

SUMMER

20¢

JUNGLE

STORIES

KI-GOR- JUNGLE LORD

"CARAVAN
OF
TERROR"



TWO BIG
COMPLETE NOVELETS—

“AMAZON QUEEN
OF OPHIR”

“THE SEVEN
FROM ZANZIBAR”



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*Charles
Atlas*

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JUNGLE STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, President

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A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL OF KI-GOR'S MOST DANGEROUS ADVENTURE CARAVAN OF TERROR John Peter Drummond 3

Through the weird fastness of the juju forest prowled the walking dead who murdered in the night. Only Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, could face that invisible horde and hope to win. Yet within his heart was not the will to fight—for Helene, his golden mate, was no longer at his side. She was dead in an unmarked grave.

TWO NOVELETS OF JUNGLE TERROR

SEVEN FROM ZANZIBAR Armand Bragaud 54

Murderous renegades had invaded the peaceful jungle depths; and only Grant Waring stood in the way of their bloody conquest of the friendly natives. But he could not fight, for he was a helpless prisoner of the men he must conquer—and a girl's life was forfeit on his first wrong move.

AMAZON-QUEEN OF OPHIR Wilbur S. Peacock 100

Ghosts walked and talked in the kraal of the living dead, waiting implacably for the helpless jungle victims to fall within their grasp. And into that ancient voodoo city came cowardly Derry Stone—to find that on his courage rested the lives of three friends sentenced to the eerie blood-rites of a murderous golden priestess.

TWO THRILLING AFRICAN SHORT STORIES

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The white god carried a strange magic, a crooked black juju—and all who stood before it—died!

VOODOO SPEARS Francis Gerard 91

The thousand and one warriors were a hundred years dead—but now they fought at Sanders' side, their war-cries thunder from the past.

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THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

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Printed in U. S. A.

Dear Pop:

Even an old Rainbow Divisioner like you would pop your eyes at the army we're putting together this time. Let me tell you, they're doing everything to make up just about the best bunch of fighting galoots you ever saw.

And that goes for what they do for us off duty, too! Take this new club-house we got just outside of camp. It's got radios, dance floors, nice soft chairs and everything. And, Pop, you can get something to eat that won't cost you a month's pay!

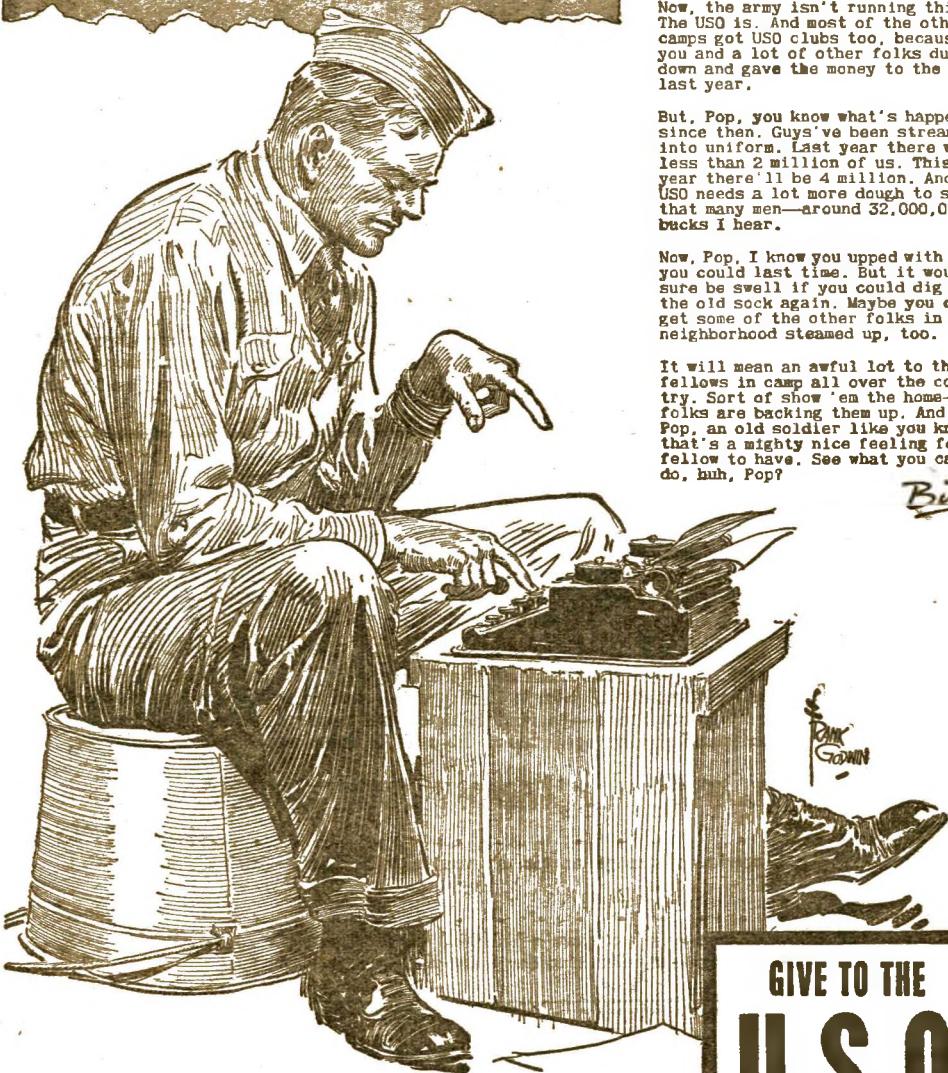
Now, the army isn't running this. The USO is. And most of the other camps got USO clubs too, because you and a lot of other folks dug down and gave the money to the USO last year.

But, Pop, you know what's happened since then. Guys've been streaming into uniform. Last year there was less than 2 million of us. This year there'll be 4 million. And the USO needs a lot more dough to serve that many men—around 32,000,000 backs I hear.

Now, Pop, I know you upped with what you could last time. But it would sure be swell if you could dig into the old sock again. Maybe you could get some of the other folks in the neighborhood steamed up, too.

It will mean an awful lot to the fellows in camp all over the country. Sort of show 'em the home-folks are backing them up. And, Pop, an old soldier like you knows that's a mighty nice feeling for a fellow to have. See what you can do, huh, Pop?

Bill



Send your contribution to your local USO Committee or to National Headquarters,
USO, Empire State Building, New York, N. Y.

**GIVE TO THE
U S O**

CARAVAN OF TERROR

A BOOK-LENGTH KI-GOR NOVEL

KIGOR

DRUMMOND



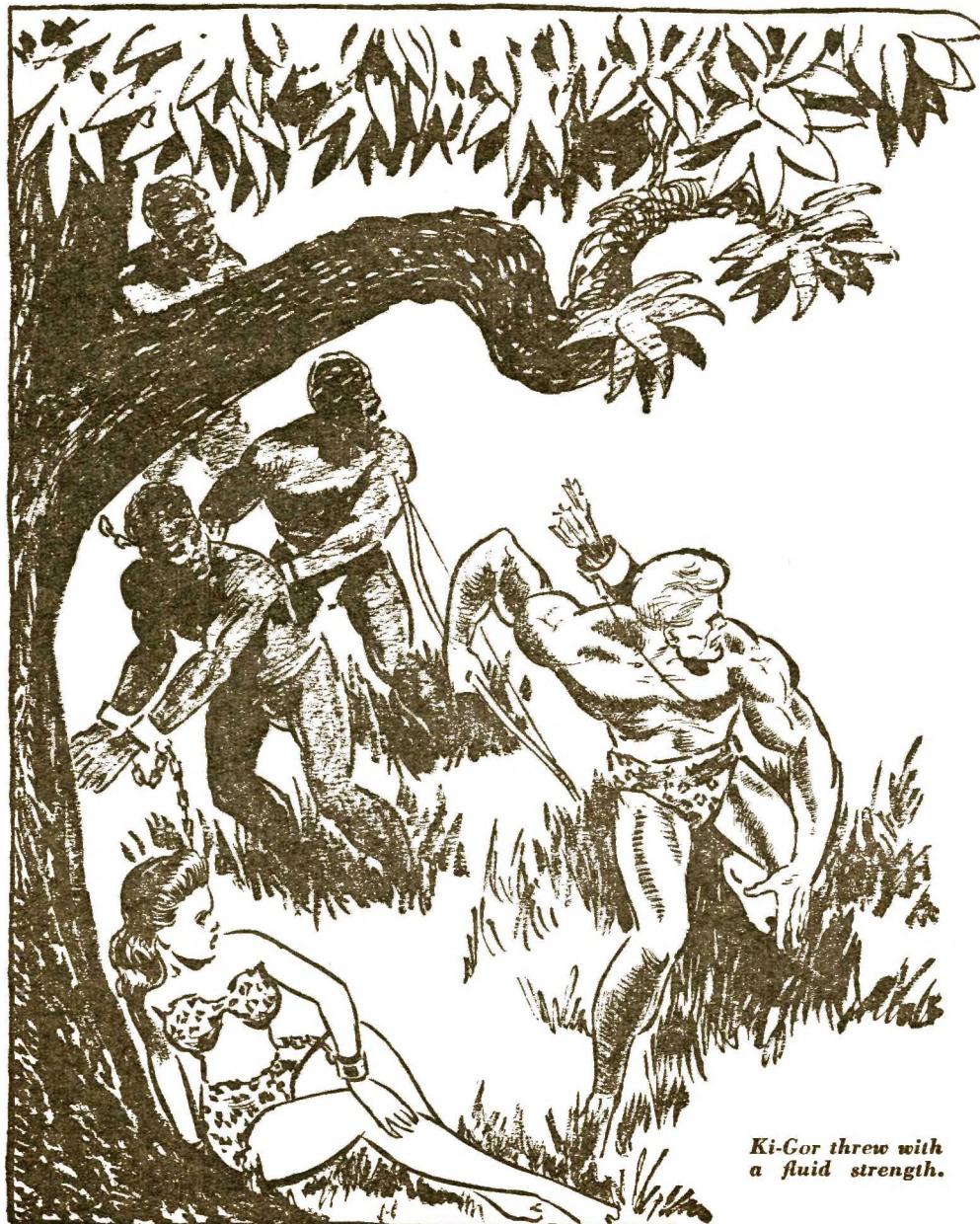
By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

CARAVAN of TERROR

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

A weird menace prowled the shadowed depths of the voodoo forest, leaving heartbreak and vicious death in its crimson wake. Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, fought his mightiest battle to halt the blood-tide sweeping Africa—fought alone—for Helene, his golden mate, lay murdered in an unmarked grave.

A STIRRING NEW KI-GOR ADVENTURE



Ki-Gor threw with a fluid strength.



THE BRASSY African sun was not yet fully risen over the purple mountains to the East, and the night sounds had not slowly dwindled into the cacophonous life of day, but already men and women moved through the *kraal* of Tembu George.

They walked fearfully, the whites of their eyes bright in the ebony of their faces, their spears and knives always close to their clenched hands, and always they walked in pairs so they might watch all sides.

For the *kayeena matuba* had struck again in the night.

There had been three people in Kanusi's hut when Kanusi had rolled onto the tawny lion-pelts he used for a bed. His wife had been by his side, and his daughter, Ceyo, who was but a few moons too young for the unmarried women's communal hut, was sleeping across the room against the thatched wall. Kanusi was a light sleeper, one who had trained himself from childhood to wake should an enemy prowl near-

by. He and his wife had heard nothing—yet, in the early morning, he had awakened to find that Ceyo had disappeared.

Even with the guards that prowled the *kraal* with ready spears and knives, even with the great fires leaping and flinging light into every cranny, the *kayeena matuba* had stolen another maiden for some hideous unknown purpose.

Kanusi sat before the doorway of his hut, slowly and steadily honing the blade of his mightiest spear with a scrap of rhinoceros hide. Three throwing knives gleamed at his feet, and a quiver of arrows was ranged beside his hunting bow at his side. His face was grim and stony, as he worked, and he did not look up as warriors and women passed his hut.

His wife wailed within the hut, the sound ullulating in dreadful monotones as she cried her grief to the blackened carved statue of *Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls. She had greyed her body with ashes, and kneeling before the statue, she fingered the juju charm given her by Gogth, the witch-doctor whose power had dwindled slowly but surely away since Tembu George had told a tale of Christianity about the fires at night.

"Hush, woman," Kanusi said quietly. "Wailing in the night will not bring back the one who was stolen."

His shoulders quivered a bit as the wailing slowed to soft sobbing, and he blinked desperately to hide the tears that glistened in his eyes. A shadow fell across his knees, and he glanced guiltily upward, knowing that the tears had been seen.

Tembu George stood quietly, waiting for the other to speak, knowing what was in the other's mind. Growing sunlight glistened on his ebony skin, and his Negroid features were firm and intelligent. He wore the tribal dress of a Masai chief; monkey-fur anklets, a glittering gold chain about his columnar throat, and a breech-clout of white and black *colubus* skins. Incongruously, though, a .45 automatic was sagging a holster at his waist. He waited, and compassion was in his eyes.

"My man-son was taken a hand of days ago," Kanusi said grimly. "Now my woman-daughter is stolen." Sorrow etched grim lines in his face. But a dull coal of anger blazed white-hot in his eyes. "We

shall see if the *kayeena matuba* can face the steel of my fighting arm."

Tembu George shook his head, squatted beside the warrior. "That is not the way," he said thinly. "Even one as great as you cannot hope to conquer those who steal our young men and women from the *kraal*. The *kayeena matuba* is an old woman's tale; there are no dead that prowl the night to steal the souls of the living. We shall find the men that do such tasks, but we shall find them as a group, for they may be many and a battle might be fought."

Anger flared in Kanusi's voice. "You talk big talk, you make big promises—but a hand of men and women have been stolen since first you made the promise to track the stealers down."

Tembu George stood lithely, standing straight and tall in the new sunlight. His voice was grave, but not harsh, as he spoke to the other.

"Have I failed my adopted people before? Have I never kept my fighting words?" He sighed. "So be it. Go your way, and I shall follow when a fighting plan is made."

HE turned to go, stopped short as a great Masai warrior stepped around the corner of the hut. Finger bones clicked on a strand of gut about the newcomer's neck, and he carried a lion's tail in his left hand. Despite his magnificent physique, and his bold hard eyes, there was something sneaking and unclean about him—much like the jackals that prowled the veldt at night.

"You will turn a corner too many some day, Gogth," Tembu George said thinly, "and a spear will slit your belly!"

Gogth clenched his hands in futile danger, but his head shrank a bit into his shoulders. Tembu George watched distastefully, and Kanusi spat directly at the witch-doctor's feet. Gogth drew in a shuddering breath of rage, made the sign of death at Kanusi with his right forefinger.

"You talk big, now," he said, "but soon your bones will be water, and worms will nest in your belly." He grinned, evilly, slyly. "And then I shall be chief of the Masai."

Tembu George took a driving step forward, and his right fist chopped with a vicious fluid strength. The blow pulsed the

witch-doctor's mouth, drove him back against the thatched wall. He stood there, stunned for the moment, while Tembu George watched with an impersonal efficiency.

"You've made your threats before, Gogth," he said quietly. "Now you speak with a forked tongue. Was it not known that you slept last night, I should feel certain that you are the *kayeena matuba*." He jerked his chin toward the great swinging gate in the kraal's wall. "Get out," he finished, "and don't come back."

Gogth straightened, wiped the blood from his mouth. His eyes were bright pools of hate then, and his right hand hovered at the knife in his loin-scabbard.

"I shall *cut* a hole for the worms to enter!" he said, whirled back around the corner of the hut.

Tembu George sighed, idly rubbed his bruised knuckles against his corded belly muscles. He grinned wryly at the silent Kanusi, then shrugged.

"He will not leave," he said. "But he will not walk so big for a time."

"Protect your back, O Chief," Kanusi said softly. "Gogth is stirring the young men in revolt. He hates me, for I spat in his face when his snake-words struck my ears."

Tembu George considered briefly, watching the warriors and women about the tiny cooking fires. Smoke drifted lazily on the still, warm wind, and the odor was crisp and clean, stirring hunger in his belly.

"Do many listen?" he asked almost idly.

"Many!" Kanusi said. "They want the old days when blood flowed like rain, when everybody feared the Masai fighting man. Now they say that the Masais are soft like women, that their blades grow dull for lack of drinking blood. They do not like the peaceful life you say is best." He rocked his head from side to side. "Aaaiieee, are we not richer, have we not more goats and *kava*, are we not respected? See they not that such a way is better?"

"War-lust beats high in a young man's heart," Tembu George said slowly. "It will be many moons before they see the rightness of my way." He turned to go. "Still, maybe things will be better! And I shall face *all* shadows."

He halted abruptly. Kanusi stared si-

lently, his hand honing the blade of his spear.

"Do not leave before the sun rises again, O Kanusi," Tembu George said evenly. "If a fighting plan is not made by then, well—" He spread eloquent hands.

Kanusi nodded, without speaking, then bent his head. His wife cried with dull agony from the dark interior of the hut; and suddenly, the morning was grey about the hut of Kanusi. Tembu George sighed, turned abruptly away, strode heavily toward the fire that leaped its tiny sparkling flames before the chief's hut.

A graceful woman glanced up from where she roasted *kava* at the edge of the dancing flames. She was slender, her soft breasts swelling against the brassiere of bright cloth, a skirt of silken bark-cloth hugging the pliancy of her hips. Her features were fine and delicately molded, and her hair was clean and loose about her face. She looked deep into the eyes of her husband, and sympathy darkened her eyes.

"Nothing?" she asked Tembu George.

Tembu George shook his head, laid a gentle hand on his wife's shoulder. "Ceyo is gone," he said, "taken like the others." He scowled. "I do not understand how Kanusi could sleep while she was stolen?"

MARI shrugged wonderingly, turned the roasting *kava* with slim hands. She knew the turmoil that was in her husband's mind, she knew how seriously he took his duties as chief of the greatest tribal nation in all Africa. Once, George had lived in the far United States, but *Kamzila*, the god of white juju, had brought him to her country where his keen mind and superb physique had earned for him the respect and chieftainship of the Masais. Then he had courted her, had married her but a few short years before. Between them was a silken bond of thoughts and emotions more powerful than any forged chain, growing through the passing months, never slackening in its strength.

She thought of that now, as she watched the grim lines of Tembu George's face, and she touched him impulsively.

"You will find a way," she said, believing her words.

Tembu George smiled confidently, and for a flickering second some of the worry was gone from his eyes.

"I'll find a way," he said. "And if I can't, then I know a man who can."

"*Ki-Gor.*" Awe was in Mari's voice.

"*Ki-Gor,*" Tembu George agreed.

Mari nodded, lifted the roasting stick, handed it to her husband. He detached the *kava*, sucked the fragrant juice from his strong fingers. Mari sank to a crude stool Tembu George had made, nibbled at her breakfast with white even teeth.

"Send for him," she suggested finally.

Tembu George shook his head. "There may be no need; it may be that some of my scouts will find traces of the stealers."

"And if not?"

"Then I shall send Sjanbock, for he is the fastest runner in the *kraal*."

They ate silently, feeling the oppression that hung over the great village. Children whimpered bewilderedly, played close to their mothers. Men walked in whispers, their weapons always at hand, their eyes flickering about the *kraal's* stockade. Dogs growled over bones tossed to them, but the growling seemed oddly muted and distorted in the morning air.

Oxen stirred lazily in the mud paddy built for them at the rear of the village, and *virini* flirted mottled-gold tails as they sprinkled the morning with bursts of sound. A naked boy flipped a rock at the birds, was cuffed angrily by his ordinarily even-tempered father. The boy cried, and his mother came to his defense. The father rose in sudden anger, and only Tembu George's instant shout of command stopped the warrior from striking the woman.

Tembu George turned back to the fire, glared bleakly into the flames. He shook his head silently, feeling the raw emotion of utter helplessness twisting his heart.

Mari bent forward, her voice soft and impelling. "It is not your fault," she said impulsively. "You are but a man—and *kayeena matuba* walks in the night."

Tembu George spun about, half angrily, then caught himself. "There are no night-walkers," he said evenly. "Believe me, when I say it."

"Of course, of course," Mari replied, but he could see that old superstitions were again gaining hold on her mind and emotions.

She stood, and went toward the wooden buckets that were beside the door of the

large hut. "I must go for water from the river," she called over her shoulder.

"Not alone," her husband said automatically.

He caught up his great Masai spear from where it leaned against a post, then strode to Mari's side. He took the buckets from her hand, carried them by their leather bails, despite her obvious reluctance.

"It is a *woman's* work!" she protested.

Tembu George laughed, and white teeth glistened evenly in his dark face. Warriors turned, reluctantly grinned, as his virile, strong laughter pealed toward the morning sky.

"That is the old way," Tembu George said, "I like this new way the better."

THEY went together, side by side, from the *kraal* toward the sullen river at the foot of the hill. Grass brushed at their ankles as they walked, and tiny birds darted from underfoot like bits of color with thrashing vivid wings. The edge of the jungle lay just ahead, and the shadows were black and distinct in the bright sunlight, lying invitingly cool.

They entered the jungle, striding the wide path to the springs that lay on the river's bank, and suddenly they were alone, and the rest of Africa far away.

They walked side by side, the woman's tall figure dwarfed by the great physique of her husband. A monkey chittered insolently from its old man's face, then forgot them and industriously scratched its furry belly. A tiny tree-snake hissed a belligerent warning, disappeared in instant fright when Tembu George flicked his great spear. Orchids grew in riotously-colored clumps along the branches; and Tembu George plucked a scarlet blossom, tucked it behind the left ear of his wife.

"Like a virgin girl, with a betrothal flower," he said laughingly. "I think that I shall play court again."

Mari giggled, liking the byplay, amazed again, as she always was, by the rich laughter, the boyish laughter, that could come from the man at her side. Despite his size and his bravery in battle, sometimes he was but a boy to be held tightly against her breasts.

"Man-boy!" she said mockingly.

Tembu George grinned, not answering; but now in his eyes lay the memory of the

dark days that had gone before. He sighed, and the laughter was gone from his face.

They said no more as they walked, but listened to the cheerful myriad sounds that trickled through the interlaced jungle. From ahead came the first mutter of sound from the tumbling river, and a breath of air brought the soft odor of the water.

Tembu George stumbled, as a creeper snatched at his ankle, swore in English when he saw the ripped anklet lying on the ground. Mari laughed, caught at the buckets, as he bent to replace the band of monkey-fur.

"Clumsy one," she said mockingly. "Once the village is hidden, you *force* me to do the work—like any woman!"

"Shoo!" Tembu George laughed. "Get the water while I fix this bewitched anklet. But wait there for me."

He watched his wife turn and stride lightly down the path. Then he bent and examined the anklet. The sinew had broken. He fitted the band again, tied the thong, then straightened. He walked toward the spring, which was just around the bend in the trail.

He had no real fear for his wife, for the spring was less than a hundred yards away, yet he felt a prickling of animal terror along his nerves as he walked, and he increased his pace.

He grinned a bit self-consciously, as he almost ran, for he had heard no sound. And he slowed his pace, that his wife might not know her husband had a sense of fear in him.

He rounded the bend in the trail, saw the small cave in the shelving bank where the spring purled forth. He saw the muddy water of the river rushing in its deep cut, winced instinctively as the bloated carcass of a deer floated swiftly by. Good swimmer as he was, he knew that such a torrent would kill him within seconds.

"Mari?" he called, then frowned when there was no answer.

"Mari?" he snapped. "This is no time for childish games—answer me!"

THREE was only the silence of the glade beating against the rushing sigh of the foaming water at his left. He sped forward, eyes on the river's surface, expecting to see arms futilely beating the water; and halfway across the clearing, he

almost stumbled over the wooden buckets Mari had carried.

He bent, studied the ground. He saw only animal tracks, and the refuse of the animals that watered at the spring during the black nights. Then he saw the light imprints of his wife's dainty feet, and a cold breath of disaster touched his senses.

For the footprints abruptly disappeared.

They walked in a straight line toward the spring, then ceased. Tembu George stared wildly around; it was as though his wife had disappeared into thin air. He glanced upward automatically, thinking Mari might have been pulled into a tree—sawed brutally when he realized that the nearest tree was twenty feet away.

He whirled about in blind panic, feeling madness rising in his mind—and in that instant he knew that Mari had been stolen by the *kayeena matuba*.

"Mari!" he whispered brokenly, and stooped to lift a scarlet orchid from the ground. He smoothed the soft petals with shaking fingers.

And then he was running toward the Masai *kraal*, rage pounding in his mind, grief tearing his heart. He sobbed as he ran, sobbed with the futile agony of a man who has failed himself and all that he loves.

"Mari!" he said again.

And then he was out of the jungle and racing up the slight hill to the corral. A shrill cry went up as he raced from the jungle, and a great black plunged down the hill to meet him.

"Sjanbock," Tembu George snarled, "find the White Lord of the Jungle and bring him to me! No, wait, I shall send a talking bark to the Golden One." He answered the warrior's unspoken question. "Into nowhere she disappeared. Ki-Gor is our *only* hope."

Gogth detached himself from the shadows of the *kraal's* gate, sneered openly as he watched the pain that lay in Tembu George's face.

"I warned you," he said sibilantly. "My Gods are the strong ones; I could fight the *kayeena matuba*, should I so desire." He spat insolently. "But you are chief, so you may see the rest of the men and women stolen."

Tembu George fought mightily for control, then turned to Sjanbock.

"Get Ki-Gor," he whispered. "And bring him here!"

II

THE warm African breeze came lazily through the jungle, bringing the scent of growing plants in a vague perfume that filled the tiny jungle glade where an icy spring bubbled tinklingly through the bed of white sand. The clear water surged briefly across the clearing, then dropped with soft splashings into the sluggish current of a brown stream that flowed to the East.

Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, stretched sleepily, great muscles rippling and coiling beneath the bronze of his skin, his grey eyes amused and critical as they watched the slender girl perched high overhead on the swaying limb of a *baobab* tree.

A white-ruffed monkey bounced impatiently in another tree, its wizened old man's face puckered in comic bewilderment as it watched Helene move with a quiet sureness along the branch.

"Jump" Ki-Gor called.

Helene's light laughter tinkled, and she shook her head in mock fear. Golden-red hair rippled about the smooth forehead, was like a living flame against the golden tan of her supple body.

"I'm afraid," she called down. "Come up, and show me how it is done." Her right hand twisted loose a cluster of *nabinta* berries, the jungle drug that, when eaten, placed the user in a cataleptic sleep that could not be differentiated from death, for ten to twenty hours—and she pelted her mate's bronzed body with the soft red berries.

The jungle giant shook his head indifferently, relaxed again beside the tiny stream, idly flicked the fingers of one hand in the racing water. He closed his eyes, as though asleep, but laughter wrinkles appeared about his mobile mouth.

"Wah!" he chided his mate. "The jungle will laugh at me when it finds that the *Golden One* must walk the ground like a frightened *dik-dik*, while Ki-Gor flees through the treetops like Nkina, the monkey."

"All right, for you, mister smarty!" The girl edged further along the branch. "I'll be Nkina."

She poised on graceful feet on the rough bark, measured the distance to a liana vine trailing from the branches overhead, then launched her slender body into the fragrant air. Her left hand caught the vine and then flipped her lithely to a mossy limb fifteen feet away. She balanced precariously for a moment, then had to grasp the trunk for support.

Ki-Gor's laughter rose clearly, and he came lightly to his feet.

"*Dik-dik!*" he teased, paced forward until he stood beneath the trailing vine.

He leaped high, caught the end of the vine, went upward hand over hand. Cables of muscles swelled and flexed in a ripple of strength across his shoulders as he climbed effortlessly to the branch thirty feet overhead. His shock of hair was a yellow mane sweeping back from a broad forehead, and he flicked a stray strand from his eyes with a toss of his head.

He brought his feet together, the vine between, holding with but his left hand, and swayed easily before the branch upon which Helene stood. He laughed deep into his mate's eyes, reading there the love and companionship that had a strength and quality that grew stronger as the weeks fled by in the lazy jungle depths.

"Was it not you who bragged before me the other day?" he asked. "Did you not say that you could better Ki-Gor?" He smiled, his even teeth white against the sun-bronze of his features. "And now you almost fall, after a *tiny* jump."

He pinched his free thumb and forefinger together in a belittling gesture of derision, then clucked his tongue in mock sympathy.

Color tinged Helene's smooth cheeks, but a smile lay in her blue eyes as she watched the jungle giant swinging so easily and lithely on the heavy twine.

"You're *afraid* to show me," she retorted. "You taught me how to swim your way—and now I swim better than you." She tossed her glowing hair in scorn. "I think," she finished darkly, "that I shall go back to the United States, where I am appreciated."

She whirled upon the huge limb, cast herself fearlessly from the tree toward another vine, caught it and swung in a soaring arc to a tree twenty feet away. She balanced on a limb for a moment, swung

laughing eyes back to her bronzed husband, then caught another vine and fled through the swaying treetops.

KI-GOR grinned, watched the slender body of his mate disappearing through the trees. This was a game they played almost every day. But, in reality, it was more than a game; the ability to travel through the interlaced boughs of the gigantic forest trees meant safety many times when danger threatened. But he and his mate liked the practice better as a game, for it put a thrill and love of life into something that could have been hard monotonous work.

He went higher up the vine, lifting himself with the lithe ease of a monkey, paused fifty feet from the shadowed jungle floor, then flipped his body until he was swinging in a great arc.

At the apex of a forward swing, he loosed his hold, catapulted through the warm air, to land catlike on a bough that swayed dangerously beneath his weight. Mighty thigh muscles cushioned the shock, and he caught his balance automatically. The branch sank, then whipped upward in its natural springiness, and Ki-Gor went hurtling forward again, as though flipped from a springboard.

His right hand caught a branch fifteen feet away, held for a second, then flung him forward so that his left hand caught another branch. His left hand barely touched the rough bark, just enough to steady his flight and throw him a bit sideways. His feet touched a huge limb, and his toes dug for balance. His hands came forward, and he balanced steadily, keen eyes searching for Helene far ahead.

He saw the flicker of motion to his right, saw the graceful body of his mate swing like a pendulum across a small clearing, and silent approval lighted his eyes. He leaned forward, dropped headfirst from the branch, twisted like a falling cat, landed on another limb twenty feet below. The bough bent downward then surged high, and Ki-Gor was whipped through the air at a speed that thrilled his heart. Judging his distance instantly, he caught with both hands at a loop of vine, whipped his feet forward, landed gently on a far branch.

His eyes were keen and sparkling filled with the zest for life, and he left his mo-

mentary perch with a rushing spring that was a fluid continuation of the movement that had brought him to the branch. His hands caught and held on branch after branch, and he was suddenly a great bronzed ape swinging easily through the treetops.

Ki-Gor traveled that way for minutes, never misjudging his distance, traveling with a lithe grace that made each movement seem effortless. Muscles corded and knotted and relaxed in his superb body, and his breathing lost none of its evenness as he raced tirelessly through the green foliage.

He swung higher into the trees, careless of the fact that it was safer twenty feet below. The sun laced through the thinning branches, felt warm and solid and good across the broad sweep of his shoulders. He paused now and then, breathing easily, balancing lightly on a swaying limb scanning the interstices of the laced branches with keen eyes. Then he went on again, traveling with an incredible rapidity. Ahead lay the small lake where Helene and he swam lazily every day; and he knew that she was traveling that way in an effort to beat him at a game in which he acknowledged no master.

He drove faster through the trees, swinging with an ease that came from years of living in the open. He grinned slightly when he saw his mate resting on a bough far below and to his left. He saw how she peered back along the way she had come, and laughter rode his eyes as he swung with an uncanny quiet about her toward the lake.

The trees thinned after a few moments, and he went more slowly, having to pick his way with more care. He dropped closer to the warm jungle floor, traveled along the heavier branches, finally squatted on a great limb on the far side from the direction in which Helene was coming.

Water rippled bluely beneath his perch, and the white sand was a gleaming contrast to the tiny azure waves. Further back, toward the roots of the tree, the sand merged into the soft green grass and brown earth of the jungle floor. There was a tiny breeze stroking warmly across his bronzed skin, and he stretched sleepily, feeling the first twinges of hunger in his belly.

A gaudy *nuhanga* fish flirted water with a red and gold tail, then flipped back out of sight, a green and black fly dangling from the corner of its mouth. Across the lake, a pink flamingo waded in the shallows like a rosy orchid walking on stilt legs. Beneath the tree, a shy *dik-dik* poked its tiny head from the underbrush then minced daintily to the water for a drink.

Ki-Gor plucked a furry yellow and brown caterpillar from the branch, dropped it squarely on the head of the foot-high deer. An instant later, the frightened deer had disappeared into the bushes without a sound.

The jungle man chuckled lightly, then froze into silence, when he heard the rustling of the trees a hundred feet away. He sat motionless, waiting, and a moment later felt his perch vibrate as Helene landed at the end of a swinging loop of liana.

SLOWLY, he peered around the trunk, smiled when he saw the rich laughter that lifted the corners of Helene's red lips. He ducked back out of sight as she worked through the limbs toward the heavy branch on which he squatted. He made no sound as she came forward; instead, edged about the trunk as she stepped on the bough on which he had waited.

She was humming lightly as she stood wide-legged, and triumph gave her face a beauty that caught at Ki-Gor's heart with an ecstasy that was almost a pain. She watched her back-trail for a moment; then, seeing that Ki-Gor had evidently been delayed, she glanced at the rippling water below, and nodded as though to herself.

Her skin was a golden tan against the tawny yellow and black of her leopard-skin breech-clout, and halter. She shrugged the halter from her firm supple breasts, hung it on a branch, then slipped the breech-clout from about her hips and stood nude on the heavy limb.

She was slender and smooth and supple as she stood in the bright sunlight; she was like a golden goddess whose tresses were of spun red-gold metal. She poised lithely, lifted her arms to dive into the cool depths below.

"*Grrrooowwff!*" Ki-Gor growled menacingly like an enraged gorilla.

And reaching out from his concealment,

he caught with both hands at Helene's slender ankles.

Helene's tiny bleat of terror rang softly—and then she was twisting through the air to the water below, flipped there by Ki-Gor's jerk on her trim ankles. One startled glimpse she had of his laughing face, and then water geysered, and she disappeared into the blue depths with a spluttered squeal.

Ki-Gor stood erect on the branch, and his laughter rang gaily through the warm jungle. He bent and peered at the dripping head of Helene as she emerged splashing from her involuntary dive.

"*Grrrooowwff!*" he growled mockingly, laughed again.

"You—*oh you!*" Helene spluttered. The jungle man came lithely erect. "*Wah!*" he said teasingly. "And you think yourself a jungle woman! I let you start ahead of me; yet I have a good sleep while waiting for you to arrive. And then you fall from a tree that is as solid as the ground."

Helene swept wet gold-red hair back from her eyes, laughed into the grinning face of her mate. "All right," she said, "you win. Now, come on in."

Ki-Gor nodded, arced gracefully from the branch into the water. He sank deep into the blue coolness, felt fresh vigor come into his great muscles, blew his breath in monster arcing bubbles. He broke water, trod easily, while Helene swam to his side. It was then he saw the laughing purpose in her eyes and he turned to race to shore.

But Helene was an expert in the water now. On land or in the trees Ki-Gor was her master—but in the water, she swam with a graceful speed he could not hope to better.

He dived deep in the azure water, trying to get away, but Helene followed with a tenacious speed that caught him before he had gone twenty feet. He came to the surface, feeling her clutching his waist, sucked in a deep breath of air, and dived again. And on his great back rode the slim body of his wife. He swam with a frantic exaggerated speed, knowing he could not get away, feeling the laughter building in his heart.

He tried to come to the surface again; and it was then that Helene displayed her lissome strength. With consummate skill,

she kept him under water, while she kept her face above water where she could breathe. Ki-Gor struggled mightily, careful not to break free, for he knew the enjoyment she got from her mock revenge. He felt no discomfort, for his mighty lungs could hold air for a long period under water.

His lips twisted in amusement, and he surged high in a flurry of movement—then went utterly limp.

THE next instant, Helene had drawn him to the surface, was swimming toward shore carrying him easily with one arm. He let his body trail limply, felt himself dragged on shore and turned on his stomach. A weight dropped on his back, and he could feel Helene's hands administering artificial respiration. He remained slack, laughing to himself, hearing the soft breathing of his mate.

"Splash water in his face," he whispered loudly into the ground.

"Of course!" Helene cried, came to her feet, raced to the lake's edge.

And then she turned, a frown of laughing worry wrinkling her forehead. She dived into the water, splashed toward the center of the lake.

"Smarty!" she called back. "Just for that, *you* can gather the fruit for supper tonight."

Ki-Gor came to his feet, growled in mock-menace, stripped the gleaming sand from his bronzed body with flickers of his strong hands. He walked slowly to the water's edge, crouched preparatory to swimming after Helene.

A twig crackled in the underbrush, and the Jungle Lord threw himself instantly and instinctively to one side. His right hand dropped to the gleaming knife scabbarded at his waist; and he whirled in a half-crouch, the blade glittering wickedly in his locked fingers.

"Who's there?" he snapped.

He was utterly magnificent and primal as he crouched against the onslaught of any hidden enemy. All laughter was gone from his eyes, and his even features were somehow solid and vicious. He watched the dark shadow coming through the jungle growth; and then as a bar of sunlight limned the intruder, all caution fled from his face.

"I come without weapons O Ki-Gor," the newcomer said humbly.

Ki-Gor smiled. "You are welcome, Sjanbock," he said warmly, thrust his knife back into its scabbard.

A black stepped from the jungle, striding lithely forward, his magnificently-proportioned body towering a full foot over Ki-Gor's head. A monkey-fur clout was about his waist, and a necklace of crocodile teeth clicked about his throat. He carried a short assegai in his left hand, and a roll of thin bark in his right.

Water made tiny splashing sounds, as Helene swam to the tree on which her clothing hung, and then branches quivered as she climbed lithely through the thick green leaves.

"You look for someone?" Ki-Gor asked politely.

"For you, O White Giant," Sjanbock said quietly, ignoring the fact that he towered over the white man. "Our great Chief, Tembu George, sent this talking bark to you." He grinned with a flash of white teeth. "Wah! To follow you and the Golden One is like chasing the wind running through dry grass!"

He extended the tube of bark to Ki-Gor who unrolled it and studied the words written there by a twig dipped in crimson *cochineal* juice. The jungle man shook his head, when he saw the words, for they were in English, and he could read nothing but the picture-writing of the Bantus.

"Helene?" he called.

His mate swung lightly down the tree, red-gold curls clinging damply to her forehead and swirling about her neck. She smiled at the black, tapped him lightly on the chest with her clenched fist.

"It is long between meals," she said ceremoniously.

Then her eyes widened, when she saw the blood-crusted wound that lay deep in Sjanbock's right shoulder. He caught her glance, shrugged.

"A Wasuli snake would stop my *trek* to you," he said simply. "He fills a jackal's belly now."

Ki-Gor handed the unrolled bark to Helene, waited patiently as she read the English words. His eyes narrowed, as color fled from her face, but he said nothing until she had finished her reading.

"Trouble?" he asked.

Helene explained swiftly, giving the message in brief concise sentences. Sjanbock nodded from time to time, offered an explanation when Helene had finished.

"It is not the *kayeena matuba*," he said grimly, "That I know! For a Wasuli tried to stop me, and the Wasulis do not walk with the night-walkers."

Ki-Gor flexed strong tanned fingers, his face solid and steady. Helene watched silently, instinctively knowing what was in her jungle mate's mind.

"Is there any you suspect?" Ki-Gor asked quietly.

Sjanbock nodded, and smiled grimly. "I think—" he began.

And the smile froze into rigidity on his keen features. He bowed a bit from his waist, bending toward Ki-Gor; and then the assegai dropped from his suddenly-lax hand squarely into the chest of the jungle giant.

He spun slowly about, staring at the jungle at his back—and a tiny blob of raw cotton was white against the ebony of one shoulder.

Then he crumpled, falling slackly, muscles loose. And he was dead before he struck the ground.

HELENE screamed involuntarily, pressed one hand against her soft mouth, terror spreading a thin film of panic through the blueness of her eyes.

Ki-Gor dropped to one knee, his left hand sweeping Helene to the earth, his right hand flipping the assegai about to the throwing position of a Masai fighting man. Keen grey eyes flicked along the line of jungle for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, and then his arm whipped back.

Muscles corded and knotted in his great shoulder, writhed like coiling snakes along his arm, and tightened fingers already taut about the spear haft. He threw with a vicious fluid strength, hurling the spear with all of the terrific power of his superb body. The assegai was a winking sliver of light-tipped blackness streaking through the air. It zipped through the interstices of laced branches—and stopped with a *chugging* thud. A shriek of agony tolled from the jungle, branches whipped from the ecstatic threshings of a falling body—and then a war-painted savage kicked out his life on the greensward.

Ki-Gor raced to the body, crouched, his knife glittering in his hand. He glanced about with the instincts of the jungle-born, waiting for a second attacker to appear. Then finding that the ambusher had been alone, he bent and straightened the dead body with a casual strength.

Flat ugly features stared sightlessly upward into his face. He shook his head, not recognizing the man, then examined the blowgun that had fallen to the ground.

"Wasuli," he said succinctly to Helene, who had raced to his side.

Helene shuddered, turned away, as her husband pulled the assegai through the back of the man. She followed the jungle giant to the lake, where he cleaned the spear with water and white sand.

"We go to help Tembu George?" she asked, knowing the answer.

"We go to help a friend," the White Lord of the Jungle said simply.

III

A WAR DRUM surged with a bright hard rhythm, and the sound was somehow vicious and brooding in the gloom of early evening. Men huddled over tiny fires in the clearing at the center of Tembu George's *braal*, and the mutter of their voices beat a dull accompaniment to the throbbing of the drum locked between the heavy knees of Gogth.

Tembu George stood in the shadow of his hut, fingering the .45 in steady hands, then slipped in a fresh clip of shells with an abrupt gesture of impatience. For five hours he had watched the young warriors of the village slowly congregating about the slyly-treacherous Gogth, and he had felt a bleak hate mounting in his heart for the man who would sacrifice the peace and prosperity of the entire Masai nation to further his own plans.

Six years before, when Tembu George had been elected chief of the Masais in a great tribal ceremony, he had fought Gogth for the right. Blood had stained the ground from their wounds, as they fought with knife and spear and talon-hands. They had fought standing up, battling like primal giants, and Gogth had been the first to fall. Since then, the witch-doctor had hated the American Negro as an usurper, had tried to undermine his influence, had

secretly fought to oust the other from the chieftainship.

Now, with the mysterious disappearances to bolster his talk, he had a wedge that he was using to prize the impressionable young warriors from the peaceful ways that Tembu George had inaugurated. He was a half-breed, and he used the cunning mind of his mother with the superb body of his Masai father to enforce the plans that were continually his.

He sat in the center of a growing circle of warriors, and the drone of his voice never changed, as he told tales of Masai bravery, of the turgid fear that the nation had once inspired throughout Africa.

His fingers drew war-talk from the leather-headed drum, and the rhythm stirred the hot blood of his listeners, brought battle sweat to their faces and a bloody gleam to their eyes. They swayed in unison, and slowly a humming chant came from their tight throats. Gogth smiled thinly as he watched; and then his face was slyly vicious, as his gaze centered on Tembu George who strode directly toward the center of the clearing.

"He comes, *this man-woman*," Gogth said loudly. "Look upon he whom you call your chief; see you not that he is not the man to wear a chief's necklace, for he is afraid to fight!"

A muttering assent of agreement rolled from tongue to tongue, and antagonism flared in dark faces as the warriors turned grimly to stare at the magnificent figure of Tembu George.

Tembu George halted in the circle of firelight, stared silently about, and eyes dropped from his challenging gaze. He turned slowly, then came about to face the witch-doctor. His tone was that of a man reasoning with a child, but a ring of steel was evident beneath the words.

"We live in peace, now," he said quietly. "Fighting is in the past. We have more than plenty; we are respected. We—"

Gogth spat insolently, came to his feet. "A curse on your peace!" he said viciously. "A hand of a hand of our men and women have been stolen by the *kayeenat matuba*; only blood-sacrifices will stop what is happening. I say we declare war, that we paint as we did before your stomach filled with water — that we take sacrifices for *Gimshai*!"

"Aaaiiiieee!" A sigh of agreement swelled upward from the warriors.

Tembu George dropped his hand casually to the gun at his waist, and he seemed to loom even larger in the flickering fire-light.

"A war starts with one fight," he said evenly, "Who faces me?"

Gogth did not stir for a moment. His gaze was hot and impelling as he stared about the waiting warriors. He caught sight of the man rising softly to his feet in the far shadows, and a smile crossed his thin mouth.

"Now!" he snapped.

And even as the word left his lips, the warrior screamed in a high voice, collapsed, his right arm skewered by a yard-long arrow that had come from nowhere. Light winked on the throwing knife that dropped from his nerveless hand—and then he was on his knees, clawing at the arrow through his flesh.

TEMBU GEORGE spun back to Gogth, but the witch-doctor was already racing for the rear gate of the stockade. A second later he was gone, and Tembu George faced the warriors alone.

He laughed shortly, scornfully, and the men cowered back as though lashed with a whip. Then a sigh of awe came from them, for striding into the light, with his great war-bow still in his hands, came Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, and his mate, Helene.

"I see you, O Ki-Gor," Tembu George said formally.

"And I see you!" the jungle giant said simply, ignored the fact that his instant action had saved the life of his friend from an assassin's knife.

Tembu George glanced at two warriors sitting at his side, gestured toward the would-be assassin. "Tend his wound, take him to the edge of the *balinga* forest, and free him."

"No!" The killer cowered from the reaching hands. "Not the *balinga*!"

There was no mercy in Tembu George's face, as he turned away. He had no fear of the forest of fantastic trees and steaming swamps; but he knew the superstitious terror that the place held for all blacks of the territory, and he knew that his almost casual sentencing of the assassin to the

death that lurked in the juju forest would command respect when next he voiced a command.

He turned away, motioned for Ki-Gor and Helene to precede him to his hut. The moon was rising, and the shadows paled about their feet as they walked. The assassin's cries rose high in the night, choked off, as a heavy hand battered at his face. A dog slunk through the gloom, its eyes ferally alive, and from a hut to one side, a child whimpered in restless sleep.

Inside the hut, which was lighted by fat candles, Tembu George smiled at the slender Helene. "It is good to see you again," he said in English. "Living with natives is all right for a time; but a man likes to talk to English-speaking people now and then."

"I know," Helene said, and momentary nostalgic memories came to her eyes. Once she had lived in a civilized country, too; but that was before Ki-Gor had rescued her from her wrecked plane, before she had savored the fullness of life with her mate in his jungle home.

Ki-Gor saw the clouding of his wife's eyes, and his mobile lips tightened. Too often, he had debated his right to keep Helene at his side, away from her people. Helene saw the slight frown on his face, and she moved to his side. And then the moment was gone, and they were one again.

TEMBU GEORGE sank to a rawhide-laced bunk, spread his hands in a futile gesture. Tired lines were engraved deep in his face, and he spoke with a weary monotony.

"The first disappeared fifteen days ago, disappeared while getting water from the spring. There were absolutely no clues, no hint that men had stolen them. And since then, twenty more have gone." His eyes were suddenly bleak and cold. "Mari was stolen three days ago, her footprints disappearing in the midst of a clearing, as though she had vanished into thin air." He frowned, remembering a vagrant thought. "Where is Sjanbok?" he finished.

"Dead," Ki-Gor said succinctly. "A wasuli slew him with a poison dart. The Wasuli died."

Pain made a dark shadow across Tembu George's eyes. "He was my friend," he said simply, almost irrele-

vantly. Then he straightened. "I have nothing to show you, no place from which to start your search for the stolen men and women; I don't even know if you can help."

Helene interposed a question. "Why would they be taken?" she asked.

Tembu George shrugged. "My guess would be that Gogth stole them so that he could arouse the Masais against me. Still, I have had him watched for days, and he has not acted suspiciously, other than his obvious eagerness to win the chieftainship."

"Gogth is a skulking *dango*," Ki-Gor said simply. "I fought him many moons ago, when he and a greasy Arab slaughtered elephants for their long teeth."

"That was Ali Ben-Hassis," Tembu George said slowly. "I fought him myself. But he is dead, slain, so I heard, in Libya," He frowned. "But that has nothing to do with our problem; what can you do to help?"

The White Lord of the Jungle smiled. "We shall see," he said. "Maybe nothing; then again, maybe a great deal. First, we shall look at the place where Mari was taken."

Tembu George shook his head dismally. "It will be of little use," he said. "I searched it myself, and found nothing but animal tracks. But I did place a guard there, should you wish to see it as it was when my wife was stolen." He sighed deep in his chest, then straightened from the bunk. "Come," he finished, "I will lead the way."

They went from the hut, striding through the warriors who watched with expressionless eyes. Tension still hung in the air; but gazes flicked to one side when Tembu George swept his challenging eyes around the staring faces.

Ki-Gor walked lithely, with the grace and strength of the jungle animal that he was, and Helene paced his side, her bright hair gleaming in the firelight. Tembu George brought up the rear, carrying a handful of dry faggots he had lifted from beside a fire. He lit one at the *kraal* gate, lighted the path as they walked toward the line of jungle at the base of the hill.

Despite the moonlight, the night pressed in with a visible strength against the flickering torch-light, reached with velvety fin-

gers that curled back into themselves as the trio advanced. Birds rustled sleepily in their ground nests, and overhead, a carrion-owl flew eerily by on soundless pinions.

They entered the path that led to the spring, walked swiftly, saying nothing, each intent on his own thoughts. In three minutes, they could see the tiny shards of light piercing the trees from the fire of the spring's guards. They pressed along the path, turned the bend in the trail, stepped into the clearing.

A guard stood with spear ready, then relaxed when he recognized the intruders. Teeth gleamed whitely in his face as he smiled.

"Nothing stirs," he said to Tembu George.

Tembu George nodded shortly, brushed past the man, indicated the ground where his wife's footprints had ceased. Ki-Gor trod lightly forward, bent and studied the ground.

It was then as though his nerves had flipped out ethereal tendrils that flickered back and forth, searching for and discarding item after item. He said nothing as he searched with keen eyes, and his shadowed face was expressionless. Then light burned in his eyes, and he motioned for Tembu George to squat at his side.

"*Klipvard* tracks," he said quietly.

Tembu George nodded disinterestedly, shrugged. "It is a watering hole," he said. "Many animals come to drink."

Ki-Gor smiled thinly, his eyes alive and slightly mocking. Helene bent at his side, and their arms brushed in silent companionship.

"A two-legged *klipvard*?" Ki-Gor asked.

Tembu George frowned, studied the tracks, then spread his hands helplessly. "I see tracks," he said. "But they are all meaningless."

"A boy is a man, when?" Ki-Gor asked patiently.

"When he can—" Tembu George's eyes widened in memory. "When he can follow the trail of a man-beast through the darkest jungle, across dry plains, through raging streams. When he can follow the tracks of a warrior who wears on his feet sandals that make animal footprints!"

Ki-Gor nodded. "Such is so," he said equably. "And these tracks were made by such feet coverings. In that way, it appeared that no men walked, for there were but animal tracks."

"But the silence?" Tembu George protested. "None heard any sound."

Ki-Gor straightened, balanced on braced legs. "Sleep darts prick; a victim sleeps instantly. He awakes, not knowing some poison put him to sleep."

Tembu George nodded. "That would explain why Kanusi and other warriors slept while thieves entered their huts." Dull anger flamed in his eyes. "That means that someone in the village helped the stealers—and it is in my mind that Gogth was the one."

Ki-Gor shrugged. "That is not the concern now," he said. "First, we must find the way the stealers left and then go after them. The lives of the stolen ones are the most important things right now." He glanced at Helene. "I shall go alone at the first light of day."

Helene shook her head. "Not alone," she declared.

The Jungle Lord smiled and pride lay in his eyes. He had expected the answer, had known what it would be; but a presence of danger stirred within him for he knew the hazards that would come with such a journey as he must in all probability take to find the stolen Masais.

"No," he said flatly. "You shall stay in the village with the other women; this work is for men."

Pique snapped in Helene's blue eyes, and she tossed her head impatiently. "Nonsense!" she said. "I'm tired of being left behind while you have all the fun. I'm going along."

Ki-Gor regarded his mate steadily for a moment, then nodded.

"Very well," he said. "We shall leave at sunup."

Tembu George turned away. "Let's take the news to the village," he said briefly. "I shall organize men to search with you."

Ki-Gor smiled, laughed silently to himself, and a twist of amusement tilted the corners of his mate's eyes. Both knew that the Masai warriors, great jungle men that they were, could never hope to pace the Jungle Lord and his mate through the jungle.

Tembu George sensed the amusement, for he shrugged wryly.

"We shall follow, anyway," he said.

And laughing, the three of them went toward the village, leaving the guards to quench the fires. There was a bond of friendship between them as they walked that was as tangible as the leafy jungle through which they made their way.

IV

THE sun was high-risen, and a hot breeze stirred clouds of *kuni* flies from the ratting vegetation on the jungle floor. Sounds were muffled and indistinct, and few animals moved in the lethargic heat. A parrot squawked irritatedly several times, then preened its green and purple plumage, as it stared with cold emotionless eyes at the two people walking the dim trail below. A monkey chittered angrily, tossed a *vastoy* pear at the man and woman, then fled into the treetops.

Ki-Gor grinned at the monkey, then peered again at the trail. The kidnappers had long since discarded their trick sandals, and now their footprints were fairly clear in the trail. The Jungle Lord saw the heavier indentations made by the two blacks carrying their unconscious burdens, and his lips were thin and grim.

Helene walked at his side, carrying the short spear given her by Tembu George, her eyes flickering from the trail to her husband's face, and then back again to the path where her eyes could read absolutely no spoor.

"Are you sure?" she asked finally.

