

JUNGLE STORIES

20c

DARK SAFARI

by
**STANLEY
FOSTER**

**CANNIBAL
VELDT**

by
**L. PATRICK
GREENE**

**DRUMS
OF THE
BUSH**

by
**GUY L.
JONES**



KI-GOR— AND THE GIANT GORILLA-MEN

FLEEING FROM THE HIDDEN CITY,
THE JUNGLE KING AND HELENE
ENCOUNTER THE SAVAGE APE-MEN
—SUPER-BEASTS EVOLVED BY A
BRILLIANT, MAD SCIENTIST

by
JOHN PETER DRUMMOND



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JUNGLE STORIES



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MALCOLM REISS, Editor

A NEW KI-GOR NOVEL

- KI-GOR—AND THE GIANT GORILLA-MEN . . . John Peter Drummond 3**
Captives never escaped that African valley and its mad ruler. How could Ki-Gor wrest lovely, pampered Helene Vaughn from the deadly grasp of the Gorilla Master?

FOUR COMPLETE JUNGLE NOVELETS

- THE BLACK GODS OF NGAMI . . . Victor Rousseau 31**
The Valley of Evil. Two white men broke its grim tabu, and died. And on their dusty trail rode Constable Evans, a third blood sacrifice to the black Ngami gods.
- CANNIBAL VELDT . . . L. Patrick Greene 56**
Nigger Schoonmaker had done a disappearing act, so it was the hangman's noose for cool Yank Harris—unless he could raise the dead from a gruesome cannibal grave.
- THE WHITE LORD OF THE ELEPHANT KINGDOM . Armand Brigaud 72**
From Mwana, great she-elephant, the jungle took her first-born. In its place, it put a man-child—he who was to be known as the White Lord of the Elephant Kingdom.
- DARK SAFARI . . . Stanley Foster 113**
Jungle-wise Darnell, bloodhound of the Congo, always trapped his man. But now the throbbing tom-toms muttered *Failure*, and voodoo-whispers echoed *Death!*

THREE SHORT STORIES OF THE DARK CONTINENT

- ORCHID DEATH . . . Hubert Roussel 47**
A shimmering, fabulous flower—but its fragile petals held slow, awful doom.
- DRUMS OF THE BUSH . . . Guy L. Jones 92**
Headhunter gold! Two men sought it and found treasure stranger than a Ju-ju dream.
- JUNGLE CARGO . . . Thomas J. Cooke 100**
He could rot on the Fever Coast—or ship with a madman and his sub-human crew.



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Ki-Gor—and the Giant Gorilla-Men

By John Peter Drummond

Captives never escaped Nirvana. No broken, blasted soul lived to flee that horrible Dark African valley ruled by Krishna, blazing-eyed mad scientist. How could Ki-Gor, guileless jungle hunter, wrest lovely, pampered Helene Vaughn from the sly, deadly grasp of the Gorilla Master?

INCH by inch, the giant figure in the leopard skin crept forward through the waving prairie grass. The fierce tropical sun beat down mercilessly on the

mighty shoulders, but a fresh easterly breeze cooled the bronze forehead. Ki-Gor froze momentarily and hugged the ground, as a chorus of snorts and the thud

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

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

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

Hardly breathing, Ki-Gor slid forward another six inches through the grass. He must get that buck. For if he and Helene did not eat pretty soon, they would be so weakened from fasting, that they, too, would fall prey to some prowling carnivores, and their bones would bleach on

the wind-swept veldt. Closer and closer to the gnu, the jungle man crept. If only I had a fire-stick, Ki-Gor thought—rifles, Helene calls them. They have a potent magic which kills at incredible distances. But he had no rifle, only the toy spear of the Pygmies, so that he must be close enough to the gnu to be able to reach it in one spring. Once the herd discovered him, even his powerful legs could never overtake them.

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

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

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

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

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

those great raking claws, was the Pygmy spear.

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

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

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

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

His lips drawn back in a snarl, Ki-Gor reached down and once more seized the animal's forelegs. Whether he could cut it up or not, he wasn't going to leave it

behind for the dogs or the lions to eat. He heaved upward and rolled the animal over. As he did, he saw something glint in the antelope's thick mane—something which reflected the sunlight. A brown hand swiftly explored the thick, matted hairs behind the horns. With a shout of triumph, Ki-Gor extricated a flat piece of metal. It was the wide, shovel-shaped blade of a Bantu assegai. A few splinters of wood in the hollow socket at the rear end told the story. Some black hunter had had much the same experience as Ki-Gor had had with the lion. Except that in this case, the blade of the spear, instead of piercing the thick hide of the gnu, had merely become caught in the thick tangle of hair in the creature's head. The antelope had got away, carrying the spear in its mane, and eventually, the haft had worked loose, or broken off.

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

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

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

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

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

"No trouble" said Ki-Gor loftily. "It was easy. There was a lion, but it was a very old lion."

"Oh dear!" Helene sighed, "I suppose

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

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

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

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

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

in to Helene's pleadings, and now here they were, camped in a little copse on the veldt—on their way to his own people.

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

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

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

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

He woke up with a guilty start and

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

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

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

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

Slowly and purposefully, the gorilla moved forward, until he stood right at the edge of the boma. As the firelight illuminated his hairy outlines, he looked to be by far the biggest gorilla Ki-Gor had ever

seen. And then suddenly it struck Ki-Gor that this was no ordinary gorilla. This hulking creature looked man-like, and yet at the same time, subtly more bestial than a true gorilla. His little eyes glittering wickedly, the man-ape seemed strangely unafraid. A frightened gasp from behind him told Ki-Gor that Helene was awake.

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

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

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

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

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

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

As he did, Ki-Gor charged him. Twice the sharp blade bit deep into the hairy arm,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

like looking for a needle in a haystack, to find anything in the pitch dark of the plateau.

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

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

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

Gradually, the outlines of a mountain range began to take shape, ahead of him and to his right. Almost imperceptibly, the sky began to grow a little paler, and the darkness all about, to dissolve. Ki-Gor found that the grass was giving way to tall shrubs, and that here and there, tall trees reared skyward. He kept on, upwind and upgrade.

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

the twig broken off the flowering shrub close to the ground.

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

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

A burning desire for revenge swept over

Ki-Gor. If this shaggy monster had not actually abducted Helene, it had at least assisted in the operation, and Ki-Gor determined that it should die for it. He crept closer to the great man-ape, unnoticed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Stay, O strange inkosi," said the tallest one in halting Swahili, "and tell us how it is possible that you could thus slay the fear-

some brute, single-handed and without a fire-stick."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Lead on," he said, gruffly.

As the little party wound down the

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

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

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

The door to the large house was guarded by two warriors with assegais. The men with Ki-Gor spoke rapidly to them, and they turned and disappeared into the house. A moment later, they reappeared, and behind them towered a huge, bull-necked negro, with alert little eyes, and an oddly humorous face. His clothes, a white shirt and white shorts, set him apart from the others—he was evidently the chief—He spoke at once, in a rolling, rumbling basso.

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

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

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

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

"Nem-mind, Boss, let it go. I'm kinda fergettin' my Southe'n hospitality, standin'

yere askin' questions. C'mon in an' have a bite of breakfast."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Man, you haven't got a chance," George said, earnestly, "I went over the east shoulder of the mountain, once with some of my boys, and we come out on to the entrance of a deep rocky canyon. The boys told me that was the entrance to the Land of the Livin' Dead, and there was a whole lot of the biggest gorilla-men I ever see layin' around there. I just said 'C'mon boys,' an' walked away from there. I once went two rounds with Dempsey 'fore he was champ, but I don't believe in messin' around with no gorilla."

The jungle man stood up, blue eyes flashing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Don' make no difference," said George,

stoutly, "I'm jus' as good an American as anybody else. An' I suttinly don' aim to leave another American lay in the Land of the Livin' Dead, I don' care *how* many gorillas is guardin' the place."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, I got the ahmy lined up," he said, "They didn't like the idea so good, at first,

but I talked 'em around. In about an hour we-all'll be ready to go beat up on the gorilla-men, an' see whut kin' of a place this yere Land of the Livin' Dead is."

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

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

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

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

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

The line of march lay down hill for a while, down the eastern slope of the great mountain. But still in front of them was an even higher mountain, or rather, range of mountains. High up in a niche between two peaks, George said, was the Gateway. Soona the M'ball, army skirted a rim, and started on the final upgrade. A nervous silence settled down over the party, and the rate of speed noticeably slackened. As they

toiled higher and higher up the mountain side, the vegetation began to thin out a little. Tall trees gave way to more stunted growths, and odd-shaped bushes, twisted by high winds. And a hot, dry west wind baked the bent backs of the M'balla.

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

"Gorilla!" he said, laconically.

George nodded and detailed two of the M'balla to go up the trail as scouts, in advance of the party. Then, he growled an order over his shoulder and led the little army forward.

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

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

Then George wheeled and strode back to his army.

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

The M'balla looked at each other fearfully, but loyally followed George up the bank. The giant American Negro led the way cautiously through the twisted brush,

one hundred yards, two hundred yards. Then he halted, abruptly, and pointed. Ki-Gor, beside him in instant, followed the pointing finger with his eyes and felt the hairs on the back of his neck stiffen.

III

THEY were standing on the edge of the brush cover. Before them a wide strip of rubbly, rocky ground sloped gently up to a natural rock palisade. There was no vegetation of any kind on the desolate stretch of shale and rubble, and beyond, the line of low cliffs marked the crest of the ridge. Directly in front of them, there was a cleft in the rock barrier—a narrow cleft that looked to be no more than ten feet wide. Through that cleft, a seemingly endless line of huge black gorillas was moving out on to the open ground. And the open ground was already occupied by at least fifty or sixty of the monsters. A low murmur ran through the M'balla.

George whirled, eyes flashing.

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

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

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

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

Then pandemonium reigned in the ravine.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the blood-lust of the M'balla was up, and they followed relentlessly. As Ki-Gor and George leaned panting on their

assegais, the tribesmen hunted down the dozen or so remaining gorilla-men, ringed each one with a bristling wall of steel, and cut them down.

One-half hour after George had fired the first shot the gorilla-men were completely annihilated. But it was a costly victory. Among the heaped up dead on the bank, thirty-one M'balla tribesmen lay crushed and dying. High up in the sky, the vultures began circling downward to their grisly feast.

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

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

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

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

encouragingly over his shoulder and went forward.

As he did, he felt a noticeable drop in the temperature, and saw that the sun no longer shone around him. Looking up he observed a pall of mist or clouds stretching eastward from the crest of the ridge. But he pressed on down the path, grim-faced, and the M'balla, quaking with superstitious dread, crept silently after him.

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

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

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

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

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

that they halt for the night as soon as possible. George agreed to the idea with alacrity, and immediately bellowed a command to the M'balla.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Spelvin had returned.

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

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

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

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

"Why did you come back?"

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

myse'f. I don' know if the two of us c'n pull off this rescue, but we c'n try awful hard."

"George, you are a brave man."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

open space. They ran forward to the edge of the bluff, to see what the surrounding country was like. What they saw made them gasp.

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

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

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

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

"I smell gorilla," he stated.

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

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

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

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

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

George raised his rifle, then lowered it again. A second gorilla-man was coming through the trees to join the first one. And another one, and another one—. A rapid glance around the clearing showed

the two men only too plainly that they were completely surrounded by at least thirty of the great man-apes.

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

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

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

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

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

IV

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

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

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

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

The two men hesitated a moment, and then Ki-Gor said, "To the houses." Apparently it was what the gorilla-men wanted. They continued to follow at a respectable distance as the jungle man and his Negro companion traversed the long green fields to the dazzling white houses.

The valley had an extraordinary beauty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The tone was friendly, but Ki-Gor didn't like it, for some reason. And how did this King of the Gorilla-men know his name? Then it came to him. From Helene, of course! Eyes flashing and fists clenched, Ki-Gor moved forward a step and spoke. As he did, the man-apes stirred restlessly.

"Where is my woman? Is she safe?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At those last words, George swayed like a tree in a high wind. Ki-Gor, in amazement, saw that the big Negro was fighting to keep his eyes open. The King backed up the steps slowly, and George staggered forward after him. Suddenly, the King's

right hand flicked out, seized the lowered barrel of George's rifle, and wrested it away. As Ki-Gor leaped forward, the King sprang agilely up the steps and leveled the rifle at the jungle man's breast.

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

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

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

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

"Now, shall we be friends?"

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

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

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

He was standing at one side of a wide doorway, and with an ironic smile, he waved his two prisoners through the doorway ahead of him. They proceeded through a spacious hallway, and at the King's command, turned to the right, through another doorway, and found themselves in a large, high-ceilinged room. The white walls of the room were unadorned, but a deep, rich looking carpet covered the floor, and low tables, chairs and divans made up the furniture.

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

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

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

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

It was Helene, all right, but something was terribly wrong. She was clothed in a white robe, sandals on her feet. Her face was deathly pale, and her eyes looked straight ahead, unfocused on anything in the room. She walked carefully around the furniture without seeming to see it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Mr. Ki-Gor!" cried George, "Don't kill him! Don't kill him yet! He's got the woman hypnotized, an' she won't never recover until he snaps her out of it."

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

"Now, hold on, Mr. Ki-Gor," George sputtered, as the jungle man spun out of

his grasp, "If you kill the King, now, tha's just the same as killing Miss Helene, yere."

Ki-Gor hesitated, eyes blazing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I am going to release you from my control," he said quietly. "You will wake up, and you will remember nothing of what has happened while you were asleep. Now. You are no longer under my control. Wake up!"

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

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

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

"Ki-Gor!" she exclaimed, "You came after me! Oh, I'm so happy! I've never

been so frightened in my life as when the gorilla-man snatched me away from the camp. But he didn't hurt me at all. And when he brought me here, Krishna was so kind. I think this is a heavenly place, don't you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If you will pardon me," Krishna broke in, with a sleepy smile, "It is not a question of whether I am good or bad. It happens that I am the ruler of this valley, which is sometimes called the Land of the Living Dead. My own name for it is Nirvana. You see, I am a Hindu, and Nirvana is an ancient Hindu conception of the Ultimate of human desire. It is not like the Christian Heaven, exactly, it is merely a removal from the world, a complete absence of desire, of illusion. I removed myself from the outer world many years ago, and found a kind of Nirvana here in this secluded valley. Here I remain, until I die. But this Nirvana, unlike the spiritual Nirvana of the ancient Bhuddists, is somewhat concerned with matters of the flesh. I like beauty and comfort and good food. At the same time, I require solitude when I feel like it. My solution was to come here and be served by slaves, and remain undiscovered by the outer world. Human beings built this palace and the surrounding build-

ings. Human beings grow my food, tend my cattle—I have discarded the Hindu tabu on beef. My soldiers, however, are these curious man-apes. They are considerably more trustworthy than any human warriors I have ever known.”

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

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

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

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

“Good Heavens!” gasped Helene, “Where on earth did you get your scientific education?”

“At the University of Cambridge,” Krishna smiled, “and later at the University of Bonn. It was at the German university that I became interested in racial evolution and, what might be termed, constructive anthropology. Some bullet-headed Prussian students were busy with a racial theory concerning their Aryan origin. That was vastly amusing to me, who come from the only true Aryan race left in the world—the high-caste Brahmans of Northern Indian. The appearance of those Prussians indicated to me that they were more likely to be descended from Neanderthal Man. And from that, I conceived the idea of trying to create modern Neanderthals. Hence the experiment with the

gorillas. The experiment is not yet complete, but my man-apes are many times more intelligent than their original progenitors. And the one thing they have learned thoroughly, is that anyone may enter the Valley, *but no one may leave!*”

“You mean we are prisoners here?” said Helene.

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

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

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

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

“Man!” he said, heavily, “We sho’ly caught ourse’ves a cold fish!”

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

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

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

“I drug them, my dear Ki-Gor,” Krishna replied, candidly, “with a rare substance which I distil from a rare plant that grows in this valley in great quantity. The drug puts them into a deep sleep, and when they wake up, they are especially susceptible to hypnosis. I then hypnotize them. I have

hypnotized so many of them so often, that the merest suggestion that they prevent people from leaving the valley acts now as a perpetual command to all of them. In the meantime, of course, they have become strong addicts of this drug, and I have to give them a daily portion of it. If this sounds hard to believe, just come out with me now and I will arrange to give them their ration for the day. You may see with your own eyes that I am telling you the truth."

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

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

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

"What does 'hypnotize' mean?"

Helene thought for a moment and shook her head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Spelvin exploded.

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

KRISHNA smiled, blandly.

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

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

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

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

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

He called to one of the slaves. The creature crawled over to him on his hands and knees and looked up dully into the King's face. With a careless wave of a hand, Krishna quickly threw the slave into a trance. He got up slowly on his skinny legs and tottered to the door. Mechanically, he opened it and walked outside.

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

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

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

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

"Ah! that is excellent sport!" Krishna

exclaimed, eyes gleaming, "Now, you see, perhaps, why nobody tries to leave the Valley. And why, *you three* will never leave the Valley."

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

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

The throngs of ape-men crowded eagerly around Krishna as he strolled over to the large door. Avidly their little eyes watched him insert the big key, and when he swung the door open, there was a concerted dash for the corridor. Krishna stepped back with a smile as the gorilla-men jammed themselves into the doorway.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Fools!" he said, contemptuously, to Helene. "It is doubly stupid to contemplate escape. For not only is it impossible, but it should be highly undesirable. Life here is extremely pleasant, and also very interesting. I have, by no means, confined my scientific activities to the creation of gorilla-men. Besides this laboratory, I have three others, and in all of them, I am conducting fascinating experiments. At the moment, I am especially absorbed in a study of the endocrines—the ductless glands. As a matter of fact, I have wished for a new subject of experimentation for a long time. One like yourself, a lovely white woman. With what I already know, I could change you in two weeks' time, from a lithe fair Nordic, to an obese, swarthy Latin type. I could make your lovely hair fall out. I could grow a beard on your smooth face. And, I assure you the operations would be completely painless to yourself. The only thing I am not quite sure of yet, is whether, after making these changes in you, I could change you back to your original self. *That* is what we will find out."

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

V

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

Krishna moved toward the door cautiously. There was only a handful of the man-apes left, now, clamoring to get into the dispensary. Krishna waited, his hand on the door, until there was room enough for this rear-guard to get inside. His eyes

swept the green fields, and a crafty smile came over his dark face, as two little knots of late-coming gorilla-men could be seen running in from the mountain slopes. As the last man-ape in the square crowded into the dispensary, Krishna slammed the door, hid the key in the folds of his robe, and walked toward Ki-Gor and George, smiling.

But the smile died on his face, as Ki-Gor swung around and started for him. He looked around wildly, but the late-arriving gorilla-men were still a hundred yards away out in the field. His hand fumbled for the cord at his throat on which the whistle hung. He ran two steps, blowing a shrill blast, as Ki-Gor hit him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Watch him," Ki-Gor directed George, and walked over to one of the slaves who was holding a sack full of the drug tablets

in his hand. The jungle man took the sack from the unresisting hand of the slave, went to one of the barred windows, and began throwing handfuls of the tablets out between the bars.

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

Krishna turned gray, as the full consequences of the stratagem were borne in on him. He staggered back, then flung himself at George. The big Negro swung his left hand at Krishna's chin, and the King of the gorilla-men fell inert to the floor.

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

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

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

Krishna fell to his knees.

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

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

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

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

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

There was a heavy silence. The slaves looked stupidly at one another, and looked

back at Ki-Gor. Finally one of them spoke.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But hours and miles went by without incident. The trees grew less tall, and the air grew cooler. Now and then the travelers could look up through openings in

the foliage and see above them their destination—the rocky ridge, partly obscured by its perpetual mists.

It was late afternoon, and the travelers were climbing into the region of weird vegetation, when they first ran into danger. Some sixth sense prompted Ki-Gor, who was in the lead, to look backwards as he rounded a bend in the trail. A huge gorilla-man was shuffling rapidly up the path behind George who was bringing up the rear. There was hardly time to warn the big Negro, and give him an opportunity to swing around with the gun.

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

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

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

In a short while, they climbed into the mists, and Ki-Gor called a halt as they arrived at what appeared to be a fork in the trail. He did not remember seeing the

fork on the way down, although, he reflected that it had been so dark that he could easily have missed it.

"Which way?" he asked Krishna.

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

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

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

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

"Singing?" said Krishna.

"Yeh, they was a whole mess of ban-shees all wailin' together."

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

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

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

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

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

As yet they were unaware of the presence of the travelers, but Ki-Gor shivered a little as he thought of trying to pacify

that many of the brutes with the limited supply of the drug that remained. But it had to be done, somehow. The idea of crossing the crater of the volcano was unthinkable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We'll have to run!" George shouted,

"I haven't got enough ammunition left to hold 'em off. We'll have to go across the crater of the volcano!"

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

"Well, we ain' got even one chance, if we stay yere," George replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Safe at last!

They were standing on the eastern slope of the volcanic peak, looking eastward at a magnificent panorama of endless ranges of mountains. Behind them the sun was setting in red glory. Suddenly the volcano gave a menacing rumble. A dozen of the little cones in the crater burst into action, shooting flames and black mud high into the air. The trio looked at each other. A few short minutes before, they were walking through the very spots where, now, molten lava and flaming death were raining down. Ki-Gor stood up.

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

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

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

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

"What is that?" he exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Helene Vaughn!" the young man shouted, "The lost American aviatrix! Oh, I say, dash it all, this is extrawdnry! You've been more or less given up for dead, you know. Oh, I say, this is a bit of luck! I'm Sub-Leftenant Tiverton of His Majesty's Sloop 'Rhododendron,' on patrol duty here on Lake Victoria. You must come aboard immediately and we'll

make arrangements to get you out to the Coast."

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

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

"Yassuh, Cap'n," said the Negro, "George Spelvin of Cincinnati, U.S.A. An' I sho' could pile into some civilized vittles right now."

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

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

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

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

Ki-Gor stepped back without answering. A smile lighted up his bronzed face. He liked the looks of this blue-eyed young man. And for the first time, Ki-Gor was glad he was going back to his own people.



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The Black Gods of Ngami

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Ngami, valley of evil. Two white men rode to break its ominous tabu—and disappeared forever. And on their dusty trail rode Evans of the Bechuanaland Mounted—a third blood sacrifice to the hungry black gods of Ngami.

LIEUTENANT CONNELL, of the Bechuanaland Mounted Police, South Africa, frowned as Sergeant Luke Evans stepped into the office of the barracks at Boskop.

"Read that, Evans!" He tossed a telegram across the table to the sergeant, who picked it up and read:

Kiss Boskop good-bye for me. Not coming back. Johannesburg's as fine as ever. Rawlins.

The sergeant raised his eyebrows. "You think Rawlins has deserted the Force, too, sir, like—"

"Like Simons? What do you think, Evans? You knew Simons and Rawlins intimately. Each of them was sent to patrol the Ngami district. A week or two later each of them sends an impudent wire in turn, announcing his desertion."

"I don't believe either of them deserted, sir, or sent that wire."

"What is your theory, then? Who sent that wire from Johannesburg in Rawlins' name, and who sent that one from Cape Town, signed Simons, telling us that he was sailing for England? What is there

in the Ngami district?" he went on, without waiting for the sergeant's answer to his first question.

"Sand, baboons, thorn scrub, and thirst."

"You're right, Evans. You know the district as well as it can be known. A lot of it is included in that enormous block of land that old Duplessis holds, but it'll never see any humans except a few wandering Bushmen. Still, it's in our district, and—"

He paused. "You don't think Rawlins and Simons quit because they didn't want to patrol the desert, do you, Evans? You know the natives have queer stories about its being peopled by ghosts, and so on. Of course that wouldn't have scared our men. Still, when a man's been riding week after week with only thirst for a companion . . ."

"I want you to go up there at once," Connell finished abruptly. "Report back to me after you've thoroughly covered the district. Try to get on the tracks of Simons and Rawlins, that's to say, learn whether they actually went to the Ngami or not. And don't you send me a wire from down country telling me that you've

deserted, because I won't believe it."

He grinned at Evans, who grinned back at him. No one would believe that of Sergeant Evans, with five wounds and half-a-dozen medals gained on the battlefields of France.

"You'd best start right away," continued Connell. "And when you reach old Duplessis' farm stop in and pay him your respects. We've got to keep in with him, however much he hates us."

Evans was just at the door when Connell called after him:

"I wish we could get hold of old Pete Flanagan. If any man knows the Ngami from end to end, it's Pete. Haven't heard anything of him of late, have you, Evans?"

"Haven't seen or heard of him for months, Lieutenant. I s'pose he's off looking for more of those diamond mines."

The other nodded, and Evans left the office.

HIS preparations were simple, and occupied almost no time at all. Into his saddle-bags he stuffed a few tins of bully beef, a quantity of flour, a small bottle of effervescent saline, as a substitute for yeast, and a roll of sun-dried beef, biltong, of the appearance and consistency of blackened sole-leather. In addition he took tea, matches, sugar, salt, and a quantity of compressed vegetables. He had also a double billy, for cooking, two large water-flasks, and, besides his service revolver, a carbine, grounded in the leather bucket that was suspended from the off side of his saddle.

Three miles downhill from the police post lay the settlement of Boskop. It consisted of the usual large market square, common to all South African towns, and three or four wide streets criss-crossing each other at right angles, lined with one-story brick buildings roofed with galvanized iron; stores, old clothes shops, and "ice-cold drinks" emporiums devoted to the native trade.

All about lay the half-desert country, at present a uniform brown, though when the rains began—if they began—it would be transformed almost overnight into an expanse of emerald. The *spruits* would run water, the empty dams and cisterns would be brimming, crops would be sown—if the rains came.

Boskop was on the fringe of the desert.

Usually the four months' downpour materialized in Boskop. Sometimes it did not. It never rained in the Ngami country, over beyond the fringe of *hopjes* on the horizon, or only enough to maintain the stunted thorn scrub that dotted the land like the wool fibers on a native's head.

That was Luke's destination, a land where no one lived except the wandering Bushman and his cousin, the baboon. A few had traversed it, among them Pete Flanagan, the oldest and most sanguine diamond prospector in the district. According to Pete, the Ngami region was thickly sprinkled with diamond "pipes," the volcanic outlets in which the stones were made. Pete's volubility had long since been discouraged, and nowadays it was only under the stimulus of a few drinks that he would repeat the old story for the amusement of his entertainers. For some time past nothing had been seen of the old man.

Diamonds had been found near Boskop. Twenty miles away two men, Hart and Van Reenen, had found stones two years before. A rush had followed, but the supply had proved to be only a single pocket.

Hart was the district money-lender, and had his hands on everything negotiable. Van Reenen was his chief satellite, an adventurer who was probably wanted under various aliases in many parts of the country.

SERGEANT LUKE rode through Boskop, past the line of stores, with their crowds of chattering natives pawing over the second-hand clothes and bargaining with the gesticulating proprietors; past the market square, with its few teams of long-horns inspanned to heavy Dutch wagons, out into the land beyond. Just on the other side of the town was Jacob's Hotel, Hart's headquarters.

On the *stoep* Sergeant Luke saw Hart sitting, tilted back in his chair, his thumbs in his armpits. Though it was not yet noon, he was already drunk. He sprawled there, a drunken blotch in the sun, fanned by a Sechuana boy with a palm leaf. Upon the little table at his elbow stood a bottle of whiskey, and a tumbler, half-full.

Seated beside him, leaning forward and gesticulating, was "Baldy" Smith, one of Hart's crowd, and one of the hard char-

acters left stranded in Boskop after the diamond rush had petered out and the disgruntled prospectors had removed to other haunts.

Inside the store adjacent to the hotel Sergeant Luke saw the mean, wizened face of Jacobs as he bent over a roll of cloth from which he was measuring a short yard for a colored woman.

"Hello, Sergeant!" called Hart from his chair, as Luke rode up. "Looks like you're starting off on patrol somewhere. Going to meet Rawlins, I suppose, and bring him back with you?"

Luke saw the furtive glance that "Baldy" Smith shot at the other. Hart's gross face assumed an expression of infantile blandness.

FOR the first time the idea came into Luke's brain that Hart might know something about the two troopers' disappearance. But though the police had proved a thorn in Hart's side, notably in curbing some of the grosser evils of frontier life in whose existence Hart was peculiarly interested, he could not imagine that Hart had been so mad as to set himself in open opposition to the Force.

The sudden impulse was killed by the flash of reason.

"Maybe," Luke answered non-committally. "I hear Van Reenen's left town," he continued casually.

Hart guffawed. "Oh, yes, after big game, Sergeant. Him and old Duplessis have gone after a herd of springbok out in the Ngami."

This speech gave Luke food for thought. Prodigious herds of these antelopes migrate periodically through the desert regions, armies of several hundred thousand sometimes covering hundreds of miles on those strange *treks* that are the peculiar characteristic of this animal. Luke knew that old Duplessis' passion for hunting was almost on a par with his hatred of Englishmen—one of his two dominant passions, in fact.

Still, Luke also was aware that Hart and Duplessis were at odds. Hart held a mortgage on the old man's lands and was pressing him hard. Three thousand *morgen*—six thousand acres of the old Dutchman's holdings—were fair ranching land, and

3—Jungle Stories—Fall

worth all that Hart had advanced on the total, composed preponderantly of thorn scrub. Duplessis had acted queerly in going off hunting with the associate of his bitterest enemy.

"So?" Luke commented. "Well, so long, Hart."

He touched the reins and the stocky Basuto pony set off upon his tireless gait, known as the "triple," which bore a close resemblance to that of a rocking-chair.

Hart and Baldy watched him till he had disappeared below the dip of the road. Jacobs came out of the store and joined them. The three broke into guffaws.

"Another of them damn' policemen on the trail," said the hotel-keeper. "One arter another, like flies going into a jam-trap."

Hart cursed volubly. "That'll be the last," he said. "We've got to make that clean-up and get down country in the next two weeks now, or hell won't have nothing on Bechuanaland for hotness."

Baldy grinned at his employer. "Don't worry, Hart," he answered. "We'll pick him up where we landed the other two."

"How about wiring one of our agents to send another telegram?" suggested Hart, turning to Jacobs.

"Give 'um time. We'll wire the post from Kimberley arter we git there."

"I'll leave that part to you, Jacobs." Hart leaned back in his chair, drained the glass of whiskey, and cursed the boy with the fan in Zulu, the lingua franca of the country.

"Get on the job, Baldy," he told his henchman.

He uttered a grunt of satisfaction as he saw Baldy riding back into town a few minutes later.

"Well," he said to Jacobs, "we've got that feller Evans, and we'll worry along for two weeks more without any more damn' policemen mixing in."

The hotel-keeper's face took on a saturnine expression.

"If Van Reenen don't spill the beans by fooling with that Duplessis girl," he observed.

"Hell!" exploded Hart. "I've warned him that this is business."

"Well, Van Reenen ain't the kind of man who keeps his pleasure and his business separate enough," responded Jacobs.

II

AS he rode on toward the desert through the scorching sunlight Sergeant Luke was anticipating his reception at the Duplessis farm with mixed feelings.

The farm was some sixty miles from Boskop, on the very fringe of the desert, a goodish way, but only a day's journey for one of the hardy native horses such as he rode. Here, years before, Jan Duplessis had built up a flourishing ranch, with a string of dams fed by a *spruit* in the wet season, and substantial enough to defy the eight months of drought that succeeded it.

Of course there would be a welcome for him, a meal, coffee, a bed if he cared to stay. No South African would deny that even to his bitterest enemy without feeling himself disgraced forever, provided he came with the necessary emblem of respectability—to wit, a horse. The horseless white man would be invited to eat alone and sleep among the natives.

Sergeant Luke had met pretty Emmy Duplessis several times. She always had a smile and a blush for him, which had sometimes made him dream of the date of his discharge, when, with his savings and a small legacy that had come to him, he meant to take up land and start out for himself with a small flock of sheep.

On the other hand, Jan Duplessis' reception of him had been, to say the least, devoid of warmth. The old man, who came of an old Boer family with a strain of French Huguenot blood, had always been an irreconcilable enemy of the British. He had migrated to the edge of the desert after the War, a generation before, and vowed that no Englishman should cross his threshold again. In time and circumstance had forced him to modify that vow he none the less retained his ancient prejudices. As he had told Sergeant Luke the last time he had visited the ranch-house:

"I've got nothing against you as a man, Sergeant. But I won't have any *verdonsmte Engelsmans* buzzing around my girl. When she marries it will be one of our own people."

Luke had wondered if the old man was thinking of Van Reenen. Adventurer as the fellow was, he had a superficial air of breeding, and was insinuating enough to have acquired a certain ascendancy over

the simple-minded old farmer, in spite of his being Hart's right-hand man. Besides, two almost rainless seasons succeeding each other had brought the Duplessis ranch to the verge of ruin, and Duplessis might have hoped to win favor with Van Reenen with the idea of placating Hart, who held the mortgage.

At any rate, Van Reenen, as Duplessis' son-in-law, would probably avert ruin. Luke thought that Emmy had hinted as much the last time they had met, when there were tears in her eyes, but he had not felt justified in speaking to the girl then—not without his discharge in his pocket.

THE sergeant decided not to make the ranch-house that night, with a view to saving his horse for the long desert marches that were to come. When the sun dipped under the horizon, and darkness was a matter of minutes he off-saddled, knee-haltered the animal, built a little fire of dead branches of thorn, and cooked his supper. He rolled up in his blanket, and was asleep almost immediately.

He was astir at sunrise, shivering in the icy wind that would change to a burning sirocco inside of two hours. He up-saddled after a breakfast of coffee, *biltong*, and a couple of cakes made hastily on the ashes of his fire, and rode on at a leisurely gait. Time had lost much of its meaning for him in those wastes. He calculated on striking the Duplessis ranch about mid-afternoon.

All that morning he rode steadily. A bite of lunch, and on again through the heat of the afternoon. The line of *ko'jes* marking the fringe of the desert loomed nearer. Now he was among them, low, single hills emerging from the plain, their tops heaped fantastically with boulders, and crowned with solitary cacti. Baboons barked at him and scampered away as he threaded the narrow cart track that at last emerged into the Duplessis ranch, the last outpost of civilization.

Luke saw the homestead in the far distance set beside the series of great dams, around which the thirsty cattle crowded under the grateful shade of the immense eucalyptus trees. Reaching the cluster of native huts two miles from the house, Sergeant Luke was surprised to discover that

they were empty. In place of the smiling native women, eternally washing rags or sweeping the mud floors, was solitude.

THE sergeant pulled in sharply. He shouted, but there came no answer.

This wholesale abandonment of the native quarters meant that something untoward had happened. He spurred his horse up past the dams, in which a little water still remained, and dismounted at the entrance to the *stoep*, throwing the reins.

He strode up and hammered on the door. No sound came from the house, which was already in the long shadows cast by the *kopjes*. There was no sign of life anywhere.

Luke tried the door and found that it was open. He stamped inside, calling. No sound came but the echo of his own voice.

The big living-room, which Emmy had furnished tastefully from Cape Town, was in disorder. The rugs were disarranged, the table pushed into a corner, three chairs overturned. Indications were that a struggle had taken place.

What had happened? A marauding raid from some wandering tribes? The natives had been at peace for years, and, if such a thing had happened, old Duplessis would not have been caught napping.

Sergeant Luke strode through the house, shouting. He stopped. He thought that he heard a moaning sound in answer.

He stepped into the kitchen and called again. This time he heard the answering moan distinctly. It came from a small cellar that Duplessis had hollowed out for a larder.

Luke made his way down the rickety wooden stairs. Hams and dried peaches hung from the roof of the little place, barrels of flour and crates of groceries were ranged along the sides.

The moaning came from a far corner. Fighting down his terror, the sergeant made his way there.

He was conscious of intense relief. Among a heap of old rags and rubbish he saw the wizened body and monkey-like face of old Jantje, Miss Emmy's Hottentot body-servant. The Hottentot, being of a higher or more adaptable mentality than the negro, is usually attached to the house in a personal capacity, generally as groom.

Jantje had always accompanied Miss Emmy when she went abroad. He had been with her since she was a baby.

The sergeant saw that the yellow man was unconscious, though he was moaning. He had been shot or stabbed. His rags were streaked and stained with blood. Stooping, he raised the man in his arms and carried him up to the living-room. A quick examination showed that Jantje had been shot twice in the head. Both bullets had glanced off his forehead without shattering the bone, but had traveled around the scalp, causing considerable loss of blood.

ADMINISTERING water and binding up his wounds, Luke soon had the Tottie restored to consciousness. Jantje recognized him and sat up, jabbering incoherently in Dutch.

"Where's Miss Emmy?" demanded Luke in the same language.

"That devil-man, Van Reenen, take her. She fight. No good. Plenty mans along with Van Reenen," Jantje muttered with an effort.

"When? Tell me all that happened as quick as you can!" Luke cried.

Jantje seemed to pull himself together. "Yesterday afternoon Van Reenen come and tell Baas Jan there's a big herd of springbok out in the Ngami country. Baas Jan go mad. He stuff a roll of *biltong* into his saddle-bag, strap on bandolier, take his rifle, and jump on his horse. In five minutes they both gone together toward the Ngami."

"Go on!"

"Last night, late, Van Reenen come back, with him that man Brouwer Miss Emmy always scared of and two more. Van Reenen say Baas Jan fell off his horse and hurt himself. Miss Emmy to go back with him while Brouwer ride for the doctor. Miss Emmy is getting ready when I tell her Van Reenen is lying. Then she says she won't go.

"She asks questions and sees that Van Reenen is lying. He catches hold of her, and she fights him. I ran to get gun to shoot them, but Van Reenen shot me in the head twice and I fell down. They thought I was dead because I lay still. They carried me downstairs and threw me into a corner. When they were gone I

tried to get up, but I remembered nothing more till you came, Baas Luke."

"Where have they taken her?"

"Into the Ngami. They doing something there, I don't know what."

"Jantje, I'm going to leave for there at once. As soon as you are able, hurry to the police camp and tell Lieutenant Connell."

"No use, Baas. Too long. Jantje go with you. White man cannot follow their *spoor* through the desert without Tottie man. We go together. See, Jantje strong now."

Making a great effort, the little yellow man got on his feet and stood looking up into the sergeant's face with a twisted grin.

"Jantje strong now. No time to go back to police camp for help when that devil-man and his other devil-mans have got Miss Emmy."

III

SERGEANT LUKE reflected quickly. He decided that the Hottentot's advice was sound. It would be hopeless for any white man to attempt to follow the tracks of horses through the scrub and over the sun-baked ground. Only a Hottentot or a Bushman could do that.

He realized that Hart and the rest of his crew had been in the conspiracy. Hart had told him that Van Reenen had invited Jan Duplessis to accompany him on the hunting trip several hours before the invitation had actually been extended. Hart must, therefore, have known of Van Reenen's intention.

"But can you travel?" Luke asked the Tottie.

"You feed horse, when you finished, Jantje strong again."

Luke knew enough of the recuperative powers of the natives to believe that Jantje would prove as good as his word. In spite of the urgent need of haste, he must feed his horse, also pack some oats on his saddle; he had intended to procure a small sack at the Duplessis ranch in any event. He offsaddled the animal, watered him, and fed him in the stable, where he filled a small sack with oats, which he strapped to the saddle. A handful or two a day would supplement what the hardy little beast could pick up in the desert.

Jantje, meanwhile, had proceeded to dig a small tunnel, about nine inches long, in the hard ground outside the house. Kindling a handful of a native herb in one end, he ran a quill through the opening and inhaled the smoke until the last embers had burned away. Then, bleary-eyed and choking but apparently quite restored to strength by the drug, a species of hemp, he sauntered up to the sergeant, who was ready for the journey.

"You get a horse, Jantje?"

"Me go on foot."

It had grown dark, but there was a brilliant moon which shed a bright light over the face of the country. Luke let his horse proceed at its comfortable triple. Jantje ran beside it like a dog, picking up the *spoor* of the horses as rapidly as was necessary. An hour or two passed, during which Jantje changed the course two or three times, before Luke finally reined in.

"Jantje, you say Van Reenen and his gang are doing something out in the Ngami country?" he asked. "What is it?" Jantje only clicked gutturally in answer.

"Are they on Baas Duplessis' land?"

"All his land everywhere."

Luke knew that the old Boer's holdings covered an immense extent of territory. Like the old-fashioned men of his nation, he lived in dread of being crowded by his neighbors, and being crowded in the Boer idea, is being able to see the smoke of your neighbor's chimney anywhere from your property. The land in question had been purchased from a native chief years before at about a penny for ten acres.

THEY went on steadily, while the terrain grew rougher, threading deep defiles among the *kopjes*. Luke did not know whether Jantje was following the tracks all the way, or whether he had only divined the direction that the kidnapers had taken. It was well on toward morning when he told Luke that they were ready to camp for the remainder of the night.

Luke knew that there was water here and there in the Ngami, and his patrol route was mapped out to enable him to halt at various pools that never ran quite dry, being fed by subterranean streams. Here, however, being off his course, he

was trusting entirely to Jantje. He was about to drink from his water-bottle when the Tottie signed to him to put it away, and disappeared with a guttural warning.

Ten minutes later he was back with an armful of wild melons, bitter gourds with roots that extended twenty or thirty feet below the ground and tapped the subterranean water supply. The horse devoured them greedily, and Luke, scooping out the pulp, as he had learned to do on patrol, quenched his thirst.

