," said the Lady Ysabel, and slid her smooth arms around Ki-Gor's waist and lifted her full moist mouth to his.

After a moment, Ki-Gor drew his head back and gently detached her arms.

"Now go," he said. "My eyes are heavy and my head aches. Tomorrow, I will talk to you."

"Yes, Majesty," Ysabel said faintly. She paused for a moment to sigh and then said, "I hope your head will not ache tomorrow, Majesty."

"Thank you," Ki-Gor said, evenly. "Good night."

"Good night, Majesty," the Lady Ysabel breathed. She slipped out the door, and once again Ki-Gor bolted it. He went to the bed, lay down and was asleep.

VI

"**S**LOWLY, slowly, Big Sister," N'geeso murmured, and Helene gladly lifted the dripping paddle from the water, laid it across the gunwales and rested her aching arms. The half-moon hung low in the western sky and a soft blue dawn was creeping over the endless swamp. If Helene had once doubted that a city such as the little Portuguese had described could have existed unnoticed, she now admitted to herself that almost anything could be hidden indefinitely among these miles of mangroves.

She peered over the crouched figure of N'geeso in the bow of the dugout and saw that the channel was widening perceptibly. While she was gazing ahead, the pygmy motioned to swing the canoe toward the right. As she obediently dug in the paddle, N'geeso crawled stealthily back to her.

"We have arrived, I think," he whispered. "We had best skirt the shoreline and take what cover we can. There may be people abroad."

For minutes Helene sent the dugout drifting like a shadow along the line of mangroves. The widening channel curved gently to the left. In a few moments,

Helene saw that N'geeso was right. They had arrived.

The channel was suddenly a broad estuary, and they were looking out on to a broad blue lake which stretched away for miles. In the dim light of dawn, the far shore could hardly be made out. But much closer—probably no more than a half a mile away—a large, heavily-forested island thrust itself up from the water.

At first glance, in that uncertain light, Helene noticed nothing especially remarkable about the island except for the rocky, square-topped hill that rose up in the middle. Then her eyes were caught by some scattered flickering lights among the trees and she noticed a number of dark shapes on the water close to the shore. As the minutes brought more daylight, she recognized the shapes on the water as strings of bluff-bowed boats. Finally, day-break revealed the square top of the hill to be a man-made stone building.

As Helene watched, the flickering lights increased in number and began to converge at a spot on the shore of the island. And across the still surface of the lake, she could hear faint cries as of many people rejoicing. The lights—obviously torches—now began to stream away from the shore into the jungle. But after a short time they reappeared at the foot of the hill, and a ragged procession of them straggled up to the square fort—for that is what Helene presumed it to be.

"A city," N'geeso muttered, "A whole city in the jungle."

Helene was startled. The pygmy chieftain's eyes had been clearer than her own. She strained to pierce the tree-clad shoreline with her eyes, and eventually she began to make out a number of huts scattered among the tree trunks. A city. The city that the little Portuguese had told of—the city of Santa Cruz do Sebastiao. Undoubtedly the torchlight procession was escorting Ki-Gor, a sick, half-conscious Ki-Gor up to the fort on the hill. She voiced her thoughts and N'geeso nodded agreement.

"Oh, Little Brother!" she wailed softly, "What do we do now?"

The wrinkles in the pygmy's forehead deepened. He glanced at the bright eastern horizon and then back at the island. Finally, he shook his head.

"Until it gets dark again," he said, "there is nothing we can do. We cannot get on the island unobserved by daylight. We must find a place to stay hidden until the sun goes down."

RELUCTANTLY, Helene agreed with him. With a last look at the island which was her mate's prison, she turned the canoe around. For several hundred yards, she sent the canoe quietly along in the direction which they had come, while N'geeso scanned the wall of mangroves. When he finally motioned to her to stop the canoe, she was ready and halted the craft almost instantly. The pygmy's gnarled black finger pointed and Helene looked inshore where the mangroves curved outward from their roots in the wet black mud. At first she saw nothing to attract N'geeso's attention, but finally her questioning eyes noticed a six-foot stretch where there was no mud or mangrove roots. A low-hanging bough drooped a thick screen of leaves over the entrance to a narrow waterway.

The narrow little canal twisted and turned through the silent swamp for some hundreds of yards until it eventually gave out on to a small pond. In the middle of the pond stood a small tree-covered island, and among the trees stood a small thatched roof hut. Following N'geeso's imperious motions, Helene sent the canoe in a circle around the island in perfect silence, never lifting the paddle out of the water. At length, the pygmy signaled her to put him ashore on the island.

When he returned to the boat after a time, he seemed to have found things to his satisfaction, although his eyes flicked suspiciously around the shore of the pond.

"It is safe enough, I think," he said in a normal voice. "We can stay here until night time."

"There is no one living in the little hut?" Helene queried.

"Not for some time," N'geeso answered. "There is only the faintest man-smell. Whoever lived there either was killed or moved away. Come, we will hide the canoe."

With the canoe stowed away in a thicket, Helene and N'geeso went to the hut. Helene felt hungry and sleepy, having been without food or rest for the past twenty-four

hours. The restless pygmy chieftain found some tender, yam-like roots which stopped the hunger-pangs for the moment. They also made Helene that much sleepier, and in a very short time she sank down on the dirt floor of the hut by the doorway and went sound asleep.

What made her wake up so suddenly two hours later, she did not know. She lay open-eyed and tensed for several seconds without hearing a sound. Three feet away from her, N'geeso was also sleeping soundly.

Suddenly the pygmy rolled away from the doorway and, a second later, a heavy iron-tipped spear smacked into the ground exactly at the spot where he had been lying.

Automatically, Helene was on her feet with her bow in her left hand and her right hand reaching for an arrow. But N'geeso was even swifter and stood glaring out of the hut with a deadly poison-tipped arrow already notched in his tiny bow.

"O Murderer of Sleeping Men!" the pygmy sputtered, "Be advised to stand still in thy tracks. Just the merest scratch by this arrow will bring death in twenty heart-beats."

A burly young black stood as if arrested in mid-stride about fifteen paces away. His broad handsome face showed astonishment.

"Be it so," the negro replied sullenly. "But why are you protecting a white woman? The whites are our enemies—they enslave us, they torture us, they kill us..."

"Wait a minute," Helene interrupted quickly.

HER EYES had caught sight of a curious design burned into the haft of the spear the stranger had flung at N'geeso. The design was a crudely outlined head of a dog. It was the sign of the Brotherhood of the Dog, the most ancient and far-flung secret society in Africa, and the only one which had truly benevolent ends.

"If you think," Helene said, "that I am one of the whites from the island, you are wrong."

"You are not one of them?" the negro responded with surprise.

"They are my enemies," Helene continued, "as much as they are yours. If

they could catch me, they would kill me. They have just taken my husband prisoner, and my companion here and I are waiting to find a way to free him."

"The giant white man?" the negro exclaimed. "The one they brought to the island just before dawn?"

"He is my husband," Helene said gravely.

"He is no prisoner," the negro objected. "He is their King, but newly returned from a long journey."

"Believe me, that is not so," Helene said, and the negro's face became sullen again.

"I will show you why," Helene said quietly and reached out and plucked the spear from the ground. Then she stepped out of the hut and with the sharp point of the spear began to make marks in the bare earth. She drew two spider-figures, such as children draw, but they were recognizable as human figures. Between them she drew a vertical line, and below this picture she traced the outline of a dog's head. She stepped back then and looked at the young native.

"Come and look at this," she invited, and the Negro came forward hesitantly. He gazed fixedly at Helene's handiwork in the earth and then suddenly threw up his head and swung it from side to side sniffing the air.

It was a recognition signal, and Helene and N'geeso did likewise. The young Negro broke out into a broad grin and spread both hands out, palms upward, in the sign of friendship.

"I am sorry for attacking you," he said. "I did not know you were of the Brotherhood. The picture message says you are separated from your husband. I believe you and trust you."

"Good," Helene said simply. "Now, perhaps you can help us. You are familiar with the island of the whites."

"Yes," the negro said. "My name is Gotu, and I am of the Gorithi-Maba. For some time, now, my brothers and I have been going to the island of the whites secretly."

Helene looked at N'geeso and nodded significantly. "In that case," she said to the youth called Gotu, "I am sure you can help us. Tell me some more of the Gorithi-Maba."

VII

"YOUR MAJESTY," Enrique de Braga beamed, "you will be delighted to know that we have three executions this morning."

"Executions?" Ki-Gor said.

"Yes. As soon as Your Majesty has finished breakfast."

"Who is to be executed?" Ki-Gor asked.

"They are unimportant—of low estate," Braga said, deprecatingly. "Maba slaves, in fact. Two men and a woman. But perhaps Your Majesty will take some enjoyment in the spectacle. It will be nothing like the splendid ones of your day. Our traditions have recorded your implacable ferocity during the Inquisition..."

"What crimes are these slaves charged with?" Ki-Gor interrupted bluntly.

"I do not know, Your Majesty," Braga replied. "The Council tried and condemned them while I was away."

"But I have not given approval to any executions," Ki-Gor said, with a frown.

"True, Your Majesty. But these crimes were committed, and the criminals condemned before you had returned. From now on, your approval will be asked for by the Council. In fact," Braga added with animation, "there is a blasphemy case that I will bring up before the Council later today. I am sure they will condemn the man swiftly and pass him on to you."

"What if I should not approve the condemnation," Ki-Gor said dryly.

"I'm sure you would, Your Majesty. Of course, the King can veto an act of the Council, but the Constitution provides that the Council can override the King's veto if they agree to *unanimously*."

"Hm," Ki-Gor murmured. "Who constitute the Council?"

"Why, the seven of us, Your Majesty. The four knights and three ladies who were waiting in the Royal Bedroom when you woke up yesterday. But, come, we must hurry to see the executions."

The place where the executions were held was a small wooden amphitheatre which stood in a clearing near the waterfront. The wooden benches were already crowded with excited chattering Portuguese knights and ladies, perspiring in their heavy clothes, so unsuited to the blazing African sun. The arena below was

ringed by uniformed Haussas, and in the center of the arena stood the three criminals, each chained to a separate wooden post. As Ki-Gor and Braga entered the amphitheatre, the crowd arose and cheered him wildly for a moment and then settled down to enjoy the ensuing spectacle.

The events were stage-managed promptly and efficiently. A portly Portuguese knight marched heavily across the arena to a point just below Ki-Gor's seat. There he swept his helmet off his head and bowed low.

"With your permission, Your Majesty," he shouted, so that all in the arena could hear, "we will commence the executions. The first is the slave of the Fidalgo Lourival de Castro who will execute him personally in the ceremony known as Freeing By The Axe."

The announcement was greeted by hearty applause, which blended into excited chatter as one of the chained criminals broke out into hysterical screams. Four Haussas surrounded him, detached him from the post and bore him struggling and screaming toward a low platform about six feet square. Fastened to the platform in a wide U-shaped pattern were five metal clamps, one of them in the base of the U—larger than the others. Ki-Gor soon saw the purpose of the clamps as the Haussas laid the struggling slave spread-eagled on the platform and fastened the clamps across his wrists and ankles. The large clamp served as an iron collar that fastened over the condemned creature's neck.

Now came a young knight carrying a shiny long-handled battle axe. He swung it around experimentally and grinned up at the cheering crowd. Then he went over to the platform and looked down at the helpless slave. After a brief inspection, he set himself beside the slave's right foot, swung the axe up lightly and brought it down with a crash. The black foot rolled off the platform, and the young knight went to the other side of the platform and lopped off the left foot. The crowd was vastly entertained.

"Free the left arm!" they cried, and Ki-Gor's eyes narrowed in disgust. Some vague memory of the many scenes of fearful torture he had witnessed floated through his consciousness and made him aware that the scene before him was not

unusual. Nevertheless, he did not like it, and he made up his mind that henceforth—by his Royal decree—criminals condemned to death would be dispatched swiftly and without torture.

THE YOUNG knight chopped off the slave's two arms at the elbow and then leaned on the axe and watched his victim's dying throes. Finally, when the suffering, mutilated body had almost ceased to move, the knight lopped off the head and held it up for the cheering crowd to see.

The next execution was perhaps less ghastly but more grotesque. The criminal's wrists were manacled close to his ankles, and, bent nearly double, he was released to run about the arena. This ceremony was called the Bull Fight. Another grinning young knight pretended that the helpless black was a dangerous bull, and dodged around in mock fear planting little barbed darts in the sweating native's back and shoulders. And when the doomed creature could no longer be goaded into activity, the young knight drew his rapier with a flourish and plunged it into his back just below the neck. The crowd cheered the knight for "going in over his horns" and killing at one stroke.

Ki-Gor was mentally recording the names of the two knights who had taken such ghoulish enjoyment in torture when the third and last victim was announced. Ki-Gor was startled to hear that the owner and executioner of this slave was Ysabel do Castello Branco. This was to be the Ceremony of Winged Knives.

A platform with metal clamps similar to the one used with the first victim, was brought out. But this one, instead of being laid flat on the ground was set up on end and secured with supports. The victim, a tall bony Maba woman, made no attempt to struggle as she was clamped to the platform in a spreadeagle position. She was infinitely braver than the two men had been, and never uttered a sound during the torture which followed.

This was somewhat of a disappointment to the perspiring crowd and certainly was to Ysabel do Castello Branco. The lady Ysabel had dressed herself in a man's costume for the occasion, doublet and hip boots and all, with her blue-black hair

flowing free behind her down to her waist. She minced out across the arena and took up a position about ten paces in front of the condemned slave. Four slaves had followed behind Ysabel each with heavily-loaded cloth bags suspended from their shoulders. Ki-Gor guessed that the bags contained knives and Ysabel promptly confirmed this.

The crowd hushed as she took a knife from one of the slaves, reversed it so that she was holding it by the point, and then stared at the doomed Maba woman. Slowly she raised the knife up and back behind her right ear and suddenly flung it. The heavy knife flew through the air, turning over slowly three times, and thocked into the wood of the platform. The crowd howled its admiration, and Ki-Gor leaned forward with interest. The knife had struck just beside the black woman's right hip and so close that it just nicked the skin. A bead of blood welled out and glistened in the bright sunlight.

A moment later the crowd roared again as a second knife quivered beside the wretched victim's left hip, also close enough to draw blood. There was no doubt in Ki-Gor's mind that the lady Ysabel could place the knives exactly where she wanted to.

"Is she not magnificent?" Enrique de Braga exclaimed. "Sometimes she will throw as many as twenty-five knives before she decides to kill the criminal!"

Ki-Gor suddenly decided that he did not want to see twenty-five knives thrown at this Maba woman. He rose to his feet impatiently.

"Wait!" he commanded, and started down the tiers of benches toward the arena. The noise of the crowd died out abruptly, and the lady Ysabel turned around with incredulous eyes.

"I understand well that I have no concern with the judgment of these criminals," he began. "That was done before my return. But I am King now, and I tell you now that no matter how serious a crime this slave committed, she should be put to death swiftly and mercifully. I will not tolerate any more of this torture."

The Lady Ysabel's beautiful eyes narrowed into cruel slits, and her full lips compressed in sudden fury. But with a

great effort she controlled herself.

"Your Majesty," she said in a low voice, "the Council tried this slave and decreed that she be tortured and killed. She was my personal slave. She asked my permission to go away to her village, and I refused her permission. She went anyway and stayed for a whole week. When she came back, she made some lame excuse about her son being sick. This insolence could not be tolerated."

Ki-Gor looked at her in amazement. Ysabel continued, "You are my King, and I your subject—but I have rights as a noble lady."

"And this poor creature," Ki-Gor interrupted, pointing to the slave, "Has she no rights?"

Ysabel's eyes widened in surprise. "They are animals, Your Majesty, only animals."

KI-GOR turned on his heel with a snort. Beckoning to a Haussa, he commanded, "Take the slave woman away and hold her for a new trial."

The crowd of Portuguese gasped, and the Lady Ysabel's face was a mask of rage. Enrique de Braga hastened across the arena to Ki-Gor's side.

"This is ill-advised, Your Majesty," he panted. "I pray Your Majesty to reconsider—"

"I am the King," Ki-Gor said stonily, and turning toward the Lady Ysabel, reached toward the knife in her hand. "Give me the knife," he commanded. After a moment's hesitation, she surrendered the weapon. Ki-Gor stood and weighed it in his hand.

"You are very good at throwing this, Lady Ysabel," he said at length, "but I am the King."

With that, he turned and walked across the sun-drenched arena, counting each pace. When he arrived at the fortieth pace, he turned and faced Ysabel, looking past her at the Haussas releasing the slave woman. As they retired with her to the sidelines, Ki-Gor held up the knife in the air.

"I am standing five times the distance from the target that the Lady Ysabel did," he announced to the crowd. "I do not remember that I ever threw a knife before. Stand aside, Lady Ysabel."

As the noble lady hastened to obey the order, Ki-Gor cradled the knife-handle in

his enormous hand. Fifty paces away stood the up-ended platform, the two knives that had nicked the Maba woman's hips still sticking in the wood. As Ki-Gor's eyes sighted on the target, he wondered at his confidence in himself. Some inner compulsion had led him into attempting a feat which he could not remember ever doing before. He could only suppose that somewhere in his forgotten past he had learned to throw a knife.

Slowly and surely he extended his arm at full length and raised it over his head. Then the powerful muscles rippled and the arm swept down and forward. At the split-second that it became parallel to the ground, he released the knife.

The crowd gave a collective gasp as the knife flew through the air almost too fast for their eyes to follow. Then there was an involuntary incredulous yell as it smashed into the wood of the target so close to one of the knives that Ysabel had thrown, that Ysabel's knife was dislodged and dropped to the ground. There could be no doubt whose knife was dislodged, for Ki-Gor's knife had penetrated almost to the hilt. The crowd rose to its feet shrieking in admiration.

"Viva, O Sebastiano! Viva, O Rei!"

Without acknowledging the plaudits, Ki-Gor strode toward Braga. The little knight was incoherent.

"Majesty!" he cried. "Magnificent! Only Sebastiano — no other — could have done such a — such a..."

"Yes, yes," Ki-Gor said impatiently. "Now, I want the Council to come together promptly and take up the case of that slave woman. I am not sure that justice was done."

"Yes, Majesty!" Braga responded eagerly. "The meeting is already set—it was to be held right after the executions. We were to consider the case of the Englishman, Ah-sha the Blasphemer."

Ki-Gor tried to think what an Englishman was. He had a feeling that he should know, but the meaning of the word eluded him.

"I told you about this Ah-sha," Braga continued. "How he denied the Prophecy—said it was impossible for you to return after so many years..."

"No. You never mentioned his name before," Ki-Gor said.

"Ah, but yes, Majesty, I told you when you..." Braga's voice died away, then sudden comprehension lighted his eyes. "Ah, now I understand!" he cried. "That was before you fell from the tree. Your head struck a spear haft—that was when you lost your memory. Of course it was. Because you remember nothing of helping me out of the pit, or of the red-headed woman with you."

Again the red-headed woman! Ki-Gor half-shut his eyes and tried with all his might to bring up some scrap of memory of her—but it was in vain.

"Very well," he said abruptly. "Let us have the meeting, at once. You will all come to my bedroom."

"The custom is to meet in the Great Hall," Braga said, reproachfully.

"I wish to have it in the Royal Bed Chamber," Ki-Gor said.

"As you wish, Majesty," Braga replied, with a little shrug.

KI-GOR started out of the arena. Braga shouted a command and trotted along by his side. A dozen Haussas hurried to form a guard, and thus escorted, the bronzed king of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano proceeded through the winding, jungle-dark alleys of the city and mounted the hill to the Citadel. Once there, he strode through the Great Hall without looking to right or left, and went straight to the Royal Bed Chamber, leaving Braga to collect the other members of the Council.

They filed in presently, looking very awed. All, that is, except Ysabel do Castello Branco whose passionate face showed fear and injured pride alternately. At a command from Braga, two Haussas brought in a slight, white-faced man with a straggling grey beard.

"Your Majesty, the blasphemer, Ah-sha. He who denied your existence up to the very moment you returned." Braga turned on the old man contemptuously. "Kneel, fool! Kneel before King Sebastiano."

The old man disregarded the order and stood staring at Ki-Gor with pathetic hope growing in his faded blue eyes. Something about the man stirred Ki-Gor's foggy memories—his rags of clothes which still held a semblance of coat and trousers, his white skin, his blue eyes. Suddenly, the old man spoke in a language which was

not Haussa nor Portuguese, and yet Ki-Gor understood him perfectly. The old man's exact words were, "Who are you?"

After a pause, Ki-Gor said, "Sebastiano."

The old man sighed impatiently. Then in a soft pleading voice, he said, "Oh, come off it, man. I don't know what your game is and I don't care. All I ask is that you help a fellow-Englishman out of a living hell. Five years I've lived in captivity among these crazy hangovers from the Sixteenth Century. For pity's sake, get me out, won't you?"

Ki-Gor felt his hands trembling a little. He had understood practically everything the old man said and the language he spoke was caressingly familiar to his ears.

"You are English?" the old man pleaded, "or are you American?"

"What is the name of the language we are speaking?" Ki-Gor asked suddenly.

"Great Scott!" the old man said, "Don't you know? You're speaking it! Like an Englishman—or as a matter of fact, you sound a bit American. Who the deuce are you, anyway?"

Here Braga suddenly broke in, speaking Haussa and ordering the old man to hold his tongue. But Braga was interrupted by Ki-Gor.

"You, Braga," he said, "and all the rest of you will go away and leave this man with me."

"But Your Majesty!" Braga cried aghast. "It is not right! He is evil—he cannot stay alone with you—he might bewitch you..."

"I have spoken!" Ki-Gor snapped. "Now go!"

Ignoring the astounded glances of the knights and ladies as they filed out of the room, Ki-Gor reverted to the English language and spoke to the old man.

"Are you a doctor?" he asked him.

"No, I'm an archaeologist," the old man replied. "My name is Joseph Ussher. I'm sorry I'm not a doctor, but I can dress wounds of course. I see your wrist is banded..."

"It's not my wrist," Ki-Gor said, "it's my head."

"What happened?" Ussher asked.

The jungle man felt intuitively that the grey-bearded stranger could be trusted. On the other hand, his stern life in the jungle

had developed a habit of wariness and suspicion which even his complete loss of memory could not destroy. He decided before confiding in Ussher to question him further.

"You said you were an..."

"Archaeologist," Ussher supplied. "We dig back into the past."

"Yes, I know," Ki-Gor said, and wondered why he knew. "What were you looking for when you were captured?"

"Why, this very place," Ussher replied. "You see, I knew about the battle back in the year 1577 in which Sebastiano, King of Portugal, disappeared while his army was completely destroyed. I was always struck by the fact that so few survivors ever reached Portugal. It stood to reason that some of the Portuguese chivalry might have fled southward from Morocco and survived as a group. The idea had always fascinated me. Six years ago, I prepared a trip to explore this region. My expedition was on a small scale, and my little group got scattered. I was taken prisoner by the Maba who turned me over to the Portuguese. So I arrived at my destination, but as a prisoner, and so I have remained for five years. I have tried to escape without success, and I have sent several messengers out, but evidently none of them got through to civilization."

"IT HAS been a fearful five years, I can tell you," Ussher continued. "At first I was fascinated to find a community which was living exactly as people did three hundred and sixty years ago, with customs, institutions, beliefs, and even clothes and weapons preserved from antiquity in every detail. But then I found out how difficult life must have been back in Sixteenth Century Portugal. For a more ignorant, gullible, ferocious and cruel group of people couldn't be found anywhere. In modern days in Portugal there is a poetic legend about Sebastiano surviving the battle and living somewhere in a cave, and that he will someday come back. These people in Santa Cruz believe the Sebastiano legend is a fact—never have doubted it through the generations. And when you came along, a giant warrior-like man with your left arm injured, they jumped to the conclusion that their prophecy—as they called it—had been fulfilled. I was foolish

enough to scoff at the legend, which angered them. And now that Sebastiano has apparently really come back, they regard me as a blasphemer, and want to burn me at the stake."

Ussher stopped and threw up his hands in a gesture of mute appeal.

"And whoever you really are, *they* think you are Sebastiano," he added. "You have all the authority of Sebastiano. I appeal to you to use that authority to save my life—and to get me out to civilization, if possible."

"I will try, Ussher," Ki-Gor said, "but it may be difficult. Everything is very strange to me. I have to learn so many things. If I am not Sebastiano..."

"Why, of course you're not," Usher interrupted testily. "No man yet has lived to be four hundred years old."

"I was saying," Ki-Gor said slowly, "that if I am not Sebastiano I don't know who I am."

"What do you mean?" Ussher cried.

"They tell me I hurt my head a few days ago—just after they found me in the jungle. And ever since then I can't remember anything, not my name or where I came from, or anything."

"Amnesia!" Ussher said in a startled voice. "That can be the result of a head injury. Oh dear—I'm very sorry to hear it."

"Amnesia," Ki-Gor repeated slowly. "Can it be cured? Will I ever remember who I really was or where I came from?"

"I'm sorry to say I don't know much about it," Ussher said. "I remember vaguely reading once about shock treatment of one kind or another—but just what sort of shock treatment, I don't know. Look here," Ussher added, struck with an idea, "if you got me out of here and *came with me*, I would get you the best possible treatment in the world. I'm a man of some standing at home, and I promise you I'll have your amnesia cured if it's possible to cure it. How about it? Is it a bargain?"

Ki-Gor gazed at the old man in silence. Was he trustworthy? Could he be believed any more than any one else in this distressing memoryless world he found himself in? Before the jungle man had found the answer in his own mind, there was an urgent rapping at the door.

"Who is it?" Ki-Gor called out.

"Braga," came the answer from the other side of the door.

"Come in," Ki-Gor commanded, and the little knight sidled in, eyes wide with apprehension. He hesitated momentarily then shut the door and drew the great bolt across it.

"Why do you do that?" Ki-Gor demanded.

"I will tell you, Majesty," Braga answered soberly. "There is trouble brewing."

HE WALKED across the room and knelt before Ki-Gor. "Please have faith in me, Majesty," he said. "Weigh my words and know that I speak the truth."

"Very well," Ki-Gor said grimly, "Go on."

"The Council is very indignant. They say their rights were violated when you sent them away while you talked alone with Ah-sha here."

"Do you believe that?" Ki-Gor demanded.

"Technically, it is so," Braga said. "But I was—and am—ready to waive my rights, and I tried to persuade the rest to do the same. But they would not be persuaded."

"What does the Council want?" Ki-Gor asked.

"They want you to hand Ah-sha over to them immediately."

"What do they intend to do with him?"

"Try him for blasphemy," Braga said, "and they will convict him, without any doubt."

"And the penalty is death?"

"Death by burning," Braga said. Joseph Ussher groaned. In five years time, he had learned Hausa and was following the conversation perfectly.

"But I would not approve of this execution," Ki-Gor said, "and then the Council would have to vote unanimously against me."

"That is true," Braga said, hanging his head.

"You would vote with them?" Ki-Gor said.

"It would do no good if I didn't," Braga said sadly. "I already threatened to vote against them, and they in turn threatened to expel me from the Council if I did."

"But they can't do that, can they?" Ki-Gor said.

"Yes—unfortunately they can," Braga said sorrowfully. "Any six of the seven members of the Council can vote to expel the seventh member and elect a new person to his place. In view of that, it is better that I vote against you on the matter of Ah-sha. I would at least stay in the Council—and, Majesty, you need a friend there."

"Why should I need friends?" Ki-Gor exploded. "I am King Sebastiano—the Council can't hurt me!"

"The Council is very powerful. Even now they are spreading the rumor through Santa Cruz that your head injury has affected your mind, and that you may have to be confined until you get better."

"Ussher, do you believe that?" Ki-Gor demanded, turning to the old man.

"I most certainly do," Ussher confirmed. "After all, don't forget that they've done without King Sebastiano for a good many generations now, and all this time the Council has been all-powerful."

"You must believe it, Majesty," Braga appealed. "Up till this morning, you had nothing to worry about, because you had two friends on the Council—myself and Ysabel do Castello Branco. But after the way you humiliated her publicly at the executions she has become very bitter."

For a few moments nobody spoke, then Braga said, "Of course, there is one way to win back Ysabel to your side, Majesty, and if you take that way, you will once more have two friends on the Council."

"What is that way?" Ki-Gor demanded.

"Offer to make her your wife and queen."

VIII

KI-GOR made no immediate answer, and after a moment, Braga felt impelled to add, "She is most desirable, don't you think, Majesty? I have been conscious of her beauty for years."

"Can she be trusted?" Ki-Gor asked bluntly.

Braga sighed. "I have never trusted her, Majesty."

"Well then," Ki-Gor dismissed the idea, "it would be silly to marry her. But, I suppose it would do no harm to be pleasant to her."

"I don't think that will be enough," Braga said.

"At any rate," Ki-Gor said with decision. "Go and summon the Council to me now and I will talk to them."

"I recommend, Majesty, that you meet them in the Great Hall."

"Why?"

"Because," Braga pointed out, "the Great Hall will be crowded with people and you are popular with the people. The Council would not dare to lay hands on you in public."

"Braga, thank you," Ki-Gor said sincerely. "You have given me a weapon I needed. Come, let us go to the Great Hall."

He crossed to the inner wall of the great bedroom on which weapons of all kinds were festooned. He selected a heavy knife and thrust it into the sheath left empty when he lost his hunting knife. Then he took down a long slender lance which had a green and yellow pennon attached to the tip. Braga watched Ki-Gor in astonishment. It was a battle-lance, handled on horse-back with a great deal of effort by the little Portuguese knights, but Ki-Gor was carrying it as effortlessly as if it had been a rapier.

"I will precede you to the Hall, Majesty," Braga said hastily, "to warn the Council that you are coming."

Ki-Gor smiled indulgently at the little figure scurrying through the doorway, then turned to the old Englishman. "Come, Ussher," he invited, "you will come with me and sit beside me where you will have the protection of my spear."

"I take it you aren't going to let them burn me," Ussher said steadily.

"No, I am not," Ki-Gor answered. "I don't know whether I will go away with you, but I will send you away safely."

"Of course, I can never thank you adequately," Ussher said simply, "and I certainly don't want to sound ungrateful—but do you think you *can* send me out safely, without going with me?"

Ki-Gor stared at the floor for a moment, then said briefly, "We will see. Come, let's go to the Hall."

The crowd started to cheer Ki-Gor vociferously as he entered the Great Hall, but the cheers died away swiftly to a puzzled buzz when the crowd saw the ragged figure of Ussher at Ki-Gor's side. And Ki-Gor could feel the bewilderment in the Hall grow as he led the Englishman to the head

of the long table and ordered a chair for him placed beside his own. The Council were unable to conceal their resentment at this latest insult to their dignity and shot furious glances indiscriminately at the Englishman and the man who they believed was their king. Braga was a picture of fearful indecision.

Ki-Gor did not sit down, but stood leaning his weight on the battle-lance which his right arm embraced.

"Knights and Ladies of the Council," he began, "we are meeting now to consider the case of Ussher, the Englishman, whom some of you want to find guilty of blasphemy. This is a very serious crime and carries with it a dreadful penalty. Now, first, three points must be established—what was the blasphemous utterance, who made it, and who was blasphemed against.

"The utterance was a denial of the Prophecy that I would return after three hundred and sixty years and once more be King. The man who denied this Prophecy was not one of you, born and brought up to believe it. No, he was a stranger, an Englishman, who came among you in all good will. You did not return his good will, but imprisoned him for no reason and kept him imprisoned. There was no reason why he should believe our beliefs—he has his own beliefs, and is not bound by ours.

"If one of you people of Santa Cruz had denied the Prophecy, you would have made a blasphemous utterance. Ussher is not one of you, he is an Englishman. For him, denying the Prophecy was no blasphemy.

"Finally, who was blasphemed against? I was I, King Sebastiano! Who, then, is the only judge of the injury done or not done to me? I am! And I judge that absolutely no injury was done me by Ussher's utterance, and I freely pardon Ussher for denying my existence. Case dismissed."

THERE was blank silence in the Hall for a moment, and then polite applause started up here and there. Ki-Gor suspected that the people were impressed by his logic and his presentation of the case, but that they had been unable to understand his merciful attitude toward the Englishman, and were resentful at being cheated out of the spectacle of burn-

ing another human being to death.

"There is another case to settle," Ki-Gor went on, "the matter of the slave woman who was to be tortured this morning."

"That case is also disposed of, Your Majesty." It was Ysabel do Castello Branco. Her eyes flashing scornfully, she continued. "The slave woman disposed of it herself by escaping. Her man also escaped. He was a Chief whom we were holding as a hostage. And now all the slaves are very restless. If you will permit me to say so, Your Majesty, your intervention this morning is the cause of it all. They do not understand merciful treatment—they think it is a sign of weakness."

It was a shrewd attack and Ki-Gor knew it. He straightened up to his full height and held the lance at arm's length.

"Those who are strong," he declared, "can afford to be merciful. Are you strong, you knights and ladies of Santa Cruz, or did I choose the wrong moment to return?"

From all over the Hall came affirming cries which rose to a final shout of "Viva, O Rei! Viva, O Sebastiano!"

Ki-Gor sat down with a smile and ordered food to be served.

That night Ki-Gor and Ussher sat talking in the Royal Bedroom. Ki-Gor had ordered a cot prepared for the Englishman, having no confidence in the obedience of the Council.

"Even though you handled them very well," Ussher said, "I think you are in a very tricky situation here. I think that not only for my benefit but for your own, you ought to go away with me."

"I can trust Braga," Ki-Gor said. "I will send him with some loyal Haussas to take you south over the mountains to the spot where they found me. From there you can follow any river course downstream until you come to a settlement."

"That's all very well to assign Braga to me," Ussher countered, "but with him away what happens to you? Braga is your only friend here—to warn you of what is going on."

"I will know what is going on," Ki-Gor said, "I do not need..."

He broke off and stared at the door. Somebody was knocking gently. Ki-Gor motioned Ussher into a large clothes-closet, then crossed the room and drew back the bolt. The battle-lance was leaning against

the wall near the door. He said, "Come in."

The door opened slowly and on the threshold stood Ysabel do Castello Branco. She was costumed for the night and she looked very beautiful. She floated into the Royal Bedroom, dreamy-eyed and moist-mouthed. Ki-Gor closed and barred the door behind her, and then stood questioning her with his eyes.

"Didn't you want me to come back?" she asked.

"Do you think it's wise?" Ki-Gor countered. "How many people know you are here?"

"No one, of course," the Lady Ysabel said, lowering her eyelashes. "I match discretion with discretion. Although, there is really no reason why I shouldn't be here. It is expected of me. The more so when it is also expected that..."

"That what?" Ki-Gor asked softly.

"That you may make me your Queen," the Lady Ysabel finished, lifting her eyes in a dazzling glance. "Oh, Sebastiano!" she cried suddenly, with an impulsive break in her voice, "Do it soon! Proclaim our marriage soon—tonight, even! You don't know it but you are in great danger! There are strong rumors going around that your mind is affected. There are members of the Council who think you should be locked up until you get better."

"Do you think my mind is affected?"

"Oh, no!" the Lady Ysabel protested. "Heavens no! It's the other members of the Council, Braga and the rest. Believe me, Sebastiano, I am your only friend on the Council. As your Queen I could be useful to you."

"Yes, I see that," Ki-Gor said. "But what can we do about this rumor that I'm insane?"

"Proclaim our marriage immediately," the Lady Ysabel said promptly. "That is what everyone expects you to do. And if you don't—the rumor will be believed."

IN A WAY, Ki-Gor admired the audacity of the woman. It was equal to her beauty. He wondered momentarily whether she was any more treacherous than Braga. Who, after all, could he believe? He had no experience to call on in his judgments of people.

"It is true," he said slowly, "that I lost

my memory from the injury to my head. But that is only temporary. I will soon regain that memory. In fact—" Ki-Gor decided to bluff a little—"it is already beginning to return to me."

"It is?" Ysabel said quickly. "Then who is the red-headed savage who was with you when Braga found you in the jungle?"

Ki-Gor gave an inward start. She had called his bluff, and his mind worked frantically for an answer.

"Ah, you haven't remembered her yet," Ysabel said mockingly.

"Certainly I have," Ki-Gor said coolly. "I remember her very well. She was the first memory to come back to me. She is my wife."

"A savage?" Ysabel's voice rose impudently. "She couldn't be. A concubine, perhaps—which would mean nothing to me..."

"No," Ki-Gor said, and decided to make his story good, "She is no savage woman. She dressed in that fashion to conform with me. She is my lawful wife."

"But the King of Portugal can only marry among the nobility of Portugal," Ysabel cried. "Or royal princesses from foreign countries."

"The red-headed woman," Ki-Gor said slowly, "is a royal princess of England."

"Oh!" Ysabel gasped, a hand creeping tragically to her mouth. "Oh! Then Your Majesty has been playing with me—jesting with me—mocking me!"

She turned slightly and ran past him to the door. She pulled the bolt back with an angry yank and dragged the heavy door open. A blaze of flickering light poured into room from the row of torches outside the door. The hallway was full of people whom Ysabel do Castello Branco addressed in ringing tones.

"O Knights and Ladies of Santa Cruz, it is my painful duty to tell you that our gracious King, Sebastiano the Conqueror, is temporarily insane! For his own good, he must be taken into custody."

Before she had finished her denunciation, Ki-Gor had reacted to the carefully planned treachery. With one bound he had reached and seized the battle-lance. And when Ysabel finished, she turned to find the point of the lance levelled at her.

"Back!" he commanded, and she looked fearfully behind her at the row of hal-

berds lowered not two feet from her slender back. Then a calculating look came into her eyes, and she suddenly dropped to the floor and rolled away to one side. There was shouted command and three Haussa halberdiers started forward.

Brutal mercenaries though they were, Ki-Gor made a lightning decision to try to spare their lives as well as preserve his own life and keep his freedom. To do that, he must somehow push the Haussas back off the threshold and shut and bolt the door which now stood half open. As these thoughts flew through his brain, his powerful hands were reversing the long lance. The tip shot upwards and back in an arc over his head, and the butt swung down and then forward. Ki-Gor relaxed his hands momentarily and the heavy pole slid forward by its own momentum. The Haussa on the right caught the full impact of the flying butt on his shoulder. The black soldier gave a hoarse cry and staggered backward, his halberd clanging on the floor.

Ki-Gor's great hands recovered control of the lance high up on the point, and swiftly he dragged it back hand over hand. The Haussa on the left had paused to look at his fallen companion, but the one in the middle came on, halberd levelled at Ki-Gor's mid-section. The jungle man snaked his body to one side of the razor-sharp blade, took one swift step forward and swung the lance-butt at the Haussa's head. The big black took the blow just above his ear. The halberd slipped out of his suddenly nerveless fingers, his knees buckled, and he collapsed unconscious.

The remaining Haussa gave an alarmed cry and stepped back. But Ki-Gor's lance-butt crashed down on his hands and battered the halberd to the floor.

By now, the press of knights, ladies, Haussas, and torchbearers in the hallway was in a state of wildest confusion. Some of the knights were exhorting Haussas to seize Ki-Gor, while they pushed backward out of range of the terrible lance. Four hulking blacks finally came forward cautiously.

Ki-Gor raised the lance-butt high and leaped at them with a fearsome roar. It was enough. The crowd behind the Haussas broke into complete panic, and the four soldiers dropped their halberds and hurled

themselves backward. It was the moment Ki-Gor needed to save himself. Still holding the lance ready, he danced backward over the threshold, seized the door with his left hand and slammed it shut. Then he drew the bolt across, and leaned panting against the door, listening to the hubbub outside.

"Oh, Ki-Gor! Are you all right?"

THE VOICE was behind him in the room. It was a woman's voice and she was speaking English.

The jungle man whirled and instinctively brought the tip of the lance forward. By the dim light of the single torch, he saw standing in front of a window a beautiful young woman dressed in a brief garment of skins. Beside her was a gnome-like figure, a tiny wrinkled black man.

"Who are you?" Ki-Gor demanded, "and how did you get in here?"

"Why, darling, it's me," ~~Helene~~ ^{Helene} said, "and we climbed up a rope that N'geeso fastened to this window sill."

"Who are you?" Ki-Gor snapped again.

"Why are you acting so strangely, Ki-Gor?" Helene's voice was distressed. "I've been so worried about you..."

She moved toward the jungle man with outstretched hands.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Stay right where you are!" Ki-Gor had had enough of women who wanted to embrace him. But as he stared at her, his heart began to pound and his mind was suddenly crowded with a phantasmagoria of confused, rapidly changing pictures. The woman in front of him was elusively familiar. He felt a curious sensation of having seen her somewhere before. But where—he could not for the life of him remember.