Ki-Gor nodded. "This is the way they went," he said shortly. "But I don't understand why they go this way; for in this direction lies only the *balinga* forest, and I have never heard of men living in its depths."

Helene frowned. "Tembu George mentioned the place," she said. "And he sent Gogth's man there last night. Why should such a place be so dangerous?"

Ki-Gor shrugged. "Some say the land is filled with swamps; others say that smoke and hot water gush from the earth; still others say that mighty beasts of prey roam the land. I do not know; I have never entered there. Evildoers are driven into its depths, and are never seen again."

"Perhaps they go through the forest, and come out on the other side."

Ki-Gor shook his massive head, palmed a stray strand of yellow hair from his eyes. He watched the mouth of a fly-trap plant gape in his direction, shuddered involuntarily when he saw the bleached bones of a small bird that rested in the purple cup. Accustomed as he was to death in the jungle; he could not look impersonally at casual efficiency of a plant that captured and digested any tiny bird or animal that unluckily entered its hungry mouth.

"No," he said, "for the fact would have been told to Tembu George. The evildoers simply disappear."

"But what could happen to them?"

The Jungle Lord shrugged eloquently. "Nobody knows," he answered carelessly. "Probably they try to make their way through the forest, and are killed by animals."

Helene shuddered at the utter callousness that the jungle bred in its people. She had seen Ki-Gor soothe the pitiful sufferings of an injured monkey, had watched him as he tended the sick in some stinking native village; and yet he brushed aside the fact that men could die in some forest that he had never seen. It was a queer streak in his nature that made him both hard and human at the same time.

They walked ever faster, pursuing the trail left by the kidnappers. Ki-Gor walked with a springy tread, his face grim and searching the path ahead and the trees and tangled shrubbery to either side. Helene paced his side, never faltering, for the months in the deep jungle had given a deceptive strength to her slim body.

The trees grew wider-spaced, the sun-light barring straight down from overhead, making a mottled pattern on the green and brown jungle floor. Tiny lizards darted to safety, watched with beady eyes, their black and silver bodies blending into the foliage. Insects chirred softly from the trees, and here and there a warbler spilled its liquid song from a pulsing throat.

And then they were at the edge of the jungle, staring at the line of black that was another jungle far across a plain. Grass rippled like a yellow sea ahead, and ostriches stalked its waves, their plumes bobbing like monster spread fans of white softness.

THEY both felt it at the same time. It was as though a cold wind had reached out tendril fingers and touched their hearts with an eerie sense of dread. They said nothing; instead, started across the plain at a fast pace. The grass whipped at their ankles, grew taller, finally tugged at their waists. The dirt grew harsh and brittle beneath their feet, and dust rose in thick clouds to mark their passing.

A *springbok* bounced from cover, fled in great graceful leaps, and a second later five more antelope raced to safety, their heads held high, their bobbing white tails erect in fright. The ostriches froze into motionlessness, watched with snake-like eyes, then whirled and walked away, their necks disdainfully stiff.

A lion cub snarled childish defiance from a bed of matted grass, then rolled to its back and pawed the air playfully. Helene laughed lightly, reached out to lift the cub, stopped when Ki-Gor caught at her arm. He gestured wordlessly, and the color drained from his mate's tanned face. They pressed forward, their heads turned to watch the great lioness that had come plunging through the grass to protect her young.

The lioness halted in the shallow nest, nuzzled the cub, snarled defiance at the man and woman a hundred feet away. Her tail twitched impatiently for seconds; then she whirled about, closed her mighty jaws carefully on the loose skin at the cub's neck, and loped insolently away, cub dangling from her mouth.

Ki-Gor grinned, felt tension disappearing from his mighty frame. He looked at Helene, laughed aloud when he saw the chagrin in her eyes. Helene tossed her glowing hair, strode ahead.

"All right, mister high and mighty," she said. "I wasn't going to hurt her old baby!"

"Why didn't you tell *her* that?" Ki-Gor asked innocently, laughed again at the disdainful straightness of his mate's back.

And then the laughter fled from his face, and there was a cold animal-wariness in his bronzed features. Movement stirred at the jungle edge, and he watched it with keen eyes. Helene followed the line of his gaze, waited for Ki-Gor to precede her.

Then pushed through the grass, going toward the spot where vultures crowded and danced and fought over a body on the

ground. The monster carrion-birds screeched cries of rage, but darted sluggishly back to safety as the man and woman advanced. Then Helene cried out softly, turned her back.

Ki-Gor approached the body, examined it from a few feet away. His eyes were narrow and grim, and his lips thinned with distaste. He bent and retrieved a spear and throwing knife from where they lay on the ground. He read the tribal mark painted on them, then quietly and competently dug a shallow grave. He buried the remains of the man, then covered the grave with several large slabs of stone that lay at the jungle's edge. He propped the spear at the head of the grave, softly spoke the Kamzila prayer of the wind and the rain, and then returned to Helene's side.

"Kanusi!" he said briefly. "He tracked the stealers of his daughter; but a spear cut him down before he could loose his weapons."

Helene cried against the breadth of her husband's chest for a moment, then straightened determinedly. Her lovely face was flushed with the emotions stirred in the last few moments.

"Hurry," she said. "Maybe they are but a short way ahead?"

Ki-Gor studied the ground, shook his head. "They passed this way at early morning," he said. "The moon will be rising before we can catch them, for we must waste much time following their spoor." He nodded. "But come, we will hurry as much as possible."

Vultures screamed angrily at their retreating backs, then ran sluggishly along the ground and took to flight, bald heads gleaming. Helene shuddered watching their loathsome bodies fade into the sky.

AND then they were in the jungle, and an eerie oppressiveness seemed to fold in about them. The trees were tangled overhead, letting through but the dimmest shards of light from the high sun. Birds no longer sang, and the insect-chirring seemed distant and muted. A snake watched with beady eyes, struck flashingly at Ki-Gor's leg. The Jungle Lord's right hand barely moved, but Kanusi's throwing knife pinned the snake's head to the ground, sinking to its hilt. Ki-Gor bent, wrenched

the blade free, cleaned it with a broad green leaf.

They went forward, finding no clear trail, following the faint markings left by the kidnappers. Ki-Gor was constantly on the alert for the slightest of noises or movements that would betoken a hidden assassin, but his face gave no hint of his feelings. He glanced at Helene now and then, reassuring himself that she would be all right, but wishing that he had not permitted her to override his objections to her coming along.

A dankness came to the air, an odor that was repulsive and unclean, one of rottenness and staleness. The trees were like thronging creatures of the night, reaching with skeletal fingers of twisted wood to squeeze the lives from the intruders. Grey moss hung dejectedly from the branches, clung like cobwebs when brushed against. Water stood in stagnant noisome pools on the ground and in tree-hollows.

The ground itself had changed. Now it was shale-like, split and ruptured by the reaching roots of the trees that had burrowed deep. Shards of it were piled high in places, razor-sharp and flint-hard; they circled such patches warily, knowing one misstep might cripple them for life.

Life grew and catapulted from the blackness of a thicket. Ki-Gor shouted a warning, spun about, caught and tossed Helene to safety in branches ten feet overhead. Then, without turning, he leaped five feet to one side. A vicious tusk barely grazed his leg, almost sent him to his knees. He whirled about in a half-crouch caught the boar by its right front leg. His left hand tightened like a steel band, jerked with a fluid swiftness, flipped the enraged beast to its side. His right hand caught the razor-edged knife from his leopard-skin scabbard, smashed it again and again into the boar's chest. Blood gouted, stained Ki-Gor's arm, made the ground slippery. The boar screamed in rage and pain, slashed terrible saber-like teeth at the white giant, kicked convulsively as the knife ripped its pounding heart.

Ki-Gor came slowly to his feet, shaken by the terrible speed of the moment. He cleaned the knife on a leaf, used more to wipe the carmine stains from his bronzed body. He blew his breath in a gusty sigh of relief, examined a dulling bruise where

a flailing hoof had smashed at his ribs. He took a step toward his spear, heard the sudden rustling in the bushes, leaped straight upward, and caught a limb.

Squealing cries of rage came from the ground, where a dozen boars watched with flaming maddened eyes. Ki-Gor drew himself higher into the tree, squatted at Helene's side. He saw the fear that lay in her gaze, and he grinned.

"Feel like Nkina?" he asked.

"Why?" Helene's fingers were soft as she touched the blackening bruise that raced along her husband's chest, soft and intimately gentle.

The Jungle Lord nodded at the boars below. "They'll follow us for half a sun, even if we travel through the trees," he explained. "But sooner or later, they'll give up, and we can get to the ground again."

Helene glanced into the darkness of the treetops, shuddered. Weird growths hung there, oddly shaped gourds, snake-like vines. Then she looked down at the squealing beasts below.

"Can't you scare them away, or kill them with arrows?" she asked.

Ki-Gor shook his head. "I don't dare," he said equably. "There are probably a two-hands' time that many in the jungle; I couldn't kill them all—and they can't be frightened."

Helene nodded, stood upright on the swaying limb. "All right," she said. "But what about the spoor you followed?"

The jungle giant shrugged impatiently. "We'll have to travel in the general direction we were going. Perhaps we'll find the trail again later." He glanced at his spear lying on the jungle floor, and his mobile lips twisted wryly.

Then he led the way into the treetops. Branches swayed beneath his weight, rustling in anger at being disturbed. Pop-eyed toads watched with dull interest, then flicked feeler-like tongues at the swarming insects. Ki-Gor balanced on a heavy limb, indicated the route that he intended to follow. The clamor of the enraged boars surged upward in a wave of hate from the ground.

"I'll go slowly," Ki-Gor said. "When you're tired, we'll rest and eat. Be careful to trust only the branches I use."

Helene nodded, watched her bronzed mate swing from the branch. She saw the

cabled muscles swell on his broad back, felt a flush of confidence in her heart. Then she, too, had launched her slender body from the limb and her right hand had caught a swaying branch. She caught and held, and spun her body forward, and her left hand acted as a lever with which to propel herself forward still further.

AND then the two of them were racing **A** through the foliage. Thin gloom surrounded them, made the going slow and difficult for Helene. But such was the White Lord of the Jungle's uncanny timing and eyesight, he moved without difficulty, keeping a pace that Helene could match.

And below on the ground the pack of savage boars trailed their passage, slipping through the undergrowth like grunting shadows, never losing sight of the quarry high overhead. A leopard growled menacingly from where it ripped at the soft body of a newly-slain *klipvard*, then turned tail and ran from the vicious tusks of the beast-pack.

Minutes passed with a timeless slowness. The Jungle Lord and his mate traveled with an increasing speed, flashing through the laced branches, pausing briefly so that the slender girl might rest from the driving pace. Steam from the jungle floor was a dank miasma that hovered high in the trees, and here and there water gushed from the jungle floor.

The trees grew more scattered, became less heavy in trunk and foliage. Sunlight blazed through the thinning treetops, was a solid weight on bronzed and golden bodies. There was the smell of sulphur in the air, thick and stinking as though it were gas from rotting eggs.

And then in the third hour of flight, the boars ceased their relentless stalking of the tree-borne quarry. They halted at the edge of a strip of gleaming grey-black lava rock, grunted in futile rage, not venturing across the stream that bisected the rock plain.

Ki-Gor and Helene slowed their frantic running across the sun-heated rock when they saw the beasts stop at the edge. Helene sighed a bit in relief, and some of the tension fled from the jungle man's even features.

"We had better eat," Ki-Gor said. "Then we shall travel as far as we can tonight, without stopping."

Helene nodded, without speaking, then

froze into an attitude of intent concentration. She gestured for silence; but Ki-Gor had already dropped to one knee, had pressed his ear against the ground.

It came in a dull ragged rhythm, felt more than heard, and seemed to gain force by the second. The air pulsed a bit, then steadied, and the sound was bright and distinct.

"Drums!" Ki-Gor said succinctly, came lithely to his feet.

He gestured silently, paced the way toward the shelter of a clump of *daxta* trees a few yards ahead. They stood silently in the shade, orienting the source of the drumbeats.

Ki-Gor pointed. "That way," he said, "past the hill."

He faded back into the trees, ran lightly toward the sound of the drums. Helene followed close behind, breathing easily, conscious that excitement had knotted the muscles of her heart. She knew instinctively that the kidnapping party was ahead, and she felt the first thread of fear in her mind.

Ki-Gor moved with the grim purpose of an animal stalking its prey. He made absolutely no sound, his feet unerringly seeking a soundless path through the grass and bushes. His supple body turned and twisted as he ran, avoiding branches by inches, and his keen eyes never ceased their restless searching out of the jungle ahead. He slipped his great war-bow from his shoulders as he ran, held it so that it could not catch on some projecting limb.

And then after five minutes of running, Ki-Gor stopped his pace, gestured for silence. Helene stopped at his side, peered through a screen of bushes. She gasped in horrified indignation, then fell silent. Flame burned high in the Jungle Lord's eyes, and his features were utterly stony as he watched the scene in the tiny valley.

Small cooking fires glowed redly in the growing dusk, each tended by three men. Other men squatted nearby, smoking, talking, their hands gesturing. All of the men were swarthy their chins covered with heavy beards. They wore the bournoses of desert men, and sandals were on their feet. There was something callous and cruel about their very indolence.

For fifty feet away, cowering beneath the weight of a great iron chain that stretched from throat to throat, were fully a hundred native men and women.

They made no sound, but their hate was a welling thing that had a tangible force. They squatted beneath the watchful eyes of five armed guards, and their cowering was purely a physical thing, for defiance was engraven deep in their features.

“*SLAVERS!*” Ki-Gor said sibilantly, and the driving hate within him beat in fiery waves against his will. Years before, he had fought against the vicious traffic in human flesh, had succeeded, so he thought, in forever driving it from Africa. Yet here was the living ugly proof that he had failed.

He shifted slowly, watching the burly Arab striding across the clearing. Knowledge grew in his eyes, and he shook his head puzzledly.

“*Ali Ben Hassis?*” he whispered incredulously.

Helene watched her mate’s face. “But I thought you said he was dead!”

“So the runners carried the news.”

Ki-Gor bent forward, carefully parted the leaves, stared about the clearing, making a mental survey for a plan of attack. His plan had to be one of stealth, for fully fifteen slavers faced any frontal attack.

“No!” Helene said softly, urgently. “We must go back and bring Tembu George.”

Ki-Gor shook his head impatiently. “It might take days to find him.” His eyes swung to the sitting prisoners, searched each face, and he nodded finally. “A hand of them I know,” he said presently. “Mari is there at the left by Ceyo, Kanusi’s daughter. Kanusi’s man-son is midway of the warriors; and others I know are chained.” His hand sought the knife at his belt, fingered the worn hilt.

Helene sagged limply, dropped unconscious at his side.

The Jungle Lord stared for one horrible fear-filled second. He saw the tiny blob of white cotton that marked the place the poison dart had struck—and then a light tap at his waist, drew his eyes to his own body.

He saw the dart hanging in the fur of his leopard-skin breech-clout; and then he was spinning to one side, his right hand flashing for an arrow from his back-quiver. So fast that it was one flowing movement,

his hand caught and drew the arrow, nocked it, and gut hummed as the feathers touched his ear. He loosed the shaft with an unconscious aim, and the string twanged with a deep bass note.

The hidden attacker sucked an agonized frightened breath of air—and then the shaft was churning through his chest, ripping the life from his heart in one breathless instant of time. He took two staggering steps backward, the slim blowgun dropping from his dead hand. Eyes stared sightlessly from his flat black face into the cruelly-avenging features of the Jungle Lord; and then his painted legs crumpled, and he was a slack heap on the jungle floor.

Ki-Gor whirled back to Helene, dropped to her side, felt pounding agony in his great heart. He drew the poison-dart free with shaking fingers, then caught the fragile body up in his strong arms. He saw the faint throbbing of the pulse in his wife’s throat, and a certain sense of relief touched his senses. At least she was not dead; she had merely been struck down by a sleep-dart blown by the black outpost-guard.

He straightened to his feet, carrying his wife, then froze into a trapped rigidity.

Ali Ben Hassis laughed brittlely, gloatingly, jerked the muzzle of his rifle for emphasis. His men stared with bold greedy eyes at the slender unconscious body of Helene, then shifted their gazes to the Jungle Lord.

“Out here, savage,” Ali Ben Hassis said thinly. “Out here, where I can chain you myself.” He glanced at the dead body, jerked his bearded chin. “Leave the nigger,” he said callously, utterly indifferent to the other’s death.

Ki-Gor stood nervously for a moment. Never before had he been stalked and trapped so easily. Always he had centered himself in a screen of nerve-sense that had made him instantly aware when danger threatened. But in the horror of the second when he had thought Helene dead, his animal instinct had failed him.

FOR an infinitesimally-long second, Ki-Gor weighed and evaluated every phase of the situation. He saw the blood-hate in the Arab’s eyes, knew that his life hung by a slender gossamer thread. Once before, they had clashed, and the jungle

man had been the victor. Now, Ali Ben Hassis held the whip-hand, and there was in his very posture the intelligence that he would exact hate-vengeance for every fancied wrong and indignity.

Ki-Gor glanced at the beautiful face of his unconscious mate, felt dull horror pounding at his mind when he thought of the fate that lay in store for her. Better that she should die cleanly at his side, than to become the broken slave of the murderous man before him.

All those thoughts Ki-Gor had, and many more, crowding each other through his keen mind in one flashing space of time. Then he whirled, took a great striding step toward a break in the ranks of men.

He knew instantly that he had failed, knew that the Arab had been waiting for that moment. Flame blossomed in a smashing concussion from the Arab's gun, drove a spear of blackness through the Jungle Lord's brain. He knew that he was falling forward, knew that, for once, he had overestimated his own cleverness and abilities. Then he was being sucked into a funnel of blackness without end.

His last conscious sight was of Ali Ben Hassis' face looming larger and larger. And he could feel the helpless weight of his wife slip from his weakened arms. Then everything blacked out, and he knew no more.

Ali Ben Hassis stood over the unconscious couple, kicked the prone man savagely, bitterly.

"Dog!" he spat. "Death will be a welcome thing to you when I finish with you." He kicked again, waved imperiously. "Tend his wound and chain him with the others."

Men lifted the Jungle Lord and his Queen, carried them to the sullen brooding crowd of slaves. One Arab made a crude bandage for the bullet wound at the side of Ki-Gor's forehead, then clamped a fold of chain about his throat. Helene was carried to the group of women-prisoners, and there a counter-drug was injected into her arm. Within a few moments, she would be awake.

Ali Ben Hassis stood apart, watching all that was done, his bearded mouth twisting in a sly grin. He had plans for the awakening of Ki-Gor and Helene, plans that would combine pleasure and profit to himself.

"Bring the white man to," he snapped to a greasy Arab. "I don't want him to strangle to death in the chain."

V

A BULLHIDE whip made a sighing crack along the line of marchers, and a black cried out in involuntary pain. He sagged a bit, was held to his feet by the hands of the prisoner behind. The monotonous humming of the guard came again, and the dust rose thickly from the valley floor.

Ki-Gor marched easily, despite the throbbing agony of his wounded head. He watched the stocky guard swagger back from the line of march, stripping flecks of blood from the plaited whip, and he marked the man's arrogant face, tucked it far back in his memory.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, easing the bite of the chain collar where it had cut through his bronzed skin. *Kuni* flies bit with fiery mouths at the bloody flesh, but he gave them no need. He steadied the boy ahead of him with gentle hands, held him until the youth could walk again without sagging.

He turned his head, caught sight of Helene's weary face, flashed her a smile of confidence. She answered his smile gamely, but deep in her eyes he read the self-reproach she felt for her stubbornness in following him into the jungle. He shook his head, trying to make her understand that she was not to blame for anything.

A blazing streak of agony whipped across his shoulders, and he turned in a snarling whirl of movement. The chain collar brought him up short, almost dragging two prisoners from their feet. He relaxed, gazed brittle-eyed into Ali Ben Hassis' sneering face.

And then he saw the man at the Arab's side, and he nodded as though to himself. Gogth spat directly into his face.

"You spoiled my plans, jungle man," Gogth said viciously. "Now I shall spoil yours."

He lifted the short whip he carried, slashed with an insane fury at the defenseless Jungle Lord, stopped only when the Arab caught at his arm. Ki-Gor said nothing, taking the smashing blows without flinching, feeling red agony pound

through his body. He breathed deeply once, then continued his even pacing in rhythm with the prisoners' steps. Behind him rose the mocking laughter of Gogth and Ali Ben Hassis.

The prisoners walked silently, their eyes taking in every feature of the landscape. They walked in the bowl of what had once been a volcano's mouth, and beneath their feet came rumblings of a giant sleeping in the earth. Steam hissed from earth faults, bringing with it the stench of sulphur and other noxious fumes. Boiling water bubbled in a hundred pools on the verdure-bare earth, bubbled and steamed in a hundred different colors, like writhing jewels scattered on the green-black rock by a careless magical hand.

The town lay but a short way ahead, a town built of ramshackle wooden buildings and of dirty tents. Life stirred in the town, stirred and flowed toward the returning caravan of slavers. The life resolved into groups and the groups into individuals who watched with keen brutal eyes as the new slaves were marched into the town.

"A purse for the white giant, now," a thin bearded Arab screeched at Ben Ali Hassis. "Ahiee, he must have the strength of ten!"

Ali Ben Hassis laughed deep in his chest. "Then I must have ten purses for him, Abu," he roared; and the watchers chuckled at the ready wit.

And then the watching Arabs caught their first glimpse of Helene. She walked disdainfully, despite her dreadful tiredness, and her hair was a flaming red-gold crown atop her golden slenderness. She saw the greedy eyes that touched her body, and there was a shrinking distaste in her gaze that drove the onlookers back like a scourge.

Abu drywashed his skinny hands, his tongue touching dry lips.

"Five purses, Ali," he said almost in a whisper. "Five purses for the white woman with hair like living flame."

Ali Ben Hassis spat scornfully.

"Twenty-five purses, or I save her for Mahmud B'Sudat," he said coldly.

Abu shook his head. "No, no, no!" he wailed. "I am a poor man, with but a pittance to spend; I cannot pay such a heavy price."

"Then begone and when we talk again, the price is ten purses more." Ali Ben Hassis gestured disdainfully, then nodded at the other slavers.

Their whips rose and fell, and the new slaves staggered into an open enclosure. A wire gate was closed, and the slavers ranged themselves about the pen as though they guarded animals from teasing children. Ali Ben Hassis glanced at them for a moment, then strode toward the open square at the center of the town.

KI-GOR watched the Arab disappear, saw that Gogth watched from the shade of a building, then turned to search for Helene. He smiled, tried to put all of his magnificent courage into the glance he gave her. He saw the quick lifting of her chin, felt pride and admiration for his mate welling in his heart.

Then he turned about, studied the enclosure and the town. Both, it was very evident, were not new, had evidently been used for years. His lips tightened, for full realization was in his mind then of the lengths to which Ali Ben Hassis had gone to make this section of Africa juju to all blacks. By making certain that natives did not invade his domain, he had set up a kingdom where he was safe from all law and opposition.

This, of course, explained what happened to the evildoers who were loosed at the forest's edge. Evidently the Arab had spies in each village who signaled him when evildoers were punished. Then Ali Ben Hassis' men would prowl the forest's edge there to capture for slavery the condemned blacks who tried to escape through the jungle.

But that had no bearing upon the immediate situation. First, a means must be devised for escape. Perhaps—

He saw the futility of using force even before the idea had fully formed in his mind. A young black plunged at a guard standing by the fence, dragging three slaves with him. His hands reached through the wires—and the Arab slaver shot him to death.

Ki-Gor came slowly to his feet, stayed motionless, held there by the brutal stark threat of lifted guns. A woman wailed in a keening heart-rending note, then sobbed deep in her chest. An Arab came through

the gate, callously unlocked the chain from the murdered black's throat, pulled the body from the corral.

The prisoners settled back again, chilled by the sheer cold-blooded efficiency of the moment. They sat and watched their captors, their eyes unblinking, their faces like chiselled ebony.

Ki-Gor squatted, felt the stiffness and pain in his body from the brutal whipping he had taken. His mind was a chaotic maelstrom of thoughts churning without purpose.

He felt within him a wild frantic surging against being fettered; for he was a creature of the wild, and captivity to him was the one thing in life that he could not bear. He felt a certain indifference as to how he had been captured; he could not change the past. Now he could but try to make plans of escape.

He tested his chains, muscles straining like coiled snakes beneath his tanned skin. The links cut deep into his hands, and his teeth were white and even as he strained. Blacks watched with bulging eyes, as the power surged higher and higher in Ki-Gor's mighty shoulders. Then, as the Jungle Lord realized he could not break the iron chain and relaxed, they sighed in awed unison.

A guard laughed mockingly from the fence, where he had watched, but respect lay in his eyes, too; for any but the forged slave chain would have broken like a rotten strand of liana. Then he straightened, mirth disappearing from his eyes, as Ali Ben Hassis came striding back from the town's center.

The Arab gestured grimly. "Twenty men and twenty women," he said coldly. "Bring the white man and his wife."

He turned away, walking swiftly through the houses. Armed men moved into the slave-pen, unlocked throat chains, herded the sullen prisoners before them. Helene crowded to Ki-Gor's side, smiled shakily into his hard features.

"What can you do?" she asked anxiously.

Ki-Gor shook his leonine mane of yellow hair. "Nothing at the moment," he said quietly, and his eyes flicked about the town. "I could escape by myself—but—" He shrugged ruefully.

Tears gleamed in Helene's blue eyes, and

her fingers tightened on her husband's arm.

"I'm sorry!" she whispered.

Ki-Gor laughed. "Wah, much time lies ahead."

HELENE nodded, confidence replacing the tears in her eyes. She smiled fearlessly, then turned to comfort a young Negress who cried uncontrollably in fear at her side. Tembu George's wife, Mari, smiled at Ki-Gor, but said nothing. She, too, was aiding terror-stricken women, comforting them with soothing words. Further back in the crowd, Ki-Gor saw the features of a dozen men and women he knew; among them Luando and Ceyo, son and daughter of the murdered Kanusi.

He strode ahead, and so confident was the set of his shoulders, so great his strides, the prisoners lost some of their lethargy, and walked without stumbling.

And then the prisoners were herded like animals into the market square, and Ki-Gor felt wonder building in his heart. He had seen slave markets before, had fought to eradicate them and the lecherous men running them, but never had he conceived of a market so large.

There were fully ten auction blocks, on each of which, the auctioneers waited with greedy calculating eyes. Men milled in the open square, the mutter of their talk rustling like the scales of a snake crawling long-dead grass. They turned to stare, and their talk died to a bare whisper.

Ki-Gor felt his lips pull back in unconscious anger, and his hands knotted at his side. Then he forced himself to relax, fought to keep himself under control. But a dull red mist was in his eyes, and he could feel the pulse beating savagely in his constricted throat.

The prisoners were separated; the men herded into a separate pen from that of the women. They milled uncertainly for a moment, then grew quiet, watching Ali Ben Hassis as he mounted the first of the auction blocks. He stared at the prisoners, then pointed carelessly at Luando.

"Bring him out," he snapped at a guard, watched impersonally as the youth was forced to his side. Two guards held Luando motionless, as the dark burly Arab turned.

"Bid fast," he called, "for many are to be sold."

A Wasuli chieftain raised his hand. "A silver piece," he called. "He is a boy, but he will grow."

Ali Ben Hassis spat contemptuously "A silver piece, *bah!*" he snarled. "The boy is a man; he will last for many moons." He scowled. "Bid up, or I keep him for myself."

"Five bits of silver," an Arab said harshly.

"Six."

"Eight."

Voces raised in a cacaphony of sound.

Ki-Gor watched the bidders, felt revulsion in his mind. He knew the fate that lay in store for them all, knew the killing work that would be theirs in some hidden mine, and a shudder wracked his mighty body.

He watched the motley crowd, amazed at the number of men that filled the square. There were more than he could count, as many as his doubled hands opened and closed twice the number of his fingers. Dark, bournoosed Arabs brushed shoulders with interior blacks. Khafjis of the desert stood apart from the fezzed Moors of East Africa. Black naked skin gleamed darkly against the white and red and yellow of enveloping robes.

There was the stink of sweat and heat and hate in the air. Tongues slid slyly over thin lips, as the buyers crowded about the pens, estimating the value of the human slaves there. Guards stood patiently by, laughing a bit as filthy hands pinched and prodded the merchandise offered to them by the crafty Arab acting as auctioneer.

Ki-Gor didn't move, as man after man was sold, then dragged off to the edge of the crowd where they were chained again like vicious animals. He waited, until at last he stood alone; then walked lithely forward, utter disdain in his proud bearing.

"Wait!" Ali Ben Hassis' voice snapped like a whip-crack.

Ki-Gor stood motionless, his keen grey eyes ranging over the treacherous sweaty face of the Arab. He saw the hate in the man's eyes, knew that brooding evil lay in the scheming brain.

"The women, first," Ali Ben Hassis ordered.

Ki-Gor permitted himself to be prodded back into the pen with a rifle barrel, felt

nerves crawling up his spine, when he saw the laughter that darkened the Arab's eyes. He stood, wide-legged, almost gigantic, his bronzed features emotionless as the Arab gestured at the women's guards.

A black guard laid aside his rifle, entered the swinging gate of the pen. He slapped aside clawing hands, callously caught a Negro girl in heavy arms, dragged her kicking and shrieking from the enclosure. He laughed from a sweaty face as he delivered the girl into the arms of the blacks standing at the auctioneer's side.

"Courage, M'heela!" Mari called from where she stood, and the girl straightened proudly.

ALI BEN HASSIS faced the clustered buyers, rubbed his hands together as though they were greasy. He licked his lips, his eyes lighting as the greedy gazes of the buyers slid along the girl's body. She was slender and virginal, breasts tight against the cloth that served her for clothing. Her nose was thin and proud, and her hands slim. Standing before the crowd, she shielded herself with a cloak of disdain.

"A purse," the Arab, Abu, said thinly, hopefully, smiled through snaggle teeth.

"A purse, and half a purse," a black-bearded Khafri yelled from the edge of the crowd.

"And a half a purse more," a Wasuli said clearly from Abu's side.

Ali Ben Hassis chuckled. "Children's prices!" he said. "Look!"

His hand darted out, caught gaudy cloth, ripped it away.

Ki-Gor turned away, sickened by the frenzied babble of voices making their bids. He heard the slap of hands as the bidder and the seller sealed their bargain, forced himself to watch again as another woman was led to the block. Pale anger blazed in his grey eyes at the indignity offered the woman, and he took a short step forward. A rifle covered him instantly, and he became motionless again.

"The wife of Tembu George," Ali Ben Hassis said gloatingly. "What am I bid?"

There was a stir in the crowd, and then Gogth came striding through. He grinned thinly at the Arab, fingered the knife at his waist. His eyes flicked to the slender

woman, then fled back to Ali Ben Hassis.

"She is mine," he proclaimed loudly. "I claim blood-hate for Tembu George. And since I stole her with my men, she is mine."

A clucking of tongues came from the crowd, followed by shouts of disapproval. Ali Ben Hassis watched with cynical eyes, then nodded abruptly.

"She is yours, O Gogth" he said loudly.

Gogth laughed deep in his throat, and his hands reached for the woman. Mari kicked him squarely in the face, and crimson leaked from his nostrils. He howled in wrath, then vaulted to the platform. His hand smashed twice, and Mari crumpled into unconsciousness. Gogth grinned through the blood.

"She has lived well too long," he said thinly. "Now I shall show her the way a man's woman *should* be treated."

He lifted the woman, jumped from the platform, pushed his way through the crowd. Men laughed at the blood on his face, then turned away when the giant half-breed's eyes sought them out.

A moment later he was gone, and the crowd had turned to watch the next woman dragged from the slave-pen. Hard voices raised in a frantic cacophony of bidding.

Minutes flowed into hours, and still the bidding went on. Young men and women were bought by sly-voiced men, and still more were brought by the slavers from the pens at the edge of town. One warrior in the first flush of his manhood defied the guards, tried to break free. A shot brought him down, and he tried to claw his way toward his murderer. A second bullet tunneled a hole through his heart. Later, his body was carried away.

And then, at last, came the moment Ali Ben Hassis had been waiting for. Five hours Ki-Gor had been forced to stand in the sun, five hours of a torture more insidious and vicious than any physical danger he could have encountered in all of Africa. The Arab, knowing all that passed in the Jungle Lord's mind, had kept Helene until the last.

But now the moment had arrived, and Ali Ben Hassis motioned for his guards to bring Helene to the block.

Ki-Gor growled deep in his throat, charged forward, utterly reckless of danger. He smashed an Arab to one side, his left hand ripping the wire fence as though

it were made of woven twigs. He sprang before Ali Ben Hassis, faced him squarely, knowing guns were trained on his wide back.

"No!" he said thinly.

Ali Ben Hassis licked his lips, his eyes lighting with a vicious glee. He rubbed the palms of his hands together with a rasping sound, and a whimper of pure sadistic delight sighed from his throat.

"Crawl, jungle man, crawl!" he cried. "Get on your belly and cry for your mate." His eyes blazed with maniacal rage.

"Crawl, damn you, crawl!"

"Ki-Gor!"

The White Lord of the Jungle turned to face his wife, and for the first time in all of the months she had been his mate, she saw defeat in his proud eyes.

He looked back at the wily Ali Ben Hassis, and his voice was oddly quiet.

"I'll crawl," he said, and his knees bent slowly.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene was crying then, fighting the arms of the guards at her sides.

THE crowd was utterly silent, awed by the sheer bleak drama of the bronzed man preparing to kneel to save his wife the indignities plotted by Ali Ben Hassis.

And Ki-Gor's knees bent still forward. He was in a full-squat now, his hands going forward toward the ground. Muscles rippled along his thighs and back, stood wire-taut on his forearms. Ali Ben Hassis stood wide-mouthed, astounded that the nerve of the forest giant should break so easily.

And Ki-Gor hurtled upward from the crouch.

He came up and over the edge of the platform, his left hand whipping about the screaming Arab, his right catching the curved knife from the other's belt. He came upright, the knife blade drawing a thin trickle of blood from Ali Ben Hassis' throat.

"Loose my mate," Ki-Gor snapped viciously, "or the earth drinks your blood!"

Ali Ben Hassis gagged, motioned weakly for the guards to do as the Jungle Lord ordered. Hands fell free, and Helene sprang toward a rifle leaning against the slave-pen fence.

Ki-Gor said nothing, planning his next move with a calm detachment. Ali Ben

Hassis stood frozen with fear, his breath wheezing in his constricted throat.

And then, whispering through the hot air, flicking from between two of the buildings, came a knob-ended stunning arrow. It smashed Ki-Gor squarely in the temple, blasting him from the platform in a sprawling twisted heap. His knife flashed through the air, spanged quiveringly in the hard-packed ground. He twitched once, his mighty muscles striving to do instinctively what his mind could not order.

Guards knocked the rifle from Helene's grip, held her helpless while Ali Ben Hassis climbed from the platform. Gogth shouldered through the crowd, war-bow still in hand, his mouth twisted in a victorious grin.

"I owed him that," Gogth said. "And much more besides."

Ali Ben Hassis nodded, fingering the bloody scratch at his throat. He felt the hand clutching his arm, whirled about to glare into the lascivious eyes of the Arab, Abu.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Twenty purses, O Ali," Abu whispered, and his gaze touched Helene. "Twenty purses for the white woman."

"Get out!" Ali Ben Hassis shouted the words. "I keep her for myself, you offspring of a filthy camel. See you not that I played a game with this white ape."

He kicked the unconscious Ki-Gor, laughed aloud at Helene's indignant cry.

"But the white man I give to you," he said magnanimously. "You have but to promise one thing."

Abu's eyes flicked along the massively-muscled body of the jungle giant, and he nodded impatiently.

"No money?" he whispered eagerly.

"No money!" Ali Ben Hassis agreed. "I want only your promise that this white ape is worked day and night until he drops. He is to rest only when he eats, and then but for half of an hour-candle."

"It is agreed!" Abu said eagerly, and his hands made a slapping sound in Hassis' clammy palm, as the bargain was sealed.

Helene cradled the leonine head of her mate against her breast, as Ali Ben Hassis motioned for her guards to release their hold. There was no hate in her eyes then, only the same steady patience that years of jungle living had brought to her husband's

grey eyes. Ali Ben Hassis saw that look, and a thread of wonder touched his mind. Then he shrugged and vicious laughter curled his mouth.

"Take him away," he said to Abu.

Helene came slowly to her feet, stood slim and deadly before the Arab. Her voice was slow and cool and condemning, and her words froze the laughter about the slaver's face.

"You have lived too long, Ali Ben Hassis," she said slowly.

She watched, calm-eyed, as the unconscious body of her jungle mate was carried from the slave square. She knew then all that Ki-Gor meant to her, understood fully all that their life together had brought to her heart and senses. She felt the dull agony of futility filling her body; but she knew that as long as Ki-Gor lived, then that long would she believe in his invincibility.

"Come," she snapped, and led the way toward Ali Ben Hassis' group of newly-bought slaves.

And such was the power of her belief, such was the strength of character in her, Ali Ben Hassis followed her as though she were the owner and he the slave.

VI

YELLOW steam purled straight upward into the air from the narrow crack in the lava-rock. It rose in a thin column, was dissipated when it struck a breath of breeze a hundred feet overhead. Other steam hissed from rocky vents, and sulphurous boiling water flowed in narrow streams through the patches of lava-rock and gummy blue clay.

Ki-Gor wiped the perspiration from his bronzed face with the palm of his hand, watched the steam rising straight upward. His keen gaze flicked around the edge of the great pit in which he stood, and he felt dull anger surging against the patience in his mind.

For almost forty hours now, for almost two nights and two days he had worked in the diamond pit, grubbing out the rock-hard clay with his antiquated tools, never permitted to rest except when he ate of the half-rotted food that was thrown to him as though he were an animal.

He saw the guards coming toward him,

as he paused, and he lifted the blunted pick-axe and brought it down with a rush of steady strength. The point bit deep in the blue clay, and he sent his weight against the handle in a burst of energy. Clay dust flapped high, rode the still air, then settled slowly. He bent, dropped the broken bits of earth into the basket at his side.

Despite the superb conditioning, he felt the dead weariness of sleepless hours sucking at his energy. He could feel the lack of strength in his body, that reserve of power that had never failed him before. But he gave no sign of the way he felt, and his blows with the pick never faltered.

He filled the basket with the clay fragments, carried it to the fuming stream by the pit's wall, where black slaves softened and washed clay in the hot water. He emptied the basket on the largest heap, smiled at Luando's tired face.

"But a short period of time, Luando," he said, "and then you can rest."

"I shall kill the first guard to come near," Luando said tonelessly. "And then I shall try to reach safety. If I get away, I bring back Tembu George and all the warriors of the Masai nation." His youthful face was grim. "Then shall many pay for what has been done."

Ki-Gor shook his head, shrugged his bronzed shoulders looseningly.

"That is not the way," he said. "All must work together; that way lies success. You would not reach the wall-ladder. And even there, you must climb and fight two guards at the top."

He whirled, hearing the almost soundless steps of the five guards who had walked from their leanto against the side of one wall. He snarled deep in his throat, then forced himself to relax, when he saw the chains carried by one man.

He made no move to fight, for he still carried the great bruises given him when he had fought ten men two nights before, when the chains had first been locked about his wrists and ankles. With the stolid patience of the jungle animal that he was, he permitted one guard to chain him, laughed deep in his eyes when he saw the fear with which the others moved away.

"You," one guard said to Luando, "help this man with the baskets he fills." He grinned from behind the safety of the great sword in his hand. "This white ape does

not seem to tire; we shall see that he does double-work from now on."

Ki-Gor shrugged, bent and lifted the basket. Luando scrambled to his feet, trailed at his back. They walked toward the blue stretch of clay, where Ki-Gor dropped the basket. Lifting the pick, he tested its weight now that his arms were chained, then swung it high and lashed down at the rock-hard ground.

He worked with a methodical swiftness, watching the guards surreptitiously from the corners of his eyes. He had caused no trouble, after that first night, and now their vigilance was beginning to relax. He swung the pick with evenly-spaced strokes, wasting none of his strength, his mind going over every phase of the plan he had in mind.

"Luando?" he whispered.

The youth glanced up from where he scooped rubbly clay into the basket. His hands continued their work, but his eyes were centered on Ki-Gor's face.

"Yes?" he said softly.

"We've got to make a break together, every man in the pit making a concerted rush at the same time. I want you to tell some of them to be ready when the sun is half way between the top and bottom of the sky. They are to tell the others. We will charge the guards in a group, and you and K'lama will throw captured swords, like bush-knives, at the guards above. As Masais, the greatest knife-throwers in Africa, you cannot miss, for the guards would spread the alarm before we could escape from the pit."

LUANDO nodded, lifted the basket carried it to the stream. He emptied it, spread the broken bits of clay with his hands, his face bent downward so that the guards would not see that he was whispering quick instructions to K'lama.

He rose lithely to his feet, his dark face inscrutable, hurried back to Ki-Gor's side. The Jungle Lord said nothing, but his eyes smiled at the hope that had lifted the young black's shoulders. He worked methodically, breaking loose the hard clay, muscles playing across his back with each titanic stroke. At last, he laid the pick aside, bent to scoop clay into the basket.

"Lift the pick, Luando," he ordered.

"Lift it swiftly and smash it against one link of my leg chains."

Without hesitation, moving so swiftly that the echo of the blow and the replacement of the weapon on the ground were almost simultaneous, Luando caught up the pick, whipped it down with a fluid terrific strength, then bent again to fill the basket. Ki-Gor felt a surge of admiration for the youth; many an older man would have hesitated for a fraction of a second, for that infinitesimal fraction of time that could have meant disaster.

But now, because of Luando's instant obedience, a bright silver scar lay deep in one link of the rusty chains that were on Ki-Gor's legs.

The Jungle Lord smiled quietly to himself, sighed a bit when he saw the instant byplay had gone unnoticed by the guards. He watched the other prisoner-slaves working with a methodical tiredness, saw one drop inertly from heat-prostration over his crude shovel. A guard walked to the unconscious man, shouldered him, carried him to the shade of the leanto. Water was splashed in his face and he groaned in waking weariness.

All attention was centered on the leanto; and Ki-Gor bent forward, spread his arms on the brick-hard ground.

"Luando," he snapped softly. "Strike my arm chains."

The young Masai caught up the heavy pick, spun it with a casual strength, smashed the blunted point at the chain. Metal spangled briefly; the chain jumped—but now one link was twisted and distorted from its original roundness.

Ki-Gor caught the pick, even as the guards turned, swung it in the monotonous rhythm he had developed through the hours of forced labor. But now there lay in his eyes some of the old confidence that was his jungle heritage. The guards turned away, their interest no longer held by the sight of a man whose strength and stamina were so phenomenal that he could do the work of ten men.

Luando carried basket after basket of the clay to the workers at the stream, and with each trip he spoke a few whispered words. Those to whom he spoke drifted about the pit, and a wave of tension seemed to hover in their wake. Slowly, fire grew and spread

in eyes that had been lack-lustre but moments before.

The minutes passed with a leaden slowness. Heat was a dank miasma in the circular pit, made more horrible by the venting steam and hot water that came from the bowels of the inactive volcano. No rest periods were permitted; there was only the ceaseless sound of picks tearing up the blue clay, and the soft *slush-slush* of the clay being softened and washed by the blacks squatting on the streams' banks.

Guards yawned sleepily, enervated by the glaring sun that rode the cloudless sky overhead. They mopped the perspiration from their faces, made interminable trips to the water-jars cached beneath the leanto. They said no words other than to give short commands to the slaves.

A vulture wheeled overhead in lazy flat circles, then sailed to the west like a drifting shadow. Steam hissed from another earth-crack with a roaring rush of sound, then died to silence, its brief rage spent in a moment of gushing anger. Water bubbled thickly in a dozen pools, bubbled with a tarry slowness, and tiny flames flickered where the gas was ignited far beneath the surface before bubbling its way to the surface.

KI-GOR said nothing more, but his keen grey eyes ranged the two hundred prisoners working in the pits, and his mind moved with the swift precision of a man whose life had been saved again and again by the fluidity of his thoughts.

He worked at a steady pace, spacing his strokes, utilizing his strength so that none was wasted. With Luando helping, his work had eased instead of grown, and he felt new energy creeping into his tired body. He saw the glances shot covertly in his direction, saw the nods that accompanied them and he felt confidence building in his heart. His face was expressionless as he watched the sun sinking toward the West; but impatience began tugging at his nerves as the zero moment approached.

"Now?" Luando said at last.

"Not yet," Ki-Gor said.

Then he bent at the waist, leaning forward as though scooping clay into the basket, and his mighty hands closed a foot apart about the slave chain fettering his ankles.

He breathed deeply, flat muscles coiling and knotting beneath his bronzed perspiration-soaked skin. His knuckles stood bone-white, and cords were like wires along his hands and arms. He pulled his hands apart with a steady rush of powerful strength that nothing could withstand.

Rust flaked from the chain, cut into his palms, drew tiny streamers of blood from his fingers. He felt the heady sense of unleashed strength in the muscles of his back, felt it building to a mighty climax—and then the battered link in the chain broke with a barely-audible snap.

Ki-Gor dropped the free ends of the chain, straightened. He saw one guard watching from a hundred paces away, saw the growing horror and intelligence in the black's eyes.

Ki-Gor straightened to his great primal height, flipped his wrist chains so that his torn hands could gain a hold at either end. He heard the excited shout of the guard—and then he was gathering his strength for a final terrific burst of energy.

The chain grew taut, as though it were a solid bar between his hands. Luando watched, open-mouthed, and other slaves glanced up from their work. Another guard shouted a challenge, ran swiftly toward the jungle giant.

But Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, had no eyes for any of them. The chain about his wrists was great, almost as heavy as the iron links that had bound his throat when he first was captured. Only by breaking the twisted link could he gain his freedom.

Muscles lifted on his columnar neck, and raced along his back in great ridges of herculean strength. His shoulders hunched, strained, and his legs were wide-spread for greater balance. He sucked in a great breath, held the fetid air in his lungs, as ropy cables of muscle played along his shoulders and down his arms.

He was like a great bronze statue as he stood there, unmoving. He was like the incarnation of force repressed, and only in the strain of muscles did he move. He knew that the first guard was but a dozen paces away, yet he could not do more than he was doing then.

Perspiration rode the flat planes of his face, and blood was slippery on his palms. He felt futility beating at his heart in waves

of despair; then he laughed aloud, and threw every bit of his waning strength into one last surge of power.

Muscles no longer rippled about his great body; now they were as hard and unyielding as the metal with which he fought. His even teeth clamped tightly, and his lips were a thin line of white across the bronze of his face. He threw every bit of power from his superb powerful shoulders against the chain, and nothing could have withstood that burst of primal savagery.

The mutilated link gave slightly, spreading slowly, then burst with a snap like a gun-shot.

"Now!" Ki-Gor's voice lifted in the single word.

AND the slaves became raging demons that nothing human could stop. They came alive in a great wave of death that flowed over the twenty guards in a flashing second of irresistible power.

A guard screamed an oath, swung his great sword in a slashing arc, went blasting backward, skewered by the blade of a pick-axe. His attacker caught up the falling sword, swung it in the terrible battle-stroke of the fighting Masai, and another guard crumpled backward, the stump of his neck pumping blood in a spouting stream. A pile of slaves swarmed over three more guards, tore them to pieces with their bare hands.

Ki-Gor spun about, and his right arm flailed in a short chopping stroke. The chain about his wrist was a scythe of death that crushed the skull of the first guard to reach him. Then he was leading the enraged slaves against the guards backed against the leanto. He was a god-like man, racing recklessly forward, smashing with his terrible killing chains, and at his side raced a hundred prisoners, crimson on the crude weapons that were lifted in their hands.

The guards built a wall of whistling steel about themselves, went down as three warriors darted forward, took the gleaming blades in their chests. Ki-Gor felt a surge of admiration for the men that could so gallantly give their lives that their friends might be free. The prisoners surged over the frantically-screaming guards.

And then the last of the guards was dead

on the bloody ground, and Ki-Gor was whirling to Luando and K'lama.

"The guards above," he shouted.

The Masais leaped for the fallen swords, caught them up, spun about, their eyes seeking the armed men who patrolled the pit edge above.

A rifle cracked spitefully from above, and K'lama crumpled inertly, his eyes glazing in instant death.

The gun spat its leaden hail again, and another prisoner screamed in terrible agony. Then muscles rippled along Luando's shoulders—and the yard-long sword was a glittering streak through the air.

It was a prodigious knife-cast, even for the perfectly-balanced knives of a fighting Masai, yet it went true with a flashing speed, and ended its flight in the belly of one guard on the pit wall. He screamed in an agonized rush of sound, plucked futilely at the bloody pommel of the sword, and then crumpled forward over the pit's edge. A projecting rock caught the twisting body, flicked it to one side, and it splashed into the steaming stream at the cliff's base.

"Aaaiieeee!" A solid paean of approval raised from two hundred throats, and then men were leaping forward, catching up the guards' swords with eager inflamed hands.

And in that second, disaster struck.

Five more guards stepped to the edge of the pit, gleaming rifles in their hands, their vulpine faces glaring hate at the prisoners below. One fired, the gunshot a flat crack of noise, and a Lingboto native crumpled in upon himself, his face a bloody mask of dead hate.

"Back, you offspring of *dangoes*," a guard screamed. "Back, or we slay all of you."

And he, too, crumpled in death.

BUT the death had reached from the opposite side of the pit. It had winged its silent way through the still air, had slashed its way through the guard's chest, and emerged a yard from the dead man's back.

"Ho, Ki-Gor!" a mighty voice shouted.

And Tembu George, with a hundred of the finest fighting men in all of Africa, reared from concealment, weapons glittering in their heavy hands.

Two guards whirled in a spasm of fear, dropped before they had taken their first

steps. Their bodies bucked in agonized ecstasy, then fell silent, long painted arrows jutting from their backs.

A guard lifted his gun, and pale flame lanced from the muzzle. A Masai warrior jerked convulsively, his left arm flipping high from the slug's blasting force. And then Tembu George whipped his great spear forward, throwing with all of the strength in his superb body—and the spear was a flicking length of death that split the head of the guard. The last guard never had a chance; he dropped with three arrows in his chest.

Then, and only then, did Tembu George glance into the pit again. Teeth gleamed whitely in his ebony face and his booming laughter filled the humid air.

"Ho, Ki-Gor," he shouted, "if a battle you want, then a battle you get! Climb the ladder, with your men, and we will make a fighting talk for the sweeping of the slave-town."

Ki-Gor grinned, ran lightly toward the ladder. Around him, men fought to race to his side. But at the ladder, they parted so that the Jungle Lord might go first.

Ki-Gor climbed the ladder, great muscles bunching and swelling in his arms, as he pulled himself higher toward freedom. He glanced down once, and a great contentment lay in his heart. With those men at his back, nothing could stop him from rescuing Helene from her greasy captor.

He stepped to solid ground, and his closed fist tapped gently on Tembu George's chest, as the Masai chieftain led his men around the pit's edge.

"You are meat in a starving man's belly," he said carefully.

Tembu George squirmed uncomfortably, shrugging broad shoulders uneasily that he should be praised by the gigantic white man facing him.

"A friend is a friend," he said at last, then scowled at the warriors grinning at his embarrassment. "Stand back, cattle," he roared. "Other prisoners come to fight a common foe."

The men fell back fingering their keen deadly weapons, but the liking did not leave their eyes. Ki-Gor saw the byplay, and his respect for the great Negro was a tangible thing. But he knew that it was not right to praise the man; for that was the softness of women-talk. He nodded,

though, then gestured toward the East where the slave market lay.

"Helene and Mari are there," he said, "and many more women and men who are held captive. A fighting talk must be made; and then we shall attack."

"*Wah!*" Tembu George nodded emphatically. "A talk shall be made."

And as the last slave was helped from the pit, the entire group followed the heroic figures of Tembu George and Ki-Gor to the shelter of a clump of *tongo*.

VII

THE soft dusk was like a grey mist hugging the ground, lightened near the top by the weak rays of the rising moon. Shadowy men slipped through the greyness, stealing toward the town ahead, their eyes gleaming like the feral eyes of prowling cats. Weapons were lifted in dark hands, and every sense was alert for the first sound of opposition ahead.

Ki-Gor, Tembu George, and several minor chieftains, led the army of black men. Unable to attack during the hours of light, because their approach would have been instantly noted, they had been forced to wait for night to fall. During those few hours, they had made their crude plans of battle, had given instructions to the three hundred men at their backs. Now, they strode forward, eagerness in their hearts, hate driving them against those whose greed had reared the slave market in the midst of a juju forest.

Ki-Gor walked with the springy tread of a great jungle cat, for he had had two hours of sleep, and such was his superb recuperative powers, he had regained almost his entire strength, as any jungle animal would. He carried a broad-bladed Masai spear in his right hand, and a newly-acquired knife was fitted into the leopard-skin scabbard at his thigh. A quiver of yard-long, steel-tipped war arrows was on his muscled back, and across his left shoulder he carried the most powerful bow he could find.

He felt the eagerness building in his heart, for he knew the mental torture that must be Helene's, and then he felt a surge of dull fury in his mind against Ali Ben Hassis. Never in his life had he set out

to deliberately slay a man; but there was in him now the thought that he would laugh as he broke the sly Arab's neck between the rigid fingers of his muscle-corded hands. His face was grim at the thought, and he moved even more swiftly through the gloom.

A *dingo* keened at the rising moon, the sound a thin melancholy sliver of lonesome desire that ullulated in brittle overtones. A carrion-owl hooted dismally from the sky, then fled on soundless pinions into the darkness. Lizards scrambled on tiny feet across the rocky ground, flicked out of sight in earth cracks. Tiny night sounds came alive, and the day was far away.

