

JUNGLE

SUMMER

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STORIES

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FIVE SUNS TO ANGOLIA!

*A new action-packed
Armless O'Neil novelet*

by DAN CUSHMAN

KI-GOR, JUNGLE

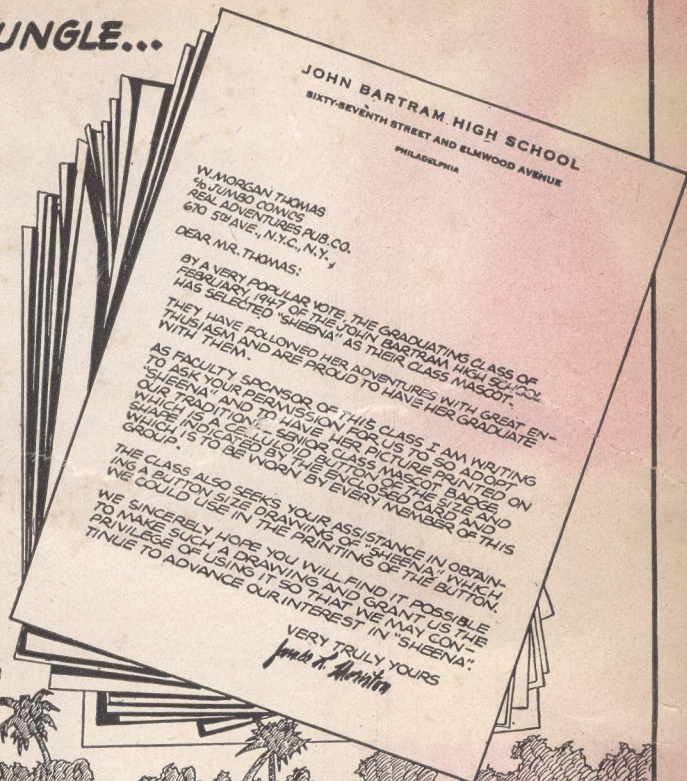
LORD, TRACKS HIS STOLEN MATE
TO THE APE-GUARDED STRONG-
HOLD OF BEAUTIFUL, DEADLY TARMA

WARRIOR-QUEEN of ATTILA'S LOST LEGION



SHEENA

QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE...



THAT'S WHAT I LIKE
ABOUT THE JUNGLE.
CHIM. PEACE, QUIET.
NOBODY* KNOWS WE
EVEN EXIST!

CHEE...CHEE!



*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

A THRILLING NEW KI-GOR NOVEL

WARRIOR-QUEEN OF ATTILA'S LOST LEGION John Peter Drummond 2

Out of the past swept cruel Queen Tarma's hun-horsemen, claiming Helene for sacrifice. And even lion-thewed Ki-Gor quailed before the swamp-beasts guarding Tarma's dripping altars.

TWO NOVELETS OF THE CONGO DEEP

THE SILVER KRAAL Bryce Walton 58

Wandaro torture had turned the *Man-who-laughs-at-lions* into a trembling, drunken coward. Yet now he was going back—to brave again the silver horror of Soukou the Sacred.

FIVE SUNS TO ANGOLA! Dan Cushman 100

No man who touched the weird package lived. But half a million francs awaited him who brought it to Angola. For dough like that O'Neil would stake his hook in Hell!

THREE AFRICAN SHORT STORIES

THE TERRIBLE DRUMS Paul Selonke 49

Ki-Jala's word was clear: "When Wasili drums do shake the moon, the bush will run with white man's blood."

BWANA TWO-SLEEP Emmett McDowell 75

What dark secret did the strange man hold . . . that even Spotted Death would do his bidding?

KILLER'S SPOOR Alexander Wallace 88

Twenty years of jungle growth had swallowed up that murder trail. But in the Bogwe's miasmic mists, Gault found the dim track—and became himself the grinning Stalker's prey.

Summer Issue 1947
(May-July)
Vol. 3, No. 11



20c per copy



THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE
JUNGLE STORIES: Published quarterly by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter October 2, 1944, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted 1947 by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc. All rights reserved. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y.
Printed in U. S. A.

Warrior-Queen Of Attila's Lost Legion

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Out of the past swept cruel Queen Tarma's hun-horsemen, claiming Helene for sacrifice. And even lion-thewed Ki-Gor quailed before the swamp-beasts guarding Tarma's dripping altars.

KI-GOR stared curiously at the man who stepped from the jungle. The White Lord had seen few hunchbacks in his time, and certainly never one such as this. Tembu George, huge-thewed chieftain of the Masai, and the two hands of warriors he had brought with him on this visit to Ki-Gor, likewise watched the

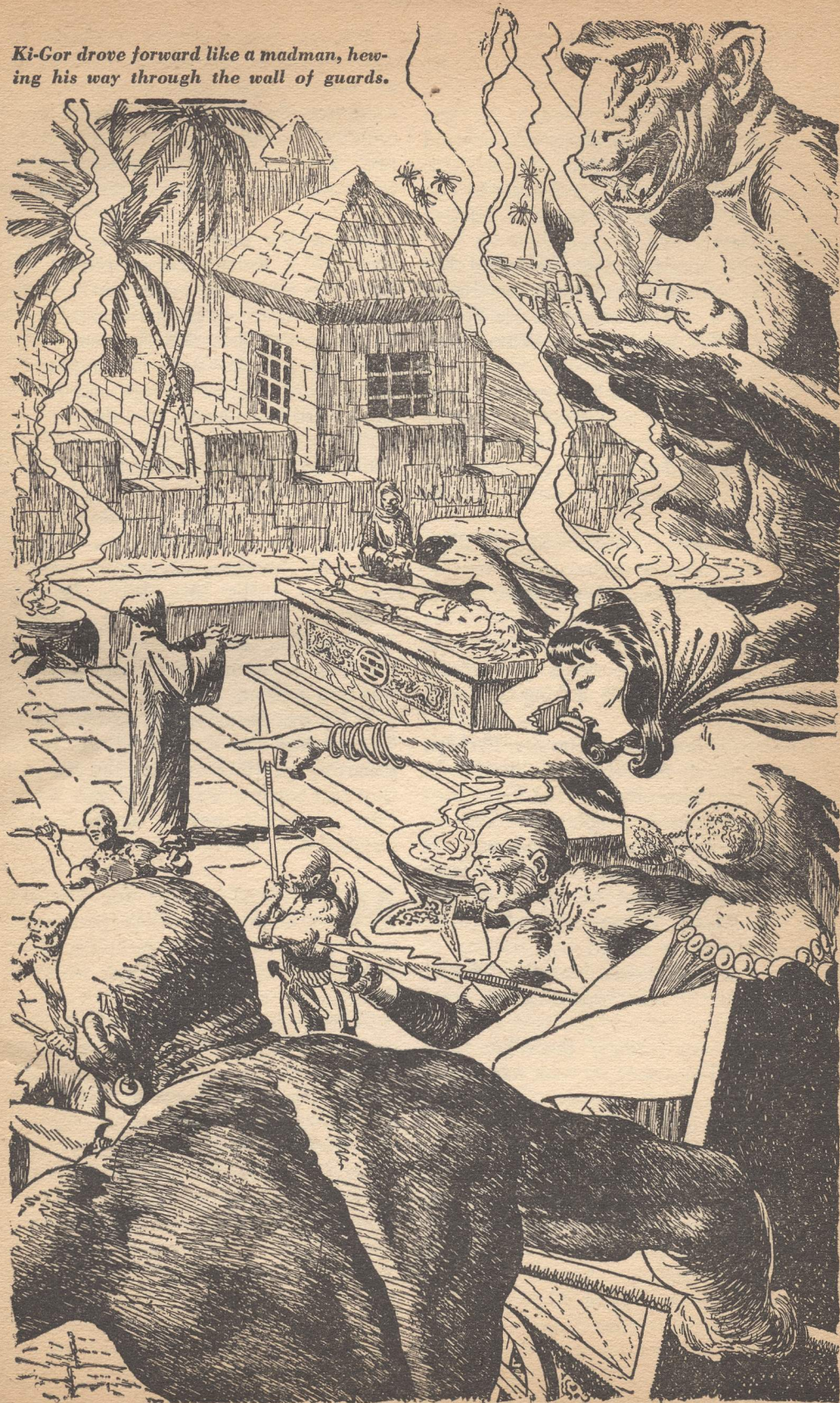
stranger with rapt attention.

The man was short, only inches taller than a pygmy, but he was as broad and thick-bodied as a gorilla. His arms were round as the average warrior's thigh and his trunk swelled bulky and deep above ridiculously short legs.

But seeing the man's face one knew he



Ki-Gor drove forward like a madman, hewing his way through the wall of guards.



possessed more than brute strength. He was a cunning man and wise, with a broad, high forehead and deep-set almond eyes. And strangely enough, though he was coffee-colored, he had scarcely any negroid features. His hair, jet-black and straight, was parted in the center and hung in two side braids. He was of no tribe Ki-Gor had ever seen.

"I would speak to the one called Ki-Gor," the stranger said, and the Bantu tongue had a curious accent on his lips.

"I am called Ki-Gor," the White Lord answered quietly.

The man inclined his head gravely in an attitude of greeting and respect. Even as his head was bent, however, his black eyes assessed the blonde-haired, grey-eyed white man known as the greatest warrior of the jungle.

"It is an honor to meet the king of these lands," the stranger declared.

"You are mistaken," Ki-Gor said. "I rule no people."

The stranger smiled indulgently. "It is known, O Lord, that when you speak, many tribes obey. Only a king has such power."

Ki-Gor did not trouble to argue. Perhaps the man merely over-reached himself in an attempt to flatter the White Lord. Courtesy with the forest people called for resounding, if not truthful, compliments.

"And these tall warriors are your guards?" he continued, his glance flicking over the Masai. "They are noble men, worthy to serve a king."

Ki-Gor smiled, amused at the thought that the fiercely independent Masai were his servants.

"These are my friends," the White Lord explained. "They obey no man except the warrior they choose as chieftain. Tembu George, here, is their leader."

Polite humor again touched the stranger's lips. "You joke with me, Lord," he observed. "My queen, you see, has had you watched for many moons. She knows the facts. It is only because you are a king that I have come."

A faint frown creased Ki-Gor's forehead. He realized the man spoke in utter earnestness. He was not voicing native flattery. What strange business was this?

"Then why have you come?" asked the White Lord.

"Tarma, Queen of the Maldeans, seeks a strong and worthy man to rule with her," the visitor stated. "She wishes you to be that man—her husband. You are the favored of the gods, O Lord, to be so honored. I, Valdur, cousin of the queen, come to arrange the details of this royal marriage."

For a few seconds, Ki-Gor could not speak. The usually imperturbable White Lord was completely taken aback. A threat of war or death or plague would have left him unmoved, but this startling offer of marriage hit him with the impact of a thunderbolt. Tembu George and his warriors were left equally speechless.

"This is, indeed, a great honor," Ki-Gor managed at last, gathering his wits to decline without giving offense, "but already I have a wife. As you can see, it would be unseemly for a queen to be a man's second, and, therefore, his lesser, wife."

The news that the White Lord was wedded to the red-haired Helene left Valdur unruffled. He searched the camp with his eyes, apparently assuring himself she was not present.

"This can be arranged, Lord," he said. "Tarma has vast wealth and will be most generous with this woman. She can go her way and costly presents will ease her sorrow. A queen's favor is not to be lightly weighed."

MAKING allowances for this man's tribal customs which perhaps held marriage as of small meaning, Ki-Gor strove to hold back the anger which Valdur's words aroused in him.

"I keep the wife I have," he said with ominous slowness, "and I seek no additional ones. There are other men in the jungle who no doubt will welcome this match with your queen."

Valdur sensed that his words had not set well with the White Lord. He shifted uneasily, apparently searching his mind for the thing that was amiss. Abruptly, his eyes lighted.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You see me and you think the queen is the same, because she is my cousin! Her skin is as fair as yours, as was her parents' back to a time beyond memory. She is tall and lovely, with hair like the night and eyes that are darker still."

"She is of pure stock, O Lord, and I am not. She is the last of the warrior line of A-tila. That is why you and no other man in the Congo must share her throne. Only those with white skin may sit on the throne of the Maldeans. You are the only man in the Congo worthy to be her husband."

Valdur felt himself on stronger ground as he spoke of the queen's beauty. He swept one huge hand to take in the sunlit glade beside Silver River where Helene and Ki-Gor made their home.

"You have power, Lord," he said, "but with Tarma you will have luxury, too. Life in my country is easy for one of royal blood. You will have a great stone house with rich furnishings, slaves and entertainers, wondrous food and drink. It should be easy to exchange such surroundings for this simple camp."

Ki-Gor's face grew sterner. He grew increasingly displeased with the man's babbling.

"I have given my answer!" the White Lord snapped. "Let us speak of it no more! I have no interest in your queen."

The muscled hunchback appeared bewildered, as though a simple mission had grown unexplainably difficult. Ki-Gor's attitude was beyond his comprehension.

"You will, at least, Lord, meet with Tarma before you definitely answer?" he persisted.

Even-tempered in all things except those which concerned his beloved Helene, Ki-Gor's natural courtesy splintered.

"No!" the jungle man flared. "I will not meet this strange Tarma. I want neither throne nor queen, and I do not give my friendship to those who speak against my mate."

Valdur slowly bowed his head. He saw how completely he had failed. The branches of a tree at the edge of the glade rustled and swayed. Both Ki-Gor and Valdur turned in the direction of the noise. An odd looking ape, slate-grey in color and larger than a man, squatted on a limb intently watching the scene that took place in the glade.

Ki-Gor hardly glanced at the ape. He had grown accustomed to its presence in the vicinity of the camp. It was a type different from any ape he had seen in the Congo before, but it was no longer a nov-

elty to him and since it caused no trouble he did not molest it.

But Valdur was visibly affected by the creature's appearance. His eyes held a peculiar, intent look, and they gradually narrowed as he stared at the ape. When he looked back at Ki-Gor, his face was harsher than before.

"I go now, Lord," Valdur said tightly, "but we shall meet again, I think. The gods may smooth the way for us yet to be friends."

With that, the hunchback threw up his hand, palm outward, in a parting salute. He turned and was gone before Ki-Gor could answer. As he left the glade, the White Lord heard the rustle of leaves and saw the grey form of the ape melt into the forest.

THE MASSIVE Masai chieftain watched the stranger go. Accustomed to the rough humor of the Masai and the sword-keen pygmy leader, N'Geeso, Ki-Gor expected a humorous remark from Tembu George about the surprising offer of marriage. But the big Masai was surprisingly serious.

"I do not understand this, Ki-Gor," he said, "but I scent trouble in it for you—and for Helene. This man is not of a people such as we know. Because he bows to you and calls you Lord, do not think your own wishes influence him."

The White Lord studied his friend briefly, half influenced by his words. Then he grinned and tapped a finger meaningfully to his head.

"I thought I wasn't hearing right at first," he laughed. "I don't believe it's anything to worry about. He's probably a member of some little mountain tribe, perhaps a little funny in the head because he is not made like other men. This queen may exist only in his mind. You saw for yourself how strangely he looked at that grey ape."

Tembu George was unimpressed. His fine eyes were thoughtful.

"You trust men too much," he grumbled. "At least let me send a few men to trail him. It will not hurt to know more about him and his *kraal*."

But the more Ki-Gor reflected on the incident, the more ridiculous it seemed. It was highly improbable that any Congo tribe

would select a woman for a leader, and even so, she certainly wouldn't attempt to secure a mate for herself in so unlikely a manner.

He decided definitely that Valdur was crazy, not badly so, but just enough to make his dreams mix in and obscure the world about him. His dress and manner, even his speech, were not like those of other men. He had merely entangled Ki-Gor in one of his dreams.

"He is not worth the trouble of trailing," Ki-Gor stated. "He's harmless. I'm just ashamed I almost got angry with him." He thrust the matter aside, refusing to bother with it longer. "Anyway, Helene will be looking for us to meet her at the American hunter's camp, so let's get started."

The American was Bill Williams, a genial, bearded brunette in his middle forties, who made his living hunting animals for museums, zoos and scientific institutions. Due to the high proportion of renegades who came into the area to prey on the natives, Ki-Gor made it a point to visit with all such white men when they first arrived.

He had liked the American and occasionally aided him during the six weeks he had been in the neighborhood. The pygmy chieftain, N'Geeso, considered Williams quite mad because of the vast pains he went to in order to catch animals which were of no value as food. But the little man was so intrigued with the strange character that he had consented to work with Williams merely to be close to him.

Williams was especially anxious to capture alive an okapi, one of the wildest of African creatures, and Ki-Gor, Tembu George and Helene had agreed to lend a hand in the difficult task.

The story about Valdur was heard with considerable laughter by Helen and N'Geeso and then forgotten in the hurried labor of building an intricate system of pit and net traps.

After five days work in a vicinity where several okapi were known to be, the traps were finished and the whole camp, Masai and pygmies alike, turned out for the drive which would send the game into the prepared snares. Williams was all smiles because even if he failed to trap an okapi, with the help of so many experienced men,

he was certain to bag many animals for which there was a market.

"I can't begin to thank you for your help, Ki-Gor," he said as they walked out to take their place at the center of the drive.

Helene, slim and lithe, walked between the two men. She wore her usual attire of leopard skin halter and shorts. She was a picture of youthful beauty, her long red hair streaming free over her shoulders, her skin tanned golden by the sun, bubbling good health in every movement of her firm, lovely body.

"Ki-Gor gets more fun out of this than you do, Mr. Williams," she said, her blue eyes laughing at her mate. "When he has Tembu George and that little imp, N'Geeso, at his side, and nothing to do but hunt, he's at his happiest."

Ki-Gor growled deep in his throat, glanced sidewise at Helene. "Quiet, woman, or I'll see that you end up in one of Williams' animal cages."

"Honest, Mr. Williams," she went on, "you have no idea what a job it is to bring this man up right. Sometimes I worry that the day will come when he will get too large for me to handle."

THE AMERICAN gave a hearty chuckle. Well over six feet, with a perfectly proportioned body and a split-second coordination which was almost unbelievable, Ki-Gor was the finest physical specimen Williams had ever seen. He had heard many fabulous stories of Ki-Gor's exploits when he came to the Congo, and after seeing the quiet, modest white giant at close range, he realized there could well be more truth than fiction in the stories.

With a speed that took Helene completely unawares, Ki-Gor reached out and swept her off the ground. He carried her in his arms like a child, paying no attention to her struggles, muttering about the dire things he would do to her.

Abruptly her laughing struggles stopped. "Ki-Gor," she said, lying quiet in his arms, her eyes directed to the trees overhead, "that grey ape is back again. Look at him up there keeping pace with us. I'm getting tired of having him peering at me all the time."

The ape had been gone for several days now, ever since the time Valdur came to

Ki-Gor's camp. Ki-Gor found it odd that he should remember the exact last occasion he had seen the creature. Helene, who usually took a pleasure in the antics of the treefolk, had complained of the ape before, saying it made her vaguely uneasy.

When Bill Williams saw the grey figure moving silently through the trees, he gave a low whistle of surprise.

"We must catch him," he whispered anxiously. "That one specimen would make my trip a resounding success. I've never seen one like him anywhere. Why it might be an important new discovery."

Excitedly, the American went on to point out the many points of difference between the grey ape and various known species. Ki-Gor had known all these things before, probably even better than Williams, but it hadn't seemed important enough to mention. He tended more to N'Geeso's views on animals—the ones that made the best food were undoubtedly the ones of greatest value.

"If you want the ape, we can get him," Ki-Gor said without undue interest, "but not today. We must get the drive started now. The blacks are ready and if you called the drive off, you wouldn't find them anxious to help the next time."

"But we'll lose him!" lamented the hunter. "You don't understand how much more important that ape is than all the okapis in the world."

"Don't worry about losing him," Helene said disgustedly. "That Peeping Tom hasn't left our side for two months!"

It was an anguished Williams who gave the word for the beaters to start moving forward toward the traps. His heart wasn't in the hunt, but he had to go through with it because Ki-Gor absolutely insisted. All game animals caught in the traps had been promised to the natives and sudden abandonment of the drive wouldn't sit well with them.

Beating on small hand drums, clacking hollow sticks together, and hitting the underbrush with spears, the huge semi-circle of blacks pressed in toward the snares. Helene remained in the center of the advancing line with Williams. Ki-Gor roamed up and down the file of beaters, keeping the advance ordered and even. Tembu George and N'Geeso worked within easy call of each other, having a marvelous time

demeaning the effectiveness of each one's efforts.

As the drivers closed the noose, Helene began to lag behind. She could hear the snarls of killer-cats enraged by the noise and pursuit and the threshing of brush as other game plunged frenziedly about. The animals were almost to the traps and she had no desire to see the final episode where those animals Williams didn't want alive would be slain for food by the pygmies and Masai.

Ki-Gor spared Helene and Williams the effort of pushing through the dense undergrowth by placing them so they could follow a trail. Helene let Williams and the blacks flanking him move out of sight, and she sat down on the gnarled roots of an immense baobab tree to await the end of the hunt.

When she had been there several minutes, intently following the sounds of the hunt, she suddenly felt an odd prickle of nerves as though someone stared at her. She glanced about her uneasily. Then she looked up into the branches over the trail and her breath caught in her throat.

SHE KNEW she shouldn't be afraid and yet she was. Thinly screened by leaves, the grey ape squatted on a limb above the trail, not ten yards away from her. He did not have the bright, shoe-button eyes of the mischievous monkeys or the dark, aloof look of the ordinary ape. His eyes were yellow, yellow and evil as a leopard's, and yet infinitely more intelligent.

Helene was no skittish girl, afraid of every jungle shadow. She had learned much of Ki-Gor's immense forest lore. Unless molested first, the great apes seldom caused humans trouble. But she sensed a difference in this grey creature. She had felt it from the first time she saw the ape near their camp.

And now in those yellow, unblinking eyes she read a threat. With Ki-Gor not at her side, there was a definite difference in the creature's attitude. She suppressed a curious feeling of panic, remembering not to show fear to an animal. With assumed calm, she rose and began to walk slowly down the trail toward the hunters. Her straining ears told her the ape remained where he was.

After a few steps, a feeling of relief, of escape, came to Helene. Then she saw a grey form slide out on a branch ahead of her. Startled, she looked again behind her.

There were two of them! The grey ape still held his place behind her and his twin blocked her way in front. Her hand dropped to the small knife at her waist, but the very touch told her how ineffective a weapon it would be against these two watching beasts. The silence of the brutes, their yellow eyes never leaving her, twisted her nerves tighter as the seconds passed.

Her first thought was to walk calmly on and try to pass beneath the second ape. Sometimes an animal could be bluffed by such an action. But the ape in front of her suddenly dropped to the ground. The sound behind her told Helene his fellow had done likewise. All doubt about the apes' intentions disappeared.

She could mask her emotions no longer. She was afraid and she showed it. The muscled brutes were shuffling toward her, slowly and deliberately closing in, their long, powerful arms knuckling the ground at each step. Helene screamed Ki-Gor's name, cried it over and over again, and then running for her life, she turned and darted into the underbrush.

The apes were after her like trained hunting dogs, furrowing through the brush in awkward but swift bounds, using their great arms to swing over and around obstacles. Helene ran with all her strength, her long, slim legs pounding desperately. She drew away from them at first, but her lead vanished when she started to leap a thorn bush and one foot caught on a root. She sprawled headlong, barely missing the thorns.

By the time she scrambled to her feet, one of the apes was upon her. Like a cornered animal, she spun to fight, knowing escape was now impossible. Her small knife flashed free in her right hand and as the beast closed in, she pounded the blade into his shoulder and arm in a rapid tattoo.

The grey ape uttered its first sound, black lips peeling back over huge fangs as it screamed in anger. Then like a club, the ape smashed the flat of its hand against Helene's head. Spark-filled blackness exploded in her brain. With a low gasp, she

crumpled unconscious into the beast's arms.

The brute snarled at the limp girl, threw her roughly to the ground and turned his attention to the wounds in his shoulder. The second ape came up, gingerly took the knife from Helene's fingers, lifted her to his shoulder. His deep guttural voice lashed at his wounded fellow, and then both creatures swung into the trees and started moving west with their prey.

II

BILL WILLIAMS heard Helene call for help. Though she was only a short distance behind him, the giant trees and tangled masses of vine and bush smothered the cry, made it sound thin and far-away. But the deceptive tone of remoteness did not lessen the core of fear in her voice.

Williams knew she was in trouble, and the knowledge momentarily paralyzed him. Before he could decide what he should do or which way he should go, a bronze figure shot up the trail towards him. The keen ears of Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, had heard Helene, and with blinding speed he reacted. He spun out of the circle of blacks and was gone like a startled spring-bok.

With an animal's certain sense of direction, he headed for Helene. The jungle's tricks with sound were wasted on Ki-Gor. For the moment, the whole of his physical and mental effort was poured into the immediate problem of reaching Helene. His mind was not cluttered with speculations as to why she called for him or visions of the dangers which might be confronting her. With characteristic singleness of purpose, he devoted his full energies to reaching her in the shortest possible time.

Williams saw Ki-Gor flash into view, gaining speed with every step, running with a deceptive smoothness which concealed the terrific demands being made on his body. Ki-Gor blasted past the American with no sign that he saw him and disappeared down the trail, his long, lashing stride drumming faster and faster. Then Williams set in behind him, feeling slow and inadequate in his heavy clothes and boots, with his rifle as an added encumbrance.

Ki-Gor was spared the necessity of searching the trail for Helene's spoor. As he reached the place where she had darted into the underbrush, he heard off to his right the angry roar of the ape which at that instant she was stabbing with her knife. The White Lord leaped high, caught a branch with his hands, catapulted himself into the lower limbs.

Like a flickering shadow he raced through the middle branches, leaping, balancing, swinging with an agility garnered through a lifetime of tree travel. He knew now the cause of Helene's trouble. The scent of the grey apes was strong in his nostrils and joined with their acrid, unpleasant smell was Helene's own soft fragrance.

As he dipped low in the branches over the spot where the apes had overtaken Helene, his nose led him to the trail of blood where the creatures had climbed into the trees with Helene. The drops of blood pointed west.

Faster and ever faster he traveled, rifling through the heights. Within minutes, Ki-Gor brought the apes into sight. He saw with relief that one of the animals carried Helene with reasonable care, and although she was limp, there was no sign of blood on her.

Ki-Gor silently began to close up the space between the apes and himself. He hoped to reach them unobserved, but the capricious air currents eddying above the jungle floor betrayed him. A sudden shift in the breeze brought the apes to a bristling stop.

The wounded ape quickly took Helene. The unhurt one whirled back to join combat with the hairless male who traveled the leafy avenues as though he were one of the tree folk. The ape beat his chest, booming a fearsome challenge intended to strike terror into Ki-Gor. The White Lord's grim, set face did not change expression and his speed remained unaltered.

He tried to circle the challenging ape and reach the beast carrying Helene. But the big bull was too clever and quick to be outwitted. He blocked every move the White Lord made. When Ki-Gor realized his opponent's cunning and determination, he saw he would lose Helene for good if he delayed combat any longer.

He and the ape faced each other on

swaying branches, separated by only a few yards of space. Ki-Gor grasped a liana, feinted a move to the left as though he were going to try to go around the creature. Instead, he swung to the right, flung across to land on the branch beside the ape.

KI-GOR'S snarls merged with the brute's, and the flaming battle-hate in his grey eyes was as fierce as the animal's. The beast, caught off-guard by Ki-Gor's strategem, required an awkward moment to reverse himself so that he could face the man. In that interval, the White Lord had an adequate opportunity to get his footing and whip his knife from its sheath.

Ki-Gor did not release the liana which he had used to swing to the branch. Instead, with his left hand he gathered several loops in the vine. Man and beast faced each other on the gently moving limb. The ground lay a long, dizzy distance below, obscured by many level's of branches.

The ape spread wide his arms, his ugly snarls flaring louder and fiercer. He leaped high, let his weight crash down on the branch in an attempt to jog Ki-Gor's footing from under him. When he saw the White Lord ride the tossing limb expertly, he roared with anger.

Then abruptly the beast charged, raced straight down the narrow limb at Ki-Gor. Heavier and larger than the man, the brute was confident the White Lord could not stand against the impact of his greater bulk. The ape meant to literally smash the man from the branch, bowl him into space.

With a battle sense garnered through countless jungle encounters, Ki-Gor guessed the ape's intention a fraction before the creature charged. He saw the brute's arms come forward, his huge shoulders hunch and massive leg muscles tense. As the ape took the first step, the White Lord's left hand slashed forward. Ki-Gor threw the looped vine full into the bull's face.

The stinging impact of the coiled liana blinded the ape, just as he threw his ponderous weight forward. Committed to his charge, he ran three steps before he could halt, before his brain could flash a warning to his legs. Brute instinct kept him on the limb, kept him from plunging into space. His great hands, which had been reaching

for the White Lord, came up to claw away the tangled vine.

Ki-Gor saw then his opportunity. He flashed in, leaning his weight into a solid knife blow. He avoided the huge muscle pads which ridged out over the ape's chest and struck instead for the throat. The blade squished deep into the hairy, anger-swollen neck on the right side just under the jaw bone. Ki-Gor swung his weight to the left, ripping the knife completely across the brute's throat, tearing it free in a wash of blood.

The ape, his hands raised overhead to fling away the vine, stood frozen for the space of two heart beats. Then blood gouted from the hideous slash, flooded over his shoulders and chest. His head flopped forward as though on a hinge, and with a curious diving motion, he suddenly flung off the branch into space. The splinter of small branches and the sodden impact of his body against the large limbs traced his fall to the ground far below.

Ki-Gor snatched a handful of leaves, wiped his knife clean and returned it to its sheath. He could hear the sound of Williams trampling through the underbrush and also the excited shouts of black men who had joined the chase. The grey ape carrying Helene heard the noise, too, and set off in alarm.

The ape, unable to resist the desire to see his fellow battle Ki-Gor, had halted at a safe distance and turned to watch. Now when he saw his partner unexpectedly slain, heard more of the hairless ones join the search for the captured she, the beast grew frightened. He began to plunge headlong through the trees, taking dangerous chances in his attempt to outdistance his pursuers.

But the burdened male was no match for the fleet Ki-Gor. The White Lord drew up with the ape and then, with a spurt of speed, flung past the creature and maneuvered to turn him from his westward flight. With the men drawing close behind him and Ki-Gor closing in from the front, the animal wasted no time in the impossible task of trying to elude the jungle man.

As the brute stopped, Ki-Gor's heart was in his throat for fear the angry ape might drop Helene. The White Lord readied himself to swing across and grapple with him the instant the ape started to let

Helene go. But surprisingly, the male looked around him, located a fork in the trunk of the tree on which he stood and hurried to it.

The beast laid the girl carefully in the fork, then whirled and catapulted into the air, flung out into space straight toward the limb where Ki-Gor crouched.

HE CAME in a wild, desperate rush, rocketing over the intervening space with berserk strength. The wound in his shoulder and the cries of the hunters maddened the bull, made him rage with the desire to tear Ki-Gor to bits with his hands.

Ki-Gor knew better than to wait for the roaring beast to reach him. He would have no opportunity to pit his cunning against the animal strength of this opponent. The other ape, confident of his power, had taken his time about dealing with a puny man, but this one meant to crush Ki-Gor in one tearing, murderous rush of death.

As the bull leaped from the branch, Ki-Gor, who had been tensely holding a dangling length of vine, ready to tackle the ape if he started to drop Helene, decided on a dangerous gamble. He lashed outward to meet the ape in the air.

The White Lord drove off the limb, his hands tightening on the vine as he spun at the leaping bull. Like projectiles, the two antagonists hurtled toward each other. But Ki-Gor held the advantage because the steel-strong vine gave him a solid support and because he took the ape by surprise.

As he swung out, Ki-Gor coiled into a knot, drawing his legs up close against him. He saw the fanged beast driving toward him and he kicked both of his feet into the creature's face. The pile-driving shock of the blow almost tore the liana from Ki-Gor's hands, and the impact threw him twisting and turning to the side.

But by his swift, daring move he won the battle before it was begun. The grey beast, whirling free through the air, was unable to turn aside from the collision or bring his superior strength into play. Ki-Gor's lashing feet caught the ape in the face, stopped him dead in the air and somersaulted him backwards. The impact

would have torn off the head of a lesser creature.

The dazed ape began to hurtle toward the ground. Instinctively, the creature clawed at the air, seeking support. He struck a branch and partially broke his fall, but before he could catch himself, he bounced off and was falling again. He hit a mass of vines, and blindly grabbing and holding, slid within ten feet of the ground before he once more fell free. When the ape struck the earth, he lay still.

Ki-Gor's instincts in this moment were those of an animal, not of a man. This grey ape which lay below him was the same one which for weeks he had allowed to hang around his camp without once molesting the creature. But the beast had struck at Helene and there was no mercy in the White Lord. After he saw to Helene, to meant to descend and make certain the ape was dead.

He hurried to the place where Helene lay, felt swiftly over her for broken bones. She was unharmed except for the bruise on her temple where the ape had slugged her. Gently, Ki-Gor massaged her neck, stroked her forehead, calling to her in a voice tight with emotion.

Consciousness returned to her slowly. She blinked, stiffening in alarm in the brief span before her eyes came into focus and she recognized Ki-Gor.

"The grey apes . . . !" she began fearfully.

"They're dead," Ki-Gor said, cutting her off. "You're safe. But have they hurt you?"

"I'm all right," she said, "except for where one hit me."

Mention of the blow brought a snarl from Ki-Gor. Red anger swirled up in him anew.

"Wait here!" he commanded, and then with the agility of a monkey he went whirling down through the branches toward the ground.

HE DROPPED to the forest floor a few steps from the ape. He had guessed that the fall had not killed the creature. The beast was slowly climbing to his knees, shaking his head and trying to clear his senses. Ki-Gor didn't mean to leave the vicious animal alive to prey on other humans.

He drew his knife and poised on the

balls of his feet, waiting for the ape to lift his head before he moved in to dispatch it. Spread out to comb a wide area, the blacks led by Williams were very close now. Ki-Gor gave his full attention to the ape, too filled with cold anger against the creature which had endangered Helene's life to be more than vaguely conscious of the hunters' nearness. As the dazed beast raised to his knees, Ki-Gor raised his knife and started in.

"No, Ki-Gor! Don't kill him!" came Williams' pleading shout. "Let me take him alive."

The White Lord's long, gliding steps slowed. As Williams ran up and put a restraining hand on Ki-Gor's arm, the jungle man turned and looked at the American. Williams caught his breath and his words trailed away.

This was not the Ki-Gor, the hunter knew, this man with blazing grey eyes and a face hard as stone. Never before had Williams seen the white giant with the jungle's savage mark on him. He stumbled back a step, half fearing Ki-Gor did not recognize him, half believing Ki-Gor might attack him. But the American's words laid hold of Ki-Gor's mind. His face softened and the savage, merciless light left his eyes.

"I should kill him," the White Lord said harshly. "He will bring trouble. Such an animal is better dead."

"This ape is important to science," Williams pointed out. "He's an entirely new species. That's the only reason I want to take him alive."

Ki-Gor looked doubtfully at the ape. "I don't know who this man 'science' is, but he's a fool to take such chances." He hesitated, then said reluctantly, "You may have the grey one, if you insist. I did promise to take him alive for you."

The hunter was overjoyed.

The blacks were crowding up, so Williams swiftly ordered them to tie up the ape and carry him back to camp. He was half afraid Ki-Gor might change his mind. N'Geeso and Tembu George raced up together.

"Helene? Is she alive?" N'Geeso asked breathlessly, afraid when he did not see the red-haired girl. Tembu George's face was strained with worry.

Williams' cheeks flamed red. In his de-

sire to save the prized specimen, he had let the girl be momentarily shoved from first place in his mind. He cursed himself, began to apologize for his stupidity.

"She's unhurt," Ki-Gor said thankfully. "For some strange reason, they didn't try to kill her. They seemed anxious to take her some place to the west. When I tried to turn this one back, he put her down and fought. They worked together more like men than apes."

Helene's head had cleared, and hearing the voices below her, she left the fork of the tree and climbed down. She confirmed the fact that the apes had made no effort to slay her and she told how efficiently the two creatures had cooperated to box her up on the trail.

After the grey ape was safely caged at Williams' camp, there was no time to spare in speculating on the odd behavior of Helene's animal kidnappers. Everyone in camp except Helene was busily engaged in handling the day's catch. Valuable specimens were placed in cages constructed on the spot from saplings and heavier timbers by the nimble-fingered pygmies. Beasts that were not so important or that had been hurt in the traps were slain and skinned, the pelts going to Williams and the meat to the natives.

It was well after dark before the weary men finished their tasks. The next day there would be feasting, but the blacks wanted to hold their celebration at N'Geeso's *kraal*, so on this night they sought their grass pallets early. Ki-Gor and Helene followed suit.

But with dawn, everyone rose. The pygmies streamed into the jungle carrying sides of meat which had been hung from branches during the night. N'Geeso strutted about, pleased with the bounty. Not until the last of his men were gone and he had exacted promises from his white friends to attend the feast, did he streak off to direct the preparations. Tembu George remained with Ki-Gor at the camp.

IT WAS after breakfast and Williams was busy taking measurements of the ape which Ki-Gor had slain when the White Lord abruptly asked everyone to be quiet. He listened a moment, then lay flat on the ground, his ear to the earth. Since they lacked the jungle man's keen sense

of hearing, the sound was too faint for the others to catch. They watched curiously as Ki-Gor got to his feet, looked toward the west and frowned.

"Sounds like a herd of zebra," he said, "running hard. Strange, because even in dry seasons zebra seldom roam this far from the veldt."

"Look at the grey ape," Tembu George broke in. "He acts like he's listening, too."

The caged bull had climbed to his feet and was pressed against the side of the cage, his ear cocked toward the now faintly-heard sound. He growled deep in his throat and swayed excitedly. It was the first interest he had shown in anything from the moment of his capture. He had sullenly refused all food and had squatted darkly in the corner of his cage.

Ki-Gor studied the ape curiously. The mutter of noise grew to a drumming of hooves. The herd was coming straight down a broad trail which led into the camp, and mixed with the animal scent was the scent of men. In the jungle, the unusual is always suspect.

"It's not a zebra herd," Ki-Gor declared. "Men come on horses, men whose scent is strange to me."

Ki-Gor's glance swept the clearing. With the pygmies gone, he had only the eleven Masai to count on in case of trouble. The handful of Bantu bearers employed by Williams would turn tail at the first sign of danger. Already they were nervously edging toward the trees.

"Into the jungle!" the White Lord ordered the Masai. "Keep your bows ready. If I raise my right hand, shoot."

Those stern fighting men required no further commands to make clear the part they were to play. They were accustomed to fighting beside Ki-Gor. They slid into the bush with scarcely a rustle.

Drawn bows would cover the horsemen from the moment they entered the camp. If they were friendly, they would ride on without ever sensing the presence of the Masai. If they were hostile, a hail of arrows would rake them at the first move they made against Williams and the jungle couple. That sudden blast of death would give Ki-Gor, Helene and their friends time to seek cover.

Williams started to take his pistol from its holster. "No!" Ki-Gor said. "Go on

with your work. Show neither surprise nor nervousness. They are friends until proved otherwise."

The American resumed his measuring of the dead ape. Ki-Gor and Helene stood beside him, completely relaxed. The caged ape was pressed against the stout wooden bars which confined him, his eyes on the trail.

The horsemen burst from the forest at a gallop, racing two abreast on wild, wiry-looking ponies. They rode bareback, using only halters to guide their plunging mounts. And despite his admonition to Williams to show no surprise, a flicker of amazement passed over Ki-Gor's own face.

In the fore of the riders was the powerful but misshapen figure of Valdur and beside him rode a woman of striking beauty, her raven hair streaming in the wind. Her skin was fair, fair as Helene's, and her curved, long-limbed body perfect in every detail.

She was undeniably a white woman, though the band of fierce warriors who pressed behind her ranged in color from light brown to ebony. She was strong, with a man's strength, as evidenced by the ease with which she sat her unruly horse, and by the practiced way she handled the long gleaming sword in her right hand.

The foremost riders were armed with swords, but the rest of the horsemen swung murderous clubs, knobbed with iron spikes. They wore their hair like Valdur, in two long braids, and their faces, though less intelligent than his, had similar features.

Ki-Gor's first reaction was a feeling that he had made a serious mistake in keeping Helene and Williams in the open. The horsemen headed directly at them, coming with such fury that Ki-Gor thought they were going to be ridden down without a word. Even the dread skill of the Masai bowmen would not suffice to halt that tight, double column in time.

But just as they came within bow range, the black-haired Tarma swept her sword aloft and the horsemen drew rein in a lunging, pawing pack behind her. Then the riders surged out in a half-circle facing the White Lord. In silence, the cruel beady eyes of the warriors fastened on Ki-Gor.

Tarma, Queen of the Maldeans, stared fixedly at the White Lord of the Jungle.



III

TARMA voiced no greeting, gave no hint of her intentions. She looked into the White Lord's steel-grey eyes, and one could not say whether there was anger or hate or desire in her gaze. She totally ignored the presence of Helene and Williams.

Her face was proud and strong, with the mark of arrogance and cruelty in it. She had high cheekbones and brilliant, challenging black eyes. Her lips were full and red—sensual lips tipped downward at the corners with tiny lines of harshness.

About her body was an animal liteness, a quick, rippling beauty such as a young lioness possesses. Her brief attire bore no resemblance to the dress of Congo tribes. Drawn tight around her hips was a scanty sarong-like garment coarsely woven of scarlet threads and her prominent breasts were restrained by a gold-linked halter of the same material.

"So you are Ki-Gor!" she declared, her voice neither questioning nor accusing. "Fear not! No harm shall come to *you*. But do not think to interfere."

She spoke in the Bantu tongue with the same curious accent Valdur had used when he first visited Ki-Gor.

"This is our land, O One From Far Away, and it is not our place to feel afraid," the White Lord stated gravely.

The barely-seen twitch of a muscle near Valdur's mouth betrayed his amusement at

Ki-Gor's neat thrust. By using the Bantu term for stranger, the White Lord feigned ignorance of Tarma's identity. And as another trick to deflate her lordly arrogance, he gently reminded her that she had better look to her own safety while she was in his area instead of hinting at causing others trouble. It seemed to tickle Valdur to see someone stand up to Tarma.

Tarma's face hardened. Unmoved, Ki-Gor watched the quick leap of anger to her eyes.

"Beware your tongue," she snapped, "I have men at my back and you have none. Your insolence may make me forget my wish to keep you out of this."

Ki-Gor's answer was an easy laugh. The quality of that laugh stabbed Valdur alert. He remembered the tall, grim fighting men clustered about the jungle man on their previous meeting. This Ki-Gor was no fool. Those guards were stationed nearby, ready to go into action if Tarma made a single threatening move.

Valdur reined his horse close to Tarma, spoke in a low, swift whisper. Her glance darted narrowly about the camp, obviously searching for hidden guards. Then unimpressed by his warning, she imperiously waved him away. The camp looked deserted to her, and she did not choose to give Ki-Gor credit for undue cunning. Valdur's lips whitened at her contemptuous treatment, but he said no more.

"You!" she said roughly, pointing at Williams. "This is your camp?" He nodded. "You caged these animals?" Again he nodded. "Then you are the one we seek."

He frowned at her ominous tone. "What do you mean?" Williams stood uneasily by the grey ape's carcass, a measuring tape in his hand.

"The evidence is before you," she said accusingly. "You spilled the blood of one of our earth-gods and dared to cage another. For these crimes, you must be judged before the altar of Zalda. That is why I, Tarma, Queen of the Maldeans, have come for you. These crimes against our gods must be avenged."

WILLIAMS was too astonished to speak. This was fantastic, a barbaric queen appearing out of nowhere and screaming accusations at him about an ape

which she called an earth-god. He gulped and looked to Ki-Gor for help.

But Helene spoke first. "Why those apes are vicious and dangerous. They tried to kill me." She blurted the words angrily.

"Silence!" shrilled Tarma, jerking around to face Helene. She had not deigned to glance at Helene before, but now she was a picture of hate. "Speak again and you, too, shall be tried before Zalda."

Ki-Gor's half-amused attitude instantly vanished. The great muscles across his shoulders and along his powerful legs rippled and grew taut. His grey eyes were abruptly cold and dangerous.

"I killed your earth-god," he said quietly, "and I would have killed the other one, if Williams hadn't begged me not to. You see, you should be thanking, instead of threatening him."

Ki-Gor gave no explanations. With two calm sentences, he shouldered full responsibility. Helene, stung by Tarma's arrogance, came to her mate's further defense.

"I suppose you think he should let those creatures carry me off," she said hotly. "We aren't accustomed to gods that beat women in the head. Furthermore, they both tried to kill Ki-Gor when he came to help me."

"They looked and acted like apes to us," put in Williams, in an awkward attempt to soothe the woman. "You can't blame a man for defending his own and his wife's lives."

Tarma's face was suddenly a cruel, tight mask.

"Silence!" she commanded. "I'll hear no lies against the earth-gods. One has been killed and another harshly treated. It is the ancient law that two must pay with their lives for these crimes. I shall take two of you back for judgment before Zalda. The Great God shall decide the way in which the two shall die. Whether in the altar flames or at the hands of the earth-gods, whether easily or with long suffering."

Tarma's venomous eyes turned meaningfully to Helene and Williams, leaving no doubt that they were the two she spoke of. She made no mention of Ki-Gor, despite his confession of slaying one ape and wounding the other.

"You, Woman of the Red Hair, are responsible for the earth-god's death," she

accused. "Only because of you did Ki-Gor fight him. And you," she continued, pointing at Williams, "are responsible for putting the other earth-god in that cage. You, not Ki-Gor, wished him insulted in this manner."

Smoothly, the Queen of the Maldeans twisted her accusations to except Ki-Gor. Two must die, but she did not mean to let harm come to the jungle lord. Now that she saw the magnificent white savage with her own eyes, she was more resolved than ever to have him for herself.

In her land, it was the ancient law that any person who harmed an earth-god must die. Her barbaric mind could not conceive that in slaying Helene she would make Ki-Gor her deadly enemy. She firmly expected him to submit as meekly to the cruel law as her own subjects submitted, holding her in no way responsible for a divine edict. Then with Helene out of the way, she thought he would come willingly to her, come gratefully when she beckoned as would any of the men in her court.

Ki-Gor did not then sense the reason for Tarma's action, but he saw that she deliberately absolved him of blame. He understood the religious fanaticism of primitive tribes and counted this demand for a blood tribute as another outcropping of the cruel superstition he had fought so long.

Ki-Gor had hoped to avoid trouble with Tarma. Now she gave him no choice except to strike first. The easiest way to spare bloodshed would be to pull her from her horse before her warriors realized what he was about. With her in his power, perhaps he could talk sense to both Tarma and her followers. Only as a last resort would he use his hidden Masai bowmen.

But before Ki-Gor could act, Tarma leaped from her horse and strode to the cage where the grey ape was growling and pulling at the bars. She walked up to the beast and reached to caress it. Williams called an excited warning to her, expecting the dangerous bull to do her harm.

Instead, the ape quieted under her touch. Guttural noises began to spill from his mouth as though he were talking to her. Ki-Gor frowned as he listened. The sounds the bull was uttering went far beyond the limited grunts of the apes he had watched since childhood.



His astonishment was even greater when the coarse, guttural sounds began to issue from Tarma's mouth. There could be no denying the fact that she was speaking to the ape. With brutish growls and grunts and strange facial contortions she spoke to the bull.

WHEN Tarma finished, she called to her men to release the beast. Her followers showed no surprise at her performance. They saw nothing unusual in their queen's conversing with the hairy giant. But Ki-Gor and Helene exchanged wondering looks, and Williams' mouth dropped open in shock. At Tarma's summons, five horsemen spurred forward to free the ape.

In the cage next to the ape was a golden lion made nervous by the presence of so many men and horses. The lion crouched at the rear of his barred cell snarling his anger.

The horsemen, in their eagerness to obey their queen, wheeled too close to the lion's cage. The huge cat gave a thunderous roar and flung himself against the bars, straining to reach the horses. The half-wild ponies reared and plunged out of control. One of the mounts hit the crossbar of the cage door with its rump, lashed out with its hooves and struck the timber squarely. Then another horse in the swirling melee was thrown against the cage and the lion's claws raked it.

Valdur's voice bludgeoned through the uproar. "Away from the cat, fools!"

The five warriors got their squealing ponies back into the clearing, but they were so occupied with holding their seats that

they didn't realize they had torn open the door to the lion's cage. The other Maldeans, including Tarma, had their attention focused on the quintet of riders.

The slaving, excited lion launched himself against the damaged door and it crashed open under his weight. With a murderous roar, the great cat whirled to find the nearest enemy, a berserk lust to kill showing in its eyes.

Tarma, Queen of the Maldeans, stood nearest the cat. When she heard the roar and realized the lion was free, she gasped and flattened herself against the ape's cage. She was cut off from her warriors and not one of them could force his horse close to that raging cat. The Maldeans were as stunned by the lion's sudden appearance as Tarma.

Ki-Gor alone of all that group kept his head. He saw the lion break free, and where a moment before he had been plotting to capture Tarma, now automatically he thought only of protecting her. Another man, remembering the queen's declared intention of slaying Helene and Williams, might have thought more of his own safety and let the killer-cat dispose of the arrogant ruler. But in Tarma's sudden peril, Ki-Gor thought of her as another human in danger.

The jungle lord saw the tawny head jerk toward the queen, knew the cat had selected her as its victim. With the instantaneous reaction which had enabled him to survive in the fang-ruled forest, the bronzed White Lord sprang smoothly to her help.

In a flashing display of brute power, he flung his muscled bulk over the ground, sprinted in at an angle so he would intercept the killer-cat just before it reached Tarma. The lion launched his express-train charge a fraction after Ki-Gor moved. In a blur of speed, man and beast hurtled toward the point of mutual interception.

The raging cat suddenly saw the man charging to meet him. Driving low over the ground in that terrible, paralyzing death-drive of a berserk lion, the animal's claws lashed and tore the earth as he swerved suddenly to meet the White Lord. The huge male came up off the ground with a roar as he leaped to crush and destroy the puny man-thing.

AS THE BEAST leaped, Ki-Gor seemed abruptly to double his speed. The White Lord darted in while the cat was still in the air, avoiding the reaching claws. The two bodies struck, but not head-on as the cat had intended. Instead, Ki-Gor came against the cat a little from the side so that his weight drove against the lion's shoulder. The animal half turned in the air, grappling wildly to regain its balance and meet Ki-Gor's attack.

That fleeting period when the lion was unable to bring either its claws or fangs into play gave the White Lord the opportunity he wanted. He scissored his legs over the creature and his left arm snapped under the savage throat like a vise. By the time the cat struck the ground, the White Lord was fastened firmly to his back. Then Ki-Gor's right hand hammered his long-bladed knife into the beast.

The lion leaped and fought, but with every straining leap he helped to rip the life from his body. Blood came in a pulsing geyser from his chest. Abruptly, the golden creature spread his legs wide, gave a hoarse bellow and collapsed.

As the lion went down, Ki-Gor sprang away. Tarma and her warriors stared at him fascinated. They had seen a man meet a golden lion on equal terms and win. They had seen a degree of courage and strength which left them speechless.

Ki-Gor stood regarding the carcass. The flame of battle died from his eyes. The tenseness left his great muscles and his breath came easily again. He bent down and wiped his blade on the tawny hide, returned it to the sheath at his belt. Then with all eyes on him, he walked to the ape's cage and opened it.

"Where is this land of yours?" he asked Tarma.

She regarded him admiringly, her lips slightly parted. She pointed toward the north, after a brief hesitation.