"Ki-Gor, darling!" Helene cried in despair, "Do you mean you don't remember me? Not at all?"

"Who are you?" Ki-Gor repeated without expression.

"Oh, dear!" Helene whispered, "What am I going to do! Don't you remember anything of our life together. Don't you remember N'geeso? Do you remember falling out of the tree and hitting your head..."

She stopped suddenly as if she had made a discovery, and Ki-Gor for the first

time saw that her hair was red-gold in the torchlight.

"Were you with me when I hurt my head?" he demanded.

"Of course, I was."

"Why then," Ki-Gor said quickly, "you must be the red-headed woman!"

"I am, darling," Helene said sadly, "I'm your wife. But apparently that blow on the head gave you amnesia."

Ki-Gor felt shaken. His wife! He had unwittingly told Lady Ysabel the truth! And this beautiful creature standing in front of him now really *was* his wife.

"Now will you put down that spear," Helene said, plaintively, "and let me come near you? Because I love you so, and it's been just awful these last few days—I've wanted to help you, but I didn't know how. If it hadn't been for N'geeso..."

She moved past the lowered point of the lance to his side and took his huge hand in hers and looked up at him. He saw that her eyes were not only lovely, but were honest and unafraid. They expressed a completely different personality from Ysabel do Castello Branco with her artful glances. And this exquisite person was his wife. For a fleeting instant, he wondered whether he could trust her any more than he could trust anybody in this strange world he found himself in. Then he suddenly thought of the old Englishman.

"Oh, Ussher!" he called. "I forgot about you for a minute. Come out and meet my wife."

"Ussher?" Helene exclaimed. "J. Ussher? Did you find him?"

"I should say he did," the Englishman said, coming out of the closet. "I am very glad to meet you."

Sudden suspicion chilled Ki-Gor's breast, and he shot a startled glance at Ussher and then back at the woman who called herself his wife.

"You two know each other?" he demanded accusingly.

"Why, of course not, darling," Helene said and her honest eyes looked straight into his. "Don't you remember how I found that box—oh, of course, you don't remember. Oh dear, it's a long story...Right now, we ought to be on our way. Mr. Ussher can go right along with us."

"Where are we going?" Ki-Gor asked suspiciously.

"Why, away from here, darling," Helene answered with surprise in her voice. "Why are you looking at me that way?"

"What was the box you found?" Ki-Gor asked quietly.

"Oh, it's too long a story, really, Ki-Gor," she replied, "And we must start. N'geeso and I have planned the escape."

KI-GOR turned away with a troubled expression. "I was going to send Ussher out, but I wasn't sure whether I would go or not," he said.

"Whether you would go or not?" Helene echoed faintly. "Ki-Gor, are you crazy?"

The Lady Ysabel had called him crazy—for reasons of her own. What was this woman up to?

"No, I am not crazy," he said steadily. "You don't seem to understand that I am king of this place."

"And you don't seem to understand," Helene retorted, "that you're a prisoner in this place."

"Forgive me for putting in my oar," Ussher said, suddenly, "but really she's more or less right, old man. Especially, now. Ysabel gave you a last chance to play on her side, and you saw what happened when you turned her down. By now, probably the whole city is being informed that you're a dangerous maniac, and the Council will stop at nothing to put you behind bars. Any moment now, I expect they'll be coming back in force to break that door down. And, if I were you, I wouldn't be here when they come."

"Ki-Gor," Helene said, decisively. "You must come and come now. You owe it to N'geeso and me. Incidentally, poor N'geeso is terribly hurt that you haven't spoken to him. He can't speak English and he doesn't know what is the matter with you. Go over and speak to him."

Ki-Gor went to the wrinkled little pygmy, wondering what language to use. But the little man solved the problem by speaking first, and Ki-Gor understood perfectly and answered in the same series of clicks.

"*Ai-ee*, Big Brother," N'geeso crackled, "I thought thou hadst completely forgot me."

"I have," Ki-Gor said, and N'geeso gave a little squeak. "I fell from the tree..."

"Aye, I saw thee fall," N'geeso interjected.

"And since then," Ki-Gor continued, "I remember nothing of what went on before."

"The gods save us!" N'geeso cried. "What a terrible thing! Thou must come away from this accursed place, Ki-Gor, and these accursed people. When thou art once again among familiar scenes, perhaps thy lost memory will return."

"I wonder," Ki-Gor said, and was struck with the idea. He stood thinking for a moment, and then turned to Helene. "Very well," he said. "How do we go?"

"By the rope N'geeso climbed up and tied to your window."

Ki-Gor crossed the room and examined N'geeso's work, tugging at the thick rope carelessly knotted around the bar.

"It will hold, all right, Big Brother," the pygmy grinned. "I had two big Mabas down below hang on it to test it."

"Mabas?" Ki-Gor said in surprise.

"Aye, Big Brother, we made some friends among them. We never in the world could get thee out of this fearful place without their help."

"Can you trust them?" Ki-Gor said.

"Aye, they hate the strange white men with the long knives, and when we told them we also hated them, they said they would help us. But let us not sit here talking—is the old white man coming with us?"

"Yes."

"Then," said the pygmy, "Big Sister should descend first, then the old man, thou, and finally N'geeso."

"I will go last," Ki-Gor said.

"It must be me," N'geeso explained. "I will detach the rope and climb down by the wall. In that way, they may not discover thy disappearance so soon."

Ki-Gor nodded agreement and explained the procedure to Ussher, after which the oddly-assorted quartet set off on the first leg of their journey.

IX

WHEN KI-GOR'S feet hit the ground, he followed N'geeso's directions and ran swiftly down to a hut, the middle one of three which stood close together at the base of the hill. As he lifted aside the heavy curtain at the entrance, and slipped inside, he saw that besides Helene and

Ussher there were four brawny native men and a woman in the hut.

"Greetings, Lord Ki-Gor," one of the men said. "I am Putesti, Chief of the Gorithi-Maba. These are my nephews, and this is my woman, Lona. You saved her from death by torture this morning, so now your life is our concern."

Ki-Gor shot a glance at the Maba woman and saw that it was the former slave of the Lady Yasbel. Her strong face was impassive, but her burning eyes expressed boundless gratitude.

"I only did what was just," Ki-Gor murmured.

"We will never forget it," Putesti said. He looked past Ki-Gor and added, "It is time to go—here is N'geeso."

"Perhaps it is too late," N'geeso panted. "They were pounding on the outside of the door as I went out of the window."

"Come, let us hurry," Putesti said. "Put on these dark robes to cover your whiteness. We will go by a friendly route down to the water-front. I have two canoes which will take us all."

As they filed out of the hut after Putesti, the jungle man fought down an odd feeling of resentment at being called "Ki-Gor." In this new world—which was the only one he could remember—he was Sebastiano. Ussher and the beautiful woman who said she was his wife had told him that he was not Sebastiano. Those two were people he instinctively trusted, and yet he wondered why he should trust them more than anyone else. It was curious, for instance, that his wife apparently knew Ussher and yet denied that she had ever seen him. Ki-Gor could find no explanation for that contradiction. Were these people right, Ki-Gor asked himself, or was he really Sebastiano and not Ki-Gor at all? How could he tell?

These questions refused to be dislodged from the jungle man's mind, and as he followed Putesti through the network of narrow tree-enclosed alleys, he became less and less anxious to leave Santa Cruz with his new companions.

The little group had gone scarcely a hundred yards on their way, when there was a distant commotion behind them. Ki-Gor looked back and saw that the windows of the Citadel were ablaze with lights. Excited shouts hung on the night

air, and black dots flitted from window to lighted window.

"They've discovered your absence!" Putesti whispered. "We must hurry before they set the Haussas patrolling the waterfront!"

As the Maba chief increased the pace, the tumult grew in volume behind the fleeing group. Ki-Gor felt a vague disgust with himself for running away. He felt somehow that he was not the kind of person who ran away.

The huts were beginning to come alive as Putesti led the group past them at a dead run. And by the time they reached the water front, the whole jungle city was awake. Putesti hastily divided his party between the two dugouts that were drawn up on the narrow beach. The Maba men pushed the canoes out into the water and Putesti motioned to his friends to get in.

Ki-Gor took two reluctant steps toward the canoes and then suddenly stopped.

"Helene," he said. "I'm not going."

"Ki-Gor!" Helene whispered fiercely. "It's too late to change your mind! Come on!"

"You go ahead," Ki-Gor said, obdurately.

"No, Ki-Gor, you must come with us," Helene pleaded. "They may even kill you!"

"No, they won't," Ki-Gor replied. "After all, they think I'm Sebastiano—even if you say I'm not!"

HELENE stepped out of her canoe, a paddle in her hand. She was trembling with the sudden decision she had made, but the time had come for drastic measures.

"Ki-Gor, we haven't time to argue," she said firmly. "For the last time will you come with us?"

"No," said Ki-Gor.

"Look! Look up the beach!" Helene said, turning suddenly and pointing. Then as Ki-Gor turned away from her, she swung the paddle swiftly at the back of his head. There was a sharp crack and Ki-Gor collapsed on the sand.

"Pick him up and put him in the canoe," Helene directed, her voice crisp.

It took all four of the Maba men to put Ki-Gor's huge limp body into the canoe, and then Putesti gave Durri and Gotu final instructions.

"Stay close," he told them, "and don't make a sound. We will try to get to the Meeting Island."

The moon—three-quarters full—came up over the city of Santa Cruz as the Maba paddles dug into the water and the two canoes headed out across a wide open stretch toward a dark, distant wall of jungle.

Dipping her paddle with the rest, Helene wished with all her heart that the circumstances were different. It was a beautiful night. Behind her, Santa Cruz looked quaint rather than menacing. It was hard to believe that the twinkling torches winding among the trees did not mean a gay festival instead of a ruthless manhunt. And the mellow tropical moonlight that bathed the serene surface of the lake with such beauty would also reveal the fugitives clearly to any pursuers.

The canoes moved swiftly side by side, and Helene began to breathe easier after about ten minutes went by and no sign of pursuit could be seen in the moonlit water behind them. It seemed to her now that they were more than half the way across the bay that separated them from the long line of mangroves. She could sense a general slackening of tension among the others in her canoe—all of them except N'geeso who crouched in front of her and grunted softly every now and then. He kept twisting and turning his head, peering this way and that into the night. Finally he leaned back and put his mouth close to Helene's ear.

"I thought we were supposed to stay close to the other canoe," the pygmy grumbled.

She nodded and looked back. She was startled to see that Putesti's canoe had dropped far behind. She put her mouth to Lona's ear and asked her about it. Lona answered that they were so close to the opposite shore that it now no longer was necessary to stay close to the other canoe. Helene nodded and gave one more backward glance before resuming the rhythm of paddling. Her heart gave a little jump as she saw that the other canoe had stopped. It was lying in the moon-path clearly to be seen, no longer bow-on but at right angles to them. Helene stared, wondering what could have happened. Then it seemed to her one of the figures was

waving an arm, as if motioning for a different course to be taken. Helene touched Lona on the arm and pointed. As the Maba woman looked again, she whispered a command to the young men. They stopped paddling.

"Why has Putesti stopped?" one of them whispered.

"Now he has started again," the other replied, "But he's going off southward—looks as if he's going for the South Passage."

"Why is he doing that?" the first one said. "The Middle Passage here is nearer."

"Maybe he has cat's eyes like me," N'geeso said. "Maybe he can see those four canoes coming out of the jungle towards us!"

A COLLECTIVE gasp went over the Mabas and they dug their paddles deep to turn the canoe around. Helene saw then with dismay the four long war canoes churning toward them, and while she dug her paddle with the rest, she was dreadfully afraid that it was going to be a hopeless race.

The Mabas were paddling a course now parallel to the shore, driving southward. The water rushed and rippled as the dug-out tore through it, and the breathing of the paddlers grew loud and harsh.

"I think we're holding our own!" one of the young men gasped.

"No," the other groaned, "they're gaining on us!"

Even though she was in fine condition, Helene began to wonder after ten minutes of sprinting how long she could keep it up. She wondered how long, for that matter, the blacks could continue at that rate. The answer came a moment later when Lona gulped and laid down her paddle.

"It's no use," she said. "Our chances are better swimming."

"I can't swim!" N'geeso croaked.

"Gotu will support you," Lona said. "Keep your hands on his shoulders and he will swim you to shore. Come, let's tip the canoe to the right and then scatter—everyone swim in a different direction."

Slowly the canoe tilted under the weight of its occupants, and then suddenly shot over. Helene dived free and was astonished when she popped instantly to the surface. She spat out some water and realized for

the first time that the lake was salty. It was very salty, saltier than the ocean. Her body was supported high out of the water, a bright, attractive object in the moonlight.

It seemed no time at all when a long canoe full of Haussas glided up beside her and hauled her over the side.

FOR THE second time in five days, Ki-Gor groaned and stirred and opened his eyes and felt the back of his head. He sat up abruptly and saw that he was in a moonlit clearing in the jungle. A large number of blacks filled the clearing, and immediately in front of him stood a Maba chief and a grey-bearded white man in ragged clothes.

"Who are you," Ki-Gor demanded, springing to his feet, "and what is this place?"

"My name is Ussher," the white man said gravely, "and I have a lot of things to explain to you in a very short time."

"Ussher?" Ki-Gor said and he remembered the metal box Helene had found. "Oh, you were somebody's prisoner—my wife found a message from you—wait a minute." Ki-Gor looked swiftly around the circle of black faces and then back at the white man. "Where is my wife?" he demanded.

"She is the prisoner, now," Ussher said, soberly.

"Where?" Ki-Gor said instantly.

"I think we'd better begin at the beginning," said Ussher. "You see, you fell out of a tree and were knocked unconscious..."

"I remember running from the Haussas," Ki-Gor said. "Yes, and I remember starting up a tree—Helene was already up. How long have I been unconscious?"

"I'm not sure," Ussher said, "I wasn't there when it happened, you know, but I think this happened about five days ago."

"Five days!" Ki-Gor said, incredulously, "Where have I been all that time? And where is Helene now?"

Ussher took a deep breath and told the astounded jungle man the detailed story of his life as Sebastiano the Conqueror, King of Portugal. Ki-Gor listened grim-faced to the recital. When Ussher told of the knife-throwing episode, the jungle man took the strange black-handled knife out of the sheath at his waist and

inspected it curiously, and when the Englishman continued on to the efforts of the Lady Ysabel to marry him, Ki-Gor gave a snort of disgust. He could scarcely contain himself when Ussher described the scene on the beach where Helene was forced to knock him out in order to get him away from Santa Cruz.

"Miserable fool!" he muttered. "To think that I would ever act like that!"

"You couldn't help it, old man," Ussher said kindly, "You only had our word for it that you weren't Sebastiano."

"What happened after that?" Ki-Gor demanded. "How did Helene fall into their hands again?"

Ussher told him briefly of the trap the other canoe had fallen into on the lake. Ki-Gor listened burning-eyed, and when the Englishman had finished, he stood for a moment silent, his mind rapidly revolving ideas for the rescue of Helene.

"I must go to that city immediately," he said finally. "There is no time to lose."

"I agree," said Ussher, "and you won't be going alone. But first listen to what your little pygmy friend has to tell you."

"N'geeso?" Ki-Gor said, looking about him, "Is he here?"

"Aye, Big Brother," the pygmy cackled, descending a tree near Ki-Gor, "The gods be praised thou hast thy memory back. Never have I known a worse moment than when you looked at me without recognition."

"That is all over, Little Brother," Ki-Gor replied. "What is this you have to tell me."

"Simply this," the pygmy said. "This man here"—he indicated Putesi—"is our ally. He is Chief of the Gorithi-Maba, and all these men here are Gorithi-Maba. They live here in the islands of the great swamp and the Haussas cannot reach them."

"Just a minute," Ki-Gor interrupted, turning to Putesi. "How many warriors have you?" he asked the chief.

"Ten times ten times ten," Putesi replied, "and they are coming here from all over the great swamp. You can hear the signal drums, and the canoes are landing every minute."

"There is more to tell, Ki-Gor," N'geeso said, touching Ki-Gor's arm. "Thy woman discovered that this Gotu belongs to the Brotherhood of the Dog and so they

trusted each other. And he told her that the Maba were forbidden weapons, and she asked him why they did not make their own bows and arrows secretly. And she showed him by making one herself. So for the past four days the slaves in Santa Cruz and the Mabas of the mainland have been making bows and arrows. And then Putesi escaped from Santa Cruz and was planning a rebellion when thy woman and I persuaded him to help us get thee out of Santa Cruz also. We said thou would help in the rebellion."

"We had not planned it for so soon," Putesi interposed.

"That is your affair," Ki-Gor said grimly. "As for me, I must go back tonight."

"And we are going with you," Putesi added, equally grimly. "N'geeso did not tell you that my woman Lona was recaptured along with your wife, tonight. We must act swiftly to save their lives."

Ki-Gor strode over to the Maba chief and gripped his hand.

"Draw me a map of this region," he said, "and tell me what your plans are."

X

ENRIQUE DE BRAGA sat trembling on a bench far down in the amphitheatre close to the arena. Exhilarated excitement and fearful apprehension alternated within him. Would Sebastiano come back this morning to save his red-headed woman as she had told the Council he would? Would he produce magic and surely save her?

The little knight thought back on the stormy session of the Council which had concluded scarcely half an hour before. How magnificently the red-headed woman had conducted herself! Braga was quite willing to believe that she was Sebastiano's lawful queen. She had been cool and unafraid as first one member of the Council and then another flung questions at her. She had not denied that Sebastiano was Sebastiano, but she did insist that he had awakened and left the cave years before, and had married her, and that they had lived happily in the jungle. And when Ysabel do Castello Branco taunted her and called her a low jungle woman, the red-headed woman had answered calmly that she was no jungle woman but was of

high American ancestry. That was when Ysabel had made a mistake.

She shrieked that Sebastiano had told her that his wife was an English princess. This startled the Council, because none of them except Ysabel knew this, and they asked her about it. Ysabel had passed it off by saying that obviously Sebastiano had been lying to protect the woman, and the woman had exposed the lie by telling a different story from Sebastiano's. The Council finally expressed its satisfaction with Ysabel's explanation—all of them except himself, Enrique de Braga.

When the Council had finally condemned the red-headed woman to burn at the stake, she had not turned a hair. She told the Council that they were taking their own lives in their hands, that Sebastiano would return with high magic, and not only save her life, but would also wreak a terrible vengeance on Santa Cruz. She had added that Sebastiano was implacable and would even go so far as to arouse the slaves against their Portuguese masters.

And Enrique de Braga had believed the red-headed woman and had decided to be on her side. He could not, of course, prevent her execution single-handed — only Sebastiano could do that and even he would need magic. But Braga had thought to talk to a dozen of his most trusted Haussas and warn them to obey him no matter what extraordinary orders he might give them. Sebastiano might be late in arriving, in which case delays would have to be created.

Enrique de Braga had arrived early at the amphitheatre and had seated himself near his twelve loyal Haussas so as to be ready for any eventuality. And now as he sat fidgeting and twiddling the hilt of his rapier, it seemed to him that the preparations for the executions were proceeding with alarming rapidity.

The knights and ladies were pouring into the amphitheatre, spreading around as each found favorite spots to sit. The section reserved for slaves was quickly filling up, too. Braga wondered vaguely why so many of the slaves were wearing their loose brown robes. Early that morning it had been cool, but as the sun mounted higher the air was getting quite hot.

Now, a group of Haussas was busy

erecting the upright target for the Ceremony of Winged Knives. Ysabel was going to finish the job on the Maba slave woman which Sebastiano had interrupted. That was to be the first event on the program. Then a male slave was to be given the Bull Fight, after which the red-headed woman was scheduled to be burned.

Another group of Haussas began preparing the burning-stake, and while they were doing that a dozen or so slaves came in with armloads of firewood which they dropped on the sand near the stake. The slaves kept on coming in with wood and going out for more until Braga could hardly sit still.

Where was Sebastiano? he asked himself. In a very short time the executions would begin. The Haussas had almost finished the stake, were in fact nailing in place the narrow platform on which the woman must stand, six feet off the ground. Braga turned over in his mind what he could do to delay the proceedings in case Sebastiano was late. Fleeting, a cold little doubt crept into his mind. Suppose Sebastiano never came? But the little knight chased the thought out of his mind as being unworthy of him.

THE HAUSSAS withdrew to the edge of the arena and the slaves went to work piling firewood at the base of the stake. From Braga's point of view, they were agonizingly efficient and swift at the task. It seemed no time when they had finished. Then through the main entrance of the arena came more Haussas with the morning's victims: first the bony Maba woman, then a terrified black man, and finally the red-headed woman. How gloriously she carried herself, Braga thought, every inch a queen! Even when she was chained to the middle one of the three posts in the arena, she held her head high, and her blue eyes flashed defiance.

Now came fat old Antonio da Gama, the Master of Ceremonies, to ask the Council's permission to begin the executions, and Braga began to get seriously alarmed. He rattled his rapier nervously in its scabbard and twisted his head back and forth to watch the three entrances to the amphitheatre. His king must come soon!

The Maba woman was brought out and

placed in the clamps of the up-ended platform, and Ysabel do Castello Branco minced out, dressed in her man's doublet and boots, and followed by the four slaves with the bags of knives. Braga's heart began to pound. He looked wildly around the amphitheatre for some sign of his king.

His eye caught Antonio da Gama, the fat Master of Ceremonies, bending over the pile of firewood under the burning-stake. The portly knight straightened up with an indignant shout.

"Wait!" he cried, "Something is wrong! This firewood is soaking wet! It wouldn't catch fire for hours!"

Braga leaned back with a sigh of relief while Antonio da Gama scolded the slaves and asked them why they hadn't reported the condition of the firewood. The slaves answered that they were not supposed to comment on the quality of the wood. They had been shown a pile of wood and ordered to carry it in to the stake. It was none of their business if the wood was water-soaked.

When the fat knight ordered them to go and collect an equal amount of dry wood, the slaves inclined their heads in acquiescence but reminded him that it would take some time. They would have to go through the city collecting a piece here, a piece there. And when the fat knight cursed them and told them to be off and get the wood as quickly as they could, Braga grinned to himself. This was undoubtedly some magic of Sebastiano's.

Then Ysabel do Castello Branco stepped forward and raised her voice, and Braga's grin disappeared from his earnest face.

"I have a suggestion to offer the Council," she said, in a clear penetrating voice. "Instead of waiting for hours while these stupid Mabas collect dry wood, I offer an alternative ceremony. I ask the Council to change the sentence of the red-headed woman from burning at the stake to my Ceremony of Winged Knives. I have a personal reason for asking this. The red-headed woman, though of low estate, has lived intimately with our unfortunate King, and for this my woman's jealousy is aroused. I wish to put her to death with my own hands. What does the Council say to this?"

While the amphitheatre buzzed, the Council took a rapid poll. The President

stood up and announced, "Although the Fidalgo Enrique de Braga is not present, the Council presumes he joins the rest in voting unanimously to approve the suggestion of the Lady Ysabel do Castello. The red-headed woman shall be put to death by the Ceremony of Winged Knives."

Braga sat frozen at his place beside the arena. It would have been worse than useless for him to have objected. It would only have drawn suspicion upon him and perhaps have warned the Council to watch him. He must be able to strike a sudden blow if necessary.

And, with every flying second it looked as if it *were* going to be necessary for him to strike a sudden blow. The Maba woman was taken out of the clamps on the target, and the red-headed woman substituted. The Lady Ysabel took a knife from one of the slaves and balanced it in one delicate hand while a cruel smile spread over her dark, beautiful face.

"Now, O Jungle Woman!" she taunted. "Where is your Sebastiano?"

WITH AN incoherent yelp, little Braga vaulted over the railing into the arena.

"My Haussas!" he shouted, drawing his slender rapier. "Follow me and fight the world if necessary!"

The crowd stood up as one man and gasped in amazement, as the little knight went flying across the arena followed by a dozen Haussas with halberds lowered. The Lady Ysabel turned and stared at the charging group in astonishment.

"What madness is this!" she cried, and then cried out again as she saw Braga suddenly stop and wave his sword high in the air. He was looking past her at somebody else.

"You've come!" Braga shouted ecstatically. "Your Majesty, you've come! Work your magic quickly, O Sebastiano, for we are but fourteen to save your jungle queen!"

Ysabel whirled and stared with superstitious dread at the giant figure who was walking across the arena toward her. Then suddenly her face contorted with fury and she turned and took a step toward the helpless red-headed woman.

"You shall not have him!" she shrieked, and suddenly cocked her knife-hand. At

the same instant, Ki-Gor roared, and his mighty right arm coiled and snapped straight like a whip. The knife was a flying vengeance speeding across sixty paces of black sand. It caught Ysabel squarely between the breasts, and its weight flung her back six feet. She lay still for a second, then raised her right arm up, her knife still in her hand. Then the knife slipped from nerveless fingers, and the arm fell, and Ysabel de Castello Branco died.

A shocked moan went over the crowd of Portuguese, and then somebody shouted, "The King is mad! He must be taken into custody!" A savage shout followed and the knights drew their swords with a rasping clangor. Then Enrique de Braga ran a few steps towards the benches waving his rapier, and cried at the top of his voice, "Whoever tries to lay a hand on our King Sebastiano will have to fight me and my Haussas first! And we will sell our lives dearly!"

He turned and found Ki-Gor beside him. The bronzed giant was pointing to the tree-fringed rim of the amphitheatre.

"Look!" he roared, "and be advised not to move from your seats!" The tumult died away as the knights and ladies craned their necks. And low cries of alarm went up as they saw that the rim of the amphitheatre was crowded with heavily-armed Gorithi-Maba warriors, hundreds of them. At the same time, from the other end of the amphitheatre, the slaves poured out of the slave-section, shucking off their robes, and stringing tall bows. The Haussas, in the absence of any orders, stood perplexed. Ki-Gor raised his arms and the amphitheatre fell silent.

"Knights and ladies of Santa Cruz," he said, "if you wish to live through this day, you will put away your swords and sit down. The city has been invaded by the Gorithi-Maba and their allies, and your Maba slaves have risen against you. If you try to fight them you will all be slaughtered. As your King, I have your interests at heart. I have persuaded the leaders of the Gorithi-Maba not to fight you, if you will agree to certain things which I propose.

"First, you will immediately free all your slaves. Second, that you will send away your Haussas. Third, upon my abdication you will recognize as my lawful

successor and your undoubted King—the loyal and gracious fidalgo, Enrique de Braga.

"Those are the terms by which you may stay alive. If you accept them, I will lead away the armed host from Santa Cruz. I recommend that you live in peace among yourselves and your neighbors the Mabas, and that you cultivate habits of generosity and mercy."

THE PORTUGUESE sat in stunned silence as Ki-Gor turned on his heel and walked toward Helene. Some slaves were unfastening the last clamp as he came beside her, and she stood for a moment in silence rubbing her wrists.

"That was calling it pretty close," she said, matter-of-factly. "Don't say anything nice or I'll break down."

"I know," said Ki-Gor. "I'm bluffing them."

"Bluffing?" said Helene. "With the city full of thousands . . ."

"I hope they think so," Ki-Gor said. "But all the men we could scrape together on such short notice are here. Less than two hundred slaves with bows and less than four hundred Gorithi. If the Portuguese order the Haussas to fight, we are lost."

There was a movement of people in the amphitheatre and Ki-Gor turned to look. Enrique de Braga hastened toward him.

"Majesty!" Braga said. "It is the Council. They are coming down to the arena. Stay where you are and let them come to you. I will arrange my Haussas as a guard for you."

Two ladies and three knights picked their way down through the benches and out on to the arena. Silently they came toward Ki-Gor. About six paces away, they all dropped to their knees and the oldest of the knights spoke.

"Your Majesty, Sebastiano the Conqueror, we salute you. No longer Sebastiano the Conqueror, but Sebastiano the Savior. We agree to the terms of peace and we thank you deeply for saving our lives. We are desolated to accept your abdication but we are honored to accept as our undoubted King, Enrique de Braga."

The five stood up then and faced the crowd.

"Viva, O Sebastiano!" they shouted.

"Viva, O Rei! Viva, O Rei Enrique!"

The Portuguese then gave themselves over to frantic cheering. Ki-Gor let it go on for a while and then raised his hands for silence. He did not speak directly to the crowd, but they could hear him perfectly as he addressed Braga and the Council.

"As a sign to the Gorithi that you accept the terms of peace, order all the Haussas to drop their weapons where they stand and then to file out the main gate and go directly to the docks. There, they will get into the barges and the slaves will row them to the mainland. Tomorrow, I will lead the Haussas away over the mountains and show the way either to their homes, or to a place where they may find employment as soldiers. All the knights and ladies should keep their seats here until the sun hits the top of the sky. That is about two hours from now. By that time, slaves, Gorithi-Maba, and Haussas should all have left the city, and there will be no danger of any incidents. Agreed?"

"Agreed, Your Majesty," Braga said quickly, and then looked up with a confused smile.

"No longer," Ki-Gor said, smiling back. "It is I who call you 'Majesty' now."

Braga shook his head unbelievably and then ran off rapidly, baying orders at the Haussas.

A short while later, the soldiers, weaponless, marched out of the amphitheatre, followed by the slaves still holding their tall bows. Finally, Ki-Gor waved a general farewell, and then he and Helene crossed the arena to the main entrance, little Braga trotting beside them. Just before leaving the amphitheatre, the jungle man stopped and the little knight's slender right hand was in his own.

"I can't remember some things, O King," he said, "but I will never forget your loyalty today. I think you will be a just king, and I hope you will be a happy man. Good-bye."

Tears streamed down Braga's face and he poured a torrent of passionate Portuguese at Ki-Gor. Finally, the jungle lord released his hand, and he and Helene went quickly to the water-front. Putesti was waiting with a canoe. Once again, and for the last time they left the shore of Santa Cruz do Sebastiano.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933 of JUNGLE STORIES, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1946.

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

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

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

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Glen-Kel Publishing Company, Inc., 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y.; J. G. Scott, 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.)

(Signed) T. T. Scott,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1946.

GEORGE G. SCHWENKE,
Notary Public,

(My commission expires March 30, 1948.)



There was a lightning movement, a gripping of endless coils. He shrieked once.

DARK LAND

By ALLEN ROY EVANS

African justice moves slowly—as slowly as the Spotted One coiling in the warm Limpopo mud. But in the end, the jungle always avenges its own.

THE river mists lifted from the great Limpopo and the sun began its old sway over all the land of Mozambique. From the verandah of the company house Marie watched a flock of flamingoes trailing off to a distant vlei.

When they wheeled their wings caught the sun, making a bright pink cloud in the clear sky.

Marie Fernandez was still almost breathless with the miracle of modern transportation. It seemed but yesterday that she had

sat at breakfast with her father in the old family mansion in Oporto. Then the long plane flight to Mombasa, a brief transfer and a short hop to Laurence Marques; then the river steamer up the lazy Limpopo.

From the ancient streets of Oporto to the primitive tropics in a matter of hours! It was still incredible and a little frightening. At least the forest was frightening. It was so vast and silent and seemed to press in on the small clearing with a threatening certainty that some day it would swallow man's feeble effort and reclaim all the land to itself.

Marie watched the line of natives swaying down the gentle slope to the river bank. Each carried a big sack of coffee beans. Sometimes the sack was balanced on a shoulder; sometimes on a head. They did not use hands to balance their loads as white men did but the sacks never slipped from either heads or shoulders. They stacked the sacks on the wharf to be picked up by the next down-river boat.

Marie could see Pedro Gonzalo striding about in his high boots and always he carried a heavy sjambok. Why did a plantation manager need such a big whip? She blinked in the growing sunlight, trying to follow Pedro's movements.

He was changed, the tropics had done something to him. Back in Oporto he had been polite, considerate — everything a Portugese of good family should be. Now he seemed hard, relentless, with a dangerous glint in his eyes.

This idea of her father's did not seem so good now. He had asked her to come out here to distant Mozambique to see Pedro. The Fernandez women always obeyed their fathers or husbands. Once she had been willing to marry Pedro, but her father had refused consent. It all had to do with the great Portugese Equatorial Company. There were two factions in the company, each trying to obtain control. Once the Fernandez stockholders had been in control and old Diaz Fernandez had been opposed to Pedro who had been on the losing faction. Now the Gonzalos were on the up-grade and Pedro's influence was needed. He might still be in the mood for marriage.

Again Marie heard distant shrieks; at least so it seemed, although Pedro had explained that jungle sounds were decep-

tive. Now she heard his boots scuffling on the south verandah and then the heavy thud of the sjambok as he tossed it aside.

"Why do you carry so great a whip, Pedro?" Marie tried not to seem too interested. "What's it for?"

"Nothing," he scowled. "Just a symbol. A custom of plantation managers." His face was dark and moist from exertion.

"I though I heard screams, Pedro. Is someone sick? Could I do anything?"

HIS voice was harsh. "Parrots or a monkey you hear. You could do nothing."

"Is the coffee good this year, Pedro?" She tried to keep him from lapsing into a moody silence. Once he had been so gay and voluble.

"No! Yes, it's good enough." He was agitated and he began to pace the verandah. "If I can get it loaded, it's good enough. But the natives steal it. The black devils!"

"Whatever for?" She was alarmed by his violence. "They don't use it, surely?"

"They sell it, I think. We're too near Boer country. Boer niggers mix with river natives. Fingos, Basutos, Swazis, even Kaffirs. I'll beat the scum into the ground. Never will they spoil my record with the Company!" His face became murderous.

In his fury he rushed out into the growing heat. Marie saw him disappear between the coffee bushes. He carried the sjambok. Presently the sad, thin sounds of anguish came through the still air of the clearing.

Marie retreated into the darkened living room of the Company house. She knew Pedro was possessed with a tremendous ambition. Some day he hoped to be a big man in the home office. If he made good with these coffee plantations along the river he would be on his way to become a director. Undoubtedly that was why he dealt so harshly with native labor. He feared they would thwart his production record and endanger his promotion.

Then Pedro came in. She heard him mixing a drink in the back part of the house. He entered the room and handed her a glass. It was hard to see his face in the cool gloom of the living room.

"Why did you come?" Pedro demanded. "Let us be frank with each other."

"I wanted to go some place. First, I thought of America. Then my father said:

"Why not go down to Mozambique and see how Pedro is doing? Also the captain of the river boat is an old family friend. So I am here, Pedro."

"Your father's anxiety for me is very touching," Pedro said in a hard, sarcastic tone. "Once he refuses we marry and tells you not to see me, I think. He tries to drop me out of the Company, but now he sends you to me. Could it be he knows my uncle is now Vice-President?" Pedro's empty glass clicked hard on the table.

"I do not know about Company quarrels," Marie said in a small frightened voice. "I thought only you would be the same Pedro who spoke of marriage once. You no longer want me, I think."

"I no longer speak of marriage." His harsh voice cut through the gloom. "Pedro Gonzalo does not forget how he was spurned by the Fernandez family. But who says that I do not want you?"

"Oh, Pedro!" Marie gasped. "You wouldn't!"

"Here in the tropics men take what they want," Pedro explained in his new, hard voice. "It is a code called the law of the jungle." He continued his dreadful pacing, like a leopard.

"I will go, Pedro." Marie whispered. "I will go on the down-river boat tomorrow."

"Pedro Gonzalo will say when you go," he answered. "You be nice; maybe we get along. Otherwise there is old Jakalaas, the witch doctor. For a present of one white girl he would be my friend forever."

"Pedro!" Marie could only gasp. "There is Hans Rhule."

"I, too, know the old river captain. A German will cross up a best friend if it is good for him. I will make it good for him to forget."

Suddenly Marie felt hard arms seize her. Without thought of consequences, she automatically struggled, kicking and beating her fists about his head.

"No, Pedro!" she begged. "No! No! No!"

THE beginning of the hot season was always difficult for a plantation manager. Some new and subtle defiance seemed to possess the natives. There were festivals and religious orgies; celebrations and mysterious rites far back from the river. Even after years of jungle experience it was

impossible to understand the native mind. The natives were apparently simple and child-like, but at certain periods they were seized with mysterious impulses; age-old jungle urges that civilization seemed unable to overcome.

It was easy enough to beat up a native, or a dozen natives. Easy enough to crush them physically. But they had an amazing, intangible quality that could never be reached. They were as illusive as the jungle itself.

At the beginning of the hot season they seemed almost impervious to punishment. They suffered physically, of course; they cringed and groaned, or cried out, but it was impossible to break their spirit completely.

They possessed a strange confidence that if they suffered today, tomorrow would be theirs. They almost gloated in the knowledge that eventually the jungle would be revenged for this temporary dominance of the white man.

For days Pedro Gonzalo had fumed at his own impotence. He checked the sacks of coffee; he watched the line of carriers and he counted again at the wharf. Always sacks were missing. He tried to bribe several of the brightest natives to become informers. They agreed readily but the information they gave him led to nothing. Angry at their duplicity, he began a series of punishments. At the end of the day he detained the last man in the line of carriers.

The little man was frightened but he denied all knowledge of any stealing. Even when the heavy sjambok was unrolled, he still shook his head. When the whip began to curl about bare ankles he stood on one foot and then on the other as if he found the ground too hot for his naked feet. Although he moaned, he still refused to confess.

Pedro Gonzalo knew that again he was being frustrated. Nothing he did seemed to break through the passive defiance of these jungle wretches. Their tactics could ruin his advancement with the great Equatorial Company. A terrible anger seized him and the heavy sjambok hissed and snapped about the victim and brought him to the earth. He curled in the dust, his arms wrapped about his head. In uncontrolled fury Pedro laid about him until the

mass in the dust no longer moaned or moved.

The next day the natives toiled on with no apparent change in their attitude. There was no outward sign of resentment. Pedro had a strange foreboding that they were not human. He shivered silently in the noon heat.

The first days of the hot season were always the worst for a European. It was the heat also that seemed to stir the natives to peculiar excesses, arousing their native savagery. All night their drums beat far back in the forest.

PEDRO came to look upon the jungle almost as a personal enemy. It seemed waiting with a terrible patience; waiting to close in and reclaim the little clearing.

Pedro felt overwhelmed; almost beaten down by the endless threatening. It was impossible to domesticate this jungle as men subdue the temperate lands. Everything must fall before it, swallowed by its slow, insatiable hunger.

He knew now that he must see the outer world again, for a time at least. He must see mountains, cold streams, horizons, a friendly nature where one grew old slowly and peacefully. Perhaps after a breath of white man's country he could come back for another trial with the jungle.

Out on the river the sun blazed with such concentrated fury that eyes ached from the fervid glare. All through the vast lands there arose a low, multitudinous murmur; a lifting in response to the terrible appeal of the sun.

A strange thing had happened among the carriers. A native called Kok had unaccountably turned informer. With apparent eagerness he pointed out the fleeing figure of a carrier disappearing with a sack of coffee on his shoulder. It was short work to overtake the thief and administer slashing punishment.

There was additional satisfaction in knowing that the victim was the actual thief. There need be no holding back the savagery of the blows; no consideration whether the thief could appear the next day or any day. There must be examples made or the plantation would fall below its record.

But it was queer about Kok. He seemed to find an actual delight in the detection

of his own people; in calling the white man and pointing stealthily to a spot where the thief was always found.

He wore a grave air as if he had some understanding of the white man's problems. Perhaps in the co-operation of this slim little man might be found the solution to a greater production.

The first time Kok came to him, Pedro had been canny. He carried both revolvers in case of organized trouble or sudden ambush. But nothing happened; nothing but the discovery of a thief red-handed. So it had continued several times. It was strange that his own people did not turn against this little Kok.

Pedro could not understand Kok's unusual conduct. Perhaps the boy had ambitions and wished the white man to make him some kind of a foreman over the native carriers. The idea might work. An empty title would cost nothing and an occasional cheap gift might bring results, although fear usually accomplished more than gratitude.

THERE was no let-up in the blaze of December heat. At the jungle edge the familiar noises died away. A torpor spread under the vast, dim roof. But below the surface of the water the ancient river ooze felt the quickening pulse of summer heat. The great Limpopo came to life.

Beneath the bank the Spotted One felt the new warmth and slowly uncoiled from the soft silt bed. It emerged as it had for many years and each day another coil was added to the tremendous length basking on the hot sand bar. It took a long time for the powerful muscles to flex and ripple in the sunshine. The Spotted One sought heat and food to change his dull, lifeless coloring to a glowing sheen; to the shimmering iridescence of well-being.

Daily Kok watched from a distance the slow progress of the Spotted One. The whole length had come up from the river and lay absorbing new strength from the sun rays.

