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# JUNGLE

## STORIES

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OF  
TERROR"

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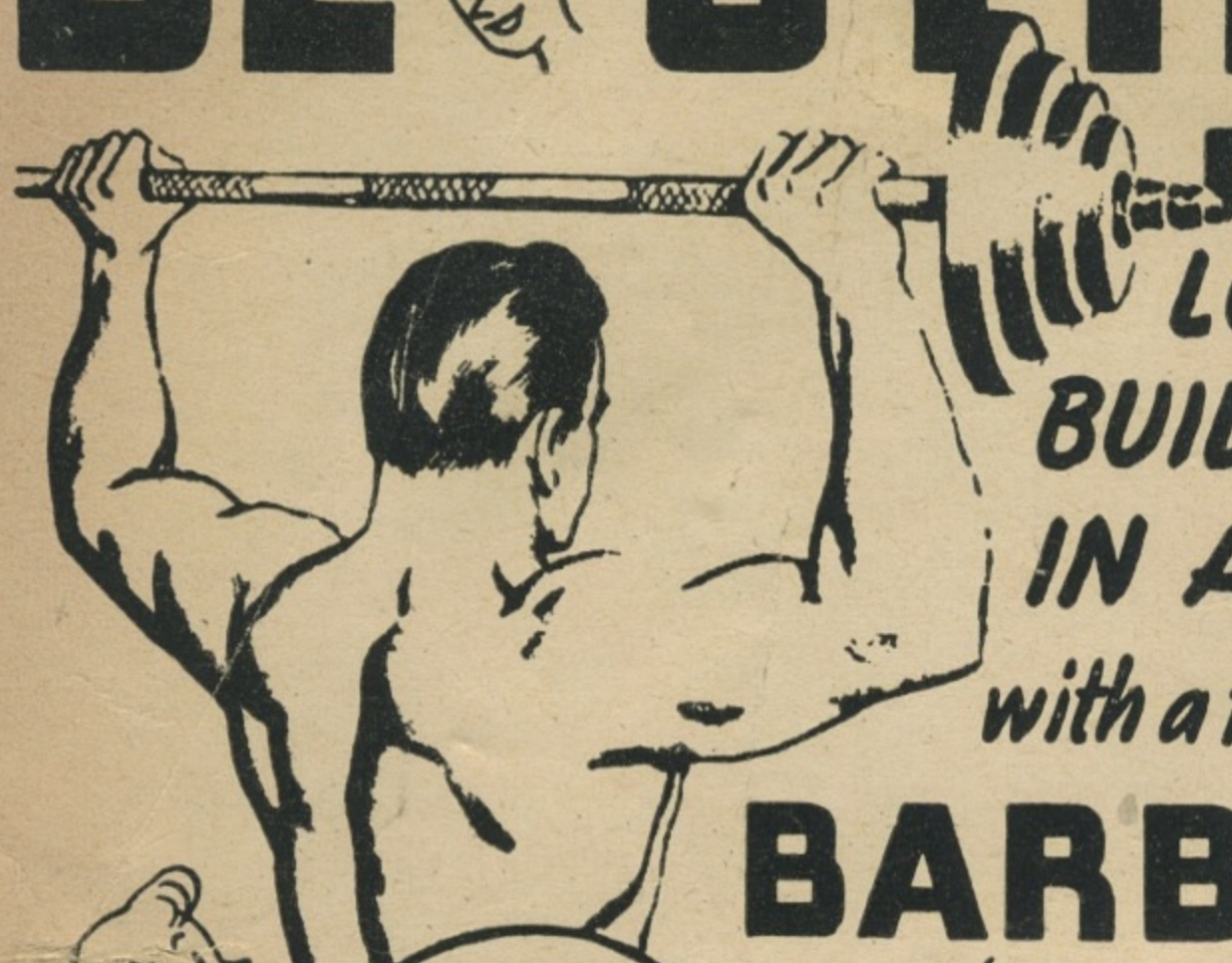
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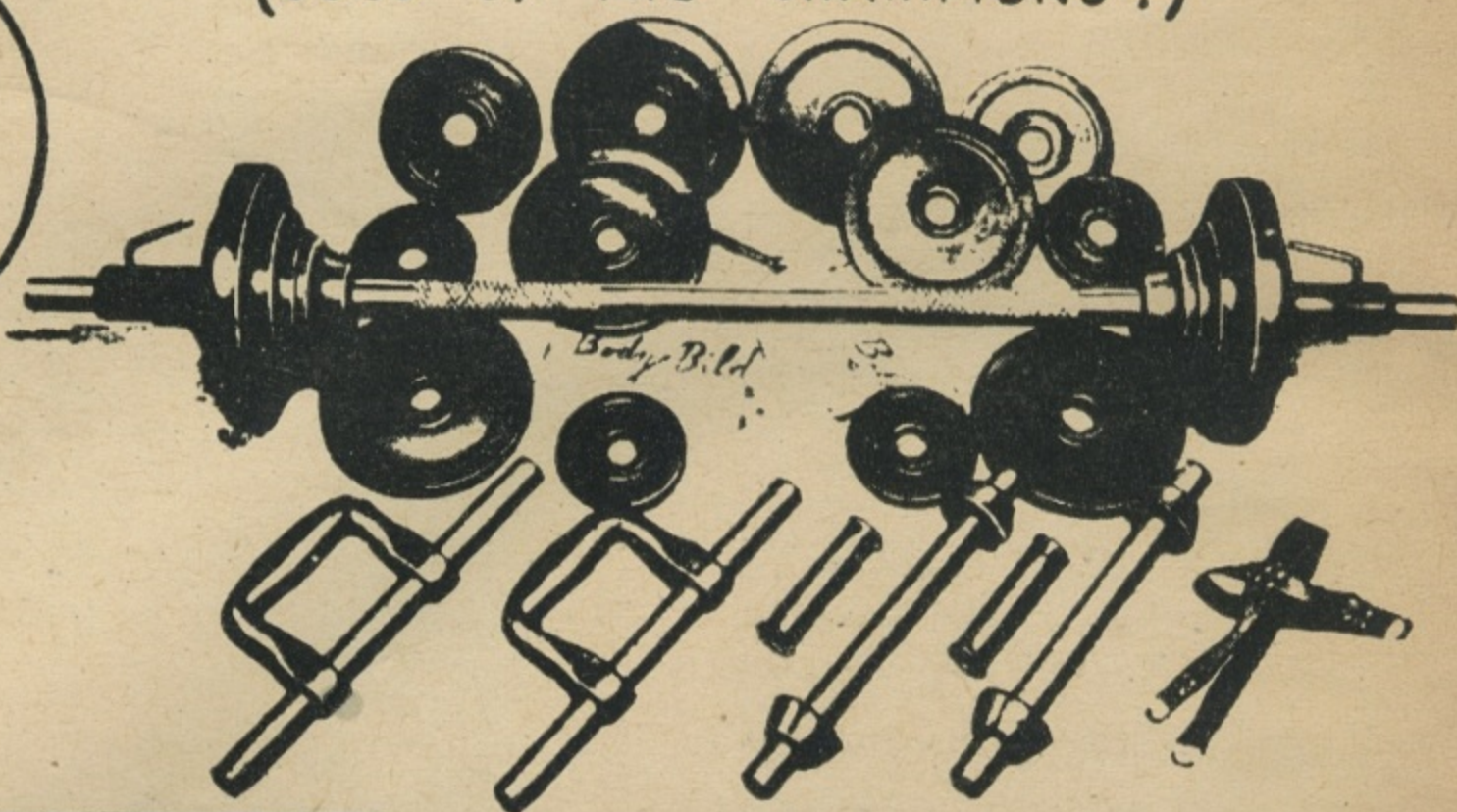
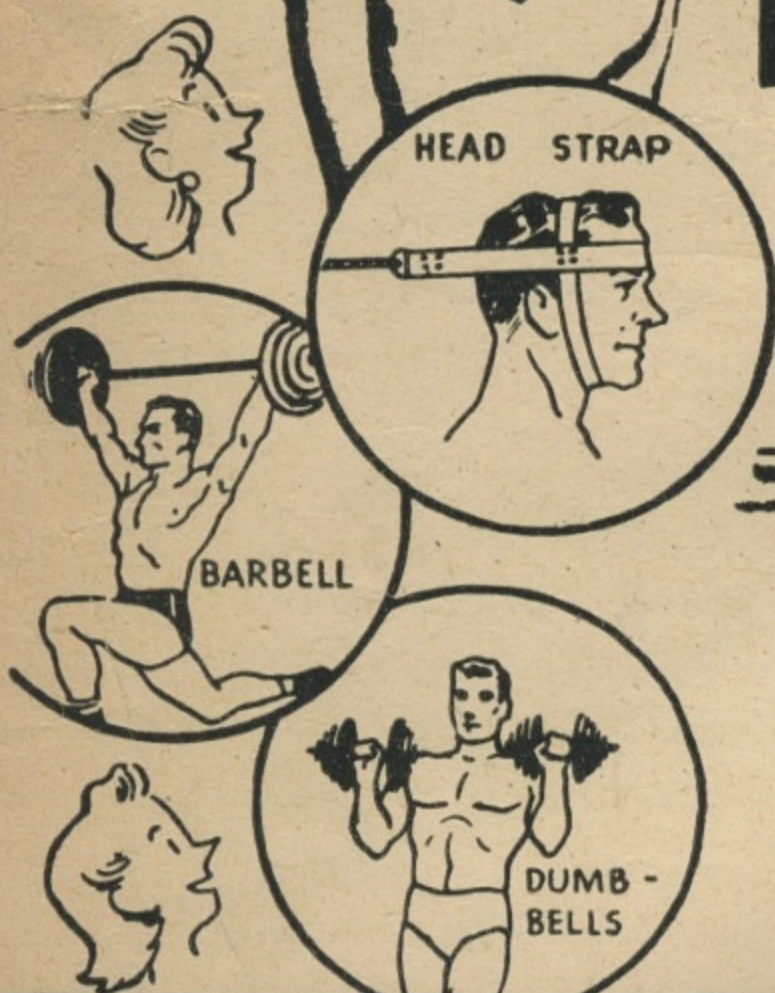


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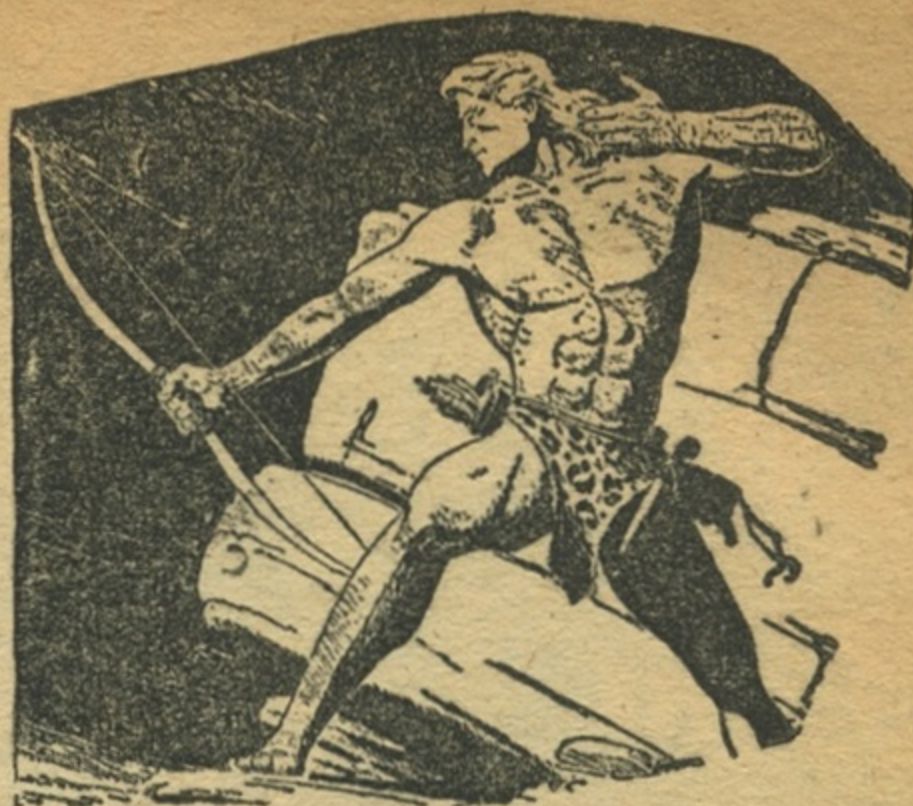
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# JUNGLE

TALES OF DARKEST AFRICA

# STORIES



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# CARAVAN OF TERROR

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

The jungle seethed with terror. Devilish rumors flew the vine-route: Ki-Gor was doomed! The vile Wandarobo, hordes of stunted beast-men, had trapped the blond stalker.... And copper-haired Helene, the tree-telegraph whispered, would die beneath the cannibal moon!

**T**HE rain came down in sheets in that part of the East Congo region. Along the north bank of the upper Uele River, a huge elephant moved slowly over

the sodden, earth traveling eastward. On the elephant's broad neck crouched a giant white man and a dainty, red-haired girl. Their heads were bowed to the tempest and



their hands shielded their eyes from the pelting rain. The girl pushed a dank auburn strand of hair off her white forehead and sighed.

"Oh! Ki-Gor!" she said, "I'm so sick of the rain. I can't seem to remember when it wasn't just pouring."

Ki-Gor grinned tolerantly at the beautiful girl beside him.

"Never mind, Helene," he said, "Pretty soon we will leave the rain behind us. We should come to some mountains tomorrow, and on the other side of them, it will not be so rainy."

At that Helene smiled back. Her eyes caressed his mighty torso and shoulders that gleamed so wetly, and came to rest on his fine head where the blond hair was plastered down and was the color of wet chalk.

"And can we rest there a little while before we push on and try to find George?" she asked. Before she was answered she looked around quickly and said, "What's the matter with Marmo? Why is he stopping?"

"I don't know," Ki-Gor replied, peering ahead and trying to pierce with his eyes the gray curtain of rain. Then he bent down and spoke to the great trained elephant in the Swahili tongue.

"What now, Marmo?" he said, "thou great gray sluggard! Why dost thou stand in thy tracks like a nervous horse? Proceed, thou lazy one, and carry us out of this steaming shower bath!"

Ki-Gor reached out a long muscular leg and heeled the elephant gently behind a great flapping ear. The elephant, however, did not move, but stood where he was. His trunk flew up and writhed like a wet black python as the delicate nostrils at the far end explored the atmosphere. Suddenly the huge leathery ears flared, and slowly, deliberately, the elephant began to sidle closer to the river bank.

"What is it?" Helene whispered.

Ki-Gor shook his head and stared toward the jungle to the left. The elephant now moved cautiously forward right along the edge of the deep, swift-flowing waters of the Uele. The tip of his trunk crooked forward and moved restlessly from side to side.

Then Helene felt the muscles of Ki-Gor's back tighten, and saw the knuckles of his right hand go white as he gripped the stout spear.

"Crawl back quietly," he whispered, "and stretch out on Marmo's back. Hold tight to the rope I tied around his middle."

"Can you see something?" Helene whispered as she obeyed his command.

"Yes," was the laconic answer. "Wild elephants."

As Helene flattened herself on her stomach along Marmo's broad back, she could begin to make out vague monstrous shapes over toward the jungle. One, two, three, she counted, six, seven, ten—a whole herd!

Silently, Marmo drifted along the river's edge while Ki-Gor poised watchfully on his neck. There might be no trouble from Marmo's wild cousins—and then again, there might. If these elephants had learned to hate humans, and caught a whiff of the man-smell from Marmo—Or even if they did not, but were merely irritated by the presence of a strange elephant, there might well be serious trouble.

Minutes passed and the numberless gray forms to the left were motionless as Marmo went noiselessly on his way. Ki-Gor had counted at least sixty wild elephants, and began to breathe easier, thinking that any danger would soon be left behind. Then the thing happened.

A LITTLE black baby elephant had left its mother's side with all the foolhardiness of youth and was frolicking all by itself on the river bank, right in Marmo's path. The little calf was facing away and was completely unaware of Marmo's presence until a chance gambolling leap swung him around looking squarely at the tame elephant's enormous legs. The calf was startled out of its wits. He gave a terrified shriek and rushed for the jungle.

There was an answering trumpet and another and another. Marmo began to shuffle forward rapidly as here and there a gray shape detached itself from the herd and hurried toward the river, ears flared. An angry cow—doubtless the frightened baby's mother—scurried after Marmo, trumpeting shrilly. Two bulls took up the cry and followed her. Marmo went faster



and faster, his huge bulk moving at an astonishing rate of speed along the river bank.

But the younger of the two bulls outstripped the rest and began to overtake the onrushing Marmo. Ki-Gor watched the young bull keenly over his shoulder. Although he gripped his assegai in readiness, he knew in his heart that there was little he could do if it came to a fight. He could not hope to kill the strange elephant with the assegai. All he could do would be to wound it, and a wounded elephant is the most dangerous, vindictive enemy in the world. Ki-Gor was thankful that Marmo had passed the main body of the herd before the alarm went up.

But the young bull kept coming on. Behind him was the older, larger bull. Their rage lent speed to their flying legs. In a few moments, the younger bull's head was abreast of Marmo's hind quarters. He tossed his head viciously and grazed Marmo's rump with one of his short tusks. Marmo squealed angrily and slackened his pace.

"Hold tight!" Ki-Gor yelled to Helene.

As the girl gripped the life-rope, Marmo flung his hind quarters around like a Bangongo dancer. The careening weight crashed into the shoulders of the smaller elephant and sent him hurtling off balance. The ground shook as the young bull went down, and Marmo resumed his headlong dash along the river bank. The older bull, the cow and three other pursuers stopped for a moment to inspect the young bull who was struggling and screaming on the ground. Ki-Gor balanced himself on Marmo's swaying neck and heaved a sigh of relief.

All the danger was by no means passed, but by the time the pursuit was resumed, Marmo was a hundred yards ahead of the wild elephants and traveling fast. Ki-Gor cast a quick glance toward the river and noted that they were abreast of a section of rapids. The river-bed here led down a gentle but easily perceptible slope. Through the centuries freshet-water had piled up huge boulders and carved a hundred little channels among them. In dry times the river would be easily fordable at that point, and even now an intelligent elephant might be directed safely through

the swift but comparatively shallow currents.

"Slow down, Marmo!" Ki-Gor chanted in Swahili, "relax thy pace, thou flying mountain! To our right lies escape from thy ugly relatives, therefore, turn right!"

He heeled the great pachyderm vigorously behind the left ear. Marmo trumpeted a protest, but swung his head to the right and slowed down to a halt. The ground shook under the plunging pads of the pursuers and a chorus of menacing squeals went up. Marmo twisted his head and stared at the phalanx of wild elephants charging toward him.

"Hesitate not, O son of a timid father!" Ki-Gor exhorted, "but go straight across, treading carefully lest thou endanger thy precious burden!"

Marmo obediently stepped off the bank and took a few gingerly paces into the rushing water. The wild elephants, trumpeting triumphantly, were almost up to him.

"Marmo!" cried Ki-Gor, "forward!"

He slapped the leathery neck, and once more Marmo set his bulk into motion. The water crept up the great pillars which were his legs, and piled up on the upstream side. In a few moments he was twenty yards out into the stream and the water was brushing his pendulous belly. Ki-Gor stared back at the bank. Marmo had just barely left it in time. Six wild elephants were tramping up and down, ears flared, fuming, and trumpeting. But none of them made any move to follow Marmo into the rapids.

Ki-Gor turned his attention back to guiding Marmo through the piled up boulders.

THE water was getting alarmingly deep. Before they arrived at midstream, it had crept high up on the sides of the tall elephant. And progress was necessarily slow as the pull of the water of the elephant's great bulk was enormous. But Ki-Gor's keen eyes picked out what looked to be the shallowest channels, and he guided Marmo toward those.

In that way they proceeded safely almost all the way across the river. Ki-Gor glanced at Helene to see if she was safe, and sent a derisive yell back at the line of wild elephants fuming impotently on the farther side of the rapids.



Suddenly Marmo's head seemed to fall from under him. Ki-Gor slid forward and downward. Evidently the elephant had stepped into a deep pot-hole. Ki-Gor clutched wildly at the ridged skin on Marmo's cheeks. But he was sliding so swiftly that he could not find a hand-hold.

With a despairing shout he fell into the turbulent waters. Before his head went under, he had a flash of the huge elephant floundering to preserve its footing, and Helene partially thrown off his back. She was hanging down one side of Marmo, her fingers clinging for dear life to the rope, and her feet dangling in the water. Then the river laid hold of Ki-Gor with invisible, invincible arms and dragged him under the surface.

The force of the current tumbled him over and over and sent him caroming against rocks with bruising violence. But through it all, he kept a tight grip on his assegai, and somehow fought his way to the surface. He had already been carried fifty feet. A momentary glimpse showed him that Marmo had regained his feet and was thrashing downstream after him. Helene was crawling back up the slippery wet side. Then the current pulled him down under again.

Is this the end? Ki-Gor asked himself, as he was rolled head over heels along the rocky bottom of the rapids. Is this the way mighty Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle, is to die? Like a squirrel fallen out of a tree into a whirlpool?

Just then he felt himself sucked into a whirlpool and one last thought recurred dimly in his battered head. What will become of Helene?

A few seconds later, he was hurled, dizzy, gasping, and choking, into some slack water. He floated for a moment toward a wide flat rock. Then he felt some fingers of current plucking at his bruised body. He was being carried out into the main stream again.

With a supreme effort he jackknifed himself, and then straightened out. His feet hit rock bottom, and his shoulders emerged from the surface. The current started to topple him off his feet again, but again Ki-Gor made a supreme effort. He was still holding the assegai in a grip of death. He plunged the point of it downstream

from him and braced himself against the stout haft.

THE current tugged relentlessly at his body, but after a few moments, he grunted in triumph. He could hold his own!

Carefully, he moved the point of the assegai a few inches. The river rushed at him and clawed him. But the assegai held at its new anchorage and Ki-Gor again braced himself successfully. Again he moved the life-saving assegai, and the current seemed to slacken.

Inch by inch, Ki-Gor fought his way into slower water toward the wide flat rock. The last few feet were easier, and he drew himself on to the rock and lay down exhausted.

Less than a minute later, he opened his eyes as he heard Helene's voice.

"Are you all right, Ki-Gor?"

Marmo was standing beside the flat rock, his trunk waving anxiously over him. Helene was clinging to the elephant's back and peering down with anxious eyes.

Ki-Gor got to his feet slowly. He felt his arms and legs and ribs. Nothing broken, although there were multiple bruises. He spoke to Marmo, and the elephant offered his trunk. Ki-Gor walked up it to the elephant's broad head.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene's voice broke and she fell into his arms crying. "I—I thought—thought you were going to be—drowned!"

It always embarrassed Ki-Gor to have Helene show emotion like that. He patted her shoulder awkwardly and stared at the rapids. It *had* been a near thing, he knew that. But great heavens! He came out of it safely, so why make such a fuss?"

"I'm all right, Helene," he said, plaintively, "don't cry. I would never drown. That wouldn't be a suitable way for Ki-Gor to die."

Helene smiled up at him through her tears. His bronzed face showed serene conviction. He really meant what he had just said!

"Come, Marmo, faithful friend!" he intoned in Swahili, "there remains a trifling distance to go till we reach the bank and pull ourselves out of this treacherous element. Forward, Marmo! And watch thy step, dear clumsy oaf!"



Marmo waved his trunk—it seemed to Helene that he all but chuckled—and set forth across the powerful current.

From there on, there were no more pot-holes, or if there were, Marmo avoided them. And in a short time, he heaved his glistening bulk up on to the south bank of the River Uele. At the same time, the rain which had been slackening, stopped altogether. And as Marmo paused on the river bank, the sky lightened in the west, a rift grew in the piled-up clouds and spread, and a moment later, the afternoon sun poured through and shone benignly on the steaming but washed clean East Congo jungle.

Marmo turned his back to the sun and found an elephant trail. In the three hours that remained before sunset, he traveled fast and covered a prodigious distance. The country the travelers passed through gave them a foretaste of the great mountains that lay before them. It was still jungle but it differed from the flat, alluvial jungle that they had been passing through. The footing was firmer even after the heavy rain, and the terrain was quite undulating. Here and there, Marmo broke out into patches of open veldt.

IN one of these, Ki-Gor called out to Marmo to halt, and the travelers sat for several minutes looking around them at the countryside. The low-hanging clouds of the rainstorm were dissipating rapidly and rising. They revealed a series of low round hills that seemed to line the narrow valley up which Marmo had been going. The hills were well-wooded with here and there bare spots showing, of grass or in some cases rock. Ki-Gor nodded his head with a satisfied air.

"Good country," he observed, "if we find a good tree or cave, we can stay here a few days to rest."

Helene glanced around nervously. Even though she had spent considerable time in Africa with Ki-Gor, she still found it difficult at times to feel entirely comfortable among the hidden dangers which lurked in the shadows of the jungle—dangers which Ki-Gor took completely for granted. As she looked over to the edge of the forest, some indistinct object moved slightly. Her

skin prickled as she stared at the object. It was tawny-colored and dappled with shadows. In a minute she could see it more clearly, and her heart bounded into her mouth.

"Ki-Gor!" she whispered and her hand clutched his wrist convulsively, "is—is that a—a lion—over there?"

"Yes," the jungle man answered calmly without looking, "there's two of them, I think."

"Well—" Helene hesitated—"do—do you think we ought to stay here, if—if there are lions around?"

"Yes, why not?" Ki-Gor replied, staring at a hill in the opposite direction from the lions. "Lions are a good sign—plenty of game around. They won't hurt you."

Helene stared at him with eyes rounded in awe. He said no more but continued to stare at this hill. He had dismissed the subject of lions.

"Look," he said finally, and pointed at the hill, "up there, it looks like some kind of a cave. We'll go and see."

As Marmo moved off, Helene cast a last look at her lions. They were both plainly visible now, outlined against the dark forest. They were sitting on their haunches like house cats, staring uncuriously at the elephant and his two passengers.

It was nearly sunset by the time they had climbed the wooded hillside to the spot where Ki-Gor's extraordinary vision had noted "some kind of a cave." In reality, it was not a cave but merely a wide horizontal fissure in a large bare ledge. The upper edge of this crack or gash in the rock was perhaps eight or nine feet above the lower edge at the outside, and then it sloped down gradually toward the rear, joining the floor about twenty-five feet back. It was as if some gigantic woodsman had come along and with two mighty blows of his ax hewn a great wedge-shaped chip out of the face of the ledge.

The floor of this curious rock shelter was level and dry, and was about fifteen feet above the ground, or level with Marmo's back. It was this circumstance that decided Ki-Gor to occupy the place for a short time, although he would have preferred a cave less open to the weather.

He debarked Helene from the elephant's back and left her to explore what there was



of the cave to explore while he went off in search of some food. He was back in a short time with some firewood, a pile of moss, and the body of a dwarf antelope which he had with great good luck intercepted and killed. As the abrupt African night chased away the brief African twilight, he and Helene piled the moss in the back of the cave and built a small fire near the outer edge. And as the predatory jungle came to life, they roasted their antelope-flesh over the flames, and felt safe and snug in their rock shelter.

HELENE woke up at dawn feeling refreshed and cheerful. Ki-Gor was not only awake, he had already been abroad and gathered some delicious fruit for breakfast. The two travelers sat contentedly at the outer edge of the cave and watched the sun come up behind a gigantic range of mountains to the eastward.

"Ruwenzori," said Ki-Gor, pointing a fruit-stained finger at the mountain range. "It isn't far—maybe fifty miles. Somewhere over there is our friend George, Chief of the M'balla."

"Oh, it's perfectly beautiful!" said Helene, staring off at the serrated peaks that pointed sharp fingers up toward the sky. "I like this place, and this lovely view. Let's just stay here for a while, Ki-Gor. Say, for a couple of weeks."

"We haven't left the rain behind us yet," Ki-Gor pointed out, "and the reason we came on this journey was because of the—the all-the-time rain—"

"Continuous," Helene corrected.

"What?" said Ki-Gor.

"Continuous rain."

"Continuous rain," Ki-Gor repeated obediently. Then he looked sharply at Helene. "Do you think my English is getting better?"

"I certainly do," Helene responded emphatically.

"Good," said Ki-Gor with a roguish glance, "maybe—maybe that is because I have a continuous teacher!"

A rumbling chuckle rolled up out of the tremendous chest, and Helene slapped him playfully.

"Tell me something," Ki-Gor said after a minute, "you say I belong to the tribe

called English. And you belong to the tribe called American. And the two tribes are related."

"But our friend George," said Ki-Gor, brow crinkled in concentration, "and he is our friend—he has helped us greatly twice. He is Chief of a Masai tribe called the M'balla, and yet he says he is truly an American, like you. How can that be? His skin is black like a Bantu."

"George is an American," Helene began, trying her best to explain as simply as possible, "he is an American Negro. He is descended from African Bantu who were carried away to America as slaves."

"Oh!" Understanding began to dawn in Ki-Gor's light blue eyes.

"But then the Americans freed their slaves," Helene went on, "and their children became free Americans."

"That is good," Ki-Gor approved. "Slaves! Wah!" he shook his tawny mane. "If you have slaves to do everything for you, you do nothing for yourself and you grow soft."

Helene smiled. The nice thing about Africa was the simplicity with which the most complex human social problems could be solved.

"Well then," she continued, "George made a journey to Africa on a big boat." She hesitated, wondering how she could explain to Ki-Gor that an American Negro ship's cook had jumped ship in Mombasa and had gone vagabonding into Uganda. Then she realized that journeys need not be explained to Ki-Gor; one journeyed in Africa without any special purpose, but just for the fun of journeying.

"I see," Ki-Gor nodded, "and George journeyed through the M'balla country and they made him their chief because he was so big."

He stood up and stretched. All his questions were answered.

"Well," he said, "if you want to stay here and rest a few days we will. But I smell rain. I think we'll have some this afternoon. We'd better go out and gather plenty of fire wood and maybe kill some food—ahee!" He stopped and stared off to the north.

Helene followed the direction of his eyes and saw a thin column of smoke rising



from behind some low, round hills.

"I think we'd better go scouting over there," Ki-Gor observed quietly, "and see what manner of people those are." He whistled shrilly for Marmo.

SOME hours later, the great elephant hovered like a great gray shadow in the trees near a clearing. Ki-Gor and Helene on his back peered through a green screen of undergrowth at a small Bantu village perched on a river bank. There were few signs of life. Three or four pot-bellied children played in the shadows of the conical huts, and now and then some spindly-legged woman walked back and forth.

"The men are away," Ki-Gor commented in a whisper, "hunting or making war. I think we will pick up their trail and see what they look like. From the looks of their women I don't think they are warriors."

Silently the elephant circled to the east of the village and then back toward the river. There was a broad path running along the edge of the river and Ki-Gor decided to head eastward along this path. Marmo covered several miles in a fast shuffle and then slowed down as a distant clamor of shouting rose on the still air. Ki-Gor directed the elephant into the woods beside the path and then urged him forward. A few minutes of stealthy progress brought the sound of shouting nearer, and in a short time Ki-Gor and Helene were staring down at a tragic scene.

An incredibly tall, gaunt black warrior was standing at bay, his back to a tree trunk, holding off a score of smaller spindly-legged blacks. They were ringed around him, screaming in triumph. At odd moments, one of them would dash in, jab at the lone warrior with his spear, and then jump backward to safety. It was evident that in spite of the warrior's great size—and he was close to seven feet tall—he was badly wounded and on the point of exhaustion. In a few more minutes, he would no longer be able to thrust with his great spear. And then he would totter and fall as his numerous assailants closed in and dragged him down like a pack of wild dogs pulling down a wounded eland.

The warrior's proudly held head was long and narrow as was his face. His blood-

soaked garment was a wide strip of cloth wrapped around his thighs, and one end was drawn up over his left shoulder in what Ki-Gor recognized was the Masai fashion.

"Jackals!" Ki-Gor muttered, "cowardly jackals! They wouldn't dare come near the Masai if he were not badly hurt!"

He watched the scene with critical eyes for a few more moments. Then he snorted in wrath, and slid down Marmo's trunk to the ground. He slipped through the undergrowth and came out in the rear of the milling mass of villagers.

"Arrgh!" roared Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle, and waded into the melee. Gripping his six-foot assegai in both hands like a quarter-staff, he slashed from left to right and back again. Consternation swept over the hysterical villagers at this sudden eruption into their midst. Their shouts of triumph changed to cries of dismay and terror. They came of a breed that had no stomach for fighting an able-bodied enemy. Before they really realized what was happening, Ki-Gor had stretched six of them on the ground. The rest then broke and ran down the path in headlong flight.

Ki-Gor bounded after them and knocked over two more jibbering, abject creatures, before turning to go back to the lone warrior. The tall Masai's head was bowed now, and he was leaning heavily on his great spear. He swayed as Ki-Gor approached him and suddenly toppled to the ground.

"Greetings—Bwana—Ki-Gor!"

Ki-Gor barely heard the whispered words as he bent over the fallen Masai. A few more mumbled words were unintelligible, and then the warrior closed his eyes in resignation. A faint heart beat showed that a tiny spark of life still flickered within the battered frame. Marmo moved out of the trees at Ki-Gor's whistle and knelt down. With infinite care, the giant white man picked up the giant black man and placed him on Marmo's back.

Helene looked questioningly at Ki-Gor.

"He spoke my name," he said a little guiltily as if he should apologize for showing kindness to a strange African.

"Who is he?" Helene asked.

"I don't know," Ki-Gor replied, "but he is Masai, and if he knows me he must be of the M'balla. But then I don't understand



why he is all alone away from his own country."

MARMO trod the distance back to the cave gently, stopping now and then while Ki-Gor got down and gathered some healing herbs and plants. Once at the cave, the Masai warrior was placed tenderly on the pile of moss, and Ki-Gor set about staunching his many wounds. In the course of his self-upbringing, the jungle man had acquired an astonishing skill in rough medical methods. He had had to, to survive some of the maulings he had suffered from jungle cats or from human enemies. He put these methods to the test now, working by fire-light through half the night. Helene helped him heat water in containers improvised from banana leaves, and he carefully bathed the long inert form of the Masai. Then he applied a styptic ointment which he brewed from a compound of certain roots and bark.

After a while, the unconscious African began to toss feebly and mutter incoherently. Whereupon Ki-Gor set about to keep down the mounting fever by bathing his patient's face with a weak solution of plant acids. Toward midnight, his careful nursing was rewarded. The Masai's delirium seemed to diminish and he lay quiet. After a while his eyes opened and he stared fixedly at the fire. Ki-Gor went across the cave and stood over him. The Masai's lips moved and a few all but inarticulate words came out.

"Conserve your strength, O Fallen Tree," Ki-Gor said in Swahili, "I speak no Masai and for you to make me understand you now would be taxing your powers overmuch. Sleep, then, Son of the Brave, and we will hold our indaba by tomorrow's sunlight."

A look of pain crossed the Masai's long ebony face. Laboriously he spoke in broken Swahili:

"Me—dying—tomorrow—not alive—you—go—Tembo George—"

He *was* a M'balla, then. Tembo, meaning elephant, was the descriptive nickname affectionately bestowed on the burly American Negro by his adoring tribesmen.

"You will not die," Ki-Gor said firmly, "I have worked healing ju-ju on you and my ju-ju is all-powerful. You have but to sleep now, and tomorrow your wounds will

have begun to heal."

A pathetic half-hope lighted the M'balla's face for a moment then died away.

"I—hear—O Ki-Gor—but—"

"Then believe," Ki-Gor interrupted gruffly. "You have called me by name. Then you must know that I am Lord of the Jungle and what I say is—is, and what I say will be—will be. Sleep, your life is my affair."

The look of hope returned to the warrior's face, and he closed his eyes with a happy sigh. Ki-Gor turned away with a smile. He knew his Africans. This one would have died for sheer lack of hope of living. Now he would live because he was convinced he would not die.

With the daylight came a misty drizzle and Ki-Gor gazed sourly out at the gray landscape. His eyes were red-rimmed as a consequence of having slept lightly for only a few hours. Helene and the M'balla warrior were still asleep. Ki-Gor scattered the smoldering campfire lest its smoke betray the cave to inquisitive humans, and then called Marmo. A very short excursion on the elephant's back sufficed to gather fruit for a cold breakfast. Then he returned to the cave and dismissed Marmo.

Helene woke up then, dewey-eyed, and stretched drowsily. Ki-Gor went over and looked down at the wounded M'balla. The tall warrior was sleeping heavily, his respiration somewhat weak, but regular and rhythmic. Then Ki-Gor walked to the outer edge of the cave and looked out.

A moment later a short spear floated up from below and clattered on the floor of the cave beside Ki-Gor's feet. Helene gave a startled cry, but Ki-Gor did not move. He did not so much as look down at the spear.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene whispered fearfully, "who is it?"

"Nobody dangerous," Ki-Gor answered contemptuously. "those fools of villagers have tracked us here. But they can't hurt us because they can't climb up here, and they're so weak they can't even throw their spears up here with much force."

Just as he spoke, three more spears flew up from the bushes below. Ki-Gor stepped easily to one side, avoiding two of them, and caught the third in mid-flight with his right hand. He stood for a moment look-



ing down into the undergrowth, eyes narrowed. Here and there he could see a black form crouching, but for the most part, the attackers were well hidden. A crooked smile formed on Ki-Gor's bronzed face.

"O Puny Ones!" he called out, "Cease playing with fire! Go away from here quickly lest you suffer the fate of your mates yesterday. I am slow to anger but be warned! If you continue to annoy me, I shall wreak a terrible punishment on you!"

There were shrill cries of anger from below, and a shower of spears came up out of the bushes. Not one of the sharp spearheads touched Ki-Gor. Some of them fell short of the cave mouth entirely—others he dodged easily—and three he knocked down with his left hand.

"So be it, O Puny Ones!" Ki-Gor snarled, "I warned you and you heeded not my warnings!"

With that, Ki-Gor poised the spear he had caught in his right hand and flung it with terrific force downward. Immediately, there was a hideous shriek and one of the blacks fell forward out of the undergrowth, his chest transfixed with the spear. Ki-Gor picked up five more spears that had landed on the cave floor and hurled them downward in rapid succession. Only one of these found its mark but cries of terror rang out from below. Ki-Gor whistled shrilly and a moment later, Marmo came crashing up the hill to the cave. The Jungle man leaped on his back and heeled him vigorously behind the right ear. The elephant thundered off in the same direction that Ki-Gor had sent him the morning before.

**W**ITHOUT ever having read about the campaigns of the great generals of history, Ki-Gor knew that an excellent way of getting rid of an annoying enemy was to destroy his base of operations. He therefore, headed Marmo straight for the village by the river. He felt perfectly safe in leaving Helene behind at the cave, because its height off the ground was sufficient defense against such a weak and unimaginative tribe. At the same time, he felt that a strong rearward thrust was the most effective method of removing the nuisance of the treacherous little spearmen.

In a short time, Marmo thundered down

on the village, and Ki-Gor halted him beside one of the conical huts and uttered a blood-curdling yell. Thirty-or forty skinny blacks, women and children dashed out of the huts and stood transfixed with horror.

"O Ugly Ones!" Ki-Gor roared, "take your children and your old men and run for safety! Your husbands—foolish insects—have incurred the wrath of Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle! They will return soon from their foolhardy excursion, and you can tell them that, hereafter, they should be more careful about what they hunt! Tell them to pursue the ferocious forest-mouse, if they wish, or the man-eating junglecock—but *to leave Ki-Gor alone!* Now, go, Ugly Ones! Clear out! Run for safety!"

The villagers needed no added urging. In desperate silence, they swarmed among their huts, seized their children and old men, and streamed away in all directions. A pack of baboons in front of a grass-fire never ran faster. In less time than it takes to tell, the village was completely deserted. Then Ki-Gor gave the word, and Marmo methodically demolished every one of the conical huts.

