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THE PARADISE
THAT TIME FORGOT

by J. P. DRUMMOND

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JUNGLE STORIES



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Into that green Eden, lost for a thousand years from hate and greed,
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KI-GOR—And the Para-dise That Time Forgot

By John Peter Drummond

THE little tree snake wriggled cautiously along the top of the broad bough toward the trunk of the tree. It stopped momentarily and tested the

air nervously with its tiny red forked tongue. Its unwavering eyes stared at the unfamiliar bulk resting in the big crotch a few feet away. When the bulk did not



move, the snake concluded that nothing was amiss and the sinuous progress continued. A moment later the articulated ring-scales gripped the hairy surface of a ruddy brown shaft that extended from the strange body in the crotch. A pleasurable feeling of warmth was communicated to the little serpent's dull brain, but still no untoward movement warned it of danger. Happily, the little creature slithered across Ki-Gor's fore-arm, and proceeded down the tree.

On another occasion, Ki-Gor might have smiled a little to himself. He was secretly proud of his ability to keep so still that not even a tiny muscle twitching would betray him to the alertest creatures of the jungle. But at this moment, his attention was riveted on the scene in the little clearing below him.

A few shafts of noon sunlight penetrated the leafy ceiling of the jungle and shimmered on the white helmets and clothes of the three whites down in the clearing, the big man, the little man, and the little woman. A few yards away from them, a narrow-headed black Somali boy was squatting, and beyond him a score of skinny-legged porters stood uneasily by their bundles and stared at the three whites.

Even if Ki-Gor had not understood English perfectly, he would have been aware that an acrimonious dispute was going on. Just the rasping quality in the big man's voice would have told him that.

"I tell you," said the big man, "I've got to have a drink, and furthermore, I'm *going* to have a drink!"

"But, Morton, dear," the woman said, "You promised—"

"I haven't touched a drop for three days," the big man interrupted, "and as a result, my nerves are completely shot. I should never have let you two beguile me into a promise like that. As a medical man, I know perfectly well that it's extremely bad for the nervous system to shut off alcohol so abruptly."

"But, darling," said the woman, almost tearfully. "You've tried that way so often, and it never worked."

"Look here, old man," it was the little man speaking, "My whole reason for bringing you and Sheila out here to Africa was to get you away from temptation. Use

your will-power. Concentrate on getting through each day without giving in. Before you know it you'll be able to hold a scalpel once more in a steady hand. You can be the old Morton Brett, the greatest brain surgeon in New York—"

"Yes, yes, yes," the big man whined. "But, as a medical man, I tell you it's dangerous to cut off so sharply."

There was a long silence. Then the little man looked at the woman and shook his head.

"Well, Mort," he said slowly, "I'll give you one drink—but only one—"

"That's all I want," the bag man said eagerly, "just one. And then maybe one before we turn in tonight, eh?"

"Just one, I said," and the little man moved toward the group of porters.

KI-GOR shifted his weight gently. The dispute was over and the big man had won. It was too bad, thought Ki-Gor. He didn't like the big man, instinctively, and he didn't like to see the big man win. But there it was. Ki-Gor stretched out a long bronzed leg slowly, preparatory to leaving the scene. He glanced upward and caught the eye of the little Pygmy crouched in the tree above him. Ngeeso could stay and keep an eye on this safari and report later. Ki-Gor was going home now to his mate.

Stealthily, he crept down the tree, keeping the broad trunk between himself and the halted safari. He heard the little man say something to a porter. There was a rustling then, and a long silence. A tin cup clinked then, and the big man muttered a throaty word of thanks. There was a brief gasping cough followed by a long shuddering sigh.

"Aaaah!" the big man exclaimed, "That's more like it! In twenty seconds I'm going to feel like a new man. I think, er—I think, David, that since I haven't had any whiskey now for three whole days—I think I'll have another one."

"I said you could have just one," the little man's voice was stony.

"Yes, and you said we would shoot gorillas!" the big man flared up. "Well, we haven't seen a trace of gorilla since we've been out."

"We will, Mort, we will." The little man was patient. "I admit I got off the track back there somewhere. I turned west

too soon. We're going to retrace our steps now for a while and then head north toward the Belgian mountains. I have a hunch we're almost into Angola right now."

Ki-Gor was standing on the ground by now. When he heard the little man's words, he drifted off through the trees. As long as the safari was going away out of Ki-Gor's territory, he had no further interest in it. The voices in the clearing faded out of his ears as he slipped noiselessly through the jungle.

The last thing he heard was the big man bellowing for another drink.

All the way back to the island in the middle of the rushing river which he and Helene had adopted as their permanent home, Ki-Gor puzzled over the scene he had left. The big man's craving for whiskey was something he couldn't understand. Months before, in Nairobi, where Ki-Gor had first come into contact with civilization, he had tasted whiskey. Almost instantly he had spit it out. How on earth anyone could wish the stuff so badly that he would create a scene before the porters, Ki-Gor could not figure out.

Helene would know, Ki-Gor reflected. She was, after all, born and brought up in civilization. It had not been so many months now—although it seemed much longer—that she had put aside civilization forever and come to live in the jungle as Ki-Gor's wife.

Yes, Ki-Gor told himself, Helene would know the reason for the unpleasant white man's strange desire for whiskey. Something told Ki-Gor, however, to omit any mention of the white woman when he described the safari to Helene. Women are rather funny at times, he had found, and if Helene knew another white woman was near, she might do some unpredictable thing or another. The one thing that Ki-Gor did not want now was to have the secret of his island-home revealed to anybody but the friendly Pygmies who roamed that section of the jungle.

A murmuring rumble grew to a roar as Ki-Gor approached the falls above the island. It was music to his ears. That falls and the other one downstream were two of the many reasons he had selected that island to settle down. They rendered the river un-navigable, blocking approach

to the island by boat or canoe from both directions. Incidentally, the falls kept that part of the river free from any adventurous crocodiles who might stray up into such rugged country.

SUDDENLY, above the roar of the falls, there came a crashing sound from the undergrowth near the river. Then pealed out an awesome blaring—the sound of all the trumpets of doom. Ki-Gor's head lifted for a moment, attentively; but at once a smile broke across his weathered face and he stopped in the jungle path. Throwing his head back, he whistled a peculiar two-toned note; waited, then whistled again.

In a few moments the huge form of Marmo, the elephant, pushed through the tangled undergrowth of the forest. The elephant advanced, bobbing his trunk up and down in greeting.

"Behold!" Ki-Gor said in Swahili. "Thou comest in good time, O great gray sluggard. Lower thy trunk, that I may ride upon thy broad neck."

The great trained elephant chuckled and lowered his trunk obediently. Ki-Gor walked up it to the elephant's broad head. Reaching out a long muscular leg, he heeled the elephant gently behind a great flapping ear. Grunting softly, Marmo moved off along the forest path, Ki-Gor resting easily on his neck.

A little later they came out on the river bank overlooking Ki-Gor's island. Ki-Gor told the elephant to stop, while he examined the scene before him.

It was always a pleasant sight to Ki-Gor, this two-acre oblong of land rising steeply out of the swift currents that washed its banks. It was the safest and the most comfortable location Ki-Gor had ever found for a place that he and Helene could call home. The upstream end of the island was a tumbled mass of boulders and huge rock slabs strewn in mighty confusion over a series of fissured ledges. During some earlier geological day, a subterranean upheaval had hurled and tossed the ledges into the shape they now appeared, and incidentally had formed a half dozen or so roomy caves. Not all of these caves were proof against the violent rains that descend on that part of Africa, but two of them were weather-tight, and high and snug.

These two Ki-Gor and Helene had furnished after a fashion, and here they lived in almost luxurious cosiness.

The lower end of the island was well-wooded and contained a small grove of the same species of tall tree as the one in which Ki-Gor was standing, now. This was a fortunate circumstance which made possible the remarkable means of ingress to the island which always gladdened Ki-Gor's heart whenever he used it.

It was a bridge of woven vines and reeds, fifty yards long, that swooped from a treetop on the mainland a hundred feet above the river to a corresponding treetop on the island. It had been constructed by the devoted Pygmies, and it was a masterpiece of primitive engineering. It sagged considerably in the center, and swayed perilously as one walked across it to the island. But, in point of fact, it was extremely strong and would hold a dozen people at once.

Ki-Gor was about to descend from Marmo's shoulders in order to cross the bridge when behind him, muffled by distance and the jungle growth, there came a faint scream. At the sound of that scream, fear leapt in Ki-Gor's eyes.

"Thou flying mountain," he roared, "take me hence! Carry me through the jungle with the speed of the windstorm! Forward, Marmo!"

For the white hunter's jungle-trained ears had recognized Helene's voice. What she was doing in the depths of the forest, and what danger confronted her he could not even guess. He had ordered her sternly never to leave the safety of their island retreat unless he was with her, but Helene, Ki-Gor knew, was apt to do many unpredictable things and there was nothing he could do about it. Now, he urged Marmo on to greater speed, wondering anxiously what had happened.

The elephant crashed through the jungle, with Ki-Gor stretched out flat on his neck. Ki-Gor gripped his assegai in readiness, and roared encouragement into Marmo's great ears.

Suddenly they came out into a clearing. In an instant, Ki-Gor's eyes caught the salient details of the scene before him, and he cried out once hoarsely, urging Marmo to his greatest speed.

Across the clearing Helene was backing

up, slowly and carefully, keeping her eyes steadily on the young lioness that crouched menacingly over the body of a dead gazelle. The lioness' tail was twitching. It was obvious that she was angry and preparing to charge. Helene was crooning in a soothing voice: "Nice girl! Helene doesn't want your lunch. Nice girl. . . ." But just as Ki-Gor entered the clearing, the lioness, with a coughing roar, sprang from her prey and bounded across the grass. Helene turned like a flash and leaped for the lower branch of a tree behind her. Ki-Gor's heart nearly stopped as he saw her hand catch hold of an overhanging bough—then slip unavailingly.

"Speed, O faithful friend!" he roared at Marmo. They dashed across the clearing like a runaway express. Ki-Gor shifted the assegai in his hand. The lioness sprang in a driving leap. Ki-Gor's arm tensed and with a mighty throw the assegai sped through the air.

Even from a stationary position, it is hard enough to hit a running lioness with a spear. For Ki-Gor to score a hit from the back of a charging elephant was indeed a triumph of skill and nerve. The assegai struck the big cat directly behind the left shoulder, with such force as to bowl the lioness completely over. She turned, snapping, at the protruding shaft of the assegai, and then with a grunt she rolled over and lay still.

Ki-Gor, knife in his hand, was off Marmo's back before the great jungle creature could stop. Helene threw herself into his arms, sobbing.

"Oh, Ki-Gor!" she said. "I thought I was so careful! I wanted to come to meet you! And then I ran smack into this lioness who had just killed a gazelle and dragged it in here. I looked her in the eye the way you told me, but she finally got angry and charged."

She was so frightened that Ki-Gor didn't have the heart to scold her. After a while, he called Marmo to him and they both mounted to his broad neck. And so they rode homeward.

"**A** SAFARI! What is a safari doing over here? Oh, Ki-Gor! You mean a regular safari—white men?"

Ki-Gor nodded. "Two white men."

"But when we settled down here, you said you thought there would never be any white men coming through this way."

Already Helene, once the spoiled, pampered daughter of civilization, was beginning to acquire Ki-Gor's deep-rooted distrust of white men in Africa. Genuine perturbation showed in her face as she watched Ki-Gor and waited for fuller information about the intruders.

They sat beside the small fire under a great overhanging ledge which served as an open-air fireplace. Here in their island sanctuary, they felt far distant from the dangerous jungle outside. Ki-Gor was recounting his experiences of the morning to Helene.

"Don't be afraid," Ki-Gor said, "they lost their way. They are looking for the gorilla country and they came the wrong way. I watched them until I heard them say they were turning back. Anyway, I left Ngeeso to keep his eye on them. If they don't go away soon, Ngeeso will come and tell us."

"I hope they go away soon. What were they like?"

"They were quarreling," Ki-Gor said pithily.

"Quarreling?"

"Yes." Ki-Gor frowned. "Helene, you have drunk whiskey. Why should anyone want whiskey so badly he will quarrel about it?"

"Well—" Helene shrugged, "some people just sort of acquire a taste for it, I suppose. After a while, it gets to be a habit and they just can't seem to do without it, that's all."

"Acquire—a taste," Ki-Gor repeated slowly. "You mean they taste it, and the first time they don't like it? But because they are foolish they taste it again, and three or four times they taste it and still they don't like it. But one day they like it a little better and so they keep on until they do like it."

Helene laughed indulgently. "You're not far off, dear."

Ki-Gor's eyes twinkled benevolently at her.

"Everybody is such fools," he pronounced, and picked up her hand and held it.

Helene looked at him with eyes full of love.

"Everybody is such fools," she whispered.

Suddenly Ki-Gor jerked his head around and stared back over his shoulder. Helene had heard nothing, but as she followed his gaze, she saw a Pygmy hurrying across the bridge. Ki-Gor stood up with a frown.

IN a few moments, Ngeeso was scurrying out of the underbrush toward them. His round little belly bobbed importantly as he ran, and his wrinkled, monkey-like face was contorted in an expression of satisfied glee.

"*Hai!* Big Brother!" he squeaked in the peculiar click language of the Pygmies and Bushmen. "Thou leftest too early! Thou hast missed a great scene!"

"Peace, Little One," Ki-Gor commanded, "Take a breath and relate calmly what thou hast seen."

"*Hai!* Rare it was!" Ngeeso exclaimed happily. "The big one—the buffalo with the voice of a crocodile—went among the porters bellowing and knocking down two of them. The other two came up behind him, the two whites, I mean. And they pleaded with him, and he heeded them not. Instead he pulled a brown bottle from a bundle, and tilted it up to his mouth and drank deeply. And nothing the other two said took any effect. Then the woman—*oohee!* but it was comic!—the woman reached up and tried to take the brown bottle from the buffalo! Never did I see such impudence in a woman—even a white woman. The buffalo drew back his right hand and smote her across the face—"

"What is this you are saying!" Helene cried. She was not so fluent in the click language as Ki-Gor, but she was picking it up rapidly. "Ngeeso! A white woman? Ki-Gor, you said nothing about a white woman!"

"Aye, a white woman," Ngeeso said with a sardonic twitch of his wrinkled mouth, "A little white jungle mouse of a woman with eyes that pop out of her head with sadness. Well, the buffalo struck her full on the mouth and, of course, knocked her down. *OOHEE*, it was a sight!"

Helene was on her feet, eyes snapping.

"Ki-Gor!" Her voice was imperative. "Why didn't you tell me there was a white woman on the safari? Some poor creature is out here in this wilderness with a

drunken brute who's mistreating her!"

"There is nothing to be done," Ki-Gor said simply. "It is not our affair."

"Of course it isn't our affair," Helene retorted, "but just the same, it's not right. If a white woman is being mistreated right here on our home grounds I want to know about it. Come on. We're going right back and have a look at that safari. Whoever that poor little thing is, we're not going to let her be beaten—not if I have anything to do with it!"

Ki-Gor sighed. Whenever Helene's lovely red hair grew redder like that and suddenly seemed to bristle off her forehead, he knew that there was not much use trying to oppose her in anything she decided to do. He turned to the Pygmy.

"Proceed, Little One," he said, wearily. "We will go back with thee to the place where thou leftest the safari."

Ngeeso took them by the tree-route until they got quite close to the intruders. Helene swung along from branch to branch with almost as much agility as her preceptor and teacher, Ki-Gor, and when the three descended to the ground, she stole through the undergrowth as silently as Ngeeso himself.

Long before they came in sight of the safari, they heard the agitated voices rising high on the still afternoon air of the jungle.

"Get out of my way, Sheila! Or I'll knock you down again! You're a pair of foolish idiots, the both of you! And don't think for a moment that you fooled me with this bottle of whiskey! I can tell when whiskey has been diluted—"

"Mort! Please!" the little man appealed. "That's a ridiculous idea! Of course it wasn't diluted! Why—with your own eyes, you saw me pull the cork!"

"Well, this time—" the rasping voice was heavy with meaning, "—this time, I'll pull the cork myself! Now—out of my way! *Out of my way, damn it!*"

The Bull of Bashan voice rose to a savage yell.

HELENE sank to her knees between Ki-Gor and Ngeeso and peered out with horrified eyes through the screening leaves of a wild banana bush. She saw a heavy-shouldered, bull-necked man with a mottled red face and a cropped mustache

lurching toward the huddled group of porters to her left. Behind him in the center of the clearing stood a little man and a woman in attitudes of despair. Her slender frail body drooped, and her once-beautiful, ravaged face was white with fear. The spectacled little man beside her took two irresolute steps forward and peered nearsightedly after the raging figure of Morton Brett.

A sudden clamor broke out among the black porters, and as Helene shifted her gaze in that direction, she saw them milling and pushing against one another in terror as the berserk white man reeled toward them mouthing imprecations. Five paces away from them, he flung an arm up suddenly, and the whole mob of them flew into a panic. The black mass broke up—as it were, exploded—from the pressure within itself. The yelping porters scrambled off in all directions, back into the undergrowth, back up the trail that led into the clearing, off to one side or another—anywhere, to get out of the way of the maddened, purple-faced white man.

One poor creature, finding his way to the rear blocked, tried to dash away past Brett's right hand. In his panicky haste, he tripped on one of the bundles on the ground. Black arms flailed as the porter tried to arrest his fall. But his balance was gone. With a despairing shriek, the black fell heavily against Brett's legs.

This, to Brett's drink-dimmed mind, was a final deliberate insult. He staggered back a step shouting curses and his hand groped for the revolver on his right hip. The miserable porter gave an agonized bleat and tried to scramble away on all fours. Brett's huge hand flipped open the holster.

"No! No! Mort! No!"

It was the little white man. Still shouting, he sprinted across the clearing. He was still three paces from Brett when the drink-crazed man sent a bullet through the porter's brain.

"You fool! You bloody fool!" the little man sobbed and flung himself on Brett's right arm. Brett's reaction was instantaneous. He flicked his right arm twice, and shook the little man off as if he were a beetle. The little man landed sprawling on his back five feet away.

So swiftly had all these events taken

place that Helene behind her screen of leaves could hardly believe her eyes. But there was more to come.

The little woman in the middle of the clearing uttered a terrified cry and ran forward.

"Morton! How could you!"

She sank to her knees beside the fallen white man. Then Morton Brett laughed a hideous laugh. The muzzle of the revolver swung around slowly, relentlessly, and pointed down at the two white-clothed figures on the ground.

Helene drew a sharp breath and half-rose behind the concealing bush.

"So, that's the way it is, is it?" Morton Brett roared. And then as the noise of the fleeing porters died away in the distance, and a fearful silence took possession of the scene, he repeated in a leering whisper, "So *that's* the way it is, is it?"

The little man raised up on one elbow.

"Put that gun away, Mort," his voice was clear and unafraid. "You've done enough damage for one day."

"Oh! So you want me to put my gun away, David Gray," Brett sneered. "How nice for you if I did. Then you could draw your own and have the drop on me. And you could kill me and leave my body here for the hyenas while you and my dear devoted little wife went off together and lived happily ever after. Which is just what you have planning to do ever since we came to Africa."

"I don't know what you're talking about," David Gray said. "And I don't think you do either."

HELENE'S heart was beating like a trip-hammer as she watched the tense scene before her. A slight movement to one side of the menacing figure of Brett caught her eyes, and her heart bounded. It was the Somali boy on his hands and knees, crouched to spring at the drunken white man.

"I know exactly what I'm doing," Brett retorted, his mouth working, "I've been on to you. Try to cut me off liquor, would you? You know damn well it might have been fatal, and that's exactly what you wanted, isn't it?"

"Mort, that's ridiculous! Sheila and I are the last friends you have left on earth. We've stuck to you long after the rest

dropped you. We've stuck to you and tried our best to bring back the old Morton Brett we knew and loved."

Helene clenched her fists in excitement. That's right, David Gray, she whispered to herself, keep stalling—keep his attention away from the Somali boy!

For a fraction of a second, Gray's words seemed to have an effect on Brett. A momentary doubt clouded his bloated face and the gun in his hand wavered. But it was only momentary. The cunning bestial grin returned, and the gun muzzle came up again.

Then the Somali boy sprang.

Whether some sixth sense warned the drunken man or whether he just happened to turn his head at that moment, Helene never knew. But as the Somali boy hit him in a slicing high tackle around the shoulders, Brett somehow swung his right arm free. For the space of two heartbeats, the white man and the black man swayed, locked in tense embrace. Then Brett's right arm thrashed out and in again. The gun muzzle jabbed the Somali under the left armpit. The gun roared. The Somali screamed and went limp.

Red froth bubbled out from the black lips, and the black fingers relaxed their hold and twitched. Brett gave a mighty heave and the faithful Somali collapsed in a heap on the ground.

"That's done it!" Brett roared and once again aimed the revolver at his wife and his friend. "My last friends, are you! So you sic your damn native on me!"

Without taking her eyes off the scene, Helene groped beside her with trembling fingers. Ki-Gor had to intervene! But her hand blindly pawed empty air! She jerked her head. *Ki-Gor was not there!*

"Say your prayers, my last friends!" the big man snarled.

Brett's face was contorted into an inhuman mask. The hand holding the fearful gun shook with demoniacal fury.

Something snapped in Helene's brain. Throwing all caution to the winds, she leaped out from behind her hiding place.

"Drop that gun!"

She stood in full view at the edge of the clearing, her blue eyes blazing. Brett threw her a horrified look and staggered back, the revolver suddenly loose in his fist.

"What's this!" he croaked, his bloodshot eyes bulging.

Helene began to shake all over. Now that she was out here, what was she going to do? She was unarmed. She certainly could not overpower that drunken brute. It would only be a matter of seconds before he recovered from the shock of her appearance.

"Drop that gun, I said!" she repeated, and hoped Brett wouldn't notice the hysterical quaver in her voice. "I've—I've—you're surrounded by—by—"

"By what?" snarled Morton Brett, and Helene's heart sank as she realized that the first shock of surprise was leaving him.

"Who are you, anyway?" Morton Brett's mouth worked and his eyes narrowed. The gun jerked up in his fist, and he took two steps forward.

Helene sucked her breath in. What a fool I was! She told herself bitterly. Ki-Gor, Ki-Gor! Where are you? *Where are you!*

Then she saw him.

HE appeared from nowhere a few paces behind Morton Brett, cold fury in his bronzed face. He stepped soundlessly, almost deliberately, and yet so swiftly that he was beside Morton Brett before Helene could catch her breath.

His left hand snaked down, seized Brett's gun-hand by the wrist and flicked the revolver loose in one terrific motion. At the same instant, his right hand crossed over and chopped upward in a fearful uppercut. He hit Morton Brett on the point of the chin with his palm open like a gorilla. There was a sound like the crack of a rifle. Brett's head flew back and his feet left the ground. He seemed to hang in the air for a moment, then he crashed heavily to the earth and lay perfectly still.

Helene's knees felt weak and she had to summon up all her will power to keep from sitting down right where she stood. She had never seen Ki-Gor hit a man harder in her life.

Ki-Gor walked across the clearing toward her, stony-eyed, ignoring the awed little couple who stared at him.

"Never do that again, Helene," he said severely. "Trust Ki-Gor. I would not let him shoot his friends. That is why I left your side."

Helene could not trust herself to speak for a moment. He was right and she knew it. Hereafter, she would always trust Ki-Gor. She was glad now that the little woman, Sheila Brett, came stumbling toward her, sobbing.

"I—I—don't know—what to say. You saved our lives—I don't know how—it just seems like—like a miracle. I know him—he would have killed us—and then you just appeared—"

Helene put her arm around the woman's thin shoulders.

"Well, there now," she comforted. "It's all over. Just relax."

"Is he—is he dead?" Sheila Brett asked fearfully.

"No." David Gray was coming toward them, his face white and drawn. "He's still alive. If he hadn't been so drunk, that blow would have broken his neck. However, he won't recover consciousness very soon."

Ki-Gor's face showed the slightest trace of irritation as he glanced toward the recumbent body of Morton Brett.

"Too bad," he said, and turned back to the man and woman. "Maybe I better kill him—now?"

David Gray looked up at him solemnly.

"A man like that," Ki-Gor said, "is like a mad elephant. He is bad, all bad. He should not be allowed to live."

"No-o," David Gray said slowly. "He's not all bad—only when he's under the influence of whiskey. Then he becomes somebody else. He would have killed us, no question about it, if you hadn't come along when you did. But—when he wakes up, he'll be all right. He will be horrified to think what he nearly did. It may be the one thing that will cure him of ever drinking again."

Ki-Gor shrugged contemptuously and turned away.

"It is impossible," David Gray said, "for us to express our real gratitude. We owe our lives to you, this moment, and we—we haven't the faintest idea who you are—unless—" A light began to dawn behind the little man's spectacles. "—unless you are—Ki-Gor!"

"Yes," said Ki-Gor with a pleased smile, "I am Ki-Gor. How did you know?"

"Well, I've heard about you, of course," Gray said, excitement creeping into his

measured tones, "the whole world has heard about you. Then you—" and he turned to Helene, "must be Helene Vaughn, the American heiress, who crashed in a trans-African solo flight."

"Yes," Helene smiled, "and Ki-Gor picked me out of the wreckage and protected me from the man-eaters of the jungle."

"Oh, I remember," Sheila Brett put in, "the papers were full of it when you showed up in Uganda. You started back for America and only got as far as London."

"Yes, I never did go on from there," Helene explained, "Ki-Gor found out that he couldn't get along without Africa, and I—I found out I couldn't get along without Ki-Gor. I flew back and joined him and we were married at Fort Lamy."

"You left your wealthy, cosmopolitan life," Sheila Brett said wonderingly, "to settle down in the jungle with—nothing?"

"I have Ki-Gor," Helene said simply, "and as far as that goes, life in the jungle compares favorably with, say, life in Europe, today. After all, lions don't kill wantonly, and even leopards don't slaughter millions of innocent people at the command of a Super-Leopard."

AH! You're so right," David Gray said heartily. "I've been making trips to Africa for fourteen years, and I've found that if you mind your own business and see that you don't infringe on the lives and rights of others—beast or human—you are as safe as you could be anywhere on earth."

Ki-Gor looked at him steadily. He said without expression: "I think it is better to take away all the guns from your friend before he wakes up."

And the jungle man coolly strolled across to the prone figure and stripped the revolver belt off it. Then he picked up the revolver, and walked past the dead Somali boy to where two gun-cases were lying. He returned then to the group, bearing the three weapons and the belt.

"Don't let him have these," he said putting them in David Gray's arms, "for any reason."

"Perhaps you're right," murmured the little man. "Now, let's see. I suppose I'd better start thinking about what to do

next. I wonder just how far away those porters have gone."

"By now," said Ki-Gor, "they are miles away. You will never get them back."

"Oh Lord!" Gray groaned. "What in the world am I going to do?"

He threw a helpless glance at the row of abandoned packing-cases and bundles lying beyond the prone figure of Brett.

"The worst of it is," he added, "that I've lost my way. I suppose if I followed this trail back I would eventually come to more familiar country, unless—unless the trail branched and I took a wrong turn."

"Don't worry," Ki-Gor said suddenly. "I'll guide you."

"Would you?" Gray cried eagerly. "That would be terribly good of you! I wouldn't let you do it if I could possibly get out myself. Heaven knows you've done enough for us for one day!"

Ki-Gor shrugged again. Helene shot him a shrewd glance. She knew perfectly well that it was all he could do to conceal his irritation at the recent turn of events.

Two basic urges ruled the conduct of Ki-Gor's life. One of them was the fierce desire to be left alone. He prized his independence and privacy above everything else. The other urge or emotion was disgust, contempt for, and even fear of white men.

He had only the dimmest of memories of the Scottish missionary who was his father and who had been killed by treacherous blacks when Ki-Gor was a tiny boy. The boy had grown to manhood, surviving the rigors of the jungle by sheer native wit, adaptability, and physical endurance. Until Helene had come into his life, he had imagined himself unique in the world.

She had persuaded him to return to his own people so that he could have the benefits and comforts of civilization rather than live the rest of his life as a naked savage in the humid forests of Africa. The experiment had been an unfortunate one. Ki-Gor had found the comforts of civilization hampering and constricting. The standards and conventions of civilized society he had found arbitrary and capricious, if not downright false. And the competitive spirit of white men, their boundless greed, their lust for power, their capacity for any treachery to achieve their ends, he found revolting and far less ideal than the im-

personal Law of Tooth and Claw of the jungle. Ki-Gor reflected that a lion, viewing his legitimate prey, an antelope, did not whip himself into a rage because he and the antelope differed in their ideas of God. The lion killed the antelope without rancor and ate her—because he was hungry.

Helene's eyes followed Ki-Gor now, as he walked over and stared down at Morton Brett's bloated face. Poor Ki-Gor! Helene thought. He had found his ideal homesite, the Island, and had established himself and her in the snug dwelling in this remote mountainous region safe from all intrusion, so he thought . . . only to have these whites come blundering in on him and start killing each other off in a manner only too typical of white men. Not only did he have to save their lives for them, but now he was saddled with the responsibility of leading them back to civilization.

No wonder Ki-Gor looked glum.

THEN Helene looked at the sad-faced little woman in the beautifully cut white riding breeches and the high laced boots. Poor Sheila Brett! What a life she must be leading with a husband who could drink himself so quickly—and so frequently—into irresponsible and homicidal lunacy. She stood apart now, staring apathetically at the ground. Helene wondered if fundamentally she was really grateful at being saved from death. Ngeeso's phrase came into Helene's mind—"a little jungle-mouse of a woman with eyes that pop out of her head with sadness." Helene was on the point of voicing an impulsive invitation to the poor woman to come to the Island with her, when Ki-Gor and David Gray began to talk.

"When will he wake up?" Ki-Gor said, indicating Brett.

"He ought to pretty soon," was the answer. "If he doesn't, we ought to bring him to if we can. I'll try and empty his stomach of some of that poison, and then I'll give him a sedative and let him sleep a while."

"How soon can he march, then?" Ki-Gor asked gloomily.

"I'm afraid not until tomorrow morning at the earliest," Gray replied apologetically. "His face is badly bruised. It's a wonder to me that his jaw isn't broken. I guess

it's true that Providence that watches over drunkards and fools."

Ki-Gor's expressionless face did not for a second betray the fact that he did not know what "Providence" meant. Ki-Gor never admitted ignorance unless he felt that there was something to be gained by it.

"Look here," said David Gray, "I feel very badly about all this. I might be able to find the way back into Rhodesia by myself, especially if you could draw me a rough map. I hate to ask you to leave your home just to guide us goodness-knows how many miles."

"This is not my home," Ki-Gor said quickly with a warning glare at Helene.

"Oh!" Gray seemed surprised. "I thought it was."

Ki-Gor shook his head, still looking ferociously at his wife. Then he turned to Gray with the blandest of expressions.

"No, we are just here for a little while, and then we will go back North. Any-way, I won't have to guide you far. I know a short-cut over the mountains that will bring us to a trail that goes to a place called Muyanga."

"Oh! Muyanga!" Gray exclaimed, "I know Muyanga. If you can get us to Muyanga, I'll know how to go on from there. How long will it take over this short-cut?"

"Three days, maybe, even going slow," Ki-Gor answered with a significant glance at Sheila Brett.

"That's splendid," said Gray, "much better than I could have ever hoped for." He regarded ruefully the bundles abandoned by the fleeing porters. "It seems a shame to have to leave all that behind—there's some fine camping equipment there among other things. But I guess the only thing to do is to pick out a few items and make up a couple of small packs."

The little man knelt down beside an opened box.

"This is something we're going to get along without," he said grimly, and one by one he took out bottles of whiskey and carefully smashed them on a rock beside him. When he came to the last one, he held it a moment and looked at it.

"I think perhaps we'd better save one and hide it away in my pack. After all, Africa is full of poisonous snakes and it

might not be a bad idea to have a stimulant along."

He stood up still holding the bottle and started toward the haversack lying in the middle of the clearing. Then he paused momentarily and looked down at Brett. The big man moved slightly.

"He's coming to, at last," Gray observed, "it's about time."

He walked on to the haversack and stowed the bottle of whiskey away in it. Then he picked up a canteen and returned to Brett.

The big man's eyes were half open, now, and he was rolling his head feebly and groaning.

"Help me get him up, will you, Ki-Gor?" Gray appealed.

Helene turned her head away as Ki-Gor dragged the stupefied creature to his feet and propelled him toward the bushes. A moment later there was a sound of dreadful retching. Then came silence.

A LITTLE later Ki-Gor and Gray joined the two women in the clearing.

"Mort doesn't know the score yet," Gray informed them, "but we helped him get rid of a lot of that stuff on his stomach. I think after he's slept a couple of hours he'll be better. In the meantime, Ki-Gor, I suppose we'd better think about looking for some place to spend the night."

The jungle man shot another warning glance at Helene, and she knew he meant her to keep silent about the Island. Very coolly, he answered Gray.

"We don't have to look anywhere. Right here is a good place for your camp. It is high and dry, and there is good water not far from here that I will show you."

"Ye-es," said Gray dubiously with a grimace, "but those corpses aren't very pleasant—"

"Don't worry about them," Ki-Gor cut in. He looked up into a tall tree and raised his voice.

"Ngeeso!" he called, "thou nimble squirrel, come down here! There is naught for you to fear and I have urgent business for thee."

David Gray's face lighted up with interest as he heard Ki-Gor speaking the Pygmy language. And when a moment later, Ngeeso stood shyly at the edge of

the clearing listening to Ki-Gor, Gray cocked an attentive ear.

"Behold those two unhappy creatures from whom life has fled," Ki-Gor said to the Pygmy, pointing at the bodies of the porter and the Somali. "They must be removed far from here. Therefore, Ngeeso, collect thy kinsmen with the utmost haste and dispose of them. Within the month I shall reward ye all by killing a wild elephant."

"My kinsmen are at hand, Big Brother," Ngeeso squeaked, "and straightway, we will do thy bidding. Without a reward, we would perform this task, but—" the Pygmy licked his long upper lip comically, "oohee! It is long since we gorged ourselves on elephant-meat!"

He disappeared into the undergrowth uttering shrill commands to unseen relatives. In a short time, a horde of pot-bellied little men and women swarmed out of the forest and scurried about the macabre task of removing the dead from the clearing.

David Gray looked at Ki-Gor wonderingly.

"The language you used just now," he said, "sounds remarkably like the language of the Bushmen down in the Kalahari. I have studied their speech, and yet I could not understand what you said."

"There are some words alike," Ki-Gor nodded, "but not many. But as you say, there are many sounds common to the two languages. Perhaps, at some time in the distant past, they were one people—the Pygmy and the Bushmen, and they split apart to live in different places and in the course of time, their languages grew apart."

"Ah!" said Gray, a fascinated expression stealing over his scholar's face. "That is precisely the theory that is held by one school of African anthropologists. It is a theory which has always interested me."

HELENE laughed as she intercepted the questioning glance from Ki-Gor.

"I assure you, Mr. Gray," she interposed, "that Ki-Gor is not an anthropologist in the accepted sense. He has eyes that see and ears that hear, and he can always put two and two together."

"But that's marvelous!" Gray cried enthusiastically. "As I've said, languages,

races, and customs of Africa, are of tremendous interest to me, and I count myself very fortunate to be able to talk to you, Ki-Gor, and get the benefit of your observations. They should be worth twice as much as the mere theories thought up by European and American scholars far removed from the actual scene."

Ki-Gor could scarcely conceal his bewilderment at this outburst, but he had felt from the beginning that there was a quality of honesty and integrity in this little man, Gray, which was rare among white men, or at least the white men that Ki-Gor had encountered. He, therefore, listened attentively as Gray went on:

"As a matter of fact, one of my deepest interests is this very possibility of some relationship or common ancestry between the Pygmy and the Bushmen. Both races are under-sized, yellow in color, and have thin lips in comparison with the Negroes around them. Both races have a very primitive culture, and both use a language of clicks. We're pretty sure both races were in Africa before the Bantu Negroes came along and drove them into the forests and the deserts. But—the question that is still unanswered is—where did the Pygmies and the Bushmen come from?"

If Ki-Gor was still overwhelmed by Gray's scientific zeal he showed it no longer. He merely grinned, and then suddenly reached out and seized an unwary Pygmy scurrying by.

"Tell me, Little Brother," Ki-Gor demanded, "where didst thy father's father's father come from?"

"I know not, Big Brother," the little creature replied, "but my mother's mother's mother was hatched from a crocodile's egg on the bank of a great river."

Ki-Gor translated this to Gray, and the little man with the glasses grew even more excited.

"The same kind of folk-lore as the Bushmen," he cried. "One of them once told me that his mother's mother's mother was hatched out from an ostrich's egg on the sunny side of a sand dune. You notice that both peoples apparently trace their ancestry through the female line. Matriarchy is, of course, much older than patriarchy in the growth of human society."

This was getting far too complicated for Ki-Gor to follow and he was secretly very

relieved that Ngeeso stepped up to him at that moment and asked if there were any further commands to be carried out. Ki-Gor suggested that the Pygmies collect some firewood for the camping place, and Helene put in another suggestion that they break out the tents and try and put them up. Helene realized that Ki-Gor was getting a little uncomfortable under the learned questions that David Gray was putting to him, and she was glad of an opportunity to break up the conversation.

FOR the next hour there was a great running about of Pygmies as they worked with the best of will and in a shrill uproar to put up the tents. But the Pygmies had never seen a tent before and were in consequence less than efficient in the task. Even Gray's supervision could not balance their ignorance, and when the tents were finally set up and pegged down, they presented a laughably lopsided appearance.

However, the tents would do to sleep in for one night if there were no heavy rainstorms, and the activity of getting them up had a beneficial effect on Sheila Brett. The shock of the dreadful scene with her husband wore off to some extent, and she was able to laugh a little with Helene and David Gray at the results of the Pygmies' labors.

About an hour after the Pygmies left, and just before sunset, there was a sound of thrashing in the undergrowth, and Morton Brett appeared at the edge of the clearing. He stood for a moment, swaying, one hand to his head. Gone was his high color, and his face, now, was a pasty white.

"Sheila!" he cried hoarsely, "Dave! What happened? What happened to me? I feel awful! I think I'm going to die!"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Gray, getting up and going toward him.

"But what happened?" Brett insisted. "I feel as if I'd been on a terrible drunk."

"You have," Gray replied.

"But how—" Brett paused. "Oh Lord!" he groaned, "You gave me a drink. I asked you for a drink and you let me have it. You shouldn't have, Dave. You should never have let me have it!"

"There wasn't much we were able to do about it," Gray replied dryly, "that is to say, we weren't able to stop you from

having more than one drink, it seemed."

"Oh Lord!" Brett groaned again, "I remember now. I insisted on having another. And then—oh, this is frightful! I remember I tilted the bottle up to my mouth! That's the last thing I remember at all clearly. Dave—did I—did I drink the whole bottle?"

The big man flopped down on his knees and started shaking all over.

"Yes, Mort," Gray said, "you drank the whole bottle—and more, too."

"Tell me, Dave," Brett whimpered, "did I act badly? Oh, this hideous curse that's fastened itself on me! Dave! Sheila! You've got to help me shake it—you've got to."

"You're in no condition to discuss anything now," said Gray. "I want you to drink this cup of hot condensed milk, and then I want you to go into your tent and sleep for a while."

"I couldn't sleep, now!" Brett whined, "I couldn't possibly! My nerves are shot to hell."

"I know that, Mort. I'm going to give you a pill to go along with the milk."

Brett lifted his twitching face and looked around unhappily. He seemed to see Ki-Gor and Helene, now, for the first time.

"Dave! Sheila!" he whispered in a frightened tone, "Who—who are they? Who are these people? They're dressed in leopard-skins—like savages—. Who are they?"

"They're friends," Gray said quickly, "They came along just in time to save your life—and ours. Drink that milk, Mort, and take that pill. After you've had a good long sleep, you'll be feeling much better. Then I'll tell you what you did while you were drunk. Come on, now. Here, come into the tent, and take off those clothes. I'll bring the milk along. Quick—do as I say."

Brett lurched to his feet, his swollen face suggestive of a hurt child.

"Dave," he whimpered, "my jaw aches, and my head aches."

"I'll bet it does," said David Gray and followed the big man into the tent.

Ki-Gor seized this opportunity to drag Helene to her feet and to say good-night to Sheila Brett.

"Oh, aren't you going to stay here with us, this evening?" the little woman said,

her large brown eyes growing larger.

"We found a very comfortable tree last night," Ki-Gor said coolly. "We will come in the morning for you."

HELENE followed him out of the clearing into the undergrowth. A moment later, Ki-Gor boosted her up to a bough she could not have otherwise reached, and then the pair swung homeward by the tree route.

Ngeeso was waiting by the bridge.

"The mad elephant, hath he finally waked?" the Pygmy asked.

"Yes, Little Brother, and feeling very bad because he drank too much mad-water."

"Hah! Serve the beast right!" Ngeeso spat. "By the Sacred Crocodile, I thought for a moment there thou hadst killed him with thy right-hand blow."

"It was something of a glancing blow, Little One, or else I had."

"Thou came in the very nick," Ngeeso declared, wagging his head importantly. "I was afraid for a moment when thy lady stood out in the open unarmed and dared him. If thou hadst not come then, I had a poisoned-tip shaft all notched and ready."

"Ah! it's as well he lived," Ki-Gor sighed, his manner belying his statement. "Go, Little One, and tell thy kinsmen that Ki-Gor thanks them deeply for their assistance this afternoon."

"They are glad and proud to help thee, Ki-Gor," Ngeeso said simply. Then a roguish expression twisted his scarred features. "Already, I can taste that elephant meat. Ki-Gor, when shall we go hunting the elephant?"

"Mercenary little rascal!" Ki-Gor roared and aimed a jesting blow of his right hand which would have killed the Pygmy if it had landed. Ngeeso chuckled with delight and ducked his head five inches, which was precisely the distance by which Ki-Gor's blow missed him.

"However," Ki-Gor said, "if thou wilt send out some young men to scout the plain below, I will be back from my journey in—" he held up a palm outspread. "five days. Then we will hunt any herds these young men may have discovered."

"Journey, Big Brother?" Ngeeso said sharply. "Dost thou indeed journey with

these dull-witted whites back there?"

"I don't want them around here," Ki-Gor retorted, "therefore I shall guide them away by the shortest, quickest route possible."

"Ah!" Ngeeso murmured approvingly. "Over the mountain, Big Brother? And across the Lost River?"

"The shortest route, I said."

"It is good, Big Brother, and thou art wise, as ever. Let me come with thee."

"No, Little One. Thou wilt best help me by staying and watching over my woman so that no harm shall befall her."

"What do you mean, Ki-Gor?"

It was Helene, speaking abruptly and forcefully in English.

"Did I understand you to tell Ngeeso you were leaving me behind?"

"It is best, Helene," Ki-Gor said with more authority than he felt.

"Well, you're not going to do anything of the kind, Ki-Gor!" Helene brushed an insect off her bare arm indignantly. "There isn't the slightest reason why I shouldn't go along with you. It's just a short trip, and there isn't any danger."

"I don't like that big man. I think he is danger," Ki-Gor said, with a frown.

"No, Ki-Gor, you're wrong," Helene said earnestly, "He's dangerous when he's drunk, and only then. I've seen his kind before. Honestly, Ki-Gor, you don't have to worry about him. Tomorrow, you'll see a different man. It's only when the whiskey gets him that he will cause trouble. And you saw David Gray destroy the whiskey."

"He didn't destroy one bottle," Ki-Gor pointed out.

"No, but he hid it. And Brett will never know it's in Gray's pack, because nobody will tell him."

"Well—I don't know," Ki-Gor shrugged moodily. "Maybe there is no danger but for some reason I don't want you to come along."

"Nonsense!" Helene scoffed. "You're just letting your imagination get the best of you. Now, it's all settled. I'm going with you, tomorrow."

Ki-Gor knew when he was beaten, and so did Ngeeso, even though the Pygmy didn't understand a word of English. He slid down the tree-trunk to the branch below and called up.

"Until tomorrow morning, then, Big Brother. If thy woman journeys with thee, why then, Ngeeso journeys with thee also, the better to watch over thy woman."

He ducked around the bole of the tree with a shrill cackle as Ki-Gor flung a piece of bark down.

II

BEFORE sunup the next day, Ki-Gor was stirring around. He spent an unusually long time examining his primitive arsenal of spears, clubs, bows and arrows. Finally he selected his longest, strongest bow and slung it on his back. He had other bows that shot more accurately, or faster, but none that could send arrows as far as this one. Out of his spear rack, he selected a short, heavy and very strong assegai with a broad double-edged blade.

Helene looked at him in amazement when he came in answer to her call for breakfast.

"What on earth are you doing with your war equipment, Ki-Gor?" she demanded. "Anyone would think you were going to trek through a country infested with cannibals."

"I don't know," Ki-Gor said unhappily. "I don't know at all. I seem to smell danger on this trip. Even going three days with these white people, I feel queer about something. I feel as if I should be well armed."

"That's silly, Ki-Gor," Helene said, but in a sympathetic tone. "I think seeing a man drunk for the first time in your life sort of got you down. I don't blame you in a way, because he was awful—I've never seen anybody worse drunk in my life—and I've seen a few. But you shouldn't let it bother you quite so much. You see, he can't get drunk again, and I think you'll find that when he's sober he'll be perfectly all right, really I do."

Ki-Gor shook his head impatiently.

"The little man," he said, "and the woman—they seem all right. Then why do they have anything to do with a mad beast like—like—"

"Brett," Helene supplied, "Well, the answer is probably just what I say—when he's sober he's a perfectly fine man. From what I overheard, he was once apparently

a great doctor in America. Those two love the man he is when he is sober. When he is drunk, nobody could love him."

"It sounds unhealthy to me," Ki-Gor said. "And, once more, Helene, I wish you would not come with me—"

"Please, darling!" Helene pouted, "Don't let's go all over that again. It's all settled. I know you're just worried because you're upset from seeing a drunken man."

"Maybe," said Ki-Gor staring into the fire.

A moment later he stood up with sudden decision and went into the main cave. When he returned, his long bow was still slung over his shoulder, but the war-assegai was missing. Evidently, he had thought better of bringing it. However, a little bulge under the leopard-skin trunks at his right hip indicated to Helene that he was carrying iron rations of dried antelope meat.

"Helene," he said, "when we get to their camp, it will be a good idea, I think, if we don't go in openly. We'll listen quietly for a little while and see how that man is behaving."

Helene nodded and stood up. As long as Ki-Gor agreed to let her come with him, she was perfectly willing to follow his orders, even when he might seem to be over-cautious.

Again, Ngesso was waiting for them at the far end of the bridge. He had probably slept in that very tree all night, although Helene noticed that the quiver on his back was newly filled with tiny arrows. He greeted the couple formally, betraying no surprise in his gnome-like face at Helene's presence. Swiftly, then, the strange trio swung through the trees toward the camp of David Gray and Morton and Sheila Brett.

THE three Americans were fully dressed and sitting around a small fire eating breakfast when Ki-Gor noiselessly slipped into a comfortable crotch in a nearby tree.

"He should be along soon, shouldn't he?" Morton Brett was saying. His manner was far different from the day before. He was humble and subdued, even timid. His face was swollen and purple.

"Yes," Gray answered, "I expected him

before now. We were a little late getting breakfast."

"Lord!" the big man muttered, "I don't know how I can face him. It's bad enough to have to face you and Sheila after you told me what I did yesterday. Unworthy as I am, you two love me and understand me. But this man, Ki-Gor, must think I'm a pretty strange sort of person."

"He'll understand that you were just in liquor," said Gray.

"Oh that!" Brett shuddered. "You have my most solemn word on that. Any time I ever feel a thirst coming on, all I need to do is to think back on how I felt this morning when you told me how close I came to—to— Oh, Dave! Sheila! Can you ever forgive me!"

The big man held his hands out in agonized appeal.

"Mort," said Gray gently, "if that scene yesterday is the means of curing your dipsomania for good and all—then Sheila and I will consider that our moment of horror and agony was not in vain."

Brett buried his face in his hand for a second.

"Bless you, Sheila!" he said brokenly. "Bless you, Dave!"

Up in the tree, Helene nudged Ki-Gor.

"You see?" she whispered triumphantly into his ear. "He's an absolutely different man when he's sober. You can trust him now."

Ki-Gor nodded slowly, but his blue eyes were cold and unconvinced. He unfolded a long leg silently and easily and began to descend the tree.

The three white-clothed people around the breakfast fire jumped nervously at the sound of Ki-Gor's voice saying, "Good morning."

Morton Brett struggled to his feet as Ki-Gor and Helene crossed the clearing toward the tents, little Ngesso trailing shyly behind. Brett's face was chalk-white, his lips gray as he spoke the first words.

"Ki-Gor and—er, Mrs. Ki-Gor," he stammered, "before anything else is said or done, I must first try and make my peace with you. You saw me yesterday a homicidal maniac in the grip of a frightful curse that has enslaved me for five years. I cannot apologize adequately, or in any way excuse my actions."

Ki-Gor's eyes held the other man's steadily, but a deep flush spread over his weather-beaten face, and he shifted his feet uncomfortably. Helene could see that he was acutely embarrassed by Brett's abject apology. She stepped forward and held out her hand.

"I think we understand, Doctor Brett," she said calmly, "and let us consider the whole incident as forgotten. The most important thing now, I think, is to get you three started back toward civilization."

"We're all ready to go now," David Gray said promptly. "We just have to sling light haversacks over our shoulders, and we can walk right out of here. It seems a shame to leave these tents here to rot, but I guess there's nothing to be done about it. By the way, Ki-Gor, I buried two hunting rifles and a revolver with a quantity of ammunition last night. If you want them we can go and dig them up now."

Ki-Gor shook his head thoughtfully.

"We don't need them," he said, at length, "They are better where they are. One gun is enough. Let me have yours, Gray."

"Mine?" said Gray, startled, "Why—er—"

"Give it to him, David," Morton Brett said, unexpectedly. "I don't blame him at all for wanting to be the only one in the party with a gun."

"Very well," said Gray, unstrapping the cartridge belt around his waist. "We want you to trust us as completely as we trust you, Ki-Gor."

The jungle man took the belt without answering and fastened it about his own waist. Then he looked impassively at the little group.

"We'll go in this order," he said finally. "I will lead the way. Then you behind me, Brett. Then Helene. After her, Sheila. And then Gray."

He said a few rapid words to Ngeeso which Helene understood as a command to the Pygmy to bring up the rear of the party and to keep a sharp eye on the three Americans.

In this manner, the strangely assorted group finally got under way.

FOR about a mile, Ki-Gor followed the trail which Gray had come down the day before. But when the trail left the

thick jungle for a short distance to cross a stretch of high ground. Ki-Gor turned abruptly off at right angles and began a long, gradual climb up a sparsely wooded side of a mountain. While the ground underfoot was not too rough, there was not much protection from the brassy glare of the sun, and the progress of the column up the long persistent upgrade was slow and halting. Morton Brett, in particular, appeared to be making heavy work of propelling his beefy frame up the slope, in spite of Ki-Gor's considerably slow pace. However, the big man did not complain, possibly because he was saving his breath.

A little after midday, there were expressions of satisfaction from the three Americans as Ki-Gor halted the party on the crest of a ridge and sought out the shade of a clump of tall bushes. There were sighs of relief when the jungle man indicated that the way led down hill from there for some distance. But the relief changed to dismay when Ki-Gor went on to say that after they descended to the shallow valley, they would have to climb a still higher mountain.

Nightfall found the party camping well up on the slopes of this higher mountain. Everyone, including even Helene, was too tired to talk very much, and after a light meal all promptly went to sleep.