"Take your earth-god," he said. "He is unharmed. His shoulder wounds will easily heal. The debt is now paid for the other one that I killed."

He was telling her that by saving her life he had cancelled out any grievance she might hold about the dead ape. Ki-Gor was tolerant of the beliefs of others, and instead of attempting to force them to see the foolishness of their superstition, he

attempted always to reason with them. By avoiding trouble with Tarma, he might later have an opportunity to show her the danger of allowing the grey apes to roam at will.

Tarma's expression altered as she heard his words. She was no longer a frightened girl, thankful to her rescuer. She was once more Tarma, fanatical queen of a primitive people. She nodded, but Ki-Gor should have been less trusting.

As he turned and walked back to Helene, Tarma spoke swiftly to the ape which was emerging from the cage. The creature remained where he was, while she hurried to her horse. With her men about her, she had nothing to fear.

"You saved my life, Ki-Gor, and I am grateful," she said curtly. "But even my life can't be measured against a god's! The two still must die!"

Ki-Gor's patience evaporated. He had done more than his part. Now he was angry.

"The ones who lay hands on my wife or my friend die!" he snarled. "I've done all that I can to be friendly. If you must spill blood, then so be it, for the blood shall be that of your own men."

Ki-Gor's defiance took Tarma by surprise. He reached out and caught Helene, turning her with one hand and shoving her toward the forest. "Go to Tembu George," he murmured. Then he was blocking the way of the mounted men.

WILLIAMS was no coward. He moved closer to Ki-Gor, so they could offer a solid front. He drew his pistol, his face pale but determined. For a moment, it appeared that Tarma might not take the White Lord's challenge. Then her lips ripped apart in anger as she saw the jungle man defying her for Helene. Since her earliest memory, her least word had been law. She had been taught there were no rights but the rights of the queen.

"The girl!" she screamed, jabbing her sword toward Helene's retreating figure. "Get her!"

With a sweep of her sword she waved a group of her horsemen forward. The warriors broke instantly into a fierce, pleased yell. They dug their heels into the half-broken ponies and charged at the

White Lord and Williams. Ki-Gor's hand brushed his waist, shot aloft holding his naked blade. Before the gleaming knife was fully raised, Tembu George and his tensely waiting Masai saw the signal and acted.

The horsemen moved fast, but their speed could not match the flight of slim Masai arrows. From the jungle's edge drove the fleeting black shafts, blurred streaks of death slanting down from eleven bows. The Masai had taken up positions in the trees from which they could command the whole clearing.

Contemptuous of the two white men before them, meaning to ride them down if they did not give way, the mounted men swept forward in a tight mass. There were cruel grins on their brown faces at such pleasant sport, and they strained forward eagerly, giving voice like a wild dog pack closing in on a wounded bushbuck, each anxious to be the one to capture Helene.

Then the volley of Masai arrows caught them. Like reeds driven by the first great raindrops of a storm, the lead riders swayed back under the feathered blast. The deadliest bowmen of the Congo sent those long shafts home and not a single arrow missed its mark.

A brutal-faced rider jerked upright and fell backwards, a red smear welling where an arrow tore through his right eye socket. The men on either side of him never knew their fellow's fate because death hammered into them at the same instant. A horse went down, kicking and screaming, and the mounts behind it piled end over end in a sprawling heap.

And then again, with that terrible rapidity which trained bowmen can achieve at short range, the second flight of Masai arrows slashed into Maldean warriors.

Men and horses went down in a welter of blood, and only the panic-stricken ponies rose to flee the scene. In the space of seconds the Masai took a dreadful toll. Six of the Maldeans, who had spurred forward to catch Helene, lay spitted with black arrows in the dust. Three others lay stunned on the ground where their mounts had thrown them when they stumbled. The remaining five of those who obeyed Tarma's order whirled their frightened ponies in a frantic attempt to escape the rain of death.

Tarma's mouth was a bloodless slash in the twisted mask of her face when she saw the forward sweep of her warriors shatter against a sudden wall of arrows. Valdur had prophesied this ending and she had scoffed. Ki-Gor had threatened death and she had brushed his words aside.

"Go, Tarma! Go now before I sweep the rest of your men from their horses!" angrily shouted the White Lord.

From the shambles on the ground, Tarma's eyes stabbed through the swirling dust to Ki-Gor. The jungle lord had not moved. A horse and rider had crashed almost at his feet, but he had held his place. He was a grim and commanding figure as his voice lashed at the Maldean queen.

Blind, unbridled wrath bludgeoned up in Tarma as she looked on the man responsible for this chaos. The lives of her men meant nothing to her in that moment. She thought only of showing this Ki-Gor that, by the fire of Zalda himself, she would have her way despite everything.

She wrenched her horse back on his haunches with a savage jerk of the halter and her sword was a glittering swirl above her head. There was no beauty in her then. Nothing but a dark madness which seared and distorted her features.

"Leave the girl!" she cried in an anger-splintered voice. "But capture this white man, no matter what the cost. Capture him or your lives are forfeited!"

It was a deliberate trick on Tarma's part. She ordered her whole force to concentrate on Williams, thus drawing the attention of the hidden bowmen away from Helene. Many of her warriors would die in the melee, slaughtered because of her pig-headed arrogance, but she did not count the cost.

THE maneuver would give the grey ape an opportunity to dart out and grab Helene, flee into the nearby forest before anyone could halt him. She had left him by his cage with whispered orders to stop the flight of any of her victims when she ordered the horsemen to capture Helene and Williams. Tarma and Valdur stayed back aloof from the fighting.

Now, as horsemen swirled in on Ki-Gor and Williams, a swift rush of brutish words ripped from her throat. The grey ape heard her command and sped along the

shelter of the cages. Helene had frozen in horror at the jungle edge when she saw Tarma send her men against Ki-Gor and the American.

Thinking Helene safe, the Masai concentrated on protecting their beloved jungle lord and his friend. Once more they struck death into the Maldeans, filled the air with rushing arrows. It was slaughter, not battle. In a lifetime crammed with strife and war, never had Ki-Gor seen any leader order so insane a maneuver.

Since the Maldeans did not carry spears or bows, they had to come close to the white men before they could strike. The Masai shot them from their horses as they spurred forward and those few in the front ranks who escaped the slashing arrows were dropped by William's hammering pistol. Yet like bloodless machines the Maldeans came on.

When he saw that Tarma was willing to pay the terrible price, Ki-Gor knew he and Williams would be overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers. The Maldeans suddenly came too fast and from too many sides for the small force of Masai to stop them all.

A warrior with an arrow through his chest plunged off his horse almost on top of the White Lord. Ki-Gor wrenched the man's club from his grasp. Then a mass of horsemen were on top of them. The club was a fearful weapon in the White Lord's hand.

He avoided a slashing sword and battered in his assailant's chest. A man tried to ride him down and he dropped the horse with a terrific blow on the head. He could hear Williams firing and shouting nearby, but there was no time for him to see how his friend was making out.

Then Ki-Gor heard Helene's ringing scream. He could not see her but he knew she was in trouble. The faithful Masai heard her scream and saw the grey beast swing her to his shoulder, but before they could turn their bows, the ape had disappeared into the jungle. That momentary break in the rhythm of the Masai allowed the Maldeans to swarm over the two white men.

With his pistol empty, Williams quickly went under. A Maldean clubbed him and as he reeled another caught him by the shirt, helfted him across his horse and spurred for the trail into the jungle.

Ki-Gor knew he was lost, yet he fought on, driven to madness by the thought that despite his precautions somehow Helene had been captured. His one thought was to hold the Maldeans in the clearing as long as he could so that the Masai could decimate them. The longer he held them, the greater chance Tembu George would have to free Helene.

He laid about him with berserk strength, and managed to leap to the back of a riderless mount. He shattered the skull of a warrior who rose to meet him. Another Maldean slashed at him with his sword.

Ki-Gor swayed and avoided the blade, but the blow gashed deep into his horse. The animal squealed in pain, flung forward with such sudden momentum that Ki-Gor was nearly thrown from its back. The agonized mount bowled straight through a narrow opening in the wall of Maldeans, smashed through them before they could strike at Ki-Gor.

Valdur and Tarma loomed in front of Ki-Gor. But the horse was out of control and before the White Lord could balance himself for a blow at Valdur, the hunchback struck. Valdur spun his horse with superb skill, leaned forward and the flat of his sword smashed down on Ki-Gor's head.

Ki-Gor sagged, fell forward on his horse and began to slip toward the ground. Maldeans started in pursuit, but the Masai were again ripping their arrows from the trees. Valdur had seen enough of this insane slaughter, and without waiting for Tarma's permission, he shouted for the force to head into the forest.

As he spurred away, Tarma followed him. The whole force swung after them at a gallop. By the time Ki-Gor dropped unconscious from his wounded pony, the Maldeans were racing from the clearing.

Ki-Gor lay face down in the sunlight as the drumming hoofbeats disappeared in the distance. The cost had been high, but the ruthless Tarma had had her way. Williams and Helene were her captives.

IV

WHEN KI-GOR regained consciousness, he was lying in Williams' tent. Tembu George bent over him, using a cloth torn from one of the American's

shirts to daub cold water on the jungle man's face. The Masai chieftain's eyes mirrored his concern.

Ki-Gor gingerly felt his head, traced his fingers slowly down the back of his neck. He grunted in surprise, feeling neither open wounds nor bandages. He sat up, ignoring the waves of pain which spread from his head down into his shoulders.

"Helene?" he said. "Did they get her?"

Torture was in his voice. He knew the answer before he asked, knew it by Tembu George's tortured look.

Then to his surprise, the black leader shook his head "no". "The ape got her, not Tarma," painfully muttered Tembu George.

"It is all the same," Ki-Gor bitterly declared. "And to think I gave Tarma her chance by turning the ape loose."

"William told me the grey beast was different from any he had ever seen," the jungle man continued. "The bull acted more like a man than the apes we see in this region. He followed orders like any of her warriors."

"I don't understand it," confessed Tembu George. "A people we've never seen before and apes that obey orders are too much for me."

Tembu George shook his head. Then, pondering the matter, his eyes suddenly narrowed.

"Tarma sent those apes in the beginning to capture Helene," the Masai chieftain growled with sudden insight. "I see it all now. She figured Helene was the only reason you wouldn't marry her. She meant to quietly get rid of her, and then she thought she could easily charm you into marriage."

At first glance, Tembu George's explanation appeared incredible to Ki-Gor. It had never occurred to him that Tarma's designs on him might be the answer to the bloody incident. Ki-Gor always had been astonished as his good fortune in winning Helene's love, and he could not visualize himself as a prize which even so barbaric a person as Tarma would look on with favor, let alone go to such extremes to possess.

"Impossible!" Ki-Gor said.

"Think back to the hunchback's story," reminded Tembu George. "He told you that

only those with white skin could sit on the throne. Because they couldn't find a mate among their own people, they had to look elsewhere. It is more than a matter of finding Tarma a husband. It is a desperate move to keep the Maldean royal line from dying out. You're the nearest thing to a white king they could find and they had no scruples about getting Helene out of the way."

Against his will, Ki-Gor saw the logic of his friend's talk. He recalled Valdur's parting words at Silver River: "The gods may smooth the way for us yet to be friends." By smoothing the way, Valdur had meant that Helene would be cleverly gotten rid of so Ki-Gor would have no objection to the match with Tarma.

"They are a cruel, wild people," pointed out Tembu George. "They do not think as you do. I know I'm right! Look how careful Tarma was not to blame you for harming the apes. And Valdur purposely hit you with the flat of his sword, when he could have easily sliced your head off."

"But surely they don't think I'd ever forgive them for harming Helene and Williams, do they?" exclaimed Ki-Gor angrily. "Before I am through, they will wish they had slain me."

TEMBU GEORGE tossed the wet rag away. Ki-Gor's mind had cleared now and he was rapidly regaining his strength. The Masai put a hand on his white friend's shoulder.

"You'd do better to think of them as animals instead of men, Ki-Gor," he said soberly. "You saw how she threw away the lives of her men just because she lost her head. She can't conceive of any will but her own. If she can't get her way by stealth, she means to get it by force."

And Ki-Gor knew that Tembu George spoke the truth. Tarma was no more than a savage animal. Both she and her strange warriors were like throwbacks to the animal world. He was not dealing with rational human beings, but with primitive creatures in the bodies of men.

"I feel well enough to travel now," Ki-Gor said. He stood up, ignoring the aching pain he still felt. "We must not let their spoor grow cold."

If he could track the Maldeans to their homeland immediately, he had a good

chance of saving Helene and Williams. Tarma had spoken of the great god Zalda to whom her victims would be sacrificed, so she would withhold her vengeance until she reached her own *kraal*.

"We will need fighting men," Tembu George rumbled. "I sent for N'Geeso and his warriors. They will be here soon."

Ki-Gor nodded approval and walked to the door, realizing he had been unconscious longer than he had thought. He glanced up at the sun, judging the time. The Masai had cleared the open space of bodies. Three riderless horses browsed at the far end of the camp.

"She pointed north, didn't she," mused Tembu George, "when you asked where she came from?"

"She lied," Ki-Gor said, studying the horses.

The iron-willed White Lord forced himself to maintain an impassive calm, because he knew Helene's and the American's fate depended on his ability to think clearly and act quickly. He held himself steady and crushed down the emotional turmoil which if heeded would impel him to rush blindly after the two captives.

"When N'Geeso comes, we three will take those Maldean ponies and go on ahead," decided Ki-Gor. "That way we can travel fast enough to keep on their heels. We'll leave an easy track for the warriors to follow, and after we scout the Maldean *kraal*, we'll double back and pick up our men."

When N'Geeso and his fierce little warriors arrived, they readily agreed that Ki-Gor's plan was good. The pygmies were highly incensed, for Helene was a great favorite among them, and they had come to regard Williams as a kind of personal charge. They were anxious to strike the Maldeans as soon as possible and the grim-eyed little men crowded close around Ki-Gor, vowing a terrible vengeance against these strangers who dared war on their beloved White Lord.

Williams' Bantu servants had scattered into the jungle when the Maldeans appeared, but now they straggled back. Ki-Gor relieved their fears that they might be forced to accompany the war party by ordering them to care for the camp until he returned.

Then, mounted on the three ponies, he

and the two chieftains set out. They soon left the pygmies and Tembu George's two hands of Masai behind. Ki-Gor warned them to keep a sharp lookout for the grey apes. He suspected that Tarma used the creatures as her eyes and ears.

He remembered how one of the beasts had hung around his camp for more than a month before Valdur arrived, and when the hunchback came he was fairly well informed on Ki-Gor. Likewise, though none of the Maldeans had ever been seen in the pygmy area before, Tarma had led her warriors straight to Williams' camp and appeared to have had prior knowledge of the fate of the apes sent to capture Helene. If Tarma could converse with the beasts and make them take her orders, it was only logical that she would employ them as spies.

The third day on the trail his vigilance was rewarded. N'Geeso, a cunning tracker as were most of the pygmies, was leading the way and Ki-Gor rode second, constantly scanning the branches overhead. His keen eyes caught a patch of grey against the pattern of brown and green.

HE CALLED a low-voiced warning to his companions. The three of them were similarly armed, with war bows across their shoulders and the formidable, shovel-tipped Masai spears carried in their right hands. Added to this equipment, however, N'Geeso had a poison blowgun.

Ki-Gor swayed to the side, his knees tightly gripping the horse for balance. His right arm came back with the spear, and then with a swift knotting of tremendous arm and shoulder muscles, he sent the heavy shaft blasting at the grey blot.

Crouched behind a mantle of vines with not more than a square foot of belly exposed, the ape had thought he was safely hidden.

Ki-Gor's spear took the creature in the exact center of the exposed section. The ape roared with pain, and lashing madly with arms and legs, came tumbling out of the tree in a welter of tangled vines. N'Geeso's blowgun was at his lips as the bull hit the ground. With a quick, short puff revealed only by the momentary tensing of his stomach muscles, the pygmy drove a poison dart into the ape's chest.

The beast had torn his way out of the

vines now and reeled to his feet to charge. Despite the mortal wound which Ki-Gor had inflicted, the ape's dreadful rage and hurt would serve to keep him driving at his enemies until the last spark of life was extinguished. But as he plowed forward to get at them, the swift poison of the pygmy dart took effect.

The creature jerked to a stop and a series of tremors wrenched his muscles. Then as though caught by abrupt paralysis, the bull crashed to the earth and lay still. In his shoulder were several crusted knife wounds. The ape was the same one Helene had wounded.

Ki-Gor quieted his horse, dismounted and retrieved his spear. He stared bleakly at the grey body, then without a word, he leaped astride the pony and started down the trail. He drove both the men and the animals hard after that. Instead of growing more difficult to follow, the track was even plainer during the next two days and it led not north, but ever west.

The White Lord puzzled as to why Tarma took no pains to cover her spoor. He thought at first that she was either contemptuous of any forces he might muster or she placed such a great reliance on her sentinel apes that she felt confident she would have adequate warning of any pursuit.

But when forest gave way to an area of stunted trees and brittle clusters of thorn he began to understand that Tarma had another reason for making no effort to hide her trail. Her track led straight into a flinty, barren wasteland. At sunset Ki-Gor stood beside the last misshapen, dust-caked tree and stared ahead at the rocky expanse which had swallowed up the Maldeans.

The tree was rooted in the last skimpy patch of soil in sight. Westward from where Ki-Gor stood was only rock, a vast lava plain, the frozen ripples of its surface giving the illusion of a red sea in the setting sun. The most expert tracker could not follow Tarma's spoor over the ancient lava flow.

N'Geeso muttered dark, pygmy imprecations, spat viciously a few times and slid from his horse to stand beside Ki-Gor.

"The Place of the Dead," he said, using the native name for the barren area. "Even animals avoid it. Unless we follow a witch,

this is but a trick to throw us off her track while she circles back to the jungle."

Tembu George grunted agreement. "It may take many suns to pick up her trail again. We may never find it."

"Perhaps," said the White Lord, his voice neither agreeing nor disagreeing. "We'll rest here until the moon rises." He stroked his tired horse. "Then we'll let our horses do our thinking for us."

N'GEESO started to suggest that at least they should turn back to the jungle and find a pleasanter place to rest. But before he spoke, the significance of Ki-Gor's words dawned on him.

"You're wiser in a day than we are in a lifetime!" he declared appreciatively. "The horses will take us home—to Tarma's *kraal*. We have only to follow them. She can outsmart us in these rocks, but not her own animals."

They hobbled the horses, stretched out on the ground, and were asleep almost immediately. As though a secret inner sense kept watch for him, Ki-Gor awakened shortly after the huge, brilliant moon swam up out of the far blackness. He roused his companions. Before they started, N'Geeso gathered up six rocks each the size of a man's fist, and arranged them in an apparently haphazard design. The keen-eyed pygmy warriors following their chieftain would know the meaning of that sign.

Many times that night N'Geeso was to rein up and arrange the rock signals which would point out their trail to his warriors. The three men gave their horses their heads, let them pick their own way into the barren waste. And with quickening interest they saw that the animals moved ever toward the center of the Place of the Dead.

The landscape was eerie and unreal, a glistening sheet of silver stretching as far as the eye could see. A faint but steady wind blew into their faces, and in all that vastness they saw no other creature move, heard no sound of animal life. As minutes stretched into hours, it grew ever more difficult for Ki-Gor to believe that an area which would support life existed within the Place of the Dead.

Yet reason told him that the weary, thirsty horses would not keep their steady

gait forward without any urging unless they expected to find water and feed at a not unreasonable distance ahead.

At sunup they rested again and sparingly distributed among man and beast two of the three gourds of water which they had brought from Williams' camp.

It was early afternoon when they discovered the hidden land of the Maldeans. They had kept on through the torturing heat, because with no cover of any kind to be found, it was no worse to keep moving than to remain stationary on the sun-baked rock. Ki-Gor and the two chieftans had long since dismounted, and they followed the plodding animals on foot, not even troubling to keep a restraining hand on their halters.

The horses, after shambling along with their heads down for several hours, suddenly nickered and broke into a trot. The lava floor tilted upward, climbing gradually for perhaps half a mile. Then the Maldean ponies, which had drawn some distance ahead, abruptly disappeared from view. One minute they were clearly visible against the skyline and the next they were gone.

"What trick is this the heat plays with us?" rasped the dry-throated N'Geeso.

"Perhaps we begin to see pictures in our minds," panted Tembu George. "Thirst and heat do strange things to men."

As puzzled as his friends, Ki-Gor forced his tired legs into a run. When he reached the point where the horses had disappeared, a hoarse exclamation escaped his lips. He stood on the rim of a huge, bowl-shaped valley. Far below him spread the kingdom of the mysterious Maldeans, a lush green land filled with jungle and marsh and abundant water.

Tembu George and N'Geeso likewise were brought up short by the unbelievable sight of a deep, fertile valley lying in the center of the Place of the Dead. For generations, natives of all tribes had avoided the wilderness of burning rock as though it were a plague spot. Occasional foolhardy warriors trekked into the lava bed, but the few who returned told only of heat and desolation.

KI-GOR could understand now why the secret had been kept. The few venturesome natives who chanced on the

valley would naturally go down to inspect the land and slake their thirst. The Maldeans would see that they never returned to the outer world. But the majority of blacks exploring the desolate rock beds would probably never even come near the Maldean stronghold. The chances of finding it were stacked against an outsider, since one had no hint of its existence until he stumbled on it.

A narrow path zigzagged down the precipitous bluff, and it was when the horses had started down this path that they had disappeared from view so suddenly. Moving carefully, the animals were even now rounding the first turn in the trail in single file.

"Stay well back from the horses," Ki-Gor directed. "If there are guards along the way, they will be curious enough about the animals to expose themselves."

Trotting close behind Ki-Gor, Tembu George said, "It looks deserted. I see no people, no sign of a *kraal*."

"A canoe moves near that island in the midst of the large lake," Ki-Gor told him. His searching eyes caught tiny details that the average man would miss. "And to the right of the canoe is a mass of grey stone among the trees regular enough in shape to be the work of men."

In the excitement of their find, the three men momentarily forgot their weariness. They padded down the winding path, every sense alert, feeling hopelessly exposed to the view of the whole valley. Actually, the thick roofing of the jungle immediately below effectively screened them from curious eyes. And to the paddlers of the canoe far out on the lake they would be so indistinct against the weathered bluff as to be invisible.

Contrary to their expectations, they found no evidence of guards. As they reached the valley floor and the trail leveled out ahead of them, Ki-Gor felt an increasing uneasiness. The way into the Maldean land was too open and unguarded to suit him.

The jungle at first was much the same as in his own fertile homeland, but gradually it changed to swampy ground. The trail followed a narrow ridge, and as far as Ki-Gor could see, it appeared to be the only solid ground. On either side of him stretched an oily black scum from which

grew strange, towering species of trees and plants.

"It's as hot here as it was on the rock bed," complained N'Geeso.

"Like breathing water," said Tembu George, his huge chest gleaming with moisture from the surrounding atmosphere.

From the dry, withering heat of the lava flow, they had come into a wet, steaming atmosphere. Ki-Gor knelt and touched the black water beside the trail. It was almost boiling. The whole area was fed by hot springs. Knowing nothing of volcanoes, he did not realize that the valley was the result of some tremendous explosion in the distant past which had torn away the cone of a volcano.

"There are animal smells I do not recognize," Ki-Gor declared, sniffing the heavy air.

The odd scents were disturbing to the horses. The plodding beasts began to toss their heads and slow down as though anxious for the men to catch up with them. Ki-Gor watched their behavior and his vague foreboding of danger grew stronger.

It was then they heard for the first time the unearthly bellows, the wierd, piercing blasts of sound which they were to come to know so well. To their right sounded a great splashing and the snap and crack of breaking plants as though a huge body breasted its way through the swamp at top speed. All three men grew tense, wondering at the nature of the peril which threatened.

Then from their left came additional screams as another of the unseen animals headed toward them. The two blacks looked to Ki-Gor for leadership. Ahead of them the three ponies had halted and stood trembling. They acted afraid and yet they did not bolt down the path as one would expect.

"Lie flat," Ki-Gor growled, "and don't move!"

"Since the horses don't run, perhaps the Unseen Ones are noisier than they are dangerous," Tembu George said without conviction.

"They seem to think we will protect them," Ki-Gor declared, "so the Maldeans must know how to ward off the swamp creatures."

THE MEN lay close to the ground, tightly gripping their spears. The terrible bellows would have sent less courageous men fleeing back along the trail. They would have only seconds when the beasts emerged to decide on a course of action. The nervous horses would draw the first attack.

"By the gods!" exclaimed N'Geeso in awe, his eyes popping with astonishment.

A tremendous green bulk loomed out of the swamp, a veritable mountain of flesh wallowing half-submerged in the muck as it bulled ahead with surprising speed. It came in a lunging rush, its evil fanged head turning and twisting atop the long writhing length of its neck.

A civilized man would have realized he was seeing in the flesh a monster whose species ruled the earth untold thousands of years before, a member of the dinosaur family. And when his initial shock at seeing an animal believed extinct for ages had passed, he would have remembered with dread that these giants were the bloodiest killers the world had ever known—great, senseless engines of destruction.

But Ki-Gor and his companions knew only that they were seeing the father of all devils, and they instinctively realized their puny weapons would be useless against that armored body.

The dinosaur's searching, snake-like head located the horses. Mud and green slime swirled off its chest as it breasted through the marsh with a sudden burst of speed. The monstrous lizard body heaved out of the swamp as the horses screamed in terror and finally stampeded.

But as the ponies broke to run, the beast spun in a lather of mud and its tremendous length of tail lashed sidewise across the path. That armored tail struck one of the horses, flung it thirty feet into the swamp. Bellowing horribly, the dinosaur clambered out of the marsh on its huge, misshapen legs and rushed across the path to get at its stunned prey.

When Ki-Gor saw the monster cross the trail and plunge into the muck on the other side, its fanged head ripping and tearing at the horse, he saw that the great tail still lay across the path. Time was running out for him and his companions, for as soon as the horse was devoured the ravenous beast would smell out the men and

this time there would be no tastier prey to distract its attention.

"We must go back," Ki-Gor hissed, "Run for it while the devil-beast is busy."

Ki-Gor came to his feet, turned to run. Then he saw the back trail was blocked. The second dinosaur which they had heard off to their left had circled in behind them. Now it flundered out of the swamp and climbed astride the path. Its long neck weaved and twisted with excitement as it scented blood. Then as Ki-Gor stood up, it saw the three men on the path.

The long neck stood straight up for a second. Then with a nerve-shredding scream the monster charged. With impassable swamps on either side of them and the trail blocked before and behind them by the giant lizards, Ki-Gor and the two chieftains stood frozen.

Their triumph at finding the hidden valley was abruptly gone. Their high hopes of saving Helene and Williams before Tarma could do them harm smashed against the grim reality of their position. Tarma had led them into a death-trap.

V

UTTER HOPELESSNESS clutched Ki-Gor's heart for an instant. It was not fear of death which tortured him, but the knowledge that if he died, Helene too would perish. This thought struck across his mind like an iron-studded lash across an open wound.

"We won't die like jackals!" he cried in sudden resolve. Then with the single word, "Come!" he blasted the two blacks from their paralysis.

Ki-Gor raced toward the dinosaur which was feeding on the horse. The main body of the beast was crouched in the swamp, but its monstrous, slime-covered tail lay like a barrier over the path. Though its blood-smeared head was still bent over its prey, the creature was nearing the end of its feast.

It was gobbling great chunks of bone and meat in its haste to finish before the other dinosaur could come up. Because the greedy creature's attention was focused on gulping the horse before its charging fellow could get a bite, it was not as alert as usual. The noise it and the other dinosaur made drowned out the men's running

footsteps, and with its snout drenched with hot blood, it could not catch the man-scent,

As Ki-Gor sprinted toward the dinosaur, the two chieftains drove close at his back. They placed their fate unquestioningly in his hands, followed him though they saw no hope in his move. Their faces were grey with strain, but hardened warriors that they were, they kept their heads.

The dinosaur charging down the trail was almost upon them when the men reached the barrier made by the feeding lizard's tail. Ki-Gor sucked in a deep breath, almost choking at the animal's stench, and then he leaped. The White Lord flung up and over the armored tail, and behind him the two blacks also crossed.

All three hit the other side of the trail running at full speed. The monster at their heels darted his hammer-head at Tembu George. But the feeding dinosaur gulped his last bite and heaved backward across the path, his fanged mouth slashing around to attack the intruder. The two dinosaurs crashed together with a resounding shock.

Without a backward look, the three men sped on, pouring their full strength into the effort of running. The two ill-tempered monsters had skirmished briefly, but now they both saw the fleeing men and broke apart. With angry screams, they plunged into the swamp on opposite sides of the trail and started in pursuit of the man-things, each straining to get one first.

The dinosaurs traveled faster through the mud and water than they did on dry land. The muck helped support their vast weight. Ki-Gor heard the changed tenor of their bellows and the suck and squish of mud as they flung forward. Ordinarily, he and the two blacks might have gotten away safely, but the long days on the trail and the terrible heat of the desert had sapped their strength.

Already Ki-Gor was tiring, and the tortured panting of Tembu George and N'Geeso told him that they too were feeling the strain. They forced themselves on through the steaming marsh, their limbs growing leaden as the path stretched longer and longer before them. Then just as they began to think they could go no further, the trail turned and they glimpsed the blue surface of the lake.

The worn horses, believing they had escaped the dinosaurs, had slowed to a walk



when they reached this point. The animals were stumbling along about a hundred yards ahead, but when they heard the fierce cries of the lizards, they galloped forward neighing shrilly.

IT WAS then Ki-Gor saw the stone fort set among the trees at the edge of the lake. The fort proper was a small two-storied building, built in the form of an octagon, but running off to the right of the building, was a high-walled rock enclosure. The answering whinnies which came from the enclosure as the two frightened horses dashed forward told Ki-Gor that it was a stockade in which Tarma kept her animals.

The turn in the trail momentarily hid the three runners from the dinosaur. Ki-Gor searched for a place where they could hide in the brief time before the lizards again came in sight of them. The Maldean fort was as dangerous to them as the pursuing monsters. They could expect no mercy from Tarma's followers. Fate seemed determined to cut them off from escape.

The narrow, brass-bound door to the fort suddenly flung wide. A Maldean warrior stepped into the open space before the building. He frowned, shielding his eyes with one hand as though blinded by coming too quickly from the darkened interior into the light.

Ki-Gor's quick glance caught the movement of the door when it first started to open. Swift as thought he acted, doing an

odd and desperate thing. He whirled in his tracks, his hands shooting out to clutch the shoulders of his companions. Before they knew what he was about, he threw his weight against them, combining their momentum with his own strength to deflect their course and pitch them bodily into the swamp. In the same motion, he leaped after them into the black muck.

He toppled N'Geeso and Tembu George off-balance so unexpectedly they had no time to voice their astonishment. As they crashed at full tilt into the mud, both men had the same fleeting, agonized thought that the White Lord had thrown away their meager chances for escape in a sudden burst of madness. What else could they think but that Ki-Gor had abruptly lost his senses?

But there was no madness in the White Lord's move. He took the only gambling chance they had to live. He had no time for explanations, only time to act. In the split-second while the dinosaurs could not see them and while the Maldean was still blinded by the light, Ki-Gor flung his friends and himself into the only concealment at hand, the thick mud of the swamp.

As they struck the mud, Ki-Gor clamped his arms around his two friends' necks, dragged them beneath the surface. They fought with the desperation of drowning men, but he held them under. By this move he left the Maldean warrior and the two frightened horses to confront the lizards.

Ki-Gor banked on the vast, but stupid, beasts attacking the prey which was before them instead of wasting any time wondering what had become of the three man-things they had been chasing. The mud concealed the scent of the men, and so long as Ki-Gor could hold his friends beneath the surface, there was no sign to betray their presence.

And the White Lord guessed the dinosaurs' action correctly. The ravenous beasts shredded the air with their cries as they crashed into view around the turn in the trail and saw the two horses galloping up to the Maldean warrior. In their greed for the kill, they plunged past the spot where Ki-Gor and the two blacks were hidden, drove without pausing for the prey waiting before the fort.

Even beneath the surface, Ki-Gor felt the wash of the lizards' passage. Immedi-

ately he shoved his friends to the surface and fought his own way out of the mud. Sputtering and choking, Tembu George and N'Geeso came to the surface, struggling to clear their eyes so they could defend themselves against a berserk White Lord.

"Help me pin his arms' N'Geeso," gasped Tembu George, lunging toward Ki-Gor. "Perhaps we can knock him out."

"Aaaiiee!" mourned the half-drowned pygmy. "But careful! A madman is like a rogue elephant."

"I'm all right," snapped Ki-Gor in an unexpectedly sane voice. "I'm sorry there wasn't time to explain, but I had to do it to save your lives."

"What's this?" exploded Tembu George. "What are you saying?"

Ki-Gor pointed a mud-caked hand toward the fort. "Look and you'll see what I mean. But stay in the mud and keep down."

THE CHIEFTANS, up to their necks in slime, glanced the way Ki-Gor pointed. They saw the two dinosaurs bearing down on the Maldean and the squealing horses. For the horses they saw no hope of escape and if the warrior didn't dart into the fort promptly, he, too, would be lost.

Yet instead of showing panic, the strange warrior calmly advanced a few steps further into the open. He fumbled at a small object hung on a silver chain around his neck. He raised the object to his lips, took a deep breath and his cheeks puffed out as if he were blowing a whistle. But there was no sound, and even Ki-Gor with his almost animal sense of hearing was aware only of an odd, unpleasant vibration in his ears.

"The fool walks to his death," said the puzzled N'Geeso.

They watched transfixed at the sight of the Maldean coolly advancing to meet the lizards. No person in his right mind would walk to his doom blowing idiotically on a soundless whistle. But the bloody ending they expected was not enacted.

To their complete astonishment, the blundering charge of the dinosaurs wavered and slowed. Then the huge beasts halted, their vast bodies writhing as if in pain. The giants back-tracked, their blood-thirsty bellowing changing to wild, panicky cries.

Abruptly one of the beasts turned and crashed blindly into the swamp as though

pursued by devils. Moments later, the other lizard spun in a great swirl of mud and fled. There was no mistaking the fact that in some way which the three men could not fathom the Maldean had driven off the dinosaurs.

"*Juju!*" muttered the awed N'Geeso. "Only the jungle's greatest wizard could turn those devil-beasts!"

Ki-Gor, too, was taken aback by the seeming miracle he had witnessed. He watched the Maldean take the whistle from his mouth, turn with an air of having done nothing the least unusual, and call to his fellows inside the fort. Several more warriors strolled out, opened the gate into the walled enclosure, and helped drive the two horses inside. Then the men disappeared inside the fort, closing the heavy door behind them.

"What can three men do against a people who know such powerful magic?" asked Tembu George hopelessly.

Ki-Gor turned the matter in his mind, his keen intelligence probing for an explanation. Time and again in his fight against superstition he had found behind the mumbo-jumbo of the witchdoctors' greatest magic a ridiculously simple trick. He felt there must be a logical explanation for the Maldean's feat.

"It is a trick, a wonderful trick, but nothing more," he said thoughtfully. "We will laugh about our fears once we know how it is done. We must get one of the soundless whistles from the Maldeans somehow."

The Masai chieftain shook his head doubtfully, and N'Geeso likewise was unconvinced. They had seen the *juju* worked with their own eyes.

"Come now," Ki-Gor reasoned with them. "If the Maldeans were such wonderful wizards, would they have let a handful of Masai make fools of them at Williams' camp? Why did they not ward off your black arrows with magic, Tembu George? Why did they not cast a spell of death on your men instead of acting like crazed *dangos*?"

This argument drove home. Certainly people with the power of magic would not have allowed such a slaughter to occur. Though grudgingly, Tembu George and N'Geeso both agreed that as usual there was good sense in what Ki-Gor said.

THE WHITE LORD and his companions were still far from safe. If they stirred from their hiding place, the Maldeans would spot them, and if they tried to go back through the swamp, they would once more be at the mercy of the dinosaurs. So through the remainder of the afternoon, with the stoicism of primitive warriors, they stood up to their chins in the mud.

As night fell, the swamp became hideous with the cries of the giant lizards. Ki-Gor led the two blacks quietly along the trail to the fort. They skirted the building to reach the clean waters of the lake, where they cleansed the filth from their bodies and satisfied their burning thirst.

A canoe had put out from the fort and headed across the lake shortly before sundown, so Ki-Gor knew other craft probably would be dragged up on the shore behind the building. A wall projected from the fort out into the water as though to offer protection to reinforcements landing when the fort was under attack. The White Lord waded out until the water came to his shoulders and then swam soundlessly around the wall, coming up behind the fort.

Several canoes were beached on the shore as he expected. The slit windows of the fort shone with torchlight. By straining his eyes, Ki-Gor could make out the shadowy forms of guards moving about on the upper parapets.

Lying flat in the sand, he slowly edged the smallest craft into the water. He floated it ten yards from the bank before he climbed in, and then circling the wall, he picked up Tembu George and N'Geeso. The location of the large grey building on the island was mapped in Ki-Gor's mind, and despite the darkness, he accurately turned the prow of the canoe in that direction.

They paddled swiftly, anxious to cross the lake and scout out Tarma's *kraal* before the moon rose. They nosed the boat into the island a short way below the grey mass of stone and concealed it in a patch of reeds.

They checked their bows by touch in the darkness, slid them over their shoulders ready for instant use. Then hefting their spears, they crept through the forest until they could crouch at the edge of the

wide, cleared space surrounding Tarma's fortress. It was a massive pile of stone such as they had never seen in the jungle.

Tremendous walls of solid rock reared up about a turreted structure much like a medieval castle. In the gloom, it was impossible to make out any precise features of the castle, but Ki-Gor knew only a people who lived in constant fear of attack would go to such precautions. He circled the walls, estimating their height, locating the four broad gates. Murmured conversation told him that guards paced the battlements.

His heart grew heavy as he saw how formidable the task of rescuing Helene would be. He thought of the great numbers of pygmy warriors who would be slain in an assault on those smooth walls, an assault which would have small chance of success. The fierce, little men were terrible foes in the jungle, but their guile and forestcraft would be of no avail in this kind of battle. How could he ask so bloody a sacrifice of his friends?

With these anguished thoughts, Ki-Gor stood among the dark trees, watching the south gate. He suddenly stiffened, catching the harsh scent of a grey ape. He drew his friends back, murmuring a warning, and they flattened themselves beneath some low shrubs. The ape was upwind from them, so their presence would be undetected.

Making a lighter blur against the night, the ape came from the forest at a shambling trot not twenty yards from where they lay. The beast ran toward the wall, halting close against it to bark gutturally at the guards above.

Ki-Gor, with long practice in mimicking animal calls, found himself unconsciously repeating in his mind the ape's harsh summons. And it was definitely a summons that the beast called out impatiently several times for there was a scurry of movement on the walls and soon after the south gate creaked open to admit the Maldean earth-god.

Not five minutes later the White Lord heard a low hubbub which told him large bodies of warriors were rushing to man the battlements and the click of horses' hooves indicated that a troop of mounted men were drawn up somewhere near the gate. Then the stir abruptly ceased and

an even deeper silence than before fell over the castle.

"I feared from the noise that we had been discovered," Tembu George whispered, "but now all is quiet. What can it mean?"

"The ape brought news of some enemy other than us," reasoned Ki-Gor. "Against only three men they would sally forth instead of lying in wait as they do."

THE WHITE LORD had assumed the Maldeans were in complete control of their hidden land. He was intrigued with the thought of finding possible allies against Tarma.

"Let us climb into the trees and wait," he said warily. "If many men come, we might be caught in the fighting. There would be no time to explain we were friends."

Hardly were they settled on nearby limbs, when N'Geeso silently pointed toward the ground below. Shadow-like forms drifted through the forest, massed at the edge of the clearing. Like a gathering storm cloud, the black files poured forward with silent turbulence, swelling out along the fringe of jungle until a vast, hushed army was assembled for the assault.

All was quiet on the battlement walls, and a man walking in the cleared space before the castle could have passed without ever suspecting that great bodies of armed men crouched stealthily on either side of him. It was evident the force gathered to attack the Maldeans relied heavily on the element of surprise to carry it over the walls. But the whole advantage lay with the Maldeans for the grey ape had betrayed the gathering assault in plenty of time.

Ki-Gor grew tense, waiting for the battle to begin. He dared not try to warn the attackers, for primitive warriors would make short shift of any strangers appearing in their midst at such a time. Then, though he heard no spoken signal, the warriors burst out of the forest at a run, sweeping across the clearing in a long wave.

Ki-Gor heard the rustle of many ropes as the front rank of men came against the wall. He realized they were throwing ropes which had metal hooks fastened on their ends. With trained precision, warriors be-

gan to swarm up the ropes as soon as the hooks caught on the top of the wall.

Still no sound came from the Maldeans. Ki-Gor began to wonder if he had been wrong, if the castle was to be taken by surprise after all. Those swarming climbers would be at the top of the battlements unless the Maldeans acted swiftly.

Then a barrage of cries sounded from the walls. A line of flames leaped up to shatter the blackness. Acting as one man, the concealed Maldeans had lit bundles of faggots wrapped with dry reeds. They cast the blazing flares down into the clearing so that the whole scene was suddenly and clearly illuminated.

Screams of pain rose from burned men on the ground. Instantly, all was disorder among the attackers. Spears, arrows and great pieces of rock showered down into their packed ranks. The men clinging like monkeys to the ropes were caught in the worst position of all.

The Maldeans had waited until the ropes were weighted with men, with the topmost climbers only a few yards from their goal, before they showed themselves. Then the scaling party was trapped, unable to descend because of their fellows crowding up from below, unable to defend themselves properly from Tarma's forces above.

As Ki-Gor watched, he saw the flash of swords and the Maldeans hacked the ropes in two, sent the swaying lines of attackers crashing down on their companions. Then the south gate burst open.

With a tremendous clatter, Tarma's fierce horsemen drove out three abreast through the open portal, spearing straight to the forest before they wheeled and bore down on the confused and tangled ranks of their enemy.

In a solid wave of flesh, riding knee to knee, the Maldeans sent their half-wild horses charging across the clearing. They crashed headlong into the besieging force, blasted over and through the foot soldiers. Howling like madmen, the riders turned and back they swept, their cruel swords and clubs wreaking a terrible carnage.

IT WAS a scene of bedlam. Clots of fighting men swirled and twisted as the horsemen tried to close a net around the forest men, press them back against the

castle walls and prevent them from escaping into the night.

Despite their awful losses, the forest men fought like they were possessed and they shattered the tightening circle of horsemen. In a desperate surge of power, they slashed through to the jungle, leaving their dead and wounded where they lay. Once in the shelter of the trees, they fled in panic, with no hope of rallying from the swift disaster which the Maldeans had visited on them.

The masterful tactics of the Maldeans were enough to excite the admiration of any warrior situated as was Ki-Gor where he could see the whole of the swift, efficient plan unroll. But the White Lord's mind was occupied with more than merely following the course of the fighting.

Seeing the fate dealt the invading force, he knew he could not subject his pygmy friends to a like disaster. But though he abandoned his original idea of taking the castle by storm, he did not for a moment give up his resolve to rescue Helene and Williams. Instead, he impetuously determined on a venture where guile and boldness would be substituted for force.

The Maldeans had not escaped without losses. A number of riderless horses were in evidence in the clearing, and many of the riders who had started the charge lay twisted in death on the field. There was still great confusion as the horsemen rounded up prisoners, fought a few die-hard knots of men backed against the castle walls, and helped get their own wounded within the gates.

Ki-Gor noted that about one mounted Maldean in every twenty wore a white cape. These men acted as captains and their capes made it easy for their men to rally around them in the darkness. Not twenty yards from the limb where Ki-Gor lay, one of these group leaders lay stretched in death.

"An army cannot enter Tarma's *kraal*," Ki-Gor said with sudden decision, "but perhaps three men can."

Tembu George and N'Geeso were immediately attentive, knowing from the tone of his voice he had discovered a possible means of entry.

"Look there! The gates stand wide," Ki-Gor pointed out. "See how those two riders go in at a trot, supporting a wounded man on his horse between them."

The quick-witted chieftains caught his idea without further explanation.

"If we go in fast, we might get by in the confusion," N'Geeso agreed.

"But Ki-Gor's white skin would betray him," said Tembu George. "Even though the bundles of wood are almost burned out, they would know him for a stranger. Let N'Geeso and me go alone."

It was typical of the two blacks that though they knew death might wait just within the gates they worried not.

"I will wear a white cape to conceal my body," the White Lord hurriedly explained, "and will go in the middle like that wounded man. Come now while they are yet excited over their victory."

They scrambled to the ground and went cautiously out into the clearing. With his understanding of animals, Ki-Gor had little difficulty in catching three of the horses standing near the forest. N'Geeso secured the white cape from the dead Maldean officer.

Then, skirting the dying flares, they rode fast toward the gates, with Ki-Gor sagging forward on his horse so that with the flowing cape and the riders on either side of him he was not easily seen from the ground.

They came into the portal at a full gallop. Armed men stood within, but they were laughing and shouting, and accustomed to the reckless Maldean horsemen. They were too busy scattering out of the way to pay close attention to the riders. Just within the gates was a broad court and though more guards stood along the sides, the central way had been left open for the returning warriors.

Ki-Gor and the two chieftains drove straight across the plaza riding like furies. The faces of the bystanders, dimly lit by torches stuck in wall brackets, swept by in a blur. People cried out to them, but whether they were saying the riders were enemies or were acclaiming those they thought were returning heroes, Ki-Gor did not know.

A narrow street opened before them. They swept into its darkness, leaving behind the castle wall and its swarming, excited warriors. They had penetrated the Maldean stronghold, but there was no triumph in their hearts for they knew the deadly peril and danger ahead of them.

Henceforth, they were three against a whole savage people.

VI

THE SOUND of the door opening awakened Helene. She lay on a sleeping rug in a large, bare room. The window high up in the stone wall above her was barred.

She felt a swift start of bewilderment. Then her eyes fell on the expressionless face of the serving woman who had entered the room and she remembered. She was the prisoner of Tarma, the strange, cruel Queen of the Maldeans. This was the second day of her imprisonment in the ancient fortress.

She had been brought to this room as soon as they arrived. Since then she had seen no one other than this cold, silent Maldean woman who had been assigned to look after her needs. Williams was held in a nearby room for once she had heard his angry shouts.

Helene sat up on the rug. Sleep had erased the dazed fatigue which had resulted from the long, hurried trek through the jungle and over the lava bed. She could feel and think again, reconstruct the savage events which had brought her to this room.

Both pride and common sense helped her to remain outwardly calm. She forced herself to eat the breakfast of fruit which the woman placed by the rug. Then to her surprise, the woman had a wooden tub brought for her to bathe in, and afterwards the Maldean combed and arranged her hair.

Helene was not left long to wonder at the reason for these special attentions. Within a few minutes, Valdur stepped into the room. The flowing scarlet cape he wore across his broad shoulders made him appear more grotesque than usual. It accentuated his ridiculously short legs and made his huge, muscled trunk seem larger.

"This is merely a friendly visit to check on your welfare," he said gruffly. "Do not be afraid."

Helene looked at him calmly. "I'm not afraid."

He studied her more closely. "No!" he said with evident surprise. "I don't believe you are." He thought a moment and frowned. "That is good. Usually women

sacrifices carry on disgracefully. In any case, the ceremony of judgment comes to-day so you have three whole days after that before you die."

"You and Tarma are most generous," she said with icy sarcasm, "but I am not so certain as you that I will die."

Amusement flickered in Valdur's hard eyes. His thick fingers toyed with the edge of his cape.

"Surely you don't think anyone could save you now?" he asked with a thin smile. "Your husband—he is the one you are counting on?"

When Helene said nothing, Valdur's cynical smile grew broader. His right hand moved to his throat, unconsciously touched the slender reed whistle which hung there from a silver chain.

"It is touching to see a woman with such faith in a man," he said, and there was more than a trace of envy in his voice. "This Ki-Gor is a magnificent man, I grant you, and a cunning, dangerous warrior. There is a spark within him, an inner power which I have seen in no other man. But you must not expect the impossible of him."

Valdur's great hairy arms plunged from beneath his cape in a gesture of ridicule. He reminded her of the trackless, desolate stone area which surrounded the valley, of the giant lizards guarding the entrance through the marsh, of the grey apes acting as tireless sentinels, and of the fact that the massive fortress lay in the center of a lake. He seemed to savor this enumeration of the obstacles which barred any rescue attempt by her husband.

"We Maldeans are an ancient people," he related proudly, "and we do not live in this valley by accident. The warriors of A-tila who fathered us selected this place because it was impregnable. With the great lizards and the earth-gods to aid us, we fear no invaders."

HELENE realized only too well how real were the tremendous obstacles which separated her from Ki-Gor. It infuriated her to see the hunchback smugly name the ways in which the White Lord could die if he were foolish enough to pit himself against the Maldeans.

"No," Valdur concluded, his eyes glittering as he watched her, "you will get no

help from Ki-Gor. You'll die, and then because he is little more than a savage, he will soon forget you. In time, we will win him to our way of life, whether by words and Tarma's beauty, by offers of luxury and power, or by force. It is easily done if one knows how. We have endured as a people because long ago we learned to take outsiders and fashion them into Maldeans."

Helene realized then the Maldean's ancestral claims might be true. Once they had been a fair-skinned race, perhaps the far outpost of Attila's ancient empire, certainly the remnant of nomadic conquerors. Whatever their true history, they were very old and their origin had been long since obscured in myth. But as through generations they declined in numbers, they turned to intermarriage with captives to maintain their vigor, until at last only the ruling family could boast pure blood. Now Tarma alone was a true Maldean, and, resolved that their kings and queens at least should remain white, the barbaric race reached out for Ki-Gor with animal directness.

"There must be a few people who didn't take your teachings too well," stabbed Helene, anxious to ruffle his smug composure. "I can hear, you know. Those sounds last night were of men attacking the walls."

Valdur stiffened. Helene's words had gone home. The forest men were indeed embarrassing proof that many did not take too willingly to the Maldean way of life. They were runaway slaves and renegade Maldeans unwilling to live under Tarma's tyranny.

Always the Maldeans had had to contend with small groups of men and women living like hunted animals around the valley, but since Tarma had come to the throne, their numbers had increased alarmingly. Unable to leave the valley because of the dinosaurs' guarding the entrance, they struck at the Maldeans with the frenzied desperation of condemned men.

"Those starving jackals mean nothing," he blustered. "They serve only to keep our warriors in training. Last night my men gave them a lesson they will remember."

Helene's laugh grated on his nerves. She had a sudden suspicion that the Maldeans were weaker than she had thought.

"Only the lizards and the grey apes keep those 'starving jackals' from crushing you," she declared, watching his lips tighten. "With a leader such as Ki-Gor, they'll finish you easily."

Valdur straightened angrily. He had come expecting a tear-stained, cringing woman who would be an easy target for his taunts. Usually, men and women who knew they were to be sacrificed to Zalda cried and pleaded for mercy. This red-haired girl showed only scorn.

"Perhaps they do outnumber us," he admitted, losing his cleverness in his anxiety to impress Helene. "And perhaps with a clever leader they might become a threat—if they could control the lizards and the earth-gods. But they can never do those things."

"And why not," taunted Helene. "Those can't be very difficult achievements if such savages as you Maldeans have learned them."

Valdur drew himself up, his eyes angry. In his way, he was wise, but this woman confused him.

"I can tell you why," he blurted. "Because Tarma and I alone know the secret of making these whistles which only the great lizards can hear. Likewise, we two alone know the Ancient Tongue spoken by the earth-gods."

"You mean you can control those huge lizards with those little whistles?" asked Helene incredulously.