When the destruction was complete, Ki-Gor turned the elephant's head homeward toward the cave. He felt no compunction for what he had done. He had harmed no innocent persons, and as for the dwellings he had flattened out, he knew that the tribe could construct a new hut-village somewhere else in a very short time. But "somewhere else" would be at a safe distance away from the white-skinned avenger on the huge elephant. Ki-Gor permitted himself a grim smile as he thought of the tongue-lashing the men of the tribe were in for when they rejoined their women. No, he reflected, those particular tribesmen would not bother him any more.

**N**OT far from the cave, the way led across a narrow strip of veldt, and as Marmo approached this strip, Ki-Gor heard the drumming of hundreds of hooves. Then as the trees before him thinned out, he could see that a good-sized herd of small gazelles was stampeding through the open space toward his left. The jungle man glanced to his right to discover if he could see the cause of the stampede. Back among the stragglers



of the herd, he could see a lithe, tawny form bounding forward with amazing speed. It was a lone lioness.

Ki-Gor halted the elephant and watched the great cat knock down two of the gazelles with powerful swipes of her great forepaws. Apparently, however, the lioness did not realize what she had done, or else she was gripped by such a hunting-lust that she could not stop. At any rate, she kept right on after the rest of the flying herd. But like all lions, she was capable of maintaining running speed for only a short distance at a time, and shortly, the gazelles began to draw away.

As he watched this performance, an idea struck Ki-Gor. He thought of the wounded Masai back at the cave, and remembered the curious dietary habits of all Masai. They were strictly flesh-eaters, flesh—cooked or raw, and they were especially fond of drinking raw beef-blood. A gazelle was not a bull, but it would suffice. Ki-Gor set the elephant in motion toward the two fallen gazelles out on the strip of veldt.

The lioness was lying panting on the grass a hundred yards away. Ki-Gor kept a wary eye on her as the elephant drew near the first gazelle. The gazelle was dead, its neck a bloody pulp where the great claws had raked sideways.

The second gazelle, lying thirty feet away, was also dead. But it was unmarked. Apparently, the lioness's paw had hit its horns, the blow breaking the gazelle's neck, but not drawing any blood. Ki-Gor glanced around and saw that the lioness was standing up, staring at him and Marmo. Quickly, he slid down the elephant's trunk to the ground, assegai in hand. He reached down and seized the gazelle by the hind legs and slung it over his shoulder. As he straightened up, he saw the lioness bounding toward him. Aided by the elephant's trunk, he swiftly got his burden up on to Marmo's back, and then turned his attention to the approaching lioness.

She stopped a short distance, eyed the elephant and the man malevolently for a moment. Then she lifted her head in a roar of displeasure and defiance. In the meantime, Marmo edged himself around so that he faced her squarely and flared his huge ears. Ki-Gor stood astride of the gazelle

and glared back at the lioness.

"Ohe, Miss Lion!" he called derisively, "You are young and flighty, and you don't know when you have killed! Why pay attention to me? You have another kill—see, over there? There is food enough even for you for two days."

The lioness still glared dangerously. Ki-Gor glanced about him on the back of the elephant, saw a good-sized clod clinging to one of the gazelle's hooves. He reached down, detached the clod and shouted again at the lioness. Her answer was a horrible growl, and Ki-Gor laughed. Then he tossed the clod in the direction of the other dead gazelle. The lioness halted her growling abruptly and without a moment's hesitation leaped after the clod. She could no more have resisted chasing it than a kitten could have resisted going after a rolling ball.

The clod landed two feet away from the bleeding carcass of the other gazelle. The lioness landed with her fore-paws on the clod. Suddenly she tensed. Her head went up and she began to sniff the air wonderingly. She took two steps forward and placed her front paws on the gazelle. Then she swung her head around at Ki-Gor and uttered a great roar of mingled defiance and satisfaction.

Ki-Gor gave a mighty laugh.

"We can go now safely, Marmo," he laughed, "Miss Lion has finally discovered her other kill—after we all but rubbed her nose in it!"

The elephant turned deliberately and shuffled majestically off toward the cave.

KI-GOR directed the elephant on a criss-cross, zig-zag path up the little hill to the cave. This was done in order to beat the brush for the enemy spearmen. But apparently they had gone, as there was no sign of them anywhere. This was corroborated by the joyous cry from Helene as she caught sight of the elephant. She stood boldly on the outer edge of the cave and waved a hand fearlessly.

The Masai warrior was awake. He was weak and drawn from loss of blood, but his eyes were bright, and he was leaning on one elbow slowly munching on some wild fruit. Ki-Gor's eyes twinkled as he stepped off the elephant's back.



"Greetings, O Fallen Tree!" he said, in Swahili, "I see you are better—well enough to eat some delicious fruit."

"Greetings, O Ki-Gor!" the Masai returned, "thanks to your ju-ju, I am better." Then he made a wry face and flung the half-eaten fruit away. "Wah! Monkey's food!"

Ki-Gor turned with a chuckle and dragged the gazelle of Marmo's back on to the cave floor.

"Hah!" exclaimed the Masai, eyes shining.

Quickly, Ki-Gor skinned a portion of the gazelle and cut a tender steak from a flank. This he handed raw and dripping to the Masai, who received it gratefully and proceeded to eat it with great gusto. In a few minutes the steak was gone, and the Masai sank back with a happy sigh. He muttered a Masai blessing, closed his eyes, and promptly went to sleep again.

During the next hour, Ki-Gor collected some dry wood and built a fire. Then he leisurely cut strips from the gazelle's hind-quarters, and he and Helene made a hearty breakfast off them. About the time they had finished, Ki-Gor looked around and saw that the Masai's eyes were open. He walked over and sat down beside the warrior.

"Tell me," he said, "Who are you that know my name? And why are you, a Masai, traveling alone through strange country?"

A thunderstruck look came into the Masai's face. He struck his forehead guiltily with an open palm, and then dragged himself up to a sitting position.

"Ai!" he wailed, "Bad trouble—Tembo George! Must go now—help him—must hurry!"

"Be calm," Ki-Gor ordered, "You can't go now, not until your wounds begin to heal."

"No! No!" the Masai answered in his broken Swahili, "Must go! Tembo George—bad trouble! My name Lesolio—he send me—find you, Ki-Gor—come quick—help him, Tembo George!"

Then the warrior relapsed into the M'balla dialect of Masai, a language Ki-Gor did not understand.

"Wait, wait!" Ki-Gor commanded. "You say you are Lesolio and Tembo George sent

you to find me?"

"Yes," the M'balla nodded his head vigorously, "Tembo George—bad trouble—big danger—"

"What danger? Who is he in danger from?"

"Wandarobo."

"The Wandarobo!" Ki-Gor echoed incredulously.

The Wandarobo, as he well remembered from previous trips to East Africa, were an extremely primitive Bantu tribe, near neighbors of the M'balla. They were undersized, cowardly, and depraved. In battle they could never be a match for the gigantic M'balla tribesmen. The latter, being an offshoot of the Masai, were not true Bantu, but were descended from fierce invaders from Abyssinia and the Sudan. Then how, Ki-Gor wondered, could the Wandarobo have become dangerous to the M'balla?

He went back to questioning Lesolio, but the M'balla was so agitated, and his Swahili was so poor, that Ki-Gor could make very little sense out of his answers. Gradually, out of the confused fragments of Lesolio's Swahili, Ki-Gor pieced together some sort of a picture of George's misfortune. An Evil Spirit, so Lesolio said, had visited the M'balla and killed many of them, and then the Wandarobo had killed others, and finally, George was now at bay, surrounded by overwhelming numbers.

Knowing George and the M'balla as he did, Ki-Gor found the whole story highly improbable. And yet, there was no questioning Lesolio's sincerity. The long, lean warrior was becoming increasingly agitated. He repeated that he had been sent to find Ki-Gor—that he had left his own country to travel alone among strange Bantu so that he could fetch the great white hunter to the aid of George. Well, now he had found him, and therefore, they must set off at once.

WHEN Ki-Gor told Lesolio that he was in no condition yet to travel, the M'balla warrior became almost frantic. He insisted that he was able to travel, and struggled to his feet in an effort to prove it. Ki-Gor held out a steadying hand, or Lesolio would have crashed down again.

At length, Ki-Gor gave in and agreed



to start immediately. He realized that Lesolio would recover faster resting quietly on Marmo's back, than fretting in the cave. Ki-Gor wished he could get a clearer picture of George's trouble. He still could not understand how George could be in any way menaced by the Wandarobo, when he commanded up to a hundred stalwart M'balla spearmen.

Briefly, Ki-Gor explained the situation to Helene, who promptly raised objections.

"I don't like the sound of that," she said, "If George with a hundred good fighting men is in trouble, I don't see what you can do to help him—single-handed." Then, seeing the hurt look in his eyes, she added quickly, "Oh, I know you're strong, Ki-Gor, stronger than ten men, and cunning. But what can you do against odds that are too much for George and his tribe? I think if you try to help George now, you will accomplish nothing but to put yourself in the same danger he's in."

Ki-Gor looked into her lovely face.

"I remember," he said slowly, "when you were captured by the Gorilla-men. There were hundreds of them, and even the M'balla would not go down to fight them. But when I went down after you, George came with me. He didn't have to. But he did."

Ki-Gor had her there, and she knew it. She shivered at the memory of that narrow escape in the treacherous valley called Nirvana.

"Yes, Ki-Gor, he did"—Helene realized she had to take another tack—"and if George is really in danger, you must go to his help. But," she thought a moment, "have you thought of this? Have you thought of the possibility that this wounded warrior may not be telling the truth? How can you be sure that George is in danger? Suppose George never sent him at all, and this may be just a trap? You have many enemies, Ki-Gor, and maybe some of them have sent this man with a lying story to lure you into an ambush of some kind."

Ki-Gor looked at her steadily for a moment, and then shook his head with an indulgent smile.

"No," he said, "Lesolio is no liar. He says George is in great danger and I believe him. We must go. Don't be afraid."

Helene knew when she was beaten.

PREPARATIONS for the departure were simple. Ki-Gor cut several strips of meat off the gazelle's ribs, wrapped them in a banana leaf, and entrusted the package to Helene. Then he gathered up the half-dozen spears which the hostile villagers had thrown up into the cave and bound them with some lengths of vine. Then he whistled for Marmo, and as the elephant's broad back appeared beside the edge of the cave, he assisted the tall M'balla warrior to a position of relative security. Helene got on behind Lesolio, and Ki-Gor took his place on the elephant's neck. A short word of command set Marmo in motion, and he shuffled forward toward Ruwenzori.

Just as Ki-Gor had guessed, Lesolio's spirits mounted as soon as the journey to succor Tembo George began. Heedless of his wounds, and in spite of a natural weakness from loss of blood, the tall Masai maintained an excited flow of conversation. Unfortunately, it was in his own tongue, and Ki-Gor could make very little out of it. Questions put in Swahili to Lesolio brought forth little more knowledge of the situation that lay in wait for Ki-Gor than he had already gained from the Masai. Lesolio's Swahili was simply not adequate to the task of telling a connected story.

Ki-Gor sent Marmo toward the southeast as Lesolio's long forefinger indicated. The M'balla warrior's directions were, however, extremely general. He couldn't seem to remember any special route that he had come over when he had traveled westward. This made progress rather slow, as Ki-Gor frequently went off the course to take advantage of patches of open veldt. Consequently, when night fell, the northern shoulder of the mighty Ruwenzori Range which was their destination was still far away.

As they made camp for the night, Ki-Gor noticed that the wounded Lesolio was astonishingly ignorant of elementary points of woodcraft. Then he remembered that in general that was true of all the M'balla. They were essentially plainsmen—their not so remote ancestors having come down from the arid North—and they were still not at home in the jungle which they had wrested away from the aboriginal Bantu. Then Ki-Gor remembered another thing.



and that was that the Wandarobo, one of the expelled Bantu tribes, were exceptionally skilled forest hunters, adept in the arts of woodcraft. They were expert trackers, they could travel the tree-route, and they could stalk their prey with the silent ease of a jungle python. In open combat they could never stand up to the gigantic Masai, who fought and killed for the love of fighting and killing. However, Ki-Gor reflected, it might be possible for the Wandarobo to wage a successful war against the Masai M'balla by luring them into the deepest forests and ambushing them. But to Ki-Gor's knowledge that had never happened, and the haughty M'balla roamed the forest-clad slopes of Ruwenzori without the slightest fear of the sly Wandarobo. In fact, the M'balla had nothing but good-natured contempt for their primitive neighbors. A few of the Wandarobo lived among the M'balla in a servile condition, performing certain menial tasks which the conquering race considered too undignified for themselves to have anything to do with. Ki-Gor remembered hearing a white man say once that the Masai were "the gentlemen of Africa."

The next morning Lesolio, due no doubt to his implicit faith in Ki-Gor's healing magic, appeared to be much stronger and, indeed, to be mending rapidly. He managed to get on Marmo's back without assistance, to Helene's amazement, and the expedition to Ruwenzori got under way again.

IT was a bright sunny morning for a change and as Marmo climbed to the top of a long grassy slope, a magnificent vista stretched out before the eyes of his passengers.

Ruwenzori!

The air was so clear that the mighty crags rearing up from the broad foothills seemed so close that they could be touched, even though they were almost thirty miles away. One great cone-shaped peak was hooded in clouds which broke apart at intervals to display the dazzling snow-covered summit. Beyond it to the south, other majestic peaks stood like gray ominous sentinels.

Lesolio pointed excitedly at the huge

range, but Ki-Gor had difficulty in finding out exactly what he was pointing at. At length, it appeared that the M'balla was indicating the middle one of three deep ravines that ran parallel down the north face of the range into the dark foothills. There, apparently was where Tembo George was. But as to knowing any particular route to get there, Lesolio was of no help. After some deliberation, Ki-Gor decided that there was nothing to do but to travel on a course that was as direct as possible.

For several miles the travelers passed through open parkland with scattered trees. Then gradually, the trees grew more numerous and closer together. At the same time, the ground began to slope down. Evidently, they were descending into some sort of valley. By degrees, the vegetation got thicker and thicker, and after two or three miles, the surroundings became almost like a jungle.

Not wishing to press through the dense forest blindly, Ki-Gor spent some time exploring. Eventually, he found a broad elephant trail. He checked its general direction by the sun, and saw that the trail went roughly southeastwards. He decided to follow it.

The trail seemed to lead for miles through the thick, gloomy, sunless forest. Without the sun to guide him, Ki-Gor had more or less to guess at his direction. But his intuition told him comfortingly that the trail would not bring him out far wide of his objective.

Once or twice he looked around at Lesolio and was shocked at the expression on the warrior's face. Lesolio was showing fear!

THE tall M'balla kept staring about at the wilderness around him. His eyes betrayed a quaking uneasiness, and his thin lips moved soundlessly. Ki-Gor did not ask Lesolio what he was afraid of. It would have been too great a blow to the pride of the supposedly fearless Masai.

After hours of this jungle passage, the trail ended abruptly at the edge of a lake. It was a long, narrow lake, its waters still and oily in the quiet early-afternoon air. To the north it stretched away several miles and then appeared to curve out of sight. The



south end of the lake was perhaps a half mile to Ki-Gor's right, and he decided that the shortest route around this water barrier was that way. Accordingly, he turned Marmo in that direction.

As they neared that end of the lake, Ki-Gor gasped. On the lake shore and extending for miles farther in was a great army of flamingoes—fantastic rose-plumed birds with stilt-like legs and beaks shaped like cutlasses. There seemed to be millions of them. Ki-Gor realized then, that beyond the lake there must be a vast marsh. The very numbers of the flamingoes indicated the probable extent of the marsh. Ki-Gor well knew that it might reach for ten miles. Such a marsh would be dangerous or even impossible to cross, even for Marmo. Ki-Gor halted the elephant to consider the situation.

The lake was extremely narrow, but was probably too deep for Marmo to wade across, and Ki-Gor was not willing to risk finding out whether it was or not. While he sat thinking, Lesolio started talking and pointing excitedly. Ki-Gor gazed upward following the direction of the warrior's finger. Evidently the direction of the elephant trail they had followed through the jungle had remained true. They were only about four miles away from their objective.

"See?" said Lesolio, "Rocks there. Bare place. Middle furrow."

The Masai indicated a rocky place halfway up the middle ravine of the three that cut down the mountain slope. At a distance of four miles, it looked like a small landslide.

"Tembo George—there," said Lesolio, pointing.

Ki-Gor stared at the place. It was directly across the lake. If they tried to find a way around the lake and marsh barrier that lay squarely across their path, they might have to go ten, twenty miles or more out of their way. Ki-Gor scrambled off the elephant's back with a muttered ejaculation.

He went to the edge of the water, looked down at it and shook his head. It was too deep for fording. He walked a few yards along the shore and was about to turn back when something caught his eye, just ahead. A moment later, he dived into the under-

brush with a shout, reappearing dragging a crude dugout.

It was merely a great log, hollowed out very roughly. It was nothing like as well made as the log canoes made by the river tribes of the Lower Congo. But for all that, it would, Ki-Gor thought, carry Helene, Lesolio, and himself across the narrow lake. He hated the idea of leaving Marmo behind but there was nothing else to do. He dragged the dugout to the water's edge and called to his companions to join him.

Lesolio was dumb with fright as he climbed off the elephant.

"Wandarobo!" he whispered, eyes rolling, "Bad! They see—you-me-her—they kill!"

"But you're not afraid of Wandarobo, are you?" said Ki-Gor in Swahili, "The M'balla are not afraid of those little jungle-fleas!"

"Not—afraid—" Lesolio's face belied his words—"but Wandarobo—too many—they kill!"

Ki-Gor glanced over at the opposite shore of the lake, where a grimly impenetrable wall of trees and undergrowth hid Heaven knew what dark secrets. "Wandarobo—too many—" And Lesolio, the proud Masai, was frightened of them. That must mean that the little forest hunters were gathered against the M'bala in overwhelming numbers. It didn't seem possible! At any rate, Ki-Gor thought, there was no time to be lost. He must get to George and find out exactly what was the situation. And the first thing to do was to get across the lake, Wandarobo or no Wandarobo. He looked kindly at the M'balla warrior.

"Come, Lesolio, come," he said, "I am Ki-Gor and I fear no amount of enemies. Your life is my affair. We will get in this canoe and cross the lake."

Marmo, the elephant, watched the precariously balanced craft go slowly over the placid water and hit the opposite shore with a slight bump. The three passengers got out and stood for a minute in front of the trees.

Then Ki-Gor waved an arm, and disappeared from sight. Marmo turned and went slowly toward the great marsh.

As Ki-Gor led the way up the slope he found that the undergrowth was by



no means as thick as it had looked from across the lake. He was able to go straight up the rising ground without looking for any trails. Even so, the gradient was steep enough so that Helene and the recently wounded Lesolio made heavy going of it. Ki-Gor, therefore, stopped frequently, and while his companions rested he scouted the vicinity carefully. Nowhere could he find signs of recent human presence.

They traveled uphill this way for about a mile, but as they climbed higher, the undergrowth grew thicker. Finally, Ki-Gor realized that they would have to find some sort of trail. He put his companions up a safe tree and then went scouting.

He went along the hillside for nearly half a mile, spotting a couple of small game trails but rejecting them as being too meandering to serve his purpose. All of a sudden a little south breeze cooled his face, and at the same time, his nostrils twitched. Ki-Gor smelled Bantu.

The next minute he came upon a broad path going straight up the hill. A glance showed Ki-Gor that hundreds of splay-toed bare feet had passed and repassed on the trail—recently. The Bantu smell seemed to be growing stronger, and Ki-Gor could hear voices in the distance.

Silently, the jungle man swung himself up into a tree and quickly found a position which, though screened by leaves, gave him a clear view of a section of the path. He had not long to wait.

A column of the most sinister-looking savages Ki-Gor had ever seen came trotting along the path uphill. They were small and slight, though not so small as Pygmies, and they were absolutely naked. Their filthy bodies were caked with bright-colored clay. Around their necks were necklaces of small white bones, and their wooly heads were partially shaven in fantastic patterns. They were well armed, each man being equipped with a light spear, a long knife, a short bow and a quiver of arrows. As they jogged up the trail, they laughed and chattered, their brutish faces crinkling with depraved glee.

The Wandarobo!

Instinctively, Ki-Gor's upper lip curled up, showing his powerful teeth in a primordial snarl. The bestial little men down

below were repeating to each other the phrase, "M'balla nyama." Ki-Gor knew that in Bantu-Swahili, "nyama" meant "wild animals," or "game," or simply, "meat." So, when the Wandarobo said "M'balla nyama," they could mean only one thing. Ki-Gor remembered, then, that when he had last been in East Africa, he had heard that the Wandarobo were suspected of practicing cannibalism.

Ki-Gor counted about three hundred in the file below him—an amazingly large number of these sly forest-hunters to gather in one group. Perhaps Lesolio's fears were better justified than Ki-Gor had realized at first. Eventually, the trail was deserted, or at least, the section of it that Ki-Gor could see. He waited for a few minutes in case there might be a rearguard coming up the trail, but when none appeared, he climbed silently higher up the tree. Then with one last look, he was off swinging through the trees in the direction of Helene and Lesolio.

HIS uncanny sense of direction led him straight to them. With a few brief words he told them of what he had seen, and then the three of them picked their way through the undergrowth to the path. Ki-Gor's intention was to follow the trail up the hill as far as seemed safe, trusting to luck that their tracks would not be noticed among all the other footprints made by the Wandarobo. There would be some risk of detection by the sharp-eyed Wandarobo, but Ki-Gor decided to take it.

However, just as Helene stepped out on the path, a sixth sense warned the jungle man to reconnoiter first. Silently he dragged Helene and Lesolio back into the undergrowth while he hid behind a banana bush close to the path. His precaution was taken not a moment too soon.

Two Wandarobo came hurrying up the trail from below. There was an air of silent haste about them, as if they meant to catch up with the main body ahead of them. But they were none the less alert, for all their haste.

As they passed by the crouching form of Ki-Gor, one of them stopped dead and sniffed the air. The other one halted after a few steps and looked curiously at his com-



panion. They exchanged a few muttered words and then both bent over and inspected the muddy ground of the path. In a very short time, one of them uttered an excited exclamation and squatted down over the incriminating footprint that Helene had left. Both cannibals, then, investigated the slight imprint, smelled it, and discussed it. The original discoverer raised his head and sniffed the air again and stared all around into the forest. He looked almost into Ki-Gor's watching eyes without seeing him.

The two Wandarobo again fell into discussion. Evidently, the first one wanted to explore the ground beside the path to try and find the person who belonged to the mysterious footprint. But the other cannibal kept pointing up the path, arguing that they could not stop. In the end, they parted company. The first one stayed on to make his investigation, and the second one trotted on up the path.

Ki-Gor gathered his muscles as the Wandarobo, eyes glittering and nostrils flared like a gorilla, stepped off the path into the undergrowth. The bestial little creature could not fail to see the evidence that not one, but two or even more people had been through the closely grown bushes. A cruel smile of triumph spread over his depraved features. For some unknown reason he hesitated before calling out to his companion. That hesitation was his ruin.

From the shadow of the banana bush Ki-Gor sprang.

The Wandarobo dodged desperately to one side with a scream of terror. But the scream was quickly pinched out into a gurgling squeak, as Ki-Gor's right arm snaked down. The prodigious fingers closed on the cannibal's throat and squeezed the life out of him.

Lesolio stood beside Ki-Gor with admiring eyes, as the latter methodically stripped the verminous little Wandarobo of bow, quiver, and knife. Helene peered over her mate's shoulder with an expression of disgust on her face. There was a time when Helene would have felt pity for a victim of Ki-Gor's strength. But by now she had become reconciled to his prompt and merciless action. She had learned the Lesson of Africa: Kill lest ye be killed.

Ki-Gor seized the dead Wandarobo by

the ankles and dragged him through the undergrowth some twenty feet farther away from the trail. Then he walked lightly back to his companions. It would be safe now, he felt, to travel up the trail.

Even now, however, Ki-Gor was not one to relax his caution. Before he stepped out on the path, he stood still for a moment and took a long look all around him. A throbbing silence hung over the jungle.

But from somewhere, came a tiny rustle—barely audible. Ki-Gor's head jerked around, and his eyes flew upward.

**A**CROSS the trail, in the lower branches of a great tree, some leaves trembled. Ki-Gor cleared the path in one bound and was up the trunk of the tree like a panther. A clay daubed black figure scrambled up the tree ahead of him. Evidently, the second Wandarobo had been overcome with curiosity and had come back by the tree route to see what his companion was doing. If the little savage was surprised to see a white giant come plunging up the tree after him, he did not let his astonishment paralyze his movements. With a mocking laugh, he scurried like a squirrel along a high limb, took off in a daring leap and landed safely on a lower branch of the next tree.

But he had reckoned without Ki-Gor.

With a promptness equalling the Wandarobo's the White Lord of the Jungle swung his long legs up on a broad limb and with one continuous motion arced his body upward and forward. By the time the Wandarobo jumped, Ki-Gor was running along the limb in the same direction. And before the Wandarobo landed in the other tree, Ki-Gor had leaped. In mid-air, his fingers closed over a thick vine trailing from the bough he had just left. His forward motion carried him through the air to a point where he let go the vine and dropped lightly on a bough ten feet below the one the Wandarobo had landed on.

There was no mocking laughter from the Wandarobo now, only the silence of desperation as he flung himself upward to the top of the tree. But fast as he climbed, Ki-Gor below him climbed faster. Twice a great hand almost closed over a frantic black ankle. Once Ki-Gor just missed seizing his prey as the savage threw himself to



the other side of the narrowing tree-trunk.

With such a panicky upward flight and such a relentless pursuit, there could be only one ultimate result. The Wandarobo reached a point on the top of the tree where there was no place to go but down. With a squeal, the Wandarobo tried a suicidal leap.

But Ki-Gor was ready for him. As the black body started to hurtle downward, Ki-Gor was braced. He whipped out an arm, grabbed the naked savage under one armpit and held him bleating and squalling. Promptly Ki-Gor's left hand cuffed the clay-daubed chin, and the Wandarobo went limp. Ki-Gor had decided that this enemy might be more useful alive than dead.

HE carefully carried the inert form down to the ground and called to Helene and Lesolio to join him. In a short while, the Wandarobo recovered consciousness, and Ki-Gor spoke to him in Swahili.

"Listen with all your ears, Monkey-Man," he said sternly. "You will live or die according to my wish. If you behave discreetly and answer truly the questions I am going to put to you, you will live. Otherwise—"

Ki-Gor balanced his knife suggestively in his hand. The Wandarobo blinked upward without answering.

"First, then," said Ki-Gor, "Tell me what is the situation with Tembo George and the M'balla. Where are they?"

The Wandarobo remained silent and continued to stare at his captor.

Speak!" Ki-Gor barked, "and quickly!" The blade glittered in his hand.

"Ayee! Bwana!" the Wandarobo said suddenly, "I will tell! Tembo George and his followers, what is left of them, are up the hill two miles. They have taken refuge in a pile of rocks, where they are safe for the moment. But they are trapped. There is no escape for them. The Wandarobo are as numerous as bees, and we hold the M'balla in a tight ring."

"How many of you Wandarobo are daring to war against Tembo George?" Ki-Gor demanded. At least he was getting the information which Lesolio had been unable to give him.

"I could not count them," the savage answered, "I truly could not. But when the

Evil Spirit came among the M'balla and struck them down, the Wandarobo gathered from far and wide to drive them out of our ancient hunting grounds."

Ki-Gor was silent for a moment. There was no question in his mind but that the Wandarobo was telling the truth. But he still could not quite understand how the M'balla could have been reduced to such straits by the depraved little Wandarobo. And *what* was the Evil Spirit?

"Answer me," he said abruptly, "Are *all* ways in and out of this pile of rocks, as you call it, closed off?"

"Every way is guarded. Soon they will surrender or starve. We would have swarmed over them like locusts before now except that Tembo George has a fire-stick."

"But some of the defenders broke out. Here is one beside me."

Ki-Gor did not look away from the Wandarobo but the Wandarobo glanced up curiously, at the great M'bala, leaning on his spear.

"That may be," the little savage replied, "Some of the defenders tried to get out but they did not go far before they were riddled with spear-wounds. There are many of us."

Ki-Gor began to understand why Lesolio had shown fear of the Wandarobo. He looked shrewdly at the little savage while a plan formed in his mind.

"Look you, Monkey-Man," Ki-Gor said finally, "I am Tembo George's friend. I and my woman, and this M'balla man, must get to Tembo George. I will leave it to you to find a way. Guide us by some safe route to the rocks where George is, and I will give you your life and your freedom. Play us false by leading us into an ambush, or by raising an outcry to your fellows, and the minute I suspect anything wrong I will twist you with these two hands and snap your backbone like a twig."

The Wandarobo licked his lips and said nothing for a long moment.

"The minute I caught you spying on me," Ki-Gor went on, "your life was forfeit. And I would kill you this moment, as I killed your mate, if it were not for the possibility that you could be of use to me alive."

The savage held up an imploring hand.

"Nay, Bwana. What you ask I cannot do."



he said. "There are hundreds and hundreds of my people surrounding Tembo George. How can I lead three people unnoticed through that throng?"

"It is for you to devise a way," Ki-Gor replied stonily.

There was a long silence. Then the savage looked fearfully up at Ki-Gor, looked away, and finally sighed gustily.

"There might be a way," he admitted at last.

"There *must* be a way," said Ki-Gor calmly. "It is your only chance to live this day out."

"There is to be a council held at sunset," the savage said slowly. "We are going to the Sacred Grove of our ancestors, high up the mountain. Only a few will stay behind and give the alarm if the M'balla tried to escape from their trap."

Ki-Gor nodded with a knowing smile.

"So much the better for you, Monkey-Man," he said, "You guide us safely past those few guards and I will release you in time for you to attend the council yourself. You can tell your mates that Ki-Gor has arrived to help his friend Tembo George. I will take your arm now, and you will stand up."

"Ki-Gor?" said the Wandarobo, obediently getting to his feet, "I don't know the name."

"All Ruwenzori will know that name," Ki-Gor said grimly, "if the Wandarobo do not immediately stop their war against Tembo George. Now—which way do we go?"

"The path here leads up to the foot of the open space in front of Tembo George's stronghold."

Ki-Gor looked at Lesolio and said, "Did you understand that? Is it true?"

"I understand—yes," said Lesolio in Swahili. "Yes—true."

"Very well," Ki-Gor said and turned back to the savage. "Lead on, Monkey-Man."

THE sun had long since left the northern slope of Ruwenzori when the Wandarobo guide indicated silently to Ki-Gor that they were nearly at the head of the trail. Although it was not yet actually sunset, as measured on the plains to the north-east, it had been twilight for a long time on this shaded face of the mountain—a gloomy,

chilly half-light, accentuated by the tall, spreading trees through which the trail wound uphill. A cold wind from the remote snow-capped peak above blew down unpleasantly on Ki-Gor's bare torso as he followed the Wandarobo off the trail into the underbrush.

So far, the trip had been without incident. The hostage-guide had apparently kept his end of the bargain faithfully, but Ki-Gor was glad the end was in sight. He was tired of keeping an unrelaxing grip on the Wandarobo's arm, and the body-smell of the unwashed savage was also getting very tiresome.

A few careful yards through the underbrush, and the Wandarobo pointed with his free hand. Ki-Gor frowned quickly at Lesolio who, behind Helene, was making a noisy passage through the undergrowth, and then ducking his head peered forward through the bushes.

He saw an open space about fifty yards wide before him, covered with gravel, rubble, and small boulders. Once upon a time, evidently, there had been a small landslide in that ravine which had come no farther than where he was standing. Higher up, perhaps a hundred yards above, the landslide had been split in two by a series of prominent ledges. These ledges had withstood the pressure of sliding rubble and divided it into two streams which had then rejoined some yards below. The effect of the ledges was to create a small oasis with one or two trees below them surrounded on three sides by a protecting redoubt of loose rock and gravel. That was Tembo George's stronghold.

"If you wait until darkness," the savage whispered, "Tembo George will not know who you are and will kill you with his firestick. If you go across the open space now, you will be seen by our watchers, but they are few—too few to do you any harm."

Ki-Gor looked at the little savage coldly. So far, he had been reliable.

"Why not go now?" the Wandarobo urged, "You can run all the way up—it is not too far."

Ki-Gor decided to chance it. The forest that fringed the opening was silent—almost too silent. But Ki-Gor wanted to get free of the trees which were the natural



element of the besieging Wandarobo and get up to George's fortress.

"How many watchers are there?" he asked the savage.

"Three or four, no more," the Wandarobo shrugged, his beady eyes glittering. "You promised to release me at the head of the trail."

"I will release you," Ki-Gor returned, "but only when I am convinced you have acted in good faith."

Then he instructed Helene and Lesolio to step out into the open and start walking up toward the oasis-redoubt. He, himself, would stand at the edge of the trees holding on to the hostage-guide until the truth of his statement was proven.

Helene's face was calm as she moved to obey Ki-Gor. She was well aware of the potential danger, but in situations like this, she trusted Ki-Gor implicitly. Lesolio, on the other hand, was tense, and his face was a dark-gray. The M'balla and the white girl stepped out on to the rubble and began to walk uphill.

There was not a sound from the dark trees.

Five paces — ten paces — the couple walked, as Ki-Gor gripped the Wandarobo's arm.

Fifteen paces—twenty—twenty-five. Almost a quarter of the distance to the ledges, and still there was no outcry.

Ki-Gor released the Wandarobo's arm, and sprang out into the open. Instantly, he cursed himself.

"Ai! Ai! Ai!"

It was his late captive, streaking away through the underbrush, screaming at the top of his lungs. Immediately, the cry was taken up all around the opening. From the cover of the trees, a horde of naked blacks poured out yelling. An icy rage settled over Ki-Gor as he sprang uphill, his mighty legs driving like pistons into the soft gravel underfoot.

FOR a split-second, the situation looked hopeless. There must have been fifty or sixty Wandarobo streaming out from the trees. They must inevitably cut off Helene and Lesolio from the redoubt above.

Helene was running now, slipping and stumbling on the rubble, and Lesolio was

running behind her, brandishing his great spear and yelling defiance.

Then a shot rang out from above, and another and another. A flash of hope streaked through Ki-Gor's brain, and he pumped his legs faster to try and make up the distance between him and Helene.

Three of the Wandarobo were down, and the group from the left-hand side of the opening were running back to the trees. But a little knot of savages to the right kept right on. They were within a few yards of Helene now.

Suddenly, Lesolio veered to his right. Spear-arm upraised, he gave a tremendous yell and made straight for the Wandarobo. A second later, he was in the midst of them, stabbing and hacking. A quick glow of admiration went over Ki-Gor, as he plunged up the slope. Although Lesolio was vastly outnumbered, the shock of his attack halted the Wandarobo, Helene, running nimbly, was within fifteen yards of safety.

Ki-Gor knocked down two Wandarobo dancing in his path, then swept to his right to go to the aid of the hard-pressed Lesolio. At one and the same time, he saw two things happen. He saw Helene stumble and fall, and he saw a short spear plunged into Lesolio's neck.

Blood spouted, and the tall warrior wavered like a tall tree in the middle of the yammering Wandarobo. Ki-Gor flung himself into the melee, although he knew in his heart he was too late. A second later, the Wandarobo swarmed over him.

A crimson veil seemed to drop over Ki-Gor's eyes. He was conscious of nothing except slashing at the wall of brutish faces around him.

Then, dimly, as if from a great distance, he heard a deep-throated roar. Giant figures, one of them in a white shirt, rose out of the red haze, and huge, two-foot-long spear blades dipped and thrust near him. The Wandarobo faded and in a minute were in full flight.

As the red mist cleared out of Ki-Gor's eyes, he saw four M'balla warriors panting on their spears, and Tembo George standing in front of him with hand outstretched.

"My gravy, Ki-Gor!" said a rolling bass voice, "Whut you-all doin' in this neck o' the woods?"



In the confusion of the moment, Ki-Gor did not grasp the implication that his arrival was unexpected. There was Helene to be attended to, for one thing. In that last mad dash, her foot had rolled on a loose rock and she had suffered a badly sprained ankle in consequence. Ki-Gor carried her the rest of the distance to the stronghold below the ledges, and bound her ankle tightly with some strips of cloth that George gave him. Then, at the far end of the enclosure, a small fire was built against the solid rock, and Ki-Gor and Helene settled themselves beside it and ate the modest meal provided for them by the man they had come to save from his trouble.

THE immense Negro, bull-necked, broad-shouldered, and genial-faced—once George Spelvin of Cincinnati, U. S. A., Pullman porter and ship's cook, now Tembo George, Chief of the M'balla—sat down beside them. After they had finished, he spoke in his rich, musical, bass voice.

"Now, will you-all please tell me how you evuh found me? An' will you tell me *why* in th' name of the good Lawd—you-all evuh *come* at all?"

Ki-Gor raised his head slowly and stared at the Negro.

"You sent for us, George," he said deliberately, "so we came."

"I sent for you!" George exclaimed. "I nevuh did no such thing! This yere is th' last place in the world I'd want you an' Miss Helene to be! I wouldn't wish muh worst enemy in th' position I'm in, right now!"

"But Lesolio said you had sent him out to find us," Ki-Gor persisted.

"No *sub*" said George flatly, "I nevuh said nuthin about you-all to Lesolio. He voluntee'd to cut his way out and try and get he'p from the Ngombi-Masai down on the plains no'th-east of th' mountain."

Ki-Gor then related the circumstances of their meeting Lesolio to the westward, near the Uele River. When he finished, George groaned.

"Oh, my Lawd! I guess whut must have happened, he couldn't get th'ough to the east, so he went in th' opposite direction, an' ran into you-all by acident. He reco'nized you from those days when we-all fought 'longside each othuh, an' figured he'd just

bring you-all back with him. Crazy fool! To make sure you'd come, he made up that there story 'bout how I sent him out lookin fo' you."

"Lesolio was a brave man," Ki-Gor said gently, "and he is dead, now"

"Yeah, he was brave, all right," said George shaking his head, "but he was almighty dumb! Honest, Ki-Gor, I'm just sick that he brought you and Miss Helene up yere. Because, I've got to tell y'awl somethin'. Ever' one of us yere in this place is strictly a goner!"

Ki-Gor looked from him to Helene and then back again.

"What is a goner?" he asked quietly, although in his heart, he had a fair idea of what George meant.

"I mean," George replied, "that they ain't a chance that a single person in this yere place will evuh get out alive. They's ovah two thousan' of the slickest, meanest, blood-thirstiest cannibals in Africa ringed around us, waitin, fer the moment when they c'n rush an' carry us off to their stew-pots!"

"But I don't understand," said Ki-Gor, "Where is the rest of the M'balla?"

George pointed at the eight silent warriors squatting behind him, and the four tall, beautiful girls just beyond.

"There is my tribe of the M'balla—all that's left of it."

"Great heavens!" Helene exclaimed, "What happened, George?"

"It's a long story, Miss Helene," George said, soberly, "an' a sad one. It all started one day when some boys of the Ngombi-Masai came by on a hunting trip. They're kind of ouah cousins like. They live down on the plains and raise cattle. Now an' then some of the youngsters will go out lookin' fer adventure. Well, this party of young Ngombi-Masai passed ouah village, like I said, an' one of 'em was sick, an' they asked could they leave him behind till he got bet-tah."

"The boy was sick, all right, but I didn't find out whut ailed him till it was too late. If'n I'd knowed whut he had, I nevah would have kept him in the village wheah all ma people could go in an' see him and talk to him and touch him."

"Why?" said Helene, "Did he have a contagious disease?"



"Miss Helene," said George, "that boy had the small-pox."