Ki-Gor strode along, glad that Tembu George and his men were with him. They had been lost for two days in the weird depths of the juju forest, lost in the sense of the word that they did not know the location of the slavers' camp toward which they were traveling. They had found the slave town early in the afternoon, but had not dared to attack until they had known the odds they faced. They had discovered the clay pit in which the slaves were working, had almost decided to attack, when Ki-Gor had forced the fight. Their unerring spears and arrows had routed the relief guards, and had permitted the slaves to escape.

Now all the men made one large army. Extra weapons had been distributed, along with the weapons wrested from the slain guards. Eight more relief guards had died silently, while on their way to the pit, and their weapons had been distributed among the blacks who could shoot rifles. Everyone was armed, and there was in all their hearts the knowledge that blood-revenge lay but an hour away.

Ki-Gor brushed Tembu George's arm, and the Negro drifted away into the darkness, taking with him the full force of Masai fighting men. Ki-Gor gestured silently to other chieftains, watched them disappear with their warriors. He hissed an order, squatted, waiting for the other five forces to circle the town. Luando squatted silently at his side, his clear eyes grave, for he knew now of the fate of his father, and he wanted only to slay those whose plans had brought about such a callous brutal murder.

Men huddled close to the ground, check-

ing the sharpness of their spears, tensing the guts of their war-bows. No one spoke and the silence was more dangerous than any shouting braggadocio might have been. The minutes flowed into one another, and at last some of the warriors growled impatiently in their throats. Ki-Gor stood, touched Luando on the shoulder.

"Come," he said, whistled the liquid broken rhythm of the night-flying *carapee* bird.

Movement surged about him in the night, and then he was leading fifty men toward the town. Luando sighed deeply at his side, and a vagrant moonbeam touched silver from the naked blade he swung tensely in his right hand.

THE town grew from the rocky earth, limned by the fires that blossomed redly in the great square. Careless guards patrolled the edge of the town, walking their posts about the slave-pens in which new prisoners were shackled. A prisoner sang a night song to the skies, and a woman answered in the melodious chanting of the Lower Zambezi. The men and women moved restlessly, as though they sensed the presence of others in the darkness that pressed against the firelight.

"That one," Ki-Gor said bleakly, pointed at a single guard.

The guard went down without a sound, clawing at the Masai throwing knife that centered his throat. His body was still twitching in great reflexes when Ki-Gor led his men past the post.

They skirted the pens, knowing the outcry their presence might arouse from the prisoners, but two of the men stayed to loose the prisoners when the right time should arrive.

Ki-Gor padded softly down a deserted street, hugging the shadows, his keen grey eyes searching for any hidden observer. A dog growled menacingly from behind a tent, then backed step by step from the marching men, turned and fled with a muffled snarl.

And then Ki-Gor gestured with both hands. Warriors faded back, and there was only the rustling sounds made as hands and feet lifted men to the roofs of the squat houses.

Luando pointed silently, and Ki-Gor saw the tiny flickers of firelight dancing on spear

blades from the house-tops across the square. He smiled grimly, fought down the desire for bloody revenge that crowded his brain.

"Wait!" he said softly, and glided forward.

He slipped through the shadows at the edge of the square, going toward the slave block where Ali Ben Hassis had stood two days before. His ankles and wrists throbbed with a dull pain where the chains had rubbed the flesh raw before being struck off by a Masai swordsman, but he forgot the throbbing in the thrill of the moment.

His eyes searched the men crowded about the fires, searching for the tall saturnine Arab or his black satellite, Gogth; and sharp disappointment filled his mind when he could not identify them.

He sent his keen gaze questing over the slavers squatting about the clearing, estimating and evaluating the chances of success should a battle ensue; and his lips tightened, when he saw the guns that flanked each man's side.

Then he was creeping to the rear of the auction block, and his left hand was resting on the platform. He vaulted lightly to the rough boards, stood erect and heroic in the flickering firelight.

"Ho!" he called. "Make no move, for you are surrounded!"

Men wheeled in surprise, and a cry of superstitious consternation came from startled blacks tending the largest cooking fire. Ki-Gor waited, hand upraised, every muscle alert for the first antagonistic move from the slavers.

"It is the white giant!" a black-bearded Khafri shouted excitedly. "He has escaped Abu's diamond pit!"

Steel whispered against leather, and a great sword swept into his hand. He surged forward through the crowd, teeth gleaming in his beard, careless of the men he knocked aside.

"Wait, white man," he roared. "I think you are a mouse that plays with cats!"

He died in the midst of a stride, the slim arrow driving through his skull from side to side, crimson spurting in bright streams from his thin nostrils. He crumpled to one side, and the sword drove deep into the belly of an Arab. The Arab screamed in a frenzy of pain, and his flailing arm knocked his gunpowder-pouch into the

flames of a cooking fire. The powder exploded in a burst of sound that blew men like grass before a wind.

AND then hell ripped loose in the slave-market square. Ki-Gor saw all of his plans smashed aside by the killing of the Khafri, saw guns whipped to shoulders, saw the bright blossoming of flames at muzzle tips. He threw himself aside, wincing from the ragged streak of pain that coursed his ribs where a slug ripped its murderous way. He dropped to the ground, swung his great Masai spear with both hands.

Arabs, brown-faced, dirty, curved war-swords swinging viciously in thin hands, surged at him, and he fought them with a cool ferocity. His blade ripped high, sighed through the thigh of the leading slaver, drifted away, leaving a gouting pulse of crimson spurting from the hamstrung man. The man screamed like a wounded rhinoceros.

Ki-Gor whirled away.

A sword blade licked in, searching for his throat, and he went under the blade, ripping upward with the spear, grunting slightly as he jerked the broad spearhead free of the stringy belly muscles. He whirled forward, carrying the fight, his spear weaving a path of death through the men that faced him. A sword-blade touched his arm, and blood coursed his elbow; but the sword-wielder died an instant later, a bloody mouth gaping in his throat where the spear blade had sliced in passing.

And then the White Lord of the Jungle stood in the circle of dead and dying slavers and he had a brief moment of respite. He swung to face the square, felt dull horror in his mind when he saw the carnage raging there. Men died even as he looked, crumpling over their guns, spears slashing the life from them, arrows seeking them out when they tried to run.

But Ki-Gor's men died, too. They fell in twisting bundles of lifelessness from housetops, staggered out of shadows, bright blood beating from shattered bodies where bullets had smashed their deadly way. But still they fought in a sinister quiet that was utterly at odds with their usual screams of defiance. And where one died, another stood to take his place. They seemed to spring out of nowhere, their spears flickering through the air, arrows drilling from

humming bows as fast as they could be nocked and drawn.

And then, when it seemed that all would die, a Khafri threw his gun away, and fell flat on his face in abject surrender. Instantly, as though they all obeyed some hidden command, others followed his example, dropped their weapons, raised their voices in cries of surrender.

Ki-Gor leaped to the auction platform, lifted his voice in a stentorian roar. He was not a man then; he was a bloody bronze god that none could defy.

"Hold!" he cried, and all sound ceased, except for the cries and whimpers of the wounded men.

"Drop all weapons," Ki-Gor ordered, "or none leaves this place alive."

Men fumbled eagerly to obey the command, knives, revolvers and other weapons clattering to the hard-packed ground. They huddled together, watching the black warriors appear at the edges of the squares, then jostled forward as though Ki-Gor was their protector against the death that moved so implacably toward them from the shadows.

Ki-Gor's men came warily from concealment, battleflame still flaring in their hate-filled eyes. Arabs and blacks shrank back from the bloody avengers, and the Jungle Lord saw that but little held the avengers from massacring the slavers.

He waited silently, as Luando and Tembu George paced to his side, felt relief surging in his heart as some of the rage faded from their taut faces.

"Why?" he asked quietly, gestured toward the Khafri who had been the first slain.

Luando snarled deep in his throat. "He bought Ceyo for himself," he explained. "It was just that he die by my hand."

Ki-Gor nodded, dismissed the subject, knowing the laws that governed all those who lived in Africa. His face was grave as he turned to Tembu George.

"Send your men to search for Helene and Mari," he ordered. "The rest shall stand guard over the slavers until a talk can be made."

TEMBU GEORGE whirled, and his great voice raised in a shout. Warriors raced toward the shadows of the square, entered the buildings and tents,

drifting through the side streets toward the slave pens. The slavers watched, fear in their faces, huddling together as they felt the vengeful aura that emanated from the slaves who had become their guards.

An Arab slunk forward, and Ki-Gor recognized Abu, who had bought him and others for work in the diamond pit. The Arab grinned oilily, fearfully, his dry hands rubbing together with a rustling sound.

"O Great One, O Man of the Jungle, what is it that you do with us poor dupes of Ali Ben Hassis?"

"*Dupes!*" Tembu George sneered. "I have heard of you—you must be Abu, the slaver! Years ago, you were imprisoned by the British for the thing that has brought you to this defeat." His sword made a glittering sweep through the air. "Back with your friends, before I drop your head from your shoulders!"

Abu whined deep in his throat, backed sullenly toward his men. Hate and fear were intermingled in his beady eyes, and he measured the distance toward the nearest side street. Ki-Gor watched impersonally for a moment, then turned and leaned against the slave block.

He felt weariness in his great body, a weariness made more horrible by the prescience of fear that lay in his heart. He had searched the motley crowd of slavers for Ali Ben Hassis and Gogth, had found neither. He knew, instinctively, that they had somehow escaped, and the thought was more galling and terrible than an open wound.

And then the Masai warriors were back, bringing the news that they had found no traces of Helene or Mari. Other prisoners had been released, and now they milled excitedly with their rescuers, finding relatives and friends whom they had never expected to see again.

Ki-Gor turned his head away, torn by raw emotions, wondering as to the best course to pursue. He saw Luando and Ceyo together again, and the sight brought to his mind nostalgic memories of how close he and Helene had been in the past years, their bond knitting them closer together as the lazy African days and nights fled by.

He accepted the double handful of retrieved arrows from a Masai warrior, fitted them into his back-quiver, then strode de-

terminedly toward Abu, who tried to hide in the thickest part of the crowd of slavers.

He dragged the dirty Arab into the open, cuffed him unemotionally into silence, then stared coldly as the slaver sank to his knees in the dirt.

"Where is Ali Ben Hassis and Gogth?" he asked tonelessly. "Speak with a snake's tongue, and I cut it from your mouth."

ABU could barely talk so great was his fear and excitement. His hands gestured as he spoke, and his face was grey beneath the dirt that overspread his olive complexion.

"Mercy, O merciful one!" he wailed. "I am your dog, your slave; I would not lie. Ali Ben Hassis and Gogth left this afternoon for the Wasuli country."

His hand made a sweeping motion in the dust, and he drew a U-shaped line. He marked directions on the line.

"They follow this trail," he explained. "It leads to the edge of the Wasuli country. They will not reach their destination before sundown tomorrow." Sudden hope lighted his eyes. "I will lead you there," he finished. "And I shall ask *nothing* for my reward."

Ki-Gor smiled thinly, thinking of the diamond pit. "Your reward shall come when a talk is made among your former slaves," he said softly.

Abu came slowly to his feet, his hate a virulent thing that had force and substance. He turned as though to join his fellow-slavers—and then whipped about, jerking a thin-bladed knife from concealment. His hand was a darting streak of death, as he lunged for the unprotected throat of the Jungle Lord.

Tembu George swung his gigantic war-sword with the lithe power of the perfectly-trained Masai warrior. Air sighed, was disturbed by a *chugging* sound, and then the blade finished its half-circle of glittering flight. The Masai chieftain stared down at the crimson that ran the blade, then bent and wiped away the blood with the bournoose of the dead Abu.

"*Aaiiiieee!*" A sigh of approbation came from the watching warriors; but there was only a terrified silence from the captured slavers.

Ki-Gor watched unmoved, his bronzed face grave and stony. "I owe another

life to you, Tembu George," he said quietly.

Tembu George shrugged. "My blade was thirsty," he said evenly. He changed the subject hurriedly. "But what of the Golden One and my wife? Are we not to follow?"

Ki-Gor nodded, slipped his great warbow over his left shoulder, caught up his shovel-bladed Masai spear.

"I leave at once," he said. "Gather what men you want, and then follow as soon as possible."

Tembu George shook his head. "We go together," he declared firmly. "I have a grudge to settle with Gogth for he was the one who took my Mari for himself." Hate twisted his even features into an ebony mask of passionate vengeance, and his knuckles were grey about the hilt of his great sword.

Ki-Gor nodded, then gestured to the prisoners cowering before the weapons of the freed slaves. "Tell the men," he said, "that a judgment talk shall be made when we return. Until then, no harm is to come to those we have captured." His eyes roamed the square. "Detail other men to bury those who are dead, and have the injured carried into some central hut where wounds may be tended."

Tembu George nodded, without speaking, raced to where a squad of his picked warriors stood beside the cowed prisoners. He spoke with many gestures watched critically as the men ran to carry the orders to all parts of the square. Then he walked swiftly about, giving quiet orders to Masai after Masai, gathering a growing retinue of magnificent warriors about him as the seconds passed.

Former slaves gathered in groups, carrying the dead from the bloody courtyard to the side streets, and then to the edge of town where the corpses were buried in the flickering of torchlight. Women wailed their songs of the dead, and men whispered the Kamzila prayer of the wind and the rain, so that the souls might pass untroubled down *Kastadi*, the River of Life.

Other men carried the wounded into a large house, where Arab doctors and native witch-doctors used their drugs or chanted their incantations so that the patients might live. Ki-Gor watched silently, impatience growing in his heart, but know-

ing that all this had to be done before a rescue attempt could be made.

The moon was high in the sky now, and the yellow beams tinged everything with the silver-gold of rime-frost. Night birds fled the air on silent wings, staring with bright cold eyes at the movement below, then fleeing toward the jungles where hunting was good. Tiny animals stalked the edge of the town, watching with glittering eyes that winked from existence when a snarling hound dashed out of concealment in an excess of simulated rage.

There was the smell of death in the air, hanging like a dank miasma over the town as though it were a section set apart from the rest of the world. And the flickering torchlight made the grave-diggers grotesque ghouls prowling in the night.

The slaver-prisoners were herded into the center of the square, and former slaves stood guard with captured weapons, their faces hard and vicious as they waited for any sign of revolt from their former captors.

BUT at last all was done; and Ki-Gor stood before Tembu George and eighty of his finest fighting Masais. He felt pride surging in his heart when he saw the determination that lay in their features, and the first bit of confidence touched the greyness of his thoughts.

"The caravan," he said slowly, "could not have travelled far this afternoon; we should come upon it early in the morning." His face was stern and unyielding. "Understand, there is to be no attack until I give the word—and I claim blood-hate for Ali Ben Hassis."

Tembu George nodded. "It shall be as you say, O White Lord" he agreed. "My men have their orders."

Ki-Gor flicked a single glance over the square, gestured for Luando to approach. The youth came eagerly, lifting his spear, thinking that the jungle giant wanted a companion. His shoulders sagged a trifle at Ki-Gor's words.

"It is a warrior's duty I give you," Ki-Gor said. "You shall be responsible for the prisoners. Let none escape; and capture any slavers who approach unknowingly. Should I not return, then shall you call a judgment talk of the wise men of the Masais, the Bangutos, the T'nekos, and any

other tribe whose members have been slaves. Their law is to be your law, their judgment your judgment. Is it understood?"

"It is understood, O White Lord," Lando said humbly.

"Good!" Ki-Gor whirled, stalked toward a street entrance at the side of the square. Tembu George's voice lifted in a brisk command, and his warriors instantly wheeled. Slaver-prisoners wailed in sudden fear, when they saw their protector leaving them to the mercies of the blacks, for they knew that only a miracle had spared their lives thus far. Ki-Gor ignored the cries, led his small army into the shadows.

A few minutes later, the town was far behind, and the African night was a pressing thing about them, as they paced swiftly down the U-shaped trail taken by Ali Ben Hassis and his slave-caravan the afternoon before.

"Hurry!" Ki-Gor said quietly, and lifted the pace to the ground-eating run of the veteran *voor-trekker*. Behind him the Masais grinned in vengeful anticipation, followed their black and white leaders, spears swinging in their strong hands, their hate a burning flame in their minds.

VIII

A N hour had passed, and still the pace did not slacken. The terrain had changed slowly; now the lava beds were behind, and the trail twisted and writhed through close dank jungle, creepers clutching with fibrous fingers at running feet, the ground soft with rotten vegetation.

Ki-Gor ran with the supple stamina of the jungle animal that he was, conserving his strength, finding his way with the uncanny perception that was like a sixth sense to his mind. Masais were dark shadows at his back, saying nothing, marvelling at the manner in which the jungle giant found his way along a path that was almost invisible beneath the blanket of black foliage overhead.

Ki-Gor smiled into the darkness, feeling again within him a wonder that men should follow his leadership so unquestioningly. Without complaint, without questions, they followed, believing implicitly in his judgment. He swallowed hard, feeling the lump

growing in his throat, then forced the sentimentalism from his mind.

Impatience crowded at his senses, made him want to rush wildly ahead. He knew that, alone, he could make better time; yet he knew also that he could not hope to rescue Helene unaided. Yet there was in him the thought that he should try to find the safari as soon as possible.

He heard the soft padding of the warriors' feet behind him, heard the muttered curse now and then as some warrior stumbled in the darkness; and he was suddenly humbly grateful for such friends, for any of the men with him would gladly and unhesitatingly give his life for himself or Helene.

Minutes flowed into each other, became hours, and still the pace did not slacken. Ki-Gor felt tiredness sliding into his body, despite his superb conditioning, knew that the warriors must be even more weary than he. The barest trace of sunlight was in the sky, and he knew that within a short while Ali Ben Hassis would have his caravan aroused for another day's *trek*.

And if the wily Arab once got safely to the Wasuli country, only a great tribal war would release the prisoners.

Ki-Gor grimaced at the thought, knowing that Ali Ben Hassis would slay the prisoners, if the need arose, rather than have the proof of his villainy alive should rescuers suddenly appear. Nerves crawled his back at the thought, and a thin panic tinged his mind.

A lion roared a challenge from beside the trail, then went silent, awed by the very number of the men he challenged. A *dik-dik* deer fled on fleet startled feet, disappearing without a sound into the under-brush. A jackal snarled over the bloody body of a *vanka* lizard, teeth flashing in the semi-gloom, then turned and ran, leaving the carmine body for the voracious ants piling from the rock-hard anthill at the trail's edge.

Ki-Gor halted the men with a brief word, waited until they had massed about him in the trail. He could barely distinguish features in the dimness, and felt a surge of cynical pity for those who would feel the vengeance that guided the men with him.

"I'm going ahead, alone," he explained. "You will follow the trail. In all probability, I shall find the caravan first. I'll try

to arrange things so that it will be delayed until you arrive."

"But, Ki-Gor—" Tembu George began.

"*Alone!*" the jungle giant said simply, slowly. "I can travel faster by going in a straight line through the jungle." He smiled, teeth flashing whitely in his shadow-darkened face. "Hurry, though, for it will take more than one man to stop Ali Ben Hassis and his men."

He turned, vanished into the underbrush without a sound. The Masais stood silently for a moment, startled at the abruptness of the jungle man's departure. They heard absolutely nothing that indicated the direction of Ki-Gor's flight. Tembu George snapped quick decisive orders, and the *trek* began again, all running with a greater speed, racing against time, each chastened by the thought that the white man had found their pace too slow for him.

AND already far away, Ki-Gor slipped like a fleeing animal through the tangled underbrush. He moved like a prowling cat, skirting the grasping branch-hands that reached for him, trodding lightly over the treacherous boggy spots of ground where one misstep would have dropped him into bottomless quicksand, racing lithely across small clearings.

He breathed easily, savoring the crisp morning air, sucking each breath deep into his mighty chest. He trailed his great war spear from his left hand, holding it at the blade joint, so that it would not become entangled in the creeping liana vines. He ate as he ran, snatching a cluster of grapes from a laden bush, stopping to slake his thirst from a rilling spring that sprang from between the hoary roots of a great ironwood tree.

And slowly the morning grew, dim light spearing through the interlocked branches of the crowding trees, making the going easier for the man who raced so desperately against time.

Fine perspiration glistened on Ki-Gor's bronzed body, but his breathing was slow and unhurried as he halted at the jungle's edge and stared across the sea of waist-high grass that stretched for a mile before him. He paused a moment, relaxing, his keen gaze seeking out landmarks that had been indicated on Abu's crude dust-map. Satisfied that he was travelling in the right

direction, he walked forward breaking a path through the dusty grass that was like a limber wall against his lithe body.

Powdery dust rose in thick clouds, coating his body instantly, making him a grey statue topped with yellow hair. *Kuni* flies bit at the crusted wounds he had received in the battle the night before, and midges danced in flickering clouds before his face. He blew his breath gustily, dislodging the midges that were lodged in his nostrils, then broke away a handful of sere brown grass and used it as a brush to ward away the flies.

Blackness moved to his left, and he froze into motionlessness, watching the lifted trunk of the elephant testing the wind. Porcine eyes glared near-sightedly across the waves of grass, and the beast grunted in habitual ill-humor. Ki-Gor didn't move, recognizing the animal for a rogue beast that had been cast from its herd because of its utter viciousness.

The elephant slowly came his way, beating at the grass with its limber trunk, its stomach rumbling loudly. *Kypee* birds rode its rough hairy back, fluttering into the air when threatened by the trunk's back-swing, then alighting again to ride sleepily. Dust rose in clouds from the beast's great splay-feet, rose and settled; and where the animal walked there was a wide path broken through the grass.

Ki-Gor tensed mighty thigh muscles, ready for instant flight, should the rogue scent him, then relaxed as the animal swung to the north, its challenging bellow roaring out to anything that might stand in its way.

Ki-Gor smiled; he had seen humans act just like the rogue elephant, so ill-natured they hated themselves. He watched the animal padding heavily through the grass, then took two steps forward.

Death whirled up from the deep grass so fast that he couldn't dodge. Had not his attention been caught by the danger of the elephant, he would have been prepared for any eventuality—but as it was he was utterly surprised.

He gasped, tried to duck aside, and a living rope of muscle flipped about his chest, pinning his arms, instantly tightening. He braced his legs, throwing himself desperately to one side, cables of rippling muscles riding his shoulders as he strained to free his arms.

There was a hiss like that of escaping steam, and a fanged mouth lifted from the grey-brown grass. Then another loop of body spun out of concealment, whipped about Ki-Gor, tightened beside the first circle of crushing strength.

KI-GOR went to his knees, feeling the air rushing from his lungs, feeling blackness sucking at the clearness of his brain. He had fought snakes before, had risked his life against them for years, but always he had had his hands free with which to fight.

But now he was as helpless as a *klipward*, his arms pinioned at his side, the instant pressure so great he was almost unconscious from that first crushing attack of the giant constrictor.

He fought with all of the superb strength of his body, flailing his weight wildly about, straining to keep the third coil from flipping about his chest. He could see deep into the beady, red-rimmed eyes of the monster snake, and the scales cut like knife-blades into his bronzed skin.

The snake struck with a desperate speed, directly for his face, and he jerked his head aside with a frenzied movement of his neck muscles. Teeth sank into his shoulder, and pain was a red mist that shrouded everything from sight. He gasped, and in that minute, he was no longer a man, but was a jungle beast trapped and fighting for its life.

He bent his neck, and his white teeth were savage fangs as he bit at the back of the snake's head. Blood was hot in his mouth, and scales gritted against his teeth, as he clamped his powerful jaws.

And then he was flipped high, whirled and battered back against the ground, as pain drove the snake insane. The coils of death constricted about his body, bringing raw agony to his bruised flesh, pinning his war-bow and quiver to his back, driving cramping vertigo through his belly.

But even as he was flipped about, the coils loosened, and his arms jerked free. He sucked in a savage breath, drove his hands forward, caught the boa's head in steely fingers. His thumbs gouged into the lidless eyes, and blood spurted over his wrists. Then his hands shifted, and he clamped his fingers over the upper and lower jaws.

Muscles corded his wrists and arms, twisted and writhed like hard cables of restless strength, and he surged with every ounce of power in his magnificent shoulders.

The snake's hissing was a stream of pure agony. Jaw muscles fought to meet the strength of the Jungle Lords hands, failed, and slowly loosened. The mouth came wider, the lower jaw slipping on its hinge, until it was almost square with the neck. Teeth ground into Ki-Gor's knotted hands, broke, and his blood mingled with that of the serpent's.

Then the bottom jaw broke with a brittle snapping, broke and tore loose from the brutal remorseless pressure. And in the same movement, Ki-Gor shifted his hold, and clamped both hands on the upper jaw. He surged with a lithe vicious effort, throwing all of his terrific strength into the hold. The snake's head bent back, curving into the neck, and snapped with a meaty grinding shock of sound.

Reflexes convulsed the thirty-foot length of the great constrictor. Ki-Gor was whirled upward, the loops of the snake constricting about his chest so tightly that he could not breathe. He felt himself whipped high in the warm air, dashed savagely to the hard earth, then swung high again. He felt one more terrible constriction about his chest—and then the world blanked out in a burst of brilliant light.

The dying constrictor shot to almost its full length into the air, whipping like a fire-hose, then flicked its unconscious victim to one side like an apple from a stick. It flailed in great sweeping surges of death, whipping gouts of dust from the brown grass, beating a great circle of flattened grass-blades with its convulsions. Then its reactions came slower and slower, almost ceased, and its bloody eye-sockets gazed blindly toward the rising sun.

And thirty feet away, Ki-Gor stirred dazedly, his arms automatically fighting away the coiling death that was already dead. Grey eyes flicked unseeingly open for a second, then closed, as a wave of nausea cramped at strained muscles.

HE lay that way for another second, then opened his eyes again. His arms and legs moved tentatively, gingerly, as he tested their reactions. Wincing a bit, he

sat, rolling to his hands and knees, then stumbling to his feet. He grinned wryly, sucking air gratefully into his bruised chest, then took four short steps to make certain that he was all right.

Then, knowing that he was but bruised and shaken, he walked to where the monster boa-constrictor twitched in death. His mobile mouth pursed in a silent whistle when he saw the size of the reptile for it was fully as large in girth as his thigh. He walked its sinuous length, then squatted near its head and lifted his keen knife from his thigh-scabbard.

Using the needle-point, he slashed a narrow circle groove in his shoulder, then flicked out the broken snake's teeth from the wounds made when the constrictor had bitten him. Kneading the flesh, he forced the blood to flow, cleansing the wounds as best as possible. That done, he used the knife point to pluck the broken teeth from his hands and wrists.

For fifteen minutes he worked; then he caught up his spear, and hurried across the plain of heavy grass. The sun was horizon-high now, and the rays felt good and solid and warm across his shoulders, drawing away some of the stiffness that had come from his bruising fight with the constrictor.

A *cerval* cat sprang out of concealment, snarled fanged defiance, then retreated with graceful bounds through the rustling grass. Ki-Gor sighed lightly, loosed his tight grip on the great Masai spear. He had no desire to fight a leopard at this moment. He whirled, hearing the slight sounds at his back, grinned when he saw the baby ostriches stalking unafraid toward him. Their bodies were like great balls of fuzzy cotton, and their eyes stared in unwinking friendliness.

He hurried onward, hastening toward the line of dark jungle ahead, feeling a sense of relief in his mind when he saw the shadows beckoning toward him. He spun about, hearing the raucous cries of rage behind, laughed aloud when he saw the *cerval* retreating in undignified haste from the savagery of an aroused female ostrich.

Then he was in the tangled jungle, and the plain and its death lay behind. He went slowly ahead, searching the jungle growth with keen eyes, stopped almost immediately and plucked several large balls of milky sap from a *carta* tree. Breaking the

rubbery globes, he spread the thick sap over his shoulder wounds and over those on his hands, his face whitening beneath its tan, as the syrupy liquid frothed and bubbled in sudden biting life.

Then the pain was gone from his wounds, and there was a sensation of coolness. Using leaves, he wiped away the sap, saw that the wounds were now cleanly cauterized. Except for a certain amount of stiffness as they healed, they would give no trouble.

Ki-Gor lifted his spear from where he had crotched it in a bush, then began his trek toward Ali Ben Hassis' camp. Worry cramped his mind now, for the fight with the constrictor had made him lose valuable time, and in all probability the Arab's caravan was making ready to *trek*.

He moved at a fast walk, slipping through the tangled underbrush with the lithe ease of an animal. And as he walked, he became aware of the subtle odor of wood smoke in the air. Later came the faint fragrance of cooking foods carried on the soft breeze. He hurried faster, drifting like a shadow through the jungle, careful never to expose himself to any watcher, not wanting a repetition of what had happened when he and Helene had found the first slave-encampment.

He crossed a clearing where an *aard-vaark* tore at an anthill with heavy claws.

The animal flicked out its ribbon-like tongue onto the ground, then turned calm eyes toward Ki-Gor, as angry ants poured from the hill onto the tongue. The *aard-vaark* made a snuffling sound, sucked in its tongue, flipped it out again, clean of ants and made rumbling grunts of pleasure. The Jungle Lord flicked a glance its way, then crossed the clearing and disappeared into the jungle again.

He ran lightly, following a dim game trail, carrying his spear in the grip of his right hand now. Eagerness and impatience fought with prudence and caution in his mind, and he could feel the surging lift of his spirits as he neared his quarry.

A voice sounded a hundred yards ahead, and the jungle giant became a living shadow at the base of a gigantic *baobab* tree. He remained motionless for seconds, then drifted slowly ahead slipping from tree to tree moving with the uncanny wood-craft of a man whose home had been the

jungle for his entire life. Not a twig broke beneath his weight, not a leaf rustled to mark his passing. A *valini* bird was undisturbed on its nest not two feet from Ki-Gor's gliding legs.

Butterflies whirled through the air like animated spots of glowing colors, and the air was heady with the bright odors of the *maheena* blossoms that overhung the trail, side by side with the richly-painted orchids clinging to the rough bark of the trees. A *carapee* bird trilled its liquid song into the air, then fled on startled vivid wings.

KI-GOR darted from shadow to shadow, drawing closer to the sound of the voice. He winced, hearing the flat cracking sound of a whip striking flesh; and then he was hidden behind a bush, peering through the interstices at the camp of Ali Ben Hassis.

The caravan was already forming for its morning trek, and slaves were breaking down the tents and folding them for carrying on the backs of grunting camels and stolid oxen. Small cooking fires sent plumes of writhing steam into the air, their ashes black and wet where gourds of water had been used to quench the flames. Dogs growled over meatless bones and already insects were black clouds where the camp's refuse had been deposited.

Arabs squatted near the head of the caravan, smoking crude cigars made of twisted leaves of wild tobacco, their beady eyes watching the slaves breaking the last of the camp. Ali Ben Hassis and Gogth stood by themselves, speaking softly, sullenness in their faces and eyes as they watched the chained slaves squatting in the center of the caravan.

Ki-Gor felt a prescience of disaster when he did not see the gleaming gold of Helene's body among the black ones of the other slaves. He stifled the feeling, moved so that he had a clearer view of the entire camp.

He forced aside a desire to laugh, when he saw the ugly bruise and red nail-marks on Ali Ben Hassis's face, for he knew the temper of his mate, and he knew that the Arab had more than met his match the night before. Then his gaze flicked to Mari, and hate flamed in his heart when he saw the whip-welts raised across her slender

shoulders. Gogth had kept his promise to treat her as a savage treats his mate.

Ki-Gor's arm came slowly up, and he balanced the spear in the tight fingers of his right hand. Death was in him for the moment—and then reason came whitely to his mind. He lowered his spear, permitted the massive witch-doctor to live for the moment.

A leaf brushed his leg as he turned away from his hiding place, and he felt the cold sweat of impatience on his body as he drifted toward the group of slaves, his eyes still searching for the slender golden body and flaming hair of his mate.

He growled deep in his throat when he saw the pain and weariness reflected in the features of the chained prisoners. But he made no overt act, for he knew that the Arabs' guns would cut him down instantly, should he be discovered. Even his superb mastery of his great war-bow or heavy Masai spear would avail him nothing against the superior numbers.

Like a shadow within shadows, he drifted from tree to tree, keen eyes searching, his spear ready for instant action. Puzzlement and worry clouded his grey eyes when he saw no sign that Helene was anywhere about. He stood for an instant in thought, then followed the line of tents with his gaze, knowing that his wife must have been kept a prisoner in one of them during the period of encampment.

His eyes widened a bit when he saw Luando chained to a tree thirty feet from the main body of slaves. The youth sagged against the bole, blood caked on his face where a heavy whip had slashed with terrific force and viciousness. He felt a thread of pride for the youth, when he saw the courage that still flamed in the Masai's glowing eyes.

Carefully, moving like a prowling cat, making absolutely no sound, he swung along the edge of the clearing, darted to the back of the tree to which Luando was chained. Slowly, with nerves incredibly taut because of the danger of being discovered, he reached about the trunk, clamped his hand over the youth's mouth. Luando jerked in surprise, fighting to free his face of the immovable fingers.

"Quiet, Luando," Ki-Gor whispered urgently, released his hold when the youth nodded in understanding.

"*Ki-Gor!*" Luando hissed in unbelieving relief.

"Where is Helene?" Ki-Gor asked.

"I—" Luando began, and his voice trailed into a silence that was more menacing than any statement could have been.

Ki-Gor stiffened, feeling dull horror mounting instantly in his mind. He fought the emotions for seconds not believing not daring to believe what he knew he had sensed minutes before. His hand was a steel vise on Luando's shoulder, muscles cabling along his wrist. And the boy writhed in silent agony from the bruising pressure.

"Where is Helene; what has happened to her?" Ki-Gor snarled.

"O White Giant, O Man who is like my mother and father," Luando said, "rather would I die than tell you what I must."

"Where is Helene?"

Luando sobbed deep in his throat, and his voice was but a whispering rush of agony.

"She is dead. Ali Ben Hassis struck her last night, and she fell dead. She was left at the trail's edge, while the safari travelled on."

"You lie, offspring of a dango. I say, you lie!"

But there was in the youth's silence then the stark fact that he did not lie. Ki-Gor loosed his hold, and his gigantic body sagged against the tree. He felt the dull pounding of his heart, and the pain in his body was a thing more horrible than any he had ever experienced in mad battle.

He thought of many things then, thoughts that crowded his heart and brain until he could see nothing before him. He leaned against the tree, hands knotted about the mighty spear shaft until the knuckles were like polished bone; and the welling emotion within him was a great pounding pulse that shook his great body with racking sobs.

And then through the agony came the first blazing thread of rage and revenge. He straightened, an heroic man of vengeance, his face a chiselled bronze mask of virulent hate. A shudder ran his body, and his lips were thin and white.

He stepped around the bole of the tree, utterly reckless of the fact that he might be seen. His great spear came shoulder high, and muscles coiled with terrific power

in his throwing arm. He sighted Ali Ben Hassis, and his arm came back in a deadly rush of strength.

"No!"

THE single word from the chained Luando snapped with authority, even though it was whispered. In the midst of the spear-cast, Ki-Gor hesitated. And then the moment was gone, and the blazing rush of rage became an implacable knot of hate deep in his heart. He lowered the spear, darted behind the tree, apparently unnoticed by either slaves or slavers.

He stood silently for seconds, memories churning in his mind, his breathing a deep and ragged sound. He knew the time was not yet come to deal with his wife's murderer; knew that the moment could only be when he locked his mighty hands about the slaver's throat.

He hesitated, not knowing exactly what to do now, feeling raw emotions tearing at his heart, sensing a new incentive growing where others had been. But at last, he straightened, propped his spear against the tree. He caught the loop of heavy chain that circled the tree, tested it between his hands, then threw every bit of power from his tremendous shoulders into a surge of strength in an effort to break the links.

Metal rasped on metal, but the links held with a cold solidity that was unnerving. Ki-Gor loosed his hold, caught up his spear.

"Luando?" he whispered.

"I'm sorry, O Lord," Luando whispered.

Ki-Gor fought back the rush of emotions. "There is no time for that now," he said. "I shall revenge myself. But now, I have work to do. Be ready at any moment, when I do what I have in mind."

There was no more time for words, for Ali Ben Hassis was striding toward the chained Luando. Ki-Gor drifted silently back into the thick underbrush. "Still the trouble-maker?" he heard the Arab ask the defenseless youth—and then he was stalking the trail at the edge of the camp.

He saw the manner in which the caravan was made up, estimated and evaluated the situation, felt a dull sense of futility in his mind when he saw the number of men he must fight to free the slaves. He calculated coldly, quickly, figuring to the minute as to when he could hope for help to arrive in the form of Tembu George

and his fighting Masai warriors. And in that moment, the decision was made for him.

"Hurry," Ali Ben Hassis called. "Mahmud B'Sudat meets us at high noon at the Hill of the Croaking Skulls."

Ki-Gor waited for no more. He turned, glided noiselessly from the camp, swung deep into the jungle, then paralleled the path of the caravan, running with every bith of strength in his lithe body.

His muscles were tired and stiff, but he moved at a pace an ordinary man could not have matched in open country. With the uncanny skill of the jungle-born, he threaded his way through the undergrowth and trees, his mind chaotic with new-grown thoughts, a plan shaping in his brain.

Perspiration dotted his bronzed skin, and his breathing was a bit strained when he finally stopped. The caravan lay a full two miles behind, and the trail in which he stood was free of trees and undergrowth. He paced it swiftly, searching for the growth of young saplings that spring from the edges of trails kept clear by bush-knives, and at last he found the place for which he was searching.

Placing his spear and war-bow to one side, using his keen knife he began the laying of a jungle trap for the dealers in death.

IX

FIRST, he cut forty lengths of green liana vine, testing each for suppleness and strength, then laying all together at the edge of the trail. He moved along one side of the trail, found a group of saplings hidden by a thin screen of bushes from the path, and cut twenty of the saplings five feet from the ground.

He notched the tops of the sapling stumps, then retrieved half of the liana vines and tied one vine to each of the cut saplings. Gathering the bundle of vines carefully in one hand, he backed through the trees, then swung his entire weight against the vines. The saplings bent backward, away from the trail, drawn by the vines, straining with the natural springiness of their wood. Carefully, making certain that one liana did not foul another, Ki-Gor then looped the vines about a heavy tree root and knotted them. Now, should

any vine break or be cut, a sapling would whip forward with an incredible speed and force.

The Jungle Lord moved with a catlike sureness toward the sprung saplings. Deftly, he fitted an arrow into each cleft, fitting each just behind the iron point, so that when the sapling sprang upright, the arrow would drive straight and with terrific force. He grinned a bit as he worked; many was the time he had made such traps for prowling carnivore but this was the first time that he had hunted men in such fashion.

He felt no qualms about what he did, or what he planned to do. The law of the jungle was to protect one's own, and he was jungle born and bred. And the slavers had lost their right to ask for or receive fair play. They had forgotten the rights of men, now they were to be hunted like the vicious animals that they were.

Finished, Ki-Gor moved a hundred feet down the trail, prepared another twenty traps, loading them with the deadly yard-long arrows from his quiver, hurrying now, for he heard the sounds of the caravan coming down the trail.

He retrieved his bow and spear from where he had placed them, drifted back into hiding. He squatted beside the first set of arrow traps, kept his hunting knife in his right hand ready for instant use.

He waited with the patience of a jungle animal, keen eyes scanning the trail through spaces in the undergrowth. A red and green caterpillar dropped from an overhanging limb, crawled the length of his arm, and he flicked it into a bush with a soundless twitch of his arm muscles. It crawled blindly for a moment, then fought frantically to escape the sticky web draped between three twigs. Ki-Gor shook his head silently, rescued the caterpillar, laid it gently on a sloping branch of a nearby tree. The spider watched with venomous fathomless eyes, then began again to build a snare for its hapless victims.

Slight vibrations came through the ground, and the sound of voices came clearer on the morning breeze. Ki-Gor became perfectly motionless, freezing as does a stalking leopard when a *klipvard* minces daintily and warily beneath his hunting perch.

He saw the first of the Arabs striding the

trail, their heavy laughter strangely obscene in the clear morning. Bournooses swirled about their bodies, and their noses were sharp lines against the fullness of their beards. Guns swung in their hands, and knives were scabbarded at their waists. They walked with swaggering steps, careless of their safety:

Oxen lumbered close behind, pulling carts piled high with trade goods and camping equipment; and behind the carts came the padding camels, their heads disdainfully high, their limber jaws chewing endlessly on their cuds.

Then came the main body of the slavers, talking, laughing, giving no heed to the chained slaves staggering at the rear of the caravan. Ki-Gor stiffened, seeing Ali Ben Hassis and Gogth in the center of the group. His eyes were like pools of grey flame as he measured each man, and there was in his heart then the knowledge that both should die that day for the crimes they had committed.

And then the first of the caravan was past the arrow trap, and the main body of the slavers was squarely in position. Ki-Gor poised his keen knife blade over the first strand of vine, then slashed with a deliberate firmness.

The sheared vine sang like a violin string, and the sapling whipped erect with incredible speed. The arrow lifted, snapped forward, driving like a streak of light directly into the group of slavers. An Arab screamed like a wounded horse, clawed at the shaft that had churned completely through his chest from side to side. Then he went down, crimson spurting from his mouth, staining the legs of the men about him, his body bucking in violent reflexes.

"Ho! Attack! Kill the butchers!" Ki-Gor roared a dozen sentences in a dozen tongues and dialects.

And the keen blade of his knife swept over the taut vines:

ARROWS sang and ripped their deadly way, reaping a harvest of death among the milling slavers. A camel bellowed in sudden pain, lashed with heavy hooves, started a raging stampede among the other camels. A Khafri grunted, staggered back, a slim shaft of death skewering his throat, and as he fell, his gun discharged, killing the man at his side.

And panic routed the caravan. Men screamed in sudden fear, fought to clear themselves of their comrades, raced down the trail, away from the arrows that drove from ambush with such deadly marksmanship. Ali Ben Hassis screamed unheeded orders, but Gogth deserted and ran with the others. The slaves cowered back from the sudden onslaught, unable to run because of the heavy chain that linked them throat to throat.

Ki-Gor came smoothly to his feet, darted through the underbrush to the second of the set of traps. Men were already massed in the trail, watching the place where the first flight of strumming arrows had cut down eight of their numbers. And some of the panic was leaving their minds; their hands were fumbling for the knives and guns they carried.

Ki-Gor ruthlessly slashed free the last twenty of the arrow-traps. Death scythed four more men in the trail, dropped them in nerveless huddles, built new panic in the remaining slavers' minds. They broke into mad flight, racing down the trail, wanting only to escape.

Ki-Gor leaped from concealment into the trail, and the mighty war-bow lifted in his strong hands. He nocked an arrow, drew the gut with a ripple of strength along his right arm, loosed the shaft. Air sang with a tight thin sound, and a leading Moor dropped in his tracks, lay without moving. Slavers streamed about his prone figure, not looking back, their shoulders hunching against the death they expected.

The Jungle Lord's hand whipped over his shoulder, caught another arrow, nocked it with a pantherish speed. He drew and fired, and nocked and fired another shaft while the first still rode the wind. Two men screamed their death cries, the murderous shafts thrusting straight outward from their backs.

And then Ki-Gor stood alone in the trail, his keen eyes watching the path to see that none returned. He heard the sounds dying in the distance then whirled and raced toward the silent slaves.

He darted toward the slaves; but already hands had caught at a lifeless body of a guard, torn a great key from his sash, and chains were dropping from bruised throats.

"Run!" Ki-Gor roared. "Hide in the

jungle, for Tembu George and his Masai fighting men come at any time."

Voices cried out in sudden questioning sounds, but the jungle giant had no heed for them. He darted to the side of a slain Khafr, retrieved a double-handful of arrows from the quiver harnessed to the man's back, tucked them into his own.

He raced against time, knowing that seconds were precious, amazed that the rout had been so complete. Emotions were hot and turgid in his mind, the desire for personal vengeance almost greater than his will. But he stifled his wishes, knowing that the safety of the freed slaves came first.

And in that moment, as he spun back to help the slaves still trying to release their stubborn chain, a rifle smashed sound into the morning, and a mighty blow whirled him to one side.

He went to one knee, blinking in sudden shock, conscious of the blood running from the shallow niche that groved his chest. He saw the rifle lifted in Ali Ben Hassis' hands, and a red mist obscured all before his sight.

HE went forward like a charging animal, growling deep in his throat his hands spread to grasp the Arab who had ducked out of concealment to murder him. He was all primal savage then, with none of the thin veneer of civilization that his living with Helene had given him. He was a great golden-skinned beast driven only by the desire to rend and tear, and he sprang forward like a maddened gorilla.

He snarled, white teeth bright against the bronze of his face, and he didn't feel the tiny flick of the second bullet whisking through his mane of yellow hair. His eyes were utterly calculating and merciless, as he threw himself at the Arab with a wild recklessness that nothing could have stopped.

Ali Ben Hassis cried in sudden fear, clubbed his rifle and swung with a desperate frenzied strength. Ki-Gor slipped under the clubbing weapon, jerked it free with a twitch of his left hand. He broke the rifle between his hands, tearing butt from barrel, then tossing the shattered pieces to one side. And then, mad laughter piling in his mind, he came to grips with the Arab.

Ali Ben Hassis was driven two steps backward, then whirled aside by the sheer ferocity of the jungle man's attack. He went to one knee, whipped his belt knife free, slashed upward. Crimson glinted along Ki-Gor's left arm, and then the knife went spinning into the underbrush.

Ali Ben Hassis came driving upward, forgetting his fear in the blasting rush of virulent hate that contorted his mind. His hands locked with those of the white savage, and the men strained like two titans for seconds.

Both were big, both were superbly muscled; their main difference lay in their minds. Cold rage motivated Ki-Gor now, a rage that grew as the moments passed, grew and boiled and settled into the muscles that swelled and rippled and cabled across his magnificent shoulders. Fear and vengeance lay in the Arab's mind, and there was in him the cold ferocity of a cornered rat who knows that survival meant the slaying of the thing he faced.

They broke and came away, and their breathing was loud in the still air. Then Ki-Gor came driving in, his left hand darting like a snake, the fingers catching the Arab's burnoose, flinging him a dozen feet. He raced in, caught at the Arab again was battered back by sledging, hammering blows of the slaver's rocky fists.

The slaves watched silently, awed by the utter primitive savagery of the battle, none seeking to interfere. Dust rose in soft clouds, almost obscured the battlers.

Ki-Gor went forward again, charging in with the deceptive swiftness of a hunting leopard, spun about the Arab, caught an outflung arm. He whipped about, pulled the arm over his shoulder, heaved with a jerk of heavy muscles. The Arab screamed, and went flying over Ki-Gor's head. He landed on hands and knees, shook his head dazedly as he watched the Jungle Lord come racing in.

Then he surged to his feet, his right hand blasting smashing blows into Ki-Gor's eyes, blinding him momentarily, driving him back. He dodged to one side, sucking in a great breath, feeling the rush of new strength to his body. And then he smashed forward, seeking the Jungle Lord, striving to end the battle as quickly as possible.

And Ki-Gor was ready. He laughed deep in his throat, reached with an almost casual

daintiness. His hands clamped on the Arab's shoulders, and a scream of pure agony shrilled the air, as steely fingers bit deep into stringy muscles.

Ki-Gor shook the man as though he were a child, shook him and forced him to his knees. Ali Ben Hassis beat futilely at the grim implacable face of the jungle nemesis, sobbed in panic-stricken rage when his blows failed to weaken Ki-Gor's hold.

Then the fingers lifted, sought the throat of the vicious Arab slaver. They tightened with a remorseless pressure, and the Jungle Lord's voice was a doom-background for the blackness stealing across Ali Ben Hassis' brain.

One glimpse Ali Ben Hassis had of the grim faces staring at him from across the trail—and then Ki-Gor twitched his hands, muscles cabling along his massive wrists.

A moment later he stood, shaken, staring blindly at the broken body that lay in a huddled heap, its head oddly twisted to one side.

He turned away, bent and caught up his great war-bow. A rifle cracked spitefully, and a slave dropped in a slack bundle of death.

KI-GOR whirled, saw that the slavers had returned, were racing toward them up the trail. He bent, caught up a great spear, and ropy muscles swelled and relaxed in his shoulders, as he threw with a superb sureness.

The spear sliced the air with a tiny whistling shriek, seemed to hover, then dropped with a sickening speed. Its broad blade plowed through the chest of the first attacker, emerged a yard from the man's back, crimson staining the bright blade and shaft.

"Fight!" Ki-Gor roared. "Those of you not chained grab weapons and protect the others."

And even as he snapped the order, his hand was fitting and launching slim arrows with a machine-like speed. He backed toward the slaves, covering them with the weight of his counter-attack, seeing the attackers dodging back out of sight. Hate flared in his eyes when he saw the great body of Gogth standing at the slavers' front, and he drove an arrow squarely at the figure. But the black was gone almost instantly, diving into the underbrush and

the arrow sank harmlessly into a tree trunk.

Freed slaves darted about, scooping up discarded guns, stripping bullet pouches from the slain slavers. They caught up bows and arrows, tossed spears to others near the slave chain. Others worked with a frenzied speed to twist the great key in the clumsy locks of the slave chain.

Ki-Gor herded everybody to one side, trying to protect them from the bullets slashing down the trail. He felt a sickness growing in his heart because most of the men and women were so helpless; with the chain linking them together, they could not hope to escape through the jungle.

"Hold out," he called briefly. "We have a chance!" But the words were burning lies in his mouth, for he knew the utter futility of the battle he fought.

And the freed slaves rallied at his side. Some used the discarded guns, blasting slugs at the slavers, crying in bright triumph when a bournoosed body dropped slackly from cover. Others drove arrow after arrow with the smashing competence of jungle men, drilling their shots almost as accurately as a man could with a rifle.

A man sighed at the Jungle Lord's side, crumpled like a tired child, and blood pumped in a streaming jet from his shattered throat. Another gasped in agony, then tied a tourniquet with teeth and one hand about his right arm, and continued hurling spears with his left arm.

Powder-smoke hugged the ground smelling thick and stinging amid the odors of dust and blood. Already circling overhead, held aloft by the sound of rifles blasting, vultures swam the air in narrowing circles their beady eyes calculating cruel as they waited patiently.

And men died in the tangled forest, died, and others stepped up to take their places. Guns roared, and arrows sang; and Death marched the jungle trail, his hands grasping lives to him with cold impartiality.

The minutes sped by, and still the battle raged; but slowly the slavers became bolder, knowing their superior forces and weapons could smother the others. They made charge after charge, only to be driven back by the utter ferocity of men not afraid to die.

And in one of those lulls, Ki-Gor turned about to seek Helene.

"*Helene?*" he called.

In that single moment all that he believed in, all of the illusion of living that had been his through the past years, collapsed. He felt his great heart break in his chest, and a soft moan sped past clenched teeth. He remembered then that Helene would never be at his side again.

"*No!*" Ki-Gor whispered, and the morning was a grey thing without life.

FAR back down the trail, Tembu George raised a powerful arm in a silent gesture of command, and his squad of warriors came to an instant halt. They stood motionless, eyes centering on the body that lay so slackly beside the trail, and horror narrowed their gazes.

Tembu George sprang forward, gently lifted the slender body of Helene so as to cradle her head against his hip, and his hand checked her pulse. Grey stole into the ebony of his even features, and he swore bleakly monotonously, without heat, for the grief in him was too deep to express with words.

His men crowded about where he squatted on the ground, and rage made horror-masks of faces already grim and deadly by the vengeance that stirred within their hearts.

"It is the Golden One, the Jungle Lord's mate," one whispered. "*Aaaaiicee*, there will be wailing throughout the land."

"But what of Ki-Gor?" a second asked.

Tembu George shook his head in a brief wordless command, and the gigantic warriors spread quickly out into searching formation, beating through the jungle and underbrush, searching for the jungle man's body. Within seconds they returned, their search unfruitful, and Tembu George nodded slightly in relief.

"A grave must be dug," he said simply.

Five warriors swung to the side of the trail, trowelled deeply into the soft earth with the shovel-blades of their massive spears. They worked swiftly, clearing the heavy grass, striking the earth aside with a swift deceptive speed.

Tembu George rose, when the grave was finished, lifting the limp pitiful figure of the girl in his arms, carrying her to the raw brown hole where he stooped and placed her gently down again. He straightened her slender limbs, fluffed her bright hair gently

into a swirl of naturalness about her soft features, gently whispered the Kamzila prayer of the wind and the rain for the soul of the woman he had worshipped as a goddess striding at the side of her jungle husband.

He folded the slim arms across her breast, gently forcing the clasped fingers into an open, more natural, position. Grief etched grim lines into his steady face, and he cursed his inability to do more than he was doing, for the Masais were the most skillful blacks in all Africa in the knowledge of herbs and their uses.

He saw the bloody stains in the palm of the right hand, automatically tried to wipe them away, saw the queerly-shaped leaf she had clenched in her stained palm. He turned the hand palm downward, stepped from the shallow grave. His hand made a brief gesture to the silent men who watched.

Bright spear blades flashed in the brown earth, and the earth slipped over the edge of the grave to blur the outlines of the soft body resting there. Tembu George turned away, mighty shoulders sagging, a thought struggling for remembrance in his mind.

He heard the unconscious sigh that stirred from his men; and then memory blossomed redly in his mind. He spun about, and lifted his spear.

"*Wait!*" he said, sprang forward.

X

KI-GOR, White Lord of the Jungle, stood like some great bronze statue in the midst of his fighting men. Memories crowded his brain, crowded and pushed and shoved and dissolved into a composite portrait of all that Helene had meant to him in his jungle existence.

He felt the emotions rip his heart, straining at his senses. And the dull agony of his thoughts was more horrible than any battle-wound could have been to his great body.

Pain was a shadow across the clear grey of his eyes, and his hand lifted in sudden reflex, as though the movement would bring Helene back to his side where she had been for so many months.

"*Helene!*" he cried softly, unheard in the roar of the fighting.

