

# **JUNGLE STORIES**

Winter 1949-1950

*featuring*

# **KI-GOR JUNGLELORD**

*in*

# **SWORD OF SHEBA**



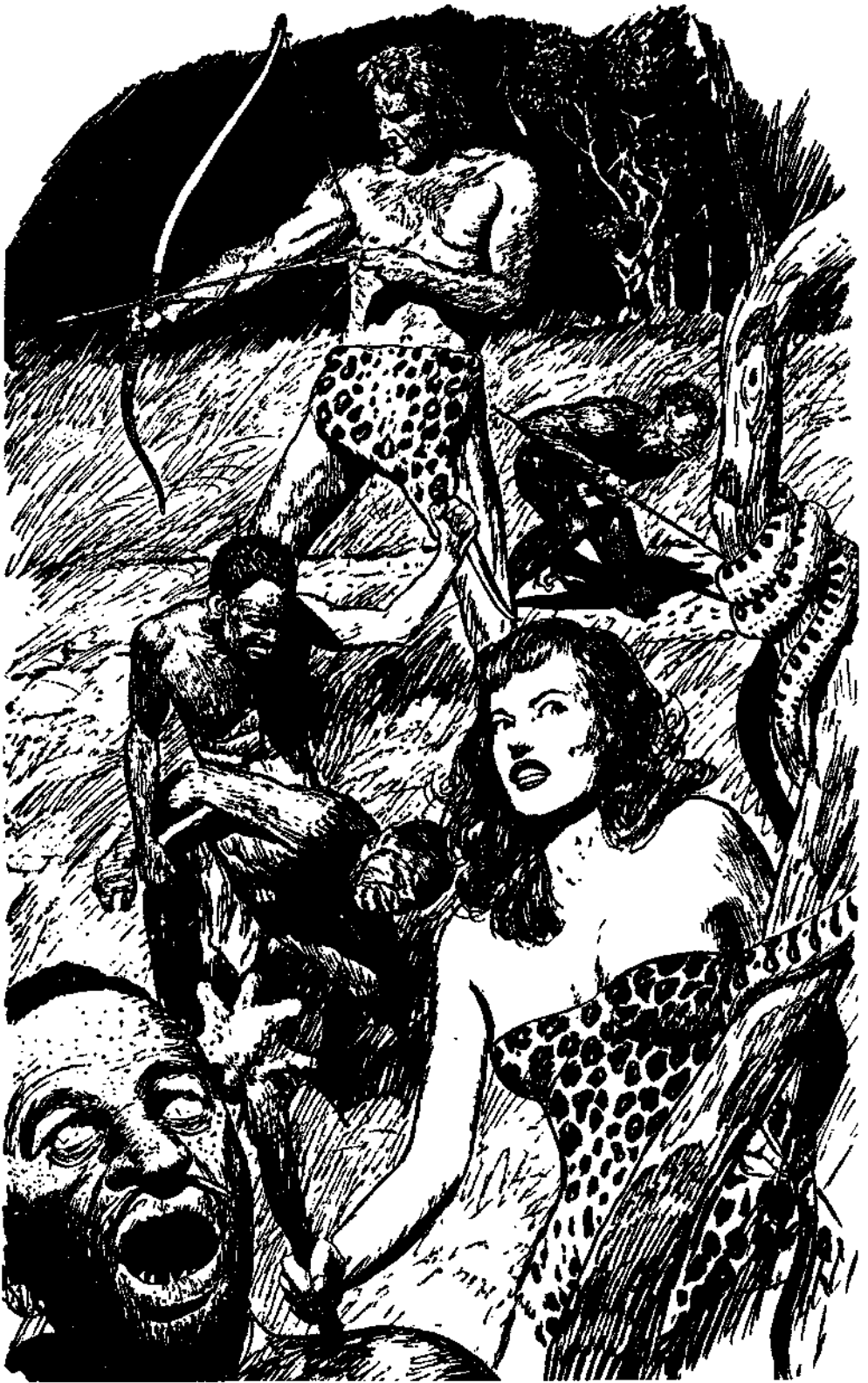
# **SWORD OF SHEBA**

**by John Peter Drummond**

It was the strangest army of all time . . . from the distant waters of the Blue Nile came the giant, white-robed Watusi, the sullen and deadly Shilluks—from Central Africa, the Tofoke and Bankutu cannibals, the dread Akkha leopard society . . . marching, killing as they came, to attack and destroy Ki-Gor's jungle kingdom. And leading them, a beautiful woman who bore a name of ancient terror . . . Bilqis, Queen of Sheba!

**T**HE LONE VULTURE SOARED and wheeled through the shimmering, suffocating air over the vast rain forest. Mile after implacable mile, the forest stretched in every direction beneath her, a vivid poisonous

green, dotted here and there with flowering crests of brilliant red flame-trees or violent yellow n'gomis. Twisting her repulsive head to one side and then the other, the vulture could not penetrate with her eyes the thick interlocked screen of boughs that



*With incredible rapidity, Ki-Gor snapped three arrows into the crazed cannibals...*

protected the damp Congo earth below from the fury of the Equatorial sun

But directly beneath that vulture—far down below the top of the flowered jungle—a tiny figure ran desperately along a game trail that threaded its way among the mighty tree-trunks. A tiny man it was, short-legged and pot-bellied, with the wool growing in sparse knots on his skull. But the short legs were flickering like the wings of a fleeing jungle parrot, and the wrinkled face was contorted with fear. If the vulture could have seen that terror-stricken face, she would have been interested and she would have soared along on the thermal currents with hope in her evil brain.

Mile after mile through the brooding jungle the tiny figure fled. The trail widened in spots and narrowed in others, went straight for some yards and then twisted and curved like a snake in its agony. But straight or winding, the tiny fear-borne figure sped, dwarfed to ant-size by the prodigious tree-trunks that loomed over it.

The jungle deer rushed away from the path, of the flying figure, and the wild pigs trotted uneasily to one side. High above in the branches the green monkeys scolded and the wild parrots flew away like bullets, squawking the alarm. Human endurance is limited, and the Batwa Pygmies are not famed for their stamina. But this little man was impelled by a fear far bigger than his puny body.

From time to time, he flung terrified glances over his shoulder as if the cause of his terror could be seen—a vast black Horror looming up higher than the great trees and with enveloping wings tipped with frightful, flesh-shredding claws. And after each backward glance, the Pygmy put on another burst of speed in a frantic—and perhaps vain—effort to escape the Horror.

But there came a time—long after the lone vulture had been left wheeling behind—when the pot-belly heaved in and out and the frail legs began, to lose their furious energy. Little by little, the Pygmy slowed down, not from any personal volition, but solely because his wracked body could no longer keep up the pace. At a sharp curve in the trail, the pipe-stem legs gave way entirely, and the little man itched forward and collapsed in a heap.

**A**FTER LYING panting for a full five minutes, the Pygmy pulled himself up to his knees and searched the jungle all around him with his flat eyes. Then he put his left ear to the ground and listened intently for a long

moment. Apparently satisfied, he got up and set forth again at a leisurely trot.

A mule farther along, a well-worn path joined the trail from the left. The Pygmy paused doubtfully, finally dropping to his knees and sniffing the packed earth. He got up quickly with evident satisfaction, glanced once more around him, and then went briskly off on the side path. Less than half a mile along this new road, he came suddenly upon a small village.

It was a forlorn collection of slovenly huts grouped in a rough rectangle around a larger, more carefully built mud house. The giant trees of the jungle had been girdled and killed to let in the sunlight. The Pygmy halted at the edge of the clearing, fearing it instinctively. But soon he moved forward, driven by a greater fear.

The village lay somnolent, bathed in the wet heat of late afternoon. Men and dogs drowsed in the scarred mud around the huts, only a few women and children moving, about apathetically. A tall, skinny boy, of about fifteen, was the first to catch sight of the Pygmy.

"Ai-ee!" he cried. "See the Monkey Man!"

Quickly other children took up the cry and gathered running from all directions. The pygmy rolled his eyes in dismay and darted toward the big hut in the middle of the village. The boy who had first seen him ran after him and seized him, by an arm.

"Where do you think you're going, Monkey Man?" he cried derisively. "You'd better get out of here before my mother pops you into her stew-pot!"

The Pygmy struggled silently for a moment, but he could not shake loose from the boy's grip.

"Let go!" he sputtered finally, in Chituba. "Let go! I go to see Chief!"

"Ha, ha!" the boy shouted to the other children who crowded around. "he wants to see the Chief! The Monkey Man wants to see the Chief!"

The children screamed with delight and surrounded the Pygmy, pushing and pinching him until a sharp voice rang out over their clamor. In an instant the children melted away and a tall straight young man stood looking down at the Pygmy.

"What do you do here, Little Man?" he said.

"I have a message," the Pygmy quavered, "from Kofu, Chief of the Nan-Bushongo. The message is to Moku, Chief of the Ge-Bushongo."

"I am Moku," the tall young man said. "How is my brother, Kofu?"

The Pygmy began to shake "Kofu is dead," he croaked "But before he died he begged me to warn you"

"Kofu dead!" Moku cried

"Aye, massacred with all his tribe!" the Pygmy said through chattering teeth "He told me to run and warn you to gather up your people and flee while there is still time!"

But what happened?" Moku demanded, seizing the Pygmy by the shoulder "Who did this? The Bankutu?"

"There were Bankutu," the Pygmy said, "but they were only a small part and they came like jackals at the heels of the Giant Men"

Giant Men?" Moku said, staring "What Giant men and where did they come from?"

"I know not," the Pygmy said "They just appeared and their like has never been seen before You are tall, O Moku— these men are like two Mokus, one standing on the other's head They wore long white robes with one shoulder bare, and they carried great white spears Some thought, at first, that they were ghosts, or Living-Dead — Amazombi — but then they fell on your brother's village and slew like leopards—"

Moku interrupted with a hard glance "Wait, Little Man— did you see them yourself?"

"No, I didn't," the Pygmy said, "but your brother told me I came upon the village later It was in ruins, and all the people were dead or dying Some of the Bankutu still were there pillaging Your brother had been left for dead and he had crawled away into a bamboo clump where I found him He told me what had happened and told me to run and warn you and then he died"

**M**OKU looked away with an agonized frown and then turned quickly back to the Pygmy "Tell me everything my brother said," he commanded "Start at the beginning and leave nothing out"

"It is a lot to tell," the Pygmy faltered, "a long story And the sun is going down There is no time to be lost, O Moku"

"There is time enough to hear the truth," Moku said grimly "Speak on"

"Nay, truly it is a long story," the Pygmy persisted "Days before the attack, there was the Arab who came speaking about a strange Queen, and the Arab demanded that Kofu surrender his young men And then after that, three young men were killed by the Leopard Society And then the



Bankutu came one day and—"

"What queen is this?" Moku interrupted, "and what has she to do with the Leopard Society?"

"I only know what your brother, Kofu, told me," the Pygmy said "There is a queen of a far distant place who sent an Arab to demand the young men of the Nan-Bushongo— He broke off nervously as a wrinkled old witch-doctor came sidling toward them"

"What's the name of this queen?" Moku asked impatiently

"It is an odd name," the Pygmy said, "which I don't remember very well Belkit, or Belkish— something like that But, Moku, what matters the name of the queen? Her giant men will come and slay you if you don't act quickly For all I know, they may be marching on this village now One thing I do know—I was followed for a while I have run at top speed since early this morning, and for the first part of the day, at least, I was followed"

"Who was following you?" Moku demanded

"I didn't try to find out," the Pygmy said "Your brother, Kofu, was my friend, and he gave me a dying message to deliver"

The little man rolled his eyes away and glanced fearfully at the witch-doctor, who was standing within earshot, munching toothless gums The Pygmy raised his arms in an imploring gesture "Haste! Moku!" he cried "Before it is too late! Don't you believe my story?"

Moku stared off into the air "I believe you," he said, at length, "although it is a strange story you tell And if it's true that my brother is dead, I wonder if we should flee, or if we should avenge his death We Bushongo are no great warriors— neither are we cowards—"

"Your brother was no coward," the Pygmy said,

"but he and his whole tribe were slaughtered by the Giants—"

"Perhaps they were caught unawares," Moku said stiffly, and turned away "I will think about this," he said "Come with me, now My women will feed you and give you a place to sleep In the morning I will decide what to do "

"It may be too late, then, O Moku," the Pygmy protested "I will take some food, but after that I must be on my way "

"On your way?" Moku said with astonishment "In the dark?"

"It is dangerous, I know," the Pygmy said, "but it would be more dangerous to stay here Besides, I have another message to deliver for your dead brother "

"Another message?"

"Aye He foresaw that you would be slow to move and he told me that if you didn't act straightaway to save yourself and your tribe, that I must continue on and get help for you—"

"Help?" Moku said, sharply "From where?"

"From Ki-Gor," the Pygmy said, lowering his voice The witch-doctor, edging nearer, suddenly shook his rattle vigorously, as if to ward off an evil spirit

"Ki-Gor?" Moku said thoughtfully "Ki-Gor does not know me "

"It matters not," the Pygmy said "Ki-Gor is Lord of the jungle—he is concerned with anything that happens to us, to any of us I will take some food and then I will go and seek out Ki-Gor and tell him of this Queen and her giants "

The Chief of the Ge-Bushongo finally seemed satisfied with the Pygmy's story He led the Pygmy to a hut and directed some women to set food before him Then he set the village drums beating to call a council of the tribe The women hastened to build a huge council fire in the swiftly gathering dusk and the men of the tribe came around and settled themselves in leisurely fashion

It was pitch-dark by the time Moku stood up to address his people gathered around the flickering council fire

The Pygmy edged around the group, sucking his teeth, and set off down the path leading away from the village

**T**WO HOURS LATER, the council broke up The Ge-Bushongo had decided that while the Pygmy's story might be true, it was unconfirmed They would send men to the village

of the Nan-Bushongo next day to investigate, and after that they would decide what to do Moku did, however, insist on posting an all night guard around the village consisting of ten of the young men He went about himself placing each youth

The west path—the one by which the Pygmy had come and gone—required two posts of two men each, one close in and one at the junction with the main game trail As Moku approached this last point, his eye caught an object lying across the path Moku bent over it and saw that it was the Pygmy

The little man was dead his skull was crushed, and his back had been raked by savage claws, the blood glistening in the wavering light from the torches

"Leopard!" breathed one of the young

"Leopard Society," Moku corrected, and thought for a moment Then he spoke sharply "You two have traveled this game trail for miles by daylight You will now follow it by night Go, this minute Go southward and find Ki-Gor—don't stop until you find him "

"Travel now—at night?" one of the youths quavered

"You will probably be safer than any of us who stay behind," Moku said bitterly "Go now—with wings on your feet "

He stood for a minute until the two torches disappeared down the game trail, then he turned with a sigh to go back and organize a defense for his people

## II

**N**'GEESO, CHIEF OF THE WOCHUA Pygmies, snored gently in the crotch of a flowering N'Gomu tree, his wrinkled body caressed by a cool breeze, and his out-sized ears lulled by the subdued roar of a cataract N'geeso's ears were grotesque to look at, but they were marvelously sensitive organs They picked up a sound that was almost inaudible over the rattle of the rushing water, and N'geeso was awake on the instant

He slid his narrow shoulders forward, hooked his tufted chin over the edge of the branch and looked down His watery eyes flew open with astonishment Ki-Gor and his mate, the beautiful, red-headed Helene, were fighting!

Or so it certainly seemed They were directly below N'geeso at the base of the N'Gomu tree Ki-

Gor was standing behind Helene, his massive right hand holding her right wrist behind her back. He lifted the wrist slightly, watching the back of her head intently.

"Ow!" Helene cried. "That hurts!"

"What are you going to do about it?" Ki-Gor growled, with what seemed to N'geeso like a sinister smile.

"I'll show you, you big bully!" Helene exclaimed. With that, she suddenly stamped on Ki-Gor's bare instep and at the same moment threw back her head. Ki-Gor grunted at the sudden pain in his foot and then caught the full weight of Helene's head flush on his jaw. He lurched back, involuntarily relaxing his grip on Helene's wrist. Whereupon, she whirled out of his grasp, spun around and hit him sharply across the Adam's apple with the edge of her right hand. Then for good measure, she kicked her mate in the stomach.

But by this time, Ki-Gor was already falling to the ground, coughing and sputtering, with one hand to his throat. N'geeso, up in the N'Gomi tree, was horrified. He loved Ki-Gor more than anything else on earth, and he loved Helene only next to Ki-Gor. Seeing his two idols attacking each other in this manner turned his world upside down for him. Whimpering with dismay, he started to scramble down the tree.