"Oh! How dreadful!" said Helene and explained briefly to Ki-Gor the nature of small-pox.

"I see," said Ki-Gor, when she had finished, "Lesolio called it an Evil Spirit."

"That's whut it seemed like to ma people," said George. "As soon as I realized that it was small-pox, I did ma best to stop it spreadin' separatin' the sick ones, but it was too late. I nevuh got it, because I was vaccinated only a couple a years back, but ma poor M'balla—"

THE great Negro broke off and shook his head. After a moment, he continued.

"They was four hundred an' fifty in the tribe befo' that sick Masai boy put up with us. When the small-pox got through, they wasn't seventy-five able-bodied men, women and children left. I used to have a hundred Morani—bachelor warriors—and I had anothuh hundred married men I could call out as a kind of reserve. But that turrible disease carried 'em all off, exceptin' twenty-seven of 'em. Twenty-seven out of two hundred."

"I'm sorry, George," Ki-Gor said simply. "Then I suppose the Wandarobo saw your weakness."

"They sho' did," the Negro replied, "They was one of 'em used to work in our village makin' spear-blades fer us. His name's Krukra an' he's a devil. He seen whut was goin' on and right away sent out a call to all the Wandarobo fo' miles around. This yere country around yere used to b'long to th' Wandarobo years ago, until the M'balla come and took it away from 'em. An' th' Wandarobo under this fella, Krukra, figured heah was their chance to get their territory back. So, one day, hundreds of them little brutes just dropped down on us from the trees and started killin'. It was awful. By nightfall, they was just eighteen of us left, an' we sneaked out, an' I led 'em up to this spot."

Ki-Gor looked around the little enclosure, noting some boxes stacked up several feet from the fire.

"This yere's a funny kind of place," George said, "It's a natural fort, on account of th' ledges up theah are too steep to climb,

an' on the other three sides it's all open ground from heah to th' trees. No place for an enemy to take covuh whiles he sneak up on you. You just sit behind these yere rocks and shoot him down. I spotted it quite some time ago, an' stocked it up with food an' ammunition an' a couple o' guns. My idea was that I'd have a place to go in case the M'balla evuh decided to have a revolution against Tembo George.

"Well, bless theah po' hearts, the M'balla nevuh had no revolution, but this yere spot come in handy just the same. Only trouble is, the food is runnin' low. If I had mo' food, I could hold out indefinitely, because they's a little spring o' water yere, an' I got plenty of ammunition. But I just figured out today, we only got food fer about two-three mo' days—five days at the outside. An' when the food is gone—well, I guess *we* is gone. So, you c'n see, Ki-Gor, why I feel so bad about that Lesolio bringin' you up yere. He just the same as put the noose 'round yo' neck."

But Ki-Gor was deep in thought.

"How is it, George," he said after an interval, "that the Ngombi-Masai have not come to your help?"

"I suppose they don't know about our trouble," the Negro answered. "Lesolio an' fo' othuh boys voluntee'd to cut their way out an' try to get to Ngombi-Masai. But Lesolio is the only one I know of that actually got out, an' he went west 'stead of east. I guess the othuh fo' boys were killed."

"How far away from here are these Ngombi-Masai?" Ki-Gor asked.

"About sixty miles the shortest way—ovah the side of the mountain. But it's tough goin', that-a-way. Much easier to go down hill a ways an' then around, but it would put on another twenty miles."

"They are friendly to you, the Ngombi-Masai?" Ki-Gor pursued.

"Sho', they is friendly. They kind of like *good* relatives."

Ki-Gor asked a final question.

"You say you have plenty of ammunition? Enough to hold off the Wandarobo for five more days?"

"Yes, I have—say, whut you figurin' on doin', Ki-Gor?"

The jungle man stood up.

"Helene," he said, in a perfectly mat-



ter-of-fact voice, "you will not be able to walk on that ankle for two or three days, so you will have to stay here. But you will be perfectly safe. I will be back in five days with help from the Ngombi-Masai."

"Are you crazy!" gasped George, "you'll nevuh get th'ough that mess o' Wandarobo alive!"

"Yes," said Ki-Gor calmly, "I will."

It was a calm statement of fact.

"The Wandarobo are Bantu," Ki-Gor went on, casually, "and Bantu are afraid of the dark. I will go out now, and they will not even see me. By morning, I will be far away. George, hold out and don't be afraid. I will be back no later than the evening of the fifth day from now."

"But Ki-Gor!" Helene appealed with her voice, "how can you go a hundred and twenty miles in five days?"

"It's all right, Helene," Ki-Gor said, with a smile. "Don't be afraid."

He stepped to her side, stopped, and picked up her right hand in his and held it for a moment. Then, bending over her, he swung her hand from side to side and smiled down into her eyes. Helene felt a little catch in her throat. That was the most intimate gesture that Ki-Gor knew of. That child-like swinging of her hand meant that he was pouring his heart out to her.

"Good-bye, Ki-Gor," she said softly, "be careful. Come back in five days, and I'll be waiting for you."

George walked to the edge of the enclosure with Ki-Gor, talking earnestly to him. Finally, he helped him up the rock parapet, and climbed up after him. The two friends stood there for a few more moments, the African white man, and the American black man. George pointed northeast, and Ki-Gor gazed up into the brilliant star-lit sky and got a bearing. Then, a last word and handshake, and Ki-Gor stepped out into the darkness across the face of the landslide.

A HUNDRED little campfires winked among the trees that bordered the opening. Ki-Gor smiled to himself at the Wandarobo—brave and cunning men of the forest that they were, they found it necessary to huddle around are, when night came, not daring to wander far from the

area of firelight. To be sure, there was a sound basis for this caution. Night was the time for the great jungle cats to go hunting, and, therefore, not a healthy time for puny humans to be abroad. But Ki-Gor felt such supreme confidence in himself—in his colossal strength and his lightning wits, that he felt no fear of traveling like this in the dark—only a stimulating awareness of increased danger.

At the moment, the series of campfires presented a little problem. They were not quite continuous along the edge of the woods, but many of them were close enough to their neighbors so that the light from one fire all but overlapped the area lighted by the next. Farther down the slope the gaps between fires were wider. It would perhaps be safer to go down there to enter the forest and pass the ring of beseigers, but Ki-Gor was in a hurry. He held to a straight line across the open rubble and slipped silently into the underbrush not fifty feet from a dozen Wandarobo nodding beside a small blaze. Seventy-five feet on the other side of him was a similar group.

Years before now, Ki-Gor had trained himself—of necessity, if he was to survive in the implacable jungle—to handle his great body like an eel. He twisted and sidled through undergrowth with scarcely a rustle to betray his passing. His body had somehow learned to gauge the pressure of branches against it without any conscious working of his brain. His feet too, instinctively, sought sure, safe ground, automatically rejecting dry twigs, or entangling vines.

Now, he took a grim pleasure in drifting so silently so skillfully past the wary Wandarobo. A nasal, whining song lifted up on the still air, over the night hum of the jungle. Ki-Gor smiled to himself, a crooked smile. If all went well, that singer would be singing a different song five days hence.

He was well past the ring of campfires and in the total darkness of the forest when the little dog started to bark. Evidently, a small breeze was carrying his scent back to the Wandarobo. Ki-Gor stood still and listened. The dog kept on barking. It was that unmistakable insistent barking interspersed with short growls which means to any dog owner that there is danger lurking near by.



A low mutter of voices rose from the Wandarobo, and the nearest campfire blazed up bright and high as somebody threw fresh dry wood on it.

The dog kept on barking, and he began to sound nearer as if he were coming up wind toward Ki-Gor. That would not do, at all. The dog might pick up his spoor and lead his Wandarobo master straight to him. That in itself would not be serious, as Ki-Gor could swing off the ground into a tree by the nearest vine. But if the Wandarobo ever realized that someone was escaping from Tembo George's fort, they would come out in full cry with torches blazing. The dog would show them his fresh tracks, and while they might not be able to read them by torchlight, they could certainly smell them and know that they were made by no Wandarobo.

Ki-Gor cursed the little dog for his silly yapping. He cursed his owner too and devoutly wished that the man who owned such an ill-trained dog should lose him one night chasing a leopard. Suddenly, an idea struck Ki-Gor. He threw back his head and gave the shivering spine-tingling hunting call of a leopard.

The savage barking abruptly changed to a frightening yelping, fading off as the dog beat a hasty retreat back to its owner. There was a chorus of nervous laughter from the Wandarobo, and Ki-Gor smiled grimly as he padded off through the inky forest.

**F**OLLOWING George's directions, Ki-Gor bore straight east. This way carried him across and slightly up the north face of Ruwenzori. At first, it was a steep uphill pull as he climbed out of the ravine. Then he went downhill—though still slanting eastward, and up again out of the next ravine. As he gained the next ridge, he was considerably higher up the mountain. He was beginning to leave the forest behind and coming into the region of the giant junipers and lobelias that grow nowhere else in the world except high on the slopes of Ruwenzori.

A late waning moon rose in front of Ki-Gor and hung red and menacing over the horizon of Uganda. He halted for a moment and gazed around at the awesome scene that the moon so dimly lighted. He

was standing on a desolate moorland that stretched upward on his right hand to the distant cloud-capped peak. There were no trees on this eerie slope, but here and there stood a number of gaunt, menacing shapes, well separated from one another. Gloomy and foreboding, they looked like tall, narrow Masai sentinels, watching over the vast Ruwenzori Range. They were the giant lobelia.

It is hard to realize that here, on this mountainous waste that lies squarely across the Equator, a plant which in English flower gardens produces a blossom a few inches long, sends spurs straight up toward the sky twenty feet tall! A mind and soul less staunch than Ki-Gor's might well have fled in terror from those forbidding shapes in the dim moonlight. But George had advised him to go over the shoulder of the mountain to make quicker time.

"And, man," George had said, "up theah' you *got* to keep movin' or else just freeze up to an icicle. That wind is powerful cold!"

Ki-Gor kept moving. With no clothing but the leopard skin around his loins, the keen wind bade fair to congeal the blood in his veins. He set off in a dog-trot, slightly uphill, but keeping the moon in his face. He maintained this pace for more than two hours, never stopping, never even slowing down. At length, he came, as George had told him he would, upon a small round, and very ghostly lake.

As he came over a lobelia-guarded spur, he could see the lake below him. Swathed in mist, it looked like the beautiful upturned face of a young girl lying in her burial clothes.

With scarcely a pause, Ki-Gor plunged down the steep slope to the lake. Still following George's directions, he skirted the lake shore until at the lower end he came upon a little stream, the lake's outlet. This stream was to be his guide which would lead him without fail straight down the mountain to the country of the Ngombi-Masai. Without halting, Ki-Gor propelled his great body tirelessly downhill beside the stream.

In one way, it was easier to maintain his dog-trot going downhill, this way. Certainly it was easier on his tortured lungs and heart. But in another way, the con-



stant braking of his speed took a terrific toll of the muscles in the back and thighs, and as the earth continually fell away from under his flying feet, his whole body was jolted and jarred with every other step.

HE was still in the open country of the giant lobelia and junipers when the yellow moon disappeared behind Ruwenzori. But not long after that, he hit the timber line, and it was then that he realized the tremendous value of the guiding stream—by now grown into a small, rushing river. Through the night gloom of the mountain forest Ki-Gor pounded, never relaxing his pace, and never having to stop to take his bearings.

When the impenetrable blackness of the forest began to give way to a murky gray, and individual objects could be indistinctly made out, Ki-Gor slowed down. When he came to a comparatively open patch in the forest, he selected a big tree and climbed up into its upper branches. Finding a comfortable crotch which commanded a view of the eastern horizon, he curled up and went sound asleep. The comparative warmth of the lower ground felt grateful to his battered body, and he didn't wake up until he felt the direct rays of the early morning sun pouring full on him.

Ki-Gor felt amazingly refreshed after his scant two hours sleep. His body was always in such magnificent condition that he was able to recuperate from fatigue in a remarkably short time. However, as he clambered down the tree to resume his headlong downhill journey, he had to admit to himself that he felt a little light-headed. There was an unpleasant air of unreality to the world. To clear his head he decided to take a quick dip in the swift waters of the river.

The water of the stream was deceptively clear. As he waded in, he suddenly found himself to his astonishment, up to his neck. The current promptly knocked him off his feet, and he was carried down the icy rapids for a considerable distance before he was able to pull himself up on the bank. He lay there panting for a moment, his whole body deliciously aglow. The cold bath had done the job—his head was clear.

The unexpected depth of the river and the swiftness of its current gave Ki-Gor an

idea. As he hurried down the river bank he kept an eye out for dead trees. He had not far to go. Just below a steep rapids—almost a series of small falls—the river hit a small shelf on the mountain side where it ran level for perhaps an eighth of a mile, broadening its banks.

Here Ki-Gor found what he wanted, several tall trees whose roots had been drowned long ago by the overflowing river. They stood now in a foot of calm water, naked of leaves and bark and rotting at the base. It did not take long to push over four of these trees and break off the tops and branches. Then Ki-Gor reeved several thick vines around the four trunks, and presently had a serviceable raft.

To be sure it would not last more than a few hours, as the rotten, porous wood would eventually get waterlogged, and the vines would disintegrate. But, as it was, the raft would carry him down the mountain as fast as if not faster than he could go on foot stumbling through the underbrush. He whittled a ten-foot steering pole from a tough green sapling, got on board his frail craft and pushed it out into the main current.

In the beginning, Ki-Gor found some difficulty in keeping the raft properly headed downstream. It had a tendency to yaw to one side and hang up on the bank. But, after that problem was solved, the raft went bobbing down the current gaily enough, maintaining a good six miles an hour in the calm stretches and much more in rapids. The rapids presented a problem, and three times Ki-Gor had to beach the raft for fear it would fall apart under him, and perform some quick repairs.

On the whole, however, the raft was a success. Especially, did Ki-Gor appreciate this when the river flowed through a great bamboo forest. George had warned Ki-Gor of this forest, telling him that the trees grew so close together that they were practically impassable. If Ki-Gor had been on foot, he would have had to crawl slowly around the trees along the river bank, and would have lost a great deal of valuable time. As it was, he floated grandly down the river at a fine rate of speed.

The bamboo forest went by and was replaced by a hard-wood jungle, which in



turn, gave way to open rolling veldt. About this time, the raft became so water-logged as to be of little further usefulness, so Ki-Gor abandoned it and swam to shore. Once there, he set off down the river bank at his old dog-trot.

He felt well rested from his hours on the raft, and was generally not unsatisfied with his progress. He judged that he was not far from his destination, and the sun still lacked an hour of its noon position at the zenith. That meant that he had come almost sixty tortuous miles in about fifteen hours—including the two hours he spent asleep in the tree. At that rate, he exulted, he would be back with help for Tembo George in much less than five days.

In a little while he came to a sharp bend in the river, and as he loped around the curving bank he had to come to a sudden halt. His way was blocked by a great herd of cattle. They were beautiful beasts with small delicate hoofs and enormous horns that grew from a thick heavy base straight up to a long tapering tip. The famous big-horned cattle of the Masai!

**F**AR over on the other side of the herd, were two herdsman, and Ki-Gor was starting around to talk to them, when he heard a hail to his right. He looked up and saw a man standing on a knoll overlooking the river.

It was the tallest man Ki-Gor had ever seen in his life. A tall feather head-dress accentuated the man's height, and his clothing accentuated his slenderness. It consisted of a length of white cloth drawn tight around his lower body and legs right down to the ankles, the other end being looped over the left shoulder. He was holding a prodigious spear with a broad blade at least two feet long, stout wooden haft, and at the end of that, a long metal spindle. The man's chiseled black features were very much like those of the M'balla, except that his lips were even thinner, his nose more hooked and higher-bridged, and his head even longer and narrower.

"Jambo!" Ki-Gor called out—the conventional Swahili greeting.

The man spoke a phrase of Masai, and when Ki-Gor did not answer, he came slowly down off the knoll, muttering to him-

self, his narrow hips swaying with exquisite insolence. As he approached Ki-Gor he stared over his head and raised his voice in Swahili.

"I would prefer," he said, loftily, "to use the more sonorous language of my fathers but if you speak only the trade dialect, I suppose I shall have to put up with it. Answer my questions quickly and briefly. First, by what right do you dare to pass through our lands?"

With that he planted himself six feet in front of Ki-Gor, and deigned to look for the first time at the travel-stained figure. As he did, his eyes flew open in astonishment.

"In the name of Heaven!" he gasped, "are you a—a white man?"

"Yes I am a white man," Ki-Gor answered, smothering a smile, "and I will willingly answer your questions provided you will answer some questions which I will put to you."

"But if you are a white man," exclaimed the slender giant with great agitation, "where is your safari? I saw a white man once, and he had a safari a mile long of Kikuyus and Kavirondo boys. He had a Moslem gun-bearer, too, and a white hat, and he wore tubes on his thighs. You are not wearing tubes, you are wearing a leopard skin."

"I am a different kind of white man," Ki-Gor answered patiently, "those others are foreigners. I am a native African white man."

"I never heard of such a thing," the giant retorted.

"Well, you will, Tall Tree," said Ki-Gor, a little nettled by the man's arrogance, "I am Ki-Gor and I am looking for the Ngombi-Masai. I have an important message for the Headman and the War-Chief. Tell me, do you know these Masai? Do they dwell far from here?"

Ki-Gor asked the last two questions out of pure malice, knowing full well that the insolent warrior was a Masai of the Masai. However, the warrior did not rise to the bait. He merely squinted his eyes and sauntered forward a few steps.

"No," said the warrior, as if talking to himself, "I cannot make you out. You are powerfully built, but ugly. Your shoulders



and arms are so thick, and your chest is like a barrel. It is true you are fairly tall—I'd say not quite six feet five, but, of course, that isn't tall compared to me. I'm seven feet even. Are you really white?"

Ki-Gor's temper was rising swiftly with the Masai's impudent words. Then when the towering giant reached out a careless hand and pinched the skin over Ki-Gor's ribs, there was a brief and inevitable explosion. Ki-Gor's right hand whipped down, seized the offending black fingers in a grip of iron. Then he stepped back quickly and jerked. Before the astounded Masai knew what was happening, he was whipped off his long legs and sent crashing to the ground where he lay flat on his face.

Ki-Gor backed off a few paces and sat down as the warrior slowly picked himself up.

"I hope you are not hurt, Tall Tree," Ki-Gor said pleasantly—he was quite cooled off, "but it was necessary to teach you that no one touches Ki-Gor uninvited. Now, I have no time to be bandying words, so tell me which way your village lies."

The Masai did not answer for a moment, but stood motionless with an expression of utmost hate on his handsome face. Then slowly swung the blade of his spear so that it pointed at Ki-Gor.

"For that insult," he said in a choked voice, "you will pay with your unworthy life."

Then he leaped forward.

KI-GOR had a split-second decision to make. The surest way of saving his life was to kill the charging Masai. On the other hand, he belonged to the tribe whose help Ki-Gor desperately needed. One does not kill a potential ally. So, as the maddened Masai lunged at him thrusting the huge spear downward, Ki-Gor flung his body to one side. The two-foot blade just missed his shoulder and hissed into the earth. Ki-Gor rolled over once, gathering his legs under him. He came out of the roll on his feet. Without a moment's hesitation, he hurled himself at the Masai's long brittle legs. Once again, the Masai was slammed to the ground.

This time Ki-Gor gave his adversary no

time to recover. He half rose and threw himself on to the Masai's chest, planting a knee on each shoulder.

"Listen to me, O Hot-Tempered One," he hissed down into the contorted black face, "there is no time for this childish nonsense. I am Ki-Gor, and I come from Tembo George, Chief of the M'balla. They have been all but wiped out by the Wandarobo, and I have come to get help for them, I must see Shafara, Headman of the Ngombi-Masai, and the War-Chief, Merishu, and I must see them at once."

At Ki-Gor's words, the Masai relaxed and an expression of open wonder replaced the fierce hatred in his face.

"That is altogether different!" he exclaimed, "why didn't you tell me in the first place that you came from Tembo George!"

"You gave me very little chance," Ki-Gor observed, dryly, "now, if I release you, will you get up peaceably and lead me to Shafara and Merishu?"

"Most certainly," the Masai replied, "in fact, I am Merishu."

Ki-Gor stood up quickly with a short laugh, and held out his hand to the Masai.

"This has been very unfortunate," he declared, "and I hope—"

"No, no," Merishu interrupted, climbing to his feet, "it was all my fault. Not knowing who you were, I was very discourteous to you. I'm extremely glad now that I didn't kill you. You move very fast, do you use magic?"

There was deep respect in Merishu's face, but also deep mortification at his recent defeat. Ki-Gor tactfully replied yes, that he did use a little magic on occasion.

"I thought so," said Merishu, much relieved, "because I really am a very good fighter. But come, tell me more about this misfortune that has struck the M'balla. First, though, let us exchange spears in token of friendship."

Solemnly, Ki-Gor and the seven-foot War-Chief handed each other their spears. Merishu looked over his new weapon curiously.

"Hmmm. Congo type," he remarked, "very small tip, But it has a good balance."

"Yes, it throws well," Ki-Gor offered, "good for distance work."



"Yes, I can see that," said Merishu, still staring at Ki-Gor's assegai. "But, of course, we Masai don't go in much for distance work. We like to close in. Come on, our village is just over the ridge. We'll go and find Shafara. You see, I have no authority until Shafara declares a state of war. And Shafara can't declare war until he has consulted the Sacred Bull. That all takes time, of course, so if Tembo George is really hard pressed, we'd better hurry along. Tell me, how on earth could the Wandarobo ever get up the courage to attack the M'balla?"

As the two men hurried toward the village, Ki-Gor recounted the tragedy that had overtaken Tembo George's people, and told of the desperate situation he was now in with his handful of survivors in the rock fort. When Ki-Gor had finished, Merishu shook his head gravely, and intoned a sentence in Masai.

"That is an old proverb of our people," he added in Swahili. "The translation of it would be, 'We are as the guinea-fowl who never knows what moment the hawk will devour her.'"

"Truly spoken," said Ki-Gor grimly, "except that in this case, it will be the Wandarobo who do the devouring."

"Ugh!" Merishu shuddered. "Detestable little cannibals! But don't fear. That's Shafara's house over there across the enclosure. We'll get him to speak to the Sacred Bull right away and get permission to declare war. And as soon as that's done, I'll call out the Morani and hold the War-Feast. How many Wandarobo do you think there are up the mountain?"

"Tembo George thinks two thousand."

"Well, I have two hundred Morani and I think that will be enough. But just to be on the safe side, we can call for a few volunteers from the married men. They ought to be glad of a trip away from their wives."

THE village of the Ngombi-Masai consisted of a quantity of woven-reed huts arranged in a wide circle around a large patch of bare ground. The ring of huts backed up to a high, circular stockade, which had but one gateway. Merishu led Ki-Gor straight across the enclosure to the headman's hut, and a moment later Sha-

fara stood in his doorway.

The headman was not quite so tall as Merishu, and he was some years older, but he had the same lithe elegance and aristocratic manner. He listened gravely while Ki-Gor told his story—with frequent interjections by Merishu—and at the end of the recital his eyes flashed and he made a sweeping gesture with his right arm.

"The M'balla are blood-kin to us," he declaimed in a deep voice, "they shall be revenged! And we will save Tembo George and your woman who is with him. I will go immediately and gain the consent of the Sacred Bull."

With that, he strode off across the enclosure. Merishu looked after him and gave a satisfied sigh.

"Splendid!" Merishu said, "that's even prompter than I thought he would be. You know, Ki-Gor, I'm really very sad about the M'balla, but I can't deny I'm excited over the prospect of a campaign. We haven't had a decent war around here since the Nandi raided our cattle, nearly a year ago. Of course, the Wandarobo are nothing like the fighters that the Nandi are, but there will be enough of the dirty little cannibals this trip to make it interesting."

"Yes," said Ki-Gor absently. His mind was not on Merishu's conversation, and his eyes were anxiously following Shafara. Then he returned to Merishu with a frown.

"Tell me, Merishu, about your Sacred Bull. How do you mean that you have to get his consent before you go to war? How can a bull give consent, or even know anything at all concerning the activities of men?"

"Shh! That's sacrilege! This is no ordinary bull, it's a Sacred Bull. It is blessed by God and through it, God speaks to us."

"Speaks to you!" Ki-Gor was even more puzzled. "You mean the bull talks?"

"Certainly."

"But animals can't talk," protested Ki-Gor, "that is, not in any human language."

"That's true," Merishu said tolerantly, "You see, the bull himself, doesn't actually talk—although he appears to be talking pure Masai, I suppose it's God talking through him. It's a Divine matter. Every year, we sacrifice the current Sacred Bull and eat him. Then, immediately, the little priest goes out



to the herd and touches another bull. We bring *that* one in and install him in the Sacred Stable. The next day the new Sacred Bull is talking just as freely as the old one did. It's a wonderful thing for us, because in that way, we get good advice straight from God, and we would never think of going against it."

Ki-Gor looked at the War-Chief keenly. The young man appeared to be absolutely sincere.

"That's amazing," Ki-Gor said slowly, "I never heard of anything like that before."

"Nor have I," Merishu answered comfortably, "I don't know that there's another Sacred Bull anywhere in the world. Naturally, we're very proud and very grateful for it—it obviously gives us a tremendous advantage over our enemies. Oh! Here comes Shafara back. I wonder what happened—he's walking very slowly."

Shafara's steps were dragging, and his face was averted. Ki-Gor felt a dreadful misgiving.

"What's the matter?" cried Merishu, "what did the Sacred Bull say?"

"The Sacred Bull said that we should on no account go to war with the Wandarobo at this time." The headman looked sadly at Ki-Gor and added, "It makes me very sad, and I'm triply sorry for Tembo George."

"BUT I can't understand that at all," Merishu exclaimed, "Why? Why? Were there any reasons?"

"Yes," Shafara replied "the reason given was that we were dangerously weakened by our war with the Nandi, and that we should not go into another war until we had recovered from the last one."

"But that's not true!" Merishu cried excitedly, "we only lost thirty men in that war and we crippled the Nandi for another five years!"

"Merishu! Merishu!" Shafara's voice held gentle reproof. "Do you dare contradict God!"

"No, of course not," said Merishu hastily, "but I say there's something wrong somewhere. How about that silly old priest? He might have forgotten to feed the bull properly today, and that's put the bull in a bad mood. You know, I think something

should be done about the priest. He's getting so old. I think he's going a little wrong in the head. He's a foreigner of some kind, anyway, and he makes me nervous the way he never says a word."

"No, Merishu," said Shafara, "you must not talk that way. The priest has always been afflicted with dumbness, and we need him. No one else would be able to discover the new Sacred Bull each year."

DURING all this discussion, Ki-Gor stood stunned and incredulous. He had left Helene with George in a place of great danger, but he had been confident that if he could only win through to the Ngombi-Masai, that war-like and invincible tribe would promptly return with him and rescue her from the Wandarobo. And, for a time, events had borne out his confidence.

He had skilfully eluded the cannibals, and had made fast time down to the plains. And, once the initial misunderstanding with Merishu had been cleared up, he had found the young War-Chief enthusiastic about taking an expedition up the mountain. Shafara had immediately approved the idea. Everything pointed to a swift and successful conclusion of his errand.

And then had come this unexplainable pronouncement—this forbidding of the expedition by the tribal god through the fantastic and improbable medium of a Talking Bull! Ki-Gor's jaw hardened. He was not accustomed to this kind of defeat. He well realized, however, that he must be tactful.

"Shafara," he began, "so much depends on this matter—not only the life of my woman, but the life of my friend, Tembo George, and the lives of twelve remaining M'balla, your kinsmen. Will you appeal again to the bull? And may I come with you to add strength to your plea?"

"I don't think I could permit that," Shafara said cautiously, "you are not a Masai and our God may be displeased—"

"Oh! take him with you," the impetuous Merishu exclaimed, "after all, the priest himself is not a Masai. Come on, we'll all three go."

Eventually, Shafara gave in, and presently Ki-Gor found himself in the stable of the Sacred Bull. This proved to be a large bare hut, one side of which was



stacked high with green fodder. Near the door, a sleek hunting-cheetah sprawled and watched the visitors with slit eyes. In the middle of the hut, a large, beautiful, brown bull was tethered to a post driven into the dirt floor. A little, gnomish, old man was sitting on a three-legged stool by the bull's head feeding him handfuls of grass. The bull chewed the grass complacently and stared vacantly at the three tall men as they entered, but the priest paid no attention to them beyond a furtive glance or two. Shafara bowed.

"A—man Ngai-ai," he intoned in Masai, "I pray to God. I pray that He will listen again to the plight of our kinsmen, the M'balla, and that He will reconsider His decision and permit us to go to their aid and chastise the detestable Wandarobo."

There was a long silence.

The bull continued to chew grass and stare. Once or twice the old priest looked at the three men with lack-luster eyes, then he stood up and faced the bull. And then Ki-Gor's spine suddenly crawled as the bull spoke!

The bull spoke in Masai, so Ki-Gor had no idea of what he was saying, but just the very idea of a human voice issuing from an animal was enough to make him want to get out of the hut as fast as he could. Yet he dug his nails into his palms and forced himself to stand motionless, as the curiously soft, hollow voice filled the hut. It was terrifying and Ki-Gor needed all the raw courage in his character to keep his self-control.

As the bull spoke, he appeared to be chewing, but the rhythmic Masai syllables sounded exactly in time with the moist jaws. Ki-Gor shifted his eyes to the priest. The little old man appeared to be supremely bored. For the most part he watched the bull, but now and then he looked down at the floor or at the wisp of grass in his hand.

The soft, muffled voice went on in Masai for several minutes, and before it finished the terror had left Ki-Gor. With deliberate rudeness, he turned around and squatted before the cheetah. Ki-Gor had a way with cheetahs. He had trained a half dozen of them and had a knack of handling the great dog-like cats. Behind him, now, the

voice of the bull rose shrilly, and muttered exclamations came from the two Masai. But Ki-Gor serenely disregarded them and reached out a hand toward the cheetah.

The hunting cat sucked in its breath and growled. Ki-Gor held his hand a foot away from its nose. The cheetah, still growling, stretched its muzzle forward and sniffed Ki-Gor's knuckles. The voice of the bull stopped abruptly and Shafara and Merishu stood on either side of Ki-Gor in great agitation.

"Come, Ki-Gor!" the headman whispered "you must leave this stable at once!"

KI-GOR got up unhurriedly, cast a last glance at the cud-chewing bull and stalked out of the hut. He noted that the old priest had been glaring venomously at him.

Out in the open air, the two Masai faced him with stern expression.

"The bull repeated the words forbidding us to make war," Shafara said, "and told us we did wrong to bring you in there. He warned us to send you away quickly because you are a spy sent by the English to find out our secrets."

Ki-Gor stared at the headman in amazement.

"What nonsense is this?" he demanded, "I am not a spy!"

"We believe our God," said Shafara stonily. "It is best that you leave our country immediately."

"Wha!" Ki-Gor exploded, "I had always heard that the Masai were a fierce, proud nation, afraid of nothing on earth! I was sure that they would leap to arms to aid their blood-kin against the primitive Bantu! But what do I find? A race of timorous women, talkative and gullible! Frightened by a Talking Bull, which in itself is nothing but some crude kind of magic! I will go and try to save my woman single-handed, and I hope that after the Cannibal Wandarobo have fattened on the flesh and blood of your cousins, the M'balla, they will come down and do the same to you!"

The two Masai stood silent for a moment, their faces stiff with rage. Then Shafara spoke in a low voice.

"So be it, Ki-Gor. You have spoken, and being our guest, we cannot harm you. Meri-



shu will go out with you and will kill a steer so that you may eat before your journey. Then he will take you to our boundaries and see you away. And, if for any reason, you ever return, Ki-Gor, you will no longer be a guest, and I will myself take pleasure in killing you for the mortal insults you have heaped on us!"

An hour and a half later on the river bank, Ki-Gor and Merishu finished their meal of raw beef beside the carcass of a fat steer. Neither one had spoken a word since they left the village. Ki-Gor's mouth was set in a thin line as his mind churned with a hundred different plans—all equally desperate—for saving Helene from the cannibals.

But Merishu's expression had gradually been softening. From outraged pride it had changed to extreme regret. Finally he broke the appalling silence.

"You know you shouldn't have said that, Ki-Gor," he offered, "I mean about our being timid and gullible, and that our God was just a piece of crude magic. I'd give much if you hadn't said that. I was hoping to go on this campaign with you. In fact, I thought a lot of you—still do. But you can't expect to attack a man's God and have him thank you for it."

Ki-Gor made no answer.

"What do you mean a piece of crude magic?" Merishu persisted, "how can the Sacred Bull be a piece of crude magic? It's God talking to us."

Merishu's efforts at conciliation were too generous for Ki-Gor to ignore any longer.

"It's quite fitting, Merishu," he replied at length, "that men should believe in God. But you cannot tell me that God speaks to men through dumb animals. There is some trick about your Talking Bull. I don't know what it is, I can't explain it, I don't know how it works—but there's a trick just the same. As for calling you cowards, I take it back. I know you are not. I spoke hastily, in a rage. But I am desperate. My wife and my best friend are in terrible danger, and right now, I don't know how I'm going to get them out of it."

"I sympathize with you," said Merishu, "and there is nothing I would rather do than come and help you, but my hands are tied. That second hill over there is our

boundary. I'll trust you to go along by yourself. It looks like rain and I want to get back to the village. Here, take some steaks with you to eat on the way. Go with God!"

The Masai jumped up and held out his hand impulsively. The two men shook hands and walked off in opposite directions without a backward look.

AS he headed toward the grim pile of Ruwenzori, Ki-Gor cudgelled his brain for an explanation of the phenomenal Talking Bull. He went over every detail that he could remember of the visit to the Sacred Stable. He had watched everyone in the hut while the Bull talked, and no one had opened his mouth—or as much as moved his lips. It was a flesh-and-blood Bull, there could be no doubt of that. So the mysterious voice could not have come from a man hiding within it.

Yet Ki-Gor was too hard-headed and practical to believe in a supernatural origin for the voice. Ki-Gor's self-upbringing among the rigors of the jungle had trained him to look for a natural cause for any puzzling phenomenon, no matter how baffling it appeared on the surface. A drop of rain on his nose brought Ki-Gor back to his immediate surrounding.

Merishu's remark that it looked like rain proved to be well founded. Standing on the hill that the Masai had indicated as the boundary, Ki-Gor looked back eastwards and saw a wall of rain approaching from the direction. A tiny speck on the veldt far away he recognized as the carcass of the steer Merishu had killed. In a moment the rain swept over it and blotted it from sight. Ki-Gor sat down resigned to a wetting. Where had that voice come from?

Somebody might have been hiding just outside the hut. But Ki-Gor rejected the idea regretfully. The voice had sounded too close. Then, far back in his brain, a tiny idea, a minute observation he had made earlier in that hut struggled for recollection. What was it now? Something about the priest. Oh yes! The cords on the priest's scrawny neck had stood out when the bull talked. What made them do that? Ki-Gor contracted the muscles of his own neck, now, experimentally. The cords did not stand



out. He tried closing his lips and then working his lower jaw. That seemed to make the cords stand out a little. He said a few words out loud with his mouth closed. Ki-Gor's eyes widened in astonishment.

By this time, the rain hit him. It came down in buckets full. But Ki-Gor sat on the hill-top absorbed in his new idea.

Two hours later, the sun set prematurely behind a bank of black clouds, and Ki-Gor rose up with a sudden decision. He thrust Merishu's great spear into the earth by the spindle, felt the knife at his waist, and started back toward the village of the Ngombi-Masai. It was almost dark when he paused by the carcass of the steer and cut out the liver, and it was totally dark by the time he arrived outside the stockade of the village.

There were comfortable evening sounds from within, murmuring voices and the spasmodic lowing of cattle. Evidently the Masai drove their cattle within the stockade at night to protect them from the lions. Ki-Gor tried to guess the location of the Sacred Stable from outside, and after prowling twice around the village selected the section of wall he thought was closest to it. Through a chink in the stockade he could see one or two small fires that were obviously going out. The village was going to bed.

Although the stockade was tall, it offered no particular problem to Ki-Gor. He reached up as high as possible and sunk the strong blade of his knife deep into a log paling. Gripping the haft, he drew himself up until his other hand reached the top of the stockade. Noiselessly, he slipped over the top and dropped down on the other side, his knife blade in his teeth.

Looking about him swiftly, he saw that he was not far wrong in his calculations. The Sacred Stable was only two huts away. Ki-Gor moved stealthily toward it. Even though it was too dark to tell, he guessed that there was no black entrance, having seen no indication of one earlier that afternoon. He crept slowly along the reed wall of the hut toward the front. Moving two paces out he saw a small dying fire of red coals a few feet in front of the door, and beside the fire a small pile of faggots.

Just then a chain clinked within, and a

moment later, a sinuous form slunk out of the doorway and moved toward him. Just as the cheetah started to growl, Ki-Gor pulled the beef's liver out from under his belt and lobbed it deftly toward the beast. The cheetah pounced on the delicacy and growled no more. Ki-Gor circled him, flipped several faggots on the fire, and slipped through the doorway into the Sacred Stable.

He stepped to one side quickly and then stood motionless. There was no sound of any kind. Then the faggots outside began to catch flame, and a flickering light outlined the great horns of the bull. As the fire burned higher, Ki-Gor made out a slight form lying on the ground close to the wall. In two strides Ki-Gor was standing over the old priest, his knife blade glinting in the firelight. The priest looked upward calmly.

"SO you *were* an English agent, after all," the priest said—in English. "I really didn't think you were. I thought you were some sort of white savage trying to call the Masai out to war against the Wandarobo. I knew the British authorities at Entebbe were watching this region and might get curious enough to investigate us if we went to war. And if they did that, they would most certainly discover in the person of the mute priest of the Sacred Bull, Professor Albert Burton, who in 1914 was England's greatest ventriloquist, and in 1916 was a deserter from the British Army in German East Africa.

"Well, I suppose it's all over now. Anyway, I've had twenty-four years of supreme authority over a tribe of African giants. Really, their sublime confidence in the Deity that I have created for them has been a deeply gratifying testimony to my art. I was a little nervous of you this afternoon—I could see you watching me like a hawk, although you pretended not to—but even so, I think I gave one of my greatest performances. Tell me, could you detect the slightest movements of my lips?"

If Ki-Gor was unable to gasp half the significance of the priest's unexpected and complete confession, he tried not to show it. The word, "ventriloquist" meant nothing to him, but he did perceive that his guess concerning the origin of the voice had



turned out to be amazingly accurate. The thing which he had never suspected and which astounded him so now, was that the old man was English. He answered the old man's question, which, happily, he had understood.

"No," he said in English, "I did not see your lips move. But your neck—"

"Of course!" cut in the old man, bitterly, "I'm getting old, and my neck muscles must show as I talk down in my throat. Well, what do you intend doing? Fetch me along to Entebbe? It might be rather a ticklish job taking me away from the Masai, you know. The Sacred Bull merely has to say a few words and they'd tear you to pieces."

"Yes, but you would have to be standing near the Bull," said Ki-Gor shrewdly, "or he could not talk."

"Quite," the old man admitted, "but somebody else near me—Shafara for instance—could talk, and talk with the familiar voice of God."

"There is no need for you to try and fight me," Ki-Gor said, a plan forming rapidly in his mind. "I am not going to take you away from here."

"You aren't!" the old man cried with pathetic eagerness, "you mean—I can stay on—as priest of the Sacred Bull?"

"Yes. The Masai believe in their God, and it would be bad to destroy their faith."

"That is true!" the ventriloquist said with quiet dignity. Ki-Gor could see the gratefulness glowing in his eyes.

"But if I let you stay," said Ki-Gor, "you must do something for me."

"Ah-ha!" said the priest dryly, "here it comes. What do you want, gold? I have plenty."

