
FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES
JUNGLE STORIES
20c
KI-GOR—JUNGLE LORD
FLINGS HIS NAKED MIGHT AGAINST THE TIDAL-WAVE OF SAVAGE, BLACK MAN-HUNTERS IN
THE CANNIBAL HORDE
A NEW KI-GOR NOVEL
by JOHN PETER DRUMMOND
WHITE MAN'S CODE
by WYNDHAM MARTYN
KRAAL OF BLOOD-MIRACLES
by CLYDE IRVINE

America's Secret Weapon

YOU won't find it on the production lines at Rock Island or Willow Run.

It isn't guarded at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, or tested at Aberdeen.

But it's the toughest weapon these men you are looking at will ever take into battle. It's the stuff with which all our wars are won.

The boy in the uniform doesn't call it *morale*. That's a cold potatoes word for something John American feels deep and warm inside.

Perhaps he can't give it a name. But he can tell you what it's made of.

It's made of the thrill he gets when his troop train stops at a junction point and fifty good-looking girls are at the station with cigarettes.

It's made of the appreciation he feels for a bright new USO clubhouse where he and his friends can go for a few hours' rest and relaxation.

It's made of laughter and music—when Bob Hope or Lana Turner visits his camp with a USO show.

It's even made of a cup of coffee and a Yankee smile—at some lone outpost in Alaska or the Caribbean.

Maybe it's just a feeling of kinship with this land of a hundred million generous people. Maybe it's just the understanding that this whole country cares; that the soldier is bone of our bone; that he and we are one.

Name it if you can. But it's the secret weapon of a democratic army.

What can you do to sharpen this weapon? Give to the USO. This great national service organization has been entrusted by your government with responsibility for the service man's leisure needs.

The requirements of the USO have grown as enormously as our armed forces themselves. This Spring we must have $32,000,000.

Give all you can—whether it's a lot or a little. Send your contribution to your local chairman or to USO, Empire State Building, New York City.

★ USO ★

JUNGLE STORIES

T. T. SCOTT, President and General Manager — MALCOLM REISS, Editor

A BOOK-LENGTH KI-GOR NOVEL

TWO THRILLING JUNGLE NOVELETS

TWO SHORT STORIES OF VELDT ADVENTURE

Fall Issue, 1942
Vol. 2, No. 3

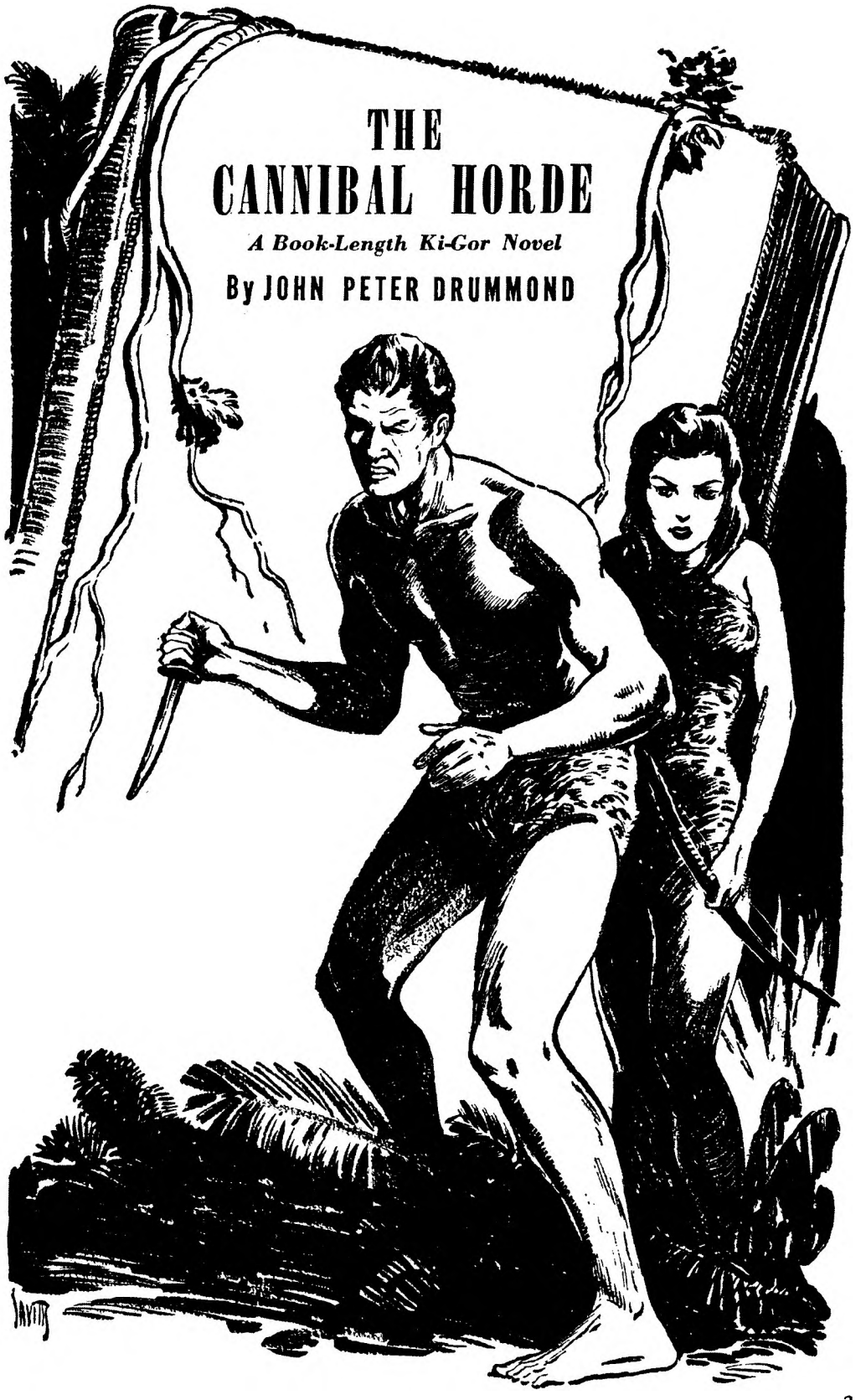
FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

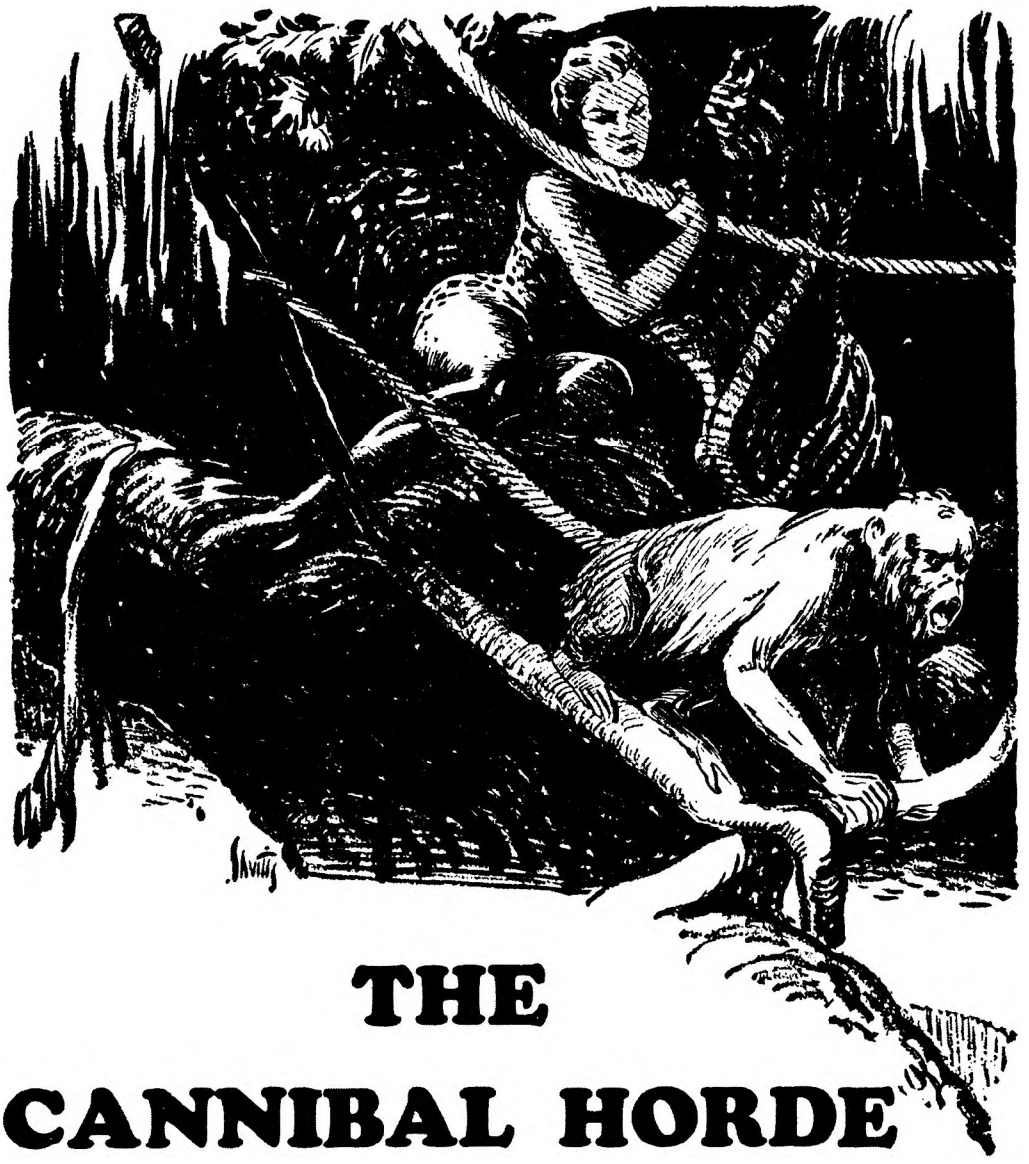
20c per copy

THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

JUNGLE STORIES: Published quarterly by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc., 461 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. This issue dated July 15, 1942. For advertising rates address: THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Printed in U. S. A.


THE
CANNIBAL HORDE
A Book-Length Ki-Gor Novel
By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND



THE CANNIBAL HORDE

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Over the fertile, happy land of the Bambala fell a dark shadow. Swift as a jungle storm, the B'Kutu struck—and behind them came a renegade prince who gave no quarter. It was Ki-Gor's darkest day.

A Book-Length Ki-Gor Novel

KI-GOR slanted the round blade of the paddle into the water as far away from the gunwhale as he could reach, then swept it around in a wide arc. The nose of the canoe swung around and pointed toward the north bank of the river. Helene in the bow lifted her paddle out of the water, and looked back over her bare shoulder.

"Are you heading for that little patch of beach, Ki-Gor?" she inquired.

"Yes, that's just inside Bambala country," Ki-Gor replied. "I'm going to leave you two there. You can float down the

As Ki-Gor leaped, the savage let fly the venom-tipped arrow.

river, and I'll met you at Otempa."

"But we'll get to Otempa long before you will, won't we?" Helene said, "if you travel overland?"

"Oah, Heavenly Days, *memsahib!*" exclaimed the third person in the canoe. "How fast are you contemplating propelling canoe by yourself—with fat Brahmin passenger doing absolutely nothing to help?"

The third person was Hurree Das, the plump Hindu doctor who was a fugitive from the authorities at Nairobi, but who had more than once demonstrated his loyalty and friendship to Ki-Gor and his lovely red-haired mate. The Hindu was an enthusiastic herbalist and had begged to join Ki-Gor and Helene on their expedition to the country of the Bambala in the south-central Congo region. The Bambala were famous iron-workers and weapons-makers, and Ki-Gor was going to them to replace weapons which he had recently lost or broken. Hurree Das had desired to come along "for lofty purpose of botanical research," as he had put it in his unvaryingly flowery English.

The canoe grated on the sand, and in a moment the three occupants stood beside it on the little beach.

"What do you think, Ki-Gor?" Helene persisted. "Won't we get to Otempa long before you will?"

"No," Ki-Gor said patiently. He squatted on his haunches and began to draw a rough map in the sand with his fore-finger. "This is the Mikenye River," he said, "flowing from east to west. Right about where we are standing, it curves south sharply. Then it turns all the way north again up to Otempa. There it heads straight west again."

Ki-Gor's forefinger had described a deep U in the sand. At the top of the right-hand shaft of the U, he put a dot, which indicated their present position. At the top of the left-hand shaft, he placed another dot to indicate the Bambala village of Otempa.

"See?" he said. "You will have to go down and all the way around this loop"—tracing the U—"while I go straight across"—he closed the top of the U with a straight line.

Helene glanced doubtfully back at the dense jungle that towered up from the river bank, like an impenetrable barrier.

"Even so," she remarked, "that doesn't look like very easy traveling to me."

"Easy enough," Ki-Gor grinned, "by the tree-route. I'll stop only a little while in Toli—that's a little Bambala fort just about half way to Otempa. I want to hear whether they know of the rumors the Tetela told us last night."

"A *Bambala* fort?" Helene said, frowning down at Ki-Gor's little map in the sand. "But I thought you said the river, here, was the northern boundary of the Bambala country."

"It is," Ki-Gor agreed, "except for this section here." He indicated the land contained within the U. "They never gave up this part to the B'Kutu cannibals. The boundary between the Bambala and the B'Kutu goes from here to here."

Again, Ki-Gor's finger traced a straight line across the open top of the U. It was the same line which he had indicated as his route overland to Otempa.

"Oh dear," Helene murmured. "Isn't that a little close to those nasty little cannibals? I'd hate to think of you—"

"Come now," Ki-Gor smiled. "You know you don't have to worry about me."

"Just the same," Helene said stubbornly. "Last night, those Tetela told us they thought the B'Kutu were about to attack the Bambala."

"You will always hear rumors in the jungle," Ki-Gor said. "And the Tetela admitted that the Bambala didn't believe that rumor."

Just then, Hurree Das, who had been poking around the edge of the undergrowth bordering the beach, gave a little cry.

"Oah! Most interesting discovery!" the Hindu cried. "Spent missile of savage blackamoor, no doubt!"

He turned and came down the beach toward them, the flimsy muslin *dhoti* flapping inadequately around his thick legs. His right hand was extended and held a small crude arrow. Ki-Gor glanced at it briefly.

"B'Kutu arrow," he said. "Be careful—the tip is probably poisoned."

"Indubitably!" Hurree Das said beaming. "Grant me a few moments while I scrape off some of the black gummy substance on tip. During some future lei-

sure, I shall perform chemical analysis on same."

Whereat, he busied himself at the water's edge harvesting a sample of the arrow-venom, after which he scrubbed himself and the arrow vigorously with liquid from several bottles out of his little black bag. Eventually, he stood up beaming and offered the arrow, now perfectly clean, to Ki-Gor.

"Most amusing idea occurs to me—wait!" he said. He dived into the black bag again and came out with a bottle of iodine. He coated the arrow point liberally with it, and then offered the arrow again to the jungle man.

"Blackened tip appears menacing," he observed, "but in point of fact—ha-ha! pun!—in point of fact, arrow is now completely harmless. You could play great joke on some unsuspecting fellow by pricking his skin with this. Wound, of course, would be absolutely and entirely harmless, but poor fellow would be convinced of impending death from arrow-poisoning."

Ki-Gor took the little arrow with a reproachful grin. Nowhere in Africa did he know of a man, black, white, or brown, who would ever forgive the perpetrator of such a joke—but Hurree Das was a good friend, even if his sense of humor now and then verged on the child-like. Ki-Gor tucked the arrow through the band of bark around his upper left arm, Bambala-fashion, and prepared to leave his wife and friend.

"Paddle easily," he told Helene. "The river is deep and the current is slow. At Otempa, the banks get narrower, and the river flows faster. But the Bambala have a bridge across it at Otempa with vines hanging down. If you have trouble getting to the bank and the current sweeps you downstream, you can always grab one of the vines at the bridge."

"I don't think I'll have any trouble," Helene said, with a trace of asperity. "I've handled a canoe ever since I can remember."

"All right," Ki-Gor grinned. "Then you probably won't tip over. The river's full of crocodiles."

"Oah, Heavenly days!" Hurree Das ejaculated, wagging his plump jowls. "Most abominable idea! I am not caring at all to furnish hearty meal for hungry saurians. Sometimes I am having serious doubts concerning seaworthiness of this frail craft."

The Hindu stared dubiously at Ki-Gor's home-made canoe.

"Come on, Hurree!" Helene laughed. "You'll be perfectly safe. Ki-Gor made it from a sketch I drew of an Algonkian birch canoe—and he made it extra broad in the beam, just to fit you!"

Ki-Gor watched them until they had floated out of sight around the steep bend in the river. Then he crossed the beach, plunged into the undergrowth, and went up the trunk of the nearest tall tree. In less than two minutes, he was two hundred feet off the ground and swinging from branch to branch in his favorite mode of travel—the tree route.

A LITTLE before noon, the jungle man halted to make a frugal meal of nuts and wild fruit. He judged he was not far from the little Bambala outpost of Toli, and he preferred to have eaten before he entered the village. Otherwise the hospitable Bambala would expect him to fill up on heavy manioc bread and the ever-present native beer.

It was much better this way, Ki-Gor thought, as he munched his nuts high up off the ground. The noon hush had closed in, and a cathedral-like stillness governed the vast cloistered jungle around him. The monkeys and the wild parrots were silenced, and even the shrill dreeing of the countless insects was subdued. Ki-Gor's keen eyes constantly roved about, penetrating the eternal gloom of the jungle below him. There was a light screen of undergrowth that hid the ground from him, except for patches here and there. But directly below his swinging heels, a broad elephant trail meandered off to the westward, presumably toward Toli.

Ki-Gor was accustomed to the silence of the African high noon, but on this day the jungle seemed to be more than ordinarily quiet. For all his giant frame, Ki-Gor was keenly sensitive to the moods of the jungle. And today, there seemed to him something foreboding, something fearful, in the flat stillness about him. It was as if the multitudes of little ani-

mals and birds were waiting breathless—waiting for something to happen.

Even after he had finished his meal, Ki-Gor lingered on his perch high above the jungle floor, reflecting. His thoughts went back to the night before, when he and Helene and Hurree Das had been entertained royally in a Tetela village.

The Tetela were a husky, warlike nation, but at the same time they were straightforward and trustworthy, and represented a high type of the Bantu-speaking tribes of the Congo. They were capable warriors, and much too proud to descend to treachery—in great contradistinction to some of their neighboring tribes. At one time they had practised cannibalism in a restricted, ritualistic form. That is to say, they sometimes ate the heart of a fallen enemy, in a religious way, to acquire that enemy's bravery. But nowadays, they did not even do that. And the Tetela detested their neighbors across the river, the B'Kutu.

The B'Kutu were still active and confirmed cannibals. They were a bestial, dirty, and degraded people, backward and treacherous. They were suspected of having Pygmy blood, and they used poisoned arrows like the Pygmies. Unlike the Pygmies, they ate human flesh as often as they could get it—ate it because they liked the taste of it. They invariably ate their prisoners of war, and during extended periods of peace, they frequently resorted to eating their own slaves.

And the Tetela had said the B'Kutu were going to war against the Bambala!

However, the Bambala apparently had laughed at the idea, and Ki-Gor hoped that the rumor was unfounded. He was very fond of the Bambala. They were civilized to the point of effeteness, but they were industrious agriculturalists, and skilled iron workers. At one time, they had been fine warriors, but long years of peace had softened them. Handsome and slender, they were inordinately vain, and spent hours dressing their hair, and daubing their bodies with clean red clay. But they were courteous, hospitable, and had a fine sense of humor. And effete as they were, they would still fight bravely, if attacked.

Ki-Gor hoped that the Tetela were wrong in their prediction of a B'Kutu attack on the Bambala. However, he knew that if the B'Kutu attacked anyone it would be the light-hearted Bambala. The little cannibals would never dare to try conclusions with the tough Tetela, and the next nearest neighbors were the Akela, an equally warlike nation.

Ki-Gor stood up on his precarious, swinging perch, and stretched. It was time he got along. It would be interesting to find out what the Bambala at Toli thought of the rumors of war. Suddenly, he stiffened.

Somewhere the fearful brooding silence of the jungle had been broken. It was a slight sound, which Ki-Gor had felt in his chest, rather than heard. But it grew a little louder, and Ki-Gor's ears picked up the sound, and identified it as the sound made by someone running.

He stood quite still, eyes fixed on the stretch of elephant trail visible to him below. In a short time, his vigilance was rewarded.

A lone man appeared on the elephant trail, running at full speed toward the west.

HE was a slender man, unarmed, and he acted badly frightened. His hair was elaborately dressed in five ridges along his long skull, and his body was daubed with red clay. He was unquestionably a Bambala.

While he was still in view of Ki-Gor, he suddenly checked his headlong flight, and stood quivering in the middle of the elephant trail. Ki-Gor almost called down to the man to ask him what he was fleeing from. But the Bambala was in such obvious terror that a strange voice would probably have only terrified him more.

The stranger hesitated only a few seconds. Then, with one last frightened glance around him, he leaped off the elephant trail and plunged into the undergrowth—headed southward.

Ki-Gor frowned. What had struck that Bambala? What was he running from in such abject terror? And why, having gone up the trail, did he halt in his tracks, and then finally leave the trail altogether? Ki-Gor thought back on the last time he

had gone via Toli to Otempa. He had only done it only once before, and on that occasion he had taken the tree route. He recalled now that on that occasion, too, he had crossed this self-same elephant trail, and that it did not go to Toli. It veered southward later, away from that village. This recollection increased Ki-Gor's puzzlement over the conduct of the lone Bambala. What was the man running from?

The jungle man waited patiently in his treetop, on the chance that he might see some one or something pursuing the Bambala. But no person or thing came along, and brooding silence once more gripped the great jungle. Eventually, Ki-Gor decided that there was nothing to be gained by waiting any longer, and that he would have to seek the answer to his question —if there were an answer—in the village of Toli. So he continued on his way.

However, some instinct caused him to go carefully, slowly, and absolutely silently. His normal pace was rapid and rather noisy as he leaped from one limb to another. But now, he stayed high in the tangled tops of the trees, pushing his way noiselessly through the damp leaves. He could see less of the ground than ever, traveling in this manner, but something told him it was the thing to do. Every now and then, he stopped and peered downward through open patches among the foliage. For three of these brief halts, he saw nothing, and after the third halt, he resumed his way almost convinced that there was nothing to look for, and that he might just as well come down lower and travel swiftly until he got to Toli.

But he decided once more to stop and look down, and when he did, the skin along his backbone prickled.

At first, it seemed as if the light screen of undergrowth just above the ground were moving—as if a light breeze were blowing down there. But even as that impression was recorded in his mind, he realized that it was no breeze that was moving that undergrowth.

The jungle floor below him was alive with men.

Silent as death, a horde of wiry, naked blacks were creeping through the undergrowth. Armed with long knives and short bows, they were unmistakably B'Kutu.

Ki-Gor carefully let himself down some twenty feet where he could command a larger area with his eyes. His amazement deepened. Everywhere he looked, the forest was crawling with B'Kutu. They seemed to be in endless numbers. And there could be no doubt as to where they were going. They were already in Bambala country, and they were headed for the Bambala village of Toli.

The Tetela were right.

And the Bambala, who had laughed at the rumor that the B'Kutu were going to attack them—would all too soon find out their mistake.

Ki-Gor's brain churned. He hated to think of the carnage that would soon take place at Toli, when the cannibals fell on the unsuspecting Bambala. What could he do about it? How could he prevent the surprise?

Two alternatives flashed through his mind. One was fling himself through the trees in a furious race toward Toli. The other was to shout at the top of his voice. Both alternatives meant that he would cast all caution to the winds, and reveal himself to the horde of creeping B'Kutu below.

But even as Ki-Gor debated with himself, a dreadful sound went up. It sounded far away at first, a distant savage wail, then spread like a grass fire through the jungle. In a few seconds, the B'Kutu underneath Ki-Gor sprang up from their concealment and joined the ferocious, man-eating cry. With a sinking heart, Ki-Gor realized that he was too late—that he could have done nothing, anyway. The first wave of cannibals had already attacked Toli.

II

ABANDONING all caution, Ki-Gor set off at full speed for Toli. Certainly the noise of his progress would never be heard over the unearthly screeching of the attacking B'Kutu, and it was doubtful if any of them would look up and see him swinging through the branches. The jungle man had little hope that he could do anything to help the little band of Bam-

bala in Toli. They were probably no more than fifty of them at most, and they could not stand up long against the multitude of invaders.

As he swung along over their heads, Ki-Gor marveled at their numbers. There were more B'Kutu within sight of him than he had dreamed were in the entire tribe, and by the savage sounds that reechoed through the cavernous jungle, there were many more that he could not see.

And even more remarkable than their numerousness was the fact that they had combined in a concerted action. The B'Kutu were so shy and so backward in any social organization that Ki-Gor would never have believed that they would ever have united like this, if the evidence were not right before his eyes. There must be some powerful and compelling force behind it all, Ki-Gor thought, to drive such primitive hunters into such unified action.

For obviously, this was no border raid. The fact that hundreds of the cannibals had circled around into Bambala territory to surround Toli demonstrated that they had intended to catch the entire Bambala garrison. No one was to escape from Toli to tell of the disaster and warn the Bambala nation that the attack had begun.

Ah! but one of the Bambala *had* escaped! Ki-Gor recalled the lone unarmed youth running for his life along the elephant trail. Had he gotten through? Ki-Gor devoutly hoped he had.

By now the jungle man was above the outskirts of Toli, and evidences of the success of the surprise attack were immediately evident. The Bambala, for all their lack of eagerness for war, did however construct their villages with a view toward their successful defense. Every Bambala village was surrounded by a ring of small two-man forts—and not one ring but three—built at some distance from the center of the village.

From his vantage point in the trees, Ki-Gor could see two of these advanced outposts. Their defenders had been killed instantly without loss to the attackers. And now B'Kutu were swarming over their dead bodies, screaming their blood-lust at the top of their lungs.

The next ring of forts had evidently had a few seconds of warning, and B'Kutu dead mingled with Bambala. But they had not held up the attack for long. The B'Kutu had poured over them in a resistless flood of screeching humanity, and had even passed the last and strongest set of defenses by the time Ki-Gor arrived over them.

And now the din mounted as the cannibals converged on the village itself, and the Bambala fought to the death against the overwhelming numbers of B'Kutu. Such a one-sided conflict could not last very long, and it was all but over by the time Ki-Gor came within sight of the village.

Heartsick, he watched a few scattered knots of Bambala fighting back to back in the midst of the torrent of blood-crazed cannibals which swirled around, and then —over them. They gave a good account of themselves, those gay slender Bambala, hacking and stabbing grimly until the last man was rolled under the roaring tide of B'Kutu.

With all his heart, Ki-Gor wished he had been a little earlier on the scene, although what he could have done, he did not know. Even his mighty strength and crafty brains would have been powerless against an attack so smartly planned and perfectly executed. Again Ki-Gor wondered who or what had organized the shy and dispersed B'Kutu into such extraordinary unity of action.

As he watched the shambles in the village of Toli, Ki-Gor suddenly felt a new astonishment. The swarming, screaming butchers down there were not all B'Kutu! There was a considerable group of Tono in amongst them. The Tono were cousins of the B'Kutu—a sub-tribe, in fact—and were equally savage, equally degraded. And there was still another tribe represented down there. They were the Tofoke, or Scarfaces, easily recognizable by the way their faces and necks were covered with rows of hideous ridged cicatrices.

And now Ki-Gor's puzzlement deepened. If it was unusual for the B'Kutu to combine amongst themselves, it was unheard-of for them to join other tribles in any action. What was the motive power, the driving force behind this?

Then still a new group of warriors appeared among the milling shrilling cannibals, and when Ki-Gor saw them, he nearly fell out of his tree with astonishment. For

these newcomers were not natives of the Congo region at all. They were big brown men who towered over the stunted blacks around them, and they were armed with throwing sticks, and long assegais, and carried coffin-shaped shields of buffalo hide. They had the haughty carriage and the graceful kilts of the Ama-zulu, and Ki-Gor recognized them instantly as belonging to that independent branch of the Ama-zulu—the Kara-mzili. And the King of the Kara-mzili was Dingazi, Ki-Gor's friend!

Ki-Gor was astounded. What were Dingazi's mightly warriors doing here in the Congo-Kasai basin, hundred of miles from their home south of the Great Lakes? And why would they be allied with these filthy cannibals, and attacking the inoffensive Bambala?

Just then there was a tiny rustle of leaves close by Ki-Gor's perch in the tree. Without turning his head, Ki-Gor rolled his eyes. An unpleasant thrill went through him. Scarcely ten feet away on a neighboring limb, a B'Kutu was crouched. His little bow was raised and a poison-tipped arrow was notched in it and pointed at Ki-Gor.

THE cannibal had evidently spotted Ki-Gor and climbed up after him. For several seconds, Ki-Gor did not move a muscle. The savage apparently thought Ki-Gor did not see him and Ki-Gor let him cherish the error.

But the jungle man's skin twitched at the thought of that deadly arrow pricking him. He stood up with elaborate casualness, and pretended to be preoccupied with the scene below in the village. But his eyes were slits, and under cover of the heavy lashes, they did not miss a move the B'Kutu made.

Evidently the savage was pondering whether to try to get closer to his quarry before discharging his arrow. The B'Kutu were notoriously poor archers, being unable to hit anything except an elepheant farther than twenty feet away. And apparently, this B'Kutu even had doubts of making his mark from a distance of little more than ten feet.

Confident that Ki-Gor was unaware of his presence, he lowered his bow and crept out a little farther on the bough. It was all the opportunity Ki-Gor needed. Without so much as a preparatory twitch of his muscles, the jungle man sprang off his perch.

It was a standing jump across empty air with the ground a hundred and fifty feet below—an exacting feat under the best of circumstances, but an almost impossible one under these circumstances. Fortunately, the other limb was slightly lower than the one Ki-Gor leaped from.

The B'Kutu's reaction was swift. As Ki-Gor took off, the little savage perked up his bow and let fly the venom-tipped arrow. In mid-air Ki-Gor doubled both knees, and saw the arrow flit beneath him. He could not be sure the tip did not graze his skin—but there was no time for that, anyway. The B'Kutu's hand flew back to his quiver, as Ki-Gor landed lightly on the bough beside him.

Out came the filthy black hand clutching another arrow. Ki-Gor's left hand shot out, gripped the B'Kutu's wrist and held it high in the air. The cannibal gave a bleat of terror and tried to fling himself off the bough. But Ki-Gor's right hand was at his throat, supporting him.

But if Ki-Gor thought his battle was won that easily, he was mistaken. The B'Kutu's unwashed hide was slippery as an eel's, and Ki-Gor's powerful fingers could not hold the grip on that scrawny neck. Whipping his wiry body like a mongoose, the B'Kutu was suddenly free—all except the hand holding the deadly arrow. Without relaxing his grip on the wrist of that fatal hand, Ki-Gor grappled frantically with his other hand. The B'Kutu was screaming now at the top of his lungs, but Ki-Gor had to time to look and see whether the screams could be heard over the tumult in the sacked village. Grimly holding the arrow hand far away, he strove for a firm grip on the B'Kutu's greasy neck.

The cannibal fought like a mad dog. Apparently he had no hope or desire of surviving the fight himself—but was bent only on killing Ki-Gor if he could. Recklessly he leaped into the air, flailing his heels against Ki-Gor's thighs. And suspended by the one wrist, he twisted from one side to the other, throwing his weight about in a savage attempt to pull Ki-Gor off balance, and send both of them hurtling

off the limb to the ground below.

For a moment, Ki-Gor thought he had succeeded. The little savage sprang straight out into the air. The incredible swiftness of the maneuver dragged Ki-Gor's huge frame to one side. And for an awful moment, the jungle man teetered on the brink of death. The twisting, screaming savage dangling at arm's length was hauling him inexorably off balance. Instinctively, Ki-Gor bent his left knee, and kick his right foot out into the air on the other side of the limb. The sweat started out on his bronzed forehead, and his upper lip was drawn tight over his teeth, as he strained and fought his way back to an even keel.

Then, with knees bent in a half crouch, he looped his right hand over and down in a short arc. The hard palm crashed down on the B'Kutu's frizzy skull, and the cannibal went limp.

Nerves jangling, and body trembling, Ki-Gor backed cautiously to the trunk of the tree. His left hand still held the B'Kutu's wrist in a death grip, even though the deadly arrow dropped out of the nerveless black hand. As Ki-Gor felt the rough bark of the tree trunk against his back, he shook his head vigorously as if to shake off a bad dream.

It had been a close call.

A brief inspection showed that the B'Kutu's neck was thoroughly broken, and that if he was not already dead, he would probably not return to consciousness. Ki-Gor looked out over the mob scene in the village. He could nowhere see a single face uplifted toward him. It did not seem possible that such a bitter frantic struggle could have gone unnoticed by anyone down below. It had taken place in full view of hundreds—if any of them had happened to look up. However, it was an indication of the single-minded bloodlust of the B'Kutu and their allies.

However, now that the last of the Bambala had been slaughtered, an anti-climactic lull began to settle over the scene. The tall foreigners—the Kara-mzili—had something to do with creating the lull, too. Ki-Gor could see them efficiently pushing the squalling cannibals out of the center of the village and clearing a space there.

And now with renewed impact, the question of these Kara-mzili reasserted itself in Ki-Gor's mind. What were they doing here? And why did they fight with the B'Kutu against the Bambala?

Just then, the milling crowd parted and a litter was borne into the cleared space on the shoulders of four strapping Kara-mzili. Ki-Gor recognized the fat, yellow-skinned young man in the litter, and his questions were answered.

The fat young man was Mpotwe, the traiterous nephew of Dingazi, King of the Kara-mzili.

KI-GOR had been with Dingazi when Mpotwe had led an unsuccessful uprising against the old king. If Ki-Gor had not been with Dingazi, the rebillion might have succeeded, and the treacherous Mpotwe might have become king over the murdered body of his uncle. But Ki-Gor had performed some feats which had convinced the Kara-mzili that he was a mighty ju-ju. The rebellion, in consequence, had failed, and Mpotwe with a few followers had fled the kingdom with a price on his head. The malevolent young prince had somehow escaped being captured, and disappeared leaving no trace.

Evidently—Ki-Gor reflected, as he stared contemptuously down at Dingazi's nephew—evidently, Mpotwe had put many miles between him and his vengeful countrymen, and had finally taken refuge in the dank Congo forest. It did not take much imagination to reconstruct what had happened since then. The scheming Mpotwe had come within an ace of becoming ruler of a powerful, martial nation—he would not long remain content to cower in the perpetual twilight of the B'Kutu jungle. He had somehow overcome the suspicions of the beady-eyed little cannibals and induced them to act as a group instead of individuals as they always had from time immemorial. From there on, the traditional efficiency and organizing powers of the Kara-mzili had taken over and welded an army out of the B'Kutu and their cousins, the Tono, and the scarfaced Tofoke.

Right in front of Ki-Gor's eyes, that Kara-mzili organization demonstrated itself. The blood-crazed cannibals were herded off into groups by the handful of Kara-mzili warriors, and some semblance of order was brought about. Under ordi-

nary circumstances, the B'Kutu would still have been running around in a delirium of excitement, hacking and butchering the dead bodies of their enemies. But now, the uproar was gradually stilled—even though the cannibals were obviously reluctant to leave the prized corpses of their Bambala victims.

A mound of stones and earth was quickly piled up in the center of the clearing, and the litter on which Mpotwe reclined was set on top of it. Evidently Mpotwe intended to address his triumphant army.

Ki-Gor wondered what the renegade Kara-mzili prince would say. It was unlikely that Mpotwe would rest with taking Toli. More likely the surprise of that outpost and the annihilation of its defenders was just a prelude to much wider action. But what was that wider action to be?

Suddenly, Ki-Gor knew. Before Mpotwe opened his mouth to speak, Ki-Gor guessed what he would announce. It would be a swift and secret march on Otempa—Otempa which straddled the Mikenye River, sprawling on both banks, and connected by a sturdy bridge between the two halves. The B'Kutu were notoriously afraid of the water, so that Mpotwe would lead them across the bridge at Otempa into Bambalaland proper. Mpotwe would never be satisfied to rule over a savage wilderness peopled by ignorant cannibals, when right at hand were the rich gardens and tobaccolands and busy foundries of the Bambala.

But now Mpotwe began to speak, and his first words showed how closely Ki-Gor had guessed.

"O brave B'Kutu, Tono, Tofoke! This is no time for feasting on the bodies of the conquered! There will soon be many more bodies! You have taken the first outpost, swiftly, magnificently! You have permitted no messenger to escape and warn the Bambala! We must strike again—swiftly and silently—like the cobra! In a short time we will be at Otempa! Much bigger than Toli is Otempa—but it will fall as quickly! Then—across the bridge! Hear me, now, your chief, Mpotwe the Great—"

But Ki-Gor stopped to listen to no more. He lifted the body of the B'Kutu on to his shoulder and began to climb high into the tree, out of sight of all the thronging cannicals in the ravaged Bambula village.

He knew what Mpotwe and the cannibals did not know—and that was that *one messenger did get away!* The Bambala at Otempa would be warned of the treacherous attack that was about to be launched upon them. But forewarned as they would be, Ki-Gor knew that the Otempa warriors could not withstand the swarming numbers of the invaders or the crafty tactics of their Kara-mzili leader. There simply were not enough of them. And it would take a certain amount of time for help to be sent to Otempa from the other parts of Bambalaland. The easy-going, talkative Bambala would be sure to waste precious hours and even days debating among themselves as to the best way to meet the emergency. In the meantime, Mpotwe's hordes would have forced the passage of the river and would be swarming southward, ravaging and slaughtering.

Somehow, Ki-Gor told himself, the cannibals must be stopped on this side of the Mikenye River. The Otempa garrison must be given as much time as possible to prepare for the attack—and to give them that time, Mpotwe must be delayed in starting from the ruins of Toli—as long as possible.

There was only one person who could conceivably cause any such delay, and that was Ki-Gor. He did not know exactly how he was to accomplish that delay, but he had to find a way—and find it soon.

For if Mpotwe and his cannibals were to leave Toli at once, they would arrive at Otempa at about the same moment that Helene and Hurree Das would float unsuspectingly downstream to the bridge. There would be fighting, and Helene and Hurree Das would be squarely between the opposing forces.

III

AS Ki-Gor climbed the tree, he set to work with his knife on the great bundle of lianas that followed the tree-trunk straight up like a cable of interwoven ropes. It was no great task to cut the clinging tendrils and loosen the lianas from the supporting tree. In a short time, Ki-Gor had yards and yards of tough, dependable rope, firmly knotted together. Coiling the rope over one shoulder, and

still carrying the dead cannibal on the other, he descended the tree again to the lowermost bough.

Mpotwe was still orating, and growing more and more impassioned. The B'Kutu and their allies listened attentively—even though they had to get Mpotwe's thoughts at second-hand. Mpotwe spoke in Kara-mzili Zulu, and a man standing below him translated it into Chituba, the trade dialect of the Congo region.

But, at least, everyone was far too preoccupied to notice Ki-Gor fastening one end of his long cable of liana around the branch of the tree. Nor did anyone notice as he stealthily let the other end, which was looped in a small foot-loop, toward the ground. Not until Ki-Gor himself was halfway down the rope, the B'Kutu corpse still on his shoulder, did a few of the listening cannibals stare unbelievingly at him.

He had still a few seconds before these ignorant savages would credit their eyes and give the alarm. And a few seconds was all he needed. Even before he slipped one foot through the loop which hung scarcely six feet off the ground, he had begun to set the long rope swinging. And by the time the first cry of alarm was uttered, he was swinging back and forth through an increasingly longer arc.

As frightened shouts went up on all sides, Mpotwe broke off his harangue with a yelp of terror. He struggled up to a kneeling position and goggled at Ki-Gor. The jungle man swung toward him and with a surge of his mighty shoulders pitched the dead B'Kutu out on to the air. The limp body flew through the air and landed in a grotesque heap on the ground about fifteen feet in front of Mpotwe.

A quick, horrified gasp went up from the cannibals, and then there was a desperate babbling sound as those nearest to the tumbled corpse suddenly tried to go elsewhere in a great hurry. On the next swing of the long rope, Ki-Gor kicked his foot out of the loop and let go. His great bronzed body lanced through the air, back arched and feet together.

It was an appalling distance to drop, even for Ki-Gor, but his iron frame and prodigious muscular co-ordination were ready. He landed on the balls of his feet and sank down almost to a squatting position, the muscles of his legs acting like coiled-spring shock absorbers. Instantly, he sprang up again lightly, his feet almost leaving the ground, and ran forward several steps until he stood beside the dead cannibal.

Mpotwe gave a despairing shriek and flung a fat arm over his eyes.

"The ju-ju white man!" he cried. "It is Ki-Gor!"

The litter was none too well balanced on its improvised pedestal of rocks, and as the gross fat young prince shrank backward, it careened over with his enormous weight. The fear-struck Mpotwe made a feeble attempt to save himself, an attempt which was spectacularly unsuccessful. With a helpless shriek he rolled off the tilting litter on to the hard-packed ground.

A low moan went over the crowd, and died away into a breathless silence as Ki-Gor strolled over to the groveling chieftain.

"I come in peace, O Mpotwe," Ki-Gor intoned in Kara-mzili, and repeated the phrase in Chituba. "Cross me not, nor attempt to harm me, and you need not fear me."

With that he suddenly straddled the lumpy mass of flesh, bent over and lifted Mpotwe up by his armpits. The nephew of Dingazi must have weighed close to three hundred pounds, but Ki-Gor swung him up into the air as if he were a feather-pillow. Mpotwe was too terrified to utter a sound. Then with feet braced and biceps bulging, Ki-Gor set the astounded Kari-mzili prince back on his litter—the litter that required four men to carry it when Mpotwe lolled on it.

A dozen Kara-mzili warriors were moving forward protectively, but reluctantly. Ki-Gor swung around and glared at them. Trembling, they raised their spears.

"Touch me not!" Ki-Gor growled. "Or I will turn you into braying bull-frogs! Be warned of my mighty ju-ju!"

The Kara-mzili hastily lowered the spears and backed away precipitously. And beyond them, the B'Kutu who had been goggling at Ki-Gor's impressive demonstration of his physical might, surged backward once again. Ki-Gor turned to Mpotwe. The fat prince, he noted, seemed to have rapidly regained

composure—no doubt, because he found himself quite unharmed at a time when fearful death seemed to have threatened.

"Oh, mighty Ki-Gor!" Mpotwe said in a subdued voice. "We did not expect to see you over here in this wilderness. What do you do here?"

A perceptible shiver traveled over Mpotwe's soft, rubbery carcass. "How—how do you mean, O Ki-Gor?" he asked, and averted his head quickly.

"You know what I mean," Ki-Gor accused. "My ju-ju has told me that Mpotwe is up to new treacheries."

"No!" Mpotwe protested. "It is no treachery! The B'Kutu make war on the Bambala, and they chose me to lead them."

"Why should the B'Kutu make war on the Bambala?" Ki-Gor demanded. "The Bambala have done them no harm."

"The Bambala refuse to trade with us—with the B'Kutu," Mpotwe said. "They will not sell their good spears."

That was probably quite true, Ki-Gor reflected. Knowing how the Bambala detested the cannibals, it was not unlikely that they would refuse to have any trade relations with them.

"And so," Ki-Gor said, "you treacherously surrounded and butchered a whole Bambala village without warning."

"That is war," Mpotwe defended.

"Your kind of war, perhaps," Ki-Gor said scornfully "But let me tell you something—you won't surprise Otempa the same way."

Mpotwe's fat face expressed wary surprise. He was silent for a long moment, evidently thinking over Ki-Gor's last statement. Finally his heavy-lidded eyes flicked back over the jungle man.

"Your ju-ju," he said, "found out Otempa was the next place we were going. How does it know there will be no surprise?"

"There will be no surprise at Otempa," Ki-Gor said flatly.

There was another pause. Then Mpotwe said, "Not a single Bambala got away from Toli. Who could warn Otempa?"

Ki-Gor thought of that lone Bambala he had seen fleeing along the elephant trail. Unquestionably, that man had been outside the ring of cannibals that surrounded Toli. Ki-Gor was willing to gamble that he got through to Otempa with the news of the invasion. However, Ki-Gor was not going to tell Mpotwe about him. He had a better idea.

"I," said Ki-Gor. "I warned Otempa."

"You!" Mpotwe exclaimed, fear casting a shadow over his eyes. "How could you warn Otempa?"

"Ask not too many questions," Ki-Gor warned. "By my ju-ju, I made a sending. And this minute the Bambala are gathering their defenses at Otempa. When you get there with your loathsome cannibals, you will find the Bambala ready and waiting for you."

FEAR and incredulity struggled for supremacy in Mpotwe's fat face. Ki-Gor began to assay his own position. He stood alone and—except for the knife at his belt—unarmed in the middle of a silent throng of ruthless, treacherous cannibals led by a ruthless, treacherous renegade from Kara-mzililand. There could be no doubt that Mpotwe feared him deeply and believed him capable of tremendous feats of magic. However, he knew that Mpotwe was afraid only of his magic. There was no question of Mpotwe and his men regarding Ki-Gor as anything but a very gifted human being. He was no god, or even a demigod. He was simply a mortal who, as long as he lived, could command supernatural weapons against them.

Behind Mpotwe's heavy eyes, Ki-Gor knew the renegade prince was probably trying to figure out some way of killing him without risk to himself. Once Ki-Gor was dead, Mpotwe no doubt felt he would be safe from that deadly magic. But—reading Mpotwe's mind further—who would take the fearful risk of attempting to kill Ki-Gor? Mpotwe and his Kara-mzili had once before seen Ki-Gor's ju-ju in action, and a terrifying experience it had been.

But—and Ki-Gor emphasized this in his own mind—the cannibals had never before seen Ki-Gor. The B'Kutu and their cousins the Tono and the scarred Tofoke had no evidence of Ki-Gor's magical powers. To be sure, they had seen an exhibition of his tremendous physical strength when he lifted the mountainous Mpotwe off the ground up

onto his litter. Otherwise, they saw only a lone, half-naked white man whom the Kara-mzili seemed to fear for some reason. Ki-Gor guessed that Mpotwe was trying to find a way to induce the cannibals to kill Ki-Gor—induce them without Ki-Gor knowing he was doing it.

Now, as Ki-Gor watched him narrowly, the fat prince seemed to have decided on a plan of action. He folded his thick arms in a composed gesture and stared coldly at Ki-Gor.

"It is not given to many to be able to make a sending," he said coolly. Mpotwe was quite evidently trying to show the B'Kutu that he did not fear this Ki-Gor so very much after all. Ki-Gor picked up the challenge promptly.

"You think I did *not* make the sending to Otempa?" he demanded. "Then, continue to think so! But—don't be surprised when you attack Otempa and find the defenders ready and waiting for you!"

Ki-Gor was well aware that this was none too strong a retort. But, evidently it worried Mpotwe to some extent. The fat prince dropped his eyes and thought in silence.

Suddenly, Mpotwe raised his head and his face was contorted with malevolent rage.

"That was an unfriendly act, Ki-Gor!" he shouted. "To warn my enemies against a surprise attack from me!"

He raised both fat arms upward as if in imprecation. A warning signal buzzed at the back of Ki-Gor's brain. This sudden change in Mpotwe's demeanor was purely for effect. What was the purpose of it?

The jungle man spun around. A little B'Kutu arrow was floating through the air toward him. Deliberately, Ki-Gor stepped aside. The venemous dart dipped lazily past him and hit the ground at the very base of Mpotwe's pedestal.

Quick as thought, Ki-Gor whipped the B'Kutu's arrow out of his armband, the arrow which Hurree Das had cleansed and then coated with iodine. Holding it up, he shouted out in Chituba to the ring of B'Kutu who were furtively notching arrows.

"If you want to kill your leader," he cried, "I care not. But, be warned that your poisoned arrows will have no effect on me. My ju-ju gives me special protection against them. Watch!"

He held out his left arm and jabbed the iodine-smeared arrow point into the flesh above the elbow. A concerted gasp went over the B'Kutu, and then an expectant silence hung on the air. The tip of the arrow was well imbedded in Ki-Gor's left arm. He let go of the shaft and let the arrow dangle from its tip. A thin stream of blood trickled from the wound.

"Already the poison is mingling with my blood," Ki-Gor shouted, pointing his right forefinger at the breathless crowd. "But it will have no effect on me—none at all. Watch now, and you will see how my ju-ju will conquer your deadly venom!"

It was a quite unnecessary admonition. The fascinated B'Kutu could not take their bulging eyes off him. For unless this strange white man had a ju-ju the like of which could hardly be imagined, he would very shortly show the well-known symptoms. His arm would begin to swell, his breathing would grow short and labored, and inside of twenty minutes, he would fall down dead.

Ki-Gor well knew the power of suspense. For a full five minutes he said not a word, but glared watchfully at the ring of bestial faces around him. He had a bad moment when the arrow-wound began to smart ferociously. Could something have gone wrong? Had some of the venom stayed on the arrow-tip in spite of the Hindu's careful cleansing? Then he remembered that once before Hurree Das had put iodine on an open wound of his, and that the iodine had stung like the sting of a scorpion. His face, however, did not betray his momentary doubt, and he took heart as the smarting gradually eased away.

The minutes crawled by in dead silence.

SOME staring cannibals began to shift their feet uneasily. By all rights, this strange white man should have begun to show some effects from their fearful arrow venom. The blood had stopped flowing from his wound, and the little trickle had begun to dry on his arm. Yet there was only a slight reddening and swelling around the blackened tip of the

arrow. There was no general angry swelling. His mighty chest rose and fell in an even cadence. His piercing blue eyes glared about with undiminished brightness. Cold fear began to close over the hearts of the cannibals. Never before had they seen man or beast survive their carefully concocted arrow venom.

Eventually, Ki-Gor reached deliberately across his chest and plucked the arrow from his left arm. He held up the point glistening with his own blood, so that all could see it. Then he strode over to the crumpled body of the B'Kutu he had killed in the tree.

"Hear me now, *O Basenji!*" he spat. *Basenji* meant bushman, savage, primitive jungle creature, and even though the word described the B'Kutu perfectly, they resented the term.

"O Basenji!" Ki-Gor repeated scornfully, "This mate of yours"—he stirred the dead body with his foot—"tried to kill me. But as you have seen, the arrow venom had no effect on me. What's more, the moment the point touched me, he fell dead. You can see that there are no wounds or marks on this body. Be warned, O Basenji!"

Swiftly, he tucked the arrow back in his arm-band, bent down and picked up the limp carcass of the B'Kutu. Then without warning, he flung the body straight into the mass of B'Kutu in front of him. The savages promptly fell into the wildest confusion. Shrieking with terror, they fought with each other to get away from the horrid, contaminated carcass. An irresistible spirit of mischief seized Ki-Gor. He flung his arms in the air and gave vent to a tremendous roar of triumph.

To the already panic-stricken B'Kutu, this was the last straw. The rear ranks broke and streaked away, and the rest followed with howls of terror. Inside of three minutes, the entire pack of cannibals had melted into the jungle surrounding Toli. Ki-Gor followed them to the edge of the village, shouting and waving his arms and generally enjoying himself like a small boy stampeding a flock of chickens.

He stood for a moment triumphant at the far end of the village, his hands on his hips, watching the last of the grimy savages disappear into the gloomy forest. Unconsciously, his right hand slipped over and touched his upper left arm. Something was missing. Quickly, he looked down and saw that the arm band was gone. It had evidently snapped and fallen off while he was so energetically thrashing his arms around. Ki-Gor was slightly vexed with himself. He had tucked Hurree Das's arrow back into that arm band, and now it had fallen to the ground somewhere behind him.

He turned, eyes on the ground, searching for the valuable arrow. Something made him look up. And his eyes met a very disagreeable sight.

While he had been chasing the cannibals out of Toli, Mpotwe had not been idle. The fat Kari-mzili prince had apparently come down off his litter and saved a panic among his own tall Kari-mzili warriors. And now he stood not ten yards away from Ki-Gor, his big spearmen ranged protectively about him. Their spears were leveled menacingly, although fear lurked in their eyes.