VALDUR saw her obvious interest and felt he had actually impressed her. He went on boastfully.

"It is more than just the whistles," he explained. "True, when you blow on them, the lizards scream and writhe. But we catch them when they are small, and in addition to their natural dislike of the whistles, we teach them greater fear. We pen the small ones up and every time we blow on the whistles, we prod them with hot irons. It does not take long for them to learn that the whistles mean pain, and no matter how large they grow after we release them, they never forget their moons of training. Now you can see how wise are we Maldeans to have learned such things."

Helene, indeed, was surprised that the Maldeans at some time in their early his-

tory had learned to control the dinosaurs by a method which would have brought a gasp of amazement from a modern psychologist. Pitched too high for human ears to hear, the whistles were actually painful to the dinosaurs. By torturing the creatures day after day when they were still young enough to be controlled, the Maldeans succeeded in training the stupid beasts to flee in panic whenever they heard a whistle blown.

"Ah," pointed out Helene, "but if an enemy captured one of the whistles you would be lost."

Valdur smiled triumphantly. He had wanted her to say just that. It gave him an opportunity to further display his cleverness.

"Only three people are regularly allowed the whistles, Tarma, myself and the captain of the fortress in the marsh," he said. "If there is a special mission, of course, I issue one to the leader."

He held the whistle away from his throat with his fingers for her to see. He swelled his chest like a pouter pigeon.

"I make them of a very delicate reed, so the chances are very small for an enemy to ever get one of my whistles. We three who wear them are always well protected, and if capture appeared probable, we would merely crush the thin reed. Ah, it is most likely the lizards will feast on your Ki-Gor should he ever stumble on our valley."

Helene's slender hope of rescue evaporated before his words. She had known from the first that her beloved mate would follow her. That thought had sustained her. But now abruptly the knowledge that Ki-Gor would somehow locate the valley and try to find her added to the burden of her sorrow. Courageous and resourceful as the White Lord was, he could not overcome the giant lizards or penetrate the island fortress.

Because of her, Ki-Gor would be killed or captured. Capture for the White Lord would be worse than death for he would never bend before Tarma. Misery welled up in Helene, but she steeled herself against betraying her true feelings. Valdur wanted her to break down. His words were carefully calculated to torture her.

"You live in a dream, Valdur, a dream of the past," she said imperiously, "That

dream will be forever shattered unless Williams and I are released. You have little time to make your peace with Ki-Gor. He is the jungle's greatest warrior, and all your safeguards will be nothing against him."

Valdur's eyes narrowed. A dart of unease shot through him as Helene's warning called up a picture of the White Lord in his mind. He frowned and his face darkened. There was the scrape of feet in the hall outside the door.

"You have kept me overlong," he burst out wrathfully. "It is time for the Ceremony of Judgment. Now we shall see which of us dreams!"

He watched her closely, waiting for fear to come into her eyes, wanting desperately to see her cringe. Her only response was a faintly contemptuous curl of her lips. Valdur turned violently and burst from the room, not understanding the strange sweep of anger which erupted in his brain.

THERE had been no call for him to visit Helene, but from the moment he had awakened, the desire had pressed stronger and stronger upon him. The drive which sent him to gloat over Helene actually was bound up more with his feelings toward Tarma than toward the prisoner.

Because her skin was white, Tarma ruled the Maldeans. Otherwise, Valdur's claim to the throne was equally strong. Tarma was as ruthless with her cousin as with her other subjects, often taking a sadistic pleasure in taunting him because of his brown skin, reminding him that he could never rule. And though he dared not admit it even to himself, he hated the queen, hated her at the same time he abased himself before her, hated her while he led the warriors who actually kept her on the throne.

He had anticipated a delicious pleasure in gloating over Helene, in seeing a white woman grovel before him. But Helene's calm disdain had blasted his hopes. Instead of quailing before him and begging for mercy, she had parried his verbal thrusts, scoffed at him, spoken of the white-skinned Ki-Gor's greatness.

Hate flared over him, and the venom of a lifetime focused on Helene. He flung out of the room, resolved to salve his feelings

of inferiority by breaking her mentally and physically before she died on the altar of Zalda. He would find a way to make at least this one smug white cringe.

Had he only known, immediately his back was turned, Helene's full lips trembled. She had guessed his state of mind soon after he entered the room and deliberately had frustrated his purpose. No matter what sadistic tortures, he and Tarma devised, she was resolved to show no weakness. It was not that she was unafraid; it was just that she did not mean to betray her true feelings to her barbaric captors.

By the time the four guards entered, she was once more serene in appearance. She walked with her head high as they threaded a way through a maze of wide corridors, emerging at last in a broad, central court.

Momentarily blinded by the brilliant sunlight, Helene hesitated in the doorway. A roar of voices broke over her, a great mob sound swelling and rising in a frenzied hysterical storm. Then as her eyes adjusted to the increased light, she saw a sea of brown bodies jamming the court.

That fierce mass of Maldean men and women was enough to make Helene's heart turn over in her breast. But the sight at the far end of the court beyond the crowd was equally terrifying. As though drawn by a magnet, Helene's gaze went over the crowd to the gigantic stone figure of an ape which sat hunched on a vast altar.

It was the idol Tarma had called the Great God Zalda! Immense and bestial, it towered up into the air, its brutal face glowering down at the swirling mass of humanity below. A tremendous metal cauldron rested on the altar before it.

Helene's guards urged her forward, two of them going ahead to open a lane through the shouting Maldeans. As she approached the idol, she realized it was an exact likeness of a grey ape. The huge arms crooked forward so that the god's hands lay together palm-upward on the cauldron. When she was almost at the feet of Zalda, she saw that the hands, instead of being stone like the rest of the figure, were of blackened soot-stained metal.

She understood then the reason for the odd position of the arms. The arms were movable. Manipulated by huge counter-

weights within the hollow idol, the arms could swing the hands up to Zalda's open snarling mouth and slowly bring them back down to the cauldron. Victims sacrificed to Zalda were placed in those open hands, swung high above the crowd. Then the pitch-filled cauldron was set afire and the victim lowered into the flames.

She and Williams were to be burned to death! She had expected the Maldeans to mete out a brutal end but nothing so horrible as this. She tore her eyes away from the gruesome metal hands, feeling a terrible sickness within her.

PASSING through a double line of guards holding back the mob, Helene came into a square open space before the idol. A throne stood on a raised dais on her left. Tarma sat watching her. The Maldean Queen's face was flushed, her eyes brilliant with excitement, and she leaned forward in her anxiousness to witness Helene's reaction.

Picked guards packed the space behind the throne. Valdur, wearing his scarlet cloak, stood at Tarma's right. At her other side were ranged three white-robed priests, and moving restlessly back and forth along the steps approaching the throne were four of the grey apes.

When they were within arm's reach of the apes, Helene's guards halted and fell to their knees. Tarma stared down at her captive, and seeing that Helene did not kneel, her lips thinned and her hand tightened on the throne. Valdur glanced calculatingly at the queen, then bent over and whispered in her ear. It was an opportune time to point out that such disrespect in a captive could not possibly be overlooked.

The mob cry rolled out again, signaling the appearance of the other captive, Bill Williams. The guards had had trouble with Williams. His clothes were disarranged and there were several ugly red welts on his face. They shoved him roughly up to the throne beside Helene. When he, too, remained standing after his guards knelt, Tarma could no longer conceal her fierce anger.

The ceremony had been in progress for some time before the captives were brought out. Now at a motion from Tarma, the three priests stepped forward and one of

them voiced a lengthy prayer to Zalda. As he droned to a close, a native bearing a lighted torch advanced solemnly up the steps.

The priest took the torch and turning, fell to his knees before the queen. Tarma rose with a swift, feline motion, her lustrous black hair like a frame about her cruel but exquisitely beautiful face. The thin blue robe she wore accentuated, rather than concealed the perfection of her curved body.

All sound died away in the court. The crowd grew still, unnaturally still, giving Helene the impression of some monstrous, many-headed beast crouching for the kill. She could feel the suppressed excitement of the Maldeans surge out of the quiet like a powerful current.

Tarma felt that current, too, and it flowed over her, possessed her. She stood motionless, her eyes raised to the face of the god as though she were gathering all the intense feeling of the crowd into her and focusing it upon Zalda. Helene saw the queer intentness of Tarma's face, saw a tremor run over her, and then her whole figure stiffened and her face took on a trance-like quality.

The queen slowly began to raise her arms. From the mob came a low murmur of awe. The arms of the Great God Zalda were swinging upward in exact and perfect rhythm with Tarma's movement. It was the holy sign that Tarma and the god were as one, that between the ruler of the Maldeans and Zalda there was communion. The thoughts and commands of the holy one were flowing into the queen's mind for transmission to the people.

Tarma spoke then, not in the corrupted Bantu tongue of her people, but in the brutish language of the grey apes. Through Tarma, the god was speaking in the Ancient Tongue, in the forgotten speech which only the earth-gods and the hereditary rulers of the Maldeans could understand.

And the four earth-gods on the steps below Tarma halted their restless movements, and turning, fastened their yellow eyes on the queen. They listened tensely, as absorbed for the moment in the ceremony as the mass of humans. When Tarma ceased speaking, the apes broke into harsh, fierce cries.

THEN one of the earth-gods left the others and approached Tarma. She took the burning torch from the hands of the priest and gave it to the ape. With a slow, ambling gait, the creature went down the steps, passing between Helene and Williams. Followed in single file by the other apes, the torch-bearer marched across the open space to the altar of Zalda.

The ape advanced until he stood beside the huge cauldron. He seemed to contemplate the idol for a few seconds, and then he swung his arm and threw the torch into the huge metal container.

A great yellow sheet of flame leaped up from the cauldron. The blaze swayed and danced as a slender plume of black smoke climbed up past the idol's head. For a full minute, the fire burned furiously, then abruptly it vanished. Downward fell the opened hands of Zalda, pressing down on the still rising column of smoke until they rested once more over the cauldron.

Zalda had given his judgment. Tarma blinked her eyes, seeming to awaken. Her arms fell to her side.

"You know the evil done by these two outsiders against the earth-gods," she cried to the people. "One they killed and one they wounded and imprisoned. It is the will of Zalda that they be given into his hands three days hence at high noon to die the death of the flames!"

A triumphant roar blasted up from the crowd, a tremendous outburst which did not quiet until Tarma raised her hand.

"It is further the will of the god that because of their arrogance in the face of their crimes that they be flogged now before the altar. They will be whipped until their senses leave them and then brine will be poured over their backs. Zalda commands that no mercy be shown these enemies."

If the verdict of death pleased the Maldeans, this decree of immediate torture pleased them more. They wanted to see blood and suffering. They wanted to hear the victims scream in terror as Zalda's vengeance was visited on them.

Dazed and shaken by the unbridled savagery of their captors, Helene and Williams were immediately grasped by their guards to preclude any hysterical attempt at resistance. But so hopeless was their position and so completely bewildered were

they by their brutal treatment, they made no attempt to struggle.

They were dragged across to the altar and bound hand and foot to metal rings in the pillars supporting the cauldron. They were twenty yards apart and high enough to be in plain view of the crowd.

Behind them they heard Tarma announce that Valdur had claimed the honor of flogging the captives. He stamped across the square with ill-disguised eagerness to receive a metal-studded whip from a priest. More than the swift appearance of the whip told Helene and Williams that many whippings had been administered on the altar. The stone pillars to which they were bound were splotted with the blood of other victims.

Valdur approached Helene, ostensibly to make sure she was securely bound, but actually in the hope that she would beg him for mercy. His eyes glittered and he was trembling as he fumbled with her wrists. Then he saw the look of disgust, of withering scorn with which Helene regarded him, and he drew back suddenly.

A terrible anger washed over him, and his hand whitened around the butt of the whip. "I'll bring you to your knees," he snarled. "I'll tear that pretty back off of you with this whip. You'll beg for mercy before I'm through."

He ripped away his scarlet cape, revealing his long, ape-like arms and huge, thick chest.

"The girl first," he said to the priest.

The priest was a tall, emaciated man. His bloodless mouth split in a humorless smile revealing yellowed teeth. He understood Valdur.

Helene closed her eyes and bit her lips against the unbearable anguish which seared her insides like flame even before Valdur had taken up his position for the first blow. This terrible nightmare into which she had been so abruptly plunged was almost more than the human spirit could stand.

Behind her, Valdur took his stance. His hairy, muscled arm came back, straightening the many-thonged whip. His lips were parted and his breath came in quick, hard wheezes.

Then he sucked in a deep gulp of air, swung with the whole weight of his torso and blasted the lash down across Helene's

shoulders. The terrible force of the blow threw her against the stone pillar and as Valdur ripped the lash up for a second strike, blood welled in long streaks across her golden skin.

VII

AFTER THEIR daring entrance into the city, instead of stumbling aimlessly around the dark, unfamiliar streets, Ki-Gor and the two blacks had left their horses and climbed to the roof of a deserted building. Despite his frantic anxiety to locate Helene and Williams, he forced himself to think and act calmly.

He and his friends desperately needed rest. They would need all their wits and strength to elude capture, let alone successfully free Helene and the American. Furthermore, they had to learn something of the castle's layout, gain a hint as to where the prisoners were kept, before they could evolve a plan of rescue.

For these reasons, Ki-Gor led his friends atop one of the flat-roofed buildings and the three of them, despite their dangerous surroundings, quickly fell into an exhausted sleep.

Sunlight striking into his face awakened Ki-Gor. He stirred and sat up. Beside him on the flat roof slept Tembu George and N'Geeso. He shook them awake.

Around the tall, central structure of the fortress clustered lower structures. Apparently in the past every foot of space had been utilized to provide shelter for the Maldean population behind the protection of the walls. But the Maldeans had declined in numbers so that many of these jam-packed buildings were now deserted.

The street below them twisted sharply about a hundred yards further on to empty into a broad plaza. Ki-Gor saw that they could reach the plaza by moving across the rooftops and likewise they could make their way almost to the main castle by the same means. He heard a rising hubbub in the street as though increasing numbers of people were walking toward the plaza.

Hunger wrenched at Ki-Gor's belly, and inured as he was to hardship, he was beginning to suffer from thirst. The Masai and pygmy chieftains made no mention of food or drink, nor would they, but the White Lord knew they were suffering.

After a time the street below grew quiet and peering down Ki-Gor saw it was empty. Practically the whole population had gathered in the square.

"Wait here!" he ordered, and before his companions knew what he was about, Ki-Gor lowered himself over the roof and dropped into the street.

His nose quickly guided him into an open doorway. The house had just been left by Maldeans going to join the gathering throng and the scent of the morning meal was heavy in the air. Ki-Gor quickly found a joint of cooked meat, a variety of fruits, and a stoppered gourd of water. Taking off the white cape which he still wore, he tied the articles in it, slipped out of the house and rejoined Tembu George and N'Geeso.

The famished men made short work of the food and drained the last drop of water. Immediately fresh strength flowed into their muscled bodies.

"That crowd is calling for blood," Ki-Gor said suddenly, detecting a growing savagery in the thunderous outbreaks. A dart of unease sparked through him.

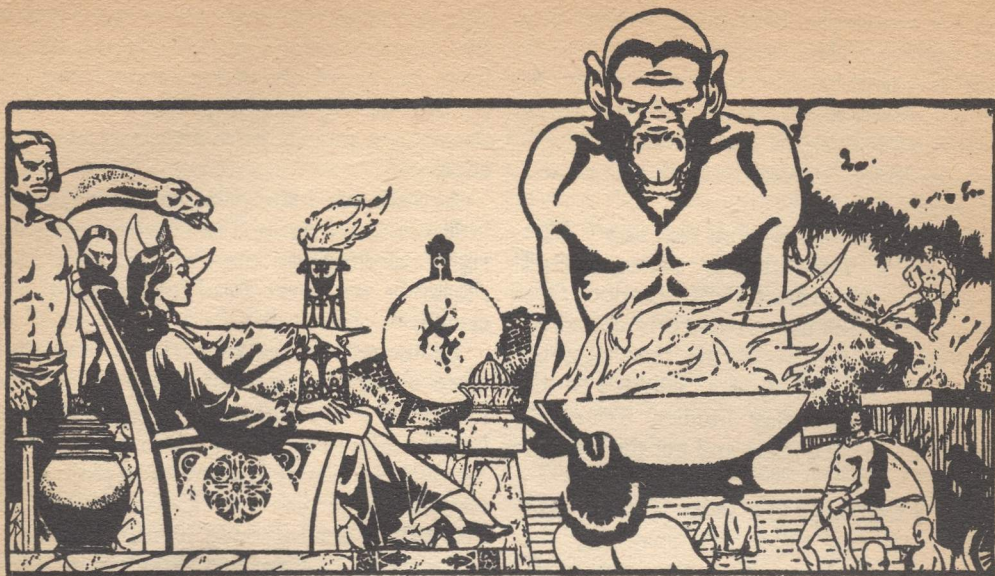
"Come!" he said. "We'll work our way across the rooftops. Maybe we can find out what's happening."

Tembu George and N'Geeso exchanged guarded looks. The same thought was in their minds as in Ki-Gor's: that they had arrived too late. Forgotten was their original intention of trying to enter the main castle while the Maldeans were concentrated in the plaza. Like silent shadows, they drifted over the roofs, wormed on their stomachs to a building directly behind the towering idol.

Ki-Gor raised his head cautiously and peered down into the square. An animal snarl broke from his lips as he saw Helene and Williams standing before Tarma. The Maldean Queen was pronouncing judgment on the prisoners, condemning them to death by fire three days hence.

"At least we're not too late," breathed Tembu George thankfully. "We'll have three days."

BUT HARDLY had he spoken, when Tarma went on to command the immediate and brutal flogging of both captives. And Tembu George, who had led his fierce warriors into half a hundred



bloody battles turned grey with sickness. The quick leap of hope to his features dissolved into deep-carved anguish.

Beside him, N'Geeso, greatest war leader of the pygmies, moaned and his face was a bleak and tortured mask. It was more than the two faithful blacks could stand to think of Helene torn to pieces with a whip, to think of seeing her tortured, yet being helpless to save her.

And knowing Ki-Gor, fear, wild and uncontrollable, leaped up in their hearts, fear not for themselves but for the White Lord and Helene. They had seen the red, raging madness which came over the jungle man at the least hint of danger to his mate. As they heard the Maldean Queen's pronouncement, they both knew she was proclaiming Ki-Gor's death sentence as well.

Yet for the space of seconds, Ki-Gor neither spoke nor moved. He was like graven stone, with even the breath stopped in his throat. In that interval, he gave no hint of the dreadful, searing turmoil which wrenched every shred of his consciousness.

His eyes were fixed on the turbulent crowd, a vast human sea held in by ranks of Maldean warriors. He saw, too, the ruthless figure of Tarma surrounded by her retainers, the rough shove of the guards as they pushed Helene and Williams toward the altar, and the misshapen figure of Valdur.

Then Ki-Gor's breath came again, came in the hard, tugging gasps of a man run-

ning full-tilt. Yet still he did not move or speak. His face whitened beneath his tan and his lips were a thin, grey streak. Helene and Williams had reached the altar and were being bound to the stone pillars. Valdur was scuttling across the open space to execute the sentence.

Tembu George and N'Geeso writhed with physical pain. A hundred daring warriors would not suffice to snatch Helene from that altar, let alone three men. Yet too long had they fought beside Ki-Gor not to know what he would do. Death beckoned him, there before the ape-god and he would go forth to meet it. He would go forth though there was no hope of saving Helene, no hope of even sparing her the torture of the flogging.

But no frantic pleadings rose to their lips, no rush of arguments against his going. They knew his mind, and their own decisions were swift and inevitable. He was their friend and more, and above all things they wanted the White Lord to live, but since that could not be, he would not die alone.

"We are beside you, Ki-Gor," growled Tembu George. "By the gods, we will get you through to the altar!"

"We will get you through and more!" swore N'Geeso grimly. "Before we fall, the stones will run with Maldean blood. Those *dangos* will have cause to remember your coming."

Ki-Gor tore his eyes from the scene be-

low. He was tense, his muscles coiled like steel springs. He seemed to turn his thoughts outward toward his two friends only by great effort. They did not guess the tumultuous drive of his mind in the fleeting time since Tarma had sentenced the prisoners.

"I go," he said, "but you two stay!" The harsh quick beat of his voice slashed through their protests. "I cannot free Helene or Williams, yet there is one slender chance I can ward off the flogging. Whether I succeed or not, whether I die or not, you must stay hidden. Your job will still be to free them and get them home again."

He glanced over the ledge. Valdur was ripping off his cape and snapping the thongs of the whip as he took up his position behind the helpless Helene.

"There's no time to explain," Ki-Gor gritted, "but you must do as I say. Don't fail me!"

HIS GLANCE struck into each of them in turn like the quick stab of a dagger. Then his broad hands reached to grip them by the shoulders, telling them in that brief touch all the things that were in his heart.

"Drop my spear to me," he said to Tembu George.

He swung over the ledge, his hands gripping the top as his toes dug for a hold on the rough stone. He clambered down the face of the building with a monkey's agility and dropped to the ground. He caught his spear in the air and sprinted for the altar.

Since Ki-Gor approached from behind the huge ape-god, only a few guards and priests barred his way, and they stood with their backs to him. The mob and the bulk of the Maldean guards were on the far side of the square. Tarma and her retainers were midway in the open space before the god.

Valdur was raising the whip for his first blow, so all attention was focused on him, giving Ki-Gor an opportunity to get down the wall and start toward the idol without discovery. Then as he raced into the open, the flashing movement of his white body caught the eyes of many of the spectators.

His startling appearance from nowhere probably caused some of the Maldeans to

cry an alarm, but their voices were lost in the blood-thirsty din. Like a streak of light he came, knowing everything depended on his reaching the altar before the nearest guards were aware of his presence.

As he neared the god from the rear, its bulk hid him briefly. Then he veered to the right, circling to the side of the idol. Abruptly he burst into full view of the crowd.

Faster and faster he sprinted, rocketing close along the edge of the stone figure. He could see the pillar where Helene was bound. She was hidden from view, but Valdur's powerful figure was in plain sight, turned sideways to Ki-Gor, the lash gripped in his extended hand.

Between Ki-Gor and Valdur a guard stood wide-legged, a naked sword held to his shoulder. The man's back was to the White Lord, but either he detected the sound of running feet or had a premonition of danger, for he suddenly twisted his head. He saw the jungle man bearing down on him and he whirled like a cat, slashing outward with his sword.

At that moment Valdur swung the first brutal blow. He struck the metal-studded lash down on Helene's shoulder with all the tremendous strength in his savage body. Ki-Gor heard the sodden shock of the whip across his mate's soft body.

Rage splintered his mind. Hate exploded through him in one dreadful crimson burst, and though a score of men had stood before him, he would have torn his way through them. Berserk strength blasted into his corded muscles.

The White Lord saw the guard turn, and like a flash of lightning he drove forward with his spear. Its shovel-bladed point leaped out and all the momentum of the White Lord's hurtling weight was behind it. Past the guard's reaching sword plunged the spear. Bone, muscle and flesh shredded under its impact, and borne on the shaft of the spear, the Maldean was lifted and thrown backward, his whole chest smashed through.

Ki-Gor threw man and spear from him, threw them forward as he drove on without breaking his stride. Then Valdur loomed before him, the whip drawn back for the second blow. Engrossed in his task and turned so that he had not seen Ki-

Gor spurt into view, Valdur had no suspicion of the White Lord's presence until the spitted guard crashed almost at his feet.

VALDUR'S contorted face blanked out in shock. He had no time to move, to even turn. Ki-Gor hit him low on the side, like a football tackler, heaving upward with his shoulders as he clasped the Maldean around the waist. Ki-Gor lifted Valdur high, carried him two plunging steps forward, then spun and crashed him bodily against the stone pillar.

Despite his short legs, the Maldean was a great, chunky block of a man. He struck the stone with terrific force, looking like a huge, ridiculous rag doll as he flattened against it still tightly clutching the whip. So fast did it happen, he didn't even cry out in pain. The breath exploded from his body and he seemed to hang for an instant as though plastered to the rock.

Then he fell to the altar floor with a limp squash, his eyes open, but only the whites showing in his brown face. The thing happening was so unbelievable that the vast watching throng could not immediately comprehend its true significance. Guards, priests and ordinary citizens were frozen with astonishment as they saw a nearly naked white giant burst on to the altar, heave the mighty Valdur up like a child and shatter him against the stone pillar.

This could not be! Not even a madman would dare such an act. Who was he and where did he come from? No strange warrior had ever penetrated the Maldean stronghold, yet this blond savage materialized suddenly in the very center of the fortress, sprang out of thin air to smash down a member of the royal family on the very altar of Zalda.

Even Tarma was transfixed by the amazing spectacle. She recognized, of course, the magnificent white savage. Yet for a fleeting fraction her mind denied the evidence offered by her eyes. It was impossible for him to be there on the altar. It could not be. And yet it was.

Then the guards about the altar recovered. They shook off their numbing surprise and streamed forward from every side to slash this insane intruder to ribbons. Like unleashed leopards they sprang

from their posts about the square to avenge the insult to their lord. The White Lord had reached the altar without difficulty, but neither he nor a hundred like him could have ever left it and lived. Every avenue of escape was immediately blocked by the flooding Maldean guards.

But Ki-Gor had no intention of leaving the altar. He darted toward the badly stunned Valdur, hauled the man away from the pillar, shoved him down on his knees in plain sight of every watching Maldean. He locked his left fist in Valdur's hair and jerked his head back so that his throat was exposed.

Then standing braced behind the warrior, he whipped out his knife and held it to Valdur's throat. The Maldean's chest was heaving and slowly consciousness was draining back into him. Ki-Gor towered over the helpless man, in a position to decapitate him with one swift slash of his knife.

"Back!" roared Ki-Gor at the guards. "Back or Valdur dies. Stand away and he shall go unharmed."

As the only male member of the ruling family, Valdur was in complete charge of the Maldean warriors. He it was who led them into battle, who devised the cunning defenses against the forest people, who gave them victories. Tarma was their queen, but Valdur was their war leader.

The foremost guards saw the muscles tighten in Ki-Gor's right arm. His wrath-scarred face told them his words were no idle bluff. No man could have looked upon Ki-Gor without knowing he would rip Valdur's throat from ear to ear without hesitation. And the Maldeans knew furthermore, that a man mad enough to willingly enter a trap from which there was no escape certainly would not stop at killing when he knew he was to be killed.

At the steps of the altar, the guards slowed. The strange white man could not get away. Armed men were packed in a vast semi-circle around the god. Nervously the guards edged closer, coming a step at a time. Not one of them wanted to cause Valdur's death, but they continued to inch forward, knowing if the White Lord permitted them to get close enough, a thrown club might drop him.

Ki-Gor tugged hard on Valdur's hair, pricked his knife point into the man's neck.

The pain roused the Maldean leader, brought him out of his daze.

"Tell your men to keep away," grated the White Lord. "I have nothing to lose by killing you. Your one chance to live is to order them off."

VALDUR blubbered miserably as he realized his plight. His body was a seething mass of hurt. He was disgraced and held helpless before his whole people. His one chance to redeem himself, to make his name a living legend would be to command his men to attack, thus ordering his own decapitation rather than bow to the white savage.

But the raw, primitive courage for such an act of bravado was not in Valdur. Faced with certain death, he was a coward. Fear geysered over the cornered bully, swept away the swaggering sham behind which he had always hidden.

"No! No!" he quavered at his advancing warriors. "Do as he says! Get back off the altar or he'll kill me!"

Behind him the White Lord could hear Helene's dry, choking sobs. When she realized that somehow Ki-Gor had come to her side, her iron control snapped. Out of love for her, he had come to his own death, come in a futile attempt to save her. Ki-Gor could hear her repeating over and over that he shouldn't have done it, but he had no time to even glance at her.

A bewildered silence fell over the crowd as they saw the warriors retreat. Tarma had come to her feet, and now her voice rang out angrily.

"What madness is this, Ki-Gor? Do you think to win freedom for the two prisoners by threatening death to Valdur? If so, you're a fool, Ki-Gor. Those two are pledged to Zalda, and though you held your knife at my own throat, I would not set them free."

"You would let your cousin die?" Ki-Gor asked contemptuously.

"Ave, or a thousand cousins," cried Tarma. "What is his life when weighed against the wrath of Zalda? Once the ceremony of judgment is held, nothing can save those given over to Zalda."

Valdur trembled uncontrollably. He heard the mutter of assent which ran through the crowd. It was indeed the ancient law that no human power could keep

a prisoner from the altar once the ceremony was completed.

"Listen, then, O Tarma," Ki-Gor shouted, raising his voice so that every Maldean could hear him. "I seek not to free the prisoners, but only to save them from the cruel and senseless torture of the whip. Swear by your god Zalda that they will not be tortured and Valdur will live."

Tarma tilted her head arrogantly. "You are in no position to bargain," she said with scorn. "Neither the prisoners nor you can escape. Harm Valdur and the three of you will live the next three days in agony."

Ki-Gor crouched over Valdur, his whole body poised. Guards around the altar sucked in their breath, thinking the jungle man meant to drive his knife into their leader's throat. The Maldean chieftain screamed hysterically.

"Then I will cheat you of your vengeance," the White Lord challenged her. "Rather than see Helene whipped, I'll kill her with my own hands and myself with her. Your people can hold you accountable for Valdur's death and your god for cheating him of his pledged sacrifice! Give your oath and I'll surrender; refuse and the three of us die!"

Tarma clenched her hands in futile rage. Not for a moment did she doubt that Ki-Gor would carry out his threat. After all, she reasoned, since Helene and Ki-Gor couldn't escape, they had everything to gain by a quick, painless death and nothing to lose. And all the blame would rest on her because she refused to give up a flogging of which she would be cheated anyway.

The deaths would place her in a bad light with the people. Valdur's resounding defeat of the forest people the previous night had temporarily made him a hero. He was valuable to Tarma.

But worst of all would be the loss of Helene. The superstitious Maldeans would not take lightly the loss of a victim who had been pledged to Zalda. They lived in terror of the ape-god and they believed he would vent his wrath on them if they failed to deliver a promised victim.

And though she would not admit it to herself, Tarma did not want to lose Ki-Gor. By a word, she could make him her captive. Uneasy mutterings went up from the crowd as they mistook her delay as a

refusal of the mad white giant's ultimatum. She tried one last trick.

"Very well, Ki-Gor," she said tightly. "Give yourself up and the prisoners will be returned to their cells."

"Swear it in the name of your god," demanded Ki-Gor, knowing that with primitive peoples such an oath would be respected, whereas Tarma would have no qualms about going back on her own word.

Tarma hesitated, then gave the oath he demanded. Ki-Gor tossed away his knife. Before he could turn to look at Helene, Maldean warriors swarmed over him. He offered no resistance.

VIII

TARMA kept her word. Helene and Williams were returned to their cells, and Ki-Gor was placed in a room nearby. He paced the floor moodily, feeling not even a passing touch of exhilaration at the breath-taking exploit he had dared.

In his own mind, he had done nothing the least heroic. He assumed any man would have done as much in the same circumstances. He felt, in fact, a sense of blame for letting Helene and Williams fall into Tarma's hands in the beginning.

The second morning of his confinement, his restless pacing was interrupted by the entrance of four guards. "We take you to the queen," announced the white-caped leader. Then, warily approaching the White Lord, the guards bound his hands behind him.

They led him down a long hall, up three flights of stairs, through a series of heavily guarded corridors and into a maze of richly decorated rooms. As they approached a large double door, it was opened for them by two guards.

Tarma lay on a low couch at the far end of the room, nibbling absently at a silver bowl of fruit and nuts on a table beside her. Her head and shoulders propped on pillows, she was staring out of a window. She allowed the guards to approach with their prisoner without giving any sign she knew they were present.

A dangerous light flickered briefly in Ki-Gor's eyes, and then he masked his feelings. Tarma selected a plum, munched a bite, tossed the remainder away.

"Leave us alone," she said to the guards,

still without looking at them or at Ki-Gor.

"But this outlander is dangerous, O Tarma!" burst out the head guard.

"Bah!" she said scornfully. "Do I fear a bound man with half a hundred warriors within sound of my voice? I wish to talk with him alone. Besides, this sword will counter any trickery he might try."

She brushed her fingers to the floor. A beautiful sword with a jeweled hilt lay beside her couch. Tarma was as expert with the sword as any of her warriors.

The guards bowed low and withdrew, but they did so with reluctance. Ki-Gor had earned their respect, and they felt he should be watched every moment. The sharp edge in Tarma's tone, however, warned them not to argue.

Tarma was silent as the door closed. Her eyes were half-closed, her face remote and thoughtful. She was beautiful as a lioness is beautiful, sleek and perfect physically, heavy with the deceptive languor which can flare so quickly into animal savagery.

Her body was naked except for the jeweled cups which held her full, firm breasts and a brief, scarlet loincloth drawn tightly over her hips. About her neck she wore a gold chain which served both as an ornament and to hold the reed whistle which she always carried.

Despite the steady throb of anger in his temples, Ki-Gor saw her beauty and did not deny it. He sensed the core of flame within her smooth perfection and felt the warm beat of it against his maleness.

She lifted suddenly and spun to a sitting position. The jeweled sword was in her hand and she toyed with it. Her gaze struck hard and deep into Ki-Gor.

"Do you grow weary of four walls, Ki-Gor?" she demanded softly. "Only two days in that room and they tell me you pace like a caged animal." She paused, seeming to measure his great frame. "You were not made to live like that. You were made to be free, to lead men in battle, to know no will but your own."

HE LISTENED and there was a shadow deep in his eyes. He stood there bound and helpless and heard the quick, measured flow of her voice.

"You were made to rule, Ki-Gor. To conquer lands and to father kings. You're

like the Old Ones who built this fortress. I can give you these things. I can give you all of them. My people are like a forged sword ready for the using. I can put that sword in your hand and send you forth to re-win the greatness of the Maldeans."

She was leaning forward now, dark, intense, weaving a net of dreams with her words.

"I can give you all a man can ask, and more," she murmured. "Look about you and see how you would live. Look out that window and see the rich land you would rule." She stood up, her head tilted to look up to him, her arms thrown wide apart. "And look at me, too, Ki-Gor, and tell me if your blood does not beat faster."

Tarma watched his look trace its way over her body, saw the involuntary tightening of his square jaw. She seemed to read the answer she wanted in that look and her breath came faster.

"But why do you offer me these things?" asked Ki-Gor. "Why not one of your own subjects, or if it must be a white man, why not one of the many who trek the outer jungle?"

Tarma dropped the jeweled sword to the table.

"I answered that when I said you alone were like the Old Ones," she said seriously. "The Old Ones of A-tila, who ruled the world with their warrior might. These white men you mention"—her lips curled with scorn—"what are they without their fire-sticks and their servants. They are like serving women themselves with their soft bodies and their endless babbling."

She walked toward Ki-Gor and came close against him, so close that if he swayed a fraction of an inch forward their bodies would be touching.

"And now that I have seen you," she said in almost a whisper, "there is another reason, a stronger one—I want you myself and I want only you."

Her warm, perfumed woman-scent enveloped Ki-Gor. Her long hair was like the night, and falling free about her face and throat and shoulders, it accentuated the exquisite richness of her skin. Her full, red lips were only inches from his own.

"But about Helene . . ." he began, the words appearing to force themselves from his throat.

She touched her fingers gently, yet quickly, across his mouth. "She is forgotten," she said caressingly. "There are many such women. They are playthings to be forgotten, unworthy of one such as you, unfit to breathe the same air."

Tarma slid her arms about Ki-Gor's neck. When he did not try to finish his sentence about Helene, a dart of triumph came and went in her eyes.

"Close her out of your mind," she continued. "You will find it easy to forget in my arms. Think of me, Ki-Gor, only me. The past was a dream, a shadowy sleep, and with my lips I will awaken you."

Her mouth pressed softly against his. She felt the returning pressure of his kiss, and with a sudden eagerness, her arms tightened and she drew him hard against her. She kissed him with increasingly savage violence, as though the swift upbeat of her emotions loosed a surging hunger she could not deny.

She ground the length of her body against his, wrenching the smoother, more yielding softness of her flesh into the closest possible proximity with his hard-muscled frame. Then abruptly she pulled away from him, and his lips followed her as though reluctant to see her break the embrace.

She ran her hands slowly over his shoulders, watching him with smouldering eyes. Then she swayed toward him again.

"My arms," the White Lord said with a curious huskiness, "you forget they are tied."

WITHOUT the least hesitation, she turned and picked the sword up from the table. Moving behind him, she cut his bonds and pulled the ropes from his wrists. As he swung around to face her, his breath came quickly and his eyes were electric in their intensity.

She stood waiting, a half smile on her lips, holding the sword in her hand. His gaze was fastened on her mouth, and his arms reached for her slowly, jerkily as though a magnet drew them. His broad hands caught her about the waist, drew her gently toward him.

Then Ki-Gor caught her against him and the bruising force of his kiss drove her head back. For a moment she was passive, drinking in the ruthlessness of his embrace,

and then savagely she responded. She dropped the sword to the floor, caught her arms around Ki-Gor, dug her fingers into his back.

When she dropped the sword, the White Lord, still kissing her, lifted her in his arms. He carried her toward the couch, holding her as though she were weightless. He lowered her until she was just above the pillows.

Then suddenly his fingers gripped her hand and he tore her away from him, spun her over so that she fell face downward on the couch. Ki-Gor put his knee on her shoulders, shoved her deep into the pillows to smother any outcry.

Acting with a deft certainty which showed how carefully he had planned this move, he used his free hands to grasp the edge of the tapestry which covered the couch. He tore the thick cloth like paper, ripping three long strips from it.

Tarma fought wildly, trying to escape the pressure of his knee, but she was helpless as a child against his merciless strength. He caught her hands behind her, tied them swiftly. She was choking for breath with her face jammed into the pillows. He pulled her head up, knowing in her desperate need for air, she would be unable to cry out for a few seconds. In that brief interval, he snaked a strip of cloth over her mouth and gagged her. Then he tied her ankles and turned her over on her back.

Tarma saw his cold face, the hate in his eyes and knew he had tricked her at the very game with which she had tried to trick him. He had made a fool of her as she had sought to make one of him. He had let her believe that she had won him with her promises of power and her artful lovemaking, had responded with a guile equaling hers until his hands were free of bonds.

She struggled insanely, lunging and straining like a mad animal, but Ki-Gor had tied her securely. He looked down at the utterly cruel and selfish woman in disgust.

"I should kill you," he said bitterly. "It would be a favor to the jungle. Yet because I am a fool I will not harm a woman. But, by the gods, I swear to break your power so that Helene, Williams and I will be the last to suffer at your hands."

HE REACHED OUT and slipped the gold chain holding the reed whistle from her neck, put it around his own throat. He picked up the sword from the floor and shoved it through the leather thong which held his now empty knife sheath.

Without another glance at Tarma, he strode to the window. He swung out of it and dropped to a ledge a few feet below. He edged along the face of the wall until he came to a mass of vines. Ki-Gor scaled down the vine until he reached the lower rooftops surrounding the main castle.

Then he moved swiftly toward the place where he had spent the night with Tembu George and N'Geeso. Twice he was forced to hide to escape discovery by the grey apes waddling about on the roofs, and as he neared his destination, he saw a dead ape sprawled face down.

He touched the creature. It was still warm. A glance at its hideous death grimace told him N'Geeso had stopped it with a poison dart.

Ki-Gor hurried on, worry touching him as he began to suspect that the Maldean earth-gods were searching for his friends. He ran crouching toward the balustrade behind which they had slept. Abuptly, two figures bobbed up with drawn bows, long arrows poised for the kill.

Tembu George gave a surprised grunt and his strained features relaxed. The pygmy, N'Geeso, lowered his bow, staring in disbelief.

"You got away!" the pygmy chieftain said, completely taken aback. "You got out of that place when we couldn't even get near it! Quick, tell us what happened."

"Later," promised Ki-Gor. "If we're ever to act, we have to do it now. Any minute they're liable to find out I'm gone. Once they do, the whole fortress will be aroused."

Ki-Gor pointed to the section of the main structure where Helene and Williams were held.

"Is there an entrance near there?" he asked. "Or have you had a chance to scout that area? I notice the earth-gods patrolling the roofs."

"There's a large court where several work elephants are kept," answered Tembu George. "We scouted it yesterday. A door opens from the court into the castle on

the one side, and on the other a fairly wide street runs to the south gate."

"Good!" said Ki-Gor, frowning in thought.

N'Geeso peered over the balustrade, alert for the grey apes.

"We learned that yesterday," the pygmy chieftain explained. "But today the grey apes have been everywhere. Apparently Tarma got to worrying that if you got into the city, others might have come with you, and she's had them searching the fortress. Twice they've almost cornered us."

Ki-Gor could guess from the little man's tone the hunted hours the two had spent, despair-filled hours when they felt they were failing their friends, letting time drain away while they got no nearer to their goal of freeing the jungle couple and Williams.

"You've done well," he assured them, sweeping away their torturing self-doubts with that simple statement. "Now we will show these *dangos* what it is to face true warriors."

IX

THE SKULKING ROLE they had been forced to play did not sit well with the two chieftains. They were proud men. Now Ki-Gor's words swept their spirits upward, filled them with a fierce wild joy that at last the gamble was to be made. N'Geeso hurriedly gave the White Lord the bow and quiver of arrows which he had left behind with the chieftains before he made the dash to the altar.

Ki-Gor led them to the court, his keen senses enabling them to avoid the grey apes patrolling their course. Three elephants stood swaying in one corner of the court, while their bored keepers lay flat in the shade of a small tree, dozing and gossiping. Two guards lounged at the entrance to the castle. Otherwise, the court was deserted.

As they watched from a low roof overlooking the open space, puzzling as to how they could get past this first obstacle, five women bearing immense loads of wood on their backs entered from the street. Ki-Gor studied them with narrowed eyes, then turning, he whispered instructions to N'Geeso.

Just as the last of the women passed them, N'Geeso dropped to the ground behind her. The loads of wood on the bent backs of the women hid the little man from the guards, and the lazing elephant keepers took no notice of the procession.

Two of the wood bearers had entered the door and the third was half-way in when N'Geeso peered around the struggling woman in front of him, puffed a dart into the guard on the left. Then moving to the other side, he sent a poison barb into the other Maldean.

Neither of the warriors disinterestedly watching the women saw the blow gun swiftly aimed in their direction. Both men started at the small but sharp dart of pain as the needle-like barbs stabbed into their throats. Immediately realizing something was wrong, they straightened, their eyes searching.

By then the fifth and last woman was struggling in the door, bent so far over by her load that she saw only the small patch of ground at her feet. The guards, their faces twisted horribly, were momentarily transfixed by the shooting agony of the poison, paralyzed so swiftly they could make only an odd choking sound.

They slid down the wall dead as the expressionless pygmy chieftain padded past them into the castle. The moment the guards fell, Tembu George and Ki-Gor dropped from the roof and walked at a normal pace toward the entrance. The small, wise eyes of the swaying elephants followed them, but the keepers of the great beasts never looked their way.

As they reached the door, the White Lord and Tembu George picked up the two guards and carried them inside. They tossed the bodies into a dark corner, and joining the waiting N'Geeso, sprinted up a flight of steps.

They came suddenly against four warriors on the dark stair. Ki-Gor swung the jeweled sword in a swinging arc, sent a Maldean stumbling back with the side of his head chopped away. With the merest shift of his body, he drove the point through the belly of another and wrenched it free in a wash of blood.

Tembu George, the immense Masai chieftain, who had insisted on bringing his beloved spear, caught a man on its

point and carried him up six steps before slowing his charge. N'Geeso calmly dropped the fourth warrior with a poison dart. The Maldeans died before they were fully aware who their foes were, before they could free their blades.

AT BREAK-NECK speed, the three twisted up another flight of stairs. Now that they were committed, their only hope of success was to reach Helene's and Williams' jailers before the dead guards were discovered behind them. Once an alarm was given, they could not hope to get out of the castle.

Ki-Gor knew the cells were on the second floor somewhere in the section of the building which they had entered. A white-caped captain turned out of the corridor above them and started down the steps. He saw the three men plunging up toward him and spun to flee.

Tembu George's right arm swept back, and with a lashing motion, he threw the shovel-bladed spear. The great razor-edged point caught the man low on the side as he turned, plunged on upward through his chest cavity to emerge at the base of his neck.

Fortunately, the force of the cast threw the Maldean against the wall of the stairs instead of carrying him out into the corridor. Ki-Gor reached him as he fell, and bending over, ripped away his white cape.

"Put this on," Ki-Gor told N'Geeso. These halls are dark. At a distance, perhaps you will be taken for Valdur leading me back to my cell."

Then they stepped boldly into the corridor, N'Geeso going two steps ahead, his blow gun concealed under the cape. Ki-Gor walked next, shielding his sword behind the pygmy, and Tembu George strode last.

The hall ended in a narrow doorway guarded by two brawny warriors. Ki-Gor's eyes narrowed with recognition. Beyond those men were the cells.

The two Maldeans standing at the narrow entrance were picked men and their alert glances flicked over the three figures who came from the stairs. They saw the small caped figure swaggering toward them with the White Lord meekly following and they stiffened to attention. Automatically, they took N'Geeso for Valdur, and since the queen's cousin was their com-

mander as well as one of royal blood, they did not look directly at him, but stared beyond him with the stony gaze of professional soldiers everywhere. They had no reason to suspect anything amiss since Ki-Gor's escape had not been discovered and it was not unnatural that Valdur would bring the captive back from the queen's quarters.

On came Ki-Gor and his companions, moving fast because every step forward made their discovery more likely. Suddenly it registered on one of the guards that the wizened face above the cape was not Valdur's. The Maldean stared straight at N'Geeso, blinking as he tried to understand what was transpiring. Then his eyes went past the pygmy's calm face to Tembu George, and looking at the fierce Masai chieftain, he knew for certain that these men were impostors.

"They are outlanders!" he cried to his fellow guard. "Halt!" he shouted.

But Ki-Gor and the two chieftains were close upon the men, and when they saw they were discovered, they leaped forward. Ki-Gor drove in with a slashing attack which shattered the defense of one guard, and before the man could recover, the White Lord's blade found his throat. The powerful Masai pinned the other guard to the wall with a lunge of his spear. And N'Geeso streaked through the narrow door into the cell area.

The quick-witted pygmy knew the clash of steel would have been heard by any inner guards, and well realizing the dire risk he took, he sped ahead into the prison corridor. His white cape and small size might allow him to get in among the guards before they saw he wasn't Valdur and he could disrupt their attack on Ki-Gor and Tembu George before it was launched.

SIX WARRIORS were lined at regular intervals down the hall and at the far end was another narrow door such as the one through which N'Geeso had just entered. Everyone of the Maldeans was staring toward the pygmy, wondering why their companions had cried out and used their swords. Holding the cloak tight about him, N'Geeso fled down the line of guards like a frightened antelope.

He flung past the first three men, and

they forgot about the door as they realized the fleeting figure wasn't Valdur or any other Maldean. They shouted to the others, and the fourth man leaped to block his way, but N'Geeso was running full tilt and he got past before the warrior could stop him.

Then he threw back his cloak and the blow gun came to his lips. He plunged a dart into the fifth guard, braked to a stop and stabbed a dart into the final Maldean. The other warriors started to run after him, but already Ki-Gor and Tembu George had burst in behind them. The Masai chieftain's spear chopped through the nearest man and his agonized scream brought up short the warriors closing in on N'Geeso.

Three Maldeans had died within the space of seconds. N'Geeso left the remaining three to Ki-Gor and Tembu George while he darted to the door to deal with the guards outside. By the time he had done his work, Ki-Gor had slain one of those remaining in the corridor and the other two had surrendered in fear and confusion. The havoc wrought by the pygmy followed by the sudden and terrible appearance of Ki-Gor and the Masai had brought a swift victory.

A look at Ki-Gor's grim face was enough to make the two bewildered Maldeans who had surrendered, open the cells which held Williams and Helene. The red-haired girl gave a cry of disbelief as she saw the blood-smeared White Lord loom in the door before her. She was too stunned to do more than look at him.

"Quick!" he said, grasping her arm. "They'll be on us in a moment."

"You mean I'm free?" she asked dazedly.

"Not yet," he said hoarsely. "Perhaps we'll never get beyond the walls. But at least you won't die on the altar."

Then he had pulled her into the hall, thrown the two Maldeans into the cell and locked it.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the shaken Williams, staring about him. "It's unbelievable that three men could do this."

Helene was jolted to her senses by the sprawled bodies. Swiftly she scooped up two swords, pressing one into Williams' hand and keeping the other for herself. Then Ki-Gor led them back the way he and the two chieftains had entered. They got down the first flight of stairs without

encountering anyone, but as they started down the second, they heard an uproar at the door to the court.

Ki-Gor saw the milling group and knew the bodies of the guards had been found. He did not slacken his pace. The twenty-odd people were not warriors and he gambled on being able to scatter them. He roared the chilling war cry of the Masai, and taking his cue, N'Geeso and Tembu George echoed it.

With popping eyes, the crowd looked up to see fierce strangers leaping down the stairs. Men and women screamed in fright, broke in all directions. The door was open by the time Ki-Gor reached it.

Once in the court, Ki-Gor raced toward the three elephants. The beasts' keepers had been in the crowd which fled so they did not rise up to interfere. Ki-Gor understood the huge animals and N'Geeso also had learned to work them, though he had nothing like the White Lord's wonderful control over them.

He selected one of the elephants, spoke to it softly, yet commandingly in Bantu and quickly had it kneeling. "You four will ride together," he said. "I will go alone on the largest beast."

They were puzzled, but in their precarious position there was no time for explanations. When they ranged atop the grey backs, Ki-Gor mounted the great bull he had chosen to ride. He wheeled the animal into the lead and headed down the street which led to the south gate.

AS THEY left the court, Maldean warriors came tumbling from the castle entrance. The escape of the prisoners had been discovered, and an alarm was being raised throughout the building. Ki-Gor urged his elephant faster and N'Geeso stayed close behind him. A few Maldeans began to run from their homes, gaping at the strange spectacle.

Ki-Gor took his bow from his shoulder, fitted an arrow to it as the south gate came in sight. Three warriors saw him, ran shouting toward the gate. He dropped one of them on the stone street with an arrow, but the others darted into a low building which was apparently a barracks. Men streamed out with swords, clubs and spears. They threw a barrier of flesh across the street.

The White Lord urged the elephant faster and charged into the men, turning the huge mount sharply so that it came back on the warriors. The beast was nervous and did not want to trample the men. It had been trained to work, not to fight.

But like clamoring dogs, the Maldeans swarmed around the elephant. Men jabbed excitedly with swords and spears at Ki-Gor. Quickly the elephant was wounded in half a dozen places. In a flash, its temper changed. It trumpeted and wheeled on the Maldeans, using its tusks and fore legs to sweep clear its path.

With difficulty, Ki-Gor swung the forest giant toward the barred gate. Maldeans were jammed there, many of them bowmen. Now as the elephant faced them, they unleashed their arrows, trying to bring down Ki-Gor. The jungle man lay flat, and the arrows whirled past or dug into the trumpeting beast.

The huge beast went berserk at this attack. Its great head came down like a battering ram and it charged with terrific speed. With all the monstrous power in its immense body, it crashed head on into the gate. The barrier blasted open under the dreadful shock and over a pulp of bodies the elephant drove into the open.

N'Geeso, who held back when Ki-Gor charged the Maldeans, now urged his great mount forward and plunged out the shattered gate after the White Lord. Warriors from the castle were close on his heels. Ki-Gor led the way across the clearing to the trees, and just before he reached them he leaped to the ground. N'Geeso signaled his elephant to a halt, and he and the others raced to where Ki-Gor waited at the jungle's edge.