He dozed at intervals during the remainder of the night, feverishly impatient to get on, yet knowing that in the desert it is literally a case of the more haste the less speed. His mind was tortured with fears for Emmy. He started up from an uneasy doze at dawn, to see Jantje on his hands and knees beside him, puffing at his remedial herb, while the billy boiled on the fire.

A feed for the horse, coffee made of the bitter fluid from the interior of the melons, and they were off again. Luke asked no more questions; he could see no trace of *spoor* upon the sun-baked ground, and it seemed impossible that the Tottie could be following one—yet as Jantje ran before him he scanned the ground ceaselessly, turning now to the right, now to the left.

All the morning they traveled through the howling desert of sand and stones, with here and there a stunted thorn or mimosa tree. At noon they halted.

"Van Reenen six hours ahead," the Tottie volunteered. "Another man join them an hour back."

"Let's push on!"

"When the afternoon grows cool, Baas."

Fuming, Luke was forced to acquiesce. He had only a little water left in one of the bottles, and the last of the melons was gone.

In mid-afternoon, when the sun's heat had begun almost imperceptibly to decline, they set off again.

THIS was the worst stage of the journey. It was less hot, but nevertheless an inferno. Luke had finished the water, of which the little dried-up Tottie had refused to drink. Jantje skipped agilely ahead of the panting horse, which labored over the stones of that desolate route. Not

a vestige of vegetation was to be seen as they threaded their way from one shallow depression into another.

Toward sunset a line of *kopjes* sprang up suddenly before them. They were approaching them as the sun dipped under the edge of the sky.

"They go through there," said Jantje, indicating a narrow defile in front of them. "No go farther."

"What do you mean?"

"Ghosts walk in that valley, Baas. Tottie man no go on. Ghosts kill Tottie man, no harm white man."

Without much hope, knowing the strength of native superstitions, Luke tried to persuade his companion. The Hottentot, trembling and mute, refused to go farther. Not even for his beloved Miss Emmy would he enter the valley ahead, where he believed the spirits of the dead to dwell.

"All right, make camp," said Luke. "I'll go on. Wait here for me. You think they're in there, do you?"

"Three hours ago they pass here," said the Tottie. "Me wait, Baas."

Luke climbed back into his saddle and rode on into the defile. The sun was down by the time he reached it. Darkness came swiftly. The first stars appeared and the moon was already lighting up the sky. The chill night wind made the sergeant shiver after the intense heat of the day.

Reaching the crest of the narrow pass, Luke reined in and looked down into the valley beneath him. He was surprised to see that here the desert yielded to a long extent of densely set thorn scrub, indicating that there was water. The entrance was a winding path hardly more than three yards across, between two massive walls of rock.

Luke dismounted to survey the valley in front of him the better. Leaving his horse, he went on afoot for fifty—a hundred—yards. It was surprising how long the defile was. At last, however, it ended abruptly in the large crater-like bowl of the valley.

Something glittering in the moonlight at his feet arrested his attention. Luke stooped and picked it up. It was a metal badge of the Bechuanaland Police. Attached to it were a few shreds of khaki tunic.

THE discovery instantly put him on the alert. That badge must have been worn by either Simons or Rawlins. The presence of the shreds of cloth indicated that it had been torn by force from the wearer's shoulder.

One of his two men had been there, then. The little piece of metal spoke as clearly of foul play as if Luke had himself witnessed the scene. The trooper must have been murdered, and the badge thrown away by his murderer to prevent identification of the remains.

Half-involuntarily gripping his revolver, Luke began the descent of the little incline leading from the pass into the valley. He followed a narrow trail amid the thorn scrub. The discovery had accentuated Emmy's peril in his mind. He meant to solve the mystery before the night was much older.

He reached the level flat of the valley. In front of him two fallen trees formed a knee-high barrier, the trail winding around it. Luke stepped aside to follow it.

As he did so, the ground yielded under-foot. He felt himself falling, clutched at the surface of the ground, missed it, and went sliding down amid a shower of sand into emptiness.

IV

FOR just a few moments Luke lay unconscious, though this was more by reason of the swiftness and unexpectedness of the fall than from the depth into which he had fallen. Half-buried by the mass of sand that had accompanied him, and by the sandy bottom into which he had plunged, he finally struggled out, blowing the grains from his mouth and nostrils, and got upon his feet.

He saw that he was standing in a circular sandpit, not very much larger than a spacious room, and perhaps twenty to twenty-five feet deep. All around it rose the rock walls of soft, crumbly sandstone, emerging out of banks of shelving sand and gravel. The floor was strewn with masses of some substance gleaming white in the moonlight.

Assuring himself that he still had his revolver, and still under the impression that what had happened to him was no more than an accident, Luke made his way

toward the wall. He looked about him for some means of ascent. He began to make a detour of the pit.

Presently he paused, turning his attention to the white things that he had seen on the floor. They were the bones of animals. Then he identified the place into which he had fallen. It was no natural pit, but a trap hollowed out by the Bushmen, perhaps a hundred, perhaps five hundred, years before. It was one of those pitfalls made by a whole generation of those indefatigable little hunters, in which they caught their game—the antelope, the bush-hog, even the elephant.

One might have expected the floor of the pit to be covered with bones, but the game had long since ceased to frequent that region, so that the greater part of the bones had pulverized and disintegrated, strewing the floor with silvery, glistening flakes.

At the farther side of the pit, however, a heap of fresh bones was gleaming white in the moonlight. As Luke approached them he started back at the sight of a glistening skull.

No skull of baboon, that—a human skull unmistakably. Piled up about it were the ribs, the long thigh-bones, the bones of human arms. Shreds of clothing still clung to this human framework. But it did not need the presence of those wisps of cloth, fluttering to and fro in the night wind, to tell Luke it was all that remained of Rawlins and Simons.

NOW he began to realize that it was no accident, this fall of his into the sand-pit, but a cunning trap devised just at the spot where one who was unwarned must inevitably step into it. Caught in the same trap as himself, the skeletons of the two troopers lay hunched up together—but in horrible disarray.

Surely no man, however hard the death agony might have been, could have twisted his limbs like that . . . and that!

It looked as if ghouls had descended into the pit and hacked the two troopers limb from limb. Even the bones were splintered and horribly mutilated. Yet surely no human fiend would have committed this sacrilege on men who were already dead.

No *human* fiend! The explanation came

to Luke next moment when, from a little shallow recess at the base of the rocks behind the pile of bones, without a sound, a hideous shape launched itself at his throat.

It was a striped hyena, one of the few denizens of those wastes, which had fallen into the pit weeks before, and had gorged itself, like the vampire that this creature is, upon the bodies of the dead men. Now, famished by its long fast, and mad with terror, it had forgotten the instincts that make it the most cowardly of all the creatures of prey, the offal-eater that follows the lion to feast on what the killer leaves. Famished and desperate, the huge gray bulk launched itself at Luke's throat.

It was Luke's backward stumble over the heap of bones that saved him from the crunching jaws that snapped together as the lean shape shot past and over him. Before it had recovered itself Luke was upon his feet again. He turned to face it, and realized what it was.

A GAIN the hyena leaped. Luke's revolver barked too late. The bullet, shot without aiming, merely glanced off the great dome of the rounded skull. The weapon was knocked from Luke's hand as the beast shot past him again, the outward thrust of its feet sending him sprawling.

Luke scrambled desperately to his feet. At its next spring, quick as a flash, the monster smashed against Luke's body. Both went sprawling to the floor of the pit. There ensued a nightmare of struggle.

With the fetid breath of the foul animal nauseating and choking him, Luke managed to get a grip on the upper and lower jaws, wrenching and straining to get the head back and dislocate the vertebræ. Man and beast rolled over and over among the bones, but Luke never relaxed his hold.

Failing to break the shaggy neck, fortified with its masses of matted hair, Luke suddenly shifted his grasp and caught the hyena by the throat. There he clung, with the jaws spouting venom over him, and the great body thrashing in an agony of pain.

Beaten almost into unconsciousness by the monster's convulsive struggles, dashed to and fro across the heaps of bleaching bones, Luke never relaxed his hold. At length the struggles of the beast grew fainter.

With the last power of his muscles Luke tightened his grip to the uttermost, flinging the entire weight and tension of his body into that grip of his hands, till, after a convulsive shudder, the creature ceased to struggle.

Staggering to his feet, the sergeant found his revolver, and extinguished the remnants of life with a bullet through the brain.

He sank back, exhausted. With reviving strength there came to him again the problem of escape. He began circling the pit, seeking an egress. His attempts to scramble up the side merely precipitated the fall of a cloud of sand. There was no niche in the soft rock in which he could set his foot. An attempt to hack a foothold with his jackknife broke away the crumbling surface of the rock as fast as he indented it.

IT was maddening to be trapped like that, with the upper ground and the thorn scrub clearly visible in the light of the moon. Sometimes Luke would manage to win a few feet upward, and, clinging there like a fly on a wall, would work with infinite care to carve out a foot-rest a little above him. With four or five such niches he could attain the surface. Just when hope began to rise the rock would crumble. Losing his balance he would roll over and over into the heap of bones beneath.

Time and again Luke tried, while the night wore on, doggedly, desperately; and always in vain. As he realized the hopeless nature of his situation it became difficult to preserve his sanity, to check an impulse to hurl himself against those walls and beat his fists against them.

There was a brief interval when he did yield to this weakness. He pictured Emmy in the power of Van Reenen and realized that, come what might, he could hardly hope to save her.

There was another interval when, lying exhausted among the bones in the moonless second half of the night, he heard the jingle of horses' bits above him, the creak of leather, the voices of men.

He sprang to his feet and stumbled forward, shouting for aid. Mocking laughter came back to him from the edge of the pit. He recognized Hart's voice.

"Hello, Sergeant," called the other. "Met Rawlins yet?"

Hoarse guffaws of mirth met this sally. Looking up, Luke distinguished two or three other horsemen dimly outlined at Hart's side.

"Looks pretty, Rawlins does, eh, Sergeant?" Hart shouted. "That feller without the head is Simons. Hyenas got into the pit and made a meal of him. They'll be coming back for you, Sergeant."

With a shout of fury Luke loosed a shot into the dark. He heard cries of alarm. The figures disappeared abruptly.

"Put up that gun!" he heard Hart yelling. "We ain't going to shoot the feller. Let him stew there in the sun tomorrer. Good-bye, Sergeant," he called mockingly. "We'll be back to see you when the hyenas and the ants have picked you clean. You'll look as pretty as Rawlins and Simons, Sergeant."

More guffaws and the cavalcade receded into the darkness. Luke raged to and fro like the trapped beast that he was, till at last he succumbed to utter weariness.

DAWN came, in splendor of red and gold, across the desert. The sun rose. Luke made another survey of his prison. With the new day his sanity had come back to him. Everywhere were the same walls of sandstone and the loose sand.

He spent the morning in a succession of dogged attempts to scale the walls. At last he gave up hope, sat down in the bottom of the pit, and awaited the inevitable.

Rawlins and Simons must have made the same efforts too, builded the same hopes, and sunk back into the same despair.

He knew he would not have very long to wait. As the incredible heat of the desert sun beat down upon his head he felt his senses leaving him. He heard himself babbling. He had a curious sense of being two persons, the one collected and resigned, watching and listening to the other one, demented, now raging to and fro, now sunk upon the floor among the bones and calling Emmy's name.

How quiet that other man was lying at last! The thirst that filled the swollen mouth like red-hot, searing iron—what had that to do with him?

The icy cold of the night wind came at last, and the two beings were welded

into one again. Sick and faint, Luke lay on the floor of the pit, shivering in his sweat-soaked clothes, knowing that only one more day of torture lay between himself and death.

HE had already lapsed into a coma when through the dark he fancied that he heard a voice calling. Through the dark of unconsciousness, by a supreme effort, he struggled back to reality.

A voice *was* calling him, although not by name, from the edge of the pit above. Luke sat up dizzily. He was sure it was Hart and his crew, come back to finish him off. But better that than another day of such torment as he had endured!

Pulling himself together, he took out his revolver and crept forward, crying out of his swollen throat, and peering craftily about him for a sight of his persecutors.

He heard something swish softly at his feet. His fingers encountered the strands of a rope.

Half-incredulous, he pulled at it. It was fastened to something above, and held tight. He thought this must be Jantje.

"Make a noose and sling it about ye. I'll pull ye up," he heard a familiar voice, although he could not place it.

Luke knotted the rope about his body. Slowly he felt himself being dragged up the slippery ascent, amid a cloud of sand. Another moment, and he sank down exhausted upon the surface under the thorn scrub.

He looked into the face peering into his own and recognized it as that of the half-mad, wandering prospector, Pete Flanagan.

V

THE contents of Pete's flask of water liberally mixed with raw Cape spirit, soon brought Luke back to complete consciousness. He staggered to his feet and caught his rescuer by the arm.

"Emmy Duplessis!" he cried.

"Hurray!" yelled Pete. "Emmy and old Jan and diamonds! They got the diamonds, policeman, but they won't have them long. You and me and Emmy and old Jan, and the big, shining diamonds! You're lucky not to be rotting with them two poor fellows, policeman. If I hadn't

heard 'em talking, and guessed they had another policeman here, the hyenas would be crunching your bones now, like them poor fellows."

Luke pulled himself together and observed his companion. Old Pete was drunk, incoherently drunk, and in that condition he was a sort of childish madman. He tapped him on the shoulder.

"Listen, Flanagan. You've seen Emmy?"

"I've seen her. Van Reenen's got her and old Jan in the nice house I builded me long ago. He thinks he's got the diamonds too, but old Pete Flanagan was too clever for 'em. Those two poor fellows was calling for days, but Van Reenen wouldn't let me go to them."

Luke shuddered at the words.

"Ya! They thought Pete Flanagan was a harmless old drunkard, so they didn't kill him, only fed him brandy and locked him in the room. Tonight I heard them saying they'd got another policeman in the pit, and I gave them the slip, because I knew you'd help me get the diamonds." His voice took on a note of frenzy. "Diamonds, big yellow boys I found, policeman! We'll get them, you and me and Van Reenen, and share them. That's why I come to you, so as you'll clean up that nest of thieves and get the diamonds."

"Where is it? Where's this place they're holding Emmy?"

"Not far. We're going to get them now. You and me, and then the diamonds. Big, fine, white, shining stones, policeman! You and me, and old Jan—"

He went on babbling incoherently. Luke shook off the last traces of his mental confusion. He was feeling stronger now. Old Pete's horse was standing near, and that reminded Luke of his own. He had no hope of finding the animal, of course. Either it had strayed or Hart and his crowd had roped it in. Nevertheless, he decided to go back to the pass.

EXPLAINING to Flanagan, who regarded him with a look of suspicion, then followed him, Luke went back. Of course, there was no sign of the horse. Dawn was not far away and the moon was down. It was impossible to see far despite the brilliance of the stars. He would not wait till day; he was burning to get on and find Emmy.

He had left his carbine on the saddle. He carried only his service revolver and three or four dozen rounds of ammunition. Moreover, he was one man against seven or eight. But delay was not to be thought of.

"Come, Pete, show me where they are," he insisted.

Pete urged him to ride.

"You'll need the horse for fighting," he hiccupped. "I ain't going to fight. I'm only showing you where the diamonds is, and you divide with old Pete. You won't keep them all?" he pleaded anxiously, upturning a face as woeful as a child's.

"I'll see that they're divided fairly, according to the law," answered Luke, and Pete seemed satisfied. Chuckling and staggering, the old man took up the trail, first past that awful pit of death, then through the scrub.

How far it was, Luke had no idea, but they had not gone more than a mile or two, and there was only the faintest tinge of saffron in the east when the flicker of a campfire appeared through the scrub, at the base of a low *kopje*.

Pete indicated to Luke to dismount, and he did so, fastening the horse to a thorn tree. Silently the two crept forward, not going directly toward the fire, however, but circling it. Luke pushed through the scrub in the old man's wake, until he reached a clearing.

In the distant foreground, outlined by the fire, he could see a queer little brick house, composed of hand-pressed bricks, which Flanagan had fashioned in the simplest manner with a wooden square out of earth and water, evidently the structure that he had made for himself during the years that he haunted the desert. Immediately before him, in the centre of the clearing, Luke saw a wide hole in the ground. At the top was a crude windlass for letting down a bucket.

CAUTIOUSLY he went forward. The pit was of blue earth—the famous diamond earth that decomposes into a yellow clay after exposure to sunlight for a lengthy period, revealing the stones embedded within. Beside the pit was a long, leveled stretch of ground, covered with decomposing clay.

Luke looked at it and was completely enlightened as to the motives that had led to the murder of his companions, and the

kidnapping of Emmy and her father. There was no doubt but that Hart and his men had discovered the diamond pipe on old Jan's land, and had kidnaped him in order to force from him a deed to the property. The two murdered policemen must have nosed out the trail of the conspirators.

As Luke looked down he felt a tug at his arm. Pete Flanagan was at his side once more.

"They've got the stones!" he whimpered. "Big, white, shining stones, as good as De Beers. They're going to make their escape with them. My stones that I found when everybody laughed at old Pete and called him a madman! Kill them, policeman, and we'll divide the stones between ourselves. We'll be rich! We'll have everything we want. I tell you they are the finest stones that ever came out of South Africa!"

Suddenly, from the house, came an outburst of oaths and drunken laughter. Instantly Luke was all alert. Shaking off the old man, who vanished, still whimpering, into the darkness, Luke turned his steps toward the house, his hand gripping his revolver. As he approached he heard a renewed outburst of quarreling, more distinct.

As he began to round the structure, he caught the faint reflected light of a candle upon the ground outside. Creeping nearer, Luke perceived that the building was divided into two rooms, to judge from a tiny window at the rear, but there seemed to be only a single door, with another window beside it.

ADVANCING softly to the rear window, Luke raised himself on tiptoes and looked inside. A single candle was guttering in its socket. Luke could make out an iron cot, and old Jan Duplessis stretched out upon it. From the posture in which the old man was lying Luke surmised that he was bound. It was impossible to see anything clearly.

Beside her father crouched Emmy, with ropes about her body. The sight awakened all the sergeant's indignation, and it was with difficulty that he succeeded in keeping in control his impulse to rush in upon the kidnapers in the outer room. He must act cautiously, he realized, if he was not to encounter disaster. How many of

them there were he could not know for sure, but there would be, in addition to Brouwer and his two confederates, Van Reenen and the party he had brought with him and which had mocked the policeman from the edge of the pit.

If only Pete Flanagan could be relied on! But Luke realized that the old man would be worse than useless in an emergency.

He made his way around the house to the little window beside the door, and peered through the sheets of mica that covered it. Dimly he could see that there were seven men in the room. Four of them, Hart, Van Reenen, Brouwer, and Baldy Smith, were seated around a table, thumbing a pack of greasy cards by the light of a candle stuck into the neck of a bottle. The three others were stretched out upon the floor asleep. Each of the players had a bottle of Cape smoke and a tin mug before him, and a pile of money at his side.

As the sergeant hesitated, preparing for the leap through the doorway beside the window, the wrangle broke out again, and he awaited the propitious moment.

Hart and Van Reenen were facing each other across the table, snarling savagely. Baldy Smith and Brouwer, upon opposite sides, looked on at the dispute impassively to outward appearances, yet their unconscious attitude showed that the former was with Hart, as the latter was with the Dutchman.

"You've won that pot, Hart," Van Reenen shouted, "but I want my revenge! I'll play you for the mine. The whole damn mine and all the stones we've got to go to the winner of the next pot! Are you game, Hart? Or are you afraid? All to the winner of the next pot, I say, after Baldy and Brouwer here have had their share. If you win the stones, I'll be satisfied with the girl!"

VI

"G'LL go you, Van Reenen!"

Hart's face was livid with excitement. Luke saw Brouwer glance at Van Reenen, lean toward him, and whisper something.

"You keep out of it, Brouwer!" Hart shouted. "This here's between Van

Reenen and me. All or none—that's the game I've played all my life, and by God I'll play it now! First pot, the winner takes the stones. If either of you two blokes wins, it's off till the next one."

"Stones or the girl!" Van Reenen affirmed. "The winner gets his choice, the loser takes the other."

"To hell with her! If you win the stones, you can have her, too!" shouted Hart. "Cut the cards, Baldy. Van Reenen deals."

The play began. Brouwer opened on the second deal. He drew two cards. Van Reenen drew three, Hart one, and Baldy Smith sat out. Brouwer bet five pounds, and Van Reenen raised him five. Hart raised five more.

The betting grew faster and more furious. Luke, completely absorbed in the spectacle, and concluding his moment had not yet come, crouched between the window and the doorway, listening. One of the three drunken men upon the floor staggered to his feet and came up to the table, blinking in the light of the candle. The two others sat up.

"And ten!" yelled Van Reenen, pushing forward two five-pound notes into the great heap in the center of the table. "That's the last of my money. Never mind raising me no more. See me, if you ain't afraid!"

"I'll see you!" Hart shouted.

Brouwer, though he had opened, had withdrawn from the game in the beginning. His eyes were watching the three men like a hawk's, Baldy more than either Hart or Van Reenen. The gold formed a pyramid, prevented from toppling over by the crumpled five-pound notes that banked it up.

Slowly Hart laid down two pairs, queens up. Van Reenen, with a savage shout, revealed two pairs, aces up, on his side of the table.

The shouting gave place to absolute silence. The three men were standing watching. Luke felt his heart thumping. In a moment . . .

With a snarl, Van Reenen dropped his fifth card, a deuce. He had been playing with two pairs.

Hart, with a shout of triumph, disclosed another queen, giving him a full house, queens and tens.

"It's mine! My game, and my stones!" he yelled, and reached for the kitty.

AS if the others had been awaiting that precise movement on Hart's part, Van Reenen's and Brouwer's guns roared out their death-message simultaneously. It was at Baldy Smith that Brouwer fired, Van Reenen at Hart.

Baldy's gun alone answered. He had been waiting for that move. But he was a second late. Brouwer's bullet caught him between the eyes. He crumpled forward in his chair, collapsed, and rolled to the floor.

With a terrible cry Hart staggered back, upsetting the table, Van Reenen's bullet in his throat. A wild, inhuman scream broke from his lips as he pressed his fingers to the wound, from which the blood came spurting.

There was the bitter foretaste of death in the wild cry that bubbled from Hart's lips. Holding his wound, he rocked to and fro, while Van Reenen, knocked to the floor by the overturned table, deliberately picked himself up and walked toward him.

Deliberately he shot Hart through the brain. The bloated body crashed down among the gold that strewed the floor. Even as it fell the inner door burst open and Emmy Duplessis appeared upon the threshold, screaming.

Her arms were bound to her sides. She was struggling desperately to free herself. At the sight of the two dead men she screamed again.

With a howl of triumph Van Reenen leaped forward and seized her in his arms.

"I've got the stones, and I've got you, too, Emmy!"

By the light of the flickering candle in the little room behind, Sergeant Luke could see old Jan Duplessis struggling with his bonds as he tried to free himself from the iron cot to which he was bound.

The sergeant stepped inside the house, his revolver leveled at Van Reenen.

"Throw up your hands!"

AT the sight of the man whom he had supposed to be lying in the death-pit, Van Reenen released Emmy and started back with a cry. His hands went up instinctively.

Brouwer was more quick-witted. Luke saw him, crouching over the overturned table, draw rapidly. Both men fired together.

Luke had made an instinctive movement sidewise. He felt the other's bullet sear his cheek, like a red-hot iron. Brouwer pitched forward, regained his feet, and came stumbling forward, yelling like a maniac. But the words that poured from his lips were meaningless babble.

He stopped, twitched, and began to spin like a teetotum, his arms extended, his fingers twitching. Then he collapsed over the body of Hart. Cries and movements had all been purely reflex, for he had been shot through the brain.

The only light that now afforded was that of the single candle in the small inner room. It went out, upset by old Jan's frantic struggles to free himself. Outside the day was breaking, it was still night inside. Luke ran to where he thought Emmy was standing. He heard the girl's frightened gasps, but it was Van Reenen into whom he stumbled.

Like a flash the Dutchman wheeled upon him and fired. The bullet passed through Luke's sleeve, grazing the flesh. Luke fired and missed. Before he could fire again, Van Reenen had flung his arms around him, bearing him to the ground, howling to the three drunken men to come and finish the job.

Luke succeeded in gripping the other by the wrist and pointing the gun toward the floor. More he was unable to do. Van Reenen was at least as strong as he, and fighting desperately as he saw himself deprived of the diamonds for which he had staked everything.

In a moment the three confederates had precipitated themselves upon the sergeant.

"*Schiet hem!** *Schiet, schiet!*" yelled Van Reenen, as he disengaged himself from the *mêlée*.

The four were struggling on the floor, rolling over and over. Luke's hand came in contact with his gun, which had been knocked out of it by the impact of Van Reenen's body. His fingers closed upon it. He fired into the body of the man immediately above him, who was pinning him down, clutching him by the throat.

The grip relaxed. Luke struggled to

* Shoot.

his feet and fired again. The hammer fell upon a spent cartridge. He brought the muzzle smashing down upon the head of another of his assailants, heard the gurgle that came from the man's throat, and found himself free.

As he turned to face the last man and Van Reenen, a stunning blow fell on his head. He staggered backward, groping for consciousness. He heard a rifle roar, had a glimpse of old Jan Duplessis faintly outlined against the growing light, felt the wall against him, and, grasping for a hold, subsided into unconsciousness.

VII

THE taste of raw spirit in his mouth, the sound of an insistent voice in his ears brought Luke back to reality. He opened his eyes, staring at the bright sunlight that lay in a mottled pattern on the floor and walls of the cabin.

For a moment or two his mind went groping backward for a clue to his situation; then he saw the dead men huddled upon the floor and remembered.

He was lying half-propped against the wall. Old Jan Duplessis was bending over him, pouring the last drops of brandy down his throat.

The old man was still in the ropes that had fastened him. Only his right arm was free. Hampering him was a part of the iron cot from which he had broken away in his struggle. He was covered with blood from a wound in the upper part of the right arm, which hung helpless at his side.

Luke started up.

"Emmy!" he cried.

"He's got her, the *verdommte swartsel!* He has taken her away, with the diamonds!"

"How long ago?"

"One hour. I have been trying to restore you. How is your head? Can you stand?"

Sergeant Luke forced himself to his feet with a groan. Although his wounded cheek had bled a good deal it was the blow on the head that had put him out of action. The room was whirling round him. Nevertheless he succeeded in standing without support.

"I'm going after him. Which way did he go?"

"Into the desert. There is a waterhole twenty miles away, but it is a hard ride—too hard for you. Once there he can circle back to the road that runs south thirty miles east of Boskop. If you untie these ropes, we can go together."

The sergeant tugged at the ropes, which had become knotted fast by the old man's struggles. He worked furiously. Each moment was carrying Emmy farther away from him. In five minutes he succeeded in loosening the main strand. After that it was not a difficult matter to free Duplessis from the remainder of the cot.

"We shall go. There are horses—" Duplessis began, but suddenly toppled backward in a dead faint. The loss of blood had overcome him.

A glance into the old man's pallid face showed Luke that Duplessis was in no condition to take up the pursuit. He must follow alone. He must key up all his strength and enterprise to that last accomplishment.

HE lifted Duplessis up and staggered with him into the smaller room where he laid him upon the mattress from the cot. The old man opened his eyes and fixed them on Luke's face with intense anxiety.

"You'll get her?"

"I'll get her and bring her back safe," Luke promised him.

The brandy had revived his strength, though his head was still swimming, and ached abominably. He staggered out of the cabin. Three or four horses were standing a little distance away, grazing on a few blades of grass that grew around a small, sandy pool of water in a dry *nullah*. Luke, to his delight, recognized his own mount among them.

It came at his whistle. He led it back to a small shed in which were saddles, stores and equipment. He had it saddled and bridled in a few moments. Then he filled his water-flasks, found and reloaded his revolver and picked up the rifle lying on the floor with which Duplessis had shot the last of his assailants.

"I'll get her!" he told the old man. Mounting, he took up the trail indicated by the horse's hoofs in the heavy sand.

There was only one route Van Reenen could have taken. It ran straight between the two ranges of low, flanking hills toward the water-hole of which Duplessis had

spoken, and of which Luke had heard, though it had never been patrolled. This was the most hideous part of the Ngami. Not a scrap of vegetation grew amid these parched and shifting sands.

From the water-hole there ran an old Bushman trail toward civilization. This was the trail by which Van Reenen hoped to return with the diamonds.

And Emmy?

The thought made Luke quicken his horse's gait despite the heat which, at eight in the morning, had already become insupportable. He rode toward the neck of the hills, feeling more comfortable than he had expected in spite of the dull ache in his head. He was forced to drink repeatedly from the water-bottle, for all his resolution not to use the precious supply until it became essential. The heat seemed to suck every drop of moisture out of his body.

Long before noon the desert had become a shimmering waste alive with mirages. Here on the horizon was a lake of sparkling water, there a great mountain where was nothing but the flat. The sand, stirred by a hot wind, rose up and filled his nostrils.

Luke felt himself a part of this mirage. It all seemed like a dream to him, that ride, or a play which he was witnessing. Only the realization of the prize at stake kept him upon his course.

AT last, when he had surmounted the low rise of land at the neck, where the lines of *kopjes* came together, he came back to reality. There, far in the distance, were two little black specks, outlined against the vast face of the desert.

Emmy and Van Reenen!

He urged his tired horse on. He had drunk one of his canteens, but now, seeing that the beast was faltering for lack of water, he unscrewed the top of the other, and, after moistening his own lips, poured the whole contents down the horse's throat.

How far the water-hole was he could not know, but from that moment he lived only in the two figures an immeasurable distance ahead of him.

There was no possibility of taking cover in the flat of the desert, smooth as a billiard table save where the winds ruffled it, that now unveiled itself before him. They must have seen him.

Again he urged on his horse, but the dis-

tance between himself and the fugitives seemed hardly to decrease, and he had a nightmare feeling of standing still.

It was not until of a sudden, a shifting of the wind cleared away the haze and the mirage that he realized he had been steadily gaining on them. They were perhaps a little over half-a-mile distant.

A puff of smoke, the whistle of a bullet past his head, the distant crack of the discharge a moment later. Again—again! Van Reenen was shooting wildly through the mirage. How far away was he?

Next moment the two horses crashed together. Both went down. Luke felt the sting of the powder as Van Reenen's bullet brushed his cheek. He fired into the Dutchman's savage face, that grinned with bared teeth into his own. He saw the blue hole that suddenly appeared between the mouth and nostrils. Van Reenen's great body crumpled.

After that Luke was only dimly aware of Emmy beside him, calling to him, shaking him. Several times he tried to rise, but the raging thirst and fever that had hold of him were stronger than his limbs.

Hours must have passed under that inferno of burning blue sky, with the inferno

of molten copper blazing down. Then it was night. Emmy lay very quiet beside him.

Hours of half-consciousness mixed with coma, then the terror of the dawn, now flooding the east with gold.

The sun was coming up. His last day, and Emmy's. Even if he had known the secret of the water-hole, he could not have risen to his feet. And that secret was hidden in the pulseless brain of that bloated thing not far away.

Out of the depths of coma Luke came to himself as water was poured down his throat, to find himself looking into the face of Lieutenant Connell.

"It's all right, old man. Keep still. Yes, she's recovering, and we've brought spare horses. We'll start back tonight, Jantje's putting up the tent. He came back and notified the post just as I was opening a wire saying you'd gone to Kimberley. Here's the clue. The pipe was on Duplessis' land, and they tried to force him to assign it."

Weak as he was Luke gaped at the bag of stones, brilliant even in their uncut state, that Connell displayed.

But he forgot them as his eyes met Emmy's.



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Orchid Death

By HUBERT ROUSSEL

Deep in that fetid, steaming jungle it bloomed. A shimmering, fabulous flower, priceless beyond compare. But its fragile petals held death—slow, grim, awful death!

PAMLOTT tripped and went sprawling on his face in the stinking jungle ooze. It was the third time he had done this within the hour—grim advertise-

ment of a growing weakness. Each time he fell he lay longer; it required a more desperate effort of will to sting his aching body into action again, to rear himself out

of the muck and continue on the seemingly hopeless quest through the half-lighted, tree-and-creeper-choked wilderness.

He scraped the slime from his face with his shirt sleeve and looked around him. His eyes burned intolerably, and the lids were swollen half-shut from the poison-stings of the myriad jungle insects. The black, fearful, unsolvable puzzle of the wild New Guinea bush mocked his stare in every direction.

Pamlott had lost his pocket compass.

That was his trouble. He did not know where or how. He had looked at it when he plunged into the jungle from the soggy beach of Princess Marianne Strait, five hours ago. It had been his intention then to penetrate no more than half a mile into this unknown stretch of Dutch territory, and, should prospects appear good, to return later with a party. Prospects had not appeared good. Within less than an hour Pamlott had been ready to retrace his steps to the waiting ketch *Torres*—and that was when he had reached into his unbuttoned shirt pocket and discovered his precious compass missing. It had been dropped, no doubt, as he stooped at some point to force a way through the matted undergrowth!

Pamlott had not been uneasy at first. He had a fair sense of direction, knew the tricks of tropical jungles, and had kept his eyes open as he proceeded inland. He was sure he could find his way back to the anchored *Torres*. He was still sure at the end of an hour's fighting with the slimy tangle of growths that hemmed him in. But his confidence had steadily ebbed with the passing of two, three, then four fruitless hours. And now, at the end of the fifth, his water bottle was empty, and Despair rode like an Old Man of the Sea upon his shoulders.

Against the gnarled bole of an ancient breadfruit tree he leaned wearily. What he could not understand was why the crew of the *Torres* did not come to his aid. Again and again he had emptied his revolver in signal of distress, until he had but one round of cartridges left, and these he did not dare expend. But there had been no response. Pamlott could only conclude that his shots were muffled by the smothering bush. Or that the crew of the ketch was indulging in its favorite pastime—sleep.

Or that, since both captain and crew had warned him against entering this cannibal-infested jungle, they now felt that, whatever his distress, it was of his own making and that they were under no obligation to risk their heads to extricate him. But no! Surely in that case they would fire an occasional guiding shot! Pamlott was puzzled. Of only one thing could he be sure: that the ketch would wait, that it would not dare sail away until there was no possible chance that its charterer was alive.

THAT thought stirred the orchidologist. Around him had gathered, in a whining, noxious cloud, the million-and-one varieties of stinging, poison-bearing swamp-insects. He brushed them from face and hands and dispelled the cloud with a wave of his arms.

"Keep away! Damn you, keep away!" he babbled hazily.

Then he made another desperate attempt to gain his bearings. Aloft the dripping tangle of leaf, limb, fern, and creeper shut off any briefest glimpse of the sky. Sunlight had not penetrated that dank roof since man walked on his fours!

Pamlott turned in the direction he guessed to be south, and struck out anew. The whining cloud followed him; the roots began once more to reach out treacherously for his boots. He slipped and wallowed and grew dizzy with the foul humidity and with thirst.

After an unmeasured space he stumbled abruptly into a miniature clearing in the sago palms, where there gurgled a tiny spring. The water appeared to be pure—or as pure as anything could be in such surroundings. Stopping not to analyze further, the orchid hunter threw himself flat in the ooze and slaked his torturing thirst. Then, filling his water-bottle, and greatly revived, he resumed his plunging through the reeking bush in search of the muddy beach he had left.

Finally night came. It occurred with such a sudden, eerie, snap-button deepening of the green jungle-gloom that Pamlott was stricken impotent in full-stride and left gasping helplessly in the pitch-black that swoopingly enfolded him. The wilderness-spaces of the world were not new to him, but this sweating, vegetation-clogged Gehenna into which he had blun-

dered was unlike anything he had ever seen, perhaps that any white man had ever seen. And Pamlott shuddered with a clutching awe of it.

With the dark came fresh droves of mosquitoes and kindred harassing insects. They attacked Pamlott through his clothes. He could fairly feel his skin growing more and more heavily saturated with their dire injections. Yet he had made up his mind not to die. Frequent recourse to the replenished water-bottle had strengthened him. He thrust out his hands and groping along, came up presently against the bole of a great tree with many outjutting roots. On one of these he sat, with his back to the tree trunk, and struck a match from his waterproof safe.

To his delight, he found, above the ooze on the ground, a chunk of root, pithy-rotten and dry. This he ignited and wedged before him with a damp leaf above it. The "smudge" thus created soon thinned the ranks of the torturing insects. Then Pamlott's optimistic side turned up-
permost.

"Thank heaven," he muttered, "there're no wild animals; and no natives—yet." And just before plunging his aching body into the sleep it demanded, he performed his unbreakable nightly rite. Striking another match, he took a thin silver case from his pocket, opened it, revealing the small photograph of a woman, and pressed this a single time to his lips. After that, he slept.

MORNING brought Pamlott new courage, and though his body trembled as with ague, he rose, strove for a hint of direction, and took up his battle with the bush. At length he came upon a solitary stunted coco-palm that had shed several puny nuts into the mud. These he broke open and ravenously ate their tough meat. Then, taking the tree as indication that he must be near the beach, he fired off another of his precious shells. There was no answer. Cursing himself for a reckless fool, he staggered onward.

That which set Pamlott's head swimming, which froze him in his tracks, took place at about eleven o'clock.

At that time, and at the same moment, he stumbled upon a native village—and

upon the orchid for which he had been searching all his life!

Flamingly conspicuous, it grew scarcely more than fifteen feet above the ground, upon one gnarled trunk of a many-trunked banyan tree. And Pamlott beheld the Ultimate. The ravishing quintessence of all Nature's handiwork. He forgot everything. He stood breathless, overwhelmed by his find. Never had he visioned anything like this epiphyte for exquisite symmetry; he knew the world did not contain its peer in coloring.

It was a hybrid of the delicious hybrids, resembling in some way every orchid he had ever seen, but transcending them all beyond hope of comparison. Even as he stood gaping, Pamlott's mind translated the wonderful blossom into dollars, into the snug fortune it would mean for whoever should fetch it out of this jungle home and before the hungry eyes of civilization.

"Lord! I've *got* to get out now," he said aloud, huskily. "I've *got* to!"

Thus enchanted, it was not strange that minutes passed before he noticed the village. Then, with a shock, he saw that the banyan tree marked one end of a long, narrow clearing—the farther end of which was occupied by perhaps two score high-peaked thatched huts!

Pamlott's heart skipped sickeningly. His right hand found the revolver at his hip. And at the same instant he saw the village, the village saw him.

In the doorway of one of the nearer huts there was the briefest flash of a black, kinky head; then a spine-chilling crescendo yell brushed upon the jungle hush! Pamlott made an instant decision: he chose to meet in the open whatever was to come. Instinctively he selected and put his back to a giant tree; and before he completed that simple movement a running black blot was spreading swiftly over the grassy space!

Small in stature were these Papuan bushmen, but ultra-well formed, and they ran easily as deer. They carried hoop-iron knives, trade-hatchets, crude bows and arrows. But Pamlott held his fire. Fresh from experiences in the Solomon Islands, he knew that a charging bushman with a knife does not always mean a direct attack. Sometimes his curiosity in the white man

will overmaster his natural instinct to take the white man's head.

"Yap! Yea! Chicago!" shouted the orchidologist at the top of his voice. For the strange lip-sounds of which the white is capable have been known to save more than one jungle-wanderer his neck—temporarily, at least.

But now they produced no effect upon the charging blacks. Pamlott guessed there were fifty of them. Down upon him they swept like a stygian avalanche. His heart sank. From one of the leaders suddenly leaped out a trade-hatchet, whistling end-over-end through the air, to bury its razor-edge blade in the bark a foot above Pamlott's shoulder. Bone-tipped arrows fell about him in a venomously whispering shower. And a moment later a sailing knife neatly sliced half the lobe from his left ear, before embedding itself, quivering, in the wood behind him.

Then it was that Pamlott decided his time had come to die, and, white-manlike, determined to die at the very dearest cost.

His aim was slow and deliberate, his finger steady as he squeezed the trigger of his heavy-caliber revolver. Less than forty yards separated him from the van of the rushing blacks, and his first shot brought down the leader, jerking, screaming, clawing at a shattered chin.

To Pamlott, that was a miss; he exclaimed in disgust. And then he found the true range. The howling bushman whom his next bullet caught in mid-leap was dead ere he struck the ground. The next got it too. And Pamlott's last charge, fired at a range of three feet, tunneled and spattered the vitals of a puff-headed, hideously paint-smearing black whose long-handled tomahawk was already poised for a bone-shattering blow.

Though there was yet another shell in his pistol's chamber, Pamlott could not fire it, for with fiendish yells the head-hunters closed in. They buried and crushed him with their weight. He was wrenched from the tree, went staggering forward like a grizzly beset by fierce hounds. He felt his skin being pierced and torn in many places. But he was almost beyond pain. Whirling viciously, he swung his right arm free of the surging mass, lifted it high, and smashed the butt of the revolver with all his strength full into a leering black face

that crunched to a blind, gelatinous mess under the blow. He himself was dazed the next moment by half a dozen cruel hacks that bit into his flesh. Yet again he lunged clear, struck out wildly with his fists—and even as he felt one of them crash home against yielding tissue, a whizzing hatchet found his temple.

He knew no more.