"No," said Ki-Gor, "I want the Sacred Bull to tell the Masai to go back with me and rescue my friends from the Wandarobo."

There was a long pause. Then the old man said slowly, "What's the good of that to me? I told you first off the reason I didn't want the Masai at war with anybody because it might start an investigation by the British."

"The British will not hear of this war," Ki-Gor replied promptly. "The Wandarobo are sixty miles west of here up on Ruwenzori."

"Oh! I see!" said the old man, "Belgian territory, eh?"

Ki-Gor had not the slightest idea whether it was Belgian territory or not, but as he was running a colossal bluff, he remained silent.

"Well then, it might be all right," the priest went on. He glanced up at Ki-Gor's shaggy head. "Look here, are you a British agent?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply, "I am. But I am—" Ki-Gor searched his mind for the phrase—"not on official business."

"I see," the old man said doubtfully. "When do you want me to do this?"

"Now," said Ki-Gor, "and there must be no mistakes. I will call Shafara and Merishu, and then I will stand beside you. The point of my knife will touch your back. You will speak Swahili and say exactly what I tell you and no more. If you say one word in Masai, or one word against me, I will kill you swiftly. If you play fair with me, no harm will come to you."

After another long pause, the former Professor Albert Burton, vaudeville ventriloquist, and now priest of the Sacred Bull, said, "I suppose if I don't agree to your plan, you would kill me here and now."

"Yes," said Ki-Gor with commendable simplicity.

"Very well, then, call Shafara and Merishu."

AT sunset of the next day, Merishu gave the order to halt and camp for the night. Two hundred Morani of the Ngombi-Masai scattered over the veldt, some to hunt small game, others to collect firewood and thorn bushes for bomas. Merishu estimated that the little army had covered more than half the eighty miles around the foot of Ruwenzori to the village of the M'balla, and he felt well satisfied. He looked around for Ki-Gor and saw him stretched out under a tree, a beautiful cheetah lying protectively beside him.

"You are tired, Ki-Gor," said Merishu, approaching the jungle man. "Well, you can have a long sleep tonight."

Ki-Gor sat up unsteadily. He was stupefied from lack of sleep, but he knew he must stay awake a little while longer out



of politeness to the War-Chief.

"You know, this has been a very strange affair," Merishu began, sitting down. "Never before has the Sacred Bull contradicted its own statement. Never before has the bull spoken in Swahili. Never before have I led the Morani out to a campaign before dawn with no feast and no long sleep to prepare them for the journey. It is curious, too, that the old priest should have given you his cheetah."

"It is a very good cheetah," Ki-Gor remarked, stroking the beast's muzzle, "and beautifully trained."

"Ki-Gor!" Merishu fixed his eyes meaningfully on the jungle man, "you said yesterday you thought the Talking Bull was a piece of crude magic. Did you find out that it was magic, and overcome it with your own magic?"

"No, Merishu," Ki-Gor answered with a smile, "there is no magic about the bull, and I used no magic. And now, my friend, let me sleep, for I am very tired. If we can start off before dawn again tomorrow, I would like it. That would make it possible for us to reach Tembo George before nightfall, and his food supply will not hold out much longer than that."

The jungle man slept soundly for nine solid hours, and woke up feeling refreshed and ravenously hungry. It was still dark but Merishu was on the job and was already routing out his Morani. They breakfasted quickly on cold antelope meat and set out for Ruwenzori.

Ki-Gor set the pace, and a terrific one it was. The longest Masai legs were hard put to it to keep up with him. But Merishu and all his command were well aware of the need for haste and there were no complaints all day until two hours before sunset when the little army climbed into the foothills and struck the bottom of the broad trail that led up to the landslide. Here some of the Morani balked. They argued that on top of a thirty-mile march, they could not make a stiff climb of four miles on empty stomachs and then be expected to fight well against a numerous and elusive enemy in his own element, a thick forest.

Ki-Gor answered the argument by saying that it was unlikely that there would

be much fighting—that it would be near dark by the time the force arrived at the landslide. His plan was to camp on the landslide overnight, and the next morning lift the siege on George, Helene and the M'balla survivors.

The more the Morani balked, the harder Ki-Gor pressed them to go forward. His strongest reason for pushing ahead he did not mention—that was, that he could not bear the thought of being separated another night from Helene, when he was this close to her. He wanted fiercely to run to her side, to touch her again and assure himself that she was safe. Eventually, Merishu, seeing Ki-Gor's agitation, came to his help and ordered the Morani to march.

The trail was broad enough for two men to walk abreast on it and Merishu formed his column in that manner. The tall, spoon-shaped, bull-hide shields were slipped on left arms in battle position, and the murderous broad-bladed spears gripped point upward ready for instant action. Before he took his position at the head of the column with Merishu, Ki-Gor gazed approvingly at the little army. There were only two hundred of them, but they were strapping fighting men, absolutely fearless and invincible in battle.

They came of a race which not many generations back had swept down from the North like wolves into East Africa where they had overrun and terrorized a huge territory far out of proportion to their numbers. The weight and headlong ferocity of the Masai attack had almost invariably prevailed over the far more numerous Bantu tribes they came up against.

Ki-Gor went up and stood beside Merishu at the head of the column, and the march was resumed.

IT was a fearsome, armored snake more than a hundred yards long that wound up the mountain side toward the landslide. Talking had been forbidden, so there was no sound except the heavy breathing of two hundred men climbing a steep incline, and now and then a hollow boom as two shields accidentally collided. By mutual consent, Ki-Gor and Merishu had taken back their own spears, and Ki-Gor held his point forward as he pressed up the trail,



his eyes searching the surrounding jungle for signs of the enemy. The last barbaric touch to the scene was supplied by the cheetah stalking silently at Ki-Gor's side.

Nerves taut, Ki-Gor never for a moment relaxed his vigilant scrutiny of the forest about him. The afternoon twilight of the shaded north face of Ruwenzori had long since set in, making the visibility poor. But the jungle man was alert for any suspicious movement of tree branches or bushes. He did not really expect to encounter any Wandarobo until the landslide was fairly near, yet it was possible that the tree-men might attack at any moment.

However, the first two miles were covered without incident, and the third. But when three-quarters of the last mile were traversed without a sign of the Wandarobo, a tiny lurking fear began to grow bigger, in the back of Ki-Gor's mind. Unconsciously, he began to travel faster, Merishu threw him an anxious glance.

"Where are the Wandarobo?" the War-Chief whispered.

Ki-Gor shook his head dumbly, but the knuckles of his spearhand showed white.

For the last quarter of that last mile, Ki-Gor threw caution to the winds and hastened forward without regard for the possibility of ambush. The Masai panted and strained after him without complaint. The excitement of impending battle began to grip them, and a feeling that at last they were entering on the climax of their journey.

When Ki-Gor turned the last corner in the trail and saw beyond the arch of the trees the open space of the landslide, he sprinted forward alone. He burst out of the mouth of the path and halted on the loose gravel.

"George! Helene!" he shouted, "it is Ki-Gor! I am back with the Masai! Don't shoot at us."

His voice echoed eerily up the ravine, then died away. Ki-Gor strained his ears for the answer, although the ledge was only a hundred yards away.

There was no answer.

"George!" Ki-Gor shouted, "Tembo George! Answer me! It is Ki-Gor!"

After the mocking echoes died away again, there was dead silence. A frightful,

cold fear clutched at Ki-Gor's heart. He stood rooted to the spot for a dreadful moment, not daring to interpret that hideous silence. Behind him the Masai were pouring out of the mouth of the trail and fanning out efficiently on either side of him. Ki-Gor uttered a grastly cry and sprang forward. Straight up to Georges' fort below the ledge he ran, the cheetah bounding along beside him.

A minute later the sweating, panting Masai gathered around him as he stood transfixed in a scene of desolation.

The ground of the enclosure was strewn with the bodies of more than forty Wandarobo. Blood was spattered everywhere, over the corpses, on the rocks, over an opened case of cartridges. There had been a furious fight to the death. Some of the bodies were still warm, indicating that the battle had taken place not long ago. The tears streamed down Ki-Gor's face and in a strangled voice he cursed the priest of the Sacred Bull for delaying the rescue party more than a half day. He cursed himself for agreeing to stop and camp along the way the night before. The Masai stood back and gazed at him in shocked awe. Merishu, face miserable, touched his arm and tried to speak words of consolation.

"The Wandarobo will pay for this, Ki-Gor," he mumbled. "We will find them and slaughter them, every one."

"That will not bring Helene back to life!" Ki-Gor said wildly. "Where is her body?"

HE SPRANG into sudden action and began searching the enclosure. In a few moments it became clearly evident that Helene's body was not there. Another minute's search turned up no trace of George or the twelve M'balla men and women. A thrill of hope electrified Ki-Gor.

"Could they have escaped, Merishu?" he cried, clutching the War-Chief's wrist. "Are they safe somewhere on the mountain?"

Merishu shook his head miserably.

"I don't see how they could have escaped," he said. "Don't forget, the Wandarobo are cannibals."

A groan of agony left Ki-Gor.

"A-a-ah!" he moaned "that is true. They have taken the bodies away—to eat them!"

There was a low growl from the ring of



Masai, and Ki-Gor swung around on them.

"Somewhere up the mountain is a Sacred Grove, the ancient gathering-place of the Wandarobo. I am going to find it because I think the filthy man-eaters will be there now. Follow me as best you can. I can go much faster through the forest than you plainsmen can. If you lose me, you will soon be able to locate me again by the sounds of battle. I am going to seek out the Wandarobo and drown my grief in their blood. If Helene is dead, then Ki-Gor must die, too."

A thick, appalling silence reigned for a few seconds. Then, like an omen, from far off somewhere came the savage thumping of Bantu drums.

KI-GOR gave a wild yell and leaped out of the enclosure. The Masai snarled in unison and streamed after him as he sprinted across the loose gravel in the direction of the drums.

He entered the forest slightly uphill from the death-strewn fort and quickly picked up Wandarobo tracks, quantities of them. Evidently, the cannibals, after storming the fort, had poured back into the forest this way. Ki-Gor raced uphill through underbrush that had been broken and trampled down by hundreds of victorious feet. Close behind him, the cheetah followed in a sinuous lope.

As Ki-Gor plunged up the mountainside, he could hear the Masai below him, thrashing noisily through the bushes. He was quickly outstripping them but he did not care. His one desire was to find the Wandarobo as quickly as possible and kill as many of them as he could. He knew, too, that as long as there was light to see, that the Masai would have no difficulty following such a broad trail as the Wandarobo had left. And there was, Ki-Gor estimated, almost an hour of daylight left.

The Wandarobo drums were throbbing louder and faster now, and Ki-Gor increased his pace. Curiously, it was hard to tell exactly from what direction the sound of the drums was coming, now. Ki-Gor made a swift guess that the reason for that was that the drums were not straight up the mountain from him but over the ridge in the next ravine to the west.

In a few minutes his guess was confirmed, as the drums sounded suddenly much louder and now seemed to come from below him. Almost at the same moment, he discovered that he had reached the narrow top of the ridge which separated the two ravines. He barely hesitated to make sure of the direction of the Wandarobo tracks, then plunged downhill in their wake.

This ravine—the westernmost of the three on the north face of Ruwenzori—was much less densely wooded than the other two, and Ki-Gor went down the steep slope at the speed of a charging rhino, the faithful cheetah stretching its long legs beside him. In a very short while, he could catch glimpses of leaping flames through the tree-trunks ahead of him.

Then the ground began to level off a little, and almost before he realized it, Ki-Gor was running out of the trees out onto the edge of an open pasture. He halted to take stock.

This grassy field sloped gently on three sides to a flat center on which grew five or six majestic baobab trees in a rough circle. In and around these trees some two thousand frenzied Wandarobo were massed. Although it was not yet dark, a dozen campfires were alight here and there on the field. But the largest and brightest fire was within the circle of trees, and the cannibals were themselves gathered in a thick black ring around this fire.

Ki-Gor was perhaps, an eighth of a mile from the screaming, milling savages and somewhat above them, so he could look right down on the most horrible scene he had ever seen in his life. His eyes only caught a few salient details before he was off, running straight down toward the grove of baobabs. But he saw the immense black cauldron suspended over the roaring central bonfire. He saw the black figure in a feather head-dress seated high up on a crude throne of stone. Below the throne were six or seven drummers flailing at the huge tom-toms. In front of them a dozen feather-skirted dancers leaped and whirled in a savage frenzy.

But the center of interest for that swaying, moaning, shrieking black ring of onlookers was the great black block of stone halfway between the throne and the bonfire. And



the thing which had sent Ki-Gor flying down the slope was the vision of a slim white body stretched out on the frightful sacrificial altar of black stone.

One thought alone filled Ki-Gor's mind as he sped across the grass, and that was a sort of dumb gratitude to the fates that permitted him to arrive before the Wandarobo had killed Helene. Now, at least, that could not happen while he was alive.

And it was his fierce resolve to sweep as many of the cannibals to hell before he finally went down under pressure of numbers. The sight of Helene stretched out on the stone drove the last vestige of sanity from Ki-Gor, and made of him a fiendish fighting-machine.

The noise in the grove was deafening as two thousand savages whipped themselves into a barbaric ecstasy for the approaching climax of their ceremony. The dancers had given way to a hideously painted witch-doctor who was approaching the pathetic white body on the altar in a series of grotesque leaps and posturings. High above his head he waved a long curved knife.

**A**S KI-GOR thundered down on the ring of heaving, shouting onlookers, he did not relax his pace. Six feet away from the outermost rank, he took off from the ground, feet first. The momentum of his leap carried him over five rows of black heads. He struck downward viciously with his feet as he landed and felt bones crack. Then he leaped again and cleared the remaining three rows into the inside of the ring.

Then three warriors ran at Ki-Gor with their short spears. He killed them each with one blow of the knife in his left hand.

The witch-doctor dropped his knife and started to run in the opposite direction. From nowhere then appeared Ki-Gor's cheetah. The spotted hunter flashed after the scrambling witch-doctor. One blow of the powerful fore-paw knocked the hideous creature down and raked his back into bloody shreds.

By now the whole grove was in the wildest confusion. Most of the blacks on the inside of the ring wanted to get away as fast as they could, while others farther away, seeing a lone enemy, shouted to each other

to attack. A handful who rushed at Ki-Gor to bar him from the altar were instantly cut down by the murderous fury of his onset. He leaped over their bodies and stood beside the altar, looking down at Helene's beautiful face. Except for a slight bruise on her temple, there were no signs of wounds, though her eyes were closed. Disregarding the tumult around him, with terrible fear in his heart, he touched Helene's bare arm.

Helene's eyes opened, mirroring a great fear. She saw Ki-Gor. She blinked once, unbelievably. Then smiled. Ki-Gor's knees trembled and he suddenly felt oddly weak.

He threw a quick glance around the grove and saw that among some of the Wandarobo the panic was subsiding. Ki-Gor's next glance showed him the reason.

The thickset black figure in the feather head-dress had clambered halfway down from his throne, and was screaming commands. Without hesitation, Ki-Gor drew back his right hand, balanced the spear, and threw it hard and accurately. The Wandarobo leader saw the spear but saw it too late. Ki-Gor's winged vengeance bit deep into the black chest, and the leader slowly toppled off the pedestal to the ground.

Ki-Gor rapidly shifted the knife to his right hand, and with his left arm picked Helene off the altar.

"Ki-Gor!" she murmured. "Don't forget George."

George! Was he there, too? Then Ki-Gor saw on the other side of the bonfire the ten M'balla corpses. And beyond them, tied up but very much alive, were George and an M'balla man and woman.

The attack which the Wandarobo leader had started to organize bogged down when Ki-Gor's assegai struck the leader down. Shock and superstitious terror rendered most of the cannibals inert. But some, braver than the rest, charged Ki-Gor as he advanced around the bonfire ahead of Helene. Others, noticing that Ki-Gor was armed with only a knife, rushed at him from another direction.

"Waghrrr!" Ki-Gor roared in ferocious joy. The nearest Wandarobo thrust faintly, dropped his spear and ran. Like a flash, Ki-Gor picked up the spear by the butt and flailed about him. But at a scream from Helene he whirled. A band of ugly painted



savages had crept up behind. They broke and fled as the cheetah suddenly appeared, his jaws dripping blood.

With his rear temporarily safeguarded, Ki-Gor turned again and reached George's side. Cutting the bonds of the three prisoners was the work of a moment.

"Golly! Ki-Gor!" George shouted. "You is crazy! Where-at is the Masai? We'll never make it outa yere alibe. Of co'se we c'n try mighty hahd!"

As if to answer George's agonized question, a shrill, terrible war-cry rose above the confused shouts and screaming of the Wandarobo. And from the trees that bordered the field a column of white-cloaked figures poured out, streaming down the slope. In the waning light, the Masai looked more gigantic than ever.

Desperation seized the Wandarobo. The majority melted out of the grove. But some of them gathered in bunches and started furiously for their recently freed captives. Ki-Gor gathered his little band and fought his way toward the ancient throne. There, he and George and the lone M'balla made a stand, Helene and the M'balla girl protected by their spears.

It soon became apparent that Merishu and the Masai had not come a minute too soon. The enraged Wandarobo swarmed over the defenders, cutting and jabbing with all their might, the three men could not have lasted half a minute more if Merishu and a score of his giants had not cut their way through to aid them. After that, the battle was just a question of how many of the cannibals the Masai could catch and kill. There was no organized resistance.

Such was the terror of the Masai name that the under-sized Wandarobo quickly abandoned hope in spite of their enormous advantage in numbers.

As soon as Merishu and his flying squad had penetrated to the pedestal where Ki-Gor, Tembo George and the remaining M'balla warriors were fighting, they surrounded the three exhausted men and their two women, and then calmly proceeded to hack their way back to the outside. By the time they had accomplished that, the daylight was fast fading and the slaughter was slowing down for lack of victims.

The Masai had suffered a loss of five men

killed. Four were seriously wounded, and eleven others carried light wounds. It would be impossible to compute the Wandarobo losses until the next morning. But that night around the Masai campfires, the Morani bragged to each other about how many of the cannibals they had individually killed.

The conversation around Merishu's campfire, however, was slow and quiet, much to the young War-Chief's disappointment. Ki-Gor and Helene were content to sit silently holding hands and stare into the fire. The young M'balla couple were also silent—almost dazed, as anyone is likely to be who had so narrowly escaped such a dreadful fate. After a while Tembo George began to talk a little to Merishu in Masai, and answer some of the War-Chief's bubbling questions. In the middle of this conversation the burly American Negro turned to Ki-Gor.

"I reck'n I kinda owe you an explanation bout-whut-all happened ovah at the landslide, Ki-Gor," he said. "I feel kinda shamed the way I was caught nappin'. Anyways, here's whut happened.

"From the time you skipped out three nights ago, up until this mownin', them Wandarobo was very quiet. They just hung 'round in the woods 'round the landslide, an' hahdly showed their ugly faces. But early this mownin' they begins to get awful noisy, 'specially down at the lower end of the landslide, by the head of the trail. They'd run out of th' trees, whole bunches of 'em an' yell an' then run right back again. I had both guns all loaded up. The eight M'balla boys was standin' ready with their speahs, an' I watched one side of the fort an' Miss Helene watched th' othuh."

"But," said Ki-Gor, "you didn't watch the ledge."

"No suh, that's the whole point. You guessed it right away, Ki-Gor. Well, you see, we didn' see no reason fo' watchin' the ledge. It nevuh once occured to me that they might be tryin' to draw ouah attention away from somewheres else. All this time we was watchin' them boys down the hill from us. They was a little gang sneakin' down from the othuh direction out of sight behind the ledge. An' they was totin' some fo'ty-foot poles with



notches cut in them. They sat these yere poles up against the othuh side of the ledge an' climbed right up. Give them Wandarobo their due—they is smaht babies. They was about a dozen of 'em got up on top of the ledge wheah they could look down on us, an' we nevuh even seen 'em until it was too late."

"What happened then?" Ki-Gor asked, "Did they throw their spears down on you?"

"Oh, no!" said George bitterly, "they was smahter'n that. They had bird nets."

"Bird-nets!" Ki-Gor exclaimed in amazement.

"Yassuh! Light and strong, and fine-mesh, an' about fifteen or twenty feet across. They use 'em to trap birds with in the jungle. Well, they trapped some mighty big birds this aftuhnoon. All around the landslide they stahted whoopin' an' hollerin' an' then they rushed across the gravel. Well, Miss Helene an' I we was all ready for 'em. I stahted pumpin' bullets into that black mess, when all of a sudden somethin' falls down around my head an' shoulders. For a minute, I couldn' figger out wut it was, or wheah it come from. The net settles all ovuh me down to the ground before I make out whut's goin' on. Then they pull the draw-string, an' I'm caught like a guinea-fowl.

"Some of the M'balla boys didn't get netted, an' they put up a whale of a fight. But it was no use. Miss Helene an' I was trussed up with the two M'ballas that was left alive, the boy an' girl and they dragged us off ovuh to that grove."

Ki-Gor nodded his head and smiled sympathetically.

"Don't blame yourself, George," he said "Everything has come out all right."

THE next morning Ki-Gor, George, and Merishu, after a brief conference, decided to get away from the ghastly scene of the battle, and go down the mountain immediately. Accordingly, the Masai gathered up their wounded and their newly taken slaves and trooped down into the middle ravine. They paused at the fort in the landslide long enough for George to recover one of his rifles and some ammunition and then proceeded down the four-mile trail. Ki-Gor, Helene, and George shared with

Merishu the place of honor at the head of the column.

The young War-Chief was in high spirits even though he had not yet breakfasted, and was full of anticipation of the triumphal return of his expedition to the village of the Ngombi-Masai. Ki-Gor, he predicted with disarming generosity, would be the hero of the day. But to Merishu's dismay, Ki-Gor announced that he and Helene would not be journeying back to the plains, but would part company with him at the foot of the trail and push on westward into the Congo. In spite of all Merishu's arguments, Ki-Gor held to his decision.

At the bottom of the trail up Ruwenzori then, Merishu halted the expedition to make elaborate farewells to Ki-Gor and Helene. George was going on with the Masai with his lone M'balla couple—"Adam and Eve," he called them—until he made up his mind as to the future. The Masai all cheered Ki-Gor with their shrill war-cry, and clashed their spears against their shields with noisy approval.

In the midst of these farewells, there was a sudden commotion. From the north, the direction the Masai were to go on their homeward journey, there appeared a score or so Ngombi—Masai—a group of elders, headed by Shafara. They pushed their way angrily through the Morani to Merishu's side. Then Shafara pointed a denunciatory finger at Ki-Gor and poured out a torrent of Masai. Merishu stared at the Headman in astonishment, and George, understanding Masai eased forward a few steps and cocked his rifle.

Finally Merishu turned to Ki-Gor with an expression of complete bewilderment.

"Shafara says that he came to stop us from making war on the Wandarobo, but we marched so fast, he could not catch up with us until now. He says that as soon as we left the village, he went into the Sacred Stable, and the Bull talked again. I cannot understand this, Ki-Gor, but Shafara says that the Bull had a terrible story to tell. The Bull said you forced it to make a false statement by threatening to cut its throat with your knife. And so the Bull, in fear of its life, gave permission for the war, but against its will. Shafara says that the Bull is terribly angry, and that the only way it



can be appeased is for us to kill you."

For the second time since he left the Masai village, Ki-Gor privately cursed the sly, intriguing priest of the Bull. He stalled for time, while he tried to think of a way out.

"Well, Merishu," he said, "What is to happen? Is *your* hand to kill me? Just yesterday you saved my life."

"No!" cried Merishu, and turned back to Shafara with a flood of passionate Masai. Shafara listened coldly, and slowly brought the point of his great spear to bear on Ki-Gor's chest.

Just then, there was a faint rustle in the underbrush behind Ki-Gor. He turned quickly to stare into the shadows of the forest. A great light suddenly dawned in his mind.

"Merishu!" he cried, "Tell Shafara that to kill Ki-Gor would be sacrilege. There is magic going on, more than he or you ever dreamed of."

Merishu's eyes rolled as he explained to the Headman. Shafara looked at him sharply and lowered the point of the spear doubtfully. Then Ki-Gor gave a long shrill whistle. Instantly, a great gray shape loomed up in the jungle behind Ki-Gor, and a moment later, an elephant's head poked itself over the bushes. The Masai gave ground with excited cries, but Ki-Gor held up his hand and called on them to stay.

"You see here," he shouted, "a wild elephant. Behold how the magic of Ki-Gor subdues this elephant."

**H**E BARKED a command to Marmo. Marmo obediently came forward and at another command went down on his knees. A shocked gasp went over the Masai. There were no metal anklets on Marmo to show that he was not a wild elephant, and they thought they were witnessing powerful magic. Ki-Gor muttered a word to Helene, and she quickly mounted to Marmo's back. Ki-Gor stepped back a pace but kept his

face turned to the elephant presenting less than his profile to most of the Masai.

"Now, O Wise one," Ki-Gor declaimed, "these friends of mine, the Ngombi-Masai, peerless warriors and splendid cattle-breeders, have one fault. They are so gullible that they have allowed themselves to be duped by a lygon—a magician. This cunning old man bewitches cattle and makes them talk. Speak to these poor deluded people, O, Wise One, and tell them of their folly."

After a brief but nerve-wracking pause, a strange voice was heard. The words were muffled, the diction imperfect, but the voice itself was high and thin and had something of the quality of an elephant's trumpeting.

"Aye, Ki-Gor your magic gives me the power of words."

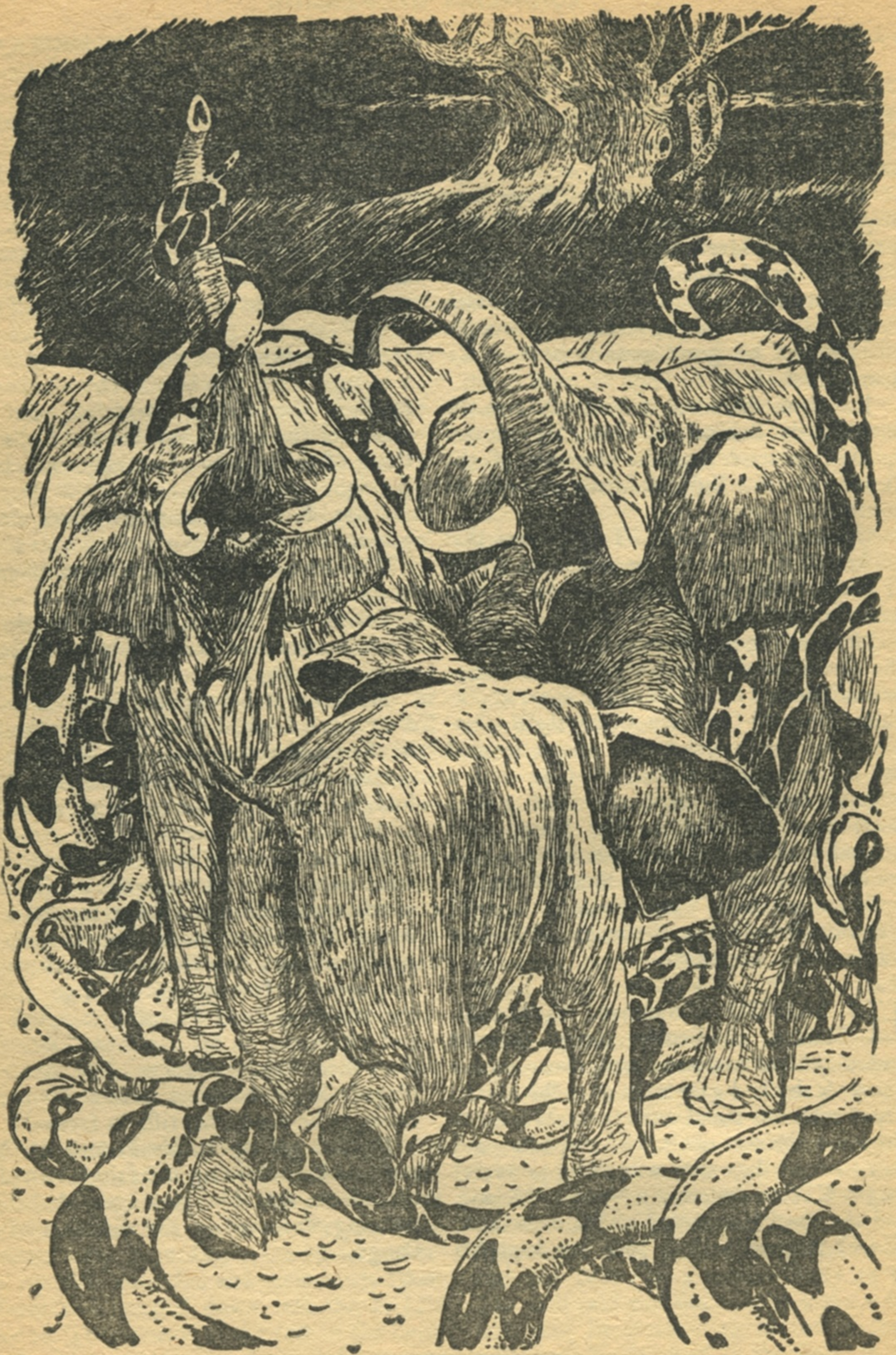
The Masai craned their necks incredulously. The voice continued:

"It is well known that ani'als do not s'eak the words of God, but talk only by the magic of a lygon."

Ki-Gor was having the time of his life. Ever since he had stumbled on the secret of the priest-ventriloquist, he had been fascinated with the idea. But already the Masai had had enough of the terrifying experience of hearing a wild elephant talk. An unobtrusive but none the less determined movement away from the scene began. It gained momentum with astonishing rapidity. The Masai first edged away, then took longer strides and in a very short time were moving just about as fast as they could go. Almost the last to go was Merishu, mingled fear and admiration in his handsome black face. And then Tembo George. The American Negro's huge shoulders were shaking with mirth as he waved his rifle in farewell.

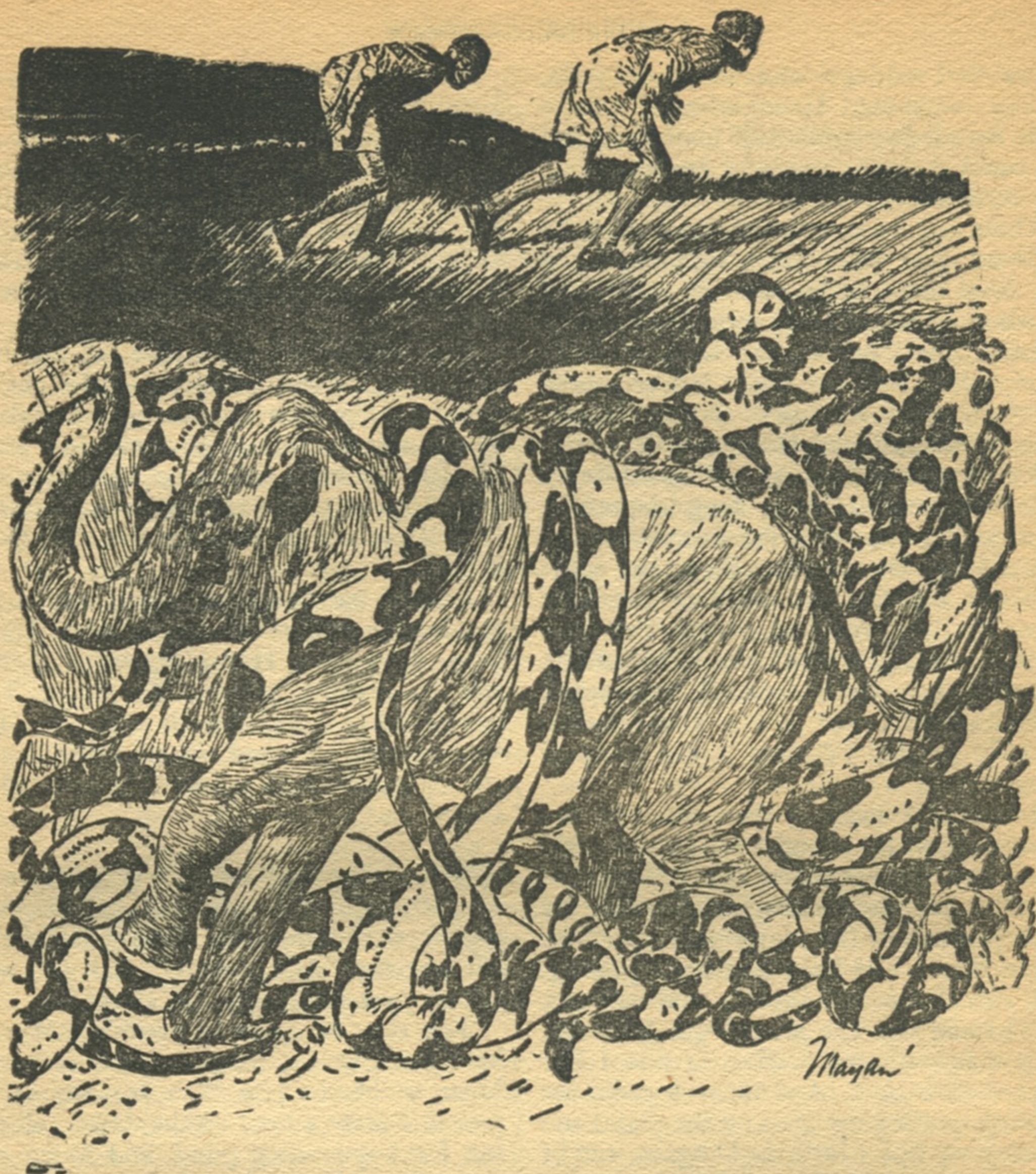
Ki-Gor got up beside Helene on Marmo's neck and swung the faithful elephant around so that his great gray bulk was pointing westward in the direction of the Congo.





*I heard a shrill scream, "Tembo!", followed by a hellish kind of stamping, trampling, and the sound of giants among the pythons.*





# JAILER OF SOULS

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

If it had been just his life he had to give up, the elephant hunter would have gladly submitted. But here, in this fetid jungle, juju—ghosts—witchery—all paled before the abominable fate staked out by those masters of cunning—the Servants of the Snake.

YOU can say what you please about such things, but the moment I first ran into this Batwa witch doctor I had what the Scotch call a grue—a feeling that

he was reaching into me to pull something out; a feeling of coldness here at the eastern edge of the hot Congo jungle.

I had been driving my converted jeep



across the southern end of Tanganyika, aiming for Gongo Houté where I was to meet Broadbent, the British hunter, so that we could pool our resources because I had but three boys.

There had been a well-defined spoor of elephant about thirty miles back, and I had got in a lucky brain shot on a big bull whose tusks would easily scale two hundred pounds. But I had had to leave the hide there, not having any alum and very little salt with which to cure it. But Broadbent, I knew, would have plenty of both.

I remembered, just as we halted for a noon camp alongside a long depression filled with water. And the memory stirred me, a little, because Broadbent had said: "There's a place just south of the Uele River, Enright, you understand? I've been there before and I didn't like it. Something wrong with it, you understand. Some queer johnnies there, and it's a God-forsaken stinking jungle. I'd give it the go-by if I were you."

I was a bit south of the river now, but Gongo Houté lay straight west, and I could not afford to back-track. But I thought—and I'm not unduly imaginative—that the veldt just east of the jungle was, somehow, queer. There had been hartebeest grazing, and a small band of impalla, and no lions, that I could see. The ground was fairly flat, with a few stunted acacias, so that I had a good view of it. And then—I could see nothing, putting my glass on the plain, and wetting my lips a little, as Dingaan, one of the Masai, spoke: "No tembo, bwana, but—other things."

"What other things?" I asked him, and he just shook his head. And then I saw a duiker all alone. It had been feeding, and now it began to run in stiff jumps as if something had frightened it, but there was nothing except a hammada at my right hand. The buck was streaking away across the gray-green veldt. And then I saw what must have frightened it: a baboon.

It had come down from the rocks running on all-fours. As it came nearer I stared, because it was not a baboon after all, but a native, a member of the Batwa Pygmies, as far as I could tell. He was tall for a Pygmy, walking arrogantly forward, his chin up.

I heard the voice of my gun bearer, Groot Yawcop: "Aie, Bwana, pass on by!"

I stopped, nevertheless, with my foot on the gas pedal, as the Pygmy held up a hand. He spoke but I could not understand him. The gun bearer's teeth chattered. "He says, master, that you can get him a buck. That duiker. But pass on by, master. Do not even look."

I could hear the tall native talking, but in a dialect that I could not make out, a queer hissing, like the hissing of snakes. The gun bearer let out his breath in a kind of sigh. I turned. His face was greenish-gray. I spoke to the tall native in Swahili: "I will procure the buck for you, Old One. Wait."

I heard the man speak again, and it reminded me of a curious interchange I had heard between a Hottentot, called Pieter, and his trained baboon, Red Dog. The baboon language, if there is any such. "He witch doctor," I heard Groot's voice in my ear. "He talk with spirits. He hear what I say."

THE duiker had stopped to graze, and I thought that the distance was too great even for my rifle. Then I heard the tall native: "Aim, master, and he will fall to your bullet. Be not afraid."

This time he spoke in Swahili, but why he should have said that I can not tell. More to humor him than for any other reason, I drew a bead on the duiker, allowing for a quartering wind, and fixing my sights for a thousand yards but not expecting, certainly, to hit him at that distance. I fired. Then I gaped. The buck had been knocked kicking. I didn't give myself credit; it was just shooter's luck.

But—was it? I heard Groot's voice in a kind of chattering mumble, turning the car and driving it out on the plain and picking up the duiker and bringing it back. The witch doctor grinned, exposing his filed and pointed teeth. He began to speak in his weird lingo, and then, sharp and plain, in Dutch: "I will pay you for the meat in my time, master," he said.

I waved, turning the car forward. The man had already fallen upon the dead buck like a dog. A quarter mile further on I looked back. I could see no sign of the



man. I saw what looked like some kind of animal. A baboon, I thought. Groot said nothing. And then, with the hammada ending, I looked sidewise to see a row of heads along it, and one rising up, atop a reddish, hairy body. The baboon, a mandrill, stood up to look at us, with his great red-and-blue jowled head tipped at me. He looked unreal.

The gun bearer spoke. "Master, he turns himself into a babuin, you understand?"

He meant, of course, the witch doctor.

I said, pshaw, but not very convincingly, I'm afraid. At the edge of the jungle I halted, not sure where I might meet Broadbent.

He would have to pass somewhere near here, I thought. I had heard of a tribe somewhere in the vicinity, not Pygmies, but savage, and dangerous to white men, from all that I'd heard. Here, just south of the Uele, the jungle is more than a little queer. Runways, with no marks of hoof or foot on them, and yet soft enough to show foot or hoof-marks, and trees that seemed to have no tops. That is, it was like a dark roof with intricate pillars, writhing and twisting, like snakes. And the jungle itself, on either side of the narrow road on which the car traveled, was like a river in a constant movement, forward and back.

And then, without any warning, there were open spaces across which we hurried. Groot was plainly uneasy, I could see. I heard him hiss, and then he pointed along the way which we had come. The road was no more than wide enough for the car. The gun bearer pointed. I looked, but I could see nothing. He said: "No tire marks, Baas."

It was so. The ground was certainly soft enough. Stopping the car I prepared to get out.

I had heard curious tales of a driver leaving his car and the car disappearing . . . but I had heard many such. But Groot restrained me. "Do not, Baas! Keep onward." His face went ashen in the dim cloister-like light.

But if this was a cloister it was a cloister for devils, as I was to find out.

This open space was perhaps a half mile wide and I could see elephant spoor plainly.

