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"BWANA CANNIBAL"

by JOHN STARR

KI-GOR—

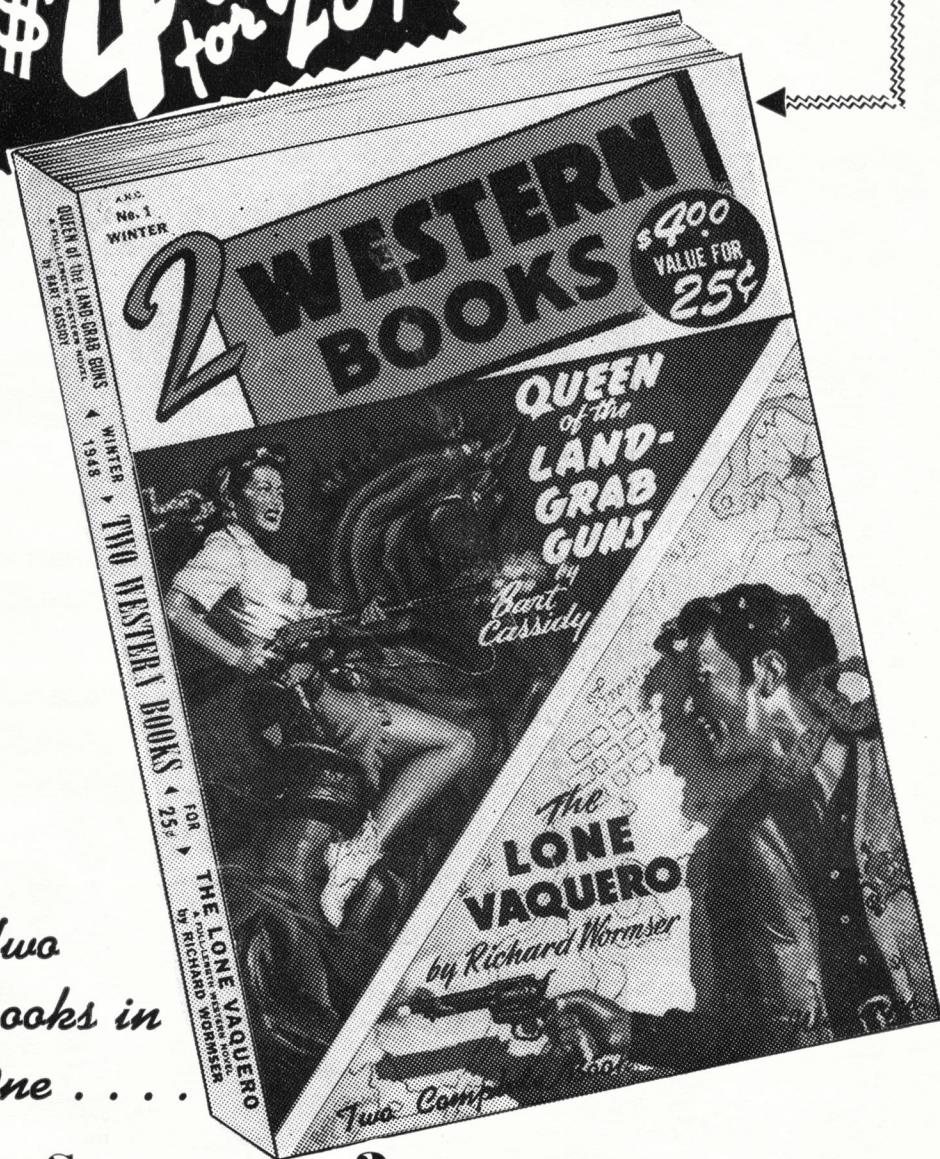
and his mate, HELENE in

NIRVANA OF THE SEVEN VOODOOS

Through M'Ball's red mists the warning drums boomed—

"Beware the Ape-Men of Long-Dead Kraal!"

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JUNGLE STORIES



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A NEW COMPLETE KI-GOR NOVEL

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Ki-Gor clutched at the man-ape's furry throat. He swung the dagger up, tried to ram it home. But the ape snorted a rasping oath and kept boring in. Suddenly, Helene screamed . . .

Nirvana Of The Seven Voodoos

By John Peter Drummond

No broken, haunted captive lived to flee the jackal-born terrors of Nirvana—where Krishna, the strange, gleaming-eyed scientist, ruled with the dread hand of ancient gris-gris. And yet Ki-Gor dared enter that forbidden kraal, dared try to wrest Helene from its secret power—and even dared challenge the proud, half-human ape-men to one last, hopeless battle . . .

INCH BY INCH, THE GIANT figure in the leopard skin crept forward through the waving prairie grass. The fierce tropical sun beat down mercilessly on the mighty shoulders, but a fresh easterly breeze cooled the bronze forehead. Ki-Gor froze momentarily and hugged the ground, as a chorus of snorts and the thud

of many sharp hoofs stamping the turf told him that the quarry he was stalking was getting uneasy. Ki-Gor cursed the inadequate little spear beside him, his sole weapon. It was a small, flimsy assegai the Pygmies had given him, and it was all but useless in the important business of hunting game. Not heavy enough to throw,

not strong enough to kill anything bigger than a jackal.

But, weapon or not, game had to be killed today. Ki-Gor was hungry. His nostrils twitched and his mouth watered as the breeze bore to him the scent of his prey, the herd of white-throated gnu—wildebeeste—the giant antelope of the East African plateau. With infinite caution he raised his head and peered through the swaying grass tops. Fifteen feet away, a young, full-grown buck stared suspiciously upwind toward the rest of the herd. He was nearly five feet tall at his thick shoulders, and the coarse, matted hairs of his mane fell over but did not conceal the cruel horns that dipped downward from his forehead, then upward and outward.

It was going to be no easy task to subdue this creature barehanded, but Ki-Gor was desperate. He and Helene had not eaten meat for over a week, ever since they had left the friendly back of Marmo, the elephant, at the edge of the Congo jungle to trek on foot, ever eastward through the grassy uplands of East Africa. There had been game in plenty, but Ki-Gor had been remarkably unlucky in his hunting. Five times he had patiently stalked plump gazelles, only to be cheated out of his prey at the last minute by roving packs of wild dogs. On two other occasions, he had lain hidden, after dark, beside water-holes, hoping to make a kill undisturbed by the dogs who would be asleep. But each of those times he had found himself dangerously close to a half dozen lions, who apparently had the same idea. That many lions was too much competition, and Ki-Gor had gone back to Helene empty-handed, and with a very empty stomach.

Hardly breathing, Ki-Gor slid forward another six inches through the grass. He must get that buck. For if he and Helene did not eat pretty soon, they would be so weakened from fasting, that they, too, would fall prey to some prowling carnivores, and their bones would bleach on the wind-swept veldt. Closer and closer to the gnu, the jungle man crept. If only I had a fire-stick, Ki-Gor thought—rifles, Helene calls them. They have a potent magic which kills at incredible distances.

But he had no rifle, only the toy spear of the Pygmies, so that he must be close enough to the gnu to be able to reach it in one spring. Once the herd discovered him, even his powerful legs could never overtake them.

Closer and closer, Ki-Gor crept, muscles tensed for action. Suddenly, the herd upwind of him grew ominously silent. Something had disturbed the gnus. Was it he? Had they discovered him? Again, he raised his head to peer through the grass stalks. No, it wasn't he the antelopes were worried about. They were all facing away from him, muzzles raised, testing the air. A few does danced about nervously, ready at any second to break into a headlong gallop. Ki-Gor decided it was now or never.

Gathering his feet under him, he crouched on his haunches for one precious moment. Then, noiselessly, he sprang. As he did, the entire herd jumped forward. Ki-Gor's leap carried just short of the young buck's back—and the buck was going away. Desperately, Ki-Gor clutched at a flying hind hoof, and held on for dear life. The buck went down with a crash. Instantly Ki-Gor leaped for its head and seized a horn with each hand. The buck lunged upward, sharp hoofs scrambling. The horns were levers in Ki-Gor's hands. Using all his mighty strength, he twisted the shaggy head viciously around. There was a tearing sound, and a snap. The gnu sank to the ground trembling—its neck broken.

"Wa-a-aghrr!" shouted Ki-Gor in triumph. At last! Here was food—meat, a plenty.

"Wa-a-aghrr!" came an almost identical roar from behind him.

KI-GOR whirled around and beheld a huge, grey-maned lion crouched not twenty feet away. Its dull eyes and gaunt, mangy sides showed it to be a very old lion, slow-moving and probably toothless. Back home in the jungle, the aged beast would have presented no problem to Ki-Gor. But here on the veldt, there was no cover, and Ki-Gor's only weapon against those great raking claws, was the Pygmy spear.

The brute looked hungry. Evidently it had been unable to knock down any of the gnus as they galloped to safety, and now it intended to take Ki-Gor's prize away from him. Stealthily Ki-Gor picked up the light spear and gripped it. Hungry man and hungry beast glared at each other across the fallen body of the gnu.

Then, with a strangled roar, the old lion sprang. Ki-Gor poised—waiting. And, as the lion hit the ground in front of him, Ki-Gor jammed the spear down the red, gaping maw. At the same time, he made a twisting leap, just missing a murderous swipe from a heavy front paw. The lion thrashed its great head in agony, and quickly snapped the slender haft in two. But the spearhead remained imbedded far down the beast's gullet. A torrent of blood poured out of the lion's mouth, and it staggered away, coughing and shaking its head.

Ki-Gor watched it until it disappeared in the tall grass, then he turned his attention back to the motionless form of the gnu. He knelt down with a smile of satisfaction. It was a fat young buck. Its meat would not be tender, eaten fresh, but it would have a fine flavor, and it would be nourishing. Ki-Gor debated with himself whether to attempt to carry the big antelope back to the camp where he had left Helene, or whether to cut it up on the spot. A foreleg in each hand, he tested the weight of the animal. He shook his head. Strong as he was, it would be too great a load to carry the distance of over a mile.

Suddenly, the smile of satisfaction died off Ki-Gor's bronzed face, to be replaced by an expression of troubled concern. How was he going to cut it up? He could have used the blade of the Pygmy spear to carve off some slabs of meat from the gnu's flanks, but—the blade of the Pygmy spear was far down the throat of the dying lion! Ki-Gor kicked petulantly at the body of the gnu. After all his patience and his care in bringing down the antelope, he was now to be cheated out of eating it. So near, and yet so far.

His lips drawn back in a snarl, Ki-Gor reached down and once more seized the animal's forelegs. Whether he could cut

it up or not, he wasn't going to leave it behind for the dogs or the lions to eat. He heaved upward and rolled the animal over. As he did, he saw something glint in the antelope's thick mane—something which reflected the sunlight. A brown hand swiftly explored the thick, matted hairs behind the horns. With a shout of triumph, Ki-Gor extricated a flat piece of metal. It was the wide, shovel-shaped blade of a Bantu assegai. A few splinters of wood in the hollow socket at the rear end told the story. Some black hunter had had much the same experience as Ki-Gor had had with the lion. Except that in this case, the blade of the spear, instead of piercing the thick hide of the gnu, had merely become caught in the thick tangle of hair in the creature's head. The antelope had got away, carrying the spear in it mane, and eventually the haft had worked loose, or broken off.

Ki-Gor wasted no time conjecturing about what had happened to the haft of the spear, however. He whetted both edges of the broad blade, energetically, on a smooth stone, until he had them razor-sharp. Then he set to work skinning the antelope, after which he began carving great strips of meat from its sides. As he cut each slab free, he placed it on the spread out hide. When he had finished, he gathered up the ends of the skin, slung the bundle over one shoulder, and headed across the veldt toward a thin column of smoke which represented his camp. In the antelope-hide bundle there was over twenty pounds of meat.

Helene Vaughn looked up with a quick cry, as Ki-Gor walked into the little thicket where she was crouching over a little fire. She was carefully feeding it twigs to keep it alive.

"Ki-Gor!" she exclaimed, "You brought home something!"

"Yes," said Ki-Gor, subduing a complacent smile that rose to his mouth. "See? Meat. Antelope." And he dropped the bundle on the ground beside Helene.

"Oh! Ki-Gor, that's wonderful," she said, in heartfelt tones, "I can hardly believe we're actually going to eat meat again. Did you have much trouble?"

"No trouble" said Ki-Gor loftily. "It

was easy. There was a lion, but it was a very old lion."

"Oh, dear!" Helene sighed, "I suppose if I stayed in Africa long enough, I'd get used to the casual way you treat leopards and lions and things. But right now, it scares me out of my wits just to think of it."

"I'm strong," Ki-Gor said, simply, as if that explained everything.

"You certainly are Ki-Gor" Helene said, with an appreciative glance at the jungle man's magnificent shoulders, "but just the same, I'm glad you have agreed to come back to your own people with me."

KI-GOR got up abruptly and busied himself with preparations for the long-deferred meal. He didn't like to be reminded of his promise to leave the jungle and go with Helene to find some outpost of civilization, whence they could be guided to the coast and eventually to England. Up till a few weeks ago, Ki-Gor's world had been peopled only by the wild animals, the savage Bantu tribes, and the occasional Pygmies of Africa's Equatorial Forest. He knew that he was somehow different from the black men and the Pygmies but as far as he knew, he was unique. Only the dimmest memory of his missionary father remained to him, and through childhood and youth he had defended himself single-handed, and by his strength and intelligence, survived.

Then one day, Helene Vaughn fell out of the sky practically at his feet. Her red hair, white face, and strange clothes were just as incomprehensible to him, as the red monoplane which she was flying, and which had cracked up. But, instinctively he protected her, even though he didn't know quite why. Gradually Helene's conversation had brought back the English he had once spoken as a little boy, before his father had been slain by a tribe of Bantu. With the bridge of a common language established, Helene had explained to him the astonishing facts that there were many people in the world like him, that they lived far away across the water, and that he belonged to the tribe called English. After days of argument and pleading, Helene had persuaded him to go to his own

people, although he was mightily distrustful of the idea, and would have much preferred to stay in his jungle home—provided, of course, that Helene stayed with him. But, in a weak moment, he had given in to Helene's pleadings, and now here they were, camped in a little copse on the veldt—on their way to his own people.

The setting sun hung low as Ki-Gor held strips of antelope meat on a forked stick over the little fire. He was already a little homesick for the dark, brooding jungle. A man knew where he stood back there, with great friendly trees to climb, and yards of strong vines to swing on from one tall trunk to another. Out here there was only the thorn boma, and the fire to protect them from the nocturnal prowlers, and with sunset there came an uncomfortable chill in the air.

But the meat was good. Ki-Gor and Helene thrust strip after strip in the open flames, and devoured them hungrily. Finally, Helene gave up with a happy sigh, and lay back feeling stuffed. But Ki-Gor kept on. He was making up for a lot of meatless days, and like all men of the jungle, he gorged himself.

The sun had long since set, and the sudden African night had settled down over the veldt, when he reluctantly discovered that he couldn't eat another mouthful. He got up with an effort and scoured around collecting a supply of fuel to last through the night. It was an ominous night, moonless and even starless. Even his keen eyes were unable to see far into the inky blackness outside the ring of fire light. The back of his neck crawled uneasily. It was a night to be especially alert for unwelcome visitors, and yet his eyes were uncontrollably heavy. Drowsy though he was, he arranged the thorn boma with great care, and stocked the fagots close to the fire. Helene was already sound asleep. He stood for a moment looking down at her upturned face. He recalled an English word she had used several times, when together they had watched a rosy sun come up in the east and shed its warming rays over a calm world. She had said it was "beautiful." Then you, Helene, Ki-Gor said to himself, you are beautiful—like the sunrise.

He squatted on his haunches beside her, and tried to keep himself awake by whit-tling a handle for the assegai blade. Presently, in the middle of a stroke, his head nodded and fell forward. Still squatting on his haunches he fell into a deep sleep.

He woke up with a guilty start and stared around him into the impenetrable blackness of the night. What had made him wake up, he didn't know. But a deep-seated sixth sense within him told him that somewhere in the darkness, some unseen danger was lurking. The little fire was almost out, only a few embers left glowing redly. Without relaxing his watchful glare, Ki-Gor reached out and dropped some dry fagots on the coals. In a few seconds a rewarding flicker of flame mounted and lighted up the ground inclosed by the boma. Helene stirred and turned her face away, but did not wake up. With the increased light, Ki-Gor peered carefully in all directions but could see nothing. He tested the still night air with his sensitive nostrils. He thought he caught a faint whiff of a familiar smell, but he was inclined to disbelieve the evidence of his nose. It was gorilla-smell.

IT couldn't be gorilla, Ki-Gor told himself. The only place he had ever seen gorillas was far away on the West Coast. And during the last ten days, as he and Helene had trekked eastward toward the great mountains of East Africa, he had not come across the slightest evidence that pointed to the presence of the giant apes. He tested the air again, but the elusive smell had gone. Ki-Gor stood up and stared out into the night.

Suddenly his keen eyes caught a faint glitter of reflected light. Somewhere out there, a pair of cruel eyes were watching the boma. Quickly, Ki-Gor piled more fagots on the fire, and as the flames leaped higher, he strained forward trying to make out the outlines of the creature that belonged to that pair of eyes. After a few seconds, he was able to distinguish a huge mass from the surrounding darkness. Whatever the animal was, it was enormous. Suddenly the mass moved, and slowly approached the fire. The blood ran cold in Ki-Gor's veins. It was a gorilla!

Ki-Gor reached down, shook Helene's shoulder roughly, and seized the blade of the assegai. He wished with all his heart that he had finished making a haft for it.

Slowly and purposefully, the gorilla moved forward, until he stood right at the edge of the boma. As the firelight illuminated his hairy outlines, he looked to be by far the biggest gorilla Ki-Gor had ever seen. And then suddenly it struck Ki-Gor that this was no ordinary gorilla. This hulking creature looked man-like, and yet at the same time, subtly more bestial than a true gorilla. His little eyes glittering wickedly, the man-ape seemed strangely unafraid.

A frightened gasp from behind him told Ki-Gor that Helene was awake.

"Ki-Gor!" she whispered, "What does that monster want?"

"I don't know," Ki-Gor muttered, "but don't be 'fraid. Maybe he wants antelope meat."

Ki-Gor bent down without taking his eyes off the gorilla-man, and tossed a slab of meat past his head. The gorilla-man paid no attention. And then as Ki-Gor straightened up, the fang-toothed beast deliberately picked up one of the loose thorn bushes that made up the encircling boma, and flipped it expertly aside. As Ki-Gor gazed in astonishment, another bush went the same way, and the gorilla-man shuffled confidently through the opening straight toward the fire.

His spine prickling, Ki-Gor stepped back a pace and shifted his grip on the assegai blade. Then, with a wild yell, he leaped high into the air and forward. He launched a mighty kick with both of his powerful legs straight at the gorilla-man's murderous face. The gorilla-man grunted with the force of the pile-driver blow and rocked backwards on its heels.

Ki-Gor landed lightly on his feet and instantly struck with the assegai blade in his right hand. It was a lightning thrust, the sharp blade slashing at the monster's throat. The gorilla-man backed away with a growl and swung a thick, hairy arm with incredible speed. But Ki-Gor dodged the crushing blow, and countered with his blade at the vast abdomen. The beast howled with rage and pain and backed out

of the boma. A thin trickle of blood began to flow from the folds of its throat.

Stealthily, Ki-Gor reached down and seized one end of a long fagot, the other end of which was blazing in the fire. With a swift motion, he flung the burning brand straight at the gorilla-man's head. Again the cruel-faced beast gave ground with a howl, and frantically brushed off the flaming fagot.

As he did, Ki-Gor charged him. Twice the sharp blade bit deep into the hairy arm, and again Ki-Gor dodged out of reach. But the man-ape appeared to have had enough. Growling horribly, he retreated to the edge of the ring of light shed by the camp-fire. There he stopped and slowly beat his breast. Ki-Gor walked coolly toward him, and the gorilla-man turned and ran out into the darkness.

Determined to be rid of the beast for good, Ki-Gor gave chase. But the gorilla-man was amazingly fast, and before he had gone very far, his massive body was swallowed up in the inky blackness of the night. Ki-Gor stopped about a hundred yards from the camp and stood listening. A distant thudding told him that the beast was still running.

Ki-Gor turned reluctantly, and started back to the camp.

Suddenly a wild scream rent the air. It was Helene.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor! The gorilla!"

A HUNDRED yards away, by the light of the camp-fire, a mammoth figure was carrying the struggling girl out of the boma. A wave of sick horror swept over Ki-Gor, and he sprinted toward the camp-site. How could I have been so stupid! Ki-Gor thought bitterly. Apparently the gorilla-man had circled away in the darkness, and returned to kidnap poor helpless Helene. Faster the jungle man's feet flashed over the turf. The man-ape was running too, in the opposite direction—with a terrified, shrieking Helene under a hairy arm.

Sobbing with rage, Ki-Gor put all his strength into an effort to catch up with the brutish abductor. But the man-ape had a few seconds head-start, and by the time Ki-Gor flashed by the camp-fire, was out

of sight in the velvet blackness of the night.

Ki-Gor drew up short and controlled his panting long enough to listen. Ominously, Helene had stopped screaming. But the sound of feet drumming over the ground gave Ki-Gor an approximate direction the beast was taking. He plunged forward.

Full fifteen minutes Ki-Gor ran, stopping now and then to listen and to sniff the air. But the thud of the gorilla-man's feet seemed to come from different directions each time, and the still air, heavy with the rank ape-smell, gave no clue as to which way the monster had gone. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, to find anything in the pitch dark of the plateau.

Finally, Ki-Gor had to admit that the gorilla-man had—temporarily, at least—escaped him. He sat down on the grass, for a moment, to think. What was to be done? And what was happening to Helene? Why had her screams stopped so abruptly? Was it because—Ki-Gor hardly dared ask himself the question—was it because the giant ape had killed her? Ki-Gor ground his teeth, and growled savagely, deep down in his throat.

Suddenly, a tiny puff of wind caressed the hair at his temples. Ki-Gor sprang to his feet, nerves taut, and sniffed it avidly. Faintly, there came to his nostrils a woody smell, the smell of trees. More faintly still came the gorilla-smell. Ki-Gor loped upwind. He knew he was going north-east, toward a towering range of mountains, whose slopes were covered by the only trees in any direction. Ki-Gor had noticed that before the sun had set. Undoubtedly, the man-ape was traveling that way. It was the type of high open forestland that gorillas liked.

Ki-Gor pushed on steadily and swiftly through the night, following the elusive ape-smell. But, as the minutes went by, he seemed to come no nearer to the object of his pursuit.

Gradually, the outlines of a mountain range began to take shape, ahead of him and to his right. Almost imperceptibly, the sky began to grow a little paler, and the darkness all about, to dissolve. Ki-Gor found that the grass was giving way

to tall shrubs, and that here and there, tall trees reared skyward. He kept on, upwind and upgrade.

After a while there was enough light for him to see the ground fairly clearly. The jungle man then turned abruptly to his left, and began a wide circle, eyes to the ground, studying out possible gorilla tracks. For an hour he traveled that way without discovering the spoor he was searching for. He returned to his starting place and commenced another wide circle to the right. Still, there were no gorilla-man tracks, and Ki-Gor hurried his steps, sick with disappointment and apprehension. His mind was so clouded with fear for Helene's safety that he almost didn't see the twig broken off the flowering shrub close to the ground.

But, all of a sudden, the slight gorilla smell seemed to increase. Ki-Gor stopped and studied the ground around him. Then he saw the broken twig, and dropped to the ground beside it. A moment later, he stood up, his upper lip drawn back off his teeth in a silent snarl.

Unquestionably, the gorilla-man had passed that way.

Swiftly the jungle man followed the spoor, eyes glued to the ground, nostrils flared. In a very short time, he realized that not one gorilla-man had made that track, but two!

That was how Helene's kidnapping had been accomplished! The first ape had decoyed Ki-Gor away from the camp long enough for the second one to rush into the boma and carry off the girl. The jungle man gripped the blade of the assegai, vengefully, and hastened on.

The sky was rosy with approaching dawn, and the upgrade was getting steeper, when Ki-Gor halted. He had made another uncomfortable discovery. The trail of the two gorilla-men had separated, going each in a different direction. The jungle man was face to face with a horrible dilemma. One of those two half-human animals was bearing the limp form of Helene—but which one?

Ki-Gor could do no more than guess which trail to follow. He chose the one which went straight up the mountain side, and quickened his steps.

II

HE was rewarded, in a short time, by a noticeable strengthening of ape-smell in the air. Apparently the giant gorilla-man had grown careless of pursuit, and was loitering along, picking nuts and fruit along the way. Ki-Gor raced uphill in an agony of suspense. Would he be in time? Was Helene still alive? Was this the man-ape who had kidnapped her?

The sun was coming up red, as Ki-Gor halted on the edge of an open space on the mountain side. His heart sank. Upwind of him, sitting in the middle of the open space was a gorilla-man. But nowhere was there any sign of Helene. He had followed the wrong beast.

A burning desire for revenge swept over Ki-Gor. If this shaggy monster had not actually abducted Helene it had at least assisted in the operation, and Ki-Gor determined that it should die for it.

He crept closer to the great man-ape, unnoticed.

The gorilla-man was sitting, shoulders hunched apathetically, licking a fore-arm. The coarse hairs of its chest and abdomen were caked with dried blood. Evidently it was the same animal that Ki-Gor had fought the night before.

Relentlessly, Ki-Gor crept forward, until he was behind the gorilla-man, though still downwind from him. Then, silently, he sprang.

The weight of his body hitting the gorilla-man's back flung it face-forward on the ground. He pounced on the thick hairy brute stood up unsteadily on its hind legs gai blade. The beast heaved and screamed with pain, and reached a huge black hand over its shoulder. Ki-Gor was plucked off and hurled twenty feet away, as if he were a terrier.

He lay stunned for a moment, then began to collect his senses as the gorilla-man slowly reared itself off the ground. The brut stood up unsteadily on its hind legs for a moment, gave a terrible roar, and started toward Ki-Gor's recumbent form. But, blood was gushing from the wound in the neck, and its short legs suddenly buckled. Before it could reach the helpless Ki-Gor, the gorilla-man's evil little

eyes glazed, and it wavered and fell in a crumpled heap.

Ki-Gor picked himself up, made sure none of his bones were broken, and approached the fallen gorilla-man warily. There was no doubt about it, the strange monster was stone dead, its jugular severed. In death it looked more simian than in life.

The jungle man's blue eyes flashed. He uttered a bellow of triumph, and started back down the man-ape's trail. He was going back to pick up the spoor of the other monster, the one who was carrying off Helene.

But his triumph was short-lived. His nose was assailed by a strong smell of Bantu. A moment later he was surrounded by a dozen or more tall, well-formed blacks, armed with broad-bladed assegais.

"Stay, O strange inkosi," said the tallest one in halting Swahili, "and tell us how it is possible that you could thus slay the fearsome brute, single-handed and without a fire-stick."

"Nay, stand aside, black men," Ki-Gor answered, "I have no time for idle chatter. There yet is another gorilla-man I must slay—a murdering beast that is carrying off my woman. I must find him before he kills her—if he has not already done so."

"Indeed, inkosi," said the tribesman, "that is a dreadful story. This other gorilla-man, then, is not far away?"

"That I do not know," said Ki-Gor, "I must first pick up his trail which I left before sunrise. So, let me pass."

"Nay, inkosi," said the tall black, "if the gorilla-man bearing your woman has that much of a head-start, then indeed, you are on a fool's errand."

"What do you mean, black man?" said Ki-Gor, sternly, "I will catch him and I will kill him, as you have seen me do with this other ape up the hill."

"It is this way, inkosi," the tribesman said patiently, "when you catch up with the man-ape bearing your woman, you will find not one man-ape but hundreds. By now, he has undoubtedly carried her into the Land of the Living Dead. The entrances to that Land are guarded by hordes of these ferocious gorilla-men. And it is said that these man-apes, furthermore, are

not wild man-apes, but trained beasts who obey the wicked commands of some mysterious human."

"O cowardly black man," said Ki-Gor, "chicken-hearted Bantu, why do you tell me old woman's stories like that? There is no slightest word of truth in what you say!"

"I am no chicken-hearted coward," replied the tribesman, stoutly, "I am as brave as you, O strange inkosi, and I tell you truth. Many from about here have been kidnapped by these hulking gorilla-men and carried into the Valley on the other side of the mountain. If you do not believe me come with us in friendly fashion, back to our village. Our chief speaks N-glush fluently, and he will tell you of this dread place."

KI-GOR stared long and hard at the tall black man, and his heart sank. There was the ring of truth in the man's voice.

"Lead on," he said, gruffly.

As the little party wound down the mountain side, Ki-Gor watched the blacks around him, narrowly. They were Bantu, his traditional enemies back in the Congo jungle. But there was a difference. These men were taller, better looking, prouder than the forest blacks. In spite of himself, Ki-Gor trusted them a little.

Although the story of a mysterious Valley guarded by gorillas sounded almost too fantastic to believe, Ki-Gor suspended judgement until such time as he could talk to the Chief.

After a considerable trek, the party neared a good-sized village which was enclosed by a large stockade. They went through a gate and proceeded straight toward a large house that stood in the middle of the village and dominated all the other huts. Strangely, Ki-Gor felt no fear for his safety. In fact, he hardly thought about it. Uppermost in his mind was the desire to hear about the strange valley from the Chief, himself.

The door to the large house was guarded by two warriors with assegais. The men with Ki-Gor spoke rapidly to them, and they turned and disappeared into the house. A moment later, they reappeared, and be-

hind them towered a huge, bull-necked negro, with alert little eyes, and an oddly humorous face. His clothes, a white shirt and white shorts, set him apart from the others—he was evidently the chief—He spoke at once, in a rolling, rumbling basso.

"Man, it's sure good to see a white face ag'in—" then he stopped, and his little eyes blinked in astonishment at Ki-Gor's leopard-skin loincloth. "Say, you is a white man, ain't you? American? English?"

Ki-Gor in his turn blinked with astonishment. He had never before heard a black speak what sounded like English. He studied the Chief for a moment, then said, "Yes. N-glush. I am of the N-glush people."

"I thought you-all looked kind of English," the Chief rumbled, "Underneath all that tan. Whut-all's yo' idea? Back-to-nature stuff?"

Ki-Gor had not the slightest idea of what the Chief was saying, even though he recognized most of the English words. So he said nothing. Then the Chief spoke again, nastily.

"Nem-mind, Boss, let it go. I'm kinda fergettin' my Southe'n hospitality, standin' yere askin' questions. C'mon in an' have a bite of breakfast."

He smiled and beckoned the jungle man into the house. Gravely Ki-Gor followed him.

He regarded the table and chairs with suspicion, but sat down at the Chief's invitation.

"Well, now, I'll tell you who I am," the Chief began, "n' then you c'n tell me who you are. I'm the head-man around yere, but I ain't been yere but about a year. My name is George Spelvin, and I come from Cincinnati. I been a Pullman porter, an' a ship's cook. I jumped ship one day in Mombasa, and took myself a little walk. An' first thing you know, I'm head-man of the M'balla. It's a full-time job, but they're real nice folks, an' I like it. Only now and then, I git a little homesick. Tell me where you-all come from."

Ki-Gor thought for a moment. He was thoroughly bewildered by the flow of English from the Chief, very little of which he comprehended, but he kept a grave face.

"I come from far over there," he said, finally, pointing to the west, "from the dark jungle. One day a woman, a white woman, came out of the sky in a red bird-machine. She told me I was of the N-glush, and that I must go with her to my own people. So we left the jungle and traveled this way for many nights. Last night, two gorilla-men came to our camp. While I was fighting one of them, the other one carried my woman away. I trailed them through the night, but this morning the tracks separated, and I followed the gorilla-man who did not have my woman."

"An' you caught up with him, my boys told me," said Chief George Spelvin, "and really polished him off."

"I killed him," Ki-Gor corrected, "and now I must find the other gorilla-man and take my woman away from him."

"Um," said George, "that's real bad. I'm sorry to say this, but I'm awful afraid you ain't goin' to see your woman, again. There's some awful queer doin's over th' other side of the mountain. I don't know just what it is. But these yere great big gorilla-men comes around in pairs and grabs people and carries 'em away and don't nobody ever see 'em again."

"**W**HERE do the gorilla-men carry those people?" Ki-Gor demanded.

"Over th'other side of the mountain is all I know," George replied, "There's a story around yere about a queer kind of place over there, where there's a man who's kind of King of the gorilla-men. They say the big apes kidnaps the people, an' then they is just slaves in this place for the rest of their lives. They never come out, once they is carried in."

"Then I must go there quickly," said Ki-Gor, "and take my woman away. She must not be a slave."

"Man, you haven't got a chance," George said, earnestly, "I went over the east shoulder of the mountain, once with some of my boys, and we come out on to the entrance of a deep rocky canyon. The boys told me that was the entrance to the Land of the Livin' Dead, and there was a whole lot of the biggest gorilla-men I ever see layin' around there. I just said

'C'mon boys,' an' walked away from there. I once went two rounds with Dempsey 'fore he was champ, but I don't believe in messin' around with no gorilla."

The jungle man stood up, blue eyes flashing

"I am Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle," he said, "and I am going into the Land of the Living Dead, and take my woman away from the gorilla-men, no matter how many they are. Give me a boy to guide me to that entrance, I am going now."

"But, Mr. Ki-Gor," said George, "you ain't got a chance. One man can't lick an army, no matter how big or strong he is."

"I will find a way," said Ki-Gor.

"Say, you must set a great store by your woman," George said, with an admiring shake of his head, "is she English, too?"

"Her name is Helene" said Ki-Gor. "She has a white face and red hair, and she says she is of the tribe of 'Mericans."

"An American girl!" George shouted, "Wait a minute! That's different! Hold on, now, we can't let them apes take an American girl into that awful place."

"You know her tribe?" Ki-Gor asked, curiously.

"Know 'em!" cried George, "I'm American, myself."

"But you have a black skin," Ki-Gor said, blankly.

"Don' make no difference," said George, stoutly, "I'm jus' as good an American as anybody else. An' I suttinly don' aim to leave another American lay in the Land of the Livin' Dead, I don' care *how* many gorillas is guardin' the place."

"You mean you will come with me?" said Ki-Gor.

"I do," said George, emphatically, "an' moreover, we'll take my army along. As head man of this yere M'balla tribe I c'n call out about seventy good fightin' spear-men. I got a rifle and a Luger of my own with plenty of bullets. I'll let you use the rifle—"

"I don't know how to shot a rifle," Ki-Gor interrupted, "Give me some assegais."

"Mr. Ki-Gor," said George, "someday, I'm going to set down and really ask you all some questions about yourself—when I got more time. Right now we better get goin'."

The huge negro stood up and bellowed some orders. Feet padded out of the house, and a moment later, a great drum began to throb.

"C'mon out and watch this," George said, "I got to give the boys a fight talk."

Outside, in the open space in the middle of the village, men, women and children were assembling. They came running from all directions, and squatted on the ground, arranging themselves in a wide circle. Into the middle of the circle, George strode, carrying his giant frame like an Emperor. The excited crowd ceased its chattering and fell silent under his commanding gaze. Then George's deep voice rolled forth in the rapid dialect of the M'balla.

He had hardly begun before he was interrupted by cries of anguish and terror from all about him. He whirled about and raised a threatening hand, and the crowd quieted down. Then George launched into an impassioned oration.

Presently the crowd began to sway and murmur. As George's emotions mounted higher and higher, the responsive murmur grew louder and rhythmic. And finally, when he wound up his oration at fever heat, the men of the M'balla leaped to their feet shouting and brandishing their assegais.

George made his way through the howling gesticulating mob over to Ki-Gor.

"Well, I got the ahmy lined up," he said, "They didn't like the idea so good, at first, but I talked 'em around. In about an hour we-all'll be ready to go beat up on the gorilla-men, an' see whut kin' of a place this yere Land of the Livin' Dead is."

Ki-Gor and George Spelvin, Chief of the M'balla regarded each other with mutual respect. In spite of the fact that each one was a complete puzzle to the other. Together they went into the Chief's house to plan their strategy.

WHEN the little army filed out of the village and headed eastward toward the mountain, each warrior, at Ki-Gor's suggestion, carried a long, throwing spear, in addition to the short stabbing assegai. Ki-Gor's reasoning was that if they met gorilla-men in any quantity they could do considerable preliminary damage with the

throwing spears at long range, before they closed in on the powerful brutes.

George carried his rifle in his hand and the Luger holstered on a belt. Over each shoulder he had draped a bandolier with ammunition for both weapons. Ki-Gor wore a long knife in a scabbard strapped around his waist, and in each hand he carried a broad-bladed M'balla assegai.

After a half a day's brisk climb, the swift African dusk caught the party still several miles short of their destination. They made camp on a bare shoulder of the mountain, taking care to build many bright fires, and detailing plenty of sentries. They had no intention of allowing themselves to be surprised by a night raid of gorilla-men.

The night passed without incident, and before sunup the little army was on its way again, climbing once more. Ki-Gor noticed that many of the strapping M'balla warriors seemed to be less than enthusiastic over the expedition, as they drew nearer to the high, mountain gateway to the Land of the Living Dead, and its dread defenders. But if Chief George noticed it he gave no sign of it.

The line of march lay down hill for a while, down the eastern slope of the great mountain. But still in front of them was an even higher mountain, or rather, range of mountains. High up in a niche between two peaks, George said, was the Gateway. Soon the M'balla army skirted a rim, and started on the final upgrade. A nervous silence settled down over the party, and the rate of speed noticeably slackened. As they toiled higher and higher up the mountain side, the vegetation began to thin out a little. Tall trees gave way to more stunted growths, and odd-shaped bushes, twisted by high winds.

And a hot, dry west wind baked the bent backs of the M'balla.

Suddenly the party came in at right angles on what appeared to be a well-worn trail. It was a strip of bare, hard-packed ground, six feet wide, that twisted up the slope, flanked on either side by high banks. Ki-Gor crinkled his nose.

"Gorilla!" he said, laconically.

George nodded and detailed two of the M'balla to go up the trail as scouts, in advance of the party. Then, he growled an

order over his shoulder and led the little army forward.

They had not proceeded far, when the two scouts came tumbling down the path, faces grey with fear. They immediately started babbling about gorillas, but George hushed them with a stern command, and with Ki-Gor, took them off to one side, out of earshot of the rest of the M'balla. Then, he listened to the scouts as, eyes rolling, they described what they had seen. The Gateway, which was hardly more than a thousand yards away, up the trail, was fairly swarming with gorilla-men. They had evidently scented the approaching M'balla, and reinforcements were pouring out of the narrow opening in the natural rock bastion.

"You have done well," George commented, and turned to Ki-Gor. "This ain't goin' to be so easy, Mr. Ki-Gor. I think you-all better take this yere Luger. There ain't no trick to usin' it. Jest point it like you'd point your finger at somethin', and squeeze this yere little thing. And when it stops goin' 'bang,' jest give it back to me, and I'll reload fer you."

Then George wheeled and strode back to his army.

"Follow me up the bank," he said, in the M'balla dialect, "we will ambush the men-apes from above as they come down the path. Do not throw your spears until you hear the order. Have no fear—you are being led by your invincible chief, and by Ki-Gor, the Gorilla-man Slayer."

The M'balla looked at each other fearfully, but loyally followed George up the bank. The giant American Negro led the way cautiously through the twisted brush, one hundred yards, two hundred yards. Then he halted, abruptly, and pointed. Ki-Gor, beside him in instant, followed the pointing finger with his eyes and felt the hairs on the back of his neck stiffen.

III

THEY were standing on the edge of the brush cover. Before them a wide strip of rubbly, rocky ground sloped gently up to a natural rock palisade. There was no vegetation of any kind on the desolate stretch of shale and rubble, and beyond, the

line of low cliffs marked the crest of the ridge. Directly in front of them, there was a cleft in the rock barrier—a narrow cleft that looked to be no more than ten feet wide. Through that cleft, a seemingly endless line of huge black gorillas was moving out to the open ground. And the open ground was already occupied by at least fifty or sixty of the monsters. A low murmur ran through the M'balla.

George whirled, eyes flashing.

"There are your enemies!" he hissed, "the filthy beasts who have terrorized your neighborhood for so many years, who have carried your relatives and friends into a horrible, unknown captivity. Let every man look to his throwing spear."

SLOWLY the gorilla-men began moving down toward them in a disorganized mob. The M'balla, grim-faced, crouched down in the bushes behind George and Ki-Gor. There was something hideously menacing about the way the mass of man-apes ambled down over the rubble. They made no sound, but came on with a sort of contemptuous calmness.

When they were less than a hundred yards away, George fingering his big express rifle, clutched Ki-Gor's arm in glee. The gorilla-men were turning away to the right.

They were going down the path, directly beneath the ambushade!

George waited until the ravine below them was choked with the black monsters, then he drew a bead on one of them, and bellowed a command. A shower of spears rained down on to the seething mass of hairy bodies. The instant they struck, George fired.

Then pandemonium reigned in the ravine.

With screams of pain and rage, the great man-apes milled around trying to pluck the spears out. George kept on firing into their midst as fast as he could reload.

IN five minutes fully half the gorilla-men lay dead or dying. But as they had originally outnumbered the M'balla by two to one, that merely evened matters up. For the brutes quickly discovered the source

of the rain of death, and started clambering up the side of the ravine.

But the M'balla, encouraged by the initial success of the ambush, stood confidently on the edge of the bank. Into their midst, Ki-Gor stepped, an assegai in each hand. After he had emptied the Luger, he had returned the weapon in disgust to George, and had gone back to what seemed to him the more satisfactory method of fighting.

A titanic gorilla-man more agile than the rest, reared its head over the bank at Ki-Gor's feet. The jungle man thrust viciously downward, and impaled the monster by the throat. The beast gave a gurgling bellow and fell backwards.

"Hai! Hai!" the M'balla yelled, and they cut and stabbed as more of the gigantic apes gained the bank. All along the line, huge hairy forms poised for seconds on the brink, great arms thrashing, only to waver and plunge downwards, pierced by a dozen assegais. Here and there, single gorilla-men gained a momentary foothold, crushing out M'balla lives with sledge-hammer blows of their mighty arms. Desperately the tribesman swarmed around, thrusting and hacking. And wherever the M'balla were forced to give ground, Ki-Gor flashed in, muscles rippling, and tawny mane flying.

The fighting was so close now, that George could no longer use his rifle, so he, too, waded in to the combat, the Luger spitting in his left hand, an assegai lifting and dipping in his right. But the rifle had done its job. The monstrous gorilla-men, terrifying as they were, were clearly outnumbered. The struggling line along the bank swayed back and forth, and finally a handful of surviving gorilla-men broke away and leaped down through the shaly gravel to the path below.

But the blood-lust of the M'balla was up, and they followed relentlessly. As Ki-Gor and George leaned panting on their assegais, the tribesman hunted down the dozen or so remaining gorilla-men, ringed each one with a bristling wall of steel, and cut them down.

One-half hour after George had fired the first shot the gorilla-men were completely annihilated. But it was a costly victory.

Among the heaped up dead on the bank, thirty-one M'balla tribesman lay crushed and dying. High up in the sky, the vultures began circling downward to their grisly feast.

The sun was hanging low as the little army, having buried its dead, climbed with Ki-Gor and George up to the Gateway. However, their steps lagged a little across the stony ground. For one thing, they were undergoing a natural reaction from the shock of the battle. For another they felt a nameless dread of what they might find on the other side of the Gateway. They were courageous warriors, as shown by their behaviour against the gorilla-men. But gorilla-men, fearsome though they were were tangible enemies that could be faced and beaten in combat. And this cleft in the mountain bastion they were approaching was the Gateway to the Land of the Living Dead. The fear of the Unknown clutched at the stout hearts of the M'balla.

Ki-Gor's finely tuned senses made him aware of this situation in the ranks of the little army. If the truth be told, he felt a little uneasy himself. But far overshadowing any fears for himself was the determination to penetrate into this awesome place, and find out what had happened to Helene. And if Helene were alive, he would probably need the assistance of the M'balla to rescue her. Therefore he felt a responsibility in maintaining the morale of the army.

So when the little force reached the cleft in the rock, Ki-Gor touched George lightly on the arm, and stepped in front of him. Then looking neither to right nor to left, he marched boldly through the opening.

A broad path lay before him, winding off down-hill to one side. Sheer cliffs towered on either side of the path, so that Ki-Gor could not see beyond the first bend, which was about fifty feet away. But as far as he could see, there was no sign of life anywhere on the path. He shouted encouragingly over his shoulder and went forward.

As he did, he felt a noticeable drop in the temperature, and saw that the sun no longer shone around him. Looking up he

observed a pall of mist or clouds stretching eastward from the crest of the ridge. But he pressed on down the path, grim-faced, and the M'balla, quaking with superstitious dread, crept silently after him.