The pack of Maldeans was pouring after them, and they could hear the clatter of horses coming at a gallop. Tarma had been found and Valdur rode with his horsemen to cut off the escape of the captives. The whole fortress was in an uproar.

Ki-Gor led his four companions directly to the canoe which he and the two blacks had hidden the night before they reached the island. The five of them shoved it into the water and climbed in. They were well away from shore before the Maldeans discovered them, and they were half across the lake before the long, swift war canoes put out from shore.

Ki-Gor brought his canoe into land as near the marsh fortress as he dared and ordered his friends to run for the path. N'Geeso and Tembu Geoge looked at him inquiringly, wondering if he had forgotten the giant lizards.

"I have one of the whistles," he said. "I don't know, but if it worked for the Maldean we watched, then it should work for us. It's a chance we must take."

He glanced meaningfully at the war canoes skimming in for landing. The Maldean craft had crossed with terrific speed. Tarma, her face convulsed with rage, stood in the prow of the largest vessel, crying on her paddlers with threats and curses. The trick Ki-Gor had played on her had driven the barbaric queen wild with fury. Where before she had been willing to go to any length to secure the White Lord for her own, now her every thought and feeling was directed toward exacting the most terrible vengeance imaginable on Ki-Gor. She hated him with a hideous passion, and the violence of her feelings ripped away all semblance of sanity from the raging queen.

HELENE looked at the reed whistle Ki-Gor had taken from Tarma and remembered what Valdur had told her about the dinosaurs. "Oh yes, Ki-Gor," she assured him. "It will keep them away."

Staying in the protection of the undergrowth, they skirted the marsh and slipped past the fort. Then they started a desperate race over the path through the swamp. Twice Ki-Gor used the whistle to drive back the lizards. At first there was no sign of pursuit, but Ki-Gor kept looking over his shoulder and he refused to let the others slacken their pace.

Then came the sound he had feared. Behind them rose the drum of hooves. Tarma had mounted her Maldean warriors on the horses kept at the fort. She knew the escaped prisoners could not outrun her horsemen, and savoring the torture which she was inflicting on Ki-Gor and his companions, she kept her savage warriors to a trot. There was no possible escape for the fleeing prisoners since the only way they could go was straight ahead. The marsh made it impossible for them to turn aside or even find a place of hiding.

Alone of those five who fled, Ki-Gor realized the purpose of the Maldean queen. He knew she was toying with them, and immediately he began to employ her own sadistic aim against her. Ahead the path turned upward to a towering bluff. If they could make it, they would be safe. He urged his companions to even greater speed.

But abruptly Tarma abandoned the toying game. The horsemen hurtled forward in a wild gallop. Ki-Gor knew it would be impossible for all of them to get away.

"Tembu George," he said, drawing close to the Masai chieftain so the others would hear, "they will catch us before we get there. When they draw close, you and I will turn and try to delay them."

The two men unobtrusively began to lag behind the others. The shouts of the Maldeans rang loud behind them. Ki-Gor shouted to Helene to run faster. Then he and Tembu George unslung their bows and, turning suddenly, drove arrows in the first rank of horsemen.

A horse went down and a rider plunged into the marsh spitted by an arrow. The Masai leader and the White Lord fed arrows into the column, shooting with deadly accuracy. Yet the toll they took did not even slacken the reckless Maldeans and both men saw they fought a hopeless battle. Two bowmen, however skilled and courageous, were not enough to block or even impede that advance.

Then Valdur's angry voice rang out and he spurred into the lead, crouched low on his horse's back, his sword gleaming in his hand. He meant to redeem himself in the eyes of his men by riding down the man who had publicly humbled him. He was nearly crazed with brooding over his disgrace.

KI-GOR fitted an arrow to his bow and waited as the warriors surged after their leader. The White Lord realized it was impossible to halt the riders. He knew he must soon be slain. But he waited grimly, meaning to kill Valdur before he fell.

With the horse almost against him, Ki-Gor saw Valdur straighten and swing the sword. At point blank range, he drove the arrow into the Maldean, saw it sink to its feathers. Then the horse struck him and flung him off the path and into the

underbrush. He lay dazed.

There were piercing cries all about and men raced past him toward the path. His senses abruptly cleared and he realized that the figures flooding by him were pygmies. N'Geeso's men were erupting from the forest which grew on the dry ground at the edge of the swamp.

By the time the White Lord got to his feet, the column of Maldeans was being cut to pieces. A withering rain of arrows and poison darts fell on them from every side. Ki-Gor's glance darted along the bloody stretch of path in search of Valdur and Tarma. With sudden elation he saw how completely the tables had been turned.

Ki-Gor immediately spotted the queen. She rode in the center of the rapidly disintegrating column, dazed and unbelieving at the thing which was happening. At the moment of her supreme triumph, swift and awful disaster swept out of nowhere to engulf her. She seemed paralyzed for a moment, her face chalk-white, her lips jerking. Then abruptly she began to shout shrill, incoherent orders, slashing about her with her sword at her own men in a futile and wholly insane attempt to make them win when no victory was possible.

But even as she spoke, the holocaust of death loosed by the pygmies was sweeping away her men and horses. At last, even in her madness she saw that all was lost, and with thought only for her own safety, she whirled her horse in the hope of escaping back to the fort. The frightened animal reared as it spun on its hind legs, and the plunging mounts of the men behind Tarma crashed against her.

Tarma screamed as her horse toppled backwards. Twice more in sheer agony her voice pierced the din of battle as her own men rode her down in their fright. Then she was heard no more. In the confusion her terrorized warriors trampled her to death, smashed her white body into a bloody pulp at the very point where she had meant to overtake Ki-Gor.

Ki-Gor found his way to Helene and put his arms around her. With Tarma and Valdur slain and the Maldean horsemen wiped out, the power of the Maldeans was ended.

Ki-Gor and Helene, arm in arm, started the steep climb up the cliff.

The Terrible Drums

By PAUL SELONKE

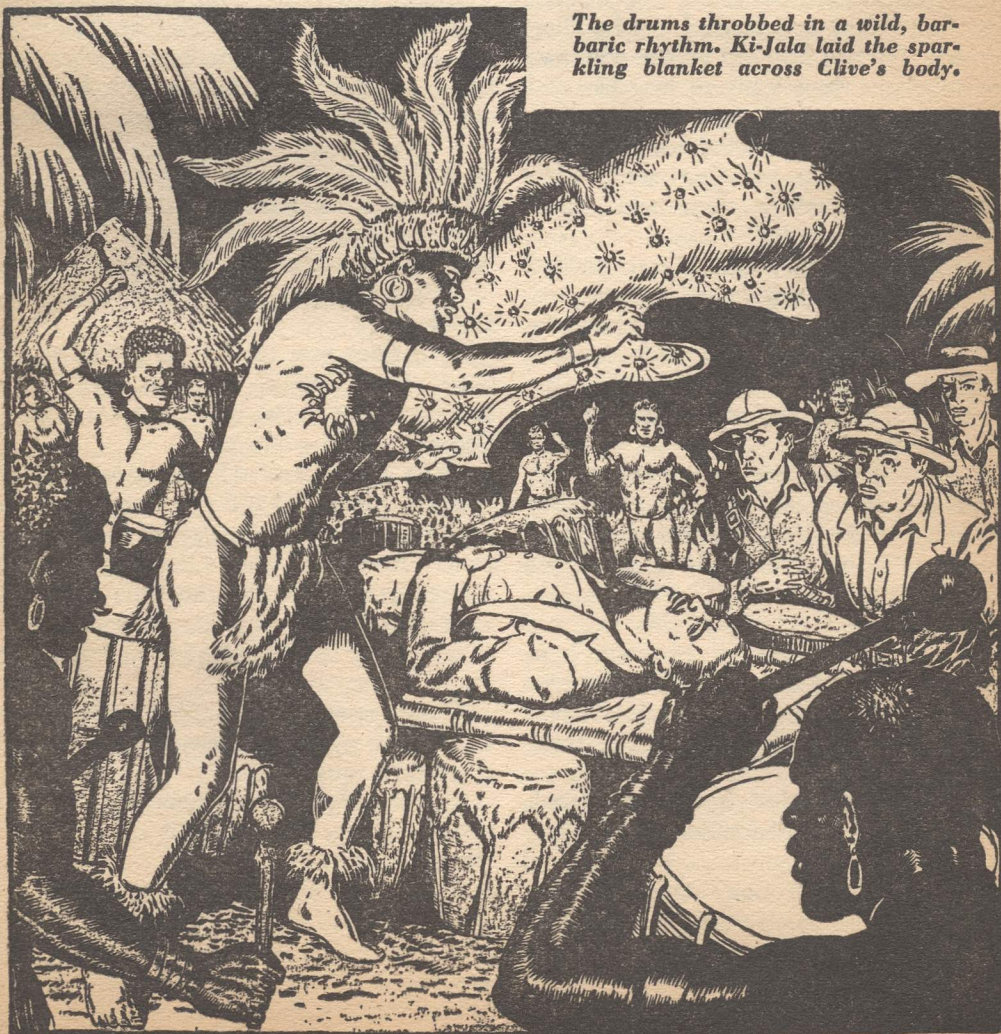
Ki-Jala's word was clear: "When Wasili drums do shake the moon, the bush will run with white man's blood."

A FEELING of peace settled over Jim Munson as the dugout rounded the looping bend in Moolu River that marked the boundary of the Ranga elephant country. He smiled at the broad naked back of Gombi, the tall Masai who stroked tirelessly at the front thwart,

twisted his crude paddle and sent the boat gurgling toward his trading post, a small, neatly-thatched building standing behind a narrow log pier at the reedy river bank.

This was home to him and his black companion. The familiar, restful serenity of the vicinity, enriched with the soft,

The drums throbbed in a wild, barbaric rhythm. Ki-Jala laid the sparkling blanket across Clive's body.



lazy chirring of insects and the fluid melodies of golden-throated birds, was an antidote to the weariness which gripped his long, lank body.

Munson had traded for years among the fierce, little-civilized tribes of the Moolu River basin and was one of the few white men the savages trusted. Now he was returning from up-river, his dugout laden with pelts, which he had traded for the cheap imitation jewelry that the black men valued more highly than bags of gold.

A parrot screamed, winged frantically out of a treetop as the dugout was warped to the pier. Gombi steadied the boat while Munson stepped out. Neither spoke. They had traveled together too long to talk unnecessarily. Both knew each other well enough to predict every move.

As Gombi began stacking the pelts on the pier, Munson started for the trading post, then halted and studied the building narrowly. He had boarded up the windows and sealed the door with an iron bar and padlock, to protect his wares while they were gone. Now the windows were unboarded. The lock and bar were gone from the door, which stood wide open.

"Gombi, come here!"

At Munson's call, the Masai padded over from the pier with a swift, easy pace. His eyes widened when he saw how the building was unlocked and wide open.

"Thieves, *bwana!*" he cried. "For the first time, thieving tribesmen have broken into our house!"

"River tribesmen are not clever enough to unbar the door, Gombi, and they wouldn't take the boards off the windows." Munson slid his heavy pistol from his lean hip. "Come, let us go inside."

They entered the building. No one was inside. Nothing appeared to have been disturbed. Even the supplies in the rear room seemed intact. Munson was frankly puzzled when they returned to the front again.

"I don't understand it," he muttered. "There is no explanation to account for..."

"On the contrary, my dear Munson, there is a lucid explanation," a cultured voice said from the doorway.

A slim, black-mustached Englishman was standing there. He was dressed in neat riding breeches and polished boots.

A rifle hung carelessly in the crook of his arm. He stepped into the room.

"Allow me to introduce myself, Munson," he went on. "I'm George Clive, a cinematographer from the *London Museum*. I was sent here to obtain pictures of the savage tribes of this remote territory."

Munson scowled. "Does that explain why you broke into my building? You're responsible, I take it."

"Quite." George Clive's even teeth were a white bar beneath his close-clipped mustache as he smiled. "We trekked here from the Coast for the express purpose of contacting you. You were out visiting some villages, we assumed, so we broke in and lived here, awaiting your return. I hope you will forgive our boldness."

"We? You mean you aren't alone?"

"Foley and Ward came with me—a pair of johnnies I'm sure you'll like. We were out for a spot of small-game shooting, and I preceded my friends back here. So our beastly wait has been rewarded, what?"

MUNSON'S scowl blackened. Clive reminded him too much of the remittance men and sports who haunt the bars and hotels of the coastal towns.

"What do you want with me?" he asked.

"We want you to take us inland to the tribe of the Wasili, Munson. We've decided to make a film of their extraordinary Ceremony of the Drums."

"You have decided!" Munson laughed without mirth. "Don't you know that the Wasili territory is dangerous to all white men? And that the Ceremony of the Drums is a secret rite the tribe holds for its sick? Asking to take pictures of the Ceremony is like begging for a piece of the moon."

"Come now, Munson. We heard on the Coast that you've witnessed the ceremony more than once."

"I have. But I'm not going out on such a crazy trip when I'm just off the river. I'm worn out."

"I say, you can't let us down. You..."

Clive paused as his companions walked in. They were also dressed in breeches and polished boots, and both looked as unnatural to the jungle as he. The large fleshy man with a red face was Foley.

Ward, the other, was thin, cadaverous, with black glowing eyes.

"What'd Munson say, Clive?" Foley asked in a blunt, whiskey-harsh voice.

"He is not too cordial to our plans." The Englishman turned back to Munson. "You should realize our position. Trekking way out here without guides was a bloody hell. It shows you how desperately we want your help."

"We'll pay good money," said Ward, his voice sepulchral as his appearance. "Fifty pun merely to guide us to the Wasili village. That is all we would demand of you for the sum. Pretty easy money—eh, Munson?"

Munson glanced at Gombi and saw the grim, mistrustful light in the black man's gaze. Then he glanced back at the men. There did seem to be something fishy about the whole setup. Still, he couldn't lose sight of the money. Fifty quid wasn't anything to let slide through one's fingers.

"I'll take you there but I can't guarantee your safety in the Wasili country," he said. "Neither can I guarantee that you will even see the Ceremony of the Drums. You will be entirely under my orders. Most important, the money must be paid me in advance."

"Agreed," nodded Ward, his black glowing eyes pivoting to Clive. The Englishman brought out a wallet and paid the sum over to Munson without blinking an eye.

Munson grinned crookedly as he pocketed the money. Chuckling to himself about fools and their money being soon parted, he went out to the pier to finish unloading the furs from the dugout. Gombi accompanied him.

The men came out and sat on the bench in front of the trading post. They smoked and conversed in low tones. Their faces were alive with excited anticipation.

"Wah," grunted Gombi, "I do not understand these men. You told them they had little hope of seeing the Ceremony of the Drums, yet they are filled with confidence. *Bwana*, I fear these men are up to evil."

Munson laughed at the black man's fears. "No," he said, "they are only fools, ignorant of the terrible ways of the bush. A fruitless journey to the Wasili *kraal* will teach them a great lesson about our country..."

DAWN, the following morning found the party ready to depart from the lonely trading post. Munson was a trifle surprised at the appearance of the three men, who had discarded their fancy clothing for the travel-stained khaki and scuffed boots of seasoned voortrekkers. The men looked less soft in the semi-dark, responsible and capable.

Munson and Gombi led the way into the jungle forest. Gombi was carrying on his back a bulky bundle filled with trinkets and gifts for the Wasili. Munson was an American, with the American trait of wanting to give value for value received, and during the night he had thought out one possible way whereby the men might witness the strange Wasili Ceremony of the Drums.

Clive, Foley, and Ward, in addition to their regular packs, were laden down with their movie equipment. All three were heavily armed.

During the first three days of the journey, the three men proved to be good travelers. But on the fourth and fifth days, when they struggled through an almost impenetrable forest interlaced with tangled vines and lianas, they began to bog down. They turned grim, sullen. Foley tried to bolster himself up with a bottle of whiskey he was carrying in his pack, until Munson took the liquor away from him.

"Munson, how much longer must we endure this?" moaned Ward. "When do we reach our destination?"

"It isn't much farther," Munson said.

"Probably he's got us lost, Ward," snarled Foley. His fat jowls were bearded now, smudged with grime and sweat. He swung hotly to Munson. "How d'we know you and your nigger are leading us anywhere near the Wasili..."

"Quiet, Foley," snapped Clive. "You agreed with me to go on this bloody adventure, and Munson warned us it wasn't going to be a picnic. I trust him. I expect you to trust him, too. Understand?"

Foley and Ward gave him hard glances, but they plodded on in sullen silence. Both men seemed close to the breaking point, and it worried Munson a little. If after they reached the Wasili village they let their ugly tempers out of hand, there was no telling what might happen. The Wasili were a savage, primitive people.

That afternoon they entered an ancient clearing that probably had been a water-hole at some remote time. It was hemmed in on all sides with thick tropical growths and was pungent with the perfume of colorful flowers that grew there in profusion. The clearing was strangely beautiful, serene-appearing, yet an intangible something hovered in the hot, moist air, like an aura of death.

"We're almost to the village now," said Munson, sliding his pack from his shoulders. He wearily seated himself upon it, mopping sweat from his lean face. "We'll wait here until we're allowed to go on."

"Allowed to go on?" Clive stared at him. "What are you talking about?"

"Ki-Jala, king of the Wasili, keeps warriors patrolling his borders. Cross the borders without permission and there's danger of being killed from ambush." Munson shrugged. "We crossed the border an hour ago."

"Good Lord!" cried Foley. "Have you placed us in a position where—where we'll be murdered?"

"Keep your shirt on," said Munson. "Relax and make no hostile moves. We are probably surrounded on all sides by Wasili warriors this very minute."

"Good Lord!" burst out Foley again. He clamped his flabby lips together and swept nervous eyes over the green jungle wall that circled the clearing.

THERE were no sounds in the jungle, nothing except the monotonous drone of the millions of insects in the trees, dinning in their ears like an eerie warning of peril. Munson was relaxed, watchful. So was Gombi, who stood beside him, arms folded across his broad naked breast. Clive was the only calm man among the others, and he was calm by effort.

Abruptly two Wasili warriors stepped out of the green wall to the right of them, both huge, magnificently-proportioned black men, their faces and bodies smeared with red and orange dyes. They carried feather-festooned spears and heavy oval shields of hippo hide. No friendliness lay in the silent, steady gaze of their ebony-hued eyes.

"Don't touch your guns," Munson warned his companions. "You'll die before you could fire one shot."

He rose and paced slowly in the direction of the warriors. Halting when within ten paces of them, he spoke in Swahili, quietly.

"I am your white brother come to your country again," he said. "I bring men of my people with me."

"Of all the pale-skinned men, you alone does Ki-Jala trust, White Brother," one of the warriors said. "Ki-Jala will not like it that you have brought these others."

"I come, knowing of Ki-Jala's great mercy. One of these men of my party is sick with a terrible disease. I have brought him to be cured by the magic of your drums."

The warrior scowled. "The drums are only for our own people, White Brother."

"All the witch-men of the bush have failed to cure this man, and he has begged me to bring him to Ki-Jala," Munson said desperately. "Ki-Jala is just. He is merciful. His drums are powerful as wind and lightning."

The warrior still scowled. "You have gifts?"

Munson gestured to Gombi, and the black man came forward with his big bundle. He laid it at the feet of the two Wasili savages.

The warriors examined the bundle without a change of expression on their hard faces. Finally the speaker of the two nodded to Munson.

"We will bear these gifts unto Ki-Jala. If he decides against giving the Ceremony of the Drums to the ailing white man, you must turn and depart from our country. Your white brothers will die if they tarry."

"King Ki-Jala's word is law," intoned Munson solemnly. "We know that the Wasili are the greatest and most powerful people in all the bush."

"E-e lu," grunted the warrior. He paused while his companion lifted the bundle of gifts to his shield, then the two of them vanished silently into the jungle.

FOR A moment there were no sounds but the lonely, desolate dreeding of the insects. Then Ward hurried up and clamped his bony, quivering fingers on Munson's arm.

"Those Wasili are devils!" he cried. "They'd have murdered us in cold blood if..."

"I told you this was a dangerous place for white men," Munson said. "You wouldn't believe me."

Foley elbowed up brusquely. "What's this damned foolishness about one of us being sick, Munson?"

Munson eyed him in disgust. "You want to film the Ceremony of the Drums, don't you? The only way you'll get that chance is for one of you to submit to the same drum treatment the Wasili give their own sick."

"I will like hell," snarled Foley. "I'm not going to be a guinea pig to a bunch of bloody savages."

"Nor I," growled Ward. "I don't like this."

"There's logic to what Munson says," spoke up Clive. "If we can get the Wasili to treat one of us for sickness, the other two will be free to photograph the ceremony. I'm willing to submit myself to the ordeal. And thus our purpose will be accomplished—don't you see?"

His companions stared at him intently. There had been a queer undertone in Clive's voice, a slight emphasis in his speech that struck Munson as having some hidden and secret meaning to the other men. It annoyed him.

"We'll go on ahead now," he announced. He began leading the way, with Gombi padding silently at his side.

So they came at last to the Wasili *kraal*.

It was different than most Congo villages, for the houses were constructed of sun-dried brick, with conical roofs of large matted jungle leaves. Each house was identical with the next, standing in two long even rows that faced a narrow lane. At the head of the lane was a larger house of brick—the dwelling of King Ki-Jala and his wives.

The Wasili came out to watch the entrance of the white men into their village. Though they countenanced Munson, there was no friendliness for the others. It affected Foley and Ward, who walked tight-lipped and pale.

Clive, though, seemed calm. He whispered to Munson. "They have made no move to harm us. Does that mean that your plea has been accepted by their jolly old king?"

"It means nothing," growled Munson.

A warrior stepped up to him, one garbed

more ornately than the others, with beaten metal bracelets weighing down his muscular arms. He was carrying a huge orange-dyed spear which identified him as one of Ki-Jala's personal guards.

"Follow me, White Brother," the Wasili said.

Munson led his party in the wake of the towering savage, who escorted them into an empty hut.

"Ki-Jala offers this house for your comfort and the comfort of your companions," the guard said. "Now, White Brother, our king and leader wishes to see you—alone."

Munson gave a meaningful glance to Clive, then stepped out of the hut. He followed the guard into the larger mud-bricked house at the head of the lane.

THE HOUSE was divided into rooms, some for Ki-Jala's wives, others for use in the business of the tribe. Munson was escorted into Ki-Jala's personal chamber, where the walls were covered with laced-together pelts, and the skulls of slain enemies dangled ominously from the low ceiling.

Ki-Jala was sitting cross-legged on a pallet that was covered with leopard skins and looked up curiously at Munson's entrance. Though he was a man of years, his back was straight and firm, his gaze steady. He wore no garments aside from a brief monkey-skin breech-clout.

"It is good to see you again, White Brother, because you are our friend," he said. "The gifts you sent are plenty. Is it that this diseased white man is your dear friend that makes you so generous?"

"He is one of my people, and I am concerned over him as you worry over your own tribesmen," Munson said. "Nothing else has cured him of his sickness. I know that your drums alone are powerful enough to destroy the devils that torture his body."

"You believe in the Ceremony of the Drums?"

"I have seen it cure the diseased of your tribe many times," nodded Munson, speaking truthfully. Though the doctors on the Coast had scoffed when he had told them of the miracles he had seen, he recognized the power of the drums.

"What is your decision, Ki-Jala?" he asked.

"The decision has been made. We are

glad to help our friends," replied the king. "The ceremony will be held for your brother at moon-rise this darkness."

"Ki-Jala is kind and good," Munson said. "May time rest lightly on your strong shoulders."

He went out of the king's house.

The white men gathered anxiously around him when he returned to their hut, and he told them that the ceremony would be held that night.

"Clive will have to submit to the treatment," he added. "That's the bargain I made with Ki-Jala."

"You're a genius, Munson." Clive's teeth showed whitely as he smiled. His eyes glowed. "We can have a camera set up..."

"I didn't arrange for that."

"Don't worry. That's Ward's job. We have very sensitive film capable of handling fire light pictures. By using a hidden camera..."

"That's your job," Munson muttered, and stepped outside to sit alone beside the doorway. He filled and lighted his battered pipe, puffed slowly, lost in thought.

After a while Gombi came out and squatted beside him. The Masai black man did not speak, but respected his master's strange silence.

"I'm worried," Munson remarked at last.

"Why, *bwana*?" asked Gombi. "Is not Ki-Jala your friend? Has he not proved it by agreeing to what we believed was impossible?"

"Gombi, you mistrusted our companions from the first. I have a feeling maybe you are right. My friendship with Ki-Jala will mean little if the white men cause trouble. The Wasili are a savage people, without mercy."

"What wrong could the *bwanas* do here?"

"I don't know. That's why it bothers me..."

AS NIGHT darkened the jungle, the village turned deathly quiet, as if in dreadful expectancy. Out of the matted bush came the crazy cries of lemurs and hyenas, and the coughing roars of prowling lions challenging one another. Munson was seated in the darkness of the hut with the three white men.

"How do you feel, Clive?" he asked.

"Like a condemned man about to be led to his execution," Clive said. "There is something frightening about all this. It seems in the very air."

One of Ki-Jala's guards entered the hut.

"The moon is up," he said. "It is the time."

Munson grunted a reply. He rose up and led the men out into the village lane, where a huge fire had been kindled, throwing writhing fingers of light and shadows over the *kraal*. The assembled Wasili were squatted in a semi-circle about the fire, motionless, silent, as though waiting in fear of something that was not of this earth.

Near the fire stood a kind of raised cot of peeled logs. Attached on all sides of it were drums, dozens of them, ranging from tremendous ones ten feet in diameter to miniature tom-toms no larger than pails. Two of the king's guards escorted Clive to the crude cot and he stretched out on it.

Munson sat near the drums. So did Foley and Ward. The latter brought out his camera and quietly placed it between his knees where none would notice it.

The Wasili began chanting—a weird muttering at first, punctuated with strange, unexpected cadences. Gradually the chanting grew louder, until it was a roar as eerie as the howl of wind in some desolate sea cavern. At the peak of this chanted frenzy, Ki-Jala emerged from his house and with slow, measured tread advanced into the lane.

He wore a huge headdress of ostrich feathers. Wrapped about his body was a cloak studded with hundreds of red stones that gleamed in the firelight like the baleful, blazing eyes of the leopard.

"The Blanket of Red Starlight!" gasped Foley in awe. "I personally never fully believed the stories on the Coast about this blanket of priceless rubies Ki-Jala has. Here is the absolute proof!"

Munson snorted. "The people on the Coast are fools. The truth is..."

Ki-Jala whisked the sparkling blanket from his body and laid it across Clive's recumbent form, going into a wild, howling dance that drowned Munson's voice. Yet as abruptly as he had begun, the king broke off his howling. He flung himself prostrate



He went into a wild, howling dance.

and unmoving upon the barren earth beside the fire.

Dozens of Wasili leaped over to the drums. They commenced pounding on them, jumping into the air as they hammered out intricate rhythms on the drums, large and small. It raised a terrible din that blotted out everything else.

The moon rose higher and higher in the heavens as the very air was shaken by the endless throbbing of the drums, which monotonously spoke in that one insane rhythm, wild and barbaric. It seemed the savage thrumming would never come to an end.

Then all at once Ki-Jala rose up and resumed his howling dance. It brought the drums to a sudden, stunning conclusion. And as Clive was carried by the guards from the cot to the hut of the white men, Munson turned to Ward, who was staring hollowly at the proceedings.

"Did you get the pictures?" he asked.

"Pictures?" Ward regarded him queerly, then forced a tight grin to his cadaverous face. "Sure, sure—a whole damned reel of it."

KI-JALA returned to his house, once again wrapped in the red-sparkling blanket. The ceremony was over. Munson went to the hut to join Clive.

"Feel cured, Clive?" he asked.

"If I wasn't sick before, I'm that way

now," Clive replied thickly. "The vibrations and cross-vibrations of those bloody drums shook every muscle in my body—shook my brain loose, almost. Ten more minutes of those drums, Munson, and I swear I'd have gone raving mad!"

Munson chuckled. "That's what this drum set-up is—a crude, powerful vibrating machine that shakes the ills out of you. So now that you've got pictures of it, we better get ourselves some rest. We'll be heading back for my trading post in the morning."

He stretched out his long, lank form on the mud floor and composed himself for slumber. Ward and Foley came in a moment later. So did Gombi. Very little was said, and they all lay down for the night.

Yet Munson did not sleep comfortably. The endless throb of the drums haunted his dreams, and hours slid by before he could shake it out of his brain.

Then abruptly he was wildly awake, sitting up in the hut and staring about him. The hut was quiet as a tomb; the bright moonlight, a square silver shaft on the mud floor inside the doorway.

For a vague instant he wondered what had wakened him. Then he forgot about it. Startled, he saw that he was alone in the hut. Clive and Foley and Ward were gone. Even Gombi was missing.

Cursing, he got to his feet and shook

the remaining sleep-webs from his brain. He stepped out of the hut.

The village was quiet as death; there was no sign of any living thing. Even the surrounding jungle seemed in a silent, brooding moment of repose. But when he turned his gaze toward Ki-Jala's house above the lane and saw that the customary standing guard was missing from the doorway, a feeling of disquiet disturbed him. It was a tribal law that a warrior be posted there day and night.

He strode up the lane, and coming nearer Ki-Jala's house, he saw the guard sprawled on the ground by the door. The guard was dead, his skull crushed in by the brutal blow of a club.

In that dazed moment, he saw another black man lying dead not far from the guard. And when he stepped up to this second corpse and saw that it was Gombi, full realization of what was happening cudgeled through his brain. For his faithful Masai had been clubbed as brutally as the other.

HE ROSE up slowly, trembling with rage. What he'd feared might happen—a suspicion he had striven to ignore—had now occurred in one swift, vicious stroke.

But what motive lay behind this? Why...?

Then he detected the dim glow of light from within Ki-Jala's house. He caught the faint, almost inaudible murmur of voices inside the dwelling.

He jerked as he thought he heard the sound of furtive footsteps behind him in the village. His fingers slid his pistol from his hip as he turned nervously. He saw nothing, though he knew he might have been seen and followed. There was no time to worry about that now, and he moved forward.

Quietly he stole into the house, and he saw that the light was in Ki-Jala's own chamber, deep inside the building. He advanced to the room door, hunched there, hot eyes watching what was in progress beyond it.

A flashlight in Ward's hand illuminated the figure of Ki-Jala backed against one of the fur-covered walls. Yet Ki-Jala showed no fear of the pistols that threatened him from the hands of Clive and

Foley. His body was held straight, and stubborn defiance shone brightly in his steady gaze.

"This is the last time," Clive was saying in Swahili. "Give us the Blanket of Red Starlight and we will spare you. Otherwise you will die, and we will search the house and find it. You will gain nothing by not obeying."

Ki-Jala did not move. He said, "The Blanket of Red Starlight is holy. It is not for me to give."

"Enough, you filthy black!" growled Foley. The big man padded forward menacingly. "We..."

Munson was sick with loathing of the white men. With a quick movement, he stepped into the room.

"Hold it, you crazy fools!" he snapped.

Clive whirled, snarled, "So you think *you* can stop us, too," and whipped his pistol muzzle at Munson.

Munson shot him between the eyes.

As Clive went crashing down, Munson was blasting shot after shot at the dodging, cursing figures of Foley and Ward. They fired wildly at the trader.

All the swift-triggered bullets missed.

Then like a black wave of vengeance, Wasili warriors poured into the room, overwhelming the white men. Munson collapsed to the floor as one of the angry savages clubbed him with a spear handle. He seemed to sink down into a pit of black velvet darkness...

Wakening later, he found himself alone, lying in a small circular mud hut, and he could see the gray mists of dawn beyond the low door-opening. A loud rhythmic pounding seemed to be going on inside his aching head. And after he managed to weakly get himself to his knees, he realized that the pounding wasn't inside his skull. It was the weird, endless pounding of tom-toms somewhere in the village. The Ceremony of the Drums, it seemed, was in progress again.

That in itself was odd, because the Wasili law allowed the ceremony only at night—except in exceptional cases. Munson tried to look outdoors to see what was going on. He could see nothing through the door, save the dried-brick wall of an adjoining hut. So he hunched down again, aching head in his hands as sickening thoughts tortured him.

OBVIOUSLY, Clive, Foley, and Ward had heard fabulous stories on the Coast of the Blanket of Red Starlight. Under the guise of photographers, they had come here to get possession of it. They had asked to see the Ceremony of the Drums so they could learn where the blanket was kept, and last night had gone to Ki-Jala's house to get it for themselves. They murdered the guard to gain entrance. They also murdered Gombi, who had tried to stop them.

The horrible position the circumstances placed him in chilled his spine. He had brought the white men here. The blame was on his head as well as theirs. The savagery of the primitive Wasili would descend upon him with equal wrath.

He spun his gaze to the unguarded door of the hut and was tempted to try an escape. Yet he quickly saw the folly of it. He probably would be skewered by a Wasili spear before he got ten steps from the hut. So he sat back and strove to close his ears to the horrible, unending monotony of the pounding drums.

Two hours passed. And two more. Then at last a warrior came in and ordered him out of the hut, marched him in the direction of Ki-Jala's large house. And as he paced alongside the savage, he realized that the maddening pound of drums was not within the village, but rose up from a hollow behind it.

He was marched into Ki-Jala's pelt-walled chamber, and finally face to face with the old king, he looked for the expected hate and fury. Startled, he saw no malice in Ki-Jala's steady gaze.

"You have proven your great love for us, White Brother," Ki-Jala said. "In the last darkness both you and your faithful black fought to protect our sacred blanket from the three white beasts. As an added test, you were placed in an unguarded hut. If you had fled from there, it would have been the act of a guilty man. Instead, you remained there, trustful of us."

"Wah," nodded Munson. "I want you to know, Ki-Jala, that I brought the white men here in good faith, without knowledge of their evil intentions."

"We know that," said Ki-Jala. "Which is why you are free to go your way and to return to us again and again as you wish.

You have shown yourself as steadfast to us as the sun that unfailingly gives us warmth and light."

"Ki-Jala and his people are good," Munson answered. He made the gesture of reverence that was the custom of the Wasili and walked out of the king's house.

HE WAS wise enough not to ask Ki-Jala about Foley and Ward. Not until he was being escorted down the lane from the house did he bring up the question to the guard who paced stolidly beside him.

"What of the other white men?" he asked.

"Ki-Jala told me to show you—if you asked," the savage said solemnly. "Follow me, White Brother."

Munson was taken into the hollow behind the village, where Wasili warriors were taking turns pounding the many various tom-toms in the Ceremony of the Drums. And he saw Foley and Ward had been strapped with *tonga* cords to the peeled-pole cot that stood in the midst of the drums. He paled as he got a glimpse of their faces. Dinning in his ears was the recollection of how Clive had said, "*Ten minutes more of the drums, Munson, and I swear I'd have gone raving mad!*"

It was the most truthful statement Clive had ever uttered. The stark insanity that glared from the eyes of Foley and Ward was evidence of that—an insanity that surely would soon result in death, for no human could endure such vibrations as were set up by the terrible drums.

Munson thought of how greed for wealth had driven these men to their destruction. Stories one heard in the jungle magnified with the telling, and the story of the Blanket of Red Starlight had been no exception. He well knew that the red stones of the blanket were not rubies. Because he had given the stones—cheap, glittering imitations which the Wasili valued more than gold—in trade with them for good furs, years earlier.

"Ki-Jala is merciful, White Brother," spoke the warrior beside him. "He knows that only some evil spirit could have driven these men to try and wrest the sacred blanket from us. Therefore he has given them up to the Ceremony of the Drums—until the devil is beaten out of their bodies."

The Silver Kraal

By BRYCE WALTON

Wandaro torture had turned the *Man-who-laughs-at-lions* into a trembling, drunken coward. Yet now he was going back—to brave again the silver horror of Soukou the Sacred.

THE tall, lithe white woman who paused in the west end of Stanleyville seemed unaffected either by the false beauty of the moonlit night with its sweet damp smell of night-blooming flowers, or by the underlying dark reality of Africa. She concealed her growing fear and concern well.

The native policeman who walked stiffly beside her was barely taller than she, and he was tall. She stood, undecided for a moment, after the policeman signified that the screened white house was that of Doctor Dennison. Then she thanked him quickly and started up the gravel path leading to the porch.

She knocked and a silently padding Negro opened the door.

"I'd like to see Doctor Dennison, please," she said in a clear low voice.

The Negro bowed, stepped aside for her, and she passed through to the consulting room.

Doctor Dennison was seated at his desk, an opened copy of his favorite medical journal before him. His thin bony face, sallow from too many years in Africa, looked up slowly at his unexpected visitor. He never bothered with appointments. He considered his services too valuable, and his cottage in the heart of the Congo was always open to those who needed his aid, be they black, white, or yellow. However, he had hardly expected such an exceptional visitor as this breathtaking white beauty. He said so, twirling an oily black cigar in his thin fingers.

She sat down, crossing long booted legs. Her eyes, pale blue as a Dublin sky, looked directly at Doctor Dennison's and didn't waver.

"Ummmm," he said uneasily.

"Something's got to be done about Larry Dane," she said immediately, and waited.

Doctor Dennison's eyes flickered, then

narrowed. He sighed because he was no longer young, among other things. "I failed to catch your name, I'm afraid. And by the way, is this a professional visit?"

"Miss Florence Sullivan," she said. "And I guess this is a professional call though I'm not the patient, yet. Something's terribly wrong with Larry Dane. He needs help. Why doesn't someone help him? Surely you could do something."

"Commendable purpose, Miss Sullivan. But one presenting tremendous barriers to success." He adjusted his glasses on his thin nose, then suddenly the cigar fell out of his hands. He stared, eyes bulging.

"You're not—not—Professor—"

She nodded. Her eyes fell, but only for an instant, then she stiffened bravely. "Yes, I'm Professor Michael Sullivan's daughter. I just came up the river. I was in London a month ago. Something's rotten here. I want to know what it is?"

Doctor Dennison frowned, swallowed with difficulty. He listened to frogs and cicadas. He wished this visit had never happened. He knew the little wizened Professor of Archeology from London had a daughter. He had talked about her often enough. But he wanted to forget about Professor Sullivan. Damn, how he wanted to forget!

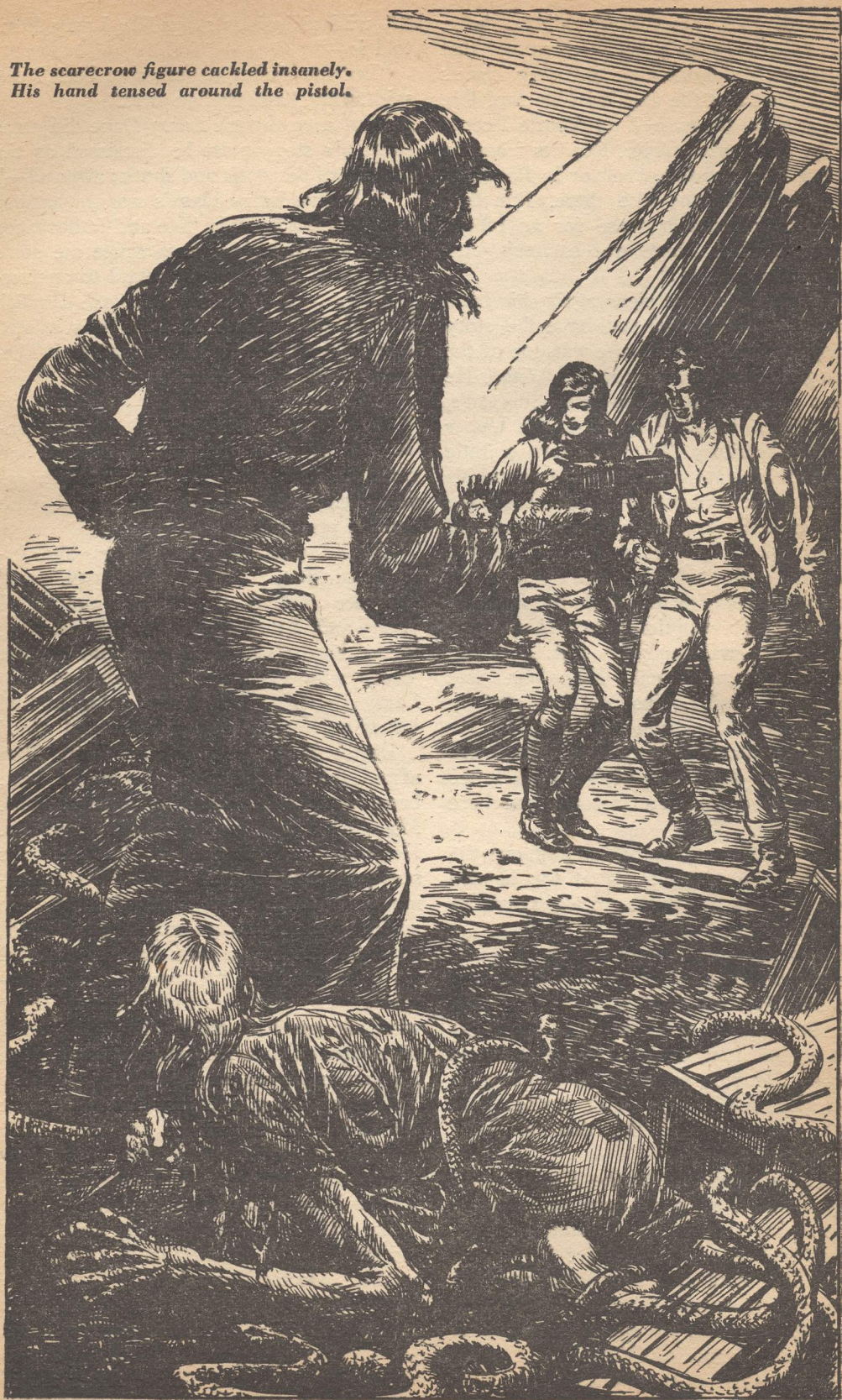
"I'm sorry, Miss Sullivan," he said hoarsely. "But it was such a shock that—"

She leaned impatiently toward him, her eyes bright. "Listen, Doctor Dennison. Let us be frank about this, or can you? My father and Larry Dane went to the Upper Lualaba. And my father was—was killed. He died in a horrible way at the hands of those—"

Her fists clenched. Doctor Dennison squirmed. There was pure hate in her eyes. And it looked much more violent, coming from a woman.

"—those black fanatical Wandaro," she

*The scarecrow figure cackled insanely.
His hand tensed around the pistol.*



finished. Her face twitched. "And father was killed in such a horrible manner that the shock did something to Larry Dane's mind. Isn't that the way it is, Doctor? Oh, I've read all the messed up reports I could get in the London Office. Reports from the Police here, and the governor in Ponthier-ville, and someone else there. But they didn't make enough sense for an official report, Doctor. There was something intentionally omitted!"

He picked up the cigar again, his hand shaking. "I'm afraid you have the story fairly straight. Larry Dane was one of the best guides and hunters in the Congo. He was a good friend of Professor Sullivan's, and offered to guide him into the Upper Lualaba territory. The Wandaro, a little known tribe, captured them. Larry and his Zulu friend managed to escape. I got the story from Larry slowly while he was still raving and it's still not complete. How true what little he said is, I don't know. He mumbled incoherencies a little too fantastic for official consumption, I'm afraid."

The girl was on her feet, standing tensely, fists clenched. Her face was drained of color, lips standing out in starkly-etched crimson slashes. "But according to that story, my father was—was tortured to death! Horribly! Wasn't he? And then fed alive to a Crocodile god those fiends worship!"

She turned and stood looking out the window. She was looking at the bloated moon shining on the tropical luxuriance surrounding the bungalow.

Doctor Dennison professionally admired her physical beauty, broad shoulders, and thin hips. But he shook his head. She should cry. She should get rid of all this hate with a good long cry. But when she spun around, her rust-colored hair swirling in a scented cloud, she wasn't crying. And Doctor Dennison knew then that she wasn't the type.

"What's happened to the King's men? Why don't they send some officers up there to investigate? What kind of a system is operating here anyway? My father was a little kind man who wouldn't harm a fly, and he comes here and is tortured to death by a lot of outlaw fiends, and nobody does anything. Why?"

"Why—why there's nothing, nothing really to go on," he stammered nervously.

"A wild ridiculous story like Larry Dane told is—"

"But my father never came back," she said tautly, "and that's a fact."

"But even though Larry Dane did come back, his story must be dismissed as the ravings of dementia and shock; after all—"

"I believe Larry Dane's story, whatever it is," she said softly. "He and father were very close friends. Larry wrote me some letters, but I never got around to answering them. He's the son of some English Lord I understand. And he was named Marsimbi by the Swahili wasn't he? The-man-who-laughs-at-lions."

DOCTOR DENNISON nodded uneasily. This girl was impulsive and could cause all kinds of disagreeable developments. She was strong-willed with definite purposes.

"He tried to help my father, and because of that, he's a broken man," said Florence Sullivan. "But he's much too young and, I understand, too good looking to rot in the Congo. I owe him a debt. That's why I'm here. I'm going to help Larry Dane. And I'm also going to find out what happened to my father and why."

Doctor Dennison shook his head. "I'm afraid that's impossible. He might have been once the-man-who-laughs-at-lions. Now he's a man who runs from shadows. He's not really insane, not in the strict sense of that misused word. He's suffering from an extreme case of shock. He evidently went through more than just hell up there. He saw a close friend subjected to—" he coughed. "Anyway, he's an amnesiac now. Can't remember much about what happened up there. His Zulu friend takes care of him. He gets a pension from London and lives on it, but that's all he's capable of doing. He just sits. He won't talk about his experience any more. His mind won't remember what it's been through. It must have been horrible, very. And if I were you, Miss Sullivan—"

She walked back to the long reed chair, and sat down on the edge of it. "I'm going up there, Doctor Dennison."

"What?" Dennison was on his feet. His glasses had fallen from his face, and his near-sighted eyes stared. "You appear to be intelligent, Miss Sullivan. After all, if a man like Larry Dane—"

"And Larry Dane's going back up with me," she went on, ignoring him. "I left the University to come here, Doctor Dennison. I know enough about psychology to realize that that may be the only way Larry Dane can recover his memory. He needs a challenge. And he's got to go back and face whatever broke him down. Face it, and defeat it!"

She straightened up, and was leaving the office before Doctor Dennison knew what was happening.

"Wait!" he almost screamed. "You can't do a thing with Larry. It's futile. He's retreated into himself. He's in a catatonic state. He doesn't want anything to do with reality. He's—"

"He needs help," she called back. "And I'm going to help him as long as the King's men are so reluctant to do anything. I believe in paying off all family debts."

"But the police won't allow you to go up there," yelled Doctor Dennison, desperately.

All the response that got from Florence Sullivan was a long derisive laugh. Doctor Dennison sagged back behind his desk and lit the cold cigar with shaking fingers. He stared moodily into the thick smoke. "What an amazing woman," he sighed. "And she'll cause the Colonel a lot of trouble, I'm afraid."

He reached for the telephone. He'd call the Colonel and warn him in advance. Anyway, it would be out of his hands then. He'd done enough already. As he waited for the connection he mused about the daughter of Professor Michael Sullivan. Somehow, he envied Larry Dane.

COLONEL Albert Richard Allingmore, chief of police for the Stanleyville district, eased his paunch, brushed a fat hand over a shiny bald head, sucked at one of his remaining teeth, and wheezed:

"My dear Miss Sullivan. Your attitude is completely justified. You have my profoundest sympathies. I, too, have lost a loved one to the hungry maw of the Congo. The Congo's a beast, my dear, a savage beast. My son, Raymond, a Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, came here to work under me as a Police Officer at Large. The Congo got him. It's all part of the beastly game you know."

"But I'm not satisfied with ignoring a

thing like this," she said. "I want action concerning my father's torture and death. It isn't normal to overlook such an atrocity."

"My dear Miss Sullivan," said Colonel Allingmore, mopping at his beefy face. "This case concerning your father is absolutely the only sign of trouble we've had from those Wandaro. In fact they're a complete mystery as far as official records are concerned. It is my opinion that poor Larry Dane's report was the raving of a fevered and broken mind. His talk of a giant crocodile with diamonds in its teeth is hardly what one would choose to call rational. Is it now, Miss Sullivan?"

"My father didn't come back, Colonel Allingmore," said Florence Sullivan. Her eyes were like frozen blue water. "That's all I know. Larry Dane said he was horribly tortured and fed alive to a crocodile. And still, the Stanleyville police refuse to do anything. The long arm of Scotland Yard wears a white glove it's afraid to soil!"

Colonel Allingmore flushed, his jowls turned a purplish red. "Come now, Miss Sullivan. I sympathize with your situation. I, too, lost a loved one in that damned infernal jungleland. But really, I see no reason to go off half-cocked, stir up trouble with those upcountry tribes, maybe cause a lot of bloodshed and massacre. You don't realize what a delicate balance is precariously maintained here, and that—"

She snapped him off. "I realize a great deal now that I never did before." She walked to the door. "I'm going to find out the real reason for this inactivity of the police here. Even though you don't intend to do anything, Colonel Allingmore, I do. Please don't take any of your petty official and juvenile steps to stop me." She left.

Colonel Allingmore slumped down, looked suddenly very tired. Wrinkles appeared around his eyes. He passed a shaky hand over his forehead. Then he straightened wearily and summoned two native policemen.

"Keep a close watch on Miss Sullivan who just left," he said in slow almost inaudible whispers. "Doctor Dennison called and said she was planning to go upcountry into the Upper Ulalaba territory. For her own safety, we must take every measure to prevent such a tragedy."

The policemen trudged out, ebony hides glistening.

The chief of police mopped at his fleshy face again, stared. A sick tiredness swept through him like a fever. With trembling fingers, he poured himself a drink.

LATE THE following evening Florence Sullivan went to see Larry Dane. An instant liking for the white woman sprang up inside the tall agile Zulu, Tanga, the moment she appeared at Bwana Dane's bungalow. Centuries of warrior blood flowed in his veins. He recognized and appreciated a fighter whoever or whatever it might be. Even if it were a woman. Though the women of his people were little better than chattels and slaves, Tanga knew that, like a Zulu warrior, this woman would rather die fighting than live as a slave.

He led her through the neat, cool bungalow and out onto a screened veranda where a huge white man, young, with light reddish hair sat motionless in a reed chair by a rattan table. His eyes were closed. A swizzle-stick rested against lax fingers. He was dressed in neat khaki shorts and open-collar shirt. But his face was very pale as though it hadn't greeted the sun for a long time.

The Zulu stood behind the chair, arms folded across his chest. He had not spoken except with his eyes. Florence Sullivan stood looking at the man.

"Marsimbi," she said gently. "Man-who-laughs-at-lions."

He opened brown eyes and looked at her. They seemed sane, but too uninterested. His mouth was partly open. She smiled, but he didn't smile back.

"Who is it, Tanga?" he finally said phlegmatically.

"Now, is that the way a white man greets a beautiful white woman in the depths of the Congo?" she smiled. "Where's your English chivalry? I've traveled a long ways to see you, Larry."

"Tanga. Who is this? What does she want? I'm tired. I want to sleep."

The Zulu hesitated. His brown-veined eyes looked questioningly at her. Somehow, he knew she was here to help Larry. He wanted to help Larry, too. He wanted to take the jungle trails again. Feel the shaft of a tasseled assegai in his hand. Feel the wind of the veldt and the cry of the hunt.

He was tired of staying caged with the white man.

"Listen, Larry Dane," she said. "I didn't come here to play mother for a frightened child. My name's Florence Sullivan."

Sweat leaped out of Larry's white face. He lifted a trembling hand and clutched a pack of imported cigarettes. The package flipped from his hand, spilled over the rattan table. She reached down and lifted one to his lips, and lit it for him. His throat tremored as he inhaled.