Then on a certain day, just as Kok had expected, the Spotted One had looped himself round and round the same horizontal branch of the same baobab tree. It had been the favorite watching place for many seasons. There was a sequence to

these things—a recurring cycle of behaviour that could be depended upon.

The Spotted One had much patience but since the coming of the plantation the wild creatures had almost disappeared. Food was difficult to obtain. Even the monkeys seemed to know. They kept to the slender branches which would not bear the great weight of the Spotted One.

The days passed. Kok stole soundlessly to the jungle edge. The head was no longer flat on a branch but lowered a little and swinging slowly, pendulum-like with a growing impatience. Along the length of the coils slight ripples of angry anticipation followed each other like little waves.

The time had come, Jackalaas said. And was he not the most powerful witch doctor along the whole length of the Limpopo? And had not one of his sons been beaten by the white man? How could the white man know that Kok was also a son. He knew nothing of the jungle secrets. Nor did he know what the great Limpopo could bring forth.

Kok felt a strange surge of power pulse through his small frame. His father labored over the most powerful spells ever brought against an enemy. Everything would go right. Then at the high heat of noonday Jackalaas had nodded. Now was the time; the moment for which plans had been made a long time. Kok sped away to the big Company house.

THROUGH an open door he saw the white man. He was carrying the white woman who had just come to him. The woman was struggling and beating against the white man. It was a bad time to interrupt—a very bad time. But Jakalaas, his father, had spoken. A father and a witch doctor must be obeyed at all costs. Kok shouted:

"Bwana! O Bwana! Come! Steal! Three steals!"

Kok saw the white man toss the woman aside and seize his sjambok, the new one with stinging metal clips at the end. Nor did he forget to jam on his thick helmet without which a white man seemed afraid of the sun. When the white man came out running, Kok pointed the way.

Dim figures were moving on the far side of the new clearing. They were disappear-



The witchdoctor peered from the jungle. Slowly he nodded.

ing in a tunnel-like path just beyond a low, horizontal branch of the baobab tree.

Between anger and excitement the white man seemed to notice nothing. He saw nothing but the dim tunnel through the trees. He rushed on, unmindful that Kok had fallen behind. For an instant he paused beneath the horizontal branch of the great tree, looking.

Kok saw the lightning movement. Kok saw the slithering and gripping of the endless coils. He smiled. He could not hear the crunching of the white man's bones but when he heard the single shriek, he laughed aloud.

When the river boat arrived in the morning there was no one on the wharf. No plantation manager; no carriers. No slightest sound of life anywhere. Across the clearing the sun blazed with its old insistence and over the Company house with its closed doors and shutters, hung a strange air of desertion.

Old Captain Hans Rhule carried a crew of three natives. They were strangely reluctant to leave the boat but he forced them to land. They moved slowly up to the silent house. The Captain knocked and called out but no door opened and no voice answered.

While the natives watched in a fearful

group the Captain pried open a verandah shutter and stepped inside. He called as he looked about curiously. In the living room a girl sat staring and speechless.

"Ach, Marie Fernandez! What then happens?"

Her lips moved but she said nothing.

He smiled to show his friendly intentions. "You know me, *ja?* Old Captain Hans, friend to your fadder?"

The girl nodded at last.

"Sure you do! No need to be scared now. What happens? Where iss Pedro? Where iss der carriers und all?"

"I don't know—anything," she managed to whisper.

"Ach, now! That iss not goot," he sympathized. "Maybe walk down to der boat? Feel better on board, *ja.*" They moved slowly through the heat, the crew trailing behind.

In the cabin the Captain said: "Sit in der shade a time und drink dis. Ven I come back you feel chipper, eh?"

WHEN he drifted back later he asked: "Now, vat happen? I got to make report to der Company, so."

"I can't tell anything yet, so it makes sense." Marie had recovered partially.

"But tell, anyway," the Captain urged. "Many things in der jungle make no sense. Take der time und tink of everything possible."

"You'll hardly believe me," Marie began. "But I don't know what happened. I don't know where Pedro went. About noon yesterday he rushed out. It was very hot. Perhaps some sudden trouble. He did not come back." She remembered how she had been struggling with him.

"You look oud der vindow, maybe?" he asked.

"There was nothing in sight, not even a native. Only the awful sun blazing on the river." She closed her eyes as if to shut out the remembered glare.

"Vat happen in der night?" the Captain urged.

"Oh, it was—terrible! Do I have to... Must you know everything?" She seemed to be enveloped with the terror of the night.

"Vell, just a liddle. But a liddle, in

case ve could do something," the Captain encouraged.

"You couldn't. No one could!" She summoned her will to go on. "It was like the very spirit of the jungle. It was more like something I—felt."

"But you saw someting, maybe?" the Captain said kindly.

"At night. It was moonlight. Natives came into the clearing around the house; hundreds and hundreds of them. They had a dreadful way of moving—more like crawling. They caught hold of each other, kind of clinging together in a long line. The line kept turning and twisting and coiling until it seemed like not a lot of separate natives but like—like an immense snake. Oh, Hans! Hans! Could they do that?" She began shaking with the memory and her voice failed.

"*Ja! Ja!* Don't let go to yourself!" the Captain soothed. "Der moonlight makes spooks mit shadows."

She began again: "I'll try and finish and then I'll never speak of it again. I tried not to watch but I couldn't seem to help it. All together they gave the most terrible scream, like somebody tortured. After the scream, they—they hissed. Oh, Hans, it was really a... a..." Her voice rose hysterically.

"*Ja! Ja!* Don't tell some more. I've heard of such. I hear whisperings all up der Limpopo, at odder stations. Guija, Mapai, Rafuri, und such. That iss all now." He kept talking on and on until she quieted somewhat. "I go on shore a liddle bit, then ve move down river."

The boat must keep to its schedule. Yet the Captain felt that he should make at least a perfunctory search. He compelled the three natives to come with him. As they walked from the river, the ancient jungle spirit enveloped them. In a year—in two years, there would be no clearing. Even now the dark tree walls seemed to press closer in anticipation of victory.

Suddenly the natives halted and drew back. They pointed to a horizontal branch across the path before them. The Captain looked closer. It was a moment before he discerned the spotted coils—coils which were bright and sleek with a lustrous gleam of well-being.

STANLEY and LIVINGSTONE

AN EVENT THAT ATTRACTED WORLD WIDE INTEREST IN THE EARLY 70'S OF THE LAST CENTURY WAS THE SEARCH FOR DR. DAVID LIVINGSTONE, WHO HAD PENETRATED THE THEN UNKNOWN WILDS OF AFRICA AND HAD NOT BEEN HEARD OF FOR SEVERAL YEARS... IN 1869, HENRY M. STANLEY, A CORRESPONDENT FOR THE NEW YORK HERALD, WAS ASKED BY HIS PUBLISHER, JAMES GORDON BENNETT, TO GO IN SEARCH OF DR. LIVINGSTONE.



...ON MAR. 21, 1871, STANLEY, WITH A FEW ARMED NATIVES AND A LARGE NUMBER OF PORTERS BEGAN HIS MEMORABLE MARCH FROM ZANZIBAR INTO THE INTERIOR. AND ON NOV. 10, HE APPROACHED THE VILLAGE OF UJJI, ON THE SHORE OF LAKE TANGANYIKA. HERE HE WAS GREETED BY A NATIVE WHO EXPLAINED IN BROKEN ENGLISH THAT HE WAS DR. LIVINGSTONE'S SERVANT! THE MEETING OF THE TWO MEN HAS BEEN DRAMATIZED MANY TIMES... AMID WELCOMING SHOUTS OF THE INHABITANTS, THE SAFARI MARCHED INTO THE VILLAGE.

AND HERE STANLEY MET THE MAN HE HAD COME THOUSANDS OF MILES TO FIND, WITH THE GREETING "DR. LIVINGSTONE, I BELIEVE." STANLEY REMAINED AT TANGANYIKA UNTIL FEBRUARY, 1872. SEEING THAT LIVINGSTONE WAS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE HIS EXPLORATIONS, HE MADE HIS WAY BACK TO THE COAST. SHORTLY AFTER HIS DEPARTURE DR. LIVINGSTONE SET OUT UPON AN EXPLORING EXPEDITION AND WHILE ON THE MARCH, FELL SICK AND DIED... HE IS BURIED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.....

*Bryce fingered his rifle tensely. One wrong move
and the massed warriors would attack.*





THE RUBY DEATH

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

The two veldt-hardened traders stuck grimly to that deadly trek. Ahead lay a fortune in rubies, theirs for the taking—if they could live long enough to claim it.

THE LOW-ROOFED trading house stood on a headland overlooking the Bay, with a slender flagstaff beside it. Three hundred feet below, the surf flashed and foamed against precipitous cliffs. Line upon line of breakers, miles long, arose, each increasing with the fall of the one before it, until the whole surface of the bay was a mass of thundering waters.

It was an isolated strip of coast without a haven, backed by jungle and, far away toward the inner country, by a range of mountains that early Arab traders had called El Mulattam, the Lashed or Beaten; and beyond which no white man had yet penetrated.

The late African sun blazed down on the point and on the exposed factory, on the verandah of which lounged two white men, traders of the house. The one was

a tall, stooping, loose-shouldered man of perhaps fifty-five. He had large, coarse features and his peaked beard, at one time fair, was streaked with grey. His big, angular frame was thin through years of poor living. He looked like one who has experienced life, its seamy side, and more of its work than its play. For all that, his face was not commonplace, its keen hardness was softened strikingly by the expression of his eyes which showed kindness, even softness of heart.

The other man was not yet thirty. He rose and began to pace the verandah with quick, swinging strides, whistling softly to himself. His companion, lolling in a hammock slung from the roof of the verandah, watched him thoughtfully from under the brim of his sombrero.

It was difficult for John Hill to see in this young man, with his powerful shoul-

ders and blue eyes that looked straight out of his tanned face, the same Alfred Bryce who had come to him more than two years ago, a mere hollow-eyed skeleton gasping for every breath he drew. Indeed, Hill, who had picked up a good working knowledge of medicine during his thirty years of trading, had planned to bury Bryce at the end of the first week. Yes, it was hard to believe, a miracle in fact. But Africa was like that, paradoxical. She could drive a man mad with her horrors, or lift his soul with her beauty—mend or slay like a goddess. Aye, Bryce was one of her favoured ones; she had decreed life for him and, right now, he was as fine a specimen of virile manhood as could be met with. He wondered how Bryce felt about it.

"You're restless," Hill broke the silence. "Maybe you're thinking of going home, back to the States?"

Bryce stopped before the hammock, frowning down at his companion.

"Go back? Why?" he demanded.

"You'll be wanting to pick things up where you left 'em. Get back to that university you used to talk about."

"No!" said Bryce decisively. "Africa's my Alma Mater." He took a deep breath and stretched, flexing his muscles.

"John, you can't imagine what it is to breathe without pain, to feel flesh on your bones and the blood coursing..."

"Aye!" Hill broke in with a laugh. "I think I can. And it's the coursing blood that's at the bottom of the trouble! You'll be hankering after the towns. Take me, I haven't seen a white woman in five years!"

"From what you've told me of your escapades, that's just as well, John."

"Aye." Hill smiled wryly. "But there's the hankering, nevertheless."

"No." Bryce insisted. "I'll stay as long as I'm of use to you. Even if you kick me out, I won't go home." He swept his arm in the direction of the distant mountains. "I'd find a way across those mountains—see what's beyond."

Hill swung his legs from the hammock, his eyebrows arched quizzically. "So, that's it," he summed up. "Aye, that's her price!"

"Whose price?"

"Africa's, my boy. She'll make a slave of you; she's got you now!"

"You don't want me to leave, then?"

Bryce asked with boyish eagerness.

"Damn it, no!" replied Hill. "You're smart. You've caught on to the trade and the lingo like as you were born to it. I'm offering you a partnership!"

HILL broke off suddenly as he saw a negro, the headman of the factory, come running across the patch of sand that covered the top of the cliff and formed the compound of the post. The headman, as he came near, gave a shout and running up to the white men, salaamed with clasped hands. His dark, bronze-colored face was full of excitement.

"Well, what is it, Juma Saleh?" demanded Hill, as Juma fetched his breath.

"Oh, *Bwana!*" gasped the headman. "*Cabooka* come. Live for come! Big *cabooka!* Plenty teeth! Come from mountains."

"From the mountains!" exclaimed Hill, his trader's instinct aroused. "D'you hear that, Bryce? Big teeth, heh, Juma?"

Juma stretched his arms to indicate the size of the tusks. "*Cabooka* come sundown, *Bwana!*"

Hill called the headman up onto the verandah, and patted him on the velvet-like skin of his well-fleshed back.

"Good news, Juma! Boy!" he called over his shoulder, "Give Juma *mattabicho!*"

Juma smiled broadly as he caught sight of a small native boy with a wisp of blue cotton cloth about his loins and a bottle of gin and a tumbler in his tawny hands. He poured out a brimmer for Juma, who drained it at once with a gasp as the liquor gurgled down his throat. Then, knowing he was no longer required, he gathered up his loose, cotton robe and threw the end over his shoulder in a graceful gesture and went away.

The two white men remained standing on the verandah, gazing landward to where the jungle fringed the sandy plain.

"This is the second safari from inland," commented Bryce. "Where d'you suppose they come from, John?"

Hill shrugged, "From behind the mountains somewhere. I've never heard tell of a *kraal* between us and them. It's taken five years for the smell of my goods to reach the hinterland, but there's no mountains trade can't cross! We can look for a *cabooka* every year now."

"Yes," mused Bryce. "There must be a pass through the mountains, hereabouts."

"Aye," agreed Hill. "But so long as they get here, they can slide down 'em on their backsides, for my part!"

"Here they come!" Bryce pointed to where the sun's rays glinted on the spearheads of the leading men of the *cabooka* as it emerged from the jungle. When the vanguard caught sight of the post they shouted, broke into a run along a path through the long grass, which, for the most part, was waist high.

The main *cabooka* plodded on behind, and as it drew near, a line of heavy black elephants' tusks appeared like linked dots above the grass. Each tusk was lashed to a stout bamboo and carried on the shoulders of two men. In the rear and on both sides of the porters marched the protectors of the *cabooka*.

Hill was making a rough count of the tusks as they came swaying out of the grass onto the plain.

"Twenty tusks or I'm blind!" he exclaimed. "But we'll do no trading till sun-up. They can camp outside the stockade. Meanwhile we'll break out the bale goods."

He led the way into the factory, unlocked the cargo-room and swung the large doors open. The two white men set the *Kroo* boys to work, knocking the hoops from bales of cloth, opening cases of muskets and rolling forward a puncheon of rum.

The baled stuff was thrown piece by piece on the shelves that ran around the room, and added to the piles already upon them. The muskets, powder and shot—the objects of every petty chief's ambition before the European Powers had divided Africa between them—were stacked for safety behind the counter that ran the full length of the room.

It was past midnight before Hill and Bryce turned in. The lights of the factory twinkled high upon the solitary cliffs. Hollow murmurs rose from the stretch of open bay; huge phosphorescent waves showed themselves in the darkness, breaking further and further out to sea. The men of the *cabooka*, encamped outside the stockade, slumbered about their dying fires. Sleep was upon White and Black, and no other sound was heard but the cries of the watch as they called to each other from the four corners of the compound.

AT DAYBREAK, Hill and Bryce were awakened by Juma; and by the time breakfast was over, the *cabooka* men were clamoring for admission into the stockade. The two white men came out onto the verandah. At a signal from Hill the gates were opened and the *cabooka* filed in, each pair bearing a prime tusk.

Hill was occupied in estimating the weight of the ivory. Bryce was watching the *cabooka* men, and there was a worried expression in his blue eyes. It appeared to him that there were already more men in the compound than he had counted on the plains the day before. Moreover, there was not the excitement and commotion that usually came with a *cabooka*. Small groups of natives were detaching themselves from the throng in the centre of the compound, and moving, unobtrusively, toward the corners of the stockade. There was an orderliness about their movements that suggested forethought.

"John," said Bryce suddenly, "we've got trouble!"

"Huh?" Hill gave him a startled look.

"These fellows aren't porters. They're warriors, and they know what they're about. Take a look!"

Hill's eyes traveled around the compound in a swift comprehending glance.

"By damn," he swore. "It's a raid! Ho, there!" he bellowed. "Close the gates! Come on, Bryce!" and he started to run for the doorway of the factory.

Somewhere a bow twanged. Hill stopped in his tracks, his nose almost touching the feathered shaft that quivered in the doorpost.

"Be still!" a voice commanded in Swahili, "and no blood will be spilled!"

The two white men exchanged glances. Bryce shrugged, and Hill let loose a string of oaths that made his ears burn, then lapsed into gloomy silence.

The leader of the *cabooka* gave his orders in Swahili, a dialect that both Hill and Bryce spoke and understood. He made a splendid, powerful figure, standing in the center of the compound and giving his orders in a deep, clear voice. His head-dress of white, ostrich plumes set off his dark features which, but for the fullness of lip, were more Semitic than Negroid in contour.

The two white men watched while the

warriors took possession of the factory with quiet efficiency. Hill's face was black with impotent rage for which Bryce's apparent indifference was no balm and, as a file of warriors brushed past him to take possession of the cargo-room, he began to swear again.

"The black devils!" he finished, with his mouth a few inches from Bryce's ear. "They'll clean us out! D'you hear? You're my partner. It's your loss as much as mine. D'you understand?"

Bryce laughed, rubbing his ear. "Thanks, John," said he, with the simple directness that had won the old trader's heart. "I'll still be your partner when we're cleaned. I've still got a little money—enough to stand my share of the loss."

Hill blinked, "I didn't mean it that way, Bryce."

"I know that, John. Maybe things aren't as bad as they look. I can't see why they lugged that ivory over the mountains if they didn't have trade in mind."

"Hell!" snorted Hill. "That was the bait, or they changed their minds! They kept their fighters out in the jungle, and brought 'em in under cover of night."

"D'you suppose they are going to lug the ivory back again?"

"Well—" Hill eyed the tusks piled in the center of the compound. "It does seem ... but why the show of force?"

"Maybe they like to fix their own rate of barter, John, or maybe it's more than just a raid. But don't start anything. They're piping the tune."

"That's too damn true!" agreed Hill. He pointed to the gate of the stockade, "There's something going on out there right now."

THE TWO men moved to the rail of the verandah. Two files of warriors, with their spears butted to the ground, had ranged themselves on either side of the gate, forming a lane which terminated at the verandah steps. At the foot of the steps stood the headman of the *cabooka*, his attitude expectant and diffident.

Presently, two broad-shouldered, sinewy blacks made their way down the lane bearing a hammock slung from a bamboo pole carried between them. Their head-dress was curious. A fillet of colored beads bound their white plumes to their foreheads, and a broad chin-strap of the same

beadwork concealed most of their features. The backs of the nearest line of warriors hid the hammock's occupant from the white men's view, but the silence that had come to the compound bore witness to his importance. Not a man moved—all eyes were fixed upon the blacks as they advanced down the line of spears.

Hill's mouth opened, but he did not speak as the hammock and the reclining figure in it came into sight. Bryce's eyes widened, and soon there came into them that involuntary, appreciative gleam that no man can hide when his eye feasts on beauty.

She accepted her headman's hand and swung onto her red sandalled feet in a swift, graceful movement, and the bangles about her ankles and arms jingled as she did so.

She was tall. The loose robe she wore, belted at the waist, left one shoulder bare. From her head-dress hung heavy ornaments, almost reaching to her shoulders, with large, red jewels in them. The inevitable white plumes enhanced the black sheen of her hair which reached down to her waist. But she was not white. Her skin was a shade darker even than that of a white who has lived in the sun. Yet there was a subtle aura of charm about her person, wholly feminine, enchanting and pagan.

Her glance swept over Hill's lean figure and then turned to Bryce, lingered on his yellow curls and returned his stare, unabashed. It seemed to Bryce that a ghost of a smile parted her red lips. It made him think of his physical defects. Then she spoke, and her rich contralto made music of Swahili for Bryce's ears:

"Let the trading begin," said she.

"Lady," said Bryce, "it is the custom to fix a rate of barter before trading begins."

"It is not mine, Bold-Eyes," she retorted.

Bryce smiled, "It is the custom of Kaffirs to steal, Lady."

Black eyes flashed at him. "And of white men," she amended. "Though you call it trade. I shall take what I need," she continued calmly, "and leave the ivory in exchange."

"And if we do not agree?" said Bryce.

"Then I shall take what I need and

leave nothing, Bold-Eyes!"

"The trading must be fair," protested Hill.

"Even so!" she flashed at him. "You will not get our ivory for a few rags and a coil of wire this time, Gaunt One!"

II

HILL'S eyes bulged and angry red showed under his tan. Bryce laughed and placed a restraining hand on his partner's shoulder.

"She's got us there, John!" said he, in English. "We drove a hard bargain last time. Keep your shirt on! She can clean us if she wants to!"

"Then why doesn't she?"

"She wants our trade, but she wants it on her own terms. And, by damn, she knows how to get 'em."

"Speak Swahili!" the girl commanded, her eyes full of suspicion. "Are you agreed?"

"It could not be otherwise, Lady," said Bryce. He advanced to the head of the steps and offered his hand to assist her to mount them. "Who are your people, and what is your name, Lady?" he asked.

"That," she replied, "is of no consequence. Let the trading begin."

Bryce was warmly conscious of her nearness and of her perfume, faintly reminiscent of the veldt when it flowered after the rain. As he started to follow her into the cargo room, her headman shouldered him aside. The shove was accompanied by a look full of venom. The sudden anger that flared in Bryce's eyes died in a grin as the probable cause of the headman's wrath came to mind. Evidently he had looked too long, and too warmly, upon the Lady of the *cabooka* than was seemly in the eyes of her stalwart headman.

Within the cargo room the girl took a position close to the door which gave her a good view of all the shelves and goods. Bryce and Hill took their places behind the counter, facing the door. But there was nothing for them to do. The girl directed her men with a pointing finger to whatever took her fancy, and it was carried out promptly without a word spoken.

Bryce watched his partner's face and there was concern in his eyes. He wondered how long Hill could stand it. With every load

that was carried out the old trader's scowl deepened. By the time the shelves were half empty his face was working, and he was swearing fluently in a hoarse whisper.

At length the girl held up her hand.

"Have you done?" gasped Hill.

"No, Gaunt One," she replied coolly. "There is one thing more. M'timbi!" She called her headman to her and, pointing to Hill's medicine chest which stood against the wall, bade him carry it out.

"No!" yelled Hill. "Not that! It's not for trade." And he ran at M'timbi who was stooping to pick the chest up.

The headman straightened up as Hill approached, and sent the old man reeling back against the counter with a vicious backhand blow.

Bryce moved from behind the counter and walked slowly over to M'timbi.

"Leave the chest," said he.

The headman spat in his face, and in the next moment he was sprawled on the floor, spitting blood. Instantly, the room was filled with the roar of voices. Knives flashed.

"Hold!" the girl's voice rang out above the tumult.

"Lady," said Bryce, when there was silence, "your servant is ill-mannered. And I say this chest is not for trade."

M'timbi got to his feet. He faced his mistress with an unspoken plea in his eyes.

The girl's gaze shifted from Bryce to M'timbi, and back to Bryce again. Her black eyes were alight with suppressed excitement.

"So you would teach M'timbi manners, Bold-Eyes." She announced her decision. "Then teach him, if you can! And if you throw him you may keep your chest." She favored M'timbi with a dazzling smile. "I want the chest, M'timbi," said she.

"It is yours, Lady!" M'timbi's deep voice boomed. He flexed his muscles proudly and turned to face Bryce. From the cries of encouragement that came from the *cabooka* men who lined three sides of the room, Bryce knew that he faced their champion.

M'TIMBI advanced crouching with his powerful arms outstretched to grapple with his adversary. Bryce could have dealt with him quickly, and knew it; for, in the days before disease had struck him down, he had held his own among the best

of his fellows on the gridiron and in the ring. But he chose to meet M'timbi on equal terms, to make it a trial of brute strength. Not wholly because of impulsive chivalry, but because the eyes of a beautiful woman were upon him.

The pair met in the center of the room. There was a moment of wary feinting, and then each was locked in the other's embrace. For a full minute they strove each to bend the other's back. Bryce's feet were slipping on the smooth board floor and M'timbi was quick to see the advantage his bare feet gave him.

He pushed Bryce before him, then suddenly shifted his grip and heaved. Bryce felt his feet leave the floor. He managed to get a head-lock on M'timbi and saved himself from a bad fall. They tottered around the floor for a space, M'timbi struggling to break the grip that was strangling him, Bryce striving for a foothold. He found it in a roughened spot of the floor, and in the next moment M'timbi sailed over his shoulder and crashed at his mistress' feet like a sack of flour.

It was more than the *cabooka* men could take. Bryce found himself backed against the wall, with half a dozen natives advancing upon him with naked steel, bellowing their rage. He felt a vague sense of disappointment. He had thought the girl would keep her bargain. Perhaps she would, if she could make herself heard—

A gunshot, followed by a stifled scream, commanded silence, instant and complete. The group before Bryce froze in tracks. Bryce saw Hill standing behind the counter with a smoking revolver in his hand. It was the heavy Colt he kept under the counter for emergencies. Evidently the *cabooka* men had passed over it in their search for arms. The girl was standing with wide eyes, her hand still pressed to her throat as if to stifle a scream. Bryce noticed that one of the jewelled ornaments that had hung from her head-dress was missing.

"Call 'em off, Lady!" Hill's voice was rasping. He waited for a moment, then his gun flashed and roared again. A gasp went up from the *cabooka* men as the jewel over the girl's right shoulder dropped at her feet.

"Call off your dogs!" repeated Hill. "D'you hear?"

It seemed to Bryce that Hill had shot carelessly, without taking aim. He ran toward Hill.

"Take it easy, John!"

Hill laughed. "Keep your shirt on, Bryce! Who's piping the tune now, my boy? And, by damn, I'll make her dance!"

THE GIRL spoke rapidly to M'timbi who had gotten to his feet and stood beside her. He shouted at the *cabooka* men. They began to file out of the room. When all had gone, except M'timbi, she stopped, and picking up the red jewels, flung them on the counter.

"A tribute to your markmanship, Gaunt One," said she, then turned to Bryce. She studied him for a moment, evidently turning something over in her mind, then:

"I keep my bargains, no harm would have come to you. I am called Mawana Hanna binti Madani, who will not be displeased if we meet again."

"Beyond the mountains?" queried Bryce.

"Even so," she replied. "But you will find danger, and the road is long."

"But a weary traveler would find comfort, and a welcome in the house of Mawana Hanna. Is it so?" asked Bryce, with an intent look.

Her white teeth showed in a smile and long lashes veiled the sidelong look she flashed at him as she turned to go.

"Even so," she said over her shoulder.

M'timbi followed his mistress out, but turned in the doorway, scowling at Bryce.

"White man," he warned, "if you venture beyond the mountains, I will stand in your path!"

"Even as you stood to-day, M'timbi?" Bryce grinned at him.

Hill leveled his gun at M'timbi's head. "Say *Bwana*, you black devil!" he swore.

But Bryce caught his arm. "Let him go, John!"

The shouts of the departing *cabooka* men rang out in the compound. Soon they would be across the strip of sand and grass, and out of sight in the jungle. Bryce made for the door.

"Just a minute, young fellow!" Hill stopped him. "Let her go."

Bryce flushed and came back to the counter with a casual shrug. The old trader gave him a shrewd look.

"I hope you're not thinking of trekking

to the mountains," he said carefully.

Bryce picked up one of the jewels Mawana Hanna had flung on the counter and examined it with interest.

"Well, John," he replied at length. "You said that Africa had got me, that she was a goddess..."

"Aye!" interposed Hill. "And maybe you're thinking she was here in person, a while back?"

"Nonsense!" Bryce slid the ornament along the counter to Hill, "Do you know what kind of stone that is?" Then as Hill shook his head: "It's a ruby, John."

"Oh," commented Hill indifferently. "What are they worth?"

"For the pair—about a thousand pounds in London."

"Huh!" Hill grabbed at the stone, hands shaking. "Are—are you sure?"

"I was an amateur lapidary back in the States. If you take a close look at it, you'll see that it's uncut. I'd say that means there's more where it came from."

"Aye, that's likely!" Hill's voice quavered. "I've waited thirty years for something like this!"

"There may be a fortune waiting for you on the other side of the mountains, John," suggested Bryce.

Hill's hard face broke into a broad grin, "I think you're a liar! But I'll go. And if and when I get the stones, I'll buy a dozen of what you're interested in, anywhere!"

"THE problem," said Hill, over the breakfast coffee on the following morning, "is the factory. We may be gone six months, and there's no one we can leave in charge."

"We can cache the ivory," suggested Bryce.

"Aye—and the equinox is about due. That means rain. It's not likely we'll have visitors for three months, anyway. Now, let's see—that gives us Juma and ten men to carry the loads—sixty pounds each. I won't get much out of your dusky beauty for that!"

"You may get a concession, John."

"You may get a concession, Bryce, my boy!" Hill grinned. "I think the lady has an eye for you, and I'm gambling on it!"

"I'm not a good bet, but I can try—assuming she has the authority to grant a concession."

"If she hasn't I'll bet she's got the guy that has where she wants him! Oh, you needn't frown, Bryce. They're all the same. Don't I know? Well, we'll trek tomorrow at sun-up—before the *cabooka's* spoor gets cold."

At sunrise Juma Saleh led the small safari across the strip of sand, through the tall grass and into the eerie twilight of the jungle. By noon, their first halt, they were deep in the jungle. And for the next five days they toiled through a forest of powerful, spreading, hagenia trees and thick bamboo from which the dark green moss hung like cobwebs.

To Bryce, for whom the experience was new, it was an enchanted forest—in the gloomy light of day when Hill took him to stalk the bush-buck through the weird bamboos; and, particularly, at night when the lonely fastness of the camp fire was a magic circle, holding at bay the moaning carnivora whose green eyes flared in the darkness. He learned to shoot straight under the direction of "the best eye in Africa," as Hill unblushingly called himself whenever his uncanny skill drew from Bryce the praise it deserved.

The spoor of the *cabooka* that Juma followed led steadily upward. By the sixth day the forest had become noticeably thinner. The bamboo and hagenia gave place to great heath gorse and shrub, and soon they saw, against the sky, the peaks of the mountains, the loftiest of which was capped with equinoxial snow.

At sunset, on the following day, they made camp at the opening of a *kloof*, a narrow cleft between steep walls of granite from which burst a stream, new born, to join its noisy tide with that of some distant river.

After the evening meal Hill and Juma went forward to reconnoiter the pass. Bryce remained behind to watch the camp; and, to the evident delight of the porters, to chant with them their plaintive songs of love and war to an accompaniment drummed on a couple of empty biscuit tins.

It was past midnight when Hill and Juma returned. Hill sat down before the fire, picked up a mug and handed it to Juma to fill.

"Well," demanded Bryce impatiently.

Hill finished his coffee before he an-

swered, then. He said nonchalantly:

"You'll be seeing your lady-friend tomorrow maybe.

"The *kraal* is not far from the other end of the pass, eh?"

"I didn't see a *kraal*," said Hill slowly. "I didn't see much because it was dark. But there's a valley, like a saucepan, and in the middle of it there's a sort of hill. I saw the light of a fair-sized town atop the hill."

"A town! What the devil! A well-built *kraal* maybe, John?"

"I've never seen a *kraal* lit up, Bryce."

"But it's impossible!" protested Bryce.

"That's what the wise man said when he was first told about elephants." Hill yawned. "Leave it till morning. We'll start early—have a good look in daylight."

BY LATE afternoon they were through the pass and out upon a ledge that overlooked the valley. The porters had dropped their loads and were gathered about Juma, pointing, questioning and jabbering excitedly. Bryce and Hill stood apart from the group.

The valley, Bryce thought, was more like a gaily-painted saucer than a saucepan. The red hills that backed the far rim were low and sloped gently down to form an almost flat, fruitful plain—a colored patchwork of fields, gold where the grain ripened, green where the ilex and oleander cast their shadows, and brown where the long-horned cattle grazed.

The flat-roofed, pink and white houses that crowned the central hill were built of stone. From their midst rose the conical dome of a large, elliptical building. A high wall encompassed the town, protected by bastions at intervals, from which the mouths of old cannon gaped. No man, however skeptical, could see a *kraal* in the solid masonry of the fortress-town. Yet Bryce knew that he looked upon a "kaffirization," a curious mixture of Sabaeen and Dravidian art.

"Well, Bryce," said Hill, who had been watching the other's face with an amused smile. "We could sit and smoke a bit. It won't melt!"

Bryce sat down on a rock, wiping the sweat from his face.

"It may have been built during the days of the Zenj Empire," he observed.

"Never heard of it," said Hill.

"Well, for the most part, they were Arabs and Mohammedan Bantus with a mixture of Indian, the same as we call the Swahili. They held the whole of the seaboard from Somal south. They held on until the Portuguese came, about the end of the fifteenth century. It's known that they pushed inland and built factories."

"Aye, I've heard of stone *kraals* along the Zambesi."

"It's likely they were towns, built by the same people," said Bryce.

"Well,"—Hill rose—"what do we do, Bryce? It might be easier to get in there than to get out."

"If we want the trade and rubies, John, we'll have to take that chance."

"I knew damn well you'd be for taking the chance—but not for rubies!"

Hill led the way down the steep trail, which soon became a wide road leading directly to the outcrop of the hill, from where it branched to right and left and ascended to the gates of the town in terraced flights of steps.

They had covered half the distance across the fields when their eyes were caught by the glint of the sun on metal. Soon a troop of warriors was seen advancing rapidly toward them. When the gap between the two columns had closed to a few hundred yards, Juma halted the porters. The two white men advanced a few paces, then stopped, each standing with his rifle in the crook of his arm.

The column of warriors bore down on them, with the white dust of the road rising beneath their feet. They came to a halt a few hundred feet from the white men.

Bryce and Hill exchanged glances as the *cabooka's* headman stepped from their ranks, looking even more stalwart and handsome in martial attire. His white robe was caught by a broad metal belt about his waist from which was slung a scimitar-like sword with a jeweled hilt.

"So the white *Bwanas* have come!" M'timbi greeted them with a sneer.

Hill shifted his rifle from his right to his left arm.

"We talk with the mistress not with the servant," said he.

"Here, at Batuta, even Mawana Hanna

obeys Mchawi," M'timbi replied, with his eyes upon Hill's rifle.

"What then, is Mchawi's will, M'timbi?" asked Bryce.

"That I conduct you to the town, unarmed. There to await his pleasure. Otherwise," he added insolently, "your bones will rot on this road, as I promised you!"

"I have no faith in the promises of men," smiled Bryce.

"But a fool's faith in those of women, O Calf-Eyes!" retorted M'timbi, and his laugh grated on Bryce's spine like a file. "Lay down your arms, on the road! *Kuja!* Come!" he ordered.

After a moment of hesitation the two white men obeyed. The ranks of the warriors opened and they passed through in M'timbi's wake.

III

THE GATES of the town were decorated with chevron patterns. Soapstone carvings, representing eagles and hawks, were perched upon shafts which stood upon the walls. Beyond the gates, the flat-topped houses flanked stone streets; and, here and there, they glimpsed an open space of garden shaded by illicineae, brilliant with the red and yellow jasmine and sweet with the odor of grangipani.

The streets were deserted. Evidently their coming had aroused no excitement, or the inhabitants of Batuta, evading the heat of day, slumbered in the seclusion of their cool gardens.

They approached the central building, which Bryce, judging from the solidness of its outer wall and the signs of the Zodiac emblazoned above its gates, took to be a kind of citadel-temple. At this point Juma and the porters were marched off down an adjoining street.

Bryce and Hill followed M'timbi until they came to a large walled dwelling with a huge wooden gate. Here M'timbi handed them over to what they were soon to discover was an armed guard.

They had ample time to make themselves acquainted with their quarters, for two weeks dragged by before they passed through the wooden gate again. They were allowed the freedom of the house and its large, shaded garden. But their guards would not answer when spoken to, and

their meals were brought to them in silence. Only once were they allowed communication with the outside.

It came in the person of a withered old man who said that he came from Mchawi to converse with them. But his conversation consisted of asking questions and answering none. When he was satisfied he departed with a bland smile, saying that he would convey the white men's desire for trade and red stones to his master, leaving Bryce and Hill none the wiser.

"You know, Bryce," said Hill after he had gone, "I think M'timbi knew something when he said you had too much faith in women."

"Maybe." Bryce was noncommittal. "Still I don't see why they keep up cooped up here."

"Hell, there's nothing odd about that! I was cooped up for six months in a Zulu kraal once—and it wasn't sweet smelling like this. I walked in the day before they cleaned up on their neighbours. They figured I'd brought 'em good luck, and if I went the luck would go with me. What makes sense for them don't make sense for you and me. But I can't figure Mawana Hanna. Why hasn't she shown up?"

"I wouldn't know," said Bryce.

"D'you suppose she and M'timbi..."

"I wouldn't if I were you!" snapped Bryce.

"Well, well," commented Hill with a grin. "That's the first time I've seen you rattled. Maybe I'd better go to bed. Good night!"

Bryce filled his pipe and went out into the garden, where the night air was cool and the moonlight cast pointed shadows on flagstones still warm from the heat of the day. A sentry slept on the wall above a small gate that opened into the garden. His back rested against a cornice stone and his knees were drawn up to his chin.

With his hands thrust deep into his pockets Bryce began to pace the courtyard from end to end, moving soundlessly on bare feet. Hill was right, he told himself. He had been a damn fool to think there was more than coquetry in Mawana's talk and smiles.

He didn't mind Hill kidding him, but M'timbi's laughter was galling. Damn the fellow! It was enough... Bryce started. A fleeting shadow had crossed his path. With

an effort he continued his slow walk toward the house, nerves taut. A knife in the back—one never knew when, or where, in a place like this! He stifled an impulse to call Hill, and when he reached the house, turned and began his walk to the far end again, his eyes probing the shadows.

In the shadow of an ilex he saw movement. He waited until he was abreast of the tree, then sprang with the swiftness and sureness of a leopard. One of his arms caught the shadowy figure in a crushing embrace, his other hand groped for the throat to stifle an outcry. But there was no struggle, the body he clasped was soft and yielding, and there was perfume. Bryce released his hold and looked into the startled eyes of Mawana Hanna.

"Allah!" gasped the girl, "but you are swift and strong!"

BRYCE was in no mood for flattery, "Lady," he said, coldly, "if I have hurt you I am sorry for it, but it seems that I am among enemies. I have found a prison, not the welcome I sought."

"Speak softly!" cautioned the girl, with alarm in her eyes. "There is danger. I dared not welcome you."

"For fear of M'timbi's anger, Lady?"

"M'timbi?" She gave Bryce a quick, searching look, "So..." and her soft laughter brought the blood to Bryce's cheeks.

"I have heard," she went on, "that you came to seek red stones, not the Lady Mawana."

"With your help, my friend must have the reward of his toil. But what is M'timbi to you, Lady?"

"It is true that M'timbi wants me," said she.

"That I know. But what is he to you?" Bryce insisted.

"A servant!" Mawana's eyes flashed proudly. "What am I in your eyes, if you can think him more?"

"I thought—he—you—" Bryce floundered helplessly.

"I am not for M'timbi," she smiled at him. "But if he grasps his ambition he will command what I would not give."

"And what is M'timbi's ambition, Mawana?"

She caught Bryce's hand and drew him deeper in to the shadows. "M'timbi is a

vain fool," said she. "He is the arms and legs of Mchawi, who has none of his own. He walks a path that leads to death, but in his folly he is blind. He sees only the seat of my father. He forgets that it is Mchawi who rules and not my father."

"Now, this Mchawi..." began Bryce.

She silenced him with a gesture. "The guard will change soon and I have much to tell. You would know of my people? Long ago they came from Somal. They fled the Caliph's wrath for they were Shiites and marked for death. First they settled on the seacoast, not far from your factory, but persecution followed them there and they fled inland. They found this place in ruins, a tribe of Kaffirs, living in huts, outside its walls. They rebuilt it, and ruled over it as its kings.

"Mindful of the Caliph's wrath, my grandfather forbade intercourse with the outer world. But the very law by which he sought to preserve us, has destroyed us. Our race, our arts, even our Faith has been debased by mingling our blood with that of Kaffirs. Black superstitions have crept out of the jungle and, like loathesome tentacles, have entwined themselves about the hearts of the people. And Mchawi, the witch-man, rules in fact and my father only in name.