He turned and strode solidly toward the edge of the trail. Men watched him leave, and panic flared in their eyes for they saw in his carriage an admission of defeat. He walked blindly, not caring, not knowing of what others thought. A bullet slashed at his breech-clout, and he did not notice. For the first time in his entire life, there was absolutely nothing that held meaning.

His mind was a black morass in which one thought stood out with a bone-white clearness: "*Helene was gone.*"

A bullet caught the edge of his shoulder, whirled him about, brought him up against a tree. He stood there for blind seconds, wishing that the bullet had not been so wide of its mark.

And in that infinitesimal second, he saw a freed slave claw at a bullet wound that dotted his chest, saw the man crumple to the ground—and saw the slender woman dart from concealment to take her husband's side and fight his battle over his wounded body.

Something came alive in Ki-Gor then, something greater than himself, a force of character that would not let him hide his personal hurt in flight. He stood and saw the battle clearly, saw the slavers crawling closer down the trail, and bright flame blazed in his eyes.

He went utterly beserk with mingled rage and grief and driving anger. He heard the strangled whimpers of pain from a wounded man, sensed the woman's tender sympathy as she staunched the flow of blood from his ghastly shoulder wound. Then he had leaped to the vanguard of his men, and his bull-like roar was a pealing challenge that drove the blood from the slavers' bearded faces.

He caught up a spear, his arm whipping back, muscles coiling and knotting beneath bronzed skin. He threw with the terrible driving cast of the Masai fighting man, smashing it forward as though it weighed no more than a small twig.

And the spear was a whistling streak of silver-tipped blackness in the sunlight. It split the wind, whining with a thin note of sound, driven with the force of five ordinary men behind it. An Arab seemed to rise to meet its point, and then it had fled completely through his body in a rush of gouting blood, and had driven its blade

completely within the chest of a second slaver directly behind.

And following the spear, came a slim arrow, hurtling forward in darting flight, driving an Arab erect, tunneling squarely through screaming features and through the back of his head. The slaver toppled into the trail, kicked his life away on the bloody ground.

A great cry arose from the slaves, and their missiles built a wall of death through which the slavers could not pass. They fought with a renewed frenzy, spirits lifted by the sheer casual ferocity of the blonde giant who sparked their battle-flame.

But even as the cry of victory arose, disaster struck from the sides of the trail. Gun-flame belched and heavy slugs tore rows of death through the rows of slave-fighters. Men died, not knowing from where death came.

Ki-Gor whirled, a shout of alarm rising from his throat; but already his men had turned to fight the new menace. Guns bellowed their roars of death, slugs hammered at the tangled underbrush where the sneaking snipers had hidden themselves after slipping about to flank the fighting slaves.

A KHAFRI toppled from his position in the crotch of a tree, his arms and legs loosely waving as his body struck and bounced on the hard ground. Another bent forward at the waist, blood dripping from the center of his forehead, his body held erect atop the bush that he had used for concealment. The slave who had shot him died the same moment, driven from side to side with a musket ball.

And then the slavers made their final attack in a great wave of men running down the trail. Gogth was in the lead, his ebony skin glistening as though freshly oiled, a great sword swinging in his left hand, his right carrying a short stabbing spear. Arabs paced his side, their rifles biting out quick retorts, revolvers stuttering in a deadly rhythm.

They were utterly fearsome as they ran, for in the courage of their superior force, they had absolutely no qualities of mercy about them, and there was a cruel anxiety about their eagerness to come to body combat with the crudely-armed slaves.

And then, as though waiting for the

right moment to appear, came a whispering wave of slim savagely-driven arrows that dropped half the attacking slavers in their tracks.

"*Hol!*" a great familiar voice roared. "Gogth is mine; I claim blood-hate!"

Ki-Gor dodged the murderous sweep of a flashing sword, drove with his spear into the belly of the Arab, then spun about from the dead body. Hot blood surged at his temples when he saw the mass of gigantic men racing the trail to the aid of himself and his men—and suddenly all grief and bitterness was erased from his heart, and dull wonder took their place.

For racing at the fore of the gigantic Masai warriors, pacing the great steps of the bellowing Tembu George, came Helene, her slim body white against their black, her golden-red hair a spear-head of flame that led the attack of the finest fighting men in all of Africa.

And then the whirlwind of Masais was through the slaves, had passed Ki-Gor, and was closing with the slavers. Cries of anger and fear made a curtain of sound in the trail. Spears lifted and dipped, came high bright with crimson, only to lash forward again in an irresistible surge of violence. Slavers died horribly, screams of surrender unheard.

Men died instantly, having absolutely no chance against the warriors Tembu George had trained himself. The seven-foot Masais fought with the cool skill of warrior-killers, almost machine-like in their scything destruction of any who stood in their path. Weapons flashed, and laughter was a strange overtone above the sounds of battle. The Masais were laughing giants who killed as readily as they laughed, spears and knives weaving a pattern of death before them.

And in the midst of the battlefield Tembu George met Gogth, the scheming witch-doctor.

Once they had met, when Gogth was younger and Tembu George had been the victor. But now Gogth's Masai blood had made him larger than the man he faced, his body perfectly proportioned, his strength a radiant thing that an ordinary man could not withstand for seconds.

Gogth stood, great two-handed sword swinging in his powerful hands, eyes bright and shiny as he watched Tembu George

catch up a discarded sword and come plunging in.

Steel clashed, and sparks darted in the tainted air. Metal rang with the high shrill notes of bells, and then the rasp of blade on blade dominated everything.

The last of the slavers died on the broad blade of a Masai war-spear, and the bloody warriors turned to watch their chief and the pretender fight their last duel on the blood-soaked ground.

TEMBU George laughed deep in his throat, swung his gleaming sword in a flaming arc of death. But his laughter rang false, for his eyes were pits of hate-filled death, and his face was an ebony mask of justice that wiped all expression from Gogth's sneering mouth.

Gogth was the bigger, but Tembu George fought with the lithe ferocity of a jungle cat. They circled and swung, their blades licking tongues of death thirsting for the hot blood that waited the kiss of ripping steel.

Gogth spun in, his sword darting in and around the blade of Tembu George. The point ripped past the curved pommel, drove deep into the Masai chieftan's arm. Tembu George winced, backed away, barely dodging a murderous overhanded swing of the heavy fighting sword. Then he turned sideways, led his sword one-handed, as though he were fencing. The blade went straight and true, fled through the muscles of Gogth's shoulders with a sighing sound.

Gogth screamed, lunged forward, enraged by the unorthodox blow swinging his sword in a beheading arc that was almost fatal to the side-stepping Tembu George. The blade hissed through the air, and so great was the blow, Gogth made a misstep.

Tembu George straightened, lifted his sword to drive in a fatal blow. And stepping back, his right foot tangled in the bournoose of a slain Arab, and he fell to his knees.

Gogth screamed in triumph, sent his sword surging high over his head, muscles cabling in his arms as he brought his entire reserve of strength for the blow that would end the fight.

Tembu George saw that nothing could save him, and he stopped his fighting to free his tangled foot. He watched the

blade swing high, light winking from its crimsoned edge, and there was no fear in his eyes. He straightened so that he would take the blow squarely, knowing that to duck aside was not the way of a Masai fighting man, and he did not want to stain the honor of the race that had adopted him for his own. He waited for his death, a proud smile on his mobile mouth, his shoulders square and unflinching.

And Ki-Gor, standing to one side, felt dull horror mounting in his mind as the death blow reached its zenith. Phenomenally fast as he was, as sure as was his hand, he knew that he could not reach the crazed witch-doctor in time to halt the murderous blow. And an instantaneous lightning flicker of his keen eyes disclosed the fact that no other warrior stood near enough to save the doomed man.

Gogth laughed in insane triumph, all of the pent-up hate and envy of years building to a vicious climax. He finished the upward swing of his great two-handed sword, tensed every muscle in his body, and the deadly blade hovered momentarily upright.

And at the peak of his swing, Gogth died.

HE died very cleanly, not knowing what it was that cut his life away from his body, his eyes very wide and startled beneath the handle of the Masai throwing knife that centered his forehead like a single bloody horn.

He crumpled to one side, the heavy sword dropping to the ground with a spanging of metal, his columnar legs, going rubbery and dropping his body slackly. His eyes lost their mad glare, and stared blankly at the sun that hung high overhead.

Tembu George untangled his foot from the folds of cloth, then walked in an unnatural silence toward Mari who stood near the group of silent slaves.

"Mari," he said coldly, "has it not always been a man's work to wage war? It is not fitting that a woman should know how to throw a knife more skillfully than her husband."

Mari hid the slow smile that twitched the corners of her mouth, then bent her head so that her husband might not see the welling of the tears in her eyes.

"You carry my water-pails," she said softly. "Then shall I throw your knives."

And then she was in the circle of his arms, crying unashamedly into his broad chest; and the pride in him was a swelling thing that almost burst his heart. He kept his gaze away from his warriors so that they should not see the shame of a man crying with his wife. And his men, like ferocious lions in battle, shifted nervously in the dust, and turned their heads away.

Ki-Gor watched and marvelled. And then Helene was close to him, and he felt the surging of emotion that he had thought was gone forever when it had appeared that she had died from a cowardly blow. He held her tightly, letting her cry against his mighty chest, grinning embarrassedly when Tembu George caught his gaze.

"But I thought you were dead!" he said, still almost unbelieving of that which was happening. "Luando told me that Ali Ben Hassis killed you with a blow."

Helene's sobbing became more restrained, and her voice drifted upward from where she cried into her husband's battle-stained chest.

"I thought that I might help you if I escaped," she explained. "I knew he didn't bury those who died, so I faked my death."

"*Faked?*" Ki-Gor's tone was puzzled.

Helene turned a bit, held one hand so that he could see her stained palm. Ki-Gor studied it puzzledly for a moment, and then knowledge came to his clear gaze.

"*Nabinta* berries!" he said in sudden understanding.

Helene nodded, pressed closer to her husband. "Yes," she said. "I ate half a handful of the berries, then made Ali Ben Hassis so angry that he struck me. I pretended to be unconscious. While he was trying to bring me to, the berries made me totally unconscious." She shuddered. "The next thing I knew, Tembu George and several of his men for forcing me to drink juice made from herbs—thus counteracting the *nabinta* berries' effect."

"They saved your life then?"

Helene nodded, but remembrance of the moment when she had wakened beside the grave where she had been momentarily buried alive made a dark shadow in the blueness of her eyes.

"Yes," she said softly, then essayed a feeble smile, feeling the bright flame of her mate's confidence folding protectively about her again. "Please," she said softly,

her love a vibrant tangible thing as she lifted her lips to his.

Ki-Gor nodded. He had many questions to ask, but knew the time for them would come later. Bending, he kissed Helene gently on her quivering lips. A moment later, he stepped away from his mate, and his voice snapped in quiet commands.

"Clear away and bury all the bodies," he ordered, "then make ready to *trek* back to the slave market. We have a judgment talk to make with those who use people like oxen, to fatten their purses."

Within seconds, men and women worked to fulfill the orders. And standing to one side, Ki-Gor and Helene and Tembu George and Mari watched, weariness in their bodies, but an unquenchable love of life in their eyes. They watched the men and women working as they cleared the carnage-stained grounds; and Ki-Gor voiced the thought that tinged all their minds.

"Never again must such a thing happen," he said. "We must make certain of that."

"Nor shall it," Tembu George said quietly. "On that I pledge my word."

XI

FIYE DAYS later, in the slave town's square, a judgment talk was made, the sullen slavers herded together in the center of the square to hear the judgment decided upon by the council of men called together by Ki-Gor and Tembu George.

The council sat in conclave in a large tent set at the side of the square. Tembu George represented the Masais; K'apa the Bangutos; Lakela the T'nekos; and F'muna the Lingbos. Ki-Gor listened at one side of the council fire, hearing the propositions, evaluating every argument and decision that was spoken.

And when the decision was reached, he preceded the council into the open, mounted the rough planks of a slave block, raised his mighty hand for silence.

Mutterings died within the beards of the Khafiris and the Arabs. Blacks shifted beneath the threat of the weapons held so carelessly competent in the hands of Masai guards. Freed slaves stood about the sides of the square, waiting to hear the judgment of the men who had been in conference for almost two days.

Ki-Gor said nothing for a moment, his keen gaze slipping across the sea of sullen faces that were turned his way. He felt a certain ironic sympathy in his heart for the men; and then he remembered the horrors such men had brought to the jungle, and his eyes went utterly bleak.

The council mounted the platform, ranged themselves at his side. They watched this white man who roamed the jungle, and there was respect and friendliness deep in their gazes, for they knew the depth of the debt they owed to his indomitable courage and cunning daring.

"This is the judgment, as decided upon by those who were wronged," Ki-Gor said clearly. "For the time of both hands and both thumbs of moons, during which time shall all be the same as it was in the last period of the same length, shall all those who dealt in human lives work in the mines."

A sullen mutter of fearful anger raised from the listening men, died away before the glittering blades of their guards' weapons.

"It is further decided," Ki-Gor continued, "that those whose loved ones died beneath a slaver's lash shall be repaid with the wealth dug from the ground. This wealth shall be taken to the coast, there sold to the British, and all divided equally among those who suffered, including the ones who were released by Tembu George and his men."

Cheerful mocking laughter and talk came from the freed slaves; then they, too, fell silent as the Jungle Lord flicked his gaze their way.

"All slavers," Ki-Gor finished quietly, "shall be branded on the forehead, so that all men shall know them for what they are. And should they ever return to this part of Africa, their lives are forfeit."

He ignored the whimpers of inarticulate rage from the condemned slavers, turned to face the black who represented the Wasuli nation.

"We find no fault with you," he said. "Gogth was not your leader, and therefore no judgment shall be made against you. Go in peace."

"May your belly hang to the ground with meat and *kava*," S'uto of the Wasuli said ceremoniously.

"May death never steal upon your unprotected back," Ki-Gor answered.

He said no more, dropping lithely from the edge of the platform, walking through a magically-opened lane through the pressing throng of people. Helene waited at the edge of the square, waited with her hair a red-gold flame about her exquisite face, her body like a golden statue among the dusky bodies of the women at her side.

She stretched out her hand, took his strong fingers in hers, and they slowly walked the street toward the edge of town.

BEHIND them, Tembu George watched the great white man and his mate going back toward their jungle home, and he smiled into the eyes of Mari standing on the ground before him.

"Wah!" he said. "Were that I was as great as Ki-Gor!"

And he felt the swelling of pride in his heart; for in her eyes he saw that none stood greater than he in her mind and love. He jumped from the platform, ignoring the further words spoken by the council as they gave their final orders for the execution of their judgment. He and Mari ran toward the street down which Ki-Gor and Helene had disappeared, and friends cried their goodbyes in a dozen different tongues.

And ahead, the White Lord of the Jungle and his glorious mate heard the cries, halted, so that their friends might join them on the *trek* back to their familiar country.

There was a sense of peace about the *balinga* forest now, and a *carapee* bird trilled its liquid song from a hidden thicket,

was answered by the soft shy notes of blue and gold warblers. The morning was warm, with a hint of soft rain in the slow air, and the sunlight painted the bodies of the white man and his mate a golden bronze.

Ki-Gor laughed with a lightness of heart that he had not known for days; and Helene echoed the sound with trilling laughter that bubbled unbidden from their throat. They were one then, and nothing could separate them, for their destinies were linked and knotted, and the lazy jungle months but brought them closer together.

And then Tembu George and Mari came running to their side; and all turned to trod the shadowed path that would take them to the future that lay ahead.

They entered the fringe of jungle, and a monkey chittered angrily from a tree limb. Ki-Gor shittered back in a clicking imitation, chuckled as the monkey peered in blank startled bewilderment. Helene walked at his side, and they led the way.

And behind, Tembu George plucked a rosy orchid from a branch, tucked it in the soft hair above the right ear of his wife.

"Like a virgin maiden," he whispered. "I think that I shall play court again."

Mari giggled, "Man-child!" she chided, but her slender arm brushed his mighty one in brief companionship.

Ki-Gor and Helene glanced back. They laughed understandingly, seeing the by-play of their friends.

"Come," Ki-Gor said. "We are going home."





Seven from Zanzibar

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

The rubber plantation in the jungle's depths had been invaded by renegades led by a half-mad murderer. Only Grant Waring stood in the path of their bloody conquest of the peaceful natives—and he was a helpless prisoner of the men he must overcome, a girl's life forfeit on his first wrong move.



Grant Waring fired with a blind instinctive speed.

FOR THE very first time since he had been hired by Grant's father, Andouiah, the two hundred and fifty pound cook, had broiled the chops perfectly—not too raw, not too brown, just right. He had made also a savory *mouloiah* of vegetables. With some limes, crushed mangoes, rum and plenty of ice, he had prepared a cool pitcher of invigorating cocktails. But instead of enjoying his lunch, Grant kept on angrily mulling over the letter just brought in by a sepian jungle

postman, stark naked save for his brassard.

That letter, written by Frank Waring, Grant's uncle, was of the nasty variety. In a few and terse sentences, it called for a larger output of rubber and ordered a drastic curtailment of operating expenses; it stated that family feelings and business didn't mix, and warned Grant that he had to deliver the goods or give up his job as manager.

Kro, the mess-boy, stared at his young master with growing concern.

Kro was a throw-back to the age when human beings lived in caves and hunted reptiles as big as barns. He didn't measure more than five feet and ten inches in height, but his shoulder-spread was tremendous.

In the last championship of Cameroons and Nigeria, staged by the sporting British officers of Lome, the other heavyweight entries had almost fractured their fists on his ungainly frame, without raising a welt on it. But they had gone down, colder than dead mackerel, when one of his round-house swings had connected with their anatomy.

At the end of the tournament, a British boxing promoter on a touristic vacation—an impressive business man with a walrus mustache and a gorgeous diamond ring—had done his best to impress Kro with glowing descriptions of the glory and the riches to be gathered in the rings of America and of the United Kingdom.

However, Kro's line of reasoning was simple:

Money, being good in the jungle only to purchase dusky beauties, meant nothing to him; for had he not already two satisfactory wives? What need had he for more?

Then, there were the spirit-ghosts of his ancestors to reckon with.

According to his tribal form of religion, these ghosts could not approve any prolonged trip of his to the faraway lands of the white men, and would be likely to punish his transgression by unleashing on his trail: The sideways-bent spirit of the plague. Or the spotted spirit of leprosy. The crawling spirit of abdominal ulcers; the blood-vomiting spirit of hemorrhage. Or even the formidable demon which, as every western African knows, seeps into his victim's breast through his nostrils, and tears his heart with a single bite.

Out of sheer native courtesy, because he saw in the proposition trouble, and no particular appeal, Kro seized on the only way out of his predicament and asked the promoter to undergo the following ritual:

"You stand all naked on your head, with a black master of magic holding your feet high, while another witch doctor whips you with a lash made of dead men's skin, and asks all evil spirits to lay off me because you take my place as the man-transgressor who must be crippled or killed."

Maybe the promoter could have consented to undergo that ordeal for the sake of reaping a fortune through Kro's pugilistic efforts, and maybe not, if he hadn't preserved all the horror of ghosts that harassed his ancient native district. Thus the promoter replied to Kro that he didn't care to monkey with witch-doctors' curses.

Kro's answer was swift and sensible.

"Why should I give up a job where I don't work hard and eat all the food I need, when you don't want to suffer and die for my sake?"

What the promoter retorted is unprintable. The upshot of it all was that Grant kept Kro, but the world lost a potential contender for Joe Louis' crown.

AFRICAN natives have strange ways of putting two and two together. In Kro's estimation, the episode of the promoter was a patent proof that some all powerful spirit-god wanted him to watch over Grant's welfare.

Therefore, in that fateful morning when the nasty letter spoiled Grant's appetite, the moment came when Kro's couldn't restrain himself any longer and, with the forcefulness of a man discharging a duty, growled:

"You tear letter, you forget it, you eat, we all very happy! Your father good man, cleared ground, by and by made plantation. You, his son, are his rightful heir. But your uncle is evil! Kill him if he comes here!"

"If I could get away with it, I would!" Grant replied with feeling; then, seeing the enormous black bulk of his cook in the door of the pantry, he added: "What's your suggestion, Andouiah?"

"I say Kro no good!" the cavernous voice of Andouiah boomed. "I tell him: Make master bwana eat chops quick-quick, before they get cold-greasy! But Kro didn't make you eat chops swiftly, because he's dumber than an ant-eater!"

Kro would not have taken that from any other black man. Andouiah, however, was an exception to the rule, because from his kitchen came all the fine food of which Kro and his wives were so fond. Therefore Kro rolled his eyes angrily but kept his mouth shut.

Suddenly Andouiah's jaw and the three chins under it sagged. His thick hand

pointed at the sun-baked lawn before the house. "Massa bwana!" His thunderous roar filled the room, "What are these men doing here?"

A brassy blaring of bugles drowned his voice. The amazed Grant jumped out of his chair, ran to the window. What he saw through the mosquito screen took his breath away.

The squad of mulattoes in saffron tunics at the head of the column marched in step, like soldiers. They wore bandoleers and cartridge belts, and were armed with modern guns and daggers.

After them in solitary grandeur strode a tall and paunchy man in a white linen suit, and high-laced boots contrasting oddly with his golden crown and his gorgeous mantle of red velvet and ermine.

Again the bugles blared. Scores of savage voices roared, deafeningly, in English: "Glory! Glory to Pernaud the invincible, King of Cameroons!"

"King of Cameroons! Is this a masquerade, or am I dreaming?" Grant snorted, when his attention was caught by a short and bowlegged fellow sauntering after the paunchy gent in kingly regalia.

This runt carried a tommy gun under his arm, a rakish panama hat on his head and more shiny patent leather high boots. The rest of his scrawny person was lost in a much too wide gorgeous uniform of Spanish Colonel of Hussars of Pavia of old vintage, consisting of a red coat studded with gold frogs and a pair of blue breeches.

The four men who came next were armed also with tommy guns, and belts from which hung holstered automatics. Two of them, veritable giants, dwarfed the other two, who were olive-complexioned and of average size.

Followed the buglers, eight in all, twenty mulattoes in saffron tunics; and a savage mob of some hundred negroes, armed with ancient guns, spears, and scythe-like axes and swords.

"What do we do, master?" Andouiah's anxious rumble shook Grant out of his amazement.

"It's a crazy mummery; it can't be dangerous," Grant mused aloud. "But it is always better to be ready. Andouiah, send your assistant to rally the plantation hands. Tell him to warn the overseers to distribute the rifles and the cartridge belts."

Andouiah trotted ponderously back into the kitchen, calling his assistant, Denin, at the top of his lungs. The foremost squad of mulattoes trampled over the veranda. A big hellion with a pock-marked face grabbed the knob and threw the screen-door open, shouting:

"Receive the king worthily!"

The bugles blared once more. The man with the golden crown climbed on the veranda, acknowledged with a wave of his hand the present-arms of the mulatto vanguard, and strode into the room.

GRANT saw that his eyes were small, brown and shiny, that his nose was too short, too thin, and with flaring nostrils, that his wisp of a waxed mustache looked silly on his round fat face, and that his shoulders were high and more narrow than his flabby waist. A shrewd and disagreeable-looking man, altogether. The last kind of a man that one would expect to wander in the African jungle with the purple and the crown of a medieval monarch over a white linen suit.

"What's all this?" Grant blurted.

"All zis what?" The flabby man smiled disagreeably, uncovering a set of small, compact teeth. "Do you include in a single, disrespectful zis my royal person, my knights and my army? Did you not hear, you big oaf of an American, the bugles sounding, the plaudits? Were your ears too thick to make out my acclaimed name?"

"Cut out the joking will you?" Grant mastered his surging rage.

"Ze joke is on you, my dear fellow. I, Pierre Pernaud, King of Camroons, I take possession of zis place and everything in it. Everything, do you understand? As to you, Misteer Grant Waring, I expect you to give ze good example to your dependents by kissing my royal hand. *Comme ça!*"

One of the short arms of King Pernaud shot up. Grant saw the back of the pudgy hand which ended a bare inch away from his face. Before he knew what he was doing, he clutched the wrist above it, twisted, grabbed Pernaud's belt and a chunk of flabby flesh below it with his other hand, and shoved.

Pernaud squealed like a stuck pig and flew backward onto the mulattoes surging through the door. They all fell in a heap, entangled in the purple mantle. The crown

fell with a loud, metallic ring on the floor. Then rifle butts smashed in the window screens, and mulattoes in saffron tunics, villainous white men, and negroes, climbed through the shreds of wire mesh, jumped into the room, fell, arose, charged. Grant heard Kro's wild cry, saw the chunky body of his formidable mess-boy catapulting onto a group of invaders and bowling them over like kingpins; at the same time he caught a glimpse of Andouiah rushing out of the kitchen with a meat cleaver in each hand.

In the next split second Grant raged at the thought that his high-powered rifles were in his study, and his revolver and automatic in his bedroom on the floor above. He pounced on the dining table and grasped it with both hands. It was a massive piece of home-made furniture and it weighed some seventy-five pounds, but, in his excitement, he lifted it as if it were made of feathers and hurled it at a compact group of aggressors.

The ear-splitting shouts of the men struck by the table, the loud crash of the breaking glassware and chinaware mixed in a single and ear-splitting clamor. But more men kept on tumbling through the windows and rushing through the door. Grant cheered at the sight of mulattoes and negroes collapsing as if poleaxed under the sledgehammer blows of Kro. In a frenzy, he grabbed a chair and smashed at the nightmare of snarling faces—olive-green, brown, pitch-black—surging all around him; at the weapons and clawing hands striking at him from every side, and at the feathered bonnets and woolly heads above them. The chair broke quickly in his grasp. As he jabbed the splintered piece of wood still in his hand into a twisted black face, he heard Andouiah, shrieking for help, agonizingly, desperately, and saw Kro, with a bloody battle-axe wrested from some fallen foe in his hand, wading to the rescue of Andouiah through a veritable human blanket of milling bodies and striking arms.

The impact of a rifle butt, fully in his breast, sent Grant reeling backward. With a supreme effort, he dug his heels into the parqueted floor and bounded onward, ducking under a swinging battle-axe, slamming a terrific uppercut into the chin of a gangling negro; then, bobbing, weaving, he jabbed and hooked frenziedly, swiftly, front, right and left, putting all his strength

and all the weight of his body into each blow. Clubbing gun butts missed him by fractions of an inch; striking blades, which couldn't pin him squarely, carved countless superficial cuts over his arms and shoulders; but he felt bones and muscles caving in under the desperate impact of his knuckles and for a moment he almost routed all his aggressors single handed. Strangled by his terrific exertion he choked wildly:

"A last effort, Kro! Denin! All my other men! Here! Come here!"

But he was unable to see Andouiah. From a corner, crowded with a chaotic tangle of men piled on each other, of swinging weapons and flailing arms, came the savage snarl of a cornered beast of prey of the smothered Kro.

The desperate Grant saw an axe, on the floor, between two unconscious negroes. As fast as he was able to, he dived to retrieve it. He never saw the war-club thrown at his head, but sheer luck made him stumble as his fingers closed on the shaft of the axe. Thus the war club, instead of shattering his skull, struck it only glancingly, and knocked him out cold.

A BUCKET of water, poured over his face, snapped Grant out of his faint. He came to, sputtering and struggling for breath, and heard someone whining with a decided western-Slav accent:

"Dontcha had enough shut-eye, bum-mack? D'you tink you are dat sleeping broad who was wading for de kiss of de prinz to get up?"

"Make believe you are the dandy prince and make him with a kiss, Wiboda," somebody else grated.

"Aw, gowan, Benninger," Swiboda howled in a high crying tenor, "The son hit my head—while de free-for-all was on. He raised a goose egg on me knob, de dam' tramp! And youse want me to kiss him?"

"Have your way, Spike, but make him get up. I'm tired of waiting."

"I giff him a lift wid der hot foot!" a third rogue grunted.

Grant opened his eyes and saw a big bully with the long knobby nose and high cheek-bones of typical western Slav, a swarthy and hatchet-faced man in his fifties, and a solid ruddy giant. The Slav, Wiboda, muttered curses from the corner

of his wide mouth; the swarthy grey-head glared at him while holding a business-like tommy gun at the ready; the ruddy giant stooped over his shoes with a match box in his hand.

Grant got up.

"At last, dam' your soul!" King Pernaud snarled at him, and sat upright on the lone unwrecked chair in the room.

Half of Pernaud's fat face was a single bruise. His bleeding knees showed through his torn trousers. His gorgeous velvet and ermine mantle hung in tatters. His head, no longer concealed by the golden crown, was huge, bald, and shining with perspiration.

"I came here without ze least animosity, you peeg of an American," he shrilled, shaking a hairy fist in Grant's direction, "but you lay your accursed paws on me, disrespectfully, treacherously! And now three corpses are stretched on ze floor: Zat negro whale of yours! Two of my bes' men! Anodder five half-breeds and four negroes of my army are crippled, useless, for ze long time. Zat gorilla down there cannot be brained, no matter how they hit him. But my men tied him, and—*peut etre*—perhaps—I shall order them to slice his throat—like this!" Pernaud slid a long finger over his throbbing Adam's apple.

"We know that you got a raw deal. We wanted to straighten things up for you. But you are too hasty, chum! You queer all set-ups!" Benninger interrupted, lifting the muzzle of his tommy-gun on a level with Grant's breast.

GRANT looked all around and saw Andouiah flat on his back, as big as an up-turned canoe. The mouth of the faithful cook was wide open, his eyes were rolled back and only their whites showed in his pitch-black face. Andouiah was dead; but Kro, gagged and trussed from neck to ankles, wriggled like a boa.

"Think fast, punk," Benninger urged. "It is up to you to save the lives of that fighting-gorilla and yourself!"

Mad, fierce hate convulsed Grant. But he had sense enough to realize that it would have been suicidal to challenge the odds against him. Struggling hard to impart a conciliating ring to his voice, he choked:

"What is it all about? What do you want from me?"

"Better late than never!" Benninger sighed and, tucking the tommy gun under an arm, he pulled a cigar out of a case and lighted it. But Wiboda protested:

"Aw, why lose time with him? It would be easier and quicker to bump him off!"

"Nix!" Benninger snarled, through a cloud of cigar smoke, "the king has more reason to hate the guts of this punk more than you, but he knows that he's a hard worker who knows his business, and therefore is willing to let bygones be bygones, for the sake of the mazuma—the dough!"

As Wiboda slunk back, growling disappointedly, Pernaud struck a pose and exclaimed:

"We know your life story, Mister Grant Waring! After losing his money in ze crash of ze New York Stock Exchange of 1929, your father, a mining engineer, came here, went in the plantation business and made good. He was a verree happy and prosperous man until your mother died."

"True," Grant nodded, biting his lips.

"Then," Pernaud continued, "your father got lonely. He decided to visit his native United States for ze first time in thirteen years—to offer his rubber to ze Government—and, perhaps, to get himself a second wife—for ze company, because he had loved too much your good maman, Mister Grant Waring, to get all hot and bothered about anodder woman."

"But in New York your father meets his third cousin, your uncle Frank, who is ze pirate of business. He hears what a fine thing zis plantation is, Frank Waring, the cousin. He digs out a crooked third party. He convinces your father to buy much real estate from him—and he lends the necessary money to your father."

"Ze real estate is phony. There's too much mortgage on it. Its locations are going to seed. Your father is heartbroken, but he has been robbed legally, zere is nozzing he can do about it. Dear shark uncle Frank forecloses on zis plantation through the nearest American Consulate. Your father dies heartbroken. But uncle knows your worth as a plantation manager, Mister Grant Waring. He keeps you on a salary and a measly five per cent on ze net profits. You love this plantation, you feel it is your duty to keep it going because the Allies need ze rubber. You remain. Now, I'll be sincere and honest with you!"

Grant couldn't help making a face at the word honest, pronounced so emphatically by Pernaud. The latter was looking at him closely and understood what passed in his mind.

"Anyhow," he snarled from between clenched teeth, "take it or leave it: Ze King business is to impress ze natives. We are business men. We acquire the controlling interest in all the valuable properties of this part of the world—how, is none of your bizness. You play ball with us and you keep your position, your salary and ten per cent on ze net profits instead of ze five per cent that uncle Frank gives you. If we make plenty of money, your ten per cent on ze profits may become fifteen. What's your answer, Mister Grant Waring?"

"I must think it over," Grant sparr'd for time.

Pernaud made a disappointed gesture and leaned back in his chair, chewing the edge of his mustache. Dasch's face hardened. Benninger cocked his head sideways and stared warily at Grant. Wiboda came forward, whining bitterly:

"Why dontcha let me soften dis punk fer you? Jes a little rough and tumble, he and I. And all the beating he can take, short of dying."

"Don't you think I'm all for giving a beating to this dam' stiffneck of a Waring?" Benninger snarled. "But let our black auxiliary do it, says I. There's plenty of fight left in Grant Waring. You could bite more than you can chew, if you tackle him on even terms."

"Just a moment!" the runt in the ample uniform of Colonel of Hussars chirped, as he sauntered toward Grant. Unbruised and spry, because he had kept out of the fight, he scanned the young American from head to foot and chuckled:

"This Yankee is a tough cove, but he got a norsty beating. He's all pricked with little cuts, he is, and the blood caking in them is stiffening his arms and shoulders. Wiboda will give 'im a ruddy going over, but it will be fun as long as they swap punches."

"Zen it is okay with me," King Permaud grinned expectantly.

Wiboda lifted his clenched hands over his head in the gesture common to all prize fighters acknowledging the plaudits of a

crowd. Then he fell on guard, rasping: "Grant, I'm going to beat you to a *frazzle*!"

"Wait a second," Grant said aloud. "I want to tell the king that there's no reason why I should think his proposition over any longer. It all depends from his getting the controlling interest of the plantation away from my crooked uncle. If he does, I'll string along with all of you. But I want a little raise in salary besides the ten per cent on the profits."

"Zat can be managed, and you are too valuable to get hurt! I forbid this fight!" Pernaud leaned quickly forward on his chair and motioned to Wiboda to step back.

"On the contrary." A thousand devils played riot in Grant's brain. "If your majesty allows it, I'll settle once and for all with Wiboda. There's nothing like a good scrap to get over bad feelings!"

"Hum!" Pernaud wrinkled his diminutive nose, "are you crazy out of bizness like all Yankees, or do you want to risk your neck for ze sake of crippling ze Pole? Well—*a la bonne heure*—no matter what happens, you, Wiboda, remembair zat you started it. And you, Grant Waring, keep in ze mind zat I tried to spare you!"

"I appreciate this, king, thanks so much!" Grant replied with simulated cordiality. But he had to call on all his self-control to avoid tearing into Wiboda like a madman, to keep the murderous rage welling in his breast from showing on his face.

"All set? *Gong! Bam!*" Benninger roared.

Wiboda sauntered on his toes and feinted. Suddenly he leaped and let go a jab, straight from his shoulder.

Grant's eyes were as keen as those of a beast of prey, but his played-out legs didn't sidestep fast enough. The blow thumped with a loud bang on the side of his head, and set a thousand bells ringing in it. Following his advantage, Wiboda closed in, light on his feet, uppercutting. Grant ducked so low that he nearly brushed the ground with his elbows and bounced up with an uppercut of his own, which caved Wiboda's stomach in.

As they both stepped back, breathing hard, Grant stared at Wiboda. He saw a big man, strong as an ox, but angular, not perfectly balanced. Wiboda's forehead was less than two inches wide, his face hard,

tough skinned and relentless; but he didn't look shrewd, nor particularly vicious.

"He's not a very bright Pole. He hits terrifically hard — generally, Poles are strong—and, curse his hide, his stomach is as tough as an automobile tire. But his lower ribs are bare of muscles, and his neck is too stringy on his huge muscular shoulders—altogether too frail for a man of his size. . . ." Grant reflected, and suddenly sprang, aiming at Wiboda's face; but, as Wiboda's arms jerked up, parrying and jabbing, he ducked under them and crashed two terrific blows into his lower ribs. Wiboda's cheeks twitched with pain, his mouth opened spasmodically. Instinctively his arms came down, to protect his aching ribs. In that very instant, Grant catapulted up as if released by an enormous spring, and hit, with all his strength and speed, the chin hanging under Wiboda's mouth.

WIBODA went down so hard that he bounced when he hit the floor; then he rolled over and remained still.

"*Kayo!*" the bandy-legged Benninger shouted impartially; on a second thought he winked at Grant and snarled: "You won, pal! But what?"

"He won our regard as a valuable employee of ze African Development Corporation, of which I'm ze President!" the authoritative voice of Pernaud interrupted. "Now all fighting is all over and I want a good dinner, wine, schnapps and cigars. What about it, Grant Waring?"

"The cellar is at the end of the flight of stairs opening in the pantry, and my late father stocked it well," Grant answered, forcing a friendly ring to his voice. "You'll find all the Havanas you want in the study. But your men killed the best cook in this side of the world."

"You mean zat fat corpse was ze chef?" Pernaud exploded, pointing at the gory body of Andouiah.

"A better man with a skillet and a frying pan never lived, and he was a fine and faithful man, too!" Grant's voice quivered.

"*Sacred. . . Oulad Shejiani!*" Pernaud cursed in two languages, "Someone mus' be punished for zis outrage! Who are the sons of stupid camels who had to kill, of all ze men here, just ze chef?"

"There had to, yer Machesty," Smythe, the runt in Hussar uniform, chirped in.

"The big black baboon cam' out of his kitchen, swinging two meat cleavers. He wanted to make cubed steaks out of all, of us, the bloody fool!"

The hard faced man in a brown riding suit who had kept his peace up to that moment spoke.

"And don't forget that this fellow, Grant, started it!" he grated meaningly, pointing at Pernaud's battered face.

"Oh, no hard feelings, I say!" Smythe was quick to soothe Pernaud's rising rage, "Waring didn't know what it was all about; now he knows that his palm is going to be greased and he likes it. As to our sodjers who made in the cook, why, the poor coves acted in self defense!"

"Mister Waring," Pernaud's cordiality was gone, "our deal stands, but you'll have to keep to your room for a couple of days. We have deals to transact on zis ground floor and, being only an employee, there's no reason why you should have a part in zem. The dealing over, though, all is again normal, you do your duty, get your monee. *Tres simple*, is not so?"

Smythe patted Grant's arm:

"Do as he says, it will be all right, chum!"

"I would like first to decently bury Andouian the cook. He was in my father's employment and in mine for ten years!" Grant choked.

Benninger gave him a dirty look and growled:

"Let him do that. Under supervision, of course."

"You are still suspected a bit, but it will pass soon," Smythe kept on buttering Grant. "Well, your Majesty, what's the verdict?"

"Let him bury his fat negro and go to his room immediately after," Pernaud wheezed. "And send someone for a bottle of brandy and ze cigars!"

As he got out of the house to call a few plantation hands, Grant saw mulattoes and Negroes mounting guard on mounds and at the intersections of all trails with guns at the ready. They were the reason why none of his workers had rushed to help while he was fighting and while they were killing Andouiah. Denin, the assistant cook, had been intercepted and slain before he could transmit Grant's order to the overseers, and now his corpse lay spread-

eagled a few paces away from the back door of the house.

With the plantation hands who were allowed to answer his call, Grant buried Andouiah and Denin in a little glade surrounded by tall flower-bushes. Then he returned to the house and asked for Kro's release. But the invaders had an excessive regard for Kro's prowess. The best that Grant could do for him was to obtain his confinement, unfettered, in an empty storage room with barred windows and a door too stout even for his giant strength.

IT was late in the afternoon when Grant, weary and aching in every limb, finally went to his room.

The latter was still as in the day when his mother had supervised the placement of the imported bed, chest, mirrors and table, and of the plantation-made pieces of furniture, which altogether made it so comfortable. The capacious arm-chair stood before the open window as it had stood for years. Grant plumped in it and stared moodily at the long green spread of the rubber trees of the plantation, at the drying sheds, at the barns which sheltered the machinery, and at the storehouses.

All was well-kept, orderly. By closing his eyes, he could visualize all his men, each at his appointed task. They were the best-treated natives for a radius of scores of miles, and consequently they all did good work.

But, all around the plantation, there was the savage jungle, full of animals, everlastingly bent in slaughtering other animals.

Grant's gloomy meditations were interrupted by a bellow, coming from the study below:

"Don't you feed us the crap that you have a right to half of the money because you cracked the safe, Dasch! We are all in it, we split, equal shares!"

"*Doucement*, Benninger!" The King was speaking. "As a sovereign, I'm entitled to two shares."

"Aw, go on!" that was Wiboda's growl, "don't king us when we are among ourselves. . . ."

The argument went on and on. Then they all got drunk, the white ruffians, and roared ribald songs out of tune.

Meanwhile, the Arabs of their escort ran from plantation-hand's cabin to plantation-

hand's cabin, and scoured all the other dwellings hemmed in by the thickets of rubber trees. From their distant jabbering, Grant realized that they were looking for young Negresses. But Grant's Negro employees came from a long-abused race, who had learned what to do in the event of a raid. At the very first sign of trouble in the house built by Grant's father, they had sent their women into hiding, under escort of a few chosen marksmen.

The large band of alien blacks who had come with the invaders seemed interested only in food. After breaking into one of the warehouses, they had come out of it with all kinds of canned edibles. And now they split the cans with ponderous blows of their battle-axes, and scooped up from the dust into which they had fallen beans, green peas and corned beef, and swallowed the whole noisily.

When evening came, one of these Negroes brought Grant a tray of steaks, puddings and salads—all very well cooked and prepared.

"Who's in the kitchen?" Grant asked in the coastal dialect of Nigeria.

He had guessed right the man's nationality because, opening his thick lips in a smile, he instantly replied:

"Bwana Benninger did it. He very expert in kitchen. But king says: 'You eat, then sleep.'"

"Tell the king that I shall obey," Grant snarled.

The next morning, he had just got out of the tub of the bathroom next to his bedroom, when the same Negro brought a savory breakfast.

Benninger came up soon after.

"How do you like the grub, Waring?"

"Swell!" Grant replied, his mouth full, "I heard that you are the artist that prepares it. I have to say that you are tops!"

"Aw, I know how to use a frying pan and a skillet," Benninger replied with becoming modesty. "I once was a chef. Then I had my own restaurant, for a while, until I got wise. But, what the hell, I don't feel like shooting my mouth too much."

"Then don't. And again, thanks!"

"I like to mess up with food, now and then," the gratified Benninger grinned. "If you care for some extras, just let me know. By the way, have you enough smokes here?"

"Plenty!" Grant replied, pointing at a few boxes of cigarettes and cigars.

"O. K. See you later."

And, as if he had been a courteous host, and not a highway robber offering to his victims some of the supplies pirated from him, Benninger waved his hand and withdrew. Around noon, Grant heard a commotion down on the lawns, and hurried to the window. His teeth clenched hard and his fists closed spasmodically, when he saw a thick-set white man and a swarm of Negroes, wearing orange colored singlets, driving toward the house the three girls of the nearby American medical mission. Then he heard the most beautiful among them—Clare Vaughan, red-headed and like a goddess—crying anxiously:

"Grant Waring! Is he here? What have they done to Waring?" And the thick-set rogue answering:

"*Cra!* I do not know. Get in the house and find out! *Adelante, fool rubia!*"

KING Pernaud had ordered him to stay put, but Grant didn't give a hoot for a hundred king-Pernauds in his present state of mind. He fumbled in a linen drawer, retrieved a stubby-nosed automatic, which he kept there for an emergency, and slipped it into a pocket of his trousers. Then he darted down the stairway to the floor below.

He had just reached it, when Clare Vaughan, Pat Garfield and Veronica Flaherty came, protesting, through the main door. On seeing him, Pat, husky and indomitable, tossed back her curly shock of black hair.

"Grant," she said, "you better explain what all this mess is, or something will happen."

Veronica Flaherty stared wildly all around. She was in her thirties, with a long thin nose, a tight mouth and a lot of freckles. Peevish, but efficient, she didn't waste time in useless question. She just looked at Grant and waited.

Clare instead went straight to him and gave him her hand. Grant wrapped his sturdy fingers around it and felt the usual thrill that her touch gave him coursing through his veins.

"We were driven away from a dispensary full of patients. We were brown-beaten, manhandled!" Pat Garfield kept

on protesting, "You are not with this gang, whoever they are, are you, Grant?" then her expert eyes scanned Grant's battered face.

"Grant Waring is all right. He always will be!" Clare Vaughan's voice shook.

A glow of intense gratitude and admiration filled Grant's heart, for, even in the detestable circumstances into which they had been plunged unexpectedly by a prank of adverse fate, Clare hadn't lost her nerve and her faith in him.

He groped for an adequate answer and found none. He just kept her hand in his own and looked at her devotedly, hungrily.

"You better put some disinfectant in these little cuts over the bruises on your face." The professional nurse spoke through Clare. "I see that you smeared iodine on the slash on your scalp. Pull your head down. . . . Here . . . this needs a stitch!" Her voice became all concern.

"Old friends, eh?" King Pernaud's voice rang sarcastically; and his knitted brows, the flashing of his eyes, the sharp inhaling of his nostrils, showed clearly how much he resented the liking shown by Clare for Grant.

"The leopard will never change his spots and the old king will believe always in l'amour, toujour l'amour, provided that he plays the leading part in it!" Grand heard Smythe whispering.

As on the previous day, he sensed that it was in the plans of the little Englishman to become his friend; therefore he hastily turned to him:

"His majesty will perhaps listen to me if I advance a plea through one of you, his assistants. These nurses—these ladies—are very good friends of mine. They can tend to the wounded and the sick better if they are not subjected to unpleasantness."

"*Mais oui!*" Pernaud stared roguishly at Clare, "We'll treat the ladies well, and how!"

Only fear that an outburst on his part could bring about Clare's abuse, restrained Grant from closing with a couple of blows Pernaud's eyes. Grant's self-control was rewarded by the instant championing of Smythe:

"He's right! Utilize the young ladies without insulting them, and they'll help us to put together a dispensary of our own,

where people will come looking up to us for help."

Pernaud was becoming angry. Dasch and Wiboda surged forward, staring impudently at the three girls.

"No buts!" Smythe grated, "You know the law, who sets it, and also what happens to all transgressors. Business comes first because, if we get what we want, there'll be for us not three women who don't care for us, but the pick of the beauties of the world, ready to please the rich fellows that we'll be. Benninger and Degrens know that. Be as wise as them, Wiboda, Dasch, and you, king!"

Clare's big grey eyes asked Grant: "What's all this? I'm afraid, for you and for me." Her lips, closely pressed together, were pale and quivering. But Grant could only press her hand reassuringly.

"Break it up, down there!" Benninger shouted at them jestingly.

"She's your girl, I see," Smythe smiled wisely. "Well, no harm in it, if you two get together when you are not needed, because it will make it easier to keep an eye on both of you."

That evening they all had dinner in the dining room, which had been patched up. The food, prepared by Benninger, was good, but the atmosphere was awful. Over the coffee Grant made it worse by asking:

"What became of Doctors Villa and Powell? Are they still in the mission?"

"Nada!" the stocky individual who had brought the three nurses in replied surly, "I left Rannike, my sub-chief with them, while they packed up as I had instructed them to do. I went ahead with the misses, reflecting that they would walk slower. . . . Rannike and the Docs didn't catch up with us on the way. I saw Rannike before sitting at this table. . . . It is too bad, but the two Docs met an accident in the jungle. *La muerta*—death—is like a thief, you know; snatches a man when he least expects it."

Grant saw Pat Garfield's eyes blazing, Veronica Flaherty bringing both hands to her mouth, to stifle a cry. Clare, at his side, gasped. The blood flowed away from her face and, for a moment, Grant feared that she would faint.

"Clare!" Grant whispered huskily.

Clare started. The morbid spell was broken, and soon the color of her cheeks

again became normal. But Grant knew that, for a moment, her reason had almost snapped.

Like most Slavs, Wiboda could nurse a grudge. "Waring," he suddenly growled, "you'll never learn to keep your nose clean, dam' you!"

"I uchually don't agree wid you, dumbkopf. But in this case I don't know! Humph!" Dasch nodded approvingly to Wiboda, then stuck his lower lip out and made a sharp motion toward Grant.

"And he is not polite, *pas de tout!* He monopolizes the bes' geerl!" King Pernaud squeaked angrily. "Mademoiselle Vaughan should be allowed to look about . . . here's good company . . . plenty of men with that experience that's more interesting than any young buck's idiotical good looks for a woman" And Pernaud's attitude showed clearly that he was speaking for himself.

"Sorry, chump! But you called it on yourself!" Benninger was no longer smiling, but hard as nails. Grant caught a glimpse of his beady eyes and felt that, when it came to a showdown, he was the most deadly of the lot. He stared at Smythe, but, for the first time, the little Englishman stared back at him without the least bit of encouragement.

IN that difficult moment, Grant found comfort only in the feel of the automatic in his trousers' pocket.

"If I see that they make up their mind to bump me off, I throw lead at once," he thought tensely. "I can blast hell out of most of these guys before I get plugged down in my turn."

Wiboda arose and stared around. Dasch nodded and pulled his head back. Benninger's hand stole to the breast of his coat and the shoulder holster beneath. Grant stuck his hand in his pocket and grabbed his automatic.

Perez, the Spaniard who had come with the girls, threw cold water on the situation:

"Before reaching the dispensary I met that Padre of whom we heard so much. He told me that he'll be here tonight, or tomorrow morning."

"Then . . ." Smythe's monosyllable rang like the command of a bugle.

Pernaud shrugged peevishly. Wiboda cursed under his breath and sat again.

"Boy, are you lucky!" Benninger

growled to Grant Waring, "but, how long will it last?"

From that moment on, they all ignored him, Clare and the other two girls. That neglect worried the three young nurses worse than the previous advances.

Besides Grant's, there were four bedrooms on the upper and two on the ground floor. King Pernaud ordered Miss Flaherty to the second floor, and Clare and Pat Garfield on the lower one. The two latter girls, however, declared that they intended to spend the night in the room of Veronica Flaherty, which was adjacent to Grant's room. Pernaud, Wiboda, Dasch and Perez expressed their dislike of that decision in profane and vociferous terms; but Smythe, Benninger and Degrens interfered, the mysterious concocter of the plan was mentioned. The upshot of it all was that Pernaud and the rogues who shared his ideas gave in. The three girls went to their room and locked the door. Grant retired soon after; but, although he put out the light, he remained fully dressed and with the gun in his pocket.

Several times, during the night, he heard furtive steps in the contiguous corridor, twice someone knocked at the girls' door. But the girls didn't open, and no attempt was made to batter their door down.

All that activity subsided when the first grey of the morning chased the darkness out of the sky. The exhausted Grant took advantage of it to snatch a few hours of sleep on his armchair.

THE sun was high in the sky when he awakened. He knocked at the thin wall separating his room from that of the girls, received a reassuring answer and felt that he could relax his vigilance long enough to take a shower and shave.

He looked very big, lithe, handsome and clean-scrubbed when he went down with the girls to get some breakfast. But the dining room table was heaped with soiled dishes. From the nearby parlor Benninger growled:

"We had our grub. Get these broads to do the cleaning and to rassle up some belly-filler for the four of you."

Grant gazed into the parlor, and saw that Benninger, Degrens and Smythe were clear eyed and well rested. The bedraggled ap-

pearance of Pernaud and Wiboda showed —that undoubtedly they were the ones who had attempted to gain admission to the girls' room as long as the night lasted. Dasch sat on a capacious armchair, with one of the bottles of whiskey in his hand. He wasn't drunk as yet, but his mood was ugly. Grant avoided the furious gleam of his bloodshot eyes, for he didn't care to start any trouble with him, not as long as he was alone and with three young women on his hands against a ruthless gang backed by scores of murderous native hirelings.

Grant and the girls had just eaten breakfast when they heard guttural native greetings on the grounds outside. A short while later the Reverend Archibald Applegate, the missionary of the zone, appeared, followed by his usual retinue of four native converts.

Reverend Applegate didn't seem disturbed by the presence of so many redoubtable black bandits in the plantation for his blotched horse face had its usual benign and dreamy expression. Tall and slightly stooped, holding his prayer book under one arm, and his umbrella in his left hand, he walked briskly toward the house.

"That's the padre of whom I spoke," Perez winked to Pernaud.

The latter sighed and scowled at Grant. Then, baring his teeth, and flaring his nostrils, he growled:

"You shall introduce us—politely—or take the consequences."

Grant hastened to open the door and was greeted by Applegate:

"Glad to see that you are well my young friend."

"How do you do, Reverend," Grant replied unhappily. In spite of Pernaud's threat and of the stares of the other members of the gang burning into his back, he added in a whisper:

"Reverend your visit is fraught with dangers! Allege that you just remembered that you have another and more pressing call to attend, and go! And please, send your accolytes at top speed, to notify the nearest British policing post!"

"Tut! Tut!" Reverend Applegate grinned tightly. Then he lifted his eyes and his umbrella toward the sky, and said solemnly:

"Oh, Grant Waring, the Lord is my shelter! What have I to fear?" And, clos-

ing his umbrella, Reverend Applegate walked into the house.

Grant gazed at his unwelcome guests. He saw them arising, with genuine deference.

"Brother Waring," Reverend Applegate chided him gently, "these gentlemen are evidently anxious to meet me. Unworthy as I am, why don't you introduce these gentlemen to me, brother Waring?"

Grant gasped, then blurted:

"This portly baldhead is Pernaud, appointed King of Cameroons by his Knights—the other men in the room are Dasch, Perez, Benninger, Smythe, Wiboda and Degrens."

Cool as a cucumber, Reverend Applegate shook hands with each of the rogues. Then he wagged his long chin, smiled like an ingratiating horse and purred:

"Forgive a pastor's anxiety for the welfare of the souls of the territory intrusted to his spiritual care. Gentlemen, what are you doing here?"

Smythe answered for the others:

"We are organizing a development corporation, for the benefit of all concerned: planters, business men and workers alike! Won't you sit down, Reverend? Let me take your hat and umbrella!"