"His daughter," he murmured vacantly. "Florence Sullivan. He talked about you. Called you Fantastic Flora. I wrote you a letter or two didn't I. I asked you for a picture. Wha—what are you doing here?"

"Just being fantastic," she said. And then she lied a little. She didn't want him to know that her main interest was in curing him of the mental illness he had received from helping her father.

"I'm a scientist, too, an archeologist. I want to go up there and carry on the work my father didn't—finish. He was on the track of what might prove a tremendous discovery. Father's idea was that the sacred crocodile worship of these Wandaro was brought into the Congo long ago from the Temple of Tanis in the Nile Delta. The Crocodile was one of the gods of ancient Egyptians; they even had a city and a temple sacred to it near the site of present-day Fayum. Soukou, they called it. The Sacred Crocodile."

She studied his face. Of course her father had told him all this, but did the reiteration strike some spark in his shocked brain?

Larry Dane's face had drained, was a dead, wet white. His lips quivered. His eyes glazed. "Crocodile . . . crocodile! No! I don't—remember." He closed his eyes again and leaned back. "Don't—remember."

She steeled herself. It was a terrific gamble. "Larry Dane," she said. "I'm going up there into the Upper Lualaba country."

He said nothing.

"Larry. I've got to go back up there and so do you. You must come with me. We've got to finish father's work. There's a score to settle, Larry. Don't you hear me?"

Not a muscle in his big body seemed to move.

Her voice rose desperately, "Larry. Listen to me. I'm leaving tomorrow for the Upper Lualaba. Goodby, Larry."

She turned and walked to the screened door. She glanced back. Larry Dane hadn't moved. He was still sprawled backward, eyes closed, hands lax and dripping sweat. A feeling of hopeless fear began gnawing at her heart as she motioned to the Zulu and he followed her out into the dust and blazing equatorial sun.

She adjusted her sun helmet as the Zulu stood stolidly by her side. "I need you to help me reach the country of the Wandaro," she said in clumsy but effective Swahili. Since the report of her father's death four months ago, she had studied until she could understand and speak the language of Central Africa fairly well. Her training in languages in school helped her.

The Zulu's brown-veined eyes shone a moment with intense longing. Then he shook his head. He opened his mouth wide. White teeth gleamed. But—

Florence Sullivan stifled a cry of horror, reeled away. The Zulu's tongue had been cut out at its very roots. The Zulu stooped down and scrawled a name in the dust, "Lualaba," then pointed at his mouth.

She steadied herself with difficulty. For an instant she thought she was fainting. She managed to gain control of herself. "You want to be faithful to Bwana Dane. Believe me, Tanga, if you want your friend to again be known as Marsimbi, you must come with me, help me. The-Man-who-laughs-at-lions is not dead, Tanga. He but sleeps. We must awaken him."

The Zulu knew nothing of psychology. No understanding of the intricate thing modern science had made of the soul. He had an instinctive comprehension, though, of the white woman's purpose. If she went into the bush alone, Bwana Dane would follow. Besides, he, Tanga, wanted to fight again. His legs ached for the desire of trekking. His arms sighed for the lust of battle. His breath filled his great chest with a screaming cry for blood, for revenge. But he hesitated for a long time.

Then he nodded, yes. He turned and looked back once at the veranda where Bwana Dane, once known as the-man-who-laughs-at-lions, sprawled back weakly like a dead man. Then he turned and followed

Florence Sullivan down the palm-lined sidestreet of west Stanleyville.

The next morning, as the thick mist from the river hung heavily over the awakening town, Florence Sullivan and Tanga the Zulu left Stanleyville with only five pack-men. There was a tense strain drawn across her face as she walked beside the Zulu.

Two native policemen who had tried to stop them now lay tied up in the dust with bruised heads. She wondered if the chief of police would send others after them. Whatever was wrong, it was terribly wrong. But she couldn't think about anything else except the ominous, hopeless fact that they were leaving without Larry Dane.

It suddenly registered, fully and fearfully, in Florence Sullivan's brain that she was traveling into the dread land of the Wandaro, alone.

II

THE girl and the faithful but tongueless Zulu crouched side by side in a sea of almost impenetrable jungle of vines, creepers, matted undergrowth that stretched from the broken slopes of Fire Mountain, to the labyrinthine, winding Upper Lualaba.

This, according to the sign language of the speechless Tanga which she was learning to understand, was the end of the long, arduous trail. This was the region of the Wandaro. Here, the sluggish current of the river gave up its clouds of mysterious fog.

A carpet of green stretched around them. The two contrasting figures burrowed deeper into the vegetation, motionless, waiting. Death, torture and death, hung heavily in the steaming air. The Wandaro knew of their coming. She wondered how, because Tanga had been so careful to hide their approach, and he was highly skilled in jungle ways. But somewhere in the labyrinth ahead, the fanatical, superstition-crazed tribe stalked the helpless band with assegais and arrows with tips soaked in the brew of the Kombe bean. And that would be a quick, writhing death.

The Bugandas hovered in a small knot of terror. They had thrown away their packs and their headpads. "*Walumbe!*

Walumbe!" one chanted. "Death. Death!" The assegais in their hands shook with fear. Their eyes rolled in terror of the fanatical promise of the Wandaro.

The Zulu motioned. Florence Sullivan burrowed deeper between the roots of the giant baobab, peered through. Nothing to see except jungle. The drums had started their sullen distant throbbing. The dull, booming monody, though man-made, seemed an integral part of the jungle around the girl. It fitted in too terribly well, like the far away trumpeting of a bull elephant, the savage grunting of baboons, and the other vaguer sounds that defied analysis.

Her Winchester was ready, but Florence Sullivan wasn't. She was so frightened she doubted her ability to hold up much longer under the growing strain. For the first time, lying there at the mercy of unseen stalking danger, she wondered why she was really here at all.

She should have taken Doctor Dennison's advice; it was sound. Larry Dane was beyond any cure. If there was any hope for him, he would have followed her. From what she could find out about him, he had been a master of Congoese. But, then, maybe she had never really thought he would follow. Maybe her real motivation for coming to this almost certain torturous death was a blind, animalistic cry for revenge; and she had just used Larry Dane as an excuse. But that was ridiculous, because it was too irrational—one white woman trekking alone into the land of the mysterious Wandaro. She was completely helpless. Her only hope was in one, lone, tongueless Zulu; a warrior of great courage and jungle skill, but still only one man against an army of blood-thirsty fanatics enslaved by ancient sacrificial gods.

And even her Buganda boys were washed out. They were huddled in a tighter knot now, moaning a slow, fear-dripping dirge.

She saw the Zulu cast at them a look of profound contempt. He, too, held a Winchester expertly gripped in his huge hands; but close beside him, ready for instant action, was his big broad-bladed assegai and a battle axe.

There was no warning before it came. Only a sudden sighing whirrr, and a loud, sickening plunk! One of the Buganda

screamed, "*Nadzikambeeee!*" Then flopped about in the jungle matting, the assegai swaying in his back. The remaining Buganda whirled around and around, fear-crazed, then fled howling for the jungle wall. They fled directly into a cloud of arrows. None of them escaped.

The blacks writhed only for a few screaming seconds before they died. Those arrows and assegais were obviously coated with the deadly brew of the kombe bean. Florence Sullivan lay in limp, sweating fear in the thick lake of leaves, vines and dirt, burrowing deeper like a frightened animal. The Zulu was a thing of black stone, the Winchester ready in his hands. These were the Wandaro who had captured him before. The blood-mad blacks who had cut out his tongue. But now he revealed no fear of them. Only a trembling lust for battle. His lips formed the word, *bulala*. Kill! Kill!

And from him, Florence gained a new strength to meet their particular fate, whatever it might be. Her fingers steadied on the Winchester.

Then for the first time, she saw the Wandaro. They were Hamito-Negroid stock—resembling more the inhabitants of southern Europe than the Sudanese Negro. Though they had wooly hair, their features had the finer facial features of the Hamite. They resembled the Shilluk and the Dinkas, yet they were different in some strange way.

Three of them edged through the wall of jungle into the clearing, pushing assegais before them, horribly painted faces behind thick hide shields. Gleaming teeth and searching, darting eyes. The three hesitated, eyes wildly circling the elephant clearing, formed by feeding elephants a few days before, leaving it comparatively free of the larger brush and vines. One of the Wandaro kicked at a dead Buganda. Another bent down and up several times as though beginning a dance, then froze. Leaves stirred around the clearing; other savage faces peered through.

FLORENCE SULLIVAN'S mouth was dry. Her heart pounded like a boiler factory in her brain. A mist blurred her eyes. Yet, there was just a chance. They were burrowed so far down between the giant baobab roots, with dirt, leaves and

moss covering them. The Wandaro might overlook them, might think she and the Zulu had somehow slid unseen into the jungle and fled.

The Wandaro's eyes passed back and forth over their hiding place, bows raised, assegais poised. But those eyes kept overlooking her hiding place! They were beginning to poke around the clearing, looking for them. She almost sobbed aloud. If the Wandaro moved on a little way, she and the Zulu might slip out to the river.

Sudden sick horror flooded her. Her skin crawled. A shape was sagging down from the baobab branch just above her head. A deadly Mamba! The dreaded reptile swayed with silent hunger back and forth in front of her bulging eyes. A four-foot viperish length with a venomous, spear-shaped head that gaped at her. Beady eyes shone like little evil jewels. A bite from the hellish Mamba sent one to a quick, agonizing death.

The Zulu had seen it too. Cords stood out in his straining neck. His thick lips stretched a tight slash across his sweating face. There was little choice—the poison of the Mamba or the poison-dipped points of the Wandaro's arrows. But the black acted instinctively against the deadly snake. The Winchester cracked inches from her face, a red blinding flash. The Mamba's head was gone. The lumpy viperish body plopped heavily past her, jerking.

And then, guided by the sudden sound, the Wandaro leaped in with silent grinning ferocity.

She was firing with methodical speed, thankful for the many afternoons of practice preparing for the blitz in London. The Zulu was firing more rapidly but no more accurately than she. The clearing was piled with bodies, reeking with cordite. Other Wandaro who had continued to leap indiscriminately into the clearing, dodged back, yelling. An arrow thudded a few inches from her face, vibrating. A spear sliced past through the leaves separating her from the Zulu.

She saw a black face framed by large flat leaves, and fired. The face disappeared in the middle of a high cracked scream.

The drums increased their fervor for a few leaden minutes; then, abruptly, forwarned by a chorus of blood-freezing

cries, she saw the jungle wall crumble inward beneath a sea of onrushing blacks. They came from all sides this time.

She and the Zulu had no time to reload their Winchesters. The Zulu let out a burbling, inarticulate cry of savage joy; he leaped exulting to his feet. His assegai sped outward as though from a catapult, passed completely through a charging black. Thud . . . thungggg, smashed his battle-ax; he was flailing it through a bursting stream of faces like a giant scythe. Skulls crunched. Bone and sinew crushed. There was a sudden powerful reek of fresh blood.

A black smothering tide flowed over her. Were those sharp piercing screams hers? She didn't know. A painful darkness was sweeping through her consciousness like a drug—

Then, from a great distance, came the almost solid bellow of .45 automatics. The sea parted, gave way. She saw light again. A breath of clean air like heady wine flooded her crying lungs. A black Wandaro's lifeless body toppled across her, rolled aside.

The Zulu had crumbled to his knees, still grasping the bloody axe. Blood welled from a hole in his heaving chest. But he was grinning. His white teeth gleamed proudly as he watched the white man walking with slow precision across the clearing. In his hands, two heavy automatics thundered a steady death drone.

She couldn't recognize the face of the white man through the gun smoke. But even before he advanced to her side and dropped down, she knew it was Larry Dane.

The Zulu toppled heavily, like a fallen tree. One red-stained hand reached out and gripped Larry Dane's wrist tightly as he died.

Dane stared madly, unbelievably, at the dead Tanga. He shook his head back and forth. Finally he said shakily: "Sleep well, Mighty Warrior, *Ubu-tongo*."

She could feel Dane's body close against her, rock-like. His helmet was gone. His hair had fallen in a thick grimy mat across his bearded face. But that face—Her hope died sickeningly. She had thought he had changed, become once again the-man-who-laughs-at-lions. But she shivered as she looked at his face. Fear. Stark white-faced

fear. He was fingering one of the spears dropped by the attacking Wandaro.

"If—it isn't poisoned," he whispered faintly. "Isn't poisoned. They didn't care about the Bulangas. But not poisoned for us. They'll take us alive! *The Crocodile!*"

A mind-drowning roar swept over the jungle as a new attack of screaming savages flowed across the body-stacked clearing toward them.

THEY emptied their guns, then tried to fight with assegais. But sheer weight bore them down.

A little later, bruised, bleeding from prodding spears, the two whites were dragged through the jungle by the triumphantly yelling and leaping blacks. They were prodded through a high boma of bamboo, an exceptionally well made boma for jungle blacks. A circle of the usual daub-and-wattle huts greeted them. But a little beyond the center of the *kraal* was a huge and incredibly ancient looking temple made of stone. The architecture was apparently ancient Egyptian, constructed of square stone segments smoothly fitted, and overgrown with moss and vines.

And in front of the arched opening of the temple was a great round pit, or well, that seemed at least a hundred feet wide.

Florence Sullivan had studied enough about Central Africa to know that this wasn't Central African culture. Her father had been right, then. This was some strange survival of an Egyptian cult that had worshipped in the Nile Delta before the temples of Tanis 3000 or more years ago.

She shot a glance at Larry Dane. Surely this sight would shock his stunned mind back into normalcy. But he was, if anything, a more pathetic figure of a man than before as he was pushed roughly toward the temple, and around the periphery of the giant well. His muscles twitched; his hands fumbled at his sides, then his body heaved back, tendons standing out like swollen veins as he tried to push himself away from the evil looking pit. His eyes bulged at the brilliant, mercilessly blazing sun.

She was sobbing for him now. It was ghastly torture for him, and it was her fault. Her selfish desire for revenge. Now he was paying a terrible price. But Lord,

what courage he really had. After what he had seen, things that had almost completely shattered his reason, he had returned to face it again. She closed her eyes and sobbed rackingly now.

"Larry!" she suddenly burst out. "Larry! Can you forgive me?"

He turned a white tortured face toward her. "You were right. It's best this way for me. But you—*You don't know what they'll do to you!*"

And then she saw the High Priest. A figure appeared suddenly in the high arched opening of the ancient Temple. Florence Sullivan shivered, gasped. A tall, purple-robed figure that stood before the abruptly silent blacks with a timeless kind of cruel austerity. Only a little of his features showed behind a black silky beard—a sharp thin nose, black, piercing eyes. They bored into hers with a living fire. Bony fingers marked hieroglyphics in the steaming air. Every black in the *kraal* bowed down and froze there before the robed figure, murmuring prayers and incantations in a strange mixture of languages Florence couldn't place. Hemetic, Arabic, maybe some pure Egyptian, she didn't know.

She was standing close to Larry surrounded by black, humped shapes. Only four remained upright. Their guards. The sun flashed brilliant streamers from a long, curved sword which hung at the High Priest's side in a most unpious manner. It was a rich weapon, the sheath set with rubies and precious stones.

"Si-Ahmet!" yelled Dane madly. His hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. "You devil, Si-Ahmet!"

The High Priest spoke in a hard, brittle voice like the rattling of old parchment. And she gasped. He was speaking almost perfect English.

"Your destiny was to feed the hungry maw of Soukou, Larry Dane. So glad you have returned and brought with you a bride for Soukou as the Holy One planned. You have returned to the Shrine of Soukou the Ever Sacred with the third white sacrifice. Before the morning's sun, both of you shall descend into the Holy Crypt of the White One of the River."

The one whom Dane had called Si-Ahmet looked deeply into Florence Sullivan's eyes. Seemed to probe into the heart

of her soul, and she shivered in spite of herself. She pulled her eyes away, turned them on Larry Dane.

He was staring as though hypnotized at the High Priest. His huge body cowered back away from him and from the sacrificial pit. He was speechless with fear. Was there anything left in this hollow hulk of the man-who-laughs-at-lions? There had to be. Had to be! But where was it? If this couldn't bring it out, whatever could?

The Priest was droning in Arabic now. She wondered what the Arab's real motive was for this weird Egyptian cultism. Perhaps the ancient ritual of the Crocodile God had survived here for many centuries, but her woman's instinct seemed to be trying to suggest that in some way Si-Ahmet wasn't exactly what he appeared.

Meanwhile, Si-Ahmet had motioned with his slender, serpent-like fingers. Blacks with fear-haunted eyes clutched her and Dane and dragged them into the dark, comparatively cool interior of the Temple of Tanis.

The sudden transition from glaring sunlight to darkness totally blinded them. A smell of death, of decay and of fear permeated the blackness. A white blob seemed to float near them, and two eyes glowed. The Arab, Si-Ahmet, spoke:

"Tonight, you shall sit in the darkness that precedes the light of the sacrifice to Soukou the Sacred Crocodile. He waits below to feast and the Sacred One hungers. Do not think to overcome your destinies and escape, though you did this before, Larry Dane. However, that was a part of Soukou's plan that you might bring the Fair One for his hungering. I am *Khorp Hemitu, hem neter, ur ma*. I am Chief of the Artificers, Servant of the God, the Great One of Seeing. I brook no opposition. My will is the will of Soukou the Sacred of Sebek, is immutable as the winds that blow and the floods that rise. Rest in the ecstasy of knowing you will feed the thirsty longings of Soukou. In the ancient days Tanis knew many, and many knew the joys of Tanis; but now such an ecstatic joy is rare and few are introduced to its nameless wonders. You are chosen to descend into the jeweled jaws of Soukou, the Sacred, who carried the dead Osiris to land upon his back, and who has lived deathless and strong since the earliest times

of Vab. Rest and prepare your souls for the giving. Tonight the rites of Soukou shall be enacted that your passage may be sanctified."

Though she didn't hear or see the Arab leave the temple, she knew they were alone in the darkness. The stone door closed with a grinding screech.

There was an appalling silence. The blackness seemed a physical thing pressing from every side, stifling. She reached out, clutched Larry's wet hand. He pressed her fingers nervously, then when she sank down weakly on the cold stones, he dropped down beside her.

"Larry," she said presently.

"Yes."

"Is this the end? Isn't there any way to escape?"

"I don't know. I escaped once, didn't I? I remember that. But I wish I could remember how. There's so damn much I should remember. Not only could we possibly get away, but there are other things—but my head aches. It aches like it was full of devils with sledge-hammers."

She hesitated. "Larry. Is there really a big crocodile? A white one with teeth made of diamonds?"

HE DIDN'T say anything for what seemed hours to her. When he did speak, his voice was low and harsh as though he were tearing every word out of his brain by the roots.

"Crocodile. Yes, there is a giant crocodile down in the pit. I remember that much now . . . it glowed in the dark like a fiery salamander . . . but I don't think it had diamonds for teeth . . . it . . . No! It's here in the Temple! There's an effigy of the crocodile. The god itself . . . Florence, I remember that much now. Your father said it is an authentic survival from the Nile Delta, and its teeth are diamonds. Worth a fortune. I remember that, but . . . but the diamonds are . . ."

"But you don't remember what happened in the—pit, Larry?"

"No! No! Don't ask me that, please! I can't remember. Mind goes black, and dizzy. I get sick when I try to remember what happened down in the pit. Silly as hell isn't it? Listen, Florence, I appreciate what you've tried to do for me. You wanted to make a man out of me. You knew if

there was anything left in me at all, I'd follow you in here. But that isn't true, because I did follow you, and I'm still a yellow-streaked coward. You had another reason for coming here, greater even than my salvation. You want to revenge your father's death. But I can't even help you do that. I'm too yellow."

"You're not," she said. "You're not!"

"I'm useless to you. I've lost my nerve. It's only a matter of time until I finish breaking up completely. I'll keep sitting here thinking, thinking, trying to remember what's going to happen to you when they take us down into—into—I knew I'd never be able to help you. I tried to get the police to help, but they're too corrupt."

"Florence—have you any idea what true, soul-rending horror is? No. Of course you haven't. I do. It was so bad that evidently a lot of it has mercifully been blanked out of my mind. But the essence is there. A feeling of the most terrible torture. Of death dragged out far too long. Of—"

His voice trailed off. She shivered, though it seemed to be getting slightly warmer in the dark Temple of Soukou.

"But you've got to remember, Larry. Listen. Can't you remember when it was, during the sacrificial ritual, that you and Tanga managed to escape?"

He was silent for a long time. Finally he said faintly: "Tanga wasn't there. They had already tortured him, cut out his tongue for the pleasure of the blacks and turned him loose in the jungle. It's an ancient custom, has some religious significance. But how did I escape? I think it was—was after your father and I went down into the pit. There was a long stone stairway leading down. It got cold. There was an awful smell of death, and I heard water lapping against stone. There was a thick chill mist like a London fog. The stone was slimy and dripping, and we kept going down and down. Ahead of us was Si-Ahmet, carrying a torch and chanting. Then he was playing a flute, a reed flute. We tried to turn back up the stairs, but blacks stood behind us with spears. We couldn't go any other way, except into the—the—"

His voice slurred off, began muttering incoherently. She squeezed his arm. She knew enough about psychology to realize

that if he could once remember the whole experience, or relive it, he would be normal again. Cured of his awful fear. But unless he remembered how he had escaped from the pit, the fact that he was cured wouldn't matter anyway.

Time must have passed rapidly as they talked. For suddenly, it was night and the sacrificial rites had begun.

III

THOUGH the Temple door was closed, blotting out the barbaric spectacle of the rites, sound penetrated. They could hear blacks screaming. The weird rising and falling of chantings filled with superstitious awe. The clashing of cymbals. The high shivery piping of reed flutes. And the blood-fever pounding of drums.

Florence couldn't resign herself to the inevitable death and slow torture. She wasn't built that way. She tugged at Larry's arm. "Let's explore around in here," she whispered. "Maybe we can find some way out."

He got up. His hands gripped her shoulders. "There's no way out of this Temple. But I remember something else now. I know, now, that that effigy of Soukou is here on the other side of the Temple. You may have the rare privilege of seeing the exalted image of Soukou. Do you want to?"

He led her along a damp wall, around a long crescent. Evidently the god's image had been shielded in some way from the other side. But as they circled the interior of the Temple, a strange phosphorescence glowed. Then they were standing at the base of the god, Soukou. It was huge, carved from some hard stone, and it gave off a radioactive, silverish light. A ferocious, gaping, cold-lighted crocodile. It was bedecked with jewels. Its mighty jaws, gaping wide, revealed teeth set with massive diamonds that reflected the weird silver radiance.

"Those jewels," muttered Dane. His face shown pale and damp in the strange light. "There's something wrong with the jewels." He edged nearer, reached out, then withdrew his hand quickly as though burned.

"No!" he said sharply. "No! I can't—remember."

"Soukou," breathed Florence Sullivan, for an instant forgetful of their danger. "The Sacred of Sebek. Abject fear must have been the origin of the worship of such a repulsive monster. After death, the sacred crocodiles of the rivers of the Pharaohs were embalmed with secret rites."

"You should've kept on enjoying Egyptology from books, Florence," whispered Dane. "Lot safer and more comfortable."

"I know," she answered. "My father should have, too; but he didn't. I wish I had a gun. If we could only get that High Priest, Si-Ahmet, I wouldn't care what happened to me."

"Nor me?" queried Dane. But when she said nothing, he finally again began questioning himself about the jewels. "I remember jewels, but it seems to me that—" He pressed his head with his hands, started pacing back and forth, in and out of the glow from Soukou.

Florence Sullivan was suddenly conscious of the real depth of her rising terror. The waiting was maddening. No wonder Larry had cracked up. Anyone would. She would too, of course, eventually. Even now she wanted desperately to scream. The drums were beating faster. The wallings growing louder and more hysterical. The reed flutes rising and rising to a pitch that ground over nerve fibers like an invisible saw. And the time that wouldn't hurry. You wanted it to, and then you didn't want it to. A person wants to cling to life as long as possible, but he doesn't want to feel his sanity shatter to bits.

But the time did go, and fast, someplace. It went much faster than she realized.

The stone door of the Temple swung wide. Robed figures with blazing torches came through, chanting, contorting. The din of orgiastic sound swelled to a maddening drone. Sweating, shaking hands clutched her arms. She resisted, threw herself back, tried to run. But other arms were around her. She saw the tall outline of Larry Dane towering over the others. His reddish brown hair reflected the wavering torch light. There was a certain fearful defiance about his bearing now. The fear was still there, it seemed, but—

Could he break the awful hold the fear had clamped across his mind? If he could

only break the band of amnesia, all this would be justified perhaps—even death. Life wasn't really as important as some other vague, abstract things. Dignity of man wasn't an empty phrase, yet. It mattered still. It had mattered during the air-bombing over London. It mattered now as they were led through the moonlit *kraal* toward the dark miasmic pit of Soukou the Sacred Crocodile.

But if Larry Dane could only break that cloud that blocked out the fateful episode, he might remember how he had escaped from the pit. But that was the desperate, straw-grasping hope people have when they face the last inescapable crisis.

COLD STARS looked down on the mad scene: the blazing fires about the edge of the pit from which tendrils of vapor writhed; the twisting, contorting Wandaros as they swayed and cried about the fires; the lean figure of Si-Ahmet, the Great One of Seeing, who stood before them. His hand held a crackling torch upraised, and he was chanting in a mournful wailing cry that might have been Egyptian mixed with Arabic.

She felt spears prodding her back; she was stumbling along behind Larry Dane. In front of Dane, Si-Ahmet walked in measured strides, and then she noticed that his body was shortening, going down, down! Then Larry's great height lessened; he, too, was going into the pit. His head leaned back as though for a last long look at the sky. She took another three steps and a cloud of overpowering musty stench swirled up and around her. Heavy curling fingers of mist wrapped around her, pulling her down.

They were descending a winding stone stairway. Her hands touched damp ooze. Below her was an abyss of shuddering vapors from which came the low ominous gurgling of oily water. The torchlight of Si-Ahmet cast but a faint glow against the thick vapor. She saw only green-scummed stone from which small pale lizards stared blindly.

Then, thundering up from below, came a sudden exploding roar. The spears trembled against her back. A long wail rose dimly from above her in the *kraal*. The roar sounded again, and the very stones seemed to shake.

It was the bellow of a giant Crocodile.

She remembered very little of the descent into the pit of Soukou. She understood the psychology of amnesia now. No wonder even a mind like Larry Dane's chose to forget. A kind of blessed paralysis swept through her, numbing her senses against inevitable shock. She was aware only of descending down, down, of the musty odor growing stronger, of the lapping of the water getting louder, of the fog-mist thickening.

Then they were standing on a narrow ramp of slimy stone surrounding the subterranean pool—Si-Ahmet, Larry Dane, herself, and three giant Wandaros who blocked their flight back up the circular stone stairway. Mist swirled about heavily above the faintly stirring surface of the water. In the center of the big pool was a small artificial island of rocks. It was covered with human bones.

The nasal wail of Si-Ahmet echoed eerily between the circular walls of the crypt. She tried but couldn't keep her nerves from trembling. Her eyes burned as she waited helplessly, looking with desperate, impotent fear at the tall silent outline of Larry Dane.

Sweat poured from his face, soaked his tattered khakis. His hands moved aimlessly, his head was turning ceaselessly back and forth as though looking and trying to remember, trying to conquer the shock that had numbed his memory. From this same pit, from this very spot, he had escaped on another horrible occasion. But how?

Fear shot through her body like electric shocks. Long woven strands of cable-strong tonga were being lowered into the pit through the mist. The lengths dropped down like the beginning strands of a spider's web. The three Wandaro guards reached out, hooked them with their assegais, drew them in. They were tying the strands about her body, beneath her arms and across her breasts. She screamed. She couldn't control herself. Her screams reverberated insanely. They were swinging her out over the water.

She hung there, spinning in slowing gyrations. The chanting of Si-Ahmet rose higher and higher. Then he stopped and lifted to his lips a reed flute that dangled about his neck on a silver chain. The sound was madness. It skirled upward, sighing,

moaning like tortured souls. And then the water a few feet under her feet began stirring ominously. Little waves began, rebounding from the dripping stone, then she saw the V-shaped ripple pointing toward her.

The V widened and she saw the huge reptile floating slowly toward her like a big white log. It was an unbelievably large crocodile. And it was that rare light grey color that stirs natives to yammering, superstitious terror. A white Crocodile. The Bantus called it, The Mother of Serpents. The Swahili refers to it as Mjusibaferi, The Lizard God.

She began to realize then how she was to die. What had broken Larry Dane's mind. How her father had died. A slow death of fiendish sadistic horror. The crocodile would swim under her, reach upward with those gaping jaws. It could barely reach her by lunging up from the water. It could devour her at the will of those above who handled tonga ropes at the end of which she dangled, human bait for a reptile god.

She was only dimly aware of things, of the revolting vision of the approaching reptile, of the muted roar of rising frenzy coming from above her, of the rippling moan of Si-Ahmet's reed flute.

She wriggled her body around slowly in the air, managed to cast one quick desperate glance at Larry Dane. His face was a twitching mask of tortured conflicts. His huge body was half bent, straining against invisible psychological bonds. His mouth was open, working, but no audible sounds came out. Only harsh tortured breath.

And then she saw in the whole abrupt transformation of Dane's body that the man-who-laughs-at-lions had returned. She cried out and the sound, in spite of her almost insane terror, was one of exultant triumph. Larry Dane was fighting.

HE LEAPED at the swaying height of the Priest, Si-Ahmet. One arm circled his throat from behind; a knee came up. The thin back bent, and a loud sharp crack bounced from the cold stones. The high piping of his flute chopped off, halted in the midst of a climbing note like a choked woman. Then the three frothing Wandaro guards were leaping toward them.

She heard the water churn beneath her feet, and she forced herself to look down. There were wide jaws, a dripping maw widening. She managed, somehow, to lift her feet out of reach of the lunging, snapping vise.

The giant crocodile slid down again, the water rolling up on either side of it and the long tail whipping about with rage. The weakness of a final stage of terror flooded through her. She couldn't avoid the crocodile much longer. She reached up, tried to pull herself up the tonga rope, but such a feat was impossible for her now. She was too far gone. Her numbed mind barely functioned. Her body seemed separated from her mind, as though her brain were fleeing from the torture to come.

The crocodile swam away in a wide slow circle to come at her again.

She glanced toward Dane. The Wandaros were shrieking in fanatical rage. Afraid to use their assegais because of their High Priest writhing in Dane's arms. Dane had unsheathed the long curved sword. He tore the flute from Si-Ahmet's neck, snapping the silver chain, and tossed the flute to one side on the rocks. Then he sliced sidewise with the sword. Si-Ahmet screamed, crumbled onto the stones, one hand dangling in the water.

Dane was starting on the three Wandaros now. He was pushing them toward the steps that led upward. They were three against one, but the way was narrow under their feet, and their assegais were long. They were in each other's way. Si-Ahmet's sword was a brilliant shining arc in the dim torchlight as he swung it, battering down the defense of the Wandaro by sheer force and speed and power.

The foremost Wandaro went down, his face cut half through. Another swung his assegai like a clumsy sword. Dane swept under it, jammed the curved length of the sword in his belly, ripped it free. The native stumbled shakily, grasping at his middle, fell choking and clawing. He plunged into the water, and its surface was suddenly tinged with veins of blood.

Florence Sullivan watched the crocodile move away from her toward the smell of fresh blood. The dying Wandaro saw it coming, managed to scream once before the reptile dragged him under.

The remaining Wandaro yelled fearfully

up the stairway, then sprang over the slippery rocks. His assegai was a dark streak as he leaped. His mouth was a wide, gasping hole; his eyes rolled with fanatical fires.

Dane whirled around, flattened himself against the wet stone. The assegai missed him by a fraction as the Wandaro hurtled helplessly past. Dane inserted a foot between the long legs. The Wandaro jackknifed, his assegai clattered from his hand, and he ground his face crunchingly into the rock. Before he could recover dazed senses, Dane's sword swished down and severed the spinal cord.

There was an ominous silence—from above her head as she watched with fearful fascination. She could hear nothing. The Wandaro above probably couldn't see what went on during these sacrifices deep in the swirling vapor of the pit. They didn't know what had happened, but they surely suspected that all was not right with their sacred ritual. They handled the long strong tonga bark ropes that swung her above the now feasting crocodile. They had been waiting for the familiar tuggings as the crocodile worried at its human bait. They would become suspicious, undoubtedly, now that their fun wasn't happening according to schedule.

Dane was crouched on the edge of the pool, face gleaming in the torchlight, chest heaving. In his hand he grasped the sword of Si-Ahmet and an assegai.

"Flora," he called. "I'm going to swim out there. I'll hand you up the sword and you cut yourself free. After that, get out of here fast. They'll be down here pretty quickly now as soon as the rope's cut. They already know something's wrong."

"Get out? How?" she managed to ask.

"I remember now," he said wryly. "Almost didn't make it did I? There's a secret door over there on the other side. There's a secret passageway that leads into other underground rooms; and it finally comes out into the jungle outside the village. Only the High Priests have ever used it, besides me. But you have to play the flute there that Si-Ahmet had. As you go through the cave, for hell's sake, play the flute."

She wondered vaguely what he meant by Priests, why the plural? Where were the others? She had only seen Si-Ahmet. And why play a flute? Then she saw him make

a long clean dive that slid him almost beneath her in one long glide. He treaded water as he handed up the word. She could barely reach it.

She could hardly lift it either, but a bare touch of its razor-sharp edge against the tonga fibre, and she fell sidewise, landing flat on the water. Immediately she struck out feebly for the stone bank. She poured all the drained will and energy she had left into her arms and legs, but it seemed as though they were hampered by iron weights.

The crocodile had enough to eat, but it was old and wise, evidently, and believed in looking to the future. It would kill now while the killing was good, and feed later at its leisure. Kill while there was live meat to kill.

The sickening wet grey bulk of it glided effortlessly toward her. She swam frantically, hopelessly, on and on. It was only a little way, but it seemed she had been swimming toward that distant slimy rock for hours. Finally she felt the stone beneath her hands. And she tried to lift herself up. Her hands slipped off. She went under, came up strangling. She tried again and again, but her weight and her weakness and the slickness of the rock defeated her.

She hung there, barely keeping afloat, gasping and choking, trembling with terror. But she did manage to turn her head about. The blind waiting for death was worse than seeing it.

But Larry Dane was close beside the crocodile. He pushed with the assegai, prodding like he was driving a cow. The reptile curved about, its tail lashed the water to white froth. Its jaws opened wide as it moved quickly toward Dane. He jammed the assegai straight between the dripping serrated teeth. They snapped shut, clipping off the thick shaft of the assegai like rotten wood. Dane chopped downward repeatedly with the sword as the jaws opened a yard from his face. The sword bit into bone, glanced off. He chopped again, futilely.

And then she saw Dane, as the crocodile prepared to champ its jagged teeth on his head, jam the sword upright between the closing jaws. It was an old trick, much discussed, but seldom employed by amateurs successfully. It didn't wholly work

this time. The sharp point of the sword jammed upward through the roof of the reptile's mouth, allowing the jaw to clamp shut on Dane's shoulder, just deeply enough that he could not writhe free without tearing his muscles out. He squirmed and jerked inside the bleeding mouth. The sword was good workmanship, but scarcely designed for this strain. It was bending.

Then she saw Dane push his free arm through the crocodile's jaws, behind the teeth, through the hinge tissue. There was no leverage for the crocodile now. It was helpless except for its raking front claws. Water was rushing into its mouth. It floundered madly, its giant body contorting spasmodically, throwing great sheets of foamy spray tinged with red.

A dark, soft, almost pleasant unconsciousness flowed over her like a drugged sleep. She sank down beneath the water like a tired sleeper into a deep feather bed.

IV

ROUGH MOVEMENT brought her consciousness back again. She was being carried. She knew that as soon as deadened senses revived. She was coughing. She opened her eyes, saw Dane's bloody, dripping face close to her. He was running around the narrow ramp circling the subterranean well. Above her, she heard tense, frightened voices descending the stone stairs.

She glanced upward. Shadowed forms were creeping fearfully down. Bulging eyed faces peered in terror behind trembling assegais.

"I'm all right, Larry," she whispered. "Let me down."

He dropped her on shaky legs as he rasped: "That damn Raymond! He's getting away. I thought I finished him, but he's tough."

She saw the High Priest, Si-Ahmet then. He held one hand pressed against his side over a hole that welled blood between his fingers and down his purple toga. He was leaning against the dripping stone wall. And even as they rushed up behind him, a large segment of the wall swung away on a noisy, groaning pivot, and Si-Ahmet fell through.

"We've got to follow him or we'll never get out," gasped Dane. "He has the flute."

A cloud of hot air swept out and over them like poison gas, as they plunged through the opening and the stone door automatically closed behind them. From just ahead of them she heard Si-Ahmet weakly piping on his flute. Otherwise the absolute blackness of the subterranean passage was still. It reeked with the musty odor of staleness, and some form of unpleasant life was thick in her nostrils. She gagged.

She gripped Dane's arm. "What is this place?" she cried. "What is it that is alive in here?"

"Snakes," said Dane tautly. "Mambas. The High Priests, the real ones, kept them here as part of their ceremonies to Soukou. He was supposed to be king of all reptiles, remember?"

Forms were shifting and swaying about them. Hissings, and the rustling of deadly, viperish bodies became audible.

"They come down here from the jungle," said Larry. "The High Priests trained them not to bite while the reed flute is being played. We're safe as long as Raymond keeps playing his pipes."

"Raymond," she said. "Who—?"

"Colonel Allingmore's son," he said bitterly. "Why do you think he wouldn't send anyone up here? I was safe for him, too, as long as I had amnesia and couldn't remember. That's why he had Doctor Dennison working on me, to report the first sign of returning memory. But shhhhhh—these Mambas are getting annoyed."

They had been moving with slow caution forward behind the flute-playing Si-Ahmet, or Raymond Dennison, late of the Royal Artillery. She didn't know how she kept on edging forward, knowing the surrounding darkness was alive with waiting, poisonous fangs. She didn't know then, or never knew, how she kept from passing out again.

The forms wriggled and writhed close beside her. She could now faintly discern the glow of the evil monsters, the beady gleaming of their eyes. The damp, hot stench was beginning to overpower her. She staggered. The sounds of the flute were receding.

"Hurry," hissed Dane frantically. "He's leaving the cave now."

He dragged her rapidly forward until they were passing through a narrow cor-

ridor in which the air was fresher. The piping had ceased. The humid stench was dying. They wormed their way through a small, almost round, passageway and emerged into a small square chamber lanced with beams of golden light from narrow crevices above them.

The chamber was dimly illuminated only by this stray sunlight. She saw a bundle of rags in one corner, and piles of crates and boxes. Then out of that same corner stumbled the pain-doubled figure of Raymond Dennison. His face was streaked with blood. One hand still held his side; the other hand gripped an automatic. It was leveled at them, while he leaned weakly against the tamped earth wall.

"Drop that gun, Raymond," snapped Dane. "You've done enough already to disgrace your country and the Crown. You've ruined your father, and yourself. The least you can do is die like the gentleman you were supposed to be, once."

The man screamed. Florence shrank away from the insane shouting thing. He was past all reason. He was utterly mad.

"Damn the Crown and damn you! Why did you have to come up here and interfere? I only wanted the treasure. If you and that damn professor hadn't come up here poking around—" Bloody froth speckled his beard. His eyes wavered. But the gun didn't.

"The Wandaro were a lawful, if strange, tribe before you came and murdered two of their High Priests, inflamed the tribe with opium, and started human sacrifice. You're a traitor to your country and to all white men, Raymond. I'm going to kill you."

The insane figure's voice rose in a cackling laugh. He tensed the automatic.

Florence Sullivan heard a faint whimpering coming from the bundle of rags beside Raymond. Raymond swore, and kicked at it. A form dragged itself upward. A thing of bone with skin tight over it that somehow managed to move along over the dirt. Filthy rags clung to it. A skeleton face looked out of a tangled mass of grey beard. Glittering eyes looked feverishly upward as bony hands clutched Raymond's legs and tried to drag him down.

Kicking weakly, Raymond's attention was diverted, and Dane rushed him, knocked the automatic from his hand. Ray-

mond choked weakly and fell. The thing on the floor jammed a shiny knife into him again and again until he died.

DANE lifted the trembling thing to its feet. He handed him the flute from Raymond's dead hand, and pointed back the way they had come. "Return to your Temple and your gods, Si-Ahmet," he said. "The usurper is dead and you are free to again preside before the jeweled altars of Soukou. The White Crocodile is also dead, but your Temple remains. Return the people to the old worship, or your ancient Godship of Soukou will die."

A withered hand clutched the reed flute. Somehow, the emaciated High Priest tottered into the cave of the Mambas, the weird wavering tones of the flute faded with him into the darkness.

She sank down. He crouched beside her and looked at her silently. There was nothing of fear in his eyes now.

"It isn't time to rest yet, Flora," he said. "Come on. We should make it to the river before sundown."

She followed him across the room. He hesitated a moment. He reached down into a bamboo box and straightened up with a handful of light-dripping diamonds and rubies. "Even with my memory dulled, I knew those jewels up there in the Temple were not the real articles. Raymond had been slowly substituting fake jewelry for these. There's a lot more than just a fortune here. I'll bet these rubies alone are two hundred carats each. They'll have to be cut, but I'll bet they're worth two hundred thousand. Here." He handed her a blinding handful of the treasure. "They'll never miss this little bit," he grinned. "We may need a stake."

"A stake?" She feigned surprise as he dragged her away. They went through a bamboo door and up a narrow passageway. Dane pushed aside another heavy wooden door and they emerged into a jungle clearing of tangled vines, creepers and luxuriant flowers and high palms.

She looked back but saw only an impenetrable mass of jungle foliage. It might take months to find that door again.

Dane was in a hurry. They fought their way into the marshy jungle bordering the river. They waded through it down stream

until Dane located a dugout canoe. He helped her into it, then pushed off, settling easily into the stern on his knees and wielding the paddle in smooth strokes.

Until dusk, they drifted down the comparatively peaceful river, thankful for the sudden, almost paralyzing feeling of peace and safety and quiet.

They talked little, and finally Dane said simply: "There's one." He pointed, then guided the canoe into a small inlet.

It was a hollow log with one end in the water. Dane squatted down and began tapping out a message. He repeated it.

"Now we wait for an answer from Stanleyville," he said.

"What message did you send?"

"I sent a message to the Chief of police of the Stanleyville district," he said grimly. "To Colonel Allingmore. I told him that we had killed the murderous High Priest of the Wandaro and that we were heading downstream to report the whole case to the governor at Ponthierville. It won't be long before we get a reply. That message will be relayed at ten mile intervals all the way down and back.

She said nothing for a long time, listening to the unceasing drone of the approaching jungle night. And then, sometime later, the message came back and after listening intently for a time, Dane raised grim eyes.

"He's dead," said Dane. "Colonel Allingmore committed suicide. As far as I'm concerned, that closes the case." She nodded slowly.

He lifted her to her feet and they started downstream again in the dugout. Speech seemed unnecessary. They drifted.

Finally she said dreamily, "You know, I like the Congo."

Larry Dane stopped paddling, and the moonlight caught his teeth in a smile. "Then I suggest that you stay here. Remember what I said about the stake we have now."

"Mr. Dane! Is this a proposal?"

"That's up to you," he said. "It is if you accept. Otherwise, no. I never gamble."

She sighed, settled back against the gunwale of the canoe, and closed her eyes.

"What can a poor girl do," she said softly, "at the mercy of Marsimbi—the man-who-laugh-at-lions?"

BWANA TWO-SLEEP

By EMMETT McDOWELL

What dark secret did the strange man hold . . .
that even Spotted Death would do his bidding?

VICTOR COE bounced uncomfortably at the wheel of the Crossley, concentrating on the treacherous red road ahead. It ran through this arm of the Ituri forest like a tunnel, hot, black, dripping.

The light was fast fading. He switched on the headlamps, but it wasn't dark enough yet for them to make any impression. Lianas scraped the cab's roof. Gnats speckled the windshield.

"How much further to the mine?" the girl asked, raising her voice above the roar of the truck's engine.

Coe allowed his eyes to slide over her and back to the darkening road. She looked tired and hot with her topi shoved to the back of her head, her feet elevated against the dashboard.

"About three kilometers," he replied shortly.

"D'you make this run often?"

"Once a month."

"Do you always talk so much?" she asked sweetly.

Coe didn't answer. His khaki tunic and shorts were streaked darkly with sweat. His bare forearms resting on the wheel were brown, sinewy and covered with short black hair. His face was sinewy, too, as if all the fat had been rendered from him by the sticky heat.

The truck rumbled across a log bridge, ground through a pothole. The road was abominable, and they'd been on their way since dawn. Coe was tired himself—tired, dirty and irritable.

Besides, the girl asked too many questions. She'd been trying to pump him about the mine all the way up from Kilo.

"You think I'm being foolish," she accused.

"Uh-huh."

"Why?"

Coe frowned. Finally he shrugged,

said: "Everybody knows this isn't any routine inspection of your property. . . ."

"It certainly isn't!" the girl interrupted grimly. "Krylov wrote that the mine was playing out and advised me to sell. Well, I intend to see for myself."

"Krylov," he said, "is no fool. If anything crooked's going on, he'll be careful you don't see it. What do you know about gold mining?"

"More than you might think! I was raised in a mining town."

"This isn't the States," he pointed out dryly. "This is Africa—the Congo. Frankly, Miss Woods . . ."

"For heaven's sake, quit calling me Miss Woods!" she interrupted irritably. "My name's Beatrice—Bea."

He said: "Frankly, this trip of yours is not only foolish; it's dangerous. Suppose you did discover something. If Krylov's a crook, he'll never let you get out of the jungle alive."

"Rubbish!"

Coe went on as if she hadn't spoken: "There are a dozen ways he could kill you and make it look like an accident. Snake bite. Ptomaine poisoning. You'd have to be buried in six hours. There'd be no autopsy."

"Are you trying to frighten me?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"I don't frighten easily, *Mister* Coe. I can take care of myself. . . ." She broke off, pointing up the road. "What, in heaven's name, are those?"

Victor Coe saw a dozen tiny black figures. They were scattering for the cover of the jungle ahead of the truck like a flushed covey of birds.

"Pigmies."

"Oh." Beatrice Woods settled back in the seat staring at them curiously. The truck rumbled on into deeper darkness, its

headlights beginning to take hold of the night.

The girl asked suddenly: "Do you think the mine's exhausted?"

Coe hunched his shoulders with an impatient gesture.

"Look, Miss Woods. Krylov, hires me to haul in supplies once a month. I don't know anything and I'm not curious. If you want to snoop around that's your business. But if you're smart, you'll be like the three monkeys: see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Play it dumb. And get the hell out of there quick as you can!"

"So you can talk!"

"When I've been prodded enough. But unfortunately, I'm responsible for you. We're both Americans, and the District *Administrateur* asked me to keep an eye on you."

The girl looked indignant. "I'm really quite capable of taking care of myself. . . ."

"You've said that before," he pointed out.

A lion roared suddenly back off the road. It was like the crash of an organ, stilling the jungle. Then one by one the noises came back on. A zebra barked. The cicadas tuned up again.

The jungle night, hot, naked, primeval, poured like a black flood through the cab windows. With a shiver the girl glanced at Coe then slid along the seat until their shoulders touched.

"All right," she said. "You keep your eye on me."

IT WAS only a few minutes before they caught sight of square yellow eyes gleaming through the jungle. A rhythmic thub-thub reached their ears.

"What's that?" Beatrice asked.

"Drums. The blacks must be having a dance."

With a lurch the Crossley pulled up before the dim sprawling outline of a bungalow with yellow light streaming through its windows onto a long veranda.

"This is it," said Coe, climbing down with a grunt of relief, stretching cramped muscles. The pungent smell of wood smoke hung in the air drifting from the native huts. The beat of the tom-toms sounded close at hand.

Beatrice leaped to the ground. "Where's Krylov?"

Coe frowned. "He's around. Let's go in." He started for the house, the girl trotting at his heels.

The door stood open. He pushed the screen aside, followed Beatrice into a big square room lit by a naked electric bulb dangling from the rafters. Somewhere an ice machine whirled gently.

"Krylov!" he called. "Hey, Krylov!"

There was no answer. In the silence the throb of the drums held an ominous note.

Beatrice shivered despite the oppressive breathless heat. She was a leggy girl, her fawn jodhpurs fitting snugly to slim hips. She yanked off her topi, gave Coe a puzzled look.

The disturbing rhythm of the drums had quickened. They seemed to keep time with Coe's pulse. He said: "I'll take a look through the bungalow."

There were only four rooms. He peered quickly into each of them one after the other, but the house was deserted.

"Where are the houseboys?" Beatrice asked.

"At the dance, I suppose. That must be where Krylov's gone." He paused listening.

"What is it?"

Gradually the drumming had reached a frenzied frantic tempo.

"That's not a dance!" said Coe harshly.

"That's *juju*!"

Beatrice's eyes widened. They were a deep cobalt blue. Her brown hair, dark with perspiration, clung moistly to her temples. She looked very young, Coe thought, and hot and dirty and appealing.

Then the drums stopped.

The night was utterly still. Not a sound broke the startled hush of the jungle.

Suddenly a woman began to scream. It was a distant eerie sound. It sent a cold spasm up Coe's spine. Other women joined their voices to the first, infected by the contagion of terror.

"What's happening?" Beatrice cried, clutching his arm.

He shook his head. "I don't like it. I don't like it at all." He started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Get a gun and a light. Krylov may be in trouble."

Beatrice followed him outside to the Crossley. "What do you mean?" she kept



He thrashed madly in the water, but the big snout glided inexorably forward.

asking. "Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

Coe jerked a carbine from the truck's cab. It was a short vicious Mannlicher-Schoenauer, chambered for the 30-06. He stuffed a box of cartridges into his pocket, grabbed a powerful spotlight.

The screaming had begun to give way to a peculiar wailing hideous chorus.

"Do you hear that?" he asked brutally. "They're keening for the dead. Somebody's been killed!"

The girl gasped. Then she dug into the dark cab, emerged with a .45 Colt in an open western-style holster which she buckled about her slim hips.

"Can you use that cannon?" he demanded sceptically.

Beatrice's eyes were enormous, but her voice was steady. "I can use it."

He wheeled abruptly, switching on the flash, and started toward the distant wailing. The girl in spite of her long legs had to trot to keep at his heels.

THE BEAM in Victor Coe's hand drove a bright white circle into the night. It speared across the clearing, glinted on dripping green fronds.

Beatrice asked jerkily: "Do you think it's Krylov they've killed?"

"Could be."

"But surely they wouldn't attack a white man!"

"Why not? Krylov's been driving them like cattle. They hate him, but they're terrified of him. Maybe they've worked up enough courage to stick a spear into him."

He stopped talking as they reached the jungle, playing his light across the leafy wall of foliage. The entrance to the trail was like the mouth of a tunnel. "Keep quiet now," he ordered and plunged down it.

The keening had sunk to a whisper. Before they'd covered fifty yards more it stopped altogether.

Thunder muttered overhead. A few drops of rain spattered into the leafy roof. The air was like steam. Mud and mould lay underfoot. They scrambled over a moss-green log that had fallen athwart the path.

"This leads toward the witch doctor's cave," he explained in terse sentences.

"The mine's over that way." He motioned to the right. "Village that way, too."

It was raining steadily now, one of those sudden tropical downpours. It made a sighing sound in the tree tops, but so far only a few fat drops had struck them. No longer were there any voices up ahead. Only the whisper of the rain.

Streams of water began to penetrate the foliage and run down their necks. It was warm and sticky. In seconds they were drenched.