"Cunningly, Mchawi has revived the old rites that my grandfather put down. Now his men are whispering among the people, reminding them of a cruel custom practiced by their fathers before we came. Then it was their belief that if their king died of old age great trouble would come upon them. It was thought that the cattle would not increase, nor the women bear children, and that the grain and the forests would wither as the king grew old. For he ruled over nature as well as men, over the rain, and over the sun, and when his physical powers waned and failed with age, so too, they thought, would the power of nature. So their kings reigned only so long as they could defend themselves against the attack of any warrior bold enough to slay them, either openly or by stealth. Thus, the people of old, tested the vigor of their kings every eighth year.

"My father is old. Mchawi cannot strike the fatal blow for himself, but he has filled M'timbi's heart with ambition, and he..." the girl's voice broke.

"And so," said Bryce, "you came to the factory to seek a man to stand-between M'timbi and your father. To lure him with your beauty..."

Her eyes flashed, "I am a woman. I fight with women's weapons! If it is the red stones you want," she added, with a contemptuous toss of her head, "I promise them!"

"What I want you might give, but never sell, Mawana," Bryce smiled.

"So I thought when I saw you first, Bold-Eyes." She was laughing at him again. "And tell me, if my beauty was for sale, could I not sell it to M'timbi?"

Bryce caught her to him, and stifled her laughter with his lips. Her supple body yielded—

Minutes later a voice called softly from the gate:

"*Kuja*, mistress! *Kuja*!"

"I come," replied the girl. She freed herself from Bryce's arms. "Our time is spent, I must go. I will come again—soon. And if I seem to smile on M'timbi, recall this hour!" And then she was gone, leaving the sweetness of her perfume in Bryce's nostrils.

When he returned to the house Bryce woke Hill. The old trader listened with a skeptical grin on his face while Bryce poured out his story.

"Well, I'll be damned!" commented Hill when Bryce had finished. "I begin to see the light. The first *cabooka* that came to us brought back news of two white men—one a big, strong fellow and young enough to be taken in by a pretty face! So, the lady comes down to look you over for herself. And she's making a fool of M'timbi, too!"

"Too?" queried Bryce.

"What do you know to the contrary?" demanded Hill.

"It wouldn't make sense, John."

"With women nothing does! You'd have been smart if you'd settled for the stones. When we get out of here I'll see what I can do to get you out of this mess. Now, for heaven's sake go to sleep!"

TOWARD evening of the next day, Bryce and Hill were led out onto the stone streets. Mchawi, the Great One, the Black Wizard of Batuta had sent for them, so they were informed. The news of

their coming had gone before them. The street was lined with men and women and children whose big, round eyes peeked over their mothers' shoulders. The women, Bryce thought, looked well enough in their colored *kangas*. But the men, well-made as they were, looked ludicrous in their gaudy vests. But there was no hostility in their animated gestures, nor in the comments they shouted from one to another.

The two white men were conducted down the straight road from their prison, past the temple gates, toward a large house through the open gates of which they saw the green of a spacious court.

Within the court, a group of twenty warriors were ranged about Mchawi, the Wizard of Batuta. He sat, or rather was bolstered up, in a chair to which were attached strong bamboo poles, so that he might be carried when he desired to move. He was a deformed dwarf, of fifty years or more. His head was of normal size, but his body was a mere lump of flesh with shapeless elongations for feet. Bryce was to learn that he had never once stood upright, nor could he properly sit, for he was without backbone. Physical abnormality and a keen, malevolent mind had combined to give him fatal power over a people in whose memories the ritual drums still throbbed.

"White men," he addressed them without ceremony, "how many guns have you got at your house?"

"Twenty good guns, powder and shot, O Mchawi," returned Hill. "But our own guns are not for trade," he added as an afterthought.

"It is good!" Mchawi flung a rawhide bag at Hill's feet. "Twenty stones for twenty guns, and powder and shot. Count them out, White-man."

"Twenty guns for twenty stones at my house," amended Hill.

The dwarf's face broke into an evil grin. "Have no fear, my people will bear the labour of safari."

"It is agreed, then," said Hill, picking up the stones and handing them to Bryce, then:

"O Chief, we have been here many days. When will our weapons be returned to us? When will you give us leave to depart in peace, as we came?"

Mchawi scowled upon him. "I have

treated you well. Why are you eager to go?"

"I brought all my people with me. My house is without servants," Hill replied.

"Doubtless you have neighbours, other white men. Will they not care for your house?"

"There are none, O Chief."

"Is it so?" The dwarf plucked his loose lips. "How long, I cannot tell. The *cabooka* must be made ready. You will be given your weapons when you are beyond the pass through the mountains. I have spoken!" He waved dismissal.

On their way back to their prison, Hill walked in silence and there was a worried look in his eyes. It was evident to Bryce that they were going back to confinement for an indefinite period, or worse. It appeared to him that Mchawi had adroitly extracted the information he wanted from Hill, by offering a good bargain.

"You know, Bryce," Hill broke in on his reflections. "Something smells."

"The stones are all right, John," Bryce smiled.

"To hell with the stones!" said Hill. "I've been thinking I told that monstrosity too much. He's got something on his mind, and it isn't good for us! Now about Mawana..."

"Yes," Bryce interrupted him, "you were going to get me out of that mess. Remember?"

"All right! Maybe she wasn't lying—about Mchawi," he finished as he saw Bryce's face brighten.

"John," said Bryce with sudden gravity, "if we get out of here it will be with Mawana's help or not at all! I think I know what's in that wizard's mind. He'll send a *cabooka* for our guns, but we won't go with it. He's no fool. He'll wait until he's sure we have no friends to ask questions. And when the *cabooka* gets back, he'll cut our throats!"

IV

FOR BRYCE the next few days were spent in a kind of mental anguish, for which Hill's satirical smile was no sedative. But Hill, for all his banter, had Bryce only known it, watched for Mawana Hanna almost as eagerly as Bryce himself. Hill, who knew from experience the dark, weird

bent of primitive thinking, saw stark facts that were hidden from Bryce. Though he gave no outward sign of it, he had come to believe in Mawana, perhaps because he could see no other way out of Batuta. If the girl wasn't playing with Bryce, there was a chance—a chance to get out and run for it at least.

Bryce slept during the day and at night kept a vigil in the garden. Mawana came on the third night. A black robe covered her from head to foot and bulged with the burden she carried under her arms.

"Take me to the house, quickly," she greeted Bryce. "I have brought your guns."

Hill rose as she came into the room.

"Ha!" he exclaimed as his eyes came to rest on the rifles.

The girl smiled faintly. Her eyes were dull as if with pain and recent weeping. She handed Hill's rifle to him.

"They're no good without cartridges," he observed, working the bolt of the rifle.

"The belts were too much to carry. A servant will meet you with them beyond the gates—the same by which you entered the town," she reassured him.

"The gates?" Bryce caught her arm and turned her to face him. "Are we to go?"

The girl's lips quivered, "You go," she answered. "I stay."

"But..." Bryce began.

"Shut up!" Hill pushed him aside. "Why, Lady?" he asked, his shrewd eyes upon her.

"Because you are marked for death, Gaunt One!"

"How do you know that, Lady?"

"Because the *cabooka* left for your factory yesterday. Because I have friends among Mchawi's men, otherwise how would I pass your guards and get your guns?"

"And you have risked so much that we might live. Why?"

The girl clenched her hands. She would not look at Bryce. "How? Why? What does it matter? Gather what you need and go!"

"And will you make your peace with Mchawi, Lady?" asked Hill, watching her closely.

"No!" she flashed. "I am not alone. There are some who will stand with me. Now, will you go?"

"No," said Hill, tugging at his beard.

"No, I don't figure to go. I have not always thought well of you, Lady. But now I ask to be counted among those friends who will stand with you."

Mawana's hand clutched at her throat. She tossed her head and tried to smile. Then she was weeping softly in Bryce's arms.

Later, Hill, who had been pacing the floor, stopped before them.

"Mawana," he asked, "can you bring one of our cartridge-belts here?"

The girl slipped from Bryce's arms, "Yes," said she. "There is time before the change of guard if I go at once."

"Good!" he approved. "Go now, then. And bring a robe such as you are wearing."

When she had gone he sat smoking, the furrows of his face deepened with thought. Then he began to clean his rifle with the pull-through he had extracted from the brass-capped hole in its butt plate.

"Bryce," he asked, as the other came in from the garden, "have you any idea what we're up against?"

Bryce sat down with a worried frown upon his face.

"It's hopeless, John. Mawana has friends—mostly women. We don't stand a chance in a stand-up fight with Mchawi and his gang!"

"I had it figured that way," Hill agreed. "She wouldn't have come looking for help if she had it here. Now, I've been thinking of that king-killing custom Mchawi's playing with. It reminds me of a trip I made to Uganda. The same custom was in force up there, then. But the old king, Bulyoyo—he was as fat as a hippo, and as crafty as a fox—didn't like the idea of defending his divine right with the sword. When the time came he got around it by electing a substitute to rule in his place, a sort of scapegoat. The poor devil he picked on ruled for seven days, then they strangled him, and everybody was happy. Thinking of that gave me an idea."

BRYCE jumped to his feet, his eyes shining, "That's it! I can substitute for Mawana's father, and when M'timbi comes to do the job..."

"Aye! You catch on quick," Hill approved.

"But how do we know when Mchawi

means to strike?" Bryce worried. "We've got to know that!"

"Maybe we do. Native customs follow the seasons. The Spring solstice is due tomorrow. I saw the signs of the Zodiac over the gate of the temple, and I'm willing to gamble that tomorrow's the day."

"Lord!" said Bryce with wonderment in his eyes. "And you call me smart! But what about Mchawi, John? He won't take it quietly!"

"Leave him to me."

"But how..."

"Never mind, just listen," Hill interrupted. "Tomorrow night you go to the temple. If Mawana can get in she can get you out. Get into the old man's sleeping quarters—fix it with Mawana. Wait for M'timbi there. He'll try to sneak up on you—that's the way it's supposed to be done—so don't go to sleep. I don't want any weapons found near you afterwards. You'll have to manage without your rifle, or anything else. Can you handle it, huh?"

"I'll gamble, John. There's nothing else for it. But I got you into this and I don't see why..."

"I make my own decisions, Bryce," Hill cut in. "And I don't figure to give an account for what I've done, or do, this side of hell! Now, go meet your lady-love. She'll be back any minute."

When Bryce returned from the bottom of the garden with Hill's cartridge belt in his hand, he came upon Hill in the act of climbing down from the flat roof of the house.

"What the devil were you doing up there?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"Oh, star-gazing," Hill replied, casually. "Just star-gazing."

"We are in luck, John!" Bryce told him eagerly. "We've got the same guards tomorrow night. Mawana thinks you're right about the solstice. She'll check. She says you're a wizard. And if we pull this off, she—I mean, we want you to stay with us."

The old trader sighed and shook his head. "I was afraid of that," he said at last. "You're going to marry her, huh? And you've fixed it to stay here? Well, well. Isn't that nice!" He stroked his beard.

"I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race," he quoted, looking up at the stars.

"Good Lord, John!" Bryce held up his hands in mock surprise. "Poetry—I never suspected it!"

"Some things are best said that way, my boy," said Hill firmly.

"And delicacy, too. Oh, John!"

"Hell!" Hill exploded. "D'you want it straight?"

"No—no!" said Bryce hastily. "I make my own decisions too, John. And I must point out that the lady in question is not a savage."

Hill's eyebrows arched quizzically. "I see your point," said he and led the way inside.

ON THE following day Bryce and Hill ate their evening meal in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. The misshapen form of Mchawi hung over Bryce's mind, like a black shadow. For Hill, when questioned, would commit himself to no more than "Leave him to me." Nor could Bryce divine anything of the plan that had been concocted behind the old trader's shrewd eyes. Hill, he thought, had shown qualities that deserved confidence, but working in the dark worried him. He saw clearly that, if successful in his encounter with M'timbi, it would be no more than a temporary check to Mchawi's dark ambition. Indeed, they might force the Wizard's hand, drive him out into the open. And that...

"Bwana."

Bryce started as the servant, who had come to remove the remains of their meal, spoke in his ear.

"Bwana, the Lady Mawana bade me to say, 'Be ready at moonrise'. I am to guide you to the temple, Bwana."

"Well, I'm damned!" Hill was surprised. "I thought he was dumb. Come here, boy!"

"Yes, Bwana. But speak softly!"

"What is your name?" Hill demanded.

"T'simbi, Bwana John."

"Very well, T'simbi. When I spoke you would not answer. Is that good, T'simbi?"

T'simbi looked about the room, evidently turning the question over in his mind. Then he said:

"Bwana, it is not good to speak too much."

"By damn, John," swore Bryce, "there's a man after your own heart!"

"T'simbi," said Hill, "I see that you are wise. You know the great evil of a loose tongue. Now return to your mistress, but come back later. I have words for you."

"And say to her, T'simbi," Bryce put in, "that I will be ready at moonrise. Say also that my eyes are hungry for the sight of her."

T'simbi clasped his hands and inclined his head:

"Even so, Bwana."

The moon was well above the red hills when Bryce and Hill shook hands at the gate at the end of the garden. The guard on the wall stood gazing out across the plains, apparently unaware of what went on below.

"Don't get squeamish," Hill advised. "Do what you have to do quickly. Mchawi will come to the temple to announce the new king to the people. Be on hand, wear M'timbi's head-gear and trappings, but keep in the shadow. And remember, no weapons in sight. Kiss Mawana for me. Good luck!"

Bryce, with blackened face and enveloped in a black robe, glided through the shadows cast by the walls of the temple on the heels of his guide. Once he looked back and saw Hill standing on the roof of their prison, his figure outlined against the moon.

No one was visible on the long, straight road, flanked by a parklike square on one hand and by the walls of the fortress-temple on the other. T'simbi kept close to the walls and, presently, led Bryce through a small gate, at some distance from the main entrance to the temple.

They crossed a courtyard paved with mosaic, the red and white pattern of which stood out clearly in the moonlight. A pond shimmered under the spreading branches of a great *baobab*. A fountain splashed, mingling its noise with the hum of insects busy among the lilies and the jasmine. T'simbi led Bryce down a dark passage until they came to a square doorway, curtained with woven grass.

"Enter, Bwana," said T'simbi, holding the curtain aside.

BRYCE stepped into a large chamber, lighted by a single rush-wood torch which spluttered in an iron bracket attached to the wall. Mawana rose from

her place beside a low divan on which the sleeping form of an old man lay stretched. Bryce looked down upon a face expressive of pride and dignity even in repose. The hooked nose spoke of his Semitic ancestry and the long, white beard and wrinkled skin were those of a man who has lived beyond the allotted three score years and ten. And it was from this venerable head, and from these feeble hands that the stalwart M'timbi would snatch a sceptre and a crown, thought Bryce with swelling heart.

"He sleeps soundly," he observed as Mawana approached him.

"Yes," said she softly. "And so he shall sleep until danger has past, or wake no more. It was needful," she explained, "to give him a sleeping potion. He is proud, and would have no man stand in his place."

"So I thought," said Bryce. "He must have wielded power firmly and wisely in his youth to hold Mchawi at bay even now when he is old."

Mawana's head lifted proudly, "True. He is still loved, and would be obeyed if he had strength to go among the people. And well Mchawi knows it! Otherwise he would have seized power long ago."

Looking upon her, as she stood with her dark beauty but half revealed in the flickering torch-light, Bryce thought of Hill's goddess. But no man would be content to worship such a goddess for long. Her beauty was not of heaven, it was of earth. It invited possession, and it was his ... Bryce checked his thoughts sternly.

"Mawana," said he, "I think it is best that I go to your father's apartment at once. M'timbi may come sooner than expected."

Alarm came into her eyes, "But you are unarmed!"

"M'timbi expects to meet an old man," Bryce reassured her. "Surprise is the best weapon, Mawana."

"But..." she said doubtfully, "what of Mchawi?"

"Oh," said Bryce with a wry smile, "leave him to *Bwana* John! Now, I must go, Mawana."

She came close to him and, as Bryce's arms closed about her, she whispered in his ear: "I am for no other man. If you do not return, I shall die!"

T'simbi was waiting outside in the passage. He led Bryce along its dark length toward the other end.

"Here, *Bwana*." He stopped before a heavy, metal-bound door.

"How much do you know of what is afoot, T'simbi?"

"Enough not to envy you, *Bwana*."

"Where is the main entrance from here, T'simbi?"

"Fifty paces back along this passage. There are steps and a road to the big gates, *Bwana*."

"When Mchawi comes, will he come that way?"

"Even so. But M'timbi will creep upon you. May your hand be sure!"

"Thanks," said Bryce. "*Kwenda*, T'simbi!"

Closing the heavy door behind him, Bryce found himself in a large room, eerily lighted by an opening through which the moonlight streamed. The opening, or window, was without bars and opened onto the courtyard which apparently surrounded the elliptical temple. There were no other doors. M'timbi, Bryce noted with satisfaction, would have to come through the window or the door, unless there was some secret means of ingress. He began a methodical examination of the apartment's four walls.

The room was sparsely furnished with a small rush carpet, a couple of tables and a low couch, evidently the bed of M'timbi's intended victim. Bryce arranged its coverings to resemble the form of a sleeping man. He chose a position near the door where it was dark.

IT WANTED about an hour to midnight. How often, Bryce wondered, had a grim tragedy, similar to the one in which he was about to play his part, been enacted within the gloomy walls of the temple? Many times, he thought, before the coming of Mawana's people had put an end to the bloody law of succession by which the old kings of Batuta had come to the throne. What must have been the feelings of those who had kept this terrible vigil? Similar to his own, he supposed.

But for him there was only the nerve-racking anxiety of an hour, for them it had been the agony of years. From the first day when greying hair had marked

declining vigor and skill, the least relaxation of vigilance would sign their death warrant. Through the lonely watches of the night they must have stalked, naked weapon in hand, wary, suspicious of guards and starting at shadows. They had slept at peril of their lives, until, at last, the assassin's dagger had found their hearts and death closed their haunted eyes.

Bryce's nerves jumped. A sound—faint, rasping! The door! Bryce flattened himself against the wall, as the door swung slowly open. As the gap widened, Bryce slid along the wall toward the door. M'timbi, his eyes upon a dummy on the bed, stole into the room, the blade of the *panga* he held in his right hand flashed in the moonlight. Bryce crept to the door and shut it softly.

M'timbi had struck what would have been a fatal blow, as Bryce shot the bolt that locked the door. M'timbi turned with a startled exclamation, terror in his eyes.

"Well struck, M'timbi!" Bryce's voice mocked him from the shadows. "A blow worthy of a slave who would be king!"

The taunt nearly cost Bryce his life. M'timbi recognized the voice and sprang at it, the heavy knife whirling above his head. The blade ripped through Bryce's tunic as he side-stepped, then he dove for M'timbi's legs and brought him down. Steel rang on the stone floor as the knife fell from M'timbi's hand.

Both men were on their feet in the same instant. M'timbi began to circle Bryce, his eyes fixed on the white man's face, his bare feet slithering along the floor in search of his knife. The clink of steel told Bryce he had found it, and he sprang as the other stooped to pick it up. M'timbi tried to grapple, but Bryce's fists drove him back against the wall. He bounded off it like a ball.

Bryce pounded him with lefts and rights, but failed to stop him; he bored in until Bryce felt the crushing strength of his arms about his ribs. Then he was lifted and thrown, and crashed to the floor with all the breath knocked out of his body.

Dazed by Bryce's punches M'timbi groped on the floor for his knife. Bryce was on his feet again. M'timbi gave up his search and closed in. But Bryce had learned his lesson, he delivered one smashing blow to M'timbi's jaw, then locked his arms about the other's waist. M'timbi

gasped as the pressure began to force the breath out of him. He sank his teeth into Bryce's shoulder and tried to gouge his eyes. The room was filled with the noise of their breathing as each put forth all his strength.

M'timbi screamed horribly as one of his ribs cracked. Bryce, shifting his grip, heaved and threw. M'timbi landed with a sickening thud, and lay with his head lolling to one side. Bryce, panting and swaying in the patch of moonlight, passed a shaking hand before his eyes. The fall had broken M'timbi's neck.

From outside the drone of horns and the rumble of drums reached Bryce's ears. Mchawi! But Hill had said he would deal with Mchawi. Dazedly Bryce made his way along the passage, to the main entrance to the temple.

Outside the cool air cleared his head. He found Mawana and T'simbi at the head of the steps overlooking the outer wall. Mawana ran to him and flung herself into his arms.

"What is all the noise, T'simbi?" asked Bryce.

"Mchawi comes, *Bwana*. See!"

A procession was leaving the courtyard of Mchawi's house. Flaming torches lit up the scene. Presently the wizard came into view, reclining in his chair which was borne by a dozen blacks and flanked by a troop of spearmen. The procession advanced slowly toward the gates of the temple.

"Where is Hill?" Bryce worried.

"I think *Bwana* John has failed us," said Mawana.

"He's dead if he has!" said Bryce, loyally.

Mchawi's chair halted before the gates to the temple. He raised his hand. The gates were swung open. The torch-bearers began a chant. Drums rumbled and the horns blared a discordant accompaniment. The procession advanced through the gates.

Dead or alive, Hill's plan had miscarried! The admission came to Bryce's mind with the bitterness of self-reproach. He should have demanded to know more of Hill's plan. There might have been a chance if he'd kept his rifle. Mchawi, at least, would have had a slug in his twisted brain by this time. And with the wizard out of the way...

The procession halted at the foot of the steps. The chanting stopped. Mawana moved down the steps to meet the Wizard of Batuta, her head held high. All eyes were upon Mchawi, waiting for him to speak. But he uttered no word. Presently an attendant approached him and spoke in his ear, then suddenly jumped back and screamed:

"Mchawi *kufa!* Mchawi is dead!"

THE WIZARD'S guards pressed around his chair, staring awestruck. A voice yelled, "A devil has killed Mchawi!"

Bryce thought he recognized the voice, and looked around for T'simbi. Then panic was upon the crowd and they fled from the temple and through the streets of the town.

Mawana ran up the steps to Bryce, her eyes shining.

"It is true," she gasped breathlessly. "He is dead!"

"Call your people," urged Bryce, "There is still danger."

"No, no danger now," she assured him. "Mchawi is dead and my father will be obeyed!"

"But how did he die?" wondered Bryce. "He was alive five minutes ago. I saw him lift his hand." He went down the steps, and began to examine the wizard's corpse. Mchawi reclined in his chair, as when Bryce had first seen him. His jaw had fallen, and his eyes were open and staring. Bryce's eyes widened when they came to rest upon a neat, round hole above the wizard's left ear from which blood was slowly oozing. He turned to look down the straight road toward what had been their prison.

"No!" he muttered. "No, it's impossible!"

"What troubles you?" asked Mawana anxiously.

"Mawana," said he, "I must go to *Bwana* John. If there is no danger for you..."

"There is none. Go to your friend, but return soon?"

When Bryce entered the house that had

been their prison for so long, he found Hill cleaning his rifle.

"John," he began, "did you..."

"Aye," said Hill. "I picked him off from the roof."

"But—Good Lord—it's three-hundred yards if it's an inch! And by moonlight..."

"And torchlight," Hill amended. "For the best eye in..."

"Why didn't you tell me?" protested Bryce.

"You'd have lost your nerve if you'd known Mawana's life depended on that shot."

Bryce sat down weakly, "I guess you were right, at that," said he. "But they'll find out."

"No, they won't," Hill interposed. "If you remember, no one in the *cabooka* that came to the factory had a rifle, and Mchawi wanted muskets. Aye, and Mawana said they'd done no trading since her grandfather's time. That means the only guns they've seen are old, muzzle-loading gas-pipes, firing a ball. If I'd used one of 'em I'd have blown Mchawi's head clean off! Besides, they're looking for a devil, not a Martini-Henry. You'll see why I didn't want any weapons around, and why I had to risk a long shot."

"I think I do, John," said Bryce, his eyes alight with admiration.

There was silence for a moment; then Hill asked, suddenly:

"You haven't changed your mind about staying, heh?"

"No, John."

Hill sighed. "Well, you're a lucky young devil!" he swore. "I've been around, but I never ran into anything like Mawana Hanna."

"Why not stay here, John?" Bryce urged. "What are your plans for the future anyway?"

The old trader stretched himself. "Well," he said, "I'll stick around for awhile. See you settled. And when the *cabooka* Mchawi sent to the factory gets back here, maybe—if you keep your mouth shut—I'll sell those muskets to your old man again, heh?"



As Tobel's hand flashed for his gun, Ryan struck.



Red Moon of Monkoto

By **DAN CUSHMAN**

It was a strange story Ryan told—that story of six jungle-crazed outcasts, an egg-size diamond, and the weird drums that only one man could hear.

CAPTAIN JOHN PEWTON of the steamer R. W. Roe had not intended to touch at Lourenco Marques, Portuguese East Africa.

Peyton's intention had been to deliver his cargo of wire rope at Cape Town, and go on to Calcutta with an equal weight of baled angora. In that case he would have steamed south of Madagascar, touching at Port Louis in the Mascarenes, thus missing Lourenco Marques by 322 nautical miles, more or less, a condition that would have suited the fat captain well indeed.

But an unfortunate condition in the Calcutta textiles industry had intervened, so here he was, delivering a mixed cargo of steel rails, salt fish and ammonium sulphate to Lourenco Marques, and taking in its place a cargo of sisal destined for the markets of San Francisco.

It had been six years since he had touched at the port, and it was just the same as he had left it. The same bald-faced sun-brick buildings baked in the tropic heat. The same tattered natives slept along the wharfs of the Mozambique Com-

pany. The same Portuguese pariahs sat between the awnings of the Saltazar Hotel, cursing the same department of colonies in Lisbon.

There was that same piano player beyond the potted palms, too. Peyton had almost forgotten. What was his name? Oh yes—"Slats." Slats something-or-other from "good old Frisco."

Peyton chose a table at that side of the terrace most likely to catch a breeze, if one should blow, and after a moderate wait a slim, Hindu waiter came, buttoning his white stengah-shifter.

"Whiskey," said Peyton. "English whiskey, and bottled water."

Yes, wars came and went, new Romes arose to bestride the earth, statesmen were driven to stomach ulcers by the specter of nuclear energy uncontrolled, but Lourenco Marques went on in its same dull orbit forever.

Even Slats.

The orchestra—piano, guitar and violin—was playing a fairly recent American jazz hit which had probably been picked up from the wireless.

The music stopped. The Hindu returned with whiskey and bottled water. Peyton was just pouring a drink when the palms parted and a tall, thin, baggy-eyed man came out dragging the heels of his tennis shoes and sat down in a rattan chair across from him without bothering to shake hands.

"Hello, Cap," he said, motioning for an extra glass. "How's things in good old Frisco?"

"Booming—the last time I was there."

"When was that?"

"Three years ago."

"I understand you're headed for Frisco now."

"Tomorrow."

Slats got his glass and poured a drink of whiskey. He seemed to have something on his mind.

"Peyton—you've always seemed to be a square fellow. Now you have a ship going back to Frisco. Loaded with copal..."

"Sisal."

"Sure. Now, you don't suppose, if you tried, maybe you could find a little extra space? Nothing fancy, you understand, just..."

"Getting homesick, Slats?"

"It's not me. Lord, I'm so far off the beat I couldn't earn a living any place but here. But there's some folks in town that would like passage, if it could be..."

"Sure. I can take on a couple of passengers. No favor about it. Business. Say, two hundred and fifty, American, each."

"Well, you see, it isn't quite so simple..."

"What have you got, Slats? Somebody hot?"

"No. Not exactly. This fellow, well, he came from Frisco, too. Fellow named Ryan. He's a square Joe. He and his wife. I think she's his wife, that is..."

"What are you trying to say?"

"He hasn't got a passport."

"How about the woman?"

"She hasn't got one, either."

"No dice," said Captain John Peyton.

"Oh hell, Peyton. Here we are, the only two Americans in port. Here's a pal of ours..."

"A pal of yours. Why hasn't he got a passport?"

"I don't know. Maybe he lost it."

"Then why doesn't he ask the Governor-General's office to cable for confirmation and issue a new one?"

"Well, maybe we could rig up something that would get by. There's a printer over on..."

"I'm not taking on any hot passengers, Slats, and that's final. I might have at one time, but things are getting too tough. Here, let's have another drink and forget about it."

SLATS poured a drink and sat there, scrooched down in his rattan chair, his pointed eyeballs shifting to the verandah stairs and back again. Unexpectedly he rose to his feet. Peyton looked. A heavy-shouldered man of thirty-five or so was descending the stairs.

"Ryan!" said Slats, "come over here."

Ryan grinned in such an honest manner that Captain John Peyton had to concentrate in order to hold onto his suspicions. The man had a reddish-brown complexion that indicated years of tropic sun. He wore white linens, cleaner than average, which wasn't saying too much, ventilated shoes, and he carried a sun helmet that had seen service.

He also carried a gun, but it was tucked discreetly beneath his linen coat so as not to antagonize the Portuguese police, and Peyton wouldn't have suspected it was there, only it made a little thump against the table as Ryan shook hands and sat down.

"Captain Peyton?" asked Ryan. "You have a ship here at Marques?"

"Yes. The R. W. Roe."

"And you were going to..."

"San Francisco," said Peyton, his voice rising with defensive sharpness as though to say, "but, bucko m'lad, I'm not taking any hot passengers, so you don't need to waste your breath asking."

Ryan sat back, smiling a little, showing a good set of teeth. Peyton decided he was older than thirty-five, but the tropics had agreed with him. Once in a while you saw a fellow like that.

"Whiskey?" asked Peyton, shoving out the bottle.

"Sure." Ryan looked at the bottle while he waited for a glass. "Scotch. But what wouldn't I give for a mint julep made with Kentucky bourbon. Or rye with White Rock. Or even good old American rot-gut in a waterfront dive, as long as it was Frisco." Ryan sent over a shrewd, "How about it, Captain? Wouldn't you overlook a little matter of credentials in the case of a homesick fellow countryman?"

Peyton decided that Ryan had been watching from the verandah. At any rate, he knew Slat had been talking it over with him.

"No dice!" he said with extra shortness because he disliked turning this fellow down. "Positively no dice."

"I'll pay five hundred bucks, Peyton. Five hundred for me, and five hundred for the woman. American."

"And what do I do when I get you to Frisco? Pack you in a bale of sisal?"

Ryan laughed, "You get me in sight of that gate, and I'll show you how to get off the boat all right."

"Sorry, Ryan. I can't afford to take the chance. Why haven't you got a passport, anyway?"

"Why—I happened to leave the States in a hurry. And the little woman—well, she has a long story. A damned long story."

"Listen, Peyton, you've knocked around

the tropics. From one port to another, anyway. You know how it is with the whites down here. You won't find one of us in twenty with a biography that would stand investigating. That's why we're here. It happens I haven't got a passport. So what? If you'd showed up a couple of days later I'd have had one forged. And the little woman? Did Slat tell you she didn't have one? That's not exactly true. She has a passport—but she wouldn't dare use it."

In explanation, Ryan pointed his forefinger to his temple and made the motion of a revolver hammer falling.

Peyton asked, "You mean somebody would kill her?"

"Why, somebody would get killed, though I'm not exactly sure who it would be."

PEYTON thought of that solid thump of a revolver when Ryan had seated himself. He looked like the man who would know how to use it.

Ryan poured himself a drink, watered it down, drank half of it.

"Ever been up the Congo beyond Matadi, Peyton? No? Well, you've been smart. I spent seven years up there."

It's a hell of a country. Hot, with a humidity that weighs two ounces to the cubic yard. Monotonous, too. That damned sun, rising and setting at exactly six o'clock every day, winter and summer. And the rains—especially in March.

There's a strip up there around Kasai where it rains at some time during every hour from February clear through to April. The whole country turns into a swamp, and that thick jungle becomes one great, steaming sponge.

I'll tell you about this particular rainy season. It was getting on toward the first of March—the very worst time. I had been out contracting for copal and was on my way back to Monkoto with a couple of porters. There's an airstrip at Monkoto where an Englishman makes weekly trips with a six-place transport, weather permitting. I had an idea to take the plane over to Albertville, and from there to Lusaka where maybe I'd treat myself to a bath with soap, and a sundowner with ice in it, just like a human being.

Monkoto doesn't lie right on the Congo.

It couldn't, with the overflow what it is during the rains. They built it on high ground about six kilometers away, with nothing except the steamboat docks down on the river.

It was getting along toward late afternoon of that day, and I had just reached the lorry road which ran from the town down to the docks when I met her. The woman.

She was small. Young—I'd guess at twenty-two or twenty-four, though I'm not a very good judge. Blonde. Not the mildewed-thatch blonde that you generally run into here in the tropics—but European blonde with flashes of gold in it. Her hair was tucked up beneath her new sun helmet, but a few ringlets strayed down. She wore a loose cotton shirt, white linen shorts, knee stockings and ankle-high boots—just the regular thing most female tourists pick up in Leopoldville for a steamboat cruise to the interior, but this girl was no tourist. She was no missionary, nor trader's daughter, either.

I stopped for a while and just stared at her—very beautiful, and all alone.

"Mademoiselle," I said, taking off my helmet, "what in the devil?"

She looked up at me and smiled. She didn't seem to understand the reason for my surprise.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Why, to Monkoto. Is this not the right way?"

She was French, or at least on the French side of Belgian, judging by her accent.

"This is the way, all right."

"Why did you act so surprised?" she asked.

"Why, you see, you're a white woman. You're out here all alone. Here, in this jungle. There are lions and leopards around, and they're dangerous, all modern debunking stories to the contrary. Yes, and natives, too, who would just as soon chew on your shin bone as look at it."

"Oh!" she said, stepping a trifle closer to me. Then she went on to give a sort of an explanation,

"I was on the river steamboat—the Francqui. I went ashore at that native village back there to buy some little trinkets. And—well, the boat just went away without me. I asked them at the

landing about the nearest town, and they directed me up this road."

"They sent you up here *alone*?"

SHE SMILED and came close so that her small shoulder touched my arm. "But I am not alone now, am I, monsieur!"

No, you're damned right she wasn't alone! And it made me feel right to have her there, too. I don't know how else to describe it—just *right*.

"You are Monsieur..."

"Ryan."

"Ryan. Ryan." She repeated the word over several times as though it had a strange feel to her tongue. After all, I don't suppose Ryans are as common in Brussels as they are in Frisco. Then she said,

"I am Mademoiselle Tansa."

Tansa *what* she didn't say, and I didn't ask. You'll find a good many out in the jungle who don't go by their real names, and I knew there was a lot she hadn't bothered to tell me.

One of those hourly deluges came along, and we waited it out in the shelter of a big bokongu tree, then we went up the lorry road and reached Monkoto about twilight.

Monkoto! You've never been there, Captain. Well, you haven't missed much. A native village of upright bamboo covered by matting and caked mud. Thatch roofs so thick they sometimes collapsed the houses when they got soaked during the rains. An abandoned mission, copal and rubber warehouses with their rusty sheet-metal roofs, the government house and rest house painted white, three or four traders' houses on stilts with long verandahs hanging low like the bills of Englishmen's caps. And that was all. That, and the solid never-ending green sponge of the jungle.

I suppose Tansa had seen that word "Monkoto" written on a map and expected a hell of a lot more. Pavement, maybe, and a moving-picture house. You know how it is with these mapmakers. They dislike nothing beneath heaven like blank space on paper, and a village of one man and fifty camels in the Sahara will rate blacker type than a city of two hundred thousand with three rotary clubs and an

eighty million dollar municipal debt back in California.

"Well," said Tansa, "if the plane stops here as they said..."

"You're taking the plane?" I asked. "Where to?"

Now, a question like that shouldn't have stopped her. She should have known where she was going—to Leopoldville, to Stanleyville, to Bukama—but Tansa just stood there, looking at me, her little head tilted a trifle to one side.

After a while she smiled and answered, "Why, Monsieur Ryan, perhaps wherever the plane goes—north, south, what is the difference?" and she nodded to that squat village with its natives in skirts of raffia, its huts sodden with rain, and the haze from the smoldering cook-fires almost hiding the assortment of white man's houses beyond.

"I think any direction would be better, no?"

She had me there. Any place would be better than Monkoto.

II

WE WENT up the steps of the government building with natives lining the path, staring at her. I rapped at the door, shouted. No answer. No light. Just a rattan chair on the webbed-in portion of the verandah, and the empty brandy glass which showed that a white man had been there.

The rain was pattering again, and over it I could hear the sound of a gramophone going top speed. It was over at the rest house. There was a light there, too—the yellow light of a petrol lamp shining from two little windows which were almost hidden by verandah roof, and vines, and netting and jalousies.

We walked over, following a quagmire path edged by a row of neat, white-painted stones.

I rapped, but nobody seemed to hear, so I opened the door and went in. Tansa followed me. There were three men in the large room. One of them, the youngest, must have been telling a bawdy story by the way they all looked up with startled, guilty expressions when they saw that a woman had come in.

It was a trifle dark in the entryway, so

the full force of her beauty didn't assert itself until she was well inside the room with the light of the lamp on her.

They stood there for a while, staring at the strange sight of a white woman not yet turned drab by the combined curses of the tropics—sun, boredom and quinine.

Franz Devoux, the Colonial Administrator of Monkoto, was first to recover himself. He stood straight, with something like his original aristocratic training showing in his thin, very brown and deeply-hollowed face.

"Ah, madame!" he exclaimed, slap-slapping forward in his unlaced tennis shoes and bowing. His protuberant eyes rested for a moment on her left hand. "Ah, forgive! *Mademoiselle!*" he said, noticing the absence of a wedding band.

He would have kissed her hand, but she did not give him the chance. He stood straight again, admiring her for at least as long as a gentleman should, and then he noticed me.

"Ryan!" He shook my hand, never quite taking his eyes from Tansa. "You American devil you!" he breathed in a voice that combined understanding and envy.

I let it go without explanation. The truth was all I could have told, and that might have made it tougher on Tansa. So I let them go ahead and think what they wanted to.

The young chap who had been telling the smutty story lifted the needle from the gramophone and stood there, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet, smiling in a way that showed how damned handsome he was.

"I'm Reginald Welton!" he announced. Just like that—like he was saying, "I'm the Grand Duke Ferdinand, and all these people are my loyal subjects."

Welton. Does that name mean anything to you? It should, if you've ever been up around Nigeria. Old C. W. Welton, the mahogany baron? Reggie was his son. A ne'er-do-well and a rotter if there ever was one—and I'm not saying that because of the trouble I later had with him over Tansa.

The third man in the room was Paul Lauritz—a hard-faced soldier of fortune I'd once been on safari with down in Angola.

"Ryan!" Lauritz elbowed Reggie out of the way with a force that almost knocked him down with the gramophone in his arms, and came over to pump my hand.

I WAS glad to see him. He was American. Came from over around Ely, Nevada, and arrived in the tropics by way of McNeil Island prison where he served time on a federal offense. Not the best sort of citizen, you understand, but he was from home, and besides that you always knew right where he stood—he was consistently and conscientiously beyond the law.

Lauritz winked and tilted his head in the direction of Tansa, "Nice chick! Where'd you pick her up?"

"Out in the jungle—but keep it under your hat."

"You playboy! You shanty Irish playboy!"

"No, on the level, Lauritz. I think she's on the jump from something."

I told him that because it was the easiest way to win his loyalty. He felt akin with anyone who was "on the jump."

Lauritz looked down on Tansa with his hungry eyes, his face twisting in a smile made lopsided by the machete scar which ran from his temple down to his Adam's apple.

He said, "Well, you better keep your eye on her or Reggie will see what makes her tick. I'll lay silver dollars to paper francs on that one. He's a devil with the ladies, my Reggie is."

There was no mistake about Reggie Welton making a play for my little Tansa. And he wasn't the only one. Devoux was right with him—each man after the manner of his race. Devoux wanted to kiss her fingers and talk to her out on the verandah, while Reggie had it in his mind to play the gramophone and shag.

It grated on me a little. I'll not deny it—I wanted her for myself, even though a glance in the mirror should have told me how hopeless my case was. So I moved over by the piano and tried to be a philosopher about it.

I don't know whether it ever occurred to you, but there are some women just made for men. For all men, without distinction. I was going to say "made for love" but that wouldn't be exactly true.

A man might hate such a woman, he might want to beat her, or strangle her, but still he'd want her as his own personal possession. No, man hasn't changed. Don't talk to me about culture, and the conventionalities of love. I've lived in the jungle where the calsumine of civilization peels off pretty damn quickly.

And Tansa—she was so intensely feminine. Not a beauty contest winner. Not that type. Her legs were too slim, her waist too small, but she was all woman. In other words she was the kind who would make that calsumine peel in a hurry.

