

# **JUNGLE STORIES**

Spring 1950

*featuring*

# **KI-GOR JUNGLELORD**

*in*

# **LOST PREISTESS OF THE NILE**





**By John Peter Drummond**

*A bronze-golden streak suddenly shot down from the latticework of limbs above the forest floor and fastened itself like a burr upon the leopard!*

## **LOST PRIESTESS of the NILE**

**Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, invaded that weird, lost land—dared to defy its Crimson Evil, the jackal-born juju of Tirin . . . only to cast down his blade in surrender at the feet of the mad Queen! For if he fought, Helene would die . . . a helpless, haunted quarry of the Hunting-Cats of Mau!**

**K**I-GOR FROWNED AS HE watched the leopard. He kept himself very still otherwise, for he was stalking—but this sun-bronzed brows, ridged slightly with muscle, came gently together so that a small nick formed just over the bridge of his nose.

Old cat, he was thinking, cat that has tasted man-blood. His fur will be scarred and patchy. It will darken after softening.

Ki-Gor always thought in the pictures and sounds of the jungle, rather than the English words Helene had taught him. He could think more swiftly that way, and

the jungle demands swiftness of thought as much as quickness and strength of muscle. Mentally, then, Ki-Gor analyzed the leopard, his quarry, in the time that it took him to flick his grey eyes back and forth. He had caught the cat scent some moments ago, from the treetops. He had swung toward it, riding the myriad jungle vines, trotting along the greater limbs, leaping the open spaces, but doing all of this in a flowing, unbroken rhythm so that at times he seemed literally to fly through the upper levels.

He had spotted the leopard through the mottled foliage, in spite of its mottled camouflage. He had seen it there on the large rock, just beyond where the jungle ended abruptly. He had frozen, then—and now he watched.

The tip of the leopard's tail switched. Once, gently *He stalks, also* Ki-Gor thought. He moved his eyes again, trying to find some sign of what the leopard hunted. The rock was part of a small *kopje*—a climbing plain began here at the jungle's edge. The plain, itself, was dotted thickly with trees and covered with lion grass, so that Ki-Gor, from his perch, couldn't quite tell whether or not a trail passed the rock. It seemed likely, though. And it seemed likely that this leopard would be looking for a man-victim. When the jungle beasts become old and feeble, only man is weak enough, then, for prey.

**K**I-GOR reached for the knife at his side. He would have preferred to use bow and arrow but he had left these weapons in the fork of a tree so that he might travel more swiftly. That reminded him of the strange thing that seemed to have happened. In his own part of the Congo—a deep jungle place, some hundreds of square miles in area, and known to very few but Ki-Gor and his friends—there had suddenly come about a remarkable shortage of leopards. Ki-Gor hadn't realized this until he had begun to hunt for a leopard. Helene had been explaining to Ki-Gor, in their tree-top home, about birthdays and birthday presents, and it had suddenly occurred to the mighty, tawny-haired lord of the jungle that a new leopard skin garb would be just the thing for Helene. Her old costume had begun to be stiff from the wettings of jungle rains, and marked in places by jungle thorns.

And so Ki-Gor—who was a man of abrupt action, like any jungle creature—had risen suddenly, said to Helene, "I will be back in one or two suns. Now I go." And he had gone. He

supposed Helene must have smiled at his retreating back, and must have shaken her head sadly, the way she usually did. He had chuckled, picturing that Helene, of course, would always have more touches of civilization than he, for Ki-Gor, the son of a missionary who had died, had been raised, suckled and mothered by the vast jungle itself. Helene, an American aviatrix, had found Ki-Gor after a plane crash in the jungle—or rather he had found her, and Ki-Gor dated the most important part of his existence from that moment.

He smiled a little as he thought of the trouble he was taking to get this leopard skin for Helene. He had found no cat scent in his own part of the jungle. He had conferred with Tembu George, the Masai chieftain who was built like a mighty obelisk, and Tembu George seemed to recall that *he* hadn't seen any leopards lately, either. He had journeyed to the pygmy kraal and talked to N'Geeso, the brave, chattering little man who knew as much about the jungle as anyone.

No leopards lately, not even among the old women gathering kaffir corn in the fields.

Ki-Gor did not burden himself with speculation on the matter. This is not the way of the jungle. He asked N'Geeso if leopard had been reported anywhere, lately, for if anyone knows the gossip of the jungle, it will be a pygmy. And N'Geeso had promptly reported that a B'Wahai woman had been taken by a leopard the week before, far to the north, in B'Wahai country.

Where there was one leopard, there would be more—but one was enough.

Ki-Gor had cached his bow and arrows in a high tree, and had sped north.

**N**OW, after two days of search and travel, this was his reward. An old and nearly toothless cat with a patchy skin and a twisted, dragging leg. A leopard good only for hunting the puniest of jungle creatures—man.

And at that moment a sample of this breed came around the corner of the rock, and stumbled forward through the lion grass.

Ki-Gor's brows rose. He didn't start, or shift a hair's width from his crouch, however, as a civilized man might have done. He merely stared at the newcomer, and made his usual instant appraisal. The brow raising—the one sign of surprise—was because the one who came into sight was a white man.

Facts went through Ki-Gor's head, and he put

them together as they did. It was an instantaneous process, the whole of it took no more, than a part of a second. This is the country of the B'wahai, he thought, this is the place where white man seldom comes. The nearest haunt of the white man is the river far to the west, it would be a long march from the river. Yet this man stumbles, see how he stumbles! He has come from the river, for some reason. Probably he is lost.

The leopard was thinking about the new white man, too, but in a much more direct way. His jaws moved just slightly, and the tip of his tail switched again.

Ki-Gor drew his knife. He crouched for a spring. His eye was already charting his course: a leap across the gap to that long branch, to the end of the branch, and then a long spring in mid-air to the leopard's back. The lord of the jungle didn't dwell on what might happen, if the slightest noise or scent should warn the leopard—what might happen perhaps if the spring should fall short. Even mighty-thewed Ki-Gor would be no match for those carved dagger-talons, then, but he didn't think of this. The way of the jungle is to do what must be done.

There would be a moment within the next heartbeat or two when the leopard would concentrate his every nerve and sense on the victim below him. The white man in a torn linen suit that had once been white, in a frayed, shapeless palm hat. The little, wiry man with a grimy face and an immensely long nose who staggered with each step.

The leopard's tail stopped switching. Ki-Gor moved. His swiftness and his silence might have given Ki-Gor a grace like the leopard's own—but there was something much too mighty about his movements to be cat-like. He leaped the gap, he ran the branch, he was in midair. All in the time it would take the leopard to twitch its whisker.

The staggering white man looked up at that moment. He saw the head and folded forepaws of a leopard above him, he saw a strange apparition, a sun-bronzed white man in a loin cloth, plummeting from the clear blue air toward the leopard's back.

The white man screamed a scream of unholy terror.

Ki-Gor struck the cat's back. The leopard snarled with rage and astonishment. It snapped itself over and around, the quickest four-tooted beast in the jungle. Yet there was one who was quicker. Ki-Gor was already clamped unyieldingly to the leopard's back. His left arm had crept

forward, under the beast's forepaw, and thence to the back of his neck. A civilized wrestler would have told Ki-Gor that this hold was a half-nelson—but Ki-Gor would have shrugged and continued to think of it, in his wordless jungle way, as the hold-for-killing-leopard. He held the leopard thus, not so much to keep the animal immobile as to secure his own position, away from this raking, four-inch claws. With his right hand he worked his sheath knife. He held this with his thumb against the hilt, his hand turned down, and both the knife and his glistening bronze arm flashed, blurred and flashed, as the blade bit.

It went into the leopard's body, just behind his shoulder. It struck again and again and again. It is sometimes hard to kill a living thing, those of the jungle know this. The leopard whiplashed, thrashed and squirmed, and once he half-somersaulted, falling with all his weight upon Ki-Gor, and causing even the lord of the jungle to bruise himself upon the rock. Ki-Gor scarcely felt the bruising. One thing at a time, at the moment he must kill his adversary, when that was done he would think of the next thing.

The leopard made three final, terrible thrashes, movements that snapped from his shoulders to his spine. And then suddenly, except for an almost pitiful jerking of one hind leg, he was still.

**K**I-GOR STOOD. He looked down upon the creature he had bested, and as always he felt the primeval thrill well up in his mighty chest. He was about to place his foot upon the victim and voice a victory cry—

Then he remembered the little white man in the dirty clothes and the shapeless hat. He turned. The man lay utterly on his back, arms flung in the form of a Y. He was breathing, but he was out cold.

Ki-Gor began a smile. No doubt, this stranger had fainted from sheer fright, and Ki-Gor could hardly blame him. Helene had given him something that approached sympathy for these civilized ones who didn't understand his ways, the jungle's ways. Not quite understanding, no, but a kind of sympathy, yes. He wiped his knife upon the still-warm pelt of the leopard and scrambled down from the rock. He sheathed his knife and bent over the unconscious man.

The man appeared to be somewhere in his forties, his face was as wiry as his frame. His long nose, his planked cheeks and small, ridiculous chin gave him the paradoxical look of a genial spider.

He opened his eyes as Ki-Gor crouched there, looking at him. They were bright blue—they were immensely bright. They filled to capacity suddenly with fear. The man opened his mouth, no doubt to scream, but Ki-Gor could see that his jaws were practically paralyzed.

Ki-Gor smiled and grunted. "Nothing to be afraid of."

The little man found his tongue, then—if not his brightest confidence for the future. In a voice that was like the dry-scratching of rough *eseve* leaves he said, "Look, cobber, all I ahsk is when you do it you do it quick. You're a civilized fellow, ain't you, nah? So, if you don't mind, no lingering stuff for Talker Watkins. Like a good chap, nah."

"You won't be hurt. I am Ki-Gor," said the lord of the jungle with easy dignity.

Then Ki-Gor was suddenly aware of new movement. From the left, from the trail this little man, Talker Watkins, had followed. He turned his head. He heard in the same moment a bone-chilling, terrified scream and he saw standing there a blonde woman in tattered khaki clothes. Behind her was a large man whose garments were also nearly in shreds, revealing arms and a chest covered with thickly matted red hair.

Right on the heels of her scream, the woman shrieked, "A savage, Brill! Kill him!"

The big man called Brill lifted a heavy Greener shot-gun to his shoulder.

**T**HERE is no fear, as such, in creatures of the jungle—and yet in this moment Ki-Gor was alarmed. If the man about to shoot him had held an ordinary rifle, Ki-Gor could have relied upon his own quickness to rush the man, confuse him so that he would miss, and then disarm him. But this shot-gun would send murderous pellets blasting in wide cone. Ki-Gor could hardly hope to avoid them all.

He saw that he had another instant left in which to do something. The blonde woman—who had straggly hair and a rather hard face—was still between the red-headed man and Ki-Gor. She had already started to move, and he had already begun a step forward, ready to aim the weapon, then fire.

Then, the man at Ki-Gor's feet cried out suddenly in his scratchy voice, "It ain't loaded, Brill!" howled Talker Watkins. "I got the last shell in my pocket, nah!" Then, as though suddenly remembering the jungle lord's presence, Watkins shifted his bright blue eyes to Ki-Gor. He put his

fingers to his mouth. "Oops," he said, "I shouldn't 'ave said that. Me and my bloody big mouth, agan!"