It seem to grow colder and colder, and darker and darker, as they descended the narrow mountain gorge. But still they saw no signs of life. Gradually, the cliffs on either side began to flatten out and disappear, and here and there they saw patches of vegetation, bushes and dwarf trees and stringy vines.

But it was the most extraordinary vegetation any of them had ever seen, and the farther they went, the more extraordinary it became. The bushes were wildly luxuriant, with hundreds of branches, wide leaves and long cruel thorns. And the trees had gnarled trunks, twisted into the most fantastic and grotesque shapes. An eerie silence hung over everything, broken only by the whistling of the chill wind as it whipped shreds of mist across the path.

It was getting so dark, now, that Ki-Gor was unable to see very far. The strange bushes and trees loomed up in terrifying shapes in the gray gloom. The M'balla huddled as close to each other as they could and still walk. From time to time, they peered fearfully around them, and the pace of the march slowed down to a crawl, even though the path sloped downhill.

At the head of the party, Ki-Gor picked his way cautiously, an assegai held ready in his right hand. Although he wouldn't admit it—even to himself—he was feeling extremely uneasy. The supernatural spookiness of the surroundings was having an effect on even his stout heart. And besides, the visibility was so poor that he couldn't tell what kind of a trap he might be walking into. His bare body, too, was chilled to the bone with the clammy, gusty wind.

Shivering, he reflected that a good hot camp-fire would not only revive the sagging spirits of the expedition, but would furnish some valuable protection in this strange and desolate situation. He turned to George just behind him, and suggested that they halt for the night as soon as possible. George agreed to the idea with

alacrity, and immediately bellowed a command to the M'balla.

A MURMUR of relief swept through the column, and the tribesmen eagerly bunched up on the path touching shoulders to regain their confidence. A few braver than the rest spread out and began hacking at the bushes with their assegais for fuel.

When some fagots had been piled up, George squatted on the ground to start the fire. Ki-Gor bent over him, watching. The flames were slow in coming. The wood was damp, and the wind increased.

Suddenly, Ki-Gor's scalp began to crawl as he heard a sound from the outer darkness.

"Listen!" he hissed, clutching George's shoulder. But George had heard it, too, and so had the M'balla. They stood transfixed, eyes rolling.

It was a kind of soft, melodious wail that rose and fell with ineffable sweetness. It seemed to come from all directions, or from no direction. There was an almost human quality in the sound, and yet no human ever made a sound like that. Mournfully sweet, it hung on the air and died away, as if some sad, disembodied spirit were wandering disconsolately through the darkness, crooning a tuneless song.

The M'balla looked at Ki-Gor and George, and Ki-Gor and George looked at each other. No one said a word. Then the wind blew strongly on their faces again, and again the ghostly voice rose. This time there were *two voices*! Another melancholy wail, pitched lower than the first, sang out in perfect harmony. Then a third—a fourth! And finally a whole choir of unearthly voices rose and fell in a terribly sweet, terribly sad hymn.

"Ghosts!" a tribesman blurted out, "*Living Ghosts!*"

At that moment there was a distant, menacing rumble, and the ground under their feet seemed to tremble. The rumble grew louder, and far away to one side, the sky grew pale. Starkly outlined against it was a conical mountain peak. Little tongues of green and yellow flame licked upwards from the mountain top, shedding a ghastly light over everything. Underfoot, the

ground trembled more violently than ever. The wind blew harder, and the ghostly voices rose to a felonious shriek.

The horrified tribesmen swayed against each other for a moment. Then, with a wild yell, they broke and ran headlong, back up the path. George roared at them to stop, but they didn't even hear him. He ran after the howling, frantic mob, and fired in the air twice, but it did not the slightest good. The M'Balla had had enough.

Trembling, Ki-Gor stood and watched his allies until they disappeared from view. He was badly frightened himself, but it never occurred to him to run. He stood glaring about him, assegai ready. Very soon the ground ceased to shake, and the light from the mountain peak dimmed and died out. The wind lowered and the ghostly voices faded away to a sorrowful moan.

Ki-Gor squatted on the ground and collected his thoughts. So far, he was unharmed in spite of the spectacular and terrifying phenomena that had occurred. But the sturdy little army which was to invade the Land of the Living Dead with him, and help him rescue Helene had vanished into the night. So now, if he was to rescue Helene, he would have to do it himself.

A pebble rattle up the path, above him. He started up, and took two stealthy steps in that direction when he was arrested by the sound of a deep voice speaking very softly.

"Is you there, Mr. Ki-Gor?"

George Spelvin had returned.

"I am in front of you," Ki-Gor whispered, "How many are with you?"

"They ain't nary one with me," George answered dolefully, "I is all by myse'f, Mr. Ki-Gor. Them po' bush niggers is still goin' to be runnin' this time next week, I guess. They was reely scared."

"And you?" said Ki-Gor, "Aren't you afraid?"

"Well, I don't feel so awful good. Seems like they's an awful mess of han'ts around these yere parts, and I don't like han'ts, no suh!"

"Why did you come back?"

"Man, they's an American girl down yere and somebody's got to git her out. An' if I cain't bring muh ahmy, I c'n

bring myse'f. I don't know if the two of us c'n pull off this rescue, but we c'n try awful hard."

"George, you are a brave man."

"Well, Mr. Ki-Gor, tha's a real compliment when you say it. Cause I guess, when it comes to bravery, you wrote the book."

Ki-Gor ignored the return compliment—mainly because he didn't understand it—and got down to business.

"This place is not good for a camp," he said, "Let us go farther down the trail."

"You said it, Mr. Ki-Gor," said George, heartily, "Le's git on away from yere. Oh My Lawd there goes them ha'nts again!"

THE jungle man shivered as the mysterious, mournful voices began their lament again. Silently, he offered the butt-end of his assegai for George to hold, and the oddly assorted pair moved slowly down the path.

Enough light from the stars filtered through the clouds to illuminate their way, though very dimly. It was enough, at any rate, to bring Ki-Gor up with a start after they had only gone about fifty yards. The trail suddenly narrowed. On one side—the uphill side—a sheer cliff wall rose and lost itself in the misty darkness. On the other side was—a drop into nothingness! Cautiously, Ki-Gor and George crept down the trail, hugging the cliff.

It was a long and terrible night for the two invaders of the Land of the Living Dead. Inadequately dressed as they were, they nearly perished from the cold winds that whistled against the cliffs. And the almost total absence of light made their progress along the hazardous trail extremely slow. But with the coming of daylight, they found an improvement in their condition.

They were down among trees, now, tall trees that rose from gently sloping park land, free from underbrush. The constant fog and cold winds were left behind, and the two companions hurried along the smooth, hard-packed trail to restore their circulation. The first slanting rays of the sun were pouring through the trees, when they reached a clearing in the forest. It was evidently an open bluff on the moun-

tain side, as they could see the tops of trees peeping up on the other side of the open space. They ran forward to the edge of the bluff, to see what the surrounding country was like. What they saw made them gasp.

They were looking down on a broad, fertile valley that was surrounded on all sides by great mountains. The valley floor was entirely cleared, and looked to be one great green pasture. It was dotted with snow-white cattle grazing peacefully, and through the middle of it ran a placid stream. At the far end, on rising ground, a score or more of buildings was grouped in a symmetrical arrangement. They stretched out on either side of a large, palace-like structure, which seemed to dominate the whole group.

The architecture of all the buildings was uniform. They were all one story high, except for the palace, which had three or four floors. They were all startlingly white, and had large, flat, overhanging roofs, also white. As Ki-Gor and George watched the scene, fascinated, the sun's rays touched those roofs. Instantly, they seemed to catch fire. The rays were caught and reflected by billions of tiny diamond-like surfaces that dazzled the eyes of the two men on the bluff.

But, except for the buildings themselves, there was not a sign of a human being.

Suddenly Ki-Gor's nostrils flared and he glanced sharply around.

"I smell gorilla," he stated.

"You do?" said George startled, "My glory, I sho' wish I had muh ahmy around."

He moved down the face of the bluff several feet and peered into the base of the trees.

"Man, your nose don't tell you no lies," he called back, "these yere woods is full of gorilla-men. Le's you an' I get outa yere!"

George scrambled back to the edge of the bluff. Then he and Ki-Gor rapidly retraced their steps across the clearing. Suddenly Ki-Gor halted.

An immense gorilla-man was standing in front of them at the edge of the trees.

George raised his rifle, then lowered it again. A second gorilla-man was coming

through the trees to join the first one. And another one, and another one—. A rapid glance around the clearing showed the two men only too plainly that they were completely surrounded by at least thirty of the great man-apes.

"Man, we sho' walked right into a spot," George grunted.

"They were hiding," said Ki-Gor, "waiting for us."

"Whut we goin' to do?" said George, "we cain't lick this many. Kill a few maybe, but when I stop to reload, the rest of 'em will come and git us."

Ki-Gor did not answer for a moment, but stood fingering his assegai, and watching the gorilla-men. He was puzzled by their attitude. The great men-apes were not attempting to come any closer to the two men, but merely stood quietly around the edge of the clearing.

"Let us go slowly in the direction of the valley," Ki-Gor said, finally, "and do not shoot until they attack us."

IV

KI-GOR moved cautiously downhill across the grass, and George followed, his rifle held ready. As they approached the ring of gorilla-men at that point, the shaggy brutes silently gave way to either side, making room for the men to pass. They still showed no inclination to attack. With a fast-beating heart, Ki-Gor stepped past the gorilla-men, his eyes darting from side to side. The oddly human brutes remained motionless.

Not until the two men had gone twenty paces or so, did the gorilla-men move. They then, very deliberately, began to follow at a safe distance to the rear.

"Mr. Ki-Gor, I think you-all got the right idea," George muttered, "I truly b'lieve them big fellers *wants* us to go this way."

And so it seemed. Ki-Gor and George went unmolested down through the forest, and emerged on to the valley floor. Behind them was a silent procession of giant man-apes.

The two men hesitated a moment, and then Ki-Gor said, "To the houses." Apparently it was what the gorilla-men want-

ed. They continued to follow at a respectable distance as the jungle man and his Negro companion traversed the long green fields to the dazzling white houses.

The valley had an extraordinary beauty. The grass was lush and unbelievably green. Here and there, wild flowers, brilliantly colored, grew in profusion. And in every direction, mountains reached majestically to the sky.

As the adventurers approached the houses, the gorilla-men behind them spread out fanwise, and one of them uttered a great roar. Ki-Gor and George whirled about. Was it the sign for a sudden attack?

Apparently not, as none of the monsters came any closer. It was a signal, though. From every direction of the valley, and from the houses, hordes of gorilla-men came running. Ki-Gor and George stood back to back, bewildered, as hundreds of clattering brutes gathered and formed a vast ring around them. Still there was no hostile move.

Just then, a piercing whistle shrilled from the direction of the houses. Immediately the man-apes on that side of the ring separated from each other, and formed a broad avenue straight up to the steps of the palace. And at the head of the steps stood a man.

Wonderingly, Ki-Gor and George walked between the two lines of gorilla-men to the foot of the steps where they halted and scrutinized the man standing above them. He was an erect, handsome man, dressed in white flowing robes. He was middle-aged, judging from the long, gray mustache and the long gray hair that fell to his shoulders, framing an aquiline, brown face. But the most remarkable feature about him was his eyes. They were large and luminous, and had a disturbing penetrating quality. He smiled down at the two adventurers and spoke.

"Welcome! thrice welcome, Ki-Gor," he said, in perfect English. "Welcome to Nirvana. I expected you sooner than this, and I expected that you would come alone. Who is this black man?"

The tone was friendly, but Ki-Gor didn't like it, for some reason. And how did this King of the Gorilla-men know his

name? Then it came to him. From Helene, of course! Eyes flashing and fists clenched, Ki-Gor moved forward a step and spoke. As he did, the man-apes stirred restlessly.

"Where is my woman? Is she safe?"

The King of the Gorilla-men made a discreet motion with his right hand.

"Your woman is unhurt," he said, quietly, "She was tired and a little hysterical from her long journey so I put her her to sleep. You will see her soon. In the meantime, let me warn you against making any threatening gestures. These large, hairy creatures are my subjects. They adore and reverence me, and if they ever got the idea that you meant to do me harm, I could not be responsible for their actions."

"Well, jes' a minute now, King," George broke in with a careless drawl, "I'm pointin' a high-powered gun right straight at your guts. You jes' *better* be responsible fer the way these yere babies act, or you-all jes' ain' gonna *live* very long."

The King's eyelids flickered ever so slightly in surprise.

"You are an American black," he observed, "How very interesting. I was going to send you to the mines, but I will reconsider. I will ask you to come into the Palace with Ki-Gor. Very interesting."

THE King gathered up one side of his robe and stepped down the white stairs with immense dignity. When he reached the ground in front of Ki-Gor and George he extended his right hand, and inclined his head, eyes half-closed.

"Let us not talk of fighting and shooting," he said, gently, "Believe me, if you kill me, my subjects will destroy you instantly. No. Let us be friends."

As Ki-Gor watched suspiciously, the King looked at George sleepily, and smiled. Suddenly, the huge brown eyes flew open and glittered at the big Negro.

"You are very tired," he said, in a low voice, "You are extremely tired from your long march. You need to rest—rest. Just relax all your muscles and—rest. You need to sleep more than anything else in the world. Sleep. Why don't you go to sleep? Just close your eyes and sleep. Don't try to hold your eyelids open. Let them fall,

and—go to sleep. Go to sleep on your feet—standing up. Go to sleep."

At those last words, George swayed like a tree in a high wind. Ki-Gor, in amazement, saw the big Negro was fighting to keep his eyes open. The King backed up the steps slowly, and George staggered forward after him. Suddenly, the King's right hand flicked out, seized the lowered barrel of George's rifle, and wrested it away. As Ki-Gor leaped forward, the King sprang agilely up the steps and leveled the rifle at the jungle man's breast.

"Carefully, Ki-Gor," said the King, "I now have the gun."

Ki-Gor stood bewildered. He couldn't understand what had happened to George, that he should allow himself to be disarmed so easily. The big Negro groaned beside him and shook his head.

"Look out for the King," George croaked, "Man, he sho-nough almost had me laid out cold. I ain't never been hypnotized befo', but I nearly was this time."

Ki-Gor reached out to steady George, thinking fast. He didn't know what "hypnotize" meant, but he had seen George almost go to sleep on his feet, and he felt a sense of terrible danger from the cool, composed person of the King. More than ever, he wanted to find Helene, and see for himself whether she was safe. The King's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Now, shall we be friends?"

Ki-Gor and George looked helplessly at the man in the white robe, and nodded slowly.

"Then, be so kind as to follow me into the Palace," said the King, "and we will start getting better acquainted."

He reached the top of the steps and backed across the wide portico, gun still leveled. Then he pulled a whistle from the folds of his robe, and blew two shrill blasts. It was evidently a signal of dismissal to the gorilla-men, and the vast crowd of them began to break up and move away. Ki-Gor and George hesitated a moment, then leaped up the white stone steps after the King.

He was standing at one side of a wide doorway, and with an ironic smile, he waved his two prisoners through the doorway ahead of him. They proceeded

through a spacious hallway, and at the King's command, turned to the right, through another doorway, and found themselves in a large, high-ceilinged room. The white walls of the room were unadorned, but a deep, rich looking carpet covered the floor, and low tables, chairs and divans made up the furniture.

Ki-Gor pivoted on his heel and addressed the King humbly.

"Helene," he said, "My woman. Where is she?"

"She is coming to join us now," the King replied with an inscrutable smile, "In fact, here she is."

At that moment, Ki-Gor's heart leaped within him as Helene walked into the room at the opposite end. He started down the room toward her, but stopped half way with a thrill of horror.

It was Helene, all right, but something was terribly wrong. She was clothed in a white robe, sandals on her feet. Her face was deathly pale, and her eyes looked straight ahead, unfocused on anything in the room.

She walked carefully around the furniture without seeming to see it.

"Here is Ki-Gor," said the King, "You may recognize him, Helene."

Helene swayed a moment, uncertainly, then she turned a perfectly blank face toward the jungle man.

"Hello, Ki-Gor," she said in a hollow voice.

"Helene!" cried Ki-Gor in anguished tones, "What is the matter? Are you all right?"

THERE was a dreadful moment of silence. Then the King's voice broke in gently.

"Tell him, Helene," he said, "Tell him how you feel."

Monotonously, as if she were repeating lesson, Helene said, "I am all right, Ki-Gor. I am very happy here in Nirvana—happy to be with Krishna, King of the Living Dead."

Ki-Gor swung around, his face contorted in an uncontrollable snarl. Disregarding the rifle aimed at him, he sprang at the King. So sudden and so swift was his movement that the King had not time to

pull the trigger, before the jungle man was upon him.

"Mr. Ki-Gor!" cried George, "Don't kill him! Don't kill him yet!" He's got the woman hypnotized, an' she won't ever recover until he snaps her out of it."

But Ki-Gor had the King on the floor choking the life out of him in a blind rage. The powerful Negro bent over and wrenched him away from the supine figure in the white robe.

"Now, hold on, Mr. Ki-Gor," George sputtered, as the jungle man spun out of his grasp, "If you kill the King now, tha's just the same as killing Miss Helene, yere."

Ki-Gor hesitated, eyes blazing.

"What do you mean?" he cried, hoarsely.

"Jes' whut I said," replied George. "He's done put her into a hypnotic trance, an' he's the only one can bring her out of it. If you kill him, she jes' ain' never goin' to wake up."

Ki-Gor whirled around at Krishna, King of the Living Dead.

"Wake her up!" Ki-Gor said savagely.

Krishna drew himself up to a sitting position, and brushed the long gray hair out of his eyes.

"I will release her," he said, with a cool smile, "as soon as you two hand your weapons over to me."

"Now, listen yere, King," George bit out, "I wouldn't kid you-all. Don' go tryin' to drive a bargain, because you'll never be closer to dyin' than you is, right this minute. You better wake her up, and wake her up quick, or Ki-Gor'll kill you, and he'll kill you slow."

Krishna's dark face grew paler. He reflected a moment, then smiled again.

"Very well," he said, pleasantly, "I will do as you say."

"You better do a smooth job," George warned, as Krishna got to his feet and approached Helene, "because if she comes out cryin' an' hysterical, they's no power on earth could stop you from bein' beaten to a pulp."

Krishna nodded, and passed his hand over Helene's eyes.

"I am going to release you from my control," he said quietly. "You will wake

up, and you will remember nothing of what happened while you were asleep. Now. You are no longer under my control. Wake up!"

He stepped backward and watched the girl. Helene's eyes were tight shut, and she held herself rigid. Krishna paled.

"Wake up!" he said, sharply, and reaching out a hand, snapped his fingers beside her ear.

Helene shivered. Slowly her eyes opened. She stared uncomprehendingly about her, and then saw Ki-Gor. She gave a glad cry and rushed into his arms.

"Ki-Gor!" she exclaimed, "You came after me! Oh, I'm so happy! I've never been so frightened in my life as when the gorilla-man snatched me away from the camp. But he didn't hurt me at all. And when he brought me here, Krishna was so kind. I think this is a heavenly place, don't you?"

Ki-Gor held her tightly to him for a moment, without speaking. Then he released one arm and pointed to George Spelvin, one-time Pullman porter, ship's cook, and Chief of the M'Balla.

"This is George," said Ki-Gor, "He is a Bantu, but he is a brave man, and he is our friend."

"Pleased to meet you-all, Ma'am," said George, with a grin. "I may be a Bantu, but fust of all, I is an American, an I's real proud to be your friend."

BEFORE Helene could express her astonishment at meeting an American Negro in this fantastic corner of Africa, Ki-Gor took command of the situation, again.

"This man," he said grimly, and pointed at Krishna, "is not our friend. He is bad. We are going away from here quickly."

"Krishna? Bad?" said Helene, puzzled, "I don't understand. He has been very kind to me."

"He is bad," Ki-Gor reiterated, "and we are going away, right now."

"If you will pardon me," Krishna broke in, with a sleepy smile, "It is not a question of whether I am good or bad. It happens that I am the ruler of this valley, which is sometimes called the Land of the

Living Dead. My own name for it is Nirvana. You see, I am a Hindu, and Nirvana is an ancient conception of the Ultimate of human desire. It is not like the Christian Heaven, exactly, it is merely a removal from the world, a complete absence of desire, of illusion. I removed myself from the outer world many years ago, and found a kind of Nirvana here in this secluded valley. Here I remain until I die. But this Nirvana, unlike the spiritual Nirvana of the ancient Bhuddists, is somewhat concerned with matters of the flesh. I like beauty and comfort and good food. At the same time, I require solitude when I feel like it. My solution was to come here and be served by slaves, and remain undiscovered by the outer world. Human beings built this palace and the surrounding buildings. Human beings grow my food, tend my cattle—I have discarded the Hindu tabu on beef. My soldiers, however, are these curious man-apes. They are considerably more trustworthy than any human warriors I have ever known."

"But, Krishna," Helene interrupted, "how can you be sure that one of your human slaves won't escape, someday, and reveal the secret of your Nirvana?"

"For one thing," Krishna replied, "I hypnotize them. For another if any attempted to leave the Valley, he would immediately be killed by my soldiers. You see, these are no ordinary gorillas. You may have noticed that they are astonishingly human in some ways. They are the product of highly intensive selective breeding."

"Selective breeding!" Helene exclaimed, "I thought that was impossible. I thought that gorillas could not reproduce in captivity."

"The original specimens which I brought here from West Africa years ago, were given the illusion of freedom. They had the run of the valley. But they learned to eat food which I left out for them, and frequently the food was drugged. In that way I had opportunities to observe them closely, control their mating, and sometimes to experiment with their ductless glands. The second generation was more tractable. From then on, I bred them for

size, intelligence and docility. These giant creatures you see around here are the result."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Helene. "Where did you get your education?"

"At the University of Cambridge," Krishna smiled, "and later at the University of Bonn. It was at the German university that I became interested in racial evolution and, what might be termed, constructive anthropology. Some bullet-headed Prussian students were busy with a racial theory concerning their Aryan origin. That was vastly amusing to me, who come from the only true Aryan race left in the world—the high-caste Brahmans of Northern India. The appearance of those Prussians indicated to me that they were more likely to be descended from Neanderthal Man. And from that, I conceived the idea of trying to create modern Neanderthals. Hence the experiment with the gorillas. The experiment is not yet complete, but my man-apes are many times more intelligent than their original progenitors. And the one thing they have learned thoroughly, is that anyone may enter the Valley, *but no one may leave! That is one of the voodooos I have placed upon this land. There are six others. You know, I sometimes call my home Nirvana of the Seven Voodooos.*"

"You mean we are prisoners here?" said Helene.

"For the rest of your lives," said Krishna, simply. "And, as I have already told your companions, it will do no good to kill me. Because whether I am alive or not, the man-apes will not permit you to get out of the valley. And with me dead, their master, the probabilities are that they would destroy every human being they could find."

"Oh!" Helene shuddered with loathing. "I thought you were so charming at first. I can't believe that you are such a monster."

"I am not a monster at all," Krishna smiled, "I am just a very practical man who does the things that please him. In this comfortable domain of mine, I let no wish go ungratified. My own happiness is my chiefest concern. Surely, that is not a monster, is it?"

HELENE made no answer, and for a while there was an electric silence. Finally George broke it.

"Man!" he said, heavily. "We sho'ly caught ourse'ves a cold fish!"

"You know," said Krishna, "there is no reason why you should take this situation so gravely. Only technically, will you be prisoners. In a sense you will be freer than you could ever be outside the boundaries of my Lotus Land. By the time you have been here six months, I am quite sure you will feel not the slightest desire ever to go away."

Helene cast a frightened glance at Ki-Gor, who, up to now, had taken no part in the conversation. The jungle man frowned and spoke abruptly.

"How is it that you are master of the gorilla-men? How do you do that?"

"I drug them, my dear Ki-Gor," Krishna replied, candidly, "with a rare substance which I distill from a rare plant that grows in this valley in great quantity. The drug puts them into a deep sleep, and when they wake up, they are especially susceptible to hypnosis. I then hypnotize them. I have hypnotized so many of them so often, that the merest suggestion that they prevent people from leaving acts now as a perpetual command to all of them. In the meantime, of course, they have become strong addicts of this drug, and I have to give them a daily portion of it. If this sounds hard to believe, just come out with me now and I will arrange to give them their ration for the day. You may see with your own eyes that I am telling you the truth."

"No funny business, now, King," warned George.

"There would be no purpose in my doing any funny business," Krishna replied, blandly, "I could have you killed, but I don't want you killed. I want you alive. You see, I have many hobbies, of all kinds. And, for a time now, I intend to make a hobby of you three. You interest me. Therefore, instead of sending you to work my mines, which is my usual procedure with newcomers, I shall keep you near me in the palace. No, there will be no funny business. Besides, you have guns which you might be foolish enough

to kill me with. Follow me now, and you will see a strange sight."

Krishna stood up and walked briskly toward the doorway. George followed him closely, covering him with the rifle. Ki-Gor dropped back with Helene and whispered into her ear.

"What does 'hypnotize' mean?"

Helene thought for a moment and shook her head.

"It's a little too complicated to explain right now, Ki-Gor," she said, "Wait until we are alone, and I'll try to straighten it out for you."

Krishna led them out of the palace, down the white steps, and across the great square of the settlement to a long narrow building, which had small, heavily barred windows along its length, and two doors, a small one and a large one, at one end. Several gorilla-men appeared from other buildings moved over to the large door and stood there, hopefully.

"This is my drug laboratory and dispensary," Krishna explained, as he led the way to the smaller door. "Slaves gather the plants and bring them here where I extract the drug and produce it in crystalline form by a formula known only to me."

He opened the smaller door with a small key and motioned them to follow him.

"Then more slaves," Krishna continued, "place quantities of the drug tablets in a long trough on one side of a corridor which extends the length of this building on the inside. I open the large door and the gorilla-men file through and pick up the drug tablets as they go along. And here you see some of the slaves preparing the feast for my simian warriors."

Helene, Ki-Gor, and George found themselves in a long room which looked like a chemical laboratory. A dozen or more blacks moved slowly around emptying sacks into a long bin that stretched along the inside wall.

"The tablets fall through a slit in the wall into the trough on the other side," Krishna explained. "In that way, the anthropoids get all they need of the drug without having access to the source of supply."

But Helene hardly heard him. She was staring in horrified fascination at the slaves. They were every one, unbelievably gaunt and emaciated. They moved with dragging steps. Their eyes were lack-lustre, and they seemed to be walking in a stupor.

"In heaven's name, what is the matter with these poor men?" Helene cried, "Are they victims of a disease?"

"Oh, no," said Krishna, matter-of-factly, "They are drug-addicts. Everybody in the valley, except myself, is a habitual user of the drug. For some reason, it seems not to have an ill-effects on the gorilla-men, but it destroys human tissue inevitably in course of time. That is why I need constant replacements for my slaves, and have to send my man-apes out of the valley on kidnapping expeditions."

George Spelvin exploded.

"Man, you is jes' plain bad an' nothin' else!"

KRISHNA smiled, blandly.

"You are the most interesting black man I have ever seen," he said, "You are going to provide me with a fascinating subject of investigation. You have something, a quality I have never seen in a Negro before."

"Well, I'll tell you this," said George, and his voice had a dangerous edge, "I ain' awful good slave material."

"No, I can see that," Krishna replied with an amused glance, "compared to these specimens in here. But, perhaps I should explain that these men are the dregs of the valley. They are so far gone in the drug habit, that I put them in here where the work is light, and where they can eat all they want of the tablets. They die off very quickly, after they come in here."

"Oh!" Helene cried, impatiently, "I can't understand why your slaves haven't long ago rebelled or run away."

"Only because of my incorruptible apes," said Krishna, imperturbably. "Here, I will give you an example."

He called to one of the slaves. The creature crawled over to him on hands and knees and looked up dully into the King's face. With a careless wave of a

hand, Krishna quickly threw the slave into a trance. He got up slowly on his skinny legs and tottered to the door. Mechanically, he opened it and walked outside.

"Come and watch this," said Krishna, "it's great sport. I have hypnotized him with the suggestion that he try to escape from the valley."

With faces expressive of the dreadful premonition in their minds, Helene and George went to the door and looked out. After a minute, Ki-Gor joined them.

Outside, the gorilla-men were massing in the square, waiting for the door to open to admit them to the supply of the drug they craved. The wretched slave was picking his way through the crowd. They looked at him uncuriously and seemed to pay little attention. But when he emerged from the crowd on the other side and walked slowly out on the green pasture, two hulking man-apes were following him.

Farther and farther, the doomed creature went across the lovely green valley floor. And behind him, inevitably, stalked his sinister escort. When the slave was about a quarter of a mile away, he suddenly broke into a staggering run. And as Helene gasped, the man-apes started after him. The first one overtook him in ten steps, seized him by the arm, and flung him high in the air. As the poor creature landed, both gorilla-men pounced on him. Helene closed her eyes to the rest of the spectacle.

"Ah! that is excellent sport!" Krishna exclaimed, eyes gleaming, "Now, you see, perhaps, why nobody tries to leave the Valley. And why, *you three* will never leave the valley."

"We will leave the Valley, Krishna," said Ki-Gor, quietly, "and when we do, you will be killed by your own gorillas—torn to pieces like the slave out there."

"Your optimism is delightful, Ki-Gor," replied Krishna, "You forget that the gorilla-men regard me, and me alone, as the source of the drug that they crave. Step outside the door with me, and I will demonstrate the truth of that statement, too."

The throngs of ape-men crowded eagerly around Krishna as he strolled over to the large door. Avidly their little eyes

watched him insert the big key, and when he swung the door open, there was a concerted dash for the corridor. Krishna stepped back with a smile as the gorilla-men jammed themselves into the doorway.

"How do they get out?" Ki-Gor asked.

"They go out the other end of the building," Krishna replied. "The door at that end swings outward under the pressure of their weight and springs back into position afterward. There is no handle on the outside of it, and it cannot swing inwards. So they have learned always to go through the building this way."

Ki-Gor grunted, then was lost in thought for a moment. Abruptly he asked another question.

"How soon do they go to sleep, after they eat the drug?"

"Almost immediately," was the answer. "They walk out of the door at the other end, find some spot of ground they like, and lie down and sleep for about four hours."

Again Ki-Gor grunted and bent his head in thought.

"If you are planning," said Krishna, with a sardonic smile, "to strike at me while the gorilla-men are asleep, you may abandon the idea. There are always late-comers to the feast—gorilla-men, who come down from their posts on the mountain sides. I shall lock this door before they get here. So that while most of the anthropoids will be in a stupor, there will still be plenty around here in full possession of their faculties—more than enough to protect me."

KI-GOR appeared not to have heard the warning. He drew George aside and talked to him in low tones. Krishna gave the pair a narrow look, and then shook his head with a pitying smile.

"Fools!" he said, contemptuously, to Helene. "It is doubly stupid to contemplate escape. For not only is it impossible, but it should be highly undesirable. Life here is extremely pleasant, and also very interesting. I have, by no means, confined my scientific activities to the creation of gorilla-men. Besides this laboratory, I have three others, and in all of them, I am conducting fascinating experi-

ments. At the moment, I am especially absorbed in a study of the endocrines—the ductless glands. As a matter of fact, I have wished for a new subject of experimentation for a long time. One like yourself, a lovely white woman. With what I already know, I could change you in two weeks' time, from a fair lithe Nordic, to an obese, swarthy Latin type. I could make your hair fall out. I could grow a beard on your smooth face. And, I assure you the operations would be completely painless to yourself. The only thing I am not quite sure of yet, is whether, after making these changes in you, I could change you back to your original self. *That* is what we will find out."

Helene shrank back against the wall of the laboratory, eyes dilated with horror, and unable to say a word in reply to the grotesque suggestions she had been forced to hear. Krishna calmly turned his attention the gorilla-men.

V

THE crowd of them around the doorway was rapidly growing smaller, as more and more of them filed through the corridor of the building. Off to either side, other gorilla-men could be seen wandering aimlessly around, on their faces, fatuous expressions of sleepy ecstasy. One by one, these dropped to the ground, curled up and went to sleep.

Krishna moved toward the door cautiously. There was only a handful of the man-apes left, now, clamoring to get into the dispensary. Krishna waited, his hand on the door, until there was room enough for this rear-guard to get inside. His eyes swept the green fields, and a crafty smile came over his dark face, as two little knots of late-coming gorilla-men could be seen running in from the mountain slopes. As the last man-ape in the square crowded into the dispensary, Krishna slammed the door, hid the key in the folds of his robe, and walked toward Ki-Gor and George, smiling.

But the smile died on his face, as Ki-Gor swung around and started for him. He looked around wildly, but the late-arriving gorilla-men were still a hundred

yards away out in the field. His hand fumbled for the cord at his throat on which the whistle hung. He ran two steps, blowing a shrill blast, as Ki-Gor hit him.

Frantically, Krishna tried to fight off the jungle man, but he was over-matched. Ki-Gor slung the screaming King over his shoulder and ran back to the doorway of the laboratory. One or two of the drugged man-apes tried to sit up, then fell back in drowsy disgust.

Helene was holding the laboratory door open and George was standing beside her, rifle held ready. Ki-Gor flashed through inside with his struggling burden, and Helene and George ducked in after him. George slammed the door shut and bolted it just as the fresh gorilla-men thundered into the square.

The gaunt slaves shrank back against the wall of the laboratory as Ki-Gor flung Krishna crashing to the floor. Outside a dozen gorilla-men hammered against the door.

"Fools!" Krishna screamed, struggling up from the floor. "You have signed your death warrant by this action! The minute I open that door, my warriors will come in and tear you to pieces!"

"But you will not open the door," said Ki-Gor.

"Somebody will have to open it, some time or other," Krishna shouted, "or do you intend to stay in here until you starve to death?"

"No," said Ki-Gor, with lowered brows, "we will not stay here long. We will go away and *you*, Krishna, will go with us!"

"You are mad! Absolutely mad!" Krishna yelled.

"Watch him," Ki-Gor directed George, and walked over to one of the slaves who was holding a sack full of the drug tablets in his hand. The jungle man took the sack from the unresisting hand of the slave, went to one of the barred windows, and began throwing handfuls of the tablets out between the bars.

It took the gorilla-men outside the door a very few minutes to discover that the coveted tablets were being dispensed in an unusual way. With glad cries they pounced on the little white cubes and stuffed them into their huge mouths.

Krishna turned gray, as the full consequences of the stratagem were borne in on him. He staggered back, then flung himself at George. The big Negro swung his left hand at Krishna's chin, and the King of the gorilla-men fell inert to the floor. He did not move.

Outside the barred windows, the gorilla-men finished up the drug tablets, and stood around, gaping expectantly. Ki-Gor obligingly threw another sackful out, and a few minutes later, not one of the man-apes in the square was left on his feet.

Swiftly Ki-Gor set to work, knotting several of the sacks containing the drug together on a piece of rope. As he was finishing this task, Krishna groaned and opened his eyes.

"Stand up," Ki-Gor commanded, "we are going now. We are leaving the Valley and you are going with us."

Krishna fell to his knees.

"Ki-Gor," he pleaded, "it is sure death. You are bound to run into more gorilla-men along the trail. They will kill you even if I am with you. Not even my commands could save you if they catch you leaving the Valley."

"We are wasting time talking," said Ki-Gor, sternly, "get up and walk out of the door or George will shoot you through the head."

Whimpering, Krishna picked himself up under the watchful eye of George and walked slowly to the door.

Ki-Gor slung the sacks over his shoulder and paused to address the forlorn slaves in Swahili.

"O miserable ones," he said, "You are free. Go and collect your fellows, and join us. We will take you out of this accursed Valley, and once more you may see your homes again."

There was a heavy silence. The slaves looked stupidly at one another, and looked back at Ki-Gor. Finally one of them spoke.

"A thousand thanks, O Madman," he said, haltingly, "but this is our home, now. We know no other place. If we went away, how would we find a supply of the drug which we must have now, or die? Go, Madman, hasten, and may luck attend you."

Ki-Gor stared at them incredulously, and spun on his heel.

"So be it," he said, "A thousand pities that we cannot spare the time to stay and persuade you out of this mode of life, which is but a living death. But we must go. Farewell, O miserable ones."

GEORGE snapped the bolt back on the door, swung it open, and pushed Krishna out ahead of him. Then Helene and Ki-Gor followed and the journey out of the Land of the Living Dead was begun.

They threaded their way among the recumbent bodies of the snoring gorilla-men, and struck out across the great pasture. They headed straight for the edge of the forest, and when they reached it, skirted it until they picked up the broad trail which led up the mountain.

As they turned on to the trail, Krishna once more rebelled.

"This is madness!" he cried, "I tell you if we meet any gorilla-men, and we will, I can't save you. They will not obey me!"

"If we meet any gorilla-men," Ki-Gor retorted, "and they do not obey you, George will shoot at them with the rifle. But he will shoot you first."

Krishna gave the jungle man a long look. Then a crafty gleam came into his eyes. He raised his hands, palm upward in resignation, and said, "Very well. I have warned you." And the strange quartet began the ascent from the Valley.

It was a long, nerve-wracking climb. At any moment a great hairy monster might rise up in the path and challenge the way. Ki-Gor's normal alertness was doubled, his keen eyes searching the surrounding forest ceaselessly. And George held the rifle ever ready.

But hours and miles went by without incident. The trees grew less tall, and the air grew cooler. Now and then the travelers could look up through openings in the foliage and see above them their destination—the rocky ridge, partly obscured by its perpetual mists.

It was late afternoon, and the travelers were climbing into the region of weird vegetation, when they first ran into danger. Some sixth sense prompted Ki-Gor,

who was in the lead, to look backwards as he rounded a bend in the trail. A huge gorilla-man was shuffling rapidly up the path behind George who was bringing up the rear. There was hardly time to warn the big Negro, and give him an opportunity to swing around with the gun.

Automatically, Ki-Gor ripped one of the drug-sacks loose from the rope on his shoulder. He shouted at George to duck, and then flung the sack full in the face of the charging man-ape. As the sack hit, it burst and spilled its contents all over the path. The gorilla-man staggered momentarily, and uttered a smothered roar. It started forward again, but suddenly caught sight of the familiar little white cubes, and halted. A hairy arm reached down and scooped up a handful of the drug tablets. As the man-ape crushed them into his mouth a foolish expression of ecstasy came over his savage face. And as the travelers watched, the gorilla-man completely harmless, sat down on the spot and proceeded to eat all the tablets he could find. In a very few minutes the hairy brute fell over backwards in a stupor, and the travelers resumed their journey.

"You wasted a valuable quantity of the drug, Krishna commented, "Six of those tablets are enough to subdue one of the man-apes, and you threw a whole sackful at him. If we meet more of them in any large numbers, you will only have five sacks left to deal with them."

Although Ki-Gor wouldn't admit it, he was worried about that very thing. But there was nothing to be done about it. It was the only way he could have saved George's life. And aside from the fact that George was a powerful friend and ally, Ki-Gor had come to regard the burly Negro with a strong affection. Ki-Gor hoped fervently that they would meet no more gorilla-men.

In a short while they climbed in to the mists, and Ki-Gor called a halt as they arrived at what appeared to be a fork in the trail. He did not remember seeing the fork on the way down, although, he reflected that it had been so dark that he could easily have missed it.

"Which way?" he asked Krishna.

"The way to the right is the way you

came in" was the answer. "Just above here it gets very narrow for a short distance as it crosses the face of a cliff. After that it goes on up to the Western Gateway, the cleft in the rock."

"And the way to the left?" said Ki-Gor.

"It is a perilous trail which the gorilla-men don't bother to guard, for the reason that it leads you to the crater of an active volcano. Once you traverse that crater, you are safe, but your chances are a hundred to one against crossing it alive."

"Volcayno, huh?" said George, coming up. "So that's what all that spooky rumblin' was, and earthquakin', and fire shootin' up out of the top of the mountain. Hoo-wee! An' we thought it was ha'nts! But still that don't explain the singin'."

"Singing?" said Krishna.

"Yeh, they was a whole mess of banshees all wailin' together."

"Oh, yes," said Krishna, "of course. I once had a set of Aeolian harps set up in a particularly windy spot. I thought that the peculiar quality of the instruments might set up superstitious dread in the minds of unwelcome visitors."

"Come, we must go," said Ki-Gor, "and we will take the right fork. The smoking mountain is more dangerous than gorilla-men. We cannot give white tablets to a mountain."

A FEW paces farther on, the trail narrowed, and Ki-Gor hesitated before embarking on the passage across the face of the cliff. The wind in their faces swirled the mist around the rocks terrifyingly.

All of a sudden, through some freak of wind currents, the mist lifted. The travelers could see four or five hundred yards ahead, past the cliff, above which the trail broadened again as it climbed toward the crest of the ridge and safety.

And there, less than four hundred yards away, a company of at least forty gorilla-men was standing.

As yet they were unaware of the presence of the travelers, but Ki-Gor shivered a little as he thought of trying to pacify that many of the brutes with the limited supply of the drug that remained. But it had to be done, somehow. The idea

of crossing the crater of the volcano was unthinkable.

As if he had read his mind, Krishna came up and stood beside the jungle man.

"Unless you give them the tablets by hand, six at a time," Krishna said, "you will not have enough to go around. And if you get close enough to give them the tablets by hand, they will kill you."

"Then what are we going to do?" said Ki-Gor.

"There is only one thing to do," said the King of the Gorilla-men, "Give me the drug and I will walk on ahead and feed it to them by hand. I, alone, have the authority to go among them unmolested."

"I do not trust you Krishna," said Ki-Gor, "you are an evil man."

"Very well, then. Die," said Krishna with a shrug. "As soon as they see you, they will come down here and kill you. And I could not stop them."

"Mm," Ki-Gor bit his lip. "All right. Take the drug and give it to every gorilla-man. George will be watching you with the gun, and he will kill you if you do not do as you promise."

"Give me the sacks," said Krishna, and bent his head to hide the light of triumph in his eyes.

The mist stayed lifted as Krishna, King of the Gorilla-men, set forth on the narrow path across the face of the cliff. Over his shoulders he carried the sacks containing the drug tablets. Silently, Ki-Gor, Helene and George watched him gain the other side of the cliff and hesitate. A tall boulder stood beside the trail where it began to broaden again.

With a quick movement, Krishna slipped the sacks off his shoulders. And before the watchers down the trail realized what was happening, he tossed the sacks over the edge of the cliffs, and dodged behind the boulder. Ki-Gor shouted, and George fired, but not in time. The bullet ricocheted off the protecting boulder, and a second later, three shrill blasts of a whistle were heard.

"He's betrayed us!" Helene screamed. "He's commanding the gorilla-men to come down and kill us!"

"We'll have to run!" George shouted. "I haven't got enough ammunition left to

hold 'em off. We'll have to go across the crater of the volcano!"

"But there's only one chance in a hundred of our making it alive!" Helen cried.

"Well, we ain't got even one chance, if we stay yere," George replied.

The gorilla-men were swarming down the trail, moving incredibly fast. The whistle kept summoning them from behind the boulder.

"You run back to the fork," George shouted, "and I'll try an' hold 'em back long enough for you-all to git up to the crater."

"No!" said Ki-Gor, "We three are friends. We stay together."

The gorilla-men had reached the boulder, and George drew a bead on the monster in the lead. But before he could fire, there was a shrill scream of terror. It was the agonized voice of Krishna, the King of the Gorillas. He had transgressed his own Law, and his subjects were visiting the familiar punishment on him. Two great simians appeared around the boulder. Each had one of Krishna's arms as he struggled between them, pealing shriek after shriek. Then each gorilla pulled . . .

Even Ki-Gor's hardened nerves quivered, as the mist descended, drawing a veil over the scene.

"Come!" said Ki-Gor, in a hoarse whisper, "they may not have seen us. Let us run for the volcano crater, while there is time!"

THE three turned and fled down the path. Ki-Gor hesitated a fraction of a second when they reached the fork, then plunged up the volcano trail.

It was rough going, and steep, and after a while, Helene stumbled and gasped. Ki-Gor picked her up like a baby, and the flight was resumed. Soon the mist lifted and they found themselves hurrying over black laval rock. The ground underneath their feet trembled constantly. Eventually, even Ki-Gor's tremendous endurance sagged, and they paused to get their breath.

George clutched Ki-Gor's arm and pointed. Not far down the bleak mountain side, the gorilla-men were patiently climbing after them.

The big Negro lifted his rifle and sighted down the barrel. But his first shot had no effect. The difficult downhill angle had resulted in the bullet going over the head of the target. George lowered his sights, and a moment later the gorilla-man in the lead toppled over.

Still panting from the exertion of the uphill flight, the three fugitives wearily continued their climb over the rough lava. They were about a half mile from the top, the rim of the crater. The pursuing gorilla-men were less than a quarter of a mile behind them. How long, thought Helene with a sob, could she and her protectors stay ahead of the relentless man-apes?