Oh, she didn't encourage them—not in any positive manner, anyhow. She seemed ignorant of their attention—more than that, arrogant of it.

After a while she turned her back on both of them and walked over to where I was sitting beside the piano.

She languidly reached out and caressed the piano keys in a series of arpeggios, and Reggie, with a disgusted motion, turned off the gramophone.

She paused for a while, looking at the keys as though she could not believe the sweetness of tone that came from that old upright.

There was a reason for its sweetness, of course. No piano keeps its brilliance in the tropics—Slats will back me up in that. The fungus does something to the strings—even this stainless steel they've been using. On the other hand, the corrosion gives a new mellowness, a liquid tone never heard in the instruments of Europe and America—and this old piano, moved over from the abandoned mission house, was about as mellow as one could get. It was like a harpsichord.

And Tansa could play! Or maybe it was only the contrast of time and place. Anyway, there, in that dingy room, beneath the smoky dance of the oil lamps, with the rain hissing on the thatch roof above, that piano had the dulcet sound of the harp that rang through Tara's halls which my sainted mother used to sing about.

I DON'T know what it was Tansa played. Some melody from the classics. Chopin, maybe. The Andante Spianato, or a nocturne. Whatever it was, it seemed to take the spirit right out of a man's body, and carry it over the stinking

jungle, with its rain, and muck, and heat, and slimy crocodiles to the green fields and pine fragrance of the Sierras.

And then she started to sing. Not a big voice. In fact, it was small, like the woman herself, but it had a sort of resonance that could fill an opera house as easily as it did that twelve-meter room.

I don't think a man there took one full breath while she was singing—not even Lauritz who had no more appreciation for music than a Burmese water buffalo.

The music heightened the unreality of her being there, and it wouldn't have seemed much more strange if she had suddenly become ectoplasm and faded away. Then suddenly she turned from the piano and asked,

"When does the plane come?"

"That plane! Oh, I say!" Reggie twisted his lips with the typical disgust of your Englishman for everything smacking of the colonies, at least some other country's colonies. "That damned pilot flew over here two days ago and didn't have the nerve to land."

"The mud, mademoiselle," explained Devoux.

"But surely . . ."

"He will land if the weather improves. But in the rainy season, one must wait and pray."

"And if the weather doesn't improve?"

"Then you are welcome at our guest house."

I knew Devoux would be damned well satisfied if the rains never stopped, so long as Tansa stayed.

Lauritz sidled up to me and growled, "I wouldn't trust that administrator. You're the fly in his butter right now."

I didn't pay much attention. I'd known Devoux for a considerable time, and he never seemed to be the type who would stick a knife between a man's ribs.

Devoux called over his native houseman, gave him some instructions, and in a half-hour we were served with tinned chicken, plantain and banana salad, and boiled cassava on a table spread with linen which had probably not been unfolded for the past ten years.

We were just finishing when there was a sharp rap on the door, and a white man came in and paused in the fringe of lamp-light.

We couldn't see much about him, except his eyes, and they were on Tansa. Oh, there was nothing unusual about that. Any man would have looked at Tansa first. Rather, it was the way he looked at her. Not the anthropoid way. He had an expression that is harder to describe. I glanced over at her. She was the same as ever. Her face a lovely, placid mask.

After a moment the man came forward, dribbling water from his soaked clothing. He was medium tall, about one hundred seventy pounds, well-muscled in a way which showed he'd always taken care of himself. He had a strong face, and I suppose some would have called it handsome, but there was a bleakness there. Not the bleakness of a criminal like Lauritz, but rather that of the corporation head, the banker, the officer of the law.

I suppose my distrust for him was heightened by the fact that he had a monocle. He lifted it by its string, smoothed some droplets of rain from it on his sodden shirt, and inserted it in his eye.

"I am Josef Tobel," he said.

NO EXPLANATION—just that, as though it were the most common thing in the world to have Josef Tobels come walking out of the jungle every night in the year.

"Welcome!" exclaimed Devoux, lying as your true host ought to lie. "Won't you have dinner?"

"A bite, perhaps. Is that potted chicken? A little please, and some of the hard bread."

He sat down at the table and ate slowly. Tansa remained in the shadow near the wall. She did not actually watch Tobel, but I knew she was conscious of each move he made.

After a while she stood and languidly poured herself a drink from the water bottle. Very calm—sure of herself. Too sure of herself. Have you ever had that feeling? She was like a nervous actress entering with excessive languor in order to give an illusion of confidence.

Her nervousness came more plainly to light in her next move. She turned away from the water bottle, drawing a handkerchief from inside her blouse to dry her lips. It was an habitual movement—something she had been doing for years, only

this time it was a mistake. I saw the sudden dilation of her eyes. She stopped, clutching at an object in her handkerchief.

It was too late. Something fell with a streak of white fire. It rattled on the floor, rolled away, paused between two segments of woven-palm matting. A cut stone—a diamond of remarkable clarity and enormous size.

She froze for a second. Then she sprang forward, but Reggie was there ahead of her. He snatched it up and let it bound around his palm.

"By the great gods of Kimberley!" he breathed. "Why, woman..."

She grabbed it away from him, her eyes raging at his interference. Reggie saw the anger there, and it took some of the suave effrontery from him.

"I was only trying to help," he muttered.

Tobel said, "Excuse me, but I wonder if I might have just a little more of that tinned chicken."

Tansa decided to have a brandy. Devoux carried it to her chair. Afterward he sat down at the wireless and tried to pick up one of the South African stations, but all he got was static. After a quarter hour filled with the crackling of the wireless Tansa stood up and said,

"Really, I'm rather tired."

Devoux snapped the thing off, "We have spare accommodations at the Government House, if you..."

"I would rather stay here."

Devoux bowed, and hid his annoyance by smoothing down his moustache.

"May I show you upstairs, then?"

We could hear their feet for a while, creaking the floor of the second story, and in a couple of minutes Devoux came back.

"So soon?" asked Reggie, grinning.

"Pah!" Devoux showed his opinion of Reggie by making a wry face. He had a drink and asked me, "Who is that woman, Ryan?"

For some reason I wished he hadn't asked that in front of Tobel.

"I already told you," I said.

"Where did you find her?"

"Why, we've been friends for a long time. A very long time!"

Tobel didn't seem to be listening. He stood by a table leafing through a stack of European magazines, humming a frag-

ment of tune. That tune—it gave me a start. It was one of the songs Tansa had sung an hour before he arrived.

His back was toward me, well revealed by his drying linen jacket. It was a strong back, very straight, with right angle shoulders—stiff, unnatural as though they had been trained to fit the severe cut of some uniform. His skin was tanned, but it did not have the leathery texture of one who had spent much time in the tropics.

"You're with the *Commerciale Societe*?" I asked him.

"No. I'm in latex."

"Buyer?"

"Yes."

"How's the market?"

"The best in history. Those new synthetics aren't beginning to supply the demand."

He went on, talking about latex, and the state of the rubber market. He seemed to know considerable about the business.

"The Nfwamba shipments have been getting through?" I asked him.

"Oh yes. Nfwamba has been doing well."

I didn't bother Mr. Tobel any more about rubber. I didn't need to. You see, there is no such place as Nfwamba.

I WENT upstairs. There were eight rooms—four on each side of the hall. I could see a strip of yellow candlelight beneath the front room on the left side. I paused, listening. No sound of anyone following me. I rapped.

"Yes?" She was standing just beyond the panels.

"It's Ryan."

"Oh!" I could hear her working the fungus-corroded bolt. She opened the door a foot or so and stood, looking up at me, her hair down and like wire gold with the candlelight shining through it. Beyond her I could see the bed with its circling billow of white netting, a stand with bowl and pitcher, a Jap-silk screen over which some of her clothes were tossed.

At first I thought she was wearing a flowered robe. It surprised me, for she had been carrying not so much as a handbag when I met her on the lorry road. Then I saw it was not a robe at all—only the cheap spread of Calcutta cotton that she had evidently taken from the bed and

wrapped around her when I knocked.

I stood there for a while, looking at her. I am only human, and the calsumine of civilization is a trifle cracked in my instance, too. She kept the door pressed against her shoulder as though she expected me to crowd inside. I suddenly felt sorry for her—she was so fragile, and alone. I wanted her to trust me. I wanted her to tell me her story. I wanted to fight for her against the cruel world of men into which some peculiar fate had thrust her.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"Who?"

"That fellow—Tobel."

"I don't know."

She was lying. I knew it, and she knew that I knew it.

"He came here following you."

"You're imagining things, Mr. Ryan. Believe me—I have never seen Mr. Tobel before."

I moved as though to go away, and she followed a step into the hall,

"Is there any way I could leave here? Perhaps a canoe, on the river?"

It was impossible. Travel at that season would be hell on an old jungle tramp like myself. I'd rather take a chance with any human danger than typhus, malaria, the blackwater.

I said, "For another month, Tansa, I'm afraid it's Monkoto for all of us."

There was someone coming up the stairs, so I went quickly inside the door across from hers and lit the candle. The footsteps coming had a positive quality. I recognized them—Tobel's.

He came on, and paused at the door, looking at me.

"Mr. Ryan!" He smiled and stood there, rocking up and down on the toes of his boots, tapping his monocle thoughtfully on his chin. "I am devilishly anxious to get to Cocquilhatville, yet they tell me the air-strip here is under water, and there isn't likely to be a passenger steamer on the river for another three weeks or more. You don't suppose, if a person simply had to get out of here, that he could find a canoe? Native paddlers, or anything like that?"

Strange, wasn't it—both of them asking about a canoe, within the space of two minutes? Accident, or perhaps not. Any-

way, I was certain that Tobel had no idea of going to Cocquilhatville.

To test that, I said, "Say, you may be in luck! There's a trader down on the river going up there in a launch. Starts tomorrow, I believe. I'll give you directions to get to his place. You'd have to leave now—tonight."

"Oh the devil, Ryan! With the muscles in my legs feeling like glass? I don't want to get to Cocquilhatville that bad."

I said to myself, "you're right, my bucko! You don't want to get there at all. You just want to find out if somebody else can get there!"

III

HE SAT down, and we talked about politics, the colonial administration. Now and then we could see Tansa's shadow as she walked in front of the light. Down below, the insect-proof door slapped shut, and Devoux's feet went squish-squishing away toward his lonesome Government House. Shortly afterward Reggie and Lauritz came upstairs. Reggie went in one of the rooms, but Lauritz came on to pause in front of Tansa's door. He saw Tobel and I looking at him, so he came on to my room.

The machete scar looked very white in the candleflame as he stood, grinning at us.

"Might have known you'd grab this room, Ryan. You'd naturally want to watch over your chick—but who's going to watch you? I wouldn't mind."

"All right, Lauritz!"

He shrugged. "I didn't mean anything. Forget it."

Tobel said good night and left. When he was inside one of the rooms with the door closed, Lauritz asked,

"Who is that fellow, Ryan?"

"Rubber buyer, he says."

"He says!" scoffed Lauritz.

"Well, who do *you* think he is?"

"I think he's a detective."

"You just have a bad conscience, Lauritz."

"Conscience be damned. My skirts are clean. Reggie's the lad that's worrying about him."

"Why should Reggie worry?"

Lauritz didn't answer the question. "Maybe Tobel's after your little Tansa."

"If he was a detective and after her, I imagine he'd have arrested her."

"You can never tell what detectives will do down here in the colonies."

I went to bed and tried to sleep. In spite of the rain it was hot, and there was no circulation through the mosquito curtains of the bed. I lay there with a dutch-wife rolled up between my legs, but it didn't help much. They were still dancing down in the native village, a couple of tom-toms coming with a rocking sound through the patter of rain.

I sat by the window for a while. A half-hour, maybe. Nothing much a person could see. The verandah was covered by big, flat bamboo shades with vines grown over them to form a solid wall.

I won't say I *heard* anyone walking. Actually, there was no sound. Rather, it was a movement—a tremble of the poorly constructed guest house.

I bent the mosquito nettings out, trying to see if there was anyone on the verandah. It was too dark to tell. I moved to the hall door, opened it. A lamp in a wall bracket on the stairs cast a diffused glow. Nothing in the hall. I listened at Tansa's door. Nothing. Then at Tobel's, and Lauritz's.

I paused at Lauritz's quite a while. Somehow, I had the idea that a man was standing just on the other side, listening just like I was. I drew my automatic, slid off the safety. What was I going to shoot? I don't know. The weight of it felt good in my hand, that was all. At last I turned to retrace my steps. It was then I actually heard someone move, that tremble of the floor, the rattle of jalousies. I wasn't certain whether it came from Lauritz's room. At last I went back to bed—leaving my door open so I could watch Tansa's room.

It was my nerves. I was making little things significant. Thoughts like that buzzed through my brain. A fellow gets a trifle shaky after eight years of quinine.

I went to sleep—and the next thing I realized I was in the middle of the floor with half my mosquito drape around my neck.

SOMEONE had screamed. A woman. Tansa. There was a thud of feet, threatening to break down that termite-weakened verandah outside. Tansa again—calling me. *Me!*

I ran into the hall. I tried her door. Locked. I drove my shoulder into it, and the bolt tore loose, spilling me inside across the floor. In my hurry I'd forgotten my electric torch. She screamed again, not knowing who I was.

"Tansa!" I said.

I could hear the quick exhalation of her breath.

"You!"

"What was it?"

She was against me, standing very close. Her heart beat like the heart of a wild bird you've caught and held in your hand.

"Somebody... I don't know," she whispered.

I struck a match. The light fell on her, on the window with the mosquito net torn out, on the steel of a dagger that had been driven deeply into the heavy mahogany frame of the bed.

She grabbed up the cotton spread and drew it about her. Others were coming. Reggie first—handsome and well-muscled in only his white trousers, then Lauritz, and finally Tobel.

They all started talking. Tansa didn't even try to answer their questions. She looked from one to the other. She suddenly ran to the bed, jerked up the pillows. She looked between the sheets, on the floor. Then she spun and faced us—all of us.

"The diamond!" she said in an intense whisper. "You stole my diamond!"

"Don't look at me!" growled Lauritz. "I was asleep. I'll leave it to Reggie, there..."

"Don't leave anything to me. How do I know if you were asleep or not?"

Lauritz jerked him around, "Listen, Reggie m'lad, you'd better know I was asleep or I'll have a little story to tell that colonial administrator when he comes around. Get it, a little story..."

Reggie took a deep breath. "Sure, Lauritz. You were asleep. At least you were in the room."

Lauritz smiled triumphantly.

Tobel went over and looked at the dagger handle. He took hold of it and tried to pull it out.

"Leave it where it is!" I said.

He stepped back. Down below I could hear the slap-slap of shoes in mud. It was Devoux, roused by the screaming.

"What's wrong up there?" Devoux

shouted up anxiously from the outside.

He got no answer so he came on, running up the stairs. He paused just inside the door, looking at us, his bulging eyes accentuating the deep hollows of his face.

"What happened?" he asked, relieved to see Tansa unharmed.

She answered, "I was asleep. I woke up when someone pushed through the netting. He grabbed me by the throat. I struggled and got away. I screamed—then the man got out through the window, and in a few seconds Mr. Ryan broke the door down. My diamond's gone. It was under the pillow..."

"Line up!" commanded Devoux like a drillmaster at St. Cyr.

He paced back and forth, waiting for his native policemen to get there. He watched while they searched us, and when that didn't turn up the stone, he directed them in a search of the premises. It went on hour after hour.

I said, "It's no use, Devoux. Whoever lifted that stone hid it where no black policeman could find it."

He motioned me downstairs with him. The big room of the resthouse was just getting gray with dawn.

"What do you think about it?" he asked, pouring brandies.

"I think it was Tobel."

"You're crazy."

"Well, you asked."

"And I say you are crazy. Do you know who Tobel is, Monsieur Ryan? No? He is of the Belgian secret police."

THEN Lauritz had been right. He always did have a good nose for the law.

"The secret police have murdered plenty of people," I said doggedly.

"Perhaps, but they are not thieves."

"All right, who do you think did it?"

He made a nervous movement with his shoulders and paced the room. We sat together down there, the two of us, while those native gendarmes turned the place upside down. Finally he became disgusted and sent them away.

Nobody had much to say at breakfast. As the day wore on, Devoux got to hitting the bottle. He sulked at the floor matting, now and then looking up to fasten Lauritz,

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or Tobel, or Reggie in his suspicious stare.

"Don't forget about me," I said, trying to break his saturnine mood.

"Ha! You are capable of it, Monsieur Ryan. But you are not the fool. Had you wanted the stone you would have taken it out there in the jungle."

So it wasn't much of a character reference after all.

It kept raining, and Reggie cranked the gramophone, playing one of those stinking French jazz hits after the other. Unexpectedly Devoux stood, sweeping us all with his intense eyes.

"Never have there been whites murdered or robbed at Monkoto! And this, I say, will be avenged! I will have the life of this thief, this dagger wielder! I say this in the name of the Colonial Administration."

He was French, you see, and now that he was half drunk he liked to spread his feathers. He turned to Tansa and bowed:

"Ma'mselle! I will get this thief for you!"

With that he stalked from the room, his appearance almost military despite his wrinkled white linens and mud-caked tennis shoes.

We all wondered what Devoux had on his mind. The jungle had made something of a neurotic of him, so it was anybody's guess what sort of a tangent he would take.

In an hour or so he came back, wiping black muck from his shoes. He poured more brandy and sat by the table, looking from one man to the other, chuckling to himself.

I noticed that some drums had started to beat over at the native village. Not that there was anything unusual about that. Those Monkoto villagers always had something to beat tom-toms about. I wouldn't have paid much attention if it hadn't been for the expression on Devoux's face.

"Ah, Monsieurs!" he said, brushing his close moustache and looking from one to the other.

I listened. The drums had a strange rhythm. The same group of sounds over and over. There was something compelling about their rhythm now that my attention had been called to it.

One of the house servants came in, carrying a bowl of cassava for supper. He

was nervous, and kept dropping things as he went ahead, setting the table.

Lauritz winked at me, "It's those voodoo drums bothering him." He asked the native, "Who are they playing to death?"

The fellow put down the food and fled the room.

LAURITZ just grinned, twisting his face around that machete scar.

There wasn't much said during the meal. We were all listening to those drums. *Thrum-thrum-da-da-thrum; thrum-thrum-da-da-thrum*; and after fifteen repetitions, a break for three beats of utter silence that was more annoying than the drums themselves.

"What do you mean, 'playing someone to death?'" Tansa asked unexpectedly.

Lauritz answered, "Why, they play the drums, over and over, and each time it brings some poor devil that much closer to death. Nobody knows who it is except the voodoo and the one who hired them—and the victim. Don't ask me how the victim knows. But as long as he hears those drums he can't eat and he can't sleep. He can't run away, because the sound of those drums will follow him. And so he just sort of wastes away until finally..." Lauritz snapped his fingers.

Reggie laughed. "Well, maybe a good funeral would liven things up."

"That's all very fine, Reggie m'lad, but what if that funeral happens to be yours?"

"What do you mean?" Reggie flared in a way that showed the tension of his nerves.

"Just what I said. What if *you're* the one they're playing to death?"

Reggie laughed.

Lauritz went on, "Damned peculiar, the way the drums started." He looked significantly at Devoux, and stuffed one side of his mouth with food. "Right after them nigger gendarmes gave up trying to find the rock."

"Well, don't all look at me," said Reggie.

"I'm not looking at you," growled Lauritz. "If you didn't take it, you didn't take it. Then the drums don't mean a thing to you. Quit worrying. It's some other bloke going out of here feet first."

"Drums!" said Tobel. "Bosh!"

Tansa asked Devoux, "Is there any truth in that superstition?"

Devoux shrugged, "The drums play. Perhaps it is for death. It is not the policy of the Colonial Administration to interfere with the religion of the native."

"But playing someone to death..."

"You surely don't believe that!" Tobel said, laying down his fork and looking from one of us to the other. "Devoux—do you put any credence in such a ridiculous thing?"

"You do not believe in the occult, Monsieur Tobel?"

"I do not!"

"Very well. Then, if the drums play for you, you have nothing to fear. You see, it is like this with we humans: Our minds have two parts. One part we have developed, the other part we have inherited. One part we get from *l'universite*, the other part from the black caves of our ancestors. So it is not always in a man's power to believe or not to believe as he wills it. Fear. It is very dark, and ancient, and it will be with us always, despite the light of our learning, Monsieur Tobel."

Tobel laughed and got up to pour brandy. His hand was as steady as though it were propped out there. He seemed to take considerable time pouring his brandy just to show how steady that hand was.

"You have no fear," said Devoux.

"None."

"And yet, our jungle nights they are very dark."

IV

LAURITZ munched hard bread and talked from the side of his mouth, "Tobel there reminds me of a fellow I knew down in Angola. You remember him, Ryan—that Portuguese engineer named Bovar? He had trouble with a native one day. The native spit on him by mistake, and Bovar tied him up with his feet pressed against a steel rail. In the sun. The rail collected the heat and cooked the poor devil's feet until the witch doctors had to cut them off. A couple of weeks later the native sold everything he owned and hired the voodoo to drum Bovar to death.

"Down in Angola they don't use tomtoms. They use those two-lipped tree-trunk drums, and they just kept saying the word 'death' over and over. Bovar was a hardshell, and he laughed like the devil

at first. But after a week of it he sent a gang out with rifles to stop that voodoo. It didn't do any good, of course. The voodoo moved out in the bush so we couldn't hear a sound of them. I couldn't, that is, and the other whites couldn't, except for Bovar. But Bovar could hear them!"

Lauritz broke out into a loud guffaw, slapping the table until the dishes danced. "You bet he could!"

"What happened to him?" Tobel asked.

"Went crazy. Raving crazy. Said he was going out and stop those drums. Ten days later we found him—what was left. We identified him by his watch. The hyenas hadn't eaten that."

Tansa shuddered and stood up. "Mr. Devoux, can't you make them stop that drumming? It's making me nervous."

"I can try," said Devoux, spreading his hands.

When morning came, the drums were still beating away with their inevitable *thrum-thrum-da-da-thrum*. It was raining steadily now, rather than in hourly bursts. Not a slow drizzle, but a steady, pelting rain that turned even the low knoll of Monkoto into a lake.

All day long the rain, and the steaming heat, and of course the drums. And the next day the same, and the next.

It was getting everybody's nerves, except for Lauritz. He seemed to be growing fat on it.

"I should think you'd be worried," I told him.

"Me? Listen, Ryan, you know I didn't lift that flasher. Hell, I'm too smart for that. Who'd want a hot stone of those dimensions? And that dagger! I might have knocked off a lawdog here and there, in case of necessity, but pinning beautiful gals to the wall just ain't my style."

Lauritz got confidential, "But take Reggie, there. Those drums are really getting under his hide. Still, I don't exactly think he's guilty."

"Who do you think is guilty?"

"Tobel. Or maybe nobody."

"What do you mean?"

"Ever think maybe your little Tansa pinned that dagger to the head of the bed and yelled 'thief' just to get the heat off? If everybody thought the rock was stolen, nobody would try to steal it again."

I didn't give the idea much thought.

It was a strong arm that drove that dagger into the hard mahogany bed frame.

WHEN I went upstairs that night, Tansa was sitting in the darkness of my room, waiting for me.

"Close the door," she said.

I closed the door, and the jalousies, too, before lighting the candle.

She stood up and laid her hands on my shoulders. "Tell me what you think of me," she whispered.

"I think you're beautiful!"

"Some other time I would like very much to hear you say that, Ryan. But not tonight. Tell me what you think of me. Do you think I am a thief? An adventuress?"

"I've given up worrying about that."

"You care for me—a little?"

"I care for you a whole hell of a lot!"

"You would risk your life for me?"

"What's on your mind?"

"That man—he will try to murder me again tonight."

"Which man?"

She shrugged.

It was ridiculous. Why would anyone try to kill her after the diamond was gone?

"You must trust me, Monsieur Ryan. Some day I will tell you everything."

"What makes you think it will be tonight?"

"Come to my room. I will show you."

"Never mind. Just tell me."

"Someone came upstairs today and cut the fastenings of my door bolt so a strong shove would open it from the outside."

"What do you want—a new lock?"

"That is up to you, Monsieur Ryan."

"All right. We'll trade rooms. Don't let on you suspect, and I'll give that lad the surprise of his life."

I looked at my gun to make sure that the rains and the fungus weren't fouling it, dropped an electric torch in my pocket, and started for the door.

"Monsieur Ryan!"

She was standing there, looking up at me, a half-smile on her lips.

"Yes?"

"You are a strange man, Monsieur Ryan."

"Why?"

"Of the four men who were with me in the big room that first night, of the four

who listened while I sang, you are the only one who has not tried to kiss me."

"Then I'll correct that right now."

She was not hard to kiss. I suppose I held her for a long time. She was very soft and womanly in my arms. Her beauty had a stultifying effect like hashish. I was tempted to say the devil with the diamond, the murderer, with everything—to ask her to go with me, to dare the jungle with its hundred fevers, to go somewhere, to Cocquilhatville, perhaps, and find a plane to outside.

Then, with an effort, I put her away. I'm not a quitter, and I knew, in the long run, it would be better to stick it out.

So I left her there in the room. The hall was dark. None of the others were yet in bed. The rain had stopped for a while, but the voodoo drums were still boom-booming away.

I went inside her room and flashed the light on the bolt. Someone had removed the screws, cut off the threaded half, and reinserted them.

I LAID down inside the circle of netting, on a pillow fragrant of Tansa's hair, between sheets redolent of the perfume of her body.

I waited. I could hear the wireless popping downstairs, and now and then a voice-mumble, and Lauritz's laugh. The rain commenced again, falling softly on the thatch overhead. And always—the drums.

They came upstairs—Reggie and Lauritz, bickering as usual. I wondered what the son of a mahogany baron was doing at Monkoto, and with Lauritz, a man he evidently despised. A few minutes later, Tobel came up alone.

Time passed. Someone snored. Perhaps I dozed—but suddenly I was awake.

There were slight movements just outside the door. The screws pulled free with a tiny, scraping sound. One of them made a whisper as it fell to the floor matting. I watched, expecting to see the man's silhouette against the glow of the night lamp on the stairs. By the complaining sound of the hinges I knew the bedroom door was open, but the darkness was as complete as before. Whoever he was, he had been smart enough to turn the night light out.

There was a sound of feet pressing the floor matting, the vague, electric impulse

which travels from man to man at a time like that. I lay rigid, clutching my automatic.

I expected him to tear the netting away, and pounce swiftly with the dagger. I had so readied myself for that movement that no other possibility occurred to me.

Unexpectedly an electric torch cut the blackness with a beam of light that was blinding.

It struck the nettings and diffused. I twisted over, expecting a bullet. The light winked off. Darkness—black, flickering darkness. I sprang forward, trying to locate the fold of the mosquito nettings.

Have you ever seen the time when you could find such a netting fold in a hurry? I tore my way through. It delayed me for a second or two, and the man was on his way to the door. We collided. I grabbed for him, but found nothing except the Jap-silk screen.

I lunged for the door. Something struck me, driving me to my knees. I came up, trying to locate him and smash him to a corner, but he was gone.

He was escaping down the hall. I felt along the floor, trying to locate my electric torch. I remembered that it was in my bed. It was too late then. I was standing in the empty hall, sweeping it with the beam of my torch, when Lauritz came from his room.

"What the hell?" he asked.

"Where's Reggie?"

"How do I know? I don't sleep with him. He snores too damned much."

Reggie had taken on too many brandies the night before, and he was still asleep. He roused and blinked at me as I played the light on him. Tobel came from his room, rubbing his eyes.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Tobel," I said, "how's chances to take your pulse?"

"What are you talking about?"

"This—somebody just left Tansa's room in one hell of a hurry."

"She's enough to raise anybody's pulse to over a hundred," smirked Reggie, shuffling from his room.

THE DOOR to my room opened and Tansa came out, holding her bedspread robe around her. Reggie left us to drape his arm around her shoulders,

"Did anybody tell you how beautiful you were in a sarong?"

She jerked away from him.

"Oh come on now!" he grinned. "Don't be so high and mighty. You're not too good, or you wouldn't be coming out of *that room*."

What was there left for me to do? I handed the torch to Lauritz and hit Reggie all in one motion.

He must have seen the blow coming and started to duck, for it clipped him high on the cheek. He reeled, striking the wall, and came back full of fight. But hell, I never did see a Britisher that could use his fists. I let him land a couple, fainted with my left, and came up with a right that smashed him down the stairs.

Lauritz stood at the top of the stairs, playing the light on him as he got up, shaking that handsome curly head of his. I thought maybe he'd come back for some more, but he didn't.

Instead, he snarled at Lauritz, "What are you doing to earn *your* money?"

Lauritz just laughed in that dirty way of his.

"Did you want to take my pulse?" Tobel asked, lighting a cigarette.

He was trying to be nonchalant, but I noticed that the fingers holding the match were shaking a little.

"Not now!" I answered.

I took Tansa back to her room. Next morning Tobel came around and asked,

"Did you really think it was I who broke into the girl's room last night?"

"I don't know who it was."

"Ryan—I'll swear it wasn't *me*."

We sat around with nothing to do except listen to the drums. All that day, and the next. It got so every movement one of us made was in rhythm with them. Our walk, our speech, even our breathing. And maybe the beat of our hearts.

Devoux spent practically all his time at the guest house. He would sit by his brandy bottle, watching, watching, watching, as though he momentarily expected one of us to roll dead at his feet.

Then, four or five times during the day, Lauritz would take time to pause in his solitaire game to tell some story or other about the voodoo—

"Dahomey! There's a country that lives and breathes voodoo. It's not just a pastime

or a religion—it's their whole damned life. I had a job about four years back driving an ivory buyer named Wiggam through Dahomey in an old Cadillac. The cooling system of the car went haywire, and that's bad stuff in a country where the temperature goes up to 130 in the shade.

"I'm not much of a mechanic, and I worked for two days trying to fix that water pump, but no dice. So I went over to the voodoo doctor, a little, scrawny black who had never taken a wife because his mother had been a sorceress, and had eaten men's souls, and sucked living blood while she bore him, and..."

"Bosh!" said Tobel.

Lauritz just grinned and went on, "I took a chicken along, and twisted off its head, and let the blood run in the dust to slake the thirst of the fetish, and dropped a silver coin in the clay vessel to regail the *bokonon*. Then I asked the voodoo doctor about the cooling system."

"And he told you how to repack the water pump, I suppose!" sneered Tobel.

"No, he just rolled his eyes back inside his skull, and after a while he reached down between his knees for a handful of sand, and let it run between his fingers. That was all.

"He came out of his trance, and I asked 'What the hell? Is that all I get for my dough?' And he said, 'I do not know what the *Fa* told you.' You see, they claim that the *Fa* only uses the voodoo's body while the trance is on.

"Anyhow, that was all I could get out of him, but on my way back to the car I got an idea. I took off the radiator, and do you know what I found? Sand! Yes sir, sand plugging the thing up so the water couldn't circulate!"

"Bosh!" muttered Tobel.

BUT BOSH or not, I noticed that Tobel was jiggling his toe in time with the drums. Every now and then Lauritz would steal a glance at him, notice that toe, and smile.

After a half-hour or so, Lauritz started talking again.

"I told Wiggam about it. About the radiator. And he just laughed. He hadn't been in the jungle long. Just like *you*, Tobel!"

Tobel glanced over sharply. It was the

first hint that we hadn't swallowed his story about being a rubber buyer.

"So I said, 'Wiggam, if you ever tried the voodoo out maybe you wouldn't laugh so damned loud. Why don't you give it a try?' So he did.

"It was night when we got there, and he twisted off the head of a chicken, just like I had, and dropped a few francs in the bowl. 'I am expecting a message from my wife when I get back to Dakar,' he said. 'Tell me if it is there.'

"The voodoo dictator went into his trance. He sat there a long time with his eyes rolled back. It was hot inside the hut, so I decided to go outside for a while, when suddenly I noticed a peculiar expression on Wiggam's face.

"What the devil is the matter?' I asked him. And he answered, 'Why, that odor! Don't you smell it?' He said it just like that, as though the odor, whatever it was, was so strong nobody could miss it. 'Smell what?' 'Why, the carnations.' Then the voodoo doctor started to speak, rocking a trifle, his eyes still rolled back so you could only see their whites, 'No message. No message,' he chanted. 'Why?' asked Wiggam, fairly jumping forward. But of course the voodoo doctor was in his trance and couldn't hear him. He just kept chanting, 'Her lips are with dust, with dust...' and that was all we could get him to say.

"What about the carnations?' I asked when I got Wiggam outside. 'You *must* have smelled them. The air was filled with them—for maybe ten or fifteen seconds.' Then he added, 'They were Millie's favorite flower!'

"Imagine that! — carnations in that baked-dirt fetish house so rotten with the smell of *gri-gris* it could have walked off by itself!"

Lauritz stopped talking and concentrated on his solitaire. I knew he'd cut off his story right there just to get under Tobel's hide.

"Well?" asked Tobel.

"Well what?"

"What about this—Millie?"

"Oh! When we got to Accra there was a cable waiting for him saying that Millie had died twelve days before."

"And there were carnations at her funeral I suppose!"

"Why, your guess is as good as mine on

that one, Tobel," Lauritz said, smiling.

Tobel was angry with himself for having listened. I could tell that by the way he hopped to his feet and strode to the table where the magazines were strewn. He leafed through a couple of them, and spun to face Lauritz,

"Lauritz, is that the truth?"

Lauritz didn't answer. His lips twisted a little, pulling his scar out of shape, and that was the only sign he gave of having heard. He was trying to make it as tough as he could. He hated Tobel because he was with the police. So he just sat there and played solitaire.

Tobel suddenly reached down and swept half the cards to the floor.

"Answer me!"

Lauritz sprang up and hovered on his toes for a moment with fists doubled, then he relaxed and bent down to pick up the cards. Tobel turned his back and went over to stand by the window. At last Lauritz answered,

"Yes, I was telling the truth! And Ryan there could tell you plenty more stories that are just as damned peculiar."

It was true, of course. But I am not the type who takes pleasure in torture, psychological or otherwise.

It wasn't easy living there, cooped up, with each man at the other's throat. And those drums—they were getting on my nerves, too. Laugh if you want to—I was glad they weren't playing for me.

V

ABOUT NOON, a fat trader named Vedameer came in to see Devoux who was sitting by his bottle as usual. Or maybe I should say *gloating* by his bottle, waiting for those drums to send somebody gibbering into madness.

"Mein heer Administrator! Dose drums. Ach!" And the Dutch trader shook his close-cropped, oily hair.

"What's the matter, Vedameer? You don't think they're playing for *you*?"

Now, that was something I hadn't considered. A man like Vedameer could have been watching through the window when Tansa dropped the diamond.

"Ach, no. The native—they tell me drums play for thieves. Me, I am not thieves." He laughed without smiling, shaking his two

hundred fifty pounds of fat. "But, Gott! Effry day, effry day! Vy don't you stop dose drums, heer Administrator?"

"It is not the policy of the Colonial Administration to interfere with the religion of the native," Devoux repeated.

"But for one thieves! All this boom-boom-a-boom-boom!" and he tossed his fat hands and started for the door.

Tobel collared him. I could not hear his question, but Vedameer's answer was loud enough.

"Yah. Mein houseboy, he say drums play for white thieves. What they stole, ach—I guess you know already mitout I told you."

Tobel walked back to the window and

"Stop!"

He drew his pistol, and clomped it down on the table. According to colonial regulations, he was the only one of us who had a right to go armed inside the settlement. Lauritz sank back to his chair, and Tobel moved to the window.

That night Tobel got me off in a corner and said,

"Ryan, this is like a sanitarium. A damned, infernal sanitarium. You don't think it was I who stole the diamond, do you?"

I shrugged.

"It's all so ridiculous. Those drums—playing one of us to death. I won't pretend they're not getting under my hide. And



After seven years, Ryan was on his way back to Monkoto with a few porters.

stared at the copal warehouse, its rusty roof turned blackish by the wet. It struck me how old he looked. And thin. The last couple of weeks hadn't done him much good.

Lauritz shuffled through his cards, glancing now and then at Tobel. Then he started to laugh. Not bitterly, or sarcastically, but as though he were really amused.

"Shut up!" Tobel shouted.

Tobel started toward Lauritz, and Lauritz half stood, shoving his rattan chair back, his hand going beneath his coat. I expected hell to break loose, and was getting ready to drag Tansa down behind the piano, but Devoux stopped them, his voice snapping like a drill officer's.

that Devoux, sitting there like a vulture."

Devoux *did* resemble a vulture with his prominent nose, his straight, dark hair, his deeply-hollowed eyes.

"Maybe I'd feel better if I could see those damned drums. Maybe I could buy them off. Do you suppose five hundred francs would do the business?"

"No," I said.

"But we could try. Go down there with me, Ryan. Down to that voodoo house, or wherever it is the drums are. Don't mention it to any of the others. They all hate me for some reason. I don't know why. But you seem more human, Ryan."

I couldn't help feeling sorry for the poor devil. Anyway, I had an itch to take

a look at those drums, too. Any change from that damned rest house with its gloomy windows, its smoky ceiling, and the ya-ya of that damned tinny gramophone.

AFTER DINNER we slogged down through the mud to the native village. It was dismal, with thick, drooping roofs sponged full of rain. The blacks hovered in doorways, looking at us. I guess the drums were doing something to them, too.

About midway along the village street we picked up the sound of men chanting in a monotonous rocking rhythm with the drums. The entire hubbub came from a large, round-roofed hut set out away from the others.

It was large, as African huts go—bamboo framework, a roof of bundled thatch, walls of woven palm once plastered with the reddish-black mud of the jungle, lots of which had either washed away or been turned to sticky goo by three weeks of rain.

"Is that it?" Tobel asked, drawing up suddenly like a condemned man getting his first look at the gallows.

"That's it."

"Can we go in?"

"Are you going to ask something of the fetish?"

"I don't know."

"If you are, you'll have to make a *vo*. A sacrifice."

"Like the chicken?"

"Why, yes. Or something a little more substantial."

Tobel frisked around in his money belt and came out with a couple of hundred-franc notes.

"Here, you take this," he muttered, shoving the money into my hand. "I don't speak their language. You buy something for the sacrifice."

I handed the money to a fetish priest wearing a mask surmounted by antelope horns.

Two hundred francs meant a *vo* of kingly proportions, so he kept us waiting for ten or fifteen minutes before he finally returned, dragging a year-old goat on a rope.

Half of the village was there by then. The commotion attracted a couple more fetish priests from the house. Each of them

grabbed one of the goat's legs, and threw him on his side, his neck stretched out. Chanting with each move, the priest of the antelope mask flourished a machete and slit the arteries of the animal's throat.

They all commenced chanting as blood gushed across the vitreous earth with the final beats of the poor animal's heart.

I am not superstitious. I am practical and realistic. I have always believed that everything has its logical explanation, if one looks far enough. But still I am forced to admit that there are things in voodoo which cannot be dismissed by a shrug of the shoulders and the words "mass hypnosis." And that blood of the ram was one of them.

I watched it, beating from the arteries of its throat, *in time with the beating of the drums.*

I saw it. And Tobel saw it, too. That, I think, is the thing that really finally cracked him.

A tremble ran through his body. He started forward, fascinated. He didn't want to look, but he did. He stared in spite of himself. He turned to me. No words—just the horrible question in his eyes. I couldn't lie. It would have been useless, anyway.

I wondered if he'd back down and not enter the house. There was a river at the end of the lorry road, and he could hire a dugout canoe. It's never been proved that the drums can get a man when he's fifty or a hundred kilometers away.

But the thought of running out didn't occur to him. Tobel had guts, I'll say that for him. I walked with him around the sacrificed goat, whose blood, in theory, had already been drunk by the fetish, and stooped over to enter the low, tunnel-like entrance of the voodoo house.

A COUPLE hundred natives were jammed in there. It was insufferably hot. The air reeked of their bodies, of rotting sacrificial meat, of drying skins and bones, of *gri-gri*, and the smoke from grease lamps.

The lamps were made from the tops of skulls, human and animal, filled with fat, with wicks of twisted goat's hair. They were "sacred" lamps, passed from one voodoo doctor to another since before the day of the first slaver from New Spain.

The light came from the smoky flames and was absorbed by the dark ceiling, or by the oiled bodies of the natives. Everything seemed to waver with unreality. The chanting, the nearby concussion of the drums, the heat, the odors, all combined to make me dizzy.

Natives sprawled in every conceivable posture. Eyes staring and bodies rigid in catalepsy, rolling and jabbering from hypnosis; eyes closed and bodies rocking, chanting the voodoo tongue which no white man has ever learned. And always the drums.