But I was on the lookout for Broadbent. I had seen no signs of life, which in itself was unusual. Then, above the purr of the motor, I was hearing a sound. It came from a distance, a kind of sobbing, and then the pad-pad of running feet.

I had seen many strange things in Africa, but what I saw now brought a quick gasp from my throat. The figure that came into view was running and stumbling, and the sound that I heard was the creature's sobbing breath. It looked like a man, bent and twisted, nearly black. But it was not a black man, but white. The figure, entirely naked, showed a criss-crossing of fresh scars, with the blood running from them. The man, not at first seeing us, clawed forward, and then fell to hands and knees.

THREE figures followed him out of the green. They were tall, and of an odd whitish-gray color. Groot gasped. "The wood-demons, master!" he said. For myself, it seemed to me that they were no more than some kind of jungle natives, painted white, perhaps Obongo, who are larger than the common run. But I had a transient impression of corpses risen out of putrescent earth.

The first of the three was poising a spear. I shot him through the body, the heavy bullet going on and through. He fell, and the two others lifted him, disappearing into the jungle as I moved toward them.

I went over to the man who had fallen. He was nothing but skin and bone, so that at first I did not recognize him, and then after lifting him I nearly let him fall. "Broadbent!" I exclaimed, staring down at him, and yet there could be no mistake. Only that the man I was expecting to meet weighed close to two hundred, whereas this living skeleton weighed scarcely a hundred pounds.

I gave him a few drops of brandy from my flask, lifting him almost with one hand and putting him on a pile of blankets in the back of the car, with Dingaan and the other porter to keep an eye on him. Then suddenly he began to talk in a language that I could not understand. And yet, in a way, it was familiar, a kind of clacking and hissing such as I had heard from the witch doctor, the same that I had heard pass



between the Hottentot, Pieter, and his Red Dog.

I was of half a mind to turn back. But I had seen elephant spoor all around me, and I had heard the trumpeting of what must have been a considerable number of bulls and cows not far off. I heard Groot's bass mutter: "You should not have killed the demon, master."

As we went onward it seemed to me that eyes looked at us out of the green. Something seemed to keep pace with us, even at thirty miles an hour, something that moved like water flowing, but without sound.

Rain began to fall although it was not the season for the rains, and then I knew that it was not rain, but rather the patter of many feet. This died, and then, where the jungle again opened up, I decided to make camp. Broadbent would need looking to. Besides this, my friend Pieter had told me one time that there was a place, oblong in shape, with a single tree in the center of it, a "white" tree, he had said. Here it would be, he told me, that he might meet me if all went well. As to the time of the meeting, the Hottentot had given me his queer grin, saying: "I will know when it will be, Baas."

Ahead of me now, and in exactly the place where Pieter had said it would be, was the tree. It was white, I thought, because it had been blasted, and yet, now that I look back on what happened, I am not so sure. I stopped the car, set up my tent, and then turned to Broadbent, who seemed asleep. I had covered him with a blanket, but his flesh seemed ice-cold. The porters had gone off only a little way, huddling together and staring glumly at nothing—like men already dead.

But I am a hunter, and not prone to fancies, and yet I knew that in Africa and especially in the Belgian Congo there are things best forgotten, things that it is not well for any man to know. It was then that I heard the wind blowing, with a kind of wailing note in it; it seemed to pass on by us, but the leaves of the trees hung dead, heavy, lifeless. Nor did I feel the least breath of air. Groot had turned gray-green, with the porters huddled, heads bent on their knees, as if afflicted with sleeping sick-

ness. And from Broadbent came no sound, no sign.

A mist, rising, curled and twisted like something alive, writhing and turning upon itself like a snake. I heard from the porters a kind of chant.

I felt a hard object in my pocket, a gris-gris, an amulet. I closed my fingers on it and the mist seemed to disappear. The shadow of a tree-trunk came creeping toward me. But with the sun shining in the opposite direction, the shadow, curiously now, seemed like a hand; a hand, reaching, out of the black heart of the jungle. I might have said that it was like water flowing in a sort of stealthy, slow advance.

The porters crouched, heads lowered, hands clasped around their knees. I sat with my rifle at the ready. And then, from among the porters there came a single, gasping groan. I looked, and the thing that was like a shadow had reached them, seeming to stop for a moment and then going on. I felt something that was like a choking miasma pass over me, as if, say, I had been on an operating table with the cone of an anesthetic clamped down. And then this passed, and I glanced sidewise at the porters . . . God!

It may have been my voice that I heard then, but the sound of it was alien, as if the word had been uttered by something else. Because, where there had been three men there now there were but two.

I do not pretend to account for it. The fact was that something had taken the man, a big fellow, weighing close to two hundred pounds. I heard Groot Yawcop: "Master, they are coming; even now they are at hand."

THERE was an all-pervasive odor of rotten-ripe melons. I knew what that meant—python. It could have been a python that had made off with the porter, and yet I should have seen some evidence of the snake. But in the obscure rites of the jungle it would not be impossible, I knew, that there would be snake-worshippers. Out from the black heart of that dim fastness I saw coming toward me a writhing and twisting thing advancing. I fired, taking my time, and placing a bullet in the heart of it. I heard Groot's voice: "He that consumed the



duiker assumes many shapes."

I was not prepared to believe that, but I knew that hypnotism might account for a good deal of it. And yet there must be something more. Something not explainable by logic. Something that, even now, set the seal of a kind of madness upon me so that I fired again, and yet again, spacing the bullets from right to left, up and down.

The serpents, if that is what they were, disappeared. But, afar off, as if deep in the heart of that gray-black mystery of jungle, there came a single, high, echoing scream.

The scream was like that of a man in his death-agony. Dingaan, raising his head, began a deep-toned chant. He was joined by my remaining porter. The words, in the native speech, rose and then died to a base mutter:

Death comes for the Zulu. It is even now at hand. The death that crawls on its belly. The death that is without soul.

*Without soul.* I muttered. I could hear Broadbent stirring. And then, oddly, that fetid odor vanished. No sound came from the jungle, as if Whoever or Whatever was there waited, biding its time, perhaps frustrated for the moment by some hostile influence, some definite barrier to its advance. I glanced toward that leprous-silvered tree standing alone, and abruptly two figures materialized from behind it.

The first, walking on two legs, was followed by another, four-footed. One behind the other. They came on at a steady advance. As the two came nearer I got to my feet.

"Pieter!" I called out, and then went forward to meet the Hottentot. The baboon behind him had its jaws open in a silent snarl.

"My grandfather tells me that we must be careful," the Pygmy said. He glanced toward the baboon. I knew that Pieter believed that the animal was the reincarnation of his grandfather, but I had a queer feeling as if a door had been opened and then shut as speech of a kind passed between them, in a succession of grunts.

I began to tell the Pygmy what had occurred, and of the witch doctor, but Pieter held up a hand. "Pieter knows," he informed me. "But he cannot see what will happen because it is dark. Dark because of spells and incantations. It is the darkness of water

and of the wiles of the serpent, Baas. Later . . . When my grandfather will tell me, we may read then what will be." He glanced sidewise at the car. "As to this weaver of spells," he continued, "he desired the buck's meat, yes, but more that that, he desired that you do his bidding, you understand? Otherwise, if you had not shot the duiker, he could not have woven his net for you. You should have shot him, Baas."

I could see the baboon's hackles rising. "Perhaps we may help the sick man," Pieter said. He meant Broadbent. I nodded. Whatever it was that had disturbed the baboon had vanished. I spoke with an attempt at casualness: "If the old devil had wanted to repay me," I said, "he could have shown me the elephants' graveyard." Pieter did not grin. Instead, his face took on a faintly disturbed look.

As to this elephants' graveyard, it is of course something that no hunter has ever seen. But if a hunter could find it he would be rich for life, since there must be tons and tons of ivory in such a place.

"I'll have a look at the sick man," I said, going over to the car and bending down to look at Broadbent. Without the slightest warning, he leaped up. There was a long, crooked knife in his hand. He lunged with it straight for my heart.

I FELT the sharp point slide along my ribs. Before I could wrench the knife from the sick man's fingers He began to babble, his voice rising to a shriek. It was the same queer gibberish he had uttered before.

I turned to see that the baboon was sitting erect, as if listening. Pieter was leaning forward as if he understood. The Hottentot's face was changing expression, his eyes drawn inward in a kind of squint. Broadbent's voice faltered, died.

"The Thing that is inside him is angry," Pieter said. "It is his jailer, Baas. But it may be that we can persuade him to depart." He grinned without mirth. "It was he who directed that knife-thrust, Baas."

Whether I believed Pieter or not, I nodded gravely, and at the Hottentot's direction lifted the sick man to a blanket alongside the car. I sought for and produced a bit of candle which Pieter lighted, placing it



at the head of the reclining Broadbent.

Then Pieter began:

"Old one, ancient One, depart now to your own place. Those that are dead owe you nothing. You cannot touch them, nor can your Servant touch them, who obeys the Snake.

"But when you go, where will you go, then, oh, spirit of Evil? Into emptiness? Into night? But I adjure you, by the Woman, depart! Her heel is on you. Serpent of Evil, go forth!"

Something, in the Hottentot's hand flashed. A sort of gris-gris? I could not tell. And then, from the sick man there came a convulsive shudder. Sounds came from him as of two voices talking together, then he fell back. A shape that was like the shadow of a black bat hovered a moment, then drove downward at the candle, the flame from which went down and down. But did not go out. I felt that if it did, somehow, that the conjuring would fail. But for a moment the flame showed black beneath the yellow, and then stood up straight. The Hottentot bowed his head.

"It went into the candle, Baas," he said, taking the candle and shredding it and casting it upward above his head. And then, for a brief instant, I saw what had been in his black hand, a Cross.

I heard a weak call from Broadbent. "Water! I'm parched!"

I gave him a small drink, and then a bit more of the brandy and after a moment he spoke. His speech was lucid. "I remember nothing after I crossed the south end of the lake," he said. "Before that, just before that, though, a native johnny stopped me. 'Master,' he asked me, 'give me something, a bit of biltong, perhaps? Be sure that I shall return it in good measure, do not fear.' Well, I gave the black some biscuit and a bit of meat. And then there was a thunderstorm, although I could hear no thunder, and something downed me, maybe lightning, I don't know."

"When was that, Broadbent?" I asked.

He told me. It was almost at the exact moment that I had run into the witch doctor. Besides this, Broadbent's description of the man exactly fitted. But how a man, even a witch doctor, could be in two places at once—?

I got Broadbent settled, giving him a little broth, and covering his body that was crisscrossed with scars. Pieter broke the silence.

"Tembo does not like the serpent, Baas."

I nodded. "Is tembo afraid of the serpent, Pieter?" I asked.

The Hottentot said: "Aie, Baas. And so he will crush the serpent when he can. He does not, above all, like to smell him. When he does, he trumpets, and then it is, with tembo, like musth. He is a destroying thunder, so that when he passes there are no serpents, or not very many, Baas."

BY NOW it was past midnight. The porters had subsided, stilling their interminable lament. I fancied, even, that they slept now as they always did, fathoms deep. I slept, too, after a little, but in an uneasy doze, which was not my habit. And as I slept I seemed to be somewhere far off, in a wide expanse of jungle, and around me pile upon pile of bones.

All of the bones were not just bones, but, as I looked, I saw that there were, all around me, tons, not of bones, but of tusks, ivory, piled where the great beasts had lain down to die there, yesterday, centuries before.

Something in the dream seemed to be warning me. A voice spoke, "Be gone, rash white man, while there is time!" I felt rather than heard the quick pad-pad of feet, and then a hiss and slither, waking to find that I was bound there, as were Groot Yawcop and my remaining boys.

The smell of decayed fruit mounted until it became a stench. A voice hailed me out of the dark: "Ay, great hunter, now you will see that I repay!"

A torch flared, showing me the masklike face of the witch doctor. Behind him figures that showed in a graveyard whiteness gleamed and glimmered, as again I heard that slither and a long, echoing hiss. "It is well that I did not delay," came the witch doctor's voice, and I thought that there was a certain frustration in it. From where I sat, bound, I could see my gunbearer, and behind him Dinga and Ndemba, my other porter, but of Pieter and his Red Dog or of Broadbent there was no sign.

I thought, thank God they got away. And I set my will against what was about to



happen, not looking at that evil figure standing before me, but hearing his voice: "The white man who tried to stab you, that was a mistake. He that was within . . . moved before I was ready, but you were saved, oh bwana, to do my will. The will of the Serpent. But look!"

The ghost-like figures in the background moved forward. I sucked in my breath. It was plain that they were not black men, but white. Or, rather, men who had been white once, but now moved and lived in a twilight of existence, mere puppets acting at the witch doctor's command. I had heard of course of Zombies, but these were living white men.

At the time, I tell you, it came to me that this was no more than a nightmare and would pass. But I was bound, so that, after a while I began to have difficulty in breathing. Wrenching my gaze away from the evil face of the witch doctor, I glanced down at my arms, twisting them to relieve the pressure. And at what I saw there, hard-bitten as I am, I think I must have fainted.

Because the ropes that bound me in that ever-tightening coil were not ropes, but coils the thickness of a man's thigh, the coils not of ropes but the coils of a python!

**B**UT then came the witch doctor's brief command, given in a queer hissing speech that was not speech but rather sounds that were inarticulate and yet sharp and queerly commanding. He seemed to speak directly at the python.

I could feel that terrible pressure loosen. The coils fell away. The snake disappeared. I reached for the hand-gun in its holster, or, rather, I thought that I did, because I found myself unable to move a finger. The pressure had left me that way. It would pass.

Five minutes passed, as, nearer now, I could hear the sound of trumpeting. The witch doctor spoke:

"Move but your little finger, oh, mighty hunter," he said.

But I found that I could not. Strain as I would, it was as if I were paralyzed, I was encased in a straitjacket, of mind and body, because, now, my thoughts were confused.

I heard that dry-as-dust voice as from the small end of a horn: "Look at me, White Man! You will obey. Ah! Now, speak as I shall tell you, and listen; the time is at hand."

I heard a voice speaking which must have been my own, but the sounds that it uttered were foreign, and then I recognized them, in a sort of apathy, as if, after all, nothing mattered: they were the same words Broadbent had spoken when I picked him up.

I saw myself, lost man, a mere mechanical doll without a brain, doing the bidding of that half-man, half-devil.

One last effort I made, then, and perhaps I prayed. Never a praying man, at that moment, with what was left of my will, I, Paul Enright, the elephant-hunter, the man without imagination, summoned a call from deep inside me. And the one word, *God*.

Something seemed to snap in my brain. I seemed to be speaking to Pieter, sending him a message, and then—there came the trampling thunder, booming down upon that open space there, as, out of the night, I saw the white gleam of the tusks, the uplifted trunks. What followed seemed more than ever like a nightmare, and yet it was real. I heard a shrill scream of "Tembo!" And then it was blotted out. I rolled, diving under the jeep, with Groot Yawcop and the porters for company. There came a hellish kind of stamping, a trampling, and the sound of giants. The giants were engaging the serpents. The jeep, rolling over, steadied, and I lay there, content merely to breathe. After a long moment, with the thunder of the herd in the distance, I heard a voice. It was the voice of Pieter:

"Master, you are here!"

It was perhaps an odd way to put it, but what the Hottentot meant was that I was my own man again, as to mind and body. Pieter spoke: "I did not run, Baas," he said. "But there was nothing I could do where I was. I took the sick white man with me, and then—I spoke to Tembo, Baas. Just as you spoke to me, when He that has gone to his own Hell would have had his way with you. It is finished. Now—have you a little tobacco, Baas?"





# JUJU JUSTICE

By RICHARD STOCKTON ULLERY

Reluctantly the villagers prepared the mourning rites for Gekuna, knowing full well he'd never see the third day's rising sun. For what chance had this lamed pariah of the jungle against the overpowering witchery of the greatest juju doctor of them all—Mgango?

**D**ARKNESS pounced swiftly upon the African village, blotting out long and blood-red fingers laid by the dying sun. The jungle beyond seemed sud-

denly to have crept silently forward, as if to swallow the little village in its dark and enormous depths.

Along the one wide street, flanked by



rows of grass-thatched shambas, torch flares splashed red against the velvet blackness. The figures of women stirring kettles that hung from crossed poles in front of the shambas emerged as vague shapes in the wavy flicker of the supper fires.

Gekuna limped into the lower end of the village and halted before the nearest shamba. A man dozing on the grass just outside the dim circle of light thrown by the supper fire leaped to his feet with a startled grunt as Gekuna loomed out of the darkness above him.

"M'bolo, Malusha," Gekuna said. "It is your friend, Gekuna."

Malusha peered through the gloom at the other's face. "Ai, m'bolo," he finally said, and shoved his half-drawn knife back into his loin cloth. "You come upon me like a spirit, Gekuna. And indeed, we had thought you dead!"

"I have been near death," Gekuna answered, moving slowly forward into the light thrown by the fire. "And I have seen many strange things since I have been away."

"You are lame! And your face is scarred from cheek to chin!" exclaimed Malusha. "What has happened to you?"

"It is a long tale," Gekuna said wearily. "Is there food in the kettle?"

"There is, and plenty!" Malusha replied. He shouted at the woman who was cooking the supper. "Netola! We have a guest! Gekuna, who has been long away, has returned hungry and tired. Heat well the kettle, Netola, for our friend!"

His stomach comfortably filled with the hot stew of greens and banana-flour bread, Gekuna stretched himself on the grass beside Malusha.

"Now that you are fed and warmed, Gekuna," said Malusha, "—the tale—let us have the tale."

"It was four moons past that I left the village on a hunting trip," Gekuna began. "In the forest, while climbing a steep ridge, I startled a wild boar which charged me. I struck with my spear but the wound only maddened the devil-pig, whose tusk gored my face, making the scar that you see. As he turned to charge me again I threw myself out of his path and plunged into a gulley that lay below the ridge. I escaped the boar,

but in the leap my leg crumpled beneath me. For all that day, that night, and most of the next day I lay unable to move at the bottom of the gulley, my leg twisted and pierced with pain. Just before dusk I heard voices above me. I shouted, and soon four men scrambled down to where I lay. They were white men, and they were kind, but when I asked them to take me to my village they could not understand what I said. After they had talked long among themselves two of them went away and returned with a bed of cloth fastened upon poles, and carried me to their camp. There were none of our people with them; later I learned that their guides had deserted them. They looked at my leg and shook their heads, and next morning they took me with them on a journey of many days."

"How could they make their way through the jungle, having no guides and not knowing the country?" asked Malusha.

"THEY had a small round box which they consulted," Gekuna answered. "It held great magic, that little box, for it told them which way to turn when they were in doubt."

"Great magic, indeed," Malusha said. "Did it speak to them?"

"It did not speak but it pointed the way," Gekuna replied. "Finally we came to a huge body of water which stretched to the end of the world, but which sometimes pressed close and deep against the shore and at other times moved away the distance of two or three spear-throws, leaving dry land where it had been. On this water were great boats, some as long as our village."

Malusha stirred uneasily. "You had fever-dreams because of your injuries?" he suggested.

"These things I saw after I was well. And I was once on one of those boats," Gekuna said decisively. "When we arrived a white medicine man tended me, and in time I began again to walk, but stiffly and unevenly, as you have seen. Many other wonderful things I saw, and much great magic, and the white men there showed kindness to me, and would have had me stay with them. But I wished for my own people, and when I was strong enough to travel I left to return home."



"It is an amazing tale," Malusha said. "I would like to know more of the magic which you learned from those white men."

"Later, Malusha," Gekuna said, pulling himself to his feet. "I thank you for the food, but I am weary. It is my wish to go now to my shamba and rest."

Malusha rose and laid a hand on Gekuna's arm. "Do not go, Gekuna," he urged. "Stay with me and my wife in our shamba this night."

"I am grateful for your kindness, Malusha," Gekuna answered, turning away. "But during many long moons I have looked forward to my arrival home, and to sleeping again on my own bed, in my own shamba. I will see you again when the day dawns."

Malusha did not release his grasp of Gekuna's arm. "Do not go!" he exclaimed. "For—you have no shamba!"

Gekuna swung about to face Malusha, his eyes glinting in the firelight. "I have no shamba! What are you saying, Malusha?"

"It is true. In the second moon since your leaving, Mganga, the witch doctor, saw a vision of you lying dead in the forest. And he claimed that your spirit then came to him saying that since he is your half-brother he should have your shamba and all your goods!"

Gekuna's face turned the color of dead ashes. The muscles of his arm rolled and twisted like black snakes entwined as he gripped Malusha's wrist. "My shamba? My weapons. My goats. My cattle?"

"All, Gekuna," Malusha repeated. "Mganga has them all!"

**I**N THE dancing red flicker of torches set before what had been Gekuna's shamba Mganga, the witch doctor, and Gekuna confronted each other. A milling, clamoring crowd had followed Gekuna. Now they pressed close about the two men.

"I am not dead, Mganga," Gekuna said between clenched teeth. "Your vision was a lie."

Mganga regarded him calmly from huge dark eyes, his tall head-dress casting a gigantic shadow before him.

"Is it truly Gekuna?" he asked in a smooth and quiet tone.

Gekuna took a step forward, bringing his

face close to Mganga's. "Look well and see," he growled, and from the pushing crowd around them came cries of "It is Gekuna your brother, Mganga. Not dead, but alive and well!"

"You lied when you claimed you saw me lying dead," Gekuna accused. "You lied when you said my spirit came to you. Always you have been jealous of me and of the things which I have worked hard to earn for myself. But I have returned. Give me back my property that you have stolen!"

The witch doctor did not flinch from Gekuna's savage stare. He even touched his fingers lightly and briefly against the scar on Gekuna's face. Then he spoke in a sonorous tone that carried through the crowd.

"It is not Gekuna!" he said.

"What does Mganga mean?" a villager asked in wonder. "It is surely Gekuna, is it not?"

"Liar and thief!" shouted Gekuna. "What new trickery is this?"

"Tell them the tale of your wanderings, Gekuna," called out Malusha from the crowd. "Tell them of the magic you have learned!"

Gekuna swung away from Mganga and recited his adventures. The villagers listened in eager silence. When he had finished the uproar broke out again.

"Your vision was but half-right, Mganga. Gekuna lay near death but was saved!"

"He has returned from the white people bringing much wisdom!"

"Return him his property, Mganga. It is yours no longer!"

Suddenly Mganga raised his hand high above his head. He stood silent and unmoving. His huge dark eyes raked the faces before him, and as the chattering of monkeys is stilled by the fierce bright gaze of the python, so the cries and murmurs of the villagers trailed into silence before the menacing stare of the witch doctor.

When all was quiet Mganga lowered his arm. "You have heard the words from Gekuna's mouth," he exclaimed in deep and resonant tones that floated somberly on the night air. "Now I will tell you the truth. This is not Gekuna who stands before you." The words rolled out in a swelling volume that completely overwhelmed Gekuna's



angry protest.

"The vision I saw was truth," Mganga continued rapidly. "I saw Gekuna dead. He is dead. An evil spirit has entered the body of our friend to use it for wicked purposes. That spirit has come here to do us great harm."

Pulling a knife from his loincloth Gekuna made a stumbling dive toward the witch doctor but his rush was blocked by the villagers. "You have spoken, Gekuna," said one. "Let Mganga speak now."

"These things I can prove," Mganga went on. "You all know that when an evil spirit enters a body it always damages the body in some way. You remember Shoto, the leopard, whose body carried a devil whose magic made him invisible for so many moons? And you remember, do you not, that it was only after Mganga cast a spell that the wicked spirit left and we were free of his killings? And was not Shoto lame because of the evil soul that broke into his body?"

He paused, and murmurs from the crowd broke the sudden silence. "I remember Shoto, the leopard," one of the villagers said. "For moons we saw only his tracks which proved him lame. And assuredly he had an evil spirit within him, else how could he have remained invisible to our hunters for so long." "It is true," said another, "that we saw him only after Mganga had made a spell against the wicked spirit."

The richly rounded tones of Mganga's voice was heard again. "You have seen that Gekuna is lame, and scarred also, proving that the evil spirit in his body is one of greatest wickedness since it had to damage the body so badly to enter. And here is more proof: just now you heard words from Gekuna's mouth of magic boxes and water stretching to the end of the world. We know that Gekuna has no magic and no knowledge of juju, therefore it is not Gekuna who speaks, but the devil-spirit who now lives in his body, wishing to confuse us and gain power over us."

"Truly, Gekuna was never lame or scarred," someone in the crowd muttered. "Moreover, those who carry evil spirits within them are not ever entirely whole of body."

Mganga swung a long arm to point at

Gekuna, struggling in the grasp of two villagers. "Look! We know my brother Gekuna was a calm and peaceful man whose speech was always mild and reasonable. We have heard savage words from his mouth tonight, in tones that are not those of Gekuna. And see how he struggles to attack and silence me because it is Mganga's eyes which can see through the body to the evil spirit within! That is not Gekuna!"

The witch doctor's voice ceased and was immediately succeeded by a wild tumult of disjointed cries and exclamations, the majority of which indicated that Mganga's arguments had been convincing; but there still were those, among whom Malusha's voice was loudest, who were not persuaded that Gekuna was the embodiment of an evil spirit.

Again Mganga lifted his arm for silence.

"Let us drive out the wicked spirit that inhabits my brother's body!" he exclaimed. "Let us pierce that body with spears until the evil soul flees from our village!"

An ugly growling undertone began to make itself heard through the clamor, and a small knot of men surged out from the crowd, close-packed and silent, to move ominously toward Gekuna. Into their path advanced another segment of the group, headed by Malusha. The two parties faced each other, and knife blades gleamed dark and sullen in the torch light.

"There will be no fighting among ourselves!" called out a new voice. From the main body of villagers, which tunneled itself to permit his thrusting passage, appeared a short-legged, heavy-set man, whose huge head, bald except for fringes of spiky white hair, seemed to rest upon his wide shoulders as snugly as if there were no neck between.

"It is Kalatcha, the head man!"

"What has Kalatcha to say?"

The head man strode with short staccato steps between the two opposing groups to a point where his broad wrinkled face was clearly visible to all.

"I have listened, and the time has come to end this business!" Kalatcha said, his voice strong and authoritative.

"Put away your knives, my people," he ordered. The great round head swung back and forth like a huge ball on the heavy



shoulders as his small eyes swept from one quarreling faction to the other, and an air of assured power emanated from him. For a moment the opposing parties shuffled uneasily under his gaze, then both groups dispersed among the main body of villagers.

"Let us hear no more of this affair tonight," Kalatcha said, looking steadily at Mganga. "Tomorrow, before the noontime meal, we will assemble at the palaver ground to decide the matter in calmness and wisdom." He stretched out a thick arm in a gesture of benediction which seemed to include the whole village.

"And now, to our shambas for rest and sleep!"

THE sun was a high round disk of burnished bronze above the palaver ground, where the total population of the village was massed. On a slight elevation stood Kalatcha, his stocky figure enveloped in flowing robes of ceremonial white, topped by a close-fitting cap from which slender ropes of beads swung like tiny pendulums with every motion of the great round head. Besides him was Mganga, smeared from shoulders to waist with a mixture of white ash and wet clay. From monkey skins of varied colors, draped around his neck, hung long strands of plaited human hair, at the ends of which dangled crocodiles' teeth, the claws of a lion and the dried and shrunken heart of a leopard. Gekuna stood on the other side of Kalatcha, his clenched jaws ridging out the long scar that ran from cheek to chin.

Kalatcha's black arm emerged from his robes in a gesture that stilled the excited clamor of the crowd.

"We have already heard the words of Mganga and Gekuna," he said. "If Gekuna is dead and a devil now inhabits the body which was his, we should drive out that devil before it does us harm. Last night we came near to fighting among ourselves. Perhaps that was the work of an evil demon who comes to us in the shape and form of a dead man. If we strike our spears into Gekuna's body, as Mganga has urged, we shall assuredly drive out the wicked spirit, if it is there. And if there is a foreign spirit in Gekuna we should be doing right. But if we pierce Gekuna's body now, can we know

whether the spirit we drive from that body is the spirit of a devil, or that of Gekuna? And if it is Gekuna's spirit, we have murdered one of ourselves!"

"Mganga, you are a powerful man of juju," the head man continued. "You cast a spell that drove the demon out of Shota, the leopard. Can you not do the same if an evil spirit is in a man?"

"Assuredly I have that power," Mganga answered.

"Then put it to the test, Mganga," Kalatcha said. "Cast the spell upon Gekuna, and if by the third rising of the sun the evil spirit has left his body, you will have proved your claim and will keep Gekuna's possessions for your own. But if Gekuna is still well and strong after the sun has risen three times it will be proof that there is no demon within him, and you will return to him all his goods. Is this a fair test, my people?"

"It is indeed fair, Kalatcha!"

"Great is Kalatcha's wisdom!"

"The time-limit is short," Mganga muttered.

"But your power is great," returned Kalatcha. "Gekuna, do you accept the test?"

"I accept," Gekuna answered. "Mganga's juju can do me no harm. Since I left the village I have seen stronger magic than his—magic beside which Mganga's is but the whine of the jackal to the roar of the lion!"

"Bring up the juju drum!" ordered Kalatcha, and at his words two men emerged from the crowd, carrying a huge, hollowed-out calabash, which they placed in front of Mganga.

The witch doctor knelt before the great gourd and a muffled rumble rolled over the palaver ground as his fingers rippled along the taut leopard skin. While the echoes still reverberated he reached down to seize the shrunken leopard heart dangling from his shoulder and swung it from his head. Striking the drum a heavy blow that resounded like a thunderclap, he brought the heart level with his eyes and swung about on his knees to face Gekuna.

Slowly Mganga extended the lump of dried flesh the full length of his arm until it pointed directly at Gekuna. Reciting in a deep and harsh tone some unintelligible phrases he pounded the drum again, con-



tinuing to alternate exhortation and drum-beat. Faster and faster he jabbered his ritual, louder and more resonantly rolled the drum, while the intervals between grew shorter, until speech and drum became inextricably intermingled in a wild frenzy of cacaphony. Sweat, mixed with the clay and ashes daubed on his body, streamed from the witch doctor in a thick and grimy solution, while his huge dark eyes remained fixed on Gekuna.

Swaying to the rhythm of the drum's thunderous rumble the crowd broke up into a disintegrated and confused mass of individuals. With heads thrown alternately forward and back, knees kicking high, the villagers circled the palaver ground at ever-increasing speed. Shouts broke from straining throats, waving knives flashed silver in the sunlight. Drunk with rhythm, the dancers whirled and spun in dizzy delirium. Mganga had dropped the leopard's heart to pound the drum at incredible speed with both fists, while his foam-splattered lips mouthed inaudible incantations. Kalatcha and Gekuna alone stood motionless.

Suddenly the furious tempo of the drum faltered as Mganga swayed unsteadily. First one hand, then the other, dropped to his sides and he crumpled forward to the ground, breathing in great sobbing gasps, his ribs seemingly about to burst through his heaving flanks. The drum's last echoes rebounded majestically from the distances to fade into a diminishing murmur. Gradually the wild gyrations of the dancers slowed; many, staggering like gigantic tops in dizzy circles, collapsed on the grass. Complete and deafening silence, enormous in its intensity, enveloped the palaver ground.

THAT night Gekuna, sleeping in a shamba not far from that of Malusha and Netola, awoke with a feeling of strange and unnatural warmth about his feet and ankles. Lying on his back he raised his head cautiously. The faint light from the torch outside, seeping through the opening that served as a door, cast itself upon a shapeless bulk that rested heavily upon the mat of skins covering his legs. Above this vague mass seemed to float, in mid-air, two small glinting beads, gently swaying from side to side. A sharp, acrid odor attacked Gekuna's nostrils.

Sweat burst from his pores as Gekuna realized that coiled upon his legs lay a myamba, one of Africa's most venomous serpents. Its bright eyes gleamed unblinkingly. Its head moved with smooth regularity above its looped length. The myamba was content, for now, enjoying the warmth from Gekuna's body; but he knew that if startled it would strike with a speed that no man could counter.

The mat upon which the snake lay, covered Gekuna's legs to the knee. He tried to judge the result if he should kick both feet suddenly upward. He decided that the myamba would be thrown forward toward his waist. A sideways kick was impossible, since he lay on his back. As these thoughts raced through his mind the glinty eyes became motionless. Gekuna forced himself to remain rigid, knowing that some unconscious twitch of his body had disturbed the snake, whose head now poised itself in ominous alertness.

In a moment the myamba resumed its swaying, the span of its sideways motion corresponding to the width of a man's hand. To the left, to the right, and back again, with the regularity of a precision machine, swung the malevolent head; and Gekuna, his brain working with the speed of desperation, remembered something he had seen during his stay with the white men.

He began to hum, very softly, keeping time to the myamba's swaying, increasing the volume of his tone by slight degrees, so as not to startle the great snake into an attack. At first it seemed that the myamba was paying no attention; its head and the upright length supporting it continued unchanged in its rhythmic motion; but as he kept raising the modulation of his voice he became aware that the part of the body that lay looped upon his legs was beginning a gentle rocking motion.

He decreased the tempo of his song, and the myamba's head slowed its motion in accordance. As the rhythm of Gekuna's voice became slower, the arc formed by the snake's head grew wider. Gekuna slipped his right hand beneath him, an inch at a time, until he grasped the handle of the knife in his loincloth. Still humming he drew back his arm until it was level with his head. The myamba, entranced, dipped its upright



length from side to side like an inverted pendulum, while the coils resting on Gekuna's legs quivered in sensuous ecstasy. At the extreme end of the snake's downward swing, when its head was almost parallel with the floor, Gekuna doubled back his legs and shot them forward in a violent kick that toppled the myamba's coiled length to the ground.

Gekuna leaped backward from his pallet away from the furiously thrashing loops below him. The myamba struck its fangs into the mat in which it was entangled, uncoiled and writhed swiftly toward the door. Gekuna hurled his knife but the blade buried itself harmlessly in the ground as the serpent slithered into the night.

Gekuna shuddered and wiped his dripping face. "Ai!" he said aloud. "This place is full of the myamba's smell." Stepping to the doorway he stooped for his knife. Lying near it was a piece of cloth. It was a woven fibre bag.

"It is my own!" he exclaimed as he held it close to his eyes. "It has the twist at the bottom that I wove so I could always know it. How come it here? It was among my goods at my shamba where Mganga now lives!" His jaws clenched hard, and the long scar ridged his cheek. "There is no doubt how the myamba found its way to my bed!"

**T**OSSING his spear on the ground behind him, Gekuna squatted beside Malusha and Netola to share their morning meal of fruit and goats' milk. As they ate he told the tale of his previous night's adventure. Malusha shook his head gravely.

"You have learned much great magic while away, Gekuna," he said. "But I would not speak of this to others. There are those who would say that surely Gekuna has an evil demon within him if his voice can soothe the deadly myamba. They would think worse of you for that than of Mganga's carrying the snake to your bed."

Gekuna considered this. "You are right, Malusha. I will say nothing of it to anyone else for now. But when the sun has risen twice more—"

"You will not be here!" a deep harsh voice interrupted. Behind them stood Mganga, his huge black eyes fixed menac-

ingly upon Gekuna.

"You failed last night, Mganga," Gekuna said.

"The spell I cast is working," the witch doctor replied. "Its power increases as the time becomes shorter." He took a long step over Gekuna's spear and strode hastily away.

"He came upon us silently," Malusha said. "It may be that he heard all our talk."

"It does not matter," Gekuna answered. "Thank you for the meal. When this matter is settled I will repay you many times for all that you have done for me."

He swung away and reached down for his spear. As his hand closed upon it a sharp, searing pain stabbed savagely into his palm. Gekuna gazed in horror upon the many-clawed little monster clinging to the spear's shaft, its brown body almost invisible against the dark wood. Tiny, malignant eyes glared upward while the steel-barbed tail that had stuck deep into the flesh of Gekuna's hand thrashed frantically.

"Scorpion!" Gekuna cried. "Poison scorpion!"

Malusha and Netola rushed to his side. Whipping out his knife, Malusha sliced twice across Gekuna's palm, then quickly made two more cuts transversely across the first pair.

"Now press hard, Netola!" he ordered. Netola grasped Gekuna's hand strongly between both of hers and squeezed with all her strength while Malusha put his lips to the gashes and sucked in his breath with a mighty pull. Spitting out a mouthful of blood mixed with a thin yellow fluid, he continued to alternate applying his lips to the wound and ejecting blood and poison while Netola maintained a furious pressure against the palm of Gekuna's hand.

"The most of it is out," Malusha said at last. "Rest upon the grass, Gekuna. A bandage of kola leaves and the sting will be but as a flea bite." He spat again. "Faugh! It is well we were nearby, Gekuna!"

Gekuna, reeling with pain and shock, sank to the ground. "You spoke of my magic," he said. "It is the greatest magic of all to have such friends!"

"Malusha!" called Netola, pointing at the spear, which lay on the ground where Gekuna had dropped it. "Look! The scorpion has been bound to Gekuna's spear!"



"It is true," Malusha exclaimed. The deadly little reptile, though lashing out wildly with claws and tail, still remained on the spear handle. "Tied by the head with lushishi grass just where Gekuna always grasps when carrying it! See the spot beneath the scorpion where the sweat of Gekuna's hand has stained the wood!"

"This is more of Mganga's doings," Gekuna said.

"But how could he handle a poison scorpion and not be stung himself?" Netola wondered.

"A drop of muavi on its head and it would sleep for a little while," Malusha answered. "Long enough for Mganga to bring it here and fasten it on the spear while we were talking and eating."

Gekuna rose to his feet. "I do not feel well," he said. "Take me to the shamba where I slept last night, my friends. Let me rest there."

Malusha and Netola helped him to the nearby shamba where he dropped on the pallet of skins that was his bed.

"I shall remain here until the sun has risen twice, and the time-limit of Mganga's spell has passed," Gekuna said. "Let Netola prepare all my food in front of this shamba; and will you, Malusha, do this for me? Watch outside the door and let no one but Netola enter?"

"No one will enter," Malusha promised.

"One more favor," Gekuna added. "Send Netola through the village, telling all that I am sick and have taken to my bed."

Malusha frowned. "For that I see no reason," he said. "But it will be as you say. Netola will go at once to tell the tale."

For the rest of that morning Gekuna lay on his pallet, resting and dozing, with Malusha lounging about in front of the shamba or sitting just inside the doorway. Before midday Netola returned from her journey through the village.

"All the people now believe that Mganga is right, that Gekuna carries an evil spirit in his body, and that his sickness means that the spell is working," she reported. "Even Kalatcha shakes his head and says that Mganga's magic is very powerful."

"That is good. It is as I had hoped," Gekuna answered. "What says Mganga?"

"He now claims you will not see the sun

rise once more," Netola replied.

"He probably thinks your blood is filled with the poison of the scorpion," Malusha said. "And if that were so, you would surely die tonight."

"Let him be happy in that thought for now," said Gekuna, a tight grin rippling the scar on his cheek.

ALL that afternoon small groups of villagers passed the shamba where Gekuna lay, exchanging words with Malusha in the doorway.

"Malusha, how is it with Gekuna?"

"He lies on his bed. He does not wish to see anyone. If you will listen you will hear him groan."

"Ai, indeed! He groans loudly!"

"It is the evil spirit that complains as it fights against Mganga's spell!"

"Let us inside, Malusha, we would watch the demon struggle with the juju!"

"No one can enter," Malusha answered firmly. "When there is more news you will know it. Until then, no one goes inside this shamba!"

Netola prepared the evening meal, and she and Malusha crouched beside the pallet to share it with Gekuna.

"When we have finished," Gekuna said, "I want Netola to go to Mganga and give him a message."

"A message to Mganga! What have you to say to him?"

"Invite him to come here tonight. I have things to talk about with him."

"It is not wise," Malusha counseled.

"While he believes you are dying, you are safe. But when he sees you he will know that you are not sick, and he will become dangerous again!"

