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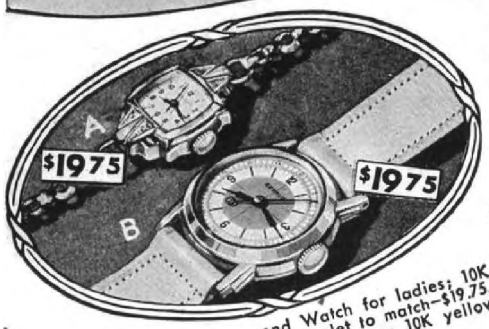

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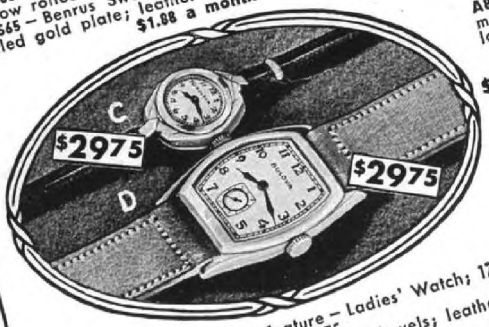

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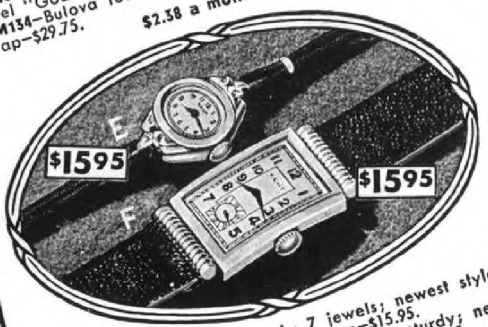

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JUNGLE STORIES

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A NEW KI-GOR NOVEL

TWO BIG JUNGLE NOVELETS

4 EXCITING SHORT STORIES

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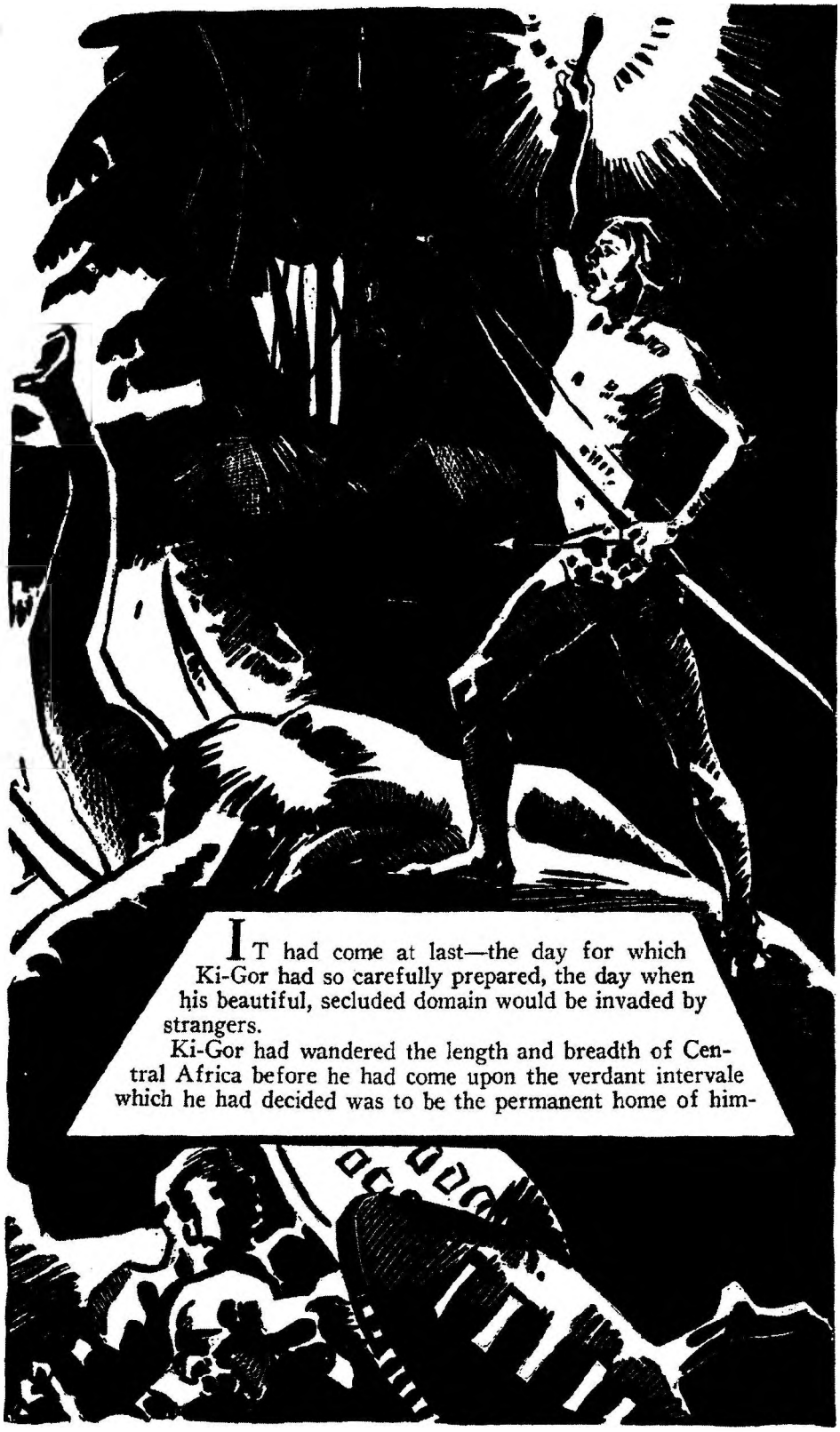
THE EMPIRE OF DOOM

A New *KI-GOR* Novel

by JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Invasion! At last Ki-Gor's beautiful kingdom had felt the conqueror's iron heel. But matching the brute power of Africa's marching legions, the jungle stalker mobilized with his own mighty weapons and the magic spell of white man's ju-ju.



IT had come at last—the day for which Ki-Gor had so carefully prepared, the day when his beautiful, secluded domain would be invaded by strangers.

Ki-Gor had wandered the length and breadth of Central Africa before he had come upon the verdant intervale which he had decided was to be the permanent home of him-

self and his beloved wife, Helene. Some ten thousand acres were set like a jewel amongst high mountains on two sides, a vast impenetrable swamp to the north, and an inhospitable desert to the southeast. For ages, apparently, the region had been overlooked by Bantu-speaking hunters or settlers, and it was populated only by a small group of Pygmies who roamed the forests and veldts in security and lived well off the abundant game. Ki-Gor, who had always befriended Pygmies wherever he had found them, was hailed by this little tribe as a Big Brother and protector.

But the price of safety in this earthly paradise was eternal vigilance. Ki-Gor and his shy little friends kept a constant watch on the boundaries of the region lest uninvited strangers should intrude their unwelcome presences into the rich intervale. The likeliest route for invaders was the narrow pass through the rugged mountain chain to the east.

It was at the outer end of that pass that Ki-Gor stood now, his blue eyes fixed keenly on several columns of smoke far away rising straight up from the distant jungle. It was early morning. The second morning that Ki-Gor had seen those smokes. The day before they were considerably farther away.

There was no doubt about it—there were strangers heading for the pass, and there were a lot of them. The smokes began to thin out as he watched them. Evidently, the strangers were breaking up camp. From the distance of the smokes, Ki-Gor judged that the invading party was unlikely to get to the entrance of the pass before late afternoon. That gave him plenty of time to prepare for their arrival. But just the same he had better be going about it.

The jungle man brushed the mane of tawny hair off his forehead, then turned and swung his long, bronzed legs up the pass.

KI-GOR had spent a great deal of thought and energy preparing against this day. He had contrived a number of devices by which he hoped to be able to hold the pass single-handed, or with only Helene to help him, against any number of invaders. The Pygmies could be useful, with their tiny arrows tipped with deadly poison, but they went their own way, and were sometimes far away across the intervale. This was the case now. Ki-Gor had not seen them for three days. It was up to him to defend the pass with only Helene to help him.

The contrivances which he needed to set up his defenses, he kept in a small hut he had built in the lower branches of a great baobab tree. This tree stood not far from the head of the pass, the inner end of it, and Ki-Gor headed for it now. He had left Helene there about an hour before while he came down and explored the outer end of the pass.

But when he arrived back at the foot of the tree, Helene did not answer his call. Ki-Gor muttered impatiently. Helene had learned the ways of the jungle astonishingly quickly, and was well able to handle herself in most contingencies. But she was still helpless against the great beasts of the jungle. Ki-Gor had told her to stay in the tree until he returned because he had crossed the spoor of a gorilla, near there, the evening before. What the big man-apes were doing in this country he did not know, but he did not like it. The gorillas were dangerous.

Ki-Gor stood beside the tree and hallooed in all directions without hearing any answer. Finally, he picked her trail and began to follow it.

He felt no great alarm for Helene's safety, but rather an impatience with her for disobeying him. Especially, at a time like this when he should be getting right to work on the defense of the pass.

But Ki-Gor's impatience suddenly changed to alarm when, after ten minutes of trailing Helene, he saw that something else was following his mate. Alongside Helene's tracks ran the unmistakable spoor of a gorilla.

The jungle man sprang forward, running swiftly but silently along the twin trails. It was another ten minutes before he came to their end, and he stepped out from a clump of bushes with a horrified glance at the scene before him.

A hundred feet away out in the open, the great gorilla danced on bowed legs, hairy arms beating his chest menacingly. Twenty feet beyond, crouched precariously on the lower limb of a baobab tree, was Helene.

She was holding a six-foot assegai in

both hands, poised like a lance straight at the gorilla. A wave of pride swept over Ki-Gor at Helene's courage. As an offensive weapon the assegai was nearly useless against the gorilla. But it served for the moment to confuse the great ape, frighten it a little, and keep it temporarily at a safe distance.

Ki-Gor glided noiselessly to one side, cursing the mischance which had caused him to come out armed only with his hunting knife. He was afraid that if he shouted the gorilla would spring forward over the assegai and crush Helene in midspring.

Cautiously, the bronzed jungle man crept away from the bushes, the hunting knife held ready. So silently, so stealthily, was his progress, that not even Helene noticed him.

At that moment, a resounding cry echoed through the jungle. Helene looked up and her face blanched as she saw another man-ape swinging through the trees. The gorilla on the ground roared once, then waddled forward. Helene gave a little cry, but grasped the assegai firmly. The gorilla reached the bottom of the baobab tree and stared up with baleful eyes. He reached up one tremendous arm to start climbing.

At that moment, Ki-Gor leaped from behind Helene to a position on the baobab limb beside her. He crouched a moment, knife poised, then with a threatening roar dropped to the jungle floor beside the gorilla.

It was not his first fight with the man-apes. Ki-Gor had a veritable contempt for the vicious creatures, in spite of their great strength. He circled the gorilla warily, watching for an opening. It came when the great man-ape screamed and sprang forward with open arms. Ki-Gor lanced in like the hunting leopard, weaving under the powerful arms that sought to crush him. The knife flickered too fast for Helene's eyes to follow it. Twice it sank home in the broad breast of the gorilla before Ki-Gor stepped back. The man-ape coughed horribly, and the murderous red glare left his eyes. He took one step toward Ki-Gor, then crashed like a falling tree to the earth.

Instantly, Ki-Gor turned and snarled at the other gorilla, which stood prudently at some distance, growling and snapping.

"See what I have done to your hunting mate!" he roared in the jungle language. "Go—before a similar fate overtakes you. Behold, Ki-Gor speaks!"

With a scream of frustration, the other gorilla turned and made off through the jungle, crying and beating its breast. Ki-Gor's great strength and hunting ability were well known in the jungle.

Helene slipped down from the tree, laid the assegai to one side and then very carefully sat down. She smiled composedly at her mate as he reached her side, but her face was paper-white, and her hands were trembling.

"Good girl," said Ki-Gor admiringly. "How did you happen to have an assegai with you?"

"Oh," she said, tossing her head in an attempt to be jaunty—an attempt that nearly failed—"I remembered your telling me once that an assegai, or even a long pole or a sapling, would hold off a leopard or—even a gorilla—for a little while. So I brought this along, just in case—"

"Good girl," Ki-Gor said again, and stared at the dead gorilla for a moment. "We can use this beast."

"You mean—" Helene began.

"The smokes were nearer," Ki-Gor said briefly. "They are coming here. We must prepare for them right away."

He bent over and hoisted the great carcass onto his mighty shoulders. Helene stood up a little shakily, and they went off toward the baobab tree at the head of the pass. Between his relief at Helene's narrow escape and his concern with the problem of defending the intervale, Ki-Gor completely forgot to scold his mate for disobeying his orders. Helene prudently avoided the subject herself.

WHEN they arrived at the baobab tree, they climbed up into the hut. Ki-Gor reached into a pile of assorted objects and drew out two large flat carved pieces of hardwood to which were attached leather thongs. These curious objects he proceeded to fasten to the soles of his feet. Then he leaned back and regarded them with a roar of laughter, in which Helene joined.

They were, in effect, enormous wooden

sandals, three or four times the actual size of Ki-Gor's feet. They were circular in shape, and carved on the under side to represent a giant catspaw with four claws. When Ki-Gor walked across soft ground with these sandals, the track they would leave would convince a stranger that some monstrous lion had been in the vicinity.

The other objects in the tree hut included a number of sturdy cross-bows mounted on thick stakes, a basket of cross-bow ammunition—short, thick bolts or quarrels—two big gourds which Helene had carved into leering faces like Hallowe'en jack o' lanterns, a quantity of strong but very fine twine, and a big Ubangi war drum.

These objects, together with the carcass of the gorilla, Ki-Gor carried down the pass, taking care to leave plenty of the terrifying cat tracks where they could easily be seen.

The pass was, for most of its length, a deep gully or donga. It was wide enough at the bottom for eight men to march abreast, and on each side a bank rose steeply for fifty or sixty feet. Except for a few scattered patches of bush and trees, the greater part of the donga was dry and open. However, Ki-Gor's plans were laid to take advantage of the several patches of foliage.

Down near the outer entrance to the donga, a lone tree drooped over the broad trail, its lower branches a full twenty feet above the surface of the ground. By ingenious use of several lengths of the strong twine, Ki-Gor hoisted the body of the gorilla into the lower branches. Then he climbed the tree and fixed the brute in such a way that it hung downward over the trail.

WHEN the operation was complete, Ki-Gor grunted with satisfaction and paddled off up the donga on his huge sandals. He stopped at the next patch of bush and began driving the cross-bow stakes into the ground on each side and a little above the path. When he had finished there were six cross-bows concealed on each side of the pass and aimed at right angles to it. Ki-Gor carefully drew back the bowstring on each of the twelve weapons, and attached a length of twine to each delicate trigger release. He carried each piece of twine down to the middle of the path and there knotted it to the string from the opposite cross-bow. He made no attempt to conceal the six lengths of twine, but merely left them temptingly lying on the surface dust of the path. Finally then, Ki-Gor loaded each cross-bow with a heavy iron bolt.

Still higher up the pass was another clump of bushes. Amongst them was a single young tree which was rooted in the steep bank and which grew out almost horizontally across the path. Now, Ki-Gor performed his most ambitious operation. He fastened a thirty-foot length of rawhide to the outermost branches of the young tree and then slowly and carebent the tip of the tree all the way around to the bank again. He fastened the other end of the rawhide cable to a huge boulder, and secured it by driving a stake in front of it. In that way, the tree was bent in a semicircular arc. When Ki-Gor released the stake in front of the boulder, the tree would spring back to its normal position like a giant whip, carrying the boulder with it.

By now it was mid-afternoon, but Ki-Gor still had two more things to do. One was to set the Ubangi war drum up on the bank of the pass but out of sight from below. Then he attached one end of a well-rosined cord to the taut drum head by means of a wad of tree-gum. He turned to Helene by his side.

"You remember how I told you to work this?" he asked.

"Yes," Helene answered promptly. "I take this little bow, make sure there is plenty of rosin on it, and then draw it back and forth across the cord."

"Good," Ki-Gor said approvingly. "Try it once."

Helene took the free end of the cord that was attached to the drum head and held it taut with her left hand. With her right hand she poised a small two-foot bow at right angles to the cord.

"Shall I?" she said. "Aren't those people, whoever they are, close enough to hear?"

"So much the better," Ki-Gor observed. "Yes, go ahead."

Helene looked down again at the improvised one-string bass viol, then drew the bow sharply across the rosined cord. In-

stantly, a hideous shattering roar went up as the Ubangi war drum picked up the vibrations of the cord, magnified them many times, and sent them crashing forth on the still air. It had something of the quality of a lion's challenging roar, that ear-splitting din, except that it was much louder than the roar of any lion yet seen in Africa.

"Whew!" Helene exclaimed. "That's some noise!"

"Yes," Ki-Gor agreed with a ferocious smile. "It sounds just like a great big ju-ju lion."

There remained one thing to do and Ki-Gor did it. He lighted the thick home-made candles that were fixed inside each of the big jack o' lantern gourds. They would burn now for several hours. Then he and Helene took up positions in some bushes at the top of the bank above the donga. From here they commanded a view of the entire pass, and of a stretch of open veldt beyond.

At last, they were ready for the invasion.

II

THE sun was dipping low toward the mountains behind them, when they first caught sight of the intruders. Far away on the veldt, some black specks appeared, moving very slowly. In a few minutes, some other specks came up and joined the first ones. They all converged for a moment like ants on a drop of spilled treacle. Then they separated and fanned out over the veldt.

Presently, a narrow black stream took shape behind these forerunners and began to flow straight toward the foot of the pass. Longer and longer grew the black ribbon, until Helene began to feel a flutter of panic in her breast.

"Heavens!" she murmured. "I had no idea there would be *that* many. And they're still coming! How many do you estimate, Ki-Gor?"

"It's a big party," Ki-Gor replied, eyes narrowed at the approaching menace. "There are more than a thousand."

"Gracious!" Helene said, shivering. "If that many really want to come up the pass, do you suppose we can stop them?"

"I hope," said Ki-Gor slowly, "that they won't really want to come up the pass—after they have met one or two of our surprises."

Helene hoped fervently that her mate was right, but as the black column came nearer and nearer, she began to have grave misgivings.

It seemed to her that the safari was a small army, and not so small at that. The two dozen or so men in the lead were naked trackers, armed only with light spears. But the main body were heavily armed warriors, carrying great bullhide shields, broad-bladed assegais, and ten-foot knobkiries. All of them wore light-colored kilts of some kind, and many of them wore tall feather headdresses.

"What kind of men are they?" Helene asked.

"I don't know," Ki-Gor answered. "They look something like the warriors I saw once when I was in southeast Africa —Swazis and Zulus. Tall, big-chested men like these. But we are a long way from Swaziland here, and I don't know what manner of men these could be. Their weapons are like the Zulus', too," he added.

There was less than an hour of daylight left when the trackers preceding the main body came toiling up the pass. They did not see the suspended carcass of the gorilla until they were almost under the tree. Then one of them apparently caught sight of the huge prints.

He gave a shrill shriek and leaped backward, looking wildly around. His mates promptly turned and fled down the pass. Left alone for the moment, the tracker crouched on one knee in abject terror. His head twisted this way and that, as if by an uncontrollable impulse.

Then, he evidently caught sight of the suspended gorilla. He jerked himself to his feet with a hideous scream and went shooting down the pass after his fellows.

By this time, the head of the main column was just reaching the foot of the pass. They met the fleeing trackers and halted their flight. At the same time, the forward progress of the column stopped. The rear ranks, however, pressed on, and the column bulged out to either side, forming, as it were, a black lake ever widening, fed by the black stream coming across the veldt.

Evidently, an excited conference was taking place between the panic-stricken trackers and the advance guard of the warriors. Far away as they were, Ki-Gor and Helene could hear the shrill uproar.

Helene looked questioningly at Ki-Gor.

"It looks pretty encouraging for us, doesn't it?" she ventured. "I mean, it looks as if those tracks and the gorilla have scared them off, doesn't it?"

"They might have," Ki-Gor admitted with a smile, "but I'm not sure yet. Those warriors look like brave men. It all depends on whether they think the tracks were made by a real lion or not. If they think it is a real lion—but just one that's bigger than they ever saw—they may come on up. When I made those tracks I hoped that no one would believe a real lion could make them. I hoped everyone would think that a ju-ju lion had made them. We'll see."

Helene was momentarily sobered by those words, but the next few moments renewed her optimism. The conference at the foot of the pass mounted higher and shriller. And, significantly, none of the milling, shouting blacks seemed inclined to venture up the pass.

"Oh, I think we've done it!" Helene gurgled, clapping her hands. "Look, they're all too scared to do anything but yell at each other."

But even as Helene spoke there came a change in the tone of the uproar from below. From shrill, excited terror, it deepened into a challenging, defiant roar.

THE milling, shifting sea of heads began to converge toward the center where an irregular patch of white and a cluster of tossing banners indicated the presence of a high leader or chief of some kind. The noise stilled momentarily, then broke out afresh. Again it hushed, and a single high, clear voice could be heard by itself. Then the din rose up in mighty applause.

The triumphant smile on Ki-Gor's face changed to narrow-eyed concern.

"The chief is making a speech," he said. "I think we are in for it, after all."

The actions of the warriors ten minutes later showed only too clearly the accuracy of Ki-Gor's judgment. The black lake began to surge forward noisily toward the entrance of the pass. A solid phalanx, at least eight men abreast, began to advance up the donga. A wall of the six-foot shields was raised protectively, and knobkiries and assegais were brandished defiantly, but for all that, the phalanx moved with extreme slowness and caution.

Ki-Gor grunted impatiently.

"There's just enough daylight left," he muttered, "for them to try and come up the pass. If they had arrived just a little later, they wouldn't have dared."

Gradually, the column pushed up the pass until it came within fifteen feet of the tree where Ki-Gor had hung the gorilla. There it paused with shrill outcries. Evidently, the advance guard was looking at those giant lion-prints in the dust very thoroughly.

Helene began to take heart a little. She tried to imagine what was going through the minds of those warriors, down there. They were perhaps brave men. But the evidence in front of them pointed to the fact that a prodigious lion had killed a gorilla as though it were an ant, and then had reached fifteen feet up in the air and impaled the carcass in the boughs of a tree. What a monstrous lion that must be!

But again Helene's hopes were doomed to disappointment. The column moved forward again. Reluctantly, perhaps, but it moved forward. Onward it came, cries of encouragement going back and forth among the close-packed ranks, right under the swinging body of the gorilla and over the fearful lion-tracks.

Helene's skin prickled with alarm as the savage phalanx came inexorably up the donga. What would happen when they saw the six strings lying across the path? The strings which, pulled ever so gently, would set off a dozen cross-bows at short range? Helene had never quite understood the scheme of the cross-bows, and now with danger coming nearer and nearer, she doubted their effectiveness even more. Right now, for instance, the column was marching securely behind their shields. The shower of cross-bow bolts would rattle harmlessly off the tough bull-hides.

The front line had reached the strings now and halted with shrill cries. There

was a long pause while the strings were investigated—at a safe distance. No one ventured to touch them.

"Ki-Gor," Helene whispered, "maybe they won't dare cross the strings!"

"No," Ki-Gor answered gloomily, "that won't stop them. I'm afraid they've decided that it is just a big lion—not a ju-ju lion."

Again Ki-Gor was right. The column slowly advanced. The front line carefully stepped across the first string, evidently at great pains not to touch it. The renewed outcry was apparently to warn the rear ranks to do the same thing.

Helene began to feel something akin to panic in her breast. What was Ki-Gor going to do? The first two surprises had not stopped these invaders one whit. Would the others?

Ki-Gor's face was reassuringly calm as he turned toward her.

"I'm going down to the boulder," he said. "When you hear me whistle, make the ju-ju lion roar."

With that, he slipped over the edge of the bank and crept downward through the bushes that grew down to the floor of the pass. Helene shivered at being left alone. It was getting quite dark now, too dark to be able to distinguish the faces of the front line of the advancing phalanx, although they were getting quite close. Beside her, concealed in the bushes, and with their leering faces turned toward her and away from the pass, the two jack o' lantern gourds flickered wickedly at her.

Helene's left hand tightened on the rosined cord and pulled it taut. Her right hand swung the bow around ready to saw it back and forth across the cord. Ki-Gor must be nearly down to the tethered boulder now. Her ears strained for the signaling whistle.

THE black phalanx was coming frightfully close. Helene's hands shook with agitation. Could anything go wrong? she asked herself. To unleash the boulder, Ki-Gor had to go awfully close to the trail. Suppose he were seen crouching in the bush. A sick wave of fear went over her, as she pictured those massed warriors surging forward and plunging their assegais into her mate.

Helene's agony of apprehension mounted with every step the phalanx advanced. Why, the front rank was almost abreast of her now! The sweat broke out on her brow. *Where was Ki-Gor!*

Suddenly, above the babble of the advancing warriors, there came a welcome sound. A shrill, sweet whistle!

Helene hauled the cord taut, and drew the bow vigorously across it. Instantly, there came that shocking sound, that earsplitting, paralyzing roar. Again and again, Helene drew the bow across the rosined cord, and a mighty ju-ju lion bellowed its war cry out over the pass.

Down beside the path, Ki-Gor waited for the first roar. When it sounded, he gripped the restraining stake with both hands and gave a titanic heave. Out came the stake from the ground. There was nothing now to prevent the young tree—bent almost double—from springing back to its normal shape.

Rather slowly at first, because of the weight of the boulder tied at the other end of thirty feet of rawhide, the tree began to straighten out across the path. But in a fraction of a second, the motion was taken up by the boulder.

The young tree snapped straight. The rawhide with the boulder on the far end acted like a gigantic whip. Five feet above the hard-packed earth of the path—shoulder high on the advancing phalanx—the fearful whip snapped.

It mowed down the first two ranks of warriors before it broke under the terrific pressure. But the boulder was in midair, traveling at the speed of a cannonball. Crushing bullhide shield and woolly skull indiscriminately, it plowed a frightful furrow of death and destruction down the congested mountain pass.

Over and above the sudden leaping death, however, came the crashing, numbing roar. It could only be a ju-ju, a fearsome, vengeful ju-ju, unleashing supernatural powers of destruction on a presumptuous, overbold band of warriors.

As peal after peal thundered from Helene's sound-effect, the close, orderly ranks of the phalanx melted into a screaming, frenzied mass of terrified black men. The rear ranks broke and fled down the pass, immediately, and relieved some of the pressure up ahead. But for a while they fought each other in hopeless panic, as

each man clawed and struggled to get away from there.

Before the last roar of the ju-ju lion died away, the survivors of the column were in full flight. Shields and weapons were flung aside in terror, as the warriors plunged down the pass. Forgotten was the warning to step across those mysterious pieces of string farther down the path. Flashing black feet tripped over them in heedless flight.

Thus the miserable warriors were beset by another unseen terror. Twelve crossbows discharged their deadly bolts waist-high into the serried mass out on the path. Without their shields, the warriors were cut down as if by a scythe. Some of the terrible bolts went clear through the first soft body and found a second victim.

At the foot of the pass, the leader and his bodyguard, who had prudently stayed behind, made an attempt to stem the headlong rout of the column. They met with little success. The warriors poured out of the pass in a black torrent, insane with terror, and swept the chief and his entourage far out onto the veldt.

There, as darkness closed down entirely, a few of the warriors stayed their flight and gathered, moaning, about their leader. But it was only a brief halt.

One of them screamed suddenly and pointed back toward the pass. A hysterical babbling arose as the sorely tried blacks gazed at a frightful apparition.

Two monsters, or a twinheaded monster—who knew which?—was glaring down at them from the bank at the end of the pass. Yellow flame shot out from the baleful eyes and from the frightful grinning mouths.

It was too much. This time, the chief himself led the flight.

III

AS the last faint cries of the fleeing invaders died away in the distance, Ki-Gor blew out the candles in the huge gourd jack o' lanterns, and drew a satisfied sigh. A death-like stillness hung over the evening, punctuated only by an occasional groan from one of the dying warriors in the pass.

"Never again will this happen," Ki-Gor observed to a trembling Helene beside him. "The news of tonight will go all over Africa, and it will not lose in the telling. From one ju-ju lion, the story will grow to a thousand ju-ju lions guarding this place. Not even the Masai would dare to set foot near here."

"Thank goodness," said Helene with a shuddering sigh, "I don't think I could go through such an ordeal again."

"Well, you won't have to," Ki-Gor said, and Helene knew he was smiling, even though she couldn't see his face. "From now, our home will be safe. No intruders will ever dare to bother us. We can live in peace and security with no one near us except the Little People and they are our friends."

"Oh, I hope you're right," said Helene fervently. "Speaking of the Pygmies, I wonder where they all went. I sort of expected them to come and join us after that first roar I produced."

"Yes, I did, too," Ki-Gor replied. "I can't think where they might have gone. Maybe we'd better go back to the Island right now and see if they are there."

"Through the dark?" said Helene, suddenly feeling a little chilly. "I thought probably we'd sleep in the baobab tree, and go on back by daylight."

"Why, Helene!" said Ki-Gor in a tone of jesting reproof. "It's only the Bantu who are afraid to travel at night. Surely, by this time, you know that the jungle is safer at night than the veldt, and our way back is all through jungle."

"Who's afraid?" said Helene boldly. "Not me. Not as long as I have you with me, Ki-Gor."

Ki-Gor mused for a moment on how quickly she had learned the ways of the jungle in those months that had elapsed since the plane she had been piloting on a trans-African solo flight had come down in the middle of the steaming equatorial forest. Whenever Ki-Gor thought of that time, he blessed the fates that had set her down in his bailiwick. He had taken her under his protection, saving her from fearful death in the leering shadows of the jungle.

And then the pampered daughter of civilization, the wealthy American society girl, had learned to love the silent white giant, Ki-Gor, who had hunted alone in the humid Congo since early boyhood.

She gave up the world to settle down in Africa with him as his wife. Now, brown, healthy, and strong, she was a fit mate for him.

He chuckled deep in his throat and took her hand in his, and they started back through the jungle to their home on the Island.

IF the intervale with its teaming game and its healthful, high mountan air was an ideal region to settle down in, the Island provided the ideal home. The Island was situated almost in the exact center of the intervale, in the rushing stream that rose in the mountains to the southeast and flowed northward to the great swamp. Above the Island there was a considerable falls, and below it there was an even larger one. The swift water which swept past either side of the Island made it dangerous to swim, but it abounded in succulent fish and it harbored no crocodiles.

The upstream end of the Island was high and rocky. Dozens of upthrust boulders and ledges had formed a series of natural caves which Ki-Gor and Helene had shortly turned into a fine set of apartments. Lower down on the long, narrow island, there was sufficient grass to graze a goat, and at the lower extremity there was a grove of tall trees.

When Ki-Gor had selected the Island as a permanent home, he was immediately faced with a problem of transporting himself and Helene back and forth across the swift water of the river. It was a test of strength even for Ki-Gor to swim the river and was therefore out of the question for Helene.

The Pygmies, led by old monkey-faced Ngeeso, promptly solved the problem, by constructing a bridge of vines high above the turbulent stream. From the top of a tall tree on the mainland, they swung tough vine cables over to the top of a correspondingly tall tree on the Island. In a remarkably short time they wove supporting vines together, and completed a masterpiece of primitive architecture.

The bridge sagged frighteningly in the middle, but it was amazingly strong, and could easily support uward of a dozen full-grown persons.

As Ki-Gor and Helene came downstream now past the upper falls on their way to the bridge, the jungle man halted abruptly. Helene, three paces behind him in the almost total darkness, ran into him with a little squeal.

"Oh! you scared me!" she gasped. "What's the matter? Why did you stop?"

"Something just came into my mind," Ki-Gor replied. "This is a good place to leave you alone for a minute. If you should be frightened by anything, you can just step off the bank and duck under the waterfall. Nothing would ever follow you under there."

"Well, what are you thinking of doing?" Helene asked. "Why must you leave me alone?"

"I'll only be gone a little while," Ki-Gor explained. "The Pygmy village is just a little distance off to the right. I'm just going to step over there for a minute and find out where Ngeeso has been. I don't understand why we haven't seen them today. Unless—" Ki-Gor paused significantly—"unless we have had some invaders from another direction."

"Oh, we couldn't have!" Helene exclaimed. "Not two sets in the same day."

"I don't think so, myself," Ki-Gor admitted, "but I'd just like to make sure. It's possible that that *impi,* that body of warriors that we met back on the pass, was just half the force. Another section of the same party might have tried to come in the other way."

"But, Ki-Gor, that's desert over there," Helene protested. "Why would anybody come across that desert?"

"I'm not really worried about it," Ki-Gor said, "but I just want to make sure. Stay here, now, and I will be back very soon."

He disappeared into the impenetrable blackness of the jungle night, and Helene settled down to an uncomfortable period of waiting for him and listening to all the multitudinous disquieting sounds of the tropical forest about her.

Ki-Gor had hardly left her aside before she began to regret that she had let him go. Why did she, now that she came to think of it? She could just as easily have gone along with him. Or better still, she could have gone along by herself to the Bridge-Tree, climbed up and crossed the bridge and been safe on the Island. She

could have kindled a fire in front of the main cave and waited there in safety and relaxation for Ki-Gor.

The more she thought about it, the more irritated Helene was with herself.

SHE edged toward the waterfall and its comforting roar. Down in her heart, she knew that there was really very little to be afraid of—that Ki-Gor would not have left her alone if there had been. At the same time, she was still new enough to the African jungle to be terrified now and then, even though needlessly. And she was mightily tempted to go on downstream and home by herself. The only thing that prevented her from doing it was the knowledge that Ki-Gor would be alarmed if he came back and found her missing.

So Helene stayed put.

Ki-Gor was not long away. She heard an unseen body crash through the undergrowth off to the right of her, and suddenly went into a mild panic. But almost at the same instant, Ki-Gor's voice floated cheerily through the humid air, and a moment later he was holding her hand.

"Well," she said, "what did Ngeeso say?"

"He wasn't there," Ki-Gor replied. "Nobody was. In fact, they've moved the village."

"Moved the village!" Helene exclaimed. "Why, they only just set it up there a little while ago."

"Yes, but you know Pygmies," Ki-Gor said. "If they happen to feel like it, they'll just pick up and move any time."

"I know that," Helene said, "but, even so, I think it's sort of queer."

"Well, we won't worry about it now," said Ki-Gor. "Let's go home and get some sleep. Tomorrow we can go looking for the Pygmies."

Ki-Gor's tone was reassuring, but Helene wondered shrewdly whether he was hiding something—hiding a private worry of some kind. She knew him well enough to know that he had an extraordinary sixth sense about impending danger. They were never exact premonitions, just vague hunches. At times when, as he put it, "he smelled danger," Ki-Gor would be restless and uncommunicative.

"Ki-Gor," Helene said, as they approached the Bridge-Tree, "do you smell danger?"

"Um—yes, a little," Ki-Gor admitted. "I don't know whether it's danger or not. I just have a feeling something is going to happen. I don't know what."

When they reached the Bridge Tree Ki-Gor paused and carefully sniffed the base of the trunk all around. His acute sense of smell was able to distinguish the slightest deviation from the normal. While he could not, perhaps, identify individual persons by the slight scent they left behind on hands or feet, he could certainly identify groups. The Pygmies, for instance, smelled quite differently from other races.

"Everything seems all right," he said at last. "There is only Pygmy smell on the tree. Go on up the tree. But wait for me at the top, and I'll go across the bridge first. In case someone or something unfriendly should be waiting on the other side."

Helene pulled herself deftly into the lower branches of the great tree feeling ashamed of herself for picking up some of Ki-Gor's uneasiness. Good heavens, she told herself, if his acute senses could not mark any tangible reason for being uneasy—why, there could not be much real danger around. At any rate, she was thoroughly glad to be back home.

She reached the top of the tree and automatically stepped toward the bridge, forgetting Ki-Gor's warning. But his hand suddenly clamped on her ankle like a vise.

"Wait, wait," Ki-Gor said steadily. "I want to go first."

"All right," Helene answered. "I just forgot for the moment."

Once again, Ki-Gor sniffed the trunk of the tree, and again he found nothing to alarm him. He drew himself up beside Helene.

"Don't come over until I call you," he said and stepped on the bridge.

Without warning, the bridge gave way under his feet.

FOR a long, sickening moment, Ki-Gor felt as if he were standing in mid-air. One hundred and twenty feet below was the river. Time seemed to stand still. When would he start falling? Ki-Gor

wondered. It seemed to him that it was an age before he could command his arms to reach out for an unseen bough of the tree.

The tips of his fingers grazed some leaves. Then Ki-Gor knew he was falling. Then some twigs whipped his wrist. Frantically, his hands clawed.

He felt himself gripping a slender branch—heard the branch crack. But instinctively he twisted his body, flung himself forward toward the trunk of the tree. His other hand closed over a larger branch. Instinctively, again, he knew this branch was not strong enough to hold his plunging weight.

He loosened his grip and grappled blindly with his other hand. It fastened on a branch as thick as his wrist. He clung onto it for dear life.

He was still hanging there by one hand, swaying dizzily in the pitch-blackness, when he heard the vine bridge hit the water with a great splash. It seemed hours since he set foot on that bridge.

There was an appalled, incredulous quaver from Helene just above him. Then, suddenly, as realization dawned on her, she shrieked:

"Ki-Gor!"

All the raw agony and primitive horror of the human race poured out onto the night air in that scream.

"Ki-Gor! *Ki-Gor!*" And Helene started to scramble down the tree, numb with horror.

"Don't worry, Helene. I'm all right."

Helene collapsed against the tree-trunk, shuddering.

"Where—where are you?" she quavered.

"Just—below," Ki-Gor grunted. "Stay—there. I'm coming up."

He was inching his way, hand over hand, along the slender branch that was his only deliverance from disaster. It was none too sturdy a lifeline, and he worked his way along it with the greatest caution.

After what seemed an eternity, he reached the tree-trunk, and dug his toes firmly into the mass of vines that entwined it.

He was safe now.

He paused the merest second, then carefully climbed up beside Helene.

"Oh, Ki-Gor!" She buried her face in his shoulder and clutched him convulsively. "What—what happened? The bridge—broke?"

"It was cut," Ki-Gor said bitterly.

"Cut?" Helene said, unbelievingly. "But who would cut it?"

"I don't know. It was cut very skilfully. So that it would barely hold its own weight. As soon as an added weight was placed on it, it gave way."

"But why, Ki-Gor, why? And who could have—?"

"I can't understand it, Helene. Unless my sense of smell has gone wrong, there has been nobody up here but a Pygmy. And I think it was Ngeeso."

"But Ngeeso—" Helene said aghast, "Ngeeso wouldn't do that to you!"

"I don't think he would," said Ki-Gor. "Ngeeso is our friend."

"Then what—?"

"I don't know," said Ki-Gor. "But we must get out of this tree. Follow me down closely. We will go over to that low-branching tree that hangs out over the river. There is nothing more to be done now until daylight. We may as well get some sleep."

As Helene curled up in Ki-Gor's arms in the other tree, she squeezed his arm.

"Ki-Gor, I'm so frightened."

"Never be frightened. Not when Ki-Gor is beside you," the jungle man said, serenely.

Helene felt better, and in a little while she was lulled to sleep by the swirling waters of the river below.

IV

IT was early dawn when Helene opened her eyes again. She started to make some sleepy remark, when a warning pressure of Ki-Gor's hand shut her off. She looked up at him, startled, and then followed the direction of his eyes.

Standing on the river bank, a little bit downstream from them, was a tiny, disconsolate figure.

It was Ngeeso.

He was staring horror-stricken at the wreckage of the vine bridge. Then a dreadful falsetto lament issued from his weazened mouth, and he began to beat his breast mechanically.

"Ai me! What has happened? What fearful calamity has caught Ngeeso unaware? Did my Big Brother come back before I could warn him? O Woe! O Misery!"

Noiselessly, Ki-Gor slid to the ground. Ten feet away from Ngeeso, he spoke, in the Pygmy tongue.

"Greetings, Little Brother."

"E-e-e-eekh!"

The Pygmy squeaked and leaped straight up in the air. He spun around, and landed facing Ki-Gor. He ran forward and threw himself at the jungle man's feet.

"Thanks to the Sacred Crocodile!" the Pygmy gasped. "Thou art safe, Big Brother! For a dreadful moment, I had thought thee dead—drowned in the rushing waters."

"Then thou knewest about the bridge?" Ki-Gor asked.

"Knew about it? Most certainly," the Pygmy returned. "Who but I would know. A clever trap—"

"Who cut the bridge?" Ki-Gor interrupted.

"Who cut it?" said Ngeeso. "Why, I cut it!"

"Thou!" Ki-Gor thundered.

"Wait! Wait! Big Brother," Ngeeso pleaded. "I did it to protect the Island. I never dreamed thou wouldst return last night and attempt to cross in the dark. Never!"

"Go on," said Ki-Gor grimly.

"Nay, I laid the trap, thinking to return here by daylight and catch thee before thou couldst—"

Ngeeso broke off, looked at the ruined bridge and shuddered.

"Ai me!" he lamented. "Miserable Ngeeso who unwittingly nearly contrived the death of his Big Brother!"

The Pygmy clapped a palm dramatically against his forehead. Ki-Gor grinned. He knew it would serve no purpose to scold Ngeeso—the little man was already punishing himself.

"By a miracle," Ngeeso went on, slapping his forehead, "Ki-Gor was saved. A miracle! I cut the vines just so—it would be hard to notice them. I don't know how thou didst not fall to thy death, Big Brother."

"By the very skin of my fingers," Ki-Gor retorted. "But, tell me, why didst thou cut the bridge? For whom wert thou laying the trap?"

"Invaders."

"Invaders?" said Ki-Gor sharply. "This becomes serious. Last evening, Helene and I repelled a whole impi of tall men at the Northeast Pass."

"Aye, we heard the ju-ju lion roar even where we were, by the pass from the desert."

"From the desert they came, these invaders of yours?"

"Aye, and thou tellst of tall men. These who came here were black giraffes! Never have these old eyes beheld such monstrous men!"

"You say they came here—to this spot?"

"To this very spot," said Ngeeso stoutly. "There were ten of them, and a leader who was not so tall but much broader than they. We were caught unawares. The first thing we knew, there was a crashing in the bush by the river like a herd of elephants. We took to the trees, and by the time we came here, there were these invaders. The leader stood right here and called your name across to the Island. When there was no answer, he started for the Bridge Tree. Then I shot a poisoned arrow in his path. He stopped and shouted up at me, though I was well hidden and he could not see me. I made no answer, and he moved toward the Bridge Tree again. I shot a second arrow, this one a little closer. He kept shouting at me and making signs with his hands indicating friendship. He spoke your name again, too."

BY this time, Ki-Gor was openly chuckling. Ngeeso looked at him sharply and went on.

"But he was no friend of mine," he said, "and Ki-Gor has no friends except Ngeeso and the Little People."

"That is not quite true, Little Brother," Ki-Gor said now. "Here in my home, thou and thy people are my only friends. But when I travel far away, up north to the land of the giants who drink blood —why, then I have another friend."

"What's this?" said Helene, who had just descended the tree and come up beside Ki-Gor.

"Our invaders," Ki-Gor informed her, "were ten Masai. They were with George."

"George!" Helene exclaimed. "How wonderful! Where are they?"

Ki-Gor put the question to the crest-fallen Pygmy.

"They are near the desert gate where we herded them," Ngeeso replied. "Were we wrong to do so, Big Brother?"

"Nay, there is no damage done," Ki-Gor replied. "But I must go immediately and make amends to my friend from the north for your rude hospitality to him."

"I will lead thee," said the Pygmy eagerly, "and whilst thou visit with him, I will gather my people, and we will come back and build thee another bridge, bigger and stronger than the old one."

It was a bewildered and reproachful party of Masai that Ki-Gor and Helene hailed shortly before midday. The immensely tall, slender warriors were evidently at the end of their patience. Their leader, a giant, bull-necked figure, hurried toward Ki-Gor and Helene.

This was George Spelvin, the American Negro from Cincinnati. Ex-Pullman porter and ship's cook, he had jumped ship at Mombasa and "kep' on walkin' " until he had reached the country of the gigantic Masai who had made him welcome amongst them. He was a full inch taller than Ki-Gor and at least fifty pounds heavier. On several occasions in the past, he had proved himself a strong ally and devoted friend of Ki-Gor and his mate.

Helene and the jungle man greeted him warmly.

"We're so glad to see you, George," Helene said.

"No more'n I am to lay eyes on you-all," the giant Negro rumbled. "Man alive, them li'l cullud midgets"—indicating the Pygmies half-hidden in the trees—"has made us feel pow'ful uncomfortable. We got a feelin' they goin' make a pin-cushion out of us any minute with them poison arruhs."

"Don't worry any more, George," Ki-Gor smiled. "They thought you were an enemy. They know better now."

"Well, that's good news," George breathed. "Say h'lo to the boys. They's two-three of 'em you'll re'connize."

And Ki-Gor did recognize several of the grinning Masai warriors. They had fought by his side in the desperate war against the Wandarobo cannibals.

"Greetings, Tall Trees!" Ki-Gor chanted, as he walked toward them.

"Greetings and long life," the Masai chanted in return, and rattled their huge spears against their shields to signify their respect and approval.

"Well, tell us, George," Helene said, "what are you doing so far away from home?"

"Ma'am, just look me ovuh," said George, with a prodigious grin. "I bin promoted. I bin made a Ambassador."

"An ambassador!" Helene cried. "Tell us about it."

"Yes, ma'am," said George. "Ambassador-Extryo'dinary an' Ministuh Peniplo-ten-shary fum the Masai to His Majesty, King Dingazi of the Kara-mzili!"

"My gracious! what a mouthful!" said Helene.

"Yas'm," chuckled the Negro. "Ol' George, he gettin' up in the world. Well, I tell yuh—it's a long story."

STRIPPED down to its bare essentials, the story that George had to tell was an old one in Africa. Years before, a considerable tribe of fighting Zulu stock had trekked northwestwards into the southern Congo. Their leader was a wily ambitious chief called Dingazi. The local tribes soon fell under the domination of the bigger, fiercer, and more intelligent newcomers.

Dingazi was a shrewd conqueror. He did not unduly oppress his new subjects, and at the same time, he did not allow the martial spirit of his own people to die down. Every year the triumphant Kara-mzili bit off new chunks of surrounding territory. Their weapons, their military organization, and their tactics were far superior to the usual run of jungle warriors. Before long, Dingazi took the title of "King," to which he had earned the right. The rhythm of conquest was maintained, and in the course of time, Dingazi had made himself absolute ruler of an enormous territory, with a population of over four million, and a trained, standing army of more than thirty thousand magnificent warriors.

But now Dingazi was getting old and his conquering ambition was slowing up.

He looked back on a full life and saw that it was good, and that there was no real necessity for continuing the seemingly interminable wars that had marked his great career. So one day, Dingazi hit on a device which would, without his resorting to war, maintain his prestige and increase his domains. He placed Mpotwe, his nephew and designated heir, at the head of the nations and tribes that bordered on Oigazi's domains. The most attractive part of this roving commission was the considerable military escort assigned to Mpotwe, who was young and strong, and as ambitious and crafty as his uncle had been at the same age. In recognition of his exalted office of Special Ambassador, Mpotwe was given well over a thousand seasoned warriors.

"That's a good sized Legation Guard," Helene observed.

"You said somepin', Miz Helene," George agreed. "Well, here's how the thing wuk out. Mpotwe traveled 'round, visitin' all these neighbors. An' each new tribe he drapped in on, he'd jest kinda *suggest*—he wouldn't *tell* 'em—jest *suggest* that they'd be bettuh off if they was ruled ovuh by Dingazi. He'd tell 'em Dingazi is a great king, and' the Kara-mzili is pow'ful good fightuhs and' why don' they think ovuh his proposition."

"Nice Ambassador," Helene commented ironically.

"Well, some o' these boys," George went on, "that Mpotwe talks to thataway, they pretty tough customers, themselves, an' they tell Mpotwe they ain't figgerin' to make no changes, right now. But some of them othuh neighbors, they ain't quite so big and tough. When Mpotwe says, 'Why'n't y'all come ovuh on my side?'—why they takes a look at them thousand warriors behind Mpotwe. And they very liable to answer back and say, 'Mr. Mpotwe, looks lak you got holt of a right good idea.' An' Mpotwe has done got hisself a conquest, without strikin' a blow."

"I remember a country that was once called Austria," Helene murmured.

"Whazzat, Miz Helene?"

"Nothing, George. Go ahead. What has this all got to do with your embassy to King Dingazi?"

"I'm comin' to that, Miz Helene. You see this Mpotwe an' his ahmy come a-wanderin' up into the Masai country."

"WAS there a fight?" Ki-Gor asked bluntly.

"Oh, no!" George laughed. "Nuthin' lak that. Mpotwe took hisself a little look 'round, an' decided they wasn't no percentage fightin' the Masai. An' when he kinda hinted 'round about us jinin' up with the Kara-mzili, why we jest laughed at him. An' at that they was only th'ee-fo' hundred Masai went out to meet him. But he knew fightin' men when he see 'em, so he was real polite an' we all exchanged presents, an' he said why don't the Masai come an' call on *him,* sometime, an' then he went away."

"So, now you're returning the call, is that it?" said Helene. . . . "But you've only got ten men with you."

George chuckled. "Well, Miz Helene, we-all talked it ovuh an' we decided I'd only take 'long ten of the boys. It's jest a li'l way of tellin' the Kara-mzili we ain't afraid of them ner nobody else. When they-all go out on a ambassador job, they got to take a thousand men to be safe. But the Masai—well, *ten* men ought to be plenty. I went down an' picked out the ten tallest boys outa the unmarried fellas, the *Morani.* Look at 'em, they ain't a one of them that's less'n seven foot tall."

George turned his head and looked pridefully at his "boys." They were, Helene thought, the most magnificent physical specimens she had ever seen, their long tight robes accentuating their whipstock slenderness.

"Even so, though," said Helene with a frown, "aren't you a little anxious about walking in amongst thirty thousand warriors with just that little handful?"

"We might be a takin' a li'l chance," George admitted, "but you know, Miz Helene, even in Africuh, they got what you call 'diplomatic immunity.' A Ambassador got a right to come in an' see you an' go way again safely—even if he bringin' you bad news."

"That's true," Ki-Gor said. "I don't know Dingazi, but any king as big as he is would not break that Law. You are perfectly safe, George."

"Tha's kinda the way, I figguh, Ki-Gor."

"Where is his country?" Ki-Gor asked.