The climb was resumed early the next morning, with the Bretts and Gray seemingly much refreshed by their long sleep in the cool mountain air. It was not long before Ki-Gor halted again on a crest of ground and pointed out the direction their way was to take that day.

"We go down hill some more," he said, "until we come to the Lost River. It's too wide and swift for us to cross without a boat, so we will walk along it until we come to the place where the river goes into the mountain and get across it that way."

"The Lost River," said David Gray, thoughtfully. "I've heard about that somewhere. You say it's a large river, but it disappears into the side of a mountain?"

"Into the side of a mountain!" Helene exclaimed, "What happens to it? A big river just can't lose itself entirely, can it?"

"I don't know," Ki-Gor shrugged, "Maybe it comes out the other side. I've

only traveled this route once, and that time I didn't stop to—to scout—”

“To explore?” Helene supplied.

“To explore it,” Ki-Gor finished with a grateful smile.

“Wait a minute,” David Gray said, frowning. “Are there Bushmen along this Lost River?”

“I don't think so,” Ki-Gor replied, “Anyway, I didn't see any. It isn't Bushman country. It's pretty heavy jungle along the banks.”

“Well, somehow I seem to connect up a Lost River with Bushmen,” Gray pondered. “Now, just what was that connection?”

“You'll see it when we come to it,” Ki-Gor said. “It really isn't as strange as it sounds. The river cuts down between two mountains. They have very steep sides, those mountains and they form a sort of—sort of—how do you say it, Helene?”

“Do you mean a gorge?” Helene smiled.

“Yes. A gorge,” Ki-Gor said. “That's just what it is—a gorge. And sometime, a long time ago, there was an earthquake, probably, and great piles of rock fell down across the river from both mountains. Maybe it blocked up the river for a while, but now the water has found a way down under the rocks.”

“Say!” Gray said with a mounting excitement, “It's coming back to me, now! I know why I connect this Lost River with the Bushmen! It's because I heard about it from them!”

“But, Dave”—it was Morton Brett—“I thought all the Bushmen were way south of us down in the Kalahari desert.”

“Most of them are,” Brett returned, “and that's where I heard the story—down in the Kalahari. I spent three years off and on down there studying the Bushmen. They have a remarkable folk-lore, rich and colorful. And I remember distinctly a story about two mountains who loved each other. These mountains were separated by a river. At first they pleaded with the river to flow somewhere else, but the river impudently refused to do so. Whereupon the mountains, in a rage, shook their sides and rolled masses of rocks down and blocked off the river. And the river swelled its sides and tried to burst the barrier of the rocks but was unable to do it. And eventually, the river grew ashamed

and hid its face among the fallen rocks.”

“Why, how extraordinary!” Helene exclaimed.

“Well, it's all the more extraordinary,” Gray went on, “to find a natural phenomenon that would bear out that story—give it a basis of truth, so far away from the Bushman country. I wonder whether this region might have once been the home of Bushmen. Perhaps they lived around here hundreds of years ago and were driven south when the big Bantu came in.”

KI-GOR regarded the little American with genuine interest. Then apparently he thought of something.

“There are not many Bantu here now,” he said. “Just a few Pygmies.”

“It's very strange,” Gray mused. “Are you sure there are no Bushmen somewhere along that river?”

“I never saw any,” Ki-Gor replied. “Maybe Ngeeso would know. He has been along the Lost River much more than I have.”

Gray listened intently as Ki-Gor questioned the little Pygmy, but try as he would to make sense of the click language, he was unable to translate the conversation. Ki-Gor's eyes were gleaming as he turned back to him.

“It's very interesting,” the jungle man said. “Ngeeso says there are people along the Lost River. They may be Bushmen, but he wouldn't know because he has never seen Bushmen. But they are not Bantu and they are not Pygmies.”

“Then they must be Bushmen!” Gray cried. “Say, I hope we catch sight of some of them when we get to this river!”

Ki-Gor was talking to Ngeeso again.

“I don't think we will,” he said a minute later to Gray. “Ngeeso says these people are not found where we will cross the river. They are all on the other side of the great rock barrier, where the river comes out again.”

“Where the river comes out again?” Gray cried.

“Yes. He says the river comes out into a long narrow valley with very steep sides. The people are in that valley. Ngeeso says he thinks they are trapped in that valley. The sides are so steep they cannot get out, and other people cannot get in.”

“How could they be trapped, Ki-Gor?”

said Gray. "Couldn't they just go in and out of the lower end of the valley?"

"Ngeeso says not," Ki-Gor returned. "He says the steep sides of the valley get very narrow at the lower end, and there is just room for the river to go through the gorge."

"Well, that is fascinating!" said Gray, "I wonder just who those people are that live down there. They must be Bushmen. Did Ngeeso tell you what they looked like?"

"He doesn't know how to describe them," Ki-Gor answered, "and anyway, he says he has only seen them from a distance—he up on the edge, and they down at the bottom of this valley. It's called Glaclanda, this valley."

"Glaclanda!" Gray fairly shrieked the word. "That's the name the Bushmen called the Lost River! Great Scott! Ki-Gor! I want to see that valley and the people that are trapped in it!"

Ki-Gor nodded with an approving smile.

"Over there," he pointed to the eastward, "you see that mountain with two peaks? When we get closer, you'll see that it is really two mountains. In between them is the valley of Glaclanda."

FOUR hours later, the party stood on the edge of a high bluff and looked down on a rushing mountain river. Its turbulent, tumbling waters swept away to their left. About an eighth of a mile away it broadened out into what seemed at first glance to be a small lake. But as Ngeeso guided the party along the bluff nearer to it, they could see that the lake was in reality a gigantic pot-hole full of fierce whirlpools and eddying boiling currents.

On either side rocky banks rose steeply upwards. But on the downstream end of the pool a titanic mass of piled rock filled in the ancient gorge to the height of something like five or six hundred feet. It was an awe-inspiring sight, that gigantic heap of tumbled rocks, boulders and ledges—millions of tons that at some time in the distant past had slipped or rolled or fallen down into the gorge.

Helene thought of the folk tale of the Kalahari Bushmen far away to the south. Two mountains loved each other and they shook their sides one day and poured down these rocks to punish the offending river

which divided them. But it was the river who won out in the end and circumvented the might of the mountains. Somewhere under that massive heap of rock the river had cut a subterranean channel.

After a brief rest, the party began the task of climbing to the top of the great rock barrier. Morton Brett had objected to the idea in the beginning. He had argued that, being without porters and supplies they should waste no time getting to an outpost, and therefore should not attempt to make a side trip to peer into a valley into which they could not descend. But Gray's enthusiasm over-ruled him finally, the little man pointing out that they had to climb the rocks anyway to cross the river and that therefore they might as well climb a little higher and look down into Glaclanda. The possibility of seeing the inhabitants of the cliff-bound valley even at a distance had aroused all the scientific curiosity in David Gray's make-up.

It was an arduous climb, though not especially hazardous. Much of the face of the barrier was overgrown with lichen, moss, and in some places grass and even small bushes. And even the patches of bare rock were broken up into comparatively small boulders by the force of the original convulsion that had tossed them down there.

Ki-Gor ordered Ngeeso to lead the way, depending on the Pygmy to go by a route which even Sheila Brett could traverse. The jungle man had rearranged the order of precedence and now brought up the rear of the column, just behind the panting, perspiring bulk of Morton Brett. The little argument between the big white man and Gray had revived Ki-Gor's instinctive dislike and distrust of Brett. And, although Brett had eventually given in with good grace, Ki-Gor wanted him where he could watch him every minute. But Brett made no further complaint during the entire forty minutes or so that the party toiled upwards, and when they all arrived at the top, he joined the rest in the exclamations of delight and admiration at the view from the top of the barrier.

"Isn't it beautiful!" Helene gasped as she gazed out of the mile-wide valley that stretched out below to the northwards.

"I should say so!" Sheila Brett exclaimed, joining her. "It's—why, it's sort

of like a minature Grand Canyon, isn't it!"

David Gray stood spell-bound for a minute, then began fumbling at the leather binocular-case at his belt.

Thousands of years before, the two mountains must have stood shoulder to shoulder, only a high grassy vale separating the two peaks. But in the course of the ages, the rushing waters of the river had cut a channel down through the sand-stone. Time and the persistent, unrelenting pressure of the swift-flowing water had finally produced this little jewel of a valley, lined on both sides by perpendicular cliffs that shone brilliant red in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. It was, as Sheila Brett described it, like a minature Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

Ki-Gor looked downward and saw the river boiling out from the foot of the barrier a thousand feet below on this side. It flowed rapidly, then, only for a short distance before it evidently found level ground. Then it broadened out and traced a beautiful silvery ribbon down the center of the valley. Ki-Gor tilted his head back and squinted, his eyes following the line of the river until it disappeared. It was about five miles away, he judged, that the mountains seemed to come together again. It must be there, he decided, that the valley narrowed again as Ngeeso had said to form a natural flume just wide enough to let the river through.

"**W**ELL, there it is," Morton Brett remarked. "I can see how nobody could ever get down into that place. Look at those sheer cliffs. They must be four or five hundred feet straight up and down. What do you see through your glasses, Dave?"

"Nothing very much," Gray replied, dropping the binoculars from his eyes. "Although, I think there's some smoke rising off in the distance near the cliffs to the right. That's the shady side—the west—this time of day, and it's a little hard to tell much at this distance."

"Well, there you are," Brett grunted, "Climb all the way up here and all you see is a little smoke, and you aren't even sure it's that. Let's get along, shall we?"

"As a matter of fact," Gray turned apologetically to Helene and Sheila Brett,

"I would dearly love to walk along the top of the cliffs for a couple of miles and see if I can't catch a glimpse of something more down there."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Dave!" Morton Brett snorted. "We've got to get back to civilization. We haven't got time to sit around while you indulge a fantastic hobby. Ki-Gor, tell him we've got to push on."

Ki-Gor regarded the big man coolly. What an unpleasant man! Ki-Gor thought, and how ungracious he was to his friend, Gray. Ki-Gor had begun to like the little man, and he quickly decided to take Gray's part.

"It's getting late," Ki-Gor remarked, looking up at the sky with elaborate care. "We'll have to camp somewhere, soon. We might as well look for a place near here. Then, in the morning, before we go on, Gray can walk around and look down the cliffs."

Brett expostulated, "we can't afford to take the time out for—"

"I think I can see a good place," Ki-Gor broke in, and moved away abruptly. "Just off this barrier over there, and a little above it. Come on, we'll all go and look at it."

A dark flush crept over Brett's face and his mouth clamped shut under the cropped mustache. Then he made a defeated gesture with his hands and followed the jungle man.

The camp-site was by no means ideal, being a rather small rocky shelf only partly shaded by two low-branched trees. But as there was very little level ground anywhere about there, Ki-Gor made it do. After the light evening meal had been prepared and consumed, the party improvised sleeping places for themselves and presently dropped off to sleep. Ki-Gor took the precaution of moving away and climbing a nearby tree to spend the night. He was taking no chances with Morton Brett, although the latter had seemed to regain his good humor over supper.

Just at dawn the jungle man woke with a start feeling something close over the big toe of his left foot. Instantly he shook the foot and he heard a squeaky exclamation. He peered down through the blue dusk and saw that Ngeeso was hanging

from a limb below him by one hand.

"Thou art nervous, Big Brother," the Pygmy complained, as he drew himself up to safety. "I thought to play a joke on thee and pinch thee by the toe. By the Sacred Crocodile, I was nearly kicked out of the tree into the valley below."

"Cease thy chatter, Little One," Ki-Gor demanded, "I hear someone move there near the ledge."

"Aye, it's of no matter," Ngeeso said. "It is merely the small white man. The Bull Buffalo still sleeps."

Ki-Gor slipped down the tree and came silently beside David Gray who was peering down into the valley of Glaclanda through the binoculars.

The little man was quivering with excitement. He lowered the glasses and looked around him eagerly as if seeking somebody to share his excitement with him. His eyes lighted up as he saw Ki-Gor.

ICAN see smoke again!" he cried. "Three or four columns of it. And what's more, there seem to be a number of little black dots at the base of the cliffs way down there—little pin-pricks they look from here, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if they were not caves. Think of it, Ki-Gor, caves! The Bushmen live in caves, you know! I think there's no doubt that we've stumbled on to a rare group of Bushmen, Ki-Gor, a group that somehow survived the Bantu invasions, long ago, and stayed on here instead of fleeing south to the desert. Let's walk along the rim of the cliffs, Ki-Gor, and try and get a closer view of them. We might even find some way of getting down there."

Ki-Gor smiled tolerantly at the little man's outburst.

"Yes," he said, "in a little while. We'll have some food first, and then we'll all walk along the cliffs."

The jungle man had no intention of leaving Morton Brett unguarded.

If Helene could have read Ki-Gor's thoughts, she probably would have told him that he was being needlessly wary about the big surgeon. Brett grumbled somewhat, when he was awakened, and during breakfast he expressed impatience with the idea of delaying the journey back to civilization to walk four or five miles

along the edge of the valley on the chance of seeing some of the inhabitants of Glaclanda far below. But there was no appearance of treachery or even unfriendliness in Brett's attitude, merely the disagreeable grumpiness of a selfish, spoiled child.

The matter of walking along the edge of the escarpment proved to be not quite so easy as David Gray had thought at first glance. The line of tree-growth came down very close to the rim, leaving only a narrow alley along which to walk. More than that, this narrow avenue was by no means level. There were many stretches where it canted perilously sideways, so that Helene, picking her way carefully, felt as if she were on the roof of a house, uncomfortably close to the eaves.

Like a house roof, the escarpment had a considerable overhang over the sheer cliffs for most of the distance—a fact which did not increase the safety of the party walking along the rim. In some spots this overhang had washed away entirely revealing only too clearly the precipitous drop of four or five hundred feet straight down to the valley floor. In places like these, Ki-Gor who was leading the way and testing every foot of the going before trusting his full weight on it, would climb up hill a short distance, toiling through the thick undergrowth of the hillside.

However, the jungle man felt no annoyance or boredom at having to make this tricky and unnecessary side trip. On the contrary, his curiosity had been thoroughly aroused by David Gray's enthusiasm, and he kept a wide-awake and speculative eye on the valley as he led the party slowly along the escarpment.

For such a comparatively restricted and small area, the Valley of Glaclanda offered a remarkable variety of terrain. Many sections, especially at the base of the cliffs on both sides, were well wooded with beautiful tall virgin timber. The banks of the river were fairly open, however, being narrow green meadows dotted here and there with copses of graceful trees. Toward the lower end of the valley, there were stretches of open veldt and the river broadened out and even divided into several channels separated by sandbars.

David Gray remarked excitedly on the

plentiful animal life in the valley, the hordes of monkeys in the trees, and the small herds of antelope on the miniature veldt. But as far as any human life was concerned, Gray was disappointed. In spite of the fact that there were two or three thin columns of blue smoke curling out of what were quite evidently cave-mouths in the opposite cliffs, there was not a single Bushman to be seen anywhere. By the time the party had gone half way along the escarpment, the little ethnologist expressed his disappointment.

"Ki-Gor," he said, "Isn't there any way at all of getting down these cliffs?"

Ki-Gor shook his head with a smile. He had been keeping a sharp lookout for a place where descent might be feasible, but so far he had seen none, and he was inclining to the belief that there were none. A few minutes later, though, Gray, undaunted, halted by the top of a narrow half-chimney that had been worn away by erosion.

"**K**I-GOR," he shouted, "Look down here. I think it might be possible to get down this way by very careful stages. There's a slight slope outwards—it isn't quite so straight down—and the rock is a little rougher. I think I can see some footholds."

Ki-Gor came back and stared down for a minute, then a grim smile came on his lips. He pointed.

"Somebody else thought the same thing a long time ago," he said. "See—down there—at the foot of the first tree?"

Gray's face paled as he stared down at what was unmistakably a human skeleton. The little man was silent as he followed Ki-Gor up and around the half chimney through the undergrowth.

But David Gray could not keep blankets on his scientific zeal for long. In a few minutes he was excitedly pointing out a break in the line of cliffs just ahead.

The rim of the escarpment dipped down suddenly at this place to a height of less than three hundred feet above the valley floor. Here, also, the smooth rock wall of the escarpment was divided by a thirty-foot wide vein of much softer rock—rock so soft, in fact, that in the course of the ages it had broken down and worn down to a great sandbank which sloped away to the

valley below at a forty-five degree angle.

"Here, Ki-Gor!" the little man cried enthusiastically. "Don't you think something might be done at this spot?"

Ki-Gor did not answer for a moment. He was peering critically down in the tree-tops of the valley. He could not be sure, but he thought that he had seen something move down there out of the corner of his eye—something flitting from shadow to shadow. He called to Ngeeso to ask him if he had noticed anything like that. Just as he spoke to the Pygmy, Morton Brett came lumbering over to the edge of the sandbank. Ki-Gor's attention was fixed on Ngeeso's reply, or he might perhaps have prevented the incident.

As it was, the jungle man saw it happening and shouted a warning. But he was too late. Morton Brett blundered out too far on the overhang. Without warning the rotted tangle of roots gave way. Ki-Gor's rescuing hand just missed the beefy shoulder, and Morton Brett went plunging down the sandbank.

It all happened so suddenly that the rest of the party did not grasp it until they saw Brett halfway down the bank, arms and legs flying, rolling, sliding, turning grotesque cartwheels. There were a few seconds of awful silence until the plunging body reached the foot of the sandbank and slowly rolled to a stop. Then Sheila Brett gave a low moan as her husband lay very still.

A small avalanche of sand and tiny pebbles shaken loose by Brett's awful plunge, slowed and came to rest, half covering his inert form.

"Mort! Mort!" Gray shouted in entreaty. "Answer me! Answer me, Mort!"

Ki-Gor's brown hand restrained the little man, and drew him back from the treacherous overhang. Then Gray gave a shout.

DOWN below, Brett's right arm stirred under the sand. After a breathless pause, his great bulk heaved, and a moment later, he dragged himself to a sitting position, the sand pouring off his white clothes.

"Mort! Are you hurt badly?" Sheila Brett and David Gray shouted together.

There was a faint murmur from below, and then the big man slowly got on one

knee, and finally stood up on his feet. He looked around him in a dazed way, then looked up. Then he took a few uncertain steps, lifting his feet high out of the sand, and paused to feel his elbows and knees and ribs. Eventually, he looked up again and spoke.

"I don't know why," he called in a high, querulous voice, "but I seem to be all right. I don't think I've broken anything."

"Oh, thank goodness, Mort!" Gray shouted fervently. "I thought you were a goner for a minute!"

"So did I," Brett returned, "but—I guess there's no harm done. That's going to be quite a climb."

"It's no use, Brett," said Ki-Gor suddenly. "You can't climb it."

"Nonsense," Brett retorted. "Why can't I?"

"The sand," Ki-Gor said, laconically.

"Don't be silly," said Brett contemptuously. "Of course, I can climb back."

Suiting the action to the words, the big man plunged up the slope. The initial impetus of his rush carried him almost ten feet before the sand began to give way under his feet. He managed to get a few more steps upward, and then the shifting sand poured down on him in torrents. He swayed and almost fell over backwards, but regained his balance momentarily. Then more sand moved inexorably down on him, swept him off his feet and rolled him choking and sputtering to the foot of the slope.

Brett gasped, picking himself up. "You—you may be right—at that—"

But Ki-Gor had moved away from the top of the slope and did not answer. He was talking to Ngeeso. After a moment, he unbuckled the gun-belt and held it out to Helene.

"Keep this, Helene," he said. "Ngeeso and I are going to find some vines. Tell Brett to save his strength. He can never get up the sandbank by himself. I'll be back in a little while."

III

OVER an hour later, Ki-Gor and the Pygmy returned. Ki-Gor was in a somewhat grim humor. He had had to go far to find the yards and yards of stout vines that he was carrying coiled up, and

he was thoroughly out of patience with Morton Brett's clumsiness.

The jungle man and the Pygmy sat down on the top of the sandbank and began to knot the vines together swiftly. In a remarkably short time a rope which looked more than long enough to reach down the sandbank to the bottom was completed. One end was secured around the base of a big tree trunk, and Ki-Gor began to pay out the other end toward Morton Brett.

"Thank goodness!" Brett shouted as he saw the rope end descending. "I've had about enough of this down here. It's spooky. I have a feeling I'm being watched, but I haven't any idea who it could be."

"Have you seen anything?" Ki-Gor asked sharply.

"No," Brett admitted. "Not directly, that is. A couple of times I thought I caught a glimpse of something dodging among those bushes there. But when I looked again, I couldn't see anything. And I didn't feel like walking over and exploring."

"All right. Be ready to take the end of the rope as soon as you can reach it," Ki-Gor commanded, "and then come up hand over hand. Don't waste any time."

Gray and the two women looked anxiously at Ki-Gor, but he said nothing and concentrated on getting the rope to Brett.

"Now!" Ki-Gor said suddenly. "Come up two steps—you should be able to reach it. Hurry!"

But even as he said the last word, Ki-Gor saw that he was too late. A snake-like object flew out from the bushes near Brett and floated through the air toward him.

"Look out, Brett! Duck!" Ki-Gor shouted.

But before the big surgeon realized what was happening, the lasso dropped neatly over his thick shoulders. He gave a startled cry and plucked frantically at the soft pliable lasso-rope. But, at the same moment, the loop tightened and nearly jerked the big man off his feet.

"Never mind the loop!" Ki-Gor shouted. "Get hold of the rope and pull! You can pull the Bushman out!"

But Brett was lunging around like a

panicky steer. Just then a second lasso drifted through the air and ringed Brett's neck with deadly precision. A third and a fourth followed immediately, and in less than fifteen seconds, Brett was rolling on the ground, arms pinned to his sides, and completely helpless.

Without hesitation, Ki-Gor shouted a command to Ngeeso and then lowered himself over the edge of the sandbank by the vine-rope. Instantly he sank deep into the sand and began to slide downwards. But he held firmly on to the rope, kept his balance and checked his progress. A glance over his shoulder showed him that Ngeeso was loyally following him down.

Before Ki-Gor was halfway down the sandbank, he saw that Brett was being dragged toward the bushes by his unseen lassoers. Helpless though the big man was, his legs were still free, and he managed to dig his heels into the ground. For a few precious moments, he resisted the pull of the lassoes. It was just long enough.

Ki-Gor hit the bottom of the bank in a shower of dust, sand, and pebbles. He reached Brett's side in three bounds and seized one of the taut lasso ropes. Ngeeso, scurrying nimbly after, notched a poisoned arrow in the little bow.

The jungle man gave a swift, prodigious heave on the lasso rope. There was a high-pitched cry of astonishment from the other end, and out of the bushes tumbled the oddest looking human being Ki-Gor had ever seen.

Instantly, Ki-Gor sprang at the creature to capture him. But the Bushman or whatever he was, was incredibly agile and started scrambling back into the bushes like a frightened pig. Ki-Gor just managed to seize a hairy ankle. He straightened up and hauled the babbling stranger back into the open.

IMMEDIATELY, the bushes erupted half a dozen more creatures just like the first one. They flung themselves shouting on Ki-Gor, and tugged at his arms, scratching and biting. Ngeeso dashed up alongside chattering fiercely, but lowered his bow as Ki-Gor shouted at him.

"Don't kill! They are unarmed, Little Brother! There is no danger!"

The Pygmy stepped back in astonish-

ment and watched Ki-Gor shake off the strange men like a terrier shaking off water. A moment later, Ki-Gor was in full command of the situation. With each hand he gripped one of the strangers by the nape of the neck. The other five picked themselves up and stood a healthy distance away from the giant white man.

Ki-Gor shouted a command to Ngeeso to strip the lassoes off Morton Brett, and then he turned his attention back to the wild looking creatures twisting and struggling in his hands.

Aside from the fact which Ki-Gor had instantly noted, that these men were unarmed, he had felt a strong instinct that they were not dangerous. A lifetime of continual physical competition to survive had taught Ki-Gor to size up the temper of an adversary in the first moment of contact. And Ki-Gor judged that these curious men were in no sense real fighters in spite of the way they had attacked him.

The two prisoners soon stopped struggling and one of them twisted his head around to look up into Ki-Gor's face. Suddenly, he spoke, in a curious guttural voice. He said just two words, but they were in a click language, and they sounded remarkably like the first two words Ki-Gor had shouted to Ngeeso.

"Don't kill!"

Ki-Gor regarded the wild man with surprise, and finally answered in Pygmy.

"No, Brother, I will not kill. And you will not kill?"

The wild man followed the words anxiously, but did not seem to understand them too well. Ki-Gor repeated them very slowly, then, and a dawning light came over the savage face.

"Yes! Yes!" he clicked, "I not kill—you not kill!"

Ki-Gor gently released both of his prisoners, and a chorus of excited jabbering broke out from all seven of the wild men. One or two of them came forward and touched Ki-Gor gingerly on the hand and shoulder. He turned quickly as he heard his name being shouted behind him.

It was David Gray toiling down the sandbank by the vine-rope. The little man hit the bottom with a rush, and ran toward Ki-Gor fairly quivering with excitement.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor! Are you talking to them? Can you understand them? Man,

this is the most fantastic discovery in the history of Africa—or the whole world for that matter. What do these men call themselves?"

"I don't know," Ki-Gor responded slowly, a little puzzled by the little man's excitement, "Their language is something like the Pygmies, but they are not Pygmies—"

"And they're not Bushmen, either," Gray broke in. "Look at them, Ki-Gor! They're Pre-historic Men! They're like no Africans that anybody has ever seen!"

Ki-Gor regarded the strangers with a prickle of interest, even though he still could not quite understand why Gray was so excited. He spoke to them again in slow precise Pygmy words.

"Who are you, Brothers?" he asked. "By what name is your tribe called?"

"Tribe?" they answered blankly. "What is a tribe? We are the Men."

"The Men!" Gray fairly screamed the syllable. "Did they say 'the Men,' Ki-Gor? It sounded like the Bushman word for 'Men!'"

"Yes," Ki-Gor said, "but wait a minute, I'll ask them more."

"The Men!" Gray exulted. "That is what all primitive races call themselves!"

"Listen carefully, Brothers," Ki-Gor addressed the savages. "What other name are you called by? What do your enemies call you?"

"Enemies?" The savages were stumped. "We have no enemies. They were killed long ago."

GRAY was understanding more than half of the conversation and the effect of it was to tie him in knots. Ki-Gor hushed him and questioned the savages further.

"Very well, Brothers, you are the 'Men.' Now, do each of you have names?"

"Oh, yes," answered one of the savages, the tallest, "I am Dlook Danala—he is Chaak Danala—next to him is Tseep Danala—"

"Ah!" Ki-Gor interrupted. "But you are all Danala?"

"Oh yes," the savage answered, as if that should be self-evident.

Ki-Gor turned to Gray.

"They are the Danala," he said, and Gray's reaction was a reverent sigh.

"The Danala!" he whispered. "Amazing! Ki-Gor, for heaven's sake I must see more of these people! See if you can't get them to take us along to their caves."

Ki-Gor grinned and then told the savages that he and his party were hungry. He used, of course, the Pygmy word which is merely the sound of smacking lips that little children the world over use before they learn to speak any language. The savages promptly came back with an invitation to follow them.

During the course of this conversation, Helene and Sheila Brett had come down the vine rope and were standing in fascinated silence at the foot of the sandbank. It was Morton Brett, freed of his lassoes, and feeling very irritable who broke in now on Ki-Gor.

"Well, Ki-Gor, we've given Dave his look at these Bushmen. Let's get out of here, now, shall we?"

Instantly Gray was up in arms. He insisted that they all go with the wild men and look at their caves and observe something of their living habits. Again, Brett acted like a spoiled child and only agreed to go along when Ki-Gor intervened firmly in the argument in favor of Gray. Eventually, the travelers followed the Danala off through the undergrowth toward the center of the valley.

As a matter of fact, Ki-Gor himself was quite curious about these strange men. He had never seen anything like them before. They were fairly tall, almost six feet, and well-formed, with large heads and rather handsome faces. Their large luminous eyes counteracted to some extent the slightly bestial effect of their protuberant bushy eyebrows, and long undershot jaws. They were quite heavily bearded, and their erect bodies were entirely covered with coarse golden brown hairs. They wore not a stitch of clothing of any kind.

To Ki-Gor, accustomed to the hairless bodies of the Bantu, the Danala were probably a stranger sight than they were to David Gray, who had imagined similar physical types in the course of his studies in anthropology.

"Except that they're lighter colored," Gray murmured to Helene as they walked behind the savages, "they're extraordinarily close to the pictures and sculptures that scientists have reconstructed from remains

of Pre-historic Man. Not the ape-like Neanderthal Man, but the higher type of Aurignacian Period in southern France and Northern Spain. Cro-Magnon Man who left those remarkable drawings in the caves at Altamira. Helene, I can hardly believe it! How do you suppose this group ever survived?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Helene answered. "Although I suppose the fact that it's almost impossible to get in and out of this valley had something to do with it. They couldn't get out, and their enemies couldn't get in."

"Yes, of course, that must be it," Gray replied, lost in speculation. Suddenly, he pounded a fist into the palm of the other hand.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Danala! Curious how that sound 'Dan,' the Dan-root, keeps cropping up in legendary history. One of the twelve tribes of Israel was called 'Dan.' Homer and Virgil called the Argive Greeks who besieged Troy, 'Danai.'"

"Why, so they did!" Helene said. "I remember my high school Latin. The old priest who stood beside the Trojan Horse and said, 'Timeo Danaos dona ferentes'—I fear the Greeks bearing gifts."

"Certainly," Gray exclaimed, "and far up in Ancient Ireland, their legendary history tells of many invaders. Actually, the last group but one was called "Tuatha de Danann," the Dan-root again. To this day, one of the tribes up in Abyssinia is called the 'Danakils.' Oh, Helene, this is so tremendous that I can hardly believe it! The Danala! I can't wait to see their caves. If there are drawings in those caves, then I'll be practically certain that we've stumbled on a remnant of Old Stone Age Men."

THE caves, when the party reached them an hour later, fulfilled David Gray's wildest hopes. They were beautifully decorated with handsome line drawings in black, white, red, and yellow. They were mostly of animals, only a few caves containing representations of humans. But all the drawings were in perfect proportion and accurate in every detail. Furthermore, they were not the stiff, flat pictures that are associated with the ancient Egyptians—they had plenty of motion and vigor.

The artistic bent of the Danala was not confined to pictorial representations on the cave walls. The women—whose hairy bodies were far less attractive than the men—wore elaborate necklaces and anklets of a dull yellow metal, and there were also in evidence well-made little statuettes of the same metal as well as well-turned round containers for water.

David Gray was everywhere, looking, examining, questioning the strange people with Ki-Gor's help.

The Danala showed themselves to be a thoroughly friendly people with a loose tribal organization of a hundred or so monogamous families. Their dwelling habits were individualistic, but their hunting and eating customs were completely communistic. The women, rather than the men, seemed to have the dominating influence. But men and women together were extremely peaceful and even courteous.

Apparently, there were no predatory animals in the Vale of Glaclanda. It was possible that they had been destroyed centuries before and no others had come to take their place. But there was plenty of small game, and medium-sized antelope which the Danala hunted with lassoes and the small wolfish dogs which were their only domesticated animals.

They also used metal-tipped spears in their hunting, and cut up their prey with dull knives made of soft yellow metal. This circumstance puzzled Gray at first, knowing as he did that the men of the Old Stone Age had never learned to smelt metal. He guessed at the answer later, but the answer was accompanied by a discovery which was to have fearful consequences.

As regards physical appearance, the Danala ran remarkably true to form and resembled one another closely. There were a few exceptions to this rule—some individuals who were much less shaggy than the rest and who had darker skins, smaller heads, and thicker lips. Notably, the man who seemed to be the sort of chief of the Danala, named Klecklee, and his wife, Ulip, were quite Negroid in appearance.

Evidently, Gray mused, in the course of the ages, other people had fallen down the landslide and survived to transmit their Bantu characteristics to future generations. It must have been these late comers too, he

reflected, who introduced the art of smelting metal into Glaclanda.

IF David Gray and his companions were curious about the Danala, it was nothing to the tremendous round-eyed curiosity which those innocent savages felt toward their visitors. The news of their arrival evidently spread through the valley like wildfire. They came from every direction to gape at the white clothes of the three Americans, at Ki-Gor's great size, at Helene's smooth-skinned beauty, and at Ngeeso's diminutiveness. However, their courtesy through everything was unfailing, and the Chief, Kleeklee, had three freshly killed antelope brought to the broad open space in front of the cave mouths. This place was evidently the community eating place of the Danala, for there was a good-sized fire burning in it, being constantly replenished. Kleeklee cut ragged steaks from the antelopes with his dull knife, and toasted them over the flames on green sticks. After an all too brief period of cooking, he handed the steaks with immense gravity to the visitors. They were charred black on the outside, and undercooked and tough on the inside. However, everyone politely and manfully chewed on the meat without comment—everyone, that is, except Morton Brett, who was inclined to complain rather than eat. As for Ki-Gor, he would just as soon have eaten the steaks raw, the cooking of food being a custom he had only recently acquired from Helene.

His strong jaws enabled Ki-Gor now to finish his meal before the rest, and he rose to his feet to thank Kleeklee and to congratulate the Danala hunters who had brought in the antelopes. Privately, he marveled that the Danala were able to kill anything with such poor weapons. He examined the metal tip of one of the hunter's spears. It was a clumsy affair very inexpertly fastened to the wooden shaft. The point was quite dull and bent over to one side, indicating that the metal was really too soft to be used for such a purpose. The Danala hunter, however, was proud of the weapon and handed it to Ki-Gor with a triumphant air. Ki-Gor hefted it, and found it very badly balanced, the metal tip being extraordinarily heavy for its size.

It was at this moment that Morton Brett

decided that this yellow metal that the Danala used for their knives, spear tips, statuettes, and ornaments, was—gold.

Ki-Gor heard the big man whispering excitedly to David Gray, and he turned to watch them. A moment later, they got to their feet and came over to him. Brett's eyes were glittering, while Gray wore a thoughtful, almost troubled expression.

"Look, Dave," Brett said impatiently, and seized the tip of the spear that Ki-Gor was holding. "Look here. I don't know anything about gold but this stuff can't be anything else. See how heavy it is, and how soft. See? I can easily make a deep scratch in it with this nail file."

A wave of anger swept over Ki-Gor at the big man's rudeness, and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from thrusting him through with the spear.

"You may be right," Gray said uneasily, "but even if you are, Mort, I don't know just what—"

"Why, good heavens, man!" Brett shouted. "Don't you realize there's a fortune lying around here! Just this spear-head alone is probably worth four or five hundred dollars—just this one spear-head! And the women's ornaments and those little statuettes—there's any amount of pure soft gold already smelted up. Now, it must have come from somewhere in this valley. What we've got to do is to find out where these Danala are getting it."

"I wish you wouldn't," Gray said, shaking his head, "I wish—"

"You wish I wouldn't what?" Brett demanded.

"Well, I mean—" Gray threw out his hands helplessly—"We've made a discovery here that's so much more valuable than mere gold—"

"Have you gone soft in the head!" the big man shouted. "Here we find a bunch of ape-men sitting on top of a goldmine, and all you're interested in is their language and marriage customs. Well, if you're not interested in grabbing off a stupendous fortune, I am."

The big man turned to Ki-Gor with a snort.

"Ki-Gor," he said, "see if you can find out where these monkeys get their gold, will you?"

The jungle man stared at him coldly and then spoke to Gray.

"Do you want to know?" he asked deliberately.

"Er—well, yes," Gray said, flushing. "It—it would be interesting to know."

THE gold was in the lower end of the valley, along the sandy banks of the river and out in the sandbars.

"Placer gold!" Morton Brett said in an awed whisper. "Millions and millions of dollars' worth! It's perfectly fantastic! Dave! Sheila!" He whirled around faced the silent quartete of whites, and his voice rose to a yell. "Think of it! We're rich! All five of us! Rich as Croesus! For heaven's sake, what are we standing here for? Let's get going—fast! Let's go back to civilization as quick as we can. We'll file a claim to this place and come back and mine it. And, while we're about it, we'd better take along some of those statuettes in our pack."

David Gray's face was a study. Helene's eyes were cold. Ki-Gor looked embarrassed. Of the four, Sheila Brett was the only one who seemed at all interested.

"Well, what's the matter with you!" Brett shouted in exasperation. "What are you all standing there for? Don't you realize what I'm telling you? There's so much gold here that even split up five ways it'll make us rich beyond our wildest dreams. Ki-Gor, think of it! You can have anything you want! Anything!"

"I don't understand what you mean," Ki-Gor growled. "I have everything I want."

"Oh, good Lord!" Brett groaned. "Tell him, Helene! Tell him what it means to be rich. You were brought up in wealthy surroundings."

"Exactly," said Helene sharply. "And since I've lived in Africa with Ki-Gor, I've found out that riches don't matter in the least. I've found out I'm much better off without riches. As Ki-Gor says, we already have everything we want."

"Well spoken," said David Gray coming to life. "There's your answer, Mort! We are not going to take a thing out of this valley, and when we get back to civilization we're not going to say a word about the gold. We have made a discovery—probably the greatest discovery in the history of anthropology. We have found a group of humans who are without any

doubt directly descended from the men of the Old Stone Age in Europe, and who furthermore are living in the same state of culture as their ancestors did fifteen or twenty thousand years ago."

"Don't talk rot, Dave—"

"And you, Mort, Gray went on, "would disregard that tremendous contribution to science just to satisfy your own personal greed. Well, we're not going to let you. Now, I think we'd all better get on back to the caves before it gets dark. Ki-Gor, did you say that Kleeklee had offered us a cave to sleep in tonight?"

The jungle man nodded without taking his eyes off Morton Brett. More than ever, now, he disliked the big man, and he determined to keep a strict guard on him.

Morton Brett was not a man to give up easily. All the way back to the caves, he argued long and persistently for the idea of seizing the Danala gold. But Gray and Helene were adamant, and Ki-Gor kept out of the argument. He kept out of it, that is, until the party got all the way back to community gathering place of the Danala in front of the caves. By this time, Brett was almost raving, and Ki-Gor decided to put a stop to his bellowing.

"Look here," the jungle man said quietly, and took Brett's arm. "You stop talking for a while, or I'll hit you."

Brett's face grew apoplectic. But one look into Ki-Gor's eyes convinced him that the white giant of the jungle meant business. Brett subsided into stony silence.

The ever friendly Danala provided more food for the visitors, and their hospitality seemed to have a beneficial effect on Morton Brett. Rather than complaining about the toughness of the meat, he seemed to grow more affable. He remembered that there was a small supply of coffee crystals in his pack, and volunteered to go and get some. Returning with the tin, he even offered to prepare the coffee.

Ki-Gor felt that the big man was not quite sincere in his new and sudden affability, but he drank the coffee, making a mental note to stay on his guard all night. Not long after the meal, however, he began to feel unaccountably drowsy. He muttered an excuse and withdrew from the campfire. Several hundred feet away, he found a good-sized tree and curled up in its lower branches to take a short nap.

WHEN he opened his eyes again, it was broad daylight and Ngeeso was whispering agitatedly and tugging at his shoulder.

"Wake up! Wake up, Big Brother! Thou hast slept like the dead! Wake up and hear my news! There is bad trouble brewing!"

Ki-Gor tried to shake the sleep out of his eyes. He felt strangely groggy. Once before he had drunk drugged coffee. He wondered if that was what had happened to him now. Ngeeso chattered on.

"I have looked in ten times ten trees to find thee, Big Brother. Thy woman and the little man and the little woman are prisoners. Whilst thou slept like a river-pig, the bull buffalo crept away in the middle of the night and took with him a number of those yellow metal idols. The Danala are in an ugly mood—they like not thieves and thieving."

Before the Pygmy had half finished his tale, Ki-Gor was climbing stiffly down the tree.

"What is thy plan, Big Brother?" Ngeeso inquired, following him down.

"I have none as yet, Little One. I must see my woman first and find out how it is with her. Then I will talk to the Danala. They are a kindly, generous people."

"Their kindness has turned to anger," Ngeeso said. "In thy place, I would be careful."

"Where my woman is concerned, there is no other consideration," Ki-Gor said grimly. "Thou, Little One, keep to the trees and stay out of sight until I need thee."

The Danala, the entire tribe, were squatting in a silent circle around Helene, David Gray, and Sheila Brett. Gray was trying to talk to Kleeklee, the Danala chieftain, as Ki-Gor came across the open ground. One of the tribesmen looked around and gave a shout as he saw Ki-Gor, and immediately a score of the cavemen ran toward him.

Ki-Gor walked through them as if he had not seen them and the expression on his face warned them not to touch him.

"Thank heaven you're here!" Gray said eagerly as Ki-Gor strode through the silent crowd of Danala. "We're in a nasty spot—thanks to Morton Brett."

"There was something in that office," Ki-

Gor said without the slightest expression.

"Yes, he must have dropped in some of those sleeping pills of his. We were all drugged."

"Where is he?" Ki-Gor asked quietly.

"I haven't the faintest idea," Gray confessed. "When Sheila woke up, he was gone. His pack was gone and so was mine. He took five little gold statuettes that were on the ledge by the cave mouth. He left behind an empty bottle of whiskey."

Ki-Gor digested this information for a moment and then turned to the chief of the Danala.

"Our companion has disgraced us, Kleeklee," he said solemnly.

"He has stolen," Kleeklee said.

"Let us go out together and find him and bring him back," Ki-Gor said.

"Go where, Ki-Gor?" Kleeklee said bitterly, "he is not in the valley."

"How do you know?"

"We have been to the foot of the sandbank where you all came down by the rope."

"Yes?" said Ki-Gor.

"And the rope has been pulled up."

Ki-Gor's face was a mask. That rope was the only possible means of getting out of the Vale of Glaclanda. Kleeklee spoke again.

"We Danala do not steal. We can hardly remember the time when anything has been stolen."

"Yes?" said Ki-Gor with a shrewd glance.

"If you and your companion had not come to Glaclanda, our little statues that we made with our own hands would not have been stolen."

Kleeklee paused and looked straight into Ki-Gor's eyes.

"We look on all of you as responsible for this stealing—"

Not a muscle in Ki-Gor's face moved.

"And," Kleeklee finished with great dignity, "we Danala punish stealing—by death."

IV

IT was all Morton Brett could do to haul himself up over the overhang at the top of the sandbank. His arms ached from dragging his great bulk up across the sliding, sifting sand, and he was sadly out of

breath. He was also very, very drunk.

After he attained to the top, he sat panting for several minutes and leaned back to ease the weight of the two packs off his shoulders. Lord! but they were heavy! Who would have thought that those little gold figures would weigh so much?

His mouth worked triumphantly. The heavier the better! Why those five blocks of gold alone were worth probably three thousand dollars apiece. Fifteen thousand dollars on his back! And heaven knows how many millions of dollars more where that came from! Whew! He wiped the sweat dramatically off his forehead.

And that fool of a David Gray and the rest of them! Try to stop him from making a fortune, would they? He chuckled evilly. They didn't know Morton Brett!

An idea suddenly occurred to him. He reached down between his legs and felt for the vine rope. His fingers curled around it and he stood up. Swaying precariously in the pitch darkness, he pulled and hauled until he felt the end of the rope in his hands. He dropped it then with an exclamation of triumph.

Now!

Which way to go?

Ki-Gor had been heading south-eastwards, until they had digressed to look at Glaclanda. But the river that flowed through Glaclanda—Lost River—flowed northwest. There were certainly less mountains in that direction. Why not follow the river? It's bound to come out somewhere, Brett thought. It was probably the best way, anyway, Ki-Gor or not. He was nothing but a savage, Brett told himself, a big brute of a savage, for all his blond hair and blue eyes. What a surprise he and the rest of them were going to get when they woke up out of their drugged sleep to find Morton Brett gone!

For a moment, he had a drunken notion to stay where he was until morning—until they came running to the foot of the sandbank and begged and pleaded with him to let down the rope for them. Oh! that would be rich, he gloated. He would lean over the bank and jeer at them.

But after a while, he decided against it. Time was awasting, and he should be on his way. Slowly he began to pick his way along the rim of the escarpment—north-westwards.

It seemed to Morton Brett that he had gone miles before he heard the cascading roar which told him that he had passed the Vale of Glaclanda. The roar came from the rapids of the Lost River as it boiled through the narrow rock flume at that end of the valley. The sound made Brett feel even more triumphant. Any rapids that sounded like that certainly would be sure death to anyone trying to swim down them. No, he decided, his companions were locked up in that valley for as long as he felt like keeping them there.

The ground sloped down now steeply, and after a short time, Brett, found himself on comparatively level ground. By the same token the trees and undergrowth were much thicker. He stumbled in the direction which he thought the river was, and was soon rewarded by the sound of gurgling water.

As he lurched along beside the river, he began to get acutely conscious of the passage of time, of his aching legs, of the blackness of the jungle. He also began to feel very hungry. Morton Brett was beginning to sober up.

He debated with himself whether to stop a while and look for something to eat in one of the packs. But his courage was oozing fast as the liquor wore off. The jungle suddenly grew very menacing. Maybe he wasn't so clever after all, Brett thought, going off by himself like that. He had no idea where he was going. The impenetrable blackness around him might be swarming with fearful dangers. Why, at this very minute a lion might be stalking him!

He stopped suddenly, his skin crawling as far away a leopard roared a fiendish contralto challenge. Cold panic settled over Morton Brett.

There was a heart-stopping crash, then, as a heavy body blundered through the undergrowth somewhere in front of him. He gave a despairing yelp, turned to his right, and scrambled blindly up the slope away from the river.

After what seemed like agonized hours, he emerged from the trees and fell down panting at the crest of a grassy knoll. He looked around and shivered. He hardly knew whether it was better to be out in the open or to be enveloped

in the velvety blackness of the jngle. Suddenly Morton Brett's heart leaped. A thrill of hope went through him. His hunted eyes had caught sight of a flickering light far away and below him.

He sprang to his feet with a yell. Cupping his hands to his mouth, he shouted again and again.

Black figures crossed and re-crossed in front of the light. There could be no doubt—it was a campfire!

In a moment, another smaller light appeared and moved slowly up the hill. There was an answering shout. In English!

Brett's knees felt weak under him. He tried to run down hill toward the approaching light, but his legs buckled. He sank to the ground sobbing and almost fainting from relief.

The moving light bobbed up the hill toward him and stopped about twenty feet away. It was an electric torch, and Brett felt that its owner was scrutinizing him.

"I don't know who you are," Brett croaked, "but thank Heaven you were near. I'm lost."

The answer came in a cold high nasal voice.

"Well, 'oo the bleddy 'ell are yer?"

"Doctor Morton Brett of New York." Brett's voice shook. He didn't quite like the tone of the man behind the electric torch.

"Doctor Morton Brett of New York, eh? Well, wot the bleeding 'ell are you doin' wanderin' 'round this Gawd-forsaken bush?"

"I'm lost, I tell you," Brett replied with asperity. He didn't like that man's tone at all. "Who are you?"

"Wot d'you care 'oo we are? Now, I'll just thank you to stand up, very quiet like. There! That's more like it! Crod! Look at the size of 'im, Ben!"

"You—you sound like an Australian," Brett offered querulously.

"Yus, I have been towld that," came the voice. "Sound like a bleddy kookaburra, I been towld. I see you're wearin' a gun. In that cayse, just put yer 'ands up, Bully Boy—way up. Naow then, Ben, go tayke it off 'im."

"Here! What's this all about?" Brett demanded, but his hands stayed up in the air.

"Two bleddy packs, too!" the mocking

voice went on, ignoring Brett. "Let's 'ave a look at 'em, Ben. Ayn't this a pretty mystery! A bleddy New York medico running around the bush in the dark with two bleddy packs! W'y, Ben, it fair shimozzles me!"

Morton Brett stood rooted to the spot. His mouth and throat suddenly became to dry to speak. The first signs of approaching dawn stole over the landscape as the man called Ben dumped the two packs on the ground and opened them one by one. The Australian stood motionless holding the flashlight in an unwavering hand. A third man squatted down beside Ben, and gave a low whistle as one of the Danala statuettes rolled out of a pack.

Brett felt sick with horror and frustration. He wanted to cover his eyes with his thick arms and shut out the terrible reality of the scene. The cold nasal voice snarled promptly.

"Keep those 'ands up! That's better, Bully Boy. Naow then, suppose you tell us w'ot that little idol is."

Brett could not have spoken to save his life.

"It's mayde of gowld, ain't it, Bully Boy? Awl right, yer down't 'ave to answer. I know it's gowld—I can tell with 'arf an eye. But look 'ere, Bully Boy, 'ere's one question you'll answer, or I'll blow yer bleddy 'ead off yer shoulders. *W'ere did yer get this 'ere little idol mayde of gowld?*"

Morton Brett shivered and gulped. Dully, he thought of the Vale of Glacland, serene in its centuries-old seclusion, and how it was to be visited by strangers twice within twenty-four hours.

V

KLEEKLEE began his speech of accusation at sunrise in front of the assembled Danala. A half hour later he was just beginning to swing into form. Ki-Gor stood opposite him ten feet away, his head bent to one side in an attitude of patient listening. Fifteen yards behind him, Helene, Sheila Brett, and Gray sat very still on the ground. Ki-Gor's position enabled him to see the slow, idle motions Helene was making with her hands. Her movements meant nothing to the innocent Danala whose only weapons were spears,

knives, and lassoes. They had been unable to understand the use of Ki-Gor's great bow which lay on the ground beside Helene. And the bundle of long hardwood arrows they had regarded as small ineffectual spears.

As Kleeklee went on and on, outlining to his tribesmen the guilt of the four white visitors, Ki-Gor noted with satisfaction that Helene was following his instructions. She was planting his arrows one by one point downward in the ground so that they formed four short rows. Her manner was that of a person with no especial purpose, and the Danala, not knowing the use of the bow and the arrows, had no idea that she was planting the arrows so that if the worst came to the worst they would be ready for Ki-Gor to do the fastest shooting of his life.

Long after Helene's task was completed, Kleeklee was still talking. His oratory, Ki-Gor recognized, was restrained but eloquent. Unlike the hysterical Bantu, who under similar circumstances would be shouting and leaping high into the air, the Danala remained quiet. What they were witnessing was a legal form which only the oldest among them had ever seen before.

Finally, Kleeklee finished, and in accordance with the fair-minded custom of the Danala, invited Ki-Gor to speak up in his defense.

"I have this to say, O My Brothers," Ki-Gor began. "First, that my companions and I are fully as angry as you are because your community works of art have been stolen. We hate thieves just as much as you do. We four, whom you are accusing, did not steal those little statues. The man who climbed up the sandbank stole them and took them away. It would be the part of justice not to accuse us of the crime which we did not commit, but rather to release us so that we may pursue the thief and bring him back to your justice."

He paused and looked over his audience. He could tell that his words were making not the slightest impression on the Danala. "Pursue the thief where?" he knew they were thinking—these people who had never gone outside their little valley for uncounted centuries. They knew nothing of an outside world. One of five strangers had stolen. He was gone. Therefore, the

remaining strangers should be punished. And the punishment was death.

Ki-Gor sighed. It was a tight situation. Not counting the women and small children, there were more than a hundred men and boys squatting in front of him, all armed with gold-tipped spears. If he were alone, it might be barely possible for him to cut his way through and win to safety. But with Helene, and the ineffectual little couple, Sheila Brett and Gray, such a maneuver was foredoomed to failure.

It was time, Ki-Gor realized, for the demonstration of the bow and arrows.

"I have this other thing to say, O My Brothers," he declared, and turned and strolled negligently toward Helen. "You cannot punish us for a crime which we did not commit. You cannot punish us because I will not let you."

With these words he reached Helene's side and took the bow which she held up to him. With an easy motion he plucked an arrow from the ground and notched it in the bowstring. Then he turned swiftly on the Danala.