When he got to the ground, he found Ki-Gor sitting up with a wan smile, one hand still clutching his throat. Helene was on her knees beside him, a stricken look in her eyes.

"Darling," she cried, "I didn't mean to hit so hard! Oh, what have I done to you!"

Ki-Gor leaned forward slightly, his great shoulders shaking. N'geeso realized, with silent laughter. He patted Helene's arm and beamed at her, although tears stood in his blue eyes. Then he worked his jaw for a moment and managed at last to speak.

"Don't be sorry, Helene," he said, and stopped to swallow. "I'll—I'll be all right in a minute. What you did was wonderful."

"But, darling," Helene protested, "I hurt you dreadfully—"

"It was my fault," Ki-Gor replied. "I should have been quicker. I didn't think you would learn so quickly."

"All the same," Helene said, ruefully, "I could have pulled my punches a little."

"No, no," Ki-Gor said. "You did just right. Now I know how well you can take care of yourself if

you should ever be attacked when I'm not around to protect you." Ki-Gor worked his jaw and swallowed again, then his shoulders began to shake again. "What I need," he chuckled, "is someone to protect *me* from you!"

Helene took his hand and joined his laugh reluctantly. Above both came the sound of N'geeso's high-pitched giggle, and Ki-Gor turned to look at him.

"Well, Little Brother," he observed. "You came down from your perch in a hurry."

"Aye—I—er," N'geeso stammered. "But I see now, it was a game."

Now Ki-Gor and Helene laughed again and Ki-Gor said, "We had you worried, Little Brother? Which one of us were you coming to help?"

"Why—er, I wasn't sure," N'geeso replied, and Ki-Gor roared with laughter. Suddenly he broke off and stared over N'geeso's head. "One of your boys," he said quietly, "is also in a hurry. It's Tlaki—I wonder what he wants."

**N**'GEESO AND HELENE both turned and gazed toward the high vine bridge which joined Ki-Gor's secret island to the mainland, across the cataract. A tiny figure was skipping along the bridge. It reached the great baobab tree, which was at the island end of the bridge, and scampered down the trunk like a green monkey. In a few moments, Tlaki, one of N'geeso's numerous grandsons, stood before Ki-Gor, his mouth trembling with excitement.

"There is a young man asking for you, Master," Tlaki said. "He has come a far distance, he says, and he is badly hurt—his back all clawed."

"What happened to him?" Ki-Gor asked, his bronzed brow knitting.

"It is hard to tell," Tlaki answered. "He speaks in Chituba and we don't understand him well. My brothers thought he said he was attacked by a leopard—but I think he said Leopard Society."

Ki-Gor started for the baobab tree.

"Nay, there is more, Master," Tlaki said. "There is an Arab an hour's journey away. He has a small satan of Bankutus and he is enquiring the way to you. And down the river, there are three Batatele, all with spear wounds, asking to see you."

Ki-Gor turned and stared at Tlaki in amazement. The Pygmy youth swelled with the importance of his news. "Finally, Master," he declared, "there is a white bwana two hours' journey upriver. There are four soldiers with him. He hasn't asked his way

of anybody, and we think he knows where he is going "

"Well!" Helene gasped "What's happening? Who are all these people, Ki-Gor, and what do you suppose they want?"

"It must be something big, Ki-Gor said with a frown "No one has come asking for us for many moons N'geeso!" he commanded "Give orders that the wounded young man be taken to the Council Tree right away, and after him the three Batatele. Have the Arab intercepted, and held until I send for him—the same for the white bwana. Tell your people to be polite to the white bwana, or his soldiers might shoot them."

Instantly N'geeso and his grandson set off at top speed for the vine bridge, the old chieftain babbling instructions as he went. Ki-Gor and Helene went to the roomy cave which was their permanent home and retreat. Helene watched uneasily as her huge bronzed husband fastened his hunting knife around his lean waist, slung the quiver of war-arrows on his back together with the heavy war-bow, and finally grasped the massive Masai spear with the long shovel-blade.

"Wear your knife," he said, turning to Helene, and carry the knobkiri."

"Are we going on a journey?" Helene asked "I thought you were just going to talk to these people at the Council Tree."

"We're probably going on a journey," Ki-Gor said "I have a feeling that these people are all connected with the same thing."

"Even the white bwana?" Helene said.

"All the more on account of him," Ki-Gor said "I think it must be Captain Craig of the K A R. He's the only white man with soldiers who knows where to find me. There's trouble of some kind and we'd better go and face it."

**T**HE COUNCIL TREE was a majestic cedar, which stood alone on a grassy knoll about a mile from Ki-Gor's island. As Ki-Gor and Helene walked up the slope with N'geeso trotting ahead like a busy fox-terrier, they could see a little knot of Pygmies gathered at the foot of the cedar.

"Your people waste no time, N'geeso," Ki-Gor observed with a sideways smile at Helene. The Pygmy chieftain only nodded his head vigorously for a reply.

The Pygmies moved aside as Ki-Gor approached, and a slender boy who had been lying prostrate struggled to his knees.

"Lie still, you are wounded," Ki-Gor said in Chituba. "Was it a leopard?" he asked, looking pityingly at three terrible claw-marks on the boy's back.

"No, Bwana Ki-Gor," the boy said, with fear-dulled eyes. "It was men—an ambush. I don't know how I got away. They killed my companion and they nearly killed me, but I ran off the trail and hid and they couldn't find me. They had iron claws."

Ki-Gor nodded grimly. "I did not know the Leopard Society was strong in your nation. You are a Bambala, aren't you?"

"Bushongo," the youth replied, "Ge-Bushongo. And until five days ago the Leopard Society has never appeared in our village."

Ki-Gor pushed a shock of wheat-colored hair back off his ruddy forehead and listened while the Bushongo boy repeated the story of the Batwa Pygmy.

"And so," the boy concluded, "by now I suppose the Ge-Bushongo are wiped out like the Nan-Bushongo."

"Who knows?" Ki-Gor said. "How long did it take you to come?"

"Five long days," the youth groaned, "I would have come much faster if I were not wounded."

Ki-Gor chewed his lips for a moment in thought, then said with decision, "We must try it. We may yet be in time. One hour from now we will start. You will lead us back to your village."

A flicker of hope showed in the Congo boy's face. "Have you many warriors, then, Bwana Ki-Gor? Stout, brave warriors?"

"I have the Wochua," Ki-Gor replied, waving a hand toward the little group of N'geeso's tribesmen. "There are none braver in Africa."

The hope in the boy's eyes died out, replaced by doubt and bewilderment. "Pygmies?" he whispered incredulously. "I never knew any Pygmies who were warriors."

"You don't know the Wochua," Ki-Gor replied. He turned to N'geeso and said, using the rapid clicks of the Pygmy language, "Prepare the War Party to march in an hour's time. Rations for ten days."

The wrinkled old face twisted with delight, "Hai!" N'geeso shouted "Elephants, too?"

"Elephants, too."

The headman of the Wochua rushed toward his men, waving his skinny arms and croaking orders. The quiet group dissolved into noisy individuals, scampering delightedly down the hill. Only Tlaki



was left behind

"Now," said Ki-Gor, "let us talk to these Batatela "

THEY WERE well set-up men the Batatela, capable fighting men They were not in a class with the Haussa, or Masai, or Zulus, but they were unusually sturdy for men who dwelt in the great rain-forests of the Congo

"I see you, Bwana Ki-Gor," the oldest of the three said respectfully

"I see you, Batatela friends," Ki-Gor returned

"We have come to ask your advice, Bwana Ki-Gor, and perhaps your help "

The jungle man nodded "Speak on "

"As you know," the man said, "we are a proud people, and we are not in the habit of asking for help Least of all against the Bankutu The Bankutu are dirty little cannibals, ignorant and poorly armed And when they attack us, we usually have no trouble driving them off But three days ago, they attacked us again, and it was different Never have they fought so desperately and so cunningly We had a great deal of trouble repulsing them And we took some prisoners who said things which made us uneasy So we came to talk to you about it "

"What did the prisoners say?" Ki-Gor asked

"They said that this attack was just the beginning They said that they were the first wave of a great invasion which would sweep over us and annihilate us if we did not submit peaceably They said they had powerful allies, giant warriors who were irresistible They said they had a new Queen, a powerful monarch who showered favors on them—"

Ki-Gor shot a glance at Helene, and his expression was disturbed

"The Bankutu are animals," the Batatela went on "They haven't the imagination to think up stories like that on their own We were afraid that there is something behind all this, and that is why we came to you "

"You did well to come," Ki-Gor said gravely

You are in great danger The Bushongo have already been attacked, and at least one village destroyed You may be next Now, I will help you, be assured of that—"

A sigh went over the Batatela, and relief showed in their faces

"—but," Ki-Gor went on, "you must help yourselves too You must immediately call a meeting with the leaders of your neighbors, the

Bambala and the Akela "

"Ask help from them?" the oldest Batatela said in amazement "We have never done that Besides, the Bambala can't fight "

"They make beautiful weapons," Ki-Gor said, "and the Akela are your equals in battle "

The Batatela pursed his lips and shook his head slowly in doubt "We will ask help from Bwana Ki-Gor," he said, "but to call on the Bambala and the Akela—"

"Look here," Ki-Gor said forcefully "You won't be asking help alone You'll be giving it as well Because if you and the Bushongo are being attacked, then the Bambala and Akela will be attacked too, sooner or later If you all unite in an alliance, while there is still time, you may be able to beat off this menace If you don't, you will probably be conquered, one by one "

The three Batatela looked at each other unhappily

"Now," Ki-Gor said, "there is no time to be lost You wanted my advice—I have given it to you You wanted my help—I will bring it But you must do your part Go now and organize your alliance Three days from now I will come to Otempa, the Bambala capital If you can get the leaders of the three nations there then, we will have an *indaba* "

The Batatela men realized the interview was over and moved up one by one to place Ki-Gor's hand on their bowed heads Then they went away, their heads held proudly high

Helene drew a deep breath and said, "Well — what do you suppose is going on?"

Ki-Gor shook his mane of yellow hair "It doesn't sound good, does it? And there's an Arab with Bankutus looking for me And Captain Craig "

"Maybe you'll know more after you talk to them," Helene suggested

"Maybe," Ki-Gor said, "but there isn't time Here comes N'geeso now, and Keeklo with him That means the war party is ready, and the elephants, too "

"Oh, but you must see Captain Craig," Helene said

"Yes, I must," Ki-Gor admitted, "but we can leave the Arab until another time Well, Little Brother," he said to N'geeso, "is everything ready?"

"Aye, everything," N'geeso replied, with a little smirk of pride "All is in readiness Fifty men, and twelve elephants, including Marmo There are ten

more warriors, but five of them are guarding the Arab and five the white bwana. Can they come?"

"No." Ki-Gor said, "it shall be this way. We will go to see the white bwana now, and the five who are guarding him shall go to join the ones who are guarding the Arab. And all ten will then lead the Arab far away on the pretext that they are looking for me. We have no time for Arabs today."

"So be it," N'geeso chuckled. "They will be disappointed not to be going with us, but they will be compensated by having the fun of tricking the Arab and his murderous Bankutu."

**C**APTAIN ANGUS CRAIG of the King's African Rifles stood up with a wry smile as Ki-Gor and Helene strode around a bend in the trail ten yards away from him. His four soldiers, strapping Baganda boys, got to their feet with sheepish looks. One of N'geeso's Pygmies was sitting on their rifles, while the other four stood near him with notched arrows and ferocious scowls.

"Hello, Ki-Gor and Mrs. Ki-Gor!" Captain Craig hailed. "I say, these Wochua of yours are scrappy little fellers, aren't they? Never saw such embattled Pygmies in my life."

Ki-Gor grinned at the tall, young officer. "I told them to be polite."

"Oh, they were," Captain Craig replied. "Most frightfully proper—but very determined. We obliged them immediately by dropping our guns. How are you both? You look as if you were about to go off on safari."

"We're fine," Helene said, "and we were just getting ready to take a trip when we heard that you were on your way here."

"That's bad luck for me," Craig said. "I wanted to talk to you."

"Come with us," Ki-Gor urged. "We're going up into Bushongo country."

"Sorry," Craig said. "Can't very well cross borders you know. Besides, I'm taking these fellows over to Mweru. They're all that's left of a border station up on the Tanga River."

"The K A R—attacked?" Helene said in astonishment.

"They most certainly were," Craig said. "Attacked and annihilated, except for these four."

"Who?" Ki-Gor asked.

"It's all rather mysterious," the captain said. "A mixed crowd jumped the post, but there seemed to be Watusi among them, and very tough."

Ki-Gor was nodding his head with dawning

comprehension. "Watusi," he said. "The White-robed Giants From Ruanda."

"Yes," said the captain, with a sharp glance at the jungle man. "The Belgian authorities notified us that some of them had slipped off the reservations. And now they're mixed up in this thing—whatever it is—that's brewing around here."

"What is it?" Helene said. "What—or who—is behind it all?"

"Why, we're not at all sure," the young captain replied, "but apparently it's a woman. Nobody knows anything about her, except that she calls herself the Queen of Sheba, and she seems to think she's going to take over Central Africa. Sounds ridiculous, but it might be serious."

"Yes, it's serious," Ki-Gor said, and related briefly the stories of the Bushongo boy and the three Batatela men. When he had finished, Captain Craig's sensitive Scottish face was thoughtful.

"It's all part of the pattern," he said, "but I can be glad of one thing. You have already started to do what I came to ask you to do. In border country like this, we can't accomplish much with official punitive expeditions. We can't cross boundaries very well without a lot of diplomatic exchange. And while that's going on, our little Queen of Sheba gets away. But you can go anywhere you want to, Ki-Gor, without the authorities knowing where you are, much less caring. If anyone can stop this blood-thirsty woman, you can."

"I'll try to catch her," Ki-Gor said simply.

"Well, of course, if you could do that," Craig said, "it would be magnificent. I shall be over at the post on Mweru for a while. Let me know how you come out, or if there's anything, I can do."

The jungle man nodded and smiled down from his great height at the tall young officer. "I shall bring you the woman—if I catch her."

### III

**T**HE WOUNDED BUSHONGO boy was on the lead elephant with Keeklo, and Ki-Gor and Helene were right behind on their ancient friend, Marmo. Behind them stretched a file of ten more elephants, each one bristling with five truculent Wochua warriors. The little force had been traveling for two days, and, according to the Bushongo, had nearly reached his village.

Keeklo slowed up his elephant and waited for Marmo to draw up alongside.

"We must be very close, Bwana Ki-Gor," Keeklo said "The Bushongo says that by the time the sun—" he squinted upward "—moves from there to there—" Keeklo indicated an hour —we will arrive at the place where his trail turns off

Ki-Gor nodded "That's good," he said "Get the party off the trail and hidden N'geeso and I will go ahead and reconnoiter."

"Only N'geeso?" Helene pouted.

"We'll go on foot or by the tree-route," Ki-Gor said, "and we'll have to go fast."

"I can go by the tree-route," Helene said, "and fast, too."

"Please, Helene," Ki-Gor said, with the appealing smile, which never failed to enchant his wife, "stay here. We'll be back very soon."

"All right," Helene sighed, "but I always hate to let you out of my sight— particularly when you might run into danger."

"I'd like to have your protection," Ki-Gor grinned, "but I won't be in any danger, just now. N'geeso and I will just be looking."

She was still sitting on Marmo as Ki-Gor looked back just before he and N'geeso rounded a curve in the trail. The Pygmy chieftain was like a hunting dog, trotting along with eyes to the dust of the game trail. Every now and then, he stopped and dropped to his knees, peering and sniffing. Finally, he looked around vaguely, as if moved more by intuition than anything else, and said, "There have been a lot of people here, Big Brother, and not very long ago Bankutu, by the vile smell of them."

The jungle man nodded and stepped off the trail. A moment later, he was going up a stout liana, hand over hand with well-coordinated ease. Ten feet away from him, old N'geeso scrambled up the trunk of the same tree like an anxious squirrel. Ki-Gor reached the lowest limb of the tree first, sixty feet above the ground, and straddled it waiting for his friend.

"Time was," N'geeso grunted, panting slightly, "when you could never beat me like that."

Ki-Gor smiled and made no answer, and the giant and the Pygmy made their way swiftly through the tree-tops until they came to the branch trail leading to the Ge-Bushongo village. Without speaking, they followed the trail to the clearing in which the village stood.

Or had once stood.