Up and up they struggled. George paused every now and then to pick off a gorilla-man. But the rest came on resolutely, and slowly the gap between pursuers and pursued narrowed. George had killed nine, but several of his bullets had missed, and his precious supply of ammunition was running dangerously low. There were still twenty-six of the monsters left—many more than there were bullets left in George's pouch.

"If—we—c'n jes' make it—to the top!" the big Negro panted, "Maybe we c'n—hold 'em off fer a little while."

They were a hundred yards from the top now, but the gorilla-men were getting closer and closer. Ki-Gor lifted Helene up in his arms, and, calling on his last reserves of strength, sprinted desperately up the steep incline. This can't be true, Helene thought dully—this is a nightmare. If the gorilla-men don't get us, what will we do when we get to the crater?

Four gigantic man-apes, slaving with rage were only ten yards behind. George whirled and fired point-blank. A scream of pain died out in a gurgle, and George fired again. A second gorilla-man fell. Despairingly, George pulled the trigger again. It was his last bullet. It reached its mark, but the last gorilla-man closed in on the Negro. George eluded a swinging blow of the giant arm and pumped his aching legs uphill. Above him, Ki-Gor was just gaining the crater's edge. The jungle man shouted down a warning. George threw an agonized look over his

shoulder. The gorilla-man was almost upon him.

Gripping the rifle far down on the barrel, the Negro whirled and swung the gun like a baseball bat. The butt crashed into the gorilla-man's black face, and the monster reeled back. Lungs fighting for air, George staggered toward the top, still gripping the shattered rifle. He looked once more over his shoulder and groaned. He knew now that he was never going to make it.

One more brute had come up and was reaching an immense arm out toward him. George struck at it feebly with the rifle barrel, but the monster bared its fangs in a horrible grin. George wanted to close his eyes to death, but he couldn't.

Suddenly Ki-Gor was beside him, hacking and stabbing with the assegai. Blood spouted from the gorilla-man's neck, as the jungle man struck with the strength of a demon. The monster roared and lurched back. Then slowly and heavily it toppled over.

Ten seconds before the rest of the gorilla-men could reach them Ki-Gor and George struggled over the rim of the crater. With Helene, they poised on the edge of a sharp declivity for a moment. Then with hardly a glance before them, ran, slipped, and slid down into the crater of the volcano.

But that glance had been enough to show them that the volcano was momentarily inactive. When they reached the bottom of the slope, Ki-Gor looked back. Twenty gorilla-men stood in a row on the rim above them. But not one of them made a move to follow.

"They are afraid!" Ki-Gor shouted exultantly, "They are afraid to come down here after us!"

THE three fugitives stood for a moment, dazed. It didn't seem possible that they were, for the moment, safe. Around them stretched the black desolation of the crater floor. Here and there thin columns of smoke spiraled up from black cones—new little volcano craters within the crater. The ground vibrated uneasily under them. But they were safe from the gorillas!

"I can't believe it," Helene said, tremulously, "but we had better hurry across this place before the volcano starts to act up."

"Yes—*ma'am!*" said George, "if you dead, you dead. Don't matter if a gorilla-man kill you, or a volcayno. Hey, and this yere ground is sho hot, too."

Already, Ki-Gor was dancing on the hot dried lava.

"Over there," he pointed to a break in the rim, half a mile across the crater, "We go there and get out through that opening. Let us hurry."

"Wait a minute," said George, and ripped off the once-white shirt he was wearing. Quickly, he tore it into strips. Then he bent down and wrapped Ki-Gor's bare feet in the strips. He, himself, was wearing shoes as was Helene, and he knew that Ki-Gor could not long stand the heat of the crater-floor without some kind of foot covering.

With that operation over, the fugitives set forth. Behind them on the rim, the gorilla-men were still standing. George made a last derisive gesture and turned to follow Helene and Ki-Gor.

The ground continued to mutter, and the columns of smoke still stood up from the little cones scattered about the crater, but that was the limit of the volcano's activity. It was as if the mountain had a personality, and was deliberately holding its fires until the weary travelers could safely traverse the crater. Now and then, they had to dodge jets of steam and boiling water that spouted up from cracks in the lava. But by hastening their steps, they made it across the shaking crater-floor in a short time, and climbed safely up through the wedge-shaped opening in the opposite side of the rim. Far back on the other side, the gorilla-men were still standing in a baffled row.

Safe at last!

They were standing on the eastern slope of the volcanic peak, looking eastward at a magnificent panorama of endless ranges of mountains. Behind them the sun was setting in red glory. Suddenly the volcano gave a menacing rumble. A dozen of the little cones in the crater burst into action, shooting flames and black mud high into

the air. The trio looked at each other. A few short minutes before, they were walking through the very spots where, now, molten lava and flaming death were raining down. Ki-Gor stood up.

An hour later, the travelers were a safe distance down the mountain side, looking for trees big enough to spend the night in. And the next morning, greatly refreshed after a long night of undisturbed sleep, they breakfasted on fruit, and headed eastward down the mountain.

Late in the afternoon, they stepped out of the forest on to the sandy shore of a vast blue lake.

"Oh! how beautiful!" Helene gasped, "I wonder where we are!"

But Ki-Gor was gripping her shoulder and pointing up the shore.

"What is that?" he exclaimed.

"I be dam' if that ain' a young battleship!" George cried, "Hey, let's hail 'em."

Coming toward them, quite close in to shore, a long white-hulled boat was gliding. Smoke poured from its single tall funnel.

GEORGE ran up the beach, shouting and waving his arms. As the boat came abreast of him, several startled figures appeared on the single deck. The water churned under the stern of the little vessel and it slowed down. The deck swarmed with men in white, and a small boat was lowered away. Ki-Gor watched fascinated as the gig, propelled by four oarsmen, moved rapidly toward shore, and slid up on the beach.

A tall, blue-eyed young man in a white uniform stepped out of the stern holding an automatic in his hand. An expression of bewilderment came over his face as he beheld the white girl in tattered white robe, the tall bronzed man in leopard-skin loincloth, and the huge Negro.

"Lord in Heaven!" said the stranger in English, "Who the deuce are you, and where have you come from?"

Helene felt tears of relief coming into her eyes, and her voice was unsteady as she replied, "We have come a long way. My name is Helene Vaughn and this——"

"Helene Vaughn!" the young man shouted, "The lost American aviatrix!

Oh, I say, dash it all, this is extrawdnry! You've been more or less given up for dead, you know. Oh, I say, this is a bit of luck! I'm Sub-Leftenant Tiverton of His Majesty's Sloop 'Rhododendron,' on patrol duty here on Lake Victoria. You must come aboard immediately and we'll make arrangements to get you out to the Coast."

"Thank you," said Helene with a misty smile, "and will you take my companions aboard, too? This is Ki-Gor. And this is George."

"Ki-Gor? George?" said the young officer, passing a hand over his bewildered eyes, and staring first at one and then the other.

"Yassuh, Cap'n" said the Negro,

"George Spelvin of Cincinnati, U.S.A. An' I sho' could pile into some civilized vittles right now."

"Extrawdnry!" Sub-Leftenant Tiverton muttered, "Extrawdnry!"

Ki-Gor moved forward and touched the dazed young man on the shoulder.

"Are you N-Glush?" he said, shyly.

"N-Glush?" replied the young man, stupidly, "Oh, *English!* Oh, yes! Rather. You know, I'm awf'ly sorry, old man, but I don't think I quite caught your name."

Ki-Gor stepped back without answering. A smile lighted up his bronzed face. He liked the looks of this blue-eyed young man. And yet even then he knew he would never go back to his people. His home was the jungle, and there he would stay.



Warrior Of The Veldt

By JOE MUSGRAVE

He was too small, too weak, too cowardly to prove his manhood before the scornful giants of Tatoga. But little Baki, the proud native boy, would rather be clawed to death by lions than find that he didn't possess the heart of a great warrior.

THE BRASSY CONGO SUN was gone, but within the House of Men the smothering heat lingered. Baki lay still and limp on his mat, the reeds under him growing wet with sweat. He felt sick in body, yet a growing sense of triumph helped to ease his hurts.

No longer would he have to endure the sneering nickname of "Dik-dik" from other youths. No longer would older men smile pityingly when he spoke of the day when he became a warrior.

He had shown them all!

Not once during the five terrible days



Before the leaping Cripple Leg could land on the white man, Baki's small figure shot from its hiding place, ready to lunge with his spear.

had he faltered. He has passed every trial in the Rites of Manhood, though even now he did not know how he had endured it. Of the two hands of boys undergoing the initiation, three had broken down, but Baki took no satisfaction in the fact since M'Bulla, the chieftain's hulking son, had not been one of those who failed.

And M'Bulla had always been Baki's chief tormentor. He was the first to ap-

ply the hated nickname of "Dik-dik," comparing Baki to the timid, dwarf antelope. For Baki was the runt of the tribe, a joke nature had played on a people who prided themselves on the great size and height of their warriors.

But though nature had cheated Baki in physical dimensions, it had given him far more than the usual quota of pride. It was pride far more than courage which



had carried him through the cruel secret rites. Inevitably now, as he thought of M'Bulla, a picture of Tabella's plump figure also rose in his mind.

Of all the maidens of the tribe, Tabella to Baki's way of thinking was the most desirable. He thought of her soft, liquid eyes, always properly demure in the presence of men, yet managing somehow behind their veil of innocence to be heavy with promise. Her oiled skin had the blue-black sheen of those night shadows which gathered before the moon came.

But her greatest charm was her early plumpness, for of what use to a man was a thin woman, and by the soft, swelling curve of Tabella's belly, by the solid, outward thrust of her broad buttocks, one could see that she would never be an embarrassment to her husband.

Baki's pride kept him from realizing that anyone other than M'Bulla might think it ridiculous for so small a man to aspire to marrying a woman almost twice his size. One of his favorite pastimes was mentally rehearsing the manner in which he would approach old N'nuka, her father, to ask for Tabella's hand.

Baki had goats enough to pay the high price the wily old scoundrel was certain to demand. It wasn't her price that had worried him. Baki's father had been a notably successful hunter until the day two rainy seasons before when the man-killing lion, Cripple Leg, had torn his life out.

BAKI'S FATHER had left him seventeen goats, and the woman never lived who was worth more than fifteen goats. No, what had worried Baki was the fact that he had no right to ask for Tabella in marriage until he had passed the Rites of Manhood.

Now, despite M'bulla's sneering predictions, he had passed the tests. At any time the witchdoctors would come to lead him and his companions before the assembled tribe where the chief would pronounce them men, entitled henceforth to all the privileges of manhood. Tabella would be there on the outer fringe of women to see it all.

Baki drew a deep, satisfied breath. "The

cost of all great prizes comes high," he reflected. Tabella was well worth her cost. A tremor of pleasure drove out his hurts momentarily, as he thought of the lifetime of delight he would have with Tabella.

His fancy was cut short by the flat, quick thump of hand drums. The witchdoctors were coming to the House of Men, shouting incantations and spinning to confuse and frighten the night devils who might be lurking to seize the souls of the newly-proven men.

There was a stir of movement in the hut. The ritual fire of animal dung had long since burned itself out, but Baki needed no light to read the meaning of those movements. His companions were getting painfully to their feet, composing their faces. They must show no weakness. Baki followed suit, stifling a groan as the mere act of standing broke the skin away from the unhealed scars on his face and chest. The crude tattoo marks made on his buttocks and thighs with a bone needle dipped in white pigment pained constantly.

Akati, the chief wizard, threw back the lionskin door covering. The light from his torch cut a wavering, golden path down the center of the hut. His eyes were lost behind a fearsome mask, but Baki could feel the hot power of them welling from the black depths of the peep-holes.

"It is done!" he proclaimed. "Five suns ago you were boys. Now you are men! On pain of death, let no man speak of the sacred rites, or reveal the secrets which have been revealed to you."

He turned to leave. Abruptly, the torch in his hand flared green and its ghastly light seemed to writhe and twist like a heavy mist. The assistant wizard outside the hut leaped high, screaming, "A prophecy! A prophecy!"

Akati trembled and staggered. The muscles of his tall, thin body leaped out like crawling snakes. For the space of three breaths the seizure held him, and then as swiftly as it had come, the green light was gone. The torch was a simple torch again and its light a golden knife against the darkness.

But in that brief span a chill had rippled through the hut. The sweat stood cold on Baki's body. Forgotten were his hurts, his fatigue. With the others, he waited breathlessly to hear the meaning of this fearful sign.

The necklace of dried toads and fingerbones rasped as Akati whirled to confront the young men.

"Aaaiiee!" he said. "It is a prophecy, indeed! Out of the well of death, along the lost winds of the earth, the dead ones came to speak of one in this hut."

He sprang out among his wizards. He spun his torch to the left and it flamed red; he spun it to the right and it was blue.

"Follow me, follow me," Akati shouted. "Let the whole tribe hear of one among you who is born to greatness. I have seen the future! I have seen a man of greatness!"

They were racing, then, like stampeding wildebeeste along the trail behind Akati. More than fear propelled them, for such is the nature of men, each in his heart felt he was the subject of the prophecy. As they swept into the kraal, the gathered warriors and women greeted them with a burst of noise.

In lifting excitement, each runner sprinted in an effort to be the first to draw up before the waiting chieftain, Naguri.

And as they swept into the central clearing, though Baki ran so hard he thought his heart would burst, his longer-legged fellows plunged past him in a ruthless, elbowed mass.

But no one passed M'Bulla. He did exactly as Baki had always dreamed of doing. His great bulk a rippling mass of muscle, he spurted ahead of the pack. He was first by nearly two spear lengths, whirling cat-like to a stop, holding himself with an arrogant poise which said he was worth any two of the puffing, blowing youths wheeling into position beside him.

Baki was a poor last.

Naguri's eyes were only for his son. He gave a hoarse bellow of approval. A smirk struggled to show on his blubbery features.

"Ho! Blood will out!" he roared to the wives, children and councillors clustered about him. "Look at the young bull, will you. Ho! The true son of his father."

So breathless he could hardly stand, Baki stumbled into the line of initiates drawn up before the chieftain in time to hear Naguri's triumphant cry. Rage lashed the little man as he realized not only the hulking, well-oiled rhino, but the entire crowd acted as if M'Bulla were the only one in the ceremony.

Even the two Baki regarded as the most important personages in the crowd had not given him the merest glance. They were the fair Tabella and that lord of many guns, the district commissioner, B'wana Tappan.

Tabella's limpid eyes grew round and bright, her lips trembled with her breathing as she gazed on M'Bulla. And though Samuel Tappan's solemn, long-featured face held its usual weary, hound-dog expression, it was at least something to have him attentively regard a black man, even a chieftain's son.

"Curse them," boiled Baki inwardly, "for being taken in by that swollen air-bladder, M'Bulla. One would expect Tabella and the white lord to recognize true merit as opposed to a trickster's strutting."

THOUGH his disappointment in Tabella only fanned his ardor all the higher, this illogical reaction was balanced by the complete disappearance of his small fund of goodwill for Tappan.

Baki had taken a sly joy in Tappan's sudden visit because it had so disgruntled Naguri. And well might the visit upset the chieftain, because it caused him to be humbled before his people, made him swallow a whole season's boasts and redraft the entire initiation ceremony. It was a wonderful thing to see the lordly Naguri backtrack before a power greater than his own.

Baki had been a child in arms when the first British commissioner came with Somali troops and announced that, henceforth, there would be no taking of heads by the Tatoga. For unnumbered generations,

the young men of the tribe after the initiation ceremony had proven themselves worthy to be warriors by going out alone on a hunt for heads. Until a man could hang two heads on a stake outside his hut, heads he had taken alone and unaided, he couldn't wear the markings of a warrior. What more sensible and orderly way could there be for Tatoga youth to show his cunning and courage?

Naguri had been but newly come to the chieftainship then, his cousin, the former chieftain, having contracted a fatal sickness the morning after he had been banqueted by Naguri. After counting the guns commanded by the commissioner, the chief had commended the white lord on his great wisdom and sworn a solemn oath that the unworthy custom of hunting heads never again would be practiced by his people.

Naturally, when the commissioner was gone, matters went on as before. "White men, being very rich and idle, with neither natural knowledge nor interest in the commonsense workings of the world, occupy themselves with the continuous making of decrees and laws," Naguri explained to his people. "It is more a way of showing authority than anything else, and since they are always turning out new laws, a man would be smothered if he tried to obey them all. There is also little patience in white men, so if we wait quietly long enough, they will bound off on other pursuits and leave us to go about our affairs unhampered."

And Naguri's cynical estimate of the white rulers proved correct. Through the reigns of five different commissioners, the Tatoga had gone about the necessary business of head hunting. Their lands were in an out of the way spot, their enemies disposed to retaliate in kind rather than to run whining to the white lords, and the Tatoga themselves were cautious to spread their activities so widely that no one tribe would ever grow inflamed enough to declare open warfare.

But this new lord, this Samuel Tappan, was of a different stripe from the other commissioners. He took the enforcing of all decrees, especially the head hunting one, very seriously. He was a veritable

devil, forever popping up where he was least expected. Instead of keeping to his cool, rambling residence two hundred miles downriver, sipping drinks and avoiding exhaustive activity, like a respectable white lord, he marched over the land like death itself, letting no obstacle bar him from any place.

When he had first taken office four moons before, he had visited Naguri, made it plain that if a single Tatoga warrior took a head, not only would that warrior be severely punished but also the chieftain himself would be deprived of his robes of authority. Thinking it was only the usual talk of white men, Naguri had hardly waited for him to leave before he had boasted that here was one more white-skinned monkey who would be easily fooled.

And now B'wana Tappan had shown up for the ceremony, meaning to hear for himself what Naguri's instructions to the young men would be. He had also requested that he be allowed a brief time in which to address the youths. He was delicate about everything, but his force of Somali troops camped outside the kraal showed the steel in his politeness.

When Naguri was finished crowing about his son's accomplishments, he signaled his guards to help him rise. It was no easy task to lift his immense haunches off the leopard-skin covered bench, get his bulbous legs braced under him.

He stood for a bit, catching his breath, while the fleshy moon of his face turned slowly along the line of youths. It was the first time the red-streaked little eyes had appraised his son's companions. It seemed to Baki that as Naguri's glance reached him, the chieftain swiftly drew it back to M'Bulla as though he had no wish to even recognize the little man's presence.

"I see you, O Children Newly Born into Men," the chieftain rumbled thickly. "I, Naguri, Lion of the Tatoga, chieftain and first of warriors, welcome you to manhood. You have been tested in the ancient rites and found worthy. The might of the Tatoga renews itself in you."

These wonderful, long-awaited words sent a stir of pleasure through the initi-

ates. Angry as he was, Baki straightened his shoulders with pride. This was, all things considered, a day of days.

"You are new weapons, sharp and strong!" cried the bulky leader, his voice clearing. "You are new swords to bite our enemies!"

A booming roar went up from the tribesman, a savage, thrilling cry. Baki swelled his chest like a pouter pigeon.

The huge-bodied Naguri himself was caught up in the excitement. His voice shrilled higher. "Hai!" he screamed. "You are men, but now you must . . ." His exhortation was never completed.

Samuel Tappan had shoved forward so that he stood plainly in Naguri's view. Tappan's face was stern, his eyes slightly narrowed. The chieftain saw him, and abruptly recalling himself, he let his sentence dangle unfinished.

He had been about to repeat the traditional words: "You are men, but now you must prove yourselves warriors. If you would be sons of glory, then win glory as did your fathers. Let our enemies know that the steel of the Tatoga is undulled. Range the jungle for the heads which will tell your bravery, the heads which will bring you the blue markings of warriors!"

THE CHIEFTAIN had exhorted so many youths with those self-same words that he had almost let them slip out automatically. He scowled to cover his confusion. Tappan had made it quite plain that he must name these initiates full-fledged warriors immediately omitting the stipulation that they must first secure two heads.

"I name you warriors," growled Naguri so low Baki could barely hear him. "The great white king who lives beyond the edge of the world commands us through his servant, B'wana Tappan, to take no more heads. He says he has heard how great is our store of heads and that he feels that we have won glory enough to last us for all time."

As he finished repeating the words drilled into him by Tappan, Naguri flopped disgustedly on his bench, his bulbous body quivering with the violence of his

action.

There was an awkward moment as the chieftain sat in stony silence, leaving the whole ceremony dangling in mid-air. Then Tappan smoothly stepped in front of the chieftain, faced the Tatoga. Using their own dialect, he spoke in calm, clear tones to the initiates, deftly praising them for the accomplishments in the name of the great white king beyond the sea who was their overlord and protector.

That king, he said, recognized them as full-fledged warriors, and knowing their cunning and bravery he decreed it senseless for anyone to call on them to prove it by raiding their neighbors. That king wished all to live in peace, he related, and he extended his protection over the Tatoga as he did over all tribes of the jungle, and any man breaking the peace would be sent out of the land to labor in chains on the coast.

Though not for the world would he have admitted it, Baki was relieved to hear officially that he would not have to fare forth alone to secure two heads. Though warriors boasted of the ease with which they got their trophies, Baki knew they lied in their teeth. He had seen year after year how many initiates failed to return to the kraal, how many stumbled back empty-handed with terrible wounds on their bodies. At the time of the initiation ceremony, the whole jungle went on guard against the Tatoga and at the merest glimpse of an unmarked Tatoga youth, other tribesmen would fall savagely upon him.

Tappan informed the tribesmen they could keep their present store of skulls and use them as always in their ceremonies.

Naguri sullenly ordered the ceremony to continue. The wizard, Akati, leaped into the center of the clearing. At his shrill cry, a deep-throated drum began to speak. Then in swift order, a hand of drums took up the throbbing beat.

"Bring forth the symbols of our greatness," cried Akati.

At these words, his assistants raced toward the darkened council house to the right of the clearing. On their approach a wall of blue flame thrust up from the

ground, covering the front of the house. To the marvel of the crowd they raced through the flame and it died abruptly behind them.

Then as the assistants raised their voices in a chant, torches flared into being within the council house. Out of the door, one after another, sprang thirty blue-painted warriors. They wore girdles of rattling skulls and bore in their hands long stakes on which were planted other gleaming skulls.

In a weaving, shuffling line they advanced toward the wildly gyrating Akati. "We bring the heads of our enemies," they chanted. "Lo! Look on them, O Wizard, and tell us the future! Invoke your dark powers and speak of these new ones we have named men!"

Over and over they chanted the same line while Akati danced without a sign he heard their plea. But when the warriors had formed a loose circle about him, he abruptly halted, splayed fingers of both hands darting toward the night sky.

"A prophecy!" he screamed. "A double prophecy!"

The drums broke off, the chanting ceased. The surging movement of the crowd was stilled instantly. This was the high point of the ceremony, the part they would argue, discuss and worry about for moons to come, for now in veiled words would be cast the futures of the strongest and weakest members of the group of new men.

"Already when I approached the House of Men the spirits of our fathers spoke to me," declared Akati. "Hear then their words: One among the new ones will be braver than the lion, more cunning than the black leopard. He is destined for greatness. He will pass through all obstacles to win honor for himself and his people. He will win the praise of even the white men and will rise to become first of warriors among the Tatoga. And to those about him he will make day seem as night, or night seem as day, whichever is to his advantage."

And hearing these words, an awed murmur arose from the crowd. Never had Akati spoken so strong and definite a prophecy. "Lo, he speaks of M'Bulla,"

was the whisper that swiftly went around.

FROM THE REACTION, apparently one person alone did not assume that it was M'Bulla who would fulfill the wizard's prophecy. That person, of course, was Baki. The small man trembled as though freezing cold when he heard the words.

"It is of me, he speaks!" he told himself. "It is of me! Now shall this cursed M'Bulla and his father learn the true measure of the one they dared call 'Dik-dik'." And he felt faint at the realization of the tremendous leap he was to make in the world.

Baki was too engrossed in his own thoughts to see M'Bulla's faint, proud smile, the way his arrogant eyes gleamed as he looked first at his father and then at the girl, Tabella. There was no doubting whom M'Bulla accepted as the person of the prophecy.

Akati had given only half his message from the spirit world and halted. His raised arms dropped slowly to his sides. He lowered his face and it seemed that a sudden shame had come upon him.

"Speak the rest!" roared Naguri impatiently. "We have heard the best, now let us hear the worst!" Always it was the same, Akati spoke both the good and the bad.

"There is one whose soul now flames with the thought of his greatness-to-be," reluctantly continued the wizard, "and it is this one who will come to ruin and dishonor.

"He will roar like a lion to impress a woman, yet prove himself a dango in trying to win that woman. He will lose everything but life, and he will wish that lost, for even children will jeer at his name."

Baki heard the words and fear touched him for a moment. Why was the crowd so abnormally quiet? He had the prickling feel of many eyes upon him. Did those fools think he was the one that mangy old soul-eater, Akati, meant?

He looked uneasy toward Tabella, disregarding the fact that M'Bulla had twisted his head and was grinning uglily at him. For the first time, the girl was

staring straight at him, a queer, disdainful look on her face.

He tore his glance away from her, fresh anger spurting up in him. His eyes touched Naguri's and he saw that the huge-bodied chieftain was looking at him with undisguised disgust. By all the gods, it was more than a man could stand! Why, those stupid jackals! He'd show them all. His hands trembled and, like a growing wash of fire, hurt rage built up in him.

He seemed to hear from a great distance Naguri's cry that the ceremony was ended and that the feasting would now begin in honor of the new warriors. In a thousand dreams he had anticipated the pleasure he would take in the feast.

It had marked for him in those dreams an exact time when he would be forever free of the derisive smiles, the contemptuous remarks of his fellows. He had taken it for granted that he would never again be "Dik-dik", because, having passed the rites of manhood, the tribesmen would immediately recognize the injustice of their former jibes.

And now suddenly he sensed that nothing was to be changed.

This knowledge was all the more cruelly borne in on him by a hoarse voice at his side saying, not with unkindness, only with thoughtless habit, "Are you asleep, 'Dik-dik'? It is our duty to escort you to your place. The others will be eating while you still stand here."

It was the grizzled M'Kuta, an old warrior friend of his father's and one of the men who had taken part in the skull dance. As was the practice, the dancers broke into small groups, with each group escorting one of the initiates to his place at the feast. In his mental turmoil, Baki hadn't even realized that the men had approached him.

"I'm not going!" snarled Baki.

M'Kuta was startled by the little man's unexpected fierceness. What in the world was this, an initiate refusing to go to his own honor feast? He scrutinized Baki and slowly comprehension came into his face.

The older man bent close, so his two companions could not overhear. "Come now, it is not the way of a man to solve

anything by running away."

"Hai!" returned Baki bitterly. "You don't regard me as a man any more than any of the others. Just now you called me 'Dik-dik'. You think, like all of them, that I am the one the prophecy names a dango!"

M'Kuta cuffed the small one's chin gently with broad, square fingers. Perhaps it was merely that unexpected, intuitive kindness which hard, simple men sometimes reveal. Or it could have been a gesture to the departed father of this small one, to the strong, good friend who had struggled to conceal his disappointment in his son. Certainly, in his heart, M'Kuta could have had little faith in this misfit's future.

"I think nothing of the kind," he declared in his hoarse warrior's voice, "but from the way you're acting, everyone will believe you take yourself to be that dango."

Baki sharply drew in his breath. That hadn't occurred to him. In his anger, he had thought of himself as refusing to share food with enemies, with disdaining any contact with contemptible fools.

"By all the gods, that is exactly what M'Bulla would say of me," he hissed. He straightened his small shoulders, his jaw jutting determinedly. "Seat me near to that wind-filled bladder!"

II

THE MEN of the tribe sat in a long double line across the clearing, with M'Bulla presiding at one end and his father at the other. The older women had attended to the cooking and now the younger women handled the serving, bringing platters of meat and fruits, gourdfuls of bitter beer to place before the men.

Baki edged into a place near his rival just as Tabella, her eyes modestly lowered in the presence of so many men, placed a platter of meats before the chieftain's son.

"Ho! What a prize to parade before a hungry man," cried M'Bulla, and though he ostensibly spoke of the heaped joints of meat, his insinuating laugh and the

quick, bold dart of his eyes told that he referred to Tabella.

The men near enough to hear laughed heartily. Baki's eyes narrowed and he looked hate at his rival. Had he kept his glance on Tabella he would have seen that the corners of her mouth quirked with pleased amusement at the sally.

"There are many whose appetite out-reaches their means," said a dry, nasal voice behind Baki, and he looked up to see N'nuka, his beloved's father, standing there with a thin, satisfied smile on his sly face.

The merriment swelled high again, for N'nuka as much as told the chieftain's son that the man who thought to claim Tabella would pay dearly for her. M'Bulla joined in the laughter and bade the tribesmen make room for his wise and honored friend.

N'nuka slipped in beside Baki, folding his thin legs under him with his usual precise, meticulous movements. Once he was arranged, he looked about him, his cunning face slightly mellowed by the success of his words. Then he discovered that Baki was one of his companions. Little wrinkles of annoyance puckered his forehead and he promptly turned his attention to the meat.

Baki snatched up his beer gourd, drank it to the bottom to steady himself. He wasn't offended by N'nuka's actions. Instead, he felt a tingling delight in every nerve.

It was not by chance, he told himself, that out of that entire gathering the greedy old man had chosen to sit beside him.

"He's a poor trader," secretly gloated Baki, "if he thinks to deceive me by his manner of greeting. Aaaieee! He's betrayed himself by choosing to sit by me. He knows Tabella is the only one for me and he can't wait to begin wringing the marriage price from me."

Every time Tabella returned the chieftain's son came out with some two-edged remark which made clear his admiration for her. But feeling abruptly certain of his ground, Baki no longer bridled at his rival's byplay. Let M'Bulla make a fool of himself, for the more open he made his desire for Tabella, the more ridiculous

he would seem when the tribesmen learned that Baki was to get the girl.

Baki was too excited to eat. He toyed with his food, affecting an elaborate unconcern about his future father-in-law's presence. Let the old dango squirm a bit, he told himself, and when he begins to fear I've lost interest in Tabella, then suddenly I'll make my bid. Taking the father by surprise that way, Baki thought to catch the old man unprepared and so get a better marriage price.

Though he failed to eat, the small one didn't neglect the beer. And the women made certain that no warrior's beer gourd remained empty for long. It was a pleasant thing, having his fill of drink for the first time in his life, for beer was one of the privileges reserved to the men and always before he had been only a spectator at these feasts.

The warm, bitter liquid swirled hotly in his stomach, sent a tingling glow out over his whole body. He no longer felt the throbbing hurts the initiation had left him with. He felt strong and cunning, and very sure of himself. He must have been mad to let M'Bulla and the others get under his skin at the ceremony. Why, none of them was a match for him!

He noted curiously, but without alarm, that the platters and gourds spread before him had begun to waver and move in the way of a reflection on the river's surface. Baki had never been drunk before. He squinted his eyes experimentally in an attempt to quiet the utensils. When their drifting lazily halted, he chuckled at the humor of a situation where by the mere power of his mind he could control the actions of platters.

"By your manner, one would hardly guess you had heard the prophecy tonight," a dry, nasal voice said in his ear.

He turned to blink into N'nuka's ill-humored face. So the old dango had broken down and spoken first. Baki gave him a superior smile.

"I am not one to gloat over my own good fortune," Baki declared. "It is enough that the gods choose to favor me, without my making too great a show before less fortunate men."

N'nuka registered stunned disbelief.

Then he closed his eyes and groaned. The stupid little brush-rat didn't even know an insult when he heard it.

"Do you really believe you are the one destined for greatness?" he asked gruffly.

"Come now, away with your timid stalking," said Baki gaily, brushing away the question with drunken assurance. "I know what is in your heart and you know what is in mine, so speak straight to the point. Name your price and let's have done with it! Why should we be overly cautious about something we both desire?"

N'NUKA DREW BACK as though a snake had bitten him. "Dik-dik's" whole manner affronted him, though he couldn't be sure what it was he babbled about.

"I hit home, eh?" chuckled Baki. "Well, if you are too timid to ask a price for Tabella, I will name one—three hands of fat, choice goats." He slapped the old man's thigh smartly with his hand. "Hai! Not even a chieftain's windy son can do better than that!"

Baki pursed his lips, waiting to observe the pleasure come into N'nuka's features.

For a space of moments, the old man seemed to be wracked by a series of convulsive tremors. He shook and jerked, his eyes bulging, strange sputtering sounds exploding from his mouth. Then abruptly he shot to his feet.

"Creeping eater of carrion!" he shrieked. "Filth of a brush rat! Stench in the nostrils of the world!"

Baki focussed his eyes on N'nuka's dancing figure with difficulty. What was all this?

"You dare speak to me of Tabella," raged the old man. "You dare think for all the goats in the jungle I would give my daughter to a feeble half-man, to a laughing-stock! Rather would I see her married to a monkey than claim you for my kin!"

For twenty places down the banquet line, men looked up from their eating, delighted grins wreathing their faces as they realized from N'nuka's loud words what had occurred.

But Baki momentarily was oblivious to them. He listened stunned to the flood of

abuse pouring from the old man's lips. It just couldn't be possible that this awful thing was happening to him.

"Why—why do you say these things?" he asked plaintively, when the apoplectic N'nuka had to stop for breath. "I'm a man of property. I'm a warrior, named so by Naguri this very night. I proved my worth by passing through the Rites of Manhood. It is my right to bid against M'Bulla for your daughter."

"A warrior, ha!" snarled N'nuka.

A roar of laughter went up from the listeners. At the far end of the banquet line, Chief Naguri and his guest, the white commissioner, heard the laughing and glanced up from their talk. But the distance was too far for them to understand the reason for the merriment.

"One could expect you to claim unearned titles," accused the old man. "Because you think the white man's law will protect you from ever being put to an actual test of bravery, you are quick to cry that you are of the same stuff as proven warriors."

M'Bulla pointed jeeringly at Baki. "Can anyone imagine 'Dik-dik' trying to get two heads? A rabbit sent out to stalk a pair of elephants would show more courage. Ho, ho! With the white man to protect him, he sings a loud tune, indeed."

Like a cornered animal trying to keep all his tormentors in view, Baki jerked about to glare at his rival. He saw that Tabella had come up with another platter of meat in time to hear all that her father and M'Bulla had said. She stood back a little in the shadows, obviously listening and watching.

"You lie!" shrilled Baki. "I was ready to win the two heads and I would have done as well at the hunt as you. You act as though I, instead of this insane white man, were the one who called off the hunt."

M'Bulla glowered when Baki flung the word "lie" at him, but then he saw Tabella and quickly reassumed his taunting, superior air.

"Go back to your grazing 'Dik-dik'," he said. "You've given us laughter enough for one night. Your poor imitation of a young lion fools no one, least of all

N'nuka."

With an ugly smile, M'Bulla turned his attention to the man on his left. In an undertone, calculatingly loud enough to carry to both Tabella and Baki's ears, he observed, "It is enough to give a girl bad dreams to even hear of such a one wanting her as a wife."

Tabella's cruel snicker reached Baki's ears.

There was no thought in Baki's action. The bitter brew had washed away his natural caution. He could bear no more. Baki drove to his feet, hurled his beer gourd onto the ground before his rival so that the dregs splattered over those straight, strong, hated legs.

"Enough!" he snarled. "I will show all of you! Within two hands of suns, I will fling at your feet two fresh-cut heads."

Delighted to see his derision had addled the little man's wits, M'Bulla overlooked the splattered beer, concentrated on making Baki look even more ridiculous in Tabella's eyes.

"Listen to him," he sneered. "When the beer wears off, he will shake himself to pieces for fear that the white man might have overheard this drunken boast."

"Though every tree in the jungle should turn to a white man," roared Baki at the top of his voice, "I will still get two heads within two hands of days!"

He glared viciously around him, then turned on his heel so abruptly that his unsteady legs almost buckled. He wove off across the clearing toward his hut to fling himself muttering on his sleeping mat. Not until long after the last sounds of revelry had died down did he fall asleep.

THE SUN was high when Baki awoke. The splitting pain in his head made him feel as though someone had driven a bamboo stake through his skull. He was wracked with sickness and so weak that the least movement made cold sweat start from his pores.

At first, he was too ill to worry much over the previous night's events, but gradually it all came back.

And then he was as sick in mind as in

body. Why had he let them make such a fool of him? If only he had left the beer alone and had kept his mouth shut! The story of the wild boasts he had made in his attempt to restore his dignity in Tabella's eyes would be all over the kraal this morning. They would never let him forget last night. He would be taunted with his "beer bravery" the rest of his days.

But Baki's hut didn't long offer refuge against M'Bulla's remorseless bullying. When the little man failed to appear, M'Bulla gathered a group of his cronies and came for him. Not wishing to miss the fun, many other villagers, Tabella included, trailed along. It would be great sport to see Baki try to climb out of the pit he had dug for himself.

They crept up to his hut so quietly that Baki suspected nothing until he heard M'Bulla cry, "Ho, brave warrior, we have come to see you off on your hunt! Ho! Come out that your admiring friends may see a fearless war-dog before he takes the blood-trail!"

The small native's heart stopped within him. He lay frozen like some small forest creature run to earth in its burrow. He wasn't prepared to meet them, yet he had to, or they would be pulling him from his haven by the scruff of his neck. His mind was utterly paralyzed.

This was the supreme humiliation of all the many ones he had been forced to swallow. He was to be labelled a coward and a braggart.

"He doesn't answer," sniggered a native in mock surprise.

"Perhaps he has already taken the war trail," giggled another, "being too shy to wait for the honors he knew we would accord him."

The burst of laughter at this remark raked Baki like steel talons.

"That must be it," declared M'Bulla, fully aware that Baki was hearing every word spoken. "It would be unthinkable for a man of the Tatoga to delay fulfillment of a vow such as Baki swore last night. Aye, one of our tribe would never lie low in his hut once he had promised to do so brave a thing."

Baki stumbled to his feet in the dark

hut, drew back against the wall. The antelope skin hanging over the door protected him from the view of his taunters, but any moment he expected to see it torn aside.

A woman spoke, and Baki clenched his hands, recognizing Tabella's voice. "Since he is gone like a true hero, would it not be fitting for several of us to tidy his house. Draw aside the curtain that we may freshen the place for his return. It will be a mark of our respect."

So she, too, was bent on deriding him.

He backed jerkily along the thatch wall, unconsciously seeking a means of escape. His arm and shoulder struck against an object suspended from the wall. He started at the contact, then coming to himself, realized it was only his father's shield.

On impulse, he reached out and ran his hand over the remembered surface of the shield. If only his father still lived, these curs wouldn't dare come yapping around this hut. His father had been a man loved by his friends, feared by his enemies, and in his shadow one always had security. Protected by that shield, his father had stood against many men in battle and it was said no one had ever seen him afraid.

A dry, tortured sob ripped out of Baki's throat. His fingers gripped hard at the edge of the shield.

"I *am* a coward," he admitted to himself, "a miserable, half-sized weakling. I did dread having to hunt down two tribal enemies and I was glad when the white lord came and forbade the taking of heads."

It was the first time in his life that Baki had ever admitted of any weakness to himself. Always before his refusal to recognize any fault in his make-up had amounted to an obsession.

"I've never fooled anyone but myself," thought Baki agonizingly. "Not one of them, not even Tabella, expected me to keep my drunken boasts last night. This is a final shame I've brought on my house, on the memory of my father, for they've cornered me at last and I can't bluff my way out."

Unconsciously, with his clenched hands he tugged at the shield, and it suddenly pulled free from its hanging. It seemed to

Baki that the shield almost leaped at him. He fell back a step, steadying its weight in his hands.

"It's a sign from my father," he gasped. "His spirit threw the shield against me. He commands me not to bring this dishonor on him."

And this new fright submerged all others. With nervous, darting speed, Baki reached for his bow and quiver of arrows in their accustomed place, slid them over his shoulder. He slid his father's great, long-bladed knife through the leather thong which supported his breechclout. Then shoving his left arm through the grips of the shield, he picked up the long unused war-spear and turned toward the door.

III

BAKI stepped out into the sunlight just as M'Bulla reached to tear away the antelope skin. The point of his spear stabbed dangerously close to the chieftain's son, so that the large youth had to leap back to avoid the unexpected thrust.

Stung by this loss of dignity, M'Bulla hastened to lash out at Baki with his tongue. "Well, 'Dik-dik', you kept us waiting long enough while you cowered in your hut," he snarled contemptuously. "Did you really believe we would think you had gone? Hah! What about your boasts now, cowardly little 'Dik-dik'?"

"I promised the heads within two hands of suns," muttered Baki. "I will have them by then."

M'Bulla slapped his thighs delightedly, looked about at his comrades. "You will never get them in your hut, 'Dik-dik'," he cried.

Tabella's laughter led the others. Baki straightened his small back. The shield was heavy on his arm, but there was a sense of security in it.

"I'm not foolish enough to let the white lord guess my purpose," he fibbed nervously. "Before showing myself in war gear, I wait for him to leave."

"Aaaieee! Your excuses are lame, indeed!" proclaimed M'Bulla. "The strutting white lord left before the morning meal."

Baki was so accustomed to defending himself, his mind almost automatically supplied him with an answer.

"I know that as well as you, but the B'wana Tappan is a cunning man and may well be lingering near the kraal to watch whether any dare break his command."

There was good sense in Baki's reply. "I think he really means to get the heads," murmured one black to another. The yapping of the pack began to thin.

But M'Bulla was not one of those convinced of Baki's seriousness. "An end to your turning and twisting," he declared. "You were hiding from us. You have no intention of taking the trail!"

Baki stared a long moment at his rival, then his red-streaked eyes fastened on Tabella. Hate lent him inspiration.

"Why do you talk so long and loud M'Bulla?" he asked coldly. "It would seem you do not like being shown up by one you have called 'Dik-dik' so long. With the excited voice of a woman, you cry that I am a coward, yet it is me—not you—who shows the courage to go after heads."

A tiny, superior smile tugged the corners of Baki's mouth. No one could guess the effort it cost him to force that false smile.

"If I, alone of all the newly-named men, have the courage to take the blood trail, then what does that make the rest of you?"

The shrewd little man had chanced on the perfect argument to silence his tormentors. And M'Bulla was the hardest hit of them all. The chieftain's son gaped dumbly at the tribal runt.

"Your belly is filled with water, M'Bulla," sneered Baki, warming to his subject. "You don't dare get heads yourself, so you try to keep me from getting them. Speak up, you great bladder! Why aren't you taking the blood trail?"

With sudden exhilaration, Baki realized he had actually succeeded in putting his rival in a bad light. His brave talk actually made him feel brave. By all the gods, maybe what he said was true!

"Wh-what do you mean?" blustered M'Bulla, noting that the attention of the crowd was turned on him. There was no missing the questioning look which sud-

denly had appeared in the eyes of those who so recently had been applauding him.

"I mean if you choose to stay here with the women," shouted Baki, "then get out of my way and let me go about a man's business."

M'Bulla swelled his great chest like an offended gorilla.

"You'll never get near an enemy," the big native said hastily, but his usual assurance was absent. "You'll be afraid to get out of sight of the kraal walls, 'Dik-dik', and you know it!"

"Ho-ho!" laughed Baki, and despite the weight of trappings, he managed to put a swagger in his walk as he headed through the crowd toward the gate. "I'm not the only one who begins to realize that the larger the rabbit, the greater its cowardice."

From the corner of his eye, Baki saw the sudden questioning look Tabella gave M'Bulla. He had hammered one thought at least into the head of the empty-headed wench, he thought triumphantly.

To the equal surprise of both M'Bulla and Baki, the tribesmen deserted the chieftain's son to trail along after Baki. For the moment, the blacks seemed to feel a real admiration for the little man. M'Bulla watched them following the ludicrous little figure and couldn't stand the thought that he himself was the one losing face.

"Hear this, loud wind in the trees," shrilled M'Bulla, "I say you won't even bring back two jackal tails."

Baki spun about. "No, not two jackal tails, but the heads of two Masai," he boasted.

"Two Masai!!" audibly repeated a band of tested warriors in surprise.

THE MASAI were the fiercest warriors of the jungle, feared and avoided by every tribe. The accepted habit was to raid smaller, more peaceful peoples. It was almost unheard of for a man on his first search for heads to penetrate the territory of the grim, ever-watchful Masai.

Until a fraction before he spoke, Baki had had no intention of going anywhere near the Masai. But the name of the dread tribe had suddenly come to him as

the one which would bring the greatest admiration from the throng.

"Aye, two Masai," stated Baki, and he stared masterfully into Tabella's troubled eyes. She stood very close to him, having deserted M'Bulla along with the others. "Let the great M'Bulla match that!"

"Curse your shriveled soul," screamed the chieftain's son, driven beyond endurance, "I'll soon show you which of us is fit to be a warrior. You'll see—you'll see!"

But Baki did not wait to hear more. Born actor that he was, he knew he had wrung everything possible from the scene, so with a disdainful smile he headed for the gate, ignoring his frothing rival. His small, spindly figure disappeared into the forest at what he judged to be the proud, confident trot of a conqueror.

His mood persisted for more than three hours, but then reality once more crept in upon him. The loneliness which hovers in the shadows of the deep jungle pursued and caught him, and as it did the glittering armor in which his over-active imagination had clad him shredded and fell apart.