We caught sight of those drums up front. Three men were bending over them, their bodies working with inevitable, trance-like monotony.

A voodoo doctor, covered with the regalia of his art, his head surmounted by an indescribable mask of grotesque proportions, was seated just in front of the drums on a little, raised dias. He sat very still, the staring eyes of his mask apparently fastened on a half-circle of calabashes containing chicken feathers, and dried blood, and iron balls, and carved figures needed for this tribe's special *bokonon*—it's worship of the dead.

"What should I do?" asked Tobel.

"Tell him what you want."

"Him?"

I knew he hated like the very devil to approach that masked figure. But he did, working his way among the packed, prostrate bodies of the worshippers until he was at the edge of the voodoo dias.

"Why are those drums playing?" he asked, his voice high-pitched, unreal.

There was no answer.

"Why are the drums playing?" he almost screamed.

Still no answer. Tobel was trying to crowd closer, but I pulled him back and asked his question in the Monkoto dialect.

Slowly the priest began to speak. Giberish at first—that was the fetish tongue. And after that in Congoese.

"Death. Death. The drums play for death."

"Whose death?"

"The drums know his name."

I repeated this to Tobel.

"Who asked the drums to play?" Tobel demanded.

I translated, knowing well enough this

question would never be answered.

The mask rocked back and forth, and the voice from inside it kept repeating the same words about the drums playing for death.

"Ask them *why* they play? What has the man done?" Tobel asked in his high-pitched voice.

I repeated faithfully, and, to add a little force, dropped several ten-franc pieces into the empty calabash.

The priest chanted on in his fetish tongue.

UNEXPECTEDLY the voices seemed to become far away. It was as though someone had wadded cotton in my ears. I looked around wondering what was wrong. One of the fetish worshippers was staring fixedly at something just above my head. I glanced up to see what it was. I could see nothing except the rounded ceiling hung with strings of dry herbs and bat's skins.

I looked back at the mask, trying to understand what he chanted, and still an uncomfortable impression remained. It was the impression that someone was standing beside me. Someone I could not see.

The sounds were still distant. I shook my head, trying to get my ears to function. The close walls of the fetish house seemed to be falling away. I was standing there alone. As alone as one on a pinnacle in the midst of a shoreless sea. No heat, no drums, no chanting. No longer the odors of death. A breeze came. A breeze from no particular direction. Like a tiny whirlwind about my feet. Then it stopped, and the air was charged with perfume. So familiar it was like a blow. The odor of Tansa, of her clothing, of her body, of her hair against the pillow.

How long? For a moment, a tenth of a second, an eternity. Who knows? The moment was timeless. And then, in place of drums and chanting, another sound. The sweet, pure notes of a piano. The same notes she had touched that first evening. Not any single tune—rather a distillation of everything she had played.

Then gone. All of it. And I was once more standing there, jostled by jibbering blacks with sweat running down my face in that voodoo house.

Terror. It rose up in me. Black, unreasoning terror stronger than my will. The

terror of the primeval man that lies deep in all of us. Terror, not for me, but for Tansa. I had to go to her. Then. Quickly.

"Come along!" I said, turning toward the door, dragging Tobel after me.

"No. I'm going to stop those damned drums."

He tried to get around the dias. I could see his hand beneath his coat on the butt of his gun.

They would kill him; I don't know why I cared. I struck him, knocking him down among the worshippers. As he lay there I caught a momentary impression of the oiled, gleaming bodies, weaving as before, the fixed stare of the mask at the calabashes, the drummers bending over their tom-toms, just as though nothing had happened.

Tobel got to his knees, groggy, and I dragged him to the door. He woke up a little when the warm rain struck his face.

"What the devil?" he muttered, feeling his jaw.

"Tansa!"

I DIDN'T try to explain beyond speaking her name. I left him there and ran up the sodden street of the village, through mud, around the rubber and copal warehouses, up the path to the resthouse where lights glowed from the half-concealed windows.

I ran inside, stopped, looked around. I saw her. Safe, sitting at the piano, listlessly touching the keys.

I don't know what I said. Everybody was staring at me. Lauritz came up, a hand-twisted cigarette hanging in his cruel lips,

"What the devil, Ryan? Have the drums got you?"

"No. Of course not. It's nothing. Not a damned thing." They were still staring at me. It infuriated me. I shouted, "It's just that I don't trust you. Not a one of you!"

"Monsieur Ryan!" Tansa left the piano and walked towards me. She laid her hands on my shoulders. I got hold of myself.

"Forget it, Tansa. It was just because I left you alone and was worried. That's all. Just worried."

"Don't tell me the drums are getting the mighty Ryan!" Reggie sneered.

I started towards him with my fists doubled. Then I saw Devoux leaning forward, watching me with a startled expression on his face. Up until then I don't

think he really suspected me. So, instead of going for Reggie, I took a swig from the brandy bottle.

Tobel came dragging in a few minutes later. Mud-spattered, disheveled—he looked like he'd taken a beating. He went upstairs without speaking. I heard his door close.

"What happened?" Lauritz wanted to know.

"Nothing. He wanted to stop the drums, but it was no use."

"Why did you come running in like you did?"

"That's my own damned business."

Next morning when I got up and walked into the hall, Tansa stepped from her door to meet me. She must have been standing there, just inside her room, waiting.

"We will have to go, Monsieur Ryan. We must not stay here any longer."

"I'm beginning to think the same thing."

"Tonight?"

"I'll sneak down to the river and see if I can line up a crew of paddlers."

It was a little earlier than usual, and no one else seemed to be up. Dawn was gray-ing the windows, mixing with the yellow glow of the night lamp on the stairs. It was the worst kind of light, so I almost fell over the object sprawled across the foot of the stairs before I noticed.

A dead man. I bent over. Reggie! He had been stabbed in the back.

I've always had a horror of touching dead men, but I forced myself to turn him over. I could tell by the caked and blackened blood on his linen coat that he'd been dead for several hours.

I glanced at Tansa. I thought she was going to scream. She started towards the door, stopped, came back.

"What will we do?" she asked.

"We'd better get over to the Government House and tell Devoux. He can bring his native gendarmes in and do as he likes."

I wondered how long Tansa had been up. She was awake and dressed when I came from my door. I wondered if she knew more about Reggie's death than she was willing to say.

There was a slight sound from the top of the stairs. We glanced up. There was Lauritz, standing very still, looking down on us.

"What the hell?" He came down and looked at Reggie. "So, he got it, did he?"

Did you put that blade through him, Ryan?"

"No. Did you?"

"Don't be a damned fool. Reggie was my best friend."

"Then make some tears."

"Where are you going?"

"Over to find Devoux."

"I'll go along."

I'D FORGOTTEN the drums for a moment. They should have stopped, for here was their dead man. But no, they beat on, the same as ever.

Devoux had just come barefoot down the stairs to order tea from his houseboy when we walked in the door. I told him about Reggie, and he froze there, listening. He also was wondering about the drums. "Pah!" he muttered, "then it was one of you others!"

One of you others! You see, he even suspected me, a man who had been his friend for six years. After a certain point a man gets to suspecting himself.

Devoux didn't bother to call his *gendarmes*. He put on his shoes and ran over through the muck. He lighted a couple of lamps and was bent over Reggie, looking at the wound, when a door opened in the hall above, and Tobel came to the head of the stairs.

For a second, those feverish eyes of his didn't seem to have the power of focusing. Then he saw Reggie—and that Reggie was dead.

He laughed. It was a wild, elated laugh. Not a laugh of triumph. Rather a laugh of inexpressable relief.

He came half way down the stairs, and paused, holding the bannister. I could tell he was listening—for the drums.

And there they were—the same as ever.

"Why don't they stop?" he asked in a voice that was half-harsh whisper, the elation draining out of him.

Devoux answered, "Because, Monsieur of the police, he was not the one who stole the diamond!"

"Ah!" breathed Tobel, coming on down the stairs. "So he was not the one!"

Tobel opened one button of his shirt and fumbled inside with his money belt. His hand came out, closed. Slowly he opened his fingers. The stone was there, gleaming in the lamplight.

"Yes. It was I who took the diamond. Took it, not stole it! I know now that I will never take it back to Belgium with me. I will not be going to Belgium. Your cursed drums have seen to that! But I will accomplish my mission, Devoux. You and your drums be damned!—the government can never say that Josef Tobel had failed a job."

I don't know what I expected. Certainly not the thing he did next.

He stepped to the door, opened it, and flung the stone far off into the swamp and blind tangle of the jungle.

"And that, *monsieurs*, is half my mission! The other half I shall accomplish now."

His hand flashed up from his shoulder holster with that word "now." I caught a glimpse of silvered gunmetal. I reached for my own automatic, knowing how hopelessly late I was. His eyes were on Tansa. He was going to kill her.

She stood there, simply congealed with terror.

The concussion of a gun rocked the air behind me. I had the impression of Tobel stumbling forward over his toes, his round-barrelled Luger pistol dangling in loose fingers.

He looked inanimate and disjointed as he lay there on the floor. It was Devoux who got the bullet in.

Devoux came forward, holding his pistol barrel toward the ceiling as though killing this man had been some sort of ritual with him.

He looked at Tobel, and at us. "This execution is in the name of the Belgian Government!" he announced.

His words, his pistol toward the ceiling, the figure he cut standing there in his bedraggled linen suit and unlaced tennis shoes, all preposterous, and yet he had a sort of majesty about him, as though he were, as he evidently believed, an agent of the inevitable.

The silence. It suddenly bore down on us. It was more forceful than the struggle, the shooting. It seemed to have body to it.

The drums had stopped!

There had not been time for word to go from the rest house to the village. How did they know? What are the secrets of voodoo? What unknown centers of energy lie in man's subconscious brain?"

RYAN sat back and poured himself another drink from Captain John Peyton's diminishing supply of whiskey. He held the glass in his fingers for a while, looking across the hotel terrace toward the hot pavement where a negro in a long, white gown walked barefoot carrying two baskets of cane on a bow across his shoulders.

Peyton asked, "And Tansa? Is she here in Lourenco Marques with you?"

"Yes."

"But what the devil..."

"About Tansa? I will tell you. Tansa was a singer with the Brussels light opera company. There was a man—a statesman. Of the cabinet. Perhaps he had a wife and family, but let's not judge him too harshly. As you have heard, it would take a will stronger than mine to resist a beauty such as Tansa's."

"This cabinet minister had access to certain gems belonging to the state. I ask you, Peyton, what good are things of beauty locked up in a concrete vault? How much better if..."

"Are you trying to say that your cabinet minister lifted some of the royal rocks and hung them on the neck of your little Tansa?"

"Only one, I believe, but it was a beauty. And that wasn't immediately found out. However, the romance of our cabinet minister was pretty hard to overlook. The cabinet was shaky. A scandal might upset it. So Tansa had to go. It was natural that they should bundle her off to the colony. After she left they learned about the diamond."

"It's actual value was not significant. I should say not so significant as the fact that it had been lifted by a cabinet minister and hung on the neck of an actress. As long as Tansa and that stone were at large, the government was in danger. And what is the life of a woman, even a beautiful woman, when compared with the good of the nation? Such, I suppose, was their philosophy."

"So they sent Tobel of the secret police. His task was to bring back the stone if possible, if not that, destroy the threat of it, and the woman who had it, forever."

"And where does Reggie fit in?"

"I afterward found out that Reggie was on the jump from the Gold Coast authorities where he killed an Englishman. Old C. W. Welton, his father, started him through the interior, paying Lauritz to keep an eye on him until they reached one of the Indian Ocean ports. Hence their strange companionship. Lauritz had wanted to get rid of him for a long time, so he got handy with his blade as soon as he figured the suspicion would fall on somebody else."

"They got him—Lauritz?"

"That would make a perfect ending to the Monkoto business, wouldn't it? But they didn't. He's in the bush someplace with those native gendarmes still on his trail."

"And the stone—did you ever locate it after Tobel threw it away?"

"In the swamp and tangle of that jungle? No. It sank forever in that bottomless, African muck. But really, it was a slight matter."

"Slight? Losing a stone like that?"

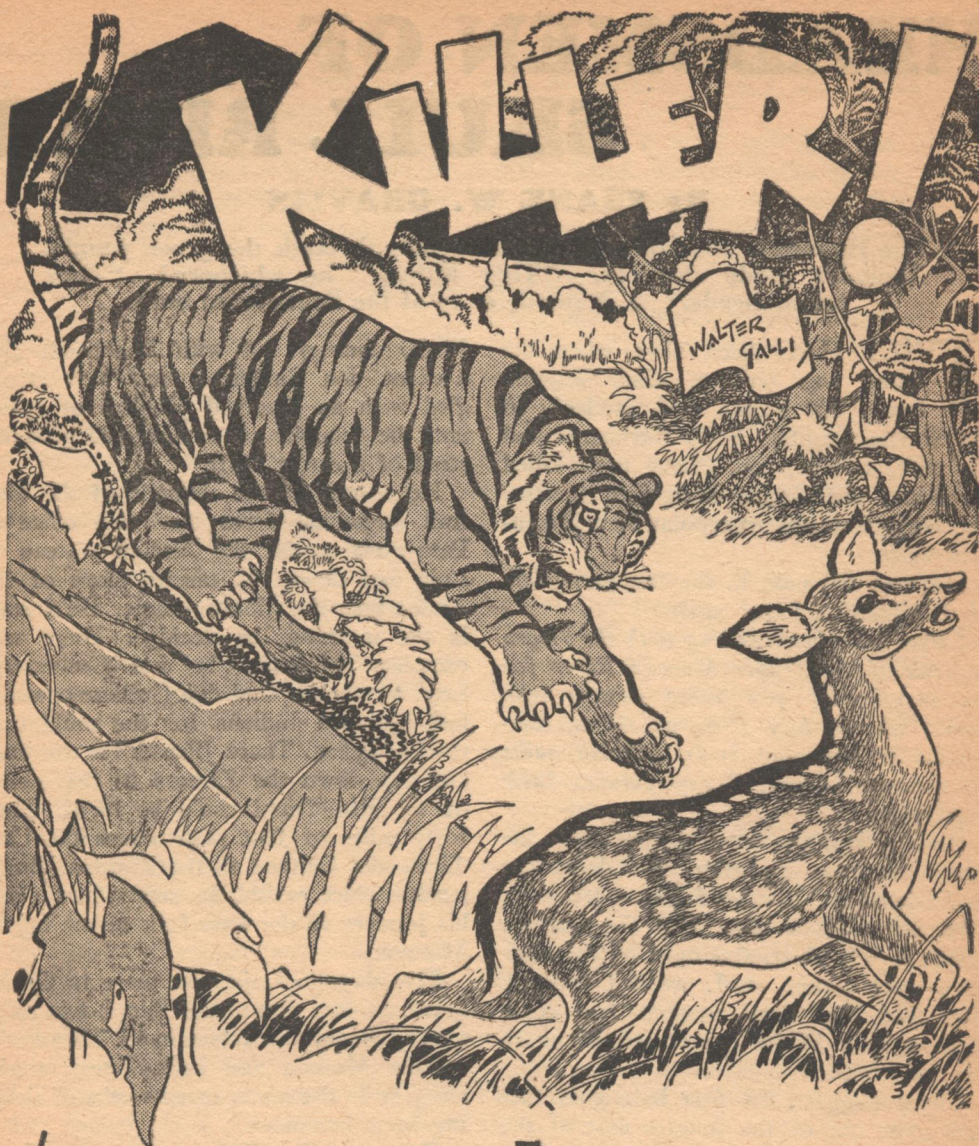
"Actually, 'stone' is not quite the correct word. You see, it was a fake. Tansa was no fool. She knew they'd be after the diamond sooner or later, so she had an imitation made. Paste, with a cap-slice of genuine diamond to give a top surface that would cut glass. The real one she mailed to herself, in care of general delivery, at the most remote civilized point she could find on a map. The chamber of commerce back home probably wouldn't be flattered to learn that the city thus chosen was San Francisco."

Captain John Peyton struck himself on the back of the head as though he were trying to drive the figments of dreaming from his brain.

"Whew! and now you..."

"Now we are going to San Francisco aboard your good ship, R. W. Roe. You won't turn us down?"

"Get those passports forged—tonight. I'd be afraid to leave you here, Ryan. You'd probably have Slats playing me to death on that syncopated Steinway of his. Imagine that—jive in the key of G all the way to Frisco!"



THE TIGER--LORD OF THE JUNGLE--MAN EATER--SCOURGE OF ALL GAME...OFTEN ONE OF THESE BEASTS HAS TERRORIZED AN ENTIRE VILLAGE LACKING FIREARMS SEEMINGLY, THE ONLY ANIMALS HE SHIES AWAY FROM ARE THE RHINOCEROS AND THE ELEPHANT. THE TIGER'S BRIGHT ORANGE COAT, WITH ITS LOUD BLACK STRIPES, LITERALLY SHRIEKS AT VISITORS IN ANY ZOO--YET ALL THIS COLORING MELTS AWAY QUIETLY IN ITS NATURAL HABITAT, AMID JUNGLE LIGHT AND SHADOWS...THOUGH NOT AS NOISY AS THE LION, THE TIGER HAS A SIMILAR ROAR BUT IS MUCH MORE DISCREET IN THE USE OF IT...MANY A MORTALLY WOUNDED TIGER HAS BEEN KNOWN TO DIE WITHOUT UTTERING A SOUND



MANY A BIG GAME HUNTER HAS LEARNED THAT THE BEST WAY TO BAG A TIGER IS TO PERCH IN A TREE. FOR, STRANGELY ENOUGH, WHEN ONE OF THESE CATS PADS NERVOUSLY ALONG A JUNGLE TRAIL, HE NEVER LOOKS UP, JUST MOVES HIS HEAD FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.



TIGERS ARE UNPREDICTABLE! THE BIG FELINE WILL SOMETIMES FIDGET AND SLINK AWAY FROM NEEDED FOOD WHEN PEOPLE ARE WORKING UNAWARE A QUARTER MILE OR MORE DISTANT--YET ANOTHER TIME, THE SAME TIGER WILL NOT HESITATE TO LEAP ON A GOAT OR COW THAT IS BEING LED DOWN THE TRAIL ON A SHORT TETHER. SOME TIGERS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO ATTAIN AN OVERALL LENGTH OF TEN AND A HALF FEET--AND WEIGHING OVER 600 POUNDS!

HEADSMEN OF SKULL RIVER

By FRANK W. GRAVLIN

The Huambiza *tundullis* pulsed ominously through the green jungle. Randall's guide shivered. "They killing," he whispered. "They taking heads." A dramatic story of the Ecuadorian bush.

THEY HAD been alive when the letter was written, Cliff Randall knew, but people died suddenly in the Shuara country. Fritz Burkhardt and his wife, Grethe, could have been killed since and their heads made into *tsantsas* and hung from the iron point of a Huambiza lance.

He read the next to the last paragraph of Burkhardt's letter again.

So we have been trading with the Jibaro Indians of the Upper Morona River for six months. If you know anyone who would like to buy skins of tigers, anacondas or humming birds, gold in quills or shrunken heads, I can furnish their requirements.

Randall laid the letter on his desk, the frown between his grey eyes deepening as he looked at the gold dust piled on a piece of chamois skin, and the nuggets beside it. The dust, and most of the nuggets, were placer stuff, washed from a river bed, but three nuggets had come from a vein. White quartz still clung to one of them.

Three nuggets, the first lode gold that had come out of the jungles east of the Ecuadorian Andes in more than three hundred years, the first since the Jibaros in two bloody nights wiped out all the Spanish settlements in the Oriente of Ecuador in 1599.

He picked up don Guillermo Fernandez' letter, smiling at the old man's spidery copperplate.

Enclosed with my letter is one addressed to you from Senor don Fritz Burkhardt. I also send you five hundred dollars in gold; sent to me for your account by the same Senor don Fritz Burkhardt.

Randall grinned as he thought of don Guillermo sweating over the composition of that letter. Don Guillermo wanted him to know lode gold was coming out of the

Jibaro country but with Burkhardt also a client, don Guillermo must have struggled with an involved problem of ethics until he thought of sending the gold instead of a credit draft.

He winced at the thought of the long trail stretching from the mine office at Pasajevela across the Andian plateau to Loja and down the eastern slope of the Andes into the Jibaro jungle. He'd start in the morning, he decided. There was camping equipment in don Guillermo's Loja warehouse, and don Guillermo would find Quichua Indians for the mule trail to Gualaquiza. There Jibaros for the dug-out trip down the Zamora to the mouth of the Rio Yaupi could be hired. Then forty miles of foot path across the Cordillera del Cuitucu to the Morona. Burkhardt's place would be somewhere along his journey to the west fork of the Upper Morona.

Five days to Loja, five more to Gualaquiza, another five to the Yaupi, two more to the Morona; seventeen in all. Two weeks up the Morona and back. Seven weeks away from the mine, seven weeks of sleeping in a hammock.

He groaned a little as he got up and walked over to the wall phone, cranked the magneto handle and waited for an answering ring.

"Mule corral? Randall here. I want four mules and an *arriero* at the staff-house at six tomorrow morning. To Loja. And don't send me that black devil to ride. He damn near shook me to death when I went out to Machala last month. I don't care if he is strong. I'm not—not there, anyhow."

He waited until the corral hung up to call the manager.

"I just saw some lode gold that came in to Loja. Could have come from the Upper Marona, perhaps the veins I lo-



Burkhardt grabbed the blanket and whirled Grethe aside in one smooth movement.

cated two years ago. We wanted to see if Peru made her claim to that area stick before we did anything but if the Jibaros are working the veins we'll have to do something. I know we can't develop a property over there now but if we put a claim in to Quito we'll have some legal standing."

He listened patiently, a wry smile twisting his mouth.

"My head means more to me than it does to you so I'll look out the Jibaros don't shrink it. They haven't so far and I've been in there a dozen times. I wouldn't go now if I didn't have to. It's too tough a trip to make for fun."

He dropped the receiver in its hook and stood for a moment, a shoulder against the wall, thinking of Fritz Burkhardt, and of Grethe. He ruffled the sandy hair at the base of his skull slowly, a finger on either side of the bony ridge there.

BURKHARDT had arrived on the dark afternoon of a rainy day in May, 1929. He came so quietly Randall didn't hear the German until he stirred deliberately against the doorframe.

"You want to see me?" Randall asked curtly in English, changing to Spanish at the blank look in Burkhardt's round blue eyes.

"You might have work for me." Burkhardt made the liquid Spanish a harsh, guttural language.

Randall saw six foot, three inches of big blond man, muscular legs below the fringed ends of pants torn off at the knees, a chest arching through the rotted blue cloth of his cheap shirt. Burkhardt carried a ragged *toquilla* hat in his hand, and his face was a big nose separating bright blue eyes above a moustache and beard red-gold as the mane of hair falling to his shoulders.

"Our agent in Guayaquil could have told you all staff men are from the States and that we use only Ecuadorians for miners. That would have saved you the trip in here. The only job open is good for a month, tallying mine timbers. Three *suces* a day and board. Enough so a man can make a travel stake."

"That will be good."

Randall nodded dismissal. "Tell the payroll clerk I said to put you on the lumber

tally job. He'll give you a *fecha*, a brass tag, and show you how to get to the Black House. You room there. The staff mess is for gold roll men only but the same food is sent up to your room and you eat there."

Randall forgot him then, bending his head to the paperwork on his desk. When he realized the big man had not left he looked up with a frown of irritation.

"That will not do," Burkhardt told him stolidly. "I will take the job but I can not stay in the Black House. Pay me the rent of the room and we will live in the village."

"You live in the Black House," Randall said curtly. "And what do you mean, 'we'?"

"My wife is with me."

"You're a fool to bring her in here," Randall said harshly. "She should have waited in Guayaquil."

"We do not come from Guayaquil, we come north from Peru," Burkhardt corrected him. "Across the desert that is above Talara to Tumbes and then up the Rio Arenillas to here." He ruminated a moment and shook his head heavily. "It was a hard trip. I carried Grethe across the desert. She is not heavy."

"There are bones on the Tumbes Desert," Randall said. "Bones of men who died before the Conquest, and of men who died there since then. Why was it so important you cross it, bringing a woman with you?"

"It was north." Burkhardt shrugged his big shoulders in an incongruous Latin gesture. "We left Hamburg, in Germany, almost a year ago. There was no work in Germany and with what little money we had we bought third class tickets to Montevideo, in Uruguay. There a German planter gave us five pesos, and we walked. When the money was gone and we were tired, we sat in a *cantina* to rest. The people came, looked at us, asked questions. I answered them. I had studied Spanish in the gymnasium in Hamburg."

BURKHARDT'S blue eyes were veiled and he spoke as dispassionately as though talking of someone else but Randall sensed a thread of cold anger deep under the calm words,

"The owner of the *cantina* offered a

place to sleep, food, and a peso a day if I would tell our story to people who came in and bought drinks. The second day he told us to go, there were no more people who wanted to hear us."

"What did you do then?"

"We walked west. When we came to a town I asked the *jefe civil* for permission to tell our story in one of the *cantinas*. Almost always he told me to go to a *cantina* he owned. We walked across Uruguay and a corner of Argentina, across the dripping jungle of the Chaco, walked up the mountains to the cold city of La Paz. Never did we have money to stay or to travel on. We walked across the Andes. I thought Grethe would die. Three nights she slept wrapped in my arms, shivering in her sleep although my coat was wrapped around her. The wind cut through the papers inside my shirt as though they were not there."

He stopped as definitely as though he had said everything and until some new thing happened there was no reason to talk. Randall sensed the contemptuous, futile resentment Burkhardt had felt as he and his wife sat in a *cantina* while the Indians examined the whites even poorer than they were. He could imagine them, like animals exhibited for pennies, the big blond man and his wife, who was probably big and blond, too.

"Your wife is here?"

Burkhardt nodded.

"Ask her to come in while I figure out if she can stay if you take the job."

"You want to see her?"

Randall felt his neck and forehead grow hot with embarrassment at the blunt way Burkhardt classed him with those Indians but he nodded.

Burkhardt turned his head and called, "Grethe!"

The affection and tenderness he packed into the baritone shout made Randall think it rolled deafeningly back from the walls of the little office.

Grethe stood hesitant in the doorway and Randall felt an instant irrational resentment that she was the wife of a man as animal-like as Burkhardt.

Grethe was small, with a fineness of bone and feature that made her size right and anything bigger, gross and awkward.

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She was not over five feet tall, from the soles of the rawhide *alpargatas* to the top of the enormous mass of white-gold hair braided around her tiny head like a crown. Her hair was not the cold lifeless color of most light blond hair, it vibrated with a luster that made Randall think of sunlight sparkling on frost crystals.

Randall saw then, with a knowledge sudden as his indrawn breath, that the *cantina* owners had not paid to hear Burkhardt's story, they had wanted to see Grethe's beauty that was like nothing they had seen before.

She wore a dress, blue, Randall called it, until he saw her eyes light with a flame when she looked at Burkhardt. He knew then what blue was, blue warm as the Caribbean caressing the prow of a ship beating south, the blue eyes of a woman who loves a man with the deep, simple, unasking love of a child.

Grethe said something but all Randall heard were the light tones of her voice. He didn't know if her words were English, Spanish or German.

"I'll give you a note to the clerk," he told Burkhardt. Sometimes we allow married couples in the Black House. The rooms are big enough for two and your food will be sent up. You can go there now."

Burkhardt nodded and Grethe dipped her head shyly before she followed him out. Randall sat quiet when they had left, quiet with the wistful longing of a bachelor for what he fights so determinedly to avoid.

BURKHARDT came to the office two days before his month was up.

"You know the Oriente very well, Senor Randall. We are going there. Will you tell me about it?"

"Come up to the house tonight," Randall invited curtly. "I can tell you enough to show you a man is a fool to go in there."

"I may bring Grethe?" Burkhardt asked. "She will go to the Oriente with me."

Randall smothered the anger tightening his throat.

"Bring her along, it may make it easier to convince you."

Randall contemplated them across the glistening waxed top of the *amarillo* wood table. Burkhardt impassive and stolid,

Grethe with the wide-eyed seriousness of a child waiting to hear a favorite fairy tale. He pulled open a cabinet beside his chair and took out a round, black object with trailing streamers of hair. He laid it in the center of the table under the electric ceiling light.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

Grethe shook her head and glanced confidently at her husband. Burkhardt reached out a long arm and picked up the head, regarding it judiciously.

"One of the Jibaro heads, no? It is the first I have seen."

"That was a man a year ago," Randall told him with coldly calculated brutality. "A Jibaro Indian who worked for me. Six months ago a Jibaro sold me the head for a carbide light and two pounds of carbide. When the victory dance was over it had no more value to him and he sold it. That's the country you want to go into, taking Grethe with you."

"The Jibaros have gold and trade it for cloth and beads," Burkhardt said stubbornly. "With the little money I have it will take a long time to get much gold but it is a better life than walking over South America. In a few years I should have much money."

Randall ran his tongue over his lips before he spoke.

"You won't live a few years," he said harshly. "If you are very lucky you'll live a few months. Some Jibaro will think you have thrown an evil spell on him, his family, his dog, his hunting, any one of a thousand things. Do you know that a Jibaro does not believe a man can die naturally? That when anything goes wrong it is not an accident but caused by someone trying to hurt him through witchcraft? A Jibaro kills anyone he thinks has bewitched him. What happens to Grethe then?"

"They only kill other Jibaros," Burkhardt shrugged. "They could not kill a white man, one more intelligent than they are."

Randall reined down his hot rage at Burkhardt's stupid insistence. He had a guilty thought that if only Burkhardt were involved he would be callously neutral instead of trying to hold him back.

"In 1599 there were three great Spanish towns in the Oriente, Logrono, Sevilla de Oro, and Mendoza. The Jibaro erased

them in two nights. Juan de Velasco reported twelve thousand killed in Logrono, sixteen thousand dead in Sevilla de Oro. Of Mendoza he said no one knew what transpired, there was neither Spaniard or Indian found alive."

"That was three hundred years ago," Burkhardt demurred phlegmatically.

II

RANDALL took a long, slow, deep breath and spread his clenched hands out on the table, waiting for the fingers to quiet before he attempted to speak.

"In 1915 Jibaros wiped out a Peruvian garrison on the Morona, in 1925 Jibaros wiped out the mission village of Cahua-penas. There is no record of how many white men have been killed one by one. Why do you think you could exchange ten cents worth of colored beads for an ounce of gold, twenty dollars? Because every trader who stays long in the Jibaro country dies, suddenly."

He knew that his anger had been obvious by the strained look of Grethe's face and he managed a grin.

"Anyhow Jibaro is not their name. They call themselves the Shuara and believe everyone in the world is a Shuara. In their mythology, when the first Shuara came out of a cave where they had been held by a great spirit *tigre*, they were very dirty and they washed in a pottery jar. The whites washed first, the Indians next and the Negroes last. The increased dirtiness of the wash water accounts for the difference in color."

Burkhardt got to his feet and looked down at Randall with a smile that Randall saw was only a gesture of muscles twisting thick lips back from big white teeth. His blue eyes were coldly determined as ever.

"Do you think living as we have lived is worse than having one of the Shuara shrink our heads? We are going to the Oriente."

"You are determined to go and to take Grethe?" Randall asked.

The light danced across wavy red-gold hair as Burkhardt nodded. Randall glanced at Grethe. She nodded, too, her head barely moving, then her chin went out and her second nod was emphatic.

"All right," Randall said curtly,

His fountain pen scratched across a page he tore from his notebook. He stood up and handed it to Burkhardt.

"An order on the House of Fernandez, in Loja, for five hundred dollars. Pay it back when you can. Don't thank me, I'm doing it for Grethe, not for you."

"I thank you for us both. Things are always done for Grethe, not for me. Your money means it will be so much less time before we can make lots of money for ourselves."

Randall wondered if he would have given Burkhardt anything at all if it had not been for Grethe and knew suddenly he wouldn't have. He knew then it was just as well Grethe was leaving.

"I hope you succeed," he said honestly. "I don't want to have a man slide into the chair beside me in a Loja *cantina* and ask if I want to buy a *cabeza reducida*; then, when I look at what he has in a dirty cloth, see it is your head."

Burkhardt smiled confidently, arrogantly, his head and shoulders thrown back. Like the Vikings pictured in grade school history books, Randall thought, a little enviously.

He followed them out on the dark verandah, left dark because of the swarms of moths and night-flying insects that flooded it when the lights were on. Grethe went slowly down the steps while Randall fumbled along the wall for the light switch. Burkhardt waited at the railing at the left of the short flight of steps.

Grethe's gasp was more a catch in her throat than a conscious attempt at sound. Randall snapped the switch on and swung away from the wall. He saw the *equis*, the big fer-de-lance, beside the bottom step, on the left. The hitching rack was just beyond, where the *equis* had been hunting rats. Its broad, evil head was lifted high, drawn back to strike at Grethe's leg three feet away.

Randall knew the *equis* can strike almost half its length and this one was seven feet long, big around as a man's arm, with a mouth that could spread to send poison fangs deep into a man's thigh.

Burkhardt made one complex, flowing movement. He caught a saddle blanket thrown across the railing, in his left hand and his right lanced under Grethe's right arm. He lifted and swung her behind him

as he whipped the saddle blanket between himself and the *equis*' darting head. The snake's strike flung the blanket in against Burkhardt's leg. Grethe stumbled, her outspread hands catching at the wall.

The saddle blanket hung an instant, the long fangs caught in it, and Burkhardt's right hand clamped the snake's neck back of the poison glands bulging out the base of the triangular head. He crushed the neck, vertebrae crackling as they splintered.

The thick body lashed madly, beating at Burkhardt and flinging loops over his arm but his fingers tightened until the squirming body slackened and the diamond patterned bulk slumped to the ground, with only a convulsive shudder rippling its length.

Burkhardt looked up at Randall, the light glinting back from his eyes that were round bits of Delft porcelain.

"If you would lend me a knife?" as asked with careful politeness. "It is best to cut off the head and bury it, so no one steps on it."

Randall brought a machete and handed it to Burkhardt who took it in his left hand. A shudder ran the length of Grethe's body before she straightened and pushed away from the wall.

"That was a brutal fright," Randall said, realizing the stupid inadequacy of the words.

Grethe's eyes were violet in the light and a frown made two shallow black shadows between them while she considered his statement, her head tilted to one side.

"Fright?" She studied it a moment longer. "There was no time to be afraid, all I felt was relief Fritz was here. I knew he would do something."

They left two days later with a mule train returning to Loja. Burkhardt looked down from his mule, laughing.

"I am a big trader on a very little mule! But South America looks much better from the top of even a little mule than it did when I plodded through mud."

From the porch of the mine office Randall watched the mule train cross the foaming Andian river, watched until the last mule vanished in the deep gully of the trail to Loja.

He did not hear from them again, did

not know whether they were alive or not, until he read Burkhardt's letter six months later.

"WE ARE no longer agents for Senor don Fritz Burkhardt," don Guillermo Fernandez said simply. "I forwarded his letter to you because it was unfinished business."

Randall searched the wise, wrinkled face across the table.

"The House of Fernandez is old," don Guillermo went on thoughtfully. "A Fernandez arranged supplies for the expedition of Juan de Salinas to the Oriente in 1557. When the Corregidor of Loja, Vallano y Cuesta, sent his expedition against the Jibaros the House of Fernandez was his agent. We know the jungles of the Morona and the Uputa are not the streets of a city."

Randall saw through the barred window looking out on the street a pair of white oxen dragging a heavy wooden sled over the broken stone pavement. Don Guillermo waited patiently for the creaking to die away before he spoke.

"We could no longer act as agents for Senor Burkhardt when we knew his methods were wrong and would end unfortunately. We warned him but he refused to change. We have arranged for *cientificos* and *exploradores* to get shrunken heads they wanted. If sometimes those scientists and explorers were not honest men we could not tell that in time."

His long-nosed, patrician Spanish face hardened.

"Senor Burkhardt had a credit of six thousand dollars when he closed his account. Made by selling human heads. It is a business we want no part of, as we wanted no part in the purchase of the 30-30 rifles from the old French mining company in Machala. When he asked us to buy them for him we notified him to secure other agents."

"Half the Shuara have shotguns now." Randall wondered why he defended Burkhardt. "You know how they got them, a head traded for each gun. Why is it wrong when Burkhardt does it?"

"The Shuara, as you know, never take heads in their own sub-tribe, only from another sub-tribe. Shrinking a man's head, to the Shuara mind, is the final, the ulti-

mate insult. An insult to the dead man, his relatives, his friends, his tribesmen. An insult that can be cleansed only with blood. If a Shuara shrunk the head of one of his own sub-tribe, his father and his brothers would hunt him down and kill him."

"They kill a relative or a tribesman who has stolen a woman, or who they think has bewitched them but they leave the head alone," Randall agreed. "What has all that got to do with Burkhardt?"

"He sells his 30-30 rifles, with twenty shells, for three heads and twenty ounces of gold. He has told the Shuara no one will ever see the heads they bring him, there is no need to be afraid of revenge even if the head is one that should not have been taken. Instead of trading for *tagua* nuts, *caiman* skins, *barbasco* and gold, he trades only for gold and heads. That means any other trader who tries to get the old trade started will be killed. When he refuses to buy heads that are so easy to get and wants the jungle products that take work to gather, he will lose his head."

"How can Burkhardt get rid of that many heads?" Randall asked. "There are always shrunken heads for sale, from Lima to Panama, if a man knows where to go. But sold by the *hundred*!"

"PEOPLE in Guayquil sell them to tourists in spite of the heavy fine and jail sentence Ecuador imposes on anyone having a shrunken head. I naturally hear of such things. They can be bought in Quito. Let it be known in your hotel you want one and a man brings it to your room. They sell at one to two hundred dollars. Senor Burkhardt asked me to arrange for dealers to take his heads. I refused and he made arrangements with another person in Loja to take all the heads he can send at fifty dollars each."

Randall took a yellow paper Guayquil cigarette from the paper pack on don Guillermo's table and opened the ends. If don Guillermo was right hell would boil over in the Shuara country and a lot of people might be hurt. He re-rolled the cigarette, wondering why the factory didn't roll them so they could be smoked in the first place and bent forward to the lighted match don Guillermo held for him.

"How are the trails?"

"The heavy rains start in six weeks. You will be back before that?" Randall nodded and don Guillermo went on, "The mule trail to Gualaquiza is passable. There is a good foot path across the Cordillera from the Yaupi River to the Morona."

"Anything new since I was there?"

"Cacusha, Old Man of the Rio Canga, died last year. His son asked Anguasha, *unta* of the Rio Yaupi, to take over as *unta* of the Rio Canga. Anguasha agreed. He had taken over fifty heads and wanted an excuse to take more. He remembered Cacusha visited the Huambiza on the Morona a year before he died. He decided a witchdoctor of the Huambiza caused Cacusha's death and he dug up the lance, crossed the Cordillera to the Morona. The Huambiza were waiting for him. Anguasha and two men, out of sixty who went, got back to the Yaupi."

"Has he got enough men for carriers?"

"Around ten men. Senor Burkhardt has somehow arranged a treaty between them and the Huambiza. Five of the Rio Yaupi men work for him at his station and another five carry his goods over the Cordillera. They will carry for you."

"Anything more?"

"Only on the Marañon River. The Huambiza raided Peruvian military posts along the bank west of Barancas last year. A few soldiers and Huambiza were killed."

"I'll start tomorrow," Randall told him.

"There is no reason you should not." Don Guillermo pursed his lips. "But each day you put it off means one day closer to the day when you may not have to go."

"You know why I'm going," Randall laughed.

"I thought the lode gold would bring you," don Guillermo agreed with a smile. "Is it possible Senor Burkhardt has found the mines?"

"I don't think so but the Huambiza may have. Or they found a pocket. All the streams on both sides of the Cordillera del Cuicutu carry gold."

"Your company is not ready to denounce the mines and start working them?"

"Not yet," Randall told him flatly. "Transportation would run two thousand dollars a ton. Everything brought in on the backs of men until we could find the old mule trail route the Spaniards used. A

million dollar investment and Peru might decide to invade the Oriente."

"Until the question of the frontiers is settled there is no chance of developing the Oriente," don Guillermo agreed. "It is unfortunate Peru is so warlike where little Ecuador is concerned. But if you are leaving tomorrow you will want to look over the equipment here. It is as you left it."

III

THE TRAIL across the Cordillera from the Rio Yaupi came out on a slope that ran down to the Upper Morona two hundred feet lower. Burkhardt's trading post spread out below like a relief model. A very precise model, Randall thought. Dugouts were drawn up on the sandy beach and a half dozen more were bottom up on a precise line of supports just above the high water mark of mud and brush.