Applegate handed him his Panama and his umbrella, and sank on the most comfortable arm-chair. Then he closed his eyes and brought long fingers together.

"Yes, Yes, your idea recommends itself to me," he drawled after a pause, to Grant's amazement. "The corporation mentioned by you, Mister Smythe, could be a good thing—if organized and directed in a spirit of true fellowship and charity!"

Whereupon Benninger cheerfully approved:

"Atta-boy, Reverend! We are benefactors, all over, and let the bums who don't think so croak! But, what the hell . . . excuse my slip, Pastor, no harm done . . . what I mean is, you must be worn out and hungry. You could manage with some breakfast, I bet!"

"Brother Benninger," Applegate boomed unctuously, "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. I could—ahem—find comfort in five eggs, sunnyside up; a proper amount of ham, done medium; cereal and cream—milk will do, in lack of cream. And, let me see! I had a touch of the fever yesterday. Therefore, much as I detest the mere

mention of liquor, I'm forced to ask for a nip of cool whiskey. Yes, yes, I think that I must drink some of the detestable devil's brew, to my utter sorrow."

A FEW minutes later the dumbfounded Grant saw the whole pack of rogues stumbling over each other in their anxiety of serving the visiting clergyman. Benninger put a platter of fried ham and eggs before him. Degrens buttered a heap of hot muffins for his consumption. Wiboda ran to Grant's cellar, and returned with a bottle of Highland Queen, one of Four Roses, and another of Bourbon. Smythe uncorked the three bottles, and poured their contents in three water glasses.

Applegate began gulping down the food with a relish that didn't justify his claim of illness in the previous day; and, between mouthfuls, he swallowed ample draughts of whiskey.

"The poor man doesn't know what he's doing! He'll soon tumble under the table!" Grant mused; and he stammered solicitously: "Reverend, that's whiskey and not water! Be careful, the way that you go at it, it will knock you out worse than a blow of a lead pipe right on your noggin!"

"Aw, go away, punk, why don't yer mind your business?" Benninger snarled. But Applegate waved to them to be quiet.

"Brothers, brothers!" he wheezed thickly. "You mean good, both of you! Don't sour my meal with an unbecoming quarrel!" and he proffered an emptied glass to Smythe, who promptly filled it.

"He's going to collapse. The combined effect of all that liquor, to which he's unaccustomed, and of the African climate, is going to kill him!" Grant rasped.

But Applegate didn't show any sign of distress, besides turning a bright red, from the roots of his hair to the base of his neck. The meal over, he unbuttoned his clerical choker and leaned back in his arm-chair, sighing contentedly. And he accepted with unmistakable pleasure the Havana Perfecto proffered to him by Benninger, which Perez lighted with a Spanish flourish.

Followed a few minutes of tense silence, when everybody stared expectantly at that pillar of the Church, who had turned into such a two-fisted drinker. Finally Applegate hiccupped, and blurted, through a thick cloud of cigar smoke:

"I heard—ahem—that the three young ladies of the American medical mission are here. Could anyone ask them to come kindly and have a bit of a chat with me?"

"You bet!" Wiboda exclaimed enthusiastically, and darted for the door. But Smythe quickly grabbed him and sneered:

"They wouldn't listen to you, old boy. I'll do the calling."

A few minutes later he returned with the three nurses, who remained breathless at the sight of the Reverend sprawled in the arm-chair, with three half-empty bottles of liquor before him, and a cigar stuck in his mouth at a rakish angle. But Applegate cheerily reassured them with a 'Greetings, young ladies, greetings. The Lord bless you. Don't reproach an hour of leisure and rest to the shepherd of souls!'

"He drank a quart and a half of whiskey and rye!" Grant whispered awedly to Clare.

Clare was too good a trained nurse to react to that information in any other way than according to the oath of her calling:

"Really, Reverend," she said severely, "You should have known better than to do anything of the sort, at your age, and in a temperature of a hundred degrees in the shade. I'll prepare some compresses with cracked ice and . . ."

For the first time since his arrival Applegate seemed annoyed.

"Of all the da . . . ahem!—blasted meddlers!" he growled at Grant.

"As to you, miss," he shook a long finger sternly in Clare's direction, "Put as much ice as you want, cracked or otherwise, on your pert head but don't you dare to get near me with the stuff . . ."

"Unless it is in a Tom Collins!" Benninger completed with a sardonic chuckle.

"Brother, brother!" Applegate's frown gave way to a horsy smile, "I'll appreciate your Tom Collins later—for, really, I'm a man of moderate habits . . ."

"Did he say moderate? After swallowing a quart and a half of eighty-six-percent liquor? O, glory!" Pat Garfield exploded.

"Tut, tut! Silence, I beg of all of you!"

"Girls, I called you because I have a message for you, and not to hear anything from your lip! Sit down, will you? And keep silent! There—that's much better!" He sighed when the girls, sat, puzzled and

alarmed. "Well, coming to the point: Perhaps you resent the high-handed procedure which brought you here. Perhaps you fear some unpleasantness, is it not so?"

Clare nodded, Pat Garfield, bridled, Veronica Flaherty moaned.

"That is it, you are worried," Applegate continued. "Well, I wouldn't, if I were you. The ways of the Divine Providence are inscrutable. But the man of God sometimes sees farther than the layman. I don't see any harm coming your ways, misses. For from it, I truly believe that the future holds good things in store for you. These boons shall be bestowed on you along unusual channels—but you shall enjoy their benefits, and that's what matters, is it not? Now I wish you a good-day, misses, and you shall oblige me if you'll go back to your room."

CLARE, Pat and Veronica left, not knowing what to think of his enigmatic promises. Applegate stared at them, as they climbed the stairway to the upper floor.

"Brother Waring, why the peeve?" Applegate asked, noticing that Grant was staring furiously at him.

"I resent the way with which you, a man of the cloth, spoke to those three ladies!" Grant replied vibrantly.

"Aah!" The long and massive face of Applegate became as hard as a gargoyle carved out of maroon marble. "Waring, I notice once more that, no matter what your qualities may be, they don't include discretion and good sense. Go into the parlor, Grant. I must have a talk with your guests."

"Go! What are you waiting for?" Smythe endorsed. There was murder in the glowing eyes of Dasch, Wiboda, Degrens and Perez turned on Grant. Benninger's face remained expressionless. But one of his hands closed on the neck of a bottle, another stole into the opening of his coat, to the gun stuck in his shoulder holster.

Grant bit his lips and passed into the parlor. From there, he heard a steady murmuring of talk for the next hour or so. The fact that he was unable to make out any word of what was being said among Applegate and the strange bandits increased his suspense so that he was fit to be tied when, at last, Applegate strode all alone

into the parlor, laid a bony hand on his shoulder, and purred:

"Pernaud and Company are not men that you would chose for employers out of your own free will. But the history of business proves that quite a few trusts were organized with predatory methods. Therefore, I wouldn't be surprised if Pernaud, Smythe, Benninger and the others would turn into wealthy men at peace with the world under the mellowing influence of success. And think how many living wages their development corporation will pay to white men and natives alike?"

Grant opened his mouth to protest; before he could utter a word, Appleghate rumbled on:

"I know what you are going to say: They could be plain, thorough scoundrels up to no good!"

"Well—in such a case you ought to trust in the judgment of the Lord, O brother Grant! For the Lord shall never permit evil to prevail for long!"

"If Pernaud and his companions don't do what's right, disaster shall inevitably overtake them! So be patient, go ahead with your business as usual with a serene heart, and keep in mind that the Good Book says . . . O, drat! I don't remember what the Bible says for an emergency such as your present one, but you get the idea, don't you?"

"Like hell I do!" Grant thought, but he kept his mouth shut.

There was a benign smile on the long and bony face. Although a strong reek of alcoholic fumes wafted from his person, his voice was authoritative and kindly. But the ill-repressed glinting of his eyes warned Grant to be wary.

Appleghate interpreted his silence and non-committal attitude as resignation to the inevitable, yet, he was disappointed because he hadn't induced Grant to endorse wholly and unequivocally his viewpoint.

"What's in your mind?" he challenged after a pause, "What are you going to do right now?"

A danger signal rang in Grant's brain, warned him not to commit himself. So he growled: "I shall go to my room to nurse a splitting headache, if that's all right with you?"

"O.K.!" Appleghate growled. "But don't forget to come down before I leave!"

Grant climbed wearily to the floor above. He had hardly put foot on its landing, when he saw the door of the girls' room opening and Clare appearing on the threshold:

"Grant Waring, step in! We would like to speak with you!"

Grant complied, felt the usual thrill when her slim fingers dug into his arm. Then the door closed softly at his shoulders and the three girls confronted him anxiously. The impulsive Pat Garfield was the first to speak:

"Come on, dish out the truth, and don't mince the words! We can take it!"

"My honest belief," Grant replied bluntly, "is that the taking-over of this plantation, the murder of your doctors, the way you three were brought here, whether you liked it or not—are all preliminary moves in a bigger and worse plan."

"You mean we are in a net—trapped?"

"That's just about it!" Grant raged. "But I shall be damned if I understand how Appleghate fits in Pernaud's schemes! He, a full-fledged clergyman, sent here by the London Board of Missions!"

"That's simple!" Clare interrupted, "The poor man found himself in the pickle all of a sudden. Undoubtedly, he's trying to pull himself and us out of it in his own way . . ."

HER words were drowned by a song roared by eight brassy throats in the dining room below. An unprintable song, punctuated at regular intervals by an age-old refrain of the waterfronts 'I never sang, I never drank, I ne-ever ha-ad a wife!'

"O, the poor Reverend! I wonder how he feels in this moment!" Clare choked.

"I don't know how he feels, but it is a fact that he's singing louder than the rest!" Grant snarled. "Do you hear that cracked tenor, making up in noise what it lacks in tune? Well, it is coming out of the whiskey-soaked lungs of Appleghate! I couldn't mistake it in a thousand, after all the suggestions and endless advices with which this—this hypocrite of a preacher—pestered my daylights for the past three months!"

Appleghate left late in the afternoon. Pernaud and the others escorted him to the door, with the deference due to a potentate. Their Arabs and Negroes arose as he

passed, with all outward forms of respect.

"And now, what?" Clare said to Grant, after observing all that performance from the window.

"Now we'll try to skip also," Grant replied firmly, and went to the stairway.

He found the gang in the parlor, engaged in a game of poker. When he strode in, Wiboda clenched his cigarette between his teeth and snarled from the corner of his mouth:

"Scram, punk! There ain't no room for you, in this game!"

"*Mais non!*" Pernaud corrected, "If he has the money to put up, he can sit in and draw a hand."

"Gentlemen," Grant answered ingratiatingly, "you've got me wrong. I didn't come to play, but to tell you that I don't intend to stay on your way any longer. This plantation is not mine; you can have it for all I care!"

"*Escucha!*" Perez growled, "It is so nice of him to give us what he has not! But he wants to deprive us of his real usefulness as a manager—the *perre!*"

"O.K., Grant," Benninger spat, without lifting his eyes from his cards. "We take the plantation. Now scram back to your room!"

"The women and I would like to go," Grant insisted, "You can rely upon our word that we shall not mention to anyone our true reason for looking for passage back to the States. You may remain here forever without trouble, and do as you wish with the rubber output, as far as we are concerned."

"What is that? What did he say?" Pernaud gasped, throwing his cards on the table.

"Just a moment, dam' the holy pants of old Nick! Let's play this hand, I say!" Smythe shrilled angrily. Seeing that his companions didn't pay any attention, he blazed at Grant: "Oh, so you come to queer my game when I have four aces, do you, precious pigeon? Yer Majesty!" he roared, turning to the king, "he wants to skidaddle! Taking the misses with him! That's all!"

"To hell with him! Give him the works, boys!" Benninger shouted, arising.

Wiboda leaped up and threw a haymaker. Grant parried and sent him back on his heels with a hook. But the others jumped

on Grant from every side. Hit hard by four or five blows, Grant floored Perez with an uppercut. Then Smythe dived at his legs. Grant kicked him off—and stumbled over a chair thrown at his knees.

That was his undoing, because Dasch and Degrens took advantage of it to grab him. He slammed two terrific blows into their bellies, but it was like hitting barrels of concrete.

With a forearm across his throat, an arm pinioned back, two clawing hands pulling his head back by the hair, and a tempest of blows battering his skull and body, Grant went down and was stunned by two kicks to the head.

He was unconscious for the next few seconds, when they all hit him at will and didn't hurt him fatally only because they got in each other's way in their hurry to tear at him.

GRANT recovered his senses with high-pitched women's screams ringing in his ears. As he opened his eyes, he caught a confused glimpse of the lovely face of Clare swaying and bobbing, of the floor and the trousered legs on it whirling at top speed. As that last fit of dizziness faded, he saw that the girls were sheltering him from his adversaries. As in a nightmare he heard Pat Garfield screeching:

"You'll kill us before you get hold of him again! Six bullies against a lone man! For shame!"

Benninger answered for the others:

"To hell with all crazy dames! Grant socked all of us before getting what was coming to him! We mussed him up to teach him to keep his tongue down in his choker, but we ain't going to be so easy on him next time. As to you, skirt, and to the other *frails*, you had a hell of a nerve to scratch our faces! We don't set to work on you broads also only because we have plans and you fit in them!"

One of Grant's eyes was tightly shut. His lips were swollen so that he found difficulty in speaking. Helped by Clare, he got up. Through his single serviceable orb he noticed with intense satisfaction that Wiboda's mouth was a big raw sore, while Dasch had a deep cut under an eye, and all the other members of the gang bore the mark of his fists. Then he heard Pernaud hissing venomously:

"Mister Waring, your uncle was so impressed by your nice cable that he left New York with the first boat. He landed yesterday at Buea. Your beloved uncle'll be here in a couple of days." The blood pouring out of Pernaud's battered nose cut short his speech. Grant was too dazed to utter a single word.

"I'm taking him to his room," Clare announced softly.

"Still soft on him, hei-ho!" Smythe sneered insultingly. "All right, take him."

Dazed and hurt as he was, Grant clenched his fists and went for him. But Pat and Veronica Flaherty got between him and the bandits who were already surging for the kill, while Clare whispered desperately:

"Grant, Grant, think what will happen to us if you provoke them again, if they lose whatever restraint they have left!"

That argument prevailed on Grant more than any fear for his own personal safety. Without another protest he allowed the girls to push him up the stairway.

In his room he dug a hand in his trouser pocket and found that his gun was still there. Obsessed by their fighting fury and venomous rage, the bandits hadn't thought of searching him.

FRANK Waring, Gran't uncle, arrived forty-eight hours later, carried on a canopied litter by four stout porters.

It wasn't a glorious arrival for Grant's relation, because he had hardly reached the plantation grounds when he was seized and dragged roughly to the house in spite of his loud protests.

The gang was waiting for him in the study. Frank Waring stared when he saw their battered faces and fierce eyes.

"I'm afraid that he doen't like us!" Pernaud sneered. Then he arose, greeted him with a bow and a smile, and pointed to the agreement on the desk: "There it is *Monsieur* Frank Waring. Grab a pen and sign on the dotted line!"

The trip through the jungle had deeply shocked the nerves of Frank's uncle. With agonizing fear he had seen from a distance gorged leopards sleeping on mounds and branches of trees. There had been a moment when his porters had lost their footing and had nearly thrown him out of the litter, into a stream where several smelly

crocodiles swallowed. Myriads of mosquitoes and blood-sucking flies had stung him to distraction. And what he had found in the plantation hadn't helped him to reacquire his equanimity. But, stronger than his fear was his business instinct, which perked up belligerently when he looked at the agreement.

"Why," he exploded, "this is plain robbery! You are racketeers, trying to muscle in! And my accursed nephew dragged me all the way from America for this! Where's that rascal?"

Grant, attracted by the uproar, was coming down the stairway.

"Ah, you!" Tall, leathery with the high-cheek-boned face of an old fashioned cigar store Indian under his thick white hair, Frank Waring waved the agreement toward him, shouting: "You'll go to jail for this, and I'll see that you rot there! So you cabled me: 'Come at once to clinch the most advantageous deal ever transacted in this part of Africa.' So, I visualized a deal with the British Government—the sale of my yearly output of rubber for five times the usual price—or the sale of the plantation for hundreds of thousands of dollars! And what do I find! A racketeers' trap, demanding my surrender of the fifty per cent of all my rubber output! African Development Association Incorporated! Bah! It ought to be called instead the Bandits' Delight! And, what's more, I should recognize as President a rascal named Pernaud, and as treasurer another crook by the name of Smythe"

"I, Pernaud, I'm King of Cameroon, and I remind you to speak respectfully!" Pernaud interrupted with outraged dignity. "I shall remind you also, *Monsieur* Frank Waring, that you manner of robbing your own first cousin of this very plantation was not—what the English call cricket!"

"That was business!" Grant's uncle became purple. "All done legally!"

"And this," Pernaud sneered, pointing at the agreement, "is business and legal also."

"Besides," Smythe added heatedly, "We are leaving you half—which is more than you did for your trusting cousin and nephew!"

"I refuse to listen to you!" Frank Waring waved his arms and stamped frenziedly. "As to you, Grant"

"Uncle," Grant replied grimly, "I think that you are as much of a pirate as these men here! But I'll let you know that the cable was strictly their idea and their handiwork! I didn't even dream that they had sent it until two days ago! As a matter of fact, I didn't even know that such men as Pernaud and company existed until they came and got possession of the plantation, killing two of my servants!"

"Oh, is that so!" Frank Waring roared. "Just wait until the American Consul hears of it!" With a sudden flip of his hands he tore the agreement, threw its pieces at Pernaud and darted out of the house.

"Where are you going, fool!" Benninger shouted after him.

"To Buea!" answered Frank Waring beside himself. "You'll hear from me!"

"Uncle," Grant shrieked after him, "do you realize that Buea is two days of march from here, and that you don't know the jungle trails leading to it?" and he rushed after him. But Benninger quickly barred his way, gun in hand:

"Don't move, punk, or I'll shoot the day-lights out of you! Wiboda, Dasch, Perez! Take a gang of our black boys and go after that shark who doesn't know that he met sharks bigger than him!"

Grant slunk back, his eyes on the unwavering muzzle of Benninger's gun. A few minutes passed. Then, from the nearby jungle, came screams, quickly stilled by the detonations of firing guns.

"He robbed my father, was the cause of his death, but I cannot let you kill like that!" Grant snarled. His eyes opened widely, searching for an opening, as he stepped forward.

"Ali, Oubal Allah! come here!" Perez shouted.

Arabs sprang from the shade of the trees under which they lay, smoking long cigarettes of native tobacco. Six of them motioned the villainous Negroes to follow.

"Wiboda took along the black fellows he needed for your uncle's job, but we have enough men left here to skin you alive!" Benninger sneered at Grant.

Grant caught a sight of a pockmarked Negro, of a tall, lanky Arab with a curved dagger in his fist. Suddenly he dived and whipped out his automatic. Benninger's gun roared, a bullet whizzed a bare inch

above Grant's skull. Then Grant's gun barked.

Benninger recoiled as if struck by the blow of a giant. The tall pockmarked Arab pitched face down over the threshold of the door. Grant whirled around. But Smythe had sprung out of the study with a prodigious leap, Pernaud and the others had taken cover behind the sofa and other pieces of furniture.

Jumping over their dead companions, the four remaining Arabs and the Negroes poured into the room. Grant fired several bullets at them, saw black men falling in the thickening haze of powder smoke.

HE was grabbing a little bronze statue and charging, using it as a mace, when bedlam broke out on the plantation grounds. Grant's men, resentful of the abuses heaped on them, were rushing to the help of their master.

Grant never knew how he managed to get out of the house without being hit by one of the bullets whistling all around him and striking the wooden planks of the parquet and the veranda. As he cleared with a single jump the four steps leading to the gravel path, Wiboda came out of the house, firing. Grant felt as if a red-hot needle had brushed his left shoulder, and whirled around, crouching low. Wiboda, still dazed by the fierce beating that he had suffered at Grant's hands ran onward, firing from the hip. Grant crouched still lower, aimed, pressed his finger. In the next split second he saw the frenzy contorting the long features of Wiboda giving abruptly way to a vacant expression of utter indifference. Then Wiboda pitched headlong, down the stairs, rolled over and remained still, while a savage howling came from the plantation.

Some of the mulattoes and Negroes near the house turned, while a yellow-skinned giant and five savage Negroes sprang toward Grant.

The latter had only a couple of bullets left. He thought that his last moment had come, when he heard the clamor of firing guns and fighting spreading all over the plantation, and saw Negroes brandishing guns, spades, clubs and heavy chunks of wood—his Negro planters—coming out of the thickets of rubber trees.

Grant catapulted to meet them. At top

speed he fired a bullet that went wide of its mark, another bullet which struck a big gangling savage in midair and slammed him down dead. The other Negro cutthroats darted hastily for cover. Blessing his luck, Grant sprinted through and past them with his empty gun in his hand.

Those of his men upon whom he came rallied around him with alacrity. As to the rest, they were fighting all over a large extent of wooded ground, against mulattoes and outlaw Negroes recovering from the dismay into which they had been plunged by that unexpected revolt and surprise attack. They were exasperated Negro workers and not soldiers, not even tribal warriors, Grant's employees; and Grant, on his turn, had no military experience, didn't know how to shout the kind of orders that are heard and obeyed above the roar of firing guns. Consequently the chaotic fighting progressed entirely out of the control of Grant, who, aware of his limitations, made a bee-line for the warehouse where Kro was imprisoned.

The room where Kro was jailed was locked, and Grant didn't know where to get the key. But, shouting to Kro to retire into a corner, he tore a gun out of the hands of one of the men behind him, pressed the muzzle against the lock and fired two bullets. When he threw himself on the door, the shattered lock gave way.

HOWLING and whining like a dog, Kro ran up to him, lifting his fettered fists. A plantation hand slashed the rope. Kro, freed, darted to retrieve the battle-axe dropped by a wounded outlaw Negro. Noticing a group of mulattoes emerging from a nearby thicket, he catapulted on them, roaring like a savage beast. His charge was so swift that the mulattoes had no time to lift their rifles and fire.

The long, curved blade of the axe whirled through them like a buzzsaw cutting through soft grass. Grant saw a mulatto collapsing, his head split in two, another mulatto tumbling on a side, with an arm almost severed. Then he sprang after Kro, into the fray.

Thereafter, the plantation became a nightmare of men firing, stabbing and hacking at each other, entwined in hand to hand duels, rolling among the roots of the trees over the grass, into the ditches.

Unfortunately for Grant and his men, Pernaud, Smythe and Dasche came out of the house, firing their tommy guns expertly; and, a couple of minutes later, Perez, Degrens and the picked half-breed and Negro rogues who had gone with them returned, in open order, shooting accurately. Grant heard Degrens, yelling in the local language that Waring, Grant's uncle, had been killed by a leopard. Murderous bullets and no leopard whatsoever had slain the rapacious Frank Waring, of that Grant was sure. But, now that the search for him had become a useless task, Grant felt only bound to rescue as many as possible of his black plantation hands, who were rapidly getting the worst of the combat.

He shouted to them to break away and take cover in the jungle. This command to flee was heard by scores of workers, who broke away from the combat and ran, by twos and by threes. The mulattoes and the outlaw Negroes didn't press too hard after these fugitives. Following Pernaud's frenzied yells, they tore compactly after Grant and his handful of followers, but they were rooted in their tracks for a few seconds by a couple of volleys, and thus Grant succeeded in getting out of the plantation and into the jungle with his retinue.

Once in the jungle, Grant had the advantage of knowing every thicket, every narrow path carved through the thick vegetation by the often repeated passage of large beasts of prey. During the following hour or so he increased his lead. But, as the vegetation grew thin, the pursuing rogues saw him and darted after him, howling revengedly and firing.

From that moment on, Grant failed to shake the pursuit off by counter-attack or ruse, because Dasch, tireless in spite of his bulk, led the chase with a tommy gun, while, out of a score or so of men with Grant, only five were armed with repeating rifles.

Hours passed, wearisomely, agonizingly. Near sunset Grant realized that he was approaching the boundary of his possessions, represented by a narrow but deep stream, where countless crocodiles spawned their eggs; and then and there, in a frenzy of desperation, he thought of a deadly ruse.

He asked a supreme effort from his men and obtained it. The sun had just faded

beyond the western brim of the horizon when they reached the stream. Grant saw ugly muzzles slicing noiselessly the surface of the water, like tops of submarines' periscopes. He ordered his followers to climb the trees alongside the stream, and to work their way up and over stout branches, so as to grab the entwined branches of the trees on the opposite side of the stream, and come down their trunks.

A few minutes later the watercourse was crossed through the aerial route and Grant and his men took cover on the opposite shore.

Darkness was setting in, when Grant heard distinctly the approaching pursuers, and, grabbing stones, threw them into the stream.

The splashing sounds thus produced must have been interpreted by Dasch, his mulattoes and his outlaw Negroes as a sure proof that Grant and his men were either fording or swimming to the opposite side.

A deafening shout of triumph rang; then outlaw Negroes and mulattoes leaped into the water.

They had hardly done so when there was a horrible churning of lashed water under and all around them. Then the jungle rang with the agonized shrieks of the men into whose live flesh the crocodiles bit. Shots rang, the rough voice of Dasch roared orders.

Grant wasn't curious to know how many of his enemies had succumbed to the crocodiles. All his thoughts were centered on the urgency of collecting enough help to rescue as quickly as possible Clare and the other two girls, left in the house, at the mercy of Pernaud and his gang. The very strange words of the just as strange Reverend Applegate had put some restraint on the rogues, as far as the three girls were concerned. Nevertheless, Grant didn't trust outlaws in possession of a well stocked cellar, holding the upper hand over three helpless young women.

The nearest native potentate was the chief Warumba, son of a shrewd headman who had attained the leadership of powerful tribes and had sent his son, not to France, but to England, with the approval of the Administration of nearby Nigeria. Thus all the benefits of British tutoring, topped by a year of attendance at the Uni-

versity of London, had matured Warumba's brain. Grant had found him always pleasant to deal with and honest, but with a will of his own.

IN the grey of dawn, during the hot hours of the morning and the early afternoon, Grant marched as fast as he was able, followed by Kro, and his handful of escaped plantation workers. But, hard as he tried, he was unable to reach Warumba's fortified village before midnight; and by that time the massive log gate was shut. Tribesmen armed with modern rifles patrolled the sentry walk above the stout ramparts of logs, buttressed by sun-baked clay as hard as concrete.

Grant knew that Warumba was touchy, a martinet for the semi-western ceremonial with which he had fortified his authority of absolute tribal despotism over his tribesmen. Therefore, he considered it unwise to march under the walls and clamor for admittance. It was better for him to wait until the next morning, but expediency commanded it. Nerve-wracked as he was, he resigned himself to spend sleeplessly the remaining hours of the night in the shade of Warumba's boma.

However, he hadn't reckoned with the well drilled sentries, who roared down at him, asking who he was, and what he was after, nor with the headman in charge, a former sergeant of French Tirailleurs, who, on learning the reason for his arrival, ordered the gate open for him, and went personally to warn Warumba.

The latter hadn't gone to sleep as yet, for the very plain reason that he had just added to his harem a beauteous mulatto girl. A difficult young woman, this brand new wife of Warumba. Born and reared in a house, where the wife, a good-looking and stylish former actress, held the upper hand over her paunchy and typically French-middle-class husband, she had assimilated all the ways of keeping a husband on his toes. Warumba, very loving for the time being, went faithfully through the jumps. In that particular night he would have liked very much to go to bed. But his new mulatto wife preferred to play *bezique*, which she had taught to Warumba. And Warumba, in spite of his deep dislike for the game of *bezique*, played it, squatting like an elephant over a pile of pillows.

The young wife was intrigued by the visit of Grant, of whom she had heard a lot, and whom she hadn't met until that night. Warumba was glad to stop playing cards. The result of it all was that Warumba discarded his comfortable *serwahl*, or under pants Arab style, and his sandals, for a mail-order palm beach suit, and received Grant in western style in the quarters of the last addition to his harem.

Grant was tired and travel-stained. But his very weariness gave a soulful expression to his handsome face, unmarred by any stubble of beard because he had shaven in the morning, when all was still comparatively peaceful in the plantation. Near him the hog-fat, heavy featured and pitch-black Warumba didn't look like the answer to the dreams of a mulatto girl reared in a white man's house. To add to the potential mischief of the situation, Warumba's new wife knew fluently the French language, had read French novels, emphasizing the so-called eternal triangle and already had more than her fill of the monotony of tribal-harem life in the jungle.

Under the circumstances, what could have appealed more to a flippant girl of her turn of mind than to make a play for Grant? For such a flirtation presented two issues, equally delightful: either Grant fell for her—and in that case she didn't mind eloping with him—or Warumba's jealousy, deftly exploited, was just what she needed to gain a permanent hold over him, and to chisel the wealthiest gifts from his well-filled coffer.

Consequently, Aimee, Warumba's new wife, sat Grant on a capacious tribal-made armchair of solid ebony with a seat of soft leather, piled pillows behind his back, opened an imported bottle of Scotch for him, gave him a perfumed cigarette, crooned over him, and didn't desist until Warumba warned her with a strangled yell that his guest had certainly not come to play post-office, and that it was time that he should say what he wanted.

Grant, too overwrought and anxious to notice the Cleopatrian mood of Aimee and the volcano of jealousy seething in Warumba's barrel chest, poured out in a single breath his fears and his request for help. Absorbed in his troubles as he was, he didn't observe the sudden-cooling of Aimee's solicitude and the displeasure that

he had unwittingly aroused in Warumba's breast.

THUS nothing could describe adequately his dismay when Warumba, on whom he had counted so much, pointed an accusing finger as thick as a frankfurter at him and bellowed, in accents that suited more his schooling than his palm beach suit and his appearance and quality of jungle chieftain:

"I'm very sorry, old chap, but, after all, the Reverend Appleghate was right in warning me not against your character, which I know to be above reproach, but against your unmitigated spite, which drives you to refuse so unreasonably the advantageous agreements proffered to all of us by the Africa Development Company!"

"But the Africa Development Company is a crook's outfit!" Grant exclaimed.

"Oh, is it?" Warumba sneered like a superior hippopotamus. "Well, my dear Waring, I don't care to contradict you, but facts speak louder than words, and the facts, as far as I'm concerned, are represented by a cool million dollars in English, American, Spanish and Belgian banknotes, intrusted to me as their bond of good faith by the Messers Degrens and Perez, and by the contract drawn by them, which I'll show you presently!"

"Are these banknotes real legal tender and not counterfeits?" Grant objected.

"My dear chap," Warumba sneered, uncovering gold teeth, "before signing the contract I went personally with the banknotes to the nearest administrative center and had them looked over. So I found out, without the shadow of a doubt, that the banknotes are the real thing, and that they were drawn by the Messers Perez and Degrens from the Governmental Bank of the Island of Fernando Po."

"Fernando Po! There was something wrong with that Spanish possession, a few years ago! Give me time, perhaps I shall remember all about it . . ." Grant stammered.

"Wrong! What wrong can there be in money issued by the Governmental Bank of any nation!" Warumba thundered. "But, just wait . . ." And, rumbling under his breath, he stomped out of the apartment of the last addition to his harem.

Aimee, left alone with Grant, stared at

him like a child who has become engrossed in a very promising toy, only to find that the toy in question belongs to somebody else and cannot be seized upon; with the result that she whiled away the time wondering who was Clare Vaughan mentioned so amorously by Grant, and hating her with all her heart, until Warumba returned with a legal document which he proffered triumphantly to Grant.

Grant grabbed it and saw that it was indeed a most generous agreement, with which the Belgian financier, Degrens, and the Spanish financier, Perez, engaged themselves to dig, convey to the coast and market all the mineral ore, rubber, tobacco and so forth, existing in Warumba's property, and unclaimed by Warumba for his use and for those of his people—for a mere ten per cent of the net profits.

THE reason for that generosity on the part of Perez and company was revealed at once to Grant. Knowing how intelligent and powerful Warumba was, the scoundrels of Africa Incorporated gave him a favorable deal to gain his support, or at the least his non-interference in their other less-philanthropic undertakings!

Grant had sense enough to accept his defeat without tackling the bull by the horns—the bull being represented, in this case, by the very buffalo-like and touchy Warumba. Therefore, he only said: "I still believe that the masterminds of the Africa Development Company are a bunch of crooks. But the very prestige of your name, the power of your personality and the awe that you inspired in them made them eat out of your hand."

These words, uttered by Grant firmly, if not sincerely before Aimee, and the surge of admiration for her husband and master that they aroused in her, were sweet music for Warumba's ears and intoxicating gratification for his soul. For a long minute he enjoyed his triumph, with his immense breast stretched out and his head thrown back; then he graciously replied to Grant:

"Perhaps it is as you say; and if you can prove it, be sure that a million dollar bond and an advantageous agreement shall not restrain Warumba from doing right!"

"I didn't expect anything else from a great and enlightened chief like you!" Grant forced himself to say.

At Warumba's urging, he consented to spend the remainder of the night in his boma. The next morning, well rested and refreshed, he led his small retinue out.

His next bet was another tribal chieftain of a far different mettle, the witch-doctor Uanga Debe. Uanga Debe was a self-made man as crooked as hell. Born at the bottom of the tribal ladder, he had got his start as a simian-looking stirrer of the unmentionable things cooked in a pot of magic by a secondary sorcerer. After that, he had worked hard and dishonestly almost thirty years to attain the top of the jungle-magician's profession. Once a foremost star of it, he had eliminated all competitors for the supreme power in various gruesome ways. Finally he had poisoned an old chief named Undio, and had stepped into his sandals.

Grant's father had detested Uanga Debe, but, for business' sake, had never antagonized him. Grant had followed the same policy toward Uanga. Therefore, he could visit him without fear.

However, in the sunset of the next day, when he came in sight of Uanga's boma, he was harassed by a premonition which dissuaded him from tackling Uanga directly.

Grant didn't believe in abiding by fancies. However, the more he thought of it, the more he became leery of dealing with a scoundrel like Uanga without getting first the lowdown about his recent doings; and that recalled to him that none of Uanga's subjects was more likely to tell the unmitigated truth about him than his brother, fellow witch-doctor, antagonist and potential successor, Utimbi, who lived in a small stockaded camp of his own behind Uanga's fortified village.

Utimbi was a wizened old Negro of medium size, with squinting eyes and a squeaky voice. He had often visited the plantation, and each time he had been given all the food he could eat and a small gift by Grant. Therefore, the young American could count on a modicum of friendship on his part.

But Grant never expected the inordinate expressions of liking and offers of service with which the habitually-surly Utimbi greeted his furtive arrival:

"O white sun! O munificent chief! My hut is honored to receive you . . ."

Grant presented him with a cigarette lighter, a scout knife of stainless steel and six Havana cigars. Utimbi went into ecstasy at the sight of the shiny blade of the knife, declared that the little flame jumping out of the lighter added power to his magic and ate a cigar. Then he confided bitterly:

"Why is not that witch doctor of the white men's God as munificent as you! May the ghost-spirits of the jungle grow bugs under his toenails, why does he lavish gifts over my brother, the chief of all lies, while he chases me from his presence like a cur?"

"Do you mean," Grant countered breathlessly, "that the witch-doctor of the white men's God with the black suit, the straw hat, the long red face and the umbrella was here recently?"

"He's here!" Utimbi roared back at him, jumping up and down in his rage. "He hit me with his um--brellah when I asked a small present from him, and my unworthy brother, who should have never been elected chief by a handful of headmen, laughed at my humiliation!"

So the Reverend Appleghate actually was in the boma of Uanga Debe! Grant shivered at the thought that, had he not decided to see Utimbi first, he could have met him smack into the big hut of Uanga, who would have bartered all his blood relations for a length of red calico. Then, swiftly, a plan formed in his mind.

"The long-faced umbrella carrier was deserted by the white God!" he announced mysteriously to Utimbi; and Utimbi exclaimed happily: "The jungle ghosts be praised! Now I'll throw my magic against him and he'll have no white magic to ward it off!"

"He has another magic, black like his soul and his clothes," Grant corrected Utimbi ominously. "But, if I could overhear what he's saying to your brother I would find a way of delivering your brother and all his wealth into your hands, O Utimbi!"

Utimbi squinted suspiciously because he suspected a catch in Grant's eagerness to harm another white man for the alleged purpose of enriching an old black hellion like him. But Grant knew how the native mind clicked, read through his thoughts,

and swiftly pacified him in terms that appealed to him:

"Of course, I expect from you half of the long face's wealth after your victory over him!"

"Uarrah!" Utimbi grinned happily, his confidence restored, "I'll give you a fourth of the wealth of the long face carrier of um-brellah!"

Grant didn't care a hoot about any share of Appleghate's personal belongings, but he had to argue and bargain over it if he wanted to gain the whole-hearted support of the immoderately greedy and not too bright Utimbi. Therefore, he gritted his teeth and insisted with indignation:

"You couldn't get a single piece of long-face's hat without my help! Promise me half of his belongings or the deal is off!"

Utimbi felt as proud, conscious of the recognition that his business genius was getting, and happy, as the owner of a second hand store suddenly skyrocketed into a membership in a Wall Street firm. Opening his toothless mouth in a wide grin and wagging his long knotty fingers he croaked:

"I give you more than a fourth! Are you happy now?"

PRECIOUS minutes had to be lost in that silly bickering, in the flickering light of the cocoanut lamp which disclosed the scorpions, beetles and spiders as big as a saucer running in and out of the twigs making up the walls of Utimbi's hut. Grant kept a stiff upper lip, but was getting a breakdown when Utimbi compromised for two thirds of the loot for himself, and invited Grant to disguise himself at once as a native.

After a last cursory protest, Grant undressed, smeared his naked body with soot from head to foot, put on a waist string and a buttock apron. Undistinguishable from any jungle Negro in the darkness of the night he was led by Utimbi shortly after to Uanga's boma.

Warriors on night duty, and lonely old women squatting before their huts in the silvery glow of the stars glanced at the ill-assorted pair, but they instantly turned their heads, because they didn't want to attract the wrath of the evil spirits which, in their estimation, were invisibly hopping up and down through the air all around the magically-waving hands of Utimbi.

The moment came when, without any

curious interference, Grant and Utimbi squatted before the real wall of Uanga's barn-like hut and proceeded to carve a hole through the branches and twigs entwined over the skeleton of poles supporting the whole building.

Grant's throat constricted uncomfortably when at last they got in. But Utimbi knew where to put his foot without knocking anything down, and Grant had only to follow the pull of his bony hand. Grant was still wondering what would happen if one of Uanga's wives or menials should suddenly come upon them in the darkness, when Utimbi pulled him down on all fours, prodded his head against a partition of branches and rough planks—and the solemn voice of the Reverend Appleghate filled Grant's ears.

After that, Grant forgot everything else in his anxiety to make out what the chanting and rumbling Appleghate and Uanga Debe, shrilling in a cracked falsetto, were up to.

But eventually Grant made out clearly what the object of Applegate's visit was, and who was getting the worst of the deal. For, insistently, cajoling, alternating golden promises with obscure allusions to the favor of the all-powerful white man's God, and to his wrath, the Reverend was coaxing Uanga to scribble his mark before witnesses on a legal document sanctioning some small exploitation of Uanga's tribal lands for an immense return.

From the choppy answers of Uanga it was apparent that the glowing promises of Appleghate enchanted him, but that his caution warned him to be wary. After a long bickering, however, his sales-resistance took a nose-dive and he croaked:

"I cannot read or understand what your paper says, O priest of the white men's God, but we black men know for generations that men of your calling don't rob us tribesmen. Therefore, I shall put my mark and seal on the paper."

Grant heard noises indicating the presence of other men in the lair of Uanga—probably Appleghate's acolytes. Then he made out scrapings on paper and Appleghate's sneer of triumph. Trembling with rage he breathed into Utimbi's ear: "The deed is finished. Let's get out of here!"

But, once they were outside of Uanga's hut, he urged his ally Utimbi:

"Get hold of the copy of the magic paper that long face left with Uanga. For I must study it to destroy long face's magic and to place his wealth within your reach!"

Whereupon Utimbi promptly agreed:

"As soon I bring you back to my small boma, I return to get what you want!"

Utimbi carried through his task a couple of hours later with ease, because Uanga had confided the safekeeping of his copy of the agreement to the jar under the totem fetish in his reception hall, which was cruder than a barn, and just as wide open to everyone who didn't fear the wrath of the totem-fetish.

GREAT was the joy of Grant when the agreement was delivered into his hands. And his exultation reached its peak when he saw what an incriminating bit of evidence of Appleghate's crooked tactics it constituted, because it amounted to no more and no less than a full release of all mineral and produce of Uanga's tribes against a yearly payment of a small sum of money and a few lengths of trade cloth, to be paid by the Africa Development Company.

When Grant explained to Utimbi what the agreement said, Utimbi was seized by a frenzy.

"Uaeeeh!" he screeched wildly. "As soon as I explain to our tribes what Uanga did, they'll depose him and appoint me chief of chiefs in his place! O white brother, you can have all the wealth of long face, because you gave me much more! Ask another reward, and you shall have it, too!"

"Utimbi," Grant replied slowly, to let every word sink, "gather your followers and spread the news carefully among them, before showing the document of Uanga's worthless treachery and of long face's attempted steal. Because, if you act too hastily, Uanga and his henchmen will kill you without giving you a chance of bringing about their destruction!"

Utimbi thought that over and agreed.

"Wisdom speaks through your mouth! I'll follow your instructions and triumph!"

"You sure will!" Grant promised. "Now, can you spare a dozen fighting men! I need them to seize long face before he returns to his cutthroat warriors."

The grateful Utimbi gave him not twelve but twenty tough, well armed and experi-

enced warriors. Counting also Kro and his plantation workers, Grant thus had thirty-five men—enough, in his estimation, to waylay Applegate and wrest the truth out of him.

For Grant was sure that Applegate was a renegade clergyman, a wolf in sheep's clothes. As he left Utimbi's camp, he mulled over the million dollars furnished by the Spanish Bank of Fernando Po. But it wasn't until around noon that he hit on a logical deduction.

Fernando Po, as Grant clearly remembered, had been brought under police survey only recently. During the last years of King Alphonse XIII's rule, under the unsteady Spanish Republic, and during the strife preceding the Spanish Civil War, it had been a forgotten possession, where criminals of all lands willing to pay exorbitant prices for their support found a haven.

The rumor that murderers, extortioners, cracksmen and thieves with plenty of cash on hand had settled unhampered in Fernando Po, and had eventually been recognized as long standing inhabitants of that island with the tacit consent of the local authorities, had spread to the nearby coast of the African mainland.

That explained the international set-up of the gang following Pierre Pernaud, real figurehead chief.

THUS, following footprints left by Applegate and his acolytes on the soggy ground of the jungle, Grant marched on and on, until Kro uttered a strangled cry and pointed at a black blur moving on the opposite slope—Applegate's umbrella!

A quarter of an hour later, the sudden appearance of Grant and his men on a soggy jungle path frightened so the long-faced clergyman that he dropped his umbrella. But he was an old hand with plenty of self-control. He quickly composed himself, and looked surprised when Grant heaped accusations and threats on him. Grant's description of the crooked deal which he had pulled at Uanga's expense cut short his protests. But he was no man to acknowledge defeat without a last struggle. Grant was dumbfounded by his cheek when, unexpectedly, he struck a pose, brought the ends of his fingers together, lifted his eyes to the sky and chanted:

"The agreement with my black brother, Uanga is—ahem!—part of a poor plan of mine—ahem!—to corner indirectly these unsavory people of the Africa Company, by showing to the native chiefs how easily they may be taken in! I planned to return Uanga's signed copy of the agreement in a couple of days, O brother Waring! I planned also to lecture him, so as to fortify him with much needed wisdom for the future. O brother, no matter what you think, the right shall prevail through me!"

"I'm going to make sure that right prevails by delivering you to the nearest Colonial authorities," Grant sneered. "So, cut the comedy and make a clean breast! Come on! Give!"

"Ah!" Applegate recoiled, as if struck by a physical blow; but he quickly retorted: "I will speak! I shall give you proof of my good faith, as a clergyman! But I'm afflicted again with a touch of the fever . . ."

"Sorry!" Grant interrupted. "I haven't a barrel of whiskey ready for you! So you can well forget that fever which you drank down so well in my house!"

"Oh, so you remember that moment of weakness of mine . . ."

"Weakness?" Grant exploded. "You guzzled a couple of quarts of hard liquor at a sitting and you call yourself weak? God save the cellar on which you lay your hand when you are at your best!"

"Brother, it is not generous to reproach a man's faults!" Applegate scolded him gently. "Yes, I confess that I drink immoderately, now and then! But it is a habit that I got fighting my fevers! And now, see how my feet are struck ankle deep into mud! Believe me, the stench of rotting vegetation on this jungle path is sorely undermining my weakened system! Can't you receive my explanations on firmer ground? Can't we go to the nearest clearing, or strip of firm ground, and settle our little business there?"

They covered the next two or three hundred yards of winding trails in perfect silence, finally emerged on a glade some seventy-five yards wide and surrounded by dense thickets. Applegate, his shoulders bent, went to the very middle of it, sank on a big boulder—and burst into a guffaw of ribald laughter:

"Fool!" he choked when his noisy hilarity was over, "You fell for it like a little

schoolboy, did you not? Well, Grant War-ing! I shall let you know the truth! Before you die, damn you!

"I'm not the real Appleghate! The real Reverend made the mistake of visiting Fernando Po out of curiosity before landing on the coast of the Cameroons.

"Pernaud—the king—noticed at once how the precious pigeon of a Reverend resembled me! That, and all the glowing things about American and British interest in the resources of the Cameroons that the real Appleghate told to the keeper of the hotel where we had made our home for years, gave us an itch for action and riches in a world beset by war. Also, we got the idea that, nobody in Europe or in America would look too far into our past if we could establish for ourselves a record of purveyors of raw materials for the Allies during the war, and if the war's end should find us with millions in our jeans.

"So, when night came, we killed the Reverend quietly and threw his carcass to the crocs. Then I went with his papers and in his clothes to the Cameroons, where I prepared the ground. Pernaud, Perez, Dasch, Degrens and the others went instead to Nigeria, where they incorporated the Africa Development Company.

"Smythe, who likes a prank, sent the fake telegram in your name to your uncle, and had the idea of bringing Pernaud as a mad king into your house, to fool you and your plantation hands until your lousy uncle came. His idea was that you were not likely to surmise too much shrewdness in a madman with delusions of grandeur, a bunch of white beachcombers dumb enough to play his game, a gang of Arabs ready to obey him in the Moslem belief that every crazy nut is inspired, and a swarm of Negroes lustng for excitement and pil-lage. It would have worked if that savage mess-attendant of yours hadn't precipitated a fight, and if my companions had been less eager to make a play for the three dam' nurses.

"Warumba was the only intelligent and cultured native potentate in this part of the world. I worked on him for a long time, in my phony quality of clergyman, and we finally silenced him with a privileged agreement and an extravagant bond. On the contrary, with benighted chiefs like Uanga we did as we liked; for, how could

the poor apes cope with clever business heads like ours?"

"Damn your black hearts, who are all of you?" Grant exploded.

The fake clergyman pulled a cigar out of a pocket, lighted it and snickered.

"I'm Gibbens, former actor, con-man, safe-cracker, promoter of worthless stocks and the real directing brain behind the Africa Development Incorporated. In the course of my adventurous life I married a string of six overage females with a yen for romance. Three of them died, leaving everything to me without knowing it—because, as you certainly know, a smart fellow can fix up wills and imitate signatures. I got all the money of my other three wives before abandoning them.

"These are the reasons why a few years ago I decided to get out of the crime racket and live straight with a million in cash and some real estate. But Scotland Yard and the F.B.I. got nosey. And what happened, curse the luck! Mouthpieces, bails and all the rest of the legal graft ate half of what I had! I managed to get away and to land with a half million in cash in Fernando Po.

"Smythe was the brains of a gang of limey wharf robbers. Benninger bossed an American bootlegger outfit until a tougher gang and the police chased him out of the States. Degrens is a former Belgian smartie —ham and egg prize fighter, sport promoter, fence, seller of estates that never existed. He came to Fernando Po with his savings and those of several other people.

"Perez has a record a yard long in South America. Dasch is a crook from Berlin, Germany. These five are worth two million dollars."

"They say that the price of the minerals, fats, etc. making up a human body is about eighteen dollars," Grant interrupted. "This is the actual worth of Benninger, until he rots. Because I killed him and Wiboda three days ago."

"Oh, so you gave the heat to Benninger and to that Wiboda, who was just a tough murderer who got away from the executioner because he was just lucky! Well, well, pal, I ain't going to cry over them! They were a lot of help as long as they lived, but now their pushing the daisies means two grafters less to share with," was the amazing answer of the fake Reverend Appleghate, alias Gibbens. "Now, coming to

Pernaud! He hasn't a cent to his name for the time being—he lived for years on me, because I knew his worth and also that some day I would utilize him—and I tell you, Grant, that Pernaud met my expectations, is my greatest helper on account of his training of police functionary.

"That poor Pernaud! In his best days he played ball with racketeers because he liked to live high, and he needed the rake-off. But he hadn't the sense to lay low and save his graft when a newshawk got plenty on him and smeared him all over the front page. Perhaps Pernaud had eaten too much and had a sore belly when he read the story—perhaps he was drunk—he's the kind who get nasty when he's soused . . ."

"I know that!" Grant snarled.

"Right!" Applegate grinned like a nasty horse. "So, Pernaud, crazy as a bat, calls on the newsmonger and pumps him full of lead. But he knows too much about the pecadillos of his higher-ups, and these fat boys wonder if it is the case of having him taken for a ride, because they don't dare to send him up for trial. But they are smart, smooth as olive oil. They just give him a chance to beat it, and to hell with him! So I got Pernaud sponging on me in Fernando Po, and now I'm using him, and I don't worry, because I know him in and out, I don't give him a chance to backfire!"

"Just a moment," Grant stammered, as if awed by all that display of shrewd crookedness, "Are you going to play square with Warumba for a change?"

The answer of Applegate was typical of him.

"What do you think I am, a sap? As soon as I'm boss of all the paying lands near the coast I put together a real army—two thousand killers, at the least. And I order Pernaud to surround Warumba's boma some early morning. Then bullets and cold steel wipe out Warumba and all his people, the torch is applied to the village and I seize all the Warumba estates without paying any royalty!"

"Sounds neat, if not honest," Grant clenched his teeth. "But what makes you think that the Free French authorities will stand for such a massacre?"

"The Allies need raw materials, rubber especially," Gibbens sneered. "De Gaulle's boys are going to get a windfall of raw materials from me—for a price. And will they

like it, with a war on, and what a war! Thanks to such a set-up, what will they care about finding out who killed Warumba and all his Negroes?"

Grant had learned all he wanted to know and more. Nothing stood any longer in the way of his frantic urge of delivering Clare Vaughan and the other girls. Discarding his assumed calm mask, he roared at the top of his lungs:

"Gibbens, you are under arrest! Come along!"

"Just a moment . . ." Gibbens sparred for time.

"Not a second more!"

"O, yeah?" a cruel exultation suddenly brightened Gibbens' long face. "Look behind you, punk, and weep!"

GRANT jerked his head around, saw Degrens and Perez coming out of a thicket at the head of a savage horde and whipped his gun out. He was pressing the trigger when the catapulting body of Gibbens slammed him down. As he hit the ground, he ducked by sheer instinct. The peal of Gibbens' firing gun rang so close to his ears that his eardrums nearly burst. Down as he was, he grabbed the right wrist of Gibbens, jerked it up, stuck his automatic into Gibbens' wriggling body. Two reports, one deafening and a few inches above Grant's head, another muffled, rang simultaneously; then Gibbens became limp in Grant's grasp, flopped on his back and remained still.

Grant, dazed, jumped on his feet. Just in time because the foremost mulatto and Negro land-pirates were on top of him.

In that moment Kro, the plantation hands, and Utimbi's warriors came out of the bewilderment with which they had looked upon the swift and deadly struggle between their leader and the fake Rev-erend.

Grant caught a glimpse of one of Utimbi's warriors leaping against Perez, his uplifted spear flashing in the sun, of Perez jumping sideways and firing, of Utimbi's warrior slammed down on his side as if struck by lightning, of Kro pouncing on Perez with a prodigious jump and crushing his skull with his clubbed gun.

Then all was a nightmare of thunderous explosions, of whirling, slashing steel, in a dense cloud of lifted dust, with sting-

ing nitrous fumes filling everybody's nostrils. Followed a close struggle, of straining bodies piled on straining bodies, of shortened weapons stabbing upward and downward. An acrid stench filled the air, stinking of spilled blood, of rancid perspiration of unwashed black bodies. Grant felt his ribs caving in, anticipated the impact of a gun butt or an axe on his skull when the press before him opened. He stumbled on a wounded man, leaped up, was pushed forward, carried on by the compact surging of his men. Out of all that clamor, of all that chaos of dust and fighting, rang Kro's urging voice:

"Master, we broke through, what's left of us, but they are too many! Hurry master, hurry!"

Then Kro was at Grant's side, swinging an enormous battle axe wrested from an enemy Negro, and nothing could stand before the two of them.

A few minutes later they were running along the winding bottom of a ravine, followed by less than twenty men, all slightly wounded.

The land pirates, however, didn't pursue. The death of Perez and Gibbens had stopped them on that appointed meeting place, which had become the scene of such a fast and savage struggle.

Warumba was good for his word. His thick brows knitted, he listened carefully to the tale of treachery and death unfolded by Grant for him. When Grant was through, the doughty Warumba exploded that he regretted that the death of Gibbens, alias Applegate, had robbed him of the pleasure of tearing him limb from limb with his hands, and thundered that he was going to rally all his warriors, with the intention of seizing dead or alive the surviving masterminds of the African Development Company and their followers. "How long will your rally take?" Grant put in a crossword as soon as he had a chance.

