

# JUNGLE

SPRING 25¢

## STORIES



A GREAT NEW  
KI-GOR  
NOVEL  
*The* SILVER  
WITCH

FANTASY  
MAGAZINE

Whispers of white man's death hissed from the Amofti kraal  
**SPEARS OF FIRE** novelet by Alexander Wallace



# You Can Be a Bombshell In Any Tough Spot!

**NOW ... A Rugged Fighting-Man Shows You How To  
Explode Your Hidden-Powers In Self-Defense**

No true American wants to be a tough! But YOU, and every red-blooded man and boy wants to be always ready and able to get out of any tough spot ... no matter what the odds. You want to have the real know-how of skillfully defending yourself ... of fearlessly protecting your property, or your dear ones ... against Bullies, Hoodlums, Roughnecks and the like. And, if in service, or going in, you've got to be ready to fight rough and tough, for your very life may depend on it in hand-to-hand combat.

Here's where a rugged, two-fisted fighting-man tells you ... and shows you ... the secrets of using every power-packed trick in the bag. You get it straight from "Barney" Cosneck, in **AMERICAN COMBAT JUDO** ... training manual for Troopers, Police, Boxers, Wrestlers, Commandos, Rangers and Armed Forces. What a man! He's dynamite from head to toes! Twice, he was Big 10 Wrestling Champ, and during World War II was Personal Combat Instructor to the U. S. Coast Guard. "Barney" has devoted most of his life to developing, perfecting, teaching rough, tough fighting tactics. He gives YOU all the angles in easy to follow steps. Mastery of his skills and tactics will give even a little guy the blasting power of a bombshell ... to knock the steam out of a bruiser twice his size.

"Barney" keeps no secrets in **AMERICAN COMBAT JUDO**! He tells all ... shows all! He gives you the seal lowdown on when and how to use each power-packed Blow, Hold, Lock, Jab, Throw and Trip, that will make YOU the "Boss" in any tough spot. You'll be thrilled and amazed when you see what YOU can do with your bare hands ... even if you are light and small. For the real secret of "Barney's" super-tactics is in using the other fellow's muscle and brawn against him ... as if it were your own ... to make him helpless and defenseless.

200 Dynamic-Action, Start-To-Finish photos show you what to do ... how to do ... the skillful fighting tactics that will make you slippery as an eel ... fast as lightning ... with striking power like a panther ... with a K.O. punch in both hands. What's more, you'll learn the secrets of using every ounce of your weight ... every inch of your size ... to give you giant-power ... crushing power ... that will keep you on your feet when the other guy's down. Best of all, you'll be surprised how easy it is. Your friends, too, will be surprised when they see your speed, skill and power.

Send for your copy of **AMERICAN COMBAT JUDO** right now! Keep it for 7 days, and if you don't think it's the best buck you ever spent, return it and get your money back. But, don't wait — you don't know when you may have to do your stuff!



**FREE  
7-DAY TRIAL!**  
Mail Coupon

## WHAT A BOOK!

It's super-charged with the know-all and do-all of every winning-trick in **JUDO**... **WRESTLING**... **BOXING**... **POLICE-TACTICS**. Actually, 4 Dynamic-Action Books in 1. Loaded with 200 Start-To-Finish Photos. All for **ONLY \$1.00**.

## PARTIAL CONTENTS

- Disabling Blows ...
- Chart of Disabling Blows ...
- Hacks ...
- Jabs ...
- Holds ...
- Locks ...
- Breaks ...
- Releases ...
- Throws ...
- Trips ...
- Arm Drag ...
- Full Nelson ...
- Shoulder Throw ...
- Hip Throw ...
- Pile Driver ...
- Fighting Two Men At Once ...
- Disarming Assailant ...
- and many others.



**SPORTSMAN'S POST, FH-9**  
26 East 46th St.  
New York 17, N. Y.

## 4 DYNAMIC-ACTION BOOKS IN 1

# \$1.00

POST PAID

## ONLY

### FREE TRIAL COUPON ... Mail Today!

**SPORTSMAN'S POST, Dept. FH 2-53**  
26 East 46th St.,  
New York 17, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

You've got something! Rush me my copy of **AMERICAN COMBAT JUDO** on 7 Days' Free Trial. I have checked how I am ordering:

Here's my \$1.00 in  cash  money order  check.  
Send postpaid.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

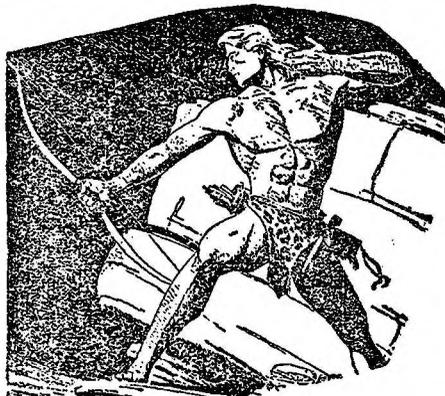
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ZONE \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

**WARNING!** If you are a Merchant, Guard, Taxi-Driver, Trucker, Farmer, Cashier, Gas-Station Operator, Serviceman, Nightworker, or in some other occupation where, due to location or circumstances, you are often alone, or go through dark, lonely places, **AMERICAN COMBAT JUDO** is a must for you. Women and girls, too, should know how to defend and protect themselves when alone or unescorted. **MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!**

# JUNGLE

TALES OF DARKER AFRICA

# STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, President

JACK O'SULLIVAN, Editor

MALCOLM REISS, General Manager

## A GREAT BOOK-LENGTH KI-GOR NOVEL

### THE SILVER WITCH . . . . John Peter Drummond 2

"Fight me and you surely die," the evil enchantress of the swamps warned Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle. And with a reckless laugh he met her challenge, racing into battle against the bloodless, fleshless warriors of the immortal Silver Witch.

## TWO EXCITING JUNGLE NOVELETS

### ANGEL IN THE JUNGLE . . . . . Lawton Ford 60

Spenser Frost trekked the bush from the Cape to the blue Nile; from Mombasa to Nigeria. But never had he seen the likes of this frail, young subaltern fresh from Sandhurst who was scheduled to lead a rebellious safari to Thunder Pass in the realm of the fierce, white-hating Amerrars. "Murder, pure murder," Frost breathed.

### SPEARS OF FIRE . . . . . Alexander Wallace 78

A fortune in black wood—for any man with skin tough enough to shed barbed arrows; whose stomach could hold poisoned drink; whose heart was stout enough to withstand the treacherous Amofti tree-spirits. A fortune in mahogany . . . for Hardisty . . . if he lived long enough to take it.

## SHORT STORIES OF AFRICAN INTRIGUE

### GORILLA! GORILLA! . . . . . Anson Slaughter 52

The gorilla feeding grounds this hot Congo morning was strangely quiet and tense. Before dusk, the troop knew, the envious, wild young bull, Sarto, would challenge Kongnor, the great but aged silver-backed leader.

### NDEMBO! . . . . . M. E. Counselman 73

Kulonga's "Ndembo Death" was indeed a superior miracle. But his resurrection—the villagers feared—would shake the very foundation of all great jungle juju.

The Silver Witch, copyright 1945, by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc.

SPRING 1953

Vol. 5, No. 8

◀ A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE ▶

25¢ per copy



173

JUNGLE STORIES • Published by Glen-Kel Publishing Co., Inc., 1658 Summer Street, Stamford, Conn. This is a magazine of fiction. The characters named and incidents described do not refer to any actual person. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted 1953 by Glen-Kel Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 1655 Summer Street, Stamford, Conn. Printed in U. S. A.



VISTAL



# The Silver Witch

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

**"Fight me and you die," warned the evil enchantress of the swamps. And Ki-Gor took up the challenge . . . racing wildly into battle against the fleshless, bloodless warriors of the notorious Silver Witch.**

**P**'AANGA walked the shadows, and the eyes of his warriors followed his every move. He walked the shadows edging in toward the blossoms of yellow radiance that were the cooking fires, and the hate in his proud heart was brighter than the flames.

Night was a sable pall over the jungle, and the orange moon had not yet risen above the trees, yet there were no sounds of voices in the *kraal*, no food cooked over the flames, and frightened children whimpered from where their mothers had hidden them in the thatched huts.

Only P'aanga moved, and his footsteps were leaden, for he alone had had the courage to raise a battle-cry, and none of his men had answered. He had stood before the dread warning, and his brave old voice had scourged the warriors before him, had brought anger to their eyes—but no courage to their hearts. He had wiped away the mark of the Silver Witch, had stroked it out of existence with a single swipe of a tuft of grass, had challenged the juju of the one who had ordered it placed on the single gate to his *kraal*.

A thigh-drum began to talk, the rhythm soft at first, drawing strength, sucking thought from the listening minds, driving fear and darkness into them. A woman whimpered from a door, her eyes wide and frightened, her arms closing about the baby at her breast. The tempo grew brighter, sharper, seeking a level that would reach all in the village. Fingers and palm stroked and tapped the gut head, drew terror into the air, sent it winging about in a rippling flood that would drown all before it stopped.

P'aanga heard the sound, and stopped his ceaseless pacing. Muscles crawled and knotted in his still-straight shoulders, and his fierce eyes glowed brighter in his seamed face. He polished the ebony shaft of his warrior's bow with the palm of his right hand, and his legs went wide, bracing himself against the insidious rhythm.

A lion roared a coughing challenge in the jungle close at hand, and the drum caught up the sound on a minor note, sent it welling back into the stillness that had fallen. A bull-elephant shrilled a trumpeting bellow from where it threshed the belly-high grass of its feeding ground, and a skulking hyena cackled an obscene laugh—and a second drum caught up the sounds, integrated them into a double rhythm that was terrifying because of its regular pagan simplicity.

P'AANGA took a single step toward the drummer, and his hand reached up for one of the arrows in his back-quiver. His fingers loosed, and the arrow dropped back with a muffled thud. The anger went from the eyes of the old chief, and he could feel the trembling of his knees.

The eyes behind the drummer's mask

slitted even more, and his hands moved faster. He drew his legs together, let his gaze travel slowly over the watching men and women. He began to chant, the sounds muffled and indistinct behind the grotesquerie of the blue and crimson mask, and the ostrich plumes nodded gently with every word he spoke.

"Aaaiiee!" a wail of superstitious terror surged softly through the *kraal*.

"Narini!" the drummer said, and the single word stilled the pulsing voices.

"Narini!" the drummer said again, and his fingers drew evil from the drums laced to the thighs of his crossed legs.

"Narini!" the drummer said again—and the arrow drove to its fletching in his right drum.

Then P'aanga was striding across the clearing, and his anger was a blade that split the men so that a path was made. He walked, and a second arrow was notched to the taut string of his warrior's bow, and the muscles of his right arm had drawn it almost the full length.

"We fight!" P'aanga said. "We are not women, we are men! Blood is in our bellies, not water, and I say we fight!"

He stood, proud and implacable, firelight flickering on his lean body, his chieftain's necklace glittering about his throat. He was chief then, not as mighty as he had been in his prime, but wise and selfless and fearless as his father and his father's father had been before him.

Low laughter crept from beneath the mask of the drummer, spread oilily in the silence that had fallen. A knife glittered in one hand, slashed at the ruined drum, and it fell free, rolling a bit before coming to rest.

"You cannot fight, P'aanga," Rakolta, the witch-doctor, said simply. "For to fight, you must have an enemy of flesh and blood—and the warriors of the Silver Witch are neither."

He slipped the gleaming blade beneath his cape of *colubus* skins, came softly to his feet. Great muscles rippled in arms and shoulders, and his legs were columnar braces mightier than any warrior's in the tribe. He towered half a head over the chief, dwarfed the other by the sheer animal strength that rippled in every move. And his every movement, every inflection of voice was a calcu-

lated insult to the gray-haired man he faced.

"We do not fight," he said, "for no one can fight the woman who walks in flame. No arrow or spear can find its mark in the juju bodies of her warriors, for they are not of this world and cannot be slain." He shook his head, and the knuckle-bones about the bottom of the weird mask clicked a gruesome echo to his words.

P'aanga turned slowly about, watching the faces of his men, reading correctly the fear that froze them into grimacing masks. Slowly he loosed the tension on the bow-string, until the arrow dangled from the slack fingers of his bow-hand.

"Many are gone," he said at last. "You, Tarasi, lost your brother; you K'eeso, lost the father of your children; none of us has been spared by the Silver Witch. Each hand of full moons they come and leave their glowing mark upon the *kraal* post, and at midnight our young men and women are herded away like the cattle of the Amazulu into the jungle, never to return, never to be heard of again."

A woman cried, her sobbing soft and muffled, and the tears made shining tracks down the dark beauty of her face. Beside her a young man fingered the hilt of his scabbarded knife, and, for the second, flame crept into his eyes.

"We fight, or we die!" P'aanga cried. "Soon none will be left but the old and the crippled, for even the last time children were taken by the glowing men. We are dying as a tribe, as a nation, being slain by a trick, for look—" He pulled a tuft of grass from his waist band. "—no longer does the silver mark shine on this grass, as it did when first I wiped the juju handprint from the post."

Smoke roiled, and flames bellied knee-high from the red coals onto which he threw the grass. A single gasp of indrawn breath swelled from the squatting warriors.

"A trick, I swear it," P'aanga finished vehemently. "These men who serve the one who calls herself the 'Silver Witch' are not walking dead; they are but brutal slavers who smear their naked skins with the crushed bodies of the fireflies and glow-worms. They can be slain—by men who are not afraid to cast a spear or draw an arrow."

Rakolta spread his legs, cocked his hands

astride his hips. His masked face swung about, slitted eyes peering into the shadows bulging ever closer to the dying fires. He waited until P'aanga had finished his exhortation, then lifted his right hand for attention.

"We can fight," he said, "*and we can die.*" He singled out a hulking warrior squatting nearby. "What think you, Barong, can the glowing men be slain?"

Fear left the warrior's face a sickly gray; his eyes rolled in superstitious awe, and a shiver coursed his wide shoulders.

"No," he declared heavily. "I sent a war-arrow through the belly of one, driving it so that no man could walk—and he came after me with his great knife, the arrow skewering him like a roasting pig. They cannot die, they are juju, they are the men of the Silver Witch, and she has lived forever."

"*Wab!*" a second warrior nodded in agreement. "I saw the shot, and know it went true—yet the glowing man could not be stopped. I say we cannot fight."

RAKOLTA lifted the mask from his face, dangled it in his hand. His bold eyes were keen beneath heavy brows, and the planes of his face were such that he was almost handsome, saved only by the thinness of his mouth. He was young, newly initiated as witch-doctor, taking the place of the old one dead but a few moons. Once he had been a warrior, one of the tribe's greatest; but now he intoned incantations, cooked brews of life and death in his fetish pots.

"I am brave," he said without boasting. "Yet I will not fight. I am the greatest man in the tribe, yet I will not fight. You know what I am, and you know that nothing living could stand to me and my weapons, yet I will not face the wrath of the Silver Witch with naked weapons."

Wood popped as P'aanga broke the slim arrow in his hand, and dust pouted in the soft puff where the broken shaft struck the ground at Rakolta's feet. The witch-doctor lifted incredulous eyes from the mark of a coward that had been hurled at him, and his hand flashed for the knife beneath his robe.

"I shall drink your blood," he snarled, and steel glittered in his hand.

P'aanga did not move, his empty bow

hanging from one hand, the other free and at his side. He faced the greater man, and his courage was a shield that kept the blade from his throat as surely as though it were a wall of ironwood trunks.

There was no sound, not a warrior moved. For a flickering eternity of time the tableau held. And then, even as decision crept into Rakolta's heavy face, there came the whirling *chug* of an arrow driving deep into wood, and eyes flickered to the vibrating shaft of a gleaming arrow sunk half its length into a fire-log close at hand.

"*Aaaiiee!*" moans of terror swelled from every throat but P'aanga's and Rakolta's.

Like phantoms rising from some madman's dream, bows drawn with deadly arrows, five men stood within the *kraal's* gate.

They were not human, these men, for they glowed with the unearthly radiance of rotting filth in the great swamp. They were alive with radiance, as though the coming moonlight touched them alone and left the rest of the world dark and brooding with shadow. They were evil and alien and creatures of terror. And such was the weirdness of their glowing bodies they seemed to lose and regain their shapes, while their faces were silvery masks that had no features.

"We heard," the leader said. "We heard the fighting talk, and this is our penalty. A hand of double hands of you shall serve the Silver Witch."

Fifty victims, almost a third of the strongest and youngest of the tribe! P'aanga felt the chill of futility touch his heart. He glanced at Rakolta, saw the stoniness of the witch-doctor's face, cursed the day that the other had become a member of the tribe, for it was he alone who had stifled what fighting spirit the warriors had had.

"Up!" the leader snarled his order. "Up, for we have far to go."

The men and women came slowly to their feet, bunching like cattle herded by dogs, seeking strength from each other, black faces gleaming with the perspiration of fear, each striving to hide behind another.

"You—you—you!" In a thin steady whisper, the leader singled out the luckless victims. "You—you—you!" His voice did not falter.

Rakolta was chosen, and for a moment his

head tightened into his great shoulders, and the muscles of his arms were tight with fight. Then slackness came to his body, and he moved numbly out before the threat of the five bows, walking to the fore of the moaning, crying, sullen group already chosen.

"You—" the leader said to Luee, the youngest of Kasi's daughters, and Kasi drew her back, facing the glowing men, his white hair even whiter in the firelight, his wrinkled hands eloquent with pleading.

"Not my last!" he cried. "One son and one daughter you already have claimed; leave me this one for my old age."

He died on the last word, the glowing arrow churning deep into his scrawny chest, rushing through his back in a gout of flooding crimson. His shocked incredulous eyes stared pathetically for a single second, then glazed, and he crumpled backward as though hit with a club.

"—and you, and you, and you—" The leader's voice went on without pause, even as his hand nocked and drew another arrow.

P'AANGA'S hand moved with the fluid speed of youth, drifting over his shoulder, drawing an arrow, nocking and pulling it with all of the hate and strength of his wiry body.

He drew until the ebony of his bow squealed with strain, until the buzzard fletching was at his ear, and then loosed his finger's hold.

Air hissed, and the arrow was a living streak of light-tipped darkness speeding toward the chest of the leader of the monstrous glowing men. It slashed with desperate quickness, caught the leader squarely in the throat, tilted back his head and came half-way through his skull.

He did not scream, for the slim shaft had skewered his jaw to his head; but his hissing gag was all the more horrible because of its lack of sound. The arrow from his bow slashed deep into the face of a terrified warrior, dropped him in his tracks, and his radiant hands clawed at his head.

Then he was crumpling into the dirt, blood the color of molten silver spilling from clenched teeth, staining the hard ground, seeping into cracks, spreading in a pool that glowed like liquid moonlight. His

feet scabbled in dying reflexes, and his body bucked in the ecstasy of death

And he was still.

"FIGHT OR DIE!"

That was P'aanga crying his challenge to the world, and his aged hands were uncanny in their skill, the great bow bending to the straining of his back, his arrows winging one upon the other as though an *impi* of soldiers faced a charge in battle.

"*Wah!*" A warrior gasped, and then broke for the weapons stacked near his hut's door.

For running now, refusing to face the arrows of the enraged chief, fleeing like mortal men, were the glowing men of the Silver Witch.

"KILL OR BE KILLED!" P'aanga's voice would not be stilled.

And then, even before the men and women in the *kraal* knew what had happened, the four slavers were gone, vanished into the crowding jungle, and the only one that was left lay still and dead on the glowing ground.

Cries rose to the night sky, swelling with fury and growing courage. Men raced for weapons, their voices raised as they had not been in days. The wailing of the women of the slain warriors keened like a bright sad overtone to the tumult.

Only P'aanga and Rakolta were calm. The chief strode to where the witch-doctor stood over the slain minion of the Silver Witch, and his step was firm and strong again.

"So they cannot die, O Rakolta!" P'aanga said loudly. "Smell your pots and tell me the answer to that."

Rakolta swallowed heavily, turned slowly, shielded the body from the chief's view. His handsome features were harsh with sudden dignity, and he held out one hand to stop the other.

"He is dead," he admitted, "but I think you should not see him."

Steel came to the chief's voice, and he brushed the greater man aside. "You were wrong once tonight," he said softly. "Don't be wrong too often, or it may be that I shall view *you* upon the ground."

Anger swelled the muscles of Rakolta; then he nodded shortly, stepped aside. P'aanga bent over the slain glowing man, a smile twisting his face for the first time

since the sign of the Silver Witch had marked his *kraal* for death.

And the smile vanished as though it had never been. A single cry of unbelief, of sorrow, of heart-breaking anguish, swelled from his throat, and the bow dropped unheeded from his hand. He went to his knees, hands outspread as though to lift the dead man, stopped the action only when Rakolta touched his shoulder.

For the glowing man, the ruthless leader of those who had come to steal the men and women of P'aanga's tribe, was his son.

He was Vigal, his only son, who had been taken by the men of the Silver Witch but a bare hand of full moons before.

"*Vigal!*" he whispered brokenly, and his breath caught in his throat.

For even as he watched, even as men and women broke and ran in mad terror for the safety of their huts, the body of Vigal collapsed in upon itself.

It was as though the bones were no longer there, as though the flesh had slumped in without support; and even as the first metamorphosis took place, a second came.

The flesh grew liquid, puddled, spread out in a glowing evil pool of death that ran with the tarry slowness of radiant mud. Almost did it touch P'aanga; and Rakolta's hands caught his shoulders, drew him away.

"It is *juju!*" Rakolta said, and for the first time, the chief heard fear in his voice.

P'aanga turned and faced the gate through which had fled the unreal companions of his son, and the tears raced unheeded down his cheeks, for this was a thing that he could not comprehend, and he knew only that evil had come to his land.

"Hear me," he screamed to the night. "Hear me, and know my vengeance. Never shall I rest until the Silver Witch and her evil are buried deep within the muck that is her swamp home. Never—"

The glowing arrow slashed from the darkness outside the *kraal*, drove him back a step into Rakolta's arms, chopped his words from his throat, blasted his breath from his body. Then he was choking on the hot red blood streaming from his mouth, was doubling forward, sliding to the ground.

He crumpled pitifully, slackly, the arrow snapping from the weight of his body. His

proud eyes were glazing, but the hate in them would never die.

"Get Ki-Gor and bring him here!" His words lifted clear and strong through the blood in his mouth. "He is my blood-brother, and by him shall I be avenged. My oath is his oath, and I—"

P'aanga was dead, and his crimson blood mingled with the silvery blood of the monster that had been his son. Only an unfilled oath remained.

## II

LAUGHTER drifted on the breeze. It tinkled with the full throaty amusement of Helene, and she tossed her golden-red hair in disdain at the small monkey that imitated her every movement in the clearing. Bright eyes watched from the tiny wrinkled face; and then the monkey jerked its head in a movement strangely human, and shrill mimicking laughter poured in jungle merriment.

Ki-Gor stretched lazily, yawning, feeling the rush of pulsing strength through his great body as he sat in the cool shade of the towering ironwood tree.

"Except for the tail, I see no difference," he remarked loudly to Tembu George, who sat nearby, gravely stropping the three foot knife that was his favorite weapon.

The great Masai chieftain studied the pair in the clearing with amused clear eyes, then shrugged.

"She is your wife—you should know."

N'Geeso turned from where he cleaned the fish he had so deftly caught with forked twigs in the icy water of the silver stream nearby. Barely three feet in height, only his intelligent features and superb musculature marked him for the full-grown warrior that he was. His small hands wielded the cleaning knife with swift dexterity, and his soft laughter answered Ki-Gor's sentence.

The slim girl, standing in the rich yellow sunlight, graceful and carefree, spun about and stalked her huge mate. The leopard-skin balter and the matching breech-clout cupped supple curves, were bright against the golden tan of her skin. She walked with the dainty grace of a *klipvaard* antelope, and the faintest hint of a smile tugged at the red line of her smooth lips.

"I do not like you—*any of you*," she said briefly, scornfully.

Ki-Gor yawned briefly, glanced at the gray-ruffed monkey still squatting in the clearing, lifting his voice.

"Helene, your pet is bothering us!"

The monkey dry-washed its tiny black hands, bounced into the air, flipped, and landed in exactly its first position. It blinked shoe-button eyes, scratched indolently at a flea-bite, chattered a clicking answer.

"You, oh *you!*" Helene stamped her skin-clad foot on the soft grass.

"Ki-Gor?" Tembu George said softly.

"Eh?" Ki-Gor was indifferent.

Tembu George gravely polished away a non-existent spot on the gleaming steel of his knife, turning his head to hide the smile he could not control.

"I think you have made a mistake—the monkey before you has no tail."

The Jungle Lord's hand moved with the flashing speed of a snake's head, caught the slim ankle of the girl, jerked her from her feet. Easily, with incredible strength, he reached up, caught her as she fell, held her so that she could only struggle impotently.

"Ki-Gor, please, Ki-Gor!"

Ki-Gor grinned, his teeth twin bars of white against the bronze of his features. "We will cage the poor monkey," he said seriously, "and if it lives on bananas and *panyanox* pears—then it is a monkey."

N'Geeso moved nearer, the fish forgotten for the moment, concern showing in his small face. Standing erect he was but little taller than the seated Ki-Gor and the squatting Masai warrior.

"Careful," he warned, "she is a woman."

Tembu George waved the wicked length of steel before the pygmy's face. "Silence, O wart," he roared, "or shall I use you for a sheath for my blade."

Thunder gathered in N'Geeso's eyes, and his short knife danced high in his hand. He turned, faced the squatting giant squarely, spat deliberately.

"Touch me once, O offspring of a *dango*, and I carve another mouth in your throat to squeal through."

HELENE giggled, and Ki-Gor drew her close, cradling her scented softness to his bronzed body. She kissed the lobe of his

ear, blew a lock of blond hair from before his gray eyes. This was a scene of which they never tired.

"So!" Tembu George came to his almost seven feet of height, swung the great knife casually in his right hand, snapped his fingers deliberately beneath N'Geeso's short nose. "Hear the mouse squeak, hear the ant tell the elephant which is the safe path to tread."

N'Geeso danced up and down in mock rage, hiding the laughter that rode his eyes. He spluttered as he talked.

"You—y-you-you cockroach! One more word, and I cut a hole in your belly and make a third mouth."

"Try it! Stand on a stump and try to reach my belly."

"Dog eater!"

"Snake!"

"Wife beater!"

"Cow!"

They glared at each other, the two mightiest men of their tribes, each absolutely fearless, each knowing the other would die in his behalf. And both *knowing* that the other was absolutely unnecessary to the well-being of the Jungle Lord and his bride whom both protected.

Helene ran her soft hands along the smooth skin of her mate's chest, slyly tickled him. He grunted, loosed his hold, and she scuttled away on hands and knees. Then she stood erect, pirouetted in the sunlight.

"I'm going swimming," she declared.

Tembu George and N'Geeso ceased their quarreling, Ki-Gor toyed with a broad blade of grass.

"The monkey talks," he said idly.

He gasped then, gasped at the cold shock of the water splashing in his face and on his great body. Three fish, still alive, flopped madly in his lap, and a scrap of skin dangled jauntily over one eye.

"There, mister smartie!" Helene said, tossed the skin pail back to where she had lifted it from the ground. N'Geeso stared blankly at the fish he had cleaned and the flopping ones still to be cleaned for the evening meal.

Ki-Gor came slowly to his feet.

"No, Ki-Gor!" Helene said, took a backward step.

"Grrrrrowwwfff!" Ki-Gor snarled like a

maddened gorilla, bent forward, shuffled toward his golden mate, arms outspread.

"Ki-Gor, please!"

Ki-Gor laughed deep in his eyes, but his firm features were still scowling and menacing.

"Stand still, woman."

"I won't, I won't! Tembu, N'Geeso, help me!"

The pygmy idly scratched his belly with the point of his razor-sharp knife, squatted on the grass. Tembu George tested the edge of his weapon, face indifferent.

"I'm hungry," N'Geeso said.

"I, too," Tembu George agreed.

Helene turned and ran then, sprinting desperately for the vines pendant from the towering trees at the clearing's edge. Ki-Gor snarled in mock frustration, raced after her. Strangely, he tripped on the fourth step, and Helene was halfway up a trailing liana before he regained his feet.

"Yaaah!" Helene cried mockingly, disappeared.

KI-GOR grinned, sprinted forward. There was no clumsiness in his gigantic body now; he was like some great golden cat springing to the chase. He leaped, caught a vine ten feet from the ground, swarmed up the jungle rope with the breath-taking speed of a *colubus* monkey, swinging hand over hand, great muscles cabling and rippling along the incredible spread of his back and heavy arms.

He reached the first large branch, balanced on wide-spread feet, seeking the flickering motion of his mate swinging through the trees. He saw Helene swinging in a great arc ahead on the end of a giant vine, saw the glory of her hair trailing in the breeze, and his breath caught in his throat.

Never, it seemed, could he get tired of seeing his mate. Never had he thought that anyone could mean so much to him. His life, before he had rescued her many moons before from a wrecked plane, was a misty thing now, without meaning, without reality. His life had begun the day that he had felt the soft warmth of her mouth on his, when her pliant body had been within the circle of his mighty arms.

He glanced back at the two blacks in the

clearing, nodded shortly, then caught a liana, launched himself into space. Air whistled in his ears, and his damp hair was lifted by the breeze. He felt the chill of the water upon his skin, and the odor of fish was cloying in his nostrils. Then he was at another vine, and his right hand drifted out, caught a fresh hold, and he was swinging along in another great arc.

He loosed his hold, dropped to a springy branch, caught his balance with the instinct of a great ape, then hurled himself head-first from the limb. He twisted in midair like a prowling cat, landed on a thick limb that surged deep beneath his weight and then whipped back in a great reflex.

He rode the momentum, rising through the air, guiding himself with brief flickers of his hands upon side twigs and small branches. A second later, he balanced on a limb twenty feet away. He caught a hanging vine—and was suddenly a great golden-skinned ape traveling through the arboreal route of the jungle.

He went fast, faster than a man could walk, and he did not exert the full extent of his powers.

A parrot screamed a raucous hate-cry at him, watched out of beady snaky eyes, then fled on wings like blobs of a riotous sunset. A tree-toad popped its solemn eyes, gravely intoned its three-noted call of warning, subsided, looking like a bump of dark brown bark. Ki-Gor swung past.

He saw the shimmer of water through the trees, slowed his flight, dropping to a lower level of limbs, where danger was less and travel easier. The trees began to thin, and he had to circle so that he did not need to travel on the ground.

He came at last to a great ironwood tree, perched upon a thick limb, smiled when he saw Helene already balanced for a dive from the branch of a nearby tree.

She was a golden living statue, her titian hair soft about her face and throat, the full thrust of her breasts and the clean lines of her slender body silhouetted against the coming sunset. Her breech-clout and halter hung on a stub of a limb at her back, and her right hand braced her slightly as she poised for balance.

She smoothed her hand along her side, fluffed her hair, then stood on tip-toes, both

hands before her, the rippling of the blue water sending shards of reflected lights to sprinkle her body with glittering spots of brightness as though she alone were spotlighted in the entire world.

Her body arched high, bending gracefully, falling in a perfect dive that cut the water like a spear. For a moment she was a pale shadow in the depths; then she was on the surface, her breath whooshing in sheer delight, her gold-red hair floating about her shoulders. She floated on her back, her hands barely moving to keep her afloat.

Ki-Gor leaped from limb to limb, landing finally on the diving branch, balancing in the paling sunlight.

"Come in, the water's fine," Helene called cheerfully.

KI-GOR grinned, dived magnificently, entering the water without a splash, turning and swimming with the curious jungle stroke that moved a swimmer so fast and with such little expenditure of energy.

But fast as he was, and no man could match him in the water, Helene was even faster. He snorted in chagrin, bubbles swirling back over his shoulders, as his slim mate left him with a burst of speed that he could not match. On the ground or in the trees he was her master; but she used the jungle stroke he had taught her with such skill that he was like an amateur by comparison.

He broke surface, drawing in a deep breath, savoring the clean scented air, feeling the warmth of the water easing the tiredness from his muscles. Turning, he went on his back, floating indolently, watching the streaks of silver in the sky that would turn black shortly with the swiftness of the African night.

He gasped then, trying to turn and swim, but already had Helene's hands caught him by the shoulders, and she had become a leech that he could not shake loose.

"So, I'm a monkey!" she said, and pulled him under.

They went deep, he swimming with the great reaching strokes of a jungle man, she clinging like a limpet, red-gold hair swirling back in the warm water, tiny goggle-eyed fish fleeing in wild fright from their approach.

Ki-Gor, his arms ceasing their steady

stroking, whirled in the water, propelled by mighty strokes of his scissoring legs, reached over his shoulder, caught the wrists of his slender mate, whirled until he held her in his arms.

"Monkey!" he mouthed soundlessly, and bubbles flirted from his lips, tangled in Helene's red-gold hair, then sped swiftly to the surface.

She giggled, pinched him, then tickled with the sure knowledge that only a wife would have. He grunted, pushed her away. She swam deliberately beside him, tickling with gentle fingers; until at last, he turned and sped for the surface.

They broke water together, and her soft laughter startled a *virini* bird in the brush, bringing back the trilling melody of its liquid song.

"I give up," Ki-Gor said, splashed water at Helene. "You are no monkey."

"Sure?" Helene splashed water in her mate's face, giggled at his grimace.

"Sure."

"Then I'll race you to the island and back."

And on the challenge, she whirled, was cutting through the tiny foam-capped waves with the regular stroke of a champion swimmer. Ki-Gor grinned, drove himself at full speed in her wake.

They were alone then, as they were so many times, the warm waters hugging their pliant bodies tight, the red and gold streaks of sunset gradually dulling in the darkening sky.

And then a voice shattered their aloneness.

"Ho, Ki-Gor?"

The Jungle Lord spun in the water, gray eyes narrowed, one hand automatically feeling for the keen blade scabbarded at his waist, the gleaming knife that never left his possession, awake or asleep.

Helene stopped her smooth swimming, trod water, peering at the shore. "Who is it, Ki-Gor?" Her voice came clearly across the lake.

"It is L'uumbo," the onlooker called from the shore. "I bring a message from P'aanga who has ridden the canoe of death down *Kastadi*, the River of Life."

"P'aanga dead!" There was disbelief in Ki-Gor's voice.

"*Wab!* It is so. He was slain by men of the Silver Witch."

Ki-Gor and Helene raced for the shore a hundred yards away, and even as they sped through the water; they saw the weird apparition appear from the brush behind the lone black, as though conjured from the green ground itself.

"L'uumbo—behind you!" Ki-Gor cried the warning.

The warrior whirled in startled reflex, took a stumbling step backward from the eerily-glowing man who stood in mute menace before him; and then steel whispered on leather, and his great bush-knife came free in his hand.

HE DIED then, even as he took his first step forward, cut down by the thin shaft of an arrow that glowed like a strip of light. The twang of the bow-string was like the sound of a Bantu's single-stringed harp, and the *chug* of the arrow biting deep was grimly ominous.

The arrow ran into his chest, sliced his heart with its steel tip, jammed through the hard flesh of his back, still glowing weirdly through the crimson stain that had painted its length. He fell, kicking in a dead reflex, then lay silent, knife still clenched, unused, in his hand.

Ki-Gor heard Helene's cry of horror, and his blood ran cold. Then hate surged in his heart, and he slashed the water for beach, wanting only to cope with the glowing murderer on the shore. What the man was, he did not know. He might be human, or he might be a devil juju, but he would feel the bite of the Jungle Lord's vengeful knife.

And then the weird murderer spoke.

"The Silver Witch says that you die," he said mechanically, as though the words were foreign to his tongue.

His right hand nocked and drew a second arrow, pulling the gut of the bow tight, loosing the shaft in one clean flow of movement. There was the whisper of the arrow winging through the air, and then the slap of the water meeting it.

Had Helene surface-dived one second later, she would have died, cleaved by the arrow. But she had faster reflexes than her conscious mind had orders: and even before

the arrow had flashed at her, she was deep below the surface, swimming with a desperate speed.

Mechanically, moving with the smooth perfection of a hunter, the killer nocked another arrow, drew the bow. And Ki-Gor knew that, speedy as he was, he could never beat the shaft below the surface of the lake.

He drew a quick breath, lifted his arm for his first stroke. He might live long enough, even with the arrow through his body, to reach the killer. He might die, but Helene would be safe.

He cut the water with his first stroke, saw the deliberate loosing of the arrow fingers, and gasped in surprise when he saw the shaft wing into the air like a streaking meteor, to fall at last in the water with a slight splashing sound.

The killer was screaming now, the ghastly bow dropping from his fingers, his phosphorescent hands flailing at the broad spear blade that jutted from his chest. He went to his knees, coughing on the molten silver that was his life-blood, then toppled forward on his face.

He was dead, his body shining in the growing darkness like the fungi found in rotting swamps, his blood flowing into the water, tinging it with brightness, even before Tembu George and N'Geeso plunged through the trees and halted at his side.

Then Ki-Gor was climbing from the water, blade still clutched in his huge hand, his eyes shocked and incredulous as he started at the glowing monstrosity that lay so silently in death.

"What is it?" he asked. "No man can glow like a fire-fly."

N'Geeso's tiny face was ashen gray now, and he mumbled a counter-juju to *Gimsbai*, the Stealer of Souls. "He is a man of the Silver Witch," he whispered. "My father's father told me of them when I was but a man-child; never did I think to see one."

"But he is dead!" Tembu George said. "The men of the Silver Witch *cannot* die."

**K**I-GOR heard the dim splashings made by Helene swimming to the beach, but his mind was on the body lying before him. "He is but a man," he said. "Look, and you will see that he has smeared himself with some ointment that glows."

He reached for the body, and stiffened in surprise. For slumping in upon itself, collapsing like a rotten pear when the core is gone, the body was disintegrating. Firmness disappeared, and corruption attacked the flesh; then the flesh was gone, and only a glowing phosphorescent liquid was left, flowing evilly, slowly, down the slope of the beach to the lake.

Helene screamed from the water's edge, raced to Ki-Gor's side, watched from distended eyes.

"What is it?" she asked. "What has happened?"

"P'aanga is dead," Ki-Gor answered, disgust and apprehension in his gray eyes as he watched the silvery liquid mingle with the lake water. "He was slain by the Silver Witch—and that was one of his slayers." His face firmed, and his wet shoulders straightened.

"I do not understand," he said, "for this is the blackest of jujus. But P'aanga was my blood-brother, and he must be avenged. I go to his *kraal* and hear the true story. Then, if I must, shall I avenge the man whose protection I swore these many moons ago."

Helene was watching the glowing pool, shrinking from the noisome odors that were rising. There was fear in her eyes, for she knew that her great mate faced something the like of which he had never seen before. This was not magic, as his jungle mind seemed to think; this was greater than pagan magic. This was Death.

And then her head came up, and she smiled into the grim features of her mate.

"We go, Ki-Gor," she said simply.

"And I," Tembu George echoed.

"*Pab!*" N'Geeso shrugged contemptuously. "'Twas but a lucky spear cast, my blowgun dart would have been more sure." He grinned at the massive white giant and his mate. "I will go to protect you," he finished.

Ki-Gor nodded, stilling the retort of Tembu George. "All shall go," he said softly. "For it may be that, should one be lost, another shall stand in his place."

Night came then, dark and black and brooding, and the night sounds churned high in the jungle depths. The moon was not yet risen, and the only light came from

the weird effulgent glow of the strange liquid that had been a man but short minutes before.

Helene shivered, turned away. "Let's go back to camp," she urged.

They turned on a common impulse, went through the darkness, entering the trees with the sureness of the jungle-born, going toward the camp that was Ki-Gor's and Helene's home.

And minutes after they had left the beach, the second glowing killer of the Silver Witch crouched in the darkness of matted bushes. Then, after a bit, he fled, ghost-like through the trees. Like a mark of death, the glowing liquid lay on the ground, frothed into phosphorescent flame where small fish fought to feed on it in the shallow water before the sandy beach.

### III

"**WE WILL** go by dugout," Ki-Gor said. An hour later, idly feeding a fresh twig to the flames of the small cooking fire. "We will save two days of trekking, by speeding down the river."

Helene shivered, her eyes darting nervously about the small clearing. Never before had she felt the cold wings of death swooping so low about the man she loved.

"Was it a man?" she said at last, voicing the thought that had lain in her mind for minutes.

"It was a devil," N'Geeso said quietly, fingered his juju bag.

Tembu George shook his head, shrugging broad shoulders, never ceasing the honing of his razor-keen three-foot knife.

"It screamed when the spear sank home," he said. "No devil would cry aloud."

Ki-Gor shook his head. "I do not know," he finally answered in turn. "Many tales have I heard about the Place of Mists and the Silver Witch who rules the lost souls there."

"Lost souls?" Helene asked.

Ki-Gor watched the flames leap higher. "They are old wives' tales, no more, no less. The Silver Witch has lived since the beginning of time; she cannot die; and she rules the souls of those who die, those who die evilly as they have lived. When living men see them, they are like men, only they

glow like fire-flies; and it is said that they cannot die."