"With this Magic Stick," he roared, "I can kill swiftly and silently from a distance! Nobody make a move, or you are dead! It would be unwise to doubt me! Look, I will show you! That dog—coming out of the cave—you all see him—" the dog was about fifty feet from Ki-Gor, "—he is alive now—but—"

The bowstring twanged.

"Now, he is dead!" Ki-Gor grated.

The Danala gasped. The arrow sped almost faster than their eyes could follow it. The dog gave a choked gurgle and leaped into the air. It hit the earth in a heap, twitched a few times, then lay still. A small rickle of blood oozed out from around the arrow which transfixed its chest.

KI-GOR'S eyes flashed truculently at the gaping Danala.

"Let him prepare to die," he snarled, "who tries to lay a finger on any of us!"

With his left hand he motioned behind his back to his companions to stand up. Would his bluff work?

He never had a chance to find out.

The Danala were getting to their feet, appalled and outraged, and perhaps frightened. Kleeklee turned to face them. Sud-

denly a startled cry broke from his lips. He pointed over the heads of the crowd to the edge of the woods behind them.

"The thief!" cried Kleeklee. "He has come back! And three other strangers are with him!"

The Danala whirled in their tracks with an indignant yell and promptly charged toward the four newcomers—the frightened, sagging Morton Brett, and his three unsavory looking captors.

For a moment, Ki-Gor stood undecided. Then he saw the three men with Brett throw themselves to the ground and quickly open fire with rifles on the unsuspecting savages. He and the two women and Gray were directly in the line of fire. The nearest shelter was the caves and Ki-Gor hurriedly herded his companions to the nearest one as rifle bullets whined uncomfortably close.

Even before they reached the cave-mouth, however, the Danala were in full flight, scattering in all directions. The noise and the deadly effect of the rifle fire was too much for them, coming on top of Ki-Gor's demonstration of the bow and arrow.

Ki-Gor stood by the cave entrance and watched the newcomers come toward him, stepping over the bodies of more than a half dozen fallen Danala. Morton Brett was in the lead, mouth slack and eyes bulging with fright. Behind him came a thin-lipped, lantern-jawed man, smaller than average and dressed in dirty, ragged khaki. Of the two others, one was swarthy and wore a black eye-patch on one side of a beaked nose. The other was a coffee-colored man, broad-shouldered and wearing only dirty shorts.

Ki-Gor's eyebrows gathered. He smelled danger—worse danger even than the Danala threatened. The thin-lipped man behind Brett leveled the rifle toward Ki-Gor's stomach and looked coldly at him.

"This the party you was speakin' of?" he demanded of Brett, "the w'ite savidge?"

"Ye-es," Morton Brett quavered. "Ki-Gor."

"Ki-Gor, eh?" said the Australian. "Well, naow, Ki-Gor, suppose you just chuck that there bow 'n' arrer on the ground. Come on, make it snappy, or 'strewth, I'll plug yer!"

Ki-Gor dropped the bow gently and bent a venomous look at the sweating Brett.

"I couldn't help it, Ki-Gor!" Brett whined. "They captured me and found the gold, and made me bring them back here!"

"Naow then," said the Australian briskly, "w'ere's the rest of yer? Eh? W'ere are they?"

As he spoke, David Gray appeared at the mouth of the cave.

"Mort!" he cried, "what—"

He stopped in alarm and stared at the villainous looking trio around Brett.

"Come aout 'ere, Sonny," said the leader. "Let's 'ave a look at yer. W'eres yer gun?"

Gray pointed at Morton Brett.

"He took the only gun we had. I see you have it yourself, now."

The Australian chuckled. "Bit of luck, eh mates? Only one gun and we've got it."

"What do you want?" said Gray sternly.

"Oo, us?" The Australian chuckled. "W'y we're interested in wild flowers, ayn't we, mates? Thought we'd 'ave a bit of a look-around daown 'ere, and pick up some new spessimins."

THE other two roared with laughter at their leader's wit, but suddenly stopped as Helene and Sheila Brett appeared beside Gray. A low whistle of admiration broke out from the Australian.

"'Ere's a bit of luck," he observed, "a pair of proper good lookin' females to wile away the time with after we get sick of pickin' up solid gowld."

Helene's eyes flashed.

"Well, Doctor Brett!" she snapped, "I should think you'd done about enough damage for one day, without getting mixed up with a gang of jail-birds! Who are they?"

"Strike me dead!" exclaimed the Australian, "these 'ere gals are igh clahss, yer know wot I mean?" He leered at Helene for a moment then spoke again. "You ayn't far wrong on the jayl-bird angle, Miss. I'm Wallaroo Jones, at your service. This 'ere is One-Eye Mendoza, and that there is Black Ben. We did 'ave a bit of trouble back on the West Coast, but I dare say they won't 'ave 'eard abaout it on the *East* Coast w'en we arrive there with our packs full of little gowld idols."

David Gray took a step forward determinedly.

"Ki-Gor," he said, "we can't permit this—this robbery of the Danala. If these men get outside with gold statues and ornaments, it will start a stampede here, and that will mean the end of Glaclanda. We can't permit it, I tell you!"

A bitter smile came over Ki-Gor's face. How unpredictable, unbelievable white men, the men of his own race, were! The ones with generous, decent instincts were invariably weak, irresolute, and foolish like David Gray. While the strong ones had no decent instincts at all, and were twice as pitiless and cruel as the fiercest Masai or Zulu.

The slit-eyed man with the nasal voice who called himself Wallaroo Jones proceeded now to demonstrate his ruthlessness. He interrupted Gray's futile protests with a series of brisk commands which his henchmen carried out briskly. As a result of these commands, Ki-Gor, Helene, Morton Brett and Gray sat in a row out in the open, ten yards or so from the cliffs. Wallaroo Jones sat in the mouth of a cave, his gun across his knees. The muzzle of the gun was less than twelve inches away from the shrinking body of Sheila Brett.

"The first one of you out there 'oo maykes a move," the Australian drawled, "and this 'ere lovely little thing beside me gets it."

Having thus effectively hamstrung his captives, Wallaroo Jones ordered his two companions to go through the caves and systematically strip them of all gold ornaments.

David Gray raged and threatened until Wallaroo shut him up with a contemptuous wave of his rifle. But Ki-Gor was silent throughout. He realized perfectly clearly how hopeless any resistance was under the circumstances, and he was not in the habit of wasting his energy in futile vituperation. So he merely sat quietly and pondered the situation, trying to think out a solution.

He knew that as long as the Australian kept his gun trained on Sheila Brett's frail helpless person, there was nothing to be done. Helene would never forgive him, if by any action of his, the white woman was killed. Therefore, he must simply

wait until something happened to alter that situation.

It was fully an hour before the possibility of any action opened up. During that hour, the Australian's two henchmen moved leisurely in and out of the caves with armfuls of gold ornaments and piled them up in a great heap to one side of the four captives. As the pile grew larger and larger, Ki-Gor began to get an inkling of Wallaroo Jones's plan. There was far too much weight of gold for the three desperadoes to carry away by themselves. Undoubtedly, Wallaroo intended to impress his five captives into beasts of burden to bear away the load of treasure.

Ki-Gor stole a glance at Helene beside him. She was looking at him in mute appeal. He turned away quickly. Helene expected him to do something. But just what he could under the circumstances, Ki-Gor did not know.

He bent a glance toward the woods three hundred yards away where the Danala had fled. He thought he detected some barely perceptible movement over there. Could the Danala be planning to attack?

KI-GOR looked up at the sky, and then down again, and inspected the palm of his right hand with elaborate casualness. If the Danala were going to attack, he must not call the Australian's attention to them prematurely. The poor cave men could not possibly succeed in coming to grips with the desperadoes—they had to come too far across the open. The three rifles would mow them down again as they did before.

But a sudden charge by the Danala might divert Wallaroo Jones's attention for just long enough for Ki-Gor to take some action that would not endanger Sheila Brett's life.

The jungle man leaned back casually from his hips, placing his hands behind him to support himself. His hands were thus hidden from Wallaroo Jones's vision. And to Ki-Gor's great joy, the fingers of his right hand closed over a good sized stone half buried in the hard-packed earth of the Danala meeting grounds.

The fingers began to scratch the dirt around the stone. At the same time, Ki-Gor turned his head slightly to one side and down, and drooped his eyelids sleep-

ily. From this position, he could see a small stretch of the woods. And he could see that that there was definitely some activity among the Danala.

He was not surprised when, only a short time later, they attacked.

They broke from the line of woods with a sharp yell, and came running out into the open in a shallow crescent. Wallaroo Jones was not caught napping. He shouted to his henchmen to join him. But while his eyes flicked away toward the Danala momentarily, he did not allow his attention to be drawn off the captives in front of him.

A thrill of dismay went through Ki-Gor. The Danala were attacking but they were not diverting the Australian's mind. Worse yet, the gimlet-eyed little man coolly got to his feet without once taking the muzzle of his gun off Sheila Brett.

That fool of a woman! Ki-Gor fumed. Why didn't she grab the gun barrel and point it in the air? Helene would have under like circumstance. It would be risky, but the situation called for desperate measures. There was the Australian pointing the gun at her but watching not her but the four people in front of him.

Then Ki-Gor stiffened. Evidently that same thought had occurred to Wallaroo Jones. He looked down at Sheila.

Ki-Gor's right hand came around in a swift arc. The stone left it and hurtled toward Jones's head. It was a snap shot and not accurate. The stone struck the desperado a glancing blow over one ear, doing no damage. It did, however, make Jones jerk the gun up as he pulled the trigger, and the bullet went over Sheila Brett's head.

As Ki-Gor flung the stone, he threw his weight forward and upward, following his balancing right hand. With one continuous motion he shot to his feet and sprang forward. It was a matter of four long steps to Wallaroo Jones—to knock the rifle down or twist it out of his hands.

Ki-Gor moved with unbelievable swiftness. But Wallaroo Jones was quick, too. He swung around with a strangled curse, as Ki-Gor leaped toward him. Ki-Gor left his feet in a flying tackle. But just then something seemed to explode in his head and he did not remember anything more for a long time.

ONCE more Ki-Gor returned to consciousness with Ngeeso whispering in his ear.

"Open thine eyes, O Big Brother!" the Pygmy was whispering agitatedly. "For pity's sake, open thine eyes! Behold it is thy friend and servant, little Ngeeso, who begs thee! I see thy chest rise and fall, therefore, I know thou art not dead! But open thine eyes that I may know that thou art not seriously hurt!"

Ki-Gor groaned and stirred uneasily. His head felt the size of a boulder. He tried to lift it and multiple sickening pains went shooting through it. With difficulty he opened his eyes and saw Ngeeso's lugubrious little face close to his. The little woolly beard on the end of the Pygmy's pointed chin wabbled with grief.

Ki-Gor essayed a twisted smile.

"Grieve not, Little One," he croaked in a voice he hardly recognized as his own. "A herd of wild Zebra hath galloped across my head. Otherwise, I am not hurt."

Slowly, he raised himself up on one elbow. His head felt as if it would roll off his shoulders. He put a hand to his forehead, and the hand came away sticky.

"Ai! but thou are a fearsome sight," Ngeeso whispered excitedly, "with thy face covered with blood! Yet I could dance and sing at the sight of thee, for thou art alive! Ki-Gor lives and will smite his enemies!"

"Patience, Little One," Ki-Gor grunted, easing himself to a sitting position. "Tell me how things stand. First, how long have I slept?"

"Not long," the Pygmy answered promptly. "The shadow of the trees hath moved this far."

By the distance Ngeeso indicated, Ki-Gor judged that he had been unconscious nearly half an hour.

"I was too far distant," the Pygmy went on, "to see accurately what happened to thee. I saw thee spring, and I heard two shots fired. Thou layest still then, and the three bad white men fired at the Danala, till the Danala fled away again. Quickly, then, the three bad white men forced thy woman and the other three whites to carry the Danala gold. I followed them a distance and saw that they went toward the

sandbox, and then I hastened back to thy side."

Ki-Gor struggled to his feet and stood a moment swaying. Gently he touched the side of his head tracing the angry welt ploughed by the bullet. Then he flexed his shoulder muscles determinedly and spat.

"Wah!" he exclaimed. "We must hurry, Little One, if we are to catch those hyenas before they climb the sandbank!"

He paused only long enough to pick up his bow and collect his arrows. Then he set off at a swift lop, running with bent knees to avoid jarring his head as much as possible. Beside him, legs twinkling, Ngeeso ran—like a little gray mouse.

"They went by the long way," the Pygmy shouted, "through the fields, to avoid the lassoes of the Danala."

"Then we may yet cut them off," Ki-Gor replied.

"Aye, if the Danala do not again try to take us prisoner," said Ngeeso. "They may hold thee responsible for these."

The Pygmy waved at the Danala corpses still lying in the open where they were felled by the bullets of Wallaroo Jones and his crew. Ki-Gor knew there was something in what Ngeeso said. Nevertheless, he headed straight for the woods and the directest route to the sandbank.

But he kept Ngeeso's warning in the back of his mind and as he came toward a suspicious looking thicket halfway through the woods trail, he slowed down and stopped.

"Come, you foolish Danala!" he addressed the thicket chidingly, "save your lassoes for those who are your enemies! Have you not learned by now that Ki-Gor is your friend? If Kleeklee is there, let him step out in the open and talk as man to man."

There was a moment's silence. Then a figure came out from the bushes and stood in the path. But it was not Kleeklee. It was his wife, Ulip, and her face was distorted with grief and rage.

"You talk of friendship!" she shrilled. "How can you be a friend? You are one of many strange people who came to our valley yesterday and today. We treated you with respect and hospitality as if you were, in fact, Danala like ourselves. But you turned out to be thieves and killers. Why should we call you friend?"

"**B**ECause I am your friend," Ki-Gor said patiently. "Those who stole from you and killed your brothers are as strange to me as they are to you. They are as much my enemies as they are yours. Remember, Ulip, that I have not killed any Danala."

"That may be so," Ulip said glowering, but there was a note of doubt in her voice.

"Where is Kleeklee?" Ki-Gor asked, "I must speak to him."

"Kleeklee is gone!" the cave woman said savagely. "They took him! Your friends or enemies or whoever they are!"

"Took him?" Ki-Gor exclaimed. "Then, come! All of you! Come with me, follow me as your leader and we will save Kleeklee!"

"How can you save him?" Ulip asked bitterly, "they forced him to go up the rope up the sandbank. Kleeklee is gone from Glaclanda—gone who knows where? And who can follow him?"

"We can follow him!" Ki-Gor cried, "come on! There is no time to be lost!"

Evidently, Ki-Gor's words were at last having some effect on the Danala. They began to push out from the thicket, clutching their poor ineffectual spears, and gazing at him with mournful eyes.

"Remember, O Danala Brothers!" he cried. "Ki-Gor is your friend! Follow me—up the sandbank and out of Glaclanda—but follow me, and we will save Kleeklee and punish the evil strangers!"

With that Ki-Gor sprang forward on the trail, Ngeeso close to his side, and the Danala fell in behind him silently.

He had forgotten his aching head now, forgotten everything but how to get Helene out of the hands of the desperate white men who had kidnaped her along with the rest of the party. He turned a dozen different plans over in his mind but settled on none of them. After all, the first thing to be done was to pursue Wallaroo Jones until he caught up with him. Then there would be time to plan. One thing would be helpful and that was that the Danala padding along behind him now were skillful woodsmen, and should be able to travel fast and quietly. And they must be brave, too, to set out to face death a third time at the hands of those murderous men with rifles.

From Ulip's words, Ki-Gor gathered

that Wallaroo Jones and his men had already scaled the sandbank. He doubted whether the desperadoes would stay long at the top of the bank for purposes of beating off pursuit. But he decided to take no chances, and as he neared the foot of the sandbank, he slowed up and approached it very cautiously, staying well hidden.

There was a rude shock awaiting him.

To be sure, there was no one in sight anywhere along the rim of the escarpment. There was no one to contest the climbing of the sandbank. It was the sight of the vine rope which made Ki-Gor curse.

It had been cut at the top, and lay in a tangled heap at the foot of the slide.

Ngeeso took in the situation with a grunt of dismay. He trotted out, examined the rope, looked up the sandbank and then returned to Ki-Gor.

"Aye, Big Brother!" he exclaimed. "How do you now propose to get out of this prison?"

Ki-Gor right then had not the faintest idea how he was going to climb out of Glacanda. He knew perfectly well that it was impossible to get up the sandbank without a rope which was well secured at the top. He walked over to the rope, lifted one end of it and thought a moment. It would be impossible to try and throw the rope—it was stiff and heavy, and besides, even Ki-Gor could not throw a rope three hundred feet straight up in the air, like a lasso.

Lasso! That gave Ki-Gor an idea.

Quickly, he commandeered a score or so of the light flexible lassoes of the Danala, and he and Ngeeso set to work knotting them together. Presently, he thought he had a light rope long enough to reach to the top of the sandbank.

He coiled it carefully on the ground by his feet, and then tied one end securely around the base of one of his long arrows. Then he notched the arrow and aimed it at the crest of the sandbank. While the Danala looked on in awed silence, he bent the great bow.

BUT even as Ki-Gor released the string, he knew he had failed. The arrow went up, up—one hundred—two hundred feet and more. But it fell short of the rim, weighed down as it was by the rope that spiralled under it. Ngeeso scratched

his head and squinted apprehensively up at Ki-Gor.

"Hast thou failed indeed, Big Brother?" he said. "No one else could bend a bow deeper than thee, and yet the arrow fell short."

Ki-Gor stared around him desperately for a moment. Then he slapped a thigh with a vexed exclamation.

"Stupid, stupid Ki-Gor," he told himself, "not to think of that before!"

Quickly, he pulled the rope down off the sandbank, coiling it as he drew it in, until he held the arrow in his hand. Then he looped the coil of rope and the bow around his neck, selected the tallest tree in the vicinity and went surging up into its branches. The tree was nearly a hundred and fifty feet tall, and Ki-Gor climbed nearly up to its swaying, feathery top.

From this precarious perch, he took aim again. His target was the thick tree trunk on top of the sandbank around which he had originally fastened the vine rope when he descended the sandbank. Back, back he pulled the bowstring.

It was now or never.

Ping!

The arrow sped up and out, straight as a homing bee. This time it hit home with a thud and quivered in the tree trunk. The soft lasso-rope feathered out behind and snaked to the ground. Ki-Gor slipped down the tree with a triumphant smile on his weathered face.

Ngeeso regarded him thoughtfully as he hit the ground.

"Will it hold, Big Brother?" he asked doubtfully, his quick mind having grasped Ki-Gor's plan.

"I ask you to try it, Little One," Ki-Gor answered simply.

"Very well," the Pygmy shrugged. He stooped, picked up one end of the heavy vine rope and walked to the foot of the sand slide. There he picked up the end of the length of lasso rope which dangled from above. Gently, the little man started up over the sifting sand.

For the space of four heart-beats Ki-Gor watched. Then he drew his breath, gratefully. The tiny, light body of the Pygmy worked steadily upwards, one hand clinging to the lasso rope, the other hand drawing up the heavy vine rope.

In a remarkably short time, Ngeeso

leaned over the rim of the sandbank with a shout of triumph.

"It is made fast!"

Promptly, Ki-Gor made a running dash up the sand slide. Twenty feet up he began to slide back. He clutched at the newly secured vine rope—and it held. Shouting to the Danala to follow him, he hauled himself upward.

Ten minutes later, he was pushing through the underbrush up the mountain side with Ngeeso beside him, and twenty Danala hunters at his back.

Ki-Gor could never understand why Wallaroo Jones chose to cut his way straight up the mountain, instead of taking the easier route along the escarpment toward the great Barrier at the upper end of Gla-clanda. Perhaps the desperadoes were afraid their captives would be tempted to throw their precious loads of stolen gold over the brink to the valley below. At any rate, this circumstance greatly facilitated Ki-Gor's pursuit. The fleeing jail-birds and their prisoners could not hope to make the fast time through the bush that Ki-Gor and his allies, all trained woods travelers, could make. Furthermore, the party of whites left a broad unmistakable trail behind them.

As Ki-Gor toiled up the mountain side, he tried to evolve the best possible plan of action. Against desperate men armed with rifles, obviously the plan most likely to succeed was ambuscade if that were possible. The spears of the Danala were effective only at very short range. But how could an ambuscade be set up?

He had first to catch up with the criminals and their prisoners without their knowledge. Then he had to guess their probable route, and send his Danala allies out in a swift silent maneuver to reach a point ahead of this probable line of march and set themselves for the surprise attack. It would be a doubtful undertaking, with many chances against it succeeding.

BUT when he caught up with the fleeing party, Ki-Gor saw at once that he would have to change his plans. From the vantage point of a tree, whence he had climbed when he came within earshot, he could see them plainly, less than four hundred yards away, crossing a bare rocky shoulder of the mountain. And as Ki-

Gor watched, Wallaroo Jones called a halt, and the entire party sat down in the middle of the rock slope.

From the standpoint of the desperadoes, the position was well chosen. There was no cover of any kind for yards around them. Nothing could approach them unseen. Ki-Gor pondered the situation with a trace of dismay. What was he going to do now?

Wallaroo Jones might decide to go in any of three directions—to the right along the hillside, to the left along the hillside, or straight up toward the not-so-far distant crest of the mountain. Ki-Gor could see that the little Australian was himself undecided.

Sheila Brett was still being used as a hostage for the good behavior of the other prisoners. She alone was unburdened with a pack full of Danala gold. But she was made to walk in front of Wallaroo Jones, just a few inches ahead of his menacing rifle muzzle. And now, as Ki-Gor watched, the Australian waved her to her feet. With drooping shoulders she trudged in front of him for a dozen paces and then stopped at his command. At a safe distance from the other prisoners, Wallaroo looked around warily, seemingly trying to make up his mind which direction to go.

Ki-Gor moved gently down his tree a few feet, to make sure that he would not be seen by Wallaroo's sharp eyes. He bit his lower lip discontentedly. Which way was Wallaroo Jones going to go?

The jungle man hissed to Ngeeso, and the Pygmy obediently scrambled up the tree to him.

"I think he will go straight up and over the summit of the mountain," the Pygmy said in answer to Ki-Gor's question. "It is steep that way, but it is not far. And on the other side, there is a long gentle slope downward."

"That will be bad for us," Ki-Gor observed, "it will take us so long to catch up with them."

"I think that is what he will do," the Pygmy persisted, "if he knows the country."

"Let us hope he does not know the country, Little One," Ki-Gor murmured. "Go thou down back to the ground and tell the Danala to be ready to leap forward as soon as I give the signal."

The Pygmy faded down the tree silently, and Ki-Gor fixed his attention on the group out on the ledges above him. Suddenly he stiffened.

Wallaroo Jones was ordering Helene and Morton Brett to come toward him. They reluctantly did so and took their places on either side of Sheila Brett. Then came Kleeklee and David Gray side by side, and behind them, the other two desperadoes. The party then started to march—but not to right or left or up the hill.

They were coming straight down the mountain again!

Ki-Gor wasted no time wondering why Wallaroo Jones had decided to retrace his steps and back-trail down the hill. He fairly flung himself down the tree from branch to branch. There was no time to be lost in setting the Danala into an ambuscade. Wallaroo Jones's decision was the sheerest good luck as far as Ki-Gor was concerned, and it might well offset some of the strokes of ill-fortune that had fallen on Ki-Gor during the past two days.

The Danala understood the principle of ambush perfectly and quickly lined the trail by which Ki-Gor was sure Wallaroo Jones would come. Thick undergrowth screened them perfectly, and Ki-Gor swung himself up into the lower branches of a tree, slightly up-hill from the Danala. He notched an arrow in his great bow and waited.

The positions were taken not a minute too soon. The Danala lay waiting for Ki-Gor's whistle signal to swoop out from undercover and attack the desperadoes before they could use their rifles. And especially before the leader, Wallaroo, could fire into Sheila Brett's frail back.

IN a moment, the bushes crackled with the weight of trampling feet, and the Australian's high-pitched nasal snarl hung on the air.

"W'y the bleeding 'ell didn't yer tell us about that trail goin' nor'west?" he complained. "We'd a been miles away by naow. Awl of you better get this straignt—I down't want none of yer tricks from naow on, see?"

There was a sob which must have come from Sheila Brett, and then the party came into Ki-Gor's line of vision. He looked downhill swiftly to make sure the Danala

were still hidden, then slowly began to draw his bow.

Then Wallaroo Jones did something that Ki-Gor could not possibly have predicted.

He commanded Sheila Brett, and her husband and Helene who were flanking her, to turn to the right—slightly off the route by which they had climbed the mountain.

Ki-Gor's muscles tightened as he realized that this new direction would ruin the ambush. The party would stumble over half the hidden Danala. There was nothing to be done, except give the signal to attack beforehand.

The attack would be successful—but at the cost of Sheila Brett's life.

There would be a few seconds before the Danala could reach the Australian—a few seconds in which he could pull the trigger of his rifle and send a bullet through Morton Brett's wife.

Automatically, Ki-Gor aimed his arrow. There was a chance in ten thousand of saving Sheila Brett.

Down came the party—captives and captors. They would pass nearly under the branch on which Ki-Gor was crouching. A spreading branch and another tall bush screened him from their eyes if they happened to look upward. But that same branch and that same bush might interfere with the flight of the arrow that Ki-Gor was going to attempt to put through Wallaroo Jones's right wrist.

Step by step, the three captives came and close at their heels the little Australian, rifle watchfully leveled. Ki-Gor cursed silently. It was a hideously difficult shot. A twig might so easily deflect the arrow from its target and send it at Sheila—or Helene.

But again, it was now or never.

Ki-Gor in a split-second calculated when the Australian would pass by a tiny opening in the foliage. Then with a prayer on his lips, he released the arrow.

Without pausing, Ki-Gor whistled shrilly and leaped out of the tree. There was a panicky yelp and Ki-Gor's heart stood still. That was the Australian's voice—but there was no shot fired.

Two seconds later, Ki-Gor burst out of the bushes in front of Morton Brett, and bedlam broke loose all along the trail.

The Australian was staggering back, his right wrist transfixed by Ki-Gor's arrow, and dangling loose. But he still held the rifle in his left hand and he was yelling wild curses. Quickly the little cutthroat cradled the wooden gunstock against his hip.

"Helene!" Ki-Gor shouted agonizedly. "Down! Down!"

Wallaroo Jones's left hand slid back down the barrel to the trigger guard. Ki-Gor made a despairing lunge forward to try and knock the gun barrel down. But Morton Brett was in the way, right between his fear-paralyzed little wife and Ki-Gor.

A white shaft of relief flashed across the jungle man's brain as he saw Helene falling away to one side. Then came the gun shot.

Ki-Gor heard Sheila Brett's agonized scream as he threw himself off his feet at Wallaroo Jones. His fingers closed on the Australian's scrawny throat. He wrenched upward and down and felt, rather than heard, the desperado's neck snap.

Sheila Brett was still screaming when he looked over his shoulder at her. But to his astonishment, she was apparently unhurt. She was kneeling beside the crumpled figure of Morton Brett.

Ki-Gor threw a quick glance at Helene. She was also unhurt, crouched on her knees to one side and staring round-eyed at the two Bretts. Then the action farther up the hill side took away Ki-Gor's attention.

The other two desperadoes had each managed to fire their rifles twice. One shot had hit David Gray, how badly Ki-Gor had no way of knowing yet. Another shot had killed a charging Danala hunter. But that was the sum total of damage that One-Eye Mendoza and Black Ben could do before they were swarmed under by the hairy cave-men.

The gold-tipped spears dipped again and again, and came up dripping crimson. The long-suffering Danala were taking their vengeance.

IT was all over in a remarkably brief time. Ki-Gor had to whistle repeatedly to bring the maddened Danala back to their senses. But finally they gathered around him, laughing hysterically with

bared teeth. In their midst was the rescued Kleeklee, half dazed by the sudden turn of events.

It was Helene tugging at Ki-Gor's arm who informed him that Morton Brett was dead.

"He threw himself between Sheila and the gun-muzzle," Helene said, "and just a fraction of second later, the rifle went off. I think the bullet went in under his left shoulder-blade."

It was some time before some semblance of order was restored. David Gray had been hit but not seriously. The bullet had gone through the fleshy part of his upper arm, missing bone and artery. One Danala had been killed, and Morton Brett had been killed. The sudden onset of Ki-Gor and his allies had not given the desperadoes time to do any more damage before they were annihilated.

Helene leaned over Sheila Brett who was still sobbing beside the body of her husband.

"Come, my dear," Helene said gently, offering her hand. "Try to control yourself."

"He—he saved my life!" the little woman sobbed, "He took the bullet that was intended for me!"

"Yes," Helene agreed quietly. "He died heroically."

Sheila Brett suddenly stopped crying and stared at her husband's still body. David Gray, one shirt sleeve soaked with blood, came and stood beside Helene. The little woman kneeling on the ground looked up at him.

"David," she faltered, "he died heroically."

Gray nodded soberly. "Yes, Sheila," he murmured, "for one fleeting moment, he was the old Morton that we knew and loved for so long. Perhaps, it was best, after all, that this thing happened. He had changed so the last few years—and I think he knew it, and hated himself for it."

"And now he's dead," Sheila Brett said blankly.

"I think he died happy, Sheila," said Gray. "He saw an opportunity to save your life and to redeem his own character at the same time."

Ki-Gor took Kleeklee aside and talked to him earnestly. A few minutes later the jungle man and the Chief of the Danala

returned to the group. Ki-Gor touched Gray's shoulder lightly.

"We must bind up that wound," he said, "and then decide what you are going to do. Kleeklee understands now that we are his friends. He wants to know what he can do for us. He is willing to have us take as many of these gold figures as we can carry and go away with them. Or he is willing to have us come back to Glaclanda with him and stay there as long as we want to."

Appreciation glowed in David Gray's eyes. "What did you tell him, Ki-Gor?"

"I told him I could not answer for you. As for Helene and myself, I said we did not want the gold, and that we would probably continue our journey."

"And I don't want the gold, either," Gray declared. "In fact, it would be my dearest wish that every one of these little statuettes be returned to the Valley. The outside world must never learn about the gold down there, or a great scientific discovery will be lost to civilization, to say nothing of the destruction of a generous and happy group of human beings."

"Good," Ki-Gor approved. "I will tell Kleeklee."

"As a matter of fact," David Gray said with a hesitant, pleading glance toward Sheila Brett, "I—I would like to go back to Glaclanda and spend some time studying the Danala. That is, if—if Sheila would come with me."

The little woman got to her feet and held her hand out to Gray.

"I will come with you, David," she said

simply. "I think that is what Morton would want me to do."

"That is good," said Ki-Gor, "Helene and I will not come with you, but if you will tell me how long you want to stay in Glaclanda, we will come back for you, and guide you to an outpost."

"That's most generous, Ki-Gor," Gray said fervently. "Under the circumstances, I couldn't ask for a better arrangement."

THAT evening, Ki-Gor, Helene, and Ngeeso camped on the barrier at the upper end of Glaclanda. Morton Brett had been buried where he died on the mountain side. Then his wife and Gray had gone down the sandbank with the Danala, and Ki-Gor had cut the vine rope. Sheila and David Gray were prisoners in Glaconda until Ki-Gor came to bring them out again, but at the same time the precious secrets of the valley were preserved from other marauding intruders like Wallaroo Jones.

As the soft African dusk gathered, Ngeeso chewed a strip of dried meat reflectively and stared out over the Vale of Glaclanda. Ki-Gor, watching him, nudged Helene with a grin.

"What art thou thinking about so intensely, Little Brother?" said Ki-Gor. "The strange hairy cave-dwellers down there? Or perhaps the unaccountable ways of the white men?"

"Who, me?" said Ngeeso. "Certainly not! I am thinking of that marvelous feast I am going to have soon, when Ki-Gor kills an elephant."



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WHITE HUNTER

By PAUL ANNIXTER

Agnew the Englishman knew jungle beasts—and men. Yet even that old Afrikander was due for a surprise when the Yank met the relentless charge of "bos Kaffir!"

BUFFALO," whispered Agnew, the Englishman, as he stopped to examine the tracks in the damp ground.

Headley nodded in confirmation. "Mboga!" verified Sufi, the black gun-bearer, tensely.

He squatted to study the brown earth

and read the complete story of the tracks that scattered through the flat-topped spiny thorn scrub.

Agnew and Headley stood scanning the nearby wall of the bush. The black Somali moved here and there, stooping from time to time to calculate the number of animals that had written their passage and how long they had been gone. Over his shoulders swung the big double-barreled rifles, ready for the use of either white man in an emergency.

"Very many of them, *Bwana*," said Sufi excitedly, coming back to Agnew's side. "Old bulls, and cows with young. But come this way, Sar. This valley between the hills—bad place to be caught." He plucked at the Britisher's sleeve, pointing to the hillside at the right where the trees were thick.

"Quiet," said Agnew firmly. He continued to study the hoof-marks, noting how they all converged toward a narrow gap between the hills. His gray eyes were preternaturally bright with the look Headley had come to know well from the past day afield, as he estimated for himself the size of the herd. "Over fifty of the brutes. . . . My word!"

Headley had had not a few misgivings about this venture into the wasteland of the Nyika, the great thorn bush of which hunters had told him so much. The Nyika, that fastness of grass and thorn trees, was a dark, mysterious maze, practically pathless and still all but virgin to white hunters. It was the haunt of wild elephant, lion and the fierce African buffalo which Agnew for some reason had been particularly anxious to face. There were tales all over the *hinterland* of hunters who had gone into the Nyika and never been heard of again. But Agnew had become suddenly bent upon making the trip. His hobby was big game, as Headley knew. His big plantation near Waruba was a veritable museum of game heads. Africa, Burma, India—there were few places the oil magnate had not gone during recreational periods in pursuit of his favorite sport. And though Headley had been a week-end guest of Agnew's presumably to discuss important business, he had found that it devolved upon him as a graceful bit of esteem and etiquette to fall in with his host's desire.

Headley had had numerous reasons for not caring to go on the hunt. That week-end invitation to old Agnew's plantation was an accolade not open to many young men in the *hinterland*, fraught as it was with big business possibilities. Agnew, he knew, was looking for the right man for a certain post, and that he should have turned the week-end into a hunting trip was a bit galling.

His admiration of some buffalo heads had started the other going on Saturday morning. He had listened over Scotch and sodas to Agnew's early exploits in the way of big game, "back in the good old days before the Express rifle had tamed the veldt." Finally had come his host's pressing suggestion that they spend the following day on a buffalo hunt. Headley fell in with the idea, of course, though the hunt bid fair to send glimmering any chances he might have had at the new refinery which the British Oil Corporation was proposing for Waruba district.

THEY had left at early dawn in Agnew's big Hispano-Suiza, shipped at heaven knew what expense from Europe, and driven nearly half the day over ungodly trails and open veldt. Bouncing about on the front seat beside Agnew, listening glumly to anecdotes of the hunt, Headley had about decided that the *hinterland* was an impossible conquest for a lone American.

He had seen it work out too many times before. The British had a century-old foothold here. They had taken over African territory with that slow, ordered advance of empire that had long proved invincible in the colonies—outdoors men, iron-hard, robust, poised and satisfied with all their traditions, knowing better how to transplant themselves and their codes to new lands than their counterparts in any other nation. Americans seemed timed a bit too fast, worked too hard and worried too much to succeed below the equator; Frenchmen worked not hard enough; Spaniards and Portuguese fitted for the climate better than any, but persistently undermined by lack of race barriers. Take men like old Agnew; they never lost their tempers over an argument any more than they forgot the color of a woman, or to don a dinner jacket even if

in a tent in the most forgotten corner of their far-flung empire.

Headley, who admired the craggy-faced Britisher, did a lot of thinking about him on the trip, particularly during the afternoon. It occurred to him that it was quite like Agnew to have dropped all discussion of the business in hand for this precarious game hunt. He knew something of the British psychology, which was to accept a man *in toto*, provided he made good in some nervy specialty of the outdoors, such as athletics or big-game hunting. If a man was sound there his reputation professionally would carry him in the business world. Headley recalled having heard somewhere that Agnew had never taken on a man without first trying him out in some such way. Courage and resourcefulness in a crisis would mean much more to Agnew, he fancied, than mere technical ability that any professor might have. The Transvaal was not humdrum England, far from it. There were floods, landslides, fever and native uprisings forever trying out a man's soul in the unregenerate tropics.

The more he had dwelt on the matter the more likely it had seemed that Agnew had a double idea in making this trip. Quite possibly it was a sort of test. Headley began to smile grimly when in early afternoon, the car left far behind, the two of them, with Sufi well ahead, plunged into the shadow thorn-scrub. His cogitations of the morning had begun to take an entirely different tack.

As they penetrated deeper into the maze of scrub, the sun beat down like a cannonade of fire on their topees, but old Agnew became more alive than he had been in the past two days. Headley remained silent, quite content to bide his time. The eye of Sufi, the gun-bearer, a man obviously long tried and trusted on the trail, turned to him from time to time as they tramped, filled with an unspoken doubt, a faint question. For the form of a good gun-bearer, to say nothing of his life and limb, depends crucially on the hunter's being there and being steady, at the climactic moment. Gradually, however, the doubt seemed dissipated. Whether or not Agnew noted these weather-signs Headley could not ascertain from his characteristic iron smile.

THE afternoon progressed, a sustained fury of heat between the thorn-clad hills — heat beating up from the baked earth and rocks, prickly white-dusted leaves everywhere, all the greens smothered in gray-white. Spoor everywhere, but no sight yet of the game they sought.

As the hours wore on, a quiet elation came over Headley, a growing conviction that the present situation was going to play directly into his hands. He knew as well as Agnew the countless ways of getting into a nasty corner with African buffalo, beside which the much-storied North American bison were dull, good-natured old cows. Big-game hunters now generally agreed that the buffalo was the most dangerous beast in the world, not excepting lions and tigers; that its intelligence and cunning ranked with that of the elephant. No whipped-up cat-courage about the wrath of this beast; it stops at nothing to attain vengeance. Wounded in the open, it rushes to thick cover and in nine cases out of ten, the hunter foolhardy enough to follow him into the bush goes to his death. The buffalo will be standing somewhere, black, motionless, savage and silent, looking out of its blood-shot eyes through the low vegetation. However cautiously the hunter makes his way through the bush, he cannot move without betraying himself to the acute senses of the waiting beast. Then, at the right moment, there is a resistless charge through the brush, a stabbing sweep and toss of the black-horned head and what is left in the brush is but food for the vultures.

Two or three times they sighted jackals or hyenas amid the sage, those nightghouls of the brute creation that always looked as if they were about to sit down. But it was not until late in the afternoon that they came upon buffalo spoor so fresh and so plentiful that the alarm-bell of their hunters' instincts set up an insistent clamor. Somewhere close by was a spring hole as the nearness of the game testified. Headley would have liked to find it and utilize what was left of the daylight making camp, and he knew that Sufi was of a similar mind. But Agnew was high-fire at the nearness of the game they had sought so long. Raking the dust out of his throat with a cough, he ordered Sufi forward again.

"You have to take buffalo as they come. It's not every day you can walk them up like this, y'know. Let's stick while the light lasts. They've gone up through that gap in the hills to feed, and a hundred to one they'll come back before dark." Agnew spoke purringly but with a certain calm superiority of the Briton, ruler of the earth.

So they resigned themselves to await the fortune of the afternoon. Furthermore, they remained, against even Sufi's admonishment, and to Headley's growing consternation, directly in the trail in the center of the valley.

"The blighters have passed up and down here countless times," Agnew said. "It's our only fair chance for today. If they're coming, they'll come before dark."

While they waited Headley reflected further upon the situation as regards his chances of getting on with Agnew. So far not the least hint of his attitude on the matter had come from the Englishman. But after the hunt, Headley knew, there must come a few minutes of straight talking over cigars and drinks, and something would be said, British fashion, once and for all. Headley could not even be sure whether he had a ghost of a chance for the coveted position. Another man might already have been chosen for the place, for all he knew, and Agnew might merely have decided to put in a rather dull weekend hunting for the love of it. The habitual cold aloofness in the Englishman's eyes, except on the subject of big game, kept Headley continually guessing, continually depressed. If there were any chance for him in the present episode it would have to show forth during the hunt. Some bit of swift action when they got to close quarters, some idea that the other would not think of, for instance. That was what would stand out for Agnew—the ability to think like an electric flash and carry the flash into action, all in that shutter-click of time between the looming and breaking of the crisis. It was all or nothing in a land like Africa anyway. Headley grinned to himself and sat tight.

"They may be returning any minute now," Agnew murmured after a bit. "But if not they will come down again in the morning to the shade of the bottoms for the heat of the day."

Headley found it all he could do to refrain from cursing at the heat and flies. Agnew, however, possessed a philosophy of quiet endurance, a stoic acceptance of unavoidable discomfort.

SLOWLY they moved toward the steep-walled gap between the hills, Agnew still keeping to the center of the valley, a good two hundred yards from the protection of any trees. They could see the low mountains now looming on either side of them, covered with sered grass and sage, barren of trees. They converged about half a mile ahead in a narrow gap through which they surmised the buffalo herd had entered the hills.

That slow march became etched upon Headley's mind like few things that he had ever experienced. It became plainer and plainer that it was a sort of test on the part of the nerveless old Afrikander. Once Agnew spoke to Sufi and took his double Rigby from the servant's shoulder. Headley did the same. He was in a sorry state from heat and nerves but determined to give no slightest sign.

Filling his breast pocket with cartridges as large as his thumb, Agnew talked casually and at random. "Great bit of work, these Rigbys. Ever use one before, Headley?"

"Once or twice," Headley nodded. "Generally I carry a .45."

"Not near enough gun for buffalo. Your bos-Kaffir takes a lot of killing. Hide on him thick as an elephant's, y'know. You have to have a rifle that shoots and keeps on shooting, both barrels, when bos makes his charge," Agnew purred amiably. Was he being tried out, Headley wondered.

"So I understand," the American appended. "The strength of the brute and the devil in him, I fancy, will carry him on a good hundred yards with a bullet through his heart. Some hunters claim it's almost impossible to kill a charging buffalo if it's out to get a man, so amazing is its vitality."

"You are bally well right there," said Agnew. His gray eyes came round to Headley with a keen but unfathomable expression which might have carried a question, or might have meant that he was subtly pleased. The faintest of iron smiles

presently showed through his mask. Still he moved not a foot from the open grassy center of the valley, and Headley moved not a foot from his side. Thus they continued the slow advance.

Headley stopped presently and pointed to the trail. Among many others, he'd spotted a few great tracks that sent a thrill through both men. They must have been made by a bull with a height a good foot above his fellows and of tremendous weight, for the tracks were deep sunk in the tough soil. At one place the beast had stopped to paw the earth. They could picture the black monster and Headley was wondering if *any* rifle would have stopping power to down such a monster before he could do damage. Agnew stood a moment, nodding grimly.

"*Ndio, Bwana*," came the low voice of Sufi. "They are but a short way ahead now."

THE sun was fast nearing the horizon, and its shadows already made long streaks of every bush and tree, bigger and blacker than nature. The hot blaze of its dying had gathered in the western sky, still too bright for the eye to gaze at. When its moment came it would pitch below the skyline, precipitating the sudden darkness of the tropics, without any perceptible twilight. Quite in accordance the all or nothingness of Africa.

Then as they were moving forward again through knee-deep grass, Sufi held up a hand. There was a faint crackle in the distant brush. Once again Sufi ventured the remark: "Bad place to be caught, *Bwana*." He glanced around him and began moving away, but Agnew called out, "Back." Obediently the man slipped back and crouched behind.

Headley glanced swiftly about, noting that the sharply rising tree-clad hillsides were still over a hundred yards distant. No cover—nothing—should the buffalo suddenly sweep down on them as was so often their way. Then, as he glanced toward Agnew, the long black arm of the Somali thrust itself past his shoulder, its rigid finger silently pointing to the narrow space between the hills. He stared.

Dark massed bodies were moving up there, surging out from the deepening shadows. "They're coming, Yank!" came

Agnew's whisper. "About thirty seconds does it," he calculated instinctively.

Both men stood there, slightly bent forward as if in the teeth of a wind, Sufi three paces behind.

The buffalo, evidently frightened by something up wind, were descending swiftly, almost at a stampede, bent on escape. Too late, Headley saw, to attempt gaining the higher ground at the side, even if they tried and, though there was no flicker in Agnew's stony mask, he had a distinct sense that the situation was a bit thicker than the other had counted on. While they stared fixedly at the black mass undulating and filling the head of the valley, Agnew gave a few sharp orders to Sufi as he glanced at the breach of his gun. "Two shots in the big guns. Six in the other two, Headley. We can fire the four of them before they get here."

Shoulders almost touching, the white men half crouched, nerves set to do the only possible thing to do: stand exactly where they were in the middle of the line of charge, and shoot down the great leaders in an attempt to split the herd. They had arrived at the decision simultaneously by that unconscious cerebration that works infallibly in men under stress. If they could heap up three or four dead buffalo directly in front of them, the mass might divide around the bodies and give them a chance. To run for it would be suicidal; the herd would sweep over them and toss and trample them to shreds.

Less than a hundred yards to come now. Headley's safety catch was off. He caught the flash of Agnew's glance. "Two shots each at fifty yards! Straight into the center of 'em. The rest at less. Pile 'em up!" The man was tempered like tungsten-steel.

If "wait up" was the game, Headley could play with the best.

Their double Rigbys bellowed out simultaneously. "Mark! The two big blighters in the center," came Agnew's shout.

THE two leading beasts, both bulls, staggered, plunged forward a hundred feet, then pitched nose down, sliding many feet before the rush of numbers behind. The herd was almost on them. A bellowing like the siren of an ocean liner arose from half a dozen bulls. Another shot that

kicked their shoulders back a foot; then under their right arms the smaller rifles were thrust by Sufi and they dropped the empty Rigbys.

At the jump of the barrels a third and fourth bull crumbled drunkenly and collided with the carcasses of the other two just in front of them. The three men leapt forward instinctively into the lee of the bodies. Now the herd was all around them, thundering past on both sides like a torrent around a rock, shaking the ground, meeting again behind them as they tore away toward the lower valley. More and still more followed, thudding, rasping and grunting as they stumbled and collided together to avoid the obstacle, then pounded on.

A rattle of further shots from the lighter rifles and a fifth animal went smashing headlong into the mass. Then—exactly one minute and a half it was in all, though it seemed age-long to the three who crouched there—the entire herd had passed. Not one of them had so much as turned its head; every ponderous brain filled with the single thought of escape to the lower valley. The breeze brought back the rumor of pounding and swishing as they tore away through brush and grass.

Headley and Agnew turned, lowering still smoking rifles from their cheeks. It had all happened so swiftly that they had not yet brought their guns down from their shoulders as the last animals went by.

Standing there beneath the bulwark of buttressed bodies that had saved them, Agnew passed a bandanna over his face. Then in the flabby reaction from tension, both men sat down on a low knoll and, after a few moments, lighted pipes, while Sufi squatted close by. Both were breathing heavily, not from exertion but from the fierce play of life and death just passed. Their brains were almost frighteningly clear.

Over the western rim of the bald hills the golden disk of the sun was just about to disappear. Agnew watched it and chuckled.

"Jove! Near thing, what? For a moment there it was a bit of a show, 'pon my word, but we scuppered them in time. What a specimen, that first bull. Over two tons, I'll wager. Your brute, of

course. I marked the shot well." His exuberance was edifying. To Agnew's British training it would have been bad form to allude further to Headley's prowess.

HEADLEY said nothing as his eye ran over the astonishing proportions of the bottom-most animal, the first to fall. Old Agnew, who had noted that shot of his, even in the thick of it all and was chatting with that peculiar nonchalance that bespoke no nerves at all, had missed no other points either, one might be sure. Undoubtedly he was making up his mind now over this and that, beneath his flow of talk. Headley would wait the answer. He was, in fact, immensely interested in the old gamester's psychology by now.

As he was tamping the tobacco into his pipe he stooped suddenly to pick up a couple of flat, brownish-yellow stones, and the geologist in him stirred to sudden life.

"I say," he exclaimed enthusiastically, holding forth the specimens for the other to admire. "Fine bit of shale, sir, wouldn't you say? May be a likely bit of territory for British Oil scouts."

Agnew's jaw dropped. He had patently been expecting something said, some definite reaction from the other, about the hunt—but hardly this scientific detachment!

"Gad!" he muttered under his breath. Aloud he said: "Well, anyway, that's the kind of nerve I'm looking for, Yank. And you're the man I choose for the Company's new post. Not Waruba; anyone can handle that. This is new territory—interior of Ubanga. Wild, mountain country—unfriendly tribes—wild animals—plenty of danger, or I miss my guess. You'd go out with a free hand, and without time limit—if the idea appeals to you."

"Rather!" said Headley, looking the other in the eye, a faint twinkle gleaming in the impassivity of his countenance.

Agnew rose, glancing skyward. It was almost dark by now. "I say, we're to have a slice of moon to get out by," he exclaimed. "Dashed good thing, that. We'd best trek out now and send Sufi and some of the boys back for the heads tomorrow. We'll talk things over on the way."



CODE OF THE BUSH

A Novelet of the Deep Congo

By BILL COOK

Inscribed on the blunt rib-bone of some butchered slave was a tale of treasure and a prophecy of doom—magnets drawing bush-scarred Buck Morgan the way blood draws a hunting lion.

THE pale, yellow glow of the lamp-light fell on the faces of the three men seated about the table. It was early night in the heart of the African Congo.

← Jungle Stories—Fall

The soft, purring of the jungle surrounded the shack on the river's edge, where it crouched like a squat, blinking toad in the blue-black darkness. Insects hummed and

buzzed and beat their wings in a constant flutter against the screens, and the thick, tangled bush was alive with the weird calling of night birds and the mocking chatter of the monkey folk.

Professor Leland-Jeffrys, world-famed scientist, raised a moist, bearded face from a first scrutiny of the object which he held in a trembling left hand. In his right he gripped a powerful magnifying glass. Sweat had already started on the faces of the two younger men who sat tensely watching him.

"Do you know what this is, Morgan?" said Leland-Jeffrys, his bespectacled, watery blue eyes peering intently, first at Morgan and then at his companion, the man called Johnson.

"Why, yes," replied Buck Morgan, wetting his lips nervously, his bronze face flushed with excitement. "It's the rib bone of a man."

"Very true," nodded the professor, turning the bone over in his long, scholarly fingers. "It is the third rib of a human skeleton. Where did you get this?"

Buck Morgan stared silently for a moment at the wispy professor, watching the old man's greenish white beard jerk with the twitching of his facial muscles. He finally decided to tell the whole truth to the old timer now, for how could he know what the writing on the bone may have already told the scientist. Besides, the professor was a man of international repute. In that brief pause the mysterious throbbing pulse of the jungle beyond the screens seemed to halt, as if the vast, dark African bush had crept closer to listen. Morgan's square-jawed face broke into a fleeting, tight-lipped grin.

"That bone, Professor," he said, lowering his voice so that it barely reached across the table, "was given to me by an old man—Ahmed Bey he called himself. He was the last of the slave traders, I guess, and he gave it to me as he lay dying on an island down the Congo. He said it was the key to a fortune."

The professor nodded, and there was a strange smile on his lips. "An old slave trader you say? Very, very interesting, Morgan. That accounts for something here"—he turned the bone in his fingers—"that is very curious."

Stilts Johnson, his dark eyes aglow with

tension, dragged his stool closer, his gaze riveted on the scientist. "Then you can read it, Professor?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"I think so," said Leland-Jeffrys, rising and stepping to a shelf of books, from which, after peering carefully, he selected a ragged volume. "There are parts of some very ancient languages which must be deciphered."

Buck Morgan uttered a deep sigh of relief, and wiped his perspiring face, as the professor returned to the table lamp and picked up a pencil. He wondered what the old fellow meant when he said it was "very, very interesting." Did those mysterious heiroglyphics tell the story of the treasure cache of the notorious slaver's gang that had swept rampant over Africa so long ago?