STRETCHED upon the filth-encrusted floor of a hut where the air hung sodden and foul, Pamlott awoke. His head ached horribly. His eyelids were leaden, and at first the thatched roof swam and danced before his gaze. Gradually, as his mind cleared, he grew conscious that he lay alongside the wall of the hut, and that his hands and feet were tightly bound with strands of gomuti rope.

Blood saturated his clothing, yet he was not weak beyond stirring. Warily he turned his head; then his frame stiffened spasmodically with surprise, he uttered something incoherent; he thought he must be delirious.

Sitting cross-legged in the center of the reeking floor and regarding him with a steady, quizzical stare, was a white man! A half-naked white man of grotesque, horribly twisted, hut cheerful aspect. His unblinking stare emanated from only one eye, for the other eye was gone. His misshapen nose seemed to have been crushed and splintered many times, and each time to have healed at a different angle. A scraggly, reddish beard grew over scarred jaws and chin, and a mop of tangled hair hung below his ears. Beside him sat a bottle of squareface gin. He was slowly chewing tobacco, and as he squirted the juice he disclosed a shocking number of black vacancies, each standing for a missing tooth. He exclaimed on seeing Pamlott move:

"What ho? Awake? Well, well! Welcome t' our city! How feel, eh?"

With astonishment and shock Pamlott's head reeled afresh. Moments passed before he saw clearly again, before he could stammer:

"Who—wh—who th' devil're *you*? What're *you* doing here!"

The scarecrow spat.

"Now, now, don't get flustered. Let yourself come around easy-like. Me? I've several titles. Name's rightfully Elliott

Cornwall Heath—around Port Moresby an' the islands, better known as Square-Face Heath. At present, prospective son-in-law t' Chief Ngoon o' this tribe, an—

"*What!*" Pamlott broke in weakly. "*What?* Great gad, man! You mean to say you're *living* with these blacks? That you're going to—to marry a bush—marry the chief's daughter?"

"I never said nothin' about *marryin'*, did I?" grunted Square-Face Heath. "But I'm livin' with this tribe through no fault o' my own. Tradin' is my rightful business. I was owner o' the ketch *Saucy Girl*; that is, I was *near* owner o' her. Bein' pressed for the bit still due, I started from Moresby three months ago on a little tradin' trip to a village I know farther down in Dutchland, where they make first-rate copra. Come a blow. The *Saucy Girl* went on the beach o' Marianne, an' it just happened old Ngoon an' his boys was right on hand t' welcome us.

"It was a big day for them; they got some o' the prettiest heads. My mate had probly the handsomest yellow beard in the islands. Also, there was a crew o' four Moresby niggers. Myself, I got damaged up some in the scuffle, as you c'n see, but they saved me; they saw they could salvage the whole cargo o' the *Saucy Girl*—which was principally gin an' dynamite—an' they wanted me to show 'em the magic o' how to open a bottle o' squareface without breakin' the neck, so they brought me here to the village.

"In about a month old Ngoon learned to manipulate the corkscrew himself. They'd already feasted high on my mate an' crew, an' they got the fires hot for me; an' then, all of a sudden, old Ngoon's daughter, Unga, who'd been down sick, got up an' she took a shine at me. Yep, it was love at first sight ;she'd never seen a one-eyed man before; she got right charmed, decided she wanted me for her very own. I had my choice between engagement an' the oven—so here I am. The weddin's supposed t' be in about two wecks."

THE derelict broke off, swigged prodigiously from the gin bottle.

"I might inquire, what're *you* doin' in here?" he added.

Though a nausea gripped Pamlott, quickly he told his story. Told of the lost

compass, of the waiting *Torres*, and of the wonderful orchid.

"Yeh, I've noticed that flower; it's purty," said Heath. "The abos thought they'd killed you out there," he went on, "though old Ngoon's given orders t' bring in all white men alive. You see, he's got another daughter." At Pamlott's visible shudder, he grinned and added: "Oh, don't worry; she's already been in an' inspected you; she don't like your looks. As I was sayin', they thought you were dead, an' they were stokin' the bakin' fires, when I convinced 'em you were just 'baby-dead'—asleep, an' if they'd wait a while you'd wake up an' they could have the fun o' killin' you all over again. So Ngoon decided to wait."

Pamlott's thoughts were recovering their balance. His mind was suddenly filled with a picture of the ravishing orchid. He said:

"I've got to get out of here, Heath, and I've got to get that flower! Understand? Have I got any bad wounds?"

"None as I can see," Square-Face informed. "Just flesh jabs. You've got a chance. It's only about four hours trek from here t' the beach. An' there's an easy way out—a ditchy little stream half a mile west o' here that runs straight south to the beach. All you've got t' do is to follow it. Besides, I've got a compass; I'll let you have it."

"But see here," broke in Pamlott, "I don't mean get out by myself, of course I want you to come with me! I'll take you in to Moresby on the *Torres*. You talk as if—"

"Forget it," grunted the one-eyed man. "I'm stickin'." And he grinned his toothless, sardonic grin.

Pamlott was aghast.

"Sticking?" he gasped. "But why man? For Lord's sake—why? Now that there's a boat, a means of getting away, you mean to say you would deliberately—"

Square-Face cut him off with a gesture.

"Why'm I stickin'?" he replied. "Because, needless t' say, that trip from here to the beach'll be one you can't afford to tarry on, eh? You'll have to be there 'fore the nigs discover you're gone from here, or they'll run you down sure as shot."

"Well?"

"Hell! Didn't I tell you I was **damaged**

up some when makin' the acquaintance o' Ngoon an' his boys?" demanded the deralect disgustedly. And suddenly he changed his position, bringing his legs from under him. He jerked up the tattered bottoms of his dirty dungarees, and Pamlott saw that his right leg was gone half way to the knee!

Square-Face nodded toward the jaggedly healed stump.

"I was usin' dynamite on 'em that day the *Saucy Girl* grounded. A stick hit the riggin' an' bounced back."

Only then did Pamlott notice the two forked branches that lay behind the other. He said simply:

"I'll help you along; carry you."

Square-Face laughed.

"Nothin' doing! In this bush, an' me weighin' a hundred an' sixty or so! An' on my crutches I can't make a mile a month in the mud. You c'n come back for me, mebbe; though I don't know's it's much use; I'm walking on gin; with the fevers I got I'll be lucky to last out another month anywhere. Now, listen, my visit's up; night's the only time for a get-away; it's full moonlight, an' it won't matter if it is dark, after you find the creek. I picked up your gun out there under the banyan. There's one shell in it; if you can, you better save that to signal your boat when you make the beach. I'll give it to you later. Right now, I'll loosen those ropes so they won't cut, an' you just lay there an' play dead. I'll go tell old Ngoon you haven't come to yet, an' I'll convince 'im that one nigger'll be plenty o' guards for tonight."

He crawled across the intervening space and deftly slipped the knots of Pamlott's bonds.

"If anybody comes in, shut your eyes like you're woozy. Leave the rest t' me."

Then he got hopingly to his one bare foot, recovered the gin bottle, placed his rude crutches and hobbled to the narrow doorway. He paused there, his distorted face drawn in a frown as though something troubled him. He stammered guiltily:

"There was somethin' else—dropped out o' your pocket. I forgot." He brought from his dungarees Pamlott's thin silver photo-case and looked at it hungrily. "Been so long since I seen even a picture o' a white woman—the kind a man wants t' do things for. Lord, she's pretty. Guess

you'd like this back in your shirt, eh?"

Though Pamlott had gone suddenly white, he explained gently:

"She's my fiancée. I'm going to marry her if I get out o' this—an' get that orchid."

Whereupon Heath hobbled back, replaced the case, and left without further words.

PAMLOTT "played dead." But his every faculty, his minutest nerve-fiber was acutely alive. Through his mind coursed a thousand doubts, fears, questions. What if Heath's word was not to be relied upon? What if it was merely the gin in him that had been talking? Pamlott squirmed. Lying here inert, was he throwing away precious minutes? Did he choose, if he could slip his ropes now. Should he do so and break for the jungle on the chance of finding a hiding-place from the blacks and of eventually discovering the stream of which Heath had told him? An occasional stirring outside the door of the hut advertised the presence of a guard, but Pamlott thought it would be easy to force a passage through the rotten thatch at the rear.

More than once when the village fell quiet he was on the point of taking his one slender chance in a thousand rather than wait for darkness. For could any gin-sodden white influence for long the child-minded chief of a tribe of cannibal head-hunters? Yet always a still, warning voice restrained Pamlott. Then he was helped to a decision. Outside the hut he suddenly heard grunting conversation, and almost before he could lower his head to the foul floor a figure slid through the entrance.

A figure whose hideousness, natural and acquired, surpassed that of any creature within Pamlott's experience. And the orchidologist, peeping from behind slits in his eyelids, recognized that this man must be the chief, Ngoon, for he was old. In his senile emaciation, he was skeleton-like; his grim-caked skin sagged loosely over the bones, and his beady little eyes were sunk deep, deep as a gorilla's, in his head. His body was grotesquely striped with a white concoction like lime; stiff pigtales were run through his sagging ear lobes. His thick, wet lips hung open, and behind them the jagged front teeth came together evenly, animal fashion.

Ngoon carried in one talon-like hand a

long-handled trade-hatchet, and this he fondled tenderly as he squatted on his haunches some feet from the recumbent white man. A current of horror seeped through Pamlott's veins. Yet he obeyed Heath's edict; stirred not a muscle, though his overwhelming instinct was to free his hands, ready to choke. Instead, he watched. For perhaps ten minutes the old chief crouched staring with shiny, unblinking eyes, and making little movements with his tomahawk, the ghastly thought in his head all too evident. Then slowly, inch by furtive inch, the hatchet began to creep upward.

Pamlott's right hand was half-clear when suddenly there was a disturbance without, and Square-Face Heath came stumping rapidly into the sodden gloom! At once Ngoon sprang up. He grunted. He grinned guiltily. And the one-eyed man laid his hand upon the black's shoulder and addressed him in Melanesian too rapid for Pamlott to understand.

When he was done, Ngoon stood frowning a moment. Then his horrible face abruptly wrinkled into a broad smile, he nodded vigorously, and turning, went out of the shack. As Heath followed him, he spoke mumblingly back to the orchid-hunter:

"A close squeak that, matey. Wait!"

Pamlott waited. Patiently he watched the shadows outside lengthen and lengthen, the light begin almost imperceptibly to fade. Then at last, with that startling, breath-taking abruptness, the jungle-black fell.

Pamlott waited. The plague of night insects came swarming to torture his sore body; still he lay motionless. And after an age, through the slit of a doorway, he perceived another light, the strong yellow light of the tropic moon flooding over the clearing. At last, too, the village sounds were lulled; outside the straw hut the jabbering, grunting and squealing died away by degrees until there was silence, the profound, awesome silence of the primitive wilderness.

In another half hour Pamlott felt safe in throwing off the loose strands of gomuti rope. He sat up and then silently stood, stretching his cramped muscles. He was in the midst of this when the faintest of scratchings at the rear of the hut caused

him to crouch, tense, breathless, palpitant.

A whispering voice said:

"Easy, easy. It's me." Then Heath's hand shoved quietly through the decayed thatch, opening swiftly a hole large enough to admit his body. Soundlessly he crawled through, pulling his crutches after him. With no word of explanation he pressed into Pamlott's hands a shell of water and a roasted pig shank, and the latter, understanding, ate and drank ravenously. When he was done, Heath passed him his revolver.

"There's an abo ten feet in front o' the door," he whispered close to Pamlott's ear. "You'll have t' get him from behind."

Pamlott's hope ran high. He felt immeasurably revived, equal to whatever lay ahead. Noiselessly he stepped to the hut entrance and peered out. It was as Heath said: three paces away, glinting like black marble in the moonlight, squatted a naked bushman, hoop-iron knife in hand, his back half turned. Pamlott edged full into the doorway and crouched. He gripped the barrel of his revolver, took a deep breath, and sprang.

Never had he struck flesh and blood harder than he struck this savage, who grunted and partially rose at sound of his hurtling body. And the blow traveled true, the heavy pistol butt crashing squarely upon the base of the brain-case, a blow that would produce unconsciousness for many minutes. Promptly Pamlott dragged the inert body into the hut, and wadded his two handkerchiefs to form a gag, which he tied securely into the bushman's mouth. While he worked, Heath trussed the black's hands and feet with gomuti rope. They finished together, and Heath said:

"Here's the compass. Gimme the gun. I'll stand guard here at the end o' the huts while you get your flower. You c'n pick up the gun when you pass back by."

"Pass nothing!" muttered Pamlott. "Man, you're comin' with me when I get back—understand?"

HE pocketed the small compass, handed his revolver over to the one-eyed man, and turned toward the end of the clearing.

"If I sh'd have to fire this last shell," Heath whispered after him, "you'll know the jig's plumb up, an' to beat it fast—not

that you'd have a dog's chance if the nigs were after you in the bush."

Pamlott nodded. And from that instant forgot everything save the marvelous flower which bloomed upon the trunk of the banyan tree, two hundred yards away, the orchard of precious orchids that was to be his in reward of many years of arduous search. Pamlott was calm. Thoughts of the orchid's wonderfulness filled his mind to the exclusion of fear and of all else. Presently he could see it hazy in the moonlight, like a guiding star to the realization of his dreams. Then, judging his distance from the village safe, he ran.

He came up panting against the bole whereon grew his prize. Ten short feet of altitude separated it from him now. With expert skill he caught a slender companion-trunk, went up it hand over hand and found a footing where he could easily reach out to the trunk that supported the delicate blossom. He reached and it was at the instant his fingers first touched the orchid's stem in soul-satisfying caress that he heard a sound which stayed him, froze the blood within him.

Shattering the enormous quiet came a quavering, hideous man-scream of anger and alarm!

In the next breath terrible bedlam broke. It was a matter of moments for Pamlott to alter his position so that he could look toward the huts. And though he was prepared for anything, he could not at first believe what he saw. It was too much like the working of some ghastly, giantly diabolical magic.

For he saw the entire warrior-population of the village awake, armed for murder, and on the run! Like a huge, sinuous black reptile they were rounding the village-end single-file, and led by chief Ngoon himself, they headed, screeching, straight down the clearing, straight for the spot where, in the brilliant moonglow, Pamlott realized his body must be ultra-conspicuous against the dark of the banyan trunks!

Of Heath he could see nothing.

How long the bushmen had been aware of their new captive's escape, how they had discovered it; whether Heath had deserted, eluded the blacks to save his own skin, or been hacked to jelly ere he could fire the warning shot, Pamlott could only guess. And these were his flashing

thoughts. For after the first paroxysm of terror, his mind instantly cleared. He felt only a sense of hope defeated, a great disappointment. For the second time that day, he resigned himself to death. He did not move to get down from the tree. It was useless. He had no weapon save his hands, no chance to outwit his cunning enemies in the bush. He decided abruptly to climb higher into the thick foliage.

Howling, yapping, mouthing, the bushmen with their high-hopping run had already covered better than a quarter of the distance to the banyan. Pamlott reached for the next projecting limb above—and midway of the motion was halted by a series of screams that cut through the warriors' babel sharply as a steam whistle through the drone of machinery. The next instant he discovered the source of these new cries.

Behind the charging column of savages, out of one of the largest village huts staggered Square-Face Heath. He was hopping on his one foot, and one crutch—and after him he dragged a struggling black woman whose elaborate reed dress and bead decorations at once advertised to Pamlott that she must be royal, the chief's daughter! In his crutch-hand Heath carried the revolver, clubbed, and after each forward lunge he whirled and brought it fiercely down upon the shoulders or body of the kicking, fighting woman, whereupon she screamed piercingly in agony and rage!

Nor was Pamlott alone in this discovery. Glancing back to the bushmen, he saw old Ngoon in the lead suddenly falter, halt dead in his tracks, his followers doing likewise. Whirling about, the aged chief stared stupidly for a moment upon the strange, gruesome spectacle that now was taking place well out into the illuminated clearing. Then abruptly he seemed to comprehend. With a scream that matched his daughter's in shrillness, Ngoon waved his column about. Again he took the lead, and, his tomahawk stiffly outthrust, his warriors at his heels, he flew back over the way he had come.

Pamlott was horribly spellbound by the grisly scene. Of the approaching savages Heath did not seem conscious. Grimly, methodically he continued his weird antics—a lunge forward, a vicious blow upon the body of the jerking, shrieking woman.

Not until a scant fifty paces separated him from the howling Ngon did he release his prisoner. The woman sank upon the ground. Then, the blacks steadily gaining on him, with incredible swiftness Heath hopped and lurched the brief remaining distance to a thatched lean-to at the edge of the jungle directly across the clearing from the village, and which Pamlott had not noticed before. Inside the lean-to he saw were stacked many wooden boxes. Gin, was Pamlott's first thought, but that spelled nothing. Why would it?

Then in one horrible, heart-sickening flash it came to him. What was it Heath had said about the cargo of the *Saucy Girl*? What? Principally gin *and* dynamite." Gin was not in those boxes.

Dynamite!

"Heath! Heath! For God's sake! Don't! Don't!" Pamlott screamed involuntarily, as though words would carry that distance and through that din!

It happened in a few seconds, but to Pamlott they were an aching age. He saw the one-eyed man fling himself against the cases, half turn. He saw the running, howl-

ing, infuriated bushmen close in thick, fifty odd of them, clustered like flies around a sugar-loaf. But it was to be the chief's own kill. Pamlott saw Ngon's hatchet go up, trembling in the moonlight.

Then Pamlott saw the thing that would haunt his dreams forever. He saw Square-Face Heath, towering above his attackers, look directly at the banyan tree, grin sardonically, and raise his hand in a brief, cheery farewell signal! And as Ngon's tomahawk started its descent upon his head, he whipped the muzzle of the revolver squarely against the end of one of the dynamite-cases. Pamlott fancied he even saw the quick, steady squeeze of the index finger that fired the last bullet crashing inward.

Pamlott did not have to hurry. There were only women, children and decrepit men in the village. Stunned and shaken when the blast threw him from the tree, he rested till morning before he re-climbed it and took the orchid.

The orchid seemed a very trifling, insignificant thing as he bore it back to the waiting *Torres*.



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Cannibal Veldt

By L. Patrick Greene

Nigger Schoonmaker had done a disappearing act, and it was the hangman's noose for grinning Yank Harris—unless he could raise the dead from a gruesome cannibal grave.

I CAN whip any — of an Englisher in this dorp!"

At the sound of the harsh voice, the girl at the piano let her hands fall with a

discordant crash on the keys and, rising hastily, ducked behind the long counter; the four miners who had grouped themselves about the piano, their arms lovingly

entwined, their heads inclined toward each other, abruptly finished the sickly sentimental ballad they were drunkenly harmonizing about " 'Ome and Mudder," looked at the speaker in dismay and then rushed like startled rabbits for shelter, stumbling over each other in their anxiety to get out of sight—and range—of the big, black-bearded Dutchman who stood swaying in the center of the room.

Apparently he had the place to himself now—except for a fresh-complexioned youngster who sat at a table in the far corner of the room—but behind each overturned table which cluttered the barroom of the Royal Hotel men crouched and whispered curses. Occasionally a head would pop up over the bar and then quickly duck out of sight again.

"Haw-haw!" the Dutchman bellowed with laughter.

His pig-like eyes glinted wickedly as he took a long drink from the square-faced bottle he held in his left hand; his right hand gripped a revolver, and that hand did not quiver.

The door of the saloon opened and a party of miners crowded about the opening. Just a moment they stood there and then hastily withdrew, closing the door with a bang, yelling—

"Nigger Schoonmaker's on the bust again!"

The big man laughed—an unpleasant, mirthless laugh—and took a few reeling steps toward the door, bellowing:

"Come on in here—you cur Englishers! Come in and see what Nigger Schoonmaker will do to you all at one time." His voice was thick; his consonants had a strange burr and he clipped the vowels in the manner peculiar to Africans.

He stopped when he heard the noise of men running away from the door, turned again and glared triumphantly about the bar.

"I can whip any — here!" he yelled. "Who's going to make me prove it? You, Tom Harkness? You are almost as big as I am. If you had any guts, you'd try. The others—bah! Under-sized, puny little gutter scum! Well, ma-an, Tom Harkness, I'm waiting for you."

"You'll wait a long time, I'm thinking, Nigger," a voice called from behind the bar. "That is, unless you put that revolver

down an' agree to a regular mill—ring, rounds *and* rules. Any time you're willing to do that, I'm your man. But you don't know what fighting fair is, and I've got no hankering to have an eye gouged out like 'Long-neck' Saunders."

SCHOONMAKER spat contemptuously. "Long-neck was soft—all roinecks are soft like verdoemte women. They want to fight like girls. Ach, sis! That's no way for men to get together. Look you, Tom Harkness. I will put up my revolver and fight you with my fists, and, maybe, feet. But, I tell you, man, we will fight as men should. No one shall interfere to say, 'Stop biting, Nigger—'" The big man's attempt to mimic a woman's voice was very ludicrous—" 'Stop kicking; stop fighting, it is time to rest now!' Come out, ma-an, and you shall have a long time to rest, I promise you."

He glared toward the bar but there was no answer. Instead, a hand rose over the top, and in the hand was a bottle, poised for throwing.

Schoonmaker's revolver spat viciously—twice in rapid succession. His first shot missed; that the second was a hit was proclaimed by a yell of pain and the crash of a falling bottle.

A woman screamed.

"You — Dutchman," a thin voice wailed tearfully. "What ja want to do that fer? I wasn't goin' to do nothink except ask yer ter have another drink."

The big man smiled maliciously.

"So-a! That was you, eh, Rat Saunders? Well, I'm coming to get you, ma-an. Count my foot noises."

He took a step forward, bringing his big foot down with a stamp.

"One," he said. "Five more and my hands will be in your greasy hair."

There was a scuffling noise behind the bar and the voice of Red Saunders squeaked:

"Lemme get past! Hout of the way, you coves!"

A dull *clump* echoed through the bar.

"Two," intoned the Dutchman.

"For Gord's sake! Won't somebody plug the —?" the voice implored. "I ain't got no bleedin' revolver or I would. Quick now, one of you, afore 'e gets me."

"Serves you right," another voice

mumbled. "Us told you to lay low."

"Hi! What's the matter with you guys? Why don't some of you belt hell out of the big slob?"

Nigger Schoonmaker whirled with a cat-like suddenness and glared about the room, finally focusing on the man who sat in the far corner.

"Almighty!" he exclaimed then. "So-a the pretty-faced Yankee talks like a ma-an; but he asks someone to do what he dare not do himself. *Wachtenbitje younker!* Wait a bit. In a little while I will come for you. First I must see to the Rat."

"Yeh? Why do you wait?" the other drawled.

II

SCHOONMAKER frowned and he stared in puzzled wonder as the speaker pushed back his chair and rose slowly to his feet, his hands resting carelessly on his hips.

A row of heads appeared over the top of the counter, the men hiding behind the tables looked around cautiously; all eyes stared with admiration at the man who had dared to stand up to the man who had them so completely overawed; but pity was mingled with the admiration. They knew Schoonmaker, knew his colossal strength, his brutality, his shooting prowess. They had seen Schoonmaker pick up two natives—both of them big men—and dash their heads together; they had seen him knock down his horse with a blow of his mighty fist—

While this Yank! They didn't know much about him—he was a newcomer—and what they did know wasn't much to his credit. He was too cock-sure about everything, too fresh, too cheeky. But, at that, he had nerve to stand up to Nigger. They'd warn him to beat it while Nigger was attending to Rat—only that would mean that Nigger's wrath would be leveled at the man who did the warning. And, anyway, what was the use? Yank wouldn't take the tip; never had been one who could be told anything—

"Well—why wait?" he drawled again.

"Do not be so hasty, ma-an." the Dutchman said slowly. "Your turn will come. First the verdoemte Rat and then you—you—!"

NOT one of the men present could have told how it happened, yet each one was watching intently.

They heard a report—saw the bottle in Nigger's hand shatter into bits—saw the smoking revolver in Yank's hand! And yet they hadn't seen Yank draw his revolver—hadn't seen him move.

Schoonmaker stared stupidly at the bottom of the shattered bottle which he was still holding—looked incredulously at Yank then back to the bottle again.

"It was a bloomin' miracle," Rat Saunders said hoarsely.

But it was no miracle—there were quite a few men out West who could have plugged Yank before his gun was out of its holster; and he would have been one of the first to admit it. But then, South Africa developed few gunmen; shooting af-frays were rare, even in the early days at the gold and diamond diggings, and most men went unarmed except when out in the bush; only went armed then to protect themselves from lions—and other vermin—and hostile natives. The quick draw was never a requisite for a South African miner—be he good or bad man. That is why a man like Schoonmaker, who could use a gun and had no scruples about using it, could terrify this settlement of miners to submission.

FOR a few moments the tableau held; no one moved, no one spoke. There was no sound save the sharp hissing intake of Schoonmaker's breathing—he inhaled noisily, his mouth wide open, and exhaled through his nostrils, making a snorting, animal sound; the muscles of his face twitched convulsively, his mighty chest rose and fell.

The air reeked with stale tobacco smoke, gin, powder fumes and the strong odor of a cheap brand of scent; the pianist—the woman who had screamed—had saturated her handkerchief with Eau de Cologne and now began to sniff it noisily in the wild hope that it would soothe her nerves. It failed; the whiskey she gulped hastily also failed—and she screamed again. The scream ended in a muffled squawk, as if someone had put his hand over her mouth.

And then Schoonmaker came out of the surprised stupor into which he seemed to have fallen. He turned his head away from

Yank, but his revolver came slowly round—
 "Drop that gun—quick!" There was
 no drawl in the voice now.

Schoonmaker, affecting not to hear,
 winked at one of the miners who was peer-
 ing over the top of the bar counter; the
 revolver was coming slowly to its mark—

"Drop it, I said," the order came again
 and was punctuated with a shot which
plunked into the wooden floor not an inch
 from the toe of Schoonmaker's boot.

"You ——!" Schoonmaker yelled, but
 he let the revolver fall from his grasp.
 A hand reaching out from a nearby table
 caught it before it hit the ground.

"You —— of a Yankee!" Schoonmaker
 yelled again and threw the jagged bottom
 of the bottle he still held in his hand with
 all his force at the Yankee's head.

The American's eyes did not waver; he
 kept them fixed on Schoonmaker, his re-
 volver did not shift a hairs-breadth from its
 line on the Dutchman's paunch, his head
 moved slightly and the bottle crashed harm-
 lessly into the wall behind him.

Schoonmaker's eyes narrowed, seemed
 to disappear behind an ambush of thick,
 bushy eyebrows; his mouth closed, his teeth
 coming together with a *snap* as a hyena's
 will after it has snapped at and missed its
 meal.

"Blimme! But the Yank's got guts!"
 Rat Saunders piped admiringly.

Some of the other miners nodded agree-
 ment but did not care to commit them-
 selves to speech. It was not all over yet;
 there were other days coming and they did
 not wish to call themselves to Schoonmak-
 er's attention.

THE big man took a step forward.

"Stand still," Yank cried warningly,
 "or I'll shoot—and it won't be the floor,
 this time."

Schoonmaker halted and teetered back
 and forth on his heels, his hands swinging
 by his side—his arms were abnormally
 long.

"Clear the room, you birds," Yank con-
 tinued. "Get the tables and chairs out of
 the way—put 'em up against the wall. And
 you—they call you 'Nigger,' don't they?—
 you stand still."

Quickly the order was obeyed. The
 woman, and several men, taking advantage
 of the confusion, hurriedly left the place.

Schoonmaker looked furtively toward
 the door, swayed in its direction, then
 tugged nervously at his beard.

"He's got a yellor streak," the Rat cried.
 "Look at the big blighter."

He thumbed his nose in derision as
 Schoonmaker turned toward him with a
 bellow of rage.

A ripple of laughter ran around the
 room, but it was quickly suppressed as
 Schoonmaker pivoted slowly, scrutinizing
 the faces of the men who lined the walls.

HE sneered as they looked away from
 him—looked anywhere but into his
 eyes. He had been cock of the walk for
 so long, hardly one there had not at some
 time or other suffered indignities at his
 hands. They were not ready to turn against
 him openly—yet. He was still the camp
 bully, a menace to them all—even more
 dangerous than usual by reason of this
 temporary setback.

"Well, Yankee," he growled. "Do we
 stay this way all night? I would sleep.
 Tomorrow at sunrise I go to the *dorp* to
 get money so that these —— may drink
 and eat." Schoonmaker was the pay clerk
 at the Lonely Mine—the mine which gave
 birth to Royaltown. "You have the little
 popper—my hands are empty, and I am no
 fool. I do not move now until you give
 the word. But"—he spat contemptuously
 in the American's direction—"if you will
 throw that gun of yours away I will let
 one of these roineks tie one of my hands
 behind my back; and with one hand I will
 break you so-a!" He held a big hand be-
 fore him and slowly clenched it. "Ja!
 Like an empty eggshell I will break you."

The American smiled.

"Hi, you they call Rat," he cried. "Can
 you handle a revolver?"

"Yus. An' if I 'ad one I'd plugged that
 big —— long afore this. Wot are yer
 waitin' fer?"

"Come here!"

The Rat jumped over the bar—a bloody
 rag tied around his left hand—and jauntily
 made his way to the American's side, pass-
 ing almost within reach of Schoonmaker's
 long arms. He was a thin, under-sized
 man, his legs badly bowed.

"What's yer name, cully?" he asked as
 he reached the American.

"Harris—Tom Harris—but never mind

that now. Here—take this”—he gave the Rat his revolver—“and if Schoonmaker moves before I’m ready—shoot him. Understand?”

“Yus! An’ I ’opes the big — moves,” the other said viciously. “Wot are yer goin’ ter do, Tom?”

“Knock hell out of him.” Harris said and took off his coat, folded it neatly and carefully placed it on a chair.

“Don’t yer try it, cully,” the Rat said in alarmed tones. “He’s big enough ter eat yer.”

Harris pulled off his shirt and under-vest.

A broad grin passed over Schoonmaker’s face as he viewed these preparations—the Yank was going to fight him!

“Almighty!” he roared. “The pretty pink-faced Yank is going to dance with me.”

The miners shook their heads sorrowfully.

“Don’t be a fool, Yank,” Harkness shouted. “Even if he fought fair—an’ he won’t—you wouldn’t have a chance. He’s like a madman, there ain’t nothing he won’t do.”

“Keep still—you, Tom Harkness,” Schoonmaker said. “Here is a ma-an. You have no part in this. We are men and when we fight everything is fair. Not?” He appealed to Harris.

THERE was a note of relief in Schoonmaker’s voice, of exultation, of gloating anticipation of the way in which he would mutilate the man who dared to oppose him.

He tore off his shirt, not that he needed the extra freedom—this affair would not call forth one-tenth of his colossal strength—but because he gloried in exposing his massive chest and shoulders.

He stood there, legs wide apart, his hairy arms stretched out toward Harris. He looked like a reincarnation of some prehistoric man-brute.

“Come on, Yankee,” he roared. “I grow cold waiting for you.”

“I’m coming,” Harris drawled and walked slowly out of the dimly lighted corner.

And then the miners saw that he was not so young as they had first thought—about twenty-five, they judged now; but

it was hard to tell. His face was smooth, his red hair was brushed back from his high forehead, his skin was pink and white—but the pink was the glow of health and supreme condition; the white was simply an indication that he did not tan—not of softness—and did wash. They saw, too, that the loose-fitting clothes he had worn had hidden a powerful physique; muscles rippled everywhere. The miners murmured admiringly—then looked at Schoonmaker and sighed. He topped Harris by six inches, weighed a hundred pounds more—then they noticed the light in Harris’ blue eyes and forgot to be sorry for him.

UNDoubtedly this subtle change in their mental attitude registered on Schoonmaker, for with a rasping “I’ll show you!” he rushed at Harris, his arms swinging wildly; he towered over the American as a cart horse towers above a blooded racehorse.

Yet with the first exchange of blows Schoonmaker sensed that he would have to fight harder than he had ever fought before if victory was to be his. Again and again Harris easily evaded his bull-like rushes, and, stepping inside his guard, concentrated his attack on the Dutchman’s bloated stomach—it was Schoonmaker’s Achilles’ heel, the one weak joint in his armor, and it was a very weak one.

In and out again Harris dodged—his fists drumming on Schoonmaker’s stomach and the onlookers cheered wildly as they saw the Dutchman double up to avoid the punishment.

Once a chance blow—a terrific one for all that—sent Harris staggering across the room until, fetching up against a clutter of tables, he fell to the floor. But Schoonmaker was too slow to follow up his advantage. True, he rushed across the room, ready to kick in the verdoemte Yankee’s ribs. But his rush was delayed a fraction of a second too long; Harris nimbly rolled clear and the toe of Schoonmaker’s nail-studded boot crashed into and through a table top. Before he could extricate himself, Harris was up—unmarked, save for a dull red flush high on his chest where Schoonmaker’s blow had landed—and apparently as fresh as when he started.

He danced away as Schoonmaker rushed at him again.

"Stand still," the big man gasped. "Or come here and let me cuddle you."

He held out his arms.

"Catch me, then, Nigger," Harris replied with a laugh, and rushed in.

Schoonmaker crouched—one arm held to protect his tortured stomach—his chin came forward.

IT was an inviting mark—Harris swung hard for it.

At the terrific impact of the blow, Schoonmaker went down and Harris stood back; he felt nauseated, his right hand was numb—useless.

"He's out!" some of the miners shouted gleefully.

"Kick the — in the face," the Rat advised. "Go on, Yank Tom! Jump on the —! That's what he'd do to you. He's done it to others, ain't he, mates? Don't yer remember poor old Honey Townsend an' wot Nigger did ter 'im?"

"Sure!" the others shouted eagerly. "Jump on him, Yank. That's the rules he fights by."

Harris did not move. That way of finishing the fight did not appeal to him. He was content to wait. Schoonmaker was not out yet he could stand a lot more punishment.

"Almighty!" the Dutchman yelled as he rose to his feet and rushed furiously.

Harris retreated. He could afford to wait—he had to wait until his hand had completely lost that numb, tingling sensation—it suited him better, at this stage of the fight, to let Schoonmaker tire himself by his frenzied rushes.

And so he gave ground, dodging to the right and to the left, leaping back when the big man pressed too closely. He continually rocked Schoonmaker's head, bruising and cutting his face with rapier-like darts of his left; his right, the injured hand, he kept as a constant menace to the Dutchman's paunch.

Schoonmaker cursed viciously every time Harris got home on his face; his threats were vile, on his face was the expression of a beast—there was little human there.

But his wind was going, the time was coming when he would be unable to follow Harris about, but would be compelled to stand and wait for Harris to come to him.

And then the end would not be very far

off; once again skill plus clean-living would triumph over brute strength undermined by bestial excesses.

EVERY man there sensed that.

Harris tested his right on the Dutchman's stomach. He pulled the blow, not quite sure of his hand, but Schoonmaker groaned loudly and the American smiled; his hand was all right now and he retreated no longer.

The miners roared in a frenzy of excitement—shouting advice to Harris, booing and jeering Schoonmaker.

Schoonmaker was giving ground now, covering up, bellowing with pain. But he was still dangerous—very dangerous—and Harris took care to keep clear of a clinch. He knew that if once the Dutchman's gorilla-like arms closed about him that man could crush him like an egg-shell.

And then the door opened and a tall, thin, sour-featured man entered.

"Stop that, you two," he shouted in a high-pitched, nasal voice, and his beady black eyes glinted with a malicious light. "You, Schoonmaker. What the hell do you think you're doing? Want to get hung for murder?"

There was a snigger of mirth at this but it quickly died away. Johnson, the hawk-nosed newcomer, was the manager of the Lonely mine and had the power to hire and fire—jobs were scarce at that time of the year.

Schoonmaker had dropped his guard at the first sound of Johnson's voice, all the fighting rage seemed to have left him as quickly as wind escapes from a burst balloon. He turned and faced the door, a hangdog expression on his face.

HARRIS, too, dropped his guard and stood looking first at Johnson, then at Schoonmaker, a puzzled expression on his face.

"And you, Harris," Johnson went on, pursing his thin, bloodless lips in contemptuous disapproval. "You've only been in this country forty-eight hours and you've already got the reputation of being a know-it-all; and now, in addition to that, you start brawls and shooting affrays in our peaceful settlement. Let me tell you, young man, that American hoodlum tricks won't go in this country—we're civilized. Why"

—his face flushed red with anger, Harris' grin was very provoking—"if it wasn't that I'd promised one of the directors that I'd look out for you because your father was a friend of his, I'd give you the sack now."

Harris still grinned and, snorting wrathfully, Johnson turned to leave.

"You come with me, Schoonmaker," he called back over his shoulder, "I want to go over the payroll with you."

He left the room and the big Dutchman, picking up his shirt and silently accepting his revolver from the man who had confiscated it some time previously, meekly followed.

At the doorway he turned.

"I'll tear you apart if you're here when I come back from Bulawayo, you — of a Yankee," he said.

The smile left Harris' face.

"You should come a-shooting when you say *that*, Nigger," he said slowly, "and if you're wise you won't come back from Bulawayo. Next time I see you I'll—kill—you."

Schoonmaker blinked stupidly, a scared look came into his eyes—there was death in Harris' cold, even voice.

"Come on," Johnson's voice sounded irritably.

Schoonmaker shrugged his shoulders in a show of unconcern which failed to register, then went out, banging the door behind him.

III

A FEW minutes later he was standing sheepishly beside Johnson's chair, listening to that man's biting sarcasm.

"It's no use telling me different, Nigger," Johnson concluded. "I know what I'm saying. I know what I saw. That damned Yank would have knocked you cold. You were blowing like a porpoise—I've told you to knock off the booze—and look at your face, man. You'll hardly be able to see tomorrow, and a dentist 'ud have a beautiful time fixing your teeth. And the Yank wasn't touched, damn him. There wasn't a mark on him.

"Now listen: you'd like to see this — out of the way, eh? He's made a fool out of you before all the boys, eh? You'll never be able to hold your head up again when he's around, will you? All right; I

want him out of the way, too. I suspect he's been sent here to investigate the way I run the mine; they're not satisfied with the 'takings'—he laughed harshly—"and maybe he's found out things, maybe not. In any case, he's dangerous."

"Then why—Schoonmaker began.

"Keep quiet, you big oaf, I'm talking. This is what you'll do: You'll sneak out of here as soon as possible—ought to be on your way before eleven—and make tracks for Bulawayo. There's a bright moon, so you'll be able to ride fast. Get the payroll money as soon as the bank's open and return at once—no boozing, mind. You ought to reach the ford on your return trip about 2 p. m. tomorrow, eh?"

"Ja. Earlier than that. By noon, surely."

"We'll say two to be on the safe side.

All right, then. There's some good places to hide in the rocks near the ford, aren't there? And if a man fell into the river below the ford he'd never be able to get out again, would he? Specially if he'd been shot through the head first, eh?"

The Dutchman's eyes glistened.

"And so I'll find an excuse for sending this noisy Yank to Bulawayo, timing it so's he'll reach the ford about 2 p. m. You can managed the rest, eh?"

"Almighty, yes, ma-an! It is a good plan, except"—he shook his head doubtfully—"they will be sure to suspect me."

"Hell! Suspect you of what? All anybody'll know is that Harris left the camp and never returned. They'll think it was because he was afraid to meet you. I'll put that thought in their heads. And, besides, I'll let on that you don't leave for Bulawayo until sunrise and how would it be possible for you to get to Bulawayo and back to the ford in time to meet Yank there?"

His hollow laugh was echoed by the Dutchman's, whose slow-working brain did not perceive the flaws in the alibi but readily accepted it as perfect.

"That is all right, then," Johnson exclaimed, furtively mopping the sweat from his forehead with a white cambric handkerchief. "Better go and get ready for the trip—and be sure of your range and *don't* miss."

The Dutchman nodded and turned toward the door.

"And say, Nigger," Johnson added

meaningly, "there's nothing like knowing how to pad the payroll, is there? I'll see you get four men's pay this month!"

NIGGER SCHOONMAKER sprawled at full length on a bed of reeds which he had cut and cursed the heat, the cloud of black midges which clustered about his face, the verdoemte Yankee and the caution of Johnson who had insisted that 2 o'clock would be the earliest he could reach the ford on his return trip with the payroll money.

Nigger was an unprepossessing sight; one eye was completely closed up, the other nearly so; luckily, he thought, it was his "sighting" eye and he had no fear that it would interfere with his accurate shooting. Two of his teeth were missing—Harris had knocked them out—and his jaws ached as if every remaining tooth in his head had been loosened. His stomach muscles ached so that every breath was a torture and his face, contorted with pain and rage, was far from pleasant.

But Nigger found it possible to forget his discomforts in a grim anticipation of the revenge which would be his; he had only another hour to wait if Johnson succeeded in his end of the scheme.

SCHOONMAKER knew that his ambush defied detection—even should the Yankee come suspecting one. The Dutchman was a veldt man; he knew how to hide his tracks, to camouflage his position, to take up an ambush as well as any native. And here in this boulder-strewn ground on the high banks of the river overlooking the ford it had been very easy to hide himself. But he had left nothing to chance; he had planned cunningly. In front of him were two boulders which inclined to each other, making a narrow V. They made a rest for his rifle. It was wedged in between them now, its sights were trained on a jagged boulder which jutted out of the river below halfway across the ford.