Helene smiled. "Then Tembu George's spear slew a man, for he is dead."

The great Masai chieftain watched the shadows of the jungle, watching the black orifice of the trail down which he and N'Geeso had walked after they had returned from burying L'uumbo a few minutes before.

"Men do not die as the glowing one did," he observed. "Dead men are buried, or burned on funeral pyres."

Helene said: "Has anyone ever seen the Silver Witch; what is she like?"

N'Geeso glanced up from the equipment he was sorting into small back-packs. "My father's father said that his father's father's father once knew a man who had seen her." He shrugged. "That may or may not be the truth. But, anyway, so the tale goes; he saw her and was struck blind by her beauty. She was like a clean white flame, glowing with eternal youth, her hair like spun moonlight, the curves of her body like the songs of love sung by virgins beneath a mating moon. She could not die, and she had never really lived. She had been spawned in hell, and the fires of hell were in her silver eyes. She loved nothing but herself, and her whip was always in her hands."

Helene shivered, shrank closer to the warm body of her great mate. He glanced into the blueness of her eyes, and his face softened.

"Fear nothing," he said softly. "No harm shall come to you."

"Me!" she said; and he understood, his hand touching hers for the moment.

Then he came smoothly to his feet, caught up two of the bundles N'Geeso had made. "Come," he said, went toward the small river.

The others followed, Tembu George pausing only to pour a gourd of water over the small fire. Steam hissed into the warm, scented air, and small animals scurried to safety from the rushing sound. Then the four of them were striding through the new moonlight, limned by it, each carrying weapons and their packs of equipment.

They turned at the river, followed its left bank, white sand gritting softly beneath their feet, going toward the wide flood of the greater river close at hand. Overhead

a carrion-owl scudded by on soundless wings, hovered, then dropped in a rush of speed. A bush-rat squealed its death cries, and a second later, the owl rose, its quarry dangling from its taloned feet.

A lion coughed a snarling challenge, and the jungle went silent for a second. Then a hyena cried its mad laugh, and the chirring of insects was a solid overtone to the rustling of the trees and the night calls of prowling beasts of prey.

**KI-GOR** strode softly, carrying his shovel-bladed Masai spear in his right hand, his bow and quiver of arrows tight over his left shoulder. He trod with the grace of a jungle cat, making absolutely no sound, gliding through the clutching shadows like a jungle wraith. This was his world, and he was as much a part of it as the animals that stalked its narrow trails.

Tembu George strode lithely behind Helene and N'Geeso, his keen intelligent eyes searching every shadow, nerves strangely tight against the death that came through glowing men. There was no fear in him; but he knew a single spear or arrow from ambush could cut down any of them before a weapon could be raised in defense.

N'Geeso padded at Helene's side, his blowgun trailing from his left hand, poisoned dart notched in the lip, ready for instant action. He shivered silently as he walked, recalling the tales he had heard, knowing more than any of his companions the deadliness of the tales of the Silver Witch. At last, he shrugged ruefully. After all, he was a man, and a man had to die some time; what better way than at the side of the girl and men he valued more than life itself.

They were an odd quartette, and many were the stories and legends of their prowess throughout Africa. Each was mighty and brave and decent, and together they were a combination well-nigh unbeatable.

But never had they faced such a menace as they sought this night.

Ki-Gor halted at the mouth of the small river, bent and parted deep bushes at his right, disclosing the prow of a huge five man dugout. Laying his spear and pack in the canoe, he bent, strained, muscles stand-

ing rope-hard against his smooth bronzed skin.

Wood grated on sand, and then the canoe floated free. One by one, they stepped onto the crude floorboard, and Tembu George and Ki-Gor caught up the wide-bladed paddles. Together, they backed the canoe from the bank, felt the lurch as the current tugged at them, then sent the ungainly craft sprinting ahead, their paddles driving in perfect unison.

Water splashed, as a sleeping hippopotamus churned the muddy flood in startled fright, and a drinking antelope lifted its head, stared from mild frightened eyes, then fled on slender legs into the safety of the shadows.

"You had better sleep," Ki-Gor told Helene, "for the way is long, and you will need your rest."

Helene nodded, lay back on the rough flooring, watched the rhythmic swaying of her husband's wide back as he drove the paddle deep with a surging rhythm in the bow. Slowly, rocked by the motion of the dugout canoe, she went to sleep.

**THE** sun was high overhead when she awoke. She blinked bemused eyes for a moment, saw the sunshade N'Geeso had created from a *colubus* skin, then sat and yawned sleepily.

"Where are we?" she asked, and Ki-Gor turned from his paddling, smiled at her. Despite the fact that he had paddled the entire night, there was no strain on his keen features, and his eyes were clear and relaxed.

"Close now." He pointed. "P'aanga's *kraal* is but a short walk inland, once we round the bend."

"Oh!" Helene smiled at N'Geeso, turned and caught the cheerful glance of Tembu George. "Good morning," she said.

"Sleep well?" Tembu George asked.

"Wonderfully."

She wrinkled her nose, turning her eyes in puzzlement. N'Geeso caught the movement, gestured toward the river bank.

"There," he explained, "it is: the Place of the Mists."

Helene saw it then for the first time clearly, smelled the odor of rotteness and decay and death that seeped into the air and swirled about their canoe. It was like noth-

ing she had ever seen before, and she shuddered unconsciously.

First there was the mist. Yellowish, fungus-like, it hugged the earth, almost hiding the skeletal trees that poked withered trunks and branches toward the sunlight. It did not move with the breeze, but roiled and swayed within itself, bulging and retreating as though bits of it were trying to tear free from the mother mass. It was somehow unclean and nauseating and evil.

And it was spread in a great cocoon over miles of the dead forest. As far as Helene could see, the mist swelled and settled in a yellowing mass, coming close to the river in spots, retreating hundreds of yards at others. No sound came from it, and nothing moved. It was a place of age and decay and death.

"Is that where—" Helene began.

Ki-Gor nodded, finished the unfinished sentence. "That is where lives the Silver Witch. It is juju, and there is not a black in all Africa who would take one step into it. It is there that revenge must be made, if the story of P'aanga's death is true."

"No!" Helene came to her feet, rocking the boat, clutching at Ki-Gor's shoulder. "No!"

He drew her close with one arm, held her tightly. "It is but a swamp," he said reassuringly, "nothing more." He felt the tenseness of her supple body, and smiled. "I promise that, if there be no need, I shall not go near the place."

"I'm sorry," Helene said slowly, sat again; but terror was in her heart, and she had a premonition such as she had never felt. She knew that, once that mist touched a living person, he would never leave its hideous embrace.

Tembu George shook his head slightly, swung the ungainly canoe with a single prodigious twisting stroke of his paddle. The current thrust sullenly against the side of the dugout, as he and Ki-Gor fought toward the shore, letting the sweep of the slow flood push them about the bend, their strokes driving them toward the crude landing pier at the river's edge.

A few canoes, gaudy in their red and green paint, bobbed on the muddy water, tied to deep-thrust stakes by lengths of crudely twisted rope, guarded against thievery by fluffy jujus of crimson dyed monkey

fur that topped each stake. The rickety pier extended ten feet from the shore, marking the landing spot of the few traders' boats that came up the river.

Ki-Gor guided the prow of his craft into the shallows, ran it aground near the side of the pier, stretched looseningly, keen eyes drifting almost casually about the semi-clearing stretching back to the crowding jungle.

"There should be fishermen," he said thoughtfully.

"Wah!" N'Geeso leaped lithely to the pier, reached a hand to help Helene. "P'aanga must be truly dead; and his kraal still in white mourning for his soul."

Ki-Gor nodded shortly, caught a post of the pier, held the canoe steady, and tossed the small back-packs to the shore. Lifting the single tether-rope, he fastened it, then caught up his weapons and stepped to the pier.

Helene came to his side, lifting a pack. Silently, Tembu George joined N'Geeso, and catching up their packs and weapons, followed the white jungle couple.

THEY heard the drums then, the thudding susurrating softly in the slight breeze, the sound barely audible through the interlaced trees. Ki-Gor's keen eyes slitted, and he could feel the tightening of his nerves, for the drumming was that of a witch-doctor's drum, such as usually sounded only in the darkness of night.

He led the way, going across the muddy flat toward the trees, studying the ground and the bushes for any sign of ambush. A dull premonition made a shadow in his heart, and he shifted his fingers on the long spear, couching it a bit better for a sudden cast. Helene seemed to sense his thought, for she dropped back a single pace, leaving him free for instant action.

"Trouble?" Tembu George asked softly.

"I do not know," the Jungle Lord answered shortly.

They entered the trees, following the dim path that notched the damp jungle, their footsteps muffled and almost unheard on the carpet of green grass and dying leaves from the branches that tangled and twisted about each other twenty feet overhead. They walked a dim tunnel toward P'aanga's kraal,

and their every sense was alert for any alien sound.

The drumming died away, then came louder, as they rounded a bend in the trail, and dimly on the breeze came the scent of wood-smoke. They walked faster, the trees thinning before them, tiny patches of maize and corn and vegetables appearing at either side of the path, all unattended by the women of the *kraal* ahead, sunlight dappling them with spots of golden light.

Then they could see the village, and the drumming was a regular cadence, somehow terrifying, typically native; and over it rose the humming of voices raised in a monotonous sibilant chanting without words.

"Ho!" a lookout cried, and warriors materialized at the open gate, bright and pagan in their great crests of ostrich plumes, clouts of fur and anklets of elephant hair swaying as they lined to face the newcomers.

"I come without weapons," Ki-Gor said formally, ignored the spear in his hand and the great war-bow strung over his massive shoulder.

"It is the jungle giant and his mate," a warrior cried, and voices lifted excitedly behind the log-stockade.

The drumming ceased as though clipped with a blade; and a moment later, Rakolta, naked save for a painted skin breech-clout, his great body rippling with strength, stepped through the line of warriors, faced Ki-Gor.

"What seek ye here?" he asked, and his tone was insolent, confident in his strength.

Ki-Gor ignored the tone, hiding his surprise at the obvious suspicion and dislike that shadowed the man's eyes. Only the barest tightening of the massive muscles of his back showed his shifting and balancing for instant flowing action.

"Who speaks to the blood-brother of P'aanga with such words? One side, or shall my spear blade taste your blood!"

Rakolta's head dropped toward his shoulders, and his knuckles were gray knots on his huge fists. He measured the mettle of the white giant before him, then let his glance touch the others; and slowly respect came to his gaze.

"Enter," he said at last, stepped aside. "These are troublous times; all strangers must be challenged."

Ki-Gor accepted the tacit apology, strode forward, stepping through the gap in the warrior's line. Helene and the two blacks followed, walking with the smooth arrogance of natural leaders, disdainful to greet those they knew until they had entered.

Rakolta followed, and behind him, the warriors drifted out of sight of the jungle, along the *kraal* walls, leaning on their eight-foot spears, watching with a cold sullenness such as the White Lord of the Jungle had never known to be in those who lived in P'aanga's village.

Ki-Gor went directly to the central fire, squatted silently before the leaping flames, conscious of the instant silencing of the babble of voices that had been within when first the sentry had shouted.

THERE was no sound, save the cracking and popping of the burning wood in the leaping fire. Smoke rose almost straight into the sky, was whipped into writhing fingers fifty feet from the ground. Ki-Gor waited patiently, not moving, his calm gaze shifting about the enclosure, noting the stripes of white mourning paint on the hut of P'aanga, realizing with a pang of sorrow that the old chief was really dead.

Tembu George and N'Geeso stood, menacing in their very stillness, their weapons tight in their hands now, while Helene came to her mate's side, squatted in silence.

Then Rakolta moved through the crowd, pacing deliberately toward the juju drum he had left a few minutes before, sank beside it, lifted his hand to drum its gut head.

"P'aanga is dead?" Ki-Gor asked, stilling the beginning stroke.

"Aaaiiee!" a single moaning cry raced the village.

"He is dead." Rakolta's voice was harsh.

"Who slew him?"

"The men of the Silver Witch. He was a fool, and would resist their juju might. He died, as all will die who face her wrath."

Ki-Gor's eyes sharpened, and he watched the witch-doctor surreptitiously. "You speak as one with water in his belly," he said coldly.

The witch-doctor came slowly to his feet, loomed big and massive in the sunlight. His lips twisted with the violence of his antago-

nism, and he flexed the muscles of his arms.

"I am Rakolta, white man," he said heavily. "I have smelled my pots, and I know the Silver Witch's juju is black." His voice was suddenly sneering. "You speak big, white man, but you do not know of what you speak."

A roar of rage came from Tembu George, and he was at Rakolta in a single step. The wicked length of steel shimmered in his hand, and Rakolta ducked involuntarily from the expected blow.

"Enough," Ki-Gor snapped, and Tembu George lowered his blade.

For a moment, he and the huge witch-doctor glared in silence, then the Masai chieftain stepped back to N'Geeso's side. Rakolta gathered his dignity again, faced Ki-Gor.

"P'aanga is dead; and no chief has been chosen in the Ceremony of the Skull." His arm swept out in a gesture that circumscribed the entire village. "We are doomed, for a man of the Silver Witch was slain by P'aanga; we must fight or run."

The Jungle Lord came to his feet at last, dominated the watching throng. His tone was soft.

"What will you do?"

"Fight!" a warrior called, shook his spear. "A silver man died, and that proves—"

"Silence!" Rakolta was superb. "We cannot fight jujus."

"But are they jujus?" Ki-Gor interrupted quietly. "P'aanga slew one, and Tembu George another. I think that they are men."

Rakolta smiled with his mouth, his eyes hard and watchful. "Did you bury the one you killed?" he asked.

And in the very silence that followed his question, the *kraal* had their answer. A hum of voices swelled to the sky, and people shifted in growing excitement.

"It means war and bloodshed," Ki-Gor counselled. "To leave your land and invade others will mean that many women will wail in their mourning huts."

Rakolta stood silently, his face a mask now, only his eyes glowing in his set face. The men and women of the village crowded close, and the sound of two dogs growling over a scrap of bone was unnaturally loud and vicious.

2—Jungle—Spring

"I swore a blood-oath to P'aanga," Ki-Gor said at last. "I shall prove there is no Silver Witch, and that the men who murder in the jungle are *men*. If I do so, will you be content?"

"How long?" Rakolta countered.

"A hand of suns, at the most. But I will need aid from you."

Rakolta nodded. "A hand of suns," he agreed. "If by then you have not succeeded, then shall we trek to better land, and death shall come to those who stand before us and the land we choose for our own."

"So be it," Ki-Gor said, and at his side he heard the soft almost soundless cry of Helene.

#### IV

MINUTES had flowed by with quickening speed, surging one into the other, until now, the first growing shadows were stealing along the ground to mark the coming of the night.

Ki-Gor and Tembu George stood on the small *veldt* that marked the edge of the Place of Mists, and the stench of death was stifling in their lungs. Rakolta and three warriors stood at their sides, weapons ready for any attack from the swamp they faced, and their fear was a tangible thing in the damp hot air.

"This is the place," Rakolta explained. "I did not see the silver men, but Barong, here, did."

"*Wah!*" The warrior nodded nervously. "Two hands of us were attacked. I shot one through the belly with a war-arrow, and still he came. I am brave, yet I turned and ran for my life. But four of us escaped that night."

Ki-Gor nodded, strode the first boggy patch of ground, his eyes squinting as his gaze probed into the thick mist that pulsed barely a hundred feet away.

He could feel the tightening of his nerves, for he knew that warrior spoke the truth of what he had seen; but he could not make himself believe that any other than living men could walk the earth.

"Our way lies there," he said to Tembu George.

Tembu George spat thoughtfully, his gaze tight on the shifting yellow thickness of the

stagnant fog. There was no fear in his eyes, just the cold calculation of an intelligent man estimating and evaluating a situation.

"When?" he asked at last.

"At sunup." Ki-Gor turned to Rakolta, measuring the strength of the man, feeling the hackles lift along the nape of his neck from the dislike the man had engendered in him hours before. "Is water in the bellies of your men, or will some go with us into the mists?"

Rakolta shifted the war-bow he carried from hand to hand, shrugged wide shoulders. His gaze flicked to the men at his side, read aright the expression of their eyes.

"I do not know," he said. "But I think that none will go. I have smelled the pots, and I know that the Silver Witch is black juju. Spears and arrows may have released two of her slave-souls from bondage; but there are hands upon hands of others that will rise and slay at her command."

"You are afraid." The Jungle Lord's voice made the single sentence a flat statement of fact.

Anger flared briefly in the witch-doctor's eyes, then faded into muddy obscurity. "Of men, no; of spirits, yes. Does that answer your questions, white man?"

"It does." Ki-Gor turned slowly, paced at the side of Tembu George, leading the small group toward the village a mile distant. He said nothing, as they walked, but tiny wrinkles of concentration v'd his forehead, and his gaze flickered again and again to the face of Rakolta, who walked now at his side.

THEY went from the muddy flat, crossing onto the scere knee-high grass that grew so weirdly luxuriant near the swamp where nothing seemed to live. An anthill, like a triangular cone of chipped rock, cast a slim shadow across their path, as though to trip them as they walked.

The jungle giant paced about the shadow, knowing how the deadly grass snakes hugged the strips of darkness away from the sun, then strode with quickening speed toward the line of jungle close at hand.

They did not talk as they paced forward, and the sullen heat of the closing day was a heavy weight upon their bodies. Over-

head, their pinions unmoving, two carrion-vultures hovered in swooping spirals in the still air, watching with hungry reptilian eyes, like evil omens of the night to come.

Close at hand, a monkey chattered in a brief vituperative spasm of rage, and the sound was welcome, bringing life back to the world, clearing their hearts of the sense of dread and death that had come from proximity to the silent swamp. A scarlet and black headed *vanka* lizard thrust its snout from the covering of a *kalchi* bush, watched with wary round eyes, then disappeared without a sound or movement of the grass in which it had stood.

Ki-Gor breathed deep, clearing his mighty lungs of the tainted air that filled them, striding with loose purpose, keen eyes never growing blank with thought; for this was the jungle, and death lurked in the slightest movement of a twig.

Tembu George strode lithely at his side, towering half a head over the white giant, his ebony skin like oiled leather, the thong of his knife-scabbard notching deep into the muscles of his right shoulder. Rakolta paced at his back, and mighty as was the witch-doctor, he was dwarfed by the sheer animal strength of the Masai chieftain.

The warriors followed close behind, their eyes searching the deep shadows of the jungle trail, fear pulsing in them, now that the night was coming on, the inky darkness when the ghost-souls of the Silver Witch would walk and slay.

Ki-Gor heard the runner first.

He heard the sound, and his spear was couched and ready for instant blinding action before the others with him knew that someone stumbled toward them through the dark tunnel of the trail.

And the runner was stumbling as he ran. He came into sight, weaving like a man gone blind, his hands outstretched to fend away the trees that loomed in his path, his teeth white against the gaping maw of his mouth, his eyes half-closed from the puffy flesh of the bruise that raced his face.

He saw them, and a gasp of relief came from his throat. His right foot turned on a twisting creeper, and he went to his knees, then clawed his way to his feet again, stumbling forward, croaking unintelligible sounds.

Ki-Gor sprang forward, caught the man as he fell, and Tembu George hurtled about the pair, raced a dozen yards down the trail, the great shining length of his warrior's knife glittering in the threads of sunlight filtering through the tangled growth of the twisting branches overhead.

Ki-Gor held the man with an uncanny ease, then lowered him to the ground, examined the wound in the man's head. It was superficial, the bruising cut of a spear haft winking home in a swinging blow.

"What happened?" Ki-Gor asked, and the first faint premonition walked with spider legs up his spine.

"Gone—stolen—silver men!" the black managed to say, gasped for breath. Fear was on his face, but hate was beginning to curdle in his eyes, and when he spoke again, his voice was clearer.

"We walked outside the *kraal*, your golden mate and the little man and my wife and myself. And from the bushes came two hands of the silver men, making no sound, striking me down before I could lift my spear. I fell, and the silver men overpowered the others."

He screamed then from the brutal pressure of the jungle man's hands upon his shoulders; and it was only when he saw the seeping sheen of crimson upon the warrior's skin that Ki-Gor realized the strength of emotion within him.

"The silver men," the black continued, forgetting himself, seeing only the dull agony in the white man's eyes, "took my wife and your wife and the little man with them toward the swamp. I could not move; the blow had sapped my strength. I knew only that a message was given me for you."

"Speak up—what is it!" Ki-Gor crouched like a white ape over the black, and the fires of hell were beginning to glow in his gray eyes. Muscles swelled and ridged along his back, and his face was stone-hard, for he knew the message that was to be told.

"One silver man said to tell you to leave the country. If you do, your wife and the little man will be returned alive to the *kraal* at the rising of the full moon."

**K**I-GOR straightened, and he was hard and dangerous and primitive as he towered over the man on the ground. He

stared bleakly about the trail, then bent and lifted his spear.

"Where?" he said, and the single word was flatly vicious.

"Away from the *kraal*, toward the setting sun."

Ki-Gor began to run then; he ran with the smooth pantherish quickness that only he could achieve. He ran blindly, going by instinct down the jungle path, unaware for seconds that Tembu George raced at his back. Then sanity came flooding to his mind, and he slacked his pace at the cry of the Masai.

"Wait, Ki-Gor, wait!" Tembu George caught the Jungle Lord, stayed him by a grip on his arm that was like the clamp of a constrictor's loop. "We must have food, for the swamp is dead. We must have weapons—and maybe a guide."

The White Lord of the Jungle growled deep in his throat at the thought of waiting even for a moment, then nodded, and went down the branching trail that led to P'aanga's village. At his side went Tembu George, and there was a deadliness about the pair that silenced the voices of the men they met about the log stockade.

They went straight to the hut that had been given them for the night, gathered the weapons that were stacked ready for instant use. Ki-Gor fitted on the arrow-quiver and the larger of the back-packs of supplies N'Geeso had put together, then locked the gigantic war-bow over his left shoulder, and left the hut.

He saw Rakolta talking with warriors near the gate, strode impatiently their way. The witch-doctor whirled at the jungle man's approach, then shook his head.

"None will go with you," he said. "They are afraid of the Silver Witch, and they would be no good as guides, for none have ever ventured into the swamp."

Tembu George came to Ki-Gor's side, saw the fear in the warriors' faces, spat in silent contempt. "Come," he said to Ki-Gor, "we shall leave these dogs in their huts and enter the swamp alone."

And then feet hammered on the ground at their back, and the warrior who had been beaten by the kidnappers came running up, weapons and a hide of food swinging in his hands.

"I go," he said flatly. "Nuee is there, and she is my wife. I go, too."

Ki-Gor smiled, and for a fleeting instant his face was young and gaily boyish. Then sternness came to his features again, and he turned to leave.

"I shall make a juju-casting for your safety," Rakolta said.

Tembu George spat squarely on the witch-doctor's feet. "Out of the way, *Lango*," he snarled. "Or I drop your head from your shoulders."

And then the village lay behind and they were crossing the veldt, going toward the strip of jungle that lay between them and the Place of Mists. Behind them came the babble of voices; and standing in the shadow of the gate, Rakolta fingered his juju necklace, and his fingers made a silent curse upon their backs.

Ki-Gor walked a pace ahead, reading the spoor easily, following the footsteps of Helene and her companions in the dusty grass. Then he stopped, read the story of the fight in which the black had been wounded, his keen eyes flicking about.

He turned at last, nodded at the black. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Umboto," the warrior said, and his bruised face was a grim caricature. His eyes were slitted from the puffy flesh, and he scowled continually, unknowingly.

"Which way is the best; do you know anything of the swamp?"

Umboto shook his head, swung his hide bag of food to his left shoulder, leaving the short assegai free in his right hand.

"I know nothing," he admitted.

Ki-Gor nodded, glanced at Tembu George, then led the way again. He knew no more than his companions; he knew only that his golden mate was a captive of a fabulous creature called the Silver Witch, and that only death could keep him from invading her domain.

HE THOUGHT of that in the hours that followed. At first, there had been the thin light of sunset; but the moment they stepped into the goeey ooze of the swamp's edge, night had fallen, swift and terrible, and they were alone in the world of death.

They made torches first, taking the risk

of being discovered, even hoping to be discovered, so that they might force an issue at the outset of their trek. Tembu George had torn dead limbs from pulpy trees, had lighted them with flames created by his flint and steel.

Ki-Gor had caught up a torch, fought the fog with its fingers of flickering light, prying a path through the dampness for them to travel, using his great Masai spear in his free hand to probe out a path for their feet to follow.

He had shivered involuntarily at first, senses rocked by the noisome odors that curled with tangible strength from everywhere into his nostrils. There was decay, the rotted stinking filthy decay of wetness and slime and horrible death. Scrawny root hands clutched at his ankles, rooty fingers raking with bark fingernails at his skin, and the yellow-gray muck sucked and bubbled, grunting in protest each time he freed his feet.

The fog flowed in about them, crowding them, hounding them, isolating them in the murky brightness that swirled from the smoky torches. They did not speak, for there were no words to say. They went straight ahead, moving with the sureness of jungle men who do not walk in circles, and their weapons were ready for any sound.

A snake had reared at last, flashing two coils of its pudgy muscles about Ki-Gor, throwing him to his knees, bringing out the rabid rage that gnawed unrelaxed in his heart. His hands had come free, ripped at the scaly flesh, shredded it while the snake hissed in agony. Then the snake had anchored its tail, and the constricting coils began their crush of death.

Tembu George had moved then, splashing forward, his great knife whistling through the air. Three times he struck, and the ruptured stumps of the snake's body flopped and convulsed and whipped about in gargantuan reflexes.

Ki-Gor had climbed to his feet, wiping the sticky stinking mud from his body, stripping it away with bloody fingers, then lifted a torch from Umboto's arms and began to trek again.

He had said no word of thanks, for such was not needed. He had lifted his

spear and the torch and had gone forward again upon his quest. He was a blond Hercules, a jungle giant, and there was no stopping him except with the cessation of the heartbeat in his massive chest.

And so the hours had fled by. They had floundered through mucky swamp that was almost a quicksand, had swum across open patches of water, had clambered and fought and slid over gnarled twisted scabrous tree knees that held the skeleton trees erect in their swampy graveyard.

Twice death had struck, twice they had met its challenge and sent it fleeing back into the omnipresent mists. They had long since lost the freshness of their start. They staggered now, the two greater men helping the smaller Umboto, even stopping to rest from time to time. And it was at one of the rest stops that Tembu George asked the question swirling in all their minds.

"Can we find them?"

Ki-Gor snarled, and the thin veneer of civilization split and sheered from him and he was all animal. "We shall find them," he said, and his great hands corded into brutal fists, "and my hands shall kill the one who brought Helene and N'Geeso here."

Umboto edged back slowly, terrified by this grim bleak nemesis who traveled with him. And his arm dislodged the twin torches smoking in a root notch, dropped them sputtering in the thick mud below. The mist closed in, touched them with unclean obscene fingers.

But they made no move; for wonder had come to their minds, flickering amidst their tired thoughts, congealing into knowledge.

*There was light ahead.*

KI-GOR moved first, and he was no longer tired and worn from the hell of the past hours. He was the Jungle Lord now, stalking his prey, and doubly dangerous because of the hurt that was in his heart.

He went toward the light, forcing himself to move slowly, tugging his feet through the clinging muck, trying to make no sound. And at his back came Tembu George and Umboto.

They went ahead like three muddy shadows, excitement building in their hearts, weapons light in their hands.

They could see the light ahead, like the faintest shade of dawn coloring the night. It wavered and spread, then narrowed and almost disappeared from the cottony shifting of the misty curtain before them.

Ki-Gor paused, his toes exploring the ground beneath his feet, and his companions ranged at his sides, testing, finally bending and touching with their fingers. They had come to solid land at last, still muddy, but firm and steady beneath their weight.

They went ahead, seeking the source of the light, walking with the patience of beasts of prey, ducking beneath low skeletal limbs, eeling about withered knobby root knees that barred their path. And slowly the fog thinned, grew tenuous, and they could see ahead.

Ki-Gor gasped, stared blankly, shocked by what he saw, for it was utterly foreign to the picture he had in mind. Beside him he heard the grunt of Tembu George's amazement, and the counter-juju whisper of the courageous Umboto.

For there was no fire, no torches, no light caused by the flames of man. There were no men, and no prisoners.

There was only land that glowed with the sickly pallor of swamplight, phosphorescent like the gleam of a firefly—but gleaming over acres and acres of growing plants and shrubs and trees.

There was light, the effulgent glow of moonlight spreading oilily through the thin mist, tinging everything with brightness, making every leaf and branch and blade shine as though dipped in silver flames.

"What is it?" Tembu George whispered.

"I don't know," Ki-Gor answered—and whirled in fluid reflex.

But swift as he was, marvelous as was his coordination, he had no chance for success. He heard Tembu George's bull-roar of rage, and the pealing cry of battle that poured from Umboto—and then the tide of silver men engulfed them, rolled them over and over, hammering them into unconsciousness.

Ki-Gor had flicked his spear, casting it with the deadly murderous thrust of a Masai fighting man, had seen it sink through the belly of the first glowing man, had seen the blade rush through the monster's back in a

gout of spouting liquid silver. And then horror had almost stopped his every movement.

For reaching behind him, tugging awkwardly but viciously, the silver man had pulled the spear completely through, then reversed it and came plunging ahead, still leading the men behind.

These then were the true men of the Silver Witch; these were the creatures that could not be slain. For no man alive could have stood, much less charged to do battle, with the hand-wide blade of the great spear slashing through his vitals.

Ki-Gor had that single thought, then a glowing club whirled out of nowhere, caught him squarely in the forehead. He went spinning backward, dropping in the cold mist, feeling the hammering of fists upon his body, barely seeing Tembu George fighting like a seven foot fiend from the blackest part of hell at Umboto's side.

Silver had been his great blade, and silver it still was. But now the silver was running and splattering and staining his wrist, as he slashed with brutal strength, weaving a wall of razor-sharp steel about him and Umboto.

But a club knocked Umboto aside, and his clutching hand caught at Tembu George. The Masai giant went down, was hammered to his knees, to his belly. Then he twisted like a snake, raced into the mists, fleeing cowardly, even as Ki-Gor felt the last blow of a club strike his own blond head, and the world disappeared in a whirlpool of black flame that surged about and consumed his every sense.

## V

**S**LCUMMY WATER oozed greenly from the dank stone walls. It swelled and coalesced into tiny beads of slime that ran sullenly to puddle on the slippery floor. Pale light slipped through the long slits of windows, made the shadows bleak and dark, hiding the vermin that crawled in rustling viciousness about the cell.

Ki-Gor paced the floor like a caged animal, feeling the ache of his bruised head slicing into his brain; the air chill and wet after the steamy warmth of the deadiy swamp.

Blood crusted the side of his face, and a

livid bruise raced his side where a spear had struck, but the real agony from his situation lay deep in his heart. For hours he had paced his cell, striving to make himself believe that Tembu George had not deserted him; but now he knew for certain that the Masai Chieftain had. He had found excuses for the act, even held no rancor for the traitorous action; but he felt betrayed, and he could feel the sorrow swelling in his heart.

He went to the heavy stone door again, clamped his hands about the thick iron bars, swayed his entire weight for the hundredth time. Rust flaked onto his hands, cut into the skin, but the door was as immovable as the stone wall.

He sighed deeply, went to the nearest window slits, peered through, studying the city with desperate feral eyes. There was no movement outside, no signs of people who must live here. The city was dead, as decayed as the remains of the ancient race that had built it in the forgotten antiquities of time itself.

It sprawled now, walls tilting at absurd angles, great blocks of stones lying in heaps of rubble, weird distorted-face statues staring from blind stone eyes at the eternal radiance that bathed them.

And even they glowed, as though light had seeped into them and was oozing out slowly but surely into the air.

Ki-Gor sucked in his breath, marvelling at the uncanny scene, awed by the phosphorescent glow that filmed everything within his sight. He could not see the sky, for the mists closed in and made a bilious yellow ceiling a hundred feet in the air; but through the city, the mists were thin and tenuous, and details stood out with a harshness that was utterly unreal.

There was no sound, as though all noise was still-born; weirdly-glowing grass grew thick between the ruptured paving of the city, and the snaky roots of trees had pebbled boulders that had been smoothed into building stones by hands long gone.

The buildings were round, the roofs flat, and all had the same slit windows as Ki-Gor's cell. The stone crawled with the milky light, and the windows were like gaping slits of blackness into night.

Ki-Gor shook his head, prowled the cell

like a captured leopard, keen eyes searching for any loosened stone that might lead to freedom, his hand stabbing at his knifeless sheath in quick reflex as a gigantic phosphorescent rat flicked into sight at the slit in the door. He watched the rodent, knowing the utter cold viciousness of a pack of them, then scared the rat away with a flick of his hand.

He felt no despair at his own position, for instinctively he knew that were he destined to die at any moment, he would have been slain when first captured. Someone had a definite interest in him; and upon that thought he based his hopes.

He thought of Helene, and his eyes went bleak.

For him, the jungle life meant nothing unless she were at his side. He smiled within his heart, remembering her light laughter, the soft warmth of her body close to his in the lazy warm jungle nights.

Then he heard the footsteps at the door, and whirled, half-crouched, loosening the great muscles of his shoulders, bracing the mighty muscles of his legs.

Stone grated upon stone, as someone lifted the heavy bar from outside the door; then breath grunted from heavy labor, and the door swung open upon huge rock hinges, and three fearful spears framed the width of light.

"Out, white man," a voice snapped harshly. "The Silver Witch will see you now."

**K**I-GOR moved slowly, calculating his chances of a successful attack, relaxing when he saw that six fully-armed glowing men were his new guard. He stepped into the narrow corridor, hemmed in by spear blades of glittering iron, slowly ran his gaze over the men.

That they were natives, he was certain, for they had the facial and bodily characteristics of Congo blacks. But beyond that, he could not say, for all glowed with the pale radiance of moonlight. His keen eyes slitted, as he tried to reason out the stain that would make them appear so, then stiffened, seeing the first guard open his mouth to speak.

For the inside of the guard's mouth, glowed, too.

"That way," the guard said harshly, his voice utterly dead, and gestured with his spear.

Ki-Gor nodded, moved slowly down the corridor, going toward a faintly-lighted doorway fifty feet away. Feet scraped softly on the damp stone flooring, and a spear butt rattled loudly in the stillness. The Jungle Lord hesitated briefly, testing the men, felt the razor-keen point of a spear slice into the skin of his back.

He went ahead, turned through the doorway, flicked his gaze about the room, lifted questioning eyes to the first guard who had sidled about him and was at his side.

"Wash," the guard ordered.

Ki-Gor nodded, sloshed water on his tired body from the huge tubs that circled the otherwise barren room. The water was tepid, and he was grateful for the sense of well-being the simple task gave him.

Finished, he turned slowly, faced the weird line of guards.

"Now what?" he asked quietly.

"This way." The guards opened their rank, permitted the jungle warrior to stride into the corridor again, then herded him toward a flight of crude steps leading upward.

Ki-Gor went up slowly, nerves tight, every sense alert and keen. He could feel the danger now, as though he had come face to face with a lion, and he paced upward eagerly to meet it.

He stepped into a short hall, went directly to the wide doorway that faced him, paced through, followed by his guard which immediately ranged itself along both sides of the doorway.

Ki-Gor turned slowly, seeing the room, startled by the wild beauty of the tapestries that covered every wall, their colors blurred through the centuries, but scenes of hunt and chase and slaying still alive and glowing with the skill of the artisans who had weaved them there. He saw the low, skin-covered divans that hugged each of the rounded walls, and his feet went ankle-deep in the thick hair of the skin-rugs on the stone flooring.

Two torches smoked heavily at the rear of the room, their brightness yellow against the silver radiance that sifted through the slits of windows, and the tang of the burn-

ing wood was weirdly unclean in the heavy air.

Ki-Gor turned to the guard who had ordered him to the room, shrugged.

"Where—" he began, and stopped, the words crowding his throat, but wonder so naked in his mind that he could not speak.

She came through the doorway like some unreal phantom of a madman's dream, and her feet seemed to make no sound upon the floor, as she passed the Jungle Lord and went directly to the nearest couch.

"I am the Silver Witch," she said softly.

And she was phosphorescent silver, from the soles of her slim exquisite feet to the crown of her head that was like spun moonlight.

She was slender and virginal, and the thrust of her breasts against the firmness of the belted robe she wore was her youth and her hunger and her challenge. Her arms were slim and graceful, and the curve of her throat was like a song at the first hush of twilight from the pulsing throat of a *vivini* bird, soft and smooth and lovely.

Her robe was blue, and she held it close as she seated herself on the soft couch, eyes of the palest of silvers studying the bronzed giant who faced her. Somewhere in her was a mingling of a negroid and a caucasian strain, and in the perfection of her cameo features was the intelligence of both.

"Who are you, Ki-Gor?" she said at last. "Many are the stories that I have been told recently of your prowess; and how is it that your skin is white, as is the skin of your mate whom my slaves captured before you."

"Then Helene is here!" Eagerness and anxiety mingled in Ki-Gor's eyes, and he took a single step forward, halted instantly, feeling the prick of three spears against his broad bronzed back.

"She is here," the Silver Witch admitted. "But that does not answer my questions."

**KI-GOR** shrugged, still staggered by the wild arrogant beauty of the slim woman he faced, feeling the animalism of her personality batter at his mind with a tangible force.

"I am Ki-Gor," he said slowly, "and I am a white man, even as my mate is white. I live in the jungle, which is my home." His tone was steady, and he could feel a

grim confidence coming to his heart again. "Why am I a captive, and why is my mate taken before me?"

He knew that he would receive but one answer, yet he wanted to hear the words, knowing then that his future actions would be justified.

But the Silver Witch shook her glowing hair, came gracefully from the couch. "Come," she said, and led the way toward an alcove of the room, then through a doorway and into the deadness of the city. Behind came Ki-Gor, and close at hand, weapons ready for instant flowing action were the guards.

Ki-Gor walked at the back of the silver girl, his mind shocked by the weirdness of her body, trying to fathom the secret of the phosphorescence. Never, in even his wildest dreams, had he conceived of such a creature; and that she was a woman, lithe, warmly curved, instead of the juju-hag he had expected, made his mind reel.

"Who are you?" he said at last, striding close to the girl, taking care not to invite a spear thrust through his back. "What is this place?" His hand swept in a semi-circle about the city.

The Silver Witch turned her head, stared at the giant jungle man with silver eyes, and something in her gaze sent pity into his heart.

"Once this was a mighty city," she said, and memory stirred in her voice. "Once my people traded throughout the breadth of the land, and our art was greater than that of any other in the world, and our music was the pounding of thoughts and emotions in happy hearts. Yes, we were great then, proud, gentle, a race that should have remained strong and proud through the centuries."

Ki-Gor's forehead wrinkled, for some of the words he did not understand; but he nodded, not wanting to interrupt.

The sound of their footsteps was strangely muffled, and except for the soft tones of the slim woman, there might have been no life at all in the weird clearing.

"Yes," the Silver Witch continued, "we were a mighty race—until the ground shook and disgorged flame and smoke and molten lava. We huddled in terror in our buildings, thinking the world was ending its life, and

frightened for the safety of our own. But at last the cataclysm was over, and we came forth into the sunlight, looking about over a world that we did not recognize. The land had changed, and now there was a great lake where once had been a plain, and smoke and ashes hung heavy in the air, and our city was ruptured beyond belief. But we were brave and resourceful, and we made the best of what we had, rebuilding our home, planting crops on the dry land."

She strode along in silent thought for a moment, then continued.

"But our life had ended, although we did not know it then. It came about so gradually, so insidiously, that we were doomed before we knew the full consequences of what was happening. Slowly the land changed, the lake seeping into earth, making a stagnant swamp about the city, the yellow mist coiling from its depth, covering us with a blanket of death through which the blessed sun could not pierce.

"And then came the silver radiance, coming from the earth touching us, changing us, killing some as though they were grass before a reaper's hook. We tried to flee, but the change had been so gradual that we had lived long before we knew our bodies were tainted, and we found that we could not live anywhere but here in our city in the swamp. We found that we must live on the food that grows in the swamp, for our bodies must have the substance that causes the glowing of the plants and trees and animals. We were as completely trapped as though a great wall surrounded us, cutting us completely away from the other world that had been part of our home."

KI-GOR listened incredulously, feeling the cold sweat on his body, not believing all that he heard, yet hearing the ring of truth in the woman's voice.

"But how—" he began, then stilled.

"We died; we died by our own hands through the months and years and centuries that passed, for some of us could not bear the thought of living forever. We could not die by natural causes, for within us was a spark of life that would not die, but was eternally nurtured by the substance that glowed within our food, and within the land that was our home.

"And so at last our very beginning became a legend. We could not leave our land, and no one had the courage to enter. Our numbers dwindled, until but a handful lived. We knew that our days were numbered, for we had decided to die by our own knives. But when that day came, years ago, we found the secret that had eluded us for centuries—we found the means of release from our existence, the elixir that would return us to normal people, to live the regular span of normal lives.