The professor propped the bone before him on the table, and, with pencil poised, scrutinized it carefully. For some moments he bent there, motionless. Then without raising his eyes, he spoke.

"Morgan," he said, and his voice was calm, quite matter of fact; "Did you kill a man to get this bone?"

BUCK MORGAN half started from his stool, his blue eyes suddenly hard. Johnson glanced from the professor to Morgan, saw the swift change in Buck's face, the quick, flashing temper that had made Morgan feared in the ports along the coast of British East, and as far as the palm-fringed islands of the Indian Ocean.

"Kill a man for that?" demanded Buck. "What do you mean?"

The professor did not even glance up, but he felt Morgan's quick anger, and he said in an even, measured tone, "Don't get excited, Morgan. There's blood shed, according to this inscription, each time this bone changes hands. Somebody was killed when you got it."

Morgan sat back looking a little sheepish. "Oh," he said, "I see. I thought you—well—there was a man killed when I got it. As I told you, it was Ahmed Bey. There was a fight on the island. The Bey and a lot of his people were killed. I was hit pretty bad myself. Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly," said Professor Leland-Jeffrys, looking up from his scrutiny of the

inscription on the bone. "I'll try to translate this for you now." He began sifting the pages of the book, running a finger down each page, searching the fine print, then glanced up at Morgan and added: "But I warn you, my boy, this bone bears the symbol of an ancient and powerful curse. He who possesses it walks always in the shadow of death."

With this calm statement the old man proceeded to write the first word on the paper. Buck shrugged and turned a grin on Johnson. He produced tobacco and papers and began rolling a cigarette. The threat of death was no stranger to Morgan, and as he lighted his smoke he leaned closer to the table to read, upside down, what the scientist was writing. The pencil made soft squealing noises on the paper. Each man could hear the other breathing. A frightened bird fluttered in the bush outside and there was the soft scampering of rats in the next room. Buck watched the moving pencil, felt the almost fanatical absorption of the old man as he probed the treasure secrets of the dead slavers.

He saw the words take shape and grow on the paper and his lips moved as he read them silently to himself—

BACK — TO — WATERFALL —
IN—SETTING—SUN—
NINE—CHAINS—TO—GREEN—

LIKE a thunderous period, a gunshot shattered the hot stillness of the jungle night. A bullet slashed through the screen. Another shot and the slug whizzed close to Morgan's throat. With a fierce oath Buck kicked the stool from beneath him and whipped the heavy revolver from the holster at his belt. Into the dark outside he drove a smashing volley of searching shots and spun about at Johnson's shout. He saw the old man topple forward, the table overturning as he fell, and the lamp crashing to the floor. In a flash the room was a shambles of overturned furniture, crackling licking flames and the thick black smoke of burning oil. Choking from the heavy fumes, Buck leaped to where the old professor lay, shouting savagely for the old man's house boy, while Stilts Johnson stamped and tore at the swift flames that crept like a hundred serpents over the dry grass matting and the tindery bamboo furniture. In the fitful

half light he thought he saw the African servant rush into the room, then he bent and lifted the motionless body of Leland Jeffrys and cried out "Quick, boy, bring a lamp!"

He glanced up as he started toward the door with the old man's body in his arms. But there was no servant, no sound of him, as Buck carried the old fellow out to the grass before the door. As he lay him gently down, Buck's sharp ears caught the rustle of foliage in the bush. Bending low he probed the darkness and the move saved his life, for there was a quick flame and the bark of a gun. A bullet screamed close above him. Buck fired from a crouch, his ears filled with the double thunder of the shots, and in the echo he heard the grunting cough of a man and the slow wilting of a body in the brush.

FOR a moment Buck crouched, listening. He heard the swift movement of someone fleeing through the jungle, beyond the bullock path, and the stamping and swearing of Stilts Johnson in the shack. Bending over the professor he knew at once, even in the dark, that the old man was dead. Dead! The word hit him like a hammer. The slaver's curse and the bone. A cry of rage burst from Morgan's lips. He dashed groping into the house, and collided with Johnson who was emerging from the now darkened study. Johnson grunted at the impact and said hoarsely "Got the fire out, Buck, but I can't find the bone! You got it?" The two stood there speechless for a moment in the dark, while the import of Johnson's words took shape in Buck's brain.

"Let's not get excited, Stilts," he said, "We're in the middle of somethin' mighty strange. Stand here by the door while I hunt another lamp."

As he struck a match and moved cautiously away from Johnson he heard Stilts say; "You mean, you ain't got the bone, Buck?"

Morgan did not answer, but went slowly through the shack until he found a lamp on a shelf. With this lighted he rejoined Johnson and the two entered the study. Together they searched the floor for the bone. After ten minutes they had found not the slightest trace. Of one thing they were both certain, however; that nothing

had burned but parts of the floor matting and some of the papers from the overturned table. There were no crumpled ashes of the bone.

"Then what happened?" asked Johnson, half to himself. "There was nobody else in the room, Buck, only you an' me an' the professor."

Buck looked at Johnson narrowly, striving to collect his thoughts. "What about the house boy? I hollered for him when the room was full of smoke. I thought I saw him here as I carried the old man out."

They stood there staring at each other. The same question was in their minds. Each thought they had seen the house boy in the room but neither was sure. Then who had flitted into the room like a ghost and disappeared?

"Somebody," said Buck, "was in this room." He drew some cartridges from his pocket and silently reloaded the empty chambers of his revolver. From a shelf on the wall he lifted down a flashlight. "Come on, Stilts," he said, "We've got two things to find out right away quick. One is what happened to the house boy, and the other, did I get the fellow who just shot at me outside." With the flash in one hand and his gun in the other, he led Johnson out of the shack.

They quickly learned the fate of the house boy, for the sweeping beam of the flash picked out his body in the grass close by the house. His head had been caved in with a gun barrel. Buck's jaw tightened grimly. Johnson said "The poor guy never knew what hit him. Where's the bozo you plugged, Buck?"

With the aid of the flashlight, Buck pushed through the bush with Johnson at his heels, weapons ready. They halted, as the circle of light fell on the body of a man whose face was raised in a stiffened snarl to the black African sky.

While a man could count five slowly, they stood looking down at the ugly face with its bristled jowls. Then Johnson bent suddenly forward, his tall lean body almost doubled, as he studied the dead man's features. "Nice shootin', Buck," he said. "Damn nice shootin'. Unless this guy is his double, or he's twins, I'll spit in your ear if I didn't see his mug on a reward notice from Southern Rhodesia."

Buck frowned and peered closer at his

departed enemy. "A bad man, eh?"

"A killer," said Johnson, "wanted for murder. Didn't you see any of those big posters, Buck, in places down along the coast? This guy's name is Rodney Tarrell. I'll search him."

The man's body was dragged out into the open near the shack, and a quick search was made of his clothes. But it failed to reveal the missing rib bone.

BUCK MORGAN stood grimly facing the black depths of the jungle. "This hunka," he said "wasn't alone, Stilts. There was somebody with him, maybe one, maybe more. They're in there somewhere." He shot the beam of the flashlight toward the dark wall of the forest.

"Don't be a fool, Buck," said Johnson, "You're not goin' in there tonight. If they're there, they'd make monkey meat out of us. It's bad enough runnin' a man down in broad daylight." As he spoke Stilts Johnson glanced past Morgan's shoulder and touched Buck on the arm. "Somebody comin'," he said, "from town. They heard the shootin', I guess."

Buck turned and saw the ghostly figure of a white man in tropical linens, and behind him a hesitant cluster of natives. A powerful flashlight in the hand of the newcomer floodlighted the scene before the professor's shack. Morgan and Johnson blinked in the blinding glare.

"What was all the shooting about?" demanded the man with the flash, coming to a halt as his startled eyes observed the three bodies. Buck now recognized the man as one of the District Sub-Commissioners, and he was accompanied by two of his grotesquely clad native policemen.

They told their story quickly.

The Commissioner, who had seen Morgan and his companion around town, and knew something of Morgan's reputation, shook his head gravely. He issued quick orders to his natives to have the three bodies carried up the trail to town, and as he followed, with Morgan and Johnson, he seemed at a loss to find a motive for the brutal killing of Professor Leland-Jeffrys.

Buck's story of the shooting, for reasons of his own, included no mention of the rib bone. There was no need to involve the Provincial government in his own

private business, nor did he wish to share the secret of the slaver's treasure with an underpaid jungle official. Without this knowledge the groping Commissioner was baffled.

"For a man with as many enemies as you seem to have, Morgan," the Commissioner said, finally, "it would appear that you bear a charmed life. Somebody no doubt was trying to finish you off tonight. The poor old professor was murdered by mistake."

Buck Morgan made no reply, but he swore a silent, solemn vow: He would avenge the death of the kindly old man, and recover that rib bone. Ten words were graven on his brain, the last ten words the old scientist's hand had written. He could see them clear and distinct, as they had been in the light of the lamp: BACK — TO — WATERFALL — IN — SETTING — SUN — NINE — CHAINS — TO — GREEN —. What waterfall? Buck knew the missing word from the lips of Ahmed Bey. Allaman! The falls of the Allaman. But — GREEN, green what? Surely not green trees or green rivers or green hills.

Well, his first task was to recover the bone, and to do it he must overtake the man or men who took refuge in the darkness of the jungle. This was his fight. He and Johnson would settle the score. In the morning with the first light of day, they would pick up the beaten trail of the killers.

WITH Johnson and a single, courageous native who agreed to act as a sort of guide, Buck Morgan pushed into the jungle from a point near the old professor's place. The trampled vegetation showed plainly that more than one man had lain there in ambush. From here broken plant stems and crushed creepers marked the path of the flight in the night. Two men at least had fled and the trail was plain.

Morgan led the way. All three carried light packs for Buck was certain it would be a quick chase and a short one. Each of the three carried a strong club with which they beat the foliage and drove off reptiles which might be in their path. As the hours wore on, Buck called a halt and ordered the native to follow the plainly

beaten trail while he and Johnson kept pace on either flank.

"Just in case," he explained, winking at Stilts. "These fellows might turn on us and set an ambush. This way, if we come up on them suddenly, we can cross our fire on them, if they want to make it a fight."

"Men run fast," said their African guide. "Make very fast hurry."

"Yeah," chuckled Buck, "let 'em run. They make very tired, too, and we'll catch up with them with their tongues hanging out."

Pushing on through the tangled wilderness, battering their way through the matted ferns and creepers and hacking at the veritable network of hanging vines, they plowed on amid the dank, shadowy jungle, breathing the heavy air that pressed down on them like a sodden blanket. At last the trail broke out on a smooth beaten footpath, and the native paused staring at the damp earth. "Go here," he pointed, motioning to the north. Morgan and Johnson saw the distinct prints of a white man's shoes.

"They moved a lot faster'n you thought, eh Buck?" ventured Johnson.

"Yeah," agreed Buck grimly, "but they've got to stop some time. Come on, we'll keep goin'."

So on they went, tirelessly, hour after hour. Once they crossed a rushing stream by way of a footlog, but the path led on, bearing now more easterly and Morgan felt that their quarry was inspired by the knowledge that this was a hunting trail which would lead them away from the region around Stanleyville, where the Lualaba emptied into the Congo. He was somewhat surprised therefore, when, shortly before noon, they glimpsed off to the left a clearing on the bank of a stream. In the center of this clearing was an iron-roofed shack with smoke pouring from its black stove pipe. Behind the shack, away from the water, was a long, low, shed-like structure.

Buck halted his companions and pointed, tapping their guide.

"You know this place? What kind place this?"

"Trade," muttered the fellow. "Him trade."

"We'll cut through here," decided Buck, "and stop there. Maybe the trader saw

these fellows or heard them going through here. We'd better stop and find out. At any rate we can warn him to be on the lookout."

From the marks on the trail they were sure now that three men were somewhere ahead of them. But the three had separated. Morgan turned to Johnson warily. "These fellows," he said, "know we're on their heels, that's a dead sure thing. We've got to be careful."

"Yeah," grunted Johnson, "they must be near played out. Maybe they're settin' a trap for us."

"Maybe," said Buck, his blue eyes narrowed, "but maybe it's just a ruse to throw us off. Come on! We'll find out what the trader knows. There's smoke coming from his stove pipe."

Cautiously now they proceeded toward the buildings on the water's edge.

THREE men drawled from the dank shelter of a fern clump in the first faint light of early morning. In the eerie mist they rubbed their bleary eyes, and stood without speaking for many moments, listening. They were a brutal looking, ill-kempt trio, with bristling beards of many days' growth on their faces, and their hatless heads were matted with hair that was drenched from the dew of the night. One of them, a thick-set, powerful thug of a man, scratched busily inside his shirt. His red-rimmed eyes blinked and he rubbed a big hairy paw across his bloated purple features. He was the first to speak.

"You blokes hear anything?" he said. "This damn place is so full of queer little noises a man can't hear hisself."

A shorter, thinner man with a narrow, cat-like face, ran grimy fingers through his dark shock of hair. "There ain't nothin' to hear, Newt," he said.

The man called Newt grunted, and the third man said "Wonder what happened to Rodney. You suppose they got him last night?"

Newt growled deep in his throat, and licked at his dry lips. "What's the use o' supposin'?" he snarled, "don't yuh suppose Rodney'd be here now if somethin' didn't happen? They either caught him, er—well, maybe his number was up."

Newt shrugged resignedly, and the rat faced man, whom the others knew as Lon

Umrie, bared his teeth. "The dirty rotters," he cried out, "they murdered him in cold blood. We oughta go back and set fire to the whole village."

"What you need," said the tallest of the three, with a diabolical grin on his long, lantern jawed face, "is a bit of breakfast, Lonnie my pal. Don't you agree, Newt?"

The other two leered at him for a moment, and Newt Hamon waved a silencing hand. "You're off your base, Jock Wilkie, an' you too, Umrie. Yuh know I always say once a pal always a pal, but if Rodney was croaked, yuh don't wanna forget we got Morgan's lucky bone. An' now it's just a three way split—soon as we can find out what the writin' on the bone says." He patted the pocket of his ragged coat, with a grim smile of satisfaction.

Umrie suggested that they put distance between themselves and the outskirts of Ponthierville, the jungle trading center from which they had fled last night. The others agreed, with grunts, and having no baggage, they set off aimlessly in a general northerly direction, pausing now and then for sounds of possible pursuit from the rear. They had Buck Morgan's "lucky" bone, but they could not eat it. One of them had smelled thin wood smoke, and their craving bellies urged them toward it.

Like three human hyenas they stalked furtively through the jungle. Newt Hamon, Lon Umrie and Jock Wilkie! Spawn of the dives of Sidney and Singapore, cut-throats and murderers. Wanted men! Men whose faces scowled from reward posters in the seaport towns and larger cities of all Africa.

AS they neared the little trader's station Buck Morgan saw no signs of life about the place. There were no blacks lounging about the buildings. Calling out as visitors do in the bush, Buck waited, halting his steps, listening. There was no answer. No one appeared on the steps before the door, nor was there any sound from within the house. Johnson looked at Morgan, then at their native companion. The African was standing on one foot, the other braced against his knee, and his body leaning on his long club.

"Funny," said Buck, "maybe the fellow's deaf, or asleep." And he led the way up to the house. At the steps they drew to a

halt, peering through the screen door. In the farther corner of the small room they could make out the figure of a man sprawled out in a chair, his chin on his chest, sleeping soundlessly.

The negro beside Morgan shaded his eyes and said; "Him sleep, bwana."

The three clumped up the steps and Buck rapped on the door jamb with his club, his eyes fixed on the figure in the chair. He was aware of another small room off to the right. Kitchen perhaps. Then from this second room came a voice.

"Entrez!" It was a woman's voice.

Morgan flung back the door and, with Johnson close on his heels, stepped into the house. But he stopped stiffly in his tracks as a gruff voice ordered: "Stand hitched, Bucko, my boy! And don't grab fer no guns. You too, pal."

At the sound of the voice a scraping was heard behind them, outside the house, and Johnson, nearest the door, saw another man crawling from beneath the building which stood on piles. A big pistol was in the man's hands and he growled as he climbed the stoop to the door.

"Neat as a pin, eh, Umrie?" said this man, shoving the petrified native inside the shack and motioning Morgan and Johnson to the center of the room. "And now Mister tough guy Morgan, would yuh mind informin' us as to what happened to Rodney Tarrell?"

Cursing himself silently for being so easily trapped, Buck Morgan thought fast. If he played the jackass a little further he might turn the tables on these thugs. Besides, he was letting his eyes adjust themselves to the shadowy room and could now see the fellow who first threw a gun on them, the man with the gruff tone. He was rising from a crouch behind a littered chest in a corner.

Another man appeared in the door of the kitchen as Buck stalled his reply to the one who was apparently leader of the trio.

"What makes you think I should know anything about your friend Tarrell?" countered Buck, shifting his position and hoping for a chance to fight it out. "And who the hell are you guys anyway with your big guns and all this bully boy stuff?"

"Don't try bluffin' us, Morgan," snarled the hairy faced red-eyed leader. "We know who you are an' you know who we

are. An' such bein' the case you won't be surprised to know that we ain't takin' any chances. Now what did you do with Rodney Tarrell?"

Buck sneered openly in the brutal face of his captor. "What did you do with harmless old Professor Leland-Jeffrys?"

The man called Umrie edged nearer and muttered: "He's baitin' yuh, Newt. We orta 'initiate 'im, I say."

Newt evidently approved the idea for he shoved his weapon forward menacingly, covering Morgan and Johnson, ignoring the native who was shaking like a man with the ague.

"Righto my chummies," he barked. "Jus' relieve our guests of their weapons an' make 'em comfortable."

Buck shot a glance toward Stilts. These men would murder them in cold blood if they made a move to fight. It might be smarter to take their medicine and watch for a break. "What's the idea?" he demanded as the hard hands of their captors lashed their wrists behind them firmly.

"We want to have a bit of a chat with yuh, Buck," laughed Newt Hamon. "And don't try to fox us, neither. You tell us what we want to know and we'll turn yuh loose. But if you act smart we'll make button-holes in both o' yuh."

At this the others laughed boisterously and Buck got a chance to measure each of the three. They were evil looking creatures —murder was stamped in each face.

A half smothered sob came from the kitchen at the moment and Hamon motioned Umrie to investigate. Buck had been wondering about the woman whose voice had bade him enter.

Johnson leaned close and whispered. "The trader's dead, ain't he, Buck?"

IT was only too true. The man in the chair was dead. Murdered and propped there for a decoy while the killers threatened his terror-stricken wife against outcry.

"Have the nice lady serve our dinner in here," shouted Hamon, raising his revolver and letting go a shot through the screen door. The explosion shook the shack and brought a heartbroken scream from the kitchen. While the acrid smoke drifted gradually aloft and the grin stiffened on Newt Hamon's bristly jowls,

sounds of activity increased in the kitchen, accompanied by heart-rending sobs. A soft, faltering step approached the door. Morgan and Johnson both saw the tear streaked face of a short, stocky dark eyed woman. She was coming dazedly into the room, like a woman in a trance, glancing neither to right nor to left. With trembling hands she began placing dishes on the table where the leering Hamon directed. He pointed for places for only three. Buck's eyes narrowed as he watched, realizing that so far they were to be given no food.

The interruption caused by the entrance of the woman seemed to stir the cowering black guide who had come with Morgan and Johnson. It must have promised him a chance for escape because, with a swift, animal-like leap, he made for the screen door. Half through, his move caught the eye of Umrie and the rat-faced renegade whipped out his revolver and fired. The shot shook the building and the slug tore into the negro's spine, catching him in mid-leap, his body pitching head-long over the edge of the tiny porch, half on, half off. There it lay twitching spasmodically, while Umrie and his companions laughed uproariously.

"Neat!" shouted Jock Wilkie, slapping Umrie on the shoulder. "Yuh sure injected him with a permanent case o' sleepin' sickness, Lonny!"

"Tryin' to get away," chuckled the red-eyed Hamon, turning to Morgan and Johnson. "Goin' to get help for yeh, eh? Well, that'll show yuh Morgan, what'll happen to yuh if yuh make a break."

Buck said nothing for his head was crammed with desperate thoughts of freedom for himself and his pardner. With their wrists bound behind them their chances for a dash such as the negro had just made were, of course, less than nothing. It would be deliberate suicide. But his eyes were alert to everything about them and he had heard the woman preparing food in the adjoining room; heard her opening cans. If he could get hold of a knife, a saw, file, even the can opener. But there was no hope—none at all—with these three hellions within arm's reach.

Hamon swung about and there was a taunting grin on his villainous features as he surveyed the two silent prisoners lean-

ing against the wall. "I'd ask you gents to eat with us," he chuckled winking at his companions, "on'y we got jus' three chairs. Would it be okay with yuh if yuh take the second table?"

"I'd rather eat with my dog," said Morgan coldly. "Don't trouble yourself. All I want to know is what you think you're going to do with us. You made a big mistake, Hamon, mixing yourself into my affairs."

The bristly-faced convict sneered and his hairy hands wriggled. "Don't be so uppity, Buck," he warned. "We been damn fair with yuh up to now. We wuz figuring on takin' yuh in with us on our treasure expedition. Yeah, treasure!" he repeated seeing the black frown on Morgan's face. "We got the lucky bone, kid. All you gotta do is tell us now where we head in with it. Ain't that fair?"

"You've sure got your nerve," snarled Buck, tensing himself. "What do you know about the bone and how? What crazy notion put the idea in your skull that it had anything to do with treasure?"

"Ha ha!" laughed Hamon, winking again at his companions. "We know about it just the same. Yuh ever hear of a bloke named Cleaver? Chimp Cleaver? Sure yuh did, Buck. Well, so did we. An' we come up with one of his niggers. He was one o' Cleaver's porters. He spilled the beans about you killin' the Chimp an' his pals to get this bone back."

"And what's that to you?" demanded Buck warily.

"Jus' this," growled Hamon, bringing the bone out of his pocket and waving it before his captive's eyes, "You got this bone from one o' the last o' the slavers and it tells where them old buzzards hid their pile. Now you know the answer! We'll declare you in if you give us the low-down on what this damn heathen writing on it says."

MORGAN stared at Hamon in silence, grimly. He was thinking swiftly, striving to find a way out for himself and Johnson. He, himself, already knew enough of the translation to start out on the treasure search. Even without the rest of the uncompleted translation interrupted by the cruel murder of the professor, he and Johnson might figure its location with

some luck. But to give this information to these three conscienceless killers would be downright folly. With the data in their hands, they would most certainly murder Johnson and himself and go on their ruthless plundering way.

Buck shook his head determinedly. If he could stall a little longer, perhaps they could find a way to escape, maybe even overcome Hamon and his two partners. "Somebody give you a bum steer, Hamon," he declared. "If I knew what those hieroglyphics on the bone said, why would we be here? We'd be splitting up the treasure right now. How can I tell you if I don't know?"

Hamon got up and walked slowly toward Morgan. His little eyes were cruel dark pin-points of ferocity and his jutting jaw was clamped tight as a sprung trap. Close to Morgan he halted. "You're a damn liar, Morgan," he snarled. "There was writin' on a paper in the old geezer's shack. Got burned up in the flames, but you know what it said. Now are yuh goin' to tell us —'r do we have to slice it outa your carcass a pound at a time?"

"The heat has got you, Hamon," replied Buck daringly. "You're crazy. Untie us and I'll prove it to you. That bone you've got—"

"Shut up!" roared the killer savagely. "I oughta chop your ears off defyin' me this way. But I ain't crazy enough to untie you. Fact is, I'm puttin' you an' this long-legged Johnson outa my sight while we eat. Jus' you two march in there," he waved his revolver toward the little kitchen, "an' spread yourselves out on the floor. Give yuh time to reconsider our proposition."

Buck hesitated, on the verge of a reckless, wild move, but Hamon leered at him. "G'wan, get in there," he ordered pressing the gun muzzle against Buck's belly. "A coupla more killin's won't give me no bad dreams."

"That'd be smart," growled Buck, edging slowly into the kitchen. "Killin' us would tell you a lot about the lucky bone, wouldn't it?"

Ignoring Morgan's remark, Hamon called to Wilkie and the two captives were rolled face to face on the floor in a corner of the room. There their ankles were bound securely, interlocked, and they were

left. The trio of half savage convicts seated themselves at the little table in the other room amid much jocularity and obscenity.

A shout from Newt Hamon brought the cringing woman with their food, and Buck raised his head to peer furtively about their temporary prison. His taunting of the leader had lessened their chances. Now they were indeed helpless.

Johnson, who had said nothing since their capture, stared solemnly in Morgan's face. His eyes were trying to tell Buck something. As the gruff voices of the celebrating trio became louder and the noise of their eating increased, Stilts whispered in Buck's face. "There's an empty can, Buck," he said "over behind you on the floor. Maybe you can reach it."

There was a look of desperation, of hope, in Johnson's deep-set eyes, and he shot a swift glance toward the doorway as Buck cautiously squirmed, turning his head with difficulty to locate the empty can.

"Keep a sharp watch," whispered Buck to Stilts, "as I try it." He began inching silently, with extreme caution, backward toward the can.

WITH every sense alert, Buck edged backward gropingly, his straining, bound arms reaching for the can. If he could get his hands on it, without tilting it or causing it to roll noisily away from him, he thought he could use it as a knife, could no doubt hack the ropes away. Sweat began to break out on his whole body and he tensed his ears to keep track of the animal like sounds from the gluttonous diners only a few feet away on the other side of the partition. Finally, after what seemed hours, his careful fingers felt the smooth label of the can. He felt around, gently, one hand closing about it.

And even as he felt it tight in his grip he knew with a sudden sinking feeling of his stomach that he could never utilize the jagged top as a saw or knife in his strained position. The risk of a thump or a knock on the floor; a sound that would arouse suspicion, was too great. Buck shook his head, his lips a hard thin line.

"Can't you make it?" whispered Johnson.

Buck frowned. Both listened with apprehension as there came a pause at the

table. Then the clatter of knives and forks began again, and they could hear the vulgar smacking of lips, the snorting of Jock Wilkie. "I've got to twist the top free," whispered Buck, already starting to grapple blindly with the sharp, ragged object behind him.

He worked desperately. The blood roared in his ears and his body tingled with the flame of his zeal. It was life or death now and if he failed— The word made him swallow dryly. He couldn't fail! Right and left he worked the ragged can top, his muscles strained to the utmost, pains tearing up and down his back and arms. The silent, ghostly woman came and went, appearing not to even glance toward the shadowy corner where the men lay, held by fear of the beasts who were eating her food, the beasts who had murdered her husband in cold blood; the husband who sat even now stiffly in the chair almost at the table with his murderers.

Johnson felt Morgan's body relax suddenly, saw Buck's face turn, caught a gleam in his companion's slitted blue eyes. Buck nodded his head. Stilts knew what he meant and his heart gave a leap. Buck had the can top free. Now to work at the ropes. But how?

With the jagged disk of tin in his fingers Buck quickly realized it could not reach the ropes that bound his wrists. Could get no pressure. Was it all for nothing? Would they be butchered by these fiends after all? From the bold conversation of the three he already had confirmed Johnson's story of their infamy, of the rewards offered for them dead or alive. These men were desperate.

As suddenly as he had felt alarm, Buck's courage came back. At his back as he gripped the sharp tin, his fingers had felt a crack in the floor. Now he was feeling his way, bringing the tin carefully to where a finger marked that crack. His frantic brain wanted to let out a cheer but his grim lips remained fixed tight as he worked the tin down, firmly into the crack. With both hands now he held the tin in the grip of a vise and pressed, wedging it slowly, solidly into the narrow groove of the floor until it was fixed there tight, unmovable.

Sweat dripped from his face and Johnson saw the silent confirmation of his question. With a deep breath sucked into

his lungs, Buck leaned back again, began quietly working the rope that bound his wrists backward and forward over the sharp edge of the can top. The vibration seemed to rise like thunder in his ears, but he knew the sawing itself made scarcely a sound. Back and forth he worked his arms, wincing in grim silence as the ragged edge tore at his skin, holding the rope taut by pressure of thumb against thumb. He felt the tiny separate strands of the rope sever, felt the knife-like edge biting through, slowly, slowly—faster and faster. The look in his eyes changed to one of fierceness, and new resolve. The rope on his wrists had parted, cut through by the tin. He was free—all but his legs and it was the work of only a moment before he had loosed them. Then, with a silent motion, he beckoned Stilts Johnson to edge carefully toward him. Johnson's bonds came off in a flash and for a moment they crouched there on the floor, facing each other, their teeth bared, listening alertly, eyes searching for something to use as a weapon.

Nothing presented itself to their purpose and both clenched their fists resignedly. They heard Newt Hamon's coarse voice lowered to a confidential whisper as the convict leader disclosed his *coup de grace* for compelling Morgan to tell the secret of the carved bone.

"He'll talk," assured Hamon cruelly, "cause I'm gonna pour turpentine down inside his shirt, me hearties."

At the laughter which followed, the loud acclaim of Umrie and Wilkie, Buck nudged Stilts, made a motion which Johnson understood to the letter. Setting themselves silently they prepared to charge. Like two great hounds of war they leaped. Buck was first and he hurled his body, every ounce of his strength and weight, through the door like a thunderbolt, aiming for the back of the brute nearest him. And behind him, his long body knifing the air, came Johnson.

TWO against three it was and the first impact of Buck as his weight smashed down on Umrie's shoulders, turned the room into a shambles of shattered wood and snarling, cursing men. The table went over with a crash of dishes, sweeping the guns off from beside the diners' places.

Hamon sprang, too late, to meet the force of Johnson's rushing tackle. Down in a thumping, kicking, swearing mass they sprawled. The woman fled screaming into the kitchen, wild eyed, gasping in terror.

Like a pair of tigers Buck and Stilts smashed right and left, with no fouls called and no quarter sought. Boot and fist they battered the bewildered heads and bodies of their completely routed foes.

Amid the bedlam of sound, the grunts, gasps and the thudding of fists, the slam-bang of the tangled mass, Buck Morgan's groping hand reached one of the heavy guns. A swift smash and he struggled from the welter to tear the half-crazed Johnson from the wilting body of Newt Hamon. The room was spattered with splashed blood and littered with shattered furniture.

With a cocked revolver in one hand and his treasured bone safely again in his pocket Buck shouted at Johnson to shock him out of his insatiable rage: "Drag them over here, Stilts!" he cried. "Against the wall."

The convicts, now hammered thoroughly into cowering, half conscious submission, offered no resistance while they were snugly bound. "Make it good and tight," warned Buck grimly. "This time we've got them! We don't want any loose knots, Stilts."

Panting there in the center of the disordered room Morgan glanced about him at the scene. In the doorway of the kitchen cowered the terrified woman, her whole body atremble. In the chair by the corner, slightly changed in position from the whirling force of the battle, the stiff body of the murdered trader still sprawled.

A gasping sob broke from the woman's lips as she came timidly into the room, pouring out a stumbling stream of French. Buck was sure it was French, for he could understand a word here and there, though he could speak but little himself.

Propping a broken chair against the wall he sat the woman in it and listened to her story while Johnson gathered all the weapons and placed them beyond reach of any of the cursing trio.

Buck turned to Stilts. "She says," he informed Johnson, "that this place is only a short trip down river to a town called Amberville. There's a frontier police post

there. She wants us to take her there with her husband's body. I say it's a good idea."

Johnson frowned and wiped his sweat-streaked face. "This is Belgian territory, Buck," he said. "We'd have to take these birds with us and if we turn 'em over to the law there we'll get tangled up in a lot of official red tape on the rewards."

Buck's reply was quick. "What the hell, Stilts," he shrugged. "We have to think about the woman—and the body. Besides I'm no reward hunter." He shot a glance toward Newt Hamon, bound fast on the floor; saw the cruel little eyes of the wanted man taking it all in stolidly. "If there's any reward you can have it."

"Well," declared Johnson eying the three prisoners thoughtfully, "If it comes to that, Buck, I say why trouble ourselves lugging them with us? Let's just put the gun muzzle to their ears an' get it over with."

Morgan chuckled at Johnson's raw humor, but he saw that Stilts meant more than half what he said. "Killing is too damn good for these stinkers," he stated. "I'd rather know that they were going back to take what's coming to them in prison. They'll be pretty roughly handled you know. Law is law, Stilts, and they've got to pay for the murder of the professor and this trader here—and a dozen others they've killed. No. I say we take them down river."

"We'll get a receipt for them," added Johnson. "Just in case."

THE woman and the corpse of her murdered husband complicated matters. But for the woman Morgan would have dug a hole and buried the man behind his shack. He and Johnson could then have easily tied their three prisoners together and driven them afoot through the jungle to the nearer Ponthierville.

"I don't like this, Stilts," said Buck, as he and Johnson, after depositing their three smouldering convicts in the open between the shack and the water, were preparing the big canoe for the trip down river, "any more than you do. But we're in this thing and we've got to see it through."

"Oh, what the hell," said Johnson, "it's the corpse mostly, Buck. I don't fancy a trip with a dead man in this heat."

"No," grunted Buck, in agreement, "if

these lousy killers hadn't run off his scared porters we could have sent the body along in another canoe."

"Yeah," nodded Johnson, depositing a sack of the woman's belongings near the stern of the craft, "A woman is a damn nuisance in the jungle, Buck."

Morgan called to the woman and placed her solicitously in the canoe. He turned toward his watchful prisoners and with his revolver motioned them to take their places in the tricky dugout. Hamon, the last of the three to step in, sneered in Buck's face and said: "You're gonna be sorry, Morgan, for the day yuh set eyes on us."

"Get in and shut your face" growled Morgan, "I'm sorry already. The sooner I hand you over to the authorities the happier I'll be." He glanced toward the deserted trading shack, nodded to Johnson, who stepped into the bow, and giving the craft a little shove, he leaped in to the stern and snatched up a paddle. They were off.

The trip down river was an uncomfortable one. Both he and Johnson had to be constantly on guard, lest one or another of their three battered captives make a break. By day, swarms of buzzing insects hovered about the canoe with its burden of death. By night Morgan and Johnson were forced to take turns on guard, not only against the ever furtive three, but also the prowling scavengers of the jungle paths, who, attracted by the scent of the corpse, which grew stronger every hour, hemmed in their camp at night with a semi-circle of blinking green eyes and the grunts and growls from hungry throats.

Amberville was little more than a glorified banana depot on the riverbank. Here between the glare of the sun on the water and the lacy shade of the forest branches, were sprawled the iron roofed shacks and warehouses of the shippers, and here had come, in its brass-buttoned barelegged splendor, the far reaching law of the white man. The Territorial Constabulary!

As the canoe rounded a bend in the river, and they saw the bamboo walks and the dull gray, unpainted iron roofs of Amberville, Morgan sighed with relief. The woman, who had uttered scarcely more than a dozen words since they started, sobbed softly and new tears welled up in her eyes. Morgan's paddle guided the canoe toward a small dock where a score

or more scantily clad natives were already assembling. Among these there now appeared an alert black man in tunic and shorts, a wide belt strapped about his middle, and a red tasseled fez cocked over his right eye. In his hand he swung jauntily a heavy club, and from his belt hung a holstered automatic.

Johnson stood up and grabbed the string-piece of the low dock. Morgan lifted a hand in a sort of salute and called out a greeting to the black policeman. That official's alert eyes had quickly observed the three bound occupants of the craft. Buck Morgan managed by a mixture of sign language and words to make known their business in the town. The native policeman's little black eyes gleamed, and he snatched from his breast pocket a whistle upon which he blew three shrill notes that brought as many more of his fellow policemen, padding swiftly from the town to join the gathering on the dock. Hamon, Umrie and Wilkie were herded, swearing vengeance on Morgan, to the sheet iron jail not far up the river bank.

Both Buck and Stilts were tired and worn, and when they said good-bye to the grateful widow of the trader, they decided that after finding some refreshment, they would make the trip back up river in leisurely stages.

"We've got the bone all right, Stilts," mused Buck, as he felt it through his pocket, "and we could start from here to hunt that treasure, but our stuff is back in Ponthierville."

"That's right," agreed Johnson, slowly, "our outfit. I near forgot it."

"Besides," continued Buck, "it's no more than our duty to go back and let the authorities there know what happened. They may be hunting for Hamon and his pals yet. We'll organize our safari there." Buck grew silent, looking up the river, hemmed in as far as he could see by the thick green wall of the jungle. Those written words of the old professor were graven starkly on his brain:

BACK TO WATERFALL—IN SETTING SUN—NINE CHAINS TO GREEN—

In the cool of the dawn Morgan and Johnson set off up river. In the same pocket with the recovered bone Buck now carried a Territorial Police receipt for the

three wanted men. He had cleaned the slate.

PUSHING the awkward craft upstream against the current was strenuous work. The progress of the two lone white men was slow, and sweat dripped from their chins as they plied their paddles, even in the shade of the overhung riverbank. They stopped frequently, drawing the canoe half out on the shore to rest, for they were in no hurry now that their plans were made. Ponthierville would be their jump-off.

Buck soon saw on that first day of their upstream journey, that Stilts Johnson was no paddler. Going downstream was one thing, but bucking the current brought out Johnson's limitations. Stilts tired quickly and often.

"Shorten your stroke, Stilts," Buck had called to his elongated companion many times during the first two days of the journey.

Johnson was a first class man on his feet or in a fight, but he could not master a paddle. He was weakening again. Buck could see him straining, could hear him grunting stubbornly, and he called forward to the laboring Johnson.

"We'd better rest again, hadn't we, Stilts?" to which the reluctant Johnson nodded with a sigh of relief.

Once more they turned the prow of the canoe toward the bank, watching for snags, for possible basking snakes or crocodiles. They climbed out and Buck beat the grass in a semi circular area, a thing he had quickly learned from the natives here in the jungle, as a caution against reptiles or scorpions. They would make a rough camp.

"We're not chasing anybody," Buck laughed reflectively, "and nobody's chasing us."

Buck gathered some wood, and dragged their stuff out of the canoe. Johnson built a fire and made a pot of soup with a can of dehydrated stuff they had bought at Amberville. This they ate hungrily. Then rolling cigarettes they lay back in the shadow and listened to the incessant hum and buzz of the jungle behind them. Gradually both dozed off and slept.

What awakened Buck he could never quite tell. It was still broad day and the

buzz of the insects filled his ears, or was that the only sound he could distinguish? Was it a bird whistling to its mate, or the distant squeal of an elephant. For several moments Buck lay alert holding his breath, listening.

Finally he raised his head a little, glanced to where Stilts had been lying. The muscles of his neck hardened, went rigid. Stilts was up, half off his knees with one hand moving slowly toward the pistol hanging from his belt. Buck watched, fascinated for a moment, puzzled; he saw Stilts' head turning slowly. Stilts had heard something, too, was searching the surrounding jungle an inch at a time.

Buck whispered very softly, gathering his feet under himself, reaching his own revolver. "What is it, Stilts?" he breathed.

Stilts did not look toward Buck, but kept his eyes probing the dense shadowy foliage. "Somebody—'r—something's—in there," he mumbled in an undertone, barely moving his lips. "First I thought it was only—a bird—maybe—'r one o'—those little—monkeys."

"See anything?" persisted Buck, searching for himself now.

"No," replied Johnson, "But keep clear o' me."

Not a sound; not even the rustle of a leaf. But Buck felt it too, now, with every nerve in his powerful body. Something was crawling nearer and nearer to their camp site. Buck took a quick sidelong glance at Stilts. Both of them knew that there must be a river trail back there somewhere. There are always trails paralleling these African jungle rivers; paths trodden down by years of black men's hunting or war parties. Perhaps there were natives marching through there now. Buck drew a deep breath, opened his lips to speak, and his blue eyes changed in color to a steely smouldering gray.

There before them, where the foliage was cautiously parting now, appeared an ugly, blood streaked face; a face with the fierce, staring eyes of a man-eating beast. With a half conscious start of their muscles, Buck and Stilts, tightened their grip on their weapons. It was the face of Newt Hamon.

Buck tensed himself as a warning cry broke from the brutal convict's throat. "Don't yuh shoot if yuh know what's good

fer yuh, Morgan, ner yuh Johnson. This time we gotcha surrounded."

Surprise gripped Buck and Stilts momentarily. How had they escaped so easily, so soon? And how had they managed to cover so much ground? They must have dug their way out of the Amberville jail at almost the same time Buck and Stilts left Amberville themselves.

Stilts growled: "Well, Buck, this is goin' to be a battle royal for sure."

Buck did not reply but called out to Hamon: "You're a liar and a double damn fool. You're crowding your luck this minute, because sure as hell somebody is going to make green bones—and—"

HAMON cackled like a maniac and broke in on Morgan with: "Better save your wind, Buck. I ain't lyin'. Look!" Buck and Stilts caught the quick movement of foliage first to their left, then to the right. They refused to be tricked however and kept their gaze on Hamon, while at the same time they realized that Hamon's two confederates were really with him. Hamon must have caught the fleeting frown on Buck's face for he laughed boldly again. "Yuh, see, smarty! Now listen, Morgan; we ain't got much time. Our boat is sailin' any day now and we got to be pulling stakes. Besides," he chuckled fiendishly, "there's a party of bare foot apes huntin' for us right now."

Buck swore warmly and waved at Hamon, shaking his head. "Why don't you and your jolly friends start shooting? What are you waiting for?"

"We don't wanna hurt nobody, Buck," laughed Hamon. "You hand over that bone yuh got and slip us the tip on how to read them hieroglyphics. That's all we want. Then you can have the whole damn jungle."

The two men glared at each other. The strange, pulsing throb of the jungle seemed to pause, and an ominous silence surrounded the five men. Buck Morgan hated few men, but he knew red hatred now as he faced Hamon, with the others flanking him and masked by the jungle foliage. He had given these men their lives once. Only killing would remove them now.

Steadily Morgan raised his gun muzzle and his finger clenched on the trigger. His blue eyes were as cold as ice as he drew

an iron handed bead on Newt Hamon.

Then the spell broke with the raging scream of the convict leader. Newt Hamon ducked and fired, plunging forward. Buck's gun blasted the echo and Stilts shot as he flung himself sidewise. Like mad men, the murderous three leaped and dived, shooting frantically, creeping always nearer. The smoke blossomed slowly like great blue flowers in the thick motionless air, and through it the leaden messengers of death and destruction screamed and moaned.

"Every man for himself, Stilts," cried Buck, flattening himself low in the coarse grass, and even as he spoke he heard Johnson's shout of pained rage, caught a glimpse of Stilts' hand clapped to an ear. Like a wild man, Johnson sprang up and dashed headlong toward his nearest enemy, the man called Wilkie. Wilkie's big pistol roared, the convict bellowed in pain and with a scream of terror turned and ran. Through that billow of smoke Johnson dove. Buck heard the smash and crash of the twigs and brush, heard the mad plunging of feet, and he shouted after Johnson as he, himself, felt the shock of a slug that tore his own helmet from his head. There were two against him now and Hamon popped up at almost point blank range, his revolver leveled unsteadily at Morgan.

With a snarl of rage Buck fired at the murderer's belt buckle heard the tell-tale crunch of the slug in flesh and bone. He saw Hamon's face, for a fleet moment, turn almost inside out in stark horror. Then came the sodden fall of the body in the bush and the pht! of a bullet fired in panic by Lon Umrie. The hatchet-faced killer, his clothes in rags, squinted along his revolver barrel with deliberate aim as Buck turned his head, still wondering where the bullet had hit him. Buck threw himself sidewise and fired. All in a half dazed instant he realized that his gun hammer had slammed on a fired cartridge. Quick as a cat he made his decision. Climbing to his feet he yelled at the top of his lungs as he hurled himself in a daring rush at Umrie.

Sudden crazed fear widened the convict's bleary eyes, and with a shrill cry he ran dodging right and left, headlong, for the jungle. Buck was after him in a sec-

ond. Umrie, he saw quickly, was trying to circle around, beat back toward the direction taken by Wilkie and Johnson.

Buck ran to head him off, juggling cartridges into his gun. As he ran he shouted repeatedly for Johnson, but he heard only the echo of his shouts in the jungle. He was dimly conscious of a raw pain just above and behind his right hip. He felt over the spot and winced with the burning of the wound. His shirt was sticky and clung to his body, but he knew from the touch that it was a flesh wound.

"Broooong!" The heavy air boomed with the sudden gun-fire. Buck caught the pale bloom of gunsmoke through the trees. He crashed a bullet quickly toward it, heard the whistling flight of Umrie's slug as it slashed leaves, the fronds of palms. He ducked, then leaped up, running with all his might after the invisible enemy.

THE man called Umrie ran for his life, eyes searching the tangled mass before him, hunting light and a stretch of open ground. His legs, too, were numb and half dead, tortured with pain, but his cruel brain was alert. He saw his chance, for his quick little rat eyes caught a glimpse of an opening in the forest, a stretch of veldt bordering the dark jungle, and there like a congress of beasts along its fringe were gathered a veritable army of fiercely chattering baboons. Hideous dog baboons, lithe, long fanged terrors of the Congo.

Quick as a cat Lon Umrie swerved, dashed away to his left, a sudden plan in his mind. "I'll swing wide around them," he panted to himself, "and Morgan'll run smack into 'em. They'll tear him apart before he knows he's trapped."

It was a cruel, clever trick and Umrie ran in a zig-zagging fashion, curving slowly to get around the baboon pack. He heard the snarling champing chatter of the fierce beasts and he smiled grotesquely.

But as he ran now an appalling horror rushed along at his heels. He turned, left, then right, heard the chattering louder and finally made a wild dash for the nearby veldt. The open! A chance to run, to make time.

Buck meanwhile circled in short arcs, listening, running doggedly until he heard shots. Then, a sigh of relief on his grim features, he pushed on faster. Umrie had

quit, had stopped and snuffed his own life out. It was just as well. He saw the broken branches and the plain groove of a man's track where it beat down the grass as he emerged onto the veldt. But there were other tracks, too, a lot of them and Buck was puzzled.

Over the rim of a rise on the veldt he stumbled to a sudden halt, his revolver lifted, frozen at the sight before his eyes.

Umrie had swung about at his step, his gasp for breath. The gun in his hand was wreathed in smoke, and he did not appear to be afraid of Morgan. Nor did Buck give the convict a second glance. He held his own fire and his eyes were wide with alarm. For, closing in on Umrie—and himself, too now—was a veritable army of growling, barking dog baboons.

With long ugly fangs bared, their neck hair bristling like gray-green quills, the fierce and powerful apes, smartest of their tribe, bounced and thumped the ground, the bedlam of their concerted war cry rising to an ear-splitting crescendo.

Buck tightened his grip on the trigger, dug a hand into his pocket for a handful of extra cartridges. He was in a quandary, stumped for the instant. Here was Umrie, and here he was. What was he thinking about? Why didn't he shoot the murderous brute down now? And, by the same token, why didn't the convict draw a bead on him? Then, in a flash Buck felt the reason. It hit him inside, in his every fiber. The barking rush of a dozen or more of the gnashing beasts showed him the double answer. Umrie was shooting, right and left. And so was Buck Morgan. It was man against the jungle wild. Buck's first bullet knocked a big male kicking. Like an arrow another was rushing toward him and he fired, blasting the beast's skull, sending those nearest him into a furious screeching chattering retreat, only to rush back once more. Again Buck aimed carefully and fired square down the gaping throat of a monstrous ape that fell and flopped around like a beheaded jungle fowl.

Right and left the two men poured their fire, the thudding bullets killing and crippling the frothing, snarling baboons, until Buck realized that he and the man he had followed to kill were standing almost back to back.

The afternoon was fast waning and the

light over the top of the jungle was fading swiftly. But even so, Buck could make out the leaping, barking baboons, pouring from the fringe of the trees like army reinforcements, scampering across the veldt toward the battle ground here in the open. And yet neither man had spoken a word.

Over the bodies of their dead and maimed bounded the hairy apes, their ranks strengthened by the new arrivals. Something of terror crept into Buck's eyes and he knew Umrie was jibbering like a crazy man, a stream of mingled oaths and prayers dribbling from his streaked face. At last he cried out in a broken voice and Buck Morgan felt a groping hand touch his elbow.

"Fer Pete's sake, Morgan," the convict shouted, "gimme some bullets. Bullets, Buck. Gardawmighty, there's a million of 'em!"

Buck dropped a couple of rounds into the man's sweaty paw, firing himself as he did, his eyes blackened with powder, the sting of sweat and the smoke half blinding both. Over them hung a thick pall of smoke, and under it, around them in the hot still air, was the stink of the dead and dying baboons. Dusk was setting fast now. Buck wondered as he shot the throat out of a beast that had clamped its teeth in his upper limb, when it would end.

BUT the end was near and it came in a way Buck Morgan could never have expected. Some of the baboons, sensing the approach of darkness, had sped away into the jungle snapping and barking. It looked like victory for man when with a fiendish snarling frenzied charge the remaining score flung themselves at the men in a mass. Buck smashed right and left, kicking, shooting, tearing at their bodies. He felt the snap of fangs along an arm, tore himself free and shot, one, two, three of the beasts. He heard a shrill cry of terror from Umrie, cast a swift glance over his shoulder and saw the convict go down under the weight of numbers, a great dog baboon's fangs fastened in Umrie's throat, and the man's revolver hurtling through the air. The noise of that snarling chopping struggle would remain with Buck Morgan for many a day, but he swung and kicked and hammered his way, a foot at a time, to where he could swoop

and snatch up the lost weapon. With two guns he fought now carefully.

"There'll be no chance to reload now," he gasped aloud. "Here's where I do a Custer." His double blast from the two weapons killed the pair that were charging him, and to his amazement he was suddenly out in the open. He stared doggedly as the baboons, attracted by the carnival of blood being waged over the body of the convict, swept over the crimsoned veldt in a swarm to fall snapping and snarling into the grisly work of rending the dead man tooth and claw.

The thunder of the guns stilled, Buck paused, groggy, nauseated at the sight and the smell, chilled by the hideous sounds. A quick look at the guns, a feel of his pocket. He had but a very few cartridges left. It was worth a try for his life—what there was left of it.

"Umrie," he said in a whisper, "a guy with your guts should have been regular. I'm sorry as hell. So long."

With every pound of strength he could muster, Buck Morgan ran. He ran like a deer, breath whistling in his parched throat, spine tingling and ears echoing to the awful sound of the baboon pack. He ran as a man can run only from the swift reach of death, and he ran until the only sound he could distinguish was the pounding of his own blood in his ears.

Then he came to a staggering halt. He was suddenly aware that it was dark night and he was alone, lost in the heart of Africa. Where was Stilts Johnson? His half-dazed brain struggled with the question as he warily searched out a tree in the darkness. He could climb up there in the branches, and perhaps get his bearings, figure out the situation. The fierce Hamon was dead, Umrie was dead. If the sinister Wilkie had killed Stilts Johnson, Buck Morgan would hunt him down, treasure or no treasure. Lashing himself to a tree branch with his belt, lest sleep overtake him and he fall from the tree, Buck shook his head thoughtfully. The slaver's ill-fated rib-bone had thus far brought him nothing but trouble.

LIKE two spitting leopards Stilts Johnson and the convict Wilkie fought through the jungle, shooting wildly at each other, one in desperate flight, the

other in grim, determined pursuit. For several hundred yards the mad Wilkie tried to dodge along a dank path, his barking revolver keeping Johnson at a distance. But Stilts followed him persistently, with taunts and screaming bullets that chipped the bark from trees. It was a running fight, filled with the brittle crack of gunfire, and the shouting of both men. Johnson, all sense of direction lost in the mad chase, kept on, until there was no sound to follow, no movement in the dense green foliage. Instinct told him that the tricky killer was lurking somewhere ahead, but he dared not expose himself.