"Up yonduh to the no'th-west," George informed him. "I come a li'l outa my way, jest so's I could stop in say h'lo to you-

all. It's been a long time since I seen you, so I just took this yere opportunity."

"Well, we're glad you did," said Helene warmly, "and now that you're here, I hope you'll spend a few days with us before you go on to Dingazi's country."

"Miz Helene," George rumbled, flashing a smile, "sounds great. I'm goin' to accept that invite."

"Good," said Helene, heartily. "Shall we go back to the Island?"

"If them li'l Pygmies'll let us move," said George.

But the Pygmies had quietly disappeared while George had been relating the story of the Kara-mzili. George scratched his head sheepishly and Ki-Gor chuckled when they discovered that fact.

"The boys ain't really afraid of nobody they kin *see*," George pointed out. "But when them li'l fellas hide behind a green apple an' shower down with poison arruhs, why even the Masai is goin' to go slow."

"You don't need to worry about them any more," Ki-Gor laughed, "now that they know you are friends of Ki-Gor."

WHEN the party reached the bank of the river opposite the Island, they found the Pygmies already hard at work preparing to construct a new bridge to replace the one that Ngeeso had destroyed. The leader of the Little People was thoroughly chagrined over his mistake in taking the Masai for enemies, and he was determined to make up for it by putting up a new and finer bridge in the shortest possible time.

While the work of construction was going on, Ki-Gor made a temporary camp upstream a few hundred yards to be out of earshot of the chattering, swarming Pygmies. And during the course of the next few days, George filled in some details in his account of the Kara-mzilli—especially details concerning, Mpotwe, the Heir-Apparent.

"He's a mean lookin' boy, that Mpotwe," George declared, "an' I wouldn' trust him as fur's I could heave an elephant. But I guess as long's Dingazi's still goin', the ol' man'll keep a grip on him. Fum what I heah, th' ol' man is quite a fella. Say, by the way, lemme show y'all the presents I'm takin' to him."

"Oh, yes!" Helene exclaimed. "I'd love to see them."

"Well, you know, it's a kind of a tricky business," George grinned as he reached for his knapsack. "Pickin' some gifts for a big chief who is used to gettin' a couple hundred cows or a couple dozen female slaves brought to him. Anyways, I sent down to Nairobi for somepin' I don' think Dingazi has ever seen before."

He drew from the knapsack a flat package which unfolded proved to be a long raincoat with hood attached. It was made of bright red transparent material—a common enough sight on the college campuses of America, but a miraculous article to a savage emperor in the South Congo. Next, George produced a large alarm clock, and finally, a small hand-mirror.

"Oh, I think those are very smart presents," Helene said, "and I bet they'll make a tremendous hit."

"Do you honest, Miz Helene?" said George, "Well, I'm right glad. I wanted to take somepin' that was easy to carry, but the same time was goin' to please th' ol' boy."

As George returned the articles to his knapsack, Helene caught sight of something she had not seen since she left civilization.

"Is that a pair of boots in that knapsack, George?" she demanded.

"Sure," George replied, bringing out a pair of laced knee-boots. "My feet's pretty tough, but I carry these 'round jest in case I got to walk th'ough some tall, dry grass, or across some hot rocks."

He turned them over showing the metal plates fixed to the soles at the toe and heel.

"Tap plates," he explained. "One time, I used to do a little tap-dancin'. Not awful good—I mean, I couldn't never do them triple-taps clean lak Bill Robinson—but I wukked out a coupla routines. Nowadays I put these on an' have masse'f a li'l fun—kinda remind me of the days downtown in Cincinnati."

HELENE laughed and turned to Ki-Gor to explain tap-dancing to him. But Ki-Gor was lost in thought, and she hesitated. Suddenly, he lifted his head.

"The Uruculi feathers," he said.

"The what!" said Helene, in astonishment.

"The headdress," said Ki-Gor patiently, "made of Uruculi feathers. You remember, the Pygmies gave it to me. They are beautiful feathers, and the bird, the Uruculi, is very seldom seen any more—anywhere."

"Yes, I know," said Helene, wonderingly, "but what has the feather headdress—"

"I will never wear it," Ki-Gor went on, "but it is fit for a great king. We will take it as our present to Dingazi."

"*Our* present!" Helene exclaimed, "you mean—"

"We are going with George to see the King of the Kara-mzili."

Long ago, Helene had learned to expect the unpredictable from Ki-Gor. But this calm statement was a complete surprise. As a matter of cold fact, she herself had felt her curiosity strongly aroused by George's story of the Kara-mzili, and had felt a definite urge to go with the giant American Negro on his mission from the Masai. But, it had never occurred to her to bring up the idea, because she had assumed that Ki-Gor would be extremely unwilling to leave their home in the intervale.

"Do you really mean that, Ki-Gor?" she cried delightedly.

"Yes," he answered with a slow grin. "That is, if you would like to go?"

"Oh, I'd love to!" she declared.

"Good," said Ki-Gor. "Tomorrow, the Little People will have the new bridge finished, and we can go over to the Island and pick up what we need to take with us."

"Well, tha's good news, Ki-Gor," rumbled George. "I sho' would enjoy havin' you folks come with me. I woulda said so, but I nevuh thought you'd tear yusse'f away f'um heah."

"Good then," Ki-Gor smiled. "Tomorrow, we'll look for Marmo, and make our preparations—and go."

"Marmo!" exclaimed George. "You mean, the big elephant? Man, tha's wonderful! That'll be ridin' in state up to ol' Dingazi!"

THE sun had not been up two hours the next morning before a great clamor from the Pygmies indicated that the finishing touches had been applied to the new bridge. As Ki-Gor, Helene, and George walked downstream, they could see the Little People running back and forth in childish delight on the new span.

It was, as Ngeeso promised, a bigger and better bridge than the old one. Big George was lost in admiration for the work of the primitive Pygmies.

Helene was glad to get back to her home, so much so, that she felt a curious reluctance to be leaving it again so soon. The goat bleated a welcome as they went toward the caves. And the little mongoose, called Whiskey, who kept the Island free from snakes, came chattering up to Helene in evident delight. George looked horrified as the rat-like little animal jumped on to Helene's outstretched hand and scampered up her arm to her shoulder. There it crouched, red eyes gleaming, and grizzled fur standing up in untidy patches.

"My, he's a ugly little fella, ain't he?" George commented.

"He is not," Helene retorted, "he's beautiful!" She stroked the mongoose. "Very beautiful, and very brave. You ought to see him tackle a snake—they don't come too big for him."

"Well, I guess I jest take yo' word for it, Miz Helene," George said, looking dubiously at the mongoose. "But he don't look lak no kind of a pet I'd want hangin' round *my* neck."

To George's further discomfort, it turned out that Ki-Gor intended to take the mongoose along on the journey. Ki-Gor, in fact, made unusually elaborate preparations for the trip. Besides two assegais, he took his powerful warbow and a quiver full of hardwood arrows. He also packed the two wide-sleeved, ankle length robes he had once made for Helene and himself out of lionskin. Their original purpose had been to provide warm body-covers for mountain journeys, but Ki-Gor realized that they would serve very usefully as ceremonial robes in which to greet His Majesty Dingazi. As a last-minute idea, Ki-Gor also added a duplicate of the rosined cord and small rosined bow that had produced the ju-ju lion roar when affixed to the head of the war drum by the wad of tree-gum.

Eventually, the preparations were complete. Marmo, the giant elephant, was summoned by Ki-Gor's shrill whistle.

Helene, Ki-Gor, and George settled themselves on his mountainous back, Helene clutching a light bark cylinder which contained the precious uruculi feathers. The Pygmies lined the trees with excited farewells, and Marmo moved majestically away, followed by the Masai in single file.

V

FIVE days of constant traveling through wild country largely uninhabited—desert, jungle, marsh, and veldt—brought the little company to the first frontier outpost of the Kara-mzili. It was a good-sized village located beside a ford across a considerable river. The round huts of the village were shaded by well-spaced trees, and behind them the black jungle loomed up ominously. But to approach the village, Ki-Gor and his little party had to cross a treeless veldt in full view of the ford.

Long before Ki-Gor halted the elephant at the ford, there could be observed signs of great activity in the village, and a company of at least a hundred warriors splashed through the shallow water of the river and drew up to meet the newcomers. As Marmo pushed forward toward these frontier guards, Helene noticed that in dress and weapons, they closely resembled the warriors who had attempted to invade the intervale.

"Them boys," George remarked, "is liable to act awful officious, if we let 'em. Th' only way to handle 'em, is act like we don't even know they are theah. Keep a-goin', Ki-Gor, ontil you get right up close to 'em."

The massed Kara-mzili warriors swayed restlessly as the huge elephant and the ten escorting Masai moved straight toward them. Excited cries of warning rose from among them, and eventually one broad-shouldered spearman—evidently the leader—rushed forward with a high-pitched yell. But it was a very short rush, and when the people on the elephant and the gigantic Masai paid no attention to him, the leader danced backwards to the safety of his own spearmen.

Twenty-five feet away from the howling, gesticulating Kara-mzili, Marmo stopped on a murmured command from Ki-Gor. George stood up on the elephant's back and stared insolently over the heads of the frontier guard. Then his Bull of Bashan voice rolled out, topping the clamor of the indignant Kara-mzili.

"Make way!" George roared. "Make way for the illustrious and sacred embassy to the great Dingazi, King of the Kara-mzili!"

The tumult of the frontier guards suddenly stilled, and an astonished silence fell over them. Then the leader found his voice again.

"An embassy?" he inquired, and then gained courage. "What embassy? Who dares to come unannounced and in such small force to claim audience with the Most High, the Emperor of the World?"

"Who dares?" George retorted. "Who dares to bar the way to an embassy of two kings and a queen riding a sacred ju-ju elephant, and escorted by ten royal princes of the Blood-drinking, All-conquering Masai, Scourge of the North!"

There was a hasty, concerted backward movement by the Kara-mzili accompanied by apprehensive glances at Marmo. From a safe distance, the leader spoke again, but with far less conviction than before.

"No one may come into the lands of the Kara-mzili without the express permission of the Most High Dingazi, Emperor of the World."

"Send fleet messengers, therefore," George commanded, "and inform Dingazi that Tembu George of the Ngombi-Masai is pleased to return the visit of Mpotwe, and comes bringing presents and words of good will. With Tembu George is Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, together with his reigning queen. Send these messengers promptly, and we will follow along at a leisurely pace as befits our high station."

The leader of the frontier guards was visibly impressed by George's ringing words, but his bureaucratic soul would not permit him to give in without a further show of authority.

"It is against all precedent," he said uncertainly. "You will have to give up your arms and be tied with ropes. Then we will take you to Dingazi and he will decide your fate."

"Miserable worm!" George thundered. "By your ignorance you have sealed your

own fate! We will stand for no such nonsense! Rather will we immediately turn our backs on you and go back the way we came. And when your master, Dingazi, hears of the intolerable offense you have given to friendly ambassadors, he will cut your foolish tongue out and stake you to an anthill!"

George folded his enormous fore-arms across his chest, and for the first time he deigned to look at the man whom he addressed. It was a ferocious, beetling look. The captain of the frontier guards was wild with shame and confusion.

"No! No!" he shouted. "Don't let them go! Attack them! Capture them!"

ON the instant, Ki-Gor rose up beside George, and a three-foot arrow was notched in the great war bow in his hands.

"Attack them!" the captain screamed. "You heard my orders!"

But his followers were none too eager to carry out his orders. Although they outnumbered the Masai ten to one, they did not like the look of those giants from the North. They were apprehensive, too, about the ju-ju elephant. None of the Kara-mzili had ever seen a tamed elephant before.

At a brief command from George, the huge Masai sauntered forward a few insolent steps, their great spears held negligently in the crook of their elbows. They tilted their long narrow heads back proudly and stared over their pointed chins at the wavering Kara-mzili.

Helene held her breath for a long moment.

In the meantime, Ki-Gor's brain had been working fast. He realized that the captain of the frontier guards had worked himself into a situation from which there was no honorable retreat. The jungle man's knowledge of the savage mentality told him that the captain was probably trying frantically to think of some way of reversing himself without losing face. Ki-Gor decided to furnish the captain a way out.

A murmured word to Marmo, and the elephant swung his trunk upward and backward. Ki-Gor leaned forward and allowed the groping tip of the trunk to graze his ear. The crowd of warriors suddenly hushed. It was evident to them that the ju-ju elephant had just whispered something into the ear of the extraordinary white man.

Then Ki-Gor spoke out loud in the same Bantu dialect that the Kara-mzili used.

"Aye, Marmo," he declaimed. "I am of the same opinion. That poor captain is temporarily bewitched."

The Kara-mzili sucked their breath in. The captain went gray and began to tremble.

"Otherwise," Ki-Gor continued, "he would never invite upon himself the fearful punishment which will certainly be his when Dingazi hears of his boorish treatment of our embassy."

The Kara-mzili began to back away fearfully. But the captain stood rooted to the ground, the sweat pouring off his glistening face.

"Happily, Marmo," said Ki-Gor, nodding his head wisely, "thy super-natural gift hath divined that this poor fellow is only temporarily bewitched. And if thou wilt but step forward five paces, reach out thy trunk, and harmlessly touch the man on the shoulder, he will be freed of his horrid enchantment. He will be once more a normal man, and he will order his men to let us pass without further ado."

A breathless silence hung over the scene. The captain's eyes bulged with fascinated horror as the elephant slowly moved toward him. The long, wrinkled trunk reached out and brushed his shoulder. Then Marmo lifted the trunk high in what might have been a ritualistic gesture, and trumpeted once, very discreetly.

An audible sigh went over the Kara-mzili. The captain looked around him in amazement. He was convinced he had just been freed from an enchantment.

"Hai! Brainless fools!" he shouted at his men. "For what reason do you stand thus in attitudes of war? Are you so blind as to contest the path with these royal visitors to our land? Make way instantly for the illustrious and sacred embassy to our lord, Dingazi, Emperor of the World!"

The frontier guards were only too glad to obey the new orders. But the captain hounded them to move faster.

"Make way, I say!" he shouted, and pointed to several of the warriors, "and you—and you—and you—be off immedi-

ately—run with the wings of the wind to Dutawayo, the kraal of our king. Tell them there that Tembu George of the Ngombi-Masai is coming, that Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle—and his queen, also—are coming, and ten Royal Princes of the Masai—all are coming with presents and words of good will for Dingazi, Emperor of the World. Quickly! Go, ignorant louts! Would you keep this illustrious embassy waiting for one tiniest fraction of a moment?"

Ki-Gor's face was a haughty mask as Marmo moved slowly through the wide opening made by the frontier guards. The chiseled ebony profiles of the Masai were models of insolence, too, as the colossal warriors stalked along on either side of the elephant.

But on Marmo's back, the two Americans, Helene and George, buried their faces in their hands, and their shoulders shook with barely concealed laughter.

VI

FROM the frontier post to Dutawayo, Dingazi's capital, it was another five days' journey. The country side was peaceful, and relatively thickly settled. The way led past many cultivated fields and through small villages. Now and then herds of domestic cattle could be seen along the way. These the Masai appraised critically—being themselves herdsmen—and found not so beautiful as the big-horned, small-hooved cattle of the North.

Evidently the messengers which captain of frontier guards had despatched to Dutawayo arrived in good time, and with tall tales. Because, on the morning of the fifth day, a large and resplendent welcoming party made its appearance.

The leader, dressed in ceremonial peacock-feather headgear, stood at a safe distance, announced that he was a son of Dingazi, and bade the visitors welcome with flowery phrases. This young man, while he was obviously impressed with Marmo and the towering Masai escort, seemed a trace disappointed with the numerical weakness of the embassy. Ki-Gor smiled to himself, knowing the African tendency toward exaggeration. However, George pointed out loftily that in this particular case, it was not quantity that counted, but quality. With a sweeping gesture, he declared that only an embassy such as this—limited to members of kingly blood—could do honor to the great Dingazi.

The son of Dingazi saw George's point and presently gave the order to proceed toward Dutawayo.

"George," said Helene, keeping her voice low and speaking English, "there's something I don't understand here. If Dingazi has a son, why is it that his nephew, Mpotwe, is the Heir-Apparent? I should think his son would be."

"Well, heah's how I figger it, Miz Helene," George replied. "This yere Dingazi has prob'ly got him a whole raft of sons, because he prob'ly got a whole raft of wives. He would have a hard time pickin' out th' oldest son. That mean he jest goin' to have to say 'Eenie meenie' and catch one of 'em by the toe. Well, it maybe turn out, he like this yere nephew, Mpotwe, just about as good as any of his sons. Maybe Mpotwe is a whole lot sma'tuh than any of the sons. So he jest pick Mpotwe and say, 'Boy, you' the one,' an' sho nuff he is!"

Before many days had gone by, Helene was to find out that George had appraised the situation very accurately.

It was a noisy, but on the whole, friendly escort that accompanied the visitors toward Dutawayo. But Helene noticed that they all kept a safe distance during the journey. Putting herself in the place of the Kara-mzili, she could not blame them much. Probably very few of them had ever seen white persons before, and if they had, they would have been dressed far differently from Ki-Gor and Helene. George, himself, was as big if not bigger than the burliest of the Kara-mzili warriors, and in addition, he wore a European-style white shirt and shorts. Then, too, the unbelievably tall Masai must have seemed like beings from another planet. And finally, the tame elephant was something outside their experience, and they must have readily accepted the idea that Marmo was a powerful ju-ju.

All in all, Helene did not blame the Kara-mzili for keeping their distance from this strange embassy. It was just as well, Helene thought to herself. These Kara-mzili were no whimpering, cowering forest

blacks of the Guinea Coast. They were alert, strapping warriors, who held their heads proudly high in the manner of the Zulus. And if they took it into their heads to be unfriendly, they could easily wipe out the little party. To be sure, both George and Ki-Gor had said that even savage jungle monarchs recognized the principle of diplomatic immunity. But just the same, it was good insurance to have the Kara-mzili stand in superstitious awe of them.

For the first time since she started on this journey, it suddenly occurred to Helene that there were thirteen members of the party. Ki-Gor, George, herself, and ten Masai. She shivered a little.

THEY arrived at Dutawayo just before sundown, and this time it was the turn of the visitors to be astonished. They had expected to see a collection of straggling mud huts, such as they had noticed on the way in—a larger group, perhaps, but more or less the same sort of village.

But Dutawayo was a city.

None of the visitors had ever seen a native African town as big as that. Ki-Gor quickly estimated that there must have been at least five thousand well-made thatched-roof dwellings in Dutawayo. They covered a gentle slope that rose from the banks of a placid river to a low knoll. There, a considerable group of these houses were perched, surrounded by a palisade, and dominated by one house much larger than the rest.

"I guess tha's Dingazi's kraal up theah, all right," George murmured to Ki-Gor. "He got him quite a layout, ain't he?"

Ki-Gor nodded. "Well made houses," he remarked.

"Yeah," George agreed. "Look to me like Bechuana style. Them small peeled logs standin' upright for walls. An' the way the roof is raised off'n the walls. Tha's how you get a real cool house, thataway."

The populace of Dutawayo turned out in force to greet the visitors. They streamed in from all sides to stare at the elephant and the white couple and seven-foot Masai and to express their amazement and wonderment in shrill shouts. Young and old, big and little, men, women and children—all tumbled over each other to see the extraordinary visitors.

The human members of the embassy somehow kept their composure in the face of the appalling crowd. But Marmo did not like it at all. There was altogether too much noise and disorder to suit the old elephant. Ki-Gor realized this and did his best to keep soothing Marmo by reassuring pats on the head, and encouraging words.

But half way through the town of Dutawayo, Marmo decided that he had had enough. He lifted his trunk high, and trumpeted three times, loudly and imperatively. The crowd suddenly stopped shouting, and those in front of the elephant began to press backward energetically. Again Marmo trumpeted, and then he suddenly flared his great ears. The Kara-mzili knew what that meant in a wild elephant, and they assumed that it meant the same thing in a ju-ju elephant. It might even mean something a lot worse. A near-stampede ensued among the people of Dutawayo. But Marmo was not through yet.

As the panicky Kara-mzili melted away on all sides, Marmo started to bolt.

Ki-Gor did the only thing there was to be done under the circumstances. It was risky, but it had to be done. He slipped the quiver of arrows off his shoulder, thrust it and the war bow at Helene, and stood up. Balancing on his toes he went straight out on to Marmo's broad flat forehead.

By this time, the great elephant was beginning to gather speed. But without hesitation, Ki-Gor gathered his leg muscles and sprang in a prodigious leap straight forward into the air ahead of the elephant.

He hit the ground running just two feet ahead of Marmo's lashing trunk. By a miracle he kept his feet and shot forward, keeping squarely in the path of the speeding elephant.

But as he ran he raised both arms high in the air and repeatedly shouted the command to stop.

Gradually, Marmo slackened his pace. Ki-Gor sensed that the elephant's temper was subsiding. At the psychological moment, he whirled and faced the great creature. He still held his arms up, the ges-

ture which was a command to halt, and skipped lightly backward.

In a moment, Marmo slowed down to a dead stop.

Ki-Gor walked up and patted the corrugated trunk.

"I don't blame you, old friend," he said, in Swahili, which was the language Marmo understood. "It is a huge crowd and a fearfully noisy one. But they mean no harm, so curb your impatience, and carry us safe to our destination."

For answer, Marmo benevolently curled his trunk around Ki-Gor's middle, lifted him up over his head, and deftly placed him on top of his broad neck.

An awed murmur went over the terrified Kara-mzili. Surely, they were watching powerful ju-ju at work.

WITH the crowd much quieter and withdrawn to a healthy distance, Marmo covered the remaining distance to Dingazi's kraal without further incident. But just at the wide entrance gate into the high stockade, the elephant did a curious thing. He halted without a command from Ki-Gor and then slowly began to lower himself to his knees.

"Hey! Ki-Gor!" said George, in an alarmed whisper. "Whut-all's goin' on?"

"Pay no attention," said Ki-Gor quickly. "We will all dismount here, just as if I had ordered Marmo to stop. He doesn't want to go inside the kraal."

George nodded his understanding and slid to the ground. Ki-Gor followed and helped Helene down. Promptly, the great elephant rose to his feet and waved the tip of his trunk over Ki-Gor's head as if in apology. To the watching Kara-mzili, the gesture seemed like a benediction. Ki-Gor stepped up beside one of the long tusks.

"I understand, O Faithful Friend," he murmured in Swahili. "Go now, but not too far away. I may yet have need of thee, and I will trust thee to come when thou hearest my urgent whistle."

Marmo swung his huge head away, then tilted it upward, curled his trunk and trumpeted fiercely. Then he shuffled away back down toward the river, and the townspeople of Dutawayo scattered briskly out of his path.

Ki-Gor beckoned to the son of Dingazi. "I have sent the ju-ju elephant away on my business," he declared loudly and distinctly. "Let no one follow him lest he turn himself into a horde of locusts and come back to plague you all."

Dingazi's son nodded importantly and yelled a warning at the crowd. Then he came forward and gestured to the visitors to Dutawayo to follow him through the gate into Dingazi's kraal.

There were several hundred people in the kraal, mostly women and children, but they were pressed back against the houses that lined the inside of the great circular stockade. There was an awed silence as the little embassy strolled across the open space.

Directly opposite the gate of the kraal stood the house which by reason of its great size was obviously Dingazi's. But half way across the enclosure, the son of Dingazi veered off to the right and led his guests to a house that was almost a quarter of the distance of the kraal's inner circumference from Dingazi's mansion. The women and children in front of it broke away and retreated in both directions.

"This is your house," said the son of Dingazi to George. "This and the ones on each side of it for the royal princes" —indicating the haughty Masai—"There will be servants for you and I hope you will be comfortable until such time as Dingazi signifies his desire to receive you."

"It is good," said George evenly. "We will await Dingazi's pleasure. We will not need servants."

"No?" said Dingazi's son.

"No," said George meaningfully, "not for the short time we expect to stay."

"Your wishes will be respected," said the son of Dingazi and walked away.

George sent a swift glance at Ki-Gor, and Ki-Gor nodded slowly. They both followed Helene into the house.

"Dingazi don't have to see us ontil he get good'n ready," said George, "an' he won't, either. He's a great king an' we got to be real p'lite to him. But I jest thought I'd let that young fella know that we is pretty big shots, ourselves—an' that we don't have to wait aroun' too long, if we don't want to."

"You were right," Ki-Gor agreed. "There is one thing I don't like. You said

Mpotwe is next in rank to Dingazi. Then why hasn't Mpotwe come to greet us, instead of that young man?"

"I don' lak that, either," said George. "An' I don' know 'zactly whut we kin do 'bout it. I guess we—"

"Wait a minute," Helene whispered. "There's a lady to see us. And I really mean a lady."

STANDING in the doorway was a young Kara-mzili woman. She was the most beautiful Negro Helene had ever seen anywhere. She was tall and nobly proportioned, and she carried herself with an instinctive dignity, a majesty that was thrilling. Her skin was the color and texture of milk-chocolate and showed glowing highlights on her sculptured cheek bones and the clean line of her jaw. As she looked in through the doorway, her generous mouth opened in a warm smile showing white even teeth.

"I am Shaliba," she said, in a throaty, pleasant voice. "My father, Dingazi, sent me to make sure you were comfortable. He would have sent Mpotwe, but Mpotwe has not returned from his mission yet. In the meantime, I will do my best to take his place."

Helene was not familiar enough with the Kara-mzili dialect to understand all of that speech, so she turned inquiringly to George. But the expression on the giant Negro's face made her pause. George was smiling a child-like smile of pleased wonderment. His eyes were wide open, and fixed on the beautiful face of Dingazi's daughter.

Suddenly, he seemed to come out of his daze. He walked forward and held out his hand.

"Shaliba," said George, "your father does us great honor to send you to us. Come inside and sit with us, and tell us about the customs of your people. And tell us what we should know before we have our audience with your father."

"I don't know what there is to tell," Shaliba smiled, "but I will be glad to come in and talk to you."

Shaliba stayed for about a half an hour, and both Helene and Ki-Gor were agreeably impressed with her. She seemed to be as sincere and gracious as she was beautiful. She answered questions frankly, and just as frankly asked some questions. She was obviously quite puzzled about Ki-Gor and Helene, and evidently could not quite make up her mind about George. But she kept her curiosity well within the bounds of good manners. When she left, she warned the trio that it might be some days before they were received by Dingazi. In the first place, the old king would not see them before Mpotwe returned, and in the second place, Dingazi was in poor health. In fact, he had been under the care of the chief witch-doctor, Mbama, for some time now.

George saw Shaliba to the door, and when he came back, his face was thoughtful.

"Say," he said, after a minute, "whut did you folks think of Shaliba?"

"Why, I liked her very much, didn't you?" Helene answered, while Ki-Gor nodded in agreement.

"I sho' did," George said, staring at the dirt floor. "I thought she was a swell gal."

"Why, George!" said Helene mischievously. "I do believe you fell for Shaliba a little bit."

A slow guilty smile stole over George's broad face.

"Well, y'know, Miz Helene," he replied, "I shouldn't wonduh but whut maybe I did—a li'l' bit."

Helene felt quite startled. In all the time she had known George, he had been a stout friend and ally, quick witted in trouble and terrible in battle, and somehow she had never conceived the possibility of his falling in love. Ki-Gor interrupted her thoughts.

"I wonder," he said, "how long we will have to wait for Dingazi. I hope it isn't long. I don't like staying here inside the kraal. I don't like spending the night in this house."

He looked about him moodily, and then spoke again.

"If I can help it, I am not going to sleep here at night."

"Well, I don' know, Ki-Gor," said George, troubled. "I don' know jest whut to do 'bout that."

"Here's what we'd better do tonight," said Ki-Gor decisively. "We will stay here, but I will not sleep. I will go in that little room back there now and sleep a

while. Then tonight I will be fresh and I can stay awake while you two sleep."

"Jest whutevuh you say," said George. "I don't think anybody heah goin' to want to ha'm us, but it's always a good idea to keep our eyes open, I guess. I'll have two Masai boys mount guard every night, as long as we stay."

"Good," Ki-Gor approved, "I'm going to sleep now."

He picked up the cloth bag at his feet, and there was a faint chatter from the mongoose inside as the little creature momentarily waked up. Ki-Gor clucked reassuringly at it and carrying the bag with him, lifted the hanging curtain that separated the main room of the big hut from the smaller sleeping room. He glanced around the little space—at the deerskin pallets on the floor, and then up above to the foot-wide gap between the top of the side wall and the thatched ceiling. Ki-Gor didn't like it. He felt dangerously shut in. But he lay down on one of the pallets, and the mongoose chirped sleepily in his bag. In a moment, both master and mongoose were fast asleep.

BACK in the main room, George sat lost in thought for a moment, then got up and went to the doorway. He intended to call one of the Masai boys over to give him directions about posting a guard that night. But his eye lighted on a strange object that was coming across the kraal in his direction.

At first glance, it seemed to be a large bundle of feathers that moved along by fits and starts under its own power in some mysterious way. It scurried along the ground for some distance in one direction, then veered abruptly and headed off in another direction. Then it would stop for a minute, seemingly inanimate, only to go into sudden motion again.

George stared at the weird object fascinatedly, and with growing interest as he perceived its indirect weaving course was bringing it closer and closer to the spot where he was standing. In a short time, the extraordinary bundle of feathers was close enough for George to see exactly what it was.

A pair of thin, wrinkled wrists supporting claw-like hands parted the feathers and a hideous, leering yellow face blinked up at George. The old man—or old woman, George could not be sure which—rose up disclosing bent, twig-like shins, and a cracked, falsetto voice made itself heard.

"That elephant was no ju-ju!"

George stared at the fantastic creature for a moment without answering. He had seen witch-doctors before, but never quite such a weird one as this.

"It was no ju-ju, I say!" the cracked voice shrilled.

George grinned. "I hope he can't hear you," he said, "or he is liable to throw such a spell on you that you could not open your mouth to speak or eat for the rest of your life."

The witch-doctor squeaked in terror and spun around and peered across the kraal. An extra knot of feathers stuck out ludicrously from behind like a rooster's tail. After a long moment, the witch-doctor twisted his wrinkled face around and glared at George over his shoulder.

"Where are the others?" the falsetto voice demanded.

"Who asks?" said George coolly.

"Who asks!" the little creature shrieked. "Why Mbama himself! Mbama—whose ju-ju protects the Emperor of the World!"

"Ah," said George, while he made up his mind just how to treat the grotesque little bundle of feathers. Shaliba had said Mbama was the chief witch-doctor of the Kara-mzili, in which case he would wield a powerful influence with the tribe, and with Dingazi. At the same time, George was determined not to show the slightest sign of fear as long as he was in the land of the Kara-mzili. To do so might prove to be very dangerous.

"Ah," George said again. "So you are Mbama. I should have known. Peace and long life to you, Mbama. I am Tembu George."

THE witch-doctor glared suspiciously. "Why did you come here?" he said at length.

"To see Dingazi."

"What do you want of Dingazi?"

"Nothing," said George patiently.

"You come on your knees," Mbama declared, "imploring favors of the Emperor of the World."

George laughed. "The learned witch-doctor, Mbama, surely knows that the

Masai ask favors of no one," he said.

"Humph," the witch-doctor grunted. "Who are the Masai!"

"Mpotwe can tell you," George said quickly. "Mpotwe came to the Masai with friendly words, and bearing gifts. The Masai are returning his favors."

Mbama brooded a moment, then said, "I have only your word."

George took up the challenge, and his tone was dangerous.

"You are being rude, Mbama, and furthermore, you are being unwise. Learn this here and now. The Masai fear no one on earth. They are unconquerable enemies—and powerful friends."

Mbama shrieked with rage. He suddenly hopped away six feet. Lying coiled in the dust where he had been standing was a tiny snake.

George acted swiftly. The snake might be venomous, but he took a chance that it was not. He swooped forward and down, seized the snake by the tail, and snapped it like a whip. The creature hung down from his hand limp, like a piece of string. George flung it contemptuously at the astonished witch-doctor. Then he turned his back and walked into the house.

Helene was standing beside the doorway, round-eyed.

"I saw that," she whispered. "It was a crazy thing to do."

"I didn't take much of a chance," George shrugged. "That li'l' man is crazy, but he ain't crazy nuf to carry round any poisonous snake in them feathuhs."

"Yes, but do you think it was wise to get on the bad side of a witch-doctor like that?"

"Miz Helene," George said, "anything we'd do, we'd get on the bad side of that fella. I know these yere witch-doctors. They're bad cleah through. They only got a little bag of tricks to impress the homefolks, an' when some strangeh come along, they all skeered the strangeh goin' to show up the bag of tricks. Then the witch-doctor goin' to lose his job. So, right away, they goin' to be against strangehs. Only way to do is show 'em you jest as tough as they are."

"Oh dear," Helene said quietly. "I had a little hunch this trip was going to be dangerous."

"Please don't worry, Miz Helene. We won't have no trouble soon's we get to see Dingazi. It's kinda unfortunate that we got heah befo' Mpotwe, but it'll all come out okay. Don't you worry."

"Yes, but aren't you afraid that horrible little man will try and do us some harm?"

"Oh, we goin' to have to keep our eyes open, Miz Helene, but we will. We'll do just that little thing."

VII

JUST before sundown that day, Mpotwe returned.

His arrival was presaged by a multi-throated roar from far down the hill of Dutawayo by the river bank. The roar grew louder as the townspeople escorted the conquering hero up to Dingazi's kraal. Ki-Gor, Helene, and George stood outside the door of their house, and the Masai gathered around them, squatting impassively beside their huge spears.

The excitement within the kraal soon equaled the clamor outside. Hundreds of royal relatives and slaves poured out of the circle of houses and raced to the kraal gate. From every hand, great war drums commenced an incessant, frightening throbbing, that mounted in a gradual crescendo as Mpotwe's procession came up the hill.

Finally the crowd around the kraal gate surged back and parted with hysterical screams, and the drums pounded frenziedly in a maddening, ear-shattering rhythm. The crowd streamed backward across the center of the kraal toward Dingazi's house.

Helene, clutching Ki-Gor's arm convulsively, peered out at the flitting, dancing figures, caught just a quick glimpse of a broad, squat, black figure in a towering white feather headdress. Behind him marched rank on rank of spears. It was too dark, and the crowd too dense to see much of the procession. But one thing was only too clear, and that was that an enormous throng was pouring into Dingazi's kraal.

The kraal was relatively big, but there were limits to its capacity. As more and more frenzied Kara-mzili swarmed in, they inevitably pressed the others back toward the circle of houses. In a short while, the outer fringe of the mob was coming dangerously close to Ki-Gor and

Helene and their friends. It began to get too much for Helene's nerves. She tugged at Ki-Gor's arm and said:

"I don't like this. They're getting much too close for comfort."

George looked at her with a wry smile and said, "Yeh, it kinda look like they goin' to be jest about sittin' in our laps in a few minutes."

"Well, don't you think we ought to all go back into the house?" Helene said anxiously.

Ki-Gor shook his head emphatically.

"No. We are guests of the Kara-mzili, and they must treat us like guests."

"I think you're right, Ki-Gor, at that," George said. "I think we-all will stay right out yere."

He shouted a command to the Masai, and the ten warriors rose to their feet and ranged themselves on either side of the trio. The three-foot blades on their spears dipped forward and down, until the spear-hafts were horizontal.

Helene looked nervously from Ki-Gor to George and back again. To her way of thinking, the situation had not been improved. The hysterical mob was still backing closer and closer toward them. If they kept on coming, someone was going to get hurt. She shuddered as she thought of the possibility of that mass of excited blacks turning on them. Masai or no Masai, they would be wiped out in a minute.

"There he goes," said George suddenly.

"Who?" Helene asked.

"Mpotwe," George replied. "Into Dingazi's house."

As if by a signal, the drums suddenly stopped and the crowd hushed. The sudden silence was almost as appalling as the noise had been before. The air was thick with expectancy. Helene felt oppressed and strangely fearful. But neither her mate nor George seemed to fear any unpleasantness.

Presently a speculative buzz began to creep over the mass of Kara-mzili. As the moments went by, it grew louder. Finally, there came a flicker of a torch, and George said, "He's come out again. He's goin' to tell 'em all somethin'."

Mpotwe made a brief announcement, after which there was a joyous yell from the crowd. The drums began to thump again, and the massed Kara-mzili began to surge back and forth.

"Don't worry," Ki-Gor shouted in Helene's ear. "He said there was going to be a feast right away down by the river. See, the crowd is moving toward the gate of the kraal."

IN a very short while, the throng of blacks ebbed away from their high-water mark so close to the spears of the Masai, and went shouting and jostling down to the other end of the kraal. Helene drew a sigh of relief.

It was nearly night now, and fires began to twinkle from the doorways of the houses in the circle, and here and there torches danced. One of them came close now, borne by a young slave girl.

"Tembu George," she said. "I am sent by Shaliba. If you will come with me, I will take you to the house of Mpotwe."

"What is that?" said George. "Is Shaliba at Mpotwe's house?"

"Yes," the slave replied. "She told him you had come, and he wished to see you right away."

"Hmm," George murmured. "All right. Wait for us while we make ready." He switched to English as he turned to Ki-Gor. "Well, this's a little bettuh. Maybe Mpotwe c'n get us to see Dingazi soonuh —maybe tonight. Then we c'n be on our way in a couple days."

"You think we'll see Dingazi tonight?" Ki-Gor asked.

"We'll soon find out," George said, "when we see Mpotwe."

"Then we'll put on our lionskin robes," Ki-Gor said to Helene, "in case we go directly to the river with Mpotwe."

"Good idea," said George. "I think I'll put on my boots. Make me look kinda official."

Ten minutes later, the trio followed the slave girl into Mpotwe's house accompanied by one of the Masai warriors, the rest being left outside. The main room of the house was swarming with an excited, jabbering crowd of people. They immediately stopped talking and fell back to either side as George's huge figure loomed in the room.

Sitting on an elevated dais across the room was Mpotwe, a sleek, overfed young man with restless, glittering eyes. His

glistening coal-black skin contrasted with the soft brown of Shaliba who sat on one side of him, and the wrinkled yellow of Mbama, the witch-doctor, on the other side.

The young prince stood up with a shout of greeting to George and Ki-Gor, and a curious look directed at Helene. Three slave girls came with mugs of native beer and offered them to the visitors.

"We did not expect to arrive at Dutawayo before you did," George said.

"I understand," Mpotwe said. "I was longer coming back than I expected. We journeyed far to the south on our return."

"I hope your trip was successful," George offered politely.

"Oh yes," Mpotwe said, grandly, "very successful. Everywhere we went, we met tribes who begged to be allowed to come under Dingazi's rule."

There was a boastful quality about the young man that aroused Ki-Gor's instinctive dislike. He stole a look at a group of warriors standing at one side, and a great suspicion began to creep into his mind. They were dressed in dark blue kilts, and wore blue feather headdresses exactly like the men who had tried to invade the intervale ten days before!

At the same time, Helene was watching Shaliba. Dingazi's daughter was very quiet, and Helene suspected that the beautiful girl was unhappy about something.

"We might still have got back before you came," Mpotwe was saying, "except that we were attacked by a powerful ju-ju on the way. But we beat him off with great heroism, and continued on our way. You will hear the whole story later," the prince concluded with a satisfied smile, "when I describe the exploit in full at the feast."

"Then we are to see Dingazi tonight?" George asked.

"Yes," nodded Mpotwe. "The king is in very poor health, but he has consented to appear at a great feast to celebrate my triumphal return. You, my friends, will be a part of the exercises."

Ki-Gor did not like the sound of that at all. He decided to keep a close watch on this paunchy young man. Then Mpotwe was addressing him.

"Tell me, Ki-Gor," he said, with a sleepy smile, "where is your kingdom? Does it lie to the north, east, south, or west?"

"Oh-oh!" George murmured under his breath, "make it good, Ki-Gor."

"My kingdom, O Mpotwe," Ki-Gor replied, "is a strange kingdom. It is where I am. It moves with me. It is to the north, east, south and west."

MPOTWE frowned at this strange answer. Then he said:

"I don't understand. Later, perhaps, you can explain it to me. However, I have something very private to speak to you and Tembu George about. That is why I asked you to come here at this time. Will you step into the other room with me? Meanwhile, your queen will be entertained by Shaliba who some day is going to be my queen."

Ki-Gor glanced at George. The big negro was staring at Shaliba. Then he looked at Mpotwe again and nodded.

"We will hear what you have to say," George said, and he and Ki-Gor followed the prince out of the crowded room.

"I will be perfectly frank with you," Mpotwe began, when the three were alone. "As you know, Dingazi is ill. I hope and pray he will recover with the aid of Mbama's ju-ju. But if he does not, then I will be King of the Kara-mzili. As King of Kara-mzili, I wish to be on the friendliest terms with such great people as the Masai and—" he threw a puzzled glance at Ki-Gor— "and Ki-Gor. There is no reason why we should not be allies. Together we should be very strong."

The prince paused to watch the effect of his words on Ki-Gor and George. The white face and the black one were impassive, and Mpotwe went on:

"My uncle, the great Dingazi, has announced that I shall succeed him when he dies, and that I shall marry his favorite daughter, Shaliba. This will happen soon. My uncle is failing rapidly. It would make his last days happy if I announced publicly tonight, that I had been acknowledged the King of the Masai."

George studied the prince in silence. Ki-Gor began to wish he had not left Helene in the other room, with the single Masai warrior to guard her.

"It will not be true, of course," Mpotwe went on rapidly, "and when I am King

I will not hold you to it. We will be allies."

"You mean," said George slowly, "that you want me to take part in a lie? You want me to say that the presents I am bringing to Dingazi are not presents—but tribute?"

"Exactly," Mpotwe breathed, "that would be a most friendly gesture on your part. You can see what great prestige that would bring me, can't you?"

"Yes," George admitted, "I can see that."

"And when I become King, I will repay you handsomely for that friendly gesture."

George looked at Ki-Gor. The jungle man's face was expressionless.

"Well," said George, turning back to Mpotwe, "there are some difficulties in the way of your plan. I will have to think it over."

"There is no time to think it over," said Mpotwe, "can't you give me your answer now?"

"I'm afraid I can't," George said. "That is, I can't say now that I will do exactly what you want me to. I will think it over. But I can say this much: I will act in the friendliest manner possible toward you—and Shaliba."

"I see," said Mpotwe thoughtfully, "I suppose I will have to be satisfied with that. Anyway, think it over well. And remember, you will lose nothing by being friendly to the next King of the Kara-mzili."

The three returned to the main room of the house. Ki-Gor breathed easier as he saw Helene sitting beside Shaliba, chatting happily. However, the witch-doctor, Mbama, was nowhere to be seen.

In the distance, drums began to throb, and a buzz of excitement went over the room.

"It is time to go down to the river," Mpotwe proclaimed, and his warriors shouted gleefully. The prince called one of them to him and appointed him to guide the embassy from the Masai to the ceremonial grounds. The guide lighted a torch and a moment later led the way out of Mpotwe's house.

"Well," said Ki-Gor, in English, "that young man is as treacherous as he looks. What do you think of that proposal, George?"

"What proposal?" Helene wanted to know. Ki-Gor told her briefly.

"I don't like the sound of that," Helene remarked, "and there's something I want to tell you. Shaliba is supposed to marry him—"

"Yeah, we was told that," George said, gloomily.

"Well, she doesn't want to," Helene declared.

"No?" said George eagerly.

"SHE didn't say so in so many words," Helene admitted, "but I could tell. She loathes the man. And here's something else. The king is in bad health, and from something Shaliba let drop, I think *she* thinks the witch-doctor isn't doing much to cure him."

"I wouldn't put *nuthin'* past that witch-doctor," George said.

"In fact," Helene went on, "he might even be poisoning the king, or something."

"My lord!" George exclaimed. "That don't put us in a very good position. What do you think, Ki-Gor?"

"I don't like it," Ki-Gor said. "The prince wants to be king as soon as he can, and he's got the witch-doctor on his side. We don't know yet how that Kara-mzili feel about it all, but I would guess that they still love the old king."

"I think tha's prob'ly correct," George affirmed.

"I wouldn't trust the prince," said Ki-Gor, "and so I would not do what he asks. Instead of ambassadors, free to come and go, we would be prisoners."

"Yeah," George said, "I guess we bettuh jest go along our original way. We'll be unduh the p'tection of the king, then, an' maybe we c'n get it ovuh to him whut his young nephew is drivin' at."

At this point in the conversation, the party came abreast of their guest house. George told the guide to stop while he went inside to get the presents for Dingazi.

The guide stood beside the doorway and held the torch low so that its light would be shed inside the house, and at the same time not set fire to the thatched roof. George started across the threshold, when he was halted by an exclamation from Ki-Gor.

"Wait!" the jungle man commanded and

went down on his knees. He inspected the dust in front of the door by the flickering light of the torch. Then he stood up, grim-faced. Without a word, he took the torch away from the guide with his left hand, gripped his assegai half way down the haft, and stepped into the house.

A muffled chatter came from one corner from the bag containing the mongoose. Ki-Gor advanced two steps holding the torch low. Then he stopped dead with a quiet snarl.

A dark, rope-like object was stretched out on the middle of the floor. Ki-Gor reached out and touched it with the tip of his assegai. The object did not move.

It was a dead cobra.

Ki-Gor's mind worked swiftly. The mongoose was still in its bag. The mongoose had not killed the cobra. The cobra had been killed elsewhere, and then had been dragged along the ground to the guest-house and left there.

The reason was only too obvious. The dead cobra's mate would follow the carefully laid trail and wreak a terrible vengeance on any humans it found nearby. That particular trait of cobras is well known.

George stared over Ki-Gor's shoulder and swore softly.

"So that's whut the witch-doctor was doin' when he lef' the prince's house so quiet. Only, he nevuh thought we'd be back so soon. He didn' think we-all 'ud come back ontil late tonight, and by that time the cobra's mate would be settin' heah, waitin' fer us."

"Yes," Ki-Gor breathed. "Well, we will just leave it there and go on. We simply won't come back tonight after the indaba down by the river. Quickly, pick up all our things and let's get out of here before the other cobra comes along."

"Yeah, leave it to me, Ki-Gor, and you get right outa heah. I got high boots on, so I'm safe. They cain't strike higher'n a man's knee, you know."

"We're all right, now," Ki-Gor said. "The other cobra hasn't come yet, or the mongoose would be making more noise."

Deftly, Ki-Gor swept the wriggling bag into a wide sleeve of his lion-skin robe, and then held the torch down for George to pick up the remaining objects. Then, quickly, the two men got out of the house. Ki-Gor handed the torch back to the guide without a word, and the little party got under way again.

VIII

WHEN Dingazi built his capital city of Dutawayo, years before, he had set aside a broad area along the river below the town as a tribal meeting-place, and a parade-ground for his well-trained army. He had had a crude, wooden grandstand built right on the river's edge, facing away from the sluggish water and overlooking the open field. In the center of the grandstand was a magnificent throne of carved wood which Dingazi, of course, reserved for himself. On either side and below the throne, there was room on the grandstand to accommodate some three hundred people—his picked bodyguard, his household slaves, and his fifty-odd wives.

On the ground in front of the grandstand were two huge pits which served as fireplaces during public feasts. And between the two fire pits was a small platform raised ten feet off the ground. This platform had wooden steps running up one side, and was used as a sort of rostrum or speaker's platform for the benefit of anyone who wished to make a public address to the Kara-mzili or to Dingazi, himself.

Open ground stretched away in front of the grandstand and on both sides for yards and yards, and afforded room for thousands of Dingazi's subjects to gather and watch his public spectacles and hear him or his underlings speak.

The great field was already half-filled with excited, chattering Kara-mzili as Ki-Gor's little party followed the guide toward the grandstand. A hundred little fires flickered all over the flat expanse and illuminated the crescent-shaped rim of dark trees that bordered it. By far the greatest light was thrown from the two huge fires that flamed up from the pits in front of the grandstand.

As yet the grandstand was empty. But soon after the guide halted Ki-Gor beside the little rostrum, a great roar went up from the mass of blacks out on the field. A group of powerful blacks climbed up behind a battery of enormous war-drums ranged along the bottom of the grand-

stand, and began whaling away with padded drumsticks. The din was unbelievable.

In a little while, a procession could be seen winding along the river's edge from Dutawayo. In the lead was a band of strapping warriors, dressed in yellow-and-black striped kilts. They marched four abreast in slow rhythm, shaking their assegais above their heads and shouting fiercely. Directly behind them swayed an open litter, borne aloft on the shoulders of four huge, naked blacks. On the litter a man reclined—a vast, thick-shouldered, pot-bellied man, naked to the waist.

It was Dingazi.

The Kara-mzili yelled ecstatically as the royal procession slowly made its way to the foot of the grandstand. Alongside the litter walked Mpotwe, eyes gleaming, and Shaliba. Immediately behind the litter came more striped kilted bodyguards, and after them streamed a column of women —Dingazi's wives and slaves.

The litter was set down gently in front of the grandstand—not fifty feet away from Helene's fascinated eyes—and the old king slowly and with apparent difficulty got off and stood swaying on his thick legs.

He was a monumental man, prodigiously tall and broad. He was not so fat as he was massive. And while his movements were deliberate he still gave the impression of tremendous vigor, and his great, grizzled head was carried proudly high.

The war-drums banged and the Kara-mzili cheered as Dingazi slowly climbed up to his throne. After he was seated, Mpotwe and Shaliba took seats at his feet. The bodyguard ranged themselves on all sides of him, and the rest of the grandstand was quickly occupied by a swarming, shrilling crowd of wives and slaves.

The throbbing of the drums mounted higher and fiercer until a sudden quick wave of the old man's hand cut off the sound like a knife. Another quick sign and a subdued but gleeful hubbub went over the crowd as they jostled back and away from the grandstand to leave a large open space far out beyond the speaker's rostrum. Dingazi's second gesture was evidently a sign that the festivities should commence. The old man leaned his head wearily to one side, and Mpotwe came down from the grandstand and started for the rostrum.

He paused on his way beside George.

"WHAT is your answer?" he murmured. "Shall I announce it?"

"I tell you," George said, with his most charming smile, "why don't you let me announce it? It might have more effect in one way—it would make you seem so modest."

Mpotwe's eyes glittered with excitement, and he nodded his head vigorously.

"Good, good!" he said. "Excellent idea! You won't regret this night, I promise you!"

As the fat young prince went on and mounted the steps to the platform, George murmured in Ki-Gor's ear:

"I *hope* we don't regret this night. But, I'm afraid young Mpotwe is goin' to get a surprise, when he heahs jest whut I announce."

Then Mpotwe began to speak in a high, clear voice.