Suddenly they broke out of the forest into a clearing. Coe flashed the light about. The bare earth had been rammed hard by the stamping of naked feet. Steam rose thickly from the embers of a drowned fire.

"Gone," he said.

The girl shivered. To their right the flashlight glinted on the rain-speckled sheen of a river. Suddenly Beatrice gasped, pointed across the clearing.

"Look!"

Coe had seen it already, the ruddy tint of flames reflected against black tree boles. "That'll be Sabu's fire. I want a word with that gentleman."

"Who's Sabu?"

"The witch doctor."

Shielding the lock of his carbine with his hand, he made his way warily across the clearing, and slid into the jungle on the opposite side. A cliff loomed threateningly above them. The fire, Coe saw, blazed in the mouth of a cave.

It was an evil scene, like the witch's cavern in Macbeth. He squinted, peering into the shadowy recesses of the chamber. The rain continued to pour down in buckets.

"Come on," he said, edging in past the fire.

A strong putrid stench assailed their nostrils.

"Whew!" said Beatrice. In the ruddy light she looked drowned. Her hair was stringing to her shoulders. Her tunic was sticking like a wrinkled postage stamp.

Coe caught a brief glimpse of gourds, bits of fur and bones. The rear of the cavern was cleared off by a string bead curtain.

"Take care!" a voice cried suddenly in French. "At your feet!"

INSTINCTIVELY Coe leaped backwards, bumping into the girl, and flashed the light downward.

Beatrice screamed.

A Gaboon viper lay coiled in their path, its blunt ugly head reared a foot above the stone floor, its eyes glittering like cut emeralds.

Coe sucked in his breath. The snake, he saw, was tethered to a rock by a short length of twine.

Then the earsplitting crash of a gun went off right behind him. He almost jumped out of his clothes.

The snake was transformed into a headless, thrashing fury!

Coe spun around. Beatrice Woods was staring past him at the headless snake. The big forty-five dangled from her hand, but it dangled in a competent manner, and a curl of smoke still eddied from its muzzle.

"*Mademoiselle*, I perceive," said the strange voice, this time in English, "is of the West!" There was a hint of amusement in the deep masculine tones coming from the rear of the cavern.

Coe jerked the beam toward the voice.

A giant of a white man was caught in the spot. He must have been six feet four in his bare feet. He was dressed nattily in English-cut khaki shorts and tunic and field boots. He stood in the throat of the cavern, stooping slightly because of the low ceiling, one hand holding aside the string bead curtain.

"Krylov!" Coe exclaimed.

"Who else? Would you be so kind as to displace your light from my eyes."

Coe let it drop, and the giant moved into the glow of the firelight, his black eyes fastened greedily on the girl.

"*Mademoiselle* Wood, is it not?" he asked in that deep musical voice. "I have been looking forward to this meeting. I did not expect you until tomorrow, though."

His English was precise, stilted, flavored with a strong foreign accent.

Beatrice was staring at him fascinated. "But I don't see . . ."

"The native grapevine," he explained. "The drums, you comprehend. They are swifter than the telegraph."

Coe asked sharply: "What was all the racket? We thought you might've run into some trouble."

"Trouble from these *canailles*? No, I

came to watch the ceremony. It is a ver-ry interesting one, you know. This is the Night of the Crocodile."

"The Night of the Crocodile!" exclaimed Beatrice. She still looked bedraggled as a wet chicken, but color glowed in her cheeks like rouge. "It sounds thrilling. What does it mean?"

A slow smile split Krylov's heavy Slavic face. His complexion was sallow from too much quinine, too many years in the jungle, but his black eyes glittered with vitality.

"These blacks, these Wanyari, they are most primitive. Their chief god is the crocodile. Come. Permit me to show you something of interest."

With a wave, he led them toward the bead curtain, stooping to avoid the roof.

"What was the snake doing out front?" Beatrice asked suddenly.

"Oh that. That is a familiar sorcerer's trick to discourage visitors." He held the curtain aside. "Flash your light in there, Coe. Take heed! Do not approach too close!"

Coe swung the torch up the cave. It widened beyond the curtain, he saw. Then the light revealed a gaping pit in the rock floor. It was a good twenty feet in diameter.

He drew close to the lip, pointing the beam into the depths. He heard Beatrice gasp.

Twenty feet below, the light glinted on turgid black water. Something resembling a log floated to the surface. Jaws opened cavernously and snapped shut. Then with a swirl the log sank out of sight.

"The crocodile pit!" Krylov said with a chuckle. "It is connected underground with the river."

Coe was silent, staring down into the pool with a curious intentness. Beatrice shivered, drew back from the edge.

Krylov said: "On the Night of the Crocodile, a virgin used to be thrown into the pool. But that was before the Belgians put a stop to the practice. Now they make only the token sacrifice."

"Horrible!" Beatrice burst out with a shudder. "Horrible!"

Victor Coe withdrew the beam from the pit. His lips were thin; but he held his tongue.

He had glimpsed something red down

there—a big splash of it glistening on a stone close to the water line. Blood! He recalled the screams of the women, the keening for the dead.

The crocodile god had received no token sacrifice that night. It had fed on a living victim!

VOICES awakened Coe the next morning. He sprawled naked on his bed, hot, loggy from oversleep. Stripped, his body had the sinewy tough look of raw-hide. Black hair grew on his chest and legs as well as his forearms.

The voices were a persistent drone in his ears. He recognized Beatrice's cool crisp inflection, the deep musical resonance of Krylov's bass. Then he caught the words: "Assay sheets."

Coe's brown eyes narrowed. He rose cautiously, padded on bare feet to the door, laid his ear against the panel. The voices became suddenly distinct.

". . . explain! Explain these if you can!" Beatrice's voice was coldly furious.

Krylov said: "The paydirt, as you so quaintly phrase it, is finished." He sounded patient, as if he were talking to a recalcitrant child. "It is not so plentiful as before. There is nothing beyond that to explain."

"Rubbish! The analysis shows a higher percentage of gold than before!"

"The assay sheets are deceptive. The dirt is richer—true. But, *mademoiselle*, there is not so much of it."

"That's sheer rot. I'm no child, Mr. Krylov. I know mining. In the last six months, production has fallen off eighty per cent! Why? I want to know why?"

The Russian manager was beginning to sound exasperated. "*Mademoiselle*, the gold is not inexhaustible. Even with the shares which the Belgian government deducts, you have obtained more than half a million dollars. What is it that you expect? The Rand?"

Frowning, Coe kept his ear pressed against the panel.

"I am an engineer," the Russian went on in his patient voice. "I, too, know mining. Again let me advise you to sell while you can find a buyer."

"I couldn't get a tenth of its value!"

"Of course not. But in a short while there will be nothing. Unload, *made-*

moiselle, while the mine is still producing."

"Rubbish!" Beatrice said again. "The gold's there!"

A heavy silence followed. Then Krylov said: "This is arriving nowhere. I must descend to the workings. If you care to inspect them . . ."

"Thank you," Beatrice replied stiffly; "but I've some unpacking to do. Victor will show me the way later."

Coe could hear the sound of retreating footsteps, the squeak of the screen.

With a worried frown he returned to the bed and lit a cigarette. Damn the girl, he thought. Why couldn't she learn to keep her mouth shut. Krylov was a dangerous man. If he thought he was in danger of exposure . . .

Coe's eyes lit on the carbine lying across the seat of a chair, and a frown creased his lean sunburned face.

What the hell, that wasn't where he'd left it last night. He distinctly remembered leaning the gun against the back of the chair.

He reached for it, worked the bolt. Nothing seemed to be wrong. But he ejected all five cartridges, examined the mechanism, tested the trigger. He could discover no evidence of tampering.

He started to reload the weapon, then paused suspiciously. The cartridges felt wrong. He inspected them narrowly, held them up to his ear and shook them.

There was no answering slush of loose powder!

With a curse, he got his jackknife from his trousers pocket, pried the soft-nosed slug from the case. The shell was empty.

Coe felt his scalp crawl. While he slept, someone had crept into his room, unloaded his carbine, substituting dud shells. At his first shot, the primer would have gone off. The bullet would have lodged in the barrel, rendering the carbine useless until he could get it to a gunsmith.

White-lipped with fury, he broke open the fresh box of shells, reloaded the carbine. Someone was due for an unpleasant surprise, he thought grimly. A damned unpleasant surprise.

SHAVED, bathed and with breakfast under his belt, Victor Coe felt better able to cope with the situation. He sprawled in a wicker chair on the veranda,

drinking a cold bottle of beer from Krylov's private stock and listening to Beatrice.

The girl's cheeks were flushed. She was wearing shorts and a man's white shirt, but the soggy heat had already wilted them. She was saying:

"The man's a crook. I found the assay sheets and looked them over before he could stop me. They show that the deposit's fabulously rich!"

"Figures can lie."

"Rubbish! This is a placer mine. There's no question of a vein pinching out. Krylov's been stealing most of the gold. That's obvious."

"Have you any proof?"

"No-o."

Coe leaned forward, tapped her on the knee. "Then the thing to do is to clear out. Hire a competent man to come in and make a thorough investigation. Fire Krylov, if you wish. But wait 'til you're safe at Kilo. For heaven's sake, don't go off half-cocked!"

Beatrice regarded him in exasperation. "You can be the most annoying man! I took a degree in engineering. I happen to be perfectly competent to make the investigation and what's more I intend to do it!"

From the corner of his eye Coe suddenly caught sight of Nanga, the cook, standing at his elbow. No telling how long the black had been there, waiting with the steady patience of an animal to be noticed.

"What the devil d'you want?" he snapped.

"Bwana," Nanga replied in mixed Kiswahili and French, "me speak *mam'selle*."

"Well, go ahead. Talk to her."

"No speak tongue of *mam'selle*."

There was something in the black's tone that caused Coe to regard him sharply. Nanga was pale, his normally chocolate complexion a blanched *cafe au lait*, his eyes showing too much white.

"All right," Coe said in a thoughtful voice, "what do you want to tell her?"

"*Mam'selle* go quick to her own village before sun go down. Big Bwana and witch doctor make fever medicine. *Mam'selle* no go, *mam'selle* die of the fever!"

Coe looked startled.

"What's he saying?" Beatrice demanded.

He motioned for her to keep still. "Why do you tell us this?" he asked Nanga in Kiswahili.

"Big Bwana, he . . ." The cook broke off suddenly, his eyes staring down the path toward the jungle.

"Go ahead. What about the Big Bwana?"

"Big Bwana come!"

Then like a startled shadow, Nanga slid into the house.

Coe glanced up, caught sight of Krylov striding across the clearing, and whistled soundlessly.

The giant Russian was decked out in white linens. A yellow silk scarf encircled his throat. Instead of a cork helmet, he wore two panama hats.

A smaller man would have looked ridiculous striding out of the jungle in an outfit like that. But not Krylov. On the Russian, it was dashing.

Krylov, Coe realized, had dressed for Beatrice's benefit. He cast a sidelong glance at the girl. She was staring at the manager in fascination.

"He—he's magnificent!" she breathed.

"Yeh," said Coe sourly. "So's a rogue elephant."

THAT COOK!" Krylov bellowed as soon as he approached within hailing distance. "Of what was he speaking to you?"

Coe waited until the manager reached the veranda before replying. "You mean Nanga? He was asking about lunch."

Krylov's face was red, furious. "I left orders for *dinner*!" He stared at Coe in disbelief. "Is that all he desired?"

Coe shrugged. "What else did you expect?"

"Anything! Anything!" Krylov made a visible effort and got a grip on himself. He dropped into a chair and stretched out his long legs. "A croc got his daughter yesterday—and he persists in attaching the blame to me."

Beatrice gasped. "But why does he blame you?"

"Oh, the girl was washing my linen in the river when the croc grabbed her."

"How horrible! The poor man."

Krylov chuckled. "Don't waste your sympathy. He is a savage, *mademoiselle*. He insists that I pay him for the loss of

his daughter. It is his pocketbook that is touched."

Beatrice said, "Oh," with a peculiar expression.

Coe didn't comment, but he guessed that it had been Nanga's daughter who'd been sacrificed to the Crocodile God. He made a mental note to have a chat with the cook at the first opportunity.

The Russian pulled himself to his feet, glanced at the jungle. Somehow he gave the impression of listening—waiting for something to happen.

"But I forget," he said and paused. "I came to escort you to the workings, *mademoiselle*." Another pause, another sly glance toward the leafy wall of foliage. "The blacks are unsettled. There has been trouble between them and the pigmies. It would be dangerous for you to pass through the jungle without me."

Coe asked: "What trouble, Krylov?"

The manager shrugged. "It is their eternal feuds. They have flared up again." He stopped, held up his hand dramatically. "Listen!"

From the south came the irregular thumping of a single drum. It was a strange stuttering beat, very faint and far away.

Coe's brown eyes narrowed. He thought the drum had begun at a damned fortuitous moment. Almost as if it had been planned.

But he didn't say anything.

"What's that?" Beatrice began.

"Quiet!"

Krylov listened, moving his lips soundlessly as if reading to himself. Gradually his face blackened with passion.

"It is the pigmies!" he roared. "That is war talk!"

The drum fell silent and another began to answer. It was fainter, farther away.

Coe turned to the girl, said: "Get your things, Bea. We're clearing out of here!"

Beatrice looked surprised. "But I don't want to go."

"Listen," said Coe grimly; "I'm responsible to the District *Administrateur* for you. . . ."

"No," Krylov interrupted. "No. No. You must not try to get through now. It is impossible. You can not reach Kilo before dark. The road will be very dangerous!"

"Sorry, Krylov. If there's trouble among the blacks, we're leaving. I'll chance the road."

He stood up lifting the carbine into the crook of his arm. "Get your things, Bea."

The girl raised her eyebrows.

"Get your things!" he shouted in exasperation. "Or by damn, I'll carry you out to the truck!"

Beatrice swallowed, rose with stunned alacrity.

Krylov said in a disapproving voice: "This is foolishness, Coe. But if you persist, I must send with you an escort. Wait please. While I gather the men."

Coe nodded, his expression blank.

Krylov stepped inside the door, reappeared immediately carrying a Rigby double-barreled express rifle. He crossed the veranda, plunged down the path at a half run and disappeared in the jungle.

COE stared after him a moment, then swung on the girl.

"Never mind your junk!" He grabbed her wrist, started for the truck pulling her after him. "We haven't time."

"Victor. Victor! Have you gone completely crazy?"

He said: "Did you think Krylov could understand that drum talk? No white man's ever been able to decipher it!"

"Then—then how did he know the pigmies were on the war path?"

"They aren't and he didn't! Krylov wants to keep us here at all costs!"

With his eyes on the edge of the jungle, Coe boosted her into the cab. The Crossley had a right-hand drive, and he ran around the hood, jumped behind the wheel, tramped on the starter.

The engine whined and caught. He gunned it, released the clutch. Wheels spinning, throwing mud, the truck leaped out like a startled kudu.

They hurtled down the red road, lurching, bounding over bumps. Branches cracked against the cab. Suddenly Beatrice screamed and pointed.

"The bridge! It's out!"

Coe saw it at the same instant. Just ahead lay a ravine with mud banks. The bridge was only a splinter of logs.

He slammed on the brakes. The Crossley skidded, began to slither sideways. Then it straightened and came to a stop

only a few yards from the bank of the stream.

"Whew!" said Coe and wiped the sweat out of his eyes. His skin felt clammy.

Beatrice giggled. It was sheer nervousness. "What—what are we going to do now?"

Coe regarded the gulley, his expression bleak. The mud banks dropped perpendicularly to the black, slow-running stream. It would be impossible to get the truck across until a new bridge had been thrown up.

He said: "Go back, I suppose. But listen, Bea, you mustn't get out of my sight." He told her swiftly about the cook's warning, about the sacrifice to the Crocodile God that had taken place the previous night.

Beatrice's eyes grew round with fright and she swallowed dryly. "You—you think Krylov has anything to do with the sacrifice?"

Coe said: "Old Sabu wouldn't have dared revive the custom if Krylov hadn't backed him up." He turned the Crossley around, started back for the bungalow.

"But why?" Beatrice's eyes were like saucers.

Coe shrugged. "It gives Krylov a hold over the Wanyari through the witch doctor. But there's more to it than that. I'd like a look around that cave!"

The truck slewed around a curve, burst out of the jungle. He brought it to a sliding halt before the bungalow of soft red congo brick. He looked around for Krylov, but there was no sign of the Russian.

"Keep your nerve, Bea," he counseled. "And remember, don't get out of sight."

She nodded mutely. She looked pale, Coe thought. Then her teeth began to chatter and a shudder rippled through her.

"I—I can't help it," she wailed. "I'm freezing!" Her teeth sounded like castanets.

He stared at her in consternation. "Good Lord," he said, "what a time to come down with the fever."

BY THE TIME Coe got the girl into the house her cheeks were flushed, her skin hot and dry, and she was complaining of a furious thirst. He helped her get out of her clothes and into bed.

Then he found the medicine chest, dosed her with quinine.

She looked up at him with frightened miserable eyes. "What is it, Victor?"

"You've a touch of malaria."

"I—I feel like hell."

Coe said: "We'll get a doctor up from Kilo."

"But the pigmies! Don't leave me, Victor, please!"

"I'll send a runner."

He started through the house in search of the blacks, but it was deserted. Even Nanga, the cook, was gone and Krylov hadn't returned from the Wanyari village.

The hollow-log drums continued their talking, now from this quarter, now from that.

When he returned to Beatrice, she was delirious. She had kicked off the sheet as if the touch of the cloth was intolerable against her bare skin. He drew the sheet over her, but she moaned and kicked it off again.

From the front of the bungalow, he heard the screen click, then Krylov's heavy steps approaching.

"Coe!" the Russian called. "Where are you, Coe?"

"In here."

Krylov appeared in the doorway, paused, a startled expression crossing his face. "What has occurred?"

Coe surveyed him narrowly. The giant's white suit was splotted with mud. His silk scarf was missing. And there was a hole through the top panama.

"What is it that has occurred?" Krylov begged. "Quick! Speak man!"

"Fever. I'm afraid it's Blackwater."

"Damn," breathed the Russian. He moved into the room staring at the girl with a queer hungry look in his black eyes. "Such a splendid creature. It is so senseless a waste!"

"She's not dead yet!" retorted Coe.

"Yes. But Blackwater fever . . ."

"I don't know that it's Blackwater. Hell, man, I'm no doctor! Did you bring the Askari?"

Krylov shrugged. "I brought them. But the girl can not be moved. Besides the bridge is out."

"I know. But I want to send a runner to Kilo to fetch the Sanitary Agent!"

Krylov's brows drew down. "I will

dispatch them this minute. But they will hide in the forest. They are afraid. We ran into difficulties coming here from the village."

"What difficulties?"

Krylov's black eyes glittered savagely. "The pigmies. They riddled Nanga with their filthy darts. Almost they killed me." He touched the hole in his panama.

"Nanga! They killed Nanga?"

"Yes. The cook." Krylov turned abruptly, strode through the door with the ponderous step of a rhinoceros.

So Nanga had been killed. Coe was not surprised. The black had tried to warn them. What had he said?

"Big Bwana and witch doctor make fever medicine. *Mam'selle* no go, *mam'selle* die with fever!"

He stared at Beatrice tossing on the hard pallet. She was talking, disjointed words that made no sense.

Coe's lips thinned. He wasn't superstitious, but the witch doctors did possess unusual knowledge of herbs and poisons.

"Water," said Beatrice in a weak voice.

COE jumped to give her a drink. She was sweating. The fever had broken.

Then her teeth began to chatter and a shudder rippled through her. With a sinking heart he piled on all the blankets at hand. In spite of the blankets and the heat, the girl was racked by chills until the bed rattled with the violence of her shaking.

Krylov returned from dispatching the runners, stood impassively at the foot of the bed. "It is futile. I have seen too many die of Blackwater fever."

Coe didn't reply. He pulled a stool beside the bed and sat there watching her with a sense of dread.

The chills passed to be replaced once more with a burning fever. The girl moaned, threw off the blankets. Then she lapsed into a coma.

Once Krylov said: "Coe, I am grateful for your presence. More than you might think."

"Eh?" Coe glanced at him suspiciously. The first thought that flicked across his mind was that the Russian knew who he was. His elaborate precautions had been useless. He edged toward his carbine standing in the corner.

A faint smile touched Krylov's face. "I am not stupid. *Mademoiselle*—" he jerked his head at the unconscious girl—"believed I had been stealing her gold. What is your word? High-grading. Is it not so, *Monsieur*?"

Coe felt weak with relief. So Krylov still believed he was only an American prospector picking up extra cash by trucking supplies into the mine. He said: "Miss Woods didn't confide in me."

"Nonsense. But that is not important. If she had died up here alone with me, everyone would have believed that I murdered her. You are my witness that it was the fever."

"She's not dead yet," Coe reminded him.

Krylov shook his head. "Listen," he said. "The drums have stopped."

"What does that mean?"

"The pigmies are like monkeys. They have wandered off into the forest forgetting the whole thing."

Coe remembered to say, "Yeh," in the approved American fashion. He might be new to this district, but he was well enough acquainted with the pigmies to know them better than that.

The truth was that the pigmies had never been on the warpath. But he kept his suspicions to himself.

The Russian said: "I will start the men to rebuilding the bridge. If the runner gets through to Kilo, the Sanitary Agent will be driving up."

During the afternoon, the manager looked in once to say that the bridge was up. "Just a make-shift affair, you comprehend." Later he called Coe to supper.

Coe ate and hurried back to the girl's bedside. During her few lucid moments it seemed to comfort her to find him sitting there.

Toward dawn, he napped in the chair. Once he waked, glanced at her. Then his eyes snapped open. With an exclamation he jumped to his feet, stood over the bed staring intently down into Beatrice's face.

The fever was gone; her skin was leaden. For minutes he watched her chest. He could detect no movement.

He picked up her wrist, felt for her pulse. There was none. With a sudden wrench of fear, he turned up her eyelids.

Beatrice Woods was dead.

FROM within the bungalow came the clang of a hammer. Victor Coe was standing outside by the Crossley. Every time the hammer struck the wood, he winced. Beatrice's death had touched him deeper than he'd suspected. He hated to think of facing the Governor-General. He might as well hand in his resignation.

Krylov emerged from the bungalow. He held the screen open, roared: "Easy there!"

Four blacks struggled through the door carrying a long coffin-shaped box knocked together from packing cases.

The blacks stowed the box in the rear of the Crossley. Krylov said: "Man, what is done is done. It was not of your making."

Coe climbed into the cab, tramped on the starter.

"Go careful across that bridge," Krylov warned.

Coe nodded bleakly, flipped away his cigarette, and let out the clutch. The Crossley rolled toward the jungle.

At the bridge Coe stopped, clambered out and inspected it. It was constructed of logs, dirt having been thrown over them to make a smooth roadbed. It looked strong enough.

He got back behind the wheel, started onto the bridge. He was scarcely a third of the way across when the timbers cracked like a pistol shot. With a ripping crash, they gave way entirely. The heavy vehicle toppled sideways, plunged nose first into the muddy stream.

Coe was slammed against the steering wheel, the wind driven out of his lungs. Something cracked. He felt a searing stab of pain as if someone had driven a bayonet between his ribs, and shook his head groggily. The Crossley lay on its side, muddy water pouring through the shattered windshield.

He forced open the door, crawled onto the side of the truck. The pain knifed into his side. It occurred to him that he must have broken a rib.

He wondered what had caused the bridge to give way. Part of a broken girder was still in place. He could see the clean surface of a saw cut. The timber, he realized with no great surprise, had been sawed almost in two.

Coe swore aloud. Curiously, he swore in Flemish, not in English.

For the life of him, he couldn't understand why Krylov should have done such a thing. It was only a five foot drop to the water and the stream was shallow. There had been little likelihood of the plunge killing him.

It appeared utterly senseless, unless . . .

He twisted quickly and looked for the box holding Beatrice's body.

It was still there, floating, caught in the canvas roof of the truck. It had been smashed by the fall, though, and he caught a glimpse of the partially exposed body.

His jaw dropped. His eyes widened incredulously. Then despite the pain in his side, he leaned over and ripped off a loose plank.

It wasn't the girl's body at all. It was Nanga, the black cook, naked, slate gray, with a bullet hole between his sightless eyes!

Coe was stunned. He stared uncomprehendingly at the body of the black. It was obvious why Krylov didn't want *that* turning up at Kilo. But why switch the bodies in the first place?

Coe face hardened. He fished his carbine from the cab, broke it down, dried all the parts with his shirt and reassembled it.

The time for dissimulation was past.

He waded ashore, scrambled up the slippery bank. With a stony face he set out up the road for the bungalow.

THE HOUSEBOY showed no surprise at his reappearance. "Big Bwana no here," he replied in answer to Coe's terse query.

"Where is he?"

The houseboy shrugged.

The broken rib was stiffening painfully. Coe was in no mood to be put off. He brought the carbine to his shoulder, trained it between the black's eyes. "Where did he go?"

The houseboy turned a muddy gray; his eyes rolled. Then he found his tongue.

"Big Bwana go that way!" he yelled, pointing out the path to the witch doctor's cave. "Him go that way!"

Coe took a step toward the terrified black, swung the rifle barrel in a short, vicious arc. It caught the native on the side of his woolly pate. His knees buckled. He tumbled on his face to the veranda.

"That should hold him," Coe muttered

to himself. He looked swiftly around the bungalow. Satisfied that there was no one else to slip ahead and forewarn Krylov, he set out for the cave.

He moved quietly through the jungle like a hunter. But he encountered nothing except a band of black and white colubus moneys that fled shrieking through the tree tops.

The air was hot, humid. Big drops of perspiration exuded from his pores, slid down his face. His khaki shorts and tunic were streaked with mud and sweat. His side was beginning to throb. He reached the clearing, slipped across it like a shadow, and paused before the cave.

The fire was dead. He remembered that he hadn't brought a light and cursed his thoughtlessness. There was no help for it now. He kicked off his boots, crept through the mouth on stocking feet. He had a bad moment as he was outlined briefly against the opening. Then he was hidden in the dense smelly gloom.

He paused, hugging the rock.

The vague mumble of voices reached his ears from deeper within the cave. They were coming, he judged, from beyond the string bead curtain.

With infinite care, he felt his way along the wall. Once his carbine bumped stone, making a tiny click. He froze, cold perspiration breaking out all over him. But the voices didn't stop.

He resumed his slow progress, reached the curtain, pulled it aside. Beads crinkled. Coe held his breath.

The crocodile pit lay just ahead, hidden in utter darkness. He tried to visualize the cave as he'd last seen it illuminated by the rays of his flashlight.

There had been a narrow shelf of rock running along the right hand wall. He inched ahead feeling for it with his toe.

He found it, crept out along the ledge. There was a faint glow up ahead as if the rocks were phosphorescent. The voices were louder.

He recognized Krylov's rumbling bass. The second voice was shrill. Sabu, he thought. The witch doctor. He cocked the carbine.

The light strengthened as he advanced. Then the cave twisted sharply to the right. He crept around the bend, and stood transfixed, staring at the tableau in disbelief.

A kerosene lantern dangled from an iron hook in the roof, shedding a tent of yellow light. Krylov sat on a stool, hands on knees. He was leaning forward talking. But not to Sabu! It was a girl. A girl secured by old-fashioned slave bracelets to the rock behind her.

And the girl was Beatrice Woods!

VICTOR COE couldn't believe his senses. He leaned weakly against the rock, staring at the girl whom he'd seen die.

"You wouldn't dare!" he heard her cry furiously.

The Russian laughed. "*Mademoiselle* forgets that she is officially dead. Of Blackwater fever." He chuckled again.

"You're a devil!"

"No," he said, "I am Krylov," and struck his chest. "Did you think to trick me? Me, Count Alexis Ivanovitch Krylov?" He shook his head as if such naïveté was beyond belief. "*Mademoiselle*, your little placer mine, it is nothing. Not that!" He snapped his fingers. "Glance behind you and you will perceive the stakes for which we played."

The girl twisted, her shackles clanking in the cavern's stillness. "Gold," she said in an awed voice.

Even Coe, twenty yards back in the gloom, could see the dull yellow gleam threading the quartz wall.

"It is rotten with it," Krylov went on in a voice drunk with some emotion. "It is from there that the assay was made which you discovered."

Beatrice's eyes widened.

Krylov said: "You perceive my embarrassment. I found this vein. It was mine. But it was within the boundaries of your claim."

He shrugged, his shadow grotesque, monstrous against the opposite wall. "What was I to do?"

Beatrice was staring at him as if hypnotized.

Down the cave, Coe slowly raised his carbine, drew a bead on the Russian's temple.

But Krylov began to talk again. Coe lowered the rifle.

"I helped Sabu to revive the crocodile sacrifice so that the blacks would be terrified of entering the cave. I tried to buy

your claim through an agent. You would not have it so. You must investigate yourself.

"*Mademoiselle*, the witch doctors know of unique herbs. Sabu brewed a potion for you which produces a high fever and ends in a death-like coma. Another body has been substituted in place of yours, *mademoiselle*, which we will be forced to bury because of the heat."

Beatrice's voice was tight with horror. "Where's Victor?"

"Dead possibly, but I hope not. He is my witness that you died naturally. I had to wreck the truck to halt him from carrying the body to Kilo."

"Why didn't you kill me outright?" she asked bitterly.

"Because you are beautiful, *mademoiselle*." Krylov's voice was suddenly hoarse. "Because a white girl such as you appears seldom in the Congo."

Victor Coe had heard enough. He raised the rifle again, called sharply: "Krylov. Don't move. I'll drop you dead in your tracks."

Beatrice screamed.

Krylov bounded to his feet. For a second, he stood transfixed, his glittering black eyes trying to pierce the gloom of the long cavern.

"Where are you, *mon ami*?" he rumbled softly.

"Here. I've a bead on your belly!" Coe answered.

A gloating expression flicked across the Russian's face. Then he lowered his head. With a bellow like the squeal of an infuriated bull elephant he charged straight into the rifle.

COE fired. Krylov staggered and a look of incredulity and pain twisted his features. On the instant Coe realized that the Russian had been counting on that dud cartridge.

Krylov didn't go down, though. He stumbled on, carried by the momentum of his charge.

Coe clubbed his rifle, knocked Krylov sprawling with the butt. But the giant's vitality was unbelievable. He jumped up, brushed Coe aside with a sweep of his

arm. His numbed brain seemed occupied with only one thought. Escape. Like a blind bull he fled blundering down the cavern.

"Stop!" Coe yelled in horror. "The crocodile pit!"

The pound of Krylov's steps grew fainter. Then they ceased in mid-stride. There was a fragmentary silence. Then a splash . . .

"Good Lord," said Coe. "He's fallen in the pit!"

Krylov screamed. The sound of thrashing redoubled. Suddenly the shrill cries were choked off in the middle as he was dragged under.

Then silence.

The crocodile god had taken its last sacrifice.

With a stone Coe broke the locks on the girl's shackles. She stumbled into his arms, shivering violently, half hysterical with relief.

"Darling, darling," she wailed clinging to him desperately, "take me away. Please take me away. Don't ever, ever leave me again."

He held her at arm's length, said unsteadily: "I owe you an explanation, Bea. The truth is, I was investigating Krylov for his honor the Governor-General. . . ."

"You," said the girl, "investigating Krylov. But—but . . . What are you? A detective?"

"Good Lord, no," he ejaculated. "I'm the *District Administrateur*."

Beatrice stared at him blankly. "But you're an American!"

"That's only half right. My mother was American. I'm Belgian. . . ."

"But that's awful," Beatrice cried rather wildly.

"Awful?" He looked at her in astonishment.

"I wanted you to manage the mine," the girl said, "and here you're the *District Administrateur*."

A twinkle lit his brown eyes. "My dear, of course I intend to look after your property. Just as soon as we're married. . . ."

He got no further because Beatrice Woods had stopped his words with her soft lips.

KILLER'S SPOOR

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

Twenty years of jungle growth had swallowed up that murder trail. But in the Bogwe's miasmic mists, Gault found the dim track—and became himself the grinning Stalker's prey.

THE DELPHIN nosed her way through the muddy waters of the Gaboon Estuary. She was small but of sturdy build and seaworthy like most African coasters. And the waning moon was kind to her, shadowing out the rusty scars and dents in her battered old hull. A bell in her bowels clanged, the slow pulse of her engine stopped and she drifted close in to the mouth of the Bogwe—so close that her deck lights painted the green wall of the forest.

"By the mark five, sir!" chanted her leadsmen.

"Let go!" came the command and a shower of sparks and dried mud flew from her hawserpipe as the anchor plunged into the water. Before the chain was out the after-winch had added their deafening rattle to the clamor of her sweating Swahili crew. Under the critical eye of the third mate, they were lifting a flat-bottomed scow, specially designed for the navigation of shallow rivers, over the rail. The young officer's profanity was like a solo sung to the accompaniment of squeaking blocks and tackle.

On the bridge Captain West swung the beam of the ship's searchlight. The white beam probed the dark channel of the Bogwe. Its water showed green and stagnant.

"That," said the Delphin's commander, addressing his second mate, "is a way to hell if ever there was one."

Richard Gault looked up the dismal tunnel. Mangroves grew out of the water and lianas festooned with green moss, were strung across them like gigantic webs. There was a green scum on the surface of the still water.

"It does look like an unhealthy hole," Gault observed.

Captain West snapped off the light: "It's that in more ways than one," said he. "The

last time I was here I brought the Corbetts in. They never came out, mister!"

"Missionaries, Captain?"

"Yes. Corbett, his wife and their twelve-year-old daughter. I remember the child well—pretty as a picture, she was."

"What happened to them, sir?"

"They were cut off by the war; isolated up-river at Mejio for three years. When the mission boat was able to get up to Mejio, they found a couple of assegais stuck in the walls of the mission bungalow. I guess they didn't stop to ask the natives for details.

"The Mpongwe are cannibals, mister! Corbett was after souls; our passenger is after ivory." The Delphin's master snorted. "Ivory and souls! They've been the death of more men than you could count, mister. If Hagen had any brains he'd take himself and his scow elsewhere!"

An involuntary look of distaste had come to Gault's clean-cut young face at the mention of their passenger's name. Johann Hagen had come aboard at Akasa with three cadaverous, slant-eyed Malays—and his scow. He was to set up a factory at Mejio and re-open trade with the Mpongwe. According to his agreement with the Delphin's owners, his trade goods were to be towed up river in the scow by one of the ship's two launches.

Hagen was a massive man with small squint eyes set in a hard-mouthed, bearded face. He walked the Delphin's decks with a stooped, rolling gait, as if the weight of his burly torso was too much for his short legs. Gault disliked him instinctively. But Hagen had guts. The Mpongwe had an evil reputation and it took a special kind of nerve to go up to Mejio and sit down among them.

"Hagen's a hard case, Captain. He's half savage himself. He'll know how to get along with the Mpongwe."



The Mpongwe canoes skimmed forward, Gault raised his rifle for the last shot.

"Maybe so," agreed West. He gave the young man a shrewd glance. He liked his second mate. He was new to the coast but there was a keen look in his grey eyes and there were ribbons on his shore-side jacket—decorations won while serving in the American Merchant Navy. His last ship had been torpedoed off the Cape, just before the Armistice.

"I'd like to talk to you about Hagen, mister," said he. "I don't like the cut of his jib, and I don't like those slant-eyes he's got with him. It's the Third's job to tow that scow up river. But he's . . . Well, I thought . . ." He paused expectantly.

Gault's eyes brightened. "I'd be glad to take over, sir," he said.

CAPTAIN WEST smiled behind his beard. "That's what I was thinking. An opportunity to see something of the inside, eh? Very well, mister. Take a man with you. See that you're well armed."

"Aye, sir!"

"Tell the engine-room we'll get under way as soon as you're clear." He paused with his hand on the rail of the bridge ladder. "And, by the way, mister, remember you're a seaman, not an explorer. If you're not here to meet me when I get back, I'll sail without you."

The Bogwe was inert between its walls of mangrove. It was not a live river. Dead leaves and branches floated on its surface and its water turned a green lip to the thrust of the launch's prow. But there was life above and below its green slime.

Brilliantly plumed birds shrieked and flashed low over its surface. Monkeys, invisible among the tangled lianas, chattered, seeming to mock the coughing of the launch's engine. The ugly snouts of crocodiles rose above the scum and drifted, motionless, astern.

As the sun climbed, fiery fingers struck through the canopy of green and a miasmic haze rose from the stagnant water diffusing the stench of rotting vegetation. Man and beast drowsed in the torpor of the tropical noontide.

Gault wiped the steaming sweat from his face. The air was motionless except for the breeze created by their own movement, which made things worse for Gault, seated in the stern. It wafted the body odors of

his Swahili boatman and the three Malays his way—a nauseating combination when mingled with the engine's hot fumes.

Hagen seemed to be unaware of the heat. He was fussing with the oil stove, preparatory to making coffee. Watching him, Gault groaned inwardly. More heat! Feeling his eyes, the trader glanced up.

"Not used to this kind of travellin', eh, mister?"

"I guess not," Gault agreed.

"Can't figure why the Ole Man sent you up wi' me. I could 'ave brought this 'ere boat by myself and paddled back up to Mejio. Was he thinkin' I'd swipe 'is damn boat?"

Gault smiled. "If that thought crossed the Captain's mind, he didn't express it," said he. "It's customary to send an officer along on a trip like this."

"Not with the artillery you're packin', it ain't!"

"I think the Captain had the Corbetts in mind when he sent that along, Mr. Hagen."

"The Corbetts!" Hagen put the coffee pot down and squinted into Gault's face. "They was killed by niggers! What did 'e say to that, mister?"

"Huh?" Gault was surprised by the other's vehemence. "Why, just what you say, Hagen. Is there more to the story?"

Hagen bent over the stove. "No, there ain't!" he said and lapsed into silence.

THAT NIGHT they moored the scow and the launch to the boles of two mangrove trees. The Delphin's launches had been designed for work, not comfort. Except for a canvas-covered cubbyhole fore and aft, the available deck space was occupied by the sturdy engines and fuel tanks. Hagen had elected to sleep on the scow with his Malays, preferring the open to Gault's cramped quarters under the after-awning. Sweating under his mosquito netting, Gault could hear Hagen's throaty snores above the weird noises of the swamp.

He slept fitfully. The life of the river squealed and snorted in the sticky blackness of the night and, what was worse, crawling things dropped from the trees to the canvas above his head with a loud flop and slithered across it. Mbanj, his Swahili boy, slept peacefully through it all. Toward dawn Gault sat up and smoked until the

black of the jungle night changed to the half-light of day.

By noon on the following day, the launch was bucking a strong current. The Bogwe had come suddenly to life. Its banks were still low and densely wooded, but there was a ribbon of bright, blue sky overhead. As the launch labored slowly upstream, gaps opened in the trees, revealing dim reaches of amber light. Groves of palm, acacia and wild banana trees marked the limit of the mangrove forest. The crown of the hill rose slowly above the tree-tops.

Gault consulted the chart opened out over his knees. Mejio was shown at the base of the hill.

"We should make it by sundown," Gault said to Hagen.

"Maybe," growled the trader. "In country like this 'ere, you don't know where you are till you gets there. Maps is mostly wrong."

Gault folded the chart. "What made you choose a spot like this for a factory?" he asked.

"That's my business," said Hagen slowly. "But if it'll do you good to know, there's better pickings in out o' the way parts."

"And a lot more risk, I'd say," commented Gault. "Take the Corbetts for instance."

Hagen spat out an oath. "You're always harpin' about the Corbetts!" His squint eyes glinted at Gault.

Gault grinned. "Does it make you nervous, Hagen? I'm sorry."

The trader's big hand clamped on Gault's shoulder, pinching his flesh in a powerful grip. His bulk towered over Gault, "Nervous. What do you mean?" he demanded harshly.

The suddenness of the attack had startled Gault and his reaction was instinctive. He drove his fist into the other's stomach.

Hagen gasped, doubled up and rolled to the bottom of the boat. As soon as he got his breath, he sat up. His hand flew to his holster, but what he saw in Gault's eyes checked him.

"If I spoke out of turn, I'm sorry for it," said Gault coolly. "I didn't mean to question your courage. I was wondering how you'd make out, that's all."

Hagen got to his feet slowly. His eyes narrowed to slits. "I'll come out on top, mister. I allus do!"

He hitched his gun belt and spat over the side to give his word emphasis.

Gault smiled. "Is that a threat, Hagen?"

"Make what you like of it, you cocky young squirt!" Hagen swore and turned his back.

The incident worried Gault. He felt that he was at fault. The trader wasn't as tough as he looked. He just didn't like to be reminded of the Corbetts' tragic fate. Under his hard exterior he was worried, scared, perhaps.

SEVERAL of the thatched huts of Mejio were still standing although the jungle had reclaimed much of the original clearing. Only where fire had done the work of axe and machete, had the green tide been arrested. The mission house, a thatched bungalow, occupied rising ground at some distance from the reedy bank of the river. Behind it, the forest rose like a wave and rolled over the hill.

Leaving Hagen to superintend the unloading of the scow, Gault climbed the slope to the bungalow. He found it empty but for its crude furnishings. The solidity of the timbers that had been put into the structure surprised him. Except for the four large openings which had once been latticed with stripped bamboo, it looked like a conscious imitation of an American frontier cabin.

Suddenly Gault felt the presence of the Corbetts. He knew them — stout-hearted, honest folk and fearless in the pursuit of what they had conceived to be their duty. Hagen was lucky. His factory was already built for him. Perhaps he had known about it; perhaps that was why his choice had fallen on Mejio.

When he came out of the bungalow, Gault was surprised to see that Hagen had pitched his tent down by the river. The work of unloading the scow was going forward slowly. Only a few cases and tin boxes had been piled on the bank. He wondered why Hagen didn't have his stuff carried up to the bungalow for storage. He found Hagen stretched out on his cot in the tent.

"That bungalow is shipshape, Mr. Hagen," he explained. "I'd stow my stuff in it, if I were you."

"I like to do things my own way," growled the trader.

Gault's left eyebrow lifted. "Sorry!" he said.

Hagen scowled at him. "You've done your job, mister. You can start downriver as soon as you like."

"Thanks. That will be in a couple of days." Gault smiled wryly.

Hagen sat up suddenly. "What would you be stickin' around here for?"

"Do you see any reason why I shouldn't, Mr. Hagen?"

The trader wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "It's a free country," he growled.

"That's what I thought," Gault smiled. He sat on the cot beside Hagen. "The Delphin won't be back for three days. Without the scow I can make it down river in twelve hours. I thought I'd do a little hunting meanwhile. If you can spare the time I'd like you to come along; show me the ropes."

Hagen stood up. He gave Gault a side-long look. "'Unting, eh?" said he. "Well, mister, the other side of the river would be a good place to start from."

He went out, leaving Gault to stare after him with two angry spots burning on his cheeks, and a puzzled look in his eyes. What the devil was the matter with the man! He acted as if he had something to hide. Maybe his trade goods weren't as declared and he feared discovery. Certainly he didn't want company. Gault's lips tightened. He was going to hunt, nevertheless, and he wasn't going to cross the river to do it.

Accordingly at dawn Gault and Mbani set out. They were, he thought, as he climbed the slope toward the bungalow, a bright pair of hunters. He knew as much about it as a Chinese cook and Mbani, born on a Zanzibar *jehazi* and bred to the sea, probably knew less. But at least he could shoot straight.

They branched off from the bungalow, crossed a burned patch of ground and followed a game trail into the gloom of the forest. Sunlight sifted through the moss-draped trees and traced lacy patterns on the narrow path. The hum of insects was like the wind in the shrouds of a ship.

At a turn in the trail Gault halted. There was another path branching off to the right. That it was a hewn trail was evident even to Gault's untutored eye. The rubbery

lianas had been cut away and chips, slashed from the boles of trees, lay yellow and worm-eaten on the ground. He thought of the Mpongwe and tightened his grip on his Winchester. There must be a Mpongwe village nearby. If there was, he'd like to have a look at it from a respectable distance.

The trail led him into a small *donga*. It was like a vault carved out of the dense bush. There was a mound in its center. At the head of the mound there was a wooden cross and—Gault stared hard—there was an earthen pot on the grave and in it there was a bunch of fresh looking flowers!

"*Tuta kwenda, sahib!*" Mbani's teeth were chattering. "Shall we be going?"

"*Nita ka hapa,*" replied Gault firmly. "Stay where you are. Stand watch."

He went to the grave and knelt by the cross. The inscription that had been painted on the crossbar was almost obliterated but after studying it closely and filling in some blanks, he got:

. . . *Corbett, beloved . . . and beloved Matyenda of the Mpongwe . . . slain . . . Pax Domini . . .*

HE SQUATTED on his heels, his grey eyes thoughtful. It was the flowers that puzzled him most. The search party that had come up to Mejo might account for the grave, but not for the freshly-cut flowers. He knew enough about African customs to know that floral offerings to the dead was not one of them. Also, there was the enigmatic phrase: *Beloved Matyenda of the Mpongwe*. Christian charity could hardly be stretched far enough to cover that!

According to Captain West, the Mpongwe had slain the Corbetts. But his version of the tragedy could be wrong. Was it possible that a converted Mpongwe, a faithful servant, was responsible for both the inscription and the flowers?

He felt sure of one thing. The whole of the Corbett's tragic story hadn't yet been told. Suddenly it came to him that to know the story was important. It had import for him. He had experienced the same feeling when he had stood in the Corbett's bungalow. It was as if somebody was trying to tell him . . .

He rose with a self-reproving smile.

He had the weakness of his calling, the scar of battles fought with the elemental powers of nature—superstition.

He walked up the trail to where Mbani stood, round-eyed and wary.

"Shall we be going now, Sahib?" asked the boy hopefully.

"Yes, back to the boat," replied Gault absently. "Mbani, what does *Matyenda* mean?"

"It is like *memsahib*, sahib, only she is holy. She is . . ."

"A woman of God?" suggested Gault.

"Oh, yes, sahib. She is *Matyenda*."

Gault took out his note book. That made it—*Beloved wife*. But why had the beloved of the Mpongwe been slain by the Mpongwe? Why hadn't she been buried with her husband and child? And why the hell was he sweating about it? Hagen would know the story. He'd ask for details. Hagen would probably swing at him, but it was the easiest . . .

Mbani clutched his arm.

"*Tui, sahib! Tui!*" He pointed to a gap in the bush. A patch of yellow, black-spotted hide showed through the leafy screen. There was no movement. Gault dropped to one knee, his eyes brightening with the thrill of excitement that ran through his veins like a charge of electricity. The screen of leaves ruffled and Gault's finger tightened on the trigger of his rifle, and froze. The leopard stood on slender, white legs and it had a mass of blonde hair!

For a moment the girl stood tense and motionless, like a sculptured image of Diana in a sacred grove. Then she was gone!

"Good Lord!" Gault gasped. He dropped his rifle as if it were hot and sprang to his feet. "Hey!" he shouted. "Hey!"

He plunged into the bush in pursuit of the girl. Vines tripped him and he fell full length among thorns. He shouted again. The silence of the forest smothered his cry. Mbani came to help him to his feet.

Gault sat up. He had begun to doubt the fidelity of his eyes, but Mbani's scared face reassured him.

"You saw it, Mbani?"

"Oh, yes, sahib! Let us be going. It is the ghost of the lost one in the *donga!*"

Gault winced as Mbani plucked thorns

from his body. The lost one! That was exactly it! The girl must be Corbett's daughter!

He shuddered when he thought of how close he had come to shooting the girl, and questions whirled through his brain. Out of the chaos one thing came clear. He wasn't going back to the Delphin until he had found the girl. Hagen was an experienced Africander. If the girl didn't show herself, they would track her down together.

WHEN he got back to the launch, the Malays were fishing off the scow's stern. No more work had been done on the unloading. Hagen was in his tent, eating a late breakfast. He looked up as Gault's shadow fell across the packing case he was using for a table.

"You're back, eh?" His thick-lipped smile was disparaging. "Did somethin' growl at you, mister?"

Gault's mouth tightened. He wasn't thin-skinned, but from the beginning Hagen's surliness had stretched his self-command like a cable taking the strain of weight. The story he had meant to pour into the trader's ears died on his lips, checked by a sudden, nameless misgiving. He sat down on the cot, fumbled for a cigarette and considered the trader thoughtfully from behind a veil of smoke.

"What are you starin' at?" demanded Hagen.

"I am wondering what you've got on your mind. You haven't unloaded the scow yet. Are you thinking of moving on?"

"That's my business, mister!"

"Not entirely, Hagen. My orders are to see you settled at Mejio and to make arrangements for the shipment of your ivory."

"The ivory'll be there when you come for it," growled Hagen.

Gault smoked in silence for a moment. "How much do you know about the Corbetts, Hagen?" he asked.

Hagen gulped a mouthful of coffee: "What the hell! You damn . . .!" he spluttered.

Gault's eyes flashed. "Keep your mouth clean, Hagen! Every time I've mentioned the Corbetts you've broached. I want to know why."

"What's it to you?"

"I found a grave near the hill this morning and I saw . . ."

Hagen moved swiftly. His hand came up from behind the packing case and his squint eyes glinted from behind the barrel of a black automatic. A chill crept up Gault's spine. There was death in those eyes. He'd seen the same look in the eyes of a Jap pilot he'd fished from the wreckage of a plane. There was a knife scar just below his heart to keep the memory fresh.

"I knew you was up to somethin'!" Hagen bared his yellow fangs in an evil grin. "I weren't born yesterday, mister. You comin' upriver—I knew there was somethin' behind it!"

"What's behind it, Hagen?" asked Gault, playing for time.

"More'n you'll ever know, mister! This gun's goin' to go off, and I reckon my Malays'll slit your boy's throat before he . . ."

A chorus of wild yells drowned out his last words. There was the sound of running feet. Mbani dashed into the tent, his eyes wild with fear.

"Sahib! Sahib!"

A spear ripped through the canvas of the tent and plunged into its center post. Mbani dived under the cot.

Hagen was staring at the quivering shaft of the spear. His jaw hung loose and his eyes bulged.

"The Mpongwe!" he yelled at Gault and rushed out of the tent with Gault right behind.

The Malays were hemmed in by a ring of Mpongwe warriors. And she was there! Standing on one of the cases of trade goods like a bronze goddess, directing her plumed warriors in a clear, ringing voice.

As the two white men emerged a group of Mpongwe advanced upon them. They came warily, fanning out to form a circle, their plumed heads and fierce eyes just barely showing above their painted, oval shields.

As the maneuver made a gap in their ranks, Hagen caught sight of the girl for the first time. He stood staring. Gault could hear the breath whistling between his teeth. The color of his skin changed to a sickly yellow under which the veins showed like twisted, purple ropes.

"It's her!" he muttered.

Like an automaton he lifted his automatic and levelled it at the girl. Gault sprang at him and the flash of the gun burned his cheek as he wrenched it from Hagen's hand. The trader's big hands closed about Gault's throat and Gault drove his knee into the pit of the other's stomach. Hagen collapsed, dragging Gault down with him. The Mpongwe swept over them like a black wave.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Gault slowly. He fancied that he lay in an open boat, tossing between sea and sky. Water lapped over his prone body . . . He opened his eyes.

The moon had risen. Its soft light streamed through an oblong of bamboo lattice. He was stretched out on a couch of skin.

A wet cloth had been wound around his head and a native woman sat beside his couch, her fingers busily weaving a raffia mat. She rose as he stirred, smiled down at him shyly and went out through the door opposite the foot of his couch.

He sat up. There was a lump on the back of his head. He winced with pain as he touched it. His boots had been removed and lay in a corner of the square hut. He rose, swayed across the rush floor toward them, and collapsed, rather than sat, in the corner.