When Harris came riding down to the ford and reached that rock, the rifle muzzle would be raised just a little and then—The idea pleased Schoonmaker. He was a sure shot with a rifle, he would not miss.

Yes, Johnson's plan was a clever one.

For many miles above and below the ford the river flowed between high, rocky banks. Only at the ford was a crossing possible and even there it was attended by some slight risk. The passage was narrow, above and below the ford the current ran swift and deep. And any man who made a false step there was in danger of being swept away by the current—after that his situation would be completely hopeless.

And what chance for Harris with a bullet through his brain? Schoonmaker chuckled at the whimsical idea. And if the body was discovered way down the river—an extremely unlikely happening—it would be so mangled and torn by the rocks that the discovery of a bullet wound was well nigh impossible.

Yes. The plan was well conceived and Schoonmaker was resolved that it would be well executed.

He looked round to see that his horse was out of sight. He could not see it—he had tethered it in the midst of a clump of mapani bush way back from the river—and was well satisfied.

A DEADLY silence pervaded the place; a silence intensified by the murmur of rushing waters and the lazy humming of tiny insects. The rocks danced grotesquely in the heat waves, but Schoonmaker's eyes never left the narrow trail which led from out of the chaos of rocks on the other side down to the river. His heavy forefinger constantly played with the trigger of his rifle.

"The verdoemte Yankee," he muttered again and again. The monotonous repetition of the words seemed to have a soothing effect on him.

The minutes passed slowly.

So still was Schoonmaker that a klip-springer, the tiny buck of the hills, came quite close and cropped the scanty herbage not a stone's throw distant.

Suddenly the Dutchman felt that he was not alone; felt that someone was standing behind him. So strong was the premonition that he turned his head to face the intruder on his solitude.

But he saw no one.

He shivered slightly as he thought of the evil reputation the place was given by superstitious natives, then cursing himself for

giving way to foolish fancies, he turned back to the ford.

Again came the premonition of another's presence.

Turning swiftly, he detected a slight movement behind one of the rocks. Taking up his rifle, he leveled it at the rock and ordered softly:

"Come out of there."

There was no response.

He repeated the words in the *Taal* and then in the native dialect.

After a short pause a tall, emaciated native, naked save for a filthy loin cloth, came toward him. In one hand the native carried a short-stabbing spear—in the other a small leather pouch.

"What are you doing here?"

"I wait for the white man to kill." The native pointed to the klipspringer.

SCHOONMAKER rose to his feet and took a quick step toward the native, intending to knock him down. With an effort, he gained control of his temper. He had to get the man out of the way by peaceful means—otherwise his plan would be ruined. If Harris came while the native was present he would cross in safety. Schoonmaker dared not commit murder before a witness—even though that witness was only a half-starved native. He considered the wisdom of killing the man or of sending him on some errand to the town! He discarded both plans. Undoubtedly there were other natives in the vicinity and he could not kill them all, or, for the matter of that, send them all on errands. Then how—

"Look, white man!"

The native's voice broke in on his cogitations and he watched him open the little leather bag and empty onto his dirty palm five small stones. They were no bigger than peas and looked like lumps of dirty glass.

"Look, white man," the native repeated.

Schoonmaker took them and examined them with idle curiosity at first, then—

"Diamonds!" he exclaimed softly. "Almighty! They're diamonds." A light of cupidity shone in his eye. "Where did you find these?" he asked in the vernacular.

"Back there." The native pointed with his assegai to a nearby kopje. "What will the white man give me for them?"

"They are of no value. They are too small."

"There are bigger ones back there." Again the native pointed to the hills.

"Show me them," Schoonmaker said with ill-concealed eagerness—Harris was entirely forgotten now. "Show me them and I will give you this." He held out a long hunting knife, the handle of which was curiously carved.

The native took the knife, tried its keen blade on the ball of his thumb, then nodded agreement.

"Follow me, white man," he said and led the way quickly along a faint trail leading back from the river and into the heart of the hills.

IV

IT was long past noon when Tom Harris, riding his horse as only the men of the West can ride, came to the ford.

Before he attempted to make the cross he closely scrutinized the rocks on the other side. Harris was no man's fool, although he had fallen in very readily with the mine manager's suggestion that he ride into Bulawayo with a letter to one of the directors residing there. "You needn't come right back," the mine manager had added. Harris reasoned that Johnson wanted him out of the way for a few days and by readily accepting he believed that he had thrown the manager off guard. But Harris had no intention of going on to Bulawayo. He meant to return to the mining town by nightfall with a wild tale of being lost in the bush. He thought that his investigation of Johnson would be much easier if he acted the part of a greenhorn!

Harris did not, however, have any suspicion of being ambushed—his scrutiny of the trail ahead was simply indicative of the man's natural caution—and presently he urged his horse down the steep trail and over the ford.

As he climbed up the steep bank leading out of the river he saw a native emerge from a clump of mapani leading a big, raw-boned chestnut mare. He recognized it instantly as belonging to Schoonmaker—there was no mistaking the curious white blaze which ran down her near shoulder and Schoonmaker was riding her constantly about the camp.

"Hell! that's funny!" he muttered.

He dismounted, tethered his horse to a convenient bush and then, revolver in hand, hastened silently in the direction of the native. He came up to him when he was midway across an open space.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The native turned around, hesitated a moment as though contemplating flight, thought better of it and waited for Harris to come up with him.

AS he drew nearer Harris saw that the native was so thin that his bones threatened to pierce the skin. His abnormally distended stomach contrasted horribly with his gaunt frame. His eyes were bleared and he blinked continually as one suddenly coming from a dark room into the full blaze of the sun. His skin was the color of cold, wet ashes; his upper lip was short and drawn back in a snarl from yellow, pointed teeth.

"Greeting, white man," he said.

"Keep your distance, filthy one," Harris said—and he spoke the vernacular surprisingly well for one reputed to be a recent comer to the country! "What are you doing with a white man's horse?"

"The white man will come with me?"

"Answer my question—dog."

The native cowered.

"A white man is sick."

Harris looked at him sternly.

"Where?"

The native pointed back into the hills.

"He fell from a rock. His leg is sick. He gave me this in payment for going to get other white men to come and help him."

He produced from the folds of his dirty loin cloth a hunting knife; the handle of it was curiously carved.

Harris took it and stuck it in his belt.

"I think you are a liar," he said. "If it proves that you are—a beating will follow. If you have spoken true words the knife will be given back to you. But where, then, were you going with the horse?"

"I was going to ride him to the white man's kraal to summon help."

"You ride!" Harris said sarcastically. Then, suspicious once again, "but you were going away from the trail which leads to the mine."

"First, I would have gone to my kraal

to send some of my people to watch by the sick white man," the native answered simply.

HARRIS hesitated no longer. "Lead the way," he said. "I will follow."

"Then it is best that we leave the horse here. There is no trail where we go." As he spoke, the native deftly hobbled the horse and then, without further words, led the way through the mapani bush, encircled the base of a tall kopje and so came to a boulder-strewn ravine. It was a desolate spot, totally devoid of vegetation and the big black rocks seemed to have retained the heat of countless centuries.

Harris sought to get a more detailed account of the Dutchman's accident.

"The white man was hunting buck," the native said. "He fell from a ledge and hurt his leg."

"And why in hell was he hunting buck when he ought to have been well on his way to Bulawayo to get the pay money!" Harris exclaimed in English. "Darned funny about this native, too," he continued. "He doesn't belong to any tribe that I'm acquainted with. Besides, I'd always understood there was no natives in this locality. He has filed teeth— Now what does that mean as far south as this?"

They came presently to the end of the ravine and Harris saw that further progress was blocked by a steep kopje.

The native pointed silently to the top of the hill and Harris tersely ordered him to lead on.

The climb was a hard one for Harris, handicapped as he was by the heavy, nailed shoes he wore, and several times he was at the point of calling a halt but the thought that Schoonmaker was probably suffering fearful pain spurred him on.

HALF an hour later they reached the summit of the hill and Harris found himself on the brink of a crater-like opening, about one hundred feet in diameter. At his feet the crater walls dropped a sheer fifty feet or more to the surface of a pool of water.

Harris shivered as though with cold.

"Where is the white man?" he asked.

The native pointed to a ledge of rock, on the opposite side of the crater, which

jutted out over the water. It was covered by small boulders.

"I do not see him."

"He is hidden by the stones. I put them round him, fearing that he might fall into the water. Come!"

The native led the way round the top of the crater and when they were directly above the edge of rock Harris saw that here the side of the crater was not so precipitous and that there was a faint trail leading down to the rock.

He wondered a little at this as he commenced the downward trail, the native close behind him. Reaching the ledge of rock, a swift glance among the boulders confirmed the suspicion which had been forming in his mind. There was no sign of Schoonmaker.

"What mockery is this?" he asked, turning sharply on the native.

In response the native leaped at him, assegai upraised. The attack was so sudden that Harris had no time to draw his revolver before the native was upon him. He caught the descending assegai with his left hand while his right leaped to his holster. Yet, quick as he was, the native divined his intention and caught his wrist in a grip of steel.

FOR a moment they stood motionless, face to face, and Harris was almost sickened by the blood lust in the other's eyes. He silently cursed the careless confidence with which he had returned his revolver to its holster as he climbed up the hill; he cursed himself still more bitterly for falling so easily into Schoonmaker's trap—he did not doubt for a moment that the Dutchman was at the bottom of this.

He was amazed at the strength of the native's grip.

"Let go, dog," he commanded sharply. But the steel-like grip tightened—and the struggle commenced; a grim, silent struggle with death for the loser. Harris strained with all his might to free his hand that he might get at his revolver, the native seeking to drive his assegai home.

Back and forth they wrestled across the narrow ledge—now teetering on its edge, now banging into the boulders against the wall of the crater—neither seeming to gain an advantage. Suddenly Harris shifted his attack. Bringing his right hand up to his

left—both hands now on the assegai—he turned the weapon on the native. Gradually, but surely, despite the frantic efforts of the other to prevent it, he thrust the assegai down. It entered the soft spot, close to the neck, and so down—

The native relaxed his grip, loosed it, tottered for an awful grimacing moment on the edge of the ledge, and fell into the waters below.

Breathlessly Harris searched the waters for a sign of the native. The surface of the water was broken by little wavelets, that was all! The ripples died away; everything was still. A few reddish stains rose to the surface just below the rock and Harris, leaning over, tried to follow them to their source but the black depths baffled him. He was preparing to leave, convinced that the man's body was caught in some fissure, when he was suddenly aware of a dark shadow in the black waters. It was coming toward him and, as it neared, he could mark the outline of a man's body. Closer and closer it came, totally submerged. It was swimming under water. Harris could see the assegai sticking from its neck. The horrible wolfish face turned upward.

With a muttered curse, Harris drew his revolver and fired at the shadowy form. Before the echoes of the shot had died away he was scrambling up the trail; his one thought to get away from the crater. He was obsessed by the gloomy horror of the place.

V

IT was long after sundown when Trooper Boh Evans of the Rhodesian Mounted Police rode up the long, dusty street which was Royaltown. As he rode he whistled cheerfully at the thought that, after several days of bunking out on the veldt, eating God knows what, a good meal and a comfortable bed awaited him at the hotel. And then, on the morrow, after he had had a talk with the private investigator engaged by the directors of the Lonely Mine, he would have a little talk with Manager Johnson and his assistant—one Nigger Schoonmaker. And the outcome of that talk, Evans thought, would mean the arrest of those two gentlemen and, possibly, his own promotion.

He had waited for a long time for that promotion, Evans had—and worked hard. He had the reputation of being the cleanest man on the force—and one of the smartest. Always the most difficult cases had been turned over to him and yet, despite his uncanny handling of them, promotion passed him by year after year. He had grown old in the service: his hair had thinned at the top, his black, flowing mustache was turning a rusty gray. Yet he was still optimistic; he was sure that this time—as he had been sure at all other times—that his reward would come. He was sure because he was determined not to go on a drinking spree when the case was settled. At last he knew his weakness. He could handle other men—white and black—the most vicious horse was docile when he took it in charge, but he could not handle himself. His ten-day—always ten days—drinking sprees after the conclusion of a case were the talk of the force. But this time—not a drink would he take!

As he neared the hotel he heard men's voices raised in anger and the cry—

“Lynch the ——!”

Dismounting quickly, he ran up the rickety steps and into the barroom.

THE room was full of men, their faces inflamed with drink and passion. They were swarming about a tall man with flaming red hair. His hands and feet were tied, a rope about his neck. The other end of the rope had been passed over a rafter and was held by a thick-set man. In a corner of the room sprawled the Rat. He, too, was bound and a gag had been thrust into his mouth; but that could not stop his eyes from looking the curses he could not speak.

Johnson, the mine manager, smiling sardonically, toying with his heavy gold watchchain, was lounging against the bar.

“Leave this to me, boys,” the man who held the rope shouted. “I’ll show you how to dangle him.”

As he spoke he gave a jerk to the rope which took the helpless victim off his feet.

“What’s this all about?” Evans asked Johnson; he thought it was the hazing of a new chum.

Johnson turned slowly toward him.

“Why,” he said with a sorrowful smile, “I’m afraid they’re going to lynch him. I’ve pleaded with them to let the law take

its course—but—er—I’m afraid they’ve been drinking too much to listen to reason. He’s a murderer—better let the boys deal with him in their own way. It’s dangerous to interfere. Come with me, trooper. We’ll go and have a drink up at my shack. No one saw you come in and we can get out quietly. There’ll be no one to report you for failure to do your duty.”

Evans licked his lips; he was very thirsty.

“You get to hell out of here,” he said tersely. “If the boys mean business there’s goin’ to be some bullets flying pretty soon.”

HE turned his back on Johnson, who took the hint and vanished suddenly into the night.

The thick-set man tugged at the rope again.

“That’s enough of that,” Evans shouted. “Come and get your drinks, boys, they’re all on me.”

The men turned to face him, indecision showing plainly in the way they fidgeted.

“Oh—! Never mind that drunken old fool Evans,” shouted the man with the rope. “He’s no policeman. If he interferes, we’ll serve him the same way. Watch me. I’ll show you how we make —— like this dance in Australia.”

Again he jerked the rope.

There was a sharp report and the self-appointed hangman gazed stupidly at the blood streaming from his broken wrist.

“Did they teach you to do that in Australia?” Evans asked crisply. “The next one that touches that rope,” he continued, “will sure as hell get a bullet through his thick skull.”

“But look here, Bob,” expostulated one of the more sober miners, “you’ve no call to butt into this. Yank here was given a reg’lar trial—everything was Sir Garney-O—by camp jury, found guilty of murder and, what’s worse, the blighter has made away with our pay.”

“If that’s true, he’ll have to pay the penalty. But he’s got to have a proper trial. You ought to know better than think you can get away with a camp trial in these days. What’s the story?”

“Last night this chap give Nigger Schoonmaker a proper licking, he did. He’d give him a worse one only Johnson comes in and stops it. They had a few words

after it was all over. Nigger calls the Yank here a — and Yank comes back with, 'I'll kill you for that!' I tell you it fairly made my blood run cold."

"This morning," another miner took up the tale, "Nigger rides off ter Bulawayo ter get hour pay an' not so long after, this blighter rides after 'im, tellin' Johnson 'e's goin' ter 'ave it hout with Nigger afore 'e gets back.

"Abart two 'ours afore sundown, we're 'ere a-waitin' fer hour pay, w'en hup comes the Yank and Nigger's 'orse is galloping alongside of 'im.

"We asks the Yank where Nigger is an' 'e hups and spins a bleedin' fine yarn."

The cockney paused, breathless.

"Well, what's the story?" Evans turned to the first speaker.

"He said," that man said slowly, "first of all, that Johnson sent him to Bulawayo and that he never told Johnson he was going after Nigger. Of course, Johnson give that the lie. Then he went on to tell us how he crossed the ford and sees a nigger with Schoonie's horse. This here nigger tells him that Schoonie is hurt up in the hills, so he goes with the nigger to help Schoonie."

"Is that likely now?" another man interrupted sarcastically.

"Up in the hills," the narrator continued in his dull monotone, "the nigger tries to stick the Yank. The Yank sticks the nigger with his own assegai, the nigger falls into a pool of water and Yank comes down and rides home. Somehow, he says, Schoonmaker's horse got free from its hobbles for she galloped past him just as he came into town. Now that's a hell of a story, ain't it?"

"Might be true at that," Evans commented.

"**T**RUE!" someone exclaimed. "It's a lie and a damned poor one at that. The Yank shot Schoonmaker as he said he would and the fool didn't have the sense to clean his revolver."

He spat disgustedly.

"Yer forget," interjected another, "that he said he fired a shot at the body of the dead nigger as it was swimming under water. Now what do yer make of that, Evans?"

"It's darned little evidence to hang a man

on," Evans said slowly, "and if you were sober you'd have sense to see it."

"Sober or not, it's all one to me," shouted a fat miner. "A man doesn't have to be sober to see the Yank's lying. Who's goin' to believe a story like that. Get out of the way. He's had a trial, a fair trial. We've given him every chance—Johnson presided, and the Yank had the Rat over there to defend him—we had to tie the Rat up and gag him, he got too bloody violent. So get out of the way, trooper, and let's hang the dirty thief."

It was evident that the loss of the pay money weighed more heavily on the miners than the murder of Schoonmaker.

"What makes you think the Yank—as you call him—took the money." Evans was sparring for time; he wanted to edge still nearer to the prisoner.

"Schoonmaker always used to carry it in his saddle wallets. Well! It ain't there now and—"

"Aw! What's the use of talking to that old fossil! Get him out of the way, boys, and string up the Yank!"

As the miners closed in with a rush Evans overturned a large table in their way. Three or four well-directed shots extinguished the spluttering kerosene lamps and, in the ensuing confusion, Evans threw the noose off of Harris' neck, and cut the ropes which bound his hands and feet.

"I'm standing here at the door," Evans called a moment later, "and the first man who tries to light a lamp will need a doctor pretty bad. Is there a Devon man here?"

"Yiss, my lad. You haven't forgot old Tom Pearce, surely?" answered a deep, mellow voice.

Evans chuckled.

"Course I haven't, Tom. You know 'Uncle Tom Cobleigh?'"

"Yiss, i' faith!"

"Then sing it, Tom. All the verses and chorus. When you're through you can light the lamps. The Yank ought to be well away by then. And mind, I'm here at the door!"

Without further urge Pearce started the ancient ditty,

*"Now listen to me, an' I'll tell you a tale,
All along, out along, down along lea. . ."*

and before the first stanza was completed

the sound of horses' hoofs came to the ears of some of the miners.

"They've gone; both the—'ave," cursed a cockney. But the others gave no heed as they bellowed happily.

"Old Tom Cobleigh an' all; old Uncle Tom Cobleigh an' all."

VI

SUNRISE next morning found the two men, Evans and Harris, on the top of the kopje looking down into the crater.

During the long ride to the ford—at first through the darkness of an African night, and then in the white moonlight—the two men had come to know each other and a mutual feeling of affectionate esteem had sprung up between them.

"If it hadn't been for the fact that I had it in my mind to investigate about here to see if I couldn't find some natural explanation of the tale the natives tell of the place, I'd have been a bit sceptical about your story, Tom. But as it is—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm willing to believe any story they tell of this hole," Harris said slowly. "How do the yarns run, Bob?"

Evans cleared his throat.

"Oh, they say that evil spirits live up here with heads like hyenas; they say these evil spirits carry off anybody who's fool enough to camp over night at the ford. Now you and me, being white men, know there ain't no such evil spirits—and if there were, they wouldn't be able to carry off a hefty devil like Nigger Schoonmaker, or anyone else for that matter. On the other hand, we have had reports of natives disappearing on the way from Bulawayo to the Lonely Mine. The reports were never followed up because the man who received them pigeon-holed them and forgot all about them. I routed them out last time I was in headquarters."

"Then," Harris drawled, chewing reflectively on a piece of mapani gum, "granting there's no evil spirits but men have disappeared there's only one explanation left as I see it. No, two. These natives who disappeared may have tried to cross the ford when they were drunk, lost their footing and were carried away by the current—"

Evans shook his head.

"That won't do," he said incisively. "When a native's drunk he doesn't go prowling about the country; he remains set."

"Or," continue Harris, disregarding the interruption, "there's a gang of body snatchers around here somewhere."

"That's more like it. And say, Harris—" Evans became suddenly excited—"think again what the native you saw looked like: Big, swollen belly, filed teeth— Hell, man! What would you say he was if you saw him up North?"

Harris spat out his gum.

"A cannibal, Bob—but—you're not trying to suggest that Nigger Schoonmaker imported a cannibal to do me in."

"Nothing like that, not that I don't think Nigger capable of a trick like that. But look here. I believe your story and, maybe a judge would believe it, but you'd have a hell of a job persuading a hard-headed jury to believe it. If Schoonmaker never shows up, you'll be in a mess. You publicly threatened to kill Schoonmaker—that was a fool thing to do."

"It was, Bob," Harris admitted. "I go off like that once in a while—lose my grip, you know."

"I know," Evans said soberly. "I'm that way myself—we ought to watch out for each other, Tom. Well, as I was saying, you threaten to kill Schoonmaker and then ride off after him—"

"Only I didn't," Harris interposed. "Johnson sent me off to Bulawayo; he wanted me out of the way for a time so that he could pull off some trick with the cyanide vats. But I've told you about that."

"Well, we'll grant you that point, Tom. It'll be your word against Johnson's, and what we've discovered about that little angel will discredit him as an agent. But you've still got to account for the way Schoonmaker's horse followed you and the fact that the pay money wasn't in his saddle wallets—and the fact that they found his knife on you. And, as I said before, you'll have a hard job convincing a jury of mining men—as they all would be—with that yarn of yours. Why not take the easiest way out and say that you shot Schoonmaker in the course of your duty as special detective engaged by the Directors of the Lonely Mine. Say he resisted arrest and—"

EVANS looked sharply at the American. "I'll see 'em in hell first!" Harris said hotly.

Evans laughed happily.

"I knew you'd say that. All right! The right thing then for us to do is find what became of Schoonmaker. Let's go down to the ledge as long as we're here—then we'll go back to the place where you first saw the native with the horse. Strikes me we ought to have scouted around there first."

When they had reached the ledge Evans scouted around among the boulders while Harris sat down and gazed moodily at the waters.

"Come here, Tom," Evans shouted suddenly.

Harris rose and went over to him.

"Here, look at this, Tom. What do you make of that?" He pointed to one of the boulders.

"It looks as if it had been blackened by smoke."

"You've said it. And see, it stands over a slight fissure in the rock."

"Yes, but—"

"When the native was swimming toward you, where were you?"

"About here I think."

Evans rubbed his hand gleefully, and began to undress.

"Going mad, Evans?"

"No. Going for a swim. Coming?"

"I wouldn't go in that hell pond for a million dollars," Harris said fervently and then laughed sheepishly.

Evans knotted a rope about his shoulders.

"I think we're standing over a cave here," he said, "and unless I'm all wrong, The entrance to it is below water level. Anyway I'm going to have a look, see."

Not a little excited now, Harris lowered the little policeman into the water and presently Evans was standing up to his neck in water, holding his revolver above his head.

"I'm standing on a ledge here," he called up, "and there's a small opening in the rock front of me just above water level—I think it extends down as far as the ledge I'm standing on. Give me plenty of room, I'm going for a walk."

As he spoke he seemed to pass into the solid rock wall of the crater and so disappeared from Harris' view.

FIVE minutes, ten minutes passed. Harris was beginning to grow alarmed. Then he heard three muffled reports. They seemed to come from the ledge of rock under his feet.

He leaned over the rock and gazed down into the water.

A few minutes later Evans reappeared bearing the unconscious form of Schoonmaker on his back.

"He's all right," he shouted to Harris, "just fainted. I've got the rope round him—do you think you can manage to haul him up?"

Harris nodded. So great was his relief that, at that moment, he felt that he could have pulled up an elephant.

"Haul away then," Evans shouted. Harris hauled, Evans assisting him as much as he could from below, but it was a long time before he had pulled Schoonmaker safely onto the rock.

Then he lowered the rope again—it was no great difficulty pulling the little policeman up.

They carefully examined Schoonmaker—cutting the ropes which bound his hands and feet—but he was unharmed save for a big bump on the back of his head. The big pockets of his corduroy coat bulged with canvas bags containing the pay gold.

As they finished their examination Schoonmaker opened his eyes. Then, gradually, the fear faded and he began to sob hysterically. His spirit seemed to have been broken.

"It was all Johnson's fault," he gasped presently. "He wanted Yank out of the way; he suspected Yank knew too much about the way he was getting gold for himself that he wasn't accounting for. And he got me because I'd padded the payroll and—and—had done other things for him. So I hide here and wait for Yank, meaning to shoot him so he would fall into the ford. And then, while I wait, Almighty! That nigger. He—"

Again he began to sob—and after a little while he slept, his muscles twitching nervously; occasionally he cried aloud as if tortured by some horrible nightmare.

"We'll let the poor devil sleep," Evans said softly. "He's been through enough hell in the last twelve hours or so to more than pay for everything. When he wakes up again, we'll have a talk with him and

I think he'll tell us everything he knows. And it'll be a hell of a tale, I'm thinking. Specially this last part."

"Go on—talk some more," Harris said. "What did you find down there?"

EVANS looked up with a start from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"There's a big cave down there, Tom, dimly lighted by the few sun's rays which get through the fissure there, and that place was a touch of hell on earth. It stunk—God! But then, cannibals—"

"Cannibals, eh!" Harris exclaimed. "So my nigger friend was a cannibal?"

"Yah! And there were three others down there. At the time of the Big Famine a lot of natives took to the hills and lived on each other. I thought they had all been wiped out but, evidently, the one who attacked you—and the other three—was a survivor. And once a cannibal, always a cannibal. You know that, Tom? How they found this hide-out, God knows. But they'd have been safe from discovery if they hadn't tried to add a white man to their bill of fare. But I suppose the poor devils were hungry; you see the natives have been avoiding this place lately.

"The way I figure it is like this. The native you saw must have enticed Schoonmaker to enter the cavern—we'll learn how later—knocked him on the head and bound him. Then he came down to the ford with the intention of getting rid of Schoonmaker's horse. It was then that you saw him and he decided to get you too."

"Hell! And he nearly got me!"

"Damned glad he didn't, Tom."

Both men were silent for a little while, then Evans continued:

"After he had fallen into the water he must have had just enough strength to crawl into the cavern before he died.

"And there was Schoonmaker, hound hand and foot, helpless in the stinking place. And there was the dead cannibal with an assegai sticking in his neck; and there were three others—an old man and two old hags, all so feeble from age and starvation that they could not move from their sitting position—and they sat there with hunger-filled eyes, looking at Schoonmaker. It's a wonder the poor devil didn't go insane.

"But he didn't and, as a matter of fact, I think we've come out of this mess pretty well."

Harris nodded—he was a little overcome by the narrow escape he had had from a most horrible death.

Evans laughed forcibly.

"I suppose the missionaries 'ud say I ought to be strung up if they ever got to know what I did down there," he said as he "broke" his revolver and extracted three used shells. "But it was the best thing—the only thing to do.

"And Tom, when we get back to the dorp, we'll go on one glorious drunk, eh?"

Harris smiled affectionately at the little man.

"Hell, no," he said soberly. "I've heard a lot about you, Bob. Not one drink do you have, you little runt. I'm going to watch you close."

Evans chuckled happily: Now he was sure of promotion!

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The White Lord of The Elephant Kingdom

By ARMAND BRIGAUD





The White Lord of The Elephant Kingdom

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

The jungle gives, and the jungle takes away. From Mwala, great she-elephant, it took her first-born. But in its place it put a white child; bade her nurse and raise it, for here was the one who was to be the White Lord of the Elephant Kingdom.

MWALA, the big elephant cow, trumpeted defiantly. Her ears spread out like two enormous umbrellas from the sides of her head. Her reddened eyes shone like live coals.

The other elephants of the herd gave her a wide berth. Mwala was their leader and unchallenged mistress. They all remembered how, after killing a charging rhinoceros with a single blow of his trunk, Rungo, the towering bull, had grown so bold as to defy one of her commands—and had been instantly charged, gored and smacked down with such force that, in falling, he had uprooted a thorn tree. For the next hour, Rungo lay dazed and bleeding amidst a mess of broken branches; and Mwala, to fully restore order, had chased and beaten lustily all the other members of the herd.

Mwala's rage was an offshoot of her grief. Her taut breasts were full of unsuckled milk but her last born was dead. A hungry leopard had killed him when she strayed from him to inspect a bush of succulent bamboo roots. When the avenging elephant mother catapulted on him with the speed and power of an express train, the leopard clung to the plump body of his victim and snarled defiance. Then, awed, he leaped away and climbed a mimosa tree.

Mwala knocked down the tree with five quick blows of her big domed head. The clawing and hissing leopard, hurtled to the ground, futilely attempted to bite the big hoof which smashed his breast into a bloody poultice.

Mwala returned to her young, and was shaken by a portentous shiver when she caressed his body with her trunk, and felt the limpness of death in it. Then she began to sway and to rock from side to

side, uttering mournful squealing sounds.

Thus the mother elephant mourned her slain offspring for the remainder of the day and during the night, until she was driven away by the stench of decay issuing from his swollen body.

Now, after a week, Mwala was still looking for trouble. She trumpeted her disdain at the eddies of heat haze, which danced around the thickets and seemed to boil out of the tips of the tall grass, and glared at the ugly gnus and at the graceful antelopes grazing on the plain to her left. Then her attention was attracted by a group of giraffes which, from the top of a hillock, were staring at the opposite slope.

Suddenly the giraffes fled, their gait resembling the bucking of a small boat on a lashing surf.

Mwala wondered what could have frightened them. Leopards? Not likely. The leopards are the marauders of the jungle and seldom attack in the open. Lions, probably. Or men.

Had Mwala been less desperate, the thought that men might be on the other side of the hill would have driven her in the opposite direction at top speed.

For, had not her mother been killed by an Arabian hunter? And had not she, Mwala, been captured in her early youth?

The men who had seized her confined her in a bewildering locality, surrounded by unbreakable stockades of tree-trunks lashed together. They shouted commands at her and chained her to tame elephants who dragged her about and butted her whenever she refused to obey.

In her misery, Mwala had found only two friends: a big, bearded white man and his little son. The white man was good. He never interfered with her rest. The little fellow always brought her sugar canes and

now and then some tender bamboo roots.

But one day the white man returned from the jungle on a litter carried by four blacks; and, after that, neither he nor the white child ever came to see her.

The white man was a Belgian Army officer, who supervised also the elephant training farm kept by his Government. Struck by a severe attack of fever while on a tour of inspection, he had returned to his native land with his family.

But, according to Mwala's dim way of reasoning, her hated enemies, the negroes, had killed and probably devoured him, and were also responsible for the disappearance of the white boy.

With sly cunning, she had disguised her revengeful lust and wish to escape under a simulated docility and was finally assigned to wood-clearing work, unshackled and with an escort of policing elephants.

That was the opportunity that she had been waiting for. As soon as she had realized that no men with guns were near, she had thrown down her kornak, crippled his negro assistants with savage blows of her trunk, and run away.

A few weeks later she joined a herd of tuskers, and with them migrated North.

Thus Mwala reached English Nigeria, and there lived for almost forty years. But the average life span of an elephant is about nine score years, and now that she was seventy-five years old, Mwala had attained the peak of her power and the leadership of the herd.

MWALA had hardly reached the top of the hill deserted by the giraffes when her ears caught the sound of a thin, excited voice which filled the gap of two score years and made her quiver in an ecstasy of expectancy.

Mwala couldn't realize that the white child who had befriended her in the elephant farm had perforce become an old man—if death had spared him. To her, he and the little fellow crying in the very middle of the plain below were the same.

She was going to trumpet a joyous greeting, when she saw the negro besides him roughly tearing the clothes off his tiny white body.

For an instant Mwala stood, trunk lifted, eyes ablaze, sturdy, column-like legs firmly planted on the ground; then the muscles

of her tremendous shoulders knotted and her huge body sprang forward as if propelled by mammoth springs.

Meanwhile Nukoo, the porter, was berating the son of Captain Lane of the King's African Rifles.

"Your father," Nukoo growled in a mixture of Arabic and Cameron dialects, "takes you along when he goes hunting big game, because he wants to make a great Afrikan-der out of you . . . as if there weren't already too many white fools interfering with the black-ivory slave trade, and with all the other ways of making money of my kind.

"May a curse strike your father! I sold one of his guns to the chief Hussein Labiar, it is true! But, when your dog of a father asked why the gun was missing, I told him that I threw it away because it was broken and no good. And he should have believed me! But he didn't! He refused to give me my pay and threatened to put me in jail.

"Hnawah! Last night I bashed-in the head of a sentry. While your father was ambushing lions, I slapped you unconscious while you slept and I carried you away! But now I'm tired to walk with you. That's why I'm going to break all your bones, and to leave you crippled for the animals of the wilderness.

"Nukoo doesn't fear your English father. He knows how to hide. And Hussein, who got the gun, will help him!"

Fright paralyzed the voice of little Robert Lane; but, small as he was, he had been reared too well to forget that a man must master his feelings. He tried to check the tears filling his eyes. But, when Nukoo struck his face, the pain was greater than both his fear and his self-control. A heartrending child's wail rang out.

That, and his own savage yells, restrained Nukoo from noticing that the ground was shaking under the fast thumping hoofs of Mwala.

Suddenly there was a shadow above him. He let go of the child, turned his head and gasped seeing the big outstretched ears, the blazing red eyes and the uplifted trunk of the charging elephant. And that was the very last thing that Nukoo ever saw on earth.

A new terror blinded Robert when Mwala lifted him gently with her trunk.

Sometimes later, on a mound in the middle of a clearing of the jungle where the elephant cow had carried him, the boy's head cleared; and, with that uncanny understanding which enables children to recognize friends and foes, he realized that, far from being threatening, the elephant seemed eager to please him.

Then he noticed a white trickle falling from the elephant's breasts and recognized it as milk.

As a small boy, Robert had learned to drink from a goat's nipple, as native children do. Thus, being healthy and very hungry, he was almost pleased when Mwala shooed him gently toward her breast.

He had to climb on a pile of stones, right under the elephant, to reach the milk bags; shortly after, however, he was drinking lustily, and the soothed Mwala basked happily in the reacquired glow of motherhood.

"Listen carefully," her happy but stern trumpeting warned the herd, "the elephant-ghosts of our ancestors sent me this son to take the place of the young one killed by the leopard. He shall be known as Tega. Perhaps, in time, he'll cease being man and turn elephant. But, regardless if he does or not, you shall not harm him. Learn to love and respect him, or Mwala will kill you."

Rungo, the bull, and Baluga, the largest cow next to Mwala, squealed their indignation and came onward with outstretched trunks. But, when they saw that a quiver of rage was beginning to shake Mwala's enormous bulk, they beat a hasty retreat, lowering their heads in sign of submission.

II

"**T**HEY were two Simbas—two full grown lions," the bronzed giant said calmly, "And here are their tails, mother."

Two yard-long severed tails, tawny, as heavy as solid leather, and ending in tufts of brown hair, sailed through the air and fell on the grass under the proboscis of Mwala, who, mastering her disgust, uttered a congratulatory squeal.

"They were hungry and ran against me with open maws," the full grown Tega continued, "but I conquered them."

Mwala was not impressed, because lions had as much of a chance against her as

alley cats before a war tank. But, to please her adopted son, she simulated admiration and wonder by swaying her enormous head from side to side, pounded on the grass with her fore hoofs, and finally trumpeted:

"You are a great hunter. I'm proud of you."

"Mother," Tega said gravely after a while, "listen carefully. Last night, traveling high above the ground by swinging from tree to tree, I managed to reach the big baobab in the middle of the village of Annike, the Banda chief of chiefs, and I listened to the decisions of his council.

"Annike has sworn by the totem-ghost of his original ancestor to kill you and the other elephants of the herd, O mother."

"Tomorrow night we'll trample out of existence the huts of his village, his life and those of his tribesmen." Mwala replied fiercely.

"I don't think it could be done." Tega deprecated, "Most of them are armed with sticks that spit thunder. Like the thunderstick which killed Rungo a few moons ago."

Mwala trumpeted mournfully. The relentless hunters of Nigeria had driven the herd Eastward. Eventually, the harassed elephants had reached the territory where the jungle, the equatorial forest and the bush meet—the French-controlled zone of the Oubangui Chari which is located between the Bamingui and the Gribingui Rivers. There Mwala's tuskers had roamed and lived in peace for years—until the Banda cannibals and totem-worshippers had learned that the Arabian traders were willing to barter guns, salt, jewels of bright copper and beads and cloth for ivory.

Hers, Mwala's, skill, and Tega's alert mind had enabled the herd to defeat the Banda hunters in scores of encounters with the loss of only a few elephants. But, recently, that wild warfare had become too strenuous. The killing of Rungo, the old bull, had been celebrated as a great victory by the Banda tribesmen of Annike and had disheartened all the young tuskers, who were becoming too meek, too resigned. Mwala's limited reasoning couldn't imagine any way of restoring their fighting grit; and that made her sorrow all the greater.

"Speaking of thundersticks," Tega continued, "I heard Annike saying that Ali, the Arabian trader, will bring him twenty

of them. That means twenty more Bandas to kill from far . . . Mother Mwala, I listened carefully, and I learned which trails the caravan of Ali shall follow.

"We must destroy that caravan. And, after, we must seize Annike the Banda chief and force him to leave the herd alone."

"I can't make out what's to be done. I can't think as well as you." Mwala replied. And her humility of baffled monster was pathetic.

"Tomorrow I shall explain what my plans are." Tega concluded, "But I'm tired now."

Tega threw himself on the soft grass and closed his eyes. The elephant mother kept on grazing all around him.

Fifteen years had passed since the day when she had rescued the helpless child from the hands of the murderous porter. That length of time had added to her height, bulk and strength. But now Tega was a full grown man. More than six feet high, splendidly muscled and quicker than a leopard in his movements, he was called the white ghost of doom by the tribesmen. Yet, he was puny compared to the smallest elephant. But his brain had proved mightier than the combined power of the herd. They still recognized Mwala as their leader; but, like Mwala, they followed blindly all his orders.

EARLY the next morning, Tega arose and stretched his bronzed limbs. His first words were: "Good! You are all here! Listen to me, O long-nosed brothers and sisters!"

The thirty odd elephants of the herd, who had formed a ring all around him, waved their ears and trumpeted. When the clamor subsided, Tega spoke in their peculiar language of grunts and squeals:

"Do you remember that gorge where the black spearman attacked Mwala?"

"I remember," a hull grunted.

"Karak, you are clever and wise." Tega complimented him. Then, while Karak rolled and unrolled proudly his trunk, he continued:

"The caravan of the Arabs brings thundersticks for the Bandas of Annike—thundersticks to kill us! And it will cross that gorge day after tomorrow."

"Then we'll just run over them, and

they'll meet the same end of Mwala's attackers." Baluga, the old elephant cow, interrupted.

"No!" Tega silenced her, "Ali's Arabs are all armed with thundersticks and march preceded by scouts who would see the approach of your mountainous bodies. A clumsy attack would be met by a hurricane of piercing fire-balls, and that would be the end of the herd.

"But I have a better plan. We'll pile boulders on the very top of one of the slopes. When the Arabs and their negro porters will march along the narrow defile beneath, I'll screech three times like an eagle. That will be the signal for you, elephants, to push down the heaped boulders, who'll fall on Ali's men and crush them.

"The survivors will remain bewildered and scared out of their wits for several days, and I'll find it easy to deal with them. Not a single man, not a single gun of that caravan shall reach Annike's village."

AT that very moment, Ali el Mohktar, the Arabian caravan leader, was drinking minted tea. A negro slave had already placed before him some crusts of bread on a platter, and was brewing the thick black coffee that rounds up the breakfast of the traveling Arab.

Ali's rapacious beak of a nose quivered. The thick lips of his big trap mouth smacked while he drank, which was a mark of good manners according to the customs of his kind. But that affectation of Bedouin politeness was belied by the feral expression of his single smoky-black eye, which was enhanced by the white scar and empty eyesocket disfiguring the other half of his face.

Ali el Mohktar was mulling over an intricate scheme.

A wealthy Englishman and his wife had been seen in Fort Archambault, with a large retinue of white and black servants. The magnificence of their tents, utensils and guns, and the money that they spent freely, had been relayed all over the jungle, the forest and the brush for a radius of scores of miles by the frantic pounding of the goudougoudous, the telegraph-drums of the blocks of Equatorial Africa.

"He hired a hundred Sara porters to carry the mountains of canned foods that were conveyed for him by the steamboat of the Chari river." Ali ruminated. "Why, does he want to spend years in this part of the world? His is not an ordinary hunting safari. Did he hear perhaps of buried treasure? And if so, why should a dog of an unbeliever get rich on the land where I have traded for years?"

The negro slave stared at Ali with abject terror. The caravan master was a dangerous man when his mind was harassed by some problem; and, in that morning, the very dullness of his single snaky eye was a sign that he was in a particularly savage mood.

"Son of Sheitan, why don't give me my coffee?" Ali roared.

The slave hastened to pour some of the black liquid in a long stemmed tin cup and brought it to his master. He was stooping over him, when Ali suddenly swore and lifted a clenched fist. In so doing he struck the arm of the slave. The cup upset and the boiling liquid fell on his burnous, seeped through it and scalded his shoulder.