"Many are the villages under my rule!" Warumba thundered. "The call, the mustering of each village's warriors, the rally here, cannot take place in less than three days!"

"In three days irreparable harm can fall on my fiancee and the other two girls in my house!" Grant countered desper-

ately, mentally tortured by the thought that perhaps Clare had already suffered the worst at the hands of Pernaud and the rogues with him.

"I can give you a hundred men, my bodyguards, all proved warriors, and you can leave with them this very minute!" Warumba thundered, lifting a fat black hand, "But they may not be enough. . . . It could be your death."

"I have risked my fool neck enough already, but who the hell cares, anyhow? Let's go!" Grant howled, jumping to his feet.

A FEW minutes later he was out of the boma, and after him sauntered a hundred towering black bullies, smeared with red and white war-paint, and armed with modern rifles, well-balanced spears sharp as razors, and short, two-edged swords.

Grant's iron constitution and the nervous tension holding him up were such that, in spite of all the tear and wear of his last fortnight of hardships, he covered the distance separating Warumba's boma from the plantation in less than twelve hours. It was exactly two a.m. by his watch when he came in sight of the lone, three-yards-wide bridge over the upper span of the crocodile-infested boundary river.

Two of Pernaud's Negroes mounted guard on that little bridge. Unseen, a score of Warumba's warriors crept close to them and threw their short spears. The two sentries, pierced like sieves, collapsed without uttering a single scream. Warumba's warriors ran to retrieve the spears stuck into their bodies, and ran on, crouching.

They dispatched in the same noiseless way another couple of sentries. Grant, who came next with the main body of Warumba's bodyguards and his own travel-stained retinue under Kro, was just catching a glimpse of the roof of his house over the tops of a row of trees, when an unmistakable voice, the voice of Clare in distress, broke the silence of the night.

At that, Grant lost all caution. Like a released spring he catapulted on; and after him charged his savage allies.

Grant didn't pay any attention to Pernaud's men, surprised all around the house, and slaughtered by the ruthless warriors of Warumba, to the stream of mulattoes which suddenly came out of a warehouse

adapted as a barracks, and to the fierce hand-to-hand combat that ensued.

Straight at the door of the house he went. He found it locked and resisting his efforts. Then Kro hit the door like a human battering ram, shattering the lock and flinging it open.

Grant ran in like a madman. The lights were on on the ground floor, but it was deserted, and sobs, women's screams and men's raucous curses came from the story above. Grant and Kro went up the stairway, taking the steps three at a time, and saw Pernaud, fat, panting, struggling with Clare Vaughan; Smythe small like a gamecock, standing over Veronica Flaherty, wild-eyed and huddled on a chair; and Dasch, massive, stony-faced but red like a tomato, fighting Pat Garfield in spite of the bloody furrows that her nails raked in his neck and cheeks.

Pernaud was the first to see Grant. Fear and venomous hatred drained the blood from his face, turned his mouth into a snarling maw of a cornered beast. To let go of Clare, and to clamp a hand over the automatic still hanging from his belt, was for him the same thing. Grant's fist, thrown in a leap and carrying all the momentum and weight of his speeding body, caught Pernaud in the middle of his face and smashed it—nose, mouth, middle of fat cheeks became a single, mangled, bleeding blob. Pernaud fell, struck a settee with the back of his head, and sank unconscious.

Meanwhile, Kro was leaping at Dasch. Heavy looking Dasch was; but with amazing speed he let go of Pat and retrieved his gun from a nearby chiffonier. An explosion rang as Kro hurled himself at him, clubbing gun lifted. Kro jerked back. The gun fell from his grasp. Again Dasch's automatic fired. Kro, swaying on his feet, steeling all his muscles, pulled a dagger out of his belt. For a moment it seemed as if he should fall. Then he sprang, sideways like a striking snake. Certainty that no human being could keep on moving onward with several bullets fired point-blank in his body, kept Dasch rooted in his track as the sharp blade struck between his ribs. But Dasch had plenty of guts. As the wide slap of steel severed his interior organs, he gritted his teeth, fired a last time, shortening his arm, straight into Kro's jaw, then punched him down, and remained on

his feet as the bloody dagger slid out of the ghastly wound in his side. A second later Dasch fell, over Kro's body. And Smythe, who had stared morbidly at that awesome struggle, reacquired the use of his lithe limbs and vaulted out of the window, grabbed the branch of a tree, slid along the trunk like a squirrel and was gone.

Neither Grant nor Clare spoke, as they clutched each other. Then Pat Garfield and Veronica Flaherty, still shaky from their ordeal, stammered at the same time, that the three of them had managed to hold their captors at bay for days, but that in that very night the beasts had lost their last shred of decency, had beaten them, and finally had cornered them in that room.

Grant went to kneel at the side of the body of Kro, who had no longer a face. He rolled the heavy corpse of Dasch from over him, and for a moment he was so overwhelmed with sorrow that he had to use all his self-control to avoid breaking down.

When Grant reached the lawn, however, the bewildered warriors of the defunct Africa Incorporated were withdrawing to a nearby wooded hillock, and Grant didn't consider it wise to chase them through broken ground in the darkness.

THUS he turned to the girls and removed them and the captive Pernaud to the cellar.

Bullets whistled over the plantation for the remainder of the night. With the grey of dawn, however, Grant heard cheers from the hillock, and the name of Degrens, hailed loudly. With a sinking heart, he realized that Degrens had returned with his bands.

When the sun arose the land pirates were all around the house.

Warumba's men fought back valiantly, kneeling in ruts and holes of the ground or behind trees, but they were outnumbered two to one, offered a crowded target, and, like most jungle Negroes, let their excitement get the best of their marksmanship.

Toward noon their casualties became so heavy that Grant began to despair of the outcome of the struggle. With a bloody bandage around his head which had been wounded by a ricochetting bullet, he went to the cellar. Clare, who had just dressed a wounded man in the wavering light of an oil lamp, tip-toed toward him.

In spite of her terrible experience, she was very slim, straight of shoulders and adorable. Grant stood before her, tall and grim, his eyes flashing wildly in his dusty face. He wanted to tell her, calmly, that they were about to confront the worst, when, suddenly, his head swam and a flow of disconnected words poured out of his lips:

"Clare," he stammered, "I admired you, I thought a lot of you, for months, from a distance. . . ."

Suddenly she was in his arms, and he was pouring adoring words in her ears, his face imbedded in her soft hair.

"Master! Bad men, attack!" A raucous voice rang from the stairway.

"I shall come upstairs with you!" Clare said firmly, "When we shall be unable to restrain them any longer, fire a bullet into my head, Grant!"

"I will, as a last extremity, but I shall be damned if I allow you to expose yourself needlessly," Grant replied, pushing her back gently into the cellar. "Besides, if we pull through, we shall get married. And when we do, I'll worship you, but I'll be boss of the house."

"I shall let you be, now and then, to humor you," Clare forced a smile on her trembling lips; but, when Grant was gone, her pretense at bandying joke against joke gave way to a flow of tears.

As he came out of the semi-darkness of the cellar the closing in of the attack invested Grant with its bewildering uproar of sounds and multitude of sights—heads bobbing up and down in the thickets, gun-flashes drawing nearer and nearer and the savage Africans howling for the kill, growing louder with the passing of every instant.

"It will be over soon, damn them!" Grant snarled. And he visualized the revengeful fury of Degrens and Smythe, last survivors of the unholy combine of the Africa Company, when, all of a sudden there was an outburst of firing far beyond the attackers.

The effect on the latter was instantaneous. Out of bushes and thickets they sprang, escaping on a tangent, like a black river of waving limbs and bodies.

Grant was uncertain if to keep his decimated cohorts around the house or

charge the fleeing cut-throats, when, without any prompting of his, Warumba's bodyguards sprang on, investing the fugitives with a hail of bullets fired on the run.

WARUMBA triumphantly entered the house a half hour later. He was attired in a tan uniform of a British General, but its collar-tabs were bright purple instead of red, and the rows of golden leaves adorning its sleeves were a Warumbian innovation.

"Realizing that half of my battalions were enough for the emergency I set on march ahead of schedule and, by Jove, I came just in time!" Warumba announced grandly, opening his thick lips in a smile which uncovered the golden teeth stuck in his bridge-work.

"I'm so grateful that I can't find words adequate enough to express my feelings," Grant replied fervently.

"Please don't mention it!" Warumba courteously replied, saluting Clare who was just making her appearance. Then he added brightly, "May I proffer my congratulations?"

"Yes," Grant replied happily, "Miss Vaughan has honored me by accepting my proposal. We shall be married as soon as we reach the next civilized center—where we shall take Pernaud, the so-called king."

"I got hold of the men, Smythe and Degrens, somewhat the worse for wear, but with necks still fit for the hangman's cravat," Warumba smiled. "Well, that puts an end to the African Development Company of the crooks. But, Mr. Waring, I can't help thinking that there would be something in the idea, if carried out honestly."

"Exactly," Grant replied. "By the way, now that my uncle is dead, and that I return in possession of my father's property as my uncle's only heir, I declare that I intend indeed to pool together the resources of this zone, giving a square deal to everybody, and making what just profits I'm entitled to."

"With your experience in rubber, you are the man for it," Warumba replied. "But does the future Mrs. Waring agree to a life spent in the jungle?"

"Entirely," Clare replied unhesitatingly,

THE DEVIL'S JUJU

By BRIAN O'BRIEN

Von Hagen had been a white god; but his son was a black devil who carried a crooked juju that N'tama could not fight—for if he fought, the juju would slay the people he loved.



The German drove the broad blade forward.

NTAMA, chief of the Bulus, was lord of many villages up and down the wide, silent Campo River, frontier between Cameroon and Spanish Guinea.

A tall, muscular, quiet-voiced man, as are all of the brown people of the Big Bush, he had been chief since his father, the Great Ekin, had died many years before.

White men had not visited N'tama since his father's death. At that time, a missionary had called the people and spoken of a new god. But the only god N'tama knew, other than the gods of rain and lightning and thunder interpreted by the witchmen, was one spoken of by his father; a great juju, Von Hagen.

Though he was a Germani, he ruled the whole land and by his magic spoke the Bulu tongue. He knew the thoughts of all; and if chiefs plotted mischief, Von Hagen, even if he were ten sleeps away, would be in their village in one night to punish them. It was thought that he flew through the night in the form of a fever bird.

But war came. The Englisi and the Franchi drove the Germani from the land. And Von Hagen passed through the village of Ekin.

"The Germani will leave you," he told Ekin, "because the magic of our enemies is stronger than ours. But we will return when our magic has grown." Then he pinned a token upon the breast of Ekin.

"By this token, which is a white magic, you are my man," he said. "You must wait until I return. Then the Germani will bring full bellies and happiness to your people."

And he went, a tall, thin-faced god in brown clothing, over the floating bridge into the dark forest across the river.

Soon after, the Franchi came and sent soldiers to take young men for the building of roads. They took rice and manioc to feed them. But for this they paid. And every man was made to work certain days every year, for nothing.

At first the people grumbled. But traders came and men taught them the ways of cocoa and rubber. Hunting was good, and they forgot the Germani and were content.

But now N'tama was troubled. The signal drums talked of war again. White men fought battles on land and under the sea and in the air.

"Foolish talk!" scoffed the witchman. "No man can fly like a hawk."

"White men can do all things," N'tama retorted. "My father, the Great Ekin, has said that white men and gods are brothers."

The Germani, the drums reported, were

driving all other whites before them.

N'tama looked over the beaten red earth of his compound. The log bridge was broken. No men had crossed the river for many moons. The Spanish bush, a dark, close wall across the silent, green stream seemed to hold terrible things. He drew his henna-colored cloth across his shoulders and lifted his head to look for a sign.

The blue sky above the forest was empty.

Beside him sat Lini, his young wife. She was fifteen, slim, well formed and the color of good red-brown earth.

"Maybe the word of Von Hagen will come true in my time," he said. "Maybe the Germani will return and bring peace and I will be a great chief in the stories of my people."

The still afternoon air was shaken by the dull thrumming of signal drums.

"A white man marches," they said. "He crosses the elephant swamp. In two sleeps he will pass the river to the north. He kills all who displease him."

"Truly a god." Lini whispered.

TWO days later, N'tama, anxiously pacing the red, beaten earth of his compound, was startled by the racket of whipping gun-shots, magnified into thunder by the dense forest across the river. There were shouts, screams and groans, and birds wheeled high above the trees. Then came silence and a white man stood on the river bank, alone in the afternoon sunshine against the dark wall of green.

"Take a canoe and bring him," ordered N'tama.

But the villagers had fled into the bush. Only Lini, her great eyes lustrous with fear, stood close.

"Wait."

N'tama went to the canoes and paddled one across the river. The white man stepped into it, and N'tama ferried him to the village.

"Where is the chief of this town?" demanded the white man.

And Lo, he spoke with the Bulu tongue.

N'tama followed him up the bank. The white man was taller than most. His face was thin, pale and sweating. His hair was pale gold as he took off his helmet and through it N'tama saw the pink of his scalp. His mouth was thick and wet. His eyes frightened N'tama for they were

bright and blue as though, inside his head, there burned a deadly white fire. His white clothes were sweat-stained and on his tunic were pinned tokens like that of Ekin. On his arm was a band with a hooked cross.

"I am N'tama, chief of the Bulu People."

"So." N'tama felt the hot eyes study him. "You remember Von Hagen?"

"Lord!" N'tama dropped and patted the earth in the manner required to greet great men. "My father, the great Ekin, spoke to him in his kraal."

"Ja, Ekin, that is the name." The white man took his hand from the gun in his belt. "I am the son of Von Hagen, he who placed the token on your father, I have come to tell you the Germani have returned."

"That is good talk." N'tama said politely.

"Who is that?"

The blue eyes were smiling, and N'tama saw a slim form disappear into his hut.

"It is my woman," he replied, embarrassed. For the Bulus do not speak of their women to other men.

"Pretty."

N'tama wriggled in confusion.

The red, prick-eared hunting dog of N'tama walked delicately from behind his hut. The German's lips drew back from large, white teeth. He drew his revolver, sighted and fired. The dog, kicked a dozen feet by the heavy bullet, screamed and writhed, snapping at a red hole in its belly. Then it died.

"That is to show men that I have a magic to kill," grinned the German.

N'tama mastered a heat that surged into his brain.

"I know the gun magic," he said. "But I do not know the magic that gives you our tongue."

"That is the magic of the new Germani. When Von Hagen went from here he made a school in my land. Many men learned your tongue. They will follow me here and be your brothers."

"How can gods be brothers to men?"

"The magic of gods. Germani magic. A greater magic than that of Von Hagen, for we are stronger, more powerful than the old Germani. All the world will be our slaves."

"We too?"

The German bit his lip and the hot eyes blazed.

"No, of course not. We are your friends."

N'tama tried to meet those dreadful eyes.

"Do gods kill the dog of a friend? A dog cannot harm a god."

The German jerked out the revolver.

"I kill because it pleases me," he spat. "I kill you, if I like. Understand? Nigger! Swine! Understand? I kill whom I like. Send men across the river to bring my loads. There you will find twenty men of the Fang. I killed them because I cannot use them. I can kill many more."

"I understand." But N'tama did not.

SUDDENLY the German laughed aloud, a great tenor bellow of laughter. He stepped close and his hand, covered with golden hairs, clapped N'tama on the shoulder.

"You are a good man," he said. "See, I will give you a token like Von Hagen gave to Ekin. This will make you stronger than your father."

He snatched a medal from his tunic and fastened it in the cloth across N'tama's chest.

"Now you are my man, as your father would wish."

N'tama remained silent.

"It is a magic," the German snapped. "You are my man."

"I understand."

"Good. Give me the best hut. Send men for my loads, and bring water and food."

N'tama went to the signal drum and tapped out a message. Soon the people entered staring at the white man and the dead dog.

"Wah! His eyes are empty like the sky," one said.

Some children whimpered, scuttling behind their mothers.

"He is a god." N'tama told them. "He comes to bring us peace and happiness."

"But we are happy," said an old man.

"You will be happier," said the German.

"Eke! He speaks with our tongue."

"It is his magic."

"O N'tama," the German said. "You will call all your chiefs to this place. I will talk to them tomorrow."

That evening the drums talked long. The German sat in N'tama's hut and out-

side were piled many boxes. He ate food by a bright lamp and drank from a bottle.

The village was sleeping when the German called N'tama.

"Send me a woman."

N'tama stared. The white man's face was red his eyes slitted and his mouth grinned secretively.

"Does a god seek a Bulu woman?" gasped N'tama.

"What—" The German looked angry. "No—No! Of course not. I only want to see them dance."

Fires were lit and women called from nearby villages. Dance drums throbbed, but the women danced clumsily, afraid of the white man. He watched them for a while, fidgetting, eyes often on Lini who sat beside N'tama.

"Make her dance," he ordered suddenly.

"The chief's woman does not dance." N'tama told him.

"Oh! Well, send these others away. I want to sleep."

By morning many chiefs squatted in the compound. Most had walked all night through the narrow trails. They waited, scratching, for the white man to appear. But it was nearly noon before he appeared, shaven and in new white clothing, glittering with medals.

"First," he called N'tama, "all signal drums must be silent. This is a secret matter. Call all villages to keep their drums quiet."

The chiefs waited, sweating in the blazing heat. Some were old and wizened. Most were naked, their bodies tattooed or daubed with crimson gara-wood juice. Beside them lay their spears and bows with hide boxes of poisoned arrows.

The German posed grandly before them.

"Hear me, O, chiefs. I have come from the land of Von Hagen. My people, the Germani, are the lords of the world. They send me to prepare you for their coming, to lead you to freedom."

"But we are free," grumbled a grizzled old man from Bikuku.

"You are not free," shouted the German. "You pay tax, you send young men to work for the Franchi. You work for them for nothing."

"That is so," some young chiefs agreed.

"Yeah! The Franchi have lied to you. You must drive them from your land."

A CHIEF stepped forward and crouched at the German's feet.

"Lord, we are as children. We do not know lies. We have seen white men, and they say they are as gods. They say they take our young men for our own good. They make us work for ourselves. Now you, another white man, say they lie. How can gods lie?"

"They are not gods!" yelled the German. "Only my people, the new Germani, are gods. You have seen my magic. You have seen the magic that kills men and dogs. All my brothers have such magic. If you do not follow me, their magic will destroy you and your kraals."

"Why then must *we* drive out the Franchi? Why cannot this magic kill them?"

"Listen, fool," the German raged. "You must work to show that you are worthy of the freedom of Germani. You must drive the Franchi and take their houses and guns and money."

"What is this palaver?" a cheerful young chief from down river wanted to know. "We do not need their things. We have what we want. We kill elephants and bush cow. We catch fish, and our women grow yams and cassava. Our children eat food. Our huts—"

"Silence," roared the German. "I hear you, O, chief. I say you lie, if you think your life is good. Even now other people in this land rise against the Franchi at Kribi and Yaunde and Duala. If you do not join your brothers, they will descend on you and kill you."

"To fight white men is a bad palaver. Is this the peace that Von Hagen promised?"

"Von Hagen was old," bellowed the German, "but we are young. War must come before peace. Are Bulus cowards? Listen, you can go to Esekowa and drive the Franchi from their fort. Then you can go to other tribes and take their cattle and women. Their men will be your slaves. You will be great chiefs under the new Germani." He stopped to mop the sweat that ran down his face. "I will give you magic to make you strong and brave in battle."

He burst open a wooden case and took handfuls of tokens marked with the hooked cross.

"Let all chiefs pass before me," he called. "I will give them tokens like the great Ekin."

Jostling excitedly, they pressed forward, admiring the shining things. He gave them drink from bottles. Some laughed, others shook their spears and began to dance the dance of battle.

"Heil Hitler!" he roared. "Hurry to your towns and bring back your young men and weapons. We will march."

N'tama watched the yelling chiefs depart. The German went into the hut and soon was snoring. The chief felt helpless. Was this, too, the magic of gods?

In his hut, Lini crouched in the darkest corner, weeping.

"Lord, I fear," was all she would say. And suddenly N'tama shook with a feeling he had never felt before.

DURING the days that followed, the German visited many villages. Once he sent a messenger to the south. Every night he drank from his bottles and sang strange songs. Once he beat a villager with his hands, leaving the youth bleeding on the ground. It was a new play, he told N'tama, laughing.

It was ten sleeps before the chiefs and their young men began straggling in to N'tama's village. Women followed them, carrying loads of food. The men carried their weapons, bows with poisoned arrows, spears, and crude swords. In a few days there were three thousand men camping about the kraal.

The German was delighted. He marched up and down before them, medals glittering on his broad chest.

"This we will do," he shouted to them. "Tomorrow we march over the old trade trail to Esekowa. We stop at every town and we take their young men. Those who refuse will be killed and their kraals burned. Thus, we will be sure that no man betrays us."

"Is this peace?" N'tama asked.

"War comes before peace." The German shouted him down. "When we reach Esekowa, we will drive the Franchi; and N'tama, son of Ekin, will live in the great fort, second only to me. Then we will send for chiefs from the north and drive them all into the sea. And N'tama will be a great new chief, the bringer of peace to

all people."

N'tama glanced to where Lini eyed him fearfully.

"Listen, N'tama," the German put his hand on the chief, "you are a good man. But you must do as I say. If you do not understand, remember that the ways of gods are not for men to know. We will be friends, eh? And you will live under my favor. Under the shadow of the Germani, you, blood of the great Ekin, will be as a god before your people."

"He speaks true," N'tama told Lini later. "He is a god, so he cannot lie."

At dawn next day the people started north, young men ahead, laughing and shaking their spears; women and food in the middle; and at the rear the German sat in a hammock carried by four chiefs. Beside him walked Lini.

"She is the wife of my friend," he told N'tama. "She must not walk with the other wenches."

And N'tama was pleased that his woman would be protected by the favor of a god.

They came to the town of Ambam and two hundred young men joined them. They camped there that night. Fires were lit and the women prepared food. The German sat inside a tent and drank heavily from his store of bottles.

Late that night N'tama listened to the faint thud of drums in the north.

"They ask for news," he told the German, "but we are silent. They ask is death come to us."

The German pondered.

"You will make answer saying that all is peaceful."

"But we march. That is not truth."

"Listen to me. Truth or no truth, you will tell them that. And every night you will make the drums talk, saying there is peace. Do you dare say I lie?"

"Nay, Lord."

"Go then."

Before dawn the line started. Several times they halted while parties went into narrow trails for puzzled young men who stared round-eyed at the German, then took their places in the march. And always Lini walked close to the German's hammock.

One morning she wore a token on a silver chain about her throat.

"It is the mark of my favor," grinned

the German. "I give her presents for your sake."

"It is good," N'tama said, pleased.

No towns were burned, for the young men saw N'tama and followed him.

SO they marched, ever getting stronger, until they reached N'kole M'ven, the hill of leopards. The chief was an old man who had served under the Germans in the old time. He saluted stiffly after the white man fashion.

"Many times did the Germani come to this town," he said. "They hanged men who stole; they flogged men who lied. They punished all wrong-doers. But they did not kill for nothing."

The German laughed.

"They are all dead. We, their sons, are more powerful. Many white men have died because we wish it. We rule every land. All men are our slaves. Call your young men and follow."

"I will not follow," declared the chief. "You are a different kind of white man. The old Germani did not drive us to war."

The German drew his revolver.

"You will not follow?"

"Nay, Lord."

There was a report and the old chief staggered, gripping his left arm.

"You see, I do not kill your spear arm," smiled the German and his eyes were full of blue fire." That is punishment to show you that I am master."

"Must I die, Lord? Does my life count to a god?"

"Yes," yelled the German glaring around at the silent people. "You are with us, or you are an enemy. Our enemies die."

"Will my young men die?"

"Yes, fool."

"I march."

Women bound the chief's arm with healing herbs and he called his young men.

In four days they reached the village of Elat, five miles from Esekowa.

There the big bush ended, and they could look, from the shelter of great trees, across a swampy plain to where a wooded hill rose. Below it was a white-walled fort enclosed in a high brick wall. Over it fluttered a flag. Down the hill from the fort were white bungalows and there was a cluster of trading stores. Many roads ran

from the hill into the bush to the north, to the south and to the west.

"O, N'tama," the German called, "you will send the women back to a safe place. In the night the men will creep up to the town and surround the fort. In the false dawn they will kill the sentries and go inside the fort."

"But if the Franchi fight?"

"You will kill them. After this is done, you will tear down the flag which is over the fort. Thus I may know the fort is ours. Then I will come."

"The old Germani led their men into battle," said the wounded chief from N'kole M'ven.

The German scowled and his bright eyes shuttled over the faces of the people.

"I have told you that we, the new Germani, are different from the old fools who ran at the head of savages to be killed for nothing. Do not doubt, man of N'kole M'ven, for I have magic to kill more than an arm."

"That I know, Lord."

DARKNESS came quickly and a small fire was lit in a clearing back from the edge of the forest. N'tama's men built a leanto for the German. Small parties of young men formed under their chiefs, ready to march. The women went back along the trail to the south. There was little noise; the men were silent, their eyes rolling to the shadows. The German drank from a bottle.

N'tama squatted before his men at the edge of the clearing. He saw Lini standing beside him.

"Go, little one, with the other women," he said gently.

"Lord, I fear," came her soft voice. "The god has told me to stay."

The old chief was sitting nearby, moaning softly as he nursed his broken arm.

"What manner of god dallies with the women of men?" he growled.

"He seeks to protect Lini."

"Why does he not protect all? A god can do all things."

"That is his magic."

"If this were no god, but a man only," said the old chief, "we would catch great trouble. This one talks of magic, but his magic is that of the gun, which we know, and the Bulu tongue. I have known a

missionary who had our tongue. But he said it was no magic, only teaching."

"His is a different magic." But N'tama's voice was uncertain.

"Maybe I will use a magic to test this god," murmured the old man.

"O, N'tama?" The German's voice was high pitched and vibrant.

"Lord?"

"You will go into the town and observe all things. Walk close to the fort, count the sentries and return to me before false dawn to tell me of the soldiers, the police and the people."

"Yes, Lord."

"Go now." The German's eyes searched the shadows outside the firelight.

Suddenly there was a sharp outcry.

"Tell them to keep silent," gasped the German. His face was working, sweating in the firelight. "What is it?"

Four young men dragged a tall figure into the clearing. He was a Haussa peddler in blue clout, clinging fiercely to his pack.

"Y'Allah!" he sobbed. "What palavar is this? Why—"

"Hush your mouth!" The German slapped the man's face.

"It is a man from Esekowa. He passed into our midst," a black volunteered.

"Good. Hold him," said the German. "This man is an enemy. I will show you what to do with enemies."

He snatched a spear from the old chief and drove it through the Haussa's throat. The man choked, bent backwards like a bow. The men loosed him. He dropped. His dusty feet kicked a little beneath the blue clout. And he died.

"Eke!" Voices gasped.

"You see?" The German's eyes glittered like a cat's. His mouth was wet and grinning. "Thus do gods kill those who cross them."

N'tama watched the German go into the hut, then, stepping carefully around the dead Haussa, he started along a narrow path.

He halted, looking back toward the fire.

The girl was moving slowly toward the hut. She saw N'tama and ran to him.

"I must go to him, for he is a god," she whispered.

N'tama watched her.

"Lini."

"Go."

She entered the hut.

"Come here, *liebchen*."

N'tama heard the gurgle of a bottle.

"It burns me," came the soft, fearful voice.

There was a scuffle, a scream and Lini fled out of the hut.

"Verdammt—" The German staggered into the firelight, gun in fist.

HE halted, rocking on his feet, before the silent chief.

"I told you to go to the town."

"You are no god," said N'tama softly.

"So, you heard." The German glanced about them. "Are you alone?"

"I am alone."

The pistol jerked upwards until it pointed at N'tama's head. The empty blue eyes blazed along the barrel.

"Now, fool, I—"

A reddened spear flashed across the firelight. The broad blade buried itself in the German's chest.

He gasped, a high, whining note. The pistol went off into the ground. The hot blue eyes closed tight and the German collapsed.

"No god; I heard him say it," said the old chief from N'kole M'ven. "He is a man, for he dies."

"Now trouble comes; we have killed a white man," N'tama said.

"We?" The old chief's eyes glittered as he twitched his spear from the dead man. "Who knows we are here? The drums have been silent but for news, false news of peace."

Lini crept out of the undergrowth and her little hand gripped that of N'tama.

Next morning, M. l'Administrator Martin, of Esekowa, listened to the excited report of a police officer.

"A dead Haussa and a dead white man. A tent with drink, weapons, a Nazi flag and medals." He smiled under his thin, forked beard. "Mysterious people, the Bulus," he told the astonished policeman. "I like them. We must visit them soon and give them presents. They will guard our southern frontier well."

Above the two officials the Cross of Lorraine whipped in a warm keen breeze.

VOODOO SPEARS

By FRANCIS GERARD

One thousand and one warriors had died in the valley a hundred years before. Yet now, when Sanders needed help so desperately —they stood again, and their war-cries filled the air with terror.

A Continuation of the Great Edgar Wallace Character "Sanders of the River"



*Death hammered from
the bucking gun.*

MOST OF US who live a normal life are apt to become a little superior at the mention of ghosts. Even the most broad-minded adopt an at-

titude of humorous skepticism with regard to this touchy subject, but those who have had any experience in the territories will know that such an attitude is fatal to ad-

ministration. Particularly so in Africa.

Sanders was neither superior nor sceptical in the matter of ghosts; and treated any discussion to do with one of those nebulous beings as seriously as he would have conducted an inquiry into a straightforward matter of theft, for he had known ghost palavers which had started in an amicable discussion, progressed to an impassioned wrangle, and ended finally in a bloody massacre involving some sixty thousand spears, which had cost the Government a two-million-pound punitive expedition to sort the thing out. Any ghost which costs a Government two million is something to be considered by a cool head, and not dismissed too lightly.

Sanders could tell, and did tell, many queer stories of ghost and ju-ju palavers, but the story of the Thousand and One Spears is a tale which he does not tell, and even that buoyant and talkative young officer, Lieutenant Francis Augustus Tibbatts, loses something of his natural high spirits when the subject is broached, and becomes less exuberant, his eyes betraying a watchful expression and his voluble tongue remaining discreetly silent.

Throughout his experience in the territories the Commissioner had come up against queer things, little insoluble mysteries and facts which were apparently inexplicable, but the queerest thing in his recollection, stranger even than the "ghosts of brass" in the Isisi, was the affair of M'Guri-M'Gori and the Valley of a Thousand and One Spears.

"**W**HO were they, sir?" asked Captain Hamilton, coming out on to the veranda and staring after a long state canoe which was sweeping out of sight round the bend of the river.

"That," nodded Sanders, "was the annual invitation to the N'Gombi Dance of Weeping."

"Are you going, sir?"

Sanders nodded. "Yes, I think so. It's quite a while since I last attended, and I think it's good policy."

"A good many years," agreed Hamilton. "Before ever I came out to the territories. I've heard about this Dance of Weeping. What is it exactly, sir?"

"It's a rum story," said Sanders, and told it.

Long ago, or *cala-cala*, as the natives say, and which may mean a fortnight back or a thousand years, there was a great king of the N'Gombi called O'Tumu the Strong. Sanders, who had heard the story often, estimated that he must have lived about a hundred years before. Under his rule the N'Gombi were the most prosperous nation in the land, though they themselves attributed their riches to the beneficence of their tribal ghost, M'Guri-M'Gori, which, roughly translated, means He-Who-Makes-Things-To-Grow.

M'Guri-M'Gori was unique, and Sanders knew him well, though now he no longer dwelt with the N'Gombi. He was unique in that, unlike other ghosts up and down the river, his effigy had actually been made so that he was not only a presiding spirit, but also a god, and his *bête* was an inspiring figure fashioned in iron-wood and of a certain magic color.

Cala-cala, in the time of the great N'Gombi King O'Tumu, M'Guri-M'Gori dwelt in a splendid ghost-hut which had been built by virgin boys of the tribe and thatched by young women into whose moral antecedents a most rigorous inquiry had been conducted by the king himself. To this ghost-hut came all those who lacked something, especially those women who desired a son, for it was well known that any such wife who lay before M'Guri-M'Gori for the hours between sunset and sunrise would be blessed with her desire. Similarly He-Who-Makes-Things-To-Grow was all-powerful in the fertility of crops and all matters affecting fecundity. Thus if a man had a barren field he would take a spadeful of its soil and place it before M'Guri-M'Gori, leaving it there for the space of three days and a night, after which he had but to sprinkle the earth on his field and it would straightway become green and full of richness.

There came a season when the N'Gombi prospered even more than usual. Their granaries were choked, their herds of goats had increased "beyond the counting of stars," and the number of children born throughout their villages was the marvel of all peoples up and down the land.

Separated from them only by the broad bosom of the river, the Akasava, on the contrary, had known a season still remembered as the year "when the Akasava

feasted on the wind." Their crops had been negligible, a mysterious distemper had almost wiped out their goats and the bush-plague had swept through the villages, leaving in its wake dead and dying, and those who still lived were lean and hungry to the point of desperation.

In their sore straits they were reduced to the spearing of fish for food, and this was very bitter to them, for the Akasava were a proud people and known as hunters of meat, and fishing they left to lowly folk such as the Ochori and the N'Gombi, whom they affected to despise. It was not surprising, therefore, that when a fishing-party of healthy, full-fed N'Gombi came upon a half-dozen Akasava canoes and watched their occupants' clumsy attempts at spearing the darting fish, the N'Gombi should sneer and cry aloud, "Ho, great hunters of meat, watch us and our lovely skill and you shall learn so that you may fill your bellies, lean Akasava dogs! Behold, we fish only that we may have delicacies, having already the fill for our stomachs in our fine crop-houses and goat-pens, but you Akasava have no great M'Guri-M'Gori to feed you with his plenty."

THE Akasava fishing-party gave up their bungling attempts and paddled back to their bank seething with rage at the N'Gombi's taunts. They duly reported the shouted insults, and Chumbiri, the Akasava chief, leaped from his stool, his spear shaking in his fist, and cried, "O ko! Are we indeed dogs that in this time of hunger we should receive naught from the N'Gombi but insults to fill our stomachs? *Wa!* If M'Guri-M'Gori can fill a N'Gombi belly, may he not likewise fill ours? Now it seems to me that if we take this great ghost we, and not the N'Gombi, will feast and stretch our stomachs with fine food."

Choosing a time when he knew O'Tumu of the N'Gombi to be far to the north with his spearmen on a hunting expedition, Chumbiri gathered his young men and crossed the river and struck. He came in mid-afternoon when the N'Gombi takes his ease, and he carried the first village without losing a single man. Not so the N'Gombi, who died before ever they could reach their spears.

With his lean warriors Chumbiri swept through the N'Gombi, killing as he went,

and each night he sat down in a different village, and each night his lean young men grew less lean and there was a slaying and cooking of goats such as never before.

The moon had moved half-circle before King O'Tumu received news of his people's plight, but one night a runner came gasping to his feet with the news of the Akasava invasion. Gathering what spears he could—a thousand all told—O'Tumu hastened by forced marches from the north to meet Chumbiri and his warriors. In a narrow valley he marched into a trap, for suddenly the hillsides were black with Akasava warriors.

"G'la!" roared O'Tumu the King, disengaging his stabbing spear from behind his shield, and "G'la! G'la!" meaning "Kill! Kill!" echoed his N'Gombi warriors, taken by surprise, but in no way dismayed.

It was a horrid business, for O'Tumu and his thousand spears never stood a chance. They fought and died to a man, one thousand and one in all, and that night Chumbiri of the Akasava bore across the river the effigy of M'Guri-M'Gori, leaving the N'Gombi to mourn the loss of their tribal spirit and the death of their king and the flower of their fighting men.

From that day the valley where the N'Gombi army was butchered has remained deserted. Not one square foot of it is tilled, and no N'Gombi would be so impious as to graze his herds there. For that matter no man nor woman of the tribe would go near it at night, for it is *lafè*, unlucky, and a notorious gathering place of devils.

Only once a year, and that on the anniversary of the defeat of O'Tumu, the N'Gombi visit the Valley of a Thousand and One Spears, and there they hold the Dance of Weeping in memory of a great king and the loss of M'Guri-M'Gori. The dance, attended by the N'Gombi chiefs and headmen, is a reproduction in mime and song of the tragedy which occurred there. Upon that one night of the year, and upon that night only, is heard again the old-time N'Gombi war-cry, G'la! G'la! G'la!, for to use that today would, in the opinion of the tribe, be inviting not victory, but defeat.

Sanders had attended the Dance of Weeping upon two occasions before. So had Bosambo, who at that time was a blood-brother of the N'Gombi chief until

he swindled him out of fifty bags of salt by a certain game.

"Well, there you are, Hamilton," said Sanders, "that's the story of the Dance of Weeping."

"But what happened to the N'Gombi ghost, M'Guri-M'Gori?" asked the Houssa captain.

"The Akasava have got him," replied the Commissioner.

"Oh," said Hamilton, "is he the god whose hut is alongside the chief's?"

"That's the little gentleman," said Sanders. "And there's a prophecy about him which the N'Gombi believe to a man. It is that 'when O'Tumu comes again, bringing with him his thousand strong young men, M'Guri-M'Gori will cross the river once more to sit with the N'Gombi to the end of the world.' Anyway, I shall go, and I shall take you and Bones with me. I think my presence up there might have a salutary effect."

"You mean the trouble between the two tribes?" suggested Hamilton.

"There's always trouble between the Akasava and the N'Gombi," agreed Sanders. "They're by nature incompatible, but this spearing of K'Saki is more serious than the other incidents. You and I'll go up to the N'Gombi in the *Zaire* and I'll send Bones in the *Wiggle* over to the Akasava to see about K'Saki's death; and then he can join us in the N'Gombi for the dance."

LATER that afternoon Sanders said, "I want you to take the *Wiggle* up to the Akasava, Bones, and sort out this killing palaver. D'you think you can manage it alone?"

Bones closed his eyes and raised his eyebrows loftily. "Far be it from me to toot on my jolly old trumpet, but really. . . . Can I handle this? Leave it to Bones, dear old chief. I'll turn the Akasava chief inside out. I'll examine him and cross-examine him and. . . . Well, leave it to Bones."

H.M. Launch No. 36 was regarded as Bones' particular property. She was a great deal smaller than the *Zaire*, but to Bones, regarding her through the rosy-tinted spectacles of youth and adventure, she was as large and as splendid as H.M.S. *Iron Duke*. She had a name, a native one,

"Komfuru," which means "that which does not run straight." Hamilton had rechristened her the *Wiggle*, and upon those occasions when Bones took the wheel she certainly wiggled and rarely ran straight.

Once round the bend of the river and out of sight of the Residency, Bones sent the steersman below and took the wheel, an action strictly forbidden by the Commissioner, who was answerable to the Government for the *Wiggle's* condition. Bones would stand for hours at the wheel, picturing himself the master of a windjammer sailing round the Horn in the bad old days and listening to the monotonous calling of the Houssa soundsman who squatted in the bow taking the depth of the river every few yards.

"In the name of God, the One, the Indivisible," sang the Houssa, "I declare that there is a fathom and half a fathom."

"By the Koran and all the Holy Suras, there is a fathom and yet another fathom."

"All praise to Allah that I may say there is a fathom and. . . ."

The bows of the little ship seemed to rise straight up in the air, and Bones found himself sitting on the deck behind the wheel.

"Master," said the soundsman, walking aft and in no way abashed, "Shaitan has thrown up a sandbank out of hell."

Bones replied in vitriolic Arabic that he wished the soundsman had taken its place and sent the tiny crew overboard to push the *Wiggle* clear again.

He came in time to the Akasava, where Chumbiri the chief—he bore the same name as that predatory chief who, long ago, had successfully carried M'Guri-M'Gori from the N'Gombi—was waiting for him with his headmen and his dancing-girls. Bones was received in unusual state and splendor, and Lieutenant Tibbets, who was by no means a fool, smelt guilt in this flattery.

"I see you, Tibbetti, and my heart rushes madly inside me at the pleasure of your coming. Behold, lord, I have commanded a dance that you may have joy of your visit. Tanini, the chief of my dancing-girls, shall entertain you, for, Tibbetti, she does such and such a thing and so forth in a manner which will please you."

"Not before the children," said Bones in English, and then in the clipped vowels of the Akasava tongue, "I see you, Chumbiri,

but there will be no dance, for I come in Sandi's place to hold a palaver upon the killing of K'Saki."

"Tibbetti," said Chumbiri eagerly, "that is a small matter and can be told in all its truth very quickly."

"A small matter, chief?" said Bones, craning forward and peering at him in a manner peculiar to Sanders. "Nay, Chumbiri, here is wind-talk, for the killing of a man is no small matter."

The chief darted a quick glance at the young man, and Bones read uneasiness in his expression.

The palaver was held between Chumbiri's own hut and the great ghost-hut wherein sat the effigy of M'Guri-M'Gori, and Bones was quick to notice something lying before the idol.

"Now, Tibbetti," said the chief when Bones had seated himself on a stool, "because there is love in my heart for you and because you are the bright young son of Sandi, I will speak the truth."

"Cheer oh," said Bones.

"K'Saki, who, as your lordship knows, was a N'Gombi fisherman, brought his canoe too close to our bank of the river and, lord, you have knowledge that we are a proud people. Seeing this abomination, an Akasava hunter threw his spear, half in jest, half in warning, and *ko!* the man, K'Saki, died of it. But Tibbetti, my fine hunter meant no harm, and he is here himself to tell you of that truth."

Bones cross-examined the spearman in question and, after requestioning the chief, gave his decision.

"IT is in my mind," he said, "that the killing of K'Saki was done with no intent or evil thought. Yet what comfort may we offer to K'Saki's woman when she comes to my lord Sandi, saying, 'Sandi *baba*, I am without my man, and I have no food with which to fill my belly nor a proper roof to cover me?'" He turned to the watchful Chumbiri. "What answer, think you, chief, can Sandi make to that?"

Chumbiri looked uneasy and said, "Lord, that is a mystery for Sandi."

"Not by a long chalk, it isn't," commented Bones in English, and then in the vernacular, "Nay, Chumbiri, for that is not justice. Now the thrower of that spear

is the cause of K'Saki's death, and he must repay the widow for her loss."

"O *ko!*" said the hunter dismally.

"Therefore, O man, you will pay to the woman of K'Saki in the N'Gombi twenty bags of salt and ten goats."

"Lord," said the hunter quickly, "in my fine hut I have but ten and five bags of salt and, behold, I am a poor man and I have no lovely goats."

"Yet I have heard that you are a great borrower," said Bones, "and, moreover, you are married to the own sister of the chief here, and will he not, in the gladness of his heart, lend you what you must pay?"

"Lord," said Chumbiri sullenly, "all my goats have died of the sickness mongo."

There came an unmistakable bleating from the back of Chumbiri's hut, and Bones glanced significantly in that direction.

"All save one or two," the chief hastened to add.

"Or three or four or five," suggested Bones.

"Tibbetti, there may be five."

"There will be five," nodded Bones, "and as to the other bags of salt, that is a mystery for you to solve," he ended, nodding at the hunter, "for it is not fit that I should plague Sandi with these little-little matters."

He stood up, and his eyes wandered across to the ghost-hut of M'Guri-M'Gori. He walked quietly over to the entrance and stood peering in. Chumbiri followed.

"Chief," said Bones, pointing into the hut with his stick, "before the lovely feet of M'Guri-M'Gori I see countless offerings."

"That is so, Tibbetti, for his eyes are gladdened by these pretty things."

"And all these things are gifts willingly given by your people to the ghost whom they love and who is kind to them?"

"That is so," nodded the chief again.

"And yet, Chumbiri," said Bones softly, "do I not see a necklace of beads which are the color of blood? Now it seems to me that no Akasava will wear beads of that color, for, behold, your people wear only those which are colored as the sun. Now across the river in the N'Gombi men wear such beads as these. Chumbiri, that necklace was about the neck of K'Saki when he died."

"Lord," said the chief hoarsely, "that is the truth, and your eyes are brighter than the stars to see all things. Now I tell you, Tibbetti, that it is our holy custom to place here not only gifts of our own, but also those taken from our dead enemies."

"Yet K'Saki was no enemy," said Bones gently, "for if he were, behold he died of a purpose, and I shall take your sister's man and hang him, as is the law."

"Lord, what would you?" growled Chumbiri.

"The beads go back to the N'Gombi to the widow of K'Saki, where they belong, so that she may put them about her own neck in memory, for *that* is a holy way of the N'Gombi," he ended significantly. "The palaver is finished."

That evening as Bones ate his solitary meal aboard the *Wiggle* he called for Abiboo, whom Sanders had sent with him.

"Abiboo," he said, "you are a follower of the one true Prophet and no believer in ghosts and ju-jus. Therefore you will be brave and not afraid to enter the ghost-hut of the Akasava."

Abiboo shrugged, squatting at Bones' feet. "Tibbetti," he said, "I am a believer in the one God, and the ghosts and devils of these Kaffirs are less than pigs to me. What is it you desire from the ghost-hut of the Akasava?"

"That which belonged to the N'Gombi and which returns to them," replied Bones.

"Master!" exclaimed Abiboo, in astonishment. "The Akasava will not be pleased."

"Take four men and bring the thing aboard this ship."

"Master, it is done," said Abiboo, and went out of the little cabin.

Bones was asleep when Abiboo and his men returned, but the morning brought Chumbiri to the *Wiggle*. The chief's face was twisted with rage, and Bones eyed him narrowly.

"Tibbetti," said Chumbiri, "your soldiers came last night and entered our ghost-hut and they took with them that red thing which . . ."

"Chief," said Bones, cutting him short, "what they took, they took at my order. It came from the N'Gombi, and to the N'Gombi it returns. Go. The palaver is finished."

The chief hesitated and muttered under

his breath, and then Bones came to his feet.

"Will you walk ashore, Chumbiri," he asked, "or shall my fine soldiers throw you in the river?"

The chief glanced at Abiboo standing at his shoulder and elected to walk.

"EVERYTHING most satisfactory, dear old sir," said Bones, reporting to Sanders that evening across the river in the N'Gombi.

"I wonder," said Hamilton.

The Commissioner and Hamilton had come up in the *Zaire*, which was now moored with the *Wiggle* to the N'Gombi bank.

"The Valley of a Thousand and One Spears, where the dance is held," said the Commissioner, "is a few miles inland, and I think we ought to be pushing off."

Just this side of the beginning of the deserted valley Sanders and his little party were met by the N'Gombi chief, T'Fari-Su'Tumu. His name meant T'Fari-He-Who-Sits-In-O'Tumu's-Place, a subsidiary title which had been borne by all chiefs of the N'Gombi since the day of the great King O'Tumu. With T'Fari were the headmen from every N'Gombi village, and each headman had his own small retinue of spears. In a place apart the N'Gombi who were to dance the Dance of Weeping waited, a thousand and one in all.

It was at sunset that Sanders, Hamilton and Bones were escorted in state into the mouth of the little valley where they would camp. The morrow would be taken up by a ceremonial palaver, and the dance would take place the day after, which was the anniversary of O'Tumu's defeat and death.

Great fires were lit, but no man set foot in the valley until a witch-doctor had entered alone and exorcised it.

"It's really quite exciting," Sanders told his two subordinates just before they turned in for the night.

It was just before dawn when Sanders was waked by the sound of running feet, and a moment later Abiboo tore the little tent flap down and gasped, "Master . . . the Akasava! Chumbiri comes with all his spears. Ayoub and Mahmet follow on my shadow with the little gun that says ha-ha-ha. Haste, master, for Chumbiri comes fast."

Within five minutes Sanders and his

little party were established with one of the machine-guns from the *Zaire* in the mouth of the dread valley. To their right the N'Gombi chief and his small army composed of his headmen and their spears and the dancers, was drawn up. Sanders had been obliged to take the left flank because no N'Gombi would fight in the mouth of the forbidden valley.

"Got that Maxim ready, Bones?" asked Sanders, as he tied a message about the little red leg of a pigeon which Abiboo had thoughtfully brought from the *Zaire*.

"Quite ready, sir," replied Bones quietly.

"I think they're coming now," observed Hamilton, peering through the dawn mist.

"Hope jolly old Chumbiri doesn't turn us out," nodded Bones. "These Akasava are messy fighters. Abiboo," he went on to the sergeant at his elbow, "tell your soldiers that they will not fire until my lord Militini orders them, and if any man disobey, I will beat him on the feet."

"Master," said Abiboo, quite unmoved by the spectacle of the advancing thousands of Akasava, "these are but *kaffirs*, and we Houssas will do as your lordships command."

Chumbiri halted his battle-line and took stock of his position. He made a mistake in his first attack. He had seen the thick barrel of the Maxim, and knew what it meant, and elected to send his first wave of warriors against the N'Gombi upon the right of the Commissioner's party. This was capital from Bones' point of view, as he was able to enfilade the attack, and the staccato chatter of the Maxim swept it away.

Chumbiri learned his lesson, and the next regiment came straight for the machine-gun and the steady-eyed men behind it.

"A little shorter, Bones, I think," said Hamilton, firing slowly and accurately with his revolver.

"It's pretty well point-blank," said Sanders quietly, and make excellent practice with a ceaseless automatic.

A little later Bones spun about. "Sorry to worry you, Ham," said Bones, "but would you take over the Maxim? I've got a scratch on the left wrist. I'll take your jolly old revolver, if I may."

"Shoot slow and shoot straight, Ahmet," said Sanders to one of the Houssas lying

at his feet. "You'd better let me have a look at that scratch, Bones."

With the use of three handkerchiefs Sanders did what he could for Mr. Tibbets' wound, for a spear had ploughed the forearm from the wrist to the elbow.

Despite their numbers the Akasava drew off again before the merciless blast from the machine-gun.

"Lord," said the N'Gombi chief, joining Sanders momentarily in the lull, "I have lost men."

"I, too, T'Fari," said the Commissioner, glancing with an expressionless face at the still shapes of three Houssa riflemen. "Go back to your men, chief, for I have sent a book to Bosambo, and, behold, the Ochori will move north and we will have Chumbiri in a trap."

"Sandi," said T'Fari candidly, "not even Bosambo may reach us in time."

Sanders did not reply, for he knew that the man spoke nothing but the truth.

IN THE last attack Chumbiri had lost too many men for his liking, and for the moment the stomach had gone out of the Akasava, but Sanders knew that the respite would not be of long duration. He called Hamilton and Bones apart.

"Can you suggest anything we could do?"

Hamilton shook his head. "Nothing, sir. The only thing we can hope for is that we last long enough for Bosambo to get here."

"I'm afraid we can't count on that, Hamilton. But what I can't understand is Chumbiri attacking when he knew that we were in the N'Gombi. It's very extraordinary. Did you rifle him particularly, Bones?"

"Good Lord, no, sir. Jolly old Chumbiri, dash his wicked old eyes, an' me parted like brothers."

"I've known brothers to fight," suggested Hamilton with a smile.

Twice more that day they beat off the Akasava attack, thanks to Abiboo's foresight in bringing the Maxim at the first alarm. But ammunition was getting low, and with it their hopes sank.

"They won't attack again to-night," said Sanders. "The Akasava don't like fighting in the dark, but we can expect it at dawn and, by my reckoning, it will be mid-

day at the earliest before Bosambo's Ochori can get here."

"I'm afraid things look pretty black, sir," agreed Hamilton.

"Absolutely," nodded Bones. "Just as black as the jolly old Akasava."

There was little sleep for them that night, and an hour before dawn Sanders had gone along the lines of the N'Gombi, speaking to them and encouraging them to a last effort.

"Sandi," said their chief, "my young men will fight, for they have small love for these dogs of Akasava; but, behold, to-day is the year-day of that on which O'Tumu the Strong himself went down before them, and it is in my stomach that it will prove an ill day for us."

So dawned the anniversary of the massacre of O'Tumu and his thousand men and, as Sanders sniffed the thin morning air and took his place beside the machine-gun, he had little hope of seeing the sun set.

"How's the arm, Bones?" he asked kindly.

"Tip-top, sir," replied Bones, and then nearly fainted as Abiboo inadvertently knocked against it.

"They're coming now, sir," said Hamilton shortly, looking to see that his revolver was fully loaded.

Bones squatted down by the Maxim and leant his back against the tripod. He was thus looking back up the long valley in the mouth of which they were making their stand and, as he looked, the thin morning mist shifted momentarily and his jaw dropped.

"Look, sir! Look, jolly old Excellency! Ham, take a dekko at that!"

Both men swung round and stared where Bones' shaking finger was pointing.

About fifty yards to the rear of the Commissioner's desperate little party was drawn up a solid phalanx of spearmen. They were tall, lean fellows such as had not been seen in the territories for many years. But they were N'Gombi, as Sanders recognized at once from stories he had heard. Their faces were completely hidden behind masks of leopard-skin, the old N'Gombi war-masks which to-day were preserved here and there as curios, but had not been seen in use for more than four generations. At their head and a

few paces apart stood an immense black figure muscled like an ox and wearing the double leopard skin of kingship, but he was a king whom Sanders had never seen. His face, too, was hidden beneath the war-mask of yellow fur spotted with black.

The Commissioner passed a hand across his eyes, and at that moment the roar of the threatened Akasava attack rose in the morning air and instinctively he swung round to face it.

But even as he did so Bones once more said, "Look!"

Sanders glanced back to those dense ranks of quiet spearmen. He saw the great wearer of the double leopard skin raise his immense stabbing-spear above his head and then he heard issue from the bull-like throat a yell which, save in the annual Dance of Weeping, had not been heard in the territories for more than a hundred years, the old-time war-cry of the N'Gombi, "G'la!"

"G'la! G'la! G'la!", roared that dense phalanx of men, and then that great leading figure flung his spear into the air, caught it again, stamped twice with the right foot and once with the left, and then . . .