"If you would rest, Mr. Gault, your dizziness would soon leave you."

Gault's head jerked up. She stood in the doorway, the moonlight outlining her lithe suppleness. Her skin was a golden tan and her eyes were as blue as the Aegean Sea on a summer's day. Gault thought there was an alertness in her attitude, as if she stood poised for flight. She did not enter the hut.

The girl was smiling at him, evidently amused at his confusion.

"I know all about you, Richard Gault," she volunteered. "I speak Swahili and I have talked with Mbani."

"I see," said Gault, dubiously.

"You have nothing to fear," said the girl. "You are free to rejoin your ship."

"What about Hagen?" asked Gault, giving voice to the question uppermost in his mind.

There was a perceptible stiffening in the girl's attitude. "You fought with him. He

is not your friend." She stated, rather than asked.

Gault smiled wryly. "No," said he. "I think Hagen would use another word to describe our relationship—a nasty one."

"I am glad," said the girl. "I was not sure when you aimed your gun at me."

Gault grinned. "You were still in doubt, I take it, when you had me knocked on the head, Miss Corbett."

"Miss—Corbett!" She repeated the name slowly. "How strange it sounds! I have been *Matyenda* for so long!"

"You are *Matyenda*!" Gault frowned. "I thought your mother . . ."

"The Mpongwe say I am like my mother. They gave me her name."

"Did the Mpongwe kill your mother and . . ." His voice faltered as he saw the look of anguish leap into her eyes.

"Jules Guidin, the man you call Hagen, killed both my mother and father. Tonight he dies!"

The last word rang in Gault's ears like a gun-shot. She stood with her head thrown back. Her eyes flashed and her firm breasts rose and fell with her quickened breathing. She looked like vengeance incarnate.

"Tell me about Hagen," he said gently.

THE GIRL looked into the young sailor's face, her eyes frankly appraising. Still watching him closely, she came into the hut and sat on the couch. Gault sat very still. He sensed that if he made a move toward her, she would run.

"When we had been at Mejio for a year, Jules Guidin came upriver to the mission. He had many canoes and men and much ivory. He was very ill with the fever. My father cached his ivory and fed his men. We gave him our best bed and my mother nursed him back to health.

"Then one day when Guidin was well again, my father went upriver to Baraka; to this village, Mr. Gault. That night I awoke with my mother's screams in my ear. I rushed to her room, but the door was locked. I ran out to get help. By the time I had roused our people, Guidin had come out of the house. He had called his men. They were all armed and our people were afraid of their guns. He marched down to his canoes and went downriver. I found my mother on the floor of her room. The next day she died.

"When my father returned, we buried her in the *donga*. Then we went back to the house. My father did not weep as I wept. He prayed for a long time. Then he took down his gun and went downriver.

"He did not return. Many weeks later the Mpongwe found him. There was a bullet hole in his skull."

She rose. Her eyes were moist and luminous and her gaze sought Gault's and held it. "I saw in your face that you think it is wrong to kill Guidin," said she. "Are you still of the same mind now, Richard Gault?"

Gault bent over to lace his shoes. It took him a long time. At last he looked up.

"It's not for the Mpongwe to avenge your mother's honor, nor your father's death," said he. "That is the privilege of your countrymen. Leave it to them. They'll get Hagen, if they have to turn this continent upside down and shake him out!"

"My father did not call upon his countrymen." The girl's voice was scornful.

"No," said Gault slowly. "Nor did he call upon black men. He did what I or any man would have done—he went after Hagen himself. If you would follow in his footsteps, *Matyenda*, you must kill Hagen with your own hand." He heard the girl's sharp intake of breath and smiled.

"But because you are a woman and white," he went on, "you will not kill him, nor will you give him to the Mpongwe. You will give him to me and we will take him downriver."

"*Wel*!" The girl stared at him in astonishment.

"Yes, *Matyenda*. You can't stay here. You must come with me . . ."

The girl sprang to her feet. "You do not understand," she explained. "The Mpongwe would not let me go. I am their *Matyenda*—their good luck. They would kill me if they thought you had come to take me away!"

"Is it your wish to go, *Matyenda*?" asked Gault.

"Oh, it is my wish!" Yearning throbbed in her voice. "But it is not my wish to see you die, Richard Gault. You must go where it is light before the witch men come to smell you out."

"I will not go without you," said Gault quietly.

THE GIRL stood very straight and still, searching the young sailor's handsome face. "Are you mad?" she demanded. "Why must you risk your life for me?"

"What about Hagen?" he asked, ignoring her question.

"I will keep him prisoner until you return with men and arms. You spoke well and I have given heed to your words. Now will you go?"

Gault shook his head. "Hagen will find a way to escape. I will not go, *Matyenda*."

The girl's hands clenched. "Very well," said she. "If you will not walk to the river, you shall be carried to it. I have spoken!" And without another word she turned and left him.

Gault swore. He didn't doubt that *Matyenda* was quite capable of having him trussed up and shipped down river. But what could a man do with a girl who had a couple of hundred black savages to do her bidding? He flung himself on the couch. He'd try to reason with her again in the morning. He fell asleep thinking how pleasant it would be to teach the *Matyenda* of the Mpongwe to love, honor and obey.

He awoke with *Matyenda* shaking his shoulder. He sat up, his eyes searching the gloom for her black minions. He could see none.

"Now, look, *Matyenda*," he said. "If you call your blacks, somebody is going to get hurt. I'm not . . ."

She placed her hand over his mouth, smothering his words. "Quiet! she whispered, urgently. "You must go at once, quickly!"

Gault removed her hand gently. Moonlight still streamed into the hut. He couldn't have slept for more than an hour.

"What has happened, *Matyenda*?"

"When I left you I went to the council of elders. Hagen was there. He has the cunning of a fiend! He has talked with the witch men. He has told them that you came to take me away and that if you escape, others will come to take me. The witch men believe him. Soon they will come to smell you out. I could do nothing against him. He has marked you for death!"

Gault smiled grimly. Why shouldn't the witch men believe Hagen? He had told them the plain truth. He saw only too clearly what was in Hagen's mind. Anne

Corbett and himself were the only two whites who knew the truth about Mejio. If they got away, Hagen knew that he would be hunted down in the long run.

"Come!" The girl pulled at his hand. "Mbani is waiting with a canoe down by the river."

"You must come with me, *Matyenda*," urged Gault.

She shook her head. "The Mpongwe would pursue and kill you! It is not my wish to see you die, Richard Gault!"

Gault smiled in the darkness. There was more than one way to skin a cat and they were wasting time. "All right," he agreed. "Show me the way to the river."

THE VILLAGE of Baraka slept in moonlight. As they moved swiftly through the pallid light past the council hut, the sound of voices reached their ears. Gault wondered if Hagen was there haranguing the elders while the witch men chanted their weird incantations and rattled skulls and bones.

They followed the trail that led down to the river between walls of tall reeds and came upon the canoe suddenly. Mbani came out of hiding among the reeds and silently took his place in the bow.

"Good-bye, Richard Gault," whispered the girl, her eyes shining in the moonlight. "I shall watch for your return."

"Get into the canoe!" Gault said, catching her arm. A look of terror came into the girl's eyes and she shrank back from his touch. Suddenly Gault understood. What she had seen at Mejio had left its scar. The world of cities would be to her a world thronged with Hagens. A place of horror.

"There is nothing to fear, *Matyenda*," said Gault gently. She stood for a moment poised for flight, her steady eyes fixed on the young sailor's face. Then she smiled.

Boom! Boom! The deep voice of the village drum shattered the silence, its vibrations quivering through the reeds and flooding the night with an urgent, compelling summons. Before the first booming note had died, Baraka was awake. Men, women and children milled about, shouting and jabbering.

Among the reeds, *Matyenda* crouched at Gault's side. "They are searching for us!" she said with dismay in her eyes.

Gault frowned. The river was their only way to safety and the launch their only hope of making it. Hagen would see that, too. He wouldn't waste any time searching for them. He would lead the Mpongwe downriver in their war canoes to get between them and the launch.

"We've got to get to Mejio before Hagen does!" he urged. "Come on!" He scooped the girl up in his arms and waded out to the canoe. "Shove off, Mbani!"

They glided through the reeds and shot out into the silvered current. As they swept past the patch of reeds, Gault steered the canoe for the right bank of the river. The current was swifter there and the banks narrower than at Mejio. Screened from the village by the dense bush, they were borne rapidly downstream.

Gault chanted softly, timing the swift, flashing stroke of their paddles. Kneeling in the waist of the canoe, *Matyenda* plied her paddle tirelessly. Gault watched the rhythmic play of muscles under the golden skin as her supple body arched and straightened with the stroke.

The channel broadened and straightened out. Gault looked back. The ribbon of silvered waters seemed to merge into a black, amorphous shadow, then gleams of light showed in its midst—moonlight flashing on paddles! Hagen and the Mpongwe were afloat and gaining rapidly.

Later, when he looked back again, the shapeless mass had dissolved into several black blurs. Even as he watched, the leading canoe took shape before his eyes and a spurt of yellow flame leaped from it. A bullet cut the water about a foot astern of him, whined and ripped through the bush on the bank. He swore under his breath.

"Faster!" he urged. "Faster!"

He slanted the canoe for the opposite bank where the shadows were lengthening. The report of Hagen's rifle echoed again and again down the river, but he was wide of his target in the uncertain light.

The skin was worn from Gault's hands by the friction of his roughly-hewn paddle shaft and his body ached. The incessant rhythm was a kind of torture. Mbani's stroke faltered.

"Rest, Mbani!" gasped Gault as he redoubled his own efforts. He was surprised

to hear *Matyenda's* voice, soft and coaxing:

"Only a little way, Mbani—only a little way!"

THE MPONGWE were yelling now. They were not more than two hundred yards astern and rapidly closing the gap between themselves and their prey. Mbani threw a frightened look in their direction, sobbed, and took up his paddle again. Gault was bathed in sweat. Endless, agonizing rhythm! As in a dream, he saw the clearing of Mejio open up.

"Faster!" he pleaded.

The canoe shot out from the shadows, heading across the river for the looming bulk of the scow and the launch moored beside it. They bumped along-side the launch.

"Start the engine, Mbani!" Gault shouted, and leaped for the launch's stern. *Matyenda* followed him as sure-footed as a cat. A bullet ripped into the boat's side.

"Down!" Gault shouted at the girl.

He found his Winchester in the case where he had left it as Mbani spun the engine's fly wheel. The engine coughed, but didn't start and Gault prayed silently.

One of the canoes was heading in, skimming toward them. A warrior stood in its bow with poised spear, a black silhouette. Gault's Winchester spat flame and the warrior toppled overboard.

His companions yelped in fear. Their paddles whipped backward, stirring the river to foam and their clumsy craft swung athwart the stream. The dugout that followed rammed it and rolled it over like a log, spewing its crew into the river. Yells and screams rent the air. The other dugouts, unable to check their momentum, veered and drifted into a tangled mass. Hagen's hoarse voice was bellowing curses.

At last the engine spluttered. And Gault's heartbeats counted its erratic pulsing until Mbani nursed it to a steady throb.

The dugouts were drifting down on them. Hagen had got his canoe clear of the tangle and as Gault swung the launch away from the scow the trader began to shoot.

"Down!" roared Gault. "Down!"

Slug after slug slapped into the boat's side, splintering wood and keeping them flattened on the bottom boards. Gault lay

on his back trying to hold in the center of the green walls that flashed by. The ribbon of sky above his head was turning grey.

They were out of range before Gault realized what Hagen had been shooting at. It was the smell of gasoline that wiped the relieved grin from his face as Hagen's dugouts became a blur in the distance. Hagen had shot the fuel tank full of holes and the precious fluid was pouring into the bilge.

He called Mbani to the tiller and sounded the tanks. The starboard tank, the most exposed to Hagen's fire, was empty. The port tank showed five gallons.

Anxiety carved deep lines in Gault's face. He was thinking of the miles of stagnant swamp, the dead water between him and the river's mouth. There might be enough fuel to take them through the worst of the swamp. But when it was gone, they would have to paddle the heavy launch with makeshift oars.

Suddenly he knew that Hagen would follow them downriver, hoping to catch them when they ran out of fuel in the swamp. He stopped the engine. *Matyenda* and Mbani looked at him wonderingly.

"The current will carry us down," he answered their unspoken question. "We'll use the engine when we have to."

They made a meal of ship's biscuits and water. By noon the Mpongwe's paddles were flashing in the sun, five-hundred yards astern. All through the blistering afternoon they followed in the launch's wake, keeping out of range of Gault's Winchester. Hagen was sure of his prey.

Just before sunset they drifted into the gloom of the swamp. The Mpongwe had crept closer and Gault could see Hagen's white topee in the stern of the leading dugout. As the light failed, the fetid breath of the swamp shrouded them with a nebulous mist. Gault started the engine.

Howls of rage burst from the Mpongwe. Hagen's voice bawled out orders, echoing hollowly down the tunnel-like channel. Mbani, feeling himself delivered, laughed and shouted taunts and curses at the Mpongwe. *Matyenda* turned serious eyes upon Gault's face.

"Are we safe now?" she asked.

"Hagen knows we are short of fuel, but he doesn't know exactly how short," he

replied confidently.

But the worried look crept back to his face as soon as she had turned her head. He knew Hagen wouldn't give her up. He would follow them out to sea, if he could persuade the Mpongwe to paddle that far.

ABOUT MIDNIGHT the engine spluttered and stopped and Gault turned the boat's nose toward the nearest mangrove tree. For two hours they labored, poling the launch from tree to tree, moving steadily forward behind the screen of trees in a line parallel to the channel. No sound but the gurgling of water broke the silence of the swamp.

After another spell of gruelling labor, Gault saw that they could go no farther without rest. He moored the launch to a tree. *Matyenda* and Mbani curled up in the bottom and were soon asleep. Gault sat in the stern with his Winchester across his knees, rubbing his red-rimmed eyes to keep awake.

The black of the night was palpable, like a viscous fluid oozing between the great boles of the mangroves, flooding the empty spaces. A vague, green radiance marked the open channel. Gault fancied he could see black blurs moving through the eerie light. He could almost hear the splash of paddles above the gurgling cacophony of the swamp. Then suddenly his ear caught a wailing note that seemed to float above the trees. It came again, repeated at regular intervals and a look of joy came to Gault's haggard face. The Delphin was bellowing her master's impatient summons. She was calling him home! He shook Mbani and the girl awake.

"Push into the channel," he whispered hoarsely. While they poled the launch into open water, Gault took signal rockets from the boat's locker.

The first rocket struck a branch and fell, fizzling out in the green slime. As a second match flared in his hand, startled cries broke the silence all around them, a rifle flashed, and a bullet whined past his ear. Recklessly Gault shielded the flame in his cupped hand. The flash of the detonator revealed a dugout bearing down on them, but this time the rocket's fiery tail soared.

With an exultant shout Gault snatched up his boat hook. As the dugout swept in on them he drove the iron-shod point

into its bow and shoved with all his strength. The canoe sheared off, rolling precariously and swept by.

The shove had given the launch momentum. They glided through the swirling mist, poling their way silently back into the blackness of the swamp. Hagen's raucous voice rose above the excited jabbering of the Mpongwe.

"He promises a new rifle to the first man to see us," *Matyenda* translated to Gault.

"He won't live to collect," said Gault.

Reed torches flared in the darkness and Gault saw a giant mangrove standing on exposed roots like the legs of a table. He poled the boat toward it. The launch's nose slid under the gigantic bole. Gault gave his automatic to Mbani.

"Don't shoot until I do, Mbani," he whispered.

Matyenda crouched at his side in the stern. Half hidden by the twisted roots, they watched the torches weaving among the trees. Hagen was organizing the search with shrewdness. The torches were gliding forward in line, showing a gap of twenty feet or more between each dugout.

Gault began to shoot at the flickering torches, hoping that Hagen would return his fire. Hagen was the mainspring driving the Mpongwe and a bullet in the right place might end the battle before it had fairly begun. But there was no return fire. The torches went out one by one.

Silently through the impenetrable black of the swamp, the Mpongwe edged toward their prey.

IN THE chill vaporous light of dawn, the Mpongwe massed to throw themselves against the white man in the tree. Twice during the night they had attacked, only to be driven back by the deadly fire of Gault's gun.

From behind the screen of roots Gault watched them grouping in the channel. His face was white and drawn and he was naked to the waist. *Matyenda* had ripped his shirt to bind the gaping spear wound in his side.

Matyenda was curled in the bottom of the launch, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. In the bow, Mbani lay in a pool of his own blood. As Gault's blood-shot eyes came to rest on the boy's upturned face, it

seemed to him that he smiled. And why not? The houris had welcomed him to Paradise long ago, for he had died with his face to the foe, sending the soul of more than one unbeliever to the gates of hell.

With a strange feeling of detachment, Gault watched the canoes fan out for the attack. It would soon be over. Something had delayed West. The thing he had listened for all through the agony of the fight—an engine's throb—had not come.

The Mpongwe started a wild battle chant, their paddles churning the water to green foam. The dugouts lurched and leaped forward and Gault saw Hagen's white topee. A happy smile lit up his haggard face. He slipped his last cartridge into the breach of the Winchester.

"I've been saving it for you!" he yelled hysterically. "Come and get it!"

The effect of his shot amazed him. Streaks of light flashed across his eyes and the report of his rifle was like the burst of a machine-gun. The water around Hagen's canoe boiled. He saw Hagen pitch forward. Shrieks of terror rent the silence. He looked at his gun foolishly.

"Launch ahoy! Mr. Gault, ahoy!" a strident voice hailed him.

Gault passed a shaking hand before his eyes. It was delirium, of course. If it were real he would have heard the engine.

"It is your Captain!" *Matyenda* cried shaking him. Then Gault understood.

West, shrewd old sea dog that he was, had heard the rifle fire and had crept up upon the Mpongwe under oars. He struggled to his feet. A hoarse cry came to his parched lips. Then, as if falling from a great height, he plunged into blackness.

A voice, floating over a vast expanse, reached Gault's ears. "Nothing," it said, "that sleep and care won't heal . . ."

Other sounds began to register: the steady throb of engines; the creak of straining timbers. He tried to sit up. A firm hand held him down.

"You're at sea, mister," said the voice. "The battle is fought and won."

Gault's eyes fluttered open. *Matyenda* stood beside Captain West. Smiling, she bent over him. A scented veil of hair fell across his face. Moist lips pressed his. He grinned and drifted away into sleep.



Five Suns to Angola!

By **DAN CUSHMAN**

No man who touched the weird package lived. But half a million francs awaited him who brought it to Angola. For dough like that O'Neil would stake his hook in Hell!

THREE MEN approached the jungle village of LeDrapeau. Two of the men were white, the third was a massive black.

They paused at the edge of the clearing, and stood for a while, looking at the wandering, double line of thatch huts, sodden and dismal from the rains, at the patches of open ground where cassava, millet and yams were cultivated during the season,

and beyond, just visible through rain and low-hanging smoke, at the rusty, sheet-metal roofs of some palm nut and copal storehouses.

LeDrapeau was like a hundred other villages one might find squatting in the vast mire of jungle between the south Congo drainage and Portuguese Angola.

One of the white men, a powerful fellow with skin turned coconut brown from too



At that moment, Armless O'Neil ripped upward with his hook!

many years of African heat, twisted his lips and spat. He laughed without amusement. He cursed, emphasizing his explosive utterances with abrupt gestures using his left arm, which was really not an arm at all, but rather half an arm, for a steel hook was all which extended from the sleeve of his bedraggled white jacket.

"LeDrapeau!" he snarled with a saturnine twist of his ugly, Irish face. "So here we are, Tommy-lad. You have finally accomplished it. You have at last dragged me to the ultimate sump-hole of the African bush."

The man called "Tommy" tilted his sodden sun helmet and laughed. He was tall, handsome, and the type who either bestrode the earth with his enthusiasm or plumbed hell with hopeless woe. At the moment he was in a bestriding mood, and no words of the one-armed one could discourage him.

Tommy said, "You're short sighted, O'Neil. You're dumb. You don't recognize opportunity. That's why you've spent eighteen years in this country, with money-making propositions on every side, and still remain flat on your financial *derriere*."

Armless O'Neil did not alter his sour expression. He could have retorted that he was flat broke from staking Tommy too often, but instead he stared out at the dripping clearing of LeDrapeau, and cursed. He cursed with slow emphasis, with a careful selection of epithets, in English, Portuguese, French — not neglecting the Algerian and Flemish dialects — and rounded out with choice Congoese. Bobolongonga, the huge black man, listened and became goggle-eyed with admiration. Here, indeed, was a vocabulary to frighten the very fetishes of hell!

Tommy said, "Hold your uncivil tongue, O'Neil. I told you there'd be plenty of pounds sterling, or its equivalent, waiting for us here at LeDrapeau, and there will be."

Armless O'Neil shook his steel hook an inch from Tommy's nose,

"There had better be, Tommy my lad! If you've dragged me here, twenty kilometers out of our way, for nothing, so help me Allah, I'll split your skull from ear to ear."

"Ai! Ai!" chanted Bobolongonga who believed every word O'Neil uttered, no matter what.

"Orsenes told me he would have seventy-five hundred francs spot cash waiting for us, and another seventy-five hundred on the line when the job was done. That should see us back to Brazzaville in fine shape."

"I wouldn't trust that Orsenes fellow with my worst enemy's wife," O'Neil growled.

They had stopped at the B'lokage rest house the day before and Tommy had got to fooling around with the government two-way wireless, and happened to pick up Orsenes at LeDrapeau. Orsenes was an Italian-Spanish mix-blood who had been one jump ahead of the colonial police for one reason or another ever since O'Neil first came down from the upper Nile. O'Neil had slept while Tommy and Orsenes were talking, so he didn't actually hear much that was said, but anyway, here he was, sidetracking at LeDrapeau instead of going on downstream toward Cocquihatville as any sane person would.

Orsenes wanted them to take some sort of a package down to Kandona for him. He wouldn't say what was in the package, but O'Neil would have laid paper francs to silver dollars it would get them in trouble with the Colonial Administration if any of their meddling police officers should happen along.

O'NEIL went on, expressing his low esteem of Orsenes, but Tommy only smiled in a tolerant manner and squatted where a big kulu tree allowed only an occasional drop of warm rain to filter through its hundred-foot sponge of fuzzy, purplish leaves.

"Sit down, O hook-armed one," he said. "It is still an hour until dark, so we might as well be comfortable."

"Sit down—here? When there's a rest house there at Drapeau? And maybe a bottle of brandy from the company shelves?"

"Ai! Brandy!" chanted Bobolongonga who had tasted this luxury of the *bondele's* palate, and found it good.

"Damn it all, O'Neil, I told you that Orsenes didn't want us to show up during daylight. He was extra careful on that point."

O'Neil squatted there and snapped his fingers a couple of times at Bobolongonga.

The big black correctly interpreted the gesture and took a long, yellow-paper Arabian cigarette from the fungus-tight "uniform can" he had been carrying atop his head. He removed a match from a box and tried to strike it, but the can's calcium chloride moisture absorber had drawn its fill, and the match head only crumbled.

O'Neil took out some of his wrath on Bobolongonga for not roasting out the absorber, then he tore off the yellow paper and chewed the strong tobacco rolled inside. Tobacco of such degenerate variety was better for chewing than smoking, anyway.

"What else did Orsenes say about his damn bundle?"

Tommy shrugged, mopping moisture from his hair. "He said one man could carry it. He said we'd get fifteen thousand francs or equivalent if we'd deliver it to Geoffroi in Kandona within five days. Said he'd pay seventy-five hundred in advance, and that Geoffroi would pay the rest on delivery. He said to be at the guest house tonight—after dark."

O'Neil had an idea the bundle would be filled with opium. That, or some stolen diamonds from the mines over Mafeda way. It was hard to sell Belgian stones in Belgian territory, but take them over the border to Angola and it was easy enough. Who ever heard of an honest Portuguese? Yes, the bundle contained contraband of some sort. The police were probably laying for Orsenes. O'Neil would have told him to go to hell with the whole proposition, but he was broke, and a broke man can't be too choosy.

The clouds lifted for a while letting the sun slant in and turn the wet, rusted warehouse roofs to rich scarlet, and then, from nowhere, there was rain again. Darkness settled over the steaming jungle. Somewhere, in the depths of the native village, a man was beating a tom-tom.

"Well, Tommy, is it dark enough to meet this *honest* associate of yours?" asked the voice of Armless O'Neil.

He could hear Tommy chuckle off there in the dark. The uniform can made a rattle as Bobolongonga placed it atop his head, and O'Neil, by habit, started down the footpath in the lead.

They passed through the native village without causing the least flutter of excite-

ment, for the men had gathered in the round-topped *avodoun* hut to incant the ruling fetishes of swamp and darkness, and only a few women and big-bellied children came down to the path to watch.

There were the garden plots, and up ahead, standing on knee-high stilts, the house of a trader, a mission-hospital where life would have tested the faith of Paul the Apostle, the administrator's "palace," and a rest house.

They could see three men sitting around a table there in the administrator's, playing cards. A petrol lamp was above their heads, but mosquito netting, hung two or three thicknesses deep across the verandah, prevented their faces from being distinguishable.

O'Neil paused to look in at them with habitual suspicion,

"That's Orsenes, sitting with his back towards us," he said.

Tommy nudged him forward, "Orsenes wanted us to be sure to wait for him at the guest house."

THEY WENT on, walking close to a warehouse whose doors stood open, letting out the strong, rancid odor of palm-nuts kept too long. The rest house was a couple hundred steps further. It was a two-story structure with a double verandah set on heavy, bamboo pillars, once a model of Belgian colonial hospitality, but now termite-eaten, and badly in need of white-wash.

No light. They went inside and fumbled around. O'Neil shouted a couple of times. At last a houseboy came in from the back, carrying an electric torch. He found matches in a tin container, lighted a petrol lamp, and stood there in his long, calico gown, grinning at them.

"Cognac!" bellowed O'Neil. "And bottled water!"

The houseboy leaped as though he had been stabbed in the rear, and dashed off through the front door for the desired articles.

"O'Neil, stop making so much racket," Tommy cautioned. "I'm not even sure we ought to have this light. Orsenes cautioned me that—"

"To hell with Orsenes. Let *him* be cautious. We haven't had a run-in with the colonial administration. Not yet, anyhow."

O'Neil and Tommy sat down at a little, metal table in the center of the shabby room and waited, while Bobolongonga, anxious to please while his master was in this saw-tooth mood, got the patent, peddle-operated punkahs to going. The punkahs squeaked like the lost souls of hell, which was all to the good, as it helped to drown out the mournful sound of rain on the thatch roof, and that heathen tomtom hammering down in the *avodoun* hut. Now and then, from the mission house, they could hear a wireless turned on full blast making intermittent contact with a Johannesburg jazz band.

It was ten minutes before the houseboy came back with the cognac and bottled water, his bare feet tracking mud across the rattan matings. The cognac was some of the vile stuff concocted up in Morocco, but it was so much better than O'Neil had expected that he paid the three-hundred franc price without a curse, and even added a few centimes for the boy's trouble.

O'Neil was pouring his second glassful when the door swung open, and Orsenes walked in.

Pablo Orsenes was an Italian-Spaniard with mixed blood from Islam's side of the Mediterranean. He was about forty, brown as Cordovan leather, dehydrated from an opium habit of long standing. He stood just inside the screen door for a few seconds, his quick, pointed eyes roving from O'Neil, to Tommy, to Bobolongonga, and back again. Then he walked forward smiling a little, and extending his hand.

"Ah—so you have come!" He spoke with an accent that was more French than anything else. "It is the pleasure for old friends to meet, no?"

O'Neil drew himself half way from his rattan chair to return Orsenes' handshake, then he sat down again, and shoved the bottle over with his hook.

"What the hell, Orsenes?" he asked. "Why this dark-of-the-moon business? What have you got? Some of those native poppy drippings that are too hot to handle? Or is it a brick or two of hasheesh?"

Orsenes laughed—an abrupt, cackling sound with no trace of amusement. He walked back to the verandah where, after considerable fooling around, he succeeded in closing the jalousies. Then he seated

himself across from O'Neil and poured himself a glass of cognac.

"Am I the sort of man who deals in the contraband?" he asked.

"You know damned well you are."

TOMMY lifted his eyebrows apologetically to Orsenes. "Lay off, O'Neil," he pleaded.

Orsenes made a broad gesture. "O'Neil—he knows too much what-you-call-it biography. So I will admit—yes. Just a tin or two, here and there. But I, Orsenes, know some biography, too. You recall Zomba, *Monsieur* O'Neil? And that steamer, flying the colors of Panama, that used to stop without blessing of the Mozambique Company and pick up that crude *chandu* packed in bales of sisal?"

O'Neil remembered. He smiled, resembling a bronze Buddha with his skin shining in the light from the petrol lamp.

"But *I've* reformed!"

"It is the word of the Prophet that no man finds the tents of Paradise facing the cities of Mammon."

"What is it you want us to take down to Kandona for you, Orsenes?"

"Why, it is a package. Not half the height of a man, nor half so heavy. What it contains should make no difference to you."

"The hell it shouldn't! What if the police open it and find it filled with *chandu*? What if they throw us in that stinking *jel* over in Leopoldville for the next five years?"

"It is not hasheesh, nor *chandu*, nor *bhang*. You can have my word for it."

"I'll open it and look for myself," O'Neil grunted with a wry twist of his lips, thus indicating his opinion of Orsenes' word.

"The package it is sealed. If the seal is broken, then you will receive no monies from Geoffroi down in Kandona. You will receive nothing if the package does not reach there within five days, either. You must get it there quickly! Unopened! Otherwise, I repeat, no money."

O'Neil sat, turning the glass in his hand, glowering. Orsenes went on,

"But from the law you have no worry. There is nothing contraband of the colonies contained in the package. No opium, no gems. If you opened it, it would be

worth to you nothing. Indeed, if you opened it, it would be worth to *nobody* nothing."

"Stop talking in circles."

"I am not talking in circles. There is a scientist—he wants it. You will carry it?"

"Sure!" said Tommy.

"Where's that seventy-five hundred francs?" asked O'Neil.

"I'll get it. I'll seek the lend of it from the administrator."

"Your credit must have improved."

"Geoffroi's credit is good." He drained his glass and stood up. "You will go with me?"

He led them through the side door and crossed the verandah, his loose, rubber-soled shoes making a slap-slap sound on the wet floor. From there he followed a path of cobbles to the rear door of a warehouse. He went inside, and came out a few seconds later, carrying a bundle.

The bundle was about four feet high, and eighteen inches in diameter. It was wrapped in layer on layer of canvas, the outside surface turned hard by several applications of native varnish. Here and there, along its seams, were gobs of sealing wax.

O'Neil hefted it. It was an easy burden for one man.

"What the hell is in this, Orsenes?"

"I cannot tell you. Believe me—I *cannot*. You will leave—when?"

"Tomorrow."

"Before dawn?"

"All right, before dawn."

"Wait here. I will go over and get the money from the administrator. If not from him, then from the Drapeau Company trader. It will take me half an hour. An hour—no longer."

II

O'NEIL watched with suspicious eyes until Orsenes was out of sight, then he hefted the bundle, poked at its sides, shook it.

Tommy asked, "What the hell do you care what's inside it? He said it was nothing unlawful, didn't he?"

O'Neil snorted and flung the bundle down. He was going to leave it there in the doorway, then he thought better of it and carried it inside the storehouse to hide

it among some bags of jackass copal.

The two white men sat down and waited. Bobolongonga curled up and snored. The rain stopped, and a few stars came out, casting a subdued glow over the clearing. Still the tom-tom, the popping of the wireless.

A light flashed up in one of the upstairs rooms of the rest house, and then went out again. O'Neil looked at the luminous dial of his pocket watch. Orsenes' hour was up. They waited another hour, and still no sign of him.

O'Neil stood up. "He doesn't need to think I'll take his damned bundle to Kandona without that seventy-five hundred francs advance. I'll throw it in the bush first."

Tommy didn't say anything. He was becoming suspicious of Orsenes, too. The man seemed to be acting in a damned peculiar manner. They roused Bobolongonga and walked through the long, fetid storehouse. From the front door they could see the administrator's with lights shining through the netted verandah from its downstairs windows.

They approached and heard a mumble of men's voices from the verandah. The peculiar, nasal tones of Orsenes did not seem to be among them.

"We'd better take a look over at the rest house first," growled O'Neil. "Maybe he's over there, waiting for us with the light off."

O'Neil climbed the front steps and shouted for the houseboy. No one answered. The boy was probably over at that reeking voodoo shack, distilling black powers from the dust of his ancestors.

He felt around and located the matches in a can on the table. The generator of the petrol lamp was still warm, and the mantle caught the first try, hissing up with a good, white light. Tommy muttered something and took a backward step. O'Neil turned to look.

There was a man sprawled out on the stairs, head down, one arm outflung, the other twisted behind him at a grotesque angle, his head far to one side.

The man was Orsenes. Dead.

O'Neil bent over him. He had not been shot, nor knifed, nor strangled. There was only one small smear of blood—and that was from his nostrils. On his forehead

was a small welt, but not enough for concussion. It was his twisted way of lying there that told O'Neil what had killed him.

"Broken back," he said to Tommy.

"The fall?"

"No, though I guess somebody wanted it to look that way."

"Oh, the devil, O'Neil—"

"I saw a porter up at Kivva whose back had been snapped the same way. He was carrying film to a movie operator making a gorilla shot, when one of the monsters got wind of him. He ran, but mister gorilla got there first. One grab, and—snap! He hit the ground looking twisted and out of joint—just like Orsenes, there."

"Hell, O'Neil, there's no gorilla within three hundred miles of this low country."

"Sure—I was only telling you what it reminded me of. Anyhow, he didn't get it broken from falling." O'Neil pointed with his toe, "Look there—his nose was bleeding, but there isn't a drop on the stairs."

"Well, what do we do?"

"Just take it cool."

O'Neil felt through Orsenes' pockets, and then inside for a money belt.

"What are you looking for?"

"Our seventy-five hundred francs."

"Gone?"

"If he ever had it, it's gone."

"We can't stay here, O'Neil. We better grab that bundle and get to moving before—"

"And stand a chance of those colonial police starting after us? No, Tommy. We'll get over to the administrator's as fast as we can and report."

THEY found three men there, sitting in the half-darkness of the verandah with the light from the front room behind them. O'Neil had heard a couple of their voices before, though he couldn't immediately place them. He paused for a few seconds to listen, then he opened the insect-proof door.

A lanky man in newly washed whites came towards him, showing prominent teeth in a smile. This was Jean Febre, the administrator. O'Neil had known him over in Stanleyville. An extremely powerful man in muddy clothes stood just behind Febre, and a smaller man was sitting in the shadow.

Febre said, "What in the name of the devil is this walking in from the jungle night? First these gentlemen, and now you. It has been a long time, O'Neil! And your companion, here, *Monsieur . . .*"

"Huston. Tommy Huston."

"O'Neil?" asked the big man, rolling towards him, looking over Febre's thin shoulder.

"Hello, Strickland," said O'Neil, finally placing him.

What the hell Philip Strickland was doing in this south country he could not guess. Strickland was head of the Araqua Copal and Ivory Societe up around Caragassou, and a mighty good business it was, too, now that the prices had skyrocketed.

Strickland shook O'Neil's hand and stepped back, passing his hand across his close-clipped moustache. He was about forty, firm-jawed, and not bad looking.

"You know my associate, *Monsieur Monteux*?" he asked.

O'Neil had heard of Monteux, but they had never met. He proved to be a scrawny Frenchman with a Dakar accent.

"What brings you here, O'Neil?" asked the administrator.

"Murder."

The administrator straightened for a second, then he decided that O'Neil was joking. He started to laugh, but the glint in O'Neil's eyes cut the laugh short.

"You're not serious!"

"We stopped at the rest house just now. Pablo Orsenes is over there—dead."

"Murdered?"

"Yes. His back is broken."

"Why, how the devil—"

"He was lying there—sprawled half down the stairs."

"Why, then it must have been an accident. He tripped on the matting, I suppose, and broke his back in falling. I don't imagine it was murder at all. An accident. A damned, unfortunate accident."

Febre had convinced himself. Like most administrators he disliked trouble, and murder was a great deal of trouble. One must find the killer, and there is a trial, and witnesses, and men get to paying too much attention to the administrator's business. Then the first thing you know, some snoop comes out from Leopoldville. All of which might be all right if it did the murdered man a particle of good, but of

course it doesn't. He ends up just as dead as he was before.

O'Neil looked at him for a moment, and just a hint of a smile twisted his lips. He knew how it was with administrators—and probably this calling it an accident would make it easier for him, too.

"Sure," he said. "It was probably an accident."

"How did you happen to go to the rest house before you came here?" Strickland asked with studied off-handedness.

"That's my own business."

Strickland kept smiling, passing his broad hand across his stubbled moustache.

"Didn't one of the native boys say he saw two white men and a porter come in about dark?"

"What are you getting at, Strickland?"

"Nothing—except that you *might* have seen Orsenes before."

"I should split your thick skull!" snarled O'Neil.

"Gentlemen! If there are to be accusations, it is I, Febre, who shall make them! And after all, it is too late to help Orsenes, no? Let us have a brandy and examine the matter more calmly."

"Sure," said Strickland in a purring voice. "I was just having my little joke with Armless O'Neil."

"When did *you* get here, Strickland?"

"Less than an hour ago. And we have not been out of the administrator's sight."

"What are you doing in this country—buying ivory?"

"Why, as you yourself said only a moment ago, that is my own business."

THERE was a doctor at the mission hospital—a thin, sickly looking man turned yellow from a too liberal dosage of his own medicines. With a weary motion he dropped a stethoscope in the pocket of his cotton coat, snapped off the wireless, and slogged over to the rest house. Orsenes' back was broken and no doubt of that, but the doctor thought it might have happened from tripping and falling down the stairs.

"I knew a mountain climber back in the States who broke his back from falling off a lecture platform," he said, making a wan joke.

O'Neil took an electric torch upstairs and flashed it around. He had an idea

somebody had given the place a good searching, but he couldn't be sure. And he kept thinking about that damned bundle.

"Now what?" Tommy asked in a dismal voice, sitting back among the mosquito nettings of the upstairs room they had chosen for themselves.

"Why, we'll have to take that bundle down to Geoffroi in Kandona. I don't see any other way we can come out on it."

"That'll still be only seventy-five hundred francs while we were figuring on—"

"He'll pay the whole fifteen thousand or he won't get it!"

"You think Strickland is after the bundle?"

"Why, sure."

"And that he killed Orsenes?"

"Who else would have strength enough to snap a back like that?"

Tommy restrained a shudder. The thought of one man so powerful he could twist another man apart was not pleasant. He was wishing he had never contacted Orsenes on that two-way radio in the first place.

"I haven't got much stomach for sleeping here," he said.

O'Neil didn't either, thought he refrained from admitting it.

"Let's hit for the bush," said Tommy.

"Wait until it clouds over. Strickland will probably follow us otherwise."

O'Neil lighted a cigarette. The moon was out, finding its way through the jalousies, making a pattern on the mildewed rattan that covered the floor. He could see the barren yard of the old compound, the roofs of the warehouses, the huts of the village looking like enlarged toadstools, and beyond, the solid, black wall of the jungle. The tom-tom had finally stopped beating, the mission wireless had been turned off. Now there were only the primal sounds of the jungle—a chorus of nocturnal birds, the weird cries of some horse-faced bats, the demented laughter of a hyena.

"Sure that bundle will be all right?"

"Well, Bobolongonga will stay with it—though I suppose he's asleep with that Enfield revolver for a pillow, and nothing short of a charging rhino could wake him up."

He lighted a second cigarette. Tommy stretched himself inside the nettings and

commenced breathing heavily, but he was not asleep.

Abruptly, like a shade being drawn, a rain cloud covered the moon. It started again—that steady, tepid deluge.

"All right," said O'Neil.

He stamped out his cigarette on the damp matting, and felt inside his coat pocket to free the safety of his American automatic. Tommy pulled aside the netting and stood beside him.

"Which way?"

"The hall, and then through that front verandah door. We can slide down the pillar and make a circle to the south. Strickland will try to follow us, I suppose, but what the hell? We could beat a drum every step of the way and still lose him on a night like this."

THE CORRODED DOOR hinges made a faint rasping, but the matted floor of the hallway gave out no more sound than a sponge. A dim rectangle of light marked the position of the verandah door. O'Neil paused there to listen. He moved on when Tommy bumped into him, and felt along the verandah rail to the corner. He bent over the rail, reached down, and found the pillar. It was as large as a man's thigh, and wrapped with vines.

O'Neil hooked one of the twisted branches and lowered himself until his toes touched the railing below, then he dropped to the ground. Tommy was there a moment later. O'Neil was turning away when he sensed a vibration above.

Someone was walking along the verandah. A heavy man. That meant it was Strickland. Tommy started away, and O'Neil hooked him by the collar, flipping him back. In the same second, the white ray of an electric torch cut the blackness.

It was Strickland up there, leaning over the rail. O'Neil could make him out by the reflections cast by the beam of light. He could see the set of his strong features, the gleam of silvered pistol metal in his other hand.

The beam swept the yard with several swift arcs, swung down, and centered on O'Neil. O'Neil's gun was out. He had intended to shoot at the torch if it was necessary, then he realized that Strickland's gun was drawing down on him. He tried to center the big man, pulled the trigger.

But Strickland was on the move. The electric torch flicked off, and the pistol in Strickland's hand let out a spit of flame. The night was rocked by four explosions so close together that a single second would have covered all of them, and then silence—a heavy, rain-drumming silence.

O'Neil doubled back inside the house.

"Have you gone nuts?" whispered Tommy in anguish, keeping one hand on O'Neil's shoulder, fumbling with his small-calibre automatic with the other.

O'Neil did not answer. He found his way across the big room and through the side door. Strickland was thudding the verandah on the other side. His partner, the snakelike Montoux, was talking in a snarling half-whisper. Still the rain, the velvet darkness. They were on the cobble path that Orsenes had followed in taking them to the storehouse. It seemed like they were running across a dark void, then unexpectedly they were beyond the rain, breathing the rancid air of the warehouse.

A man was snoring not far away. O'Neil found him in the dark, and gave him a healthy boot in the slats.

"Awake, thou infidel eater of pork!" he snarled.

Bobolongonga came to his knees, snorting like a rhino, bumping O'Neil's shins with his big-framed Enfield revolver. O'Neil dragged the bundle from its hiding place and tossed it so it landed squarely on the big black's shoulder.

"Do I carry this and thy unblessed uniform can as well?" muttered Bobolongonga.

O'Neil did not even answer the question. He stalked ahead, letting Tommy and the burdened black follow him as best they could.

Strickland had the torch going again from the rest house, sweeping the old compound yard with its beam. A light had appeared at the administrator's. There was a whistle blast from one of those native policemen who had been trained at Leopoldville.

O'Neil found a footpath that led south beyond the settlement. They went through abandoned fields now deep in ochilla weed and papaya growing wild. There was muck for a half-mile, after that the main footpath pointing south, and the jungle closed

down on them, blotting up the sounds from LeDrapeau.

III

O'NEIL kept going, like a blind man, sorting his way through the blackness of jungle night. Unexpectedly the moon came out, sending a long, bluish beam through the high bowers. He stopped, and squatted beside a fallen *essaka* trunk feeling for a cigarette.

"Why stop when you have a moon to see by?" complained Tommy.

O'Neil spat. "If my traveling doesn't suit you, Tommy-lad, you can go and be damned. I'm sick of you. I'm sick of the trouble you get me into. You and your bundle!"

Once again the match heads crumbled from dampness, so he tore off the cigarette paper and chewed the tobacco. "Oh yes, you're a prize partner! What was it you said?—'There'll be plenty of pounds sterling in good old Drapeau, you can take my word for that!' Why, you rum-dum, fiddle-playing tropical tramp! I should wring your rooster neck. And by the nine blessed gates of Mecca, some day I will!"

"Ai! Ai!" chanted Bobolongonga, putting down his burden.

Tommy answered in a tired voice, "You're dumb, O'Neil. We have the bundle. If Geoffroi won't kick through with the fifteen thousand francs, we can open it. What if it is full of hasheesh? It wouldn't hurt that rubber-tired conscience of yours. You've peddled worse."

"Who would pay fifteen thousand francs for a bag of hasheesh when he can pick all the hemp he needs in his own back yard?"

"Maybe it's placer diamonds highgraded from the mines at Kama-Kama. Geoffroi handles plenty of the hot stuff."

"A bag of diamonds that size?"

"Well—how the hell do I know what it is? Maybe it's a map to Sheba's mines. Maybe it's the jawbone that Sampson used to slay the Israelites. It must be worth plenty or that Geoffroi-Orsenes combination wouldn't be wanting it."

That was so incontrovertible that O'Neil was forced to agree.

"Why, you're right there, Tommy. And Strickland, too. The only thing on earth that interests those kind of men is money."

At dawn they went on, following the footpath through a jungle bowing overhead in a solid sponge of green, so thick that in an hour's travel one might use five fingers to count the times he glimpsed the sky. The earth was silt-black, brightened by various fungus, and here and there, like flame in the gloom, was a rotten log blazing with orchids.

There were no villages save for an occasional nest of pot-bellied pigmies who vanished into the unknown well of the jungle at sight of them.

Two days, and they reached the banks of the Ufunta, whose broad, brownish waters crept almost stagnant toward the Congo. Late in the evening, a dugout manned by Ilongo fishermen answered their hail and transported them upstream to their village which stood on ten-foot piles along the stream's swampy shores. Next morning O'Neil dickered for a dugout and a half-dozen paddlers for the trip to Kandona. He reached there at noon on the fourth day after leaving Drapeau.

KANDONA lay on a low rise of land on the west bank of the Ufunta. It was a town of three or four hundred grass and bamboo huts, a street of white man's pleasure houses, and the extensive palm-nut and rubber warehouses of West Africa Consolidated. Born as the eastern terminal of a two-hundred kilometer narrow-gauge rail line from the Kwango many years before, Kandona had slowly rotted away amid the miasma of the deep tropics until high profits from oil nuts and rubber set her off on her present flush of life. Far from Leopoldville, and supplied from the Portuguese colony to the south, Kandona lived as she pleased, and offered an assortment of wickedness that would have shamed Cairo herself.

"Well, let's get over to Geoffroi's wherever that is," said Tommy impatiently.

"Carrying that bundle with us, I suppose? No, Tommy. The price of an assassination in this town is considerably less than the amount I intend to ask—and Geoffroi is the type who buys on the lowest possible market."

They went up the cobbled street, past dinky slum-shops where Armenians from Dakar and Rabat kept up a continuous babble. Here and there were Arabs, tall

and hawklike, spotless in white tabarouches, and the inevitable Chinese, sitting, placidly smoking bland Shanghai cigarettes half papier-mache, but still turning twice the profit of their haggling competitors.

A lorry jolted up the cobbles splashing mud with its broad tires while O'Neil cursed until its Turkish driver gawked back from the rear window and almost ran over a Hindu water carrier.

"Thrice son of a leprous pig!" screamed O'Neil in the jargon of Islam, shaking his hook. "Thou infidel essence of camel's dung!"

"Hold your tongue, O'Neil," grumbled Tommy. "I don't see why you have to make trouble wherever you go."

"I wouldn't be in this rotting sinkhole having mud splashed on me by an unchristian lorry driver if it hadn't been for you, Tommy my lad."

"Ai! Ai!" chanted Bobolongonga, still carrying the sealed bundle and the uniform can.

A sidewalk on stilts and a quarter-mile wooden lorry track struck off toward the new buildings of the Consolidated. Beyond that the street turned, and the slum shops became fewer. There was a French cafe with sidewalk tables protected by a wooden awning and mosquito nettings, a hotel called *L'AngLaise*, and a dozen sing-song houses of a type common from Cairo to Johannesburg.

O'Neil turned in at the hotel which was run by a slatternly Frenchwoman and an oily-looking Turk from Suez—her husband.

"We have a room on the court," the Turk said with a variety of servile bows. "Clean linens, *Monsieurs!* The best. Boiled water at no extra charge—"

"How much?" asked O'Neil.

"Four hundred francs."

"For a single night?"

"Ah, *Monsieur*—it is only the favor to the English gentlemen that we rent the room at all..."

O'Neil threatened him with his hook. "Don't talk to me about favors! I'll pay eighty francs and not one centime more. And I must have a pallet for my black boy thrown in."

The Turk fairly wept. His slattern wife chimed in with French vituperation, calling O'Neil six varieties of cheapskate. At last they haggled out a price of 150 francs,

an amount which O'Neil paid in advance, thus almost cleaning his pockets.

He left Bobolongonga in the room to watch over the bundle, and led Tommy up the street to Geoffroi's place — the "Parisienne."

THE PARISIENNE was a two-story structure of sawed khaya wood with a sheet-metal roof. It had recently been covered with some of the cheap yellow paint which is made as by-product by the Rhodesian copper mines, but the paint had mottled from moisture, making the building look considerably worse than it could have looked before. Inside it was long and dim. A couple of oscillating D-C electric fans kept up a futile humming, now and then causing a stir in the heavy humidity without helping it.

O'Neil paused in the center of the big room a moment, looking around. It was eight years since he had seen it. There was a battered mahogany bar, a mirror etched by fungus until it resembled unpolished steel, a roulette wheel and some *vingt-et-un* games going halfheartedly on early-siesta money. Beyond was an arch through which could be seen a dancing floor with a piano and a long-throated Egyptian guitar lying atop it.

He asked for Geoffroi, but the cockney Englishman behind the bar shook his head.

"'E's 'avin' siesta, me bucko, and I value me bloomin' life too much to rouse 'im."

"Orsenes sent me," said O'Neil, expecting this to change things, but it didn't.

"Orsenes be damned!" the cockney said.

"It's about that bundle Geoffroi was expecting from up in the Congo country."

"I don't know nothin' about no bloomin' bundle, and I ain't a-goin' to rouse Geoffroi."

O'Neil cursed him suitably and took a chair over by one of the wall tables from where he could watch both front and rear.

"Cognac!" he shouted, beating the table top with his hook.

A native in a long, white gown brought a bottle of poor brandy. O'Neil tasted it and spat. He threatened the native's skull with his hook arm. The native seized his bottle and fled, returning five minutes later with a litre of Angouleme usually reserved for visiting officials of the Consolidated.

The Angouleme soothed O'Neil consider-

ably. He devoted his siesta to it. Toward evening, Geoffroi came in.

Geoffroi was a tall, shifty eyed Frenchman with large ears, their lobes pierced and hung with crescent gold earrings.

He saw O'Neil and came over, squinting with his little, shifty eyes.

"O'Neil! It is the pleasure! And you, *Monsieur*—"

"Huston."

They shook hands, and Geoffroi reached for the bottle.

"Buy your own liquor!" snarled O'Neil.

Geoffroi laughed, jerking his head, and making the gold earrings dance. "The same old O'Neil, no?" He called for another bottle, tore off the foil seal, pulled the cork with the opener on his watch chain. With a flourish, he filled all three glasses. "You are interested in our rubber vines these days, O'Neil?"

"No. I came here at the behest of an old friend of ours—Orsenes."

Geoffroi held the glass to his lips, poker-faced, but with eyes turned a trifle harder than usual.

"What about Orsenes?" he asked.

"He's dead."

Geoffroi exhaled. "Where?"

"At LeDrapeau. He was murdered."

"So?"

"Strickland was there at the time, if that means anything to you. Tell me, Geoffroi, is there any reason why Strickland would want to kill Orsenes?"

"Why do you ask *me*?"

"Because there was a certain article—a bundle."

"Strickland got it then?" asked Geoffroi, leaning forward.

"No. *I* have it."

"Ah!"