N'geeso moaned with disgust at the scene that met their eyes. The village had been almost completely destroyed. The roofs had all been



burned from every hut, and only here and there were any walls standing. The entire area was strewn with bodies of the dead villagers, lying where they had been struck down. In the center of the clearing, where the chief's house had once stood, there was now a gigantic bonfire. And around the bonfire, drunk with blood, victory, and Bushongo beer, were about two hundred Bankutu.

"They're not human!" N'geeso muttered. "They're hyenas!"

Ki-Gor bared his teeth in disgust.

"I don't think they've placed any guards," he said to N'geeso, "but we'll circle the clearing once and see."

UNLIKE THE BAMBALA and Bushongo, and Batatela and Akela, the Bankutu were true savages. Primitive and ignorant, they had survived by sheer force of numbers, and a rat-like desperation in battle. They were small and wiry, and although their weapons were crude—long knives and short bows—they were good woodsmen and trackers. Like all savages, they were undisciplined, and gave themselves over wholeheartedly to their obscene victory feasts. They rarely bothered to post guards, and as far as Ki-Gor and N'geeso could see, they had made no exception this time.

As the jungle man and his tiny friend made their way back toward their own party, Ki-Gor formulated his plans.

"We'll line this path on one side with forty men," he said, indicating the branch trail that led from the destroyed Bushongo village out to the main trail. "The ten elephants, each with one man aboard, will

surround the village. At a signal they will charge. The Bankutu will see only one way to escape—out through the path. As they run past, they will be struck down by arrows. If any get through, there will be you and I and Helene and Keeklo to take care of them. I don't want a single Bankutu to escape."

"I hear you, Big Brother," N'geeso said "and it shall be done as you direct."

"We won't wait until darkness," K1-Gor said. "We will strike now so that we can be sure none of them escapes." The Pygmy chieftain chuckled in his throat. "None of them will, Big Brother," he promised.

When they had rejoined their party, Helene's violet eyes were dark with apprehension. She twisted a lock of her red hair uneasily as K1-Gor outlined the plan of battle. But when he said that she would be at his side at the end of the path, she instantly brightened and shook her long Zulu knobkiri at the grinning Wochua as they filed past to take up their stations.

A few moments later, she and K1-Gor took up their own post at the point where the trail branched. The Pygmies flitted grimly down the branch and the elephants shuffled away through the undergrowth to swing around and take the Ge-Bushongo village in the rear. K1-Gor slipped to the ground, motioning to Helene to follow him. He then strung the war-bow and stuck several arrows in the ground in front of him. He was now ready.

There followed an awful period of waiting for the action to start. Except for high-pitched dreeping of insects, there was no sound in the heavy afternoon air. Helene fidgeted with the razor-edged knife at her waist, shifted the knobkiri from her right hand to her left hand, and then shifted it back again. Marmo stirred restlessly and kicked up little puffs of dust with his huge pads.

Helene stole a glance at K1-Gor. He was completely relaxed, steely blue eyes fixed on the branch path. Helene said in a murmured whisper, "Did you say there were two hundred of them, K1-Gor?" When he nodded, she said, "But they're good fighters. Do you think we can handle them all right—with less than sixty?"

K1-Gor smiled without taking his eyes off the path. "Yes," he said, "we can handle them all right."

His huge hand went up and pushed the yellow hair back off his forehead, and Helene thought to herself, "I must cut his hair tonight, it's getting too

long." And then she heard distant yells.

FOR A MOMENT she could not be sure the sound was coming from humans. It was so high-pitched that it might have been a chorus of leopards, screaming with rage and fear. But it was coming from the right direction and it quickly swelled in volume. In a moment, the screams began to sound closer, and Helene knew with beating heart that the Bankutu were fleeing down the path toward her.

At that, it seemed an age before the first Bankutu came in sight. The cannibal lurched around a bend in the trail, screeching and clawing at his neck.

K1-Gor calmly notched an arrow and said, "That one's got Wochua poison in him. Don't bother with him unless he comes too close. Then just tap him on the head."

The stricken Bankutu staggered toward them, his screams, changing to a sort of choked wheezing. Suddenly, another of the cannibals sped around the bend. He had evidently escaped the shower of Pygmy arrows and was racing for his life. When the first Bankutu got in his way, he flung him aside to the ground and raced on. Suddenly, he caught sight of K1-Gor and Helene and gave a bleat of terror. As he looked wildly about him for an escape, K1-Gor sent a heavy war-arrow through the cannibal's chest. He staggered forward a few paces, then stumbled to the ground.

A group of three cannibals came in sight now, but all of them appeared to have been hit by Pygmy arrows and K1-Gor ignored them as he notched another arrow. The undergrowth beside Helene rustled and she leaped backward with a little cry. Then she saw that it was N'geeso and Keeklo and lowered her knobkiri.

"It is going well," N'geeso reported softly. "They are so befuddled with blood and beer that they're panicking like a herd of kudu."

The three Bankutu were rolling down the path toward them at a furious rate. Helene raised her knobkiri, but N'geeso plucked her by the arm and drew her to one side.

"Let them go, Missy," he said. "The harder they run, the quicker the poison acts."

The cannibals rushed past her, so crazed with horror that they did not seem to notice the band of four that silently and coldly watched them.

Another group raced around the bend and then slowed down abruptly as they saw K1-Gor and Helene and the two Pygmies. There were six or

seven in the group, and all of them had apparently run the Wochua gauntlet successfully. With incredible rapidity, Ki-Gor snapped three arrows into them and all three arrows found a home. But at that moment a much larger group appeared around the bend, and in a matter of seconds the trail seemed to be full of Bankutu.

Sudden fear clutched at Helene's heart as the screaming mob rolled down the path toward her. But Ki-Gor imperturbably pumped two arrows into the black mass, then one, two, three more. By this time the cannibals were nearly upon them.

"Stay behind me!" Ki-Gor yelled. He dropped the bow and swept up the great Masai spear as if it were a twig. Helene caught a brief glance of the two Pygmies leveling their fragile poison-tipped spears and then the storm broke.

**T**HE NEXT few moments were a confused jumble of crazy images. Ki-Gor thrusting and slashing, the long double-edged spear-blade glistening red—the two Pygmies crouching on the other side of the path and stabbing upwards, daintily inoculating the enemy with their deadly poison—and herself swinging the beautifully balanced knobkirie about her. She counted four Bankutu that she knocked down and then she lost count. The whole world seemed to contract before her eyes and be covered with a red haze. The knobkirie began to grow intolerably heavy, and she began to run out of breath.

Then, all of a sudden, it was all over.

She found herself leaning against a tree, her arms at her sides and her chest heaving. Ki-Gor was standing in the middle of the main trail, feet spread wide apart, his right arm holding the Masai spear aloft, and his bronzed face a mask of triumph. A horde of Wochua were swarming about, uttering shrill cries of victory, and up the branch trail from the ruined village came the elephants, their riders dancing with glee on the broad backs.

"Ho, Little Brothers!" Ki-Gor shouted his teeth gleaming whitely. "Well done! Well done! Did any escape?"

"No! No!" the Wochua cried, "Not one, Big Brother!"

They crowded about him, each holding up two, three, four fingers, indicating how many Bankutu each warrior had personally disposed of. Ki-Gor took a rapid count of fingers and then threw back his maned head with lusty laughter.

"According to you," he roared, "we killed about

five hundred Bankutu! Where did they all come from? Because N'geeso and I counted less than two hundred of them in the beginning!"

There was a moment's silence, then the Wochua began to giggle with embarrassment. The giggles spread until the whole assemblage was hopping about, shouting with laughter and pushing one another in merriment.

Ki-Gor shook his spear for attention. "Mount the elephants," he commanded "and we will leave this accursed place immediately. Don't bother to loot the Bankutu—their weapons can't compare with your own, and they have nothing else that you'd want."

"O Big Brother!" one of the Pygmies shouted. "Do we get a holiday for this work?"

"Yes," Ki-Gor grinned. "Yes, we will have a holiday. You are going home now but I am leaving you for a day or two. As soon as I get back, we will hunt a wild elephant and kill it and have a feast."

The Wochua cheered like school-boys and clambered up on their respective elephants. But Helene was disturbed. After Ki-Gor had boosted her up on Marmo and then joined her, she said, "I didn't know you wouldn't be coming back. Where are you going?"

"Don't you remember?" Ki-Gor said. "I promised the Batatela that I would come to a meeting."

"Oh, yes—now I remember," Helene said. "You said you would meet them in Otempa."

"In three days," Ki-Gor added. "Two days have already gone by. I'm going to have to hurry to keep my word."

"Yes," Helene said in a small voice. "That means—I can't come with you."

"You know how I go when I'm hurrying," Ki-Gor said gently.

"I know," Helene said, and she also knew that there was no use trying to persuade Ki-Gor to let her come with him. "Well—hurry home won't you?" she said. "Because I'll worry about you until I see you again."

"Don't worry about me," Ki-Gor said. "I'll be home within two days after you get home, anyway."

## IV

**A**FTER ABOUT AN HOUR ON the trail, Ki-Gor shifted Helene over to another elephant with N'geeso and Keeklo. He then turned Marmo's great grey head on to a small trail

which he knew ran roughly southwest until it hit the Mikenye River. He arrived at the river about an hour before dark and traveled along its north bank until he could no longer see his way. At that point the jungle man reckoned that he was no more than twenty-five miles from Otempa, twenty-five miles down the Mikenye. This would be an easy march for Marmo, so Ki-Gor curled up for the night in the top of a baobab tree.

He was awake at the first hint of dawn, and after a quick breakfast of custard apples and caju nuts, he was on his way. If Ki-Gor had been afoot, he would not have stayed close to the river, but Marmo brushed through mangrove thickets as if they were jungle grass, and Ki-Gor was glad to be relieved of the necessity of constantly checking his direction.

The Mikenye was a true jungle river, slow-moving and deep, and between a hundred and fifty and two hundred feet wide. It traversed a variety of terrain, all of which was typically Equatorial. Between stretches of dark cloistered rainforest, there were patches of open swamp where the green scum lay an inch thick on the stagnant water, and elsewhere were stretches of pleasant open parkland. The Bambala, with their capital at Otempa, lived along the Mikenye, as did the Bankutu, and farther downstream, the scar-faced Tofoke, and the sturdy Batatela.

In general, the north bank of the river was lower than the south bank and harder going. But there was no place for Marmo to cross the stream until they reached a fordable rapids, about fifteen miles away, ten miles above Otempa. When the going became especially thick, Ki-Gor cast longing eyes across the Mikenye and wished with all his heart that he were on the other side. He even considered abandoning Marmo, if a Batatela or Tofoke canoe came along. He would hail the paddlers and ask them to take him aboard. Unfortunately, the river was completely bare of water borne traffic, and it was not until noon that Ki-Gor saw his first canoe.

But when this happened, Ki-Gor was already unpleasantly aware of the fact that the other side of the Mikenye was swarming with warriors.

He first saw Bankutu, in considerable numbers, and just after that he sighted Tofoke, their faces striped with self-inflicted scars. And a little distance beyond, on a high grassy bank, he saw a half a dozen immensely tall white-robed warriors.

"Watusi!" Ki-Gor murmured. "Go quietly, O Marmo. Inch away from the bank to good cover. We'll stop a moment and think this over."

It was the mysterious army of invasion, there could be no doubt. And there was no doubt where it was headed. The Bambala stood between the mysterious queen and the Batatela, who had beaten off a first attack by a detachment of Bankutu. Now, the queen was marching her full force against the Batatela, crushing the Bambala along the way.

Ki-Gor considered his position. He could easily arrive in Otempa in time to warn the Bambala of their danger. But the Bambala could not hope to defend themselves alone against the combined Tofoke and Bankutu, least of all when the invaders were backed up by the giant Watusi. Ki-Gor wondered how many there were of the seven-foot spearmen, and how they had ever been induced to leave their grassy plains in the North East and come down into the steaming jungle. Ki-Gor wondered also about the queen and what manner of woman she could be to rule such a mixed array of blood-thirsty warriors as this. He remembered that an Arab had come looking for him, an Arab accompanied by Bankutu. The Arab certainly came from the queen, and that meant that the queen knew Ki-Gor, or knew of him.

Ki-Gor slapped Marmo's broad back with sudden decision, and then slid to the ground.

"Wait for me, O Grey Mountain," he said. "I'm going over to have a look at this queen."

**H**E MOVED NOISELESSLY out to the river bank and surveyed the scene once more. Now, a lone canoe was out in midstream, almost abreast of him. In it were two Tofoke, one of them apparently fishing. There were no other canoes in sight, either on the water or on the banks. Ki-Gor stepped out of the bushes in plain sight and hailed the men in the canoe.

"I see you, O Brothers with the proud scars!" he called.

The two men in the canoe jumped like startled animals, and then stared at Ki-Gor without answering.

"I have business on the other shore, O Brothers," Ki-Gor said pleasantly. "Will you be kind enough to take me across in your canoe?"

The Tofoke exchanged uneasy glances with each other and then continued to stare at Ki-Gor.

"Come, Brothers," the jungle man said, persuasively, "I ask but little of you. Just take me across the water to the other shore."

But the fisherman murmured something hauled in his hand line, and picked up a paddle. The two

then paddled rapidly over to the south bank, where they beached the canoe and ran into the forest.

Ki Gor shrugged and moved down the shore to a point opposite the high bank where the group of Watusi was standing. They suddenly became conscious of him and shouted at him in Swahili. Without answering, Ki Gor waved a hand at them and then went about his business, which was to find a sufficiently tough liana suspended from a sufficiently tall bough on tree on the river bank.

This was not a difficult task, and very shortly afterwards, Ki-Gor was climbing an immense tree that stood a hundred and fifty feet away from the river. Around his waist he had tied the lower end of the liana. The upper end was growing from the top of a two hundred foot tree that stood almost on the river bank. When Ki-Gor arrived at the top of his tree, he saw with satisfaction that he had a clear unobstructed shot to the river.

Upon the high bank on the other side the Watusi stared in silent wonderment as Ki-Gor undid the liana from his waist and took in the slack. The thick wood vine was almost a straight line parallel with the ground. Ki-Gor had left his bow and quiver and spear on the ground, now that both hands were free. He caught the liana between his ankles, took a strong grip on it with both hands and then to jump off from the top of the tree like an eagle.

And like an eagle diving at a fish hawk he swooped down and across the under brush on the river bank and continued across the river. The Watusi yelled and scattered as they saw him coming straight at them. Before he reached the top of his arc, he loosened his grip on the liana and landed like a cat on the bank. Quickly retrieving the vine before it could swing back, he fastened it to a sapling and the straightened up to face a score of mad Watusi who were coming toward him with their great spears leveled.

"Ho, Tall Trees!" Ki-Gor said pleasantly in Swahili. "Your friends the Tofoke were afraid to bring me across the river. Therefore I had to come by myself."

One of the Watusi licked his lips and said, "Who are you? How do you dare to come so boldly into the midst of the Ever-Victorious Army?"

"I am known as Ki-Gor," the jungle man replied and would have continued, but the Watusi warrior interrupted.

"I have never heard of you. Are you—"

Now Ki Gor interrupted. "Your cousins the Masai have heard of me," he said, his eyes suddenly

very blue. "And your Queen has heard of me. She sent an embassy to me, which I couldn't receive. I am now returning her courtesy in person. Please take me to her immediately."

THE WATUSI looked at one another and then looked at Ki Gor with new respect. The Masai were a name to conjure with, and Ki-Gor's bearing was impressive. The tallest warrior stepped forward. He was easily seven feet two inches tall, and his handsome face could have been chiseled out of polished ebony.

"We will take you to the Queen's tent," he said, "and her advisors can decide whether she will see you. But in any case you cannot go into her presence armed. Give me your knife."

Ki-Gor smiled at the warrior's outstretched hand. "No man," he said, "has ever touched my knife and lived more than a minute afterward. I will keep my knife."

The Watusi pondered this for a moment and finally nodded slowly with respect. It was the sort of thing he would have said to Ki-Gor, if their positions had been reversed. Turning to the others, he raised his spear and shouted a command. The Watusi quickly formed two lines and Ki-Gor walked between them with the leader of the giants beside him.

Evidently, the Ever-Victorious Army had halted to prepare a noon meal. After a few minutes walk, Ki-Gor and his escort came in sight of a good-sized pavilion tent. This queen, Ki Gor told himself, believed in being comfortable even on a military campaign.

Up to now, Ki-Gor had seen only Watusi. But the tent was ringed by another group of white-robed men, almost as tall as the Watusi and even blacker. Ki-Gor tentatively identified them as Shilluks from the Sudan. They were evidently a personal bodyguard, because they jumped up and barred the way to the Watusi. The Watusi responded with angry shouts, and a loud argument followed.