"What have I done?" he suddenly cried, stopping dead in his tracks.

Like a sick man awakening from a dream of health, pain rushed in upon him. For the brief pleasure of embarrassing M'Bulla, he had made an impossible position even worse. At the very thought of the Masai, his mouth grew parched and his hands trembled.

He grew sick again, as sick as he had been that morning on awakening. With leaden feet, he staggered down the trail until he came to a stream. He filled his empty belly with the cool water, and though it made him feel slightly better, he told himself he was in no condition to travel further.

A lion, disturbed in its slumbers, coughed angrily nearby. A band of mandrills barked their hate in answer. Baki shivered, thinking of the night to come, and abruptly decided that, after all, he could trek further.

District Commissioner Tappan and his squad of soldiers had taken this same trail. Their sign lay clear on the ground. By catching up with them before nightfall,

Baki could wriggle close to their camp and share some of the security their fires and guns would give against the night's perils. That would be far better than spending the night alone, for white men, as queer and useless as they were in most matters, were excellent protection against both the animals and the devils of darkness.

With a new purpose for travelling, Baki made good time. When he came to the point where the path was intersected by an old elephant track leading off toward the Masai lands, he was relieved to find that the white lord had not turned off the main way. Tappan was heading toward the Wasuli area.

Baki turned his face away from the Masai trail, and shivering, ran faster. He crept up to the white man's encampment at dusk. Tappan and his followers had stopped among the trees beside the trail. The Somali had cleared away the underbrush with their knives and circled the camp with a thorn boma. Tappan sat alone before a small tent at one end of the camp watching his men prepare their evening meal around a great fire at the other.

Baki flattened himself on the ground, hid his shield and spear under a bush and began to plan a course of action while he waited for it to grow darker. When the last light was gone, he wriggled near the thorn boma. The men were busy eating and Tappan's back was to him, so he had no difficulty wedging himself down between the roots of a baobab tree without discovery. If he kept low in his nest, he wouldn't be seen, yet he could pass the night almost as safely as if he were within the camp. Just before dawn he could wriggle away and Tappan and his Somali troops would be none the wiser.

Lulled by the clacking Somali tongues, Baki put the night noises out of his mind and let his weary body relax. He was too tired and upset to be hungry.

A sudden hail from the jungle made him start: "Ho, brave warriors of the great white lord, a friend comes with word from the chieftain of the Tatoga."

That voice was all too familiar. Baki peeped from his hiding place. At the far edge of the boma, he saw the broad-shoulder

dered figure of M'Bulla. Though he had no concrete reason for such a reaction, a tingle of alarm ran over him. After all, Naguri was not accustomed to using his own son as a runner.

AT M'BULLA'S FIRST WORD, the Somali had leaped for their guns. "Why don't they shoot the big-bellied car-rion-eater," wondered Baki savagely. But the trained men merely stood, silent, watchful, until Tappan gave them the word to let M'Bulla enter the camp.

The chieftain's son, once within the thorn wall, bowed with exaggerated deference to the commissioner. Tappan had risen from his seat and came toward M'Bulla.

"Ah," said Tappan in recognition, "you are Naguri's son. What is this word you bring?"

An oily, somehow uneasy, smile pulled at M'Bulla's fat lips.

"It is an embarrassing thing, O Lord," he told the white man. "Could we not talk alone?"

The perpetual frown on Tappan's lean, hound-dog face deepened slightly, and he turned and led the black to his tent.

Their guarded words were clearly audible to Baki, hiding only a few yards from them.

"My father is your greatest friend," declared M'Bulla. "Your least wish is his law. He sends me to you because he does not wish a command of yours to be broken, nor to have you think when it is broken, that he approved of such evil-doing."

Tappan grunted approvingly, but without too much conviction.

"You told those of us in the ceremony last night that we were not to take heads," continued the black, "and warned that if anyone did, Naguri as well as the evil-doer would be punished."

Tappan nodded, puzzled as to where this was leading. But Baki's mouth had dropped open with shock. He already knew what M'Bulla was about.

"You were no more than gone from our kraal when one man who has often given my father trouble slipped out to take the blood trail. When my father discovered this, he was in a rage and ordered me to

overtake you, so that you might know to trail this evil-doer and guard against his breaking the law."

"Ummm," said Tappan, pulling at his cheek. In answer to M'Bulla's question, he assured the son that his father naturally would not be held responsible. "But the finding of this man before he commits a crime may not be easy. Does your father have any suggestions on this?"

For a moment, M'Bulla's glance lingered on the stacked rifles beside the Somali fire.

"It will not be difficult," he said harshly. "He is one called Baki, the small dango you saw in the ceremony."

Then the black explained that Baki meant to raid the Masai and that therefore he would follow the only easy trail which led to their lands.

"His spoor will be easy for your Somali to follow for his track lay plain on the trail before me until darkness tonight. He is sore from the Rites of Manhood and is travelling slowly. His small feet and the oddness of his walk leave an easy spoor."

* Tappan rocked back and forth thoughtfully.

"You have done a good thing in coming here," he said at last. "This is proof of your father's friendship. And I do not forget my friends. Perhaps one day I can do a favor for him."

M'Bulla clucked his tongue against his teeth. He picked up a handful of dirt, let it sift through his fingers. Then he cocked a quick glance at Tappan, dropped it to the ground again.

"There is one small favor he would like to ask," he said softly.

"Ah? And that?" said Tappan.

"When you catch the small dango, Baki, say nothing of my father's part in this. It would be better if it seemed you caught him without help."

Tappan pulled at his cheek.

"Mmmmm. Yes, of course," he agreed. "This Baki has relatives and friends who could cause trouble."

M'Bulla quickly nodded. Then he asked permission to sleep the night in the camp.

"I will return to my father's kraal in the morning," he said. As though the mat-

ter bore on his mind, he needlessly added. "I will be there before the sun is half across the sky."

Baki was overcome by the enormity of M'Bulla's treachery. Smarting under Baki's insults, the chieftain's son was making certain of the little man's utter failure and humiliation. The betrayal of a fellow tribesman's plans to a white man, let alone to Tappan, violated the whole warrior's code of the Tatoga.

LONG AFTER Tappan and M'Bulla lay sleeping, Baki trembled and cursed in his hiding place. No matter what he did, he was ruined. If he remained out in the jungle, Tappan's hard-faced Somali warriors would run him to earth, and in addition to the white lord's punishment, the tribe would scorn him for a clumsy, loud-mouthed failure. If he took the only other course open to him and returned immediately to the kraal, he would be jeered at as a coward, without backbone enough to carry through his boasts.

And no one would ever believe that M'Bulla had betrayed him. His accusations would be laughed at as the feeble lies of a weakling. It was just that unbelievable that a chieftain's son would so basely betray a fellow tribesman. And Tappan had sworn to remain quiet about the source of his information.

It was an hour before dawn when Baki finally reached a grim decision. "There is no hope for me," he said. "I am finished. Every day of my life I have swallowed bitterness and I can stomach no more. Before the new sun is high, I will kill myself and escape both Tappan and my jeering fellowmen, but I swear that M'Bulla will ride the Canoe of Death down the dark waters of Kastadi before I do."

And the murder in his heart was so much greater than his fear of the night that Baki wriggled away from the camp, recovered his spear and shield and set out down the dark trail. The Somali would be rousing soon, so he had no time to waste if he were to escape them long enough to carry out his plan.

It was dawn by the time he reached the

point where the Masai trail crossed the path. He went a few hundred yards down the trail, hurriedly studying the area for a site that would meet his needs. He found what he wanted in a small clearing beside a waterhole.

Using his bowstring to spin a pointed stick against a dry piece of bark, he sparked a tiny fire into being, fed it first with moss and grass, and then with handfuls of leaves and sticks. His purpose was to quickly build up a supply of ashes, but few coals. He wanted the Somali to believe he had camped here for the night.

While he fed the fire, he breakfasted on kava and blue vastoy pears, throwing the remains into the flames so the time of his eating could not be estimated from their freshness. He lay full length in the ferns and grass, crushing his outline strongly enough to make it appear he had slept there.

Then he started toward the Masai lands, careless of the signs he left. He had travelled along this path several times with his father and he remembered that not far ahead was a rocky stretch. When he reached the flinty section, he turned off the trail, stepping with utmost care so he would leave no spoor. Then he squatted down in a patch of berry bushes to wait for his pursuers.

He relied on his knowledge of white men and native trackers to give him his chance to kill M'Bulla. A white man such as Tappan would be so impatient to catch a lawbreaker that he would make his men break camp before dawn and hurry them headlong to the Masai trail, wanting to get them on the job as soon as there was enough light to track. Because of that, Baki didn't worry that Tappan would discover that his quarry had actually been within speaking distance of him all night. The Somali did only what they were told and they wouldn't be looking for his sign along the dark trail from the camp to the Masai path.

Then once the Somali actually began to follow him, they would reason that from the clear trail he left he had no fear of being followed. That would lull them into being overconfident of catching him, so by the time they reached the rocky stretch,

they would have no thought of his trying any trickery on them. Instead of trying to hunt out his sign among the rocks, they would hurry over the difficult flinty section, certain that he wouldn't turn off after being so careless before.

Once Tappan and his men were past, Baki meant to dart back down the trail and overtake M'Bulla. Long before the puzzled Somali got through combing back over the rocks to discover the ruse he had played, he would have driven an arrow through the chieftain's son. That was all the time he wanted. Then the Somali could find him.

Baki didn't have long to wait. Down the trail the warbling notes of a virini bird abruptly chopped off. A parrot gave a harsh, startled squawk. Nearby a wild pig lunged off into the underbrush. Then the forest was still.

Baki crouched lower, tensely drew aside a branch so he could catch a fleeting glimpse of his pursuers as they passed. His head wasn't filled with daydreams of glory now, with swaggering pictures of himself as a hero. A single thought pounded through his brain: "They must not catch me!" And in that moment even his feelings of sick loneliness and fear were forgotten.

He half-sensed, half-heard the quick, soft brush of running feet. It was a lone man, running with terrific speed, Baki realized. Was this the swiftest of the Somali, hurtling ahead of his fellows in the hope of being the first to bring down his master's quarry?

That cursed white man was capable of just such cunning, and if the runner were far enough ahead of the main body, he would be over the rocky stretch before Tappan ever came abreast of Baki. The small man had a sudden, frightening vision of being trapped where he was.

He tried to think what he should do, but before he could organize his confused mind, a powerful, black figure, naked but for a breechclout, flashed past on the trail. He glimpsed the great, heavy shoulders, the long, driving legs, saw the tasseled war spear and painted shield carried by the man.

He sat frozen for an instant, blinking

stupidly at the point where he had seen the runner.

Then a thundering rush of blood smote against his eardrums and he leaped to his feet. His belly knotted in a spasm, and white hot fire seared down through his vitals.

The man who had passed was M'Bulla!

IV

M'BULLA hadn't returned to the kraal. For some reason, he had changed his mind and was helping Tappan. He thought to run down Baki himself.

Above the pounding of his heart, Baki tried to listen for Tappan. There was no sound to indicate the white man was near. The little man leaped out on the trail, his face ripped with savagery.

"The treacherous jackal has overplayed himself," he gritted. "The white lord hasn't a chance now to take me before I kill him. And M'Bulla will be drowning in his own blood before he realizes that instead of the hunter, he is the hunted."

Baki raced after M'Bulla. A demoniac strength possessed him, lashing him on and on down the twisting green aisle of the path. Beyond every bend, he expected to find his unsuspecting enemy. But though he kept going hour after hour, not once did he draw within sight of the long-legged chieftain's son.

By mid-afternoon, Baki's merciless demands on his body began to tell. Every breath was a knife stabbing into his lungs. His legs wobbled and shook, and he felt his shield and spear must tear his arms from their sockets.

His pace became no more than a faltering, weaving trot. He had to face the fact that he was no closer to catching M'Bulla now than he had been in the race through the kraal during the Rites of Manhood. With that bitter realization, the last remnants of his strength shattered.

His foot caught on a root. He stumbled, too weak to steady himself. There was a tear of pain in his ankle as he crashed to the ground.

He made no effort to move. With half-closed eyes, he labored for breath, while

the jungle reeled around him. An hour later, the reverberating roar of a lion roused him. Night had fallen while he lay in an exhausted daze.

Baki got to his feet groggily. The sharp, throbbing pain in his right ankle made him bite his lips. He limped to a large tree and with difficulty climbed into the middle limbs, settled himself in a fork.

He shivered. It had been near here, on the edge of the Masai lands, that Cripple Leg had dragged down his father. His father had led a band of hunters out to try to rid the jungle of the man-killing lion, but it had been he, himself, who died. And Cripple Leg still lived on to kill and ravage.

Baki's ankle awakened him before morning. By the light of the late moon, he saw how swollen it was. He would do no running on the morrow.

M'Bulla had beaten him again. M'Bulla always won. He won even without trying.

So they had all been right, after all, in reading the wizard, Akati's prophecy. And he alone had been wrong. The gods smiled on one man from birth and they turned their faces away from another.

And he was one they turned away from.

A cloud drifted across the moon. Quite close a lion roared and there was a terrible, wracking savagery in its tone. Baki listened with the practiced ear of a child of the jungle.

"It's the same lion I heard at sunset," he decided. "He's made no kill this night, and he grows more sullen and vicious with hunger."

He thought about the chances of the lion reaching him if it should come his way and wondered whether he should move higher in the tree.

Then suddenly in the darkness a bitter smile tugged his lips. "Why should I worry about my safety," he asked himself. "He would only be saving me the trouble."

His fingers nervously touched his knife hilt. "No," he decided, "I won't do it until the Somali corner me. There's still a chance that when he can't find me, M'Bulla will turn back to join the white lord."

He toyed with the idea of having the unwary M'Bulla come back along the trail to stumble into his grasp. He would step unexpectedly out of ambush, call him the name he deserved and then deliberately drive an arrow through his belly.

But even as he pictured the dying agonies of his enemy, he sat up and cursed. *There was no chance that M'Bulla would be coming back to meet Tappan tomorrow!* Tappan was the last man in the world the chieftain's son wanted to meet right now.

WITH THE STUNNING SHOCK of a thunderclap, Baki suddenly realized the full extent of M'Bulla's treachery. The hulking black was doing far more than making Baki look like a stupid, bumbling failure. He was employing his small enemy's downfall to make himself look like an exceptionally daring, cunning hero.

M'Bulla was going into the Masai lands to get two heads for himself!

By betraying Baki, he had not only won Tappan's trust, but he had carefully planted the idea that he was returning immediately to the Tatoga kraal. Then, leaving before the white man broke camp, he had sprinted for the Masai area, secure in the knowledge that the energies of Tappan and his Somali would be fully engaged for several days in tracing down Baki.

That gave M'Bulla ample time to strike down two victims. If the Masai should complain to the commissioner about an unknown raider striking down two of their people, the crime would be laid to Baki. And when M'Bulla smuggled his two heads back home, the fact that he had succeeded at the same time his rival was being caught like a rabbit in a noose, would awe the Tatoga.

None of them would betray M'Bulla and none would suspect him of any baseness. The tribesmen would only say he was smarter, braver than "Dik-dik" to take his heads under the very nose of the feared white lord. The comparison they would draw would be much to M'Bulla's advantage.

"That great mountain of fat, Naguri, has a finger in this too," gritted Baki, for

he knew his rival would not have acted without his father's permission.

"Because he thinks me worthless as a warrior, the chieftain willingly sacrifices me to falsely court the white lord's favor and at the same time gratify his son's vanity. Tappan will think him a friend after this."

And while Baki gnawed the sour boon of hate, the red dawn came. Many times on such a morning he had heard the old ones say, "Gimshai, Stealer of Souls, walks abroad this day for the blood of his victims already reddens the sky."

A faint movement on the ground caught his eyes. He stiffened, his first thought being that somehow the Somali had caught up with him during the night. Then he made out the tiny figure that had caused his alarm.

It was a foot-high dik-dik, poised in its perpetual attitude of alarm beside a stand of shrubs.

In sudden, flooding rage, he caught an arrow from his quiver, fitted it to his bow. He squinted an instant against the uncertain, red light. Then he sent the barb hurtling into the small body.

The tiny antelope was flung off its feet by the fury of the arrow. Before it kicked its last, Baki reached the ground, limped to stand over his kill. His face a mask of viciousness, he whipped out his knife, leaned down to skin and clean the creature for food.

But the knife never bit into the tender flesh. Baki's anger left him as swiftly as it had come. A look near to shame caught his features and he leaped back. Keeping his eyes away from the dik-dik, he hurriedly secured his knife, picked up his shield and spear.

He wheeled blindly away from the trail into the thick undergrowth. He kept up his directionless flight until he could no longer bear the pain from his ankle. Then he rested, assuaged his hunger with a sparse breakfast of berries and nuts. He noted vaguely that the lion roared several times off behind him, but he gauged its distance away as being considerable and he felt no alarm.

He no longer knew what to do, so he merely sat staring until thirst drove him up

in search of water. The thought of suicide eddied ever around the edges of his mind, and he waited for the necessary resolution to come to him.

He found a large, muddy waterhole, knelt and drank, and then soaked his ankle in the cool water for a time. He hobbled ten steps down a game trail leading away from the waterhole and knew he could no longer bear the torture of walking. Dully, he lay down in a patch of grass beside the trail.

He rested on his side, gazing with strained, unseeing eyes down the trail to the waterhole. There no longer was any sense in delaying the thing he must do. He was finished. There could be no more running away.

His hand slid toward the knife, closed about the handle and then froze. A Somali warrior, moving with snake-like stealth, worked across his line of vision toward the waterhole. Baki huddled low in the grass a fraction of a moment before the tracker turned and stared straight in his direction.

Baki was afraid to move for fear the man would spot him. When a minute had gone by and he heard no sound, Baki ventured to shift his head enough to peer through a break in the grass. He saw that Tappan and the rest of his men now stood with the tracker. The black was pointing along the ground and whispering to the white lord.

Baki knew the tracker was telling the commissioner that his quarry was very close.

TAPPAN stood in quiet thought, his lean, sad face as solemn and unexcited as ever. Then with inaudible whispers he dispatched groups of his men to his right and left until finally he stood alone with the tracker. With a weary, abstracted air, Tappan watched the muddy water for a while. The tracker kept shifting and watching him like an excited hunting dog held leashed by its master within sight of game.

Baki shivered. He understood what Tappan was doing. He had sent his men into the jungle on both sides of the path and was giving them time to get into po-

sition. Then he would come down the trail and flush the quarry. No matter which way Baki tried to flee, an armed Somali would be waiting for him.

Tappan turned away from the waterhole. The Somali tracker took up a position behind him, his rifle ready. The white man was only armed with a pistol, and now with abrupt decision he loosened the flap on his holster.

Time had run out for Baki. If he was to cheat them, he must grab his knife and drive it home. He would have time for no more than one stab, for when he moved they would see him and be on him.

His heart throbbed as though trying to tear out of his chest. His breath wouldn't come. He tried to tense, for a sudden, sure motion.

But wait! What was that great, tawny figure that slid shadow-quiet out of the foliage behind the white man and his tracker?

Savage, exultant hope flared over Baki. Tappan and the Somali would die before he did! The huge lion which had stepped from hiding behind them was crouching for a charge. He guessed it to be the same beast which had been crying its rage to the jungle all morning. Hunger had driven it to stalking men.

Tappan started down the path. The black waited for him to get a few steps ahead before following.

The lion didn't utter its usual paralyzing roar at the moment of charging. With the infinite cunning of an experienced man-killer, it catapulted from its crouch in utter silence. Baki watched the immense, reaching strides with which it drove past the waterhole and down on its victims.

His breath caught. There was no mistaking the odd, limping stride of the cat. He had heard it described by hunters time without end. The lion was "Cripple Leg"!

Baki was watching his father's murderer repeat its bloody work on two more men!

The lion was half way to its prey before the tracker heard it. The black swung around. He screamed, fought to bring his rifle up. But he was too late,

the hurtling killer-cat was leaping for him even as he fired.

Baki heard the explosion and the cat's almost simultaneous roar as the bullet crashed through its shoulder. Then the great beast was on the hapless black, driving him to the ground, ripping and tearing with fangs and claws.

Tappan had whirled, his face white and horror-torn. He leaped back, clawing for his pistol. It was a puny weapon against that raging devil-cat, but it was all the protection he had. The killer would be on him in another second.

There was no conscious thought in what Baki did then. There were reasons for what he did, but his simple, primitive mind would never have been able to fathom them.

Baki thrust to his feet as the cat leaped clear of the black and thundered down on Tappan. As Baki came up, his left arm slid through the grips of his father's shield and the heavy war spear was gripped in his right hand. He sprinted forward, his swollen ankle forgotten.

Tappan was almost running backwards by the time he got his pistol clear. In his nervous haste he misjudged his direction, swerved off the path. A tangle of vines struck him behind the knees.

He fired just as his feet shot out from under him. The slug hammered into thin air. The gun blasted again, even more harmlessly, as he jolted onto his back in the tangle of vines.

The lion was at him then, springing to disembowel him with a single rake of its claws. But before the leaping cat, all four feet off the ground, could land on the helpless white man, Baki's small figure shot out of the forest.

Baki didn't throw his spear. He drove straight into the lion with the heavy shaft braced against him. The long, barbed point plunged between the killer-cat's forelegs. With driving legs, Baki hammered the shaft against the thrusting weight of the beast, dug the razor-edge through lungs, heart and belly.

He was too small to handle the writhing madness of the spitted cat for more than a fraction of time. Then the spear shaft was torn free of his grasp with a

violence that threw him to his knees.

The cat spun over on its side, blood and crazed snarls flooding from its throat. It fell away from the helplessly entangled Tappan, ripping earth and shrubs in insensate fury, driving the shaft deeper into its vitals as it tried to reach Baki. It reared high, launched a crazy, wobbling charge at the little man.

Baki was only half up when the beast sprang. He was like a small terrier wild with the taste of blood. His face was fierce, contorted, his eyes ablaze with hate.

There was no fear in the little man, only a terrible naked hate. And he seemed to fight instinctively. He had torn his knife free and now as the cat came at him, he shoved the great shield up and out so that it covered him.

The splintering fury of the beast's claws slammed against the shield. Baki went down, but he kept the shield over him, and as he fell he shoved home the long blade. He hit the ground with stunning force, the full weight of the cat on him.

He heard Tappan shout, heard the pistol blast once. "Why doesn't the fool keep shooting?" wondered Baki. Then he lost consciousness.

V

WHEN HE ROUSED, he was lying on his back beside the carcass of the dead cat. Tappan bent over him.

"You saved my life," the white man said gruffly. "You're a very brave man. I thought you were finished when the cat finally reached you, but you had done him in with that beautiful spear work. Your shield broke his dying strike."

Baki stared levelly into the white man's eyes.

"You owe your life to my father," he said seriously. "It was his spirit that sent me here. That lion was his murderer. I killed it with his weapons and his courage, for I have neither. Now peace can come to my father, for he is avenged."

A puzzled look came to Tappan. With fingers still nervous from his experience, he pulled at his cheek.

"You mean you came here to hunt that devil?" he asked.

"I can claim no honor," muttered Baki. "It was my father's spirit that guided me. Even in death, he is the jungle's greatest hunter."

Tappan had served his government in many out-of-the-way places, among many savage peoples. He didn't flicker an eyelid at the little man's solemn pronouncements about his father's spirit.

"All honor to your father, then," he murmured. "You are a proper son."

In an unusual gesture for a white man, he helped Baki up. The small warrior was so startled by this courtesy that he forgot about his ankle until his weight suddenly came down on it. He winced involuntarily.

Tappan noted the ankle thoughtfully. A man with a bad leg could hide by a waterhole and wait for a lion to come to him, but with such a handicap he would be in no condition to be tackling Masai warriors on their home grounds.

"I have a thing to say," he confessed slowly. "I was following you because I thought you meant to break my command about taking heads."

When Tappan paused, seeking the proper words of apology, Baki's lips lifted bitterly at one corner.

"Don't be angry," said the commissioner. "I realize now I was wrong. I see you are a man to be trusted—a man like your father."

Baki blinked as the truth suddenly dawned on him. The commissioner thought he had been following an innocent man. Baki wasn't to be punished, humiliated.

"And since this lion was a known man-killer," the white man went on, "there is a reward due you. It is my custom to see that the government rewards brave hunters. You will be the first to collect in this district."

Tappan smiled stiffly, the first smile Baki remembered seeing on his face.

"And since I put some value on my own life," he said, "I will add a personal gift of—well—twenty goats. If I remember the price this season, that should be enough to buy a proper wife."

A delighted gleam came into Baki's eyes as the white lord detailed the gifts which were suddenly his. But at the men-

tion of the word "wife" his face went hard. Tappan, however, didn't see this change, for he had turned away, suddenly somber to regard the man he had lost to the lion.

"I'll rest a bit," he said curtly, "while we wait for my men to return." He walked to the same plot of grass where Baki had hidden, seated himself, his face turned away from the dead Somali. Tappan had some thinking to do.

Baki turned his attention to the lion. He hobbled about, surveying it from every angle. The crackling chain of events that had snatched him up was still more than he could easily comprehend. The slaying of "Cripple Leg" would be the talk of the jungle.

Baki recovered his knife, spat thrice on the cat, and carefully cut off the beast's whiskers. There was great magic in the whiskers of so dreaded a man-killer and he would be able to do some worthwhile bargaining with the witch-doctors of the area. Akati would dance a merry dance to get possession of those most potent bristles. Baki wrapped them in a leaf, secured them in his breechclout.

He didn't want to skin the cat until the Somali had had an ample opportunity to admire it, so to occupy himself he tugged his spear free, picked up his blood-smeared shield, and walked to the waterhole to clean them.

He had just finished washing the spear and was polishing it dry with a handful of grass when a sudden prickle of alarm rippled the small hairs along his neck. He had heard no sound, seen no movement, but there was a feel of danger abruptly on him.

He turned his head and white-hot fear blasted over him. Moving silently in on him in a wide half-circle were ten hideously painted warriors. There was no mistaking those giant figures, with their scarred, stone-hard faces, their plumed head-dresses, and scalp-hung shields.

The Masai!

AN INARTICULATE CRY of fright ripped from his lips. Rather all the devils of night should rend his body than have those merciless warriors take him.

Yet there was no escape. They had pinned him against the waterhole.

A great, square-shouldered Masai leaped high, roared, "On the Tatoga carrion! Take him! He shall learn what it is to raid the Masai!"

They came in a rush, screaming their hate. Baki went mad with fear. He knew the horrible torture that was to be his fate.

Instinctively, he swung his spear like a club, so terrified he hadn't sense enough to jab with its point. And because the blow was wholly unorthodox, a thing no trained warrior would ever do, he caught the leading warrior completely off-guard.

The steel-heavy shaft whipping in from the side hammered the man's shield aside and slammed against his head. The Masai turned a complete flip and crashing against two of his men, sent them sprawling. Baki flailed down on the tripped men, knocked one of them unconscious, but had his spear jerked from his hands by the other.

The rest of the Masai were almost on him. He screamed and leaped into the waterhole, reeling and splashing as he fought out towards the center. The bottom was soft black mud and it was that mud that saved Baki.

Because of his scant weight he didn't sink deep enough in the sucking black slush to completely bog down. But the huge-bodied Masai vaulting out into the waterhole in an effort to catch him mired so deeply it took their full strength to make any progress at all.

They would have caught him eventually for they had only to surround the waterhole and drive him out with arrows. But before they could act, the crashing reports of a pistol broke through the bedlam, followed almost immediately by the bark of rifles.

Where Tappan's voice had gone unheard, the sound of his pistol and the added authority of two rifles in the hands of the first of his Somali to come up had a miraculous effect on the Masai.

Like leaves scattered by a sudden wind, the warriors splattered into the forest in every direction. They were too battle-wise to argue with an ambush. They had

learned the hard way in battle against white troops that spears and bows were no answer to bullets in an open fight.

Baki was left trembling neck-deep in the center of the waterhole. On the bank lay the still forms of the two men he had clubbed. Tappan, scarlet with rage, ran to the two unconscious Masai.

"Before my eyes—before my very eyes they try to kill a peaceful hunter!" he raged in English. "So this is how the Masai respect the law. Blast me, if I haven't caught Bandulla redhanded. This is one mistake he won't talk his way out of!"

The commissioner sent a pair of his men into the water to help Baki to the bank. The small man came out reluctantly, uncertain as to what Tappan's raging in a strange tongue meant. Could it be he held Baki partly responsible for the incident and was angry because he had felled the Masai?

He stole a glance at the inert warriors was infinitely relieved to find they were still breathing. All of Tappan's men had gathered and he was flinging commands at them. Abruptly, the white man's mouth snapped severely shut. He turned and darted his glance over the Tatoga.

"I—I tried not to draw blood," the rattled little man stuttered in a desperate lie. "Surely, the white lord saw I refused even to use the point of my spear. These two will recover."

"I saw it all," snapped Tappan, and then his voice softened, took on a note of admiration. "You're not as large as a full grown rabbit, but you think and act quicker than any man I've ever seen. Every tribesman around here is terrified of the Masai, yet you made monkeys of them until I could get into action."

He pulled at his cheek.

"And you came out of it without a scratch," he marveled.

Tappan gestured at the unconscious blacks.

"You did me a real favor," he declared. "Bandulla can't claim the raiders were enemy tribesmen disguised as Masai. We're going to the Masai kraal immediately with these two."

And an hour before sundown the grim-

aced Tappan led his small detachment up to the gates of Bandulla's kraal. The utter silence of the village was proof that he was awaited. Tappan had hardly uttered his angry demand for entrance before the gates swung wide.

Baki, limping at the white man's heels, confidently expected a flood of painted warriors to rush out of the kraal and slaughter them all on the spot.

But, instead, three of Bandulla's headmen, stiff-backed and expressionless, stood framed in the entrance. They began the usual polite ritual of greeting.

Tappan cut them short. "I would see your chieftain—immediately."

The faces of the headmen tightened. Once the Masai had been absolute masters of the jungle and had issued such peremptory demands. Now they could only bow to the inevitable.

Bandulla received the white man in the great circular council hut. The Masai leader was a handsome man, quick and strong as a black leopard though well past his middle years. He sat very quietly among his councillors, waiting until Tappan was half across the room before he rose, his features expressionless.

In his composure was no hint of the searing rage with which he had received the warriors who had blunderingly attacked an enemy under the nose of the district commissioner. He made a small gesture with his left hand and a servant shoved a small, copper-studded stool into place for the visitor. It was wordless recognition of Tappan's rank.

"I see you, O Father of Many Warriors, Right Hand of the Great King Beyond the Sea," he said evenly. "Regard this kraal and all within it as your own."

Tappan stopped beside the stool and about his gaunt figure was the tautness of a drawn bow.

"Your words are soft with friendship," the white man said, "but your deeds, Bandulla, are hard—and it is in deeds that one always finds the truth."

Bandulla's brows arched slowly. He motioned to the stool beside Tappan, and seeing that the white man refused to sit down, sank down in his own great chair.

"Ah?" he said in muted surprise. "There

is the feel of anger about you, my friend, and you speak to me in riddles."

"Then I shall speak more plainly," declared Tappan, and swiftly he built his case against Bandulla, detailing what he had seen. He had his Somali bring into the council hut first the two captured Masai, then Baki, and finally the skin of the man-killer, Cripple Leg.

BANDULLA sat unmoved through the commissioner's terse, cold accusation until the lionskin was thrown on the floor at his feet. Somehow, that sight touched through his armor. He started upright in his chair, frowning at the skin.

"See you, Bandulla! I caught your men at their bloody work!" proclaimed Tappan. "But for me, they would have slain this good and peaceful Tatoga hunter, this small, brave man who with his own hand slew the devil-cat which for endless moons has preyed as much on your own people as on his.

"This is the way you would keep the peace, Bandulla, by murdering a man who does your people good!"

Bandulla tapped thrice on his muscled thigh with his fingers, thinking fast.

"I deny nothing," he said at last. "But I had cause to believe that this man came seeking heads. It was my duty to protect my people. And my men had no intention of killing him, but only of capturing him, that he might be turned over to you for punishment."

Tappan smiled thinly.

"You had no cause to suspect this man of seeking heads," he said. "I happen to know of his every move for the past few days and he hasn't been near a Masai warrior, let alone making any threatening move against you. Is every man who enters your borders to be pounced upon?"

The Masai chieftain looked troubled.

"Confess now," demanded Tappan, "your warriors knew nothing about this small hunter. They merely ran across his spoor, trailed and attacked him."

Bandulla raised his eyes to Tappan's.

"That is true," he said, low-voiced. "It would seem they made a bad mistake——"

"So you admit it!" snapped Tappan, grasping the chieftain's words with grim

triumph.

"—but an understandable mistake," went on Bandulla, as though he had not been interrupted.

"What?" ejaculated Tappan indignantly.

"Only a short time before they found the trail of the Small One," related the chieftain, "one of their number was actually attacked by a Tatoga warrior. You see, these men of mine were themselves hunting Cripple Leg. They knew he was near and had separated to better find his sign, when a Tatoga tried to ambush one of them. He leaped from behind a tree with upraised sword, but he was clumsy and my warrior heard him in time to jump aside, suffering no more than a gashed shoulder.

"Then my war-dog, wounded, mind you, fought and subdued the Tatoga. He claimed no credit for the deed, however, for he said the Tatoga was a terrible coward who screamed like a woman and was so weak with fright he couldn't fight."

Tappan shook his head wearily, his gesture saying plainly that Bandulla would have to make up a far better story than that. But his eyes opened wide at the chieftain's next statement.

"I have the man here," Bandulla said quietly. Then while he savored Tappan's expression, he clapped his hands once as a signal. "To prove I meant to hold him for you, you will notice he is quite alive and unhurt, except, ah, for a few bruises."

Two burly Masai guards shoved a shambling hulk into the room before them. The prisoner was alive as Bandulla said, but from the looks of him, he had absorbed a terrible beating.

He was naked, bruised and scratched from head to foot and only fear of his guards gave him strength enough to keep from collapsing. He was barely recognizable, his face swollen out of shape, one eye completely closed.

Baki forgot his awe of the Masai and stepped away from Tappan to get a better look at the prisoner. He stared unbelieving for a long moment.

"It's M'Bulla!" he cried. "By all the gods, it's M'Bulla!"

And forgetting etiquette, forgetting ev-

everything, the little man staggered back and sat down on the stool which had been brought out for Tappan.

"Aye, it's M'Bulla, son of Naguri, the Tatoga chieftain," confirmed the Masai leader.

Tappan cursed quietly to himself in English. He felt not the least pity for the slobbering, moaning figure which the guards now held upright between them. It was suddenly all clear to him.

"In attacking the Small One, you did wrong," the white man said curtly to Bandulla. "But in capturing this dango and holding him for me you did well."

In order to save his face and also make clear his point there were to be no more wanton attacks by the Masai on strangers, Tappan talked on at considerable length, but it was apparent to all that no punishment was to be meted out to Bandulla.

"I shall follow your every wish," the relieved chieftain assured him. He hesitated, his glance going to Baki. "I had promised certain gifts to the Masai warrior who succeeded in ridding us of Cripple Leg". He signaled with a handclap again. "If the Small One would accept these gifts, I would feel honored. The Masai admire a brave man and are glad to give him their friendship."

COMpletely OVERWHELMED, Baki gapingly watched while an array of weapons, ornaments, amulets, colored cloth and beautifully tanned skins were borne in. But it was the final gift which made him cry aloud with pleasure, though its appearance simultaneously brought a frown to Tappan's features.

Bandulla had thought of presenting the gifts to Baki on the spur of the moment, as a gesture more for Tappan's benefit than the little tribesman's. Had he given more consideration to the matter, he would have been careful to omit that final gift. As it was, he came to himself a second too late, and though he made frantic gestures to get it back out of sight, both Baki and Tappan had spotted this final proof of his generosity.

The gift was a Kaffir maiden, plump as a fatted calf, young and shy, with her ebony charms set off by a tiny white-

beaded apron and enormous copper bracelets and earrings.

Bandulla could come by such a handsome gift in only two possible ways and both were against Tappan's express commands. Either he had stolen the girl from her home kraal in a raid or he had bought her from slave traders. No Kaffir maiden could legitimately turn up as a chattel of the Masai leader.

"Aaaiee! You are the best and wisest of chieftains," enthusiastically cried Baki. "I shall cry your magnificence throughout the jungle. Ho! The man who speaks a word against the Masai shall answer to me!"

"You cannot have her," Tappan sternly interrupted the flow of ecstatic praise. "As a slave, she must be returned to her parents immediately. The holding of slaves is strictly forbidden."

Bandulla wriggled uncomfortably, faking a bad cough as he tried to think of some way to cover up the mistake. Baki, however, fully occupied the commissioner. Shaken with anguish at the thought of losing this Kaffir jewel, he pleaded and coaxed, trying to make Tappan relent.

"It is forbidden," icily repeated the white man.

Rage suddenly struck into Baki. The other gifts were forgotten. He was being cheated of his rightful due. He haughtily drew himself up.

"The pleasing of a friend is, after all, a small thing unworthy of attention," he murmured. "Let my words about the girl be forgotten."

Tappan grunted. The little devil was not so subtly reminding him that he was being damned arbitrary to the man who had saved his life.

And on the long return trek to the Tatoga kraal Baki maintained his reserve toward the white man. Tappan had brought along both M'Bulla and the Kaffir maiden, but the small native seemed unaware of their existence. Baki kept close to the Masai bearers that Bandulla had sent along to carry his gifts to the Tatoga kraal. They were the same warriors who had attacked Baki.

It was the Masai chieftain's way of punishing them for getting him in bad

with the commissioner. The carrying of loads for another man is a humiliating duty to a Masai and Bandulla also had given them strict orders to wait upon Baki's every wish. He felt this punishment would impress Tappan.

M'Bulla was in no shape to trek, so the Somali had to carry him in a litter. Like the great coward he was, he blubbered and moaned constantly, realizing ever more clearly the magnitude of his disgrace.

A short way from the Tatoga kraal, Tappan halted the group, ordered all except his Somali to rest there until he returned from a conference with Naguri. He called Baki to him.

"I'm honestly sorry about the girl," he began, and he tried to explain why he couldn't allow Baki to keep the slave.

"It is nothing," Baki coolly assured him.

But his whole manner told Tappan how greatly he lied, and the white man had his own reasons for wanting to win over the native. By gaining Baki's wholehearted friendship, he could have a valuable ally in the Tatoga kraal, for he knew the little man would be regarded as a hero by his people, no matter what their former attitude had been.

"One of my reasons for going on alone," said Tappan smoothly, "is to draw a clear picture to the Tatoga of your bright deeds and of M'Bulla's evil ones." He tugged his cheek. "It was my thought that I could tell the story in full detail, whereas your own modesty would naturally seal your tongue."

Baki looked up from the ground for the first time. Some of the sullenness faded from his face.

"I will relate how you killed Cripple Leg and saved my life, giving you the credit due a brave man," explained the commissioner. He cleared his throat. "And, of course, I will tell how you *easily could have taken two heads when you so skillfully fought off the Masai*. I intend to praise you especially for this. It will be an example to your people that a truly great warrior does not need heads to show his courage and skill."

Baki beamed, despite a determined ef-

fort to hide his delight. The white man's story would be accepted as the absolute truth, and it painted him with colors brighter than even his own active imagination had been able to garnish the adventure.

"Now about the girl," said Tappan off-handedly, "it was my thought you would take her into the kraal, show her off as your slave. Then to set another wonderful example for your people, you will announce that you are setting her free because you do not feel it right for men to own slaves as they would goats."

Baki hesitated only a moment. "It is a thing I had in my mind all the time," he solemnly declared. "I will set the girl free."

Tappan had been gone nearly six hours when a Somali returned to bid Baki and the others to make their entrance. And Baki, limping at the head of the column of gift-bearing Masai, with the girl trailing a few steps behind him and M'Bulla cringing in his litter at the end of the line, was given the welcome of a returning conqueror.

Tappan had done his work well.

Except for Naguri, the whole tribe was on hand to greet Baki. The chieftain sat alone in his house, guarded by Somali. He was living his last hours as ruler of the Tatoga. On the morrow he would announce his abdication. The commissioner had allowed Naguri that face-saving gesture.

VI

WHEN TAPPAN departed, he would take both Naguri and M'Bulla with him. There was no compromise with justice for those two. They had been caught in a noose of their own making.

Under the warm admiration of the tribesmen, Baki shone like a bright gem for a time. But to his surprise, after awhile he grew weary of the praise heaped on him, of answering questions about his triumphs, of hearing the wizard, Akati, relate endlessly how in his prophecy he had clearly indicated that Baki was the chosen of the gods.

He pushed out of the circle of warriors and went up to the stone-faced Masai. He suddenly got no pleasure out of their humiliation.

"Return to your kraal," he said, "and let my friendship go with you. You will each select for yourself a gift from the burdens you carried."

Then explaining to his admirers that he wished to be alone, he stalked off toward his hut. Along the way, he noted the great number of women archly watching him, murmuring among themselves. He realized the reason for their unusual interest when he reached the hut and found that the Kaffir maiden was silently padding along behind him.

Baki eyed her appraisingly, but a vision of Tappan rose before him, so with a sigh he sent her into the hut alone while he squatted down by the door. He began to frame in his mind the words he would use when he announced that he was freeing her.

A shadow fell across the ground before him. He looked up to find N'nuka and and his daughter Tabella. N'nuka's sour face was etched with a fawning smile. He beamed softly on Baki, like a jackal viewing a haunch of meat which it has all to itself.

Tabella stood back a few steps, a more nervous look on her face, her plump legs twisting. At the sight of her Baki's heart beat faster. Had the world ever seen a more desirable woman? Compared to Tabella, the Kaffir girl was nothing.

"I have impatiently awaited your return, old friend Baki," began N'nuka. "I—I searched for you the next day after the feast and they told me you had gone. I had something important to tell you."

He paused, dry-washing his skinny hands, his bird-like eyes trying to estimate the impression he was making.

"Yes—heh, heh—I had a little too much beer that night and said things I didn't mean. Why, when Tabella told me the fool I'd acted, I rushed out to find you. Imagine me acting like that to a friend, to a person I've always thought so much of."

Baki forced himself to breathe slowly, so he wouldn't betray his excitement.

"Speak out, old one," he said harshly. "What was it you wanted so to tell me that morning?"

N'nuka faltered. This was a different Baki from the one he remembered. Some of the oily old man's confidence seeped out of him.

"Why, that I would be honored to have you for a son-in-law, though—though, of course, the marriage price you named of fifteen goats is a little too low."

He laughed artificially, and spread his hands in what was meant to be an expansive gesture.

"But then a man with your wealth, a man who it is said might even become a chieftain, doesn't worry about price. Ah, look at my daughter! Your name is never out of her mouth. You will be a happy pair, you two, and I will be a faithful father to you both."

Baki grunted disgustedly.

"Go away, old man," he said. "Your lies come too late. I no longer want your daughter."

N'nuka made queer choking noises. Trouble in setting a price he had anticipated, but never a flat refusal like this.

"Give her to M'Bulla," suggested Baki. "He is the son-in-law you wanted."

"No, no!" cried N'nuka. "It was you! You can have her for fourteen goats."

"I wouldn't have her if you gave her to me for five goats," growled Baki. "I have a woman already. Why should I be bothered with a greedy, quarrelsome wife?"

He called out to the Kaffir girl and she showed herself in the door. Tabella broke into sobs. N'nuka's face was grey. He could see himself starving in his old age, with no rich, influential son-in-law to care for him.

"Only a Tatoga wife can give you warrior sons," he gasped desperately. "Come now, a mere seven goats and Tabella is yours. A great warrior can't be satisfied with a slave."

Baki pursed his lips. He teetered unconcernedly on heels as though he had no more to say. N'nuka was a picture of misery. Tabella was wailing.

"All right, if you must get rid of the worthless wench," he said, unexpectedly,

"I'll give you five goats—no more!"

"Yes!" screeched Tabella.

But the old man had no idea of arguing. He swiftly acquiesced, afraid Baki might change his mind.

"Send her in the house then," gruffly ordered Baki. "You know where my goats graze. Go take your five."

"But the other woman? What will you do about her?" asked N'nuka timidly.

Baki looked at Tabella as he answered.

"I will decide that later, when I am better able to consider the matter."

Not until after her father had gone, his face beaded with sweat, did Tabella timidly edge past Baki's unconcerned figure into the hut. Squatting on his heels, Baki rocked a bit before calling the Kaffir girl out of the hut and sending her to Tappan.

He rocked still a while longer, then, beginning to smile to himself, he finally got up and sauntered into the hut.





“Bwana Cannibal”

By JOHN STARR

Even the Great Leopard Carson, veldt-hardened trader, could not escape the terrible gris-gris which haunts white men who eat human flesh . . .