"Gecko!" Ali yelled, jumping to his feet and savagely hitting the slave, who fell backward. Quick as a flash Ali unsheathed the curved sword stuck in his belt and slashed.

The cruel blow slit the unfortunate man's right biceps, uncovering a strip of bone. Baring his teeth, Ali was going to strike again, when a rapid tattoo of drumming echoed in the distance.

"Again the goudougoudou!" Ali el Mohktar growled, lowering his sword. "Mbre, you worthless carrion!" he added, staring at the wounded slave, "You know the code of the goudougoudou, you can interpret its sounds. What does this last drumming say?"

Mbre glanced at his bleeding, crippled limb and became gray with horror and pain.

"It says," his voice sounded strained and toneless: "Men of the forest and the jungle, the Englis is great, the Englis is magnificent, he's wealthy beyond all dreams. I, Hyrra the drummer, I have seen the folds of large money-bills that he carries in his valises, I have seen the gold coins which fill his pockets. The Englis is brave he's powerful. There's no chief

of chiefs in his country who doesn't want to give him his daughter as a second wife, because it is known that he can give hundreds of goats as a marriage price. Numberless livestock and fowls roam his possessions in the faraway white man's town called Glas-cowah and in another mighty town named Lon-don. Men of the forest and the jungle, I have seen the Englis' riches. . . ."

At this point the eyeballs of the slave rolled, and he fell backward in a faint.

"Someone, patch up this wretch's wound." Ali called disdainfully. "I don't care if he suffers, but he's worth money to me on any slave market, and I don't want him to bleed to death." Then he hissed under his breath. "I swear by Allah that I'll get hold of the Englis' possessions and of his money. But I don't want to challenge the wrath of the French authorities. Somebody else must seize the Englis and his safari for me and pay the consequences . . . and this someone will be the idolater, the human flesh eater Annike."

DURING all that day and part of the next one, the elephants of Mwala's herd heaped piles of enormous boulders on top of a bleak hill. And Tega supervised all their trips up the slope, with their trunks fastened tightly around the huge stones that they were carrying.

At last the young man thought that everything was ready and, warning the elephants to remain in the neighborhood, went to look for the approaching caravan.

Unseen by Ali's men, he sighted them toward evening and witnessed from a distance the pitching of their camp.

Toward noon of the next morning, he returned to the scene of the prepared ambush, and sought Mwala.

"Mother," he announced, "before sundown the Arabs will enter the gorge."

"We are ready for them." Mwala trumpeted.

Tega led the herd to the thick wood bordering the outer slope of the hill topped by the piled boulders, and told them to wait hidden in the thicket. Then he sought a vantage point and placed himself so cunningly in the shadow of a bush that no one could have seen him from a distance of more than three or four yards.

Toward the middle of the afternoon the scouts preceding the caravan appeared and entered the gorge. One of them looked at the ragged rampart of boulders on the top of the sheer wall of rocks to his left, and snarled:

"By Allah! That crest was bare the last time that I passed here."

"O glory to the fools! O, praised be the blind!" one of his two companions mocked him, "Don't you see how big the stones over there are? Who ever heard of men strong enough to carry such big weights to the top of a hill?"

"Nevertheless," Rhsel el Marhoun, the scout who had spoken first, insisted, "we ought to go around that hill and see what there's on the opposite slope."

"It would be a waste of time, and useless labor," the leader of the tiny vanguard shrugged. "If there were natives ambushed near here, they would anticipate just such a move, and shoot at us, to put us out of the way when the rest of the caravan is still too far to hear the reports of firing guns. But everything is peaceful. Nay, Rhsel, you let your imagination play tricks on you. Let's go on."

In his hiding place, Tega heaved a sigh of relief. When the scouts went out of the opposite side of the defile, and loomed smaller and smaller as they walked on, his excitement found an outlet in a loud yell.

Suddenly his mouth clamped shut, and the muscles of his powerful body tensed. For, far on the North, the sun was drawing tiny flashes from a long ribbon of moving figures, advancing on a flat stretch of bare ground. The caravan was approaching.

In spite of his hard training, for a moment he felt sorry for all those men who were about to meet their doom. Then he reflected that the Arabs were all Marauders and slavers, and the negroes who had served them for years brutalized murderers, who had shown no mercy to the hapless inhabitants of the scores of villages which Ali el Mohktar had attacked and destroyed to get human cattle for his black-ivory trade, until the interference of the French patrols of the Oubangui Chari, and of the English patrols of neighboring English central Africa had made things too hot for slavers.

AN hour or so later, the Arabs and the black porters of Ali crowded the narrow defile when three times the screech of the hunting eagle rang.

The men of the caravan paid small attention to the call of the hunter of the sky because they didn't care for eagles and didn't fear them. But Mwala and the other elephants came out of the wood. Their towering bulks climbed up the outer slope of the hill, without dislodging a single pebble and as silently as shadows.

Soon they were on top of the ridge and struck with their wide, cupola-like heads. The huge piles disintegrated. The boulders leaped into the air and fell toward the bottom of the ravine.

The booming noises alarmed the men of the caravan, who lifted their heads just in time to see the deadly shower that was falling on them. In a sudden fit of panic they threw away their weapons and their loads, and blindly leaped right and left. But there was no shelter, no chance of getting away in time. A few seconds later the narrow gorge rang with a bedlam of agonized cries. Then it was all over, and a handful of men, the survivors, were running as fast as they could out of the defile.

Ali was among them. But the sinister face of the ruthless chieftain no longer showed cruelty and snarling haughtiness. His single eye was glazed, his mouth hung open. A low moan issued from his parched throat.

Ali shrank back when a bronzed giant suddenly loomed before him.

He was a naked white man. Ali was not sure whether the stranger was a white savage, or a jungle ghost. But his long, big muscles were the strongest that the Arabian chief had ever seen. His handsome head was jerked back proudly. His gray eyes were as firm as steel and glowing with uncommon intelligence.

"Ali the murderer, Ali the thief," that amazing white man said, in a mixture of Banda and Ndele dialects, made all the harsher by the addition of strange sounds that didn't have any human ring, "you are my prisoner. Come with me, or I kill."

Ali had lost his rifle. His sword, pistol and dagger were still in his belt, but he instinctively felt that, if he moved a hand to grasp one of them, the white giant

would have grasped his wrist and broken it. Bewildered and desperate, the chief-tain turned his head and stared appealingly at the men who had come out of the gorge after him.

They were only a dozen or so, and none of them had a gun. The sight of the naked white man had frightened them even more than their leader, so that they stood rooted on their tracks. Suddenly one of them gave forth a piercing cry, turned about and fled.

As in a dream, Ali saw towering shapes of elephants galloping right and left of him. The white man, far from being worried, shouted after them a succession of beastly growls. Ali el Mohktar thought that he was going insane when he heard the elephants uttering similar growling sounds back at him.

Then the steely hands of the white giant were on him. They tore sword, dagger and pistol from his belt, they unfastened his sash and tied his wrists behind him with it.

For several minutes Ali moaned, curled under the weight of the heavy hand planted firmly on his shoulder. Then, one by one, the elephants returned, driving the survivors of the caravan before them.

"Well done mother. Well done, brothers and sisters." Tega approved. "Now, let us bring these hairless apes to some hidden place of the jungle."

TOWARD evening, on a clearing surrounded by thick walls of virgin jungle, Tega said to Mwala.

"Mother, don't you scold me because I forced some of the younger tuskers to carry here a dozen wounded. I can kill men who are strong and full of fight—but I can't stand the sight of helpless, suffering men without lending them assistance.

"I cleansed their wounds with water, I poured strong herb juices in them. I set their broken limbs—and they are now prisoners, with Ali and his able bodied companions in that big cave there . . ."

The mouth of the cave opened before them. The towering shape of a young elephant grimly mounted guard before it.

"How long must we watch on all these enemies of our elephant people? Would it not be better to kill all of them?" Mwala trumpeted angrily.

"Before deciding about their fate," Tega

decided, "I must capture Annike the Banda chief."

"When?"

"Before the dawn of tomorrow. Annike and his men are celebrating the might and the power that will be theirs tomorrow, when the caravan carrying the guns will be among them—that's what they think, the fools. They'll spend the night filling themselves with honeyed beer, and will collapse in the sleep of drunkenness and exhaustion before sunrise. And that's the time when, after giving the sentries of their village something to worry about, I'll seize and carry away Annike."

"I shall round up the herd at once." Mwala agreed.

"No, mother." Tega declared, "I shall take with me only two elephants: Baluga and Karak. Two elephants shall not be noticed in the jungle, at night. But the whole herd could be sighted by late Banda hunters, who could manage to bring the warning to Annike."

Mwala shook her tremendous head from side to side. The ways of all men, even of that beloved adopted son of her, were too much of a mystery for her poor reasoning power. Then she thought that that same day Robert's cleverness had enabled the herd to trap and defeat a caravan of two score riflemen and porters, and, lifting her trunk high, she trumpeted proudly to the sky.

ANNIKE, who didn't know that the coveted guns were lost, visualized himself as the undisputed native master of all the territory between the Gribingui and Bamingui river, and north of the Bamingui. The meek N'Douka tribes already paid him tribute. He had harassed and ambushed them at every turn, but he had managed to keep on good terms with the French authorities by paying punctually the head taxes due by his Bandas. The N'Douka, who had been unable to do the same, and had not been intelligent enough to explain to the French officers what kept them penniless and without anything to barter, had been put down in the Governmental annotations as refractory. But the Ndele still refused to recognize his supremacy.

"I have already thirty guns. With the additional forty that Ali is bringing me, I shall easily defeat the Ndele, who, besides

their bows and spears, have only some fifty mokhalas—ancient, smooth bored Arabian guns which can't hit a target at a hundred meters." Annike kept on repeating to himself; and, contentedly closing his eyes, lay his head in the lap of his preferred wife, who caressed him while chanting a monotonous song of her people.

Short and squat, built like a grand piano, Annike was. But his enormous shoulders, big logs of arms and thick legs had uncommon strength. Like most Bandas, he had a short, wide face, large, gaping nostrils and bovine, blood-shot eyes. His forehead was low and his brows were thick.

The repulsive figure was rendered all the uglier by the tribal scars disfiguring his face.

Most negro chiefs of confederations of tribes of the Oubangui-Chari territory have scores of wives of all ages. But Annike, who had married more than a thousand women and had numberless children, was surrounded by a mere dozen of young brides. That was because the mates who grew too old, or ceased to please him, were throttled by his powerful hands.

"Why should I keep on feeding useless mouths?" was one of the preferred tenets of the Banda chieftain.

Ulima, the young bride, playfully pulled a tuft of his kinky hair.

"Sun of my life," she said huskily, "I'm the beloved of a mighty chief, but I have no jewels. Why don't you buy for me, from Ali the Arabi trader, some earrings of hammered silver, or fine copper wire to fasten as a necklace around my throat?"

"All the wild honey, and all the money that I have put together, will just pay for the forty guns." Annike rasped, "But I promise you that, before going to war against the Ndele, I'll round up that herd of elephants who have so far succeeded in escaping my hunters. Some of their ivory will pay for the jewels that you want so badly."

"O Annike," Ulima moaned, "They say that a white jungle God leads the elephants. O Annike, how can you conquer the wards of a supernatural being?"

"Damrou." Annike growled, turning to a scarecrow of an old man, who had strips of white chalk smeared on his face and a necklace of bones and mummified monkey's

paws hanging from his scrawny neck, "Did you make your magic?"

"I did. With all my devil-powders and the dried blood of the man killed three nights ago by the leopard-ghost."

Annike nodded in approval. He was also the secret chief of the leopard society of the Bandas, who worshipped the ghost of a hypothetical leopard ancestor, and regularly smuggled into the jungle fellow tribesmen, killed them, and devoured some of their flesh.

"Did the magic turn right?" Annike insisted.

"It did." Damrou the witch doctor chuckled.

"Then, as a reward," Annike decided, "You'll get the choicest morsel of the two rhinoceroses."

The rhinoceroses in question, mainstay of the feast, had been caught in deep holes, dug in the ground by Banda hunters and covered with a deceiving layer of branches and leaves, and had been killed with stout spears. But it had taken nearly two days to pull them out of their snug fosses and to drag them up to the village. Now decay was setting in their swollen bodies. That, however, didn't interfere with the hunger of the Bandas.

"The gourds of honeyed beer are ready. Shall we begin to eat?" Damrou said, licking his cracked lips.

Annike clapped his hands. Flutes, tom-toms and likembis, case-like musical instruments covered by a fan of thin metallic bands, raised at once a din of discordant sounds. The women shrieked, the men howled and hopped, the children screeched. Damrou went to slash the balloon-like belly of one of the rhinoceroses and the feast began.

THE night breeze carried a muffled echo of that uproarious celebration to Tega, who was warily making his way toward the Banda village. To avoid that the lumbering Baluga and Karak could step into some elephant trap, invisible in the darkness, Mwala's adopted son was walking some hundred yards ahead and testing the ground for them. Thus he was alone when, on crossing a glade, a leathery cable-like body suddenly leaped out of the tall grass and wrapped itself around his body and legs.

"A python!" Tega choked; but, in that supreme moment, he didn't lose his trigger-fast thinking power and fighting grit. His right hand unsheathed as fast as lightning the broad-bladed, heavy dagger hanging from his belt. His left hand met in mid-air the python's head, which was striking for his jugular, and grasped it below the throat.

Tega knew that a python's crushing power attains its peak when the tail of the big snake is fastened around a boulder or around the trunk of a tree. Therefore, hopping, straining his muscles against the python's weight which was dragging him down, he strove to reach the center of the clearing.

The python, however, fought to pull him toward the nearest thicket; and, though his lashing tail found no half imbedded boulder or stump of tree, he still managed to squeeze Tega so hard that his ribs cracked and the breath was choked from his lungs.

The young white man thought that his last moment had come. A thick coil was curling around his right arm when, with the strength of desperation, he imbedded the point of his dagger into one of glowing eyes of the reptile.

Hissing like a steam engine, the python released his deathly grip; and, before the constricting coils could squeeze again, Tega slid out of them, leaving the dagger imbedded in the huge snake's triangular head.

He ran from the thrashing python, panting, with stabs of pain running like fiery hot irons through his injured body; and, in that very moment, a towering shape appeared on the glade. Gigantic hoofs pounced on the python, and smashed him into a shapeless heap.

"Thank you, Karak," Tega wheezed.

"Are you hurt, brother?" the bull elephant grunted.

Tega's stamina was asserting itself. The pain was leaving his muscular frame, his breathing was becoming normal. His bones had, somehow, withstood the terrific pressure without breaking.

"I'll soon be well," his voice sounded firmer.

"Let me carry you." Karak replied; and, in spite of Tega's protests, he lifted him and placed him on his back.

"Walk slowly. Be careful where you put those big hoofs of yours."

The comfort and inactivity of the ride soon restored his strength. Thus he was alert of mind and perfectly fit physically when the glow of the campfires built in the middle of the Banda village loomed near.

"This is the place," Tega decided, "where I go down. Wait for me here, Karak, and you also, Baluga."

The old cow elephant, who had joined them, squealed obediently.

A FEW score yards further, Tega stared with satisfaction at the three white stones which, during his previous scouting trip, he had placed as a landmark near the brim of the six-foot deep, weed-screened hole in the ground.

"Here's my cache: the dry hemp and the bow and arrows of that Banda lookout who dared to fight me and proved so easy to kill." He muttered, jumping into the hole.

After scraping off the damp sod that he had heaped on it, he retrieved the hide-bound package and found, to his intense satisfaction, that the bow string and the hemp were dry. Breathing a deep sigh of relief he settled to listen to the sounds coming from the Banda village.

It didn't take long to him to realize that the celebration was almost over.

"The hairless monkeys of Annike must have gorged themselves with meat and beer and are now heavy with indigestion and drugged with sleep." he sneered in the darkness, "The few sturdy Bandas who still howl and drink will soon fall down exhausted and lose consciousness."

Without further ado, Tega began wrapping tufts of dry hemp around the arrow tips.

"From a Banda hut you came," he said when he was through, "and to the Banda huts you shall return, bringing flaming destruction with you."

The signs of the approaching dawn—the fading of the stars, and the spreading of a milky radiance—were on the sky when the glow of the bivouacs in the Banda village died out entirely and Tega began building a little fire of his own. But the smoke that arose from it was sucked and thinned by the weeds covering the mouth of the hole, and none of the Banda sentries could see the smallest trace of it in shifting shadows of the receding night.

A half hour later, Tega came out of his

hiding place holding the bow and arrows with one hand, and a red-tipped, partly burning branch with the other. Never forgetting to walk against the wind, he circled the village until he saw a sentry leaning on a spear.

Tega put down the ember, bent the bow, aimed and let fly an arrow. The sentry fell transfixed before he could utter a single sound.

Crawling on his belly, and still carrying bow, shafts and ember, Tega came close to the village.

A few minutes later, arrows carrying tufts of flaming hemp flew through the air and fell on the thatched roofs of several huts, which caught fire almost instantly. A rising breeze fanned the conflagration.

Soon terrified cries rang out; and swarms of frenzied blacks ran out of the blazing huts striving to beat off the flames that were licking their greasy bodies. But louder than all that din were the ear-splitting, beastly yells with which Tega challenged the enemies of his elephant people.

The concerted howl of revenge of the Banda warrior was their answer. Some of the burning arrow shafts had been found, and the warning had spread that enemy tribesmen were responsible for the fire. Now these enemies were shouting defiance from the nearby jungle. The Bandas were accepting the challenge, and hastening to the kill.

THEY came out of their beleaguered village without method or order, like a confused mob, the Banda warriors; and, behind them, came Annike and the witch doctors who, having drunk juniper alcohol besides huge quantities of beer, were even heavier footed than their subjects.

Reviling them in their own dialects, shooting now and then a deadly arrow, but keeping out of sight all the time, Tega drew them deeper and deeper into the jungle, where they lost their compactness.

Finally Annike suspected a ruse.

"This yell . . . it comes apparently from several points, but it is always the same, as if a single man were shouting it," he muttered to Damrou the witch doctor, who had stood by his side. "And, no matter if the attackers are many or few, where are they leading us? Are we walking blindly into an ambush?"

Anniké waited for an answer, got none and grew angry.

"What a witch-doctor are you?" he snarled, because, as the chief of the leopard society, he considered himself protected by the leopard totem-ghost and therefore immune to all magic, "You should have foreseen the burning of the huts; and you should tell me, now, what's going to happen."

Striving frenziedly to maintain his prestige, Damrou made passes with his hands, and sparred for time—for some sign of the true intentions of the attackers, on which to base a forcible answer.

"A spirit is whispering to me," he rumbled eerily. "But, Annike, I must wait for his word . . ."

The chalk smeared on old Damrou's face, and the fact that the remainder of his black skinned features were invisible in the darkness, contrived to give to his head the appearance of a skull. In spite of his gross callousness, Annike felt a shiver running up and down his spine. And, in that very moment, a gigantic, light-skinned human being dropped behind them from the stout branches of a mimosa tree under which they were passing, and sent Damrou sprawling with a blow.

Anniké whirled around to face the unforeseen aggressor; but a fit of superstitious fear weighed down his limbs and numbed his brain. Thus he couldn't even lift his spear when Tega's steely fist crashed on his jaw.

Tega caught the squat, heavy body of the chieftain before it could fall, and threw it over his shoulder as easily as if it had been that of a child. Realizing from a confused howling to the right and to the left that he had been sighted by some warriors, he climbed up the knotty trunk of the tree as speedily as an ape. Then, grasping branch after branch with his right hand, and carrying his unconscious prisoner over his left shoulder, he left behind the uproar of the bewildered Banda warriors.

THE trumpeting elation of the herd when Annike was brought among them was as great as the fright of Annike in finding out that he was a prisoner of wild beasts led by a wild white man. The meeting of the Banda chief with Ali el Mohktar in the cavern acting as a jail was typical of the

nature of each; because the negro accused querulously the Arabian slaver of having driven him against the elephants with his requests for ivory, while, on the contrary, Ali cursed him soundly and spat on him.

"Fool of an idolater," the Arab shouted, "you should have destroyed the elephants and their strange leader long ago; and, in failing to do so, you should have propitiated them with choice fruits and fodder."

"But the ivory . . ." Annike protested.

"There are other valuable things besides ivory." Ali rasped, thinking of the riches of the Englishman's safari.

Ali's slave, no longer subject to the cruelty of his master, and with a healing arm thanks to Tega's ministrations, blessed his white deliverer whenever he saw him. Before dealing with Ali and Annike, Tega decided to put a few questions to the grateful black, and, to such an end, he took him from the cave.

The next morning he brought Ali in the open and showed him a book placed on a boulder.

"My Koran!" Ali panted, "I recognize its binding. What induced you to retrieve this Holy book from that gorge where my caravan met its doom?"

"The wish of your God. Of Allah." Tega replied. And Ali gasped, struck by all the power of the orthodox answer in the mouth of that extraordinary wild white man.

"Put your hand on the Koran, and swear that you'll never fight elephants and never sell guns to negroes who hunt elephants." Tega ordered.

"And if I refuse?" Ali snarled.

"You'll be executed by Mwala, the elephant leader."

"What will happen of me if I obey?"

"You'll go free."

Without another question, Ali placed his trembling hand on the Koran. His shaky voice rang fervently:

"In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate . . . I, Ali el Mohktar, son of Mehmed, I do swear . . ."

Not long after Annike was led out of the cavern on his turn and confronted the skin of a freshly killed leopard stretched on a makeshift easel of poles stuck into the ground.

"I know that you are the chief of the leopard society of your tribe, and that you

eat human flesh." Tega thundered. "I know also that, as a leopard man, once you make an oath touching the skin, or the claws, or the skull, or a tooth of a leopard, you must abide by it or the totem-ghost of the leopard father will destroy you."

"Who told you that?" Annike asked suspiciously.

Just as he had learned how to speak negro dialects by listening to them, Tega had heard enough of the superstitions of jungle negroes. Therefore he readily seized that opportunity of awing the Banda chieftain.

"I know everything," he answered. "The ghosts of the unseen world are my friends."

Annike shrunk away from him. A ring of terror crept in his voice as he said:

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Banda hunters are responsible for the death of a few elephants of my herd. Therefore the surviving elephants want to kill you," Tega replied. After a pause, to give Annike time to realize how desperate his predicament was, the white youth added, "I persuaded my elephants to let you live on one condition: that, placing both hands on that leopard skin, you make a solemn oath that, henceforth, neither you nor a single man of your Banda people will harm an elephant or lay traps for the undoing of elephants."

Annike quickly touched the leopard skin and swore everlasting peace with all elephants in his own name and in his people's name.

Soon after Ali's Moslem followers were induced to swear on the Koran in their turn. Then the whole herd, preceded by the immense Mwala with Robert astride her neck, trampled majestically away, leaving their tamed enemies to themselves.

WHEN the huge back of the last elephant disappeared in the green tangle of the nearby jungle, Annike began to bewail his fate:

"My village is destroyed," he howled, beating his breast with both fists like a gorilla, "The guns that you, Ali, were bringing me, are gone. And my prestige is impaired."

"I know where you can get more and better guns," Ali replied cannily.

Then he described the wealth of the

Englishman's safari until Annike's popping eyes shone greedily.

"You may have the guns, and most of the food supplies," he concluded. "But, for my share, I want all the money, the tents and the implements . . . and all the negroes of the safari, who'll survive the attack, whom I'll sell as slaves on the clandestine markets of Sudan."

"Granted." Annike eagerly consented, "but, how can we seize that strong safari?"

"By ambushing, and fighting it." Ali replied grimly, "But you'll need all the warriors of your confederation of Banda tribes if you wish to win quickly. And many Banda must necessarily die."

"That would be the least, provided that my power and wealth should profit by it," Annike callously replied. "But the French authority will inquire. Their soldiers will come. They'll defeat my tribes and hang me."

"No, by Allah!" Ali growled, "You'll escape punishment—and so will I—if we kill the Englishman and his wife . . ."

"With the leopard-totem rites, so that my totem-society may be enriched with white man's wisdom." Annike rasped.

"You accursed cannibal!" Ali spat disdainfully, "You may slit their throat, and drink some of their blood . . . but their bodies must be carried in N'Douka territory, and some of their supplies also."

"So that the N'Douka may get the blame for the massacre. You are clever, Ali!" Annike exulted.

"Yes, I am!" Ali, mollified, replied. Then he thought of the setback that he had suffered at Robert's hand and scowled. But, much as he detested to admit it, there was nothing that he could do as a revenge. The oath on the Koran was binding.

AS he had been instructed to do by his deliverer, Ali's slave had listened carefully. While his master and Annike kept on discussing the minor details of their grim scheme, the grateful negro managed to leave undetected and entered the jungle. And there, when he least expected it, Tega suddenly appeared before him.

"You are indeed a jungle God, O master of the elephants," Mbre, the slave, said awedly.

"I know how to move as noiselessly as the leopard, but more cunningly than the

spotted one." Tega smiled. "Now, tell me: Are Ali and Annike going to keep the compact that they made with me?"

"They are," the slave replied. Then he related what the two murderous partners were planning to do to the Englishman's safari.

"That's no concern of mine." Tega decided when Mbre was through speaking. "All white men who wear clothes are hunters. They kill helpless grass-eating beasts for sheer lust of killing. They kill elephants. Let them die on their turn."

"My protector," the slave replied fearfully, "Must I return to Ali?"

"Yes. For a moon I want you near him, and, during that time, I'll seek you at regular intervals, and you shall tell me if Ali ever thinks of going back on his word. But after this last moon of suffering, I'll see that you go free, and I'll help you to return to your people."

"They are the Koutoko, way up North." Mbre cried.

"You'll be a free Koutoko tribesman again," Tega promised. "But, for another moon, you must endure Ali's cruelty, and serve me well."

"A moon . . . what's a moon, compared to the years when I have been an abused slave?" Mbre chuckled, and kneeled gratefully before Tega.

When he lifted his head, the white giant was gone.

TEGA had declared that he didn't care if the Englishmen lived or not. But, after leaving Mbre, curiosity and an indescribable urge began to harass him. Finally he decided:

"My elephants are now safe from the attacks of the Banda. Why should I not go to see what the strangers look like?"

After having resolved to do so, he felt a strange elation. Alternating whirlwind runs on grassy glades with that swinging from branch to branch in which he was so proficient, he went to the place where he had left the herd and communicated his decision to Mwala.

The big cow elephant, however, did not agree that the white man and his wife had to be left to their doom.

"Your father and mother—the real ones—were white," she grunted, thinking of the Belgian family of the elephant farm.

"Your father was a tall man, with a long beard . . . you should warn these white people that they will be soon in danger. You shouldn't leave them prey to the evil men of Annike."

"All white men who wear clothes are hunters who kill not to satisfy hunger, but out of sheer wantonness. And I'm no longer a man. I'm an elephant, and the adopted son of a great she-leader of elephants!" Tega replied.

"You are!" Mwala trumpeted proudly. "But nevertheless . . ." But Tega was already away, running as fast as his legs could carry him.

THE next day, the throbbing thumping of the Banda goudou-goudou drums, which are audible at incredible distances, filled the air when Tega circled the camp of the Englishmen's safari from a safe distance.

The neatness and order of it impressed him. Thus, his curiosity fully aroused when night came and he was able to swing over the camp following the tree route and without fear of being detected.

Finally, hidden between the leaves of a gigantic thorn tree, he looked down on a white-haired woman, with a kindly face marked deeply by suffering. The man who sat near her on a stool was tall, bronzed and lanky. He had dark hair which was thinning on top and turning to gray at the temples, a beak of a domineering nose and a close-clipped mustache. But his eyes were firm and serene, and, in looking at them, Tega felt his heart beating faster.

Then the voice of the white woman came up to him. It was a soft voice which enthralled the young giant hidden on the tree above.

"Why do I like this white she so much?" Tega thought. "And why does her voice sound so familiar to me?"

"Donald," the woman was saying, "you keep on repeating that the tale that they are white men living with beasts, in a savage state, in this part of Africa, is just native fable. And our son, who was stolen in Nigeria fifteen years ago, must be dead by now. And yet, I feel that we did right in coming here. I feel that my dear little one—or his blessed soul—is near us in this very moment."

Tega was clutching at the branch on which he was roosting, and trembling violently. An irresistible attraction drove him toward that sad and gentle white woman, toward the dignified man who sat near her.

Suddenly he shook his head and tensed the muscles of his powerful breast.

"This must be magic. White man's magic," he thought feverishly, "and if I don't run away at once, I shall fall prey to it. And I shall become the slave of these strange hunters, I, a lord of elephants!"

Convinced that he was doing the right thing, he swung away and, leaping from tree to tree, he finally reached a flat-topped cram-cram well out of the camp.

"I'm a lord of elephants," he kept on repeating, while he slid down the trunk of the cram-cram tree. But his words lacked conviction. And, when he ran southward, he felt a great emptiness in his heart.

During the following night, the goudou-goudous beat with a redoubled ardor. But, the next morning, their thumping subsided. That sudden silence grated on Tega's nerves more than the previous orgy of drumming. Finally he was unable to resist the urgings of his instinct any longer.

"Mother Mwala," he said, "I'm going to warn the Englis of the danger that they are running."

But it was almost midnight when he came in sight of the locality where he had previously seen the camp. And, to his dismay, no glow of bivouac broke the darkness covering it.

"Perhaps they moved elsewhere," Tega thought; but he felt faint and a bleak dread clutched at his heart.

Then he heard a chorus of sinister noises: the ghoulish laughter of hyenas, the deep growls and the snarling of lions and leopards fighting over carrion.

Tega took to the tree route, carrying his naked sword between his clenched teeth, because, though lions and hyenas are earth-bound, leopards are climbers and most dangerous when met on a tree. But the beasts of prey had enough food among the ruins of the camp to worry about the remorseful man who gazed thunderstruck from above at their grim feasting.

"I'm too late. Ali and Annike struck and triumphed," Tega gasped at length;

and, bowing his head, he retraced his way out of the neighborhood of the ravaged camp.

ALI, the slave had made a habit of sneaking out of the hastily rebuilt village of Annike every evening, in the hope that his white jungle God could see fit to approach him again. Thus it happened that, in the sixth evening, he finally saw the handsome white giant detaching himself from the gray trunk of a euphorbia against which he had clung up to that moment with the skill of a stalking animal.

"What happened to the Englis and his wife?" was Tega's instant query.

"The massed Banda tribes executed a surprise attack. The Englis' and his servants fought well, and shot down many Bandas, but Ali's Arabs drove the negroes on and on, aiming guns at their shoulders, and killing whoever showed a willingness to turn about, so that finally the camp was overrun.

"Most of the white and black servants of the Englis were slain. Thirty black porters were seized by the men of Ali, and will be sold as slaves. The Englis, his wife, three white men of lesser rank and five black menials were seized. They will be killed next week, when the moon is full, with leopard rites. And then their bodies will be conveyed to N'Douka territory."

"How many warriors has Annike?" Tega asked in a terrible voice.

"Most of the outside tribesmen he sent back to their villages. He kept only a hundred men from Dazua and a hundred from the big village on the banks of the M'gounba stream . . . besides, he has a hundred and fifty warriors of his own retinue . . . there are also the twenty-five survivors of the caravan."

"I should have killed all the Arabian dogs . . . and their black cutthroat servants, in that gorge where I trapped them . . . all, excepting you," Tega moaned.

"Master," the slave panted, "what are you going to do?"

"I want to rescue the Englis."

"You can't do that by calling the French soldiers. Ali has spies in the nearest forts; and he has sworn that a warning to the French concerning the identity of the destroyers of the safari will result in the

death of the Englis and his wife under torture."

"Can you tell me what his informers look like?" Tega stormed.

"No, master of the elephants," Mbre replied, "I never had occasion to see them."

"I don't know what the soldiers of the white men's fortified bomas would do to me, if they saw me; and I don't care to ask their help," Tega growled, "but I would like to be able to recognize all of Ali's spies. . . . I would like to destroy every one of them.

"Mbre," he said after a pause, "where do Ali and Annike keep the Englis?"

"The Englis, his wife, and their white servants are in the big hut that has just been built near Annike's dwelling."

"In the center of the reconstructed village?"

"Yes, master. And two of Ali's men, armed with rifles and short guns, mount always guard near their hut's door."

Tega stared grimly at the top branches of charred trees outstanding above the still green branches and moss of the thatched roofs of the village's huts. They were too bare and brittle, these trees; and that made it impossible for him to enter Annike's headquarters by the usual aerial route. Thus the stratagem, resulting in the fire which had enabled him to seize Annike, was directly responsible for his present inability to get near to the Englis.

"Mbre," he said, "when Annike's village is attacked, do what you can to help the Englis."

"I will," Mbre replied fervently. "And, if I could use my right arm . . ." he added, glancing meaningly at his limb, wounded by Ali and now healing, thanks to Tega's ministrations.

Mbre was anxious to know how his benefactor, the elephant master, planned to attack the village, but his long servitude had taught him to refrain from asking unwelcome questions.

"Have you any more orders for me?" he asked humbly.

"No," Tega replied. With a prodigious leap, he grasped a branch some two yards above his head. A few seconds later, Mbre heard the spitting death snarl of a leopard, among the leaves of another tree on the edge of the nearby jungle. The spotted one had met Tega—and, before he

could leap and claw, he had been nailed firmly to a branch by a lightning-like sword thrust.

"Mother," Tega said breathlessly as soon as he reached the herd, "carry me North as quickly as you can. I wish to strike an agreement with Mdougo, the chief of the N'Doukas."

BEFORE the Bandas would extend their sway over them, the N'Doukas had been an industrious people. But the Bandas had seized their harvests with such a regularity that they had finally decided to leave their fields untilled. Their goats, kept in pens hidden in the jungle, had been attacked and decimated by the prowling leopards.

Mdougo, chief of the N'Doukas, had once been big and powerful. But now he spent most of his time sitting moodily before his hut, and his muscles were getting soft, layers of fat cushioned his big neck. His mind had become so sluggish that he was not even excited when a lookout reported that a wild white man, mounted on an enormous elephant, had reached the southern edge of the village and was asking to see the N'Douka chief.

A few minutes later, the unbeaten man-chief of the elephant and the discouraged chief of the N'Douka tribes faced each other. But Tega saw no cowardice—only bitter resignation—in the resentful eyes and deeply lined face of Mdougo.

"You are a man and not a fearful antelope," he said, coming to the point. "Would you risk your life for a chance of grinding the pride of Annike and his Bandas into the dust?"

The passive mask that was Mdougo's face suddenly came alive. His eyes opened wide, his mouth contracted, baring his clenched teeth.

"Risk my life?" he snarled. "Man-God of the jungle, I would gladly surrender it for the sake of seeing Annike slain and his murdering Bandas routed by my people."

"Then let the drums of war beat!" Tega said in a terrible voice. "Tell your men to remember their slain brothers and their ravished women—all the humiliations that they have suffered and the fastings that they have endured. Because they'll soon face and rout the Bandas."

SHORTLY after the destruction of the Arabian caravan, Tega and his elephants had retrieved the ammunition and the guns left in the gorge. Some of the weapons turned out to be smashed beyond repair. But sixty of them, being still serviceable, were given to the N'Doukas. Counting also his forty muzzloaders, Chief Mdougo had thus a hundred men armed with firearms, besides two hundred and fifty spearmen and bowmen. But years of defeat had sapped the N'Douka courage; and Tega, aware of it, appreciated the necessity of putting new heart into them.

He did so by leading small parties of warriors on night raids, which invariably ended with the destruction of a Banda patrol.

Thus Annike lost fifteen men and as many rifles, which became the property of the N'Doukas; and no Bandas dared to leave their villages after sunset.

"If this keeps on," Tega finally confided to Mdougo, "in a half a moon's time Ali and Annike will have lost most of their warriors and guns, and you'll just walk into their village and seize it."

But, in that same afternoon, Mbre managed to come out of the village and met the elephant-master, who had been anxious to talk to him for several days.

"Ali and Annike plan to kill the Englis tomorrow, for they dread the idea that the Englis and his wife might be delivered, because, if they should become their accusers, there is no part of Africa where they could hide safely."

Tega gasped. On the very point of carrying his plan to a final success, frustration was staring at him in the face. Then he thought of the big, curved Banda knives carving to death the kindly Englishwoman and a bleak sorrow clutched at his heart.

"Mbre," he managed to stammer after a pause, "after sunset I'll crawl up to the hut that almost touches the thickets on the southern edge of the village. . . ."

"A sentry is always stationed there," Mbre interrupted fearfully; "a picked sentry, strong, unafraid. He'll fight and scream if you . . ."

"I'll kill him before he can raise an outcry," Tega said. "And, as soon as you hear twice the screech of the chimpanzee, you, Mbre, must come into the thickets loaded with some of the mantles of the

Arabs and some of the cloths that they wrap around their heads. . . ."

"Master," Mbre stammered, "I can steal a few burnouses while they wash themselves for the evening prayer, and I can make them believe for a while that An-nike's men got away with them. But, tomorrow at the latest, they'll find the truth; and you know how cruel Ali is in his rage."

"Before the sun rises another time, death will strike Ali—or I'll not be any longer among the living," Tega promised grimly.

"You shall have the burnouses," Mbre promised huskily.

Fast as a streak of lightning, Tega returned to Mdougo.

"Get your men ready," he exclaimed, "we attack at midnight. And this is my plan: The N'Doukas armed with rifles must line up in the sparse wood half a mile north of the village. The N'Douka spearmen shall go as near to the huts as possible; then they'll take cover, and shout at the top of their lungs the vilest insults. They'll boast that they are the N'Doukas and that the Bandas, who have bartered their hearts for those of bleating she-goats, don't dare to come out and fight them.

"The Bandas will fire. But the fact that the spearmen shall not be able to match bullet for bullet, and the undiminished flow of insult, will goad them into the open.

"When the Banda warriors rush out of the village, order your spearmen to run, O Mdougo. But not at random. The flight must be ruled so that the pursuing Bandas may be made to run skirting the woods, and offering a clear target to the N'Doukas riflemen ambushed among the trees. And, as soon as that happens, let your men armed with guns fire as fast and straight as possible!"

"It is a good plan," Mdougo mumbled, "but my spearmen will stay too long under the hail of the Banda bullets. . . ."

"The darkness of the night and the nervousness of the Banda will send the bullets astray," Tega snapped. "If my orders are obeyed, there's no doubt about the issue: the Bandas will be routed, and your spearmen will turn about and chase them right into their village."

"And you master of the elephants . . . where will you be while we fight and die?" Mdougo asked.

"In the village, where I shall put an end to Ali's foul life and deliver the English—with the help of twenty chosen N'Douka warriors, whom you must pick out for me," Tega exclaimed.

AS Mbre had warned, the sentry posted on the southern edge of the village was a dusky giant. Tega's fists did not stun his thick head, the arm that the elephant master clamped around his neck choked his screams, but did not strangle him. With a supreme effort, the sentry twisted his muscular body sideways and struck with his short spear.

The sharp blade sliced a strip of skin from Tega's hip; and, in that very moment, the white man of the jungle flexed his legs, then leaped. The impact of his catapulting body smacked the Banda against a tree with a sickening thud.

For a moment he held in his arms the huge body of his adversary, which had suddenly become limp. Then he eased it to the ground and uttered twice a rendition of the screech of the chimpanzee.

A few minutes later Mbre entered the thicket.

"Master," he whispered, "I have here fifteen burnouses and head-cloths."

"Quick," Tega breathed, "wrap my head and those of my men in Arab style."

In that very moment, a concerted howling rang on the opposite edge of the village.

"Mdougo is doing his part," Tega chuckled. "Let's go."

Nobody stopped them as they ran across the narrow alleys. Excepting for a cordon of negroes strung all around the huts of the non-menaced points, all the warriors were hastening to face the N'Doukas. The irate call rang, time and again: "Let's go to tear off the skin of the lion that the N'Douka sheep have thrown on themselves."

The Banda guns were roaring on the south when, shivering with excitement, Tega saw Mbre's arm pointing at an enormous hut.

There were lamps burning within, and Arabs clustered before the open door. One of them, seeing the burnoused figures of Tega and his N'Doukas coming at the double quick, mistook them for friends and called:

"Quick, Muslim! Come to see how Ali is going to carve the Rumis' bellies!"

And, in that instant, all the ferocity of the wilderness where he had been reared galvanized Mwala's adopted son. His head shot forward, his powerful spine arched. Ear-splitting, irrepressible, the mad trumpeting of the charging African elephant issued from his throat.

The speed of his attack was such that it carried him headlong into the tangle of the Arabs who, terror stricken, darted right and left to make way for him. He fell with them, in a welter of lashing dark arms and legs, slashed as quickly as a clawing leopard with his heavy sword and rebounded out of the heap of their clustered bodies, into the hut.

Behind him rang the battle-cry of the N'Doukas, rushing on the prostrate Arabs with lowered spears. But Tega didn't hear it. All his attention had suddenly centered on the Englishman and his wife, tightly lashed to a pole stuck in the soft sod, in the very center of the hut, and on Ali, who was facing them, holding a dagger in his fist.

There were other figures of white men, fettered and laying against the opposite wall, and two Arabs mounting guard over them; but Tega's eyes were fascinated by a red trickle of blood, seeping from a gash that Ali's dagger had carved on the forehead of the white woman, by the convulsive expression of desperation and rage that contracted her husband's features.