"If the hunk would only show his face," mumbled Johnson, searching the shadowy tangle. He had only a couple of shots left, and he wanted to come face to face with Wilkie. Crouched low, Stilts began crawling forward toward the spot where he had last caught sight of his enemy. As he began moving he heard the faint faraway sound of voices. Wilkie must have heard it, too, for with a cry like that of a frightened animal, he leaped from his cover, fired wildly at Johnson and ran. Stilts whipped up his revolver and fired excitedly, rapidly. He swore in rage when he saw that he had missed, but his long legs carried him smashing through the undergrowth. His empty weapon rammed into his belt, his only wish now to get his bare hands on Wilkie's throat.

Wilkie ran now like a man whose mind has gone, shouting threats and obscene oaths at his pursuer. In a shallow, trickling stream, hidden beneath a sudden deep sloping bank, Stilts Johnson caught Wilkie, caught him as they both fell sprawling headlong. In a flash they were grapping fiercely, each with a knife. The convict fought cursing, slashing savagely at his opponent, while Johnson, lean and lank, and all but spent by the chase, struggled silently, his one aim to drive his hunting blade through the killer's heart. Slash and rip and tear! It was kill or be killed, and Stilts Johnson knew it. He knew it as he felt the hacking point of Wilkie's razor-sharp knife, but he clung grimly to his man, pressing him backward.

Blood oozed from their wounds, and they fought gasping now. Johnson pressed Wilkie to the muddy bank of the stream,

fighting desperately for the one thrust that would let him rest. Sweat stung his wounds, but he was insensitive to pain.

Some primitive instinct made him feel the man in his vice-like grip sag suddenly. Quick as light Stilts drove his knife to the hilt. He felt a tremor of the other's body, heard a whistling whisper from Wilkie's clamped teeth, and he felt himself suddenly sprawling across Wilkie's body.

THE sun came up and dried Buck Morgan's damp clothes as he walked. He was crossing a semi-circular plain. The sun was at his back. That was right. The river could not be far away. He was staggering now, his feet unsteady but his mind was clear and he knew enough to keep his blue eyes squinting around him. He had but a single cartridge left. Lon Umrie's emptied revolver he had thrown away far back there in the trees.

The warmth of the sun felt good on his back, and he kept assuring himself that he was walking right. Away back there when he and Stilts had been facing the three desperate convicts, it was afternoon, and the sun was on their backs then. Now it was morning, and if he walked with the sun at his back he would be heading in the direction from which he and Stilts had originally started. It couldn't be far from Ponthierville.

Far away, across the undulating grass, his roving eyes caught sight of the party of blacks as quickly as they sighted him. Buck increased his gait, pointing his steps for what looked to be a trail through the nearby jungle. He heard the peculiar "Hoyahoyawana" cry that rose in a shrill chorus from the natives, looked quickly again and saw them waving their long spears and gesticulating. "Hoya!"

"To hell with you," growled Buck, starting to run through force of habit. If he could reach the jungle ahead of them, he would have a chance, he believed. And with the thought, he shook his fist at the now running natives, fired his last bullet in their general direction and plunged out of sight into the shadowy jungle.

They were after him. That much was certain for their calls followed his flight toward the river. The further away the better. The noise of barking dogs and the alarming cries of guinea fowls soon

slowed him down and he realized that he was approaching the open again. This time he made out a stretch of water through the trees. Then he discerned a shack with an iron roof, and he stumbled out of the jungle at the end of a village street. Yapping dogs and screaming native children fell away from his path as he rushed along, past a dozen huts. He saw a little spindly dock, caught sight of a white man in fresh linen and shining helmet. It was Pon-thierville! There was his disreputable old hotel, and here were a couple of white men coming to greet him with amazement in their eyes, their outstretched arms quickly catching the suddenly weakened Morgan.

It was good to be back in civilization, even such as it was. A company doctor from the rubber docks down the street, sat beside Buck's bed after looking him over thoroughly, and smoked a cigarette. Buck lay motionless, his eyes wide awake, silent. He was too damn tired to go to sleep.

"But tell me, Morgan, my friend," spoke the doctor thoughtfully, "how did this whole thing start? I mean what sent you out after these uh, these criminals? That's a job for the provincial police, my boy."

Buck looked up and grinned a little feebly. There was no use dragging the nice doctor into the hellish curse of the Ahmed Bey's rib bone. Besides, it was his secret; his alone—except for Stilts Johnson. Poor Stilts. He'd have to find Stilts; organize a search party with official police and all and find him—his body anyway. No, the doctor was all right, but the unlucky "luck" charm with its fabulous treasure far away like the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—that carved human rib bone would stay secret.

"You see, Doc," grinned Buck amiably, "Stilts Johnson an' Buck Morgan are just a couple of no-good Americans. When we left here a week or so back it was more accident than anything. We figured it would take us an hour maybe to run down those fellows who killed Professor Leland-Jeffrys. We weren't interested in the reward, honest."

"I see," agreed the medical man, stroking his mustache.

"If you'll just hand me that little leather case," continued Buck, "I'll show you something funny."

DOCTOR MARRIN handed it over from the washstand. Buck opened it and drew out a folded paper which he spread out. It was an official Congo police organization receipt for the persons of Newt Hamon, Lon Umrie, Jock Wilkie, alive, said persons wanted for murders as listed, etc., etc., and for which the holder of the receipt would be entitled to all and sundry reward monies standing for the capture of the above convicts, escaped.

"And it was you who shot and killed Rodney Tarrell," declared Doctor Marrin. "I heard of it here in town. You've a lot of money coming to you, haven't you, Morgan?"

Buck chuckled and folded the paper again. "Money," he said with a peculiar light in his eyes. "To hell with the money. I'm keeping the receipt as a souvenir. But I'd mortgage my hide to the man who could show me that my pardner, Stilts Johnson, was alive. Damnitall!"

"Calm yourself, Morgan," urged the doctor. "We'll find out about Johnson as soon as you're on your feet again. Just rest your—hullo! What on earth's going on downstairs?"

Morgan lifted himself in the bed to listen. There was a lot of loud talking and unintelligible gibberish. Awkward footsteps were climbing the rickety staircase. Then Buck Morgan's door opened and the doctor stepped back. In the doorway, propped up by a uniformed native policeman at each arm-pit, stood Stilts Johnson, a humorous grin on his emaciated face.

"Stilts!" Buck bounced out of bed like a rabbit out of a hole.

"Hyah, Buck," greeted Johnson. "Whyn-cha wait fer us?"

"Huh?" Buck was puzzled, dragged Johnson over to a seat on the bed. "What do you mean?"

"Me an' my friends here," replied Stilts, indicating the two fezzed policemen. "Our whole party. The rest of 'em are downstairs. Didn't yuh see 'em wavin' their spears an' yellin'?"

Morgan slapped his sore thigh and burst out in hearty laughter, his first in days. So it was Stilts being carried in on a bamboo stretcher by the native police and their posse. And he'd run like the hammers of hell to get away from them. "Gees, Stilts," said Buck, "I was worried. I just made

it myself a half hour ago. You had a tough time, eh?"

"Oh, not too tough, Buck," denied Johnson, but one of the native cops at this point interrupted Stilts to tell the story in his own inimitable fashion. So from the black men Buck found out that they had found Stilts, locked hand-and-wrist with Jock Wilkie. The convict was dead and Stilts was very near it. The police, so the story went, were themselves on the trail of the escaping murderers, when they came across the two bodies in the jungle northward. Johnson had been cut up a lot.

"So Wilkie is dead, too!" nodded Buck with a note of finality in his voice.

"Good riddance, I say," declared the doctor.

"An' if yuh want the proof," laughed Stilts, "my friends here have got it to show. Bring it in, Shiney."

The negro policeman grinned and saluted, stepped back into the hall and in a moment reappeared. He had a crude basket-like affair made of bamboo strips, which he placed on the floor and opened. There was an air of pride in his manner. Buck and the doctor looked into the basket and saw a white man's bloody head. It was the face of Jock Wilkie leering up at them.

"They did it, Buck," explained Stilts. "They have to bring back somethin' to show the folks at their home station."

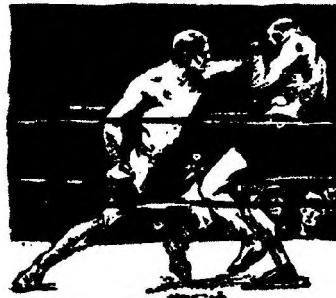
"You'll excuse me," said Doctor Martin, moving to the door. In a moment he was gone. The police, with their gruesome trophy, followed shortly, leaving Buck and Stilts alone.

For many minutes they sat there together, silently, staring out through the window netting at the jungle along the river bank. "Yuh got the lucky bone, Buck?" asked Stilts with a note of reverence in his voice.

"Lucky?" repeated Buck, laughing incredulously.

"I hope to spit, it's lucky," stated Stilts seriously. "We're both alive, ain't we, an' well."

Buck Morgan shook his head and smiled. You couldn't argue with Stilts Johnson's kind of philosophy.



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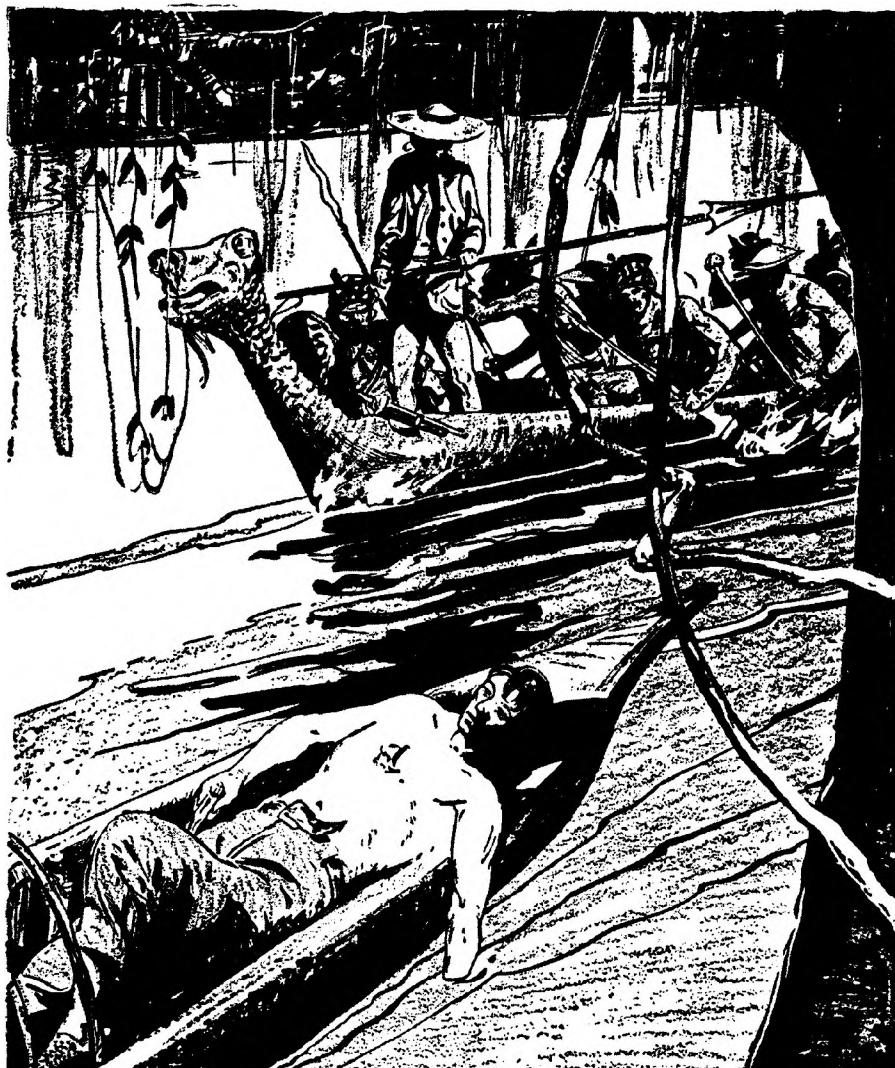
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South of Singapore

BY E. A. MORPHY

There are only two kinds, mused the Pirate of Kwala: the hawk and the hawk's prey. But grim young Flint, with Inche Mahmud's kris caressing his throat, remembered a third kind—the hawk and hawk's prey, and the sharp-eyed hawk-hunter.

FLINT was in a tight place, and he knew it.

Grinning down at him from two long prahus that had crept noiselessly alongside his canoe were a couple of score of Orang Laut—Malays of the sea.

There was no unseemly yelping or shouting. They simply grinned at the

white man as he blinked up at them with sleep-laden eyes from the bottom of his canoe.

One of the Malays wore a baju of a more saucy cut than that of any of his companions, while round his head, in the negligee fashion affected by independent chiefs, was knotted a gaily colored handker-

chief. In his hand was Flint's revolver, which he pointed at Flint's head in a manner which indicated a sound knowledge of the weapon itself, its work and purposes. It required no verbal processes of introduction to explain to Flint that he was looking at the more or less notorious river pirate, Inche Mahmud, and that therefore he might consider himself as having arrived at what would prove his jumping off place for the hereafter.

As Flint had started out on his trip down river with the express purpose of committing suicide, this rencontre should not have worried him. But it did.

Flint was a fugitive, in a quiet and unobtrusive way, from the mining settlement a hundred miles up the river, of which he had been the only European ornament for nearly two years. It was a commonplace little affair all told: There was Flint and all these Chinese towkays and coolies, as well as the Indians and Malays and mongrel traders, and the inevitable young ladies from Japan. Enter, an alluring grass widow with only a bare touch of maiden modesty, and the most entralling purple eyes. For a fool's fortnight Flint revelled in unaccustomed kisses and champagne. Then there were a couple of thousand dollars belonging to Flint's temporarily absent towkay for which the angel yearned in the worst possible way. Flint, feeling he could deny her nothing, chivalrously got it for her, and the grass widow—in the airy manner of her kind—levanted.

The sudden reaction proved too much for Flint, who promptly decided to wipe himself off the face of this earth. Accordingly, he wrote a letter to his towkay announcing his intention of committing suicide, and then sallied forth with his revolver to the river side to complete the tragedy. Grieving bitterly over the hollowness of fate, he realized that his best course would be to shoot himself somewhere miles away in mid-stream far from the settlement, in the heart of the sodden ulu, where his shattered corpse would topple in among the alligators as soon as the lethal shot was fired. With this object in view, he appropriated the first canoe he found moored by the bank, and paddled down into the shadows. To the credit of Flint's tragic intentions, it should be ex-

plained that for a European to embark upon a journey down the Palinggu river, unequipped and unescorted, was per se at that period, in every respect tantamount to suicide.

BUT Flint was a Californian of Irish extraction, and therefore a sportsman at heart and resilient by nature. As he glided down among the steaming everglades, old thoughts and memories came crowding into his head, like living pictures. There was the kindly gray-headed mother back in the golden sunshine of Santa Clara. There was the red-headed girl with the gray eyes and the dear little freckles—the girl whose memory the grass widow had only temporarily eclipsed—in the adjacent capital of San Jose. There was the remembered smell of the pines and redwoods, and the serrated crests of the Sierras towering eternal in the East. There were so many matters to think about, indeed, that Flint decided to defer his projected suicide until the sun went down. With the advent of that phenomenon, however, a further delay was engendered by a new reflection. It had suddenly dawned upon him that—were he to refrain from shooting himself—there was a remote but not wholly figmentary possibility that he might surmount and survive the infinite perils of the river. It was purely a fighting chance, no doubt; but it appealed to his sporting instincts, so he took it. Only one point connected with this decision troubled his mind: That was his knowledge of the ways of the pirates of the Kwala, or delta, who invariably lopped off the hands and feet of their alien captives before chucking them to the alligators.

This apprehension kept him awake for many hours, but eventually he fell asleep in the bottom of his canoe, and woke up to find himself blinking at Inche Mahmud and down the barrel of his own revolver.

For thorough and consummate atrocities, there was nobody in the whole State of Palinggu who approximated the same class as the Inche. He was, in fact, the King of the Kwala, and he ruled it with true Oriental rigor.

Flint blinked several times while he was gathering his wits about him, and thinking of something to say. Then he rubbed his eyes, feigned a yawn and smiled at

the pirate, serenely. It was a chance.

"Tabek, Inche!" said he, giving the customary salaam of Malaya. "This seems a welcome to give a tuan who has come far and risked much to see you!"

The Inche lowered the revolver and gaped at his captive in obvious bewilderment.

"Tabek, tuan!" said he. "But what in the name of Allah brings a tuan, unarmed and unprotected, to meet the Inche Mahmud in the Kwala Palinggu?"

"It is a delicate subject to discuss in public, Inche," replied Flint. "I am Tuan Flint. If the Inche should not know my name, many of his friends do. Were I to speak loud, it might spoil plans. Pitchers have ears!"

The Inche Mahmud was a brave man, as it became a pirate chief to be. With a wave of his hand he ordered back the prahus, and stepped into Flint's canoe.

Now, apart from being the only tuan, or white man, residing in the interior of the ulu at that time, Flint enjoyed widespread fame as being the only member of his race in Palinggu who knew every dialect of Malay, Chinese and Siamese that was current in the dependency.

"The whole world knows Tuan Fleeny!" said the Inche, with a polite smile.

Flint bowed. He had the gift of thinking quickly, and he was now thinking how he could save his feet and hands from the alligators. It would not do to seem unprepared.

"I come about the Inche's treasure," said he boldly. "It is said that the Inche has a thousand tons of tin in his kampong. He knows that men-of-war are blockading the Kwala, and that the new government is organizing police flotillas up-stream. He might therefore prefer bags of dollars to blocks of tin. I can sell the Inche's tin for solid dollars—good Mexican ringgits. Nobody will suspect a tuan of smuggling the Inche's condemned treasure. I will only charge a commission of ten per cent. The Inche knows that the word of a tuan will hold water."

The eyes of Inche Mahmud gleamed with triumphant joy. Of a truth the blessing of Allah was upon him. Since those pestilent warships had been patrolling outside the Kwala, and sending their small boat over the bar, half the pleasure had

been knocked out of his existence. Now, these rumors of police flotillas indicated a menace to his very livelihood. Nay, more; the savings of a lifetime were threatened, and would be gone if once those treasured hoards of tin were ravished by these white invaders.

AT the age of forty, as a rule, the Malay abandons all the depravities of his youth and places avarice at the lead of his passions. The Inche was well past fifty. The bulk of his savings consisted of some 15,000 or 16,000 pikuls of tin—800 or 900 tons—that had been "collected" from time to time from miners and traders on the river. It was utterly impossible for him to smuggle out and dispose of so vast a treasure. None of his own followers had the requisite gifts of duplicity to enable them to avoid capture, and the confiscation of the metal, if they sought to dispose of it in Penang or Singapore. A Chinaman could do it like a shot. But every Chinaman in Palinggu belonged to some particular society or Kongsi, to which he was bound by the most appalling oaths of fidelity. There was no such society of Kongsi which the Inche had not despoiled—of which he had not cast some member to the alligators after having first fed those ravenous reptiles with their living victim's hands and feet. Therefore no Chinaman could be trusted.

But a tuan! A tuan could do any earthly thing he chose, and in business he was utterly to be relied upon. To do the tuans justice, the Inche had never before known one of them to play with contraband; but that was because all of them he knew anything about were policemen, or judges, or captains of ships or regiments. Here, however, was Tuan Fleeny—neither policeman, judge, nor captain—the incarnate evidence of the great favor in which the wise Allah held his servant, the Inche Mahmud!

That evening when the prahus reached the strip of sandy beach back of which stood the seemingly innocent little fishing village which was the Inche's home and headquarters, Flint was sitting in the place of honor on the right of the truculent pirate chief.

During the ensuing weeks, the white man found much novel entertainment watching the methods of the pirates in ply-

ing their nefarious trade under the very noses of the boats from the warships. Not more than one boat in three of the trading craft that passed up or down the river, escaped paying toll to the robbers. Occasionally a cutter full of blue-jackets would spot a piracy from afar off, and hurry to the screaming scene of outrage. But the deep-keeled sea boat would have to be piloted gingerly through the unknown channels of the shallows, whereas the pirates, in prahus so light that they could sail over a meadow if the dew lay heavy on it, simply laughed at their pursuers and vanished up impossible inlets as soon as the naval men got within range. Sometimes the untutored travelers showed resistance and then Flint saw things that were terrifying and beastly. The wretched Chinaman, as the victim generally happened to be, was dragged to the side of the prahu, where a pirate gripped his hand and held the wrist to the rail. The spectacle which followed was too horrible for description. The cruelties of the Malays to their wretched prisoners were equal to anything in the annals of North American Indian warfare. The American troops who operated against the Moros in the Philippines have had occasion to know something of the fiendish inhumanity of which the piratical denizens of some of those islands were capable. The pirates of the Kwala were worse than even the worst of those that infested Mindanao under Spanish, and for a time, under American rule.

Meanwhile, Flint, safe in the sanctuary of the Inche's friendship, fished and smoked and shot snipe, and pretended that he had no cares. Incidentally, he did his best to calculate the value of the Inche's hoard of tin. He estimated it at nearly a thousand tons, which, at five hundred dollars a ton, would approximate half a million dollars. And ten per cent on half a million was fifty thousand dollars. Then Flint, who had ample time for such diversions, dreamed dreams wherein he sat at the wheel of a speedy roadster on the Alameda, beside the red-headed girl from San Jose.

THUS matters stood when one day a high-pooped junk floated over the bar. Chinese skipper was skilled in the ways of and dropped her hooks in the Kwala. Her

pirates, and was perfectly ready to pay the customary "squeeze." To his amazement, however, nobody came to levy it. This omission he erroneously ascribed to the presence of the white warship that rode so lazily in the distance.

That night, however, a boat drifted down the river with a European who gave his name as Tuan Smith. The tuan chartered the junk for a voyage to Singapore at a rate that eclipsed the most fatuous aspiration of the Celestial, especially in view of the fact that the trader recognized in Tuan Smith's companions two of the most notorious pirates in Malaya. Being a Chinaman, however, he was clever and kept his eye on the main chance. "These worthy fools," he reflected, "desire me to forget that I have a tongue, or even eyes for things that do not concern me. I shall utterly forget that I have eyes or a tongue."

A week later he sailed for Singapore with Mr. Smith as passenger, and twenty tons of tin as Mr. Smith's baggage. At Singapore the metal sold as readily as minted silver, and Flint found himself with the equivalent of about twelve thousand dollars in his pocket.

Then Flint's soul was preyed upon by temptations. With twelve thousand dollars and his freedom in hand, there seemed no reasonable obstacle to his shaking the dust of Asia from his feet, and leaving the Inche and his hoard, as well as the towkay in Palinggu, and all his other troubles, to the inscrutable providence of Allah. The Inche was an outlaw and an infamous person. Hanging would be too good for him. Why should not Flint keep his tin, or the proceeds thereof?

On the other hand, Flint's soul was racked by the memory of the fact that the Inche, instead of murdering him out of hand, had treated him with every kindness, and had imposed the most implicit trust in him. It would certainly be "queering the pitch" for any other tuan that might ever drift up that way, if he, Flint, were to skip out with the pirate's tin at this juncture. Moreover, at best, he had only some twelve thousand dollars in hand. Were he to dispose of all the rest of the treasure, which he confidently expected to do, his honest commissions would come to be stated, was a sportsman; so he decided over fifty thousand dollars. Flint, as has

to see the game through to the finish.

At the Tiffin Rooms whither Flint usually repaired for his noonday sling or cocktail, Captain Peter Gibney sat all day, and fished for any small blessing that it might please heaven to send in his direction. He was ready to accept anything from a gin pahit to the portfolio of an ambassador, while up his sleeve he had fifty recipes—all infallible—for making a kingly fortune. What his soul sighed for at the time of Flint's advent, however, was not a kingly fortune, but a plain, ordinary job. In this connection, there was not a steamer for sale or charter between Bombay and Hakodate which the gallant but unfortunate skipper was not ready to put into commission; but especially had he his eye upon an elderly but sight-draft coaster, that lay rotting in the harbor of Singapore itself—a burden on the hands of the Chitties who had foreclosed a mortgage on her. She was some eight hundred tons carrying capacity, and was to be chartered for a song. Gibney's idea was to run her between Singapore and the Natunas, and make a million on the copra trade.

Flint had no soul for copra, but one day he put a new heart into the poor out-of-work skipper by informing him that he had a job for just such a steamer.

"It's only a one-trip job, Captain," said he, "but it will be well paid, and it will give you a leg-up in starting out again in business for yourself."

THUS it came about that after several weeks of waiting, the faith and patience of Inche Mahmud were rewarded one morning by the spectacle of the steamship *Lady Raffles* picking her course across the bar of the Palinggu. Even as the pirates watched her from their lair among the mangroves, a white man-of-war boat pulled smartly alongside and Lieutenant Hesketh of *H. M. S. Reptile* ascended the gangway. The occasion of his visit, as he jovially explained, was to warn the master of the trader against the dangers that menaced from the Inche Mahmud and his followers.

Captain Gibney heartily thanked the officer and ordered up the stengahs—whiskies and sodas, without which no social or ceremonial interchange of courtesies between Englishmen or Americans would,

in that part of the world, be considered complete. Under ordinary circumstances, the skipper assured his visitor, he would not worry much if it snowed pirates; but when he was warned on the point by a naval officer, who boarded his hooker with the sole purpose of giving such a warning, he knew that it was high time to keep a sharp look-out.

"We're always knocking about in some of the shady channels nearby," explained the lieutenant, "there are four boats on the job, worse luck! We'll have to be double-extra careful now we've got you to look after; but if ever you smell a rat, fire a shot, or make a row of any sort, and some of us will be alongside in a brace of shakes. I don't want to teach my grandmother to suck eggs," he concluded, "but these Johnnies would steal your back teeth while you were looking at them."

Thereupon it was arranged that if ever the blue jackets heard a shot fired on the *Lady Raffles*, they were to regard it as an urgent appeal for armed assistance.

Flint, in his capacity of Mr. Smith, the charterer, who was interested to the extent of several hundred tons of tin from his mines, heartily endorsed the officer's advice, and added his thanks to those of Captain Gibney. It was not for him to advertise the miraculous immunity from piracy which the *Lady Raffles* was certain to enjoy.

Scarcely had the lieutenant taken his departure, when a ramshackle old fishing koleh came drifting out from some channel in the mangroves, and swung lazily down on the steamer. Her crew of three had some fish to sell, while the eldest of the trio desired to be engaged as port pilot.

"We've as much use for a port pilot as a hog has for a holiday!" laughed the skipper.

"Engage the blighter, just the same, and charge it up to me," said Flint. "It's a blackmail, but we must do it! I know what I'm at!"

GIBNEY did a lot of thinking; but he saw there was no doubt whatever about Flint's knowing what he was at. No white man could have accumulated six or seven hundred tons of tin up the Palinggu without knowing how to mind his own business. At the same time his eyes bulged

far from their sockets a little later in the day when ten stout canvas bags, each holding one thousand American dollars, were passed over the rail to the fishermen.

The pilot was Inche Mahmud.

But Captain Gibney soon admitted in his own mind that his charterer's money was well-spent. He understood river work, its ineffable slackness and tiresome uncertainties, owing to the tolls and exactions of chiefs and pirates along every mile of navigable water. But here was a sportsman who flung ten thousand dollars at the head of the pirates' ambassador, and lo! they treated him as a sportsman should be treated. Day after day, and day after day, a ceaseless procession of boats sailed quietly down to the *Lady Raffles*, and day after day, uninterruptedly, she settled lower in the water with her ever-increasing cargo of tin.

Day after day, also, Flint held palaver with Salleh, the pilot, otherwise Inche Mahmud, and lengthily he explained to that leader of murderous men that—once a man had successfully amassed a fortune—honesty was really the best policy.

The Inche laughed.

"Has not the Inche been honest with the tuan?" said he.

"Yes."

"Has not the Inche learned that the tuans are honest, and therefore it profits a man to deal with them honestly?"

"I suppose so, Inche," admitted Flint.

"But all men are not tuans—not even all white men—and, tuan, this is Asia. Any food pleases the fowl that scratches in the kampong, but tame your hawk, and he still seeks the living prey!"

"I suppose we are all as Allah made us, Inche."

"The tuan will find that that is so."

An unscrutable smile of superior wisdom for an instant illuminated the weather-beaten face of the pirate. "We are all as Allah made us, tuan—the hawk, and the hawk's prey!"

A fortnight went by, and there were over six hundred tons of tin on the steamer. In the mellow evenings of those long hot days, Flint used to lie back on a long deck chair and weave dream fancies of iridescent splendor. At the market rate of tin, the cargo already on board, was worth all of a clear \$350,000. Ten per cent on

that was \$35,000—ample to satisfy the chastened ambitions of Flint. But they would take on board at least fifty tons more, which would mean at least another \$3,000 for Flint. That extra \$3,000 alone would more than square his towkay up in Palinggu, as well as all his other possible responsibilities, and pay all his expenses back to Santa Clara. Yes, he would write to the dear old mother, and to the girl with the red hair, and tell them all about his adventures with the pirates; excepting insomuch as the same touched upon his intent to commit suicide, or the matter of the towkay's \$2,000, or—most especially, this item—the grass widow with the entralling purple eyes.

ANON, dinner being over, and a cool whiskey and soda sizzling gratefully at his elbow, Flint would set his dreams still farther into the glorious future that was to come, and develop the nobler virtues that are fostered by prosperity. Aye! He would remember poor old Inche Mahmud—the pirate that pitch-forked him into a fortune. And he would get the red-headed girl, who would then be Mrs. Flint, to say an odd prayer now and then for the ragged-edged soul of the pirate!

"It's more on her lay than mine," reflected Flint, "Or I'd try to do it myself. Lord knows the old chap wants it!"

And at this point in Flint's meditations, one evening, Captain Gibney came up the deck, leading Mr. McGlew, the chief engineer.

"Tell him, Mac!" said the skipper, as Flint enquired what was the matter. And Mr. McGlew panted out his story:

"These Malays who are loading your tin, Mr. Smith, are all pirates, pure and simple; and that damned fisherman who has blackmailed you out of your ten thousand riggits is old Inche Mahmud himself!"

"What!" ejaculated Flint, in admirably simulated astonishment and dismay.

"A fact, sir!" said the Scot, "and I wouldn't mind the blackmail if he played the game for it; but now he's gone and arranged to cut all our blessed throats—yours, mine and the skipper's, and the lot of us—and then take the hooker down to some of the Dutch islands and sell your tin on his own account!"

"Oh! That's the game, is it?" said Flint,

and he spoke with meticulous nicety this time, because he really was amazed. "That ruffian of an old pilot is really the Inche himself, and he's going to cut all our throats?"

"Yes, sir! He'd have done it a week ago, only he's afraid of the gunboat people coming over to visit us, and he wants to get more tin on board. That's why he put off tackling my Chinamen till today. He's got the Malay quartermasters and Khalassies all fixed, and it was the chief quartermaster came to old Yong Lee, my 'No. 1' fireman, this evening, and asked him could he run the engines for them for a week. Young Lee bit the bait like a fish, and they told him everything. Then he came and blew the gaff to me!"

"Why was that, I wonder?" asked Flint.

"Why, sir, the old boy knew as well as I do that they'd jab a kris through his gizzard the jiffy they'd done with him. You've no idea, sir," concluded the engineer, "what bloodsome devils these pirates are!"

"Well, I seem to be learning at any rate," sighed Flint. "We are all as Allah made us! The hawk and the hawk's prey . . . ! Well, I'll be damned!"

"What's that, sir," asked the chief.

"Nothing," laughed Flint. "At the same time, Captain Gibney, would you regard it as a bad breach of etiquette if the charterer were to make a professional suggestion to the commander?"

"Lord; no, sir!" replied the skipper, highly flattered.

"Well, what price clapping your quartermasters into irons, and firing off a shot or two as a hint to your friends on the Reptile?"

"But your tin, sir!" expostulated Gibney. "Those beggars will scoff or sink every other ounce of it that tries to pass the Kwala if you once raise the alarm. They tell me there's still over a hundred tons of it on the way. A hundred tons of tin is a fortune!"

"I suppose it is!" admitted Flint, sorrowfully, "still it wouldn't be much use to me if I was dead! Guess we'll have to give it a miss in balk this time, anyway, skipper, while you just jump those Malays of yours, and signal the gunboat."

"Right Oh! sir!" said Gibney, and he went into his cabin for Flint's snipe gun,

while McGlew went below to summon his second and third, and the two Eurasian mates, to assist in manacling the Malays.

"And to think that I tried to play the game by the bounders!" chortled Flint to his own soul, as he was left to his own reflections. "And to think, too, that I tried to teach the Inche the primary rudiments of honesty! So that's what he meant when he talked of the hawk and the hawk's prey —to knife the whole lot of us!"

"Well, Inche," concluded the whilon fugitive, addressing a wraith that was not there, "Well, Inche, old man, if three hundred and fifty thousand good old jingling iron men don't happen to be worth anything in your business, they'll come in very handy in mine. I guess this hooker takes a pasear tomorrow morning!"

Captain Gibney emerged from his cabin with the snipe gun, and fired two shots down the Kwala.

"I'll follow you in an instant, Captain," said Flint, as Gibney went below to supervise the arrest of the Malays. "I just want to get my revolver."

HE ran down to his cabin for the weapon. When he came on deck again, he looked up the Kwala apprehensively. Something told him that the pirates were watching the ship. Surely enough, as he looked toward the inlet whither the Inche retired, every evening, he saw the shadowy outline of a boat pulling out from the mangoes. Meanwhile rough shouts and blows on the main deck told him that the Malays were showing fight. There were enough men below, however, to subjugate the quartermasters without difficulty, while he felt that it was his own particular duty to attend to that shadowy boat. When she came within about fifty yards he could plainly see that she held half a dozen occupants, so he hailed her to stop or he would fire.

"It is only the pilot, tuan!" called back the voice of Inche Mahmud. "We heard shots and shouts and bad noises, so we hurried to ascertain what was the matter."

"Come no nearer, pilot!" warned Flint. "The Captain has arrested his quartermasters who tell him that his pilot is Inche Mahmud, and that his men are pirates, one and all!"

The boat quietly drew nearer.

"Stand back, pilot!" again warned Flint. "The Captain has signaled the gunboat. Did you not hear the shots, thou fool! Look down the Kwala! There comes the boats! The quartermasters say you mean to murder us!"

Bang!

Another flash; and Flint threw himself on the deck, with a hot scar on the shoulder where the bullet had just grazed the skin.

Two white men-of-war boats, swinging into full view, cheered as they pulled for the steamer. Like a wraith, the fishing boat sped back toward the shadows of the mangrove swamps. For appearance's sake Flint fired a couple of shots into the sky as Gibney came rushing up the gangway.

"You're not hurt, sir, are you?" gasped the latter. He was out of breath after his scuffle with the quartermasters.

"Not a bit!" said Flint, "only a touch on the shoulder. Here come the *Reptile* boys. Better look slick and let down the gangway for them!"

Half an hour later, having heard the whole story so far as it lay within the knowledge of Captain Gibney or Mr. McGlew, Lieutenant Hesketh turned to Flint with the sigh of a disappointed man.

"I suppose you couldn't help us to bag the beggars, Mr. Smith?" said he. "You know we'll give 'em beans and honey if

you can only put us on to them! Send them back with their tails singed."

"For the Lord's sake don't drag me into it!" pleaded Flint. "Why, they'd kris every miner and boatman that ever did a hand's turn for me if they dreamt that I was informing against them. Moreover, I have no more notion than a crow as to where the beggars hide themselves when they're not blackmailing me!"

Back in the darkness of the mangroves, the Inche Mahmud lay under a load of sorrow such as no pirate of the Palinggu had ever been called upon to bear. When he arose and looked forth to seaward in the pink flush of the false dawn, it was to see the *Lady Raffles* dipping her flag as she lumbered past *H. M. S. Reptile*. In view of the fact that it still lacked a couple of hours of gunfire, the warship had not yet got out her colors. In a moment, however, the White Ensign was broken over her stern rail, and dipped with punctilious politeness to the trader.

Then the *Lady Raffles* went chug-chugging through the turquoise sea, with Flint's fortune safe below her hatches.

The Inche Mahmud withdrew his gaze from the harrowing spectacle.

"Bismillah!" he sighed, with the fortitude of the true believer. "It is the will of God!"

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THE JU JU KISS

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

When Fletcher Craven, jungle turncoat, betrayed his benefactor, the jungle gods repaid him with strange retribution.

PERSISTENT devils, ain't they?" Keever Trent said softly, conversationally, hugging the damp ground a bit closer as the poison-tipped

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arrow whispered past his shoulder and thudded solidly into the thick trunk of a mahogany tree.

He raised the Krag's muzzle a trifle,

tensed his lean finger on the trigger, spat contemptuously at the broken scream that echoed the shot. For a moment regret lay deep in his faded eyes, and then he allowed his attention to wander to the unkempt man at his side.

Fletcher Craven sobbed deeply in his chest, naked terror making a white mask of his weak face, his thin fingers clawing convulsively at the heavy rotting log behind which they had taken refuge.

"Lord, Trent," he cried brokenly, "we haven't got a chance! These Zulu butchers will murder us before another hour passes!"

Pity and slight contempt lay deep in Trent's steady eyes, as he watched the fear in the other's face and listened to the whining voice that had scaled in panicky fright until it was almost unintelligible.

"Easy, Craven!" he snapped, then allowed his voice to sink to a more kindly pitch. "It's almost sunset, and the niggers don't fight after dark—afraid of spirits. We can make a run for it before long."

Craven whimpered in frightened disbelief, then quieted. He lay still for a moment, the ragged sound of his breathing the only whisper in the rank steaming jungle. He shuddered convulsively as another arrow whipped searchingly over their heads.

"Hakeauk a' na'un auteah!"

The words bounced jeeringly out of the silent jungle, their hate-filled inflection snapping both men to instant attention. Tiny muscles ridged Keever Trent's jaw, and his lips thinned, as he interpreted the Zulu's command. He raised his head cautiously, spat out a few words in answer. For seconds, he and the unseen savage yelled questions and answers.

"What are you saying? What's going on?" Craven clutched frantically at Trent's ragged sleeve.

Keever Trent shifted the Krag slowly to a more comfortable position, his eyes bleak and hard. He spoke through thin lips, the words clipped and passionate.

"You sneaking little snake," he said harshly, "you told me that you were on good behaviour while I was out prospecting that stibnite claim. You didn't say anything about that Zulu girl you took to live with you after I was gone!"

Craven flinched, his face growing pale

beneath the blaze in the old prospector's eyes. He drew away from Trent, his mouth working desperately to form placating words.

"It was an accident," he cried frenziedly. "She was playing with my revolver, and it went off. I swear I didn't do it! She shot herself."

"In the back?" There was an utter lack of emotion in Trent's voice that was more savage and condemning than anger.

Perspiration trickled down Craven's distorted face; his eyes glazed with desperation as he pawed wildly at Trent's rigid arm.

"Look, Trent," he whined wretchedly, "we're white men; we've got to stick together. It doesn't matter a damn if she was killed—she was just another nigger wench!"

Trent's words were edged with fire and an inner hurt. "You dirty murderer," he said clearly, "those Zulus were friends of mine. And, now, you expect me to kill them to protect your rotten skin."

HE was silent for moments, his face set and still, only his eyes alive. Many thoughts were racing through his mind, memories of the slim brown body of the girl who was even then being mourned by her family. She had been his friend, even as her family and friends had been; now she was dead, slain by his partner who cowered terrorizedly at his side.

Craven tried another form of persuasion, his chest heaving in a frenzy of terror at losing the aid of his companion.

"All of it," he said pleadingly, "you can have all of the stibnite claim; I'll sign over my share! You'll be rich! But, for Heaven's sake, don't turn me over to those savages!"

"I'll do what I can." Trent nodded his grizzled head. "But not for your share of the claim." His voice hardened. "But understand this—when and if we get back to Mombasa I'll see that you stand trial for murder."

Craven sank to the ground with a muffled sob of relief, his flabby lips mouthing trite words of thanks, his hands opening and closing convulsively. But, momentarily, blazing hate flared in his close-set eyes.

Keever Trent shouted out in Swahili dialect, received an answer, talked briefly,

his grizzled head shaking a bit at the words. Then he stiffened his back, edged the Krag higher on the protecting log.

"They're coming," he snapped. "Get ready!"

Craven nodded dumbly, lifted his rifle with the desperate fierceness of a cornered rat. They waited tensely, interpreting the myriad sounds of the Congo Basin jungle, their eyes straining for the first signs of the feather-bedded Zulu warriors.

Then, the tangled jungle resounding to their hideous war cries, black shapes slid from cover, raced forward toward the two whites. There was no order to the charge, but there was a deadly savagery in the way they fitted and loosed poison-pointed arrows as they ran and, then, casting aside their short bows, catching their assegais in their painted hands. They were horrible, fear-inspiring creatures from another world, as they swept their grease smeared, paint striped bodies forward in a screaming attack.

Keever Trent laughed softly without mirth as he fired into the onrushing horde, pulled trigger until the gun was hot and the magazine empty, and then stood swinging the Krag like some monstrous club. He fought like his Viking forebears, a soundless cry whistling from his heaving chest. An assegai touched his chest lightly, left a streak of pain in its wake. He clubbed the savage to earth.

Craven was backed against the mahogany tree, the barrel of his rifle hot in his hands as he emptied it at the revengeful Zulus. Then he cast it aside, and used his heavy revolver with deadly effect. He screamed brokenly in fear as he fought, his voice a shrill note in the crash of battle.

And then the fight was over as quickly as it had begun. With muffled shouts the few savages still alive melted into the jungle, leaving the two whites momentarily victors.

The smell of powder-smoke was pungent in the air, mingling headily with the heavy odor of fresh blood. Seven Zulus sprawled loosely on the ground, their proud feathers bedraggled and sticky with crimson.

Craven sagged to a log, thumbed fresh shells into his revolver with shaking fingers. His mouth trembled with exhaustion and fear as he counted the victims of the brief encounter. He turned wearily

toward Trent, went rigid at what the other was doing.

Keever Trent had tied a length of ropy liana around the biceps of his left arm, winding it until the flesh was swollen so the liana was hidden. With his teeth he had removed the bullets from three rifle shells. He cut a criss-cross gash with his knife directly over a short gash made by a flying arrow in his forearm. Then he poured the powder from the shells into the wound, and touched a flaming match to the gray powder.

His lean face went sick with agony as the powder flared whitely in a burst of super-heat. He wavered for a moment on his feet, then walked slackly over to a fallen tree and sank to its rough bark.

"Poison arrow," he explained briefly through set teeth. "Only chance to live lay in cauterizing it immediately." His head drooped wearily for a second, then lifted. "Get me," he ordered, "a couple of those sap boils from that tree, so that I can make a dressing from the sap." His right hand gestured weakly toward the edge of the clearing.

"Sure!" Craven clambered to his feet, walked to the clearing's edge.

"That tree to your left is the one," Trent called weakly.

CRAVEN could see no difference between any of the trees; all of them had boil-studded trunks. But he did as Trent had ordered, ripped several rubbery boils loose from the indicated tree, then brought them back to the agony-wracked man. He watched interestedly as Trent broke several of the boils, then covered the blackened wound with the quick-drying liquid.

"Jungle medicine," Trent said tersely. "Good in jack-knife surgery."

Together, they made and tied a rude bandage, then, after a short rest, started their weary trek toward the river. They left the dead warriors where they lay, knowing that the remainder of the Zulu avengers would return to bury them with traditional ceremony and witchcraft.

Night-flying mosquitoes and blood-sucking gnats made their existence miserable as they pushed steadily through the rank undergrowth. Trent led the way, using an assegai as a bush knife on the inextricably

woven liana vines and shrubs. Craven followed closely on his heels, tripping on the creeping lianas, every shaken nerve tense for the hideous cries that would mean another attack by the remaining Zulus.

KEEVER TRENT moved more slowly as the hours passed, his legs trembling a bit from the steady marching and the Upas fever that was spreading with relentless speed throughout his straining body. He cursed softly now and then when the makeshift bush-knife slipped from his weakening hand and fell to the ground, only to be retrieved with dogged determination. His blurring eyes were losing their keenness; outlines of various obstacles—even in the bright moonlight—were becoming dim and hazy. But he stopped their slow progress only long enough, every thirty minutes, to loosen and rebind the ropy liana around his upper arm, making certain that mortification did not set into the muscles.

His mind grew misty from the fever, until only sheer instinct drove him forward. He had but one thought left in his befogged brain, and that was that Craven should stand trial for the murder of the native girl.

He had many reasons for that, not the least of which was that, if Craven did not stand trial and receive just punishment, his daughter—Mary of the golden hair and the ready smile and tinkling laughter—would become Craven's wife.

Keever Trent swore softly to himself at that, swore a private oath to his God that before he would permit such a thing to happen he would deal justice to the man himself.

Fletcher Craven, stumbling tiredly behind Trent, heard the soft bitter curses, and instinctively interpreted their meaning. His sweaty hand closed spasmodically on the revolver butt at his waist for a moment, then reluctantly loosened. But it was not the thought of murder that stayed his hand, rather it was the awful fear of being left alone in the steaming jungle.

Somewhere close by in the night, a prowling lion coughed rumblingly, and the obscene cackle of a slinking hyena broke in the middle of a cry. A night bird croaked tentatively out of the silence that had fallen at the lion's rumble, and then the myriad

sound of the jungle sprang back into weird and startling life.

Craven closed the short gap between himself and Trent, knowing that the prospector meant safety, but hating the other with all of the bitterness of his twisted soul. He knew that the older man despised him for his rank cowardice and his murderous nature, and he hated him for it. And that hatred, as he plodded woodenly behind the stumbling figure of Trent, was slowly driving him to the brink of insanity.

For in the leather belt-pouch at his waist was Stibnite, the vehicle from which antimony is smelted and used in a dozen different ways. Two weeks before, the government had granted them a concession to prospect for minerals in the rich Congo Basin, and, but five days before, Trent had discovered the fabulously rich deposit. He had made a rough map, then returned to camp, to find that only a quick dash for the river could save their lives from the outraged blacks.

Trent had given Craven the map to carry in the belt-pouch, and had, because of his daughter's interest in Craven, declared that they would lease the government land and share alike in the profits. For due to the European war, and because of its use in war materials, the value of the element had skyrocketed amazingly in the last few months.

Now Craven fingered the cool butt of his gun again, many thoughts swirling in his fatigued, crafty mind, waiting only for the chance he needed to remove Trent, get the gold he carried, and make his way to the coast.

THE moon was a blob of dull silver directly overhead when they made cold camp in a small clearing. Trent flopped to the ground, almost totally unconscious, babbling words in a dozen different dialects.

Craven crouched beside the stricken man, afraid to move from his side, holding the revolver tightly in his lap. He sucked avidly at the canteen, shuddering at the night sounds. Then he leaned over Trent, shook the unresisting shoulder.

"Trent," he said urgently, affrightedly, "snap out of it, man!"

Trent cursed wildly in Bantu, his eyes flickering open, and then closing again.

"Wake up, you fool!" Craven's lips were tight in growing panic.

"Sure, I'm all right." Trent rolled heavily to a sitting position.

"Where are we?" Craven's voice was a muted scream. "What'll I do if you die from that arrow poison?"

"Die, too!" Trent's laughter was a hideous cackle. "Then Mary will be safe from your bloody hands."

"Listen, Trent," Craven forced a friendship into his tone that he didn't feel. "You promised that you'd get me out of this. Hell, man, I don't know anything about the jungle; you were the one who insisted I come along. It's your duty to get me back safely!"

Trent swayed weakly, his breathing labored and heavy. He caught with feeble fingers at Craven's arm. "All right," he said. "On one condition."

"Sure, Trent, sure," Craven promised eagerly. "Anything you say."

Trent licked dry, hot lips. "Give Mary my share, and then leave her entirely alone."

"I promise!" Cupidity flared briefly in Craven's narrow eyes.

"All right," Trent's head nodded sleepily. "I'll trust you once more. Go ten miles due south, then follow the river east to the coast. You can't miss Mombasa."

He slumped sideways in a death-like faint. Craven rolled him to his back, ran his hands feverishly through his clothes until he located the thong-tied money sack. He stripped it of its heavy gold pieces, then tossed the bag contemptuously to one side.

He unloaded Trent's gun, shoved all of the ammunition into his pockets. He emptied Trent's canteen into his own, slung it over his shoulder. Catching up the broad-bladed assegai, intending to use it as a bush-knife, he paused for a moment looking down at the doomed man.

"Sap!" he said viciously, succinctly. Then, swinging on one heel, he crossed the clearing, went cautiously but swiftly down the shadowy trail that led to the river.

There was no remorse in his heart at leaving the other to the tortures of the natives, only the fearful anxiety that he would not reach the coast with his precious map. He heard the ravings of Trent for yards down the trail, then a sudden bend cut off all sound. He trekked faster as the

hours passed, cutting trail with a desperate haste, fear forcing him on, until he was almost stumbling in his frightened rush. The night sounds seemed to close in upon him as he cut his way; time and again he crouched in frozen terror. Later, he was running, his mouth a ragged circle as he screamed defiance at the pressing jungle around him.

THE four Zulu warriors found Trent shortly after sunrise. They drifted silently out of the jungle, stood silently over the fever-tossed prospector. One of them raised the razor-sharp assegai, laid its gleaming edge lightly against Trent's throat.

"No," the leader of the four said slowly, stopping the death stroke. "He is not to blame."

"He helped the other to escape," the first savage said heatedly. "He is to die."

The Zulu leader drew himself erect, his gaze steady as he forced away the other's weapon with his own. They stood a moment in silent antagonism.

"He fought for his friend, as we fight for ours," the leader said slowly. "I claim him for a friend. Too, he knew nothing of Laki's death until we told him. He is a brave man and a great warrior. And his body is sick with arrow fever. We do not slay him."

The last two clucked their approval, went quietly away to search for the spoor of the murderer. They found it, called excitedly to their companions.

The leader paused reflectively for a moment, then gestured with one painted hand.

"Follow him," he ordered, "and exact vengeance for Laki. I stay with my friend and treat him with good medicine."

Then the three were gone like shadows down the trail, disappearing with an uncanny quiet. The leader turned back to Trent, made him more comfortable on the ground. Then he, too, disappeared into the jungle, returning shortly with a handful of roots and herbs. He ground them into a damp powder, forced Trent to swallow. Gradually, as the huge warrior looked on anxiously, Trent's body became soaked with perspiration and he slept. The Zulu filled his lower lip with crude snuff, settled patiently back against the bole of an iron-wood tree.

CRAVEN lurched heavily down the trail, his body rebelling after torturous hours of travel. His eyes were feverish, continually searching the back trail and the banks of the river. He slashed now and then at the creepers entangled before him, cutting a clear path for his weakened body.

Fifty yards behind him, slinking like wraiths through the verdant undergrowth, were the three Zulus, coming ever closer to their quarry, wary of the violent death that lay in the guns at Craven's side. Slowly but steadily, they crept closer to the white renegade ahead.

Craven swore suddenly in pain and surprise, as the assegai rebounded from a rubbery vine and slashed a four inch gash in the calf of his leg. He grasped the leg with both hands, horror of the situation unnerving him for the moment. Then he caught sight of the small trees at one side of the trail, and his eyes lightened with sudden hope.

He wrenched several of the sap boils from the nearest tree, tore a strip of cloth from his ragged shirt, prepared to make a jungle dressing such as the one Trent had made the night before.

He grinned thinly to himself as he worked. He owed Trent a lot; for not only had he made him a fortune and given him knowledge of the jungle remedy, but by conveniently dying—as he naturally must—he had cleared the way for Craven's acquisition of Mary with her slender passionate body and her kisses that were like molten flame.

He laughed aloud as he smeared the bloody gash with the sticky sap and tied the cloth bandage tightly. Then he lifted his gun and the assegai from where they had fallen, started his trek again.