"We found the secret, but so much of the elixir must be made we could not do it with our few numbers. We became raiders, stealing men and women for our slaves, forcing them to dig the minerals we needed for our own lives. But they could not live in the swamp as we; they died within a few months, and had to be continually replaced. We had no trouble in finding new slaves, for we had become a legend, and our bodies were such the mere sight of them cowed any resistance.

"Now we are almost in sight of our goal; within a few days we shall drink our elixir and step forth from this swamp city. We shall live but a fraction of our lives in other lands, but we shall *live*."

Her voice hardened, and her gaze came again to Ki-Gor. "That is the reason you are here. We have heard of your power over the tribes, and you shall be of service to us."

Ki-Gor swallowed. "You have lived—*how long?*" he asked at last.

The Silver Witch laughed, and hate and tiredness and death was in her voice.

"Since time began, since apes walked where men walk now. I cannot truly say. For eternity, I sometimes believe; too long, I always know."

Ki-Gor said no more, and there was fear in him now, for the first time that he could remember. He feared nothing alive, and yet he felt the cold sheen of terror on his face when he looked at this creature walking beside him, this slim young girl who had outlived an entire race of people and the memories of the civilization they had founded.

He knew that she did not lie, for there was no necessity for her lying to him. He tilted his head slightly, looked deep into the glowing silver of her eyes, and felt his

senses reel; for swirling in the depths, shadowed by the centuries, was a brooding knowledge of the world that he hoped never to attain.

And then the moment was gone, and the sweat upon his body was cool, and he could think again. He shook away the thought of the woman at his side, took two driving steps forward, poised on the brink of the shallow pit that stretched for dozens of spear casts to every side.

He saw the workers, and they were the evil fantasies of a crazed man's dreams, slaving with crude tools, glowing with the weird radiance that touched everything in this strange world hidden within the Place of Mists. And even as he looked, one of the workers collapsed, lay still, and two guards dragged the body to one side, cast it callously into a narrow ditch, where a moment later it flowed into the glowing scum that he had seen before when a man of the Silver Witch had died.

"Why?" his voice was hoarse as he said the single word.

The Silver Witch shrugged, gazed moodily at the dozens of workers. "It always happens when one dies," she said. "Their hearts quit beating, and their blood ceases its flow—and death comes in the rotting silver fluid that you see." She shivered. "Once my people died that way. But then we found that only those die who nurture the crops and dig the minerals, the rest of us lived forever, more or less sheltered from the power that seeps from the ground. They die from wounds, but slowly, for they feel no pain, and only a wound in the heart or brain can drop them in their tracks." She smiled slowly, and the evil of centuries lay mirrored in her eyes. "That is why the blacks outside the swamp think them immortal."

A guard turned, saw the small party upon the bank, walked toward it, his face shadowed by the hood of the cloak he wore. His heavy whip slashed a path through the workers, and he walked with the swagger of an arrogant man.

**K**I-GOR straightened, feeling the nerves tighten along his neck, sheer animal antagonism tightening his lips against his teeth. He did not recognize the man, but

the thought was in his mind then that here was an enemy, and he loosened the great muscles of his arms instinctively as the newcomer approached the wall and looked up the ladder before ascending.

Then the Jungle Lord's breath caught in his throat, and his gaze locked with the man's at the bottom rungs of the ladder.

"Rakolta!" he said aloud, and many things were clear to him now.

The witch-doctor climbed the ladder with swift sure ease, stepped to the ground beside the Silver Witch, and his eyes mocked the plight of the white man.

"What has he said, Narini?" he asked quickly.

"I haven't told him yet," the Silver Witch said slowly, turned to face Ki-Gor. "Look!" she said, and waved her hand at the pit.

Ki-Gor turned slowly, knowing what he would see, yet fighting the knowledge, for he knew the horror that was to be his. He turned with the magnificent grace of a slowly-moving leopard, and his hands were rock-hard fists at his side.

"No!" he breathed. "No!"

"Yes!" Rakolta's hate was naked in his voice then, and the whip twitched like a live thing in his hands. "There she is, white man, there she is and there she stays—unless you do what we command."

Ki-Gor sucked in a hard breath, seeing the slimness of Helene among the workers now, disclosed when a guard had ripped away her cloak, standing slim and defiant and warmly-human among the glowing monstrosities that dug in a terrible silence.

She took a step toward Ki-Gor, and he could see the smile on her face; then a guard stepped before her, and his whip cut a crimson streak along her shoulder, driving her back.

Ki-Gor spun, went at the nearest guard, a growl rushing from his throat, his hands leaping for the menacing spear. And snaking out, tangling about his ankle, jerking his feet from under him, was Rakolta's whip.

He went to the ground, spinning, flipping about to come erect—then sank back slowly on side and elbow, reading the death that lay in the couched spears, knowing that if he made but one move, he died.

"She has done nothing," he said at last, fighting for calmness, knowing that the time

for threats and physical force lay in the past or in the future.

Rakolta grinned, and his mouth was thin and cruel. "We need you, white man," he said viciously, "else you would have died in the swamp. We need you; and we hold your mate until you have done our wish."

Ki-Gor came slowly to his feet, ignoring the spears, flicking but one glance at Helene. He towered over his guards and the Silver Witch; only Rakolta could see him eye to eye.

He was dangerous and deadly, and muscles were rope hard in his thick thighs, but his voice was steady.

"And your wish?" he asked.

Narini, the Silver Witch, stared straight at the white giant, measuring him against her thoughts; and he shuddered unconsciously at the utter soullessness that he read within her silvery eyes.

"You will bring more slaves; you will bring them here, no matter how you do it. When they are here, then shall your wife be released. Until then, she works in the pit."

Her voice grew utterly sexless, viciously cruel, and he read for the first time the true depths of her ambitions. "If you fail, or if you fight, then shall you see your wife become like those who work at her side."

Ki-Gor turned, stared at the glowing pit, feeling the tightness in his heart, fighting the terror that mounted to his brain. He knew what he must do, balancing Helene's life against a hundred others, and he knew that he could never make such a decision, for above all else Helene was his life, and he was her mate.

He thought of that and a hundred other things, his mind a chaotic jumble of thoughts that tangled so tightly he could feel the pain. He read the enigmatic appraisal in Narini's eyes, saw the hate that twisted the face of the treacherous witch-doctor, felt the blade of a single spear touching his back.

He made his choice, made it with the singleness of purpose that was his character. His gray eyes were narrowed and deadly, and his face was rocky hard, as he spoke.

"I shall bring the blacks here," he said evenly. "I shall bring them here so that my wife may be spared."

## VI

KI-GOR, White Lord of the Jungle, turned away from the pit, went toward the silent dead city. He felt the thin yellow mist swirling about his rangy body, sensed that he walked on ruptured stone; but there was in his heart then something that shut away the world for the moment. He moved slowly, leadenly, for he had measured and evaluated the entire situation, and he knew that he alone could not fight the dwellers of the weird city.

Behind him came the guards, like glowing ghosts of warriors, their spears the only reality. And behind them came Rakolta and Narini, walking slowly, talking in tones too low for Ki-Gor to hear, Rakolta's eyes glowing with the fever of victory, Narini composed and dangerous, her gaze never leaving the wide bronzed shoulders ahead.

And far behind, deep in the pit, Helene stood rooted, understanding much of what had happened, by interpretation of the gesturing figures upon the pit-bank. She had seen Ki-Gor hurled to the ground, saw him rise and talk, finally had seen his shoulders sag and his head nod agreement. A dry sob touched her throat, and then she bent and caught up the crude hoe, began to dig the glowing odorous plants that padded the muddy soil.

Nearing the great central building of the Silver Witch now, Ki-Gor forced alertness into his numbed brain again, allowed his gaze to wander about the ghost city, wondering for the dozenth time what secret path could lead through the swamp to the mainland. He would have to tread that path, and he knew that he could not follow it unaided, keen as were his senses, for he had been inextricably lost when coming into its depths.

He felt the urging of the spears at his left, went up the cracked polished steps to the dark doorway that was strangely shadowed by the glowing of the wall at either side, passed through into the small alcove, waited in the room where first he had met the Silver Witch.

Narini and Rakolta entered the room leaving the guards outside. Rakolta remained standing, while Narini sank gently to a soft couch, idly toying with the fur of the skin

on which she rested.

She was beautiful then, and deadly, for her soulless eyes rested upon Ki-Gor, and he could not read the thoughts that raced within her silver-glowing body. She was uncanny and weirdly evil; yet she seemed dainty and almost childish as she watched the man who stood within her power.

Rakolta seemed to sense her inscrutable thoughts, for he shifted belligerently on his naked feet, laid his robe aside, stood revealed in all of his primal strength. Strangely, he seemed to fit into the massive grandeur of the room, as though it were his, and the others the intruders. At last he spoke, and his voice was harsh with his triumph.

"It is good to see you humble, white man," he said heavily, "for too long have I heard of your prowess as a warrior. The jungle claims that you have a white jujū that protects you, but I say that a knife will slit your throat as well as any other."

Fiery sparks swirled madly deep in Ki-Gor's eyes, but he said nothing, ignoring the towering black, his gaze tight upon Narini, the Silver Witch. And his very quiet sparked hate even more from Rakolta.

"Were you not needed, then should we see who is the greater man," he spat. "Then the jungle would know that you are what you are."

"Quiet!" The Silver Witch's voice cracked like a whip, and Rakolta subsided, glaring futilely at the jungle giant who ignored him completely.

"What am I to do?" Ki-Gor spoke for the first time.

NARINI stretched indolently, the soft curves of her body stark against the filminess of her robe, and the Jungle Lord felt his breath catch in his throat at the sheer weird loveliness of this creature he faced. It was almost more than he could comprehend that she was not younger than he.

"I need a hundred slaves for the pits," the Silver Witch said thoughtfully, then frowned slightly. "Do you know how many make a hundred?"

Ki-Gor shook his head. Helene had strange ways of speaking of quantities, too, but he preferred the jungle method which took little thinking and permitted no errors.

"It is both hands, as many as you have fingers on both hands," Narini explained, laughed softly when she saw the white giant's comprehension. "The men you bring must be stalwart, strong, able to work well. You will have to bring them armed, or they will be suspicious; but they will find that their weapons are of no avail, once they reach here."

The Jungle Lord's muscles tightened instinctively, then relaxed. Narini held the threat of death in her hands, and he could but obey her commands.

"How—" he began, and she interrupted.

"A hand of guards will go with you, showing you the secret way. They will watch for your return, hiding themselves from sight. Once you bring the new slaves back and lead them to a secret place which will be shown to you, your mate will be freed, and both of you may go."

"And N'Geeso, the pygmy?" Ki-Gor asked.

The Silver Witch shrugged. "Him, too, if you wish, I care not, for he is but trouble."

Rakolta stepped forward, his eyes bleak and stormy, heavy hand fingering the hilt of the knife at his waist. "I do not like it, now," he said thinly. "This white man talks too readily, too easily. He may betray us." He nodded to himself, and steel glittered in his hand, the great blade of his knife swinging from its scabbard. "It is better that he die, and we plan more raids without his help."

Fury was on Narini's face, and she sprang to her feet, silver eyes blazing at the hulking black. "You take too much for granted, Rakolta," she snapped. "First, you plan to use this man because the natives will follow him like dogs, believing everything he says. Now you turn the other way and want to kill him. I say he goes and returns, and I am the ruler of this land!" She laughed, almost hysterically, the notes titillating in tiny echoes from the stone-beamed ceiling, rustling into nothingness.

"He dares not trick us," she said, "for his mate will die, more horribly than he realizes, if he fails to bring back the slaves we need."

Ki-Gor listened, feeling his plan shatter in his mind. For she had found the single flaw in that which he had hoped maybe to

do. He had thought to bring back a hundred of the finest warriors in the land, thus releasing all of the prisoners, wiping away once and for all the hideous people who lived in the yellow mists.

But now he saw clearly that his plan had been a mistake, unless more cleverly conceived, for Narini was no fool, and would be prepared for any eventuality that might arise.

And as though the Silver Witch divined his crowding thoughts, she turned to him, strangely quiet now.

"One hand of days you have, Ki-Gor," she said. "If you do not return by then, your mate will have the silver glowing throughout her body, and nothing will save her."

Ki-Gor breathed deeply, conscious of the black look from Rakolta, seeing the small smile of triumph curl Narini's soft mouth. His plan might still work, but it must be made more subtle, the infiltration of scores of chosen warriors through the Silver Witch's guard-lines. With himself working on the inside, while apparently bringing slaves into the swamp, and the extra warriors sneaking in through the perpetual fog, guided by some warrior to whom he could tell the secret route, then there should be little trouble in overcoming the handful of silver men who lived in this city of decayed grandeur.

So his thoughts ran with quicksilver speed, but his face gave no hint of the turmoil in his mind, and to the watching eyes he was but a man already whipped in a battle of wits.

"I am ready," he said at last.

"I warn you, Narini, for the last time," Rakolta snarled.

"Guards!" the Silver Witch called loudly, and glowing men materialized in the room as though conjured from the very walls.

Rakolta nodded in defeat, gestured wordlessly for Ki-Gor to precede him from the room, then followed, the guards forming a menacing column at his back.

And watching them leave, Narini glided sinuously to the wall, pirouetted slowly before a polished silver mirror, smoothing her hands along the soft skin of her body, and for the first time, emotion swirled dark and welling in her ageless eyes.

"Maybe?" she whispered to the silent room. "Maybe?"

ON THE rubbly street, Rakolta took the lead, striding loose-limbed and dangerous before the Jungle Lord, arrogance in his very bearing, his muted anger a tangible force in the misty air. He went along the main street, then turned into another that was little more than a narrow lane between towering walls. There were no shadows, for the eerie light swelled from every exposed surface, and the echoes of their feet on the damp stones were the only sounds.

Rakolta entered a building, went directly to a side door, lifted and lighted a torch, then held it aloft, the meager light bright after the milky luminescence outside. Two other torches smoked fitfully at the entrance to the dark doorway, and below echoed the challenging voice of a man.

"Silence, fool," Rakolta snarled, went down the stairs, the guards forcing Ki-Gor to follow with the quiet menace of their spears.

He stared about him as he came to the foot of the stairs, his nostrils flaring at the stench within the tunnel, then he knew that he had come to the slave quarters. A lone guard stood before barred doors, grounded his spear as they passed, then leaned idly and watched them disappear about a bend in the man-made tunnel.

They went ahead, going down a slight incline, slimy water oozing in fluorescent drops from the walls, puddling in pools of cold flames at their feet. Splashes of the liquid landed on Ki-Gor's legs and feet, stained them with the glowing brilliance that belonged to his guards' bodies.

The floor inclined upward, and they went faster, urged by the harsh curses of Rakolta, came at last to a thick-set door, guarded by two men. The guards saluted and Rakolta's party passed through the eagerly-opened doorway, stood at last in freedom from crowding walls.

Ki-Gor turned slowly about, striving to see through the thick mist that rolled in cotteny moist batts from every side; he could barely make out the figure of Rakolta ten feet away.

"I go no further," Rakolta said. "You will go outside the swamp, gather the men

and bring them back. These men will go with you, showing you the way, then will wait for you to return." His voice grew hard and thin, and the muscles of his knife-hand bulged. "I hope that you try a trick, white man, for you are dangerous to me and my plans, and I would like nothing better than to slit your belly from crotch to throat."

Ki-Gor straightened, his lips thin against his teeth. "You have made your threats, Rakolta, now hear my words. If harm comes to Helene and N'Geeso while I am gone, then shall I come for you."

Grayness came to Rakolta's face then, the grayness of a man who knows that death lies but a step away. Then he sucked in a deep breath, stepped toward the open doorway that went directly into the side of what appeared to be only a muddy hill.

"A hand of days," he said viciously, "and I hope you take more."

He was gone then, the door swinging shut, showing only a clever man-made imitation of the hill's side to Ki-Gor's view.

Ki-Gor turned back to the glowing men who composed his guides and his guard. "Which way?" he asked dully, followed the first two of the men into the billowing fog.

He walked with the careful grace of a jungle man, doing instinctively what his mind did not order, feeling the threat drain from his mind, leaving only a nameless fear for the safety of his slim wife back in that weird fortress of the Silver Witch.

Automatically, he tried to remember details of the trail; but the fog was a mask through which he could not make out details. Skeletal hands clutched at him, but he ducked low, and only the momentary clatter of a guard's spear touching the dead limbs showed that life had fled them long before.

Gleaming ooze squashed underfoot, and a snake hissed, fled like a ribbon of living light, disappeared into the fog. There were no other sounds, for the guards did not talk, gliding like phosphorescent phantoms at the front and back of their prisoner.

"How far must we travel?" Ki-Gor asked.

"Silence, white man," the first guard said, turning his glowing head, and his face was a death mask, his mouth and eyes barely darker than the gleaming expanse of his features.

Ki-Gor went silent, using every bit of his skill again, trying to fix his position in his mind, but failed again, for he had nothing by which to orientate himself. The guides seemed to move through the thick steamy fog by instinct, going along a trail hidden by glowing mud, muck that grew deep and dangerous two feet to either side of the hidden path.

THE heat grew more intense, sucked in by the mist from the sunlight that must be gleaming overhead, thrusting it with a solid force against the small party, drawing perspiration from Ki-Gor's great body, painting the guides' bodies with sweat that trickled in glowing streaks.

Ki-Gor paced swiftly along, believing the reality of all that was happening to him, yet not understanding how such things could be. He had seen strange things in the depths of his beloved land, had heard stranger stories, yet even the wildest of imaginings had not come close to the sheer horror of this hidden land.

He remembered the Silver Witch, seeing her in his mind as first she had appeared in the great room to which he had been brought. That she was beautiful, he could not deny; that she was evil, he sensed so deeply that he shivered unconsciously. And Rakolta was evil, too, but his evilness was a bold brutality that any man could meet with glittering steel.

Somewhere there was a secret that Rakolta held, something that had brought him to this land. And—Ki-Gor's eyes blazed in sudden thought—he alone of all the people in the land did not glow with the sickly, unholy phosphorescence of pale moonlight!

Then the tenor of Ki-Gor's thoughts changed, and he cursed himself for a fool. Evidently Rakolta brought his own food, eating only it, and not staying long in the Place of Mists.

Still, that did not explain his friendliness with Narini, nor did he have particular reason to believe her explanation for needing slaves. She could have lied, in all probability had; he had no proof of her story of this mysterious elixir that would bring her back to the world of man. In fact, it was a bit inconceivable that she alone should

have discovered this brew after so great a length of time.

He stumbled, caught his balance, saw that he walked now through a thin sheet of mud that no longer glowed so mysteriously. Turning his head, he saw the weird effulgence of the phosphorescence behind him, then shrugged and walked on.

Behind him, a guard coughed harshly, grunting a bit, then fell in a floundering heap in the mud. His flailing arms and legs geysered the sticky muck over his two companions, and they bent to help him, silently, uncannily.

And then, materializing like a black ghost, swinging something that caught the sheen of weird light, sent it sparkling in a great arc, came a stranger.

"Ho, Ki-Gor!" a great voice bellowed. "Turn and fight!"

Tembu George was there then, swinging his three-foot blade, a Masai battle-cry rumbling in his chest. One guard straightened, swung his spear—and the blade of the Masai's knife *chugged* deep, slashed him from crown to navel, spilled luminescent blood in a flood of splattering silver.

"Attack!" the first guard screamed. "We are betrayed."

And whirling, he came straight at the Jungle Lord.

Ki-Gor spun, dropping to one knee, catching up the spear of the first guard to fall.

And in the same great spinning movement, he came full about, parried the first spear stroke instinctively, then let his blade lick up and drive deep into the belly of the guard.

And almost died.

For he had forgotten the unholy life that raced the blood of these creatures out of hell, and the man kept coming, dragging the spear from Ki-Gor's hands, his brutal own weapon flashing about in vicious strokes that even the lightning reflexes of the jungle giant could not avoid.

Then steel met steel, and sparks cascaded in a bright shower of yellow and red, and Tembu George was balancing again for a death stroke. Air screamed as the blade whistled in its lethal stroke, and the head of the silver man jumped from its shoulders, bounced into the mist like some juju

head into which had been thrust a lighted candle.

The body stood erect for a moment, silvery brilliant blood pumping in a jetting stream, then collapsed, throwing Ki-Gor to one side.

"Behind you," Ki-Gor snarled, tried to free his legs.

Tembu George whirled, faced the two guards who came at him simultaneously, and his bull roar of defiance was gay and challenging and mad. He swung his great blade, slowing the attacks, and his legs were straight and braced to meet the spear thrusts that nothing could halt.

And then Ki-Gor had wrenched the imprisoned spear from the belly of the slain guard, whirled it with an uncanny speed, thrown it with the terrible underhand cast of the Masai fighting man.

The blade sank deep into the throat of the first attacker, hesitated, then drove home, the blade emerging a foot from the top of his skull. He went hurtling to one side, blasted there by the force of the blow, disappeared in the quagmire with a thudding splash that instantly ceased.

And now with but one guard to face Tembu George began his advance. He went forward on light lithe feet, the blade building a wall of death before him that nothing could face. Two stabs the guard made with his spear, then turned and ran. Tembu George grinned mirthlessly, bent and caught up a spear, muscles swelling in his shoulder for the coming cast.

And even as he braced himself, Ki-Gor came to his feet, knocked the spear hand aside. "Let him go," he barked. "Let him go."

Tembu George snarled between set teeth: "He'll get away and warn the others!"

"And he'll guide us back to the city," Ki-Gor snapped.

They began to run then, moving with a common purpose, each pausing only to snatch up spears, then speeding on, going straight toward the glowing figure ahead, risking a fall into the mucky swamp at either side.

And ahead, more certain of his steps, their only link with the lost city or the outside world, the glowing man began to pull away.

## VII

KI-GOR ran with the quickening speed of a hunting leopard, going by instinct through the hazy curtain of mist, catching his balance with a fluid grace each time he misstepped, speeding on again, Tembu George panting at his back.

But fast as they moved, the pursued guard was even speedier. He splashed through the thin scum of mud, hugging the center of the hidden secret trail, never looking back, intent only on escaping. And slowly the distance increased between him and his pursuers.

Ki-Gor saw the quarry being shadowed by the mists, halted with a splashing of goeey mud from each foot, whirled and snatched at the bow Tembu George carried on his left shoulder. Wordlessly, instantly divining the jungle giant's plan, the Masai chieftain lifted the bow clear, turned so that Ki-Gor could snatch a slim arrow from the back quiver.

Ki-Gor dropped his spear, fled with even greater speed than he had before. Behind him Tembu George caught up the extra spear, came hurtling ahead, eyes grim and brutal as they saw Ki-Gor gradually come closer to the running guard.

Then the glowing man reached the edge of the phosphorescent swamp, was limned for a second by its silver glow.

And in that second Ki-Gor made his move. He nocked the arrow, drew the gut with a rush of strength that knotted loose muscles like straining cables in his arm and shoulders. He drew, and the fletching touched his ear. One moment he held the arrow tightly; then the gut sang a song of death, and the arrow whipped through the tenuous mist with the flicking speed of a vagrant thought.

The fleeing guard grunted, went to his knees, ripped at the slim shaft that skewered his right thigh. Then his hands broke the wood with a brittle snap of sound, drew it free, and he was on his feet again, racing toward his goal.

Ki-Gor smiled with a grim twist of his lips. His arrow had flown true, crippling the man ahead so that he could move only at a slower speed.

Tembu George raced to Ki-Gor's side,

and both began their running stalk again. They went easier now, able to risk a moment here and there to make certain of their footing, coming at last to the silver stretch of land that hemmed in the city of the Silver Witch.

They saw the man ahead, limping now because of the flesh churned to bloody froth by the ripping arrow, and followed him a hundred feet behind, caring not if he heard, for he was going in a straight line.

He was not truly a man they saw, for he was but a brighter glimmer in the swelling fog, a twisting phosphorescent shape to which their gaze clung as though magnetized. They followed him as closely as they dared, traveling single file now, Ki-Gor couching the spear Tembu George had given him.

Slowly the minutes passed, and still the weird chase continued. Twice the guard fell, struggling back to his feet each time, rushing staggering ahead, his breathing a series of labored grunts.

And at last he came to the upthrust hill that marked the secret entrance of the lost city.

His voice croaked an order, and his hand beat on the hidden door—and he died in the midst of a stroke, the heavy spear slashing away his life, dropping him back into the fog, mud sucking at him with slobbering pouting bubbles.

"Quick!" Ki-Gor snarled, splashed the last few yards to the solid ground, crouched out of sight of the men within the opening door.

Tembu George remained in plain sight, bracing himself on wide-spread legs, his face rock-hard, his spear hand tight and strained with the power locked in his set muscles.

The door swung wide, and Tembu George's spear flashed light like a streak of flame-tipped blackness, slammed deep into the chest of the first guard, jammed completely through, tossed him in a kicking heap far back in the entrance.

The second guard cried aloud, then choked; for Ki-Gor reached out with brutal savage hands, and his fingers were constricting steel bands about the man's glowing throat.

Ki-Gor growled deep in his chest,

twitched his great wrists. Bone popped brittlely, and the guard convulsed, then went slack. With a heave of flat hard muscles, Ki-Gor threw the cadaver into the fog, where it splashed soddently.

On catlike feet, he slipped into the tunnel, reached for the first guard, dragged him outside, threw him after his comrade. Then he turned and regarded Tembu George steadily.

"I am a dango," he said quietly. "I thought that you ran like a jackal."

Tembu George shifted uneasily in embarrassment. "I ran, because one of us free might help the other, I was still lost when I heard your party coming through the swamp." He grinned. "We fight well together," he finished.

"We do," Ki-Gor admitted, and the past few minutes were forgotten in the press of the moment.

He turned to face the interior of the secret tunnel, squinting the better to see the dim ghostly phosphorescent length. His face was hard and thoughtful, and he leaned against the jamb, his thoughts a turmoil in his mind.

Ironic laughter boiled in his heart, for he knew now how the fates had tricked him. He and Tembu George were trapped, as surely as though they wore chains. They could not bring help from the outside, for they did not know the secret path; and they were but two men, regardless of their prowess, in the city of their enemies.

They had but one way to go, and that was forward. They must risk their lives in a cause foredoomed to failure; for even if they rescued Helene and N'Geeso and Umboto, they still could not make their way to freedom without help.

Then Ki-Gor's mighty shoulders straightened, and he drew a deep breath. The time for worry lay in the future; now lay only the problem of freeing those they had come to find. He glanced at Tembu George, then motioned at the glowing mud.

"Cover yourself quickly," he said, saw the look of indecision in the giant black's eyes. "Only glowing men are in the city," he said. "Our only chance lies in being disguised."

Tembu George nodded, went to his knees,

splashed the glowing muck over his body. Ki-Gor knelt at his side; and seconds later two gigantic weird monstrosities of men stood before the secret portal, their weapons ready in their hands. Tembu George carried the single great spear, Ki-Gor wore the quiver of arrows and carried the bow.

They entered the secret way.

Ki-Gor closed the door, locking it with its crude cross-bar, then led the way down the tunnel, striding almost casually, his feet making no sound.

He halted at the tunnel's bend, peering cautiously about the angle, keen gray eyes almost black in his shining face. He saw the guard ahead, then froze into motionlessness, for two others strode from one of the barred doors, stood idly beside their companion.

They did not talk, standing stolidly, spears and knives close at hand should they be needed. But from within the rooms at either side of them came the soft sounds made by moving restless people, and the muttered frightened sobbings of women in pain.

Four flares guttered pale yellow flame in brackets on the walls, whirling shifting shadows in a drunken saraband along the corridor, and the phosphorescent sheen of the damp walls made a weird picture such as no living person could conjure from the depths of his imagination.

"Trouble?" Tembu George whispered.

Ki-Gor nodded, then straightened, stepped about the corner, Tembu George lengthened his pace, strode at the Jungle Lord's side. Together walking at an increasing speed, they paced toward the three guards, conscious that at any moment their disguise must be penetrated.

The guards glanced up indolently, paying no particular heed, noticing the two glowing newcomers only because of the slight noise they made in walking down the corridor.

"Ho," the first said, "is—"

He clawed for his sword.

Ki-Gor's right hand slid up and over his shoulder, caught a slender deadly arrow, drew and nocked it in one swift fluid continuous motion too fast for the eyes to follow. He nocked the arrow and drew the gut until the wood of the great warbow

squealed in protest. Then his fingers loosed their hold, and the arrow flashed with the speed of light.

The steel head made a *thwocking* sound, tunneled through the head of the first guard, pinned his head to the face of the second guard who had turned in quick dismay to face the sudden disturbance.

They went down together, pinned together like fish on a Pelele spear, and both were dead before they struck the floor. The third guard whirled about, catching up his spear, and it was at him that Tembu George leaped in full battle fury.

Sparks showered in a golden flood from the striking blades; then the glowing guard drove forward past the Masai's haft, and crimson streaked the luminescent mud that was his crude disguise.

**T**EMBU GEORGE grunted in anger at being so easily touched, reversed his spear with lightning speed, used it as a quarter-staff, almost broke the tough wood in a blow that knocked the guard from his feet. The guard's weapon clattered to one side, and for a second he peered upward at the spear of his antagonist, his hands coming up in a pleading movement.

Tembu George drove the spear down, grunting with the effort.

Ki-Gor turned away, sickened by the slaughter, even though he knew it was justified. He pressed close to the bars of one door, squinting into the semi-darkness, seeing the weird apparitions that were men walking and squatting and standing about the huge room.

"N'Geeso?" he called.

"Ki-Gor!" A dark shadow detached itself from the wall, bounded forward. Then N'Geeso was reaching through the bars, touching the jungle man. "Are you touched with the silver plague, too?" he asked, and there was horror in his tone.

Ki-Gor grinned, shook his glowing head. "This is but mud," he explained, peered past the pygmy. "Where is Umboto?"

A second shadow resolved into the figure of the warrior who had joined forces with them when first they entered the swamp. But he walked proudly no longer, and there was no life in his face, only the dull apathy of a man who has looked at the world and

found it not to his liking.

"What is wrong, Umboto?" Ki-Gor asked, and sensed the answer.

"She is dead. The warrior's voice was like the soft sighing of a breeze. "My wife is dead of the silver plague."

Ki-Gor held the words that sprang to his tongue, for he knew that the warrior, by his jungle code, would want no sympathy. He felt the body of Tembu George at his elbow, heard the grunt of instant sympathy. Then he spoke, his tone matter-of-fact.

"We must try to escape. Come."

He heaved at the heavy stone bar, lifted and laid it aside, stood aside as N'Geeso shoved the gate open with his amazing strength. "Good," the pygmy said softly, glared at the silver liquid that marked the places where the guards had fallen in death.

Umboto had not moved, but stayed in the shadow of the doorway, his head shaking in silent negation.

"I stay," he said woodenly.

"Revenge, Umboto," Tembu George snarled. "Revenge on those who slew your wife!"

"Leave me alone," Umboto said harshly, turned back into the slave quarters.

Ki-Gor stood in the doorway, watching the young warrior squat beside two glowing slaves. His eyes were shadowed with sorrow, for he knew the depths of the other's despair. His gaze ranged the room, and he felt no surprise that the other slaves made no move to leave. They were dead men already, their hope faded and withered by the things that had happened to them.

He turned away, catching a flaming torch from a wall socket, going to the door across the hall. He peered through the grating, saw Helene far across the room, surrounded by women whose bodies were as phosphorescent as the silver tails of fireflies. Flaming torches circled the walls, but even their cascading light could not dim the bright glow of the women's bodies.

"Helene!" he called softly, and stood aside as Tembu George wrenched the great bar from its sockets laying it quietly on the damp floor.

And then Helene was in his arms, the perfume of her deep in his heart,

his free hand clumsily stroking the softness of her shoulder. She held him close, and his strength was hers, and she was momentarily content.

"I was afraid, Ki-Gor," she said at last, "for I knew the hold they had on you."

He smiled into the brightness of the room, feeling his maleness and his strength, repaid entirely for any danger he might have fought through for this moment.

"We go now," he said quietly. "There is a secret way; and with luck, we may get free of the swamp."

Helene nodded, stepped back, gestured toward the women's slave quarters. "Can we take some of these?" she asked. "Some are not touched as yet, and if they go with us, they may be saved."

Ki-Gor nodded, followed Helene into the room, watching as she ran lightly toward half a dozen slim black women huddled in a far corner. Tembu George and N'Geeso crowded at his side; and all three went forward at the insistent beckoning of the slim white girl.

"They are afraid of you," she explained. "They think you are glowing men, too."

Tembu George laughed softly, wiped his huge hand down his forearm, smoothing away the gleaming mud that was already drying from the heat of his body. Reassurance came to the women's eyes, and they came slowly to their feet.

And even as they rose, two of them screamed in fear.

For coming through the open door of the slave quarters were a dozen of the Silver Witch's warriors, their weapons glittering in their hands, all the more terrible because of their very silence.

Tembu George moved first, swinging about in a perfectly executed circle that ended only when his flaming torch went whipping into the faces of the charging men. He ground the flames into the first face, then ducked, wrenched away the warrior's spear, beheaded the man with a single stroke of the gleaming blade.

He was great then, fighting with the blinding speed of the trained Masai warrior, one of the greatest fighters the world had ever seen. He engaged three men at once, his spear like a streak of hell before him, driving back the men with the sheer sav-

agery of his attack.

And behind him came Ki-Gor and N'Geeso. The pygmy darted in, caught with muscle-distended arms about the legs of a warrior, lifted, toppled the man; and Ki-Gor swooped in, caught up a spear, leaped to the side of Tembu George.

A second warrior went down, slashed there by the spear of the Jungle Lord, slain by the flicking tip of Tembu George's huge spear blade. And now three armed men faced the warriors who were left, where scant seconds before only unarmed men had stood.

They worked together, with the speed and unison of men who know instinctively how their comrades fight, their blades weaving a wall before them, behind which they moved with the sure-footed strides of fighting men to whom a battle is a thing to heat the blood and brighten the eyes.

They fought together, and another warrior fell, was trampled by his companions. They fought together, and the warriors broke before their strength and skill and courage, and began to retreat toward the door.

And still the three came on, for they knew that this was the only opportunity they would have to escape. Hell was in their eyes, and their faces were set and stony. They were terrifying, hideous, like two glowing demons conjured from the blackness of the pit, with a tiny naked imp fighting at their sides.

THE ring of steel on steel, of steel on wood, and the sickly thud of steel grating on bone and flesh, covered all other sound. The suck of breathing was like an undercurrent, barely heard in the strife of battle, and the slaves made no noise, huddling in their misery, watching the battle with an apathy that was past understanding.

"The right." Ki-Gor gritted and swung to herd the warrior to one side, so that they might not slip into the passage and bar the door. Immediately, Tembu George and N'Geeso caught the thought, swung their might to turn the tide of human flesh.

And through the door came the Silver Witch.

She stood for a moment, entirely unafraid, watching with a calm detachment

that was almost ludicrous. Her eyes widened slightly, as Ki-Gor spun in, drew a mis-stroke from a lunging warrior, then spat his face with the bloody blade of his spear. She watched the warrior drop, and her eyes swung again to the Jungle Lord.

"STOP!" she cried, and such was the command in her tone that the battle ceased as though it never had been.

Ki-Gor whirled, faced Narini, muscles siding in bold relief on his forearm as he debated the casting of his spear. Tembu George snarled deep in his throat, and N'Geeso crouched a bit, bracing his thewed small legs for better balance.

"You cannot win," the Silver Witch said. "Drop your weapons, and you may live."

Tembu George laughed deep in his chest, nodded at the dead men upon the floor. "Come and get us," he invited.

N'Geeso laughed softly, took a catlike step forward.

"We leave now," Ki-Gor said softly. "We leave or we die—and you with us."

The Silver Witch laughed gently, mockingly. "One moment," she said, "And then we talk."

"We leave—now," Ki-Gor said thinly.

Narini shook her head, and it was incredible that she could look so innocent and appealing and viciously evil at the same time.

"Put out the torches," she ordered her warriors.

"No!" Ki-Gor lifted his spear. "The first to move—dies."

The Silver Witch moved forward, stood pressed against the crimson tip of Ki-Gor's spear, the blood spreading in a blotch that was purple against the blue robe she wore.

"The torches," she said again, and Ki-Gor and his companions made no move as the gleaming warriors circled the walls, damping the torches by beating them against the floor.

And at last they stood in semi-darkness, lighted by the weird glowing of the dwellers of the lost city and the yellow flickering from the torches in the corridor.

"You will not leave, Ki-Gor," Narini said at last. "You will not do anything that might displease me. For I am truly now your

master; and if you do not obey, then your mate will be sacrificed."

"You lie," Ki-Gor snarled, turned his head for reassurance from his slim wife.

His spear went down then, fell with a loud clatter in the frozen silence of the room. He felt his world stand still, felt the tightness constricting his heart, and he knew the words of Narini, the Silver Witch, were true. He was her slave now, would do as she commanded, do whatever she commanded.

For Helene, standing slim and unafraid in the semi-darkness of the room, marked by the mud that had disguised her jungle mate, was glowing with the mark of the silver plague. Already she had begun to glow, only slightly now, but as surely and as horribly as the pitiful creatures that dug their way to death in the slave pit of the Silver Witch. She was doomed—unless Ki-Gor could buy her freedom with the deeds that he must do.

## VIII

QUIET had come to the cell at last, the bitter brooding silence of utter defeat. Ki-Gor sat soddently against the wall, staring blindly into space, seeing nothing, as inanimate as the dank stone that supported his broad back.

Tembu George moved with the restless impatience of a caged gorilla, moving his arm, not permitting coldness to settle into his wounded shoulder, his gaze sympathetic and wondering as he watched the jungle giant. He paced to the heavy door, glared at the impassive guards outside, then came slowly back to the Jungle Lord's side, squatted with lithe ease.

"What now, Ki-Gor?" he asked softly, watching the door. "What lies ahead?"

Ki-Gor turned his head slowly, and the mute agony in his eyes was more horrible than any outburst could have been. His hands were knotted on his knees, and the flesh was white and drawn with strain, the bronze fading beneath the terrific pressure of the straining fingers.

"I shall kill her," he said simply. "I shall throttle her with my bare hands."

His speech was as cold as ice, the words coming clear and keen, the black hate and

hurt of his heart showing only in the strain that was in his body.

Tembu George shook his head. "That will do no good," he said evenly. "Helene's life is forfeit, if you challenge the authority of the Silver Witch."

"She will die," Ki-Gor said savagely. "She will die—and I will be responsible!"

He came to his feet, strode with the short choppy steps of a man who fights the future, not knowing what he fights or with what to battle. His face was craggy and hard, and muscles rode the breadth of his shoulders, and the latent savagery in him was an awful force.

And then he stopped in mid-stride, and knowledge was in his eyes.

"I shall do what she asks," he said brutally. "Helene's life means more to me than any number of blacks."

"Ki-Gor!" Tembu George whispered.

"I know, I know!" Ki-Gor turned blazing eyes on the Masai. "I will be betraying my friends." He smiled, and hell was in his face. "But Helene—"

He whirled, as stone grated on stone, his speech choking off, as the two guards pulled open the door and stood with spears leveled. The first of the guards jerked his head in a silent command.

"Come," he said. "The Silver Witch will see you, white man."

Tembu George rushed to his feet, came to the white man's side, held him with a hand on his bicep. He shook his proud head, and grimness was in his tone.

"Fool her, play with her," he said in a dialect he hoped the guards would not understand. "Find the secret hiding place of the juju medicine, and then—"

Ki-Gor snarled, threw off the restraining hand, went from the cell. He heard the words of Tembu George winging from behind, but gave them no heed. Impatiently he strode forward, following one guard, another at his back. Within seconds, the sound of Tembu George's voice was hidden by the turns of the tunnel; and a moment later, they began to ascend a narrow stairs that went upward into darkness.

**T**HE Jungle Lord felt the quiver of tortured nerves, steeled himself against the interview that was coming. He knew now

the depths of the blackness that was Narini's heart, and he knew that Helene's life would matter no more to the Silver Witch than the life of any other. She was vicious and scheming and brutal, and only appeasement could buy anything from her.

The guard rapped sharply with his spear upon an unseen portal, then pushed it open, at the sound of Narini's voice, stepped in and aside. Ki-Gor came up over the last step, his eyes narrowed against the uncanny blaze of white light that was so brilliant it had a physical force. Despite the warmth of the air, he felt a chill walk mincingly down his spine.

"Here!" a voice said imperiously, and he turned slowly, adjusting his gaze, saw Narini sitting on a low throne-like chair.

But his gaze barely touched her in passing, for it was drawn as though magnetized to the solid column of light that gushed coldly white from the center of the floor.

One second, he gazed, and then he turned his head away, fearful that he might be blinded, blinking away the involuntary tears that clouded his vision.

The guard's spear touched his back, and he went forward, almost stumbling in his temporary blindness, opening his eyelids a slight crack, so that he might go directly toward the Silver Witch.