"O Lord of the Kara-mzili! O Protector of the Race! O Mighty Hunter! O Peerless Warrior, terrible in battle! O Emperor of the World! Ruler of the Universe! Listen to the words of your unworthy servant!"

Mpotwe paused dramatically, and Dingazi closed his eyes and nodded wearily.

"I have just returned," said Mpotwe, "from a great mission—which had for its purpose the spreading of the glorious name of Dingazi. And here is the tale I have to tell of that expedition."

Dingazi's nephew had a gift of oratory, and he held the thousands of Kara-mzili spellbound as he told of the rivers crossed, the mountains climbed, the deserts skirted, the jungles penetrated, the miles traveled by his expedition. He announced the names of tribe after tribe who, he said, came and begged to be annexed to the kingdom of Dingazi.

During this phase of his oration, he hesitated momentarily and glanced down at George. As George smiled ironically, he did not add the name of the Masai to that number.

The most thrilling story of all, however, was reserved until the end of his long speech. And during this story, Ki-

Gor's face relaxed a little, and he even allowed a crooked smile to show.

On the way home, Mpotwe said, the party ran into a misfortune which, had it happened to any but the mighty Kara-mzili, would have resulted in the annihilation of the party.

They were attacked, Mpotwe said in awesome tones, by *ten thousand ju-ju lions!*

A low moan of horror went over the crowd as Mpotwe said these words. Involuntarily, the Kara-mzili huddled closer to their fires as Mpotwe described the onslaught of these fearful creatures.

"One minute," he said, "we were starting peacefully up a little donga toward a notch in a mountain range. The next minute they attacked—without warning!"

He paused dramatically.

"Each lion," he declared, "was bigger than an elephant—with wings twice as big as eagles—and *two heads,* spitting flame and destruction! And there were *ten thousand* of these monsters!"

The Kara-mzili shivered deliciously.

"But the worst of all," Mpotwe said in sinking tones, "was the frightful roaring they made. Worse than ten times ten thousand thunder storms. It was indescribable."

Mpotwe paused again.

"They caught us unawares—being ju-ju," he picked up again. "And before we could organize our defense, two dozen of our brave fellows were struck down. The miracle of it was that any of us lived to tell the tale at all. Here we were caught in a donga, beset on all sides by these terrifying creatures."

Mpotwe shook his head and paused. Then he looked around with a fierce light in his eyes.

"What saved us?" he demanded. "I'll tell you! Kara-mzili bravery! Kara-mzili discipline! Kara-mzili might! A handful of us beat off the most formidable supernatural attack ever known in the history of the world. We slaughtered them by the hundreds. I, myself, slew eleven of the loathsome beasts with my own hand, and we drove them off. We lost thirty-two brave men, that dreadful day, but we left the field victors!"

A yell of admiration went up on all sides. Mpotwe smiled and waved a hand. The war-drums spoke up, and from the far side of the crowd came a column of blue-kilted warriors, four abreast. They were the veterans of Mpotwe's expedition. They marched straight for the speaker's rostrum, keeping fine order.

AT the rear of the column came a large disorderly band of stragglers, weeping and shaking their hands over their heads. When the warriors had all marched in and lined up in front of the grandstand, Mpotwe waved the stragglers forward and lifted his hand for silence

"The prisoners, O Dingazi!" he shouted. "Four from each of the new subject tribes! Three out of each four to be slaves! The fourth—for the crocodiles!"

Ki-Gor grunted and glared up at Mpotwe, as the field rang with wild yells. Dingazi waved a sleepy hand, and warriors leaped among the prisoners and dragged screaming, struggling victims down past the grandstand toward the river's edge.

Helene suddenly felt sick all over when she realized what was happening. One by one, twenty-two miserable humans were thrown off the river bank into the black, crocodile-infested water.

Ki-Gor and George stared distastefully at the fearful spectacle. The Masai looked on contemptuously. Primitive savages though the Masai were, they found nothing to approve in such needless cruelty.

But the Kara-mzili went into hysterical raptures. A solid wall of sound beat against the eardrums of the shocked embassy. George placed his mouth next to Ki-Gor's ear and shouted to be heard over the din.

"I got you-all right into the middle of a mess of bad actors," said George, "an' I'll nevuh fo'give musself."

"I'm not afraid," Ki-Gor replied.

"Well, Lawd help us if they evuh turn on us," said George. "I guess we jest got to trust ol' Dingazi, an' keep on the good side of him."

It seemed as if the sadistic appetite of the Kara-mzili would never be satisfied. But eventually, Dingazi himself stopped it by getting to his feet and waving an arm peremptorily. The crowd immediately

quieted down. Up on the rostrum, Mpotwe raised both arms petitioningly.

"Are you ready for the war dance, O Dingazi?" he cried.

"Not now," the king replied in a harsh, strong voice. "First—the ambassadors."

"But—" Mpotwe stammered uneasily.

"The ambassadors!" Dingazi roared.

Mpotwe descended from the platform and beckoned to George. As the giant Negro strode up to him, the prince said:

"Explain immediately that you are not ambassadors, but royal prisoners."

Mpotwe's crafty eyes were suddenly anxious. George did not reply, but merely smiled inscrutably as he climbed the steps to the platform. His boots clicked arrogantly on the rough planks. He waited a moment for the crowd to become completely still, then his rich bass voice rose on the air.

"O Lord of the Kara-mzili! Mighty Hunter! Peerless Warrior! Emperor of the World! Ruler of the Universe! My first words to you shall be spoken by the rare and precious gifts I have brought you. My royal retainers will bring them to you now—with your permission."

Dingazi, still standing on his feet, nodded approval. George uttered a command, and three of the Masai started for the grandstand. Mpotwe's blue kilts were massed across their path, and made no effort to clear a way. The Masai trio, however, ignored their presence and marched unswervingly at them.

Dingazi's eyes gleamed with admiration, and just as the leading Masai would have crashed into the motionless Kara-mzili warriors, the old king rasped a command. Hastily, Mpotwe's warriors fell away on both sides, and the three Masai stalked insolently onward through the path they cleared.

The crowd watched with bated breath as the three mounted to Dingazi's throne.

"The first gift, O Dingazi," George announced. "A magic robe. Wear it during the heaviest rainstorm and not a drop of water will touch your skin!"

A gasp of admiration went up from all sides. Dingazi promptly put on the raincoat and looked around with a pleased grin.

"The second gift," said George. "The magic tick-tock box. It measures the movement of the sun. And when the sun is directly overhead—it will ring a bell."

Dingazi stared incredulously at the alarm-clock.

"ONLY a king may touch it with safety," George went on. "Anyone else will sicken and die. Tomorrow, when the sun is directly overhead, you will hear its bell."

Dingazi set the clock aside gingerly.

"The last gift, O King, is your second self. You have seen your second self before, often. But he always hides in the river. I have brought him away from the river and imprisoned him in that frame. Now, you may see him any time you wish by picking up that frame and gazing at it."

Dingazi looked into the mirror quickly, and an expression of rapturous joy stole over his features. George decided to strike while the iron was hot.

"These precious gifts, O Dingazi, I have brought you as tokens of esteem and friendship from the Blood-drinkers of the North, the Embattled Giants, the Invincible, All-Conquering Masai!"

It was not the speech of a prisoner, or a subject. It was the speech of an ambassador.

George shot a glance down at Mpotwe. The prince's fat face was twisted with rage, and he turned and ran toward the grandstand.

"The war dance, O Dingazi!" Mpotwe cried. "The war dance, in honor of the ambassadors!"

Dingazi, absorbed in his own reflection in the mirror, nodded absently. Instantly, the war drums went savagely into action. A shrill concerted yell went up, and Mpotwe's blue kilts streamed away from their post below the grandstand, out past the rostrum to the open space beyond.

Mpotwe went with them, shrieking incoherently, and in a moment his warriors had formed into ten ranks behind him, a hundred men wide. Then, as the drums throbbed their intricate rhythms, the warriors of Mpotwe performed intricate steps and movements in unison.

They danced backward four steps, then rushed forward ten steps, and leaped high in the air. Then they repeated the routine. Each rush brought them closer to

the rostrum, and the group of Masai around Ki-Gor and Helene.

George knew perfectly well what Mpotwe's intentions were. The dance was intended to work up the blood-lust of his warriors, to the point where they would keep on rushing forward, fall on the embassy and slaughter them before Dingazi could interfere. In fact, Dingazi would be powerless to interfere, because the entire tribe would become infected with the lust to kill.

Something had to be done.

George cupped his hands toward the grandstand and shouted at Dingazi at the top of his voice. The king heard that Bull of Bashan voice topping the din, and looked up angrily.

George threw up his arms in a dramatic gesture and—began to dance himself!

There were cries of astonishment from the crowd, and the noise of the drums died away. In a moment, the entire tribe of Kara-mzili, from the monarch down, stood in blank amazement and dead silence as George Spelvin of Cincinnati embarked on an American vaudeville tap-dance routine.

IX

IN all that vast crowd, only Helene had ever seen that kind of dancing before, and she alone guessed at George's intentions.

The floor of the platform was rough, and there was no music to accompany him, but George did a pretty fair imitation of Bill Robinson. His taps were blurred, and he could only remember a few simple steps, but he tripped around the creaking platform and chuckled gaily. The astounded savages listened eagerly to merry rhythms that clicked off his tap-plates.

No entertainer ever worked harder. The one thing George counted on was the rhythm—the common heritage of all Africans. And he was not wrong.

The first of the Kara-mzili to succumb was Dingazi, himself.

"Hai!" shouted the monarch, with a delighted grin, and his subjects followed suit. Then George knew that he had won. He had broken the spell of the war dance, and substituted a new and gentler spell.

Mpotwe was foiled. Dingazi waved imperiously, when George finished and climbed down the steps. The entire party was beckoned up to sit beside the king.

MPOTWE glared malevolently at George as he went past. The witch-doctor, Mbama, was standing beside the prince.

The embassy had just reached the battery of war drums at the foot of the grandstand on their way to the throne, when Mpotwe ran forward, shouting:

"Dingazi! Dingazi! There are two ambassadors! But you have heard only one! What about the white one? Will he not address you? Has he no gift?"

Ki-Gor's face broke into an impatient frown. It was a lapse of judgment on his part and he knew it—not making his speech to Dingazi at once. He thrust the cylinder containing the Uruculi feathers into Helene's hands.

"You give it to him. I will run back to the platform and make my speech."

Hurriedly, Ki-Gor pushed through the crowd of Kara-mzili warriors that swarmed between him and the rostrum. He was vexed at himself for not keeping a cooler head. He had to keep his left arm crooked, because the mongoose was still nestled in the wide sleeve. He had forgotten to dispose of the little animal.

A moment later, Ki-Gor was very glad he had not given up the mongoose. Because Mpotwe, foiled once, played his trump card.

Before Ki-Gor could reach the rostrum, the witch-doctor had scurried up the steps carrying a covered, round basket. As he reached the top step, his shrill falsetto cut the air.

"Mbama speaks! Mbama warns! Beware! Beware!"

Instantly Ki-Gor realized that his haste had put him in a serious predicament. He had not the slightest doubt that the witch-doctor was going to denounce him. And here he was—separated from Helene and George and the Masai by hundreds of Mpotwe's own warriors. He must get to the platform!

"Beware of the white witch!" Mbama was screaming. "He has cast a hideous spell on Dingazi—"

That was all Mbama had time to say. The witch-doctor saw Ki-Gor flashing

toward the rostrum. With a shriek, he dropped the basket on the platform, and dashed down the steps. He made it to the ground just in time to elude Ki-Gor's clutching fingers. Then a horde of warriors swept down on Ki-Gor, and there was nowhere to go but—up the steps.

The jungle man whisked upward. He knew perfectly well what he was going to find on the platform, and his eyes very shortly verified his judgment.

The lid had fallen off the basket, and a huge cobra reared up, hooded and swaying, from it.

Ki-Gor's right hand plunged into his left sleeve and shook out the mongoose. The little grey animal landed lightly on its feet, and crouched for a moment on the platform, red eyes blinking.

The cobra and the mongoose saw each other at the same instant, and simultaneously, the age-old enemies went into action. The mongoose flew straight at the hooded serpent. The cobra struck furiously. But the mongoose whipped aside and the venomous fangs missed their mark by a hair. The cobra's head hit the platform with a thud, and before it could recover itself, the mongoose was upon it. The little creature sprang lightning-fast on the back of the hood. Its ferocious teeth fastened on the snake's neck at the base of its narrow skull.

There was a brief thrashing around, as the cobra whipped its coils around the mongoose. But in a minute it was all over. The sharp teeth quickly gnawed through the snake's spinal column, and the coils relaxed.

Ki-Gor bent over, picked up the cobra by the tail, and held it up.

A superstitious moan went up from the crowd. It was broken by a shriek from Mbama. The witch-doctor was tumbling up the grandstand toward the throne.

"He's a witch! A witch!" the witch-doctor screamed. "Kill him! Throw him to the crocodiles, before he kills Dingazi!"

A confused mumbling rose on all sides, and Ki-Gor's heart sank.

The worst had come.

WHEN a witch-doctor denounced a victim, no one—not even Dingazi, in this instance—could save him. Ki-Gor's first concern was for the safety of Helene and George. For the moment, they were in Dingazi's favor.

"Ki-Gor!"

It was George's voice topping the confused murmur of the crowd.

"Hold on, Ki-Gor! We're comin' to get you!"

"No, George, no!" Ki-Gor shouted excitedly. "Stay where you are—behind the war drums!"

A desperate plan was forming in Ki-Gor's mind.

"Stay there, George," he repeated. "If you come out, you haven't got a chance. If you stay behind the drums, you can hold off an attack for a little while."

"But we can't let 'em throw you to the crocodiles!" George shouted.

"You can't stop them," Ki-Gor shouted back. "Trust me to get out of it somehow. I'll come back—Helene, get the lion-roar ready—"

Mpotwe's warriors were clambering up onto the platform now. Ki-Gor whirled and shouted at them:

"Stand back! I am a witch! I will go to the crocodile pool by myself. You may follow me and watch me. But do not touch me! Whoever dares to touch me, I will instantly change him into a jungle-mouse!"

The warriors hesitated. Ki-Gor strode across the platform straight at them. They quailed under his stern gaze and started to back down the steps.

Ki-Gor followed them down. When he reached the ground, he walked unmolested a few steps toward the grandstand. A tiny hope began to flicker in his breast. If he could frighten the warriors enough to keep them from touching him, he might be able to go straight back to his party, unharmed.

The hope was short-lived, however.

Mpotwe came pushing his way through the massed warriors.

"Up spears!" he barked.

The ring of Kara-mzili around Ki-Gor lifted their spears up and poised them over their shoulders, ready to throw. Ki-Gor bowed his head. Resistance would be futile.

He lifted his head and looked over the plumes of the encircling warriors toward the grandstand. In the general excitement, the fires had been left untended, and

it was hard to see much in the dim light. At the foot of the grandstand, he could make out the white robes of the Masai, towering above the drums. Above them, the striped kilts of Dingazi's bodyguard clustered around the throne. Ki-Gor could not see the witch-doctor, but he could hear his incessant yelping—inciting the Kara-mzili to kill. From the crowd, there came a steadily increasing roar.

Ki-Gor threw back his head and yelled. "Helene! I'm coming back!"

Then he turned and started toward the river.

A howl of triumph went up from the warriors and was taken up all over the field. The savage call for blood followed Ki-Gor all the way to the river's edge, ringing hideously in his ears.

But hope was not dead in Ki-Gor's heart. In all the furious din about him, he could not hear the thump of the drums! Had the Masai ousted the drummers and dug in behind the protecting rampart of the huge tom-toms?

It was pitch dark by the edge of the river. As Ki-Gor and the frenzied warriors drew nearer to it, the light shed by a single torch carried by one of the Kara-mzili could do little to dispel the gloom. The torch-bearer was pushed up behind Ki-Gor, and then the jungle man could see the wavering flame reflected on the slick, oily surface of the river. Huge, ghastly shadows danced beyond as the torch sputtered and smoked. A faint odor of corruption hung on the air. Ki-Gor's nose crinkled in disgust, and he searched the dimly lighted surface of the river with his eyes. He could see no crocodiles, but he knew they were there, lurking in the greasy, black depths.

Mpotwe's warriors, by now, had reached the peak of their frenzy. Yelling insanely, they closed in behind Ki-Gor, stabbing at him with their spears.

HE turned and faced them, blue eyes flashing and teeth bared. Slowly he retreated three steps, until he stood on the very brink of the low bank.

His hands crept up to the low collar of the lionskin robe. Then, like a flash, he shucked off the robe.

Before the raving Kara-mzili knew what was happening, Ki-Gor had flung the robe straight into the faces of the nearest warriors. With a savage snarl, the jungle man leaped at the torchbearer, snatched the burning brand out of his hand, and flung it out into the river.

And before the infuriated blacks could recover their balance, Ki-Gor seized the miserable torchbearer by both wrists, and swung him off his feet. At the same moment, the torch hit the water with a hiss and immediately went out, plunging the whole scene into darkness.

The first row of Kara-mzili screamed with rage and stabbed out blindly. But Ki-Gor swung the body of the squealing torchbearer in a wide arc, knocking down spears and spearmen alike. At the end of the arc, Ki-Gor released his hold, and the torchbearer went spinning out over the river.

He landed with a prodigious splash in an upstream direction. At the same moment, Ki-Gor hit the water in a long, shallow dive—in a downstream direction. His arms were flailing and his legs thrashing as he touched the water and an unspoken prayer bubbled at his lips.

Then, over the howling bedlam back on the bank, he heard a hideous shriek cut the black night. Ki-Gor took hope. At least, the crocodiles had discovered the torchbearer first. There was a chance, now, that they would all move upstream in the direction of the kill.

Ki-Gor pumped arms and legs harder than ever. In this desperate situation, every second he lived increased his chances of pulling out with a whole skin. He had to put a certain distance between himself and the enraged Kara-mzili, before he dared go ashore. At the same time, as far as he knew, a scaly monster might that very minute be pursuing him through that fearful black water. Ki-Gor redoubled his pace.

A hundred thoughts went boiling through his brain as he churned through the water. Would he escape being overhauled by a crocodile? If he got ashore safely, could he find Marmo? Could George and the ten Masai protect Helene until he got back? Had he gone far enough downstream yet to risk turning shoreward?

The sprint was finally beginning to tell on his arms, and legs, and lungs. He shot

both arms forward, held his legs still, and coasted for a moment. The maniacal shouts of the Kara-mzili sounded clear and still very close. He wondered if they were following him along the bank.

ROLLING gently over on his back, he he was surprised to see how far he had actually traveled. A second torch-bearer had evidently joined the group of warriors on the bank. They were, Ki-Gor judged, a good two hundred yards away. The surface of the water served as a sounding board, making their howls sound deceptively close.

Ki-Gor peered around him to try and orient himself. It was literally pitch black. He could see nothing except the distant torch and its dancing reflection in the ripples he had stirred in the oily water. Above him there were no stars; evidently the sky was heavily overcast. He rolled back onto his stomach again and began to swim quietly.

A sudden thrill went shooting up his spine.

A faint musical ripple had sounded right beside him. A crocodile? Ki-Gor held his breath.

Again there was the sound. This time it was in front of him. It sounded almost like a large drop of water. There it was again! Right behind him!

Ki-Gor's cupped hands dug the water. His legs galvanized into action. He shot forward. Ki-Gor put everything he had into this second sprint, teeth clenched, waiting for the moment when he would feel huge jaws clamp over his beating legs.

After a few seconds, he decided to swing to his right and head directly for the bank. But just as he began to turn, his hand plunging down at the end of a stroke, scraped on something rough below him.

He stifled a yell and bulled forward through the water, eyes shut. Again his hand scraped—both of them—and then his knees. For a paralyzing moment, Ki-Gor did not realize that he was aground in the darkness. Then his heart leaped as he recognized finally that he was not scraping a crocodile's back, but a rock.

He rose swiftly and found that he was in water less than knee deep. The ripples sounded again, but now Ki-Gor knew they were caused by raindrops.

He cocked an ear and heard them falling on leaves in front of him. He had blundered ashore in the darkness.

Now! If it was possible, he had to locate, somewhere in this sooty blackness, an elephant named Marmo. He put two fingers in his mouth and blasted a shrill whistle.

Head bent, he stood in silence in the increasing rain, waiting for an answering trumpet-call. From upstream came the confused roar of the Kara-mzili. Ki-Gor's heart tightened as he thought of Helene.

Marmo! Where are you?

Again he whistled. The rain came down harder, drowning out the insane baying of the blacks.

Ki-Gor listened a long moment and sighed. There was no answer from Marmo.

The jungle man stepped out of the water, hands extended, and pushed his way blindly through the thick brush along the bank.

X

AS soon as Ki-Gor thrust the container of Uruculi feathers into her hands and started back toward the rostrum, Helene knew he had made a mistake. But before she could summon her voice, a wave of Kara-mzili warriors had closed in between her and his retreating back. He was separated from her and George and the Masai now, and it was a tactical error. No matter how strong he was or how fierce the Masai, they could never cut their way to each other through such overwhelming masses of Bantu.

George saw it, too, but like Helene he saw it too late.

"My Lawd, Miz Helene, he shouldna done that. Mpotwe goin' to catch him sure!"

"Oh, George, I know!" said Helene agitatedly. "What'll we do?"

"Nothin' we *kin* do," said George tightly. "If we tried to go get him, we'd jest all of us get killed."

Helene fought down a mounting panic within herself.

"Oh, George!" she said. "He'll find a

way out. He's got to! He always has, before. He's got to this time! We must have faith in him, George! Because—because he's *Ki-Gor!*"

The events that followed alternately justified Helene's faith, and then dashed it to earth. When the witch-doctor screamed his curse from the grandstand, and George had been ready to order the suicidal sortie to the rostrum, she was proud that Ki-Gor commanded him not to. She did not know how Ki-Gor was going to escape, but she somehow had faith.

A little later, her faith in Ki-Gor's invincibility was sorely strained. When he shouted to her that he would come back and then walked toward the crocodile-pool at the points of the Kara-mzili spears, she sank down behind a great war drum and rocked back and forth with closed eyes and clenched fists.

Then came the fiendish yells of Mpotwe's men. It could mean only one thing. But Helene refused to believe the evidence of her ears.

"No! George, no!" She scrambled to her feet, face contorted. "I have faith! He's escaped—somehow!"

The expression of stunned horror on George's face indicated that his faith was not quite so strong as Helene's. Mechanically, he turned to the impassive, gigantic Masai.

"They will probably attack us now," he announced to them. "You will fight like Masai, I know. But none of you must leave the shelter of the drums. Stay together and we may come out of this."

Helene's eyes fell on the little bow at her feet and she remembered with a start that she had a part to play. With trembling fingers, she unfastened the rosined cord that was tied around her middle. She held out the end with the big wad of tree-gum.

"George," she said, and her voice was once again strong, "will you press this gum as hard as you can on the head of this drum?"

"Why, whut you got theah, Miz Helene?"

"You'll see. Quickly, George—and I guess you'd better tip the drum over on its side, so that I can hold the cord straight out from it."

Wonderingly, the great Negro did as Helene asked. But there was no time for more questions. A great uproar had broken out in the grandstand above.

Dingazi, Lord of the Kara-mzili and Emperor of the World, was suddenly asserting himself.

Peering up through the gloomy light shed by the dying fires, George could barely make out the grotesque figure of the witch-doctor cowering backwards from the throne.

"It makes no difference that he was a witch!" Dingazi roared at his medicine-man. "He was an ambassador to my Court and his life was my affair! You broke the Law by inciting the warriors to kill him! How dare you come now and propose that I kill these others! How dare you!"

"Dingazi! Dingazi!" Mbama wailed. "You know not what you say! To talk to Mbama thus—you are bewitched!"

"If I am bewitched," Dingazi retorted, "it is because your ju-ju is not strong enough to protect me. But I am beginning to think, Mbama, that I am not bewitched so much as—*betrayed!*"

FOR a moment, the witch-doctor seemed too shocked to answer, but could only retreat farther and farther from the throne.

"Let it be understood," Dingazi thundered, "that these people down here are under my protection!"

George gripped Helene's shoulder.

"Amen!" he muttered. "Maybe we-all got a chance to pull out of this, at that!"

"How's that?" Helene whispered. "What were they saying?"

George translated for her. But in the middle of it, Mbama's hideous cackle broke in. The witch-doctor had crept down the grandstand past the ranks of the king's bodyguard.

"So be it!" shrilled the witch-doctor. "So be it, O Dingazi! But remember! Mbama's ju-ju is all-powerful!"

With that, the fantastic little man scrambled away out onto the field.

George raised his voice toward the throne. "All thanks, O Dingazi," he said, "for your protection!"

"You have it!" snapped the old king. "It is the Law. But all is not well among

the Kara-mzili. I have just been learning some things from my daughter, Shaliba. Things about my witch-doctor and my nephew which I can hardly believe. Shaliba has told me, too, that you refused to plot with Mpotwe. You have thus doubly earned my protection."

Just then, a great triumphant yell went up from the river bank beyond the end of the grandstand. The thousands of Kara-mzili out on the field fell silent, as Mpotwe and his men came marching back from the crocodile pool, chanting exultantly.

"The witch is dead! The white witch is dead! He has gone to feed the crocodiles! The witch is dead!"

Helene tried to shake off the cold horror that was stealing over her. George went murmuring among the Masai.

"No! No!" Helene whispered to herself. "I won't believe it!"

A drop of rain fell on her clenched fist.

The only sounds on the field now came from the chanting column of men. Through the dim half-light shed by the dying fires, they could be seen marching out in front of the grandstand. Suddenly the chanting ceased and Mpotwe's high, clear voice rose out of the gloom.

"O great Dingazi! Look with pride on your servants! We have delivered you from the white witch who impudently cast a spell over you! No longer can he harm you! We threw him into the river and lo! even while his body was in mid-air, a great crocodile came halfway out of the water and received him in his jaws!"

There was an ominous silence from the throne. Mpotwe took a breath and went on.

"These others who were with the witch, O Dingazi, do not let them fool you! They are traveling under false colors, telling you they come as ambassadors from the Masai! That is a gross lie! They are no ambassadors—they are prisoners! The Masai recognized me as their king, and appointed these miserable felons to come direct, bearing tribute! They are entitled to no safe-conduct whatsoever! They are forsworn criminals! To the crocodiles with them, O Dingazi!"

A murmur went over the assembled Kara-mzili as their insatiable blood-lust began to rise again. George gripped his huge Masai spear. He knew now that it was inevitable that his little band would be attacked. And he saw little chance of standing off the Kara-mzili hordes for very long. His only consolation was that Helene could not understand Mpotwe when he described the fate of Ki-Gor. Perhaps it was just as well all around, the giant Negro reflected, that they be attacked and killed. He could not see how Ki-Gor could possibly be still alive. And Ki-Gor was his dearest friend.

The muttering of the Kara-mzili swelled and then suddenly cut off, as the voice of their king thundered at them from the throne.

"Silence! This is Dingazi speaking to you. Know then, that my nephew, Mpotwe, whom I selected to be my heir, has broken the Law! He has killed an ambassador who was entitled to my guarantee of safety. He has lied to me about Tembu George and the Masai, attempting to make *me* break the Law, too. That I will not! Tembu George spoke as an emissary of a free and powerful people on friendly terms with us. His life, and the lives of those with him, are sacred! Whoever does them harm shall feel the consequences of my might."

"Dingazi! Dingazi!" It was Mpotwe. "What words are these—"

"As for yo, Mpotwe!" Dingazi roared. "You are no longer my heir! You are a foresworn criminal yourself, and you have until dawn to get away from Dutawayo!"

"BEWITCHED! Bewitched!" screamed Mbama. "Close your ears, O People, and avert your faces! Our Lord Dingazi is grievously enchanted! There is a fearful ju-ju still at large! It can only be these fearful Masai—"

"Soldiers!" Dingazi broke in. "Seize that pestilential priest! I hereby command all my soldiers except my bodyguards to surround and take the false witch-doctor, Mbama!"

"Heed him not! Heed him not!" shrieked Mbama. "He knows not what he is saying! He is not responsible! Soldiers! Follow your rightful commander —Mpotwe!"

The close-packed masses on the field murmured in bewilderment as the king

and the chief witch-doctor fought each other for supreme authority. It was a puzzling, frightening situation. They feared and loved Dingazi—they feared and hated Mbama.

Mpotwe suddenly seized the initiative.

"Follow me!" he shouted to his own men. "We must save our king from the Masai demons! Fall on them! Kill! Kill!"

"This is rebellion!" Dingazi shouted. "Guards! Down beside the Masai and protect their flanks—"

The rest of his commands were drowned out by the war cry of Mpotwe's *impi* charging between the two smoldering fire-pits.

"Stay behind the drums, O Masai!" George shouted, "and make every spear-thrust count!"

Mpotwe's men came rushing forward with all the bravery and ferocity that has characterized the Zulus since the ancient glory of King Chaka. They threw themselves recklessly against the rampart of war drums, hacking and stabbing with their short assegais.

But these men of Mpotwe were used to quick, cheap victories, against foes who dreaded the name of Kara-mzili. This handful of Masai could not possibly stand up to them, they thought. One headlong charge and it would all be over.

There were only ten Masai, and a gigantic American Negro. But this handful was not afraid of the name of Kara-mzili. They were not afraid of anything.

As the first rank of yelling Kara-mzili reached the line of war drums, the long Masai spears licked out. The prodigious three-foot blades cut Mpotwe's men down like butter. The second rank pressed on. Their short, stabbing assegais could not reach past the fearful Masai spears.

In thirty seconds, the Masai cut down twice their number.

The survivors recoiled momentarily. The onset was slowed down.

"Hai!" cried the Masai gleefully. This was their idea of true sport. They were never quite so happy as when they were engaged in bloody combat.

George ran alertly to the left flank of the line of drums. As he feared, a dozen or more of Mpotwe's men were rushing around to take the defenders in the rear.

He struck down the first man, and saw the rest pause. Then a group of light-colored kilts swarmed up beside him. Dingazi's bodyguards had remained loyal!

They poured down off the grandstand to each end of the line of drums and drove Mpotwe's men back in disorder.

Kara-mzili was fighting Kara-mzili!

The rain, which had been coming down intermittently for some time, now began to pour down in earnest. The untended fires all over the field hissed and sputtered and sent up ghostly columns of steam.

"By golly, Miz Helene!" George cried delightedly, "we beat 'em off! We truly did!"

But George's triumph was premature. A wall of enraged warriors erupted from the darkness. Five and six at a time, they leaped up on the drums.

Again the deadly Masai spears did murderous work. The men of Mpotwe sobbed with rage, as all along the line, their assegais were outreached.

"Blood-Drinkers of the North!" shouted George. "Make your spears drink blood!"

The Masai responded with a cascade of delighted shouts and hurled the attackers back for the second time.

"Well done! Splendid, Masai!" George roared.

But even as he spoke, Mpotwe's *impi* hurled themselves at the drums once again. Rage at their humiliation lent strength to the attackers. They poured and swarmed over the drums in such numbers, that a few inevitably got past the thin line of defenders.

BUT again Dingazi's bodyguards came to the rescue. A scant dozen cut in from the flanks and cut down those attackers who had broken through, before they could do any damage.

This was the most determined assault of the battle. Mpotwe's blue-kilts came on and on, to be cut down by the untiring spears of the Masai. Eventually, it was more than flesh and blood could endure. The Masai, protected up to their chests by the war drums, had the added advantage of longer spears.

With shrieks of agony and terror. Mpotwe's men broke backward from the holocaust at the drums and turned to get away from those terrible spears.

A joyous yell went up from the Masai warriors.

"They run! The miserable dogs are running! After them! Don't let them escape!"

"No! No!" George shouted. "Don't run after them! Stay behind the drums!"

But the Masai were already vaulting up on to the tops of the drums. The battle-madness was on them, and they could not resist. George clutched at one lean ankle going over the rampart.

"Nay! Let me go, Tembu George!" the warrior cried. "We've got them on the run!"

He wrenched himself free and jumped off to the other side with a joyous whoop.

"Oh, my Lawd, Miz Helene!" George groaned. "Them fools! We were winnin'! We were safe! But, now they'll jest get out theah in the dahk, an' be killed off! Miz Helene, I guess this is the end."

Helene, crouched beside her drum, the rosined cord held ready in one hand and the little bow in the other, drew a deep shuddering breath.

"I'm ready, George," she said, in a dead voice. "Up till now I clung to the hope that—that Ki-Gor would come back. But now—I'm afraid, George—I'm afraid he's not coming back. Ki-Gor is dead, and I'm ready to die, too."

At that moment, there came a sound above the din of battle. Helene and George both jumped and stared. Then came the sound, again!

It was an elephant trumpeting.

"Marmo!" they both cried together.

The noise of the battle hushed.

"Is—is—Ki-Gor—with him?"

Helene whispered the question, hardly daring to hope.

Suddenly a low moan of horror swept over the great field. At the same instant, Helene saw the torch blazing high in the air. It was in Ki-Gor's hand and he was standing on Marmo's back.

"The witch!" cried the Kara-mzili. "Risen from the dead! Ju-ju—ju-ju—most deadly!"

Helene's brain clicked, and she went into action. Her left hand drew the resined cord taut. Her right hand poised the little bow across it at right angles. Then she drew the bow hard across the cord.

A frightful, ear-shattering roar filled the air, rasping and resonant.

"The ju-ju lions!" Ki-Gor shouted at the top of his voice. "Flee, Kara-mzili! Flee before you are slaughtered by the ten thousand ju-ju lions!"

Again Helene drew the bow, and again the hideous, mangling roar sounded.

The Kara-mzili broke into complete and utter panic.

The men of Mpotwe's *impi* had heard that roar before. At that time, it had been the signal for sudden, swift and mysterious death. They bolted now.

The rest of the Kara-mzili, having heard Mpotwe's dramatic and exaggerated accont of the ju-ju lions, caught the infection of panic instantly. Almost all the fires had been put out by the rain. They could see nothing. But that terrifying, insufferable noise rang in their ears from all directions.

And in the center of the field, the ju-ju elephant stalked toward the grandstand, with the ghost of the witch brandishing a torch.

It was too much.

Dreadful gurgling shrieks bubbled from thousands of lips, and inside of ten minutes the field was empty.

THE only people left were Mpotwe's dead and wounded around the rampart of drums, two slightly wounded Masai behind the drums, and eight more Masai out on the field. They were unhurt but badly scared, and were stretched out on the ground under their shields.

And up on the grandstand, Dingazi, Lord of the Kara-mzili, sat on his throne. He was twitching with fright, but he had stayed to await whatever fate had in store for him. His sole companion was his favorite daughter, Shaliba.

As Marmo maneuvered himself alongside the drums, Ki-Gor slid down his side to the top of one of them. Helene stumbled toward him, incoherently blubbering. Ki-Gor leaped lightly down beside her and folded her into his arms.

"O-o-oh, Ki-Gor!" Helene wailed. "I was so afraid that this time you—you weren't coming back!"

"Ah, Helene," said Ki-Gor, and patted her awkwardly on the shoulder. Ki-Gor loved Helene, but this was a scene, and

Ki-Gor hated scenes. "I promised you," he said, "I promised you I would come back."

"Jest as simple as all that," George Spelvin murmured. Then out loud he said, "Well, man, I'm always goin' to b'lieve you after this. Anybody who gets throwed into a rivuh o' crocodiles an' then climbs right out again—I'll b'lieve c'n do most anything!"

Ki-Gor released Helene with a smile and held his hand out to George.

"Good friend," he said, "you kept Helene safe."

"Almost didn't," George replied, gripping his friend's hand. "If you hadn't come along—"

"I was late," Ki-Gor said quickly. "I meant to get back much sooner, but it took me a long time to find Marmo."

"Well, Ki-Gor," said George, "you didn't come a minute too soon, but, still an' all, you wasn't late. Or, we wouldn' none of us be standin' heah, now."

Just then there came a timid, querulous shout from up in the grandstand.

"Lawdy, whoozat!" George exclaimed, whirling. His nerves, if the truth were told, were a little edgy as a result of the evening's events. He held up Ki-Gor's torch and peered upward toward the throne.

"Who is it?" he demanded in Kara-mzili.

"Dingazi," was the reply. "Have the ju-ju lions gone?"

"Yes, O King," said George. "We have sent them away."

"A-ah!" breathed the Lord of the Kara-mzili. "That was mighty ju-ju! I never thought to live through such an exhibition."

Then the realization seemed to dawn on the old man that he had lived through it, and was safe now. He spoke again and his voice began to assume royal authority.

"How am I ever going to get out of this rain? I'm too old and fat to climb the hill on my feet, and all my cowardly subjects have run away. All but one, that is," the monarch added graciously.

"All but one?" George asked.

"Shaliba stayed with me," Dingazi said with great satisfaction.

"Oh! Shaliba!" George said eagerly. "We owe her a great deal."

"Yes," Dingazi grunted. "She told me the truth about my traitorous nephew, Mpotwe, and that poisoning schemer, the Chief Witch-Doctor. I'll have his heart's blood."

Ki-Gor said, "If you will come down here, O Dingazi, I will take you up the hill to your kraal on the back of the elephant."

"What's that?" said Dingazi, uncertainly. "The elephant? The ju-ju elephant?"

"He obeys me," said Ki-Gor reassuringly. "You will be quite safe."

There was a pause. Then Dingazi said, "Very well then, I will come down. But you must all come to my kraal, and spend this wet night in my house. Tomorrow, I intend to make gifts to you in return."

XI

IT was an awed, shaken group of Kara-mzili who gathered the next morning in the king's kraal in answer to the summoning drums. They considered it miraculous that any of them were alive after the terrible visitation of the night before. And when their king appeared in front of his house with the White Witch, it was all they could do to keep themselves from bolting all over again. Then the Masai appeared with their giant leader, and again moans of fear could not be restrained. Several of the tall warriors bore wounds, and their white robes were bloodstained. But they were all there—all ten. What incredible fighters! the Kara-mzili marveled, to hold off an entire *impi!*

Dingazi held informal court in front of his house. He seemed in much better health than he had been for months. And when he announced publicly that Mpotwe and Mbama were expelled from the nation and could be killed by anyone finding them, the Kara-mzili nodded wisely. There were those among them who had long suspected what was going on. No one had said anything, because no one could be sure who would come out on top.

Ki-Gor made a presentation of the Uruculi feather headdress—rescued at the last minute from the shambles behind the war drums—and Dingazi was entranced. He commanded slaves to bring out bales of beautiful buckskin garments and pre-

sented them to Ki-Gor and Helene.

Then Dingazi announced to his people that he had selected Tembu George to be his heir, but that Tembu George had declined the honor. But at all events, Dingazi said, when he died, the Kara-mzili must send a delegation to the Masai and offer Tembu George the crown.

"And if you will not stay here as my heir," Dingazi said, turning to George, "I will, nevertheless, so consider you, wherever you are, as long as I live. To bind the bargain—" the old man jerked his head around to the door of his house. "Shaliba!" he cried. "All of you! Come out!"

Shaliba came proudly through the doorway followed by ten other young women, all more or less her age, and all very nearly as beautiful.

"Tembu George," said Dingazi, "I have eleven daughters of marriageable age. I give them to you. They are your wives."

"My—my wives!" gasped George Spelvin of Cincinnati.

"Every one of them is of royal blood on her mother's side," said Dingazi complacently.

"But eleven!" George exclaimed. "Shaliba would—"

"By the time you are my age," Dingazi broke in, "you will have eleven times eleven wives."

"But, hear me, O Dingazi," George protested. "It is the custom among the Masai to have only one wife."

"Only *one* wife!" Dingazi cried in astonishment. "Well—well, your customs do not concern me. I give you my daughters. Do with them as you wish."

"You—?"

"Take them with you!" Dingazi shouted testily. "If not as wives, then slaves. But they are yours, do you understand, yours."

George paused, staring at Dingazi's eleven comely daughters. Then he strode toward them. He stopped beside Shaliba and took her hand and looked into her eyes. She returned his look. George turned toward his battered warriors.

"O Morani!" he cried. "O wifeless ones! Seek your wives. You are now Morani no longer. You are married men!"

Satan on Safari

By CLYDE IRVINE

Van Root was a jungle devil—a beast whose only law was *"Kill!"* For that code he lived . . . and by it, died.

SEVEN months after he'd gone into it with Jan Van Root, the big Dutch prospector, Rawlinson staggered out of the jungle clutching the biggest diamond in his trembling hands that any of us had ever seen. Beside it "The Star of Africa" was a pebble.

But it did him no good. He never lived

long enough to enjoy it and the stone's still in Chancery, for we never did find out how he met Van Root or where he came from in the first place.

Emil Druten, who works on the pier, said that he was given the heave-o off a tramp ship from Antwerp; and the bucko mate, a caustic New Englander, was very sarcastic about the big, lanky American's mistake in stowing away on a ship with an American flag in a foreign port without finding out just where and when, if ever, that ship would reach America.

But Rawlinson had enough strength left to gasp out the story of Van Root's discovery of a new bluefield where diamonds were as thick as raspberries and to tell us why he came back alone.

When you're living safe and sound in a civilized port, even though the jungle comes creeping down to the water's edge, you forget that right behind you there are miles and miles of green hell, with jungle grass ten feet high and monkey-ropes laced so thick that you've got to cut them away to beat a few miles a day, to say nothing of cobras and pythons and leopards and a hundred other deaths that lurk and wait for you. You forget, too, that savages live in there who've seldom seen a white man and know only the law of the jungle. It's not a pretty law.

It was into that hell's broth that Van Root and Rawlinson went, seven months ago. The big, lanky American soon learned that he was keeping company with a white devil. For Jan Van Root was tougher than the toughest native that ever lived and he, too, knew only one law—*beat* them—*beat the hell* out of them, so that they dropped in their tracks, or died on their feet or were left for the jungle beasts and the swooping vultures.

Everything went fairly well, apart from the daily *sjambokings* that Van Root handed the shivering crew of porters. Their black hides were criss-crossed with welts where the heavy *sjabok* lifted the flesh from them, but they stuck with him, partly out of terror of himself, more out of the fear of the unknown.

He had some grip on all these niggers, too. They didn't seem like the regular run of Kaffirs but had the air of men who'd been in jail for a long time and hadn't found it as easy as most niggers find it. Rawlinson said he thought Van Root drugged them, or that they had to have drugs and he supplied them in return for their services, but he sure beat the living daylights out of them and his blows were quicker than lightning and struck as unexpectedly and as devastatingly.

THAT'S how things were going when this small tribe, resentful of the approach of white men into their territory, tried to kill Van Root. The *assegai*, quivering in the tree-trunk, missed him by about two inches.

"Lord!" Rawlinson husked through his parched lips. "You should have heard him! I guess he went mad for sure. He managed to capture the native who threw the *assegai*—shot him through the thigh—and he had him strung up like a ham from one of the trees."

Somebody forced some whiskey down the Yank's throat and he went on.

"He beat him! I've never seen anything like it—never imagined anyone could do a thing like that and sleep peacefully again. The native's body was literally whipped from his bones! Yes, on the level, the flesh tore off him as if it'd been dough. I was so sick I vomited and Van Root jeered at me and flicked me playfully with the whip so that I felt I'd been stroked quickly with a white-hot iron!"

Well, we had a reporter there taking it down and it's all in the records now. Most of us know the rest of the story but now and again we have to tell it all over again. Yes, here's the stuff. It's all set down just as poor Rawlinson gasped it out before his life was snuffed.

"That afternoon," Rawlinson's story read, "we reached a *kraal* where a small tribe of natives lived. The man who had attacked Van Root was one of this tribe and it was easy to see they knew about his fate, the way all natives know what's happening miles away even when they're not there to see it. They were a surly lot and stood about, staring at us with sulky, sullen eyes, refusing us any food, or water, or sleeping accommodation. I could see Van Root getting madder by the minute, but he'd worked out his rage on the dead native and I guess he figured he could

wait until these dirty savages found it would be better for them to do what we asked.

"Anyhow, there's no telling what might have happened if a little pickaninny hadn't wandered across the clearing right past Van Root's piggy eyes. He stared at her as if she'd been a ghost!

"And no wonder! For that infant was wearing more diamonds than the Queen of England! It's a fact! They were hung around her in lumps—hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds—on the unwashed neck of a waddling little Negro baby!

"They were uncut, of course, but even a greenhorn like myself could see what it meant. Van Root's hands shot out, he lifted that kid and stripped her of that necklace in the flash of an eye. The natives only saw him grabbing the baby and they were on the point of slicing him apart when he threw the kid from him, yanked out his gun and cowed them into a corner of the *kraal!*

"Well, it was easy after that. The whole *kraal* was set on a field of blue clay, the same sort of blue clay that yielded the first crop of diamonds in Kimberley. But Van Root knew what many of the old diamond-miners didn't know, and that was that the blue clay was but a thin covering for the real diamond layer beneath.

"Oh, yes, I know! All over Africa they say the Kimberley diamond fields never out-cropped profitably anywhere else, even in Rhodesia, but they said the same about the gold reefs in Canada and they say the same about everything that's been stumbled on the way we stumbled on this field of a million diamonds. 'Luck' they call it, and I guess they ain't so far wrong!

"Van Root went really mad after that. When he found the whole village resting on an incalculable fortune, he whipped them into a slave corps, the way the old Egyptians must have whipped their millions of helpless slaves to build the pyramids.

"He'd stand over them with that great whip singing, lashing them on to dig, dig dig until their sweat ran from them like a stream and they dropped dead in the blue clay where they stood. The pile of diamonds grew greater as the blue clay grew less and less. Beneath the blue clay there would be enough diamonds to make Van Root and myself multi-millionaires a dozen times over.

"That was the trouble. I took turn and turn about with him, on guard with a repeating rifle, to stop any funny stuff from the beaten tribesmen, but I never could *sjambok* them and Van Root jeered and sneered at me for a milksop. Finally, I found him regarding me with a sly little grin and then I began to feel that very soon Jan Van Root would find an excuse to put a bullet in me, too. It would leave all the diamonds for him!

"I still don't know what happened, for there isn't any Jan Van Root any more. And no matter how closely anybody looks they won't find him. For I looked carefully myself and all I found was—that! Yes, that diamond! I found it in a big hole—with little bits of flesh and stuff nearby.

"I TELL you, I don't know! Yes. Yes . . . that's right! Sure, I guess that must have been it! Uh-huh, now I come to think of it, it must have been that. But I don't know for sure. I wasn't there at the time. All I heard was a sound like the world had split in two and then things—terrible things—started raining down on me. Raining down through the jungle!

"I'd better tell you, I suppose. I got

scared of him. Yes, I got scared of this madman with the whip and I determined to get out, see? I started back on the trail with one of our own natives who knew the way, but we hadn't gone far when this terrific explosion took place and I felt like the earth was bursting. It threw us flat on the ground and the grasses flopped as if they'd been cut by a mighty scythe. The wind rushed past us and then—this stuff—bits of people—and things—came raining down on us!

"M'awaba—that was the native's name—shrieked in terror and I guess I wasn't feeling any too gay myself. The way Van Root had been acting had me plenty jittery; but I slapped the black across the mouth and managed to get up on my feet, shaking all over as if I'd been through six rounds with the world's heavyweight champion.

"Well, we went back! We came out of the jungle and right where that *kraal* had been there was just—nothing! Nothing at all! Just a big hole in the ground—and that thing lying at the bottom of it—and—and those other things—y'know—lying about!

"Yes, I guess it must have been the dynamite we carried. Van Root was getting impatient 'cause the niggers weren't making fast enough time for him. He wanted to get to that bottom layer, I guess. I heard him say he'd use dynamite to clear it if they didn't get on with it—and I guess he used too much."

At this point in Rawlinson's narrative someone asked a question, quickly, giving him no time to think of the answer. The question was, "Did you put a slow fuse on it?" and Rawlinson answered, "Yeah!" before he knew what he was doing. He smiled then and said, "I guess I haven't long to stay. If you go there—?"

He never finished the sentence. His big blond head fell sideways and he was dead. We've tried for years to trace him but every lead failed. Nobody in America ever heard of a Ted Rawlinson and we feel the name was assumed for reasons he knew best. Van Root hadn't any dependents or relatives either, so the Crown took the diamond in Chancery.

The jungle looks real nice at night, doesn't it?

SONG OF DEATH

By CHART PITT

The jungle gods called, and Paul Stanley knew that he must answer . . . following ever deeper into the mystic Never-Never land of the Pada Gala whence none had ever returned.

NIGHT rolled in across the jungles of Pada Gala where the black rivers glide like twisting serpents among the mangroves—and death hunts its prey beneath the flaming stars.

For weeks Paul Stanley had fought his way up the lonely river, breasting the sweep of those muddy waters that rolled forever out of the jungles. As he strained above his paddle he dreamed of lands that

lay beyond the fever-bogs of the Pada Gala: dreamed of quiet inland glades where rubies blazed in the bed of mountain brooks—and the Lost Tribes of the Timarooks still held their grewsome blood rites beneath a waning moon.

The red glint of a fire showed on the mangrove hedges at the bend of the river. Stanley reached for his rifle. Then slowly, cautiously, the canoe crept forward. Men learn to move silently in the jungles of the Pada Gala—men learn or men die.

Then he saw the man by the fire: a white man who stood staring at the river, watching the black water as it came sweeping out of the night-bound jungle.

Something stabbed at Stanley's heart at the sight of that pathetic figure. The mark of the Jungle Death was upon him. But as he stood there tonight by his fire, his eyes refused to look toward the sea, and white-man country. He looked up the river to the land of the Never Never, and death.

Then he began to sing: if you could call a thing like that a song. His broken voice held the croak of death. The words were of little account, as if the singer was improvising as he went along: something to fit a tune—*but what a tune!*

It was as wild as the cry of a jungle-cat; and as sweet as a temple-bell at twilight. It held a haunting sadness that seemed to speak of lost ages, and tribes of men that had vanished from the earth. It was a holy prayer, and a burning battle-cry: a tune that had come out of the lost spaces of eternity, and it flooded down upon the world till it and the black night were one.

There is a nipa hut by the blue lagoon
Where the tom-toms tump 'neath the jungle moon.
There is a grassy glade where the palms grow tall
And the rivers listen when the Black Gods call.

Paul Stanley nosed his canoe in toward the river bank, and approached the white man's camp. There was something in that tune that made him come—come as a friend.

The tides of the Tonka swept sullenly to the sea. They whispered mysteriously among the trailing branches of the mangroves. That black river of the jungle knew many, many secrets of the unmapped hinterland, if it wanted to tell.