Ki-Gor smiled and stood erect. The big red-headed man pulled both triggers of the shot-gun desperately, heard the empty clicks, and then lowered the gun slowly and stared at Ki-Gor. There was puzzlement, not fear in his eyes—after all, he too was big and powerful, although obviously he didn't know of Ki-Gor, for he might have experienced fear, then.

The blonde woman with the hard face started to back away. She kept her eyes on Ki-Gor. She said to her companion, "Knock his head off, Brill—sock him one. Quick!"

"Shut up, Nyra," said Brill, in a heavy, grating voice. He squinted at Ki-Gor. "This guy's white. But there's something screwy about him."

Ki-Gor didn't quite understand the term, but he sensed its meaning. He wasn't offended. Does the lion heed the chattering of monkeys? He held his smile and said, slowly, carefully, "You are far in the jungle. How did you get here?"

"He speaks English!" said Nyra, lengthening her face and opening her eyes very wide. Without realizing it she suddenly started to primp, to poke back the straggled ends of her hair. Ki-Gor saw now that it was not really blonde hair, it was dark near the roots.

Then Brill managed to smile. It was a heavy, unnatural smile, Ki-Gor felt that this man did not smile often. He lurched forward and held out his hand. "Brother," he said, "I don't know who you are, but I'm sure glad to see you. We're loster than a town clown at a two-bit carnny. Been crawling through this bush for days—"

Ki-Gor shook hands with Brill, surprising him by matching his iron grip with one of steel. "I am Ki-Gor," he said. He felt no need of any more self-introduction.

The red-headed man said, "I'm Jason Brill, this here's Talker Watkins, and the young lady is Miss Abigail Wilson, known professionally as Nyra the Charmer."

Ki-Gor bowed gravely to each, using the slight inclination of the head. Helene had once showed him. A secret smile played imperceptibly at the corners of his lips. Talker Watkins, was getting up now and rather futilely brushing himself off and staring at Ki-Gor with his bright, blue eyes.

Brill kept explaining, "We're show folks, Mr Ki-Gor. We were on our way up the river to the oil

camp, just as harmless as you please, when a bunch of black devils attacked our boat. We ran, and then we couldn't find the river again, and we been trying to find something, *anything*, ever since."

Talker Watkins sighed "Every time I think o' them oil workers up there, with all that money in their pockets, and not a blahsted one of 'em knowing about six ace flats or dealing from the bottom—"

"Shut up, Talker!" growled Brill

**N**YRA THE CHARMER stepped forward and turned what she probably believed were irresistible violet eyes upon Ki-Gor "Mr Ki-Gor, you *must* guide us out. I realize it will be some trouble—but I know you won't let your fellow white people down." She cocked her head hopefully "Will you?"

Ki-Gor said, "I will show you the way to the river." But he was frowning, now. He had already been gone too long from Helene, and this would mean more delay. Yet he couldn't let these people wander, probably to their deaths, in the jungle. And there was a reason beyond that. Ki-Gor always felt uncomfortable when these outsiders came to his land, or anywhere near it. Instinctively uncomfortable.

"Hi! Look 'ere!" came Talker Watkins' voice suddenly. He was pointing to the dead leopard on the rock. "I remember, nah! That blahsted pussy was about to 'ave my neck! And right before I pahssed out—" he turned in slow surprise and pointed at Ki-Gor—"this clobber was droppin' on him!"

Brill stared at Ki-Gor then. "Did you knock that thing off all by your lonesome?"

Ki-Gor shrugged and nodded.

Brill shook his head and whistled. "What a screwy place this Africa is. We could of stayed in Australia if it wasn't for Talker's big mouth." He scratched the matted red hair on his chest. "And them leopards." He shuddered. "We seen a whole pack of 'em chasin' after a deer, or something, a ways back."

"And a white woman with practically nothing on, chasing after *them*," said Nyra. There was something defiant in her tone.

"Look, Nyra," said Brill, turning to her, "forget those snakebite visions of yours, will you? I told you it was the heat made you see that."

"I did, too, see it," said Nyra.

Brill said, "There's no such thing as a white woman with practically nothing on who chases



after a pack of leopards."

Ki-Gor said, "There is also no such thing as a *pack* of leopards. The leopard always hunts alone."

"Huh?" said Brill, looking at Ki-Gor again. "Then what *did* we see?"

Ki-Gor shrugged.

But his frown was deeper than ever. Deep in the instinctual part of his brain something was telling him that there was a connection between the sudden disappearance of leopards from the jungle, and the strange sight these people claimed to have seen.

## II

**H**ELENE WATCHED THE MOVING, rippling black shoulders before her, and in spite of herself, sighed a little with impatience. Tembu George, the Masai chief, was hacking a path through the jungle, and the going was slow. Helene would have much preferred the tree-top travel Ki-Gor had taught her. But this trek was as much for the benefit of Tembu George as herself, and the barrel-chested native would have worried doubly if Helene had disappeared into the upper branches, too.

Helene, herself, was certain that Ki-Gor, who was to have returned in two suns, was only delayed somewhere. She smiled a little. She had gone through all this so many times before. There was a time when one stopped worrying, and began to shrug. And wait. That was the time one began to belong to the jungle.

Tembu George suddenly stopped his labors, and stood erect, his magnificent head with its circlet of wild dog teeth casting about, his nostrils flaring. The broad bush knife dangled, thonged, from his wrist. He turned, and looked at Helene then. The Masai warriors in single file behind her came to a stop. Tembu George motioned ahead and said, "River."

He spoke the language of the Masai, and Helene answered in kind. "How do you know, Tembu George?"

The big chieftain grinned and in turn touched his ears, his nose and his chest. "Ears hear the call of the river bird, nose finds the crocodile reed, and heart knows because it is the heart."

Helene looked up at the mottled jungle roof. The light of the glaring African day showed up there somewhere beyond the tree-tops, it came into the verdant gloom of the jungle only occasionally in thick slanting beams of light in which dust and decayed matter danced. Helene said, "The night comes soon. We will camp at the river and cross in the morning."

Tembu George nodded and pushed or slashing tangled *liane* and *ngou* vines hacking broad leaves and branches that choked the trail. It was not a foot trail; it was a game passage started at one time by an elephant, seeking a watering place perhaps, and kept open—if its present state could be called that—by animals of all kinds. Helene had seen the tiny, double pointed hoof marks of the water buck whose flesh tasted like Rhino, the crater of elephant tracks, and the spoor of a dozen other species.

They had taken this trail because it was the only semblance of a path leading in the general direction of the B'Wahai country. Now that Helene thought of it, Tembu George was being extraordinarily brave to head for the land of the B'Wahai. They were a curious long-headed tribe who, apparently by pure instinct, made war on everything in sight. They were secretive, proud, suspicious—and rumored to be cannibalistic. Only the pygmies sometimes entered their land and returned without harm, the B'Wahai were apparently amused by the pygmies and considered them droll pets.

Something like monkeys. So very little was really known about the B'Wahai, since the pygmies have a genius for dismissing from their primitive brains any ethnological facts they happen to learn. They are much more interested in whose wife has left him for what warrior, and whether the aggrieved party wishes his wife back, or merely compensation in goats or native iron, and so on.

Tembu George and Helene had sought N'Geeso to take with them on this trek. But at the pygmy kraal they had learned that N'Geeso and some others were out in the bush where they had just killed an elephant. "Aiee!" Tembu George had boomed, laughing—"that offspring of forest bird and baboon, N'Geeso! That chattering one! He will be quiet, at last, this day, quiet and stupid, his belly full of meat! The chattering one never knows when he will kill me again, and he eats each time for the next moon! Aiee!"

Helene had smiled and nodded. It was true, the pygmies gorged themselves and fell into a stupor when they made a kill. She watched Tembu George puff up with self-satisfaction—he and N'Geeso had each saved each other's lives numerous times, but there was a loud and long-standing verbal feud between them.

Here they were, then, at the border of the B'Wahai country without their valuable little emissary. Helene decided she would keep Tembu George from actually penetrating the area. They could camp temporarily at the river, send messengers fanning out, and seek news of Ki-Gor at the villages.

**T**HE thickness of the jungle suddenly ended—almost with shocking abruptness. Tembu George, ahead, hacked a spear plant away, lifted his blade for the next stroke, and suddenly froze in that position. He stood, staring ahead—and down—then slowly lowered the bush knife.

Helene came up to him. "What is it, Tembu George?" But by the time she finished speaking, she saw what it was. They were standing on the rim of a huge gorge, which dropped for many dizzy hundreds of feet to a swift-running river in its floor.

Helene felt a strange thrill at this unexpected sight. Whatever else, the Congo was never dull, it was so vast that one could roam it for a lifetime and still find new sights. This deep gorge was new to her, and evidently to Tembu George, also. The rest of the Masai warriors came up, crowded behind,



and began to comment in awed tones on the thing. She looked across the gorge. The drop was just as sudden on the other side but there was vast, rocky plain and lion grass there, rather than jungle.

She had a queer feeling—which she couldn't explain—that she was looking at a new, and almost unearthly land of some kind. Perhaps it was the mellow, unreal light of the late afternoon. She started to shrug, but the shrug turned into a shudder.

Tembu George turned to her. "Ki-Gor would not have gone by here. There is no way to cross."

"Ki-Gor usually crosses the places where there is no way to cross," she smiled.

Tembu George thought about that for a moment, then nodded soberly. "It occurs to me," he said, "that I may know this place. There was a warrior, my good friend. He became a great chief and he wandered far to many places. To the kraal he brought strange ivory and stranger tales. He spoke once of a land of tall people—the people of the cats, he called them—a land shaped like the blade of a spear. Two rivers with deep valleys such as this formed the edges of the spear, and came together at the point. The other end of this land was guarded by the fierce B'Wahai—at least they would let no one pass further if they saw him." He ran his knuckle across his forehead, as though, wiping a time-mist away. "My friend entered this place, and he called it the land of Mau."

"The land of Mau," repeated Helene softly. She wondered why saying the word caused a small shiver to run down her spine.

One of the Masai warriors suddenly lifted his assegai and cried out '*Nsang'ea ndoci! Ala!*' Look!

THEY followed his point. Some hundreds of yards down the gorge a thin, rope-like contraption swayed in midair. It was a vine bridge, crossing the gap. A strip of braided vines made a narrow pathway, and a single vine, waist high, a handhold.

"Perhaps Ki-Gor crossed there," said Helene, and then she smiled faintly, "although it would not be like him to take such an easy way."

Tembu George frowned and said, "Do you think it is wise to cross? If this is the land of Mau—"

"I am looking for Ki-Gor, my mate," said Helene simply. The American girl had taken quickly to the simple dignity of Ki-Gor's jungle. Standing there, in her leopard skin, arms and limbs softly bronzed by

the sun, reddish hair falling in a smooth cascade to her bare shoulders, sturdy breasts rising and falling gently with her breathing—she looked born to this vast and verdant land.

The party moved on to the bridge.

"I will go first," announced Tembu George. Helene, with a smile, noticed that he put his foot upon the braided vine path very gingerly. She brushed past him. "The weight of mighty Tembu George," she said, "may make the bridge tremble. Even the lion trembles in the presence of the Masai's chief. I will try it first."