He felt awe gather in his mind, for she was almost blindingly silver now, as though her body had caught the spouting radiance of the column of light. Her hair was spun moonlight, and her silver eyes were like mirrors of swirling ice, and the lines of her body were blurred and soft beneath the brilliance.

Her hand lifted, and sandals scraped as the guards withdrew toward the entrance through which they had come. She sat for a moment, contemplating the great bronzed figure, finally nodded as though she had answered some unspoken question.

"So you would defy me," she said at last.

Ki-Gor was silent, trying again to see the column of light, watching it from the corners of his slitted eyes. He could see more clearly now, saw that the light did not shift and swirl, but was absolutely steady, gushing in a flow that was almost liquid from a circular hole fully three strides in diameter.

"Answer me," Narini snapped.

"You know what I will answer," Ki-Gor said.

Narini relaxed, and her hands slid over the weird carvings upon the arms of the throne. She smiled, and the evil slid from her face, and she was strangely feminine. Ki-Gor turned his gaze to her, shivered unconsciously, drawn against his will by the sheer feral vitality of the woman.

"You are a strange man, Ki-Gor." Her tone caressed his name. "You are not afraid, and your skin is white, as was that of my people ages ago."

Ki-Gor swung his gaze about the room, seeing now that he stood in some temple, for carvings were upon the wall, and a great blocky altar stood close to the column of light, dark stains still marring its silver simplicity. Other than the throne and the altar the room was bare.

A slim hand touched his arm, and fingers were hot against his flesh. He glanced down, his eyes adjusted now, and his gaze followed the lines of the arm, up to the slender shoulder, along the curve of the chin.

"Ki-Gor?" The single word was hesitant.

He waited quietly, not knowing what was coming, sensing the change in the woman before him, feeling the quickening of his heart, as the heart of any man must beat faster at her closeness.

Narini stood, and her skin was cool and silver beneath the blueness of her robe, and he could feel the strength of her yearnings and her desire to touch his senses.

"Ki-Gor?" she said again, and stepped from the low dais, faced him, the crown of her silver hair barely coming to his shoulder.

He sensed her mood, and tried to avoid it. "What of Rakolta?" he asked.

Narini stiffened, and contempt came into her voice. "I owe him nothing," she said. "He came here a long time ago, seeking the source of the legend about myself. My people captured him; but he talked so eloquently of the good he could do for us, we permitted him to go free. He built up the legend about us, helped us gain new slaves, used the superstitions of his people to make himself a powerful man. I owe him nothing."

Ki-Gor did not move, afraid that he

would break the spell that held him in thrall. Narini's fingers seemed incredibly heavy on his arm, and he could feel the beating of hot blood at his temples.

"Why is he helping?" he asked.

NARINI laughed softly. "Because of the jewels of which I alone know the hiding place. For them, he will do anything I ask."

Her mood changed, and with it her personality. She moved slowly closer, and the perfume of her body stifled his instincts, threaded deep into his emotions.

"Am I beautiful?" she asked.

Ki-Gor nodded, tried to draw back, felt the movement swing her closer to him.

"Am I desirable?" Her free hand came gently to rest on his right arm.

"You know you are." The words were thick in his throat, and he could feel the cold sheen of perspiration on his forehead.

"Take me out of here, Ki-Gor, take me into that world of yours where the sun can shine and breezes blow softly. Take me with you, and the wealth I have can buy us the world."

Ki-Gor watched the emotions swirl in the depths of Narini's eyes, felt a dim pity for the girl, knowing as he did the dreams that moved in her mind.

"Take *you*?" he asked gently. "When I cannot take myself."

Eagerness came into her features, and her soft finger slid along his bronzed arms, until she was holding him lightly by his shoulders.

"I can free you," she whispered. "I am Almighty here; my word is law."

"And the others, your people?"

"Pah!" Narini frowned. "There is but a handful of them, and none so young or desirous as I."

Ki-Gor could not move; it was as though his muscles had betrayed him. He swallowed heavily, feeling the stark desirability of the silver woman who held him at arms' length, and the thoughts in his mind were turgid.

"But you could not live."

"I can, I can!" Narini laughed. "There is enough elixir, more than enough. I waited, thinking my people should go, too. But now, wanting to go with you, I can drink the elixir and be normal again within the passing of a sun."

"But your people, the slaves—?"

"What care I for them? Oh, to be alive again, to walk on green grass and see the sun, I would—" The Silver Witch's eyes narrowed. "Go with me, Ki-Gor," she said, "and I shall free the slaves. One cup of the liquid for each of them, and they will be whole again."

"And Helene?"

Narini came tight against him then, her flesh warm against his, the thrill of her body creeping unbidden into his mind. He could smell the perfume of her hair, and her lips were soft and fresh against the unyielding hardness of his mouth.

"Take me with you, Ki-Gor," she whispered, and her arms held him tight. "Take me with you, and we shall be alone in the world. I will be yours, I will do anything you say. Only take me with you!"

Ki-Gor felt the stricture of the breath in his throat, tried to draw away from the lissome girl who pressed so closely, so provocatively, against him. The air was suddenly tight in his lungs, and the maleness within him was a thing that could not be denied.

"Alone, the two of us," Narini whispered again, and her kiss was molten flame burning against his emotions.

For an ageless eternity that moment held; a spinning vortex of time where nothing existed but the warmth of their mouths and the tight quivering of the girl's body against his.

AND then Ki-Gor pushed free, and the back of his right hand scrubbed at his lips. Anger and contempt lay in his face and eyes then; not against the slender girl who faced him, but at himself for permitting himself to be swayed for the most infinitesimal of seconds from the trueness and depths of feeling within him for Helene, his golden mate. He stood, rugged and gigantic, his scorn a flaming whip that drove the girl away from him in a stumble that dropped her into the throne.

She sat there for a brief moment, while anger blazed in her silver eyes, and hate swelled and contorted her face into a mask that was like something conjured from a nightmare. She was old then, and evil, despite her ageless body, and her rage blazed so whitely she was like a person transformed.

"You had your chance," she whispered, and her voice was like the rustling of a coiling snake. "You had it, and discarded it. Now, I shall break you as I've broken others." She laughed savagely, bitterly, the notes whirling high in the vaulted chamber. "You've had your chance; now you shall see that sniveling woman you call your mate die from the silver plague. You'll see her rot away in agony; and her death will be your doing, for you could have saved her."

Ki-Gor caught his breath, and unconsciously he measured the distance to her throne, his hands knotting at his sides.

"If she dies, you die," he said, and a promise was in his voice.

Narini came erect in the throne, and her hands were tight on the ornate arms. Her features smoothed, and the anger slid from her eyes as though it never had been. Once again she was the Silver Witch.

"She dies," she said brittlely.

Ki-Gor made his bid then, moving with a blinding speed that nothing human could have matched. Great thigh muscles locked, then exploded their strength, striving to throw him forward in a great leap that would end only when the throat of the Silver Witch lay locked within his heavy hands.

He moved, knowing that only a split second would protect him from the spears of the guards, seeing realization flash into Narini's eyes the second before he began his plunge. He braced his feet, and threw his arms forward for perfect balance. And the floor opened beneath his feet.

One second he had in which to see the triumph lance into Narini's eyes, one moment of eternity in which to see how her right hand had knotted about and lifted the very tip of the ornate arm of the throne. And then he was dropping, spinning about, making one last effort to escape the death trap into which the Silver Witch had dropped him.

He saw the floor spin past, caught a fleeting glimpse of Narini's vindictive face; then he was whirling about, flashing toward a great pool of light in which he could see nothing. Stone grated on stone overhead, and he knew instinctively that the trap had closed. Then stone brushed his shoulder, battered at his head. He felt the crumpling

twist of his body striking, tried to cushion his fall by relaxing his muscles. But quick as were his animal reflexes, superb as was his control of his body, he failed. Light flared intolerably in his brain, even brighter than the whirlpool of brilliance into which he had fallen, and he knew nothing more.

## IX

TEMBU GEORGE moved softly about the cell, shadowed by the diminutive N'Geeso. They followed the line of the glowing wall, ignored by the slaves huddled abjectly about the room, watched apathetically by Umboto, who sat numbly in one corner, monotonously humming the Wasiri chant for the dead, mourning his wife.

But the two warriors had no eyes for other than the guard who leaned sleepily against the barred door of the cell. He dozed, and caught himself in sudden starts of awareness, then dozed again, fearing nothing from the cowed prisoners at his back.

Tembu George flexed the great fingers of his hands, and a grim smile etched his mouth. His eyes were hard and dangerous, his movements like those of a stalking black panther. N'Geeso crept at his back, silent now that plans had been made, matching the stealth of the man who towered twice his height.

Then they were at the door; and Tembu George was lifting his hands, fingers curved like rending claws, sliding them between the bars, poisoning them for an infinitesimal instant at either side of the glowing guard's pulsing throat.

Tembu George grunted, drove his hands together with terrific force, catching the soft flesh of the throat in a vicious grip, straining backward, giving his victim no opportunity to lunge forward and break the hold.

N'Geeso reached through the bars, caught the warrior's harness, dragged him tight to the door, held him immobile while the Masai giant's fingers crushed away his life.

Not one sound did the guard make, other than the shifting of his leather sandals on the worn stone of the flooring. He clawed futilely at the constricting hands, his eyes bulging, great tendons swelling in his arms and shoulders.

Breath hissed hotly from Tembu George's throat, and strain raced his arms, knotted the muscles of his shoulders. Perspiration gleamed on his skin, and his teeth were a solid line of white in his ebony face. He held the guard motionless, pressing with terrible efficient strength.

And with a final convulsive jerk, the glowing guard went slack, crumpling away from the Masai's loosened fingers.

Tembu George grinned, pulled the heavy belt from his waist, dangled it through the bars, looped it about the cross-bar outside, then managed to draw up the free end. Spreading his feet for leverage, he exerted titanic power against the unequal balance, surged his hands high, and the bar came free. A second later, he shoved the door open, stepped through, followed by N'Geeso.

"Umboto?" Tembu George said softly.

The warrior shook his head slowly, turned his gaze away. Tembu George flicked his eyes about the room, seeking others who might help, and defeat was in his face when he saw the indifference of the slaves.

"Come," he said shortly to N'Geeso, and went down the corridor, stopping only to catch up the spear of the unconscious guard.

The pygmy trotted with soft even steps at the giant's side; and both moved like grotesque black shadows through the gleaming phosphorescence of the Silver Witch's citadel.

"Where now?" N'Geeso asked.

Tembu George shrugged, turned down the blackness of a cross-tunnel, where the stone was oddly free of the luminescence that marked the slave quarters. Their steps grew cautious, and they went more slowly, coming at last to a flight of steps leading upward. Tembu George went first, testing each step, spear outthrust to mark the ending of the passage.

They came to a cross passage, made the turn, then drew up short, catching the barest flicker of light through a crack in the wall. The Masai's hands felt over the wall, found a door, and he lifted the latch, slowly drew the portal open the barest fraction of an inch.

"What is it?" N'Geeso whispered softly, pressed close to the crack.

"*Wab!*" Tembu George sucked in his

breath. "It is Rakolta and Helene."

The pygmy growled deep in his diminutive chest. "Slay the dango," he snarled.

Tembu George shook his head, softly closed the door. "No," he said, "they will keep. She is in no danger, for they but talk. We shall find Ki-Gor, and then our chances of success will be better."

Blinking, trying to adjust their eyes to the clammy blackness of the tunnel again, they walked along the damp stone floor, guiding themselves with brief touches of their hands along the walls, the sound of their rustling footsteps gradually fading as they inched along the corridor.

And at the foot of the steps they had just traversed, knife tight in his hand, a third man walked the tunnels, stalking those ahead, crimson murder lust pulsing in his brain.

**B**EHIND Tembu George and N'Geeso, standing in the center of the great temple room, Rakolta watched Helene, as she peered through the bright glare of the column of white light that pulsed from the floor.

"This was the meeting place of the priests," Rakolta said, "and it holds the secret for which I have been searching these many moons." His lips thinned, and hatred lay deep and black in his eyes. "Narini promised she would give me that secret; but she lied, for I know that she means to cast me aside when it suits her needs."

Helene pirouetted slowly, seeing the monstrous carvings and weird gods that marked the wall and ceiling. She felt awe crowding her heart when she descried the column of silvery light, seeing how it touched the ceiling and spread oilily through the air as though it had substance.

Helene was incredibly beautiful in the harsh light, for the silver plague had highlighted her radiant red-gold hair and tinted her warm skin with the silver phosphorescence that was now unnoticeable in the blinding glare.

She turned her eyes toward the smirking witch-doctor, evaluating the mettle of the man with a cold thoroughness that brought futile rage flickering into the planes of his face.

"What secret could be so great," she

asked, "that you could sell your own people into slavery for it?"

Rakolta laughed, and his hate was a naked flame in his eyes. "They are not my people," he said brutally. "They took me into their tribe when I was a man-child. I owe them nothing. I should have ruled them, for I was their greatest warrior, the best tracker, the finest hunter in the tribe. But they gave the chieftainship to P'aanga, who now is dead because I ordered him slain." He stiffened, like a great black giant limned in silver light. "I am the mightiest man in the jungle."

Helene shook her head slightly. "Ki-Gor is your master," she said softly, confidently.

Rakolta laughed aloud, and there was in the timbre of his voice a note that spider-webbed crawling nerves through the jungle girl's slender body. She tensed, and color faded from her cheeks.

"He is to die," he said flatly. "If Narini does not order him slain, then I shall cut his throat myself."

Helene shivered, seeing the hate and envy that contorted the vicious face of the witch-doctor. She felt no fear for herself, for she knew the capabilities of her mate; yet she knew that the man before her might do through treachery what he could not do by skill.

"Why," she asked, "do you hate Ki-Gor so much?"

Rakolta turned, lifted his heavy cloak from his back, and Helene gasped, seeing the whip scars that marked the smooth skin. When he came about again, his face was greasy with perspiration, and his voice was a thin whisper of repressed passion.

"He gave me that," he whispered. "He lashed me twenty times, and branded me a coward before my friends. I was a slaver many, many moons ago, and he trapped me with slaves. Some of my friends died, but I lived, and I swore revenge." His voice scaled high, echoing and titillating throughout the room. "Now I shall prove who is the master."

Helene turned away, sickened by the madness of the man, staring with thoughtful eyes about the room. Twice she had tried to escape, and dull bruises marked her soft flesh where Rakolta's brutal hands had grasped her. She saw the two doors of the

room, knew that she could not reach them before the black. She could feel the panic building in her mind, forced the thoughts aside, for she knew that within her lay the power to free herself and Ki-Gor from this city.

How she knew that, she could not say; she knew only that Rakolta had brought her to this temple room, intending to tell her something, and as yet he had not disclosed the thoughts he had in mind.

She saw the carvings and inscriptions on the walls, marveled at the intricacies of the designs, narrowing her eyes to see the scenes of life that moved over the walls in weird caricatures of realism. She saw animals that had no counterpart on earth, and other scenes brought to strange life weird plants and buildings such as the history of the world had never recorded.

Rakolta had remained silent, watching, but now he moved forward, catching her slender arm, whirling her about. His eyes were narrowed, and his lips thin, and she could feel dread build scorchingly in her heart.

"I can save *your* life," he said slowly.

HELENE frowned, and her pulse came strong and steady, for she knew that at last the man was coming to the point. She had no hint of his thoughts from his actions, felt only a revulsion that he should touch her, and wrenched her arms free.

"My life?" she asked.

Rakolta nodded, and his eyes flicked nervously about the bright room, as though searching for shadows in which hidden watchers might lie in wait for his unwary words.

Evil was in his face, the ageless evil that lurked deep within the eyes of the Silver Witch. His hands rasped softly together as he drywashed them, and his breathing was loud and abnormally strained.

"Go with me," he said harshly. "Go with me, and I'll make you the queen of all Africa."

Helene gasped, and her anger drew the blood from her face, leaving it white and stony. Her lips thinned, and her nails dug deep into her palms; but even yet she did not move.

"How?" she asked, and so noncommittal was her tone Rakolta's voice became eager, excited.

"There is wealth here, incredible wealth, piled up by these ancients and hidden by the priests. I've seen some of it, seen jewels and gold and silver ornaments and idols that would buy anything in the world we want." His tone softened, was like the hissing of a wakened cobra. "Narini knows the hiding place; she is the last of her line, for she is of the priesthood, and—" His hand toyed with the chased metal pommel of the knife at his waist. "—she can be made to tell."

"Ki-Gor—" the word was a whisper.

"He'll be dead," Rakolta gloated; then softened his tone again, seeing the instant tightening of the jungle girl's features. "Or I'll let him go free—if you will come with me."

She struck him then, lashing with all of the power in her slender body, driving him away, a gray streak marring the darkness of his skin, blood oozing in crimson lines where her nails had scratched his cheek.

"You dog, you utter filthy beast."

Rakolta cowered back, startled at the blazing anger that flared in Helene's face. For the moment she was his mistress and he the slave. Then rage, too, came to his face, and he lunged forward, his hands grasping for the elusive jungle girl, blood lust in his eyes.

"I'll kill you," he snarled. "I'll tear you to bits with my hands!"

Helene whirled away, darting toward the nearest door, wrenched at the ancient catch, was forced to spin away before she could force the portal. Rakolta hurtled after her, his knife naked in his hand now, spittle staining his mouth, his eyes blank with the fury of his mind. His face was pebbled with greasy drops of perspiration, and his huge legs drove him with a speed Helene could not match for long.

And in the midst of a step, he came to a full stop, fear sliding into his face, his breathing rasping in his throat. His sandals scuffed on the rocky floor, and he whirled, stood in a half-crouch, facing the Silver Witch standing in the doorway of the newly-opened door.

"Rakolta!" she said softly, and in the single word he read his fate.

Rakolta began to smile, the fear going from his eyes now, all of the pent-up greed in his mind pouring into his face. He took a sliding step toward the Silver Witch, and his fingers moved open and closed with a steady monotonous rhythm.

"Come in, Narini," he invited. "We've got some talking to do, and now is as good a time as any."

She came into the room, flicking only the single glance at Helene who was pressed against the cavern wall, eyes wide and watchful, still burning with emotion. She walked toward the great black man, stood slender and proud before him, her skin and brilliant hair a soft smooth silver in the blinding light from the column pushing upward from the depth below the floor.

"Betrayal?" she asked.

Rakolta shook his head. "Not betrayal—payment." His words grew thick and slurred. "I've waited too long, I want what has been promised, the wealth that you alone know the secret of, and I want that secret now."

Narini laughed, and the soft echo of her voice was all the more mocking because of its utter lack of fear.

"You black pig," she said softly. "Think you that your hands will ever touch the holy jewels and gods of my people. Your kind were slaves when this city was great—and slaves touched no feet into this temple."

**R**AKOLTA licked his lips, and the kill-lust in him was a tangible thing. He shifted slightly, gaining balance; and if the Silver Witch noticed, she gave no heed. She was imperious, her slender body limned through the blue robe that was almost white in the light. A vein pulsed at the base of her silver throat, and her hands rested easily at her sides. She was weaponless, facing his naked steel; yet she dominated him, and the knowledge was a goad to his wounded vanity.

"We made a pact," he said thinly. "I furnished the slaves to make your damned elixir, and I was to receive the wealth you did not want. For the last time, *I want the jewels and gold!*"

His hand reached for her, and she struck it away. "Touch me, and you die, I swear it, die as horribly as such a thing can be managed."

He caught her then, and his fingers were black against her silver skin. For one second, fear came to her luminescent eyes; and then she fought with a silent fury to free herself.

His knife tinkled to the stone floor, and he caught her with both hands, sliding them along her arms, driving them at her pliant throat, laughing now, the tones sibilant and utterly mad. She bent like a reed before the wrath of a raging storm, his fingers clamped about her throat, her hands beating futilely at his massive chest.

And Helene smashed into him from behind.

He almost went to his knees, not losing his hold on Narini, bending before the swift sure blows of the jungle girl. He grunted before each blow, then smashed his right hand twice at Narini's face, battered her into unconsciousness. His tight fingers relaxed, and the Silver Witch slumped awkwardly to the floor. Spitting like an enraged lion, he whirled, drove squarely at Helene.

She spun, tried to flee as before, and the fallen knife betrayed her. Her right foot twisted on the hilt, and she went to one knee. Rakolta caught her even as she came to her feet again.

He followed her up, strangling her as he had Narini, his face puffy with the mad rage that dominated him, his eyes blood-shot and inflamed. Words spewed like froth from his wet mouth, as he strangled Helene, and she could barely hear.

"*Strike me, me the mightiest—curse Ki-Gor—tricked—I'll choke the—*"

She could feel the throne at her back, could feel the cold hardness against her naked skin. Thoughts raced chaotically in her mind, and she knew that death was but seconds away. Like an enraged lioness, she fought to free herself, clawing with wide-spread fingers, trying to batter the murderous hands from her throat. Slowly blackness drew before her eyes, and her gaze saw only the hate in Rakolta's face. "*Ki-Gor!*" she thought—and felt her body slacken, her hands reaching out for last support.

## X

**K**I-GOR, White Lord of the Jungle, moved at last. His hands fumbled instinctively for balance, even as they had when he had fallen through the secret trap, touched the cold stone on which he lay, became still.

He did not move again for seconds, fighting back the blackness that still crowded his mind, feeling the ache of his bruised body pulsing with every beat of his heart. He lay on his back, eyes still closed, recalling fragment by dim fragment that which had befallen him.

And then full knowledge came to his mind, and he opened his eyes.

He almost cried aloud, for the brightness of the light was like something psychical, etching itself deep into his brain. Cautiously, he experimented, finally managed to open his eyes in a narrow slit that permitted vision.

But even that vision did him little good, for his view was sheered away a few feet from his eyes, swallowed in the blinding brilliance of the place into which he had fallen. He could see nothing but white light, as though he lay in a cocoon of hot sunshine.

He moved his arms slowly, experimentally, then braced hard palms against the floor, shoved himself into a sitting position. Except for an aching body bruised by his fall, he was unharmed.

He came to his feet, standing in a half-crouch, then straightened, hand extended over his head, trying to reach the ceiling. His fingers touched nothing, and he turned slowly, trying to orient himself in his tomb of light.

He heard the scrabbling of claws on the stone, and for the briefest flicker of time, thought that he saw some animal dart across his line of vision, close to his bare feet. Instinctively, his hand drove for the knife at his waist, felt only the bare scabbard.

Never had he felt so helpless as he did in that moment. In the jungle he was master of any situation; even in his brief captivity, he had felt no fear. But now, naked and unarmed, dropped into some place that he could not see, he felt the first thread of despair tugging at his senses.

Then a low laugh came to his mouth, and he straightened to his full primal height, began to stalk the place of light. His feet moved with sliding steps, and he crossed his arms before him so that he might not run squarely into some obstruction.

He came to a wall, and his sense of touch told him that it had been made of hewn blocks. He felt a surge of relief, for deep in his mind had been the thought that he might have been dropped into some cavern in the bowels of the city, from which escape was impossible. But now, knowing that men had made this place, he knew, too, that the artisans had had to have an egress.

He went swiftly along the wall, moving more confidently now, still being careful and cautious. His foot struck some obstruction, and squinting through narrowed lids, he saw that the object was a great chest. Eagerly, he bent lower, peering into the depths.

He shrugged then, seeing the cascading brilliance that winked at him from the countless jewels heaped indiscriminately in the chest. Jewels held no value for him, other than as ornaments.

He went about the chest, finding more piled one on the other, explored them eagerly, hoping to find weapons in one. Each was a treasure house of red and blue and green and red stones, and atop them lay grotesque idols of gold still untarnished by the centuries.

He passed the chests, still working along the first wall, came to a corner. Not pausing, he went ahead, hearing again the faint rattle of claws on stone, and a new sound like the scraping of leather over rock.

He froze into silence, his nerves like tendrils of thought searching out and recording every impression. Faintly, he heard the bubbling sound of liquid welling from a deep pool, but the slithering sounds had ceased.

He took a cautious step, then another, and a second later was moving as he had at first. He met no obstacle in his travel of the second wall, did not hesitate at the corner, but went ahead knowing now that he was in a square room.

His hands touched the wall eagerly as he walked, searching for the outline

of a door, but he found none. A minute passed, and still he walked; and then he had come to the end of the third wall.

He felt, rather than heard, the swift lunge of the animal at his feet, kicked instinctively, heard the snarling squeal of the glowing rat he had kicked into space. Liquid splashed, and for one moment the light seemed brighter.

He grinned to himself, for he knew that the rats had to have some entrance into the room. And even as he thought, he heard the swift click of more claws on the floor. Cold sweat sheened his body, for he knew the utter ruthlessness of a pack of rats in pulling down their game. He could not fight them for long, not if they attacked him in a pack as jungle rats did.

He went along the fourth wall, found no doorway, knew that he was in approximately the same place as where he had awakened. Turning, he went squarely across the room.

He felt the light now, felt it as a solid force that pushed at his great body. It had the substance of a thick mist, and he could not open his eyes against the glare. He walked slowly, inching one foot before the other, not knowing what to expect.

And hell exploded at his feet.

It came in a belt of living light that spun about him in a constricting coil, almost pinning his arms to his sides. He heard the maddened hiss of a great snake, felt horror and revulsion explode into smashing energy in his body.

He tried to whirl, to spin out of the single coil, and went squarely into a second. Despite himself, fear touched his mind; for never in any of his wildest dreams had he thought such a nightmare scene could happen.

Teeth gouged at his neck, and he threw his head aside, smelling the acrid scent of an aroused python, feeling the knife-edged scales slicing at his flesh. His hands flashed for the weaving streak of light that was the snake's head, and his left caught a brief hold.

But that single instant of holding saved his life. He swung his right hand, caught the neck of the snake, felt the constriction of the coils tightening about his chest and belly. His breath came hard in his throat,

and the world was a spinning mass of light dominated by this great phosphorescent reptile endeavoring to crush him.

His hands tightened about the neck of the snake, and he bent it with every atom of strength in his massive shoulders. Muscles bulged and rippled and twisted along his arms, surging into the planes of his back, and his legs were tight with strain.

He tried to break the supple neck, and flesh shredded beneath the titanic power of his locked fingers, and the hiss of the wounded snake was like the roaring of wind through a slotted reed. He fought the savage brutal strength of the enraged reptile with all of the cool calculated power that was in his body. And for the moment he won.

The first bright coil loosened slightly, and he could breathe again. He bent the snake away from him, writhing with the quick desperation that was his only hope of escape. The thigh-thick body of the glowing python bunched in ropy spasms, trying to strengthen its hold, beginning to tighten again.

And Ki-Gor spun from the constricting coils, feeling flesh rasped from his body, recoiling from the hammering blow of the blunt head against his chest. He rolled with the twisting litheness of the jungle-born, scrambling on hands and knees to escape the death that followed.

HE CAME to his feet at last, standing, bloody and spent, trying to pierce the eternal brilliance of the chamber with his gaze, hearing the maddened hissing of the great snake somewhere before him. His nerves crawled, and he longed for the feel of his knife within his hand, for he knew that he could not escape the reptile for long. And great as was his strength, keen as were his instincts, he knew that he could never slay the snake except by accident.

He backed, hearing the hissing coming closer, backed until his shoulders touched the wall, and he knew that he was trapped.

Like a ribbon of whiter light in a hell of brightness, he saw the snake flow toward him. His hand outspread on the wall, he edged away, not knowing which way to go, only trying to avoid the vicious monster that

stalked him like a panther over a dik-dik deer.

He came to the first of the boxes, lifted it, tilted it so that the sparkling contents went in a wild clashing flood toward the snake. The python coiled with a wild hissing, was like a pagan statue of a heathen god rising from the offerings of its devotees.

Ki-Gor emptied another and another chest, then went straight across the room again, searching for the hole he knew must be in the floor, the entrance through which the snake and the rats had come. He felt the quick slash of needle-like teeth on one leg, battered about him with the two-foot statue he carried now as a club.

His foot splashed into liquid, and he sucked in his breath, seeing that he stood at the edge of a ten-foot pool of liquid that glowed like molten sunlight. He could barely see, for the light was blinding; and he turned away, seeking to escape the pool.

The snake came driving in, and he went backward, splashing into the pool, driven there by the sheer fury of the reptile. His outflung arm struck stone at his side, and he whirled instinctively, clawing at the shallow steps carved into the thing his hand had struck.

He went upward, going with blind instinct, knowing that he stood on the side of a pyramid-like column jutting from the pool of glowing liquid below. He had dropped the golden idol when first he had begun his climb, and he went swiftly upward, taking his chances upon facing something more horrible than the death that waited below.

And as he climbed he felt the lessening of the light, saw the first bit of grayness overhead. Faster he went, clawing his way along the cold stone, fighting to keep his balance.

He felt the flow of fresh air upon his sweating face, felt hope surge anew in his heart. His upraised hand touched the rim of a square hole above, and he pulled himself upward from the column he had climbed, rolled free upon the floor.

He blinked light-benumbed eyes, and the change from brilliance was so great, he saw things in shades of grayness. His mighty lungs sucked gratefully at the cool air, and he rolled to hands and knees, turning his

head to peer backward at the hole through which he had come.

A gasp came from his lips, for he realized that he had come up through the column of light and into the temple chamber. And even as that realization came to his mind, he saw Rakolta throttling a girl, breaking her back over the strange throne-chair.

"Helene!" the thought whirled unbidden to his mind, and his muscles exploded a burst of power that sent him in a crouching rush at the back of the gigantic witch-doctor.

One blow he struck, one terrific smash of a knotted hand, and the witch-doctor was hurled to one side, gasping from sudden agony.

Ki-Gor caught Helene as she slumped, held her tightly, knew instinctively that she still lived. He laid her gently on the floor, turned slowly to face the rising black.

He was no man then; he was a great primal beast reincarnated out of the mists of time. His hands were talons, and blood-rage blazed in his gray eyes, his nostrils pinched and thin from the hate seething in his heart.

"I claim blood-hate," he snarled.

And smashed forward.

**R**AKOLTA met him hand to hand, straining upward with the utter viciousness of a man who knows that but one would survive the test of strength. There was no fear in his eyes, for his heart would admit no man could best him in mortal combat; only the twisted muscles of his face and the sheen of hate-sweat on his shoulders showed the feeling that rode his mind.

They met, and the shock was like wood on wood. Ki-Gor drifted in with a blinding speed, shifting at the last second, striking for a belly blow with the stiffened fingers of his hand, and the black witch-doctor met the stroke, stopped it with clenched fingers, kicked upward with a sandaled foot.

Ki-Gor twisted, riding the blow on his thigh, wincing at the red haze of pain that coursed from his leg, went to his knees, the mighty muscles of his thighs locking and straining to lift him erect again.

Rakolta laughed deep in his chest, spun,

caught the jungle man's right arm in a cross-leg hold, dropped to his back, throwing Ki-Gor in a great spinning parabola for twenty feet across the room. Flesh slammed on stone, and Ki-Gor's sick grunt was abnormally loud.

Helene stood frozen at the side of the stone, sucking in great shuddering breaths, gently massaging the bruised muscles of her throat, seeing the battle through the gray mists of death that still covered her eyes. She took a single step to help her giant mate, almost fell from weakness, leaned again against the throne, helpless to interfere.

Rakolta came whirling in, looming like a black genie in the temple of light, his mouth a gaping red maw against which his teeth were a clear white. He laughed in triumph, took four great driving steps—and Ki-Gor lifted from the floor, smashing shoulder into belly, hurling the witch-doctor against the wall. There was no laughter in Rakolta now, and his face was twisted with the agony in his body, as he fell in a twisting heap to the floor.

Ki-Gor poised on the balls of his feet, watching, waiting for the man to rise, feeling the hate still surging in his heart. Rakolta came slowly erect, began to stalk the blond giant he faced.

Both were great then, swelling muscles rippling like gliding snakes beneath their skins, tendons finger-thick along their necks. But only in their bodies were they the same. Cold steadiness had come to the Jungle Lord, and he moved with the easy grace of a mandrill in battle, while Rakolta fought with the lumbering ferocity of a maddened gorilla.

"Remember P'aanga?" Ki-Gor said softly, and slipped in, his great hands spreading, catching the witch-doctor's upflung arm, clamping on it, drawing the man close. And then, for a fleeting second he loosed his hold, and his hands fled to Rakolta's throat.

Muscles bulged and knotted and bunched along Ki-Gor's shoulders, and his lips were tight against his teeth, and he drove the entire power of his body in a strangling hold that no man could break with force alone. He bent the witch-doctor back, seeing the agony in his face, shaking with

the passion that rode his mind.

"Remember the slaves?" he whispered, and his hands were ununlockable bands about the pulping flesh.

Rakolta smashed his knee into Ki-Gor's groin.

No man could have withstood the blow. Ki-Gor gasped, sucked in a shuddering breath, was blasted backward, Rakolta rolling free, his hands clawing at his throat.

And then sheer hell came to the temple of light; for the two men met again for the final time, battling with the naked ferocity of Neanderthal men, seeking to rend, to utterly destroy.

Bloody fingers gouged at Ki-Gor's face, nails raking like knives at his slitted eyes, streaking the skin with crimson cuts. And Ki-Gor blasted open-handed blows at the Negro's neck, trying to break the other's spine.

He felt the red ribbons of pain streaking through his head, but he gave them no heed, for he was all animal now, and nothing would satisfy him but Rakolta's death. He shifted his attack, catching the black's left arm, whirling, levering against it, his sheer speed and weight almost tearing it from the man's shoulder socket.

Rakolta screamed in agony, clubbed with knotted fist at Ki-Gor's neck, kicked suddenly, broke free. His arm was almost paralyzed, dangling at his side, as he spun to flee.

**K**I-GOR caught him on the second step, and he was walking death. His right hand slashed at the black's face, laid the cheek open as though ripped by a knife. His left hammered up, caught Rakolta in the throat, drove him back two full steps. Ki-Gor came rushing in, seeing only his foe now, both hands smashing in a two-handed attack that drove the black before him like a leaf before the storm.

Once he struck with his left; then his right whipped about, and his suddenly clenched fist smashed squarely into the apex of the witch-doctor's jaw.

Rakolta grunted, went slackly to the floor, his body rolling completely over before coming to a full stop. Then he was still, his eyes staring blankly at the glaring column of light.

The growl in Ki-Gor's throat was not human, but was the victory cry of a hunting beast. Almost at a crouch, he went forward, hands strained and grasping for the slack body of the unconscious witch-doctor.

"*Ki-Gor!*" The single word was a command and a prayer and a question.

The Jungle Lord paused in midstride, slowly straightened, the bloodlust fading from his eyes. He was a man again, and looseness came to his tense muscles as he turned to face his wife.

"Helene," he said simply, and was at her side, holding her close, feeling her warm tears on his mighty chest.

He was worn and spent and incredibly drained of his superb energy; but life was still in his heart, and for the moment he was very glad to be alive.

"I knew you would come," Helene whispered, smiled through her tears. "I knew that nothing could keep us apart."

Ki-Gor swallowed the choking lump in his throat, held her gently in the circle of his arms, letting the fragrance of her hair touch his senses, feeling relaxation coming to his heart.

"I thought for a time—" he began, then fell silent.

She sensed the thought that was in his mind, and a shiver touched her heart, for she could see the great spreading bruises and bloody scars that marked his body. She knew instinctively some of the battles that had been his, and for her then the world existed nowhere except within themselves.

She kissed him full on the mouth, and he savored the sweet warmth of her lips, pressing tight to her slender body, knowing that for him the world began and ended in her.

And in the midst of the kiss, Rakolta groaned. He groaned, and his hands scrambled on the floor with faint scratching sounds. Ki-Gor turned his head, and rigidity came to his great body.

For striking again and again with the knife she had retrieved from the floor, her gloating an evil thing twisting the beauty of her face, was the Silver Witch.

She laughed as she struck, and bright pulsing spurts of flooding crimson spurted high from Rakolta's body, stained her hands

and wrists and blue robe. She murdered the witch-doctor, even as the Jungle Lord and his mate gazed helplessly at the scene, then came swiftly to her feet, darted to the throne, tugged at the arm.

One second the body of Rakolta was in view; then it was dropping into the cavern of light beneath the temple, blazing jewels sliding in a clattering rush away from it when it struck.

"*It's there, pig, it's there,*" the Silver Witch exulted. "*Take it with you now.*"

Rakolta's hands slid deep into the flow of incredible wealth, moving as though alive, then stilled. And hissing from the depths of light came the angry challenge of the monster python.

Then the trap swung to, and the floor was even again; Rakolta had been paid in full for his treachery.

Ki-Gor turned, breaking from the thrall that had held him in its power, and knew that he could never beat the last kill-desire of the Silver Witch. Her hand came swinging up and back, and the bloody knife was a winging streak toward his mighty chest.

He could move, could evade the blade; but if he did, then Helene would sheath the knife in her body. There was no time to hurl her from its path, for but a fraction of time remained in which to move.

The Silver Witch laughed then, for she knew that she had finally won. She laughed, and the weird echoes swirled about her like a cloak, highlighting her ageless evil. She laughed—and the sound broke on a high note.

For driving from the opened door, taking the blade squarely in his chest was Umboto.

## XI

FOR an eternity in which all time stood still, the tableau held. The Silver Witch still stood, hand flicked out in the last action of hurling the blood-stained knife. Ki-Gor was braced before Helene, frozen motionless, his eyes just beginning to register his knowledge of that which was happening.

And dying, his chest skewered by the crimsoned steel, Umboto fell in a crumpling heap to the floor. His knees touched first, then his outflung hands, and lastly the knife, the weight of his body driving the blade

fully to the carven hilt.

He lay on the floor, almost on his side, and his eyes were clear of fear and grief and hate now; there was only a plea in them that drew Ki-Gor to his side.

"Revenge my wife and my people," he whispered, and died even while Ki-Gor nodded silently.

And then, as though in answer to the silent call the Silver Witch might have sent, a spear haft hammered on the temple door, and a guard cried for admittance.

"Enter!" cried Narini, laughed softly, as guards poured into the room in a glowing flood.

Twelve — thirteen — fifteen — eighteen — and still they came, forming into a shapeless mob across the room, obviously awed by the weirdness of the temple, yet herding together, pressed there by the men who came after.

They formed no ranks, and Ki-Gor felt a dull wonder creeping into his mind when he saw that only the first carried any weapon, and that a single spear.

Thirty-one — thirty-two — thirty-three — and there were no more of the guards, for these were the people still living from the cataclysm of centuries before, these were the remnants of a once-proud race that had ruled the entire continent.

And slowly the laughter faded from the eyes of the Silver Witch, was replaced by puzzlement, for none of the newcomers spoke. They gazed instead at the door through which they had come, and the terror on their faces grew deeper by the minute.

"What is it, you fools?" the Silver Witch screamed. "Why do you not seize these people?"

And answering her question, striding loose-limbed and dangerous through the doorway, came Tembu George.

He walked like a conqueror, a great sword swinging in his hand, blood staining his massive body, a wide grin on his face when he saw the Silver Witch in Ki-Gor's grasp.

"Ho, Ki-Gor," he roared. "I bring you a gift."

"Two gifts," a second voice cried, and N'Geeso came through the doorway, care-

4—Jungle—Spring

fully carrying a great pottery jug in his muscular arms.

They came together, side by side across the temple, and behind them, pouring in a macabre throng through the portal were the slaves of the Silver Witch, slaves no longer, for they held weapons in their glowing hands, and death was a shadow in their eyes.

"No!" Narini whispered, stretched her hands toward the huge jug N'Geeso carried. "No!"

KI-GOR caught her by her slender arm, held her motionless, while the pygmy slowly lowered the burden to the floor. He straightened, grinning.

"Ho, elephant, we fight well together."

"Silence, wart," Tembu George said condescendingly. "Else I shall add you to my prisoners."

Ki-Gor gestured for silence, his gaze steady on the proud face of the great Masai Chieftain. "What has happened?" he asked. "How could you rouse the slaves and capture their masters?"

Tembu George tapped the jug with his sword, and a soundless murmur of dread tightened the former guards into a small huddle. The Silver Witch sucked in her breath, and Ki-Gor felt her muscles go taut within his grasp.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The elixir," N'Geeso said proudly. "This elephant and I raided a great room, slew three guards, took all of the juju medicine they had made. We are the masters now, for these dangoes do not dare fight, for fear I shall destroy their only way of becoming men again."

"What of Umboto?" Tembu George said, seeing the slack body near his feet.

Ki-Gor told of what had happened, describing tersely his fight below the temple, and of the death of Rakolta. Anger flared in the blacks' eyes, and they turned slowly to face the Silver Witch. She cowered back, knowing that death lay but a pace away.

"Please?" she whispered. "I was not to blame; Rakolta forced me to—" She went silent before the blazing contempt in Ki-Gor's eyes.

Then the Jungle Lord was lifting the jug, holding it so that Helene could drink. "One

cup," he said. "Drink two large swallows, Helene."

Helene drank the dark liquid that filled the jug, drank, and gasped from its foul taste. But with that drink would come normal life again, and with it went the last of her fears.