"I shall be on my guard. And you and Netola will be just outside the doorway. There will be nothing to fear."

Darkness had fallen when Malusha reentered the shamba.

"Netola has returned," he announced. "Mganga is coming. The village thinks that your evil spirit, knowing itself conquered, has sent for Mganga to plead with him to remove the spell."

"That is well," Gekuna said. He stretched out on the pallet and let his arms lie flaccid at his sides. "Set the torch in the doorway so



that the light within will be bright, and have Netola prepare banana beer. When all is in readiness you and Netola sit at the doorway beside the torch to watch Mganga and to listen."

Mganga's lofty headdress dipped low as he stooped to enter the shamba.

"M'bolo, Mganga," Gekuna said, his voice almost a whisper. "Enter, and sit. Netola, bring banana beer for my brother."

"There is no use of begging my mercy now, Gekuna," Mganga declared. "You have seen the sun for the last time. The power of my juju is too strong for the evil spirit that is within you."

Netola placed two tall narrow-necked gourds between Gekuna and the witch doctor and returned to the doorway to sit beside Malusha.

Gekuna reached for one of the gourds and removed the tuft of cow's tail with which it was corked. "The power of the scorpion's poison is what you mean, Mganga," he muttered.

"The juju spell brings death by one means or another," Mganga retorted. "If a scorpion has stung you, the greater the power of the magic that makes it happen."

Gekuna drank deeply from the gourd and set it back beside his bed. "You have no magic, Mganga," he said in a loud voice that made the witch doctor start with surprise. "I know that you brought the myamba to my bed last night. I saw, and Malusha and Netola too, how the scorpion was fastened to my spear. Your spell can do me no harm. I am as well as you, and will live as long!"

He sprang from the pallet and stood over Mganga. "All the village will know these things, when the sun has risen twice more," Gekuna went on, while Mganga sat silent and rigid, his huge eyes raised in a wide stare of amazement and alarm. "Tomorrow evening I will invite you here again, to be with me until the sun has risen. Then you can try to make a juju that will explain how it happens that I am still alive!"

Mganga was suddenly on his feet. He threw a quick glance toward the doorway. Malusha had also risen, and the torch light gleamed red on the spear in his hand.

"You have no snake or scorpion now," Gekuna grinned. "If you come to this

shamba before tomorrow night, Malusha and I will kill you. But in the evening, come and be my guest until the rising of the sun!"

"I will come," Mganga said in a choked voice. He lowered his eyes and stared abstractedly at the gourds on the floor. "I will come," he repeated.

Gekuna followed his gaze. "There will be beer," he said. "I will entertain you well."

GEKUNA remained in the shamba during the whole of the next day, with Malusha or Netola at the doorway to keep out the villagers, who were curious to know whether the evil demon had yet been conquered. Mganga did not appear, but it was said that he claimed resolutely that the wicked spirit would be driven from Gekuna's body before dawn.

When night had come, Gekuna rose from his bed and stepped outside.

"It has been a long day to wait," he said to Malusha, stretching his arms above him. "Let us place the torch as before so it will throw a good light within the shamba. But this time when Netola has brought the gourds of beer I want you to move away from the doorway and let Mganga and me remain alone."

Malusha shook his head doubtfully. "It is foolish to do that. Tonight he will surely seek to kill you."

"Do not fear, my friend," Gekuna laughed. "I will be on the alert against him." He drew from his loincloth a small circular mirror, its diameter about the length of a man's middle finger. "Have you ever seen such a thing as this?"

"It is as the surface of the lake when no wind blows, and makes a picture of what is above," Malusha said. "But it is not water. Where did you get this thing?"

"It is a bit of white man's magic," Gekuna answered. "They had many uses for it. I will leave you now. I have something to do inside."

While Malusha set the torch in the doorway, Gekuna took out his knife and marked a small circle on the dirt floor beside his pallet. Then, kneeling, he held the mirror above the pallet against one of the inside poles supporting the grass-thatched roof.

He was very careful as to the height of the mirror and its angle of reflection. When



he was satisfied, he fastened the mirror to the pole so that as he lay on the pallet he could see reflected the little circle which he had made on the floor beside him.

The tall form of Mganga momentarily blocked off the light from the torch in the doorway. Gekuna rolled on his side, lifting his left shoulder just enough to conceal the mirror hanging behind and above him. At the same time he slid his right hand beneath him until it touched the handle of the knife in his loincloth.

"Greetings, Mganga," he said. "You are prompt. Netola, let us have the banana beer."

As before, Netola glided in carrying the narrow-necked gourds and placed them on the floor between Gekuna and Mganga.

"Will you not drink, Mganga?" Gekuna asked, taking up one of the gourds. "We have a long night before us."

"I will drink," Mganga answered. His voice was low and pinched, as if he was not sure of his ability to control it. He took the other gourd and drank deeply. Gekuna, lying on his side, one hand on his knife and the other holding his drink, watched the witch doctor intently.

"It is good beer," he said, and set the gourd on the floor, keenly aware of Mganga's eyes following the slender calabash as it traveled to his lips, away and to the ground.

"It is indeed," Mganga agreed. He looked quickly toward the doorway, from which Malusha and Netola had now moved away. Gekuna, his eyes glued to Mganga's every move, grinned.

"We are alone," he said.

Mganga's head jerked back, as if the remark had jarred on his nerves.

"I mean we shall not have more beer unless I call Netola," Gekuna explained.

"There is no need," Mganga said.

Gekuna picked up his gourd again, drank, and set it back on the floor. This time he was careful to place it exactly in the small circle which he had marked out earlier.

"This lying in bed wearies me," he complained, rolling over so that his back was toward Mganga. "It will be good to be up again after the sun rises." By lowering his right shoulder slightly he was able to see his

gourd of beer reflected in the little mirror above his head.

"Rest if you will. You have nothing to fear from me, my brother," Mganga said in a low voice.

Gekuna, squinting at the mirror, caught a flashing glimpse of long dark fingers fluttering for an instant above the gourd. Sitting up, he turned to face the witch doctor.

"Mganga, I learned a bit of magic while I was away. By making a picture of a man in my mind, I can see what he is doing even though I am not looking at him."

Mganga regarded him steadily, his eyes dark and enormous.

"I made a picture of you in my mind just now," Gekuna continued. "Tomorrow the village will know what I saw."

Mganga rose suddenly and Gekuna leaped to his feet with him, whipping out his knife.

"They will not believe you," Mganga answered in a strangled voice. "I can tip over the gourd and then you cannot prove what you say."

"Will they believe you?" Gekuna retorted. "When they see me alive and well. Malusha will call the whole village here at sunrise and they shall know that your magic is not magic but lies, told to keep for yourself what you stole from me while I was away. Who will believe what you say? Who will ever believe anything you say again? What will be the worth of words of a witch doctor whose juju is as monkey chatter?"

Mganga took a step forward and Gekuna leveled the knife at his heart. "I am not sleeping now, as when you brought the myamba to my bed. And I have not my back to you, as when you fastened the scorpion to my spear. Take one more step, Mganga!"

The witch doctor stood motionless, the knife an inch from his heaving chest.

"I have another picture of you in my mind," Gekuna said. "I see the famous witch doctor, stripped of his headdress and his fetishes, helping the women to break sticks for the fires, washing the cook-pots—"

"That you will never see!" Mganga said in a loud voice. He ducked below Gekuna's knife and seized the poisoned gourd.

"Your magic too, will fail," he said as he drank.



# DIAMONDS ARE DEATH

By J. C. HUDSON

**The Code of the Bush says "lend a helping hand."**

**Marvin Stuart, the wily outcast, had ten greedy fingers at the ready when the diamond-laden prospector stepped into his hut.**

**T**HE sun colored the sky a fiery red, like hot metal. It was as though Sol, master of this jungle land, was reluctant to give way to the forces of night, and wanted to make one last display of might. He did succeed in making the jungle silhouette blacker than he did during the day, but that was all. And as the sky grew darker the creatures who prowl by night and hide by day began to make themselves known.

From somewhere out of that inky blackness of jungle, almost subdued by the sounds of nature, came the pulsing beat of a drum. It was a soft beating like that of a heart, but yet it had in its sound something unreal, something supernatural. It was the heartbeat of something that lurked in the jungle that no man could see, yet some with their spirits attuned, could feel.

Marvin Stuart was one of those who had no feeling for drums; no feeling to understand them, that is. His only feeling toward them was hate. He would have gladly piled all the drums in Africa in one spot and enjoyed a big fire. He had feeling for the supernatural, but only in so far as it concerned good and bad luck, omens, signs and what not, for he was a gambler. And as things stood he was a gambler down on his luck; a gambler who had played for high stakes and lost. He knew now, as he stood brooding over his fifth or sixth drink (he had lost count) that he had been a sucker.

There had been a chance to make something of himself eventually had he stuck to the brokerage, but not now. Get rich quick with rubber; so he sank everything into this rubber plantation only to find that it was a dud. His money gone, and stranded in the middle of the jungle, he was bitter to say the least. He knew that he must get out somehow, or with the combination of drink, heat, and drums, go crazy. The first six

months hadn't been too bad but as the realization dawned on him that this rubber deal was never going to pay off, the jungle turned slowly but surely into a green hell.

He brooded now as he turned the half-filled glass slowly in his thin hand. Finally lifting the glass, and tilting his head back so that the light on his thin haggard face made him look mad, he gulped down the last of the drink. The drums grew louder, it seemed to Marvin. He stared with a bitter hatred at the jungle from whence the sound came, mentally challenging the black monster, the jungle, to try and destroy him. As it was the monster was trying to climb the stockade fence, to creep in on him, to bury him.

He was occupied with these thoughts and the throbbing drums when a white man walked through the gate of the stockade. Marvin wasn't surprised. Kenya had its share of bearded, fanatic prospectors driven crazy by the sun and the fruitless effort of their search. He was always treating one of them to a free meal. As this man drew near Marvin could see that he was not much different than the rest. His big brimmed hat was crushed down on his head and his clothes were torn and tattered. He carried a small pack high on his back from which dangled a couple of pots and a frying pan. And slung over his right shoulder was a carbine. He turned now and started up the white stone path that led directly to the bungalow, and Marvin could see that his face was wreathed in a square, black beard. He paused when he reached the veranda, placed his foot on the bottom step, and exhaling as though to catch a second wind, he smiled and spoke.

"Good evening, friend."

It was a soft voice that came from between two rows of sparkling white teeth,





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and two thin, bloodless lips that smiled from behind the beard as he spoke.

Marvin looked at the man with an air of disgust.

"I know. You would like me to stake you to a meal and let you sleep here for the night, and you'll pay me when you make your strike."

The stranger smiled and spoke again.

"I take it this is a common ritual with you?"

"It is."

"Well, this time it's going to be different.

I have made my stake and you will be paid for a meal and a place to put my bedroll."

The man is obviously lying, Marvin thought, but at least he'll be company for dinner.

"Come in," Marvin said.

THE interior of the bungalow was simple. A living room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. At one time it had been a clean, comfortable little home, but Marvin's discouragement had caused him to neglect it as well as himself.



As they entered the bungalow the prospector removed his pack and gun and put them in the corner, throwing his hat on top of them. Marvin called toward the kitchen:

"Shanamia."

In a matter of seconds a small dhoti-clad figure of an Indian stood in the kitchen door.

"Yes, Sahib?"

"There will be a guest for dinner."

Shanamia gave a quick little bow.

"Yes, Sahib."

Marvin lit a cigarette, then impolitely offered the pack to the bearded stranger.

"Cigarette?"

"Very much. I haven't had a cigarette in three months and I've forgotten what a tailor-made tastes like."

Marvin settled himself in a wicker chair near the window while the prospector sprawled in the wicker opposite him. Marvin noticed how greedily he dragged on the cigarette, stopping after every puff to look at it.

"So you made your strike?" Marvin asked.

"Yes, sir, and one of the best ever made in this part of the country. I've seen some that have been made but none of them ever matched this. I've got a bag full of stones I'm taking in to have assayed."

"Aren't you afraid someone will rob you?"

"Diamonds don't mean much to these bush natives and I think I can tell a bad character among white men when I see one."

"Still I suppose there is no other way to get the stones assayed but to carry them on your person?"

"That's the only way. But I've got protection," he added, and he opened his shirt front to reveal a .38 hanging under his left arm in a shoulder holster.

Shanamia interrupted the conversation with the quiet clink of dishes as he set table. Both men watched him in silence for some minutes. The drums were growing louder now, or at least Marvin thought that they were. Perhaps there were more of them; other villages joining in. The prospector noticed this too because he turned to Marvin and said:

"Your local Bantu village must be getting help from their neighbors."

"Help for what?" Marvin asked.

"Help to run down the evil spirit; that's what they're playing for, you know."

"Can you read drums?" Marvin asked.

"Not always, but I happened to come by that village just the other side of the river and the chief was telling me that there were evil spirits near by, and they were trying to frighten them away."

For once Marvin seemed interested in the drums.

"How do they know when the evil spirit is frightened away?"

"The witch doctor always seems to know. Sometimes it's actually a person," he continued.

"Come now, don't tell me witch doctors can sense evil spirits in the air?"

"I wouldn't believe it myself if I hadn't seen it. But that's one of the unexplainable things about the jungle; things that a white man can't understand because his mind works differently."

Marvin said nothing, but he knew that this man had been out in the bush too long. Or perhaps his strike had been too long in coming.

After the meal, which they ate in silence, Marvin brought out his cigarettes and they smoked and talked. When the conversation had run out Marvin felt the need of a stimulant so he ordered Shanamia to bring in his last bottle of whiskey and two glasses. If this fellow has stones, Marvin thought, I'll get more from him drunk than he would give me sober.

The prospector looked surprised, but not at all displeased when the bottle was put on the table.

The prospector studied the drink for a while, not suspiciously, but with anticipation. Then with a quick motion poured the whiskey down his throat. He grimaced, shuddered and finally smiled.

"Not having the money for some time to indulge in whiskey I find that I must acquire a taste for it all over again. Speaking of money, I said when I came here that I was going to pay you, and that's just what I'm going to do before I forget it."

He got up and went to his pack lying in the corner, and although partially hiding his actions with his body, Marvin saw him take from his pack a box about the size of a shoe box. And as he did so he began to



talk to himself.

"Don't excite yourself now, it's only me," the prospector said, speaking to the box he held close in front of him. After several minutes of exertion he came back to the table holding a small leather bag.

"My strike," he said as he threw the bag on the table.

Marvin's mind wasn't on the stones right then. He was curious to see if this fellow was really crazy.

"Who was it you were speaking to when you opened that box?" The prospector winked. "A young fella I picked up in the jungle to guard my stones."

Marvin nodded understandingly. "Oh, I see." Stark raving mad, Marvin thought. If I don't get rid of him pretty soon I'll be as crazy as he is. A guard in a shoe box!

The prospector emptied the contents of the bag out on the table; the rough stones sparkled under the yellow light of the lamp. Marvin had seen diamonds before, knew a good strike when he saw one, but this was fabulous. The drums seemed to crescendo, and the light that the diamonds sent out to Marvin's eyes came in waves that were in time with the beat of the drums. The prospector ran his hand through the stones, his fingers finally picking up two small ones.

"There you are."

Marvin held the stones in the palm of his hand. In his most sarcastic manner he said, "Are you sure you can spare these?"

The pointed sarcasm went unnoticed.

"Nothing is too good for the man who gives me food and shelter."

WITH great deliberation he put the stones back in the bag and the bag back in the shoe box, talking all the while to his imaginary guard. He tried to turn and get up at the same time but fell to his knees. He broke into a fit of laughter.

"I'm not really crazy, it's just that I'm not used to whiskey."

"Well, there's nothing like a good stiff drink to help you get used to it," Marvin said. Then he pushed another drink across the table, and the pack of cigarettes, which was now almost empty. Marvin studied the man across the table, and the corner of the shoe box sticking unceremoniously out of the knapsack. This was clearly a job for a

gambler, for the big point was not in getting the stones, but in getting them out of the country. The customs officials were suspicious of everyone. Getting the stones might involve some dirty work, but Marvin knew that the combination of desperation, bitterness, the jungle, and the drums would make the dirty work come easy. It would take three days to get out of the country by the quickest means, which only meant that he would have to have some way of keeping the prospector from reaching the authorities before then. A runner could reach Nairobi in two days at the very least.

The prospector noticed Marvin's studious expression and laughed.

"You can't get those diamonds so don't overtax your brain thinking about it." As though he were reading Marvin's mind.

Marvin smiled feebly. "Farthest from my mind. How could I steal the stones with your guard in the box?"

"Yes, don't forget the guard. He's so faithful and efficient."

Both men laughed, Marvin falsely at first, but as the idea struck him, insanely. The man had read his thoughts. The prospector guffawed noisily. Perhaps for the same reason, Marvin thought.

When the whiskey was finished, and the prospector's head was bobbing and jerking in the motions of a man fighting sleep, Marvin suggested they both retire. The prospector gave no response, but slumped forward, his head hitting the table with a thud. Suddenly the drums occupied the silence left by the two men. Thumping, throbbing drums that beat in time with Marvin's own heart, and seemed to shake his whole body. He grabbed the prospector under the arms, and felt the hard lump of the .38. He withdrew his hands, and slowly and carefully opened the sleeping man's shirt front. The prospector stirred, and Marvin quickly withdrew the gun and stepped back from the slumped figure. The prospector made several attempts to arouse himself, but the effects of the whiskey and the long trek through the jungle were too much for him. He slumped motionless on the table.

Marvin again put his hands under the prospector's arms and pulled him into the bedroom. He threw him on the bed. Then he went to his own room and put the gun



in the chest of drawers. He stopped for a minute to collect his thoughts. He knew he was moving around like a man sleep walking, and he broke out in a sweat when he realized that the motive in his subconscious mind was murder. To kill a man in self-defense is one thing, but to kill a man in cold blood, in his sleep . . . Marvin shuddered. Well, the diamonds would make up for that when he got back to London.

He went to the back door and called into the night. "Shanamia." The drums took over the silence left by his voice.

MARVIN stared out into the blackness toward the dim form of Shanamia's little white hut for some minutes before he realized that he had a stroke of gambler's luck. He wouldn't have to leave word for the quiet Indian to go to Nairobi first thing in the morning; Shanamia had left earlier in the evening for his monthly visit. Marvin whistled softly to himself. It had been a long time since he had had that kind of luck. Maybe it was the drums, or maybe the stones were lucky. Marvin wasn't sure, but whatever it was, luck was with him.

He turned from the jungle night to the dim light of the bungalow, walking slowly to his room. It was as though his mind was sitting on a hair line, the line that divided decent thought from the gross deed he was about to commit, and he was afraid that any jarring motion might bring him back over that line to decency.

He opened the drawer where he had put the gun, checked it and found every chamber loaded. He walked slowly to the doorway of the other bedroom, and stood there staring into the darkness, trying to discern the prospector's form lying on the bed. He could see nothing in the dark, but heavy breathing directed him to his target. His throat was dry, his palms wet, and every muscle in his body was wound as tight as a spring. He felt the little streams of sweat pouring down from his forehead into his eyes then down his cheeks. It was as though that being on the decent side of that imaginary line was weeping silently in anticipation of its own death.

Marvin walked into the dark room and stood over the sleeping prospector. It was

easy to see the form thrown carelessly on the bed now for his eyes were getting used to the darkness. He listened for a moment to the slow, heavy breathing of the man on the bed; to his own heart beating away up in his throat, beating hard as though it were about to burst; to the drums, which rose to such a crescendo now that the sound seemed to roll over him like giant waves. He lifted the gun and almost without aiming pulled the trigger. A roar filled the room, and his hand jumped, unprepared for the gun's recoil. Everything seemed quiet now, even the drums. One sound was silenced forever—the slow heavy breathing.

Marvin dropped the gun on the floor, went back into the living room, and straight to the prospector's knapsack. The box containing the diamonds was just like the drunken prospector had left it. Marvin's hands shook as he untied the clumsy knot left by the prospector. He quickly lifted the lid, and as he did so a quick moving form struck him in the hand, dropped to the floor and recoiled for another attack.

As quick as he could recover his senses Marvin made a dive for the gun. The snake struck with deadly accuracy just as he reached it; it struck him in the forearm a little above the first bite. Marvin opened fire. After writhing in agony a few seconds the snake lay still.

The night seemed very still after the noise of the gun. Even the drums had become more quiet. Slowly regaining his senses Marvin looked at the two wounds the snake had made; four tiny holes, but no blood. His heart was pounding against his ribs, and he watched in horror as his hand and arm began to swell. He forced his eyes to look at the snake and recognized it instantly as the deadly swamp adder. His head began to spin and his stomach turned a flip. He smiled as the thought stuck in his head "what a way to die, with a fortune in diamonds in my hands." He picked up the bag of stones and with some effort emptied it into his swollen hand. They made a neat little pile, spilled over, ran between his fingers, and lay sparkling on the floor. The drums had stopped. Marvin toppled from his kneeling position, falling face downward among the scattered gems.





# AMAZON QUEEN OF OPHIR

By E. RICKARD ZOAR

Riah laughed that night; a man and  
his wife in the jungle of no return  
. . . and their only weapon a  
string of beads.

**M**IKE THOMPSON and his native  
makut, Loku, stumbled away from  
the burning airplane into the pro-  
tection of the wet jungle trees. Bright orange  
flames leaped almost to the height of the  
trees and crackled and hissed as they touched  
the wet leaves and foliage. The air was



heavy with the banana-scent of burning dope. All around them in the trees the monkeys had set up a frightened chattering and screeching.

Thompson stood on wide-spread feet, his jaw bunched and his silver colored hair glinting in the hot glare of the fire. He was a tall man with level gray eyes and a crop of silver-white hair that made him look ten years older than his twenty-eight.

Loku stepped back deeper in the shelter of the trees, sweat glistening on his dark body. His eyes were worried. "Is bad, Mist Thompson," he said. "I your makut for many round moons, and this first time I ever see you in jungle without fire-stick!"

Thompson rubbed his hand over the flat of his thigh where the .45 automatic was accustomed to ride, and his mouth tightened. He didn't even have a knife.

"There's nothing we can do about it now," he said stiffly. He turned his back on the fire and motioned Loku towards the forest of the Congo. "Gun or not, I've got to get to my wife!"

Loku hesitated, grooves of worry standing out sharply in his forehead, and then he was turning obediently, leading the way. He wore the trousers of the white man but his dark chest was bare. In his right hand he carried his ganto, a knife two and a half feet long with a single sharp edge.

As he pushed his way through the leafy, knee-high foliage, Loku fondled a string of colored beads that hung from his neck. They had been given him by his wife on his wedding day and had it not been for them, he surely would have been devoured by the evil one by this time. Abruptly he stopped and faced Thompson.

"**M**IST THOMPSON, you no got weapon. You take charm beads my Gnuah make for me and wear them. No evil harm you then, even without weapon!"

Thompson's mouth tightened impatiently. Loku and his damned superstition! "Thanks," he said drily, "but you keep them yourself, Loku. We'll need a damn sight more than a string of beads to get Laurene away from the Tugonda tribe!"

But Loku shook his head patiently and held the beads out in his brown palm. "We fly from Nairobi and find girl's bird-plane

where it crash in Tugonda jungle because beads help us. We crash in jungle but no get hurt because beads save us." He pointed up at the murky sky, barely visible between the tops of the trees. "Sun almost gone behind jungle, soon it be dark and the Tugonda can creep up on us while we no see. You take beads and Tugonda no harm you. You no need weapon."

Thompson chafed irritably. "All right, Loku." He took the beads in his fist and rammed them in his pocket. "But we haven't the time to stand around and talk! Are you sure you can find the trail to the Tugonda village?"

Loku nodded, his eyes carefully averted. "Me find village, Mist Thompson, you no worry."

But Thompson was worried. He had left his wife in Loanda and flown to Nairobi with Loku to pick up a hunting safari they were to guide. Laurene, his bride of a month, had begged to go along and he had refused.

But the girl had an adventurous spirit of her own. She had held a commercial pilot's license for years and as soon as Thompson and Loku left, she had taken off after them. When he reached Nairobi, Thompson heard about it. He would never forget the look on the faces of the chief of the region police and the registrar.

"She developed engine trouble somewhere over the southern region of the Congo," the registrar had told Thompson, "and the last we heard from her radio was that she was preparing for a crash landing."

Thompson's face paled at the news. "Could you get a fix from her radio?"

The registrar nodded and pointed to a wall map. "They've had ships searching this area for the last half hour." His finger traced a circle around a colored area on the map. "She must be very near the Congo river—"

Thompson, watching the area his finger pointed out, had sucked in his breath sharply. "That's almost in the heart of the Tugonda territory!" The fear in him was suddenly acute.

The registrar nodded, sympathy in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Thompson, but for God sakes she never should have started off



alone! Even if we should locate her. . . ."

Thompson swung away from him white-lipped. "I'll find her myself," he said tightly, "and if those devils have done anything to her—"

The registrar had watched him leave, compassion in his eyes. "Pray God you don't find her!" he had whispered softly under his breath.

And now, his own ship a burning mess in the jungle, Mike Thompson was going after his wife—and without even a gun. As they moved deeper into the trees, the jungle grew thicker and Loku had to hack out a path through heavy vines and branches.

Thompson followed, shoving the branches impatiently away from his face, feeling more and more helpless without his gun. But they had been lucky to survive the crash, he reflected, and it was his own fault that he had not had the automatic strapped to his waist. It had gone up in flames with the ship.

Sharp edges of the branches Loku had cut dragged Thompson's face and he cursed. He dug in his shirt pocket for a cigarette. All he had with him was the cigarettes, a cigarette lighter and a small can of lighter fluid. But they would need more than that to get back to Nairobi alive. A man in the jungle without a weapon couldn't last long.

Loku had stopped hacking and was holding up his hand. He said, "This trail, Mist Thompson. Is need for much quiet now, if Tugonda have not already seen us."

Thompson nodded. The sun was gone, and under the trees the jungle was darkening. "We wouldn't have much of a chance if we got there in broad daylight anyway."

Loku's face was serious. "We not have much chance even in darkness without beads."

Thompson let out an exasperated breath. "Beads be damned! Let's get going."

The trail was a narrow strip about the width of two feet that angled northward through the underbrush toward the banks of the Congo river.

"Tugonda village is on this side of river," Loku told him as they jogged along at a half-trot. "Is speak Bantu dialect I teach you many round moons ago."

Thompson said, "As long as we know their dialect maybe we can make some kind

of a bargain to get Laurene away from them."

Loku grunted. "No make bargain with Tugonda! Sometimes they kill, sometimes they take man alive for torture and eat, but no make bargain!"

THOMPSON felt a chill fear touch him. "We've got to find her alive. I can figure some way to get her away from them if it isn't too late."

Loku kept his eyes straight ahead of him. "Mist Thompson," he said softly, "ever since I your makut I never tell you lie. I tell you truth now. If beads good to us, we no find girl alive. Is better she be dead than be alive in hands of Tugonda!"

Thompson felt sweat in the palms of his hands. "What do you mean by that?" His voice was harsh.

Loku's face was unreadable in the darkness. "Once, many round moons ago, Loku see native after Tugonda get through with him." He shot a quick glance at the white man. "Is many things worse than death, Mist Thompson. Tugonda know that! Is better to die quick and merciful than be taken alive by them!"

"Shut up!" Thompson's voice quivered. There was a sudden picture in his mind of his wife being taken by the cannibal Tugonda. It wasn't pretty.

Loku had suddenly slowed to a walk and motioned Thompson to do the same. "Is maybe one hour away from village by your clock. Is best we go slow and quiet, for even now we may be watched."

Thompson cursed under his breath. "The hell with going so slow, we haven't the time—" He cut it off, seeing Loku had come to a dead stand-still.

"What's the matter now?"

Loku motioned for him to be silent. He was standing poised on his toes, the long bladed ganto held in readiness. Thompson heard it then, the soft beating of a native tree-drum in the distance.

"Is too late, Mist Thompson!" Loku's voice trembled. "Already we have been seen, and even now we are watched!" He slid down on his knees. "Is better we get down and off trail until it is darker. There is still enough light for them to shoot their darts at us!"



Thompson dropped quickly beside Loku and together they began edging away from the trail back into the jungle. All around them there was a silence. Not even the chatter of the monkeys that Thompson was so accustomed to hearing, broke the silence, and the damp jungle air seemed to press down against them. Far in the distance they could still hear the soft beat of the drum in a rapid one-two cadence.

Thompson slid back under the protection of a wide frond and wiped the sweat away from his face with his hand. Loku crouched beside him and he could hear the makut's terse, uneven breathing.

Thompson stiffened at the sudden sound of a jungle bird chirruping loudly in the stillness, and then overhead, the monkeys came alive and began screeching angrily.

Loku's arms were rigid, the knife gripped tight in his hand. Thompson could see nothing in the deep gloom but he heard a soft swish in the air past him.

"Mist Thompson—" Loku's words ended in a soft grunt. He toppled silently on his back.

Thompson cursed and jumped to his side. "Loku! What . . ." And then he saw the short, feathered dart where it had caught Loku high in the chest. He jerked the dart free and saw that there was little blood, only a tiny hole where the tip of the poisoned dart had entered the flesh.

He braced an arm under the shoulders of his makut and tried to lift him up. But Loku was a dead weight. His eyes fluttered open once and then he was gone.

Thompson fought down a sudden sickness. Loku had been a faithful servant and one of the closest friends he had ever known. He felt a sudden and sharp bitterness well up in him. The Tugonda were like jungle snakes. They struck from the darkness, quick and savage, without warning.

Cursing aloud, he reached down and jerked the ganto out of Loku's lifeless fingers and vaulted out on the trail. It was so dark now that he could hardly see five feet in front of him. His knuckles stood out whitely around the handle of the knife and his face was a rigid triangle. He had the sudden premonition that his quest had been a foolish one, that Laurene had long since been killed by the black men who

struck unseen from the jungle depths.

He stood there on wide-spread legs, eyes burning at the darkness around him, feeling helpless, rage running riot through him. He didn't know how long he stood there, not seeing or hearing anything, wondering how long it would last, when his temper finally snapped.

HE raised his voice suddenly: "Come out here and get me! Come out in the open and fight like men!"

There was no answer but the dying echo of his own voice. He switched to the native dialect. "Patilia, yellow swine of the jungle! Reach out in the open—"

He saw them then. They stepped out of the jungle soundlessly and formed a circle around him. There was white war-paint streaked over their faces and in rings around their heads. They stood on naked feet, long hollow rods that were their blow guns, held next to them. They were tall and broad, the biggest of any natives he had ever seen.

He stood waiting an instant, his fingers wound around the knife like tight wire, every nerve in his body raw with fear. Then he was starting toward them. With luck he could get one or two before he went down; he wondered what the poison sting of the little dart would feel like. . . .

But as Thompson moved at them, one who seemed to be chieftain stepped out from the circle and raised his hand.

"Husah! How is it you speak our dialect, white-haired kashai?"

Thompson stopped, his face pale in the darkness. There was only one thing in his mind now, only one thing that could keep him from committing suicide by hurtling himself at them.

"What have you done with the white Gnuah you seized only this morning?"

Surprise touched the chieftain's broad face. "You have not been to our village and already you speak of the white Gnuah?" He stepped closer, his eyes straining in the darkness. The warriors drew around him in a tighter circle and the chieftain began walking around Thompson slowly, surveying him with curious eyes.

Thompson stood on stiff, wooden legs, still holding the knife, eyes narrowed.

The Tugonda chieftain stepped back and



motioned the half-dozen warriors in closer. "Why do you inquire for the white Gnuah? Why is it you seek her, and how did you know we had taken her?"

Thompson's voice was tense with emotion. "I have come to bring her back with me to our people. What harm have you done her?" He held his breath waiting for that answer.

The Tugonda chief turned to his warriors. "You have heard him speak, men of Tugonda. The words of the high priest Satalla are in my mind. For many round moons now he has been telling us of the descendant of Riah who occasionally walks the earth among us and keeps the rain on our crops. Look at the kashai! He is white. His hair is the silver of the sun and you have heard him speak our dialect fluently. You know that I would not let Satalla sacrifice the white Gnuah for fear she might be of Riah, and Satalla himself said that if she were our goddess, within one day there would appear the golden haired one from the sun to bring her back. Perhaps even now we face him who is of Riah!"

There was a sudden and loud muttering as the natives fell back uncertainly. The chief raised his arms. "Warriors! If this is truly him of Riah, there will be blood on the face of the sun if we let harm touch him!" He motioned to two of the warriors. "Guard him well and we will bring him safely to our village." He turned to the white man. "If you are really descendant of Riah, this will indeed be a great night for me and my people."

Thompson stared as two of the warriors came upon either side of him and the chief beckoned him to follow. This was crazy. The fools thought he was a god.

IT was a long hour before they came to the edge of the Tugonda village. By the time the first of the huts came into view there was a bright full moon overhead, and the wattle native homes, shaped like over-grown beehives, were bathed in a silver, ethereal light.

The main section of the village was grouped around a clearing that had been hacked out of the jungle, a safe distance from the banks of the Congo.

As they moved into the center of the

village the chief ran ahead of them to the hut of the mowambo, the high priest Satalla. Thompson kept his eyes sharpened for any traces of his wife but he saw nothing.

The Tugonda warriors brought him to an empty hut at the far end of the village and motioned him inside. They made no move to take the ganto away from him. They put a guard around the hut and left him alone on the inside.

He waited for what he judged to be a half hour before the chief came into the hut after him and brought him outside. He saw that the whole village had been aroused. There was a fire burning brightly in the center of the clearing and the sharp odor of wood smoke touched his nostrils. The warriors and their wives had gathered in small groups, their voices excitedly discussing the arrival of the white-haired kashai.

Thompson was led out to the fire. His appearance brought a sudden lull in the voices and a shuffling of feet as the warriors and their women crowded close around the fire to get a better look at this silver-haired descendant of Riah.

Thompson scanned their ranks, searching for a glimpse of his wife.

Satalla, the high priest, pushed his way through the warriors to the white man, voicing loud complaints at having his night sleep interrupted.

There was a spotted animal-hide robe thrown over his huge shoulders and he began a careful scrutiny of the white man out of small black eyes. He walked around him eyeing him from shoes to head.

At length Satalla faced Thompson, naked feet spaced wide, contempt in his face. He was a big native, a head taller than Thompson, with his black wooly hair shaved close and the livid triangle of the high priest branded on his forehead. His nose was flat and wide-nostriled over thick lips. His chest was broad and thickly muscled. Thompson had the fleeting thought that the high priest would be unbeatable in any hand to hand combat.

Satalla turned his leer on the chief. "Huntura! For this you have broken my night's sleep?"

The chieftain's wide face stiffened. "It was in my mind that this might indeed be the descendant of Riah of whom you have



told us so much lately," he said softly.

"Husah!" Satalla grunted. "This is nonsense!" He turned to the warriors. "Bring out the white Gnuah to the light of the fire!"

Thompson felt a surge of hope. At least she was still alive.

Huntura said, "The white kashai came down from the sky in a great bird, just as the white Gnuah did, and his bird landed in a great sheet of flames, yet he and his servant were untouched!"

The voices of the warriors around them rose in wonder at this. Surely none but the descendant of Riah himself could spring alive from the heat of fire!

"Nonsense, I tell you!" Satalla's voice was lifted over the others. "This outlander is of the same enemy race as the white Gnuah; the same race that seeks to conquer us!"

Thompson saw his wife then, and his face colored with anger when he saw what they had done. Loku's words came back to him with a rush: "Is better we no find her alive. . . ."

Her arms were bound securely with jungle vine and she came through the warriors half walking and half dragged by the two natives on either side of her. Her gaunted face was milk white and drawn with fear. Her clothes had been taken away from her and she wore the gray-brown skin of the kudu antelope drawn over one shoulder and tied at her waist.

He could see caked blood where the edges of the vine had cut into the soft flesh of her arms, and the livid marks on her thigh and legs where she had been burned by native fire brands. He uttered a low curse. The light, golden hair was dirt-smeared and swirled loosely around her shoulders. She was pushed roughly in front of the high priest Satalla.

"**L**AURENE!" He tried to get to her but the warriors gripped his arms and held him back.

When she saw him the girl's mouth opened in surprise and two spots of color flushed her cheeks. "Mike!" Her voice was weak. "Thank God you've come!"

Thompson pulled himself away from the warriors and ran to her. He began slicing

the vines away from her arms with the ganto. But he had not sliced through two strands before the warriors pulled him away and took the knife out of his hand.

"See this!" Huntura was pointing bright-eyed. "Here is more proof! When the white Gnuah was seized and brought here alive because we thought she was of Riah, you said yourself that if she was his descendant, before the end of one day, another would come to keep her from harm! See for yourself how he calls to her in a language we do not know and seeks to free her!"

Satalla's voice boomed over the voices of the warriors. "This is not so! Tugonda men, listen to me! You would take the word of Huntura over me who has been branded servant and priest of Riah himself? Look at the white Gnuah. If she was descendant of Riah, why should her flesh burn even the same as ours does when it is touched by fire?"

Huntura's dark face was grim. "Perhaps what you have done has angered Riah and caused him to send the white kashai! If this is so, even now the lives of all of our people are in great danger!"

An outburst of guttural voices greeted this, and Satalla held out his arms for silence. "Listen to me, men of Tugonda! If this silver-haired kashai be the offspring of Riah, let him prove it to us now! Let him create fire where there has never been fire, as it is written the true descendant of Riah can do!"

Satalla turned to the white man, the small eyes bright with cunning. "Show us, kashai! Let us see you make magic stronger than mine!" There was a roar of approval from the warriors as they pressed in closer.

There were bright beads of sweat on the back of Thompson's hands and his mouth felt suddenly dry. He had been a man who regarded all superstition as idiotic and he knew of no magic. It wouldn't take the Tugonda warriors long to find it out, and once they did. . . . A chill slid over his spine. He couldn't let them put their hands on Laurene again.

"Come then, kashai!" Satalla's voice mocked, "why do you hesitate? Let us see fire where there has never been fire!"

The words brought a sudden thought



flashing into Thompson's mind. His hand strayed to the can of lighter fluid in his pocket. It was idiotic. But it might work.

He tried to force the dryness out of his mouth as he addressed them in their own tongue. "I will show you magic, men of Tugonda. Magic that is mine alone through the power of Riah, and not even your high priest can duplicate it!" He moved to the warriors holding his wife. "The Gnuah," he pointed to her lashed arms, "must be freed. Riah's anger has already been provoked by her harsh treatment, and to continue it will mean death to you all!"

There was a moment's hesitation and then the two warriors jumped away from the girl and one of them handed Thompson the ganto they had taken away from him. He slashed her free quickly and began rubbing her arms to restore the circulation.

"Mike," she whispered frantically, "what are they going to do to us?"

"Don't talk," he said under his breath, "just try to act like a goddess, whatever the hell that would be." His hands shook as he rubbed her arms and turned to face Satalla.

"Bring me a gourd filled with water," he said.

Satalla gave the order but there was hate in his eyes. "You do not fool me, kashai," he growled, "no one can steal the loyalty of my people from me, and when I have proven to them that you lie, I will feast on your heart before this night is over!"

Laurene pressed close to Thompson. "I can't understand what he's saying, Mike. What are they going to do to us?"

His voice was tense. "They're superstitious idiots like all natives, and fear anything they don't understand." He explained what he had in mind briefly.

"But suppose it doesn't work?"

He said softly, "Don't even let yourself think of that."

A naked warrior brought a gourd filled with water and placed it at the white man's feet before the fire. Thompson motioned the others in closer and then turned to Satalla.

"Now, mowambo, hand me a fire stick and I will show you the magic of Riah!"

Satalla stepped to the fire and drew out a flaming stick. Thompson pointed

at the gourd. "Now, if your magic is great, Satalla, cast the fire from the stick on the water!"