Quickly, another group of about a dozen men joined the argument. They were tall, lean men, too, and blackest of all. They wore no clothes at all, and Ki-Gor recognized them as Dinkas from the White Nile. Although they were the fewest in numbers, they were just as truculent as the Shilluks and the Watusi, and only the fact that they could not seem to decide which group to fight, prevented an instant and bloody brawl.

Suddenly, then, three men came out from the

tent and pushed their way shouting into the melee. After a moment they succeeded in silencing the quarreling warriors, and Ki-Gor had an opportunity to study them.

All three were Arabs. The eldest was a grey-beard dressed in the *aba* and *arghal* of Yemen. The tallest was dark and woolly-headed and was dressed in the style of Kordofan. The third Arab was a sleek, crafty-eyed young Egyptian dressed in a tarboosh and a white ankle-length tunic. Ki-Gor felt those crafty eyes on him, and he quickly moved toward the young Arab. It would not do to have anyone think that the Watusi had brought him in as a prisoner.

The Egyptian stepped back a pace and, speaking Arabic, said, "Who are you?"

"I am Ki-Gor," the jungle man said, also in Arabic, "and I have come to see your queen. Who are you?"

A muscle behind the Arab's left eyebrow twitched, but otherwise his face was calm as he said, "Ah! Ki-Gor—you are welcome. I went to see you."

"I know," Ki-Gor said imperturbably, not deigning to explain why he had not received the Arab. "I will see your queen, now."

This time the Egyptian could not conceal his amazement at the jungle man's coolness. There was a long pause, and then he said, "I am Faid Pasha, the Queen's Political Advisor. I will ask her if she will receive you."

Ki-Gor shrugged and half turned away in a manner that indicated that he did not expect to be kept waiting long. Now the Egyptian's eyes were wide as he slipped inside the tent. The throng of Watusi, Shilluks, and Dmkas watched Ki-Gor in awed silence. For his part, he let his eyes wander serenely over them. Behind him, he could feel the eyes of the two older Arabs boring into his back.

After a very brief time, the young Egyptian was out again, smiling affably.

"Her Majesty is pleased to welcome you," he said. "She invites you to break bread with her."

Ki-Gor shook his head. "Tell your queen that I have already eaten," he said coolly. "I will wait until she has finished her meal."

The Arabs exchanged blank looks, and the Shilluks, who understood Arabic, goggled at the jungle man. Finally, the Egyptian murmured something and disappeared within the tent again. It was several minutes before he reappeared, but again he was smiling.

"Her Majesty commands you to enter, O Ki-Gor," he said. Ki-Gor nodded and stepped toward the doorway of the tent. As he followed the Egyptian inside, he was conscious of the other two Arabs glaring at the knife at his belt.

## V

THE INTERIOR OF THE TENT was so dark, that at first Ki-Gor could distinguish only a vague shape at the far end. Then, as the Egyptian intoned an introduction, Ki-Gor's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and the sight they beheld was one, which he had not quite expected.

A strikingly beautiful woman rose up from a lion skin-covered divan and extended a long-fingered hand toward him. She was extremely tall, and yet so perfectly proportioned that Ki-Gor was not immediately made aware of her size. From a golden girdle resting low on her swelling hips a white pleated skirt of some soft material hung down to her ankles. Above the girdle she was bare, except for two small round breastplates of gold which indicated rather than concealed her pouting bosom. Her face was strong and square-jawed, with a thin high-bridged nose and thin lips. Her eyes were unexpectedly a pale gray, framed by thick black brows, and the glowing cream color of her complexion was emphasized by the dense blackness of her piled-up hair.

"Welcome, O Ki-Gor!" she said in a deep, dramatic voice. "I have heard much about you."

Ki-Gor regarded her a moment and then said, "I am well-known without wishing to be. But you have the advantage of me, Your Majesty. I do not know your name and I do not know of what kingdom you are Queen."

The woman smiled with perfect good humor and said, "You will hear more of me and my kingdom in a short time. I am Bilqis. And my kingdom will be called Saba—Sheba, as the Feringhis call it. I am named for my ancestor, who was Queen of Ancient Saba."

Ki-Gor wished for Helene at his side to tell him what ancient Sheba or Saba was, and why anybody should remember who its Queen was. The woman went on in her pure Yemen Arabic.

"I sent Faid Pasha on an embassy to you because I think that you and I can help each other a great deal. Let us sit down and talk."

She sat down gracefully on the lion skins and



indicated a circular stool to one side and slightly below her. As Ki-Gor moved forward to the seat, he turned his head, casually looking around the tent. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the woman sweep him from top to toe with her eyes, then glance swiftly at the Faid Pasha.

"What part of Africa are you from, Ki-Gor?" Bilqis asked.

"Does it matter?" Ki-Gor said with a smile. "I am here now."

Bilqis considered that a moment and then said, "You look like a European."

"That is possible," Ki-Gor replied. "But I am an African, as it happens."

"I am told that you are a great chief," Bilqis pursued, "that you are Lord of the Jungle."

"I have been called that," Ki-Gor said mildly.

"What 'Jungle' are you Lord of?" Bilqis asked, narrowing her eyes. "What are its boundaries?"

"The Jungle has no boundaries but the seas and the deserts," Ki-Gor said.

Bilqis deliberated that for a moment. "It seems to me," she said finally, "that you are claiming a great deal territory."

"I claim no territory at all," Ki-Gor said calmly, and got to his feet. "You wanted to see me—so I have come to see, you. But I am not interested in talking about boundaries. Was there anything else you wanted from me? If not, I will be on my way."

**T**HE WOMAN'S GREY eyes opened wide in amazement.

"No! Don't go!" she exclaimed. "There are many things I want to talk about with you."

"I don't know what they could be," Ki-Gor said coldly. "I don't know what you want of me."

After a moment's thought, Bilqis said softly, "I want your friendship, for one thing, and your help. How many warriors do your bidding, Ki-Gor?"

"That is a hard question to answer," Ki-Gor said.

If all the fighting men who *have* done my bidding at one time or another were assembled in one place, it would be the largest army that Africa has ever seen. But when I fight, I don't use large masses."

The Queen lavished an admiring smile on Ki-Gor. "You are wise beyond telling," she said. "I act on the same principle. My army here is very small. Two hundred Shilluks, three hundred Watusi, and about seven hundred Bankutu and three hundred Tofoke. Two hundred of the Bankutu are out on a raid, now."

"A raid?" Ki-Gor inquired politely.

"A terrorizing raid," Bilqis said, "against some scattered Bushongo clans. It's a method I've discovered that works very well against tribes that are big enough to cause some trouble conquering."

"How does it work?" Ki-Gor said.

"You know the Leopard Society?" the Queen said, apparently changing the subject.

Ki-Gor nodded grimly. "The Leopard Society fears me," he said.

"I know that," the Queen said with a thin smile. "But the Leopard Society is my friend. They think they are my allies. Actually they are my vassals. I have completely won them over. They think a wonderful future is in store for them when I gain control of Central Africa."

She paused for a moment to see the effect of her words. Ki-Gor regarded the backs of his hands and quoted the Koran. "The avid wolf is choked by too much sheep-meat."

"There are many sheep," Bilqis conceded, "but I don't try to eat more than one at a time."

"How does the Leopard Society work for you?" Ki-Gor said.

"In tribes where they are strong," the Queen said, "they undermine in advance. By the time I arrive with my small—but ever-victorious army—the tribe is a hollow shell. By these means, I have already gained control of the Fang, the Baluba, the Balunda and a dozen smaller tribes."

"The Society is weak among the Bushongo," Ki-Gor observed.

I know," Bilqis said, "so I'm using my other method against them—the terror raids. I have some other business right now, down the river, but by the time I swing eastward again, the Bushongo will be in no condition to resist me."

"I see," Ki-Gor said. "Your Bankutu destroy villages and clans before they can get help to each other."

The Queen's lips parted in a cruel smile. "It's a method that never fails," she said. "For instance, the Bankutu I'm waiting for now have destroyed two Bushongo clans within seven days. That's enough to terrify the whole tribe."

"But suppose you meet some tribes who refuse to be terrified," Ki-Gor said.

"I haven't yet," Bilqis said triumphantly. "I haven't lost a battle. And I don't intend to. That's why I wanted to talk to you. Join forces with me, Ki-Gor, and we will divide Africa between us."

After a tiny pause, Ki-Gor shook his head with a smile. "It is written in the Koran," he said, "that

victorious allies always, quarrel over the fruits of victory "

"Ah, but I would not quarrel with you, K1-Gor," Bilqis said with a ravishing smile. I would arrange a full settlement beforehand so that we could not disagree on anything afterwards. That's why I asked about your boundaries "

**K**I-GOR pretended to think that idea over. In reality, his mind was working furiously on the problem of just how he was going to get away from this extraordinary woman who talked so calmly of conquering Africa. He was certain of one thing, and that was that she would never let him walk out of her tent and out through her army until he had consented to become her ally. It had been a bad mistake on his part to walk so coolly into the camp of the warrior queen. He had not realized at the time that she knew so much about him or thought she knew.

"What do you have to say to me, O K1-Gor?" Bilqis said, leaning forward and watching him intently.

The jungle man cocked his head with friendly impudence and gazed over the Queen's head at an object that was hanging on a tent post.

"I have this to say," K1-Gor drawled. "That is a truly magnificent sword I see there behind you. Was it made in Damascus?"

"Damascus is ancient," Bilqis said, rising from the lion skins. "but that sword was fashioned before Damascus was built. That sword, O K1-Gor, was given to my ancestor—whose name I bear—by Sulheman bin Daoud, the King of the Jews."

She took the sword from the tentpost and put it into K1-Gor's hands. The jungle man murmured in admiration. He had seen weapons like this before, but none that was so beautiful. It was a delicately curved scimitar about three feet long, including the jewel-encrusted hilt. The blade itself was feather-light and ornamented with wavy lines. The jungle man flicked a thumb across the cutting edge and wondered to himself whether his own knife at his belt were any sharper.

"It is a great treasure," he said as he handed the sword back to the Queen.

"It is more than that," Bilqis said. "It is a talisman. Who fights on the side of the Sword of Sulheman fights to victory—"

She broke off as a sudden chorus of angry yells sounded outside the tent. Faid Pasha, who had been a silent observer during the whole conversation,

stood up with a meaningful glance and said, "Trouble again."

Bilqis gripped the scimitar until her knuckles whitened. "We will go outside," she said in a voice of anger, "and settle this!"

The Egyptian went to the doorway of the tent first, and K1-Gor—at a motion of the Queen's—followed him. Close behind him, he could hear the rustle the Queen's skirt until he stepped out of the tent where the roar of the warriors drowned everything else out.

The bad blood between Shilluk and Watusi that K1-Gor had seen earlier had broken out afresh, and this time, apparently, the two older Arabs did not dare to go in among the shouting, spear-rattling warriors to break it up. The group of Watusi, though vastly outnumbered by the Sudanese, were gathered in a tight knot bristling with spears, and were whipping themselves into a battle-frenzy. The dozen or so naked Dinkas were clustered near the tent and were watching developments with rolling eyes and flashing teeth.

But if the Arabs were afraid to stop the quarrel, Bilqis was not. Every inch a queen, she strode into the milling mass of Shilluks with the Sword of Solomon raised high in the air.

"Back! Back, you dogs!" she cried and the Shilluks growled but made a path for her. The uproar of the Watusi died away suddenly as they saw the embattled queen marching upon them.

"Down spears, Watusi!" she shouted and sullenly they lowered the enormous blades. "Now!" she panted, as she stood before them, "who—who started this shameful thing?"

The white-robed giants shuffled their feet and looked at one another. Finally one of them spoke up.

"They called us blood-drinking heathen," he said, "and we said they must be cowards, and that they would never call us names if we were their equal in numbers."

Then one of the Shilluks stepped out of the mass and said, "O Just and Merciful Queen, they called us pig-fearing Moslems."

Bilqis turned her head and glared at him. "And so you answered that they were blood-drinking heathen?"

"Aye, Protector of the Faithful," the Shilluk said.

"And who," Bilqis demanded, turning back to the Watusi, "said pig-fearing Moslems?"

A lithe giant stepped forward, "I did, O Queen."

he intoned, "and I can think of many more names to call them—"

"Silence!" Bilqis screamed "Come here, both of you! Stand in front of me, side by side, and face me!"

Shilluk and Watusi obeyed, eyeing her uneasily

"You call yourselves warriors!" Bilqis cried "But your tongues clack in your heads like trouble-mongering women! My warriors fight my enemies, not each other!"

A PALL OF SILENCE hung over the scene as Bilqis paused and glared at the hapless warriors. All eyes were on the magnificent figure of the Queen. Ki-Gor stepped backward slowly—one pace, two paces. With the attention of everyone centered elsewhere, it seemed an opportune moment to leave the presence of the Queen of Sheba and her Ever-Victorious Army.

Moving casually, as if he were just trying to get a better view of the scene, the jungle man drifted behind and away from the three Arabs. Bilqis raised her voice again, the scimitar held stiffly at arm's length. Ki-Gor glanced over his left shoulder and saw that three Dinkas were between him and the corner of the tent. If he could get past them and around the tent, he could be away before anyone could stop him.

He looked back at Bilqis standing with the Sword of Solomon raised high in the air. Suddenly the curved blade licked out at the throat of the Watusi, and again, like a flash of lightning, at the throat of the Shilluk. A concerted gasp went up from the watching crowd as the two warriors reeled backward gurgling, bright red bubbles forming under their chins. Before their dying bodies hit the ground, Bilqis had wheeled about holding the crimson-tipped blade over her head.

"Be warned!" she cried "Be warned, Men of the Ever-Victorious Army! Save your taunts and your blows for my enemies, and quarrel not with one another!"

She stared triumphantly at Ki-Gor, and he knew that the moment had passed when he could escape from her. He masked his feelings with a cool smile and sauntered to the doorway of the tent where he waited for her. Still holding the sword, she swept by him through the doorway, and Ki-Gor followed her in silently, with the Egyptian moving quietly behind him.

Inside the tent, Bilqis stood for a moment with

her back to Ki-Gor, wiping the sword clean with a piece of cloth.

"How do you like my discipline?" she asked, when she turned around. Before Ki-Gor could answer, she said, "It's expensive, I know, but it's effective. I see to it that my warriors are more afraid of me than they are of any enemies."

Ki-Gor was silent as the Queen hung up the sword on the tentpost. The bad blood between the Watusi and the Shilluks had shown him an important weakness in this mysterious army of conquest. If there were some way to exploit that weakness, it might be the secret of defeating Bilqis.

"You should stay with us, O Ki-Gor," she said, sitting down on the lionskins, "and observe my battle tactics. Once you saw how this army fights, you would no longer hesitate about allying yourself with me."

"What are your tactics?" Ki-Gor said bluntly.

The Queen smiled and said, "There is no reason why I shouldn't tell you. I don't expect that you will be fighting against me." She paused to direct a meaningful glance, and Ki-Gor understood perfectly well that he was a prisoner until he agreed to her plans. "The best warriors in Africa," Bilqis went on, "will give up a battle if they don't win on the first charge. So my army attacks in three waves. If the Bankutu and Tofoke don't break through on the first charge, then the Watusi go in. The Watusi never fail to make a hole somewhere, and into that hole go the Shilluks. And soon after that, the battle is over."

Ki-Gor nodded approvingly and said, "What are your defensive tactics?"

Bilqis tossed her head scornfully. "I don't need any," she said. "I always do the attacking."

At that moment, a low confused babble rose outside the tent. Faid Pasha shot a glance at the Queen and moved toward the doorway. But before he even got there, the big Kordofan Arab burst in, eyes rolling with excitement. Behind him came several Dinkas, one of whom was half-carrying a blubbing little Bankutu.

"Wiped out!" the Kordofan Arab shouted. "The raiding party has been wiped out!"

"What are you talking about?" Bilqis demanded. "You mean the two hundred Bankutu? How could that happen?"

"Ambushed by Pygmies!" the Arab cried hoarsely. "This man thinks he's the only one who got away!"

Ki-Gor silently cursed himself for not being

more thorough back at the Ge-Bushongo village. Unobtrusively he retreated until he felt the tent wall at his back, and his right hand crept toward the hilt of his knife.

"Stand forward, you Bankutu," the Queen commanded, "and tell what happened! How could you possibly be defeated by Pygmies?"

The little savage staggered forward, gasping and half-blind from exhaustion. He raised his head to speak and caught sight of Ki-Gor. A look of utmost horror seized his ugly face and he gave a long, low wail.

"It is he!" he shrieked, pointing. "He was their leader! Ki-Gor! White Lord of the Jungle!"