Ki-Gor gave the jug to Tembu George, who handed his sword to N'Geeso. He took the jug, faced the crowding prisoners of the Silver Witch.

"I promised you this," he said, and a swelling cry, a muted animal cry of thanksgiving, hope and prayer echoed his words.

"Two swallows each," Ki-Gor said. "Is there enough?"

"More than enough," Tembu George said slowly, "for many of the slaves are dead."

Narini straightened. "You cannot," she cried. "You cannot waste the elixir on those blacks."

"You first," Tembu George said, and handed the jug to the first slave.

And at last all of the prisoners had been served their antidote to the devil's curse that lay in their bodies. They backed away from Ki-Gor and again faced the muttering men who had been their slave-masters.

Ki-Gor balanced the almost empty jug in the cradle of one arm, faced the Masai. "Now?" he asked quietly.

Tembu George spoke a name, and a former slave stepped from the glowing ranks of his freed people. He came to the side of Tembu George, stood patiently.

"This man knows the secret path to safety," said Tembu George. "He will guide us."

**N**ARINI moved slowly, her silver face strained with impotent fury.

"You fools, you utter blind fools," she hissed. "It will take ten of your lifetimes to make more of that elixir, enough for all of us."

She caught at the jug, had it before the astounded Ki-Gor could pull it from her grasp. She had it and was running about the throne, lifting the jug until her lips were at the mouth.

She drank then, drank with great pulsing breaths, had swallowed five times before Ki-Gor could wrench the jug away. She laughed scornfully, triumphantly, into his face, and

her words were mocking flat sounds.

"I shall win," she cried, "I shall win as I have always done. I have drunk the elixir, and I shall—"

She screamed, and agony contorted her body, her slim hands clawing at her throat.

The Silver Witch was changing.

She had been slim and virginal and beautiful, her silver hair a bright cap over her soft features, her gentle curves swelling against the blueness of her robe.

She had lived for thousands of years, kept alive by the mysterious radiance permeating her realm. She had been old when history was young, and the passing centuries had not marked her for their own.

But now . . .

She had drunk the elixir, had drunk it as had the slaves; but her body had been different than theirs, and the radiations had touched hers longer. Perhaps she had misjudged the quantity that she must drink, because of the speed of the moment; but the elixir had betrayed her just as she had betrayed all those who had trusted her.

She was changing now, the fine lines of age coming to her silver skin, sucking in the flesh like a withered apple, drawing it tight over the bones, crippling her and drawing her to half her former height.

Her eyes, so keen and ageless, grew dark and stormy, watery with glowing tears, and the lids were hairless, veined, tight against the shrunken orbs beneath.

Her hands were claws now, instead of the firm fingers and palms that had touched Ki-Gor's arms, and muscles were wrinkled and knotty in the gnarled flesh of her wrists and arms.

She screamed again and again, and her voice became cracked and aged, drying slowly into a squeak that held no resemblance to anything human, her teeth fell like small gleaming stones from her mouth, and her lips shriveled, the cheeks sinking in until her face was like that of a skull.

The blue robe slipped from her dwarfing body, and she rolled upon the floor, her body scrawny and attenuated, her hands beating in a frenzy of agony on the floor.

Horror swelled in the temple room, swelled and grew into a sense of madness, for that which was happening was beyond belief. The prisoners cried aloud in frantic

terror, huddled tight against themselves, and the deathless people of the Silver Witch were silent, seeing something happening to their leader such as they could not recall.

She was three feet high now, sucked into herself, her skin like the dusty leather encasing a mummy's body, her arms and legs bowed and twisted with incredible age, almost on hands and knees now, torn by the incredible spasms that rocked her body.

"Juju!" N'Geeso whispered, and crossed himself with a counter-juju mark, spat through his circled arms.

Ki-Gor tried to turn away, but horror held him fast. He shielded Helene from the sight, knowing that never would the memory of this go from their brains.

And then the Silver Witch reached the climax of her transformation. She was silver no longer, the glow burned forever from her body. She was a living shrunken mummy, threshing over the floor. She spun to her feet, tottered close to the pillar of light.

Hate burned in her eyes, all of the evil hate that centuries had stored within her withered mind. Her shrunken arms lifted in a final curse, and her reedy voice screeched a message that had no meaning, for the words were not words, but the maddened ravings of a distorted mind.

She died horribly, even more terribly than she had lived. She was almost a skeleton now, the parchment-like skin clinging to her bones. And even as the horrified throng watched, her body collapsed into itself, the leathery skin flaking away, breaking into dust when it struck the stone floor. The body collapsed entirely from its meager weight, and white twisted bones shone brightly through the powder of the desiccated flesh.

And the Silver Witch was no more.

"Aaaaaa!" A final cry of terror raced the room.

KI-GOR strode forward then, catching up the blue robe that had masked Narini's loveliness, brushed all that remained of the Silver Witch into the column of light, the bones clattering brittlely as they fell into the crypt of light she had guarded for so long. The blue robe fluttered from the jungle giant's hands, disappeared into the column of light.

Then Ki-Gor turned about, and his tone was level, so steady it shocked sanity back into the minds of his listeners.

"Narini is gone," he said, "and her reign of terror is over."

Moving voluntarily, swinging about with a common purpose that needed no commands, the prisoners herded their former masters out of the chamber of death, until at last Ki-Gor and Helene stood alone with Tembu George and the body of Umboto.

"Bring him," Ki-Gor said gently. "We shall bury him outside the swamp, where the sun can touch his grave, and his friends can mourn his passing."

The dim echoes of their feet on the worn steps were friendly now, for death did not stalk their backs. They walked in the warmth that came from many moons of being together, and peace was again in their hearts.

Ahead, N'Geeso beckoned from an open door, and the jungle couple entered, surveying the crowd.

"What shall we do, O Ki-Gor?" a former slave asked, pointing at the former masters.

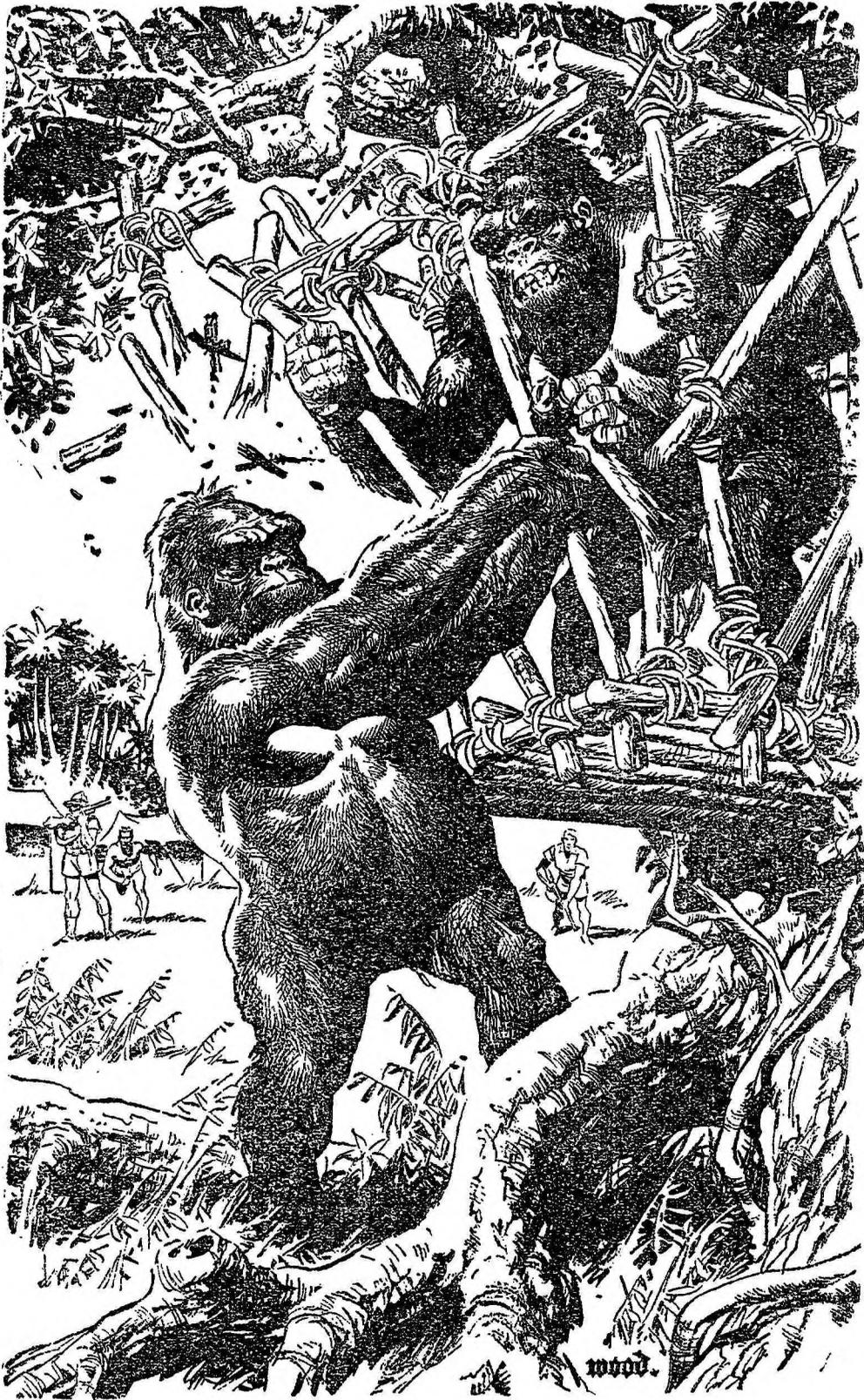
Ki-Gor shook his head, seeing that the newly appointed guide stood at their side, and that Tembu George was poised in the doorway of the arch leading to outside, the body of Umboto still in his arms.

"It is not for me to say, for you are the wronged," he said quietly, went through the crowd of former prisoners toward the doorway where Tembu George waited.

He paused there, Helene and N'Geeso at his side, heard the spokesman make the sentence that was the common thought of all the freed men.

"Hear me, O silver men. From now until eternity shall you dwell in this, your city. Death shall await you outside of the swamp, for guards will be there from the time we can place them outside the waters of this place. You cannot raid again, for we shall know you are men, and our weapons shall thirst for your blood."

He kicked the jug, the liquid running onto the floor, disappearing almost instantly into the cracks in the floor. And a final cry came from the men who had murdered hundreds of slaves that the elixir might be created. Never again could it be prepared, for Narini, who held its secret, was gone.



*Kongnor rushed forward, screaming, straight for the hanging cage.*

# GORILLA! GORILLA!

By ANSON SLAUGHTER

There was a strange, disquieting tenseness around the gorilla feeding grounds this hot Congo morning. Before the sun sank behind Mt. Kivu—the troop knew—the wild, young bull Sarto, envy goading him, would risk fight with Kongnor, the troop's great but aged silver-backed leader.

THERE wasn't a muscle in the old gorilla's body moving a fraction of an inch. His black eyes, hard and bright, flicked right and left every moment and his flaring nostrils quivered with every vagrant eddy of steaming air. But his huge dark bulk was otherwise motionless on the slope above the jungle clearing. The silver-gray hair of his back and shoulders scintillated in the sun, reflecting the tenseness of his body.

For hours, ever since the pack had risen from their matted sleeping grass, Kongnor, the old leader had been alert. It was a new danger which disturbed the silver-back. All his years and all his wiseness failed to tell what the danger was, where it was, or when it might come. He knew somehow that it was coming. His keen sense of smell was strained to the utmost, his sensitive ears burned with the effort, but he learned only of the usual Kivu Forest activities.

Dik-dik were constantly near in the deep green bush. Rhinos thundered far off by the river bank. Earth-shaking hippos yawned and wallowed. Porcupine scurried past, and the leader noted each in turn. Even leopards, three of them that morning, came uncomfortably close, but that traditional enemy of the gorilla was disregarded. Some more powerful distraction was imminent. Some great mysterious danger was approaching.

The females and the young ones, twenty black beasts in all, idled in the clearing, eating bamboo shoots and wild celery, squatting in groups in the lush green undergrowth, but the watchful old one waited, crouched on the rise, a huge scowling protector of his pack.

The Congo morning was hot and humid

and green. The tangled bush was higher than the biggest of the gorillas, a six foot sea of waving grass and twining round-stem vine. Around the wild rose and coarse celery, hanging fern and 'rukungangeri' with yellow blossoms were laced in intricate profusion. Maiden hair fern and pink lobelia added spots of color to eternal green. In spite of the intense heat there were wisps of vapor trailing in the deeply shadowed areas at the base of bamboo trees, fragrant veils of steaming air that swirled and floated and vanished in the quiet of the morning. Above it all the hard brilliance of the leader's eyes watched the pack and sought for a glimpse of the approaching danger.

The gorilla feeding ground was in a narrow valley below Mt. Kivu. One end of the valley ended at the brink of a sharp cleft in the hills, a stony slash in the earth at right angle to the valley. From beyond this ravine faint sounds now reached the old giant's ears, the drums of man. Like a soft echo of his own steady pulse, the rhythm of the drums could only be heard when no other sound rose above the eternal small sounds of the jungle. The old one intensified his concentration to follow the distant sound of the drums against the rustling of his troop in the clearing, against the quick crackling of stripped wild celery and lobelia hearts. Imperceptibly the throbbing grew stronger.

Then the big young bull gorilla, the oldest of the troop except for the leader, the strong, hostile young-blood of the pack, heard the drums too. He dropped his pretense of casual loafing to stand motionless, a vigorous, vibrant young beast, looking

across the ravine toward the approaching sound. Sarto had been anything but casual during the idle morning feeding. He had been watching Kongnor, following the old one with persistent eyes, calculating, crafty and envious.

His attitude said he was deliberately unconcerned in any of the movements of his leader, but he had never for a moment failed to observe every action and expression of the old one. He was waiting. He had been waiting for weeks and would wait more weeks if necessary, but eventually he would challenge Kongnor—fight for the supremacy of the troop. Sarto was young and strong, he was a full-grown and proud gorilla, and he wanted to be the master of the troop. It was inevitable that in the end he would be a leader—the master of the females and the protector of the young. If not of his own troop, then he would fight for and win another family.

If he could battle his own leader and kill him, that was his destiny. If the wisdom and experience and battle skill of the leader was too much for him, he would be killed or driven off to seek another fight in another range. So he gauged his opportunities carefully and planned his attack and waited for the one best moment.

WITH the rhythm of the drums openly beating against the deepest fibres of Kongnor's brain, the old one moved. All the troop heard the drums then and they stirred restlessly. The females were bunched together, the young pushed into concealing holes in the matted jungle growth. The leader rose from his crouch and stood almost erect, his head raised, his great arms thrust upward. Slowly his doubled fists thudded down against his breast, pounding an alarm and warning. He dropped to all fours and raced down to the center of the clearing. There he paused to push down impatiently at a too-slowly moving youngster, knocking it sprawling towards the females.

Without further communications with his family Kongnor moved purposefully toward the upper end of the valley. His troop followed silently, strung out without apparent intention of concerted action, but nevertheless achieving a positive and efficient file. Immediately behind the leader the

young bull took his place.

The silver-back seemed completely indifferent to Sarto's hostility and open envy. The old one had known however, when the first glimmerings of the lust for power had been born in the bull. The leader's wise old eyes had missed none of the signs so plainly written. He had known for weeks, and he too waited. When the challenge came he would defend his position. With fang and sinew he would fight, as ferociously as he knew, as craftily as his age and long experience would enable him, as desperately as his undefeated will would drive him. Until that time he was the leader and his duty was plain.

On higher ground the troop passed from the lush green verdure to the slopes of the bamboo forest. The throb of the drums kept pace with them, even came closer. Then suddenly before them, directly in the path of the leader, a new sound came to them. Men! Men were ahead of them. There were no drums before them. There was only man smell and man noises, close ahead. There must have been a planned approach by the hunters, with a party with drums to drive the gorillas into the head of their main column.

The leader stopped short and barked his commands. The troop melted into the bush, all the females and the young ones. Sarto stayed where he was, just behind the leader. Again Kongnor barked shortly, but the younger gorilla did not move. With quick strides, swinging on his long forearms, knuckles to the ground, the leader came back, crashing heavily into Sarto, knocking him off balance.

The only response to this action was a snarling, throaty defiance from Sarto. Eye to eye the pair crouched in silent conflict, the younger one scowling in furious rebellion. Then he turned away from the leader. The time was not yet for fulfilling his instinct to dominate. This was not the place.

But the old silver-back was not content to let the young one show his mutinous envy and get off so easy. He lunged forward suddenly, before Sarto had completely turned, and with tremendous blows flailed the younger beast on back and shoulders, ramming him to the ground. Under the

weight of the leader Sarto crouched on the ground, covering his head.

Kongnor's anger evaporated. The sight of one of his troop, his family, taking punishment like a new born infant, cowering on the ground, was too familiar a sight to him to permit further discipline. As the father of the troop he had so often emphasized his commands with just such treatment and such customary reaction, that he lost his anger. He cuffed the young one on the flank and swung away, concerned again more with the sound of approaching alien threats than with juvenile menace to his authority.

The slope where the troop was hidden was sleeping under the morning sun. The air was hot and damp and still, the ground burning. In bamboo thickets and concealing grasses the motionless haze stifled the pack, but no movement could be detected. It was as though the area was completely deserted, waiting for something. Purple patches of shadow thrown by the thick foliage were impenetrable to the eye.

The men came slowly into the sight of the troop. Hidden in the bamboo a score of pairs of black curious eyes glittered and waited. The leader stood on all fours, frozen into immobility, tensed and alert. He expected the file of men to keep moving, to pass through the area, as such files of men usually did, not bothering to look aside from their path too carefully, unaware of the presence of the family of gorillas about them.

**T**HE safari made an unexpected move however. The first men in the line were blacks, naked men bearing loads upon their heads. Then two blacks in khaki shorts each carrying rifles. Then three white men, fully dressed in breeches and tunics and leather boots, followed by a long file of many more blacks burdened with bundles and harnessed with swinging leather cases and packs strapped to their bodies. Four men in one little group staggered under the weight of a bamboo cage suspended from poles across their shoulders.

In the midst of the concealed troop of beasts the white men shouted commands. The safari halted and the file broke up in noisy confusion. Men moved in all direc-

tions, pulling out folding seats, tables, cots and canvas shelters. The savages jabbered and built fires. The three men in the center of all the busy group were seated in camp chairs, fanning themselves and giving occasional orders.

Scarcely a hundred feet from the men Kongnor knew a moment of despair. He cast about wildly for some avenue of escape, some way out of the situation which trapped them. Not for himself, but for all the members of his family. It would be almost impossible for the females and infants to move away undetected. The old one considered briefly the possibility of charging the men and scattering them, giving his troop time to escape the attention of the hunters. But it was a useless hope. He scanned the circle of men about the several smoking cook fires, peering for a sign of some vulnerability. He swept the valley with calculating gaze, and here and there he saw some of his females in the bush. He had no way of knowing if the men too could see them.

Possibly the one single deterrent to the gorilla's dominance of the jungle as the mammoth of strength and power he really is, might be his ignorance of his power. Since the gorilla has no way of knowing that his own phenomenal strength is so many times greater than man's, his weight twice a big man's, his agility and endurance so far above not only man's but also that of many another creature, he therefore is reluctant to contest with other creatures. He has not the confidence he really deserves. He does not know how his force compares with other beasts, how superior he is. Unless driven by desperation or straightforward attack, the gorilla does not seek combat. He is no coward, he will defend himself and his troop against any odds, but if he once came to know that man would be a helpless weakling in his grasp, or that even his lifelong enemy, the leopard, would collapse under a single blow from his huge arm, then he might be inclined to enjoy a mastery over other jungle animals.

The enforced skulking in the bush began to torment Kongnor. He fretted about his pack, he worried and scowled and rumbled deep in his chest. Then suddenly he sprang erect as the brash Sarto, concealed nearby, moved noisily and clumsily. Immediately

there was an uproar in the men's camp. The young gorilla was in full view of the entire camp.

The leader bounded into the open, screaming his warnings and commands to his females. At his furious growls and screams the troop dashed back from their hidden positions, all in one concerted rush up the slope of Mt. Kivu, disappearing among the bamboos. Only the young hot-blooded beast remained, with the leader.

Furious at the lack of caution, the stupid clumsy betrayal of their position, Kongnor jumped from one tree trunk to another, barking orders at the young fool to follow the females. Experience had taught the wise old one to move rapidly from one place to another in the presence of men. He moved swiftly from bush to tree, casting fearful glances at the last of the youngsters as they faded into the undergrowth up the mountain slope, watching the men as they moved in the lower area, shouting and pointing. Still the bull gorilla did not retreat upward, but rose on his legs, thrumming his chest and screaming at the men.

The hunters did not use their rifles. Quick words were passed along. Nets and ropes were being dragged out. The white men wanted live specimens, for sale at big prices, and they were determined to shoot only if they must.

In a frenzy at the defiance the young bull was screaming at the men, Kongnor rushed back and forth, loath to go and leave a member of his troop in danger. By then the men were approaching directly to where the two gorillas were in plain view. The men carried a net on four slender poles, and ropes held between two blacks at a good safe distance. Warily they approached until Kongnor could no longer force himself to remain. He bounded back still barking and rumbling, stopping from time to time as close as he dared. Then the young bull too began to retreat, but for him it was too late. A swift thrust of the poles bearing the net, and encircling by the men with ropes, and the defiant Sarto was caught, struggling mightily.

**T**HE cries of the captured gorilla were almost drowned out by the triumphant and excited yells of the natives and the

white hunters. Struggling and biting frenziedly Sarto was dragged across the tangle of grass toward the camp. Several times the unfortunate beast attempted to rush his captors, enveloped in the net as he was, but the men with the long ropes held him tight between them, pulled in both directions, causing him to stumble and crash, with the net drawn ever tighter.

To old silver-backed Kongnor still concealed in the bush, the cries and roars of the bull were demanding and insistent. To the old one the event of the capture was more than a narrow escape for himself, more than a danger still present; it was a demand on his instinctive obligation to his troop. One of his family was in great danger.

In the camp savages rushed about shouting, "M'kubwa! Oh til Oh ti! N'guvu sana! M'bya sana!" Kongnor on the hill saw them drag together lattices of wired bamboo and short lengths of wire rope, yelling gleefully. The words escaped him but he was in no doubt as to the general meaning of their exuberance. With a heavy sorrow he watched as they wired together a small strong cage, building it around the trussed gorilla. Then when the men dropped their work and stepped away, he could see Sarto crouching in the cage. With a thick wire the men hoisted the cage a few feet off the ground under the limb of a tree.

The mounting sun made a deep pool of shade under the tree, a dark shadowy green circle rimmed by brilliant yellow. The figures of the men there moved slowly now, stirring up cook fires again and gathering in groups to chatter. The straining eyes of the old leader scrutinized the area, examining every foot of the camp. He saw then that there was another cage on the ground not far from the tree, and that in that cage another captive raged and snarled. A leopard, tawny yellow in the green shade, moving restlessly in its too small prison, red maw snarling and spitting. A revulsion and a cold shudder passed over the old gorilla. His lifelong hate, the leopard—an old unreasoned, unjustified hate—but stronger than his courage. The sight of the cat distracted him, caused his huge body to sway from side to side with the pent up excitement of nerves strained beyond his habit.

Then his eyes were again held by the gorilla in the cage, and he became calmer.

When Kongnor was satisfied he had seen everything in the camp, he moved toward the central tree. Swinging along noiselessly and keeping low in the tall grass, he reached a point on the rim of the camp about a hundred feet from the suspended cage. There he waited again for a long moment, intent and silent. He was close to the other cage, the leopard's prison. The hateful smell of the cat assailed him, striking deep in his belly.

Kongnor couldn't make a plan, develop a strategy for the rescue of his young male. He exercised every caution he had acquired over the years of his jungle life, he took what opportunities and advantages presented themselves to him, instinctively, but he knew only one manner of action. He rushed forward screaming, straight for the hanging cage, his great weight pounding the earth as he charged.

The men of the camp were again thrown into confusion, but this time they had no nets or ropes ready. They flew in all directions, out of the huge gorilla's path. In a few bounds the leader was at the suspended cage. In less time than it took the hunters to survey the situation Kongnor and Sarto together tore at the springy bamboo bars, roaring and thrashing. By grasping at the shorter grass and roots of the ground beneath the cage, the rescuer added his weight to his prodigious strength, dragging the tough bars from their lashings. The anthropoid foot afforded the beast an extra purchase on the ground. His powerful jaws snapped and cut ropes and uprights, and his bulging muscles tore the cage apart. With the excited Sarto swelling his chest and arching his back inside the cage, the tremendous power of their combined strengths was too much for any man-made trap.

With a noisy splintering and cracking the tough bars shot in all directions, releasing the young bull. Then the two black figures were on the ground chattering defiance at the camp. Perhaps because of a deep-rooted paternal sentiment or because he wanted to speed the freed young male on his way back to the safe jungle, Kongnor gave Sarto a mighty long-armed swipe which

lifted the other completely off the ground. The young male landed scrambling, and churned dirt and grass roots into a hail of rubble as he lunged from the camp.

The white hunters had their guns close to hand and were leveling them as the silver-back swung around to follow. For a moment Kongnor rose high, his thick arms extended, then he dived for the bush. A sharp crack split the golden haze across the camp. The dry grass rustled in a course toward the slope of Mt. Kivu. More reports came from the white hunters' guns, each a clear sharp sound which stilled all the other jungle sounds. The reports ceased as the path of the rescuer grew still again, as no further sight of either gorilla was gained.

**F**AR up the slope of Kivu Kongnor moved more and more slowly toward the retreat taken by his females and young. His great hulking black frame was crouched low on the path, bunched over, one thick arm hugging his belly. It might seem that his prodigious strength was no longer capable of carrying his weight. Slowly and deliberately the other long arm reached out ahead and pulled him forward and upward, his legs dragging and stumbling. Every few minutes he rested, hugging the path.

Through dimmed eyes and fogged mind another danger came to the silver-back. Somewhere behind him he caught the sound of movement on the path. Not the noise of man, nor of big jungle animals. It was more like the stealthy soft padding of a leopard.

With torn fingers and a burning in his vitals he scrambled upward, lunging dizzily now and again, falling repeatedly. He must join his females, his troop, or be torn to ribbons by the vicious attacker gaining on him every moment.

The smell of the leopard was close. For an instant Kongnor thought to crawl into the twisted undergrowth beside the trail, to lie in the concealing grasses. But the leopard would smell him out. In such difficult terrain the outcome of a battle with the leopard would have been doubtful whatever his condition. Injured as he was, he knew a moment of panic and hopelessness.

After a few minutes which seemed hours Kongnor came into a bare rocky clearing above the bamboo tree line. A few dogwood-like plants and bay trees grew in clusters on the dry slope. At this little clearing two paths presented themselves, one the rising trail up Kivu, the other a dipping course into a donga running between two minor peaks. The silver-back took the lower road dropping into the familiar 'tunnels of thorn' which had been constructed by gorillas as retreats in time of threatened invasion of their usual precincts. Here the going was easier but the leopard too could follow faster.

The 'tunnels of thorn' were literally tunnels, paths through the complicated thorn bushes, built by the pushing of heavy black-haired bodies through a sea of tough branches, covered over by twigs and tall grasses pulled down and caught in thorns. The tunnels were thus eternally shaded, dusky even at midday, cooler by virtue of drafts created, and high enough for gorillas to traverse at a crouch. The ravine was a maze of such tunnels, all criss-crossing to form a network of roads by which any part of the donga could be reached.

**H**ERE the gorilla troop waited for the leader. In a junction deep in the ravine, Kongnor saw the females waiting for him. There were some of the younger ones beyond in a tunnel on the opposite side of the junction. The old one came slowly, deliberately, looking only ahead, intent on reaching his females.

When Sarto, now freed and again full of assurance and vibrant with power, rose from a squatting position at one side of the clearing, Kongnor paused. Behind him, entering the tunnel from the rocky knoll, the crackling and swishing of the leopard's passage was clear.

The hot-blooded Sarto looked from the sagging old leader to the females. All had caught the smell of leopard, and the troop began to leap away. The bull's fierce glare was crossed by a flickering uncertainty, then he too dropped his long arms to the ground preparatory to a swinging rush from the hated cat, the dread leopard's disembowel-

ing claws, the slashing fang of the furred killer.

Across the few yards separating them the voice of Kongnor broke through Sarto's panic. There was to be no deviating from the traditional way of life for the leader. Instinct ruled their lives, their way of life, their way of death. Not because he was mortally injured would Kongnor allow the young bull to fail in an inherited duty. Kongnor gathered his legs under him and roared out his command, his pain, his challenge. At full height, his life flowing from him in bright red threads, he drummed his chest and faced his adversary on his feet.

To the young bull the call was too strong to ignore. This was his time. Sarto faced Kongnor and screamed back his own challenge, the challenge of the young. Then, unmindful of any other sight or sound or smell, he charged.

The tremendous force of Sarto's rush slashed through the old gorilla's flailing arms. The young maw was thrust forward, long teeth seeking the old throat. In a fleeting moment it was over. So quickly it was done Kongnor had no opportunity to inflict but a single wound in his own defense. It was only a scratch, the drawing of a long tough thumb nail across the black face of the young one. But it was a wound. As the old life ebbed, as he lay on the tunnel floor, senses fading, he knew he had fought his best.

Black leaping shapes filled the old eyes, softened now. His troop was flying along the tunnel, away from him. Sarto, the new leader, was the last to go. The noise of the leopard was closer. Barking commands, strangely similar to those of the earlier morning given by another protector of the troop, the new master of the females followed them.

The old silver-back was done. Although he could still hear the tearing sound of the leopard's swift approach, he could no longer smell the cat. There was no fear in Kongnor's belly, only a warmth at his throat, a comfortable feeling. He lingered in a warm peaceful quietness. Then, before the leopard reached him, there was nothing at all. -

Sgt. 1st Class  
Einar H. Ingman  
U. S. Army  
Medal of Honor



**T**HE REDS IN AMBUSH on the ridge had lain concealed, withholding their fire. Now they opened up. The two squads were trapped. Their leaders were wounded; others were dropping.

Sergeant Ingman took command. He reorganized the survivors, assigned fields of fire, encouraged the men to fight. A red machine gun opened fire. The sergeant charged it alone, hit it with a grenade.

Then he tackled another gun. A grenade and a burst of fire knocked him down, badly wounded. He got up, reached the gun, and dispatched the entire crew. When his squad reached him, they found Sergeant Ingman unconscious—but 100 of the enemy fleeing in panic.

“Bucking the Communists,” says Sergeant Ingman, “takes an awful lot of staying power. The G.I.’s have got it. You have, too, when you invest part of your hard-earned pay *regularly* in U. S. Defense Bonds.”

Bonds are first of all a cash saving for you. But they’re also back of our country’s *production power*. Which couples up with G. I. *fire power* to keep the peace for all.

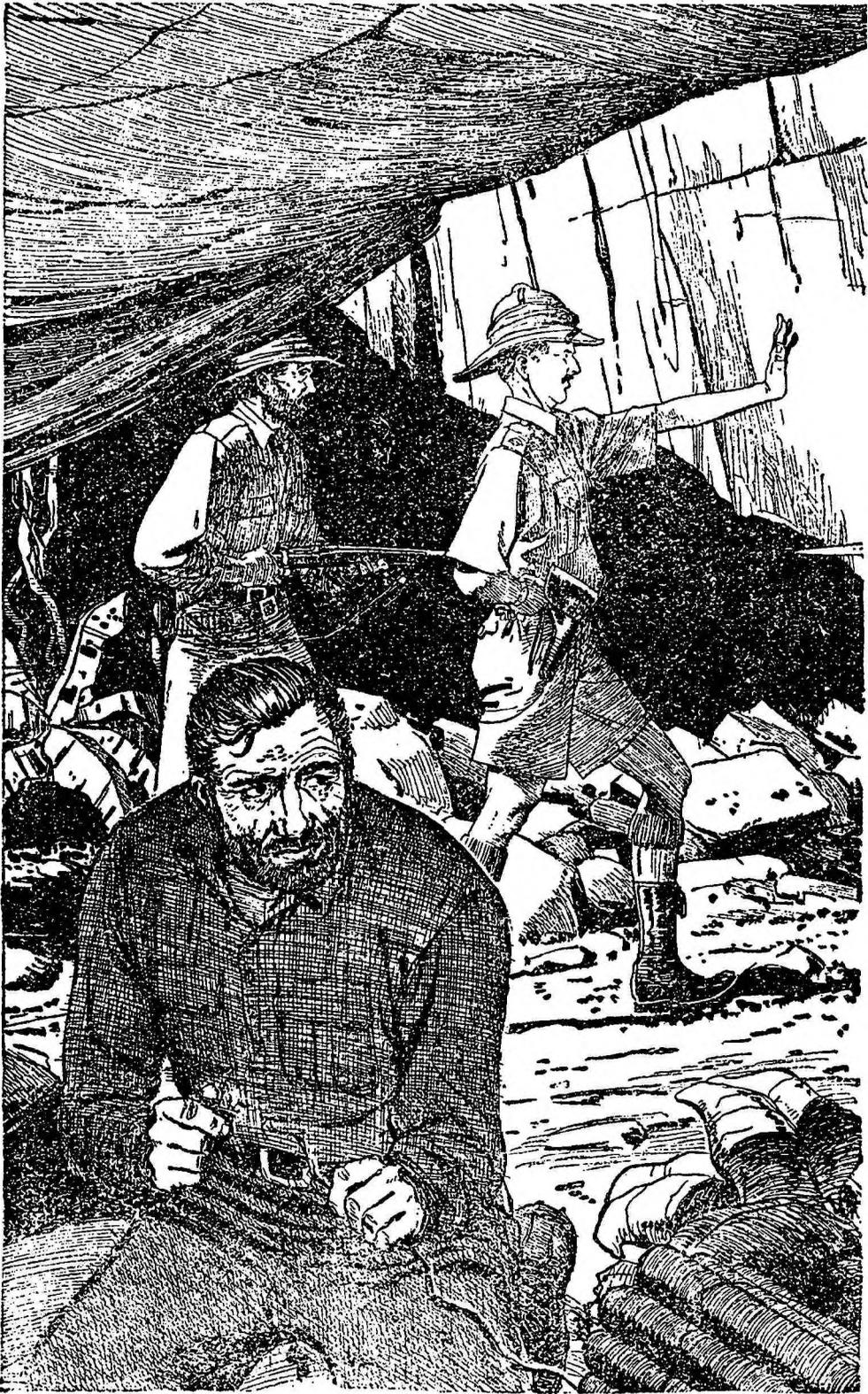
Peace is for the strong!  
For peace and prosperity save with  
U. S. Defense Bonds!

Now E Bonds pay 3%! Now, improved Series E Bonds start paying interest after 6 months. And average 3% interest, compounded semi-annually when held to maturity! Also, all *maturing* E Bonds automatically *go on earning*—at the new rate—for 10 *more* years. Today, start investing in Series E Defense Bonds through the Payroll Savings Plan.

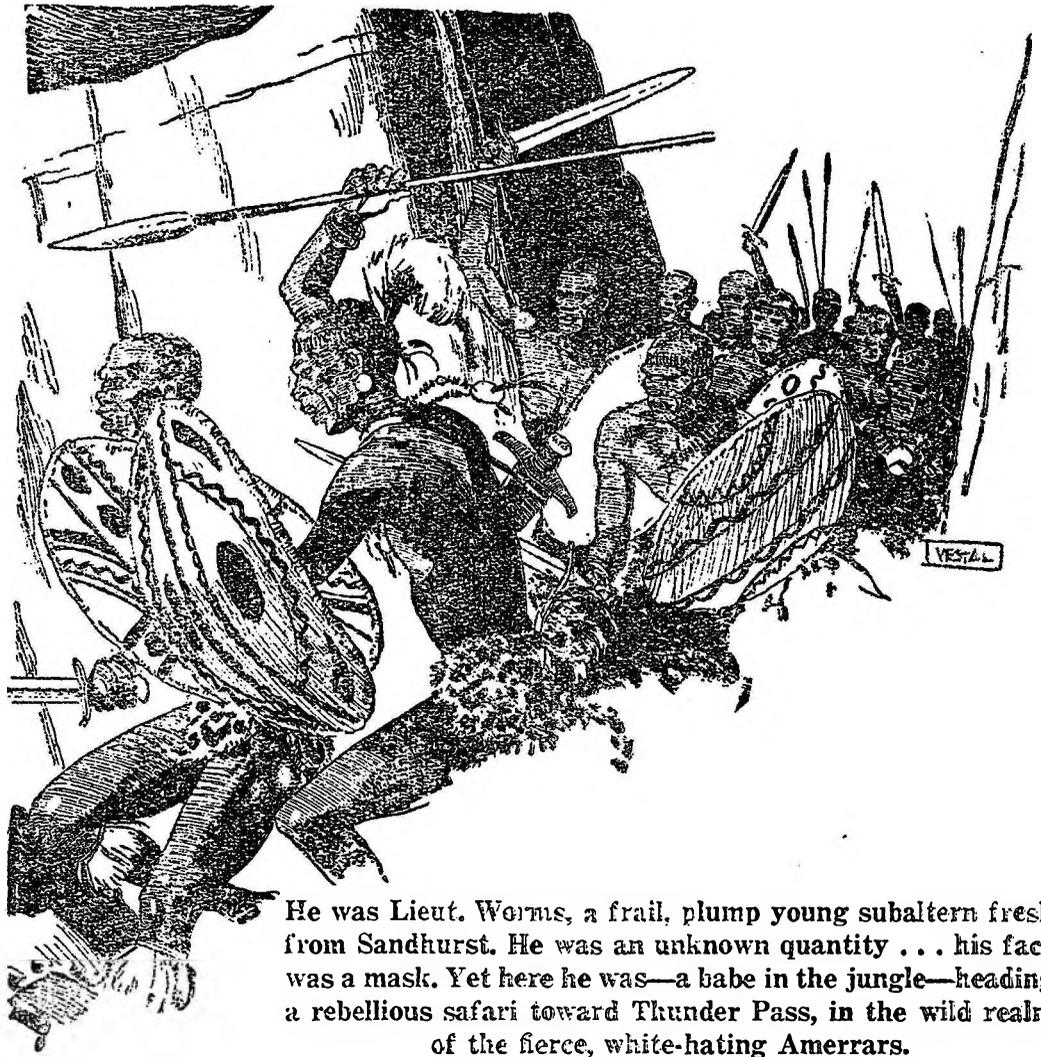


The U. S. Government does not pay for this advertisement. It is donated by this publication in cooperation with the Advertising Council and the Magazine Publishers of America.





*It was astounding. Frail Lieut. Worms walked boldly toward the warriors . . . and death was on every side of him.*



He was Lieut. Worms, a frail, plump young subaltern fresh from Sandhurst. He was an unknown quantity . . . his face was a mask. Yet here he was—a babe in the jungle—heading a rebellious safari toward Thunder Pass, in the wild realm of the fierce, white-hating Amerrars.

# ANGEL IN THE JUNGLE

By LAWTON FORD

I'VE SEEN a look of contempt on the face of a man . . . seen it more than once, here and there. In Uganda, when Spenser Frost looked at Lieutenant Worms, I saw the essence of contempt, and a furious resentment.

Frost had risen and was waiting by the flap of our big tent when the lieutenant came into camp. Long shadows of the tawny sun-down lay across the cleared space where our fires were built and our baggage stacked. The newcomer's three porters stopped and

squatted with our boys, too driven by exhaustion to pretend they weren't completely fagged out, but the white man in his tight tunic and his creased shorts was dapper and trim. He looked as though he hadn't trekked a mile.

"Mr. Frost?" The visitor spoke in a very clipped manner. "I am Worms, Assistant District Commissioner." He didn't wait for my boss to answer, but sauntered in and dropped onto a cot. He dug a little curved pipe out of his big uniform pocket. "Sit

down, old fellow. We've got to chin a bit."

I don't blame Frost for not being able to answer. The Boss was younger than I, quite a lot, but he was over thirty-five anyway, and this lad in the colonial army uniform was about twenty-one. "Sit down, old fellow," he said to Frost, draped nonchalantly across my cot, not giving a tinker's dam for the fact that he was talking to the roughest and hardest safari leader in all of Eastern Equatorial Africa.

I had at first intended to make myself scarce, for I had foreseen a major conflagration when these two met, but after that introduction wild elephants couldn't have pulled me away. I got a glimpse of the Boss's face when he looked at the lieutenant, and I stayed.

Spenser Frost's reply was a strangled cry. I think he said, "You whelp!", or "God help us!" but no one could be sure. Certainly Lieutenant Worms didn't understand.

"Beg pardon?" he muttered, drawing intently on that funny little pipe.

"I said 'Get up!'" the Boss ground out then. "Who asked you in here?" His freckled knuckles were gleaming.