Behind him, savage amusement bright in their dark eyes, the three Zulus followed him again, their weapons held loosely in their paint-striped hands. Their mission of vengeance seemed to have been forgotten for the moment.

KEEVER TRENT opened his eyes wearily, focused them slowly on the four gigantic blacks who squatted over a

tiny fire nearby. His hand reached automatically for the rifle at his side, groped aimlessly for a moment.

The tallest of the four men roused at the slight sound, strode over to Trent. He bent over the white man, his face calm and emotionless, but with eyes that were friendly and compassionate.

"You will live," he said briefly, in the Swahili dialect.

Trent swivelled his gaze around the shadowy clearing. "The other white man," he asked in the same dialect, "you killed him?"

"He is dead, a proper ending for such a man—he was a jackal."

"How?" Trent asked, his eyes narrowing despite himself.

"He slashed himself with an assegai," the Zulu said judicially, "and smeared the wound with sap of the Devil-Devil tree. He did not know that the jungle has bad as well as good medicine. He died in screaming torment. *Wallah!* His agony must have been great, and a pleasure to the ears!"

Trent closed his eyes with an involuntary shudder, then opened them to glance fleeting at one of the Devil-Devil trees close by.

"It was just," the Zulu finished. "He was a stranger to the jungle and the jungle exacted its pay for his crime."

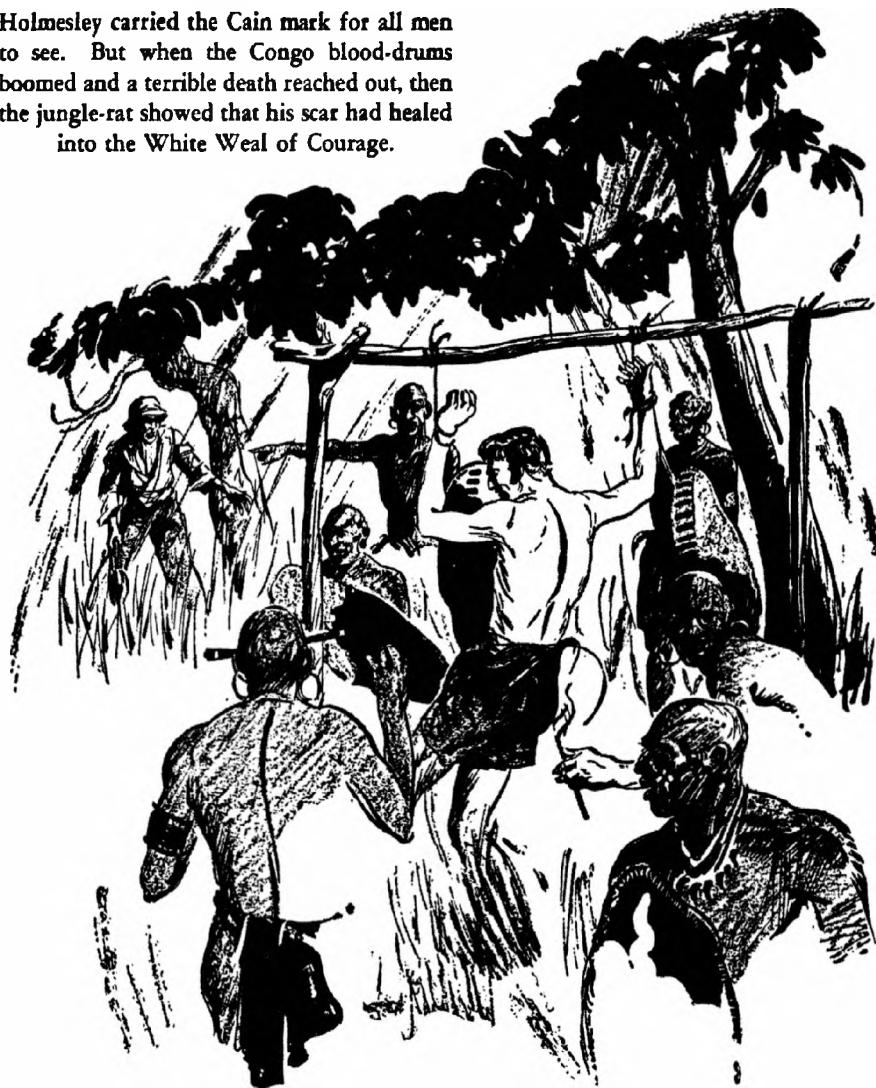
Keever Trent nodded his head in slow agreement. He instantly divined what had happened when he had collapsed from the fever of his wound, and he felt that, somehow, things were as they should be.

He looked again at the Devil-Devil tree, from whose sap the African savages obtained their poison for their spears and arrows. Naturalists called it the Upas tree, and it held an uncanny resemblance to the tree from which he had used the healing sap for his own dressing the night before.

"Bad man—bad medicine," he said slowly, smiling without mirth.

Then, because he was incredibly tired, and because he knew that he was safe with the Zulu warriors, he turned wearily on his side and drifted off into dreamless sleep.

Holmesley carried the Cain mark for all men to see. But when the Congo blood-drums boomed and a terrible death reached out, then the jungle-rat showed that his scar had healed into the White Weal of Courage.



IDOL OF DEATH



By CLYDE IRVINE

REX RYDER'S finger tightened on the trigger as the tall grasses swayed again. Somewhere in that green wall something had moved!

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"Leopard?" whispered Sclecht, anxiously. He brought his own Savage .303 to his hip and his knuckle whitened. Rex sighted carefully. The ten foot grasses

swayed again, slowly, as they had swayed before. A hand—a human hand—pushed them aside with infinite weariness, and a white man, his face drawn with hunger and exhaustion, tumbled out, waved thin arms in a gesture of helpless surrender and then crashed forward on his face.

A cloud of parrakeets screeched as they flew in a brilliant cloud from a nearby tree and frightened monkeys cursed fluently as they chattered of this strange happening. Both men lowered their rifles and with a curt command to his black boys to assist the stranger Rex Ryder strode forward. At his side, his heavy face expressing the utmost disapproval, Scliecht walked slowly, his cold gray eyes flicking over the prostrate man.

"Jungle rat," he said as Ryder bent to examine the stranger. "By the looks of him—Good Lord, Ryder, he's a convict!" He pointed to the ragged remnants of clothing still sticking with jungle steam and sweat to the stricken man. "That's the Portuguese East brand. I've seen it too often not to know it. What the hell's he doing 'way over here in the Congo?"

"We'll leave that question 'til later!" the American colonist said briskly. Two boys lifted the convict and carried him to the *bwana's* tent.

Hours later, washed, shaved and dressed in clean linen, Derek Holmesley told his story. It was, at best, a bit incredible. Three weeks beating across country from Portuguese East, alone, unarmed and without a single boy—it sounded like a pipe-dream! Holmesley's eyes wandered as he spoke, whether from exhaustion or furtiveness they could not tell.

"You say this fellow who was with you, this Norman Jenks, was found shot dead on the trail the morning after you struck elephant spoor?" Rex demanded abruptly. "That's okay with me. These things happen. But how come the trek across from Portuguese East?"

"We—we had a bit of trouble," admitted Holmesley uneasily. "Words, in fact! He was a big chap, strong as a horse. I think—no, I'm sure he thought I was too careful. I'm a tenderfoot. I wasn't taking too many chances."

Scliecht, with a Boer's bluntness, interrupted, his cold gray icy eyes like frozen spikes. "You mean you were yellow, don't

you?" His voice was contemptuous, the voice of the *voortrekker*, hard and unrelenting.

Holmesley nodded miserably. "I think he said that, too!" he managed. "But that wasn't all. He—he taunted me, continually. All the time. I—I—can't stand that. Never could. Can I have a drink?" He gulped the sundowner avidly. But Ryder shook his head when he pleaded for another.

Should he, Rex thought, believe this story? The man was obviously a derelict convict. He would probably lie without a moment's hesitation.

"I don't know how it happened," Holmesley's voice went on monotonously. "But the morning after we'd had a few words I found Jenks dead. He'd been shot. And with my gun!" He looked at them eagerly. "I swear I never did it! I didn't know anything about it. But there he was with a bullet-hole between his eyes—and *somebody* had fired my gun!" He licked his lips nervously. "My boys 'peached' on me. I was arrested—for murder!"

Scliecht rose distastefully. He lit his pipe and said between his teeth. "I can fill in the rest. It's easy enough. You were chucked in the jail by the Portuguese and bribed your way out. And then you ran for it. You were making for the West Coast, you damned fool—weren't you!"

HOLMESLEY didn't answer. He was sitting with his head between his knees, sobbing. The sight was too much for Ryder. Something in him rebelled at this deliberate cruelty on Scliecht's part. With an impatient gesture he silenced the older man.

"We can't turn you back into the jungle unarmed," he said quickly. "In any case you can't be so yellow if you've managed all this distance without a gun and without a guide. I'm willing to take a chance on you—on one condition!"

"Leave him for his own kind—the jackals!" Scliecht said angrily. He half-slipped his heavy automatic from the holster. "He's a murderer, and a cowardly one to boot. Why load ourselves with a rat like that? One of these—" he gestured to his gun. "And we'd be rid of him and the Portuguese would thank us." He

laughed grimly. "They might even reward us!"

"But I never did it!" the despairing denial came from the beaten man. "I never killed Jenks. I hated him, yes. But I never killed him. I tried to tell them that. They laughed at me. The British wouldn't help me. Nobody seemed to care. There was only one thing to do and I did it. I escaped, just as you say! I'd have gone anywhere—anywhere—to get away from *that*!"

"So you tried to cross Africa on foot, without even an *assegai*?" Rex's voice cut off Sclecht's angry words. "All right, you stay with us 'til this *safari* is over. We're making for the *kraal* of M'Tembu, up in the elephant country, and if you'll pitch in and do your share, I'll stake you. It won't take me long to find out all about you!"

"Thank you," the convict gasped gratefully. "Thank Heaven somebody believes me. You've no idea what it means to a man who's suffered as I've suffered in that stinking jail. I'll—I'll do anything for you, Mister Ryder—*anything*! I—I—can't tell you—!" His voice, strained and weary and broken, faded and he sat still and quiet, his face working.

"Forget it." The big American colonist swung on Sclecht. "Listen, Hans, I know how you feel about this guy. Maybe you're right and he's a wrong 'un from 'way back? But I figure he needs a break. Let's give him a chance. If he plays us dirty—I'll *help* you to put him away!"

"I mean it," he continued, to Holmesley. "One false move, fella, and I'll drill daylight through you. Now, there's a spare tent. You can have it and in the morning you pitch in with us, and after the *safari* is ended we'll try to clear up this business."

With that Sclecht had to be content. But as the days passed he never lost a chance to humiliate the ex-con and on a hundred occasions used the lash of his sarcasm on the defeated man. Rex wondered if the man would break, but as the *safari* struck farther into the heart of the jungle, some of the craven look departed from Holmesley and a queer dignity settled on his slim shoulders. It was as if having his life spared by Rex Ryder, he was constituting himself the living shadow of his protector. Wherever danger threatened, from overhanging branches on which the

mighty pythons lay waiting for unwary travelers on the narrow trail; or in the matted sub-strata of fallen rotting vegetation where the deadly cobras lay coiled; from the tall green wall of grasses that sheltered the greatest killer of them all, the leopard; he was always first. In time, Rex, who had years of experience in jungle hunting, began to think his judgment was well placed. Derek Holmesley was making good.

And then, in the brief hour before the African night slammed down like a titanic shutter, they came upon the *kraal* of M'Tembu.

M'TEMBU, the Elephant and Killer of Elephants, welcomed the *safari* warmly. Standing six feet high, plumed and feathered, the great chief held his hand outstretched and said: "O, *inkoos* Ry-Der, there have been many moons waxed and waned since last my *kraal* sheltered you. Enter, you and your household and your bearers. M'Tembu bids you welcome."

Rex answered in the same dignified manner and introduced *bwana* Sclecht but when he would have introduced Holmesley, Sclecht protested in a low undertone. However, Rex, as if he hadn't heard, continued.

"And this *bwana*," he said to M'Tembu, "is of my family, too. He is *bwana* Holmesley." The chief acknowledged the introduction and after Rex had brought out the presents for the chief and his wives there was prepared a great feast. For on the morrow the warriors of M'Tembu would go on the elephant *safari* with the white men.

But just before the meal, meeting Holmesley alone between the native huts, Sclecht remarked in a bitter, biting tone: "I'd have sent you among the blacks, you bloody jailbird! You've no right to sit with white men—or even with a nigger chief. Ryder's too damn soft with rats like you, too damned soft by half!"

Holmesley was silent. As if he knew that Sclecht's verdict was the verdict that most white men south of the Portuguese line would bring against him, he suffered the insulting words to pass. But a flush came to his thin, intellectual face and his underlip oozed a tiny drop of blood. When

he raised his eyes to Sclecht they were filled with worry.

"But you can't go through with this act," Sclecht continued coldly. "I've been watching you. Always in the lead. Pretending you're looking after Rex Ryder! Why, you yellow-belly, that man would make ten of you. He doesn't need your filthy protection—such as it is."

"I was only trying to show my gratitude," Holmesley managed. His eyes took in the surrounding jungle where it appeared above the *kraal* stockade. Out there was death, by tooth and claw. In here there was death, too. The death of hope. For he could see it now and Sclecht's next words confirmed his suspicions. Sclecht hated him enough to kill him.

"Gratitude!" Sclecht repeated and laughed grimly. "You could show that best by getting the hell out of here. Nobody wants you. Why don't you take a man's way out?" He grinned sardonically. No! That's too much to ask! Why, you filleted kipper, you haven't the backbone to do anything. Not even for Rex Ryder."

"I'd die for Ryder," Holmesley said evenly. "I'd do anything for a man like that. But not for you. Nothing I can say or do will ever make you change your opinion of me."

Sclecht laughed and spat on the ground. He sneered at Holmesley.

"They say the diamond head-band of the *ju-ju* here is worth a million dollars," he said, as if to the moon. "It's in that hut, over there between the Chief's hut and the hut of his first wife. Behind it—see?" He pointed through the ring of huts encircling the fires where the pots were heating and spits slowly turned with the crisp, browning legs of small deer. "In that hut, my brave fellow, there is something that has challenged the bravery of every man since Sam Porter. Poor Sam. He stole it one night—and ran!"

"He got as far as that fringe of trees there. They still call it the Tree of Sacrifice. D'you know why? 'Cause they flayed poor Sam alive there. Stripped the skin off his living body like you'd take the wrapper off a cigar. Only, more painfully."

"What's that got to do with me—and Ryder?" Holmesley's lips were dry. "D'you mean—d'you mean you want me to prove I'm not a yellow coward by—by

stealing that diamond head-band from the *ju-ju*? I'd be killed!"

"I didn't say so," Sclecht's tone of contempt flicked Holmesley's raw nerves. "I just said I didn't believe your act. I never yet saw a yellow-belly turn into a square guy overnight. And that's what you did—or tried to make Ryder believe you did. You're still yellow!"

He walked away ponderously, the heavy gun swinging at his hip. But his eyes were gleaming as he heard a sudden gasp behind him. The derelict convict stood shivering, his lips working slackly, eyes drawn to pin-points of pain.

A DRUM started beating. More drums took it up. Dinner was served. Holmesley made his way to the long circle of seated men. Warriors were coming in from all sides of the *kraal*, smacking their lips at thought of the feast. Rex Ryder was in animated conversation with the chief, M'Tembu, while Sclecht applied himself industriously to his food. Seating himself opposite him, Derek Holmesley could feel nothing but Sclecht's insensate hatred, the sure end to it all by a return to that noisome jail and—death.

And the weakness that had dogged Holmesley all his life now came to the top. The thing that Sclecht sensed in him, that wasn't so obvious to a man like Ryder, rose within him like a devouring demon and sapped his new-found courage. He reached for the gourd of native beer and drank it in one great gulp.

"Fill it," he said in the dialect. It was filled. Again and again. And finally, Rex Ryder saw its effect in the flushed, reeling Holmesley as the feast went on to its orgiastic conclusion. When the women came out, their swaying hips skirted in ankle-length ropes of fibre, and danced before the warriors it was Holmesley who clapped his hands loudest, yelled approval.

The thudding rhythm of the drums seemed to drive him to greater energies than the bucks themselves. He teetered to his feet and began to dance clumsily, like a broken puppet. His red face and staring, drunken eyes sickened Rex Ryder. He turned away and only his lips, thin and tight on his face, showed the disgust he felt.

At last the feast ended. The last gourd

of native beer was gone. The last shin-bone cleaned. The last handful of maize eaten. The dancers had gone back to their huts. In the *kraal* of M'Tembu only the snores of the sleepers remained to compete with the snarling yelps of the jungle cats, the barking cough of the leopard and the far-away blood-curdling laughter of the scavenging hyena. Like a silver shield on a blue field, the moon rode high.

HOLMESLEY never knew how he got there but dawn was breaking in the East when he found himself staggering through the deep jungle grass. His shirt and shorts were soaked with steamy perspiration and his feet felt as if his boots were made of lead. His head ached terribly and a dull, dead taste of sour native beer fouled his breath.

For some time he staggered on, recovering slowly from the effects of his "binge." As remorse overcame him he became maudlin. A tree-trunk offered him a seat and he sat down, resting his throbbing head on his hands, swaying drunkenly. He paid no attention to python or cobra, to hidden leopard or prowling cheetah. He was too drunk.

Slowly, pictures began to form in his mind. He had a vague recollection of darkness and the glowing embers of a fire. As the pain thumped in his head, flashes of light struck across his hidden eyes and he saw a fearsome sight—the mighty *ju-ju* of the tribe M'bassa, M'Tembu's tribe, killers of elephants.

The tribal god, his enormous eyes gleaming in his coal-black face, sat in the gloom of the *ju-ju* hut. On the floor a guardian slept. Slept? Was he not, rather, dead? For what man sleeps like that, spread-eagled flat on his back, his mouth slackly open, his eyeballs staring?

Yes, the guardian is dead! And the drool of blood from his lips has run down his cheeks and slowly spreads out beneath his shattered skull. The fearsome god of the M'bassa grins his wooden grin, his great red lips bulbous, the glint of rings on his ears and nose of beaten, hammered gold, while round his kinky skull, gleaming with a thousand hidden fires—the diamond head-band of the *ju-ju* shoots lines of flame and color in the fitful light of the dying embers.

He raised his head. Even through the trellised monkey-ropes that screened the trail he could see that picture again, feel the thrill of horror that overcame him for a second as his eyes fell on the slain sentry. But the eyes of the *ju-ju* gleamed sardonically and the diamond head-dress seemed a band of living fire, a fire worth a million dollars.

Slowly, he shook his head, trying to clear it of these images, faint incomplete images spawned by the coldly contemptuous words of Sclecht and the stinking, heady vapor of native beer. Had it been a dream? Just a drunken dream, induced by exhaustion and heat and a sense of his complete unworthiness? That *ju-ju*—that obscene, terrible wooden god on his flashy throne of baobab wood studded with jewels. That awful *tabu* with which a god, like royalty, is hedged about! Was he real?

The images became clearer. And now, with a thrill of terrorizing fear, he knew that it was not a dream! It had never been a dream. Somehow, some time during the night that had fled in the fogs of drunkenness he had killed a man and stolen the *tabu* head-band from the M'bassa's tribal god! He had put himself more than ever beyond the pale of men—for now black man and white man would hunt him to a fearsome death.

"Oh, Lord," he groaned. His tongue felt thick and viscid and his hands shook as if palsied. "I must have been mad! Damn you, Sclecht, damn you! You planted the idea in my head—watched me get drunker—and—. Gad! I am a craven—a thief and a murderer." He groaned and set his head down again. Slowly he tried to re-construct the scenes but they were all jumbled together. Only one thing was sure. He was alone in the jungle—fleeing!

Fleeing for his life—with the *tabu* head-band!

In a sudden realization of his awful danger he leapt to his feet and began to search his clothes for the precious head-band. The head-band that Sclecht had said was worth a million dollars. Always Sclecht! Always that sneering, sarcastic voice and those cold, ice-gray eyes. Why must Sclecht hound him like this? Dominate him, even in his dreams?

The vapors of drunkenness vanished as his brain seized upon the one dominant fact of his search. There were no jewels upon his body! No head-band. Nothing! What had he done with them? Thrown them away in a drunken fit of forgetfulness? Dropped them on the trail? His head seemed to be bursting as he searched frantically, beating around the trail, seeking a fortune that might buy him his salvation.

BUT they were gone. The glittering strip of flaming color wasn't on his body. Nor in his clothes. His shoes—no, it wasn't there either! It wasn't hidden in the lining of the *topee* Rex Ryder had given him—and at the thought of Ryder his pale face blanched whiter.

Rex Ryder? What would he think of him? What would that grand trail-breaker think of the wreckage he had saved from the jungle only to have him turn out a murderer and a thief? And what could Rex do if M'Tembu wanted revenge? For M'Tembu and his tribe would not rest, day or night, rain or shine, until the desecrator of their *ju-ju* was dead. He shuddered, feeling that the native warriors were around him now in the green walls of the jungle, their muddy hot eyes staring at him, their strong fingers clenched on throwing spear and *assegai*, knuckles whitening on the hardwood shafts of knobberries; waiting for the instant when they would skewer him like a wild pig. He stared about him fearfully.

But only the awakening morning greeted him with riotous sound and color as monkeys and parakeets gave voice and orchids opened to the sun.

As the African sun rose higher in the sky, swimming up like a spinning red-hot ball of flame athwart the jungle tree-tops, he sat down again to take stock of his position. Undoubtedly, he had been drunk. Also undoubtedly he had stolen the *tabu* head-band. But how? In what manner had his drunken steps been guided to the *ju-ju* hut? Had anyone waited while he did the deed and taken the head-band from him?

Or was it not more likely that he had lost it on the trail? And if the M'bassa had not followed him by now, was it not possible to re-trace his steps, find the

jewelled bauble and either return it to Rex Ryder and have him intercede for his life? Or run for it?

Death was sure, in any event. Nothing was surer. For the keen-nosed blacks would trace him as a bloodhound traces a runaway criminal. And at the thought his lips curled in self-condemnation. He was a criminal now, a weak-willed, broken criminal who had violated the first principles of hospitality and gratitude and brought nothing but sorrow and trouble upon his benefactor.

He rose, setting his jaw grimly. Death was better than this hell of mental torture. Anything was better than to live like this, a skulking fear-driven wretch. The trail beckoned, broken grasses showing where his stumbling feet had trod. Somewhere in there the head-band of the god was lying—or death was waiting.

“LISTEN, O mighty M'Tembu,” the voice of Sclecht was honeyed with deep meaning as he leaned toward the angry chief and gestured with his thick, pudgy fingers. “Is it not all alike, this thing? Why has *bwana* Ry-Der been so silent? I have been anxious to trace and find this killer of priests and stealer of *tabu* jewels, but what has Ry-Der done? Nothing! He sits as one who cannot or will not do anything!”

“All this is true, *bwana*!” M'Tembu answered. His great strong body quivered as he beat his ceremonial *assegai* on the hard-packed earth of his hut and his muddy eyes flashed. “But this is nothing. The head-band of the *ju-ju* must be brought back to the god. Or how else will the tribe M'bassa hope to live? . . . Power will be gone from the arms of our warriors so that they will be weak as children without the god's strength. What evil will fall upon us! We shall surely die!”

“But it is the fault of *bwana* Ry-Der,” insisted the oily voice of Sclecht. His gray, icy eyes were cold and still. “Yet there he sits, saying nothing, thinking! And of what does he think? He thinks of that vulture-meat he saved from the perils of the jungle and the law of the white man. He is the one who has done this thing. It is the drunken one who killed the guardian of the *ju-ju* and stole the diamonds from the brow of the god.”

"It would seem to be so, *bwana!*" M'Tembu's breath was short and angry. "Yet for many moons he has been my friend and M'Tembu does not lightly make friends of the white men. But, there is a place as wide as the Congo between a white man and one of us. And that is where the white man seeks gold and shiny stones and does not care how many he kills nor how friendship is strained or broken in the getting of them. It shall be done!" He struck a drum with the hilt of the *assegai*.

A native appeared and M'Tembu barked his commands. Then he turned to Sclecht. "I prepare now for the event," he said and began to dress himself in plumes and feathers. Sclecht, his work done, bowed with concealed contempt, and went out. As he did so Molada, the witch doctor, his hideous mask a fright, clattering with dried seeds and trinkets and dressed in the trappings of his weird profession, passed him on his way to the Chief's hut.

"Now for the fun," Sclecht said, rubbing his hands. "If they don't get that little stinker in the next few hours it'll be curtains for Mr. Rex Ryder!" But nothing of this showed on his carefully-controlled face as he crossed the *kraal* to where Rex sat outside his hut.

"Why don't you let them go for him, you fool!" he asked without preamble. "Surely you can see no one else could have done it. His footprints—why, the *spoor* is as plain as elephant—show that he was at the *ju-ju* hut. The head-band is gone—and so is Derek Holmesley—if that ever was the little rat's name. Let the bloodhounds go for him!"

Rex looked up wearily. The events of the night had left him with a feeling of intense disappointment in Derek Holmesley's regeneration. Now he could see what might have made Holmesley unreliable. Drink? A mania for strong drink—only evident when M'Tembu's hospitality, combined with the thought of an elephant hunt, had turned the *kraal* into a drunken revel.

But, still, there was a picture of those Saxon blue eyes, the feeling that Derek Holmesley was not as Sclecht said he was, the desire to play the game with a man weaker than himself. But now things were too serious to allow sentiment to overwhelm him. The *tabu* head-band was gone

and Holmesley could not be found. His *spoor* ended at the jungle wall. Where, in that green hell, was the thief hiding?

"M'Tembu trusts me," Rex answered. He rose to his feet and strapped his revolver to his belt. "I'm going in for him now. I think I know how he'll travel—as he traveled before. West! He'll have that single idea in his head. And if he has the diamonds he'll travel fast."

Sclecht looked around him warily. From the Chief's hut the bedizened figures of Chief M'Tembu and his witch doctor, Molada, appeared. M'Tembu raised his ceremonial knobkerry in a wide sweeping arc. As if on wings two lines of warriors raced across the center of the *kraal*, their brilliant plumes waving, the great wide blades of their *assegais* silver in the sun. They closed round Sclecht and Rex Ryder like a wall of steel, topped by multi-colored feathers.

"**I**'M afraid you're too late, old boy!"

I Sclecht said bitterly. "And by the looks of it we're both in the same boat. Here comes M'Tembu and that nightmare, Molada!" As he spoke the Chief and the witch-doctor reached the edge of the warriors. They broke to let them through and M'Tembu spoke.

"*Bwana Ry-Der*," he said gruffly. "For as long as my first-born has been on the earth I have been thy friend. And you have been my friend. But this is over. You have brought one here under the guise of friendship who was nothing but a coward and a killer of sleeping men, a thief of that which wasn't his, and one who desecrated the *tabu* of my tribe. The *ju-ju* of the god of the M'bassa is mighty and his warriors are like hounds when they scent the chase. Therefore, I have taken thee, *bwana Ry-Der*, and will hold thee until the sun goes down. If He-Who-Kills-in-the-Night is not back here with the jewels by then—you will die!"

"But, M'Tembu, you must not do this thing," Ryder yelled above the sudden clatter of *assegais* and knobkerries on hard-baked shields of hide. "The arm of the Great White Father is long and will reach you and there will be none of the tribe M'bassa left to bury their dead. Think of this!"

"I have thought of all this, *bwana*," the

Chief retorted. At his signal Rex's gun was whipped from its holster and a huge black grabbed his arms. M'Tembu shouted, "Tie him to the stake. Leave him until the sun sinks in the West and the shadow of night is ready to fall. When night comes—and the *tabu* is not made good, if the one who has stolen the *ju-ju*'s head-band is not here—you must pay with your life! Leave him!" He gestured to Sclecht. "I will speak with him further." Turning on his heel he strode away.

"You see!" Sclecht said to the struggling Rex Ryder. "I told you! They'll get him, anyhow. And what good will it do you to suffer like this, strapped like a chicken to that damned stake. M'Tembu was all for killing you here and now but I talked him out of it. Now, maybe, I can manage to make him see that killing you isn't going to be a good idea."

As Sclecht strode away, following the Chief, Rex Ryder's eyes followed him. Slowly a light began to dawn in him. So it was Sclecht's talk that had brought matters thus far! Sclecht? Pretending to be his friend, yet working against him! But why? What was the motive? and why had M'Tembu forgotten the long days of friendship and made of him a hostage? There was no answer to these disturbing thoughts.

But, very soon, there was something else to think about. There was the swift foray of a platoon of warriors, their plumes dancing as they ran hither and yon, setting up a strong pole in the center of the *kraal*, a stake. And then, seized quickly and hustled toward it, Rex Ryder sensed the awful fate they planned for him if those diamonds were not recovered. He was tied hand and foot to the stake. Near him a large fire was laid, needing only the touch of the torch to make of him, too, a living flame!

The sun swung lower in his fiery arc. Lower still, until its rays shot gold and crimson, crimson like blood newly shed, like the flames of the fire that would soon be lit—and still there was no sign of Derek Holmesley—no sign of the *tabu* head-band.

"IT is written," M'Tembu said sternly, gazing at Rex Ryder's contorted face as he struggled in his bonds. "It is written that the *ju-ju* must be avenged.

And here is the keeper of the *ju-ju*, Molada, the witch-doctor of the tribe M'bassa to see that the tribal vengeance is carried out fittingly. Where is He-That-Kills-in-the-Night, O *bwana* Ry-Der? Call him forth to thy aid—or else you die. Call him!"

Rex Ryder was a strong man. Above all he hated cowardice yet something in the implacable visage of the giant chief, something in the glittering eyes of Molada that shone through his horrid mask, something in the ghastly grin of Sclecht, made him suddenly yell forth with all the power of his lungs:

"Holmesley! Derek Holmesley! Where are you—where are you?"

And as if the echo of his voice was ringing in the *kraal* a voice cried weakly, "I'm coming, Mr. Ryder! Holmesley's here!" and out from the green wall staggered the man they sought, his face as drawn and weary as when first he staggered into Ryder's camp. His clothes were literally stripped from him, blood drenched him where the cruel bush thorns had clutched his hurrying form, sweat and dirt co-mingled on his head to form a veil from which his burning eyes sought the man who had befriended him. *Assegais* rose like silver leaves before the wind. Only a word was needed to leave Derek Holmesley shredded bloodily before them.

But that word did not come, despite Sclecht's yell of triumph and cruelty. "Kill him!" he suddenly screamed. "Kill him, despoiler of temples!" but M'Tembu waited and Molada waited—for such are the ways of the African native who savors long and well of his vengeance and knows well how merciful is sudden death. There was no mercy in those muddy, hate-filled eyes as Derek Holmesley staggered onward, his arms flailing weakly.

"I didn't do it," he panted, reaching Rex's side and collapsing beside him. "I didn't do it, M.. Ryder! If I did—I was drunk—and the jewels are gone. I can't find them—anywhere! Believe me, boss, I haven't got them!"

But rough, ungentle hands seized him and very soon he was strung up in the place that Ryder had occupied. His agonized face appealed mutely to the man he worshipped and Ryder swung on M'Tembu in a rage.

"O, You-Who-Listen-to-Men-with-Snakes'-Tongues!" he shouted fiercely, pointing at Sclecht. "Is it for this that I have been the friend of M'Tembu for many years? Is there so little faith, M'Tembu, that you can dare to think of sacrificing me—or any of my family? What of him?" His finger, shaking with anger, pointed at the face of Sclecht. "Is he then not as guilty as I? Is he not of my family as thy son's daughter and thy daughter's son are of they family?

"And—" he continued, swinging on the witch-doctor, "since when has a thief or a murderer been so dealt with? Is there not the 'smelling-out' *ju-ju*, O mighty witch-doctor, which will tell the *right one*? Is it not true that thou, and thou alone, can 'smell out' He-That-Kills-in-the-Night and He-That-Steals-the-Stones-That-Shine? This I demand! Release him—" and he gestured to the squirming figure of Derek on the stake, "or there will come a greater *ju-ju* than M'bassa has ever known and burn thy *kraal* to the ground and lay thy warriors in rows like the winnowed mealie patches of the Kaffirs. Let us hear what the warriors say? Let us hear what M'Tembu says to this!"

"Ai-eceeee!" A wailing chorus greeted these words. "Ai-eeee! It is true, O Chief! Let us have the 'smelling-out.' Then it cannot be said to the white soldiers that we of the M'bassa sacrificed an innocent man!"

"It is well, O *bwana* Ry-Der!" M'Tembu said, finally. He made a gesture.

Derek was quickly released but Rex had to support him on his weakened legs. Then, sitting in a circle, all the men and warriors of the tribe assembled, the three captives in the arc of the circle facing the Chief, Molada began to "smell-out" his victim. They could see the glitter of his eyes behind the hideous mask of animal horns and human hair that surmounted his head. The clink and clatter of his bracelets. The gleam and shine of lion's claws and monkey's paws and the rattling accompaniment of dried seeds in tiny gourds attached to his wrists and ankles. He danced.

HE began to whirl, slowly. The drums beat softly, hands drawn lightly over them. As they increased their tempo so

Molada whirled faster and faster until he was spinning like a top. The weird, unearthly sight fascinated Holmesley, and even Ryder and Sclecht were transfixed by the devilish dance.

"*Bom - ba - bom - boom - a - bom - bom-a-boom!*" The drums thudded louder. Molada suddenly ceased his gyrations. His eyes must have closed behind the mask. He swayed gently and then began to drop, slavering like a dog, like a jungle beast, emitting little mewling cries—all animal, all horrible.

The circle of men were rendered dumb and terror-stricken as he began to range them, smelling them out as a hound will smell, snuffing their odor, rubbing close to them with his own stench increased by the sweat that ran down his body. Goggling, their eyes like prawns, the natives seemed chilled and frozen as the witch-doctor's hideous mask came nearer and nearer. Slowly he approached the white men, slowly yet inexorably. But he passed them and went round the circle. The drums rose to a frenzied thunder and he leaped about like a wild beast, leaped and threw himself in the air.

Suddenly, running on all fours, he raced to the white men and began to snort and snuff among them. To Derek Holmesley his hideous mask bent and the weakened man's mouth flew open, flew open to show his tongue, wet and drooling. Saliva ran down his lips and chin.

Molada moved on. Again, suddenly, he threw his head forward and Rex opened his mouth in a silent cry. Molada whirled, swept toward Sclecht, his nose snuffing like a beagle. And Sclecht's dry tongue came out, seeking to wet his lips. But, literally, as it is said in the Bible, his tongue, "clove to the roof of his mouth" and Molada shrieked triumphantly.

His bony finger shook as he pointed to the cringing Cape Towner. "That is the One-Who-Kills-in-the-Night," he screeched above the din and uproar of two score screaming voices and the hammer of drums. "This is the man who stole the head-band of our tribal god!"

Sclecht's terror-driven legs sprung him in the air in a leap that carried him over the nearest man. Incredibly swift he made for the shelter of the jungle. But long before he reached it a silver streak flew

from the hand of M'Tembu, a broad flat silver streak with a thin, black tail—and Sclécht's gurgling death-scream rattled as his heart was split in two. The *assegai* of M'Tembu quivered in the corpse.

* * * *

MURDER will out," they said. And in Derek Holmesley's case murder *did* out eventually when a native boy—whom Jenks had ill-treated—dying from the attack of a leopard, blurted out the truth of that affair in Portuguese East Africa. Cleared of that charge hanging over him, once more a man among men, Derek gladly accepted Rex Ryder's offer of partnership.

If you ever need two top-notch men for *safari*, men who are afraid of nothing, they're ready to take you into the heart of wildest Africa.

But those who go on *safari* with Rex Ryder and Company are always surprised at the excessive hospitality shown by a certain tribe of elephant-hunters, the little-

known tribe of M'bassa, whose Chief is M'Tembu, Elephant and Killer of Elephants.

Nothing is too good for the tall American and his smiling British companion. The *kraal* of M'Tembu and everything within it, is at the disposal of the *bwanas*. And there is a queer, enigmatic grin on the face of the witch-doctor, Molada, as he shows visitors the diamond head-dress of the tribal *ju-ju*. He listens to their exclamations of wonder with a tolerant smile.

For Molada, who is a savage, also knows a great deal of the art of making people believe they have done something evil or something good. Just as the late Hans Sclécht, who had once studied to be a doctor but had fallen into evil ways, knew the power of suggestion—hypnotic suggestion!

It is peculiar but nobody seems to know where Hans Sclécht is buried.

Perhaps, in his own words, he is with his own kind—among the jackals?

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JUNGLE GODDESS

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

CRUDELY carved out of a monolith in the shape of a wide-lapped ape, the enormous throne filled the bottom of the crypt. Its arms were the ape's

arms—each of them must have weighed a half ton. The wide, chunky jaws of the simian head topping its back, were open in a lurid grin.



Fierce and unswerving was the Jungle's allegiance to the wing-footed white goddess—all but Mahmoud the Slaver, who bowed to no law but his own brute strength.

Massive as the throne was, it did not dwarf the appalling mummy sitting on it. Twice the size of a modern human being, the awesome skeleton was knotty with shreds of desiccated flesh and draped in rusty-colored robes studded with golden disks. The look of infinite sadness of the face of that wasted cadaver—all cavernous and empty eyesockets, jutting cheekbones and bare blackened teeth—was enhanced

by the golden band clamped around its skull.

A dozen of smaller skeletons were chained to the enormous stone slab supporting the throne. Around them were orderly rows of alabaster urns and weapons, with gorgeous alabaster hilts and rust-eaten blades.

Dr. Davies gasped:
"A chapter of the forgotten history of

Equatorial Africa is coming out of the mystery of the ages."

The other members of the scientific expedition—Mrs. Davies; Rafferty, the famous physician; Colonel McNeil; Goldman, the philanthropist and scholar who had financed the expedition; and the young archeologists Douglas, Leiden and Morris—all voiced their approval. But, far from being elated by a legitimate sense of pride, they felt a grim uneasiness.

At length Douglas pulled at his shock of sandy hair and rumbled:

"I wonder if there's some truth in the belief that the priest-sorcerers of antiquity placed avenging wraiths in the graves of their contemporary rulers."

"Certainly not! But I think I can explain by which psychological twist you came to think of that rot," Dr. Davies puffed. "You're dog tired, like the rest of us. That's why the sight of that giant cadaver affects your momentarily unsound nerves."

"Nerves or no nerves, there's a curse in the snarls of the chained skeletons of these poor menials, who died of starvation in the darkness near the rotting corpse of their king. And that horrible odor of stale myrrh, acrid dust and decay which seeps from the soil beneath them is the foul breath of death, hungering for new victims!" Mrs. Davies shivered. Then her voice rose to a hysterical pitch: "Good Lord, Clark! What's that smoke film coming out of the king's mummy?"

The negro porters were leaping pell-mell out of the excavation, as if the very devil was chasing them. For a mist was enveloping the head of the giant mummy, and through it loomed the horrid apparition of empty eyesockets and long, bare teeth, clenched in a deathless grip between the fleshless jaws.

Then a wind moaned in the jungle outside; and, like a menacing devil sinking out of sight at the bid of an all-powerful necromancer, the king's mummy began to crumble. A cloud of saffron dust gushed out of its disintegrating mantle; its huge hands broke and fell in a shower of minute pieces from the arms of the throne; the big bony breast caved in.

Finally the skull tumbled onto the shapeless mound of the throne seat. Out of the dirty mess of debris a golden crown

stuck out, like a piece of discarded theatrical bric-a-brac.

"Too bad," Dr. Davies regretted. "What a priceless subject of study that ancient king would have been, if I had succeeded in carrying him intact to civilization! But the rarefied atmosphere of the crypt preserved his remains for centuries—and a waft of fresh air disintegrated them!"

"You can still get plenty of anthropological data from his shattered bones. And, see what an archeological treasure you have in all these vases and weapons!" Mrs. Davies comforted him.

MRS. DAVIES was a strong, beautiful woman who being inordinately fond of her scientist husband had insisted in sharing the hardships of the archeological expedition with him.

The Davies had a four-year-old daughter, unusually sturdy and tall for her age. Mrs. Davies would have preferred to leave the child at home, but in the lady's opinion none of their near relatives could have cared properly for her little June. Therefore, rather than entrust her to the dubious care of her family, she had brought her along and hired as a nurse the daughter of a Belgian missionary.

Unfortunately, the very satisfactory Mlle. Tournier had stuck a leg between two boulders and fractured an ankle while bathing in a stream, shortly after the arrival of the expedition in the Chari territory of Equatorial Africa.

A few reliable porters were conveying her to the infirmary of Fort Archambault when the expedition reached a Sara Massa village, where Mrs. Davies' attention was caught by Bwassa, a towering negress shaped like an ebony statue and endowed with a tireless constitution and the strength of a professional wrestler.

Bwassa had been sold early in marriage by her father to a warrior and hunter for a string of goats and four lengths of shiny copper wire. Unlike most Sara Massa women, she had found her mate to her liking and had been overjoyed when she had given birth to a child. Unfortunately, a few weeks later, her husband Ngouro was killed in a combat with some Djinge raiders.

Bwassa was not loud in mourning her mate; but her sorrow was as deep as that

of a dog who has lost her master.

One day, she went to wash her loin cloth. She placed her infant in the shade of a bush, scanned the shallow water to make sure that no crocodile hid in it, and kneeled into the mud. A swarm of birds, perched on some nearby trees, mocked her with their strident chirping.

Bwassa volubly cursed them; but soon her jaws got tired of wagging.

It was a sultry afternoon. The sun shone on the wavelets in the middle of the stream. When the birds flew away, Bwassa's idle brain began working. Vision after vision of the days when her husband bathed in that very watercourse and of the play of the gleaming water-drops, running over his black body, formed in her frustrated imagination. Finally the monotonous rustling of the rushing stream, the cadenced slapping of her hands in the water and her brain-sapping desperation hypnotized her in a gloomy trance.

The loin cloth was thoroughly washed; but Bwassa still kneeled in the mud, with her head down on her breast, when an agonized wail rang.

Bwassa jerked her head around, saw a slinking tawny shape dragging her babe away by the neck. With a single motion she grabbed her spear and jumped to her feet.

But when she catapulted to the rescue the leopard was climbing a tree with its prey in its jaws.

Quick as an ape, Bwassa followed. But the four agile clawed paws of the leopard were quicker than her long human limbs. When she reached an aerial bridge that the top branches of the tree made with the entwined branches of another tree, a mess of blood drops on the leaves warned her that the spotted killer had made good its escape.

During the remainder of the day, Bwassa searched for her infant. Her reasoning told her that her quest was useless, that the leopard had killed and devoured her child, but she refused to accept her loss. When her hope faded, her heart broken rage became a mad, killing lust. She wanted to locate the savage leopard and pin it on the ground or on a branch with a spear thrust. She wanted to hack its paws, its spotted sides, with her heavy knife, enjoying every bit of its agony.

Only when the sun faded beyond the western edge of the horizon did she realize that it was useless to scour the jungle any longer. Bent, with her mouth twisted in a savage snarl and her eyes red with fatigue, she returned to her village.

SHE spent that night curled like a dog in her hut. The next morning she squatted before its entrance with her hands in her lap. Various tribesmen spoke to her but she failed to answer. And from that day on, she passed most of her time in this manner.

Gangara, the witch doctor of the village, made a potent and very evil smelling stew of frogs, snakes' fangs and unmentionable powders. But to no avail. Then, importantly rolling his eyes and gesturing back and forth with his bony hands, he boomed:

"The all-powerful spirits of the air have no secrets for me. They whisper in my ears: 'Great sorrow stole Bwassa's soul. Only great happiness can restore her reason.'"

The necessary great happiness was furnished by Mrs. Davies. For hearing Bwassa's story from the Alifa, or village chief, Kussumba, she regaled the bereaved negress with two lengths of gaudy red and yellow calico and a shiny copper bracelet studded with multi-colored glass beads.

Here was indeed wealth, and the acme of beautiful fashion, according to Sara Massa standards! Turned instantly into the social leader of the village, Bwassa bared all her teeth in a wide grin when all her fellow tribeswomen enviously crowded around her, jabbering their admiration.

That same evening Mrs. Davies offered to hire her. Bwassa enthusiastically agreed. The inordinate liking that she showed at once for little June and her willingness to obey, turned her into a fair nursemaid after a short training.

The porters didn't like Bwassa though. Every time they tarried in obeying an order of Dr. or Mrs. Davies, she sped them on with a well aimed stone, or with a pile-driving blow or kick if they happened to venture within striking distance of her long limbs.

In the very moment that the awesome skeleton of the ancient king was dis-

covered, a fit of peevishness convulsed little June.

"Wassa!" she cried, "I want my mamma and my papa!"

Firmly planted on her widely spread legs and with her muscular torso slightly thrown back, Bwassa affectionately stared at her.

"Petite Ju," she crooned in a mixture of French, pidgin English and Sara dialect, and with a soft voice that ill matched her towering appearance and the four-inch-wide dagger stuck into her girdle. "Your papa's white magic finds wonders of the long-dead. Your *maman* is with him."

"But I'm scared, Bwassa," June insisted.

It was the first time that the giant tribeswoman had seen the little white girl afraid. The superstitious imagination of the affectionate savage became alarmed. Shiny beads of nervous perspiration appeared on her small, egg-shaped and shiny skull.

"Ago-li!" Bwassa wailed, "may it be that the ghosts of the buried people fought with the totem ghosts of the white men and are beating them? And are the white ghosts screaming their pain and helplessness through Ju's mouth?" And, kneeling, she gathered the little girl in her powerful arms and shot frightened glances all around.

An ominous drumming rang in the distance. Gradually, it swelled into throbbing waves of thumping sounds; then it subsided in a scarcely audible tattoo. It had nearly died out when again it swelled, reached a pitch of sustained roar and seemed to fill all the surrounding jungles. Before long, the throbbing of a multitude of drums came from all points of the horizon.

"What's all the noise?" the child sobbed.

"They are *goudougoudous*. They talk of curses and great sorrow to come. Don't listen to them, little flower!" Bwassa panted and, to enforce her advice, clamped her big hands over June's ears.

Her touch was gentle and the modulation of her voice aimed to be reassuring. But the contraction of her face and the wild rolling of her eyes turned the child's fright into stark terror. Her sobs became ear-splitting screeches, until the receptive and naive Bwassa lost her self control and began to howl dismally.

The immense squatting negress and the

tiny white child were clutching each other and yelling at the top of their lungs, when Dr. and Mrs. Davies with the other members of the scientific expedition worriedly rushed into the camp.

ALL that remained of the dead king, and of the unfortunates who had been buried alive with him, was brought into camp in individual tin boxes, together with the most beautiful vases and weapons, when dinner was prepared by two porters and former regimental cooks of the Tirailleurs of Lake Tchad, under the skilled supervision of Mrs. Davies.

Unusually the members of the scientific expedition ate with the relish of men who work hard in the open. But that late afternoon they were too upset by the belated excitement of their discovery. The dishes placed before them had hardly been touched when Douglas blurted:

"The skeletons that we found presented the features of the so-called *Homo Atlanticus* race. But the vases and weapons buried with them are of pre-Grecian Cretan workmanship."

"That's indeed a riddle," Goldman replied. "The *Homo Atlanticus* people were tall, with reddish skins and well carved features—presumably dark-haired offshoots of the *Cro-Magnon* race; and, as far as science knows, they lived on the Northern coasts of Spain and Africa. But they never put foot in the Creta of the highly civilized Armenoids who were later conquered by the ancient Greeks."

Douglas wrinkled his pug nose.

"Perhaps," he said after a pause, "a migration of pre-historic Cretans reached this part of Africa first—and were eventually conquered by another migration of *Homini Atlantici*, who adopted their material culture, or craftsmanship. That would explain why the skeletons had no Cretan-Armenoid characteristics, but were surrounded by Minoan-Cretan vasea and weapons."

An approving smile softened the severe features of Goldman.

"What do you think of it?" he asked Dr. Davies. "In scientific matters you are our supreme court."

Before Dr. Davies could reply, all hell broke loose. Negro battle drums beat fiercely, gourds filled with pebbles rattled,

a clamor of savage shouts filled the air.

"Quick, get hold of your rifles!" Colonel McNeil roared, jumping to his feet.

The porters were all former soldiers of the French Tirailleurs or of the British King's African Rifles; quick as a flash they rushed to seize their weapons and to break open ammunition cases. Thus they were ready when a horde of black tribesmen in war attire came out of a green wall of dense thickets at a wild *tu* and spread all over the bare expanse confronting the Southern edge of the camp.

"They are unwashed Djinge, big as giraffes and lanky as skeletons. Look how the sun flashes on the points of their javelins and on the blades of their battle axes! Look how the ostrich plumes of their headmen wave in the wind, may the evil spirits lurching under ground reach out and drag them to perdition!" howled Bwassa, and fiercely got hold of her long spear; for there was rivalry and deep hatred between her Sara Massa nation and their racial kin, the Sara Djinge.

"Line up, fire a volley over their heads!" McNeil shouted at the top of his lungs. His bushy brows met over the bridge of his nose. His cheeks, purple as slabs of raw steak, set as hard as chunks of granite.

The crash of thirty firing guns followed his orders. The savage horde came to an abrupt halt.

"Douglas, put through a call to the nearest French fort while I make palaver. They are too dashed far, our Gallic friends, but they can avenge us if we get killed for our sins!" McNeil snarled. Then he shouted at the top of his lungs in a pidgin of French and Djinge dialect:

"Onward the *A*-lifa, the chief, the witch doctor or whoever else leads you, sons of shedding snakes!"

A TOWERING negro came out of the massed ranks of the embattled tribesmen. His face was smeared with white clay. Long white stripes painted along his arms and legs gave him the appearance of a walking skeleton. His breast was hidden by a wide necklace of entwined grass, bones and shriveled monkeys' paws.

"He's a witch doctor and he looks nasty and tough," Dr. Davies muttered. There was no fear in his lean face, but his glance

turned apprehensively to the shelter of piled up stones, built for such an emergency in the middle of the camp, where his wife had taken refuge with little June.

"No bullet can harm us," Mrs. Davies shouted to him, lifting her head above the parapet of their shelter. "But I don't see why you should stand in the open. You're a scientist and not a fighting man."

"In a pinch like this every man must lend a hand," Davies replied. He looked at his wife's animated, lovely face, and burst into laughter. "Damn it, I'll be hanged if I don't believe that you're enjoying the thrill of your life in all this uproar."

"Certainly!" Mrs. Davies said quickly. She confided to her husband, "I'm going to leave June here with Bwassa. I'm going to fire at your side."

"You'll stay where you are," Dr. Davies said sternly. "Otherwise I shall be so busy watching for you that I'll make a stupid target out of myself."

MORRIS and Leiden hastened to assemble the single machine gun of the expedition. It was their only hope against the vastly superior numbers of their opponents.

They were nearly through with their task when the Djinge witch doctor screeched:

"I'm Foutah N'Dio, I have great magic power! I speak for my people: It has been known along many, many generations of masters of sorcery of my people that on the beginning of all things the all-powerful totem spirits had bodily shapes.

"When men began to make magic, the evil spirits discarded their bodies and buried them in the jungle. But they said: 'Never touch the bodies that once were ours, or terrible will be our vengeance!'

"And now you, white men, have disinterred the forbidden relics! And we, the black men, will be destroyed on account of you!

"Bring the bones of the evil spirits into their graves before it is too late! Allow us to make magic and soothe the mighty wrath without interference!"

"If you don't . . ." the witch doctor's voice arose to a wild pitch, his long and scrawny arms waved madly. "If you don't —we'll kill you! We don't fear your guns!"