But there was no fear in Mpotwe's fat face. His heavy lidded eyes, on the contrary, glittered with enmity as he stared at Ki-Gor. Worse still he held a B'Kutu arrow in his hands, and Ki-Gor instinctively knew it was the one with iodine on the tip.

"Stay where you are," Mpotwe snapped. "Don't move—unless you want twelve spears through your guts. I'm beginning to think your ju-ju is not so mighty, after all. I'm beginning to think your ju-ju is no ju-ju at all, but just a neat little bundle of tricks."

Ki-Gor said nothing, but his face was a grim mask as he folded his arms expectantly over his chest.

"You can fool those ignorant Basenji," Mpotwe went on. "But you cannot fool me. This arrow did not poison you, because you took the poison off it, beforehand."

Mpotwe glared at Ki-Gor.

"Isn't that true?" he demanded.

Ki-Gor allowed a thin smile to appear on his lean face.

"What Mpotwe thinks," he said carelessly, "is no concern of mine."

The fat prince scowled furiously.

"Answer me!" he cried. "Or I will find ways to make you answer me!"

"Think what you please, O Mpotwe," Ki-Gor replied coolly. "And do what you please. If you are right and I really have no ju-ju—then you will be safe in doing anything to me you please. *But*" —and here Ki-Gor bared his teeth in a fierce grimace—"if you are wrong, the consequences may be terrible for you!"

Mpotwe hesitated just long enough for Ki-Gor to suspect that the fat prince was not quite so sure of himself as he wanted to seem. For a fleeting moment, the jungle man toyed with the idea of running an extra bluff with that arrow—of daring Mpotwe to try it on himself. If it worked, and Mpotwe was afraid to prick himself with it—then Ki-Gor's mastery of the situation would be destroyed. However, if it did not work, then everything would be lost, and Ki-Gor would have absolutely no protection against Mpotwe. Ki-Gor decided against the idea.

It was not good having Mpotwe suspicious that his ju-ju was mere trickery, but as long as Mpotwe was not quite sure, Ki-Gor still had a chance of regaining the upper hand at some time or other. When Mpotwe finally spoke again, Ki-Gor's hope rose. For the Kara-mzili prince evidently had decided to postpone the issue, and Ki-Gor could wish for nothing better. Time, at this point, was Ki-Gor's ally.

"I will dispose of you later," Mpotwe said finally. "There is too much to be done right now, for me to take the time to deal with you in the way you deserve."

"It is good," said Ki-Gor with a crooked grin. "There will be plenty of time after you discover that the Bambala at Otempa are ready and waiting for you."

Mpotwe looked startled, and Ki-Gor followed his thrust up.

"You will wonder, O Mpotwe!" he jeered, "how Otempa could have been warned. For if my ju-ju is just a bag of tricks, then I could not have made a sending to Otempa."

The fat prince suddenly turned aside and began screaming commands at his Kara-mzili bodyguard. Evidently he did not choose to prolong the battle of wits.

Four of Mpotwe's biggest warriors now came forward and surrounded Ki-Gor, carrying more than a hint that he was to consider himself a prisoner. However, the jungle man was not too badly satisfied. The situation could have been a lot worse. As long as there was a tiny thread of doubt in Mpotwe's mind concerning Ki-Gor's magical powers, he had some sort of hold over the fat prince. There was, of course, the chance that Mpotwe would try out that arrow to find out whether it was harmless or not. Not on himself, that was certain, but on one of his own men, or one of the cannibals. If that happened, and the arrow was proved to have no venom—it would make Ki-Gor's position precarious.

But apparently Mpotwe considered that his first and most important job was to rally and collect his scattered army of cannibals. He set about this with typical Kara-mzili efficiency, sending out his warriors in pairs to scour the jungle, while four drummers kept up an incessant rhythm on two giant double-headed tom-toms.

EVEN so, it was a long time before any of the B'Kutu or their allies could be persuaded to return to the village. Several times Ki-Gor caught Mpotwe looking longingly in his direction, and Ki-Gor surmised what was going on in the fat prince's crafty mind. If Ki-Gor's dead body could be exhibited to the B'Kutu, the cannibals would be convinced that it was safe for them to come back.

But evidently Mpotwe would not take the risk of trying to kill Ki-Gor himself, and none of his warriors was brave enough to try it, either. This was tremendously encouraging, and the jungle man squatted happily in the middle of his quartet of nervous guards, while the drums hammered away and the rest of the Kara-mzili beat the jungle dispiritedly for their cannibal allies.

Eventually, a few of the B'Kutu were discovered and caught and brought struggling back into the village. Mpotwe lectured them severely, while they cast frightened glances behind them at the imperturbable figure of Ki-Gor.

But the wily Mpotwe now played a winning card by commencing preparations

for a cannibal feast. It was a sickening sight—as much for the Kara-mzili as for Ki-Gor—but it finally brought the B'Kutu and their cousins out of hiding. Warily they came at first, one by one, and then two by two. But after a while, as the cooking fires blazed up higher, and the bodies of the fallen Bambala were gathered and butchered, the cannibals began to swarm in.

Fighting down his rising gorge, Ki-Gor told himself that his ultimate object was achieved. He had set out to delay the immediate march of Mpotwe's army on Otempa—and he had succeeded. The afternoon was well advanced, and the cannibals would be in no state to move from Toli until the next day. That should give the men of Otempa plenty of time to arrange their defenses.

But now a new worry arose to assail Ki-Gor's mind. What about Helene and Hurree Das? They would arrive at Otempa in the canoe on schedule that evening and they would find no Ki-Gor. When he had left Helene, she had already been uneasy about his traveling so close to the border of the B'Kutu country. She would be bound to fear that the worst had happened to him when he did not show up at Otempa at the time he had promised to.

There was nothing to be done about it, however, but trust to Helene's good judgment in the matter. Even if he could make a break for freedom, Ki-Gor knew that he would be stalked by the B'Kutu—and he acknowledged that they were magnificent stalkers. They would be less inclined to fear him if he were running away, and he might receive in his flesh an arrow which had not been cleansed of its poison.

As long as Helene stayed put in Otempa and did nothing rash, Ki-Gor knew there was nothing to fear—for the present. It would be up to him the next day to figure out some means of insuring her safety. As long as she stayed put—but Ki-Gor suddenly realized he had overlooked one factor.

Otempa would have been warned of the attack on Toli. Helene knew he was going to Toli. Helene would be in a state. And with that thought, worry settled down anew on Ki-Gor's mind. Helene had great faith in his ability to take care of himself, but in a situation like this she would be fearfully anxious about him. If she would only keep her head, Ki-Gor prayed, and not run out into the jungle to try and find him single-handed. . . .

IV

IT was a gruesome evening. The Kara-mzili warriors were as disgusted with the nauseous scene as Ki-Gor was, and withdrew to a great campfire of their own. The jungle man saw that Mpotwe's men did not intend to relax their vigilant guard of him, so he philosophically curled up and went sound asleep amidst the obscene revelry of the cannibals.

As a result, the next morning Ki-Gor was probably the most refreshed individual in the shambles that was once the border village of Toli. Mpotwe sent his haggard and harrassed Kara-mzili among the bloated, sluggish B'Kutu to try to arouse them for the march on Otempa. It was a prodigious task, for the cannibals had no sense of dicipline and were extremely disinclined to move from their gruesome surroundings. In the resulting confusion, Ki-Gor saw an opportunity to make a clean getaway.

He ignored it, and stayed right where he was.

If Ki-Gor had been of a reflective nature, he might have been surprised at himself for such an action—or lack of action. But he had wakened from his long sleep with a well-defined plan for the day, a plan which he hoped would remove the threat of danger from Helene and Hurree Das, and which would incidentally benefit the easy-going and peace-loving Bambala nation. The only way that plan could be put into operation was by his staying close to Mpotwe.

The fat prince was in a savage mood at the interruption in his schedule that Ki-Gor had caused. It was well along in the morning before he could finally get his force under way—a delay of some eighteen hours of his march on Otempa. And even then, his motley horde of savages did not move with their accustomed speed.

Ki-Gor was ordered to walk beside

Mpotwe's litter—an order he did not mind at all, as it gave him an idea of how the renegade prince ran his army. But for the duration of the march, Mpotwe constantly addressed veiled threats at Ki-Gor—little asides that hinted that Ki-Gor had no magical powers, at all, but was a mere trickster, not to be feared by any Karamzili. To all of these, Ki-Gor smiled grimly and returned one answer—"Wait until you get to Otempa!"

It was about two hours after the noon sun when Mpotwe was informed that the first wave of B'Kutu were within reach of the outer defenses of Otempa—that is, that part of Otempa which was on the near side of the river. Most of the town was on the farther side, the southwest side of the river in Bambalaland proper, but in the course of years a considerable number of Bambala had moved across the vine bridge, and a sort of residential suburb had sprung up behind the three rings of defense shelters.

Ki-Gor thought it probable that Helene and Hurree Das would have landed on the far side of the river, and, therefore, would be safe from any preliminary fighting. However, he could not be sure of that, and he determined to put his plan into action immediately. For his plan—if it succeeded—would stop hostilities even before they began.

"Go back to those B'Kutu quickly," Mpotwe was telling his messenger. "Tell them to lie still until all the rest are close up behind them. Our full force must strike without warning. Go! Hurry!"

"Wait!"

Ki-Gor's voice was twice as commanding as Mpotwe's. In spite of himself, the messenger paused. Ki-Gor turned on the astonished prince before he could say a word.

"Your B'Kutu," he stated in a tone that brooked no disagreement, "Your B'Kutu are in for a bloody surprise. Scores of them will be killed and you still won't take Otempa!"

Mpotwe's neck swelled. "What surprise?" he bellowed.

Ki-Gor half-closed his eyes wearily, as if his patience were wearing thin. "How many times have I told you, O Mpotwe," he said, "that the Bambala are ready and waiting for you. I warned them. I made a sending to Otempa from Toli."

"You made no sending!" Mpotwe shouted wrathfully. "You cannot make a sending! You have no ju-ju! You are a fraud!"

"Silence, Mpotwe!" Ki-Gor shouted back. "I am getting tired of your insults! I gave you more than fair warning! I warned you of my ju-ju—I warned you of its consequences. I was about to suggest a plan to you whereby you could accomplish your aims without risking the lives of your B'Kutu. But you will not listen. Instead you insult me! Go, then! Throw away your warriors! Throw them into a bloody ambush! When they stagger back, bleeding and shattered, from the Bambala steel—then remember that Ki-Gor is no fraud!"

Mpotwe glared ferociously at his prisoner. But there was hint of fear in his close, secretive eyes.

"Go on!" Ki-Gor taunted. "Send your messenger! See? He stands here twiddling his thumbs while the great Mpotwe tries to make up his mind about Ki-Gor's magic!"

Ki-Gor threw his head back in derisive laughter.

IT was a brave front. More than that, it was a desperate gamble. Ki-Gor was gambling that that lone Bambala he had seen streaking through the jungle before the attack on Toli had gotten safely through to Otempa with his warning. If the Bambala had not gotten through—and Mpotwe attacked and found the garrison unready—Ki-Gor's stock would be low indeed. Therefore, Ki-Gor was trying to bluff Mpotwe out of even attacking at all.

The renegade prince sat irresolute for a moment, while his messenger awaited his commands. For a moment, Ki-Gor thought his bluff was going to prevail. Plaintively, Mpotwe spoke.

"What is this plan?" he said. "How can I obtain my objects without fighting?"

"Send an embassy to the Bambala," Ki-Gor said promptly. "Tell them your demands, and see how many of them they will grant rather than fight you."

The jungle man held his breath as he waited for Mpotwe's repercussion. But fate intervened before the fat prince

could utter an opinion. Another messenger arrived, a B'Kutu who had been sent back from the advance guard.

This second messenger was obviously not the bearer of good news. He was a petty B'Kutu chief, disheveled and blood-flecked. Breathlessly, he told of how that advance wave of cannibals did not wait for orders from Mpotwe, but had crept right up on to the outer row of defense shelters. These appeared not even to be manned, and the B'Kutu were emboldened by this seeming carelessness on the part of the Bambala to keep right on going toward the next line of defenses.

To their amazement and dismay, they were suddenly and fiercely attacked from behind. There had been Bambala aplenty, but they had stayed hidden until the cannibals had unsuspectingly gone past them. A shower of spears had taken a fearful toll of the B'Kutu, and then the Bambala had leaped vengefully into close quarters. It was with the greatest difficulty, the messenger reported, that the B'Kutu had extricated themselves from the ambush, and their losses were very heavy.

Mpotwe shot a frightened glance at Ki-Gor, and Ki-Gor heaved a discreet sigh of relief. The fat prince could not help but believe now that Ki-Gor had made a sending to Otempa warning them to be ready for an attack. The jungle man tensed himself for the next development.

But the next development went far beyond anything Ki-Gor had expected. Mpotwe began screaming and babbling at the top of his lungs.

"Attack! Attack!" he yelled. "With everybody! Or everything is lost! Everyone—attack!"

As he screeched his orders, Mpotwe put both fat legs over the side of the litter, and jumped clumsily to the ground. He threw one last terrified look over his shoulder at Ki-Gor, and then lumbered away heavily, as if he were desperate for his life.

"Keep him off!" Mpotwe shrieked. "Keep him away from me! He is a great ju-ju!"

Ki-Gor's guards backed quickly away from him, and then, while he was still too astonished to do anything, they turned and fled precipitately after their master.

Ki-Gor stood for a moment in perplexity watching the flight of the Karamzili away from him. He assumed that Mpotwe's cries of "Attack!" meant that his whole force should attack the defenders of Otempa. It was the logical thing to do, the surprise having failed. Sheer weight of numbers crushingly applied must now take the place of surprise.

The jungle man turned and snaked up a tree-trunk. Arrived in the lower branches, he set off by the tree-route in the direction of the Mikenye River, which he estimated could not be very far away. Mpotwe's precipitate flight, and his orders for a general assault had temporarily upset Ki-Gor's plan for instituting negotiations. Ki-Gor had hoped to create a lull in the hostilities during which he could seek out Helene and Hurree Das and remove them to a safer place. As matters stood now, there was no lull, and he had to find them while a pitched battle was going on around them. And while the forewarned Bambala had scored in the first round, Ki-Gor doubted that they could long hold their ground against Mpotwe's surging hordes. They must be fearfully outnumbered, and while they could probably give a good account of themselves against the cannibals, they would be outmatched by Mpotwe's strapping Kara-mzili if he chose to throw them into the fray.

The sounds of battle grew in Ki-Gor's ears as he swung tirelessly and swiftly through the trees. Ki-Gor visualized the jungle hordes swarming up to the Bambala defenses all along the semi-circular ring. He quickened his pace, and soon emerged on to the bank of the river.

Less than a quarter of a mile downstream he could see the vine bridge that connected the two halves of Otempa—or rather which connected the main part of Otempa with its outpost across the river. The bridge was crowded with black figures streaming over to the main town away from the fighting zone. Ki-Gor's keen eyes made sure that the figures were almost all women and children making a belated evacuation—they were most certainly Bambala warriors.

Where, Ki-Gor asked himself, were Helene and Hurree Das?

IT being just before the rainy season, the Mikenye was quite low, and there was a narrow strip of muddy beach all along the bank down to the vine bridge. Ki-Gor set off down this strip at a fast lope, hoping that the fighting had not extended quite to the river bank. He was not a moment too soon.

Half way to the bridge, a little knot of scarfaced Tofoke erupted from the undergrowth beside Ki-Gor. The jungle man saw then a fraction of a second before they saw him. Hardly slackening his pace, he leaned over and scooped up a ten-pound rock. Just as the bestial Tofoke caught sight of him, he flung the rock hard into their midst. One of them never knew what hit him, and the rest scrambled back shrieking into the undergrowth.

The din of battle mounted higher and higher as Ki-Gor swept into Otempa. The great open square at the end of the bridge was crowded with women and children and old men, all frantic to get safely across the river to the main part of the town. So dazed by the shock of the attack were they that Ki-Gor caused scarcely any comment from them as he pushed through their midst. Here and there, Ki-Gor saw wounded warriors looking equally dazed. He went up to one of them.

"Where is your leader, the Chief Kwete?" he demanded of the warrior.

The man regarded him stupidly for a moment, and then said, "Ah! You are he who is called Ki-Gor! Have you brought us help? For we sorely need it."

"Maybe I have," Ki-Gor replied, then repeated his question. "Where is Kwete?"

"Out the North Trail," the man said. "I just left him. It's our strongest point —if we can hold it. They need more arrows, though. That's what I came back for—"

The man's voice trailed off into a mumble. His eyes closed and his head nodded. Ki-Gor caught him as he started to sag to the earth.

"You are hurt," Ki-Gor said gently. "Where are the arrows? I will take them to Kwete."

The sinking warrior gestured feebly behind him. Ki-Gor stared over the heads of the crowd and saw several bundles of arrows piled against the base of a tree. The jungle man looked down again at the Bambala.

"Rest easy, brother," he said. "I will take the arrows along."

The blood had drained out of the warrior's face, and under the coating of red clay, it was a ghastly color. He was quite evidently dying. Yet there seemed to be something else he wanted to tell Ki-Gor. The jungle man bent his head to catch the faint whisper.

"The Red-Haired One"—he heard—"your woman—with Kwete—"

An ugly thrill went through Ki-Gor.

"What was that you said, brother?" he demanded. "My woman?"

But the warrior was dead.

V

KI-GOR carried the limp body over to the tree where the bundles of arrows lay. He laid it down gently and looked around to see a small group of curious Bambala watching him. There was another wounded warrior among them carrying a bow. At Ki-Gor's request, the warrior handed over the bow, and Ki-Gor slipped it up over his arm and on to his left shoulder. Then he picked up three of the bundles and set off up the North Trail.

There must have been about a hundred iron-headed arrows in each bundle, and awkward and heavy they were to carry. A lesser man might have found himself unequal to the task, but Ki-Gor swung all three bundles over his right shoulder, curled his arm over them to balance them, and broke into a rapid trot.

All these actions, however, were more or less automatic and mechanical. Ki-Gor's brain was burning with the Bambala's dying words. There could be no mistaking what he said, and Helene must be somewhere ahead of him along the trail in the thick of the fighting. It was a rude shock, for Ki-Gor had hopefully come to believe that Helene would have stayed away from danger until he arrived, at least.

If he had not been so worried about Helene, Ki-Gor would have been considerably annoyed. Because she must have

known she was walking into danger—the garrison at Otempa were warned of the B'Kutu attack as evidenced by their readiness for it when it came. But Ki-Gor was too anxious for Helene's safety to be annoyed very long with her. And his anxiety increased with every rapid step forward along the trail.

As he left the last houses of the town behind and plunged into the jungle, the noises of battle became louder and louder. the high-pitched venomous scream of the cannibals echoed throughout the cloistered forest and was answered by the defiant yelps of the Bambala. The ground thudded under the heels of hundreds of hurrying blacks, and the undergrowth crackled under the weight of grimy bodies. And, as if the sounds were not in themselves sufficient indication of the desperate conflict in progress, Ki-Gor met every now and then wounded Bambala stumbling back along the path. One of them was hacking at his arm with a knife. Evidently, the warrior knew of no other way to treat a wound made by a poisoned arrow.

There was no need for the jungle man to stop and ask how the battle was going. Some of the wounded men were too far gone to do anything but stare dully at him. But others hailed him feebly and urged him to hurry forward with the arrows.

"We're outnumbered up there," they told him, "but we can hold them off as long as our arrows last."

"Where is Kwete?" Ki-Gor asked one of them.

"You will come to a place," he was answered, "where the trail crosses a stream by a footbridge. Turn off the trail there to your left, and follow the stream a short distance. You will come to one of our strong points, and you will find Kwete there."

It was not many minutes later that Ki-Gor arrived at the stream. Before turning off to his left he halted. The battle sounds had suddenly died down for no reason that Ki-Gor could think of. The shrill shouts which had filled the air a moment ago had now stilled, leaving an ominous silence that was broken only by the occasional scream of a wounded man.

What had happened?

Ki-Gor could not believe that Mpotwe's men had been beaten off—not that easily. There were too many of them. Just then, the ground under his feet hummed a little, and a moment later a dozen or so Bambala came tumbling down the path toward him. They came from the direction of the enemy and were evidently an advanced post in retreat.

Ki-Gor stood grimly in the middle of the path and waited for them to come up to him. As they panted toward him, their clay-smeared faces showed mild astonishment.

"Where are you going?" Ki-Gor demanded bluntly.

"The posts on either side of us gave way," one Bambala explained. "Without support we would have been surrounded and killed. We took advantage of the lull to get out."

"How far back were you going to go?" Ki-Gor asked.

The leader of the little group looked sheepish. He glanced around him as if measuring the possibilities of defending the footbridge. Then he said, "We will go no farther. Give us some arrows and we will stay here and protect Kwete's flank."

Ki-Gor grunted approval and dumped one of his bundles on the ground.

"What does the lull mean?" he asked. "Were they beaten off?"

"No," the Bambala said emphatically. "They were breaking through everywhere —but they were taking heavy losses. And for some reason, they just turned and ran away."

"What makes you think they will attack again?" Ki-Gor asked.

"Twice already they have attacked and retired," the Bambala said, "and then attacked again."

That was unusual, Ki-Gor reflected. Battles in the Congo—indeed in most of Africa—conformed ordinarily to a single pattern. A tribe attacked—bravely, even recklessly. If the attack succeeded, the battle was won. If it failed, the battle was lost. Few tribes even of the best fighting stock resisted attack for long, or persisted in pressing for long an unsuccessful assault. The great exception to this rule were the Kara-mzili. And unquestionably the secret of the Kara-mzili's military success was the rigid discipline which sent

them attacking again and again opponents who beat their first charge.

Ki-Gor watched this little group of Bambala distribute the arrows and then take up positions around the footbridge. Then he plunged down into the stream and waded off in the direction of Kwete's position.

Before he realized he was anywhere near the Bambala chieftain's defense post, a spear went whizzing past his head and voices rose in challenge.

"Save your spears for the enemy!" Ki-Gor roared. "It is Ki-Gor—with arrows for you!"

Instantly, three Bambala rose out of the undergrowth with contrite faces.

"Shame on our heads, O Friend—" they began, but Ki-Gor brushed off their apologies and told them to take him to Kwete. A moment later, he held Helene in his arms.

"Oh Ki-Gor!" she whispered, "I've nearly gone crazy! I should know by now that you can take care of yourself, but—"

"I'm here, aren't I?" Ki-Gor said gently, and patted her back. "Now, there's no time to lose—"

He looked swiftly around. Kwete was coming toward him, and beside the chieftain Hurree Das stood up. The Hindu had evidently been doctoring a wounded warrior. His umbrella was open and lying on its side sheltering the head of the warrior from the sun.

"My goodness gracious, Ki-Gor!" Hurree Das called out gaily. "Most unexpected pleasure—having you dropping in like this! What is general outlook for all in your opinion?"

Ki-Gor grinned noncommittally and took Kwete's extended hand.

"The arrows will save our lives, Ki-Gor," the chieftain said.

"Will they attack again, you think?" Ki-Gor asked.

"Without doubt," Kwete said grimly.

THE jungle man looked out beyond the wicked breastworks that enclosed the miniature fort. The position was well-chosen in a little copse surrounded on three sides by a wide tobacco field. At the rear a natural covered runway of underbrush led off to the wooded stream from which Ki-Gor had come. It was like most of the Bambala "strong points" in commanding open fields. Any enemy would have to attack without cover, exposed to the arrows of the defenders.

This tobacco field was dotted with black shapes, and a score or more of grimy B'Kutu bodies lay in grotesque positions in front of the wicker breastwork. Ki-Gor turned back to Kwete.

"How soon can help come from the south?" he asked.

"I sent to King Masolo the minute I heard the B'Kutu were attacking Toli. I should have had word from him before now. But"—Kwete shrugged—"I haven't."

Ki-Gor shook his head. Well he knew the easy-going Bambala and the intolerable slowness with which they were quite likely to meet even such a serious emergency as this. Bluntly, Ki-Gor inquired of Kwete how many men he commanded around Otempa. The answer was discouraging—the Bambala were prodigiously outnumbered by Mpotwe's invaders.

"Without immediate help," Ki-Gor told Kwete, "you can't possibly defend Otempa this side of the river."

A frown of disagreement appeared on Kwete's handsome face.

"You probably won't be able to withstand this next attack," Ki-Gor pursued.

"We threw back the others," Kwete pointed out.

"Not everywhere," Ki-Gor said. He told the Bambala chief about the group he had met retreating along the North Trail, and their story of being left unsupported. And even as Ki-Gor spoke, a wounded Bambala arrived from another direction with the news that two other defensive posts had been abandoned to the left of Kwete's position. For a moment, the chieftain looked dashed. Then he raised his head dramatically.

"We will stay here and defend the place to the last," he declared. "We will die fighting."

"No matter how heroically you die," Ki-Gor observed drily, "it will not necessarily save Otempa—or prevent Mpotwe from crossing the river and carrying the war into Bambalaland. And if that happens"—Ki-Gor shot a keen look at Kwete—"all the Bambala warriors will not be able to stop him."

Kwete looked distressed.

"What about your neighbors, the Bushongo?" Ki-Gor asked. "Would they come to your help?"

Kwete shook his head. "They are blood-kin to us," he replied, "but they have always been jealous of us. It's more likely that they would jump in and start grabbing on their own acocunt."

"Then your situation is serious, and your responsibility great," Ki-Gor said. "You have to keep Mpotwe from crossing the river. And you have to find a means quickly—before this next attack begins."

The jungle man moved toward the breastwork and stared across the tobacco field at the edge of the forest beyond. Kwete followed him.

"What do you think I should do?" he asked plaintively. "Retreat across the bridge now?"

"That would be disastrous," Ki-Gor said. "Your enemies would overtake you and cut you to pieces while you were doing it."

"What shall I do, then?"

"You should count yourself lucky," Ki-Gor replied, "if you can get your people back across the river without loss of life."

"How will I do that?"

"Consent to a parley with Mpotwe."

"What?" Kwete looked at Ki-Gor aghast.

"Let me explain," Ki-Gor said. "Mpotwe does not know just how strong you are now. He probably thinks you are stronger than you actually are. If he could gain to the river's edge without any more fighting, he might consider that a sufficient profit."

Kwete looked shocked. "You would have me abandon territory without a fight?"

"You need time more than territory," Ki-Gor pointed out. "If you can get safely across the bridge with what men you have left—then you can hold it until help arrives. But"—Ki-Gor made an impatient gesture—"you have no time to argue about it. If you want to do it, I will go and talk to Mpotwe, but I have to do it this minute, before he launches his final attack. So decide quickly—whether to die bravely, but uselessly, or to save what you can of Otempa."

Kwete glanced across the tobacco field at the border of the jungle. There were unmistakable signs of renewing activity over there. The Bambala chieftain sighed and shook his head.

"I don't know how you can accomplish it," he said. "But it Mpotwe calls for a parley, I will discuss terms with him. Not directly—I will not speak face to face with the cutthroat—but through you as an intermediary."

Ki-Gor wheeled and walked toward Hurree Das. He had committed himself to a desperate errand, and he was not quite as sure how he was going to accomplish it. But Hurree Das's big black umbrella had given him an idea.

"My friend," he said to the Hindu, "you and Helene must go back over the bridge right away. I may succeed and I may not, but Kwete will grant that you two should be sent to safety. I am going over to talk to Mpotwe. Will you give me that thing?"

Ki-Gor pointed to the umbrella, and received a prompt and voluble acquiescence from the learned Hurree.

FORTHWITH then, the B'Kutu and Tofoke who were gathering on the far side of the tobacco field for a final and supreme assault on the Bambala were treated to an unexpected and wholly unwelcome sight.

The great White Witch who had struck such terror to their hearts back in Toli suddenly appeared from the Bambala position. He was walking coolly across the tobacco field toward the forest all by himself, apparently totally oblivious to the thunderstruck savages watching him. In his right hand, he carried a Bambala spear with a tuft of grass waving from the tip —the sign of peace. His left hand was supporting an extraordinary instrument the like of which none of the B'Kutu had ever seen before. It looked like a black shield, round and dish-shaped, held horizontally over the Witch's head by means of a slender pole.

The B'Kutu stirred uneasily and immediately sent a messenger to Mpotwe informing him of the reappearance of Ki-Gor. And as Ki-Gor came closer and closer to them, they prudently retired through the jungle before him.

Mpotwe, as it happened, was not far away. In fact, he was on his way to the

very group of B'Kutu who sent him the messenger. With him were his own Kara-mzili warriors whom he was planning to throw in to battle behind the initial assault of the cannibals against Kwete's position. When the messenger arrived telling of Ki-Gor, the fat prince flew into a rage.

"Superstitious fools!" he cried, "to be afraid of a single man!"

And he urged his litter bearers to put on speed and carry him to the cowering cannibals as quickly as possible. In a short while, he was among the retreating B'Kutu, screaming curses at them. But a few moments later, a voice broke in on his imprecations—a powerful deep-throated voice shouting his name.

"Mpotwe!" Ki-Gor roared. "O Mpotwe! Stop your shouting! Listen to Ki-Gor's words and profit from them!"

The renegade prince suddenly became as still as his B'Kutu savages. His pale face grew paler and he cowered on his litter. The Kara-mzili clustered protectively around him and stared off at the lone white giant who picked his way toward them through the light undergrowth. The B'Kutu all around retired even more briskly, their pointed faces sullen masks. Only one of them was brave enough to turn and stand in front of Ki-Gor.

"Shoot! Shoot!" Mpotwe murmured.

The B'Kutu lifted his bow and released the string. A tiny deadly dart floated through the air. Without relaxing his stride, Ki-Gor swung the umbrella downwards. The envenomed arrow tip glanced off the ferrule and barely pierced the fabric beside it. The watching B'Kutu gave a moan of dismay as Ki-Gor lifted the umbrella over his head with the little arrow dangling by its barb.

"That should be enough," Ki-Gor said sternly. "Stay your murderous hand for a moment now, Mpotwe, and hear what I have to say. It will be to your benefit."

Fear and incredulity struggled for supremacy in Mpotwe's fat face, but he said nothing and awaited Ki-Gor's next words.

"I told you the men of Otempa were warned and would be ready for you," the jungle man said, "but you wouldn't believe me. You have lost heavily in unsuccessful attacks. You are about to launch another one. This attack will be beaten off, too. And when it is, your B'Kutu will melt away. You will have gained nothing."

Ki-Gor paused. For a moment he was tempted to go much farther than his original plan. Just that little trick with the umbrella, an unfamiliar object to these primeval savages, had put them in such awe of him that he might be able—at that moment—to chase them all far away from Otempa. But, Ki-Gor reflected, it was a possibility and not a certainty. And as long as there was a chance that too daring a move might fail, he could not risk it. His immediate task was to stop all hostilities, and he had better limit himself to that.

"To save your face, Mpotwe," Ki-Gor said, "you have to win at least a partial victory. Call for a parley, and you may get some of what you want without spilling any more blood for it."

Mpotwe's black eyes glittered craftily.

"You just came from the Bambala," he said. "Did they tell you to tell me this?"

"No," Ki-Gor said promptly. "In fact, Kwete, their chief, said he would not talk to you face to face. But if you call for a parley, he will talk through me as a go-between."

Mpotwe looked away in silence, as if he were thinking the proposition over. Ki-Gor suddenly could not help but feel that his plan asked a great deal of Mpotwe's credulity. To his surprise, however, the Kara-mzili prince swung around with a gesture of decision.

"Very well," Mpotwe said, "I will call for a parley. It can do no harm. If Kwete will not grant my demands, I can still attack him."

Ki-Gor was so pleased with this unexpected acquiescence by Mpotwe that for the moment he forgot to be suspicious. The fat prince acted with great promptness, sending messengers along his lines to tell his jungle warriors to stay quiet until further orders. Then Mpotwe ordered his litter moved to the edge of the jungle where he could see the Bambala strong point across the tobacco field. And presently, Ki-Gor strode back over that field with a formal request from Mpotwe to Kwete for a discussion of peace terms.

THE jungle man was to cross and recross the tobacco field many times that day in his capacity as intermediary, but he did not mind it in the least. The most important thing was that his plan seemed to be working even better than he had ever hoped.

Kwete's first counter to Mpotwe's original request was a demand that the attacking forces be withdrawn a half mile from the positions they then occupied. Mpotwe assented without a word, and the parley was on.

Mpotwe first demanded that all of Bambalaland be surrendered to him. Kwete's answer to that was the unconditional surrender of Mpotwe and his forces. Neither commander had the slightest expectation that these demands would be accepted. They were merely ultimate aims, and each commander fully expected that they would be whittled down to the point where they approached each other closely enough so that a meeting of minds might be near. Hours of haggling and bargaining and counter-bargaining went by while the whittling process went on. Patiently, Ki-Gor went back and forth across the field, hard put to it, sometimes, to keep a straight face as each chieftain received the other's latest proposal and denounced it in the strongest terms.

At long last, a compromise was reached. It was precisely what Ki-Gor had recommended to Kwete in the beginning. The Bambala were to evacuate Otempa on the west side of the river, retiring unmolested across the bridge. Mpotwe promised no further aggression until another series of talks was held concerning whether the Bambala should sell the B'Kutu any weapons.

Kwete was jubilant over the outcome. Now that he and his surviving warriors were safe across the bridge, he admitted that he could not have held out against another B'Kutu attack—particularly if it had been followed up by a charge of Mpotwe's own Kara-mzili bodyguard. Ki-Gor was satisfied that his plan had finally worked out and that he had been able to stop fighting as long as Helene and Hurree Das were in the fighting zone and in danger of being involved. About the future of the Bambala, Ki-Gor was not so optimistic.

"I'm afraid," he told Kwete, "that your fighting has only just begun."

"Ah, but wait until our reinforcements arrive," Kwete said. "The little cannibals can't stand up to us, man for man."

Ki-Gor was not even sure of that. The B'Kutu had shown desperate courage that very day, and although no one could have been braver than the Bambala that day, they were still too civilized to fight with the same zest as the cannibals.

"Have those reinforcements begun to come in yet?" Ki-Gor inquired.

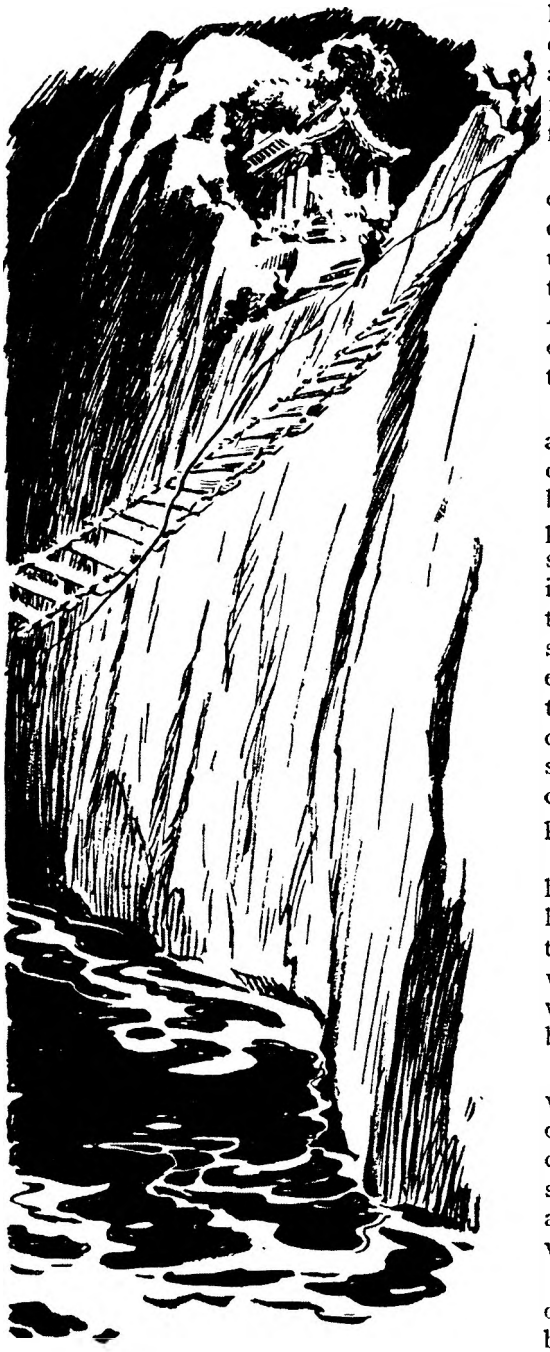
The Bambala said they had not, but that they ought to at any moment. Ki-Gor had his private opinion about that, knowing the Bambala habit of procrastination. And yet, for the safety of all Bambalaland, the Otempa garrison should be reinforced, and reinforced heavily as quickly as possible. For the wily Mpotwe would observe the armed truce just so long as it suited his own purposes, and not a minute longer.

"What will you do, Kwete, if Mpotwe tries to cross the river before the reinforcements come?" he asked casually.

"The only way he can come is across the bridge," Kwete answered. "If he does that, we can defend this end easily—or even cut the bridge if we are too hard pressed. There is no other way he can come. The B'Kutu are terribly afraid of the river. They would never dare swim across, and they have no boats. So, for the moment, we are perfectly safe. Later, I hope we'll be strong enough to go back across the river ourselves and reconquer the land we surrendered today."

Ki-Gor in his heart did not like to hear Kwete sound so complacent. Although he could not deny the logic of the chieftain's words, he felt that something was being overlooked. Mpotwe was not the sort of man you could merely shut up on the other side of a river, and then forget about. Mpotwe should be watched—carefully, vigilantly.

However, the jungle man felt that he had done his share in helping the gallant but improvident Bambala. It behooved him now to take his wife and their friend the Hindu doctor and go away from there as soon as he politely could. That proved to be not very soon.



It was Ki-Gor who kept the sharpest watch on the farther bank

The Bambala were determined to have a great feast that night, with Ki-Gor as the guest of honor. He had not the slightest desire to stay so long, but there was no way out of the situation. The Bambala would have been mortally hurt if he had walked out on them. One thing encouraged him a little, and that was the arrival of a contingent of fifty warriors from the interior of Bambalaland—the first, so they said, of large reinforcements.

The rest of the day was given over to elaborate preparations for the feast. The cleanly Bambala washed themselves scrupulously clean, and then daubed their glistening bodies all over with fresh red clay. After that, they spent hours doing each other's hair in the complicated coiffure that was so distinctly theirs.

No more reinforcements arrived that afternoon, but Ki-Gor was apparently the only person in Otempa who was bothered by the fact. The gay Bambala were completely absorbed in their festival, and seemed to have all but forgotten the existence of the B'Kutu menace just across the river. It was only after the most strenuous pleading by Ki-Gor that Kwete eventually provided a strong detachment to guard the bridge while the feast went on. The detachment was to be relieved at short intervals by new groups, so that no one would be deprived of the fun of the party.

This, of course, did not help the vigilance at the bridge. Each new group relieving was more intoxicated on beer than the one preceding. And in the end, it was Ki-Gor of all the people in Otempa who kept the sharpest watch on the farther bank of the river.

The surrendered portion of Otempa provided a sharp contrast to the riotous scenes of revelry in the main town. There were campfires, many of them, as Ki-Gor observed. But there was an unusual lack of activity of any kind. Ki-Gor liked the whole situation less and less.

At three o'clock the next morning, most of the Bambala were lying snoring in beery slumber. A few die-hards were singing and carousing here and there, but they were too happy to pay much attention to Ki-Gor as he walked past them with Helene and Hurree Das following sleepily. The jungle man led the way down to the river where the canoe was launched. By the light of the few campfires still alive, the trio launched the canoe and set off in the pitch blackness upstream. Only then did Ki-Gor heave a sigh of relief.

VI

WHILE the Mikenye River was deep and sluggish all around the great U which Ki-Gor was retracing, the current was swift enough to cut down the normal speed of the canoe by nearly half. It was nearly noon by the time the canoe with its three occupants neared the base of the U where the river, from going southward, would turn sharply east, and then equally sharply north.

All during that time, Ki-Gor had been thinking about his happy-go-lucky Bambala friends. He was sure that Mpotwe would attack them sooner or later, and that they would not have the resources to withstand him. They should have called on the Bushongo, or the Tetela. They had not done so, and Ki-Gor was sorely afraid that they would need somebody's help, and that soon.

"Let's go ashore," Ki-Gor said abruptly, and swept the bow of the canoe toward the south bank. Helene raised her paddle and looked back in surprise.

"What are you going to do, Ki-Gor?" she asked.

"I think I'll leave you two again," Ki-Gor said with decision, "and travel overland. This going upstream is a little slow, and I've decided I ought to get to the nearest Tetela settlements as soon as possible."

"Tetela?" Helene echoed, wonderingly.

"Yes," Ki-Gor said. "I've decided that somehow they have got to help the Bambala—whether the Bambala ask for their help or not."

"Well, you know best," Helene said doubtfully. "But, do you think the Tetela will go to the help of the Bambala?"

"I've got to persuade them to, somehow," Ki-Gor said.

"Aha!" exclaimed Hurree Das, silent up till now. "Personally, I am inclining to wagering small amount on success of Ki-Gor's enterprise. Ki-Gor has astonishing powers of persuasion, don't you know?"

Helene grinned. Hurree Das did that to her with his flowery English. Furthermore, there was something to what he said—concerning Ki-Gor's powers of persuasion.

"Well, thank goodness," Helene said, "you're going to travel on the opposite side of the river, this time, from those dreadful cannibals."

"Yes," Ki-Gor smiled. "But, as a matter of fact, even if I did go on the other side of the river, I don't expect I'd see any B'Kutu."

"Yes, of course," Helene said. "I suppose Mpotwe will keep them close to Otempa while he figures his next move."

She reached her paddle out ahead as a fender as the canoe approached the bank. Ki-Gor swung the stern around, then stepped out in the shallow water and held the canoe steady. To the accompaniment of anxious murmurings from Hurree Das, Helene then moved back to the stern position. Ki-Gor released his hold on the canoe and straightened up.

"From here up," he said, "the current is very light. If you keep going steadily, you should be able to make it to the first Tetela village by sundown. I'll be there to meet you."

"Are you sure?" Helene said mischievously. "The last time we made a date to meet somewhere, it seems to me you were delayed."

"Who knows the future?" Ki-Gor said, with Arabic simplicity. "But I'll try to be there, this time." He swung himself up on to the bank and looked back with a grin. "Be careful of the crocodiles," he said, and disappeared into the undergrowth.

As Helene paddled upstream, she felt singularly light-hearted. The matter of Ki-Gor being involved with the B'Kutu had frightened her more than she had admitted to her stalwart mate. She, herself, had once been a captive of a cannibal tribe—in fact, Ki-Gor had arrived only in the nick of time to save her from their stew pots. And ever since then, she had had an awful dread of the very idea of cannibals.

But now, she and Ki-Gor were well out of the fight between the Bambala and the invading B'Kutu, and she was thoroughly glad of it. To be sure, Ki-Gor still had to induce the warlike Tetela to go to the help of the Bambala. But Helene made up her mind that she was going to put her foot down on any further participation of Ki-Gor's in the war. If he could send the Tetela against the B'Kutu—well and good. But that was as far as she wanted Ki-Gor to go. She dug her pad-

dle into the water hard, to emphasize her thoughts.

"Dearie me!" exclaimed Hurree Das. "Are we not fairly flying along! My gracious goodness, dear lady! Is it not too close to middle of day for such display of energy? Surely, you are not lasting whole distance going at such furious a speed!"

Helene laughed. "You're right, Hurree, I won't. I'll slow down, don't worry."

"Ah!" Hurree said, "only thing worrying me is my present status of fat, helpless millstone around your neck."

"Oh, come now!" Helene said. "You're nothing of the kind!"

"Dreadfully afraid I must differ to the contrary," Hurree Das said mournfully. "When I regard my tremendous bulk sitting here doing nothing, I am filled with contrition. Least thing I could do would be to hold umbrella over your head for affording shade against sun's rays. But alas! Am mortally afraid to move even fraction of an inch, for fear of upsetting this frail craft."

"Never you mind," Helene consoled. "You just aren't the athletic type, Hurree."

"Oh, by no means, whatsoever!" Hurree shuddered, closing his eyes at the thought.

"But you make up for it," Helene went on, "by being very good company. I tell you what you can do—you can tell me a story."

"Ah! Delighted to!" Hurree said brightening. "I shall tell you story of Ramayana, great Hindu epic, whose twenty-four thousand verses I once read in original Sanskrit."

"Twenty-four thousand verses!" Helene gasped.

"Oh, do not worry!" the Hindu chirped. "I will condense greatly to prevent utmost boredom on your part. Let us say I will merely venture to give you highlights of beautiful story—in my own words."

"I'll love it," Helene said. "Begin when ready."

"Very well," Hurree Das said, folding his plump hands in his lap. "Prince Rama was the son of Dasaratha, King of Ajodhya, and in consequence of a palace intrigue, he was driven into exile with his beautiful wife, the Princess Sita—"

Helene found herself enchanted with the old story of the exiled couple, and their adventures and tribulations. The Hindu's melodious voice went on and on without hesitation. Hurree Das must have read the Ramayana more than once, Helene reflected, because he never had to pause to collect his thoughts, or to remember the correct order of events in the long narrative.

So absorbed in the Hindu's story was Helene that she became almost oblivious of everything but the mechanical business of paddling and keeping the canoe on a straight course close to the bank of the river to stay as much as possible in the shade. She came out of her reverie suddenly with a start to find that the canoe was now in the blazing sun.

SHE had not changed her course, but the river had. They had arrived at the base of the U, and the Mikenye was beginning its long deep curve. Helene interrupted Hurree Das.

"Excuse me, Hurree," she said, looking quickly about her. "But we seem to be out in the sun all of a sudden, and I've got to decide what I'm going to do about it."

"So sorry my umbrella is of no use—" the Hindu began, but Helene broke in with a laugh.

"Oh, we don't need it," she said. "I'll just cross over to the other side of the river. The tall trees there will shade us for a while. And, if we need to—we'll just come back to this side, later on. Now" —steering the canoe into midstream—"go on with the story. I'm enjoying it ever so much."

"So glad you are," Hurree Das said gravely. "Well then, Rama and his brother, Lakhsmana, consulted with each other about what means to employ to rescue Sita from the cruel giant, Ravana—"

And Hurree Das was launched again on his tale.

A few moments later, Helene thought she heard some faint sounds from the jungle beside them—human voices, possibly. But she heard no repetition of the sounds, and she hated to interrupt Hurree Das again to listen for them. She decided that there was nothing to worry about, and continued paddling, as the Hindu resumed his story.

From there on, Helene kept her eyes

pretty much in the canoe, only occasionally casting absent glances ahead to see that she was paddling a straight course.

Just when Helene awoke to the fact that she and Hurree were not alone on that part of the river, she could never say. She must have seen the B'Kutu—or rather looked at them—some time before her brain grasped what her eyes were telling her. And by that time she had already passed the first raft full of cannibals and was drawing abreast of the next one.

A sudden icy fear clutched at her heart. She stopped paddling and stared stupidly at the raft. It was incredible! It was full of B'Kutu! And yet it couldn't be! The B'Kutu were far away down at Otempa!

Then full realization smote her. She gave a little cry, and started paddling furiously away from that bank, diagonally toward midstream.

"Gracious goodness!" Hurree Das exclaimed. "Whatever is the matter?"

"B'Kutu!" Helene hissed. And just at that moment, a felonious yell broke out from the little blacks on the rafts, and echoed up the bank.

"Oh, Lordie! Oh heavens! Woe is us!" the Hindu moaned. "Wherever did they come from?"

"I don't—know!" gasped Helene, redoubling her strokes of the paddle. "But —we'd better—make some time—or—"

She broke off as she saw another raft, a third one, issuing from the bank farther upstream. The river was curving sharply now, and with every few feet, it seemed, more rafts came into view. Glancing swiftly along the shoreline, she counted seven of the hastily rigged craft, and each one of them held about ten of the fearsome little blacks.

But by now, by dint of her hard paddling, she had sent the canoe out of reach of any of the rafts she could see. And even with her heavy passenger, she should easily be able to slip upstream before any of the rafts could pole across to intercept her.

"Don't worry, Hurree," she muttered, still stroking hard, "I think we'll get past them, all right."

"Oh, dearie! Sincerely hoping you are right!" the doctor said fervently. "Cannot bear the thought of my tender flesh going down beastly gullets of such loathsome blackfellows! Very idea gives me jimmywillies!"

Helene snickered a little hysterically, in spite of herself. But she quickly sobered when she realized that Hurree Das was being perfectly serious about a very serious situation. But she began to take hope as the canoe glided past the seventh raft, well out of reach of it.

The B'Kutu were keeping up a furious din now, as if enraged that the canoe should be so close and yet just beyond their clutches. Helene was moved to yell defiantly, back at them. Now that she seemed to be moving out of danger, Helene began to marvel at these despised B'Kutu and at their leader, the renegade Mpotwe.

How the Bambala had underestimated them and him! While the Bambala had been reveling at Otempa, they had supposed Mpotwe was resting on his laurels across the river from them. But now it was evident that the wily Karamzili had lighted campfires to give the impression of his occupancy. But actually, he had marched far up the river to plan and launch a flank attack. The Bambala had been confident the B'Kutu were much too afraid of the water ever to cross the river by any other means than the bridge. But somehow, Mpotwe had persuaded them to ferry across the river with these rudely constructed rafts. Much as she hated Mpotwe and his despicable little warriors, Helene was forced to admire his energy and the malevolent brilliance of his mind.

She rested a moment panting, and looked back down the river. The raft farthest away was by now more than half way across. The rest of the rafts were strung out in a sort of loose echelon. Helene shivered a little. She would hate to be forced to turn around now, for any reason, and try to get through that formation of rafts. Probably, she reflected, she would not make it. But she thanked her stars that she had got past the terrible danger. Now, it was just a matter of paddling as swiftly as possible to the rendezvous with Ki-Gor at the Tetela village.

She turned her head forward, scanning the bank to her left with a swift glance. The bank was alive with B'Kutu, running along, brandishing their bows and shouting. Helene waved the paddle derisively

at them, ad then dug the blade into the water. As the canoe shot forward, she glanced automatically over at the other bank to her right.

A disagreeable sinking feeling came over her then. There were cannibals on that bank, too.

How did they get there? None of the rafts she had seen had made the complete crossing yet. Were there still other rafts that she had not yet seen?

Then, as the canoe followed the great curve of the river, she saw the other rafts. They were ahead of the canoe, upstream, and they stretched all the way across in an unbroken line. What she was looking at now was not so much a group of ferries, but a rude pontoon bridge. The string of rafts were made fast to one another, and a long row of shrieking cannibals danced on them from bank to bank.

VII

HELENE stopped paddling in dreadful dismay.

"Oah gracious!. Dear lady," Hurree Das exclaimed. "What now, please?"

"We're in bad trouble, Hurree," Helene said soberly, "and I don't kow just how we're going to get out of it."

For a moment, Helene did not know what she *was* going to do. With cannibals on both banks, it was hopeless to think of putting ashore and trying to escape that way. The river was completely closed ahead of her, and all but closed behind her. She sat for a moment helpless, her mind paralyzed with the awful, all-enveloping danger.

Then she plunged the paddle into the water and swung the head of the canoe around. If there was no escape in three directions, and only a slim chance of escape in the fourth—why then, she had to try for that slim chance, even if it meant running the gauntlet of those seven rafts downstream.

"Can you swim, Hurree?" she inquired, keeping careful control of her voice.

"Can swim—after a fashion," the Hindu quavered. "But not in this river. Very thought of crocodiles already paralyzes my legs."

Helene had forgotten the crocodiles, but the idea by now had no impact on her. If she was going to die, it didn't really much matter whether she died from a poisoned arrow or from a lurking river-monster. If anything, she supposed the poison would be less terrible.