## VI

**K**I-GOR'S KNIFE SPRANG INTO his hand. Without turning, he plunged the razor-edged blade into the tent wall behind him and slashed open a rent four feet long. Everybody in the tent tried to move at the same instant. The Queen leaped, shouting, toward the tent post for her sword. The two Arabs sprang at Ki-Gor, and the Dinkas lunged after them, hissing murderously.

In the meantime, Ki-Gor left his feet, twisting his body in mid-air, and went through the opening in the tent wall like a springbok. Outside, a lone Dinka guard stood six feet away, eyes popping with incredulous astonishment. Before he could move, Ki-Gor was on him in two swift strides. A left-handed cuff, to the jaw sent the Dinka toppling to the ground. Ki-Gor slipped his knife back into its sheath, scooped up the Dinka's spear and was off like an antelope.

Ten seconds later, he had put ninety yards between him and the tent of the Queen of Sheba. Running swiftly through the main body of Shilluks who were sprawled on the ground in little knots, he was past each group before they could recover from their astonishment enough to try to stop him. Far behind, a swelling chorus of shouts told of the pursuit that was being organized.

If the Shilluks had known who he was, perhaps they would not have let Ki-Gor run through them so easily. As it was, he reached the edge of the encampment and had almost attained the safety of the jungle before any frizzle-headed men from the Nile attempted to stop him. Then three of them who were already on their feet and who had been watching him running toward them, suddenly

lowered their spear-points and called on him to halt. Ki-Gor made no answer and did not slacken his pace. He did swing the Dinka spear across his body parallel to the ground, gripping it with both hands. When, he was ten feet away from the three Shilluks, he flung the spear straight at them.

The spinning hardwood shaft was long enough to hit all three of the warriors at shoulder level. Two of them jerked their spear points up to try to fend off the flying Dinka spear, and the third one frantically tried to duck. None of the three men was quick enough, and the heavy shaft mowed them down like jungle grass. Ki-Gor hurdled their toppling bodies and plunged into the thick undergrowth.

Protecting his face with his forearms, the jungle man ripped through the close-knit bush, as howls of rage and consternation went up from the Shilluks behind him. It took all of Ki-Gor's prodigious strength to force a passage through the tangled underbrush, and his progress was agonizingly slow. Moreover, the Shilluks would find the going relatively easier by simply following his broken-out trail.

The jungle man paused for a moment and listened. The uproar behind him had grown general but it remained far behind and was not coming closer. Ki-Gor guessed that the Shilluks, having no taste for traveling through thick bush, were arguing about what to do, rather than acting. Wiping the sweat out of his eyes, the jungle man peered up through the low leafy screen above him and sensed a shadowy mass far above it to his left. Ki-Gor needed tall trees at that moment. Turning toward the shadowy mass, he plowed through the clinging, whipping bush.

In about five minutes, the undergrowth began to thin out, and soon after that, Ki-Gor stood at the base of a huge hardwood tree. Far away, the Ever-Victorious Army buzzed like a swarm of angry bees disturbed in the night. Ki-Gor grinned and sprang into the tangled mass of lianas that spiraled up the trunk of the great tree.

Half an hour later, he swung across the Mikenye River at a point about a mile upstream from where he had crossed before. As he hurried down to the spot where he had left Marmo, he observed that the other bank was still in a turmoil. This was all to the good, the jungle man reflected, because it meant that the Queen of Sheba would be delayed on her march on the Bambala. He found the great grey elephant placidly browsing among some banana bushes, and, after collecting his bow and arrows

and war-spear, he hauled himself up on to the great beast's back

"Stir yourself, Grey Mountain!" Ki-Gor commanded, digging his heels into Marmo's leathery neck. "We have urgent business in Otempa!"

**J**UST BEFORE SUNSET, Ki-Gor walked into the chief town of the Bambala and bent his steps toward the well-built house of Kwete, the Paramount Chief. Very quickly a voluntary escort of laughing chattering Bambala formed about him, for they knew and loved him. It struck Ki-Gor as very odd that they apparently had not expected him, and that none of them spoke of the danger that was so close to them. The Bambala are an extremely easy going and carefree people, unable to bring themselves to face unpleasantness until the very last moment. And yet it seemed to Ki-Gor that today the Bambala were being almost suicidally happy-go-lucky. With a deadly enemy only fifteen miles away, Otempa showed the aspect of a town, which was absolutely at peace with the world. Nowhere could Ki-Gor see the slightest preparation for the defense of the place.

Old Kwete, the chief, greeted him affectionately. "I see you, Bwana Ki-Gor," he said gaily. "You are always welcome in my house."

"I see you, O Kwete," Ki-Gor returned gravely, "but I did not expect to see you alone. Where are the emissaries from the Batatela and the Akela?"

"Are they sending emissaries?" Kwete said in surprise. "I knew nothing about it. What do they want?"

Ki-Gor stood in appalled silence for a moment, then he muttered, "The fools! The proud fools!"

"Is something the matter?" Kwete said, in sudden concern. "Who are the proud fools?"

"Something is very much the matter, O Kwete," Ki-Gor said, and went on to tell the old man briefly about the mission from the Batatela who had come to him asking for help against the mysterious new enemy. "And I told them," he concluded, "to bring chiefs from the Akela and meet with you here today. But the fools—I suppose they decided that they could beat off these invaders by themselves!"

"But this Queen," Kwete said, "will have to go through our land to attack the Batatela."

"Exactly," Ki-Gor agreed, "and she will attack you first. Probably tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning!" Kwete gasped. "What are we to do?"

"We'll have to move swiftly," Ki-Gor said. "The Bambala must spend all night preparing defenses along the lines that I will draw up for you. And give me a canoe with your two best paddlers, I will go down the river immediately and try to bring Batatela and Akela forces back with me."

"Can you do it in such a short time?" Kwete asked.

"I don't think we can save Otempa," Ki-Gor said. "We will do well if we save the Bambala. Those fools, the Batatela," he added bitterly. "If they had only done what I told them to do, we would be at least a day ahead in our preparations."

"I see—well, we shall do our best."

The Paramount Chief of the Bambala moved to the doorway of his hut and gave orders to furnish Ki-Gor with the canoe and paddlers he had asked for. The jungle man nodded approval.

"Listen closely, O Kwete," he said, "the Bambala are brave fighters but they can't hope to resist this army of the Queen of Sheba. If you try to make a stand against her, you will be slaughtered. You will have to retreat—sacrifice Otempa and the gardens and fields around it, if necessary. Divide your warriors in two parts. One half of them should man your outer defenses and wait for the attack. The others should take the women and children and all the extra weapons and go down the river to meet the Batatela."

"What happens to the men who remain behind?" Kwete asked carefully. "Do they have to be sacrificed?"

"The Bankutu and Tofoke will attack first," Ki-Gor said. "The Bambala can beat them any day. But as soon as the Bankutu are beaten off, then your defenders should turn and run before the Watusi—the White-Robed Giants—can attack. And now, I must go. There is so much to do and so little time in which to do it."

"But, Bwana Ki-Gor," Kwete protested, "what happens after my men save themselves?"

"I don't know yet," Ki-Gor replied, "but I hope somehow that I will be able to show the Queen of Sheba what it feels like to be attacked."

**K**WETE HAD PICKED his paddlers for strength and endurance, but Ki-Gor, paddling from the middle of the canoe, exhausted first one and then the other of them. No canoe had ever before traversed the placid water of the Mkenye River at such a furious speed. Matara, the chief town of the Batatela, was close to

fifty miles downstream from Otempa, but Ki-Gor, aided by a three-mile-an-hour current, covered the distance in less than four hours

When the flying canoe had approached within about five miles of Matara, Ki-Gor heard the throbbing of war drums in the still night air. This was better than he had hoped for. At least, the Batatela were mobilizing, which was something. How soon they would be ready to move upriver might be another thing.

The jungle man paddled harder than ever while he rehearsed in his mind the arguments he would use to persuade the Batatela to start up the river that very night. It would take all the powers of persuasion that Ki-Gor possessed, because the Batatela, like all Bantu, were fond of long-drawn preparations and feasting before they embarked on war-parties. And when he finally accomplished that, his night's work would not be done, because the Batatela alone would not be able to stop the Ever-Victorious Army. They would need the Akela, and the Akela lived another fifty miles down the river.

As the canoe rounded the last bend in the Mikenye and came within sight of Matara, Ki-Gor's spirits rose a little. The Batatela stronghold was ablaze with camp-fires. The war drums boomed defiantly as the town swarmed with shouting, dancing figures. Then Ki-Gor noticed the canoes beached along the river bank. There were literally hundreds of them, of all sizes from little two-man coracles to great forty-man war-canoes.

The jungle man stared in astonishment, as his paddlers found a spot to beach the canoe. He knew that the Batatela never before had possessed so many river craft. He stared at the dancing figures silhouetted against the bright campfires. Here and there among the bark-cloth kilts of the Batatela, he saw feather skirts.

Akela!

Ki-Gor grunted with satisfaction. So the Akela were already there! Perhaps the Batatela were not such fools after all!

**T**WO HOURS after sunrise, an impressive armada of war canoes drew abreast of Otempa. There were over two hundred craft of varying sizes, at least a third of them forty-man giants, and all of them bristling with heavily armed Akela. They came in stealthy silence, five abreast in the middle of the river.

Ki-Gor stood in the first boat, of the right hand column with three Akela chiefs, scrutinizing

Otempa. The place was deserted, but apparently untouched. There were no signs of devastation of any kind. A youth with the characteristic hairstyle of the Bambala popped out of a hut and stared at the Akela fleet in astonishment. Ki-Gor hailed him and the youth came timidly to the shore.

"They haven't attacked yet?" he demanded as his boat shot in toward where the youth was standing.

"No, Bwana Ki-Gor," the Bambala boy said wonderingly, "but they're very close to our lines. Any minute, the attack may come."

"Where is Kwete?" Ki-Gor said.

"Up in the lines."

"Go to him as fast as you can," Ki-Gor commanded. "Tell him that help is coming. The rest of the Bambala are coming back and with them are the Batatela."

"The Batatela?" the youth said with widening eyes.

"They've landed below here," Ki-Gor explained, "and they will all be here in a little while. Go and tell Kwete this, and tell him to hold fast if the Bankutu attack. We're going to turn the tables on these invaders."

The Bambala youth nodded with a happy grin and started to back away.

"Wait!" Ki-Gor said. "Have you seen my elephant?"

The youth pointed past Ki-Gor's shoulder across the river. "Is he yours?" he said.

The jungle man snapped a glance behind him. On the far bank, across from Otempa, a huge elephant stood watching the Akela armada, the tip of his trunk lifted testing the air.

"It's Marmo," Ki-Gor told the youth. "Thank you. Now run!"

As the boy sped away through the deserted Bambala town, Ki-Gor turned to the Akela chieftains in the boat with him.

"Forward," he said, "and we can break the silence now. Let the drums beat and the warriors shout."

Instantly, one of the chiefs raised his voice in a shrill, long-drawn word of command. In a nearby canoe, a heavy wooden mallet descended on a giant drumhead and the Mikenye River seemed to explode. A concerted, exultant yell went up from two thousand throats, spears clashed against metal-studded shields, and the war-drums growled and throbbed with a furious rhythm, as the armada moved majestically upstream.

The canoe with Ki-Gor and the Akela chiefs resumed its position at the head of the right-hand

column, and the jungle man's blue eyes searched the forested south bank of the river for the first sign of the enemy. Naturally, he could hear nothing over the din that the Akela were making. But he had deliberately touched off the drums and the war-cries in the hopes that the unexpected noise might halt or at least delay the first attack of Bilqis Bankutu against the thinly held lines of the Bambala

## VII

IT WAS NEARLY HALF AN HOUR before he caught his first glimpse of the enemy. A little group of Bankutu ran out onto a point formed by a bend in the river. They stood for a moment, staring in astonishment at the Akela war fleet, and then scurried back into the undergrowth. Ki-Gor smiled to himself. Tough fighters though the Bankutu were, they had never been a match for the Akela.

Then, as his canoe rounded the bend, Ki-Gor joined his voice with the clamor of the Akela in a great shout of triumph. The south bank of the Mikenye was lined for a quarter of a mile with gesticulating, spear-brandishing Watusi and Shilluks. The plan had worked!

The Akela chieftains looked inquiringly at Ki-Gor. He pointed to the north bank of the river. They turned quickly and signaled to the next canoe abreast of them, who in turn passed the signal on to their left. In a moment, the head of the column of canoes was veering toward the north bank, leading the war fleet with them and placing nearly two hundred feet of open water between it and the ravaging army of Queen Bilqis.

But the fleet did not stop. Hugging the north shore of the Mikenye, it continued upstream, war drums booming and warriors chanting. This was part of Ki-Gor's plan.

The Watusi and Shilluks, equipped only with their huge spears, fumed impotently as the Akela war canoes glided past, far out of their reach. The Bankutu and Tofoke had crude bows, which were ineffective at more than a hundred feet, and while an occasional flurry of flimsy arrows was released, few of them even reached their marks, and none of them did any damage.

To the increasing fury of the white-robed giants, the Akela canoes continued to slide upstream, making no move to land against them. After a while, the head of the column was about to pass the last of Bilqis' warriors, whereupon they began to follow

along the shoreline, shaking their spears angrily and shouting challenges to battle.

Ki-Gor watched this movement carefully. The Akela armada stretched out along the river for more than a half a mile, and the army of the Queen of Sheba was forced to spread itself dangerously thin along the south bank to keep from being outflanked. Finally, the moment arrived when Ki-Gor judged that he should enter the next phase of his plan.

He spoke to one of the Akela chiefs, who immediately signaled to the nearest drum-canoe. The sweating drummer suddenly increased the tempo of the chant, hitting up a furious pace. The other drums followed suit all the way down the line. Paddles rested in the great war canoes as they gradually slowed to a stop, and the smaller craft swung their noses around toward the south bank.

The canoe that Ki-Gor was in swung out of the line altogether, made a full turn and shot back down stream. Halfway back to the tail of the column, the canoe stopped, and Ki-Gor stood up and raised both mighty arms. The drummers nearest to him broke rhythm again and hit five heavy measured beats. On the last beat, they stopped and the voices stopped. For a few seconds the Watusi and Shilluks continued to shout, then gradually their voices died away in wonderment and mystification, and an electric silence descended on the river.

KI-GOR WAITED a few seconds and then broke the silence with a voice of thunder. "Where is the woman who calls herself your queen, O Watusi? Has she run away?"

A wall of angry noise rose up on the river bank, and scores of Watusi splashed out into the water a little way, shaking their spears hysterically. Ki-Gor stood in his canoe, hands on his hips, and watched them grimly. Or appeared to watch them — actually his steel-blue eyes were searching the forest behind the prancing Watusi. And it was not long before his search was rewarded.

Eight naked Dinkas appeared out of the murk of the forest, and behind them four others came carrying an improvised palanquin. Somebody whistled shrilly and the Watusi quieted down and stepped back on to the bank. Bilqis, Queen of Sheba, sprang from the palanquin and advanced angrily to the water's edge.

"It is not I who ran away!" she cried shrilly, pointing the gleaming Damascus sword at the jungle man. "You ran away, O treacherous Ki-Gor!"

"But I didn't run far enough," Ki-Gor retorted. "Unfortunately for you, O Bilqis!"

His canoe drifted toward her, and Ki-Gor set himself for a task, which he never relished, which was a battle of words. But it was part of his plan. He must keep the attention of the Queen of Sheba and her warriors centered on himself until the moment arrived to spring his trap.

So for the next ten minutes he and the tall woman on the river bank hurled insults at each other across a gradually narrowing strip of water. The paddles of the Akela dipped lazily in the river, apparently just keeping the canoes from drifting downstream on the sluggish current, but actually moving the entire fleet imperceptibly closer to the south bank.

Suddenly Bilqis was interrupted in a barangue by a shout behind her. The young Egyptian, Faid Pasha, came running toward her babbling. And Ki-Gor knew then that the time had come to strike. He motioned to the canoe with the great drum.

Boom! Once more the drum sounded its deep-throated signal. Instantly, the Akela reached down into their canoes for bows and arrows, which they had carefully kept out of sight up to now. At point blank range, they began shooting as fast as they could notch the hardwood shafts. A pitiless shower of arrows rained into the astounded Watusi and Shilluks, taking an immediate and heavy toll. All up and down the river, the thin line of white-robed giants reeled backward from the water's edge, leaving scores of their number writhing on the bank.

And then from the forest behind them came a new, shrill war cry. The Batatela and Bambala had struck!