Because your bullets can kill some of us, but all our tribes shall die if the enraged evil spirits are not appeased!"

"Old brass hat, what will happen if they attack?" Goldman calmly asked.

"A fear greater than that of our firearms—the fear of the spirit world that doesn't exist—drives the black fools on. And they are many," McNeil growled.

Goldman shrugged. "Then, rather than exposing Mrs. Davies and the child to be spitted on two spears, let them have what they want. We can always return with a half company of soldiers to get the relics—after leaving Mrs. Davies and June in a French fort."

"What!" impulsively exclaimed Mrs. Davies, who had overheard him, "you are a bunch of sissies if you let a pack of adde-brained savages frighten you." Before any of the male members of the expedition could restrain her, she jumped out of her shelter and shouted in French:

"Your evil spirits are powerless. But many soldiers will burn your villages if you attack us!"

It was a brave answer; but it turned the witch doctor into a venomous raging maniac. Shaking his ceremonial club, which was topped by a monkey's skull, he hopped so frenziedly that the lion tail fastened to the rear part of his belt lashed out, giving him the appearance of a strange, gaunt skeletal beast. Then he turned to face the battle line formed by the porters, with foam pouring out of his mouth. McNeil saw his arm jerking back and frantically yelled:

"No, Foutah N'Dio! Wait . . ."

But the witch doctor spat in his direction and threw the club of the monkey skull.

Instantly bedlam broke loose. Javelins and throw-knives sailed through the air, flashed in the sun like bursting bubbles of melting silver. Muzzle-loaders fired with terrific noise. Then, out of the clouds of burning black powder, the tall Djinge tribesmen charged, howling like mad dogs.

The members of the scientific expedition and the porters fired at top speed. Every one of their bullets found its mark, but the catapulting black warriors leaped over their dead and wounded companions, plunged into the thin line of the defenders of the camp and broke it.

In a few moments, the fighting spread

all over the collapsing tents and around them. In the nick of time Dr. Davies, Goldman and the fat and bald Dr. Rafferty rallied around the crude shelter protecting Mrs. Davies and the child June, and were at once attacked from every side by a swarm of frenzied warriors. The heavy sword which struck at Dr. Davies' head turned in the fist of its owner, but the blow of the flat of the massive blade was enough to knock down the scientist. A score of spears, striking from every angle, pierced Goldman and Rafferty. The fat physician died with merciful quickness. Goldman, was pinned against a mound of boulders. With his left shoulder, arm, hip and thigh pierced by the spear blades, he kept on firing his rifle pistol-like with his right hand until its reservoir was empty. Then he struck weakly with the butt of the rifle at a big bearded savage and lost his senses.

The machine gun handled by Morris and Leiden began firing. The stream of bullets struck the closed packs of the Djinge from the flank, wreaking terrific execution, and broke their attack. The surviving porters took advantage of the respite that they thus got. They hastily banded into groups and countercharged with the recklessness of desperation.

Suddenly a frenzied yell of Douglas rang above the clamor of the combat:

"Lousy witch doctor, die!"

Followed an ear-splitting outburst of wild shouts; then, as the screaming subsided, a booming Djinge voice bellowed:

"Foutah N'Dio is dead! The spirits show that there's no respite, no hope for us!"

But Douglas, who had fired three bullets point-blank into the muscular belly of Foutah N'Dio lay dead also, hacked into a gory poultice by a tempest of striking axes and broad-bladed spears.

THE mob of fighting negroes spread. For a while the dust, lifted by scores of quickly trampling feet, formed a thick cloud, through which the black shapes of the Djinge and the porters leaped back and forth like fiends dancing in the smoky pit of hell; but the bursts of machine gun fire kept on systematically cutting down all the groups of Djinge who were not engaged in hand to hand struggles with the porters, until, disheartened by their mounting

losses, the Djinge fled wildly from the camp.

On the plain, their headmen attempted to rally them; but, by that time, Morris and Leiden were no longer restrained by the fear of hitting friends as well as foes; the machine gun fanned out, with a steady, angry rattling, and down went headmen bedecked with ostrich plumes and stark naked Djinge warriors.

A couple of minutes later all the Djinge still able to run rushed headlong into the jungle from which they had come. All firing ceased. In the almost unreal silence which succeeded to the ear-splitting uproar of the combat, myriads of flies swarmed out of the crushed grass and, buzzing, alighted over the dead and the wounded.

THE first words of Dr. Davies on recovering his senses were: "Is June safe?"

"Yes," his wife said brokenly, "but Douglas and Rafferty are gone. Goldman is dying. And McNeil! I shall never forget the horror of his hacked body . . . we recognized it only by his size eleven shoes."

Dr. Davies' head felt as if red hot hammers were pounding on it, and the brassy vibrations of the eddies of heat haze dancing in mid-air stung his eyes like needles. But, biting his lips, he managed to arise and stumbled up to the place where Goldman lay on a blood-soaked blanket.

"Perhaps," he muttered to Morris and Leiden, who worked feverishly on the wounded, "if you could stop the hemorrhage . . ."

"They can't. And they ought to stop soiling their clothes with my gore. It is journey's end for me, Davies." Goldman smiled weakly. He had difficulty in breathing and a pink foam kept on dribbling out of the corners of his mouth.

"His lungs are pierced," Davies was thinking vaguely, when the dying man stammered:

"My friend . . . you have done your best . . . but listen to me . . . forget our discoveries and all researches . . . make a bee-line for home, with your wife . . . and little June." Then he closed his eyes and without a moan, without a single jerk, he went limp from head to foot and died.

Davies stared at his inert body for a

long time. Then he kneeled and covered it with a tent cloth. When he rose again, the brassy hue was leaving the sky. But the nerve-wracking wail of the wounded, begging water, was already turning the serenity of the sunset into a nightmare.

WHEN the three surviving scientists looked for the remains of the ancient dead and the precious vases taken from the crypt, the chief porter regretted:

"While the fighting was fiercest, some Djinge took them and *vite, vite*, carried them away!"

"Cursed luck!" Morris snarled. "There's nothing left for us but to accept the last advice of Goldman and go back to America empty handed."

"No!" Dr. Davies grated. "On point of death, Goldman thought only of our safety. But I'm sure that the Djinge's mind was cooled by the beating that we gave them. By now, they must be thinking of penalties that the inevitable French punitive expedition will clamp on them. I don't anticipate much trouble in getting the relics back."

THE next morning, the wide trail of bloodstains left by the defeated tribesmen led them to the Djinge village.

The spirit of the Djinge was indeed crushed, and the fear of the black Tirailleurs of the French kept them huddled into their huts. From the darkness within, the white eyeballs of the warriors nursing wounds, of negresses and pot-bellied children, anxiously followed every movement of Dr. Davies.

Only an immense and stooped headman named Koro-Koro—the new Alifa who had taken the late Foutah N'Dio's place as a chief, dared to come to meet him.

Davies bluntly asked for the return of the relics, Koro-Koro promptly offered goats, stores of millet, ivory. When all these propitiatory gifts were curtly refused, he cringing explained:

"The witch doctors, trained in secret practices of Yondo by Foutah N'Dio, brought the magic spoils to the forbidden land of dead that walks."

"Give me a guide. Describe me the exact spot where the witch doctors are burying them!" Dr. Davies exclaimed angrily.

The chief threw himself face down on

the ground and poured dust on the woolly back-of his head.

"I'll give you one, two guides!" he screeched. "But you'll die also, and the French will be angrier than a wounded elephant! Their punishment will be terrible!"

"I promise that you shall not suffer for whatever shall happen to me in your confounded land of Death-That-Walks. But send the guides to my camp. Tomorrow morning, at sun-down," Davies commanded. And, without another word, he left the Djinge village.

THE land of Death-That-Walks was a district infested with the black, whirling, airplane-shaped tse-tse flies, carriers of sleeping sickness. Had McNeil been alive, he would have restrained the Davies, Morris and Fichte from entering it. Had Rafferty been spared by the Djinge spears, he could have managed to keep them healthy. As it was, a fortnight later the surviving members of the scientific expedition, who had relied too much on germ-killing ointments to destroy the venom of the tse-tse flies' bite, were all attacked by the terrible sickness.

When he recognized the terrible symptoms, Dr. Davies decided to reach Fort Archambault by forced marches. But about two hundred and fifty miles of jungles and difficult bush country separated his decimated party from that military post and its infirmary. He personally put through a radio call for help, but the answer was not encouraging. The post commander announced that he was despatching patrols to help the stricken scientists. He mentioned an easily recognizable village as the best meeting point. But he warned also that he doubted that Dr. Davies and his companions could reach it in time, or locate it.

TWO days later, the foggy-brained Morris carelessly walked under the low branches of a banyan and was pounced upon by a leopard who crouched in ambush over them. Leiden rushed to the rescue; but the incipient disease affected his eyesight and imparted an inconquerable tremor to his arms. Four times he fired and missed. Finally the leopard bit off a chunk of muscle and jugular vein out of

the neck of the unfortunate Morris, then turned on Leiden and horribly clawed him and a porter before it could be despatched.

The next day Leiden and the porter died and were buried beside Morris; and five porters became walking dead—entered that stage of the sleeping sickness where the brain ceases to function and the body becomes a senseless automaton.

Eight porters remained healthy. But stark fear cowed them.

That same night, while couples of shiny-green dots—eyes of ravenous beasts of prey—restlessly circled in the pitch-black darkness outside the barrier of flaming branches built all around the camp; and while the air rang with thunderous howls, snarls and the horrid laughter of the hyenas, the eight porters squatted and spoke fearfully of age-old rules that no man can break, and of the curse which was destroying all the members of the expedition.

The following morning nobody came into the tent when Dr. Davies called weakly for some warm tea. Bwassa, who slept like a faithful dog beside June's cot, arose and went to investigate.

A few minutes later she returned, stammering:

"The apelings without courage or honor are gone. Only the sick remain with us!"

Dr. and Mrs. Davies were too spent to realize that desertion eliminated their last hope. They fell down on their cots and sank into a stupor.

The towering Bwassa stared at their inert forms for a long time.

Eventually, her primitive brain reached the conclusion that it was up to her to save her beloved little Ju, who had not been contaminated by the deathly poison of the tse-tse. But it was typical of Bwassa that her mind focused on the necessity of fighting the wrath of the evil spirits with a ruse, and with magic. Gangara, the Sara Massa witch doctor of her own village, was, in Bwassa's estimation, the only man who could insure June's safety. But, how was she going to rush June to Gangara, as long as Dr. and Mrs. Davies lingered between life and death?

"I cannot wait," Bwassa decided. "I cannot, alone, keep away the beast of the jungle at night, and take care of so many dying people in daytime, and cater to Ju. Why shouldn't those who are the prey of

the evil spirits die quickly—so that Ju may be saved?"

Having made up her mind, Bwassa lost no time in acting. While June still slept she ran into the jungle and gathered an armful of poisonous herbs. Then she mashed them and collected almost a quart of deadly juice in a pot.

For the remainder of the day, she comforted June by telling her that rescuing white men were coming. But, when night came and the child went to sleep on her cot, she forced Dr. and Mrs. Davies and the sick porters to drink the poison.

The venom was potent. They all died quickly and without much pain.

At sunrise Bwassa opened a passage through the still smoking embers of the fire she had built all around the tiny camp, and carried all the dead porters into the jungle.

Then she buried the emaciated bodies of Dr. and Mrs. Davies, and the salvaged bones, vases and weapons of the dead people.

That done she muttered a call for the evil spirits owners of the relics. The rising of a morning breeze she interpreted as their whispered answer. Fear for a moment stilled her tongue. Then she stammered that she had killed to honor them, and on condition that little June should be spared for two moons.

LITTLE June eventually awakened with Bwassa grinning and hopping around her cot. Before the child could ask what had happened to her parents, the towering negress announced that soldiers had come during the night and carried them to a healing place.

"The soldiers left you with me because I told them that I must bring you to a man of great magic of my race, who'll cleanse your life of all curses," Bwassa concluded.

The condition of her parents for the last three weeks, and the awesome look of their dessicating faces, had shocked and frightened the child so that Bwassa's declarations failed to add to the bewilderment of her little mind.

"When shall I see mother and daddy again?" she asked weakly.

"In as many days as are fingers in the hands of four men—and, by that time, they'll be well, they'll love you much, and give you many gifts!" Bwassa chortled.

The dazed child accepted the explanation because her mother had always approved Bwassa's untiring devotion; and, moreover, Bwassa had gained her love and confidence.

It was not yet noon when the big negress gathered the little white girl in her arms and began her journey toward her distant village.

"I spared my masters the long agony of the living death. I fooled the ghosts of the ancient people for the time that I need to carry Ju to Gangara, who'll chain them all again underground with his potent magic."

So Bwassa reflected, and was very much pleased with her wisdom and shrewdness. But it was typical of her that being unable to use a rifle she disdained to take along one of the firearms left in the camp by the deserters.

DURING the following ten days, the jungle-wise negress carried June safely over hardly recognizable paths winding through marshes and quicksands. But when she recognized the approaches to her village all her caution faded in a jabbering of happy promises.

June didn't understand what she was talking about, but was pleasantly excited by that outburst of gaiety. Blotted against the perspiring breast of Bwassa, and supported by her right arm, she playfully patted the shaft of the spear clutched in her right fist.

As the negress walked in the shade of a steep wall of rocks, the child, laughing, glanced at the dense bushes that topped them. Suddenly a shrill cry came from her lips.

Alarmed, Bwassa lifted her head. Stark terror dilated her eyes at the sight of a black panther leaping out of the bushes. The wide open mouth of the panther was as red as blood, its fangs gleamed white against the sable of its muzzle as its sleek, black body streaked through the air.

Bwassa had hardly time to drop June and lift her left arm in an instinctive gesture of defense. Painful tongues of fire seared it from shoulder to wrist as the cruel claws of the panther ripped it.

Her ear-splitting screams rent the air, mixed in a nerve wracking uproar with the panther's growls; but even in that su-

preme moment the big negress did not forsake her little Ju.

Clear of the white child, she leaped, but the weight and rending fury of the panther pivoting and clawing on her shoulders forced her down on her knees. There was such power in her muscles, however, that in a paroxysm of desperation she managed to toss the panther off, and to stab at its furred body as it struck the ground.

The panther quickly rolled on its back, and instead of severing its spine the spear blade broke two of its ribs and carved a big slash on its side.

The stunning power of the blow paralyzed the jungle killer for a fleeting instant. Bwassa saw the long hair heaving on its belly, the gory chunks of flesh torn from her back still sticking to its thrashing claws, and again struck. But pain and loss of blood already weakened her muscles. The spear dug a deathly hole into the panther's intestines, but failed to pit its twisting body down.

The next instant the panther's fangs closed on the shaft and broke it as if it were matchwood. Then, spitting and snarling, it crouched, whipping the ground behind her rump with her tail like an enraged house cat.

Bwassa knew how wild is the last leap and how deathly the grip of a fatally injured beast of prey. Gritting her teeth to master her pain, she hastily got hold of her heavy knife and stared at the play of the muscles under the panther's black fur.

When she saw them swelling, she quickly brought her arm up.

The next instant, a whirlwind of black fury sped from the ground in a lightning leap, but just as fast was the flashing of the heavy knife under the sun. The wide blade thudded, a terrific snarl rent the air, and the panther, its leap broken, struck out with outstretched paws and cruel, hooked claws. Then the panther fell, with its lower jaw almost sheared off, and Bwassa stumbled back with two ragged gashes in her breast.

Swaying on her heels, the big negress recovered her balance and glared at the panther, which hugged the ground with its outstretched paws. Long shivers of pain ran along the mud-smeared back of the wounded beast of prey, a gush of blood

spurted from its broken muzzle, but its fierce green eyes shone with all the fury of hell.

The fatal wounds had deprived its muscles of their power, but the very fading of its life heightened its indomitable ferocity. Soon the panther's back arched for a last leap.

Bwassa repressed a moan and tightened her grip on her knife. When the panther sprang her arm swung. A snarl and an ear-splitting howl rang almost instantaneously as the panther, unable to twist its body in midair, met the terrific blow which split the base of its skull.

UNABLE to believe that the terrific struggle was over, Bwassa stared at the last panting of the dying beast of prey. Only when its carcass stretched out on a bedding of decaying leaves, quivered and remained still, did all nervous tension leave the bleeding negress and a sudden fit of infinite weariness filled her with a mad desire to throw herself face down onto the muddy soil of the jungle. Then, through the roar of faintness filling her ears, she heard the horrified wailing of June.

"Alla . . . alla . . . Little one, I must bring you to . . . Gangara. . . ." Bwassa sighed. But slippery blood ran down her arms, seeped into her hands. The effort of holding her heavy knife became too much for her, so she allowed it to slip between her gory fingers and to sink into a muddy pool.

Bwassa knew that she couldn't patch her wounds properly. Thereby she just stuck moss into the gaps in her breast, and choked:

"Little Ju, walk at my side. I'm too tired to even hold your hand."

At first little June shrunk from the bubbling gore drenching the Bwassa body. Only a second and angry urging induced her to walk whimpering at the negress' side.

When they finally came in sight of the village, the screams of a woman and a buck warrior sent a swarm of men, women and children streaming out of the gate to meet them.

Shortly after, in the middle of the ring formed by her fellow tribesmen, Bwassa gave up the struggle of keeping on her feet and fell backward in a faint.

WHEN she recovered her senses, the villagers had stepped closer and she saw, as if from the bottom of a well, the wizened features of Gangara, the witch doctor, the puffy face of the Alifa Boussome bending over her, and, high above, a fleecy white cloudlet drifting lazily in the angry blue of the sky.

"Do you recognize me, hurt as I am?"

Bwassa gasped.

"We do, accursed female! Where have you left your masters?" Gangara croaked suspiciously.

Bwassa weakly gazed at the circle of black ankles and big, sprawling feet at a level with her prostrate body, then her glance lifted and she saw fear and awe on scores of contracted faces. "I can't tell the truth," she thought, agonizedly. "If I were strong and healthy I could persuade Gangara to make magic for little Ju's sake. But soon I'll be dead. And alone, with an accursed reputation, Ju would be doomed . . . they would carry her into the jungle and leave her to die as unlucky. . . . No. . . . I must secure a place for my little white mistress in the village . . . and die hoping that her white gods may gather enough strength to drive away from her the revengeful ghosts of the long dead people."

"Why don't you answer?" Gangara insisted, baring his toothless gums and angrily screwing his blearily eyes.

"My white masters were benignant sorcerers," Bwassa replied, "they melted themselves into smoke and entered the body of this white child—of their daughter, who'll grow with all their keen judgment and power in her. Already there's great luck and magic in this little one!"

"A few days ago . . . a buffalo charged me . . . and she stopped it with a wave of her puny white hand!"

"A life for many lives! I thought of my dead husband and child. . . . I thought of the lives of you, my people. . . . I offered myself to the totem-ghosts of the panther, and lion, and crocodile totems, to add their magic and strength to hers. . . .

"Now I'm dying. But little Ju will protect our tribe. No achievement will be too great for you, with her in your midst."

Gangara and Boussome shot dubious glances at June who stared at them, biting her lips to avoid bursting into sobs.

"But you must take good care of her." Bwassa's voice was growing weaker. "Because she will not make miracles for you until she believes you are worthy of her gratitude."

"We'll take care of her," Gangara finally decided in a croaky falsetto. And Boussome, in a cavernous basso, bellowed his endorsement.

Bwassa closed her eyes. Her faithful, one-track mind rejoiced in the thought that June was temporarily safe. She had not succeeded in solving the problem represented by the enemy evil spirits, but, somehow, that thought failed to alarm her any longer.

Thus Bwassa died quietly, thinking of her dead husband Ngouro, and of her babe that a leopard had stolen, as of tangible beings whom she was bound to meet in another life. And her last instants were happy because June's tiny hands were on her forehead and June's tears were falling on her face.

DURING the following month, June was treated kindly, but many refused to believe in her lucky powers.

Then a breathless hunter brought the news that a war party of Banda tribesmen were marching rapidly against the village.

The women vociferously reproached June for bringing bad luck. The warriors went out to battle. But they hardly came within sight of the advancing Bandas when the latter were suddenly charged and dispersed by a herd of enraged rhinoceroses coming out of a ravine.

It was the Bandas' fault. Trusting in their superior numbers to overcome the Sara Massa village, they had neglected to send ahead scouts who would have warned them to avoid the grazing grounds of ill-tempered rhinoceroses. But Gangara and Boussome saw a clear proof of June's protecting magic in that unforeseen event and were so emboldened that they ordered a headlong pursuit, which ended in the conquest and pillage of the Banda village.

Consequently, the Sara Massa warriors returned loaded with booty and driving before them all the goats of their unlucky enemies. Their women, who had spent the day mourning them for dead and waiting for the worst, went on a rampage of noisy joy. In an access of remorse, they con-

fessed abjectly to Gangara that they had insulted the white child.

At that, the rage of the witch doctor and of the Alifa Boussome knew no bounds. They ran amok, dispensing lusty blows right and left on the repentent tribeswomen, roaring at the top of their lungs that the patent show of ingratitude was bound to be punished with a misfortune as great as the triumph over the Bandas; and at last, to conciliate June, offered her all the copper wire captured in the Banda village.

The white child, of course, had no use for it and made them understand that she was returning it to them.

Gangara and Boussome took advantage of the situation to appropriate most of the gleaming wire, jewelry of the jungle tribes, and distributed the rest among the warriors. Shortly after, the witch doctor staged a great celebration which consecrated June's status and authority, and established a strict code of heavy punishments for whoever failed to serve and cherish her.

From that day on, the best and most nourishing food was June's for the asking. The tribeswomen catered to her and massaged her body when she was tired of romping around.

Perhaps on account of all these cares, and the strenuous life of endless playing and exercising in the open that she led, June's natural stamina developed to a far greater degree than is usual for a woman.

Thus, when she reached her fourteenth year of age, her strength and skill with all kinds of weapons was as remarkable as her golden beauty.

II

JUNE was fifteen years old when Mahmoud, a freebooter son of a Kredda marauder and a Salamat tribeswoman, surnamed himself Murzuk conqueror and sword of Allah, and declared that he was the successor of the deposed Sultans of Ouadai.

Mahmoud had a great barrel of a chest and arms reaching down to his knees. A shade shorter than six feet, he seemed much bigger on account of the thick shock of hair topping his long and bony face, which jutted at the corners of the jaws. A long and flat nose, flaring at the nostrils,

a pair of shifty, blood-shot and close-set eyes framed between thick eyebrows and high cheekbones, and thick, liver-colored lips ringed by a fuzz of black beard, gave him the look of a giant mandrillo.

It was his fierce appearance as much as his reckless courage and a reputation of cruelty awesome even in Ouadai, where the meaning of mercy is practically unknown, which had grouped around him a fast increasing band of cutthroats.

Mahmoud, however, was no fool. He knew that he could never become Sultan of Ouadai; but he hoped to become enough of a nuisance to induce the white authorities to buy him off with the leadership of a confederation of tribes or with a large sum of money.

Instead, a squadron of meharistes rode out of his knowledge over two hundred miles of blazing trails and suddenly swooped over his camp, located in a swale of the hottest part of the world—that is, of the immense depression east of Lake Tchad which is without streams or wells, and where the traveler finds water only in the hollow trunks of the widely scattered baobab trees.

The speed of Mahmoud's racing camel enabled him to escape. Realizing that his star had faded forever in Ouadai and in its surrounding wastelands, he sought a refuge in the territory of the Salamat people of his mother. There he warmly protested that he was a full Salamat at heart and fawned on the local chief until he was granted protection and full freedom. This generosity Mahmoud rewarded by establishing a contact with a band of slavers and murdering his benefactor.

In the black ivory trade Mahmoud prospered, until the generous prize offered by a slaver merchant of Sudan for a large consignment of captives induced him to commit the capital mistake of raiding a Salamat village.

The reaction of the strong and closely knit Salamat nation was all the more devastating, because they saw in his treachery a danger to be wiped out in blood.

By the hundreds they rallied to the call of their chiefs. They tracked down Mahmoud's band of slavers, closed in on them from every side and killed most of them. Hunted mercilessly and desperate,

Mahmoud decided to transfer his activities to Sara-Massa territory.

BY that time, Gangara, the witch doctor, succumbed of old age, and elephantiasis was killing the Alifa, Boussoume. The thickened flesh of his enormously swollen arms and legs had cracked and was split by deep gashes. Unable to move and racked by excruciating pain, he lay helplessly on his back. His agonized, deep-throated howls were audible far beyond the outer fringe of huts of the village.

Boussoume's misfortune had not affected June's reputation of luck because, since her arrival, the village's fields had given good harvests, and the goats' herds had multiplied. Moreover, no other enemies had appeared from the day of the rout of the Banda raiders.

The villagers believed that Boussoume was being punished by the invisible evil spirits of the air for some hidden sin of his past. As a result, his sons were barred from succeeding to him and every headman clamored for the leadership of the tribe.

All the old men and women never tired of croaking to June:

"*Uddah*, you must take one of them as your mate, and all the others will obey him as Alifa!"

But the very idea of such a union repelled the white girl.

She considered it her duty to help the village's children because Bwassa had protected her to the last breath of her life, and she loved the old fellows, who had catered to her needs when she was small and helpless. But nothing could have induced her to become the wife of a Sara Massa. Their cavernous nostrils, the rank odor emanating from their bodies, their coarse voices and their brutality repelled her sickeningly.

She could have curbed the headmen to her will, with the threat of her superior strength and skill with all kinds of weapons; but she didn't care to become the female Alifa of a negro community—a chieftainness forever harassed by the treachery of her browbeaten and revengeful headmen.

When death put an end to Boussoume's sufferings, the villagers' resentment at her refusal to marry took an ugly turn.

A fat negress went before June's hut and shouted:

"Your skin is as white as a crocodile's belly. If you don't want a Sara Massa as your mate, why don't you go back to the wilderness from which you came?"

Nobody came forward to silence her. June, deeply hurt, failed to reply.

It was a mistake on her part, because from that moment the villagers used whatever little wits they had to devise ways of insulting her. They broke into savage chants while she slept and dumped offal near her hut; they killed her fowls and mixed dirt with her hoard of millet while she hunted in the jungle.

Eventually June's patience wore thin. With her sword stuck into her belt and her spear in her hand, she cornered the most annoying tribesmen and challenged them to duels which they fearfully refused. Then she mercilessly thrashed the two huskiest tribeswomen.

That silenced the adults. But the children, principal object of her care, took up where their parents left off. They escorted her everywhere, howling curses and pelting her with stones; and no spankings or slaps could silence them.

A jungle negress would have tamed the whole bunch by gashing the heads of a few of them with the butt of a spear; but, in spite of her wild training, June had the heart of a white woman and couldn't bring herself to injure her little tormentors. The day came, however, when she announced that also the children had forfeited all rights to her protection and that she was about to leave the village forever.

Out of her knowledge, a grim punishment was overtaking the community. For Mahmoud's decimated band of slavers had captured two Sara Massa hunters and were forcing them to lead them toward the village.

IT was late in the afternoon when Mahmoud attacked.

The crash of the first volley of the slavers reawakened in June's mind the nightmarish vision of the Djinge charge against the scientific expedition of her father, and, by association of ideas, she could almost see Bwassa, drenched with gore, stumbling away from the carcass of the leopard and stretching a protecting hand toward her.

Forgetting her resentment, June shouted to the children to run out of the rear entrance of the village and to seek refuge in the jungle. When nobody followed her advice, she got hold of a little girl and a boy who happened to be near her. But the little girl was torn out of her grasp by her mother. The boy squirmed, kicked and finally bit her hand.

"That's too much!" June sobbed. "You hate me so that you don't want me to do anything for you! Work out your own salvation! I'm through with you!"

In that very moment, the foremost group of the invading slavers came running into the alley. Their victorious shouts died in their throats as to their utter amazement they suddenly saw the beautiful white girl. But they quickly forgot their surprise in a surge of brutal desire and ran toward her howling obscene taunts.

June was only an overgrown child. The crashing reports and the ferocity and deadly cunning of the slavers' faces terrorized her. With a few leaps she reached her hut, slung a bow and a quiver across her shoulders and grasped her spear.

When she again jumped into the alley, a compact swarm of slavers was filling it. June got a glimpse of the towering chieftain who led them and, ducked the lashing of his enormous arms, she stabbed out wildly, piercing a squat mulatto beside him and ran with an icy grip of terror clutching at her heart.

A slaver lifted his gun to shoot her down, but Mahmoud knocked him sprawling with a heavy blow.

"Dib! Dog!" he boomed. "I don't know how this white woman got here, but would you deprive me of the pleasure of her body? And of the gol' that she'll be worth to me when I tire of her?" Then he savagely roared to his whole pack: "Ari, ari! Run after the wild *nasrani*, grab her, bring her to me unharmed, or I'll tear the skin off your back!"

But the speed of the terrorized June was lightning-like. Panting curses, the pursuing slavers saw her flying blonde hair rounding the corner of one alley after another, streaking out of the village and into the jungle. Out of breath, they finally stopped at the foot of a *cram-cram* tree, beyond which her footprints ceased.

When Mahmoud overtook them, the old-

est slaver, a graybeard called Fadel, rasped lugubriously:

"She's not hiding on the branches above. Surely she was a *djinn*, who assumed human form just for the time necessary to fool us."

"A *djinn*!" Accursed hunk of carrion, all your years, all your experience, have they not put any sense in that hammerhead of yours?" Mahmoud roared at him. "She is only a white woman—made of flesh and blood even as you and I! Quickly! Climb that tree and seek for her."

The nimblest of the band hastened to obey the order. But they only succeeded in driving away a large and cawing bird, and in upsetting a nest, out of which a shower of eggs flopped over Mahmoud, who was anxiously waiting below.

The eggs were quite ripe, and smelly. Spattered with their stinking juice, Mahmoud savagely cursed when he realized that the white beauty had disappeared without leaving any traces.

Some time later the heartbroken Sara Massa rounded up in the conquered village confirmed him in his belief that June was no ghost at all, only a woman, with a dubious reputation of luck and able to swing from branch to branch like an ape.

"*Machtab*—destiny—enabled her to get away from you. Forget her!" Fadel, the rascally graybeard, advised. But Mahmoud glared furiously and shook his massive head in disagreement.

"I swear by Allah," he growled, "that I shall not rest until I capture that white ape-woman, dead or alive!"

AS soon as she felt sure that a safe distance separated her from her pursuers, June ceased swinging from tree to tree and continued her flight on the ground. When darkness came she dug a niche under an enormous boulder, built a fire before it and went to sleep.

Early the next morning she resumed her southward march. Her fear was gone—for many frightful events had crowded her short span of life, and in death she saw a familiar nemesis, ever ready to strike and unavoidable when the supreme moment came. But her mind and her whole nervous system were obsessed by a morbid dread of Mahmoud.

The slaver chieftain had suddenly come

in her life as an embodiment of everything she loathed. His gorilla-like arms and barrel chest, his massive head and heavy features were uglier than those of the worst looking negroes. But still worse were, in June's opinion, the venomous and ruthless cruelty and the unclean lust emanating like a tangible aura from his sinister figure. Somehow, her heart was chilled by a premonition that his destiny and hers were somehow entwined.

For several days, the thought of falling in Mahmoud's hands, or feeling the repellent touch of his big hands over her body and the abomination of his hot breath over her face, upset June so that, now and then, her body shook spasmodically and disconnected moans issued from her lips.

HOWEVER, as the days passed and the distance from the conquered Sara Massa village increased, her fears abated and she began to take an interest in the country she was crossing.

One morning she was carefully threading her way in a dark jungle thicket when the shrill challenge of an ape overhead froze her statuesque body. Quick as a flash, she pulled an arrow out of her quiver and bent her bow.

A few seconds passed. Then her sharp eyes saw a full grown chimpanzee, with two young apes clinging to her like frightened children. June's heart froze at the thought that perhaps the hanging parasitic festoons and the branches hid some enormous boa constrictor, with a hide too smooth and thick for her arrows, when she caught the glimpse of tawny forms moving on the branches above that on which the mother chimpanzee crouched.

June took quick aim, released the bow's string. Its twang was followed by a sharp snarl as a leopard tumbled from its perch, clawing helplessly at the leaves of the tree as it fell.

Fast as lightning was the stroke of June's spear on the thrashing leopard hitting the ground. The second stab drew a last dying moan from its throat.

June lifted her eyes from the slain beast of prey—and saw another and bigger leopard closing in on the chimpanzee, and a third one treading on the branch right above her. Before she could aim another arrow, the leopards sprang—the female

chimpanzee tore away her young ones from her breast and threw them down, then, lashing out with her long arms, she clutched both big cats in a frenzied hug.

The two little chimpanzees fell close to June who instinctively grabbed them and pulled them out of the way—just in time because immediately after their mother ape and the leopards fell in a single, balled tangle of crushing hair arms, tearing claws and savagely biting fangs.

For a fleeting instant June saw the face of the female chimpanzee—almost human in its heartrending expression of pain. A flattened, long-whiskered muzzle was pushing into her throat. Then the deafening howl of pain of a leopard with a snapping spine and the agonized squeals of the female chimpanzee mingled in a single, nerve wracking sound.

June danced excitedly around the three rolling, lashing beasts. Holding her spear poised, she watched closely for an opening. But the three animals fought and rolled too fast, and for several instants June didn't dare strike for fear that her spear might find its mark in the hairy, bleeding body of the ape.

Then, suddenly, the female chimpanzee was on her back, with the crippled leopard savagely biting her belly. A sob and a frenzied growl issued from June's throat and the other leopard, which had slashed the ape's jugular with its long canines, sprang up from the chimpanzee's weakly twisting body and leaped at the young woman.

But June was ready for him. There was all the fury of vengeance and pent-up exasperation in her stroke. Straight into the open mouth of the catapulting leopard went the long blade of her spear, severing tongue and throat, jutting out of the back of its spotted neck. But the very impetus of the leopard's leap was such that a foot of shaft went through the wound. To avoid the dying stab of its claws June was forced to leap quickly backward, releasing her spear.

SHE was finishing the two crippled beasts of prey with her sword when shrills, castanet-like rattlings of teeth and loud gurglings at once human and beastly rang in the sultry air of the jungle. Waddling on their short legs and waving their

long hairy arms, the two little chimpanzees were returning to their mother.

As they came abreast of June they looked at her, and there was a ludicrous challenge mixed with tears in their beady eyes. Then they threw themselves on the bloody body of the female ape. They caressed it and pulled at it; they stuck their bare flat faces on its bigger and motionless flat face; they made a show of anger when the dead ape failed to move. Finally an immense and inarticulate sorrow convulsed them. Their antics, at once funny and heart-rending, subsided. They squatted on their short legs, their little fat bellies heaving, their long arms slumping; and the fringe of beard-like hair encircling their bare chins stuck dejectedly into the long hair covering their chests.

After a while, their egg-shaped heads jerked up. Their capacious mouths opened widely and their wails rang discordantly through the jungle.

June didn't interfere, because she knew that her advances would have been met with tearing hands and savagely biting teeth by the two little apes as long as the body of their mother was warm. To while away her time she looked for a straight branch and built another spear shaft to substitute for the one cracked by the spitted leopard in its death throes.

The blade of the old spear was transferred to the new one and secured with freshly severed leopard's tendons which in drying were bound to fasten steely point to shaft as firmly as soldered metal, when finally the horror of death drove the two little apes from the cold carcass of their mother.

Not until then did June cautiously approach them. But it took her all the remainder of the day to convince them to accept food from her hands and to follow her.

JUNE was still busy with the training of the young apes when the fiery lash of an African drought hit the middle basin of the Chari. Alongside the rivers, the vegetation remained thick and green; but elsewhere, the marshes dried, the pools became stinking mudholes full of dead bugs and rotting leaves. All parasitic growths collapsed and decayed, giving forth a pestilential stench. Braying hippopotamuses

and ugly crocodiles, with caked mud smeared all over their scaly hides, lumbered along dusty jungle trails toward the river banks.

The disappearance of the screening vegetation, as well as the inability of the young chimpanzees to walk fast, slowed June's southward progress, enabling Kulikoro, a star-tracker sent by Mahmoud to catch up with her.

Kulikoro was a squat, pockmarked and brutish half-breed who had all of Mahmoud's sins but none of his courage. With the three other slavers that he had brought with him, he saw June playing with the two little apes from the concealment of a tangle of boulders and shrubbery. But he had heard of her uncommon strength and fighting skill, and also of her reputation of magic, which the presence of the chimpanzees seemed to prove. Therefore, instead of boldly rushing upon her, he whispered to his men to make loops with their ropes, and to tie her before she could put up a resistance.

The next instant the keen nostrils of the two little apes caught the slavers' scent. A wild squealing rent the air. June saw her charges turning toward the thicket, waving their long arms and baring their teeth—and saw the gleaming barrel of a gun under the sun.

That was enough for her. Gathering the young chimpanzees under her strong arms, she sprinted away as fast as an antelope. Too late Kulikoro and his men sprang out of the thicket, foolishly shouting to her to stop, at the same time firing over her head to frighten her into submission. But they soon lost her from sight; and thereafter, hard as they tried, they were unable to find any trace of her passage through the spongy refuse covering the soil of the dying jungle.

That night June told the two apelings that she had made up her mind to go to the land of the pygmies, who were so formidable in the gloom of the thick woods, where poisoned darts are deadlier than spears and battle axes. The little apes, of course, couldn't understand a word of what she was saying. But June had to talk to someone, even to an animal, to get over the shock of her unexpected meeting with Kulikoro, who reminded her of her most feared foe, Mahmoud.

THREE are almost five hundred miles as the crow flies between the middle basin of the Chari River and the edge of the great Equatorial forest. But most of that wilderness is broken ground—hills, valleys, impassable bogs and watercourses. To cross it a human being must walk for more than a thousand miles.

It was a back-breaking journey for June, with two half grown chimpanzees to care for; made harder because June could not take advantage of the comparatively easier going of the immense stretches of rolling land encased between the patchwork of the ranges of hills. This was the kingdom of Simba, the lion, and she dared not travel there.

The rainy season had come and gone when June walked over the summit of a long range and saw, across the valley below, a dark-green and compact wall—the first rampart of the Equatorial forest. Then, a flurry in the sparse wood on the valley's bottom caught her attention.

A combat was taking place there, between a hundred odd negroes and as many pygmies. Both parties were pitifully lacking in real warlike skill, and consequently the fight was something of a large game of tag. The pygmies tried to step close enough to shoot their poisoned arrows, but not so close that the negroes' battle-axes and spears could reach them; and the negroes, in their turn, endeavored only to side-step the flying arrows and bring home blows of their heavier weapons.

A sudden pity for both negroes and pygmies drove June down the slope toward them.

She soon singled out their chiefs—a tall negro with a wrinkled face and a big-bellied, goat-nosed pygmy—and shouted at the top of her lungs:

"Stop, or a curse will strike your tribes! Stop in the name of the all powerful spirits!"

More than her words, her exotic appearance and the sight of the chimpanzees excitedly hopping at her sides fascinated the warriors on both sides and took their hearts out of the combat.

Who was this tall white girl draped in a tunic of leopards' skins, who brandished a warrior's weapons with such an assurance? By what power had she curbed two apes to her will? Here was indeed magic

of the first magnitude, magic that it would have been dangerous to ignore. Pygmies and negroes eagerly listened when June addressed them in her Sara Massa dialect; and, by her very boldness convinced them that she was a supernatural being. Easily forgetting their quarrel because, as June had surmised, they were peaceful folks at heart, they crowded around her, jabbering their differences.

It developed that for generations the negroes, belonging to a Bongo tribe, had given plantains and millet to the pygmies, and had been regaled by them with wild honey and game.

The valley between the brush, territory of the negroes, and the section of forest considered by the pygmies as their own, was their common border and meeting point until recently when the Bongos had found a large herd of goats on it.

Knowing that their little friends had never owned livestock, they were amazed when the pygmies hastened to claim the herd. After much desultory arguing, the negroes claimed the herd of goats for themselves, whereupon the incensed pygmies attacked.

June went at once to the root of the question. Why did the little forest men want the goats found by the Bongos? Had they some secret reason for behaving so? If such was the case, they had to tell her the truth—secretly, if necessary. They could count on his discretion and fairness as an arbiter.

"But beware!" concluded June, who, having visited for years the hut of the late Sara Massa witch doctor, Gangara, had learned all his tricks, "I have great power. The invisible ghosts of the air and of the underground sent me here and will destroy the guilty if they refuse to confide in me."

The pygmies grinned and grinned, opening their great traps of mouths widely and standing on one leg, like pot-bellied storks. But their nervousness grew with the passing of every minute. Finally their chief begged June to walk with him to a nearby thicket of mimosa trees. There he confided:

"The goats belong to a big village of Nyam-Nyam, who live on a tongue of brushland cutting into the forest. We stole them because the evil Nyam-Nyam way-

laid my men several times and took the game that they had killed from them.

"We wanted to leave the goats in the valley for a while, because if the Nyam-Nyam found them among my people, they would kill all of us. The Nyam-Nyam are too many. They are fierce and unafraid of our poisoned darts."

June knew the law of the forest and the jungle. Unable to retaliate against the Nyam-Nyam by force, the pygmies had taken their toll by stealth. But it was unwise to disclose the reason of the goats' appearance in the valley to the Bongos, who were too simple-minded to keep a secret.

Thus, as soon as she returned with the pygmy chief to the place where both tribes were assembled, she announced:

"Leave the goats in the valley for a few days, in care of a detail of warriors. If their legitimate owners don't come to claim them, they must be evenly divided among the pygmies and the Bongos. But, thereafter, the latter must remain grateful to their little friends—because the pygmies' protecting spirits drove the goats into the valley."

That solution appealed to all and was received as a bit of extraordinary wisdom. Its result was that both pygmies and Bongos begged June to remain with them. And luck assisting, the Nyam-Nyam never thought that the little people had stolen their herd. They accused instead a villainous tribe of southern Bandas, and drove them away from their neighborhood.

JUNE had thus found followers more manageable than her former Sara Massas and what was more a safe haven in the immense African forest, where the thick overhanging branches of the trees shut off the beams of the sun from the eternal gloom of the ground beneath.

Without worries and with plenty of time on her hands, she spent her days hunting and training the two chimpanzees to recognize a scale of modulated cries as commands.

Finally, her skill in climbing the tallest trees and the power of her punishing blows whenever they did something particularly naughty, confirmed her authority on the intelligent apes, who eventually learned to understand and obey her minutest wishes.

III

FOUR years later June had attained the peak of her beauty and strength. She could lift simultaneously two men at arms' length and bend a heavy spear blade between her hands. But the gentleness of soul that she had inherited from her parents remained her chief characteristic; and every time that pride stiffened her neck, she remembered the good Bwassa, torn and bleeding, leading the tiny, helpless child to Gangara's protection.

Thus the love as much as fear of incurring her wrath induced her Bongo and pygmy friends to respect her order never to mention her in their rare dealings with outside tribesmen. As far as the Nyam-Nyams were concerned, June found a way to discourage them from abusing the pygmies any longer without manifesting herself. Her method was simple. Every injury inflicted by Nyam-Nyam on a pygmy was punished during the following night with a hail of stones, which fell from the leafy top of the immense trees in the middle of the Nyam-Nyam village, and broke the roofs of huts as well as the heads of the tribesmen inside.

The Nyam-Nyam headmen didn't know that a white girl and two apes reached that tree at will by the aerial route. After watchful lookouts were unable to discover the presence of strange tribesmen in the neighborhood of the village, they reached the conclusion that ghastly agencies avenged every injury inflicted on the pygmies, and ordered their men to leave them severely alone.

Meanwhile, the passing of the years had consolidated the sinister empire of Mahmoud over the basin of the Chari River. His previous setbacks had taught him the wisdom of keeping faith with the strong and of leaving no incriminating clue on the wake of his raids. Thus he showered the most powerful tribal chiefs with gifts and ravaged the weakest communities at will; but, after the removal of the captives, he saw that the corpses of the slain were carried to the jungles, where the beasts of prey destroyed them, and he never burned the deserted huts. The patrols of policing soldiers who eventually visited the deserted villages found scanty signs of violence and reported that appar-

ently the inhabitants had left of their own accord.

But Mahmoud's cutthroats often remarked that a white woman had slipped through his grasp in spite of his oath to capture her; and that was an unending source of irritation for the cruel chieftain, which he unvariably vented with curses and blows on Kulikoro, who had been defeated in his mission to capture June by his overcaution.

One morning, like a tortured animal maddened by the lash, the stocky half-breed went on a rampage of murderous rage. With a sudden jerk of his hand, he pulled a pistol out of his sash and aimed it at Mahmoud's belly.

"Sultanj," he rasped from between clenched teeth, "you hate me . . . you tell that I'm unworthy to serve you . . . you rob me of my share of the black ivory's sale. In the name of Allah, permit me to leave peacefully, oh Mahmoud!"

The years had changed Mahmoud's ugly appearance for the worse. His features had turned coarser, his close set and blood-shot eyes had become as glassy and pitiless as those of an enraged rhinoceros. Suddenly Kulikoro saw the awesome face of the Sultanj purpling, contracting into a satanic mask; the realization that he had actually challenged the cruellest man of the Chari struck his mind like a searing thunder stroke. Out of sheer desperation, he was going to pull the trigger when the hard muzzle of a rifle jabbed into his back.

One of Mahmoud's giant bodyguards had come to the rescue of his master. Kulikoro dropped his pistol and threw himself face down on the ground, screaming:

"In the name of Allah the merciful, the compassionate, have pity, oh Sultanj!"

"You are going to look again for the white woman," Mahmoud growled disdainfully. "After finding her, you'll tell her that you are a fugitive from my wrath, and my enemy—sending one of your companions to tell me where's her hiding place. For you shall remain with the white girl—to gain her confidence and that of any tribesmen who may be with her, to betray her into my hands after my arrival. And, by Allah, this time you must succeed, oh Kulikoro! If you don't I shall skin you alive with my own hands and I shall tie

you bleeding and raw over an ant heap. But, before you go. . . ."

Slowly, deliberately Mahmoud wrapped his hands around the silver inlaid hilt of the heavy whip hanging from his wrist by a silver chain. For the next quarter of an hour, the hissing and thudding of the striking whip mingled with the ear-splitting shrieks of Kulikoro. When merciful unconsciousness silenced the half-breed, Mahmoud looked annoyed.

"This dog," he rasped, "doesn't stand under punishment as well as a negro."

A fortnight later, still nursing his aching back, Kulikoro went on his quest with two particularly villainous negroes, who had graduated from the status of slaves into that of slavers, oppressors of their own race.

KULIKORO had a wit of sorts. Instead of searching at random, he worked on the theory that no white-skinned and blonde haired woman could live in the black man's country without being sighted by some hunting tribesman. But, for many weary months, he was greeted by dumb surprise on the faces of all the tribesmen whom he questioned. Kulikoro was so disheartened that he would have given up his quest and even sought the haven of a fort's jail if the brutish threat of his companions had not urged him on and on.

"You must do what the Sultanj ordered," the freed negroes kept on howling into his ears. "We'll kill you if you try to escape. And if you return reporting failure, you know what Mahmoud will do to you."

Finally Kulikoro wandered into Northern Congo. And their, one sultry afternoon, an Angobadj hunter whom he had regaled with a stick of tobacco whispered to him that, once, he had seen from far a magic white woman followed by two apes.

AFTER that, Kulikoro was able to limit his search to a given zone. He ignored fatigue and the passing of uncomfortable weeks. And finally he was rewarded by the sight of June with some of her Bongo tribesmen.

One of the two renegade negroes, despatched after the Bongos, located the huts of June's negro friends that same night.

The next day, Kulikoro demanded ad-

mission into the village as a trader of firearms. Lomela, the Bongo chief, agreed to see him.

Under the shade of the banyon growing before the chief's hut, Kulikoro ordered one of his men to unwrap a long package and produced two rifles of ancient vintage. According to Mahmoud's instructions he should have allowed himself to be cheated in the barter. But a great elephant tusk in Lomela's hut stirred his greed so that he nearly forgot about June and the torture that awaited him in the event of a failure.

"You take the firesticks," he croaked anxiously, "and give me the tusk. It is a fair bargain, because the firesticks and the ammunition that goes with them will enable your men to kill plenty of game."

"I can't give you the tusk," the naive Lomela explained. "It belongs to some hunters of the little people who want me to carve it with likenesses of men and beasts."

Kulikoro taunted the chief.

"Since when," he snarled, "are strong and tall black warriors the friends of dwarfish grub eaters of the forest? Let me help you to curb the pygmies to your wish. The firesticks of my two sharpshooters and your warriors' spears should enable you to do as you wish with the pygmies."

Lomela uneasily hunched his shoulders. At length he arose.

"Wait here for me," he rumbled. And, without another word, he went to look for June.

Kulikoro's heart chilled as he saw the lanky frame of the negro chief jogging toward the forest. The ominous snarls of his two renegade negroes increased his fright, borne from the conviction that he had bungled his mission from the very beginning.

"When he returns I'll not speak any longer of ivory. I'll do only as the Sultanj instructed me," he whispered placatingly to his scowling companions. But he saw only scorn and seething rage in their ruthless eyes.

The minutes passed, increasing Kulikoro's suspense and worry. A cold sweat seeped out of his oily skin.

Then, suddenly, a golden streak of wavy blonde hair, and a flash of white, hurtling

limbs came down from the tree in a mighty leap, and Kulikoro almost fell backward. Then, gasping, he stared horrified at June, looking threateningly at him an irate Greek goddess of old.

"You are one of Mahmoud's men—the very man who, many moons ago, tried to intercept me in my flight southward." Her voice rang vibrantly. "And now you are attempting to bring strife between these peaceful negroes and the little people!"

Kulikoro's mouth contracted.

"Not true," he shrieked, reverting to the original instructions of his master, "I hate Mahmoud. . . . I rebelled against him."

June scornfully surveyed him from head to foot.

"Man-toad," she said disdainfully, "you are too craven to revolt against anyone. You strike only like the soft-bodied poisonous viper. By treachery, against an unsuspecting enemy. Look at your negroes' faces! Their look of domineering cruelty tells what they are!"

Instantly, one of the two renegade negroes slid behind June, whipping out a long knife. But, before he could strike, two furry shapes fell on him from the top of the tree. Long, hard fingers tore his stomach open—big, crushing teeth clamped on his throat.

THE other renegade negro cried out in utter horror as he saw the chimpanzees tearing his companion limb from limb. But almost at once his savage, instinctive courage prompted him to lift his gun. His trembling finger was fumbling for the trigger when a Bongo black jumped on him and split his skull with a blow of his ax.

At that, Kulikoro's fright turned into hysterical frenzy. He threw himself face down on the ground, scooped up handfuls of dirt and poured them over his head. His fat shoulders shook spasmodically as he wailed out his cowardice and worthlessness and begged the mighty mistress of the jungles to forgive him.

June was a white woman. Therefore, the tears and agonized pleadings of the pock-marked trickster affected her.

"I'll let you go, on one condition," she rasped. "That you swear on the Koran that. . . ."

A sudden inspiration had flashed in her mind.

"Yes," she said looking fixedly into the face of Kulikoro, dejectedly propping himself up to his knees, "I'll spare you on condition that you return to Mahmoud and tell him that I live, with my villagers, in a little wood a thousand lengths north of the hills of Nagobandi."

"I swear, on the Koran, that I will!" Kulikoro replied fervently.

"That's enough! Pick yourself up and go!" June shouted.

"May Allah reward you!" Kulikoro replied abjectly, and, leaping up with an agility surprising in his sagging frame, he ran pigeon-toed out of the village.

"I'll send expert scouts after him . . . to see what he does . . ." Lomela blurted to June. But the girl restrained him with an imperious gesture.