"No! No! *Bakamo*—we will discuss this first," said Tembu George.

Helene waved him back and stepped on to the high passageway. It began to sway with the first step. She clutched at the vine support. She looked down, the walls of the gorge plunged swiftly, almost vertically to the bottom. Down there the river roared over the rocks—the sound of it came up as hoarse, eerie, continuous tone. She pictured herself falling. Helene was still civilized enough to imagine things. She pictured her self lobbing over and over in a long arc, with the clutching feeling of falling in her stomach and chest, she pictured the way her cry would dwindle and become almost inaudible just before she struck the bottom.

She became dizzy, clutched the handrail, and forced her eyes upward and ahead again. She kept walking.

A few more steps taught her how to proceed without making the bridge sway. It was matter of placing one foot carefully before the other, rather than walking in a normal manner. By the time she had reached the middle of the bridge, she was moving on at a fine clip. And beginning to enjoy it.

Tembu George had apparently become alarmed. Now she could hear his voice bellowing after her '*Mama le!*' He always addressed her by the standard native word for white women when he was alarmed. '*Yaka!*' Come back!

She turned, and smiled and waved to him, to show that she was all right. She meant to go to the other end of the bridge, then turn around, go back, and lead the others across. It seemed sturdy enough so far. Probably it would be wise for the warriors to cross one at a time, but she thought it could be done.

She readied the far side, then. She paused for a moment to stand on tiptoe and survey the land that spread out before her. A slight rise at the lip of the gorge concealed most of it from the eyes of anyone on the opposite bank.

**I**N WONDER, she took a long deep breath as she gazed on the panorama that spread itself away from her. More than anything the land here seemed like something in a bad, endless dream—or something done by the brush of a gently mad painter. The long plain was dotted with *kopjes*, cork tree and camel thorn. In the foreground the lion grass rippled with breeze; the waves of moving air crossing it were visible. It seemed to have a life of its own. And the sound of the breeze mingled with the soft roar of the gorge behind her, so that there no, quiet, but a vibrant, portentous, yet elusive whispering all about her.

There were patches of forest, too, and while these lay still wherever they were, Helene had the curious feeling that they were somehow alive, too.

Helene began to turn to walk back again.

At that moment her eye caught movement at the edge of a small grove to her right. Just the faintest suggestion of something low, long, and black slithering in the shadows. She paused; stared.

From the grove there stepped a tall, lithe woman in bizarre, brief dress. She led a black panther by a chain and a bright, golden collar.

The first thought to flash through Helene's head was one of doubt. "*I'm seeing things*, she thought. *The air here, or the sun, or something, is giving me hallucinations.*

But both the woman and the panther stopped a few yards before her and stood there, real and solid enough. Helene stared back with wide eyes. The woman lifted her arm before her, and held it horizontally, palm down. "*Akh-nien-top!*" she said, curling the syllables of the strange word about her tongue in a soft, liquid way.

Helene shook her head to show that she didn't understand. She glanced at the black panther. Its green eyes were on her; its tail switched slightly, otherwise it was motionless.

The woman who held the panther was young, and, Helene had to admit, rather beautiful. In her lithe, flowing limbs and supple torso there seemed to be something of the same grace of the panther itself. She was dark haired; blue-black her hair was, and it was drawn tightly back and up from her skull, then held in place by a long, cylindrical hat. She wore small breast plates of a shining metal, a jewel studded strap hanging vertically from the center of these, and a short, light skirt around her waist.

She came forward several steps, moving in a sinuous, padding walk, and then Helene could see

more of her face. Dark red lipstick traced carefully the outline of her mouth. Her eyebrows were penciled into a rakish, plunging V. Her eyes were as green as the panther's. Something in the woman's look—her slender, sinuous look, and her olive skin—struck Helene as familiar. Something she couldn't put her finger on at the moment—

"*Banka Bana-tu?*" said the woman, suddenly. Her voice was, as much as anything, a low purr.

Helene's eyebrows went up. The woman was speaking in an Eastern Bantu dialect; Helene knew some of this language. "Yes. I speak Bantu. *Isisi*—a little. Who are you, and where do you come from?"

The dark-haired girl smiled; Helene felt that the panther might have smiled in that same way after killing and eating an antelope. "*You will be asked those questions,*" she said.

**H**ELENE glanced over her shoulder. She saw Tembu George and the Masai warriors still on the other side of the gorge and she realized that from their position they couldn't see the woman with the panther, nor could they hear Helene speak. There was something she didn't like in the blank, steady stare of the woman's green eyes. There was something she didn't like about being alone with her on this side of the gorge.

She said quickly, "You must come and share meat with us. My warriors are with me." And then she turned to go back across the bridge again, not really caring whether the feline woman with the green eyes followed her or not.

"*Stop!*" came the woman's voice.

There was something much too confident in the command to be ignored; Helene turned.

The woman pointed to the vine fastenings of the bridge, and then to a jeweled dagger at her belt. "Go and I cut the bridge. You will fall into the place of the deep water."

Helene stared back, but didn't answer. She might have pled, she might have argued—but Ki-Gor had long since taught her to recognize the times when *bakamo*—palaver—was of no use.

Abruptly the lithe woman spoke to the panther in the same liquid tongue she had first used. It turned its head, yawned at her, showing saber teeth in a pink mouth, then quietly dropped to a lying position with its forepaws spread out. It now kept its eyes steadily on Helene. The woman looked at Helene. "You must not move. If you move Sabala will kill you." She dropped the beast's lead chain,

then, and stepped quickly toward the bridge

Helene, wide-eyed, and frightened in spite of herself, said, "What—what is it that you do?"

The woman said, "I cut the bridge. Your warriors are not welcome in Mau.

"Wait!" said Helene. She half-turned toward the other girl. A low, warning growl came from the panther's throat, and she froze. She said, "We mean no harm to this place!"

The woman laughed shortly and sharply. Then she drew her dagger and bent toward the anchored vines.

At that moment Helene looked across the gorge and saw that Tembu George had already seen the lithe, dark-haired woman. And Tembu George had already taken several steps out on the bridge that was about to be cut!

### III

**K**I GOR WALKED LIGHTLY across a vast plain of lion grass—and tried to keep himself from yawning with boredom.

Jason Brill and his party were proving not exactly amusing. Not that Ki-Gor had really expected to be amused when he offered to guide them to the river trail, but he had hoped that the time would pass pleasantly, at least. For Ki-Gor's taste that meant largely in silence. Ki-Gor reflected that not even pygmies and monkeys chattered the way these people did—

Curiously, although Talker Watkins chattered the most, Ki-Gor minded him the least. He said so little of import that one could close his ears to him in a way. Or if one really wanted to listen, the Talker did come up with the occasional bright phrase or droll remark.

As for Brill, and the woman who called herself Nyra the Charmer—it was a forked trail to decide which was worse. Both of them had the same recurrent theme to their talk: Money.

Brill was talking about money now. He had lumbered up to a place beside Ki-Gor, and stayed there even when Ki-Gor quickened his pace. The matted red hair on his chest heaved with his breathing as he walked. "Look, Ki-Gor," he was saying, in his heavy, grating voice, "I been thinkin' over what you told me about yourself. I mean about being lord of the jungle and all that stuff—and the way you knocked off that leopard. That's pretty terrific stuff. It's got zing, you know what I mean?"



And it's worth cold cash.

Ki-Gor grunted and kept walking.

"Now I know all the angles, see? I got ways of getting along. I took in ten thousand pounds in Australia before Talker loused us up there—that's a lotta dough. I said we were in show business, and so we are, in a way. Only you don't make that kind of dough in show business, strictly. You know what I mean?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Ki-Gor. "You talk strange words."

Brill looked oddly at Ki-Gor and said, "Are you kiddin'?"

**K**I GOR, at last, couldn't stand it any longer. He ignored Brill completely. He turned and held up his hand to halt the others. Talker Watkins came trotting, Nyra right behind him. Talker's blue eyes were even brighter now that Ki-Gor had caught game and fed the castaways their first meal in many suns. "Hullo, clobber," Talker said. "What's up, nah? What little surprise for my worn-out tucker has this blahsted bush got to offer this time?"

Ki-Gor said, "It is near night. We will rest." He

pointed to a small rise to their right "I will find food"

"Ki-Gor, that's wonderful," said Nyra, who was just arriving "I'm starved. Once I ate in the Ruz, but, believe me, it didn't taste any better than that first antelope you brought us" Ki-Gor looked at Nyra and saw her eyelids flutter. He had noticed that she had painted the lashes black from a tiny box in her shoulder bag and he had wondered then that one would carry a shoulder bag with face paints and little wire hair clips and such things in it, rather than food or a knife, or something essential when lost in the jungle. Ki-Gor didn't understand this fluttering of the lashes at all. He shrugged mentally and decided that Nyra the Charmer was probably mildly *nsala*—bush mad.

Ki-Gor then rather brusquely directed the gathering of thorns and set the two men to work building a *sareba* at the top of the knoll, something to keep out prowling cats in the night. When they were finally hard at it, he set off for a patch of jungle ahead.

Ki-Gor felt wonderfully relieved now to be trotting toward the jungle. He would have an hour or so to himself, anyway. He actually hoped that he didn't find game too quickly, so that he wouldn't have to return right away. He wanted to swing through the high foliage for a while, feel the upper air moving past his cheeks and his naked torso, see the branches and vines and motes of jungle light blur by. He looked at the sun. Another two hours of daylight, at least, and he always liked the forest in this late afternoon light when the shafts from the sun were high and nearly horizontal, and the jungle floor was a cool, murky green.

He mounted one of the first trees at the jungle's edge. With a sudden, impulsive joy he ran to it, sprang, grabbed a lower branch, then swung himself upward by whipping his body in a quarter circle. This sent him hurtling forward, feet-first. He doubled himself, then snapped around in mid-air, and his reaching hands found another limb. Forward and upward he swung, planning his next hold sometimes in the middle of the air, and coordinating all of his movements so that his progress seemed not at all a series of leaps, steps and swings—but a continuous graceful thing.

All of this he did with his arms, his shoulders, his legs and of course, his jungle-whetted senses. It left his mind free. Ki-Gor could always think best when traveling through the upper branches like this.

He was, first of all, a little worried about Helene. Worried that *she* might be worried. He could remember several occasions when her confidence in Ki-Gor had wavered enough to make her—well, foolish during one of his protracted absences. He hoped he might find a suitable leopard during this trek with the castaways, that would save time. The skin of the one he had killed on the rock had been scarcely good enough to cover a hyena. As for this business of taking the three wanderers to the river—Ki-Gor was beginning to be slightly puzzled. He wasn't sure of the exact geography of this B'Wahai country, yet he felt it must follow the general pattern of the deep Congo-land and meet one of that river's tributaries by sloping to the East. There had been no sign of that yet, however. And curiously enough, he hadn't encountered any of the B'Wahai, themselves, the tall, fierce tribe among whom only pygmies could walk in safety. All that he could suppose was that they had already passed through the haunts of the B'Wahai and by chance had simply avoided them. This bothered Ki-Gor, too, he had meant to examine B'Wahai land, because he had heard that they were great leopard hunters, that not only their chiefs and sub-chiefs wore the spotted skins, but every warrior and even some of the women.