"Get up?" Worms asked. "I say, don't let's be a bore, shall we? We've no time for that. Sit down, old fellow, and let's compare notes." When Frost didn't answer, remaining frozen by the tent flap, Worms looked up surprised. "Is anything wrong?"

"What's wrong is that you're here," Frost said finally. "I didn't ask for you."

The newcomer was looking at me as the Boss spoke, so I introduced myself. "Jack Reilly. I work for Mr. Frost now and then." Lieutenant Worms acknowledged this with an absent nod. He looked back up to Frost.

"The D.C.'s orders," Worms was explaining mildly, with a curious expression. "By the way, I'm in charge here now."

That's what really stopped Frost. Worms was in fact in charge as soon as he arrived. We had orders from the District Commission . . . he was sending his Assistant up to take charge of our expedition. We were told to wait for him. Even Paul Laurent, the game warden who hired Frost to do this job, didn't have the authority to ignore the D.C.

Frost remained standing, his unshaven face somewhat shadowed above the cone of light from the lantern we had going. "Okay,

you're in charge," he said. If you could see Worms you'd get an idea of how much it took for the Boss to make that flat statement, and why it was more like a challenge. The Boss's customary expression is a sort of Says Who! look.

Worms was a typical young subaltern, fresh from Sandhurst, plump and small-waisted, fair hair and infinitesimal blond mustache, smooth rosy cheeks, blue eyes . . . I might be describing a girl. You have to see these colonial army lieutenants to believe it. The first thing you look for is signs of milk on the mustache.

"As I see this operation," Lieutenant Worms began, "we're to block Thunder Pass so the bigger game won't get through. Paul Laurent says you're going to use dynamite. Can't think why we must be so drastic. Why not just station a few native chaps there on a permanent guard?"

Frost was blunt. "They tried that. The Amerrar killed 'em or drove 'em off. The Amerrar like elephant meat. Lieutenant, what experience have you had in the bush?"

The question made Worms smile. "Why, enough, I dare say. Let me ask you, Mr. Frost, what experience you have had with the Amerrar?"

THE Boss stuck his chin out. "I've trekked the bush from the Cape to the Blue Nile, and from Mombasa to Nigeria," he said. "Beginning about eighteen years ago . . . let's see . . . you'd be about two years old at that time? . . . running around in wet diapers?"

This didn't bother Worms too much. "About that," he agreed. "But the point is, you see, I was running around in wet diapers in the Thunder Pass territory."

While Frost was digesting this Worms puffed on his little pipe. "Dad was territorial Agent for Amerrar at that time," he continued. "I was born in Djibouti and was raised near an Amerrar village not ten miles from Thunder Pass. That's why the D.C. felt I could be useful in charge of this expedition. I know the Amerrar."

Frost wasn't to be stopped. "I'm going to dynamite rock," he blurted, "not people. What do you know about dynamite?"

"You've been hired to do that work," Worms conceded. "You are the dynamite

man. But we don't want to blast a filthy hole in our relations with the natives. Things are fairly quiet now and the D.C. means to keep them that way. It'll be ticklish enough chasing the big game back where they belong without making enemies of the Amerrar people. I intend to carry out my orders. Any objections, Mr. Frost?"

The Boss's jaw was thick with stubbornness. "Would it do any good to object?"

Lieutenant Worms smiled faintly. "I'd recognize your objection, of course, Frost." After a moment's pause he asked, "Any reservations, Frost?"

"If I had I'd quit," Frost said. "If I do a job I do it right, all the way. Or are you going to do this job?"

Worms rose and put his little pipe away. "Carry on, Mr. Frost. You do the job. Just remember I am in charge of the expedition. All decisions on major matters, particularly in reference to the Amerrar people, are to be discussed with me before they are carried out. Now, shall we go over the plan of the safari, the route, supplies and so forth? We must get this done before the rains."

I left them going over the route and other details. I made myself scarce, took care of the three boys Lieutenant Worms had brought in, posted guards for the night. I left the Boss and Worms circling each other like tom-cats around the map and lists on the table.

The Boss is a red-neck, a big hard-bristled guy with an arrogant jaw and sudden shoulders. In the bush he never shaves, and sports a red beard like a flame-thrower. He wears washed khaki shorts and a T shirt as a sort of trade mark, like most safari bums, with jungle boots and pith helmet. He's over six feet four and wide as a door, and hard rock all the way down to his spine, which is spring steel.

Spenser Frost started out as a driller near his home in Colorado when he was a kid. He joined a crew working on a tunnel on the coastal railroad in Kenya Colony, liked the country and the life in East Africa and stayed on afterward. He got a taste of life in the bush up in the Tanganyika territory and became what is known as a safari bum. Never satisfied to stay in one place very long, always on the move, trekking into the Belgian Congo for rubber, down into the

blue clay country for diamonds, over to the Eritrean coast for pearls, always on safari, either prospecting on his own or for hire.

After a few years his reputation as a successful safari leader became wide and impressive. He was hired for long, difficult treks, sometimes dangerous jobs. No one can say for sure what a man like that is looking for, except possibly that he's a professional adventurer. However, he prefers to be known as a safari bum. At all times, in all circumstances, he is ready for anything, preferably trouble. The only thing is, my boss liked the kind of trouble he could lick with his fists or his guns, and here he was faced with the Assistant D.C. who apparently thought a fist was what you held your teacup with, but who had the all important rank. With eighteen years of jungle experience behind him, Frost was being asked to say yessir to a cream puff. Not asked . . . told.

As for Worms, he fitted a mental picture I've had of his type. Years ago I saw a lot of such blasted infants in Sam Browne belts and helmets too large for them, with their swagger sticks and one pip on each shoulder, their yawping pink mouths crying, "Oh bully!" and "Stout fella!" and "Well done, Sir!" . . . their tales of week-ends on the Thames. They say, "Oh, Mater's quite neurotic!", and they suck up tea with milk in it in each other's quarters. When they run, which is not often, one sees that there is too much and too soft second lieutenant in the seat of their britches, and their shoulders are too narrow. Quite often they lower a chin strap from their too big helmets. I don't know whether it is to hold the helmet down or the chin up. Perhaps both. I was glad all I had to do was to take my orders from Mr. Frost and keep my mouth shut. I got my gray hair from being born too soon, not for asking for trouble.

Well, whatever they argued about I don't think anything was changed much. When we started off next morning nothing I could see was any different. The baggage was lifted, our path northward was the same one we had laid out long ago. We got under way at sun-up, the only bearable part of the day. The heat was not too uncomfortable, there was a damp freshness in the air, the natives scampered about, glistening black against the vivid jungle green, almost willingly

getting into position. The world was agreeable.

WORMS did once have his say, not that it did him any good. We had a local guide and three boys out in front. Then there were ten porters, our seven and the three Worms had brought, then Worms, Frost and myself, followed by the Boss's Number One boy, and five more boys with light luggage. We had one good boy back as a rear guard in case any stalking animals might think it a good idea to creep up on us. But Worms didn't like this arrangement. He suggested to the Boss that his three porters be armed and sent out as flank guards. The Boss looked at him in amazement, his mouth open, his big teeth gleaming in his beard.

"Armed? With what?"

"Why, rifles, of course," Worms said. "They've become used to handling rifles . . . I've seen to that."

"You've seen to that!" Frost echoed. "Do you mean to tell me you've armed your porters? . . . allowed natives to use guns?" He turned to me to share his astonishment.

I asked, "Does the D.C. know that?"

"Haven't thought it necessary," Worms said. "Anything wrong?"

Breathing heavily the Boss spoke with restrained vigor. "In the first place no white man ever allows a bush native to shoot a gun. We've given these people enough civilized trouble without introducing them to guns. In the second place, there's no such thing as a flank guard in the jungle. It's bad enough for us to keep to the trail, or to make a trail where there is none, without expecting a lone native off to one side to know where he is doing. A flank guard would never find the column again . . . he'd be lost in ten minutes. Certainly he would be a helpless victim for any beast he came across. I thought you were concerned for these people!"

"I'm very much concerned," the younger man replied. "But I didn't see anything wrong in a flank guard. It's standard procedure in my book. Besides, you've got a rear guard out . . . isn't that the same?"

Frost snorted indignantly. "He's on the trail, isn't he? He can't get lost. He's a hundred yards behind us . . . if he got in

trouble I'd be there in less than a minute."

Lieutenant Worms busied himself with the straps of his binoculars case, but since the Boss continued to look at him Worms was forced to answer. "Very well, Frost. Carry on as you are."

This is going to be a nice cheery little journey, I thought, but I kept it to myself. It wasn't going to be a long journey . . . the Amerrar region is only a few hundred miles from Wagunya Gani. Twenty to twenty-five days should see us in Ruynville where we were to pick up the dynamite, and two more days to Thunder Pass.

Frost had arranged with Paul Laurent to use explosives stored at Ruynville rather than carry such cargo through the jungle. All we had to do was to blast enough of the walls of Thunder Pass so as to obstruct the free and easy migration of some of the large animals, elephant particularly, from the open plains and almost uninhabited jungle over to the more thickly settled northern areas. There were mine, oil and farm lands in the north regions which were being bothered by the steady stream of roving elephant herds which went through the Amerrar country via Thunder Pass.

One of Paul's duties as Commissioner of Wild Life was to influence and control herd movements, the segregation of wild life in the bush, to induce a general westward movement into the deeper Congo lands, where herds may roam unmolested and unmolested. Due to the inroads of civilization on the territory once held safely by lion, elephant and water buffalo, these beasts are becoming a greater problem each year. Since these animals serve no practical domestic purposes and cannot be put to any considerable value to man other than as trophies and decorations, and since their capture or extinction is dangerous and expensive, their increasing numbers are a problem to the advancing industrial projects.

Laurent had tried to turn the herds back in several ways unsuccessfully. The Amerrar people like elephant meat, and their staked pits and traps were always being filled without much effort on their part. They merely had to slaughter the mammoth fallen creatures in the pits, which were placed directly in line with the pass. So we had to close the pass to elephant, cutting off one more avenue

of approach to the north, making it more difficult for the elephants to leave the southern and eastern areas and leaving the westward boundaries open and inviting to them.

Naturally a month in the Waganya Gani jungle, in heat and steaming mists, and tangling undergrowth, on a business trek, is not too enticing. With Worms along to make my boss irritable it was somewhat less than agreeable.

We made fair time. The first few days were through high plains around the Panuquara range where at least we could see where we were going. Then we worked our way eastward through the Gallasas jungle and the going got a little stickier. Worms was a little worried about the column's flanks, making rather a point of it I thought, continually peering either to right or left and stopping to listen as though he suspected we were being paced by some unseen enemy in the rukimgangori to one side of us.

He was being a little ridiculous for he couldn't see ten feet through the greenwalls lining our trail. To make it worse Frost ignored these tactics of the lieutenant and barged ahead whenever Worms stopped to peer like a worried bird-dog through the bush, usually managing to get twenty or thirty yards ahead, so that Worms in the end had to run to catch up with us.

At night in camp the Boss was of course, always on the alert, while here Worms plumped his soft fat shorts on a cot and dozed or picked chiggers out of his toes. When we settled down for the night Frost made it a point to check the boys on guard every hour. Normally, at other camps, the Boss was content to do this or to have it done once or twice during the night, but not while Lt. Worms snored delicately under his netting. I suppose the Boss wanted to prove to Worms that at a time when the utmost precautions should be taken, then Worms slept like a fool, whereas he, Frost, the old hand at jungle safari wasn't so irresponsible as to take chances even if it meant getting very little sleep. I didn't know Worms as well as I do the Boss of course, so I'm not sure if the Lieutenant had any point to demonstrate in conking off right away and sleeping like a babe till sun up, but I suspect

5—Jungle—Spring

he might have wanted to prove that he wasn't worried at all. Neither one said anything about these matters nor explained what he thought.

This went on for a few days, Worms and the Boss ignoring each other with such intensity that I doubt if they thought of anything else.

I HAD to talk to someone. If my boss, who was usually a fairly genial fellow, insisted on sulking all day, that left only Lieutenant Worms to chin with. I tried him out. The lieutenant was not what you would call one of the boys but he talked enough so that I could forget the dreary struggle through the bush now and then.

Mostly we talked about the lieutenant's home grounds around Mombasa, the colonial army barracks and the town, but once I got him going on the subject of the Amerrar natives. Not much is known about the Amerrar except that they are a fierce and proud tribe. I've heard it said that they are composed mostly of descendants of the great warriors of Chaka's empire.

Worms told me a great deal he knew from personal observation as a kid growing up near the Amerrar village. He was most intrigued about the Amerrar swords, great two-handed double blades of fantastic sharpness. The warriors took pride in the keenness of these swords, spending hours honing them down to razor edge. They made scabbards of leather, stiff hard rhino skin usually, but after very little time these scabbards were slit on both sides by the sharp blades. They couldn't keep a scabbard very long for they were usually cut to ribbons after a few times in use. The men didn't use their swords often . . . they saved them for the important tasks. They were useless for hunting in the bush because a man had no room to draw and swing such a long heavy blade, but for slaughtering the big beasts trapped in their stake pits they were unbeatable.

One of the most fascinating skills of the Amerrar was their use of small throwing stones. In hunting small animals and in raids on neighboring tribes the art of throwing stones with incredible accuracy was their standby. Any Amerrar warrior could hit a wildebeeste at a hundred feet, and could be depended on to stun the animal at anything

under forty feet or so. In the tangled bush around them the Amerrar used this skill to great advantage where it was difficult to get close enough to use a sword or a spear.

Naturally this amazing accuracy with stones was the basis of some of the young men's games and sport. Mock duels took place with each young native placed in a three foot circle marked out on the ground about a hundred feet apart. The game consisted of trying to force the other to retreat from his circle. Each one threw small stones the size of a golf ball, generally scoring several hits. In a game like this retreat brought only laughter, but in a real duel between men, in which the same weapons were used, it was very different. In the first place the distance between the circles was shortened to thirty or forty feet. It was rare in a duel for any man to retreat . . . he would gladly have died rather than put a foot outside his circle. Sometimes one duelist was killed; always the end of the duel was reached only when one man was unconscious. I felt that these men would have interested the Boss very much, for Frost is a man of curiosity about people. He likes people, all kinds, as long as they act like men. The Amerrar duels would have stimulated Frost and excited his admiration.

## II

THE Boss treks hard . . . it's his way. We made twelve and fourteen miles a day when I felt eight would have been a day's work. Some good days we reeled off sixteen miles through the thickest, stinkiest muck, along river edges, through swamps, over mud flats. I was dead on my feet most nights; the Boss looked like he'd just come crawling on all fours out from under a mud-wallowing hippo, but Worms . . . that amazing kid never looked any different. Eight miles or sixteen, through thorn or over rock he was dapper, calm, pressed and polished. No amount of slogging ever had any effect on him. He was absolutely tireless. His short fat legs pumped along like clockwork, he switched at this and that with the little combination swagger stick and riding crop he carried, and merely glowed at the end of the day.

I know this infuriated the Boss, as it did

me if I were to confess the truth. Frost stepped up the pace whenever he could, trying to make that blasted infant sweat, but all he succeeded in doing was to near kill me and himself. I can't explain it . . . there isn't any explanation I'd believe, having seen it . . . but the end result was only that we made wonderful time.

We made Ruynville, where we were to pick up the dynamite, in nineteen days. We came upon it suddenly, late in the afternoon, rounding a bend in the Lipo River. Off to one side there was a cleared slope, mud and rukenrara by the river bank, just mud farther up the slope. There were a few round native huts and a large straw hut like a duka in a small open kraal. There wasn't a soul about, the boma deserted, bare even of domestic animals. What caught my eye at first was a garden near the one straw hut, a blaze of red and white with splotches of pink rukenbagufa blossoms. There were tall poles holding aloft a screen of cheesecloth over the patch to ward off the burning sun, a fence of string with scraps of cloth fluttering on it to scare the birds, and a miniature irrigation network of ditches between the rows of flowers. With the lush eternally devouring vegetation of the jungle not a hundred yards in all directions this specialized shamba of flowers was the last thing any of us expected to see.

Lieutenant Worms was as amazed as I. "This is Ruynville?" he exclaimed, looking around the clearing.

Frost grunted. "All there is of it. Wonder where that old goat Ruyn is hiding?"

We looked in the straw hut but found it practically bare. There was a single bed composed of a rough blanket on the hard packed clay floor, a hard looking lump for a pillow, a few baskets, pots, jars and garden tools. On one side of the entrance the wall was lined with wooden boxes which at first I thought to be the store of explosives, but soon saw was a supply of native brewed whiskey. It was in quart-size earthen jugs, about six in a box, each wrapped in straw and tightly corked. The harsh raw odor of newly fermented grain mash identified it, although I had seen such jugs before and knew them for what they were.

We waited about expecting someone to come into the boma but no one did. The

other huts were empty. "We'd better pitch camp," the Boss decided. "We'll set up the tents further up the slope. Ruyn will probably show up later. Ten to one he's on a toot, and his boys are off loafing somewhere."

Ruyn showed up good and late. We had all bedded down for the night when N'guvu Sana, our boy on guard, came into the tent Frost and I shared. "Bwana," he whispered. "The Bwana Uzee come. Oh ti! Oh ti!"

I struggled up, blinking in the light of the fire outside. Through my netting I could see that Ruyn's hut was lit inside, a grotesque wavering shadow jumping and swaying on the muddy ground of the kraal.

Frost had awakened and we walked hesitatingly over to the old man's hut. "What's he up to?" I asked, "a voodoo dance?" The other native huts were silent and dark.

The Boss grinned. "Just crazy drunk," he said. "You never met Ruyn, did you?" I was so glad the Boss's sulky mood was at last temporarily suspended that I didn't pay much attention to what he said. We stood in the entrance of the hut and watched.

Ruyn was all of seventy, a tall cadaverous wisp of a man, eyes bleared and filmy under a shock of dry white hair. He wore skin tight faded blue pants cut off just below the knee, no shirt over a burned dark and spindling torso, frail thin arms from which claw-like hands fluttered as he walked. He was circling the interior of his hut like a captive stork, hugging an earthen jug to his washboard ribs under one arm, skipping and stumbling blindly. He was bent over like a gnarled twig, a dried up, twisted reed. A lantern swung from a pole, throwing a glaring bleak light over the scene. Ruyn's thin voice cackled and screeched unintelligibly to the accompaniment of his dizzy reels.

"Hey, Ruyn!" the Boss yelled. "What do you think you're doing?" He had to yell again before the old man heard. Then Ruyn stopped circling and stood swaying in the center of the hut, blinking at the harsh light. "Drunk again," Frost laughed. "Don't you ever stay sober to greet your guests?"

Ruyn waggled his head dolefully. "Ah yah, hapana! Get drunk to greet my guessh," he mumbled. "Only way to greet a guesh . . . get a skinful so's you don't care what they

do. T'hell with gueshs. G'way! Shanzil!"

Frost laughed again. "You're getting worse all the time, old man. Every time I see you you're drunk as an ostrich with the hiccoughs. How long can you keep it up?" There was a note of concern in the Boss's voice . . . and a look of kindness on his usually bold face.

Ruyn waved us away disgustedly. "Go 'way," he said. "Stop spoiling the view. Lemme 'lone!" He turned his back on us and fondled his jug with exaggerated affection. "Maridada sana!"

"You better not let the distinguished Assistant District Commissioner see you like that," Frost said. "He'll pin your ears back."

Ruyn ignored us and remained silent to all that Frost said. After a minute's teasing Frost turned away. "Come on, Jack. We will have to leave him 'til morning. No good talking to him now."

We told N'guvu Sana not to let the old man out of his hut and went back to our cots. The cackling and solitary carousing continued for a long time. Finally I dropped off to sleep but awoke several times to hear Ruyn's quavering voice in hysterical glee or horrible song. When morning came all was quiet. N'guvu Sana said he was sleeping crouched on his knees and elbows in a corner, covering his precious jug like a nursing grasshopper. The native boys still hadn't returned.

**WE LET** Ruyn sleep 'til mid-morning then went to the hut again. Lieutenant Worms didn't think our account of Ruyn's antics was funny. "What has he to celebrate?" he inquired, looking around at the steaming muddy slope.

"It isn't a celebration with him," Frost said. "It's a wake. You see, Ruyn hates the whole human race. White men especially. The natives he tolerates because they are what he calls unspoiled, but he avoids white men as much as he can. That's why he stays out here in the bush. He'd rather live in this stinking heat than with his own kind."

Worms sniffed. With quick insight he put his finger squarely on the sore spot. "Sounds like it might have been a woman," he said.

The Boss looked at Worms oddly for a moment. "It was. His wife. But that was long ago. Now he gets along on native

whiskey and little jobs . . . like storing supplies for people, acting as a way station. All he needs is a jug. He hardly ever goes down to Nairobi; only when he needs something special."

I felt sorry for Ruyn, but Worms was unimpressed. "He ought to be in an institution," was all he said, not unkindly, not vehemently . . . merely an opinion. "Shall we get our explosives and get on with it?" He walked ahead to Ruyn's solitary hut.

Frost looked at me in wonder. "That guy," he said, "is going to be the death of me. Come on, Jack. We better get there first."

We went into the kraal and the Boss shouldered himself into Ruyn's hut ahead of Worms. "Hey Ruyn!" he yelled. "Shake a leg, you old goat! Look, see who's come to surprise you."

Ruyn's answering voice came from an unexpected quarter. He appeared around from the rear of the hut, hastily and alert. He was still dressed as he had been in the night, but he had a hoe in his hand instead of a jug. He appeared perfectly sober, but excited. He moved quickly, impatiently, as though suspicious of what we wanted.

"Here I am, Mr. Frost. Oh, Mr. Reilly too. You've come for your box? I'll get it. Is that all you want?" He dropped the hoe and hitched up his pants with fluttering fingers.

"Don't get excited, Ruyn," the Boss said calmly. "Take it easy. We only want the dynamite."

"I'll get it! I'll get it!"

"You got it in here?" Frost started to go in the hut.

The old man sprang in front of us. "You . . . you fellows just wait. I'll get it." Every line in the papery old face was in motion, his eyes bright in contrast to the way they were the night before . . . his expression alive with distaste. Worms put a hand on the old man's arm, restraining him.

"What's the matter, old fellow? What are you up to?"

"Nothing . . . nothing," Ruyn shook off Worms' hand. "I'm just . . . a little bit in a hurry. I'm gardening just now. Must get back."

"In this heat?" Worms asked. "Man, you'll kill yourself!"

"Not in my shamba," Ruyn protested. "Anyway, I'm late. I should have been up a bit earlier." He paused, looking doubtfully at the lieutenant. "I'll get the dynamite." He went to the blanket on the floor, his simple bed. Pulling the blanket back he revealed the pillow, a stout small wooden box. Ruyn's old claws tugged at it weakly.

The Boss bent in front of the old man and pulled at the box. "You let me handle this. Keep out of the way. You don't have to lift and carry for me, you know." The box was about a foot square, with rope handles on the ends.

"Time you took it easy," the Boss muttered, putting the box down gently outside. "Hey! How long's this stuff been here?" There was a greenish brown stain along the bottom edges of the box. Frost ran his finger along the stain and smelled it.

"Oh, three-four months," Ruyn said. "What's the matter . . . m'baya sana? This is it . . . this is what they send up for you, Mr. Frost. This is what I was to give you."

The Boss was shaking his glowing beard slowly, frowning at the box. He wiped his hands on his rear pockets.

"It's all there is," Ruyn chattered. "You'd better take that."

Lieutenant Worms stepped up and addressed the old man. "Three or four months? I should say it's no good!" He turned to Frost, holding a hand out as though to push the Boss away. "I say, Frost. Keep away from that stuff . . . over-age, you know. Dangerous."

Frost smiled in expectation of something to be relished. That was all he had to hear from Worms. "Dangerous, Lieutenant? It's dynamite, isn't it?" He looked at the box curiously. "What do you expect, you can play cricket with it?"

Worms was looking about, tapping his leather-booted calf with his crop as though seeking an answer to a problem. "This all the explosive you've got, Ruyn? Afraid we can't use that stuff."

Frost bent over so fast you'd think he was hit in the back of his thick neck. He picked up the box and held it against his belt. "You got some more dynamite in your pocket, Lieutenant? This is all there is. You heard the man. This we got to use. Jack, give Ruyn a chit for the dynamite."

Worms protested hotly. "I say, Frost, you're not serious? That explosive has settled out . . . the nitro is free and . . . and dangerous. You see that stain? That means the explosive has been lying there in one position too long. It ought to have been turned over periodically . . ."

"I know all about it," Frost butted in. "But what do you think I'm going to do . . . abandon the trek? This is the only dynamite there is. We've got to use it."

"You'll kill someone!" Worms protested. "Any slight jar might set it off . . . a sharp blow . . . it'd go off any second."

The Boss stood holding the box grinning at Worms. "You want to go back and tell your D.C. you were afraid to use the dynamite . . . that you gave up and ran home?"

The lieutenant scowled as fiercely as his pink and white face could manage. "I'm not thinking of myself, Frost! What about the natives? Or do you propose to carry that box all the way to Thunder Pass yourself?"

I think the Boss was genuinely surprised. "Of course! What did you think? You think I'd ask anyone else to do it?" He swung around to me. "Here, Jack, detach my water bottle and hook the straps under these handles. I'll swing it around on my hip."

I took the Boss's water bottle and rifle. "If nothing else," I said, "this'll keep you from getting too many kicks in the pants. We can't afford to have you slightly jarred, Boss."

"Just keep away from me, Jack. You, Ruyn, take that chit. It'll be as good as whiskey in the jug next time you go down to Nairobi."

Ruyn took the chit and tossed it in an empty coffee tin. "I'll have one of the boys take it down. I'm pretty busy here, don't go down often."

"By the way," I asked. "Where are your boys? I haven't seen one since we got here. Desert you?"

Ruyn picked up his hoe and stood impatiently waiting for us to go. "Oh, the boys. No, I told them to take a little holiday. They'll be back. I don't need them all the time, you know."

Frost smiled. "They'll be back when they need more white mule, eh, Ruyn? Well, take care of yourself." He strode off in the direc-

tion of our tents, me following and Worms tagging along reluctantly. I heard the Lieutenant mumbling complainingly, "I don't like it! I don't like it!" But there was only one alternative, as Frost had pointed out. Worms certainly didn't want to run back with his tail between his legs.

Ruyn was back hoeing at his garden when I turned around to call goodbye. He paid no attention . . . didn't hear, I guess.

FOR all Lieutenant Worms didn't like it and eyed the heavy box swinging at the Boss's waist with a certain worried concentration, he didn't avoid Frost. I couldn't see that he made any effort to put extra space between the Boss and himself. He was right with us as before, chugging along purposefully.

Frost paid just enough attention to the dynamite and not too much. He was careful not to swing it against anything, and to put it down carefully when we halted every hour to rest. At night the Boss guarded it himself, not letting either me or Worms touch the box. He didn't have to tell me twice.

We reached the approach to Thunder Pass a few days later, a rocky slope up from a sharp bend in the tumbling Lipo River. The fall of the water at that point is brief and violent, almost a straight drop of twenty feet or more. The turbulence and impact on the stone river bed created drum-like reverberations, giving rise to the name of Thunder Pass. The cleft in the rocky ridge of the Wamuna mountains is a narrow one, about thirty feet wide, and only forty or fifty feet deep. However the sides of the pass are sheer gleaming rock faces, straight up and down, making a perfect corridor over the crest of the Wamuna. Because the southern entrance of the Pass is so close to the edge of the green jungle mass, the game following the Lipo River often stray up through this corridor and find their way over the crest into Amerrar territory. Elephant splashing and squealing in the shallow river leave it when they approach the cascade at the bend. They ascend the stony slope and so wander through the Pass. Once through they fall easy prey to the Amerrar, whose pits and traps lay cunningly concealed in the northern exit

from the corridor.

There was no sign of the presence of any of the Amerrar early in the morning when we set out to place the explosives. Frost pointed out a spot at the near end of the Pass, where stratified rock overhung in a perfect conformation. The dynamite could be placed under the ledge in the side wall and with very little preparation could be counted on to bring down sufficient rubble to block the Pass almost from wall to wall.

We three, with all the natives cautioned to stay in our camp by the river bed, stood at the approach. The Boss told me what he wanted us to do, while he opened the wooden box.

"Jack," he said, "you find me something to tie these together with, while I put the caps and fuses in. Lieutenant Worms, I think you'd better stay here and cover me when I take the dynamite up in the Pass."

Lieutenant Worms wasn't going to be left out of anything. He squinted at Frost in the bright early sun, pursing his lips like a pouting girl. "You've carried that dynamite far enough, Frost. I think I'd better go up the hill with you."

The Boss kept on working on the sticks. "Nothing doing," he said. "This stuff is my responsibility."

"But you can't go up there alone," Worms protested. "You would need me if any natives showed up."

"If I need you I'll call you." Frost straightened up and reached for the length of cord I'd dug up. He tied a dozen sticks.

"Remember, I'm in charge of this affair," Lieutenant Worms said stiffly.

"I'm not likely to forget it. All the same, this is my job, and no young squirt is going to do it for me."

Worms then compressed his lips in what was meant to be a thin line. "Mr. Frost, I order you to follow my wishes. I am going with you. That is final."

"And this is final too!" the Boss snapped. He put the bundle of sticks in my hands. His jaw was thick, his red beard seeming to bristle vibrantly. His eyes were hard and insistent. "You are staying, Lieutenant Worms, if I have to beat you to your knees." He squared himself off in front of Worms, his big hands ready.

"I'll see that you regret it, Mr. Frost." The lieutenant's voice was low and even. "If you ever expect to get another job in this country, you'll obey my orders." Worms didn't seem to pay the least attention to the Boss's threatening attitude.

Frost gurgled in helpless anger. He was flushed and scowling, but he didn't move except for a sort of futile gesture with his hands. A lifetime reputation, all his future jobs could be ruined by trouble with an official, even one as objectionable as Worms. I knew how frustrated the Boss must have felt. Fiercely he turned to me, took the dynamite, which I wasn't reluctant to surrender, and walked around the lieutenant.

Worms snapped his little swagger stick against his leg, then calmly followed. Frost was twenty paces in the lead, going up the pebbly slope with a determined step.

In another five seconds my grin disappeared. Watching the belligerent pair stubbornly trudge up the slope I was probably the first to see a group of tall rangy natives appear silently over the rise in the Pass. Amerrar, I concluded, and yelled a warning.

Both Frost and Worms stopped dead in their tracks, then Frost moved upward again, a little faster. Lieutenant Worms was right after him. "Mr. Frost," he called, "let me go first. I can speak to those men." Frost didn't pause, and the lieutenant had to catch up.

**T**HERE were about a dozen light-skinned, bushy haired Amerrar in the Pass.

As I watched, while my two companions stumbled forward over the rocky ground, several Amerrar stooped and picked up stones. Worms saw this too, for he called out, "They're going to throw, Mr. Frost! Keep down!"

Frost was in front a little. The first stones flung were at a distance of a little more than a hundred feet. As a testimony to the accuracy of the Amerrar throwing, Frost was hit in several places by small stones.

"Get down, Mr. Frost!" Worms yelled, his voice high and excited. "Let me talk to them!"

The Boss shook himself and walked on. He walked right into the next volley of stones. He was hit again, this time with

more effect, for he fell to his knees. I clapped my rifle to my shoulder and put one just over the heads of the natives.

Worms spun around and shouted back down the slope to me. "Mr. Reilly! Don't fire again. I'll handle this . . ." He bent over the Boss and calmly took the dynamite from him. I heard him repeat, "Get down, Mr. Frost," and then he walked on alone, toward the crest of the rise.

As he walked toward them he spoke loudly to them, in the Amerrar tongue I suppose. I couldn't get a word, but he talked plenty of it, a sort of friendly engaging argument . . . a very persuasive tone of voice. It seemed he spoke without much effect, for he too walked into a hail of stones. I could see little spurts of dust as stones struck his clothes, his legs and shoulders. There were plenty of near misses kicking up dust about his feet. He was only a few feet from the spot where we wanted to place the dynamite when he was stopped good.

At first Worms had held the dynamite behind him with one hand, gesturing with the other. Then he toppled forward, stunned by a direct hit just under the brim of his helmet, and in falling he swung the explosive in front of him. There he crouched over the bundle, cradling it to his stomach, resting on his knees and his elbows. I muttered fervent prayers that one of those stones would sooner strike the exposed fat britches rather than the dynamite . . . Lieutenant Worms would have sailed in fourteen directions . . . !

The natives up in the Pass were like figures on a stage. At that distance their posture and gesticulations were seen clearly only when in motion. Occasionally I caught a glint of sun on a long blade as a few swords were flourished. I ran up the slope toward the Boss, who was shaking his head groggily as he attempted to rise. The Amerrar were concentrating on Worms then, hitting his crouched over figure repeatedly. Frost pushed me off as I helped him up.

"I've got to get the dynamite from that fool! Jack, use that rifle!" He stumbled up to Worms.

I spaced a few shots over the heads of the figures ahead of us, while Frost crouched

beside the lieutenant. I could hear the Amerrar then, a chorus of jeering yells as they hesitated at the whine of slugs close to their ears. In a pause I saw that Worms wasn't unconscious, just hugging the stony ground in a protective curve over the explosive. Frost had the bundle away from him in a moment, muttering curses at the lieutenant, and then was crawling over to the wall where he'd intended to plant it. The natives were less than a hundred feet away, their aim devastating at that distance.

A dozen times Frost was hit, small enough a target though he was, inching his way along close to the ground. Worms was being pelted mercilessly. I dropped beside him and put a couple more shots among the stone throwers. As long as they didn't come any closer I felt I should aim to frighten them off only . . . not to kill or injure . . . but Worms didn't want even that.

"Don't fire, Mr. Reilly," he said, his voice muffled by an arm folded in front of his head. "We can't afford to hurt the beggars."

"I can't afford to get knocked out either," I said. "And if one of those rocks hit that overage dynamite, Frost is done for."

WORMS raised his head for a brief look. "He's about finished," he reported. "He's got the fuses attached." In another moment I saw that the Boss had the fuse lit and was crawling back to us. I knew he had a sixty second fuse . . . there wouldn't be much time to get away from there.

As I looked I saw we were going to be speeded on our way by the Amerrar.

They had started forward, running down through the narrow corridor toward us, still slinging a few stones. A half dozen swords reflected the brilliant sunshine. As they came more blades were withdrawn. Time to go!

Worms had risen and was about to follow me when the Boss yelled. "The fuse!" he cried. "That old junk! . . . the fuse is out!"

Lieutenant Worms hesitated. "Too late, Mr. Frost. We'll have to come back later."

Frost wasn't in the mood for postponement. "Hold 'em off, Jack!" he shouted. "Give me just a minute." He had his lighter out and was diving for the dead end of the fuse.

"You can't make it!" I yelled, and turn-

ing I jumped all the lead I could into the swift tide of now screaming savages rushing down on us. That's when Lieutenant Worms went into action.

"Hold it, Reilly!" he snapped, and took a couple of paces up the slope toward the wall of brandished swords which grew closer every second. He didn't look as young as he had before.

With his high pitched voice raised only a little, his words crisp and level, Lieutenant Worms spoke.

The Amerrar didn't stop entirely, but they slowed. Worms stood casually, snapping his swagger stick against his leather covered calf, his head up, his manner composed and authoritative. He cracked out Amerrar words like lashes from a whip.

The Boss got up again . . . the fuse was smoldering. "Let's go," he said, but Worms didn't budge. Instead he snapped out more Amerrar in a stronger voice, and the natives actually came to a dead stop not thirty feet from us. Worms paused to inject a few words of English. "They're too close as it is . . . if they come any closer they'll all be blown to bits."

The Boss answered quickly. "About forty seconds to go. You can't stay here. Fall back!"

Worms looked at the bundle of dynamite sticks against the wall of the Pass twenty yards to our right. "Forty seconds . . . ? Too long!"

"Fall back!" Frost shouted. "No time to waste!"

"Can't let the beggars come any closer." Worms said. He did exactly the opposite of what I expected. He raised his voice again in Amerrar, meanwhile pulling out his service revolver. Then he deliberately and casually walked forward, talking to the Amerrar, pointing his revolver from the waist, waving them back with swagger stick in his left hand. The absolute authority in his manner was incredible.

THE Boss got the point quickly. He grabbed my rifle and moved up alongside Worms, holding the gun at the ready. I had to go along.

Frost joined in the talking act, in English and Swahili, not that he could hope to be

understood, but just for something to say. For that forty seconds the two men walked. After the first five seconds the awestruck Amerrar started back. They walked backward, slowly at first, uncertain of what to expect, dominated by the sheer audacity of the two crazy men who refused to be stoned. Then they moved faster, leaping over boulders, keeping a safe interval.

When the Amerrar were a good two hundred feet from the blast, and the Boss and Worms were pressing close, the side of the Pass gave a convulsive shudder and crumbled down into the cleft.

The blast and the ensuing rock slide had filled the Pass from wall to wall with thousands of tons of broken shale, boulders and gravel. The floor of the Pass was ten feet higher at the point where the charge had been laid, an upside down jumble of rock splinters and slanting edges. No elephant would ever again use that Pass, unless, I thought with an inward grin, he was being chased by Lieutenant Worms.

I was suddenly aware of a quiet in the Pass which hadn't existed hitherto. I turned in time to see the last of the Amerrar flying down the hill toward their village, bushy hair more upstanding than ever, scabbards rattling against their legs, their backs dwindling as they got away from there. I didn't wonder at their reactions . . . probably this was the first time anybody ever threw stones back at the Amerrar.

The Boss snorted in amusement as staccato as mine. But Worms didn't laugh. He pulled his tunic down, straightened his helmet, and slapped his swagger stick against his leg. Frost was watching him, a hint of marvel in his eye.

"Shall we go, Mr. Frost?"

"Let us go, Lieutenant Worms."

I really didn't expect the Boss to say much more than that, although I knew what he felt, because I felt the same. But he fooled me. The two men swung toward the jumble of rock in the Pass, heading back to our camp. I stumbled along behind. Just before they separated to clamber over the up-ended rock and piles of gravel, Frost slipped his hand under the lieutenant's arm. "Lieutenant Worms, as they say, words fail me . . ."



# NDEMBO!

By M. E. COUNSELMAN

Kulonga's "Ndembo Death" was indeed a superior miracle. But his resurrection—the villagers feared—would shake the very foundations of all great jungle juju.

**I**T WAS the day before the feast of the Bringing Alive. And it was for this—not merely the honor and triumph, but a more practical reason—that Kulonga had been willing to "die Ndembo."

The small Lower Congo village, built within earshot of the Great Cataract, fairly buzzed with activity. Black women, naked to the waist, ran in and out of thatched huts, that circled the *kampung*, bearing fruit, pounding mealies, and chasing young dogs to be slaughtered and popped into the cooking pot.

A Bringing Alive was a gala occasion, as well as a rather nervous one—since a person who has "died Ndembo" and come alive again may legally demand any possession to which he takes a fancy . . . and beat or strangle the owner if he refuses to part with it. Surreptitiously, all over the village, wise elders were burying things: a trade knife, a string of beads, a carved nose-bone, a bright coil of copper wire . . .

For, when Kulonga came alive tomorrow—under, of course, a new name that the witchdoctor would give him—his staring eyes might fasten on any of these goods, and they would straightway be his . . . or else!

**N**OW, lying in rigid simulation of death on a grassy spot between the *kampung* fence and the jungle, Kulonga squinted up at the yellow sky and wished irritably that his mother would come on with his noonday meal. The fierce African sun beat down on

his almost naked body, wringing the sweat from his black flesh like a woman wringing out a damp cloth.

For three changes of the moon he had lain thus, after that well-pretended fit which he had helped along with a chew of *b'yang* root. Kulonga—and he smiled with satisfaction at the memory—had "died" very nicely, jerking and foaming at the mouth, with his black eyes rolled far back in his head. People of the village would talk of his "dying" for many years to come.

Six other young men, some younger, some older than himself, had followed his example as candidates for the dread Ndembo secret society. But—Kulonga's smile broadened faintly—the others had not been able to stay dead. Safari ants, crawling over their bodies and biting them as they lay supine outside the village fence, had caused four of them to leap up, cursing, and thereby shamefully end their initiation. Two more had been frightened into coming alive by a leopard, which made so bold as to sniff at their bodies, sprawled there at the jungle's edge at the mercy of any prowling beast.

Only he, Kulonga, had been able to lie there, dead, for the minimum period of three moons—fed thrice a day by his patient mother, who realized that a Ndembo dying was their only hope of future prosperity.

Natuka, his mother, he was aware, had always been disappointed in him, her only offspring. For, Kulonga had been born slightly lame, and therefore could not hunt as well as other Bushongo warriors; could

not dance at the feasts; could not seem to attract any of the giggling young girls of the village who might, one day, as his wife, help Natuka at the cooking pot. He knew Natuka thought him a fool and a dreamer; beating her very seldom, to be sure, but addicted to sitting on the bank of the sluggish Congo, watching the course of a ripple instead of spearing fish.