"Don't!" she ordered. "That coward will do as he promised because he fears his God Allah and me worse than Mahmoud. Now, let me think. . . . It will take him twenty days, at least, to return to Mahmoud's camp in the Chari country. . . . and Mahmoud will reach the place that I mentioned in about the same time. . . ." After a pause June added:

"You have been telling me, oh Lomela, that there are many black fighters, in a walled place, in Angobandj. . . ."

"Yes, mistress," Lomela nodded so energetically that he almost dislocated his neck, "many black soldiers under a fat and bearded white officer, who gets drunk on honeyed beer and is very mean."

"Yes, I remember," June agreed. "You mentioned before that that white leader is ugly and nasty even with his fellow white people, and that was the reason why I didn't go to see him."

"Lomela, select a trusted and clever tribesman and send him to tell the white officer that Mahmoud, Sultanj slaver of the Chari country, is coming to raid in Congo territory and will make his camp in the wood north of Angobandi in about forty days. . . ."

June had been right in believing that Kulikoro had made up his mind to abide by his oath; all the more so because the pock-marked emissary realized that her instructions would lure his hated master Mahmoud into a deathly trap.

But both June and Kulikoro had not

reckoned with Mahmoud's experience and guile. For Kulikoro's entrance into the village had been observed from the wooded top of a nearby hill by the ancient rogue Fadel and another sharp-eyed slaver.

When Kulikoro ran out of the Bongo community without his two black watchers, Fadel and his companions became suspicious. However, they didn't make the mistake of leaving their hiding place to meet him. Instead, they allowed him to enter a winding valley before setting out after him.

KULIKORO had nearly gone insane a fortnight later, when Fadel had confronted him in the presence of Mahmoud, and accused him of treachery. The ancient ruffian related every detail of Kulikoro's journey and the real location of June's village.

When he was through Mahmoud grinned at Kulikoro:

"What does the white woman of the jungles look like by now?"

"She is beautiful . . ." Kulikoro stammered.

"Is her hair still wavy and blonde? Her legs shapely and slim? And her breast . . . ?" Mahmoud insisted, making a motion with both hands before his chest as if caressing two imaginary apples.

But Kulikoro was looking at the fire smoldering in the Sultan's cruel eyes and only strangled sounds could issue from his throat. He leaped back in abject fright when Mahmoud roared:

"Hunk of dung! Fat carcass of iniquity! You wanted ivory and wealth, did you not? And you disobeyed me and agreed to betray me!" His big teeth clenched. His swarthy ham of a fist closed on the hilt of the dagger stuck into his belt.

Suddenly Kulikoro's eyes rolled and he fell in a heap. Mahmoud leaped on him, prodded him with his dagger; then he rolled him over with a kick.

But glassy and unseeing the eyes of the pock-marked tracker were turned toward the brassy sky and no pulsation of breathing shook his breast.

"Oh the accursed of Allah!" Mahmoud spat, "I anticipated pleasure in killing him slowly! But his foul heart burst, all of a sudden, and robbed me of my vengeance!"

TWO weeks later, June was supervising the quartering of some slain antelopes when a breathless negro came at a wild run, reporting:

"Oh *esa musunguu* . . . oh white woman . . . we are lost! Your enemies . . . the slavers . . . are near! They are marching on our village instead of going to Ngobandj!"

"Lomela!" June instantly cried out, "send messengers to intercept the one who must be on his way back from the soldiers' fort . . . other messengers to warn the white commander of the new move of our enemies—and rush to the village to round up all women and children, to send them to the forest haven of our pygmy friends. But leave the warriors before the village!"

Then, in their language of clicking sounds and gestures, she instructed her chimpanzees:

"Leave me. Go at once to the land of the big trees. You are no help to me in a fight in the open, only a hindrance."

The two apes snarled, hopped up and down beating their knuckles on the ground in a rage; but finally they did as instructed.

June saw them waddling down slope, swaying their enormous arms. When they reached the plain their bodies bent forward; digging their knuckles into the ground they ran on all fours until they disappeared in a sparse wood.

With her mind at rest as far as her beloved apes were concerned, June waited to catch a glimpse of Mahmoud and his band.

She saw them over the crest of a distant hill an hour or so later. She judged that they were at the least two hundred men and all armed with rifles.

"I could never stop them with my poor Bongo negroes," June gasped. "I can only hope that Lomela may drive away all the women, children and herds fast enough to make it unnecessary to put up a fight."

However, when she reached the village after a sustained run, only half of the non-combatant villagers and herds had begun their retreat. June hastily rounded up the others and sped them on. But to insure their escape she was forced to muster the tribal warriors for a desperate rearguard combat.

Her disposition was simple. On the crest of a hill, alongside the trail leading into the village from the north, she placed

all village men armed with guns and ordered them to open fire on the slavers as soon as they would pass below. The remaining hundred warriors she kept under her orders.

A half hour later the slavers came. But the volley of the ambushed negroes was ill aimed. It killed only one slaver; and immediately the whole band of the slavers deployed, facing the hill and the village and began firing. The result of it was that the Bongos on the crest beat a hasty retreat; and their fellow tribesmen ambushed in the bushes with June cried out that they were going to die without a chance of striking back.

Before they could lose heart entirely June ordered them to retreat to the village and to stab down the slavers as they came along the winding alleys.

The first slavers to go among the huts were easily despatched. But Mahmoud bellowed to the rest to line up and fire.

The volleys pierced the flimsy walls of matted branches of the huts and killed the negroes crouching behind them. The villagers' resistance was in danger of becoming too costly when, suddenly, June launched a furious counter-attack.

The slavers were rolled back in utter disorder. But they were tough and seasoned fighters. With slashing swords and guns firing point-blank they closed in on the huskier but clumsier negroes.

In the savage mêlée her rifle and quiver were torn from June's shoulders; clawing nails carved deep scratches into her arms, bullets and blades barely missed her.

June never knew how she tore herself free when her tribesmen lost heart and fled. But suddenly slavers were falling all around her under the terrific stabs of her spear and, leaping above the dead and wounded, she was running out of the conquered village.

But, a couple of miles further, she rallied her Bongos and made a surprise attack on the flank of the advancing slavers. It was a quick skirmish, followed by another rout. However, for the remainder of the day, June kept on mustering her repulsed negroes and harassing the slavers. Thanks to these tactics, she prevented Mahmoud and his men from catching up with the women and children of the tribe, and so they were saved.

TWO days later, safe in the hidden village of the pygmies, June learned from the messengers who had been in the Belgian Post of Angobandj that the bearded officer was gone. Another officer, a comely young man, had been sent to substitute him. But this handsome lieutenant refused to believe that the slavers could be more than the usual score or so of black ivory raiders.

"This new *musunguu* chief has no experience. He'll be killed and nothing shall stand between Sultanj Mahmoud and us," Lomela moaned.

"Send other scouts, to watch his movements and those of the slavers," June replied sharply.

A WEEK later Mahmoud was thoroughly baffled. He had lost thirty men and squandered precious ammunition; and what had he to show for it? Two toothless oldsters, a few wounded negroes and the meager booty found in the Bongo village.

The most disconcerting feature of his dubious victory was that unlike their first meeting June had fought back at the head of her negro followers with a ferocity and skill that made him wonder if she was a *djinn*, after all.

Thanks to her efforts the real prizes of the slavers—the women, the children and the husky young negroes—had disappeared in the Equatorial forest, where trees are as tall as the pillars of a temple and a mysterious gloom darkens the space above the grassless soil.

Remembering that Kulikoro had confessed that pygmies also served the white girl, Mahmoud instructed his trackers to look for June and the Bongos in some village of the little people.

Most of his scouts returned reporting failure. Three succeeded in their quest, but Mahmoud would never get any information from their swelling bodies, which bristled with tiny poisoned darts.

The day after the discovery of the slain scouts, the ancient Fadel sought the brutish Sultanj in the privacy of his tent and croaked:

"Why must we lose men and time? We don't know this land. Our explorers are no match for those of the little people in their native forest. Mahmoud, perhaps

you know in your wisdom that the moment will come when you'll capture the white queen of beasts. But I, Fadel, I would fear to walk in her tracks, because I believe that she's a deceiving beautiful ghost, and not a creature of flesh and blood. Let's go back, oh Sultanj!"

"We can't return with our men empty-handed and the shadow of failure over their faces," Mahmoud replied gloomily. "Therefore, for another couple of moons we'll look for the white maiden and her followers. If we fail to corner them, we shall tell the men that Mahctub wants us to leave them alone, and we'll raid other villages of the Bongo-Bongo people."

"*Inshallah!* We'll seize plenty of black ivory, one way or the other!" the gray-beard grinned satisfactorily, and brought his hand to breast and mouth in salute. But when he returned to his individual campfire, a cloudlet of sparks flew toward the east in spite of the fact that no wind could be observed. The graybeard fearfully pulled out his dagger and dropped it. It fell with its point toward the east also.

"Bad omens!" Fadel, the ancient ruffian, croaked to the nearest of his villainous companions, "strife and death are overtaking us from the east." And he spat on the flesh of his wrist, to ward off the evil luck.

IV

BUT he was partly wrong. From the north, and not from the east, trouble was coming in the persons of the soldiers of Lieutenant Huyssen, commander of the Belgian Post of Angobandi.

Huyssen was a sturdy man in his late twenties. Son of a Rotterdam merchant, he had a practical turn of mind. Instead of ruling by fear the immense territory policed by his half company of a hundred black soldiers, he endeavored to train the tribesmen in agricultural pursuits. At his insistence, many villages raised tobacco and fruit trees.

The blacks didn't like to exert themselves. At first they moaned that bad luck had consorted with their mothers in the days of their birth whenever the straight and energetic figure of Huyssen appeared in their midst. After the first harvests, however, their feelings underwent a change

and benedictions rang in the young officer's wake.

Sunburned and handsome, Huyssen took everything in the same stride. Gifted with a sense of humor, he never failed to see the good and also the funny side of all his wild dependents, so that their antics were at once his concern and his private circus.

As far as June was concerned, the trouble was that in sending her call for help she hadn't realized that Angobandj's commander was bound to interpret it according to the usual wild flare for exaggeration of the negroes.

Thus, if the men despatched by Lomela had mentioned myriads of slavers, Huyssen would have deducted that he was confronted by the invasion of two or three hundred ruffians. But, according to June's instructions, the couriers mentioned the exact number of Mahmoud's men—and Huyssen divided by ten and went after them with a single section of twenty-five soldiers.

IT was typical of the men of his advance patrol, who were only savages in uniform, that, after sighting Mahmoud's tents, they neglected to mention their excessive numbers.

When Huyssen came out of a wood at the head of his small force it was too late; a slaver sentry saw the advancing section and fired.

An hour later the slavers had forced Huyssen and the remnants of his troops back into the woods and were slowly surrounding them when, unseen by the combatants, June reached the rearmost ranks of the slavers by an aerial route.

Her scouts had done well and brought the warning in time. But her Bongo negroes and pygmies hadn't her speed. Fiercely measuring the odds, June realized that Mahmoud had a chance of annihilating the soldiers in the next half hour.

He was down there, Mahmoud, less than a score of yards from the tree on which she was perched. Long, strong muscles rippled under the smooth skin of June's arms as her bow bent; then the fingers of her right hand snapped open, releasing the string. The arrow, aimed at Mahmoud's wide back, sped to its mark. But, in that instant, Mahmoud partly turned and lifted a hand to emphasize an order. The ar-

row pierced his arm from elbow to shoulder.

The startled Mahmoud roared like a stricken bull and threw himself down. June shot four additional arrows in quick succession. Four slavers fell, pierced through. Most of their companions ceased firing at the soldiers and gazed fearfully at the thickets behind them.

June reflected: To keep on shooting arrows would have attracted a volley straight on her tree. But she had to do something, to give a respite to the cornered soldiers.

During the next minute or so June stared at the headcloths and burnouses of her hated enemies. Then, hearing her headmen urging them to finish the section, she inhaled deeply, tightened her grip on the handle of her spear and leaped. She fell lightly on the grass below on long, bent legs which instantly hurtled her forward, in an apparently suicidal charge.

Suddenly Mahmoud saw her. His ear-splitting yell of rage added to the bewilderment and the milling of his men:

"Stop her, kill her, Inshallah!"

A ragged volley rang, but June almost flattened herself on the ground, then turned about as speedily as a leopard and escaped. Half the slavers catapulted after her, howling savagely and firing.

Purposely, June checked the speed of her magnificent legs. Darting right and left among the trees, she presented an elusive target; now and then she turned to shoot an arrow.

A quarter of an hour later, the roar of the firing guns of the soldiers and of the slavers who had remained to face them was growing dim in the distance; but the murderous rage of June's pursuers waxed unabated when, noiselessly but deathly, small poisoned darts flew against them from behind boulders and thickets.

Several slavers fell. The survivors began firing wildly in all directions. But the poisoned arrows kept on coming, in spite of the fact that they couldn't get a single glimpse of their assailants.

Suddenly a slaver screamed:

"We are lost! What chance have we against the forest's evil spirits led by a white she-devil?"

The ensuing panic was sudden and unstoppable. Giving up the struggle, they

all fled as fast as they were able to, and behind them thundered June's battle cry, the full-throated challenge of the Bongo negroes and the excited yelps of the pygmies.

Then the pygmies wailed shrilly, because their short legs couldn't keep up with the pace of the headlong chase. But, overtaking the hated slavers with breathless spurts, the negroes struck with spear and ax, taking a murderous toll.

MAHMoud heard the panicky screams of his escaping men and the victorious shouts of the Bongos, growing louder with the passing of every instant. An invincible dread, a feeling of futility and defeat took all the fight out of him. But, in that decisive moment, a whim of luck favored him in the form of a bullet, which pierced the throat of Zwolle, Huyssen's sergeant, and left some fifteen nerve-wracked savages in uniform without adequate officering. Huyssen considered that it was inadvisable to launch a pursuit. Thus there were only volleys to speed up the escape of Mahmoud's slavers. But the decimated section confronted the remainder of the slavers' band with fixed bayonets and, with the help of the pursuing Bongos, killed, wounded or captured a score of them.

A FEW minutes later Huyssen saw the wondrous beauty who had rescued him in the nick of time and was so dumbfounded that he pinched himself to make sure that he was awake. Then her soft voice breathed in the dialect of Northern Congo:

"Good health to you, *musunguu*, white man."

"Good health to you, *esa*," Huyssen gasped. The more he looked at her, the more he wondered if he was confronting some magnificent beauty from an unknown planet. At length he blurted feverishly: "You are more splendid than the sun and I owe you my life. But, in the name of everything that's above, who are you?"

June blushed. The fact that the handsome white officer was finding her beautiful took her breath away and filled her heart with wonderful, blood-stirring vibrations. It was a feeling so overwhelming that her tongue stuck paralyzed in her

mouth. But when Huyssen invited her to come with him to his fort the tales of the nastiness of the bearded officer who had ruled in it before him returned to her mind. She stared irresolutely at Huyssen, saw his hand stretching toward her in a friendly gesture and all the instincts of her primitive maidenhood carried her away in a lightning-like spurt.

The Bongos quickly followed her. And Huyssen, realizing that an attempt to stop them could have degenerated into a fight, was forced to let them go. He stood for a moment with his face turned smilingly toward the forest into which June had vanished. Then he turned and barked to his troops: "The slavers are scattered. Prepare to return to the fort."

BUT Huyssen had underestimated Mahmoud's frenzied desire to capture June. The slaver chieftain gathered his men in a clearing many miles from the scene of the battle, where he had June's arrow pulled from the live flesh of his arm and swore by Allah and Sheitan that he would not return to the Chari territory until he captured or killed the white she-devil. Promising his men a silver coin for every day they spent here, he planned how he could overcome June and her loyal warriors. His crafty mind realized that it would be impossible for him to attack through the thick forest where June had taken refuge. The poisoned arrows of the pygmies were too deadly.

That left only the treacherous trails of the marshes which were on all sides of the deep forest. Mahmoud learned the position of June's camp through spies, and from their reports he grew certain that a resolute attack would scatter her forces.

Therefore, after a few days' preparation, Mahmoud placed a cordon of fifty men before the mouth of the forest passages and boldly advanced through the surrounding marsh with the main body of his followers.

The men whom he led brought along gourds full of pebbles and sealed with dry skins; makeshift round drums and trumpets fashioned out of antelope's horns. Between these devices, their blood-curdling howls and the roar of their firing guns, they raised a deafening clamor which created the impression that they were ten-

times their actual number. The effect of it was that the entire tribe of pygmies devoted to June deserted their negro allies and scurried for some holes in the thick forest known only to them. Shortly after, the clamor terrorized also the two chimpanzees and drove them for cover among the dense trees. June didn't want to see them shot down in an unequal fight and didn't attempt to stop them.

But, as she had done the previous time, she quickly sent all negro women and children into the forest. She also placed resolute groups of warriors behind the barriers of tree trunks and heaps of stones that barred the end of the marsh's trails. As soon as the slavers drew nearer, each of these crude fortifications belched bullets, arrows and javelins.

The slavers had in their rifles weapons more deadly than the muzzle-loaders and bows of the negroes; but they couldn't deploy and fully utilize the superiority of their weapons. Consequently nearly two hours passed before their various bands could storm the barriers.

The hand to hand fights on the edge of the marsh were short and vicious—the negroes striking frenziedly with guns and swords against the brutal slavers. But finally the burnoused horde swept on, invaded the pygmy village . . . and were greeted by a parting taunt of June:

"Oh men of the unlucky Mahmoud, again you have conquered a mess of empty huts! Make your nest in them and enjoy the smell of the little people!"

As she retreated into the forest, her tantalizing laughter sounded farther and farther. Almost insane with rage, Mahmoud swept after her at the head of his baffled band.

JUNE quickly overtook the survivors of the brave defense and led them at a run through the forest trails, which she knew by mind. A couple of hours later they joined the women, the children, and the warriors detailed to escort them. June was rejoicing in the thought that they had outdistanced the pursuing slavers and got out of danger, when one of the negroes sent ahead as scouts returned reporting breathlessly:

"Other slavers, as many as five times the fingers of two hands . . . bar the

most northern approaches of the forest."

"Perhaps we can hack a way through the dense growths to the right and the left of the place where our accursed enemies wait for us, and pull through undetected!" Lomela proposed.

June agreed. "That's a good plan and will insure the escape of the women and children—provided a group of fearless warriors draw the pursuit of this waiting detail of slavers in another direction," June replied. After a pause she added: "I'll lead such a group. Who comes with me?"

All the men who had fought in the village, and half of those escorting the non-combatants, instantly volunteered. June chose thirty of them, the strongest and fastest of the lot, and led them so skilfully that they reached the forest's edge without being sighted by the waiting slavers.

June scanned the array of her enemies. About forty of them sat in a compact group, with their guns on their laps. It was possible to see others strung at various intervals to the right and to the left of the main body.

"It is best if I strike hard and wisely," June reflected; and, after lining up her crouching followers behind a screen of bushes, she corrected their individual aims.

"*Vitta . . . war, kill!*" her shout finally rang. Twenty muzzle-loaders roared deafeningly, ten bows twanged. Then, led by June, the negroes charged.

The unexpected volley and sight of their blood-spattered companions that it brought down, bewildered the slavers when the heavier and taller blacks catapulted into them, bowling them over or scattering them.

During the following four or five minutes the spears and axes of the negroes struck savagely, wreaking terrific execution. But the slavers, posted before the trails to the right and to the left of the main one, began firing; and, drunk with victory, June's negroes went after them triumphantly.

In vain June shouted to her tribesmen to keep on right ahead. Dumbly, with their muzzle-loaders and cold steel weapons, they ran headlong against a dozen sharpshooters who, from a distance of some two hundred yards, poured a stream of bullets against them.

To make matters worse, the defeated

central group of slavers took advantage of the respite to turn about and open fire. They shot three or four volleys and ran on in a counter attack.

The combat became thus a chaotic clash of isolated groups, with the negroes getting the worst of it.

June was beside herself with helpless rage. For a moment, she had felt that a totally unexpected victory had been right in her grasp. Then, just as unexpectedly, the combat had taken a disastrous turn. Her only consolation was that the real object of her attack had been attained; for there was no doubt that, while their warriors fought and died, the women and children of the negro tribe were making good their escape.

Suddenly a bullet seared June's side. With a snarl, she buried her spear in the breast of a black-bearded hellion who was jumping on her howling at the top of his lungs; then she brought her hand to her ribs. She withdrew it covered with blood, but she felt no pain, no fit of dizziness. . . .

"Back . . . back into the forest!" she shouted desperately.

This time the survivors of her small band obeyed. Howling fiercely, the slavers charged after them. But, among the dense growths, their quick firing guns held no advantage over the spears and axes of their enemies.

The fight degenerated into a drawn-out sniping duel. From the lengthening of the shadows on the open ground confronting the wood, June realized that sunset was not very far off. She smiled weakly at the thought that, by that time, Lomela had led the women and children to some safe hiding place. But her side was beginning to ache abominably.

SUDDENLY, a volley crashed behind her. A negro warrior leaped into the air and fell with gore and cerebral matter gushing out of his shattered skull. A desperate shout rang: "Arabi . . . more Arabi . . . are behind us!" A wild panic seized the decimated negro band. Dropping their weapons, they ran for cover, completely deserting June.

Bullets whistled like angry bees all around the white girl when an unforgettable coarse voice roared:

"Get the white daughter of Sheitan! Bring her to me, dead or alive!"

A bleak desperation overwhelmed June. For a moment she felt that her cruel destiny had doomed her, and she had no defence against the cruelty and ruthlessness of Mahmoud.

Then the vision of Huyssen became so alive in her feverish brain that she almost thought that he was at her side. Huyssen, who had found her beautiful. In a snap of fighting fury, June wildly swore to live.

Her hand grasped her spear firmly. Crouching low, she ran out of the wood, charged the slavers barring the mouth of the trail like striking lightning. Glancing bullets burned furrows on her left shoulder, on the outer side of her right thigh when her spear disembowelled a big bur-nousued mulatto, pierced the breast of the Arab slaver behind him and, propelled by all the pain and nervous tension convulsing her transfixed the neck of a third cut-throat. It was so deeply imbedded that she was unable to wrench it out. Then, empty handed, June was past the broken array of the slavers.

A quarter of an hour later, with her pursuers far behind, she kneeled alongside a stream and slacked her thirst. She was painfully pulling herself up when the howling of the approaching slavers warned her that there was no rest and no respite, that she had to run on and on, regardless of her weakness and agony of pain.

When night came, June realized that her tireless legs and stout heart had carried her to safety in spite of her wounds, and that her pursuers were hopelessly out-distanced. But the wilderness teamed with other savage enemies.

Luck assisting, she found an empty cave, piled up branches before it. For the remainder of the night, the beasts of prey endlessly howled before the leaping flames protecting the cave's entrance. At dawn the blood had dried on her wounds and its scent was no longer maddeningly alluring for the ravenous big cats. But June, who had spent a sleepless night, felt that her limbs were stiffening and her strength waning.

"Tomorrow, or the day after, fever will set in. I shall be helpless and the beasts of the wilderness will devour me," she

thought unhappily, and her desperation was deepened by her knowledge that she could hope for no help from the scattered and frightened negroes and pygmies.

Suddenly it was as if the officer who had rescued her from Mahmoud was before her, beckoning. June knew from the reports of her scouts that he had returned to his walled house—to his post.

"I might reach his strong place tomorrow, if fever doesn't set in," June gasped; and, in spite of her pain and terrible predicament, she smiled because she had at last an excuse to go to the man of her choice.

The next day the lookout on the watch tower of the Post of Angoband saw a beautiful white woman draped in a torn leopard skin, with raw gashes on her arms and legs, coming stumbling toward the gate. For several instants he stood with his eyes popping out of his orbs, wondering if he was dreaming. But nearer and nearer the white woman was coming. He saw that she was visibly in pain, and far behind her but increasing their speed with the passing of every moment, there were grey, spotted shapes trotting after her.

"Hyenas!" the negro soldier gasped. Then, opening his capacious mouth widely, he shouted the alarm.

A minute later the gate swung open, and Lieutenant Huyssen, bareheaded and cursing fiercely, ran toward the collapsing June and gathered her in his arms.

Sometime later, in the infirmary of the Post, portly Dr. Nys, the surgeon of the garrison, examined June's wounds and found that they were deep and painful, but not affecting any vital organ.

"Bon!" he finally said to the anxious Huyssen. "I'll give her an anti-tetanus injection to make sure that blood poisoning doesn't set in. But what she needs most is rest . . . plenty of it."

They carried the still unconscious girl to the spare officer's room of the fort and placed her on a soft, clean bed. When her head sank on the pillow June reacquired her senses and smiled at Huyssen. But, as soon as she drank a pitcher of fresh milk brought by an orderly, she drifted into a deep sleep.

She was still sleeping the next morning when Mahmoud, following her day-

old tracks, climbed to the bare top of a hillock and saw the Belgian flag whipping the wind over the Post, on the plain far below.

V

NYS had a sentimental record of two score years of wild oats, and a very adequate wife. Therefore his admiration for June's beauty didn't upset his thinking faculties and he was able to carry on sensible conversations with her.

Little by little, he induced June to overcome her timidity and her reserve. Thus it happened that the more she talked with him and with Huyssen the more the forgotten memories of her childhood returned, and English words came spontaneously to her lips.

A week later her wounds had almost healed, and the ravishingly beautiful barbarian had become—such is the marvelous adaptability of the human race—a docile, lovely young woman, very eager to learn the mysteries of civilized life from Mine. Nys.

But one night, a familiar sound awakened June. True to her jungle training, she reacquired her senses suddenly and completely. Rousing from her bed, she carefully looked all around.

Nothing disturbed the serenity of the white-washed room. The fresh flowers, placed every day in the big bowl on the table, sent forth a delicate fragrance. The silvery beams of the moon streamed through the open window and splashed on a hand-carved stool.

June felt rested and supremely happy. She was going to lie down again, when the familiar sound clicked, much closer.

"My two apes," June whispered. "They found my trail and soon they'll be here. No walls will stop them." And, arising, she put on the fresh tunic which she had fashioned out of some soft, well-cured skins that Nys had given her.

The coughing and subdued barking of the chimps rang on the walls. Then June could see one of them, on a sentry walk separated by a mere three yards of empty space from her window.

Suddenly a harsh native voice rang. The report of a firing rifle broke the stillness of the night. The chimpanzee yelped,

vaulted above the nearest merlon of the parapet and was gone.

A fit of choking rage convulsed June. With a single leap she flew out of the window, fell lightly on the balls of her feet on the sentry walk. The dark drops that she glimpsed on the stone slabs were blood—blood of the faithful beast which had come looking for her.

The sentry was still on the adjacent wall, holding his rifle at the ready. June went for him like a streak of lightning.

The sentry knew of the young white woman and so didn't fire. But the savage in him broke out as she came abreast, and he struck at her with the butt. The next instant the rifle was wrested out of his grasp, a terrible blow crushed the side of his face. He fell in a heap, utterly unconscious, and June stood above him like an avenging goddess.

The cry of the chimpanzees rang again, somewhere in the tall grass of the plain confronting the fort. It was at once an inarticulate reproach and a plea, and went so poignantly to June's heart that, tearing the cartridge belt with its hanging bayonet from the waist of the knocked-out soldier, she vaulted above the parapet and alighted on a soft patch of ground at the foot of the twelve-foot high wall. She set out at a fast trot after the fleeing chimpanzees.

ALITTLE later, a black corporal making the rounds came upon the unconscious sentry and shouted the alarm. Huyssen quickly donned his clothes, rushed to the sentry walk.

The disappearance of the soldier's rifle and cartridge belt created at first the impression that a raiding party of natives had entered the fort for a few minutes. But no wounds were on the sentry's body. A bottle of ammonia, uncorked under his nose by Dr. Nys, brought him back to his senses. Almost instantly he blurted out a full story of the chimpanzees' appearance and of the fury with which June had struck him.

Huyssen cursed himself for having neglected to warn the garrison about the apes, which were like loyal pets of the jungle girl.

Swearing helplessly, Huyssen ran into the adjacent corridor, calling his orderly, shouting urgently to Sergeant Roos to get

a section ready for a midnight sortie.

Dr. Nys attempted to restrain him:

"Your pursuit might frighten our beautiful amazon with a notion that your black tribesmen are going to fire again on her apes. Better calm down and wait. The girl is white, in skin and in mind and—*c'est évident!*—she cares for you! She'll be back, don't you worry!"

"But she's not entirely healed," the excited Huyssen countered. "And the slavers who captured me and wounded her are still at large and eager to kill her!"

To that argument Nys had no answer. An ominous feeling contracted his heart when Huyssen left the fort at the double quick at the head of his soldiers.

And from the grass-shaded edge of a nearby ravine, a cruel-faced slaver watched the gate with a leer. He carefully counted how many soldiers were coming out, then, crouching, he ran along the ravine's bottom toward the wood where Mahmoud waited with the main body of his band.

IN the dim light of the night, Huyssen perceived a trail of broken stems in the tall grass covering the plain. He followed it until he reached the wood, where the apes first, and then June, had taken to the trees.

There he switched his searchlight open, anxiously scanned the ground and saw no tracks on it. The realization that from that point June had continued her flight by the aerial route somehow comforted him—but suddenly the thought struck him that, in the virtual state of war created by the presence of the slavers in his territory, he had subordinated the interests of the service to his own, and committed the military crime of leading a detail into treacherous ground without throwing around them a protecting screen of scouts.

Clenching his teeth hard, Huyssen finished his searching. For a split second he thought of taking the prescribed precautionary measures, but almost instantly he realized that it was useless to do so; for, if enemies were approaching, the location and formation of his section was by now known to them, and a late action by scouts wasn't going to change anything for the better. It was much better to return at once to the open ground, which offered no cover to enemy moves.

Fervently hoping that his fears would be unfounded, Huyssen ordered the double quick toward open ground. But he had hardly covered a few yards with his men when the silence of the wood was shattered by sharp reports and the whistling of speeding bullets.

Huyssen realized that the tangle of the trees forbade a deployment and all attempts to wage an orderly combat. Raising his voice above the clamor of the enemy attack, he mustered the men at the rear of his tiny column in a squad, and instructed them to open fire on the wood. After a couple of volleys, he ordered to cease firing and joined the column with them at a wild run.

He was repeating that maneuver when the slavers' charge struck.

Favored by the concealing darkness, most of Mahmoud's cutthroats came on crouching close to the ground, while their companions kept on firing from the surrounding thickets.

From then on, it was savage hand-to-hand fighting. The soldiers screamed the battle cries of their original tribes, struck with bayonets and with the butts of their guns; bit and kicked with all the strength of their muscular legs. The slavers, leaner and wiry, slashed at them with upward strokes of their daggers, firing point-blank with their pistols, dragging the black infantrymen down by sheer strength of numbers and furiously stabbing them until their agonized screams subsided and their torn bodies became limp.

Up to the last Huyssen shouted orders rallying his faithful soldiers around him and banding their efforts into a wall of firing rifles and striking bayonets. When that last compact resistance was shattered, Huyssen threw away his empty automatic, grasped a rifle by the barrel and struck like a whirlwind at his burnousued enemies. But finally he found himself with a twisted gun in his hands and his shoulders against a tree.

He was practically defenseless when three big slavers pounced on him and threw him down. With a crushing knee caving into his breast, and firm hand pinioning his arms down, Huyssen saw the blade of a dagger flashing over his face and thought that his last moment had come.

But, the next instant, a piercing scream

rang. The slaver holding the dagger was swept away from him, spitted on a long spear; then the reddened spear struck again at the other two slavers, at a wildly charging pack of cutthroats.

Attracted by the clamor of the combat, June had returned, just in time to save Huyssen's life. But her bravery and strength couldn't hold for long against the whole band of the slavers. Soon her spear was shattered by the slash of a heavy sword and she was thrown down and securely tied, together with the bruised and exhausted Huyssen.

A COUPLE of hours later they lay flat on their backs, with the scarlet glare of a bivouac right in their eyes.

A breeze moaned through the overhanging branches of the trees. It carried pungent odors of fresh grass, of thymes, of decayed leaves, which mingled with the sharper scent of the burning branches of the camp fire. Huyssen thought of the previous occasion when he had reacquired his senses near June. A breeze had blown, too, and the damp swishing of it over his face had been just as crisp; but, that time, June had been free and happy.

Now, instead, Mahmoud looked at them from the other side of the heap of burning branches. The scarlet screen of leaping flames enhanced the heaviness of his massive head, the outline of his long nose and angular jaws; it gave a red gleam to his close-set eyes, to his slanting lips and to his bared teeth.

Looking at him, the distracted Huyssen could almost believe that he was indeed a fiend out of hell, a monster endowed with an uncanny power against which there was no defence. He would have resigned himself to his defeat and to his grim fate if his mind hadn't been lashed into a convulsion of murderous hatred by the thought of June at the mercy of the bestial Mahmoud.

The latter was talking with some of his cutthroats. Huyssen couldn't hear what he was saying, but the gloating of the cruel chieftain was as evident as the fawning of his murderous crew. The bumousued slavers flung coarse taunts at the captive officer.

Suddenly Mahmoud arose and, swaying on his massive legs, went to the prostrate

Huyssen and spat on his face. When he kicked at the ribs of the helpless officer the savage laughter of the slavers sounded like a ribald applause coming from the pit of hell.

Then Huyssen heard June crying, pitifully, heartrendingly. His nerves went to pieces. Mahmoud instead leaped back as if he were hearing the menacing wail of a banshee. All the cruelty and soullessness of him found it impossible to believe that the untameable and hard-fighting leopard woman could be capable of pity or fear. In her unexpected sobbing he surmised a ruse. Scowling, he glanced at the thickets all around.

BUT no savage animals sprang out of them to June's rescue. And finally Mahmoud stared at the girl's face, saw her damp, horrified eyes turned toward Huyssen.

"*Inshallah!*" he cursed, as the sudden understanding of the tender feeling binding the girl to the young officer fanned his rage into a paroxysm of hatred for both. "The invincible leopard woman, the queen of all savage beats, has lost her heart to a puny man of her race! Oh accursed slut! For his sake you fought and attempted to humiliate Mahmoud! But I broke your power! And now, look how I'm going to tear your lover limb from limb!"

"Don't harm him!" sobbed June. Her distracted mind raced to find words that could stop the murderous fury which he was about to vent on Huyssen. But she felt weak and helpless, and Mahmoud's burning glare took the last shred of energy out of her heart. At last she stammered: "Spare him and I'll try to please and serve you. . . ."

Mahmoud felt that he had triumphed. Making an obscene gesture of utter contempt he roared to the villainous audience of the slavers:

"No woman is worth a swine's hoof. This one fought us like all the devils of Sheitan and now, for a crippled white dog, offers herself to me, as my chattel and slave!"

The slavers shouted, laughed, howled unmentionable curses, made lewd gestures.

Mahmoud enjoyed his hour of victory too much to shorten it with any show

of hurry. Huge, revolting and ugly as a devil, he stood in the scarlet halo of the camp fire like a medieval conception of a fiend. Then he spat taunts at June, he reviled Huyssen, engaged in a vile repartee with his cutthroats. At length Fadel, the old graybeard scoundrel, prodded him on:

"The leopard woman is waiting for you, oh Mahmoud! Is fear of her tied lover what's keeping you from her?"

"The master is never in a hurry to go to his slave," Mahmoud snarled.

Leisurely, he stooped over June, slashed the ropes binding her wrists and ankles. Then, throwing away his dagger, he lifted her and brutally pressed her to his chest.

Apoplexy nearly struck Huyssen when he saw the enormous arms of Mahmoud closing around the limp white body of the girl, his liver-colored lips pressing her neck and shoulders.

"June!" he shrieked at the top of his lungs, "let me die, but don't permit him to slobber you with his kisses, don't let him make of you an *abi esa*, a dishonored concubine. . . ."

Perhaps his words did it; or the savagery of her jungle training suddenly effaced her weakness and spirit of sacrifice; but, the next instant, June's white body became a buzzsaw of destruction. Quick as a flash her arms leaped above Mahmoud's massive biceps; then one of her hands closed on his throat, the other clutched his face, dug a thumb into his left orb and gouged the eye at the bottom of it. Then her steely knees pistoned up, in quick succession, at his stomach. Her fists balled, punched savagely. Mahmoud, in a faint, was hurtled into the camp fire.

But June was too thoroughly aroused to stop. Snarling like a mad beast, she pranced before the leaping flames, picking up rocks, throwing them at her torturer's body wriggling among the burning embers.

The next instant, all the slavers' pack was up and charging. Scarred hands grasped Mahmoud's ankles, dragged him out of the fire, rolled him on the grass to smother the flames which were already running over his flowing garments and painfully biting into his flesh.

In the midst of an enraged mob June fought like a tigress. Mouths and noses were broken by her blows, arms and hands,

caught by her strong hands, were twisted and fractured. But finally the numbers of her aggressors brought her down. Ropes were hastily tightened around her limbs.

A panting voice rasped:

"Shall we tear her guts out of her belly, oh Mahmoud?"

"Mahmoud is blind of an eye, burned and in a faint. But I tell you what to do with her, until Mahmoud revives! Beat her until all her skin peels off!" the ancient rogue Fadel shouted.

A burly slaver doffed off his burnous and got hold of a whip. Then his arm lifted, the uncoiling whip crashed through the air with a sound like a pistol shot. A sickening thud followed as the thick strip of hippopotamus' leather struck the defenseless body of the girl.

"Don't, dogs!" Huyssen yelled madly, attempting to rise in spite of his fetters.

A savage kick smashed him down on his back. Then three, four whips hissed, struck his head, his body, his twitching legs. But his rage was greater than pain. He cursed at every blow and snarled defiance until consciousness slipped away from him.

WHEN he recovered his senses, the fire was out and he could see the barrel of the gun of a sentry gleaming under the moonlight at the opposite end of the clearing.

His body ached from head to toes. Nevertheless he looked anxiously for June. His heart sank when he saw her blood-stained form a yard away from him.

"*Mon Dieu*," he stammered, "if they killed her let me die under the worst tortures, but give me a chance first of slaying Mahmoud with my own hands!"

To his soul-restoring relief the girl breathed:

"I'm not hurt badly . . . but hush, *musunguu* . . ."

For strange clicking sounds came from among the trees and presently June answered them with similar sounds.

The sentry within Huyssen's range of vision heard them also. He lifted his head, puzzled. When a noise very much like a man's death rattle rang into the thickets before him, he lowered his gun and ran to investigate.

Several minutes passed but the sentry

failed to return. June, however, kept on jabbering in that weird language and squeals and clicks answered from another bush, until a choked cry broke the stillness of the night.

A third human voice thinly screamed somewhere in the shrubbery as a cloud passed before the shiny face of the moon. When the cloud drifted away and cold moonlight again shone all over the esplanade, Huyssen saw two short and hairy forms scurrying among the stacked guns and the tents.

"The two apes!" Huyssen gasped in amazement.

The chimpanzees reached June, sniffed the scars left by the whip over her body and were driven away by the hateful odor of dried blood; but they soon returned, obeying the urgings of the girl.

When they were beside her, they hesitated for a precious minute; then, driven by June's frenzied jabbering, the huskiest chimpanzees dug the knuckles of his fore hands into the ground and began to chew her fetters. For a while the other chimp alternately looked at him and at his mistress; then he stooped also and got in the first ape's way. A sharp blow pushed him back when, with an enraged squeal, he returned to his chosen task. The first chimp slapped him harder and was instantly bitten above an elbow.

The next instant the two apes were tearing into each other and raising an awful uproar of shrieks and snarls.

Huyssen was going insane with suspense and rage at the strange behavior of the two apes when June with a mighty wrench tore the threads of rope still clinging to her wrists and tackled the ropes binding her ankles.

But, by that time the chimps, who had so effectively waylaid and slain the sentries, stopping them from giving the alarm —were awakening the entire camp with the clamor of their stupid scuffle. Slavers drugged with sleep were pouring out of the tents when June jumped to Huyssen's side and proceeded to untie him.

Her fingers were strong and quick. They rapidly unfastened the ropes from around his limbs, then slid under his armpits and lifted him.

Huyssen cursed because his cramped limbs were slow in recovering their

strength as June leaped to cuff the apes apart.

In that moment the slavers charged from every side. They did not fire for fear of hitting each other, but their swords and daggers shone under the moon. Huyssen and June quickly grabbed two heavy sticks from a pile of firewood and, together with the chimpanzees, fell on the slavers like raging furies.

For a while it was a mad melee. But, at close quarters, the apes' bite and the crushing and tearing power of their long arms were irresistible. One slave after another fell horribly maimed, pain-wracked ruffians limped out of the scuffle with twisted and fractured arms and legs. But, suddenly, a chimpanzee pitifully squealed and collapsed over the bodies of his victims.

JUNE, forgetting that a deadly fight was on, kneeled near her inert beast. Huyssen brained a slaver who attempted to grasp her by the hair, then he got hold of the sword of a dead enemy and made room around the grieving white girl with a quick succession of slashes and lunges.

The next instant June shouted that her ape was dead and that she was going to avenge him. Grasping a rifle she shattered the skull of the nearest slaver with a terrific blow.

The slavers gave way, sticking their daggers into their sashes, grasping their rifles.

June quickly jabbered a stream of clucking sounds. The surviving ape lifted Huyssen and catapulted toward a tree, and bore him aloft. Too late the slavers opened fire and ran to a final attack.

"They are killing her! Leave me, you beast, let me go to her!" the lieutenant screamed insanely wriggling in the steely clutch of the chimpanzee.

But, soon after, the soothing voice of the girl was breathing soothingly near his ear, changing his agony of fears into a wild exultation. Her soft hair brushed his face, one of her hands closed on one of his wrists, lifting him, helping the ape which was carrying him. With his heart in his throat Huyssen went through the amazing sensations of fast travel by the aerial route, with its breath-taking succession of prodigious leaps from branch to branch through the empty air and with

the fleeting pattern of the ground far below.

A quarter of an hour later the chimpanzee suddenly released his hold around Huyssen's waist. For a fleeting instant the young officer anticipated the crushing impact of his body on the ground far below, but June was quick to grasp him under an armpit and to complete the leap bearing his full weight.

They had barely reached the opposite tree when the chimpanzee wailed and began to crash through the branches. His long, outstretched arms partly broke his fall. With a soft thud he landed on a mossy patch at the foot of the towering baobab. There, he turned on a side and, bringing up his knees hugged his belly, moaning.

June, supporting Huyssen, was quick to slide down the baobab's trunk. Then, releasing the officer, she kneeled beside the ape.

A quick survey disclosed that the muscular stomach and loins of the poor beast were pierced by several wounds. Faithful to his mistress to the last, he had carried her friend to safety while his life blood was pouring out his shaggy body.

And now it was dying. Tears ran out of its eyes, and, in the cold light of the moon, its long, flat simian face bore an almost human look of heart-rending sadness.

Suddenly its long arms shot out, hugged June. Its egg-shaped head, with its strangely human tuft of hair, leaned on the girl's breast; and, meanwhile, its blood kept on running copiously, over its hairy hide and over the white body of the young woman.

"Perhaps we can bandage him . . ." Huyssen whispered.

But June, crying, shook her head in denial. She knew that the last moment of her beloved ape had come, and she didn't want to disturb his end with useless handling.

Several minutes passed and Huyssen couldn't help thinking that less beastly than Mahmoud was the poor hairy thing which was writhing, shaken by his last death rattle, in the shapely arms of the jungle goddess.

Eventually that ghastly sound subsided and the huddled form of the chimpanzee was still. June rose and, bearing its body,

in her arms, went to a deep hole of the ground. Her sobs, unchecked now, broke the stillness of the night as she piled huge stones over her dead ape. When the burial was over, she choked:

"At the least, the scavengers of the wilderness will not tear him to shreds. And now I'm alone, very much alone, in the jungle and the forest."

Huyssen gathered her to his breast, muttered comforting words in her ear, until her despondency and fit of heart-rending sorrow abated.

SUDDENLY June stiffened in his arms. "Keep still. Don't breath so loud," she whispered.

After a while, pressing her mouth to his ear, she gasped:

"There are two of them coming. We have no weapons. We need weapons otherwise, reeking of blood as we are, we shall be scented and destroyed by the beasts of prey. Grasp a rock—we must kill these two slavers, *musunguu* dear."

The two slavers soon appeared, a large fellow, with his rifle slung across his shoulders and brandishing a spear—and Fadel, the old ruffian.

Huyssen felt June's fingers crushing his shoulder like a steel vise; then the slavers were close to the thicket and June pushed him on.

Huyssen leaped. But his aching legs failed him. His stone just brushed Fadel's neck and fell out of his hand. Then he desperately grasped Fadel's rifle and wrestled with him.

Fadel was old, but his leathery muscles were as strong as steel cables. Suddenly his head darted like that of a snake and his teeth bit into Huyssen's neck.

A red mist fell over Huyssen's eyes. Instinctively he brought his knee up, heard Fadel grunting. With a supreme effort he wrested the rifle from his hands, hit him in the breast with the butt. Fadel fell backward on a pile of rocks with a sickening thud.

"His skull smashed like a rotten egg," Huyssen heard June saying. He turned his head and saw her, with the weapons of the other slaver in her hands. Their owner was stretched face down, in the thick grass.

"More are coming. What's the use of

running?" June continued fiercely. "Let's kill as many of them as we can. There's always time to escape."

Her madness was communicating itself to Huyssen. He no longer felt tired; he remembered only the abuses that June had suffered at his side.

"Let's make our stand—behind that glade," he rasped, pointing to a clearing to their left.

They had hardly kneeled behind a mound, with a flat, bare expanse of ground before them, when they saw seven or eight slavers, coming at a run. They stopped at the sight of the bodies of Fadel and of his companion; and, in that very instant, June and Huyssen opened fire.

They heard Mahmoud's bellows. He was in that group of pursuers, too, but they couldn't distinguish him from the others in the semi-darkness.

Three, four slavers went down; then their guns were empty and they were charging, June brandishing her spear, Huyssen with clubbed gun.

A lanky slaver ran toward Huyssen. He fired, missed. Huyssen's blow met the lifted barrel of his rifle and they grappled, rolled over the ground, tearing at each other with fists, knees and butting heads.

"Allah preserve me, help me kill this she-devil!" another slaver shouted in abject fright and, bringing his gun to his shoulder, he fired.

The bullet seared the side of June's head, caused her to spin around like a human rolling top. But, steeled by her hatred and rage, she quickly recovered her balance. In a daze, but still strong and dangerous, she ran on and stabbed at the breast of the slaver, who fell backward, lifting his arms and his gun.

His second bullet thus flew skyward, far above June's head. But, before the girl could wrench the spear out of the body of her victim, the other slaver and Mahmoud fired on her. They missed in their excitement, and June, letting go of the spear, leaped on them, threw her arms around them and rolled with them on the ground.

But blood was streaming out of her head-wound, and her weary limbs had only a tenth of their old strength. Mahmoud and the slaver pinned her down.

"Ride here, pin her arms down, while I stab her!" Mahmoud panted, and, wheez-

ing and cursing, he lifted himself on his knees, grasped the hilt of the dagger stuck into his sash—and, from his remaining eye, saw Huyssen, who after savagely battering his adversary into unconsciousness, was rushing to help June.

"Kill the daughter of Sheitan by yourself! I'm wounded, blind, I must get away quickly!" Mahmoud screamed to his companion; and, leaping to his feet, he escaped as fast as he was able.

THE slaver hardly heard him, for June, with a supreme effort, lifted her knee and smashed him in the belly with a sickening thud. A fighting man to the last, he was getting hold of a pistol stuck into his sash, when Huyssen came on the run and brained him with the butt of his rifle.

The young officer quickly jumped to June's side; but, before he could grasp her arm to help her arise, the girl leaped to her feet.

"*Musunguu*," she panted, "leave Mahmoud to me. Don't interfere while I kill him, or I'll turn against you, too, *musunguu*!"

Huyssen gasped, crestfallen, for in that moment June was a raging beast of the jungle and no longer woman.

Bare-handed, with long leaps, she went after Mahmoud. For a few seconds they raced, the heavy-set Sultanj, with his burnous billowing like the wings of a huge beetle, and after him and bent on his destruction the white girl, slender, beautiful, white limbed and infinitely more dangerous.

Then June closed in with a savage roar. Mahmoud screeched, turned about lifting his dagger. But a steely hand closed on his right fist, bending his arm back, another hand, as firm and crushing as a vise, grasped his throat.

Mahmoud fell backward, hit the ground with a thump that jarred every bone in his big coarse body, and June's knee tore into his stomach.

"For all my poor black people, and my little folk slain by your killers. For my two faithful apes, who gave their life for me," June growled. Her face was as firm and emotionless as beautifully carved, pitiless marble. But her eyes glowed with such a relentless fury that the dilated orbs

of the choking Mahmoud couldn't stand their stare.

Again the Sultanj shrieked, but only choked, horrible sounds issued from his crushed throat. Then his massive face swelled to twice its ordinary size, turned to the color of bleeding liver. His legs kicked spasmodically. And finally the shoulder muscles of June's bunched, her right arm made a sideway, tearing motion. Choked to death, his neck broken, Mahmoud relaxed, and a bloated, lurid tongue jutted out of his puffed and bleeding lips.

June arose. Now that her enemy was dead, her fury was fading. A reeking nausea was sickening her. But the next instant Huyssen was near her. Passing his arms around her he pulled her away. And the dead Sultanj remained alone, on a trampled stretch of ground, staring out of popping and unseeing eyes at a long file of fire ants, which were already coming down the trunk of the nearest tree, attracted by the scent of blood.

The slaver knocked out by Huyssen was still unconscious. No more of the decimated band of cutthroats were coming.

"*Musunguu*," June said. "You lost some men and you were captured for running after me. I'm sorry for your soldiers who died in the combat near your walled *boma*. But perhaps more soldiers would have died in a long hunt for Mahmoud. And now you can tell your Government that Mahmoud is no more and that his band has ceased to exist—because, those who are still left will give up all ideas of raiding and killing helpless negroes when they see their Sultanj and his lieutenant Fadel dead."

Huyssen nodded gratefully. It was true. He had met success after escaping the cruellest of deaths by a hairbreath. Congratulations, and possibly a decoration, were to be his reward. But suddenly a dreadful thought struck him.

"June!" he murmured, "you'll never run away from me?"

"Never!" the girl replied vibrantly. "In this moment I say farewell to the jungle. But you must be patient with me, because I don't know the ways of the white women who wear clothes. You must teach me . . . and care always for me, until, out of the *esa musunguu*, of the savage white

woman that I am, will come out someone . . . like your mother . . . like my mother, who died in the wilderness with my father."

"That I gladly promise," Huyssen exclaimed, pressing her to his breast.

THE first gray of dawn was in the sky when they began their journey back to the fort. Being young and very much in love, they didn't even speak of the horrors they had gone through. All their thoughts were in their future and the happiness that was in store for them.

From a bush, a tiger cat blinked malevolently at them. He had eaten porcupine and a mess of quills tortured his mouth. He simply had no sympathy for the buoyancy and evident happiness of the two blood-stained human beings who, hand in hand, were walking so lightly toward the rising sun.

Then the clicking of the awakened insect surged from among the African grass. And that was the first chorus congratulating June and Huyssen on their engagement.

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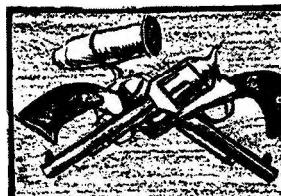
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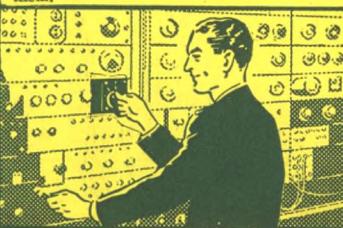
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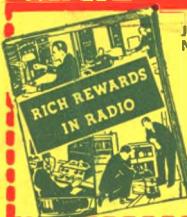
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