“GET THAT LITTLE APE!” Rick Carson’s huge body plunged into the raffia grass. He came up with muck on his big hands. His ruddy face twisted into a snarl. “Over there!” he shouted, flinging his pith helmet at the trunk of a rubber tree. A tree which stood a few miles from the thousand acres of land which he had swapped for debt owed him by a wrestling promoter in Johannesburg who couldn’t pay off. In fact Rick was glad of the chance to try his hand at a rubber plantation. It would be good to settle down to some quiet after barnstorming all over the globe. Good to own something as he wasn’t getting any younger.

Kaffie, his guide, brought the squealing monkey down from the branches. Rick grabbed Congo by the tail. The monkey hopped upon the massive shoulder of his master. “You long tailed devil,” Rick glared, “Cambient would have my hide if I lost you!” The white man crawled back into the hammock. His great weight made the staves creak. The Yafouba porters took up their burden and the procession moved into the oncoming jungle night.

Up front the torch bearers lighted sticks of dry split cane. Red tongues of flame pierced the jungle darkness. It gave a

weird tint to the moldy undergrowth which choked the trunks of the trees. It reminded Rick of Cambient, the French Administrator. Cambient had likened Bongi, the new chief of the Wali’s to the undergrowth, and Nakal, the former chief, to the choked trunks of the trees.

“It ees like this,” Cambient explained, “in ze old days zee Wali was cannibals. And zis Bongi has zee soul of a cannibal. If he becomes chief, sacre bleu!”

Well he has become chief, Rick thought. I oughta know. Every day new trouble on the plantation. Fires breaking out in the warehouse. Then the water buffalo are ghosted away. Evil spirits, say my Yafoubas. I go to Cambient. I gotta right to demand protection. Where the hell is he? Hotfootin’ through the jungle with his Sudanese. Yeah, a real pal that Frenchie. Leaves me a note of warning. Tells me to stay away from Bongi until he comes back from Timbuctoo. In the meantime who’s gonna take care of the evil spirits ghostin’ my buffalo away? Well I know the answer to that one. Rick Carson.

The bwana hitched up his cartridge belt. His shaggy reddish brows were knitted with scars. His bull neck shot from his shoulders and almost swallowed his head.



He was certainly not a handsome man. But he carried his huge physique with muscular pride. Although his middle was softening to fat it was evident that Rick Carson could more than hold his own in any rough and tumble.

The nostrils of his bent nose widened as his angry thoughts heightened. I'll show these guys that they can't shove Rick Carson around. His meaty fist tapped the leather holster of his Walther automatic. I'll talk straight American to 'em. If they don't savvy maybe some lead pills will set 'em straight.

"You make talk?" Kaffie turned toward the bwana. In all the toughness of the white man's face there was a generous smile. He was really fond of this little native son of a gun. Carson growled, "Nothin', Kaffie, I'm just pitchin' pennies to myself. You know it ain't everyday that a mugg from Montana gets to meet the great chief of all the Wali tribes."

Kaffie frowned. Montana, mugg, two more words to keep in his brain. He liked working for Bwana Carson. The American paid good. He was not like the other white masters. His pockets bulged with cigarettes which he gave freely to his Yafouba workers. He got drunk once in a while but never beat anybody.

All the men had great respect for him. Hadn't Kaffie found a picture of Bwana Carson as the Great Leopard? It fell from the master's desk one day. The bwana was naked except for a leopard skin. His arms outstretched ready to crush devils. Strange words were printed on the picture. Kaffie remembered them. C.H.I.C.A.G.O. G.Y.M. Kaffie had stolen the photo and made all the Yafoubas look upon it. That was why they were following Bwana Carson into the mouth of the terrible Bongi. Because their bwana was the great Leopard himself and no harm could come to them.

"Bong-iii! Bong-iii!" wild screams broke the jungle silence. Rick Carson gripped the hammock. His green-yellow eyes alert as a cat's. Bongi's torchbearers were less than a hundred yards off. The heart of Kaffie quickened at the cry of the horrible Bongi's name. The Wali chief had even murdered his own brother to become chief.

KAFFIE looked at Rick Carson. It reassured him. Just look at the bwana's ears. Thick and curled like no ears any native had ever seen. There was no doubt who his master's *nia* was. Yes, the spirit of the Great Leopard lived within the bwana.

The caravans merged amidst wild shouting. Rick Carson noted one group of men that neither merged nor shouted. The Wali guards. Tall thin and fierce with black powder rifles slung over their shoulders, Native pea shooters, he thought, sometimes they work, sometimes they don't. But still better than spears.

An elaborate hammock with jeweled leather and brightly striped cloth came swinging through the jungle. Rick's eyes were keen. This must be the great Bongi himself. A plumed head moved from the hammock. The shriviled mummified face of an old black swept the Yafoubas and their bwanna with a swift glance. Panther teeth hung from a chain around the dried neck.

"What's his racket?" Rick shifted toward Kaffie.

The guide was puzzled. He mulled over the word. Then he smiled, "Wali witch-doctor. Name Siakin." Carson thumped to this booted feet. His lips moved and the black powder rifles leveled. "Shhh . . . shhh." Kaffie cautioned. Siakin was handed down from the hammock. He kneeled in the path. Rick saw him lift a dead tree rat from beneath his robes. The rat was placed on the path. The wrinkled hands covered it with dirt. Siakin mumbled as he sprinkled the mound with ashes.

"Now bwana can make talk." Siakin said.

Rick shoved the muzzle of a rifle aside. It had inched against his shoulder, "Pardon me, soldier," he snapped, "but I'm ticklish." The guard grumbled and stood back. Carson's hands knotted into fists on his hips. "Where's Bongi?"

The witch doctor blinked. The big white man was direct. He did not have the smoothness of Cambient. All the better. This bwana would be that much easier to deal with. The old man answered in Wali.

"What's he say, Kaffie?"

"Follow. He will lead."

"Okay." Carson trudged alongside the hammock now with the Wali witch-doctor heading the procession several hundred yards ahead. Congo the monkey chattered at the trees and bounced along on the ample shoulder of his master. Rick stopped to light a stogie. The odor of the burning cigar was pungent in the damp jungle air. It was a fraction of ash and leaf in his fingers when Siakin halted the procession.

They faced two paths. A curtain of raffia grass hung from the thickets which bordered one path. Siakin bowed before the curtain. He made signs with his gnarled fingers and prayed softly. They moved on. "What's behind that curtain?" Rick demanded of Kaffie. The young guide shrugged, "Nobody know. No go. No allow. Maybe devil."

Carson whirled around, "Let's find out. Might be they got my buffalo penned up there."

"No. No. Bwana." Kaffie pleaded. Rick saw what he meant when the Wali guards came running back. Carson stepped back in line and they trudged a few more miles. Kaffie placed a harmonica against his lips. The French Administrator had given it to him. Rick grinned, "I was wonderin' how long it would take." The guide blew a tune and the Yafouba carriers hummed. Carson's thoughts returned to the raffia curtain. I wonder what the deuce is behind it? Damned, if I won't find out.

"You talk, bwana?"

"No, just pitchin' pennies again."

The procession stopped dead. Two slabs of rock loomed up in the jungle night like gigantic doors. Torches burned upon the summit of each rock.

The Wali sang as they passed between the rocks and entered the village. Dozens of cone shaped huts ringed the clearing. At the far end, a long, flat topped thatched house was drenched in moonlight. Torches burned on the veranda.

Siakin entered the thatched house. Rick waited with impatience. The old witch doctor came forth and said, "Bongi see bwana when moon go into face of sun."

Rick moved forward. The Wali guards snapped for action. The restraining hand of Kaffie went to his bicep. Yeah, there

was no use kickin' up right now. His men were poorly armed. Maybe he could straighten things out with the chief tomorrow. "Okay, doc," he said to Siakin, "give us a place to hole up for the night."

They walked from a clearing to a lonely hut. It was a bit larger than the rest. Still Rick had to crawl in on his hands and knees. He lighted his carbide lantern. Mud walls formed a brown cell. There were no windows. Two straw mats were ready for sleeping. Wali servants brought food and drink. Rick and his Yafoubas touched none of it.

"Say, Kaffie," he whispered to his guide outside the hut, "I'm taking a walk. Watch out that nobody sees me."

The guide guessed what was on his master's mind. He begged the bwana not to go. He fingered a leather pouch around his black neck. "No can go unless have *grigris* bwana." Rick grinned and slapped his holster, "This is all the *grigris* I'll need." Kaffie watched the big figure of the white man silently slide into the jungle.

ONCE CARSON was out of sight of the village he lit the lamp. It formed a milky pool in the jungle darkness. He cut slowly through the brush and thickets. He knifed off a tangle of vines and dropped quietly on to the path. He hurried. Driven by the vision of the raffia curtain waiting for him where the paths forked beneath the moonlight.

He halted several times on the trail. The stir of animals in the brush. He held the lantern in one hand, the automatic pointed from the other. There was a scurrying sound and the jungle grew silent again. Probably, rabbits, squirrels, tree rats or some other small creatures.

His heart pounded as the trails forked beneath tropical stardust. There it was, the raffia curtain, forbidding him to take another step. It came to his waist. Rick lifted his legs high and crossed. It gave him a queer feeling to be on the other side. He was on a narrow path. Clusters of vines and dripping spider webs roofed it like a veil. He stooped and made his way cautiously. It didn't seem like the kind of place to hide buffalo.

The muzzle of his gun kept poking

ahead of him. Thorns caught in his shirt. He swore and picked them off. His bull neck twisted. What was that noise? His palm tightened on the metal butt. The leaves quivered behind him. Rick whirled around. A form dived across the path. He got a glimpse of webbed feet and dark brown fur. Otter. That's what it was. Must be a stream or lake nearby.

He breathed deeply. The smell of marshes. The strong odor of decaying vegetation oddly mixed with sweet scented flowers. A big tree loomed out of the darkness. He raised the lantern. Something sitting in the branches. The light splashed. A carved wooden idol grinning weirdly in the night with shell-teeth. Beneath it, offerings. A wicker basket of rotted fruit. Rugs, brass rings, carved ivory animals and necklaces. These savages sure gave a white man the jitters with their voodoo.

What was it Kaffie had said? Idols on forbidden paths. They marked the things that lay behind them. What things? Cool drops moistened his brow. Come on Carson, pull yourself together. He moved on. Gun projected. Lantern low. He could see each step he took. The muzzle of his revolver stopped dead at a wall of latticed vines.

The trail ended smack in a tangle of vines. His eyes shifted. Through the thickets . . . an opening . . . just about the size of a man. His elbows and knees went down upon the soft earth. The sickening smell of over-sweet flowers, the muck of the marshes, the terrible over-powering stench of decaying vegetation.

He crawled through. The thorns tore at his face. He cursed softly and got to his feet. A clearing with a small hut in the center. The door was covered with a veil of palm fibre. Suddenly he felt that someone in that hut was staring at him through the palm fibre. His heels were rooted to the muddy ground. He had never been afraid before. But now he advanced on the hut. Not because he wanted to. He felt he must. An unseen hand had swept from the jungle and was brushing him along despite his fear.

He stopped before the hut and looked beyond. The fetid waters of a swamp glistened in the moonlight. Stunted trees

circled the clearing like gnarled fingers reaching from the ground. The smell of death and decay was nausea in the pit of his stomach. The sky overhead was silent and strewn with blue chips of stars.

You won't find the answer there, Carson. You gotta look into the hut, rip the forbidden veil aside. His fingers shot out and he jerked the fibre loose. A huge shadow loomed inside. He held the lantern up. The bulging whites of eyes stared at him from a dead black face. The purple tongue protruded in gruesome mimicry. Great scars seared the sagging neck which had been choked and broken. Arms and legs were twisted weirdly. Bent out of shape. Torn loose from their sockets. The poor man, whoever he was, had been badly mangled. The stench of the dead body which was rotting to grey ash made Carson leap back.

As he turned away he got a glimpse of a silver headed cocomaque stick held in the black's bruised hands. There were valuable rings on the twisted fingers. Jewels set in ivory. He must have been a man of great wealth. No wonder the raffia curtain, no wonder the forbidden trail.

Rick searched for the opening in the thickets. His eyes looked up startled. A white strip of cloth fluttered from behind a tree. Carson's fingers sweated against the trigger. He moved close to wild berry bushes. When he glanced behind the tree the cloth was gone. He heard footsteps on a back trail. They grew fainter.

Well, it ain't a ghost anyway. Bongi must've sent someone to spot me. If I wanna insure my hide I oughta hop back to my plantation. But what good is it without my Yafoubas and the buffalo? Plus the supplies I brought with the caravan. Rick followed a short cut from the tree. Maybe I'm jumpy. Seein' and hearin' things after peekin' at the pop eyes of that murdered black. He couldn't forget the man's mangled form.

He saw the flicker of torches in the distance. The cone roofed huts rising in the night. The village wasn't far off. He stopped to get his bearings. He blew out his lantern and crept out of the jungle. His Yafoubas were sitting outside the hut. A faint tune came from Kaffie's harmonica.

He slipped behind them and crawled into the mud cell. He placed the holster beneath his twisted ear for a pillow. Then he felt the warm little monkey body of Congo press against him. He smiled and fell into deep sleep.

RICK CARSON awoke to the pounding of tom-toms. He broke sleepily eyed from the hut. It was high noon. The yellow glare ribboned against his face. Across the clearing he saw a long stretch of straw mats. Slaves were heaping calabash bowls and palm twine baskets of food on the mats.

"Feast?" he asked of Kaffie.

"For you, bwana," the guide said.

Maybe they hadn't seen him break through the raffia curtain after all. "Anybody leave the village after me last night?"

The guide shrugged, "I not even know bwana had come back." Kaffie smiled broadly, "Yes, Great Leopard do not need *grigris*." Rick grunted. Even an educated native like Kaffie was loaded with abracadabra. "What's this leopard business?" he was annoyed. "That is your *nia*," the guide said. That was another one. *Nias*. Accordin' to these babies everybody was someone else. "Okay," Carson chuckled, "My *nia* wants a cup of java." He was surprised at the speed with which his boy got the pot ready.

Rick drank greedily. Hot coffee. Couldn't do without it even in the jungle heat. He wiped his mouth on his forearm. Strapped his cartridge belt tight and threw his shoulders back. "Kaffie, tell the big chief I'm gonna pay him a visit."

"Already told." Kaffie had the pleased face of a boy who had been up to mischief. The Wali warriors came to escort the bwana and his guide. Carson recognized a familiar head, "You, keep that muzzle out of my nose like I told you yesterday. Or I'll wind that black powder rifle around your neck." Kaffie was swollen with pride for his master. Only those who carried the spirit of the big cat could be so brave.

Rick halted half-way across the compound. A boy was leading buffalo to water. "That looks like my animals," he said. He noticed the bodies of the beasts

were painted with white clay. Very queer indeed.

At the far end of the compound a fat man with soft black breasts sat in the full glare of the sun. His navel protruded like a thumb from his bloated stomach. A half dozen men surrounded him. They were dressed with more decorations than the other inhabitants of the village. A slave held an ordinary black umbrella above the fat one's shaven head. At his feet there sat Siakin the witch doctor.

Carson was aware of the curious stares. They acted as though they had never seen a white man before. Cambient had visited many times during the reign of the former chief, Nakal. But they continued to regard him like a man from another planet.

Bongi pompously motioned Carson and his guide to take straw mats and sit before him. He spoke in Wali. Kaffie interpreted. "Chief say you must be guest. Have feast."

"Yeah, what else?" Rick stared back at the heavy lidded eyes of Bongi.

"He say you have ears shape like animal."

Carson grinned, "Bongi's got leopards on the brain too, huh?" His lips stiffened. "Ask him about the buffalo." Kaffie repeated. The chief's nostrils widened with anger. Words poured rapidly from his thick lips. "He say bwana who take forbidden trail cannot ask about buffalo."

Rick Carson sprang to his feet. A dozen guns ringed him in. Bongi was giving orders. "You must give up gun," Kaffie said. The shaggy brows drew together. They'd Swiss cheese him before he could budge the trigger. He unfastened the holster. The revolver thudded in the dirt at Bongi's feet. "He say gun come back to bwana after make feast." Kaffie smiled and added, "Great Leopard do not need gun I have told him."

"Sure," Rick turned angrily on Kaffie, "my mitts are gonna turn into claws any minute." The guide did not understand the white man's anger.

Bongi smiled wide enough to show all his filed teeth. He indicated the banquet table behind cool palm trees. Rick felt he had seen Bongi before. The hut in the clearing. The murdered black. The resemblance was close. There was no doubt

now that the other was his brother, Nakal. Bongi even carried a silver headed stick of cocomacaque.

They took their places around the straw mats heaped with okra soaked in hot sauce, red peppers, giant catfish, roast pig, chicken and goat. Huge calabash bowls of milky fermented palm wine stood cooling in the shade.

The members of the court sat solemnly around Bongi and Siakin. Rick noticed a frightened youth slip in and take his place among the older men. "That is To-Pan, son of Nakal," Kaffie whispered. Carson was about to speak when the beat of tom-toms nearly drove him out of his seat. The sound thundered over the clearing.

Masked dancers pounded their naked toes in the dirt. Gaily dressed *griots* cartwheeled and clowned. Those who could not make Bongi laugh were driven off the field at the point of whips. Carson's eyes slitted. The warriors pushed a buffalo into the compound. The animal was covered with white clay. Its legs were tied. Siakin arose and mumbled. Then the beast was struck with a stone mallet. Rick's temper mounted. But he had to sit by helplessly as the beast was hacked to pieces with machetes. Siakin prayed throughout the ceremony. The white planter kept hearing the name Mokobo repeated. The animal, likely his animal, had been sacrificed to this Mokobo.

The feast continued. "Cannibals," Rick muttered. He'd forgotten that Siakin understood. Bongi offered a piece of meat of tender cut and delicious odor. There was no refusing a chief. Carson bit into it. The taste was like veal.

Siakin cackled like an aged hen, "Bwana cannibal," he repeated. Led by Bongi the court broke into laughter. He turned to Kaffie for an explanation. "Bongi say you eat piece of man." Carson shoved the plate aside in disgust.

SUDDENLY Bongi addressed him in Bambara. A language they both understood. "Guide say you have *nia* of Great Leopard?" The others leaned forward. Anxious to catch the white man's answer. Rick knew this was nothing to

joke about now. He was a prisoner. His Yafoubas were porters, not fighters. For the most part they were frightened stiff of the Wali.

"Yes, I am the Great Leopard," he said solemnly.

The chief and his court were skeptical. They kept looking at his green-yellow eyes and twisted ears. Kaffie motioned to the Yafoubas. Nothing to worry. Bwana is the big cat.

Siakin took up the questioning. "How you know your *nia* is that of Great Leopard?"

Rick hesitated. This cross-examination by a jungle D. A. had him baffled. The wrong answer and he was through. He felt Kaffie nudge him. His eyes widened at the photo Kaffie handed him. The one he had taken in Chicago ten years ago. In the days when he was Leopard Carson, two hundred twenty pounds of dynamite as the posters used to say.

It was crazy but he handed the photo to Siakin. The members of the court and Bongi examined it in detail. The chief pursed his thick lips. His eyes were shrewd blots of black. "Mokobo greater than leopard!" he shouted. The others took up the cry.

Black fingers gripped him and tore him from the feast. He struggled against the Wali warriors. His hands curled into fists that couldn't punch. He felt the blood clot his neck veins. "You dirty sons of . . ."

A knot of leather broke on his head and he staggered. They were dragging him out to the clearing.

He glimpsed the terror stricken faces of his Yafoubas. He heard Kaffie cry after him. Mournful chants and the beat of tom-toms broke against his ear drums. His eyes widened at the ring of natives which had gathered. A tidal wave of excitement had gripped them. There were shouts of Great Leopard and Mokobo. Fights broke out. Wali warriors beat them apart with whips. Now he had the score. The title of Great Leopard meant something to these people. So Bongi was tossing him in with Mokobo. If he won, no he couldn't win. That was just it. Bongi was no fool. Mokobo would finish him off and it would

be tough for every bwana between here and the coast.

The clearing was shaped in the form of a triangle. Bongi sat alone at the farthest end. His fat face grinning in the sun. Siakin hobbled out with a set of bones. He circled with his arms. Danced and chanted. He invoked the name Mokobo and left a trail of ashes and feathers.

Rick flexed his biceps. His eyes slitted. He was ready for this Mokobo. What would it be, a judo expert or some strong young black with a set of ivory knucks to crack his skull in? The boy To-Pan darted from the crowd. His dark eyes were wet with tears. He pressed a leather packet of *grigris* into Rick's hands and said hurriedly in Bambara, "May all jungle gods help you, Mokobo murdered my father, Nakal!" He vanished in the crowd.

Carson digested the words with a shudder. The bruised and mangled form of Nakal leaped into his mind. What kind of weapons did this Mokobo pack? He turned. No escape. Wali spears, whips and guns everywhere. The mob blocking the forest edge. Except for the point of the triangle where Bongi gloated.

Kaffie had moved to the edge of the crowd. He cupped his hands and shouted above the din. "Make like Great Leopard!" His voice was frantic. He got down on his knees and swayed in imitation of an animal. The frightened little band of Yafoubas stood behind him. They carried knives and arrows. One of them even carted a French pistol beneath his robes. But there was no hope from that quarter. It would be suicide to try and save him. Besides, they were porters, not warriors.

Rick hesitated. Maybe he was nuts but it was worth a try. It was no crazier than one of Joe Pierson's grapplers gettin' ready to tangle with a devil spirit in the African jungle. He dropped on all fours. The drum beats lowered. He opened his mouth and roared. Quiet gripped the village. A deadly silence. His eyes shifted. He saw Kaffie excitedly telling all that his bwana was the Great Leopard.

A pocket opened in the jungle's edge. Mokobo, the devil-spirit was led out by Wali guards. He wore a mask of shells and clay. His body covered with straw

and feathers. The guy was no higher than his chest. He swayed like a gorilla beneath the make-up. The Wali guards leaped away. They put on a good act all right. It was what he figured. An expert at jungle judo, small and panther-fast. But the crushed form of Nakal. There must be some deadly weapons beneath all that feathery straw.

Mokobo swayed toward him. Long arms swinging aimlessly. Rick stepped around and limbered up. His hand went beneath shirt and came out with a pocket knife. He concealed it in his curled palm. Just in case. He circled. It had been quite some time since his last match. His joints felt stiff. Mokobo seemed to have no definite plan. He just walked right after him.

The tom-toms began again. It knifed his nerves. His jaw tightened. Singers chanted in low voices. The African sky was a haze of silver-blue. The sun mounted high and got lost behind clouds. A thousand eyes were focused on him.

Mokobo's arm shot out. Rick leaped aside. The guy was awfully fast. He could see that. The masked figure stopped moving. The clay mouth grinned hideously with its implanted hippo teeth. Carson saw black eyeballs move beneath the slitted spaces. He glanced at the feet. Small and covered with hair. The toes were oddly flexible, like tongues. It wasn't a man. It wasn't human.

Carson drew back as the ape leaped for him. His forearm tangled in the hairy web of arms. He heard the bone snap as he spun through the air. Two hundred twenty-five pounds hurled like a feather pillow. He sat dazed. His legs crumbled beneath him in the dirt. The pain in his arm sewed his lips together.

His knife glittered on the ground. He covered it quickly with his palm.

The ape was moving toward him. Carson crawled along the edge of the crowd until his breath came back. But they expected this of the Great Leopard. He rose to his booted feet. From the corners of his eyes he saw Bongi. Leaning forward with rapt attention. The cocomacaque stick crossed over his fleshy black knees.

Carson was cornered in the triangular

space. He edged back toward Bongi. The knife tight in his hand. Mokobo swayed forward in a straight line. He was well trained in the art of murder. He took his time. Long practice in killing Bongi's enemies had taught him that he must go slow if he wanted a big meal afterwards. The ape moved for him with unerring instinct. Concentrating only on his victim.

Rick Carson's green-yellow eyes were glued on the beast's straw covered neck. He stopped fading back. He couldn't run away. The closer he got to Bongi the less space to deal with Mokobo. He thought for a moment of plunging the blade at the fat chief's middle. But that would leave him defenseless before Mokobo.

THE APE spread his straw and feather covered arms. Like the wings of a huge bat. There was no hope of dashing past them. Rick was sealed off in the triangle's corner. The shouting was tremendous. He saw Siakin get the ivory horn of ashes ready. That was what they sprinkled on the dead.

There was no more than half a dozen feet between himself and Mokobo. He gripped the knife. He'd try for the jugular vein beneath all that straw. Rick Carson lurched forward. He opened his mouth and roared in imitation of a leopard. Might as well go at it with all the trimmings. If he got the jugular there wouldn't be a doubt as to his being the Great Leopard. The shouts of the natives were wild, frantic. His roar and his forward movement had sent them into a frenzy.

The boy, To-Pan pushed through the crowd. His eyes found those who were praying for the leopard.

Kaffie turned to the Yafoubas. Hadn't he been right all along. Look at the courage of the Great Leopard. The Yafouba porters raised their heads with pride as Bwana Carson closed in on Mokobo. The leopard was the *nia* of their tribe. The Wali had never quite believed in the Yafouba legend. Now they would see for themselves who were the real warriors.

The claw-like fingers of the ape reached with blinding speed. They closed over the slower hand of the man with his open blade. Rick felt the crushing power. Heard

the savage laughter of Bongi. His hand was cracking in a hairy vise. He punched blindly at the mask with his free arm. The taloned fingers of Mokobo jolted the pain to his shoulders. A cry came from the mask as a pistol shot shattered the air. The taloned fingers relaxed. Rick dived into the screaming, confused mob and plunged into the darkness of the jungle's edge.

He tore through a web of vines. The undergrowth punched his churning legs. He raced wildly through the blessed darkness of the forest. He stopped once to hear the sporadic bursts of black powder rifles. Then he heard them coming for him. He tripped over gnarled roots of trees, cursed, picked himself up and ran like mad again. His heart churned like a dynamo. He felt the blood lock his throat.

It was tough, punching through brush that yielded stubbornly. Cutting a path through snarled thickets. He heard them closing in. There were other trails, short-cuts, they must know all of them. He was a fly against a wall. But the wall was dark enough to hide him for awhile. His ankles twisted in the undergrowth. His foot caught in a knotted mouth of roots. He ripped both his boots off and left them to rot in the jungle.

There was a breaking of daylight. A veiled path. It would be easier to run with naked feet along the path. When he heard them he could dive into the jungle brush again.

He tore along the path. The smell of marshes. The sickening scent of over-sweet flowers. The dead end wall of vines. The stink of decaying vegetation which was more the odor of the dead chief's wasting body. He grappled for the opening in the vines. He burrowed through like an animal.

The clearing of marsh land. The hut. He ran past the mangled form of Nakal slumping ashen and fly speckled in the raw sunlight. Carson cut for the swamp. His feet sank in the muck. Ferns brushed his face. The dampness of the swamp made him shiver. He glanced across a spread of bullrushes. If he could only reach the other side.

He hopped from the shore to a rotted

log. It gave way as he leaped to another one. He tracked across the swamp. The fetid waters faded beyond him as he plunged into the jungle again. Voices. The Wali. They were already on this side. Impossible! How could they make it so fast. He was a fool to think he could have evaded them.

He ran from the voices, stumbling over thickets and brush. An open shaft of grey light cut through the trees in a small clearing. They shouted at him. He was seen. He circled like a hunted animal not knowing which way to turn. His shirt and trousers hung in remnants. His face scratched and swollen. His feet two bloodied pin cushions of thorns.

Black faces peered through the branches. Wherever he turned he saw their eyes. He slid behind a clump of rubber trees. And they were there too. They reached out and grabbed him. Laughter split their lips as he tried to fight back. He whirled to face the stocky figure of Cambient.

The Frenchman removed his pith helmet and revealed a glistening bald crown. He mopped his head and sighed, "Mon Dieu, Carson, you are harder to catch than zee rabbit!"

The breath beat back into Rick's lungs. His eyes were still confused.

"I thought you were Bongi . . . the Wali,"

he blurted without thinking.

"Bongi is dead," Cambient flipped his hand, "I come back from Timbuctoo and zere is no Carson on ze plantation. I know you would not mix with zis cannibal of a Bongi. I come quick with machine gun."

Cambient removed his pith helmet and mopped his bald crown again. "I arrive and ze To-Pan's men fight with Bongi. Ah, zere is nothing like zee machine gun. Pouf! it ees all over for Bongi. And the story Kaffie tells. Sacre bleu! You fight with courage against zee ape. Ze Yafouba believe you are zee Great Leopard. You give them courage again. They shoot him in ze back. Zis revolution start led by your Yafoubas. And then I come with zee machine gun. But wait . . . you are not even listening to me!"

Rick Carson's eyes searched beyond the forest. His shaggy reddish brows knitted. "You know I wrassled a lot of gorillas from Johannesburg to Jacksonville. But I never figured that debt swapping would make old leopard Carson come to grips with a real live ape in the African jungle."

Cambient smiled, "You mean ze Great Leopard Carson."

"Yeah, that's right," Rick grinned, "The Great Leopard Carson. That's me ain't it?" he added with disbelief.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 of JUNGLE STORIES, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for Oct. 1, 1948.

State of Georgia, County of Thomas, ss.:

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared T. T. Scott, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the JUNGLE STORIES and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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(Signed) T. T. Scott,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1948.

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As the Nilimo warriors came forward, Professor Prayne tensed his muscles, took a deep breath, and sang out with all the power he could muster.

DEVIL RAIN

By WALT SHELDON

Professor Jeremiah Prayne staked his civilized, scientific brain against the mysterious, dark powers of jungle voodoo. Which would win?

WHEN THE STORM CAME Professor Jeremiah Prayne, of course, didn't at all see the poetry or the mystery of it. His good, scientific mind didn't work that way.

He stood in the bow of the flat boat, small, freckled, abstracted. From the middle of the river he could look beyond the jungle tops and mark the sky as it filled with swirling, boiling cloud, as it went from blue to yellow, to dark gray. "Amazing, the violence reached by mere thermal storms in these latitudes," he said to K'kua. Better talking to K'kua than to himself. Better even though the black didn't understand, even though he felt a

curious and very unscientific dislike for the head boy.

K'kua shook his woolly head. He was spindly, with flaring nostrils and eyes that seemed always about to pop. But he carried himself with great dignity and a slow, even step. He pointed to the approaching thunderhead. "Devil rain—fire spear. Yo. Bad."

"I daresay," scowled Jeremiah Prayne. He looked at the head boy sharply. K'kua's insistence on juju halts—to let the bearers' spirits catch up with their bodies, as he explained—had probably cost Prayne the goal of his expedition. The burial mounds had disappeared, obliterated by a

new swamp, by the time they reached the remote spot. And this after ten years of sweat and planning.

K'kua suddenly tapped his fingertips on the heel of his other hand. It was his way of calling for quick attention. Prayne turned his head, which looked rather like a sunburnt, upside-down pear, and stared with K'kua. He saw the dim movement of the jungle's edge. Just the floating of a shadow through thick trunks, tangled roots and vines . . .

"Nilimo," said K'kua.

"Yes. Naturally." Prayne resented K'kua's being obvious. After all, the Professor probably knew more about the Nilimo spirit people than the native did. Learning about them from scraps of reports had been only part of his long preparation. Hostile, suspicious and a bit mad, the Nilimo—old hands had been sure Prayne would never get through their country by river. But he'd correctly reasoned that a few rattles and bells would keep them off. And now he had not only voyaged through their country, but was returning the same way.

"No man see Nilimo," commented K'kua. "See arrow, see foot mark. Not see Nilimo."

"Oh, shut up," said Prayne wearily. The man was a little like the country itself; smoldering and immutable. Smug. The beggar had no problems beyond holding the boat crew together until they should get back. Prayne would be glad to leave him. The least he wanted now was intelligent and civilized sympathy with his rotten failure.

Yes, failure it had been. He'd planned so thoroughly and worked so hard to get the backing of the Anthropological Society. Bits of bone and wood and stone, fragments of information had passed through many hands, then come to him; and from them he had deduced a lost race—a vastly important scientific discovery. But all he'd found had been a swamp. He felt sick.

As he stood there, thinking, the storm hit. The towering thirty-thousand foot cloud came upon them like a racing juggernaut, everything in stepped-up tempo. The moment of flat, stifling calm, first.

Then wind, sweeping off the brown river toward the storm, dragging hanks of water with it. A second later the sudden, violent shift of wind, and the first lances of the rain.

K'kua's eyes were wide, and his shoulders had begun to tremble. Prayne looked at the other blacks; he saw the white rings of fear around their pupils, as they noticed K'kua and lost their own confidence.

"Listen, you bloody fool!" roared Prayne, whirling on K'kua. His voice matched the thunder—like many diminutive men he had a resounding baritone and was proud of it. "It's a perfectly natural thing, this storm! The sun heats the land and the currents rise, condense to cloud, become agitated, and create a potential between the particles! But you wouldn't understand that, would you? You'd ruin a man's life because of your damn' superstition, and——"

Prayne caught himself. His voice had begun to rise to rather shaky heights. And K'kua and the others were staring back at him with mild reproach in their eyes.

"Get on with your poling!" he said finally, gesturing and stepping to his camp chair in the stern.

Now the storm was fully upon them. Lightning bled the dark green color from jungle and sky, left it dead white for a hanging instant. Thunder blasted, rolled. The great *bambambo* tops lashed in the wind, wailing for surcease. The rain was cold and it stung. In a moment Prayne found himself soaked and shivering where a moment before he had been hot with sweat.

The flatboat pitched wildly. The boys cowered under the gunwales and in the bottom and set up a moaning which Prayne could hear between splits of thunder.

He rose from his chair, wet khaki wind-plastered to his little chest. "Get those poles!" His voice was that of a giant. "Keep the boat moving! Pole it, you damned beggars!" But the wind took the booming words, snatched them away.

Prayne caught sight of K'kua's thin club at the awning post. He hesitated before he snatched it up. Blacks were funny. It was all right for the head boy to beat upon them, but they'd been known to de-

sert white bosses who did it. He wouldn't hurt them, he decided—just shock them into action. He picked up the club.

"No, *Bondela*, no!"

K'KUA had seen him from the bow. He was holding his hand up, staggering toward him, crosswind, holding the gunwale with his other hand for support. Prayne stepped toward the first knot of blacks huddled on the deck.

"No, no, *Bondela*!"

Prayne swung the flexible rod across the shiny backs below him. The boat boys cried out; they wailed, opening red mouths and they scuttled away from him, pointing back. "*Yo! Yo! Bad!*"

Abruptly the boat jerked about. Prayne fell backwards; he almost lost his footing and had to grab the gunwale. Looking outside he saw that they had hit a stretch of rapids, and that the craft was swirling about, leaping and bouncing. He tried to shove himself to a full standing position again. He reached it halfway, and fell back once more.

A terrible explosion of lightning and sound came out of nowhere and centered on a huge tree opposite the shore. Prayne saw the flame leap from it. And then in the next instant he was falling.

He clutched, his fingers found nothing. The water hit him with a warm shock-violent and all-embracing. He thrashed about with his arms. His head came up and he yelled, and then water, like a vast palm, stifled the sound. Things swirled before his eyes. He began to see crazy flashes and colored patterns.

All he could think was: *this is a terrible way to go*. Undistinguished, unmourned, his last effort in life a failure. A miserable, unscientific fool like K'kua would live of course—live to take other men up the Congo, up the Ruki, up the Salonga, Lomela and Tshuappa, and all the other avenues of his musty, steaming land. Maybe some of them would be able to overcome the handicap of ridiculous native behavior.

There came a grayness, and instinctively he knew this was what preceded eternal dark. His chest felt tight; his head numb.

The grayness lightened. There was a

pale green, and then things began moving in it. He felt something across his chest. An arm. He opened his eyes. A black arm. A woolly head next to his own, and the other black arm flashing in steady strokes. "K'kua!" he managed to choke. The native didn't answer. Another sputtering wash hit him, filled his mouth and nose. Instinctively he struggled and felt the arm about his chest tighten. He became sensible and scientific then, and stopped struggling.

When they reached the bank, Prayne thought he could pull himself out, but he merely dropped back along the slimy mud and wet grasses. "Where's the boat, K'kua? *Basu?*"

K'kua's broad spade of a hand closed about his upper arm. He felt himself jerked roughly to his feet. Silently, the spindly, raw-boned black man pointed toward the interior of the jungle, and then shoved Prayne into it.

"Now, look here, K'kua! You can't just kidnap a man——"

K'kua shoved him hard this time, in the center of the back. "Go!" he grunted.

Prayne was no coward. He didn't actually think he could best the tall native in hand to hand combat, but he was willing to try. He drew back his fist. K'kua's arm flashed again, toward his loin cloth, and came up with the cleaver-like jungle knife. Prayne had forgotten about that.

Prayne was no fool, either. He went.

They started off through the dense foliage just as the rain died down. Prayne's heart pummeled at his ribs. K'kua wanted his life, he was sure of that, but he couldn't imagine why the black had pulled him from the rapids in order to take that life. Not that he really expected to understand natives. They were mad, all of them, utterly mad. He gritted his teeth and stumbled on. They were on an elephant trail, he saw; it was narrow but he had no trouble following it.

The drops the storm had left fell from the points of big leaves to logs or other leaves below, making loud splashes. Each one was startling in the heavy, damp hush of the jungle. Now that they were deeper into it, there was little light, little color. Prayne thought of the crypt of some vast,

natural cathedral. Occasionally a shaft of light would come from a hole in the matted roof above, but always it would seem abrupt and out of place. And there was the jungle smell. It was a musty, insistent odor of rotted leaves, rotted logs, rotted earth; it had an overtone of moist greenery. The storm had not left the land cool, only more humid. The sweat rolled from Prayne's inverted pear of a head and tiny insects buzzed about it.

They went on like that for step after weary step. Hours, it seemed to Prayne. Occasionally when the underbrush became thick in the trail, K'kua would push past the Professor and whack at it with his bush knife. But always he did it quickly—and alertly. There was no chance to jump him and capture the knife.

PRAYNE kept going. Somehow. After a while he felt he could hear the silence of the place. That was a paradox, of course—but this was a paradoxical country. He knew that the thick quiet was a thing in itself; he could measure it between the other sounds, the sudden screeching of birds, the chattering of monkeys, the whirring of startled wings, the sawing of insects.

Presently the sporadic shafts of light began to disappear, and it became darker. Prayne was still stumbling on. He was still going because he couldn't feel anything any more. He was in a numb, crazy dream. His knees gave way under him.

The Professor awoke before it was light. He awoke suddenly and in the instant of waking he curiously remembered where he was and what had happened. But it was ink black all around him. He heard a soft breathing nearby, reached over until his fingertips brushed skin.

"Bondela?" The husky whisper startled Prayne.

"K'kua! For heaven's sake, what are we—"

"Th!" said K'kua. It was the Congo sound for quiet. The native let the silence hang for another moment, then he whispered; "In tree. No move."

"What?" Prayne felt to one side of him and his hand went off the edge of a kind of platform. Now some of the gloom went

away; a full moon somewhere over the treetops made tiny motes of yellow light in the jungle. Prayne could suddenly see enough to realize that he was in a tree—at least thirty feet from the ground. He became dizzy.

K'kua was whispering again. "Boat go far, far 'way; hurry-hurry. Nilimo want K'kua, want *Bondela*. K'kua and *Bondela* hurry-hurry run 'way."

"You mean to say you—you brought me here to keep the Nilimo from capturing us?"

K'kua grunted. That meant yes.

"But, I thought—well, *why* you should do this for me? Why did you pull me from the water?"

"I head boy," said K'kua with a curious grave pride.

"This platform; you made this too? And carried me up?"

Another grunt.

Professor Jeremiah Prayne expelled a long sigh of relief. He lay back again. The yellow mottling turned to pale salmon as the big, jungle sun charged into the sky from the east. The morning birds stirred; the monkeys began chattering again. Prayne's sense of relief didn't last long; he sat up again suddenly and said: "K'kua—how do we get back?"

"Find river."

"The Ruki? Where we came from?"

"No. Find baby river. Baby to go to father."

"A stream, eh? If we follow the current we'll end up in Ruki, or Congo eventually. Well, that's logical, I suppose. But it doesn't sound easy."

K'kua didn't answer, but made his way down the tree and motioned for Prayne to follow. The Professor had to shut his eyes some of the way to keep from getting dizzy. He couldn't imagine how the black had managed to get him up to the reed platform.

They were finally on the soft, dank jungle floor and Prayne could do nothing but look about him rather stupidly. When he caught K'kua's glance he thought he saw the native smiling at him. A superior sort of smile.

K'kua said: "*Kekake*—eat!"

"Oh, yes. Quite," said Prayne. "But

what? Rotted logs?" A terrible thought struck him. "Beetle grubs."

K'kua reached into his inexhaustible loin cloth again. His hand came out with a bit of cassava root in it.

"Well, it's better than nothing," sighed Prayne. He reached for it.

K'kua shook his head. He pointed to the trail, then to the underbrush beside it. "You go. Sit." Bewildered, Prayne obeyed. He squatted, and watched the native go through a lace work of leaves. He saw him take one of the omnipresent *ngoji*, the rope like vines that festoon the jungle, and test it by running his hand along it. It seemed all right; he hacked off a length. And then he searched about with his eyes for a moment until he spotted what was apparently the right size sapling. He cut some pieces from this. While Prayne watched, amazed, he shaped three sticks, notched two of them, crossed those two and inserted a third, so that he had something shaped like a figure four. Once more he selected a sapling; a green, springy one this time, and he bent it over and fastened it to the diagonal of the 4.

The black's long, nimble fingers made the finishing touches of a spread noose, and dangling bait. Then suddenly he scuttled across the trail and was squatting at Prayne's side.

"What do you hope to——"

"*Th!*" The white man must be quiet.

Even as they began waiting, Prayne determined that he would match K'kua's patience, second for second. And when five minutes had passed he was already fidgeting. He stole a glance to the side. K'kua was immutable; a basalt statue, only his flaring nostrils alive as he breathed. Prayne's right leg began to ache, and he moved it, and a twig rubbed against a leaf. He felt K'kua's sharp look.

As he sat there the peculiar enormity of his situation hit Prayne all at once. He had planned so well; he had pitted his scientific brain, the product of civilized centuries, against a mere patch of jungle country, no more than a splash on the map. He had even foreseen that there would be little things he wouldn't quite foresee. But he hadn't counted on this.

He hadn't counted on being alone in a vast jungle with none of the other handy products of civilized centuries available. As for K'kua, he was handy enough following a trail, wielding a bush knife—but could he bring Prayne out alive?

HE HAD TO SINK back to a sitting position. His leg was numb. Then the blood came into it again and he winced with the prickling pain. Again, as K'kua looked at him, Prayne thought he detected a faint, superior smile. He began to hate the black, again.

In the trail there was a sudden, swishing noise, a flash of movement—and then the sapling sprang upright, slapping leaves. Dangling from the noose was a tiny antelope.

Prayne watched with open mouth while K'kua jumped to the animal and quickly cut its throat. He wouldn't have believed it.

Later they sat at a fire. Prayne tried to help with it, but K'kua shoved him away and patiently showed how to set a fire that didn't smoke, with dryer sticks spoked, like a wheel. The Professor's only contribution was matches from his oiled silk pouch.

When they had eaten they moved on again. And in spite of Prayne's determination, the nightmare weariness came long before the morning was out. Once again the dim jungle was an endless, soupy thing that hung all about him, sapping the senses. They finished the antelope at mid-day, and K'kua found a slightly bitter fruit to go with it.

The afternoon rests were more frequent. Prayne knew that he stumbled more than ever, but he could scarcely feel it. When he found scratches on his skin, they were surprises. K'kua had to point out the spot on his ankle where a jigger flea had bored in.

In all the day the men said probably fewer than fifty words to each other. At nightfall, K'kua built another platform. And at nightfall they heard, for the first time, the drums . . .

The beat started insidiously, the first few thumps not quite recognizable for what they were. Then the recognition

grew with the volume of the sound. Boom-boom-boom. Boom. It rocked through the jungle. Direction? It was everywhere. Far and near. One drum, but from all sides. It kept beating, on and on.

"Nilimo," whispered K'kua.

Prayne threw a startled glance toward the head boy's outline in the gloom. They weren't out of the mad tribe's back yard, yet, apparently. Had K'kua made a mistake in his calculations? If only Prayne could see the sky, note the stars—his science would give them direction, then. It would be surer than black instinct, he was certain of that.

Boom-boom-boom. Boom.

"Nilimo know we here. Nilimo want find us."

"Obviously," said Prayne.

He didn't really sleep that night, not in the sense of continuous rest. The dark hours were a series of catnaps set between wakeful moments in which the drums slogged into his brain. His under lip was trembling and his fingers shook when morning came.

Again Prayne descended from the tree and looked rather helplessly at his companion. The drums, sounding somewhat muffled, were still beating.