ALII'S ferocity and courage were proverbial in all the bad lands stretching from Darfur to the Oubangui river; but his swarthy face became sickly pale when he saw the beastly, snarling mask into which Tega's face had turned, and the muscles of his bronzed body standing out like steel cables.

Ali felt his fist getting limp. In a split second he realized that his dagger was too puny a weapon against that ferocious being who was about to spring on him. Gasping, the Arabian chieftain threw away the dagger and grasped the butt of the automatic stuck in his sash.

In that very instant he heard a beastly growl, he saw that awesome face shooting toward him as fast as a speeding bullet. The barrel of the automatic was coming

out of his sash, when a tremendous weight struck his forehead. For a split second Ali el Mohktar saw a myriad of exploding stars; then the darkness of death descended upon him. And Tega, who had cleaved his skull with a terrific blow of his sword, grasped his limp body, threw it at one of the two Arabs in the room, and pounced on the other, who threw down his rifle and flattened himself face down on the ground, shrieking a call for mercy. Tega put a foot on his hack and was lifting his sword to strike, when he heard the gentle voice of the white woman:

"Don't! Let him go."

The murderous flame died out of the young man's eyes. His face was again calm and handsome when he went to cut the ropes fastening the two Engels to the pole.

He had some trouble in rallying his N'Doukas, who, finding little opposition, were bent on running among the huts, killing indiscriminately.

But finally he succeeded in banding them around the rescued prisoners. Just in time, because Banda warriors were just beginning to rush from every side toward the big hut.

The following run through the dark alleys of the village was not slowed down by two quick-paced combats, which ended almost at once with Tega and a spearhead of N'Doukas slashing and stabbing through all opposition. Then they were out of the village; and the cool peace of the jungle welcomed them.

Tega found the herd waiting for him a mile farther.

"Mother Mwala," he said, "watch over these people until I return. And if I don't, carry them within three miles of the big boma of the white men. That will be enough to insure their safety without compromising yours."

"Where are you going?" Mwala countered.

"To help Mdougo, who did as I asked him to," Tega replied, and sped toward the distant clamor of the combat.

Everything had gone on as Tega had planned, with the exception that, as soon as the ambushed N'Douka riflemen began firing, the enraged Bandas charged straight for them.

From that moment on, the combat had been a chaotic melee. But, though lesser

warriors, the N'Doukas fought grimly until Mdougo fell with a thigh hacked deeply by the blow of an axe.

The N'Doukas' ranks were wavering; some of them were already turning about to flee, when an ear-splitting, beastly yell rang, and the figure of Tega appeared slashing right and left among the Bandas.

Instantly, the cry "The elephant-master is fighting," gave new heart to Mdougo's warriors and brought consternation among the Bandas. Bellowing like a bull, Annike tried to rally them. And Tega, who caught sight of him, leaped toward him, lifting his sword high.

Anniké held a spear with one hand and a short-handled axe with the other. With the spear he lunged, and saw its shaft shattered by a downward slash of Tega's weapon. Madly, putting all his strength in the blow, Annike struck with the axe. Tega sidestepped and brought his sword down with tremendous speed. Almost decapitated, Annike fell face down on the ground. A N'Douka quickly pounced on him, severed with his dagger the still intact muscles and ligaments of his neck; then he stuck the head of the dead Banda chief on a spear tip, and lifted it high.

For an instant, the Bandas all around stared horrified at that grim trophy; then they turned about and fled.

IT was gray dawn when Tega returned to the place where he had left the rescued Englishmen with Mwala; and a curious sense of expectancy filled his heart.

Thus, somehow, he was not surprised when both the tall gentleman and his wife began to stare at him with increasing interest, until the woman cried out excitedly:

"But, Donald. . . . Am I going insane? Look, that birthmark on his left breast. . . ."

"If he has also a tiny mole buried under that thick brown hair of his, right above his right temple, I shall believe that there's a God in Heaven," the voice of Sir Donald Lane sounded strangled and eerie.

He found some difficulty in making himself understood. But at last, smiling, Tega bowed his head; and, when they saw the little mole, husband and wife went nearly insane with excitement.

Tega didn't know how it happened, but suddenly the white-haired woman was em-

bracing him and crying on his shoulder, and the tall man with the clipped mustache was pounding his arms, and smiling.

There was some confusion when they induced him to remember particulars of his childhood, because the tales of the Belgian elephant farm that Mwala told so often to him kept on popping in. But, eventually, he remembered the name of Nukoo, the porter who had attempted to kill him and had been killed instead by Mwala.

"My son," Sir Donald said at last, "when you disappeared there was little that I could do. I was a very poor man. An officer who had worked his way up from the ranks, without influence or money. When we left Africa heartbroken, I proffered my resignation. I took a fling in business, made money, and then still more money. . . . I was knighted, and, as soon as tales reached us of wild white men in this part of Africa we came. And now we owe our lives to you."

"And to Mwala," Tega corrected. Then a sudden worry crossed his mind: "You are my real father and mother; do you expect me to come to live with you?"

"But certainly, my darling," Lady Eva Lane said.

"I wish I could," Tega replied firmly. "But, without me, Mwala and the other elephants could not escape traps and hunters for long. . . ."

"Don't you worry about that," Sir Donald hastened to say. "I bought hundreds of acres in Nigeria. . . . The very locality where you disappeared fifteen years ago, and the surroundings. That largish place shall become the home, sanctuary, property and grazing place of Mwala and her herd."

"We'll take Mbre along, and we'll leave him with his Kotoko people," Tega added.

Then he communicated the provisions taken for the benefit of the herd to Mwala, who was very much pleased.

"My son," she trumpeted, "we shall have plenty of food, and no worries. But these kind people are wrong in thinking that they are your real parents. Your father was a tall man, with a long red beard."

And Tega, who knew that it is impossible to induce an elephant to forsake an accepted belief, smiled covertly but refrained from contradicting her.



Drums of the Bush

A Story of Ecuador

By Guy L. Jones

Jungle gold! Its glittering trail led deep into the land of the head-hunting Jivaros. Two men followed the siren lure—but only one returned, with treasure stranger than a Ju-ju dream.

FOR two stifling weeks, always under the watchful eyes of Awak, the Jivaro, and a dozen of his little brown warriors, the two white men had been moiling among the black sands of the Rio Zamora for a few flakes of a dead man's gold.

Milroy and Sanders had been in that Ecuadorean jungle country no more than half a month. But where great blooms can unfold to perfection in the space of a single day, hatred can ripen almost overnight. Already there was a brittle tension between them.

Sanders was a big man, a stalwart of the outlands. His manner was bold, arrogant. His hair, unkempt, disordered, was black as the jungle midnight. A wayward beard, equally as black, masked the contour of his jaw—hid, perhaps, a hint of weakness there.

Sanders had but one eye. The other had been lost years ago—possibly in some remote bottle brawl. It must have been a lusty and a ragged wound that had robbed him of half his vision. The flesh about that vanished eye had been so lacerated that the upper and the lower lids had healed

tightly together. The left side of his face held a curiously blank and gruesome expression.

But Sanders had one perfectly good eye, and that in itself was enough to compel attention. Its iris was of a color that showed a marked contrast to his complexion. It was a tawny eye—a tiger's eye. And in its pale amber depths flashed little threads of restless light that seemed to squirm and writhe like tiny golden maggots, never still.

Young Milroy and Sanders had struck hands in partnership back in Guayaquil. Milroy, just down from the States, fell in with him at the Cantina Bianca. And over their wine Sanders had told him of Breen. Breen had gone into the head-hunters' country on a one-man quest for rumored gold. A month later he had crawled back over the cordilleras to die of fever at Guayaquil. But Sanders did not tell Milroy that Breen had come back with his once black hair turned to purest white. He only showed Milroy the vial of black sand he'd got from Breen before he died—a vial of black sand flecked with gold.

Milroy, with his thin, sensitive face and his narrow shoulders slightly stooped as if from long bending above books, didn't look the type to whom such strong adventure might appeal. But the lure of Breen's gold took him by storm. He staked his last cent on the gamble—bought an outfit for himself and the penniless Sanders.

Back in the populous security of Guayaquil the hazards of the venture had seemed remote to Milroy. But once down in the damp closeness of the jungle where the mid-day silence lay like a snake asleep and where the hot, fetid air struck a man's cheek like a vampire's breath, and the Jivaros crept among the shadows like dwarfed ghosts of men—a chap had to look at things differently. The very stillness, redolent of the mingled growth and decay of centuries, seemed to whisper of weird perils. Dark dreads. A hovering threat. . . .

BUT Sanders had laughed down any talk of possible menace from the Jivaros.

"Bah!" he snarled. "What's a dart against one of these!" He patted the holstered Colts at his belt. "With our guns we can put the fear of the devil into Awak and his whole pack. Anyway, we don't need to kow-tow to them. They've got to know we're better men than they are, and no mistake about it!"

"All the same, we are in their country now, where they are just as good as we are," declared Milroy quietly. "It's a fact that's bigger than we are, Sanders. We've got to bow to it—and go softly."

It was then that contempt had reared its head like a waking serpent in Sanders.

"Hell, Milroy! We're down here after gold, not to turn ourselves into lousy Jivaros!"

Nevertheless, Milroy had wisely held to his determination. He went softly among the Jivaros. He helped them where he might in their crude labors. He mingled with them as equals; followed their customs—outwardly, became one of them. Thus, despite the fact that their only communication was by means of signs, he had won the friendship of Awak and his people, so necessary to the success of their venture.

The Jivaros regarded Sanders in a dif-

ferent light. He held himself haughtily, and a little fearfully aloof. They tolerated his presence solely because he was with Milroy. Sanders could not fail to perceive this, and it rankled in the man. It served, too, to strengthen his unjust bitterness toward Milroy.

"Go Jivaro, will you!" . . . Sanders thought it over and over. . . . "Go Jivaro!" . . .

THEY had found Breen's gold. But the find was not the rich one Sanders had expected. Careful washing was necessary to recover more than a trace of yellow in their pans. Daily, heedless of the swarms of little stingless bees that crawled on their hands and faces, regardless of the short, sharp tropic downpours that drenched them to the skin and sent Awak and his men scuttling to the shelter of friendly trees, Milroy and Sanders worked the river bars. Their tireless industry was a source of wonder to the natives. They could not understand that strange activity, nor the desire for the yellow dust which prompted it. At the end of two weeks Milroy and Sanders had perhaps five pounds of dust between them.

Each night they had divided the gold as fairly as was possible into two portions. In a skin sack each man kept his treasure to himself. The gold lay beside them in their blankets while they slept. Milroy left his there by day, secure in the knowledge that it would be untouched. Gold meant nothing to the Jivaros. Sanders, however, carried his dust always with him. He never trusted it beyond his reach. Arrogant, suspicious, he stood as a man alone, an outcast by his own hand.

Milroy and Sanders slept side by side in blankets spread upon the hard-packed earth floor of Awak's great *hea*, a community house built of double rows of *chonta* poles and roofed with thatch. The Jivaro beds, low platforms ranged along the sides of the *hea*, were too small for the white man's length. Nor would Sanders have lain upon one of them even had its size been made for his bulk; for hanging from latticed canopies above those rude couches stared hundreds upon hundreds of shrunken human heads.

Night after night Sanders had become prey to an imagination one would not have

suspected him to possess. Those gruesome *tsantsas* held for him a peculiar, prickling fascination—though he would have cut off a hand sooner than confess it to Milroy.

THE Jivaros slept with bare legs extending beyond their short bed edges. Heels rested on hardwood bars below which slow fires burned to warm them. There were times when in the flickering light of these flames the *tsantsas* leered and gibed at Sanders. And the night wind stealing in among the *hea* poles set their long hair swaying until the whole dead company seemed doing a devil's dance upon his crawling brain.

Sanders arose with the first break of dawn. There were two doors in the *hea*, one at either end of the roughly oval structure. One of these narrow doorways was for the use of women and children, the other solely for the men. The men's door faced the jungle instead of the river. Sanders pushed aside the hanging poles that barred the doorway for the night and slipped out into the dawn.

For a moment he stood still outside the *hea*. His eyes were fixed on the jungle wall some thirty yards away. Somehow, he felt that something was amiss with the day's beginning. He listened intently. Instead of the usual sleepy twitter of waking birds among the foliage, there was an unwonted quiet. Silence reigned absolute.

As he contemplated this phenomenon, a faint whisper passed his ear. He dodged instinctively. From the corner of his eye he caught a flash of the vividly feathered dart clinging to the wall of the *hea*. Sanders' face went gray with a sudden fear. There was no arrogance about him now. He leaped desperately back to the security of the *hea*. Curdling yells rose from the jungle and tall men armed with spears and blowpipes came swarming out from the bush. Sanders made the *hea* door with a shower of spears rattling about him. He barely had the bar in place against the door before the raiding Lagronyes crashed like a dark wave against the wall.

PANDEMONIUM reigned within the *hea*. Awak's guttural voice shouted orders. The waking Jivaros scrambled wildly for weapons. Milroy was out of his blankets at a bound and had his guns in

hand. While the Jivaros ran to loopholes in the *hea* wall and sent their primitive missiles winging out upon the attackers. Milroy sped toward the door. In the confusion of the moment Sanders was nowhere to be seen.

Risking death which at any moment might come flying in between the loose hung door poles, Milroy stood there and poured lead into the Lagronyes storming the portal. His bullets were effective. Cries of pain and anger, yells of consternation went up from the Lagronyes. They broke their massed attack and ran for the jungle, leaving dead and dying men behind them.

Milroy reloaded swiftly. He looked around for Sanders and saw the man at the far end of the *hea*, crouched among the frightened Jivaro women and children. Both his guns were in Sanders' hands, but there was no smoke issuing from their trembling muzzles. His gaze was darting this way and that as if searching for a way of escape. His face was a map of abject fear.

"Come on, Sanders!" cried Milroy. "They're on the run! Let's give it to 'em!"

Milroy lifted the door bar and leaped out in pursuit of the fleeing Lagronyes. Behind him pressed the blood hungry Jivaros, eager for heads. But as well pursue the wind as those terror-stricken Lagronyes. They had the start on their pursuers and the jungle shadows had swallowed them completely.

MILROY, with Awak and his warriors, soon returned. Their chase had been a fruitless one. Not a single Lagronye had been sighted. But the day was not without its satisfaction for the Jivaros. There were heads waiting to be made into *tsantsas*. Seven Lagronyes lay dead before the *hea*. An arrow in the eye had stuck down one of them. Three were transfixed by *chonta* spears. And three had succumbed to Milroy's bullets. Here were seven Lagronyes who never again would raid a Jivaro house for plunder and women.

The women and children came out their door and trooped around to the front of the *hea*. There was great rejoicing. With them came Sanders. Now that the danger was over, he wore a mantle of composure. Even the boldly contemptuous glances of

Awak and his warriors failed to ruffle it. Perhaps, however, Sanders would have lost a measure of his brazen front if he had chanced to see—as did Milroy—the significant manner in which the little brown men looked first upon the dead Lagronyes and then covertly at him.

"Why didn't you take a hand, Sanders?" asked Milroy. "Why didn't you come along?"

"I was looking out for the women and kids," asserted Sanders. "I was ready, if those devils had busted in."

Milroy knew these words for what they were—a thin cloak for cowardice. But he merely shrugged, not choosing to provoke Sanders to hot retort. He did not wish to give the Jivaros the impression that he shared their contempt for the man. For, after all, Sanders was one of his own blood.

After inspecting the victims of the battle, Awak came and stood beside Milroy and reached a hand up to his shoulder. He gestured toward those three Lagronyes Milroy's bullets had killed, and he spoke loudly to his people. His speech brought vigorous acclaim. The Jivaro warriors pressed about Milroy with loud shouts.

"*Capitu! Capitu! Capitu!*"—a name reserved for a white man of importance.

THERE was swift activity, then. The great *tundui*, a drum fashioned of a hollow log and skin tightly stretched, was set booming to call neighboring communities upriver to the *tsantsa* feast. Hunters were sent to the jungle. Women were dispatched to gather fruits. There was no panning for gold that day. Sanders urged that they go to the bars as usual, but Milroy wisely declined. Cursing the whole business as a waste of time—cursing Milroy, too, beneath his breath, for kowtowing to the Jivaros—Sanders held himself aloof, disgruntled, sore.

And beat by beat, hollow, weird, the great *tundui* boomed unceasingly. Sanders dared not venture alone into the jungle. He paced about the clearing, cursing aloud the drum. But no matter where he walked, he could not escape its monotonous vibrations.

Boom. . . . Boom. . . . Boom. . . .
Voice of the jungle, eloquent of its hidden savagery. . . . *Boom. . . . Boom. . . .*

Boom. . . . It threatened to drive him mad.

Then came the women with baskets heaped high with luscious fruits. Soon the hunters began to straggle in, bringing tender monkeys and parrots of bright plumage to be roasted for the feast. Then Awak called his people together in a circle about the dead Lagronyes. Amid cries of barbaric exultation the heads were taken. Each was severed cleanly at the neck by a blow from a heavy hardwood *machete*. The grisly trophies of Milroy's prowess were given one by one into his hands to hold for a victorious moment. And Milroy stood to the task nobly, though his face was white under its young tan at this first intimate contact with the dead.

Sanders, watching with flickering eye, was no less ashen than Milroy.

Boom. . . . Boom. . . . Boom. . . .

"Oh, damn that drum!" Sanders cursed over and over under his breath "Damn that drum!"

Amid a pagan ceremony that lasted throughout the afternoon, and in which Dick Milroy was a prominent though inwardly sick and reluctant participant, the Lagronye heads were prepared for shrinking. In the end the skins, each skull carefully removed and cast away, hung limp at the top of a row of *chonta* poles firmly planted in the ground. There they would repose until they were needed in the evening.

And all the while the great drum boomed, beating into Sanders' brain a compound of black jungle fear and bitter rancor at Dick Milroy.

THE sun was swinging low over the jungle. Awak's guests were beginning to arrive from down the river. Women and children were forbidden entrance to the *hea*. The men gathered within about a central fire and drank hugely of *chicha* and boasted loudly of bold exploits in battle. Milroy was the center of attraction. Sanders, unnoticed, neglected, was left to his own devices. He paced about outside the *hea*, watching the women preparing the feast over outdoor coals. With the setting of the sun the great *tundui* had ceased its booming. But its reverberations still echoed with monotonous regularity in Sanders' brain. And as he listened to the cries with-

in the *hea*—"Capitul . . . Capitul"—something of the bitterness that filled him welled out upon his tongue.

"Go Jivaro!" he muttered venomously. "Go Jivaro, will you! . . . Turn against a man of your own color, will you! . . . *Jivaro whelp!*"

Food from the outside fires was brought to the men within the *hea*. But Sanders did not enter or partake. He paced back and forth before the door. Back and forth, like a jungle beast. And later, when dark had fully come, he stepped inside and stood for a while with folded arms, grimly surveying Milroy and the Jivaros about the fire.

There was a tenseness there. The remains of the feast were being cleared away and shrinking stones and jars of sand were being piled close by the fire. The Lagronye heads atop the *chonta* poles were brought in, and about them danced the Jivaros in a wild and barbarous concert of movement. At the height of this dance Sanders left the doorway and began to move by slow degrees along the inner wall of the *hea*. He moved with apparent carelessness, yet there was about him a definite certainty of purpose.

WHEN the dance was done the Jivaros went at once about the business in hand. The stones were put to heat in the replenished fire. The heads were taken from the poles. Through the lips of each were thrust three short pins of *chonta* wood, dyed red as blood. Over and under these pins were wound long strings to hold them in place. This to keep the lips closed; to prevent the spirits of the Lagronyes from talking back to their captors, who reviled their victims constantly. A circle of Jivaros squatted around the fire, among them Awak. He made a place beside him for Milroy. Behind them crowded the rest of the men, watching, waiting. A small gourd filled with the juice of some jungle plant was placed beside each seated man. The real business of making the heads into *tsantsas* began.

Awak thrust one of the scalps into Milroy's hands and signified that he should do as did the rest. The white man watched Awak roll a stone from the fire with a forked stick and place it within the scalp. Over the hot stone Awak began to mas-

sage the skin, dipping his fingers now and then into the gourd beside him. No sooner did the stone become cool than Awak had another in its place. All were busy at the task and Milroy did his best to follow suit.

From hand to hand the heads went round the fire for vituperation and massage upon the shrinking stones. By infinitesimal degrees they grew smaller as they progressed in their endless circling. It was a gruesome business. A few minutes of it was enough to turn Milroy sick at heart. But he stuck it out until a signal from Awak gave him release. All who had been busy with the hot stones arose, yielding their places to others eager to have a hand in abusing their fallen enemies and turning their heads into *tsantsas*.

Milroy had a moment now to himself, almost the first that had been his since the dawn. And he bethought himself to look about for Sanders. He had seen him, while his fingers were busy on the *tsantsas*, standing just within the doorway. But now Sanders was nowhere to be seen. He could not be inside the *hea*. Milroy stepped out into the jungle night, grateful for its clean, dark freshness after the fetid reek about the shrinking fire. The women and children were ranged alongside the *hea*, peering in between the *chonta* poles upon the scene he had just left. Expecting to find Sanders somewhere among the watchers, he circled the structure. But Sanders was nowhere to be found.

A queer uneasiness laid its grip upon Milroy. He walked farther afield, out in the clearing under the heavy sky that hung like flame-stippled velvet. And he lifted his voice in a shout:

"Sanders! . . . Sanders!"

HE had no answer. Where, he reflected, had he last seen the man? By the doorway? . . . No—he remembered now. He had seen Sanders making his way along the *hea* wall—toward their blankets.

Milroy's uneasiness took definite form. He urged his legs almost to a run. He slipped inside the *hea*. Unnoticed, he sought the spot where he and Sanders slept. He found his own blanket rumped and tossed. His sack of gold was gone. And so was Sanders' pack.

For a moment he felt nothing but pity for the man. But a second later his lean

jaw hardened. By his own efforts he had held the friendship of the Jivaros, made it possible for himself and Sanders to find that gold. He had earned it. It was his. Yet somehow it was less the actual loss of the gold than it was a sudden bitterness toward Sanders for his treachery, that prompted Milroy to call the Jivaro chief aside and point out to him his own empty blanket and the spot where Sanders' pack had hung.

AWAK, his beady eyes agleam in the firelight, nodded comprehension. He went among his men, spoke to one here and another there, quietly. These chosen men, ten of them, slipped away from the group about the fire and followed Milroy and Awak. Straight down to the water's edge Awak led them. He pointed out to Milroy a vacant space among the drawn-up dugouts. One of these—Milroy remembered it as the lightest craft of all—was gone.

At a curt command from Awak the warriors trotted back to the *hea*; returned shortly with weapons of the chase in hand. Quietly they shoved off a big dugout and jumped aboard. Awak and Milroy watched until the current and the river shadows had them. Then the Jivaro chief shrugged and turned back toward the *hea*.

There was something sinister, a snake-like silence that was the very essence of the jungle, about the going of those dusky pursuers. Milroy, nerves taut from what he had gone through during the hours just past, found himself atremble with a creeping horror. He felt a sharp regret that he had not held his peace and allowed Sanders to make good his escape. It was on his lips to shout desperately to Awak. His mind tried silently to convey to the Jivaro chief his desire to have the men recalled. But Awak was already passing into the *hea*. Milroy realized his own helplessness as he returned with leaden steps to the *tsantsa* ceremony.

Hour after hour the thing went on. Milroy's eyes grew red from want of sleep and the acrid sting of wood smoke. Mechanically he took his turn at massaging the *tsantsas*. But his thoughts were elsewhere. His imagination was painting vivid pictures on the canvas of his mind—jungle

night—gurgle of water under relentless paddles—Sanders, strong man made weak by lust for a few flakes of gold—Sanders fleeing down the Zamora with a horrible death at his back. . . . Beads of cold perspiration stood out on Milroy's brow.

On and on the nightmare dragged. The Jivaros seemed tireless in their zeal. But by and by, one after another of them left the circle of shrinkers and curled themselves on their rude couches for a snatch of sleep. Other eager hands filled their places at the fire.

For Dick Milroy there was no sleep. Again and again he stumbled to the *hea* door, his senses reeling. There under the solemn stars he stood straining his ears against the night silence for some sound he never could quite hear. . . .

DAWN came, and the sun rose like a flame over the steaming jungle. But there was no cessation of industry within the *hea*. Like brown demons the Jivaros worked. And there would be no halt until the task was done. A labor of days.

Ere the morning was half gone, Awak's man hunters came home. Ten had gone. Only seven returned. And three of these carried bloody wounds. Yet there was triumph in the manner of their march up from the river to the *hea*—for one of them bore proudly, fingers twined in unkempt hair—the severed head of Sanders.

Milroy had expected this. He had dreaded the moment and braced himself to meet it. Yet face to face with the ghastly reality of it, he went weak and sick to the core.

Awak took Sanders' head from its bearer. With a look of grim satisfaction upon his dark face he gave it into Milroy's hands—a traitor delivered. Milroy took the grisly thing. Had to force himself to do it. And he saw gravel upon Sanders' countenance the stark terror that had come upon the man in his last desperate moment at bay. Terror that death itself had not served to efface.

Wide-eyed, legs braced, Milroy stared—a rigid moment that seemed eternity. Then a sudden nausea, weakness that bore down upon him like a crushing weight, seized him. His temples throbbed. His brain seemed on fire. His knees buckled. The thing dropped from his nerveless hands and

rolled at Awak's feet. Then a merciful curtain of blackness fell gently about Dick Milroy, releasing him from horror.

WHEN Milroy became again conscious of his surroundings, he found himself lying upon a bed of blankets—his own and Sanders'. Existence in the Jivaro *hea* had resumed its orderly course. The fire was extinguished. The shrinking stones were put away. The guests had departed. Of time, since his collapse, he had no recollection. But the events preceeding it lurked with him like the haunting memory of a torturing nightmare.

During the days while the *tsantsas* had been reduced in size until finally hot pebbles were used, and, at the end, heated sand, Milroy lay unconscious in the grip of jungle fever. He did not see the final replacing of the lip strings with longer, brighter cords; the sewing of the eyes; the last filling with sand, which was left there and sealed in with neat-fitting wooden plugs to give solidity. He did not see the final blackening of the *tsantsas'* faces with charcoal from the dead fire. All this Milroy had missed. But he had no regret. He had seen enough. He lay there upon his blankets and strove to efface the whole gruesome picture from his mind. But Sanders—that look of horror upon his dead face. Sanders he could not forget.

The Jivaro women fed Milroy nourishing broths and sustaining fruits. His strength began slowly to build. Often Awak sat in impassive solicitude beside Milroy's bed. But never once, by sign or sound, did the Jivaro refer to the man Sanders. For this Milroy was grateful enough. Yet there were moments when he could not help wondering what had become of the gold Sanders had taken with him. Once, he made Awak understand his wish to know this. The Jivaro only shrugged his shoulders and shook his head carelessly.

Milroy had expected nothing more than such reply. The gold, he knew, was of no concern to the Jivaros. Blood lust had been their chief urge to capture Sanders. The loss of the gold Milroy accepted philosophically. That could go hang. His one wish, his only desire now, was to get out of this accursed country and walk among men of his own kind again.

BY some quirk of savage intuition the Jivaro chief must have divined this wish of the white man's. When Milroy was on his feet once again, he found a litter built of poles and vines. Rude but surprisingly comfortable it was, and ready for travel. Sometimes walking, but more often carried in this conveyance by relays of brown men under command of Awak himself, Milroy journeyed by devious trails out of the jungle and up to the clearer air of the rising foothills.

Here Awak made his farewell. And despite the native's repression of emotion, Milroy fancied a faint regret in the somber depths of the Jivaro's dark eyes. Then, at the moment of parting, Awak put into Milroy's hands a gift, a beautifully made hunting bag of soft monkey skin.

Before Milroy could in any way express his thanks, the Jivaros had turned homeward, and were jogging at a lively pace down the path. Standing there in the trail alone, with the bag in his hand, he suddenly realized that Awak's gift was not an empty one. There was something in the bag, something compact and of considerable weight. His pulse leaped with a quick surge of exultation.

Milroy's fingers trembled with eagerness as he untied the thongs that held the bag closed. His groping hand brought to light its contents. For a long and awful moment Dick Milroy stood as one petrified, staring at the thing he held. . . . Instead of the gold he had expected to find, he held upon his palm the shrunken head of Sanders.

Its one eye was sewed tightly shut. Its mouth was held closed by vermilion pegs and colored cords. But there was no mistaking it. Deft dark fingers had molded the shrunken features in startling likeness to Sanders' expression in life. Sanders in grisly miniature.

HAGGARD, unkempt, nerves on edge, Milroy at last reached Guayaquil. And Sanders came with him.

It was on the edge of night when he entered the town. His steps turned toward the *Cantina Bianca*. He wanted a drink. God, how he wanted it! But he did not reach the *cantina*. On the way he came face to face with a man he'd met on the boat down from Colombia, a grizzled

old adventurer named Raeburn. Raeburn had sat with Milroy and Sanders in the *cantina* on that day when Sanders had persuaded Milroy to join in the quest for Breen's gold. And Raeburn then had tried to dissuade Milroy from the venture.

"Dick!" cried Raeburn, when he had recognized the apparition confronting him. "Dick Milroy! . . . Man, you look like something straight out of hell!"

Milroy nodded wearily. "Hell . . . That's right, Raeburn. . . . That's where I've been."

Raeburn flung a kindly arm across Milroy's shoulders and steered him to the curb. He shouted for a conveyance, bundled Milroy in and carried him off to his own hotel room. There, with the warmth of brandy coursing his veins, Milroy told Raeburn the grim story, from start to finish. And at the end he took Sanders' head from the bag and set it upon the table. The three men were together again, as they had been on that fateful day in the *Cantina Bianca*.

Gravely, in silence, the two living looked upon the third. And suddenly Milroy stiffened in his chair. His scalp was prickling, his eyes staring wide.

"Look!" he cried hoarsely. "Look!" He pointed a trembling finger at Sanders' head. "Look, Raeburn—his eye! The thing's alive!"

The *tsantsa* did seem to be grinning, hor-

ribly. And the eye—Sanders' one good eye—illuminated now by the glare of a naked incandescent bulb above the table, was agleam with a tiny spark of living fire.

Milroy, his hands on the table, leaned forward, gazing with an awful fascination at that eye. By what dark wizardry, what savage art, had the Jivaro achieved result like this!

"Come out of it, Dick," said Raeburn quietly, yet with a tenseness in his voice. "Here—drink this."

Milroy relaxed under Raeburn's hand upon his shoulder. He gulped the stiff brandy Raeburn slid before him.

Raeburn picked up the *tsantsa*, his keen eyes searching its features. Then, with a decisive move, he whipped out his pocket knife, snapped open a blade and with it ripped the stitches from Sanders' lids. He tipped the thing—and down upon the table top slithered a thin, dry cascade of yellow dust. A stream of gold from Sanders' eye.

Raeburn looked at Milroy, and Milroy, speechless, stared back at him.

"Well," observed Raeburn finally, "I should say your Jivaro friend has something like a sense of humor."

"Yes," agreed Milroy slowly. "Yes. But grim, Raeburn—grim as hell! . . . Pour me another brandy, like a good chap. Maybe I can forget it."



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Jungle Cargo

By THOMAS J. COOKE

A grisly choice: Rot on the savage Fever Coast—or ship with a mad, drunken brute and his hellish crew of silent, shuffling jungle monsters.

WHEN you have been shipwrecked, and, sole survivor of the crew, have tramped through the African jungle seven days on the food you can pick from the bushes; when your clothing is in rags and ribbons, your feet blistered and bleeding, and your stomach in a state of unstable equilibrium, you are likely, on touching the coast again, to welcome the sight of a brig at anchor in the bay, and to more than welcome the offer of a berth from a man who sculls ashore at your hail, especially so when he imparts the information that the nearest settlement is still two hundred miles farther on. That is why I shipped with Captain Bruggles.

He was the largest man I had ever seen—almost seven feet tall. But, unlike most tall men, his development was perfect. There was nearly a thirty-inch stretch across his back from shoulder to shoulder; his arm was as large as an ordinary leg; his leg could not have been gartered by an average woman's belt; and his clenched fist would hardly have gone into my hat, had I possessed one.

"I'll give you a passage," he said, when I had told him my trouble; "but you might as well ship with me; you sail first mate, you say. I want a mate who can cook for the crew, or a cook who can navigate and keep the crew in shape. I don't care which."

AS I was too exhausted to be of use at an oar, he sculled the boat out to the brig while I sat upon a bow-thwart, blessed my good luck, and studied the craft I had shipped in. She was about four hundred tons' register, and, judging by her sheer, the tautness of her standing rigging, and a general smoothness, was not very old; but braces and halyards hung in bights, and there was a week's work for a full crew, scraping and painting. Truly, she needed a mate, and I was about to say as much

when a hoarse, roaring growl sounded from the brig, and echoed back from the forest on the beach.

"What is it?" I asked, in astonishment.

"One of my crew," answered the captain. "He's hungry."

I said no more. He sculled rapidly up to the side ladder, told me to toss up the painter, and sang out: "Hillee ho, boy, on deck! Pull rope, pull rope, pull rope!"

I threw the coiled painter over the rail, and a huge, hairy face with red eyes, wide, grinning mouth, and fang-like teeth looked down on me. Then a hairy paw as large as Captain Bruggles' hand caught the rope and pulled it taut.

"Up you go!" said he.

"Not much!" I exclaimed, reaching for an oar. "That's an orang-outang, isn't it?"

"They're all young and tame. Follow me up. Leave the oar alone. There's no danger, and you mustn't hit one unless he deserves it. That only spoils 'em."

I CAUTIOUSLY followed, but remained on the side steps while I inspected the deck. The big brute who had taken the painter had belayed it, and was slouching forward, looking back at Captain Bruggles, who had seated himself on the mizzen-hatch. Squatted on deck forward and crouching over the windlass were four others of the ungainly beasts, and in a strong iron cage amidships was a sixth, undoubtedly the hungry one, for he shook his bars and bellowed at us.

"Climb in," said the captain.

"If you don't mind, Captain," I answered, a little huskily, "I'll stay here a few minutes, until I'm more accustomed to it. I can hear you. Is this your crew—that I'm to oversee and cook for?"

"This is my crew. I've trained 'em from babies. They're not able-seamen yet—that is, they can't paint and scrape and splice like a man; but they can do twenty men's



I threw the coiled painter over the rail, and a huge, hairy face with red eyes, wide, grinning mouth, and fang-like teeth looked down on me.

work shortening sail, and cost me nothing in wages and very little in grub. But, I admit, I can't keep a mate; and there's no good reason for it, either. All it needs is a little nerve and common sense and firmness, and a mate'll have no trouble with 'em. I think you're the man for me. You'll only have to cook their mush for 'em once a day, and give 'em orders same as I do. My daughter cooks for the cabin. Got a galley down aft."

"Your daughter!" I exclaimed, in astonishment. "A woman aboard with these brutes?"

"Yes," he bawled. "She's not used to 'em yet, and stays below." He nodded toward the cabin. "By the way, you must be hungry. Come down below and fill up. Then we can talk things over better."

HE arose and approached the companionway, and, with my heart beating painfully, I stepped to the deck and followed. A growl of protest arose from the combined throats of the six, and the prisoner rattled his bars furiously. I hastened my steps, looking back, ready to spring overboard if need be, but Captain Bruggles quelled the uproar by halting, lifting his hand, and uttering the one word, "Hush!"

He called through the closed door, and bolts slid back on the inner side. When it opened we descended, and I saw a slim girl in the half-light of the passage.

"Father!" she sobbed; "oh, Father, don't leave me again! I'll die if you leave me alone again. They were crawling around looking down the skylight."

"Were they?" he answered sternly. "And I told them not to. All right. I'll 'tend to 'em. This is a new man, going mate with us, Jessie. Let's see—your name's Fleming, isn't it? Mr. Fleming, Jessie; this is my daughter, Mr.—"

"Rob! Rob! Oh, Rob!" she screamed, and in a second I had my arms around her, while she kissed me as I never was kissed before, and most certainly never expected to be kissed by her. She was the girl that every man knows—the girl who said "no"; and we had parted under the moonlight three years before at a certain swinging gate near the end of a lane four thousand miles from this brig and its horrible crew—I to go back to the sea and forget, if I could; she to continue her even

life and—so it seemed now—to remember.

"What's all this?" asked the father, sternly, and I released her.

"Why, it's—it's Robert Fleming," she answered, in some confusion; "I told you about him, didn't I, Father? We're old friends."

"Lovers, I should say, if I'm a judge. Well, no more o' this. Young man, you want a berth, I want a mate; but I want no son-in-law, and I do want my girl for a while. Understand this at once."

"Very well, sir. I understand," I said, while Jessie drew away from me, "and whatever scruples I had about taking this berth have disappeared. I'll ship at going wages."

"All right. We go down to Frenchtown, on the Pango River, for a cargo of animals, snakes, and birds—whatever my agents have collected. That's my trade—procuring wild creatures to supply the menageries. And as I'd been to sea before I learned it, I combine both ends. Your work, of course, is to stand watch like any mate, rig tackles for cargo-work, and, in short, do everything that my boys forrard can't do. You won't have to cook for 'em long, because I'm training the oldest and most intelligent to light a fire forrard, and he can soon cook the mush. The rest of their grub is fruit, and such, which they help themselves to. Here, I forgot, Jessie, get something for Mr. Fleming to eat."

II

JESSIE had listened with a strained look of terror in her face while her father talked, and I noticed how her pretty features had changed from what they were when I knew her at home; she had aged ten years. And I did not doubt that the aging process had begun when she joined her father.

She immediately began setting the table, and soon had a cold meal ready for me, which I attacked as a starved man will. Meanwhile, an uproar on deck had called the captain away from us, and when I had eaten enough to be able to speak between mouthfuls, she said:

"You must not go in this vessel as mate. Insist upon it. The last mate was killed, and, I believe, the one before the last. Father is the only man in the world who

can control them. They will kill you, too—they will kill you, Rob. And then—what will I do?"

"I agreed to, Jessie. I can't go back on it."

"Run away tonight. Take the boat, and take me with you. I am dying of terror. I cannot bear it. Oh, Rob, take me away from this vessel!"

SHE buried her face in her arms and sobbed like a child.

"There are wild beasts ashore, Jessie," I said, gently; "and we would have to tramp two hundred miles. You cannot do it. I only shipped to be with you. Wait until we make a port. What manner of man is this father of yours, anyway, to condemn a girl like you to this?"

"He is a man without human sympathy," she said, lifting her tear-stained face. "He left me at home when I was little, but paid my way; and six months ago he sent me passage-money and instructions to join him at St. Louis on the *Senegal*. He cannot understand fear—he has never felt it; he boasts that he can conquer any wild beast in the world with his hands, and wonders why others are afraid. He is kind to me—though I tell him frankly that I do not care for him as a daughter should—but when he is drunk he is a fiend."

"Drinks, does he? I should think a man in his trade would not."

"He drinks at every port when the work is done—that is, when all the animals are disposed of. The noise is frightful, and he is the worst—a greater beast than any."

"I'll stand by you, Jessie," I said, as I arose. "I'll get you out of this scrape if I can. And"—I leaned over her—"you'll stand by me, won't you—you'll say yes instead of no?"

"Yes, yes, Rob, of course. Oh, forgive me for that. I didn't know—I thought you were going to stay home. I thought I'd see you again."

Her father's heavy footsteps sounded on deck, but there was time for one kiss, and I took it; then he called down the skylight to me to come up. I obeyed, noticing as I closed the companion-door and turned to face him on the poop what I had not noticed when I entered the cabin—that over the companion was a steel cage,

or grating, which could be secured from the inside, and that the skylight and after companion each held a similar arrangement.

"I put 'em on to satisfy Jessie," he said, as he observed my glance. "Now, come down to the mizzen-hatch and I'll introduce you; but, first I want to know your relations with my daughter."

"I met her at home," I answered, firmly, as we seated ourselves. "She and my sisters were great friends, and I asked her to be my wife. She declined at the time, but reversed her decision two minutes ago. I shall marry your daughter at the first opportunity, Captain Bruggles; and she herself will satisfy you that she will not suffer. I am one of those rare men who go to sea for pleasure; but, with a wife, I will remain ashore and live on my property."

"I care nothing for your property, Mr. Fleming"—his voice was almost a growl—"but I do for my girl. I've waited twenty years for her to grow up. So, let her alone. I've warned you. Now we'll talk business. Get two handspikes out o' the rack."

III

A LITTLE nervously, while the huge brutes forward watched me, I stepped amidships and secured the handspikes; he took one from me, leaving me the other, and told me to stand beside him on the hatch."

"You're to give each one in his turn a thump on the head after I hit him. Strike about as hard as you'd hit a nail with a hammer; it won't hurt 'em."

"Now, boys!" he called to them, "hillee-ho, boys! Come talk—come talk—come talk. Hillee-ho!"

"You must learn my calls," he said, turning to me. "They're used to 'em."