It was known to his mother also—Kulonga sighed—that her son looked with foolish desire upon M'palla, the chief's tall, lusciously plump daughter, who had never felt a man's touch . . . Nor was ever likely to, if Balengalenga, her father, did not reduce her marriage price of ten goats, ten pigs, and a tree's length of copper wire! Or, that was the last market quotation—the chief, on a greedy impulse, was apt to raise the ante before sundown.

Kulonga sighed again, lying very still with his eyes shut against the blazing sunlight. In the old days, he thought bitterly, candidates for the Ndembo society were allowed to lie dead in comfort, in an enclosed *boma* outside the village, safe from hungry beasts if not from insects. One could at least sit up now and then, covertly, in the dark of night and flex one's aching muscles. This new rule that candidates must lie dead in the open, stared at all day long by curious villagers, was patently cooked up by old Ogogo, the witchdoctor, in order to hog all the profitable "gift-pointing" for himself.

But Ogogo would not defeat him! Kulonga set his fine white teeth stubbornly, remaining motionless with a supreme effort as a large poisonous spider crawled over his sloping forehead and down the bridge of his flat nose. He would not move, or scream, or leap up and run away as the others had done. He *would not!*

After an age the spider crawled across his mouth, down his neck, and hopped to the ground. Kulonga expelled a deep breath of relief. Then his eyes opened a crack, eagerly, as a light touch on his arm told him that his mother had come with his food.

**F**OOD? Bone soup, or corn gruel! Kulonga restrained himself from making a wry face, and parted his lips very slightly for his mother to spoon the unpalatable liquid between them. It was forbidden that

he chew—he, a dead man? Oh, for a juicy hunk of stewed dog! But, from sheer hunger, he let the tepid gruel run down his gullet, careful not to contract and expand his throat-muscles visibly. There was no telling when Ogogo might be peeping through the high liana-lashed poles of the fence, ready to declare him "undead" and therefore disqualified as a privileged member of the Ndembo.

"Kulonga, my son!" Natuka whispered, then caught herself and began to speak as though to the air, since it is forbidden to address the dead. "O, my son who is among the spirits!" she wailed hastily. "If he were alive. I would tell him a thing. The girl, M'palla—today near the Great Cataract she asked of someone, saying: 'The dead one sleeps at peace, no doubt? May he rest well!' " Natuka nudged her son. "Aheh! Is that not a sign of one sort or another?"

Kulonga's heart skipped a beat, but his masklike face did not alter. Only a small quiver in his half-closed eyelids, a tiny twitch of his lips, told his mother that he had heard. He saw her wrinkled face smiling above him, and longed mightily to whisper a forbidden word or two in reply, especially when Natuka sighed:

"Ah weh! It has been so long a time! I have not eaten meat for three changes of the moon, with no man to hunt or fish for my hut. And today I gave Ogogo everything that I own, in payment for the Bringing Alive tomorrow. Oh weh! What if one who lies dead should awaken too soon . . . ?"

"*Nnkh! Nnkh!*" Kulonga made a small negative sound deep in his throat. By his mother's quick smile he knew that she had understood—and that, at sundown, she would slash her arms in blood-sacrifice to Obambou, the death-god, beseeching him to help her son be a corpse as long as he must.

The sun hung briefly at the midday mark, then slid down the sky like a burnished golden plate. Kulonga writhed inwardly under the intense heat of its rays, as he had done for almost ninety days already. In the daytime there was the sun, and there were insects. At night there was fear, with the cold eye of the moon staring down into his eyes; a time when many devils walked abroad—to say nothing of a few hungry

beasts. He groaned silently. Would this ordeal-by-patience never end?

Many times during the afternoon people of the village came to the fence to peek at him. Kulonga could hear them whispering and giggling. Now and then he could see the gleam of black eyes and white teeth through the fence cracks . . . and once he thought he heard a familiar voice, which made his heart pound as the heart of no dead man should.

"Kulonga is dead!" the voice of M'palla whispered. "Be quiet, you birds and monkeys, there! Disturb him not!"

The corpse sighed, lying for a long time in a warm glow of happiness. Tomorrow, tomorrow! He listed carefully in his mind the many items that he would "point" as gifts when he, a man bereft of his senses, having just returned from the dead, must be humored in all things. That silver bangle some trader had given the third wife of Balengalenga—yes, he would certainly demand that. And then, shrieking loudly that it was a black mamba, he would fling it at M'palla's feet. Woo! She would be pleased. And she would wait for him, hiding in the jungle if her father tried to sell her to anyone before he could claim her.

A line of safari ants crawled over his bare chest. Kulonga set his teeth, steeling himself for the agonizing bite of the vicious insects, then grinned as the procession crawled away. He shut his eyes once more and drifted into a half-doze . . . from which he awakened suddenly with an almost visible start.

O GOGO was standing over him, dressed in his everyday attire of leopard skins, feathers, and impalla horns. Copper wire, given him by some slave-trader, was wound about his arms from wrist to elbow, and about his skinny black legs from ankle to knee. His painted face bent closer over the dead man—and Kulonga held his breath. lest the witchdoctor find some excuse to proclaim him "undead."

Ogogo straightened with a grunt of grudging approval, then muttered a few words in the Bantu language to some one standing near him. Kulonga, rolling his slitted eyes slightly to the left, was surprised to see that his other visitor was Balengalenga, the fat chief himself, perched astride

the shoulders of a tottering slave. He strained his ears to catch their conversation—then froze with apprehension as he caught a name. M'palla! Had one of her father's many spies overheard that whisper of encouragement through the fence?

Kulonga tensed himself, waiting, as Balengalenga's deep voice gave some order, followed by a cackle of sadistic mirth from Ogogo. The chief had a cruel sense-of-humor, especially directed at those of his village who dared to cross him. And he did not favor Kulonga, the Limping One, as a son-in-law. M'palla was his best negotiable property, and he intended to get much more for her marriage price than any son of old widowed Natuka could pay.

Balengalenga clapped his hands in command. One of the slaves dashed away toward the deep jungle, the *splat-splat* of his bare feet jarring the ground under Kulonga's head. The man was back in a moment, coughing and gagging. Once again Ogogo's high cackle of mirth shattered the evening stillness . . . and suddenly he was bending over the dead man, smearing something on his face and chest. Something with a stench so revoltingly bad that Kulonga almost retched, then steeled himself, breathing through his mouth so that he would not have to smell.

*Carrion!* Ogogo, put up to it by the chief, had sent for a bit of nauseous, decayed animal-carcass, and anointed Kulonga with it!

"Wah!" shouted Balengalenga, holding his nose and giggling. "This one is indeed dead! He is beginning to stink!"

"Aheh!" the witchdoctor snickered, joining whole-heartedly in the wicked little jest. "Perhaps Kulonga's spirit has wandered too far. It may be that I can not drive it back into a body such as this!"

Whooping and howling with laughter, in which even the slaves joined, Kulonga's tormentors returned to the *kampung* and left him lying there, smeared with carrion and gagging helplessly at his own foul odor.

The sickening fumes rose and hung about him, undisputed by any breath of wind. Clenching his teeth against nausea, Kulonga forced himself to lie still, aware of more giggling peepers beyond the fence. After a while, though his thick purple lips were

tinged with gray, he became used to the stench. But then flies began to swarm over him, attracted by the rotting meat, and his skin fairly writhed under the tickle of many bug-feet . . .

But when the sun sank behind the matted jungle horizon, the man who had "died Ndembo" still had not moved.

Kulonga shut his eyes miserably as twilight settled down over the Congo. If only the night hours would pass more quickly! If only he could really die and know no more until tomorrow's dawn! No nauseating odor. No itching insects. No . . .

He stiffened abruptly, hearing a faint sound to his right, where dense jungle crowded the small clearing. Already a lopsided moon was glaring down at him. A cool breeze had risen, caressing his hot, sick body. But . . . That rustling sound came again; closer, much closer.

**T**HE dead man waited. He dared not turn his head for fear Ogogo might still be watching him, just waiting for him to make a slight move during these, the last few hours of his initiation. But he would not give the old demon that satisfaction, Kulonga promised himself grimly. He would lie here motionless until morning if the stars fell on him! If the jungle caught fire! If . . .

Kulonga sucked in a quick, horrified breath. Some quiet-footed animal, slinking out of the jungle's edge, was sidling up to him. He could hear it, feel it snuffling at him.

Then he saw it—the grinning nightmare-head and sloping body, poised for flight but tantalized by the smell of the carrion smeared on his body.

*A hyena!* No, two! Three! Now a fourth was slinking out of the jungle shadows, panting with eagerness to sink its teeth into this deliciously dead-smelling native, sprawled so invitingly outside the village.

Kulonga swallowed hard. The muscles of his stomach, bare to the loin cloth, knotted as a blunt snout nuzzled his ribs. Another hyena hurried up, jostling the first out of place, to lick hungrily at the decaying meat on Kulonga's face. He set his teeth, torn in half by will and instinct; the will to lie here and let these jungle-scavengers gnaw at him; the instinct to shriek and bolt for the *kam-*

*pong*. His carrion-odor had maddened the hyenas now. Even if they realized that there was a live man underneath, they would still tear into his supine body unless he ran for it—now, *now!* Gnaw at his stomach. Slash at his face with their ugly sharp teeth . . .

The dead man shuddered, but he did not move. Gathering saliva in his fear-dried mouth with an effort, he spat full into the eyes of the nearest hyena, moving only his tongue. The beast jumped back in surprise.

But a second and third hyena were already sniffing at him, and suddenly one of them nipped at his side. The fourth animal, dashing over to join the feast, sank its teeth deep into Kulonga's forearm before he scared it away with a long hissing whistle—his only outcry. They drew back, circling his body warily, poised for a new attack . . .

Then, one of the hyenas yelped and streaked toward the jungle. A second shied away from something—a small stone—that rolled against Kulonga's shoulder. Then all four of the creatures fled as, abruptly, two dark figures burst from the village gate, brandishing sticks of firewood. Kulonga let out a *whoosh* of relief. It was his mother, Natuka. And M'palla was with her!

"Oh, Kulonga, my son! You . . ." Natuka wailed, dabbing at his wounds with her skirt, then caught herself. "Ah weh! My dead son's body!" she corrected herself hastily. "The hyenas ate of him—and yet he did not break the Ndembo!"

There was pride in her voice, and a shining admiration in the face of M'palla, standing beside her.

"I heard my father laughing with Ogogo about his cruel jest," she said formally, addressing the air above Kulonga's head. "And I hurried to tell the dead one's mother. Someone is very brave—even though dead. What would not such a man be," she giggled shyly, "if he were alive!"

Kulonga stifled a grin, and did not wince as his mother washed the carrion and blood from his wounds. Presently, with a fearful glance toward the shadows, the two women left him and hurried back to the safety of their huts, lest any wandering devil-devil should observe them . . . Kulonga, of course, the spirits could not harm—since he was quite, quite dead. Dead enough to satisfy even Ogogo. Had not his body been eaten

by hyenas? What more proof could anyone ask?

AT DAWN a great procession burst from the village gate, headed by a scowling Balengalenga and a disgruntled Ogogo, now dressed in the full regalia required for a Bringing Alive. His face was painted white in the semblance of a skull, and he wore a necklace made of a human spinal column.

With a large gourd-rattle and a *machete*, the witchdoctor began to dance about, yelling and brandishing the knife at what might have been an invisible butterfly above his head. At last, with much ceremony and noise, he succeeded in chasing Kulonga's wandering spirit into a tree at the jungle's edge.

Two strong warriors were drafted to break off the limb on which the spirit was perched. With much grunting and straining under the weight of the two-pound branch—plus, of course, its invisible occupant—they carried it to Kulonga's body. Ogogo, waving his weapon threateningly, shouted a command. And Kulonga's spirit reentered his corpse.

As the witchdoctor addressed him—not as "Kulonga," but by the fearful secret name of one who has "died Ndembo" and been resurrected—he stood up, reeling a bit on legs he had not used for three months. Supported by the two warriors, he walked into the village . . . where Natuka, a wizened black Sara Bernhardt, pretended at first not to recognize him, then fell on his neck with loud cries of welcome. Kulonga, whose senses were still in the Spirit World, scowled at her and turned away, complaining that some old she-goat kept following him. There was great laughter, and much food. Oh, it was a wonderful Bringing Alive!

The feast was in full swing, some hours later, when Kulonga (one must not speak his new name) began to trade on his status as a witless newborn babe, not responsible for his actions . . .

And his actions were outrageous. Any but one who had "died Ndembo" would have paid with his life for them—by slow torture!

First of all, gibbering "spirit-words" that he had learned while among the dead, Kulonga staggered over to Balengalenga, the

chief, seated on the back of one crouching slave, with his splayed feet resting on the feet of two others. The slave on his right rang a small bell incessantly, while the one on his left thrust fiercely at the air about his master with a spear—this to ward off any evil spirits that might seek to enter the chief's body by the same route as his food and drink.

Balengalenga had hardly tilted his gourd of palm-beer to his lips when Kulonga snatched it from his hands, drained it at a gulp, and kicked the chief very hard on his fat rump.

Then, still gibbering "spirit words," the lately dead man "pointed" two silver chains belonging to Balengalenga's youngest wives, and immediately flung the bangles at the feet of M'palla and his beaming mother, with a mad howl that they were snakes.

Finally, leaping up and down, and beating his black chest, Kulonga squalled that he must be given, by each member of the community, all the goats, pigs, slaves, and wives that could be encompassed by the copper wire leglets of Ogogo.

There was nothing the witchdoctor could do about it. Choking with rage, he took off his precious leggings of wire and stood them up on the packed earth before Kulonga, like two wobbly copper vases. The villagers snickered at the idea of even one goat or pig being stuffed into these slender receptacles, and heartily agreed to the "gift-pointing." M'palla caught her breath in disappointment, while Natuka groaned aloud, certain that her son's long grueling ordeal had addled his naturally feeble wits. Even Balengalenga, scornfully amused, agreed that the Ndembo should have his way . . .

Whereupon, Kulonga, babbling gibberish, began to uncoil the wire leglets, stretching them out in a wide circle on the ground. Into this wire circle, still drooling with the prescribed idiocy of his Ndembo state, he drove eight goats, five pigs, two of Balengalenga's strongest slaves . . . and, last but not least, his giggling daughter M'palla.

Which—and even Natuka agreed happily that evening, in the hut with her son and his new wife—was no small amount of property for a young man to acquire who had been dead for the past three months!





# SPEARS OF FIRE

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

A fortune in black wood—for any man with skin tough enough to shed barbed arrows; whose stomach could hold poisoned drink; whose heart was stout enough to withstand treacherous Amoffi tree-spirits. A fortune in black mahogany . . . for Hardisty . . . if he lived long enough to take it.

**A**T SONJI the Benue was nearly a mile wide. On the opposite side the thatched roof of the Nigerian Mahogany Company's station showed above the palms which leaned gracefully over the high bank. Beyond the rain-forest climbed the hills and gave off a queer, green steam under the all-devouring sun. But there was a cool breeze, strong enough to whistle

in the ventilation holes of Brent Hardisty's helmet.

He stood in a pool of shadow, looking across the river, a slight frown between his eyes.

The fact that no one had come across from the station to meet him had started him thinking again that there was just one snag about his new job—he'd be under

the notorious Curtis Braddock, the Company's District Manager.

All up and down the rivers Braddock was known as a man of force and character; or, if the opinion of those who had worked under him for a season or so were preferred, a destroyer of youth if ever there was. A man who belonged, psychologically, to the eighteenth century, to the days of the slave trade. At every station on the up-river trip from Logos Brent had picked up a little gossip about the man. Much of it could be safely dismissed as the mere carping of disgruntled, homesick exiles. But not all of it. Brent had the case of young Talbot in mind.

Talbot had got into trouble up in the Panji forest. Whiskey and women were at the bottom of it, according to report. But most managers understood that sort of thing. They had done their trick in the mahogany forests. They knew what a man was up against, alone in his jungle camp for half-a-year, surrounded by blackmen, his nerves racked by fever and interminable palavers, his sleep troubled by the incessance of the dance-drums—always struggling against the jungle, against ignoble lassitude and latent despair.

And when a man broke, most managers called him "out" for a spell and kept him busy around the district station, gave him a chance to work the poison of the jungle out of his system, to get a grip on himself. But Braddock had not done so. For some mysterious reason he'd let Talbot go from bad to worse, left him to rot in the jungle. The result: Talbot, in a fit of despondency, had blown out his brains in his bungalow in the Panji forest.

The uninitiated might wonder at that. Brent wondered at it. He believed that a man was "the captain of his soul, the master of his fate . . .", and that when things went wrong it was due, not to the workings of an inscrutable fate, but to some flaw in the man's character. It was quite natural for him to think so. He'd been born in a backwoods, Kentucky cabin; he'd taught himself to read and write; he'd worked his way through university, and had come out on top in spite of the odds against him.

Several senior men had turned down Braddock's district. But not Brent Hardisty. He

saw an opportunity to step into a manager's bungalow. A good showing on a tough "drag" would open the door, and he meant to move in, even if he had to elbow out a dozen men like Braddock. He looked equal to it. He was golden-brown, lusty and hard. Strong bones showed through flesh and thin, white ducks, and he moved down the steep trail to a sandy pocket with the effortless ease that comes of perfect muscular coordination.

A FEW dugouts were drawn up on the sand, their black-skinned, mopey-eyed owners sitting on their heels nearby, repairing fish nets. For a copper coin a couple of them launched a canoe and ferried Brent across the river. A dapper, little Hausa, in white coat and shorts, came down onto the Company's float to meet him. He was as brown as burnt sienna, and his white teeth flashed in an engaging smile.

"Listen, boy," was his disconcerting greeting, "I tell you my name is Belo. I am your friend!"

A smile quirked the corners of Brent's mouth. In Belo's quaint mode of address he thought he heard the echo of Braddock's voice. He said:

"Well, all right, Belo." Then, much to the houseboy's astonishment, switched to good Hausa, and told him to send a couple of men for his kit boxes, which he'd left in the ox cart across the river.

The station faced the river. There was a stretch of lawn with a tall flagpole in the center of it, and the gardens around it were bright with crotons, purple trumpet flowers and a hedge of hibiscus. The Residence stood behind a screen of bamboo and palms. It was a big, commodious place, with balconies running around the upper story. A Hausa watchman, in khaki uniform with a rifle slung across his back, was hauling down the Company's house flag as Belo led Brent up the hibiscus-flanked path to the office and strongroom on the ground floor of the building.

"You make palaver with Big Master," Belo said with his flashing smile, and then went about his business.

The compound was still full of the glare of the setting sun. Passing from it into the semi-dark of the office, Brent stood, looking

around, blinking owlishly. A rattan fan squeaked on its hinges above his head and wafted the pungent odor of incense around the barely furnished room. He could make out the shadowy outline of the man sitting behind the desk, which stood near a window with closed jalousies. With the light behind him he was aware that he was being subjected to careful scrutiny, and he felt again the faint stirring of the resentment he'd experienced when he'd arrived at the native village to find no one to welcome him.

Suddenly the jalousies were jerked open. Bars of light and shadow fell across the desk. A bulky man came from behind it. He had a face of leather, a skeptical smile, and the hardest eyes Brent had ever seen. He was soberly polite, and, after a brief exchange of greetings, he moved back behind the desk and sat there in silence, frowning over what Brent guessed was his file, sent up from Headquarters in advance.

"Where did you learn to speak Hausa and Swahili?" he asked suddenly.

"At Logos. I sweated it out at nights with a couple of native clerks who wanted to improve their English, sir."

"Hm-m-m, the studious type, eh?" There was a long pause, then: "I see, you've only been out for a year, and that time spent on the coast. I tell you, boy, quite frankly I'd have preferred a man with more actual experience in the jungle. Are they short of men down there?"

"No, sir. Four senior men turned the job down before they got around to me."

"Ah!" Braddock's head jerked up. "The Talbot story, I suppose?"

"I didn't inquire, sir," said Brent, and lapsed into cautious silence. On the basis of first impressions he was inclined to the opinion that the worst he'd heard about Braddock might not be far from the truth. The man's mouth was loose and shaped to abuse. And now his eyes held the light with a mocking, cynical gleam.

"Talbot was like a lot of the youngsters they send up here," he said. "The old school tie, and all that damned nonsense. If you've got any such fancy notions, Hardisty, you'd better go back where you came from. I've no time for that sort of thing."

"I think I know what I'm up against,

6—Jungle—Spring

sir."

"And yet you haven't been in the jungle alone. What makes you think that you can take it any better than Talbot?"

"I'm not thin-skinned."

"No—no, I don't get that impression. And the fact that you know Hausa is a point in your favor. But it's not often the firm employes Yank-Americans." He looked up, his smile almost genial, inviting confidences. Brent responded quickly:

"An aunt of mine is married to Mr. Chambers, and he—"

"Ah, Chambers of the London office! A family affair. I see!" The words came with a faint smile that brought the blood into Brent's cheeks.

"What d'you see?" he demanded sharply.

Braddock's face went blank. "Nothing you need to worry about," he said. "Now, about your job. You'll take over where Talbot left off. It's a rugged concession, one of the worst in the country. Nevertheless, I want every log afloat before the hamattan starts to blow. That means by October up here. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that'll do for now. I hope to get you started up-country in a day or two. Meanwhile, make yourself at home." He struck a gong on his desk. Belo materialized at the door, and Braddock dismissed Brent with a curt nod and a wave of his hand.

BRENT followed the houseboy up a steep flight of steps into a small bedroom. A screen door gave out onto the balcony, and the hibiscus immediately below scented the air. He had just finished washing when two native boys came in with his boxes, followed by a lean, narrow-faced Britisher, with black hair that looked as if it had been lacquered to keep it in place. He had a twitchy smile, and came into the room with quick, jerky steps.

"I'm Simpson," he introduced himself, "Assistant Manager. Sorry I couldn't get over to meet you, old chap. All our fellows are out on their respective drags, y' know. Just the two of us here, and the old boy was a bit liverish this morning. I couldn't get away. How about a sdowner?"

"Finc, Mr. Simpson!"

Belo poured out the drinks. "Welcome to Sonji station!" said Simpson, and downed his drink in a gulp, then: "How did you get along with the old boy?"

"So far so good," Brent grinned.

"Bit of a martinet," Simpson volunteered. "But really a splendid chap when you get to know him. The firm thinks no end of him, and so do I. We've been together up here for five years."

"Five years!" Brent echoed with a slight frown. "Lord, this outfit evidently doesn't believe in fast promotion."

"Oh, I've had my offers but I like it here. Not a dozen white men in the district. No extravagant entertaining. Tennis, polo and all that sort of rot. A chap can make a little, save up a bit for when he goes Home, y'know." He sat on the cot and called for another drink.

"As I've said," he went on. "Braddock's a bit of a stickler. Likes a good map sent down with the monthly reports. Map-making was Talbot's strong point—about the only one he had, poor devil! He made an excellent one of your drag. It's in Braddock's office, I think. Look it up. It'll help."

"Thanks, I'll do that."

"Glad to help in any way I can." His mouth twitched up to his left ear. "By the way, we eat at eight o'clock. See you then." He rose with a quick movement, and went out.

Both Braddock and Simpson, Brent discovered that evening, could drink enough to put two ordinary men under the table. After the meal Braddock's mouth became more repulsive, physically and verbally, and the pair made Brent the butt of a good deal of sly innuendo. By nightfall the conversation had become unpleasantly personal and Brent, feeling his liquor and his gorge rise to it, decided to retreat to his cot while the going was still good.

"Simpson and I will be going over to the village in the morning," Braddock told him as he excused himself. "Got to get some canoe boys for you. Meanwhile, you can snoop around. Perhaps you'll find something to write home to Chambers about, eh?"

A muscle tightened in Brent's jaw, but he said nothing and left them with a curt "Good night."

He spent the following morning looking

over the station, and got acquainted with his future headman, a grizzled veteran of the forests who answered to the name of Auran. Braddock and Simpson did not show up for the noon meal and, after the noon siesta, he went down to Braddock's office to look for Talbot's map. He was sitting on his heels, sorting through a pile of old files he'd found in a packing case, when Braddock walked into the office. The manager pulled up with a throaty grunt as he caught sight of Brent, then:

"What the devil! What are you snooping in there for?" he demanded.

A swift flame of anger lighted Brent's eyes. He straightened up slowly, giving himself time to regain his composure. Then he said evenly: "I'm looking for Talbot's file. Mr. Simpson said—"

"Talbot's file!" Braddock's face was suddenly charged with blood. His mouth was ugly, and the way he swayed forward told Brent that he'd been drinking. He came to a stand before Brent, his glare supported by an immense frown. "You blasted sneak!" he swore thickly. "By heaven, I'll teach you!" He launched a savage blow at Brent's head.

Brent had seen the punch coming, and he faded back fast. Even so, the power behind it drove him back against the wall with his head ringing like a bell. He did not retaliate, he didn't want anything like brawling with a manager on his record. As Braddock came roaring at him, he sidestepped and backed away with a placating gesture.

"You've got me wrong, sir!" he said. "Nobody sent me to pry—"

Braddock did not give him time to finish. He made another rush. And again Brent avoided him. He tried to talk fast but Braddock's whiskey soaked wits were beyond the reach of reason. With every rush his fury increased. Cursing and grunting with exertion, he drove Brent around the room, finally cornering him behind the desk. He got home with a punch that buckled Brent's knees. Thoroughly aroused by the blow, Brent sent him reeling across the room with a left jab followed by a hard right to the head.

Braddock slammed up against the opposite wall with a shock that shook the room. He shook his head, cursed, then made an-

other rush. Brent came out of the corner to meet him head on. Under a barrage of well placed blows Braddock went down on all fours. He arched his back, hands flat on the floor, trying to push himself up. But his feet slid from under him, and he went flat with a groan.

Brent looked around to see Simpson standing in the doorway. His eyes met Brent's in a wide, blank stare.

"Better take a walk, Hardisty," he said unemotionally.

## II

WITH tight lips Brent strode out of the room. He followed the path down to the river, walking swiftly to work the tension out of him. He didn't know what to expect now. The thought uppermost in his mind was that Braddock would send him back to Logos, and that would about finish his career with the Company. He kept going until darkness and the mosquitoes drove him back to the station.

As he crossed the lawn two white-clad figures showed against the black of the hibiscus hedge. A cigarette was snapped out and crushed underfoot as the pair moved slowly down the path toward the river. Thinking it was best to avoid Braddock until morning, Brent kept to the lawn on the opposite side of the hedge. As he came abreast of Braddock and Simpson he caught the tail end of a sentence:

"—must admit that his connections make it look that way, Simpson." Then Simpson's voice:

"It doesn't follow, old chap. I did tell him there was a map, y'know. I'm sure that was all he was looking for."

"You may be right. But, I tell you, Simpson, we'd better call the whole thing off—for this year, at any rate. I can't send him down."

"Oh, Lord no! It would start no end of talk. But I don't think we should call off the Perez deal. He might turn nasty, and he has a fine conception of squeeze. Never met a Goanese that didn't, in fact. Besides, I think we can work something out—"

Their voices faded as Brent quickened his stride. In his room he sat smoking, thinking over what he'd just heard. He

interpreted it to mean that Braddock and Simpson were doing a little private trading on the side. And, since the practice was interdicted by the Company, it struck Brent as being obvious that Braddock believed he was an agent, a kind of spy sent out by the Home office. That would account for Braddock's violent outbreak in the office. He wondered if Talbot had run afoul of Braddock for the same reason, and wished that he knew more about his predecessor's background. He decided that he'd have it out with Braddock first thing in the morning, convince him that his only connection with Chambers was a letter of recommendation, his only concern to make good at his job and get into the big money himself. With that settled in his mind he got under the mosquito netting and went to sleep.

Belo awakened him early on the following morning.

"Ahla feeah!" he said with his happy grin. "I tell you, boy, Big Master say he want to see you damn quick."

Brent dressed quickly and went down to the office. Braddock's face was blotchy and swollen. His greeting was crisp and to the point.

"Forget what happened yesterday, Hardisty. I had a bad day over at the village. Trouble with the chief over your boys' wages, and too much whiskey. We'll just forget it, eh?"

"Glad to, sir! I was afraid you'd think—"

"I don't," Braddock interposed. "Now, I couldn't get a good houseboy for you, so I'm sending Belo along with you. He knows the ropes and you can trust him. Here's the map you were looking for." He handed Brent a folded sheet. "Look it over, and get Belo to pack your stuff. You should be on your way in a couple of hours. Fit?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Now, a word of warning. There's a Portuguese trader in our Panji concession. He's got the idea that any unstamped log on the river is his property. So don't leave your stamping to your headman. That's what got Talbot into trouble. He started drinking and left everything to his headman. Consequently, a small fortune in mahogany went adrift, and he turned in a false report to cover the shortage. I covered up for him. I kept him up there, gave him the chance

to recover his logs. If he'd got a grip on himself he could have done it. But—well, you know what happened."

Always two sides to a story, thought Brent. Braddock went on:

"Adui, the capital of the Janji district, is not far from your base camp. The Obo is a shrewd, old devil. Keep on the right side of him. You'll have labor trouble if you don't. Another thing, up where you're going the Hausas have a lot of Arab blood in their veins. They're all Mohammedans, and damned fanatical about it, so don't show too much interest in their women. Clear on that?"

"Yes, sir."

"One more thing. Keep off the whiskey. I tell you, boy, the Panji forest will make or break you. It's up to you. Now, get on with it."

An hour later Brent stood on the Company's float amid sunlight and clamor. The core of the excitement centered around the two big dugouts which were to convey him up to the headwaters of the Panji. The boatmen Braddock had hired finished loading the canoes, and now sat in them, all jabbering at once, impatient to be off. A shout went up as Simpson came mincing down the steep path to the float. Two husky Hausa watchmen came paddling after him, with an iron-bound box slung from a carrying-pole. The box contained the cash to meet the payroll of Brent's forest gangs. Attached to it there was a thin coil of rope, ending in a bamboo float. This was to mark its position on the river bottom if Brent were capsized in the rapids, or attacked by hostile tribes and forced to abandon it.

"Keep it chained to the leg of your cot at night," Simpson advised, as the Hausas stowed the box under the rattan shelter in the leading canoe. "Good bye, and good luck, old chap!"

They shook hands, and Brent got himself settled under the shelter, using the box as a back rest. At a shout from Auran paddles flashed in the sun. The stroke quickened in rhythm with the beat of the headman's drum, and they went lurching upstream, heading for the mouth of the Panji.

**IT WAS** a long, weary paddle up the Panji at two miles per hour. And it was a

curse upon all Syda-motibolos, the Little Forest masters—as the Hausas called the young white men who risked their lives in search of the living gold of the great rain forests—that they must do their work in the wet season, before the hot breath of the Sahara, the *hamattan*, reduced the water ways to mere trickles.

For the first few days the going was not so bad. There was a Company rest house in most of the villages along the route, and a man could sleep with a dry skin. But below the rapids, due to an exceptionally heavy downpour, Brent was forced to abandon his canoes and trek. Thereafter, the going got very rough. The banks of the river were lined with thorny bamboo, which resisted all penetration like a living thing. Confronted by this barrier Brent was forced to make a decision. He could camp where he was until the swollen rapids subsided, or he could strike deeper into the jungle where, if he was lucky enough to strike one, an elephant trail might give him a road through the forest as broad and solid as a paved street. Auran and his fellows were all in favor of waiting until they could drag their heavy dugouts upstream.

"The Amofti live in this forest, master," the headman cautioned Brent. "They are bad men. I fear that they will attack us."

But Brent had no time to waste. At the best he had sixty days to clean up his drag. Every day counted now.

"We have twenty guns," he told Auran firmly, and gave the order to break camp.

Six hours after the start he struck an elephant trail, roughly parallel to the winding course of the Sonji. The herd, he guessed, would be heading for the hills where the bamboo shoots were green and succulent, and with unerring instinct the great beasts choose the line of least resistance; the trail never led him up too steep a slope, or into a cul-de-sac, and where they rested there was always a clearing, a good camping ground, close to water. He saw nothing of the Amofti, and yet he knew that they were all around him, lurking in the bush on the flanks of his little caravan. Their drums were silent, and when he came to one of their villages, it was to find it deserted, a sure sign of their latent hostility.

But they did not show themselves until he was all but clear of their country. The safari was fording a swift, narrow stream when they burst out of the bush suddenly, intent upon spearing the few Hausas who had gained the opposite bank. But Brent had long been expecting just such an attack, and he had posted a half-dozen of his men among the rocks on the left and right of the ford to cover the crossing with their long-barreled guns.

At a yell from Brent the Hausas on the opposite bank dropped their loads and flattened out on the ground behind them; then, at another shout from Brent, a volley went whistling over their prone bodies into the close-packed band of charging Amofti warriors. Several fell, and the shock of it stopped them dead in their tracks. While the Hausas reloaded Brent's Manlicker snapped with deadly effect. A few easy victims was what the Amofti had anticipated, and they faded back into the bush before Brent had fired three rounds into them.

For a time there was absolute quiet, then a shower of arrows came arching across the stream. Brent saw Belo go running down the back trail, yelping like a dog with a can tied to its tail. But old Auran and the other Hausas stood their ground. A couple of volleys fired into the bush scattered the hidden bowmen. With Auran and a dozen Hausas at his back, Brent made the crossing, rooted a few bowmen out of the bush and sent them scampering back to their village. And that was the last he saw or heard of the Amofti for a long time.

"They will not come back," Belo assured him that night when they were camped a dozen miles beyond the ford. "They know now that we are great fighters, and that you are wise in war, Syda."

Brent smiled over Belo's "we." But he did not remind the houseboy of his headlong flight from the field of honor. What Belo lacked in many virtues he made up for in his skill as a cook, and in his concern for his master's comfort.

**F**OR the next two days they slugged through the sodden jungle, seldom with dry skins. Then the country changed. Hills, savage and densely wooded, heaped themselves up into the most forbidding forms.

Into them and through them Brent led his little caravan. At long last, from the shoulder of a ridge, he saw Adui, a small mud-walled town, crowning the top of a mist-shrouded hill. Talbot's map showed a lake and the base-camp, both within a half-day's march of Adui. But it was too late to go on, and he gave orders to camp on the spot.

On the following morning he sent Auran, Belo and the main body on to the base-camp with orders to clean out the bungalow and native huts for his forest gangs. He saw them on their way; then, with a bodyguard of six Hausas, he set out for Adui.

The walls of the town commanded a valley several miles across. There were stretches of cultivated ground, and grassy slopes, with herds of horses, and oxen, fawn-colored and not much much bigger than donkeys, grazing on them. Troop of horsemen came dashing out of a narrow gate and down the hill to meet them. They all wore spiked helmets reminiscent of the days of Saladin; chain mail glinted under their gorgeously colored burnouses, and they brandished their long guns at arm's length above their heads. As soon as they came within range, all the long guns exploded in the air. Then, by a quick turning movement, the charging horsemen enveloped Brent's little band while they shouted, every man in screaming falsetto: "Hou, Allah! Hou!"

And thus, enveloped in tumult, in the midst of a fantasia out of the dark ages, Brent made his entrance into town, and was conducted into the presence of the Obo.

Ben Undo was the Obo's name, and he seemed to have shriveled in his flowing burnouse, with its long sleeves and cowl, like a dried nut in its shell. In the courtyard of his house, under the shade of a tamarind tree, a servant served coffee in small brass cups. The old fellow sucked it through toothless gums, and smacked his lips like a kid with a stick of candy, while Brent talked business.

Since the rates the company paid for labor had been fixed by custom, Brent had no difficulty in getting the men he wanted. But when he decided to ride to the base camp, he soon found out that Obo was a shrewd bargainer. It was noon before he was in possession of the horse at half the first price asked. And even at that, he rode out of the town

convinced that he'd paid twice the beast's worth.

The old caravan road into the Cameroons followed the course of the Panji. A two-hour's ride along it brought Brent to the lake. Here the road angled away from the river and the marshy, reed-grown shore of the lake, and climbed to higher ground where there was a rest house with a paddock behind it for pack animals. The high ground gave Brent an unobstructed view of the lake, and Talbot's map showed the base camp and main drag a couple of miles west of it. He saw at once that the lake was an ideal spot to stamp and raft his logs. Talbot, evidently, had had some other idea, for he could see no log boom stretched across the lake's narrow outlet. His Hausa bodyguard was somewhere on the road behind. But he wanted to look over the drag before darkness came, and rode on without them.

The base camp stood in an extensive clearing, facing a gap in the surrounding hills out of which the Panji came roaring feather-white. His bungalow was the usual square floor four feet above the crawling earth, sheltered by a peaked roof of thatch. A hundred yards behind it was the native compound, flanked by four, large huts, two on each side. The main drag was visible from the veranda of the bungalow. It looked like a white scar on the face of the hillside.

As Braddock had said, it was a tough drag. A deep and wide ravine, which ran parallel with the river for several miles at least, had presented Talbot with a problem. But he had solved it by building a bridge. The solidness of the structure amazed Brent. It was difficult for him to understand how whiskey could get the better of a man with the engineering skill and the guts to tackle such a job. He returned to the bungalow filled with a deep sense of gratitude. Whatever Talbot's failings, he'd certainly made the extraction job an easy one for his successor.

Belo had a meal on the table for him when he stepped into the bungalow. Brent ate in silence for a time, thinking about Talbot. Suddenly he asked:

"Did you know the Syda Talbot, Belo?"

The houseboy was standing with his back to Brent, looking out of the window that faced the compound. He turned about slow-

ly, his expression blank as he shook his head.

"You were not at Sonji when he came up river?" Brent was puzzled.

"No, master," Belo explained. "My mother was sick, The Big Master was kind. He let me go home to my village."

"Did Auran know him?"

"No, master. Auran came to Sonji little time before you come. He work at Benué station before, long time," Belo answered, and then started to clear the table. Brent filled his pipe, and went out to see what sort of job Auran had made of cleaning the native huts.

The gang from Adui came in before noon on the following day. They were experienced forest workers, and by sundown Brent had them organized into groups, the fellers, the saw-men and the adze-men.

### III

IT WAS Brent's chief job to select and mark suitable trees for felling, and he soon found out that he was in for a tough grind in the Panji forest. Here, the mahogany grew on steep hillsides amid entanglements of thorny bamboo, perhaps one or two big ones to an acre of forest. For eight hours at a stretch he scrambled up and down the steep slopes like a squirrel on a treadmill, to get his crew off to a good start. Yet the concession promised to be a rich one. On the first day he spotted two patricians of the species, the aromatic *Guarea*s, worth at least three thousand dollars apiece on the European market.

It took four men half a day to fell the giants, and when they came down they shook the earth for miles around; and for several minutes afterwards the woody lianas which came down with them dragged broken twigs to earth in a shower. Then the saw gang came with cross-cuts to cut the logs where Brent marked them; then the adze-men to shape and square each side of the log in turn.

The extraction process was man-power, pure and simple. Small trees were cut to make a corduroy track; then a hundred hands swarmed to the ropes. Small boys ran ahead, smearing the track with potopoto mud. Old Auran's shrill falsetto chanted an appeal to Allah for strength.

All hands responded in chorus: "Hou, Allah! Hou!" and heaved. The boys danced around the haulers, screaming encouragement. The great log moved, and was started on its long journey down to the coast.

The next two weeks things went very smoothly for Brent. Belo was almost unbelievable, a veritable paragon among cooks, and always smiling, always at hand to anticipate his master's needs. Parting with a boy like Belo must have been like drawing teeth, he thought, and that made him think kindly of Braddock. Well fed, as fit as he'd ever been, and with Auran, trustworthy and competent to keep his Hausa gang at it, he was confident that he'd have the drag cleaned out well in advance of the hamattan. And then everything started to go wrong.

He was smoking an after-lunch cigarette in a small clearing when he heard Auran shouting at the top of his voice: "Master! Master!" As he jumped to his feet Auran burst out of the bush and came running up to him.

"What is it?" Brent asked.

Auran fetched a couple of deep breaths and gasped out: "Oh, master, an evil thing has come to pass!"

"So—what thing?"

"The Amofti, master! They have come to avenge their brothers whom we slew."

Brent stood staring down into Auran's black, wrinkled face.

"This is foolish talk, Auran. The Amofti would not dare to follow us into this country."

"No—yes, Master! They leave juju sign in the bush!" In his agitation Auran caught Brent's arm and started to pull him up a trail into the bush. And just then a gang of Hausas came rushing down it, wild-eyed and shrieking as if all the bush-devils in Africa were on their heels. To avoid being trampled underfoot, Brent dived into the bush, and crouched there, revolver in hand, expecting to see a band of Amofti warriors come charging down the trail at any moment. Nothing happened. He waited a little longer; then, as the shouts of the panic-stricken Hausas faded in his ears, he came out onto the trail and advanced cautiously up it. At a rustle in the bush behind him he spun around, ready to shoot. But it was only Auran crawling out of the bush. Brent

cursed him under his breath.

"Where is this juju?" he demanded sharply, as the headman got to his feet and looked around nervously.