The store seemed to be one of two big *heas*, Shuara huts with *chonta* palm trunk walls and palm leaf thatched roofs. The big *heas* had the characteristic semi-circle ends connected with straight side walls, a door in the center of either semi-circle, one for the men and the other for women. To the right and closer to the hill Randall stood on, five small *heas* were grouped in a square, four of the huts exactly on the corners of the square, the fifth in the mathematical center. Randall grinned at the evidence of Burkhardt's German methodicalness. They were probably the only *heas* in all the Shuara country that were at right angles to anything.

Back of the five *heas* the plantations of the post spread, green with *manioc*, cotton, tobacco and *guayusa* shrubs. In a separate clearing were militarily precise rows of bananas and plaintains. Burkhardt must plan to stay, Randall thought, since the bananas would take fifteen months to set fruit. He saw Shuara women working in the clearings with the deliberate movements of women who know they will be doing the same thing all their lives. Groups of Shuara men stood about on the beach and about the east door of one of the big *heas*.

The carriers behind him grunted at the delay but Randall took a minute more to look at the clearing, giving an unstinted admiration to the man who had made all

this in six months, cutting it from the jungle.

Randall went down the slope, picking his way over surface roots slick and greasy from the morning rain.

Inside the *hea* it was dark. The only light came through the two open doorways at either end of the forty foot hut, and through the cracks between the lengths of *chonta* palm trunks that made the walls. The slender trunks were spaced apart where the *lianas* tying the trunks together passed between them.

Randall waited inside the door while his eyes adjusted to the gloom. A wide counter of adzed boards ran the length of the *hea* through the center. On his side of the counter Randall saw twenty Shuara leaning or squatting against the wall of the *hea*, grouped by sub-tribes.

There were Huambiza, tall and light-skinned. There were Shuara from the Upano, round jawed and full-lipped and even slender Aguaruna from the Alto Maranon, with thin, narrow faces, their bodies almost feminine beside the muscled torsos of the Huambiza.

A ten foot blowgun stood behind each Shuara and they all wore traveling pouches of monkeyskin hanging from a broad strap across one shoulder. Hanging from their necks were dart quivers made from a section of bamboo with a small round gourd filled with kapok in front. The kapok was to wrap the ends of the darts, dipped in chocolate brown *curari*, so they would fill the quarter inch bore of the blowguns.

Burkhardt was behind the counter, looking through shelves stacked with glass and metal jewelry, cotton cloth, hand axes and machetes, tins of black powder and bars of lead for muzzle loading shotguns, and the inevitable small cans of Vienna.

A ten pound square can of hard candy sat on the counter nearest Randall and he saw the round lid closing the six-inch center opening was to one side, leaving a segment of the opening uncovered. He wondered Burkhardt left it there, the Shuara use sugar as medicine and the hard candy should be powerful medicine to a *wishinu*.

A rifle was just beyond the big tin of candy, a chain running through the lever and disappearing through two holes bored in the plank. Randall crossed the hard-

packed, smoothly swept dirt floor and looked at the rifle, a Winchester 30-30.

He called to Burkhardt then and the German spun as though the words were bullets. He put a huge hand on the breast-high counter and leaped it lightly, grabbing Randall in his version of an *embrasadura*. One arm under Randall's, the other over the opposite shoulder, both heavy, flat hands pounding the air from Randall's lungs until he begged for mercy.

Burkhardt's deep baritone filled the *hea*.

"Grethe! It is the gentleman from the mines!"

GRETHE shrieked delighted welcome from the second *hea*, connected to the store *hea* by a covered passage. She ran in and ducked under an open section of the counter, her open arms closing around Randall's neck as she kissed him full on the mouth.

Randall realized gloomily that his first kiss from a blonde in three years could have been from a sister, an undemonstrative sister at that.

"The first white man comes in here you kiss!" Burkhardt roared. "Right before me! Have you no shame?"

"Not when the man is Senor Randall!" Grethe confessed with a dimpled smile. "How long will you stay?" Randall thought he saw entreaty in her eyes but it was gone before he could be sure. "A very long time, I hope."

"If I can rent dugouts from your husband I go up the Morona tomorrow morning. I'll be gone two weeks but I'll stay as long as you'll have me when I get back."

Burkhardt's face hardened and he muttered, "*Perdone mi*," walking by Randall to a Huambiza fingering the rifle chained to the counter. Grethe smiled at Randall again, a little timidly, before she went back through the passage. Randall waited, listening to the conversation the Huambiza and Burkhardt carried on in the present-tense Spanish.

"The gun costing?" the Huambiza began.

"It costing three heads and twenty ounces of gold."

"Guns always costing one head and no gold. Why this gun costing three heads and much gold?"

"This gun shooting better, shooting far-

ther and shooting many times altogether. Only I having this kind of gun."

"I bringing gold but no having heads," the Shuara said gravely. "Thou giving me gun for gold, I bringing heads tomorrow?"

Burkhardt's mouth opened in a roaring laugh. Randall felt the slow anger of the Shuara along the wall flow across the room like something tangible. Every Shuara there, not a Huambiza, had a blood feud with some Huambiza but they did not like the laughter. Trading should be a solemn exchange of incredible sums asked and ridiculously small amounts offered. A flat statement of price with no bargaining allowed rasped their sense of propriety.

"Who trusts a Huambiza?" Burkhardt asked, and waited as though he expected an answer.

Randall wondered if he knew what the Huambiza and the other Shuara thought of that. In the Shuara country a man's word was better than his bond, it had the value of the life he would give to make it good.

"Thou giving me heads and gold I giving thou the gun," Burkhardt went on sourly. "Huambiza always taking heads, always having heads."

A little sigh, seeming half concurrence and half envy, came from the Shuara along the walls. They knew what Burkhardt said about the heads was true, Randall thought. The Shuara are the most warlike people on earth and the Huambiza the most warlike of the Shuara. Only through the lands of the Huambiza between the Rio Morona and the Rio Santiago, are there no trails. No other Shuara dare pass through the land of the Huambiza except when crazed with *maikoa* and on a war of extermination.

The Huambiza looked slowly along the line of Shuara against the wall and they were motionless as though his hard black eyes froze them in place.

"Huambiza taking many heads," he agreed equably. "More heads than any other Shuara. Thou keeping gun for me. I coming back when moon round and thou selling me gun for heads I bringing."

"Two weeks?" Burkhardt's mirthless laugh jarred the *hea* again. "I selling gun to first Shuara bringing me heads and gold. For that price I giving gun and twenty bullets."

"No other Shuara coming for gun," the Huambiza told him calmly.

BURKHARDT shrugged in obvious indifference and turned from the Huambiza, resting an arm on the counter as he talked to Randall.

"They must be kept in place like animals," Burkhardt said. "This one will not waste my time again until he has the heads and the gold. I do not bargain. I tell them what I will give for something I want and what I will take for something of mine. I stand no nonsense from them."

Randall could not tell if Burkhardt felt a vibration in the heavy wood plank, whether he saw something in Randall's eyes that warned him, or if it was some elemental animal sense told him something was happening behind his back.

The Huambiza, in a patent attempt to restore his lost prestige after Burkhardt's laughter, had slipped his hand into the open tin of hard candy.

Burkhardt's hand slapped the tin cover the Huambiza had slipped aside to reach the candy down on his wrist that was still inside the can, imprisoning his hand. Deadly hate flamed murkily in the Huambiza's flat black eyes. This was even more bitter to him than the laughter had been. Theft is the blackest crime in the Shuara code, punished by death. The Huambiza must have been thinking only of his attempt as a joke on the laughing Burkhardt but his shame now could only be wiped out in blood.

Burkhardt laughed, his head thrown back, laughed until tears came into his eyes.

"I catching Huambiza like catching monkey stealing peanuts from gourd! Catching Huambiza monkey with his paw inside can. This be story for telling many times!"

The hair on the back of Randall's neck lifted and a chilly breath whispered along his spine. The Shuara along the walls were motionless and Randall knew with a shocking clarity they were not afraid of Burkhardt but they were deathly afraid of the Huambiza. The Indian was big, five foot nine or ten and he would weigh a hundred and eighty but he looked small beside Burkhardt.

The Huambiza stood immobile, chest rising and falling evenly, his free hand hanging limply beside the only clothing he wore, the brown *itipi* skirt. But the thin

tube of bamboo thrust through an ear lobe showed his leashed emotion as the red and yellow toucan feathers tied to it trembled faintly.

Burkhardt lifted the cover of the candy tin with exaggerated courtesy and the Huambiza took his hand out after an instant's consideration. His eyes never left Burkhardt's blue ones.

"I coming back for rifle, *capitu apachis*." He probed the carefully blank faces of the other Shuara. "No other Shuara bringing heads or gold for my rifle."

They recognized the warning, Randall saw, and their acceptance of it was clear by their empty pretense of seeing and hearing nothing. The Huambiza grunted and pointed to the door with his chin. Two Huambiza standing against the wall took their long blowguns and went out silently. He looked at Burkhardt once before he followed them.

"I coming back, *capitu apachis*," he threw the words over his shoulder.

The other Shuara went out after a discreet interval, with a nonchalance and haste that would have been funny if their anxiety to get away had not been so deadly serious.

"They will come back," Burkhardt said gruffly. "Animals must be handled as animals. Dominated, never allowed to think they are equals."

"It's a good trick if it's successful," Randall said slowly. "The Incas, the Conquistadores, the Ecuadorians and the Peruvians have all tried to do it, and failed. I don't think you'll succeed."

"If I am to build here they must fear me."

"The Shuara have such an inborn sense of freedom they have no word for chief. They obey only the elder of the family, or on a big war, one who is chief for that war only. They call him *unta*, the Old One. He has no power, no special authority, and can not exact obedience. When that Huambiza called you, '*capitu apachis*', Whiteman Captain, he was joking. *Capitu* is a Shuara corruption of the Spanish *Capitan*, and they use it, usually humorously, only to white men. I don't like it when a Huambiza does something funny, their jokes usually end rather unpleasantly."

"What does an Indian's joke matter to me?" Burkhardt asked scoffingly.

"HUAMBIZA jokes always seem to involve death. I never joke with them because I do not care for their kind of humor."

"I have cleared all the land about my store so that no one can come within a thousand yards without being seen. Five men from the Rio Yaupi work for me. They know if I am attacked they will have to fight for me or be killed."

"You could be speared in the back on the trail. Or Grethe. Usually the Shuara do not take a woman's head. But they have done it several times."

"Next you will tell me to watch out for blowgun darts," Burkhardt said with heavy humour. "One danger is as great as the other."

"I know better than you the danger from blowgun darts and the danger from the Shuara," Randall told him sharply. "I know no Shuara ever shot a man intentionally with a dart from a blowgun. They believe darts and *curari* poison would not kill animals if they had been used to kill a man."

Randall took a slow breath, forcing his anger under control. He wondered bitterly how this stolid German always managed to irritate him so much.

"Salt is an antidote against *curari*. I've seen monkeys hit with a poisoned dart have salt forced into their mouths. They recovered. A white man might have enough salt in his body so that if he pulled the dart out right away he could recover. I know all that perhaps better than you do."

"What you don't seem to know is that a relative of someone whose head you buy will decide you had a hand in the death. You won't live long after that happens. What happens to Grethe then? What do you think happened to the white women of Sevilla de Oro, Logrono, Mendez and Borja?"

"You worry very much about Grethe," Burkhardt said coldly. "You do not need to, she is my woman and I will take care of her."

Randall knew Burkhardt was justified in what he said. He realized he didn't care very much what happened to Burkhardt but that he cared a great deal what happened to Grethe.

"It is time to eat," Burkhardt said

roughly. "It is better to eat than to quarrel."

He barred the doors into the store and led the way into the other *hea*.

Grethe's dinner was a masterpiece of dried and tinned goods, *manioc*, *yucca*, heart of palm salad and *hassenpeffer guatusa*.

"The *hassenpeffer* would be much better," Grethe said gravely, "if we all did not know that the rabbit was a *guatusa* and if we did not know a *guatusa* looks so much like a rat."

"You will be gone two weeks?" Burkhardt asked, raising his head from his plate. When Randall had nodded he went on, "Grethe goes to Loja in a week. If you were going back so soon you would be company for her."

It would only take four days to see if the veins he had discovered were being worked, Randall knew, but to conceal from the Huambiza with him what he was doing would take much longer. He would have to sample barren rock, pan where he would find no colors, spend ten days making sure they did not suspect him while he looked at rocks to see that the exposed veins under them had not been disturbed.

"Why send Grethe out alone?" he asked. "Have her wait until I get back."

"Some rifles are waiting in Loja and one of us must go. Grethe could not stay here alone but she can make the trip. Two of my men will go with her. I do not think there is any danger."

RANDALL kept his silence. It seemed foolish to talk of danger to her on a trip to Loja when, tiny as she was, she had walked across South America and north from Chile to Ecuador. Few men had traveled as far as she had. He knew what angered him was that he had no right to say what she should do.

"I can hang my hammock in the store?" he questioned as he got up from the table. "And how about some cigarettes? Mine were lost when one dugout turned over in the cross-current at the mouth of the Rio Yaupi."

"Hang your hammock anywhere," Burkhardt blustered. "There are plenty of hooks. But cigarettes, how many do you want?"

"Three cartons will get me back to Loja," Randall estimated. "I thought I saw four cases in the store."

"They cost forty-five *sucres* a carton," Burkhardt said slowly.

"*Carajo!* Twenty times what they cost in Loja!"

"It is expensive bringing them in here," Burkhardt grumbled. "I will give you one or two packages but for cartons I must charge you what I charge the Shuara. I have to make something on them if I am to stay in business."

"I'll take three cartons," Randall said stiffly. "But I brought no money and only enough trade goods to pay my men. Will you take my draft on Loja?"

"Give it to Grethe." Burkhardt nodded blandly. "Include also your canoe rent. It is thirty *sucres* a day for one and you want two for two weeks. That is eight hundred and forty *sucres*. Grethe can draw the money in Loja."

Randall saw the red flushing up under Grethe's fair skin. She handed him pen and paper with her head lowered and he saw her hands tremble. Randall shrugged. He could get the dugouts for a third what Burkhardt asked if he wanted to haggle a day or two but the whole amount was less than a hundred dollars. If Burkhardt wanted to forget he had loaned him five hundred dollars with no security, that was all right. But it was nice to know Grethe remembered.

He made out the draft, leaning over a cleared space on the table and straightened, handing it to Grethe.

"I'm going to get my last good sleep for a while," he said and stretched. "I'll leave tomorrow at dawn so I'll say good-bye now. Especially to you, Grethe. You won't be here when I come back but we may meet on the trail or in Loja."

"She would not leave so soon but the rains start in a month and the trail from Loja to Gualaquiza will be very bad." Burkhardt's voice was strangely conciliatory. "I thought it best she start this coming week."

Randall nodded and went alone into the dark store. He found two hooks and slung his hammock and tied the mosquito net over it.

He lay awake a long time thinking of the changes in Burkhardt. He had money

and was avaricious for more. He was cruel; he was domineering.

Randall grinned as he remembered Burkhardt's remark about having to make a profit. Just because he was fond of Grethe was no reason Burkhardt had to sell him cigarettes wholesale.

IV

THE TUNDULLIS beat thinly the afternoon of the day Randall started back down the river to Burkhardt's station. At first it was merely a stirring in the air from the east. But when the great war drums closer took up the staccato beat, his ear drums throbbed.

"Pakinmawui," a Huambiza paddler muttered. "They are killing."

"It being a war?" Randall asked.

"They being Huambiza *tundullis*."

None of the men would answer his questions but the beat of the paddles quickened from the first sound of the war drums.

Randall saw in his mind the section of log three and a half feet in diameter and five feet long. A slot ran lengthwise with a diamond shaped opening at either end of the slot. A tongue was formed in the center of the drum where the slot made a triangular detour. There were two more diamond shaped openings at the base of the tongue. The *tundullis* were hung by fibre ropes tied from two posts to lugs at either end of the drum. The pattern of diamonds, slot, and the lugs on the ends represented *pangi*, the anaconda, the great water boa of the dark jungle rivers.

That night the Huambiza paddlers would not camp on the river banks. They reversed ends on the dugout and pushed it up beneath overhanging growth that roofed and concealed a creek on the south bank. The water was clear and cold from the unknown heights of the Cordillera del Cuicutu.

They ate in the darkness that came with the dramatic suddenness of the Equatorial night, around the three-log radial fire of the Shuara. One of the Huambiza asked Randall a question, with a studied casualness in his voice that narrowed Randall's eyes.

"Thou going with us to the fighting, *capitu*?"

Randall tested the sentence, weighed it, hunted over it for hidden meanings until he thought of himself smelling the bulk of the question the way a dog sniffingly examines the walls of a strange house.

"No," he said finally. "I going to Loja, beyond the great mountains to the west. There not being time for me going with thou and yet leaving the Shuara country before it raining."

The Huambiza nodded understanding and twisted his head, cocking it a little to bring an ear squarely across the sound of a drumming from the south.

"Upano *tundulli*," he commented, and spat.

"Upano and Gualaquiza Shuara like monkeys throwing nuts of ivory palm at jaguar," he went on. "Jaguar paying no attention long time but when he starting after monkey it dying. We Huambiza ignoring monkeys long time, now we killing all monkeys."

RANDALL looked anxiously up at the silent *heas* when the dugouts rounded the bend of the river on the afternoon of the third day since the *tundullis* had begun to beat.

There were no canoes on the beach, no one moving around the *heas* or in the plantations beyond. A hushed air of expectancy brooded over the clearing as though a stage was set, waiting for the actors. Randall remembered what Velasco said about the destruction of Mendoza, no one could tell what had been done there for neither Spaniard or Indian were left alive.

He stepped through the open door of the store and saw no one inside.

"Burkhardt!" he called, and felt ashamed of the tremor that had been in his voice when Burkhardt came yawning from the passageway.

"*Wimiti*," Burkhardt said in Shuara, "I see you have come." He grunted and went on in Spanish, "You are in your house."

Randall waited until the Huambiza brought in the last of his equipment and went over to the wall, squatting there and waiting patiently for their pay.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Are you all alone here?"

"Grethe left a week ago. Then the

Shuara stopped coming. Five days ago the Upano men and women left in the night. The *tundulli* are beating but I don't know what it means."

"What happened to the men I left here?"

"They went away. I don't remember when." Burkhardt yawned noisily. "Who knows what a Shuara does or why he does it?"

Randall turned, startled by the soft whisper of cloth against wood. A Huambiza, the one who had attempted to steal the candy two weeks before, stood an instant in the door before he crossed to the counter. Two other Huambiza followed him in but went over to the wall and stood there, silent after a short grunt of greeting to Randall's men. Randall saw all three carried muzzle-loading trade guns.

He couldn't see the eyes of the one at the counter but the pupils of the eyes of the two against the wall were dilated from the belladonna in the *maikoa* they had drunk. They had walked with the dragging, heavy-heeled walk of the narcotic, anaesthetized beyond fear. Until the *maikoa* wore off they knew they were under the protection of the *arutamas*, the Old Ones, the souls of their ancestors, who would see no harm came to them.

Randall saw the legs spotted red with the seeds of the *achiote* and black with *sua*, genipa juice. That meant they had taken heads. Their bodies were black with *sua* reverting to the bluish color which showed it was about four days old.

Heavy double lines of *sua* crossed their noses and bisected circles on either cheek. The *sua* face painting had been done over a base of *achiote*, rust-brown in contrast to the blood-red of the fresh *achiote* on their legs.

Long black hair darkened with *sua*, carefully braided and ornamented with tufts of yellow and red toucan feathers, was wound around their heads beneath the open-topped hats of wooly monkey fur. Until a Shuara has taken a head he wears two short braids on either temple. These braids had been cut off in a square bang.

Randall loosened the snap fastening the strap over the revolver in its holster and saw two pair of black eyes judging the movement. He felt pleased that he carried a heavy .38. Two hundred grain bullets

would stop even *maikoa*-crazed killers, if he got them in quick enough.

The men who had gone with him up the river seemed to feel the tension. They had drawn their legs up until they could dash from the *hea* at the first thin sliver of trouble.

The Huambiza at the counter put his hand on the rifle.

"I bringing heads and gold for my gun. And bringing more gold for more bullets than twenty."

"Bullets costing two ounces gold each twenty," Burkhardt said.

THE HUAMBIZA'S head jerked and one of the two against the wall came over to the counter and laid a woven bag of *chambiza* fibre on the planks with a thud. He went back to the wall and stood there, gun loose in his hand.

Burkhardt took four leather pouches from the sack and weighed them on scales he took from beneath the counter. His motions were slow and he repeated the weighing on one pouch as though he forgot the weight before he could mark it down.

"There being gold enough for two extra boxes of shells."

The Huambiza grunted and Burkhardt reached under the counter and unlocked the padlock fastening the chain. He straightened and pulled the chain free of the lever. He went to a shelf and came back with three boxes of shells.

"Thou know how shooting this gun? How feeding it?"

The Huambiza shook his head.

Burkhardt ran his thumbnail around the cardboard box and opened it. He slipped shells into the tubular magazine, the Huambiza watching closely until he laid the rifle on the counter.

"The heads, the *tsantsas*?" Burkhardt asked.

Again the Huambiza jerked his head and the second man put another *chambiza* sack on the counter. The first Huambiza walked over to the door and the second one left the counter and stood beside him. The Huambiza at the counter reached into the sack and took out one of the three orange-sized lumps inside it.

He dropped it back in the sack and picked up the rifle. He had one in either

hand now, his trade gun in his left and the 30-30 in his right. He walked away from the counter and stopped at the door to look at Burkhardt an instant. His thin lips pulled away from teeth blackened with *nushumbi* nut in an animal snarl. Then he walked swiftly out after the other two.

Randall filled his lungs with air in a long deep breath and let the air out through pursed lips.

"I wouldn't go through that again for ten thousand dollars!" he burst out explosively.

Randall saw that Burkhardt had not heard him. Burkhardt looked at the *tsantsa* he held in his hands, turning it over and over. He reached in the sack and tugged at one of the *tsantsas* but it seemed held and he gave it up, his hand moving and bulging out the sack as he reached for the other.

He took it out very carefully and inspected it closely, as though he had never seen one before and was still holding it when Randall glanced out the door to see where the Huambiza had gone.

They must have run down to their dugout, he thought. The dugout was in the middle of the stream, the full force of the current sweeping it along and now it was five hundred yards below the eastern edge of the clearing. Randall shrugged and crossed quickly over to the counter.

Burkhardt looked down at the two *tsantsas* and then his stunned eyes met Randall's.

"The *tsantsas* are of the two men who went with Grethe." Burkhardt's voice was strained, thin.

RANDALL knew then whose the third *tsantsa* was, knew even before Burkhardt's thick fingers, fumbling with the *chambiza* fibres that had been cunningly twisted around the *tsantsa* to keep it in the sack until last, loosened the last one and brought the *tsantsa* out.

Burkhardt's voice was hushed as though he spoke of some grave secret.

"I should not have sent Grethe to Loja. I should have gone with her. But all I

have in the world was here and tied up in those rifles in Loja."

Randall saw the *tsantsas* on the counter had not been smoked, the skin was yellow, lighter than in life. Burkhardt held the third *tsantsa* now in tender fingers, straightening the tangled strands of gleaming hair.

This was the end, Randall knew, the end Burkhardt had made inevitable. He knew the pain he felt was nothing to the agony tearing at Burkhardt. Nothing could be done here. All he could do was what Grethe would have wanted him to do—take Burkhardt outside.

The Huambiza paddlers had waited to the end of the play, waited for the last dry morsel, so they could tell it around the three-log radial fires, tell it as the finest of all the legendary Huambiza jokes.

"Thou taking us to the mouth of the Yaupi, I giving what thou want from here." Randall's hand indicated the shelves.

He waited while they pondered it, stared silently at each other. At last one of them looked up.

"We taking thou to mouth of Yaupi, no farther."

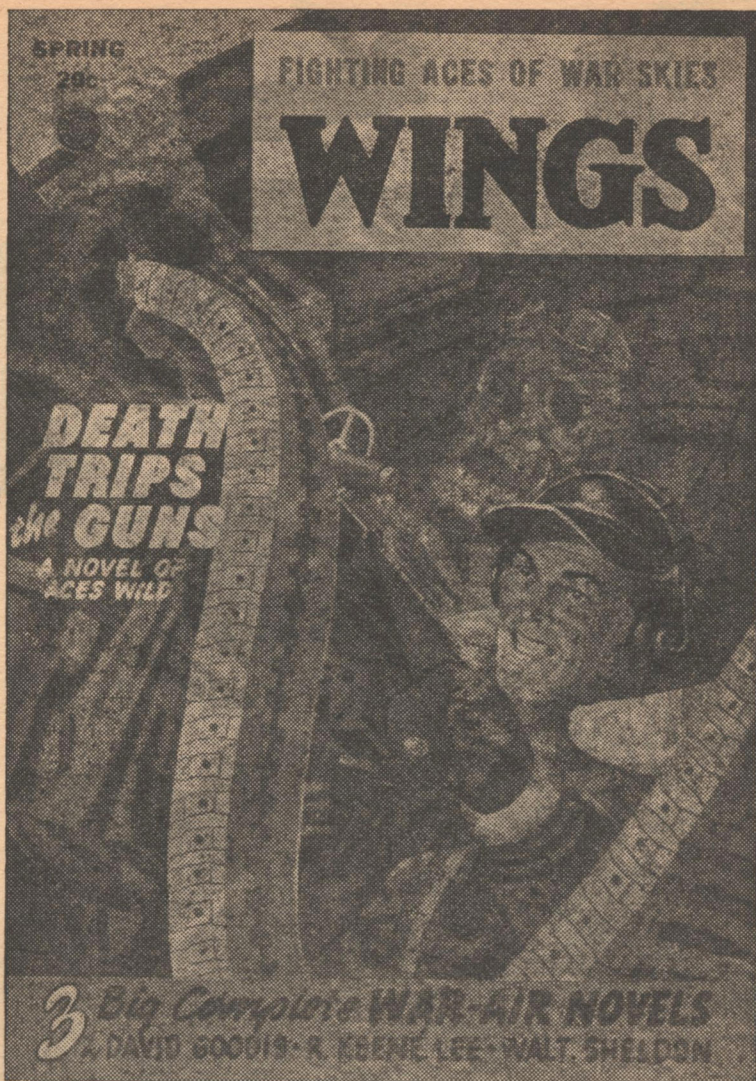
Randall relaxed then. Sooner or later one of the Gualaquiza Shuara would pick them up there. He looked slowly at Burkhardt.

The man had softened, melted, his big body collapsing as if into a hollow shell. His face was a putty mask with a loose mouth, a face wiped clean of the lines of greed and perplexity and struggle.

It was the face of a child with eyes that were shallow bits of blue glass, dull and lustreless with the light behind them gone out.

Burkhardt would live a long time, Randall knew. It would take many years to waste away the big body. Years of holding jealousy to a *tsantsa*—a *tsantsa* with long streamers of glowing hair and eyelids closed on a doll-like face.

"It is Grethe." Burkhardt's voice was muffled, heavy, as though his tongue were thick and clumsy. "Grethe has come back to me."



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*The crazed Blacks were all over him. Kenrick
fired point-blank.*



Blood For The Black Ouanga

By BRYCE WALTON

When he saw the monstrous shadow moving down from the hills of Kalihar, Kenrick knew mere human strength couldn't save his wife. For that shadow was the dread god, Kraa E'leoo—coming for his bride.

THEY WERE suddenly very close.

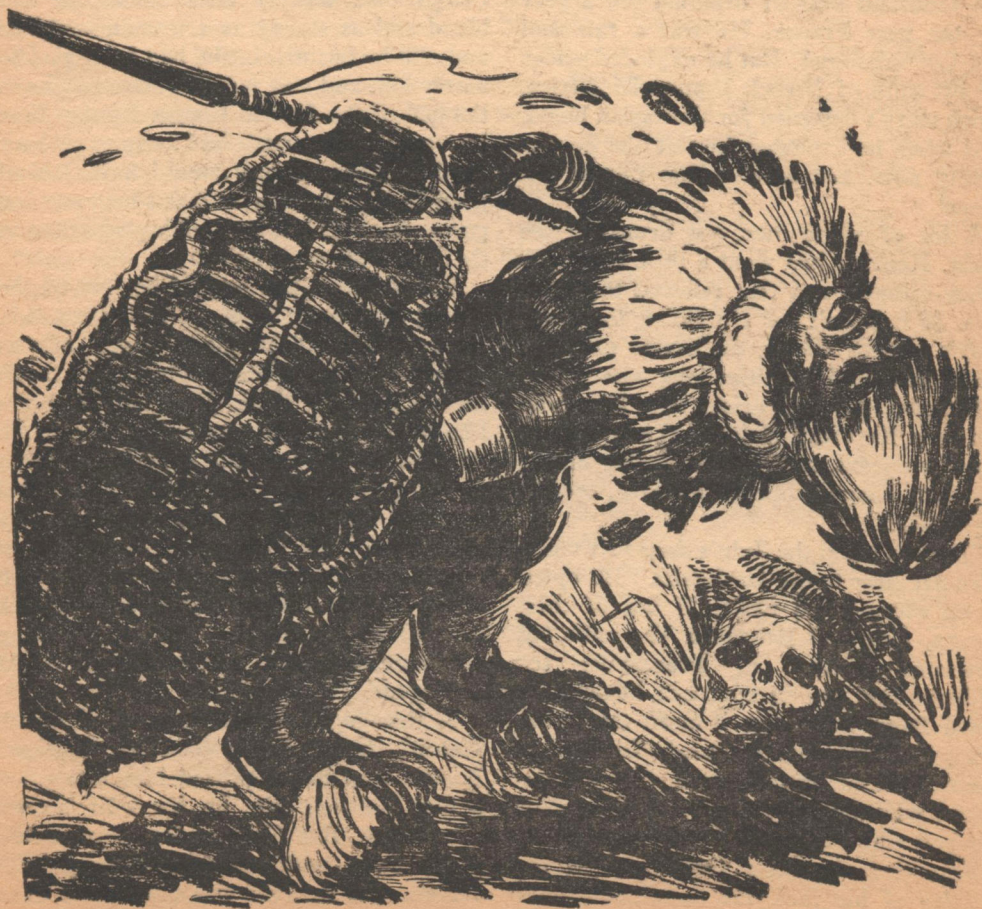
The voodoo drums of the Baghnalla.

They had been fading on slowly as Kenrick approached their source, filling his brain, and heating his blood with their dark rhythms. Their insidious throbbing and pounding had drawn him on and on—a mind-shattering trek beyond Bangasso.

And now the sound burst suddenly upon him in all its insane power, hurling out its mocking monody in a thunder of nerve-grinding madness. Laird Kenrick froze his

big square body in the thick shadows bordering the site recently abandoned by migrant Fangs who, besides cannibalism, also practice shifting agriculture. A leprous moon splashed an evil blotch over the *donga* hemmed with moss-draped baobabs and ironwoods. Kenrick knew better than to expose himself in that moon-naked clearing. He stood tensed in momentary indecision.

Kenrick breathed deeply to ease the pounding of his heart. His hand touched



the butt of the heavy Colt at his side. And he felt better. But the Rada drums still clutched at his body rhythm, trying to time the flowing of his life's blood with their own monstrous chanting. That wouldn't do, not at all. That drove men mad. That is, mused Kenrick, it had driven men mad long ago when the Rada drums had been common in sultry humid depths of the Middle Congo.

But Rada drums hadn't sounded their cries of inhuman blood lust for years. Their sudden rebirth spelled only one word. The image of that word in Kenrick's heated brain pulled his big hands into straining knots, and bristled his straight black hair with an almost bestial hate.

"Kebreau!" He said it over and over. He'd been saying that for a long time. He closed his eyes, leaned in blind weariness against the trunk of an ironwood. Kenrick was too highly emotional, sensitive, to be Commissioner of the district from which he forced an extraction of two thousand tons of uranium ore a year for the new France. He was a fair and just Commissioner. But he exploded under the pressure of French Equatorial Africa, which wasn't designed for Caucasian blood. And when he exploded, he felt like he was feeling now. But after a few minutes, it passed.

A lot of white men got drunk in the Basin. Kenrick just went a little crazy for a few minutes and that relieved the pressure. If it wasn't for Du Boise, the Company's French doctor, the Congo probably would have finished him long ago.

N'Gowa, the huge aristocratic Zulu who had been Kenrick's right hand man for almost two years, touched him gently on the shoulder. Kenrick opened his eyes, breathing easier.

"Bwana," said the Zulu's deep soft voice. "We are near to the Baghnalla." He opened an ebony hand twice. "I beg of thee, Bwana, return to Bangasso. We radio big Governor-General in Brazzaville for soldiers. For you to approach blood-madened Baghnalla alone, it mean thy death. Great Protector not yet ready for Bwana Kenrick. You cannot save thy golden-haired wife unless you remain alive. Nor can you slay Kebreau, the accursed."

Kenrick said nothing. Only tightened the muscles of his face. He hadn't said any-

thing since they'd left their *kraal* a week before. There was nothing to say unless he got his wife back. Unless he got Conny back and choked Kebreau's fat neck! Twisted it, broke it, and smashed—

He motioned to the Zulu who shrugged and started around the open clearing through the thinning jungle. Tall thorn bushes, acacia, and mimosa, and massive, water-storing baobab trees, tall rank grasses, elephant, Rhinos and buck.

And Kenrick thought only of Kebreau. He was a pathological killer who killed for the love of killing, and for what other ghastly reasons, Kenrick could only guess at. He more than just hated all white men. His crimes were crimes of passion alone. There was no profit for Kebreau except the perverted joy he got from butchery.

As Kenrick stumbled along the trail he cursed himself even louder than Kebreau. He had met Conny in Leopoldville, traveling with her Uncle who owned some big gold dredges in the North East Belgian Congo. She was of Boer stock, big and blond and as sturdy as a woman could be and still be beautiful. She had been glad to marry him and stay with him six months in the hell of the French Congo. By that time he would have enough laid away to go back to the States. Conny would have looked good in the States with that silver evening gown she was always talking about, and the white gloves, and—

But Kebreau had carried her out of the village that night, right off their verandah. Kenrick winced at the memory of the scream. Conny's scream. It had cut through the thick steamy dark, sliced into his brain like boiling acid. It was burned there. He doubted if the scream would ever stop crawling through his mind. They had pounded the bush for two days, but only that damn fool Brent had been able to find Kebreau's spoor. And he had gone on alone. They lost Brent's trail, and Kenrick was bound in helpless desperate waiting for some sign as to where Kebreau might have gone.

A strange, perverted monster, Kebreau. Kenrick had led the band of outraged Bantus who had captured him two years before and sent him up for a life's term for killing. But Kebreau had sworn he'd come back with curses dripping with venom. And Kebreau was a black magician.

He knew how to curse.

KEBREAU had been educated in French at Fourah Bay College in Freetown. But in addition he had studied black magic and all the intricacies of voodoo under the tutorship of village witch doctors of the Upper Congo. His knowledge of ancient black rites to long-buried gods was legendary in the remoter uplands.

But Kenrick hadn't known that Kebreau would return to Kalihar, or he would have beaten him there. He had waited for the sign of Kebreau's destination. That sign was the dark throbbing of the Rada drums. And when they had begun a month after Conny's abduction, Kenrick had started trekking immediately. He didn't let himself think of what had or would happen to Conny. He couldn't. At least he knew she still lived. Kebreau was saving her for the final rites for which his mad brain was so noted below Kalihar.

N'Gowa halted again and put out a long silver-braceleted arm. Kenrick stopped impatiently in the thick dark. Giant mosquitos and blood-sucking gnats swarmed over him. But their passage was no longer disturbed by noisy parakeets; the prowling leopard's ghostly cry was fading as were the muted shrieks of hyenas and lemurs, the sleepy scolding of apes. All being pushed back into the lower rain forests by the uplands and the Rada drums. The lowland seemed to slink back, retreat in fear of the arisen Baghnalla's sacrificial challenge.

Taking advantage of the pause, Kenrick raised his canteen, washed out his mouth carefully and swallowed a measured amount. Then he spoke for the first time since leaving the village.

"Don't stop me anymore, N'Gowa. Time runs through our fingers like water. If the moon becomes clouded, we'll be stopped until sunrise. By the next sun, Conny will be—" What could he say? He could only vaguely imagine what happened to a white woman during the unspeakable rites Kebreau cooked up in the depths of his filthy mind.

In the moonlight, the big Zulu's glistening hide shone like polished basalt.

"We go to face more than men, Bwana," said the Zulu. "Kebreau, he bring up

thing only hinted at in mimic voodoo. Thing out of Africa dead long time. Kebreau bring up *juju* from pits dug before Bantus come. What can we do, Bwana? We are two against all the Baghnalla. And against the old gods of sacrifice. I beseech thee, brave Bwana, I—"

Kenrick grimly pushed the Zulu ahead of him. It took a lot to give a Zulu the shakes. And Kenrick had a pretty good idea what it was. Human sacrifice. Blood drinking. Death chanting. Writhing bodies given up beneath the knife to lustful, almost forgotten African Gods. And the Rada drums might even signify the summoning up of Khraa E'leoo, about whom only vague whispers leaked out from the very oldest village High Priests.

"You will not say, Bwana," breathed the Zulu ahead of Kenrick, "that you do not believe the voodoo?"

Kenrick ploughed on through the thick moonlight, between palisander and oil palms. He didn't say anything. Many a white man has been asked that question. Those who say nothing answer more truthfully. He had lived in the Congo long enough to become acquainted with tribal High Priests. He had seen things happen in the primitive shadows, not easily disposed of by civilized sneers.

Kenrick's best friend in the upper middle Congo was an old Village High Priest of the Baghnalla called Durand. He was well educated and had even adapted a French language and name. He had demonstrated strange things to Kenrick's awed mind. Very strange things. Kenrick wondered how Kebreau had managed to gain control over the Baghnalla whom Durand had controlled so well.

The Zulu's instinct guided them over the precarious trail toward the Baghnalla's *kraal*; and Kenrick's fanatical driving power kept them going. They advanced as fast as the winding trail would allow, every straining sense sharpened painfully for any warning sound a padded or naked foot might make. Kenrick's colt brushed comfortably against his swinging hand with each step.

The Rada drums had reached a height of intensity that seemed to be reaching into Kenrick's tortured soul. He could see Kebreau now, through the dynamic force of his towering brute strength and the

perverted cunning beneath it, working the Baghnalla into great pitches of frothing hysteria. Hysteria so great it couldn't be satisfied by ordinary voodoo, but instead demanded the more ancient and forbidden human sacrifice. There were stories among the older priests, of orgies that raged through blazing nights.

Kenrick and the silent moving black stumbled to a stop as the moon suddenly went out behind a cloud. They were abruptly trapped in a stygian darkness. They had been climbing a steep, vine-choked slope, preparatory to topping a craggy rise that led down into the shallow valley and the Baghnalla's *kraal*. The horrid cry broke against them like a tortured beast's.

The Zulu crouched in the darkness, the whites of his eyes glowing with an animal phosphorescence, big hands gripping his assegai. Kenrick's scalp twitched. His right hand swung the Colt. Even an ordinary scream under such conditions would have excited fear. But this scream that climbed up from the rocky ledge above them seemed not one of fear, but of gleeful insanity.

They peered through the dark, searching for what had emitted that shrieking laugh. Then Kenrick heard breathing, or rather heavy panting, and a retching gasp. The sounds came closer. They came slowly up the rise on the other side of the slope.

Then the white moon exploded through the sky, and a shape raised itself up and hunched in a grisly silhouette against the light. The shriek came again. A long gurgling cry, and the shape hurled itself at Kenrick down the steep slope.

II

AS THE moon broke clear again, Kenrick dived flat. His Colt was in his hand. He jabbed it forward into the thing's belly as it rolled to a shuddering stop against his side. But the Zulu had been faster. His assegai, which he slowly withdrew, had already been quivering in the thing's flesh. Kenrick felt a pulpy giving way beneath his arm. From the stench, he knew the thing was beyond being a danger, at least in any known way. It lay motionless, doubled in a posture Kenrick knew only too well. It was a corpse.

Kenrick rolled slowly away from the stench.

"*Aaiie*," moaned the Zulu softly. "Bwana. There is someone up there."

Kenrick jerked upward at the sound of slow, sliding feet. Loose stones rolled down and past him. Forgetting caution, almost instinctively, he whipped up his Colt and fired. The Zulu crouched, waiting. But there was no response to the shot. Just the continued slow, deliberate sliding of footsteps dragging down the further slope of loose gravel.