Aided now by the current, she drove the canoe down upon the flotilla of rafts. Concentrating everything on her danger-studded course, she slanted off to her left, along a diagonal line parallel to the echelon of rafts. She had room enough almost all the way to keep sixty feet away from each raft. Remembering what Ki-Gor had said about the short range of the light B'Kutu bows, she estimated that sixty feet would keep the canoe well out of arrow-shot from the rafts. And there was water enough to her left to keep sixty feet from every raft—but the last one.

The water rippled and gurgled under the canoe as Helene thrust it forward with long powerful strokes. She could have gone faster without Hurree Das sitting gray-faced and mute in the middle of the canoe. But his very weight lent momentum to the light craft, and enabled her to turn it sharply.

It was this last fact that gave her an idea of how she might get past the last raft. She had shot past five of them now while the B'Kutu aboard them shrieked in impotent rage. She had to go very close to shore to pass the sixth one, and the seventh was squarely in her path. There was hardly thirty feet of open water between the seventh raft and the river bank.

But the last raft was a good hundred feet beyond the sixth raft. She might—if she could turn sharply enough—dodge outside that last raft. It would be like reversing her field like a football player on a touchdown run. Her hopes of escape suddenly rose high.

The clamor on the next to last raft was deafening as she sent the canoe boiling past it. She shot a grim glance in that direction and saw the cannibals lifting the long poles high out of the water as she went by. Another glance ahead to the last raft, and she prepared herself for her swift maneuver.

"Sit low in the canoe, Hurree!" she commanded, "and hold tight! We are going to make a very sharp turn!"

Exultantly, she gave one last prodigious stroke. Then she flipped the paddle over

her head and plunged it into the water on the other side of the canoe and braked hard with it. Hurree Das gave a squeak of terror as the craft heeled dangerously. Quickly, Helene twisted the paddle, and the canoe gained an even keel, though it rolled terrifyingly. The bow had not come quite far enough around. Helene whipped the paddle to the other side and stroked hard before the canoe could lose too much momentum.

She was dimly conscious that the yells of the cannibals had taken on a new note. They all seemed to be screaming the same words.

"Gandu! Gandu!"—or so it sounded.

Not knowing the Congo dialects, Helene supposed it was a word signifying rage or frustration. A joyous wave surged over her. Her maneuver was going to work! They were going to get away!

A lightning glance at the last raft showed her that the cannibals aboard were desperately trying to reverse the direction of their slow-moving craft. They were digging their poles toward shore and pushing away madly. But they would be too late, Helene told herself exultantly! She only had to keep paddling straight out into the main current of the river, and she would soon be far out of reach.

Thirty seconds more and she and Hurree Das would be safely on their way back to Otempa!

The B'Kutu were still yelling, *"Gandu!"* and the endless repetition of the word suddenly began to ring a little bell in Helene's memory. She remembered hearing the Bambala using it. Did it mean "crocodile?"

At that moment, she saw the swirl of water just a few feet in front of the canoe. Instantly, Helene braked with her paddle. But at the same moment, two frog-like eyes rose out of the water, and then a long ugly snout—right athwart the conoe's course. Under Helene's desperate paddling, the canoe swung around. But there was not time or room to avoid the unsuspecting saurian.

A split second later, the canoe's prow hit the crocodile a glancing blow behind one frog eye. The great lizard gave an astonished bellow and instantly went into action. Helene did not know it then, but the brute was just as frightened as she was, and his actions now were purely defensive. But defensive or not, they were just as calamitous in their results as if the crocodile were attacking the canoe.

The whole thing was so sudden that Helene never did have a clear picture of what actually happened. She had a brief glimpse of churning water under the bow of the canoe. Then there was a fearful shock as the crocodile crashed his mighty tail into the side of the canoe. Hurree Das gave a howl, and the canoe skittered sideways over the water for ten feet.

Helene just caught a glimpse of Hurree Das grabbing for his little bag and his umbrella as the canoe capsized. Then she twisted her body to meet the water.

HELENE had no plan of action, now, and her movements were purely instinctive. When her head came up out of the water, she found herself making for the nearest raft full of cannibals. Dimly, she felt them less of a menace than the crocodile. Her left hand still grasped the paddle. Without letting go of it, she still made good time with two legs and one arm.

But how she made it safely to the raft, she did not know. One of the long poles used for propelling the raft crashed into the water inches from her face. Without hesitation, she seized the end of it and pulled frantically. There was a scream and a splash and the cannibal at the other end toppled into the water.

Then she shoved the pole hard, without letting go of it, and kicked her legs hard, following it up. In a moment, she gripped the pole higher up. Unmindful of two other poles crashing at the water near her head, Helene worked up the pole until she was at the edge of the raft. Then she dropped the pole, and swinging the paddle in her left hand, slashed at the legs of the nearest B'Kutu. They backed away in astonishment, and Helene flung a leg over the edge of the raft.

Before the astounded cannibals could recover, she was on her feet and was gripping the paddle in her right hand. With a shrill cry, she sprang at the huddled group of B'Kutu, cutting from side to side with the paddle.

Two of the grimy little savages went

down under her unexpected attack. But then the rest of them closed in on her with demoniacal yells. It seems as if a hundred filthy hands were clawing at her.

Both legs were imprisoned, and her left arm. And one of the little brutes jumped on her back trying to get his hands around her throat. But Helene was not conquered yet. She ducked her head, and the encircling hands raked her face and eyes. Flailing her free right arm, she staggered away toward the edge of the raft. She teetered there for a split-second, fighting off the swarming cannibals in a frenzy.

Then, somehow, she was free of them for a precious moment. She turned and hit the water in a shallow plunge. But, as her head broke the surface a second later, she almost wished she had stayed on the raft and been killed. For unbelievable pains were shooting through both eyes. She shook her head and looked around her. To her growing horror, she found she could not see.

Her hand flew up to her eyes and felt a gummy substance on them. Sickening horror went through Helene. Those savage hands that had smeared over her face —were they covered with arrow-poison? Whatever it was, it was making her eyes feel as if red-hot pokers were thrust into them. She dared not rub them or do anything but keep them tightly closed.

Almost insane with despair, Helene thrust her head down and went into a furious racing crawl. She knew she was swimming downstream and away from the rafts, but that was all she knew. What would happen to her now, she could not even guess. She was really acting in a complete panic, with the dim hope somewhere in the back of her mind that if she kept on swimming the water might somehow wash the deadly poison out of her eyes.

Sometime later, it might have been seconds, or minutes, or hours, Helene felt her knees strike bottom. She stopped swimming and stood up thigh-deep in the water. Her eyes were certainly no better for the washing she had given them. Behind her the cannibals screamed and splashed. Acting on a sudden decision, she rushed out of the river on to the bank, and flung herself blindly into the undergrowth.

And now came an interminable flight into the jungle, stumbling, tripping over roots, caroming off tree-trunks, screaming as trailing lianas slithered over her shoulders—were they lianas or were they snakes? Helene brought herself up short.

The pain was subsiding in her eyes, and with it some of her terror. She still could see nothing, but her mind was beginning to emerge from her blind panic. She groped about her until she felt a tree-trunk take shape under her hands, and there she stood trembling, taking stock of her situation.

She could not remember ever having been in such a terrible position. All alone, in a strange country, unarmed, and finally —quite blind. What was going to happen to her?

Then, as Helene's sanity returned to her, she began to feel a burning shame. She asked herself what Ki-Gor would have done under the circumstances. One thing he would not have done—she told herself—was to give way to such a panic. Nor would he have deserted Hurree Das, poor helpless Hurree Das, the way she did. What had become of him? Had he been killed by the B'Kutu?

She could still hear the babble of the cannibals in the distance—and it was not too great a distance at that. Evidently, in her blindness, she had circled and come to a stop not very far from the river. Instinctively, she felt around the tree-trunk for a column of vines. Even if she was blind, she still ought to be able to climb up to a safer position.

Just then, she heard something coming toward her through the undergrowth. She froze and listened over the pounding of her heart. Nearer and nearer it came. Whatever it was, it was no B'Kutu—it was making far too much noise. With mounting terror, Helene could only guess it was a large animal of some kind. Her trembling fingers groped hurriedly for vines to grasp. But within her reach the tree-trunk was quite smooth. She moved hurriedly around it, cursing her helplessness.

But Helene was destined never to climb that particular tree. Her foot caught in a surface root, and she crashed noisily to the ground. She lay still, frozen with fright.

Whatever the unseen thing was that had been approaching her had heard her fall and had stopped to listen.

There was no sound.

THEN a human voice called out of the jungle—a familiar voice—and Helene burst into tears of relief.

"Hulloa, *memsahib!*" called Hurree Das. "*Memsahib!* Are you there?"

"Yes, Hurree," Helene quavered. "Over here! Under a big tree. Come quickly, Hurree, oh—I never was so glad to hear anyone's voice—"

A moment later, the Hindu doctor was kneeling solicitiously beside Helene, patting her on the back.

"Dear gracious! Dear lady, what is the matter?" he said. "Your eyes—"

"I've gone blind, Hurree," Helene sobbed. "Those filthy little cannibals had arrow-poison on their hands, and they rubbed it into my eyes."

"Oah, now—it may not be so bad," Hurree Das said, soothingly. "Come, just sit down now, and relax. Hurree Das will take care of you."

"Oh, it's awful, Hurree!" Helene moaned. "Do you think it will be—I'll be permanently blind?"

"At time like this," the Hindu said, firmly, "patience is greatest possible virtue of all. Let me make quick examination first. Ah! that is more like it! Relax properly! Remember, you are in hands of first-rate physician!"

The plump fingers explored Helene's eyes tenderly to the accompaniment of sympathetic little clucks. She heard the Hindu rattling in his little bag, and wondered vaguely how he had ever got the bag ashore from the overturned canoe. Then it suddenly struck her as astonishing that Hurree Das himself got ashore! How did he do it?

But now a wet cloth was being wiped over her eyes, wiping away the poison.

"What do you think, Hurree?" Helene asked tremulously. "Do you think I'll ever see again?"

"Oah yes," the Hindu answered cheerfully. "Without slightest shadow of doubt you will see—you will see very shortly."

"Really!" Helene gasped. "Oh, I can hardly believe it! I thought surely that arrow-poison would—"

"In first place," Hurree Das broke in, "arrow poison would have no effect on eyes unless it contained snake venom. I analyzed this B'Kutu poison, you remember, and found it to consist only of vegetable poison — strychnine, mainly, from plant called *Strychnos Icaja Baill.* Evidently, B'Kutu blackfellows do not mix snake venom in their arrow poison."

"And the strychnine would have no effect on my eyes?" Helene said in bewilderment.

"Not the very slightest," Hurree Das said firmly. "So you see, dear lady, it was not arrow-poison on dirty hands of blackfellows."

"For heaven's sake, what was it, then?" Helene demanded.

"A sort of turpentine," the Hindu replied, still bathing the swollen eyes. "They had been doing considerable primitive lumbering for purposes of making rafts. Long poles for poling seemed to be especially gummy sort of wood. This gum got in your eyes, causing severe pains, no doubt—"

"They were," Helene said grimly.

"—and temporary blindness," Hurree Das concluded. "However, nothing to worry about. I have removed all foreign substance now, and I will bathe the eyes with boric solution, and shortly, dear lady, you will see out them just as clearly as ever."

Helene was silent for a minute. Then she said very humbly, "I think I've been all kinds of a ninny—"

"Not ninny at all!" Hurree Das denied indignantly. "You had not medical or botanical education—you could not know you were not permanently blinded—"

"Well, anyway," Helene said, "I feel pretty rotten for the way I deserted you."

"Deserted me!" Hurree Das cried. "What are you meaning? You did not desert me. On the contrary, it was cowardly Hindu doctor who deserted you!"

"Tell me what happened," Helene said.

"Well," Hurree Das said, "as soon as I ascertained that canoe had struck crocodile, my mind became scene of utmost confusion, I can tell you! Only mere instinct told me to seize my bag and umbrella. Next thing I knew I was floundering in water. But to my utmost astonishment, water was shallow—only up to my

shoulders. This was great consolation, but I perceived I was by no means out of danger. Possibly crocodile was still lurking about, waiting chance to nab my leg!"

Helene turned her face away quickly, lest Hurree Das see the smile she was trying unsuccessfully to suppress.

"Worse still," the Hindu went on excitedly, "was provocative attitude of B'Kutu. They were seeming to think they had me at disadvantage—and for once, I was in complete agreement with them. But I am typical Hindu, and if Hindu people are not distinguished for active qualities, at least they have survived four thousand years, by some hook or crook or other."

Hurree Das paused. Helene said, "What did you do, then?"

"Unlike Mahatma Gandhi," Hurree Das went on, "I did not offer mere Passive Resistance. Under circumstances, I perceived that something more than Non-Co-operation was called for. I was holding bag and umbrella in right hand, high above water, to keep same from getting wet—"

"Yes," Helene said breathlessly.

"—And I waded farther in toward shore, until water was only at large portly waistline. Whereupon, B'Kutu made concerted rush at me from both sides. I turned around then, reached up with left hand and opened and closed umbrella rapidly at them. Once I escaped attack of mad dog in such fashion."

"And it worked against the B'Kutu?" Helene said incredulously.

"Dear lady, you cannot imagine extraordinary effect of my deadly umbrella on superstitious savages. They were thrown into utter panic. So, seeing them in this condition, I made my way safely to dry land."

HELENE could hardly contain herself at the picture Hurree Das painted of himself. She would have given anything to have seen him holding a pack of murderous savages at bay with nothing more than an umbrella, and then wading, dripping but sedate, to shore.

"Well, I think that was simply marvelous, Hurree," she said, "and I guess only you could have done it."

"So far," the Hindu broke in, "I have told you only good news. But now comes reverse side of picture."

"What do you mean?" Helene said.

"Cannibals on river," the Hindu said, "likewise, cannibals on shore. These I do not fear, thinking to disperse them with umbrella, too. But these dry-land cannibals are not alone. Down river bank comes procession of big, tall Kara-mzili with fat prince who is leader of all."

"Mpotwe!" Helene gasped.

"Same fellow," Hurree Das said sorrowfully. "And this Mpotwe is not scaring so easily. So quickly, I explained to him in Swahili I was medical man and could patch up any wounded men of his army. So he immediately retained me as Army Medical Corps. So far, not so bad. But now comes worse."

"Worse?" Helene echoed apprehensively.

"Mpotwe demanded to know whereabout of you. I confessed ignorance. He then said you had disappeared in bush, but that he was sending B'Kutu to hunt you down. Naturally, I was horrified, but I did not let him know it. Instead, I told him you were dangerous woman of superhuman strength, and that it would be safer for everyone concerned if I, myself, came to look for you. Luckily, I was able to find you in very short time."

The Hindu paused, and Helene felt that he was embarrassed.

"And what is to happen now, dear lady," he concluded in a very tired voice, "I do not know."

And now it was Helene who was silent while she digested the full importance of the Hindu's story. The more she thought about it, the more did a growing fear tug at her heart.

At length she said, "Then Mpotwe knows you went out to look for me?"

"Yes," Hurree Das said sadly.

"Did you give your word that you would bring me back to him?"

"Oah no," the Hindu said wearily. "Not necessary to. I was followed by whole regiment of B'Kutu."

"You mean they followed you *here?*" Helene exclaimed, her voice rising.

"Oah yes. They are squatting all around us now. Silent little beggars, are they not?"

"Oh, Hurree!" Helene groaned. "Then we didn't escape."

"No—thanks to blundering fool of crocodile."

"But—but what are we going to do?" Helene said desperately.

"I am not knowing, dear lady," the Hindu said. "At present moment, I can only lead you back to Mpotwe. If not, sundry cannibals around us will simply make pincushions of us with little poisoned arrows."

"Well—" Helene struggled to stand up—" then we'd better go. We may be prisoners now, but it won't be for long. It's just a question of time before Ki-Gor finds out what has happened to us. And I've learned to rely on Ki-Gor to come through."

She put her hand on the Hindu's arm, and the two of them began to make their way slowly through the jungle.

"Possibly so," Hurree Das, the gambler, said. "But track odds are lengthening against our champion in race against time. Has it occurred to you, dear lady, that Ki-Gor will be waiting for us to arrive at Tetela village far up river? While Mpotwe will be taking us in completely opposite direction, toward Otempa."

Helene had been trying to put that very thought out of her mind.

"That is to say," the Hindu added, "we will be lucky if Mpotwe takes us with him—alive." Then, in a voice that was professionally cheerful, he said, "Bye the bye, how are the eyes feeling now?"

"They're mending fast, Hurree. The pain is all gone, and the left eye is opening a tiny slit."

"Excellent! Excellent!" the doctor said heartily. "I would say situation is excellent—as far as eyes are concerned."

VIII

MPOTWE sat on his litter like a gross, thick-lipped Buddha. His eyes were half-closed and inscrutable, but Helene could feel the black pupils fixed on her. The renegade chieftain spoke to her directly in Swahili.

"I first saw you a long time ago at the court of my uncle, King Dingazi. That was when my attempt to seize power failed—because you and Ki-Gor interfered. But even then, I liked your looks. You found favor in my eyes, even though you are so thin. I still like your looks, O Red-Haired One, and considering that I brought no wives with me, I would like you for a wife."

The skin along Helene's back prickled, but she suppressed the gasp that rose to her lips, and looked stolidly ahead.

"But," Mpotwe continued, "I must deny myself the pleasure. The B'Kutu have recognized you as Ki-Gor's woman, and they have demanded your person. They are hard to handle, at best, these Basenji, and it would be unwise of me to refuse them this request."

There was a long pause. Then Helene cleared her throat.

"What," she asked, "do the B'Kutu want to do with me?"

"They want to eat you," Mpotwe answered impassively, and a great numbness settled over Helene's brain. As if from a great distance, she heard Mpotwe.

"They are afraid of Ki-Gor," he said. "They think Ki-Gor is a great witch. But you live with Ki-Gor—you are his woman. Therefore, you must be immune

to his witchcraft. So they believe that if they eat you, they also will become immune to any of Ki-Gor's spells."

Helene shook her head as if to wake herself up from a nasty dream. But the dream would not leave her. Mpotwe's voice went on in a monotone.

"These savages are not used to discipline, but they have submitted to a number of strange and unfamiliar commands of mine. It would not be well for me to carry my authority too far. Besides, if they eat you and then are able to face Ki-Gor without fear—that is to my advantage. We are moving on Otempa on this side of the river. This time it will be a complete surprise. The stupid Bambala will never expect us. But if Ki-Gor is there—and I assume he is, since he is not with you—he might pull some trick to cheat us out of our victory, as he has already done."

Hope stirred momentarily in Helene's leaden heart at the mention of Ki-Gor. She almost cried out that Ki-Gor was not in Otempa, but she just caught herself in time. If Mpotwe did not know where Ki-Gor was, there was no point in setting him right. There was certainly no point, Helene told herself bitterly, in telling Mpotwe that Ki-Gor was patiently waiting for her in a Tetela village twenty-five miles up the river. Worse still, she realized as she thought about it—he probably had not even arrived there yet. It was early afternoon, and Ki-Gor had agreed to meet her at sundown. He would not even begin to miss her for another five hours to come!

"How—how soon does the—the banquet begin?" Helene said, trying to smile at her own ghastly joke.

"They would like to have it here and now," Mpotwe began — and something snapped in Helene's brain.

"You cruel beast!" she flared. "You come from a civilized nation—the great Kara-mzili—and yet you join these hideous cannibals in making war on a helpless woman, a blind woman at that! Hurree Das!" Helene cried, "Oh, Hurree Das! Where are you?"

"Right beside you," the Hindu's voice said quietly.

"Oh, Hurree, did you hear?" Helene sobbed.

"Yes, I gathered what was said," Hurree Das said, "even though I just came from attending some wounded."

"Oh, what am I going to do?"

Mpotwe's voice broke in, speaking Swahili. "You did not let me finish, O Red-Haired One. The B'Kutu want to have their feast now. But I have forbidden it."

"Forbidden it?" Helene cried, suddenly aflame with hope.

"I have forbidden it now," Mpotwe said with a sardonic laugh. "The feast will be held at sundown, at the end of the day's march."

Helene reeled. To be apparently reprieved, and then to have the reprieve quickly snatched away—was almost more than she could stand.

"If I allowed the feast now," Mpotwe said, "there would be no marching for the rest of the day. And before sundown, I intend to be within striking distance of Otempa, so that I can launch the attack at dawn tomorrow."

Helene groped for Hurree Das's hand and gripped it. The renegade prince went on talking relentlessly.

"But I have promised," he said, "that nothing will prevent the B'Kutu from eating you at sundown, and they have agreed to that. So you see? I am not so cruel—I have given you an extra half day of life."

With Mpotwe's savage laughter in her ears, Helene fainted.

IX

KI-GOR looked with tremendous satisfaction at the great assemblage of Tetela warriors that thronged the bank of the Mikenye. His self-appointed mission had succeeded far beyond his wildest hopes. It had succeeded, too, in much shorter time than he had thought was possible. Here it was only mid-afternoon. In a few short hours he had visited five villages and aroused the warriors in each of them to follow him.

To be sure, his job had been much easier and simpler than he had thought it would be. The Tetela had heard of the sack of Toli and of the unprovoked attack on Otempa, even before Ki-Gor told them. They were in an ugly mood toward the

despised cannibals, and only needed the slightest of urging to set them on the war-path.

But whatever the motives, Ki-Gor was well-satisfied with the results. Nearly a thousand of the toughest, best warriors in the whole Congo-Kasai Basin were ready to descend upon the rear of the B'Kutu at Otempa. Ki-Gor had explained the situation at that town, and now the Bambala were supposedly watching Mpotwe's army, and were ready to repel them. But how little confidence he placed in the vigilance of the easy-going Bambala, he also went into, and the Tetela agreed with him.

But they were less inclined to agree with his outlined strategy for dealing with the B'Kutu. He had proposed to the Tetela that they cross the river right there and go overland—across the top of the U—taking the B'Kutu in the rear and completely by surprise. The Tetela granted the wisdom of the strategy but rebelled at the idea of the long overland march through the heavy jungle. They would much prefer, they said, to race down the river in their many canoes. The mileage was much greater but with twenty and thirty paddles to a canoe they would make much better time than they ever could crawling through the bush.

When Ki-Gor pointed out that going by water would probably lose the surprise-quality of the attack on the B'Kutu, the Tetela scoffed. The Tetela didn't need the help of surprise, any time they fought those dirty little cannibals. The B'Kutu were simply not a match for them under any circumstances. That was undoubtedly true, and Ki-Gor admitted that to the Tetela, but he could not convince them of the danger that lay in Mpotwe's brilliant tactical mind. They had never come up against the Kara-mzili and had no idea of their advanced military tactics. So that argument did not sway the Tetela. Who was this Mpotwe? they asked. A mere foreigner—to be wiped out with his despicable B'Kutu allies.

If he had pressed the matter, Ki-Gor knew, he could have prevailed on the Tetela to take the overland route. Unfortunately, he was in a bad position to press the matter. For he did not intend to go with the punitive force himself. He had promised Helene that he would wait for her at the village on the river, and he felt that he should keep that promise, after the scare Helene had had over the sack of Toli.

So, unless he went with the Tetela, he could hardly insist on their taking a route they did not want to follow.

The Tetela leader came and stood beside Ki-Gor. He was evidently a little embarrassed at going athwart Ki-Gor's expressed wishes, and wanted to justify the Tetela choice of routes.

"It is better this way, O Ki-Gor," he said. "We are no Basenji to go wriggling through the jungle at a fast rate. We could never make it to Otempa overland before nightfall. But by water, our great war canoes might take us there only a little after sundown. We can land a little upstream of the B'Kutu and storm their camp in the dying light. Because—and you can depend on this, Ki-Gor—once we come to grips with those devils, it won't take us long to dispose of them."

Ki-Gor nodded with a grin. He knew the Tetela confidence in themselves was well justified, and he conceded that they would probably do as their leader promised. Then, Ki-Gor sighed. He wished he could go with the avenging force.

"If I had not given my solemn word to my wife," he said, "I would love nothing better than to join your attack. I bear the cannibals no love, nor the treacherous Kara-mzili who leads them."

"If you gave your word, you cannot go back on it," the Tetela leader said politely. "It is too bad, though. We would dearly love to have you with us."

The jungle man was torn between his desire to go with the expedition and his fear of the scolding he would get from Helene if he did.

"There is this," the Tetela said, suddenly hopeful. "If we go by water, and it is pretty sure that we will, we will meet your wife coming up the river. You could see her and get her to release you from your promise."

"It is an idea," Ki-Gor said slowly.

"Why, certainly!" the Tetela said, enthusiastically. "There is the river! We must go down it, she must come up it! You can't miss seeing her!"

"No," said Ki-Gor, "Unless she happens to have pulled over to the shore to rest."

And renewed doubt hit him. "That could very well be. She might even see your fleet of war canoes coming and be afraid. She might think you were some unfriendly tribe and hide along the bank."

"We could all keep our eyes peeled," the Tetela offered. "I will order everyone who is not paddling to watch the banks carefully."

Ki-Gor hesitated, his eyes roving over the embarkation going on all around him. Canoe after canoe was taking on its load of strapping warriors. On this exciting dash down the river, he was afraid the Tetela would be in no mood for scrutinizing the banks for a lone canoe with two occupants.

But—and here a thought struck him—if *he*, Ki-Gor, were watching those banks, he would never miss seeing Helene. His keen eyes would certainly pick out the canoe, no matter how cleverly Helene might hide it.

"Wait a minute," Ki-Gor said to the Tetela leader. "Let one canoe go in advance of all the others. And I will go in that canoe."

The Tetela leader gave a shout of joy, and it was quickly taken up by a thousand throats as Ki-Gor stepped down to the water's edge.

X

THE four stocky scar-faced Tofoke carrying Helene in the improvised litter stopped abruptly, and then dropped the litter rudely to the ground. The swelling around Helene's eyes had gone down enough so that she could see out of both of them, now. She looked over her right shoulder. Through the screen of leaves she could see mellow slanting sunbeams dancing on the wavelets of the river. What had caused the halt? Helene asked herself. It was not yet sundown—not by at least an hour and a half. Mpotwe had said they would march until sundown.

The bushes crackled up ahead, and presently Hurree Das came panting toward Helene. His face was pale and his jowls trembled. Helene noticed irrelevantly that he was wearing his rubber gloves, and carrying a little bottle full of some colorless liquid.

"Oh, dearie me!" the Hindu moaned. "Best laid plans nearly going awry on account of capricious jungle monarch. Mpotwe has decided to go no farther today. Already close enough to Otempa to make attack tomorrow at dawn."

Apprehension crawled down Helene's back.

"You mean," she said, "they aren't going to wait for sundown for the festivities?"

"I'm afraid they are planned for very near future," the Hindu said, wetting his lips.

"Well," Helene said, suddenly feeling very cold all over, but retaining a grip on herself. "It begins to look as if they're going through with this thing."

"Oh Lordie!" Hurree Das groaned, "if only Ki-Gor were near!"

"I might as well face the facts, Hurree," Helene said. "Ki-Gor is a good many miles away and he isn't even coming in this direction. He is sitting there, 'way up the river, waiting for you and me to come poking along in the canoe."

She looked despairingly around at the Tofoke litter bearers and the B'Kutu squatting beyond. Then she looked back at Hurree Das. The sweat was pouring off his round face, and he pulled a corner of his *dhoti* up to mop it off. Then he took his black pill-box off and held it in his trembling hand a moment.

"You have had no ideas, lady?" he asked.

Helene shook her head. "What ideas are there?" she said. "I'm only just getting back the use of my eyes, and I'm sitting here in the midst of swarms of cannibals."

"Yes," Hurree Das nodded, his jowls shaking again. The little black hat suddenly dropped from his fumbling fingers, and he stared at it resting on the ground at his feet.

"If Ki-Gor could only have missed me before now," Helene said evenly, "then I might have some little hope. I have tremendous faith in him. But"—she glanced at the sunlighted river again—"he won't even know we were delayed for at least another hour and a half. And by that time—I will be resting in little bloody pieces in the B'Kutu stew pots."

"Same reasoning as my own," Hurree Das said, in a voice far less controlled

than Helene's. "Therefore, I perceived necessity for postponement of—of ceremonies. They must be postponed at all costs."

There was no hope in Helene's eyes and but little interest as she regarded the sweating Hindu.

"If they could only be persuaded," the doctor went on, "to wait until morning—that would give Ki-Gor all night to come."

Helene sighed. "Naturally, you couldn't persuade them."

"Naturally," Hurree Das agreed. "I tried hard with Mpotwe, but all the time getting nowhere. He has feeling you are dangerous, and he wants you out of way as soon as possible."

Helene winced, and a film came over her eyes.

"Oh, Hurree!" she cried, "why torture me with what might-have-been? If I've got to die—at least, I want to be able to die bravely—"

"Wait a minute, *memsahib,*" the doctor said. "If B'Kutu cannot be persuaded to postpone slaughtering you—they might be frightened, somehow. I have been racking poor incompetent brains for some means of frightening them."

"*Frightening* them?" Helene said, as a little thrill went through her. "What do you mean, Hurree?"

The Hindu bent over and picked up his hat. Helene's eyes followed him, saw his hand drop the bottle on the ground beside the litter before it groped for the hat.

"Do not stare at the bottle, *memsahib,*" Hurree said, replacing the hat on his black curls. "It is only hope of postponement we desire so mightily. Do not interrupt me now while I explain. There is so little time. But follow my directions about bottle. Do not hope too much—but it might secure postponement."

"But what, Hurree?" Helene said frantically.

"Listen carefully," the Hindu commanded. "You have to do this for yourself. I cannot do it for you, or these people would suspect something was up. It will hurt you like very devil—but better transient pain than certain death. In that bottle is juice from poisonous vine. It is powerful vesicant—it will raise painful blisters on your skin if it touches it."

The savages around the litter suddenly stood up chattering. Helene looked around and saw Mpotwe's litter being carried toward her. Hurree Das quickened his words.

"Smear that juice on each thigh and each upper arm," he instructed. "Make rough design if possible—something like crocodile in shape."

He started to move away.

"Forgive me pain it will cause," he said, over his shoulder. "And forgive me if results are not as I hope. It is all poor, inadequate Hurree Das could think up."

The Hindu was walking rapidly away as Helene reached out and snatched the bottle off the ground. Mpotwe's litter was halted some distance away and the Karamzili bodyguard crowded around their prince. The cannibals grinned wolfishly at Helene and began a soft little chant.

HEART pounding, Helene uncorked the bottle close to her thigh. She glared back at the cannibals and hoped against hope they were not watching her hands. Stealthily, she tipped the bottle slightly on to the finger tips of her right hand. Then she smeared the colorless liquid the length of her left thigh. If there had been pigment of some kind in the liquid, the smear would have shown a design more or less boat-shaped. Or it might have represented the long, narrow body of a crocodile. Two quick swipes crossways would represent the stubby pairs of legs.

While a great hubbub went on around Mpotwe, taking the attention of the cannibals, Helene repeated the operation on her thigh, and then on each of her upper arms. The liquid felt cool, almost cold, on her skin and carried no hint of future blistering. She replaced the cork in the little bottle and peered down at her thighs. There was nothing to see, except the faint water glistening of the liquid. Nothing to see, nothing to feel—as yet. And Helene had an unpleasant thought. What if Hurree Das had been wrong? What if he collected the wrong kind of vine? It wasn't probable, she admitted, because the Hindu was a fine botanist.

Nevertheless, Helene's heart was falling as she looked around for something to take the fluid off her fingers. If the

stuff really was a vesicant, she did not want her fingers burned, too.

The Tofoke litter-bearers had moved away several yards and were squatting, watching the commotion around Mpotwe. Just at the end of one of the litter poles stood a crude earthenware water bottle. Helene put her feet on the ground and calmly took three steps to the bottle.

Instantly some B'Kutu shouted. Helene's heart sank further. The cannibals were taking no chances on her trying to make a break. She bent over the water bottle and tipped it over on her hands, washing them and the little bottle of vesicant. Then she slipped the little bottle down inside the waist band of her brief leopard-skin trunks.

By this time she was surrounded by a half dozen B'Kutu, all yammering at her. She glared at them briefly, then turned her back and sat down on the litter. The bottle pressed hard into her stomach, and she hoped it would not make too noticeable a bulge. She sneaked a quick look down and saw that it was not too noticeable as long as she sat leaning forward. When she stood up, it might be a different matter.

Helene also sneaked a look at her thighs. The ivory-smooth skin had not the slightest blemish showing, and she began to worry a little. There was as yet no sensation of burning, or irritation of any kind. Could Hurre Das have made a mistake?

Several big Kara-mzili were coming toward her now, undoubtedly attracted by the commotion of the B'Kutu. Helene watched them dully as they approached. The hopes that Hurree Das had aroused in her when he gave her the bottle of vesicant and told her what to do with it were fast receding. Suddenly, she asked herself what the purpose of smearing the stuff on her was, anyway? What did Hurree Das have in mind? He might perhaps have explained to her, but his conversation had been cut short by the appearance of Mpotwe.

The Tofoke litter bearers, apparently under orders from the Kara-mzili, now came back and picked up the litter. The Kara-mzili ranged themselves on each side of the litter, and Helene was carried straight toward Mpotwe.

Now what? Helene asked herself. Is the slaughter to take place immediately—before the vesicant gets a chance to work?

But the litter was set down directly in front of Mpotwe's litter, and the Tofoke moved away. Mpotwe leered down at her. Helene looked helplessly about for Hurree Das. She finally spotted him some two hundred feet off to one side, talking earnestly to one of the tall Kara-mzili.

"It is unfortunate for you, O Red-Haired One," Mpotwe rasped in Swahili, "that we came to the end of our march so soon—and you come to the end of your life so soon. I promised you you would live until sundown, but now I see we cannot wait that long. If I can give you life, I can take it away again."

Helene gazed up at the bulbous face without knowing what to say. It was so unbelievable, somehow, that anyone should be telling her she had only a little while more to live. In a queer sort of way, it made her doubt the possibility that she *was* going to die.

"You still have a little while," Mpotwe

said indulgently, "while the tribes make a rough camp and build some fires."

Even that shocking statement left Helene strangely unmoved. She began to realize that her previous awful dread of the fate Mpotwe was so confidently predicting had completely gone. She even had the impulse to smile impudently up at the fat prince. Absently, she started to scratch her left arm above the elbow. Then a thrill shot through her and she stopped her right hand in mid-air.

The skin of her left arm above the elbow was beginning to itch like fury. Likewise her right arm and likewise both thighs. Hurree Das had made no mistake in his plant juices! It was beginning to work!

She threw a swift sidelong glance at the spot where she had seen Hurree Das. The Hindu was talking to another Kara-mzili warrior now. And the first Kara-mzili, the one he had been talking to a moment before, was standing to one side looking very thoughtful. Helene pulled her eyes away lest Mpotwe notice her interest in the Hindu. Bitterly she regretted that Hurree Das had not been able to finish explaining his plan to her. If she only knew a little more of what he had in mind, she could govern herself accordingly.

"Well, then, Red-Haired One," Mpotwe said with heavy mockery, "are you not afraid to die—and to be eaten by these dirty little men?"

Helene looked up steadily at the beady little eyes. It would certainly do no harm to appear confident, she reasoned.

"No I am not afraid," she said. "Because I am not going to die."

The renegade prince threw back his head and laughed a short, nasty laugh.

XI

HELENE'S mind churned. What was Hurree Das's plan? Obviously the vesicant was intended to raise blisters on her arms and thighs—but what then? How would that save her life from the cannibals? Then a thought struck her. The blisters would certainly give her an extremely unwholesome appearance. Could it be that Hurree Das wanted to make the B'Kutu afraid to eat her—for fear they would be poisoned?

Her arms and thighs were beginning to burn in earnest now, but a quick glance down at them was disappointing. There was only the faintest sign of blistering, a mere pinkness appearing where she had smeared the plant juice. Again she looked cautiously toward Hurree Das. Now he was talking to two B'Kutu with two Kara-mzili listening beside him.

The Kara-mzili had taken charge of the business of making a camp and were handling it with characteristic efficiency. One large group of savages were clearing a great space, in front of Mpotwe's litter, of all undergrowth. Half of them were cutting bushes, and the other half carrying them away. One detachment had evidently been assigned the job of collecting dry wood for the fires, while still another group was engaged in building the fires themselves, with the rings of small rocks and the green-wood trestles to hang the stewpots on.

So well organized was the activity that it seemed no time before a dozen fires were blazing, and the B'Kutu were trooping down to the river bank to fill their crude vessels with water. It was a sight not calculated to increase Helene's newly restored confidence and hope. Nevertheless, she clung bravely to her hope, and found that it helped her attention on Hurree Das's mysterious activity among the Kara-mzili, and even more, among the B'Kutu themselves.

Mpotwe seemed to have forgotten her existence for the time being and immersed himself in conferences with his Kara-mzili captains, presumably discussing the business of the next morning's attack on Otempa. Helene considered this a blessing at first, for it not only meant that she did not have to endure the fat prince's mocking words, but also she could watch the Hindu without attracting the suspicion of the dull-eyed B'Kutu who squatted around her.

The speed of the preparations for the feast appalled her. The sun was still on the river when the cooking-pots hanging over the fire began to steam. And yet the plant juice had hardly raised any color at all on her skin where she had applied it, even though her arms and legs were

burning and itching fiercely. She could see that Hurree Das, too, was a little worried about it. Twice he went past her, saying no word but glancing sharply at her thighs. His large round eyes shadowed with apprehension each time he saw no appreciable blistering.

Suddenly, there was a purposeful bustling and shouting of orders. Helene realized with an ugly shock that the B'Kutu were ready for their grisly banquet. The stew-pots were bubbling and the cannibals were yapping expectantly. In a horrified daze, Helene watched the savages range themselves — with incredible swiftness, it seemed to her—around the newly made clearing. Her litter was carried to a spot twenty feet in front of Mpotwe's litter, and for the first time, Helene noticed a crude sort of altar fashioned out of a dozen or so straight saplings laid across two piles of stones. Underneath the parallel poles was a wide-mouth earthenware pot of Bangongo workmanship. Helene's scalp prickled as she realized that the pot was intended to catch her blood as it spouted out under the sacrificial knife.

Even before any actual ceremonies began, the B'Kutu began a soft little chant, repeating it over and over.

"Aba-a-a N'kutu! Nyam nyam! Aba—a-a- N'kutu! Nyam nyam!"

Helene well knew the meaning of *"nyam nyam."* In all Bantu dialects it meant "fresh meat!"

Hurree Das stumbled toward her, his face a picture of horror.

"Have faith, lady! Please to having faith!" he cried hoarsely, staring at her arms and legs as if by sheer force of willpower he could raise the blisters there which had so far not developed. "They are so quick!" he moaned. "They have made everything ready so quickly! I should have given vesicant to you sooner! But have faith—"

He hurried away toward Mpotwe. Helene looked helplessly after him. She knew he was as helpless as she was. His plan to protect her depended entirely on the visible effect of the vesicant on her skin. As yet, there were no visible effects. And at the rate the business was proceeding, there was not much time left to have faith—

Suddenly, a sharp cry came from some savages still on the river bank. They came stumbling in toward Mpotwe. Helene caught the word, "Tetela," and her heart leaped. Mpotwe quickly rasped some orders which were promptly repeated by the Kara-mzili moving among the fires. Swiftly and silently the savages tipped the boiling stew pots over on to the fires, and one by one the fires hissed and smoked and fizzled out.

Helene gathered that Tetela had been seen on the river, and that Mpotwe was determined that the Tetela should not see the cannibal force. At first, Helene could hardly believe her good fortune. Not only were the ceremonies postponed, but the chances were that Mpotwe could not hide his savage minions in time.

Then, the more she thought about it, the more her hopes soared. Hurree Das appeared beside her, eyes gleaming.

Tetela are speeding down river in canoes," he whispered. Undoubtedly Ki-Gor is with them. I will go and watch."

Helene's heart gave a great bound at Hurree Das's words. Of course, Ki-Gor would be with the Tetela! Mouth open with excitement, she watched the Hindu ambling rapidly toward the river bank. Then a little chill struck her, as she saw two Kara-mzili stride up to Hurree Das's plump figure and seize him. And a moment later two more Kara-mzili stepped up to her, and pinned her arms to her sides. A large black hand was clapped over her mouth.

Mpotwe was taking no chances of an outcry from his prisoners.

FOR a few seconds, Helene struggled against that great horny hand clamped over her face before she realized that it was quite useless. And the next ten minutes seemed an eternity. Her back was to the river, so she could see nothing of the Tetela canoes that were sweeping downstream. But against the sepulchral silence of the camp, she could hear the Kara-mzili muttering. And out on the river she could hear the carefree shouting and singing of the Tetela as they paddled all unsuspecting past the hidden army of invasion.

After she had discovered the futility of fighting to cry out, Helene had to fight

The savages began a soft little chant: "Nyam nyam!"

herself to preserve her sanity. There, within a hundred yards of her, went an unknown number of potential rescuers! It was a maddening situation. She concentrated on translating to herself the muttered comments of the Kara-mzili.

"Twenty canoes," one said.

"War paint and weapons, too," another said. "Are they going to attack Otempa before we can?"

"Who knows?" the first one murmured. "I always heard they hated our little friends, here, the B'Kutu."

"Good fighters, too, *I've* always heard," the second Kara-mzili whispered.

There was no mention of Ki-Gor, Helene noticed, and her heart sank even farther. When the Tetela were first reported in sight, she had hoped Ki-Gor would be with them. If he had been, she knew he would never have passed the B'Kutu so innocently. His alert senses would have divined their presence somehow. But then she thought of the promise Ki-Gor had made—"I'll try to be there, this time," he had said—and she visualized Ki-Gor sitting patiently in the Tetela village miles away, waiting for her and Hurree Das to appear. And it was not yet even sundown!

But time eventually takes care of the most intolerable situation, and eventually the army in hiding relaxed as the singing of the Tetela died away in the distance. The Kara-mzili relaxed their grip on Helene and she heaved a bitter sigh. Then Hurree Das was at her elbow.

"So full of exasperation," he said gloomily, "I can hardly talk. However, mere presence of Tetela helped us in one way."

"How?" Helene asked dully.

"Caused postponement," the Hindu pointed out. "Now, fires have to be lighted all over again and—ah!"—he broke off and pointed—"vesicant is having time to do its work."

Helene looked down at her burning thighs. A bright red crocodile stood out in bold relief on each leg!

Hurree Das's eyes shone purposefully as he moved away. Mpotwe began rasping orders again, and the B'Kutu resumed their soft, spine-tingling chant.

"Aba-a-a N'kutu! Nyam nyam! Aba-a-a N'kutu! Nyam nyam!"

A score of the savages flung fresh wood on the steaming fires. And in a moment they began to flicker, and presently burst into flame. The hissing pots were replaced on the trestles, and the atmosphere seemed to thicken about Helene. Then, above the chant of the cannibals, came the voice of Hurree Das.

"Stand up, *memsahib!* Stand up and hold your arms high above your head!"

A group of B'Kutu all carrying long knives came toward her litter. With her eyes fixed on them, Helene rose and lifted her arms. Then Hurree Das's voice continued. But he was no longer speaking English—or even Swahili. Helene could not understand his words, but they sounded remarkably like B'Kutu, itself! Here and there, she caught familiar words. "Ki-Gor" — *"gandu!"* — *"nyam nyam."* Once he broke into English, giving her directions—

"Walk straight toward nearest fire—and then turn around—so all can see crocodiles!"

Helene followed his commands, and the B'Kutu chant broke off into a low concerted moan.

AROUND and around she turned so that no one could miss seeing the fearsome red welts on her limbs. Hurree Das went on in his strange high voice, and Helene could not even guess what he was telling the cannibals.

But the group of B'Kutu who had started for her with drawn knives had halted irresolutely and were staring at her with a horrified fascination.

But now a guttural cry broke out from Mpotwe.

"What are you telling them, Yellow Man?" the prince demanded in Swahili. Quickly the answer came from the Hindu, likewise in Swahili.

"I am telling them that Ki-Gor has bewitched his woman! Ki-Gor is a mighty witch, and even from a distance can he cast a *kissi!* If you do not believe my words, look at her yourself—and see the crocodiles that Ki-Gor's mighty ju-ju has caused to stand out on his woman's arms and legs! Anyone who is brave enough to eat her now will be eaten in turn by a hundred thousand crocodiles who will rush out of the river behind you!"

"Silence! You fool!" Mpotwe cried. "There is not a word of truth in what you say! Ki-Gor can send no *kissi* to protect his wife when he does not even know his wife is in danger!"

"He knows, O Mpotwe!" Hurree Das replied, but his voice faltered, and Helene's heart skipped a beat.

Mpotwe screamed some orders in Kara-mzili, and his warriors started for Hurree Das, and others made for Helene.

"Fool of a Yellow Man!" Mpotwe shrieked again in Swahili. "You should have preserved your life! But by trying to cross my will, you have only sealed your doom! The woman shall die and you with her! You cannot make me fear Ki-Gor when Ki-Gor is far away!"

The tall men of the bodyguard were making straight for their victims when a new voice broke in—a fearful, deep-throated voice.

"Ki-Gor is never far away when his wife is in danger!"

Helene half turned with a sob in her throat, and saw the giant bronzed form leaping over the heads of the ring of B'Kutu, a long Bambala spear glittering in his right hand.

In a split-second the whole camp was a bedlam, with Mpotwe mouthing commands. But Ki-Gor kept coming.

"You, Mpotwe!" he roared, and his words could be heard over the screams of the B'Kutu. "You, who did not believe in my ju-ju—you will never have another chance to test it. Witness! all of you! And be warned!"

The great muscles tautened as Ki-Gor's right arm shot back over his shoulder. The spear seemed a live thing as it poised in his hand. Then he heaved. Swift as an arrow the spear, and as straight.

Mpotwe gave a choked cry and flung up a flat arm. But the spear had already found its destination in the folds of his fat throat.

For a slow heart's beat, no one in the clearing moved. And during that sickening moment, Helene asked herself what would happen to Ki-Gor and Hurree and herself now. She knew that if the Kara-mzili attacked, Ki-Gor could not—single-handed—save the three of them. It all depended on whether the Kara-mzili were too shocked by his sudden appearance to do anything.

She started running toward Ki-Gor to be by his side, and as she did, she saw the Tetela.

They swarmed into the clearing from all sides with yells of triumph. Helene had a brief vision of their spears dipping among the panic-stricken cannibals, before she flung her arms around Ki-Gor's neck and fainted.

THE three sat in the best house in Otempa whence they had gone with the victory-drunk Tetela to tell the amazed Bambala of annihilation of Mpotwe and his verminous army.

"I know one thing, Ki-Gor," Helene said, "I never want to go through another moment like the one when the Tetela went right past us on the river—and never knew we were there."

"They knew you were there," Ki-Gor retorted. "They pretended they didn't. They went past on the river so that they could land downstream. It was less than half the Tetela force. The rest of them followed me along the shore, and the two forces carefully surrounded Mpotwe's camp and waited for my signal."

"But my dear old fellow," Hurree Das said, lifting a cup of Bambala beer away from his mouth, "how in name of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva did you know where we were?"

Ki-Gor half-smiled. "I nearly did not come," he said, "but that does not matter. what matters is that I *did* come. The B'Kutu were careless about hiding the rafts they crossed the river with. And they never did hide your canoe. I saw it washed halfway up a sandbar. One side was stove in. We landed then and guessed what had happened."

"Most extraordinary!" Hurree Das cried, accepting another cup of beer from a Bambala girl. "But by Jove! Jolly good job you're arriving when you did!"

"In connection with that, Hurree," Helene said, "I didn't know you could speak B'Kutu."

"Before tonight I could not," Hurree Das replied. "Perhaps you noticed me talking with Kara-mzili and B'Kutu while camp was being prepared?"

"Yes, but don't tell me you learned B'Kutu in that little time," Helene said.

"Most indubitably and without any question," Hurree Das said luxuriously. "I learned enough words to make speech about Ki-Gor's magic. You see, we Indians are good linguists. I, for instance, speak my native Gujerati plus Mharathi, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Bengali — and English! Did I ever tell you, dear lady, that I took honors at Bombay University—in English?"

BUSH-MAD BWANA

By WILLIAM DE LISLE

Any port in a storm, Elston had thought when the gale swept the veldt. But that was before he knew the horror behind the Dutchman's vanishing gate.

THAT the old Dutchman was disgruntled seemed pretty evident by the way he slammed down the lid of the big chest.

"Here!" he growled, holding out a white drill suit of a cut fashionable, perhaps, in Cecil Rhodes' day. "What about these? Will they do?"

"Fine!" pronounced Dick Elston, determined not to be put out by his host's boorishness. He lay the trousers up against his legs. "Fits me like a glove, see?"

"Humph! Got all you want?"

"Everything, thanks," answered Elston, politely. "And a darned sight more than I ever expected," he added under his breath, as without another word the Dutchman turned and left him.

"Funny old gink," was his thought, as he stripped off his sodden clothes. His mind ran over the events that had led up to his practically forcing himself on this surly old Dutchman for a night's lodging. He thought of the light, which, while serving to guide him from the jungle to this lonely shack, had been so uncompromisingly put out at the precise moment when he had knocked at the door for admission. "There's one thing sure," he told himself as he wrung out his dripping leggings and festooned them across the back of a chair to dry, "it's pretty obvious that he didn't want me here."

He picked up the coat the Dutchman had so grudgingly lent him, and for the first time noticed a large hole in its back. A jagged hole it was, and with its edges badly iron-molded, and since the Dutchman had not thought of providing him with a dry shirt it meant that his bare back would be thus prettily exposed.

"Oh, well," was his cheerful comment. "Good soldiers never look behind!" But as his fingers came to the buttons and encountered a small, round, neatly-punched hole just over the breast pocket he stopped.

Dick Elston was not a nervous man, nor yet a man over-given to introspection, but as he stripped off that coat and studied the two holes in juxtaposition, he was aware of a distinctly quickened pulse. It didn't take an expert eye to see that somebody had been shot while wearing that coat, and a very cursory examination of the relative position of those holes showed him at once that that somebody had been most assuredly killed.

"Feels like a shroud!" he muttered, as he put on the coat again. He ran his fingers through his hair, wiped his face on his handkerchief, but all the time he was thinking of the Dutchman's funny kind of welcome. "He didn't want me to come here," he thought. "Why?"

IT was a very uneasy man who, ten minutes later, walked slowly into the next room to rejoin his host.

The Dutchman was sitting at the table in exactly the same position as when Dick had first discovered him. His long, matted beard overflowed his chest, while his fingers lay tightly interlocked on the table.

"So!" he growled, as Elston came into the circle of light cast by the hurricane lamp. "They fit you, eh? Draw up that chair yonder, and sit down. I suppose you'll want a drink?"

Elston nodded. He felt he did need a drink, and, moreover, needed it strong. The discovery of those holes had not only given him a nasty shock, but had actually engendered a vague suspicion in his mind. Ten years of jungle wanderings had carried him into many strange camps, but in all his experience he was able to recall no such lonely house as this, nor any such queer character as the mysterious hook-nosed Dutchman who was his host.

"Water?"

"I'll have it straight, thanks. Here's how!"

Elston could only stare blankly at that deadly weapon.

The Dop was strong. It went down his throat like liquid fire, but when he had recovered from the fit of coughing brought on by its unexpected rawness he felt considerably better for it.

The Dutchman, however, had not joined him.

"Tell me," he asked, as Elston's eye caught his. "Why did you come here?"

"Why did I come here?" Elston repeated the question in surprise. "I've already told you that three times. I've told you how I left my safari at noon in order to follow up an elephant spoor, and how, as luck would have it, I not only didn't get the elephant but lost my safari as well."

"Yes—but how did you come to find *me?*"

"I saw your light from the jungle," Elston explained. "The light," he added bluntly, "which you so hospitably doused when you heard my foot on the doorstep."

"But were you looking for *me?*" persisted the Dutchman, not in the least disconcerted by this revelation of his boorishness.

"Looking for you!" Elston stared. "Why in hell should I be looking for you?"

"But were you?"

"Good Lord, no! I hadn't the foggiest idea there was another white man within a couple of hundred miles of me."