HE WENT through the jungle tops in an aimless pattern and noted the sights and sounds and smells of the forest. The chattering of monkeys, the startled explosive screams of homing parrots, the buzz of the insects. But no game to speak of. He wearied of moving through the trees presently and dropped to the ground. He paused to examine with mild interest a long, red-leaved plant which seemed to be a species of *karatonga*, the witch-doctor's deadliest poison, the plant that could kill when eaten and even cause great pain on the skin with its juices. This plant was larger and had narrower leaves than the variety he knew. He uprooted it, cut off the bulb with his knife and began to examine it.

He was startled by the sound of a shot, and the booming echoes which followed it. He lifted his head quickly. The shot had come from the direction of the plain, and the *kopje* where the others were camped. He knew that they had only one shell left for the shotgun—no other weapons. Only something very urgent would have made them use that.

Ki-Gor listened for part of a second. To ordinary ears there would have been no sound beyond the

thick, muffled quasi-silence of the jungle itself. But Ki-Gor's sharpened ears heard something—faint and tiny noises—the shouting of men and the swift *pock pock pock-pock pock* of a miniature war drum.

Swiftly, he sheathed his knife again and swung back into the trees. He flew with the hurtling madness of a hunting falcon through the leafy tops. The jungle seemed startled and hushed in his wake. As he sped on, the sounds he had heard became louder. Men's voices, they were some shouting deeply, others crying in falsetto. And the beat of the war drum crescendoed. Ki-Gor came to the edge of the forest, to the open plain again, and saw what had happened. He didn't pause to look at the sight for any length of time, he took it all in as he dropped in a long arc from the trees to the ground, and the partial concealment of the lion grass. He saw that his three charges were still upon the *kopje* behind the partially-built thorn hedge, and that they were ringed by squads of tall, black warriors with chalked shields and garish battle plumes.

The war drum, the size of a small cooking pot, was being held and beaten furiously by a medicine man beyond the perimeter of the circle. *Pock pock pock-pock pock!* It was a mad sound, a blood quickening sound, it was a saucy snapping at the heels of the warriors. Yet the warriors were not advancing on the *kopje*. They were moving about it cautiously, showing themselves every once in a while from the concealment of the lion grass—some leaping defiantly to brandish a shield or an assegai and give a bloodcurdling yell.

**K**I-GOR saw why the attack was not pressed home. Jason Brill, bulky and red-thatched, stood atop the knoll with the shot-gun held across his middle. A warrior lay at the foot of the knoll with his chest and head half blown away. These attackers had seen what the Greener shot-gun could do; they had no way of knowing that Brill had fired the last shell. And Brill had no intention of letting them know it. So they were circling, taunting, looking for a weakness in the defense, and working up their own courage for a mass charge at the same time.

Ki-Gor crouched and moved swiftly through the tall grass. He moved as the lion which gave the grass its name moves—and his bronzed skin was camouflage just as the tawny hide of the king of beasts. He moved toward the drumming witch doctor and the group about him just outside the

circle.

These blacks, of course, must be the B'Wahai. They hadn't slipped completely through their country, after all. Ki-Gor noted their elongated heads, broad shoulders and spindly legs. The medicine man who beat the drum stood upon one leg, curling the other about his knee—he looked much like a stork. He wore a leopard skin and leopard teeth about his neck. His head-dress was of jackal tails.

Ki-Gor scowled to himself at the delay of this attack by the B'Wahai—but he wasted no time regretting. He had made a tacit contract to take care of these three people and get them to the river, he had said he would do so, and that was more binding to Ki-Gor than the tightest legal agreement would have been to a thoroughly civilized man.

As usual, it never occurred to Ki-Gor to reflect upon the large odds against him in this affair. To imagine, or consider, that one of the well-armed B'Wahai warriors might very well kill or badly wound Ki-Gor in any melee that followed. This ability to turn off his imagination completely when it would have been only in the way, was perhaps, as much as anything else, the secret of Ki-Gor's fearlessness. It was true. Ki-Gor could be startled, alarmed, and even know moments of fright—but fear was not his. There is no room in the jungle for the fear that only enlightened man knows, the fear which is a product of reason.

As Ki-Gor moved on, the shouting of the B'Wahai suddenly crescendoed. He glanced swiftly to the side. He saw that they had worked up the courage for their charge at last. They were rushing the *kopje* from all sides, some were already trying long range assegai-throws.

And Jason Brill stood there, big, mute and dehcant, holding the shot-gun as a club, ready to swing it. Whatever else he lacked he had courage in this matter.

Ki-Gor straightened from his crouch and ran erect. This made him visible. If the witch doctor or any of the blacks with him should turn—but he had to take that chance now. Speed was the thing. He raced with the limbs of the antelope; his bronzed thighs flashed so swiftly that they lost outline and became a blur of movement.

The witch doctor with the stork stance drummed away. *Pock-pock pock pock pock!* Beside him another tall B'Wahai in a leopard loincloth and a kaross of lion's mane about his shoulders, stood, motionless and silent. The other member of this

headquarters party was a slightly shorter warrior in simple dress, who stood a little to one side and held the weapons of the other two. Witch-doctor, chief and aide-de-camp—absorbed, they watched the battle, waiting for what must be the inevitable outcome. The drum killed completely the sound of Ki-Gor's lightning approach.

**W**HEN KI-GOR was a little more than ten feet away from the witchdoctor, he leaped. He sprang high into the air, propelled by all the power of his mighty thighs. He shot his feet out ahead of him and bulleted through the air—his toughened soles struck the witch-doctor on the back of the neck and sent him sprawling, dazed.

Ki-Gor bounded immediately to his feet again and turned to the weapons bearer. This plainly dressed B'Wahai was staring, at him with white-ringed, saucered eyes. Paralyzed Ki-Gor snatched a spear from him, and then struck a lightning blow with the side of his hand to the bridge of the man's nose. The weapons bearer fell unconscious.

Ki-Gor whirled upon the chieftain in the lion's mane. He pointed the spear at his middle. He could see now that the chieftain, in spite of slender, muscular body was not a young man—his face was crisscrossed with scars and wrinkles.

Ki-Gor spoke Bantu, hoping this B'Wahai chief would understand. He pointed to the men who had been charging the *kopje* and who had now turned to stare at the silence of the war drum, "Tell them to stop. If they attack the spear tastes your blood!"

The B'Wahai chief's eyes flickered, and Ki-Gor knew he had understood. He stared just once at the assegai point threatening his midriff, then he turned abruptly and motioned to the warriors with his arm. His voice was wonderfully rich and deep, it rolled like cannon smoke across the lion grass. *Akeka! Na!* he called, in the language of the B'Wahai. He repeated the phrase.

The warriors around the *kopje* slowly lowered their weapons. Ki-Gor nodded as the chief turned to him again. "You will walk before me," he said, gesturing with the spear. "You will stay at my assegai point until the warriors are moving away, and at the horizon. Then you may go and join them."

The chief answered in his deep voice. "Tesonga, chief of the B'Wahai, obeys not the strange white man, but the point of his spear." Then with great dignity, and with his head high, he turned and began

to walk toward the *kopje*.

They walked perhaps twenty steps toward the *kopje*. On its crest Ki-Gor could see Brill staring at him. The man still stood defiantly with his legs spread and the empty shot-gun held across the matted red hair of his chest. Talker Watkin's spidery little head popped up from behind the thorn *sareba*. He heard Talker babble. "Hi—that's the lad, Ki-Gor! Show 'im who's salty boss around 'ere, nah!"

Ki-Gor was in the act of smiling faintly to himself. In that small part of a moment the warning came. It was no warning of any of the five ordinary senses, it was no warning that a man dulled by civilization would have detected. It was something in an unnamed, primeval gland, or nerve end somewhere at the crest of Ki-Gor's spine. He whirled. As his eyes came about he had only time to see the tall witch-doctor, the one who had been beating the drum—and to see the heavy war club crashing through the air toward his own head. He knew in that instant that his first leap hadn't knocked the witch doctor out. And that the witch-doctor had been very clever, had waited for his chance, gathered the club from the fallen weapons bearer and then stalked Ki-Gor.

Instinct lifted his arm to ward off the blow, but it was too late. The club came down and abruptly the lord of the jungle knew nothing but blackness.

## IV

**H**ELENE COULD NOT HELP herself. When she saw Tembu George, in all his tall magnificent bulk out upon the vine bridge—and when she saw the strangely clad girl with the green eyes and dark hair put her dagger to the vines—she moved involuntarily. She stepped toward the other girl, she raised her arm, and she screamed a warning.

The crouching black panther leaped toward her.

The dark-haired girl saw this from the corner of her eye. She snapped "Chala!"

The panther struck Helene, because it was already too late to stop its spring in mid-air, but it struck with claws retracted. Helene fell from the force of the blow. The panther immediately bounded away from her, and then sat to one side, still watching.

The panther's mistress then turned, and with several quick motions, slashed the supports of the bridge over the gorge. But Tembu George, on the

other side had already heard Helene's warning scream and had already seen the danger. He scrambled back just as the long bridge fell.

Several of the Masai warriors bellowed and shouted and hurled spears at the black-haired girl. They fell short—they tumbled to the bottom of the gorge, and seconds later the clatter of their landing came echoing up the chasm.

The girl laughed contemptuously, then turned quickly to Helene. She lifted her olive-skinned arm, she extended it rigidly in the direction of the down-sloping plain. She pointed her finger. Walk, she said in the Bantu dialect she used. Sabala and I follow.

Helene rose slowly. She stared at the dark-haired girl for a hanging instant. Then she turned and looked once more at the Masai warriors on the opposite bank of the gorge. They stood there helpless. Tembu George's huge figure a little ahead of the rest. There was dejection in the way they hung their arms at their sides, in the way their shoulders slouched.

Get Kĩ Gor! Helene shouted across the chasm. You must get Kĩ Gor!

She felt a sudden blow on the side of her head. The dark-haired girl had swung her arm with feline quickness and had boxed Helene's ear. Helene whirled toward her and could almost feel her own sudden anger burning in her eyes.

The dark-haired girl half-smiled and said calmly in her throaty purr. When Tirin orders—you obey! You understand this? Helene looked directly into the girl's green eyes. It seemed to her that the pupils were slender, vertical ovals and that they expanded and contracted gently with each minute change of light. Helene said coldly and slowly. I am Helene, the mate of Kĩ Gor. I obey only Kĩ Gor, lord of jungle. Tirin laughed, throwing her head back.

In Mau one obeys Tirin. But you will learn this. Again she pointed to the sloping plain. Go!

Helene had no choice. She shrugged—more for defiance than anything else—then turned and set out across the sweeping lion grass. Down into that weird plain, which faded into a lemon yellow mist at the horizon and which was dotted with the curiously formal shapes of *kopje*, jungle patch, and grotesquely twisted camel thorn. Into that land which seemed not quite real to her even as it spread out before her eyes. She felt the light-headed, hollow feel of a nightmare, and she shuddered.



**T**IRIN was silent as they traveled. She gave no clue as to their destination. Helene walked through what seemed a carpet of unreal light and occasionally glanced over her shoulder at the dark-haired woman. The thing that had struck her as familiar when she first saw Tirin was beginning to take clearer form in her mind. The girl's build—lithe, olive-skinned—and the narrow, almost triangular lines of her face strongly suggested the pictures of Egyptian women Helene had seen in museums and books of archaeology. The heavy use of cosmetics suggested that, too. And there was one other, small bit of evidence—the liquid, hisping language she had spoken.