Why, then, Sanders and his party drew aside as the great body of N'Gombi warriors thundered out of the valley, running faster, faster and faster until the shock of their attack crashed into the amazed Akasava, and then the mist came down again and the Commissioner and Hamilton stared at one another with white faces, while Bones sobbed and giggled hysterically.

WHEN Bosambo and his canoes swept up the little tributary and disembarked not a hundred yards from the mouth of the valley, he came, his hands outstretched to the Commissioner, his expression one of deep emotion.

"Sandi," he said simply, "my heart is glad to see you." He paused and then went on, "Lord, many years have I known you and marvelled at your cunning. Now I tell you to your face that you are a warrior and a chief of warriors, for who else in all this land would have had the courage to keep a thousand spearmen in reserve for so long?"

The Commissioner said nothing. There

was nothing to say. He knew quite well he had had no spearmen in reserve.

It was only later that Sanders understood the reason for Chumbiri's attack and it was Abiboo who was his informant.

"Master," he explained, "when Tibbetti told me to go to the ghost-hut of the Akasava and bring him that which belonged to the N'Gombi, I did not know he meant the little red beads, and took the *bête* of M'Guri-M'Gori himself."

"You lifted the ju-ju itself?" gasped Sanders.

"Master," said Abiboo simply, "it is but a thing of wood such as these kaffirs love."

"Phew!" whistled Hamilton inelegantly.

Foreseeing future trouble, thanks to the changing hands of this powerful tribal ghost, Sanders, after expeditiously hanging Chumbiri, called a palaver of both the N'Gombi and Akasava chiefs and headmen.

"Behold," he said, "you are come to hear that justice which is the justice of my king, D'Jorja," the Commissioner put his hand to his topee in salute, "and this is the answer to your riddle. There is an island in the middle of the river which men call The Island of Birds. Here, half-way between N'Gombi and Akasava, M'Guri-M'Gori shall dwell for all time in a ghost-hut which shall be built by youths and maidens of both tribes. Then for three moons shall he be guarded and served by N'Gombi spearmen and again for another three moons by Akasava, when once again N'Gombi shall guard and love him. Thus in turn you shall pay him tribute and he shall be the great ghost of you all, turning to you a face full of kindness, and, behold, both N'Gombi and Akasava will grow fat in his shadow. But be very sure that if again there is a killing palaver for this grand ghost, I will come with my soldiers and I will take both chiefs and there will be sorrow in the N'Gombi and Akasava, for both shall hang, and between them I will light a fire and make an end of N'Guri-M'Gori, that he may trouble me no more."

"O ko!" gasped both peoples at this dire threat.

Sanders held up his hand for silence. "Is it just?" he called, and from ten thousand throats came the answering roar, "Wa! It is the justice of Sandi."

That evening on the *Zaire* as Sanders and his subordinates sat over their coffee Hamilton said suddenly, "So the prophesy's fulfilled, and M'Guri-M'Gori came back to the N'Gombi."

"Yes," said Sanders, nodding with a strained face, "and if you remember the rest of the prophesy it was that 'when O'Tumu comes again bringing with him his thousand strong young men, M'Guri-M'Gori will cross the river once more.'"

There was a little silence between the three men, and then Bones gingerly lifted his bandaged arm so that it rested on the edge of the table, scratched his head with his other hand and said, "Rum, dear old Excellency, dooced rum."

BOSAMBO of the Ochori sat in his state canoe being paddled rapidly down-stream, and as he went he hummed a low song such as Kroomen sing when they are happy. The chief had cause for his good-humour, for he had extricated himself from a very delicate position with considerable profit. When he had heard that Sandi was in the N'Gombi, Bosambo had known a moment of acute dismay, since he, too, was in the N'Gombi quite illegally and conducting a great hunt with his spearmen, wherein he was breaking every law of the territories. He had been still more disconcerted when his scouts came racing in to report the predicament of the Commissioner's little party, and how he was to save his master's life without betraying his own poaching had caused the Ochori chief profound thought.

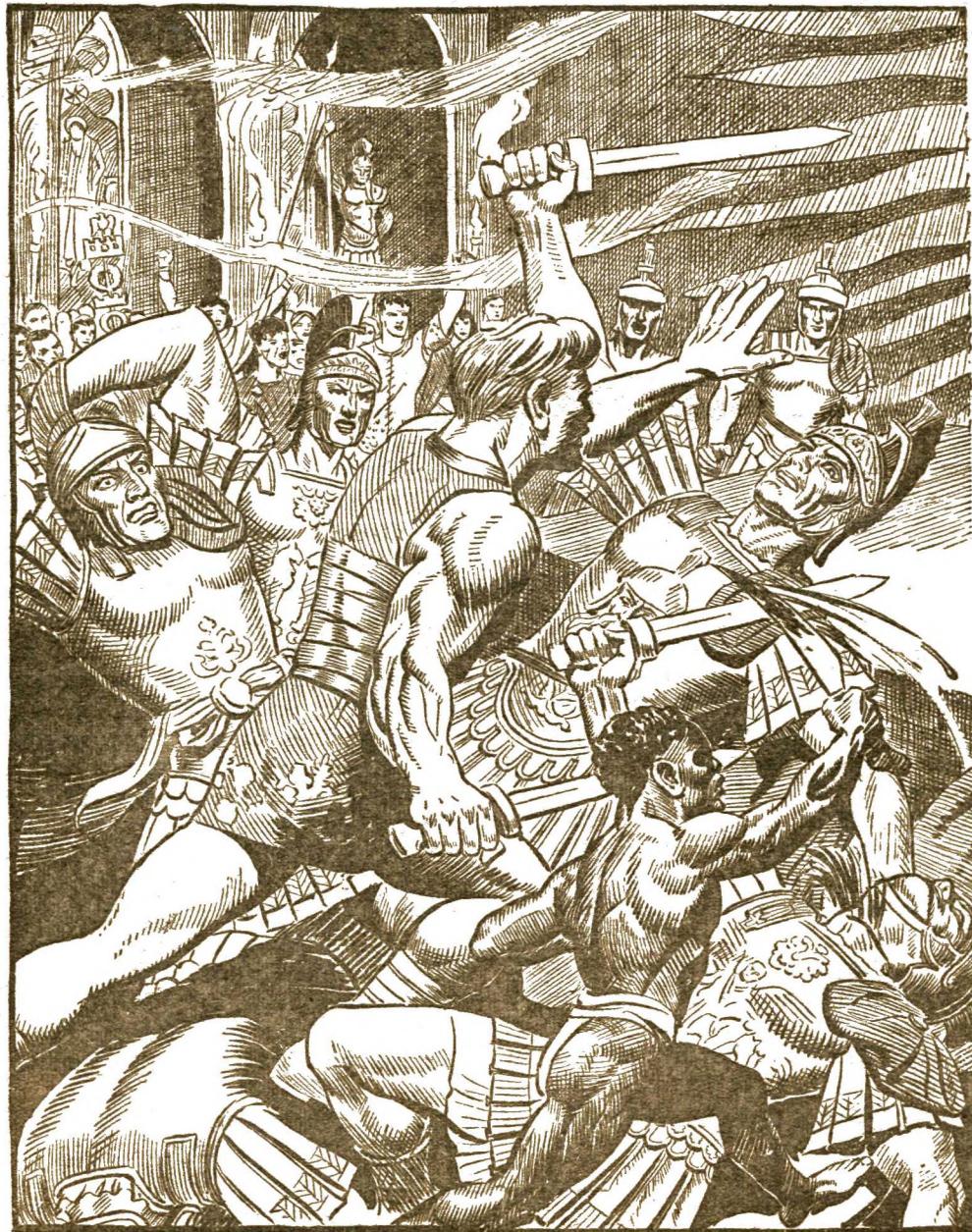
Bosambo leaned forward and picked up something from the floor of the dug-out. It was a strip of leopard skin six inches wide with two round holes in it. The chief sighed. The making of those masks had cost him the hide of every leopard he had killed in his hunt. Still, the loot from the Akasava city more than made up for their loss.

Bosambo leaned back and, lifting up his voice, sang light-heartedly.

AMAZON QUEEN OF OPHIR

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

Ghosts walked and talked in the kraal of the living dead, waiting implacably for the helpless jungle victims to fall within their grasp. And into that ancient voodoo city came cowardly Derry Stone—to find that on his courage rested the lives of three friends already sentenced to the eerie blood-rites of a murderous golden priestess.





Derry Stone plunged toward the altar—and the knife slashed down!

DERRY STONE came through the door into the shadows of the room, and his shoulders were wide against the sunlight. He stood silently for a moment, then strode lithely to the tables at the rear. Behind him, an Igort pygmy squatted patiently outside the doorway, polished the length of a five-foot blowgun with a small calloused palm.

Derry Stone halted beside a table at which five men played cards.

"Got room for another?" he asked, pulled a chair from another table.

The dealer looked up. "Get out of here, Stone," he said brittely. "We haven't got any use for a murderer."

Derry Stone's hands were white on the chair back. Pale anger blazed in his eyes, and with it was a thread of black fear that grew as the seconds passed. He pushed the chair aside, his smile thin and sour, and his voice was a whiplash of sound.

"The next man to call me *that* is going to regret it!" he said savagely. "Hell, other guides have lost men on a safari; why make me the goat for what happened on mine?"

"Get away from this table, Stone," a second man said, and three of the players came slowly from their chairs.

Derry Stone turned without a word, stalked blindly from the room. He stood on the outer steps, blinking into the brazen light of the African sun, and he shook uncontrollably for a moment. Brazzaville was a white-washed stretch of buildings that seemed to quiver in the waves of heat—and he hated it suddenly, with all of the blind anger of a big man who finds that his hugeness is a shell built about nothing.

"*Damn, damn, damn!*" he swore softly.

The pygmy came slowly to his feet, stood at the white man's side. He scratched a flea-bite beneath his dirty clout, watched the emotions in Stone's face with eyes of shiny obsidian.

Derry Stone looked down, and the rush of his emotions was too great for him to stop his hand. He slashed with his fist, caught the four-foot black in the side of the head, blasted him from the steps.

The pygmy lay prone for seconds, then anger contorted his wizened features, and he groped blindly for his blowgun. He came to a half-crouch, lifted the weapon in a motion so smooth and effortless that nothing could have stopped it. Derry Stone stood motionless, and there was in him then the thought that death might be the thing for which he sought.

And then the pygmy lowered the blowgun, compassion in his eyes.

"A man does not strike his friend," he said simply.

Derry Stone's heart was a solid ache then; he strode down the steps, touched the tiny man on one shoulder.

"I am a *dingo*, Buuna," he said. "I sneak where I used to walk; I am a *bu-nadi*, a murderer."

"You are sick, -but no murderer."

Derry Stone jerked his chin at the gaming room where the laughter was bright and friendly. Bitterness etched his face, slumped his broad shoulders.

"They think so!" he said broodingly.

Buuna spat contemptuously. "Doubt is for enemies," he said quietly.

DERRY STONE nodded, but the fear was in him again, just as it had been five months before on safari. A wounded rhino had plunged from hiding in a *thongo* thicket and charged his two employers. They had died horribly within seconds, while he had raced to safety in the crotch of a giant tree. He had told himself over and over again that the white men's deaths were not his fault; his gun had jammed, and nothing short of three ounces of steel backed by an oversize powder charge could have stopped that hurtling behemoth. But he had known deep in his mind that he had failed his employers and himself—for he had been afraid, and ran, as though he had been an amateur guide.

He could have saved the men; there were ways of turning a wounded animal from its charge. But blind unreasoning panic had gripped him, and he had failed his duty. Now, there was in him the fear that he would always fail, that he could never be certain of himself again. And that terror was even more terrible than the disrepute and ill-favor into which he had fallen with those who had been his companions in the Congo for the past decade.

"To hell with them all," he said bitterly to Buuna. "They're glad to see me fall."

Buuna nodded. "We go to Bukala now, Bwana," he insisted.

Derry Stone shook his head. "I'm going back to the States, Buuna," he said slowly. "I'll never be any good here in Africa; when a man loses his nerve and reputation, he might as well give up." He scowled bleakly at the two men who cut him dead from across the street.

"But before I go," he finished, "I'm going to slug a little respect into some people I know."

He brushed past the pygmy, paced swiftly down the street. Buuna frowned, trotted tirelessly at his side, trailing the blowgun behind him in the powdery dust. They made an odd, almost legendary pair as they walked the street, for they had been companions for nine years, ever since the great white man had saved the pygmy from a horde of screaming blue-faced mandrills.

Together, they had penetrated almost all of Africa, making exploration trips, guiding safaris, mapping dim trails for various governments. And always there had been

between them a feeling of mutual respect and friendship that grew stronger with the years.

But now, walking along the street, there was a sense of strain between them. The white had struck the black, hit him without provocation; and both knew that the thing was wrong. In Buuna, was a feeling of hurt pride, the sense of loss that a man feels when his faith in another is broken. And Derry Stone hated himself, for he knew he had been wrong, but such was the bitterness in him that he could not acknowledge the fact.

He shrugged impatiently. What the hell! Why should he worry about the feelings of the pygmy nigger at his side? After all, the black owed his life to him; he could smack the other around whenever he pleased. And then a sudden revulsion of feeling struck him; he knew he was taking his hurt and spite and bewildered fear out on the tiny man, knowing the other would not retaliate. He stopped, stared bleakly into Buuna's face.

"I struck without thought," he said evenly. "You owe me nothing more."

Buuna spat thoughtfully, and humor and liking came back to his eyes. He scratched himself absently, searching for the fleas that crawled his scalp.

"It is forgotten, *Bwana*," he said. "A blow is a hasty thing that travels with its own mind." He grinned, showing tiny filed teeth. "Wah! Your hand is heavy; my head rattled like a gourd filled with nuts!"

Derry Stone fished in his pocket, found a slim roll of bills. He split the roll, gave half the bills to the Igoro.

"This is yours," he said quietly. "With it, you can buy wives and cows, and be a great man back in your country. This is goodbye; for tomorrow I leave for the States."

He stood motionless for a moment, then turned away.

"*Eho, Bwana*," Buuna said, tucked the bills into his breech clout. Then he paced along again, following the big white man as he had for so many years.

Derry Stone whirled. "Damn it, Buuna," he snapped, "I said this is goodbye. I'm through with Africa, and with you. Now beat it."

Buuna picked at his teeth with the point

of a poisoned dart. He shrugged, meekly peered into Stone's eyes.

"*Eho, Bwana*," he agreed again.

"I said—" Derry Stone began again, then shrugged in wry amusement. "Okay, come along; we might as well see this last day and night together."

"*Eho, Bwana!*" Buuna smiled to himself.

FOR the next five hours he trailed the white man from saloon to saloon, dull misery in his eyes when he saw the slackness come into the white man's face, gently helping the man to his feet when his drunken belligerent boasts started brawls in quick succession. Always, Derry Stone gave no heed to Buuna's pleas or advice; instead, started again to prove by his drinking capacity and blasting fists that he was the same man he had been a year before. And always, when the fights were starting, there came that paralyzing wave of fear to his mind, and only the press of bodies kept him from running in blind panic.

But there came the time when he could take no more. Battered, still-drunk, he was thrown from a water-front dive, and was immediately picked up by the constabulary police. He had proven nothing to Brazzaville, nor to himself, other than the fact that his former life was finished. Taken to the jail, he slumped drunkenly to the metal cot, hiccupped gravely, and stared blankly at Buuna in the opposite bunk.

"I tol' you to go 'ome," he said. "Why-inell cantcha mind your betters!"

Buuna shrugged, tucked fresh snuff into his lower lip. "Your head is sick," he answered quietly. "You need a friend."

"Sure, I nee—"

Derry Stone slumped to one side, and his drunken snoring filled the cell. Buuna slipped to the floor, tugged the thin blanket from beneath the white man, gently covered him. Then he squatted on his bunk, patiently watched the moon climb the ladder of the sky.

He didn't change position, except to scratch absently at the fleas that bit at his small body, until the moon was gone, and the first tinge of sunlight was in the sky. Then he stretched lazily, glanced at the cell door, as the black jailer and a white man came down the short corridor.

"*Kandri esor?*" he asked.

"Wake up Stone," the white man said impatiently. "I want to talk to him."

"*Nupah!*" Buuna shook his head. "Bwana sleeps."

"Shuddup!" Derry Stone groaned, rolled to his side. He blinked at the white man outside the door, then scowled. "Leave me alone, get out," he snarled.

The white man gestured, and the jailer twisted a heavy key in the lock. Hinges creaked, and then the white man was shaking Stone with violent hands.

"You yellow quitter," he snapped. "Straighten up, before I straighten you up!"

Derry Stone was utterly, terribly ill for a moment. But when he straightened, most of the drunkenness was gone from his mind, and some of the slackness was gone from his body.

"All right," he said sullenly, "you've had your laugh; now get the hell out of here!"

The visitor shook his head. "I'm not laughing, Stone, I'm feeling sorry as hell for you." He leaned against the wall. "What in the devil made you try to tear the town apart last night? There are at least fifteen complaints against you, and you look as if somebody had run you through a wringer."

Derry Stone swallowed, found a cigarette and lit it. He hid his eyes behind the smoke.

"Just a farewell party," he said evasively. "I'm leaving this damned country today." He frowned. "I don't get your angle, Hastings, why bother with me?"

Hastings shrugged. "I've got a job for you," he said slowly.

Derry Stone laughed, and the sound was harsh. "A job for *me*!" he said. "Hell, nobody would trust me with a BB gun on a *dandu* hunt."

"I know." Hastings glanced at his watch. "But this isn't a *dandu* hunt; this is more important. Frank Vardon, his daughter, Helen, and Tod Manning, their plane pilot, are forced down somewhere in the Congo. I want you to go after them."

"Why *me*?" The old fear was piling in Stone's mind again; he knew that he'd fail again. "Hell, there are a dozen men who know the Congo as well as I—and they're not *murderers!*"

Hastings nodded at Buuna standing across the cell. "There's the reason," he

said. "Buuna was the one who gave Vardon the information about the lost city; he's the only one I know of who could find his way there without a great waste of time."

"Then take him; he and I split up yesterday." He turned to Buuna, spoke in Igoro. "Dik-dik," he explained, "Bwana Hastings wants you to guide him and his men to the *kraal* of S'eba; the two white *Bwanas* and the *Bwana-san* are lost there, and must be guided back."

Buuna spat, his emotionless eyes flicking from face to face.

"I told you so," he said complacently. "I told you the bird would not like them in his belly, and would vomit them up."

DERRY STONE could not suppress the instant smile. "That may be," he admitted, "but there is not much time for talk; you must find my friends."

"*Your* friends?"

Derry Stone flushed. "Not exactly; but they are my people."

Buuna shook his head. "I don't go," he said definitely. "The *kraal* of S'eba is a place of black juju. The *ghost-men* men are there, and the place is cursed by Sul." He shrugged. "Let them climb back into the bird's belly and return through the air."

Derry Stone turned to Hastings. "He won't go," he said indifferently. "It is like he told Vardon; the place is cursed and the home of ghosts." He ground his cigarette impatiently against the wall. "Why not try to locate them from the air?"

"We tried. A plane has been searching for two days. The only place that looked remotely like Buuna's description of the palisade has clouds of some sort about the base. There was no place to land, anyway, so the pilot had to turn back." He caught Stone's arm with a heavy hand. "You've got to go with Buuna and bring those people back, before they starve to death. Hell, none of them know the jungle."

Derry Stone shook his head. "Not me. Get Wilson, or Jarvis, or Gruber; I'm sailing today on the first boat out."

Hastings laughed without humor, and his eyes were steel-hard with purpose.

"You're not going anywhere without my permission," he said. "I don't like to get tough—but I can. As Secretary to the

Governor-General, I can keep you here from now on."

Derry Stone lifted burning eyes. "A squeeze play's no good; I'll buy my way out."

"You'll use cigar coupons; you were fined all you had on you, for the fracas last night."

"Why pick on me?"

"Because your boy won't go without you. I think that even *you* will have some trouble in convincing him that he should go."

Derry Stone sank to the bunk, cradled his aching head in long fingers. He knew that the squeeze-play was getting tight, knew, too, that his nerve was almost gone. And—

"What about it, Stone?" Hastings snapped.

"Buuna," Stone said to the pygmy, "will you lead the way to the *ghost-city*?"

Buuna shook his kinky head. "Nupah, Bwana," he said flatly, and superstitious fear flickered in his eyes. "The kraal of the dead is not for us; Sul lives there, and his children feed his belly." He shifted beneath Stone's level gaze. "Anyway, the *Ingiai* comes soon, and we cannot *trek*."

"What about the rains?" Stone asked Hastings. "We'll never get out and back before the rainy season sets in."

Hastings smiled. "I'll have a plane carry you inland as far as possible; you'll save three weeks of trekking. Coming out, you'll have to do the best you can." His face sobered. "You've got to do it, Stone —those people don't deserve to die just because you're yellow!"

Anger thinned Stone's lips. "All right," he said, "I'll take a crack at the job. Now get out, and let me get some sleep. Figure on leaving tomorrow at sunup."

"Thanks, Stone, you'll not regret this."

"Get out!"

Then Hastings and jailer were gone, their footsteps echoing dimly in the shadowed jail. Derry Stone glanced at Buuna.

"We search for the *ghost-city*," he said. "Scratch a map on the floor."

THE Igort bent, traced a crude map with his finger on the dusty floor. His tone was an awed whisper, and his ebony skin had paled to a sickly grey, when he spoke as he drew.

"Ophir lies here, at the base of the hanging mountain. It is in a valley that stinks of death, and ghosts walk the streets of the great *kraal*. It was S'eba long ago, many fathers back, and its queen was such she put the sun to shame. Then a sickness came upon her, and she became like a child feeling the mating pangs. She loaded many men and elephants with treasure and took it away. She never returned, but her people lived as ghosts in the *kraal* that had been hers."

Derry Stone shivered, hearing the legend for the first time. Before, when Professor Vardon had become so excited over hearing the story, he had been mapping an area miles away in the jungle. Vardon, as an anthropo-historian, had prevailed upon Butuna to draw a map, then had taken his daughter with him in a hired plane, to search for the city which he believed to be the fabulous site of the Queen of Sheba's mines.

Derry Stone had dismissed the flight with a slight grin. He had heard so many legends in Africa that he gave but small heed to any of them. Now, it seemed that a legend told by Buuna was to be the factor that was to chain him to the country that was throwing him aside as a despicable coward. He laughed bitterly, erased the memorized map with a scuffing movement of his boot.

"Do not laugh, Bwana," Buuna warned. "The *kraal* is cursed!"

"Hell, it's just another deserted city!"

"Nupah, it has a special curse." Simple dignity seemed to give the tiny man added stature. "And the curse is to remain until a jungle grows where S'eba once stood." He shook his head. "I do not think that we should go."

"I—" Derry Stone began, and stubbornness came into his face. "We are going, Buuna," he finished quietly. "There is a task to do. We will pick up Dnai tomorrow, for he is a good jungle man, and will ride the bird's belly far into the jungle. Then we shall cut trail to S'eba. If we do not find my friends within five moons, we shall return." He turned on his side. "Now, I sleep; wake me when the sun goes down, for there will be much to do."

"Eho, Bwana!" Buuna shrugged resignedly.

Derry Stone lay awake for some time.

Some of the fear was gone, and in its place lightly surged again the love of adventure and excitement that had been his years before. But enough of the fear remained in him that his dreams, when he slept, were wild and troubled.

II

SIX days had passed since Derry Stone had agreed to make a search for the missing whites; five days in which Dnai, Buuna and he had slashed a jungle path through the tangled lianas and interlocked trees with the razor edges of their bush-knives, after being deposited by plane in a clearing far within the interior of the Congô. The steamy heat was a dank miasma that pressed with visible strength against the tiring bodies of the trekking men.

Derry Stone drove the point of his bush-knife into a spongy balsa tree, sank tiredly to a fallen log. Buuna squatted at his side, perspiration gleaming oilily on his wizened body, his filed teeth white.

"You grow old and weak," he said mockingly.

"I wait for you, *dik-dik*," Stone answered airily.

"Fash!"

"Fash, yourself, you old fraud!"

Derry Stone leaned back, stared at the rugged escarpment that sprang with brutal dignity from the jungle, miles ahead. He watched the threads of smoke tendrilling upward from its base, and suddenly the jungle was like a pressing trap about him! He fought the panic within his mind, sweat breaking on his face.

Close at hand, a monkey chittered insolently, and a blot of shifting color fled on startled wings from the hanging moss of a gigantic *baobab* tree. The air was heavy with the heady musk of a clump of tangled *maheena* blossoms beside the log on which the white man sat. A *dik-dik* deer poked a shy head from beneath a frond of ferns, then darted to safety without a sound.

Derry Stone shivered then, smiled at the shyness of the foot-high deer and stretched lazily, before bending and retrieving his bush-knife.

"The *Ingiai* is early this year, Buuna," he said. "Come, we have far to go before making camp for the night."

"Eho, *Bwana*," Buuna said.

Without a backward glance, the three began again the interminable task of cutting trail through the tangled undergrowth, toward the city of Ophir.

They worked with the swinging strokes of trained jungle men, conserving their energies, slashing at the rubbery vines that impeded their progress, cutting a path which was just wide enough to permit them to pass.

Dnai cut trail with the stolid indifference of the Bantu, perspiration gleaming oilily on his bare skin. He said nothing, but hummed a monotonous tune that gave a steady rhythm to his strokes.

Derry Stone followed Dnai, consulting his compass now and then, and Buuna trailed the white man, chuckling occasionally to himself. The great bush-knife moved tirelessly in his hand, and his strokes never faltered.

SLOWLY the hours passed. The trail swung now and took a twisting turn until it followed the bank of a muddy river. A log lying at the river's edge suddenly came alive, scuttled toward the water; its bull-like roar rousing dim echoes. It slid sinuously into the river, sank without a sound, then reappeared fifty feet downstream, its cold eyes watching the intruders with an evil intensity. Another crocodile came surging to the surface in a wake of streamers of tenuous mud; seconds later a hundred-foot stretch of river was alive with the reptiles.

"Want to go swimming, Buuna?" Derry Stone asked with a grin.

Buuna shivered, watching the gleaming rows of teeth in the split mouth of a twenty-foot crocodile. Shaking his head, he backed away from the river's edge.

Dnai grinned. "If we must cross," he said in Bantu, "I know of a way that will keep us safe."

Derry Stone shook his head doubtfully. "Those babies don't know what friendship is," he said grimly. "We wouldn't last a minute." Sudden futility filled his mind; this *trek* was too sure of defeat, to keep on going. Too many hazards lay in the way.

"I think . . ." he began, then stopped suddenly.

Dnai spun on one heel, went toward the jungle. He grinned back over his shoulder,

dug in the soft ground, and then handed several potato-like roots to the two.

"Eat these," he said, chewing industriously upon a tuber of his own.

Derry Stone eyed his root dubiously, then took a tentative bite. It had a sweet, nut-like flavor that was pleasant to the taste.

Buuna ate his roots slowly, spat thoughtfully, then squatted silently at the white's side. He examined his blowgun carefully, relaxing in anticipation of the last few minutes of *trekking* that lay ahead. Dnai watched quietly, leaning against a tree and toying with the heavy knife in his hand.

Derry Stone felt puzzled; he could see no reason for the delay. He was about to speak, when Buuna stared up at him, and said:

"*Bwana*, you stink like a *dango*!"

Derry Stone flushed. He glanced down at the pygmy and as he looked down, he caught the evil odor of the tiny man's body.

"It is time," Dnai said, and walked directly down into the crocodile-infested water.

A crocodile spun and sped toward the wading black. Teeth gleamed and the enraged hiss was like that of escaping steam. Dnai stood stolidly, the great knife poised in his hand, but making no move to escape.

Then Dnai moved slightly, just escaping the first charge of the maddened reptile. It spun in its length, hesitated, then floated motionless in the water. Dnai, reaching out almost casually, slapped the crocodile's snout with the flat of his knife. The crocodile hissed, sank in a swirl of muddy water and did not reappear.

DERRY STONE lowered his rifle, staring amazedly, as others of the tremendous crocodiles made no move to attack. Buuna swore softly, then grinned up at the white man.

"I'm going swimming," he called, as he waded out to Dnai's side.

Derry Stone sighed relievedly, scrambled down the bank, then dropped into the water. He waded against the slow current, following the moving Dnai, feeling the skin crawling on his back, as a crocodile lazily investigated the intruders.

Twelve minutes later, they were across the shallow river, staring back at the restless reptiles that frothed the water.

"Hell!" Derry Stone said feelingly.

"A family trick," Dnai explained complacently, scraping mud from his legs. "The roots make a man stink so that the river-gods do not attack."

Buuna grinned. "I think nobody attack," he said, edging away from his companions.

Derry Stone nodded assent and stood so the breeze cleared his nostrils of the odor that was being sweated from his body.

"How long will this last?" he asked Dnai.

"The stink will go before we camp tonight," Dnai said.

"I hope so," Derry Stone said forcefully. "This is one time I don't have to be told by my friends why I'm unpopular!" He felt a mild amazement that he could still joke.

He smashed experimentally at the jungle's edge. Within seconds he had cut a path-notch, and was joined by the other two. They worked silently now, making path as swiftly as they could, trying to reach the city of which Buuna had told, before the sun completely disappeared.

Great patches of color fled through the air, the gigantic butterflies drifting quietly until the men had passed, then settling back to branches and ferns where their colors rivalled the clumps of orchids. Insects hummed quietly, and a snake rustled out of sight from the branch on which it had been somnolently resting.

Slowly, the jungle grew less tangled; the sunlight began to filter through in shining streamers and patches of brightness. Going was faster, and better time was made; until two hours later, Derry Stone's gleaming knife sheared through the last twisting length of liana, and the three men came into a large clearing.

It was so sudden, this bursting out of the jungle, that the white man could only stare in amazement at the city that sprang from the ground a mile away.

THE ground between him and the city was a twisted, rubble mass of broken terrain, its level churned and broken by an internal heaving that had thrust up hills of earth twenty feet tall. Gleaming sheets of greenish-black lava covered almost the entire valley—great patches as smooth as polished floors, others broken and shattered

into stretches of rock powdered into heavy gravel. There was little vegetation, as though nature were afraid of encroaching upon the floor of ruptured earth and stone.

Like a dream city, spreading to the base of the towering palisade, gleaming with the subdued colors of a spectrum, spangled with tiny streaks of gold and silver light, lay the lost city of Ophir.

Towering high into the clouds, was the sheer, striated cliff of rugged stone, seeming to overshadow and protect the city that nestled at its base. It seemed a watchful sentinel brooding over the puny efforts of the mortals that had toiled at its feet.

"Lord!" Derry Stone breathed incredulously.

The city was intact, except for the west end, where an earth-tremor had razed building after building. The rest of Ophir still stood in its ageless glory, buildings rising solidly, their outlines blurred and softened by the intervening distance. It was a strange admixture of styles: minarets and turrets towered high in the air; square and rounded buildings were a pleasing minor tone to the overhang of the towers; tiny windows stared like peering eyes toward the plain of lava, and over all, seemed to hover an ageless sense of waiting and sense of living.

Derry Stone fitted his bush-knife into its scabbard, and hurried forward, ignoring the dull cries of warning from Buuna at his side. Dnai followed more slowly, his eyes wide and fearful, a moaning prayer coming from his throat.

III

TO Derry Stone, striding along the broken ground, came sensations such as he had never experienced before. He became aware, for the first time, of the blanket of thin mist that hovered over the valley, and of the odor of sulphur that hung in the air. He saw the tiny spurts of steam and the trickling fumeroles of smoke that burst from the fissures in the valley's floor. Vibrations seemed to be transmitted through the ground to the soles of his boots, as though, deep in the ground, a sleeping giant stirred uncomfortably. Unmistakably, this was volcanic land, although it was equally evident that the volcano had not erupted for many years.

He felt a chill touching his heart when

he finally descried the deserted streets of Ophir; he felt that they should be teeming with life now, just as in the past. He halted on the outskirts of the city, holding his companions back with a wave of his hand.

"Take it easy, and stick with me," he said cautiously, and fought down the impulse to turn and run.

Buuna laughed shortly, grimly, and gazed with narrowed eyes down the broad street that faced them. He fitted a poison dart into the lip of his blowgun, cradling several more in the twist of one finger.

"I stay at your side, *Bwana*," Buuna said thinly.

"I do not stray; I am no fool," Dnai said.

"Fine!" Derry Stone turning back to the city, strode purposefully down the street.

Dull wonder filled him, now that he could see the city intimately. The passing years had not dulled, but seemed to have made more glowing, the colors of the paints and stains of the buildings. Lacey bas-reliefs of carvings were everywhere, bringing to life again the civilization that had perished thousands upon thousands of years before, and inextricably fused into them were carven strips of gold and silver, and another metal, goldish red.

Derry Stone lightly touching the polished portal of an imposing building, felt an uncontrollable greed pulsing in his mind, for more wealth than a man could spend in a life-time, was used as decoration in this city. With that wealth he could live like a king—could tell the men who despised him to go to hell! He shivered at the thought.

He went on down the street, stifling the feeling of greed, knowing that the time for treasure-gathering lay in the future, and was amazed to think that he should think that way. He stopped beside the steps of a great temple; then, driven by some instinct, cautiously mounted the steps, and shoved open the great swinging door.

Buuna and Dnai followed at his heels, their skins gray with fear, but no wavering of purpose was in their minds as they followed the white man.

Derry Stone pushed through the door, paced slowly forward, awe filling him with the threnody of fear. He heard the startled, frightened gasps of the blacks at his back; then, they fell silent, too awed to speak.

THE altar was a golden cup fully six feet in diameter, with sinuous depressions for the flooding of the blood to the cups of the worshippers. Solid, carven legs of silver held the cup aloft, fully eight feet from the floor, and a broad stairway of golden metal led from the floor to the priest's seat of execution. Great blinding gems circled the edge of the altar, and made a tracery of design down each columnar leg.

Over the altar hung a great gold sun, with golden rays streaming mettallycally to either side.

Carven balconies ranged about three sides of the great room, three tiers of them, and hanging from their edges, were great sweeps of gold and silver cloth. The room was empty of seats.

Derry Stone, darting forward to where the great sun-diamond hung on a golden chain before the altar, cupped it in his hands. His heart was a pounding thing beyond his control; for the diamond was fully eight inches in diameter, it was so large as to seem unreal, despite the solidity of its coolness against the warmth of his hands.

Buuna, springing forward, knocked the gem from the white man's hand. The gyrating stone sent shafts of brilliance about the room, as it swung from the golden links.

"*Nupah, Bwana!*" he cried. "Those who look on the eye of Sul are forever cursed and without reason."

Derry Stone turned with a half-snarl, his hands reaching out to hurl the pygmy away from his side. Then, sanity returning to his mind, he shook with a surge of emotion that was agonizing in its force.

He passed his hand over his eyes, swung away from the great sun-diamond, forcing himself to walk steadily toward the entrance of the temple. He felt then that strange forces were at work in the temple—forces that would drive all the saneness from a man's mind as though it never had been.

He turned slowly, nerves crawling, feeling the tension mounting in his rangy body. His knuckles were white on the rifle, and he fired without consciously aiming.

A man cried out in a choking, bubbling grunt of sound, and crimson flooded throat-

high in a spurting stream through the crack of an opening door.

The attack came in a whispering wave of blunted arrows. Dnai instantly dropped in a senseless heap. The arrows sang and ripped the air, whistling in through the windows and suddenly-opened doors. Buuna gasped, went to his knees, a bloody streak skidding into life on his chest. Two arrows caught Derry Stone simultaneously, blasted quick agony through his left arm, and knocked the rifle from his grasp.

He whirled half around from the stunning force of the blows, catching instinctively at his belt gun. He triggered four shots as fast as he could squeeze his forefinger. Someone screamed.

A black staggered in the front door, pawing blindly at the tiny thorn splinter in his throat. He said nothing; stood swaying for a moment, then collapsed.

"Buuna—run!" Derry Stone ordered savagely.

"I wait for you," Buuna called simply.

Derry Stone took two steps toward the door, then returned and caught up the rifle, slinging it by its strap over his left shoulder. Pain raced with quicksilver-like speed through his chest from the arrow blows.

He spun away from the front door, seeking a place from which he could fight, and darted into a side room, followed by Buuna. He whipped about, dodged the flight of a whispering arrow, blasted the remaining shots from his gun. A man screamed, then there was silence. Another voice shouted in loud gutturals from outside. Feet sounded on the floor and steps of the temple.

Buuna bent forward, puffed through the blowgun. A man choked suddenly, stepped into view, his tongue plucking futilely at the dart in the roof of his mouth. He collapsed, his hands flailing the floor for agonized seconds.

Derry Stone loaded his gun feverishly, waiting for the second wave of attackers. He was afraid, more afraid than he had ever been in his life—for he was afraid of acting as a coward would. But within him, growing where he thought it had forever died, was the courage and high spirit that had been his for so long.

And as the seconds passed, as he real-

ized that the shadow of fear was lifting from his eyes, laughter came into his eyes, and his lips twisted in a reckless grin.

"It's good to be alive, Buuna," he said simply.

Buuna scratched himself impatiently, grinned into the white man's eyes.

"Your head is no longer sick, *Bwana*," he said. "I am glad."

Derry Stone nodded. He paused irresolutely, then walked forward. His hand was hot on his rifle, and he felt the tightening of his chest; but he did not hesitate.

DERRY STONE shoved open the door and walked boldly forward. He gave only a passing glance at the altar and its gigantic sun-diamond, but so mesmerizing was the stone, he had difficulty in looking away.

Buuna whimpered deep in his throat from superstitious fear, but faltered not, staying at the white man's side.

Light streamed through the window-slits, coloring all of the polished gold and sparkling gems with a thousand prismatic colors. But Derry Stone was not interested in the wealth strewn so carelessly about, as he saw the woman who faced him from beside the altar.

The woman, in the gutturals of a bush dialect, said:

"What seek you, Stranger, that you should desecrate the Holy of Sul?"

Buuna darted before the white man, his blowgun raised. Derry Stone halted the movement with a light touch of his hand.

"My friends are prisoners here," he said quietly. "Your prisoners?" he asked.

"Mine!" Cleotus stated calmly.

Derry Stone shook his head slightly; never had he seen so lovely a woman. And to find her in the midst of the Belgian Congo made her all the more unbelievable.

"Who are you?" he asked in English.

The Priestess of Sul, failing to understand, shook her head. "I do not speak that language," she said in the bush dialect she had used before.

"Who are you?" Derry Stone repeated in *Watussi*.

The priestess smoothed a fold of golden cloth at her waist, touched the pendant diamond on a chain at her throat.

"I am Cleotus: High-Priestess of Sul; the Chosen of Sul; the Keeper of S'eba."

"Get ready to run, Buuna," Derry Stone said in English. "Men are circling us again."

"*Eho, Bwana!*" Muscles tightened in the pygmy's back.

Derry Stone spoke to the priestess.

"Release my friends," he ordered.

"Sul's belly is hungry," Cleotus said, never changing expression.

"Sacrifices?" Derry Stone asked incredulously. "You, a white woman, sacrificing other whites."

"I am the Chosen."

"You're a—" Derry Stone switched to English. "Run, Buuna," he roared.

Buuna darted forward, racing toward the door. A black who tried to stop him at the entrance, went backward with a howl of agony. Derry Stone laughed grimly, as he took a driving step forward.

It was then a knob-arrow caught him squarely in the temple.

He went down slowly, feeling the recoil of the gun in his hand, watching the expression in the eyes of the priestess as she stood beside the altar. He saw the glints of fire from the great sun-diamond. Then, all consciousness blotted from his mind, he was falling into a tunnel of blackness that had no ending. The last thing he remembered was the tinkling peal of laughter from the woman who watched from beside the golden altar.

THE laughter was still there when he awoke. He came to slowly, blind stabs of pain racing through his brain, as he struggled upright to a sitting position. He gazed blearily about, saw that he was in a large room lighted by swinging lanterns, and that four other people were staring at him from where they were chained to the walls.

"Where am I?" he asked stupidly.

Helen Vardon laughed loudly, shrilly, with thinly-restrained hysteria.

"Helen!" The white-haired man snapped from where he sat at the girl's side. Then he glanced back at the trader, and explained.

"You are a prisoner beneath the city of Ophir, as all of us are."

Derry Stone glanced at Dnai, who sat speechless, twenty feet away. He grinned, his heart twisting within him when he saw the half-smile on the black's mouth.

"Can't you say 'hello,' Dnai?" he said.

"Massela cut out his tongue last night," the young man in the leather jacket said briefly.

"No!" Hate and sympathy intermingled in a burning blend in Derry Stone's mind. "Who is this Massela?"

A sandal scuffed in the doorway, and Derry Stone almost gagged when he saw the pasty, fish-belly white of the man's skin.

"Who names Massela?" the newcomer asked in *Watussi*. "I am he; I am the greatest fighter in the world."

As Derry Stone struggled to his feet and faced Massela, he became conscious of the chain that coupled his right leg with the ring in the wall.

"You fight bound men with a tongue-knife?" he snapped viciously. "Loose me, and . . ."

A thin, shaven-crowned man dressed in priestly robes shoved impatiently past Massela, slashed with the whip in his hand and drove Derry Stone back against the wall. He smiled evilly as he struck, laughing when he saw the courage in the white man's eyes.

"You shall be loosed," he said slowly.

He slashed again with the whip; and reluctant admiration filled his eyes, as the white man straightened slowly and stood against the vicious blow.

Derry Stone said nothing, felt only the burning pain of the whip-lashes on his face and throat.

THE priest turned contemptuously away, drew Massela with him, and both disappeared as quietly as they had come. Derry Stone leaned dazedly against the wall, fingering the welts that were rising so swiftly upon his cheeks. He turned hot eyes toward the other prisoners, then bent his knees until he was squatting on his heels.

"You must be Frank Vardon," he said to the older man, "and the girl is your daughter?"

The older man nodded. "This is Tod Manning, my pilot," he said, with a jerk of his head toward the younger man in the leather jacket.

Manning grinned thinly. "How's the chance of getting out of here?"

Derry Stone still looked at Frank Var-

don. "What happened that you should be captured?" he asked quietly.

Tod Manning explained. "We were caught in a storm, and the instruments went haywire. The storm grew so bad, I decided to land when we saw a break in the valley's mist. We were captured during the night by Lassius, the High-Priest, and his men."

"Lassius? Was that the boy with the whip?"

"The same," Frank Vardon said.

"I think," he continued, in a tone that was brittle, "we are to be sacrifices to a god called Sul."

Derry Stone nodded, fumbled until he found the crumpled remnant of a cigarette in his pocket, lit it with a stray match, and drew slowly on the fragrant smoke. His keen eyes ranged over the prison room, his mind busy.

"You say we are under the city?" he asked finally.

Frank Vardon nodded. "Yes, we are in the old mine shafts; these mine workings are used as living quarters by the Ophirians." His eyes lit up. "This is *actually, actually* queen of Sheba's mine. These people are the descendants of the mine workers—their white blood evidently coming from the explorers of centuries ago, Venetians, probably."

"Are there many people down here?" Stone asked.

"Several hundred."

Derry Stone nodded slowly.

"And everybody lives below ground?" he asked.

Tod Manning shifted slightly, the chain rattling harshly. "We saw one of the whites who had dared to venture above ground," he said softly. "Lassius and that monster, Massela, cut him to pieces with their metal whips. He died very unpleasantly."

Helen Vardon sighed deep in her throat, stared at Derry Stone with eyes like frozen ice.

"What are *you* doing here?" she asked.

The trader shrugged. "My name is Stone, Derry Stone," he said. "I made a special *trek* into the jungle, in the hopes of finding and guiding you to safety."

He whirled, startled, as a sandal scuffed at the doorway. Lassius smiled thinly down at him, flicking the heavy length of his

golden whip against his thin white leg.

"Up, dog," Lassius said softly. "You are about to receive a great honor; Cleotus will hold audience with you."

Derry Stone rose slowly, moved his foot so that the chain clinked.

"Unchain me," he said steadily.

"Do your best, Stone," Frank Vardon said, groaned a bit as the priest's whip slashed him across the mouth.

Derry Stone forced himself to relax, as the priest bent and unlocked the chain with a curiously fashioned key.

A knife was suddenly in Lassius' hand, and its keen edge sent a winking sliver of light gliding about the walls.

"One move to escape or attack," Lassius warned, "and I make an offering to Sul outside his temple."

Derry Stone nodded slowly, grinned at the prisoners, then stepped through the doorway, and walked heavily down the dimly lighted tunnel. Lassius paced at his back, his heavy robe rustling, his sandals scuffing lightly on the stone flooring. The whip lashed suddenly across the trader's shoulders.

"Hurry, dog," Lassius said thinly.

V

DERRY STONE walked faster, fighting the rage within him, feeling the rawness of the whip-burn across his shoulders. He turned to the left, out of the dim tunnel, and caught his breath in amazement.

The cavern was huge, its walls vague shadows in the distance. Huge flambeaux of wood flared and smoked from niches in the wall, casting flickering shadows over the men who toiled everywhere. Everything was blue, the blueness of the clay in which diamonds are found. It stained the men who worked, and seemed to fill the very air with a gray-blue color.

Through the center of the clay floor flowed a stream fifteen feet wide and evidently several feet deep. Black slaves crouched on its banks, carefully washing small baskets of the clay, laying aside what appeared to be lusterless bits of rock. Another hundred blacks dug with knives at the clay walls and floor, loosening the clay, heaping it in piles for the washers.

Over all this, whips and great knives evident in their hands, were white men.

But they were not a healthy white; they had the slug-like pallor of something long buried. They looked up as Stone and Lassius entered the cavern, then turned back to their jobs as overseers.

"That way," Lassius said coldly, gesturing toward a side tunnel.

Derry Stone went quietly, skirting the puddled mud of the floor. He entered the tunnel, hesitated at a cross-tunnel, seeing the flickering light that came around a bend fifty yards down its length, and stumbled forward when the whip slashed viciously again.

He made a right turn at the end of the tunnel, pushed through a wooden door, stopped involuntarily, staggered by the wild barbaric splendor and beauty of the single room.

Drapes of golden thread hung in shimmering folds from the walls, their edges touching rugs made of countless thousands of skins of the *anasi* birds whose shimmering plumage could not be duplicated. At the far end of the room hung a plaque fully fifteen feet in diameter, obviously of gold, but with its entire face crystallized with polished diamonds, until it glowed with a million lights of its own conceiving. Golden rays lanced from its edge, heightening the illusion of a sun captured and hung to the wall.

Couches were strewn about the room, each covered with priceless draperies of soft skins and softer plumage. Incense smoked lazily from a brazier at one side, filling the air with a mysterious sense of unreality. Tiny lamps flickered about the room, giving a hazy light that was somehow pleasing to the senses.

Then, as some of the first thrill subsided, Derry Stone saw Cleotus.

She lay on a low couch, half of a *vastoy* pear in her right hand, her left toying with the ruff of a small *colubus* monkey. A black slave fanned her gently with a great sweep of ostrich plumes.

She was dressed as Derry Stone had seen her before, the golden skirt clinging to the slender curve of her hips, the breast-plates cupping her breasts, with the great sun-diamond lying in their swell. Her hair was the color of strained honey, and her eyes were a startling blue against the clearness of her skin. Strangely, she was not the white of her people, but instead, had

the high coloring and ruddy lips of a girl who spent many hours in the open.

She nodded imperiously; gestured the High-Priest away.

"Go, Lassius," she said. "I will talk to this one alone."

"But—" Lassius began sullenly, defiantly.

"I said, *go!*!" There was no brooking the command in her voice.

LASSIUS turned angrily, stormed out, slamming the portal behind him. Cleotus smiled a trifle grimly, then gestured impatiently for the white man to approach her side.

Derry Stone walked slowly forward, stood straight and tall beside the couch, meeting levelly the woman's gaze as it travelled over him.

"Where do you come from, Stranger?" Cleotus asked. "And why do you dress and talk so strangely?"

Derry Stone grinned, despite himself. "I come from a land called the United States," he said slowly, "and I dress this way because all my countrymen do so."

Cleotus was silent for a second, her white teeth nibbling the pear in her hand. Some of the coldness was gone from her eyes, and they were frankly curious.

"You are a strange male," she said finally. "You are not afraid of me; neither are the other white prisoners. Why is that; do you not know who I am?"

"I never heard of you, before I was captured by your men," Derry Stone answered.

"Never heard of S'eba, nor of myself?" Surprise shadowed the priestess' voice. "But surely S'eba's descendants—"

Derry Stone laughed aloud. "Cleotus," he said, you're a legend, a fairy tale to tell to the children."

"Fairy tale?" Cleotus asked.

"Skip it!"

"Skip it?"

Derry Stone shrugged. "Look, what are you going to do with myself and my friends? We have done you no harm; surely you don't expect to keep us captive forever?"

Cleotus looked away, then stretched lazily. "No," she admitted, "I do not expect to keep you captives *forever*."

Derry Stone nodded. "I know," he said, "the threat implied, but you will be foolish to carry it through."

Pale juice squirted from the crushed fruit in the priestess' straining hand; she came half-erect, then, stared intently into the trader's eyes.

"You can earn your freedom, white man," she said finally.

"How?" Derry Stone asked warily, glancing at the black slave.

Cleotus gestured impatiently. "The slave is deaf and dumb," she said arrogantly. "He can say nothing." She watched the trader for a long moment, then touched the edge of the couch. "Sit down, so that we may talk without being overheard."

Derry Stone sank to the couch edge, conscious of the dim perfume of the girl, feeling the blood tiding to his temples at her nearness.

"What will you do?" Cleotus insisted.

Derry Stone shrugged. "Almost anything," he admitted.

"I want you to slay Lassius and Maserla for me."

"Slay—" Derry Stone could not keep the amazement from his tone. "But why?"

"Because if they are not killed, I die. Already, they plot my death."

Cleotus laughed, but her eyes were strangely cold and tired. "I have little to say, for I am the last of the royal line. Lassius is a greedy man who would usurp my rule; he permits me to rule only because it pleases him to do so."

Derry Stone considered briefly, weighing the various points in his mind.

"Is there no other way?" he asked.

"None."

"Perhaps I can find another way."

Cleotus laughed, and the sound was clear and tinkling like the brightest of bells. "You are a strange man," she said at last. "You fight like a fiend to save your friends, but hesitate at slaying two men in order to save the lives of you and your friends."

Cleotus touched Stone's bare arm, and drew him close to her. "I can promise other things," she said. "Your people value these stones I wear and the metal used in building; well, aid me, and I will not only free you, but will give you all that you can carry with you, so that you may be Pharaohs in your own land."

"There are no Pharaohs any more,"

Derry Stone said absently, straightened slightly, when he saw a green metal chest beneath a carelessly-flung cloth of gold. "What is that?" he asked sharply.

Cleotus glanced impatiently aside. "I know not," she said. "The slaves brought them when your friends were captured."

DERRY STONE came lithely to his feet, took four pacing steps, and whipped the cloth aside. He nodded; opened the lid. The chest was a perfectly-equipped medicine chest for jungle work. He read: Ammonia, Iodine, Gauze, Alcohol, Potassium Permanganate, Sulphur, Silver Nitrate, and dozens of other medicants and medical aids.

He searched the chest thoroughly, hoping he would find a hidden gun, but found nothing. Another chest revealed women's clothing, while a third held canned food, and the fourth the all-important official papers and reports of Frank Vardon.

Derry Stone tossed the cloth back over the boxes, dejectedly retraced his steps to the couch and sank tiredly to its softness. He smiled faintly.

"You win, Cleotus," he said finally. "I'll kiss my self-respect goodbye, and buy my friends' escape by removing your competition."

"Kiss—what is that?" Cleotus asked puzzledly.

Derry Stone grinned. "This," he said, and caught her slender body in his arms.

She was a struggling pliant creature in the circle of his arms. She fought with the fright of a jungle creature, her lips hard and firm against his, her breathing hot and disturbed.

Then her lips were warm and soft, and she clung to him, half-affrightedly, half-wonderingly.

Derry Stone released her, straightened, shaken by her warm suppleness, feeling his heart straining in his chest. He saw the softness of her eyes just before they went cold and hard. The next instant, she lashed out with the golden whip at her side.

Derry Stone twisted it away in mid-air, tossed it to one side. He laughed at her fury, came lithely to his feet.

"That was a kiss," he said evenly.

"Very pretty," a voice said from behind him, its mocking tones deadly and hissing. "And a very nice plot you have

decided upon between the two of you." A whip hissed, and cracked across Derry Stone's shoulders, bringing an involuntary gasp of agony.

Derry Stone whirled from the flickering whip, red streamers of pain and anger racing to his brain. Then he was half-crouched, his legs tensed for a plunging drive, his great hands curled for a stabbing thrust.

"Down—on your knees!" Lassius cried, and swung his whip in a whistling arc.

But in the middle of the blow, he cried out in terror. For Derry Stone had darted in, caught the whip-tip, jerked with all his weight. The wrist-thong held, and the High-Priest catapulted into the trader's bludgeoning fist.

Lassius went down in a twisting fall, his eyes blank and staring. Derry Stone whirled, grinned flashingly at the Sun-Priestess.

"I'll be back," he promised, and was gone in a darting run.

He dodged into the corridor, sped straight down its length, nerves tightening as he heard Lassius' strangled cry ring out behind him.

"Guards—Ho, the guards!" Lassius screamed in Bantu; and two gigantic blacks stepped into the mouth of the tunnel, spears glinting dully in their muscled hands.

Derry Stone made a hand-turn at the corridor's opening on his right, whipped about, brought up with bruising force against the opposite wall. He had no idea where the corridor ended—but light was ahead, and he raced towards its source.