"Then you were lost?"

"Was—and, for that matter, still am."

"And you didn't know I lived here?"

"Never even dreamed of it."

"And you didn't come here to find *me?*"

"Holy Moses!" Elston crashed his fist on the table so that the tin cups rattled. "Haven't I told you so over a dozen times? What are you driving at, anyway? What are you *afraid* of?" he asked, softly, a sudden thought of those holes coming back to his mind.

"I'm afraid," admitted the Dutchman, "I'm afraid you are a police officer."

"What!" With a startled look in his blue eyes Elston sat bolt upright. "A police officer?" he stammered. "Now why in hell should you think that?"

The Dutchman's eyes flickered and fell under the other's earnest scrutiny.

"Because it so happens that my last caller *was* a police officer," he admitted.

"Was he? Oh!" Elston was beginning to see daylight. No wonder the fellow had been so slow in letting him in. He was beginning to get the drift of those persistent questions now—to understand something of what was in the fellow's mind.

"And curiously enough," volunteered the Dutchman, "he came on just such a night as this."

"Did he?" Elston tried to keep all trace of excitement from his voice. "Er—why did he come here?"

"To arrest me."

"What for?" And in spite of himself the question was like a pistol-shot.

"Murder!" shrugged the Dutchman, his yellow teeth showing in a cheerless smile.

"Murder?"

"YES. He didn't say what he came for, of course, but I guessed it even before he opened his mouth." He glanced across at Elston's horror-stricken face before adding, "And curiously enough I thought for a moment you were the same man."

Elston just shook his head, for speech, right at that moment, was utterly beyond him.

"Of course, you're not," agreed the Dutchman, smilingly. "I know you're not. You couldn't be. I buried that one."

"Buried him!" gasped Elston. "You—"

"Yes," interrupted the other's easy voice.

Elston's jaw dropped. For what seemed to him to be hours, he sat there utterly bereft of words, bereft even of the power of thought. His eyes followed the Dutchman's fingers as they calmly filled a pipe, noticing—but attaching no importance to—the extraordinarily calloused condition of his hands.

"Yes," he went on presently, "it was on a night like this that he came. I lent him that same suit you're wearing now, and just like you did, he said it'd fit him like a glove, he took his drink straight, and when he drank it he said, 'Here's how!' just like you did. Now, d'you see the similarity between you?"

"Wore—the same—suit?" stammered Elston. His brain was in a mad whirl. Either he had misunderstood, or else the monster across the table was coolly confessing not to one but to *two* murders. His fingers crept nervously to those holes in his borrowed coat.

"Yes," confirmed the Dutchman. "That's where I got him. It wasn't bad shooting, considering the poor light."

Elston winced, as his fingers fell away. To his heated imagination it seemed as though a shot had actually torn its way through his own flesh. Those holes were scorching him. He had a wild desire to tear the coat from his back and slam it into the Dutchman's evil face. How right he had been as to the meaning of those holes. How right about the house, and about its murderous occupant.

"I buried him over by that big baobab tree just outside the clearing," mentioned the Dutchman with that same air of imperturbable calm. "Maybe you noticed it when you came up—no?"—as Elston merely stared—"but maybe you wouldn't in the storm, but he's there all right, all safe and snug by the little white gate."

Elston sat up. He had been debating with himself exactly why the Dutchman should have seen fit to confide in him, and had missed the beginning of that last sentence.

"Little white gate?" he repeated sharply. "What gate?" There was no gate to the Dutchman's compound, and that he knew for a fact. Had he not stumbled all over the place while he had been waiting for someone to open the door to him? "What gate?" he said again, a new and amazing suspicion darting through his mind.

The Dutchman's pipe stopped half-way to his mouth.

"Eh?" he stammered.

"Which gate?" Elston's voice had risen to a shout. "There is no gate! You're lying to me. You've been pulling my leg. What's your game? What gate are you talking about?"

"What gate?" stammered the Dutchman uneasily. It was plain that he was nonplussed. His eyes darted around the room like those of a trapped animal. He opened his mouth to speak, but apparently thought better of it, for he closed it again.

"Well?" jeered Elston.

With an obvious effort the old Dutchman pulled himself together. He scratched his head bewilderedly. Then, with an exaggerated air of secrecy—

"I'll tell you just what it is," he whispered, wagging a calloused forefinger under Elston's nose. "That gate is a very funny gate. You can't always see it. It—it puzzles even me—sometimes." He laughed, a queer, cackling, uncanny kind of laugh.

AND after a moment's blank amazement Elston started laughing, too. He wasn't any too sure what there was to laugh about, but he had felt suddenly weak—and very shaky—and to laugh offered some slight relief. Actually, he realized, there was nothing at all to laugh about. Bush-madness is no laughing matter, and it was crystal clear to him, in those moments, that the wretched Dutchman was mad as a March hare. He had fallen victim to the maddening loneliness of the bush, that dread specter which stalks at the heels of every wanderer in the silent places of Central Africa. And presently the laugh died on his lips, and in a dead silence the two sat eyeing each other across the table.

"Poor devil," thought Elston, as he watched the Dutchman's fingers nervously locking and unlocking. All that story about the murderers was just so much drivel, a figment of a disordered brain—like the little white gate that wasn't there. He couldn't think why he hadn't caught on to it right away. The thing was as clear as daylight. He watched the man nodding his shaggy head—nodding it slowly and rhythmically like some mechanically-operated figure of a Chinese mandarin. "Crazy as a loon!" he thought, as he watched him fumbling in his pocket.

And then his heart missed a beat, for instead of the matches for which he had thought him to be searching, the Dutchman had suddenly produced a big revolver.

"Yes," he went on coolly, taking the recital at that point where it had been interrupted by mention of the gate. "Yes, that's where I got him. I'm a very good shot. Very quick and very straight. Very quick," he added with a peculiar emphasis, "and very straight!"

Elston sat fascinated. The movement had been so quick, the threat so utterly unexpected, that for a moment he could only stare blankly at that deadly weapon. Too late he saw the error into which he had fallen. Too late he remembered the damning evidence of those holes in the coat he was even then wearing.

Slowly the truth dawned upon him in all its ghastly realism. The Dutchman was no harmless lunatic, no mere bush-idiot, but rather a dangerous, homicidal maniac.

And he was armed.

"And you know," he was saying with obvious relish, "I can put another bullet through that very same hole."

Elston's eyes quivered. Looking into the mouth of that revolver he realized it was touch and go. The slightest movement, the slightest sign of fear, and he knew he would be joining the company in that grave beneath the baobab tree. Forcing his voice to steadiness, he looked the Dutchman straight in the eye.

"I don't doubt you could," he rasped. "But in the meantime—I'm thirsty!" And pretending not to notice the menace of that leveled revolver, he picked up his tin cup and shoved it right under the Dutchman's nose. "How about another drink?" he asked.

The ruse worked admirably. His attention thus distracted, the Dutchman lowered the gun and with his free hand pushed the bottle toward his guest.

"Help yourself," he offered carelessly, at the same time moving his chair a full three feet further back from the table.

Elston's face was like a mask in its impassiveness. That movement of the Dutchman's chair had defeated his plan to make a sudden lunge for the possession of the gun. Mad as the Dutchman undoubtedly was, he was yet cunning enough to have sensed his danger, and by that move to have put himself beyond the possibility of attack. It was now only too clear just how those others had met their ends, and Elston began to cast around in his mind for some means by which he could escape the same fate. At all costs he must get hold of his rifle. His fingers were itching to feel its stock. With that in his hands he would be in a position to handle the madman. But how to get it? How to get into that inner room without arousing his host's quick suspicions?

"I DON'T like callers," remarked the Dutchman presently, breaking the long silence. "They come here to spy. I've been living here a good many years now, and nobody knows—nobody knows."

Elston actually shivered. It didn't take any particularly incisive intelligence to realize just *why* nobody knew. He found himself speculating as to the probable number of wanderers who had stumbled into that house—and had never left it again except to be buried. And gradually a great loathing of the mad Dutchman began to obsess his mind. He pictured him as a loathsome, hairy spider, waiting in his lonely house to devour any unwary traveler who might, fly-like, have the misfortune to get caught in his web.

Outside the storm was raging with unabated violence. Fierce gusts of wind were shaking the shutters on their badly-fitting hinges, and, surging in through the cracks in the door, tossed the hurricane lamp to and fro on its string. Elston's fingers were aching for the feel of his rifle. Somehow he must get hold of it. How? Frantically he sought around in his mind for some plausible excuse to leave the room, something that sounded reasonable. But it was the sight of the Dutchman's hand once more creeping around to his pocket that finally spurred him to action.

"Well," he said, conscious of a queer hoarseness in his voice, "if you don't mind I think I'll turn in. It's been a long day—and—and—and so I think I'll be turning in."

A long silence followed his words. He would have liked to get up and move toward the door, but the Dutchman's careless handling of that revolver kept him chained to his chair. He wondered what was passing in the man's mind. What he was planning to do. Picking up his tin cup he made pretence of draining it, and then, with a tremendous effort, rose shakily to his feet.

The Dutchman rose, too, and for a second stood regarding him warily.

"Very well," he said at last. "Just as you like." He took down the hurricane lamp from where it hung suspended above his head, and with totally unexpected civility handed it to his guest. "You'd better take this with you," he said. "You might need it, and I can manage without it. Er—good night."

"Good night," stammered Elston, amazed at his easy victory. Taking the lamp

from the Dutchman's hand he walked backward toward the grass door, keeping a wary eye on that revolver. Nothing happened, however, and a moment later he had reached the temporary safety of the inner room.

"Phew!" he breathed, as he snatched up his rifle and ran his hands lovingly over its worn stock. Now he was all right. Thank Heaven he had been able to get hold of that. With a sigh of relief he turned to close the door behind him, for it was in his mind to change back into his own clothes and then boldly walk out of the house. Not for anything in the world would he spend the night there—so much he had long since decided. Bad as was the jungle outside, he still preferred it to the certainty of being murdered in his sleep. And if the Dutchman tried to stop him—well, so much the worse for him! And with that determined thought, he rammed a cartridge into the breech.

The bolt shot home with a useless click, offering not the slightest resistance to his touch. Staggered, he wrenched it back again—only to find himself staring into an empty magazine. For a moment he was absolutely paralyzed. There had been five rounds in there when he had laid it down. Five rounds! Swallowing the panic that threatened to unman him, he poked his finger up the barrel, felt around the bottom of the magazine, frantically searched through all his pockets. And slowly a feeling of utter helplessness began to take possession of his mind. The Dutchman had been one too many for him. By some means or other he had managed to steal those cartridges, and so leave him defenseless. And just as those others had been put out of the way, so would he be put out of the way, unless—

WITH a sudden need to know what was going on in the next room he crept across to the door and, parting a few strands of the grass, peered through. The Dutchman, a huge dark blur in the shadows, was sitting in exactly the same position he had left him, revolver in hand, staring across at the opposite wall. So far, then, he had made no move, and Elston was just about to withdraw when his eye was attracted to several pencil-like rays of light coming, apparently, through the dividing wall. He stared at those rays for a moment, puzzled, then the truth dawned upon him.

The light was from his own lamp, and the Dutchman had drilled the dividing wall so he could see through into the inner room.

With a sharp catch in his throat, Elston backed away. It was suddenly very obvious not only what was in the madman's mind, but also how he intended to carry it out. With frantic haste he caught up the remainder of his clothes and, putting them where he could easily lay hands on them, turned down the light. The lamp creaked loudly, and simultaneously, from the other room, came the sounds of somebody moving.

That lent speed to his already flying fingers. With a feeling akin to nausea he tore off that fateful coat and flung it across the room, and a second later the trousers followed suit. Sweat was pouring down his face as he dragged on his clothes and, with fingers that trembled awkwardly, wound the damp leggins around his bare legs. Was the Dutchman watching him even then, through one or other of those holes? Could he see him sufficiently clearly to shoot? He had spoken of the bad light—Elston realized what he had meant then. Every instant he expected to see the muzzle of the revolver come poking through the wall. Every hole, every cranny, every little crevice seemed to his heated imagination to be the frame of a murderous eye.

At last he was dressed. With no clear plan in his mind he tiptoed back to the door and, opening the grass, peeped through. Blinking his eyes he looked again, looked this way and that, up and down.

The Dutchman was gone.

For a moment he stood staring in utter bewilderment. There were only two rooms in the house, and the Dutchman was in neither. Where, then, was he? A swift glance at the tightly-fitting shutters of his room showed him he had nothing to fear from that direction, and once again he applied his eye to the door. And then he saw. There was one side of

the room which, owing to the thickness of the grass through which he was spying, seemed to be out of his range. It was the side lying along the dividing wall—and no sooner did he realize that than he knew where the madman was hiding. He was standing up close to one of those holes.

Which one?

Elston's nerves were going. Perspiration literally streamed from him as he tried to look in every direction at once. From one of those holes the mad killer was watching him. Every second he expected to hear the roar of that revolver, to feel the sting of the soft, flattened bullet. The thought of the size of that hole in the back of the white drill coat filled him with a horrible nausea. He was waiting there to be shot down, to be shot down like a rat in a trap.

With a tremendous effort he pulled himself together. He still had the empty rifle in his hands, and if only he could get within clubbing range of the madman—before he had time to fire—he might still give a good account of himself. That was the thing to do, he decided. To get at him while he was least expecting an attack.

Very softly he opened the grass door and listened. No sound whatever was coming from the darkened room. Could he have been mistaken about those holes? Was the room empty after all? Gripping the rifle firmly in both hands he took a tentative step forward. Paused—listened—took another step—

The room was empty.

And then he sprang to the door. Gone was all attempt at concealment, gone was all caution, he only knew that beyond that door lay safety. With fingers that fumbled in their eagerness he dragged out the bars. Once he thought he heard a whisper behind him, once he thought he heard a cry, and—as the door came crashing open to let in the full blast of the storm—he thought he heard a wild, demoniacal laugh.

But by that time he was running, running like one possessed.

He couldn't see where he was going, cared nothing for his direction, so long as he put as great a distance as possible between himself and that murderous Dutchman. Once only did he pause, and that was when, blanketed by the murk of mist and rain, he heard the unmistakable crack of a pistol-shot.

"And I wasn't there!" he panted triumphantly. But the storm tore the breath from his lips and sent his yell of defiance hurtling and swirling away into the night.

* * *

"HAS the bwana gone?"

The Dutchman looked up from his writing.

"Oh, it's you, Mattamulla, is it?" he asked. "You heard my shot, then?"

"N'dio, bwana," answered the smiling boy. And looking around the room, "Has the bwana gone?" he asked again.

"Yes," said the Dutchman gravely. "He's gone. But you'd better tell the boys to keep close to their compound tomorrow. He may come back—he was a bit difficult—but I don't think he will."

"Umepiga?"

The Dutchman shook his head.

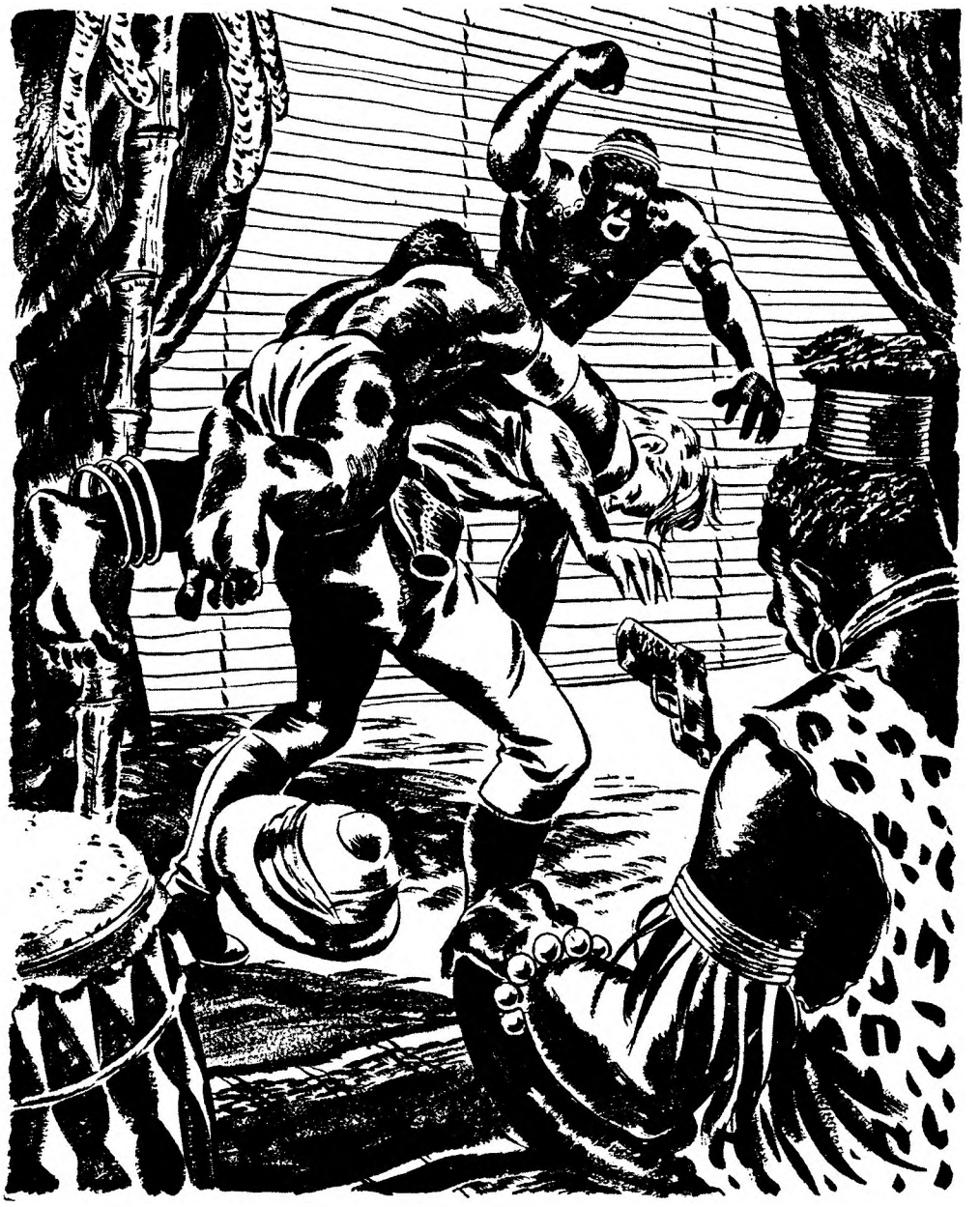
"No, I didn't beat him, Mattamulla. I—as the English put it—led him right up the garden," he explained. "When the corn bins are full, as the old saying goes, it is wise to keep out the rats."

"Even so, bwana," agreed the boy, laying five cartridges on the table. "The bwana was surprised to find his gun empty," he chuckled.

"And Heaven knows you made enough noise in getting through that window," growled the Dutchman. "I heard you very plainly." He turned to his books again, and with a satisfied smile, "Mattamulla," he remarked, "last month we panned a shade over forty-three ounces of the finest gold. It is our record month, so far."

"Good, bwana!" The boy had started to make preparations for a belated meal. "And there's plenty more in the stream."

"If only we can keep the rats away from it," assented the miner. "Oh, and by the way, Mattamulla, while I think of it, you'd better get one of the boys to mend that gate that used to stand by the big baobab tree. I had forgotten that you had taken it away. I very nearly came to grief over that gate. What? Oh, yes—wash the old suit and get it ready for the next one."



"You'll pay for this, Umgaala!" he shrieked. Then something hit him.

Kraal of Blood-Miracles

By CLYDE IRVINE

Few in all Africa knew the way to the Mountain of Plenty, where a white man—and a white girl—might vanish. But Bridges found a way—only to bow to a ritual of death.

ELEPHANT grass waved high between the edge of the jungle and the kraal of the Uganwi. The high stockade gleamed golden yellow. Drifting lazily above the village where Umgaala reigned, veils of blue smoke told the explorers that they had reached their journey's end.

Standing where the jungle growth ended, jaw jutting as his strong teeth clamped upon his pipe, Dale Bridges surveyed the *kraal* with appraising blue-grey eyes, tilting his helmet back to show a tangled mop of blond hair. His hands, strong and capable, rested lightly on the butts of his revolvers. Nearby, the rifle slung over his shoulder, Jola, his gun-boy, stood waiting for the *bwana's* next order.

"The fires of Umgaala seem lighted for the evening meal," the white man muttered, taking the pipe from his mouth to point to the thin tendrils of smoke curling above the spiked stockade.

"It is said, *bwana,* that the Uganwi suffer at times from famine!" Jola said, grinning. "Yet, despite this, master, they grow fat and are arrogant, thinking themselver superior to others!"

"Perhaps they are, too," Dale said. His lips twitched. It was quaint to listen to the natives talking of prestige, of childish honors.

"The Uganwi have a reputation to uphold, *bwana!*"

Dale nodded indifferently.

"They fight well?"

"That, too, master! But they say they are the chosen people and that nothing can exterminate them—as others have lived and died and been forgotten!" The gun-boy grinned again and patted the rifle. "But this gives them the lie. When they are hit they die—just like the rest!"

"Well, I hope we don't have to do that, Jola!" Dale answered. He pulled the peak of his topee over to shade his eyes. "I'm a peaceable man. If I get what I want —and don't have to pay too much for it—there'll be no shooting. But any funny stuff—!"

He left the sentence unfinished, his teeth clamping down again on the pipe. With a wave of his hand he signaled the *safari* onward and fifteen native porters groaned, lifted their fifty-pound packages to their heads and stepped forward on flat feet.

UMGAALA proved to be taciturn.

Sitting with his fat belly between his knees and his leopard-skin robe hanging from his broad and flashy shoulders, he listened without interruption while Dale Bridges explained why he had come to visit the *kraal* of the Uganwi. His small, shrewd eyes were still while the white man talked. The broad, thick lips did not move. Only the wide play of his nostrils showed that his face was alive and that he was absorbing every word the white man said.

"So," he said at the end of the recital, "you seek a new kind of animal here? This animal is not known to us and we, the Uganwi, are the greatest hunters in Africa!"

"That is known to all the world," said Dale, using the most extravagant words he could think of at the moment. "It is said that this animal is something like a lion but is not a lion. It has a coat like a leopard and is not a leopard. Yet it fascinates those who have sent me to look for it and I would wish to have the aid of your great hunters!"

Umgaala's little eyes snapped angrily.

"Enough of this!" he growled, bending forward, his great fingers clutched around the haft of his ceremonial *assegai.* "The white man knows there is no such animal here—and there never was such an animal unless in the brain of the man who speaks with two tongues!"

"You mean—?"

"Umgaala is not a fool!" retorted the angry chieftain. "I know why you are here. You seek—as all the others have vainly sought—to find out if there is a mountain here in which much treasure lies. Treasure of yellow metal and bright stones that white men kill to obtain? Is this not a truth?"

Dale shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

Infuriated by his silence, Umgaala began to roar and stamped his feet upon the ivory steps of his throne so that the whole structure shook. For a moment his knuckles showed almost white as he gripped the *assegai* and half-raised its broad blade toward the white man's chest. Then he laughed grimly.

"Once before," he grunted, "a man came here to cheat and rob the Uganwi. He was shown much hospitality and he gave many gifts just as you have done!" He gestured to the piles of cotton goods, copper wire and shining trinkets that Dale's porters had placed at his feet and kicked them savagely.

"Would you like to meet him, *bwana?*" he asked mockingly. His eyes were red with suppressed rage, his thick lips twitched.

Dale stared. There was something about this savage chief that he didn't like, some inner force of cruelty which had no doubt been fostered by his dealings with ruthless whites.

"*You have him here?*" he asked. Automatically his hands dropped to his guns. And in that instant two huge bodyguards leapt upon him and dragged the weapons from their holsters. In the twinkling of an eye he was as helpless as a babe.

"I have him!" Umgaala acknowledged, grinning evilly. "And now I have you, too! You will see what happens to those of your race who seek to make fools of Umgaala and the Uganwi!"

Again an almost imperceptible signal and two more of the huge guards detached themselves from the throne and marched stiffly away. Umgaala smiled thinly.

"I will return your weapons, *bwana!*" he remarked caustically. "In my own good time. It was necessary to take them from you—to prevent you from losing your temper!"

Dale glared at him helplessly. The guards had not bound him. But, without his weapons, he might as well have had his arms cut off.

"This is indeed a strange way to return my gifts, Umgaala!"

"Your gifts?" Umgaala's brow clouded with anger. "Here—take your gifts! They are worthless to the Uganwi!" and he kicked the trade goods so hard that they scattered around Dale's feet.

Dale's fists knotted. His shoulders tensed. For one brief instant he contemplated hurling his 185 pounds of solid bone and muscle upon the insolent Umgaala. A double row of gleaming *assegais* rose like a shining wave before his eyes. His fists relaxed. But he was breathing heavily as the two guards came back.

"Look!" Umgaala sneered. "Look at your compatriot, *bwana!*"

Dale looked. A cry of mingled horror and revulsion retched from his parched throat and recoiled from the sight of the man who tottered weakly between the giant natives.

TWO empty sockets where his eyes had been turned horridly to the setting sun. A body, once tall and lean and powerful, now bent in pain as his twisted legs scrabbled over the earth. Dale saw, with horror, that the wreckage that stumbled toward him had once been a white man. Bridges bit down upon his lip until the blood came, sent his helpless fists knotting and clutching in desperate anger. Then, with an oath, he swung upon Umgaala.

Umgaala laughed softly, the *assegai* of his chieftain's rank held with its broad blade flat toward the raging man.

"It will do no good!" he insisted. "He was like you, *bwana*—once upon a time! Harrison, he called himself. Tony Harrison! Did you know him, *bwana?*"

"My Heavens!" said Dale, recoiling. The native's insensate brutality appalled him. "You—you mean—that—that *this* is Tony — Tony Harrison? But—but — !" He stopped, staring at the laughing giant whose belly heaved in wicked mirth. "Heavens!" he shouted at the ginning face. "You'll pay for his, Umgaala! One of these days—you and the Uganwi—you'll all pay for it," he shrieked wildly.

And then something hit him. For an instant he had a vision of a whirling picture in which the blinded face of Tony Harrison, the grinning mask of Umgaala and the immovable black faces of the bodyguard swirled before him. Then it all went dark.

When he opened his eyes again he thought he was still seeing visions. Framed in a halo of blonde hair through which the lights of the *kraal* fires glinted redly, a woman's face of extraordinary beauty gazed down upon him with eyes that were large and darkly blue. A short nose ended above full lips in a wide, friendly mouth. Her chin was softly rounded and even the tattered remnants of a once-modish blouse and tropical shorts could not conceal the symmetrical loveliness of her tall, slim figure.

Unable to speak he stared at her and saw her flush beneath the intensity of his eyes. She stroked his head and held a gourd to his lips. Mechanically he drank of some sweetish liquid.

"Better?" she said, smiling.

He nodded, tried to rise but fell back with a groan.

"One of the guards hit you with a knobkerrie!" she informed him. "Umgaala thought you were going to hit him. Were you?"

"I was!" he admitted ruefully. "If I'd had my guns I'd have killed him—right then and there!"

He shuddered at the memory of the man he had seen.

"The swine!" he said bitterly. "To think of a native treating a white man like that. The—the—!"

"That was my—my brother!" she told him, helping him to raise himself. "Umgaala is like most natives. He doesn't—er—like white women. But he—he was different about me. To rile Tony, I expect?"

Dale asked hesitantly,

"Did he—did he do anything to you?"

"No! But Tony thought he had. He hit Umgaala. And you saw what Umgaala did to him?" She looked out of the door of the hut. "He keeps him tied up like a beast in a cage over there. Just like a wild animal!"

Dale shuddered again.

"I expect," she said, without looking at him, "I expect you came for the same purpose as ourselves. You heard about the Mountain Of Plenty?"

"Yes!" Dale acknowledged. "I helped a native down in Rhodesia who was having trouble with the Commissioner. Out of gratitude he told me of this place. Warned me not to let Umgaala know my real purpose but to say I sought a strange animal. Is there such an animal as the native described?"

He told her briefly of the lion-leopard.

"I don't know," she told him calmly. "There may be. There are some funny things up here. I wouldn't know—because they won't let me out. They don't—chain me—as they do poor Tony. But I'm a prisoner just the same—just like yourself!"

"How did I get here?"

"They brought you over and threw you outside here," she told him, and sat down on the rush-covered pallet at the side of the hut.

"Why?" he wanted to know.

"I suppose it was Umgaala's idea of a joke?" she said.

She cupped her face in long, fine hands and stared at him.

"I have some skill as a nurse, you see!" she said softly. "When anyone gets hurt here they bring them to me. I had a course at Johns Hopkins. Graduated as a nurse."

He nodded, remembering the whole story now.

TONY HARRISON and his sister Thaila had come to Africa, scenting adventure, two years ago. Handsome and well-to-do, the young Americans had been instant favorites among the club set of Nairobi. However, after one or two spoon-fed *safaris,* the newcomers had suddenly decided to strike out on their own. They told no one of their destination but the well-equipped expedition seemed to be able to look after itself. Both Harrison and his sister were crack rifle shots. No one worried about them, and, after a while, they were almost forgotten.

Now and then someone, over a sundowner, would remark lazily: "Wonder whatever became of that chap from the States? What's his name? Harrison? Yes, by jove, that's it—Harrison! Deuced good-looking girl his sister was, eh? Seem to have dropped out of sight, what?"

But no one had ever imagined that Tony Harrison, young and handsome, rich and carefree, had been tortured to the point where death would have been a happy release—and that Umgaala, knowing this, did not kill him outright but suffered him to live broken in body and mind, a pitiful thing for the eyes of men.

"Then," said Dale slowly, "Umgaala knows of the Mountain of Plenty?"

She nodded.

"But money and jewels are of no use to them!" she said, twisting her long fingers nervously. "The Uganwi are very proud—as you might have noticed?"

He grinned. Life was flowing back to him. He liked this tall and lovely girl who sat before him, her tanned legs slim and strong beneath the tropic shorts, her small feet encased in calf-length close-knit stockings, the worn shoes looking scuffed and broken.

"Umgaala was enraged when he found out that we had discovered the mountain's secrets," she went on. "We hit a pocket

of gold, nuggets bigger than your two fists put together. Nearby there were oodles of diamonds. I don't mean just little stones but big ones. You never saw so much wealth lying around loose in your life. And it was all ours—if we could manage to get Umgaala to co-operate!"

"And he wouldn't?" ventured Dale, his eyes fixed on her unabashedly, frankly admiring her.

"Not only that," she said bitterly. "He reviled us both—as I suppose he reviled you, too?" And when Dale nodded she continued. "He talked about food and famine, gold and poverty. It seems these people undergo periodic starvation when the crops fail or clouds of locusts come and eat every green blade for miles around!"

Dale knitted his brows, trying to appraise the situation.

"But what had that to do with—with what he did to Tony?"

"It all stemmed out of that first discovery!" she said. "Umgaala's witch-doctor—you haven't met him but you will, soon—Umgaala's witch-doctor said that Tony's action would have bad results, a famine would come because he had dared to delve into the mountain, and many of the Uganwi would die. And, strange to relate, it *did* happen! Umgaala almost went mad. He sent for Tony—and me!"

Dale waited silently.

"I don't know what Tony imagined Umgaala was going to do to me," Thaila Harrison continued. "But after Umgaala had accused us both of destroying the mountain *juju,* he grabbed me and pulled me toward the throne!"

"And Tony went into action?" opined Dale.

Her eyes flashed.

"Yes, he did! But it was a useless attempt and—as you saw—it ended terribly for poor Tony. I wish—I—wish" her voice trembled and tears rose to her eyes, "I wish they had killed him then! It would have been more merciful!"

"I can see now why Umgaala hates any white man who comes around looking for an easy way to get the treasure out of the Mountain of Plenty!" Dale muttered. "And at that I'm lucky only to get bopped over the bean with a knobkerrie. It might as well have been an *assegai!*"

THE next day Dale had the mortification of seeing his entire stock of trade goods distributed to the natives, his revolvers and guns confiscated and his porters reduced to slaves of the tribe Uganwi.

The long days passed in maddening boredom and ever before his eyes, leaving him raging with helpless anger, was the pathetic sight of the blinded Tony Harrison, chained like a wild animal, living in a cage while his tall and lovely sister Thaila worked with the native women in the fields.

There seemed no hope for the small party of white folks held under the terror of Umgaala's power. The huge-muscled guards never allowed them to forget that they were prisoners. And, in time, even Jola's irrepressible spirits began to sink.

"Many moons pass before Jola ever sees his own *kraal* again!" the dispirited gun-boy said one evening. His eyes were hopeless.

"Chins up, Jola!" Dale answered, though he was far from feeling confident about the matter. Well he knew that no opportunity would ever be given them to tell the authorities about the terrible happenings in the land of the Uganwi. And by the time Umgaala's revenge was over there would be no one left who would care. Even he had almost forgotten about the Harrisons until that moment when the wreck of a one-time handsome, strong and vigilant man had tottered toward him between the burly guards.

Time passed and the victims of Umgaala's power grew listless.

They met the witch-doctor of whom Thaila had spoken. N'gota was a small, wizened man whose wicked eyes peered out from deep sockets and whose mouth was like a rat-trap. His medicine-bag flopped between his thighs, rattling and tinkling with an assortment of strange and outlandish charms, amulets and relics of beasts, birds, fish and human beings. Human ears formed a grisly necklace on his withered, stringy throat. Bones and dried seed pods rattled on his wrists, ankles and knee-thongs.

Obviously, Umgaala did not intend to leave Dale Bridges alive too long. At least not in the way he was alive now, all in one piece and with two good eyes and two strong hands. This was made

plain to him by Thaila one night as the witch-doctor danced before the tribal fire in a weird and terrible manner.

"That's what he did before they—before they brought Tony out and—and—did all that to him!" she whispered as they sat on the outskirts of the crowd whose swaying bodies and chanting voices made the scene strangely compelling.

"Just tribal stuff!" he tried to assure her. But his eyes did not leave the whirling figure of the witch-doctor on whose head a mask of frightening ugliness was poised precariously. The little man's body, bedaubed and horrible in its weird dress, long feathers dipped in blood trailing from his waist, pranced and gibbered around the fire while the slow, methodically maddening beat of tom-toms began to increase in tempo.

"Just how much food have you had in the last ten days?" she asked him suddenly. Her face was caught in the light of the fires and he saw the terror behind her eyes. "Just how much?" she repeated, "I'm half-starved!"

"And so are they!" she answered. "They're growing angry as the crops seem to dry up every day and the beasts which they hunt stay far from their drinking-places. Watch out for yourself, Dale! They'll blame you for it—just as they blamed poor Tony for the locusts!" He could see her, silently beseeching him with her eyes to take notice of the witch-doctor, N'gota.

Dale had never felt so helpless in his life. He had to hold on to himself while he adopted an air of blasé detachment as N'gota wheeled and circled, growing ever nearer to them, his wicked eyes blazing through the slits in his horrible mask. His blood crept with a sense of foreboding as N'gota finally spun to a stop beside him and pointed his witch-doctor's staff at his heart.

"LISTEN, O people!" chanted the medicine-man while the tom-toms throbbed to an undercurrent of ominous sound. "This white man has brought the Uganwi to the point of famine!"

"Ai! Ai! Ai!" they wailed, a chorus of despair and terror.

"He has come over the hills and through the jungles with the thought to commit theft upon the Uganwi," howled N'gota, working himself to a frenzy. His horrid mask leered evilly into Dale's impassive face.

"And now—!" the witch-doctor's voice rose to a shriek, "now the waters dry up, the fields burn, the mealie patches are ashes in our mouths, the beasts flee from the lands of Umgaala and mothers see their children die at their breasts because they have no food!"

"A-a-a-a-a-a-i-i-i-i-i-i-i!"

The tribe shrilled the mournful moaning like a keen wind howling through the trees. The air quivered with the sense of their terror.

"My *juju* says that the white man must die—not only he but all those who have brought pain and hunger to the Uganwi!" shouted the horrible little man, stamping like a marionette while the drums thudded their unending rhythmic summons. A yell of execration rose from the people as he whipped them to a frenzy equal to his own.

"Die!" they shrieked, stamping and hammering *assegais* on shields of rhino hide with a thundering echo to the tom-toms. "Die! Kill them! Kill them, O N'gota, and bring back the harvests, the water and the meat! We starve, N'gota! We die like flies!"

"So be it!" howled the little man, whirling like a top to stretch his wand across to the spot where Tony Harrison was caged and bound. "Bring that one first! And after him—if the gods are not kind enough to be satisfied—the others must die, too!"

Dale paled as the full import of the thing hit him. He caught Thaila as she swayed toward him, gripping her slim body with a hoop of steel to prevent her from fainting. Her face was drained of blood as a group of guards hastened to Tony's cage.

They brought Tony out, holding him up as his weakened legs bent beneath him. His sightless sockets turned upward, seeking the light he'd never see again. His poor tortured body sagged between the massive torsos of the coal-black men who carried him along as if he had been a child. Their faces were expressionless, as if carved from ebony, while all around them a ululating wail rose above the stock-

ade and N'gota pranced and whirled in an ecstasy of fanatical glee.

The drums thumped. A line of half-naked girls, their small pointed breasts thrust forward above their scanty loincloths, swayed in a frenzied dance, contorting themselves in snakily rhythmic convulsions, clapping their palms together to the rumbling beat of the tom-toms. Over the scene of sacrifice the firelight glimmered, touching them all with its red flame, lighting up the glare of religious madness in their staring eyes. And Tony, lurching weakly between the guards, stumbled to his death.

It took a long time.

Before the blood-lust of Umgaala and N'gota was sated to the full Tony Harrison died a hundred deaths. His screams rose above the far-off clattering cough of leopard and drowned the roar of the king of the jungle. Birds and monkeys, shattered from their night-time quiet, shrieked and howled in sympathy and through it all, through all the long hour that lapsed before Tony Harrison died, the ceaseless thud of the drums, the wailing, howling of the savages and the leaping flames of the firelight combined to create a scene of horror and terror.

Thaila crouched beside Dale, her whole body quivering as the executioners subjected Tony to their unspeakable tortures. She winced as if every blow was searing her own soft flesh. When his screams rent the air she moaned until, mercifully, Nature covered her senses with a cloak of darkness and she fainted.

When she opened her eyes again her brother was dead.

"Unless," said Umgaala the following day, "unless the white man can do something with his magic—" and he laughed flatly "—he and the woman will be sacrificed next. The gods must be appeased. The Uganwi will not die for the sake of two such as you. And there will be no more food for you—until the gods show their favor!"

Dale had been shaken to the core by Tony's terrible end. In ten years of the African jungle, of seeing many strange and terrible events, he had never witnessed such concentrated brutality and wickedness as Umgaala's people and the fanatic ferocity of N'gota had contrived to use upon the helpless, blinded body of Thaila's brother.

But, too well, he realized that they were worse than helpless. The girl was prostrated, refusing the little food he had been able to get for her from Jola. And now, the ultimatum! Either a miracle must happen or death, in its most frightful form, awaited both of them.

IT was with no thought of being able to fight the fate that threatened to overtake them that Dale sat with Thaila that day, talking over the problem which confronted them. On her neck she wore a tiny mirror, a gift from her brother and one that was the twin of hundreds brought by Dale to the tribe of Uganwi. Unconsciously Dale reached out for it and held it in his hand, staring at himself in its surface, unable to realize that the gaunt, unshaven face he saw in its depths was his own. Pain and horror had sunk his eyes deep in his thin, lean face. His blond hair had grown matted and long, and hung on his shoulders. Lines that hadn't been there when he set out with his *safari* were etched deeply around his grim mouth and tight jaws.

"Not very handsome!" he suggested, trying to take her mind away from the happenings of the night before. "I'd win no beauty prize!"

Thaila smiled. It hurt him to see the effort she made to be brave.

He toyed with the mirror, catching the sun's rays on it and flashing them across the *kraal*. A thin shadow loomed beside him and he looked up into the sardonic face of N'gota, the witch-doctor.

"The white man," N'gota suggested with a sneer, "is perhaps trying to perform some great *juju* of his tribe?"

"Yeah!" Dale said calmly. He ached to rise and fell the brutal medicine man with a blow from his fist, but Thaila's eyes spoke, cautioning him. With an effort he grinned mirthlessly. "Just signalling the gods to send some manna!"

Umgaala joined his witch-doctor in time to hear the last words.

"Manna?" he asked. "What is that? Food?"

"Yes!" Dale answered, still flashing the mirror's rays toward the distant hills. "Manna is food—food from the gods!"

His jaw stiffened as an answering flash came from the peak of a miles-distant hill. Between it and the *kraal* there lay jungle that he knew from experience would take almost a day to cut through. His heart leapt at the idea. Perhaps, over there, someone had seen his signal? But almost immediately he gave it up again for no further flash answered his attempts.

"What does the *bwana* mean?" demanded Umgaala threateningly, his *assegai* ready. "Does the white man mean that food comes from the sky?"

"It did—*once!*" Dale said. He looked up, straight into Umgaala's muddy little eyes. "Once, a long time ago, north of here, a tribe believed in a God—as the Uganwi believe in their god—and a great famine struck them as it has visited the people of Umgaala!"

"And what did the tribe do?" asked N'gota patronizingly. "Did they sacrifice to this God—" he looked sideways at the drawn face of Thaila "—just as we did?"

"Yes, they made sacrifice!" Dale acknowledged. He flashed the mirror again and almost jumped as another flash caught his eye from the distant hill. "They sent a message to their god to feed them!"

"And did he?" Umgaala's voice was low but his eyes glittered.

"He did!" Dale said. He remembered that the signal for help was three dots, three dashes and three dots again and began to flash it as he spoke. "A great sacrifice was made—just as you sacrificed—and then one day the people woke up to find the ground covered with a substance that their witch-doctor said was manna. A great cloud of quail also came to them. The people ate the manna and the quail and were saved from death!"

N'gota sneered.

"And that is your God?" he asked.

Dale nodded.

"I don't work at it often," he said. "But now and again I remember about certain things I heard when I was a child. This is a good time to think of them!"

"It would be a good time, too, to ask this God of yours to send some manna to us!" Umgaala grunted angrily. "So far N'gota's *juju* has not brought food to the Uganwi. How can we eat monkeys and birds which may be our fathers' spirits. There are no fish in the rivers. The deer have gone. And no one can capture the lion or the leopard for they roam far from here. Perhaps your god will answer your signal?"

"Perhaps he will," Dale said. His eye had caught a series of flashes from the far-away hill and something leapt within him as he once more sent the three dots and three dashes of the "S O S" across the valley. He knew no more of the code but prayed silently that he had not been mistaken.

"If he does," N'gota said, his little face twisted into a sneer of contempt," it will prove that the white man's God is greater than the *juju* of N'gota!"

"And they can go free," Umgaala said generously, "if food drops from the sky as he says!" And he laughed in a way that was not good to hear. His muddy eyes were mocking as he turned away.

WHEN Umgaala and N'gota were out of earshot, Dale told the excited Thaila what had happened.

"It may be my imagination," he said, not wishing to raise false hopes, "but there is just a chance that an *askari* patrol may have picked up our signals. Just a chance. This is the time of year when the resident military officers are relieved on post. There is a British military station about forty miles from here on the other side of those hills. Pray God that it is so and we may get out of this. If not—!"

"If not," she repeated, "we will never get out! Oh, I know—" she said, gripping his fingers "—I know what they'll do to us, Dale, if nothing happens. And what *can* happen? Only a miracle—and they don't happen nowadays!"

"They never did!" he smiled, tilting her chin up. "All those things have a plausible explanation. But they make very good stories and both those babies—" he nodded in the direction of the chief and his witch-doctor "—both of those babies believed it. They'd believe anything!"

"Anything they see!" she corrected him. "Like everything else in life, results count! But so far I don't see any loaves and fishes, or whatever miracle it is that you expect, happening! Do you?"

"No!" he said glumly, "I don't! There isn't a cloud in the sky—far less a six-course meal such as Umgaala seems to

think I can conjure up from this bit of silvered glass!"

"But a cloud is coming!" she said, pointing upward.

Far away a twisting funnel-shaped cloud swayed across the heavens. The air had grown still. Even the chattering apes and birds had ceased to screech and shriek. Everything seemed held in suspension. The sky grew livid while the queerly-shaped cloud raced onward. Almost unbearable heat pressed down upon them. And then the funneling cloud swept over the hills and burst like thunder above their heads.

The natives screamed as the cloudburst broke above the *kraal* and the water drummed like bullets upon the conical roofs of their huts. In an instant the whole floor of the *kraal* was a sea of yellow mud and Dale and Thaila, drenched to the skin, streaked for the nearest shelter.

Running along with her hand gripped in his own, Dale felt something hard slap his face and he stopped, staring incredulously at what had hit him. On the wet muddy ground before him a fish—a real fish—flopped desperately and then lay still.

"Good Lord, Thaila!" he yelled, "it's here! The miracle! Look—look—for heaven's sake, look! Fish—oodles of them—falling from the sky!"

He picked up the fish as hundreds of others fell around him and held it out to her. It was indubitably a fish, its gleaming scales all muddied but its flesh firm and edible.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he howled, half hysterically. "Fish from heaven for the Uganwi! Now I wonder what the hell N'gota and Umgaala will say about this?"

"But—but—!" Thaila's eyes opened in wonder. "But what is it, Dale? How on earth can such a thing happen? It seems like magic?"

"No magic at all!" laughed Dale, forgetful of his rain-soaked body. "It's as simple as falling off a roof. It's a waterspout. Ever hear of one?" She shook her head and picked up a fish to stare at it as if it would take wings and fly away. "Very simple thing really. The waterspout occurs at sea where the air currents set up by atmospheric conditions draw the water from the sea up to meet the water that is in the clouds. The whole thing swirls along like that, drawing fish and things up with it. This one has swept overland, that's all. It met certain air conditions over the hills there and burst overhead, spilling these fish which it had carried from the sea, right in Umgaala's lap!"

"Thank God!" she said and meant it. The cloudburst, ending as quickly as it had begun, left the ground in the *kraal* covered with fish.

A scene that almost beggared description followed.

The Uganwi seemed to go mad. Even Umgaala danced like a dervish as he and his tribesmen grabbed up handfuls of fish, eels and squids and began to eat them raw. N'gota, faced by something that not even his *juju* could explain, stood glumly by while the men and women gorged themselves. The much-needed rainwater had been caught in barrels always ready for such purposes and very soon a tribal feast was in progress. The savages realized that fish would not keep and so they simply ate and ate until they could eat no more.

Even Dale and Thaila joined the feast, but preferred the cooked fish that Jola made for them. While they were eating, Umgaala strode toward them, ramming huge fistfuls of fish down his gaping throat. Dale nudged Thaila. She met his eyes, smiling.

"NOW it comes!" he whispered behind a slice of cod. "I've got to let him think I expected this to happen. Wonder if the rat will keep his word?"

Umgaala stopped and grinned at them, his black face oily with fish.

"Your god must have seen your signals?" he said, wiping flakes of sole from his thick lips and licking his fingers greedily. "Never have the Uganwi had such a witch-doctor in their midst, *bwana!*"

"Umgaala is a man of his word or he is no man!" Dale said calmly.

"That is so!" Umgaala said. But his small eyes glittered. "Umgaala has given his word that the *bwana* and his woman can go free—if food fell from the sky! Undoubtedly food such as this fell from the sky. Therefore Umgaala must keep his word. But—" and his voice fell to a wheedling tone "—would it not be better for the magic-working *bwana* to remain in the *kraal* of the Uganwi and take what-

ever of the yellow metal and the shining stones he needs from the Mountain of Plenty?"

"You mean—you won't let us go?" demanded Dale, clenching his fists angrily. "Umgaala talks with two tongues!"

"Umgaala is saying," the wily native replied, "that it would be better for a great medicine-man like the *bwana* to stay with us. For there are many times when the Uganwi face famine and want. Yet, the *bwana* came to seek the metal that gleams like the sun and the stones that glitter with many colors. Is this not so?"

"Never mind all that now!" Dale retorted. Too well he realized that in Umgaala's eyes men who could work miracles such as this were too valuable to let go. Dale saw N'gota's dark face, clouded with anger and apprehension, staring at him from the shadows.

"Listen!" he said desperately. "I could teach N'gota this *juju!* I will tell him my secrets. And he can bring a cloud of fish to the Uganwi when famine comes. But let us go free, Umgaala! You have given your word!"

Umgaala sighed.

"I am sorry for N'gota," he said piously. "He is going to die very soon!"

"But—!"

The words froze on Dale's lips as N'gota's body suddenly stiffened.

From between the discredited witch-doctor's ribs a blood-smeared *assegai* blade emerged and was withdrawn like the flicking tongue of a serpent. The wizened little man's mouth flew open. His eyes seemed wide in wonderment. Then he toppled forward and threshed wildly before he died. The guard who had killed him wiped his blade upon the dead man's loin cloth and walked calmly away.

"You see," Umgaala said earnestly, his own *assegai* poised now in his fishy hands. "There is no witch-doctor but you, *bwana!* You must stay, for once a witch-doctor is taken into a tribe he stays until—until death releases him!"

Dale turned to look at Thaila. She sobbed and clung to him.

Umgaala, insisting that Dale should wear the dead witch-doctor's horrific garb, gave them N'gota's hut. Dale called Jola to attend him in his new role and although the boy was terrified at first he entered quickly into Thaila's suggestion that they search the hut with the greatest care.

"What's the idea?" Dale wanted to know.

"Something N'gota used to do always mystified me!" she said. "He'd walk into this hut—and then appear again, outside the stockade. The natives thought it was magic. But I figured there was some kind of trap-door or tunnel, some way he had of getting out of here to impress the natives!"

"You may be right, at that!" Dale conceded, but he was not very hopeful. "Of course, it stands to reason that N'gota would have some back-door for his stunts—but a trap-door? I'll believe it when I see it!" And as the search seemed unsuccessful his hopes went lower.

The hut was filled with queerly-shaped instruments, animal pelts and grotesquely-carved wooden idols, some as big as a man. Leaning up against one of these, the tired Jola gave a muffled cry.

"Bwana!" he stammered, pointing, "the thing like a man moves!"

The idol had swung on a carefully-contrived base to reveal a small entrance, cut through the back of the hut which was built right into the stockade, offering a quick, easy passage to freedom.

"Here it is!" Dale exulted. "Arm yourselves with those *assegais*—here, Thaila, take this bow and these arrows—careful, now, they're poisoned! Ready?" he had a heavy machete gripped tightly in his own hand. "As soon as darkness falls—we'll make a break for it!"

NIGHT falls swiftly in Africa. The small party, moving like shadows, made their sortie soon after darkness, finding a path that led away from the *kraal* into the jungle.

But, though most of the Uganwi were sleeping off the effects of their bestial gluttony, Umgaala's own guard was still alert. It was a keen-eyed lookout, seeing grass moving slightly when there was no wind, who sent a slim *assegai* hurtling toward them.

Dale, leading the advance, heard a strangled cry, turned to see Jola leaping up, only to fall headlong in the grass.

"Get under cover!" he growled to Thaila. "They'll be after us!"

She helped him drag the wounded boy into the thick underbrush as Dale, crouching, awaited their pursuers. Stalking their prey like animals, the sentries moved silently, blending with the darkness.

Almost before he had time to prepare for the sudden onslaught they were upon him. Dale's machete flashed in a swirling arc, cutting through the stabbing spear of the leading black. His backward swipe almost cleft the man's head from his body. Behind him a bow-string twanged. He turned, seeing the dilated eyes of another warrior, transfixed through the throat by a poisoned arrow.

"Look out, darling!"

He whirled as Thaila's warning reached him. The remaining guard, stabbing spear shortened for the death-blow, threw himself forward. Dale had only time to parry the blow in the split second before he felt himself falling backward. His foot had caught in a root. Desperately, blindly, he stabbed upward. The heavy machete sank into something soft hurtling over him. Warm, sticky blood flowed over his hand as the dying native slumped upon him.

They waited for a while but no other guards came to see what had happened to their comrades. Thaila had bound Jola's wound as best she could. They decided to push on while it was still dark.