"I'll want a little time for that, sir," I said, holding hard to my six-foot club. I was a large, heavy man myself, and had borne myself well in a great many rough-and-tumble fights, but I had never fought an orang-outang, and the sight of those half-dozen monsters lumbering toward me was weakening. The smallest of the six—for the prisoner was released—when standing erect would top my height by more than an inch, while the largest nearly ap-

proached the giant at my side in size and weight. But they were not always erect; their usual mode of progress being a swinging walk on all-fours, and when they would lift their immense heads and shoulders, bearing their weight on the hind legs, the long, hairy arms would continue the walking motion, just clearing the deck as they swung. They stepped upon the outside edge of the foot, the unsightly toes curling under, and their lips would draw back in convulsive grins, exposing the yellow fangs; then the wide mouths would close and an expression of fierce gravity occupy their ugly faces until the next emotion prompted a change. They squatted before us in a row, breathing hoarsely and blinking hideously.

"Haeckel," said the captain to the fellow on the right, "come!" The big ape scrambled toward him.

"Look," he said, and the blinking eyes were turned on me.

"Mate, mate, mate. See, boys," and the captain pointed at me. Then he shoved his big finger into the beast's face and said, impressively, "Work, work, work." This formula was repeated three times, while Haeckel blinked his respects to me. Next the captain brought his handspike down on his head with force enough to have cracked the skull of a Hottentot, but Haeckel only winked faster and grinned.

"Hit him yourself, now—a love-tap, not too hard."

I was very careful not to. Haeckel grinned again, and took his place at the end of the line, fully acquainted with his chief officer.

IN the same manner, gathering courage and confidence from the amicable grins I received, I was introduced to Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Spencer and Marsh.

"I've named 'em after the leading evolutionists," said the captain, as we returned to the poop; "but I doubt that they'd feel complimented."

I was too weak in my knees and dizzy in my head to ask whether he meant the scientists or his pets; the reaction of feeling following my interview with the brutes had come, and I barely escaped fainting. Jessie's white face and wide-open gray eyes, looking at me through the skylight—where she had probably climbed to watch

us—was what nerved me to hold my senses; for I knew that I would need all my store of courage and strength to get her away from that brig and her unnatural father.

"You see," he said, when we had seated ourselves on the quarter-rail, "it's utter nonsense to say that animals can be controlled by kindness alone. You can't do it. Their nature will assert itself once in a while. And, by the same token, you can't control 'em by severity alone; it makes 'em ugly, and they break out when they dare. But combine the two, and you have the working rule which made the Christian religion the greatest force for civilization the world has known—hope of reward and fear of punishment. It will civilize a devil out o' hell."

"Practical, I admit," I answered, "in your case. But how may a man of my size inspire them with fear?"

"They fear you now—all but Spencer, the one who was locked up—and you must see that they continue. Never hesitate to strike if they are ugly, and, when they work well, praise them."

"How about Spencer? How shall I put fear into him?"

"He'll be in my watch. You will have Haeckel, Darwin, and Tyndall."

"How about Spencer, when all hands are up? I must be among them all."

"He's just a little ugly lately, but'll get over it. I'll bring him around myself. Only, don't pick a row with him."

"No fear, Captain. And will you tell me how the last mate was killed, so that I'll know more about what not to do?"

"Damnation!" he growled. "Damn a habbling hussy! He was killed because he was a damned fool and disobeyed instructions. Spencer is the oldest, and has one privilege over the others—he gets his mush in a separate kit a habit he formed when he was alone with me. You must remember to give him his share before you serve the others. The last mate forgot it."

"Cheerful prospect for me," I said, rather bitterly, "when I can't tell them apart."

"We won't sail till you do know 'em and until you know all the culls and tricks. I came in here to get a little sleep, and wouldn't object to a few nights more. I stood both watches for two weeks—am

badly used up." He certainly looked it, too.

"Then the mate was killed on this passage?"

"Two days out. It was Spencer."

"I'll take particular care to learn Spencer's face and habits. That is, unless I can make another deal with you. I'll buy this brig of you at your own figure, and give you passage to the nearest consular port, provided you drop your crew overboard and help work ship."

"Have the money with you?"

"No. I'll send for it through any consulate."

"No good."

"Very well, Captain, I have my choice, then, of another trip in the jungle or a berth here where I will probably die. I take the chance; but, though I mean to obey your injunction in regard to your daughter while aboard, it is only fair to you and myself that I say now that it is on her account that I stay. You have taken her from a quiet country home—"

"Never mind, never mind what I've done. It's my business, and she's my girl. Don't broach this subject again."

"Very well, sir."

"There'll be work enough to keep your mind busy here, without concerning yourself with my family affairs. Come forward, and I'll show you how far Spencer has gone in his trade."

He spoke dispassionately, even though, being angry myself, I had given him cause for extreme anger. But, as I followed him, I came to the conclusion that this remarkable man had seldom felt the need of so cheap an emotion; one of his size and strength could have his own sweet will and way without it.

IV

JUST abaft the foremast was a newly built bed of stones and mortar, and resting on this an iron tripod supporting a pot the size of a washtub. Here we halted and Captain Bruggles sang out:

"Spencer, come. Fire, fire—cook, cook."

Spencer came from the group at the windlass. He was the largest brute of all, though I had not remarked it in my embarrassment when being introduced. Looking for other characteristics by which I might know him in the darkness, I noticed

the absence of his right ear—possibly lost in some argument with his fellows. As he approached I drew back, for the monster rose up on his legs squarely before the captain, bared his yellow teeth and growled.

"He's still ugly," said the captain, quietly to me. Then he drew his clenched right fist quickly backward to a level with his shoulder and launched it forward, following with a heave of his whole mighty body. Never in my life had I seen such a knock-down; the fist, impacting on the protruding chin of the grinning beast, lifted him off his feet and turned him nearly over in the air. He came down on his head, floundered to the deck, and lay quiet. It was a knockout. The others jabbered excitedly, but remained where they were.

"Now's your time, Mr. Fleming," said the captain; "get a handspike, say 'Fire—cook' to him when he comes to, and bat him with the club. You'll never have a better chance to impress him."

I WAS not anxious for the experiment, but preferred the risk to the almost certain death which would come of failure to impress Spencer. I secured a handspike, stood over the brute, and, when he groaned, moved and sat up. I knocked him back.

"Fire—cook!" I ordered, sternly, and the captain repeated it.

Spencer sat up again, grinned at me, and went back to the deck. When he arose he blinked, and, without striking him now, I again gave the order. Blinking steadily, he arose to all-fours and lumbered toward a pile of boards near the fore rigging. Selecting one, he picked it to kindling-wood with his hands and feet. I had seen feats of strength at circuses on shore, but never, perhaps, such an awful display of muscular force as this—unless, perhaps, it was that knockdown. When he had made a pile he carried it to the pot and arranged it carefully underneath. Then he disappeared down the fore-hatch and returned with a flint-and-steel and a piece of tinder.

"Spencer," said the captain, gently, "water, water."

The ape arose, grinned ever so slightly, secured a draw-bucket and drew a bucketful from over the side. This he poured in the pot.

"He don't like the touch of water," said the captain. "When he can handle it

cheerfully, I'll give him fresh water and teach him to stir the mush."

SPENCER was now striking fire from the steel and blowing on the punk. Soon it caught; he arranged small slivers to feed it, added larger ones, and, when the fire was burning well, squatted before it with an expression on his face of fascinated admiration.

"That'll do, Spencer. Put out, put out, put out," ordered the captain. The pot was not heated yet, and Spencer arose, tilted it, and deluged the flames. Then he was patted on the head, and praised—in which ceremony I, perforce, did my share.

"He can light a fire all right," said Captain Bruggles, as we walked aft; "but when he burns himself he is apt to knock the whole business overboard. Then, too, he must get used to the water."

"How do they steer?" I asked. "Do they know the compass?"

"No; but if you set the course for 'em they can hold her to it fairly well; and steering by the wind is easy for 'em. Sometimes, too, when their natural intelligence don't tell 'em what rope to pull, you may have to put it into their hands. On a dark night a topgallant buntline is the same to them as a topsail buntline. Of course, it delays matters a little, but I make it a point to begin shortening sail early."

He led me below, where I signed his articles at the bottom of a long list of "mates," and received an outfit from his slop-chest; then he showed me my room, Spencer's bucket, and the bin of meal for the making of mush.

As darkness was closing down I performed this part of my duty, cooking the mush in sight of them all, and with my handspike within reach; but nothing unpleasant occurred, Spencer coming at my call and blinking gratefully as I served him, while the rest waited expectantly, and ate their portion together out of a wash-deck tub.

I fought orang-outangs all through the night, but wakened in the morning much improved in spirits and vitality, and convinced that the only safe plan of action was to refrain from all open communication with Jessie, to simulate the greatest interest in my work that was possible, and to appeal to the first consul or man-of-war

that we met; for Captain Bruggles was most certainly violating the maritime laws of all nations. At breakfast, when for a moment I was alone with Jessie, I outlined this plan and she agreed to it.

V

THE day was spent in completing my acquaintance with the crew; but, beyond a slight fretfulness at the disagreeable washing-down of deck in the morning, there was no trouble, or promise of it; they evidently classed me in with their masterful captain, and did not compel me to assert myself. Next morning we weighed anchor, set the canvas, and went to sea.

To me, accustomed to see a whole crew manning a topsail halyard and mastheading the yard to the music of a chantey, it was an uncanny spectacle—that getting under way. There were cleats nailed to the deck abaft the leading-blocks, and—three at the fore, three at the main—the monsters would scramble along these cleats in all postures, sometimes face upward, again face downward, with the halyards gripped by one hand or one foot, or their teeth, while the yard went aloft in jerks. When up to its place we nipped the halyards at the block and they stopped pulling and belayed. All up-and-down running rigging led through leading blocks on deck, so that they could use their immense strength rather than their mere weight. Two could sheet home and hoist a topgallant-sail, one could set a royal, and, when it came to stowing the anchor, Haeckel and Spencer did it—by hand.

THE passage down the coast was uneventful. My nervousness wore off after a few night-watches alone with them, and I found that they welcomed my approval of tasks well performed as they feared my occasional demonstrations with a capstanbar. But Spencer made no headway with his cooking; in spite of all we could do, he would not touch the draw-bucket unless told to, and even showed as great a repugnance to carrying fresh water from the tank in a bucket, though in the morning washing-down of the deck he took his share of the splashing without unusual protest.

With Captain Bruggles my relations were serene and even friendly. Having uttered his commands with regard to his daughter, he seemed confident that they would be obeyed; and as Jessie never left the cabin, and I was very careful not to arouse his suspicions, my relations with her had not developed past what they were on our first meeting by the time we had sailed up the muddy little Pango River and anchored off Frenchtown—a cluster of thatched huts, a trading-station, and a rickety wharf. There was no government, no consulate, no post-office, no other craft in the river.

ORDERING me to rig cargo-whips and strike out all empty water-casks, Captain Bruggles went ashore in the one boat, and I enjoyed my first long talk with Jessie, which contained little of value to this story, except our conclusion that nothing could be done here in the way of escaping. When he returned I was innocently busy with the work, and he informed me that various cages of different brutes, birds, and reptiles would come off soon on floats. He himself would stow them in the hold, and on the passage up the coast would feed and care for them. That day and on the three following, natives from the shore floated out a holdful of large and small cages—boxed in (I suppose to prevent excitement among our crew)—and I stuck them down the hatches as fast as they arrived. What they contained I could not guess, but, all being aboard, we hoisted over the prison-cage amidships, which went ashore and returned, boxed in like the others. There was no doubt of the occupant of this—another ape. The roaring and growling from within and the answers of the crew were unmistakable evidence. We stowed it on the main-hatch again, but left the boards on for the present, while Captain Bruggles clubbed his agitated pets down the fore-hatch and covered them.

"It's a female of their breed," he remarked to me; "and we'll have to keep her closed for a while, until they're used to her presence."

Another cage had come off with this last load, which the captain opened on deck, disclosing a four-foot snake of species unknown to me, but possessing the triangular head of all poisonous serpents. This crea-

ture, he explained, was a rarity, and, being valuable, he would stow it in the cabin—which he did, in spite of Jessie's protest. A few other packages and bundles came off, which he also took below, and I surmised, by the odor of his breath at supper-time, that there was whisky among them. There was; he was drunk before dark, and a greater change in a man I never saw produced by the stuff.

His face took on the color of a ripe tomato, and the sacs of flesh under his eyes puffed out and half closed the lids. His gray eyes, darker from the obscuration, glittered through two horizontal slits, giving a hideous expression of ferocity to his face, while his rumbling voice became an almost inarticulate growl. While I was stirring the mush for the crew he roared continually at me from the poop, and as I could not understand a word that he said, and would not leave the supper to burn, my inattention brought him forward in a fury of rage. He collared me, lifted me clear of the deck, and shook me as a terrier does a rat, then dropped me. I was not injured—though very angry—and managed to understand that he would feed the brutes himself that evening. He stirred violently while I nursed my wra'h, and when the mush was cooked and I had doused the fire with a bucket of water, he lifted the fore-hatch.

VI

UP they came, and as I looked on their faces and heard their snarls I retreated toward the handspike-rack, secured one, and went aft; then calling to Jessie to fasten them, I closed down the iron gratings over the skylight and companions.

"There may be trouble tonight, Jessie," I said, when she appeared at the forward door, "and I may have to jump over and swim; but, if there's a gun to be had ashore, I won't be gone long."

Her answer was drowned in a storm of abuse from her father. He had filled Spencer's bucket and kicked it out of the way; now, with a large dipper, he was spooning the last of the mush into the wash-deck tub, and squinting viciously at me. But the crew were paying no attention to their supper; they were creeping around the big box amidships, sniffing,

grinning, and growling, and, as the captain brushed past them on his way toward me, three of them followed menacingly a few feet.

"What are you saying to my girl?" he bellowed, as he approached. "Didn't I tell you to let her alone?"

"Captain Bruggles," I answered, raising my handspike, "don't lay hands on me again. I won't have it. If you were not so drunk you'd not think it necessary. We'll have our hands full with the crew tonight. As for your daughter, I was telling her to fasten the gratings."

"What for? Who told you to drop the gratings?"

"Never mind that now," I answered. "Look forward—look at them."

MY manner impressed him and he turned. I meant no trick; the brutes were ripping the planking off the cage, and two of them—Tyndall and Spencer—were fighting. Captain Bruggles ran forward, seizing a handspike as he went, and charged among them. He used his six-foot club one-handed, as I would have handled a belaying-pin, separating the combatants, and driving them forward to the windlass, where they jabbered and snarled at him, and rubbed the sore spots; but they were conquered for the time. Then, telling them to stay where they were, he came aft and finished the demolition of the cage-covering, disclosing an undersized brute, a full sister to those forward, but only half-grown. He studied her for a few moments, while she grinned and chattered at him, then he burst into a roar of drunken laughter, and, slapping his thighs, came aft to me. His mood had changed; he seemed to have completely forgotten our quarrel, and this alone prevented me from going overboard to seek aid for Jessie on shore.

"Ain't it fun?" he chuckled, before he had reached the mainmast. "Ain't she a beauty, and ain't they all in love? Let's turn her loose. Come on." He turned back.

"Captain Bruggles," I called, running after him, "I beg of you not to. You will never get them under control again. Take my advice and box up that cage again—or I'll do it, and you keep the rest back."

It was almost too dark now to see the expression of his face, but I knew by his

steadfast stare that I had angered him.

"You coward!" he said thickly; "and five minutes ago you dared face *me*, and I thought I could like you; but you're a coward, after all."

"Father!" came Jessie's pleading voice from the companion. "Father, do as he advises, please do!"

"Shut up, you mincing trollop," he roared at her. "You're too sympathetic, by Gawd, you two." He turned and pounced on me. I had left the handspike aft, but had I possessed it I could not have used it after he had seized me.

"What is there between you two?" he bellowed in my ear as he held me by the arm. "Hey! tell me; what is there between you?"

"I have already told you, Captain," I answered. "There is nothing, and will be nothing between us while we are both here. When we get ashore I shall want her for my wife!"

"You will, hey! Want her for your wife, will you? I'll give you a wife, by the Lord—I'll give you a wife!"

VII

STRUGGLE as I could, while Jessie screamed from the cabin, he dragged me to the cage, slipped the bar, opened the door, and thrust me in. Then he closed the door and rebarred it. The female snarled at me, but made no attempt to resent the intrusion, and I possessed myself of a piece of planking which lay half through the bars. Crazy with mingled fear and rage, I jabbed it at the captain's face as he stood near the door, but he dodged and drew back out of reach.

"There's a wife for you," he said, with as much sarcasm as his drunken voice would express. Then followed a volley of personal abuse.

"Oh, if I get out of here alive," I answered, insanely, "I'll kill you for this, you devil!" Then I turned to watch my fellow-prisoner. She was paying me no attention, being more interested in the movements of her admirers outside. They were coming aft in a body, swinging their huge shoulders from side to side, beating their chests, and growling angrily. Whatever may have been their state of mind before, they were certainly in a most jeal-

ous rage now, possibly at me, who had obtained precedence over them, but directed for the time at Captain Bruggles, whom they had seen favor me. The giant Spencer was in the van, and he made straight for the captain.

“BACK, boys!” he thundered. “Back! —go back! go back!—go back!”

Spencer, with a blood-turdling, booming roar, sprang high in the air and came down on his enemy, who staggered under the load, but maintained his footing. Then began the mightiest single combat which, I believe, ever took place on earth. A full moon was now rising over the eastern hills, but there was not yet sufficient light to see clearly their outlines—only their combined bulks, surging back and forth in the shadows, a blacker darkness. There was no growling nor snarling, but a continuous wheezing in short, jerky notes. They reeled and whirled, sometimes falling fast together with a thud which shook the deck, but arising tightly locked, and slowly drifted aft past the mainmast and mizzen-hatch. Then I saw them separate, one staggering over against the rail, and I heard the captain's voice, in thick, broken accents:

“Jessie, Jessie, loose the snake!—quick! Turn the snake out on deck! I'm bitten—crippled!” He was sober now.

BUT his appeal was answered by Spencer's snarl of rage, and again they clinched. I heard no answer from Jessie, and my attention was drawn to my immediate neighbors, two of whom had locked and were fighting as deadly a battle as the other; the other three were fumbling about the cage, and my main fear now—inasmuch as the young lady was watching them with amiable curiosity—was that they would unbar the door—which might let me out, of course; but I felt safer at present where I was. Two of them attempted it, but the bar was keyed by a vertical bolt which baffled their intelligence; yet, fearing accidental success on their part, I stabbed viciously with my splinter at their hairy paws as they worked, and the result was satisfying. Each uttered angry snarls of pain, and each, possibly, thinking the other the assailant, a third murderous battle began, and the female jabbered approvingly, moving over toward the side of the cage near-

est the last fighters. This brought her uncomfortably close to me, and I moved to the other corner. The cage was about eight feet square, and the bars were too close together to admit the passage of a paw, so, unless my cage-mate began demonstrations, I was in no danger. Though undersized, she was large and strong enough to have broken my back with a blow, or bitten my arm off, had she cared to; but she was docile and happy, dividing her interest between the combats in her behalf and the remaining brute without, who was improving his time by getting acquainted.

A terrible cry rang out from the pair at the mizzen-hatch, and at first I could not make out whether it came from Spencer or the captain. It was a death-cry, containing every note of mental and physical agony, and was repeated again and again. At last it became articulate.

“Fleming! Fleming! — Jessie! — the snake!”

“Loose the snake, Jessie, if you can!” I called; and then, “I can't help you, Captain; I'm locked in.”

THE moonlight was stronger now, and I could see them huddled on the deck, still but for the movement of Spencer's immense head. He was uppermost, and his furious growls, coming half choked from his throat, told of his victory. The cries of the captain had ceased, but awful sounds of huge teeth snapping and grating and crunching, as the monster bit and burrowed, made a horrid accompaniment to the vengeful snarls. Then there was quiet for a moment, but for the noise of combat forward, and Spencer lifted his huge, ungainly shape—a black silhouette against the white paint-work of the cabin-trunk—threw himself into sudden contortion, and something passed over the cage, scattering warm, sticky drops of liquid, a few of which struck my hand. Then, sounding his humming, booming roar of challenge, he bounded forward and pounced upon the lovers at the bars.

I do not know which one it was, Spencer being the only one I had recognized in the darkness, but believe that it must have been Huxley, the next largest, from the vigorous resistance which he made; there were a few preliminary blows with their long, powerful arms, then they locked,

whirled forward, and from this on they were indistinguishable from the others. Three separate struggles for life and love were now going on before my eyes, but I had little chance to observe them, for the female, angry at the interruption to the *tête-à-tête*, and evidently considering me responsible, was facing me, erect, and mouth wide open, eyes half closed, and hoarse growling barks coming from her throat.

SUDDENLY she extended both long arms high above her head and sprang. I dodged, and avoided the direct impact of the brute, but could not escape a glancing blow on the head from one heavy fist, which sent me reeling into a corner. When my wits came back I was crouched on my knees, still gripping my splinter of wood, and with my brain throbbing in a splitting headache. In the opposite corner, as high as she could climb, was the female, looking back over one shoulder as she clung to the bars and whispering excitedly. In the middle of the cage was the cause of her agitation—the snake. It was coiled, and its head rose from the middle of the coil, waving like a reversed pendulum, and darting forward and back while it hissed steadily; but it was not threatening me, and I regained my feet with the hope that, having saved my life once, it would continue the service, and with this hope came the hope that the brutes without would kill one another, when Jessie, if she had escaped madness or death from fright, could liberate me.

VIII

THE moon was much bigger and higher in the sky, proving that I must have lain at least an hour unconscious; and in this hour results had come to two of the duelists, for in the starboard scuppers was one quiet form, and on the edge of the fore-hatch another. Either they had fought to the death and separated to die, or they were the vanquished of two battles, the victors in which had later come together. Two were fighting furiously near the port fore rigging, and the other two were aloft; but this was a flight and pursuit—not a fight. They had reached the foretop as I looked, and the leader, uttering grunts of

pain and protest, reached for the main topmast stay, and went up it, hand over hand. The other followed, growling menacingly. Up the main topgallant rigging they went, out the topgallant yard, up the lift, and then straight up to the royal masthead, where the rigging ended; then they slid down the main-royal stay to the fore topgallant masthead, and from this their descent was a zigzag by lifts and foot-ropes until they reached the top, when they again started up the main topmast stay; but the pursuer had gained steadily, and just as they were halfway up—directly over the cage—he caught his quarry by the leg. The fight was resumed in midair. Hanging by one paw as often as two or more, they swung about the stay, tangling themselves in the staysail halyards, striking, kicking, and biting, until one, with a human cry of agony, let go and fell, head downward. He struck with a crash on the starboard upper edge of the cage, clung a moment and fell to the deck, where he quivered, gasped, rolled over, and finally lay still.

Another was dead.

BUT his death had produced results within the cage. Why the snake should have held me responsible for the jarring and shaking of the cage when the great beast struck it, I do not know, unless it was because its eyes were on the female in the opposite corner, who was manifestly innocent. It was within easy striking distance, and chance alone saved me, my splinter of wood, held before me like a crane, receiving the impact of its open jaws as it launched toward my leg. It writhed about the flooring for a second or two, then coiled, lifted its head for another spring at me, and—went down under the blows of my stick. I nearly decapitated the reptile with the first sweep, and followed up my advantage until it ceased to writhe, by which time I was in a nausea of fear, trembling in every limb, and wet with perspiration; for I had not bettered matters. But, as the orang-outang opposite slowly descended the bars, I desperately imitated the hissing of the snake and she scrambled up. So hope again rose somewhat in my heart. I kept her there by hissing, and by occasionally moving the dead snake with my stick.

A LOUD, wailing shriek sounded from the two at the fore rigging. They were huddled on the deck, and I did not doubt that one had felt the death-bite. Again it rang out, echoing among the hills, and again; then there was silence, but for that horrid crunching sound, and at last one of them arose, just in time to meet the descending weight of the victor up aloft—who had descended the stay to the dead-eye and sprung at him suddenly from the rigging.

Fervently hoping that they were evenly matched, and that this last battle would be a draw, ending in death for both, I watched them, hissing the while, as they lunged and careened along the deck. But it was not to be; one of them was Spencer, as I knew by a momentary inspection of the right side of his face as they passed the cage, and the other was certainly not Huxley, the next in prowess, for Huxley must be the one beside the cage. It was one of the others, and though once, perhaps twice, a victor that night, he had no chance with the giant Spencer. This struggle was short; it ended at the main rigging, where they fell in a heap, and it ended as had the others, with the fearful cry of agony, the choked growling, and the crunching. Then Spencer, survival of the fittest, arose to his feet and roared his challenge to the universe—the booming, humming, barking growl of an angry orang-outang; and, with hysterical flightiness, I answered with my hiss—to which he paid absolutely no attention.

He came toward the cage, pouncing upon and mangling the body of Huxley for a few moments on his way, and squatted before the female, jabbering hoarsely and pawing the bars with his huge hands. What impression he made upon her was beyond my understanding; but she chattered in return, and at last, as though understanding her fear, he stalked slowly around the edge of my corner, grinning hideously. I picked up the dead snake, wriggled it in the air, hissed to the best of my ability, and poked the battered head of the reptile through the bars. Spencer sprang six feet away, then, making a detour along the rail, returned to the safer side of the cage, where he squatted and began the grimacing and mumbling and jabbering of simian courtship.

AND thus I passed the rest of that night, keeping the female in order by occasional hissing, but making no strong impression on the doughty Spencer. I called repeatedly to Jessie, but was not answered until daylight broke, and then came a voice which I did not know from the companion:

"Rob, are you there?"

"Jessie!" I answered, joyously; "yes, I'm all right for the present. Don't come out. I've got the female under control with the dead snake, and they're all dead but Spencer. How are you? How have you made out?"

"Where is father? Oh," she screamed, "it's horrid. They've killed him, Rob. What will I do? What can I do?" She wrung her hands.

I looked aft, and in the gathering light made out the headless body of Captain Bruggles alongside the mizzen-hatch, and knew then what had passed over my head early in the night.

"Don't look, Jessie!" I called. "Go below, and some of the natives may come out. They certainly must have heard the noise."

"I loosed the snake, Rob, when father told me to, and then I fainted, I think. What has happened?"

"They've killed one another—all but Spencer and the female. Don't come on deck. Someone will be off soon from shore."

IX

SHE said no more, and I watched the antics of Spencer. His grotesque grimacing seemed to fail of satisfactory results—even though every square inch of his hairy body was damp with the clotted blood of his rivals, he could not win the favor of the frightened young lady in the cage. She paid more attention to the snake than to him, and maintained her position of safety, high on the bars. At last Spencer changed his tactics; he began to "show off."

Attacking the pile of boards at the rail, he produced a good supply of kindling-wood, which he arranged under the iron pot; then, procuring the flint-and-steel, he started the fire, but he neglected, as usual, to fill the pot with water with the result that when he had enthusiastically piled on the fuel, the pot became red-hot. And still he

worked insanely, launching whole boards at the flames, and creating, perhaps, the most successful fire that he had ever seen.

"Water, Spencer!" I called loudly and peremptorily. "Water!—draw water!"

TO this day I do not know why that excited brute, possessed as he was by primitive instinct and passion, obeyed my order. It may have been reason, but I doubt it. It may have been the force of habit, yet he hated water; but whatever the motive, he obeyed me. He seized the draw-bucket, lowered it over the side, and brought it up brimming. This he launched at the fire. It struck the red-hot pot squarely, and the result was a shattering of the receptacle to pieces, some of which went one side, some the other, and one of which dropped on Spencer's toes, sending him forward, howling with pain. The others burned their way into the deck, and flames sprang up, ate their way to the rails and fiferail, and crept aloft on the tarred rigging. Spencer remained forward, grunting over his sore foot, and soon there was a roaring barricade between us. The female turned her back to the heat and would have descended, but I remonstrated with the dead snake and persuaded her to remain where she was.

"Jessie!" I called. "Jessie! come out now—quick!"

She showed herself at the door and answered me.

"Come out, and slip the bar—quick! It's safe now. Spencer can't get aft, and this one is afraid of the snake."

She opened the grating and came out of

the cabin, looked at each dead body on the deck, and then crept forward to the cage.

"Lift out that bolt in the bar, Jessie," I called encouragingly, for she was tottering, "and then run aft to the taffrail—to get into the boat when I join you."

She did so. I moved toward the door, shaking the snake at the female and hissing her out of my way, and, when Jessie had sped aft, I opened my prison and closed the door behind me. Then I thought for a second or two, and obeyed a prompting that I am not ashamed of to this day. Jessie was perched upon the taffrail, ready to slip down into the boat towing astern; she was safe, and so was I, with that potential snake still in my hands. I opened wide the door and hurried aft.

Jessie was in the boat before I reached the taffrail, and when I descended on two parts of the painter—so as to be able to slip it—I found her in a dead faint.

"No wonder," I mused, as, while the boat drifted downstream, I dashed water in her face. But when she opened her eyes, and smiled weakly, and called me by name, I knew that sanity was left her.

"Look at the brig Jessie," I said, as I lifted her. "There's Spencer out on the jib-boom, and the female on the spanker-boom. It's a horrible courtship."

But she would not look; instead, she stared downstream, and I followed her gaze.

Rounding the next point in the river-bank was a French schooner-of-war—one of the slave-trade police of the African coast—and from her peak floated a homeward-bound pennant.

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Dark Safari

By **STANLEY FOSTER**

Jungle-wise Darnell, bloodhound of the Congo, always trapped his man. But now the throbbing tom-toms muttered *Failure*, and ghostly voodoo whispers echoed *Death!*"

GODFREY DARNELL draped himself comfortably in the deepest upholstered chair in the Witwater Rand branch office and stared at the replica of the great Cullinan diamond on De Korff's desk. Removing a cigarette from his case, he lighted it and then let his monocle slide down the front of his silk shirt. Only three hours back from a month's trek into the bush country, yet every trace of the hardships through which he had fought his way were gone. His lean, jungle-hardened form was camouflaged with a sartorial effect that bordered on the foppish, his riding trousers and belted tunic, his putts reaching that degree of perfection which would have delighted the highest-priced tailor on the Strand.

But the languid air, the slow drawl, and the vapid expression he affected did not show the real man underneath who, on the trail, was the most feared trapper of men in the criminal world around the De Beers diamond fields. Strangers, when introduced to him, usually took him for a younger son, a remittance man, until told that he was none other than "Chumfo" Darnell, a name that was whispered more often than spoken and known from Zambezi to the Cape. It was in Mashonoland

in central Rodesia that he had gained his name, a soubriquet the Zulu tribesmen had given him when he had gone into the jungle and brought back a giant breed wanted for the murder of a red cap in Pretoria—had trailed the black man a thousand miles in uncharted country and carried him out raving in the delirium of fever. "Chumfo," in the parlance of the savage warriors, meant that peculiar sixth sense which enabled the traveler to thread his way through the labyrinth of vegetation in jungle-land with the same accuracy that brings the old seadog to his home port.

"You're back, eh? Safe and sound!" De Korff considered two or three words enough for any sentence. "Worried some. You never wrote. Get Porthis-King?"

Darnell shook his head and smiled. "I never did believe that he went north. Mombassa thought they had him, but it was the wrong man. No, he's a wise 'un, De Korff, and he's droolin' under cover between here and Cape Town."

"Damn bounder! Sneak thief! Get him yet. Caught tramp steamer." De Korff glanced at his watch. "Had lunch?"

"Not yet. I believe it's your time to buy 'em."

"Right-o!" De Korff reached for his hat

and at the same instant the outside door opened violently. A youth from the sorting department below stood on the threshold, his white face working with emotion.

"Well! What is it?" demanded De Korff.

"Calaveras knifed—Southern Cross stolen!" replied the youth with a quaver in his tones.

"What?" Darnell was on his feet instantly and towering over the boy.

"Van Ortis found him—dead—and the stone's gone—maybe more. They're checking up now."

"When?" cut in De Korff.

"They've just found it out and sent me here."

"Who did it?"

The youth shook his head and shrugged.

"Come on!" Darnell led the way down to the sorting room at a pace that had De Korff puffing before they reached the vaults where the stones were kept for monthly shipment to the main offices or other distributing agencies. At the door they encountered a group of curious sorters who gave way before them. Before one of the great vaults, the door of which was open showing hundreds of uncut stones piled behind the glass frames, lay the body of the guard, Calaveras, his face covered with a bit of canvas, and his gun caught in the death grip of his stiffening hand. In the vault the chief of the sorting house and two of his assistants were checking up the stones.

DARNELL and De Korff pushed their way inside.

"What's gone?" Demanded De Korff shortly.

"The Southern Cross and about twenty clear whites—small sizes," replied the foreman.

"Any idea who did it?" queried Darnell jerking his head back toward the body of the dead guard.

The foreman glanced over his shoulder and, recognizing the speaker, faced him.

"Calaveras wasn't dead when I found him and when I bent over him he whispered three words—'The Black Rhino.'"

"Hell's Kettles!" ejaculated De Korff. "The Black Rhino! Couldn't be—He's in the bush. Under police surveillance."

"Nevertheless he's been in town for

three days," drawled Darnell. "I was intendin' to tell you about that at lunch. I saw him as I came in this mornin' and I made some inquiries."

"Must get him," declared De Korff. "Are you ready?"

"After lunch," returned Darnell softly. "I want one square meal before trekkin' the bush again."

"You'll get it. Back soon—telegraph." With that De Korff hurried from the vault. Darnell turned to the sorting room chief.

"I've heard of the Southern Cross stone. Tell me about it."

"It's one of the most valuable stones ever uncovered," declared the foreman. "About sixty carats and worth more than a hundred thousand pounds—a pure blue-white with twelve facets, shaped like the Southern Cross—the most perfect stone I ever saw. It came from the Pretoria Pipe and one of the men picked it up on the weathering field a few months ago. All the officials have been here to inspect it and they were going to add it to the collection for the Wimbledon exhibit."

"Isn't that a bit high for a sixty carat, uncut—one hundred thousand?"

"Not when it is colored as perfectly as the Southern Cross. It's the most exquisite thing since the Porter Rhodes beauty."

"A hundred thousand!" mused Darnell, blowing a ring of smoke toward the ceiling. "The Black Rhino can retire now, what?" He shrugged and turned toward the door where he almost collided with De Korff.

"Looking for you. Let's eat." De Korff led the way swiftly out of the building to the clubhouse where the waiter placed them in a corner where they could talk uninterruptedly.

THE manager sat drumming the table nervously as Darnell leisurely ordered his lunch, lingering over his selection of the salad and giving particular pains to each other item on the menu as he ran down the list. De Korff barked his order in staccato, but curbed his impatience until Darnell had finished his coffee and leaned back to light his cigar.

"Thanks, De Korff!" he drawled. "Now I'm ready for business, but it had been so long since I had eaten a civilized lunch that I wanted to get the full pleasure of it. The memory of this will have to carry me

through many a meal of half-cooked pork and sago bread with perhaps a cup of quinine tea. That's why I refused to talk of the Black Rhino during the lunch—I didn't want to think of—the future."

"The jungle, what?"

"Of course." Darnell arose and flicked an imaginary bit of ash from his sleeve.

"What part?" demanded De Korff.

"The Kwando River country—Belgian Congo. In ten days he'll be in Old Om-lotti's kraal with a couple of hundred Kikondia warriors campin' on the trail waitin' for me."

"You want men—police. How many?"

Darnell shook his head decisively. "I'm takin' Gagni—just the two of us. It's the quickest—and safest."

"Sounds like suicide. Better take aid—ten men."

Darnell again negatived the suggestion and glanced at his watch.

"Well, I'll toddle along," he said, thrusting his hand out to De Korff. "I'll be back at the end of a month—perhaps—Adios!"

"Luck to you! Get your man—dead or alive. Ten thousand in it." He wrung Darnell's hand. "Adios—Chumfo!"

At his hotel Darnell found the wiry little nondescript, Gagni, part Kafir, part what-not, whom he had rescued from the dread *bolvando* torture in the Tanganyika gorilla haunts and who had been his veritable slave since that day. Under his master's directions he had filled the tonneau of the car with supplies, chiefly petrol, the remainder biscuit, canned meat, a little tea and sugar and their rifles and ammunition. Half an hour later they slid out of town at a speed that would have brought the red caps in on them in a minute if any other than Darnell or a high police official had been at the wheel.

II

WHEN they had crossed the Witwater Rand and began skirting the Dwar Mountains in the direction of Mafeking, Darnell relinquished the wheel to Gagni and sank back into his seat immersed in his thoughts, going into the details of the plans he had hurriedly formulated when standing before the vaults where the murder and robbery had been committed. It was the first time he had ever trekked the

notorious Black Rhino and he knew that his every resource, his every strategy, his every instinct would be brought into play before he brought his quarry to earth. The Chumfo which had been attributed to him would be sorely needed before they had traversed the Kwando River jungles on the headwaters of the Zambesi.

THE Black Rhino had long been the stormy petrel of those veldts along the outposts of civilization from Lake Nyassa to San Paulo de Loanda on the West Coast. If there were any crimes in the category of outlawry of which he was not guilty, Darnell had never heard of them. There were rumors that he had incited the bloody Noy-to uprisings and had profited to the extent of several tons of ivory; the Belgian authorities wanted him for murder on a number of separate charges; a heavy reward for his body was offered by the Portuguese; and the police of Nairobi had him listed for abduction.

But like the will-o'-the-wisp he would suddenly appear from the dark, mysterious depths of the jungle, and then, having committed some daring piece of devilry, would vanish into the intricate paths of the wild pig runs where death in a hundred forms awaited the pursuer. His name no one seemed to know although Darnell had heard that he was of Greek lineage and had once been the head of a thriving trading business in Somaliland, but that his methods had brought him within the toils of the native police with the result that he had fled to the south.

Low and swarthy, tireless and unbelievably strong, there was a marked similarity between his stature and that of the dread gorilla, but because of his sudden bursts of temper and his quick, ruthless actions he had been dubbed the Black Rhino by the natives and so apt was the sobriquet that his real name, whatever it was, had been lost. One other rumor of the Kwando River country suddenly flashed across Darnell's mind, one that had long aroused his curiosity, and he determined to investigate it while searching for the Black Rhino.

More than one big game hunter had returned from the central Congo jungles with the report that the Kwando natives worshiped the leopard and did not dare kill one for fear that the wrath of the gods

would fall upon them. Consequently, the jungles were so infested with the great cats that danger lurked in every shadow and that hundreds of the villagers were carried off yearly by these great tawny brutes who, apparently, were quick to take advantage of the passivity of the natives, and who had become man-eating to an extent hitherto unknown. Somewhere Darnell had heard that the Black Rhino had killed scores of the leopards in old Ormlotti's kingdom and in each instance had eaten the heart of the giant cat raw. In this manner he had obtained the awe and the respect of the warriors and was molding his power over them to fit his own aims and ends. He had married Ormlotti's daughter and, it was reported, was the real ruler of Kikondia.

ARRIVED at Mafeking, they halted long enough for a bite to eat at a pub and then, as the evening shadows began to lengthen out, pushed steadily north toward Tokozi and the Kalahari Desert. Only once during the first day did Darnell make inquiries regarding his quarry and that was from an agent of the Diamond Syndicate at Mafeking, a link in the "grapevine" over which the information needed by the company winged its mysterious way. Assured that the Black Rhino was only a few hours ahead and headed straight for the Kwando Valley, Darnell settled back behind the wheel and gave himself over to the grim chase with the doggedness that had characterized his work.

Gradually they went forward into the thinning vegetation of the Kalahari Desert, the heat at times seeming almost unbearable, but after sundown a delicious coolness swept across from the mountains in the west and by ten o'clock they were forced to put on their tunics to keep out the encroaching chill. Far into the night Darnell drove, keeping the almost trackless trail with that intuition which had gained for him his name. Some time after midnight they halted and, wrapping themselves in blankets, snatched a few hours of sleep. With the dawn, after a hurried breakfast, they were off again.

A few minutes after leaving they ran into the tracks of the Black Rhino's car, and for the remainder of the day they dogged the wheel ruts, coaxing every bit of speed they could possibly get out of the

little motor. The sand made the going hard, and the heat was such that twice they were forced to use some of their precious water in the boiling radiator. Once they found where the Black Rhino had changed tires. Here and there were scant patches of vegetation, and in these for the next two nights they camped. On the fourth day they reached the veldts of Bechuanaland and the Mabula plains where they refilled their water skins and replenished their larder from a Dutch stockman.

ALTHOUGH the roads were in none too good shape they made excellent time across Mabula and on drawing near the Kwando Basin where the heavier vegetation indicated the beginning of the jungle they encountered their first real difficulty. The Black Rhino, in passing, had warned the warriors of one rather important village that his pursuers were behind, and when the little car drew near the town, following a road between two impenetrable hedges, they found the way obstructed with a stout palisade. Gagni reached back among the packs and brought out an ax. With it he attacked the poles vigorously, but hardly had the first blow been struck when several shots were fired from the cover of the hedge fifty yards in front, and the bullets sang dangerously close.

Darnell leaped for cover behind the palisade and returned the fire with his automatic so effectively that the hidden assailants apparently fled and left Gagni free to remove the obstruction. Then at high speed they darted through the village and were surprised at its deserted appearance for they had expected a general assault. Then miles farther along they found the going absolutely impossible unless they cut away the jungle on each side of the path, and they ran the car deep into the bushes and, covering it with a tarpaulin, left it. Carefully they went back along the path, obliterating every vestige of the trail for a half mile or more in an effort to prevent the theft of the car. Then they packed what they considered necessary supplies for two weeks in the jungle and strapping on their heavily laden kits, began their long trek up the Kwando River with the dank jungle ever closing in more closely about them.