"No eat," said K'kua.

"No eat?" Prayne cocked his head. He was hungry, of course—but he felt a curious sense of triumph. K'kua, damn him, was stuck at last. He wasn't master of the jungle, after all.

K'kua pointed along the trail. "Water."

Prayne shrugged and followed him. Obviously the native had something ridiculous on his mind possibly some bit of juju such as that he had used to delay the expedition in the first place. But he could nothing but trot along.

They moved through endless undergrowth and things repeated themselves until the senses were dulled. It seemed they hacked the same vines, pushed aside the same leaves, stepped over the same rotted logs a hundred times. Prayne held up a little better. He was getting used to it.

They broke from the jungle suddenly and they were on the bank of a narrow stream.

Prayne stared at K'kua, then grinned,

"Good boy." He looked at the stream the way one looks at a deliverer. It moved sluggishly; it was thick and brown, but it had a definite current flowing to the right—by following this they'd be able to reach one of the larger waterways. He knew now why K'kua hadn't taken time to catch food that morning. Then he brought his head around suddenly. "But how do we travel on it? No boat—"

K'kua was already eyeing some trees. He walked to one about the thickness of a man's body, frowned at it, and peeled a bit of bark. Then he began to hack at it with his jungle knife.

Prayne sat and watched. There was nothing else he could do; he had no implement, and couldn't help. He watched with wonder and a kind of envy as the black delivered blow after blow without pause. The sweat glistened on the skin of his back; his shoulder blades rolled under the supple covering with each stroke—yet he wasn't even breathing hard. The heavy knife bit into the soft wood, making a hollow, clopping sound. Chips flew.

It took K'kua most of the day to build the raft. When the tree had fallen he trimmed the branches, then divided it into two lengths of about six feet each. He foraged a little way downstream after that, Prayne with him, until they came to a thicket of reeds. Prayne helped gather the stalks. These were then laid as a platform over the two buoyant logs and lashed with *ngoji* vine.

At last they were ready to shove the raft into the water.

THE DISTANT drums had changed the rythm of their song. There were several of them now; they seemed to be conversing. Prayne's ears had begun to accept the sound, absorb it without really hearing it.

Then K'kua stiffened suddenly. His rangy head turned and quivered in his long neck. His lids came down over his bulging eyes, making slits. He listened for a moment. "No go water," he said, turning to Prayne. "Go foot." He motioned to the jungle wall across the stream.

"What?" Prayne's sandy, rather bushy eyebrows twisted themselves into an eccen-

tric curl. He looked at the raft that had taken them all day to fashion; he looked at the oppressive jungle, and he looked back at K'kua again. He pointed to the raft. "Boat. *Basu*," he said firmly.

K'kua shook his head. He pointed downstream. "Juju. Drum say juju."

"Oh, good Heaven, no!" said Prayne, in exasperation. He put his own hands to the end of the raft. "Look, K'kua, suit yourself with your nonsense, if you will. I'm taking this thing downstream."

"No, *bondela*, no——"

Prayne didn't listen. He was already worrying the raft into the water. A moment later he was on it, holding it to the bank by a bush. He had his other hand on the long pole K'kua had cut. "Well, K'kua—are you coming?"

The black's face was contorted. His great nostrils flared in and out; his eyes were steady and unblinking. Finally he stepped from the bank on to the raft. "I head boy," he said.

The sentiment almost touched Prayne. He laughed and said, "You're a good fellow, K'kua—just a little unscientific, that's all."

And Prayne felt so good that he insisted on poling. He scarcely noticed the way K'kua sat there, swiveling his head back and forth, burning fear in his eyes. He let the solid green cliffs of jungle go past on either side. The sun beat down upon the stream and the air was a warm sea; all movement seemed suspended, detached from reality. A flock of homing parrots shot across the bow with guttural screams. A crocodile splashed from the bank.

Presently the sun was dropping into the west and sending blood red rays across the tree tops. The shadows were dark and purple on the yellow water. There was abruptly a kind of mound in the stream ahead. It crossed from bank to bank. Prayne raised himself and squinted. "What's that—hippo?"

K'kua stirred beside him. The black grabbed the pole, moved to the fore part of the raft and shoved into the water ahead, braking. The current pushed the raft on and he braked a second time.

"What the devil, K'kua," said Prayne. He could see that the object across the

stream was a dam of mud and reeds.

And then in the next instant—casually, it seemed—the banks of the stream were lined with tall, ebony warriors carrying spears and shields.

K'kua let out one hoarse, whispered word. "*Nilimo*!"

Prayne stared about him, dumbly. There were at least a dozen savages on each side. They simply stood there, looking quietly at the two men on the raft, but in each noncommittal stare there was an evil look of death. Flat, pitiless stares——

Prayne groaned. He understood now why K'kua hadn't wanted to take the raft. He'd read something in the drums—figured it would be probable that the Nilimo would be waiting for them on this stream. His only hope now was that it would be quick, without agony, without torture.

The raft bumped into the dam and stopped.

It made a curb above the water juts high enough to hold them there.

Prayne gaped at the warriors. They still stood there, and none had made a move toward the trapped men. They were silent. Prayne felt hollow and lost inside, but somehow too overwhelmingly terrified to cower or tremble. All he could do was look. They were men of long, stringy muscles, and of heads that sloped back from the eyes. Their faces were striped blue and white; their chests and upper arms decorated with raised scars. One who seemed to be the leader stood a little apart and sported a kind of crown of white feathers.

"Talk to them, K'kua. See if they understand."

But K'kua was rigid; his eyes were wide.

Prayne doubted that he heard.

The things he'd learned about the Nilimo in his years of preparation galloped through Prayne's head. They were a suspicious, untamed jungle tribe who cultivated little and lived by hunting. Everyone else was their enemy, to be killed. They were insanely superstitious; they would make a journey of days or weeks to circle an unpropitious omen in the regular path.

THE LEADER spoke suddenly, pouring out staccato syllables in a heavy, strident voice. Someone across the stream answered. Others chimed in. There was a kind of rhythm to their verbal exchange, as though it were a set ritual. Monosyllables and short sentences went back and forth, then rose slowly in pitch and intensity. It was clear enough what they were doing. They were working themselves up to the moment when they would pounce upon the captives. And after that? Prayne could only think of nameless things and shudder.

He sat there, then, while they called and talked and began their first, faint stirrings. The air of late day was damp against his cheeks, the sweat wouldn't go. It dripped from his chin.

Yet he felt chilled inside.

And then abruptly it was cool on the other side of his cheek. Prayne frowned and tossed a quick glance upward. He couldn't see much of the sky, but the scattered cumulus puffs were getting grey with veils of trailing virga. He frowned more deeply. Humid air, convectional instability, and a sudden wind shift. Scientific factors, all.

His mind raced. As he sat there listening to the words of the Nilimo. There were several phrases that they kept repeating. He hadn't the slightest idea what they meant, but from their tone, they seemed to be threats or invectives of some kind. "*Ibwa loyoka!*" the chief would call. "*Na!*" another would answer. And then several would chime in with the same grunted word.

Now the warriors on the bank had picked up their spears and were brandishing them, or holding them across their chests. Their cries were becoming more frequent; their movements more agitated. The leader had begun a kind of shuffling dance where he stood.

Professor Jeremiah Prayne drew a deep breath. He stood up. He saw them glare at him, and he tensed every muscle of his legs to keep himself from swaying on the shaky platform. He raised his arms slowly to the sky, filled his chest, and then sang out with his deep, stentorian voice, using all the power he could muster.

"*Ibwa Loyoka! Na! Na!*" roared Professor Prayne.

Their chattering stopped short. They gaped, slightly puzzled, as he'd figured they'd be. There was for a moment the heavy silence of the jungle weighing all about.

And then from the south came the first rumblings of thunder.

Now the eyes of the Nilimo warriors opened wide. They stared at each other, at Prayne, at the sky, and began to mutter.

"*Na! Na!*" Prayne boomed at them. He shot his finger out, pointed to the savages one by one. Several cowered back as he did so.

More thunder, and louder this time. The smaller clouds were scuttling across the sky fleeing the wrath of the greater one that approached.

Prayne spread his arms and sent a gurgling howl from his throat. He shot his opened fingers at the blacks, in the conventional gesture of imparting a curse. A few back further into the jungle. "*Na! Na!*" said Prayne. The leader kept darting his eyes about.

Lightning flashed. "*Ibwa loyoka!*" roared Prayne. The thunderclap followed it, rocking the sky. A black curtain drew swiftly overhead. The vanguard drops pecked at the brown surface of the stream.

The warrior with the plumed crown emitted suddenly a long, chattering cry; and the others replied with a kind of moan. Prayne continued his curses, his meaningless roars and fantastic gestures. And then the body of the storm pounced upon them. The rain came in solid waves, diagonally, across the lashing tree tops. The stream which had been sluggish a moment before, was suddenly a churning, boiling thing. Lightning shocked the universe; thunder sent echoes to the horizon. All through it, Prayne stood there, waving his arms and roaring. The words didn't matter any more.

The raft began to turn about, driven by wind and rushing water, and Prayne shuffled desperately to keep his stance. K'kua was still at his feet, but he had no time to look at the man and see his reaction. Then part of the top of the dam gave way; the water began to rush over

it. The raft lunged forward, and slid halfway across the dam, then became stuck.

Suddenly the white-plumed chief was running toward them along the top of the dam, screaming and lifting his spear. With his free arm, he was beckoning to the others.

Bitter fear gripped Prayne. He'd known his diversion couldn't last forever, but he'd hoped that it would somehow shake them enough to make escape possible. It was probable that the sudden buckling of the dam had spurred the chief to action. Prayne turned, held his pear-shaped head high, thrust his narrow chest forward, straddled his legs and awaited the spear. He'd done his scientific best but it hadn't been quite enough to fight this crazy unscientific land.

There was a flash of movement at his feet. K'kua sprang from a crouching position, and leaped forward along the top of the dam. The heavy jungle knife arced through the air. For a terrible instant lightning flashed again and put sharp, bright outlines to everything—before him Prayne saw the momentary tableau of death; the bush knife cutting the Nilimo chief nearly in half, the rising shoulders of the spindly head boy—

The raft shook and swayed. More of the dam gave way. "Come, K'kua!" shouted Prayne. "Hurry!" the black made

the surface of the raft again just as it plunged across the broken dam and shot downstream.

PROFESSOR JEREMIAH PRAYNE had never in his life been as glad to see anything as he was to see the broad Ruki. The river appeared suddenly as the stream turned a sharp bend, then entered it. Prayne delivered a long, heavy sigh of relief and felt happy moisture in his eyes. He turned to K'kua who was poling, and grinning.

"Hurry home," said Prayne, smiling. There was fondness for the black in that smile. Beneath Prayne's joy there was also a sweeping, peaceful feeling—the kind of quiet strength that could easily withstand such disappointments as finding a burial mound obliterated by a swamp. He was taking no relics back with him, but he was taking something else infinitely more valuable.

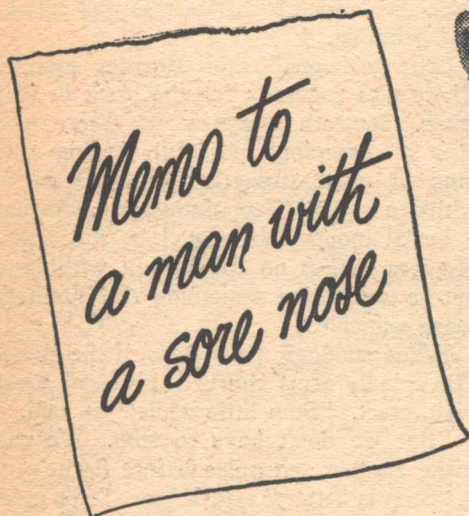
K'kua suddenly poled toward the shore. His spindly arms churned, his head stood high, erect. "Stop little while," he said.

"But we don't have to stop. We can make another ten miles before dark—"

"Stop is better," said K'kua. "Not good if body go too fast for spirit—"

Prayne stared at the black for a moment. Then he widened his smile. "K'kua," he said, "I believe you have a point there."





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PANTHER WIZARD

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

THE FACTORY, WHICH CONSISTED of a half dozen huts, a bungalow and a tall flagstaff, clung to the bank of the river with the indefatigable jungle pushing at it from behind. Deep in the *zone d' Insecurite*, surrounded by the untamed Bubundi who still nourished their young warriors on the hearts of enemies slain, its only contact with the

outside world was the Sanaga River.

But for all that Hugh Barran, the trader, had amassed a small fortune during the ten years he'd spent at the post. Much of what went "in" and all of what came down from the upper reaches of the river passed through his compound. And he was still on the right side of forty; tall, supple, with fine grey eyes framed in a

Barran's automatic spat death when Ameke's warriors broke from the bush.



face brown and wrinkled as if it had been baked in an oven. He had one companion, and that a black man. He spoke without the bitterness common to men who love solitude, but he was remote, inscrutable—a resurrected man with knowledge he did not choose to share. His nearest white neighbors were the Lautecs, who lived at the Government post twenty miles down river, called Navabi.

As a minor Government official at the coast Andre Lautec might have lived out a useful life, but as *Chef de Sub Region*, with no more than a dozen native troopers to back him up, he was hopelessly inadequate. It was his job to collect the native head-tax; it took something plus a title and brass buttons to get it. In common with the majority of mankind the Bubundi resented the burdens of civilization and were no less reluctant to shoulder them and uncommonly successful in their method of evading them. Whenever Lautec made his official tour up river they withdrew into the fastness of their jungles, to return only when Lautec's launch chugged down river again and their look-outs' drums throbbed the "all clear". It was a game of hide-and-seek—an amusing diversion from the Bubundi point of view, but it drove Lautec mad. Lacking the natural authority that comes with strength of character, Lautec tried to make the natives obey and respect him by a precocious display of brute force with the result that rebellion smouldered all around him.

For every trader along the river his name had become synonymous with trouble. For Hugh Barran it meant all of that and more. It was too dangerous now for Jeanne, Lautec's niece, to make her monthly trips up to the factory, ostensibly to look over his stock of can goods and gew-gaws. She was not yet twenty; immature by the scale of years, but by any other she was what the Bubundi called *bonto elengi*, that is to say, an eye full of femininity. Barran had got into the habit of looking for her, yet it was not until she failed to come that he realized that he was in love with her. The discovery gave him no joy. It made him sweat and he spent a good deal of his time thinking about it.

He was thinking of her now as he sat on his veranda watching a pale moon rise above a veil of clouds. Somewhere back of the hills a drummer was forcing space and time to speak his mind. Barran frowned, he had an ear for the drums, he knew most of the calls. But lately he'd been unable to make anything of them. Evidently the Bubundi were using a secret code.

He rose and paced the veranda from rail to rail with long swinging strides. His heels beat against the damp wood with a dull sound.

Why didn't Lautec quit? He was licked. Why didn't he get Jeanne out of the country before something happened? For that matter, why didn't he go down to Navabi himself and have it out with Lautec? He paused and stood looking down river, following its silvered course to the first bend where the upright trunks of the trees faded into shadowy perspective.

He knew the answer to that last one. He couldn't trust himself with Jeanne anymore. If he didn't blab like any love-sick fool she'd know it anyway—women were so damnably astute! If he were ten years younger—but he wasn't. He was fifteen years her senior with a face as ugly as the sins of his youth.

Suddenly a large canoe shot around the bend—a large war-canoe with twenty paddles flashing and churning the water to foam. It came swiftly, a black shadow hugging the near bank of the river where the current was slacker. In a moment the measured beat of a drum timing the stroke of the paddles became audible. Barran's tense attitude relaxed, they were making too much noise to be bent on mischief.

"Ho, Goji!" he called his headman.

A screen door slammed. Goji came out onto the veranda. He stood six feet two on his splay feet; he was mission educated, a nominal Christian at best, for he boasted that he had eaten a dozen men before the white lords came. His filed teeth and powerful jaws attested to his competence if not to the fact.

"Make the guests huts ready, Goji," Barran told him. "Light the lamps."

THE BUBUNDI WARRIORS landed and made their way up to the gates of the compound, shouting and laughing. It was only when Gigi opened the gates to let them in that Barran saw the white pigment, used in a purifying ritual, that streaked the black, muscular body of their leader. His eyes narrowed, they'd had their fun. They were fresh from a killing.

Their headman came swaggering across the compound. He was naked but for a strip of cloth drawn between the crotch tied to a raw hide thong about his waist from which his war clubs dangled and a bull's tail trailed behind. A heavy leather pouch of European make hung from a cord about his neck.

Barran hitched his gun-belt and came to stand at the head of the veranda stairs as the headman placed his foot on the bottom step.

"I see you, White man!" The deep-toned greeting was accompanied by a bold stare and Barran's jaw tightened. To be addressed so by a native was an insult, the bitter fruit of Lauteq's incompetence.

"I see you, warrior!" he returned. "How are you called? And where is your village?"

The headman eyed him insolently before he answered: "What is it to you, White Man, whence I come or where I go? I am called Ameke. I travel far and swiftly and I would have guns and powder for my young men."

"The Government has forbidden trade in guns until the Bubundi pay their taxes," said Barran, curtly. "I will give you food and shelter for the night, but first you must give up your spears for me to keep until the morning."

The big Bubundi stepped back a pace and bared his teeth; then he lifted his spear and shook it, the copper rings on his arms jingled. "No man takes Ameke's spear!" he said, with fierce pride.

"Is it so?" Barran answered coolly. "Then Ameke sleeps in the bush and goes on his way hungry. I have spoken!"

Ameke's great chest rose and fell with his quickened breathing. The spasmodic tightening of his jaw muscles and of his grip upon the shaft of his spear showed plainly what was passing through his mind.

There were twenty warriors behind his back, before him one white man and his servant. A store to be looted, escape into the jungle easy. Barran knew that between him and death there was just the prestige, the thickness of his white skin.

"Bid your warriors to pile their weapons at my feet, Ameke," he repeated firmly. Then he walked down the steps unhurriedly and, reaching out his hand, grasped the headman's spear.

There was a moment of brief resistance, the mere tensing of muscles as pride tightened Ameke's grip on his weapon. Then his heart misgave him. There was no fear in the white man's eyes. Truly a great warrior this one, who walked among hostile spears as if they were sticks in the hands of women! *Ai*, his *anu* was strong! Ameke's gaze wavered, his hand opened and dropped to his side.

Barran balanced the heavy, iron-shod weapon in his hand. "It is a man's weapon," said he, with a placating smile while the cold sweat trickled down his spine.

One by one the Bubundi piled their painted shields and weapons on the veranda. At a word from Barran, Goji carried them inside. When it was done Ameke took the bag from his neck. Said he: "Lord, we go far into the jungle, perchance where no man has been before. Surely, you will give us guns for this journey. See, I have money. Enough to pay the tax and to trade for the guns." He opened the bag and emptied its contents on the ground.

Barran's eyes opened wide as they came to rest on a heap of silver coins with the glint of gold among them. More money than a whole tribe could earn in a year! Then the color drained from his face as the significance of it struck him with the force of a blow. Ameke was fresh from a killing. He had come from the direction of Navabi—Lauteq—Jeanne! A hoarse cry broke from his lips, his hands shot out and grasped Ameke by the shoulders, in a moment he tripped and flung him to the ground. Then he was on his knees, astride the big black with his thumbs driving into his windpipe. Frantic with apprehension he shouted in English:

"You black ape—what have you done?"

Talk, blast you! Talk!"

AMEKE'S EYES BULGED, he was all but beyond speech. He heaved and writhed in a death struggle like a cat in a sack. Then hands were clawing at Barran. His shirt was ripped from his back. A blow on the head dazed him and Ameke threw him off. He struggled to his feet with one of the blacks clinging to him like a leech. He grasped the black by his wiry hair with one hand and got a good grip on his loincloth with the other. With the strength of desperation he heaved him up above his head and threw him among his companions as they surged toward him. Before he could get his gun clear of the holster another jumped from behind, pinning his arms with lean, black legs. Barran bucked like a horse, and shook him off as Goji rushed into the fray, swinging a war-club.

Goji had the reach of a gorilla and with a club he was terrific. Four of the Bubundi were stretched out cold before one had put a hand on him. They broke and ran, then gathered around Ameke while Goji strutted before them shouting taunts and insults. Barran loosed a couple of rounds over their heads. Before the echo of the shots had died away they were racing for their canoe, with Ameke well in the lead.

With a whoop Goji started after them, but Barran called him back. He was obsessed by one idea, to get to Navabi as quickly as a dug-out and paddles would take him. He went up the veranda steps in two jumps. With shaking hands he armed himself. *In the name of heaven, what had happened to Jeanne!* He rushed out bare-headed, wild-eyed and with the ribands of his torn shirt flying behind him. Goji fell back with his mouth open when he saw Barran's face. He thought his Bwana had gone mad, and he was not far from wrong.

"Come on!" Barran yelled at him and raced for the river. He ran their light dug-out out into the stream and sat in it cursing and bellowing for Goji at the top of his voice. Presently Goji came looping down the trail. He had Barran's pith-helmet and a shirt in one hand a rifle in

the other.

"You're like a mother to me," said Barran, somewhat mollified. "Get in."

Goji gave him a shocked look. Said he: "The store is not locked yet, Bwana. You have the key."

"To hell with it!" Barran exploded. "Shove off!"

Lautek's bungalow stood on the left bank of the river opposite to the native village of Navabi. A stockade, fifteen feet high, surrounded the post. There was a parade ground of hard, red earth. A patch of lawn and a garden shaded by elun trees faced the bungalow behind which crouched the thatched huts of Lautek's *seviteurs* flanked by their cultivated *quartiers*.

The first thing Barran saw when he entered the compound was the body of a native trooper lying in front of the open gates. He had been speared to death. At the sight of it he stopped, wiping sweat from his forehead while his eyes traveled slowly around the silent compound. There were other bodies, sprawled out in grotesque positions. All native troopers, not a Bubundi warrior among them. Surprise attack, panic and massacre, the old tragic story. He passed a shaking hand before his eyes. There would be no survivors.

He found Lautek under an elun tree. The blood from several spear wounds had congealed on his white coat and the ants had been busy for some time. An automatic pistol lay where it had fallen from his hand. Barran picked it up and pulled out the clip. Lautek had died before he could fire a shot.

The sky was turning gray; and orange pillars of light supported a low ceiling of dark clouds in the east. But not a living thing stirred in the native village across the river. The Bubundi had scattered into the jungle, for French justice could be swift and stern. Yet the Bubundi had chosen a good time to wreck their vengeance upon Lautek. The rainy season was about due. Soon the river would be in flood, a punitive column would not be able to penetrate far beyond Navabi before autumn. Meanwhile, there were certain things he must face. He set his teeth and walked toward the bungalow.

"Search the compound and the huts for

the white woman's body, Goji," he said in a flat voice, speaking for the first time.

The bungalow had four rooms. The living room had been rifled. Papers littered the floor and there was an empty cash-box that had been hacked open. Barran went to one of the bedrooms. The faint odor of perfume came to his nostrils as he opened the door. He paused licking dry lips, then pushed the door open quickly. The room was empty. Everything seemed to be in order. It must be outside, he thought, and sat down on the bed with his head between his hands; too sick at heart to do more than wait. He lifted his head as Goji entered the bungalow and came to stand before him.

Goji held up his ten fingers: "So many men are dead, Bwana."

"No women?"

"None, Bwana."

A great weight seemed to lift from Barran's brain and for the first time that night he began to think straight. Of course, the young Bubundi warriors would not slaughter the women, not when the price of a bride ran to three cows and five goats. At face value a white woman would not be worth that much, but as a hostage she'd be worth her weight in gold! That was it! They'd take her with them, hide her somewhere in the jungle. When the French caught up with them mild punishment would be the price of her life. Where would they take her? He'd been long enough in the country to make a good guess. Everyone, including the French officials knew that the Bubundi still gathered at a secret place deep in the jungle where they practised the dark, bloody rites of their forefathers. Jila Morogi, The Meeting Place of Panther Wizards they called it—No white man knew its location; but Goji did, his grandfather had been a renowned wizard in the old days. The trick would be to get him to talk. He looked at the big Bubundi with speculative eyes, then:

"Much evil has been done here, Goji," he said. "And many of your people will die for it, which is a pity because the witch men put the evil into their hearts. But the witch men will not die. No, they will live to sharpen spears for better men to

throw!" He paused waiting for his words to take effect. But much to his astonishment Goji's answer was a deep laugh. Then he looked at Barran steadily and said:

"I know what is in your heart, Bwana. Am I blind? You desire the white girl above all other things, even above the store where there are enough goods to buy many women. Well, she is not among the slain. You think she has been taken to Jila Morogi, as I do. You would follow, but you do not know the way. So, you will ask me to take you there."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Barran with a shocked expression. "Am I that easy to read?"

"We have lived together for many years as brothers, Bwana."

Barran caught the note of reproach in the other's voice. Said he: "I should have known that it was enough to ask. What is your answer, Goji?"

"You know that it is death for the white man who sets his feet on the trail to Jila Morogi, Bwana. But I see that your heart is set on it. If I did not show you the way you would find it yourself, and then you would surely die!"

"Hm-m," said Barran with a quick look into the other's face. "My brother has something more in mind."

"Even so. You speak the language of my people well, and it came to my mind that if your skin were as black as mine they would not know you for a white man in the dark."

Barran ran his hand over his rugged features,

"You're not far wrong at that," said he with a wry smile.

TWO DAYS LATER they were fifty miles above Navabi, laboring up stream in their light dug-out. Emerging from a gorge the river had broadened into what the Bubundi proudly called "our own water". It was a narrow lake with reedy banks behind which grew trees of every variety, most prominent the mimosas with their cream balls and feathery foliage. There were patches of sandy beach sparkling with mica where the crocodiles lay sunning. A little further on they came to a small bay with trees arching over it

to form a cool arbour. Several canoes were drawn up on the beach. Goji pointed with his dripping paddle.

"Jila Morogi is three hour march beyond this place, Bwana," he said. "We will camp here until it is dark."

They beached the canoe and dragged it up into a patch of reeds. There was a narrow game trail, a rut almost knee high, leading into the dim shadows of the forest.

"It is a trail that no white man has set foot on before," Goji told Barran, gravely.

"From here on the going gets tough, eh, Goji?"

"True, witch doctors guard their secrets well. The path is charmed for those who have paid their tithe to the wizards. But for us—" He broke off, pulling a small object out of his loin cloth. He handed it to Barran with a placating gesture.

"Wear this around your neck, Bwana. It is a charm against the evil of this place. See, I have one like it."

Barran accepted the charm with a quizzical smile. It was the dried hand of a monkey. He said: "You're backsliding, Goji. What would the good priest say to this?"

"It can do no harm, and it might do much good," retorted Goji.

Barran laughed: "Better be on the safe side, eh?"

Goji's face set into stubborn lines: "We go no further without them," said he.

"Oh, all right!" said Barran hastily. "Did I say I wouldn't wear the damned thing?"

At sunset they put out their fire. Barran stripped and Goji helped him to blacken his body with the oil and lamp black they had brought with them. He exchanged his breeches for a loin cloth and covered his hair with a gaudy woolen hat such as the Bubundi bucks were proud to wear.

"Well?" he demanded as Goji eyed his disguise critically.

"The face is not good, Bwana."

"It never was," growled Barran. He tucked his automatic into the folds of his loin cloth. Goji carried an extra clip of cartridges and the flat tin of lamp black. A small bundle made up the rest of their

equipment.

Before midnight they were deep in the jungle, pressing on at a dog-trot. The night was inky black but secret markings on the trees made it possible for Goji to follow the trail. The noise of jungle life was all around them. Green eyes flared like lanterns and went out as lurking beasts slid through the underbrush with rustlings as faint as sighs. Thorns tore Barran's skin, and once a liana, invisible across the trail, caught him under the chin and all but jerked his head from his shoulders. After that they went slower while the noise of the river faded to a whisper in their ears.

After they had gone some distance further an owl hooted. Goji paused, fingering the charm about his neck and muttering a spell against evil. Then he started again, changing his direction for that whence the sound had come. After a few minutes an owl hooted again, so close and so suddenly that Barran was badly startled. Goji halted and, motioning Barran to silence, clapped his hands making a hollow sound. Answering claps came from nearby. Suddenly a figure dropped from a tree rustling as it passed through the leafy branches. It brushed by Barran, beckoning Goji to follow. The bush through which they were passing became thicker, and soon the forest was alive with shadowy figures. Vaguely Barran could see the naked forms of men and women as they fluttered by, plunged into the underbrush and were gone.

At last they came to a clearing where high, sheer cliffs swept around to form an amphitheatre. Barely discernible in the deep shadow cast by the walls stood a large square hut surrounded by several smaller ones. In the fore-ground there was a low mound with two slabs of stone on top of it, one flat the other upright, like a throne on a dais.

AT A SIGN from their guide Goji squatted down about twenty feet from the mound. As Barran took his place beside him he started to speak but Goji silenced him with a quick gesture. Looking into his companion's face Barran saw that his eyes were fixed on the square hut, which he recognized as a ju-ju house.

As his eyes became more accustomed to the twilight of his weird surroundings, he made out the figure of an old man, emerging from the shadow of the huts. He was followed by a procession of nude forms, clapping their hands and chanting as they came. They broke into two streams, circling the clearing while two attendants assisted the old man up the mound where he seated himself on the stone slab.

"He is Angoi, the Moranthi, chief of all the wizards," Goji told Barran in a tense whisper. "He was an old man when my father brought me here."

An abrupt silence came to the clearing as the old wizard raised his hand. When he spoke his voice sounded like the crackle of dried leaves.

"Who has come?" he demanded.

The black who had acted as their guide stepped forward. "Goji, the grandson of Goji the Wizard."

"*Aie, aie*, I know the father, his spirit talks with me. Let the grandson come forward!"

"Goji rose and walked close to the mound. The old man peered down at him.

"Do you come for good or evil, O son of Goji?"

"For good, O Moranthi," Goji's deep voice answered.

"Is it so?" Then the old man's voice crackled on in sing-song cadences: "Yet Goji no longer walks in the path of his fathers. No longer does he pay his tithe to the Moranthi, or bring his goat to the sacrifice. *Aie, aie*, he has put aside his shield and spear and carries a gun for a white man!"

"True, I have done all these things," Goji answered without hesitation. "But now my heart inclines to my own people again. I bring my tithe. Gold, O Moranthi, the white man's gold!"

"Good, good!" the old man chuckled, then he shot out a crooked finger, pointing at Barran.

"Who is this stranger who comes with you?"

There was a pause before Goji answered, and Barran broke out into a cold sweat. They had planned carefully, rehearsed every move. But he had no illusions, he knew that it took more than

lamp-black to hide a white skin. To gain time, the few hours remaining before daylight was the best he could hope for. And in those few hours he must find Jeanne, get her away—

"He comes from far away, O Moranthi," Goji's voice cut in. "His father was an Arab but his mother was of our people. He would be one of us. He, too, brings gold."

"You talk much of gold, O son of Goji. But I do not see it. Where is the gold?"

"There is much of it and it is heavy, Moranthi. We hid it down by the river. When it is light we will show your people where it is."

The old wizard was muttering while his hands moved in jerky gestures. Talking it over with himself or the spirits Barran thought with a grim smile. He was like an animal prowling and whimpering around a baited trap. He knew there was something wrong but the smell of the gold was too strong.

The old man rose. "Let Goji and the stranger sleep in one of the huts," he announced his decision. "Tonight I will make magic. If they speak the truth, it is well. If they do not, they will die. I have spoken!"

Their guide beckoned them to follow. They crossed the clearing walking toward the huts. As they approached the outer circle of squatting initiates a stalwart figure arose from among them.

"I know you," said a deep voice in greeting.

"I know you, Ameke," answered Goji, and shouldered his way past. Barran was seized with a violent fit of coughing. He clamped his hand over his nose and mouth. He passed the big headman with his head drawn down between hunched, shaking shoulders.

Their guide had conducted them to one of the huts and they were seated in noisome darkness before Barran had recovered from the shock of meeting Ameke.

"Hell!" he swore. "I didn't figure on meeting that fellow here. He'll talk!"

"It makes no difference," said Goji, calmly. "The dancing will start soon. They will not come for us until morning, and if we are not on the river by then they

will eat our hearts, Bwana!"

"A few of 'em will get a belly full of lead first," said Barran and lapsed into gloomy silence. According to Goji there was only one road into Jila Morogi, which meant that there was only one way out, around the circle of dancers and onto the river trail. The black shadow of the cliffs would cover their flight, but a white skin would show like a flare. Jeanne would have to use the lamp-black. She'd probably balk at it, waste time. It was a hell of a thing for a girl brought up in a French convent. But there was no other way; in fact, it was lucky that there was not, otherwise the Bubundi would have posted guards—

The lively beat of the *nagoma* broke in on his thoughts. They waited in tense silence while the pulse of the drums quickened and the chant of the dancers increased in volume. Goji thrust the small bundle into Barran's hands.

"I will keep watch," said he. "Take care when you go into the ju-ju house, Bwana!"

"Is it guarded?"

"Aie, by a devil, perhaps. Who knows? I would not go into it; no, not even for you, my brother!"

THEY CRAWLED OUT into brilliant moonlight. A few tall palms dappled the dusty space between the huts and the ju-ju house. Somewhere nearby a leopard coughed and a dog whimpered in one of the huts. The chant of the dancers rose and fell while the drums tom-tomed frantically. Barran could see two long lines of dancers advancing upon one another and then retreating; against the glow of fire-light they looked like black marionettes dangling from a taunt string. The little village was deserted.

Quickly he crossed the open space to the ju-ju house. There was a picket fence of split rubacae logs surrounding the building. Two poles crudely carved—a grotesque and obscene representation of a woman with a leopard's head—formed a kind of gateway. Beyond the opening into the house yawned like a black maw. Barran paused as he passed between the posts. Something had moved and the fetid odor

of tom cats pricked his nostrils. He took a cautious pace forward. Suddenly green eyes flared at him. Barran's hair stood on end, his gun was blazing in his hand as he leaped backward. His back struck the fence as the beast sprang at him snarling with rage and pain. Instinctively he shut his eyes and threw up his arms to protect his head. He felt the wind of a paw that missed him by a fraction. When he opened his eyes it was to stare down at the body of a full grown leopard, stretched out on the ground a few paces from him. The beast's muscles were still twitching. Barran did not move he couldn't believe that his shots had killed it. Then he saw that there was a collar about its neck with a leash of hippo-hide attached to it. Evidently the leopard had reached the end of the leash in mid spring, and the jerk had broken its neck.

Cursing himself for having fired, Barran stood tense listening to the rumble of the drums, expecting that at any moment they would stop, indicating that someone had heard the shots. But the rythm pulsed on, tonelessly repetitive, interminable.

It was as black as tar inside the ju-ju house and it smelled like a sewer. There were faint sounds—rats rustling in the thatch, or someone retreating to the rear of the hut. He had matches, but he dared not strike a light.

"Mam'moiselle — Jeanne!" he called softly.

A little gasping cry answered him. The next moment the girl flung herself into his arms.

"M'sieur Barran!" she cried. "But-but you are black—I saw you in the light of the doorway!"

Barran took her arms from about his neck gently. Said he: "There's no time for talk. You must be as black as I am in a matter of minutes, Jeanne."

The darkness hid the expression on her face from Barran but her shocked tone was enough to tell him that he was going to have trouble. "Exactly that," he said, crisply. "As quickly as possible, mam'moiselle." He put the bundle into her hands.

"Mon Dieu, is this all!" gasped the girl.

"It will not be for long, an hour perhaps. Remember your life and that of my man, Goji is at stake, Jeanne."

"I understand," she answered with surprising meekness, and withdrew into the darkness. Barran listened to the rustle of her movements as the beating of his heart counted out the fleeting minutes, between darkness and dawn, between life and death.

"M'sieur," the girl's voice came to him in a hushed whisper, "you did not mention the risk of your own life."

"I've no one to answer to for that," said Barran impatiently. "Hurry please, mam'moiselle!"

"I hoped that I might have some claim upon your life," she persisted. "Indeed, I have hoped that you would ask me to be your wife."

"Huh—!" Barran jumped as if something had stung him. "You want *me*!"

"Exactly that!" she answered, imitating his own crisp tone. "Do you refuse me, M' sieur?"

"Good Lord—no!" said Barran emphatically. "But—but why start a thing like this at such a time!"

There was silence for a moment, then her voice came to him with a little catch in it: "Because what you ask is impossible—you must help me, Hugh!"

Barran's jaw sagged open, "Damned if I thought of that!" said he; then, in sudden panic: "Perhaps we can manage—"

Her hand found his: "I have no fear now. It is my wish to live, not to die with you!"

WHEN THEY CAME OUT Goji came running toward them. Barran told the girl to wait in the shadow of the ju-ju house and went to meet him. They crept forward to a point where they had a good view of the *ngoma*. The drums had slackened in tempo. The long lines of dancers had broken up into groups of men and women, who danced an obvious interpretation of courtship and love. Many had become exhausted and lay where they had fallen. Goats' skins of palm wine were passing from hand to hand among the watchers who squatted around the central mound.

"They will be drunk soon," observed Barran. "Perhaps it would be best to wait for an hour."

Goji shook his head: "They will not see us. We must pass the guards on the trail before it is light."

"All right, you lead we follow." Barran turned and beckoned to Jeanne.

Goji set off at a dog-trot. They circled to the rear of the huts and gained the shadow of the cliffs where their black bodies became part of the night. Although the girl was only ten paces ahead of Barran she was all but invisible, but the white soles of her feet flashed as she ran. He called softly to Goji and they slowed down to a walk.

Then the trail opened before them. In a moment they were moving swiftly down it, the forest mould a soft carpet for their feet. The trail twisted down an incline then leveled off into a flat clearing. It curved around a shoulder of rock, dropped suddenly and tunneled through a dense patch of forest. For an hour they pressed on. There was a confusion of sound all around them, faint rustlings made by the passage of man or beast, it was impossible to distinguish them. Goji paused to listen frequently, then they went on again without exchanging a word.

When they came out of the tunnel the noise of the river was plainly audible, and Barran knew that they must be near the Bubundi outposts. He was beginning to think that they had passed it when the orange flare of a fire appeared ahead.

Goji halted. Barran saw him grasp his monkey's hand while his lips moved in silent invocation. Then he beckoned and they crept forward.

The soft blackness of the night flooded the small clearing, filling the empty spaces, seeming to engulf the twinkling fire. Two Bubundi squatted before it, their spears thrust into the ground with their painted shields resting against them. The smell of roasting meat drifted across the intervening space.

Goji shook his head dubiously, and whispered: "We will pass these two men when they are dead, Bwana. How can it be done? As you know, there are others asleep in the bush but the hoot of an owl

will rouse them."

Barran was silent for a moment, then: "Keep hold of that monkey's paw, we're going to need it," said he. "I'm going to keep those fellows talking while you slip by with the woman. If anything happens, run for the river. Get her out. Don't wait for me, understand?"

"Yes, Bwana."

Barran drew the girl to his side. "This is it," he said. Her hand tightened in his.

"I am not afraid," she told him. The steadiness of her voice thrilled Barran. Here was a woman with more courage than a man, for she had not a man's strength to back up her spirit. A black Venus at that, if ever there was! For a moment he stood savoring the strong flavor of her presence, sensing more than he could see.

"Go with Goji," he said gently; then before she could protest he crept toward the Bubundi warriors.

At the edge of the clearing he rose suddenly. His voice came from the shadows, speaking the Bubundi tongue.

"I see you warriors!"

The two Bubundi sprang to their feet as one man and snatched their weapons from the ground. The red firelight bathed their fierce features. With a thrill of alarm Barran recognized Ameke, and faded deeper into the shadows.

"Come forward that I may see you," growled Ameke, poising his spear.

Barran laughed harshly: "What, would you spill the blood of a wizard and be cursed forever, warrior? Know that I come from the Moranthi. He has words for you, O Slayer of White Men!"

The title pleased Ameke so much that he lowered the point of his spear. "What words, wizard?" he demanded.

"Who would know that but the Moranthi himself. Does he make gossip for women of his wisdom? Perchance, the Bubundi are in need of a war-chief. Perchance he thinks of you. Who can tell? The Moranthi will speak for himself."

AMEKE seemed to expand, to grow taller, Judging that Goji and the girl would be clear by this time, and noting the effect of his words, Barran saw that the

time had come to play the last card. He pointed to Ameke's companion. Said he: "Send that one to get another to take your place and follow me. The Moranthi waits for you."

"Go!" said Ameke to the other warrior in a voice that had the ring of authority in it. It was plain that in his mind's eye he already saw the white plumes of a war-chief upon his head.

"How do white men die, warrior?" asked Barran to gain a little more time.

"The same as other men, wizard. Oh yes, and they fear to die. This one begged for mercy, but my spear drank his heart's blood!"

"Did you slay him with the spear you carry now, warrior?"

"Oh yes," bragged Ameke. "He pointed his little gun at me, but I——"

"You lie, warrior!" Barran interposed, suddenly. "A white man took your spear from you and twenty more."

Ameke shrank back, his teeth bared in an animal like snarl of fear. Barran sprung upon him. The heavy spear drove forward. But Barran was expecting the thrust, he twisted sideways and caught the shaft in his hand giving it a quick, powerful pull at the same time. Before he could release his grip Ameke was jerked forward. Barran's fist crashed on his jaw and his knees buckled. Before he fell Barran had him by the throat. Ameke put up a brief struggle for his life. Barran was intent on one thing, there must be no outcry, no hoot of an owl.

When he got to his feet the vague outline of the tree trunks and the trail showed in the pallor of the false dawn. He picked up Ameke's spear and started down the trail at a run. He had not gone far before the urgent tap-tap of a drum gave wings to his feet. Ameke's body had been found and he knew that Bubundi warriors would soon be on the trail behind him.

Around a bend in the trail he came upon Goji and the girl. The big Bubundi was pounding along with the girl slung over his shoulder, eating up the distance with great swinging strides. Jeanne was yelling and pounding on his back with her clenched hands. She ceased her struggles as Barran caught up with them.

"She would not go on without you," Bwana," Goji explained, without slackening his pace.

"Good boy!" Barran approved.

The girl lifted her head and glared at him. "You tell the brute—oh—*mon Dieu*—" her protests died in jerky gasps as Goji quickened his stride.

They reached the small bay a few minutes later. While the girl watched the trail Barran and Goji dragged the canoes down to the water. One after the other they shoved them out into deep water where the current caught them and swept them down stream like pods fallen from the trees. They were dragging their own light craft out of the reeds when Jeanne screamed.

Leaving Goji to launch the canoe Barran dashed back to the beach. Several Bubundi warriors were racing down the trail with the newly-risen sun flashing on their spear heads. Barran pushed the girl to the water's edge as Goji got the canoe afloat. The Bubundi warriors saw them and dashed forward with wild yells. Barran waited until they were within twenty paces of him before he fired. Then his automatic spat death. Two of the Bubundi fell, a third, unable to check himself, tripped over

them and sprawled on the trail. The other dived for cover in the bush. Barran made a quick dash for the canoe and shoved off. A few strokes of the paddles drove it out into mid-stream. The swift current caught them and swept them away. The Bubundi warriors broke cover, two dashed to the water's edge and hurled their spears. They fell short, and when their quarry had vanished from sight around a bend of the river they were jabbering like a cage full of angry monkeys, searching for their canoes.

Before sunrise on the following morning Barran saw the flagpole of Navabi showing above the trees. It was his intention to pass the post and make for Sandra, a French military station further down river. But as the sun came up the clear notes of a bugle broke the silence of the dawn. The tri-color of France climbed up the flag pole and dropped at half-mast over Navabi. Jeanne turned to face him. She wore his jacket and her red-gold hair floated in the wind, but her face and limbs were still streaked with black. She smiled:

"There is no need to go on now," said she. "There is always a padre with the soldiers, and you will take me home to-night."

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MAY 15th

WATCH FOR IT!





The Apes Screamed “Kill!”

By EMMETT McDOWELL

Trapped in the ancient city of Tanit were monsters schooled for a thousand years in death's slow tortures . . .

WILL BRANT KNEW THAT he was being followed.

He knew it, for he had discovered the Touareg peering in at him through the door of the Cafe de Tripoli. Brant had never seen a Touareg before, and he had stared right back.

The slight figure in the flowing robes with the blue veil masking the lower half of his face, had impressed Brant as disturbingly sinister. He had heard many tales of these strange veiled men of the Sahara and shivered despite the blistering heat of Tunis in mid-August.

When he left the cafe, the Touareg was loitering about outside. He fell in about twenty paces behind, stalking along after Brant with no effort at concealment. The town Arabs regarded the desert raider with alarm, gave him a wide berth.

Three bars later the Touareg was still there.

Brant began to grow annoyed, but he was too discouraged, too full of his own trouble to care much. He made a half-hearted attempt to corner him. The raider, though, eluded him easily.

Brant was having difficulty with his feet by that time.