With the wounded boy between them, they staggered on down the main trail. In the morning they came upon a camp.

Thaila's eyes, as she turned to Dale, held tears of relief.

Lieutenant Colin MacGregor, in charge of the small troop of *askaris* listened to their story. He said:

"I remember you now, of course," looking at Thaila. "You, too, Bridges. I've seen you both at Nairobi. I say, wasn't it lucky I spotted your SOS? Couldn't for the life of me think what the game was but—well, it looks as if we'll have to teach Umgaala a lesson—a final lesson!"

Dawn was breaking when Dale, with MacGregor at the head of the soldiers, reached Umgaala's *kraal* again. Thaila, attending to Jola's wound, had been left with two men to guard her.

Though armed with Dale's rifle and revolvers, together with others they had acquired the same way, Umgaala's warriors proved no match for the sustained firepower of the troopers. Finally, with fixed bayonets, the *askaris* attacked, carrying the stockade, rushing the gate.

Dale burst into the *kraal*, shot a huge black barring his way, and ran into Umgaala's hut. It was empty. Grabbing a native by the throat, Dale shook him until his teeth rattled.

"Where is he? Speak! Where is the brave Umgaala when his warriors die!"

The unfortunate man's head jerked nervously toward the women's quarters. Dale turned to MacGregor.

"Gun's empty!" he said lightly. "Can you spare some more ammunition?"

"Of course!" MacGregor handed it over, grinning. "Goin' to do some huntin'?"

"Snake!" Dale rejoined grimly. "Black snake named Umgaala!"

"Good show!" MacGregor agreed. "Nasty brutes, eh? Specially that specimen. You'll do the Government a favor if you kill it!"

"Aim to!" Dale said. "I've got personal—and family reasons, too!" His tall figure strode toward Umgaala's hiding place.

WHITE MAN'S CODE

By WYNDHAM MARTYN

Harvesting snake venom was no easy job. But on top of that, Bill Wilson had to nurse a lost sheep of a black hue. And his jungle ward was a magnet for half the trouble in Africa.

A Novelet of Renegade Intrigue

THE great red ants were marching. All the jungle knew it and fled from the voracious army. Marching with their soldier-guides on each flank, no human obstacle had power to deflect their course. The rats that are everywhere a curse knew well that they must forsake their dwellings. Fierce fighters as they were, they knew that this horde would destroy them utterly if they remained.

The snakes took their writhing way from the path of destruction. The great beetles, almost three inches long, that boomed at night like bullets against the white men's lamps, went scurrying to safety. The great hordes of crickets, that were destroyers themselves, when passing like pestilences over the crops the natives had sowed, moved aside from the inflexible path of the red ants on the march.

Wilson, the American collector, was warned by his native boys and began to break camp. He had been hoping to rest for a week in this native hut and catch up on his field notes, but his boys said the hut was directly in the danger zone. Wilson was interested only in snakes. Insects which made life in dark Africa almost unbearable only annoyed him. He had suffered from the great termite swarms when they took the road, but he hated the red ants more. Every bite became a pustulent welt. When they had passed by, he could probably reoccupy the hut.

In the native hut, he knew, there were snakes and rats and innumerable insects, from the huge moths that looked like birds to the tiny ones the size of gnats. Woe to the rat or snake that did not leave in time.

Wilson put his specimens in the zinc boxes and was glad he traveled light. It was easy enough to get out of the way of the marching myriads. No more difficult than getting to the bank of a river and watching the water rush by. But it was death not to move. He was making for a cleared spot, an hour later, under some trees when a native ran toward him. *"Bwana,"* he gasped, "there is a white man in a hut, and he will be torn to pieces! He is a white man and sick of fever. I dare not go near him! I am afraid."

Unhestitatingly, Bill Wilson ran toward the hut indicated. Fleeing animals darted aside as he raced toward the red stream of destruction. What was a white man doing here? He knew of no expeditions working in the locality; and who but a collector, or orchid hunter or scientist would venture into the deep jungle? A white man, lying sick of fever, in a hut that was doomed, hadn't much chance of survival unles the rescuer got there first. And running in a jungle was no easy task. Lush roots strong as wire impede his progress, and sweat poured from him. As he entered the low door, the red ant army was making its attack on the frail rear wall.

The native boy was right. There was a white man, English or American by the look of him, and he lay on a low cot, muttering in delirium and making ceaseless movements with his wasted hands.

Bill's rifle roared. Then the tide of savages rolled over them.

Bill Wilson was tall, this man was taller; but he didn't weigh as much. Bill draped him over his broad shoulders, his right arm against the back of the man's knees, and went back to his waiting men.

IT wouldn't be right to accuse them of cowardice. They were brave enough, as he knew, and loyal. But to their way of thinking a delirious man was possessed of a demon, and they believed that such

an evil spirit might leave the sick man and enter into them. If it did that, they would be eternally in great torture and mending darkness. Over native Africa lies the pall of superstition and the belief in malignant beings lying in wait for the souls of the living. They believed that the air was thronged with invisible beings trying to influence the action of the living. The evil spirits seeking to make them commit criminal acts; the good spirits trying to keep them from such actions.

These men who served Wilson had known about this white man long before they had informed their employer. The drums had told them. The monotonous two tones that meant nothing to the superior white man served as jungle telegraph to natives in this flat land of dense brush and trees. So the news came in by drum-beat. Villages had their code names. So had the chiefs and medicine men.

Wilson's number one boy had a long native name but was prouder of the one Wilson had given him. The name was Snoopy, and it was well deserved, for he stuck his flat nose into everything. Snoopy believed the name was highly complimentary. It was Snoopy who found a white man suffering from fever, lying in the hut among the mangoes.

This hut in the days of slave trade had been one of many such camps, set about twelve miles apart, where the heavily manacled slaves could spend their wretched nights. Twelve miles a day was all they could march. Many could not make even that. They were cut free from their living companions, when they died, and thrown into the jungle. Following these slave caravans were wild beasts certain of ample food.

Why hadn't Snoopy told his *Bwana?* It was because the hut where the white man lay was known to be haunted by the malignant ghosts of the Arab slavers who, many years before, had been massacred by revengeful slaves. Snoopy knew that the Arab ghosts took vengeance on all black men. Thus it was that the hut was avoided.

It was only when the unknown white man was threatened by certain death in the march of the great ants that Snoopy spoke. He believed that his employer would find out in some mysterious way and would punish him if he did not tell. The white men in dark Africa were not many. But they always helped one another and their anger was to be feared.

Snoopy looked down at the unconscious stranger. He thought the man would probably die. Wilson was wondering how it was he had managed to get to the shelter of the haunted hut. He asked Snoopy.

"He was brought there by a great blue bird," Snoopy said.

Bill Wilson said nothing. Natives had their own unexplicable ways of stating facts. Snoopy might just as well have said he had been brought by a great, black snake. That would have meant very probably that he had come in by the winding dark-colored stream that threaded this jungle land. Wilson hadn't this fanciful way of describing things, nor the gift of interpreting them.

This white man was one of his own race in danger of death and he must be saved at any cost. For the hundredth time Wilson wished he were a doctor. He must employ methods that might be altogether wrong. He decided on a native remedy for reducing fever that had pulled him through once. But, first of all, the patient must regain consciousness. Perhaps it was too late. There was blood on his face and neck that had not come from fever. Snoopy was looking at these wounds, recognized them as knife wounds, he knew. Someone had stabbed this white man.

Bill Wilson had something to do there that he could do well. In his three years of African *trekking* he had seen disaster and death often enough. His men had been mauled by the great cats or stabbed by hostile tribesmen. He had learned how to treat what he could see with his own shrewd eyes. He went to work eagerly, competently.

The wound on the stranger's head had been made with a club or some such blunt instrument. Wilson cleansed the wound and applied a dressing made of herbs the natives used; and then turned to the knife wounds on the shoulder. Two clean cuts, but not deep or dangerous. Now, what had a white man, English or American, Bill Wilson didn't yet know which, done

to get such damage in Africa where the white men, as a rule, kept out of brawls?

The man was wearing well-cut riding breeches and expensive monograms. His shirt and underwear were of silk, with embroidered monograms. His hands were well cared for. His hair, now damp with sweat, was golden brown and probably with a curl in it. The blue eyes were bloodshot and wild. His teeth were white and regular. He moaned deliriously as Wilson did his crude surgery.

BILL WILSON was glad to do what he could, but the entire affair was interfering with his work. In a day or so, he would start to make his way to the marsh of snakes where his work lay. Now he was slowed by having to look after this unknown. The District Commissioner's office was a hundred miles away and there was no doctor within two hundred miles. That meant almost three weeks of *trekking,* in this dense jungle land. It was a devil of a fix to be in. It irritated Bill to see that Snoopy and the other boys were glad at the prospect of delay. Africa doesn't breed the habit of hard, continuous work. That, the natives thought, was the white man's vice.

While Bill was smoking his pipe and wondering just how ill his patient was, the stranger sat up. His eyes were now not unseeing and wild. He looked about him and sneered at what he saw. Then he said, in a voice of command: "Get me a whiskey, whoever you are, and make it fast."

Bill was a good-natured man, but he didn't take such orders well.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" he snapped.

"I know that," the other said, "but I don't know where the hell I am. What is this? A tent? If so, how come? And what about that drink?" He put up his hand and felt his bandaged head. "Who hit me?"

"Listen," Bill Wilson barked. "I don't know who hit you or who knifed you, and I don't care. You're in my tent, and there isn't any whiskey within a hundred miles." Wilson hadn't met this type of American before. Here, he supposed, was the spoiled son of a millionaire, the sort of man who had had everything done for him. Bill, as an American who had come up the hard way, resented the other. "The British District Commissioner headquarters are about a hundred miles away, due west, and I'm going due east," he finished.

The other man put his hand to his forehead. "My skull aches like hell and I'm running a fever. Get me a doctor."

"There's no doctor within two hundred miles," Bill said. Then his voice changed, grew hard. "I don't know how you got in here, but why not return by the same route?"

"How *did* I get in here?" the other man said slowly. "I was having a pleasant evening with some pals and gals. Now, why did I want to run away from a party like that? It doesn't make sense."

"My number one boy says a great blue bird brought you."

"So it did."

"You mean you flew a plane into this jungle?"

"I must have. Don't ask me why. And don't look at me as if I had stolen the ship; I bought it. Where is it?"

"I haven't seen it. My number one boy told me about it and I didn't believe him." The whole thing sounded incredible. White men who owned planes didn't take hazardous and unannounced flights into dense jungles with no landing fields anyhere near.

Snoopy seized the opportunity to sidle up to his master's side and talk rapidly.

Bill Wilson explained. "Snoopy says you came down in a swamp and the great blue bird is sinking. I know these local quagmires; she's there for ever. I suppose it's true; but how you escaped killing yourself, I'll never know."

"I always escape," the other said carelessly. "It's in my stars. I remember running out of gas and looking for somewhere to land. Anybody else would have hit a tree and killed himself, but Mrs. Stratford Waterford's lovely little boy picks himself out a nice soft swamp."

"Mrs. Stratford Waterford?" Bill said softly. This woman, a widow, was one of America's richest women. She had two children. A daughter, who was a duchess or countess, Bill couldn't remember which, and an idolized son, America's number one playboy, who had wasted fortunes and given his doting mother many an hour of grief. Of course, he was handsome;

women would love that. And, of course, he was selfish and unreliable; and men wouldn't like him for that.

"I'VE read about you in Sunday Supplements," Bill said. "Many times."

"I'm worth a fortune to Sunday Supplements. So you know all about me?" Plainly young Waterford was proud of his fame.

"Maybe not all. There might be something good in you. If so, the papers left it out."

Young Waterford flushed. He always resented criticism. And who was this young American to criticize him?

"You know about me. Now I'd like to hear who and what you are," he said nastily.

"I'm Bill Wilson, a professional hunter and collector."

"What do you collect?"

"Snakes."

"Snakes? That's my racket. I'll bet I've seen more snakes and worse ones than you'll ever come across if you live a hundred years. You ought to take lessons from me on snakes."

"I see them without getting the horrors," Wilson snapped.

"What's the idea? Do you like them? Open up, Wilson."

Wilson smiled. What use was it to get mad at this spoiled child? He'd have to see a lot of him, and it had better be on a friendly basis.

"I don't collect snakes like many men do. If I find a rare specimen, I take him along. But my real job is collecting snake venom."

"That's an idea. I'll buy some and slip it into cocktails for gals and pals I'm tired of. I tire easily, my mother says. Who buys your stuff?"

"Bacteriologists and scientific researchers."

"What the deuce for?"

"For serums and things like that. Antidotes to snake poisoning. Also snake venoms yield various toxic bodies which have a selective action on animal tissues."

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume? I suppose you're an M.D., too?"

"Never even went to college." Wilson sighed. It was his great disappointment that he wasn't scientifically trained. Some day, when he had saved money, he'd get himself a college degree in science, and then he might get a chance to work for the American Museum of Natural History. But this playboy wouldn't understand an ambition like that.

"There's nothing in college but discipline and disappointment," young Waterford asserted. "I ought to know. I've sampled the best in the Ivy League, and they all let me go. My mother never would let me try the co-educational colleges. Said I wouldn't work if I did. That sounded funny to people who knew me. As if I ever intended to work!" Young Waterford shivered a little. "I feel logy, and I wouldn't trust a clinical thermometer inside my mouth. I'd get glass splinters in my tonsils." He watched Wilson take a capsule from an aluminum box. "What's that? Venom?"

"Quinine," Wilson said. "Ten grains of it. You ought to sleep."

"I hope so. When I wake up, we'll discuss your taking me back to civilization. Better start making plans right away; I'll be in a hurry."

Again the carelessly arrogant tone irritated Wilson. Here was a man whose life he had saved ordering him around as though he hadn't business of his own to attend to.

"Then you can walk back wherever you came from," he snapped.

Gerry Waterford frowned. It was evident this man did not understand that he must get his patient away from the jungle. "I'm not asking you to do it for nothing. I'll pay you more than you'd make in a year peddling snake venom." He yawned. "We'll talk it over later."

IT was a week before the subject came up again. Meanwhile, Gerry had fever badly and raved deliriously. What he said interested Bill enormously. He jotted down names that were used again and again. It might be only incoherent ravings or it might be true. If it were true, Mrs. Stratford Waterford's son was in a bad way. Of Bill's natives, only Snoopy was of any use. The others believed that the shouts and shrieks of the white man came from the ghost of the old Arab slave dealer who had taken possession of him. The white man's soul had been eaten by the

evil ghost, and the Arab had taken possession of the white man's body. There was danger to them in this. The Arab might prefer one of their bodies.

When, finally, Gerry Waterford regained consciousness, he was weak, but had lost little of his dominating manner. In a mirror he looked at his face. There was a crescent-shaped scar on his left temple which would be permanent.

"Gee," he said, "how I could go for some Scotch!"

"You won't get any. This is your big chance to take a booze cure."

Waterford looked about him. He was in a native hut.

"This was my hut before the red ants moved in," Bill explained. "They've cleaned it out thoroughly and there ain't a mouse or rat or snake in the thatched roof now. Too bad you don't seem to like it. You'll be here for some time."

"This is a hold-up," Gerry said. "What's your price to take me back?"

"I haven't a price. I'm not in the nursemaid business. I've got my work to do and my orders to fill, and you'll have to come along or stay here. It won't be any pleasure to have you; but left alone, you'd die." His voice changed. "Why do you want to go back to a place you ran away from because you thought you were going to be murdered by Stennert and a man called the Turk?"

"W-what!" the other cried. "How did you know that?"

"Then you admit you escaped from them in your plane?"

Gerry closed his eyes. "I had to get away," he said.

"Why did Bubbles stab you?"

"She thought I was so drunk I didn't know she was trying to steal my money." His manner was vague. "Ali was crazy about her but she wouldn't look at him and that made him try to get me. He'd have killed me if it hadn't been for Joe Stennert."

"How come Stennert stepped in to save you?"

"That's quite a story. How long will it take me to get my strength back?"

"Ten days, probably."

"Ten days. They may be here by then," Gerry said, and he looked at the low doorway with fear in his eyes.

"I'll know when they come," Bill Wilson said. "Snoopy listens to the drums. If you're in a jam you'll be safer with me."

Gerry thought it over. "You don't like me, do you?"

"That doesn't matter. In Africa, white men have to stick together. We won't be getting back to the Coast for six months. Maybe never. The odds are that all the booze will be baked out of your system by then."

Gerry laughed; "I'll go." Then he grew more serious. "You're sure the drums will tell about Doc Stennert and the rest?"

"Is Stennert a doctor?" Envy was in Bill's voice.

Gerry grinned wryly.

"Of philosophy, not of medicine. He's a doctor of crime, too. I'm not yellow as you think, but I'm afraid of that man. Could he follow us?"

Bill considered.

"I doubt it. We travel light and fast, not like the big safaris."

Gerry's breath came out in an explosive sigh of relief.

"Next year you can have a big safari of your own if you want it. No, I'm not raving. I'll stake you to anything you want if you get me back home again. I'll fit out a big scientific expedition."

Bill thought it sounded well, but he had no belief that such a thing would happen. He had an idea that this stranger was one of the most fluent liars he had ever met. Nothing of what he had said seemed reasonable. Six months was a long time for two such different types to remain together in enforced intimacy. In the end they would either hate one another or grow into the closest of pals. And Bill Wilson did not see himself feeling like a brother to this spoiled and arrogant lad.

II

DR. REINHARD STENNERT'S career had been an irregular one. Unlike his respectable family, he had been a gambler and mixed in many shady affairs. After taking his degree at Bonn, he went to the United States. Here he mixed up in anti-American propaganda and was deported with many of his Bundist companions. Always a bitter hater of England, he now hated the United States equally.

Of all Americans, he most hated Mrs. Waterford. It was she who had first suspected him and who had disclosed his identity as a spy. Stennert never forgave and he never forgot.

England was closed to him, as were British possessions. Stennert brooded over Mrs. Waterford so much that he wanted to punish her more than he wanted anything else. But how? He could not get back to her country, and she wouldn't be likely to leave it, now that conditions were unsettled.

Gerry Waterford thought Stennert was being framed. He had always liked this big, jovial man who had taught him to fence and to speak French and German. But Gerry was not concerned with politics; he was too busy amusing himself for serious thought. Gerry did not guess that Stennert planned to use him to gain revenge on his mother.

Stennert journeyed to Portuguese East Africa. He knew it well of old, and spoke the prevailing native dialect fluently. The Portuguese authorities knew him only as a former importer. He spent money lavishly. His house near the old fort of San Joao was well fitted for the scheme he had in mind. It was a simple plot. He planned to kidnap Gerry Waterford. He thought he knew a bait that would bring Gerry to the trap prepared for him.

Kidnapings have greater elements of danger than any other crime; and Stennert studied kidnaping as earnestly as he had once studied for his Ph.D. The bait was the very lovely and wholly unprincipled Bubbles Braganza, a half-caste Portuguese dancer whom Gerry had met at Cairo. Later in Lourenço Marques, Stennert met the girl. She had been expelled from Cairo by police orders. She had told him about an American millionaire who had written her flaming letters, which she had kept.

"My sweet," Stennert said, after he had read them. "He seems crazy about you. But he is fickle. Some other girl may have his heart now."

Bubbles Braganza laughed. She was tiny and vivid, with flashing sloe eyes. "I can get him back any time." She sighed. "He is what you call my type. I do not like big, fat men who are bald."

"Can you mean me?" Stennert asked, laughing. "All right, I am big and fat and I have little hair. But under that hair is what you and your Adonis are lacking in. Brains! You shall have him. You must write a letter as ardent as his and I will see that he gets it."

IT was while his mother believed Gerry was staying with a relative with a big estate in Kenya that he flew south to Portugal's African colony.

Stennert greeted him affectionately, and Bubbles was lovelier than ever. There was a dinner party that night and Gerry was filled with alcohol and affection. And when he was in this mixed mood he generally looked for trouble, suspecting all other men of flirting with his girl. The man this time was a great Turkish merchant named Ali Reshad. Ali was evidently jealous of the American. Stennert tried to smooth things, but there was a fight. Gerry hit Ali. Ali did not hit him back; instead he picked him up and whirled him around in what wrestlers call an airplane spin. He was unconscious for five minutes.

Gerry thought he saw a plot between the girl and the Turk, and he accused her of it, when he could sit up and take notice. And later she had tried to take his wallet, which he had carelessly shown to be bulging with Bank of England notes and American bills. That was all Gerry remembered very definitely.

He dimly recalled being locked in a room. He had escaped and dropped to the ground beneath his window. He had staggered to his plane and taken off. Then had come agonizing moments that sobered him when he could find no landing place. And then a crash, and waking up with the unknown Bill Wilson staring at him.

So Gerald Stratford Waterford, who would some day inherit half of a hundred million dollars, started life anew as assistant to Bill Wilson, whose father had never had a hundred dollars at one time.

Gerry thought snake-collecting was dangerous. But as he watched Wilson peg out the snakes and make them yield the heavy clear poison, which was put into specially-prepared test tubes, he thought he could do it, too. But he wasn't sure which snakes were deadly and which harmless.

"A good rough-and-ready rule," Bill said,

"is to remember the bad ones usually have blunt tails and flat heads."

Gerry saw a snake one day that was like this and thought he'd capture it unaided. Fortunately, Bill saw him and yelled for him to stand back. Never had he seen Bill so excited. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"That's a Swila, or spitting cobra. It was just getting ready to fill your eye. If it had let go, we'd have had to bury you."

"Wow!" cried Gerry. "I didn't figure anything like that!"

"And don't always be leaning against trees unless you have made certain there aren't any snakes along the boughs. There are dozens of poisonous tree snakes around. Look at that baby." He pointed to a writhing reptile that dropped from a branch and slid into the grass. "That's a big *boomslange* and they're sudden death."

"And you choose a life like this!"

"It's the only way I know of making money so I can go to college and get a degree."

"That beats me, too," Gerry laughed. He was better than he had been for years and found he didn't need whiskey to keep him going. He slept well and the native dishes Snoopy prepared suited him well. He began to put on the weight he needed. His only grief was that his mother would be worrying. She never expected him to write, but he sometimes cabled when he was away from home.

He began to have a sincere liking for his companion. And he liked Snoopy and the other men. Cheerful, smiling and contented they seemed. He had grown used to the incessant drum music that was part of dark Africa's speech and used everywhere. Men signaled in the dense jungles if they were lost or in grave danger.

ONE night, Snoopy came to his employer's side and whispered through the mosquito netting. *"Bwana, Bwana,* the drums have been talking. There are two white men with many servants near us. They talk English but are not from England or your country. One, the drums said, their servants called *'Bwana tumbo.'"*

Bill Wilson knew that meant "Big Belly." He remembered that the man Gerry had feared—Stennert—could be so described. What would they want out here if not to harm his friend? Lying there in the dark, Bill blamed himself for making Gerry take this long journey with him. If he had really believed the other was in danger, he would have changed his plans. But the story seemed to preposterous and unreal; and he did not want to lose valuable time by taking Gerry to the British Commissioner.

Bill went to Gerry's hammock. "I've got news," he whispered. "Came hot over the drums, via Snoopy. Two men, neither of 'em American or English, are near us. They've got a bunch of natives with them, and the natives call the leader 'Big Belly.'"

"I've got to beat it," Gerry said. "That big man is Doc Stennert and the other one is Ali, who's going to break my back."

"Not with me here, he won't," Bill said.

Gerry shook his head.

"Wait till you see the big baboon; he must weigh two-fifty. You thought I was lying when I babbled on about what happened at Mozambique. I've got to get to the British Commissioner. They can't pull that sort of stuff in British territory."

"They won't," Bill said. "This isn't British territory. I thought you knew we crossed into the Belgian Congo two days back. That makes it bad. We'll start back at daybreak." Bill thought a moment. "I'm sorry about this, Gerry. I sort of thought you were pulling my leg."

"Forget it," Gerry said. "You won't be the loser if I get back."

"You'll get back, all right," Bill asserted confidently. He sensed that Gerry, for all his seeming courage, was really badly frightened.

The playboy winced.

"I wish I thought so, Bill. You don't know them. There are those infernal drums again. I hope Snoopy is listening in."

Bill nodded.

"He'll be on the job. Sleep, if you can. Tomorrow will be a long day."

It was a long day. Gerry wasn't strong enough to make many miles, but he stuck to it without grumbling. In the jungle the natives could hide easily enough. It was not in the humid and sunless jungle that danger would come. A wide river had to be crossed. During the rains, it was a swift and raging stream. Bill and his

party had crossed it going west a few days before. It had seemed a river of glaring sand with narrow threads of water. The danger lay in the fact that, during the crossing, they would be in full view of anyone watching from the thickets on either bank. The expedition which the drums had announced might be made up of genuine hunters or collectors who hadn't any ill will to Bill's friend. But if *Bwana Tumbo* should turn out to be Stennert's men, then the heir was in peril. Bill felt toward him now as a sort of elder brother, felt wiser and stronger. Gerry depended on him and believed in him.

The river at the boundary of the Belgian Congo was crossed safely. So Gerry thought; but Snoopy and his master were not so sure. Snoopy was anxious. The natives from Portuguese East Africa were Mahommedan negroes of mixed descent, and Snoopy dreaded the Arab strain in them. Never could Snoopy forget the horrors of the slave trade which had been mainly in Arab hands.

It was when they had made camp and were resting, after their forced march, that the trouble came. It came in a strange way.

ONE moment, the jungle was teeming with the myriad small sounds of a million insects; the next, blood-freezing war cries split the air, and savages poured from the close trees in a wave of death.

Light glinted brightly on the polished blades of vicious assegais, and made bone-white and terrifying the stripes of paint that daubed the gleaming, oiled bodies.

There was no time for thinking; there was only that split second in which automatic reflexes made Bill and Gerry lunge for the guns at their sides. The porters wailed in unreasoning fear, grabbed their knives and spears, then broke and turned to run.

Bill's rifle roared its song of death, and a screaming savage plunged inertly to the ground, his assegai still gripped tightly in his dead hand. Gerry had no time to fire; he was still lifting his shotgun, when a hurtling black smashed him to one side.

Then the tide of savages rolled over the white men, pinned them to the ground. They fought furiously, straining with all of their strength, gagged from the fetid stench of the natives. And in a moment, all was over; the white men were unable to move.

Bill's rifle and shotgun were seized and the knives and spears were taken from Bill's four men. They were all bound. With the white men, the raiders were less severe. The entire thing was done quickly. They had taken Bill and his party at exactly the moment when they were exhausted.

The head man spoke a language Bill didn't understand, so he called Snoopy.

"*Bwana,*" Snoopy said, "This man says we shall all die. He glared angrily at Gerry. "He has brought this evil on us!"

It wasn't a moment to blame anyone. As for the threat, this might be the Makwa natives' mischief. Natives of different tribes expect hostility from other natives. Snoopy and his friends had not liked venturing into the Belgian Congo country. Snoopy dreaded cannibal natives; but he liked his employer and when he was paid he would have enough money to buy the cattle that would get him wives.

"Well," Gerry said, "they've got us. I suppose it was in the cards. But why did I have to drag you into it? You'd better have let the red ants get me." He was terribly depressed. "Look: Here they come!"

III

DOCTOR STENNERT came toward them, smiling. He seemed amiable, as though they might have been old and valued friends. A little behind him was Ali. Turks are very strong physically, and Ali had a fifty-inch chest and almost no neck. He had little dark eyes that narrowed at sight of Gerry. He licked his lips as a wild animal does at sight of a meal.

"Welcome to the Belgian Congo," said Stennert.

"We're not in it," Bill said. "We crossed the frontier an hour ago."

"We shall return to it," Stennert said. "My country and Belgium are old friends, and in the Congo I have the protection that I cannot get here."

Ali spoke. "He will not let me break your back. He says that is too merciful.

You would not feel anything after that. But I shall do many little things that will make you wish you were dead."

Doctor Stennert smiled. "Pay no attention to him, Gerry. I'll protect you."

"You swine!" Gerry shouted. "You're worse than he is."

"I once tried to teach you good manners," Stennert said, "but I fear association with this American snake-catcher makes you forget." Stennert came to the tree stump on which Gerry sat. "Your dear mother would not let me whip you, as I longed a thousand times to do for your insolence, but she cannot help you now." Suddenly, his fist shot out and caught Gerry's temple, knocking him from his seat.

"You wouldn't dare do that if he hadn't had his hands tied," Bill cried.

"The snake-catcher," Stennert sneered, and swung at Bill. He watched the two men struggle clumsily to their feet. It was a bitter sight for Snoopy who thought his American master was the wisest and bravest of men, and now saw him beaten by another. Snoopy wondered what his fate would be. This big, fat man with the shining, smiling face and the gold-rimmed spectacles must assuredly be a very powerful chief. But even more, Snoopy feared the Turk whom he suspected to be an Arab half-caste. *Bwana Tumbo* was big and fat. Ali was big and muscular. He would be very cruel.

The Makwa natives took charge of Snoopy's men. The order to march was given, and they crossed into the Belgian Congo once more. Gerry could barely drag his weary legs along. When Ali impatiently kicked him. Stennert objected. "Dead, he is worthless to us. When he has laid his golden egg, you may have him. But we don't want him to die, yet." He spoke to the tired man. "You see how careful I am for your welfare."

Gerry muttered an oath.

Stennert laughed, then continued. "I have spent so much time thinking about you, Gerry. I have spent money, too, and there have been times when I despaired of getting you here. How delighted I should be if beside you your dear mother marched. That thin, arrogant old hag who had me deported. How I should like to pay her back for all she did."

He smiled. "But I shall, Gerry, I shall. Her heart is of flint, all except one little spot. And in that spot you are enshrined—" He made an exclamation of dismay.

Gerry Waterford had pitched forward and lay prone on the river bed.

"He has fainted," Stennert said after examining him. "You, Wilson, are strong and he is your friend. Carry him. When you faint, one of these Makwa boys will take up your load. But if you die I shall not regret it at all. Perhaps you had better die that way. Why save you?"

Bill Wilson draped Gerry over his shoulder as he had done when he rescued him from the red ants. For the moment the burden was not heavy, but if he had to march far it would grow unbearable. Perhaps they wanted him to drop by the trail so exhausted that he could only lie there until some great beast lurking nearby would spring at him. The hunting knife he always carried had been taken from him. And left behind him was his zinc box with three very rare snakes in it. And worse still, his test tubes of venoms were there, too. Months and months of hard work had gone for naught.

These two white men must be marching toward their camp. They could not have made the trip without pack animals. Hardly a white man in Africa could travel as light as Bill Wilson and be content with native foods and no other drink but water, or *pombe,* the beer the natives made from Kafir corn.

The fat man was smiling genially. He seemed good tempered; and yet Bill had seen a flash of savagery in his small eyes when he had knocked Gerry down. Fat men usually couldn't endure the hot humidity of the jungles, but Stennert seemed in perfect health. Bill marched on. He had told Gerry he must put on weight and of late Gerry had been growing heavier. It seemed ironical that this very extra weight would help to exhaust Gerry's friend and protector.

BILL managed to make the journey. When camp was made, Gerry was showing signs of life. The two lay on the damp earth, Makwa men standing guard with spears. Presently, Bill smelled

the aroma of bacon and coffee. No native foods for Stennert and no water. When he and Gerry some hours later were brought before Stennert and Ali, Stennert was pleasantly drunk. His fat red face glowed. But Bill saw through this disguise. Stennert was a dangerous and cruel man. All the things Gerry had said about him, and which Bill had disbelieved, were true.

Bill was an American citizen. His papers were in order and the British District Commissioner was his friend. He knew of Bill's expeditions. If he did not come back within a reasonable length of time an investigation would be made. But the Commissioner had no jurisdiction in this country. The Belgians had never forgiven the British for exposing the cruel way in which they treated their natives. They were more friendly then with the governors of the German provinces who cared nothing for native welfare. And although the German colonies were long ago lost, the feeling remained.

WHILE Bill and Gerry lay on the ground, Ali the Turk came up. He was a ferocious ape of a man but Stennert was his boss. He snapped out an order in *Makwa,* and two men hauled Wilson to his feet. "Doctor Stennert wishes to see you," Ali said. When Gerry strove to get to his feet the Turk buffeted him across the face. "Not you," he shouted.

Bill Wilson saw his friend sink back to the damp ground with his cheekbone cut and badly bruised. Fury seized him and he swung at the huge man, catching him flush on the jaw. The Turk staggered. Then Bill hit him again on the same spot, and he went down. The natives who watched did not know what to do. They dreaded Ali, but they dreaded also infuriating this other white man. He must be a great chief, they thought, to knock to the earth the terrible Ali whose father had been the most cruel of slave dealers in the days that were gone.

Ali rose to his feet and faced Bill. He hated Americans, and he had lost face before these *Makwa* boys who would go back to Portuguese East Africa and tell everyone what had happened. Well, they could also tell their friends what a terrible revenge Ali had taken! From his belt he snatched a short curved knife and advanced. Bill saw that he was standing in a ring formed by Ali's natives. They would jump him as soon as he turned to run, just as dogs will turn on a bigger and more powerful beast that tries to escape the pack. There seemed no hope. Poor Gerry, trying painfully to get to his feet and stand by his friend, saw death at hand.

But death was delayed for the moment. "Stop!" roared Stennert who came hurrying up with a Luger pistol in his hand.

"You will not! Put up that knife. I must talk with my guest who collects snake poison."

"Thanks," said Bill. "I thought the end had come."

"Just delayed," said Stennert, smiling. He turned to Gerry. "Gerry, my dear young friend, I must apologize for what Ali did. Like myself, he has lived in America. But unlike myself, he was not respected. You may have heard of the Masked Terror who wrestled in so many rings. This is he."

"I licked them all," Ali said proudly, and patted his enormous chest. "And they were so jealous, I was deported as an undesirable alien. I am Madrali the Terrible Turk, and no man dares meet me."

"You shall tell him about it later on," Stennert said. "But I must talk to him first."

Bill sat on a camp stool and faced Stennert who was in a much larger and more comfortable chair. "You puzzle me," Stennert said. "I have met many explorers and collectors, English and American, but they were men of education and position. You are a very common sort of fellow. Now tell me exactly where you met Gerry and what you know about him and about me."

Bill reluctantly described what had happened. He resented Stennert's description of him, but no doubt it was true. He wasn't a member of a scientific party but just a roughneck explorer who had first learned about snakes from the snake charmer in a circus, where he worked after running away from a hated job on his uncle's farm.

"You helped Gerry to run away from

me," Stennert said. "You have made me spend much money and time. You shall pay for it."

"I haven't any money," Bill asserted. "How can I pay?"

Stennert smiled. His light eyes were very cruel. "You will see."

BILL thought it was a good moment to find out exactly what was going to happen to Gerry. Kidnapping and blackmail were the motives of this expedition, if Gerry was to be believed.

"You can't get away with it," Bill said when Stennert had not answered his question.

"I can and shall," Stennert said. "The Waterfords have harmed me. In the old days they looked upon me as a menial. I who am better born and a hundred times more educated. They shall pay for that. And I need money. They must provide that. Now that I have caught Gerry, the drums are taking the news eastward; and when it comes to Mozambique, the campaign begins. There is a director of the Race National Bank in London who is named John Waterford. He will be told to get together, in American currency, one million dollars.

"We shall give him time. He will go to Scotland Yard and his embassy, and they will begin to try to catch me. Your own F.B.I. men will get to work. Useless, I assure you. I shall set a limit. If when that limit of time is reached and the money is not sent as directed, I shall enclose one of Gerry's fingers."

Stennert laughed gently. "One week later, one more finger. It sounds melodramatic, doesn't it? It is, but that sort of thing is very impressive."

"They'll get you for it," Bill cried.

"Don't get excited. You will keep your fingers. No multi-millionaire mother will give a dime a dozen for your fingers. Is it in your mind to encourage Gerry in his defiance of me?"

"It sure is," Bill said. "Something will turn up. Your boys aren't the only ones to use the jungle telegraph."

"My dear Mr. Wilson, what an unwise thing to say! I had overlooked that. You have done me a good turn but you have condemned your own four men to death. My Makwa boys will enjoy that." Stennert's voice was friendly. "And I suppose you haven't thought of what might happen to you? You will never see Gerry Waterford again."

"Why shan't I see Gerry again?" Bill cried.

"Because, while he may be alive for a long time, even if he has no fingers left, you will be dead. It is unfortunate for I have nothing against you. I do not like Americans and your manner is too assured. You presume to talk to me as though we are equals," Stennert leaned back in his chair, tilting it a little. Bill could see that the smile was false and that in the man's heart there was the lust for cruelty and power. "And you must remember I am in friendly territory and no men of the F.B.I. or Scotland Yard can penetrate here."

"You stinking swine!" Bill cried, and then saw the smiling mask drop from Stennert's face. It was at this moment that Bill took advantage of the tilted chair whose fore legs were off the ground. Bill didn't think he had much chance, but he leaned forward, hooked a chair-rung—and jerked.

STENNERT went backward to the soft earth and his fall made no noise. That he did not shout for help was due to his conceit. He was immensely strong, and he was armed. All would jeer at him if he called for aid against this unarmed American.

It was not Stennert's lucky day; for his spectacles were wrenched from him when the gold wires were caught by a twig. Without these glasses Stennert was practically blind. He always carried spares, but they were not on him. Dimly he could see the tall American standing over him. Stennert fired from his reclining position. This ability to shoot from the hip had saved his life more than once. He did not think he could have missed at the distance.

Ali and the head boy came running toward him. They helped him to his feet. "Where is the American?" Ali demanded. "He has escaped! You are not so clever as you think. Never could this have happened to me!"

"Don't ask stupid questions," Stennert stormed. "He is lying dead in the bushes.

I shot him with this Luger." He snapped out orders in *Makwa,* and the head boy went running. Wilson could not escape. The natives would spread a wide circle around the camp and then close in gradually until he was caught. They were jungle-trained, and how could any white man hope to elude them? True, this was not their own jungle, and natives venture almost timidly into the territories of other tribes. But they would be more afraid of Ali's anger than possible danger from their own kind.

Stennert blazed with anger. How could he have been so careless? He should have known that the American who ventured into deadly places with only four boys and no pack animals must be out of the ordinary. Stennert knew that Ali was laughing at him.

Suddenly from the native quarters came sounds of shouting. "They have found him," Stennert said. "He will be dead, and that is lucky for him. I did not like him, and he would not have had such a pleasant death."

Stennert was wrong. They had not found Bill. What they had found added to Stennert's uneasiness. Snoopy had escaped. Not only that. He had killed one of Stennert's boys and taken his spear, Stennert struck the boy who brought the bad news. "Fools!" he roared. "You shall suffer for this!"

Ali laughed aloud. Long he had resented Stennert's arrogance. "Why do you not blame yourself too? You let a much more valuable prisoner escape."

"Get me my glasses," Stennert commanded. He had stamped upon his own, and both lenses were broken. He didn't think Wilson had one chance in a thousand of escaping. If he did, it would be to British territory that he would make his way. London and New York would know about Gerry Waterford, and the Belgian authorities would not dare resist their united commands for an investigation. And when that came, Portugal would not dare shelter Stennert. Then Portuguese East Africa and his comfortable house in Mozambique would be forbidden territory. And all his dreams of riotous living would vanish.

Ali sped toward Wilson's defenseless blacks. He used one of the tricks that had barred him from wrestling in the United States. He picked up a bound native, and then brought his backbone down on his heavy knee with terrific force. In a moment, the three faithful boys who had served Wilson for so long, lay moaning with broken spines. They were tossed into the jungle to die in torture.

Ali laughed. He had always been at his happiest when inflicting torture. That is why the foreign wrestlers had hated him and forced him out of the wrestling game. Madrali, one of the many so-called Terrible Turks that had been crowd-pleasers, had first met Stennert in America. He admired and feared the man. Ali believed by sticking to him he too would get his share of wealth. He had long ago abandoned the Mahommedan law of abstinence from intoxicants. This was the first time he had ever been able to blame his chief for carelessness. Thinking it over he wished he had not blamed Stennert, for the German was a man who neither forgave nor forgot.

IV

SNOOPY was a loyal servant and devoted to Bill Wilson. Snoopy felt certain that he and his master were doomed. He knew enough of *Makwa* language to understand what was being said. Snoopy's men looked to him for leadership. He had no comfort for them. He repeated that phrase heard so often in Africa. *"Bado kidogo,"* which means, "be patient." Snoopy saw that his guard was drinking strong *Kangala* beer.

Then came the moment when the big native nodded a little and his eyes closed. Snoopy took his great double-edged spear and ran it through the sentry's heart. The man gave a little sighing sound that the other *Makwa* did not hear. Out into the jungle rushed Snoopy. Darkness was coming, and he dreaded the black and deadly night unless he was with his fellows under the protection of a white man.

Then he got a great shock. Hurrying into the dense cover, he collided with another man. He had raised his spear to strike when he saw it was Wilson. *"Bwana!"* he cried in joy. He felt more courageous now, although the white man

made his speed less. No white man could make his way through jungles as can the native. Definitely, it made capture more probable. But he was prepared to serve his *Bwana* to the end.

"Listen," Snoopy whispered. "They are coming and they are many. Follow me." His heart exulted. His master, that wise and strong man from a far country, had escaped, too. Just as Snoopy was wiser and stronger than the other natives, so was his master stronger and braver than these other white men.

Half of Stennert's men hurried to the river crossing that led to British territory, and half of them plunged westward into Congo land. This was a region of unfriendly tribes, and nearby was a large settlement that was dangerous to white men, for this tribe was said to be cannibalistic.

It was when Snoopy and Bill were exhausted and hopeless that Snoopy saw something that made his heart beat faster. Snoopy fell into a hole. To Bill this was just a hole, but to Snoopy it was possible salvation. From its formation Snoopy knew he had fallen into the lair of the *Manis* or Great Scaly Anteater, as the natives knew them. These *Pangolins*, as white men term them, are almost four feet in length and they burrow deeply to avoid the larger beasts of prey. Snoopy knew about these strange creatures and their habits. He knew that often wild pigs lived in deserted holes. Pigs are always in greater danger of being eaten by the great cats than the scaly anteater. The pigs could not make much refuges, so they used deserted lairs for hiding places.

"I go first, *Bwana,*" Snoopy said, and put his spear in his master's hand. He took out a curved knife he had stolen from the dead native. A scaly anteater couldn't do much damage but a wild boar was dangerous. At close quarters, a spear was useless and a knife was a poor weapon. There would be room for them both if the pigs were not at home. There was a pig odor, Snoopy noticed, as he went down head first. Outside, Bill waited anxiously. Snakes had a habit of taking cover in old deserted holes and Snoopy might easily be bitten in the dark depths.

Snoopy's woolly head emerged. He beckoned for Wilson to enter.

Bill found that the anteater's den was a circular space six feet wide and only three feet in height. It was stuffy, airless and with a sickening stench. Snoopy was chuckling with joy, certain he was safe from pursuers. The white man, with his greater powers of reasoning, was not so sure. Native trackers would see easily enough that no wild animal had made the marks they must have left at the mouth of the hole. Snoopy might keep invaders out as Horatius held the bridge, but they could be smoked out.

He wondered how Gerry was faring. Dead from neglect or violence, he was worth exactly nothing.

Snoopy groped his way to the dark mouth of the hole, with his sharp spear held before him. For a moment, he watched for the return of the wild pigs who had made this their home. No boar had a chance against this weapon. But the pigs might create a scene outside, and the natives might suspect that something was wrong.

THEY waited. At length, "I've got to get some air," Bill said at last, "or I'll vomit. It may suit a pig or an anteater down here, but I'm coming up for air."

"Listen, *Bwana,*" Snoopy cautioned. Faintly, in the distance, could be heard the drums beating. No doubt, the *Makwas* were asking if a white man had been seen. Menacing and monotonous, the drumming sounded. Somewhere, not far away, a native was beating his drum with two sticks. Snoopy muttered *"Bado kidogo!"*

Suddenly, Snoopy whispered: "They come. Twenty men. Hide, *Bwana.*"

The native hearing is sharper than the white man's, but Bill could hear the sounds. Men were beating the bushes. They wouldn't like this night work, and they beat the bushes with sticks to frighten any great cat that might be lurking. And they shouted to encourage themselves.

Snoopy darted out and pulled over the mouth the limb of a tree that had fallen nearby. This was the moment for any sensible pig to make for home and Snoopy

lay in the passage with his great spear in readiness. Nothing sought to make entry. Hours passed before steps came near. They sounded like innumerable little cracking echoes. The *Makwa* men were passing over the little cleared space. Here, the tropic sun had fallen with its burning rays on *shoet* bushes. And as they were dried and sapless they gave out these little explosive noises when stepped upon. The *Makwa* were coming toward them. They were cruel men with sharp two-edged spears, and they passed not a foot from the covering branch. They were frightened, Snoopy knew. They feared the evil spirits of the jungles. And in their nervousness they had not noticed the marks made when Snoopy had dragged the great branch.

The bad moment passed. The sound of the feet grew fainter. And presently there was no sound of drums

"We can sleep," Snoopy said happily. "Until the day breaks we are safe."

When dawn came, Snoopy decided to creep toward the Stennert camp to try to free his three men. It was a dreadful shock when he came upon their bodies in the rank undergrowth.

Not many men were in camp. The main body had not come back from its search. Snoopy could see Stennert and Ali. They were talking to Gerry, who looked much better now that he had rested. Snoopy could see that Gerry had a rope fastened around his ankles and, more loosely, around his wrists. Snoopy saw presently that the two men left the bound man and went to a tent. There they opened a bottle and began to drink.

Posted around the encampment were sentries with spears. The few others were grouped together, singing. Evidently nobody anticipated danger. Snoopy approached as near to Gerry as he dared and then threw one of the knives he had taken from the mangled bodies of his three men. It fell almost at Gerry's feet. Gerry turned quickly, but Snoopy had melted into the thicket.

Bill did not know what to think of it, when Snoopy reported. If Gerry got away, where could he go and what could he do? He had no ability to sustain himself as Bill and Snoopy had. Bill knew they must rescue him.

The prospect scared Snoopy but he would go through with it. He had seen how terrified the natives were of the two white men. Yet the natives from Mozambique were crafty and used to white men and not like inland natives. If they were afraid, there must be good reason for it. Snoopy didn't know which one he dreaded the more, the one who smiled or the one who scowled.

IV

WHEN Gerry saw the knife—and he had not heard it fall on the soft ground—he thought a miracle had happened. One minute, there had been no chance of escaping, and the next minute brought him a knife that he could reach. But he didn't reach for it at once. He looked from side to side to see if anyone was watching Loud talking came from the screened tent where Ali and Stennert sat drinking. At first, he thought they were quarrelling. But as he listened, he knew they were boasting of what they would do when they got home. They seemed pretty sure of getting the ransom money.

That made Gerry think.

During his stay in Africa with Bill Wilson, Gerry had made many resolves to behave better in the future. This doing without hard liquor had made him feel better than he had for years. He resolved to see more of his mother. But that all depended on the failure of the holdup scheme, which might succeed. The police might take a hand and then Stennert might kill his captive to save himself. He had been thinking in this vein until he saw the knife. Who could have thrown it at his feet but Bill? That meant Bill was alive and near him. Never before had he believed so much in any man as he did in Bill Wilson at that moment.

Gerry first freed his wrists. Then he cut the rope at his ankles. His joy at being free again was checked by the thought that he wasn't much better off, unless Bill was near. And, even then, what a desperate situation to be in! He edged into the dense bushes and trees, and saw with despair that a native with a spear was there. Was this one of Stennert's cruel tricks? Had he planned this to plunge his prisoner into deeper despair?

Then he recognized the faithful Snoopy.

Snoopy beckoned, and the two crept away a few yards to where Bill was waiting. The two men shook hands and grinned.

"Don't thank me," Bill said. "It was Snoopy's own idea and I'm proud of him."

"What happens now?" Gerry demanded.

"There are only two ways out," Bill said. "One is to ask you to spend a few days with me in an apartment I've rented from a family of wild pigs. The other and better idea is to get Stennert and Ali and confiscate their outfit."

"That's impossible," Gerry declared.

"Everything is possible in Africa. I've just sent Snoopy to scout around a bit. He says the main body can't be back today, and that the others are getting stewed on *Kangala* beer. It's going to be a difficult job; but you've got a knife, and maybe Snoopy can steal a rifle."

"And if we fail?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "I'd rather take a chance. After all, we have no guns or medicine chest. You can't imagine just what that means. Now this way, we've got a chance. You can back out of it if you want to."

"What sort of louse do you think I am?" Gerry cried.

Snoopy came back. He had no rifle, but he had good news. Stennert and Ali were sleeping. They would sleep for an hour or two. Anything to relieve the tedium. There was nothing to read; and because each cheated, they quarreled at all card games.

Stennert lay on his back, his mouth half opened. He was a repulsive specimen without his genial and false smile. He awoke with great suddenness when a gag was thrust into his mouth. He was bound hand and foot and he could not cry for help.

"What you'd like to know, you fat swine," Gerry said, "is what happened to Ali. We got him first. He's more dangerous than you." Gerry was standing over Stennert, waving the captured Luger. Bill Wilson had Ali's big automatic, and Snoopy grinning by the en-

trance, stood with a rifle. This was better than any spear, to his way of thinking.

"This is the idea," Wilson said. "I'm taking charge of your outfit and we're going back. I shall give you both to British authorities when we cross the frontier. One of us will be always awake with a gun. I hope you do try something. I'm not fond of jackals, but I'd like to give them a good dinner, for once. Don't think your native boys will help. Snoopy will tell them there's a big reward for both of you back in Mozambique, and they hate your guts already. Now Snoopy and I are going to tell your men there's a new officer in command."

Lying there, the two defeated men passed miserable minutes. The natives were not loyal and they had always hated Ali. They would be glad to serve under the Americans. Natives liked to back the winning side. To see their two former leaders shackled and humiliated would tell them where their interests lay.

Stennert knew that Ali was lying there blaming him. And it *was* his fault. He should not have underestimated the man he had sneered at and called a very common sort of fellow. And when he shot, he should have killed him.

It seemed a long time before Bill and Snoopy came back. When there was a sudden shouting, Stennert hoped the natives had overpowered the two and were coming to the rescue. But nothing like that happened. Bill Wilson appeared instead.

"Well, gentlemen," Bill said cheerfully, "I've taken over. You probably heard the boys cheering the speech that I made and Snoopy translated. I'm going to ungag you, but don't raise a lot of hell; I wouldn't like that!"

Ali was the first to speak. "There is no charge on which the English can hold me! I have done nothing."

"Yeah? I'll charge you with killing three of my boys by breaking their backs and throwing them out to die. They were under British protection, remember?" Bill turned to Stennert. "I suppose you'll say there's nothing I could bring against you?"

Stennert tried to hide his rage and fear with his famous smile. "We are not there yet. Many things can and will happen."

"You bet," Bill said. "And you won't like any of them. One is that you'll melt a lot of that lard off. You're going to be put on a diet."

"We have thirty other men," Ali said. "All of them are loyal to me and not like the cowardly scum left to look after camp. They will kill you."

"We took that matter up just now," Bill said, "and there isn't going to be any difficulty about that. The reward is what fetches them."

THE outfit came again to the almost dry bed of the river that was the eastern boundary of the Congo territory. The men from Portuguese East Africa were no longer sullen and silent. At times they were merry, for Snoopy had told them that each one would get a lot of money when these two wicked criminals were thrown in jail.

Yet, it was a long dangerous trek to a safe region.

Suddenly they stopped, began jabbering excitedly and pointed to where, in the high and distant sky, two specks were seen. These specks soon grew into two airplanes.

The planes made excellent landings on the open veldt. From one, negro soldiers jumped out, formed into line, and awaited the command of their white officer. Bill recognized the men as members of the K.A.R., the Kings' African Rifles. They stood at the very edge of the line that separates British territory from that of the Belgian Congo. Were Bill and his party to cross they might create an incident.

But from the other plane, a tall thin woman stepped. She held herself very erect in a dominating and imperious manner. Just now she seemed anxious and perturbed. Then her eyes fell on Gerry. She gave a cry of delight, plunged across the boundary and kissed him.