The path in the next two miles degen-

erated into a mere wild pig run with the jungle a perfect wall of massed plants and creepers. It was noisome and dank and evil-stinking and rarely ever did the sunlight penetrate the matted roof of foliage fifty feet overhead. And hanging to that roof was a parasitic mass of vegetation dripping decadent life-forms that rotted in decadent ooze along the river banks. And on the river he saw an occasional giant crocodile and innumerable snakes of sluggish movements and evil, death-dealing appearance.

BEFORE they had penetrated the reeded river banks a mile they became acutely conscious of the fact that they were under the surveillance of the Rhino's spies, savage warriors who slipped through the depths of the jungle like veritable wraiths. Twice they caught a glimpse of the hideous headgear they affected and it was only with an effort that Darnell resisted throwing a bullet after one of them; but he realized that such an action might bring the blacks in upon them with disastrous results. As long as they were willing to play the waiting game, that much closer would he be to his quarry.

Throughout the long afternoon they trekked through the gloom, ever pursued by those fitting black shadows, themselves ghosts of evil who dare not face him in open battle, but who, he felt, would eventually make a meal off him—for cannibalism was not unknown in the Kwando country. Twice a small feathered arrow or dart flitted past his face and, instinctively he knew that the bone tips had been dipped in the deadly extract of rotted bananas, mixed with some unknown herb which had brought death to Jorgenson, the explorer, in less than two hours.

When night fell with that startling abruptness peculiar to certain tropical countries, they had encamped on the bank of the river in a tiny open glade. As they sat at their frugal meal there came to them a heavy, booming sound like the beat of a tom-tom, apparently echoing up from the banks of the stream not twenty feet away. Gagni's hand closed about the handle of his long knife and Darnell brought the barrel of his automatic on a line with a clump of bushes from which the sound seemed to come.

The weird, monotonous beating continued for several minutes while Darnell and his man sat in complete silence. After the first few beats Darnell became convinced that it was a signal, something similar to the Morse code for there was a certain regularity in the blows, a definite interval between the sounds, and sometimes a repetition of the same signal. And somehow there was something in the melancholy reverberations as they echoed along the mysterious river that brought a threat of imminent danger, a hint of death.

III

CASUALLY Darnell arose and walked down to the edge of the river, Gagni close at his heels. He peered deep into the bushes, and for a long time in the half light, he was unable to distinguish anything. But Gagni came forward and parted the shrubs exposing a hollow log, one half of which was inserted into the water.

"No tom-tom," he declared in a guarded tone. "Balletti!"

Darnell leaned forward with quickened interest. The world's oldest wireless! The tribal telegraph system which used water as a sending medium instead of air! A sender and a receiver out of a simple hollow log, effective, according to reliable report, for a distance of twelve miles! A number of times he had heard of this weird form of African wireless, but never before had he come in contact with it. Steadily the signals kept coming in, echoing from the hollow of the log with an eerie, uncanny sound.

Gagni picked up a short club which he found beside the log and beat upon the surface four times, short and quick. A few seconds later the booming was silenced as suddenly as it had started.

"You talk same like?" questioned Darnell of Gagni in the vernacular of the diamond fields.

"No can do," replied Gagni softly. "Spik Kafir—no Kikondia."

That the signaling came from the Black Rhino who was trying to get in touch with his warriors, Darnell did not for an instant doubt, and for a minute he wondered whether or not he should have followed De Korff's advice and brought with him a small army of men. Had he underestimated the cunning and the power of the Rhino?

He threw off the thought with a shrug and returned to the camp.

"Catchem hell," laconically declared Gagni when he had returned. He stood staring into the jungle as if he expected the rush of the blacks at any instant. A few minutes later he sat down at the roots of a giant tree and placed his gun across his knees.

"You catchem sleep—I watch." Gagni pointed toward a clump of bushes and, with an indefinable sort of a gesture, indicated that his master should obey his instructions.

Darnell removed his watch from his pocket and handed it to Gagni.

"Wake me at two o'clock," he ordered pointing to the hour on the face.

Gagni nodded and two minutes later Darnell was dead asleep, rolled in a mosquito bar, and well hidden back in a clump of bushes.

HOW long he slept he never knew, but it seemed only a short time until he was awakened by a sudden scream, poignant and blood-curdling. He lurched to his knees wide-eyed and staring into the vague darkness. Gagni apparently had built a small fire, a mosquito smoke, which blazed fitfully and by the flickering glare he was able to distinguish a dozen writhing, glistening forms near the roots of the tree against which Gagni had been sitting.

For a minute he thought it was a nightmare and then he saw Gagni throw off two of his attackers and stagger to his feet with another warning shout. As Darnell leveled his automatic he saw one of the blacks swing a formidable weapon, a wide blade attached to a long pole, and Gagni went down completely decapitated. A surge of horror swept over Darnell leaving him motionless, frozen in his tracks, and then suddenly he found himself firing straight into that mass of warriors, directing an oath with each bullet, and he had the satisfaction of seeing four of the warriors drop and remain motionless beside the fire.

For a full second the blacks seemed stupefied by this sudden volley, and then at a guttural shout from one of them, a dozen leaped forward upon him. He sprang for the cover of the jungle leaving his kit and rifle behind him and taking with him only his automatic and the belt of ammunition about his waist. Precipitately he fled

deeper into tangle of cane and massed vines, stumbling and falling every few feet, but struggling ever ahead, for his only hope lay in whatever distance he could put between him and the Kikondias.

For an hour he fought his way through the jungle without halting even for a moment's breathing, expecting each moment to bring several of the hideous warriors upon his back. The angry snarl of a leopard from a brake a few feet ahead caused him to swerve back in the direction of the river and when he came to an open glade, only a few feet across, he halted to listen. The deadly silence of the night seemed to close down in upon him like a heavy blanket.

The sudden attack of the Kikondias had cut him off from all hope of retreat back in the direction of the auto and he was forced to push on in the direction of the town and the Black Rhino. A thousand mosquitoes and forest insects clouded about his face until their continuous drone almost drove him mad. He dared not light a cigarette for the flare of the match would, he knew, instantly bring in a flight of the deadly bone-tipped arrows. Then suddenly the night was full of that weird, booming sound of the hollow-log signaling—the Balletti. That the warriors were signaling the white man's escape there could be little doubt, and Darnell knew that the break of dawn would see two hundred men combing every inch of the jungle for him.

AT the mouth of the glade he discovered the wild pig path he had followed that afternoon, and half crouching and grasping his automatic for instant use, he crept warily forward halting every few minutes to assure himself that his pursuers were not closing in upon him. Apparently they were still searching the vicinity of the scene where the attack had been made, for twice he heard shouts showing that they were far behind. But sooner or later they would pick up his spoor, because the Congo warrior, according to common rumor, could smell the trail when other traces were hidden.

Vainly Darnell wished for the watch he had given to Gagni just before he went to sleep. Not having the slightest idea of how the hours were passing, he didn't know whether it was near dawn or mid-

night, but the intense darkness had grown like a pall, and he was of the opinion that it was nearing dawn when the night is the darkest. Throughout the long hours of his flight, the deadly throb of the Balletti followed him — boom-boom — reverberating through the thickets of reeds and beating upon him like physical blows. Mile after mile the echoes seemed to him to be creeping in closer upon him, and then he realized that he was nearing another of the logs on which someone was signaling. Fearing that he was upon the Kikondia village, he crawled into the cover of a clump of high grass and lay down.

Suddenly the dawn broke to be greeted with a paean of song, harsh and metallic, by the song birds of the jungle. He gazed about him, aware for the first time that his hands and face were swollen all out of proportion. His eyes were almost closed and the poison injected into his veins by the bites of the insects half maddened him. He made a short tour of investigation about his hiding place and came to the conclusion that no village was near him. Save for the birds there was no indication of life about him, although once he was certain he saw a yellowish shadow glide from a covert a hundred feet away and disappear into the jungle. Shortly afterward the scream of some animal in distress told him that the leopard had stalked its prey.

THROUGHOUT the day he lay in that clump of grass through which the sun penetrated with stifling heat. At times he dozed and strange dreams seemed to flit through his head. And when he awakened he had a difficult time trying to distinguish the dreams from the realities. A peculiar dizziness seized him, and he seemed utterly unable to use his legs. Immediately he recognized the symptoms of the dread blackwater fever, and he knew that unless he got aid from somewhere in the next twenty-four hours the Black Rhino had won. Hopelessly he considered retracing his steps to the camp of the previous night and trying to recover his kit bag which contained quinine and other drugs which would eliminate the fever and bring him around in a day or two, but then he realized that the chances were a thousand to one that the warriors had destroyed the kit and all that it contained.

WHEN at last the cool night fell, bringing with it a relief that lifted Darnell's hopes again, he dragged himself to his feet and once more staggered along the endless path that led to the Kikondia villages. As on the previous night the monotonous beat of the hollow-log signals smote his ears with maddening regularity. To him the notes of the weird signaling were strangely similar to a certain bar in Greig's Funeral March, but instead of the lofty motif there was something sinister, threatening, hinting at death.

Almost overpowering came the impulse to shout his presence to his enemies and then shoot it out with them until the end, but he closed his lips in a thin, determined line and threw his every ounce of energy into the business of forging ahead. At times he caught himself babbling incoherently and his senses reeled. Once he must have lost consciousness for he found himself prone on the ground. It seemed hours before he could get back on his feet, and then his legs seemed detached from the remainder of his body and required his full concentration to make them move. Suddenly a large conical shape loomed before him, and realizing that he had reached his journey's end and that he was in the heart of Kikondia, he collapsed against the skin shield which was used as a door.

Someone must have picked him up and carried him inside the hut, for when he regained consciousness he was half choked and sputtering with his mouth filled with a bitter albeit cooling liquid. Slowly, as his vision cleared, he stared about the semi-darkened room, his eyes finally coming to rest upon as strange a creature as even mysterious Africa can produce. Standing before him and holding a calabash gourd in which there appeared to be more of the liquid he had just tasted, a grotesque, disfigured, dwarfed native, who might have been a hundred years old, grinned toothlessly. On his head just above his eyes, were secured two long horns, evidently those of a cow, while from his nose and lips were suspended a number of heavy copper rings. His dress consisted of the skin of a gorilla or a large chimpanzee which covered most of his body, but left his arms and legs bare.

Darnell recognized him immediately as one of the powerful devil-devil doctors who

through weird incantations and strange practices wield an almost unlimited influence over the tribesmen in the torrid regions of the Dark Continent. Obediently Darnell took the gourd from the devil doctor's hand and drained the contents. Then he let his eyes rove curiously over the room.

THE hut seemed to comprise two compartments, the one in which he had been carried and which seemed to be a sleeping and living-room for the devil doctor, and another in which a series of small fires were burning filling both rooms with an acrid, pungent smoke. Suspended by wires or fiber strings from the roof were a number of round objects of six or eight inches in diameter and Darnell's muscles grew tense. In more than one section of the Congo it was the custom to cure the heads of the warriors slain in battle and then place them in a conspicuous position before the hut of the chief. Darnell shot a single questioning glance at the devil doctor and the latter apparently divined his thought.

"Oogooti," he explained in a high, thin voice, shaking his head from side to side vigorously.

He spoke in the Massengai dialect of the Tanganyika Districts, a language used largely over central Africa, and one with which Darnell had become thoroughly acquainted.

The devil doctor shuffled into the adjoining room and brought back with him one of the round objects, placing it on the grass couch beside Darnell. It was the head of a leopard on which the flesh and skin had been dried and cured so as to be almost indestructible. Darnell immediately began questioning the old man and found him readily talkative.

The leopard heads were those which the Black Rhino had slain, no other man in Kikondia daring to slay one of the sacred cats. The Black Rhino, however, declared that eating the hearts of his victims protected him from their wrath and made them powerless to injure him. It did not take Darnell long to discover that there was not a little enmity between the Black Rhino and the devil-doctor who said his name was Neri and that he was the uncle of the chief, Omlotti.

BUT Neri had other news for Darnell—news that sent a chill to his heart. It appeared that Omlotti's warriors had discovered the white man at Neri's door and had carried him first to the chief. There a counsel had been held in which the Black Rhino had suggested that the white stranger should be given to the leopards as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of the Gods. This wrath, according to Neri, had been manifested in a number of ways, chief of which had been a continued drouth which had practically ruined the crops of grain, and had driven the cattle to the Kwando River jungle basin where the leopards had fast depleted the herds. Accordingly it had been decided that four days hence, when Neri had caused the black-water fever devil to depart, Darnell would be securely fastened to a tree in the heart of the haunts of the leopard and the blood of a freshly slain pig be scattered about to bait the cats.

Instinctively Darnell felt for his automatic only to find that it had either been taken or that he had lost it in the jungle. Neri having imparted this information, apparently considered the interview at an end and returned to his work of curing the heads in the other room. For a long time Darnell lay there watching him, searching his memory for some means of delivering himself from his dilemma. Of course he had a fighting chance if he could recover sufficiently from the fever, but, without his gun, he knew that it would be slender, indeed.

IV

THE concoction which Neri had administered to him worked wonders and by the middle of the afternoon, his head was cleared and he seemed to feel the return of strength to his muscles. He slept well that night and on the following morning felt more himself and ready to tackle the odds-on fight for his life. Weakly he got to his feet and walked to the doorway. The cool of the early morning was refreshing and he drew in great lungfuls of the air untainted by the deadly smoke of the curling fires.

At first he thought that there were no others about the hut save himself and Neri and he immediately began to consider the possibilities of flight. Then, scattered

about the tiny clearing and in various attitudes of repose, he saw a number of black warriors, at least a half dozen, and their eyes seemed continually on the hut. Calling Neri to him he questioned the devil doctor in the Massengai tongue.

"Why are the warriors on the watch? Is Neri afraid?"

"They watch the sacrifice," explained Neri grinning. "The white man can go where he pleases so long as he stays in sight of the guards."

"Do they speak the Massengai?" Darnell knew the susceptibility of the native to bribery.

"They will talk no more," replied Neri, "for their tongues have been silenced. They were warriors of the Levato tribe four suns to the east, and they were captured and brought home by Omlotti in the last war. One-third of their tongues have been removed to keep them from telling how many warriors Omlotti has and other secrets they might learn here, if they should escape."

"Do they fight for Omlotti, then?"

"They do Omlotti's bidding—or mine."

The stately beat of approaching drums mingled with mellow blasts from calabash horns brought an end to the conversation, and Darnell glanced inquiringly at Neri.

"Omlotti comes—and the Black Rhino."

Neri advanced several yards to meet his guests who were seen marching in a long procession across a small veldt in the direction of the village. Darnell leaned nonchalantly against the wall of the hut and lighted a cigarette, fervently wishing that he had his automatic. With tense expectancy he awaited the arrival of the most dangerous criminal he had ever sought, and whose mission, he knew, was to test the nerve of his victim.

A HALF a hundred warriors came in front, each carrying the cow-skin shields and long, iron-tipped assegais, the latter dipping menacingly at each step. Behind them were two crude sedan chairs, palm-covered, and carried by stalwart bearers, evidently other captives, for they closely resembled the guards about the devil-devil house. In these chairs reclined a gaily dressed black, wearing a glittering array of ornaments, and little else, Omlotti without a doubt, and the Black Rhino, huge scowling, and almost as black as the chief.

It was the first time Darnell had ever had the chance of a leisurely study of the Greek. Hitherto he had been forced to content himself with a glance or two, and that at a distance. He was even more huge than Darnell had thought. Squat, broad-shouldered, with muscles which rippled when he moved, and arms that reached to his knees, he somehow seemed to be the acme of brute power, and his low forehead, beetling brows and sinister mouth accentuated his resemblance to the carnivorous world. It was easy to believe the rumor that he had a mania for killing.

The chairs were placed before the hut and the warriors gathered in a semi-circle to the rear to watch the proceedings. Omlotti gravely saluted Neri and then leaned back comfortably. He had waxed fat on many feasts and the palm-leaf canopy had failed to keep the heat of the morning sun out, so that beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead and trickled down over the folds of his neck. The Black Rhino, on the other hand, appeared cool in his duck trousers, silk shirt and pith helmet. A crooked smile twisted his mouth into a sardonic expression.

"We don't need an introduction, do we, Mr. Chumfo Darnell?" he questioned, speaking excellent English.

"Hardly," replied Darnell advancing leisurely forward. "Is this in the nature of a social call?"

"It is," returned the Greek, his grin deepening. "We came to extend our sympathy—our heartfelt condolences that one so young and so famous should meet such an early and untimely end. Perhaps Neri has told you of the will of the Gods." The Black Rhino was enjoying himself hugely.

Darnell shrugged, and replaced his monocle, staring at the Greek coolly. "I did hear him say something to that effect, but I am forced for this once to forego the pleasure of waiting upon the will of the jungle gods. I came for the diamonds, and of course you know that I can't go back without them."

A FLICKER of admiration glinted in eyes of the Greek. Men of his stamp always respect iron-nerved sangfroid, and Darnell was playing the game for all it was worth. He knew that the slightest indication of weakness would bring torture.

"Would you like to see the Southern Cross" queried the Greek.

He brought forth his wallet and opened it. From a small chamois bag he removed the stone and held it up to the view of all. A sheen of fire played like a living thing through the facets and a tremor seemed to run through the Black Rhino's hand as he glanced at it. Darnell strode forward two or three steps in order to get a closer view of the stone and then he came to an abrupt halt when the muzzle of an evil-looking revolver peeped over the edge of the sedan at him.

"Exquisite, eh?" The Rhino dropped it into a bag and replaced his wallet. "It is worth a fortune—a hundred thousand pounds. Luxury—bright lights—song!"

"But you'll never enjoy them," cut in Darnell shortly. "My word for it."

"Bah!" The Black Rhino spat contemptuously. "In three nights the cats will feast at the edge of the jungle. My word for that!" Then his anger departed as suddenly as it had arrived, and he smiled again. "Allow me to express my happiness at your quick recovery from the fever." He bowed ironically.

Omlotti, apparently bewildered and not understanding a word of the conversation, bowed as deeply as the Black Rhino, and the business seemed to be contagious for the warriors bent until their fantastic head-gear almost brushed the ground. Darnell, not to be outdone in politeness, returned the salutation with all the exaggeration of an old-time minuet. With that the carriers, at a sign from the Black Rhino, caught up the chairs and the procession moved off. The Black Rhino leaned out.

"Adios—until the third night!" he called.

"Get ready to go back to Pretoria with me when we do meet. Adios!"

IN the hut that afternoon he found Neri consulting a greasy pack of cards. One by one he slowly turned them face up and stared at them long and solemnly. Darnell quickly gathered that the old devil-doctor did not know the meaning of the cards, but attributed to them magical powers, and he was wont to use them in his incantations to bring on rain and ward off whatever dangers might beset the tribe. This gave Darnell an idea and he was quick to act upon it.

Throughout the diamond fields Darnell had hunted and banished trick gamblers when not on some more important mission, and he had, in the course of this work, learned a number of his parlor tricks that on the variety stage had puzzled him in his boyhood days. Taking the pack from Neri's hands, he shuffled it, repeating all the while some of the Massengai chants he had heard the witch doctors along the coast intone. Then rolling up his sleeves, like the mountebank by the light of his calcium lamp, he made cards disappear before the old man's very eyes, changed the spots on others as Neri stared at them fascinated, and then finally caused the entire deck to vanish into thin air.

In ten minutes the old devil-doctor's face expressed an awe that would have been ludicrous to Darnell had so much not depended on it. Still it was easy to see that mixed with that awe was a trace of canny suspicion, and Darnell knew that he would have to exert every caution in order not to overdo the thing. Consequently he returned the pack to Neri and left the room, conscious of the fact that the old man's eyes were following his every move.

FROM that time on, Neri showed a more marked respect for the prisoner, serving him with food and drink with solicitous care, and keeping an eye on him almost all the time. Darnell then began his campaign to convince the devil doctor that he was of supernatural origin that he could wield powers hitherto attributed only to those heathen gods they worshiped and feared. He mumbled incantations, he drew cabalistic signs in the dirt before the door with a stick, and he poured grains of wheat in the path before the hut as the voodooists pour the rice before the door to keep the Loup Garou away.

All of this Neri followed with watchful eye, so that by the fall of night, Darnell felt that he had made considerable headway. He slept soundly that night, but with the dawn he was up and greeting the rising sun with an impromptu performance that rivaled the death dance of the Skotos about Tchad. This seemed to properly impress Neri, and several of the guards gathered about him watching him closely. Then he retired to the hut and remained under cover for the remainder of the day,

avoiding Neri studiously. He saw no one.

On the morning of that fourth day he again went through his performance greeting the sunrise, and again Neri and the guards gathered close. Realizing that he must stake everything on one throw of the dice, he called into play his last trick—ventriloquism. Often while in the solitudes of the bush country he had amused himself through the long evenings practising, and Gagni had been completely mystified for weeks by voices and songs which seemed to come from almost anywhere.

TWO of the guards were standing within ten feet of him and Neri was half crouching in the bunch grass not quite so far away. Darnell ceased his gesticulations and stood with folded arms facing his little audience. Then, in the Massengai lingo, one of the tongueless guards began to speak.

"Oh, Neri, the gods speak." The voice of the guard was low-pitched, but carrying so that all understood. The black's muscles grew tense, but he seemed afraid to move, while his companions appeared to debate whether or not they should take to their heels. Neri half arose and stared at the guard, bewilderment and mystification personified.

"The gods speak," repeated the guard although his lips did not move. "Whoso bring hurt upon the head of the White One may not live. The Black Rhino laughs at the gods. He has stolen the White One's star and death follows in his path. Listen, Oh Neri! The Rhino has slain the leopard. The gods are angry. They want a sacrifice but it is not the White One. Do as he bids you and prosper and live. Disobey and die."

It worked! A feeling of elation almost intoxicated Darnell and he almost shouted his joy when Neri and the guards threw themselves prone at his feet. Instead he stood with arms folded and watched them as they brought their foreheads to the ground and remained motionless. Then he motioned them to arise.

"The White One has only to express his wish—it shall be done," declared Neri, his old voice quivering with fear and excitement. It was a long chance, but it had won and the reaction left Darnell not quite himself.

During the afternoon Darnell and Neri made ready for the sacrificial ceremonies which would take place when the pall of darkness began to settle over the jungle. It would be best, so Darnell told Neri, to let the Black Rhino and his followers remain ignorant of the revelation through the mute guard, but to pretend that the sacrifice would take place as planned. When he had been tied to the tree and was awaiting the arrival of the hungry brutes, Neri was to drive away all spectators, declaring that he would not permit anyone to look on. Then Neri was to cut Darnell loose and guide him to a place of safety where he could hide until such time as he could recover the star from the Black Rhino.

V

WHEN the sun was a half hour above the western hills, the beat of the tom-toms announced the approach of the Black Rhino, Omlotti and the horde of warriors marching slowly toward the devil-devil house. That apparently was the signal for Neri to call the victim into the hut and dress him in a leopard skin with the sacrificial tail bound tightly about his forehead. As he completed this ceremony he thrust Darnell's automatic into his hand.

On the way to the jungle a dozen women danced in wild ecstatic throes to the beat of the tom-toms and the wail of gourd horns. Neri alone walked with Darnell, the others giving him a wide berth as though they feared him, and Darnell wondered whether or not the rumor of his supposed supernatural powers had spread among them. The tongueless mute who had given Neri the warning kept close behind in a fawning attitude.

To one of the palm trees they fastened the victim securely and then Neri ceremoniously scattered the blood of the freshly slain pig about the place. Then after completing a weird ceremony which included a long incantation during which the last of the sun's rays melted into the gloom of the jungle, he stood erect and ordered all the spectators to depart immediately else they would incur the wrath of the gods by prying upon a scene meant only for the eyes of those gods. Reluctantly the black warriors and Omlotti left. The Black Rhino apparently intended seeing the sacrifice

through to the end, but Neri repeated his command and the Greek, evidently not caring for a repetition of his clashes with the devil-doctor, reluctantly took his departure.

SOMEWHERE back in the tangles of jungleland there came the angry, hungry bark of one of the leopards and a thrill stirred the hair on the back of Darnell's neck. Neri stepped back several paces and waited, evidently desiring to be certain that no prying eyes were on him when he cut the victim loose. As the minutes passed slight sounds, as if something was pushing its way through the thickets, came to Darnell's ears, and he wondered if the great cats were already creeping in upon their prey. Then he saw the black body of one of the warriors climbing a tree fifty yards off to the right and almost at the same instant he caught the glimpse of two other fleeting forms in the bush further back in the direction of the village. The curiosity of the warriors was greater than their fear of Neri, and they had returned despite his commands.

Neri drew close.

"They have returned," he whispered. "The Black Rhino is suspicious and they do his bidding."

"Then we'll wait for darkness," returned Darnell. "When they cannot see, cut the bonds." Then Neri withdrew silently.

Realizing the danger of any suspicious action under the eyes of the Black Rhino and the fighting men, and the futility of trying to make his escape while the light would reveal his every movement, Darnell steeled himself to the long wait until complete darkness blanketed them. Gradually the shadows deepened and with them came the deep, barking roar of the dread leopards while there echoed an occasional long-drawn howl, indicating that they had winded their victim. Two of the tawny brutes appeared to be about five hundred yards down the river and they were drawing steadily closer.

Then, quite suddenly, a roar broke from the bush less than a hundred feet in front of Darnell and there came a warning shout from half a hundred black throats from the tree-tops and other hiding places about the place. Several of the warriors dropped from their perches and ran for a more secure position in the rear. There was no

mistaking the intention of the leopard. It was hunger-mad and the smell of blood had aroused it to that point where no power daunted it. In spite of Neri's proximity, Darnell felt a chill creep the length of his spinal column.

THE snarls of the hungry lurker showed that it was stalking rapidly and was already within fifty feet of Darnell, still he did not dare signal Neri, for the light was yet too strong and the inevitable result of any attempt at a rescue would mean a flight of assegais more deadly than the crouching cat. The snarls were answered from another point close by and almost as an echo came another bark off to the left a few yards. With his fingers closed about the trigger of his automatic, Darnell peered into the gathering darkness, determined to wait until the last possible second before signaling Neri.

A sudden suspicion chilled the very marrow in Darnell's bones. Would Neri dare face the giant cats which he worshiped if they waited any longer? Was Neri still waiting in the bushes behind him, or had terror sent him scurrying back into the village? If so, then the end was in sight. It took every atom of Darnell's self-restraint to keep from shouting to Neri, not for assistance, but to assure himself that the old man was still there.

The bark of the nearest leopard had ceased and Darnell knew that it was creeping in upon him or was stalking one of the natives in the trees, either of which would mean the same, because it would have to pass him to reach any of the warriors. He trained his every sense on the tiny glade in front of him and waited for the appearance of sinuous shadows.

WITHOUT any warning three of the crouching brutes appeared in the edge of the glen. It was the light of their eyes that betrayed their presence for their tawny bodies melted into the shadows without shape or form. Then slowly they crept forward, inch by inch, their every movement visible to Darnell's imagination. He tore his fascinated gaze from the greenish points and shot a fleeting glance at the tree-tops. The mantle of darkness was enveloping them. Praying that it was dark enough to cover his actions, he gave vent

to a scream of fear, only half simulated, and the cats halted momentarily, as if nonplussed by this unexpected sound, but the angry lash of their tails against the ground told him that it was only a matter of seconds until they would leap. Darnell gave the signal at that instant, a low whistle like that metallic sound of all Central African night birds, and in that whistle he breathed a prayer—as he had never prayed before—that Neri would come.

Instantly he felt, rather than saw, the form of the devil-doctor appear at his side and a knife blade was pushed under the bonds about his arms behind the tree, and the touch of it gave him the most exhilarating sensation he had ever felt. The bonds were severed and with a single movement he leaped to Neri's side behind the trunk of the tree. Again Darnell screamed, as if in pain, and as the nearest cat leaped for the tree he snatched the skin rope from his shoulders and hurled it at the flying shadow. Then, at Neri's heels, he fled with all possible speed back toward the village, but hugging the bank of the river.

The crash of the underbrush to their left showed that the blacks, overawed by the ghastly scene they had witnessed, or thought they had, were fleeing for safety. Elated at the complete success of the plan, Darnell could have shouted his relief, for in those few tense minutes he realized that he had been toying with eternity, and had won by the narrowest margin. A weak, uncertain feeling in his legs showed him how great had been the reaction.

A HALF mile from the scene, and almost completely hidden in the bush, they came to an abandoned cattle stockade, and securely barring the gate, they crawled into the herder's hut where Neri had hidden the white man's clothes. Darnell hurriedly put them on, and lighted a cigarette with a great sigh of relief. Then he grasped Neri's hand.

"I owe you much, my friend," he declared gratefully.

"It was the will of the gods," returned Neri simply and without another word threw himself on a pile of grass and fell asleep. Darnell followed suit, hut for hours he remained awake, staring into the darkness, planning for the morrow, and then he fell into a fitful slumber.

With the dawn he was up and after a cold, frugal breakfast, for Neri was afraid to build a fire, the old man departed for his hut, but promised to return by the middle of the day. Darnell spent the morning wandering along the river, completing his plans for the recovery of the Southern Cross, keeping carefully under cover the while. On the river bank he discovered another of the half-immersed, hollow logs, and this gave him a new idea.

Impatiently he awaited the arrival of Neri and when the old devil-doctor did appear Darnell led him to the river.

"Can you talk with the Black Rhino over this—get a message to him?"

Neri nodded affirmatively.

"Then tonight we will send a message to him from the jungle down the river—will you go?"

"It is on the knees of the gods."

Neri reported that all was quiet in the village, that there was no suspicion of Darnell's escape, and that the Black Rhino, probably to forget the horror of the scene, had gotten himself completely drunk. During the afternoon, the devil-doctor prepared food for two or three days and packed it in a shoulder pouch, and an hour before sundown they set traveling as rapidly as possible.

THEY reached the scene of the camp where Gagni had been slain about nightfall, and Darnell glanced over the glade, but found it bare of any traces of the conflict. Probably the warriors had returned and buried the bodies. Until midnight they sat before the mosquito blaze and talked.

"When was the Black Rhino's brother last in Kikondia?" asked Darnell.

"Many seasons ago," replied Neri, holding up the fingers of both hands. "He returns no more."

"Dead?"

Neri shrugged. "Perhaps."

"We'll take a chance," said Darnell to himself and arose and led the way to the hollow log on the river's edge. He placed the club in Neri's hands.

"Say to the Black Rhino," ordered Darnell, "that his brother comes. Tell the Black Rhino to meet his brother here in the jungle when the sun is three hours high in the morning. Tell him that it is very

important and that he must come alone."

Neri obeyed, and for the next five minutes he beat methodically upon the log. Then he halted for a space of a few minutes and repeated the signal, and hardly had the booming echoes died away than the reply came. Neri listened intently until it had ceased.

"The Black Rhino will come," he announced.

Throughout the remainder of the night Darnell was awake, although Neri was on guard half of the time. Several times he heard the approach of one of the innumerable leopards which infested the river jungle, but apparently they were frightened away by the light of the fire which was kept blazing freely, the one protection of the native against his dread feline enemy.

WHEN the day broke they cooked a breakfast and made tea. Then, extinguishing the fire, they secreted themselves beside the trail and awaited the coming of the Black Rhino. Eight—nine—ten o'clock passed and Darnell began to wonder whether or not the Black Rhino had fallen for the ruse. Then out along the trail a few yards they saw him coming—and at his heels marched a score of his black warriors. He brought them to a halt by a word of command at the edge of the glen and advanced slowly and guardedly to the trysting place.

Realizing that the Black Rhino had turned the tables and that his men would beat the bush in a few minutes, Darnell, hoping that the sudden appearance of one whom the blacks thought dead would send them into flight, stepped from the bushes, followed by Neri. The Black Rhino halted in his tracks and stared unbelievably at the apparition, and then with the rapidity of a striking snake, his hand leaped to his holster and his gun blazed twice. Neri cried out once and then slowly crumpled to the ground beside Darnell, and the black warriors, seeing this, fled in a body back along the trail. To them Neri had been the personification of their worship, and to see him slain had been the final straw.

The Black Rhino threw a hurried bullet in the direction of Darnell and then sprang for the cover of the jungle. Darnell fired twice at the fleeting target and then plunged

forward in pursuit. Straight into the heart of the dank, fetid jungle he followed the plainly visible trail of the Rhino, halting momentarily every now and then to assure himself that his quarry had not hidden in ambush and was waiting for him. The harsh scream of frightened birds betrayed the other's flight and guided him as well.

THEN began a ghostly game with death that Darnell knew would remain in his memory forever. With a cunning and sagacity that would have shamed the most wily of the jungle denizens, these two experts in jungle knowledge stalked each other. The chattering of the birds ahead ceased and Darnell knew that the Rhino had slipped into an ambush and was waiting and he circled widely in order to cut off all possible retreat into Kikondia and then closed in on his man, noiseless as a shadow and always under cover of the creeping vines and dank foliage.

Another of those brilliant plumaged birds started its discordant cry over his head and an instant later several others deeper to the left echoed it. The Rhino, fearing an attack from behind, had continued his flight, his probable intention being to draw Darnell deeper into the trackless mass and then resort to endurance. It was his wisest move, for Darnell was weakened as a result of the fever, and the Rhino was reputed to be absolutely tireless. Midday came and went and still the pursuit continued ceaselessly. Once Darnell thought he caught sight of his man, but he was not certain. They must have covered miles, although at times Darnell was forced to resort to his knife in order to get through a particularly close-woven barrier. It was past three o'clock in the afternoon when they at last struck a bit of higher ground on which the vegetation was slightly thinned. And it was here that Darnell instinctively knew the Rhino would make a stand. Accordingly he dropped to the ground and wriggled his way forward, inch by inch, studying every possible covert with minute care. A shattered spider web, a leaf with the under side exposed unnaturally and a blade of grass that was slowly coming erect were all he needed to bring a grim smile to the corners of his tightened mouth. Softly he slipped into a slight depression in the ground and then he

brought his automatic to bear upon the heart of a small clump of reeds and creepers twenty feet away.

FOR a full half hour he lay there motionless while the sun found an opening in the leafy canopy and beat upon him with almost unbearable sultriness. Yet he dared not move. It was a waiting game and could only be ended by one of two things—darkness or flight by one of them. Twice a parakeet circled over the clump in which the Rhino was hidden and each time it made as if to alight, but with a shrill call, it arose to the top of a low-branched palm a few feet to the rear.

A reed moved slightly and Darnell grew tense, expecting each moment to bring a glimpse of his man. For several hours he had given up all hopes of getting his man alive and it was shoot until one ceased firing, if they met. Once more the reed swayed and at the same instant Darnell became aware of a slow-moving shadow in the branches of the palm tree overhead. For a long minute he watched this shadow bewilderedly and then, with sudden understanding, he caught the outline of a great yellow body poised on a limb almost over the spot where the Rhino was hidden. It was a leopard almost as large as the Numidian lion, and seemed to be glaring at Darnell and making ready for the thirty-foot leap.

Instinctively his automatic covered it and his finger closed convulsively on the trigger. Then, with a half groan, he crouched deeper into the depression. To fire at the cat would expose his position to the Rhino. Had the cat-god of the Kikondias come to the aid of the man who had used it for his own murderous aims? The irony of it brought a smile to Darnell's face, and he waited grimly for the denouement.

It came with startling abruptness. The great cat suddenly launched itself into the air and flashed downward. Darnell's first thought was that it had fallen short of its mark, for it was headed straight into the clump of reeds. Then came a bellow of surprise from the Rhino and Darnell caught the true import of the amazing climax. A snarl—a cry—and all was quiet.

"The mills of the gods grind exceedingly fine," quoted Darnell softly.

He sprang to his feet and peered into

the clump of matted reeds. The leopard raised its head with an angry purr of suspicion and Darnell emptied his automatic straight into the flashing eyes. The Kwando king slumped across the body of the Black Rhino.

VI

A FORTNIGHT later, in dinner jacket and a new monocle screwed in his eye, Darnell rang the doorbell at De Korff's bungalow and a servant showed him into the library. A minute later the manager entered. For a second he gazed at his visitor uncomprehendingly, and his lips parted in amazement. The glass of port wine he was carrying slipped from his hand and crashed on the floor.

"Hell's Kettles!" he gasped at last. "You? Why—why, you're back?" He sank to a chair and stared at Darnell and his hand fumbled as he reached for a cigar.

"No doubt you are surprised," returned Darnell affably, "but I'm back again."

"But—but—the Rhino! The diamonds! The Southern Cross!"

"I have them."

"You—you killed the Rhino?"

"He died in the maw of the Kikondia God."

"How? What? I don't understand."

"No need of getting so excited, De Korff," admonished Darnell softly as he dropped his hand into his coat pocket and let it remain there. "I have the diamonds and that is all you care about."

De Korff regained control of himself after a visible effort. He rang for the servant and the latter brought a decanter of port. De Korff poured out two glasses and passed one to Darnell.

"You surprised me. . . . Thought you dead." De Korff was himself once more. "Gone so long. Got the diamonds?"

For reply Darnell spread open the chamois pouch on the table and the Southern Cross caught the lights from the chandelier with a flash of brilliant color. A strange glint crept into De Korff's eyes as he gazed upon it.

"Glorious!" he whispered, his hand reaching out for it instinctively. "Tell you what! Got some Burgundy—old stuff. To the Southern Cross."

HE arose and left the room hurriedly. A minute passed and another and then he returned with two large wine-glasses filled with irradant ruby liquid. He placed one in Darnell's hand and raised the other to his lips.

"To the Southern Cross—and its rescuer!" He drained his glass, but Darnell returned his to the table untasted.

"Why—what's wrong? You didn't drink," expostulated De Korff.

"I don't drink cyanide, De Korff—or Mavoletis, or whatever your name really is," replied Darnell slowly, keeping an eye on De Korff's hand which began to move furtively toward the table drawer.

"Cyanide? You dare accuse—?"

"Careful!" interrupted Darnell, a certain metallic quality taking the place of the affected drawl. "Another inch and I'll drill you. You've been covered from the moment I entered this room, De Korff. One more move and you're through."

De Korff caught up the telephone. "Police headquarters," he called.

"Save yourself that trouble, De Korff—or Mavoletis," advised Darnell with a smile. "If you want the police you only have to open the door. They're waiting for you. You're under arrest for complicity in the theft of the Southern Cross."

"You're insane. What proof have you? Bah! Mere suspicion!" But he replaced the telephone on the table. "Show the proof," he demanded.

"Would you care to see a letter written by you and addressed to your brother, the

Black Rhino, alias Demetry Mavoletis, giving him the location of the Southern Cross and assuring him that only one guard would be on duty at the hour when the murder and robbery was committed? I suspected this before I left for the jungle, and when I got a close view of your brother, I was certain of it."

"That's a lie. Demetry never squealed."

"That's true," admitted Darnell, "but your Kafir go-between did squeal—when we brought him face to face with the Gods of the Kwando. He stole your letter to the Rhino—in order to blackmail you later. Any handwriting expert will identify your— No, you don't!"

With a lightning leap Darnell sprang to his feet and thrust his automatic into the pit of De Korff's stomach. The latter slowly lifted his hand from the table drawer.

When the Red Caps had departed with their prisoner, Darnell replaced the Southern Cross in the chamois bag and thrust it into the inside pocket of his dinner jacket.

"Let's see!" he mused. "An alligator pear salad with capri dressing and filet of sole with tartar sauce would be a little bit of all right. A biscuit tortoni and coffee, yes."

"Hello, Algernon! Be careful!" jeered a tipsy girl from a parked car at the curb.

"Shut up, you fool!" warned her escort hoarsely. "That's Chumfo Darnell."

"The rewards of fame!" murmured Darnell with a crooked smile as he made for the club.



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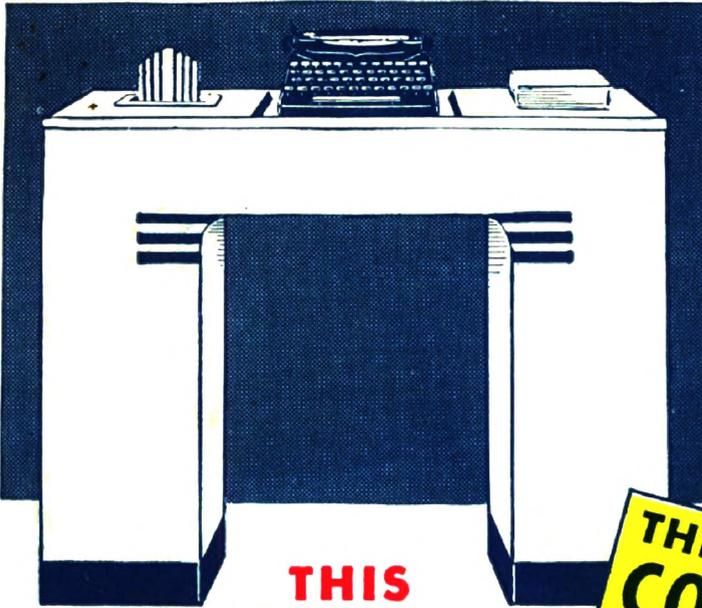
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