“Aw’righ,” he muttered; “go ahead an’ follow me!”

His peregrinations from cafe to cafe had led him finally through the Porte de

France into the native quarter. It was like entering another world—a world of mosques and tiny shops and narrow, tortuous streets. Veiled women eyed him boldly as they slipped past. The blended aroma of spice, perfume, sweat and manure filled his nostrils with the pungent smell of North Africa.

Brant was not very tall and slight, with a scholarly stoop. His white linens were soiled, his panama hat shoved to the back of his head so that a lock of straw colored hair fell down across his sweaty forehead.

It occurred to him that he must be a disreputable sight. Good thing the faculty at Drake University couldn't see him now—

With a sickening lurch of his stomach, he remembered that he was no longer on the Drake faculty—nor ever would be again. Cooper would see to that.

Gordon Gore Cooper, wealthy cotton broker and amateur archeologist, was president of the university board. He had given the school several fat endowments and was financing their present excavations at Carthage. Brant clenched his bony fists. He should never have knocked Cooper down.

Yes, he should have to!

Violence was always regrettable; but there were times when there was no other recourse. And Cooper had inferred that he, Brant, was in league with the thieves.

It was true that the Carthaginian votive tablet had been stolen while it was in his keeping, but certainly that was no sign that he knew anything about it. He felt hot all over again at memory of Cooper's words.

Why should anybody want the thing anyway? Just a few lines in Punic engraved on a rock. He shook his head.

"What I need," he said half aloud, "is another drink."

Muttering to himself he made his way unsteadily up the narrow alley. He never understood how it happened, but quite unexpectedly he found himself in a garden.

It was just a tiny courtyard bounded by red and green twisted columns and crumbling arches. A crowd of men—Berbers, Moors and Arabs—were squatting on cushions and mats, sipping coffee as they

watched a girl dance on a raised platform.

They were so intent on the dancer that no one noticed Brant as he let himself sprawl on a vacant mat. He saw the Touareg enter, beckon a waiter.

Then Brant forgot the Touareg, forgot everything as the dancer absorbed his full attention.

She was a real Ouled Nail. Not some Spanish or Berber prostitute posing as one for the entertainment of gullible tourists. The sheerest pantaloons of yellow silk hung from her brown naked hips to her ankles. A short green jacket embroidered with gold thread covered her shoulders. Her toenails were hennaed. Spangles glittered on her cheek and chin.

She didn't move her hands or feet much. But her body writhed and jerked to the tempo being pounded out by a hideous, one-eyed Kabyle drummer. First her breasts, then her stomach, then her haunches. It was the most startling exhibition of muscular control Brant had ever witnessed. He was repelled and fascinated at the same time.

The waiter brought his coffee, and he sipped the strong syrupy liquid, his eyes fastened on the girl. The dance was almost over when Brant's head began to feel strangely heavy.

He rested it against a twisted pillar, let his lids close. The rhythmic thud of the *debrouka* sounded fainter. He would open his eyes in just a minute. Just one more minute—

The cup fell out of his fingers, smashed on the tile floor with a tinkle.

At once, the Touareg rose to his feet. He made a sign to the waiter, left the court.

The drum beat faltered. A buzz of curious whispering rose on the air like flies from carrion, in which the name Kheir-ed-Din, was distinguishable. Then the Touareg returned, bringing two dish-faced negroes in scarlet fezes with him.

They tucked up their robes, lifted the unconscious white man by his shoulders and ankles, bore him from the courtyard

No one tried to interfere.

WILL BRANT was a scholar. A real scholar whose specialty was Cartha-

genian Culture. He knew half a dozen Semetic dialects including Punic, ancient Hebrew, Arabian. He had made extensive studies of the archeology of the north and west coasts of Africa seeking light on that strange superstitious race of ancient business men. But this was his first visit to Africa.

He had been chosen to accompany Professor Hunter because of his grasp of the Punic dialect. Unfortunately though, he and Cooper, the expedition's backer had clashed right from the start.

The wealthy cotton broker was arrogant, overbearing, a sensationalist with a mania for publicity. One of the expedition's first finds had been the votive tablet. It had been an important find. Its lengthy inscription had hinted at a flourishing Carthaginian colony on the west coast of Africa, possibly as far south as the Cameroons.

Cooper had wanted to release the news immediately with his usual bombastic exaggeration.

Brant had objected. He had no use for Cooper and hadn't bothered to conceal it. He could be scathing when he chose, and he wasn't afraid of man, beast or devil. When he had finished with Cooper, the burly cotton broker would have liked to smash the smallish, wiry archeologist. But something in Brant's colorless gray eyes deterred him.

The stone had been turned over to Brant to translate. Before he'd had a chance to examine it properly it had been stolen.

Cooper had been beside himself with rage and disappointment, going so far as to accuse Brant of being in league with the thieves.

Undaunted by the bigger man's size, Brant had knocked him down with a right to the jaw.

His resignation had been requested immediately, while Cooper had sworn that he would have him blacklisted with every university in the United States.

Will Brant had found himself in Tunis without a job, but worse than that, not much likelihood of ever securing a post again in the only work for which he had been trained. His career ruined, he had

embarked for the first time in his life on a monumental binge.

BRANT AWOKE with a headache, a thick tongue and the dismaying sensation of not being able to remember where he was.

He was lying naked on a hard native bed, he found, covered with a thin sheet. Sunlight streamed through a grilled window, splashed against a tile floor, hurt his eyes.

The room was large, airy. A silk oriental rug hung from one wall along with several framed photographs of scenes from Mecca.

Brant sat bolt upright. He'd never seen this room before. Never!

He tried to marshal his thoughts, but he had only the haziest memory of wandering into a cafe where an Ouled Nail had been dancing. A Touareg had followed him inside—

He sprang out of bed, a rather startling figure—scrawny, and tough looking as a picked rooster—and peered anxiously through the grill.

An empty courtyard lay below surrounded by screened balconies. Nothing else. He turned away with growing bewilderment.

His clothes, he found hanging on the wall. They had been cleaned, neatly pressed. There was a razor, toothbrush in a sealed container, toothpaste and shaving soap on the washstand.

How had he come here? It must be a native caravanserai of some kind, he decided. He'd better dress and make inquiries.

Suddenly he remembered that he was supposed to take the boat back to the States this morning. He was aghast and began to shave furiously.

After he had nicked himself twice, he slowed down. Suppose he missed the boat; there would be another. Why should he be in such a hurry to return to the States?

He drew in his breath.

Maybe he wouldn't go home at all! He'd always wanted to prospect the coast of Rio Muni in search of Carthaginian remains. It was his contention that the hot, fertile jungles of west Africa hid the ruins of more than one ancient civilization.

The ivory coast, the Cameroons, the slave coast, the Crystal Mountains of Rio Muni. Even their names made his heart jump faster—

Brant was straightening his tie when someone scratched on the door. He opened it, found a negro servant standing on the threshold.

The black bowed, said in a high feminine voice: "The master is at breakfast and begs you to be kind enough to join him."

Brant looked startled. The black was enormously fat with a moon face. His voice had been the voice of a eunuch.

Good Lord! he thought; my imagination is running away with me. That sort of thing isn't done anymore. Not in Tunis!

He said: "Where am I? Whose house is this?"

There was no surprise in the black's impassive countenance.

"The house of Kheir-ed-Din."

Brant swallowed. The name of Kheir-ed-Din was on everyone's tongue. A Moor, he was reputed to be wealthy as Croesus and as unscrupulous. According to the tales told about him, he lived in greater luxury than the Dey of Tunis ever had known.

He was supposed to be the head of an international ring of art thieves, of the white slave trade in North Africa, of the dope smuggling traffic. If only a third of the rumors were true, Kheir-ed-Din was more fabulous than the Thief of Baghdad.

Brant followed the servant, down a broad curved stair, through a hall carpeted with priceless oriental rugs, into a high ceilinged room that opened directly onto a garden.

As he entered, a man rose to greet him—a tall, brown skinned Arab in the flowing white costume of the Moors.

He shook hands with the confused Brant in the American fashion, said "Good morning. I trust you found everything to your satisfaction." His English was flawless, tintured by an Oxford accent.

"Yes, yes," Brant managed to get out. "I—The fact is—"

Kheir-ed-Din saw his guest's embarrassment.

"I was happy to be able to put you up. After all you'd had something of a shock.

What is the American idiom? You were justified in going on a toot."

Brant winced, looked more embarrassed than ever. Kheir-ed-Din squatted tailor-fashion on the cushions, motioned for him to sit beside him, clapped his hands.

A servant appeared carrying breakfast on a tray with four short legs, set it on the floor before Brant. There were ham and eggs, coffee, toast, guava jelly, orange juice.

An American breakfast was the last thing in the world that Brant had expected. In the background he could hear the tinkle of a fountain and somewhere a woman was singing one of those interminable Arab songs.

"The votive tablet," Kheir-ed-Din said, "is in the study now. It will be the most convenient place to work, and right after—"

Brant stopped chewing.

"What votive tablet?"

A faint expression of annoyance touched the Moor's smooth brown features. He was strikingly handsome, his dark eyes half veiled by long black lashes. Full red lips drew a firm line beneath his thin aquiline nose.

"Look here," said Brant in confusion; "I might as well be honest. I don't remember coming here at all."

"But our conversation at Ali's Garden. Surely you can recall that?"

"No. Not a thing."

Kheir-ed-Din's face broke into a smile. "Ah," he said "I think I understand. You were out on your feet when we met!"

"I suppose so. I can remember watching a dancer. The rest is a blank."

"That's unfortunate," the Moor said in a distressed voice. "I hope you won't change your mind about translating the tablet. I have been so lucky as to come into possession of it."

At Brant's expression of dismay, he hastened to add: "I am quite anxious to learn what the inscription says in advance of the public. So anxious that I offered you five hundred pounds to translate it for me."

"But why?" Brant stared at Kheir-ed-Din in open mouthed astonishment.

The Moor's eyes were half-veiled by his

lids; he looked like some hungry bird of prey.

"I have my reasons. Very good ones. Our bargain was that no one should know that I had the stone for six months. At the end of that time, I was to ship it to Drake University. You were kind enough to agree.

"The damage is done', you said last night; 'It is irreparable! This man, Cooper, was your enemy, who would go to any lengths to ruin you——"

Brant wet his lips.

"Could—could I see the stone?"

"Certainly."

Kheir-ed-Din rose, led the way through another arched corridor into a tiny chamber, furnished in the occidental manner with a desk, filing cabinets, shelves of books.

The pitted stone tablet lay face up on the desk like a small tombstone.

II

BRANT'S EYES were bright as he regarded the half erased carving. His curiosity was like an irresistible itch. Why should the Moor be so anxious to learn what the inscription said? He could scarcely wait to get at the translation. Kheir-ed-Din's proposition might not be entirely ethical; but for the life of him, he could see no real harm in it.

"I'll do it!" he said.

"Good." Kheir-ed-Din's eyes narrowed. "You can start immediately if you wish."

Brant nodded, running his fingertips over the carving.

"Ring if you desire anything," the Moor added and withdrew, closing the door behind himself.

Brant was startled by a soft "click!"

He wheeled to the door, tried it gently. It was locked. The single window looked out on the same courtyard he'd seen from his room above. But it was barred by a wrought iron grille set into the frame.

He was a prisoner, he realized with a start. For all his suavity, Kheir-ed-Din was taking no chances.

At noon and again at dusk, meals were brought to the archeologist by a negro

servant.

Will Brant ate, studying the rude Punic symbols between bites, scarcely conscious of what went into his mouth. Kheir-ed-Din looked in on him after dinner, but Brant waved him out impatiently.

The inscription was in a Phoenician dialect strange to Brant. There were gaps that had to be guessed at, letters blurred by time.

But as the translation slowly progressed, his excitement grew like a fever. When at length, he transcribed the last word, his hand was shaking so badly that he could scarcely get it down on paper.

He lit a cigarette, smoked furiously. No wonder Kheir-ed-Din wanted the stone! But what was he to do?

Picking up the paper, he scanned it again, comparing it a final time with the original.

"To the Goddess Tanit," he read; "a votive offering made by Gisco because he has heard the voice of the goddess, blessed . . . (illegible) . . . to set down this record . . . might know the plight of your devotees in the city of Tii.

. . . (Here a great many words were illegible . . .)

"... and sacked the outer city, looting the temples, slaughtering men and women. Those of us who escaped took refuge in the inner town where we abode three days in great fear whilst the hordes of Aethiopians prowled the streets of Tii like wild dogs.

"Then the priest of Tanit, blessed be she said unto us . . . (illegible) . . . to Carthage. No more will Tili send galleys laden with gold and silver, ivory, apes and slaves unless many war galleys . . . (illegible) . . .

"... (a great many words illegible) . . .

"... so when dark had fallen I. Gisco, slipped from the inner valley and traveling by night reached the harbor after three days. There I found our people much alarmed for they had heard the war drums and seen the glare of many fires.

"We made haste to put off in a galley of fifty oars and sailed northward passing between a large island and the great fire mountain known as the 'chariot of the gods', where we turned west and sailed

past the river of many mouths. We continued west for fifteen days rounding Cape Dagon on the sixteenth and after five days more came to Cerne. There we joined a fleet of twelve galleys bound up the west coast of Libya for Carthage...."

Brant's colorless gray-blue eyes were a glitter. Cerne was the clue. Cerne had been a colony of Libya-Carthagenians planted in 550 B.C. by Hanno. It had definitely been located on the island of Sherbro off Sierra Leone.

Cape Dagon must be the present Cape Palmas, Liberia. The river of many mouths had to be the Niger. The Fire Mountain was, of course, Mount Cameroon.

The only mountains immediately south of the Cameroons were the Crystal Mountains of Rio Muni. Tii must be located in the fastness of the Crystal Mountains! Three days march from the coast!

The rest of the tablet was unimportant. Gisco had reached Carthage to find it besieged by the Roman armies of Scipio. The Carthaginians were in too desperate a plight to send succor to their colony of Tii in the African jungles.

Tii had waited in vain. There in the jungle-infested valley of *Rio Muni*, the crumbling walls and palaces, the gold and ivory of Tii must still be awaiting a discoverer.

Fabulous treasure!

And from the clues in the inscription, Brant was sure he could go straight to it. He sprang to his feet, began to pace back and forth in the study.

Kheir-ed-Din had been lying. He couldn't afford to turn this stone over to Drake. He wouldn't dare let Brant himself go free.

As he paced back and forth he noticed a light spring on across the courtyard.

He paused, peering through the grill at the yellow, glowing square only a few yards away. He saw a figure move across the opening and sucked in his breath.

It was the Touareg who had followed him from cafe to cafe yesterday!

WILL BRANT'S suspicions were thoroughly aroused. He switched off the light in his study and with his eye to the grill watched the Touareg in

his room across the tiny court.

There was no doubt but that he had been drugged in Ali's Garden the day before and brought here while he was unconscious. The night air was warm, heavy with some exotic fragrance. He could see the desert raider moving about the room as he began to disrobe.

Brant's pale gray eyes widened suddenly with disbelief.

The Touareg wasn't a man at all, but a woman! She wasn't even a Touareg. She was a European woman!

As she turned toward the window, he received his second shock. The woman was the Countess Zita Nadasdy!

Brant had seen her many times. She was an Hungarian who maintained a villa on Cape Carthage not far from the site of their excavations. Very little was known about her. But Cooper had been a constant guest in her house...

"Why, that soft headed sucker!" he muttered under his breath.

Of course the countess had learned of the tablet through Cooper and of its importance! She must have stolen it and brought it to Kheir-ed-Din.

Countess! he thought angrily. She was more than likely some tart. But whatever else she might be, he was forced to admit that she was a beautiful woman.

She was seated before a mirror, doing her black hair in an upswept, sophisticated style. Her brown eyes were almond shaped, giving her oval face an exotic touch. She had cleansed the stain from her skin which was a warm tan. It was with something of a shock that he realized she must be in her early twenties—only a girl and already steeped in crime.

She dressed leisurely in European clothes, switched out the lights. In the still Tunisian night, Brant heard her door close as she left the room.

He had decided on the only course he could follow if he were to leave Kheir-ed-Din's house alive. He turned the lights back on, sat down at the desk again.

He made a copy of the translation. But this time he was careful to omit any geographical references. He burned all his papers and notes, ground the ashes beneath his heel.

When he came to the votive tablet itself, he felt his determination weaken. Brant was a sincere scholar, and what he was about to do struck him as sacrilege.

Then he pressed his lips together, and with his pocket knife defaced any words that might give a clue to the location of the lost city of Tii.

Finally he rang the bell, told the black-amoor who answered that he must speak to Kheir-ed-Din at once!

"Hello," said Kheir-ed-Din. "Finished?"

Brant nodded. There was a determined expression on his thin, sunburned face as he faced the Moor, handed him the translation.

Kheir-ed-Din's dark eyes glittered as he started to read; then a frown drew his brows together.

He looked up, asked: "What are all these gaps? There isn't any reference to the location of this city. I don't understand—"

Brant said: "Tii's location was described pretty accurately. In fact, so accurately that I think I could lead you straight to it."

The Moor's face darkened.

"Then why haven't you translated those parts?"

"I did." Brant tapped his forehead. "They're all here."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Brant in a cold precise voice, "that I don't trust you any further than I could throw a bull by the tail. I've no intention of being found in some alley with my throat slit. No. There's no use to look at the tablet. I took pains to erase any clue there."

With an oath, Kheir-ed-Din's hand darted inside his voluminous gown, emerged with an ugly black luger.

"That's stupid!" Brant told him dryly. "If you kill me you'll destroy any hope of finding the city."

"I could make you talk," the Moor said in a thick voice.

"Easily. And I would lie my head off."

For a long, tense moment the two men regarded each other. The tall dark Moor in his flowing robes. The pale, intense American. Then Kheir-ed-Din managed to

regain his self control.

"What is it that you propose?"

Brant said: "That we search for the city together."

Kheir-ed-Din nodded his head in defeat.

"One other thing," Brant added. "The consul is a friend of mine and I intend to turn certain papers over to him. If anything happens to me, they'll be handed to the French, British and American authorities simultaneously."

The Moor opened his eyes. "But suppose there is an accident—" His eyes glittered with a strange light.

"That would be too bad," said Brant. "I'm leaving now. I'll be at the hotel until the arrangements for our expedition have been made."

And he walked out the door, the flesh of his back crawling.

But Kheir-ed-Din didn't protest. He summoned a black to escort Brant to the door, gave him directions in a strange guttural dialect.

The black, a huge grinning devil in tarbouch and brown robe with a tribal-scarred face, didn't leave Brant at the door. Kheir-ed-Din's palace was located on Cape Carthage adjoining the Countess Zita Nadasdy's estate, and when Brant boarded the trolley for Tunis, the black got on right behind him.

"You!" said Brant in Berber. "Where are you going?"

"With you, master."

"Why?"

"It's the will of Kheir-ed-Din that no danger approaches you."

Brant suddenly chuckled, as much from nervous relief as from the humor in Kheir-ed-Din's going to such lengths to protect him.

He'd been scared back there in the study, scared stiff! His knees didn't feel as if they'd hold him another second. And he sank onto a seat, conscious of the black's watchful eyes. In spite of the soft warmth of the night, his face was beaded with cold sweat.

"Salamambo," the conductor called the next station.

Brant had a queer feeling that none of this could be happening. That he'd wake up to find that he was late to his eight

o'clock class on the "Archeology of Punic Carthage".

III

"**W**ORK!" said the baboon, and he said it in good American but with an accept impossible to describe. Throwing down his shovel, he fell to scratching himself.

The second baboon stared at the rebel with a glimmer of admiration in his sunken beady eyes. Then he too abandoned the digging.

The two apes had been excavating the floor of a ruined temple. It had been built of huge blocks of sandstone, quarried from the surrounding cliffs. The bronze statue of the god lay half buried in the rubble from the caved-in roof. Lianas and convulvi wove a tropical tapestry up the ancient walls and a giant ironwood had sprung up in the center of the floor, spreading its branches like an umbrella over the ruins.

The first baboon said: "Work no good. Why for? Plenty food. Plenty She. Why for work?"

The second baboon had no answer for this. He scratched his ugly dog-like head. They were drills—a species of West African baboons. Yet there were certain differences that set them apart from other drills. They were bigger, for one thing, with an abnormal cranial development. The cerebral cortex, the seat of memory, reasoning, intelligence was unusually well developed.

"Man work," the second baboon said.

"Man got pain." The first baboon struck his forehead. "Here. Big pain. No let him rest. Before man and his She come, apes happy. Eat. Play. No work. Now all time dig, build hut, make spear, learn, learn."

The second baboon suddenly dived for his shovel, began to dig furiously.

"Man come."

They were both industriously throwing the dirt out of the temple as Jesse Quinn hove in sight.

Physically Jesse Quinn had changed little since the landslide had trapped him and Diana, his wife, in the valley with

the talking apes. He was harder, browner. But that was all.

The change was inside.

Some of the happy-go-lucky attitude of the baboons had rubbed off. And when Diana was particularly indignant with him, she would tell him angrily: "Instead of you civilizing the baboons, it is they who are making an ape of you!"

On the surface the valley hadn't changed either. The same hoary, thick green tangle of jungle filled it from wall to wall. The lost city of Hanno still stood in crumbling ruins beside the tiny blue lake where the ibises waded on their crazy stilt-like legs.

But like Jesse it had changed. Startlingly.

The ancient temple of Tanit had been cleared of two thousand years accumulation of debris, roofed with thatch. Even the gardens, where once the priestesses of that strange cult had held their licentious orgies, were neat again and trim. The pool had been cleaned, repaired, filled with water from the lake.

Running water, piped in sections of bamboo, had been installed in the temple. There was even a shower.

Diana cooked in bronze utensils old as the city. They ate from gold and silver plates, drank from vessels used two thousand years ago by the ancient Carthagenians.

There was only one thing missing—salt. Jesse could understand why the blacks craved it above anything else, ate it like sugar. He could have eaten a handful himself.

As he came in sight of the temple of Baal Moloch where the two drills were excavating, he stopped, peered inside.

"Found anything?" he called.

"No," the drills grumbled in unison.

"Well, keep at it," Jesse told them. "There's bound to be a hoard of gold in this damn city someplace."

The first ape, whose name was Ooga, and who was of an argumentative disposition, leaned on his shovel, demanded:

"What good gold? Eat gold?"

"No-o-o," said Jesse, studying Ooga thoughtfully. Ooga was the son of Thoth and of Thoth's own granddaughter. He was amazingly intelligent, a big, grizzled

drill with jaws capable of cracking the thighbone of a cow. He gave Jesse more headaches than all the rest of the baboons put together. Even Thoth had trouble managing him.

Not that Ooga was bad; he was irresponsible with a great love of hearing himself talk.

Just then the second ape, who'd kept industriously to his digging, gave a grunt of excitement.

"What is it?" Jesse asked.

"Step! Step!"

JESSE SPRANG inside the temple—a tall, rawboned figure in breechclout and sandals. The ape had been working near the wall. Two steps of a stair leading down into the dirt had been exposed by his shovel.

Jesse felt his heart leap. He seized a shovel, began to throw the dirt out of the stairwell. The two drills, infected by his excitement, set to work again furiously.

They uncovered three more steps and still the mysterious stair continued downward. Jesse's gray eyes were aglitter. He was sure that this time he was about to discover the treasure of the lost city of Hanno.

Somehow news of their work had communicated itself via that strange jungle telegraph. Baboons came running from all directions. Cocky young males with bows and quivers full of arrows. Females carrying their young on their backs like wizened little jockeys.

Even Diana had got wind of the news. Jesse saw her walking down the overgrown street, slim and longlegged and brown as a nut. Her dark hair was done up with an ivory comb, and she wore sandals and a brief leather apron in front like a Kaffir belle. Small silver shields engraved with Punic letters cupped her breasts.

Jesse whistled lewdly.

Diana blushed. They had been married less than a year and then only to stop gossip since in this business of collecting wild animals she must accompany him into the jungle.

She said: "Stop it. You embarrass me. What have you found?"

Little Kee loped at her heels—only he

wasn't little any more; he was a half grown baboon.

"What is it? What is it?" he chattered in excitement.

Jesse wiped the sweat out of his eyes. Even Thoth, he saw, had descended from his home in the cliffs and was approaching, head down, as if watching his feet.

The great, grizzled, dog-like animal, whom Doctor Evans had trained to speak basic English, was a magnificent specimen of the West African drill. The other apes drew out of his path.

"Esse," he barked. "What you find?"

"A stairway," said Jesse.

"Peste!" cried Diana. "I thought you had discovered something!"

"Maybe I have," he rejoined laconically.

The baboons couldn't stand the suspense. They jumped about the top of the excavation chattering, barking, quarreling—half in bastard English, half in meaningless grunts of excitement. Finally a dozen ran to fetch some more tools and pitched in. Jesse had to climb from the hole to keep from being shoveled out along with the dirt.

He stood beside Diana peering down into the rapidly deepening excavation. He could count sixteen worn steps.

Little Kee jumped up on his shoulder, almost knocked him into the hole. Jesse shoved him off impatiently.

"Damn!" said little Kee.

"Really, Jesse," Diana began. "You must watch your language. Kee picks up—"

"Rock!" the apes in the hole barked.

Jesse ran down the steps, examined the wall that they had uncovered. It was made of great blocks of masonry, sealing off the stair.

"Tear it down!" he said.

Sinking his pick into the rotting cement, he worked loose a stone, pulled it out. A cold, wet wind blew out of the black gaping hole, hit Jesse like a stream of ice water, sent gooseflesh rippling across his bare skin.

He shivered, put his head to the opening. The wind brought a rushing sound with it. A muted roar as if an underground river was threading its course through the heart of the Crystal Mountains.

"Get torches!" he called to Diana. Then he turned back to the wall, began to enlarge the hole.

Thoth, himself, accompanied the girl to the sacred fire, trotting at her side like a hunting dog.

THE APES regarded fire with a vague awe. It warmed them during the chilly season of Rains. It helped dispell the oppressive humidity that was always present. Some of them had even learned to enjoy their food half scorched.

But since it was so difficult to call the spirit of fire into being, a dozen old females had been designated to keep it fed with sticks unless it died of hunger.

Diana gathered an armload of reed torches and lit one, while the old she-apes chattered questions at her. She and Thoth returned to find Jesse waiting impatiently at the foot of the stair.

"Hurry up!" he called.

But for all his eagerness, he advanced cautiously into the darkness, holding the torch above his head. It flickered wildly in the wind that blew out of the mountain, revealed walls and ceiling of rock.

It was a narrow passage that the apes had uncovered, a passage that had been hewn from the living stone. The walls still bore the chisel marks. It led on and on, a quarter-mile, a half mile. The sound of rushing water grew steadily louder.

Diana crept at Jesse's elbow. Behind her Thoth's eyes glowed green in the torchlight. Little Kee tried to scamper past the great drill. But Thoth kept him in his place with angry cuffs. A dozen of the bravest apes followed, making worried, clucking sounds in the windy darkness.

"I'm cold." Diana shivered, pressed against Jesse.

It was cold. Doubly so after the fierce heat of the valley above. The way slanted downward, always downward. Jesse came to a halt. The red glare of the torch was flung back at him from a black swirling surface.

It was a stream, he saw, with the dark oily shine of swift water. It had worn a deep channel so that the stalactite-toothed ceiling was at least thirty feet

above their heads.

From some opening, it sucked in a current of air. Jesse lit another torch, let the stump of the first one fall. It winked out instantly and was swept away.

"Where do we go from here?" Diana asked in frightened voice. Her teeth were rattling from cold. Thoth was making rumbling sounds in his chest.

Jesse flashed his torch about.

"There's a ledge just above the surface. It seems to follow the stream. Come on."

He edged out on it, pressing against the damp wall. Here and there the smoking torch revealed chisel marks where the way had been artificially widened. The sound of the water was a never-ending roar in their ears.

Diana said: "Jesse, the torches are running low. We won't be able to get back."

"Just a little further," he said. "It's growing light ahead."

They followed him because he had the torch and gradually the hole widened. Light, daylight, glinted off the stream which was running like a millrace now. A deep, booming note could be heard.

Jesse went as fast as he dared. He was the first to leave the tunnel. He leaned weakly against the wall of rock, staring at the scene below, while Diana and the baboons crowded around him.

They had emerged from the channel onto a narrow shelf. On their left the river rushed from the cavern to plunge down, down in a series of cascades. The bottom of that awful gorge was hidden in mists. Vegetation sprouted from crannies and fissures in the cliffs, spread a green mantel over the hissing stream.

The chasm seemed to stretch ahead of them for miles—further than they could see. A tremendous rift in the mountains, as if some giant had driven a wedge into them, splitting them asunder!

"It makes me dizzy to look," Diana said.

"Lie on your stomach," Jesse bade her. He was examining the face of the cliff on which their ledge hung like a balcony. He gave an excited shout. A faint trail led down from their perch.

"What do you think, Thoth, can we get down there?"

The great drill scratched his head, a perplexed scowl on his dog-like face.

"Me get down," he rumbled. "You?" He shrugged—a trick picked up from Diana.

Little Kee scampered past them, disappeared over the edge. Diana shrieked. Jesse yelled: "Hey!" and reached for the monkey's tail, but he was a fraction of a second too late.

When he looked over the edge, the half grown ape was already fifty yards off, scampering down the face of the precipice like a mountain goat.

"Wait a minute," he told Diana. Before she could protest, he eased over the ledge. The trail was much easier of descent that it had appeared from above. "Come on," he called. "It's not near as bad as it looks."

There was a moment's silence, then Diana's trim, tanned legs appeared over the edge. She felt around with her toes for a foothold, lowered herself beside him.

A brown cascade spilled after her as the remaining baboons dropped down the trail, vanished around the shoulder of the cliff. Jesse and Diana followed with more caution.

THE DEEPER they descended, the ranker became the vegetation. Rough steps had been chopped from the cliff in the worst places. Then the stream began to level out. It was further and further between cascades. Its voice became a murmur.

They rounded another shoulder in the mountain. Jesse halted, his fingers sinking into Diana's arm as he brought her to a stop.

"Listen."

The vagrant breeze brought them the faint sound of music and shouting from the mist shrouded depths of the glen. An eerie strident sound of cymbals and drums and flutes mingled with hoarse voices and the murmur of the river. The wind veered. The music died away.

Diana's green eyes were wide. Jesse said, "What the hell!"

Just then little Kee came scampering back to them.

"Man! Many man!" he cried and leaped to Jesse's shoulder.

"Blacks!" Jesse asked in a tense voice. Little Kee was so alarmed he could scarcely speak. He clung to Jesse's shoulder, shivering with excitement.

"No! No! White man. Many white man."

"The devil you say! Where are they?"

"There!" Kee pointed down the trail. "They come."

Jesse's heart gave a great bound. He hadn't realized how much the outside world meant to him. He wanted to shout and laugh.

He caught hold of Diana, hugged her gleefully.

"By God! We'll give them a start!" Suddenly he looked into her face. "Hey! What're you crying about?"

"Oh, Jesse, I'm so happy, I can't stand it. Paris. The Place Vendome and the little sidewalk cafes. I never thought I'd see them again, ever. And the shops." Big tears rolled down her brown cheeks.

"Come on!" he said. "Let's go meet them."

"Who do you suppose they are?"

"I don't know. Some planter possibly." He tugged at her arm.

"But Jesse," she protested. "I—I'm practically naked."

"So what? I'll buy you the finest gown in Paris."

Half laughing, half crying, she allowed herself to be led down the trail. They hadn't gone a hundred yards when Jesse suddenly halted again.

"Good God," he burst out. "What are they?"

Diana gasped.

Little Kee, infected instantly by their alarm, gave a leap into the trees, where he peered out from the branches.

"Run! Run!" he chattered.

A dozen figures were toiling up the trail towards them. They wore long black robes that fell to their ankles. Their heads were shaven, eyebrows plucked. With their bald crowns and hairless faces sticking out of the black robes, they were like a procession of giant vultures.

They caught sight of Jesse and Diana at almost the same moment and stopped,

pointing up the trail at the man and girl above them.

Diana said, "Jesse, I'm afraid."

Jesse stared at the strange, somber figures. The illusion of giant vultures was heightened by their pale faces and cruel, beak-like noses.

Just then he caught sight of a party of blacks behind the robed men. There must have been forty or fifty—a long double file, half visible through the undergrowth. They were dressed in leopard skins and glittering metal helmets carrying leather bucklers and swords and short stabbing spears like Zulu impi.

One of the shaven polled white men swept his arm toward Jesse and Diana, shouted a command.

The black warriors broke into a run, scrambling up the slope like monkeys. Jesse could see their strained, tense features glistening like obsidian with riverlets of sweat.

"Back!" he snapped at Diana. "Up the trail!"

She spun around, began to run up the slope.

"Kee!" Jesse shouted. "Kee. Find Thoth! Kee! Kee!"

There was no answer. The little ape had vanished.

Jesse could hear the grunts of the pursuing warriors behind him. He lunged after Diana.

"Hurry!" he panted.

THE GIRL'S FOOT suddenly slipped on a loose pebble. She sprawled on her face, rolled into Jesse, sweeping his feet out from under him. They skidded down the trail in a cloud of dust.

Jesse managed to grab a sapling, stop himself. He reached for Diana, missed. The girl slid a dozen feet further, brought up against the trunk of a small tree. She sat up, dazed, just as the blacks reached her.

Two of the warriors grabbed the girl, hauled her to her feet. The rest swept past after Jesse.

Diana shrieked. Jesse could see her struggling wildly in the hands of the two savages. One of the silver breast plates had torn loose. Her dark brown hair had

come undone. Then the blacks were upon him.

Jesse's cold blue eyes were flat, ugly with desperation. He kicked one of the warriors in the groin, wrenched the sword out of his hand.

It was a heavy, two edged weapon. He whirled it down on a black neck, wrenched it free. A crimson stream followed the blade. The savage dropped like a poleaxed steer.

There was no chance to escape up the precipitate slope. With a yell of rage he charged straight down on them, wielding the sword like a claymore. What he didn't know about swordsmanship, he made up in ferocity. Besides he had the advantage of height, and the blacks were packed so thick in the trail that they got in each other's way.

Jesse lit in their midst like a berserk Highlander. He almost made it to Diana when one of the savages thrust a spear between his legs. He lunged onto his face cursing, spitting dirt.

The flat of a sword caught him across the back of his head. Something seemed to explode inside his skull. He slumped to the ground like an empty sack.

IV

WILL BRANT pushed the mosquito netting aside, sat up. The tent was hot, close. Sweat filmed his face. He had awakened with the feeling that he had overslept. It must be ten o'clock. Why hadn't he been called?

A frown gathered on his thin, sun-burned countenance. He slipped his feet into mosquito boots, the feeling of something wrong persisting.

His eyes suddenly widened. There hadn't been a sound from outside his tent! The rattle of gear, the soft voices of the porters, all the usual noises of a safari in camp, were stilled.

The first thought that jumped into his mind was that Kheir-ed-Din had deserted him. He sprang to the entrance, peered out.

No. There was the Moor's striped tent. The Countess Zita Nadasdy's tent had been pitched just beyond. Chop boxes

and bundles were stored neatly about the camp.

The dead embers of last night's cooking fires dotted the ground.

But of the blacks themselves, there was no sign.

Brant snatched his holstered revolver. He ran outside, buckling it about his middle.

They had made camp last night beside a stream high up in the Crystal Mountains of Rio Muni. The jungle-clad slope reared above him like a living green wall. Further down the gorge, a faint mist hid the trail that they had traversed yesterday. The stillness was unbelievable, broken only by his harsh breathing and the chuckling murmur of the water.

"Kheir-ed-Din!" he yelled. "Zita! Wake up! The porters have run off."

The hills threw his voice back. "RUN OFF! Run off!"

There was a startled grunt from the striped tent, then the Moor's voice asking, "What did you say?"

"The blacks have deserted!"

Brant could hear Kheir-ed-Din curse in Berber. "One minute," he said.

Brant ran to Zita Nadasdy's tent flung back the flap. Her camp cot was swathed in mosquito netting. "Zita—" he began, then backed out hastily, his ears burning. The countess slept *au naturel*.

Will Brant had never considered himself prudish, but Zita Nadasdy shocked him to the core of his being.

She had admitted quite brazenly that she had pumped Cooper and had stolen the tablet. She had brought it to Kheir-ed-Din because she couldn't handle an expedition into the jungle alone. The Moor seemed a little afraid of her, which puzzled Brant.

"What's this about the blacks?" Kheir-ed-Din cried as he emerged from the tent. His dark eyes swept the silent camp, and Brant could see the blood blacken his hawk-like visage.

"*Bismillah!*" I'll see to it that the dogs are flayed alive for this!" He wheeled on Brant. "Why didn't you call me sooner?"

Brant said coldly: "I just woke up." He sat down on a chop box, lit a cigar-

ette. His pajamas hung from his frame like a flour sack.

They both heard Zita Nadasdy stir, call her personal boy in a sharp voice.

"Susu!"

The Moor delicately lifted an eyebrow. "Has the countess been informed?"

Brant shook his head. "Quit yelling for Susu," he called out to her. He was too shaken to be politic. "Get up. The porters have deserted."

They heard her gasp. In a matter of seconds she burst from her tent buttoning her skirt, bootlaces flying.

"Gone!" she said. Her brown eyes were round with alarm. There was no question but that she grasped the seriousness of their situation.

They were six days march beyond Oyem, the last French outpost in Gaboon. They must be well into Spanish Guinea—walled in by mountains, trapped in the fetid rainforests.

They had taken ship for Libreville in French Equatorial Africa and had entered Rio Muni by the back door rather than expose themselves to the greedy prying Spanish officials. None of them knew the first principle of fending for oneself in the jungle.

At least, Brant knew damn well that he didn't. The countess probably could take care of herself anywhere.

She said, "Give me a cigarette, Will," regarded him over the flame as he lit it for her. "I was afraid of this."

"It is easy," said Kheir-ed-Din, "to be a prophet after the event!"

"If you had listened to the blacks," she retorted dryly, "you would have known that our friend Brant, here, was leading us straight into a tabu area. These mountains are evil, the natives say. A race of monkey men—"

"Nonsense!" said Brant.

The countess shrugged. She sat down on a log, began to lace her boots. She was wearing gray gabardine breeches that emphasized her tiny waist. She said:

"I didn't say that I put any credence in it; that is what the blacks believe. The monkey men are wicked spirits who have taken possession of the bodies of baboons. They use bows and arrows to drive off

their enemies, and they talk among themselves in English——”

“What is done, is done,” Kheir-ed-Din interrupted. He had discarded his Moorish costume for European boots and breeches, shirt and coat. His headdress, though, was typically Arabian—a *hlafa*, the thin white cloth falling to his waist like a cape. “The point is, what are we to do now.”

“Return to Oyem and hire new porters,” the countess said impatiently.

“Are you so sure that you can find the way back?”

They looked at each other in consternation.

“There’s nothing else to do but try,” Brant broke the silence.

BY MID-AFTERNOON of the second day, they were hopelessly lost and knew it.

The countess had fallen down and smashed the compass. The sky was overcast with thick gray clouds that looked as if they were filled to bursting with water. All about them reared the tumbled peaks and ridges of the Crystal Mountains, their valleys choked with jungle to which an evil mist clung like poisonous gas.

Brant was in the lead as they toiled up yet another slope. He was following a gorilla trail although none of the three recognized it. Earlier, they had heard the great apes barking angrily at this intrusion. Brant had thought it the barking of wild dogs.

When they came at length to the crest and saw only another miasmatic, jungle-infested valley with range after range of mountains thrusting their saw-edges into the dull sky, the countess dropped limply on a rock.

The Moor had lost his dapper appearance. He spoke in grunts and seemed to have retreated into the fatalism of Mohammed.

Brant said: “We’ve got to get under shelter.” He had his eyes on the sky. A slight figure in khaki shorts with a hump-like pack on his back, a revolver belted about his waist, a rifle in his hands.

“I’m soaked to the skin now,” the count-

ess retorted. “What difference will a little rain make?”

“We can build a fire and dry out.”

“Deliver me from your fires. The last one was all smoke.” She wrinkled her nose. “I felt like a sausage after five minutes—or a smoked herring!”

Brant didn’t think this was funny. He couldn’t understand how the girl was able to maintain such levity in the face of disaster. There was no question but that she possessed courage of a high order. Brant admired it; he just didn’t feel like laughing.

He unshipped the powerful binoculars, searched the valley carefully.

“There’s a line of bluffs off to the left. Maybe we can get underneath them. Primitive man found they made very satisfactory shelters.”

Zita giggled.

“What’s so funny about that?” he demanded.

She said, “Forgive me, Will. It was the thought of you putting anthropology to such practical uses. I suppose you’ll have us chipping out flint weapons next.”

“If our ammunition runs out, we may be forced to do just that.”

“And you could show us how?”

“I think so. There are two methods—direct percussion and using a bone-flaker.”

The countess’ brown eyes twinkled as she regarded him from beneath thick curly lashes.

“I shall have to take care,” she said, “or you will be dragging me off to your cave by my hair. I will not fight too hard; my scalp is quite tender.”

Brant gave her a startled look. He could feel his ears growing red. “We’ve wasted enough time,” he said hastily.

It started to rain before they reached the cliffs. A drenching tropical down-pour, that soaked them to the skin. It made a rushing sound like a freight train.

Brant slogged along in the lead with Zita struggling behind him, swearing in three languages.

“This is the wettest rain I’ve ever encountered. I’m——” She broke off suddenly with a startled exclamation. “Look! There! Up ahead!”

Through the curtain of rain, Brant

caught sight of a huge notch in the bluffs. It was like a gate through the mountains. For some reason he felt a thrill tingle down his spine. Perhaps it was a pass leading to some outpost of civilization. He quickened his steps.

When they reached the gap, water was flowing among the rough boulders in its bottom. Flowing away from the valley that they'd just left. Brant realized that this must be a divide in the watershed.

He splashed along through the shallow trickle, watching for an overhanging ledge where they could crawl in out of the rain.

All at once the Moor burst into an excited flow of Arabic. "In front! Look! The earth vanishes!"

Zita gasped.

Brant raised his eyes, drew in his breath. It did look as if they were staring beyond the edge of the world.

The tiny stream plunged down like a thread into roiling mists below that hid any glimpse of the bottom of the awesome abyss. He crept to the edge, lay flat on

his stomach, peered over. At that moment the rain stopped. A rift appeared in the clouds and a flood of torrid yellow sunlight poured down into the chasm like a searchlight.

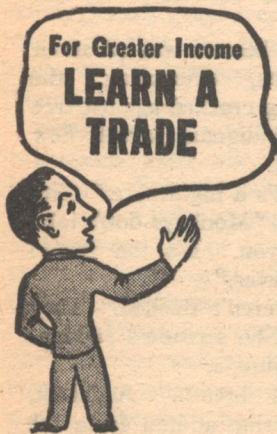
THROUGH GAPS in the mist he could catch glimpses of the valley floor. The thick jungle looked like sward at this height. Here and there were crazy quilt patches that must be cultivated fields. He lifted the binoculars with trembling fingers, focused them.

"There're people down there!" he said.

"What are they like?"

"I can't tell from this distance. But what does it matter?" He began to inspect the sheer sides of the chasm through the glass. "The question is, can we get down to them?"

At some distant time in the past the cliffs had crumbled at this point, forming the V shaped gap. The action of the stream had further breeched the wall. The countess, who had had some slight ex-



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perience with mountain climbing in the Tyrol, thought they could negotiate the descent.

She took the light camp ax, cut alpenstocks. She insisted on them linking themselves together with the coil of rope and led the way over the edge in order to prospect the safest route.

A dozen times they had to lower themselves bodily over sheer drops. Long before they reached the gentler slopes below, Brant realized that they would never be able to climb out again by this route.

Dusk caught them halfway down. They found a comparatively level bench where they halted for the night.

After repeated failures, Brant got the wet wood to burn. They huddled together about the flames, listening to the savage din of the jungle. Far below them tiny points of lights flickered like the reflections of stars.

The next morning they resumed their descent. Brant kept trying to catch another glimpse of the valley's floor with the binoculars, but it was hopeless. The jungle had closed around them, thick, hot and stifling.

Once they sighted a band of chimpanzees. The apes seemed half tame as they swung off grumbling through the middle branches. A leopard squalled from the rocks above—an angry frustrated plaint, because his hunting had been unsuccessful the night before.

Suddenly the Moor called for them to stop.

"I hear drums!" he said, "and yelling."

They huddled together in the trail. A twig snapped as Zita shifted nervously. "Quiet!" Kheir-ed-Din growled.

At first Brant thought the sound must be the thud of his own heart. But it grew progressively closer, louder, a confused yelling, mingled with the rattle of drums. He could feel gooseflesh start from his skin.

A duiker sprang from the undergrowth, bounded out of sight in terrified leaps, fleeing before the racket.

"It's a hunt!" Zita cried. "Those are beaters."