Helene walked on and on until the minutes blurred, and she felt no more sense of time. When the first of the buildings came into sight she couldn't recall whether they had been traveling for hours or less than an hour. She was weary, she knew that—something about the arid dullness of this landscape made her weary. Almost hypnotized her.

She rubbed her eyes, then passed the back of her wrist over her forehead when she saw the buildings. They had just mounted a sweeping rise in the plain, and there were the structures in a large flat depression, perhaps a mile off. They were of stone. She could see no sign of life about them, she could hear no sounds. Involuntarily, she stopped to view the panorama.

Tirin moved to her side, then pointed.

"That is Mau."

"This is the place we seek?"

Tirin nodded "My brothers and sisters sleep, now When the sun ends its march they will wake Then it will be decided what to do with you A use will be found "

Helene looked at the dark-haired girl sharply She didn't like the implications of her words, or the cold tone in which she spoke She frowned Somehow she must find a way to escape, somehow she must learn more of this place, as the first step Helene said, "I do not understand What is Mau?"

**T**HE GIRL seemed willing enough to answer the question, although she still spoke in that impersonal purr of hers As they walked toward the grouped stone buildings she voiced a kind of explanation It seemed to Helene to take the form of a recital, a ritual narrative "Three thousands of crops ago" said Tirin, "the people of Mau came from the land of the towers and the great river in the north They were even then the keepers of the cats, aiee, for they could speak to the cats even then They found this fertile plain and many slaves in the country all about to grow the crops "They stayed And now there is the lands of Mau "

Helene thought for a moment so that she might phrase her next question in the limited Bantu tongue "But no one outside of this place tells of the land of Mau How is this?"

Tirin pointed in three directions, one by one "The river cuts deep there and there None may cross On the other side the B'Wahai men slay all who come That is why no B'Wahai slaves are taken "

Helene still didn't understand clearly, but she decided not to press the matter There was too much to be seen, too much to be taken in And there was that business of planning some kind of escape, although that seemed hopeless for the moment

Except for a brief, golden glow in the western sky, it was dusk when they entered the streets of the stone city In that fading light Helene saw paving of great blocks, massive walled buildings The stone was carved in places and the capitals of the stone columns were of the conventional palm and lotus motifs found at the Nile Cats were represented nearly everywhere There was bas-reliefs of cats they were painted on walls, they formed stone buttresses, and there were statues of them ranging in size from life to ten feet

Tirin led Helene through what appeared to be

a main avenue There was a large, looming temple at the end of it People began to emerge from the houses, now, and Helene noticed that all were built in the slender, lithe way that characterized Tirin, and all dressed very much like her They blinked and stared at Helene and whispered quietly to each other in that liquid tongue They moved, every one of them, with an odd, feline grace

The men of Mau had a curious vanity Helene noticed that some wore long mustaches, and that these had been artificially stiffened, and the hairs separated so that they resembled, for all the world, cat whiskers It might have been ludicrous But there was something about the blank, green-eyed stare of these men that stopped cold any possible smiles or laughter

There was one more thing about the people of Mau quite a few, Helene saw, led leopards or black panthers on chains, as Tirin did They spoke to them softly sometimes, and the animals obeyed in a surly, languid, feline way

Helene wondered if she would keep her sanity in the face of all this Almost too many surprises to handle, all at once She squared her shoulders and stiffened her spine as they came to the steps of the large temple Tirin said, "Up!" and Helene mounted them

Now the sun had set fully, and there was a soft light in the city of Mau from thinly scattered torches along the edges of the roofs Helene had to squint and step carefully to find her way up the stone stairs Tirin strode behind her as supremely confident in the gloom as the panther itself

The people of Mau crowded behind and followed in their quiet, eery way She could scarcely hear their soft whispering, she could not hear their steps at all *The way of a cat, thought Helene, the way of the sheathed claw and the soft whip-muscles always ready to spring The burning eyes that move in the darkness The prowlers The prowlers of Mau*

The back of her neck crawled and prickled

**S**HE CAME to a large, square front door to the temple She stepped into the gloom inside Torches along the walls threw a murky light over a huge, rectangular room There were more steps at the far end of it On the dais there loomed a huge statue of black stone, a sitting cat A cluster of green jewels—emeralds, perhaps—formed its almond-shaped eyes

A man stepped from behind the cat-idol The



soft whispering of the Maus stopped. Now the only sound was the gentle spitting of the torches high along the walls. This man, like the other men of Mau, was dressed in a short skirt-like garment and naked above the waist except for criss-crossing decorative straps which were studded with jewels. He, too, wore an artificially stiffened mustache, his was grey, and larger than any others Helene had seen. He was an older man, but erect, flat-bellied and magnificently muscled.

He looked at Helene with unblinking, greenish eyes for a full, agonizing ten seconds. Then he turned suddenly to Tirin. He spoke to her in the purring tongue of Mau. She answered. They gestured and nodded at Helene several times as they spoke, and finally Tirin switched to Bantu again and addressed Helene directly.

"This is my father, P'oa-Tahn," she said. "He is chief of Mau. He has said that you are not the same as the blacks we capture, and that you must be treated differently."

Helene felt relief wash over her—and then felt it stop. There was something in Tirin's look—

"You will not be made a slave to work in the fields," said Tirin. "You will be used in the hunt."

"The hunt?" Helene bent her head slightly.

A kind of smile rippled across Tirin's thickly painted lips momentarily. She glanced briefly at her father, the chief, as though asking permission to make an explanation, he nodded. Tirin said to Helene: "The sun and the land have been good to the people of Mau. There is no pestilence in the air, and there are many slaves to work in the fields. This leaves time for the hunt. Sometimes an antelope, a zebra, or any other kind of quarry is released, and then the leopards are sent after it. Wagers are made, for each man of Mau takes pride in his hunting leopard. We have ranged far to find them and only lately found a way to attract them from many miles away by scent."

Again she showed that faint smile. "Our next hunt should be the finest. The quarry will start several hours ahead of the cats just before sundown, in the long valley to the west. There will be camel thorn for cover and patches of jungle for escape. It will be a long, hunt. But the cats will find the quarry in the end, as they always do."

Helene swallowed, returned Tirin's stare, and then asked the question whose answer she already suspected. "And the quarry?"

"Will be you," said Tirin quite calmly.

KI-GOR WAS AWARE OF JOLTING, and the fact that he seemed to be swinging in the air, before he awoke. There was pain in his head. There was still nothing but a pinkish blur before his eyes, but his hearing was beginning to function.

He heard deep voices speaking a strange tongue—it sounded like the B'Wahai phrase the chief had uttered—he heard the

slap of feet through underbrush and then the chunking sound of a bush-knife. Then his sense of sight began to clear. Shapes loomed in the pink blur, took sharper edges, and presently the blur went away.

Ki-Gor saw that he was trussed, hand and foot, to a long pole, he hung from the bottom of it and four B'Wahai warriors—two on each end of the pole—carried him. It was a procession, they were moving along a jungle trail. Just ahead of him, linked by vine ropes about their necks, walked the three white people he had tried to guide to the river. Brill, Nyra and Talker Watkins. All three of them were very silent.

Ki-Gor made no attempt to show that he was conscious again. He kept his eyes partially closed, looking through the slitted lids, so that he would not seem awake if any looked at him. His head throbbed terribly, and his wrists and ankles ached from the tight bonds, but in the way of the jungle he had shut his own mind to this pain. He was already pointing—every brain-cell, every nerve-end toward one idea—escape.

Then, abruptly, he heard Jason Brill's grating voice. The big, red-headed man was muttering to Talker Watkins, who moved at his side. "Listen, Talker, you got to figure a way to make these characters understand you. It's the only chance we got."

"Hi, nah—I don't even speak the beggars' language," said Talker.

"But you picked up some Bantu. That lingo stuff always comes easy to you. You could make 'em understand some of that—almost all the tribes know some Bantu words."

The Talker's tone became sarcastic. "And what'll I tell 'em, nah? They should be good chaps and let us go, on account of our honest faces?"

Brill shook his head. "No, I got something in mind. This Ki-Gor character—" he jerked his thumb toward the trussed lord of the jungle—"might be

the answer I mean it's a long chance, but we got to try anything we can. We're in a *spot*, I mean."

Watkins sighed, "I only 'ope it's quick. No torture. I couldn't even stand to be tickled when I was a little tyke."

"Stop making cracks and listen—and try to get it straight," said Brill. There was the feeling of a growl in his voice. He glanced at Ki-Gor again. Then he turned back to the little Australian. "You notice how they're half-afraid of this Ki-Gor—even when he's tied up like that? Notice how they took a long time, circling him and all that, when they tied him up?"

"He's fair dinkum, that Ki-Gor lad is," Watkins admitted.

"Well, stop admiring him a minute," Brill snapped, "and listen. These black apes are crazy with superstition. They probably think Ki-Gor's got some kind of magic in him. Medicine. You know what I mean? So all we have to do is convince them we know how to handle that medicine, see? We make a few magic passes, or something, and tell them we'll kill off this Ki-Gor's magic, if they let us go."

Nyra, in her hard alto voice said, "Sometimes you do get a decent idea, Jason. Not often, but sometimes. Sounds good to me."

Brill looked at her coldly for a second.

Watkins said, "It don't seem quite fair to me, nah. This Ki-Gor chap was pretty good to us."

Brill sneered at him. "Since when 'ye *you* been going to Sunday School, Talker?"

Talker Watkins shrugged and stared thoughtfully at the matted floor of the trail as he walked ahead.

"Come on, Talker," Brill said. "Call that head man. Try to make him understand—talk like you never talked before."

"Hi. I suppose it's got to be done, nah." Talker Watkins sighed very heavily this time. He lifted his long-nosed, wrinkled head—it was like tilting, then carefully balancing a sun-speckled Bartlett pear—and called to the chief and the witch-doctor ahead. "*Yaka! Bakamo!*"

**T**ESONGA, the tall, hook-nosed chief, turned quickly, his lion's mane kaross swishing as he did so. He glared at Watkins in some surprise. Then he held up his hand and stopped the procession. He moved toward Watkins in a few long strides, the spindly witch-doctor hurried after him. He stood there, looming above Watkins, and glaring down at him, and his shining black eyes in

that nest of facial wrinkles were like two live coals thrown in a pile of thorn-brush. "Bakama!" Speak! He all but hurled his deep voice at Watkins.

The little Australian trembled at the tips of his limbs, but he held the rest of himself together manfully. He drew his narrow shoulders back, he filled his small chest with air. He turned his pale face upon the B'Wahai chief. He spoke, picking his words painfully and clumsily. "Ki-Gor—" he pointed to the trussed jungle lord—"juju—gris-gris—*magic*."

Tesonga nodded. That fact was clear enough.

Now Watkins touched his own chest. "*Emu juju Emu mpifo*." He was magic, also.

Tesonga cocked his long head in some doubt.

Watkins sweated through it, somehow. He used English, Bantu, pidgin-English, Maori, and much involved sign language. Brill and Nyra stood to one side, staring anxiously. Ki-Gor, hanging from the stilled carrying pole, watched quietly through slitted eyes. And Watkins made himself understood—which was a bit of magic in itself. Gradually, painfully, he made it clear to the tall chief that he and his friends would counteract Ki-Gor's juju for all time—providing they would be freed, sent on their way.