Then from a distance, far beyond the closer sound, Kenrick's ears tingled again to the long hideous shriek. It wasn't repeated. And as he listened, the rattling stones and rustling of brush died in the direction of the Baghnalla's *kraal*. With a revolted kind of fascination, Kenrick turned back to the corpse.

He shuddered, broke out in cold sweat. He pushed back his helmet and swiped with shaking fingers at his face. The body of the thing was blotched and discolored as though it had died from the plague. But there was another quality of pure horror about this cadaver. It had been tortured. Its eyes had been burned; only blackened sockets stared. Black nails curled from puckered fingers. And before the thing had died, its body had been flayed.

The Zulu automatically was making counter-magic motions with his hands. Kenrick's throat was dry, and he felt his lips twitch as he saw in the gaping mouth of the body only the tattered stub of a tongue.

Kenrick studied the body with growing horror. There was something familiar about the mud-spattered and tortured figure. But the face was so far gone into stages of decay and the whole body so distorted that—

As Kenrick crouched there on his haunches cursing Kebreau in three dialects, his fingers curling in savage rage, it suddenly flashed into his brain. He *did* know this—this man! He had assumed that the man was black or mulatto beneath that coat of filth, blood and decay; but now he knew that this man wasn't black. He was, or had been, white!

A wave of sick rage hit Kenrick like a drug. "Brent!" he choked. "It's—it's Brent!"

"Wah," said the Zulu softly. "It *was* Brent. Only the good Bwana's clay remains."

Kenrick pressed his hands against his burning eyes. "Brent . . . why'd you do it, Brent?"

"Ayah, he was stubborn as Tembu himself, Bwana. But his heart was the heart of the lion, and the Great Protector has taken him to rest."

Brent Saunders had worked with Kenrick faithfully for those two years in the Basin. He was young, tough, ambitious and honest. They had drunk everything from imported Old Schiedan gin to Cordon Bleu together at Pointe Noire, with gay and laughing Conny lending her charm to a beautiful night. And Brent had been among the first into the bush that night of Conny's abduction. He'd sent a runner back to the village saying he had picked up Kebreau's trail and giving Kenrick a lead. When Kenrick had smashed his way there, the trail was gone and so was Brent. Yes. So was Brent. Kenrick rose slowly. He swayed slightly with the anguish of his burning rage. Kebreau had done this to Brent. And now he had Conny.

The Rada drums were swelling like the meating and swelling and the pounding of a gigantic heart. Kebreau had her there and the drums would soon reach the peak of their frenzy when the sacrificial knife would fall.

Kenrick was shaking like a mad dog. There was no thought of taking time to bury the unclean thing that had been Brent. He choked mumbling curses as he charged up the slope and tore blindly down the faint path on the other side. Kebreau flooded his brain. Kebreau thundered in his pounding heartbeats. Each booming of the Rada drums spelled Kebreau. Kenrick really had no hope of saving Conny. But there was compensation. He would get Kebreau. Get him and tear out his bull throat with his bare hands. Get Kebreau and rend, tear, maul—

"Caution, Bwana. The Rada drums are to drive out reason. Remember wise words of the Toubib. The fever has not yet released you, Bwana."

The Zulu's vibrant voice soothed Kenrick, cooled him somewhat. One misstep would hurtle him down the rocks below

the trail. And the French Company Doctor, Du Bois, had warned him:

"Here I can take care of you, Kenrick. *Mais certainement*. I do not advise that you go into the jungle. Your system is too delicate, M'sieu, and the fever, she will get you. *Surement! Sacre!* If you must kill yourself, do it here. It is much less effort, *hein?*"

Kenrick, of course, hadn't payed attention to Du Bois. He didn't like the little Frenchman very much anyway. He didn't like the way he looked at Conny; but then you couldn't blame a white man in the Basin for that.

And then Du Bois had given Kenrick enough shots in the arm to kill a water buffalo, and had shaken his bald head sadly as Kenrick wordlessly and grimly left him.

Now, as the Zulu led the way down into the valley toward the Baghnalla *kraal*, Kenrick tried to put the image of Brent's grisly broken body out of his mind. But it kept growing, sharpening like a persistent nightmare. The man he had known in the close friendship that grows among white men in the bush, his body lying contorted back there on the ridge in the fetid moonlight. Its sightlessly leering face. Kenrick wanted to howl at the drums. His whole body was shivering to their gnawing rhythm.

And there was no reason to assume that he could escape the same fate. A fiend's death among blood-maddened, lust-maddened, god-haunted blacks! And the echoes of long dead names came back to Kenrick from the stories old Durand the High Priest had told him about voodoo mysteries:

Damballa Oueddo, the Serpent God. Ogoun Badagris, the god of the Bone. And Khraa E'leoo, Drinker of Blood. Kenrick felt an angry, thirsting force pressing through the liquid moonlight from the shadows. Kenrick knew then the logic of the Zulu. He should have waited and requested troops from the Governor-General, stamped out Kebreau and his maddened blacks before their uprising spread into broader fields of butchery.

But Conny was doomed to die when the Rada drums reached their peak. If he waited for the troops they could never have reached the Baghnalla *kraal* in time.

In time for what? In time to stare helplessly, impotently at the slaughter! Kenrick growled deep in his throat.

He would get Kebreau anyway. He might die tonight in shrieking torture. But, somehow, he would get Kebreau.

SO KENRICK, the American, trudged on behind N'Gowā, the Zulu, his Colt gripped rigidly, nerves sharpened by a peril that grew with each booommmmm of the Rada drums. Peril in the giant form of Kebreau and an uprising of cannibalistic gods that were hungry from their long burial.

"If I could only get word to old Durand?" he said hoarsely to the Zulu. "Kebreau's probably got other villages around this section under his power."

"Perhaps, Bwana," said the Zulu. "Durand is good, kind white magician. But being white magician, he had to oppose Kebreau. But Kebreau lives and kills, Bwana. What has happened to Durand?"

The Zulu was right. Durand never willingly gave way to Kebreau's black magic. He was a good white magician, and Kenrick had helped him in many ways. But what had happened to Durand?

The enforced slowness of their precarious trail was hell. The drums pounded insanely. Each step was a possible introduction to flesh-thirsty, silently-stalking killers. The recollection of Brent's corpse persisted in his fevered brain. And the knowledge of what might be happening to Conny filled his chest with liquid flame. Sweat soaked his khakis, ran into his eyes. At frequent intervals he stopped abruptly and wheeled, his eyes gaping into the shadows of Kalihar where his ears had caught the rustle of dislodged gravel, or the scraping of scuddling feet, or the snapping of dry twigs.

"Something carried Brent up there," said the Zulu. "There are others there."

Kenrick quickened his strides. Whoever had dumped Brent over the ridge was ahead of him. Revenge was hot in his heart.

The sound they heard then left no doubt of its nature or source. Below Kenrick, on the trail, someone coughed, a dry, strained, hacking cough. Kenrick drew his Colt and almost ran toward the shadows. But the unknown in front of them quickened

its pace with theirs. They strained, breathing heavily, still trying to maintain caution.

Then Kenrick tensed, hair prickling on his crawling skin. That reverberating shriek he had heard twice before that night shattered the moon pools and shadows about them. A kind of deadly suspense hung there for an instant. Then the quick, deadly din of killing released the tension. They heard panting ahead, a grunting and clanking of unsheathed blades. Then there was the unmistakable crunch of a blade sheering bone, and a hoarse scream of dying pain. It sliced off into a bubbling, fading choke.

N'Gowa leaped forward, Kenrick close beside him. They paused on the fringe of a lake of shadows beneath an overhanging ledge. As they crouched there, helplessly outlined in the moonlight, stealthy footsteps sped away into silence.

Kenrick followed his Colt into the darkness. The Zulu leaped in, sword cutting at the shifting shapes of shadow. They paused. A lion roared nearby. Then they could hear faint moans just ahead of them, and a rustle as though a body were dragging itself over stone. They waited for the moon to break through again. Aching minutes they waited while the death groans wrenched at the night. Then they groped toward the moaning victim who, whether friend or foe, was obviously beyond any aggressive action.

Kenrick shot a quick glance toward the craggy outline of the escarpment as the moon sneaked clear again. Toward the east and the lower Cameroons, the sky was still thick and starless, but the wind was from the west and Kenrick knew that soon now the valley of Kalihar would be moonlight.

Kenrick's eyes saw the writhing body ahead of him and slightly off the path. A thin, wrinkled, spindle-legged form writhing, emitting spasmodic groans of pain. Even with his grey-bearded face and toothless gums hidden in shadow, Kenrick knew it was Durand, the friendly old white magician he had known since he came to the Congo. Kenrick dropped on his knees, lifted the wrinkled head. Blood gushed from his mouth, and Kenrick saw that a Baghnalla's blade had opened his thin chest. Death would have been in-

stantaneous to most men. But the High Priest wasn't ready to die yet.

KENRICK dragged the groaning body back into the shadows against the wall of rock. The Zulu stood over them on guard, assegai raised. Durand's deep-socketed eyes widened with recognition, and he mumbled:

"M'sieu Kenrick . . . I have created mighty Ouanga against Kebreau's black soul. A death Ouanga. But it will take a little more time. I had M'sieu Brent's body buried in rocks outside *kraal*, but someone told Kebreau, and I had to move his body tonight. They follow, but they do not know yet. Brent . . . up . . . there . . . he must be buried again. Before they find and end my . . . Ouanga."

"But why?" asked Kenrick, but Durand continued weakly.

"Bury body again before you go on. Leave it buried in some secret place until it is only bones and tattered cloth. This you must promise, or Kebreau will live on. *Live to kill* . . ."

His eyes clouded with growing pain and he struggled up, his voice rising to a wail. "You must promise . . .!" Then he fell back coughing, froth speckling his face.

"But Conny," Kenrick urged desperately. "Mademoiselle still lives?"

Durand's thick mumble welled through the dark. "Madamoisele is being robed for the sacrifice to Khraa E'leoo, Drinker of Blood. She is being cloaked in the blood-soaked feathers of white birds. Soon her bones and flesh go to the feastings and her soul goes to—" He coughed fitfully.

"Then I've no time for burials, Durand," Kenrick jerked.

"If you believe my words, M'sieu Kenrick," sighed the ebbing voice, "bury Brent tonight in a hidden place where Kebreau cannot find him. You must . . ."

Kenrick heard the Zulu's voice above him. "Bwana would question the wisdom of a High Priest's learning? You have known darker mysteries, Bwana. Ayah. We will bury Bwana Brent safe from the scratching of human jackals."

Durand breathed a shuddering sigh of relief. "Mademoiselle . . . you cannot save her. She is doomed to Kebreau."

"He's human of a sort," Kenrick said. "I'll rip him apart and he'll be meat for his own gods."

Durand started up, his body arching, his puckered mouth writhing back. "He *was* human. But now he's a slave of Khraa E'leoo; and tonight, together, they will gnaw bones and howl." He rolled gently over on his side, his gory wound gaping. He had decided it was time to die.

Kenrick made the sign of the cross over his face and said harshly as he had heard Durand whisper for so many others: "*Legba, ouvri barriere pour li; tout Mystery 'gider li.*" Then he looked across the Kalihar and repeated it to himself: "Lord, open the gate for him; and every mystery protect him."

"Wah," mumbled the Zulu. "Many a Baghnalla's spirit will weep at the memory of this night."

With frantic haste they retraced their steps up the slope back up the trail to put Brent's body under the ground. They found the gruesome form and buried it as quickly as possible under an overhanging ledge, piling stones and gravel around it. It was the best they could do. They couldn't dig any kind of a grave. They were piling up rocks, not quite having the chest covered, when Kenrick saw an Ouanga packet of red stained cloth. He reached down and retrieved the curse. Bright ribbons encircled it, and brilliantly dyed feathers. The packet was soaked in blood and caked with ashes.

"Ayah," said the Zulu. "Durand's magic is powerful. He has put big *juju* on Kebreau."

Kenrick knew the packet belonged inside the cairn on Brent's chest over the heart. He put it there before filling the gap with stones. He repeated Durand's last request, even if he didn't respect his voodoo. Or did he? He had learned the fact many white men never learned, that one either respects the jungle or it kills him. And jungle death was never the most pleasant kind.

Kenrick raised, started down the slope again toward the Rada drums. He was desperate now, with fear driving new strength into his aching muscles.

And then he noticed that N'Gowa wasn't with him anymore. He looked about him with doubt and impotent rage. Difficult

to believe, but the Zulu's fears had conquered his ancient pride. He had run away like a damn hyena! But then, why blame the black. This was suicide, and the Zulu had nothing to gain.

"N'Gowa!" he whispered as loudly as he dared. He called again. Only the Rada drums answered.

III

BLIND purpose guided Kenrick across the field of root crops toward the big *kraal* of the Baghnalla. Go slow, he cautioned himself feverishly. Go slow. But a red mist of primitive revenge-lust to get his fingers around Kebreau's neck dragged him stumbling and panting across the manioc. Get Kebreau!

But he could think of no specific course of action. Even if that cowardly N'Gowa had remained with him it wouldn't have made enough difference to matter. Expediency would guide him. There was nothing else. Now the Rada drums were so near that he could feel the very earth shivering beneath their pulsing force. Perhaps it was best, Kenrick thought, that at such moments man has learned not to be rational, but to be guided by his not-so-deeply buried subconscious instincts.

Poor old Durand had said he had Kebreau cursed with his Ouanga. But Kenrick wanted to cheat that curse with his bare hands. He wanted to revenge the little white magician, and repay somewhat the horror committed on Brent's body. And the revenge for what was happening and would happen to Conny only the devil could help him devise.

Kenrick felt his body relax a little, paradoxically, like oiled machinery as it prepared itself for the challenge. He felt his blood pounding heatedly, and his lips drawn to fine wire. Huge shadows, cursed with centuries of African and pre-African devil-worship, wavered and seemed to be assuming some evil, inhuman life of their own.

Kenrick stumbled to a stop. His skin crawled. Still some distance away he saw the shifting, lurid glow. The hairs on the back of his hand bristled as he stared. This must be the ceremonial fire he had been stalking. He swore at his irrational fears and pushed on, snaking slowly with

infinite caution, through the thick growths of flowering shrubs and rustling grasses.

He was shaking all over as though with blackwater. And somehow, it wasn't right that he should be afraid of shadows. Peril was no stranger to Kenrick. Any threat of an assegai, sword, poison arrows or throwing knives from ambush, had never shaken his nerves. But now he was afraid. Afraid of vague shadows and nameless voodoo mythology. Kenrick fought back savagely. Why—he felt as though he was going insane. *He believed the voodoo.*

He swore at himself in trembling Swahili. Not him. Not Laird Kenrick, the American. They'd never break him down. He'd never swallow this *juju* hocus-pocus.

But that terrible pressure was growing inside him again. Kenrick wanted hard facts to work on, not shadows and myths and superstitions. He wanted flesh to pulp beneath practiced fists. A thick corded neck to rend. He was sick of shadows and groans that died in the dark. And worse—afraid of them. Of things he'd never been afraid of before.

And abruptly he was face to face with harder facts than shadows. He stealthily crept around the base of a cottonwood and peered through the weirdly lit hell that had once been proud old Durand's peaceful village. His eyes sucked in the whole nightmare scene in one shivering glance. The sharp jagged teeth of the escarpment at whose base the village was built leaned over a shrieking, leaping pack of human beasts. And hanging over this serrated black silhouette, the moon shone, paled by flaring torches in jerking hands and huge fires that roared at the foot of the peristyle. On top of the peristyle was erected a great mahogany pole dais and on it, gazing out across the maddened pack like a fantastic idol stood the monster, Kebreau! His face was painted a ghastly white, with green eye sockets. He was wrapped in a robe of brilliant feathers soaked in blood.

Kenrick had seen him once before in that night when, among the Bantus, he had aided in his capture. But now, amid the witch-fires, fanatical chanting, and the wildly beating Rada drums, Kenrick seemed to be seeing something else. Something much more hideous and gigantic than Kebreau. Then, he had been only an in-

sane killer doomed to rot behind bars. Here he was a throned King of Evil. A representative of carnivorous gods surveying his worshippers from whom, presently, would erupt bubbling shrieks that would gurgle off through slit throats.

Kebreau was a giant, seven feet tall. He looked even bigger in the firelight as it reflected from the great feathered cloak. He was like a shape from the primitive slime; long, massive arms, huge sloping shoulders. And above all, the bullet-shaped head that jutted forward on a thick neck. The wide, flat nostrils flared beneath deep-set little eyes. Thick lips writhed back from tusked teeth. Everything pointed to his kinship with the primitive blood sacrifices he worshipped.

A red, trembling haze clouded Kenrick's eyes as he crouched there. Insects worried at his face and arms. Shadows tightened about him. A huge furry grey spider fell on his neck and scurried down his arm. The screaming-mad blacks with their, quivering faces were twitching, leaping, whirling, frothing in their monstrous saturnalia. A fog of raging hatred shivered through Kenrick. It left him a gnashing, hunched thing tensed there in the shadows of the trees. He felt no more a product of civilization than those howling blacks in the *kraal*. The roaring Rada drums were raging fire in his blood. His brain screamed: *Kill! Kill! Kill!*

And Kenrick, the white man, felt his lips stretch into a killer's mirthless grin.

HE SAW the bulk of Kebreau step slowly forward with his trunk-like arms outspread. And in them he carried an inverted crucifix of human bones. The sign of Khraa E'leoo!

Kenrick felt a little gasping whine come out from between his clenched teeth. This was the time. This was the time! The jungle moon was full and white. The Khraa E'leoo ritual march was beginning.

Pale robed celebrants were approaching processionaly. They were shrieking, swinging gourd rattles wound with snake vertebrae. A long wooden trough carved from a tree bole was brought in, coffin-wise. It was being placed in front of Kebreau. Others brought big wooden bowls and cups and a long, gleaming sacrificial knife.

Kenrick trembled violently. He swiped at his frothing mouth. Yes. Almost time. He felt his hands gripping the earth, tearing bits of grass and crushing it in mimic throttling lust. There! Yes! There was the prize offering to Khraa E'leoo! The ancient god would feast very well after its long hunger.

Conny! It was Conny being escorted across the dust-clouded *kraal* by dancing, leaping fiends! The tall, softly-rounded Conny bound spine to spine on the sleek back of a huge black bull. The bull glittered with adornments, embroidered draperies from the Sudan. Lighted corpse-fat candles were fastened to its horns. Conny, her soft flesh writhing in pain, stared with hopeless, wide-eyed horror into the blank sky.

As the bull was led to the feet of Kebreau and the chanting rose toward the shuddering stars like demons moaning; as the sadistic killer who had enslaved himself to lost, dead gods, took the sacrificial blade in his fat paws and stepped down, and touched the girl's slender throat—then the last shred of reason exploded in Kenrick's brain in a burst of ripping red flame.

He heard bellows of mad longing retching from his throat as he leaped into the torchlight like a hunger-maddened lion, fingers reaching, neck straining.

Cries of startled fear escaped a host of black throats as Kenrick hurled himself across the *kraal* between twitching naked bodies, straight as a Mambutti pygmy's arrow. Straight for Kebreau's throat.

He almost reached Kebreau before the startled blacks collected their howling wits. Kenrick's hazy mind glanced over the hideous white, green-eyed horror of Kebreau's face, the massiveness of his towering strength. But his only subconscious drive was a ferocious aching to tear Kebreau's heart out. To rend, trample, crush his body into the dust until his flesh and bones were pulp. And then to keep on stomping and trampling until—

Far away, he heard his boots pounding the dust of the *kraal*. He was aware of the wavering torches gleaming and smoking, and the wide mouths, drawn jowls, and sweating bodies leaping toward him. He charged into them with all the mad-

dened speed of his two hundred pounds, head down, knees driving.

His first ripping impact hurled blacks aside momentarily. In the interim, a spark of reason came back to Kenrick. He twisted, panting frantically, his red-rimmed eyes darting like a trapped beast's. He swore, sobbed. He had failed, as he had to fail. But as he backed against a caille he determined to sell himself at a stiff price.

The blacks' slobbering cries rose higher. But above them all he heard Conny's scream. His name. She cried it out like a terror-stricken child in the dark. And then they were on him with reaching arms, slashing knives. He fired point-blank into faces, saw the momentary gratification of oozing skulls and spewing blood. He emptied the Colt and, as a grinning mouth came at him, he put all his weight and speed behind a smashing blow across the face. The face disappeared in a mess of shattered teeth and stringy, hanging flesh.

His arms swung down. He grabbed an upraised sword from a dripping hand. At the same time, he hurled the Colt at another grinning mouth. He heard a crunch even as the sword sheared flesh and bone. It was a blind, wild blow. It stuck fast. The wide blade caught in a tangle of broken ribs. He was cursing, trying to withdraw it, when a solid wall of ebony surged over him like a wave of ocean. He went down, yelling impotently, still trying to draw the blade from its human sheath.

Slimy hands clutched, clawed and tightened around his throat. He couldn't breathe or see. The stench of bodies was overpowering. White-hot pain began to melt finally into a dimming purple light as he kept on struggling. A shudder of revulsion colored the falling curtain of darkness as he felt teeth snapping at his flesh like ravening leopards.

Kenrick was glad when it all faded away.

KENRICK was being dragged, he remembered that dimly. He could feel his heels sliding through the dust. Later, he heard distant voices mumuring. As consciousness came back he felt intense muscular pain and saw flickering torches. He blinked, shook his head, then was suddenly awake.

He was lying at the foot of the peri-style. Above him, the stars still shone blurredly. He moved his eyes down, saw that a procession of robed blacks were marching in slow order, chanting a low, mournful dirge. The decorated black bull still stood with Conny naked on its broad back.

Kenrick blinked helplessly. His head pounded. Blood clotted his scalp. His hands were bound with tonga cord. His clothes were torn, skin mauled, gashed and wet as though worried by animals.

Suddenly the Rada drums stopped. The abrupt silence was worse than the drums. He heard the intermittent bleating of tethered goats. He twisted his eyes around and saw the blood trough held coffin-wise before the half-bent Kebreau. He saw the knife above Conny's throat. Figures stood about with hands outstretched, trembling with thirst. They held cups to dip warm blood from the trough.

Kebreau began then some sort of ghastly libation which was repeated by the swaying worshippers. Kenrick jerked as other noises echoed from Kebreau's cavernous body. They were slow, laborious, thick. Almost an unintelligible mumble. The dreadful sounds came from deep in his throat. A series of deep-rasped gutturals strung together on meaningless vowel monotones.

Kebreau had risen from his bent posture over Conny. He had turned his gleaming face toward the Kalihar. A low moan rose from the celebrants. A moan that echoed deeply in minds that had long known the mysteries which civilization no longer credits. It climbed to a wail of rigid fear. And as Kenrick looked, every head followed Kebreau's, stared with bugging eyes toward the mountains. Kenrick, too, turned his head. He saw nothing but a huge, black towering face of rock over which the moon still shone white.

A slight wind rose, then, and stirred the dust of the *kraal*. A little breath that brushed Kenrick's dripping face. The baobab rustled. Kenrick thought of secrets long dead, threatening to come from their graves into the night. A hushed expectancy hung over the compound, and all the time Kenrick was trying to work his hands free of the tonga cords.

But why free his hands? One cannot

fight gods of death. And these blacks were waiting for the return of Khraa E'leoo. Khraa E'leoo who hungered and would take Conny as his bride tonight. Take her back into the Hills of Kalihar.

Kenrick swore wildly, incoherently. Why was he believing all this superstitious mumery? The natives were worked up to this madness by dope and by Kebreau's power. But he—he didn't believe! He didn't! For a white man in the Congo, that road led to drunken madness.

He worked frantically at the tonga cords. They were slippery and wet with his sweat and blood. And as he worked in the red and yellow torch flame, he became gradually aware of the abysmal fear that clutched these worshippers. A fear so great that it trembled through the sultry night like a strange wind.

Then a woman's voice screamed in the night:

"Khraa E'leoo! Will you devour my flesh, and leave my bones for the morrow?"

And then a chorus of women shrieked:

"Khraa E'leoo! Do not eat my child!"

Kenrick strained, jerked at his bonds. The winds from Kalihar breathed heavier. A cloud of dust swept across the body of Kebreau, the black bull and the girl. Kenrick rolled and pawed wildly at the tonga. But he kept his smarting eyes on the shadow that seemed to be reaching down from the Kalihar. Or was it the moon passing through tendrils of cloud?

Kenrick put all his remaining strength into one savage heaving lunge against his bonds.

"CONNY!" he screamed. And the tough tonga snapped like rotten cord. Little choked animal sounds merged in his throat. He was on his feet and at Kebreau in one heaving lunge.

IV

IMMEDIATELY he smelled the awful odor of Kebreau's body. It was an abnormal thing. A stench of decay. But it was overpowered by the coluds of Kenrick's red rage. He clutched at that thick greasy throat. But the big body unfolded like a huge coil, hurled Kenrick from him. He stumbled dazedly to his feet and plunged at Kebreau a second time.

Kenrick knew the natives would hesitate

to act, frozen with fear as they were by the approach of their mystical god. If they only held back long enough for him to finish Kebreau—

The black giant was swinging his knife at Kenrick now, with a slow clumsy awkwardness that surprised Kenrick. That abnormal slowness of movement and the stench. Fever, thought Kenrick, as he charged. Kebreau's got some strange fever. And badly.

Kenrick fell beneath the giant's blow. He grasped the tree trunk legs, strained upward. The stench and puffy softness of those legs was almost unbearable. Abruptly, as he strained, the ape sprawled his length in the dust at the feet of the bull. Kenrick could have raised and touched Conny's body then, but he dared not release Kebreau. She was motionless and quiet. Probably unconscious. Or—

Behind him, Kenrick heard shrieks of rage rising up finally. Yammering cries of hate were closing in as he grasped the soft flabby forearm which was trying to sink the knife into his back.

But they were deadlocked there. Kenrick strained wildly while the blacks charged across the *kraal* and the white-green mask of Kebreau's face grimaced foully against his. The awful stench was like vapor, and his lips flapped ponderously against Kenrick's ear. His voice was deep, wheezing, labored.

"Blanc...they tear us apart. Let Khraa E'leoo go hungry little longer. We both want girl for self. Not god..."

"You damn ape!" choked Kenrick straining for his throat. "I'll—"

"It is our only chance, Blanc..." Kebreau sighed, thick-tongued. "Help me escape with girl into jungle. We can fight there...for her..."

The voice wheezed off, rattled to a moan. Behind Kenrick, the cries had died out into a low murmuring. He glanced back into the *kraal*. The blacks had slowed to a stealthy, cautious advance. He turned back, sickened, to the fevered Kebreau.

What did Kebreau have planned in his monstrous, twisted mind? Kenrick didn't know. He only knew that he was desperately hanging on the strands of a last frail rope that had never existed. This was a momentary compromise in order to try an escape from the maddened blacks.

"All right, Kebreau," hissed Kenrick. "But what about Khraa E'leoo?"

Kebreau was rolling ponderously away. The odor seemed to grow worse. Kenrick gagged.

"Forget Khraa E'leoo," he wheezed painfully. "They on us now. Pretend to fall back as though hurt. Lay there. When I cut girl's bonds, follow me into jungle. We fight there, for girl."

Kenrick felt the pack around them. It was his only way out, if it was a way at all. He could hardly stand the thought of Kebreau's stinking hands on her again, but it was a desperate chance. They feared Kebreau so much. He might get away with it.

He released Kebreau, sprang to his feet, staggered and went down. The blacks froze as Kebreau climbed to his feet, and called out an unintelligible string of jargon. Kenrick watched the drooling celebrants standing half-bent, their white eyes rolling from Kebreau to the shadow that was still moving almost imperceptibly in from the mountain.

Kenrick blinked. A shadow! Monstrous shadow! It seemed to be thickening! It seemed to be trembling against the moonlight. Didn't Kebreau see it there? Kebreau who had summoned Khraa E'leoo from some nameless crypt?

Kebreau was raising his arms in supplication toward the moon, his palms upward with the knife across them. His lips murmured an undecipherable black invocation. His ravenous pack leaned forward. Kebreau took the knife in his right hand, poised it above Conny's throat.

Kenrick's muscles tensed again to spring upward. Then the knife plunged down. But not to her throat. Instead, it licked across the tonga bark that bound her to the bull. And while the blacks stood there in stunned fear and awe, Kebreau lifted her with ponderous slowness and shambled around as though to escape.

Kenrick leaped up and weaved after him. But as both Kebreau and his limp burden dove for thorn *boma* opening behind the peristyle, they were stopped in mid stride. Kenrick's mind balked, screamed in disbelief. He saw the god strike!

He saw Kebreau shriek harshly like a broken rip-saw deep in his throat. His body flopped in the dust as though felled and torn

by a great claw. The cloak was ripped from him, its blood-soaked feathers raining through the air as from some great bird clawed to pieces. Conny was flung yards away as from a catapult.

A long high tremulous cry rose from the Baghnalla. Then there were individual screams of terror. Kenrick heard the pounding of frantic feet flying in abysmal fear. Blacks dispersed in every direction. Then the entire *kraal* was empty. Little spirals of dust circled through the moonlight.

Kenrick saw the bloated figure of Kebreau as he lay jerking and flopping about in the dust. His legs and arms gyrated and struck helplessly at something that was invisible.

KENRICK stumbled toward Conny. Was there really a god of Kalihar called Khraa E'leoo who had been buried and who had arisen, hungry and yearning for—

No! His sanity cried out against it. Yet, he was seeing it now. And he could feel. The wind and the dark moving shadow. Kenrick yelled madly and rushed toward Conny's sprawled, naked body. There *was* a god called Khraa E'leoo! There was! And it had come to claim its sacrificial offering. And it was here to practice its terrible revenge on Kebreau. Kebreau had tried to cheat Khraa E'leoo.

Kenrick never reached Conny. Not for a while. The god had gone away. Kenrick didn't know why Khraa E'leoo had left so suddenly. But it was gone. And Kebreau still lived. Kebreau and the god had fought. And Kebreau had won.

Kebreau sprawled, panting like a great felled bull, a few feet from Kenrick. He was entirely naked, rolling in a fluttering mass of broken, blood-drenched feathers. The white and green ritual paint that had hidden his face was gone, washed away by the sweat of his battle with the god. Kenrick could see his body and features then for the first time, tonight, undisguised. He was looking at a grisly horror.

Kebreau's face was sunken and hollow. His body seemed somehow both sunken and, at the same time, puffed. Like a drowned corpse. There was a slate-grey sickening pallor beneath the jet-black hide. His mouth gaped open. His heavy lips

trembled flabbily as he panted.

Kenrick stood wobbling weakly. Waves of dizziness rolled over him. Then Kebreau was heaving himself to his feet. His bull neck hunched down between his sloping shoulders. The blotched face glared in a hideous mirthless grin. An eerie, burbling wheeze whistled through his discolored mouth. Thick, mumbling words filtered out.

"Now, Blanc. We— fight—"

Kenrick muttered. Every aching muscle and nerve in his body tensed. "I'm going to kill you, Kebreau. *Kill!*" A sensual joy spread through Kenrick as he thought of how he would kill Kebreau. Fists crunching, knees driving to groin, rending, tearing, mauling and stamping and trampling that body out of what small human resemblance it still had.

Something came out of Kebreau that might have been a laugh. "You— kill me! Fool blanc!"

His flapping mouth mumbled. "Khraa E'leoo, yes." One puffy arm dropped and a swollen finger pointed into the dust. Kenrick darted a quick look. Kebreau had prepared in advance to defeat Khraa E'leoo. A pentagram was drawn in the dust. It was interwoven with a maze of circles and lines that crossed and recrossed into an eye-straining perplexity.

"Khraa E'leoo— he not know all my— magic. He not know my secrets of Krath or of Tho-Bath Ulango. I trap Khraa E'leoo in these circles and lines. They like lines of space and he wander through them now. Maybe find his way free— never." He paused. His dead sunken eyes fixed themselves on Kenrick.

"Now," he mumbled brokenly, "I kill blanc. Take girl."

His hands spread wide as he lumbered forward. Kenrick watched Kebreau, watched his glazed, corpse-like eyes as he sought to clutch Kenrick in those abnormally swollen and puffy hands. Kenrick backed away from the grisly sight...

Kenrick's mind spun dazedly. He watched Kebreau's strange gait. The manner in which he painfully lifted up first one foot, planted it, then lifted the other, like a zombie.

Kenrick let those bloated arms widen to embrace him, then threw all his weight

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and fighting skill behind a right to the solar plexus.

Kenrick gagged. His fist, instead of meeting firm flesh, sunk half way to the elbow in a soft, soggy cushion. He fell back... The stench increased. A terrible inhuman pain was twisting the monster's face. The eyes bulged. His hands groped at the air. Animal sounds parted the pendular lips. Gritting his teeth, Kenrick, knowing he had to stop this horror now tore in again between the slowly reaching arms. He sent home a savage smashing blow squarely into the monster's face.

Kenrick shuddered in sobbing disbelief as his fist went through the spongy bone and flesh, shattering the whole front of Kebreau's face into a yellowish jagged mask.

The broken splintered mouth fell open. A long, wailing moan drooled out while broken teeth and unhealthy mucous sprayed. The swollen body trembled violently. It swayed, then fell forward into its old crouch and stumbled toward Kenrick again.

Stark horror plucked at Kenrick. It wouldn't stop. "Die! Damn you!" screamed Kenrick. "Die! Die!"

He drove every straining knot of muscle behind a terrific hammer-like smash at Kebreau's heart. Kenrick tottered, almost fell in a wave of near panic. There was a squeegy sound. He felt bone and flesh rip apart. Before Kenrick's bulging eyes, the entire left chest of the thing called Kebreau caved in. The force of the blow stopped its advance and it toppled backward. It plomped on the ground like a huge overly-ripe melon. It lay tremoring faintly. Its mouth widened and a mass welled out.

KENRICK staggered back weakly. Sweat flowed coldly from his body. His breath came in short sobbing gasps. He half fell beside Conny, then hooked his arms under and strained upward. Somehow he lifted her, and weaved toward the opening in the thorn boma behind the peristyle.

White eyes followed him. He saw them, felt them. Then the rustling of moving bodies followed him, and the sudden growing thud of many naked feet on the dust.

Kenrick saw shapes moving, one here, one there in the moonlight. There were flashes of cold light on polished blades and painted faces. The Baghnalla's fears had faded a little, and they were out to get Kenrick. And Kenrick's gun had been gone a long time.

His breath was jagged pain as he staggered forward. He felt the soft breathing of his wife, helplessly slumped in his arms. Her long hair caught in the thorns. Sobbing madly, he tried to extricate it, foolishly trying to save her beauty while the yelling blacks leaped forward to take her life. The air was suddenly rent with shrieks and cries.

The sharp crack of a rifle echoed against the walls of the Kalihar. The whistling sigh of slicing spears and the crunch of battle axes. Even without the welcome war-cries, Kenrick knew the battle sounds of the Zulus. Here and there a Baghnalla warrior toppled into the dust. The others had no heart for more death that night. They fled, bounding and yelling, into the bush.

Kenrick sat there, only half-conscious, Conny cradled in his arms. His eyes lifted to the ring of Zulus around him, standing stiffly, arms folded over broad chests. Then the ring parted and a powerful figure strode through dragging something behind him.

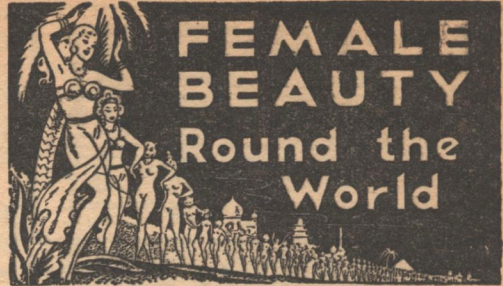
"N'Gowa," Kenrick wanted to shout, but couldn't find the energy. Then he was ashamed for ever suspecting the big Zulu of being a coward.

The big Zulu grinned broadly. His teeth gleamed. He swung his burden easily around in front of him and threw it before Kenrick. It writhed and moaned. Shocked recognition hit Kenrick.

"That's Doctor du Bois," he said grimly. "N'gowa. What in hell is the general idea?"

The Zulu poked du Boise with his assegai and du Bois groaned, rolled over, revealing a sneering, pain-riddled face. It leered brokenly at Kenrick, then twisted into passionate, flaming hatred.

"I know party of Zulus trekking north," said N'Gowa, "I go to bring them to Bwana's and memsahib's aid. I find du Bois on trail with renegade, Franz. They followed us. Tell Bwana Kenrick, oh



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mighty but misguided *juju toubib*," said the Zulu.

Du Bois' eyes were narrow, fixed on Conny's naked body. His lips trembled. His bald head shone dully in the pale light.

"*Pardieu*, and why not, M'sieu? I wanted her. *Sacre!* How I wanted her! Alone in the bush with her and she would not even smile for my pleasure. And then finally when I speak my love, she laugh! *Laugh!* No woman can laugh at Armand du Bois! No one, M'sieu!"

Kenrick's fingers itched. "Then you worked with Kebreau? Or rather, that monster worked for you?"

"*Surement*," whispered the Frenchman weakly. "And why not? We were both mad. He for revenge and blood. Me—for a woman who laughed at me. And have you not guessed, M'sieu? I wanted the Commissioner's job. I should have had it. I was here years before you came—before they convert the Federation into its accursed centralized government. Why did I trust Kebreau? How should I know that? He was to give the Lorelei to me. But—*sacre!*"

"The god, Khraa E'leoo, almost cheated both of you, you yellow jackal," swore Kenrick.

Du Bois laughed horribly, blood gushing from his mouth. Kenrick noticed, then, the assegai hole gaping in the Frenchman's chest.

"I wanted to drive you mad, too, my friend," cackled the Frenchman. "Remember the shot I gave you before you left? An intravenous injection of sodium pentathol. In case you are so ignorant, M'sieu, it greatly increases the so devilish suggestibility.

"The drums, the fear, the strain. Scared out of your wits by a damn black god!"

The Frenchman somehow threw himself upward, clutching at the girl. The Zulu pushed him down on his face with a naked foot. He died there.

Conny was moaning softly. Her eyelids moved a little. She stirred gently in Kenrick's arms.

"We've got to get back to a hospital quick," he said. He felt stronger now that his doped fears were cleared

away. His mind grew sharp again. N'Gowa gave rapid orders in Swahili to the other warriors. They ran into the bush to prepare a litter for Conny. Then the big Zulu looked at Kenrick fixedly and asked pointedly:

"Is everything of this *juju* night completely explained to you Bwana?"

Kenrick hesitated, puzzled, then caught N'Gowa's meaning. "You mean the disease of Kebreau?"

The Zulu solemnly nodded, his face expressionless.

"Very odd disease," said Kenrick, shivering inwardly. "Haven't run into anything quite like it before. Haven't even heard of anything like it."

"It was the curse, Bwana. Never doubt it. It was the *juju* ouanga of old Durand. He put ouanga on Kebreau month ago when Bwana Brent was slain. Kebreau kill Brent in very bad manner. Then white priest Durand bury Bwana Brent where Kebreau can not find. He think. Then he chant big *juju* over Bwana Brent. And as Bwana Brent's body rotted, Kebreau rot also. Rotted on his feet and stayed alive. That was very great *juju* of Durand, Bwana. Never doubt it."

Kenrick hesitated a moment. He must make a choice. Either Kebreau had died from a grisly voodoo curse, or by some as yet unknown disease. The monotonous dreeding of insects was a lazy song. A lion roared a loud challenge close to the thorn *boma*.

From a greater distance came the long ghostly cry of a leopard.

Kenrick was a white man; his choice was already made for him by that fact. He said hoarsely: "Believe in your primitive voodoo all you like, N'Gowa. But I'll believe that Kebreau died from some unknown disease. Then we'll both be happier."

"You speak a truth there, Bwana," the Zulu said softly. "You speak a very great truth."

The moon suddenly went out behind a dark cloud.

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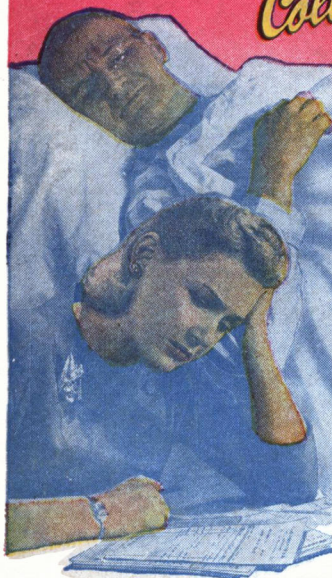
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