"Darling, are you all right?" she cried, and then proceeded to burst into tears. Gerry comforted her gently.

The officer smiled, saluted Bill Wilson. "I've come to arrest Doctor Stennert and Madrali," he said.

"I've got Stennert and Madrali," Bill grinned, "and I'll be glad if you'll take

them off my hands." He told the captain what had happened.

When he had finished, Mrs. Waterford came to them. "A perfectly amazing story, Captain Sackville. My boy is a hero. Alone, he captured these dreadful men." She beamed at her tall son. "My Gerald can do absolutely anything. He should get the Victoria Cross or the Congressional Medal."

"Why not both of them?" Gerry said, anxious to keep her from further boasting about him. "Listen, mother. You've got it all wrong. The praise you're heaping on me belongs wholly to Bill Wilson."

"Is it possible?" Mrs. Stratford Waterford took a look at Bill. He had a homely pleasant sort of face. "Of course, it's your modesty that makes you say that. But a mother can see the real truth. You are a hero, Gerald."

The captain coughed, solemnly.

Bill asked a question. "How do you happen to be here?"

"It is not as mysterious as it seems," Captain Sackville answered. "It was due chiefly to your friend's habit of flying where he likes without attending to the rules and regulations of flying across frontiers. He flew into Portuguese East Africa and left it without informing the authorities. I'm afraid our own people have a grievance against him for that."

"I'll fly your ship back and apologize," Gerry said cheerfully.

Captain Sackville smiled. "I don't think you'll be flying for a time, Mr. Waterford. Your license has been suspended."

"You'll get it back," his mother said. "You always do."

Sackville winced, scowling at Gerry. "Your plane was reported by two other fliers and when your mother asked—I should say demanded—a government expedition, we got useful hints from the native drums."

"Gosh, yes!" cried Gerry. "The drums!"

"Gerald is a marvelous aviator," Mrs. Waterford asid. "In the war he would be an ace. I think we should be getting back now, Captain Sackville. I want to get to a cable office." Mrs. Waterford was used to arranging things to suit herself. She spoke to her son. "Say goodbye to your friend, Gerald. I'm so much obliged to you, Mr. Wilson; I'm sure my son will miss you."

"I'M not leaving him," Gerry said. "We'll go home on the same boat. Bill's going to put in about six years studying to be a doctor of science or medicine. And when he's Doctor Wilson, the world will hear of the Waterford-Wilson expeditions."

Mrs. Waterford knew then that Bill Wilson had done her a greater favor than she could ever repay.

"I am sure I am very grateful to you, Mr. Wilson." She said. "And that is but small payment of the eternal debt I owe you for the safe return of my son."

Bill Wilson flushed, gave stammering thanks. A few seconds later, he clambered into the plane after Gerry and Mrs. Waterford.

Gerry looked down from the climbing plane to the men on the river bed. Presently he spoke to his mother, and all of the old insolent arrogance was gone from his voice.

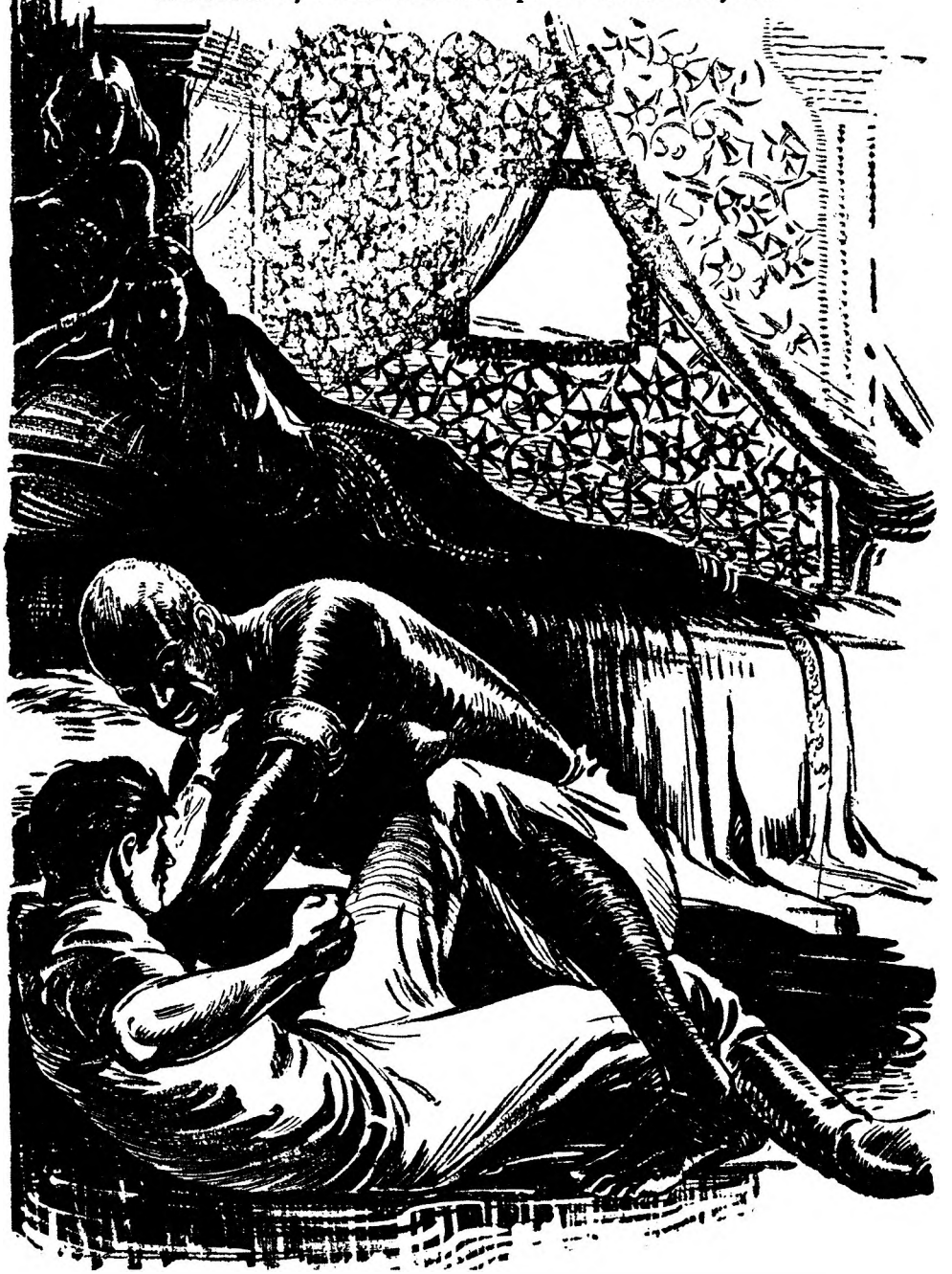
"I'll make up to you all of the worries I've given." He glanced at the tanned features of the man at his side. "With Bill's help," he added.

Bill Wilson stretched lazily, nodded, smiled with the warm friendliness of a man who had found his destiny at last.

DAKAR DREAD

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

A Novelet of Plot and Counterplot in Moslem Africa



Elliott slipped. Then the whole weight of Kumba's giant frame hit him.

ON the desk of Major Douglas Elliott stood a tall cool drink that Cumba, the Ashanti orderly, had brought in. Elliott glanced at the open door, stood up and stared uncertainly at the newcomer.

He saw a narrow head, combed so faultlessly that the hair seemed painted

rather than brushed on top of it, a horsy face enlivened by two piercing eyes, and a chin like the butt of a cheese, towering above a pair of high, bony shoulders. The lanky visitor was attired in faultless pongee clothes and carried a sun helmet and a malacca cane in his left hand.

"Er . . . the pleasure is all mine," Elliott managed. "Please sit down."

"Right-o, and the name is Sir Archibald Thorpe-Effingham," the visitor said pleasantly, sinking into the armchair with a distinction of motions extraordinary in a man of his angular frame. "Foreign Office, Major."

In that moment Cumba returned, carrying a pitcher and a single glass.

"By Jove! Here's the answer to a thirsty chap's prayer!" Sir Archibald exclaimed.

"Glass number two, quick!" Elliott exclaimed to his orderly.

Cumba shook his woolly head vigorously, to signify that he had understood, and withdrew, wondering for the thousandth time since his enlistment why white men didn't drink using the same glass in turns.

"My visit," Sir Archibald Thorpe-Effingham drawled, after gulping down two drinks in quick succession," is a direct result of the appointment as Resident General, or Governor, to all-important French Guinea, of a General Gustave Etienne Marie de la Perriere.

"General de la Perriere is a spare, gray-haired soldier of France, who carries his five feet four of stature with rare dignity, and has a reputation for nursing grudges.

"The Government of unoccupied France has granted him full powers. He can admit as many so-called German tourists as he wants. He can bar every confounded Nazi agent out of Senegal if he gets a notion to do so.

"Aged Marshal Petain remembers what Perriere did at Verdun as a Colonel, and his half-month's defense of a group of hills with a few starved native companies against vast hordes of doughty Riffians. Therefore, he has full faith in Perriere's firmness.

"But the pro-German lobby in Vichy know that Perriere hates us English—his son was unavoidably left behind during the evacuation of Dunkerque. Consequently, our Government fears that Perriere's appointment, and the full powers granted to him, are the work of pro-German interests.

"Hitler can use an additional trump card with de la Perriere: preferred treatment granted his prisoner son, and his eventual release if his General father proves amenable.

"And to justify the old axiom, that troubles come in droves, a very black, very fat and very cantankerous gentleman of sorts, who looks like an old-fashioned blackface American mammy in his robe of state, has been insulted by a German disguised as an Englishman, and soon after was presented with valuable gifts by a German diplomatic agent. The three-hundred-pound potentate is no less than Saladior-Dioum, Almamy or Sultan of the most important group of Ouloff tribes. And that is not all!

"The Axis has purchased, with a million gold francs, the allegiance of Mahmadou el Hadj, descendant of that El Hadj Oumar who, toward the middle of the last century, gathered hundreds of fighting followers and founded a Moslem sect by relating his solitary interviews with the angels of Allah, in the heart of the night and the secrecy of his tent. He never produced a witness—but his word was never doubted, in his part of the world!"

Sir Archibald paused for breath.

Elliott murmured sympathetically: "Sounds bad, does it not?"

"Bad?" Sir Archibald exploded. "It is ghastly! Just think what the Ouloffs are! Thousands upon thousands. All trained soldiers, because the French never bothered to Westernize the Negroes of Senegal, but introduced conscription among them long ago. And that's not all. If the Ouloffs join the Axis chariot, the Mandingues and the tribes of Cayor will make common cause with them. Their religious antagonist and age-old enemies—the Tucouleurs—will not move against them because Mahmadou El Hadj, like his ancestor Oumar, has a large Tucouleur following. The Governor of Guinea could hold all these tribes in leash. But the actual Governor of Guinea de la Perriere—may turn into a stooge of the

Axis, and a declared enemy of Great Britain, at any bally moment!

"We got to work fast! We've found out that young de la Perriere can't be returned to his father, for a very convincing reason: the poor fellow died of a visceral ailment last June, in a German concentration camp.

"His fellow prisoner and devoted orderly, Bourdette, comforted his last moments. Bourdette was born in the Somme-Charente district of France, where the la Perriere estates are located. He did odd jobs on them, in his late teens, as a matter of fact, and, as we found out also, he's personally known and trusted by the General.

"Our secret service, operating in Germany, succeeded in smuggling Bourdette out of his concentration camp and out of Germany. But Bourdette would be eliminated in record time if he should attempt to reach de la Perriere Senior —the anti-British branch of the French Secret Service has woven an invisible net all around the new Governor.

"Now, let's get to business. Working under a disguise, strictly on your own, you have scored twice, in Ethiopia and in Equatorial Africa, have you not, Elliott? Your country has rewarded you with the promotions for exceptional services. . . .

"Go to French Guinea, impersonating a trader, a Frenchman, even a wandering tree. Get General de la Perriere's ear, drag Bourdette under his nose, and, by thunder, all official England shall swear of your name!

"It sounds like a large order, I realize. And I know, as well as you do, that you have only one chance in five of succeeding. Worse, you'll have to move smartly, if you wish to remain among the living," Sir Archibald said gravely. "But . . . you know the tight corner the British lion is in. If you work the trick it will mean a lot for England, Major Elliott."

"I'll take the job, Sir Archibald," Elliott replied.

II

PERHAPS a mist arising from the bay, or a cloudlet was just passing before the fiery disk of the sun. At any rate, the light in the room suddenly seemed to dim. Jane's face no longer smiled, in her portrait. Elliott remembered a similar expression of worry on his fiancee's delicate features, when the Italians of the Commander Giuliari had cornered him, in black Goggiam. "Imagination plays strange tricks on one's nerves," he mused, to steady himself.

"Of course," he said aloud, "I must find a key. A human introduction card."

"Another impersonation," Sir Archibald approved. "Your method worked twice. There's no reason why it shouldn't score the third time."

"In Equatorial Africa," Elliott continued," a dead German soldier—Prossler—gave me a cue. He resembled me a lot, that aviator. It would be fine if we could find some officer—a soldier wouldn't do—of the Government of Vichy, who bore a strong resemblance to me. This officer, however, should be one of our prisoners of war, and, therefore, unable to pop up in Guinea at the wrong time."

Sir Archibald gulped hard and played nervously with his cane.

"There's a possibility," he suggested after a while, "that some officer, looking very much like you, could be actually in Equatorial Africa or with the operating forces of De Gaulle. . . ."

"Such an eventuality must be ruled out," Elliott replied firmly. "As far as I know, there may be underground ties between the Petain and the Free French factions. They fight each other, they are deadly enemies, and yet they are not. Each of these two camps of embattled Frenchmen is honeycombed with informers for the other camp, to say the least.

"My life counts little, because sooner or later we must all die. But, what would happen to my mission if—after I had obtained recognition in Dakar as, let's say, a mythical Captain Potage, caught against his will by the acceptance of De Gaulle's rule by the garrisons of Equatorial Africa—an accredited informer should warn de Perriere, or the secret agents keeping an eye on him, that the Potage is drilling recruits for De Gaulle, or drinking *pinard* in his Free-French fort?"

Sir Archibald replied unhappily:

"I shall be candid with you. I'm not a plain liaison chap of the Foreign Office, but a functionary intrusted with all kinds of secrets and mementous responsibilities. I pulled the ropes that brought you to Freetown, because I reached the conclusion that you were just the man I needed, after glancing at your record. Now you pull all kinds of objections out of your bag, all good sense stuff, but dashed nuisances just the same. The inquiries you mention will take lots and lots of time. Must be done secretly and painstakingly, to any use at all. Unfortunately, I've already written to London that I have begun straightening up the de la Perriere problem. The delay will put me in hot water. If, meanwhile, de la Perriere goes German, I shall be recalled under a cloud."

"I see," Elliott mused. "You have found a diplomatic way of squirming through a loophole. If you fail, you'll give all the blame to me. If I succeed, you'll take all the merit." Aloud, he said: "Sorry, Sir Archibald Thorpe-Effingham. The inquiry that I proposed must go on. I can't think of a better plan."

TWO weeks later, Sir Archibald had lost ten pounds. Elliott had calmly collected several pictures, and shelves of duplicates of character notes. All that work, though, brought him nowhere, until, in the fifteenth day from the beginning of the research, a special courier from Syria brought in a dossier concerning a certain Lieutenant Balikine of the Legion Etrangere.

As he perused Balikine's dossier, Elliott realized that finally he had scored.

Balikine was about six feet tall, long-legged, slender, with square shoulders and a tapering waist. The shape of his head, and the features of his face, also, could have induced a casual observer to believe that he and Elliott were the same person.

It seemed perfect.

Looking closer at the front and side pictures of Balikine, Elliott, however, noticed that Balikine's nose was a bit sharper. His eyebrows had a satanic slant lacking entirely in Elliott's face, and the triangular spots of baldness over his temples accentuated it.

The record of Lieutenant Cyril Balikine was as lively as his appearance was exotic. French-born son of a former Czarist diplomat, he had sown more wild oats in his early twenties than four average playboys do in a lifetime, and had run afoul of the law a couple of times. But all trouble had been smoothed out, thanks to influential friends of his father.

Then Balikine Senior had died, leaving only debts. His own luxurious tastes, and his son's riotous living, had exhausted what money he had salvaged from the fury of the Bolshevik revolution.

Two months later his son was driving a taxi. From then on his manner of living was precarious, indeed. There was an ugly story of a wealthy dowager who had lost her jewels, intrusted to a gigolo who matched Cyril Balikine's description. Then came a strange murder mystery in Paris, in which the young nobleman was involved.

Perhaps the evidence pointing to Balikine was too flimsy and circumstantial; or the pull of his father's friends still assisted him. At any rate he faded from sight, and the Surete Generale didn't look for him.

The next year, he was among the soldiers of the Fourth Foreign Infantry Regiment who were decorated for conspicuous gallantry. Why and how had he joined the Legion Etrangere? Nobody cared to know, in Paris, not even the dowager, who had become engaged in a feud with a younger but not beautiful woman over the looks of another gigolo.

In the Foreign Legion, Balikine was respected because he had guts. Plenty of them. At thirty-five, he was a lieutenant with a breastful of decoration ribbons. Staunch supporter of the Petain Government, he had been captured in Beyrouth, with some other officers and men of the Foreign Legion who had fought for a fortnight against Australian, British, Indian and Free French forces.

A convenient pilot was found, from among the prisoners of the forces who had tried to keep the British and the Free French out of Syria. His name was Camille Mallier, a short, stocky, sworthy man.

Mallier was a convinced supporter of General Weygand and Marshal Petain. He wrinkled his nose disdainfully every time he heard De Gaulle's name. But he hated the Germans and loved good British banknotes. It took all the pull of Sir Archibald Thorpe-Effingham, though, to convince the Command of the Middle East that they had to sacrifice a brand-new, freshly seized Vichy plane.

TWO days later, the airplane in question stood on the landing field of one of Beyrouth's airdromes. Its tanks were full, its motor had been checked and found in top condition. Its Free-French pilot was drinking an invigorating glass of eggnog in the officers' mess.

Meanwhile, a company of slightly tipsy British officers had invaded the landing field. These officers, all connected with His Majesty's Intelligence Service, were, as a matter of fact, drearily sober and not glad of it; but they played their part like consummate actors, and plagued the ground crews and guards at the airdrome with a lot of useless queries, which could not be dismissed lightly on account of their rank.

Consequently, no crew man or guard noticed the stocky French aviator with a four days' growth of beard, who ran crouching low out of some bushes, and covered in a few seconds the distance separating the border of the field from the airplane.

Mallier, the aviator in question, knew his business. With a deft heave he set the propeller in motion; then, looking like a heavy-set ape, he climbed into the cockpit, slammed the door shut and pulled at the controls.

The ground crew and the guards were thunderstruck when they heard the roar of the motor. When they sprang into action, they found the tipsy officers barring their way.

The airplane had taxied for a score of yards and was going too fast when they finally succeeded in running after it. When the airplane left the ground. But the guards didn't know if its abrupt departure was due to a whim of its legitimate pilot, or to the daring attempt of a deserter, and hesitated to open fire.

Officers, known for their ability to keep their mouths shut, had been assigned to pilot the pursuit planes watching the sky over Beyrouth in that day. Warned by the radio operator of the airdrome, who had been quickly enlisted by the eggnog-drinking Free French pilot, these pursuit pilots made a show of flying after the runaway and attacking it, but they managed to lose it.

Twelve hours later, Mallier brought down the stolen plane on a cleared field near Sokoto, in northern Nigeria. There he was met by Elliott, who had been brought to Sokoto the previous day, together with the orderly Bourdette, by a transport plane.

Elliott saw that Mallier was well fed, and ordered him to snatch a few hours of sleep. But, to keep the escape alibi fool-proof, no additional gasoline was poured into the tanks of Mallier's plane, which held still about enough petrol to cover the sixteen hundred-odd miles separating Sokoto from Dakar.

The next morning, Elliott, Bourdette and Mallier climbed on the stolen machine. Elliott, with the corners of his eyebrows trimmed, and with two tiny triangles of hair shaven from above his temples, was attired in a battered uniform of Balikine's Foreign Regiment. Bourdette wore the clothes of a private of the same outfit.

Sir Archibald was happy as a lark when he saw them off.

"Hullo, hullo, my dear Major!" he greeted Elliott, much to the latter's irritation. "You look very much the philandering woman-chaser today, don't you? Not the kind one would intrust with one's sister or pet niece in a lone spot, ha ha!"

ELLIOTT had mapped the trans-African flight, and all the details that went with it. But Sir Archibald took the attitude that he had conceived the idea of sending Elliott to keep Gende la Perriere out of the Axis fold, and that as a result he was entitled to the lion's share of the credit Sir Archibald could do so with the most serene state of mind. He wasn't going to run any danger, while Elliott stepped in that king cobra's den of the French Secret Service —of French West Africa.

"Remember," he clipped joyously,

after grabbing Elliott's hand for a last time, "no check-up can betray you. You only have to play the game according to schedule to win through. I don't entertain any doubt about your success, and neither must you, by Jove!"

"I'm tempted to hit you once, on your horse's teeth, for good luck!" Elliott thought furiously.

Finally, the door of the cockpit was closed. Mallier grabbed the controls. A British aircraftsman pulled away the chocks.

The plane taxied, arose smoothly. While it seemed as if the soil of Niagara was being sucked far under the fuselage by the clear ether, Elliott drifted into a brown reverie. For the first time in his career as an Intelligence Officer, he felt a lot of misgivings, a sensation akin to fear. In his two previous field tasks —in his duel with the Italian Colonial Secret Service in Ethiopia, and in his clash with the German masterminds of the League for African Rights—he had been helped by the fact that his adversaries were coping with a wild, immense country, where they didn't feel by any means at home.

Now he was going into a part of Africa, inhabited by tribes just as fierce, but thoroughly under the control of the crafty, well-organized and resourceful Bureau Indigene, or French Secret Service, which in its turn, was watched closely by large numbers of German agents.

The pressure of a nervously twitching shoulder against his own jerked him out of his gloomy thoughts. Bourdette, the orderly of the deceased de la Perriere, had opened widely his sunken eyes. He was contracting his neck and flattening his chin over his breast, while the hair arose stiffly over his square head of French peasant.

"What is it, *soldat?*" Elliott shouted above the roar of the motor.

"Mon Commandant!" Bourdette gasped. "I saw the face of my dead master! His eyes, horribly dilated as they were in his last moment, stared at me . . . they seemed to float besides the back of the pilot's head! *O mon Dieu de bon Dieu, mon Commandant!* Where I was born, they say: If you see a recently dead acquaintance, you or the men with you will go to the ghosts' world inside of forty-eight hours."

"Tommyrot!" Elliott exclaimed. "You ate too much for breakfast. That's too bad for anyone before an aerial journey, and especially for a Frenchman, accustomed from childhood to feed himself on a cup of black coffee and a roll in his first daily meal." But, inwardly, Elliott raged: "Damn the frog! His lust for sensationalism, for dramatizing himself, has carried him too far. Unless he plays his past well, I shall put the screws on him when we return to base."

His anger quickly subsided when he glanced at the orderly's face. It was too ashy pale. The man was not faking. He was genuinely terrorized.

"He's a hysterical type. Or the sufferings he went through as a prisoner affected his mind," Elliott reflected. But, somehow, it didn't click.

An hour later, Bourdette had fallen asleep, sprawled on his seat, with the tip of his pointed nose quivering and his mouth twisted sideways. He wasn't handsome, or wholesome looking in the least. But he looked the rugged, level-peasant that he was. He didn't seem tricky by any means. Just a plain fellow of average intelligence, unimaginative and not easily ruffled.

As he stared at him, Elliott felt his worry growing. Not because he believed in ghosts in the very least; but because he had heard of simple-minded fellows endowed with the gift of sensing the coming of trouble, as some birds sense the approaching of the changes of season.

The Scots Highlanders call these men *"feys,"* and have a holy fear of their warnings.

III

SEVEN hours later, as they flew over the jungles separating Senegal from southern Mauritania, fate suddenly took a hand. A hawk of the skies, a pursuit plane bearing the British colors, suddenly plunged from the stratosphere. It came down, keeping in the blinding stream of the beams pouring from the sun, and remained thus invisible until it was nearly on the tail of Elliott's plane.

Yet, Elliott and pilot Mallier didn't fear a surprise attack. The British had supported De Gaulle's unlucky attempt to seize Dakar the previous year. They had also conquered Syria, steamrolling the opposition of the local Vichy troops. But there was no declared warfare between Great Britain and the Government of unoccupied France.

However, the pilot of that plane meant business. A hail of bullets suddenly poured out of the machine guns mounted on the wings of his flying machine.

Mallier had been in several air combats. He zigzagged, catching bullets in the tips of his machine's wings, and in non-vital parts of the fuselage. When the pursuer nearly got on his tail, he went on a loop.

Beside the pilot could turn and regain altitude, Mallier threw his throttle open and gained a few miles. Immediately after, the unforeseen happened again. An air pocket caught the pursuing craft, sucked it in a whirlpool. Mallier took advantage of it to increase his advantage.

The enemy pilot, however, had plenty of skill, and a faster airplane. Slowly, to avoid straining the frame of his machine, he got out of trouble. Once he did, he made a bee line for the tiny speck that Elliott's plane had become on the western horizon.

A half hour later he caught up with it. Mallier shook off the pursuit a second time, but his plane's tail was nearly shot away.

A quarter of an hour further, Elliott realized that the end was in sight. Being a practiced pilot and air fighter, he took charge of his plane's machine guns and attempted to fight the harassing Britisher. But, was he a Britisher after all? His sturdy pursuer bore the British colors.

Suddenly Mallier cried out. Elliott saw blood pouring out of the cuff of one of his sleeves, and hastened to grab the controls.

In that moment he happened to glance at the ground below and noticed a square buff structure, looking like a squatting beast of a bygone age in the middle of the green spread of jungle. Then he caught a glimpse of something red and blue.

"A French flag flying in the breeze! A fort!" he shouted.

Mallier couldn't parachute out in his condition. Bourdette was in an airplane for the first time in his life, and sobbed with rage be couldn't put up a fight for his life.

"I must bring them down, with this battered flying crate!" Elliott raved.

But the airplane was rapidly getting out of control.

"I'll be shot to hell, soon." Elliott grated mechanically. In that moment the circling enemy machine passed before his gun sights. Quick as a flash, he pulled the trigger.

The next instant the attack was over. Apparently unscathed, the enemy craft was flying away. Was it a wound that had driven its pilot from his nearly doomed quarry—from Elliott's crippled plane? Elliott never knew, because for the next four or five minutes he had to use all his strength, skill and grim resolution to pull through, to avoid crashing.

When he finally grounded the plane, after a bumpy landing over a rocky plain which nearly wrecked the wheels and the bullet pierced fuselage, he was so exhausted that he fell on the wheel in a semi-faint.

A few seconds later an angry trumpeting jerked him up on the pilot's seat.

Two huge rhinos had appeared out of the jungle, and were coming at a trot. Mallier had fainted and lay in a heap on the floor of the pilot's cage. Bourdette, shaken and air-sick, held his square head with both hands.

"Grab a gun, com' out with me!" Elliott roared, making a dive for the raft of the portable arms and bandoleers.

The rhinos were charging when he jumped out of the open door of the cockpit. He quickly kneeled, took aim, fired. But the rhinos kept catapulting on.

They were nearly on top of him when Bourdette jumped screaming out of the opposite side of the cockpit. Elliott fired a last round almost pointblank, saw a rhino diving snout first into the grass, and he just managed to leap clear of the immense slashing horn of the other charging rhinosceros.

The next instant he heard a thunderous

crash. He turned, inserting a new cartridge clip into the magazine of the rifle, and saw the airplane breaking and drifting sideways. The snout of the surviving rhino soon came out of the mess of the crumpling and trampled fuselage.

Elliott had just enough time to notice that the long slashing horn of the ugly beast was gone—it had probably been broken while it tore through the airplane —then he saw the ponderous hindquarters of the tank-like beast coming out of broken tubing and twisted plates.

He was lifting his rifle to fire, when a volley crashed far to his left.

THE rhino flopped down into the wreckage. Gradually, the broken pieces of fuselage settled over the collapsing behemoth and pancaked, until it became a jagged mound flanked by a still intact wing and the twisted frame.

A patrol of Senegalese Tirailleurs advanced into the plain holding their guns at the ready. They were big, beefy fellows, with puffed features as black as coal. They wore tan uniforms, blue puttees and sandals. Their negro commanding sergeant jabbered a few words, which sent four of them straight to the wreck. Then, with the remaining four soldiers, the Sergeant walked up to Elliott.

"*Mon Lieutenant,*" he rumbled in halting French when he was abreast of him, "we have no Legion Etrangers in this neighborhood. What are you doing here?"

Elliott didn't resent the fact that the Senegalese didn't snap at attention, for French soldiers are bound to pay that form of disciplinary respect only to Generals, or to their commanding officers on duty. It was the insolent attitude and tone of voice of the black non-com that exasperated him. Luckily, he remembered that Senegalese, and Ouoloff Senegalese in particular, firmly believe that they are the equals of some white men, and a great deal better than most white men—which doesn't interfere with their true devotion to the flag of their French masters.

Therefore he answered brusquely but without bitterness:

"I fought the English. I was captured by them, but I broke away. Helped by two other French prisoners I captured a Free French plane. Defeated in my intention of landing in Tunisia, rather than being caught by the De Gaulle traitors on the Sahara, or dying of thirst in its wastes, we kept on flying. . . ."

"We saw the English plane that attacked you. We fired against it. Perhaps our bullets and not yours drove it away when your machine was done for," the Ouoloff sergeant cut in importantly.

Elliott nodded. "In coming down, I saw a fort. Take us to it. But help me first to pull the wounded pilot out of the wreck," Elliott replied.

"Am patrol commander. Must see your papers first of all, mon Lieutenant," the Ouoloff sergeant countered.

"The pilot may need urgent help," Elliott replied, pulling the identification papers that the British had taken from the true Balikine out of his pocket.

"Am on duty, *mon Lieutenant,* must see papers. If you think me wrong, report me. My name is Matambe." The sergeant shrugged, stretching a huge, black paw toward Balikine's papers.

To argue meant further delay. Elliott allowed him to see the identifying documents, and was somewhat mollified by the speed with which Matambe perused them.

Then he had the papers back and they were both running toward the wreck, followed by Bourdette. But the Tirailleurs who had gone first to the wrecked plane had already done their work. They were extricating the horribly crushed body of Mallier from under a mess of splinters and the hind hoofs of the dead rhino.

Elliott saw a shiny-grey pellet stuck on a broken plank. Prodded by an obscure instinct, he wrenched it free, saw that it was a flattened bullet, and dropped it into a pocket.

"*Pauvre homme, l'aviateur,*" the Ouoloff-French of Matambe rumbled as if from a distance. "But we'll give him military burial, near our camp."

"What about a camp?" Elliott snapped. "Are we not going to the fort?"

"Last month the mighty Almahmy Saladior Dioum became very angry." Matambe explained. 'Saladior Dioum

marched on fort. We, the Ouoloff of the garrison, we don't like to fight the Almalmy. Our Lieutenant understands, brings half company away.

"Saladior Dioum goes into fort with plenty warriors, and breaks everything inside, smashes floors and rafters of ceilings also, but leaves French flag on watch tower, and so the honor of France and the honor of *l'armee* is not insulted.

"Now Saladior Dioum is appeased. No friend but not enemy of French. Waiting to decide. We Tirailleurs, we still obey our Post Commander, Lieutenant Massillon."

Without another word they began the long march to the camp.

"Things are coming to a pretty pass when the black soldiers of this land of Senegal tolerate that greatest of all French military crimes, the destruction of Government property, and their officers stand passively by while Almalmy Saladior ravages a fort at will. Sir Archibald was right. It would be very bad if Saladior should join the Axis," Elliott thought grimly.

An hour later he was dining with the bearded Lieutenant Massillon in the latter's tent, in the very middle of a jungle clearing. Massillon, who looked like an ancient Assyrian stone-carving brought to life by an uncanny power, liked to play bezique above everything else in the world. When he learned that Elliott had a passing knowledge of that card game, he pulled out a deck and a score-tablet.

"Allons!" he exclaimed happily.

Elliott's trans-African trip, his air combat and near death under the rhinos' attack didn't mean a thing to Massillon. Had he been in Elliott's place, he would have been overjoyed getting a chance of forgetting hardships playing bezique, and he didn't care to ask if Elliott felt in the same way.

As far as Elliott was concerned, he needed Massillon's good-will and recognition. Consequently, he played bezique for four solid hours without raising an objection. He also lost fifteen hundred francs, which he couldn't fork over, because, to play properly his part of escaped prisoner, he had on his person only the average money carried by a none-too-careful Lieutenant of White Russian extraction a fortnight after getting his monthly pay envelope—that is, a miserly four hundred francs.

He explained.

Massillon was magnanimous when he heard of his predicament.

"Mon vieux," he said grandly, "keep what you have and send me what you owe me after getting a couple of monthly salaries." Then he instructed his orderly to make a bedding of freshly cut grass for Elliott in his own tent.

THE half company of Massillon had a complement of six mules. Two of these long-eared animals Massillon lent to Elliott and Bourdette, and gave him a letter for the commander of the nearest Fort.

Some two hundred miles of twisting trails separated Massillon's camp from Dakar. Halting in a fort lost in the wilderness after another, Elliott covered half that distance astride of a succession of mules in thirteen days. Then he reached a good military road, got a lift on a supply truck, and covered the second half of his journey in four hours.

The Command of Dakar had been notified of the heroic escape of Lieutenant Cyril Balikine, Aviator-pilot Mallier and first-class private Passaens, of the Third Foreign Regiment, detachment of Syria. After a hasty check-up of the defeated forces of General Dentz, the claim of the supposed Balikine had been considered creditable. The number of the wrecked plane that had carried him was identified as that of a brand-new scouting craft, sent to Syria on the eve of the British invasion. Which vouched for a bona-fide escape.

And there was the other plane.

Accordingly, great indignation had been displayed against the perfidious British, who had attacked relentlessly the brave champions of unoccupied France until they had been forced to land in the wilderness, and sincere regret had been expressed for Mallier's death. A warm welcome had been prepared for Balikine and Passaens.

The supply truck brought Elliott and Bourdette straight to Divisional Headquarters in Dakar, located in a spacious

tree-lined avenue. As soon as he alighted, Elliott was led to a large hall and treated to champaigne, buffet lunch and French pastry. Several ladies were present. Elliott, playing Balikine, courted all of them.

He could have enjoyed himself thoroughly if he hadn't worried about Bourdette, who after being promoted corporal on the very moment of his arrival, had been taken in tow by a Headquarters' sergeant, and led triumphantly on a tour of the town.

Late in the afternoon Elliott, really tired, expressed a desire of snatching a few hours of rest, and was guided to the quarters assigned to him.

There, he took a much-needed bath. He had just dried himself and was pondering the advisability of asking about Bourdette, when there was a discreet knock at the door of his room and an orderly came in, bearing a brand-new uniform of lieutenant of the line, from kepi to boots, and an official envelope.

Elliott opened the latter and read:

"By order of the Commander of the zone of Dakar, Lieutenant Cyril Balikine is temporarily assigned to the Headquarters of the motorized troops, sub-division of anti-tank devices. He'll depend in such a capacity from Commandant Langeron, commander of the specialized detail of infantry and artillery officers transferred to Senegal from the Metropole the first of August, 1941."

The general wasn't de la Perriere, but one of his seconds in command. Thus, as Sir Archibald had surmised, de la Perriere remained far from Elliott's reach. However, Elliott had ample reason of congratulating himself, because he had installed himself securely in the enemy camp—unless Bourdette bowled everything over with an uncautious word.

"Is the Lieutenant pleased?" the orderly asked, picking up the disreputable garments discarded by Elliott.

"Mais surement," Elliott smiled saturninely, as Balikine would have done in his place. "By the way, I hope my Legionnaire isn't getting too drunk."

"It all depends how he acts under the influence of the liquor, *mon Lieutenant,"* the orderly replied wisely.

"When he's drunk, he lies like a dowager asked about her age; he fights, tells lies, and gets in trouble," Elliott scowled. "And furthermore," he added as an afterthought, "he refuses to obey officers who don't belong to the Foreign Regiments. That's the reason why I would like to keep an eye on him."

"Everybody says how admirable is the way of sticking by their men of the officers of the Foreign Regiments," the orderly replied with feeling, "I shall look after your man if you want me to, *mon Lieutenant!"*

The orderly withdrew, and Elliott stretched himself over his bed. The next instant, he was asleep.

It was early evening when the orderly returned:

"Mon Lieutenant!" his anxious call awakened Elliott. "Your Legionnaire got away from his non-com guides, and entered all alone a cafe for negroes. Now he's insulting some Tirailleurs. They are likely to accept his challenges and batter him to a pulp! I tried to lead him away —and he gave me this!"

Elliott opened a pair of eyes still befuddled by sleep and saw that the orderly was pointing at a magnificent shiner blackening half of his face.

"I'll dress in a hurry and come to that dive with you," Elliott growled, jumping out of bed. "That fool! That idiot! I'll teach him how to behave!"

IV

A QUARTER of an hour later Elliott and the orderly stopped before the door of a bistro of the negro quarters. The thumping of a piano out of tune came out of the bistro, together with the fierce bawling of angry Senegalese voices.

Suddenly a chair sailed out of the open door, missing the orderly by a fraction of an inch. As if that had been the forerunner of bigger and nosier things, bedlam broke lose. Then, above the crashing of breaking furniture, the shrill voices of terrorized negresses rang deafeningly.

The first things seen by Elliott on entering the low-ceilinged dive were a dazzling arc described by the striking saber of a Spahi, and the scowling, pursed-lips

expression of a Moroccan Tirailleur, diving under the broad regulation knife of a Senegalese soldier, and stabbing at his belly with a naked bayonet. The adversary of the Spahi was a negro in foppish civilian clothes—probably a minor employee of the *Residence Generale*—and he brandished a bottle with a knocked-off bottom as a weapon. The Spahi's saber struck the top of his head, and threw him down like a poleaxed bullock; a second later, the Moroccan pulled his bloody bayonet out of the Senegalese, who fell forward on the receding bayonet, and landed on his face.

The next Moroccan and another Senegalese suddenly came to grips. They fell, kicking and punching savagely over a heap of upturned tables and chairs, as a saxophone flew from the bandstand and hit the floor with a deafening clang of twisting metal.

The drunken Bourdette, originator of the riot, had taken advantage of the fact that the non-Senegalese soldiers patronizing the dive had lost no time in siding up with him, to climb on the band-stand without opposition. Many were the things that could be hurled from that dominating place deserted by the musicians: musical instruments, stands, stools. With happy abandon, Bourdette was throwing them in quick succession, without discriminating between friends and foes.

In a split second, however, Elliott realized that the destructive pastime of the orderly of the late Lieuetnant de la Perriere was bound to end badly. The slashing and whirling Spahi sword, and the ferocity of a half dozen of Moroccans, had struck like the impact of an unforseen cyclone, too quickly for the slow-thinking Tirailleurs; for the Moroccans hated every member of that Senegalese soldiery, who had been used for years to steamroll the tribes of hillmen of Morocco.

Three of them and two civilian negroes had been wounded by the first onslaught, which had pushed some thirty Senegalese and ten civilians against the walls. But while the still uninjured black civilians had given up the fight, the thirty Senegalese soldiers were only bewildered, but by no means cowed. Their big hands clutched their tribal knives—the coup-coup, which had become a part of their regulation armament. Ugly things were these coup-coups: about a foot and a half long, and some four inches wide at the middle of the blade.

Soiled strips of multicolored paper hung in festoons from the ceiling. The negro girl entertainers and the musicians had taken a refuge behind the band stand, and from there they shrieked obscenities at the fighters.

A tremendously fat woman in a red spangled evening dress and an oily individual of undetermined nationality and race, with a big golden earring hanging from the lobe of his left ear, clutched at each other on top of a sort of pulpit —the singer's perch—and from there howled curses at Bourdette.

Elliott surmised that they were the propietors; but nobody listened to them and, therefore, in that moment they didn't count. The heads of the Senegalese soldiers were bobbing up and down. Woolly, bare heads. Black faces topped the *chechia* of their corps. Wide shoulders bending forward. Huge arm muscles bulging under the cloth of the uniforms' sleeves.

Elliott darted to the middle of the hall. "What is all this uproar?" he thundered in French. "Moroccan Tirailleurs, Senegalese Tirailleurs, you are all soldiers of France! Put your weapons in their sheaths! Instantly!"

The next instant he had a proof of the well known fact that French colonial soldiers off duty have no regard for strange subalterns.

A Moroccan spat. The Senegalese snarled at him. Crouching, they surged forward. Their pride was outraged because they had been beaten in the first flurry of fight.

ELLIOTT'S desperate glance searched behind the band-stand, noticed a window behind the waving arms of the entertainers. It was a square window, some two yards wide. Only a Venetian blind hung before it. Elliott had no way of knowing what was behind that window; but it represented the only avenue of escape, as far as Bourdette was concerned.

Above Elliott hung an old-fashioned crystal lampadarium, bearing electric bulbs

in the sockets of the original candles. The other lighting appliances in the hall were dim red and green lanterns, placed at wide intervals and fastened to the walls. The smashing of the lampadarium and its lights was bound to plunge the room into semi-darkness.

Elliott grasped a French cafe table—a round-topped piece of furniture—and heaved it with all his strength. Crystals and shattered bulbs fell to the floor with a high-pitched tingling noise as he sprang toward the band-stand.

The visibility in the room was very poor, when the thoroughly maddened Senegalese catapulted on. In that instant, though, Elliott jumped on the band-stand and got hold of Bourdette.

The latter didn't recognize him and hit the side of his face with a tambourine. Elliott grunted a "Damn!" and uppercut him, putting all the power of his pivoting shoulders behind the blow. Bourdette crumpled, and Elliott slung him over a shoulder and ran to the window. The last yard, he blasted through a tangle of shoulders and heads of shrilly protesting musicians and entertainers.

Elliott never remembered how he succeeded in smashing the Venetian blinds, and in lifting Bourdette and himself over the sill. But deeply impressed in his mind remained the sharp thud with which a coup-coup imbedded itself in the window frame.

Savage cries, the thunderous trampling of scores of milling feats, and an uproar of clashing steel and breaking furniture filled the cafe when Elliott leaped into a pitch-black alley. But the British officer didn't alight on its bottom, because strong hands caught and held him and the inert Bourdette in midair. Then a knotty fist dug into his collar band, twisted it and almost strangled him. Strong fingers clutched firmly the holstered automatic hanging from his belt, when the beam of a flashlight struck his face and blinded him.

Instantly a gruff voice rasped:

"Put him down, *especes d'andouille!* Believe it or not, he's an officer! A profound basso answered:

"Ca c'est gigolo! This is funny! What would an officer do in that sewer for negroes?"

The beam of the flashlight shifted from Elliott's face to Bourdette. The disguised British officer was thus able to see the men who had captured him.

They belonged to the Corps of the Gendarmes, of that French military Police that is recruited almost to a man among former non-coms of the regular Army. In full evidence over their sleeves were their chevrons, which are called *"gallons de'imbecile,"* or idiots' stripes, by the French rank and file who hate the gendarmes.

Before Elliott could explain, whistles were blown deafeningly all around the cafe. The night rang with stentorian commands when the clamor of fighting spread to the street before the main door of the cafe.

Elliott understood what was happening: The Senegalese and the Moroccans still on their feet had recognized the gendarmes' whistles; forgetting their quarrel they had ganged on the representatives of French law and order, and were now attempting to evade capture by breaking through the cordon formed by the gendarmes.

"I can explain . . ." began Elliott.

A tall and middle-aged *Marshal des Logis* waved a meaty hand before his face: *"Non, non!* No time to talk, now! *Taisez vous.* Lieutenant, you'll have to do your explaining in the Police Station!"

TOGETHER with Bourdette, but not manacled like the orderly, Elliott was taken to that place. The Spahi, who had miraculously escaped injury, two bleeding Moroccans and a score of Senegalese were brought along, too. To the utter dismay of the gendarmes, seven or eight Senegalese had managed to break away. The remaining Senegalese, the Spahi and six Moroccan Tirailleurs had been left at the cafe under technical arrest. Military surgeons, hastily called, already worked on them.

The Police Station was a duplicate of an average French one, and oddly out of place in Western Africa. The fat mulatto woman in red-spangled dress and the oily individual of the gorgeous earring soon made their appearance there.

At the sight of Bourdette, who was over his fit of drunken belligerency, the fat woman clawed her hands and attempted to scratch his eyes out. While two husky

gendarmes pulled her back panting and cursing, the oily cafe owner pointed a dramatic finger at Elliott:

"Arrest this man!" he shouted dramatically, "I never saw him before, never did him any harm, and yet he broke my beautiful, my priceless lampadarium, which was my pride and joy! Force him to give his name! I want to sue him! He must be punished! He must be made to pay through his nose!"

The Police Station had been militarized to cope with the times. In charge of it was a lieutenant of gendarmes, with a prominent nose and a handlebar mustache so black that it looked as if it had just been dipped in India ink; but all the inquiring duties remained in the hands of the Commissaire, who was short, corpulent, red-haired and with a stubby, spongy nose.

"What a vaudeville team they would make!" Elliott thought irreverently as he glanced at them.

But the red-haired Commissaire was in deadly earnest.

"Voyons, Lieutenant," he said acidly, "we know that you are out of our jurisdiction. Your Corps Commander must pass judgment over your case and dictate your punishment, or defer you to a court-martial, if the circumstances warrant it. But we must make our report. Your name, please. Or, better, let's see your identification papers."

Elliott dug in his pockets. They were empty. In his hurry of hastening to Bourdette's rescue, he had neglected to transfer to his new uniform the documents with which he had reached Dakar, and the order transferring him to the staff of Commandant Larminat.

He had no other recourse but to state his case and give his actual address. Unfortunately for him, both the Commissaire and the lieutenant of gendarmes had learned of his arrival in Dakar under his alias of Balikine, but not of his new assignment. Consequently, their suspicion was aroused by the discrepancy of a brand new uniform of the Line on a self-declared officer of the Legion Etrangere just back from a dangerous trip.

Their verdict was unhesitating:

"In that disreputable dive, where no officer ever goes, you acted as an agent provocateur by deliberately smashing the central lights, thus enabling soldiers of two races to kill each other under cover of darkness. Had you any special reason for doing so?"

"I wanted to rescue Legionnaire Passaens." Elliott replied.

"Was his skin more important than that of the four or five men who were hacked in the darkness?" the Commissaire insisted.

"In the Legion, we take care of our own," Elliott protested, very conscious of the fact that he couldn't disclose the real potential value of Bourdette.

"Encore des tripes! As your fine new uniform proves, you are no longer a Legion officer, but an infantryman!"

The Commissaire and the lieutenant of gendarmes put their heads together. Presently the gendarme officer said:

"The vagaries in your explanations, and your lack of identification papers leave us no choice but to hold you here while we investigate your story and personality.

"Now, let's hear the Legionnaire . . ."

They didn't lock Elliott in a cell. They ushered him unceremoniously into a rear room, furnished with a fly-specked calendar, a big chipped table, and a half dozen very hard chairs. And they gave him as companions two burly gendarmes, who whiled away the time for the next two hours smoking pestilential cigars and spitting on the floor.

V

IN their investigations, the French leave stones unturned only when they have special reasons of doing so. Telephone calls brought, in quick succession, one of the officers who had entertained Elliott, the driver of the military truck which had brought him to Dakar, and the orderly who had led him to the cafe. All three of them were ushered before the Lieutenant of Metropolitan Infantry detained in the rear room of the Police Station and vouched for the fact that he was indeed Balikine.

After that, the Commissaire made additional telephone calls. Then he sauntered into the rear room and notified Elliott that he was free to go, but that, being new to

Dakar and therefore unable of finding his way around in the early hours of the morning, two gendarmes in a motor car would take him back to his quarters. Elliott detected a sour note in his voice and an undimmed light of suspicion in his eyes. But a conviction that he had better take a bold stand, and that it was dangerous to leave a fool like Bourdette under lock and key, prompted him to ask the temporary release of Bourdette, until the matter of his punishment could be taken up by the commander of personnel of the Divisional Headquarters.

The Commissaire balked. But Elliott insisted, and French military law was on his side. The outcome of it was that Bourdette was allowed to go with him.

The car rolled smoothly through tree-lined avenues; on rounding a fourth corner, the gendarme driver found his way barred by a stalled truck.

A gendarme dismounted to investigate; when men poured out of the truck and out of the shade of the trees flanking the road. These men shoved automatics into the gendarmes' face, covered Elliott and Bourdette with a tommygun, and ordered all of them to leave the automobile.

Bourdette and the gendarmes, gagged and tied hands and wrists, were loaded on the truck. Elliott was made to cross a silent alley; then, blindfolded, he was pushed into a second automobile which instantly drove away.

No one spoke.

Minutes later, the automobile came to a stop. Still blindfolded, Elliott was led out of the tonneau, along a gravel path, over a short flight of stairs and through a corridor.

Finally he came to a stop in a place redolent with tobacco smoke. When the blindfold was removed from his eyes, he found himself before a massive desk, in a room filled with masked men.

"Lieutenant," one of them said, "please sit down."

Elliott got hold of a chair and complied. Eleven of the mysterious men walked up to him, scanned him from every side, muttered comments when the shaven spots over his temples caught their attention. Finally, and for no reason at all, the last masked men slapped him and leaped back.

Quick as a flash, Elliott jumped out of his chair, rushed him, jabbed with a long left, and crossed his right. Hit by the two piledriving blows, the masked man reeled and sank on an armchair. Another masked stranger of distinguished bearing said coolly:

"I think that we have seen enough. Allow Monsieur Balikine to go!"

Elliott heard guffaws of laughter. The blindfold was again clamped over his face, and someone gripped his arm.

The same auto carried him at top speed for a few minutes; then the door of the tonneau was opened and he was helped out. A vibrant voice announced:

"Lieutenant! In time you shall learn the reason of our actions. If the police become curious and ask you, tell what you saw; it shall not harm us any."

The car went away with such a speed that it was gone before Elliott could remove his blindfold.

"Blast the luck!" he snarled as he saw the tail-light disappearing behind a street corner.

His exasperation was increased by the fact that the street was deserted. As far as he knew, his quarters could be equally a block away or at the opposite end of the town. He was sleepy, craving a soft bed; but he was confronted by the prospective of spending hours wandering aimlessly.

"I shall stay where I am," he finally decided, "until some patrolling policeman or soldier comes by and puts me on the right track."

HIS surmise was right. A few minutes later a police car sped over the street and came to a stop abreast of him with a great shrieking of brakes. Policemen, plainclothesmen and two gendarmes poured out of the tonneau. In one of these gendarmes Elliott recognized one of the men who had been captured with him. The gendarme, on his turn, recognized him.

"Mon Lieutenant!" he blurted solicitously, "what did they do to you?"

Elliott related his experience. The Commissaire in charge of the police detail was a dull-looking individual with a face shaped like a cassaba melon; but his brain was by no means as dumb as his appear-

ance. When Elliott was through speaking, he rasped:

"If I hadn't already heard the story of the gendarmes and the Legionnaire waylaid with you, I would believe that you are in cahoots with a group of troublemakers, aiming to bewilder us with a succession of fool pranks, so as to cover some secret activity of theirs. I think, instead, that you tell the truth. Further inquiries shall tell us what this is all about."

"Where's my Legionnaire?" Elliott gasped.

"He was kicked out of the truck with the gendarmes a few minutes after your unwilling departure. They had to walk for two or three minutes to get back to their automobile. Now Legionnaire Bourdette is safe in the barracks." The Commissaire shrugged. "If you want to listen to me, you'll allow us to take you to your rooms before your bad luck plunges you into further trouble."