Suddenly a band of baboons broke out of the jungle onto the game trail just

ahead. There were about a dozen of them, huge grizzled drills.

Brant's eyes widened in disbelief. The apes were carrying bows and arrows!

They were the biggest drills he had ever seen—larger even than the South African chacma. The leader, a ferocious dog-like creature, was barking orders at his companions.

"Go 'round! No let black man see you!" He seemed to be leading the baboons diagonally toward the wing of beaters trying to circle them.

Just then one of the drills caught sight of the three people in the trail.

"Man!" he cried.

With startled barks the baboons melted into the underbrush.

Zita was the first to get her breath back.

"The monkey men!"

The Moor's face was a dirty gray.

Brant could feel his heart thumping crazily.

"They talked! You heard them! English!"

"Yes, I heard them," said Kheir-ed-Din. He seemed stunned.

The uproar of the beaters was all about them—savage shouts, drumming, the thwack of sticks being cracked against tree trunks. A flock of indignant parrots flew squawking overhead.

"It's monstrous; it's a nightmare." Zita Nadasdy bit her lip. "Monkeys don't talk. They don't, I tell you. It's the fever! We've caught the fever."

But her cheeks weren't flushed. They were deathly pale. She screamed suddenly, pointed into the jungle.

Brant caught his breath. A black, sweaty face was peering at him from the greenery.

The savage was wearing a bronze helmet and carrying a drum. His eyes rolled in astonishment. Then he turned and shouted something over his shoulder.

Brant could hear the call being relayed back. There was a crashing of undergrowth and a man on a horse burst through the foliage.

The rider wasn't a large man. He was slender, dark complexioned, with a short curly beard and fierce brown eyes. A black cape fell to his stirrups. Gold rings dan-

gled from his ears. He looked every bit as startled at sight of the three people in the trail as they did at seeing him.

He called to them in a strange tongue.

"What did he say?" Zita whispered.
"Can you understand him?"

"God help us!" said Brant in a frightened voice; "I can. He wants to know who we are. He's speaking Phoenician!"

V

THE MAN REINED in his restive horse. "Who are you?" he repeated in Punic. "From whence did you appear? Did you fly down the cliff like eagles?"

Never in all his life had Brant expected to hear the Punic dialect actually spoken as a living language. He couldn't believe his ears.

"From the north," he said, finding his tongue.

"The north!" The rider appeared excited. He leaped from his horse, flung the reins to a black retainer. More and more of the savages were popping from the jungle. "Not from Kart-Hadach!"

"Kart-Hadach" was the Punic name of Carthage. Will Brant wet his lips, nodded.

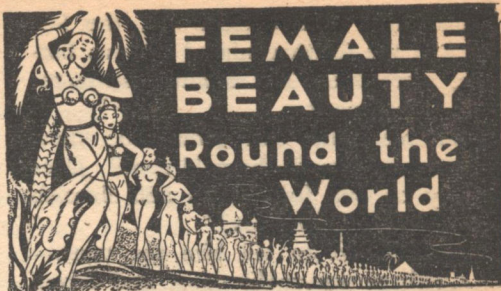
"By the lord Moloch! The priests captured a barbarian and his woman two days ago who had made their way here from the outer world. There must be a breach in the mountain somewhere! Kart-Hadach! So you are from Mother Carthage."

Some instinct prompted Brant to nod again. "What place is this?"

"Tii. For two thousand years and longer we've been isolated in this valley, cut off by unscalable mountains, hemmed in by savage Aethiopians. Less than a hundred years ago a party of priests made their way out. They were devoured by the wild blacks. Only one returned to tell their fate."

"Tii!"

Brant's heart gave a great leap. A line of the inscription on the votive tablet came back: "*We retreated into the inner city——*"



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This, then, was ancient Tii, the lost colony of the Carthaginians! It was fantastic, incredible. His common sense refused to believe it.

"Tell me," the man demanded; "how did you get through the wild men? Does the city of our forefathers still flourish after all these centuries?"

Brant started to tell him the truth—that Carthage was rubble, dust, and driven sand, that the savage black hordes had been subdued for years—but discarded the idea hastily.

He said: "We were sent out by the council of Kart-Hadach to learn if Tii had perished."

The Phoenician clapped him on the back.

"Then your search is ended." A broad grin split his face. "By the veil of Tanit, but you'll create a sensation. You're to be my guests, of course. Wait 'til the Shophetim learns of this. He'll pull his beard out hair by hair!"

Zita Nadasdy had contained herself as long as she could. She clutched Brant's arm, shook it impatiently.

"Who is he? Where are we? He looks like something off a stage! Tell me quick before I die of curiosity."

Brant hesitated.

Kheir-ed-Din was regarding the Tiian with a perplexed scowl.

"I can almost understand him. What language did you say he spoke?"

"Punic."

They regarded Brant blankly.

"Punic!" Zita echoed. Then her eyes widened. "Punic! You mean——"

He said: "I mean that we've found the lost city of Tii!"

Pumiyathon, as the young Tiian aristocrat introduced himself, gave up any notion of continuing with the hunt. He ordered three of his retainers to turn their horses over to the celebrated visitors from Mother Carthage, led the way toward the city.

"Tell me," he asked as they jogged along, "Do they still sacrifice children in the fiery embrace of Baal Moloch?"

Brant was horrified. In his excitement, he'd forgotten this particular feature of Phoenician worship. During their exca-

vations at Carthage they'd uncovered hundreds of urns containing the calcined bones of children thrown into the flaming maw of a huge bronze idol.

He shuddered, said, No. Not for generations have the Carthaginians sacrificed humans!"

Pumiyathon's eyes brightened.

"By the scales of Dagon, that's news! Wait 'til the high priest of Tanit hears of that!" He leaned toward Brant. "You understand, there are those among us who have tried to abolish this shameful practice. But we are looked upon as blasphemers and worse!"

"What does he say?" Zita demanded in exasperation. She and Kheir-ed-Din were riding abreast behind Brant and their host.

"He says there are two factions in the city—one for sacrifice and one against it."

"You mean that they still throw little children into a furnace?" Zita's dark eyes were enormous.

Brant nodded.

"Disgusting!"

The jungle trail debouched suddenly onto a road paved with huge blocks of stone in which chariot wheels had worn deep ruts. Pumiyathon turned up it towards the head of the valley.

This end, he informed Brant, had been left in its natural state as a game preserve. But they hadn't gone far before cultivated fields began to replace the jungle.

Naked blacks tended the fields with primitive hoes. They passed cumbersome two-wheeled carts, loaded with produce, creaking their way toward the city.

FROM TIME TO TIME Brant caught sight of beautiful villas tucked away behind walls, surrounded by gardens and groves. These, Pumiyathon told him, were the estates of the wealthy Tiian families.

Nominally, Tii was a republic. But she had only one chief magistrate, the Shophetim, whose rule had become hereditary, subject of course to the council.

Bomilcar, the present Shophetim, belonged to the conservative party and was one of the staunchest defenders of the horrible practice of sacrificing children.

Brant was translating Pumiyathon's

words for the benefit of Zita and Kheir-ed-Din, when the little cavalcade rounded a bend, and he caught his first sight of Tii.

Enclosed by ruined walls, the city spread up the slope of the mountain, its flat roofs half hidden by the tropical verdure. The hanging gardens of Babylon must have looked something like this, Brant thought. He heard Zita gasp and Kheir-ed-Din call on Allah.

A chariot was rattling down the road. The driver, a young man in a scarlet robe, pulled up his horses as he neared them.

"Pumiyathon!" he yelled; "who have you there?"

Pumiyathon's chest swelled. "Travelers from Mother Carthage!"

The newcomer's eyes widened. He was a slight, womanish fellow with jeweled pendants sparkling in his ears.

"From Carthage!" he cried. Then with a yell, he wheeled his horses, lashed them into a furious run, dashing back toward the city at a reckless swaying pace.

He must have roused the entire city, for as they cantered through the ruined gates, hundreds of excited people crowded the thoroughfare. More were running up all the time to join the press—priestesses of Tanit with naked breasts, fierce, hook-nosed men in varicolored wool ketons, women with their hair piled high in the strange Canaanitish style, black slaves and noble lords. They jostled and pushed, indifferent to rank, in order to catch a glimpse of the three strangers from Carthage.

But it was the apes that struck Brant with the greatest astonishment!

The hairy, half-human beasts perched in the branches or rubbed shoulders with the crowd, tame as dogs. He could see little monkeys, long armed jabbering chimpanzees. There was even a huge squat gorilla peering from a balcony.

Then he recalled that apes had been sacred to the moon.

It brought back with a rush memory of the baboons. Momentarily, he'd forgotten them in the startling discovery that Tii was a living city.

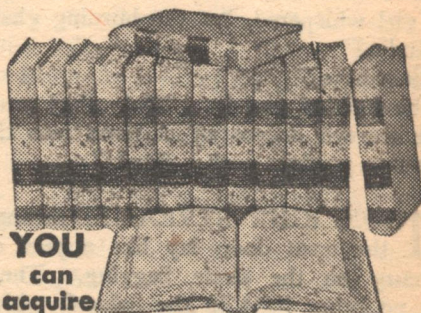
Brant was past words, past wonder, but

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a shiver went through him. Baboons armed with bows and arrows! Baboons that spoke English!

English!

If they'd learned parrot-like to talk from the inhabitants of ancient Tii, they should have used Punic. But English——

Was any of this real, or was it like Zita had said, only some fever-induced hallucination. Brant surreptitiously pinched himself.

Zita Nadasdy edged her mount beside him, clutched his arm.

"Look!" she whispered and nodded above the roofs toward the upper end of the valley where Pumiathon had told them lay the sanctuary of Tanit.

Brant saw an oily black cloud issuing from one of the temple buildings.

"Smoke? What about it?"

"I've seen that kind of smoke before," the girl whispered, "at the burning ghats of India!"

"Sacrifices?"

She nodded mutely. "Only they must have thrown dozens of children into the flames to produce such a cloud!"

MOONLIGHT STREAMED through the open door, lay like a pool of mercury on the stone flagging. There was no other light in the cubical, which was only one among hundreds of such cells facing the sacred grove of Tanit.

From where Diana lay face down on the hard pallet, she could watch the silvered wood, see the gleam of bodies flitting among the dense black shadows. Laughter reached her ears, and subdued shrieks mingled with the eerie music of timbrels and flutes. For this was the night of the full moon, the night sacred to Tanit!

The girl's body was tense, her breathing quick, frightened. When she shifted her position the chain about her ankle clanked faintly. It was a long slender chain fastened to a staple in the stone wall at the foot of her bed. Diana had been chained there inside the tiny cell since her capture.

This afternoon black slaves had come to bathe and dress her in a long blue tunic. She'd been powdered and perfumed. A girdle of red leather had been fastened

about her waist, her hair done in Canaanitish style, a nose button clamped to her nostril.

Footsteps approached, accompanied by masculine voices. Diana quivered. But the voices and steps went past her door and faded.

She could hear the sleepy muttering of the sacred apes in the branches. They were annoyed at the revelry going on below them.

Again she heard the tread of someone nearing her cell. But this time it didn't pass! Diana drew in her breath with a faint gasp. The moonlight revealed a man standing in the doorway. He was a lean, dark man with a short beard. His cloak was thrown back from his shoulders discovering a knee-length white keton of wool, hairy calves and arms.

He left the doorway, came toward her unsteadily. Diana thought she would suffocate as he stood above her, saying something in that incomprehensible language. She could smell the sour odor of wine that clung to him like an aura. He was drunk. She felt him touch her shoulder and flinched away.

The man laughed. Stooping, he tried to seize her in his arms.

Diana hit him in the pit of his stomach with her clenched fist!

The man grunted, staggered back. He gave an angry curse, his eyes glittered suddenly in the moonlight as he lunged at her.

She sprang to her feet, managed to evade his clumsy rush. Then she was brought up short at the end of her chain, fell sprawling on the hard stones. The fellow pounced like a big cat. Diana screamed.

At that instant there was a savage growl from the doorway. Something hurtled across the floor, sprang at the man's throat. He went over backward making harsh terrified gurgling sounds that were all mixed up with the beast's growls.

Diana was frozen with horror. She watched the struggle breathlessly, her eyes round as saucers.

The beast sank its fangs into the man's neck. Shoving with its forepaws, it tore out the entire throat. There was a great gout of blood, black as oil in the moon-

light. The man quivered, lay still.

Diana saw the beast lift its bloody muzzle, walk stiff-legged toward her.

"Thoth!" she cried.

Flinging her arms around the great grizzled drill's neck, she began to sob as if her heart would break.

"You no hurt?" Thoth growled. "You no hurt?"

"No! No! I'm all right. But Thoth, where's Jesse? What have they done with Jesse?"

The ape shook its head. "Don't know."

Both of them heard the startled gasps from the entrance. The door was jammed with awe-stricken temple priestesses, drunken revelers.

With a growl, Thoth leaped straight at them. They scattered in superstitious terror. They'd seen a miracle that night. One of the goddess's own sacred apes had protected the barbarian girl from being profaned.

"Thoth!" Diana cried. "Find Jesse! Find Jesse, Thoth!"

Diana crawled up on the stone shelf that served as a bed. She drew her feet up, clasping her hands about her knees. She was careful not to look at the dead man on the floor. The night felt suddenly cold. She began to shiver as if she had a chill. She couldn't stop. Any second she expected them to drag her from the room. But no one came.

Not 'til daybreak did the priests of Tanit work up their courage to the point of entering the cell. They struck off Diana's shackles, led her out into the sunlight.

There were brown circles under the girl's green eyes. Her face was pinched, bloodless. Her shoulders sagged hopelessly. She would not have been surprised if they'd killed her then and there.

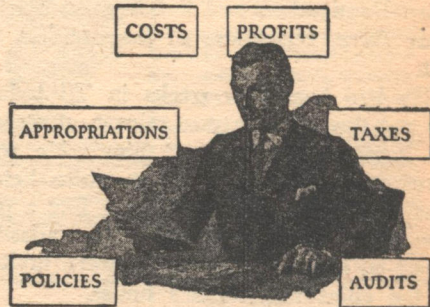
Instead, she was taken to a large bright room atop the temple. It was furnished with a carved bed of ivory and ebony, mirrors of bronze, vials of perfume and powdered violet sand. Azure dust had been sprinkled on the floor and a censer wafted pungent, sweet smoke through the air. Two negro slaves prostrated them-

8—Jungle—Spring



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selves at her entrance.

The priests left her there and backed out, superstitious awe in their expressions.

No one touched the body of the man sprawled on the floor of Diana's cell, and later in the day slaves came and walled up the doorway. Diana watched them working from her balcony.

She was completely, totally bewildered.

WILL BRANT cocked his head sideways parrot-like as he regarded the gold rings in his ears. They were a gift from Pumiyathon and it behooved him to wear them, regardless of how foolish he felt.

He had been two weeks in Tii today. He put down the bronze mirror, stretched his legs out in front of him. He was barefooted, clad in a short white koton that hung from his lank frame like a pillow case. Tonight he and Zita Nadasdy, Kheir-ed-Din and their host were invited to the chief magistrate's house.

His brow wrinkled suddenly with worry. He lit one of his last cigarettes at a squat clay lamp. He was an archeologist, he thought savagely; not a conspirator.

He'd been a happy man right at first. Tii was an archeologist's paradise. He'd wandered about the city—the street of the bakers, the wine merchants, the tanners. He'd watched and asked questions and taken notes.

He'd even made a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Tanit at the upper end of the valley, where hairless black robed eunuchs had shown him about the groves and temples. He could feel his ears burning yet at memory of the priestesses—the sacred harlots with rings in their noses and anklets of silver that jangled as they walked with swaying hips.

He jumped suddenly to his feet, began to pad soundlessly back and forth across the tiled floor.

Damn! Why couldn't they let him alone to study and observe and write.

Instead they had to embroil him in this plot to overthrow the Shophetim and the hierarchy of priests!

Pumiyathon was at the bottom of it. The young Tii aristocrat was an ideal-

ish, but he was practical, too, Brant thought. He had recognized instantly the importance of Mother Carthage having done away with the grisly practice. That carried authority.

Brant, Zita and Kheir-ed-Din had been welcomed into the secret councils of the rebels with enthusiasm. Zita was a natural born conspirator; she matched enthusiasm with enthusiasm. But it was hard to tell what the Moor thought.

A blue dusk was filtering through the open windows. The strange noises of the city ascended on the cool evening air. It was almost time to leave for the Shophetim's house.

Brant stopped his restless pacing, looked about for his revolver, which he kept hanging from a hook in the wall. It wasn't there.

He frowned, searched among the robes on his bed, through his pack. Alarm squeezed his heart! He began to hunt frantically all over the room. But the revolver was gone.

And not only the revolver, but his rifle as well and all his ammunition.

Cold sweat popped out on Brant's face. What did it mean? Why had they disarmed him?

The Tiians didn't know that the guns were weapons since they had been careful not to use them.

Brant ran out of his room onto the balcony overlooking the inner court. Pumiyathon's house was built in the form of a hollow square surrounding a garden. At that instant the silence of the house was punctured by an angry scream!

Brant felt his blood turn to ice. The scream had come from the suite of rooms occupied by Zita Nadasdy.

He sprinted down the balcony, put his shoulder to the countess' door, burst inside.

Across the room Zita was struggling furiously in the grip of Kheir-ed-Din!

Brant was too surprised to do anything but gape for a moment. She was dressed like a Phoenician girl in a sheer sleeveless tunic caught about her waist with a heavy gold girdle. Her hair was powdered with azure sand. There was a ruby nose button on her left nostril.

She was panting. Brant caught the salmon tinted gleam of her body through the sheer fabric of her tunic as she wrenched free.

He lunged forward, grabbed the Moor by the shoulder, spun him around.

Brant knocked him down. He didn't give him a chance to rise, but stooping, grabbed a handful of the Moor's hair, beat his head against the tile floor.

Kheir-ed-Din's eyes rolled up. He went limp as a turban cloth.

Brant gave his skull an extra thump, straightened, brushing his hands with the air of a man who's just finished a disagreeable but necessary job.

"That's bad!" he panted. "We need to stick together; not fight among ourselves."

Zita was neither hysterical nor indignant. She was mad through and through.

"That pig! I'll fix him for this once we get back to civilization!" She turned to Brant, her eyes softening. "You were magnificent."

"What happened?"

An expression of distaste flicked across her features. "Why talk of it? Will, what are we to do about this conspiracy?"

"Why—why," he said in surprise, "we haven't much choice, have we?"

She shivered. "Where is this going to end?"

"If Pumiyathon is successful," he said uncertainly, "I think he'll help us find a way out of the valley."

"And if he isn't?"

He shook his head.

"I can tell you!" she said, "they'll crucify us or burn us in the belly of Baal Moloch! Pumiyathon has to win!"

VI

THE MOOR GROANED and opened his eyes. He struggled to his feet, clutching his head, gave Brant a look so full of hate that the archeologist felt his blood run cold.

"Look here," he said, "I'm sorry as the devil that I had to do that."

Kheir-ed-Din didn't say anything.

The countess' eyes flashed. "Never mind him, Will," she said scornfully.

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"He'll do as I say. He is nothing! A man who carries out my orders. If he thinks to disobey, I'll have him thrown into the Mediterranean in a weighted sack."

"What?" Brant said in a stunned voice.

The Moor looked frightened, but defiant. "You go too far, Countess. We're a long way from Tunis."

Zita's eyes were cold. She didn't raise her voice but there was some quality in it that caused the Moor to turn dirty gray.

"Kheir-ed-Din," she said; "at the first sign of treachery on your part, I shall kill you."

"I was jesting," he muttered.

The countess turned her back on him contemptuously. "Will," she said in an unhappy tone. "I had hoped that you'd never learn of this. I wanted you to like me. And now——" She bit her lip.

Brant swallowed.

"You were the boss?" he asked. "Kheir-ed-Din took orders from you?"

"Is it so strange? I had contacts he could never have made. He was nothing but a petty thief, a smuggler." She broke off as Pumiathon entered the room.

"The litters are waiting below," he told them. The Tiian's thick eyebrows met above his nose in a frown. "I'm glad to find you together, because I wanted to warn you. Bomilcar's planning some treachery."

"What's that?" Brant burst out.

Zita and Kheir-ed-Din stared at the Tiian. They both spoke Arabian fluently and had had little difficulty picking up a smattering of Punic.

Pumiathon said: "I don't know what piece of treachery Bomilcar intends, but eat of no dishes that he doesn't taste first."

"Your revolver!" Brant said to Zita in English. "Wear it under your robes!"

"It's gone. I've been waiting for a chance to tell you."

The Moor said: "Mine too."

"And mine," Brant added.

They regarded each other in mounting alarm.

THE BANQUET HALL at the palace was a great, high ceilinged room with

a U-shaped table at one end. The guests lay on their stomachs, propped on their elbows around the outside of the U.

Bomilcar, at the head of the table, was licking the grease from his fingers. He was a barrel of a man, his great belly sagging in a fold over his girdle. He fixed Brant with a shrewd eye.

"So the citizens of Carthage no longer sacrifice their children to the gods?" he shouted down the table as if he couldn't believe it.

Brant found himself the center of attention, wriggled uncomfortably. A troop of near-naked dancing girls was performing in the center of the floor. But nobody watched them..

He drew a deep breath, said: "The practice was abandoned as a crime against Tanit. A sacrilege to the goddess of fertility."

He noticed that several of the guests nodded their heads in agreement. All the leaders of the anti-sacrifice party were present. Brant was worried. It was as if the chief magistrate had gathered them all together in order to dispose of them at one stroke.

"That's pretty reasoning," Bomilcar chuckled. "But sacrifice has its practical aspect here in Tii. It enables us to keep our bloodlines pure and also to hold down the population."

The dancing girls had finished their posturing. They ran off the floor, the tiny silverbells at their ankles tinkling musically.

Zita, who lay next to Brant, swore in German as she spilled wine down her neck.

"This is the damndest way to eat," she said. "I feel as if I were wallowing in my food like a pig."

Brant was too nervous to have any appetite. He wondered how she managed to choke the stuff down. The dinner hadn't been a success despite the succession of entertainers—jugglers, singers, two naked blacks who'd fought with daggers. Directly opposite, the Moor was watching him with half-lidded eyes.

"Perhaps Tanit has deserted Mother Carthage," Bomilcar suggested. "At least we have striking evidence of her presence among us."

Everyone stopped talking and turned to listen.

Zita said: "What's he getting at?"
"Shhh."

Bomilcar belched. "As you all know," he went on, "the priests captured a barbarian and his woman several days ago."

Pumiyathon who lay on Brant's left, whispered, "I'm beginning to doubt the existence of that barbarian. No one has seen him or his woman except the priests."

"The woman," Bomilcar explained, "was placed among the temple priestesses. The other night one of the worshippers went in to her. But Tanit had the girl under her protection and sent an ape, who killed the man before the very eyes of the priests. Then the ape and the girl talked in the language of the beasts."

There were gasps from the guests, an excited buzz of conversation. A harpist had begun to play her triangular instrument, but she was ignored.

Pumiyathon said under his breath: "A likely story!"

Somebody asked what had become of the barbarian girl.

"They've installed her in a room of the innermost sanctuary." Bomilcar rolled over, struck a gong. A single quivering note rang through the hall. The harpist picked up her instrument and departed.

"But enough of this. I've prepared a surprise for tonight. It's not often I have the pleasure of entertaining guests from Mother Carthage."

A shiver of anticipation ran around the table. Bomilcar's stunts were always the talk of Tii for days afterward.

The chief magistrate struck the gong again.

Before the note had died away, a hundred palace guards had poured into the hall. Stalwart blacks in plumed helmets and glittering cassocks. They surrounded the table, standing just behind the guests with drawn sword.

One of the women shrieked. Zita pressed against Brant.

"Look at Kheir-ed-Din!" she whispered.

The Moor had drawn a Webley revolver and was pointing it at Brant's forehead.

"He lied!" the countess said. "He must

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have been the one who stole our arms."

Pumiyathon began to curse in a dreadful voice. Bomilcar chuckled.

"Thanks to our friend from Mother Carthage—" the chief magistrate said, and he nodded his round glistening face at the Moor—"I have the names of all the principal conspirators in this abominable plot." His tone suddenly harshened. "Take them away!"

"He's sold us out!" Zita said in a passionate, reckless voice.

Brant saw her hand slip into the bosom of her gown. It emerged with a tiny automatic no larger than the palm of her hand. It had been hung on a cord around her neck, he realized.

BEFORE he could stop her, she pressed the trigger. There was a deafening explosion for such a tiny gun.

A round black hole appeared in Kheired-Din's forehead. He slumped face down on the couch, the heavy Webley revolver clattering into a bowl of fruit.

"Get his gun!" Zita cried in the stunned hush that followed.

Brant sprang to his feet. The point of a sword dug into his back. He stood perfectly still, bathed suddenly in cold sweat.

Zita gave an angry cry as one of the guards tore the automatic from around her neck.

"Take them away!" Bomilcar shrieked, recovering his voice. He was cringing as if afraid that they might call down a bolt of lightning on his head next.

Brant and Zita, Pumiyathon and the half dozen leaders of the conspiracy were hustled from Bomilcar's palace.

The deserted streets were black and silver in the moonlight. Their footsteps made a shushing sound. The guards' armor clanked. No one said anything as they were herded across town and through the south gate.

On either hand the road was lined with tombs. Brant shivered. Zita pressed against him as if the physical contact gave her some assurance.

"We're being turned over to the priests!" Pumiyathon growled.

Ahead Brant could make out the low wall that blocked the upper end of the

valley. The sacred groves were dark masses piling behind it like storm clouds.

Already the elfin melody of flute and timbrel was audible in the distance. The monthly rites to Tanit were in full swing, he guessed. They were bad enough, though they were nothing compared to the orgy that engulfed the whole city during the annual festival of Tammuz.

Pumiyathon said in anguished tones: "If only I could reach my men—"

"Aren't these some of them?" Brant asked indicating the ranks of black soldiers hemming them in.

Pumiyathon snorted.

"These? These are Bomilcar's personal guards."

"Oh."

Brant was silent. This is it, he thought, the end of road. But he couldn't really believe it. He could feel the smooth stones beneath his feet, smell the sweet, fertile scent of night blooming flowers. All his senses seemed to have been oddly heightened.

When Zita's shoulder touched his, it felt so hot that it almost burned him. He was conscious of a sudden compassion for the girl, a deep sense of personal loss—

"Will," Zita said in a stifled voice.

"Yes."

"Will, I'm afraid. Hold my hand."

He took her hand. It was cold and small and she clung to him tightly. The sound of the flutes was louder.

Would they be sacrificed in the belly of Baal Moloch or stoned? Stoning was a favorite method of execution among the Semetic peoples, he recalled. Somewhere on the mountainside above them, a hunting leopard squalled angrily.

Pumiyathon began to curse. The Tïan aristocrat was angry with himself, Brant sensed. Angry because he had walked into Bomilcar's trap.

Pumiyathon was popular with the city guards. They would rally behind him instantly if there was only some way of letting them know his predicament. They would be a pitifully small force against the men Bomilcar could raise, but at least they would have had a fight for their lives.

Bomilcar, though, was taking no chances.

They were led secretly through a small postern gate into a closed court. From the court they crossed a resounding hall. The sound of revelry grew fainter off to their left.

They emerged finally into a dark grove, where they were halted while the soldiers raised a grating in the stone flagging underfoot. A ladder was lowered into a deep pit. It went down, down—twenty-three feet.

"In there." The captain of the guards jerked his chin toward the circular black hole.

Brant peered into the stygian darkness. He could feel his stomach grow hollow. The guard made a threatening motion with his spear. Brant crawled over the lip of the pit, began to climb down the ladder, feeling for each rung with his feet.

Zita followed, then Pumiathon and his companions.

Brant kept glancing below him. He thought he heard something move in the deep tar-like darkness of the pit's bottom. He stiffened, felt his blood turn to ice.

Zita stepped on his fingers as he halted.

"What is it?" she hissed.

"I don't know."

"Get moving!" the guard shouted from the rim of the pit above.

Brant began to descend again. His fingers were slippery with sweat on the wooden rungs. He had literally to force his muscles to obey his command.

Then he heard the noise again. The horror of it nearly drove him frantic. He would have run up the ladder like a monkey except that it was blocked by Zita and the others.

He let his foot down. The suspense was unbearable. Then the sole of his foot touched a stone floor, and he edged away from the ladder.

"Watch your step," he told Zita. "Here's the bottom."

"An American!" said a startled voice in unmistakable Yankee accents. "Or have I gone completely off my nut?"

Brant couldn't have been more surprised if a lion had pounced on him out of the pit's darkness. Zita screamed. There

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was a rattle of exclamations running up the ladder.

The guard shouted: "Go on! Go on!"

"Who is it?" Brant asked in a shaky voice.

"The name's Jesse Quinn if it means anything to you."

"But—but how did you get here?"

"If you'd let me know where I am," the voice said, "I might be able to tell you."

VII

ZITA and the Tiians had reached the bottom. They huddled about Brant staring into the darkness across the pit toward the voice.

The ladder was hoisted out, the grill replaced. They could hear the sounds of the guards retreating.

Brant said cautiously: "I'm Will Brant. I don't know exactly where we are. Someplace in Rio Muni. I was with an archeological expedition searching for a lost Carthaginian colony. We found it. This is it."

"Where's the rest of your party?"

"I'm the rest of it," Zita chimed in. "All that's left of it. What are you doing here?"

"I'm not doing a damned thing," said Jesse shortly.

The irrepressible Zita giggled. She had the most amazing powers of recovery Brant had ever seen in anyone. Her resilience must be due to the hard life she'd led. Her family, he gathered, were impoverished and she'd lived by her wits most of her life. He found himself secretly admiring her courage.

"Mr. Quinn," he addressed the invisible stranger. "This is the Countess Zita Nadasdy. These others are—are descendants of the original Carthaginian settlers."

Jesse whistled.

Pumiyathon asked in Punic: "Who is this fellow?"

"Just a moment," Brant told him. Then to Jesse: "How do you happen to be here?"

Jesse hesitated. "My wife and I are wild animal collectors," he said finally.

"Our base is over in the Cameroons, but we were in the Crystal Mountains after some drills. We happened to stumble onto the ruins of a city—not in this valley, but the next one. A landslide trapped us. Then we found a tunnel that led here."

"We thought we'd discovered a way out. But we were jumped by a band of these—these Carthaginians and their blacks. I was laid out. When I came to, here I was."

"That was a couple of weeks ago. And here I've been ever since. I don't know what's become of Diana. That's my wife. I didn't know who these people were and couldn't understand their language. What's your story?"

Brant told him. He told him about stumbling onto the lost civilization, about Pumiyathon and the young nobles who had hoped to overthrow Bomilcar and do away with human sacrifice, about the treachery of Kheir-ed-Din, and the feast at Bomilcar's palace.

Jesse listened without comment. Not until Brant was finished, did he interrupt. Then he asked:

"If we could get out of here, there's some chance that Pumiyathon could take the city?"

"Some. He's in charge of the guards, and his men are devoted to him——"

"Then by God, let's dig out!"

How?"

Zita, who had been translating their conversation sotto voce for the Tiian's benefit, broke in:

"These are the ancient cisterns of the temple, Pumiyathon says. They're not far from the river, and if we can get out, we can escape by the stream bed. Pumiyathon is sure that he can raise enough men to take the city by surprise."

As they spoke the moon had slowly climbed higher in the sky until its pale beams glowed down through the grating, the bars making a cross hatch on the floor.

Brant and Jesse got a good look at each other for the first time. The archeologist raised his eyebrows at sight of the tall lean sunbronzed man in the leopard skins.

Jesse's hair was long and matted and a two weeks growth of beard furred his jaw. His pale blue eyes were narrow

slits. There was some thing wild, frightening in his appearance. The elegant young lords of Tii drew together, babbling amongst themselves.

"From whence comes the barbarian?" Pumiyahton demanded.

"From Britain," Brant said, realizing that it would be impossible to make them understand America.

Pumiyahton's visage relaxed. "That explains it," he told his compatriots. "The Britains are savages who paint themselves blue."

Zita giggled again.

Jesse was frowning.

"Come along, I want to show you something," he said abruptly as if he had just reached a decision.

Come where?"

Jesse indicated an arched doorway. "The cisterns are all connected."

Brant started after him. Zita grabbed his sleeve, trailing along. The next cistern was identical to the one they'd just left—about forty feet deep and fifteen feet across. Overhead the stone walls curved inward like a bottleneck, and another grating barred the mouth.

"Look at this!" said Jesse in a strange voice.

Brant swung around. The wild animal collector was pulling an ancient bronze casket into the moonlight. Zita sucked in her breath. Brant's heart gave a great leap. Then Jesse threw back the lid.

A dim corruscating light seemed to emanate from the ancient casket as thousands upon thousands of gems caught the moon's rays, amplified them, reflected them from their tiny facets.

With a low cry, Zita fell on her knees, ran her fingers through the stones.

"Pretty, eh?" said Jesse in a matter-of-fact voice. "I was trying to dig out when I found them. There're more. I don't know how many chests. And gold too in another cistern. Ingots of the stuff stacked like kindling."

"The treasure of Tanit!" Brant whispered. "The priests must have hidden it here thousands of years ago. Possibly during the Aethopian invasion."

"That's about what I figured," Jesse

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said. "They're bound to 've forgotten the stuff or they wouldn't use these cisterns for a prison. What I can't figure is where they got it. There aren't any diamonds or emeralds or sapphires in Rio Muni."

"The Congo," Brant said. "South Africa. You don't understand the Phoenicians. They traded everywhere. Even as far north as Britain for tin."

From the next pit they heard the Tiians break into excited cries. A harsh, rasping call was audible above their voices.

"'Esse! 'Esse!"

"Thoth!" Jesse yelled and dashed back the way they'd just come."

THE TIANS were staring upward at the grating where the ugly grizzled head of a baboon was visible.

"Thoth!" Jesse called in a low voice. "Here I am, Thoth!"

The ape gave a bark of pleasure. Another ugly snout thrust over the edge and another until a dozen were visible.

"You o. k.?" one of the baboons demanded. That was little Kee, Jesse realized. He was the only one who had a predilection for slang.

"Where's Diana?"

"In big cave. High up. More high than tree."

"Is she all right?"

"She O. K., O. K., O. K.," Little Kee barked, his voice rising in excitement. Thoth cuffed him for his noisiness, growled a warning.

The Tiian's gaze jerked from the apes to Jesse. They were speechless, caught in the grip of a superstitious funk. Brant and Zita had entered the pit and were listening open-mouthed.

"Wait, Thoth," Jesse told the ape. "Don't go away." He swung on Brant. "Thoth can pull off the grating and lower the ladder. What about these fellows?" He indicated the Tiians. "Can we trust them? Will they stand by us?"

"Y-yes," said Brant.

"Do you think there's any chance of a revolt being successful? I've got to know." Jesse's voice shook with the intensity of his emotion. "They've got my wife locked away somewhere. We might

be able to escape but I've got to get her out first, and I'll need help. Quick, speak up man!"

"I—I think so."

"All right. Now, listen close. Tell these fellows we'll get 'em out, and help fight. That the apes will help too. They've poison arrows——"

"Poison arrows!"

"Yes. But if we win, they must free Diana."

Brant drew a shaky breath, repeated Jesse's words in punic.

"The apes will help," Pumiyahton cried. "The sacred apes of Tanit!"

"Yes," said Brant, then added with a stroke of inspiration. "The apes say that they are from Tanit, who has witnessed your struggle against child sacrifice. She has sent them to aid you, since the taking of life is repugnant to her."

With a low cry, the Tiians fell on their faces.

Zita said in English, admiration in her voice: "To think how you've been wasting your talents! Will, I love you!"

Jesse raised his eyes to the drills. "Lift off the grating," he called, and when that had been done, commanded them to get the ladder and lower it.

In a matter of moments they all stood outside the pit. Jesse was scratching Thoth behind the ears, explaining what the drills must do. The Tiians, their eyes rolling, watched and listened in terror.

Little Kee bounced around, unable to repress entirely his bottled-up excitement. While Ooga strutted back and forth, dog-like, telling the others exactly what he intended to do to the Tiians.

"The first thing, I suppose," Jesse said, "is to get away from the temple grounds. Then what?"

"The barracks," Brant replied in a stifled voice. "Go straight to the barracks."

All at once there was a shout from the temple behind them. It was followed by startled cries. A light blazed up.

Brant yelled. "Quick! The river! We've been discovered!"

Jesse felt his heart sink. "Follow us through the trees," he commanded Thoth. Then he plunged after the others.

No longer could there be any question of taking the city by surprise, Jesse knew. He paced back and forth, back and forth in the officers' quarters of the barracks, which they'd reached only a few minutes ago.

Pumiyathon wasn't present. He was out talking to his startled, sleepy men in the vast courtyard where they had been assembled after being routed from their beds.

Fifteen hundred men and a dozen apes against a city of ten thousand. It was preposterous! Jesse clenched his fists.

The drills were alarmed. They clustered together on Jesse's side of the room, jabbering amongst themselves.

Brant, who'd flung himself into a chair, said: "If we'd only been able to take Bomilcar by surprise!"

Zita leaned down, rubbed her cheek against his face. She didn't say anything, but her eyes were wide, luminous.

Jesse strode to the window and stared out.

The barracks of the city guard were located near the upper edge of Tii, higher up the mountain slope. The city seemed to unfold beneath him like a vast relief map.

The sky was gray with dawn, dimming the innumerable lights. The sound of drums and voices rolled up to him. Then he stiffened as he caught sight of a dark mass of men flooding up the street straight towards the barracks.

Jesse spun around.

"Quick! Tell Pumiyathon that Bomilcar's army is here!"

Zita caught her lip between her teeth. Brant sprang to his feet, ran out of the room. In a minute he returned with Pumiyathon, who took one look through the window, then ran back.

Jesse thought they would try to defend the barracks, but Pumiyathon's men began to pour out into the open. They fell to work throwing up a crude barrier across the street.

It was an effective move, Jesse realized, for it telescoped Bomilcar's overwhelming army into a narrow file, and left Pumiyathon a retreat into the barracks

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where he could make a last ditch stand. The other streets were being blocked as well. The gray dawn resounded with shouts, crashes. Somewhere drums were thudding.

Jesse leaped through the window, the apes tumbling out after him.

A great cheer went up from Pumiyathon's men as they caught sight of the beasts. For some reason the apes seemed to hearten them tremendously.

Jesse leaped to the top of the breastwork, and then the drills followed. Their powerful bows were strung, arrows knocked.

Down the street Jesse could see the dark wave of advancing soldiers. They filled the narrow alley from building to building. It was a breath-taking spectacle with the morning sun glinting on bronze helmets, flashing from spears and swords. Behind the first phalanx rank upon rank of archers came on a trot.

Brant had scrambled up behind him.

"God!" the archeologist breathed.

The first ranks of Bomilcar's army were close. Little more than a hundred yards off. It looked as it must wash straight over the breast-high barricade like a tidal wave.

A dozen arrows whistled overhead. A man screamed.

"Shoot," Jesse yelled at the apes.

Thoth bent his bow, released the poisoned sliver of wood. The other apes fired. Jesse started to leap down behind the barricade, where Pumiyathon's men were drawn up, their black sweaty faces bloodless, tense, as they set themselves to meet the shock of the advancing army.

Only it was a shock that never came.

As the shower of arrows from the apes' bows took effect, the wave of Bomilcar's men came to a confused halt. There was a whole chorus of frightened cries:

"A miracle! The sacred apes of Tanit! The gods have deserted us!"

Then a great incoherent roar went up. "The goddess! The goddess!"

Here and there a man threw down his arms. Then more and more followed their example. It ran through the massed soldiers like a fever.

"Quick!" Jesse yelled. "Tell Pumi-

yathon to order a charge. Now!"

Brant spun around. "Advance! Advance!" he yelled at Pumiyathon.

Without waiting for further orders the men leaped over the breastwork. They charged down on the superstitious, terror-ridden army of Bomilcar with Jesse and the sacred apes of Tanit in the lead.

It wasn't a battle. It wasn't even a rout.

It was a triumphal entry!

Pumiyathon's men marched through the city between crowds of cheering citizens, who showered them with flowers. They kept chanting: "The goddess has chosen! The goddess has chosen!" When they reached the palace, Bomilcar was dead.

The Shophitem literally had been torn to pieces by the mob.

JESSE LEFT the others at the palace. "Diana. Take me to Diana," he commanded Thoth.

The great, grizzled drill grunted in assent; set off at a trot toward the sanctuary of Tanit. Little Kee hopped along at his side. The other apes were strung out behind. They had grown accustomed to the cheering throngs that met them on every hand, but they were still leary.

Jesse was breathless by the time he reached the topmost floor of the great temple.

"In there!" Thoth grunted, pointing his nose toward a massive door barred on the outside.

Jesse threw off the bar with trembling fingers, shoved the door inward.

The room was empty.

"Diana!" he cried. "Diana!"

He could feel his heart sink. Then he gave a shout. Diana burst from the balcony. She ran into his arms.

"Jesse! Jesse!" she cried. "It is you. I've been terrified that you were dead."

He held her for a long time. All at once she stiffened, pushed away.

"Jesse! We must escape from this horrible place. We can't waste another second!"

His face was blank, but a twinkle began to grow in his blue eyes.

"There's no hurry."

"No hurry! Are you mad?"

"Why," he said, "I thought you might like to see the city. It's not every day a person gets a chance to visit a lost Carthaginian colony—"

"Lost Carthaginian colony?" Her green eyes were startled. "But Jesse, I don't comprehend!"

"Nether do I," he grinned suddenly, "but it's a damned convenient thing for us."

THERE WAS a trail to the notch in the mountains at last. It had been laboriously chipped from the cliffs by relays of black slaves. Jesse stood at the head of the trail, taking a last look down into the mist-shrouded depths of the abyss.

He was wearing a suit of Brant's khakis. They were much too small and fit him like the skin of a sausage. Diana had been more fortunate. Zita's clothes were nearer her size.

"And you're sure you won't come?" he asked Brant.

The archeologist shook his head. They had been over this many times before. For hours they had discussed what must be done—Brant and Zita, Pumiathon, Jesse and Diana.

It had been Pumiathon who had resolved their difficulties.

"From what you have told me of the outer world, it appears obvious that it would only mean our destruction if we were discovered. No, my friends, Tii has survived two thousand years alone. It won't hurt her to wait a few centuries more."

In his heart Brant was delighted. He couldn't have been dragged from the city by wild horses. He had already begun work on a history of Tii, its archeology, religion, customs and art.

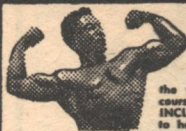
Zita refused to leave him. "It's the only place left," she had informed them with a twinkle in her brown eyes, "where a countess can live like a countess."

Only little Kee had wanted to accompany Jesse and Diana back to the outer world. And he begged and begged until they consented in desperation.

They shook hands once more. Brant

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said, "You'll be back? You won't forget the cameras?"

"We won't forget," Diana said. "We won't forget anything."

Jesse shouldered his pack, picked up his rifle.

Thoth came over and shook hands solemnly, imitating Brant. There was a sudden dampness in Diana's eyes and Jesse had to swallow a large healthy lump in his throat.

"Well, I'd best be getting back to Zita," Brant said. "Come on, Thoth." He started down the trail into the valley, but Thoth lingered a minute.

He looked at Kee, who was fidgeting nervously. The little ape could scarcely wait to be off on the great adventure.

"Him smart monkey," Thoth growled "You watch him."

"We'll take care of him, Thoth," Jesse said. "And bring him back sound as a nut."

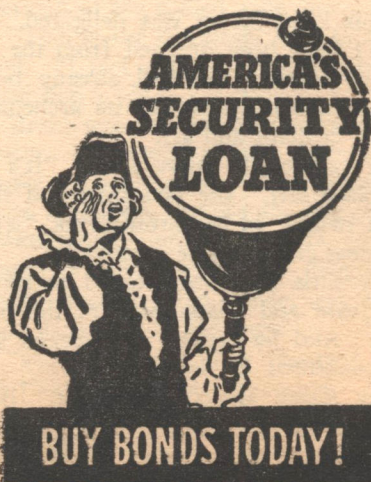
"You come back too."

Diana threw her arms around the great, grizzled drill's neck. "We'll be back, Thoth. Don't ever doubt it."

Thoth went "Humph!" it sounded just like a testy old man trying not to show how pleased he was. Then he bounded down the face of the precipice.

Jesse and Diana and little Kee turned their faces toward the jungle and civilization.

"Oh, Jesse," said Diana, "I know now why Lot's wife had to look back."





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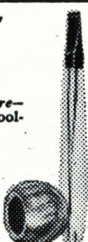


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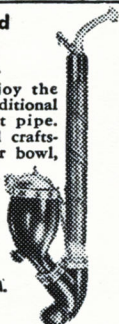
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