The Ever-Victorious Army was like a man who, staggering backward from a blow in the chest, lurches forward again from another blow between the shoulder blades. The Akela needed no signal to attack. The Mikenye water foamed under their paddles as the war-fleet closed in.

According to the pre-arranged plan, the canoe bearing Ki-Gor made straight for the spot where Bilqis was standing surrounded by her seven surviving Dinkas. Nine other five man canoes also converged on the same place. The Watusi and Shilluks were surprised and confused and vastly outnumbered. But Ki-Gor knew that after a while, their fighting qualities would begin to show and his advantage in numbers would count for less.

When his canoe was still ten feet from the shore, Ki-Gor leaped out into the shallow water with his huge, shovel-bladed Masai spear. Bilqis was less than fifty feet away from him, staring at him in consternation. The Arab, Faid Pasha, shouted wildly

to the nearest group of Watusi and three of the Dinkas rushed at Ki-Gor.

**T**HE JUNGLE MAN grasped his spear far down on the butt and swung it parallel to the ground like an axe. One of the Dinkas went down in a welter of blood, and the other two recoiled. Quickly, Ki-Gor recovered his spear and stabbed upwards at the next Dinka's unprotected belly. He withdrew the blade just in time to parry a murderous thrust by the third Dinka, and then with a lightning blow he chopped him down.

In the meantime, four boatloads of Akela had swarmed ashore and were attacking the remaining four Dinkas around Bilqis. The giant queen was screaming with rage and brandishing her gleaming sword, but apparently she had no idea of trying to run away. Ki-Gor silently thanked his good luck and hurled himself into the melee.

One struggling Dinka stood between him and the beleaguered Queen of Sheba. Ki-Gor shifted his spear to his left hand, knocked the Dinka down with it, and leaped to the Queen's side.

Her lips were drawn back off her teeth in an animal snarl, and she slashed viciously at Ki-Gor's throat with the Damascus blade. He just barely parried the blow with the butt of his spear, and then his right hand stabbed down and seized her right wrist. With a quick motion he flicked the sword from her grasp as if she had been a baby. Then, still holding her wrist, he turned swiftly toward the river, dragging her with him.

With an infuriated scream, Bilqis put her head down and bit him savagely on the arm. Ki-Gor grunted with the pain, dropped her wrist, and seized her by her long black hair. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the young Arab bearing down on him at the head of a group of yelling Shilluks. There was not a moment to waste. As Bilqis pealed scream on scream, he dragged her to the water's edge and flung her into one of the beached canoes.

Two Akela paddlers leaped into the canoe as he pushed it off. He scrambled in and threw himself on top of the squawling, scratching woman. Somehow he pinned her wrists together and got his knees on her heaving thighs. Only then did he venture a glance over his shoulder at the river bank, where he had been just a moment before. It was swarming with raging Shilluks. The four Akela canoes were putting off with only a handful left of those who had originally gone ashore. It had been close timing.

Ki-Gor urged his paddlers to take him swiftly



to the opposite bank. Once there, he dragged the struggling Queen of Sheba out on to the marshy ground and trussed her wrists and ankles with lianas. Then he took a deep breath and turned around to survey the progress of the battle on the other shore.

**T**HE AKELA CHIEFS came paddling toward him and he moved to the water's edge to talk to them. They were excited but by no means jubilant.

"Hail, Mighty Ki-Gor!" they said admiringly. "You said you would take the woman, and you did! You didn't have a moment to spare, though!"

Ki-Gor nodded. "She's strong as a bull crocodile," he said, "and almost as dangerous." He squinted across the river. "The giants are holding their own," he observed.

"Never have we seen such fighters," the Akela chiefs said, looking anxiously over their shoulders. "They're outnumbered five to one—and they're holding their own. What do you think, Bwana Ki-Gor—shall we break it off?"

The jungle man glanced down at the helpless figure of Bilqis and pondered a moment.

"We can probably wipe them out," an Akela chief added, "but it will cost us half our warriors to do it."

"No, I think we can break it off," Ki-Gor said, with sudden decision. "Their strength must already be cut down by a third. And without their queen, they will probably go home."

The Akela chieftains looked relieved.

"And what of the woman?" they said. "Will you bring her to our country?"

"No," Ki-Gor said. "I have promised to deliver her to the white bwanas. They will put her safely in prison where she will trouble nobody any more."

If they were disappointed, the Akela leaders did not show it.

"So be it, Bwana Ki-Gor. You are going with her now?"

"Yes," Ki-Gor replied. "You have done well, Akela friends—I won't forget it."

"We are always proud to fight by your side, Bwana Ki-Gor," the chiefs responded. "Farewell, we go now to break off the battle."

"Be sure to get word to the Bambaala and Bataatela," Ki-Gor warned, "so that they will have a chance to retreat when you do."

"We will," the Akela responded. "Farewell, Bwana Ki-Gor."

"Farewell, Akela friends," Ki-Gor said, and turned around to see Marmo standing behind him.

trunk curled upward in greeting.

"Ho, Grey Mountain—the jungle man said, "you are a welcome sight. We have a long journey to make, this woman and I—and we'll make it a lot quicker with you than if we had to walk."

At that, Bilqis, Queen of Sheba, proud conqueror, began to weep. Ki-Gor tossed an unfeeling glance at her and began cutting some long, tough vines. He flung three of them across Marmo's back, two feet apart, and then tied each of them under the elephant's ponderous belly, leaving just a little slack in each one. Then he slapped the elephant lightly on one leg and said, "Down, Grey Mountain, down on your knees, so that I can load you more easily."

Marmo grunted and rolled his head a moment, finally bending one foreleg and then the other, bringing his lofty back nearer to the ground. Ki-Gor bent over the prostrate form of Bilqis as she stared wonderingly at him through tear-stained eyes.

"Where are you taking me, Ki-Gor?" she whimpered.

"To a good safe place," the jungle man replied grimly, and heaved her up onto the elephant's back.

"Are you going to hand me over to the Belgians?" Bilqis said, tremulously.

"To the British," Ki-Gor answered briefly, and slid her feet first along Marmo's back, lifting the vines so that when she was finally in place, they held her down by the ankles, the hips and the shoulders. Ki-Gor took his position then on Marmo's broad back, and the elephant slowly got to its feet.

**B**ILQIS uttered a low wail of dismay, which was drowned out by a triumphant yell from the river as the Akela who had been watching the operation lifted their paddles in loud approval. Ki-Gor waved his hand to them and put the elephant in motion away from the river. In a few moments they were out of sight in the thick undergrowth.

"Ki-Gor," Bilqis said, and her voice was no longer weepy, "you are a fool to do this."

"No," Ki-Gor said, "I'm not a fool."

"But you are," Bilqis insisted. "I was well on my way toward conquering all Central Africa. Hundreds of thousands of Africans already call me their Queen. And now you have conquered me. You will be their King, don't you see?"

Ki-Gor made no answer.

"And not only will you be their King," Bilqis went on, in a voice dramatically low, "but you will be *my* King. You can not only have all of Central Africa—you can have me."

Still Ki-Gor said nothing

"It's a prize no man has had yet," Bilqis continued, undaunted by Ki-Gor's silence, "and men have killed each other for desire of me, Ki-Gor. Other men have killed themselves because they could not have me—because I would not give myself to them. Do you believe me, Ki-Gor?"

The jungle man looked down at the imprint of the Queen of Sheba's teeth in his arm with a rueful smile. "Yes," she said, dryly. "I believe you."

"I was saving myself," she breathed, "keeping myself for the man who would come along and be stronger than me." She paused dramatically, then raised her voice. "But now—he has come along. You are stronger than I am, O Ki-Gor. You have conquered me, and I am yours!"

Ki-Gor frowned to himself. He did not know whether it was worse to have the woman cursing him or blandishing him.

"Ki-Gor," she said, "these vines are so tight on my wrists and ankles. They hurt me."

"I'll take them off tomorrow," Ki-Gor replied. "when we are well away from your Watusi."

"Aren't you afraid I will run away?"

"Tomorrow," Ki-Gor said, "you will be afraid to run away. You would be alone in the jungle without any way of knowing which direction to travel or how to feed yourself or—"

"Then won't you be afraid that I will steal your knife or spear and attack you?"

"If you made one unfriendly move towards me," Ki-Gor said, "this elephant would kill you."

Bilqis thought this over for a minute and then said, "Where are we going and how long will it take us to get there?"

"Oh, be still, woman!" Ki-Gor said in sudden exasperation. "You talk too much!"

## VIII

LATE IN THE AFTERNOON OF the second day after the Wochua Pygmies had returned home from the battle with the Bankutu, N'geeso crossed the vine bridge from the island to the mainland and shouted for his grandson. Tlaki came running, impressed by the urgency in his grandfather's voice.

"Where is Missy Helene?" N'geeso demanded.

"I don't know," Tlaki replied. "She hasn't come back."

"Come back from where?" N'geeso snapped.

"Didn't you know?" Tlaki said. She went out to meet Ki-Gor. He's overdue and she went out the North Trail on the chance she'd meet him."

"Alone?"

"Keeklo went with her," Tlaki said. "They took the biggest young elephant—the one we call Tsetse."

Anxiety twisted N'geeso's lined face. "How long ago did they go?"

"The sun was not yet up to the top," Tlaki replied uneasily.

"Go!" N'geeso commanded. "Take ten boys and go and find her. She has been gone too long."

The old Pygmy stood and watched Tlaki speed away on his errand and then turned and went slowly back across the bridge.

Three hours later the sun went down behind the great trees of the brooding forest, and Tlaki had not returned from his mission. Nor had Helene come back. N'geeso crossed back to the mainland and called the Wochua about him to wait—all night, if necessary.

The stars came out in a black velvet sky, and at midnight a full moon climbed above the trees, flooding the jungle with a ghostly brilliance. The waiting Wochua moved closer to one another and stared round-eyed at their chief. N'geeso's flat lips moved soundlessly. He was praying to the Crocodile Ancestors whom he worshipped.

The moon climbed to the zenith and then tumbled down the western wall of the sky-dome, but still there was no sign of Helene or the searching party. When the first streaks of dawn appeared, N'geeso rose up on his spindly legs.

"Prepare the War Party," he said heavily.

"How many?" asked one.

"Every man," N'geeso replied. "Every man who can carry a bow. I am afraid—I'm very afraid. And I want to go with all the strength I can gather. Quickly, now—because it will soon be light enough to follow spoor."

CAPTAIN CRAIG of the King's African Rifles stood on the jetty and looked with amusement at the hundred-foot lake steamer "Ermintrude" which was tied up alongside. An unearthly uproar of chattering and squawking came from the crates stacked up on the after deck of the lake steamer Van Struyk, the bearded owner of the "Ermintrude", wagged his head.

"Won't make much money this trip, Captain," he said. "Only twenty-two green monkeys, and about

eighty assorted parrots. If it weren't for those three gorillas I'm taking aboard, I'd be losing money."

"Where do you pick them up?" Captain Craig asked.

Over on the Belgian side, Van Struyk said, "Doulens wharf — about ten miles down the shore from Lukonzolwa."

"Hm," Craig mused. "Nasty things, gorillas—if they ever broke loose."

"No danger," Van Struyk said. "They're strongly crated. No, the only thing is that it takes time to load the heavy beasts. I shan't get into Fort Rhodesia until well after dark. Nearer midnight."

"Well," Craig said, "best of luck. See you again about Wednesday, I suppose?"

"Wednesday, yes," the bearded man said, and glanced over Craig's shoulder towards the Headquarters Bungalow which stood in front of the red-roofed barracks. "I say," he remarked, "one of your boys is coming down here in a powerful rush."

Captain Craig jerked his head around and saw that a black soldier was running at full speed toward the jetty. He pulled up ten paces away and marched up to Craig and saluted smartly.

"Leftenant Rice send me to tell the Captain," the soldier said. "Bwana Ki-Gor is here. With a woman."

"With a woman?" Craig said sharply. "What woman?"

The soldier showed the white of his eyes. "Arabi woman," he replied.

"Great Scott!" Captain Craig murmured. "He got her!"

Van Struyk grinned through his beard. "You look as if it was good news, Captain," he said. Then he glanced at his watch and said, "Well—time to cast off. I should think."

"Wait a minute, Van Struyk," Craig said. "I think you're going to have a passenger."

"Passenger?" Van Struyk echoed. "To where?"

"All the way to Fort Rhodesia," Captain Craig said. "Come along to the office, Van Struyk, and we'll make out a government ticket for her. I'll have to send an escort along with her, too. Leftenant Rice and six boys, I think. This is going to delay your departure a bit—I hope you don't mind."

"Not a bit," Van Struyk said genially, as he fell into step with the captain. "After all, seven passengers. I say, who is this woman?"

"The Queen of Sheba," Captain Craig said carelessly.

ACTUALLY the departure of the "Ermintrude" was delayed by four hours, but in spite of that her bearded master was not too annoyed because the revenue from seven passengers, even at Government rates, added up to a tidy sum. It even compensated for the fact that he would not arrive at Doulens Wharf before sundown and would therefore have to conduct the tricky business of loading gorillas by torchlight.

Captain Craig hailed Ki-Gor with enthusiasm tempered by a little awe. He stared curiously at the sullen figure of the captive queen, and then led Ki-Gor into his office, leaving orders for Bilqis to be heavily guarded.

"By Jove, Ki-Gor," he said, "you should get a knighthood for this bit of work. I dare say it wanted a bit of doing, too. Enormous creature, isn't she? Sit down and tell me all about it."

Ki-Gor closed his eyes wearily for a moment, then opened them and said, "It wasn't an easy job. She's harder to handle than a good many men. I've had practically no sleep for four days."

"Well, look here," Craig said, "why don't you pop off and have a nap for as long as you like, and then when you wake up we can have a bite to eat and you can tell me."

The jungle man shook his head. "I'd rather give you a quick report and then be on my way home. Helene was expecting me three days ago and she'll be worrying. And what's more, there are still some Watusi wandering around and they might take a notion to go over to my country."

"Only some Watusi," Craig said.

"Sounds good. Let's have it!"

Ki-Gor nodded and told as briefly as he could everything that had happened since he had last seen Captain Craig. At the end of the recital, the Captain shook his head admiringly.

"By Jove," he said, "I think you're the only one who could have pulled it off. We all owe you a lot. Especially for not giving in to that hetty charmer. If you ever did throw your lot in with her, all of us poor devils would be in for a bit of trouble. I gather she offered you everything, including the island of Madagascar, eh?"

Ki-Gor smiled and stood up. "Some day when there's more time," he said, "I'll tell you all about it. Right now, I have to go home."

As he left the settlement, Ki-Gor glanced up at the sun and estimated that it would take him about three days to get home, if he pushed Marmo hard. He glanced back at the Headquarters Bungalow and

saw the proud figure of Bilqis, Queen of Sheba hands securely manacled, being escorted to the door of Captain Craig's office. The jungle man felt a momentary twinge of sympathy for the woman.

With all her lust for power and her complete contempt for the value of human lives, there was something about her that compelled admiration of a sort. Menace to the peace though she was, it seemed a little shameful to load her with chains. Those three days alone with her in the jungle had been trying days for Ki-Gor. Even though he had never had eyes for any woman but Helene and never would, he could not altogether avoid the impact of her commanding personality. Her beauty, bold and cruel though it was, was massed on a great scale and Bilqis undeniably knew how to use it. More than once during those three days, Ki-Gor had had to recall to mind the massacred Bushongo villagers to arm himself against Bilqis' persuasiveness.

**K**I GOR would have been interested if he could have heard a conversation aboard the 'Ermintrude', soon after the steamer cast off and headed across the wide waters of Lake Mweru. He would have been surprised, too, to know that Bilqis had a fair command of the English language.

The Queen of Sheba sat in a deck chair near the bow of the steamer and regarded the muscular young lieutenant who was leaning back against the taffrail.

'Ah, you are so strong, Lieutenant,' she murmured, staring at the burly thighs which bulged out from under the khaki shorts. Her huge eyes traveled upward over Lieutenant Rice's barrel body to his round, honest Welsh face. 'At least,' she said, 'if I am prisoner, I am prisoner of strong man.'

'Oh, I don't know,' Lieutenant Rice said, blushing. 'Never thought of that, particularly. After all, a soldier—er—has to keep fit and all that sort of thing, don't you know?'

'Yes,' Bilqis said softly, 'I know. I know what I see.' And her brilliant eyes continued to admire Rice's muscles. The Lieutenant scuffed a toe uneasily and studied the sun-bleached planking of the deck.