The high priest stepped back, his eyes watching the white man shrewdly. "Even the child of a warrior knows that fire will not burn in water. What foolishness would you have us believe now?"

Thompson said, "Watch now, warriors! Your mowambo has admitted that he has not the power to make fire burn in water. I will show you proof of what you seek, I will cast fire where there has never been fire, as you have asked me to do!" He dropped to his knees and the warriors crowded around him, craning their necks to see.

Thompson's face was a tight mask. If it didn't work. . . . He reached into his pocket with his left hand and brought out the string of colored beads Loku had given him. He held up the beads in front of them and while their attention was on them he slipped the small can of light fluid out of his pocket.

Holding the little can cupped in the palm of his hand he managed to unscrew the cover. Dangling the beads in his left hand, he spilled the fluid over the edge of the gourd on the surface of the water. Still holding the beads, he moved quickly to his feet and slid the empty can of fluid back in his pocket.

He turned to Satalla. "And now, mowambo, put the fire stick in my hand!"

The high priest handed him the small torch and Thompson stooped over the gourd. The leaping flames reflected for a moment in the surface of the water. He raised his voice and spoke in the native dialect. "In the name of Riah, the brightest fire of them all, let there be fire on the surface of water!" He brought the flames down to the water's surface and held his breath.

There was a second of silence while they watched. No warrior breathed and Thompson could feel the tense hammering of his pulse. And then there was a sudden and loud pop in the silence as the fluid laying on the surface of the water burst into flames.

Thompson stepped away from the gourd uttering a thankful prayer and the warriors,



their eyes wide with fright jumped back from the fire.

"*Ungowa! Ungowa!* Fire burns in water;" Then they were moving in closer, staring with open mouths. As the flames flickered and died, an awed muttering rose from the warrior ranks. Surely none but he of Riah could do such a thing as this!

Satalla's eyes glittered with anger and jealousy. "It is a trick!" he cried. "A dupe of the white swine to trick us into believing he is sent by Riah!"

"Then duplicate it, mowambo!" Huntura's voice rose in a loud challenge. "You say your magic is greater than his, then show us, or forever hold your tongue!"

There was an approving shout from the warriors, and Satalla, frantic with anger, lunged at Thompson and snatched the torch out of his hand. The high priest stooped over the gourd and plunged the flames in the water. But the fluid had burned itself away and the fire hissed when it touched the water and blinked out.

The warriors' voices were suddenly raised in loud trumpeting. "See this!" Huntura shouted at them. "Is there need of stronger proof than this?"

Satalla roared: "Fools! Easily duped children!" His voice was lost in the shouts of the warriors and he was completely ignored.

Huntura spoke to Thompson over the noise of the warriors. "Is your only reason for being here to rescue the white Gnuah?"

"I come by order of Riah to bring the young goddess back to the land of the sun," the white man told him.

"And what of the pain the young Gnuah has suffered at the hands of the mowambo, Satalla? Are my people to be cursed because of this evil judgment?"

THE warriors quieted gradually and they stood silently, listening intently for the white man's answer.

Thompson said, "Perhaps there will be no curse on your people if you let the Gnuah and myself leave now, free of harm. But I would warn you to beware of your high priest, Satalla! His poor judgment may yet lead your people into great harm!"

Satalla pushed angrily through the natives and confronted Thompson. "This kashai lies, gullible Huntura! He is a white out-

lander swine and no god! If you let him go free he will only return with great numbers of his white brothers and conquer us and make slaves of us! The silver-haired one and the Gnuah should be burned in the circle of stones as a sacrifice to Riah and their hearts brought warm to me in my hut!"

"Enough, mowambo! You have shown yourself a poor priest for your people this night! The silver-haired one has proven himself a true descendant of Riah. You would bring death upon our people because of your jealousy of his powerful magic!"

There was a rising mutter of assent from the warriors. Satalla reached forward and jerked the knife from the white man's hand.

"If the kashai is of Riah, he will need no knife in the jungle!" He flung the ganto away from him over the warriors.

Huntura looked at Thompson quickly. "What do you say, kashai! Will you need a weapon?"

Thompson bit back a curse, a sudden tightness in his throat. A man in the jungle without a weapon might last through the night, or he might last five minutes. . . .

But he knew he couldn't ask for the knife.

"The descendant of Riah needs no weapon," he said through stiff lips.

Huntura moved his head in agreement and turned a baleful glare on the high priest. "You have very nearly brought the curse of the evil one on our people this night, mowambo. You are an evil one and not suited to be high priest of the Tugonda!" He turned to Thompson.

"Listen to me, kashai. In order to incur your blessing, we will this night dismiss Satalla from his duties as high priest to our tribe and banish him forever!"

Again the warriors' voices supported Huntura with mutterings of approval. Satalla stood with arms folded under his robe, his small eyes glaring at Thompson.

Huntura raised his arm and pointed. "Then go, kashai; return to the land of the sun and from his golden kingdom send down blessing to me and my people that we may live there with you in the land of plenty when our life here is done."

Satalla turned on Thompson and the girl. "You may leave this village alive, white swine," he muttered under his breath, "but once you are in the jungle we shall see if



Riah will protect you from my holy knife! My people will not believe you are gods when I bring your hearts back to them as proof!"

Laurene, leaning against her husband, looked up at him round-eyed. "What did he say, Mike?"

His face was hard-lined. "We're free," he said, "if we can get through the jungle."

"Mike! You mean they're going to let us go?"

He nodded. "But without any weapon." His face twisted sardonically. "Maybe we can use Loku's colored beads to protect us!"

It took them an hour to get back to the point in the jungle where Loku had met his death. Thompson knew Satalla would follow them and he knew he would have to fight the big black before they could get out of the jungle alive. Laurene was too weak to move fast, and Thompson, carrying her half the way, was out of breath and in no condition for battle with a man of Satalla's size.

HE held her up and forced her on. "We've got to hurry. If Satalla catches up to us. . . ."

The Tugonda high priest caught up with them just as they broke out of the jungle into a small grassy veld. The mowambo was alone.

He had discarded his robe and he advanced on them slowly, the short bladed knife glinting in the moonlight.

"Now, kashai, we shall see how much of a god you are!"

Thompson's mouth was a wire-stiff line in his face. The high priest would be skilled with the use of the knife, and he had no weapon at all, other than a string of beads.

As the high priest moved at him, Thompson slipped the beads out of his pocket and opened the knotted ends.

Satalla lunged suddenly, knife moving in a vicious swipe toward the white man's stomach. Thompson, moving quickly, slid out of the way and the blade glanced his skin, just enough to draw blood. For an instant Satalla was off balance and Thompson vaulted inside his arms and looped the bead string around his neck.

The beads were as hard as small stones, and he held the ends in his hand and twisted until they began to dig into Satalla's throat and chop off his wind.

But the big native had survived many jungle battles, and with a quick movement he caught his heel behind Thompson and they went down in the coarse jungle grass with Satalla on top.

Thompson saw him raise the knife. He still had the beads around the native's neck and he twisted desperately and tried to kick the heavier man off him. But he was pinned helplessly. He put every bit of pressure he had on twisting the bead string, and when the blade was halfway down he managed to wrench to one side so that it cut into the high part of his shoulder instead of his chest.

Satalla had every pound of his weight behind the knife thrust. The blade sank into Thompson's shoulder up to the handle. His head whirled and he tried to fight off the sick dizziness that rushed over him.

Satalla jerked the blade free. Thompson could feel consciousness fading. There was a black curtain closing around him.

And then Laurene screamed. She stood with fists clenched, eyes fastened to the knife in Satalla's raised hand.

Thompson never knew what it was that kept the life in his body those last few seconds. It might have been his wife's piercing scream that cut into his ears and jerked his eyes open and kept his mind from floating into blackness. He remembered the beads clamped around Satalla's neck, and somehow he remembered to twist.

He used both hands, pouring all the strength he had in the final twist. Satalla's breath was cut completely off. His eyes bugged and then he had dropped the knife and was trying to tear the pressure away from his throat with his hands.

No man who ever knew Mike Thompson would have called him superstitious, and yet when he staggered into the white settlement on the edge of Lake Tanganyika with his wife, his right fist was clenched around a string of colored native beads. And for years after that, no one but his wife understood why the skeptic Thompson wore a string of colored beads. . . .



# The Seven from Zanzibar

By J. G. WILSON

**The blood-dipped treasure of Ubangi-Shari lured them—Steve Gurney, professional hunter; Le Clerc, the avaricious Frenchman; his beautiful, flirtatious wife, Elsa . . . and four others whose powerful greed for the jeweled cache overrode their deep fears of black African terrors.**

**T**HE worst fate that can befall a white man in Africa had finally overtaken Steve Gurney. He was stone broke. He had been run out of the Belgian Congo on a trumped-up charge of ivory poaching. His license had been lifted and he had been forever forbidden to operate as a professional hunter in the territory again. Steve had suspected Vliet and Naame, two Belgian hunters, of rigging the charges, but there had been nothing he could prove.

The French had been cooperative in issuing him credentials. But the Congo wasn't Kenya-Uganda and business hadn't come his way at first. When it did, it only made matters worse. Steve had hung around N'Baiti spending his money and had finally moved up to Maripiri to meet a party of rich American sportsmen. The deal fell through at the last minute, however, when two in the party came down with black-water fever. The Americans beat a hasty retreat to the coast, leaving Steve with just a few hundred francs in his pocket.

Now he was still in the squalid, sweltering, mud-and-wattle and sheet-iron village of Maripiri on the north reaches of the Kuango in the sprawling upper part of the Congo basin. His last franc note was gone and his future looked as black as a jungle night.

The night Steve met Le Clerc, the one-time professor from Sorbonne, he was moodily watching a card game on the verandah of the resthouse provided by one of the Grandes Campagnes for their planters passing up and down the river and stopping off in Maripiri. Three rather sloppily dressed French planters and a man named Hawkins were boredly playing poker for medium stakes. Hawkins was a bandy-legged little

Englishman who made a living buying wild rubber from the natives.

The slap of the cards on the table, the faint hiss of the gasoline lantern suspended from the ceiling and the whirr of night-flying insects as they beat their wings against the screening, rasped on Steve's nerves. The everlasting muggy heat and the faint throb of a distant jungle drum weren't helping matters, either. This was the first night Steve hadn't been invited to take a hand in the game. They knew he was broke, damn them. Another day or two and he would be living off the bush, a grim prospect indeed, deep in the Congo.

With a curse, the little cockney threw his cards down, scraped back his rattan chair and came over to Steve who was pretending to be interested in the slow progress of a huge black beetle as it laboriously climbed the laced bamboo screen that separated the verandah from the resthouse proper.

"Of all the rotten luck," the Englishman complained bitterly. "Three aces and 'e tops me with four bloody queens!"

He sat down next to Steve and peered at him keenly. "'Ow, Yank, wot's the trouble now? You look gloomy enough to cut your own throat. Bit down on your luck, maybe?"

Steve lost interest in the beetle but kept a scowl on his face. In Africa it never paid to let your guard down. A white man down on his luck was the object of scorn from native and white alike. "I'm expecting to take a party out in a very few days," he said.

The Englishman chuckled. "That's a damn lie and you know it, Yank. However, I heard there's a man in the village looking for you. A bloke named Le Clerc. Just pulled in this evening, and 'e's a Frenchie



*"I have not seen it, O, white lord," spoke  
M'Noula, "but I have heard of it. Shembo,  
the devil-man in my village, has told me."*





by the sound of 'im. Say, speak of the devil! There 'e is now!"

A SMALL man in immaculate whites had just come up the steps and opened the bamboo door. His black leather boots were polished to a mirror brightness, and his little black Mephistophelian beard and moustache were as carefully trimmed as though he were ready for a stroll on a fashionable Paris boulevard. Glittering black eyes, high cheekbones and a thin-ridged nose gave his face a keen, hawk-like appearance. Hawkins winked and went back to the card game. The small man walked over to Steve.

"You are Gurney?" he asked abruptly.

Steve nodded. "You've been looking for me, I've heard. Sit down."

"I've been looking for a hunter all the way up from M'Baiti," the Frenchman grumbled, sitting down. "But none of the ones who offered their services suited me. Perhaps you are the man I'm looking for."

"I think I can handle anything you might have in mind," Steve said.

Black, shiny eyes regarded Steve steadily, as though their owner was weighing something important. Abruptly a small, well-manicured hand shot out. "My name is Gaston Le Clerc," the Frenchman said, shaking hands. "I've been told you know the country north of here rather well. Ubangi-Shari, I mean. If you do, you're my man."

"I know that country pretty well," Steve admitted. "I hunted up through there two years ago."

"Bien!" Le Clerc's small, sensitive fingers stroked his silky black beard and his restless black eyes regarded Steve searchingly once more. "Perhaps then you are familiar with a spot at the confluence of three rather small jungle streams." The Frenchman pitched his voice lower, so that it was for Steve's ears alone. "The place is notable because there are deep ravines there cut by the streams out of a curious limestone-type rock. The walls of the ravines are chalk white, I understand. The whole area is park-like, a wide, grassy savannah with a few large baobab trees growing here and there."

Steve said, "The three streams form a river that empties into the Kuango. And the gorges you speak of do have chalk white walls. I trailed an old bull up in there and

finished him off at the base of one of the white gorges. The spot is miles south of M'Bala and quite a ways west of here. There used to be a small village of Bangalas—Bantus—near there, but native villages shift all the time and it may be gone now."

For the first time Le Clerc smiled. "Bien, at last!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "I am in luck! I think we can talk business."

"What is it you want?"

"Elephant."

Steve frowned.

Instantly the Frenchman's manner became cold. "What is the matter? Are there no elephants in Ubangi-Shari?"

"Elephant, yes, plenty of them, but I don't think that's what you're after," Steve said. "Nobody picks out a pinprick on the map and says 'take me here, I want to shoot an elephant.' You've sounded out every white hunter, rubber buyer and trader between here and the coast until you finally had the luck to find the man who knew of this place you want to find. You have your own good reasons for wanting to go there, but it isn't elephant."

The Frenchman's voice was curiously soft, like a knife ripping through silk. "I am willing to pay you double your usual fee for a hunting safari," he said. "I refuse to bargain with you beyond that. That is my proposition, take it or leave it."

The half-cooked plantian Steve had filled his belly with that evening wasn't riding too well, reminding him that he was in no position to bargain. He grinned thinly. "All right, you've got yourself a hunter, Le Clerc."

They both arose.

"Remember, no questions, no arguments," Le Clerc warned, holding a finger stiffly pointing at Steve. "I am going up into Ubangi-Shari to shoot elephant. Is that understood?"

Steve checked a scowl. "Where are you staying? I'll want to check over your gear and make arrangements for porters."

Le Clerc informed Steve he was staying at a resthouse about a hundred yards away. "I'll want part of my fee in advance," Steve said crisply. Le Clerc promptly pulled out a wallet and handed over a fistful of crisp franc notes. The crackle of the notes be-



tween Steve's fingers made him feel better, but he wasn't exactly proud of himself. Under other circumstances he would have turned the waspish little Frenchman down.

The bamboo door opened and another man stepped onto the verandah. Steve instantly saw an altered expression on Le Clerc's dark, thin face. The Frenchman's eyes were obsidian-hard with hate. Then, slowly, Le Clerc whitened around the mouth until his face froze into a taut, hard mask of fear.

Steve turned around and saw a fattish, red-faced white man. He was wearing soiled whites and had a battered jungle topee on his head. His eyes were large, prominent and blue, and they played insolently over Steve and Le Clerc. A grin broke across the man's thick, sensuous lips. Then he turned around and left the resthouse, the bamboo door banging behind him.

"Who was that?" Steve asked of Le Clerc.

"I—I don't know," Le Clerc replied.

He passed a hand up over his sweating forehead, his fingers shaking noticeably. He was lying badly, but Steve elected to let it pass. They walked over to the resthouse where Le Clerc was staying. "I'll want to check your papers," Steve said.

"Come on up on the verandah of the resthouse," Le Clerc invited. "There's a light of sorts there. You can look over my papers and then inspect the gear. It's under a canvas around at the rear."

They went up creaking steps weakened by the everpresent white ants and onto the verandah. A palm oil lamp gave rich, warm light. Steve took the leather portfolio that Le Clerc offered him and swiftly scanned the official-looking papers. All seemed to be in order. There were permits for two elephants, passports, all officially stamped and approved. But Steve cocked a surprised eyebrow as he thumbed through them. Putting a finger on a graceful feminine signature, he looked questioningly at Le Clerc.

"My wife, Elsa," the Frenchman explained stiffly. "She is going with us."

THE screen door opened and closed softly. Steve looked up and grunted in surprise. A woman in a man's white shirt, twill breeches and scuffed bush boots was

standing there eyeing him boldly, her hands thrust deep in the front pockets of her breeches. Her hair was ash blonde and lay in thick coils on the nape of her neck, being smooth on her temples and on top. Her face was slightly angular because of strong cheekbones, but was very pretty and her eyes were a cool, misty blue.

"Oh, there you are, my dear," Le Clerc said, after a short pause that was made almost painful by the woman refusing to take her eyes off Steve. "Where have you been?"

"Enjoying myself without you around," the woman drawled insolently. "Who is this? Introduce me to him."

"This is Steve Gurney, the man D'Etoile told us about," Le Clerc said smoothly, though his smile was fixed and frosty. "He is going to take us up into Ubangi-Shari. Steve, this is my wife, Elsa."

Elsa extended her hand; her handclasp was warm and moist. "I'm so glad you're going," she said. "I was so afraid our—er—guide would turn out to be someone eaten up by fever and positively hideous with atabrine."

She gave Steve's hand an extra flirtatious squeeze before she let it go.

"This may be a pretty rough trip, Madame Le Clerc," Steve cautioned. "There will be a litter and porters for part of the way, but there will be times when you will be afoot."

"Call me Elsa," the woman said boldly. "Madame Le Clerc is much too formal."

Steve flushed.

"I can take the rigors of the bush, I assure you," Elsa said blithely. "I've always wanted to bag an elephant. That will be thrilling, don't you think? I know I'm going to enjoy every minute of the trip."

Steve shot a look at Le Clerc. The little Frenchman wasn't enjoying his wife's flirtation.

Steve hastily borrowed a flashlight and went around to the rear to check the gear, picking his way around a couple of sleeping goats.

He shot the flashlight beam toward a canvas-covered mound of gear, then, with a startled grunt, swung the beam up and over to his left. It splashed full in the face of the short, fattish man who had dis-



turbed Le Clerc earlier.

"What do you want?" Steve snapped.

The fat man grinned. "Mind moving that thing out of my eyes? Thanks, that's much better."

"What are you doing here?" Steve demanded.

"Must have lost my way in the dark," the fat man countered easily. "One hut looks like another at night, you know."

"You followed Le Clerc and me over here."

The fat man shrugged. "Are you taking Le Clerc up-country?"

Steve hesitated.

The man chuckled hoarsely. "I'm not being nosey. All I want to do is give you a word of advice. Be careful. This is the first time you've met Le Clerc, isn't it?"

"It is, yes," Steve admitted.

"Just as I thought. Well, don't trust the little blighter."

Steve moved closer to the fat man, keeping the flashlight averted in a way that gave him a partial view of the other man's features. A grin split the fat man's coarse face. "I don't know what kind of proposition Le Clerc laid in front of you, but be careful. He's rotten to the core and he's dangerous. By the way, what is his proposition?"

"He and his wife want to bag an elephant apiece."

The fat man's mouth pursed thoughtfully. "So that's his story!"

"That surprises you?"

"Knowing Le Clerc, no. But I'll lay odds ten to one it's a very special elephant he's after! It will have to come from a certain spot up in the Ubangi-Shari, won't it?"

The fat man chuckled again and stepped out of the fan of light thrown by the flashlight. Steve shot the beam around, but the fat man had disappeared behind a corner of the resthouse.

Steve made a sketchy check of Le Clerc's gear. There was equipment enough for a long safari, but he wasn't reassured. What was he getting into? What was Le Clerc after?

Elsa, too, was a worry. A calculating, predatory woman, very lovely and much younger than her husband.

Steve didn't see Elsa until the next morn-

ing. He was rechecking the gear more carefully when she greeted him with a sunny, "Good morning, Steve!"

The breeches she was wearing were the tailored kind that sell for a high price at Dakar. They outlined her lush curves and fitted her shapely calves and thighs like tights. Her blouse was equally tight, restraining her round, swelling breasts in a way that made Steve stare. Her jungle helmet was freshly whitened, her boots polished, and her grooming was immaculate, her makeup skillfully applied. Though the Congo sun was already hot, she was the counterpart of the white woman in the tropics usually seen only on cinema posters.

Steve was uncomfortable. Elsa had preened herself to impress him. That was bad enough, but why had she been so flagrant with it? Le Clerc joined them, and his hard stare told Steve that his wife's tactics weren't lost on the Frenchman.

"Do you think we can get underway this afternoon?" Le Clerc said stiffly.

"This is Africa," Steve explained patiently. "You can't hurry things here. It will take two days to get organized. I've got to line up porters, get the gear broken down to seventy-five pound loads, arrange a tipoye for your wife—it will all take time."

Le Clerc started to scowl, but Elsa's laugh tinkled mockingly. "I am sure Steve knows what he is doing, Gaston. You will do well to leave things in his hands."

Le Clerc took his wife by the hand. "No doubt you are right, my dear," he said grimly. "Come along now. There is work for us to do too."

As Elsa strolled away, she drawled over her shoulder. "I'll see you later, Steve."

## II

THE safari wound out of Maripiri early on the morning of the third day. The sun was just rising. The mist still clung to the surface of the river and the pepper birds were just beginning to stir in the trees. Le Clerc was at the head of the sinuous column of porters padding on the hard-packed jungle trail. Steve was at the rear, and Elsa was riding in a tipoye, a rattan chair slung on two stout fan-palm poles and borne on the shoulders of four husky



Bangala porters.

They made good time, and Steve, busy with the details of maintaining a steady, distance-eating pace, would have forgotten his worries had it not been for Elsa. The woman had intensified the campaign of coquetry she had begun so boldly in Maripiri. As the day wore on, Steve was able to evaluate Elsa and her tactics a little more objectively. It wasn't only that she was interested in the tall lean man her husband had hired to take them to a pin-prick on the map in Ubangi-Shari, though that certainly was part of it. But the greater part of it was a wanton desire to hurt and humiliate the man she married. It was a kind of hate that the blonde woman had for the Frenchman!

They made camp that night near a native village where there was manioc for the bearers, and again got an early start the next morning. The heat and humidity hung over them like a pall, but Le Clerc and especially Elsa seemed to bear up under it, the blonde woman retaining the cool composure of a queen as she rode in the lurching tipoye. She seemed to be aloof from the long winding line of sweating porters and it was only when she caught Steve's eye that her soft, provocatively formed mouth spread in a smile.

Several times Steve caught her watching her husband broodingly as Le Clerc strode along through the dank rain-jungle. What was going through her mind, he wondered? Whatever it was, it almost made him feel sorry for the Frenchman.

The changing of porters in the villages as they came to them was accomplished without a hitch, mainly because Steve had a way with the chiefs. The heat, the somber throb of tom-toms at night and the sound of prowling animals failed to dampen Elsa's bubbling enthusiasm when she was near Steve. As time went on, however, Le Clerc proved to be more and more uncommunicative, leaving the conversation almost entirely to his wife around the fires at night. Because of the leopards, the bearers threw up thorn and brush bomas each evening and the tents were pitched within the enclosure.

Steve learned that Elsa was originally from the Saar and that she had met Le Clerc in Zanzibar and had married him soon

thereafter. A bitterness crept into her voice whenever she spoke of her marriage, and a hard film crept over her eyes almost every time she gazed at her husband.

Up north of M'Bria, Le Clerc became more restless. He consulted a map more frequently. It was on the afternoon of the hottest day they had encountered that he broached what was on his mind. The column halted, and the bearers eased out from under their loads and sprawled on the dank trail. Overhead even the bird and animal life wasn't stirring in the tangled creepers and aerial roots.

Steve went forward to see why Le Clerc had halted the trek. As he went by the tipoye he felt the woven top to see if the bearers were keeping it wet. Elsa smiled at him. Steve kept on going, wiping the sweat out of his eyes. Le Clerc, his whites soaked with perspiration, was squatting beside the trail, his map spread out across his thigh.

With a thin finger Le Clerc pointed to a red X on the map. "This is approximately where we are headed for," he said. "As I see it, the trail begins to bear away from our destination about here, which is where we are now. Isn't it about time we left the regular village-to-village trails and headed into the jungle?"

Steve traced a curving course across the map with his finger. "If we cut away from the trail here we'll run into these swamps. Once in them we'd be mired for weeks. In fact, it would probably be impossible to get through." He moved his finger about an inch. "Another day's trek will put us here, with higher ground between us and where we want to go. Actually, we'll be closer to the gorges at this point. A map like this isn't too accurate when it comes to detail."

Le Clerc stared at Steve. He hadn't trimmed his beard since they had left Maripiri and it was getting ragged. He pawed at the flies around his eyes and said:

"Whatever you say. Just remember I'm keeping an eye on you."

Steve grinned thinly down at Le Clerc. "Do you think I would try to fool you? Why should I do that? Anyway, there is something I want to discuss with you. We're going to have to do something about the porters."



"The porters?" Le Clerc frowned quickly. "What about them?"

"They'll probably quit once they learn they have to portage through jungle," Steve explained. "This last lot we picked up aren't prize packages exactly. I've been sounding them out, and we'll be lucky to keep half a dozen of them once the going gets tough."

Le Clerc arose, bristling. "I'm paying you good money to take me up in here. Back in Maripiri you made no mention of porters quitting."

Steve shrugged. "It is one of those things that can't be foreseen. Anyway, let me finish. I think the best plan is to go on to the next village and round up another lot. It will mean losing three or four days, of course, but it will save time in the long run."

"No," Le Clerc said angrily. "Time is all-important to me now. Talk to them, offer them double pay, and tell them we'll not stand for any nonsense about quitting."

"It won't work," Steve warned.

"It will work," Le Clerc insisted. "I've traveled through jungle before. I know what I'm doing."

STEVE shrugged. "You're the boss. But just in case you're wrong, I think our best plan will be to get as close as we can to the gorges the first day and there set up a permanent camp. We can operate out of that and won't really need porters. Unless of course your future plans call for porters. I wouldn't know about that."

"There will be no need for porters once we get there," Le Clerc answered.

Steve started to turn away. Le Clerc's thin fingers fastened on Steve's sweaty arm. "One more thing, Gurney," he said through his teeth. "Try to be a little less fascinating to my wife, will you? I'm not blind, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"She hasn't taken her eyes off you since we left Maripiri."

Steve pulled his arm from Le Clerc's clutching fingers. "Perhaps. But it is none of my doing."

"I wouldn't know about that," Le Clerc spat. "Anyway, make an effort to be with her less. Be more formal with her. After

all, your status is employee, not consort!"

Steve turned on his heel and walked down the line of sprawled half naked bearers, speaking to them in their native Bantu dialect and getting them slowly on their feet again. He could feel Le Clerc's hot gaze following him.

Elsa stopped him. "What were you and Gaston quarreling about?" Her smile was mocking, challenging. "Was it me?"

Steve didn't answer her, and her tinkling laugh was like an electric spark in the charged air. Steve fully expected Le Clerc to come storming back from the head of the column, but nothing happened.

They left the trail the next day. As Steve had predicted, most of the porters had quit by noon, laying down their loads and slipping off into the jungle at every opportunity. About a dozen suddenly dropped their loads and bolted into the growth, and that stopped the column.

Steve strode through the clutter of gear, past Elsa.

"Trouble, Steve?" she said. "Are the boys quitting on us? Gaston should have listened to you and gone on to the next village and hired another bunch."

Steve went on up to where Le Clerc had slumped down on a bedroll. "I told you this would happen," he said.

Le Clerc shrugged tiredly. "We seem to have four or five boys left. I think I will follow your advice and set up a permanent camp at the first likely spot we come to."

Steve nodded. "We will have to abandon the tipoye. You'd better tell your wife she will walk from here on in."

"Very well." Le Clerc walked back down the trail. The tipoye was resting under a gigantic silk cotton tree. Le Clerc halted and said stiffly, "My dear, we are going to abandon the tipoye. You'll have to walk from now on, I'm afraid."

Elsa pouted. "I was afraid of that. Why didn't you listen to Steve when he told you the porters would quit?"

"It won't hurt you to walk. You've been carried every inch of the way so far."

"I'm afraid of snakes."

Le Clerc's face hardened. "You are just being difficult, my dear. I'd suggest you stop throwing a childish tantrum and co-operate with me. Here, I'll help you out."



Elsa arose. Ignoring her husband, she extended a slender hand toward Steve. She grasped his fingers and stepped out onto the ground. Her smile was dazzling. "Thank you so much, Steve," she said brightly. She had turned one shoulder toward Le Clerc.

Steve watched the Frenchman's dark eyes. He had seen hate before but nothing match the intensity that burned in those eyes.

"Was that necessary?" Le Clerc barked.

"Was what necessary?" Elsa said guilelessly.

"That little episode. I'm warning you, I can be goaded just so far."

"Your imagination is running away with you, Gaston. Isn't it, Steve?"

Steve hastily left to scout ahead for a camp-site.

THE rest of the day was taken up in making a camp about two miles further on at a spot selected by Steve. It was a small, grassy savannah on the edge of a tangle of jungle that was shot through with bright splashes of flowers and filled with the twitter of birds and rustle of tiny monkeys, as in troops they swung from vine to vine high in the matted growth.

The native boys trampled the saw-edged grass and built a large thorn boma and pitched the tents. Steve stowed the gear as it was brought in, the boys working in relays. Elsa seated herself on a small medicine chest and fussed with her fingernails, refusing to have any part of the labor. Le Clerc, however, kept going, even though he dripped with sweat and his clothes were ripped to tatters by thorns.

They finished stowing the gear by the light of a big thornbush fire in the middle of the boma. Shortly thereafter Le Clerc announced he was going to bed. Elsa, standing in front of the big green umbrella tent, shook her head in reply to his questioning glance.

"Well, don't stand around out here all night," the Frenchman grumbled. "We have a big day ahead of us tomorrow."

"Are you afraid I'll make love to Steve if you leave me alone with him?"

Le Clerc shot a furious glance at her, then ducked under the flap of the umbrella tent and disappeared. Elsa strolled toward

the fire, humming softly. She stopped a few feet from Steve. She thrust her hands deep in the front pockets of her white breeches and surveyed him quizzically. A challenge was boldly written all over her face and danced provocatively in her misty blue eyes.

Steve, in spite of himself, began to feel uncomfortable. What was she up to now? What phase of the game she was playing was this? As in Maripiri, her jungle garb accented rather than hid her lush curves. She was, Steve had to admit, as desirable a woman as a man could ever hope to meet.

Steve sat down on the ground in the outer rim of the firelight. The night was warm and humid, but the smoke from the crackling thornbrush kept the insects away. Elsa walked over and sat down close to him.

"Trying to run away from me, Steve?" she teased. "Most men don't do that. Quite the contrary, in fact."

"Why do you torture your husband?" Steve asked abruptly.

Elsa looked at the tent into which Le Clerc had retired. "Torture him?" she said innocently. "What do you mean?"

"The way you act around me," Steve said bluntly. "It isn't because of me. You're trying to hurt your husband. Why?"

Elsa dropped all pretense. Her lips twisted cruelly. "Perhaps because I want to hurt him."

"That isn't an answer."

"Then it's because I hate him. Haven't you guessed that?"

Steve stared at the fire. The flames hissed and crackled as they consumed the thornbush, casting long, weird shadows on the walls of the boma. "Hate is a big word," he said.

"It is an understatement in this case."

"Why do you hate him?" Steve asked.

Elsa laughed, a low, throaty sound. "Are you trying to get the story of my life, Steve?" she said.

"You can call it that if you want to."

Elsa laughed again and pushed a wisp of blonde hair up off her forehead. "All right, I'll give it to you. Why not? Very briefly of course. I met my husband in Zanzibar. I was stranded there and in trouble. Police trouble. Nothing so terrible, perhaps, but I was broke and I had to get away. Gaston



was in a position to save me. You know what happened, don't you? He agreed to save me if I would marry him. It was the rankest kind of blackmail, but I had no choice."

"This blackmail, as you call it, has kept you married to him ever since?"

"Yes. If only I could tell you how I've longed to leave him. But I haven't dared."

Steve laughed quietly. Elsa's face slowly became pink. "What are you laughing at?" she demanded.

Steve said, "Le Clerc might have blackmailed you into a marriage, but he couldn't hold you forever. Once you left Zanzibar you were free to leave him. But he has money, hasn't he? That's what you're after."

Elsa smiled a cold, cruel smile. "You've learned a lot about me in the short time you've known me, Steve. He does have money and next to myself I love money better than anything in the world. I will leave him someday, when the time is right, and I won't go empty-handed!"

Steve grunted. The ruthlessness of the blonde woman was like a knife thrust. "Tell me something about the professor," he said.

"Professor?" Elsa sniffed disdainfully. "The title doesn't really belong to him. He started a boys' school in Southern France back in the thirties. It wasn't very successful and he ended up by absconding with the funds. That's your professor for you."

"What has he done since? He has made money somewhere."

"He made a lot of money in the European black market during and right after the war. Then things got too hot for him there and he fled to Algiers where he met me. But it cost him quite a bit to get me out of my scrape and we've lived pretty high. Outfitting for this safari into the interior took a big chunk of cash—"

"In other words," Steve probed, "the money is about gone and that is why Le Clerc is here."

"That is correct," Elsa admitted calmly.

"And you're sticking with him to see how the deal turns out?"

"You are right again, Steve. I intend to get my stake out of this, somehow, and he'll never see me again."

Steve tried to frame his next question carefully. "A man is going to rebuild his

fortune up here in Ubangi-Shari. He is going to a tiny pin-prick on the map to do it. What is it? It can't be diamonds, this isn't the country for them. It isn't gold. What is it?"

Elsa threw back her head and laughed, her smooth, bronze throat the color of new copper in the dancing firelight. "So he hasn't told you. Well, when I think of it, I guess I wouldn't either. I thought perhaps you had made him tell you by now. If I were a man and strong like you I would make others give me what I wanted."

"I have known all along that it wasn't elephant you're after," Steve said. "Under other circumstances I wouldn't have taken the job. But I was broke and had to do something."

"I see. And now you're asking me to tell you what you've gotten yourself into."

"That's right. It's about time, don't you think?"

Elsa's cool blue eyes studied Steve's face. "I think I will tell you," she decided. "Why not?"

"Go ahead," Steve urged.

### III

"TOMORROW my husband will show you a map. Not the big one you have seen him studying, but a detailed map of this section. An airman's map, in fact, that goes into a lot of detail."

"Airman's map?" Steve said.

"Yes. I'll explain. About a year ago two Frenchmen named O'zué and Ragame patched up a wrecked Italian warplane in Egypt and took off on a flight to West Africa. Ragame was the pilot and O'zué the passenger. O'zué had with him two large briefcases stuffed full of jewels, perhaps a million dollars worth. They had come out of middle Europe and represented one of the biggest hauls in the post-war scramble.

"Others had gotten on O'zué's trail, of course, and he wound up in Alexandria. There he met Ragame and for part of the jewels got him to fix up the plane and fly him out. They flew up the Nile valley to Khartoum, then headed west. They were trying to make a West coast port in the Cameroons of French Africa. There O'zué



presumably would have picked up a tramp steamer bound for a South American port."

Steve was beginning to understand. "This plane was wrecked?"

"Of course. Near the white-walled gorges on those little rivers that empty into the Kuango here in the Ubangi-Shari. O'zué was killed, but Ragame survived. He was badly hurt, however, and all he could do was bury the jewels under a wing of the plane and make his way out. He wandered around the jungle, fever-ridden, half crazy from insect bites but by a miracle stumbled into a native village and was saved."

"He was brought out to the coast. He gave false directions regarding the airplane and it wasn't found. But because of his condition and much against his wishes, he was flown to France for medical attention. When he recovered he came to Zanzibar and there met my husband whom he had known in France. Ragame needed money and made a deal with Gaston, offering a fifty-fifty split if he would finance the expedition to the site of the wrecked plane. Ragame had saved his route map and had the spot well marked."

"Where is Ragame now?" Steve said. "What happened to him?"

"He died the day before we left Zanzibar. Complications brought on by his injuries and the terrible experience he had been through. Fortunately, Gaston had the map and a good description of the place."

"What about the short, red-faced man who was in Maripiri?"

"You have seen him? His name is Benton. At least that is what he calls himself. I don't think it is his real name. Ragame approached him first with the scheme, but they didn't come to any agreement. Shortly thereafter Ragame met my husband."

"But this Benton is here in Africa," Steve said.

Elsa nodded. "He followed us here, yes. Evidently he decided he had made a mistake in being skeptical of Ragame's story."

"Does he know where the wrecked plane is?"

"I don't think so. I don't think Ragame told him."

Steve scowled "I don't like this."

"Good heavens! You're not going to turn squeamish, are you? With a million dollars

to be had, any moral issues involved are perfectly silly."

Steve stared at the red core of the dying fire.

"Steve," Elsa said softly. "Look at me."

Steve turned his head and she kissed him, swiftly sliding her arms around his neck and pulling her lithe firm body against him in a convulsive surge of passion. Her lips were like a searing flame and Steve reeled before their impact.

She released him and stared at him with shining eyes. "It isn't all trying to hurt Gaston, Steve," she said huskily. "I'm really beginning to like you. Just remember that."

She arose swiftly and headed for the tent without looking back. A movement caught the tail of Steve's eye. It was the tent flap fluttering. Was it a vagrant breeze or had it been Le Clerc?

Steve stayed outside for an hour pondering his problem. Far off in the soft African night a drum began to throb faintly as the drummer in a remote village told all those who would listen that the white bwanas were making camp in their country.

Steve scowled blackly. He didn't want to be a partner in finding the jewels. They were stolen loot and it was the kind of a mess he wanted to stay clear of. At the end of the hour, however, he thought he had a solution to his dilemma and went to his tent.

During the night the five bearers slipped away.

AS ELSA had predicted, Le Clerc showed Steve the map in the morning. It was a sectional airman's map, complete with the red crayon lines drawn in to mark a cross-country contact flight. The details were not as plentiful as in better charted terrain, but there was enough. After a little study, Steve oriented their camp in relation to the approximate location of the white-walled gorges, drawing in lines to mark a course to them.

If Le Clerc had seen his wife kiss Steve the night before, he gave no hint of the fact. Indeed, as the end of his quest seemed to be drawing near, his thoughts were apparently taken up with the jewels. His eyes were bright and hot as he studied the map laid out on the ground, and he rubbed his small hands together in greedy anticipation.



The sun was well up. The cacaphony of the birds had died down and a noisy troop of dog-faced apes had stopped chattering. Steve assembled three cold lunches and laid out a knife, machete and matches. He decided he would carry the light bolt-action Mauser that Le Clerc had brought along for Elsa.

As Steve busied himself under the gnarled old baobab tree that flung long protecting arms over the camp, Le Clerc strolled up behind him. He watched Steve in silence for a few moments, then said:

"My wife informs me she has told you about the jewels."

Steve looked up from a kneeling position. "That's right. I asked her."

Le Clerc bit his lip. "You asked her and she told you just like that, eh? I could make something of that if I wanted to."

"Is that what you're doing?"

"I just want to warn you not to try any tricks. You'll be paid and paid well for your trouble, but if you try to make off with the jewels I won't hesitate to kill you."

Elsa had just come up in her turn. "You wouldn't have the guts to kill anything, Gaston," she said scornfully. "Why do you have to talk that way? Steve isn't going to rob you."

Le Clerc's white teeth showed under the curl of his upper lip. "I was just making my position clear, my dear. I'd suggest you drop the subject. I've been putting up with a lot from your nasty disposition, but I'm not going to tolerate it any longer."