Geoffroi straightened as though these words were a hypodermic. He snapped his fingers and chuckled. "*Bien!* That is good! Who but my dear friend O'Neil, the armless one, would have brought away that bundle? You have it here? Bring it to the back room. Better, upstairs—"

"Not so fast, Geoffroi."

"Yes?"

"There is a little matter of remuneration. Pay. Money."

"You bet," said Tommy. "Fifteen—"

"Shut up!" barked O'Neil.

"Fifteen what?" asked Geoffroi.

"Fifteen hundred pounds-sterling." O'Neil answered.

Geoffroi's lips exploded, blowing droplets of cognac. "Pah! You are a madman! Fifteen hundred pounds!—one hundred and eighty thousand francs!"

"Or I'll settle for six thousand good, round American dollars."

"Orsenes said I would pay this?"

"He said that bundle had to get through—in five days. It got through in four. Well?"

"Let me see it."

"You go to hell."

Geoffroi thought for a while, and poured more cognac.

"Ah—my good friends. It is, of course, all so foolish. The bundle—it is worth nothing like what you ask. A few thousand francs, perhaps, but fifteen hundred pounds! *Voilà!*—behold me, *monsieurs!* A poor man. An honest, but humble innkeeper—"

"Who handles stolen rocks from the government mines, and half the opium in west Africa."

Geoffroi spread his fingers in a plea for tolerance. "Perhaps, now and then a few diamonds, a little of the *chandu*, but only as a favor to old friends. Still, I am poor. Yes, should I sell everything, would I have fifteen hundred pounds?"

"You know damned well you would."

"I will make the deal with you, O'Neil. Because we have been the old friends, to you I will offer—say twenty thousand francs."

"No."

"Ver' well. Then twenty-five thousand, but that is my positive las' offer."

O'Neil stood up. "Let's go, Tommy, the man's all through bidding. I heard a steamboat whistle a bit ago. Maybe it's a boat that will take us out of this stinking country."

"*Monsieurs*—"

They started for the door, O'Neil with a vigorous stride, Tommy a lope in the rear.

"*Monsieurs*," shouted Geoffroi, "fifty thousand francs! Sixty thousand!" He stopped, and, with air all but expended from his lungs, spoke at their retreating backs in a scarcely audible whisper. "Ver'

well, you American robber, fifteen hundred pounds."

O'Neil grinned and did an about-face. "Dig it out, Geoffroi!"

"You think I carry so much moneys in my pants pockets? Bring the bundle. Let me see it. Let me be sure that the seals are not broken."

"You'll pay the money *first*."

"I will compromise. You carry the bundle. I will look at it in your arms. If it is the one, then I will pay over the moneys—"

"No."

"But why—"

"Because if I ever got it in this human deadfall of yours, you'd have one of your knife men cut me down. You pay over that money. In cash. And I'll have that bundle over here short of an hour."

Geoffroi gave O'Neil a look of mixed hatred and admiration. He motioned to them and climbed the stairs. He led them down a hallway, unlocked a door. They entered what were evidently his private rooms. An iron bedstead stood at one side surrounded by a film of fresh netting. A couple of large windows with native bamboo jalousies looked out on the street. Geoffroi turned a switch that set the automatic punkhas to going. They started a breeze that actually felt cool.

"You will wait here," said Geoffroi, and disappeared through some Chinese bead draperies to another room.

They could hear him rattling around with a lock. There was a considerable delay, and he came back with a thick roll of thousand-franc notes. O'Neil watched intently as he counted them out—180 of them. O'Neil riffled their corners, grunted satisfaction, and stuffed them in his jacket pocket.

"I'll be right back with that bundle."

Geoffroi thought for a moment. "Wait until dark. It would perhaps be better."

O'Neil shrugged and went down the stairs.

IV

BOBOLONGONGA was asleep with the door bolted and O'Neil almost chopped through a panel with his steel hook rousing him.

He cursed the big black and looked at the bundle. The seals were intact. He sat down on the edge of the bed and inspected

the money. Sight of it seemed to mellow him considerably. He lay back and smoked one yellow-paper cigarette after another. The sun went down, and rain came in a sudden torrent. It went away leaving a pale evening starlight. He ground out his fifth cigarette and stood up.

"Grab your bundle," he said to Bobolongonga.

Outside, the street was still running tepid water. The air was heavy with humidity, and stench of rubber smokehouses hung in a blue layer. Men of many races crowded the walk, half of them already drunk on cheap millet beer and the smoke of unlawful *bangh* cigarettes.

O'Neil left Bobolongonga in a mud-filled alley between Geoffroi's place and a dive next door while Tommy and himself went inside to make sure the coast was clear.

The room was crowded and hot. In the rear a hybrid orchestra consisting of piano, Egyptian guitar, native balafron and tomtoms created an infernal substitute for music while dancing girls executed sinuous movements.

O'Neil did not pause. He walked straight on, bulling his way, occasionally tossing someone from his path with a careless sweep of his hook arm. Half way up the stairs he spoke to Tommy.

"Notice that side table?"

"Which one?"

"That big shave-head Senegalese with the silver earrings. That's Dakar. He's Strickland's bodyguard. Used to be, anyhow. I had a run-in with him one time up at Cocquihatville."

Dakar was not a hard man to see. He was sitting over there, back against the wall, watching the stairs with dull, yellowish eyes. He was very large—larger even than Bobolongonga—with a gorilla build combining sloping shoulders with long arms. Probably a gorilla's brain, too. Beside him was a hawk-faced fellow of North-African mixed blood, carefully keeping his eyes on the drink before him, but still missing no move that O'Neil or Tommy made.

"What the devil?" asked Tommy when they reached the upper hall. "Do you think Strickland followed us here from Drapau?"

"There are his hatchet men—draw your own conclusions from that."

O'Neil rapped at Geoffroi's door. No answer, so he rapped again.

"What the devil?" muttered Tommy. "O'Neil, you don't suppose that Senegalese down there could have—"

"Geoffroi's the sort who can take care of himself."

O'Neil tried the door. To his surprise, it was unlocked. Enough light came through the windows to reveal the main features of the room—the furniture, the iron bed with its film of netting. He knew where the light hung, but he did not turn it on. He walked quietly across the matted floor, and through the draperies to the second room. Dark in there. He found the string which operated the native jalousies. The glow of light which entered revealed the greatly elongated figure of a man.

He seemed to be standing on tip-toe, arms thrown overhead, almost touching the ceiling. A shaft of light from a window across the street reflected down from a tilted wall mirror revealing a man's feet encased in white, perforated shoes, toes hanging down a few inches from the floor as the toes of a man who has been hanged.

O'Neil reached out and touched the form. It swung a trifle, bringing a complaining sound from the rafter overhead.

"Who is it?" Tommy asked.

"Geoffroi. He's dead."

"Hang himself?"

"No. Somebody strung him up by the thumbs."

TOMMY drew out a match, but O'Neil knocked it from his fingers. He lifted the rest of the jalousies. Things became visible in the whitewashed room. There was Geoffroi, shirt torn off, hanging by his thumbs. A twist of rope and matting that had been a gag was hanging loosely about his neck. A piece of rusty, quarter-inch wire rope lay at his feet, and by the looks of his lacerated back he had been worked over considerably with it. Death had been caused by a knife wound above the kidney.

"Orsenes got off easy," muttered O'Neil.

"You think Strickland—"

"Of course. He must have followed us right into town. Saw us come here, I suppose, and took it for granted that we delivered the bundle. Strung Geoffroi up by his thumbs and skinned him alive with

that rusty cable trying to find out where it was."

"Cripes!" muttered Tommy, looking at though his dysentery were about to come back on him.

O'Neil tore the netting from one of the windows and leaned out. Down below he could see the narrow alley, and the shadow of Bobolongonga with the bundle beside him, one hand on the butt of his revolver.

"Let's get out of here!" said Tommy.

O'Neil opened the door into the hallway. A Moroccan girl with tinkling head-bangles was walking with her back towards them. He waited until she went inside a room. That heathen orchestra was still hammering away down below. From somewhere came the laughter of women, the sharp, acrid odor of burning opium. It seemed strange to have everything going on the same as ever while Geoffroi, the master of the house, was in there, dead, hanging by his thumbs.

"Reminds me of a wake back in Boston—"

"For Hell's sake," muttered Tommy, "get to moving. Do you want a knife through your ribs?"

"Stop talking about my ribs when you're worrying about your own."

They went down the stairs. Dakar, the apelike Senegalese, was gone from his table by the wall, but the mix-blood was still there, drinking slowly, pretending not to notice who it was coming downstairs. Tommy would have rushed on through the front door, but O'Neil turned the other way and led him to the table they had occupied through the hours of siesta.

Two trader's clerks in long white gowns and topis sat there with half-killed bottles of millet beer, craning to watch the girls who were still executing their dancing steps. O'Neil cut short their reverie by smashing one of the beer bottles with a sweep of his hook. The clerks remonstrated, and O'Neil cursed them, driving them from the table. Then he moved one of the chairs so its back was against the wall and sat down.

"Why do you always have to start a racket?" Tommy complained. "Why not just find Bobolongonga and take a sneak into the bush with that bundle? After all, we got more money than we deserved. Yes, and when they—"

"Stop sniveling." O'Neil sat for a while,

slowly scanning the room. Then he beat on the table top, deeply scarring it with his hook. "Waiter!" he bellowed.

A tall black with concentric cheek markings of one of the Angola tribes came over and stood at surly attention.

"Cognac!" said O'Neil. "And make it Angouleme. Get it?—Angouleme!"

O'NEIL expected some of the cheap Moroccan brandy that tasted like low-test kerosene, but when it turned out to be another long-necked bottle of the Angouleme he refrained from splitting the black man's skull, and tipped him three copper franc pieces instead.

He poured a drink and savored it slowly, cupping his hands over the glass, letting his eyelids droop after the manner of a French connoisseur as he inhaled the bouquet. Tommy gulped his brandy and fidgeted around as though the seat of his chair were heated to 140 degrees, centigrade.

"O'Neil, why stick around this filthy dump?"

"Because I expect a visit from Strickland, and I'd rather talk to him here in the light than outside in the dark."

Dakar walked back inside. He weaved across with his bow-legged shuffle, and paused a few steps from O'Neil to stand, hands on hips, massive shoulders hunched forward, shaved head gleaming with oily lustre in the lamplight. He turned without changing expression and sat down beside his North-African partner. After a wait of three or four minutes, Strickland and Monteux came in.

Strickland did not glance at Dakar. He smiled and came over to O'Neil's table with Monteux tagging behind.

"O'Neil, we meet again!" Strickland said, pausing a step away, and smoothing his close-clipped moustache.

"Surprised?" asked O'Neil, eyelids drooping with the pleasure of the cognac grape.

"Why, no. There's no use lying. We followed you here."

"Why?"

"You know that, too. We are interested in a certain bundle that was given you by Orsenes back in LeDrapeau."

O'Neil waited.

"You still have it?"

"Sure. It's right here under the table. Help yourself."

Strickland recognized the sarcasm in the words and kept his gaze steady, but Monteux bent almost double peering beneath the table.

"That bundle is not worth a copper centime piece to you, O'Neil," Strickland said with an easy smile.

"No?"

"In fact, when I get it, I intend to burn it. After being satisfied with its contents, of course."

"Don't tell me there was something in there that would send you to jail."

"Not that, either."

O'Neil kept inhaling. "Still, I know of someone who would prize it highly."

"Not Geoffroi."

"Why, no. Not any more." O'Neil was groping in the dark, but no one would have guessed by the Buddha smile on his ugly face as he sat there. "Why keep fooling around, Strickland?"

"Very well, how much will the noble doctor pay you?"

O'Neil had no idea who this "noble doctor" could be. "Perhaps — five hundred thousand francs," he answered.

Strickland located an empty chair and pulled it over. It creaked beneath his bulk as he sat down. He leaned forward, elbows on the table, smiling into O'Neil's veiled eyes.

"Why, then, it is up to me to meet the competition. I will have the money for you when you deliver the bundle."

"I'll take the money *now*."

Strickland thought for a while. Then he shrugged and drew out an order book and an indelible pencil. Writing carefully he made out an order for the desired amount on the Banque Commerciale du Congo, tore it out, and slid it across. O'Neil looked at it distantly without making a move to pick it up.

"In currency!" said O'Neil.

"You think I carry such amounts around in my jacket pocket?"

"Then it's no deal."

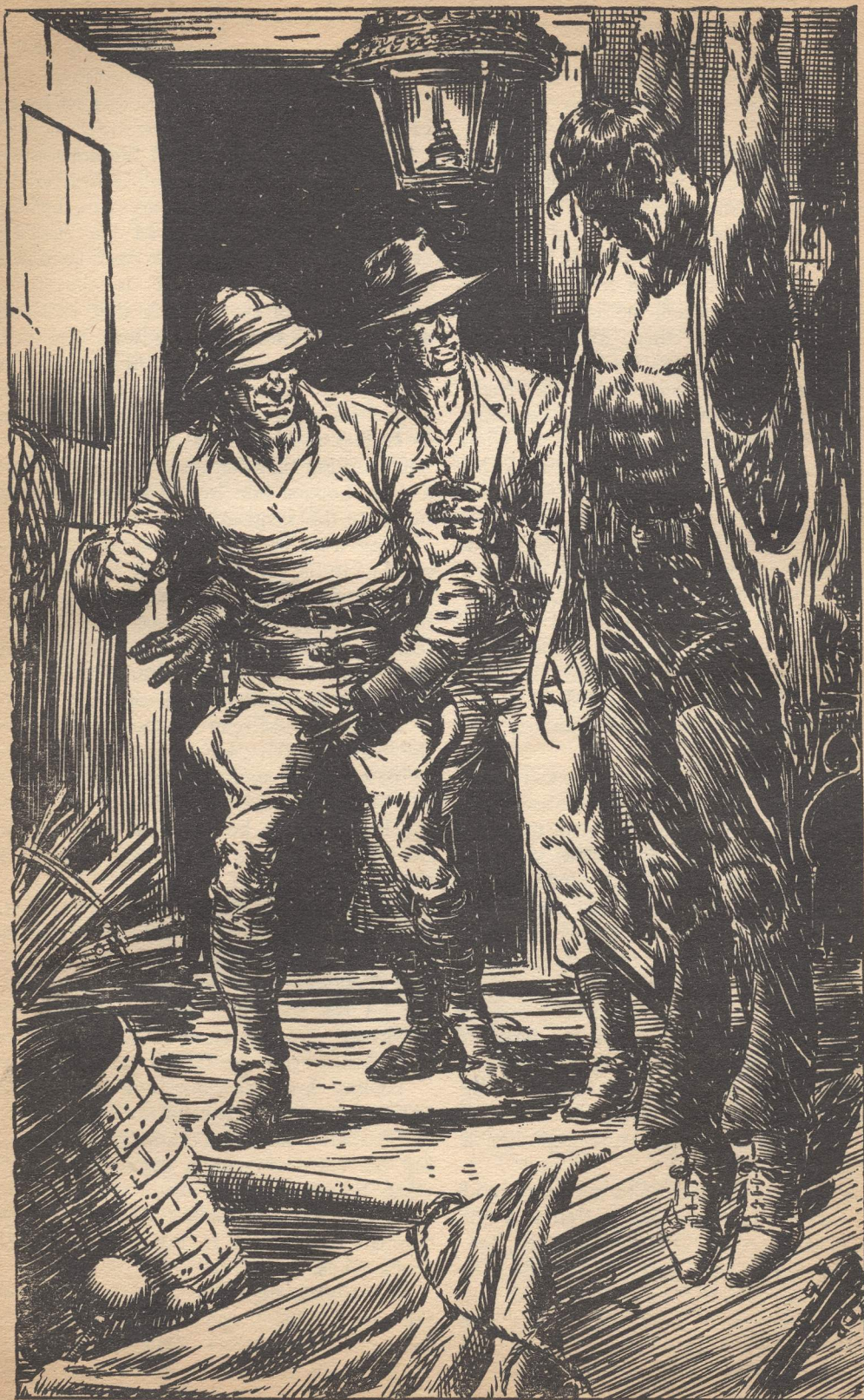
"That order is good!"

"By the time I got it to a branch of the Commerciale it wouldn't be worth a damn, and we both know it."

"I want that bundle, O'Neil!"

"Then pay for it."

FIVE SUNS TO ANGOLA!



Geffroi was hanging by his thumbs, his back a bloody mess. He was dead.

STRICKLAND'S temper had a brutal quality that had won him several re-proofs from the Belgian Department of Colonies for his treatment of erring natives—and that temper sprang its leash now.

He rose from his chair, his hand shot out, grasping O'Neil by the collar. His hand twisted, snapping O'Neil's head to an off-angle. He was powerful—more powerful than any man O'Neil had ever met. He knew better than to fight against such strength. Instead, he let Strickland draw him forward, then, at the correct moment, he swung his hook in a short, devastating arc. It connected with Strickland's forearm, bruising it to the bone. Strickland gasped and staggered back, blind from pain. He kept trying to work his fingers, but his whole right arm seemed paralyzed from the blow.

Monteux sprang up, chattering like a 'gilla monkey, his hand beneath his coat. There was a glimmer of gunmetal. A Spanish automatic. He managed to get its safety-click snapped off, but Tommy was on him then, swinging a wild right. It connected, sending the little Frenchman down hard with his skull banging the floor.

In that second, O'Neil took quick stock of the whole situation. He noticed the North-African crowding the wall to make way for Dakar who had come up with a thick-bladed machete in his hand. Strickland still could not make that right arm function, but he was reaching awkwardly with his left, trying to get at a gun butt turned the wrong way.

O'Neil booted the table, driving Strickland off balance. He intended the table to stop Dakar, too, but the huge Senegalese was swift on his feet. He avoided the table with the footwork of a skilled boxer and pounced with long arms high like a gorilla.

He was set to grasp with one hand, and kill with the machete, but O'Neil was not where he expected. O'Neil was quick, too. He had rolled back and to one side. He propped his left foot against the wall for extra force, waited until Dakar was just catching himself and turning with the machete, then he swung his hook like an axe for Dakar's head.

The blow might have cracked the skull

of the huge Senegalese, only he moved at the last second, and took it high on the cheek. It sent him reeling with blood smearing his oily skin. He trod on an overturned chair, smashing it like so much cardboard.

Strickland had extracted his automatic, but Dakar was in his way. O'Neil could have drawn and killed either man, but he dared not shoot because of the surging customers who were now making chaos of the room.

Somebody threw a bottle that thudded against the stucco wall without breaking. This must have reminded O'Neil of his Angouleme cognac, for he grabbed the precious long-necked bottle and took time to stuff it in his coat pocket. Tommy was still working on Monteux. O'Neil shouted at him, hooked him by the collar, dragged him into the surge of the mob.

They were carried against the stairs instead of to the front door as O'Neil wanted. Strickland was bellowing over there, cursing, trying to charge through the crowd. Tommy headed up the stairs two at a time, with O'Neil right after him, almost trampling a frightened dancing girl.

The North-African was over there by the wall, standing on a chair, a revolver in his hand. He spotted Tommy and O'Neil—tried to draw a bead. O'Neil let fly from the hip, and the bullet must have caught the fellow in the leg by the way he buckled sidewise.

The upstairs hallway was deserted. Geoffroi's door—then on through the window from which O'Neil had torn the netting. Bobolongonga was down below, bundle on his shoulder, Enfield revolver in his hand, standing close to one corner as men spilled from the front door.

Tommy lowered himself and dropped to the ground. O'Neil came a moment later.

"*Bwana!*" muttered Bobolonga, lowering his revolver with a gesture of relief when he saw who it was.

"Come along!" said O'Neil running through deep muck to the rear of Geoffroi's place.

A sidewalk on stilts took them toward the native village, and there another walk led back to the street. Things seemed to be going on as usual by that time. Nothing about a spot of shooting to alarm Kandona.

V

THE FAT TURK was behind his little wicker cage in the hotel. He tossed O'Neil the big, iron key to the room and bowed to all of them including Bobolongonga.

"Is there a doctor in Kandona?" O'Neil asked.

"Ah, yes. *Monsieur* will find Doctor Cassiz at the Company compound. An excellent doctor for treating the tropical diseases. Not one of your good-for-nothings who give only the quinine—"

"Anyone else? Maybe a professor. A newcomer?"

The Turk snapped his finger. "Ah! The Doctor Jerrison! An Englishman. Or American. He arrived perhaps three weeks ago. Perhaps longer—"

"What's Jerrison's business?"

"Perhaps he is the man of science. Perhaps—"

"Who comes to see him?"

"One forgets—"

"Did Geoffroi come here to see him?"

The Turk started with surprise. "One night, very late. Geoffroi—"

"Where is he now, this Jerrison?"

The Turk glanced at the hooks hung with room keys. "Perhaps in his room. Perhaps not. Some men are forever carrying the keys outside."

"What's his number?"

"Thirty-one."

O'Neil climbed the stairs.

"Do you think he's the 'noble doctor' that Strickland mentioned?" Tommy asked.

"He's the scientist Orsenes talked about, too."

"Listen, O'Neil, let's just toss this bundle in the bush and to hell with it. It's getting on my nerves."

"Throw it away with men still willing to dig up good money for it? Listen, Tommy, I don't know what we have wrapped up here, but right now I'd rather have it than a shell game at the Iowa State fair."

A strip of light shone beneath the door to number thirty-one. O'Neil paused there for a moment, and decided against rapping. He motioned for Bobolongonga to follow him to the verandah, and found a place where the big native could hide in the deep shadow of some ngassi vine.

After that he went back and knocked at the door.

No one answered for a moment, although he could hear the whisper of light footsteps across the matting.

"Jerrison!" he barked.

A girl's voice answered in frightened English, "Who's there?"

"O'Neil. I've come to see Doctor Jerrison."

"He isn't here."

"It's about a certain package."

"You must be making a mistake."

"It's from the Congo country. A sealed package. The Doctor was expecting it, wasn't he?"

"I don't know."

O'Neil was never much account when it came to arguing with a woman. He walked impatiently to the verandah, said something to Bobolongonga, and walked back. The door to number thirty-one was open, and Tommy was inside. He couldn't help laughing a little. There was no doubt about it, the lad certainly had his way with women.

He walked in himself.

Tommy said, "Miss Sheila Jerrison, meet Armless O'Neil. He's a trifle uncouth, but honest."

"You don't need to apologize for me!" growled O'Neil.

HE LOOKED at the girl. She was very fair—not the bleached-burlap type of blonde one often sees in the tropics, but a natural with bright, straw-colored hair, a clear skin only starting to tan, and good blue eyes. She was beautiful—O'Neil, for all the bluntness he affected, was conscious of that.

He asked, "Was your father dealing with Geoffroi and a man named Orsenes for a bundle from the Congo country, Miss Jerrison?"

"You called me *Miss* Jerrison. That is not the case. Doctor Jerrison is my husband."

"I see. But the bundle—"

"That would be the Doctor's affair."

O'Neil nodded. "Well, somebody had better make up their mind pretty quick or I'll take that bundle down and throw it in the river. It's getting just a wee bit too hot to handle."

The girl seemed agitated. She went to

the window, lifted the bamboo shades, and looked down on the street. She came back, seated herself on the edge of a rattan chair, and commenced rubbing her hands nervously.

O'Neil knew that the girl was suspicious, and he didn't blame her. There had been plenty of murder over that damned bundle, and maybe no end of it yet.

She said, "The Doctor went over to the company compound to see a man. He should be back in a few minutes."

"What does 'Doctor' stand for, M.D.?" O'Neil asked.

"That, and PhD, too."

"I've read about him somewhere."

"Perhaps in connection with the artificial protoplasm experiments."

"Maybe."

"He was also the man who polarized the meningitis bacteria," she added with a touch of pride.

"Is he here to set up a laboratory to investigate tropical fevers?"

"I am not a liberty to tell just why he is here."

"Or what is in the bundle," added O'Neil with a hint of a smile.

"Is there a bundle?"

"You know there is, sister. And if somebody doesn't decide about it pretty soon—"

"Keep civil, O'Neil. You're not in a cognac dive now," said Tommy.

They waited, O'Neil smoking a vile, yellow-paper cigarette, Tommy expending on Sheila Jerrison the charm which women from the Cape to Cairo had found almost irresistible.

After an hour or so there came the thump of an English boot out in the hall, and Doctor Jerrison came in.

O'Neil expected a young man, so Doctor Jerrison was a surprise. He was undoubtedly fifty, and without the immaculate, silvery haired charm with which some men of middle years attract young blonde ladies like Sheila. He was thin, a trifle stooped, jittery in his movements, his face worked with many purplish veins. His forehead, although narrow, was of a type one usually associates with intelligence, and his eyes were sharp and direct.

"Good evening," he said, pausing a step inside the door and looking from Tommy to O'Neil. The quality of his eyes, and the heightened color in his face told that

he had been drinking. The odor of whisky followed him into the room.

Sheila went to meet him. "Dear—these men, Mr. O'Neil and Mr. Huston—in-sisted that you would want to see them. They were saying something about a—bundle."

Jerrison made a startled movement. "A bundle?" He was trying to be poker-faced about it, but he was not a good actor. "Who told you men I was expecting any bundle?"

"Geoffroi," answered O'Neil. "Oh, come on, now, Doctor. We didn't come here to stick a knife in your ribs."

JERRISON glanced at his young wife. He must have received some message from her eyes, because his attitude changed abruptly.

"Sorry. This damned thing is getting me. The town, the heat, the rains. And the waiting—more than anything else, the waiting. Never knowing what man to trust. But the bundle—it has not been tampered with?"

"No."

"Ah, I say! That's good. You have it here?"

"It's inside the hotel."

"Now, that calls for a drink!" He walked to a little, spindle-legged bureau of Indian craftsmanship and commenced jerking open its warped drawers. "Where is that bottle?" he demanded, spinning to face Sheila.

"Darling—"

"My dear, I do not propose to be embarrassed in front of guests."

Sheila's shoulders seemed to droop a little as she crossed to a little, lacquered trunk and drew out a half-consumed quart of English whisky. Doctor Jerrison took it, found a couple of water tumblers, and poured a large measure of the liquor into each of them.

"It seems we have only two glasses," he said. "You will forgive me if I drink from the bottle?"

"Go ahead," said O'Neil.

They drank. By watching Jerrison's Adam's apple, O'Neil could tell he was taking a stiff jolt of the stuff, and by Sheila's expression he knew it was making her a trifle sick to see him do it.

Jerrison lowered the bottle, shuddered like a freezing man who finds warmth by

a stove. "And now that bundle. You say it is in the hotel?"

"Yes," answered O'Neil, making no move to go after it.

"Forgive me—perhaps you wish to go through the formality of delivering it to *Monsieur Geoffroi* and having me receive it through him."

"Geoffroi is dead."

Some of the color drained from Jerrison's face. His old, twitching nervousness returned to him. He seemed tempted to reach again for the bottle, reconsidered, and paced the room.

"Dead? How?"

"Murdered."

"By whom?"

"I don't know. Somebody strung him up by the thumbs and tortured him. Jerrison, what the devil do you have in that bundle, anyhow?"

"I cannot tell. Believe me!"

"You *can't*?"

"The relations of the Belgian and British nations might suffer if its contents were known."

This was a trifle more than O'Neil was willing to swallow, and his face showed it. Doctor Jerrison lifted the lid of the trunk, and drew out a leather portfolio.

"After risking your lives, I do not doubt you would like your payment before making delivery."

Tommy blurted, "But Geoffroi already paid us—"

"Why, that could not be. I paid Geoffroi only a small retainer—"

"Sure!" said O'Neil. "Only a small retainer. Same with us. Let's see, now, how much were we to get . . .?"

"Three thousand pounds." Jerrison unzipped the portfolio and paused. "That will be satisfactory?"

Temptation showed on O'Neil's face, but some latent sense of honor got the better of him.

"Sure," he said. "Three thousand was the figure."

Jerrison counted the money out in new Bank of England notes.

"It is understood, of course, that a portion of this money will be used to reimburse Senor Orsenes."

"Orsenes has been reimbursed—in full."

"Good! And now, the bundle. Remember, Mr. O'Neil, if the seals have been

tampered with I will expect to get that money back."

"The seals are O.K.,"

O'Neil went into the hall. It seemed safe enough. He went to the verandah. It was too dark to see Bobolongonga, but he located the faint, bluish glimmer of gun-metal. He spoke, and Bobolongonga came out, holstering his revolver.

"Bring the bundle," said O'Neil. "We're finally getting rid of that damned thing."

Bobolongonga carried it to the Doctor's room and dropped it with a grunt of relief. Jerrison eagerly rubbed his hands over the varnished canvas, inspected the dobs of sealing wax, looked at its top, its bottom. Satisfied, he stepped back with hands on hips, his face triumphant.

"Like *Mercurus* in the drama of Seneca, I will say—'*Ex omnibus his rebus, judicat, cum quanto periculo, et cum quanta virtute*'"

"Sure, and a many a happy Irish holiday to you, too," grinned O'Neil, fondling those stiff, new Bank of England notes in his jacket pocket.

AN HOUR later, in bed, Tommy tossed around on the stretched canvas trying to sleep. The mosquito nettings allowed no air to circulate. He decided to sit up and have a smoke. He thought O'Neil was asleep, but he wasn't. O'Neil got up for a cigarette too. Only Bobolongonga snored on his floor mat.

"I keep worrying about that girl," said Tommy.

"Sure!"

"Oh, not the way you think. I'm just sorry for her. She's so damned small, and sweet—and helpless. I can't figure why she ever married a man like Jerrison. Old, and rummy with booze—"

"There's lots of things that matter to a woman besides a handsome face, Tommy my lad. There's brains, for instance. Why, Jerrison could compute the distance to the moon by its angles of inference with the planet Pluto while you were computing three plus four in a crap game. Sheila probably married the thirsty old genius to wean him from the bottle and save a noble career for science."

"Then I feel more sorry for her than ever."

O'Neil finished his cigarette, got the

MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING-

(OR IS IT?)



BY GROUCHO MARX

WHAT do you want to save up a lot of money for? You'll never need the stuff.

Why, just think of all the wonderful, wonderful things you can do *without* money. Things like—well, things like—

On second thought, you'd better keep on saving, chum. Otherwise you're licked.

For instance, how are you ever going to build



that Little Dream House, without a trunk full of moolah? You think the carpenters are going to work free? Or the plumbers? Or the architects? Not those lads. They've been around. They're no dopes.

And how are you going to send that kid of yours to college, without the folding stuff?

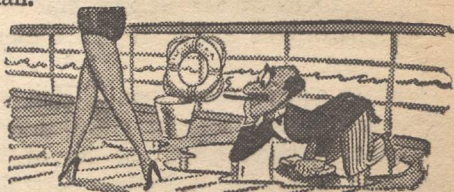
Maybe you think he can work his way through by playing the flute.

If so, you're crazy. (Only three students have ever worked their way through college by playing the flute. And they had to stop eating for four years.)

And how are you going to do that world-traveling you've always wanted to do? Maybe you think you can stoke your way across, or scrub decks. Well, that's no good. I've tried it. It interferes with shipboard romances.

So—all seriousness aside—you'd better keep on saving, pal.

Obviously the best way is by continuing to buy U. S. Savings Bonds—through the Payroll Plan.



They're safe and sound. Old Uncle Sam *personally* guarantees your investment. And he never fobbed off a bum I.O.U. on *anybody*.

You get four bucks back for every three you put in. And that ain't hay, alfalfa, or any other field-grown product.



Millions of Americans—smart cookies all—have found the Payroll Plan the easiest and best way to save.

So stick with the Payroll Plan, son—and you can't lose.

SAVE THE EASY WAY... BUY YOUR BONDS THROUGH PAYROLL SAVINGS

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grass-filled dutch-wife between his legs again, and tried to go to sleep. He dozed off—then suddenly he crawled through the flap in the nettings. He had heard a woman's cry, a shot, the thud of feet.

"Tommy!" he said, feeling for his automatic.

Tommy was already opening the door. O'Neil followed him to the hall, strapping on his hook as he went. He rammed Tommy at the turn leading to Jerrison's room. It was dark, with the hall nightlight gone out. A pistol gave out a flash at close range, filling the hall with concussion and a shower of gypsum plaster as the slug bit along the wall.

Tommy smashed a shot with his small-calibre automatic, but O'Neil was dragging him back, spoiling his aim.

"What the hell, you one-armed idiot?"

"That might be Jerrison for all you know."

People were crowding into the hall from other rooms, jabbering in a half-dozen languages. There was a light. O'Neil saw Sheila drawing a white silk robe around her young figure. She was very slim, her waist flowing to the full lines of a woman just reaching maturity, and O'Neil couldn't help thinking that it *was* preposterous for her to be married to the middle-aged doctor.

She saw O'Neil and Tommy there and ran down the hall. Tommy put away his automatic and offered her the manliness of his chest.

"Don't be frightened, Sheila—"

"It was someone, like a gorilla, at the window. I saw him tearing the shutter loose. I screamed. Then someone tried the hall door. It was the Doctor who shot that first time. He went out into the hall, and I don't know where he is now."

"What calibre gun does the Doctor carry?" asked O'Neil.

"An American gun. A thirty-two."

"That was no thirty-two that whammed at us. I know Luger velocity when I hear it. Strickland must have been out in the hall waiting until Dakar got through the window."

Mention of Strickland's name seemed to terrify the girl.

"Take it cool," growled O'Neil. He started down the hall, hooking people out of his way. He met the Turk staggering

upstairs under the weight of an unconscious man. The man was Jerrison.

"*Nicim?*" wailed the Turk. "Why?—in my hotel? My honorable house?"

He carried Jerrison to the room and flopped him on the bed. Jerrison's face was smeared with blood from a bullet wound in his scalp. The wound looked worse than it was. He came around, made sure the bundle was safe, and asked for whisky.

"Come on, Tommy," said O'Neil. "He sounds like his old self. I'm going to bed. I understand there's a boat headed toward Cocquilhatville in a couple of days, and I intend to get a little sleep before I board her."

"You mean to say you'd go away and leave these two helpless people here—"

"Tommy, *you* can stay, and be damned. But O'Neil is headed back. Back with money in his kick. And when he gets to Cocquilhatville, he's not stopping. O'Neil is heading right on to Boma, and from there to the States by the first roach-menagerie that lifts anchor!"

O'NEIL spent a fair night. He arose, took a shower, and breakfasted on white bread, papaya, and a half-dozen of the tiny eggs of the tropics. He was seated on the verandah, lingering over a sun-downer with real, genuine ice in it when Doctor Jerrison hunted him out.

"Have a drink, Doc," grinned O'Neil, ringing a little brass handbell for the serving boy.

"Why yes, a drink." Jerrison seemed nervous, preoccupied. He kept rubbing his patched-up scalp and glancing at O'Neil. A slim negro boy with projecting heel-bones came in, buttoning his freshly starched stengah-shifter. Jerrison ordered a double whisky.

"It is very unpleasant—this being a stranger in an unfriendly land."

"Sure, Doc. I've been up against it, too."

"And that bundle. Really—it is valuable. Not to me only, you understand, but to all mankind. It has to get through quickly. Otherwise it will have no value whatever. Yet Strickland will make it unpleasant."

"Unpleasant is a mild word for what Strickland will make it."

"Ah—exactly. Now, you have a peer-

less reputation as a jungle traveler. A great reputation. If I could secure your help in getting through to Angola . . ."

"Not a chance, That's no country for a white man down there. It's hell, even for the natives. I'm headed north—to Cocquihatville, and then on to Boma, and the States—home."

"It can't be you really intend to refuse! Mr. Huston said he was sure—"

"Tommy is sure of too damned much."

Jerrison lifted the drink the native boy brought and took it down at one tilt. He shuddered, partly from the effects of the liquor, partly from the thoughts in his mind.

"O'Neil — the horror I have of those black jungle trails! Darkness in the midst of sunshine; life feeding on death, the marsh, the crooked roots, the hundred-foot trees growing from grotesque bulbs, the snakes dropping slimy and green from the vines above—"

"After eighteen years of it, I don't need a description."

"Yet these we must face—alone."

"Why don't you wait for the plane?"

"The plane? They told me there would be no plane. For four weeks now—"

"It'll take off as soon as that airstrip is from under water. These heavy rains won't last more than another ten days."

"Ten days and it will be too late."

"Well, maybe you'll get out sooner. Maybe five or six days. Hell, that pilot can put you down in Malanje in three hours."

"We cannot wait!"

"Say—you aren't planning to take Mrs. Jerrison!"

"What can I do? I tried to leave her in London—it was useless, She will not be left behind now. She is much younger than I. She was my assistant. Very talented. You see—I drink. Too much. It had interfered with my career. Sometimes I believe she was more interested in my career, the desire to save my scientific works—"

"Sure," said O'Neil. "But I'll tell you this—any white person who tries to go through with that bundle will die. Take my word for it. If the hundred fevers of that black, Angola jungle don't see to it, Strickland will."

"Then, of course, she must remain behind."

"And if you take my advice, you'll stay behind too until that plane leaves."

DR. JERRISON smiled in a manner which told O'Neil that this bit of advice would not be taken. He drained the last drops of his double whisky, adjusted his sun helmet, and went down the verandah stairs.

Walking in quick, nervous strides he headed in the direction of the big, company buildings, but as soon as he was certain that his wife could not see him, he turned left and followed a winding sidewalk on stilts toward the river. There, rising from the miasma of Congo overflow, were the closely spaced palm and thatch huts of Bantu and Ba-fiot tribesmen.

The chief of the village was an old Bantu who had risen through witchcraft. Dr. Jerrison found him seated in a smelly hut where he lived with his goats and his many wives.

"I am looking for a crew of paddlers to take me to Angola," Jerrison said. "I have been told that you could help me."

The Bantu looked at him with crafty, glittering eyes. He chanted, and moaned, and weaved from side to side, finally coming up with a price of one thousand francs. To such a demand, O'Neil would have threatened to cleave his skull, and in the end he would have secured the crew for a tenth that price, but Jerrison paid without argument.

"I must leave tonight—after dark, And nothing must be said to anyone. You understand?"

The Bantu fondled the banknotes with fingers as hard and bony as hawk's feet, and hid them somewhere beneath a heap of dusty monkey skins. "Me understand!" he chanted. "*Bwana*, me understand."

Early the next morning O'Neil was awakened by a rap at his door. He opened it, and faced Sheila Jerrison. She looked as though she had been up all night.

"The Doctor—he's gone. He's taken his bundle and gone. I just found a note he wrote to me."

O'Neil glanced at the note, but he couldn't make out the scribbling. "What does he say?"

"That he's leaving—without me. That I'm to wait for a plane."

"Men have gone to Angola before."

"But he's not strong. And he's been drinking—"

"He's over twenty-one."

"Mr. O'Neil, you'll have to help me!"

Had it been a man asking him, O'Neil would have thrown him out and gone back to bed. But the girl made it different. She looked so helpless, so fragile. O'Neil cursed himself as a weakling, and turned, running into Tommy who by now had found his way from bed.

"O'Neil, you can't just walk out on—"

"I can put on my pants, can't I?" he barked.

VI

DAWN was coming up through the purple jungle mists when O'Neil, Tommy and Sheila Jerrison went outside. They couldn't find Bobolongonga, but the all-night tom-toms were still going it in one of the voodoo huts, so they knew where to find him. The huge black was one of twenty natives stretched out on the floor mattings, gazing transfixed at the smoky ceiling. O'Neil booted him urgently in the ribs, breaking the spell.

"Has Doc Jerrison been down here?"

"I do not know, my *bondele*."

"How about Strickland?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know anything? Do you know who the chief is in this witchdump?"

The Bantu chief was not five steps away, sitting on a low dias, all except his bony legs covered by a grotesque mask.

O'Neil tossed him a franc piece and asked, "Did you line up a dugout and crew for Doctor Jerrison?"

The Bantu weaved and chanted in an unknown tongue.

"What does he say?" O'Neil asked Bobolongonga.

"It is the fetish language. He asks for more money. Paper money."

O'Neil leaped to the dias, and as stunned worshippers watched, he tore off the voodoo mask, grasped the Bantu by his skinny neck, and shook him until his head seemed ready to snap off.

"Was Doctor Jerrison here?"

"Ah, mighty *bwana*!" gasped the Bantu. "Thou art powerful, O hooked-armed one—"

"Was Jerrison here?"

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"A white man. Skinny like an old rooster. He pay for canoe, paddlers—"

"How about Strickland? Big man. Strickland."

The Bantu moaned and shook his head, but O'Neil could guess what had happened. "Sure he was down here, and you put him on the Doc's trail. You doublecrossing—"

"Ah, mighty hook-arm!"

O'Neil didn't take time to get the rest of the story. He strode out of the voodoo hut and along a footbridge that was here suspended on grass ropes, and there perched on poles, leading across swamp-ground to the edge of a lagoon where forty or fifty dugouts were moored. He rounded up a crew of eight Ba-fiote tribesmen, and spent some time trying to leave Sheila Jerrison behind. It was useless. She insisted on following her husband. He gave up, and as the sun rose they headed into the sluggish current of the Ufunta.

O'Neil sat at the bow, eyes on the low-hanging mists ahead. Tommy and Sheila were in the middle of the slim craft, and Bobolongonga, like a general, had control of the stubby steering rudder in the rear.

It was a useless trip, O'Neil knew that. The chances were against ever finding Doctor Jerrison. A needle in the proverbial haystack was nothing compared with a man gone in this primeval well of the jungle.

The river seemed still as a lake as it passed through a country of wide bayous. Hundreds of gibbering monkeys swung through the tendrils overhead, and birds with bright, fungus-colored plumage fluttered through the high, greenish shadows of the great forest. Here indeed was the black heart of Africa, the land of a hundred fevers where not even the adventurous ivory trader came to seek his "white gold."

THEY RESTED through the stultifying heat of afternoon, and went on until starlight. The country rose a little next day. Here and there they sighted villages of pygmy huts perched in trees with ladders of twisted vines hanging down. Mid-day, and the leader of the Ba-fiots shouted, "*Aye-ya!*" and pointed a dripping paddle. Coming towards them was a dugout manned by a crew of six.

O'Neil hailed them, but they went on, quickening rather than slackening their

rhythm. His own paddlers told him it was the crew hired by Doctor Jerrison.

"Then they dumped him! Damn a south Congo native. They're all the same!" He shook his hook under the head paddler's nose threatening him with violent extinction should he ever run out on one such as O'Neil.

"*Aye-ya!*" chanted the native, digging in with new vigor,

An hour passed. Two hours. A gunshot made an abrupt, flat sound in the hot, morning air. O'Neil looked for the tell-tale water streak that would be left by a skipping bullet. There was none. The shot was distant—from the right. He ordered the boat toward a small cove, overhung by huge, mossy trees.

The paddlers were chattering from alarm, but their fear of the hook-armed man was greater even than their fear of an ambusher's gun. So they bent to their task, and the boat slid swiftly into the shadow of the cove. It brushed beneath a veil of parasitic vines covered with pinpoints of yellow blossoms, and touched bottom near a grassy bank.

There was an ancient elephant trail up there, and beyond was an area of brightness that proved to be the sun shining on a stretch of savannah grass.

No sign of life across the savannah clearing, but in the soft earth of the trail O'Neil saw the imprint of white men's bootheels.

Tommy was going to crowd on into the open, but O'Neil hooked him back.

"Take it easy, Tommy-lad. Strickland and his boys are probably out there someplace waiting to shoot our heads off as soon as we get into the open."

Sheila was almost in tears from worry. "But the Doctor! If they followed him—if that shot was—"

"We won't help him any by committing suicide."

They waited as twenty minutes ticked by.

"Good Lord, O'Neil!" Tommy finally exploded.

O'Neil quieted him with a violent gesture. His eyes were on a spot where the tops of the tall, savannah grass were waving—waving although the air hung heavy and still as a hot blanket.

Someone was moving out there. A man.

O'Neil had watched enough grass-sign to know that. Finally the stalks parted, and a grayish form appeared. It was Jerrison in bedraggled linens, crawling on all fours.

Sheila screamed. She started forward, but O'Neil clamped a hand on her.

Jerrison saw them. He staggered to his feet and ran, hunched over in a pitiful effort to hide himself. He made the overhanging concealment of the jungle and stood panting, his eyes quick and restless from a touch of fever.

He made several attempts to talk before the words came,

"I lost it. The bundle. Lost it! Do you hear? They were after me. My crew left me—the cowards. They tried to shoot me this morning. I got away and hid in that grass. Then they tried to shoot me again—just a little while ago—"

"Where are they now?"

"Out there. By those trees I think. They were trailing me, trying to find that bundle where I hid it—"

"How many are there?"

"Strickland. And that gorilla fellow. And the parrot-faced one. But they won't—"

"Darling!" Sheila had a hand on his shoulder, trying to calm him. She tried to make him lie down, but he was too nervous. Her efforts made him angry. He struck her hand away.

"I need a whisky!"

"Not today," said O'Neil. He felt sorry for the poor devil, but there was no help for it. "We didn't bring a drop."

BOBOLONGONGA fumbled in his cartridge pouch and drew out a rough-twisted *bangh* cigarette. O'Neil didn't stop the Doc from taking it, or explain to him what it was. Jerrison lighted it, and inhaled the smoke down to the last cubic centimeter of his lungs. At first the smoke soothed him, then it began destroying his perspective and giving him that heart-of-a-lion confidence which is the usual effect of hasheesh.

Over by the cluster of trees, the smoke of a fire hazed up through the bright sunshine. It was blue-white at first, then it became black.

O'Neil wondered what Strickland would want a fire for. Surely not to cook by.

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"What would Strickland want to destroy in a fire?" he asked.

The question made Jerrison straighten up. He flung away the wet stub of his *bangh* cigarette. The narcotic, the alcohol he was steeped in, the fever, all were combining to tip the balance of his mind.

"The bundle!" he cried. "The bundle. That's what the fire is for. They found it, and they're burning it!"

Before anyone realized what he was doing, Jerrison started through the chin-high savannah grass as fast as he could run. O'Neil called for him to stop. He ran, trying to catch him. For the distance of two hundred meters he failed to gain, for that cigarette had done something to the man's muscles, but after that he closed the distance rapidly.

Bobolongonga came like a charging elephant thirty or forty paces behind O'Neil, and Tommy was back there somewhere with the girl.

The grass suddenly faded away, and they were in an area that had been trampled by herds of elephants. Four trees stood in a cluster at one side, and beneath them were the three men, looking at the fire.

The earth was still soft from rains, padded by trampled grass. It gave no sound of approaching feet. The men did not hear Jerrison's approach until he was less than twenty steps away. Monteux spun around, looked with amazement, as at a madman.

Jerrison screamed some words that O'Neil did not catch. Monteux twisted aside, drawing his Spanish automatic. O'Neil was too far back to leap in and knock the gun aside. There was only one chance to save Jerrison. He stopped abruptly, whipped out his gun, fired from the hip. Twice, as rapidly as the mechanism would eject. Monteux was driven back by the shock of the heavy calibre bullets. He went down, his parrot face twisted until it bore only a grotesque likeness of man.

Jerrison scarcely looked at him. His eyes were on the fire. He sprang for it, and commenced digging wildly in its blazing mass.

Strickland spun to locate O'Neil. O'Neil might have killed him at that moment, but Dakar was to be reckoned with. Dakar was rolling forward, hand at his hip. O'Neil leaped forward and to the right

to throw Strickland in the line of fire. But Dakar had not reached for a gun—he came up with a wide-bladed machete.

Strickland's gun roared out. O'Neil could feel the sting of powder against his cheek, but his quick movement had saved him. They were too close for O'Neil to get his own gun in play. He flung it away, grabbed Strickland's gun hand, forced it up as he swung his hook for the skull.

STRICKLAND managed to weave away. They clinched, almost trampling Doctor Jerrison and the fire. O'Neil raked with his hook, knocking the gun from Strickland's grasp. For a few seconds it was a contest of strength—the kind of contest Strickland wanted.

He grasped O'Neil and bent him, hands feeling for that certain place in the small of his back. He would get it, just so—then that sudden twist like he had given Orsenes at the head of the stairs back in Drapeau, and O'Neil would turn to a boneless object in his hands. Strickland laughed, his face pressed close, his breath on O'Neil's cheek.

O'Neil knew better than to fight Strickland's strength. He bent with it, shifting for his chance. He threw one leg back, and Strickland took a quick half-step to gain balance. At that moment he ripped up with his hook, sinking its point in the soft flesh beneath Strickland's jawbone. The sudden shock of it made the big man falter. O'Neil twisted, spun, set his feet, and whipped Strickland, screaming, through the air.

Strickland struck the earth and lay stunned. O'Neil booted one of the guns out of reach and picked up the other. He turned to locate Dakar, just as Bobolongonga, with a mighty heave, was lifting him high in the air.

Bobolongonga balanced the gorilla man for a moment, then he drove him, belly first, over his bent knee. Dakar was all through, but Bobolongonga gave him another slam, and then another just for good measure.

O'Neil glimpsed Strickland staggering to his feet. He thought the big man had a little fight left, but instead Strickland started across the clearing, running with a wavering lope,

O'Neil would have let him go, but Bo-

bolongonga, after one bellow of alarm, whipped out his Enfield revolver and fired. Strickland ran for half a dozen wavering steps, then he plowed race first into the earth. He was finished. O'Neil didn't need to walk close to make sure of that.

"Ho, *bondele*, I am great fighter, no?" asked Bobolongonga showing his teeth like a set of piano keys.

"You'll do," said O'Neil.

"Maybe I shoot Dakar, too?"

"The hell with him. He's harmless with Strickland out of the way."

Tommy ran up with Sheila.

"Where were you while the war was on, Tommy?" asked O'Neil.

"Somebody had to take care of the girl, didn't they?"

"My hero!" spat O'Neil. His eyes fell on Jerrison who had dragged the half-consumed bundle from the fire and was staring at it, his face hopeless.

"Cheer up, Doc. You saved the damned thing. And in case you haven't noticed—you're still alive."

"But the bundle—it is useless now."

Jerrison drew out a penknife, cut the rope bindings, unrolled yard after yard of fire-eaten canvas. The center of the roll was made of inch mesh "ratproof" wire, and inside that was something wrapped in moss which was now cooked and steaming. Jerrison removed the moss revealing half-a-hundred little twigs with clusters of heat-shriveled roots.

"What the devil?" O'Neil asked.

"These? You do not know?"

"You've made damned sure I *wouldn't*."

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Tommy's eyes became bright as he listened. "I dare say a little colonga farm would be a mighty profitable venture."

The Doc nodded.

O'Neil grinned cynically, "And you wouldn't be above turning a buck or two yourself, would you, Doc?"

"Why, no. I will admit that the monetary angle was one of the considerations. And why not? Consider the work I have done for the benefit of the human race—and then to see quacks, yes, professional ethics be damned, quacks with M.D.'s reaping huge rewards—"

"Sure, Doc. I'm not above taking a little honorable profit myself."

Two hours later their canoe was headed back toward Kandona. O'Neil sat in the bow with Tommy just behind him; near the middle of the craft, Doctor Jerrison slept off the effects of hasheesh. Sheila, sitting over him, watched his breathing with mixed emotions revealed on her face.

"You stay away from that girl," said O'Neil. "She's doing her damnest to be loyal to her scientific stew-bum. And she will be loyal. I know her kind."

"She's in love with me, O'Neil."

"She'll stick with Jerrison."

"But you don't mind if I sort of hang around? At the rate the Doc's going, I doubt he'll last through the next rainy season, and it would be a shame to see that lovely creature left alone in a hell-hole country like this."

"You depraved tropical tramp!" snarled O'Neil, shaking his hook beneath Tommy's nose. "You moral leper!"

But beneath his fury, O'Neil knew that Tommy was right. It would indeed be a shame, a dirty, unconscionable shame.

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