Tesonga frowned, then turned and held a low-toned, deep-voiced conference with the witch-doctor. The witch-doctor screwed his face up, hopped up and down a bit, gestured, and finally nodded. Abruptly, Tesonga whirled upon Talker Watkins. He glared again at the little Australian, then lifted his long arm to point to Ki-Gor. "Do!" he said in Bantu.

The Talker swung his bright, blue eyes helplessly toward Brill. "Nah, what am I supposed to bloody well do?" he moaned. Brill bit at his words. "Any damned thing, you fool. Go make magic passes at him. You been around carnys long enough to put on a show, haven't you?"

"Hi." Watkins nodded, and pursed his lips. "Only I don't think these cobbbers are going to be as easy to fool as a crowd at a carnival. I don't think the beggars'll take my word for it."

Brill's eyes flicked to Ki-Gor, then back again. "Listen," he said quickly, "I got it. I got it figured. Look at Ki-Gor's hands and feet. They're white as paper from being tied up like that. If he gets loose, they'll be numb, and useless. He'll be no trouble to handle. *Tell these clowns I'll fight Ki-Gor after you get through lousing up his magic. That'll prove it to em.*"

Watkins squinched his brows and said, "It still don't seem right--"

"Do it, you damned fool!" said Brill "And hurry!"

**T**ALKER WATKINS turned once again to the tall B'Wahai chief and slowly and clumsily communicated his message. There was more muttered conference between the chief and the witch-doctor. Tesonga finally nodded to Watkins. Then he clapped his hands, pointed to Ki-Gor and ordered the bonds untied.

Watkins stepped to Ki-Gor, waved his hands in cabalistic gesture and said, "Hocus-pocus! Salaam Cobber. I hate to do this to you—but it's either you or us!"

Ki-Gor opened his slitted eyes and stared directly at the Talker. That was all he did. It startled Watkins so that he jumped backward and said, shuddering, "Ohhhhhhh!"

"Do it some more, you yellow Limey!" Brill roared at him.

Watkins stepped forward again—fearfully—and again waved his arms in high magic circles over the lord of the jungle. "D-don't get mad with us, nah, Mr Ki-Gor," he said. "We m-might find a way to get you out, too."

Ki-Gor stared at him without answering. The warriors worked at the knots and the bonds gave way. Ki-Gor fell heavily and unceremoniously to the ground. He curled his spine and sprang immediately to get to his feet again, the moment his feet hit the ground he felt the terrible, stinging numbness in them, and in spite of all the will he could pour into his limbs, they buckled under him.

Jason Brill lumbered forward. He held his huge shoulders racked back, and he flexed the bicept muscles that showed through his tattered shirt. His chest heaved with his breathing, and the matted red hair upon it seemed to swell and contract. Ki-Gor took it easy in getting to his feet this time. The pain was, in both his wrists and his ankles—he had virtually no control over the blue, thong-bitten flesh. He managed somehow to get up and to stand there, facing Brill, in a swaying, weak crouch.

The B'Wahai had formed a circle. They were calling and grunting to the two contestants, their eyes were flashing and many had broad grins across their lips. The B'Wahai loved a fight. They were already becoming so immersed in the idea of this one that they had, in their primitive way, practically forgotten the original causes and the purpose of the



battle.

"*Tinga! Tinga!*" they cried, evidently calling for Ki-Gor and Brill to start.

"Hey, just a second!" called Brill. He was pointing to the hollowed gnu-tail which formed the sheath at Ki-Gor's side. Ki-Gor's knife was still in it, "He's armed. Take that shiv away from him, so's it's an even fight!"

Watkins translated this hastily for Tesonga's benefit.

Tesonga shook his long, hook-nosed head. "The magic of Ki-Gor is dead. *Ibwa wete*. Knife makes no difference!"

Watkins, white-faced, reported that to Brill. Brill swore.

**K**I-GOR faced the big, red-headed man, and the faint smile of combat touched the ends of his lips at last. It was Ki-Gor's way, that smile would come even though his hands and feet were practically useless—the fact was that he hadn't enough control over his fingers to grasp the knife and draw it. Still he smiled. Handicapped this way he would be about evenly matched, he decided, with the powerful Brill. Ki-Gor would smile anytime when he had an even chance in a fight.

Brill rushed suddenly. His big arm swung like a crane, and behind there was all the power of his

chest and broad back Ki-Gor's jungle-tuned senses saw the rush coming in plenty of time, he tried an instinctive side-step, and his ankles gave way Brill's fist struck him full in the face, bright things danced before his eyes He fell

Ki-Gor lay there upon the ground, partly on his elbows and knees, his useless, tingling hands curled in dull hooks from his wrists He lay there and stoically watched Brill's heavy booted foot draw back for the kick At the last instant he would try to dodge that kick, he would wait to see whether it came for his ribs or his head He watched Brill's eyes He saw the narrow hate and excitement in them—yet Ki-Gor even now felt no particular thirst for revenge upon this man He would kill him, if there were a chance, yes He would kill him in the same way that he might kill a man-eating lion or a maddened water buffalo As something dangerous But without vindictiveness—that was a refinement only a more civilized man might have enjoyed

The booted foot, heavy with walking leather and rawhide lace slashed through the air A head kick, meant for Ki-Gor's temple It came with terrible speed and power—but Ki-Gor's jungle reflexes were already moving, almost without his willing it He rolled away as the kick came, and at the same time, brought his head down, upon his chest

Brill's boot grazed his cheek, scraping the skin painfully, but doing no other damage Ki-Gor rolled completely over, once, then again Both his hands and feet were stinging maddeningly now with returning circulation—but under that sting there was the beginning of feeling—of control—

Brill came on, following his advantage He skipped, like a soccer player, putting his right foot into position for another kick Ki-Gor strained with effort then, from the inside of him, from the very core of his will His arm flashed, with speed that a normal eye could barely follow Somehow he *willed* feeling into his stinging fingers He clutched Brill's ankle, then pulled Brill lost balance and as though he had been a light whip instead of a burly human of more than two hundred pounds, he snapped His shoulder blades slammed into the ground, knocking the wind from him

**K**I-GOR leaped to his feet His eyes blazed as he towered over Brill His hands were still clumsily curled and his feet felt run-through with thorns from all directions But the feeling in them was returning swiftly, they were becoming more alive with every instant that passed

Ki-Gor said acidly, "You have a black heart, Brill I leave you to the B'Wahai "

The slender B'Wahai warriors, who had been watching all of this, were staring at Ki-Gor with awed, white-ringed eyes The witch-doctor himself had taken a place well behind the chief, he was crouched and in a position to back away even further if the notion struck him Tesonga, however, stood firm and held his hawk-nosed, scarred face high There was, if anything, a kind of primitive admiration in the stare he kept upon Ki-Gor

Brill was lying near the feet of one of the warriors The man's assegai rested on the soft loam not much more than a foot from Brill's outstretched hand For a moment—as Ki-Gor turned his eyes away to look at the blacks—Brill's eyes flickered the silent B'Wahai There was no sense toward that weapon

Ki-Gor spoke again He used the Bantu which is the *lingua franca* of the jungle "Ki-Gor is lord of the jungle," he said to the silent B'Wahai There was no sense of boasting in his words, they were simple fact "One may cage the lion, or drive the elephant to a stockade But the lord of the jungle hunts free The B'Wahai will remember this and tell it to their sons "

They stared back, letting the meaning of the words seep through their narrow skulls Ki-Gor knew that this was the moment when he could walk away Seconds from now the situation, might be different, but now they were, in a sense, paralyzed by what had happened, and by what Ki-Gor had said

Ki-Gor turned Calmly, and matter-of-factly he walked back along the trail toward a low-hanging, vine-covered branch a few yards away The pain in his hands and feet was becoming less now He hoped that he had regained enough of their use to swing into the trees when he reached that branch He knew that he must walk toward it like this—sudden movement might startle the B'Wahai into action And he knew he must, do this thing within the next few seconds, after that it would be too late

A sudden, shrill cry rang in Ki-Gor's ears 'Ki-Gor! Look out! Look out, nah!'

Even as Ki-Gor recognized the voice of the little Australian he guessed what had caused the warning He whirled, and saw that his guess had been right Jason Brill had jumped to his feet, grabbed the spear from the warrior standing near him, and was already swinging his arm, throwing it at Ki-Gor

The spear hurtled toward Ki-Gor He dodged

and snatched at it as it went past his shoulder. His hands were not fully alive, yet, he miscalculated by the smallest fraction and his palm closed on the sharp edge of the blade before it clutched the haft. Then he stopped the spear in its flight and brought it down to his side.

Jason Brill stared at this naked, mighty-thewed white man who plucked spears from mid-air—he stared with awe and fear.

Suddenly the spindly-legged witch doctor began to point at Ki-Gor, then hop up and down and chatter in his own language. Ki-Gor saw the others move startled eyes toward him, then look back again. Ki-Gor glanced at his own hand, the one that held the spear. He saw the trickle of blood where the blade had cut the flesh of his palm.

He could guess what the witch-doctor was saying. *He has no magic—*ae*—he bleeds like any other man—* Watching the eyes of the B'Wahai warriors he could almost see the courage flow back into them. They formed a circle around Ki-Gor and began to move in. They still moved cautiously, but, Ki-Gor well knew that the spell of surprise was broken now. They would never let him walk toward that low branch and swing into the trees—

**A**BRUPTLY KI-GOR swung the assegai shaft diagonally across his midriff. He circled it back so that the handle pointed forward, the blade behind him. He gripped it near the end and near the center. He took several quick, running steps, chunked the handle of the spear into the ground, threw himself into the air, and polevaulted over the head of the nearest B'Wahai.

He took five more running steps. He leaped. He left the ground, and the falling spear behind him, and from the spring of his huge leg and torso muscles seemed to float into the lowest branches. The B'Wahai shouted and jabbered behind him, and the sound of them faded away gently as he sped through the trees.

Ki-Gor hurtled through the jungle tops just long enough to move out of sight. The moment he decided that the B'Wahai's keen eyes could no longer glimpse even the blurred form of his bronzed body moving the mottled leaves, he turned swiftly, swinging through the trees in a wide circle.

There was a faint smile on Ki-Gor's lips. His wrists and ankles still felt sore, and the cut on his palm stung a little, but in all effect the use of his limbs was his again. And he had made a decision. In the instant when he had cried a warning to Ki-Gor,

Talker Watkins had exonerated himself. The Talker was not one of the dangerous beasts, to be killed with a shrug, as Brill was. Ki-Gor would rescue him from the B'Wahai. He could not be too sure of the hard-faced girl, Nyra, but he would give her the benefit of the doubt.

And so Ki-Gor traveled a wide mile, circling to a spot which would place him behind the B'Wahai's line of march. He was already formulating his plan. He would drop upon the first straggler, wrest bows and arrows from him, and then from the trees harass the B'Wahai, pick them off one by one. When they had become utterly demoralized he would take their captives from them.