"You make me sick," Elsa sniffed. "You're in love with me and no matter how many times I grind my heel into your face, you'll come whining back for more."

"You blond witch—" Le Clerc's fingers were closing and opening convulsively. "Perhaps we had better get started," he said, controlling his rage with great effort.

He ducked into the umbrella tent and reappeared buckling a flap-holstered Smith and Wesson .38 around his waist.

"Gaston is so dramatic," Elsa murmured contemptuously. "I'm sure you're frightened, Steve."

Steve picked up his rifle, shrugged into the shoulder straps of a canvas rucksack and strode off, Le Clerc and Elsa following. Steve had a clear mental picture of the map

Le Clerc had shown him and he led them unerringly to the confluence of three rushing little jungle streams that tumbled through a series of gorges with chalk-white walls. Gray old baobab trees dotted the open grassy area near the gorges.

The change in Le Clerc was very apparent. Forgotten was the quarrel with Elsa. There was a hungry, eager look on his bearded face, and the greed in his dark eyes shone brighter than any jewels he would ever find.

AT STEVE'S suggestion they separated to look for the plane, Elsa and Le Clerc staying together and promising to stay within sight of the gorges. Steve worked his way upstream, entering jungle characterized by towering forest giants and intermittent mats of rattan and creepers. The interlaced branches shut out the sun except for a mottled pattern here and there on the ferns and undergrowth.

The jungle opened up a little, then closed in again with bamboo thickets taking the place of the giant ferns. Steve skirted these and presently found himself under the spreading branches of a gigantic baobab tree.

Steve was in no hurry to find the wrecked plane. He would let Elsa and Le Clerc do that, and it might be days or even weeks before they succeeded. The plane could be anywhere within five miles of the gorges and it wouldn't take much jungle growth to hide the wreckage.

The heat of the day hadn't really started. Steve sat with his back against the tree and rested, thinking. As the noise of his progress through the jungle died and was forgotten, the small animals resumed their normal activities, the pepper birds began chirping again, and the monkeys chattered and squealed as they fought over the wild bananas growing near the water.

And then suddenly the noises stopped. Steve, who had been half dozing, snapped into instant alertness. Not a leaf stirred. Steve felt sweat roll down his ribs.

He turned his head very slowly, his gray eyes searching the tangled growth above him. And then he heard it. The scratching sound of claws on one of the long horizontal boughs of the baobab tree above him. He



moved his head very slowly until he could look up. What he saw froze his blood. It was a magnificent leopard slowly creeping along on the long gray branch, its tail lashing the sunken flanks, the slanted eyes burning with a kind of green fire. Stray beams of sunlight played on the mottled, rippling coat like tiny searchlights on a velvet cape.

Steve let his hand slide along the stock of the Mauser. If the beast scented him or came so close that it might be startled into a spring, he would have to rely on a snap shot. Whether he could avoid a sudden lunge was debatable. The raking, razor-sharp claws would be swift as light. His best bet, Steve decided, would be to roll to his right, swinging the rifle up and firing all in one motion.

But the leopard moved right on by! It crept to the end of the branch, where its weight made the branch bend downward. The beast balanced there, teetering and swaying. Then the great-thewed thighs coiled and the leopard launched itself through the air in a long leap, catching the tip of a branch of the next tree. The animal glided forward and in a few seconds was lost in the green leaves.

Steve relaxed. The leopard was stalking something, but he was no longer in danger. He waited for the scream that would shudder through the jungle as the leopard struck. It came with startling suddenness, ear-splitting, terror-ridden. It sent a twinge of horror knifing through Steve, for it was a human scream.

Steve burst through the lush growth into a small, grassy clearing. There, thrashing on the loamy ground, was a huge black man, his skin satiny in the sunlight. The native had his muscular arms wrapped around the middle of the leopard and was hugging it to his chest so that the murderous claws raked only air.

Strong as the man was, however, such a situation could not last long. The leopard was twisting and squirming, its teeth chopping and snapping, and snarled hate-sounds spewed from the open mouth. Steve raised the rifle hurriedly. With the sharp report, the leopard's head was smashed sideways. Thick, dark blood muddied the black and yellow-white fur just below the ear. The great forelegs thrashed blindly for a moment, then relaxed.

With a grunt the black man thrust the dying animal from him and came to his feet. His satiny skin glistened with karite butter and sweat, and swatches of leopard fur stuck to his muscular chest. He was tall, superbly built and without a blemish except for tribal scars on shoulders and forehead.

Steve spoke to him in the Sango dialect. The native touched his scarred forehead. "My life belongs to the white lord," he intoned.

"Your village is nearby?" Steve asked.

"Close, yes, O lord. But it is a miserable village."

Steve learned that the black man's name was M'Noula.

Steve squatted, resting his weight on his heels. M'Noula squatted native-fashion nearby and waited for Steve to speak. Steve chose his words carefully.

"You have seen the great metal bird the white man flies, O, M'Noula?"

"Aie! The white man's bird that flies faster than the hawk! Yes, I have seen!"

"You have seen the great metal bird that fell into the jungle like a hawk with an arrow through its wing?"

M'Noula scratched a broad knee and considered the question. "I have not seen it, O, white lord, but I have heard of it. Shembo, the devil-man in my village has told me."

"You will tell me what Shemba has said, O, Noula."

There was a silence. Was it fear, or merely simple, primitive caution? "I will tell," M'Noula said finally.

"Where is the metal bird?"

An arm thick with rippling muscles was raised. A long finger pointed. The native then raised his pointing finger toward the sun and described a short arc in the air, indicating, Steve judged, about an hour's time. The wrecked plane then was off to the northwest, an hour's trek distant. Steve pulled out a pocket compass, unsnapped the lid and studied the quivering black needle.

He arose. "I go now," he said simply.

M'Noula said nothing. Steve walked to the edge of the little jungle clearing and plunged into the tangled growth. In a little over an hour he arrived at the place where the wrecked airplane was a heap of twisted grayish metal on the jungle floor. He had



not reckoned with Le Clerc's cleverness, however. Both Le Clerc and Elsa were there ahead of him! It seemed that Le Clerc had climbed a tall ebony tree and had seen the jagged hole in the green roof of the jungle where the plane had smashed through.

Steve told of his experience with the leopard. "How thrilling," Elsa gushed. "I certainly hope you're around if I am attacked by a leopard!" Steve turned his attention to the plane. Most of the rusting engine was buried in the dank Jungle mold. One wing had been torn off, the other was still attached to the crumpled fuselage.

#### IV

STEVE stepped up on the wing root, peered into the passenger compartment and got a queer thrill. A skeleton, stripped clean by the ants, was still balanced on the seat, held in place by a rotting safety belt. There was a jagged hole in the bleached, grinning skull, and scraps of clothing clung to the bones. One bony hand still clutched at the dual control column, as though at the last moment O'zué, the passenger, had tried to right the falling plane. Already the vines were sending thin tendrils into the cockpit through cracks in the cowling.

Steve stepped back down onto the ground. There was a chunking sound behind him. Le Clerc was using a small spade under the wing that was still intact. He had removed his pistol belt. Sweat stood out on his forehead as the hole in the leafy mold slowly deepened. Elsa stood close to him, watching. Tension was making her mouth thin and hard, and her fingers were clenched so tightly the knuckles were white as chalk.

Le Clerc dug down two feet, then let loose a mighty yell that again sent quiet quivering through the jungle. The Frenchman went on his knees, his eyes gleaming wildly. With clawed fingers he scrabbled wildly, tossing up dirt like a digging animal. He tossed out a gleaming object that rolled under a bending fern frond. With a choked cry, Elsa snatched it up and gazed at it with glowing eyes. It was a large emerald!

Le Clerc scrabbled some more. He brought up the buckles of the buried briefcases, a few scraps of rotted leather, but that was all. Slowly, as the horrible truth dawned on

him, Le Clerc's face went gray. In a frenzy of desperation he pawed at the dirt, scattering it in every direction. But the cold hard fact was unalterable—except for the emerald, the jewels were gone!

Le Clerc began to curse, slowly and methodically at first, then wildly and hysterically, raising a clenched fist in the air and letting tears roll unheeded down his cheeks. Spittle collected at one corner of his mouth and flecked his beard.

Steve looked at Elsa. Her face might have been a mask. It was so hard the cheekbones stood out like sharp sticks. Her eyes were sunken and hot and terrible. She grabbed up the shovel and poked in the hole Le Clerc had dug, then clambered around the wreckage and dug on the other side. Obviously, however, Le Clerc had dug in the right spot. Roots caused the little spade to skid and slide no matter where she chose to dig, telling all too plainly that the jungle floor hadn't been disturbed there in years.

Elsa gave up, finally. She wiped the sweat off her face, brushed back her hair and stared at Steve in shocked disbelief. "They're gone, the jewels are gone!" she croaked.

Le Clerc stopped cursing. "Gurney, did you get here ahead of us?" he said. It was an accusation, but, at the same time, it was almost pathetically hopeful.

"Don't be a fool," Steve said. "I just arrived and you know it."

With a scream Le Clerc bounded to his feet. He scuttled over to where his gun lay. Jerking the gun from its holster, he spun around in a half crouch, the muzzle of the pistol centering on Steve's chest.

"No! Don't!" Elsa screamed. "Don't shoot!"

But Steve had raised the Mauser and covered Le Clerc. For a moment madness flickered in Le Clerc's eyes. Then it died out. Tenseness flowed out of him. He shrugged and tossed the gun back on the ground. "Sorry," he muttered. "Lost my head for a minute. You couldn't have dug there before I did, that is obvious. The dirt hadn't been disturbed for some time." He clenched his fist and shook it angrily. "But somebody was ahead of me," he shouted "Months ago, I would say. Who could it have been?"

"There is a native village nearby, probably the one Ragame stumbled into when



he was lost," Steve said. "The natives there know all about the wrecked plane."

"You think the natives stole the jewels? They attach no value to things like that, do they?"

Steve shrugged. "Not the same value you do, perhaps, but the jewels are bright and shiny and might be used to decorate a loin cloth or a devil-devil man's robe." He chuckled dryly. "Can't you just see a Bantu belle wearing gems that a society lady might envy?"

Elsa flung the small spade down and confronted her husband. "You've failed me," she accused bitterly. "I was a fool to believe you."

Le Clerc gestured angrily. "The jewels were there. You can see that."

"They were there, they were there," Elsa mimicked viciously. "What good does that do me? Where are they now?" Her lips were thin and hard. "You've failed me," she yelled. "This time I am going to leave you."

"You had better shut your mouth," Le Clerc warned. Unexpectedly, Elsa quieted down.

LE CLERC asked Steve to locate the bangala village. Steve judged the village to be located on one of the streams not far from where he had rescued M'Noula. His deduction proved to be correct, and they arrived in the village in the late afternoon.

"Ho!" Steve called out. "People-who-dwell-on-the-little-river, visitors have come to sit on the mats in your huts! Strangers have come to hold council with your chiefs. Come forth and hear!"

The somnambulant spell that had hung over the village broke. There was a rustling inside the beehive-shaped huts of wattle and thatch. Dark, kinky heads were thrust out the U-shaped openings. Slowly they came out and surrounded the three white intruders, big muscular men with tribal scars on their naked backs, some of the paint from the drum orgy of the night before still adhering to their faces.

These were real back-country blacks, the men wearing little more than breech-clouts, the women wearing short skirts of native woven raffia cloth. They carried no weapons, however. Steve sensed that their attitude was

that of curiosity, rather than hostility. Elsa, nervous and apprehensive, her swagger and self-assurance gone for the moment, kept close to Steve.

"Take me to your chief," Steve droned. "The white lords wish to hold council with your chiefs."

Steve had noticed a larger hut where a freshly flayed leopard skin was skewered to the wall for drying. It was from this hut that a man with white kinky hair stepped. He was a tall man with an unaffected air of dignity and he wore a leopard skin slung across his big chest from shoulder to thigh. The fresh leopard skin was from the one he had killed, Steve decided. M'Noula had evidently presented it to his chief.

The circle of blacks parted to form a narrow corridor, and the chief came through. His eyes gravely swept over the three whites and came to rest on Steve. "I, O'bie, extend greetings, O, lord," he said.

Steve made a suitable reply in the same grave manner. He exchanged several phrases with the chief, then turned to Le Clerc. "We are to have a feast. The chief is honored by our visit."

"Good lord, a feast?" Elsa objected, her nose wrinkling in disgust. "I flatly refuse, Steve!"

"What about the jewels?" Le Clerc demanded. "Did you ask him?"

Steve wagged his head. "It would be impolite to bring up business immediately. We'll have to feast first, then I can ask. If I speak of the jewels now, all we'll get will be a blank stare. Nobody can be as evasive as an African when he isn't ready to tell you something."

Elsa shuddered and clutched Steve's arm. "This is awful. What kind of nasty mess do you expect me to swallow? That awful looking stuff the porters gobble down?"

"That is manioc," Steve said, grinning thinly. "I imagine this will be a little more elaborate. Dumboy and chopnut mostly. It isn't as bad as it sounds. You can at least make a pretense at picking at it."

"He's quite right, Elsa," Le Clerc said sharply. "There's a fortune at stake, and if eating a little native food is all that stands in the way, we'll eat it if we gag on it."

Elsa put her hand to her throat and made another throat. "Ugh!" she shuddered.



"I know I'll be sick."

Le Clerc turned his dark gaze toward Steve. "She will do what she has to, since it is the only way."

They ate in the chief's hut, which was the largest one in the village. It was under a silk cotton tree and looked out over the circular, hard-packed dancing area. They sat cross-legged on clean mats of palm fiber arranged in a circle. They licked their fingers and made sucking noises of approval, led by Steve. Baked cassava bread was laid out on plantain leaves, and there was dumboy cooked in palm oil, ground chopnut, karite butter and golden pheasant eggs piled in wooden bowls.

Elsa ate sparingly. Following Steve's advice, she left the chopnut alone, but picked at the other things heaped in a wooden bowl set between her knees on the matting. When they had finished, Steve leaned back, sighed and patted his belly politely to signify that he had fed well. He wiped his fingers on the matting, then, choosing his words carefully, he struck out boldly.

"The white man's bird fell in the jungle many suns ago, O, chief."

The chief scratched his broad chest. "It is so," he agreed.

"Many bright stones were carried in the white man's metal bird."

Steve stared unwinking at the chief as he spoke. Now the brown face under the kinky cap of white hair seemed to be graven of ebony. The broad cheekbones seemed to become a little more prominent and the caliper lines down around the mouth were deeper. The deepset eyes flickered finally and the great splayed nostrils pinched inward. "We know nothing of the bright stones, O, lord," the chief said.

"They were buried under a wing by one of the white lords-who-rode-in-the-bird."

"We know nothing of bright stones, O lord."

"The bright stones were dug up and taken from their resting place," Steve insisted.

THE chief was obviously distressed. "No bright stones, lord. We know nothing of them."

"The bright stones were taken by the Bangala people from their resting place and brought to the village."

The chief's face was agonized. "Not so, O, my lord."

Steve was puzzled. The native chieftain was lying, and it distressed him to do so. Obviously, the jewels were in the village. Steve went on, gently prodding the chief, alternately heaping praise on the Bangalas and playing sternly on the native's superstitious nature. He promised gifts of tobacco, red cloth and salt.

But, finally, he had to turn helplessly to Le Clerc. "He says he knows nothing of the jewels. He is lying, of course, but I can't shake his story."

Le Clerc's black eyes were glittering with suspicion. "Are you sure *you're* not lying?" he accused. "I can't make head or tail of that mumble-mumble talk and you know it. He could tell you he had the jewels buried under these mats we're sitting on, and I wouldn't know it."

"I've told you the truth," Steve said. "I'm getting a little tired of your accusations, by the way."

"That's it, tell him Steve!" Elsa applauded.

"You keep out of this!" Le Clerc said angrily.

"I'm only trying to keep you from making a mess of everything," Elsa said sweetly. "You can trust Steve. He isn't like you."

Le Clerc's face went white with fury. His fingers clenched and he raised his arm. Steve caught the Frenchman's arm in a vice-like grip and hissed in his ear, "Not in front of the natives, you fool! That's the worst thing you could do!"

ELSA had recoiled from the threatened blow. She regained her poise almost immediately. "Let him go, Steve," she said contemptuously. "He won't strike me. That is the one thing he has never dared to do and I don't think he's going to start now."

Steve released Le Clerc's arm. "I'm going outside," he said brusquely. "Stay here with your wife. I think I can find out something."

Steve stepped out onto the packed dancing ground. He had seen M'Noula going by. He called softly, "M'Noula!" The native was over near the entrance of another beehive-shaped hut. Steve motioned for him to stay where he was. He walked over to the native.

"Bright pebbles that belonged to the men



who rode in the metal bird have been brought to the village, O, M'Noula," Steve said.

M'Noula shot a worried glance toward the chief's hut. "It is so," he muttered.

"Your chieftain has lied," Steve said boldly. "He has told me the pebbles are not in the village, but I know that is false. Your chieftain won't tell me where they are. Where are they, O, M'Noula?"

M'Noula traced a pattern in the gray dust with a bare toe. "My life was saved by the white lord," he said.

"Where are the bright pebbles?" Steve prompted gently.

M'Noula looked at him. "Shemba has them, O, lord!" he said.

His breath whistled in his nostrils like a startled gazelle's.

Steve nodded gravely. "There is no need to fear. Neither Shemba nor your chief will know what you have told me."

The taut muscles under M'Noula's satiny skin relaxed. "It is good, O, lord," he said gratefully.

Calling them outside, Steve informed Le Clerc and Elsa of what he had learned. "Who is Shemba?" Elsa asked.

"The village devil-devil man, M'Buiti, the medicine man. A powerful one, too, since it was fear of him that kept the chief from telling the truth about the jewels. Had M'Noula not been indebted to me, we would never have learned anything."

"Then we go down and see Shemba, is that it?" Le Clerc said.

"Not yet," Steve advised. "Give me time. Let the chief think we are taking counsel among ourselves. It must appear to him that we arrive at the truth by some means of our own. I don't want to get M'Noula into trouble."

They sat crosslegged in the shade of the silk-cotton tree on the edge of the dancing ground. The big drum in the village drumshed began to throb with a soft yet stirring resonance. Elsa shuddered. "What is that awful thing?"

"The big talking drum. It is probably telling other villages of our presence here."

Steve, used to the ways of Africa, would have waited an hour or longer before going down to the hut at the end of the village where Shemba lived, but he could not curb

Le Clerc's impatience that long. Finally, tiring of the little man's insistent prodding, he stood up, stretched lazily, and said:

"All right, I'll go on down and see Shemba. You two had better stay here. Some of these devil-devil lads have to be handled carefully."

Steve strode confidently between the uneven rows of thatched beehive huts. Though the angle of the sun was lengthening, it was still hot, the listless air feeling like suspended breath from a furnace. Even the cicadas, the heat-loving insect, were drowsing.

Steve, knowing that eyes were watching him from the devil-devil man's hut, did not hesitate. He walked quickly down to the hut, lifted the goat-skin curtain hung over the door and ducked inside. He stood just inside, trying to adjust his eyes to the semi-darkness. He could feel mats under his feet, could sense the presence of others, and the rich, age-old smells of Africa smote his nostrils.

He heard a soft chuckle in the darkness. He widened his eyes, then squinted them as he tried to focus on the source of the chuckle. And then he saw. It was a white man sitting on the mats! Benton, the short, red-faced, fat man he had seen in Maripiri. Benton chuckled again. "Surprised to see me, eh?"

Steve scowled. "How did you get here?"

"This isn't the first time I've been in the bush. I've knocked around a bit from the Cape to the Gold Coast. I left Maripiri ahead of you and by traveling light, beat you here by four days."

"Le Clerc underestimated you."

Again the fat man let his hoarse chuckle come up from the depths of his ample stomach.

"Why are you here?" Steve demanded. "What do you want?"

"The same thing you do."

Detail was coming into focus as Steve's eyes adjusted themselves to the gloom. Benton, in wrinkled, soiled whites, scratched himself absently, like a native.

"Ragame must have told you the complete story," Steve said.

"That's right."

"The jewels are gone. They're not at the plane."



Benton nodded. "I know. I learned that without having to locate the wreck."

"Where are they now?"

"Our friend Shemba has them, as you bloody well know."

STEVE looked at the devil-devil man. Shemba was sitting cross-legged on the mats, watching them with bright, unblinking eyes. He was naked from the waist up, but a skirt of animal skins and raffia reached to his knees. A mixture of clay and oil was daubed in streaks of white and red on his bony face. He wore anklets of white feathers, a necklace of teeth, dried livers and the shriveled, claw-like feet of toads. His head-dress consisted of a raffia band, feathers and long white monkey hair.

Benton, Steve realized, was a man to be reckoned with. He knew his Africa. Unerringly he had picked out the most powerful man in the village. Even more impressive was the fact that Benton had gained the devil-devil man's tolerance if not his goodwill.

"You're right," Steve said to the short man. "Shemba has the jewels."

Benton's eyes squinted craftily. "Where are they hidden?"

"Don't you know?"

"You know I don't know. If I knew I wouldn't be here, would I?"

"Shemba is going to be a hard man to do business with," Steve said, after a short pause.

"Can't say as I blame him, though," Benton retorted. "The blighter knows once I locate the jewels I won't stand on any ceremony. I'll just take them and light out for the coast. He knows the bloody things are valuable and has them well hid."

Steve stepped toward the rear of the hut. Hung on the bamboo uprights that supported the wattle were clusters of dried toads, and the small bleached skulls of birds and mice. A sort of half wall of dried mud and bamboo plastered with ocher and decorated with crude figures, separated the front part of the hut from the rear. Behind the partition was a crequios, a sleeping mat raised a few inches off the floor.

Turning, Steve saw for the first time the automatic Benton had on the mat between his fat thighs. Benton grinned, dropped a

pudgy hand on the gun, then raised the hand to his knee, leaving the gun where it was. "Sit down," he invited. "Let's have a heart to heart talk. There are a couple of things I want to know, and no doubt I can tell you a thing or two of interest."

Steve sat down slowly, native fashion, his back deliberately partly turned to the M'Buiti man.

"I don't think you're working with Le Clerc," Benton said. "You're working for him all right, but there's a difference. You know about the jewels. You were bound to find out. But I don't think you're in this for a cut. Am I right?"

Steve shrugged.

The fat man chuckled. "I'm taking that for a yes. Let me tell you a story. Le Clerc and I were together in this thing at one time. Does that surprise you?"

Steve nodded. "In a way. It makes things a little clearer, though."

"You can understand why he looked like a ghost when he saw me in Maripiri that night. He thought he had given me the slip in Zanzibar."

"What happened?"

"Ragame, the pilot of the Fiat, came to both Le Clerc and me with his proposition. We agreed to finance the deal and each take a third cut. Le Clerc and Ragame got together, however, and decided they would cut me out and each take half. Le Clerc used that blonde wife of his to an advantage there. She and Ragame went everywhere together for about a week. Then when she had wheedled the complete story out of Ragame he suddenly disappeared. Le Clerc did a good job. A slit throat, probably, and the weighted body chucked into the harbor. It was beautiful. Le Clerc and the woman pulled out that same night, leaving me behind to twiddle my thumbs. What they didn't know was that I had gotten more information from Ragame than they thought. I got into his room one night when he was sleeping and lifted his wallet. I made a copy of that map Le Clerc has."

It was a good story. Whether it was all true or not, Steve had no way of knowing. Part of it was, he was sure. "Why are you telling me this?"

Benton's eyes became greedy, calculating. "Throw in with me. You and I together



can swing this deal. I think it's too much for one man. I haven't been able to locate the stones. You know that. Well, the two of us together might have better luck. What do you say?"

Steve frowned.

Benton patted the oily receiver of the automatic. "I've got two of these. You probably have a rifle. I think we can pull it off."

"Just what do you have in mind?"

"Find the stones, take them, kill anybody who tries to stop us."

The cold-blooded seriousness of the fat man made Steve grunt. That Benton meant what he said he had no doubt. That such a bloody plan would fail he knew. He scowled again.

"Half," Benton said calmly. "I'm offering you half."

"I'll think about it," Steve parried.

Benton's mouth tightened. He obviously took the statement for a refusal. "Don't be a fool," he warned. "You need me and I need you. Better we each get half, than an assagai in the belly. And don't try to tell me you're not after the jewels for yourself, because I know different."

"I want to think about it," Steve insisted.

Benton scowled. "Well, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you are sticking with Le Clerc. If that's how it is, heaven help you. He'll kill you once you've served his purpose."

Steve edged around on the matting to face Shemba, as though, after much weighty thought, he had decided to talk to the medicine man of the village.

"It is said that Shemba is a great wizard," he said sceptically.

"The white man speaks for himself?" Shemba replied, bold-eyed.

"The white lord speaks what his ears have heard," Steve replied.

No expression flickered across Shemba's bony face. "His ears have heard what they have heard," the medicine man said cautiously.

"Where are the bright stones that came from the white-lord's-bird-that-died-in-the-jungle?" Steve asked. "Let the great wizard tell us that."

Shemba lowered his monkey hair crowned head and mumbled. Benton chuckled. "He says very bad. That's what he has been tell-

ing me every time I bring the subject up."

"Shemba is a great wizard," Steve intoned. "Let him tell where the bright stones are."

Again Shemba mumbled.

"See, very bad," Benton crowed. "You can't get anything out of him."

"He's bargaining, that's all. He wants an offer."

"Try him," Benton urged. "See what it gets you."

"What does Shemba want for the trifling handful of bright pebbles?" Steve asked.

Shemba made no reply.

Benton sighed. "It isn't like it was twenty years ago. Then you could trade a bolt of red cloth for a whole barrel of jewels. The natives know what the white man values now."

"It isn't wise to press these people too hard," Steve said. "I'm going to leave him alone for a while."

## V

A BIG native entered the hut. His tribal scars were freshly daubed with clay and oil and a sullen scowl made a fierce mask of his black face.

"One of Shemba's special pals," Benton commented dryly. "There's a dozen or so of them, real fanatics. I wouldn't trust any of them as far as I could throw this hut."

Steve arose.

"Give Le Clerc my best regards," Benton said, grinning.

"I'll do that." Steve thrust aside the goat-skin curtain and stepped out in the hot, blinding afternoon sunshine.

He walked between the huts back to where Elsa and Le Clerc were impatiently waiting.

"Your friend Benton beat us to the place," Steve said.

Le Clerc sat up straight, his dark eyes blazing. "Benton here?"

"He got the jump on us in Maripiri and came on ahead. He wasn't following you as you thought at all. He sneaked a look at Ragame's map back in Zanzibar and knew where the wrecked Fiat was."

Elsa had turned white. Now an angry red color flooded back into her face and neck. "You're so very, very clever!" she flung at



Le Clerc. "So very, very clever! You've ruined our chances with your stupid, blundering, smug cleverness. Oh, how I hate you!"

"Benton hasn't gotten his hands on the jewels yet," Steve said quietly. "He knows Shemba has them, but that's all. We're just about even with him at this point."

Le Clerc said, "Ah, you see? That tantrum was entirely uncalled for."

Elsa, ready to pour out more abuse, closed her mouth slowly. "Well, I don't know," she said sullenly. "I won't be convinced until I see the jewels."

"Patience, my dear," Le Clerc urged. "You have been very nasty to me lately. Has it ever occurred to you that after I have the jewels, I may decide that putting up with your nasty disposition isn't worth it after all? I'll be wealthy once more and the most beautiful women in Europe will be at my feet."

Elsa sniffed angrily. "There are limits even to what wealth can do," she snapped. "You can't threaten me that way."

Le Clerc let his grin die and looked at Steve. "What kind of a deal did Benton try to make with you?"

"Who said he tried to make a deal?"

Le Clerc frowned. "Of course, he tried to make a deal. I'm no fool."

"He offered me half," Steve said. "He wants the two of us, he and I, to go to work on Shemba. Two of us knowing the African mind might get somewhere. I turned him down."

Le Clerc stared at Steve, but apparently decided not to challenge his story of the dealings with Benton. "What do you intend to do about locating the jewels?"

"Work on Shemba. Soften him up with tempting offers. He'll tell me what I want to know when he's ready and is convinced he has milked me for everything the situation is worth to him."

"How long will this take?"

"A day, a week, a month," Steve said. "Who knows? Shemba is shrewd. He knows the jewels are valuable and he has two factions bidding against each other. He won't be in any hurry to make a deal, that's my guess."

"What is our next move then?" Le Clerc asked.

"We'll stay in the village tonight. Tomorrow is another day and we'll see what happens."

"Stay here?" Elsa objected. "You mean stay here in these hovels? I know they're full of nasty crawling things!"

"We'll have clean mats and a hut to ourselves," Steve said. "I've slept in many a native hut that was less infested with crawling things than some of the hotels in Dakar and Algiers I've put up in."

"First that awful food and now this," Elsa shuddered.

"I'm sure you'll live through it, my dear," Le Clerc snapped.

Elsa appealed to Steve. "Your plan is to wait on this Shemba's pleasure. Is that the best you can do?"

Steve nodded. "At the present time, yes. We have to be careful. Not only is Shemba a powerful man in this village. He has a special following. Big, tough, surly fellows, entirely different from the bunch we feaster with in the chief's hut."

Elsa shrugged wearily in resignation.

Later a dance was put on in front of the chief's hut.

Steve watched for awhile out of politeness, then slipped away into the darkness. He returned to the hut into which Elsa and Le Clerc had retired. Elsa, pleading a headache, had begged off from watching the dance.

Steve crawled into the hut. He heard Le Clerc snoring. Then Elsa's whispered voice said, "Steve?"

Steve sat down near the door, his back to the wattle wall. There was a faint scratching sound as Elsa crawled over to him. He could see the faint gleam of her eyes, could feel the exciting nearness of her.

"I want to ask you something, Steve."

"What is it?"

"Did Benton tell you about Ragame?"

"Nothing more than you did."

"Did he tell you how he died?"

"He didn't go into any details."

"You're lying, Steve," Elsa said gently. "I know you are."

"You'd better go back and get some sleep."

"I can't. Those tom-toms. They seem to be inside me."

The black African night was pulsing



with the rhythmic beat.

"You've got to get used to them," Steve said. "You'd better get back to your husband before he wakes up."

"Do you want to know something else, Steve?" Elsa said. "I like you."

"You'd better get back to your husband," Steve repeated.

She whispered, "You are the first man I've ever known I could like for himself alone."

Then Steve felt her warm breath and an instant later her searching lips had found his. She clung to him avidly in the full grip of a passionate kiss. Then she released him and said:

"There's more where that came from, Steve. Any time. Just remember that. And think about this. After we find the jewels, somehow, I don't care how, I hope it will be just you and I. I'm not just using you, Steve. I want you. But I want to be rich too."

"Are you suggesting I murder your husband?" Steve demanded.

"Don't sound so shocked. Of course not. I don't care how you work it out. I'm merely letting you know where you stand with me. You take it from there."

Her lips brushed his again, this time lightly, and, before Steve could say anything, she was crawling back crossing the matting toward the dim form of her sleeping husband.

STEVE was beginning to feel drowsy when he heard the scratching sound on the wattle near the entrance of the hut. He raised his head cautiously. "Zo nie?" he called softly. "Who is there?"

"It is I, M'Noula," was the whispered reply.

Steve crawled outside and stood erect. M'Noula, squatting by the entrance arose and seized him by an arm. "Over here," he whispered urgently. Steve allowed himself to be drawn into the deep shadows around at the rear of the hut. The dance was still in progress, the drums podding, the naked feet pounding. The firelight and dust made an orange blur at the other end of the village.

"What is it?" Steve asked.

"The bright pebbles that the white lord desires are buried in Shemba's hut," the

native said simply.

Steve was grave. He knew that M'Noula had pondered his problem for hours before coming to a decision. M'Noula knew that the white lord wanted the bright stones. He owed his life to the white man. That had finally overshadowed the awe he had for Shemba.

"In Shemba's hut?" Steve asked gently. "Where?"

"Under the sleeping mat," M'Noula said.

"I am grateful to M'Noula," Steve said gravely.

But M'Noula had vanished into the darkness. Steve knew better than to call after him. He returned to the hut and sat inside in the darkness, thinking. The jewels were buried in Shemba's hut. What now?

He waited an hour for the answer. The dance was still going on with no signs of letting up, the tom-toms, if anything, throbbing more loudly. Steve heard the sound of a man running heavily. Then a scream. He scrambled out of the hut, rifle in hand. There, staggering toward him in the dimness, was Benton. In one hand he held a goatskin bag. The other hand was pressed tightly against his stomach.

He stumbled and floundered drunkenly, like a man mortally hurt. Steve ran toward him, and he sank to the ground, moaning. Steve went down on his knees beside him. Blood was darkening Benton's whites and spurting between his pressing fingers.

"I heard the native telling you where the jewels were," Benton gasped. "I was hiding back of the hut, hoping to hear what you and Le Clerc might have to say to each other, but I heard you and the native instead."

"You dug up the jewels?"

"Yes. I thought it was a good time. A dance was going on and all that. But Shemba and a couple of his men sneaked away and caught me in the act. One of them stabbed me with a spear."

The fat man released the bag, and some of the jewels spilled out on the ground. Even in the dimness the stones winked and flashed malevolently. Le Clerc and Elsa had heard the noise and had come outside. Steve gave them a swift synopsis of the situation. With a low cry of exultation, Elsa, on her hands and knees, swept up the goatskin



bag and crammed the loose jewels into the puckered opening. As she arose, Le Clerc snatched the bag away from her. Elsa screamed and flung herself at her husband, her nails raking his face.

Steve had caught a shadowy movement near the next hut. "Save the quarreling for later," he snapped. "Shemba and a couple of the natives are right over there. They must have followed Benton. We're in a tight spot!"

Even as he spoke a spear thudded into the wall of the hut. "They mean business," Steve warned grimly. "Let's see if we can make the river. If they catch us now we haven't a chance. They figure that Benton and all of us are in this together."

Elsa saw a flitting figure, caught the gleam of a spearhead and screamed in terror. She flung herself at Steve, her fingers clutching at his shirt. "Save me, Steve," she whimpered. "They're after us!"

Steve shoved her from him. "I'll try to get Benton going. We'll try to make the river and grab a canoe. Over that way to the left between that row of huts. Hurry!"

Steve hauled Benton to his feet; the fat man was all limp weight. "Help me with Benton, Le Clerc," Steve yelled. "He's heavy."

Le Clerc had already started toward the river. "Let the fool die," he called back.

Steve felt something hit his foot. It was an automatic dropping from the waistband of Benton's ducks. Steve snatched the gun up and fired it rapidly three times in the air. He then bent quickly at the waist, letting Benton's limp form fall across his shoulder. He thrust one arm behind a knee, grabbed a dangling wrist.

Steve lumbered and lurched over the uneven ground. He could see Le Clerc and Elsa ahead of him, their white clothing making them discernable. Roots tripped him. Branches slapped at him and thorns bit and stung as he left the village area. He hit the trail that led down to the river, trotting hard, his breath coming in gasps.

**B**EHIND him and on both sides he knew that Shemba's black warriors were slipping through the jungle growth, maneuvering for a chance to cast their spears. He staggered out into an opening under the

arching branches of tall jungle trees. The river gleamed faintly. There was the smell of mud. A couple dozen dugouts were lined up along the grassy bank. Le Clerc had selected one and was slashing at its tough liana mooring rope with a knife.

Le Clerc cut through the liana just as Steve dumped Benton suddenly into the dugout. Elsa was already in the dugout, crouching in the stern, her hands gripping the gunwales. "Hurry, please hurry!" she moaned.

Steve yanked the paddles out from under the bamboo thwarts. Le Clerc shoved the dugout clear of the bank and sprang aboard. Steve turned the craft downstream and began to paddle. A couple of spears cut the water ahead of them. Steve steered the heavy dugout out toward the middle of the stream. Le Clerc had grabbed a paddle and the dugout began to move faster. Elsa remained where she was, ignoring Steve's shout to grab up a paddle.

"Benton is dead," Steve panted. "He must have died as I carried him."

"I told you to leave him," Le Clerc shot back.

They paddled hard for fifteen minutes and it began to look as though they had won clear. Le Clerc exclaimed triumphantly, "We've made it! We've made it!" Suddenly he gasped and his breath gurgled in his throat. He dropped his paddle and arose to his full height, straining, his hands clawing. The handle of a short throwing spear protruded from his chest. The natives, knowing the jungle, had cut ahead, taking advantages of the bends in the river to head them off.

Steve made a grab for Le Clerc as he teetered, but he missed and the Frenchman went over backward into the black water. Le Clerc's weight toppling, coupled with Steve's lunge, upset the dugout, dumping Steve, Elsa and the dead man into the river.

Steve dove deep and swam strongly for the opposite shore. He crouched there in the reeds and ooze, his eyes keening the darkness. A shining head and flailing arms slowly drew nearer. Steve waded out and hauled Elsa, dripping and gasping to her feet. Grabbing her by, he hauled her bodily into the jungle.

Thorns slashed them, lianas tripped them, but Steve kept driving deeper, endeavoring



to get beyond the outer perimeter of the search that Shemba and the warriors would surely make. They crouched there in the dark while the native warriors thrashed through the bush trying to find them. Once, when a warrior was within yards of them, Steve had to hold his hand over Elsa's mouth to keep her scream of terror from giving them away. Finally, the search was abandoned, the natives deciding, perhaps, that all aboard the dugout had been drowned.

Steve waited a few minutes to be sure, then, pulling Elsa to her feet, made off swiftly in a northwesterly direction. "We'll come in on our camp from a different direction," he explained. "We'll make up a couple of light packs and keep right on going. We're safe enough now, I'm sure. I'm sorry about your husband, but there was no use trying to save him. He was dead before he went over the side."

Elsa was calmer now. "Don't waste any sympathy on me," she said coolly, as she trotted behind Steve, a hand hooked in his belt. "Steve, wait a minute before we go any farther. I want to ask you something."

Steve halted. "What is it?"

"What about the jewels? Are we going to leave them there in the river?"

Steve pulled the goatskin bag out from under his shirt. "I have them right here. I grabbed the bag just as Le Clerc went over."

"Oh, you're wonderful, Steve!" Elsa cried. "I love you!"

"This may come as a shock to you, but I'm going to turn these things in," Steve said quietly.

"You're going to what?" Her words

crackled like the snap of whip.

"I've been planning to do that all along," Steve explained. "I think I heard you say there was a million dollars represented by these stones. My reward for turning them in will be the conventional ten percent, which won't be bad, and it will legally be mine."

"You're not going to turn them in," Elsa flung back. "Think of it! We'll be rich. Just you and I, Steve! You and I. I meant what I just said in my excitement a moment ago. I love you, Steve!"

Steve shook his head. "I'm turning them in."

Elsa laid both hands on his shoulders, and she stared deeply into his eyes. She was visibly stirred, her face taut and white. "All right," she said grimly. "Maybe your way is the best. But I still want you, Steve. With or without the jewels. I've loved you since I first saw you in Maripiri."

"We had better get started."

"Don't judge me by my relations with Gaston!" Elsa cried. "I hated him. If I could only make you understand that."

"That isn't it."

"Perhaps it was what Benton told you," Elsa said desperately. "I didn't have anything to do with what happened in Algiers. Not really. It was Gaston who killed Ragame."

"We had better get started," Steve said gently. "We have a long way to go."

Elsa stared at him, her eyes terrible. Then her shoulders sagged and a dry sob wracked her as she accepted defeat. Steve put the jewels back inside his shirt. He pointed off through the jungle. "We should reach camp by daybreak," he said.



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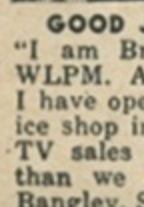
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