Elliott was very willing. It was dawn when he went to bed. Having no special duty to attend for the day, he slept until noon; then he bathed, shaved leisurely, dressed and lunched in his rooms. He had just drunk the two cups of black coffee, French style, and the glass of Grand Marnier liquor with which he rounded up his meal to play well his part, when the orderly—the same one who had guided him to Bourdette's rescue—came in, announcing that a visitor was at the door.

Elliott ordered that the visitor should be ushered in.

The orderly returned with a tall and muscular lieutenant of Chasseurs d'Afrique in his early forties, who hadn't a distinguished appearance, but was impressive just the same. The gray patches over his temples shone like shiny metal between the black of the top of his hair and the nut brown of his skin, baked by long exposure to the African sun. A long scar cut a deep furrow in his left cheek. His mouth was as firm as a steel trap.

"I'm Verlat," he said curtly. After shaking hands with Elliott, he produced his identification card. Elliott read on it "Bureau Indigene." His heart sank.

"You are under no suspicion whatsoever," Verlat growled. "I intend to spend the day with you because I'm sure that you have seen and heard things of interest to the Bureau Indigene during the last twenty-four hours. Probably you would remember what is not worth a rap, and forget to mention what I want to know, if I would ask you to tell your story as the Commissaire did. But the interesting particulars shall come out of themselves, in the hours we shall spend together."

An alarm bell rang in the back of Elliott's mind.

"Be careful," it warned. "This Verlat lies. He wants to put the finger on you, don't give him the least chance to build up a case, or you are lost."

Verlat had a method. Instead of bullying and harassing the supposed Balikine, he showed him around town. Elliott talked a lot, as the average Russian does, but he never made a slip.

When evening came, Verlat's geniality began to fade. He was irritated because he was getting nowhere, instead of making discoveries. Elliott expected that he would either lose his temper or give up. Instead, Verlat invited him to dinner.

He guided Elliott to a little restaurant where he had, undoubtedly, worked his wonders on some previous occasion, because Elliott noticed that he was greeted fearfully by the owner.

Verlat ordered a large meal. For himself he chose *vin ordinaire,* alleging that he preferred it to the choicest vintages; but he ordered for Elliott the oldest and headiest wines. Elliott understood what the game was. The Bureau Indigene paid a fixed allowance for these sprees in the line of duty of its agents. Verlat spent all the share to be consumed by his prospective preys; but he economized on his own fare, and pocketed the difference; which was not cheating, because he was entitled to do so.

To finish the meal, Verlat ordered *omelette a la comfiture.* Omelette with sugar and plenty of flaming rum, highly intoxicating on top of a large imbibition of strong wines. When Elliott showed signs of drunkenness, he smiled sourly and ordered a bottle of Russian-style vodka with the coffee.

"He doesn't doubt that I'm Balikine, French-born Russian," Elliott inwardly exulted at that point of the meal and of

the duel of wits. "He wants just to find out if my escape from the English was bona fide, or if I landed in Dakar as a British or Free-French agent. Brainy Russians have a reputation for cleverness when sober; but it is common knowledge that the shrewdest Russians tell all their secrets under the influence of liquor. Well, brother Verlat doesn't know that I can drink a Scot champion whisky-guzzler under the table. I shall gulp vodka, then play the part of the helpless intoxicated for him. And I shall tell him secrets—the secrets of Balikine's life. Also things that shall convince him that Balikine loves reactionary systems, and that therefore he approves of the German-inspired provisions adopted willingly or unwillingly by the Government of unoccupied France."

Accordingly, Elliott drank vodka, sobbed into his glass and protested that he was glad that a real he-man's government had taken the place of the lassitude of the Third Republic.

VERLAT stared at him dubiously, all the more disgruntled because, although he hadn't drunk as much as Elliott, he had gulped down enough wine and liquor to get an ear-splitting headache. He became more attentive when Elliott mumbled, jabbered and cried out that the peccadilloes of his youth couldn't be brought against him because satisfactory service in the Legion Etrangere blots out a man's unsatisfactory past—and that, anyhow, most of the jewels of the wealthy old woman had turned out to be paste, and the rest had been purchased for a pittance by an unscrupulous fence of Marseilles with strong political connections.

Verlat was alarmed by that hint to strong political connections of Balikine's partner in crime of the late twenties. The Lieutenant of the Bureau Indigene was after evidence of sabotage and espionage. He would have been delighted, because the discovery of it would have been good for his, Verlat's career, if Elliott had turned out to be an officer who had sold out to the British, or a partisan of General De Gaulle. But he wanted no run-in with politicians; particularly because there was a possibility that the politician, mentioned by Balikine, had turned Fascist.

Therefore Verlat hastened to give a new turn to the conversation, became uneasy when Elliott stuck to the subject with drunken insistence. Suddenly Elliott blurted: "And that man of wits who was done in! He was blackmailing an important man, who put cash on the line to get rid of him, but I had no part. . . ."

"Trague! I lost my time and I'm sidetracked!" Verlat swore.

"Zut! You are too soused, you don't know what foolishness you are talking about!" he shouted, arising. *"Ferme la guele,* fool!" he added in a snarl, because Elliott kept on jabbering; to confirm his order, he stuck a hard elbow into the pit of the stomach of his guest. Then he hastily asked for the bill, paid it, and dragged Elliott out of the restaurant.

In the street outside, Elliott noticed a few burly men, clearly ill at ease in their civilian clothes. They all surged expectantly when Verlat came out supporting his sagging guest. Verlat, however, sent them away with an angry gesture. Elliott had passed the test. The dangers of the jail and of the Tribunal for high treason were effaced from his path, for the time being.

The next day he presented himself to Commandant Larminat, an alert little man with an incredible capability for work.

ELLIOTT let a fortnight go by, while he worked diligently at his tasks and learned all the ropes of the military administration of Dakar.

One day, he was drilling a detail of antitank gunners when General de la Perriere paid an unexpected visit to Larminat's men.

Elliott saw him coming, on the drilling field. Short, slender, with a delicate tired face under the shiny golden leaves of his kepi. His despondency was as evident, and whatever vitality he still had was sapped by the uncertainty about the fate of his son, sorrow for the downfall of his country, and the fear of contemplating a future that was bleak for all Frenchmen.

He asked a question of a man, exchanged a few words with Elliott.

The disguised British officer thought that it was his chance of establishing an acquaintance. Therefore he said that he had met in Syria officers who had served under Monsieur le General in the campaign of the Riff, and expressed his wish of obtaining an audience.

"I can be reached most mornings between ten and eleven," the General answered kindly. "Obtain permission from your ranking officer."

Like many undersized Frenchmen, Larminat had a high-pitched and querulous voice. When Elliott asked a morning off to see the General, the pint-size Commandant shrilled:

"*Mais pourquoi!* You may report whatever you have to say to me. I shall refer it to the Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Staff will submit your request, duly endorsed by me, to the General. This is the regular way. And it will not drag you away for a whole morning, when we have so much to do if we wish to train our men quickly and properly!"

Elliott said prudently:

"*Mon Commandant,* you know as well as I that the owners of that dive undoubtly have money and political pull. The police —and, what's worse, the Bureau Indigene —are both after me. A routine memorandum of explanation would help me little. *"Voila!"*

"Only the personal protection of the General could put me permanently out of trouble. I know your generosity, ***mon Commandant!*** If I should ask you, you would take up my case, and defend me to the limit. ***Mais non!*** The interests of our important outfit require that you preserve your serenity of mind, that you remain above all sordid and trailing squabbles! That's the reason why I respectfully demand to plead personally before the General, instead of begging you to take up my case with him!"

It was a long and dramatic speech. The late Colonel Stevens of the British Intelligence Service would have replied amusedly to it: "My boy, are you blessing me with a Colonial rendition of the good, old Shakesperian soul?"

Sir Archibald Thorpe Effingham would have wrinkled his nose, or opened his mouth into an equine smile, according to his mood of the moment, and clipped:

"My deah old chap, that's a bit thick, don't you know!"

And the average Tommy Atkins, sojer o' the King, would have listened with his mouth wide open and his long chin sagging; thereafter, he would have told to a crony in the privacy of the barracks:

"Hi s'y, Major Elliott 'as gone barmy, that's what Hi s'y!"

Commandant Larminat, instead, loved all high-sounding praises of his magnanimity as much as he detested sticking his nose into a mouse-trap of a trouble-shedding contention. Elliott's appeal pleased his pride. It gave him an opportunity of clothing his selfishness under the shiny mantle of devotion to the service. He felt big and also comfortably safe when he blurted:

"You can have a full day off. Even two, if you need them!"

Elliott thanked him vibrantly and left instantly, for in his brief experience under Larminat's orders he had learned that the hard-working Commandant was temperamental. He made up his mind quickly, but he changed it just as fast; and he never was short of arguments, proving that such a change was dictated by sound reasons. Elliott started at once to see the man of destiny.

VI

THE Residence Generale of Dakar is at once a pretentious and a commodious building. Elliott liked its facade, and even more its stairways and polished halls. But he found it impossible to get into the anteroom contiguous to the magnificent office of General de la Perriere.

The spacious hall, where he was stopped by an unflinching, booted and spurred Captain of Chasseurs d'Afrique on General Staff duty, harbored also two burly and swarthy individuals with thick, motionless faces and restless eyes, who were typical low-grade French secret-service men, and two young, blond and very sturdy fellows, wearing white linen suits bulging at the hip.

"I would bet a month's pay against an Irish clay pipe that these boys are Gestapo. And the bumps under their coat waists must be Luger automatics, and not flasks of Kirsh," Elliott mused; and he steeled himself for the inevitable investigation of the Germans.

Just as he thought, one of the two husky blond boys soon walked stiffly up to him, nodded a firm approval when the Cavalry Captain repeated for the fourth time that the General granted interviews only after

approving the written explanations of the would-be visitors.

Then the German rasped:

"Why should you, a subaltern, see the General in the privacy of his office? Men who refuse to commit themselves on paper have ulterior motives, are suspicious characters."

His French was perfect, as grammar went, but it preserved a guttural accent which was as French as sauerbraten.

"Excuse me," Elliott replied with the boldness of a former Foreign Legion officer, "I'm an army man. I don't see why a civilian should butt into my case without specific reasons."

The German became as red as a beet. His gray eyes shone angrily.

"You should understand the reasons for my reticence." Elliott instantly said the proper thing to soothe a German. "You must have seen military duty at some time or another, because, in spite of your civilian clothes, you carry yourself as a military man."

The angry flush left the German's face. His lips spread in a grin. There was no longer bitterness in his eyes when he exclaimed:

"True, I have been a soldier. I'm actually a business representative, a personal friend of the General. My interest in things here is therefore logical."

"If you are a friend of the General . . ." Elliott stammered, "if the Captain permits me to go . . ."

"I don't permit, I order you to go!" the Cavalry Captain exploded, "I told you that it is useless for you to stay here any longer! *Foutez moi la paix, et vite avec ca!*"

"Seeing that the Captain permits me to go," Elliott continued undaunted, "I wonder if you, *Monsieur,* have a moment for me. . . ."

"What on earth can you have to tell to Monsieur Latour? Go, *par Dieu!*" the Captain roared. Latour, however, silenced him with a sharp gesture and, with another, motioned Elliott toward the capacious embrasure of a full-size window, out of everybody's hearing.

WHEN they were there, he snapped: "Tell what you have to say quickly! My time is limited." And his sharp eyes stared fixedly into those of Elliott, as if attempting to ferret out the remotest secrets of his soul.

Elliott told of his supposed capture by the English after a stubborn stand, of his arrival in Dakar on a stolen plane, and all the particulars of the riot in the cafe with the happenings that followed it. Then he blurted under his breath:

"Monsieur Latour, I realize that my plight is particularly bad because, being a French-born son of a Czarist officer, I'm a natural enemy of mob rule, and a believer in authoritarian forms of government. I was one of the officers suspected of Fascist tendencies after the battle of France."

The German shrugged:

"Bah!" he snarled, "Dakar is under Vichy, and the latter isn't yet what it should be; but it has no love for outmoded forms of parliamentarianism."

"But, Monsieur!" Elliott whispered, "those of the Bureau Indigene are men trained under the Third Republic. The Police are what they were when the French Deputies talked all day and did nothing! The fact that a few negroes got cut up in that dive has brought so much against me that I am running a chance of being court-martialled."

"From which part of Russia was your father?" Latour asked.

"From St. Petersburg."

"The town renamed Leningrad by the Bolsheviks," Latour sneered.

"The Germans will efface the blot of Lenin's name from the old capital of the Czars!" Elliott replied vibrantly, and noticed with gratification that the German's face relaxed into an expression of friendly approval.

"My mother," he said, "was a Balt. There's no Polish or Mongolian blood in our family."

"And no Semitic blood?" the German grinned.

"Most emphatically not!" Elliott simulated indignation.

"I know how you Russians feel about the Soviet and the racial question," Latour rumbled, "I was joking, of course. Did you say that your mother was from the Baltic country? So! Your endo-Germanic blood of real Russian is still more German because Balts of the leading classes are of German ancestry!

"Tell me about that strange kidnaping!" he suddenly scowled.

Elliott remembered the words of the leader of the masked men:

"Tell the whole truth, it cannot help us any!" That meant that the mysterious kidnapers knew what they were doing and had to be taken at their word, if they were friends of the cause of freedom. If they were not, what was the use of protecting them? So Elliott related what he had noticed about them, which was very little.

"That should help the Police to find the nest of these men. Too bad you are unable to describe them!" Latour finally decided. "Coming to your case, I think your troubles can be smoothed out. But it would be better if you went for a while to some Post, well out of Dakar. There, however, you shouldn't take any interest in tribal affairs and politics. Look only after your soldiers and you shall never regret it! And, who knows! Some day you might receive an advantageous proposition to return to a Russia ruled by a respectable and modern form of Government."

Latour's attitude showed clearly that he had said and heard all that he cared to say and hear, and that a further word would displease him. Therefore Elliott clicked his heels, shook the hand proffered to him and withdrew.

That afternoon he sent to Monsieur Latour, care of Residence General, a card with a few words of thanks. The next morning he reported to Commandant Larminat and found him in a tantrum:

"*Mon d'un nom d'un sole chion!* Name of a name of a dirty dog! So you got out of trouble by getting yourself transferred, did you? What a fine way of appreciating my kindness in granting you permission to state your case at Residential Headquarters! Now they'll probably send me a nitwit to fill your place!"

"Where am I going?" Elliott asked, after expressing his innocence of all desire of leaving the outfit so splendidly directed by the Commandant.

Larminatt, mollified, sputtered: "The notification tells only that you must report to Divisional Headquarters. You'll probably find out your destination there."

At Divisional Headquarters, Elliott learned that he was going to the Zone of Cayor.

"Curse the Germans," he thought furiously. "There's nothing in Cayor requiring the presence of a British Intelligence officer!"

Suddenly a sergeant clerk rushed into the room where the files of the officers of the garrison were kept, and placed an official order over the desk of the Captain in charge. The Captain glanced at it and blurted to Elliott:

"Name of a galloping eel! I don't understand! Are you acquainted with General de la Perriere?"

"The only time I attempted to visit him I was almost thrown out on my ear!" Elliott replied ruefully.

"Really? *Alors,* why did General de la Perriere look into your marching orders, which were being kept secret? And what induced him to change them? Because his personal order is here, stating that you must go to Fort Polidor, in Ouoloff territory, and not to Cayor!"

VII

THE military roads of Senegal are many. But a few miles to the right and to the left of most of them, the wilderness is such as it was a hundred years ago.

Elliott went with a convoy of foodstuffs and ammunition, guarded by a section of soldiers traveling on two armored trucks.

In normal conditions they should have reached the heart of the Ouoloff country in five or six hours; a hundred and twenty miles east of Dakar, however, they found a ditch had been dug across the road. When soldiers and drivers left the *camions* to fill it, a burst of machine-gun fire clattered from a thicket. It was ill-aimed, but it forced the rest to deploy and return the firing. After a while the soldiers darted onward. They found only a few drops of blood in a thicket. The attackers were gone, and their footprints couldn't be identified from among the multitude of tracks of wild animals.

The convoy drove onward once more, until at a distance of twenty-five miles from the fort, it was stopped for good. A new bridge, spanning a tributary of the Gambia River, had been dynamited. The Lieutenant escort commander scowled at the twisted steel frame and at the shattered pillars, and growled:

"We must cross the ford five miles up-river, wading waist-deep and we must leave our trucks and supplies behind." They did so some two hours later, carrying only a few boxes of ammunition for the garrison.

Only a couple of miles separated them from the fort when Elliott detected the peculiar gleams that the sun draws from the modern blackened gun barrels.

"There's trouble waiting for us," he warned the Lieutenant section commander. "What's this mess, anyhow? Are the tribes revolting?"

"Not quite," the Lieutenant snapped peevishly. "But that fat pig of Almalmy Saladior Dioum is sour at the entire world, and gives gentle hints of it to the Residence Generale by murdering soldiers, by blowing up bridges, and by ruining roads."

Elliott glanced again at the bushes ahead of them.

"There go the blackhearted negroes!" he shouted. "They are working their way around your outfit. Have you a couple of machine guns?"

"A light machine gun and a flame-thrower."

"Good! Send the flame-thrower to the right, where the ground is woody. It will burn hell out of the rebels as they come out of the branches. The place for the machine gun is to the left of the section, which faces that rock-studded plain."

The Lieutenant, nodding, shouted the necessary orders.

A few minutes later, the Ouoloffs came out of their concealment and charged; but the flame-thrower turned two of them into human torches; the machine gun downed four additional Ouoloffs, and forced the others attempting to surround the left end of the section to retreat. Then the section advanced, firing, and met only weak and scattered resistance.

As he passed beside a heap of rotting leaves in which was half-buried a dead tribesman, Elliott growled:

"The Almalmy Saladior Dioum should be hanged!"

"Everybody thinks so, from the Resident General to the last battalion mule-tender." the Lieutenant said. "The trouble is that Saladior can rally fifteen thousand fighting men in forty-eight hours, and the whole Ouoloff nation in a month. And it would be no mere tribal war. Every buck Ouoloff, no matter how wild, has done military duty, knows a smattering of company tactics and the use of modern weapons. Besides, plenty of army rifles, ammunition, and quite a few machine guns have been smuggled into Ouoloff territory since the World War—when the Senegalese were recognized as oversea Frenchmen by the grateful and not entirely wise French Government. Is it any wonder that, rather than provoking an Ouoloff war by attempting a capture of Saladior, the commanders of the Posts located in Ouoloff territory prefer to fight his guerrillas as if they were free-lances, and not connected with him?"

"I know that many high-caste Senegalese have been educated in France, and some of them are Colonial Army officers or top-ranking Governmental employees," Elliott remarked. "How can these intelligent negroes accept the leadership of a tyrant like Saladior Dioum?"

"The Battle of France worked the trick," the Lieutenant snarled. "More than a hundred thousand Senegalese are now prisoners in Germany, and almost as many were killed and wounded. The disaster destroyed the prestige that the French-trained high-caste Senegalese had enjoyed among the tribes!"

The last words of the Lieutenant were drowned by a distant roar of musketry, and by the breeze-borne howling of large numbers of wild fighting men.

"The guerrillas of Saladior Dioum must be playing a particularly dirty trick on Fort Polidor," Elliott said.

"They shall not find the going easy," the Lieutenant replied. "Captain Courcy, in command at Fort Polidor, is a brainy war-leader. He'll never be caught napping. However, let's hurry up and lend him a hand." He turned to his men and roared: *"Au pas gymnastique!"*

At the *pas gymnastique,* the section tackled the last trail. The farther they progressed, the more the clamor of battle rang loud in their ears.

FINALLY, they crossed a last sparse section of jungle and came in sight of a treeless expanse of ground, dotted with

the black shapes of Ouoloff warriors, crouching in ditches and kneeling behind boulders around the square structure of a typical French-African fort. From the beleaguered fort issued dense billows of smoke, which spread over the watch-tower and the battlements like swollen sails.

"Five hundred Ouoloff, at the very least!" Elliott exclaimed. "Let's run for the gates, with the flame-thrower and the machine gun opening a patch for us!"

The contour of the ground sheltering the Ouoloffs from the fire of the garrison didn't protect them from the arriving section.

"Look what clear targets their big black shoulders make for us! And they don't even dream that we are coming! Surprise and panic will keep them from seeing how few we are!" Elliott shouted excitedly. "Let's go quickly! Speed and hard hitting shall rout them! Machine gun and flame-thrower in the middle! Riflemen and hand-grenade throwers, deploy right and left of the machine gunner and the flame-thrower, two paces behind them. All ready? *En avant! Marchez!*"

From the next second on, events proceeded at a breakneck clip.

The Ouoloff had sent out lookouts to watch their rear, but the lookouts hadn't gone far enough to be of real value. The first volley of the attacking section struck down four lookouts and several of the tribesmen firing against the fort. The remainder justified the theory of Frederick the Great, that three enemies attacking the rear of an embattled outfit undermine its resistance more than the advent of an additional battalion on the side of its frontal attackers. As Elliott had surmised, they were caught by panic and streamed on a wild run right and left of the fort.

Elliott and the Lieutenant agreed that it was unwise to divide their few men into two details engaged in two different pursuits. Therefore they went after the largest tribal unit; while the fort commander led the garrison out of the gates, in a bayonet and hand-grenade attack against the other swarm of Ouoloffs.

The latter, however, had received military training through the conscription system. The brief respite, when the section ceased tearing after them, restored their courage. Thus they ran for three or four hundred yards away from the garrison, then they turned and made a stand. Their military rifles were of old vintage, their hand-grenades were crude and home-made; but they enjoyed the advantage of greater numbers. In a fierce counter-attack they met the onslaught of the garrison, throwing two of their faulty hand-grenades for each of the more destructive grenades heaved at them by the soldiers, and they fired their rifles at top speed. Then the half-naked black tribesmen and the tan-clothed black soldiers of the garrison mixed in a furious melee.

The pursuit of the other Ouoloff mob had carried the section two-thirds of a mile east of the fort, when Elliott turned and saw that the garrison was being beaten back toward the gates.

"Let's go back to the fort!" he roared at the Lieutenant.

"Mais oui, par Dieu!" the lieutenant replied; but he was heavy-set and short-legged. Elliott and the fleetest men of his section soon outdistanced him and the soldiers who stuck to his side.

The danger was not past.

Less than a hundred yards separated Elliott from the gate when he saw a bare-headed officer and two soldiers cut off by a swarm of frenzied tribesmen slashing with fixed bayonets and the terrible Senegalese coup-coups.

"There!" he roared at the soldiers with him, "rescue that officer! Use no bullets, stab with your bayonets!"

He saw the officer turning his head, smiling; no doubt, cornered as he was, he had heard Elliott's order and was grateful for it. Then a blow as powerful as the iron mace of a giant hit Elliott's head and a vulcano exploded within it. Elliott pitched face down on the ground and remained still.

HE awakened in a white infirmary room, with a splitting headache. A bulbous lieutenant surgeon bent his plumb shoulder to stare into his slowly opening eyes, then pulled a cigar stub from his mouth and chuckled:

"Just as I told you, Captain! The bullet glanced, inflicted no serious injury. He'll suffer headaches for days, and the hair shall never grow again on a scar as big as a sou on the side of his head. But

such trifles, *pouff!* He'll keep on being sturdier than you and I!"

Elliott gazed at the captain, saw that he was an intelligent man in his early thirties. A blond fellow, with regular features and keen gray eyes. "Where have I seen this chap before?" Elliott wondered; but the effort of thinking redoubled his headache.

"Ah! Your face contracts, becomes pale!" the surgeon pointed the cigar stub at him. "You better close your eyes and rest, *mon vieux!* The introductions may come later!"

Elliott obeyed. Soon he drifted again into unconsciousness.

The next morning he awakened ravenously hungry. When he asked an orderly for food, he received the reply that his bath was ready, and that the *toubib*—the doctor—would have breakfast with him in an hour.

To his intense surprise, Elliott found a bathroom with modern plumbing fixtures and hot and cold water. When he wondered at the miracle, a grinning bath boy as black as coal replied:

"*Le Capitaine* Courcy is great gentleman. At his own expense, he brings a soldier plumber from Dakar one year ago. By and by soldier plumber work and *voilà!*" The long black finger of the bath boy pointed at the hot water pouring out of the faucet and into the tub.

Elliott didn't forget to shave above the temples, and to trim his eyebrows slantingly. Thus, he was the saturnine Balikine when, with fresh bandages applied by a medical sergeant, he went to where breakfast waited over a service table. And what an Anglo-Saxon breakfast it was! Haddock, just grilled out of a can. Plenty of bacon and fried eggs. Jam, butter and cheese. Toast, tea, coffee and a glass pitcher of creamy milk.

"Do you eat all that for your first meal?" Elliott asked *Toubib* Marly.

The French surgeon stared at the spread of food and shuddered.

"*Pas de ma vie!* Not on my life!" he replied vehemently. "A *croissant* and a cup of black coffee are plenty for me! But Captain Courcy thought that you would be excessively hungry and ordered every item of this gargantuan meal. By the way: I was almost forgetting. . . ." Marly pulled a letter out of his pocket and handed it over.

Elliott opened it and read:

"I regret that I can't thank you personally for saving my life with your timely intervention, because military duty calls me elsewhere. Please, consider yourself at home in Fort Polidor; ask for whatever you want. Lieutenant Delmas will remain in charge while I'm away. Check with him your date of appointment to rank and his own. If you are his senior, don't hesitate to assume the command of the fort until I return. Good luck to you and au revoir.

Charles Philippe Courcy."

"Where did the captain go?" Elliott asked.

Marly pursed his lips, opened his round eyes widely and spread his hands.

Elliott nodded, to signify that he understood, then he looked at the sumptuous breakfast and whistled under his breath. But he was too hungry and the food was too inviting and too much to his taste. So, giving up all speculations about mysteries for the time being, he sat before the table and began eating.

Lieutenant Surgeon Marly stared at him in morbid fascination for a few minutes. When he realized that Elliott seemed to grow rather than diminish after swallowing a remarkable quantity of food, Marly stared at the grandfather clock in the corner, and saw that it was only eight-thirty.

That was too much for *Toubib* Marly, Green to the gills, he gulped and bolted out of the room. Elliott, undaunted, shoved a fifth egg and another generous helping of bacon into his plate.

ELLIOTT found Lieutenant Delmas capable and understanding. Balikine was his senior in rank for a year, but Elliott would not have assumed command of the fort if Butreau, the lieutenant escort commander, hadn't outranked Delmas also. For Elliott had seen enough of Butreau in action to entertain doubts about his bravery, and also about his inefficiency as commanding officer.

The fire had been more impressive to look at than really destructive. It had consumed some hay and a lot of the saddlery kept in one of the storages of the fort, but it hadn't inflicted an irreplace-

able damage. The origin of it remained a mystery until it was found that a Tirailleur of the garrison wasn't among the dead or the wounded—just missing, which meant that he had deserted.

"His name was Tembe, and he was a member of Saladior Dioum's own tribe," Lieutenant Delmas said to Elliott. "Tembe didn't have the heart to shoot the captain or myself from behind. And he didn't dare to stick with us because, in the back of his mind, he must be convinced that the Almalmy will eventually throw all Frenchmen out of Senegal. So he started a fire and went to report to the Almalmy."

And such, as a native informer reported, had been the case.

The same native informer brought more disconcerting news: Sidi El Hadj Mohammed and Saladior Dioum were considering an alliance.

"If they do," Delmas said, when the informer was dismissed, "tthe Southern Mauritanian Moors, the Peuhls, the Toucouleurs and the fighting negroes and half breeds of the Macina are likely to join in. Only the Bambara will remain out of it, for their feud with the Hadjst sect is as old as the rise to power and death in battle of its founder, El Hadj Oumar."

"What would happen," Elliott suddenly said, "if Saladior Dioum should become convinced that the Germans tricked him and are using him as a despised tool?"

"He would leave no stone unturned to harm them, so revengeful he is. But whoever attempts to change his mind and sic him on the Germans gambles his life on a very narrow margin. Particularly, because Saladior Dioum trusts a newly found adviser—a Beldoggu Bakari, who knows the German language."

"Is this Beldoggu Bakari a disguised German?" Elliott asked tensely.

"No, he's a very clever Fazzanese negro schooled by the Senusi, and ousted from the Senusi order a quarter of a century ago for appropriating *sakadals* intended for the order. Perhaps Beldoggu Bakari caught the notice of one of those wandering German commercial agents who are, in reality, scouts and spies of the Reich. At any rate, he was brought to Germany, and taught the German language.

"Ten years ago he suddenly appeared in the Macina, and preached the Koran without much success. Then he joined the Hadjsts but didn't stay long among them. Three years ago he settled in the Cayor as a *marabout,* or hermit and preacher. All that time the Bureau Indigene kept an eye on him, without finding anything that could point out at any political activity of his. All to no avail. The Germans had apparently found Baldoggu Bakari unsatisfactory and hadn't hired him—and consequently Bakari left to his own resources, was playing the Moslem religious racket for a living. Saladior Dioum is the kingpin of the Ouoloffs, who worship a hodge-podge of Mohammedanism, idolatry and sorcery. But Saladior is a fanatical Moslem."

"Besides the Koran, what are the things that Saladior likes most?" Elliott asked.

Delmas shrugged.

"Statuettes, of all things, in spite of the fact that the Koran forbids the reproduction of the human body, in picture or sculpture. Muscular strength and women. He keeps on adding concubines to his harem of two hundred negresses—but they remain always two hundred, because he either strangles or breaks the neck of the mate who ceases to please him."

"What a lovely character he must be!" Elliott exclaimed. "And tell me, Delmas, what does Saladior detest most?"

"He, the crooked, sly and treacherous tyrant, detests deception in all other men in general, and among his intimates in particular. Woe to the henchman who lies to him!"

"Statuettes . . . let me see!" Elliott mused aloud. "If I'm not wrong, some particularly beautiful lead soldiers of all ages have been made in Nuernberg, Germany, and in Paris, for almost a century. The French quarter of Dakar is graced by remarkable stores. Could one find some of these colorful lead soldiers in any of these stores?"

"*Mais oui,* in the local branches of the Magazines, or department stores, of the Louvre and the Printemps. But the really interesting toy-soldiers are very expensive. A lieutenant's monthly salary buys no more than ten boxes, containing either eighteen lead warriors on foot, or twelve on horse."

"Captain Courcy left a letter in which he states that I can have whatever I want

in this fort," Elliott replied. "How much cash do you keep on hand here?"

"Hundred thousand francs, for tribal expenses. Why?"

"I want three thousand francs. For a brand-new kind of tribal expense."

"Bien . . ." Delmas didn't look very happy.

"Splendid!" Elliott approved. "Now that this is settled, do you know of any marabout, or Ftig Moslem teacher, who would go to Saladior Dioum with some gifts of mine, to notify him that I ask permission to visit him?"

"I'm acquainted with a marabout and two Ftigs. Any of them would carry your gifts and your message—for a price. But you must be joking. Only an insane officer would dream of placing himself in Saladior's hands."

"What schooling have you had?" Elliott grinned.

"Gymnasium, Lycee and St. Cyr."

"Gymnasium and Lycee. Our French high schools, with a special emphasis on the study of the classics, and of the Latin language. Well, Delmas, how would you translate the Latin proverb: 'Audaces Fortuna ad iuvat, timidosque repellet?'"

Delmas said promptly:

"Luck helps the audacious and deserts the faint-hearted."

"Exactly! Delmas, I have a hunch that boldness will do more with a man like Saladior than a lifetime of turtle-in-the-shell policy. Tribal bullies like him are half-gorillas and half-children!"

"All Russians are crazy," Delmas thought. "But Captain Courcy has given a free hand to this fellow and I don't like his satyr's grin, anyhow. If he wishes to cut his own throat, the pleasure is his own." Aloud he said: "I cannot stop you because you outrank me. You assume all responsibility for your doings, don't you?"

"Entirely!"

Delmas heaved a sigh.

"A la bonne heure! When do you want your marabout?"

Elliott calculated. "The detail returning to Dakar from the fort will cover the distance in a week. The store'll take a couple of days to execute my orders. The next incoming detail will arrive here in eighteen or twenty days. . . . Have the marabout ready in three weeks!"

VII

FIFTEEN days later a mule convoy arrived, carrying provisions and the two cases. Elliott, in his quarters carefully opened them and dug out of packing straw several nice red and gilded boxes, placed them on the floor and proceeded to open them.

They were indeed beautiful, the little lead soldiers, made by a firm which had catered for three quarters of a century to children of kings and millionaires, and to collectionists. Charles V of Spain, Henry IV of France, Napoleon and the last Czar of Russia were there, with their splendidly attired general. The Grenadiers of the Old Guard charged, the magnificent Musketeers of Louis XIII sat on magnificent steeds.

The intrigued Delmas assisted in the unpacking.

The next day, the very black and very ignorant *marabout,* Bandi N'Khe, left the fort with three mules. The beasts bore the lead soldiers. Also a bottle of Chevalier D'Orsay perfume, brand new, unopened and contributed with reluctance by Delmas. Also a silver cup with two silver cyclists pedaling around its base, won in the gay nineties by a former commander of Fort Polidor, and left behind by him. And several tins of hors d'oeuvres and plum marmalade, of which Saladior Dioum was inordinately fond.

The answer came a fortnight later, with the same marabout.

The Almalmy Saladior Dioum stated that he had never been so pleased by any other previous gift from anyone. He rejoiced because a man of Lieutenant Balikine's taste and rare judgment had decided to pay him tribute. And, therefore, he graciously agreed to receive the Lieutenant Balikine.

"See what you did?" Delmas raved when the haughty reply was related to him. "Balikine, you have dishonored our uniform. A French officer paying tribute to a barefoot Almalmy, who looks like a blackfaced soothsayer at a country fair! And, after that, you are still going to humiliate yourself before him?"

"Am I?" Elliott guffawed. "Saladior Dioum practically declared that he takes me under his protection, does he not?

What the hell do I care if he thinks that I'm making an act of submission to him? I'm not considering the 'I look down on you and you don't dare to look down on me' sort of thing. I'm after results!"

Then his face set grimly. "Give me two Tirailleurs, I would look too cheap and unworthy of attention if I went to Saladior unattended. But see that these Tiralleurs are Ouoloffs, and order them to choke their feelings and bow to his will, asking incolumnity as fellow tribesmen, if things go wrong with me. I don't want to drag anyone into any possible ruin of mine."

The Marabout Bandi N'Khe went along with Elliott and the two soldiers.

THE Ouoloff country, which they soon entered included every feature of West-African soil: Bare, sun-baked cliffs, brush country, woods and jungles. When they were deep into it, Elliott noticed bare skulls of buffaloes and leopards placed at regular intervals over poles.

"Sheitan's worship!" Bandi N'Khe never tired of saying, pointing at them. "The Ouoloffs wrongly believe that these bony spoils attire and fasten the invisible evil spirits, who, otherwise, would harm the Ouoloff people."

Two days later, though, grinning and bare human skulls took the place of those of the buffaloes on top of the poles.

"These," Bandi N'Khe explained, "are supposed to hold evil spirits from injuring the Ouoloffs, but not from harming all other men." And the alarm in his voice warned Elliott that, in spite of his quality of hermit-priest of Islam, Bandi N'Khe feared the skulls.

The first band of Saladior Dioum's warriors to meet Elliott exasperated him so that he needed all his self-control to avoid picking a fight with their leader.

They were burly negroes, with puffed features. They carried modern rifles and cartridge belts, and they knew how to shoot straight. But their conscription terms had not taught them to respect an officer's uniform, because they looked contemptuously upon Elliott and told him that only his quality of guest of their Almalmy restrained them from trampling him to death under their big knobby feet.

The next band, composed of negroes with red pantalets, announced that they were sent to escort Elliott to the Almalmy's presence. But they behaved like guards sent to take charge of prisoners because, while they left Elliott in possession of his automatic, they forced his two Tirailleurs to surrender their rifles.

Late in the afternoon, they came out of a gorge and found themselves on the outskirts of a large community of widely scattered huts, houses of clay hardened by the sun, and log structures.

"This is Saladior's seat of power." Marabout Bandi N'Khe warned under his breath. "Do you see that magnificent residence on the knoll in the very middle of the huge village? Saladior Dioum lives there."

The magnificent residence was a rambling construction, full of angular peaks, unmatched friezes, and carvings. Rather than a palace in the proper sense of the word, it was a madman's conception of a single-story mammoth mausoleum.

But, when he was near it, Elliott saw that a wooden sentry box had been built before its cavernous portals. A sentry mounted guard before that booth—a sentry in red pantalets, but sporting one of the old fashioned red and black rimmed kepis of the French infantry.

Saladior Dioum was in the courtyard. He sat on a sofa covered by a gorgeous rug made of several skins of leopard sewn together. His enormous back leaned on a mound of pillows. His nape rested on the breast of a young negress, who kneeled on the sofa behind him.

Saladior's eyes were half-closed. A bandanna of red silk studded with little yellow flowers was wrapped around his head. His wide face seemed even larger on account of his big, puffed cheeks.

He wore a long robe, which left bare his bull neck, his arms, as big as the thighs of a strong man, and his enormous feet. His belly stood out balloon-like. His sash bisected his tunic just below his chest, which was a huge wall of muscles.

"Damn the mountain of black blubber that he is!" Elliott mused. "He looks like a magnificent copy of Aunt Jemima!"

Then his glance fell on Saladior's hands.

They were the biggest hands that Elliott had ever seen, and they were

covered by a net-work of corded muscles. Their thumbs reminded Elliott of black pigs' knuckles. Elliott remembered Delmas' words: "Many are the mates strangled by Saladior's hands." He could almost see the enormous black paws of the Almalmy fastening themselves around a negress' neck, snapping it like a match-stick.

Saladior opened his eyes and it was as if his eyesockets had suddenly become glowing coals; for his pupils were purple, and the whites around them were so bloodshot that they seemed uniformly red.

"Bismillaten!" his voice of a giant bull-frog boomed. "See how much I think of your gifts!"

Some of the boxes of lead soldiers were on the cushions beside him. The one containing Cleopatra's barge rested on a pillow of honor.

"I'm him!" Saladior continued, pointing at the leaden Marc Anthony, "but none of my women is as comely as the mate of this magnificent little chief."

"Perhaps the woman of this white man before you is as beautiful as the little she-statue. Kill him and take his woman for your mate!" a thunderous voice said.

The negro who had spoken was nearly seven feet high, and built like an extremely powerful wrestler.

"White man," he insisted, "you are too thin, too miserly to be good for anything. Give your woman to Saladior."

A sudden vision flashed in Elliott's mind of his fiancee. Much as he loathed to even imagine such a profanation, he couldn't help thinking of his Anne, so kind, so beautiful and so trusting, seized by brutish tribesmen, thrown into the huge murderous paws of the Almalmy.

A wild recklessness swept over Elliott.

SUDDENLY he could almost see dancing before him like burning letters of fire, the words of Delmas: "Saladior likes nothing better than bravery and muscular strength!"

"Miscegenation of pig and swine!" Elliott roared at the insulting giant. "You dare to revile me so because you hide before the authority of your Almalmy! You would cringe before me if we met man to man in the jungle!"

"Kumba Sy!" Saladior opened his immense mouth in a thunderous laughter. "The white officer despises you! The white officer calls you weakly and cowardly!"

Kumba Sy leaped onward like a big cat and threw himself face down on the ground before Saladior.

"Almalmy!" he shrieked. "If I ever enjoyed favor near you, allow me to tear this white dog limb from limb!"

An expression of amusement and intense, gloating cruelty twisted the puffed features of Saladior.

"White officer!" he said, savoring every word. "This is Kumba Sy, my executioner, the strongest man of all my tribes. Demand my merciful protection and you shall get it as my guest. But if your liver is not moldy, you'll prefer death rather than recognizing yourself a lesser fighter than Kumba Sy!"

"Ask Saladior's mercy!" the Marabout Band N'Khe whispered behind Elliott. "Kumba Sy has the strength of ten men! He would break all your bones, one by one; you would never have a chance with him!"

Elliott hesitated.

"What, don't you answer?" Saladior bent forward and shouted. "Are you throwing yourself on the ground, as my servant, or do you agree to fight Kumba Sy, barehanded and to the end?"

Elliott unbuckled his gun belt, took his coat off, peeled off his shirt. Before he could fall on guard, Kumba Sy leaped on him.

Saladior roared in glee.

Elliott sidestepped and swung hard. His blow hit Kumba's ear and split it open, but didn't slow him in the very least. Then Kumba turned about, jumped on Elliott and clamped his arms around him. As he did so, he sought Elliott's throat with his teeth, brought up his knee and smashed him in the groin.

Elliott escaped the blow by a hair, bending his body. He wrenched himself free with a supreme effort, saw in a flash that Kumba was instinctively bringing his hands up, to cover his face, and struck savagely at his midsection. But, although he put all his strength in the blow, Kumba acted as if he hadn't been hurt in the least. Elliott jabbed again. But it was like hitting a barrel of concrete. He

hurt his hands, but he didn't inflict any damage.

Suddenly Kumba's arms shot around him once more and bent him backward. Elliott felt the chin of the tribesman crushing his breastbone, and realized that his bent spine couldn't withstand the pressure much longer. With a desperate effort he dug his thumbs into the sockets under Kumba's ears and pressed as hard as he was able.

Kumba grunted, jerked his head back, away from Elliott's torturing thumbs. Elliott twisted in his clutch, grasped his head with both hands, turned and heaved.

Kumba flew over his head, fell hard. But he rebounded instantly like a rubber ball. Then, laughing obscenely, spreading his hands wide, he went for Elliott. The British officer heard the booming laugh of Saladior, the shrill laughter of Saladior's women. It was an ear-splitting cackling of hell. The breath came out of his lungs in gasps. He gave way. Kumba bared his teeth in a derisive grin and followed after him.

Suddenly he sprang. Elliott threw himself down and kicked viciously sideways. His heavy boots struck one of Kumba's shins. The terrific blow would have broken the leg of a lesser man. But Kumba's legs were tremendous in size and in power. Kumba stumbled and fell down screaming.

Elliott jumped up, kicked him in the head, threw him over. Frenziedly endeavoring to avoid further punishment, Kumba scrambled himself up, on hands and knees. Elliott pounced on him, struck at the unprotected base of his skull, and under his ears, with the hard flats of his hands.

These ju-jutsu blows battered the nerve ganglia under the muscles of Kumba's neck, but, to Elliott's amazement, didn't knock the Ouoloff strongman out. It dazed him, though. Elliott rushed him, battered his face and jaw with a quick succession of uppercuts and hooks. Elliott's whole body pivoted and threw its whole weight behind the blows.

Kumba's puffy face literally disintegrated. Blood poured out of his mashed eyebrows, out of his gashed cheeks and lips and broken nose. For a moment he swayed on his feet, and Elliott exulted at the thought that he was about to fall down and to remain down.

But, when he seemed almost gone, he lowered his head and charged like a savage bull, with such a speed that the surprised Elliott couldn't sidestep entirely the impact of his giant frame.

The next instant, the whole weight of Kumba's giant frame hit him. Two enormous calloused hands squeezed his neck, almost broke it. A huge knee dug into the pit of his tomach and crushed it.

Almost unconscious with pain, Elliott shot up his hands, battered the concrete chin of the giant, then attempted to dig again his fingers into the sockets under the corners of Kumba's jaws. But Kumba pulled his huge neck between his shoulders; Elliott's fingers found only bunches of swelling muscles.

The desperate and half strangled Elliott lost the power of reasoning.

VIII

FRENZIEDLY he clawed the sides of the black giant who was killing him; and Kumba, who hadn't been shaken by his strongest blows, began to emit chuckling sounds and to wriggle! That mountain of a man, that gorilla of a monster Senegalese was ticklish!

His fingers had nearly crushed Elliott's windpipe, when a hysterical burst of laughter shook his entire body and loosened the hold of his hands. Elliott took advantage of it to fill his lungs with a desperately needed gust of fresh air. The very agony that his battered breast and neck suffered in breathing released all his reserves of savage energy. Thrashing, heaving and butting, he whirled from under Kumba, then turned, catapulted on him, hit the side of his face with a knee, threw him on his shoulders, and jumped with both feet on his stomach.

This time Kumba was really hurt. Up he sprang, throwing Elliott down, but, once on his feet, he doubled up with pain.

Elliott, rendered insane by rage and by the bodily suffering that he had endured, swarmed all over him, punching like a madman, and Kumba didn't take his blows easily. The terrific punishment that he had suffered had softened the giant. Soon he began to reel. Elliott's

mind, on the contrary, cleared. The feeling that the tide of the struggle was turning in his favor, and a frenzied urge to hurt Kumba, to keep him from recovering on his turn, added springiness to his sinewy legs, improved the timing and precision of his blows. Kumba's eyes, Kumba's jaw, the temples of the tottering giant became his targets. He hit them time and again, with the speed of a machine gun, and the cumulative impact of his blows bore more and more telling effect with the passing of every minute.

Then Kumba was down. By sheer instinct of fair play, Elliott stepped back. That chivalrous move, rather out of place in the brutish surroundings of Saladior Dioum's seat of power, saved his life; because, in that split second, a shiny coup-coup flew through the air, fell with a metallic bank between the prostrate Kumba and Elliott—on the very place over which Elliott had stood.

Because all his attention was centered on Kumba's attempts to arise, and on the spasmodic twitching of Kumba's spent limbs, Elliott didn't see the tribesman who screamed:

"Grasp my weapon, Ouoloff! Kill the white dog who took your pride away from you, O Kumba!"

But Elliott was ready when Kumba rolled over, moaning and shivering with pain, then lifted himself on his knees and stretched out a hand to get hold of the weapon. He stretched it wide of its mark, too, because his swollen and lacerated eyelids, and the gore seeping from them, blotted his sight so that the dazzling gleams drawn from the coup-coup by the sun loomed to him like a globe of fire, hiding the exact place where the weapon lay.

When Elliott stooped quickly and retrieved the coup-coup, the baffled Kumba jabbered, howled like a wounded dog, and collapsed on his face.

"Almalmy!" Elliott vibrantly exclaimed, turning to Saladior Dioum, who sat with his ugly mouth and bloodshot eyes opened widely, as if unable to believe what he was seeing, "I won because Allah wished it. But the attempt to kill me—with this thrown weapon—was treachery. Whoever was guilty of it trampled on your honor, O Saladior Dioum!"

A savage rage instantly took the place of Almalmy's amazement. Elliott wasn't the target of it, because he had cleverly avoided accusing him. But, in that moment, no men on earth were detested by Saladior Dioum more than Kumba and the knife thrower. He hated Kumba venomously because he had begun the fight as his champion and his choice to win—but had lost. He hated as much the knife thrower, because his failure to kill Elliott had brought about a situation resulting in his, Saladior's, loss of face.

"The Ouoloff who threw that coup-coup! Here, before me! I want him!" Almalmy Saladior roared, jumping on his feet.

Nobody came out of the breathless throng.

With an agility unsuspected in a man of his weight and girth, Saladior retrieved his sword from the cushions and unsheathed it. Then he swished it above his head, booming in fearful threat:

"Whoever saw the accursed one who threw the coup-coup must point him out, or bring him before me; otherwise I shall wound and kill, until I grow tired of shedding blood!"

There were a few moments of breath-taking suspense. Then a few hysterical voices howled: "Marena N'ge the coup-coup is yours! Marena N'ge, we don't want to die for the sake of sheltering you!"

"Marena!" Saladior snarled.

A tall negro was brought forward, struggling and protesting in the grasp of two worried Ouoloffs. Saladior gave a glance at him and leaped like an obese cat. His striking sword described a dazzling semicircle under the beams of the sun.

The disgusted Elliott turned his head when Marena cried out. Then Elliott heard a thud. When he gazed again at Saladior, the latter was returning ponderously to the sofa, holding his bloody sword high. Far in the back of the courtyard, an Ouoloff warrior was dragging away by a leg the maimed corpse of Marena N'ge.

Undaunted by the forbidding attitude of the deeply enraged Almalmy, Elliott played his last card.

"You are great, O Saladior Dioum. All-powerful you are, but the displeasure

of Allah prostrated your man Kumba. The revenge of Allah will strike you in some uncanny way if you don't eliminate from around you all falsehoods, and the liars who fatten on your favor without entertaining any regard for you in the bottom of their hearts!"

SALADIOR'S red-rimmed eyes glowed. "Who are these men? Mention one of them if you dare!" he roared in a terrible voice.

"I'm accusing Beldoggu Bekari!" Elliott replied vibrantly. "Tell Bekari to face me, if he dares!"

A scowling Saharan negro darted out of the crowd without any prompting. He wore the green headwear of the Moslem who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and he affected a bearing of haughty assurance. But Elliott noticed that his fingers twitched spasmodically.

Without giving him a chance of speaking first, Elliott exclaimed:

"When you lived in the land of the Germans, where the sky is often gray, did you pray punctually as the Koran prescribes?"

Beldoggu Bekari gasped, as if struck by a physical blow.

Elliott continued: "I know there were mornings when you felt too cold to arise and pray at sunrise! And with that memory of sacrilege in your heart you went to Mecca, and fastened your sacrilegious eyes on the tomb of Mohammed the Prophet, may Allah preserve his name!

"But I'm no doctor of Moslem law! It is not up to me to pass judgment on you, when the Almalmy Saladior Dioum, ruler of the Ouoloffs, and son, grandson and great-grandson of true believers is here looking at you and me, and drawing his own conclusions!

"I only tell you, Beldoggu Bekari, you took the gold of the Germans and hope to get still more from them. The Germans are your masters, you are here to serve them, to make Saladior their servant also. Place your hand on a sacred book, on the Koran, and swear that I'm wrong, if you dare! But you will not dare! You know that perjurers of Allah's sacred name are barred forever from the Paradise of Allah! You know the agonizing and eternal suffering that shall be imposed on their souls, after death!"

"Bring the book of Allah!" Saladior thundered to a menial.

But Elliott had guessed right. Either Bekari was really a devoted Moslem, or Moslem superstition had soaked his mind in the long years when he had eked a livelihood as a marabout.

"I don't want any sacred book! I shall not swear for a Rumi—for a Christian!" he choked desperately.

"Swear for me, that you have only my interests at heart!" Saladior shouted at the top of his lungs.

Bekari argued, sobbed, cursed Elliott and begged Saladior to keep on having faith in him. But once the malignant mind of Saladior set on a track, it was impossible to give a new turn to his thoughts. When the menial brought a greasy Koran, Saladior pressed it on Bekari, ordered him to put his hand on it and to swear that he didn't want to make him and his Ouoloffs slaves of the Germans. Elliott kept silent.

Saladior worked himself into a frenzy, which eventually became murderous madness, until the desperate Bekari stammered:

"O Almalmy! O mighty Almalmy! In the name of the merciful, the compassionate, how can you believe the mouthings of this Rumi? Don't you realize that Sheitan and his devils of discord spoke through him? Don't you see that he's *maboul*—crazy!"

"And if he's crazy!" Foam poured out of Saladior's twisted mouth. "You impostor! You accursed and false prevaricator! Did you forget that madmen are beloved by Allah! Did not the Prophet, may Allah preserve his name, declare it?"

Beldoggu struck his head with both fists. The green turban fell from it. The head of the deceitful marabout, shaven save for a scalplock, and shaped like an egg, stood miserably revealed, and his appearance suddenly lost all dignity.

"I must become a madman beloved by Allah to clench this deal!" Elliott instantly thought, and jumped up and down, pulling at his hair. Then he fell on all fours and growled like a diminutive lion.

"Almalmy Saladior, my master, the Rumi is indeed, crazy, and, therefore,

Allah took away the stain of unbeliever from him!" Bammiku, one of Saladior's wives instantly shrilled; because Beldoggu Bekari had brought from a distant Ouoloff tribe another comely negress, who had become Saladior's concubine, and her rival for his affections.

"Listen to the crazy officer who was a Rumi, destroy Beldoggu Bekari that traitor who's unable to prove his friendship for you by swearing on the sacred book!" Bammiku insisted at the top of her brassy lungs, hoping that Bekari's ruin could bring about also that of the concubine.