Ki-Gor switched his head around suddenly. He was in mid-air, flying across a long gap, arms outstretched for a tough, hanging liana that would swing him even further when he grasped it. In one vagrant instant Ki-Gor's nostrils had caught a sharp, pungent smell—the spoor of cat. Leopard. The game he had originally sought.

He struck the vine, clutched it, and then instead of swinging further forward, he scrambled hand over hand along its slanting length to the upper levels of the trees. He squeezed himself into a fork of branches and held himself very still. Only two parts of Ki-Gor moved: his eyes, which darted back and forth, penetrating the deepest spots of jungle gloom below, and his nostrils which dilated gently as he cast about for another indication of that leopard scent.

The leopard spoor came to him a moment later. And then, in the moment after that, he detected another spoor. Mingled with it, strongly. He frowned. This was human scent: his nose found, now—

Far below Ki-Gor two objects suddenly emerged from the green gloom of the trees and began to cross a small clearing. Ki-Gor's brows moved upward. What he saw down there was a leopard, all right, but it wore a golden collar and a chain, and leading it by this chain was a tall, slender olive-skinned girl with jet-black hair. Her own walk was no less flowing and graceful than the padding of the big cat itself.

## VI

**O**N THE JUNGLE TRAIL, TALKER Watkins stood and stared with dizzy disbelief at the golden bronzed man in

leopard skin who disappeared into the mottling of the trees. The Talker, who seldom touched liquor, felt like the one time he had accidentally become very drunk on Yankee mixed drinks. Everything had happened so fast. And everything in this whole blasted continent of Africa seemed to happen in spite of what a man wished, or even actively did about it.

But suddenly it occurred to the Talker that maybe that could work two ways.

He looked about him. He noticed that the B'Wahai were leaping up and down, brandishing their weapons, surging toward the spot where Ki-Gor had disappeared, and then fading back again. They were no doubt considerably disturbed by the whole business. That high-pockets chap of a witch doctor was screaming and babbling at them, but they didn't seem to pay much attention to him.

The Talker saw his opportunity. He had never been a man to let an opportunity go, and all of his fortunes—but, alas, all of his misfortunes, too—had come from his grabbing of opportunities. Well, he had one now, one that mightn't come again for quite a bit of a while. The rope had been taken from his neck in order to free Brill for that scuffle with Ki-Gor that hadn't quite come off. He was unfettered, certainly the most desirable state of all. The B'Wahai were howling their long necks off and not paying much attention to their captives. The green jungle wall was just off to his right, no more than a few feet away—

Deftly, Talker Watkins slipped into the jungle.

The overwhelming, stifling fear and loneliness came almost immediately. There it was, the dark, bottle-green jungle all about him and the big leaves and vines—which seemed to be live things—slapping and swishing at him as he plunged through them. But he plunged on. This was better, this was much better than being captive to the tall, mad-eyed black men. Freedom was always better, even when the danger was tenfold.

He ran when he could, he crashed and stumbled and crawled when he couldn't. He went on as though every demon of the forest rode his heels.

And there were moments when he had an idea that such was exactly the case.

He felt no qualms about leaving Brill or Nyra. He knew them too well. They'd have left him in a jiff, and in fact on several occasions he had caught them attempting to rob or swindle him. He had no doubt that either would murder him given enough motive—which meant simply enough money. But

he had stuck with them this far, at any rate. Talker Watkins nimble fingers could do things with dice or a deck of cards, yet by himself he was unable to create favorable situations for his talents. He had formed his partnership with Brill and Nyra because of their somewhat superior imagination and brass. Well, now he was through, he was. He might end up picked clean by the bloody ants, but he was through and in one sense of the word he had never felt better in his life.

He kept going. He heard the shouting and the jabbering of the B'Wahai fade far behind him and knew that neither they nor his erstwhile partners had noticed his departure yet.

There was a time of course, when he had to slow his pace. And when his pace suddenly became a broken stagger, as it had that terrible day on the plain that Ki-Gor had first rescued him from the leopard on the rock. It seemed at least a matter of hours before this happened—actually it was a matter of minutes.

Talker Watkins stumbled suddenly into a clearing, looked up with his eyes glossed by weariness, and—

**H**E SAW an olive-skinned, dark-haired girl leading a leopard by chain as though the beast were, for all the world, a tabby fresh from the hearth.

"Hi!" said Talker Watkins to himself, in a low moan. "It's come, nah. At lahst the jungle's got me—I'm nutty as a fruit cake!" Somewhere in his brain, dimly he remembered Nyra claiming she had seen something like this. But he still didn't quite believe it.

The olive-skinned girl seemed to believe him, though. She wasted less than a quarter-second in one startled look, then suddenly slipped the leopard from the leash, shot a pointed finger at Talker Watkins and cried "Nat!"

Talker Watkins froze, he was completely encased in a gelatin of terror. He wanted to close his eyes, but he couldn't. He could only stare at the lithe, bounding beast with its mouth open and pink, dagger claws extruded, he could only stare and watch it come for him.

Now he knew that it wasn't a hallucination. Now he knew that, at last, Talker Watkins was for it—and he didn't even have time enough really to make his regrets and wish he'd lived his life differently. There was room really for only one desire that it would be quick. He wondered" if leopards did the

main part of the damage with their claws or their teeth—a little of both—maybe

Then something happened to make Talker Watkins disbelieve what he saw all over again. The leopard was halfway across the clearing. What appeared to be a bronze-golden streak suddenly shot down from the latticework of limbs above the forest floor, and fastened itself like a burr upon the cat.

The Talker noted that the cat was somewhat surprised, too. But the animal didn't manifest its surprise in a white face and a pair of raised eyebrows. It snapped and whirled in mid-air, it snarled and it tried to claw at the thing upon its back. Watkins saw also, from the corner of his eye that the dark-haired girl still held the empty leash and that she seemed to be moving her head about staring into the jungle to the right of her.

She cried suddenly "Chala!" The leopard continued to snarl and whip itself this way and that. Ki-Gor, upon its back, already had his forearm locked under its paw, his hand curled around to the back of his neck. He was reaching for his knife, now. He hadn't had time to draw it when, from the tree-tops, he had seen Talker Watkins appear and then watched the cat charge Talker. "Chala!" shouted the dark-haired girl. "Chala!" She ran forward toward the leopard as she shouted this time.

The cat turned its head. It blinked. Something seemed to connect suddenly in its dim, feline brain. Ki-Gor, upon its back, had heard the cry, too. He glanced at the dark-haired girl, a small frown sitting his brows. She gestured, waving her palms, and she shook her head. She kept running forward.

It was plain enough to Ki-Gor that the girl didn't want her dangerous little pet killed. And that she was willing to call it off in return for its life. Ordinarily Ki-Gor might have finished the cat off, anyway, for the combat-lust was still sharp in his veins. But curiosity won out. He felt the cat below him quiver, and pad back and forth, wavering uncertainly—trying to obey its own defense instinct and the voice of its mistress.

Ki-Gor leaped abruptly from the cat's back and stood to one side.

**T**HE DARK-HAIRED GIRL nodded to him and said something in a curious, flowing liquid tongue that he supposed was a word of thanks. He regarded her suspiciously. He stood where he was, poised and alert, while she snapped her fingers and the leopard sulked abruptly back to

her side. She fastened its leash again.

There was something—an elusive something—in the girl's manner that struck Ki-Gor as deceptive. She had declared a kind of truce. Ki-Gor couldn't help but think of the way any *cat* declares a truce—to secure an advantage. Yet, as he stared at this woman, he had to admire her cool, flowing beauty, her feline grace that made her seem a piece of living sculpture. Watching her, Ki-Gor felt the mingled fascination and suspicion that men have always felt with the feline breed.

He waited. He waited for her to speak, to establish communication of some kind. To make the first move.

Her move came, then, and it wasn't toward Ki-Gor at all. She whirled swiftly toward the jungle wall on the right of the clearing and in a strong, firm alto voice called something in that liquid purring tongue of hers.

In that moment Ki-Gor detected blended man and cat scent again. The breeze, a very faint one, had been from the opposite direction, which was why he hadn't noted it before. Now it was clear—strong—alarming. He whirled toward it. From the green dimness which swirled about the trunks of the jungle trees there stepped a dozen people, both men and women, all dressed as briefly as the dark-haired girl, all leading cats—either spotted or black leopards—on chain leashes.

The girl looked at Ki-Gor and made one short, sharp, triumphant laugh.

Talker Watkins had been standing to one side with his mouth far open all this time. Ki-Gor heard him moan "What next in this bloody jungle? I'll take a nice calm nightmare, instead, nah!"

Ki-Gor darted his eyes about. The twelve cat-like people who had appeared were swiftly moving to encircle him. Their animals strained at the leashes and regarded Ki-Gor with hungry, greenish and yellowish eyes. Three of the lithe, olive-skinned men suddenly muttered softly to their charges, then both men and beasts leaped gracefully into lower limbs of the trees, blocking Ki-Gor's escape in that direction, too. Ki-Gor frowned. No wonder the girl had called a truce, by some special sense—sharp hearing perhaps—she had detected the approach of these people. And Ki-Gor knew that, for the moment, there was little he could do. The lord of the jungle could meet in combat any leopard that moved in the forest night—but thirteen of the beasts, given a pack instinct by their masters, well, that was another matter.

The dark-haired girl he had first seen suddenly took a step toward Ki-Gor. He watched her impassively in his jungle way. He didn't miss the way her eyes moved up and down quickly, taking in his magnificent frame, the flat, hard thews across his chest and the immense span of his shoulders. He saw that a faint smile came to the corners of her lips.

"I am Tirin," said the girl suddenly in Bantu. "Princess of Mau. Many white men, it seems, come to Mau in this moon."

**K**I-GOR lifted his head a little. Vaguely he remembered Tembu George telling him of a place called Mau which was near the land of the B'Wahai. He had thought it perhaps just another black legend. But what interested him most now was Tirin's statement that other white people had come here. He didn't believe she could mean Brill and Nyra—unless these people had spotted the B'Wahai and their captives from the jungle.

Ki-Gor decided to discover more. Easily and conversationally he said, "I am Ki-Gor. I hunted and came here on the trail of game. My own land is far to the south."

Tirin's carefully painted, razor-edged eyebrows flickered just once. Her green orbs held upon Ki-Gor in an unblinking, baleful way. "Ki-Gor—" she repeated in her low, purring voice. She glanced quickly at the other people of Mau who, with their cats, still stood guard. Then she said, "The girl called for Ki-Gor at the edge of the chasm. She railed to her blacks who were left behind—"

Surprise washed over Ki-Gor—although he took care not to show too much of it on his face. In an instant he knew who this white girl must be. Only one would call his name to her blacks. And he could guess how it had come about, he hadn't returned soon enough and Helene had come looking for him. He had been a fool, this was one time when the way of the jungle had been wrong, and now he deeply regretted his abrupt departure and his lack of explanation when he had left Helene to look for a leopard skin.

Very slowly, and as calmly as he could, Ki-Gor said, "Where is this white girl?"

"She is our guest in Mau," said Tirin, with a half shrug.

"Then you will take me to her?"

"Yes." The girl turned to the others suddenly, gestured a bit and addressed them in the purring tongue. She indicated an almost imperceptible trail

that led from the clearing and nodded to Ki-Gor.

Talker Watkins, his jaw still hanging, had been watching these proceedings. Now, suddenly, he trotted to Ki-Gor's side. "Hi! Where's everybody going, nah?"