The man on the river bank turned and saw the approaching canoe. A swift shudder passed through his emaciated frame. Then slowly he turned away, and once more he was watching the black river that came twisting out of the jungle.

Once more he sang. No longer were there words to his song. It was just a low, droning hum that rose and fell to the haunting measures of that terrible tune.

STRANGE emotions flooded in upon Paul Stanley and took possession of his soul. He seemed to be going back: going back to something he used to know a million years ago.

A stubborn conviction crept upon him, that in some far-off incarnation he, too, had known that song, and sung it under the primeval stars.

It was like a half-forgotten memory: something that was drifting back from that nameless crypt where the lost memories of earth are stored. He was quite sure that never before upon this earth had he heard that tune: yet it awoke strange memories of other places. Places he never had seen.

He landed his canoe on the muddy bank and approached the stranger.

"My name is Stanley," he said as he offered his hand to the gaunt-faced white man. "And your name is—?"

"My name?" he lifted a hand to his head as if to brush away something that was clouding his brain. "Oh, yes. My name. It was Tom Grayson, before—"

The man with the mark of death upon him did not finish the sentence. Stanley waited for him to pick up the raveled ends of his thoughts.

The sick man seemed to have forgotten that he had a visitor in camp. Slowly he turned away and resumed his sullen staring up the river, and once more he was croaking his eerie song.

The trade-wind whistles a mating-tune.
The blood runs hot 'neath the jungle moon
The palm makes love to the banyan-tree
And the Black God calls to you and me.

The red glow of the camp-fire splashed its pool of light about them. There was a heap of fuel that the old man had dragged out of the jungle. Evidently he was intending to spend the night there, but there was no sign of a camp.

"Where you got your outfit?" Stanley asked.

The stranger spread his hands in a dramatic gesture: hands that were turned palms upward, and empty.

"There is no outfit—nothing," he said without even a trace of emotion.

"Trying to make your way down to the Settlements, I suppose?" Paul suggested then.

The stranger shook his head.

"I go up the river."

Tom Grayson spoke in a strange, hollow voice that sounded like a vo-do curse. Then he repeated the words again, and this time he was staring at the black, sweeping water, and Paul felt that he was talking to the river, and the black tides of the Tonka understood.

"I go up the river—to die."

Stanley turned his face away. Something told him that this was not the first time Tom Grayson had whispered that secret to the river; a secret that the Tonka had known from the beginning.

Paul Stanley was faced with a problem. He, too, was going up the river—but not to die!

His strong arms had tamed the miles of the lower river, and he would tame the new miles as he met them. Should he share that strength with the old Jungle Rat, and take him up the river, or leave him there to die?

The stricken man would be nothing but a liability: a hundred pounds or more of useless cargo to drag up-stream against the stubborn current of the Tonka. And for what purpose?

What did it matter where Tom Grayson died? The creeping vines of the jungle would bury his bones, and the world would forget him.

Paul tried to push the thought out of his mind: tried to go back to the white-man's code that required that the strong should protect the weak. But he couldn't push the thought out of his mind. This was not white-man country. This was the jungle, and it was the black and brutal law of the jungle that the strong should live, and the weak should die.

TOM GRAYSON seemed to have forgotten the presence of the other white man. His tragic eyes were watching the black waters of the Tonka that swirled past him in the dark: water that flowed forever out of the forbidden land of the Never Never. He leaned toward that unclean river as if it were a shrine, and he sang to it softly like a mother's lullaby.

There's a sacred shrine on Gazabo's crest
Where palm meets pine and East meets West.
Hark—the mission-bell and the temple-gong
Are calling tonight to Clan and Tong.

For a moment Paul Stanley was submerged by a multitude of confusing thoughts. It was not white-man's law that ruled the jungle. Neither was it black-man's law. It was something that ran back across the ages, to that lost horizon of time when all men were brothers.

Fragments of history drifted aimlessly about in Paul Stanley's mind, like fallen leaves floating on the face of a pool. There were legends in the East that related the exploits of a mighty Tongsman who carried the flag of Cathay to the uttermost isles of the sea; and who could say that it was not here in these mysterious jungle-depths, that Ula the Strong had planted his settlements, and planted the seeds of wisdom that he had brought from the East.

Bits of half-forgotten native legends bobbed up out of the deep wells of memory. But there was something that had nothing to do with either history or legend; something that was whispering a great truth in the palms tonight, if men would only hear.

It called to him in the low rustle of the wind, and it called in the swish of the river.

That far-off and forgotten voice was trying to tell him that today he was retracing the old trail where once the mighty warriors of Ula the Strong had trod.

The creeping jungle had overgrown the cities they had built, but Mongol blood still flowed in the veins of the illusive tribes-

men who peopled the Never Never Country, and Mongol mysticism still lived on through the centuries. The Universal Brotherhood was still the law of the land—and it was of the Universal Brotherhood that Tom Grayson sang tonight.

He could feel it in the black night air about him. He found the proof in the surging memories that came to life as he listened to that haunting tune that came from the doomed man's lips.

A dead priest brings you a better law
Than the blood-red code of the fang and claw.
On the holy ground where the old shrine stood
We drink our pledge to the Brotherhood.

Paul Stanley knew that it was a wild and impossible thought, but men who live long in the jungle, get used to wild and impossible thoughts.

He listened to the haunting melody that came from the lips of the Jungle Rat, and listened to the black waters of the Tonka gurgling their answer among the trailing pepper-vines—and made his decision.

Tom Grayson belonged to the Universal Brotherhood, and together they would go up the river as had been intended from the beginning.

The camp-fire slackened and died upon the river-bank, and black, mysterious night held sway above the desert miles.

MORNING came to the jungles of the Pada Gala.

The red-faced sun glared down through the palm trees: a practical, matter-of-fact sun that belonged to a world that knew nothing except the hard rule of reason. Gone were the impossible fancies that had hovered over the jungle last night.

Paul looked over at the Jungle Rat, still sleeping in the blanket he had loaned him. He thanked his lucky stars that he had not mentioned anything to Tom about taking him up the river.

Now in the cold reason of daylight, he knew that could never be. The jungles of the Pada Gala was no place for sentiment. In the Pada Gala men forgot their sentimental notions. They learned or they died.

They parted there on the muddy bank of the river: a man in the pride of his stubborn strength, and a man who had left all his strong days behind him.

Paul Stanley stepped into his canoe and went paddling up the river, eager to leave the camp behind him—eager to escape from the thoughts that clustered about that lonely camp on the river.

The tides of the Tonka were strong today. Deeper he dipped his paddle into the water, and he threw his strength into each stroke, and inch by inch he fought his way toward the bend.

Something seemed to be holding him back as though invisible hands were clutching at the canoe and would not let him go.

Paul looked back. The old Jungle Rat was still standing on the bank. No sound came to him across the rushing water, but Stanley knew that Tom Grayson was croaking his song to the river—the river that understood.

Paul Stanley muttered an impatient oath as he wheeled his canoe in the wash of the river and went shooting down the stream.

"Hop aboard," he called to the old man as he swung up to the bank.

The old Jungle Rat clambered aboard, and hunched himself up in the bow of the canoe, and once more they were heading up the river. The old man said nothing. No word of thanks; no word of surprise. Paul wondered—*was* Tom Grayson surprised?—or had he known!

DAYS passed. Days that were full of bitter toil for Paul Stanley as he fought his way up the river. Nights when the jungle-gloom deepened about them, he built a fire upon the beach to protect them from the prowling beasts of the great tropic wasteland, and drive away the sadness that lived forever in the glutting dark.

But Tom Grayson seemed to find no companionship in the flame. He seemed to have no need for companionship. He stared always up the river where black night covered the world, and he sang himself to sleep to the moaning strains of that barbaric lullaby.

Then one morning Stanley awoke to find a dead man in his camp. Tom Grayson lay upon his side, wide-open, sightless eyes staring up the river, and the look of abid-

ing peace was on his lifeless face.

Paul buried him there on the muddy bank of the Tonka, with his face turned toward that dark hinterland. As he rounded the bend in the river he looked back, and wondered.

Yesterday two men had been ascending the river. Now one was going on; and one was staying behind. Then something seemed to elbow the thought out of his mind. Was the Jungle Rat back there on the bank of the Tonka, or had the real Tom Grayson gone on up the river?

The lips of the old Jungle Rat never would sing again upon this earth, but the echoes of that strange song seemed to be calling in Paul's brain. Calling from the deep wells of memory, almost too far away to be heard.

Strangest of all, Paul had tried and tried to learn that song from the old man and failed. Now when it was lost forever, the ghost-echoes of that dead song was coming back to haunt him—the voice of Tom Grayson singing forever in his brain.

Gradually the low, gloom-glutted jungles gave way to upland glades that were like some mighty Garden of the Gods. Still there was no sign of the Lost Tribes, or the rubies that had lured so many white men to their doom.

He pushed his way deeper and deeper into the forbidden country, and the memory of that song went with him mile after weary mile. Nights as he lay awake watching the stars in the cool, crisp heavens above him, he heard that song of the jungle ringing on and on in his brain. Sometimes as he fought his way up the foaming rapids of the hill-country, that song came close to his lips, but never could he quite get hold of it, to drag it from its deep chambers.

Then one evening as the white man inched his way up the river, he felt the fear of failure and defeat creeping over him. He was hungry, and there was no food in the canoe. For three days he had lived upon wild oranges. Mile after mile he had scanned the river bank as he passed, always hoping that just around the next bend he would find a herd of antelope to furnish the food which he so desperately needed. But always it was the same: a land that was as beautiful as a dream, but empty of life.

One more bend, and he would have to call it a day. One more bend, and he would go into a foodless camp, and in the morning he would gather his breakfast of wild oranges, and push on up the river. Paul turned and looked behind him. How many more days would he last with nothing but wild oranges to eat? There still was time to turn back. The swift current of the Tonka was rushing toward the sea, and he could cover more miles in a day, than it had taken him a week to make against the current.

Paul shook his head. He must not even think of going back—never think about defeat. Perhaps around the next bend he would come upon the antelope-herd.

A few moments later he rounded the bend, and there in the distance he saw a quiet lake shimmering in the light of the last after-glow, and knew that he had come to the end of the trail.

A hump-backed promontory jutted out into the lake, and on its crest a castle of strange, oriental design bulked its shape against the fading sky-flare.

Beyond it lay broad miles of park-land country that ran away and was lost in the haze of the twilight.

THE white man stared at it fascinated. It was the Shrine of Gazabo of which Tom Grayson sang. The land of the Lost Tribes he had come so far to find.

That night as he lay watching a lean-faced moon going down behind the hump-backed crest of Gazabo the song came to him; as easy as the strains of Home Sweet Home, and as familiar.

He sang it full-throated beneath the stars: and in that moment it seemed to him that he could hear the far voice of reed-pipes playing that same compelling tune.

For days and weeks Paul Stanley had tried to learn that tune. Now he tried to push it out of his mind: tried to think of other things, such as the Lost Tribes of Cathay and the rubies. But the song refused to be forgotten or pushed aside. It sang its wild, barbaric measures in his brain, and overflowed from his brain, and once more his unwilling lips were singing.

A dead priest brings you a better law
Than the blood-red code of the fang and
claw.

On the holy ground where the old shrine stood
We drink our pledge to the Brotherhood.

A spiritual wind flooded in from the deep spaces of the unknown, and it blew cold upon Paul Stanley's soul. It seemed to be blowing away all the things that belonged to the yesterday, and left him nothing except the shadow of things that were to be tomorrow.

It was a foodless camp Paul built that night on the head-waters of the Tonka, but even his hunger failed to drive away that feeling of peaceful calm that had settled over him.

He knew that tomorrow would be bristling with swift adventure: and death would be there, trailing him across the miles. This was the land of the fierce Timarooks that no man ever had been able to tame: but the grim threat of a perilous tomorrow somehow failed to cast its ominous shadow across his camp.

He hummed a strain from the Jungle Song as he swung his hammock under the spreading branches of a banyan tree. He smoked his last pipe beside the fire, and as the coals of his fire died out in the dark, he lay there and watched a star twinkle on the far horizon. And thus he fell asleep.

He awoke in the dawn: awoke to the noisy chatter of parrakeets in the branches above him. He rubbed a sleepy eye and rolled over for another nap. He seemed far away from the world of toil today. For the first time in weeks he felt at peace with the universe. As a sailor comes in from a stormy sea, to relax in the shelter of a snug harbor: so he relaxed, and went back to his dreams.

The red-faced sun was rising beyond the iron-wood ridges when again he awoke. This time he bounded out of his hammock.

For a moment he stood there stretching the sleep out of his body. It had been weeks and weeks since he had enjoyed a night's rest like that.

Then he lurched forward, and his bulging eyes stared at something that lay upon the ground.

A circle had been drawn in the sand, and in the middle of that circle lay a dead antelope.

Someone had visited the camp while he slept, left their offering of food—and disappeared into the vast stretches of the Never Never.

The white man turned and looked about him. He took out his field-glasses and scanned the surrounding hedges, hoping to catch a glimpse of the mysterious friend who had visited him under cover of the night.

Not a trace of life was visible. The parrakeets scolded from the branches of the banyan-tree, and the soft breathing wind whispered softly among its rustling branches, and no other sound broke the glutting silences of that vast, mysterious land.

FOR a moment Paul Stanley forgot that he was a white man, and bound by the hard, cold reason of the Caucasian. The spell of the Never Never was upon him. He knelt within that circle in the sand: the circle of friendship which contained the much needed food: and kneeling there beside the dead antelope he lifted his head and sang.

We write our scroll on the yielding sand
For we are the men of the Never Land
Pledging our faith where the old Clans stood
In the sacred circle of brotherhood.

The song rolled out across the peaceful land, and the weird echoes came drifting back across the water—or was it something more than an echo.

Out of the brooding hush it came, strangely twisted echoes they were, but they still held the haunting melody of the Jungle Song; and as it drifted back across the water it sounded like reed-pipes playing.

The white man cooked his breakfast, and when he had eaten his fill of the rich, juicy antelope-steaks he felt a new courage creeping over him, a fighting courage that was ready to pit his rifle against the thousand spears of the Timarooks.

As he left the camp he turned and looked back. He couldn't forget that circle in the sand. Evidently it was a symbol of friendship among those strange primitive people of the Lost Tribes, and when one cannot speak the language of the Natives, symbols and signs are the only means of communication.

He struck off across the half-open park-country, toward a low range of hills that followed the general contour of the lake. It was in the hill-brooks of the Timarook country that the rubies were to be found—or so the old tale ran.

One man had come out of the Timarook country, years ago. He was dying when they found him, with a fistful of rubies gripped in his hand, and strange half-delirious words upon his lips.

The old Hill-rat died, and even the location of his grave had been forgotten, but the tale he told lived on among the islands. It had been told and retold, and probably most of its accuracy had been lost through too much handling. But all agreed that once upon a time rubies had come out of the Never Never country: and that many a man had paddled his way up the Tonka in quest of the treasure and never came back.

So Paul Stanley carried his rifle in the crook of his arm as he set out from the lake shore: and his rifle was still ready some two hours later when he came to a little mountain-brook that flowed down from the deeper hills.

At once he began prospecting the stream, and a moment later as he clawed around among the pebbles he came upon fine particles of rubies. Not much larger than grains of sand, and of no commercial value whatever, yet those little blood-red particles told him that he was in *ruby country,* and sooner or later he would come upon a deposit of the precious gems.

From time to time his hopes were brightened by finding larger particles among the sand. Some of them were the size of a grain of wheat, and these he slipped into his pocket.

The sun passed the noon-mark, and began its swing down the western sky, but the white man did not notice. Neither did he notice the shapes that followed him noiselessly through the bush.

The lure of the treasure-hunt was upon him, and time and distances meant nothing to him now.

Then without warning a party of Native hunters swarmed out of the bushes and surrounded him.

PAUL STANLEY made a jump for his rifle, and saw that it was too late.

The big, black warriors crowded about him, ugly-faced giants who brandished their spears threateningly. The white man knew he didn't have a chance. It was a hunting party returning to camp with a supply of antelope meat, and Paul had an idea they had marked him for the cooking pot, too.

A big, brawny fellow stepped forward and began rummaging through his pockets. He gave a snort of anger when he discovered the little rubies. He showed them to the others, and there was a babble of threatening voices.

Stanley shuddered at the sound of it. It was a language that was utterly unfamiliar to him. It was not Mongolian, but they spoke it in that rapid-fire explosive manner so common among the people of China.

There was no use trying to barter with this tribe of savages. They couldn't understand a word he said.

Then an idea popped into his head.

Stooping over, he drew a circle in the sand and stepped inside the loop.

The natives drew back, and with wide eyes they stood staring at the symbol of friendship he had drawn in the sand.

Then the big fellow who had been rummaging his pockets threw back his head, and in a deep and thundering voice began to sing. It was a Timarook version of the Jungle Song, and Paul Stanley joined him, his ringing tenor voice lifting the English words above the booming tones of the Tribesmen.

As they led him back toward the village, Paul Stanley was doing some deep thinking. He was convinced now, that the circle in the sand was something more than a token of friendship, it was some sacred symbol of the Lost Tribes, and that weird, wild song he had learned from the dying Jungle Rat was the National Anthem of these strange, forgotten people. Tribal dialect might differ, but that tune was a passport to the innermost reaches of the Never Never Land.

Once in his idle musing he had fancied that the soul of the Jungle Rat had gone on up the river ahead of him, leading the way into the forbidden kingdom. Now he knew that the song Tom Grayson had sung, had proven a passport among the Lost Tribes.

Was that the reason meat had been left

at his camp last night. Had some wandering Tribesman heard him singing, and had welcomed him as a guest.

The white man hummed a strain of the Jungle Song as he followed the black Tribesmen to their camp. The languages of men were a babble of discord upon the earth, but a tune—thank God, that was one universal language that all tribes of men could understand.

STRANGE ceremonies were enacted in the camp of the Timarook that night, ceremonies in which the white man took a part. In fact it seemed that the wild and weird incantations focused themselves around this stranger who came up the river: a stranger who knew the sacred symbol, and sang the sacred song of the Tribes.

It all seemed like a dream to Paul Stanley. It was so weird and compelling that it swept the sound logic of reason aside, and left only the glamour of the Voo-doo Clans.

But in the back of his brain was the white-man's logic and the white-man's desire. Tonight he was a guest of the Tribe, but tomorrow he would be free to roam the creeks of the Never Never Land in search of treasure.

Gray dawn crept in across the park-lands, and it was the signal for breaking up the feast. Paul Stanley was led in state down the lake shore, and over to the banyan tree where he had set up his camp.

He was surprised to find his outfit loaded in canoe, and with it was heaps of food. Dried antelope meat and smoked fish, as though he was outfitting for a long journey.

Then with full pomp and ceremony they carried him down to the water, and placed him in the canoe. They handed him the paddle, then shoved the canoe out into the rushing tides of the Tonka.

A deep and rolling song came up from the assembled Tribesmen. It was the Song of the Jungle—but it seemed that it was the sad words of farewell they were singing. Paul looked back, and they waved him good-bye. Then the rushing waters of the Tonka swept him around the bend, and from up and down the lonely waterway came the tump of tribal drums, and those drums seemed to say that Paul Stanley was going down the river, and all would be well with him—*if he kept going down the river!*

A slow-kindling anger was burning in the white man's heart: an anger that was more than half sadness. The Timarooks had drummed him out of their country, but they had been so polite about it, and done it in such a nice way he couldn't quite curse them.

The swift-flowing Tonka carried the light canoe like a wind-blown feather, and it was many, many miles from Gazabo when the white man nosed his craft into the bank for his mid-day meal.

A fresh killed antelope was in the bow of the canoe. Paul dragged it out on the river bank, ready to cut a pan of steaks for his dinner.

Then he leaned forward and stared at a native basket that had been hidden beneath the antelope. He dipped his hand into the basket, and he sang the Song of the Jungle, the song of the mystic brotherhood that still lived among the Lost Tribes.

As the blood-red rubies trickled through his fingers he felt that the soul of Tom Grayson was there at his side.

JUNGLE VENGEANCE

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

Braggart Jan Straker swore he'd plumb the black sorcery of the Congo gods. He learned . . . but of what use is voodoo knowledge to a gibbering, misshapen monster?

"YOU'RE a fool," Old Keever Trent said dryly, "but if you're set on going into the Congo Basin, during the rainy season, I'm the man to take you."

He twirled the swizzle-stick in gnarled fingers, his faded eyes watching the immaculate man on the other side of the rattan table with the clear sagacity of a man whose whole life had quite obviously

been spent in a wilderness of jungle.

Jan Straker smiled with his mouth, stroked the tiny vandyke at his chin. *"Ja,"* he said gutturally, "now is the time to go. I have but a few months in which to work; then I must return to the university."

Keever Trent shifted his gaze around the Loangoan saloon, his tone becoming quietly skeptical. "You understand," he said, "that you haven't the remotest chance of success in gaining the formula of the witch doctor, Patogi, for which you're looking!"

Jan Straker's heavy fingers curled into a massive fist on the table top. He smiled again with his lips, but his eyes were suddenly flat and shiny.

"I will get it," he said thinly, and for a single instant Keever Trent had a glimpse of the other's ruthlessness of purpose.

Trent's eyes narrowed a bit at the brittle quality in the German's voice. He scratched his chin reflectively with a stubby thumb, then lighting an aged pipe, leaned back in his chair.

"Let's go over this thing once more," he said quietly, "just to make certain that I've got it straight. Your name's Jan Straker, and you're from Heidelberg University. You have heard of some of the primitive remedies of the Bantu witch doctors and intend to take several of them back with you. But the main thing you are searching for is the formula of the mixture used in straightening crooked legs and arms."

"Ja!" Jan Straker leaned forward in his chair and his eyes lighted with sudden avidity. "That is what I want—the bone straightener. A formula like that would be priceless—to society, I mean."

Keever Trent shook his grizzled head. "It can't be done," he said, "I can take you into the interior; I can introduce you to Patogi, and you can see for yourself the actual operation—but it is impossible to obtain that formula."

STRAKER'S hand made the glasses dance on the rattan table. "Nothing is impossible," he snapped, "if the problem is correctly approached. I will obtain some of this bone-bending medicine before I return."

Keever Trent drew reflectively on his pipe. "Have you ever been in the interior? Have you ever tried to deal with the natives?"

"Bah!" Jan Straker spat contemptuously. "Even niggers have their price. They'd sell their souls for a gun or a couple of cattle."

"Guns are out," Trent said sharply. "There is a law against trafficking in firearms with the natives." He rose slowly, knocking the dottle from his pipe into a horny palm. "All right," he finished, "I'll guide you into the Congo and take you to the place you've heard about. Not because I know you can obtain the formula, but because most of my living is made that way. Do I make myself clear?"

"Ja, I understand. Now, when can we start?"

Keever Trent pondered a moment, checking various details in his mind. "Sunup, day after tomorrow, at the earliest."

"All right," Jan Straker pushed back his chair, lounged to his feet. "Send all bills to me, and you might pick out an outfit for me."

Trent smiled. "I'll do that," he said, "since this is your first trek into the interior."

He shook hands with the German, watched the tall figure disappear through the saloon's doors, then settled back into his chair. There was something about the man he did not like, but try as he might he could not put his finger on the exact thing that had aroused his distrust.

In the first place, it wasn't the logical thing to do to pack into the interior of the Congo during the rainy season. True the formula of the bone straightening remedy might be valuable, but, still, the secret had been safe for thousands of years; another three or four months would not be long to waste.

Keever Trent finished his warming drink, crooked a finger at a tall negro standing just outside the doorway. He watched approvingly as the man moved across the floor with the padding strength and movement of a leopard.

"Ayah, Bwana?"

"We trek in two suns, Awassi," Trent said shortly in Swahili. "I want as many pack-men as you have fingers on

both of your hands opened eight times.

The Zulu straightened massive shoulders, his dark face smiling. He touched his forehead with the fingers of one hand, nodded respectfully.

"It shall be done, Bwana," he said, "but the men will not go without extra pay. This is the beginning of the Ungiai, the rainy season."

Keever Trent nodded. "That is just. There will be one sack of salt for each man for every three days we are on trek, in addition to the regular pay. Make provision for thirty days. There will be myself and a Bwana Straker.

Awassi's dark eyes clouded for a moment. "Bwana Straker is an evil man," he said.

Old Keever Trent stiffened a bit in his chair at the words. It was not like his number one boy to talk disparagingly of a white man. He glanced sharply at the Zulu's face, trying to catch the slightest clue to the meaning of the other's cryptic words.

"You know of this man?" he asked.

Awassi bowed his head, but his eyes were still clouded. "I am an ass, a pig without brains," he said humbly, "I speak without knowledge of what I say."

Trent nodded, apparently dismissing the subject. "Two sunups," he said again. "Have the men in the clearing at the foot of Loango."

"It shall be done," Awassi said, and then he was gone like a drifting shadow through the door and out into the stifling sunshine.

Keever Trent sat motionless for a short while, turning over every part of the situation in his mind. He knew instinctively that Awassi knew more than what he had told, but he knew, too, that that knowledge would not be forthcoming until the savage so desired.

At last, a sudden decision reached, he left the saloon's quiet dimness and walked through the dirty, crooked streets to the French telegraph office. He wrote and left a message to be sent up-country, there to be radioed to its destination. He was assured by a perspiring operator that a message would probably be returned within the day. Satisfied that he would know more within a few hours, he went about the accustomed business of building a safari of thirty days duration.

BRAZZAVILLE and Leopoldville lay miles behind, miles of torturous trekking through an almost impenetrable jungle of gigantic trees and interwoven lianas and creeping vines. The smart regularity of the safari had degenerated into a loosely woven queue of sweating porters led by the two whites and their gun bearers.

"Halt!" Keever Trent called sharply. He squatted and wiped the perspiration from his face and neck with a kerchief that was almost wet from repeated use.

Jan Straker sank wordlessly at his side, for once his easy flow of speech gone. He struck sullenly at a bloated fly, cursed when his palm smacked loudly against his sunburned face. He unstopped his canteen, sucked avidly at the warm liquid.

Behind them the stragglers caught up with the main line of porters, dropped their packs, squatted in an unnatural silence beneath the huge trees. The sounds of their breathing was loud on the still air, and their body odor made the sullen heat even more stifling.

"Damn such country," Straker snarled, glaring around the small clearing. "It kills a man with slow torture."

Keever Trent nodded, rinsed his mouth with a swallow of water, then drank carefully from the canteen. He watched the last of the stragglers drop their loads, then shrugged a bit in relief. Four men had been lost in the past five days from snake bites, and the loss of them had been more than the loss of four negroes; for he considered their safety to be a part of his daily work.

"We're almost there," he said shortly. "We'll camp here until we have permission to go on."

"Permission?" Straker's laugh was a harsh sound. "What the devil are you talking about? Do you expect some French soldier to hand you an engraved invitation or permit!"

Trent smiled humorlessly. "Straker," he said, "we are no longer in French territory. Geographically we are in the Belgian Congo. But such a designation is only words. Officially and realistically we are in the kingdom of Balanta. Without his permission to travel, we could not travel another hundred yards toward his main village."

"You mean we've got to kowtow to a

damned nigger in order to travel farther?" Straker's face grew even more red with congested blood.

"Easy," Keever Trent's voice was sharp. "Some of the porters know a bit of English." He touched a match to his pipe, relaxed in its fumes. "That's about the size of it," he finished, "we must have Balanta's permission before we can go farther. Around here, his power is absolute."

Jan Straker laughed mirthlessly. "And I suppose," he said cynically, "that if he says to turn back—that is just what we will do!"

Trent nodded. "Exactly."

Straker snorted in disgust. "Well, send some of these niggers out to tell him we're here."

Keever Trent scratched his chin reflectively, his mild eyes searching the edges of the clearing. "I'll make you a bet," he said softly, "that there are two hundred of Balanta's men within a hundred yards of here. Sit down, you bloody fool!" He caught the other's arm. "Make one move they don't like, and you'll look like an arrow-studded pincushion."

They sat silently for a moment, Keever Trent relaxed and waiting, Jan Straker nervously scanning the jungle's edge. The jungle was strangely silent, the myriad sounds hushed as though waiting for some signal. The porters huddled together, gazing fearfully at the matted forest, looking now and again at the two whites ahead.

AND then as though conjured from the very earth itself, there were three blacks at the clearing's edge. They stood silently for a moment, watching the white intruders with crafty, beady eyes.

"Don't move," Trent warned again in a quiet whisper.

He himself stood, faced the three blacks. And with his standing their relative height became apparent. Keever Trent stood a good two inches less than six feet, yet he towered over the savages by once again their height.

Yet, for all of their lack of height, the pygmies were almost perfectly formed. Their arms and legs were not bowed and gnarled like those of so many tribes, but were straight and well proportioned to their bodies. Only their heads were misshapen, and their ugliness lay in their size which made the tiny men seem topheavy. Their faces and bodies were striped with red and green paint, plumes were thrust into fanciful headbands, and clouts and anklets were of woven monkey fur and gleaming bits of metal.

"I come in peace," Keever Trent called in Swahili.

"And these?" The middle pygmy motioned with his hand.

"They follow my orders," Trent said easily. "We ask only permission to make boma for the length of a moon."

"A friend makes a gift when he sees his friends."

Keever Trent allowed his breath to come out in a slight gasp. Always, even when he was in friendly country, he knew that until the first few moments were passed the lives of himself and his men hung by a thread, he snapped his fingers, watched as four porters brought up their bundles, then was silent until they had scuttled back to their places.

"I have brought gifts for those who would be my friends," he said.

"You have permission for one moon."

And then the leader was gone. Without a sound he seemed to melt into the dark forest, not a rustle to betray his passing. His two companions shouldered the four bundles with superb strength, then, too, were gone as though they had never been.

"Well," Keever Trent smiled a trifle wearily, "that's that. Now, with a little good behavior, we're safe from Balanta and his men."

Jan Straker rose from the damp ground, his breathing suddenly loud and harsh. *"Gott im Himmel,"* he said, "that spokesman was like a small devil incarnate! I believe he would have killed us in a moment, had the presents not pleased him."

"He would have," Trent said slowly, "And without the slightest fear of government reprisal. You see, he is probably the most feared native in the Congo. Just to keep him quiet, the French pay him twenty thousand francs a year."

"Ja," Straker said thoughtfully, "I can well believe that."

Keever Trent paused a moment before ordering the safari forward. For a moment he had caught an undertone in the other's voice that had not been there be-

fore, a slight thickening of the words that seemed to tell of hidden thoughts.

Then he shrugged in annoyance. He held the whip hand; here in the jungle Jan Straker had to depend upon his guide for his very life.

"Forward," he called, again led the way.

THE rain was a steady smashing sheet of steamy water. It lashed with steady insistence at the thatched roofs of the circle of huts, puddling the thick mud everywhere. For eleven days it had rained thus, never ceasing, always pounding down in such torrents that it seemed the sky must have been wrung dry long before. Feeble sunshine lighted the jungle with the dimness of late dusk, shadowing everything with a melancholy that grew deeper as the days passed.

Keever Trent, his poncho glistening about his body, dodged from a central hut, slogged rapidly through the clinging mud to the hut Balanta had set aside for his and Straker's use. He stepped through the door, wiped some of the rain from his face.

"Patogi is ready," he said eagerly, "to show us how the bone straightening medicine works."

Jan Straker looked up from a book in which he was writing. He gazed blankly at Trent for a moment, his thoughts evidently far away. He was no longer the immaculate man that had approached Trent in Loango. His clothes were dirty and wrinkled, his hands grimy, his face covered with a light and unkempt beard. He had changed incredibly in the last few days.

"What?" he asked, then seemed to understand what had been said, "Oh, certainly, I'll be with you in a moment."

"Hurry. Patogi doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Keever Trent turned from the doorway of the hut, raced back to the hovel in which the witch doctor practiced his dark arts. His mind was a whirling maelstrom of rushing thoughts as he ran. For he had seen the interior of the book in which Straker was writing, and had recognized it for what it was.

It was a book of military maps and reports.

Keever Trent shook his head puzzledly, trying to make sense out of Straker's using such a book. He had watched for ten days the growing intimacy between the German and Balanta, discovering that Straker had lied about many things. It was only too evident that the German had made more than one trek, for he talked with Balanta in a native dialect, and had made many jungle decisions and precautions that only an experienced trader could know.

Still, that would not account for his owning a military book, nor would it explain his poring over it by the hour. Africa was not at war, even though most of the civilized world was up in arms. Surely, there could be no use for military tactics in such a God-forsaken wilderness!

But he had no time for further thought. He stooped and entered the witch doctor's hut, was joined almost immediately by Straker. They stood for a moment adjusting their eyes to the smoky glow that filled the interior.

And with their passing through that doorway, they seemed to have traveled back tens of thousands of years in time. There were but two people in the hut; one a boy who sat near one wall, the other an incredibly old man who huddled over an iron pot over a flickering fire.

Herbs and roots hung from the walls and roof, and beside them in festooning garlands were the dried and mumified remains of many men and animals. Smoke swirled and coiled in undulating folds through the air, shifting in a macabre rhythm with some unheard melody. The glow of the tiny fire made the walls seem to crowd closer that they really were, bringing a sense of suffocation to the two whites.

And then the man over the cauldron lifted his head. Keever Trent heard the shocked breath of the German, knew that the other was experiencing the same feeling he had first felt when seeing Patogi for the first time.

Age had laid a fine pattern of wrinkles over the witch doctor's body, making him seem to be one of the mummified figures brought weirdly back to life. His hair was a pure white, almost shocking against the blackness of his face. He had no nose, only a hole in the middle of his face, and the vicious blow that had taken away his

nose had sheared away his upper lip, leaving his teeth gleaming like a hyena's.

He was tall for a pygmy, standing almost four feet in height, and in the close hut he seemed to have even more stature than usual. He turned toward the white men, and for one long instant, Keever Trent thought he detected savage amusement in the twisted face of the man.

"Ask no questions," Patogi said sibilantly, his words plain even with his mutilated mouth.

AND then as though forgetting that he had an audience, he began a task that civilized medicine could not begin to approach. He moved to the boy, lifted him and set him in a short canoe which rested on the floor of the hut.

The boy whimpered a bit in superstitious fright at his close proximity to the hideous old man. Then he was silent, fitting his body into the claylined canoe, settling his buttocks into the seat hollow, thrusting his legs before him into the deep leg channels. He sat silently then, waiting for the witch doctor to begin his native miracle.

Keever Trent and Jan Straker stood shoulder to shoulder a few feet away, not knowing what to expect, knowing only the tales that had been told them by other men who had witnessed the scene. They saw the bowed legs of the youthful pygmy, and felt instinctively that the witch doctor was wasting his time and energies on a hopeless task.

Keever Trent coughed a bit from the smoke of the fire, mentally measured the distance between the knees of the boy, mentally assuring himself that they were not less than eight inches apart. He shook his head a bit ruefully, wondering what the feelings of the boy would be when the medicine man failed to straighten the curved bones.

And yet he was not skeptical to the point that he believed nothing would be done. In his years of jungle trading he had seen too many things happen that could not be explained with the cold logic of pure science.

"Bah," Straker whispered, "I do not believe such a thing possible!"

"Silence!" Patogi snapped, looking up for an instant from his work. Then he turned back to the boy in the canoe. Lifting a kettle of milky liquid, he poured it into the leg channels of the canoe, completely covering the deformed legs. Then he brought the cauldron from the fire, poured the hot mixture into the white liquid. The two liquids combined to make an oily iridescent union that gleamed with a darkish sheen.

Patogi set the pot to one side, glanced sideways at the two whites. "He will sleep in the canoe tonight," he said. "Tomorrow we will begin the task of straightening his limbs."

Keever Trent touched Straker on the shoulder, nodded toward the doorway. Two minutes later they shed their ponchos in their hut, lay down upon their cots. Trent lighted his stubby pipe, smoked quietly for a time, busy with his thoughts. He roused a bit at a sudden movement from his companion.

"Bah," Straker said, "that nigger was playing a joke on us. Surely he doesn't think we're fools enough to believe that his stinking mixtures will straighten that boy's legs! And why didn't he say a lot of his heathenish mumbo-jumbo to impress us?"

"He didn't have to impress us," Keever Trent answered. "We don't matter a damn to him! And as for incantations, well, this is a straight job of medicine, and not one of sorcery and demon chasing. No, I think we saw the first part of the actual bone straightening job."

"It can't work. No superstitious nigger can cook up a lot of herbs and weeds and do things our finest surgeons can't do."

Keever Trent smiled without humor at the roof. "For a man who has come as far as you have to find it, you are strangely skeptical about the thing."

"I suppose so. But, oh, well, we shall know more tomorrow."

And the morning brought to them a sight such as had never been theorized in the finest medical schools in the world. They watched as Patogi began his task of straightening the boy's legs.

The flesh of the legs seemed to be utterly lifeless, wrinkled and sagging like the folds of an elephant's hide. Both legs were pinioned at the crotch, leg and ankle with wooden pins to a table top. Then Patogi put a steady pressure on the curve of each leg in turn, forcing, minute by minute, the

curved bones an inch nearer plumb. Then he thonged the legs to the table top, so that they could not spring back into their old curves.

For a week he alternated the medicine soaking and the pressure, slowly bringing the legs into a natural shape. Until on the eighth day after the treatment started, the boy stood alone on legs that were perfectly straight.

"Gott im Himmel," Jan Straker whispered amazedly, watched closely as the boy walked gingerly on his newly shaped legs, "it really works!"

Keever Trent puffed at his pipe, his eyes clearly reflecting the wonder that lay in his brain. He knew he had seen a miracle of medicine done by an ignorant savage, and the sight had brought home to him the fact that even civilization was lacking in many things.

"Well," he said finally, "there is the living proof of the value of the treatment you have been seeking. But I still don't believe you will be able to take either the formula or the medicine back with you."

"No?" Jan Straker turned blazing eyes to the old trader. "Well, let me tell you something. I'll have that formula before I leave, one way or the other."

Keever Trent recoiled from the avarice in the other's eyes, his hand brushing the holstered gun at his hip instinctively. He knew now that only a short time would elapse before Jan Straker made a violent play for a vast fortune that lay in the oily liquid that had the miraculous power of straightening twisted limbs.

"BWANA, Bwana Trent!"

The words were a sibilant agonized whisper in the night, coming from a man who dragged himself painfully over the dirt floor of the hut. Keever Trent came instantly awake, his hand finding the gun at his side. He rose from the cot in one swift flow of movement, whipping the netting to one side with his free hand.

"Who is it?" he called, picked his flashlight from the floor.

He switched on the light, then sprang forward in solicitude, dropping his gun back onto the bed. Carefully and tenderly he helped the grievously wounded negro to the bed.

The flowing blood was almost purple against the ebony of the Awassi's skin, coming in a steady stream from a jagged wound high in his chest. He lay silently for a moment on the cot, only his agony filled breathing to tell that he was still conscious. He moved a bit as Keever Trent tried to dress the wound.

"It is no use, Bwana," he said slowly, "I am already dead."

Keever Trent straightened, his hand searching for the gun he had dropped. His face was like chiseled stone in the glow of the flashlight, but his eyes were blazingly alive with hot anger.

"Who did it, Awassi?" he said, "Who did this thing?"

"Bwana Straker," Awassi's voice was growing weaker. "I saw him steal into Patogi's hut and heard muted screams. When I tried to help the old one, Bwana Straker stabbed me with an assegai." He sighed deeply. "I knew he was evil; I saw him beat a bearer to death in Tabora many moons ago."

"Tabora?"

"Yes, he was with the soldiers there." Awassi twisted his head a trifle until he could gaze straight into Trent's eyes. "You are a good Bwana," he finished, "But you—" His voice was gone in a tiny rattle.

Old Keever Trent stood silently for a moment, fighting back the lump in his throat. For ten years Awassi had been his number one boy, and now, because of the greed of a man, he was dead—murdered.

He checked the loads in his revolver automatically, his eyes blank and unseeing. He knew now what Straker's purpose had been in trekking into the jungle —Awassi's last words had finally fitted into place the last ragged fragment of a puzzle. And he knew that he had two jobs to do; he had to avenge the Zulu and he had to protect the witch doctor.

He covered the dead native with netting, then switched off the light. Darting shadow-like from the hut, he raced quietly over the muddy ground toward the witch doctor's hut. His breath was hot in his throat and his blood pounded heavily at his temples. He cursed softly, bitterly, as he ran, his eyes alert for the first movement that would disclose Straker hiding in ambush.

He caught the slight moan from the hut ahead, slowed a bit, then stepped suddenly through the door of the squalid hut. He blinked a bit in the dim brightness caused by the smoky fire, then went rigid with horror and disgust.

Patogi was on the floor, spreadeagled, his body writhing in silent agony. Jan Straker stood over him, his face livid with sadistic savagery, a crimsoned knife dripping from one hand. He bent over the old native again as Trent came to a stop in the doorway.

"What is the secret, you damned nigger?" he said heavily. "Tell me before I cut you into ribbons."

Patogi shook his head in mute defiance, his eyes blazing in his ebony face, and for the first time Keever Trent noticed the bloody horror that was Patogi's chest.

Jan Straker was flaying Patogi alive.

"Get 'em up, Straker!" Trent said, his voice like chilled steel.

Jan Straker whirled, crouching a trifle, his eyes glittering madly in the dim light. Trent braced himself for a sudden spring to one side, and his finger tightened on the trigger of his gun.

"Millions! Think of it, Trent, millions for this nigger's secret!" Jan Straker was utterly insane, his thin veneer of civilization split and riven by his crazed desires. "Help me cut it out of him, and we'll split what we get for it!"

"Drop that knife, and get over by the wall."

Keever Trent watched carefully as Straker moved sullenly to one side. Then he moved forward, bent over, slashed the witch doctor's bonds with the bloody knife Straker had dropped at his command.

"Half, think of it, Trent, just half will make you more wealth than you've ever dreamed of!"

Jan Straker's voice was a low whisper in the night, shaking with the intensity of his thoughts. He trembled a bit, his hands clenching and unclenching, as he watched Patogi rise to a sitting position.

"YOU dirty butcher," Keever Trent said slowly, "these natives are my friends; I do not rob them of anything by brute force. I learned long ago that the jungle and the jungle men have a vengeance of their own."

"To hell with them," Straker's voice scaled a bit with wild greed. "That secret of bone bending will make us rich."

Keever Trent used his free hand to raise the tortured Patogi to his feet. His eyes were slitted a bit as he watched the German.

"Your job isn't to get that secret," he said.

Jan Straker stiffened, then relaxed a bit. "You know?" he said. "You know what my mission is?"

Keever Trent nodded. "Yes," he said, "Awassi gave me the final clue. I knew that you were not from Heidelberg—a wire gave me that information. Too, I saw the military book you were studying. Everything added up to just one thing. You were sent here by your bloody handed dictator to furnish the natives with guns and to start a revolution. That is the reason you've been so thick with Balanta; you figured on buying him over to your side."

"All right," Straker laughed, and the sound was madly alive. "So that was my job! But I get only a higher rank for that, while this secret of this nigger's will give me money and power. To hell with you, and to hell with Hitler! I'm looking out for myself!"

And with those final words, Jan Straker plunged forward in a vicious dive.

Trent sent a slug smashing at the crazed German, seeking to wound the man in a manner to lame but not kill. But in the sudden reflex movement, he missed. And then he had no more time for gun work. Straker caught him about the knees, brought him to the floor. Straker growled and slobbered like some crazed animal, his hands seeking for Trent's throat.

Trent fought with a desperate fierceness, clubbing with the gun, using every fighting trick he had picked up in forty years. He smashed with failing strength at the maniac, felt red ribbons of pain tearing at his body with every blow of the German's hands and knees. He lost the gun in the first few seconds of fighting, tried to hurl the other aside.

And then he was free; Straker whipping to his feet and dodging to one side. Keever Trent shook his head dazedly, got to his knees. He saw the gun coming into alignment with his chest, but for a moment

he did not realize exactly what it meant.

Then the gun bucked deafeningly, and a mightly blow caught him in the chest, hurling him back to the hard-packed floor. He moaned a bit, striving to catch his breath. He felt the kick of the second slug, rolled over to his side. For one long moment he was conscious, saw the savagery with which Patogi brought the heavy club down on Straker's head. Then he sank into an abyss that grew blacker and blacker.

PATOGI straightened from the slack body of the unconscious German, turned painfully toward the door, as the natives crowded into the hut.

"He attacked me," he explained. "The other came to my aid."

And then he gave short sentences of instruction. Within moments, Trent and Straker were laid side by side, and Patogi was at work with his crude medicine, his own grievous wounds forgotten for the moment.

Keever Trent never remembered the next few weeks. For days he was delirious from the agonies of his shattered chest and from the fever that crept so insidiously into his shattered body. His lucid spells were few, and then he was too weak to ask questions or feed himself. He drifted in a shadowy world that lies between life and death, conscious only of a blackness that had no life or dimensions.

He remembered dully asking a question, whether it was on the night he was wounded or a month later, he could not tell. He had peered up into the horrible face of Patogi's and mumbled a few words.

Patogi's face was without expression, but his eyes were alive with compassion for the man who had saved him from a torturer's knife. He touched Trent's forehead with a hand that was surprisingly gentle, then his eyes became like polished stone.

"He is all right," he said soothingly. "I did but strike him to the ground with a club. I am giving him medicine, too."

Keever Trent nodded. He felt no particular animosity toward the German, but he did intend to turn the brutal soldier over to authorities when he trekked back to the coast.

But he did remember hearing sobbing moans and screaming pleas during a few of his lucid spells, and he knew that Patogi had lied about the seriousness of the German's wounds. It was only too evident that the attempt to minister medicine to the secret agent was not entirely painless.

And then, eight weeks after the fateful night in Patogi's hut, Keever Trent stood in the clearing watching the last of his safari making preparations to leave. He was still weak, but thanks to the crude surgery of the witch doctor, was entirely out of danger and able to travel.

"You leave us now?" Patogi said from the doorway of his hut.

"Yes," Keever Trent replied, "Just as soon as you bring Bwana Straker here. I must take him back that justice be meted out by his own people."

Patogi stirred a trifle, and for a moment Trent thought the scarred face tried to smile. He gestured toward the interior of his hut.

"He is in here," he said quietly.

Keever Trent felt a premonition of coming danger touching his spine, but he walked steadily into the hut. He paused for a moment adjusting his eyes to the semi-gloom. He stiffened in sudden horror, then turned on one heel, went out into the clean sunshine again.

"I return alone," he said.

He added nothing, knowing as he did the mind of the witch doctor before him. Years of jungle trekking had taught him that there were some things that only a fool would try to fight. He watched Patogi lift a gourd from the ground, took it as it was offered.

"This," Patogi said, "is the medicine. Take it with you as a gift. Your medicine men can use this as a guide to make more." He chuckled, and the sound was rather terrible. "Your companion knows of what it is made and how it works; I explained every step to him while you were sick."

Trent nodded, lifted his arm and waved the safari into motion. He turned and followed the line of bearers toward the West, falling into the ground-eating pace of the experienced trekker. At the edge of the clearing, he paused for a last glimpse at Patogi.

He stiffened a bit, seeing Jan Straker

beside the witch doctor. Then he turned and the jungle swallowed him up. He was a jungle man, and he knew the ways of the jungle. He knew that he had been incredibly lucky in many ways. And he was carrying back to civilization a medicine that would be a boon to humanity. But, still, there was sickness in him that came not from his wound, but from his last sight of Jan Straker.

FOR the jungle and the jungle dwellers have a justice and a vengeance of their own.

And even as the bone-bending medicine could be used to straighten crooked bones so could it be used to twist straight limbs and bones into a travesty upon nature's work.

And the jungle had exacted its vengeance on Jan Straker. Never again would he walk proudly through the world. Never again would he be a fit opponent for a healthy man. For Patogi had used the bone-bending medicine to shape Straker's body and limbs and head into a nightmarish figure that would turn men pale with horror to see. A figure it would be the most hellish unkindness to take outside.

Patogi was a just man in his own savage creed. No one knew better than he the jungle's implacable law of vengeance, and he used himself as the tool through which vengeance was accomplished.

So he sat and watched the hot sun climb into the heavens. He drowsed a bit, completely satisfied with his tiny world. And somewhere to the West, Old Keever Trent trekked toward home, his mind filled with many thoughts. The jungle was strangely quiet in the early morning sun.

The Ju Ju Dance

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Borgan ruled his evil jungle kingdom with lash and gun . . . until the lowliest of his subjects branded him with the mark of the Ju Ju Death.

DOWN on the square the flame-glow hung in the dark like a hazy crimson mushroom. The bonfire was a leaping yellow blaze and the swinging torches of the dancers were like scarlet flowers weaving in and out through the blue dark. Smoke made a bulging gray plume that towered high—almost as high as the snowy Himalayan peak that marked the rim of Tibet. The noise towered higher. The noise must have penetrated heaven.

A naked native was bound hand and foot to the post behind the bonfire. Water dribbled down his forehead under the thatch of black hair and dripped from his chin. His Nepalese face was twisted into a mask of stark terror, eyes bulging like birds' eggs, tongue hanging from a flapping mouth. Occasionally he shot a terrified glance at the wall of black jungle lifted behind the scrabbling huts of the town, as if hoping some savior might sweep out of the night to rescue him. But there was no help for that native in the black jungle of that mountain deep in Nepal, and he knew he was doomed. He opened his mouth and howled.

The circle of natives, leaping and bounding around him in a frenzied, mad merry-go-round, howled, too. Wild torchlight glowed on twisted faces; caught the shine of savage teeth, the glitter of eyes more wicked than the sheen of the long, curved Ghurka knives and the fat Nepalese scimitars. Pounding feet wrapped in hairy goatskins beat up clouds of dust that reeled aloft to mix with the wood smoke. The waving arms of the dancers shone like polished brass. Faster and faster went the dance.

"Oheee!" The native strapped to the stake began to scream. An old priest came out of a hut across the square. His back, hunched like a camel's with deformity, was draped with a yak-skin robe. Bracelets jangled on his skinny brown arms. A carved wood mask made his face twice as grotesque as an opium dream, a face with three eyes and three horns, half rhinoceros and half man. The old priest advanced into the hot fire-glow and began to beat on a pair of enormous brass cymbals. *Slam! Slam! Slam-slam-slam!*

Faster and faster went the dancers. Faster and faster went the cymbals. And the native at the stake screamed louder and louder.

The noise had attained an ear-splitting din that must have echoed south to India and north to the uttermost caves of the Llamas, when the door of the hut across the square opened once again and a procession of white-robed women filed out into the crimson glare. Six women carried long, sharp carving knives. And the sixth and last woman in the line held to her lips a long, lily-shaped brass trumpet.