Saladior Dioum stared wildly at her, saw Elliott's antics from the corner of his eye and shoved the book against Bekari's breast. Bekari gave out a howl, as if a red-hot poker had touched him, and leaped back.

"Allah knocked the turban of the holy pilgrim from his lying head!" growled a headman, quick to pit himself against the losing Bekari.

Saladior Dioum turned toward the East and bowed deeply then he kissed the Koran and returned it to the menial. But, immediately after, he roared an obscene curse and went again for his sword. Beldoggu screamed and sprinted for the main door of the crude palace.

Elliott saw Saladior tearing after him like an enraged hippopotamus, while flashing coup-coups, swords and daggers slid out of a score of sheaths. Then a fit of infinite weariness overcame him. Slowly, he squatted on the ground and let his head fall on his breast. He had triumphed. There was no need of doing anything else for the day. Saladior's murderous fury was sure to eliminate not only Bekari, but also his friends and henchmen, and every trace of enemy influence. In the next day, Elliott had only to behave as if the fit of madness had left him, and he would find it easy to speak business with a Saladior impressed by the knowledge that he was a Christian visited by periods of that insanity which is respected by ignorant Moslems as a proof of the favor of Allah.

The battered Kumba Sy was slowly regaining his senses. He looked at Elliott through swollen eyelids with respect and some gratitude. Because, in Kumba's crude way of thinking, Elliott had been good to him when he had switched Saladior's fury to Beldoggu Bekari in the very moment when he, Kumba, was about to feel all its murderous weight.

THE next day Saladior entertained Elliott, elevated to the authority of guest of honor. They ate and drank coffee together. Elliott had learned the Koran from beginning to end. He recited Fatah after Fatah, and Saladior stared at him with infinite admiration.

"Tell me," he finally said, "can it be that, with all your knowledge, with the favor of Allah so clearly over you, you are a non-believer? You know the right Tarika—the right road of Allah—why don't you follow it to the end? Otherwise, after death, all will be lost for you—for you, who are deserving!"

Elliott simply replied:

"Inscrutable are Allah's wishes, and what's written in the book of fate. What must be will be! O Saladior, think only that Allah—that God—uses me for his ends!"

"Bismillaten!" the ponderous Saladior replied. From that moment, he was receptive and easy to convince.

He listened carefully when Elliott told him that he had to expect nothing from the Germans, and explained why. Then Elliott pointed out a way of gaining immense prestige and merit.

"The French," Elliott explained, "no matter if Dakar French or the others, and the English all want the ruin of el Hadj Mohammed, who never was friend of the Ouoloff. Attack Hadj—defeat him! And I guarantee you English money—and this ample reward from the French: All the garrison of Dakar will be assembled in parade. Flags shall whip the wind, drums will roll, bugles will blare.

"An heroic statue—yours—will be in the middle of the square.

"A general will pin a decoration on your mighty breast, O Saladior Dioum. Everybody will say: 'What a great ruler Saladior is! No man ever was as brave, or as clever!' "

"I don't care for a fanfare of bugles!" Saladior said. "Drums don't make much noise! I want a full military band, two military bands, playing for me the Mar-

sellaise, the Sidi Barahim and the March of the old French Marines."

"There will be three full regimental bands!" Elliott eagerly promised. "Even a squadron of mounted Spahis presenting sabers! Even a battery of artillery firing a salvo! And, when you return triumphantly to this seat of power, the three bands will escort you out of Dakar playing the famous march of the Metropolitan-French troops called Sambre et Meuse, and the March of the Legion Etrangere!"

"Aaah!" An ecstatic smile creased the immense face of Saladior. "Artillery firing, Spahis presenting sabers, three military musics and a decoration! Aaah! I go to war against el Hadj Mohammed. I defeat the Hadjsts! In the years to come, for generations. . . ."

"For ever . . ." Elliott magnified.

"*Oui,* yes, forever!" the flattered Saladior agreed modestly. "The whole world will speak with wonder and awe of my greatness!"

"And, you confounded mammoth pig," Elliott inwardly added, "you shall never know how much I would like that you could burst, if it were not that you are so necessary to my game!" But, aloud, he confirmed: "Yes, Almalmy Saladior! You were always great! You needed only to see the best way to show the world how mighty you are! Now, you have made the right choice, and glory will always follow your name!"

That evening Elliott stretched himself on the comfortable couch prepared for him, with complete success in the Ouoloff and Hadjist tribal affairs in his grasp, but feeling lower than a worm. Saladior's messengers were busy in spite of the late hour; for they were getting ready to start, the next morning, on their tour to rally the Ouoloff tribes for the undoing of the Hadjsts.

IX

FORT POLIDOR was located at the eastern end of the Ouoloff territory. Therefore, it was an ideal starting point for an invasion of the Hadjst country. On Elliott's suggestion, Saladior Dioum agreed to choose the immediate surroundings of the fort as the last locale of rally of his Ouoloff tribes and their allies.

Thus, a few days later, when they reached the fort, they saw makeshift Ouoloff huts over the hills and the plains surrounding the fort. And additional Ouoloffs kept arriving with the passing of every hour.

Elliott found that the captain hadn't returned. Lieutenant Marlais, however, received him enthusiastically. He wanted to treat Elliott to the last bottle of champagne available in the fort, but Elliott had urgent business to attend, and no time for celebrations.

"Among your men, have you any Tucouleurs?" he asked, coming to the point at once.

"A full dozen of them. Why?" Marlais said.

"I beg you to excuse me, but I cannot explain at this stage of the game. I can only say that I need a Tucouleur Tirailleur unable to keep a secret."

Marlais snorted, "It sounds screwy, but your way of getting at Saladior Dioum looked crazy, too, and see what you did, God bless you for it! *Et bien,* I have just the man you want. His name is Ahmadou and he's loose-tongued and greedy. Do you wish to see him?"

"Yes, but strictly confidentially, without witnesses."

"Use my office, and close the door while you speak with Ahmadou," Marlais decided with a shrug.

AHMADOU turned out to be a very ugly negro, with an ape-like stoop and shifty eyes. He snapped at attention and uneasily watched Elliott. He seemed relieved when, instead of finding fault with him, Elliott stated:

"The Toucouleur, your people, were the fighting arms of El Hadj Oumar."

"Yes, *Taubab!* Yes, master!" Ahmadou replied proudly. "They even conquered Timbuktoo for El Hadj Houmar." It was typical of his primitive craftiness of mind that he showed no fear or surprise when Elliott continued:

"Too bad the Germans prefer their old enemies, the Ouoloff, because the latter are more numerous. Ahmadou, I have no quarrel with your people. But I must follow orders. If I catch them, I'll destroy them with the help of the Ouoloff and of the half-company that Lieutenant

Marlais shall give me. But, if they get out of my reach. . . ." Elliott made an expressive gesture.

Then he added gravely: "I shall start the drive against the Hadjsts in a couple of days. I give you permission to pay a last call to your people before doom overtakes them. But remember, Ahmadou! Don't tell them that destruction is about to strike them—and don't mention to them that the Germans sold them out to the Ouoloffs! These are important informations. El Hadj Mohammed, the descendant of El Hadj Oumar and actual ruler of the Hadjst sect, would pay a lot for them! But you must not tell a thing, mustn't accept a bribe. The Germans forbid it!"

"I shall keep the secret, *Taubab!*" Ahmadou, the Toucouleur Tirailleur promised emphatically; but the crooked twist of his mouth, and the glaring of his eyes were ample warnings that he had entirely different plans.

"Then it is all settled. Go now, if you wish, and in two days join the column at Kita Biraun. But remember! I authorize your blood relations to come with you with some excuse or another. If they do, I'll protect them. But don't disclose to any Talibe, to any follower of the Hadjst creed, the secret that I confided to you as a reward for your faithful services as a Tirailleur!"

"I won't, *Taubab,* and may Allah bless you!" Ahmadou replied fervently, but with a crooked smile, and ran to retrieve his belongings.

A half hour later, Marlais rushed excitedly into the office and found Elliott stretched comfortably on a rattan chair and smoking a cigarette.

"Ahmadou is gone, in full marching kit, carrying his weapons!" Marlais announced breathlessly.

"Did the guards at the gate attempt to stop him?" Elliott drawled.

"How could they? He had a written permission from you! Why did you give it to him? Do you realize that he's likely to carry a warning to El Hadj Mohammed?"

"I made him promise that he will not," Elliott replied, exhaling smoke through his nostrils.

"Quelle blague! Do you really think he'll keep his promise?" Marlais almost screamed.

"Not at all!" Elliott replied. "Have a cigarette."

Marlais gasped like a fish pulled out of the water, and stormed out of the room.

A FEW days later the Ouoloff-Tirailleur column reached Kita Biraun; but Ahmadou wasn't there. That same afternoon, and some five miles east of Kita Biraun, a horde of Hadjsts suddenly appeared on top of a nearby hill and fired against the invaders. Then, as suddenly as they had arrived, they faded from sight. The next morning, in the seat of power of El Hadj Mohammed, the sergeant in charge of the vanguard found a scroll hanging from the blade shaft of a spear planted before the door of the deserted house of Hadj Mohammed. Without stopping to unroll the scroll, the sergeant hastened to bring it to Elliott, who opened it and read: "I can't demand that people die fighting superior numbers. But I hate the rulers of Dakar and I hate the Germans, who gave gifts to me, to fatten me like a sheep prepared for slaughter, and after that betrayed me to the Ouoloffs. Therefore, I go to join the Free-French in their lands of Equatorial Africa, with my faithful Talibes and their women and children. In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate.

El Hadj Mohammed, Almalmy and Marabout of Islam."

"Now Saladior Dioum will raise hell!" Marlais snorted, when he read the letter in his turn.

"Why should he?" Elliott shrugged, "I'll promise him that he'll get his Senegalese version of a Roman triumph of old. His people will be allowed to pillage what the Hadjsts were forced to leave behind in their flight. In a few words, the Ouoloffs will eat their omelette without breaking eggs—without suffering a single loss! Why should they kick about it?"

"You are so clever," Marlais replied, with a prodigious wink, "that I wouldn't be surprised if you were afraid of yourself!"

AS Elliott had surmised, Saladior Dioum was overjoyed in learning that the mere knowledge that he was marching

against them had routed the Hadjsts, and that the plums of the victory were going to be bestowed on him just the same. His tribesmen returned to their villages laden with booty and singing the praises of their Almalmy and his French-officer allies.

A fortnight later the answer to the report sent by Marlais and Elliott came from Dakar. In it, General de La Perriere expressed his satisfaction because the Ouoloffs had been pacified, and declared that the renewed allegiance of such an important group of tribes made up amply for the defection of the Hadjsts, who had thus ceased making nuisances of themselves in the territory controlled by unoccupied France, and were likely to become nuisances in Free-French territory

But, a week after, a tourist arrived at Fort Polidor with two minor agents of the Bureau Indigene. This tourist was a flat-nosed, chesty fellow, with piercing and restless eyes. He buntly announced that his name was Dobrowsky, and that he was traveling for his amusement. But the agents of the Bureau Indigene didn't offer explanations for their arrival. From their behavior, it was possible to see that they had come as Dobrowsky's bodyguards, and that they stood ready to enforce his wishes.

As soon as he found an opportunity of speaking to Elliott out of the newcomers' hearing, Marlais snarled:

"I don't like the damn cheek of these fellows, and I don't see why they should curse us with their presence, the *especе de salauds!*"

"I sincerely agree with you," Elliott answered. He didn't say, though, that he surmised that Dobrowsky was not a plain sight-seeker with a Resident's pass, but a Gestapo agent sent after Elliott's scalp. For, according to the unwritten rules of secret service, Elliott had welched and deserved to be squelched. He had obtained the protection of that other German agent in disguise, in the Resident's palace of Dakar, after tacitly accepting the veiled ultimatum proffered to him: "The charges against you, Balikine, will be silenced; but you'll have to shut your eyes on all tribal plottings." Instead, he had upset the German applecart, as far as the all-important Ouoloffs and the Hadjsts were concerned.

Thus Elliott wasn't surprised when Dobrowsky endeavored to gain his confidence as a fellow Russian with a friendliness of advances that were given the lie by the icy glint of his eyes.

Elliott, however, knew the methods of elimination of the grim undercover men of counter-espionage, and of underground political repression. Therefore, he met Dobrowsky's advances with apparent cordiality, but he always had some urgent duty to fulfil when Dobrowsky and his two assisting members of the Bureau Indigene endeavored to take him along on lonely jaunts out of the fort, or in the dark basements. Moreover, Elliott developed a habit of keeping his gun-belt always on, and another one of sitting with a hand carelessly placed over the butt of his holstered automatic whenever Dobrowsky and his assistants were close by.

One day Elliott was inspecting the guard at the gate when a dusty tribesman with keen eyes ran out of the jungle and came straight to him, then bowed deeply and placed solemnly his gun and dagger on the ground.

"Bismillaten! Seven blessings on you!" Elliott said courteously.

"Bismillaten! Salamou r'likoum!" the tribesman replied with another and deeper bow; then he called also the bessings of the invisible spirits of the air over Elliott, begged Allah to preserve him from all evil spirits, and invited him to listen out of everybody else's hearing to his reasons for not having paid his yearly head-tax as yet.

Such requests are not uncommon among West-African tribesmen. Elliott sent two soldiers into the jungle to find out if additional tribesmen with ready guns were ambushed there. When the soldiers returned reporting that such was not the case, Elliott walked with the tribesman up to a white stone marking the fifty yards' range from the foot of the wall, and announced:

"Warrior, I'm ready to listen!"

"Many thankss, Major Elliott, sir," the tribesman unexpectedly replied. "I'm a native of Bathurt, Gambia, and not a Senegali. I rate number one hundred and seventy-two in His Mapjesty's Intelligence Service for Africa. Sir Archibald Effingham-Thorpe wishes to inform you, Major,

that the real Lieutenant Balikine escaped from his concentration camp. Perhaps he reached the Syrian coast, stole a boat and was picked up thereafter by a scouting Italian mosquito boat. At any rate, may Allah destroy him! he's now in Italian North Africa. So it is vouched by our undercover agents operating in Libia, who have proven their worth amply, as you know."

ELLIOTT'S lips thinned, but his features showed no other sign of his distress, nor did his watchfulness relax. Thus, he wasn't caught unaware when Dobrowsky suddenly appeared in the gateway.

"You shall give my thanks to Sir Archibald and inform him that I'll speed up my business here," Elliott quickly said to the native agent. "But, for the time being, put up something of a show. That man in civvies there at the gate is an enemy—more poisonous than an adder."

"O merciful Allah!" the native agent instantly intoned at the top of his lungs, stooping to pick handfuls of dust from the ground and throwing them over his unkempt hair. "I have two wives and six children clamoring for the food that I'm not always able to provide for them! Give me time to pay my head-tax, O merciful *Taubab*. . . ."

"Enough of this comedy!" Elliott interrupted loudly. "Pick up your gun and go away before I lose patience and have you locked up! And bring the money, or the equivalent in livestock, in fifteen days, or it will go badly for you!"

The agent leaped like an antelope to retrieve his weapons. As he got hold of them, Dbrowsky called him.

But the agent paid no attention to the disguised Gestapo agent. Moaning over his shoulder to Elliott: "I shall pay, Inshallah, but my family will starve on account of it!" He turned about and sped over the cleared plain. He plunged into the jungle.

Dobrowsky rushed angrily up to Elliott. "I shouted in Ouoloff to that man to stop and come to me!" he roared. "Why did he fail to do so? And you, Lieutenant Balikine! How did you dare to send him away when you knew that I wanted to interrogate him?"

"If I don't browbeat this vulture, he'll clamp the lid on me, quick as blazes," Elliott thought. Scowling, he yelled back angrily: "*Sacrè*, Dobrowsky, who in hell are you, Admiral Darlan in disguise? You, a tourist, as your papers show—how, damn you, do you dare to shriek like a magpie, and sputter orders all over the place?

"Yes, that tribesman didn't answer to you, in spite of your lousy shouting in Ouoloff! Yes, I sent him away! And what of it? What, by the horns of the devil in short pants, have you to say about it? The man was just a cheat who didn't pay what he owed to the Government in time! I sent him away in a hurry because it is no good to allow natives to shoot their mouths off too much! Given a chance, they jabber you dizzy, and then consider themselves entitled to all kinds of delays, and become resentful if they don't get them! And tribal discipline goes into the refuse heap!

"And that's not enough! If I didn't know that you are a civilian, without a tinker's dam of knowledge of the rules and ways of the military on colonial duty, I would knock your head from in between your ears for yelling at me the way you did before my soldiers!"

Dobrowsky became purple with rage. For a moment Elliott thought that he was about to start punching, and got ready to hit back devastatingly. However, Dobrowsky was too sure of his power to court physical injury in a rough and tumble fight. Soon the angry gleam in his eyes gave way to a shrewd glint. His thick lips curled into an ugly smile.

"Everything you said sounded reasonable," he rasped. "Yet, it would have been courteous of you to cater to my—er—innocent curiosity. Instead, you preferred to inflict a slight on me. I shall not forget it!"

"On the contrary, you should apologize to me," Elliott replied more calmly. "But what's the use of arguing? Let's go to the mess and forget all about our little quarrel over a glass of Pernod."

"No!" Dobrowsky replied icily. "I'm not in a drinking mood." Turning on his heel, he walked stiffly back to the fort. In the courtyard he found the two men from the Bureau Indigene and spoke to

them under his breath, jerking his thumb now and then in Elliott's direction. Elliott saw that and became alert.

The fact that Dobrowsky had tailed him only intermittently for the last couple of days, his repressed ferocity after their quarrel, and his present cooking up of some deviltry aimed at him, as Dobrowsky's gesturing proved—all that, on top of the devastating news of the escape of the real Balikine—were signals of impending danger. Elliott had little time left to wind up his business in Senegal—and if luck didn't assist him, it was the end of his career and his life.

X

AFTER supper, Elliott remarked that he had a headache, but instead of returning outright to his room he went to search for Marlais, who was on his turn of night duty.

"Mon cher," he told him, "I shall be very indebted if you send me, instantly, to Dakar, to report personally on the features of the invitation to be extended to Almalmy Saladior Dioum, who's waiting on pins and needles for his decoration and military show of shows."

Marlais pursed his lips and nodded knowingly.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "I think, too, that it would be unwise to make Saladior wait too long, and you are the man to speed matters up. I'll go at once to write and sign your order of departure. I'll personally supervise the saddling of a few mules, and the mustering of a trusted escort.

"Who knows!—perhaps our three guests will be seized by a profound sleep, and we shall not see them snooping around in the hour of your departure."

The three guests—Dobrowsky, and the two Bureau Indigene men—used to spend the evenings, when they didn't watch Elliott, drinking liquor and playing cards. Elliott never knew if some soporific had been placed in a bottle of liquor—but the fact was that the three sleuths had to be carried to their rooms in a deep stupor a half hour after his interview with Marlais. The coast was thus clear when, around midnight, he took leave of the Lieutenant and the Doctor, and was greeted by them with such a Latin emotional display of friendship and concern for his welfare, that he couldn't help thinking that they didn't expect him to return, and were sorry to be losing him permanently.

Then, astride his mule, Elliott rode out of the fort in the starry African night and felt as if the clutching claws of death were opening and releasing him. Before entering the jungle trail, he turned to give a last glance at the fort which, muddy-gray and shapeless in the eerie radiance of the night, squatted like the carcass of a gigantic beast, flung there by a superhuman power to die.

"It is strange," Elliott mused, "how it does look like a symbol in mortar and stone of the dissolution and doom facing France!"

He remembered the last time he had visited Paris, just before the outbreak of the Nazi madness. The casual visitor saw only light, gaiety, artistic beauty and a breath-taking display of wealth, in the Ville Lumiere, in the Town of Light that was Paris. But thousands upon thousands of citizens lived in destitution in the ungainly quarters, where the average tourist never went, and selfishness reigned everywhere, among the factory workers, in the tight houses of the upper and lower middle classes, in the offices where the politicians concluded their deals, and in the gilded mansions of the rich.

France, supreme at the end of the World War, had made her bid for Continental European hegemony without mending the spreading wounds of her political system, without taking care of the people at home. The avalanche of steely war machines and marching men of militarized Germany had shattered the French colossus. The real patriots of France, rich and poor men who had labored unsuccessfully to stop the decay, who had fought without hope on the battlefield, now strove to pull their country out of the quagmire. Their country, with its past of glories, but old, decadent and divided against itself.

"May God have pity on them, what a heartrending task is theirs! And may God save England!" Elliott muttered fervently; and urged his mount into the damp shade of the jungle.

SEVERAL days later, when only a few miles separated him from Dakar, Elliott met a lieutenant of engineers engaged in map-making, and learned from him that the outskirts of Dakar were teeming with troops.

"Senegalese are quartered near the southern gate," the engineer explained. "The Moroccans and other native non-negro troops guard the orthern approaches to the town. The last battalions of the African Regiments of the Legion Etrangere, and other white units, are billetted on the eastern edge of Dakar."

When the lieutenant was gone, Elliott mused over the situation. The road over which he was riding led straight to the town's southern gate. But Elliott feared that the negro soldiers, enemies of the Ouoloffs, who were his friends, could play him a few dirty tricks. The Moroccans, consequently, didn't know how to deal with them.

The route chosen by Elliott was a big disappointment for the mules, which were accustomed to get water and fodder shortly after sighting the town, and for the squad of Senegalese of his escort, who were dead tired. Therefore Elliott begged the officer on duty at the eastern city limit to take care of them.

The lieutenant of marine infantry agreed gruffly. When Elliott asked him for a sidecar and a motorcyclist, he made an impatient gesture and grunted:

"I have nothing of the sort available. Walk on for a few blocks. You shall find a school turned into a barracks, and some Foreign Legionnaires loafing before it. Their company commander may do something for you."

"To which regiment of the Legion does this company belong?" drawled Elliott, who was not anxious to confront men and fellow officers of Balikine.

"To the Fourth. They were sent from Morocco a month ago, and they are the most quarrelsome lot I ever saw. They ought to be hung, every one of them."

The Fourth. Balikine's regiment. Elliott felt a chill.

Suddenly he saw a short and stocky man with a cap pulled down over his eyes staring at him from the opposite end of the street. Conscious that his tall stature, wide shoulders and long legs were easy to identify, because the average French officer is short, Elliott grew worried and asked the lieutenant if he knew who the fellow was. But he got little satisfaction; the lieutenant shrugged and growled: "Just a fool who's killing time, I suppose!"

The avenue was lined with trees and described a long semi-circle. Some blocks of it were bordered by native houses, others were flanked by the outer walls of fruit orchards. Thus, the moment came when Elliott was unable to see any longer the building housing the Marines, and heard his footsteps booming loudly in the surrounding silence.

He was walking along a wall, in the shade of a succession of overhanging branches, when something sharp hit the cobblestones behind him with an angry *zing!*

ELLIOTT cursed, pulling out his automatic. He stared around, but saw only tree branches swaying in the breeze above the walls. Houses towered over the next corner. But one of these houses had all its windows shut. The sign and tuft of grain stalks of an inn were the main features of the opposite house, but nobody stood before it. Elliott walked on.

Suddenly a man jumped from the stout tree branch under which Elliott was passing, and fell on him, throwing him to the ground. Elliott prodded himself upon an elbow, hit the man with his free hand, bowled him over and jumped to his feet. But other men vaulted over the wall. One of them, pulling himself up a tree from the garden where he had been in ambush with the rest, Elliott recognized as the blond German who had spoken with him in the Resident's palace, a couple of days before his departure for Fort Polidor.

Elliott was no coward, but he knew better than to engage single handed with ten men. He planted a bullet into the shoulder of a negro in baggy trousers who was lunging at him with a long-bladed claspknife, and sprinted toward the inn on the next corner. To his intense gratification, he saw soldiers in tan uniforms and white-covered kepis coming out of the inn. They were Legionnaires, alarmed by the report of the firing gun.

At the sight of an officer of Metropolitan infantry pursued by three white and six black civilians, the Legionnaires pulled their bayonets out of the scabbards hanging from their belts.

Any seasoned Legionnaire would have understood after an interview that Elliott had never been an officer of his famous Corps. Elliott, though, knew something about the stepsons of France and their calls. Thus, prodded by desperation, he shouted: "I'm Lieutenant Balikine, of the Second Foreign up to two months ago! *A moi, la Legion!*"

"Eh, la bas, copains! They are going to cut the throat of one of our officers! Come on, *vieux de la Legion!* Let's boot the *salauds* to hell!" a Legionnaire instantly shouted into the door of the inn.

Another two Legionnaires came out on the run. With the four already outside, they rushed on. When they were abreast of him, Elliott made a turn about and sent a bullet into the thigh of the foremost pursuer.

The next instant, cutthroats and Legionnaires clashed. The rogues were armed with cudgels and long knives, weapons adequate to cope with the short 1938 model bayonet of the French Infantry. But Elliott's aggressors were amateurs compared with the tough and seasoned foreign soldiers, who sidestepped, ducked and stabbed effortlessly, and knew through long practice how to avoid the blows and strokes of their adversaries.

Three cutthroats went down in the first melee. The German mob-leader had not left the top of the wall. From there he fired a bullet which broke the shoulder of a Legionnaire. Elliott fired at him in return, and saw him toppling from his perch.

The disappearance of their leader discouraged the cutthroats still on their feet. Howling, they turned heel and ran, pursued by the cursing Legionnaires. A door in the wall opened to receive them. They catapulted into it, save for the last one, who was grabbed and pulled back into the street by the soldiers. Then the door banged shut. It was oaken and thick. The Legionnaires tried to break it down, failed to do so and stormed over the wall with Elliott.

But, in the garden, they found nobody waiting for them, only a trail of footprints leading to the rear door of a house.

That rear door was flimsy. It caved in when Elliott kicked it. The house, however, turned out to be empty.

The fresh prints of an automobile's tires were on the street confronting the facade of the building, which had obviously remained untenanted for a long time, and had been utilized recently only for the express end of scuttling Elliott.

"Nasty business, *mon Lieutenant!*" a tall Legionnaire with a scarred face remarked. "What's left of the mob that wanted to kill you got away in a high-powered car. As long as they remain at large your life will be in danger. But we got some of them. Shall we force them to talk?"

"Let the police do it," Elliott snapped. "I want you to get the reward that you deserve for your brave help, but I wouldn't like you to get in trouble."

Elliott regretted that he had not caught the blond German, and it was of small comfort to him that a few drops of blood remained on a bush at the foot of the wall from which he had directed the murderous attempt of his assassins.

GENDARMES and policemen came soon enough to take charge of the wounded and captured cutthroats. They looked curiously at Elliott when they heard that he was Lieutenant Balikine. No doubt, the memory of the uproar which had marked his arrival in Dakar was still remembered keenly by the local enforcers of the law of France.

The Commissaire in charge, this time, was small and shabby-genteel. The sergeant of gendarmes was, as usual, sturdy and above the middle size. He had a tiny wisp of a red mustache, instead of the jet-black handlebar of the sergeant of gendarmes who clashed with Elliott in Dakar—but, otherwise, he could have passed for a blood relation of that doughty.

"I need a side-car and driver," Elliott announced bluntly. "I have information of the greatest importance for the Residence. It must be communicated quickly. I'm sure the Residence will appreciate whatever cooperation I'll get."

It was just the right approach. The

ring of authority in his voice. The mystery of an important mission, whetting the curiosity of the local guardians of French law. The hint of a reward.

Not a sidecar, but a high-powered automobile was placed at Elliott's service. There was an argument between the Commissaire and the sergeant, who both wanted to go with Elliott. The captain of the company of Legionnaires settled it by expressing an opinion that the Commissaire, higher in rank, couldn't desert the police detail and the prisoners, and that, anyhow, the job of escorting Elliott was more becoming to a plain sergeant. Elliott placated the Commissaire by declaring that he intended to mention his name to General de la Perrerie.

"Delorme!" the Commissaire instantly exclaimed. "Please tell His Excellency that Commissaire Pierre Etienne Honoré Delorme rescued you from a band of footpads, and gave you his car. By the way, from where do you come, Lieutenant?"

"From the Ouoloff country," fumed Elliott, in nerve-wracking suspense because he feared some last-moment interference likely to bowl over his bold attempt to get at La Perriere.

"I heard that the Ouoloffs have been pacified. Officers of their race on duty here in Dakar—intelligent high-castes educated in France—are frankly ashamed and a bit resentful because they could do nothing with their fellow tribesmen—and, suddenly, the officers of a God-forsaken jungle fort worked the trick." The Commissaire chuckled. Then he whispered: "Lieutenant, are you going to report some other tribal trouble?"

"I can't say." Elliott lifted his hand in a mysterious gesture.

The eyes of the Commissaire sparkled. "Or, perhaps," he asked avidly, "are the De Gaulle crowd and the English planning a land invasion of Senegal?"

"Je suis tres triste! What I have to tell is only for the General . . . but you are very clever, Monsieur le Commissaire Delorme!"

"Aaha! I understand!" The Commissaire was beside himself with pride, and grateful to Elliott for having surrendered in part to his shrewd way of finding out things. "Onward, chauffeur!"

The automobile rumbled on. When, after ten minutes or so, Elliott recognized the neighborhood of the Residential Palace, he glanced at the sergeant of gendarmes, who sat at his side with folded arms.

"Sergeant," he rasped, "we must stop at the building housing the personnel of the Residence. There is a man there, by the name of Bourdette, a first class private of the Foreign Regiments, who must come with me before the General as a witness of events preceding the mission which I just carried through."

"Mais oui! Bourdette, the Legionnaire who escaped with you from the English concentration camp!" the sergeant blurted. "No doubt, the *bougre* saw some British Intelligence officer during his period of prisonry, and you noticed the same officer in disguise in our present territory!"

"It is so very pleasant to recognize at every turn that our police have such remarkable powers of deduction!" Elliott exclaimed with a poker face. Then he added in an important whisper: "I met near Fort Polidor not one but two of these British undercover men. One is dead now. Unfortunately the other got away. But this is confidential!"

"I didn't hear a word! A single one!" The gratified non-com made a sweeping gesture with his meaty hands. Then he blurted excitedly: "You must be tired, Lieutenant! Remain in the car! I shall round Bourdette up, and bring him to you! But we are already before the personnel's building! Eh, *gardien de la paix chauffeur,* stop here!"

Elliott was a bundle of raw nerves when the sergeant jumped out of the tonneau and rushed into the building. The next five minutes seemed to him longer than years. A moment came when a wild fear seized him that Bourdette had made a slip and that, consequently, the game was up. . . .

But soon enough the sergeant came out of the building, flushed and smiling at the automobile and at him, and behind the sergeant trotted Bourdette, with a brand-new kepi perched on the very top of his square shaggy head.

The automobile quickly reached the palace of the Residential General. Elliott and Bourdette alighted. The ser-

geant did likewise, and rushed ahead of them to whisper a few words to his comrade in rank in charge of the relays of sentries.

The outcome of that ground breaking was that guard after guard allowed Elliott to pass without a hitch until he found himself again in the waiting hall before the reception room of General de la Perriere.

ELLIOTT inspected the big hall with an anxious eye. So far, his supposed quality of French Lieutenant had enabled him to proceed easily. For a French Army officer, though not entitled to the regard and privileges enjoyed by the Officers' Corps of other countries of Europe, if he is on special duty gets all the service and facilities that he wants, because everybody knows that he's not likely to fake; for a lie of the kind would send him before a courtmartial.

But Elliott didn't hope that the bluff could carry him without a struggle to the General's presence, for officers and functionaries of the staff of a General, or of the Governor of a Colony, are entitled to examine all reports intended for the Command of which they are members.

Elliott had resolved to get over this last obstacle by brute strength, if it need be. But he was aware that French military regulations declared that while no private or non-com can stop bodily a subaltern, and that a subaltern attacking another subaltern must accept a challenge to a duel from him, or face punishment, a superior officer attacked by a subaltern is entitled to pull out his gun and shoot him dead. And the subaltern drawing weapons against a superior officer goes straight before a firing squad. Thus, the presence of a couple of superior officers in the hall would mean serious trouble for Elliott.

However, the only officer present in it was a tall lieutenant of gendarmes. Four men in civilian clothes were at hand, though, and each of them was an adversary to reckon with. For three of these fellows were swarthy, wide-shouldered and alert French plainclothes men. The fourth, of gigantic size, was undoubtedly a German.

The lieutenant, the three plainclothesmen and the German seemed horrified when they saw Elliott.

"*Espece d'andouille!* You, specimen of an eel!" The Lieutenant cursed the gendarme sergeant who had brought Elliott in. "What are you doing here with this . . . this Lieutenant Balikine?"

The thunderstruck sergeant remained frozen on his track and made a desperate gesture.

"The Resident General sent me South without mentioning my mission to every member of his household," Elliott whispered quickly to him. "Go away and don't fear. I shall recommend you to the General, and he'll clear this silly misunderstanding."

The sergeant gave him a dubious glance, saluted the subaltern of his Corps and beat a hasty retreat.

"Come onward with me, Bourdete, and fight if they don't let us through!" Elliott snarled.

"I shall pick on the men in civilian dress, although they look too tough," Bourdette rumbled. Just the same, he followed Elliott balling his fists.

Elliott walked up to the lieutenant of gendarmes.

"The General waits for me," he snapped. "Please get out of the way."

"*Ta barbe!*" the gendarme officer sneered. Then, winking at the German, who nodded grimly, he put a big hand on Elliott's chest.

"Back to your hole, former Legionnaire," he croaked. "This place is not for your likes!"

Elliott smiled, threw his left forearm over the gendarme lieutenant's left shoulder, and stuck his right wrist against his right side. Then he swung his shoulders and the entire weight of his body leftward, and at the same time he hit the gendarme officer sharply with his right hip. The gendarme officer lost his balance, and fell heavily on his side.

"On!" Elliott roared, and leaped toward the door of the General's study.

The French plainclothes men catapulted to bar his way. Elliott clipped the foremost of the three on the chin with a terrific uppercut, and knocked him out instantly. But the two others jumped on him, tied him effectively and strove to kick his ankles from under him. As he

fought savagely to shake them off, Elliott saw the German leaping on him swinging a blackjack.

XI

ELLIOTT relaxed his muscles, then he quickly swung his body sideways. The effect of this dodge was that the descending blackjack hit the head of one of the French plainclothes men who held him.

The unlucky fellow let go of Elliott and collapsed. The German cursed, grabbed Elliott's collar and twisted. There was great power in his grip. Elliott, half strangled, wrenched an arm free and hooked a punch into his belly. The German made a wry grimace but didn't release his hold. Elliott saw his right arm and fist holding the blackjack swinging back to strike again, and at that moment the plainclothes man still in the fight clutched him tighter, fastened a leg around his calves and blocked his efforts to jerk his head out of the way, to punch a second time at the German.

But a big and dark object shot up behind the German and struck the back of his head with a resounding thud. The fingers of the German's left hand slid out of Elliott's collar. His right arm fell down limply. A grunt issued from his unconscious lips when he sank at the knees, and down he went.

"Salaud! I got him in the nick of time, *mon Lieutenant!"* Bourdette gloated, as he stood with a shattered chair in his hands over the collapsed German agent.

But Elliott was too busy to reply. His remaining adversary had just brought a knee up. Just in time Elliott had jerked his body back, but the glancing blow had grazed his groin and it hurt like hell. And then the plainclothes man attempted to butt Elliott.

The latter went berserk. With a savage push and heave, he shook the plainclothes man off. While he was still out of balance, Elliott leaped on him, hooking, uppercutting, crossing his blows. In a couple of seconds the face of the French plainclothes man disintegrated, became a gory mess of chopped flesh. A last furious punch at the pit of his stomach lifted him and threw him flat on his back. And, once he hit the polished marble slabs of the hall, he remained still.

But the struggle was not over. The lieutenant of gendarmes was recovering his wits. One of his ankles had been broken by his heavy fall, and his ribs ached. But he was pulling himself up stubbornly on a knee. Soon the echoes of the hall magnified his stentorian calls for help.

A swarm of soldiers and plainclothes men rushed into the hall from two side doors. The soldiers came to an abrupt halt when they saw Elliott, in his uniform of French lieutenant, standing above the unconscious secret agents. The plainclothes men pulled out automatics and blackjacks; but they were not in a hurry. To their practiced eye, it was an open and shut proposition. Elliott had not the wings of an angel, and therefore he couldn't get away. Therefore there was no need of charging him without method and order—particularly because, in doing so, some champion of the law was likely to get badly bruised. It was much better to awe Elliott and seize him unresisting. If Elliott was fool enough to put up a fight against so many odds, the best thing to do was to close in on him compactly, smothering his flaying arms by sheer strength of numbers.

However, in the hall had come also a so-called German tourist—a young product of the Colonial School of the Third Reich, who was hard as nails but without much self-control. Seeing the German on the floor in a pool of blood, this young German pulled out his automatic, shouted: "The swine killed *mein Kamerad!"* and fired. A French plainclothes man pushed his arm upward in the nick of time. The bullet passed high above Elliott's head. But the crash of the report, magnified by the echoes of the spacious hall, rang like a peal of thunder.

A few French plainclothes men and soldiers were struggling with the young German who had gone berserk, when the door of the adjacent study was flung open. General de la Perriere appeared on its threshold.

"Who dares to turn the Residency into a shooting gallery? Order!" he roared. "Everybody stand at attention, or I shall clamp in jail the whole lot of you!"

Elliott started when he saw the commander of Fort Polidor, Captain Courcy, beside the incensed General. Bourdette, on the contrary, was overwhelmed by a fit of emotion.

"Monsieur le General! Monsieur le Vicomte!" he shrieked hysterically. "Don't you recognize in me Pierrot Bourdette, who as a boy used to bring truffles and wild flowers to Madame your wife, may God rest her soul! O, Monsieur le General! I'm that very Pierrot Bourdette who loved your son so much, and was so proud of serving him! O, Monsieur le General! Help me and this brave officer who came with me!"

"Bourdette!" Instant recognition effaced the purple of rage from the face of the General, and turned it ash-gray. Convulsive with anxiety, torn between agonizing dread and wild hope, he stammered: "Bourdette, what are you doing here? In Heaven's name, where's my son?"

That was too much for the high-strung and demonstrative Bourdette. Beside himself, he burst into tears and waved his hands miserably.

"MONSIEUR LE GENERAL!" Elliott's voice sounded respectful but firm. "In the interest of the service, and in your own interest, I beg you to see me and Orderly Bourdelle in the privacy of your office."

"I endorse this man's suggestion," Courcy instantly added. "And, *mon General!* Protect him and Bourdette from the men who are after them, in the service of enemy interests!"

A short, puffy-featured fellow came importantly out of the solid rank of the plainclothesmen. Pursing his thick lips so that his close-cropped mustache stood out like a bristle, he let forth a high-pitched shout:

"This Lieutenant and this private, who came to Dakar under the name of Passaens, and turns out to be an individual called Bourdette, are guilty of various crimes and infractions and must be delivered, instantly, to the civilian Police!"

"Par Dieu!" The General's roar filled the hall, "Since when do turncoats dare to order about a Resident General? You!" The General's finger shot toward the short, black-clad fellow, "In the span of six years you have been a Republican, a Communist, a Croix de Feu, and alternately a Labor Organizer and a Union-breaker! And now you are a German bootlicker! Soldiers! Clear this residency, instantly, of all men in civilian clothes who are not members of its Staff. Gendarmes not on duty, Inspectors, plainclothesmen! Back to your Stations! As far as that TOURIST is concerned, lock him up, I shall review his case later personally!"

Quick to take his cue, the lieutenant of gendarmes who had fought Elliott so strenuously roared to the plainclothesmen to hurry out, forestalling any action from the soldiers.

When the door of the study closed behind Elliott and Bourdette, shutting out the subdued clamor of the mob leaving the hall, the General grasped the orderly's shoulders, shook him, gasped, "My son! Where's my son!"

"The Lieutenant de la Perriere!" Bourdelle choked, hesitated, and finally shouted, *"Monsieur le General:* Your son is dead!"

The General stumbled toward his desk like a blind man. He sank on his chair, and hid his face between his slender, twitching hands. Elliott, unaccustomed to French display of feelings, was embarrassed by the behavior of the General, and yet found it so poignant that he use all his self-control to keep a stiff upper lip.

"Bourdette!" The General at length leaned back on his chair, and there was no longer sorrow, but a terrible frown on his slender face. "Bourdette! Tell me how my son died!"

Monotonously and in singsong at first, then growing excited and gesticulating wildly, Bourdette related how young la Perriere had been taken prisoner after a brave resistance, and his growing misery in the concentration camp to which he was sent.

"He never remonstrated," Bourdette's voice alternately snarled and sobbed. "But he had always lived well. The little food—the bad food—hard bread, scanty rations of vegetables, no eggs, no meats, no coffee, only a bit of haddock now and then—ruined his health. He suffered more and more intestinal troubles. The German Army officers were kind to him.

The Gestapo men who took their place —the first batch—treated him and all of us well. But they were sent elsewhere. Other Gestapo men—very rough *bougres* —and some brutal young fellows—took their place.

"I don't remember what it was all about, but once one of them attempted to ridicule your son, and your son made a monkey out of him. All the prisoners nearby, even some other German jailers, laughed!

"But the fellow who clashed with your son was a bad one—and strong as a bull! Other Germans time and again pulled him away from your son . . . but one day he found him alone, slapped him. Your son struck back and was battered to a pulp. I came to his help. Other prisoners did. We were all beaten by the camps' guards, placed in solitary confinement.

"An old German officer made an inquiry. The bad German fellow was sent away. But the humiliation of the beating had been the last drop. Broken in mind and body, your son couldn't eat without throwing out his food. They put him in an infirmary . . . but, a few days later, he came to the end of his road there. . . . I was allowed to comfort his last moments! He died in my arms, *mon General.* His last words were for you!"

Only the cracking and clenching and unclenching of the General's hands had punctuated that tale. The General de la Perriere had spoken no word, as the particulars of his son's death stabbed, one after another, in his ears, into his brain. But his eyes glowed like live coals.

A long pause followed, when Elliott stared embarrassedly at the shades in the corners of the room, at an expanse of roof tops, and at barren, sunbaked hills, visible through the open window. The face of Captain Courcy was in the shade. Captain Courcy stood as silent and still as a statue.

"What message has this officer who came with the servant of my dead son? What does this Lieutenant Balikine want?" the General finally said vibrantly, to no one in particular.

"May I speak for you?" Courcy's voice, addressed to Elliott, came out of the shadows.

"Certainly, *mon Capitaine!*" Elliott blurted.

"Thank you!" Courcy replied softly. "Then, I tell General de la Perriere—in your name—in the name of all the French officers of Western Africa: We respect the Government of unoccupied France, we understand the motives governing its actions, but we know our duty. We defeated De Gaulle, we fought an English invasion; but that does not mean that we want to toe the line for the Germans! All the Germans here—so-called tourists or otherwise—must go!"

"Yes, they must!" Bourdette shrieked, lifting his shaking hands, "One of them killed my Lieutenant de la Perriere! Why is he not here, that murderer? *Mon Dieu,* why don't you allow me to kill him?"

"Enough, Bourdette!" the General roared, jumping up and overturning his armchair, "Courcy! Balikine! I'm ordering the instant roundup of all German agents in Dakar, and all over Senegal! Do you want to have a part in it?"

"Monsieur le General! With all my heart!" Elliott exulted.

XII

THE Germans had got an inkling of what was in store for them, because the orders to round them up found them barricaded in the Hotel in which they had their quarters, and from which they had summarily chased out all employees and non-German guests.

A battalion of Senegalese Tirailleurs was hastily flung all around the hotel. Then, under a flag of truce, an officer went to ask the Germans' surrender. All to no awail, because the Germans replied from behind the barricaded windows that whoever wanted to get hold of them had to fight for the privilege.

They kept their word. They broke with a shower of hand grenades and a hail of bullets the attack of three companies of Senegalese Tirailleurs.

"Ahaah! So, they want to be heroes to the last?" General la Perriere snarled, "Very well! Send out the tanks!"

A big tank, followed by two medium

ones, rumbled out of a capacious hangar, gathered speed on the straight avenue leading to the hotel's main door. Finally, with a roar of an earthquake, it smashed through the hotel's facade and came to a halt in the hotel's courtyard. The smaller tanks followed suit. Two companies of Moroccan Tirailleurs ran after the tanks and entered the hotel in their turn.

The Germans put up a last resistance through the invaded rooms, but the odds were too much for them. Before sunset about a hundred of them were prisoners, a score in a military hospital, and the burying-details were gathering the dead.

Elliott's work was done. But he had still to get out of Dakar and out of Senegal.

The next morning, Captain Courcy strode into the room assigned to him.

"Lieutenant," he announced after the usual greetings, "you have rendered us a great service but, as you well understand, you have hurt many prides, and made quite a few enemies in this town of Dakar. Therefore, it is imperative that you go to some outlying garrison. The General ruled Fort Polidor out—I don't know why. You are assigned to a post on the border of Gambia."

The border of British-owned Gambia! Elliott couldn't trust his ears.

"Captain Bessinier, who'll be your commanding officer, will leave Dakar early in the afternoon," Courcy continued. "Would you like to go with him, or do you prefer to spend another couple of days in Dakar?"

"I shall leave with Captain Bessinier. It will be my opportunity of getting acquainted with him during the trip, and out of duty," Elliott hastily replied. He noticed that Courcy was repressing a chuckle.

ELLIOTT and Captain Bessinier did most of their journey on motorboats chugging swiftly over a succession of communicating rivers. Thus they reached their destination in three days. After a hasty meal in the Post, Bessinier invited Elliott to visit the border.

They walked along a fence of barbed wire until they came upon a passage

guarded by two Senegalese Tirailleurs. Two black infantrymen of the King's African Rifles were on the opposite side of the fence. South of them, Elliott noticed a dusty automobile parked under a flat-topped tamarisk.

Elliott weighed his chances of darting through the passage; but the two Senegalese Tirailleurs seemed very alert, their respect for rank didn't extend to deserting officers, and their fixed beyonets looked excessively sharp. On the other hand, Elliott loathed the very idea of pulling out his automatic and shooting them down treacherously.

"I was almost forgetting!" Bessinier exclaimed. "Here's a souvenir from General de la Perriere. Courcy gave it to me for you. But, please, don't open it until later."

Elliott took the gift and pocketed it mechanically, when Bessinier's attention turned to the two Senegalese Tirailleurs.

"Especes d'andouilles, how long is it that you don't shine your accouterment? Come here and let me give a look at it, you baboons!"

The two Senegalese snapped at attention. Bessinier passed a finger over their crossbelts. Neither of the three noticed that they had left Elliott alone, near the passage.

Elliott sprang. Three leaps carried him into British territory. The King's Royal Riflemen instinctively ran to intercept him, but he quickly shouted to them "I'm in His Majesty's Service!" and they lost no time in getting out of his way.

Some twenty yards further Elliott turned and noticed that Bessinier was waving a hand in his direction, but didn't seem surprised.

"Balikine!" he presently shouted. "What in Hades are you doing?"

"I'm returning home!" Elliott countered cheerfully. "I apologize for having impersonated a French officer. I'm a British major, happy for having rendered a service to France!"

"But that's absurd! Return to French territory and explain!" Bessinier roared.

Elliott opened his mouth, but another voice cut in.

"Good, timely repartee! Bally Senegalese guards soaking it for future reference and all that. But, I say, old chap, haven't you had enough of the chirping banter?"

Elliott turned as if stung by a red needle, and saw the equine features and elongated figure of Sir Archibald Effingham-Thorpe coming out of a gully.

"You did a bit of extraordinary work!" Sir Archibald cried, opening his mouth in a long-toothed smile.

Elliott wasn't listening any longer, because the unwrapped gift of General la Perriere was in his hand.

It was a cigarette case of fine leather, bearing the la Perriere coat of arms in solid gold. The note contained in it said:

"This case was given to me on one of my birthdays by my beloved son. Please, keep it as his souvenir and mine, and believe that I do earnestly hope that, one day, we may fight again shoulder to shoulder against the common enemy."

"So," Elliott mused aloud, "General de la Perriere understood that I was a British officer in disguise."

"And so did Captains Courcy and Bessinier. From the very beginning." Sir Archibald smiled.

"I have it!" Elliott exclaimed. "Courcy was the leader of the masked men who kidnaped and examined me on the first night of my arrival in Dakar!"

"Quite!" Sir Archibald replied gravely, "But they know, and we know, that you, and you alone, won the game by bringing into the fold the Almalmy Saladior Dioum.

"Because, my dear fellow! Had the Ouoloff remained on the fence, or worse, how on earth could anyone have fooled and bullied El Hadj Mohammed and his precious Talibes into joining the Free French cause? Then by Jove! With the blasted Hadj trouble out of the field —and the priceless Ouoloffs again at his back and call—the old General had what it takes to clamp the law on the Jerries.

"Now, my dear Major, what can be done to please you?"

"Have you a mess room and officers' quarters around here?" Elliott smiled.

"The usual Post's mess room."

"Good. Such being the case, I would appreciate very much a tall, cool drink."

Here's the Kind of MEN I Build!

Charles Atlas

An actual untouched photo of Charles Atlas holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion Cup Winner
This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' California pupils.

Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The *identical natural* method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—*my way*. I give you *no gadgets or contraptions to fool with*. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension" you can laugh at *artificial* muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

Only 15 Minutes a Day

My method—**"Dynamic Tension"**—will turn the trick for you. No **theory**—every exercise is **practical**. And, man, **so easy!** Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of **"Dynamic Tension"** almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

FREE BOOK "EVERLASTING HEALTH AND STRENGTH"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book *today*. AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 150-X, 115 East 23rd Street, New York City.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 150-X
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **"Dynamic Tension"** will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly.)

Address .....

City ..... State.....

Be a RADIO Technician

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Established 27 Years

I Train Beginners at Home for Good Spare Time and Full Time Radio Jobs

More Now Make $30 $40 $50 a Week than Ever Before

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers a way to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now, plus the opportunity for a permanent job in the growing Radio industry. There is an increasing demand for full-time Radio Technicians and Radio Operators. Many make $30, $40, $50 a week. Clip the Coupon below and mail it. Find out how I train you at home for these opportunities.

Broadcasting Stations employ N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other capacities and pay well.

Set Servicing pays many N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 extra a week in spare time.

Loudspeaker System building, installing, servicing and operating is another growing field for N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians.

Jobs Like These Go To Men Who Know Radio

The 882 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ Radio Technicians and Operators with average pay among the country's best paid industries. The Radio repair business is booming now because manufacturers have stopped making new home and auto Radios and the country's 57,400,000 sets are getting older, requiring more repairs, new tubes, parts. Many N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own full-time or spare-time Radio service businesses. The Government needs many Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Radio factories employ thousands of trained technicians as they rush to fill millions of dollars worth of Government orders. Think of the many good jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for these jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens jobs in the future. Yes, N. R. I. trained Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They are THOROUGHLY TRAINED. Many N. R. I. trained men hold their regular jobs, and make extra money fixing Radio sets in spare time.

Beginners Soon Learn to Make $5, $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments which give you valuable practical experience. My 50-50 method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

Extra Pay in Army, Navy, Too

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

Find Out How N. R. I. Teaches Radio and Television

Act today. Mail coupon now for 64-page Book. It's FREE. It points out Radio's spare-time and full-time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers you. Mail coupon in envelope or paste on penny postcard—NOW.

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 2KG
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

I Trained These Men

$10 a Week in Spare Time

"I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made $600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of $10 a week just spare time."—JOHN JERRY, 1729 Penn St., Denver, Colorado.

Had Own Business 6 Months After Enrolling

"I went into business for myself 6 months after enrolling. In my Radio repair shop I do about $300 worth of business a month. I can't tell you how valuable your Course has been to me."—A. J. BATEN, Box 1168, Gladewater, Texas.

Sergeant in Signal Corps

"I am now a Sergeant in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps. My duties cover Radio operating, maintenance of Army Transmitters and Receivers, operating Teletypes, handling duties of the Chief Operator in his absence."—SERGEANT RICHARD W. ANDERSON, U. S. Army (Address omitted for military reasons.)

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS

FREE BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2KG
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

NAME..... AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....