With evident reluctance Auran led him up the trail for some distance, then came to a halt, and pointed a shaking finger. Looking up Brent saw a human skull grinning down at him from the fork of a yubi tree. The eye sockets had been ringed about with red pigment. Immediately below it a patch of bark had been blazed from the trunk of the tree, and a few crude symbols had been burned into the sap wood with a heated iron, or spear-point. Nothing more.

"What does it mean, Auran?" he asked.

"The Amofti have put the curse of the tree-spirits upon us, Master. There will be much trouble now. Do not touch it, Master. It will make you sick—"

"Nonsense!" snorted Brent. But he knew that it was not. The Hausas were Mohammedans, but they had accepted the Koran at the sword's point. Their ears were still attuned to the low-toned booming of the juju drums, and in their hearts there was the fear of the dark mysteries of their ancestors. They were juju-ridden, and the silence that had come to the forest made Brent realize that he had serious trouble to deal with. Not the sound of an axe, not a man working anywhere.

"Get the damned thing down out of there!" he told Auran. But the headman backed away, shaking his head; then he turned suddenly and bolted down the trail.

BRENT climbed up to the fork, wrenched the skull from it, and dropped to the ground again. He was about to hurl it into the bush, but changed his mind as it occurred to him that one of the Hausas might stumble upon it.

"Out of sight, out of mind," he muttered, and went to bury it in the bush. Then he returned to the tree and chopped out the symbols with his machete.

The native compound was full of dark commotion when he got back to camp. Before a fire which burned yellow in the midst of a circle of squatting men, a Hausa sorcerer was beating his drum. Another, all tricked out in the hideous regalia of his profession, was dancing like a crazy ape

while chanted incantations to offset the Amofti juju. Wisely, Brent did not interfere. It might take a day or two, but the safest course was to let them work it out of their systems in their own way.

But he was worried about the Amofti. He was inclined to think that only a small band had come into the Panji forest, and that they'd planted their juju and then cleared out. Yet it was possible that a few of them were still lurking out in the bush, waiting to see if their juju produced the desired effect.

As he rounded the corner of the bungalow he hauled up with a grunt of surprise. Belo, who he'd sent into Adui earlier in the day, was back with an ox-cart loaded with supplies. But it was the tall, handsome girl who stood at the foot of the veranda steps that held Brent's attention. She wore a single garment, a length of cloth passed under the right arm and knotted over the left shoulder through which the sunlight passed, revealing in shadowy outline the fine proportions of her body. Silver bells attached to her ankles tinkled when she moved, and there wasn't enough Hausa blood in her veins to put a shadow under her brown skin. A full-blooded Arab slave-girl from the bazaar of Adui, Brent deduced from the fact that she wore no veil.

At his approach the girl's full, red lips shaped to a smile, but at his frown it vanished and she looked down at the ground. Belo jumped down from the ox-cart, salaamed and met Brent's scowl with a broad grin.

"I tell you, boy, this good girl. I bring her for you."

"Take her back where she came from, quick!" Brent snapped.

Belo looked shocked. "But, Master," he protested, "she come from Obo's house. She dance for him. But Obo ver' old, this girl ver' young, ver' good. She not know—"

"Get rid of her, I said!" Brent interposed angrily, and Belo dodged behind the girl to avoid a threatened slap. The girl's eyes looked deeply into Brent's for an instant. Anger sparkled in their dark depths, and her body tensed as if she were about to make a spring. Then, without uttering a word, she turned and walked away, her head held high.

In the morning Brent awoke with the drum out in the compound pounding in his ears. He had a dull, feverish headache and no appetite for breakfast. He drank his coffee, but pushed aside the plate Belo had set before him, and sat frowning, his fingers tapping the table top in rhythm with the drum.

"Master sick?" Belo asked, his tone full of concern.

Brent shook his head; then: "How long d'you suppose they'll keep that up?" he asked.

Belo shrugged. "Big palaver, Master," he said. "Hausa boy think Amofti out in bush."

"Call Auran, and I'll give them something else to think about," said Brent peevishly.

"No good, Master," Belo shook his head. "Hausa boy damn scared. You go to Adui, make palaver with Obo. He send men with gun to drive Amofti out of bush, maybe."

"Hm—you've got something there," murmured Brent and fell silent. But the more he thought of Belo's suggestion the better he liked it. It would cost the Company money, but they stood to lose a damn sight more if his gang refused to go into the forest. "It's worth a try," he decided. "Saddle the horse, Belo."

He went to his bedroom, dragged the cash box from under his cot, unlocked it and took out a bag of silver. He re-locked the box and shoved it back under the cot with his foot.

HE RODE into Adui an hour before noon, and hauled up in front of the Obo's house. But he sat in the courtyard for an hour before the Obo came out in answer to his request for an audience. The old man was not disposed to take a serious view of the Amofti's incursion into his district.

"Ah, those Amofti," he said contemptuously, "they are too stupid to be good slaves. Besides, they are like monkeys in the forest. My warriors could not catch them."

"I want to drive them out, not to catch them, Obo."

"Be patient, my son. They will go away soon."

"But I cannot wait, father. There is little time left before the harmattan."

"What cannot be done before harmattan, can be done after harmattan, my son," said the Obo complacently.

"For the love of Allah, send twenty men with guns into the forest," Brent pleaded desperately, and set his bag of silver down at the old man's feet.

A gleam came into the Obo's eyes. "Ah," he said, "I see that you are deeply troubled, my son. And you do well to remind me that Allah is all merciful, compassionate. Your plea touches my heart."

Brent rode out of Adui with a wry mouth. He had gained his point. The Obo had agreed to send a troop of his horsemen into the forest, but it had cost the Company money, all right! He was minus one bag of silver, and pledged to hand over another as soon as the Amofti had been driven from the forest. He thought he understood better what Simpson had had in mind when he'd spoken of a "fine conception of squeeze," and he wondered what Braddock would have to say about the deal. Well, it was better than leaving a small fortune in time left before the harmattan."

He got back to camp just after dark. The drum in the compound was still throbbing, and it seemed to Brent that every beat re-echoed in a hollow chamber in his brain. He went into the bungalow, shouting for Belo. He got no answer, decided that he didn't want to eat anyway, and headed for his cot.

The first thing he saw on opening the door to his room was his cash box—smashed open, empty! In the next moment he was shouting for Belo and Auran.

Determined to catch the thief, he searched the men's quarters and their scanty gear in person. The search yielded nothing. Then he had each man brought to the bungalow for questioning, and again drew a blank. The Hausas all told the same story. They had been completely absorbed in their anti-juju ceremonies. No man had left the compound during Brent's absence; and no man had seen a stranger come into the camp. Contritely Belo confessed that he had left the bungalow to eat the evening meal with Auran.

"But I was not away far, Master. And just a little time."

"Long enough," said Brent grimly. Then,

as Belo hung his head and looked as if he were about to burst into tears, he added: "You are not to blame. I left no orders for you to watch the box. Tell Auran to get the men settled down. I want every man on the drag before sunrise."

Completely baffled, Brent sat on his cot staring down at the empty cash box, his elbows on his knees, the palms of his hands pressed to his throbbing temples. There was more involved than the loss of the money. He wouldn't be able to pay off the Obo, and that might start more trouble. He'd have to send down to Sonji for more cash. Well, thank God, he had enough to make good on that, at any rate. And if he cleaned up the drag Braddock wouldn't have much to kick about.

#### IV

HE WROTE out his monthly report, and enclosed a letter to Braddock. It was an urgent request for cash to meet his payroll, and if Braddock acted on it promptly he wasn't licked yet.

He awoke with a blinding headache. As soon as he put his feet on the floor he was seized by a fit of ague, and knew at once that he was in for a dose of fever. He wasn't particularly worried. The Company's doctor had told him that he was one of the lucky ones—something in his blood that responded readily to the action of quinine. He dosed himself with the drug, and went out to breakfast with his ears buzzing. But he had no stomach for anything but coffee. Belo shook his head over his untouched food.

"Master plenty sick now," he said. "Big Master say: 'I tell you, boy, nothing like whiskey for fever. It make the sweat come'."

His imitation of Braddock's manner and voice made Brent smile. "Good advice—if there was any whiskey," he said.

"Plenty whiskey," Belo grinned. "I bring one case. I know master get sick, always white man get sick in jungle."

"Lord, you're like a mother to me, Belo! Make it a stiff one, and hot, eh?"

He was sipping the-liquor when Auran appeared at the door. One look at the headman's dour face was enough to tell Brent that something else had gone wrong.

"Well, what is it now?" he asked, with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"The men say they wil not go to work, master."

"Why not?"

"Because there is no money in the pay box, master."

Brent's lips tightened and a look of grim determination came to his face.

"All right," he said. "I'll talk to them."

The Hausas were gathered in the compound, gesticulating and jabbering like a troop of monkeys. Feeling dizzy and a little unsteady on his feet, Brent strode among them. Firmly, and in good Hausa, he told them:

"I have asked the Big Master Braddock for more money. As soon as it comes, I will pay you according to contract. Meanwhile, there is no akal, no food, no tobacco for the man who does not work."

His edict was received in ominous silence. Brilliant eyes, set in tense, black faces, glared at him with unwinking intensity. The smell of grease and sweat was very strong as they pressed closer, closer around him. He could hear their quickened breathing, feel the hot breath of those immediately behind him on the back of his neck.

He was just one white man, alone, unarmed. All they had to do was stick one of their long knives into his back and help themselves to the stores he'd threatened to withhold. A shudder ran across his taut nerves. But it was more mental than physical, and nothing of what he felt showed on his face. The Hausas could see no fear in him. They muttered and swayed about as a big fellow elbowed his way forward to confront Brent. Brent knew him. He was the cock of the compound, a trouble maker, feared and disliked by his fellows. With muscular arms folded across his naked chest, he stuck out his heavy jaw and shouted:

"You say Hausa boy steal money! Now, you say Hausa boy go hungry and work for nothing! T'haffad, Nazarini! T'haffad!"

"T'haffad, blackfellow!" Brent snapped back at him. "Be careful, I say, or it will be worse than bad for you!"

The big black looked around at his companions, seeking support. All eyes were upon him, but not a man moved, not a word of encouragement was spoken. The

black's bluster became a little uncertain. He exaggerated it, pounding his chest with his clenched fist and shouting:

"I am Jili! I am strong. If this Nazarini harkim does not give us akal, I will break his back like a reed!"

"There is no food for the man who does not work," Brent repeated calmly; then added with a short laugh: "And if Jili's belly is as big as his mouth, he will be the first to go back to work, I think!"

The remark tickled the Hausas' sense of humor, and their laughter was a whetstone for Jili's anger. It took him a moment to work up his nerve, and then he made a rush at Brent, bent double, his arms extended to grapple. Brent sidestepped quickly. At the same time his open hand flashed up and chopped down on Jili's outstretched neck. It was a jujitsu blow, alongside the neck, parallel to and just under the jaw bone and it could paralyze, even kill if delivered with sufficient force.

Under the momentum of his rush, Jili went sprawling among his companions. The impact of his body knocked one man down and scattered a dozen others. Without another word, Brent stepped into the gap over the unconscious black's body. The Hausas were not unhappy about the fall of their self-appointed champion. Grinning, they moved aside to allow Brent to pass; and before he reached the bungalow, he heard old Auran shouting orders, herding the gangs out into the forest.

**B**UT in the days that followed Brent soon found out that it was one thing to drive blackfellows to work, and quite another to keep them at it. They went out into the forest every morning as usual, and they stayed there until sunset. But a couple of husky loggers working with peevies could have extracted more timber in a day than they did in a week. What was worse, every morning Auran came to report that two or three men had slipped out of camp during the night. At the rate he was losing men, his total labor force would soon be reduced to the few men who had come up from Sonji with him. Racked by fever and at his wits' end, he was tormented day and night by growing conviction that the Panji forest was going to lick him.

Then he thought of the oxen he'd seen grazing on the slopes of Adui. With a dozen teams and a skeleton gang to handle them he could still clean out the drag. The trick would be to persuade the Obo to let him have the beasts on credit. Not much hope of that—but, hell, it was worth one damn good try!

He was standing in the Obo's courtyard before noon, his head ringing like a bell from the effects of the quinine he'd taken.

"When you asked for warriors, I sent them into the forest," Ben Undo reminded him sourly. "And now you have no money to pay me."

"You know that the money was stolen, father. Also, you know that I have sent for more money."

"True, I know this. But there were no Amofti in the forest, my son. And I do not think that the Syda Braddock will pay me so well for chasing shadows. Besides, my people say that there is a juju curse in the Panji forest, and that you—"

"That is the talk of fools, father!"

The old man's smile was tolerant. "It may be that my people are fools, my son. And yet you know that the Syda Talbot died in this forest. And I see that you are sick. Nothing goes well for you since you took down the Amofti juju. It may be, as you say, but—"

"Give me the oxen, Father," Brent pleaded. "And I will show you that there is no curse upon me, or the Panji forest!"

But the old man's only answer was a shake of his head, which conveyed, as plainly as words, a cold refusal.

Brent rode back for camp, fathoms deep in a profound fit of depression. It seemed to press on him from all sources, from the bloody sunset, and from the darkening jungle on the mountain slopes. He was out of his depth in this forest, up against things he could not understand, could not come to grips with. If he had a little more time—but the great leaves of the trees, he noted, were changing color, the slanting rays of the sun beating through them so that they looked like yellow cellophane.

The river was not foaming into the lake as when he'd first seen it, a sure sign that the rainy season was drawing to a close. He hauled up, frowning at the logs that jammed

the lake's outlet. He'd be lucky if he got another raft afloat before it dwindled to a swamp. And yet there was still time. The money he'd sent for should reach him before the end of the week. And then—

He was seized by a violent fit of shivering as a cool wind came sliding down from the mountains. When the paroxysm passed there was a haze before his eyes. The lake, the mountains, the sky—everything was out of perspective, wavering, fluid.

When he opened his eyes he was on his cot, but he couldn't remember riding into camp. The odor of cooking permeated the bungalow. Hunger and the smell of it made him feel a little dizzy. But he wasn't sweating. His sheets were dry, and he knew that he was over the worst of it. At his shout Belo came to the door, and stood grinning at him.

"Master better now," he said. "I tell you, boy, you sleep like dead man!"

"How long, Belo?"

"Three days, Master."

Brent sat up as if something had stung him. Unconscious for three days! A hell of a lot doctors knew about malaria. Three days—"Did the money box come?" he asked.

"No, master."

Brent passed a shaking hand before his eyes. What else could go wrong? Nothing had gone right since he buried that damned skull. Lord, it was enough to make a man believe in juju!

"Lazy blackfellow eat plenty, but don't work for Auran," Belo told him. "You make no trouble, Big Master fix 'em, I tell you!"

"Big Master—here?" Brent was startled.

"He come up-river with box-money, I think," Belo said.

"I'd sooner see the devil," groaned Brent. But somehow he knew Belo was right.

He drove what was left of his gang out into the forest the next day, and somehow managed to keep on his feet. But it was hopeless. They worked, or went through the motions, while he was standing over them, but squatted on their heels where they were as soon as he turned his back. They had him licked. He knew it, but he couldn't find the energy to do anything about it.

HE HAD shaken off the fever, but he could not shake off the horrible las-

situde the disease had left in its wake. He got little sleep at night. Failure was a hard thing to sleep with. And it was worse for him, because he could not rid himself of the nagging idea that it was all due to some flaw in his own make-up. He felt self-betrayed, and he lay under his mosquito netting, tormented by the thought that in a matter of days—hours, perhaps—he'd have to face up to Braddock. And it was this accursed jungle, not Braddock, that had driven young Talbot to suicide.

Unable to stand it any longer, and not a little alarmed at his own morbid state of mind, he got up and went out onto the veranda in his pajamas. Soon Belo came out with whiskey and soda. He set his tray on the cane table, and looked up at Brent, his face a picture of commiseration.

"Drink a little, Master," he urged. "Sleep will come. Big Master always say—"

"I know—clear out!" Brent told him irritably.

Belo's smile came and went as Brent filled his glass and drank. Then he salaamed and effaced himself.

Out in the compound a Hausa bagpipe was wailing, its harsh, squeaking notes dominating all other sounds; then the Hausas began to chant a song of ancient days, a hymn of dead ages. Brent sat drinking and brooding until the camp was quiet, and his loneliness became a palpable horror. He swallowed his next drink neat, staggered into his room, and flopped on his cot.

"Hardisty!"

He opened his eyes, groaned, and shut them again against the glare of sunlight flooding into the room.

"Hardisty, get on your feet, you damned sot! D'you hear me?"

Brent sat up and swore as his bleary eyes came to focus on Braddock. The manager's bulk filled the doorway, and his glare, supported by an immense frown, pushed at Brent across the intervening space.

"A hell of a man you turned out to be, you with your damned, cocksure, Yankee manner!" he stormed furiously. Then he went stamping in and out of the room, leaving a foul string of epithets trailing behind him. Finally, he came to a stand at the foot of Brent's cot and finished. "You're the worst man they ever sent up to me,

Hardisty. Not a man on the job—and you dead drunk before noon!"

Brent got to his feet. "Hardly touched the stuff before last night, sir," he said. "I felt a bit off color and—"

An oath and a wave of Braddock's hand cut him short. "I've that heard before," Braddock snorted. "I've had a look around, and I've had a talk with the Obo. A hell of a mess you've made of things! The firm stands to lose—"

"I don't think so, sir," Brent interposed. "Now that you're here we can get those oxen. Then I'll clean up this drag if it's the last thing I do on earth."

Braddock's mouth stretched into a tight, thin line. He regarded Brent steadily for a time, then: "You're through, Hardisty," he said with deliberation. "I'm sending you down to Logos. I'll give you enough for expenses. No more. If you think you've got more coming you can take the matter up with Headquarters when you get there. Understand?"

At the oblique allusion to the money he could not account for Brent's face changed color. He said: "I'd like to say a few words before you kick me out, Mr. Braddock."

"All right—say 'em."

Then Brent gave him a clear and detailed account of all that had happened. Braddock listened without interruption, his face blank. As Brent paused he asked:

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your letter told me as much. Now listen, Hardisty, I'll include your story in my report to Headquarters. They may believe you, but I tell you, boy, quite frankly I don't! The ox cart I came in with is outside. Just throw your stuff into it and get to hell out of my sight!"

Brent's lips whitened, and a gleam of anger changed his eyes. But it was gone in an instant. He didn't have the will to argue, the fever had burned it out of him, and the brooding spirit of the jungle still held him in thrall. Why should Braddock accept an excuse for failure when, apart from his own shortcomings, he didn't believe there was one himself?

Braddock was watching Brent's face narrowly, his poise that of a man braced for

a swift attack. His mouth slackened into a sneer as Brent turned away and stooped to pull his bag from under the cot. Then he pulled a coin purse out of his pocket, counted out a half-dozen gold coins and stacked them on the table.

"That'll see you down to Logos," he said. "I'm going up the drag now, and I don't want to see you around when I come back."

Brent merely nodded assent, and Braddock uttered a snort of contempt and went out. Belo came in to help Brent pack.

"It makes my stomach sick to see you go, Master," he said. "I talked with Big Master, but he only cursed me. Perhaps when his anger is gone he will listen."

Brent straightened up slowly, his eyes clouded with thought. After all there was an explanation for what had happened, and Belo was the witness to the truth of it. What made Braddock so damned sure—well, there was an explanation for that, too. Braddock hadn't forgotten the beating he'd taken at Sonji station. This was the payoff. Sure Braddock had him down—

"Where will you sleep tonight, Master?" Belo's voice cut in on his thoughts.

"At the rest house by the lake," Brent told him. "Get started down-river tomorrow, I hope."

"I have put akal in the ox cart, Master," Belo told him as they finished packing. "Also, there is whiskey in the little bag."

"Thanks—thanks for everything," Brent murmured absently, and pressed one of the gold coins into the houseboy's moist hand.

## V

**J**UST before sunset he dismounted before the rest house. While the ox cart driver unloaded his bags and carried them into the bungalow he unsaddled his horse and led it around to the paddock. Later he made a lonely meal of the sandwiches Belo had packed, and then went out onto the veranda.

The hillside sloped steeply down to the lake.

Beyond the mountains cut the skyline with sharp precision, their uniformity of curve and color broken by vast stretches of green, now aglow with the suppressed

flame of the setting sun, a jungle of blood and gloom.

Darkness came swiftly to the mountains, and all around him the bush was full of hurried noises. Queer monkey-whinnings came out of the misty green; the bamboos creaked, quivering, incessantly moving in the light wind. The jungle was alive, breathing, restless—all the growing and living things it sheltered engaged in a merciless struggle for survival. Suddenly there was awakened in him a dread of its weird power, its oppressive strength. Out there there were unspeakable horrors, things that went back to the beginning of time, against which it was futile to struggle. He felt the green walls closing around him, thought that he'd never escape.

He shivered in the sudden chill of the night, and told himself that he was in for another dose of the fever. It was bad for him—too much imagination. Hell with it! A man in his condition, and with what he had to face at Logos, needed something to make him sleep and forget. He went into the bungalow and came out again with a bottle of whiskey. He settled himself in the cane chair and, with grim determination, proceeded to drink himself into a state of insensibility.

He was not a drinking man, and two stiff tots of the raw spirits only deepened his mood of black despair. He was pacing the veranda when he saw her, swaying through a pool of moonlight, a white flower gleaming in her glossy, black hair.

"Ahlen wasahlan, Syda!" she said in a throaty contralto as she came up onto the veranda.

"Ahlen wasahlan!" murmured Brent.

She sat on the veranda rail, her perfect shoulders against the post, her smile faint. Brent eased himself into his chair, and was silent for a moment, savoring the strong flavor of her presence. A very handsome girl, he decided, and thought that it was no wonder that Belo had looked shocked when he'd sent her away at their first meeting. With a quizzical smile he asked:

"What is your name, girl?"

"Zo-koma, Syda."

"Lotus of the North," he translated, and thought that she was well named. Then: "Who told you I was here, Zo-koma?"

"The ox cart driver who brought you here, Syda."

"Well, well!" murmured Brent, and poured himself out another drink. He sipped it slowly and then, struck by a sudden thought, asked: "Did he not tell you, also, that there is a curse upon my head?"

She looked at him, her expression grave. "The curse is in what you drink, Syda," she told him, pointing to the whiskey bottle at Brent's feet. "There is neither sleep nor forgetfulness in it, only despair and—death!"

Brent's jaw sagged open. A lecture on the evils of alcohol was not what he'd anticipated at first sight of her. But, of course, the girl was of the Mohammedan faith, and since the Koran interdicted all intoxicants— He started, struck by another thought, and looked up at the girl quickly.

"Perhaps you knew the Syda Talbot?" he asked

Her answer came softly: "I knew him as well as a woman may know a man, Syda."

"Ah!" Brent understood now. She was telling him that what had happened to Talbot could happen to him. And, by heaven, she was right! He was more than half way down to hell already. There was a long pause, then he asked:

"You were Talbot's woman, Zo-koma?"

"Even so," she answered huskily. "He was good and kind. I have not forgotten him."

Brent's expression became puzzled. "You came from Adui—just to tell me this, Zo-koma?"

The girl slipped from the veranda rail, and drew herself up to her full height. Her eyes caught the moonlight and held it, flashing. "I came to tell you that there is no evil in this forest," she said with the throb of passion in her voice. "The evil is in the heart of Belo, even as it was when he took me from my father's house and gave me to the Syda Talbot."

"Belo—Belo here with Talbot!" Brent stiffened in his chair, his hands gripping the arms so that the cane creaked and snapped under the pressure.

"Even so," said the girl. "Know, also, Syda, that when you came Belo came to my father's house again. He gave me gold to come to your house, and he said that he

would give much more if I did not tell you what I knew."

"But—but why?" gasped Brent.

The girl shook her head. "If you do not know, I cannot tell you, Syda. It is for you to seek out the evil. I only know that Belo is evil. Oh, yes, I know that he killed my lover as surely as if he had driven a knife into his heart! I can tell you no more. I go now, Syda. And may Allah take the darkness from your eyes, and strengthen your hand against your enemies!" Then she turned, glided down the veranda steps to vanish into the shadows of the jungle trail.

For a long time Brent sat utterly still, while mentally he relived the past from the first day of his arrival at the Sonji station. And in the light of what he now knew, every incident, every remembered word added up to just one thing. From the very start Braddock, with cold-blooded deliberation, had set out to break him, even as he had broken Talbot. Belo had planted the juju; Belo had robbed the cash box—Belo the perfect servant, Braddock's man!

Sure it couldn't be anything else! In retrospect the whole scheme, in all its fiendish cleverness, was as transparent as crystal. The fever must have done something to his brain, or surely he'd have seen through it before this. Sure, he was right, it was simple. Send a man into the jungle; arrange a series of mishaps to make it tough for him; then, when the victim's resistance is at the lowest ebb, have a man like Belo handy to stick a bottle of whiskey under his nose. Oh yes, and then bring on a girl to help him forget his trouble, and—well, if the poor devil didn't succumb to the treatment, if he didn't go native for a spell, he'd be fit to play a harp among the angels in heaven!

**H**ALF-AN-HOUR later he was riding along the Lake road. The tall reeds were rustling in the wind. The moon was caught between two clouds, and the forest threw its black shadow across the surface of the lake. Suddenly his eye was caught by a flash of yellow light near the lake's outlet. He pulled up and saw that someone with a lantern was out on the rafts. Then he made out two shadowy figures moving across the logs toward him. His eyes widened with

surprise as he recognized Braddock and Belo. The pair stopped. The lantern was lowered as they squatted on the logs, then the sound of scraping, followed by the ring of blows on metal, came to his ears.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered in an explosive whisper. And in the next moment he was out of the saddle, and pushing his way through the reeds to the margin of the lake. Crouched there amid the reeds he could see the two men plainly in the light of the lantern, and what they were doing was obvious to him now. They were scraping out the N.M.C. he'd stamped on some of the logs and putting another stamp in its place. The pair moved closer to him, Belo with a long pike-pole on his shoulder, a hammer in his left hand; Braddock, carrying the lantern in one hand, the heavy, metal stamp in the other. Now, he could hear their voices, caught their words:

"—many does that make, Belo?"

"It is five, Master."

"The devil! You should have started before this. I promised Perez six Guareas, y'know, and he'll raise—"

"It was not safe, master." Belo's voice cut in defensively. "He did not drink or sleep like the other. But now that you are here—"

"No, five is the best we can do. We'll have to cut 'em adrift tonight. The shortage will show against Hardisty's account. I tell you, boy, I'm taking more chances right now than it's—" His voice faded as they moved swiftly along the logs, jumping from one to another.

Brent saw it all now. Braddock was selling the best logs to the trader Perez, and covering the shortage by accusing his Sydas of incompetence, drunkenness and the Lord only knew what else. Talbot hadn't turned in a false report, but he'd been short in his account by many thousand dollars' worth of mahogany. And Braddock had hounded the poor devil, driven him to suicide. Yes, and right now Brent Hardisty would be dead drunk in the rest house while history repeated itself, but for the fact that Talbot had left his image in the heart of an Arab slave-girl! A very smart man was Curtis Braddock—"a destroyer of youth if ever there was" as a few had discovered before it was too late!

Brent sprang from the shore to the raft,

and cat-footed after the glow of Braddock's lantern. He was within a dozen paces of the pair when Belo turned and saw him. The houseboy let out a squeal of fright, then, quick as a flash, he swung the pike-pole over his shoulder and drove the spike at Brent's belly. With a sweep of his left arm Brent parried the thrust, leaping forward at the same time. Belo collapsed under a punch that all but jolted his head from his shoulders. As he fell flat across the logs Brent whirled around to face Braddock.

The manager stood astride one log, his feet firmly planted on two others. Coolly he set the lantern down on the log in front of him. Its light fell on his face as he straightened up, pushed his topee to the back of his head, and stood looking at Brent with the metal stamp held across his thighs at arm's length. Then his mouth twisted into a queer grin.

"It would seem that you've blundered onto the truth, Hardisty," he said. "Or it may be that you've got more brains than Simpson and I gave you credit for. If that's so you'll come in with us and keep your mouth shut."

"You haven't got what it'd take to gag me," Brent told him quietly.

"Don't be a fool! I tell you, boy, you'll get nothing out of this firm. You'll sweat the best years of your life out in the jungle, then they'll send you home, rotten with fever, broken in health, to live out the rest of your life on a pauper's pension. Keep your mouth shut, and we'll send you home with money in your pocket. Think of New York with plenty to spend. Think of it, boy!"

BRENT shook his head, his face expressionless. For a long moment they stood, each gazing deeply into the other's eyes, each silently measuring the other's strength. Belo groaned, rolled over, but did not attempt to get up. Under Brent's cold stare Braddock's eyes became uneasy, but he smiled and said:

"What have you got in mind, Hardisty? We're a long way from civilization, and there's not much you can do, y'know."

"Right now," Brent said, "I'm going to do something for Talbot. I'm going to beat the living daylight out of you, and then—" He broke off as Belo grabbed him by the

leg, and tried to twist away as Braddock leaped at him, swung the stamp above his head. But Belo held on. He staggered, recovered, and threw up his arm to protect his head. Braddock's forearm struck his, breaking the force of the blow. But the corner of the stamp smashed through the cork of his topee and creased his skull. Half-stunned he went down on all fours. Then Braddock's knee crashed into his face. He rolled over onto his back. Only the span of his shoulders saved him from going down between the logs.

Then Braddock flung himself on top of him. He grasped Brent by the throat, forcing his head down into the water while he swung the stamp to strike again. But contact with the water restored Brent to full consciousness. He caught the handle of the stamp as it came down, and a quick twist of his wrist wrenched it from Braddock's grasp. But with the dead weight of Braddock's body across his he was powerless to do more.

"Belo, the pike-pole, quick!" Braddock roared. "Push the logs apart, you fool!"

The spike of the pike-pole thudded into the log close to Brent's head and as Belo threw his weight against it, the gap under Brent's shoulders widened inch by inch. Braddock had the heel of his palm under Brent's chin, forcing his head down, down—

Brent realized that in a matter of seconds he'd be under the logs, or that his head would be crushed between them. He put every ounce of strength he had into a last desperate struggle for his life. His groping hand came in contact with the pike-pole. He grasped it, writhed and heaved. He got a fleeting glimpse of Braddock's face, savage, horrible. Belo had jerked the spike from the log and was trying to wrest the pole from Brent's grasp. With the strength of desperation Brent clung to it, and, with Belo's unwitting assistance, got his shoulders up and athwart the logs.

"Let go—let go of it!" Braddock yelled, and reared up to smash his fist into Brent's face. And just then, while Brent was heaving on the pole with all his strength, Belo let go. Suddenly released the pole shot forward with terrific force. There was a sickening thud, and Braddock rolled over with the spike driven into his skull up to the hook.

It took Brent a few seconds to absorb the shock of it. Then, still badly shaken, he got to his feet and looked around for Belo. The houseboy was standing like a man in a trance, his mouth open, his bulging eyes fastened on Braddock's body. As Brent advanced upon him he sank to his knees whimpering like a monkey.

"Master—oh Master!" he gasped out. "I did not mean to kill you. Do not send your ghost to—"

"Get up!" Brent snapped.

Belo looked up at him with fear-glazed eyes. "Oh, do not kill me, Master. he whimpered. "I am just little black-fellow. I do what the Big Master say."

"You'll tell your story to the Obo, eh?"

"Oh yes, master! I will tell all."

Later that night Brent wrote out a long report. Then, as the sky turned gray with the dawn, he escorted Belo into Adui. There he handed him over to the Obo for safe-keeping until the close of the season.

"Now that you have the curse of the Panji forest locked in your guardhouse, Obo," Brent said with a faint smile, "I ask again for the oxen, and for men so that I may make good the time that has been lost."

"I will give them to you, my son. My people will sleep better knowing that there is no curse in their forest. They will work hard for you."

"There is another thing that troubles my mind, father. A girl. Her name is Zo-koma."

"Ah!" The old man's eyes quickened with interest. "I know the girl. But, Syda, she is very beautiful, and she dances well. I will buy her for you, but she will cost much—"

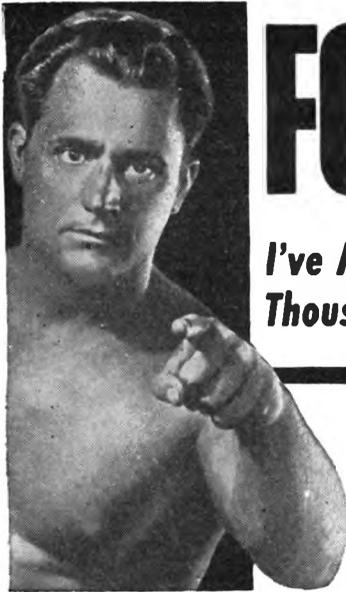
"I do not want to buy her, Father. But I will pay her bride-price so that she may be free to give herself with her heart. Also, I wish to leave a gift of gold for her with you."

"Wallah!" murmured the old man. "You white men—I shall never understand you! But it shall be as you desire, my son. Go now, and the peace of Allah go with you!"

The hot breath of the harmattan fanned Brent's cheeks when he rode out of Adui.

From a nearby hillside Zo-koma watched until the little caravan vanished into the dusty distance. Then she turned and walked away, her head erect, her smile serene.

# NEW BODIES FOR OLD!



**I've Made New Men Out of Thousands of Other Fellows...**

**"Here's what I did for THOMAS MANFRE...and what I can do for you!"**

*-Charles Atlas*

**G**IVE me a skinny, peepless, second-rate body—and I'll crum it so full of handsome, bulging new muscle that your friends will grow bug-eyed! . . . I'll wake up that sleeping energy of yours and make it hum like a high-powered motor! Man, you'll *feel* and *look* different! You'll begin to *LIVE!*

**Let Me Make YOU a NEW MAN— IN JUST 15 MINUTES A DAY**

You wouldn't believe it, but I myself used to be a 97-lb. weakling. Fellows called me "Skinny." Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. I was a flop. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—"Dynamic Tension." And it turned me into such a complete specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

**ARE YOU**  
Skinny and run down?  
Always tired?  
Nervous?  
Lacking in confidence?  
Constipated?  
Suffering from bad breath?  
What to Do About It  
is told in my free book!

**What is "Dynamic Tension"? How Does It Work?**

When you look in the mirror and see a healthy, husky, strapping fellow smiling

back at you — then you'll realize how fast "Dynamic Tension" GETS RESULTS! "Dynamic Tension" is the easy, NATURAL method you can practice in the privacy of your own room—JUST 15 MINUTES EACH DAY — while your scrawny chest and shoulder muscles begin to swell, ripple . . . those spindly arms and legs of yours bulge . . . and your whole body starts to feel "alive," full of zip and go!



Atlas Championship Cup won by Thomas Manfre, one of Charles Atlas' pupils.

**One Postage Stamp May Change Your Whole Life!**

Sure, I gave Thomas Manfre (shown above) a NEW BODY. But he's just one of thousands. I'm steadily building broad-shouldered, dynamic MEN—day by day—the country over.

3,000,000 fellows, young and old have already gambled a postage stamp to ask for my FREE book. They wanted to read and see for themselves how I build up scraggy bodies, and how I pare down fat, flabby ones — how I turn them into human dynamos of pure MAN-POWER.

**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 150Z,  
115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.**

Send me—absolutely FREE—a copy of your famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength" 32 pages, crammed with actual photographs, answers to vital health questions, and valuable advice to every man who wants a better build. I understand this book is mine to keep, and sending for it does not obligate me in any way.

Name..... Age.....  
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

**FREE** My 32-Page Illustrated Book Is Yours Not for \$1.00 or 10c — But FREE

Send NOW for my famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength" 32 pages, crammed with photographs and valuable advice. Shows what "Dynamic Tension" can do, answers many vital questions. Page by page it shows what I can do for YOU.

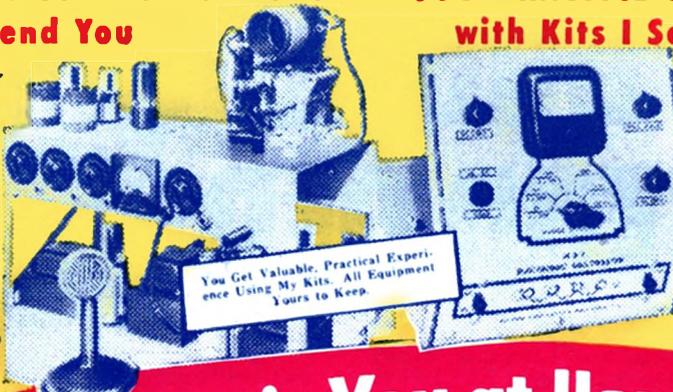
This book is a real prize for any fellow who wants a better build. Yet I'll send you a copy absolutely FREE. Just glance through it may mean the turning point in your whole life! Rush the coupon to me personally: Charles Atlas, Dept. 150Z, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.



## YOU PRACTICE COMMUNICATIONS with Kits I Send You

### Build This Transmitter

As part of my Communications Course I send you parts to build the low power Broadcasting Transmitter shown at the right. Use it to get practical experience putting a station "on the air," perform procedures required of Broadcast Station operators. You build many other pieces of equipment with kits I send. I train you for your FCC Commercial Operator's License.



## YOU PRACTICE SERVICING with Kits I Send You

### Build This Tester

You build this Multitester from parts I send, use it to earn extra money in your spare time fixing neighbors' Radios. I also send you speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, loop antenna, everything you need to build a modern Radio and other equipment. You get practical experience working with circuits common to both Radio and Television. All equipment is yours to keep. See and read about it in my FREE 64-page book. Just cut out and mail coupon below!



J. E. Smith has trained more men for Radio-TV than any other man.

# I Will Train You at Home to be a RADIO-TELEVISION Technician

## TELEVISION

### Today's Good Job Maker

TV now reaches from coast-to-coast. Over 15 million TV sets are now in use; 108 TV stations are operating and 1800 new TV stations have been authorized. This means more jobs, good pay jobs with bright futures. Now is the time to get ready for success in TV. Find out what Radio-Television offers you. Mail coupon now for my 2 Books FREE!



## America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You Good Pay, Success

Do you want a good pay job, a bright future, security? Then get into the fast growing RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience, many no more than grammar school education. Keep your job while training at home. Learn RADIO-TELEVISION principles from easy-to-understand lessons. Get practical experience on actual equipment you build with parts I send you.

### Make Extra Money in Spare Time While Training

The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS that show you how to service neighbors' Radios in spare time while training. Use MULTITESTER you build to help service sets, get practical experience working on circuits common to both Radio and Television. Find out how you can realize your ambition to be successful in the prosperous RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Even without Television, the industry is bigger than ever before. 105 million home and auto Radios, over 2900 Radio Stations, expanding Aviation and Police Radio, Micro-Wave Relay, FM and Television are making opportunities for Servicing and Communications Technicians.

### Mail Coupon — find Out What Radio-TV Offers You

Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Cut out and mail coupon below. Send in envelope or paste on postal. You will get actual Servicing Lesson to prove it's practical to learn at home. You'll also receive my 64-page Book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Read what my graduates are doing, earning, see photos of equipment you practice with at home. J. E. Smith, President, Dept 2NR, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

## I TRAINED THESE MEN

**Has Growing Business**  
"I am becoming an expert Teletechnician as well as a Radio-Television Technician. Without your practical course I feel this would have been impossible. My business continues to grow."  
—Philip G. Bregon, Louisville, Ky.

**Good Job with Station**  
"I am Broadcast Engineer at WJPM. Another technician and I have opened a Radio-TV service shop in our spare time. Big TV sales here. As a result we have more work than we can handle."  
—J. H. Bangley, Jr., Suffolk, Va.

**Praises NRI as Best Course**  
"I was a high school student when I enrolled. My friends began to bring their Radios to me. I realized a profit of \$100 by the time I completed the course."  
—John Hopper, Nitro, West Va.

**Gets First Job Thru NRI**  
"My first job was operated with KDLR, obtained for me by your Graduate Service Dept. I am now Chief Engineer in charge of Radio Equipment for Police and Fire Department."  
—T. S. Norton, Hamilton, Ohio.

## NRI Training Leads to Good Jobs Like These

**Broadcasting:** Chief Technician, Chief Operator, Power Monitor, Recording Operator, Remote Control Operator, Servicing: Home and Auto Radios, P.A. Systems, Television Receivers, Electronic Controls.

**FM Radios In Radio Plants:** Design Assistant, Transmitter Design Technician, Tester, Serviceman, Service Manager. **Ship and Harbor Radio:** Chief Operator, Assistant Operator, Radio-telephone Operator. **Government Radio:** Operator in Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Forestry Service Dispatcher, Airways Radio Operator, Aviation Radio; Transmitter Technician, Receiver Technician, Airport Transmitter Operator. **Television:** Pick-up Operator, Voice Transmitter Operator, Television Technician, Remote Control Operator, Service and Maintenance Technician.

## Tested Way to Better Pay

## Good for Both—FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept 2NR  
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.  
Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television."  
Both FREE (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....  
Address.....  
City ..... Zone ..... State .....

Approved Under G. I. Bill