After a time, Bilqis moved her wrists restlessly, the manacles jingling. An expression of pain crossed her features and she looked down at the stout chains. The lieutenant cleared his throat and said, 'A bit heavy, aren't they?'

Bilqis nodded. 'They hurt my wrists,' she said simply.

Rice bit his lip and stared out at the waters of Lake Mweru. The nearest shore was a good five

miles away. Then he cast a cautious side-long glance at his beautiful captive. There was something almost saintly in her resignation.

'Look here,' Rice said with sudden decision. 'You're not a common criminal, whatever. You're really a sort of prisoner of war, aren't you?'

The huge eyes lifted to his with uncomprehending innocence.

'I mean to say,' Rice stammered, 'I could—er—more or less—accept your parole. That is, if you liked.'

'Prole?' Bilqis said.

Rice pointed to her wrists. 'I mean,' he said, 'if I took those things off you, you could give me your word that you wouldn't—er—try to escape, couldn't you?'

Bilqis looked past him at the water. 'Escape?' she said wonderingly. 'Where would I go?'

'Exactly,' Rice said, taking a key from the pocket of his bush jacket. 'Do you give your word?'

'Oh, yess!' Bilqis said, with a brilliant smile. 'You are kind, Lieutenant, as well as strong.'

'Oh rats!' Lieutenant Rice muttered, bending over her. 'I mean to say, I'm not really. Just try to be decent, now and then, whatever.'

A moment later, Bilqis stood up with a happy sigh and rubbed the red marks on her wrists. She glanced casually at taking in the six heavily armed black soldiers lounging around the deck house. They returned her glance imperturbably.

'What time will we come to land again, Lieutenant?' she asked.

'Not till a bit after sundown, I should imagine,' Rice replied.

'Will you—have to chain me again then?'' Bilqis said, wistfully.

'Er—no. No indeed.' Rice said, a little comfortably. 'After all, you've given your word not to escape, haven't you?'

'Yes,' Bilqis said. 'The word of Queen.'

## IX

**I**T WAS WELL AFTER SUNDOWN when the "Ermintrude" approached Doulen's Wharf. As her searchlight picked out the tall pilings of the jetty, a flickering procession of torches threaded its way through the trees from the settlement to the lakeside. Bilqis and Rice stood just under the window of the deck house watching the scene. As the "Ermintrude's" engine-room telegraph clanged

for half speed, the crew scampered along the deck to their posts at the capstans, bow and stern. A swarm of grinning blacks lined the edge of the jetty, ready to receive the ropes that would be flung ashore. Behind them, Bilqis could see looming out of the torchlight the heavy cages mounted on crude wooden slab wheels.

The crowd of blacks on the jetty broke out into high-pitched cries as the "Ermintrude" eased in toward them. The bow rope went flying through the air to be caught by a dozen hands as the slack splashed in the black, oily water. Van Struyk spun his wheel and roared a command as the stern began to swing around, the reversed propeller churning a yellow froth.

"I say!" Lieutenant Rice said. "A bit of a lark, I'd say, all this! Fascinating indeed to goodness!"

His round face gleamed with pleasure in the leaping half-light of the torches. Bilqis threw him a speculative glance, and then dropped her gaze to his Webley in the open holster twelve inches from her right hand.

"Yess, Leftenant," Bilqis said, "verree int'resting."

The six men of the King's African Rifles sauntered past them and lined up along the rail on the shore side. Both bow and stern ropes had been made fast on the jetty, and the capstan crews were chanting in Swahili as they hauled on the bars, turning the drums and hauling the steamer alongside the pier. Bilqis touched Rice's elbow with her long fingers.

"Let us go over there"—she indicated the rail—"I can't see here. Your men are in the way."

"Oh yes, of course," Rice said eagerly. "Indeed to goodness."

Rice's soldiers gave way at his quiet command and melted backwards. Bilqis leaned her elbows on the rail as the "Ermintrude's" side groaned against the pier. She peered at the formidable gorilla cages. A melancholy howl went up from one of them.

"Poor things!" Bilqis said. "I know how they feel. I am prisoner, too."

"Oh no!" Rice said anxiously. "Hardly the same thing, do you think? You're not in a cage."

"No," Bilqis said, and then suddenly was silent. For just at that moment, she saw an Arab standing by one of the cages. It was Faïd Pasha.

Van Struyk's voice boomed behind them.

"Step along up to the bow, would you please?" the bearded skipper said. "Those cages will come along this way on their way aft. This is a delicate business, you know."

"Oh quite," Rice said, taking Bilqis by the arm. "Everything will be all right, though, won't it?"

"As far as I know," Van Struyk said, squinting shoreward. "Although there's a funny atmosphere here tonight. Can't quite put my finger on it. The natives aren't as noisy as usual for one thing. I wonder what's up."

Out of the corner of her eye, Bilqis could see Faïd Pasha watching her as she moved up to the bow of the steamer with Rice at her side. Then Van Struyk bellowed a command, and the gangplank was rolled out. At the same instant, Faïd Pasha disappeared.

VAN STRUYK strode ashore across the gangplank, followed by several of his crew carrying coils of heavy rope. The crowd on the jetty followed him to the nearest gorilla cage, which he began to inspect carefully with an electrical flashlight.

"Hm—I suppose he wants to make sure those cages are all tight and so forth," Rice mused, "before he takes them aboard. Can't say that I can blame him, can you?"

The young Lieutenant was so absorbed with Van Struyk's movements that he failed to notice that Bilqis did not answer him. She, in turn, was absorbed with the movements of some other people who were filtering out onto the pier. After a while, Lieutenant Rice noticed them, too.

"I say, look at those two long tall Johnnies!" he exclaimed. "Over there on the right. Immense, aren't they? I wonder where they came from. Something on the order of the Masai—only taller still, 'deed to goodness! Look, there are more of them—lots more! I say, what's up here?"

He moved down the deck toward the gangplank, Bilqis close by his left side. As he arrived at the inboard end of the plank, a score or more Watusi broke into a dead run toward the "Ermintrude." Lieutenant Rice reached for his Webley. But before his hand had crossed his body, Bilqis slid the heavy gun out of the holster. Cool and quick as a cobra, she pressed the muzzle against the young man's left side and pulled the trigger twice.

Lieutenant Rice died instantly as the cruel slugs ruptured his innocent heart. Before his body crashed to the deck, his black soldiers had begun firing on the onrushing Watusi. Their rifles roared and a dozen of the tall warriors fell on the pier and the gangplank. But dozens more were swarming aboard with fanatical shouts. In less than two minutes, all six of the Baganda soldiers were cut to pieces, and the

blood-lusting Watusi were raging over the steamer looking for more victims

At the sound of the first shots, the natives of Doulen's Wharf had dropped their torches and fled from the pier, and with them had gone Van Struyk. The remainder of the crew of the "Ermintrude" had taken to the water at the first rush of the Watusi. Thus, in an incredibly short time, the Ever-Victorious Army was in complete possession of steamer and jetty.

The triumphant Watusi made way for their Queen as she stepped across the gangplank, the Webley still in her hand. With a terrible smile on her aquiline features, she strode across the pier through a lane of screaming, gesticulating warriors until she came to the young Egyptian.

"Shah-bash! Well done, Faïd Pasha!" she intoned in Arabic, and placed her left hand on his shoulder.

Faïd Pasha lowered his head modestly. "I did my best, Your Majesty."

"Did some jinn tell you I was on that ship?" Bilqis demanded.

"I learned that by various means," Faïd Pasha replied, with a subtle smile.

"Where are Yakub and ibn Makal?" Bilqis said.

"Both dead in battle on the river bank."

"How many survived altogether?" Bilqis asked.

"There are less than three hundred Watusi and Shilluks," Faïd Pasha said. "The Bankutu and Tofoke deserted." The Queen's eyes narrowed. "Curses on that devil, K1-Gor!" she exclaimed. "If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to even scores with him! Tonight, I rest. But tomorrow, we march—we march to K1-Gor's country. We will seek him out and destroy him! Do you hear, Faïd Pasha?"

The Egyptian nodded grimly. "I hear, O Queen," he said, "but I must tell you that it is my opinion that we will not have to seek out K1-Gor. On the contrary, he will be seeking us out."

"What makes you think so?"

"K1-Gor's wife is our prisoner."

"K1-Gor's wife!" Bilqis shrieked in astonishment.

"You knew he had one, didn't you?" Faïd Pasha said, barely concealing his pride of accomplishment.

"Yes, K1-Gor told me," Bilqis said, "when did this happen—and how did it do it?"

"After we beat off the Akela and Batatela, we marched straight to K1-Gor's country—I had been there before, you remember—thinking he might have taken you there. We found the woman riding along a trail on an elephant with no escort but a Pygmy boy. I suspected who the woman was and

ordered her captured. The Pygmy shot poisoned arrows and we lost three Watusi—"

"It was worth it if you got the woman," Bilqis said firmly. "What is she like? Is she beautiful?"

"She is an American," Faïd Pasha replied with a shrug. "Perhaps the Americans think she is beautiful. She has red hair and blue eyes. For my taste, she is much too thin. And of course, she can't compare to Your Majesty."

Bilqis curled her upper lip. "That fool, K1-Gor!" she muttered. "He will learn what happens to men who reject Bilqis!"

"The woman is very calm," Faïd Pasha said, "and she appears perfectly confident that K1-Gor will come and rescue her."

"Ha!" Bilqis said with a harsh laugh. "Where is she? I must see this wonderful bargaining piece."

"I left her with the main force at the Ruined Fort," Faïd Pasha said. "I only brought fifty men with me on this safari."

"At N'Danga?" Bilqis said. "How far is that from here?"

"Less than a day's march," Faïd Pasha said. "My idea was to rest the men there and at the same time do some recruiting among the Warua to the north. And we are in a strong position there, in case K1-Gor should try to lead a strong force against us."

The Queen's face gleamed with a savage smile. "I hope he does!" she said, "and soon!"

## X

FOR THE THOUSANDTH TIME, Helene, wife of K1-Gor, made the circle of the ancient fort, and for the thousandth time she cursed her folly in going out to meet K1-Gor with only little Keeklo for protection. Poor Keeklo! Helene shook her head. He had given his life unhesitatingly, fighting against insuperable odds to save her from the white-robed giants and their Arab leader.

And now, two days later, she found herself pacing over flagstones worn smooth by unknown generations of bare, black feet. Once more she started around, scanning the grey ten-foot high walls, ignoring the curious eyes of the Watusi on one side of the fort and the more hostile Shilluks, ranged along the other side.

Countless centuries before, a race long since vanished had erected that fort on the ground plan of a six-pointed star. They had been skillful stone-cutters, squaring off the edges of enormous blocks and fitting

them together like dominoes. About two hundred feet in diameter, the fort might originally have been roofed over—but now the lichen-covered walls were open to the sky—or rather to the trees.

For the jungle had long ago moved in on the old fort embracing it like a jealous lover. Immensely tall trees ringed the stone battlements like an outer stockade, and two forest giants towered up inside the walls, having cracked the flagstone paving. High in the air the leafy boughs of these and the surrounding trees interlaced to make a thick green roof which shut out the sun and kept the fort, even at midday, in a twilight gloom.

As she sauntered past first one and then the other of the trees growing within the walls, Helene studied them surreptitiously. They were both at least four feet in diameter and their lowest limbs were no closer than fifty feet above the ground. The usual parasitic lianas spiralled around the vast trunks and swung long tough tendrils from the boughs down nearly to the ground. Helene considered the idea of going up one of the lianas hand over hand and escaping. Ki-Gor could have been up to the nearest limb in less than ten seconds.

But she had not acquired her mate's fabulous skill in climbing, and it would be only too probable that the watchful warriors could catch her before she could pull herself up out of reach of their spears. She sighed and continued her aimless pacing around the worn flagstones.

Suddenly one of the Watusi on top of the wall gave a shout.

Ras Bilqis!

The reaction of the warriors in the fort was instantaneous and deafening. Yammering like crazy men, they streamed up the ladders that led up to the top of the walls. There, they crowded gesticulating on the battlements above the main gate to the fort. For one heart-stopping moment, Helene thought that she had been forgotten. She glanced quickly to her right and to her left at the Shilluks streaming past her. Then she poised herself to make a dash for the nearest hanging liana.

But huge black hands clamped on her shoulders, and her heart sank. Two grimy Shilluks, laughing like idiots, rushed her to the wall and dragged and pushed her up a ladder to the crowded parapet. There, she was almost completely engulfed by the black giants, and could see nothing except the inside of the fort below. But in a very short while, the object of the warriors' wild attention came into view.

A TRIUMPHANT little procession of chanting prancing Watusi appeared below. Her Leaping and whirling and skipping, they straggled out on to the floor of the fort. Bringing up the rear of the procession were eight sweating Worua boys bearing on their shoulders an improvised litter. Helena stared with tearful fascination at the bold-featured, big-boned woman who reclined majestically on the litter.

"So that's the Queen of Sheba!" Helene muttered to herself and then felt herself dragged helplessly along as the warriors around her swarmed toward the ladders to go back down to the ground. By desperate efforts, she managed to keep her balance on the slippery bamboo ladder while the hysterical Shilluks pushed and shoved and hauled. When she finally reached the floor of the fort, her two guards dragged her roughly through the milling crowd to the place where the Queen's litter had been set down.

Then she heard a shouted command in a deep contralto voice. The warriors' cries died down, and they backed away, leaving an open space around the litter. The Queen rose from the litter and stood up with her arms folded across her deep bosom. Her eyes glittered at Helene.

Who arr you?" Bilqis said in English.

For a moment, Helene was too astonished at the woman's insolence to answer. When the Egyptian had captured Helene, he had told her in considerable detail of Ki-Gor's defeat and capture of Bilqis, and had told her how delighted Bilqis would be to have her. Helene, as a prisoner, Helene, now, glanced at the Egyptian standing behind his Queen, smiling his crafty smile.

Helene flushed with sudden anger. "You know perfectly well who I am!" she retorted to Bilqis. "You haven't seen me before, but I believe you've met my husband. And I wouldn't be surprised if you should see him again—and pretty soon!"

An expression of concentrated, murderous fury contorted the Queen's face. "You leetle fool!" she snarled. "Yon don't know what you arr talking about! You will not be Ki-Gor's wife forr long!"

"I think," said Helene coldly, "that Ki-Gor will have something to say about that."

"Ha-ha! Yess!" Bilqis said with an evil laugh. "He will have to say something! He will have to choose."

"Choose?" Helene said.

"Between you and me," the Queen rasped. "If he chooses to take me forr his wife—I will send you away without hurrtng you. If he chooses you—"

Bilqis shrugged — "he can have you. But you will be dead."

Helene felt her heart pounding. It was not real fear, because she had enormous confidence in Ki-Gor's ability to rescue her from any situation. Nevertheless, her heart was pounding, and she found it a little difficult to keep her voice from trembling. She spoke up bravely.

"You don't know Ki-Gor," she said. "He doesn't change wives—for any reason."

"This time he will change," Bilqis said, "because if he does not change—he will have no wife at all."

Helene shook her head with a confident smile, and this seemed to enrage the Queen still more. "You think perhaps I am playing some child's game with you?" she stormed. "I assure you I am not! You will not smile like that when the moment comes for Ki-Gor to choose! Because if he chooses you—think of this, you little smiling fool—if he chooses you it will mean he wants you to die! Then will you smile?"

## XI

**T**HE WOMAN WAS TERRIFYING in her fury, and Helene felt the pit of her stomach grow cold. "Ki-Gor, where are you?" she said to herself. "Hurry, please, before this woman loses control of herself completely!"

"You think you are so much better than me!" Bilqis shrieked. "You have no doubt that Ki-Gor will choose you over me! Arr, you mad? Don't you realize I am a Queen? What man will not choose a Queen if he is given the chance? Or is it that you think you are more beautiful than me? Is that it? Is that it?"

Her voice rose to a scream and she swung around and addressed the young Egyptian. "The Sword!" she shrieked. "Bring me the Sword of Suheiman! We will touch up this pretty little woman's face a little with the Sword of Suheiman! Then perhaps Ki-Gor will not think she is so pretty!"

Fad Pasha's face showed alarm, and for a moment it seemed that he was going to protest. Then he turned obediently, went to the litter, and returned with the wicked-looking scimitar. As Bilqis reached for the sword, Helene braced herself. Hemmed in by the fascinated warriors, she had no escape. It would be futile to try to run. All she could do was shut her eyes tight while the mad Queen slashed at her soft cheeks. But she would not shut her eyes until the last moment—until that cruel blade licked out at

her face. With mounting horror, she watched Bilqis extend her sword arm, wild blood-lust in her wolfish face. "Ki-Gor!" Helene moaned to herself. "You are too late!"