The priest clashed the cymbals. The dancers howled. The women with bowls and knives formed a ring around the native at the stake. The bowls were lowered. The knives were slowly raised. The woman with the trumpet lifted the beautiful horn slowly to her lips. The native strapped to the stake exhaled a last long screech. The trumpet blared. *Ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta, ta-taaaa!* The knives.

"STOP! Stop it!" Hiding in the rhododendrons at the jungle edge, Kleeve fastened his thin white hands on the arm of his big companion. Kleeve's skinny face was quivering, wet. His jaw chattered. He clawed at the big man. "Stop it, Borgan. Don't let them kill another one. They're afraid of you. You're the king around here. You said so yourself! You said you was boss. They'll do anything you want. Don't let them torture that man. Stop it! Stop—"

Borgan's thick fingers grabbed in Kleeve's mop of graying hair; yanked the ragged figure clear of the ground and flung him head over heels into a clump of briar. "I told you never to paw at me," the big man snarled. "I tol' you the only thing I *couldn't* stop around here was these devil dances. Sure, I'm th' boss o' these woods. I'm king of these natives, I am. An' bein' king, I knows more than to monkey with their religion an' their fun—"

Dealing the ragged figure of Kleeve an extra kick for good measure, Borgan knelt to peer through the brush, like a boy peeking through a knot-hole. His tiny button-black eyes peered at the dinning square of the mountain town, and his rosy cheek dimpled. What he saw there seemed to entertain him after all.

You couldn't be chicken-hearted and expect to boss a mountain tribe deep in the heart of an Asian Back-of-Beyond like Nepal. Borgan, who had battled his way up from Baluchistan, across the toughest corner of India and the wildest end of the Himalaya Mountains, was not chicken-hearted. If Borgan had ever owned a heart he had lost it on his tenth birthday when he had kicked a blind man into the Thames off Albert Dock and hit

for the Far East on a limey tramp.

A hard man was this Borgan, and big. His iron muscles bunched like cantaloupes under his shirt sleeves and broke open the seams on his back. His shoulders, feet and hands, his mouth, nose and ears were enormous. He had a big blue anchor tattooed on his left arm and a big blue dancing girl, unclad, on his right. What was more, he stood six feet seven barefooted and bald-headed, and he had a blue Greek cross very piously tattooed on his bald head.

That blue Greek cross tattooed on his bald skull was the only pious thing about Borgan. Kleeve, who hated the muscle-slabbed giant, thought he looked like an elephant. In the light of a Nepalese devil dance—a red glow streaming through jungle brush, for example—Borgan did look a little like an elephant. His ears jutted like pulpy fans on either side of his head, and his tapering nose, bridging straight down from his forehead, was not unlike a trunk. And his beady black eyes were elephant eyes. Then, too, the upper teeth, the canines at either end of his big mouth, were long like tusks, and stuck out over his lower lip when his mouth was closed.

The giant Borgan was no collar ad, by any means. Nature had given him a final touch to keep him from posing for magazine covers. A scarlet strawberry-mark made a big, triangle-shaped blotch on his thick left cheek. In the middle of that red birthmark was a deep dimple. It seemed to Kleeve that this cute dimple made the huge Borgan more of an elephant than ever. That and the big nose and fan-like ears and tusky teeth.

KLEEVE hated Borgan with a hatred that made Indra Chan's historic hatred for Kutaab the King look like brotherly love. Kleeve hated Borgan with all the hatred of the sensitive for the brutal. Kleeve wasn't sensitive any more, but once he had been an artist. Now he was a skinny fellow, shaky-fingered and stumble-footed and foul-mouthed, his mouse-like face pointing down under a thatch of colorless hair.

Once Kleeve had owned a talent with the brushes, and had painted the dawns, sunsets, lakes and pines, the brilliant and gorgeous landscapes of the Orient. Once he had worn clean drill and enjoyed music and twilights in Darjeeling. Once he had stood upright and lived on art and color and good food. Now he lived on muck and drink and hatred.

Kleeve was just about done.

Kleeve was bent over and ragged. He lived on his hatred for Borgan. He hated Borgan with the hatred of the sensitive for the brutal. He hated Borgan with the hate of the weak for the strong. Borgan had muscles like iron, hands like leather traps, fists like sledges. Borgan could twist Kleeve's wrist until Kleeve prayed for mercy. Borgan could kick Kleeve from one thorn bush to another. Borgan could—and often did—beat Kleeve into a granny's knot. Kleeve could do nothing. Kleeve was a skinny, wretched mummy. Kleeve had no muscles. Kleeve was afraid. Kleeve would weep.

And Kleeve hated Borgan, finally, with all the ripe, heart-eating hatred of the slave for his master for Kleeve was big Borgan's slave and had been ever since that red day five years a-gone. That was the day Kleeve had shot the drunken captain of the Seventh King's Lancers who had tried to blackmail his sister. Kleeve and his sister were Americans. They would have had no chance from the British court. Kleeve had wiped the prints from the Enfield rifle, kicked the body under a bed, and turned to run. And Borgan had been standing in the door of the mountain bungalow.

Borgan had dimpled. "I won't tell," he had said. "You just come along with me."

Kleeve had gone along with Borgan.

In Baluchistan he had tried to turn back. Borgan had kicked him across a room and described a body dangling in the gallows. "Try to leave me again, buddy, an' I hands you over to the police an' collects th' reward." From that day on Kleeve had been the slave, trudging at Borgan's heels, staggering under Borgan's duffle, cooking Borgan's lunch, washing Borgan's dishes, taking Borgan's beatings and playing the goat to Borgan's enormous humor and zest for jokes.

There was no killing Borgan. Mountain brigands tried and failed. Tigers tried and failed. Luck was always with

the giant. He beat his way through the toughest fights and brawls dragging his slave with him. Kleeve had tried to kill him, Lord knew. Kleeve had tried bullets from behind, but his white hand had been shaking so badly for the last three years that it couldn't stop, and the bullet had grazed Borgan's ear. Borgan had thrown Kleeve through a closed door and strung him up by his thumbs, being very careful to keep his guns on himself after that. Then Kleeve had tried knives. Borgan enjoyed the game. He could always kick the knife from Kleeve's palsied fingers, and then kick Kleeve's bones out of his skin.

Kleeve had learned not to try.

Here in Nepal there was no hope, no chance. Borgan had made himself king of the mountain. The natives didn't worship him, but they respected him, which was even better. The Ghurkas admired the man's gigantic physique. The Nepalese priests of the tribe admired the man's courage and bluff. Borgan had only recently advised them in a war with neighboring Tibetan raiders, mapping out a cunning plot of campaign that had won the Nepalese a complete victory. So the town was Borgan's.

A shrewd trader, he was making a fortune in hides and relics. "Couple years more," he had leered at Kleeve, "an' I goes back to the world a rich man. Rich, what I mean. An' *you'll* be my valet, eee?"

Kleeve wept at his own helplessness; wept at the memory of the wretched years he had spent in the big man's power, the wretched years that stretched ahead. Huddled in the briar, Kleeve watched the big man grinning as he peered at the horrible torture-dance of the natives. Salt tears wiggled down Kleeve's cheeks.

The noise of the dancers was now jubilant and ghastly. Kleeve knew what was happening. They had staged these ceremonies before. When that priestess blew her trumpet the knives would start. It would be slow. The bowls would slowly fill. A cut here. A cut there. It would take three hours. By dawn the victim strapped to the post would wish for nothing but death.

Weeping and sweating, Kleeve crawled back to Borgan's side. "Stop it, Borgan. Make them stop that dance, for heaven's sake. You've got a gun. Don't let them do it. Stop them—"

Thick fingers snapped around Kleeve's throat. Borgan's eyes were like blackberries narrow with anger. "You make any more squawks an' they hear us watchin'," he snarled savagely, "an' it'll be just too bad. White men ain't supposed to see this dance. Ain't I told you? An' for the millionth time I'm tellin' you I couldn't stop this dance if I wanted to. Which I don't. Because I like it. I'm entitled to some entertainment, ain't I?"

BORGAN liked the dance. He was entitled to some entertainment. Kleeve thought of those words as he dragged himself up the black trail. Borgan had slugged him in the stomach and told him to go back to the bungalow and get a good breakfast ready. Borgan would stay out the remainder of the night, enjoying the dance.

Kleeve groaned and staggered off in the dark. The jungle pulsed with the echo of the native ceremony. Looking back, Kleeve could see the flames showering sparks at the sky and casting wild shadows among the trees. He could hear the throb of pounding feet, the timeless clash of the cymbals, the clawing of the dancers. He clapped his hands over his ears to shut out the sound, and ran. Even then the sound got through to his brain. *Yah-yah-yah! Slam-slam-slamm!* No wall, no distance could ever shut it off.

It was eight miles down the trail to the bungalow. The ragged white man looked like a ghost as he stumbled along the black path. Briars fastened into his tattered coat. Stones razored his bare feet. His face was colorless and drawn under the matted gray hair. Once he stopped in his tracks, nursing a wild impulse to rush back to the native village and charge the heinous dancers, throwing rocks. But the natives would have torn him to shreds. Barbarians, these Nepalese mountaineers. What chance would a wretched wreck have had against them when a giant like Borgan was afraid to disturb their rites—the only thing he *was* afraid of.

Kleeve moaned to himself. "If I was half a man I'd do it. I'd fight them all. But I'm not half a man any more. It's Borgan. He's beaten me to a scarecrow."

Shaking as if with palsy, Kleeve waved a thin fist at the sceneless sky. A streak of green invective poured from his white lips. "That Borgan. I'll never be anything till he's dead. If I could only kill him—only kill him—"

But the very thought of trying to kill Borgan again made Kleeve shiver so he all but fell to the ground. Kill Borgan! He snapped shut his mouth and glared at the dark in guilty terror. No. He wanted no more of these terrible whippings. It was too late, anyway. If he did kill Borgan these Nepali devils would kill him in return. They were on Borgan's side, and they thought Kleeve was Borgan's slave.

Kill Borgan? Sweat jumped from Kleeve's pores. He ran again. If he didn't get a good breakfast ready Borgan would pound him to jelly. Running in the dark Kleeve panted and waved his hands. Those hands were like frightened white butterflies fluttering before his face. He moaned at his hands. Too weak and shaky to hold steady a rifle, what could they have done against Borgan's bulk? Kleeve ran along weeping. He'd get Borgan's breakfast, and then if Borgan was satisfied and in good humor Borgan would give him a cup of whiskey.

"Whiskey!" Kleeve sobbed out the word to himself. "It's all I got left. Whiskey—"

He heard his feet stamping on the gravel path that led to the bungalow. The bungalow was a shadow under tall cottonwoods, a sturdy little cabin with screens and a veranda. Kleeve had worked to build that bungalow, driven by Borgan's lash, like the slaves in Egypt worked to build a pyramid.

As he came blundering and panting up the path, tongue lapping out, hands over his ears, his thin face dripping, Kleeve saw with a start that the bungalow door was open. A curse shattered from his dry lips. He had forgotten to close the door. The place would be full of bugs. Borgan would smash him in the mouth for that.

Lips mouthing oaths, Kleeve ran to the veranda and into the door, and almost stumbled flat over an object lying like a black shadow across the doorsill. With a yell the wretched man snatched for a lantern, flared a light, and held it in a quavering hand. The dim glow fell on the object blocking the doorstep. Kleeve dropped to his knees with a choking cry.

"Oh, Lord! *It's a woman.*"

SHE was beautiful. Kleeve's weak blue eyes went bright. He remembered Paris models he had painted in a long-ago day, in a dim, cobwebby past too distant to have been true. But she was more beautiful than they. Her wind-blown hair was the color of polished mahogany, a rich, dark auburn that set off the matchless coloring of cheeks and throat. The leather jacket and breeches and riding boots could not hide the contours of that gentle figure. But the pallor of her face frightened him, and he caught her in trembling hands. And she opened scared eyes, blue as the far-off Jihan Wells.

"Oh."

"You're hurt. L-lady! What you doing here? You're hurt."

She smiled, then. Smiled at Kleeve. He thought her smile the most wonderful thing he had ever seen; and his throat knotted in his neck. For one second a flush flooded his temples as he thought of his ragged coat, his broken nails and unwashed face. Then he thought of something else and the hair stiffened on his scalp. "Wh-what you doing *here?*"

She was still smiling, bracing small shoulders against the door-jamb. With a small hand she brushed a lock back from her forehead; smiled up at Kleeve. "Thank Heavens! You're white and an American. Why, my name is Joanne. Joanne Carns, you see. And I've been such a fool. You see, father and the rest of us were camping at Silghari—"

"Silghari!" Kleeve gasped. "Why, that's a hundred miles over the divide."

"That's it," she said faintly. "I took the plane and flew. We were flying, you see. The crowd of us. But I decided yesterday the camp was dull, so I took my own plane for a little trip. It looked so—so wonderful and wild over here. So yesterday afternoon I told the others I'd be right back and I came over. It was a lark. When I went around the mountain peak the others wouldn't know where I'd gone. I saw a good place on the mountainside to land. There was a little temple

and a lake. I just thought I'd stop a while and paint the shrine. I'm an artist, you know. So I landed the plane and set up an easel and started to paint. There's a little shrine and a little blue lake and a broad grassy field. . . ."

Paints. Airplanes. A grassy field. The lantern rattled in Kleeve's fist, and he glared at the girl, panting: "I know where it is. Ten miles through the cottonwood forest. But what in the name—"

"Well," she went on, smiling at him, "I'm such a fool. There I was painting away and plenty of time to finish and get back before dark when I thought I heard a sound in the brush over behind my plane. It *was* scary. I'd never thought to bring a gun. Father will be furious. Well, anyway, I heard this sound and looked over my shoulder and there was something moving in the brush over there. An elephant. Lordy, I was scared. It looked like the biggest elephant in the world, too. I just ran.

"And then, when I got into the trees, I couldn't find my way out and then I must have fainted. So foolish. I'm ashamed. Anyway, I started out of my faint and it was night already. Then I *was* lost. I've just been running miles, I guess. And don't you see, I was scared because father and the others couldn't see what direction I'd flown in, and they'll be out hunting, but they'll never in the world come over here. They'll be furious, all right. They're probably flying down into India this minute." Tears came suddenly to her eyes, glimmered on her lashes. "I have been so frightened. You'll take me back to that shrine where my plane is landed—"

"Sure!" Kleeve's teeth were chattering wildly. Wildly he looked around over his shoulder at a sky just going hazy with the promise of dawn. Far back in the jungle somewhere there was a pulsing, ominous noise, the distant tune of chanting and dim cymbaling. "Sure. We'll have to start at once. Right off. We"—his voice rose with growing fear—"we'll have to run for it. Can you run? Oh, my heavens! We'll have to start *now*."

He was shaking. His jaw rattled and the rags danced on his shoulders. She drew back in fear. "Why? What's the matter? What can— Is there danger? Is it that sound? Is it that drumming sound I've been hearing all night? That did scare me when I first heard it. What is it?"

"Nothing," said a thick, slow voice that came from behind Kleeve's back. "Nothing at all. It ain't nothing for *you* to worry about at all. It's just a native dance, see? Just a Nepali dance, that's all. It's their superstition, see? They believe that some men can put themselves at night in the form of animals. They believe a man can turn himself into a tiger or rhino or elephant if he wants to. Well, a child or woman in the village gets killed by an animal, and the village priest accuses some native of bein' that animal which did it. So the tribe burns that native at the stake as a witch an' a murderer, see.

"That's all it is. Just a native dance these superstitious fools are holdin' while they burn this accused guy to the stake. It's a Nepal custom, that's all. They think these guys can turn themselves into animals an' when a villager gets killed some guy has to burn. Ha, ha! 'Tain't nothing for *you* to worry about. Don't you worry, dearie. *I'm* goin' to take care of *you*."

At the first words, the girl sprang up with a stifled cry. Kleeve spun around with a squawk. Borgan stood on the veranda. His massive fists were hung comfortably, thumbs in belt, and he teetered back and forth on his heels.

In the quaking lantern light, Borgan looked taller than ever. His bald head gleamed, a monstrosity with the tattooed Greek cross. His jaw was out-thrust and the fangs jutted at each end of his mouth. His eyes, fixed straight on the girl, glittered like polished shoe-buttons. The ugly red blotch on his left cheek was merry with the deepest dimple Kleeve had ever seen there. So Borgan smiled.

YAH-YAH-YAH! Slam-slamm-slammm! The echoes of the distant dance pulsed through the graying dark, went trailing off through the tree-tops and died away on the mountain. The girl threw a hand to her mouth; stared wide-eyed at the giant Borgan.

"You mean these natives are torturing a man!" she cried. "They're killing a

man because they think he could turn himself into a—an animal? Why, it's horrible." Her shoulders stiffened in the leather pilot's jacket. "You're a white man. And you stand here and let those—"

"Couldn't stop 'em if I wanted to, lady. Old tribal superstition, see? But it's nothin' for you to worry about, girlie."

Kleeve was appalled by Borgan's little eyes. Those winky shoe-buttons roved the girl, fixed on her a terrible stare. Kleeve had seen a cobra staring like that at a petrified rat. Sweat coasted down Kleeve's chin. Borgan's oily drawl was saying: "Don't worry, girlie. I'll look after *you*."

"He's a liar!" Kleeve's shriek came hoarse as an old horn. He was shaking like a dried fig on a twig, but his voice went on. "Don't believe him, girl. G-get out of here. Run. He's a devil!" Kleeve stood on knees that sagged with terror, and squalled. "Run. Get out of here. That man's a fiend. He likes that dance. Says he wants entertainment. The natives are on his side. He tortures me. He's a fiend—a devil—a murderer!"

The lantern jounced in Kleeve's shaking fist, shedding crazy shadows. Borgan's bald head seemed to scrape the ceiling. A great guffaw exploded from his teeth. He swung up a ham-like hand and dropped it gently on the girl's shoulder. With a cry she shrank back, and he firmly drew her toward him again.

"Don't believe that little snipe. Why, I wouldn't hurt you for the world, girlie. I'm goin' to take care of you from now on." Borgan's voice was soft as melting butter. "Him, he's just jealous of me, see? Ho, ho. Calls me a murderer, *he* does. When *he's* the murderer see?" The buttery voice suddenly changed to a filey rasp. "Whaddya mean tellin' this girl I'm a fiend, you little rat? I'll pull your head off'n y'r skinny neck."

With a crooked grin, Borgan drove an elbow under Kleeve's chin. *Crack!* Kleeve's head went back and banged on the door. The girl screamed. The frail cry was strange in that dingy cabin. It did something to Kleeve. He came back off the door with a fierce cry. With all his might he hurled the lantern. The lantern struck square on Borgan's jaw. There was an explosion of glass, oil and red flame. A bull-loud bellow blew from Borgan's mouth. With a shove he sent the girl spinning into the cabin. He leapt the doorstep and crashed the door shut.

The cabin interior was a cave of blue-gray shadows, for dawn was coming. The girl crouched, terrified, against a wall. Borgan stooped like a wrestler, hands splayed open, boots slowly moving him toward the pop-eyed Kleeve. Kleeve crouching with his white hands quivering on a chair.

KLEEVE hurled the chair. It smashed on Borgan's shoulder. The big man tossed off the splinters and kindling with a bellowing laugh. Kleeve hurled a water jar. Borgan ducked, and the jar burst to shards in a corner. Then Borgan hurled his automatic pistol *Zing!* It went across the room like a cannon ball; took Kleeve smack on the chin. Kleeve collapsed atop his splintered shin with an agonized screech, hands snatching at the gun.

But Borgan was on top of him like a wild gorilla. Kleeve's hand dropped on the automatic, and Borgan's nail-studded boot dropped on Kleeve's hand. The boot kept on going and thudded into Kleeve's ribs. Kleeve went heels over head like a scarecrow in a cyclone, and Borgan's lashing fists, going like machine-driven mauls, battered Kleeve from one corner and to another. The fists came from everywhere. Kleeve's head danced on his shoulders like a punching bag. Teeth came out of his mouth. When he fell Borgan stood him up against the wall and knocked him down again.

Going down in a brilliant crimson haze, Kleeve had a vision of the girl's face, a pale oval face lit by fear-bright eyes. He heard her scream. He saw her throw herself at Borgan, beating with small hands at the grinning face. "Stop it! Stop it! You're killing him!" Borgan was grinning. He put an arm around the girl and yanked her cheek against his. Kleeve pushed up on wobbly elbows, fought to get himself on his feet.

Fury and blood blinded him. His hands were cotton, his feet were clay. He could not see the gun Borgan had thrown. He could only see Borgan's bull grin, see the girl's terror-wide eyes. Kleeve went at Borgan with a yowl. His fists bounced off Borgan's face like tennis balls. Bor-

gan was shouting with laughter. "Well, if it ain't my buddy fightin' me again."

"Leave her alone. Take your bloody hands off that girl—"

Borgan's delighted guffaw. . . . The girl's scream. . . . Borgan's fist coming up from the floor like a sledge-hammer. *Wak!* The fist slugged hard into Kleeve's mouth, and Kleeve somersaulted across a table to land like an old suit of clothes in a dark corner. Kleeve coughed and tried to get up. There wasn't anything left to get up on. A blind haze swirled around him. Dimly he heard the girl's choked voice:

"Leave him alone. Oh, please. Leave —him alone and I'll . . . Leave him alone and I'll do anything you—you wish—"

Whuff! Everything went out of Kleeve with a gust, and he collapsed flat in a pool of dawn sunshine that fell with Asian suddenness through a window.

BORGAN sat with his chair tilted comfortably against the door, chuckling and smoking his pipe. Now and again he glanced admiringly at the big blue anchor tattooed on his left arm and the big blue dancing girl tattooed on his right. Again he would brush sweat from the Greek cross tattooed on his bald head. The dimple in the red triangular birthmark blotching his cheek came and went. He smoked, blowing lazy rings.

The girl sat at the table with her head in her arms. Sunshine found gold-brown ringlets in her auburn hair. Borgan stared at the tattoed dancing girl, then fixed his gaze on the girl at the table. He drawled:

"Now it's goin' to be all right, see? I'm the boss of this Nepal tribe, see? They're scairt of me. I'm just about king. Now what I was sayin' to the local village priest yesterday. A king needs a queen, see? So now I think it would be fine an' dandy. Now I got just th' queen I need."

Kleeve stirred in the corner opened his eyes, moaned, looked about with a glimmer of frightened recognition, and saw the girl.

"Oh," she whispered at him. "You've been unconscious all day. I wanted to bathe your face. He wouldn't let me. It's afternoon." Her cheeks were like wet marble. Her face was drawn with fatigue, lined with fear. She looked exhausted. "All morning he's been talking. I—I was afraid you—were dead."

"That's what I was sayin'," Borgan's voice went on, ignoring the interruption. "I need a queen." He blew a smoke ring, then drew a dirk from his belt and picked at his tusks. "You'll be my queen, girlie. You suit me fine."

"Ahhh!" Kleeve groaned. The girl was crying silently. Borgan went on. "Now you take it hard, baby. Look. There'll be a weddin' an' all. I just made up my mind. Listen. I'll do right by you. Make it O.K., see? This tribal priest was once a convert in India, see? He reads English some. Good. He'll do the job. Look, I got this Bible I always carries for luck: We'll have a regular service an' all. Say. It's almost four o'clock." Borgan loomed up out of his chair drew a little leather testament from his pocket. "We oughta be married tonight, I reckon."

Outside the cabin there sounded a clamor. Borgan whirled, yanked the pistol from his belt, put an ear to the door. Then he yanked open the door and faced three Ghurkas who stood jabbering on the veranda. The natives looked like wild men, their black hair blowing, faces twitching with excitement. They chattered at Borgan, waving knives, then fled off.

Borgan stood in the doorway, and grinned. "They're off again. An elephant bashed a native kid in the jungle this noon. They're out layin' traps for the elephant. If they don't catch th' critter by midnight th' priest will accuse one of th' natives, an' there'll be another dance. I'm goin' along to get th' priest before he gets busy on this dance business. Don't worry, girlie. I'll be back by dark."

BORGAN bathed her with a brutish grin, then glared at Kleeve. "Well, if my buddy ain't come around already!" Crossing the room, he yanked Kleeve up off the floor. Then dragging Kleeve by the collar, Borgan went to the two windows, drew and padlocked the blinds. With a choking grip on Kleeve's throat, Borgan yanked him through the door. Turning, the giant blew a kiss at the girl, slammed and padlocked the cabin door,

tossed Kleeve across the veranda. A sound of quiet sobbing through the locked barrier.

"Kleeve," Borgan snarled, "you're through."

Kleeve struggled. He could not shake free of that giant arm. Oaths and helpless moans blew from his swollen mouth. He glared dimly from bruised eyes. "You can't do it, Borgan. I'll—I'll—"

"You're all through," Borgan snarled. "You hurt my feelings. You called me names front o' my fiancee. She said she'd do anything I wanted if I didn't kill you like I shoulda. So I promises. I ain't gonna kill you," Borgan said. "But the Nepal jungle is."

Carrying Kleeve under his arm, Borgan swung off into the cottonwoods. Kleeve beat at Borgan with feeble hands, and Borgan twisted Kleeve's nose. "I don't mind you breakin' the only lantern in th' place," Borgan chuckled. "I won't need no lantern. Not tonight. Ho, ho. But I hate you callin' me names. Now lissen. I'm gonna dump you overboard, see? I'm gonna drop you down a hill. When you hits the bottom, beat it. Get out. Go make your own living. You been wantin' to get ridda me for years. Now you are. I'm givin' you a break.

"I told a Ghurka to watch that cabin, Kleeve. I told 'em if they seen you come near it to cut off your mouse head, see? Lissen. After I throws you down that cliff you're to clear out. If I ever see you again I'll blow your bloody head off."

Kleeve tried to fight. It was hopeless. He was being carried like an empty sack under that muscle-slabbed arm. He kicked and bit. Borgan laughed and twisted his nose. Kleeve wailed. Borgan's boots thumped up a mist of dust. The trail twisted through a thicket of Indian pine, came to the rim of a long slope that dropped into a mass of vinous jungle. Borgan stood Kleeve on his feet, held the man at arm's length, fingers tight on his throat. "G'bye Kleeve."

"Borgan," Kleeve panted, "I don't care what you do to me. But that girl! Listen, Borgan. If it's th' last thing I ever do, I'll kill you—"

"If you came near my bungalow ever again," Borgan grated, "th' natives will knife you to ribbons. If you ever come in gunshot of me again I'll blast off yer face. I'm gettin' married tonight, or I wouldn't even let you live at all. You kill me, huh? That's a joke. You skinny snipe. You even got no guns. You got nothin'. Ten hours in th' jungle an' you'll die."

Kleeve fought again. With the howl of a cornered animal he threw himself at Borgan. This time he got a fist to the big man's eye. A blue welt swelled under Borgan's eye, and the red blotch of his left cheek went livid purple. His fist slashed out like a flung bludgeon, smashed square into Kleeve's thin face. Kleeve flew through the sunshine, hit the slope doubled up, and bounced in a tangle of rags, arms and legs, down the hill, to hit with a stunning smash in the wedge of dank jungle.

IT was late when Kleeve came around. The mountain was shading to pale blue. Kleeve crawled, belly to the ground, dry tongue panting. Dragging on vines, he hauled himself to his feet. He fell down and hauled himself up again. His face was streaming. His hands were scarlet. He shook a splitting head and glared about him with eyes glazed in pain. His feet were blocks of agony.

Pictures glowed and flashed in his brain. Borgan. Wild animals sneaking through jungle grass. Native savages dancing around a torturing fire. Borgan's grinning tusks. The girl. *The girl!* That flashed in Kleeve's mind, and he began to stumble and run.

Dimly he realized he was running in the direction of the place she had said her plane was abandoned. The lake, the field, the Nepalese shrine. Kleeve tripped on vines and cursed. He could not fly a plane. What could he do? Her father? But her father had no idea where she was.

Kleeve heard himself calling out, though it sounded more like a crow. He flapped along in his rags like a skinny ghost, wild-eyed, tangled gray hair blowing like a wig. He blattered curses for Borgan and prayers for God. Oh, heaven, how could he save the girl! When he thought of her there in that cabin he ran faster. It was not very fast, however, because his feet kept giving out and throwing him to his face. He cried aloud. What could he do? If he went near the bungalow the Ghurkas would

butcher him. Borgan would drill him through the temples.

Kleeve flailed his way through vines, reeled across a swamp, glaring wildly. How to stop Borgan? The nails dug into his clenched palms. When he thought of Borgan he went blind. When he thought of the girl he cried out with pain. He cursed his fists for being so small and thin. He cursed himself for cowardice. To late now to be brave. Too late.

He was getting near the shrine where she'd left her plane. What could he do? Set the plane on fire? But what of that? Who would see? There were a thousand bonfires always going on the mountain. Kleeve fell into a thorn bush, ripped himself free. Naked to the waist and sobbing, he tumbled into a dry gully.

His head bumped hard ground and he sat up with a terrified howl. Next minute he was staring wild-eyed at an enormous object that blocked one end of the gully, a huge gray quivering mass, gigantic in the late afternoon light. "An elephant!" Kleeve gasped out the words. "An elephant caught in the old native trap!"

SHAKING, sweating, panting, Kleeve scrambled to the gully top and stared down at the unconscious beast. It lay on its side, its huge feet trussed in rope snares that had been hidden under the weeds. The trap could not have been sprung long. Kleeve saw the elephant was only stunned by its first fall. Apparently the creature's skull had struck a boulder on the gully bank.

Kleeve's mind began to spin. An elephant slaying a child of the tribe that noon. The natives were hunting. If they failed to catch the creature by nightfall, a villager would be accused of sorcery, a native would be denounced by the priest. It was the tribe's superstition. They believed men could take the form of animals. There would be a devil dance, an execution.

A fire blazed before Kleeve's eyes. The girl. Landing in her plane to paint the shrine. Setting up her paints. This elephant. Superstition of the tribe. Devil dance. The words flew around in Kleeve's head. Suddenly he yelled. He yelled and sprang into the air.

"I've got it. Oh, Lord, I've got him. Borgan. I've got him."

He was running. His feet crashed through briar and vine. He did not have much time. The elephant would waken. The natives would be coming to the trap. Kleeve ran like a crazy man. The natives always visited the traps before dark. He would have to work fast. And loosen the ropes in the snare so the beast could battle to freedom when the Ghurkas came.

Kleeve crashed through a pine grove, scrambled through a mass of underbrush, rushed through a neck of sandalwoods and stumbled out on a grassy open field. The plane was there, across the little blue lake. There was the abandoned Nepali shrine. There was the girl's painting apparatus set up in the field.

"The paints!" Kleeve screeched at himself. "The paints!"

He clutched the box of scattered oil colors, yelled, and rushed back into the sandalwoods. A wild, mad figure he made, racing along with that paint box under his arm. Madder still when he reached the snare where the stunned elephant lay, snatched brushes and tubes and, chattering a laugh, got to work. The Nepali tribesmen coming to inspect this last animal trap would have fled at once, squeaking with terror.

Lying hidden in a distant clump of fallen lianas, hugging the paint box and panting oaths, Kleeve heard the natives approach the trap. He heard the great beast scream, and knew one of the Ghurkas had thrown a knife. Then the jungle was shivered by a terrible trumpeting. The animal had plunged from its loosened snare. It passed within twenty feet of Kleeve's hiding place, trunk aloft, ears out like fans, going like a tornado. Kleeve saw the knife glinting in the huge gray shoulder, saw the ropes and stakes flying on the trampled, monster feet. But no Nepali could have caught that elephant.

No Nepali wanted to. Kleeve could hear them running off through the dusky cotton-woods, screaming and searching as they ran. Clutching the girl's paint box, Kleeve started for the bungalow.

BORGAN was coming up the trail in the scented mountain twilight. Chuckling to himself and smoking his pipe and nodding his bald tattooed head and swinging his massive tattooed arms. The Bible

he carried for luck was snug under his arm, and the dimple was snug in his crimson-splotched check. Borgan grinned as he saw the bungalow under the trees, and fingered the keys from his pocket.

The old Nepali priest had promised to come as soon as the hunters returned from the traps. Well, he couldn't come too soon for Borgan.

Why, there he was already. Borgan heard a sound on the trail and turned around. Not only was the priest padding up the path, but about forty Ghurkas were with him. Silent as cats in the dusk they bore down on Borgan. The hunchbacked priest wore the yak-skin robe and the horny wooden mask. Borgan took the pipe from his teeth and laughed. "Say, this here is to be a white weddin', see? You should save that outfit for yer devil dance."

The old Nepali priest nodded and waltzed and made an odd croak in his throat, and the forty Ghurkas flowed into a ring around Borgan.

Borgan frowned. "Say, now."

The masked priest jigged up to him and pointed a bony finger. The priest said one word: "Elephant."

Something in that witch doctor's tone caused the sweat to burst on Borgan's discolored cheek. The grin and dimple vanished. He glared at the circle of faces surrounding him, and the pipe dropped from his fingers. The circle was getting smaller, closing in. Gathering in on Borgan like a tightening noose. Borgan saw the wicked little eyes, the leering savage teeth, the short curved knives. Borgan breathed heavily. His eyes darted wildly, like little black rats in a cage. Water flowed from his yellowing face.

The priest's bony finger was still pointing. The priest spoke again, a hoarse croak: *"Elephant!"*

The Ghurkas sprang. Borgan whipped out his gun. A knife lashed like lightning past his nose. *Zing!* The gun went flying. Borgan yowled and struck out. Hands tore at his face, his mouth, his ears. They swarmed over him like panthers. Ropes snaked over his arms. His mammoth boots tripped. Bodies crushed his heaving spine. Knives slashed his shoulders. Hands clapped on his throat, trapped his windpipe.

He whirled, kicked, bit, stamped; raving.

A big man Borgan was, and hard. But not too big and hard for forty wild Ghurkas who were careful not to kill him just yet. They piled atop him and he fell with a backsnapping crash. Straps caught his ankles and wrists. They were carrying him. "Elephant!" said the old priest. *"Elephant!"* Borgan's mouth flew open, and he screamed.

When he was gone the dust settled quietly in the pond of golden moonlight where he had stood. Then the bushes parted. And a ragged, tatterdemalion figure raced out into the path, snatched a bunch of bright keys from the dust, and sped swiftly for the bungalow around the bend.

JUST as they reached the field where the plane was waiting, the sound of a trumpet blast echoed far along the dark mountain. *Ta-ta-ta! Ta-ta-ta. Ta-taaaa!*

"What was that?" the girl whispered.

"Just — nothing," Kleeve whispered. "Just—just Nepal."

"We're leaving it, Kleeve." She took his hand. "We're leaving it far behind."

When the engines roared and the plane wheeled through the grass for the take-off the noise startled a huge creature from the underbrush. Kleeve saw the elephant standing in a flood of moonlight at jungle edge, stricken motionless by the roar of the zooming ship.

Ropes dragged on the great beast's feet, and the moonlight clearly revealed the strange markings on the huge forelegs and head. For there on the elephant's left foreleg was a big blue anchor. On the elephant's right leg a big blue dancing girl. A big Greek cross decorated the forehead above the tiny black eyes. And there on the left jowl was the red triangular blotch.

Kleeve, who had been an artist, shivered. And sighting the sullen glow of a bonfire deep down the mountain—the only thing Borgan *couldn't* stop—he shivered again. He thought of the keen, slow-moving knives. He thought of the slow-filling bowls. But then he smiled grimly, and turned his face to the windy western skies. It was fair enough. Borgan had said, himself, that he liked the dance. Borgan had said he was entitled to some entertainment.

White Elephant

By CAPTAIN HUGH THOMASON

The fate of a jungle empire hung in the balance when those thundering titans met in grim death combat.

WILLIAM SOMMERFIELD, the British teak *walla* in charge of the work in the Me Mai concession of the Further India Corporation in North Siam, sat in the camp chair in front of his tent. Before him stretched the dark-walled avenue cut through the jungle a few months before by a wild tropical

storm. Across its farther end flowed the Me Mai, still muddy from the recent rains. On a high limb of a dead cottonwood tree rising from the opposite bank, two grotesque hornbills carried on their amours.

Somerfield stretched his long, angular arms luxuriously and inhaled the opiate fragrance of the slender white blossoms of the *dawk cham pee*. He gazed at the patch of brown water down the avenue. A great teak log floated lazily on its muddy surface. A faint smile twitched the corners of his firm mouth. He ran his fingers through his thin, sandy hair. That log was a straggler.

During the preceding forty-eight hours there had been a rain the like of which had not been seen in years. More than twenty thousand logs had been lying in the dry bed of the stream for eight years, and now they had been floated out to the river and started on the way to Bangkok. In those few hours he had justified his recent transfer to the Me Mai. He had succeeded where others had failed. It meant almost thirty hours of constant toil, but it had been accomplished, and fourteen hours of sound sleep had put him in the best of spirits.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the boy was just removing the breakfast dishes. Sommerfield had decided to take a day off. He would inspect no logs. He would break his way through no jungle. He would rest, read his mail and get what pleasure there was in life for a jungle *walla* exiled from civilization.

When the breakfast dishes had been removed, the boy brought out the stack of mail that a carrier had brought from Chiengmai the day before. Sommerfield had been too tired to read them, but gazed at them hungrily as the boy placed them on the table. He crossed the tanned knees between his shorts and golf hose and settled himself for a comfortable morning.

His feeling of satisfaction and contentment was dispelled by the first letter he read. It was from Hodgkins of Bangkok. At varying intervals Hodgkins sent to all members of the company a copy of his Further India Teak Tirade, a breezy letter giving the news and gossip of interest to every member of the company. The letter which Sommerfield opened was written in a more serious vein than was habitual with Hodgkins. The first paragraph was as follows:

TEAK WALLAS TO BE DISCHARGED

"Yesterday it became known that the rumors which have been afloat for the past two months are confirmed. The lease on the Prae Jungle which was denied the Further India Corporation on the ground that the government would itself extract the teak, has been granted to the Compagnie General d'Extreme Oriente. As this is the last uncut jungle in the country, the work of the corporation will probably end with the work now under way. Unless the company is able to do something immediately to ingratiate itself with the government, there will be no chance of finding further work for the assistants. As only two men can be used in Burmah, the jungle *wallas* may expect to have home leaves and discharge within the next two years."

SOMMERFIELD reread the paragraph. He knew that it was not official, but he also knew that it contained more truth than poetry. He cursed the day he had signed up with the company and cursed himself for not resigning years before, when he would have been able to get into some other kind of work. For twelve years he had given the company his all, and now he was to be turned out with no hope for the future.

He cursed the government. "A bunch of fools clutching for a straw like a drowning man," he muttered. "Currying favor with France, with the hope that if the crash comes French troops will keep the king on his throne. And why the crash? The ignorance of blind fools. The tradition that if Buddha approves of a new king, a white elephant will be born in the kingdom. Can't the new king rule without a white elephant? But, no, he calls in all the mossbacks as advisors. They get excited because there is no white elephant. Their fright spreads to the people and the rulers fear insurrections conjured up by their own imaginations. Damn them!"

He pictured himself back home looking for a position. He knew that he was not fitted for work at home even if he could

find it. His years in the jungle had made him "jungle shy." He was afraid of people. He spent the Christmas holidays on hunting trips with some other jungle *wallas,* because he was afraid of the crowds that gathered at Chiengmai and Lampang during the holidays. He knew he would be terrified if he had to accept a position in a place where there would be a lot of people around him.

"Boy!" shouted Sommerfield.

The boy appeared from behind the tent.

"Whiskey soda."

The boy disappeared and in a moment was back with the bottles and a glass. Sommerfield poured himself out a stiff drink and gulped it down.

The boy's eyes opened in amazement.

"The Nai drinks, yes, but he does not go at it with both feet in the trough as the Americans do," he said to himself. Behind the tent he gave vent to his surprise. "Bad news from *Maung Nœwk*—the foreign country—" he announced, and discussed the possible nature of the news with the cook and coolies.

When Sommerfield had finished his letters he ripped the wrappers from the six copies of the Bangkok *Times,* arranged them in chronological order and started to read. The lurid details of the war in the air above England, and the general European situation offered a strange fascination. He was absorbed in this, when one of the men from the elephant camp rushed into the clearing.

"Sir, Father Eclipse of the Moon is on a *musht. Maa!* he is as terrible as a cholera-breeding spirit. He has been tied, but he is breaking loose and we can do nothing."

Sommerfield's first impulse was to say that he did not care what happened, but he smothered the idea. He was still in charge of the work on the Me Mai. Father Eclipse of the Moon was the great tusker who had succeeded in breaking the stacks of logs that had formed in the stream during the high water and had made it possible to float the logs down the river. They had expected the tusker to go on *musht.* Black oil had been oozing from his *musht* holes for several days, but during the rise in the stream, Red Moon, his rider, had been able to control him.

"Where is he?" demanded Sommerfield.

"Tied to a tree in the elephant camp," replied the native, "but he is breaking loose and we can't get near him."

"Has Nai Kow called in the other elephants?"

"No, sir, we are all trying to get a rope around his hind legs."

"Has that descendant of stupid buffaloes never heard that trained elephants can hold a wild one while he is being tied? Tell him to call in the other elephants. Hurry!"

The man disappeared down the jungle trail on the run. Sommerfield picked up his heavy walking stick and followed more leisurely, but at a rapid walk.

Before he reached the camp he could hear the bellowings and trumpetings of the great tusker as he struggled to break his bonds. Now and then he could hear the shout of one of the natives.

When Sommerfield came into the clearing of the elephant camp, he saw Father Eclipse of the Moon standing beneath a great tree. He was bellowing and growling. His mammoth head swung from side to side, his ears flapped, and his tail lashed angrily. Around him a group of natives in their blue, red-bordered suits and black turbans were busily engaged in getting in each other's way, but keeping clear of the elephant.

"Scions of generations of pariah hounds, shut up," commanded Sommerfield as soon as he reached the group.

The men stopped their shouting and waited for orders.

"Have you sent for the other elephants?" Sommerfield asked Nai Kow, the head man of the camp, who Sommerfield insisted was the living proof of the soundness of the Darwinian theory.

"Yes, sir. I sent six men to find them and ordered them to come quickly." Nai Kow's beady little eyes shifted as he spoke.

"Do you think he can get loose, Red Moon?" Sommerfield asked the great tusker's rider, who had been darting in almost under the elephant's feet in attempts to slip a noose over its hind legs. Red Moon was a tall native, broad-shouldered and muscular. He was so quick, energetic and resourceful that Sommerfield thought he must have some Chinese blood in him.

"Sir, last night I hobbled his front feet and chained them to the big tree. Then I tied his two hind feet to those two trees. I knew that he would be like a cholera spirit today. He roared and bellowed all night and at dawn became even more angry. *Maa!* he pulled and snorted and puffed like one of the fire wagons at Chiengmai. He broke first one of the ropes holding his hind legs, and then, after much jerking and pulling, broke the other. I did not become worried until he started to break the hobbles. I have never seen an elephant break a six-ply rattan hobble; but see, two of the strands have been broken."

While Red Moon was speaking, Father Eclipse of the Moon was milling around the tree, snorting, trumpeting and bellowing. He was fighting desperately for freedom. He moved so continuously that it was with difficulty that Sommerfield was able to keep his eyes on the hobbles.

FATHER ECLIPSE OF THE MOON had jerked and twisted his feet so viciously that the links of the chain had worn through two tough pieces of rattan and it was only a matter of time before the others would be broken and then there would be trouble. The nine-foot tusker was normally gentle and docile, but demented by the pressure of the *musht* glands on his brain, he would kill anyone in his path.

As Sommerfield watched, the big elephant jerked back on his bonds until the chain was taut. He bellowed, slapped the ground with his trunk and curled the tip around the stray ends of rattan. He twisted and pulled so viciously that the tough plaited hobbles were wrenched almost out of shape. Another strand broke.

"Ropes," ordered Sommerfield.

"Here, sir," said Red Moon.

Sommerfield tied a running noose on the end, drew out a big loop and handed it to Red Moon.

"Lay it on the ground there beside his back feet. If he steps in it, jerk upward and pull quickly."

Without hesitation Red Moon ran in close to the animal's feet and dropped his rope. Father Eclipse of the Moon kicked viciously, missing him by inches. With a stick Red Moon straightened out the noose, so as to give plenty of room for the big feet.

"Get poles and beat him on this side. Force his rump around over the noose," ordered Sommerfield.

The men obeyed eagerly. They pounded, beat, and jabbed his hind quarters with anything they could lay their hands to. Father Eclipse of the Moon reacted to the punishment by bellowing the louder, kicking more viciously and straining to get loose. He was stepping on the edge of the loop time and time again.

The men became excited and a little careless. One of them, with a light bamboo, got his pole too near the elephant's head. Father Eclipse of the Moon lurched suddenly, extended his trunk, wrapped it around the stick and twisted it from the man's hand.

"Jump!" shouted Sommerfield, but it was too late.

Although the pole was wielded awkwardly, it descended on the man's back and knocked him to the ground. In a second the great foot was over the prostrate form ready to crush out a life and grind a body to a pulp. Sommerfield was among the men before the foot could descend, and he broke his heavy walking stick on the animal's toes. The movement of the foot was delayed a fraction of a second. During that moment, Nai Kow, who had caught the man's foot, jerked him out to safety.

Father Eclipse of the Moon, robbed of his prey, became more violent, and slashed madly with his pole. The men were already out of range. Bellowing and roaring, he whirled the pole above his head and hurled it at the group. His aim was bad and the pole missed the men by several feet. He was still as far from the noose as ever, and another strand had been broken.

Sommerfield ordered the men to try again, and Red Moon moved the noose closer.

Father Eclipse of the Moon lunged backwards again. The fifth strand gave way under the tremendous pressure.

"Run for your lives!" shouted Sommerfield. The warning was unnecessary. The men were already disappearing. Sommer-

field knew that he was in greater danger than the others. He could not reach the cover of the jungle before the tusker would be upon him. A house would be no protection, as Father Eclipse of the Moon could knock it to a pulp in one charge, and Sommerfield could not climb a tree like a barefoot native. He looked for a tree that was easy to climb and yet strong enough to stand under the charges of an infuriated elephant.

"The rope!" shouted Red Moon, as he pointed to the rope hanging from a large tying tree a few yards away.

Sommerfield ran for it, made all the height he could on his jump, and started laboriously up toward the branches. Something caught his legs and he was lifted a full two feet. It was Red Moon. With his hands under the soles of Sommerfield's feet, he helped again. The white man's hand caught the limb. He raised his legs and wrapped them about it affectionately.

As he raised his chin above the branch a wild trumpet of rage echoed through the jungle. Sommerfield saw that the great tusker had broken loose from the tree and was gazing around as if bewildered, his trunk outstretched and his ears cocked.

"Hurry," whispered Sommerfield.

The tusker caught sight of the dangling figure, and with another trumpeting blare, charged.

Red Moon was coming up the rope like a monkey. Sommerfield braced himself in the branches, reached down, caught the mahout's hand and with one jerk swung him to the branch, as the elephant's extended trunk caught the rope and snapped it as if it had been a piece of twine. Furiously, Father Eclipse of the Moon charged the tree. It shook, but held. Again the elephant charged.

"He can't get us," panted Red Moon. "This tree will never come down."

The tusker tried again and bellowed with rage.

In the distance, Sommerfield caught cries of warning.

"Take your elephants away! Father Eclipse of the Moon is loose. Flee!"

Father Eclipse of the Moon also heard the cry, and made off in the direction of the sound. As he passed a sapling he snapped it as if it had been a reed and disappeared into the deep jungle, waving it over his head.

BOTH Sommerfield and Red Moon sat motionless, listening to the crashing of the undergrowth. When the noise of the charge was no longer audible they could still hear an occasional trumpet and an angry bellow. Even these sounds died out in the distance. Slowly they came down, and as they did so, they saw the men slipping from trees and emerging from the surrounding wall of jungle.

Nai Kow was the first to arrive.

"Send for Sewai," ordered Sommerfield. "Tell him to bring his poisoned arrows and shoot Father Eclipse of the Moon. Tell him that I will give him ten ticals more than the usual price if he gets him today, but also tell him that I do not want the elephant shot full of arrows. Just in the foot and just enough to cripple him temporarily. You understand?"

"*Kow chai*—understood," replied the head man.

He turned to one of the men and gave the orders, telling the man to make all possible speed."

"Sewai is not at home," broke in a deep voice.

Sommerfield turned to see who was speaking. It was Panya, the aged and shriveled spirit doctor, who was somewhat of a demigod in the district, because of his supposed control over the legions of evil spirits that daily harassed the jungle people. Sommerfield had known Panya for years and had had long and interesting talks with the old man on the subject of spirits and exorcism. Panya was no charlatan. He was a real student of his profession and honestly believed in his amulets and formulas.

"Where is Sewai?" asked Sommerfield.

"He has gone to shoot Paa Luang, Chow Rajaboot's tusker who has been on the *musht* for the past two weeks and has already killed two men, wrecked a village and killed one of the prince's best elephants and gored several others. As long as Paa Luang only killed men and wrecked villages, the *chow* did not bother about him, but when he started killing other elephants, the *chow* became excited. He told Sewai to shoot him immediately. That elephant is a devil at all times, but when he is

musht he is worse than a spirit tiger. He will kill anything he sees."

"When did Sewai start out to find Paa Luang?"

"Only about an hour ago. He ought to find the elephant today, because when last seen, Paa Luang was not far away and was coming in this direction."

Sommerfield turned to Red Moon.

"Go find Sewai and tell him I will give him fifteen ticals extra if he cripples Father Eclipse of the Moon before night."

After a few questions as to where Sewai might be found, Red Moon started off hurriedly. The camp, which had been deserted, now assumed its normal appearance. The men sat in a circle discussing the rage and fierceness of the great tusker. The men told Panya of his terrible strength and how he had broken loose. The stories they told were such wonderful fabrications that Sommerfield stayed to listen.

As the tale was nearing completion, Boon, the rider of a quiet cow elephant, rushed up breathlessly.

"Bua Kam calved this morning and the calf is an albino!" he exclaimed. "She would not let me get close to touch the calf, but I could see the white hairs on his tail. They are white, as white as cooked rice!"

The group of natives stared at Boon as if he had announced the end of the world. They were incredulous, bewildered, stunned.

"It is true, Nai Som-er-fee," he said, turning to the white man. "It is true. I thought I was crazy when first I saw it. I rubbed the eyes. I pounded the head. I looked again. The hairs on the tail *are* white! And there are five toes on the left hind foot. I saw them, too. His whole body is pinkish and covered with white hairs."