AIR was heavy in his lungs, and he could feel the turgid pounding of hot blood at his temples. The stench of sulphur and smoke was heavier in the tunnel and he gagged in a sudden spasm. Behind him, he heard the excited bellowings of the enraged Lassius.

He spun about another corner, brought up short against a metal door. He clawed at the latch and felt a surge of relief, as the fastening fell with a clang of metal. Reaching out with desperate hands, he swung his weight on the loop-handle, and jerked the portal wide.

He grinned unconsciously, whirled through the doorway, blinded by quick perspiration, then jerked the door closed

again. He leaned pantingly against the portal, gasping for air, wincing at the metallic clang from the other side. Then, he turned, and took a running step forward.

He cried aloud in surprise, tried to turn the step into a lurch to one side, managed to regain his balance. Then he shrank back against the door, fighting hideous panic, his eyes wide and staring.

For the first time in his life, Derry Stone knew *real* panic and defeat. He was in a huge cavern, the ceiling of which surged sharply upward to a stalactited chimney that ended in darkness. The walls stretched for hundreds of feet to either side, their scaly surfaces brightly lighted.

Before him stretched an immense river that dropped with a soft splashing down a monstrous hole to his left.

But the river was not of water—it was of glowing, flowing molten stone. It was lava that bubbled and smoked and flamed with a deadly placidity that was more menacing and terrifying than anything Derry Stone had seen before in his life.

Derry Stone cursed frantically, futilely; realizing that he was trapped on a thirty foot strip of ledge along one wall of the great room.

A fumerole of flame erupted with a tarry slowness from the river twenty feet away, the fire licking up in a splash of fiery energy, then winking out as the lava flowed back in upon itself. Bubbles edged slowly into being, broke with a subdued *plop*, then swelled again with a steady insistence. The liquid rock flowed like cold molasses, but the heat coming from its glowing sinuosity was a physical force that drove Derry Stone back against the door.

And then a whip cracked warningly to one side—and Lassius stepped onto the ledge, his thin lips curled in a vicious smile.

“Fight, and you die,” he said, his voice brittle.

Derry Stone sobbed deep in his throat, considered briefly his chances of darting past the High-Priest. And then his shoulders slumped, he sighed deeply; for behind the High-Priest had stepped two of Lassius’ black guards.

“You win,” he said briefly. He stood, still and cold, while the whip-blows cut his back to bloody ribbons.

VI

THE water made tiny splashing sounds when the mud was dropped into its swift flow. The slaves worked silently, digging with their knives at the endless walls of blue clay, while others washed the clay, handful by handful, in the swirling water.

Derry Stone worked side by side with Helen Vardon and her father. Tod Manning and Dnai dug with their blunted knives at the clay overhead. For hours, Derry and his companions had stood in the water, softening the clay by moistening it, then probing into its sliminess with raw fingertips. Derry Stone found a small diamond, washed it with a twitch of his hand, then dropped it into the box on the bank. He clawed another handful of clay; bent again.

“You say the plane’s all right?” he whispered softly.

“As far as I know,” Vardon answered.

Derry Stone shook his head. “Be ready to make a break at our first opportunity.”

He stopped, watching the flickering of light through a crack in the side wall. On the other side of that thin partition of stone and dirt lay the place where gleaming lava flowed turgidly from one vent, to disappear into another within a few hundred feet.

A guard whistled from across the room, and whips cracked nastily against the backs of the cowed, lethargic slaves. Derry Stone aided Helen from the stream, then scrambled to dry ground, and bent to lend aid to Frank Vardon.

Without a word being spoken, the four were marched back to their stone cell with its dirt floor, where they were chained again as they had been the night before.

Massela’s laugh rang dully in the room, and the *spang* of his sword on the door-casing echoed the laugh. Manning watched the executioner with a steady glance. Dnai watched with open hatred. Frank Vardon’s hands opened and closed with a ruthless rhythm.

“I’ll break you, white man,” Massela said simply, brutally, as he lashed with the whip thonged to his right wrist.

Derry Stone cried aloud, as the golden scourge flayed open again the wounds left by his flogging at the hands of Lassius.

He stumbled erect, lashed out blindly with both hands, smashed his right fist directly into Massela's laughing mouth.

Massela whirled to one side from the blow, blood spurting from his broken lips; and a snarl of pure rage strained in his throat. He lifted the heavy sword to swing at the defenseless man—and Dnai swept his feet from under him.

He went down, screaming for help, fighting with a tigerish ferocity to tear the black's straining hands from his throat. He twisted, surged to his knees, smashed with both hands at Dnai's face, bending backward from the black's weight.

"Dnai!" Derry Stone snapped. "Don't kill him!"

But Dnai was past reasoning; and his corded hands tightened with an incredible slowness of purpose about Massela's throat. The other's movements were slower now; his face purpling with congesting blood.

He turned on his side, gathered his legs beneath his belly, shoved with the last bit of his strength. His body shot up, drawing Dnai after him, jerking free only because the black's chain tripped the other. He rolled toward the door, shoving the sword to one side, then came clumsily to his feet. He swayed weakly, sanity gathering in his eyes again, vicious hatred twisting his lips. He fingered his throat, then kicked the sword aside with a twitch of his foot. Gathering the butt of his metal whip in his fist, he walked slowly forward, deadly purpose in his eyes.

FIVE minutes later, he swung about, glaring madly at the silent condemning eyes of the helpless prisoners. He drew the whip-tip through his left hand, and the blood made tiny *splattering* noises when it dropped from his fingers to the floor.

"You'll die for that," Derry Stone said softly, stretched against his chain, his hands uncannily gentle, as he strained to ease the unconscious black into a more comfortable position.

Massela bent, retrieved his sword, backed from the room. He said nothing more, seeming utterly drained of energy by his orgy of sadism. Then there were only the sounds of his footsteps fading down the hall.

Helen tore strips from her skirt, dipped

them in the water and passed them to Manning who cleansed the ruptured flesh with gentle hands. Within seconds, the task was finished as best as it could be, and Dnai lay on his stomach, his eyes half-mad with the agony that burned deep in his body.

Derry Stone leaned back against the wall and clasped his hands about his knees, trying to stop their enraged shaking. He said nothing, but a throat muscle twitched again and again in his neck. He looked up as Dnai whispered suddenly, his words thick and unnatural because of his lack of tongue.

"Revenge, *Bwana*," he said hoarsely. "If not me, then you?"

"*Bakashi*, Dnai," Derry Stone answered grimly. "It shall be done."

And then footsteps were heard again in the corridor; but now several men were walking steadily. The sounds halted at the doorway; then Massela and Lassius entered the prison cell. Massela's eyes flamed with a dull anger, and his mouth was twisted where Stone's blow had smashed the flesh. Lassius was almost impersonal as he glanced around. He snapped his fingers, and stepped aside, as two of the black guards came through the doorway.

"Take the black," he snapped in Bantu.

Derry Stone lurched to his feet, his hands widespread to stop the guards from passing him. Behind him, he heard the rasping sounds of Manning and Vardon coming to their feet.

"Where are you taking him?" he demanded. "Surely that butcher of yours has had enough pleasure for today?"

Lassius grinned with his white lips, but there was only a calculating brutality in his eyes.

"Massela was struck," he said viciously. "There is a cure for those would flout my authority." He gestured again at the blacks, who stooped and lifted the almost-helpless Dnai to his feet. Then he turned back to the trader. "There is much you have to learn, white man," he said, "about my power. Your time here is not long, but further trouble will bring you only what the black is about to receive." He nodded at Massela. "Unlock the white man's chain," he finished.

Massela bent, took a queerly-shaped key

from his belt, unlocked the chain from about Derry Stone's leg. Then he did the same for Dnai. Rising, he tucked the key back into his belt, and fingered the knife that rested so handily at his hip.

He jerked his head toward the door.

"Out," he said brittlely.

The guards went first, half-carrying Dnai between them. Derry Stone followed, with Lassius and Massela at his side.

"This way," Lassius said, gesturing toward a side passage.

THEY entered the side corridor, walking more swiftly now, for Dnai had regained part of his strength. One guard lifted a guttering flambeau from a wall socket, and held it aloft to light the way. Sandals made rasping sounds on the stone floor, and the stifled breathing of the hurrying men echoed in rustling whispers from the sweating walls.

The air seemed clearer here, as though a current from outside was bringing fresh atmosphere to thin the choking fumes that continually seared the lungs of the underground dwellers.

Then the light flickered on the panel of a metal door, and one of the guards swung the portal wide, holding the door open for the others.

They passed through; then waited while the torch-bearer moved silently about, lighting other wall-flambeaux with the one in his hand.

Derry Stone glanced about curiously, not knowing what to expect, but looking for instruments of torture to be used on Dnai, and perhaps, on himself.

He felt a vague, anti-climactic bewilderment, when he saw that the cavern room was entirely bare of man-made objects. It was a huge room; great stalagmites and stalactites fusing together from the ceiling to the floor. Great sweeping friezes of stone curtains swept in graceful folds of solidified beauty, sparkling as though powdered with diamond dust. In the exact center of the cavern was a quiet lake, its surface undisturbed, the light glittering in bright shards from its surface, then fading into a blackness of depth that suggested the sterility of outer space.

The guards pushed Dnai to the edge of the lake, then held him motionless.

Lassius walked forward, fingering the knife in his hands. He smiled with his lips, as he watched the hate and fear flicker in the black's face.

"You are a swimmer?" Lassius asked Dnai.

Dnai nodded slowly, cautiously. "I can swim," he answered.

Lassius chuckling deep in his throat, pointed to a stone that reared a few feet above the water's level, in the exact center of the pool. "The game is for you to ride that stone for the length of time it takes a torch to burn itself out. If at the end of that period, you can swim back to the bank, I, in Sul's name, promise complete freedom."

Massela laughed, the sound like the wailing cry of a prowling *dango*; Lassius made a slight gesture with his right hand—and the two guards twisted Dnai about, then shoved him over the five-foot embankment.

Dnai twisted in midair, dived in cleanly, stroked instinctively to the surface. He held himself motionless in the water for a moment, then swam easily toward the stone. Lassius deliberately lit a fresh torch, set it in a crack, and watched as it flamed into brightness.

"Till the flame dies, black man," he cried, his voice echoing dully in the cavern. "Freedom, if you swim back then."

Derry Stone watched, fascinated despite his utter bewilderment, as the black swam directly to the stone and pulled himself to its small rounded top. Dnai squatted there, his feet dangling in the water, puzzlement on his face. Water ripples danced in merging circles.

"Down," Lassius snapped at one of the guards.

The guard immediately slipped to the cavern floor, his head and hands dangling over the bank. He made slapping sounds in the water with his cupped palms.

IT was a vague shadow, at first, against the darkness of the lake's depths. It surged a bit, then settled for a brief second. The water roiled slightly, settled back, then bellied again against the banks, as the shadow stirred. The light of the dozen flambeaux, sank softly for feet into the lake, making a monstrous thing out of the moving shadow. An air bubble rose, broke with a tight *plop* of released gas.

Dnai moaned deep in his throat, drew his feet from the water. Massela laughed obscenely, while Lassius chuckled lightly. The guards were silent, the prone one coming softly to his feet again.

"Till the torch dies out," Lassius said softly.

And then the shadow drifted out of the depths of the lake, grew and swelled until it seemed that it could grow no more. It swam upward, moving with a deadly slowness, without hesitancy. Water surged in tiny waves against the lake banks, broke with faint splashings. Then the swimming shadow entered the first glimmerings of light.

Derry Stone froze, felt his heart still for one interminable minute, and a deathly sickness cramped his stomach. He watched with distended eyes, unable to move, feeling the sweat of cold horror congealing on his body.

It was no shadow now. It was the swimming body of a monster crocodile, its mouth agape, the teeth shining white in the flambeau light, its cold eyes studying, unwinkingly, the motionless Dnai.

"*Bwana!*" Dnai's single word was like a prayer.

Now the crocodile floated motionless on the lake's surface, its knobby eyes like glass marbles without life, its tail barely twitching. Its mouth split open, and its bull-like roar brought mad echoes tumbling from the cavern walls, echoes that were echoed by the splitting falling noise of shattered stalactites that vibration had loosened. It went quiet again, and moved purposefully toward the stone in the center of the lake.

Derry Stone watched in stark fascination, unable to move, knowing that Dnai would not last for seconds against that monster, for the reptile was the greatest he had ever seen, fully thirty-five feet in length from gaping snout to weaving tail.

"Till the torch dies," Massela cried sadistically. "Till the torch dies!"

And the crocodile smashed forward.

Water piled high before its driving snout, piled and divided, and spun in foamy clouds in its wake. Its mouth was agape, a full five feet, the teeth like notched scimitars. It sped forward, drove clear to the top of the stone, then slid to one side.

Dnai raced through the water into which

he had dived at the crocodile's charge. He raced with the choppy stroke of the clan that was his, wasting no movements, cutting through the water with a deceptive speed. The crocodile whirled, too, spun in its length, and flashed toward the fleeing black.

Dnai reached the far bank, clawed at the smooth wall that rose above his head. His left hand found purchase. There was the scrape of leather on rock, and Massela raced along the edge of the bank. He stood over the frantic black, laughing at the clawing motions, fingering the knife in his belt.

"A hand," he said, "Can you use a hand?" And bent to his knees, his right hand extended.

Dnai gasped in relief, seemed to lift himself by sheer will-power toward the outstretched hand. His fingers curled into a grasp that was intended to end about Massela's wrist. The slug-white face of the Ophirian executioner went serious for the moment.

"Attack *me*, will you, dog!" he snarled.

He drove the keen blade of his belt-knife squarely through Dnai's straining wrist.

DNAI screamed, went backward in a splash of water, flailed instinctively, madly, to escape the crocodile that drove in at that exact minute. His leg shoved against the split mouth of the monster, the great teeth scything flesh from his calf. Then he spurted away in a burst of panicky speed, the knife blade glittering weirdly where it gleamed, skewered through his wrist. The crocodile spun in pursuit, maddened by the odor of fresh blood in the crimsoned water.

Lassius laughed at the vicious byplay of Massela as he slashed with his golden whip to drive Derry Stone back. The trader half-crouched, his mouth twisted in a soundless snarl, futile rage pounding blackly at his temples. And Massela, his face split by a wide satisfied grin of sadistic enjoyment, raced back around the pool, stopping at the side of the High-Priest.

It was now that Dnai reached the limit of his endurance. He hid behind the stone in the pool, avoiding the monster's rush by inches. He clambered precariously upon the rock, balanced there, and tugged

the knife from his wrist. Crimson spurted in great pulsing beats. He turned slowly, waiting for the final rush of the crocodile.

"*Bakashini!*" he called clearly, and his wrist snapped in the terrible knife-cast of the Masai warrior.

A sliver of silver winked through the air, and darting with incredible speed, ended its flight with an audible *thwack* in Massela's throat.

Massela bent backward, clawing at the golden handle of the knife whose point jutted redly from the back of his neck. He tried to scream, but made only a bubbling grunt. Then his legs buckled, and he went to his knees, his eyes bulging horribly, blood surging between his wrenching fingers. He fell slowly forward, dead before he left the bank, and there was no reflex of muscles when his body struck the water.

Instinctively, Derry Stone had put out a restraining hand. Cloth ripped, and then the executioner was gone, water spraying high. But in the trader's hand, hidden in the curve of his fingers, was tightly gripped the queerly curved key that unlocked the prisoners' chains.

Lassius stood as one stunned by the rapidity of events. He bent over the edge of the pool, watching Massela's body slowly sinking into the murky depths. When he straightened, his thin face was utterly savage.

Derry Stone turned to run, but stopped when he saw the guards' spears brought back for stabbing casts. He spun about, took three driving steps forward—and dived headlong into the lake. A spear whispered over his shoulder, cut the water with a ripping sound. A second spear creased his side and brought a knife-like edge of pain to his back. Then he was diving deeper and deeper, going down with every bit of strength in his powerful body.

Intuitively, he knew that his only chance for survival lay in entering the den of the crocodile, and hiding there until he could swim back to the surface again. There had to be air in the den, and there had to be a den, for the banks of the lake had given no hint of the dweller's presence in the pool. He knew that he could not survive a fight with the monster deep in its lair, but he had no alternative.

So he stroked harder and harder, going

deeper by the second, feeling the pressure building about his body until his ears rang and the stricture of his chest was a live thing. He could see but faintly, for the light of the flambeaux did not penetrate more than a half-dozen yards.

Just as he felt he could go no further, he saw the blacker outline of the hole that must lead to the crocodile's den. He swam with a dogged, desperate persistence, his arms moving with mechanical precision; and, shaken with knowledge of the hideous danger he was courting, entered the hole in the lake's bank. His senses swimming blackly, he broke the surface, sucked in great draughts of the foul air, savoring each lungful as though it were of the purest.

He felt the rush of water at his back, tried to turn, and something brutally alive, smashed his side, lifted him completely from the water and dropped him in a sodden, unconscious heap on a stony floor. In that last flickering moment of unconsciousness, even as he heard the rasp of the crocodile's body on the rocks, he was sucked into a funnel of blackness that had no ending.

VII

THE drums were beating, sounding with a ragged insistent rhythm that slowly, persistently drove a threnody of madness into Derry Stone's mind. Then waking, he rolled to his side and gazed about. A dull amazement filled his mind—he heard the slight movement at the foot of the couch upon which he lay.

"You have slept long," Cleotus said, and sank to his side upon the couch.

"You—but—" Derry Stone began; then his voice faded, as he looked past the girl at the room again.

The room was obviously the sleeping room of the Priestess, for feminine garments were hung in orderly array on racks along one wall; while on the other side of the room was a dressing table, with a great plate of polished silver for a mirror. On the table were golden jars and bottles of shimmering crystal. Brocaded hangings of cloth-of-gold were on the walls, and soft rugs of *anasi* feathers hugged the floor. Faint perfume was in the air.

Somewhere, a drum pulsed with a bright, high rhythm, overtoned with the rich full

thudding of another drum beaten in an off-rhythm. Derry Stone heard the drumming from far away, and felt the quick chill coursing his spine again, when he remembered his half-forgotten dreams of madness.

He lay back, watched Cleotus from half-closed eyes, tracing the soft curve of her throat where the golden chain rested in a tiny pressure-groove from the weight of the sun-diamond in the swell of her breasts.

"How did I get here?" he asked slowly.

Cleotus smiled, and there was in her face then, a softness and beauty such as he had never seen. She stroked a fold of the couch cover before answering; then gazed squarely into his eyes.

"I rescued you from the lair of Sul's servant," she said. "I could not interfere while the 'game' was played; but when you dived deep and did not come up, I reasoned that you had swum into his den. I ran down the secret passage, used only by the priests, opened the door, and found you unconscious on the ledge. My torch frightened Sul's servant long enough to enable me to drag you to safety. Later, slaves I could trust brought you here, where you have been for a period of four sleeps.

Derry Stone shivered, remembering those last terrifying, numbing minutes in the water. Unconsciously, his hand sought for and touched the slender fingers of Cleotus. He could feel their electric warmth racing with a vibrant aliveness up his arm.

"Why?" he asked. "Why did—"

"I don't know." Cleotus shook her head slightly, and golden sparkles of light twinkled in her hair.

"Please—" Derry Stone said gently.

And Cleotus, High-Priestess of Sul, bent forward, and her mouth was soft and warm and rich against his. Then she withdrew, her hands unconsciously pressing against her breasts, color rising in her throat and face.

"You are a strange man," she said at last. "You fear me not; you deign to laugh at me; and you kiss me with the tenderness of a woman."

Derry Stone grinned. He forced himself into a sitting position.

"Where are my clothes?" he asked. He frowned when her gesture indicated garments heaped on a nearby stool. "You

mean I've got to wear *those*?" he finished distastefully.

Cleotus smiled. "They are the harness and accoutrements of a S'eban warrior; your garments were shredded to bits by the tail-blow of Sul's servant. All that is left are your queer sandals."

Derry Stone laughed aloud. "Well, at least I still have boots."

The girl smiled, then walked slowly across the room.

"Hurry and dress," she said. "There is much to do."

"Right," Derry Stone agreed.

HE laced on his boots with quick nervous flickers of his fingers. Then he fumbled with the harness, fitting it to his shoulders, pulling the chest straps tight, and snapping the buckles about his waist. He eyed the skirt of soft gold cloth in mild disgust; then stepped into it, and closed the belt about his flat belly.

"All right," he said.

He lifted the heavy sword, tested its edge with his thumb and whistled softly when he found how razor-keen it was. Slipping it into the scabbard on his left hip, he picked up the foot-long dagger, fitting it into the slim sheath over his right hip.

He strode to the great disc of polished silver, posed before it, and grinned a bit in quick amusement for there he saw mirrored, the reincarnation of an ancient Ophirian warrior. Bronzed and flat muscled, he wore the strange armor well, and he swelled a bit with pride, when turning about, he saw the approval in Cleotus's eyes.

"Now what?" he asked.

Cleotus shifted nervously, hesitation in her face, her eyes drifting from his gaze. "I don't know," she admitted. "You must try to rescue your friends—but I think the task will be impossible to accomplish, for all of S'eba will be at the ceremonies."

Derry Stone took a step forward, and his hands were brutal when they grasped the Priestess' arms. His face was white and drawn; his eyes suddenly hot and flaming.

"Ceremonies?" he snapped. "What ceremonies?"

Cleotus did not draw away from the bruising hands; she looked Derry Stone squarely in the eyes.

"Your friends die as sacrifices to Sul within a short period. The moon is setting; when the first ray of sunlight touches the center of Sul's image over the altar, then . . ." Her voice trailed into silence.

Derry Stone flung the girl away, towering over her as she sprawled on the soft rug. His face was hard and merciless.

"Who makes the sacrifice?" he said grimly; then nodded slowly, when he saw the confirmation in Cleotus's face.

"If I don't," Cleotus said quietly, "the sacrifices will be made, anyway. And I, too, shall be sacrificed. I am no braver than anybody else; I have no wish to die."

"I understand," Derry Stone said slowly. "I cannot blame you."

He saw the glitter of light upon a twisted bit of metal on a low stand; he lifted it with a steady hand. Cleotus watched, shrank a bit as he whirled to her, then came to her feet as he stretched out a helping hand.

"You have a plan?" she whispered.

"Yes, I . . ." Derry Stone stopped his speech, his eyes narrowing. "Why," he asked briefly, "are you aiding me?"

"I . . . because . . ." Cleotus flushed. "I do not know," she finished proudly.

Derry Stone took her in his arms, stilled the quiver in her shoulders with gentle soothings of his hands. He felt a great pulse throbbing at his throat; and he knew then that his destiny had touched his life with warm, blind fingers, mending a broken thread that had hung loosely for years.

"Will you help me to free my friends?" he asked.

Cleotus nodded. "Yes," she answered simply.

Derry Stone juggled the key in his hand. "Is there a passage through which you can lead me and my friends to safety?"

"Yes, there is the passage used by M'Kindu, when he took a message from the white woman days ago. It leads to the edge of S'eba. None will know, if the escape is made that way."

"How do I find it?" Derry Stone asked. He memorized her short, crisp instructions.

HE felt futility surging within him when he considered the task that he had set for himself, particularly so, when he realized that his only weapon was in the sweeping blade belted to his hip. He

scowled bleakly, unconscious of the girl's watching eyes, and his gaze was taken by the greenish metal of a box protruding beneath a golden cloth. He frowned, turned away; then swung back with a startled laugh of realization. He thrust the key into the hand of the High-Priestess', bent forward, and tore the cloth from the equipment boxes.

"You brought these in here?" he asked. Cleotus nodded. "Yes, I thought . . ."

Derry Stone cut her short. "Do you know where the plane is?" he demanded anxiously.

Cleotus shook her head. "What is a plane?" she countered.

Derry Stone grinned, despite the gravity of the situation. "It is the canoe with wings," he explained gravely. "Is it destroyed?"

"No," Cleotus said with a brief gesture of her hand. "Lassius had it pulled into a market-shed in the great square."

"Fine, then this is what you do. Release my friends, show them the way to safety, and tell the younger man to get ready to fly like a bird. I shall be along within a few minutes." He studied for a silent second, then finished: "Wait with my friends; I shall want to say goodbye."

He hated the deception he was playing, but the plan he had in mind was such a desperate long-shot, and the probable consequences so terrible, he felt he was justified in what he planned to do in kidnapping Cleotus from the barbaric kingdom-city.

Cleotus hesitated for a moment. "All right," she said finally.

"One thing more," Derry Stone said. "Leave the key on the prison floor, for I shall need it again presently."

With a brief nod, the girl was gone, the soft sounds of her sandals fading into silence, as she opened the room door and fled with a muffled sob. Derry Stone paused briefly, fighting the bitterness that welled deep in his heart; then bent again to the cases.

He opened the medical case first, carefully lifted out the large bottles of iodine and ammonia, and stood with them cupped carefully in his hands. He strode to the dressing table, found a small candle, then returned and removed a roll of silk dental floss from the medicine case. He tucked Vardon's valuable papers into his boot-top.

A moment later, he slipped cautiously from the room, to glide silently down the deserted corridor.

He shivered, remembering the mad flight that had been his the first time he strode this corridor. Now, approaching its end at a walk, he found the earth-fault he had missed the first time. Through it, he could see the squirming light that emanated from the glowing lava in the next cavern room. He went on to the metal door, swung it open awkwardly with his filled hands, then stepped through to the narrow ledge.

He cringed from the light and heat, realizing that death had barely missed him before. But he had no time for idle thinking; he turned to his left, down the ledge; went to its furthest end. There, he stopped, depositing his burden on the smooth stone. Searching, he found the tiny cracks that gave onto the room of blue clay where the diamonds were dug and washed.

Using his dagger, he worked a shallow hole in the crumbly rock of the wall's base, scooping it so that it was a shallow basin, into which he set the bottles of iodine and ammonia, side by side. Then he drove the dagger into the wall a few feet from the level of the ledge, working it in the rock of the wall so that it was braced firmly but loosely. Taking the dental floss, he tore two lengths of it. He tied a heavy stone to one end of a length, dangled the stone over the ledge, tying the other end to a projecting bit of rock at the base of the wall. The second bit of floss, he tied to the golden hilt of the dagger and to the rock, so they were connected, but the string was not taut.

Then he bent, held the candle so that the heat of the molten lava melted its base, and set it squarely on the ledge. Notching it halfway down the length, with a thin scrap of rock, he fitted the tight string into the slit. He dangled a length of dental floss into the smoking lava, watched it burst into flame, then lit the candle wick. Certain that a vagrant current of air would not blow out the candle-flame, he came stiffly to his feet, retrieved a flat, heavy piece of lava from the ledge, and balanced it carefully on the dagger. Then, and only then, did he sigh softly and step back.

Satisfied, he turned, ran lightly toward the door, hesitated—then closed the door

behind him, and sped down the empty corridor.

HE could feel the steady pounding of his heart in his chest, and his breath was hot and raw in his throat. He yanked his sword from its scabbard, and balanced it in his hands.

A sleepy Ophirian guard turned lazily, opened his mouth to scream a challenge, and went down from the slashing blow of the great sword, crimson spouting in a pumping solid stream from the stump of his neck.

Derry Stone didn't pause, even though his stomach cramped in quick nausea. He skirted the body that bounced in hideous twitching reflexes, and ran toward the opposite entrance. Without a backward glance, pausing only long enough to snatch a flaming torch from its wall socket, he darted into the tunnel.

He was racing against time now, running on desperate feet to accomplish his self-appointed task. His feet made slashing echoes.

Then he was in the main corridor, and sound could be heard from his left. He raced down the tunnel to his right, stopped before the door of the cell in which he had been imprisoned, feeling sudden relief touch his heart when he saw that it was empty of prisoners, and that the key lay in plain view. He bent to retrieve it, and whirled when he heard the light footstep at his side. He flirted his sword aside from its quick upthrust; sheathed it, when he recognized Cleotus.

"Only the younger man was here," she whispered fiercely. "I set him free; but the others have already been taken to the temple."

Derry Stone stared blankly for a moment, seeing the crumbling of his plans. Then his jaw squared, and the momentary panic faded from his eyes. He rose to his feet, and drew the slender body of the girl close to him with his free arm.

"Go to the temple," he said quietly. "Try to delay the ceremonies as long as possible."

"There is no hope for your friends," Cleotus said fearfully. "Sul must have his blood-sacrifice beneath the knife—for so it is written in the Holy Book of Sul. As long as S'eba survives, a sacrifice must be

made every thirty days, and this is the day of the Sun-ceremony."

"Go," Derry Stone said evenly. "I shall see that no sacrifice is made."

Cleotus turned; she stood for one moment in the light of the torch Stone had balanced against the wall. She was so truly glorious at that moment—as golden as the God she worshipped—that Derry Stone's heart skipped a beat, and the longing within him was a tangible thing.

"Hurry," he said, as he felt the quick tearing emotion in his heart. An instant later, she was gone.

He snatched up the torch, stepped into the corridor, and ran toward the sounds he had heard a few moments before. Stopping before a heavy door, he kicked the latch open.

There were faces, scores of them. Some gaped blankly his way; others did not lift; some stared with open angry belligerence; others were wooden and without expression. Chains rattled lightly as their wearers shifted beneath the torchlight, then stilled again, as though they, too, were awed by the presence of the warrior in his golden armor and skirt.

"You," Derry Stone snapped at a face that glared openly, "on your feet!"

THE black rose, with a smooth rippling of muscles, stared wordlessly at the trader. He didn't flinch from the driving gaze of the white man, and his hands flexed a bit as though they waited only the opportunity to strike.

"Listen carefully," Derry Stone said, "for I haven't time to repeat the directions. Follow my orders; release the others here, and make your escape. Hurry, for there is no time to waste."

"I do not understand . . ." the black began. He gaped in sudden silence as Derry Stone thrust the twisted key into his hand.

He listened intently as the white man gave directions in a crisp, emotionless voice, nodding now and then to indicate that he understood; then turned and unlocked the chain about his leg. He went from man to man, quieting the sudden uproar of voices, unlocking chain after chain. Derry Stone watched for a second, then whirled back to the corridor.

He ran lightly, spun into a cross-corridor, and cursed softly when his torch per-

ceptibly dimmed. And in that fleeting second, a black figure hurled itself from a wall-niche where it had crouched unseen, and caught the white man about his knees.

Derry Stone gasped in surprise, tried to hold his balance and swing his heavy sword at the same time. He went crashing to his side, felt his breath blast out his open mouth, as he tried to whirl into a defensive position. Then his arms were swept behind him, locked immovably, and from the corner of his eye he looked squarely into the most savage, vengeful eyes he had ever seen in his life. The torch guttered in a sudden spasm of life, sending shards of darting brightness about the tunnel.

Then cold horror choked all emotion in Derry Stone's heart. For swinging in a flat vicious arc, driving with every bit of strength in a wiry arm, a gleaming knife flashed in the deadly throat-thrust of a knife-fighter's death-blow toward his neck.

He managed one choked scream, twisted desperately against the rigid muscles of his attacker, felt the blow smashing into the soft tissues of his throat. Blood was hot on his lips for a second; then the torch seemed to gutter completely out, and he knew no more.

VIII

THE chant was a haunting brooding rhythm that raced with a constant echo through the great temple. Flambeaux flamed smokily about the walls and along the edge of the balcony, and the quiet shiftings of the packed crowd was like the soothings of the wind.

Then a soft sigh came from the watching crowd, and the tenseness seemed to evaporate, as Cleotus came through the door and advanced to the side of the High-Priest.

"You are late," Lassius snarled so softly that none but she heard.

"Sul's image is still in darkness," the girl murmured.

Lassius scowled, choked back a bitter curse, then nodded contemptuously at the captives on the floor. Cleotus followed the line of his glance, and, for the first time in her barbaric life as the High-Priestess of S'eba, felt a twinge of pity for the victims that were to die beneath her sacrificial knife.

"Where is the third?" she asked quietly.

"I left him below; for the sacrifice calls for but two to be offered in Sul's belly." He glanced at the golden cup that towered at his side.

He turned and raised his hand.

Lassius began a new chant in the ancient S'eban tongue, rolling the words out in a sonorous overtone that rang like the deep notes of an organ. The chant was answered by the S'eban warriors and women that packed the temple; and gradually as the seconds passed, a mass rhythm swayed each body, until the golden temple was a solid paean of chanted rhythm and swaying movement.

Light from the great flambeaux flickered about the dread majestic scene, bringing into clear relief the planes and shadows of the slug-white faces of the subterranean worshippers, high-lighting the fervor that flamed in every eye.

He made a slight gesture with his hidden hand; four slaves stepped forward, caught up the bound bodies, and swung them into the golden cup.

"*Sul, Sul, Sul!*" The chant was a monotonous beating of a hundred voices.

Cleotus raised her voice with the others, but her gaze was centered on the first sunbeam within inches of the golden sun-disc. When that beam touched the center of Sul's image, a knife was destined to flash, and crimson to pulse redly.

Cleotus started from her reverie, flushed beneath the suspicious stabbing glance of the High-Priest, turned and stepped gracefully up the steps that led to the altar's top. The sacrificial knife was unaccountably heavy in her hands, and she felt panic mounting in her heart.

She came to her position, stood quietly, the knife held flat across the palms of her outstretched hands. Staring silently for a second into the blind terrified eyes of the bound victims, she felt quick admiration surge within her heart as courage suddenly and completely effaced the fear that had been there. Then her glance went to Sul's image; and she stood without moving.

"Sul shall be pleased," Lassius intoned.

"*Sul shall be pleased,*" the S'ebans answered softly.

"*Sul is all powerful.*"

"*Sul is all powerful.*"

"*Sul is the word, the law, the all.*"

"*Sul is the word, the law, the all.*"

CLEOTUS closed her eyes; there was in her then the thought that this was not the way that things should be.

She trembled a bit, watching the burst of glorious light that blazed from the diamonds set into Sul's image, as the sunlight crept slowly, inexorably toward the center of the disc. She jerked a bit, as she heard the harsh roaring of sound come from the square; and, flashing a glance at Lassius, saw the stiffening of his shoulders. With a flick of one hand, he sent a black guard gliding from the temple to investigate the source of the noise.

A low rumble of thunder came from far away, and the sunlight perceptibly dimmed, as thin clouds moved across the sky. The tiny sounds of rain lightly striking, echoed dimly from the arched roof.

Lassius droned on, watching the sunlight streaming lower on Sul's image, a tiny smile etching his mouth. As the light came lower, he turned away from the echoing crowd, to watch Cleotus lift the jewel-studded sacrificial knife to make the final blow. He bent forward, lifted a shallow bowl of gold from beneath the great golden sacrificial cup, and held it loosely, waiting for the first surging of hot crimson from the blood channels.

"Now!" he said clearly, as Sul's image seemed to be completely covered with blazing light.

Cleotus sobbed deep in her throat, as she lifted the knife mechanically.

She knew that her life hung by a mere thread; and she was brave enough to realize that she was a coward in wanting to live. She shifted a bit on graceful limbs and shook her head, as the inner battle raged. Her hand drew back for the first blow, lifted—then sank to her side as though the arm no longer had strength to move.

"Now!" Lassius snapped.

"No!" Cleotus said clearly; bent swiftly, and slashed free the bonds that held the prisoners.

Lassius stood silent for a moment, while a concerted gasp of superstitious horror echoed from the watchers. Slowly, his face whitened even more, and sadistic mockery flared in his narrowed eyes. He knew now that the moment had come; for none would live who failed to do Sul's duty.

"*In Sul's name!*" he screamed, and

leaped, glittering knife drawn, towards the steps that led to the belly of Sul.

FAR below the temple, Derry Stone stirred restlessly, felt the blows rocking his head, and feebly tried to fend away the hands. He blinked groggily, saw that a fresh torch sputtered brightly in a wall niche, and twisted about to face the man that bent over him.

"*Buunal!*" he gasped incredulously.

"It is I, *Bwana*," the pygmy said gleefully. "For days and nights I have searched for you." His wizened face sobered. "The black prisoners said that you were dead, slain by a thing they called the 'servant' of Sul. In my grief, I stumbled along this tunnel. When I heard you running toward me, I thought you were one of the 'ghost-men' and I attacked you. Only when I struck for your throat, did I see your face clearly for the first time. I turned my hand but smashed your throat, and you lost your senses. That was but a moment ago." He laughed aloud. "Now you are all right! *Eho, Bwana*, we make our escape the way I came in."

Derry Stone came slowly to his feet, aided by the steady hand of the pygmy. He retrieved his sword, and touched his bruised throat gingerly with gentle fingers.

"How did you get here?" he asked. "Were you captured, too? Were you one of the slaves I just released?"

Buuna shook his small head as he scratched at a flea over his right ear. "I fell into a crack in the ground, broke through a skin of dirt, and there was a tunnel. I could not climb from the great crack, so I dropped into the tunnel. I wandered for many bellyless meals, finally found this *kraal* that is underground. You know the rest."

Derry Stone whirled, caught up the torch: "We do not have time to talk," he said. "You can tell me about your adventure later. Now, we must rescue my friends from the temple above."

"No," Buuna shook his head. "We must run for safety; let them free themselves, they are not us."

"*Dik-dik*, I free my friends," the trader said harshly. "You can run for freedom by yourself."

He turned and dashed down the passage-way. Buuna shrugged, popped an incau-

tious flea between thumb and forefinger, then loped after the white man. There was a tiny smile upon his withered face, and his filed, pointed teeth gleamed whitely in the ebony of his face. He ranged himself at the white man's side, grinning when Derry Stone flashed a quick smile his way. He flipped a makeshift blowgun from his belt, considered its two-foot length as he ran, then philosophically fumbled several thorn-darts from his belt pouch; these he stuck into the wooden dart-holder lashed close to the mouthpiece.

"It had better be a *good* fight, *Bwana!*" he panted hopefully.

Derry Stone nodded, without answering; ran even faster.

Then they were on a stairway; and overhead they could hear the chanting of hundreds of voices. Derry Stone clutched his sword more tightly, as he came to a sliding stop before a closed door.

He heard the sudden cessation of sound from behind the door, then caught the single word that was spat in a strange language. He bent sidewise, as Buuna reached past him and tugged on the door-handle. The next moment, they had burst through the door, Derry Stone's torch describing a fiery arc through the air, to land squarely on the neck and shoulders of the High-Priest racing up the steps to the sacrificial cup.

LASSIUS uttered a startled squawk, dodged instinctively from the fire that blazed about his head. He whirled, stumbled and fell headlong from the steps. The crowd of horrified worshippers stood—motionless, frozen!

"*Cleotus!*" Derry Stone called, swept forward like the vengeful reincarnation of a long-dead S'eban warrior, the great sword in his right hand swinging in deadly arcs.

A black guard, screaming an oath, lifted his spear for a blow at the running white man. He shook his head, to clear the fly sting from his lip, and died that way, his body crumpling in upon itself, the tiny dart imbedded half its length in the softness of his lip.

"*I fight, Bwana!*" Buuna screamed happily, caught up the spear, lanced out with it and stepped over the writhing body of a second guard.

Then his bush-knife whispered from its

sheath, and he was spinning in a flat, clever attack that took three vengeful Ophirians by surprise. The first died with his throat completely severed; the knife fled through the biceps of the second, and hamstrung the legs of the third.

But Lassius was on his feet now, and his darting hand had plucked a sword from beside the altar; he spun to meet the down-sweep of Stone's blade. Metal clashed like the high notes of ringing bells; then the swords were disengaged, and the fighters stepped back.

Derry Stone stepped in, led with a feint, parried the sweeping blade of the High-Priest; then fled back with a twisting lunge directly at Lassius' chest. The point ripped cloth, grated on metal; and a mesh-shirt of gold was disclosed.

Lassius grinned, as he drove with the weight of his body. His sword, coming in direct line, slashed Stone's chest, ripped a bloody gouge and slid free, deflected by a rib. Lassius swore deep in his throat.

Then Derry Stone's blade feinted wide, led with a quick twist, dropped for an infinitesimal second. He saw the eagerness in the High-Priest's eyes, knew the trick had worked. Lassius came surging in, using his sword like a saber, striving to slash instead of lunge. And Derry Stone's licking blade stabbed him through the left shoulder.

Lassius screamed in pain, sank to his knees, whirled aside; and, tearing the sword from his shoulder, he bobbed up again, his left hand whipping to the robe's belt. His fingers caught the golden hilt of his dagger; he drew and flipped it in one single motion. Derry Stone, a sob deep in his throat from the burning agony, saw that the knife had skewered his right arm just above the wrist.

His sword clanged to the floor, and he leaned, half-fainting, toward the sacrificial cup. It was then for the first time that he saw the magnificent stand Buuna was making at his back. The pygmy fought eight men, fending them off with his bush-knife, using his left hand to load the blowgun held between the last two fingers. Even as the white man looked, Buuna lifted the blowgun, his cheeks swelled and deflated—and an Ophirian pawed at the thorn-dart in his throat.

A knife whispered through the air,

smashed the length of its blade into the chest of an Ophirian, and from above came Frank Vardon's vengeful cry. Feet pounded on the steps of the altar, and Frank Vardon swooped to catch up Stone's fallen sword.

But he was too late, for the High-Priest had stepped forward, and was swinging his bloody sword in the blow that would kill the white man who had dared to attack him. His face was white and set, the eyes utterly cruel and hating. He swung with every ounce of power in his lean frame, and the sword was a gleaming arc of silver as it raced toward the defenseless trader.

In the middle of the blow, Lassius crumpled.

HE went to one side, the sword whirling from his relaxed fist, to end its flight in the belly of a charging guard. The guard screamed convulsively, and fell, plucking futilely at the golden pommel.

Lassius fell backward then, his face a bloody mask through which his eyes still glared in the awful fixity of death. He fell, and his body twitched in tiny reflexes.

So fast did it happen, that Derry Stone almost failed to hear the flat crack of the gunshot. Then, as realization came, he whirled to face the front entrance of the temple. Tod Manning stood there, a .45 automatic bucking in his hand, the slugs butting a path through the panic-stricken Ophirians, blasting the warriors back; smashing aside the men who still fought Buuna. The weapon went empty, and Manning changed the clips with the speed of a magician. He fired again and again, a tight grin on his face, his legs wide-braced.

"Hurry it up," he bellowed over the frightened screams.

Derry Stone listened in a daze, hearing the words, seeing the flame erupting from the automatic. He stared blindly at the knife in his arm, jerked it free with a steady hand, but sagged instantly from the gush of pain that raced up his arm. He clamped his hand about the arm, braced his feet, and glanced up at the altar. He saw Helen and Cleotus staring at Manning in the doorway.

"Run!" he barked.

And then the tremor struck the temple.

It started as a mere vibration—unheard but felt—then grew progressively stronger as the seconds passed. It seemed to erupt from the floor of the temple in one long swell of vibration that reached a climax only when the floor was twisting like a live thing gyrating in its death throes. It reached its climax, and died away into a sullen rumble of shifting earth. People screamed in terror, fighting in blind panic to escape the great room. The altar cup shivered, then regained its balance. The great sun-disc, the image of Sul, swayed on its golden ropes, then seemed to lean slowly outward, as a rope of gold broke with an audible snap.

"Oh, my God!" Derry Stone cried, as he tried to upset the altar.

But he was too late. Lazily, almost gently, the image of Sul fell forward—and one golden lance that represented a ray of sunlight stabbed out, piercing Cleotus's breast.

Then the image continued its fall, diamonds bursting in a glittering shower when the gold was bent and twisted on the floor.

But Derry Stone gave it no heed; he was dashing up the steps, trying to stop the flow of blood with hasty fingers. He felt the burning of hot tears in his eyes, as he bent over the girl; and sickness filled his heart when he saw the deepness of the wound.

Crimson flowed in steady pulsation, staining the gold of the altar cup—and Derry Stone realized that Cleotus had been right: a sacrifice had to be made to Sul on every ceremonial day.

"White man?" Cleotus opened her eyes, and they were deep and untroubled and knowing.

Derry Stone leaned forward, and all of the world stopped for him then; nothing lay ahead but a dark grayness that held no meaning.

"Yes, Cleotus," he answered softly.

"Kiss," Cleotus whispered; and she was a woman then.

Derry Stone bent even further, and his lips touched hers with a gentleness that he did not know a kiss could possess. He kissed her once, then straightened, and his heart seemed to crumble within his chest.

He turned blindly away, and stumbled

down the steps, unaware that Helen and Vardon stood at his side.

"Cleotus," he whispered to himself.

And then the second vibration pulsed high in the deepness of the earth. It swelled with an audible noise that was frightening in its deliberate intensity—it broke with a roar that threatened to deafen its hearers. Light glared outside the temple.

"Hurry!" Tod Manning screamed.

Derry Stone nodded automatically, and took a step forward. Then on sudden impulse, he reached out, tore the great sun-diamond from where it hung before the altar cup. It sparkled with an uncanny life in his hand, and there was a crimson stain on one facet where the life-blood of Cleotus had touched in passing.

"This way," Manning shouted, as he caught Helen's hand.

They ran then, in a compact group, fearing no attack from the people who milled in a growing panic through the streets. They raced toward the square, from which could be heard the growl of a warming plane engine.

Even as they entered the public square, the earth erupted in a sheet of flame.

IX

THE roar of sound was like the detonation of millions of pounds of giant powder; it lifted high, sucking in twisting winds, then pressed down with a visible pressure.

Hurled from their feet, they fell in twisting bundles, clawing desperately for support. Flames towered hundreds of feet in the air behind them, lighting everything with ghastly flickering detail. People, crying in terror, died; their bodies flashed to death in that first awful burst of flame. Smoke rolled and twisted, and steam spouted in a blinding cloud. The ground was a live thing that writhed like a giant in torture, shifting like the unstable flexings of a rubbery sheet. Great fissures opened, closed, then opened again; and from each spouted flame and smoke and steam.

Derry Stone rolled to his feet, helped Helen to hers, and together they aided her father. Buuna was already erect, standing beside Tod Manning. They ran again, forcing themselves erect against the titanic twisting of the aroused volcano.

Then they were at the plane, and were climbing into the cabin. Tod Manning slipped into the pilot's seat, shoved the throttle slowly forward, listening critically as the motor surged high in a paean of unleashed power.

"This is it," he called.

The plane rolled slowly from beneath the shed.

It shied a bit, twisted to one side from the force of the cyclonic winds that whipped about the square. Then Manning brought it back into line, forced full-throttle. The tail came up; the plane was racing on two wheels. Buildings sped past, flickered out of sight, and the far end of the square seemed to race toward the plane. Faces were white and taut as seconds passed; for all knew there would be no more time for a second run.

Now Manning eased back on the wheel-stick . . . the plane lifted lazily, dipped sluggishly, then fled into clean flight toward the sky overhead.

Derry Stone peered from the window, pity in his clear eyes. He saw the new eruptions that cracked the ground below, saw the rubble that was all that remained of half the city. He saw men and women scuttling like ants through the streets. He saw the black slaves escaping into the friendly jungle.

The volcano erupted in its last terrific, shattering spasm of life.

Earth split and flawed like writhing worms of black and light across the valley, flames and smoke whipping from them. Houses tumbled with a majestic slowness, sucked in upon themselves, disappearing within fissures that gaped for split seconds.

"Look!" Derry Stone cried aloud.

For the great palisade was shifting, sliding with growing momentum, leaning outward with a majestic slowness. Tons upon countless tons of tumbling rock piled in a slide that engulfed Ophir in one endless moment. Wind whipped the smoke away, flames died without a succeeding flicker of life.

What had been Ophir was only a vast heap of rubble that, strangely, had a twisted jungle growing from its top, carried there from the palisade upon which it had grown.

Derry Stone shuddered; Buuna's words reached dimly out from his memory: *the*

curse of Sul to remain until a jungle stood again where Ophir had waited throughout the years.

Now the jungle stood in tangled majesty, and the prophesy was fulfilled. Ophir was no more; its centuries' old life flicked away in the twinkling of a few minutes. Its people were dead—buried forever in a rocky tomb.

DERRY STONE leaned back in his seat, his fingers toying unseeingly with the great diamond that pulsed with light in his strong fingers. He heard Frank Vardon's question, but did not answer it for a second.

Then he said: "I made an iodine-ammonia bomb, knowing the heat and light of the red-hot lava would cause it to explode and break the retaining wall between the underground river and the molten stone. I thought the explosion would create a diversion that would permit me to free you and escape. But I forgot that the volcano had an open mouth, into which the water would flow. The steam thus created must have stirred the volcano into brief activity again."

He shook his head, and slid back the window panel. He heard the sudden excited gasp of Frank Vardon; caught the smothered sound made by Helen. Then he threw the great sun-diamond from the window.

It fell in a long parabola, winking and glittering like a miniature sun. It flashed with growing speed, then was lost on the ground.

"Cleotus!" he whispered brokenly. He felt the comforting touch of Helen's hand.

As he turned away from the window, he smiled about the cabin. He felt the ache within his heart; knew that it would be there always. But he knew, too, that he would see Cleotus somewhere, some day, again. And gradually a peace softened the pain within him.

"Let's go home," he said tiredly.

Buuna smiled; no longer was the defeat in Derry Stone's eyes—instead, purpose and confidence flamed there again.

And the plane fled toward the newly risen sun, fleeing along on the wings of the wind, carrying its passengers' hopes and dreams and memories toward civilization and friends.

nued from other side)

one of his victims up—as they'll be cutting me in ext half hour—and you'll find nothing. And by ay, Mr. Colt—*YOU are on his list!*"

is spoke Jeremy Taylor, in the death house, to or Thatcher Colt, the man who sent him there.

immediately after Taylor's execution, the hunt arted for the mystery killer. Months went by. Then ne day the warden burst into Colt's office, panting that he had found a clew—and then slumped dead at Colt's feet!

Like a pistol shot, two men hopped a cab to the address the warden had given. And shortly, in strutted an oily-looking charlatan in elegant white gloves—a treacherous note of sympathy in his voice—announcing that one of the detectives sent to fetch him had been strangely stricken in the cab on the way to Headquarters, and lay on a slab in Bellevue that very minute!

The man fairly exuded death at every pore—yet they could pin nothing on him! And Colt seemed to be next in his line of victims.

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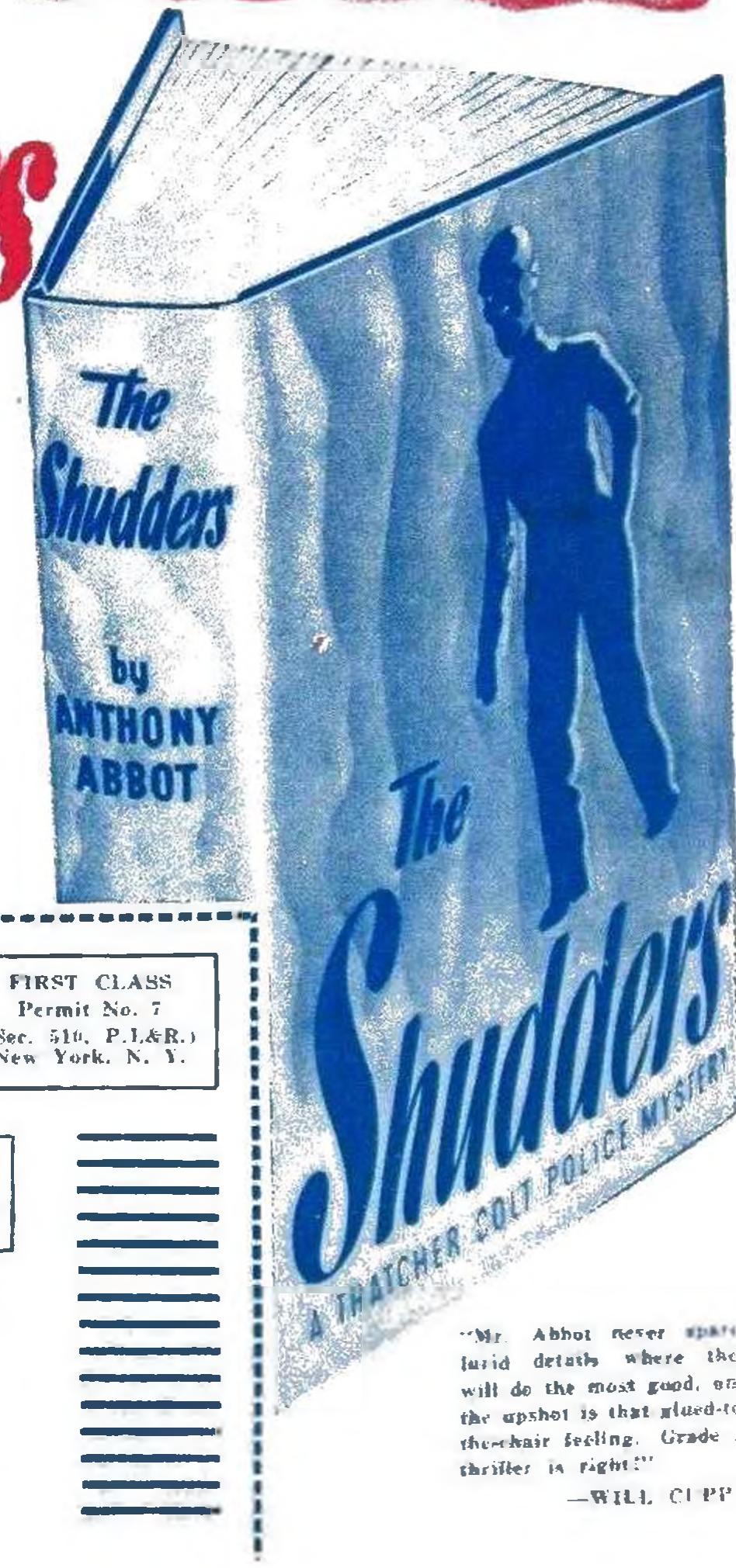
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this fiend who killed for the
sheer sport of killing?

"HE stole Marcella Kingsley from me—the only thing I have loved in this life. She is in another man's arms tonight—and I only minutes from the electric chair!

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