And then suddenly he was there.

His voice sounded like the crack of a rifle from the tree above them.

"Don't touch her, Bilqis, or you are a dead woman!"

Now he was sliding down a liana into the midst of a group of Shilluks. They tumbled over each other to get out of his way, and he landed lightly on his feet. He tossed away the wadded-up leaves that had protected his hands, and strode toward Bilqis. His face was drawn and haggard, and his eyes red-rimmed with fatigue. But they flashed icy fire as he advanced on Bilqis.

She dropped her sword arm to her side and stared at him as if she could not believe her eyes.

"You!" she intoned. "You have come!"

"I have come," Ki-Gor echoed, "and just in time to stop you from harming my wife. If you had so much as touched her, I would have killed you like that!"

He snapped his fingers and leaned forward, shoulders hunched, glaring at Bilqis. As Helene watched him anxiously, her first joy and relief at seeing him were dampened by the realization that he was alone and, except for the knife at his belt, unarmed. She looked quickly at Bilqis, and guessed that the Queen was thinking the same thing.

There was a long pause, and then Bilqis said softly, "How could you kill me, Ki-Gor? I am surrounded by the finest fighting men in Africa and you are alone."

Ki-Gor gave a short laugh. "Do you think for a minute," he said, "that I would come alone?"

**B**ILQIS looked at him for a moment, and then suddenly shouted a command. On all sides, warriors sprang up the ladders to the top of the wall. Helene's heart sank. She could always tell by Ki-Gor's voice when he was bluffing and when he was not. At this moment, he was bluffing.

The men on top of the wall were peering out in all directions through the half-light of the jungle. After a few moments, they called down in bewildered, disappointed tones. Bilqis smiled with evident satisfaction.

"I thought so," she said. "You want me to think that you have an army surrounding me. There is not one single man to be seen out there."



Ki Gor nodded grimly "You and your Shilluks should go back to your Northern deserts," he said, where you know your way around This is the jungle, and we of the jungle have ways of doing things that you never dreamed of Your men up there on the walls don't know where to look for my men "

Helene sensed that Ki-Gor was stalling to gain time He gave a quick glance into the trees above and went on. "My army is here—even if you can't see it And if you harm either my wife or myself, they will take a terrible vengeance "

The Queen uttered a savage laugh "You are trying to play tricks again, Ki-Gor," she said "Before, you have fooled me with your tricks—but no longer You are alone, and you know it and I know it And this means that I change my plans If you had come with an army, I was going to make a bargain with you, using this woman—your wife—for a bargaining piece But now—I don't have to make bargains with you I shall simply take my *revenge!*"

The next few minutes passed in a hideous blur before Helene's eyes The Shilluks pounced on Ki-Gor and Ki Gor submitted without the slightest attempt at resistance At the Queen's command, they dragged him over to one of the walls of the fort where two heavy iron wrist-cuffs were suspended on short rusty chains from spikes driven into the masonry The jungle man was backed up against the wall arms spread eagled, and the manacles snapped on each wrist

Then Bilqis came toward Helene, smiling her murderous smile, and took her by the wrist She shouted a command and the Watusi and Shilluks backed away in all directions, leaving a wide open space around the two women Fifty feet away, Ki Gor watched silently An expectant hush settled over the ancient fort

Bilqis called to the Egyptian and when he came to her, she handed him the scimitar, and he went back with it among the warriors

Now " the Queen said to Helene, "you were so sure that Ki-Gor would never choose me instead of you You thought you were better than me, didn't you? Well, I am going to give you a chance to show that you are better than me We are going to fight each other with our bare hands If you are so much better than me, you will be able to keep me from breaking your back across my knees—you will be able to keep me from breaking your arms and legs, one by one—"

**W**HEN BILQIS first started to speak Helene had heard her words in a sort of horrid daze Then the clear, awful meaning of the words came home to her, and it was as if someone had turned on a switch in her brain Helene was suddenly clear-headed and cool, and quickly weighed her chances in a hand-to-hand combat with this giantess who towered eight inches above her, and who outweighed her by probably fifty pounds

Not for a moment did Helene doubt that the woman could break her back and her limbs—the steely grip on her wrist was already proof of her prodigious strength Speed, Helene decided, and agility were her only weapons

As the venomous words dripped from the Queen's mouth, Helene stole a glance at the muscular hand that gripped her left wrist The Queen's hand was turned upward, fingers and soft under-part of the wrist uppermost While the woman was still talking, relishing every sadistic word, Helene suddenly chopped down with the side of her right hand on that upturned wrist

Bilqis interrupted herself with a short yelp and momentarily relaxed her grip on Helene's wrist Instantly, Helene wrenched her hand free, and at the same moment crashed her right fist into the Queen's face Then she skipped backwards, just escaping the encircling arms of Bilqis As the Queen stood alternately blinking and screaming with rage, Helene circled cautiously around her left side

Without warning, Bilqis rushed her and launched a terrific kick, which would have half killed Helene if it had landed But Helene just did evade it and continued to circle her adversary Bilqis made another bull like rush This time Helene was ready She danced backward, waiting for the kick Then as the powerful leg-came driving through the air at her stomach, she leaped to one side At the same time, her right hand pounced on the Queen's ankle and jerked it upward

Bilqis teetered on one foot for a second and then crashed helplessly to the ground A thrill of triumph shot through Helene and she leaped recklessly in and smashed her heel in the woman's face But her exultation turned into sudden dismay, as she felt a hand seize her left ankle She turned and flung herself on Bilqis' prostrate body, kicking her left leg frantically But the Queen hung on grimly and grabbed the toes of Helene's left foot with her other hand

Sickening pain shot up Helene's left leg, and she

knew that if she could not break that hold instantly, the woman would twist her foot all the way around. She tried to dig her right knee into the Queen's throat, but the woman's powerful arms held her off. Frantically, then, Helene punched at Bilqis' bare stomach with both fists. "One, two, one, two!"

A gurgling scream came from the woman, and Helene felt the pressure on her ankle relax for a second. She kicked out furiously and was released. Wasting no time, she rolled away and sprang to her feet. Slowly, Bilqis rose from the ground, glowing balefully.

The warriors were chattering with excitement and wonderment at the extraordinary spectacle they were witnessing. Dully, over the uproar, Helene heard Ki-Gor's voice shouting something to her about a ladder. But she could not hear him distinctly, and she dared not take her eyes off the Queen for even a split second to look at her chained husband.

Bilqis was coming toward her slowly now, arms outstretched and fingers curved into deadly claws. She was a fearsome sight. Her mass of black hair stood out from her head like a baboon's mane. A thin trickle of blood oozed from one nostril, and her teeth were bared like an infuriated leopard's.

**H**ELENE pondered her next move. She knew that, above all, she must not let this woman get her on the ground. She must somehow keep on her feet, and at the same time stay out of reach of those long powerful arms. As Bilqis advanced, she gave ground slowly, keeping her eyes fixed on the woman's middle.

Now, Bilqis was coming toward her faster, and Helene drifted away in another circling movement around Bilqis' left hand. The roar of the warriors rose higher as their Queen seemed to be closing in for the kill. Faster and faster the Queen moved, claw-like hands raking the air, and Helene stumbled a little on the uneven flagstones as she constantly moved backward. Bilqis was close enough to her now to head her off as she tried to pass her, and with a dismayed shock, Helene realized that the Queen was deliberately herding her toward a wall of the fort, where she would have less room to maneuver.

In a sudden panic, Helene reversed her direction and made a dash to her own left. But Bilqis was not caught napping. The long fingernails of her right hand caught the tip of Helene's shoulder and raked downwards. Helene felt herself flung off balance, and at the same time one foot tripped on the edge of a flagstone. With a little moan of despair, she hurtled

to the ground.

She tried to get to her feet and roll away at the same time, but before her feet were fairly underneath her, she felt two huge hands close around her neck. She was lifted clear of the ground, her feet kicking vainly in the air. The long muscular fingers squeezed inexorably and the world began to go black in front of Helene's eyes. Fighting for consciousness, she hit at the Queen's face with both hands with all the power she could muster up.

The fingers on her throat seemed to relax a little and Helene continued to pound away at the contorted face in front of her. Then she felt the ground beneath her feet. Bilqis was leaning backward trying to keep her face out of reach of Helene's punishing fists. But the strangling fingers remained clamped on Helene's throat, and she knew she had to break the hold soon or perish.

She seized the Queen's wrists and hauled down on them, trying to tear those cruel hands from her throat. But Bilqis, grinning savagely, merely spread her feet wide and squeezed harder. Gasping for breath, Helene brought up a knee hard between Bilqis' vast thighs. The Queen gave a shriek of pain, released Helene's throat, and staggered backward clasp ing her groin and bent nearly double.

**H**ELENE lurched to one side, swallowing hard and gulping air into her tortured lungs. She knew that she had a golden opportunity to attack the Queen and batter that hateful face, but she could hardly lift one foot off the ground and place it before the other. In fact, Bilqis recovered herself while Helene still stood half-paralyzed and almost incapable of moving.

Slowly, the Queen approached her, her huge eyes burning with unimaginable hate. Helene looked about her helplessly and took a few staggering steps to one side. But Bilqis moved much faster and Helene knew that the game was up.

In a fatalistic stupor, she turned away. The Queen's hands closed once more on her wrists. The grip was not so strong as it had been earlier, but it was still too strong for Helene to pull out of.

"Have you had enough?" Bilqis said in a malevolent murmur, and drew Helene's arms behind her back. "We have not finished yet. No—we are only beginning."

She lifted both of Helene's wrists a little and Helene gave an involuntary gasp.

"Does that hurt?" Bilqis said softly. "It is nothing. It is only the beginning!"

Weak as she was, a sudden fury swept over Helene. She refused to let this bestial woman play with her like a cat playing with a mouse. She flung her head backward impetuously. There was a sharp crack as she felt the point of the Queen's chin squarely on the back of her head. Automatically, she stamped downward on the Queen's instep, and, as her wrists were released, she spun around to face her torturer.

Bilqis stood swaying, half-knocked out, her eyes staring vacantly. Summoning all her remaining strength, Helene hit her across the Adam's apple with the side of her hand. The Queen crumpled up on the ground, gasping and choking. Both hands clutched her throat as her neck muscles strained and her chest heaved.

As the onlooking warriors murmured in awe, Ki-Gor's voice dinned in on Helene's consciousness.

"Helene!" he shouted. "Over here! Run up the ladder next to me! Hurry! While there's time!"

Helene turned and took a half a step toward him and stopped.

"But what will you do?" she said. "They'll kill you!"

"Do as I say!" Ki-Gor insisted. "Never mind about me!"

"No, No, Ki-Gor!" Helene said, half-weeping. "I would never leave you!"

"I'll be all right, Helene!" Ki-Gor raged. "Do as I tell you—hurry! The woman is getting up!"

Helene looked back and saw Bilqis staggering to her feet. Still clutching her throat with her left hand, she tottered toward her warriors. Several of them ran forward to meet her, but she waved them back and pointed to the young Egyptian. Faid Pasha hastened toward her then and she seized the little scimitar from him. Still silent from her paralyzed larynx, Bilqis turned and started back toward Helene.

"At least come to me, Helene!" Ki-Gor begged, and finally Helene obeyed him. She was about fifty feet from him, and the Queen about the same distance behind her, when she started. When she had run half the distance, she flung a glance over her shoulder and saw that Bilqis was gaining on her fast, running like an avenging fury, the sword upraised.

"Now," Helene thought, "it is truly all over"—with herself unarmed and Ki-Gor chained to the wall. She wondered dismally how she could have ever hoped for any other outcome.

AND THEN, UNBELIEVABLY, Ki-Gor stepped forward from the wall! The manacles were still on his wrists but the rusty chains were dangling free, foot-long ring-spikes suspended from the ends.

"Now—go up that ladder!" Ki-Gor commanded, and sprang past her. As in

a dream, Helene turned toward the ladder ten feet away, but her eyes followed Ki-Gor as he ran at Bilqis. In a split-second of action, the razor-edge blade flashed and Ki-Gor swung the chain on his right wrist. There was a ringing clang and then a gentle tinkle as the fragments of the shattered Sword of Solomon showered on to the flagstones.

A concerted roar of rage burst out from the warriors and they surged forward as Ki-Gor wheeled and sped toward the wall. Helene, at the foot of the ladder, came to life and ran up the rungs for dear life. Even before she reached the top, she felt the ladder shake as Ki-Gor flung his weight on it below her.

At the same moment, she heard a squeaking voice above her exhorting her to hurry. N'geeso!

She leaped onto the top of the wall to find the Pygmy chieftain in a fury of excitement, a poisoned arrow already notched in his diminutive bow. But N'geeso was not alone. Beyond him stood Tlaki, and beyond Tlaki—Helene gasped as she saw that the top of every wall around the fort was swarming with Pygmies, all with notched arrows, all dancing with excitement! Now, Ki-Gor was on the parapet and dragging the ladder up after him.

"That's the last ladder!" Ki-Gor shouted, with terrible satisfaction. "The Pygmies have drawn all the others up."

Helene's eyes went involuntarily to the main gate of the fort. On the wall above it, a horde of Pygmies was massed, already pouring a deadly shower of poisoned arrows down into a milling mob of Shilluks. N'geeso squealed and began shooting and the holocaust began.

In a few seconds, the Ever-Victorious Army realized that it was hopelessly trapped inside its own fort. It swiftly disintegrated into a mob of panic-stricken, crazed individuals running around aimlessly, seeking in vain an escape from the deadly arrows of the Pygmies. In blind desperation, they began to fight one another, Watusi against Shilluk.

Faid Pasha, his slight figure dwarfed by the

white-robed giants, was fighting his way toward the Queen when a Shilluk

knocked him down. The Egyptian struggled to his feet and pushed on to within a few yards of Bilqis when another Shilluk clubbed him down again. As he lay writhing and shrieking on the ground, Bilqis tried to go to his assistance. She clawed her way shrieking through the mob, and, in a fury, a seven-foot Watusi turned and plunged his great spear into her back between the shoulder blades, driving it entirely through her so that it protruded redly from the front. Then like a pack of wolves, every Watusi within reach of her closed in to hack and stab at the queen who had once led them to victories.

Ki-Gor turned away from the sight, grim-faced, and placed a hand on N'geeso's shoulder.

"Save your arrows," he murmured, and the Pygmy chief ran along the parapet, calling on his tribesmen to cease fire. Gradually the shower of arrows stopped around the perimeter of the fort, and the Pygmies began clambering up the lianas back into the treetops from which they had originally come.

As Ki-Gor helped Helene on to a low-hanging bough, a tiny remnant of the Army of the Queen of Sheba were still vengefully hacking at each other down on the corpse-strewn flagstones of the fort.

"**T**HROUGH THE YEARS," Helene mused, "I should have learned to have nothing but the completest confidence in you, Ki-Gor. But toward the end, there at the fort, I just didn't see how we could possibly get out alive."

She gazed comfortably at the hammered-silver moonpath that extended from the beach at their feet across the expanse of Lake Mweru. Up and down the beach on either side of them, scores of little fires flickered, surrounded by hundreds of Pygmies

singing and dancing grotesque little victory songs and dances.

"I know," Ki-Gor conceded. "It was awfully close. If I'd had just the Wochua with me, we would have been there hours earlier. But with so many others joining us, it slowed down the speed of the whole group. You see, we were following the trail through Batwa country, and the Batwa insisted on joining us in a body. And the next morning the Bambuti heard about it and sent a big party to us. I was glad to have them, of course—especially the Bambuti, because they have an arrow-poison that works faster even than the Wochuas'—but it took me longer to move a force of that size."

Helene shivered, although the heat of the day still hung over the beach. "I can still see you," she murmured, "chained to that wall—so helpless."

"I wasn't so helpless as you might think," Ki-Gor said dryly. "But as long as you were holding your own in your private fight, I had to stay quiet until the Pygmies could come down out of the trees and pull up the ladders and get into position. You put up a wonderful fight, my Helene. You remembered everything I've ever taught you. I was very proud of you."

"I guess you must be a wonderful teacher," Helene said. "Everything I did was sort of by instinct. But I still don't know how you could have pulled those spikes out of that solid rock."

"It was just a matter of time, working them loose," Ki-Gor said. "They'd been in there so long the rock was rotten and crumbly around them."

He stared out at the moonpath in the water and Helene gazed at his strongly-chiseled profile. A vagrant puff of wind came along and blew a lock of his long soft hair down over his forehead.

Helene straightened up. "Ki-Gor!" she said severely. "The first thing tomorrow morning, I'm going to give you a haircut!"