"Where did you get your opium?" asked Sommerfield.

"Nai Sommerfield, I do not smoke opium. I sell my allowance of opium every month. It is true. Come and see."

SOMMERFIELD knew that it was possible that the calf was a white elephant, or albino, as the Siamese word should be translated; but he knew also that the chances against it being a white was more than a thousand to one. If it were a white elephant, he knew it was a startling event—an event important enough to bolster up the tottering destinies of the government. He recalled the letter from Hodgkins. "Unless the company can do something to ingratiate itself with the government—" Ingratiate itself? If it were really a white elephant, the company could get anything it wanted. He would not be discharged. He would not have to look for another situation. For a moment Sommerfield saw a long and pleasant career as a jungle *walla* stretched out before him and then put the thought out of his mind. Why raise false hopes?

"Nai Som-er-fee, I believe Boon is telling the truth," said Panya, the spirit doctor. "Many omens have foretold the birth. You have just witnessed the last. Father Eclipse of the Moon is the young elephant's sire. You have seen an exhibition of strength and power which, to my knowledge, no elephant has ever displayed. This morning Father Eclipse of the Moon went on *musht* and at the same time the young elephant was born. That prodigious strength of the great tusker was the strength of Buddha. The white elephant will be as strong as his father, and the king will be as strong as his father. The king will be as much greater than other men as Father Eclipse of the Moon is greater than other elephants.

"I have noticed other omens. Probably Nai Som-er-fee did not notice that three days ago there was a large white cloud in the eastern sky which took the form of a white elephant. The head was fully formed and at first the trunk hung down with a slight curl at the tip; but as I watched, the trunk curled over the forehead as if the cloud elephant was saluting the king. As the sun set, the whole body of the cloud elephant was changed to a deep pink, which Nai Som-er-fee knows, is the real color of an albino elephant. The tail remained white long after the rest of the body had been colored by the rays of the setting sun, and I doubt not that it will be found that there are white hairs on the tail."

"It is true," broke in Boon.

"And if his tail is white," continued Panya, "he is a white elephant in spite of

any other qualities he may lack. Nai Som-er-fee has heard the old proverb: 'When buying an elephant study his tail; when buying a wife, study her mother.'

"That, Nai Som-er-fee, was the first omen. Then that night, there was a rain the like of which has not been heard of in this region for a hundred years. There was no stint to Buddha's generosity. I have been told that your company floated out logs that have been lying in the bed of the Me Mai for oever ten years. That rain flooded the rice fields from here to Krung Tape—Bngkok—as it flows down the river.

"After such a rain as that to usher in his representative, would God Buddha give us an elephant that is only partially white? I have not seen, Nai Som-er-fee, but I believe that the elephant is white, as Boon has told us. I believe that the new king has great merit and that God is showing His approval by sending an elephant perfect in all eight points. He is also showing His approval of the company by having His representative arrive in its herd. The company has great merit."

Sommerfield smiled in appreciation of the old man's compliment.

"Nai Panya, how does this show that Buddha approves of the new king?"

"The ancient tradition says that there is a white elephant born in the kingdom whenever a new king comes to the throne —if that king has the approval of God Buddha. If he does not have the approval no white elephant is born. The white elephant is therefore the representative of Buddha. Some say that it is Buddha himself coming in the form of a white elephant, but I doubt that. That Buddha did come to earth once in the form of a white elephant is beyond question—every priest will tell you that—but that was many years ago.

"In ancient times the king sent princes to escort the white elephant to his presence. A gorgeous hall was erected in the palace grounds for his abode. Dancing girls and musicians were in constant attendance. He was fed by slaves in splendid uniforms, who offered him food on platters of silver and gold. A body of priests were appointed to chant prayers before him, and also to give him instruction in conduct and manners. Singers from royal opera sang him to sleep. He was treated as the Buddha himself might be treated.

"But the late king forgot the ways of his ancestors and the white elephants were put in stables and lacked attention—at least, so I have been told. He died a young man. But Buddha is honoring the new king, and the birth of this elephant proves that the new king has great merit. I have heard people say he was unworthy because no white elephant was born, but now here is the proof of Buddha's favor. Who dares doubt it now?"

There was a murmur of approval when the old man finished speaking. After waiting a few moments the spirit doctor continued:

"Some time ago Nai Som-er-fee told me that there was no significance in names. He told me that I was not wise simply because my name, Panya, means 'Wise.' Perhaps he will say that Bua Kam—Moon-white Lotus—the name of the mother elephant, has no connection with giving birth to a white elephant. Perhaps he will say that Nai Boon, the rider, is not lucky although his name means luck."

"I am indeed lucky, Nai Som-er-fee," said Boon, his frank young face all aglow and his eyes shining with excitement. "Princes and nobles will come for the elephant. A hundred of the greatest tuskers in Siam richly decked with gorgeous howdahs or gold embroidered trappings will escort the white elephant; and I as the mother's rider will be envied of all. The king will give me a uniform and maybe presents of silver and gold."

"We will go to see this calf and determine whether it is a white elephant or not," said Sommerfield. "One look is better than many omens, Nai Panya."

"Bai; bai! Let's go; let's go!" shouted the men in chorus, but Boon interrupted.

"Nai Som-er-fee, I met a man who was on his way to the temple. I told him the news and asked him to send the priests here as soon as possible. Would Nai be willing to wait for them?"

Sommerfield was eager to see the ceremonies that would be performed, and assented.

"The priests are necessary," said Panya. "We shall all do obeisance to the young elephant, and then the priests will

say prayers for his health and wisdom. When they have finished I will chant incantations to drive out all evil spirits that may hurt him or cause him to become sick. Every care must be taken for his health, else we may be severely punished by the king. If he should die before he gets to Bangkok, we would indeed lack merit. The king will wreak vengeance upon every one of us. It is an honor to have a white elephant for the king, but to have a dead one is disaster."

IT was not long before the priests entered the clearing. They came in single file with the old patriarch of the temple leading the procession. Immediately behind him was an acolyte carrying his elaborately embroidered ceremonial fan, haversack, and betelnut box. Behind these came four other priests with acolytes carrying their ceremonial equipment.

A group of novices dressed like their seniors in brilliant yellow robes came next. Last of all came the villagers, men, women and children, all in their holiday attire. They made a colorful picture, with *panungs*—trousers—and *pasins*—skirts—of every color of the rainbow. Many of them carried great silver bowls filled with scented water and sweet-smelling flowers. The priests were given the place of honor in the group, the men mingled with those present, while the women and children stood a little distance away, but close enough to hear the conversation.

While the new arrivals rested, Nai Panya told of the omens he had noticed, and then Boon described the young elephant.

"Bai," said Sommerfield, when they had had time to rest.

"Bai," shouted the men, and off they started with Boon leading the procession, Sommerfield next, and the others following in the order of their rank. Boon took a trail leading to the stream, crossed it, and headed for the salt lick about a mile from camp. He skirted the clearing and started up the ridge behind it. It was broiling hot, and the villagers straggled up the path, panting. Through the trees could be seen the outline of Bua Kam, the mother elephant. She had heard them coming and was headed in their direction.

"Tinee dee quoi. Here is better," said Boon.

The crowd protested. They wanted to see the white elephant. They had not come to look through the trees at the head of an old one.

"She is in a very bad humor," exclaimed Boon. "She almost charged me this morning when I went close."

An argument followed. It was settled by Sommerfield, who announced that he, with Panya, Boon, and Kow, the headman of the camp, would go in closer to determine whether or not it was really a white elephant.

The four started forward quietly.

Boomp!

Bua Kam slapped her trunk on the ground so fiercely it sounded as if someone had broken the biggest drum in the village temple. The four stopped short. Behind them they could hear the frightened cries of two or three children.

"Mai dai! It can't be done," whispered Boon.

"Dai it can!" insisted Sommerfield.

"Boomp!" warned Bua Kam.

Cautiously Sommerfield made his way through the undergrowth. Boon was right behind him, but the other two kept timorously to the rear. Bua Kam continued her warnings until Sommerfield was within ten yards of her, and then let out a nasal shriek.

Through the bushes before him, Sommerfield could see the little clearing that Bua Kam had trampled down. In the shade of a tree lay the calf. It was of a pale red color and seemed to be covered with light fuzz. Its toenails were white and there were five on each hind foot instead of the customary four. On its tail the larger hairs stood out, white and stiff. The eyes were closed, so it was impossible to tell their color; but whether they were black or pink made no difference. The calf was an albino—a white elephant, a representative of Buddha, the indubitable warrant of a favored king.

"I think he needs water," whispered Sommerfield. "See how he is panting?"

"Yes, water. He has no water. God Buddha, he has no water." Boon's whisper was hoarse as if he also needed water. "Here on the ridge there is no water and the little one cannot walk down the steep

hill. She cannot carry him and will not leave him to get water. God Buddha! If he should perish!"

Like a wild animal he darted noiselessly through the bushes to the place where the priests were waiting. When Sommerfield arrived, a prayer service for the little elephant was in progress. Seated on a decaying log his ceremonial fan before his face to prevent thoughts of mundane things from creeping into his mind, was the head priest. On the ground before him with elbows on the ground and palms together in the attitude of prayer, were the brown villagers. Heads were bowed low to the ground or thrown back with faces uplifted to the leafy dome made by the great jungle monarchs whose branches spread out between them and Nirvana.

Prayer after prayer fell fervently from the shriveled lips of the aged priests.

When the priest had finished his pleas for the mercy of Buddha, Panya, the spirit doctor, took charge of affairs as naturally as if it were part of the same service, as indeed it was. The priest saw nothing incongruous in it. Why should the people?

BUT Panya's tactics were totally different. His was not the attitude of a suppliant coming to a greater power for help. He stood before the spirits of the jungles with shoulders back and head up. He called them by name, and dared them to lay so much as a finger upon him who was their master. He reminded them that the spirit he controlled was greater than they, singly or collectively. He recounted his marvelous deeds and threatened to bind them and tie them for eternity if they did not accede to his will.

He ordered all spirits of disease and insanity away from Bua Kam and the white elephant. He called in the thirty-two good elements which are necessary to the health of men and animals alike. Spirit after spirit was called upon and ordered to perform certain duties.

The angry bellow of an elephant broke through the stillness of the jungle. It was not Bua Kam. It was from the opposite direction. The animal trumpeted and bellowed again. The confident, haughty expression on Panya's face seemed to be frozen there. He stared incredulously in the direction of the noise. Some jungle spirit was evidently disputing his authority.

The crowd was in a panic. They could hear the *crash-crash*, as the elephant broke wildly through the jungle. There was another trumpet. With one accord they started down the steep path toward the salt lick. Men and women dropped the silver bowls and spilled the scented water which they had brought to sprinkle on the sacred animal. The smaller children were swung to their elders' hips and carried off in the rush for safety. The trumpeting was closer. Panya was among the first to seek shelter.

Sommerfield caught a thick vine that hung from the branches of a great teak tree and made his way upwards. Boon was right behind him. Halfway up, Sommerfield stopped to laugh. The situation was in a way ridiculous. He had had many experiences with elephants, but he had never before been forced to climb to safety twice in the same day. After all, it was a pleasant interlude in the dull, monotonous routine of the life of the jungle.

They were well concealed in the dense foliage when the elephant appeared.

"Paa Luang!" gasped Boon. "It is the *chow's* elephant. If he does not follow the people he will kill the white elephant. He has attacked every elephant he has found since he went on *musht*. We have no merit. We have no merit."

"You are right," said Sommerfield to himself. "We have no merit."

He had not allowed himself to count too much on the change in the company's fortunes that would follow the advent of the fetish, but he had felt a peculiar exultation when he satisfied himself that the calf was actually an albino. Why should hope be dangled momentarily before his eyes and then snatched away?

From his perch high up in the tree, Sommerfield saw Paa Luang crashing through a clump of bamboos. He was one of the largest elephants Sommerfield had ever seen. He was a stately beast that would make a wonderful showing in a procession; but his tusks which were four feet long, curved inwards, so that they almost touched at the tips. They would be in the way of an elephant working with teak logs, but for show they were splendid. Long black streaks of oil oozed from

musht holes above the elephant's eyes.

The elephant trumpeted again. An answering trumpet was heard. Boon clutched Sommerfield's arm. That trumpet was not from Bua Kam either. It was too far away. The tusker stopped in his tracks, cocked his ears, and felt the air with his trunk. He trumpeted. It was answered. He bellowed and kicked up the ground with his front foot. His challenge was answered once more, and Sommerfield could hear a crashing of trees in the direction of the newcomer. Paa Luang with another growl, charged through the jungle in the direction of the white elephant.

"Boon, your knife," whispered Sommerfield. "Throw it. Stop him."

As the tusker passed under the tree, the rider drew his heavy jungle knife from its sheath and hurled it at the animal's head. The aim was good. About six inches of Paa Luang's scalp was opened to the bone. Paa Luang ducked his head, hunched his shoulders, and backed. As he started forward again, Boon hurled a dead limb which checked him a second time.

"Back, worm!" shouted Boon, but a trumpet from the other side of Bua Kam held the elephant's attention. He trumpeted and charged.

THE head and shoulders of Father Eclipse of the Moon broke through the jungle around the clearing in which the young calf lay. He passed the mother elephant without seeming to notice her and rushed on to the fight.

With heads up, trunks curled tightly between their tusks, ears fanned straight out from their heads and tails held high and stiff, the two tuskers rushed at each other like two locomotives under a full head of steam. Their heads dropped low and came together with a reverberating bang.

It seemed that one of them would certainly be stunned by the impact, but both went at the fight as if nothing had happened. Each animal strained and pushed as he grunted and roared. Round and round they went in a circle. Paa Luang's tusks were longer, and although he could not get them to the sides of Father Eclipse of the Moon, he did rake them back and forth across his chest. Moon's shorter tusks could not reach Paa Luang so long as they kept head to head. Both elephants strained with tails high and lashing furiously.

"*Phra* Buddha Chow!" murmured Boon.

Blowing, grunting and bellowing, the two elephants struggled. At first neither seemed to be able to get an advantage, but Father Eclipse of the Moon was stockier and could use his weight with greater effect. Gradually Paa Luang lost ground. With a tremendous effort Moon pushed him back a full foot. At the same time Moon ducked his head and disentangled his tusks which had been straddling the long slender ones of his foe. As quick as a cat he twisted his head to the left and sank his right tusk into Paa Luang's tough chest. Before the *chow's* elephant could take advantage of his own unprotected side, Moon's head was back and their tusks were interlocked. At that game, Paa Luang did not have a chance. His tusks curved together and were so long that only at an angle could they do effective damage.

Again they struggled in a circle with heads lowered, straining and grunting. Again Moon tried to slip past his opponent's guard to make another thrust, but Paa Luang lifted his head suddenly to keep the short tusks from slipping free. So suddenly did both elephants move and so fierce was their attack, that the long, slender tusks of Paa Luang were broken. Two stubs remained, one a foot long, the other over two. The ends were jagged and sharp.

The maneuver had disengaged their tusks. Moon, with his head below Paa Luang's lunged forward for a deadly thrust, but the short jagged tusk caught him between the eyes and tore the skin from his forehead and raked it back behind his ears. The heavy skull had protected his head, and Moon had sent a second thrust into the massive chest. As Moon drew back for a second lunge, Paa Luang backed and dropped his head on the defensive. Again they maneuvered in a circle. Bellows of pain mingled with those of rage.

PAA LUANG became desperate as he felt himself being pushed back. He exerted every ounce of strength in a supreme effort. Moon went back. His hind feet struck a decaying log and he faltered.

Paa Luang was on him in a flash. Moon struggled to maintain his balance. Paa Luang caught a ragged tusk in his shoulder. He thrust again into Moon's right side, and was making a third jab as Moon regained his balance and whipped his hind quarters to the left. Paa Luang's jagged tusk raked Moon's leathery side.

Like a demon Moon tore into Paa Luang's unprotected flank. Once, twice, three times, Moon sent his tusks home. Bellows of pain echoed through the jungle. Then they were head to head again, tusks locked and heads lowered.

Moon's thick tusks were now between his enemy's broken stubs. With a tremendous effort he forced Paa Luang back. He shoved again and suddenly raised his head. His tusks fitted closely around Paa Luang's neck. Moon seemed to expand upward. Both elephants' forefeet were off the ground. Still Moon was coming forward. Suddenly he twisted to the right. Paa Luang was unbalanced and fell to his side. He did not move. His neck had been broken.

But Father Eclipse of the Moon was not through. Time after time he thrust his tusks into his prostrate foe, stamped on him and knelt on him again. He seemed controlled by a demon. He was even more savage than during the fight.

Bua Kam gave a quiet, coaxing call. He stopped suddenly and faced her, bleary eyed and wild. The call was repeated.

Bua Kam turned back to her calf and ran her trunk over the little body as if caressing him. She felt the dry, panting mouth. Father Eclipse of the Moon followed. He, too, ran his trunk over the little form, but he did not seem to be caressing it. It was more as if he were trying to decide just what it was. Bua Kam stepped gently aside as Father Eclipse of the Moon slipped his reddened tusks gently under the calf. With his trunk across the little animal to hold him firm, Father Eclipse of the Moon lifted him from the ground, held him high in the air and slowly, with Bua Kam at his heels, started down to water.

Neither Sommerfield nor Boon moved for some time. Finally the words *"Phra* Buddha *Chow"* slipped reverently from the native's lips. As Sommerfield reached the ground, he noticed Panya, the spirit doctor, waiting for him.

"Did you see, Nai Som-er-fee?" asked Panya.

"I saw," replied Sommerfield.

"It was Buddha," said Panya. "The strength of Buddha broke the rattan hobbles when Father Eclipse of the Moon tried to get away. It was Buddha that brought him here to protect his white elephant. It was Buddha that gave him the strength to win. The king has great merit."

War Drums of the Touareg

A great novelet of revolt in the desert—and the men of France who fought to save a crumbling empire

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

ON the west, a profound peace—the peace of all dead and desiccated things—hung over the desert. On the north, the east and the south, the air was filled with a glow of white flame as dazzling as that of the sun in the sky by the refractions of the lakes of Faguibine, Horo and Fati. The bare hills sur-

rounding the bowl of Goundam looked like hunch-backed, prehistoric monsters. As seen through the dancing eddies of heat haze, the rocky welts covering their slopes seemed to coil and uncoil, like colossal muscles knotting and preparing to spring.

In the very center of the arid plain, the tents of camel hide of the permanent camp of Iguellad Touareg sagged under the heat. The whine of a single-string amzad violin and the voice of a woman, singing of love and jealousy in the Thamashek language, rang eerily in the thin air. But the flag topping the watch tower of the nearby Post hung at mid-mast; for the radio had just announced that the French Government had capitulated to the victorious armies of Nazi Germany.

In the shade of a flat-topped baobab tree, the veteran Captain Latour nervously puffed at a cigarette. He was a small, spare man, with piercing black eyes, a grizzled beard and a skin browned and toughened like cured leather by the Saharan sun. His second in command, Lieutenant MacCarthy, stared at the leaping Adam's apple in his stringy neck, at the sagging of his shoulders and the tremor of his hairy, sun-burned hands, and finally laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Pull yourself together, *mon capitaine,*" he whispered. "You know better than I that Touareg despise every display of sorrow before disaster as a contemptible show of weakness."

"May the devil drag to the bottom of the universe all Germans, and all Touareg with them!" Latour choked. "Everything you say is true! *Surement!* But I was born in Picardy—and now my village is a heap of ruins, all my relations are stranded refugees, tramping the roads of France without hope for relief. German and Italian soldiers overrun my beautiful country. My career, the security of my grade are gone. *Pardieu!* Is there not enough in it to drive any sensitive Frenchman insane? MacCarthy, you are French born and the finest subaltern that I ever had. But the blood coursing in your veins is Irish. A temper you have; but also a self control in the face of misfortune that I envy you . . ." suddenly he ceased speaking and, throwing his kepi back with a jerk of his hand, he pulled at his stiff hair.

"Watch out!" MacCarthy insisted. "The fatigue detail are bringing our mehara back from the pastures. They'll soon ride before us!"

THEY were coming, the loose-jointed, long-legged camels of the squadron, swinging their snaky necks with the rhythm of their pace. The dust lifted by their thumping hoofs swirled around their barrel-like bellies. High above the cloud of fine dirt and spurting gravel, the Touareg meharistes of the escort sat proudly on their rhala saddles and towered like images of wrath above the swaying current of bobbing camel muzzles. Their wide breasts were draped in glistening black tunics, their long arms jutted at the elbows, their fierce eyes glowered through the slits of the chech cloths wrapped tightly around their heads and the lower parts of their faces. The sun drew blinding gleams from their gun-barrels and the cross-hilted poniards strapped to their left forearms.

Keradj agTarka, the acting sergeant in charge, tapped the root of the neck of his orange-pelted camel with his left foot, and turned it toward the baobab tree. When he came abreast of the two officers he forced the camel to squat, leaped out of the saddle and straightened at attention.

Nearly seven feet tall and solidly muscled, he was a big man even among Touareg. The stare of his yellow, blue rimmed pupils was awesome, but when he spoke the spell of his forbidding appearance was broken by his high-pitched voice—the voice of a child coming out of the breast of a giant.

"Salamou r'likoum!" Keradj shrilled. "Seven blessings on you, Sidis!"

"Bismillaten. May Allah bless you also seven times! How did you find the pastures?" Latour replied.

"Thick with green grass. The mehara filled their humps to the bursting point. But I have important tidings. Riders of my race coming from the north tell me that the Berabich—the Arab desert nomads—are gathering for a mighty raid. And the Mopti negroes, jungle monkeys of the south, are howling themselves into a warlike frenzy. If the soldiers who left for the great *cherbobba*—for the big war across the sea—don't return quickly, all that's left to us is to die over a heap of our slain enemies."

Latour's eyebrows knotted and his mouth worked. But his voice sounded steady enough when he said:

"The departed soldiers shall not return. But we will strike at the Berabich before they mass all their man power. After that, we'll leave our mehara and on horse or on foot we'll fight with the Tirailleur Infantrymen left in Mopti territory."

"Inshallah! It could be done," Keradj grunted. "I would like to fight horseback again. My big toes itch for the feel of the leather loops."

"I shall never understand," MacCarthy remarked, "why you Touareg of the South ride horseback balancing the weight of your bodies on your toes, stuck into loops of leather or rope hanging from the saddle, instead of using regular stirrups."

"Why does a scorpion walk backward? Why the crocodile prefers the rotting abomination of a carrion to the flesh of a fresh kill? Every man or beast has his ways!" Keradj guffawed.

Neither Latour nor MacCarthy felt like laughing; but they did, and loudly, because tribal custom required such a polite acknowledgment of the jest.

MEANWHILE the scent of the water filling the troughs in the courtyard of the fort was stirring the returning mehara into a frenzy. Harsh orders, and blows of the butts of the spears of solid iron of their herders, restrained them from stampeding. But their raucous barkings and whinnyings filled the air. Noticing that even his well trained mount was frantically shaking its pendulous lips, Keradj released it with a modulated command. The orange pelted mehari leaped up as if propelled by enormous springs and joined the other camels, which were trotting into the fort.

Eventually the mehara reached the water and the uproar abated. In the silence which succeeded to the previous orgy of sounds, Keradj piped:

"I learned also that a caravan of white men is coming from the east. I sent corporal Moussa and five meharistes to meet them and to bring them here."

"A party of white men!" Latour exploded. "Who can be these fools who wander all over Tropical Africa when all the furies of hell are loose?"

A smile crinkled the corners of MacCarthy's mouth, uncovering his firm white teeth. His keen blue eyes twinkled.

"Most likely," he drawled, "they are scientists—or big game hunters—who got deep into Africa before the outbreak of the war, and didn't go home because they shared General Gamelin's belief that a sit-down war was enough to starve the Nazis into submission."

Captain Latour started like a pony stung by a bee. But, when his irate glance fastened itself on his subaltern, the latter's handsome face had assumed a look of blank respect.

"A la bonne heure!" Latour growled. "Keradj, you can take a day's rest. And you, Lieutenant MacCarthy, come with me."

A few minutes later, they confronted the other mehariste non-coms in the commander's office. They were the handsome Belad, son of Issouk, chief of the Kel Antassar; Kela, a giant with a brick-red complexion and enormous square hands; and Attici, sharp-featured and famous swordsman.

MacCarthy calmly looked at them. He was as tall as Belad, and only a couple of inches shorter than Kela. However, the latter's bulky muscles were no match for the steely symmetry of the Lieutenant's body. In friendly contests with blunt-edged swords, MacCarthy had often bested Attici.

The Touareg loved Latour for his wisdom and fairness; but there was a trace of uneasiness in their attitude toward him. They could not help seeing in him a foreigner, a man different from them in every way. On the contrary, MacCarthy's superiority in the martial virtues constituting their principal asset, and his cool resourcefulness made a leader according to their own heart, and they enthusiastically obeyed his slightest wishes.

Far from being proud of that preference, MacCarthy resented it as a slight to Latour, who was more his older friend than his commander. For he couldn't forget the day when he had joined the squadron as a recently promoted *sous-officier*. . . .

Without a family of his own and with a paternal urge which he was ashamed to confess to himself, Latour had patiently tutored him in Saharan lore, always of-

fering wise suggestions, never reproaching a blunder. When the young lieutenant had finally made the grade by leading a counter-raid in Berabich territory successfully, he had obtained a leave of absence for both of them and joyously stood all the expenses of a trip of celebration to Timbuctoo.

Now, the situation was changed. For years Latour had swallowed the impalpable desert sand carried by the wind, and the sand had finally corroded his lungs. Several ill-healed wounds had contributed to still lower his vitality. But, unobtrusively, with infinite tact and skill, MacCarthy had taken upon himself all the strenuous duties of the management of the squadron and the post—and Latour was convinced that all went well thanks to his prestige and directing ability.

CAPTAIN LATOUR sat in his capacious armchair, alternately glancing at two big black flies running in circles over the blotter laying on his desk, at the swarm of winged pests buzzing in and out of the open window, and at the huge map covering the wall behind the three blue-clad and faceless non-coms.

Suddenly Belad spoke:

"I ask to be released according to the regulation enabling all *soldats* of the Camel Corps to resign and go in forty-eight hours. The Kel Antassar of the squadron demand to leave with me."

Latour's face reddened, but before he could speak, MacCarthy went up to Belad and laid a hand on one of his shoulders.

"Does this mean," he snapped, "that the Kel Antassar are going to fight against us?"

Belad jerked his head back. His eyes flashed.

"For several moons I rode and fought at your side and under the Sidi captain's orders," he said vibrantly. "We have shared the same food, and bandaged each other's wounds. From me you have only to expect friendship—and help."

A sudden thought convulsed MacCarthy's mind.

"Kela. Attici," he rasped without turning his head. "Are you resigning also?"

"No Sidi, by Allah!" Attici exploded. And Kela gruffly added:

"Belad already spoke to us. It is right that he goes, and it is our duty to stay with you. Keradj also shall keep on serving with the squadron."

"Just as I thought," MacCarthy mused. His fist left Belad's shoulder, grasped his hand.

"The Sidi captain is shocked by the sudden announcement that he's going to lose a brave man like you. And so was I. But I'm sure that now Captain Latour will let you go, as you have a right to."

The flame in Belad's eyes faded. His fingers clutched MacCarthy's hand like a steel vise.

"What is written is written. Nobody can escape his destiny," he said gravely. "But every man who prizes his honor shall always beg Allah to protect the interests of his true friends even more than his own."

"May Allah bless you, Belad!" MacCarthy sadly smiled. Then he turned to Captain Latour.

The latter sat stiffly in his chair. Smoldering anger as well as a tinge of dismay contracted his face. His fingers fumbled convulsively with the edge of the blotter.

"*Mon capitaine,*" MacCarthy asked respectfully, "what's your decision?"

"The regulations speak clearly," Latour tonelessly replied. "He's entitled to ride out of the fort within forty-eight hours of his request."

"Thank you, Sidi, and may Allah preserve you!" Belad exclaimed. "My seven Kel Antassar will ask to make salaam to you before leaving. Shall I bring them here?"

"That's unnecessary," Latour rasped. After a pause he added: "You shall take two mehara each—the ones bought by your wages. According to rules, you must surrender your rifles. But there are some spare guns in the arsenal of the fort. You may ask Lieutenant MacCarthy to issue one to each of you, as a gift of this squadron, in which you have worthily served."

Again and more fervently Belad repeated his thanks; but Latour's head was turned when the Kel Antassar non-com left the room.

Several uneasy minutes followed Belad's departure. At length Latour clenched his fists and growled to Kela and Attici:

"There's little to say. We shall wait for the arrival of the white men's cara-

van. Then we'll ride out leaving a section of meharistes under Keradj to garrison the post, together with the Senegalese section and the detail of French Legionnaires."

WHEN Attici and Kela were gone, MacCarthy remarked:

"News must have reached Belad that the Touareg also are about to revolt. He couldn't relate them to us without betraying his people. But I'm sure that he's going to plead our cause with all the authority he has as the son of a great chief. I'll bet my shirt against a pipeful that he'd even fight duels for our sake in the Touareg councils, if he had to. But he couldn't tell what he plans to do for us—except for some vague mention of his friendship—without hurting our pride. I interfered to keep you from hurting his feelings with additional harsh words. I hope you forgive me."

He looked pleadingly at Latour.

"Sacre!" Latour savagely replied. "Don't you think that I knew what Belad was about, after all the years I spent among Touareg? But can you understand how deep my humiliation is." He stared at the young officer abstractedly, then began to speak in a dry monotone.

"As a wind-up of a long career, I suddenly lose control of the territory intrusted to me. My tribesmen-meharistes, who should look up to me for guidance, concoct intrigues behind my back to save my rotting old skin—and I'm aware that, if they go, they'll perhaps get killed for your sake and mine; if they remain, they'll probably be slaughtered at our sides. Meanwhile, I can preserve a shred of dignity for my grave only by playing the part of the dumb and the blind."

MacCarthy bowed his head because he couldn't stand the desperate expression on the wasted features of his old friend. When he lifted his eyes, Latour's face, all cheekbones, jutting forehead and spiky beard, had assumed a pathetic and absurdly boyish look.

"I had prepared a speech of blood and thunder . . . something capable of inspiring, of leading our squadron onward like a driving flame . . ." his spent voice raved on as if from a distance . . . "but when Belad resigned it all seeped out of me, like water pouring out of a worn-out sponge."

MacCarthy's throat constricted with pity.

"Get you gone!" growled Latour suddenly, unwilling that his subaltern should see him break down. "See that the squadron get ready."

MacCarthy hurried out of the room. As he ran down the stairway, the thought struck him that the present danger wasn't the only doom hovering above Latour.

"If a revolution flares in France—if he loses his pension—what will the future have in store for a worn-out and prematurely old fellow like him?" the lieutenant thought. "He hasn't a cent of his own. No training whatsoever besides his military calling. He'll starve to death, like one of the poor, toothless scarecrows who lay in the sun on the edge of the Arabian towns!"

At that moment, the stentorian voice of the lookout rang from the watch-tower, announcing that a caravan was in sight.

II

THE caravan came across the flatlands east of the fort. The dancing eddies of heat haze magnified its two huge motor-trailers, and the brightly colored trappings of the load and saddle camels. An uniformed mounted escort added a final touch of magnificence to the column, so colorful against the drab yellow of the ground and the black and dusty-green of boulders and twisted thorn trees.

In spite of his cynical mood, Latour was impressed. Shuffling uneasily in the shadow of the gateway, he scowled at the soft sandals of nayel hide strapped to his dusty bare feet and tugged with a bony hand at his Saharan blouse.

"I comprehend that I must go to my quarters, *et plus vite que ca!*" he muttered. "It is proper that I put on a starched white uniform."

MacCarthy cursed the thought that if the captain dolled up he also had to discard his cool pajama-like attire for the choking and crackling conventional clothes of the Saharan officer.

"Why should you!" he hastened to say. "No mere tourist can own a streamlined train like that. It's probably an expedition financed by some great University. And you know as well as I do that scientists

never notice their contemporary human beings."

To his heartfelt relief, Latour readily agreed:

"Of course. The scientific mind doesn't give a plugged franc for formalities."

The Touareg of the squadron were pouring out of the fort, and those of the Iguellad camp were hastening out of their tents. Men, women and naked pot-bellied children were coming also at the run from the nearby village of the harratin, or former slaves.

The Iguellad made up a stately gathering. Tall men, in dark tunics reaching below the knee and wide, white karteba pants; with helmet-like blue or black check cloths tightly wrapped around their heads, and face veils, which left uncovered only their wild eyes and the roots of the noses. Severe-looking women, bright with heavy earrings and bracelets of hammered silver and brass, majestic in their long blue capes.

When the caravan reached the fort, Captain Latour stopped the escort leader with a gesture of his hand.

"Dismount and lead your camels by hand," the captain instructed. "My courtyard is cramped. Much as I regret it, I can't let your big motor-cars in. Leave them close to the wall. Nobody shall touch them. If necessity arises, I will detail guards to look over them."

The door of the first trailer swung open. Out of it stepped a tall man with a long face shaded by a sun helmet. Attired in a costly palm beach suit and spotless white shoes, he strode up to Captain Latour and brushed with two fingers the hand that the veteran officer proffered to him.

"*Monsieur* the fort commander," he grated angrily. "Did the breakdown of the French Army also destroy the discipline of its Colonial troops? I demand that the trailers be run inside the courtyard beyond the reach of this rabble."

Latour withdrew his hand and bit his lips. But he was more hurt than insulted.

"But, *M'sieu*, it is plain that there is not room," he said with a patient smile. "The trailers will be quite safe."

"What! Is this the courtesy you extend to strangers?" the tall man exploded.

The veins angrily swelled on MacCarthy's temples.

"If you were not a tenderfoot lost in a strange land," he roared, "you would know better than to insult the hospitality of your host. Stop your childish chatter and come inside the compound like any other grown-up individual."

Suddenly MacCarthy ceased speaking, for a young woman was standing in the doorway of the trailer—a young woman of breath-taking beauty.

Her face was cameo-like in its perfection, her long-lashed eyes deep and lustrous. Her graceful body had lovely curves and was endowed with such an unaffected poise that the Touareg, who admired beauty and dignity in a woman as much as bravery in a man, greeted her with a sonorous: "Salamou r'likoum, esa!"

Breathlessly she hastened to place herself between the tall man and MacCarthy, who seemed about to come to blows, and gasped:

"We were touring southern Mauritania when the radio warned us of the French disaster. We hastened south and toward the nearest fort—yours—but on the way, dust and flies have played havoc with my husband's—with Mr. Dennison's temper."

"Don't apologize for me, Felicia! I'll be damned if I stand another word from this officer of wild savages!" Dennison shouted.

There was such desperate pleading in the glance that Felicia Dennison turned on MacCarthy that the Lieutenant, deeply moved, stepped back, lowering his fists.

LIKE most middle-class Frenchmen, Latour had a profound respect for wealth and a firm conviction that the whims of millionaires had to be condoned.

"*Bien*," his solicitous rasping interrupted. "Thanks to Madame's tact everything is all right. We all understand. We are no longer angry at each other, *hein?* Does Monsieur Dennison agree to shake hands with my second in command, the Lieutenant de MacCarthy?"

"Your name MacCarthy?" Dennison sneered at the young officer.

"If you don't mind," the latter replied coolly.

"I don't. In fact, I don't give a damn about it. But you look Irish, all right. Why are you in a French outfit?"

MacCarthy choked his surging rage.

"Perhaps you have not heard," he said after a pause, "that after the unfortunate

end of the battle of the Boyne, many Scottish and Irish fighting men sought a refuge on the continent. My ancestors belonged to that group of political exiles, and their descendants were born in France."

"Quite extraordinary!" Dennison snapped, and turning his back on him he addressed Captain Latour aggressively:

"Captain, I want to reach the navigable course of the Niger River and board a steamboat sailing for the coast as soon as possible."

"All traffic on the Niger River has been temporarily suspended," Latour said politely.

Dennison dismissed that objection with an airy gesture of his hand.

"Don't let that worry you!" he sneered. "Give me a score of your loud mouthed meharistes as an escort, and I guarantee you that I shall find a boat."

Latour looked unhappy.

"What's extraordinary in my request?" Dennison insisted.

"M'sieu, I am desolated, but there are several reasons why I can't satisfy you," Captain Latour finally said. "The tribes are rebellious; you don't know how lucky you were to reach this fort without trouble. A small escort wouldn't insure your safety. Only the entire squadron could effectively protect you all the way to Timbuctoo. And I can't put the squadron at your disposal. I'm going with it on a policing tour."

"Then, what do you expect me to do?" Dennison exploded.

"You couldn't find a safer place than this fort for a radius of seventy-five miles. Wait in it until the storm abates."

"That's out of the question!" Dennison roared. "Can I use your radio?"

"It is at your disposal." Latour bowed.

SEVERAL hours later, Dennison stormed into Latour's study.

"I've just contacted four American Consulates. Four, mind you!" he shouted. "They all replied that I should have left long ago and that they can't send a passenger plane for my wife and myself. Also I sent a radiogram to the Resident General for French West Africa. Some fool of his staff replied asking if my request for escorting troops and an armored motor launch was supposed to be a joke!

"I shall stir up plenty of hell when I return to the States, I assure you! But now—let's come to business! You have not gone on your policing tour in so far, you could as well begin it in a couple of days! Give me a strong escort . . ." and reluctantly, in a smaller voice, Dennison concluded, *"S'il vous plait. . . ."* Then an angry flush spread over his face and his fists clenched; for he had suddenly noticed that MacCarthy, sitting at a desk in a corner of the room, had lifted his head from the map spread before him and was looking at him with twinkling eyes.

"From the attitude of your subaltern," Dennison snarled at Latour, "I see that I have made a mistake in coming here."

"M'sieu," Latour replied, bringing the tips of his fingers together. "You arrive into my fort like a bombshell, you want us to strike out our plans and forsake our responsibilities for your benefit. I regret it, but it can't be done!"

"Then I'll tell you what I shall do!" Dennison exploded: "My Consular authorities and you French play me for a fool! Very well! I shall round up my men, and with my wife I shall march toward the British garrison of Gambaga, on the northern border of His Majesty's protectorate of the Gold Coast!"

"You are crazy, man!" MacCarthy gasped. "That's a fever-ridden, five hundred miles' journey, on rotten ground and with brutish tribes popping up at every bend of the trail. And you don't know if in Gambaga you shall find a British garrison or a horde of savages raising hell over a heap of ruins."

"I'm far from crazy," Dennison retorted disdainfully. "You French are at the end of your rope. Why should I remain indefinitely in this fort of yours, to be caught in it and slaughtered with my wife by a wholesale tribal uprising? I'm not blind to the dangers of a journey to Gambaga. But there are no troubles in Gold Coast territory. If we reach it we'll have more than a chance of pulling out of Africa with our lives."

"M'sieu," Latour said, "you are master of your own actions and responsible for them. In the light of reasoning I should judge your undertaking foolhardy. But I have often noticed that, under the sun of Africa, the march of events often takes odd

twists. Your absurd journey to Gambaga may turn out to be the only device that could save your wife's life and yours."

Dennison staggered as if struck by a physical blow. He had hoped to change the Captain's mind with his tirade; but his bluff had been called, and now he had to humiliate himself by obeying the dictates of Latour and MacCarthy—or make good his threat. In a surge of outraged pride he decided to adopt the latter course.

"We'll accept your hospitality for tonight," he choked. "Tomorrow we shall leave."

THE dinner, served by Latour's orderlies, was gloomy and listless. Only Felicia and MacCarthy exchanged a few words. After the coffee, everybody arose and went to his quarters.

As soon as he reached his white-washed room, which was as narrow and bare as the cell of a monk, MacCarthy peeled off his starched white tunic and his shirt, and, inhaling deeply, stretched out his arms. His long, hard muscles stood out like steel cables on his powerful chest and shoulders, stripped of all layers of fat by the Saharan heat.

He was going to pull off his trousers and shoes and getinto bed when a knock banged at the door. He shouted: "Come in!"

To his amazement, one of Dennison's men entered and proffered him a sealed envelope. MacCarthy tore it open and read: "Mr. Dennison requires the pleasure of Lieutenant MacCarthy's presence, out of the fort and near his trailers, at ten o'clock sharp!"

"Sabir," MacCarthy snapped, "what does your master want."

The town Arab leered, widely opening his eyes, and made a vague gesture.

"I don't know," he purred. "What shall I tell my Si?"

"That I'll be hanged if I can make out what he's up to, but I shall keep his appointment."

The Arab bowed and withdrew. He was chuckling as he closed the door at his shoulders, but MacCarthy attributed his antics to his poor opinion of Dennison. For he had called him Si, or plain mister, and not Sidi, or excellency—which is a title lavished by African Arabs on anyone amounting to anything.

The Lieutenant gazed at the clock on his dresser. It was half past nine. He muttered: "Damn the conceited fool!" And put on a Saharan blouse. But over it he buckled his gun belt. There were sentries on duty at night, but in spite of their vigillance, isolated marauders often managed to reach the foot of the walls with their daggers naked and ready to strike. At close quarters, only a bullet fired point-blank could stop them.

When MacCarthy came out of the stairway, an angry moon and myriads of bright stars shone in the deep blue sky. Under their radiance, the watch-tower was a thing of silvery beauty. But black shadows shrouded most of the courtyard. Suddenly the lieutenant's nostrils caught an unforgettable scent. Felicia Dennison's delicate perfume! He halted and lighted a cigarette. Then he saw her coming out of the shadow.

Instantly he noticed that her cameo-like features were drained of all blood.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

Her fingers nervously shook as she grasped his arms. Her eyes were black pools. Her mouth opened spasmodically and her hot breath came out of it with an uncontrollable sob.

"Calm yourself! Take your time before speaking," MacCarthy whispered solicitously.

Felicia Dennison gasped: "Go back to your quarters! He's coming here to give you a beating in front of the attendants. He wants to avenge himself on Captain Latour and on you. Tomorrow all the Touareg meharistes will laugh at you."

MacCarthy growled. "He's crazy if he thinks he can get the best of me! He's only a soft dandy . . ."

"But he could!" Felicia gasped. "He's uncommonly strong, an expert boxer. He won an intercollegiate heavyweight championship and has kept himself fit from that day on. . . . For your sake—not mine—forget all about the appointment, go back to your room."

BUT MacCarthy was not listening. His keen ears had caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Dennison appeared before them. MacCarthy released the young woman's frenzied hold on his arms.

Bare to the waist, his face a raging

mask, Dennison came up to them like a big cat.

"I felt that something was wrong when she went out of the room and failed to return," he snarled. "What did she say to you? What has she to do with you? The wench. . . ."

With a sudden lunge he tried to leap past MacCarthy and to get hold of his wife. But the young officer's fist pistoned up, throwing him back on his heels.

Dennison shook his head to clear it and stepped back. The power of MacCarthy's blow had inspired him with respect for his hitting power and also with the need of using caution. But he had a lot of faith in himself and didn't doubt of the final issue of the test.

"I wanted to hammer you down slowly," he grated. "But she upset my plan and I have to knock you out quickly, before your savages run down from the walls to save you from your beating."

Then he closed in, feinting. MacCarthy saw an opening and jabbed. The next instant a terrific blow struck the side of his head.

MacCarthy clenched his teeth and leaped in with a straight jab. Dennison ducked, then sprang up with a hook carrying all the weight of his body behind his fist.

MarCarthy felt as if a meat cleaver had split one of his cheeks open. He reeled but instinctively he brought up his hands, covering his face. Dennison hit him, left and right, left and right, through the openings between his forearms and the tops of his shoulders.

The four blows hammered the base of MacCarthy's skull, behind his ears. They didn't leave any lingering pain; only a sensation that his head had suddenly become empty and a bell was ringing, loudly insistent, in every nook and cranny of it. He staggered and Dennison stormed all over him, punching at top speed.

MacCarthy stepped in close, so that Dennison's fists hit empty air behind his head, and clinched. Dennison shook him off. At close range, shortening his punches, he struck at the Lieutenant's face. But MacCarthy had fought too often at close grips with tribesmen stabbing with their daggers. Every time that a fist whizzed toward it, his head jerked, avoiding the blow by a fraction of an inch. Then, unexpectedly, MacCarthy pistoned two hard smashes to Dennison's midriff.

The clubman grunted, bent his body to put his stomach out of effective reach. In so doing he brought his head down, hitting the bridge of the Lieutenant's nose at same time and instantly was straightened up by a sizzling uppercut. They both had enough of that first exchange. As they gave way, the dazed MacCarthy heard Felicia gasping:

"Alan Dennison, in Heaven's name, why don't you fight fair?"

It sounded like grim irony to MacCarthy, for his ability in rough and tumble encounters was recognized throughout the Sahara. Twice he had killed powerful tribesmen with his bare hands in the course of ferocious combats, and he didn't doubt that he could easily dispose of Dennison if he discarded all rules. On the contrary, in an orthodox fist fight, he could rely only on his superior stamina. Dennison didn't take a stiff blow in the bread basket too well, but he had the edge on him in punching power, and he vastly outclassed him in boxing skill.

"Like hell I'll fight clean!" the thought raced in MacCarthy's battered head. "What stops me from using my bag of tricks? Why should I allow this loutish highbrow to get the best of me? He didn't play fair when he schemed to hurt and humiliate me!"

As they clinched, MacCarthy planned:

"As soon as he lets go I'll strike his Adam's apple with the heel of my hand. Not too hard, because I want to stun him and not to crush his windpipe. Then I'll kick his legs from under him, and I'll put him to sleep with a few smacks of the side of my hand on the nerve ganglia under his ear."

And almost instantly, he realized that he couldn't do anything of the sort. Not with Felicia horrifiedly staring at them and expecting both of them to use the absurd rules of the Marquis of Queensberry.

IN the heat of the struggle, they had not noticed that, in the deep silence of the night, their blows rang like a beaten bass drum, and that for several minutes the soldiers on duty on the sentry walks had amazedly stared at them. However, when

the caravan attendants came out of the dormitories assigned to them, as Dennison had instructed them to do, one of the watching soldiers slung his gun across his shoulders, and ran to warn the non-com in charge.

That worthy was the Legionnaire Sergeant Domicelli, a Corsican who made a rule of trusting nobody. Fearing that the caravan attendants could be staging an uprising in cahoots with a rebel chieftain of the surrounding territory, Domicelli proceeded to awaken the entire garrison.

MacCarthy and Dennison were too busy trading blows and finding the going increasingly rough, to pay any attention to the audience who soon gathered around them.

Dennison had cannily reflected that MacCarthy's body was encased in the steely muscles of a rider hardened by spartan food and strenuous living. Therefore he concentrated his attacks on the more vulnerable target presented by the Lieutenant's head. But all the straight blows that he aimed at it were easily blocked by MacCarthy, who was an expert fencer accustomed to parry lightning-like sword blows. Dennison had greater luck with his hooks and occasional crosses; but MacCarthy kept his chin low and presented no target for a clean knockout blow. And, now and then, he reached Dennison's breast and stomach with bruising blows which were beginning to tell.

As far as MacCarthy was concerned, his head had cleared and he wasn't even winded. But his face was a mess of cuts and bruises, and he found it increasingly hard to use his fists in accepted boxing fashion; instead of reverting to the wild free style of the Saharan.

Suddenly he heard a caravan attendant muttering in Arabic to one of his companions:

"Throw your club between the legs of the mehariste officer and make him fall. Our master will reward you with plenty of *filous*—of money."

"Inshallah! Why don't you do that yourself?" another one interrupted.

"Because he knows that, if he does, he'll be buried tomorrow with his guts hanging from the slash carved in his belly by a Touareg poniard," a third caravan attendant concluded.

Followed a silence full of murmurs and shuffling of sandals and slippered feet. Then a harsh Touareg voice snarled:

"Who dares to mention us? Inshallah, make room for your betters, you ksouri, town rats, or we shall cut your ears and force you to swallow them!"

Behind MacCarthy, Keradj shrilled:

"Sidi, why do you permit this stranger to lock you in his arms and to dance you around? Break his ankle with a kick, Sidi! Or better, shake him off, grab a sword, give him another, and finish him in a true warrior's duel!"

Finally Domicelli came on the run with Captain Latour and most of the Legionnaires.

Latour, shaken out of his sleep, was snappy and catankerous. In his agitation, he had slipped a pair of trousers over his nightgown and put on two unmatched shoes. When he saw MacCarthy and Dennison slugging in the middle of a ring of caravan attendants and meharistes, his rage gurgled out in a strangled cry:

"Stop, do you hear me? This very instant!"

MacCarthy tried to obey; but Dennison kept on slamming at him. Domicelli attempted to separate them and was struck on an eye by the maddened clubman.

"Porco de Dio!" Domicelli grunted, and, lowering his head, rammed it into Dennison's midriff, then shot it up like a jack in the box, and butted him straight in the face.

Dennison stumbled backward, struggling to regain his balance, with the wind knocked off his lungs and salty blood pouring out of his mashed lips. Before he could recover his balance and strike again, two Legionnaires pounced on him and twisted his arm behind his back.

"Bring him to my study!" Latour exclaimed. "Madame, be kind enough to come also. And you, MacCarthy, follow us."

IN his oven-hot study, Latour first glanced at Dennison's note, given to him by MacCarthy, and then listened politely to Felicia Dennison, who undaunted by her husband's threatening glances, related his attack on the Lieutenant.

When the young woman was through speaking, Latour said kindly to MacCar-

thy: "My son, it relieves me that you did not engage willingly in a boxing contest before tribesmen unaccustomed to the white man's jousting. Before going to the infirmary to have your face patched, please conduct Madame to the dining room, see that she gets a soothing cool drink, and wait for me there."

When they were gone, the veteran captain leaned back on his chair and, cocking his head sideways, stared for a long time at Dennison.

"You are not a cad in the proper sense of the word. Not even a fool," he said at length, letting every word sink in. "The trouble with you is that, at your thirty years of age or so, you still have the turn of mind of a spoiled brat. Plenty of sound whackings with the back of a brush in your childhood—or a great deal of hard toiling for a livelihood later, would have made a man out of you. As it is . . ." Latour spread his hands wide in a helpless gesture.

He loomed very grey and puny behind his massive desk. Dennison, huge and scowling, tensed his muscles and stepped forward clenching his fists.

"Don't!" Latour's voice cut in like a steel file, "if you do I shall be forced to clamp you for an indeterminate time in *salle de police*. And there only a few rats and plenty of big, black cockroaches would keep you company, M. Dennison!"

A grunt and a scraping of hobnailed boots came from the doorway. The clubman turned his head and saw the squat and powerful figure of Sergeant Domicelli and, behind him, the giant shapes of the Touareg non-coms Kela and Keradj. The visor of Domicelli's kepi, bent *"à la casse gueule"* in old Legion style, shaded a tightly shut black eye. His other eye, baleful and unblinking, glowered like a live coal.

Dennison swallowed hard and let his arms fall at his sides. Latour continued pitilessly:

"What is best for you to do, M. Dennison, is this: You'll round up, your wife and your men—and go. Not until I get satisfactory answers from the radiograms that I shall send to your Consular authorities of Northern Africa, and to the English Gold Coast. For your enlightenment, I shall let you know that these radiograms shall convey the warning that left to your spleen you are liable to abuse Madame Dennison, who is a very lovely woman deserving all care and respect. I think that I know your American Consular authorities very well. I can imagine what steps they shall take as soon as you return to civilization, unless, of course, it develops that, during the long trip to Gambara, you have treated Madame with all the delicacy and regard to which she's entitled. Unfortunately, it is impossible that I permit you to return to the quarters assigned to you. Madame Dennison will, in order to enjoy a good night of rest. But you shall occupy a small spare room, and a sentry will be at your door until you cool off.

"Tanabrine!"

An orderly hopped in from the nearby corridor.

"M. Dennison goes to the third guest room. Make him as comfortable as possible there," Latour ordered. "And you, Domicelli, place a sentry before his door."

"And if *M'sieu* becomes riotous?" Domicelli hopefully asked.

"He shan't make any such mistake!" Latour thundered.

When they were all gone, Latour arose and saw for the first time that he had a tan shoe on a foot and a black one on the other.

"Name of a cabbage!" he gasped, "I hope Madame is of the belief that fine feathers don't necessarily make a wise bird." And he went to the dining room, to communicate his decisions to Felicia and MacCarthy.

THE fort's radio buzzed uninterruptedly during the following morning. At noon, Dennison was presented with the typed copies of the replies sent by a few American Consulates. He became green at the gills when he read them.

Tactfully, Latour refrained from commenting on their contents. But, as a last measure before releasing Dennison, he asked him politely to promise to take good care of Mrs. Dennison during the trip.

This the clubman readily did. Apparently, his experiences of the last twenty-four hours had sobered him a lot.

"He's not so bad," the captain confided to MacCarthy when Dennison finally went to supervise the preparations for the trip. "Spoiled by a life of idleness and too much money."

"But, *mon Capitaine!*" MacCarthy exclaimed. "Are you going to allow him to drag his wife on that crazy journey?"

"You like Mrs. Dennison, *n'est-ce pas?*" Latour gravely replied. "*Bien* . . . can we guarantee that no harm shall come to her if she remains in this fort?"

MacCarthy became pale and bit his lips. Latour clutched his arm with a strength unsuspected in his emaciated fingers.

"We are sitting on a volcano, and you know it, my son. Very soon we shall fight for our very lives. We can't ask anyone to share our destiny . . . perhaps our doom."

A FEW hours later, MacCarthy was going over a list of supplies in his room when he heard a knock at the door. He went to open and found himself face to face with Mrs. Dennison.

"I couldn't go without saying goodbye," she said simply.

MacCarthy smiled at her. "You are very beautiful," he said simply.

A tense silence fell between them. Suddenly, without prompting, she stepped into the room. MacCarthy closed the door behind her.

"As long as I live," he choked, "I shall always remember this moment. I wanted you to remain here. Desperately I wanted it. But Latour . . ."

"I understand," she replied huskily. "Captain Latour believes that my place is at Dennison's side. He doesn't know that . . ." She hesitated, then whispered softly, "I hate him. He was my husband in name only."

"The thought of Dennison has nothing to do with Latour's attitude," MacCarthy whispered, blushing. "The truth is that soon there'll be much fighting around here. And we are not sure that we'll get the best of it."

Felicia's face became deathly pale. Her eyes burned with an intense light. "I'll never forget you," she breathed faintly, and she began to cry.

AN hour later Captain Latour entered MacCarthy's room and smiled at the sight of the lieutenant dejectedly slumped on his cot, with his face to the wall.

"*Nom d'un nom,* what's keeping you here? Are you sick?" he asked solicitously. "The caravan is gone and you didn't even come down to greet the beautiful American girl for a last time!" Then his nostrils caught a whiff of a telltale perfume.

"*Pardieu,*" he mused, "this is Miracle d'Orient, at five hundred francs an ounce. . . . Madame Dennison's perfume. . . ." Then he shot a second glance at MacCarthy who had not moved, shrugged his shoulders eloquently and tip-toed out of the room.

II

THE next morning the squadron was lined up in orderly rows on the esplanade confronting the fort.

The racing camels, well fed and perfectly fit, squatted contentedly. The swollen guerbas, the water-skins hanging from the towering rhala saddles, had been inspected by the non-coms and found perfect. Tinned meats, dates and several kinds of grains—all compact, non-perishable foods—were crammed into the bags.

The scent of recently laundered cloths, broiling under the sun, of freshly oiled weapons and of the tar plastered on the camels' itches, floated over the plain.

The meharistes stood in the spaces between the squatting camels. Each of them had a foot on the halter fastened to the nose ring of his mount. All had the same proud and erect bearing, the same glance of birds of prey, ready to soar and swoop over a kill.

Everything was ready. But the lighthearted bravado, the carefree bantering which had in the past characterized all the departures of the squadron, this time was lacking. All—from Latour to the meharistes with a few months' service—knew that the might of a great western nation no longer stood behind them. Thrown on their own resources, they had to stand alone against numberless tribes, long-repressed and never tamed, who now were rising like a devouring flame against them.

Latour and MacCarthy were also in Touareg attire. Only the insignia of their grade, sewn to the breasts of their tunics, characterized them from their men.

Before starting, the captain called his second in command aside.

"MacCarthy," he said, out of hearing of his men, "are you positive that the Berabich will come through the swales of Uladah?"

"A six days' ride separates their pastures from Lake Faguibine," MacCarthy explained. "Therefore they'll have to water their mehara at the least once during their journey. They can do so either at the wells of Uladah or at those of Kahrir. But the latter are within striking distance of a tough bunch of Touareg tribes. The Berabich, who never got along with the veiled people, will leave them severely alone."

"Have your way. Let's go!" Latour suddenly decided.

MacCarthy lifted his arm and motioned to Kela and Attici, who were watching him from their places in the squadron's array. Then he went to his white squatting mehari and climbed on the saddle.

When Latour's mehari sprang up with its master on its back, the hundred-odd mounts of the three departing sections of the squadron did likewise. The heads of their riders suddenly stood in sharp relief against the brassy blue of the horizon, and the sun drew dazzling gleams from the pommels of their swords, strapped across their shoulders.

Then Captain Latour lifted his arm high and brought it down sharply, pointing forward. One hundred Touareg feet prodded the roots of their mehara's necks. The squadron rode on, in a rising cloud of lifted dust and spurting gravel.

Acting Sergeant Keradj, who was remaining behind, stared at them for a long time, with his heart sinking in his gigantic breast. When the long file of white and tawny camels and the blue silhouettes of their riders became tiny in the distance, Keradj turned about and bowing his fierce head slowly strode toward the fort.

THREE days later, the squadron was riding over an expanse of desert sands leveled by the wind, when suddenly a group of riders stood revealed on top of a distant dune.

Captain Latour signaled the squadron to stop and to spread out in combat formation. But Moussa, who was famous for his eyesight, even among his hawk-eyed Touareg comrades, waved his hands reassuringly and shouted in a loud voice:

"We have nothing to fear from these riders. It is Belad ag Issouk, accompanied by other former Kel Antassar meharistes!"

The squadron rode on at a brisk trot; and soon the wind coming from the north carried to them Belad's joyous greeting.

But a grim warning clouded the eyes of the former sergeant of Legionnaires when he met Captain Latour and MacCarthy.

"Haste, *mon Capitaine!* The Berabich approach! At this moment, fully thirty kilometres are between you and the wells of Ouladah; but only a bare three hours of average riding separate the Berabich from them!"

MacCarthy considered. Three hours' riding. Twenty-two kilometres at the average pace of a saddle camel.

"*Mon Capitaine,* a long gallop is indicated," he suggested to Latour.

"*Mais certainement!*" the captain agreed. Then, turning to Belad, he spoke warmly: "You have gone out of your way to render us a great service. I thank you in the squadron's name and I call upon you all the blessings of Allah!"

"And upon thee . . ." Belad replied courteously, and whirled away with his companions.

TWO hours later the squadron cantered across the bottom of a swale between two dunes, and were enveloped by a buzzing swarm of big, black and stinging flies.

"These are flies which usually nest in the grass and the trees around the wells! And, having sucked no blood for a long time, they are hungry! What better proof could there be that the Berabich are not yet in Ouladah?" a mehariste shouted cannily.

At top speed the squadron rode over the sandy slope. As they reached the top of the last dune they shouted triumphantly. The four wells of Oladah were in the sparse oasis below.

Attici and eight meharistes watered their mounts quickly and were despatched as scouts to establish contact with the Berabich. Squad by squad, the remainder of the meharistes watered their camels from three wells, which soon became muddy and

almost empty—then they drank their fill from the fourth well.

They were replenishing their *guerbas*—the water skins which are more precious than their weight in gold during the long desert journeys—when Attici and his men returned, announcing that they had sighted the coming Berabich.

"First by a hair-breadth," MacCarthy said to Latour.

The latter was looking at the conformation of the oasis. Its northern edge was bordered by a low, crumbling wall—a natural trench for dismounted troopers. To the right, thick thickets criss-crossed with muddy ditches provided a fine shelter for another twenty or thirty meharistes on foot, who could act as a diminutive right wing. But the approaches to the wells from the west were bare and unscreened by shrubbery.

"The Berabich will launch a last desperate charge from there, after hurling their first attack against the northern edge of the oasis," MacCarthy pointed out that exposed side to Latour. *"Mon Capitaine,* better that we keep half the squadron on the saddle, because the marksmanship of our Touaregs is a bit erratic—particularly when they get excited. With cold steel, on the contrary, they are unexcelled. We will hold back part of our forces and at the last let them put an end to the Berabich resistance with a countercharge."

"Well planned!" Latour replied curtly. "Give the necessary orders, my son."

A few minutes later the Berabich Harka rode warily toward the oasis, preceded by outriding scouts. But the Touareg, past masters of ambush, had taken cover so skilfully that not even a telescope could have disclosed their appearance.

Only a score of yards separated the Berabich from the hidden Touaregs when their racing camels, frenzied by the scent of the nearby water and straining at the halter, broke into a lumbering run.

Suddenly the eyes of the Berabich scouts opened widely, a look of fear contracting their swarthy faces. Jerking back on their saddles, they reined in their mounts which, bleating, struggled to keep on going toward the water. For, just as previously the Touaregs had deducted that no one was waiting for them in the oasis from the presence of the flies, by the same process of reasoning the Berabich scouts had taken warning by the absence of the winged pests.

Attici, in charge of the ambush, saw their mouths opening to shout a warning and pressed the trigger of his rifle.

The next instant, a roaring hail of bullets tore through the scouts and the Berabich main body. At point-blank range, it had a devastating effect. Men tumbled from the saddles, camels reared and fell. Other camels, panicked by the scent of freshly spilled blood, bit and kicked right and left and threw down their riders; then, in a fit of murderous frenzy, they pounced on the wounded, kneeled on them and crushed them under the pressure of their huge bodies. When the two machine guns of the squadron added their angry clattering to the roar of the volleys, the Berabich lost courage and gave way.

Hidden by the shrubbery covering the top of a knoll, MacCarthy noticed a graybeard with a face whiter than those of his companions. He appeared to be a man of authority, judging from his commanding gestures, and his green turban, the latter a sign that he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

"And here's where you're gathered into Allah's arms," MacCarthy growled; and drew a careful bead. But, as he pressed the trigger his knee slid on a patch of moss and the shot went wide. The next instant the graybeard faded from sight behind a cluster of mounted Berabich.

At this moment one of the machine guns jammed. But its work was done. The Berabich had only one hope left—a whirlwind charge through the exposed side of the oasis. But this MacCarthy had foreseen.

Coming compactly at a breakneck gallop from behind a towering dune, the Berabich rode in a little less than a minute over a bare stretch of bumpy ground, over which their leaping mounts presented erratic targets to the remaining machine gun of the squadron. Suddenly they were countercharged by fifty mounted Touareg meharistes.

The Touareg meharistes came on, howling thunderous shouts of *"Allah Akbar!* Allah conquers!" and crouching on the saddles, with their ferocious eyes glaring across the slit of the litham veil and their

long, straight swords and spears of solid iron whirling above them.

For an instant, the Berabich lost courage and reined in their mounts. They knew what it meant to clash with the Touareg.

It was a fatal mistake, because it took all the battering impact out of their own charge. Into the milling mob of discouraged men and bewildered camels the well-rested Touareg camels struck like an irresistible avalanche; then the Touareg spears darted in all directions at lightning speed, the Touareg swords struck with mighty blows which split skulls open and severed arms and hands.

To make matters worse for the Berabich, Latour and MacCarthy ordered the meharistes of the center and the right wing to the saddle, and led them in a pincer-like sweep which struck into both sides of the wildly scattering Berabich Harka.

A few minutes later, the fighting was over, and Latour and MacCarthy had to use all their authority to stop a useless massacre of the beaten Berabich by the enraged Touaregs.

THE prisoners, some two hundred of them, were disarmed and assembled in the oasis. MacCarthy searched for the gray-beard with the green turban among them, but failed to find him. The surviving Berabich headmen confessed that he was not one of their people.

"He's a Holy Mrbet—a Marabout," one of them explained. "Two moons ago he visited our camps with a few acolytes. He recited the Koran from beginning to end and was accepted by us as a chief of chiefs."

After stern inquiries revealed that another smaller band of Berabich was a short distance away, having remained behind to collect the plunder of a nameless half-breed tribe which had been unfortunate enough to cross the path of the Harka.

It was useless to take all the Berabich into custody. Only the headmen were detained. The rest were relieved of all firearms and left in the oasis with a camel for every two men; and by that simple expedient they were given a chance to return eventually to their habitat, but they were also prevented from stirring up any further trouble.

The squadron cooked and ate a meal in the oasis. After that the mehara were allowed to graze for a couple of hours.

But it was still early in the afternoon when with their few dead and wounded strapped to makeshift litters tied alongside of some spare camels the meharistes rode north to overtake and annihilate the second Harka of the Berabich raiding party.

The Berabich left in the oasis were too busy patching up their wounded and burying their dead to look at them as they rode away; but the vultures circling above the battlefield raised a din of raucous cawings.

A few hours later the squadron rode around a scene of horribly stinking and unmentionable things—all that the Sahara heat and the rending beaks and claws of another flight of vultures had left of the massacred tribe.

Further on, a wide area full of tracks of human feet and camels' hoofs narrowed into a neat path leading northward.

MacCarthy smiled at his superior. "Probably with typical Bedouin greed they haven't parted with a single item of captured clothing. They went away burdened with booty, the murderous fools, and their trail is as clear as a garden path. They will not be hard to run down."

It was a good guess. An hour before sunset, silhouetted against the dying sun, the meharistes suddenly saw a long file of loaded camels, and desert Arabs riding gun in hand.

The mehara of the squadron had been on the move since early in the morning but the brief rest in the oasis and the fresh grass and water which they had enjoyed had put so much strength in their big bodies that they fairly flew over the ground when Latour ordered the gallop.

As far as the meharistes were concerned, the lust of the chase inebriated them. Relentless riding in the lashing wind, fighting, the pursuit of the routed enemy. What greater joys are there in life for a Touareg?

Panic struck the escaping Berabich when they sighted the black silhouettes of the Touaregs swooping down on them on their fast racing camels. They loosed the loaded camels, they slashed the ropes with

which they had fastened bundles of booty to their saddles. But it was no use. Inexorably, relentlessly, the better camels of the Touareg drew closer and closer.

The Berabich scattered. Holding the barrels of their guns under their left armpits, they let go volleys at random while they galloped on. But the Touaregs disdained even to waste a bullet in answer to such aimless firing. Crouching with their heads level with the wooden crosses topping the pommels of their saddles, they urged their meharas to a faster gallop.

Suddenly the foremost mehariste overtook the last of the escaping Berabich. Without changing the posture of his body, without wasting a motion, he jerked his arm sideways. His long spear darted like a striking snake. The Berabich gave forth a stricken scream and slid out of the saddle. The mehariste disengaged his spear with a twist of his wrist and rode on, forgetting the slain enemy before the Berabich had pitched headlong into the hot sands.

Five or six additional Berabich were overtaken and slain or wounded in brief combats. Then a desperate voice roared from the head of the escaping Berabich party:

"Aman! Aman! In the name of the Merciful, the Compassionate, we ask the truce of surrender!"

LATOUR brought his whistle to his lips, blew three deafening blasts, and reluctantly the scattered meharistes reined in their mounts. Moaning, cursing their destiny, the raiders halted. Then the Touaregs rode from every side toward Latour, who had brought his camel to a stop, and in a compact body the Touaregs urged their mounts toward a tall graybeard attired in a gorgeous silver-embroidered burnous.

Lifted dust and the lifted squalls of the Bedouins lent a chaotic appearance to the whole scene. But—perhaps it was premonition—MacCarthy's eyes did not leave that majestic figure in a silver-embroidered burnous.

Suddenly he saw the chieftain aiming his gun pistol-like. A shot rang.

To his utter horror, MacCarthy saw Captain Latour fall back on the saddle, then slowly begin sliding off it.

"Quick, catch the *Sidi Capitaine!*" he shouted hastily.

The meharistes nearest the veteran officer jumped down from their mounts, but before they could reach him he hit the ground limply, rolled over and remained still.

A savage growl came from MacCarthy's throat. Pulling out his automatic, he urged his mount toward the Sheikh.

The latter saw him coming and understood the danger. Wildly he looked all around, saw a young Berabich to his left. He glared at the youth out of his only eye with simulated rage.

"Dib! Filthy dog!" he roared at the top of his lungs. "How dare you to fire at an officer when I ask and obtain the *aman!*" Without waiting for an answer, he shot the young man through the head. Then he grinned ingratiatingly at MacCarthy, who had now approached within speaking distance.

"Swine of a chief without honor, put down your rifle!" MacCarthy's voice grated like a steel file. His rage was so great that his body shook as if ravaged by ague. But his fist clutching an automatic was as firm as a rock.

"But, Sidi . . ." The Sheikh's face, with a short, concave nose and a cruel, slanting mouth, was a picture of indignation and sorrow. "Allah is my witness! With my own hands I rendered justice by executing my unworthy follower who wounded your fellow officer. . . ."

"Dog! Filthy hyena! I saw you drawing a bead on the captain, I saw the spurt of flame coming out of your gun!" MacCarthy thundered.

By that time they were so close that their camels brushed shoulders. All the voices around them had ceased and only a shuffling of hoofs and a creaking of saddles was audible.

Big drops of perspiration ran down the face of the cornered chieftain. His cheeks sagged under his matted beard. But his finger tightened convulsively around the trigger guard of his gun.

MacCarthy jabbed the muzzle of the automatic into his ribs. "Drop your rifle," he snarled, "or I shall put a bullet into your accursed carcass!"

The Sheikh's lips twisted into a savage snarl, baring his clenched yellow teeth.

Suddenly MacCarthy's fist darted up. The barrel of his automatic smashed like a blackjack against the Sheikh's jaw.

A vacant expression spread over the features of the murderous chieftain. Knocked out cold, he fell out of the saddle and was caught in mid-air by a dismounted mehariste, who slammed his inert body on the ground and quickly tied his wrists and ankles.

MacCarthy stuck his automatic into the holster.

"Kela!" he roared.

"Yes, Sidi!"

Enormous in his glistening black takarbast tunic, Kela hastened up.

"Muster a squad, Kela. As soon as this hyena comes to, see that he's shot."

Kela clenched and unclenched his hamlike fists.

"Why waste good bullets on him?" he rumbled. "Let me work on him with my telaka poniard, O Sidi! All the squadron want to hear his agonizing screams, begging for mercy first, then for a quick death. . . ."

"No torture!" MacCarthy roared. "We are soldiers applying a law, and not tribesmen taking a toll of revenge!"

"As you wish, Sidi!" Kela promised reluctantly.

MacCarthy forced his mehari to squat, dismounted and went to the place where Latour lay.

The bullet had pierced the veteran officer's breast, just below the neck. A steady jet of blood issued from the wound, in spite of Attici's efforts to stop the hemorrhage.

The meharistes had placed the Captain over a hastily assembled pile of saddle blankets, rolling another blanket into a makeshift pillow to make him more comfortable. For the flow of blood had already soaked the layers of thick cloth and was seeping in tiny rivulets out of them.

"An artery must have been severed. He can't last long," MacCarthy thought.

The desperately wounded Latour apparently understood what was passing in his mind. A ghost of a reassuring smile moved ever so lightly his pale lips, and he made an effort to speak. But no sound came from his paralyzed throat.

MacCarthy kneeled at his side. His eyes were moist, but with a desperate effort he forced a calm expression on his face.

"*Sidi Capitaine,* my friend," he stammered, "we foresaw a campaign of a couple of weeks, but we did our job in a few days, and now the squadron has time to spare. Therefore instead of returning straight to Goundam, we shall bring you in the neighborhood of Timbuctoo. Then Attici and a few picked meharistes will carry you to a regular military hospital, where you will recover."

Suddenly he stopped talking. Words of comfort were useless with a man as brave as Latour.

LATOUR'S hands moved weakly. MacCarthy stooped over him in order to make out what he was trying to say from the motion of his lips.

The wind had subsided. The meharistes stood all around, still as statues. In the profound silence, MacCarthy heard Latour's wheezing:

"The iron-banded coiffer . . . in my room . . . everything in it . . . yours. You will find . . . keys . . . in my . . . underbelt."

At that moment, a thunderous volley, followed by a lone shot, drowned his faint whispering.

"Kela has carried through the execution," MacCarthy thought. In his mind's eye he saw the giant sergeant striding firmly toward the fallen Sheikh and firing the *coup de grace* into his head with his revolver.

At that moment, a horrible sound issued from Latour's mouth—a death rattle, choked by the gush of blood.

"*Sidi Capitaine,* my dear tutor and friend!" MacCarthy choked.

For an instant, Latour's eyes opened wide. With a supreme effort, he stilled the wheeze of death in his throat and faintly but clearly breathed: "The coiffer . . . yours . . .?"

"Yes, Capitan Latour," MacCarthy stammered. "I shall take it. And I thank you."

The face of the dying man relaxed. His eyes closed.

MacCarthy stifled a sob. A flurry of tears swam in his eyes. When his vision cleared, he saw Latour's mouth and breast frozen in utter stillness.

THEY placed Latour's body on a flat, rectangular boulder. Four armed meharistes volunteered to mount guard for the night at the four corners of that natural catafalque.

Attici and Kela prevailed on MacCarthy to go and take a few hours of much-needed rest under his tent.

"For the sake of the squadron, Sidi," they said solicitously. "What could we do, besides fighting in our own thoughtless way, if you should become ill and unable to lead us?"

MacCarthy was about to retire when a lookout shouted: "I see three riders, coming from the east!"

"Moussa!" MacCarthy shouted to the acting corporal. "We may get valuable information out of these people. Take four meharistes and round them up!"

A half hour later the meharistes brought in three strangers on camels. The meharistes gruffly ordered the three to get down from their camels and line up before MacCarthy.

"They are three Adzjer," Moussa curtly introduced. "Dasua, a woman; Berzag, her brother; and their servant, Chebel."

MacCarthy stared at Dasua. He saw an oval face with two great pools of black eyes, a tall, shapely body. The pointed tips of her breasts stood up under her soft tunic; the barbaric bracelets covering her arms glittered under the moon.

"A desirable woman, by Allah!" Kela rumbled behind MacCarthy. "But I don't like her brother. He's a true Adzjer Touareg—and there never was peace between his kind and mine."

Like most Adzjer, Berzag was enormously tall. With his black-swathed head and face, he had the appearance of a sinister ghost.

Chabel, the man servant, had, on the contrary, the appearance of an average Imrad, or half-caste Touareg—just above the medium size, without any outstanding bodily feature.

"Salamou r'likoum!" the woman greeted MacCarthy, bringing her hand to breast and mouth. "We have been riding for several moons. We are hungry and thirsty. Help us, Sidi, and Allah shall repay you."

"What's your full name?"

"Dasua oult Mehmed!"

"Oult—daughter of—Mehmed! Half Arab."

"Yes, Sidi. Like most Adzjer, my father had Arabian blood in his veins."

MacCarthy hesitated a moment. He had no liking for the Adzjer Touaregs, and no desire to have the woman in his camp overnight, but to send away a needy traveler begging help is a grievous sin in the eyes of Allah, according to the unwritten law of the Sahara.

To gain time he asked, "Are you Adzjer on the march?"

The woman replied promptly, "No, *Sidi.* Only my brother and I are traveling as far as the Faguibine Lake."

He said gruffly, "You shall be given food and water, and you shall rest in my camp for the night."

"Let me take care of them, Sidi," Attici promptly volunteered, and MacCarthy understood that the quick-witted Attici didn't trust the Adzjer, and intended to keep an eye on them as long as they were in the camp.

Then MacCarthy went to his tent and threw himself on the pile of saddle blankets, making up the makeshift couch prepared for him. Almost instantly he drifted into a deep slumber.

IT was the unmistakable sound of steel clanging on steel that awakened him a few hours later. He sprang up and leaped out of the tent. A few strides brought him to the place where Kela and Attici, surrounded by a ring of meharistes, circled round and round each other, clutching their naked swords.

MacCarthy caught a glimpse of Dasua, the Adzjer woman. Her head was thrown back proudly and the moonlight, bright as day, threw a silvery sheen on her beautiful features and on the cruel sneer curling her mouth. Arms akimbo, her companions were a picture of haughty disdain.

MacCarthy roared:

"Attici, stop! Put your sword in the scabbard instantly, Kela!"

Reluctantly, his two acting-sergeants moved apart. But, his eyes still closely following every motion of his adversary, Attici growled:

"There was a challenge. It is an affair of honor. Don't interfere, Sidi!"

"How dare you answer back!" Mac-

Carthy thundered. "And you, Kela! Put your sword down, miserable one!"

"I shall!" Kela raved. "But I demand my freedom. And Attici'll do the same, if he hasn't turned into a cowardly sand lizard. Then we'll settle our quarrel!"

MacCarthy thought swiftly. Affairs of honor among the Touaregs were extremely important in their eyes. Even a superior officer had no right to stop them. He held up his hand.

"Before fighting," he said, "you should have told me the cause of your quarrel."

There was a moment of breathless silence. Then a mehariste said:

"Warriors must always tell their chief what sends them at each other's throat. Kela and Attici broke this rule!"

A chorus of approving murmurs followed his assertion.

"Sidi, I beg your forgiveness," Kela hastened to rumble. "But I sought the company of this woman Dasua and she had kind words for me. The night air was soft. Looking at the shining face of the moon, I asked her if she wanted to enter the relationship of marriage with me—if she thought, as I did, that love was beginning to bind us.

"At that point Attici came near us . . . and suddenly Dasua proffered him her bracelet of stone, the lover's token. . . ."

"And so," snarled MacCarthy, "you let the woman make fools of you both and you challenged Attici."

"He did worse, by Allah!" Attici exclaimed; "he pulled my veil down and struck my bare face. Then he grasped a handful of gravel and threw it at my head."

According to the Touareg code, only blood could rinse these most dishonoring of all insults. MacCarthy roared: "You shall fight to your heart's content—but not here. Upon our return to the fort your quarrel is your own. But until we are out of the enemy's country it is my own."

"You are the chief. We shall do as you say," Attici replied. "And if the Adzjer . . ."

"Argh!" a savage voice interrupted. "Who is this Rumi who treats us like dust under his feet?"

Tall and sinister, Berzag, Dasua's brother, crossed the empty space in the circle formed by the meharistes and insolently came to a stop before MacCarthy.

"You are a chief among your men!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "But I, Berzag, I dare you to fight me man to man! Now order your men to kill me, or send me away and show yourself for the coward that you are!"

In a flash, MacCarthy realized that like Dasua the lanky Adzjer warrior was following out the lines of a prearranged plan, aiming to eliminate or discredit the leaders of the squadron.

"Inshallah, you heard me? Is your tongue knotted by fear?" Berzag goaded.

Several meharistes sprang forward, unsheathing their swords. Each of them would have gladly taken up the quarrel for his beloved Sidi Lieutenant. But MacCarthy waved them back, snarling, "I'm the one who shall fight and kill this Adzjer when the moment comes! Has any man a sword to lend his lieutenant?"

A dozen meharistes hastily proffered their blades.

MacCARTHY stepped into the open space ringed by his men and calculatingly stared at the Adzjer. He saw a long-armed man, over six feet tall, with a veiled face as thin and keen as the blade of an ax. Then Berzag's sword flashed dully under the cold beams of the moon.

MacCarthy quickly parried, but the impact of the Adzjer's blade on his own sent a numbing shiver up the muscles of his arm.

"The accursed cutthroat is thin, but he's got tendons and muscles like steel cables," MacCarthy thought.

Berzag had no knowledge of orthodox fencing, but his whirlwind attack of rapid lunges and slashes constituted in itself an impenetrable wall of steel. The nimbleness of his legs, however, was his principal asset. He could cover more than two yards with a leap, and his ability to change stance at lightning speed without losing his balance was amazing.

On top of that, he was a seasoned duelist. He knew how to use his longer reach, and never gave MacCarthy a chance to break through his guard with a counter stroke. For almost a quarter of an hour he drove round and round MacCarthy, who was fatigued after three days of endless riding and running combats.

Finally, out of sheer desperation, MacCarthy attempted a counter attack and nearly got his head chopped off by a terrific stroke. He could hear the meharistes beginning to whisper anxiously that the legs of their lieutenant were beginning to cave under him.

Berzag sensed a kill and laughed raucously. His attacks increased in strength and rapidity, his footwork became dazzling.

"Watch out, in Allah's name!" Moussa shrieked, noticing that MacCarthy had lost his balance in parrying a downward stroke.

That warning excited the Adzjer, who lunged like a striking snake, but with a sudden shift MacCarthy parried fast and low—then his blade leaped and struck the shoulder of Berzag, who howled and sprang back—but not quick enough to keep MacCarthy's sword from pinking his neck.

An obscene curse croaked out of Berzag's mouth. Losing his head, he charged recklessly. But MacCarthy parried coolly, knocking his sword aside, and stabbed him through. Then seeing that Berzag was collapsing he stepped back, lowering his weapon.

The meharistes cheered wildly. However, MacCarthy had shot his bolt. For the next few minutes he stood there propped on his sword, breathing hard.

When his strength returned, he straightened his shoulders and roared:

"Dasua! Come here!"

The Adzjer walked up to him brazenly, brazenly throwing back the folds of her cape. In the vivid radiance of the African moon, MacCarthy could see how alluring was her magnificent body, fully revealed by her soft tunic.

"What do you want from me, *Sidi?*" Not a single tremor of her voice, not a single glance disclosed the slightest concern for the man, supposedly her brother, who was at this moment breathing his last. Instead, her sensuous moth smiled. Her big black eyes scanned MacCarthy caressingly from head to foot.

For a moment, the Lieutenant remained speechless. He remembered Kela's words, at the moment of her arrival in the camp —"*Sidi* Lieutenant, here's a most desirable woman, by Allah!"—and he fully understood why the Kela and Attici had fought for the privilege of possessing her. . . .

But then his soldier's mind took command.

"I know your kind!" he snapped. "You desert robbers are all alike. You are a spy, sent here to ferret out our plans. But enough of it! Which is the name of the rogue who sent you?"

Dasua brought her slender hands to her breast.

"Sidi!" she cried. "Are the evil spirits of the night driving you insane? Nobody told me to come to you!"

"Then," MacCarthy replied promptly, "swear on the Koran that you are telling the truth."

At the mere mention of the oath sending to eternal damnation all Moslems who use it falsely, a sudden change took place in Dasua. Her beautiful face became a snarling mask. Her body arched like that of a cornered beast ready to spring.

"I won't!" she shouted wildly. "Why should I mention Allah's sacred name to please an infidel? Spawn of Sheitan . . .!"

"Wench!" MacCarthy snarled. "I cut the wings of your lies! Enough! I should place you before a firing squad, but I don't wish the blood of a woman on my conscience. Go, quickly, into the desert like the despised vulture you are. Quickly, I say, before I repent of my weakness."

With a supreme effort, Dasua mustered her burning fury.

"But it is not yet dawn . . ." she choked. "We need rest desperately. . . ."

"To give you time to carry your mission of destruction to the end!" MacCarthy said coldly. Then his fists knotted, a thunderous shout came out of his throat: "If you delay just five minutes, I'll place you before a firing squad! Call your beast of a tribesman, saddle your mehara and go! Do you hear me, wench? Go, or I shall personally give the order to fire on you!"

Dasua stared at him fixedly. Suddenly, with a lightning-like movement, she unsheathed the poniard strapped to her left forearm and leaped on him. A mehariste who had noiselessly placed himself behind her, foreseeing just such a move, threw the barrel of his rifle between her legs.

Dasua fell, grinding her face in the sand.

"Get up and go!" MacCarthy roared at the top of his lungs.

This time Dasua went without raising any more objections.

III

THE funeral of Captain Latour took place early in the morning.

The other Touareg dead had been interred in the style of their race, with their knees bent under their chins, in graves topped by stone slabs carved with their names in Tifinhar characters and surrounded by a ring of rocks open toward the east. However, over Latour's grave a rough cross carved out of a boulder was placed.

Then a mehariste who was also one of the rare Koranic students of his people recited the first Fatah and the Moslem prayers of the dead, and MacCarthy commanded the final volley. And with that plain ritual, topping the Moslem burials and the Christian one, the hard-fighting barbarians and Latour, the disillusioned officer, ceased to belong to the world of the living and became memories of the desert and the hamada.

MACCARTHY returned to his tent. He was exhausted but also so nerve-racked that sleep was out of the question. He stared vacantly at the eddies of heat haze shimmering past the open flap of the tent and impersonally, as if he were mulling over the fate of a stranger, he wondered what the future had in store for him, left in command as he was of a squadron of semi-wild tribesmen with only a sergeant, Keradj, and a willing but not overbright corporal, Moussa, as assistants.

A melancholy pall crushed his soul, paralyzed his thinking faculties. For a fleeting moment, he was stirred by the memory of the cameo-like features of Felicia Dennison but even the vision of the lovely American girl soon faded as deadly lassitude drugged his mind.

Mechanically he lighted a cigarette, but after a few puffs he threw it at a scorpion crawling in the triangle of sun-baked ground under the opening of the tent. For the smoke bitterly stung his throat and he found no pleasure whatsoever in it.

Then he heard the thumping of a camel's hoofs, a clamor of voices.

"A fool mehari trying to break loose," he shrugged, when a dark shape blotted the entrance of the tent.

"Sala mou r'likoum, Sidi," a tired voice rasped.

MacCarthy lifted his head and saw Tegama, one of the meharistes he had left in Goundam. Something extraordinary must have occurred, he knew, to bring the Touareg hurrying after the column.

"Has anything happened at the Post?" he demanded.

"Nothing as yet," Tegama panted. "But the jungle negroes are marching against it. And no help can reach it from the east because, Sidi—*Timbuctoo has fallen to the rebel Touareg.*" Then his knees caved in and he fell headlong into the sand.

"He left the fort with three racing mehara. Two of them have died under him," explained Moussa, as he bent to pick Tegama up. "For two days and two nights he has ridden ceaselessly on our trail, without taking an instant's rest to eat or sleep."

MacCarthy prepared at once to return to the threatened Fort. First, there were the wounded, and the Berabich captive to be disposed of. MacCarthy offered freedom to the latter on condition that they would swear on the Koran to refrain from attacking any white-officered troops for a year. They did this gladly and were released with water skins, food supplies and some of the seized camels. The wounded meharistes, on the contrary, rode on with the squadron until they reached Touareg territory. There MacCarthy reminded them that they were bound to die at the hands of their revolting fellow tribesmen, if they remained behind as incapacitated soldiers, and ordered them to proffer their resignation. Then, waving away their fervent thanks and blessing he led the remainder of his force toward the doom that was closing in on Goundam.

TWO days later, they were close to their destination when the wind brought to them the unmistakable sound of firing guns. MacCarthy ordered a halt, sent out patrols.

Eventually the scouts returned, reporting a fierce fight raged at the gate of the surrounded fort, and that there was a strong party of Mopti warriors in ambush

in the gorge leading to Goundam from the north.

"Did the negroes see you?" MacCarthy asked slyly. He knew the answer.

A chorus of scornful laughter answered him. The idea that dull-witted jungle blacks could detect the stalking Touareg appealed to the meharistes' sense of humor.

"Perhaps we can reach the esplanade below the Post by a roundabout route," Moussa remarked to his officer, "but once in the fort only the angels of Allah and their winged horses could drag us out of it alive."

"True," MacCarthy nodded. "But I cannot ride away, leaving the garrison to the Mopti and the Farimake." His glance scanned the ranks of the waiting meharistes broodingly.

After a moment he shouted "Soldiers, the odds are too great! If there are any among you who want to leave, they can do so now and consider themselves honorably discharged." Then he lighted a cigarette and squinted at the sky through the dancing eddies of heat haze.

Only a wavelet—a mere fleecy speck—drifting in that borderless immensity moved.

"Perhaps," MacCarthy mused, "something like that will carry my soul to eternity before the day is over." He threw away the cigarette stump and scanned the rows of light-pelted racing camels. The blue-clad Touaregs stared straight ahead. "Just as I expected," MacCarthy muttered. "None of them took advantage of my permission."

LESS than an hour later, the squadron reached the plain surrounding the fort without meeting opposition.

From that point on, though, there was not a moment to lose. MacCarthy urged his mount on, first to a gallop, then to a break-neck charge. Less than a minute later he was crashing at the head of the head of the squadron into the thick mob of howling blacks at the forts gates.

The meharistes fired from the saddle, struck at top speed with their iron spears. Every one of their blows found a mark, but far more effective proved the battering rams of destruction which were the catapulting camels. The ferocious bites of their big teeth, and their wild kicking in all directions scattered the untrained, stinking negroes in all directions.

After a brief skirmish, the squadron rode down a last cluster of shrieking tribesmen and galloped through the broken portals of the fort.

In that moment, MacCarthy had a fleeting vision of Senegalese Tirailleurs, Legionnaires and naked negroes heaped on the ground in a tangled mass of twisted bodies and jutting limbs. Just inside of the portals he had a glimpse of Domicelli, struggling in the huge arms of a black giant with muscles bulging like knobs of polished ebony. Then Domicelli's head jerked back, and MacCarthy saw that blood was pouring out of his mouth.

MacCarthy was trying to get to his help when he felt his camel collapsing under him. He realized that the poor beast had been struck by a bullet, tried to leap out of the saddle—and could do nothing of the sort. His left side was paralyzed.

He was wondering if it had been the knock of a war-club or the more dangerous slash of a battle ax which had crippled him when a terrific blow struck his head. Limply he crashed down in a heap on top of his collapsing camel.

MACCARTHY recovered his senses in a round room full of wounded lying on a spread of blood-soaked straw. The first sight that confronted him was that of Moussa without face veil, with a bandage around his head and his long, wavy Touareg scalplock hanging out of it. Another bigger and gory bandage encased the powerful torso of the mehariste corporal. His flat stomach heaved with the agony of his breathing, and shivers shook the corded muscles of his naked arms and legs.

Slowly, MacCarthy's surprise at not finding himself in the infirmary of the fort gave way to recognition. He was in the top-room of the watch-tower; and that meant that the negroes had captured most of the fort.

He attempted to pull himself up in a sitting position, but his head felt as if it were bursting asunder. Gritting his teeth, he lifted his hand and slid his fingers over a turban-like bandage.

"You have been unconscious for two solid hours, but in another one you'll be on your feet. It was just a glancing bullet, which carved a furrow in your scalp but didn't graze the bone beneath. We sterilized your wound with the last tumblerful of cognac, Sidi."

MacCarthy looked up and saw the long, pointed chin and square nose of Martel, the Corporal of the Medical Corps in charge of the infirmary.

"How many able-bodied men have we left?" MacCarthy asked.

"Thirty-five meharistes, six Legionnaires and two Senegalese," Martel sighed, wiping his hands on his blood-stained duck trousers.

"Not so good! Is Keradj still alive?"

Martel, who had studied medicine and surgery at the University of Algiers for three years, grinned tiredly.

"The big camel has six wounds on his body, each of which would put me down for keeps. But he doesn't even feel them."

"It takes a lot to put a Targui out of the run. But the other men in this room? How are they, Doctor?"

"All desperate cases. You know what hand to hand fighting is in this part of the world. Who goes down gets stabbed a few more times."

MacCarthy glanced sadly at the unconscious Moussa and at the other wounded all around. Then he rasped:

"Tell me what happened here."

"Mais surement!"

Martel sat down at his side and began:

"Some forty black Tirailleurs, survivors of the massacred garrisons of the Mopti territory who had made common cause with the jungle negroes, were the ones who put the skids under us. Our own Tirailleur section was on duty—and their *esprit de corps* was their undoing. They saw the deserters coming in an orderly column and thought that they were reinforcements. Sergeant Boussonke strolled to the open gate to greet their commander—and got a bayonet stroke in his guts.

"After that, the newcomers promptly rushed the machine-gun emplacements on the walls. They had hand grenades and knew how to use them. Our heavy machine guns were wrecked and most of our Tirailleurs dead when Domicelli and Keradj rushed out with their Legionnaires and meharistes. But the treacherous Tirailleurs blew up the portals of the port before they could get what was coming to them.

"There were no machine guns when the jungle hordes swarmed all over the esplanade. It was messy fighting. As long as our men had hand grenades to throw, and chemical liquid for our flame throwers, the attacks were easily broken. But thereafter it was all point-blank rifle firing and cold steel work. For every naked negro who fell, a hundred took his place. Thus the moment arrived when even the radio operators, the clerks and my orderlies had to do their part.

"The arrival of your squadron has given us survivors a new lease on life—it gave us a chance to carry here our wounded, a few ammunition cases and some water skins and bags of reserve rations. This tower can hold out indefinitely. At least, as long as the water and ammunition last." Martel's eyes grew large and staring. "The worst of it all is, Lieutenant, that since Timbuctoo has fallen, no help can ever come!"

LATE in the afternoon MacCarthy climbed on the platform.

The sentry walks and the courtyard beneath were heaped with dead . . . deserted of all living beings. The soldiers couldn't put foot on them without being submerged by another mass attack, but the marksmanship of the six Legionnaires and two Tirailleurs on the watch-tower kept all negroes away from them. Now and then a woolly head popped out of the windows of the invaded barracks and storerooms, and, more often than not, was shattered by a well-aimed bullet.

But a labyrinth of trenches had been dug all over the surrounding plain. An uninterrupted savage howling came from them and from the broken ground beyond.

"Sidi," Keradj shilled. "From tomorrow on it will be hard to fight in the stink arising from so many rotting bodies."

But MacCarthy was thinking that there was no reason of holding on in that lone tower of a third-rate fort lost in the African wilderness. Not when the French Colonial Empire was in dissolution.

Grasping the megaphone usually used by the lookout, he shouted in the choppy

Farimake language that he wanted to hold a parley with Ugadou and the other chiefs of the besiegers.

"What are your plans, *Sidi?*" Keradj asked when he was through.

"I'll ask for all our camels. For a temporary retreat of the savages to give us time to clear out with the wounded."

"Do you think, *Sidi,* that the hyena, Ugadou, will accept your conditions?"

"Why not? That'll give him a chance of getting possession of the fort without suffering additional losses."

"But I don't see why Ugadou should bother to parley, when he has just to squat on his hams, out of range of our rifles, and wait for us to starve to death."

"Well said! But you are wrong just the same, blessed be our luck!" MacCarthy smiled, because with his shoulders thrown back and his head high a towering negro was strutting out of a trench, holding aloft a dirty-white rag fastened to a spear.

The next instant MacCarthy's jaw sagged with amazement. Most of the tribesmen coming after the flag of truce were Arabs, and most conspicuous of all was Dasua, the treacherous Adzjer beauty, and the mysterious graybeard with a green turban, previously noticed by MacCarthy during the combats against the Berabich.

When they stood right below the watch-tower, MacCarthy noticed once more how blood-stirring Dasua's beauty was.

Smooth was her forehead, framed by her silky, curly hair. Her eyebrows were two slender black arches over her long-lashed, shiny black eyes, slightly slanting at the corners. Her smooth skin had a saffron coloring, which went very well with the pomegranate red of her shapely lips and the pearly white of her teeth.

"Inshallah! I would like to take that woman for my own!" Keradj shrilled into MacCarthy's ear. But MacCarthy was not listening. The face of the green-turbaned graybeard had captured all his attention.

Serene, dignified, it had a look of uncommon intelligence, but not of that peculiar slyness and hatred which twists the features of most Arabs when dealing with enemies. And in his eyes, turned toward the platform topping the watch-tower, there was pity and also a humorous twinkle.

MacCarthy glanced next at the attire of the unusual Arab and noticed that a pair of field-glasses hung from his neck and a map-folder from his side. His belt was also a modern one, for it supported an up-to-date automatic instead of the customary brace of daggers and silver-mounted pistols.

He wasn't in any hurry to speak, the old fellow. Cocking his head sideways, he made an imperceptible signal to the Adzjer girl.

"Bismillaten, O Rumi leader who cast me off in the desert," Dasua mockingly greeted MacCarthy. Her small hands fluttered in his direction, looking very slender because of the heavy rings covering them, and because of her hennaed fingernails.

MacCarthy climbed on an embrasure and stood waist high above two merlons.

"You are wearing the headdress of a true believer. Did you accept the true faith?" Dasua continued, pointing to the white bandage which surrounded his head like a turban. Then her laughter rippled like a silver bell in the thin burning air, and her arms, gleaming with bracelets, made a wide gesture. Her round breasts stood up under her light tunic, her waist loomed very slim and shapely against her blue mantle.

"WHAT a *mujer, por Dios,*" Hurtado, the ranking Legionnaire, exclaimed raucously. His five comrades cheered, waving their kepis and rifles.

That applause displeased the old Arab. He motioned to Dasua to stand back.

"You called us here. What do you want from us?" he called to MacCarthy.

MacCarthy outlined his proposals. But before he was through he knew that he had failed from the contemptuous shaking of the old man's head.

A silence followed punctuated by the moans of the wounded crowded on the floor beneath and by the barkings of the camels which had been placed in a nearby ravine by the negroes.

At length the old man decided:

"Rumi Lieutenant, there's no place where you could safely go. And, besides that, I can accept from you only an unconditional surrender."

"After which the negroes would slaugh-

ter us," MacCarthy suggested coldly.

A kind smile curled the mouth of the old Arab.

"Since the beginning of the wars of the Rumi, and the Moslem," he said slowly, "many cornered *Rumi* warriors recited the words recognizing that there's only one God, Allah, and that Mohammed is his prophet; and they were spared!"

"Does that go also for us?" Legionnaire Hurtado shouted impetuously.

"Yes, as true as my name is Yacub el Magihrari, Sheuyukh of Islam!" the old man replied vibrantly.

Keradj stepped over an embrasure. Like a faceless image of wrath, he stood all blue, powerful and sinister against the brassy glare of the sky. A confused jabbering of negro voices coming from the trenches swelled out into a chaotic clamor at his appearance, for Keradj and his two-handed sword had left an indelible mark in the memory of the Negro insurgents.

"Inshallah!" Keradj snarled. "We, the Touareg meharistes of *Sidi Lieutenant* MacCarthy, we are already of the true faith. Must we accept the grant of our lives from you, O Arabi?"

A sudden transformation took place in the old man's appearance. His serene face became a raging mask, his long beard spread and quivered.

"You, *oulad M'ssaoud,* you, Touareg accursed by Allah," he shouted at the top of his lungs. "All the blood of the Arabi killed by your kind since the dawn of time is among us! You always were beasts of prey, and the curse of my race! And you dare to ask for mercy. . . ."

Instantly, all the Touareg meharistes on the platform became raging maniacs.

"Ask you for pity? No Targui ever lived to beg a favor from a worm of an Arabi! Inshallah! Old goat, one of us is enough to kill in combat all of you Arabi consorting with stinking jungle negroes! *Sidi Lieutenant,* allow us to go out, to take instant revenge for this insult!"

MacCarthy silenced his raving meharistes; then he prevailed with Keradj to come down from his vantage point. When calm was somewhat restored, he waved his hand at the Arabs and the negroes on the plain below.

"Yacub," he announced, "I intended to give this fort up honorably, for the sake of my men. Your conditions—and your hatred against my Touaregs—make any further deal impossible."

Yacub courteously brought his hand to breast and mouth, then he turned about and walked away. Dasua lingered a moment longer. An indescribable expression contracted her sullen face. Suddenly she shouted: *"Maboul! O Rumi* officer, you are crazed!" and, wrapping herself in her mantle she ran after the old man.

At that moment, loud screams rang at the eastern end of the negro array. Suddenly, black warriors jumped out of the trenches, milled, ran in all directions, turned about and clustered around their headmen, who were shouting orders inaudible in the ear-splitting din.

"What's going on? *Vierge de Pilar,* the truce is over, shall we fire on them, Lieutenant?" Hurtado roared.

Suddenly MacCarthy's ears caught a word out of the howling of hundreds of frenzied voices:

"Oulad messaoud!"

"Oulad messaoud! The accursed of Allah, the veiled warriors!"

The scattered shouts were becoming a concerted roar of panic and defiance.

"Keradj!" MacCarthy yelled. "Do you hear also?"

BUT Keradj was already cupping his hands above his eyes, to ward off the beams of the sun. After a while he stretched a long arm toward the east. Following the direction pointed out by his hand, MacCarthy saw what seemed a fast-spreading blue carpet, coming at top speed toward the fort.

A minute later he perceived wave after wave of galloping horses, and, above them, the long ribbons of flame of the gun-barrels, spears and naked swords brandished by their blue-clad riders.

"Sidi," Keradj choked. "You could have bought your life from the Arabs and the negroes by deserting your own veiled warriors, but you did not. And now their kin are coming, by the hundreds, to rescue you and to destroy our enemies!"

By the time the negroes massed on a long line facing the east, the Touaregs were less than six hundred yards

away. Machine guns could not have stopped them at that distance. The ill-aimed guns of the negroes killed or wounded some of them and brought down a few horses, but the Touaregs who came next shifted the weight of their bodies on the saddle, tugged at the reins and streaked right and left of their fallen comrades. And still more squadrons of blue-clad warriors kept on coming from the east. Apparently, there was no end to them.

Only a few score yards separated the Touareg from the negro array when there was a fluctuation of woolly heads and black shoulders, and the battle-line of the jungle warriors broke in spite of the frenzied shouts of their chiefs.

Suddenly, ahead of the charging squadrons, catapulted a spotted horse, bearing a tall Targui who whirled a two-handed sword above his head.

"He's the Amenokal Issouk, Belad's father!" Keradj excitedly shrilled into MacCarthy's ear, when a thunderous battle-cry rent the air:

"Allah Akbar! Allah conquers!"

There was a last bobbing of equine heads, with their flattened ears and bared teeth—a last flying of manes in the wind. Then the breasts of the horses of the Touareg first line crashed into the breaking negro array, tore enormous gaps into it. The second line of galloping Touaregs battered down all negroes who managed to remain on their feet. The following hurricane of horses and blue-clad riders ground the fallen blacks into the blood-soaked soil.

But still ahead of the Touareg fighters galloped Issouk and his bodyguard. Into groups of bewildered negro warriors and against isolated individuals they tore, stabbing, slashing and parrying at top speed the blows aimed at them. Single-handed, they shattered the defenses of the shallow negro trenches before the defeated tribesmen could rally.

Soon the combat became a massacre—a wild game of tag, with negroes running as fast as they were able to, and mounted Touaregs stabbing and slashing after them. In an incredibly short time, the surface of the plain was covered by a layer of black bodies.

The main body of the Touareg Harka gathered around the fort.

MacCarthy stared at the shiny crops of the prancing horses, at their swishing tails, at the lather smeared over the rippling muscles of their necks and breasts. He couldn't make out what the Touaregs intended to do with the fort and the survivors of the garrison. They shouted neither greetings nor threats, and the expression of their faces was completely hidden by the litham veils covering their mouths and chins, and by the khol smeared on their eyelids as a protection against the sun.

At length, right under the watch-tower trotted a Targui wearing a silver-embroidered waistcoat, and mounted on a beautiful black stallion of the Asil Arabian breed. MacCarthy's nervous tension relaxed as the hand of the young chieftain lifted in a salute:

"Salamou r'likoum! Sidi, do you not recognize in me your friend and former sergeant, Belad?"

"Mesalkher!" the Lieutenant replied happily. "You came in our hour of desperate need. May Allah bless you and all your companions!"

"Don't thank us!" Belad laughed. "We are only fighting our own battle by crushing that swine of Ugadou, who dared to pit his power against ours." Belad gestured to the riders beside him. "But my father—and Tarka, the Aouellimminden Amenokal—and Kilgueri, chief of all the Tadmekelet tribes—have plans concerning you. So, come down, let them touch your hand, and after that decide quickly if you want to become their friend or not!"

A FEW minutes later, MacCarthy met the three chieftains of the Touareg forces.

Issouk, in his early fifties but stronger and quicker than a youth of twenty, was all warrior. Kilgueri, extremely tall, seemed still taller on account of his gauntness. He scanned MacCarthy from head to foot with his piercing yellow eyes and left all the talking to the burly Tarka, the Amenokal of the redoubtable Aouellimminden, who bristled with tremendous energy.

"It is this way," he came to the point at once. His jet-black eyes flashed, the butt of his iron spear stabbed the ground at the end of each one of his arguments.

"The French took away our camels and restrained us in a thousand ways because they never ceased to fear us. But now their power has disappeared, like a pailful of water sucked by the sand of a dune. Before the arrival of the French, our fathers ruled in Timbuctoo—and in Timbuctoo we rule again, after conquering the French garrison, after crushing the Songhai, the Haussa, the Peuhls and the Sosso, who foolishly challenged our supremacy. But we need leaders expert in the fighting ways of the Rumis—because we want to bring under our control also the Kountas and the half-breed Touareg of the Air without bleeding our manpower white with too many losses."

His flashing black eyes bored into MacCarthy's fiercely. "Belad told us that your blood isn't French—that you belong to a race which never had a quarrel with ours. He told us also that you are a friend of our veiled people, and the best war-leader of the Niger river country. Therefore we gladly rode over sixty miles in less than two days to save your life; and now we want you to become an Imochar, one of our best warriors; and as soon as there is a vacancy, we shall appoint you chief of a tribe."

Seeing that MacCarthy hesitated, Belad added hastily:

"*Sidi Lieutenant,* put the machine that talks over the wind to work. Find out by yourself that your oath of duty to the French Government is binding no more. The French flag doesn't fly any longer over any part of the Niger river basin, and of the lands north and south of it. Thereafter, convinced that it would be useless for you to keep faith with the dead, join us out of your free will. And ask from us any favor you wish. It shall be granted!"

MacCarthy's thoughts suddenly went to the European civilians living in Timbuctoo, to the wives and children of the functionaries and officers of its garrison.

"If the French power in Tropical Africa is broken, I shall join you!" he replied vibrantly. "But only on condition that you set free your Rumi prisoners and send them with an escort to the faraway lands where the English rule."

An angry growl issued from Tarka's throat. His strong fist brought the point of his spear down, at a level with MacCarthy's breast.

"Prisoners are slaves!" he raged. "Shall we give up scores of Rumis who can serve us for the sake of you, of a single man who's not a true believer?"

The muscles of his arm tensed, his spear shot forward. But the lanky Kilgueri quickly sprang on him, dragged him back before he could stab MacCarthy through.

Then Issouk shouted:

"What good are Rumi prisoners to us? They can't work under the hot sun like *barratins,* and we couldn't trust them with any directing position, because they would turn against us at the first chance. And their women . . . some of them are beautiful; but have we not plenty of beautiful women among our Targuias?

"As far as I'm concerned, I shall gladly release my Rumi prisoners to get the allegiance of this man, because we Touaregs know that his mind is as clever as his arm is strong—and because we can trust his given word. You shall do the same, Tarka, if you let your wisdom get the best of your fury."

"And, what's more!" added Belad, who had learned a lot during his years of duty with the squadron—"all the non-French Rumi shall know of our mercy. They'll like us for it and, in the future, they'll sell us guns, all the things that we don't have and that we need."

Tarka ceased struggling in Kilgueri's grasp. Gradually, a shrewd gleam flashed in his eyes and he looked on MacCarthy with greater respect.

"I can't hate you for protecting your own kind," he conceded finally. "Go to your machine that speaks to the wind. On your return, I shall let you know what my decision is."

PROBABLY because the Arabian master-mind Yacub had willed so for his own ends, the negroes had left the radio-room untouched. One of the two radio-operators had been slain, but Kirilenko, the veteran Russian Legionnaire, had suffered only a broken leg. It was easy to carry him to his old armchair of unpainted wood and antelope's hide before his apparatus.

Most of the stations which Kirilenko called failed to answer. Those which did

transmitted the replies of native operators who had made common cause with victorious rebel chieftains.

Belad had told the truth. Nothing remained to MacCarthy but to make his terms with the Touareg chiefs.

He found them in the courtyard, which had been cleared of all corpses by captured jungle negroes, pressed into work against their will by their Touareg conquerors.

MacCarthy was tense and by no means sure of himself when he walked up to Tarka. But, to his utter surprise, the redoubtable chief of chiefs of the Aouellimminden offered him his hand at once.

"I learned from Keradj and some other meharistes that for their sake you refused the offer of freedom and life made to you by Ugadou and by the Arabs who were with him. *Inshallah!* I'm ashamed for having haggled with a man of great honor like you over the Rumis whom we caught in Timbuctoo! But now, besides sending them free to the territories of the Inglis, I shall give them all their belongings, loads of food and gifts!"

In a pitch of emotional outburst Tarka shook from head to foot. He was excessive in all his feelings and reactions, and without the least self-control; nearly as disconcerting in his remorse and revulsion to friendliness as he had been in the fit of murderous rage with which he had originally met MacCarthy's proposal.

The Lieutenant, however, knew how to deal with Touaregs. Without saying a word, he laid his hand on the sinewy hand proffered palm upward, and with that simple gesture the deal was struck and he became an Imochar—one of the Imaggaren, of the bravest of the braves and recognized leaders of the Touareg warriors of the Niger country.

THE next day Issouk, Kilgueri and Tarka left with most of their followers for Timbuctoo. With them went the Legionnaires, the hale on horseback, the wounded in litters strapped to the sides of the camels of the dissolved *mehariste* squadron, which had been rescued from the negroes.

The only happy European in that party was Martel. No wearisome journey to English Nigeria, no misery of unemployment thereafter were in store for him. The triumvirate of Touareg chiefs had learned of his skill as a *toubib*—a doctor—from Belad and had hired him at an enormous salary.

"They are good for it," Martel told MacCarthy. "They found plenty of gold and currency in the banks and in the coffers of the Residency of Timbuctoo. And they control all the trade of the Niger river. Just imagine, Lieutenant, I'm going to get in a single year more than ten years of toil in a French practice could put together for me. And, in the present troubled times, you know how difficult it would be for me to establish myself as a practicing physician in France!"

MacCarthy's congratulations were wholehearted, but there was no happiness in the smile which he forced to his lips.

He had chosen to remain with Belad, who had been appointed chief of the Goundam region. For a brief space of days, there would be peace and security. And now that his squadron of *meharistes* had been dissolved, the memory of the last days spent with its founder, Captain Latour, was constantly in his mind. And now, too, that he had time to reflect on the past, his thoughts went to Felicia Dennison.

Was the American girl trudging along forlorn jungle trails at the side of the man she detested? Or had Dennison's safari been ambushed and destroyed? MacCarthy's heart sank when he visualized Felicia's slender body the victim of beasts of prey after the departure of the victorious tribesmen, or her desperation and horror in the capacious hut sheltering the harem of a brutish negro chieftain of the jungle.

When the Touareg calvalcade left, MacCarthy could not master his worry any longer. He took Belad aside and urged him to send scouts to find out what was happening in the jungle country. But Belad bluntly replied:

"Ugadou, Yakub and Dasua got away. But Ugadou lost most of his warriors. Yakub is a Shuyukh, and therefore a high member of the Senusi brotherhood. But what have we to fear from the Senusi? The Ahaggar Touareg, who are not as numerous as we Touareg of the Niger, checked them at the peak of their power, and besides they have not recovered from the disaster that they suffered when the

Italians invaded their headquarters in the oases of Kufrah.

"And Dasua . . . in the hands of a shrewd schemer Dasua can be a dangerous tool. We know all about her, though! We have little to fear from her!"

But MacCarthy's face remained clouded and gradually Belad, with the keen mind of the barbarian trained in the ways of the western men, divined what was upsetting him.

"Perhaps," he chuckled under his face veil, "you are thinking of the beautiful Rumi woman who left the fort a few weeks ago." The desert tribesman's keen eyes studied MacCarthy calmly. "But we can't send Touareg scouts into the jungle, where they would be singled out and ambushed before they had gone a hundred steps."

MacCarthy met Belad's gaze frankly. "My brother, you are right. I cannot ask your Touareg fighters to go with me into the country of Ugadou's negro murderers. But there is a thing I must do. My own people wander now in the midst of terrible dangers, and must be saved from the deadly net that is being spread for their undoing."

Belad's eyes flashed. "May Allah bless you, *Sidi!*" he said vibrantly. "What you say is true. You are hungry for the company of your own people. Then why are you losing time? Go, *Sidi!* And if the Moptis kill you, the Touareg confederation shall hunt them down until the last one is slain. But you shall not die. Allah will not permit it, for your heart is as great as your bravery!"

MacCarthy turned about to hide his emotion. Then he rasped: "Seven blessings on you, my friend!" Without another word he turned and went to get his jungle kit and rifle.

Thus he began his journey into the jungle.

IV

A WEEK later he stared at his own reflection in a limpid stream and was awed by the figure that he cut. A haunted look of insanity had crept into his eyes during the week he had spent alone in the treacherous jungle. It hadn't been fear so much that had taxed his strength, but fatigue, lack of proper food and especially the tension of continuously watching out for prowling leopards and snakes—for the mighty, crushing boas with spotted hides perfectly matching the coloring of leaves and parasitic growths, and the long, thin and deadly poisonous mambas, which can be hardly seen in the underbrush and have a knack of pursuing a fleeing man at a speed greater than that of a galloping horse.

As if that were not enough, his Touareg clothes had been nearly slashed to shreds by the long thorns and broken boughs. His military boots had lost their smart shape and had become ungainly tubes, caked with mud.

The judgment of the trained colonial soldier and explorer that was his, however, was keener than ever. Accordingly, aware that he had entered Mopti territory, he took care to walk in the middle of shallow streams—after making sure that they were not occupied by crocodiles—and over mounds of fallen leaves and rotting wood. And he carefully avoided all sunny clearings.

Several times he heard the approaching steps of negro warriors and, from various hiding places he watched their antics, secure in the knowledge that they didn't even dream that he was close by.

The morning came when, in coming out of a ravine, he suddenly saw on top of the slope above the back of a Mopti warrior leaning against a boulder.

"The big ape is watching someone . . ." MacCarthy mused, as he took stock of the absorbed look of the Mopti. He wondered if it could possibly be the Dennison caravan. According to his calculations, they ought to be about here by this time.

MacCarthy had lived for years among the Touareg and had acquired their uncanny skill of reaching unsuspecting enemies and dispatching them with a quick stab. But his instincts rebelled at the idea of killing a human being without giving him a chance of fighting back.

At last he decided to climb up to the Mopti, to prod his shoulders with the point of his sword and command him to surrender, and then to pump him for information. Strapping his rifle across his shoulders, he unsheathed his sword and carefully crept up the slope.

Everything went well until less than two yards separated him from the Mopti. He moved a step forward—and a dry twig snapped under his foot.

That crackling sound was enough to send the Mopti into a whirlwind of action. Fast as lightning he grasped his spear, turned about and stabbed. But quicker than his spear point was MacCarthy's sword. Like a darting tongue of live flame, it parried and struck. Run through the neck, the Mopti fell backward on the boulder, then slid down in a heap, a gusher of blood spurting out of his mouth and the deadly wound simultaneously.

MacCarthy left him where he had fallen, stared above the boulder and saw that his guess had been right. Some two hundred yards below the Dennison caravan crawled steadily, following a natural path of flat ground.

A dozen attendants, armed with rifles, acted as a vanguard. Then came Dennison, four additional riflemen, and two giant black porters shouldering a long pole, from which hung a hammock in which Felicia lay. MacCarthy's teeth clenched hard as he noticed her dispirited and emaciated appearance.

The other porters followed in a long, straggling file. Algerian Arabs with rifles in the crook of their arms walked right and left of the disorderly column. MacCarthy's experienced eyes observed the lack of contact between porter and porter, the absence of chiefs of squads.

"A surprise attack," he reflected, "would throw that mob into wild confusion. It's not a bad thing I happened along."

Over the boulder he leaped, shouting a friendly call. But, aware that in his ragged attire he was unrecognizable from a distance, he came down slope with his right hand lifted in sign of peace.

THE effect of his appearance was extraordinary. Guards and porters alike stopped in their tracks and began jabbering excitedly. Dennison and his bodyguards strode to meet him, holding their guns at the ready. At that moment Felicia Dennison screamed:

"Lieutenant MacCarthy! Heavens, what has happened to you?"

MacCarthy felt suddenly that he was getting an ample reward for the dangers and hardships encountered for her sake.

However, the very mention of his name acted like a red cloth waved before a bull, as far as Dennison was concerned.

"So," he snarled icily, "we meet again. Lieutenant MacCarthy, I believe! What is a lieutenant of the Camel Corps doing here, without his soldiers?"

"Send your men back," MacCarthy retorted. "I have some important things to tell you—in privacy."

"I don't understand what you are after," Dennison replied suspiciously. "Is there an official order behind your mission or are you merely poking your nose where you are not wanted?"

"I can assure you that I came here because I had to," MacCarthy said coldly.

Shrugging, Dennison motioned his men to step back. Then he joined MacCarthy under the shade of a flat-topped thorn tree. He said nastily:

"Did Captain Latour order the filthy disguise you have on?"

"Latour is dead," MacCarthy said in an icy voice. Then, with military conciseness and precision, he related what had happened around Goundam, and among the Moptis, since the departure of the caravan from the fort.

Dennison listened without interrupting, without moving a single muscle of his long face. He lighted a cigarette but did not offer one to MacCarthy.

Dennison smoked for a minute, scowling and thinking hard. Finally he threw away the cigarette stump and scowled:

"How can you expect me to believe you? No officer could become a tribesman without turning traitor!"

"Throw overboard your stiff-necked views, and try to understand what I said, damn you!" the exasperated MacCarthy swore. "Man, do you realize in what pickle you are in?"

"I know only that I acted wisely when I left Goundam," Dennison sneered. "Possibly Latour is dead, and the tricolor doesn't fly any longer over Goundam. But your present state tells me that you are just a runaway, an officer who left his men in their hour of danger, and is now stranded. Your cock and bull stories about your pull with the Touaregs, and a negro ambush staged for the destruction of my caravan, are just ruses to chisel

food, money, a chance of mooning around my wife. But do you know what you'll get from me? Just ten minutes to disappear. Return to the hole from which you came, at once! If you don't, I shall order my men to fire on you!"

He turned and shouted to his men:

"MacCarthy is no longer an officer. He says that he joined the Touaregs, and like a marauding Touareg he must be treated. I gave him ten minutes' start. If he's still around at the end of it, shoot him down like a wild dog."

Felicia Dennison jumped out of her hammock and ran forward then. Dennison's face mottled angrily as he hastened toward her. MacCarthy started to follow but Dennison's bodyguards barred his way with their leveled guns.

In desperation, MacCarthy called in Arabic to all the caravan guards:

"Speak sense to your master, and close your ranks for the infidel attack. Beware, the Mopti are close by!"

Only sneering taunts replied to him. The Algerian Arabs, happy at the sight of a Rumi officer fallen from grace, found a genuine pleasure in rejecting his warning and in reviling him.

"Mrs. Dennison, I appeal to you!" MacCarthy said helplessly. "Death or slavery will be your lot if your husband insists in going on."

But Dennison was forcing his wife back into the hammock, angrily shouting down her protests and pleadings. A swarthy Algerian bodyguard snarled wolfishly and dug the muzzle of his rifle into MacCarthy's midriff.

"*Ari, ari!* On your way, fool of a Rumi!" another bodyguard spat, his finger itching on the trigger on his gun.

There was nothing else for MacCarthy to do but to plod helplessly out of the camp. As he reached the bushes topping the slope, a whistling bullet passed high above MacCarthy's head, enforcing his departure. As he ducked out of sight, he was smitten by the realization of the dreadful quagmire into which Dennison had enmeshed his wife and himself.

A desperate resolution formed in MacCarthy's mind. He could not return to his Touaregs, leaving Felicia to the grim destiny that was in store for her. No matter what happened to him, he had to follow the caravan from a distance and do what he could to save the American girl —or die with her.

IN spite of his ostentatious disdain of MacCarthy's warning, Dennison was worried when he strode into the narrow defile through which their trail led. The repeated reproaches of his wife, her morbid fear and a sinister foreboding which he hated to acknowledge had deeply affected him. But he had declared time and again before his men that the passage of Iturri constituted a short cut, that cowardly jungle negroes would never dare to attack a well-armed caravan and he was the kind of a man who would die rather than admit that he was wrong.

The attitude of the caravan attendants added to his preoccupation. They had grinned a "Yes Si!" when he had ordered them to band the porters into a compact, rectangular formation and to line up all around them with ready guns. But, instead, they had left the porters to their devices and were walking in groups, arguing and laughing. Dennison had picked up a few words of Koranic Arabic, but he was unable to understand a single term of their Sabir dialect. He had an uncomfortable feeling, though, that they were making fun of him.

As he reached the central stretch of the passage, he thought that the very careless attitude of his unruly men proved that no real danger could be in the offing. He heaved a sigh of relief and pulled out his cigarette case.

Suddenly a multitude of small birds flew out of the bushes and boulders dotting the adjacent slopes. The shrill jabbering of some invisible monkeys became a din of hysterical simian protests.

Dennison and the Sabir guards saw nothing unusual in these tell-tale signs; they only glanced at the eddies of heat haze dancing all around them and at the brassy reflection of the sun on the summits of the slopes, and carelessly mopped the perspiration running down their faces. But a sudden terror overcame the porters, who were negroes hired in the swamp districts of Mauritania. Throwing down their loads, they grasped their clumsy weapons and loudly begged the Arabian guards to stop and to be on their guard.

Seeing that the nearest guards were scowling at him irresolutely, Dennison was wondering if he ought to order the formation of a square or urge the porters on, overrunning their fears, when like a peal of thunder two deafening volleys crashed right and left of him.

The screams of the wounded sent porters and Arabs alike into a frenzy of panic. Howling at the top of their lungs, they ran right and left bumping into each other, and pointed at the white clouds of burning gun powder of the attackers' muzzle-loaders, which were spreading with alarming speed all over the slopes.

Porters and guards ran pell mell toward the place from which they had come, until the booming of tribal drums, magnified by the walls of the defile, rang before them, and a compact mass of savage negro warriors appeared, barring their escape. Simultaneously, another horde of jungle negroes streamed into the gorge from its southern end. Giant black warriors were pouring out of the adjacent slopes, leaping like charging guns from boulder to boulder, firing, throwing javelins and heavy knives.

A few minutes later, a chaotic hand to hand struggle raged on the bottom of the narrow valley; but, at close quarters, the ferocity of the Mopti warriors and their heavy spears and big battle axes met a poor resistance in the light spears and daggers of the porters and the poorly aimed rifles of the Arabian guards. And all the while the throbbing drums urged Ugadou's warriors on and on. In cadence with them, headmen and witch doctor howled that the moment had come to win, and kill, and splash in the blood of all white men and their servants.

EVENTUALLY only a dozen men kneeled firing all around Dennison and Felicia, who having been placed by her husband into a deep hole of the ground was temporarily safe.

Three glancing bullets had on the contrary seared a bloody furrow into Dennison's side and broken his left arm above the wrist. Unable to reload his rifle, he had thrown it away. He held his automatic in his right hand when the Mopti closed in on his handful of defenders from every side.

In that supreme instant, Dennison regretted agonizingly all that he had done to MacCarthy. Down on his back, with rough fingers tearing his hair off his scalp, with ham-like hands squeezing his throat and a big black knee grinding into his stomach, he fired his last bullet into a snarling black tattooed face, then struck out wildly with his empty automatic.

He broke the jaw of the giant who was strangling him and threw him off. But, as he attempted to pull himself up, he was stabbed through and pinned to the ground by three long spear blades. In an agony of pain, with the mist of death already shading his eyes, he caught a glimpse of a flashing, enormous blade. Then the decending battle ax crushed his skull, putting an end to his suffering and to his life.

V

MACCARTHY found it easy to follow the Moptis, who triumphantly marched toward their village without any precautions whatsoever. Their endless howling, the steady throbbing of their war drums, the rattling of their gourds filled with pebbles and the raucous blasts of their long trumpets chased away all jungle animals for a radius of several hundred yards around their trail.

Then, when he least expected it, the Mopti main stronghold loomed before him at the end of an esplanade covered with tall grass, and he understood why Ugadou had selected the Iturri gorge for their ambush. It was an ideal place to trap the poorly led caravan, and also near enough to the logical place where to divide the spoils of victory and hold a palaver.

At less than three hundred yards from the village, the lieutenant noticed the beginning of a mounting trail, marked by a rough pole topped by the skull of a leopard. The hillock to which that trail led undoubtedly was the meeting place of a Mopti leopard society. But its members were not likely to leave the village during the approaching night of celebrations and division of booty.

Without a moment's hesitancy MacCarthy climbed, made his way up the hillock, tearing his way through a succession of thick bushes. When he reached the summit, he saw with intense satisfaction

that Ugadou's village was close to the sheer wall of rocks making up the hillock's outer side.

From his observation point on top of the drop of rocks, the vivid flames of a huge camp fire shot up from the clearing in the middle of Ugadou's village. Thus MacCarthy was able to see everything that was taking place in the Mopti stronghold.

THEY were all there: Felicia Dennison, sitting on a square block, with her head hanging down and a terrified look on her bloodless face. Ugadou, huge as a full grown bull-gorilla and as ugly. The white-bearded Yakub who, near the negro king, seemed puny and fragile. The woman Dasua, brazenly beautiful. This was the temporary headquarters of the unholy alliance of Ugadou, brutal chieftain, and the sly, scheming Yakub and his agent, Dasua.

Yakub was seething with indignation.

"O great stupid water-buffalo!" he lashed at Ugadou. "I impressed on you the fact that I wanted the Mirrican and his wife as valuable hostages. Why did you allow your men to kill him, you wild buffalo with the brain of a scorpion? Why do you refuse to give up his wife?"

"I'm king of the jungle!" Ugadou boomed, beating on his huge chest with an enormous fist. "When you came to me I, Ugadou, I agreed to accept your Senusi people as my allies, but I never promised to recognize them as my masters. We killed the Mirrican because we wanted his blood. I'm keeping the Mirrican *esa* so that it may be said: Ugadou conquered a white leader and took his white wife as one of his mates."

Yakub glared at him as if he were a worm instead of a giant towering above him head and shoulders. Then his thin arm pointed at the woolly headed Moptis sitting all around the huge camp fire.

"Without my advice," he shouted, "what could you do? You were unable to wrest the fort of Goundam from the handful of soldiers who defended it. You were routed by the Touareg. I told you how to attack the caravan. Alone, using your own pitiful judgment, you would have failed even in that easy undertaking."

Ugadou's narrow forehead almost disappeared in a scowl that brought the roots of his kinky, greased hair almost on top of his bushy eyebrows.

"I'm not to blame if the Touareg defeated my people!" he boomed. "You told them what to do in Goundam. . . . I, and only I, led them in the gorge of Iturri, where nothing could stand before me!"

With growing satisfaction Ugadou fixed the enormous muscles of his long arms. But even he was amazed by the effect of his short speech. For witch doctors and headmen were seizing on it, and angrily cursing Yakub. The warriors were arising, and their concerted mumbling was louder than the breath of a hurricane. The Mopti negresses, called by the clamor, ran out of the huts. Seeing what was happening, they gave free expression to their instinctive hatred for Dasua and Felicia Dennison alike. They were white and comely, and the object of an attention which they, the Mopti negresses, could never hope to stir.

From his vantage point MacCarthy saw Felicia drooping. Dasua, instead, jerked her head back arrogantly, and flashed a disdainful smile at the enraged jungle negroes.

The white-bearded headman yelled: "Stop the bawlings of your Mopti dogs! At once! Or I'll call the curse of Allah on you."

But it was too late. Ugadou had tasted the fruits of victory, of supreme command. Suddenly he lashed out with his mighty arm. Yakub went tumbling head over heels.

The Shuyukh lifted himself up almost instantly but with his left arm broken, twisted at an unnatural angle. There was a look of agony on his face, and his pale lips were tightly clamped to stifle the screams surging in his throat.

Suddenly a young negro warrior whipped a dagger out of his sash and leaped on Yakub. Then a swarm of Moptis pounced. There was a flurry of black arms, a lurid sweep of naked blades, gleaming red in the scarlet glow of the camp fire. The heap of murderous jungle negroes opened, slunk back, leaving at Ugadou's feet a hacked, bleeding lump of flesh and bones which had been the body of Yakub, Senusi of the second degree and Holy Mrbet.

Not a single twitch of fear contracted

Dasua's beautiful face. Her voice was steady as she exclaimed:

"And now, O Ugadou, beware of the wrath of Allah!"

Ugadou's hideous face grimaced at her. "Go to the hut of the *esa*, the white woman, desert wench," he thundered, jerking back his massive head and puffing his enormous breast. "You will be her servant and prepare her to become my slave!"

Dasua snarled: "I will do as you say. But beware, Ugadou! You have killed a Marabout, a Holy Man!"

From his vantage point MacCarthy saw Dasua going slowly to Felicia Dennison and arousing the dazed white girl by shaking her. Then the two women walked slowly to a hut close to the western side of the stockade.

As a proof of his power, Ugadou stuck his big sprawling feet into Yakub's gore. For a moment he stood thus, proudly basking into the admiring murmurs of his tribesmen. Then he boomed:

"Bring all the booty here. I want to select my share, and divide among you what remains!"

An uproar of joyous shouts rent the air. Carrying all the camp supplies of the slain Dennison, and all the reserve foods and barter-goods of his destroyed caravan, a multitude of Moptis hastened to the clearing in the middle of the village, and all their fellow tribesmen crowded after them.

A DARING plan formed in MacCarthy's mind. Forgetting the menace represented by the roving beasts of prey in the darkness, he came down from the hillock and made his way to the western side of the stockade.

A half hour later, y means of stealthy maneuvering, he reached its foot and saw with infinite satisfaction that the tree trunks with which it had been built were studded with knots and stumps of branches. He pulled off his boots, smeared his legs up to the knees with black mud and slung his rifle and his sword across his shoulders.

As he had foreseen, no lookouts and guards watched that far flung part of Ugadou's fortified village. The Moptis certain that no enemies were in the neighborhood and the gaudy celebration which went with the partition of the spoils had brought all the villagers in the central clearing.

Thus the moment came when MacCarthy came down from the inner part of the stockade and sought the hut in which Dasua and Felicia Dennison were imprisoned.

He had identified it well enough from the top of the hillock of the leopard men. When he located it now, he was worried for several instants by the guttural jabbering in Farimake dialect of the negro porters guarding its entrance. An outcry from them would mark his end.

However, torn as they were, his lack face cloth and the black Targui tunic of Targui warrior blended perfectly with the darkness. Thus he was just a shadow of the night when he kneeled against the rear of Dasua's hut and began furrowing into the dry mud and branches of which it was made.

He had carved a hole big enough to stick his head in, when he heard a rustling sound within and Dasua's voice, snarling in Mopti:

"I have a naked dagger in my hand. Leave me alone, jungle hyena in the form of an accursed negro, or I'll kill you."

"Dasua," he answered quickly in Arabic. "I came to barter a life for two lives—for your life and that of the white woman. It is MacCarthy, the *Rumi* soldier. Don't betray me."

An amazed gasp came from inside. A few instants of tense silence passed. MacCarthy was already fearing that the revengeful hatred of the scorned desert woman would prove his undoing, when he heard her whispering:

"For my own sake I'll listen to you. I shall help you break through, because it would be the end of both of us if a Mopti found you where you are now."

Between the two of them they had no difficulty in enlarging the hole so that MacCarthy was eventually able to squeeze through it. Then Dasua's hands sought his arms, forced him into a sitting position. The next instant she was sitting also, close to him, and he could feel all the fire and restlessness of her passionate body seeping through the hot skin of her shoulder into his arm muscles.

MacCarthy whispered urgently: "Where is the white woman?"

Dasua said sullenly: "She is in the other room. Do not attempt to see her, as guards are close by." She gathered suddenly closer to the young officer. "Why are you concerned for this feeble white woman, *Sidi,*" she whispered passionately. "Am I not more beautiful than she? Take me, *Sidi.* We will escape together and find great happiness among my people!"

In the darkness MacCarthy cursed her silently. The desert wench was endangering his whole plan with her sluttish obstinacy. He said slowly, emphasizing each word, "The white *esa* is my own kind. I must save her."

Dasua stirred, she said sharply: "Then I will not aid you, *Rumi* officer.

MacCarthy growled: "Do you realize that if you don't escape, you'll be forced to join Ugadou's harem, or you'll be given by him as a wife to one of his brutish headmen?"

"I'll kill Ugadou—and myself—if that happens!" Dasua gasped. But MacCarthy felt fear welling in her.

"This is my offer," he pressed his advantage quickly. "I'll round up the Touareg. I'll bring them here, and destroy Ugadou and his power. Thereafter, I'll give you an escort who'll bring you safely to the lands under Senusi control."

"And the price of it?" Dasua tensely breathed. "Whose life do you want me to save?"

"That of the American woman. You are resourceful. You can convince Ugadou that it would be unlucky for him to touch the American woman for two more moons, and, if that's not enough, persuade him that thereafter the magic protecting her will lose power, and it'll be safe for him to do as he wishes with her. Find other excuses if this doesn't work. But remember. One life for two lives. Keep the American girl alive—and undefiled—until I return to this accursed spot of the jungle at the head of the Touareg. For otherwise you'll never be able to go back to your people."

Dasua's body tensed against his! For what seemed to him an eternity he heard only her agitated breathing, broken now and then by the grinding of her teeth.

Finally she whispered fiercely:

"I despise you worse than the dust of a filthy alley of a Mopti village. But, do you think that I would ever allow you to bask in the love of that *Rumi* woman—while I return, scorned, a failure, to the Senusi and to my fellow Adzjer tribesmen?

"Inshallah! I'll strike only this bargain with you, O MacCarthy! I'll protect the Mirrican woman until you return, but only on condition that after the rout of the Moptis and the death of Ugadou you'll join the Senusi and come to the Adzjer country with me as my husband—ready to live at my side as a despised mate as long as I want you to!"

The very force of her declaration convinced MacCarthy that it was useless to argue. He didn't doubt that she would do as she had said. He wondered what had caused the fickle desert woman to make such a strange proposal. Could she be in love with him? For a moment he thought of calling the deal off, and he steeled himself for the suicidal effort of breaking out of the Mopti village with all the Mopti pack aroused by her savage calls.

But when Dasua's nails dug into his arm, and her cruel chuckle rang in his ears—*"Inshallah, Rumi* who turned Targui! Do you accept my condition, or must I call my porters?" he simply replied: "Swear on the Koran that you'll do your part and take my word that I shall do as you wish."

He had hardly spoken when Dasua quickly replied: "In the name of Allah, the all-powerful, I swear that I'll protect the American widow to the last drop of my blood."

Then her hands were pushing him out of the hole carved in the rear of the hut. As he crawled out he heard her whispering: "I'll wait anxiously for you, my husband-to-be!" and he swore under his breath.

The loud shouts of the Moptis, getting drunk on native beer and palm wine, and quarreling over the shreds of booty thrown at them by Ugadou, met him like a savage chorus roaring out of hell when he climbed to the top of the stockade and lowered himself down its outer side.

Mechanically he retrieved his battered boots, for they would have been a dead giveaway. He didn't want to warn the Moptis of the surprise attack that was coming.

VI

LESS than forty-eight hours later, by driving himself night and day, he reached the Post. All was as it had been when Latour ruled the Post—except for the fact that no uniforms were in sight. The *harratin* and the half-breeds, who had returned to their villages, came out of them to greet him with a bedlam of joyous shouts.

He was entering the courtyard when Keradj and Belad ran down from their quarters to meet him. Belad hailed him with delight.

"My beloved *Sidi,* I was told that in his last moment your *Capitaine* and friend Latour made you his heir, and I couldn't resist a temptation to rummage into his things for your sake. And do you know what I found, MacCarthy? A trunk full of money! Gold coins, banknotes of various colorings and shapes. But here is the inventory of the whole, in *Sidi* Latour's own handwriting, which I also found in the trunk. . . ."

In spite of his great weariness and desire to get going, MacCarthy took the slip of paper proffered him by Belad. It read: "Gold coins, (English sterling, American dollars, French twenty Franc pieces) total value ten thousand francs. English banknotes—two thousand pounds. American dollars—five thousand. French thousand Franc banknotes—fifteen."

It was a rich nest egg. Enough to get a start in any given calling, in some part of the world free of the warfare ravaging Europe—perhaps in North or South America.

For only a minute MacCarthy was surprised by the find. He remembered that Latour had inherited from his peasant parents an abiding distrust for banks. Wearily, he looked up at Belad.

"Thank you, my brother. It was a kindness of you to find this for me. But I have other tidings."

Then he told Belad and Keradj of the attack on the caravan and the happenings in the Mopti stronghold.

Belad looked at him steadily as he concluded his recital. Then the desert warrior said gravely: "One thing is clear: The Moptis have grown too evil and too bold. They must be destroyed as soon as possible. I'll order at once the beating of the Tobol drum of war."

He ran to the platform topping the watch tower. A round-bottomed tobol drum, nearly two yards wide, had been placed there, in lieu of the bugles of a regular garrison. Pointing to that age-old tocsin of the Touareg warriors, Belad shouted to the two squatting near it:

"Grasp your drumsticks and beat the call to war!"

The deep, booming sound spread all over the fort and past it. The air, shimmering with heat haze, seemed to swell and roar with it.

Almost instantly, black and blue clad Touareg came out of cellars, of dormitories, of the tents pitched all around the fort. Carrying saddles, weapons, bags of reserve foods and water skins, they ran to the places where their horses were picketed and their camels hobbled.

With an amazing speed a long column was put together. The Touareg were on the move!

THEY rode camel-back up to the jungle's edge. Then they left the mehara with a detail of attendants and climbed on their horses.

As long as the jungle trails allowed it, they proceeded restfully on horseback in a single file. When there was no longer foothold for the horses, and it became necessary to tear a passage through the tangled growths, they dismounted and went ahead on foot.

Four days after their departure from Goundam, their advance scouts stalked noiselessly upon some Mopti lookouts, and killed them before they could raise an outcry.

"Quick!" MacCarthy ordered Belad. "Take a hundred men, go to the hillock of the leopard society—you'll recognize the trail leading to it easily—fire into the village from the summit of the hillock as soon as you see the storming party enter the village. Have your most trusted headmen form a cordon of another two hundred men to prevent any Mopti from breaking through the approaches to the stockade from the east, the north and the south."

"And you . . . what are you going to do, *Sidi?*" Belad asked.

"I shall lead the remaining two hundred warriors over the western part of the stockade, by the route which I followed to get into Dasua's hut. That's the spot where a surprise attack is most likely to succeed."

"It is right," Keradj confirmed happily, because it was clear to him that he was going to take a part in the storming at MacCarthy's side. "Too many Touareg in the Mopti village would only get into each other's way. And, if things go hard for us, Belad and his men can always come down from their perch to lend us a hand."

MacCarthy nodded in approval and ran with his men through the jungle growths until, by a wide, roundabout route, he reached the bushes confronting the western stockade.

A Mopti was on its top. But Keradj chuckled and instructed a Targui:

"When I whistle like a striking snake, throw a stone against the stockade's foot."

Then, crouching, he ran up to a point some fifty yards to the left of the Mopti lookout. There, he firmly planted himself on his feet, lifted and balanced his two-yardlong spear of solid iron in his right hand, breathed deeply and whistled.

The stone sailed through the air, struck the stockade. The Mopti lookout heard the noise. He leaned over the stockade's top and stared at the ground below.

In that split second Keradj threw his spear with terrific precision and strength. The long tube of solid iron cut through the ether like a flying black line and imbedded itself into the neck of the Mopti lookout who, losing his balance and dragged down by the weight of the spear stuck into his neck, fell over and shattered his skull on the ground below.

MacCarthy saw Keradj leaping onward. He did likewise and all his Touareg swarmed over the stockade after him. In a moment they were jumping down its inner side and charging against the huts and through the winding alleys.

A large number of Moptis were stabbed and hacked down without a chance of putting up more than a dispirited resistance, when the screams of the terrified negresses and of the naked, pot-bellied children, recalled most of the warriors and headmen from the central clearing of the village. But in every alley the Touareg gave way only to fall on the sides of the rushing streams of jungle savages; or they received them on the points of their long spears and then counter-attacked, without wasting a single motion, bringing every blow home.

Suddenly, it was all over. Screeching in abject fright, the surviving Moptis fled to the village gates and past them. But, when they saw the Touareg of the cordon established by Belad's headman arising from the grass in which they had been crouching with ready guns and spears poised to strike, the defeated Moptis threw down their weapons and loudly begged for surrender.

The central clearing was deserted when MacCarthy reached it at the head of his Touareg. Even the guards at the door of Ugadou's dwelling had deserted. But from within came sounds of struggle and agonized cries. The MacCarthy heard Dasua's voice, screaming out in agonizing pain, and he catapulted onward, firmly clenching his naked sword.

THE one thing that MacCarthy had dared hope for: white man's magic, which was supposed to strike with the worst infirmities whoever outraged Felicia during the two moons following her capture, had deterred Ugadou and all his witch doctors.

During the first five days following MacCarthy's departure from the Mopti village, they had regaled the half-demented white girl with the best food at their disposal, and left her alone in the corner of the big, barn-like room where Ugadou's women lived.

It was one of Ugadou's wives who finally dissipated the Negro chief's savage fear of white man's magic.

One of the husky negresses had long coveted the platinum wrist-watch that Felicia still wore. Prodded by a morbid curiosity and by her own greed, she squatted near Felicia and became emboldened when the distracted American girl fearfully shrunk from her. Finally she hooked her strong fingers into the wrist-watch's band, tore it off Felicia's arm, and triumphantly arose clenching it in her big fist.

But she hadn't reckoned with her fellow harem women. They also had coveted the little, ticking jewel, but had not dared to steal it from Felicia on account of her

reputation of white magic. But the wrist watch in the hand of Gunga, the daring negress, was quite another thing. They jumped on her *en masse,* attempting to tear it from her grasp.

Gunga fought back, screaming at the top of her lungs. The twenty or so children of various ages milling in the huge room began to cry and howl at the top of their lungs.

Attracted by the fearful din, and prodded into one of his outbursts of murderous fury, Ugadou ran into the harem room and began to dispense terrific blows all around.

A few minutes later, whimpering, bleeding, his mates cringed against the walls. But Ugadou wasn't through with them. Clasping the hilt of a big-bladed knife stuck into his belt, he ordered them to tell why they had fought. They did, at once, begging him to spare them. And thus Ugadou found out that it was safe to hurt and abuse Felicia, and that Dasua had lied to him.

His reaction was typical of him. Personally he went to Dasua's hut and pulled her out of her hut by her long black hair and dragged her to his own dwelling.

Dasua screamed incredible threats in a hysterical fit of horror and rage. Ugadou left her, with a score of his headmen and warriors to revile her, and went to get hold of Felicia.

The American girl had feared his violence too long to be surprised by it. But, with his big hands crushing her, and his hot, unclean breath over her face and shoulders, she became a primordial female fighting against a detested attacker. Her nails raked his face and almost blinded him.

Ugadou had not suspected that such a burst of fury could come from a woman so apparently subdued and weak. Amazement more than pain relaxed his grasp.

Felicia, released, ducked under the big arms and ran out of the harem room into Ugadou's hut. Seeing Dasua, a barbarian but a white-skinned woman, she ran instinctively to her and was gathered in her trembling arms.

Cruel, scheming and ruthless Dasua was. But her courage was as great as her wild beauty. In that supreme moment, with all the appalling misery of her lot as a captive of the Moptis for life clear to her, she thought only of revenge and of the compact which MacCarthy had made with her.

When, booming like a maddened buffalo, Ugadou came out of the harem room after Felicia, Dasua broke Felicia's grasp. Quick as lightning she pulled a slender dagger from her belt and leaped on the negro king.

The stroke, aimed at his heart, slid over one of his ribs, cutting a painful but not a fatal furrow into his side. The Moptis in the room instantly lifted their spears to stab Dasua. But, with a savage roar, Ugadou ordered them to step back.

His face was an awesome mask as he went to retrieve his big battle ax from the niche where he kept his weapons, and turned on Dasua. He was deliberately slow in his motions, to enjoy better all the terror of the Adzjer woman's last moments, all the agony of Felicia who was forced to witness that gruesome scene and knew what to expect thereafter.

That was the moment when, at the end of her rope, Dasua screamed, ear-splittingly, agonizing.

MACCARTHY and the Touareg rushing after him saw Ugadou striking down at Dasua, missing, lifting his ax for another blow. The Touareg charged, with a thunderous battle-cry.

From the corner of his eye the Mopti chief saw his men falling under the blows of the Touareg, rolling to the ground with them in terrific individual hand to hand struggles, and he realized that fate had turned against him and somehow his stronghold had been attacked.

Then Ugadou leaped on the cornered Felicia and Dasua; but MacCarthy catapulted on him like a streak of lightning.

The point of the officer's sword pierced Ugadou's shoulder, threw him off balance. Ugadou reeled. MacCarthy struck again, slashing three of Ugadou's fingers.

Ugadou let go of his ax. Before MacCarthy could step back to stab again, the ponderous negro king jumped for him, threw him down and smothered him with the immense weight of his huge body.

In falling, MacCarthy's elbow struck the ground. The sword flew out of his grasp. Ugadou, bellowing like a wounded bull,

clamped one huge hand on his throat.

MacCarthy's neck was nearly crushed and broken by the terrific pressure. Instinctively he stuck a thumb into one of Ugadou's eyes, brought his knee up. MacCarthy heaved and the next instant Ugadou had rolled off.

Seeing MacCarthy's sword within his reach, the Mopti chief got hold of it. But before he could arise MacCarthy leaped on him unsheathing the *telaka* poniard which he carried strapped to his left forearm in Touareg fashion. The straight, sharp blade struck at the base of Ugadou's huge neck, disappeared into his breast.

Ugadou jumped up, throwing him off. MacCarthy fell, but quickly rebounded to his feet.

Instantly he realized that the struggle was over. With the hilt of the *telaka* poniard sprouting high out of his immense shoulder socket, Ugadou swayed, opening his mouth widely, rolling his eyes so that only their blood-shot whites were visible. Then, with a beastly moan, he fell backward, kicked once feebly and remained still.

Behind MacCarthy, the Touareg were triumphantly shouting. Not a single Mopti remained alive in the room. From the adjacent harem no sound came from the cowed mates of the slain Ugadou. The children whimpered like frightened dogs.

Then Felicia, sobbing, stumbled out of the corner where she had crouched in utter terror and fell into the open arms of MacCarthy.

THE Touareg column was leaving the Mopti village, which they had put on fire after driving away all women, children and old men, when Dasua confronted MacCarthy. Her face had lost its shrewd, furtive cunning.

"*Sidi* MacCarthy," Dasua said quietly, "You are not a Tagui. I could make you happy, as long as our youth last . . . but the sun, and the wind, and the lifted sand turn the most comely faces of desert women into coarse masks, when maturity approaches. Think of me, O MacCarthy, coarse, bedraggled and barefooted . . . and of you at my side, old and sorely missing the Rumi world you're accustomed to.

"That is, why, O MacCarthy, I relinquish all claim on you."

"Is that true, Dasua?" MacCarthy asked quietly.

"Yes, in the name of Allah!" Dasua replied firmly.

An immense weight was lifted from MacCarthy's heart. Suddenly, everything around him seemed to be undergoing a change? The sun was brighter, the green of the jungle no longer gloomy and forbidding, but colorful, inviting.

As in a dream he heard Belad speaking:

"You can do much for me and for my Touareg people, *Sidi* MacCarthy. I understand now that their hold on the Niger River cannot last forever. But thanks to you they spared their French and other Rumi prisoners—and, after all, if the Touareg had not seized Timbuctoo, the half-breed races would have done so, in a sea of blood. . . .

"Therefore, *Sidi*, when the moment comes, it will be up to you to make favorable terms of submission for my Touareg people with whatever race of Rumi that will ultimately rule our part of Africa."

"That I shall gladly do, because the Touareg accepted me as one of their own, and they are entitled to my devotion," MacCarthy replied vibrantly.

"Then it is all settled!" Belad exclaimed. "I'll return to Goundam. Dasua shall begin her northward journey toward her Adzjer people, with the escort that I'll give her. And you, MacCarthy, will go with the American girl, with your woman, to Timbuctoo. And when you shall both find rest and a secure happiness in some distant land of your people, remember that Belad was your friend."

MacCarthy's eyes were misty as Belad turned and went to his mehari. He was sure that it was the best solution, that the love and gentleness of Felicia were the best that he could ever hope for. But his heart contracted as he thought of the loyal Touareg by whose side he had fought and suffered.

When he lifted his head, Dasua and Belad were gone. And Felicia was smiling at him through her tears.

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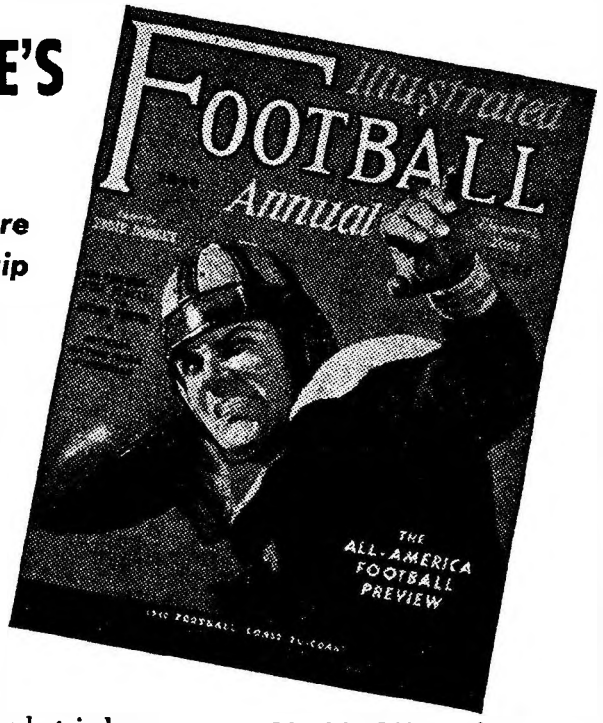

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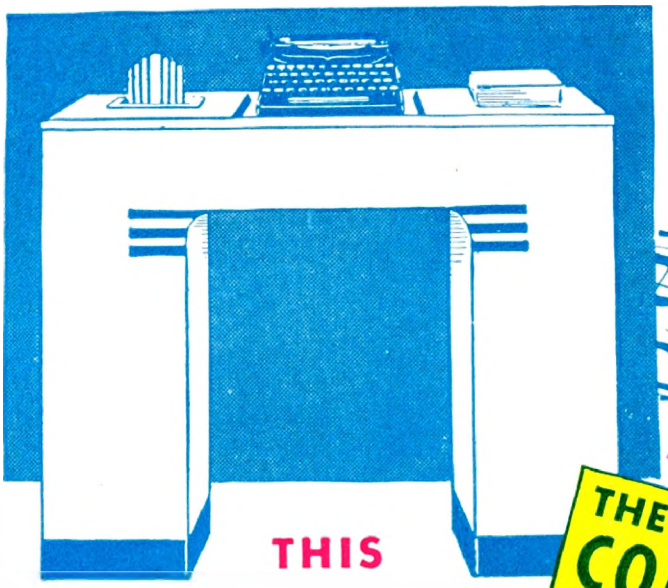

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