Ki-Gor half-smiled at the spidery little man with the bright blue eyes. "You come," he grunted. "Where we go will be better for you than the jungle."

Watkins sighed. "'Ow true. *Anything's* better than this blahsted bush. Let's get along, then."

They pushed on through the jungle, several of the cat-men and their leopards ahead, some behind, and Ki-Gor, Tirin, and Talker Watkins in the middle. Ki-Gor kept himself alert, wary. There was about the people of Mau, he felt, a kind of inborn deceptiveness. They would do nothing the straightforward way if there were a method that called for intrigue—he was sure of that.

Tirin told them of Mau as they moved on. Ki-Gor, who knew little and cared less about the tortuous course of history, made no connection between the Mau tribe and colonists from Egypt during its days of glory. He accepted Mau as he accepted everything else in the jungle. It was there because it existed. He saw nothing remarkable in the fact that these people were almost completely cat-like in their movements, their habits, their very thinking. Many of the jungle tribes mentally affiliated themselves with an animal species and consciously bred and developed themselves that way. He remembered a river tribe which worshipped the crocodile, the men filed their teeth and swam as swiftly and skillfully as the great saurian, himself.

**T**HEY EMERGED presently from the jungle patch and they were on grassy plain again. But here the veldt sloped away in a huge, shallow depression and Ki-Gor saw ahead the geometrical stone shapes of clustered buildings—the tiny city of Mau. Quiet—stifling quiet—seemed to hang over it with a soupy thickness.

Tirin had been explaining about the leopards. "We ready them for the hunt," she had been saying, and Ki-Gor had the impression that her smile broadened just a trifle as she spoke, "and that is why we do not sleep today."

He nodded and said nothing. He kept his face impassive. But he was thinking that he had felt these people would be nocturnal, even before Tirin actually told him so.

Tirin moved closer to Ki-Gor as the party



descended the sloping plain. She looked at him often, smiling in her offhand, inscrutable way and occasionally her bare shoulder brushed against his as they walked. She was saying, "Life is good in Mau. There are rich crops and many slaves to work them. You would like it." "Life is good for me in my forest," said Ki-Gor, shrugging. "And with my mate, Helene."

He wasn't looking directly at her, then, but he sensed that she glanced at him sharply for an instant. Many minutes later they were stepping on to the paved stone streets of Mau. Talker Watkins stared in awe at the carvings and paintings on the buildings all about, he grunted and whistled and drew his breath through his teeth and kept up a running comment. "What an attraction!" he was saying. "A bit of super-colossal, nah! You could charge five bob a head for admission to see the place— put on a show with the cats over in a tent somewhere, and have your gambling games lining the streets! A chap could be a bloody millionaire overnight!"

As they moved through the streets some people emerged sleepily from the stone buildings and blinked at the procession, their pupils twitching with the daylight. They entered a broad, main avenue with a large temple-like building upon a knoll at the end of it. They traversed this avenue and then began to mount the long steps to the temple. Watkins was still keeping up his running chatter, Ki-Gor was still looking about, noting details in his keen, yet automatic way.

Tirm suddenly padded forward, springing lightly up the steps. She clapped her hands and called out once. From the columns around the doorway of the temple there came a squad of cat-men, armed with curved, claw-like short-swords. They came with incredible, lithe swiftness. Each bore a length of thin metal chain in his free hand.

Ki-Gor crouched, whirled, and darted his eyes this way and that in the manner of a trapped jungle animal. The cat-men were too agile, too quick. They came from all sides, enveloping Ki-Gor and Talker Watkins. Ki-Gor felled one with a quick, mighty blow of his half-closed fist, but by that time he felt the chains slipping over him from every other direction.

He went down swinging and struggling, but that only served to entangle the chains more until they were as fast as a net about him. In a moment he was helpless. Without showing any emotion, or being at all articulate about it, the cat-men lifted

him swiftly and carried him, along with Watkins, into the gloom of the temple.

## VII

ALMOST BY REFLEX, KI-GOR continued to struggle. In a sense he knew that the chains would not be thrown off, that he was helpless, yet it was his nature to fight them until all of the magnificent strength was sapped from his muscles. The cat-men who carried him called for help with their squirming bundle, and others moved up to assist. The chains bit into Ki-Gor's flesh, but he scarcely felt them. He scarcely noticed how they moved in the temple, either, beyond being aware of passing through dim corridors and moving occasionally down a set of steps.

Then, suddenly, there was the slithering of a thick stone door, and Ki-Gor felt himself dumped upon the floor. The chains rattled, and bit into his flesh. Fingers worked at his chains, hastily, brutally. It was all done with amazing speed and sureness— seconds later Ki-Gor was free of the chains, and the cat-men had gathered them up, backed through the stone door and closed it again.

Ki-Gor began to whirl his head about to look at his new surroundings, and a voice—a thrilling, familiar voice—called to him.

"Ki-Gor!"

He sprang to his feet, turned.

It was Helene.

They embraced wordlessly there in the cold, stone chamber and they shut their eyes to the dim light that flickered through slits near the ceiling. Ki-Gor and Helene—the lord of the jungle and his mate—he felt the live, taut warmth of her and he held it fast to his own mighty chest.

The voice of Talker Watkins finally interrupted. Ki-Gor hadn't realized that he had been brought to this cell, too—although the men of Mau had evidently not considered the little Australian dangerous enough to need chains. Talker said, "Hi, nah, folks—that's all very charming, but maybe we ought to be figuring a way out of this bloody calaboose!"

Ki-Gor kept his arm about Helene's waist, and turned and laughed at Talker. "This is Talker Watkins," he told Helene. "He saved my life. Talker—this is Helene, my mate."

Helene smiled, stepped forward, and offered the Talker her hand. Watkins widened his blue

eyes until it seemed that they might take up all of his pinched, freckled face. He was trying hard not to whistle—both in amazement and in sheer appreciation of Helene's lithe, leopard skin-clad figure. He swallowed his adam's apple several times. "I give up," he said. "I just fair give up. I cahn't tell *what ll* happen next in this blahsted country!"

Helene kept her smile, to encourage the Talker, and then explained for him—and for Ki-Gor—how she had come here, and what she learned of this land of Mau. Ki-Gor listened silently, nodded, and then recounted his adventures to Helene.

The Talker stood through all of it snaking his head quietly. When the Talker was silent, he was really impressed—

"Now we will look for escape," said Ki-Gor with undaunted simplicity, when the narrations were done. He was already moving about the stone floor, casting his eyes this way and that in the small stone cubicle.

**T**HE ROOM was perhaps twenty feet square. The ceiling was ten feet high. Slits near the ceiling glowed with spitting torchlight and took away some of the gloom. Ki-Gor went to one of these, leaped softly, hooked his fingers on the edge of the slit and chinned himself. He peered into the opening. He said to the others, "That is the outside, but even a monkey could not slip through there."

Helene's smile had gone now that she was concentrating, again on their situation. "Ki Gor," she said, "if we escape from here, it must be quicker. Their leopard hunting will begin soon. They've been getting ready for it all day—"

Ki Gor was staring at the stone door which had closed upon them. He dipped his head, frowned slightly, and said, "I see no bars, no locks."

"It's probably barred on the outside," Helene said.

Ki Gor shrugged. He had imagination enough, but not the civilized kind of imagination which can lead to hopelessness. In the way of the jungle, a fact was not a fact until it had been tried and proven.

He stepped to the heavy stone door. He pushed at it and it didn't budge. "It opens inwardly," Helene said. Ki-Gor examined the tiny crack between the door and the stone wall. The surfaces had been sanded smooth so that they fitted very closely and precisely. Carefully, then, he bent across the door and gripped at the miniature crack with the tips

of his fingers. There was scarcely room to insert a sheet of paper in the slit, there was virtually no hold. But Ki-Gor pressed with his fingertips on the corner of the door until there was some friction at least. His biceps, his forearm muscles bulged, pouring strength into his fingers. His grip on the door was almost entirely a thing of friction, from the pressing of his hands. But there was a grip of sorts—an infinitesimal crack that he could feel.

The stone door moved a thousandth of an inch.

Helene breathed sharply inward, Talker Watkins, in wonder, said, "Hi!"

Ki Gor strained mightily. Now his muscle power rippled back from his biceps, along the padded deltoids of his shoulder, across the sweeping trapezoid muscle of his back, down the pillar-like extensors of his spine, into his thighs, his calves, in his very arches and toes. The door opened some more. An inch of its edge showed now—two inches—three—five—

Abruptly it came clear and he gripped its other side with lightning speed and swung it completely open, so that its own balance held it that way.

"Gawry!" said Talker Watkins with an awed shudder. He had been staring, pop-eyed. His legs wavered under him and it seemed for a moment he would faint with relief. But he swallowed and steadied himself.

There was a passageway out there, which appeared to run at right angle to their erstwhile cell. It was perhaps four feet wide. To the right it seemed to slant uphill, and down there in the gloomy distance they could see a small set of steps, a landing, and a turn.

Ki-Gor paused, looking both up and down the passage.

**H**ELENE touched his arm. "Ki-Gor—the diagrams of Egyptian temples I've seen—well, never mind, I haven't time to explain that to you, now—but there's always a tunnel entrance. Underground, and some distance away. The priests always used it for disappearances and other kinds of magic." She pointed to the right. "That way we'll run into the guards again—but the other way—it may lead out."

Ki-Gor grunted and nodded. "This way, then," he said. He turned abruptly and began to walk swiftly downgrade. Helene and Talker Watkins followed close behind him.

There was no way of telling how far down the passageway took them. The walls began to narrow

and close in after a while, the sweat of the earth and drippings of green moss appeared upon them. The air became cooler, clammy. There were many turns, most of them right, or forty-five degree angles. It became much darker, and Ki-Gor slowed his pace, crouched, peered ahead into the greyness, and after a while when it became blackness he guided himself by running his fingertips along the wall.

Abruptly, Ki-Gor felt another wall in front of him. He turned to the left, and there was wall there, too. "Here is the end," he whispered back.

"There must be an exit," Helene said softly. "They wouldn't just have a passageway going nowhere."

Ki-Gor said, "Wait." He moved to the end-wall, pressed his fingers against it, and felt carefully all about for cracks. There didn't seem to be any—it a door led from here it was even more precisely made than the one in their cell. As a last resort he pressed his palms and shoulders to the wall and pushed.

It moved.

"Hi—that's it, nah!" breathed Talker Watkins.

A crack of light showed around the edges of the door. Ki-Gor heaved again—powerfully but softly—and it opened a number of inches. He gave a final push, it swung all the way.

They had emerged on a small hillside, kopje-dotted veldt stretched out before them to a red sky streaked with sunset clouds, so that they knew they faced west. They stepped out into the open, with the overwhelmingly sweet tang of freedom in their blood again—and then from a clump of boulders before them stepped six of the catmen of Mau, with drawn, curved short swords.

"Ow—guards 'ere, too!" moaned Talker Watkins.

Ki-Gor's eyes darted silently about. The cat-men were silent, too, their green eyes were expressionless and their artificially stiffened whiskers seemed to tremble with alertness. They were perhaps twenty feet away, and they moved toward their prospective captives in a kind of padding crouch. Alone, Ki-Gor knew he could have escaped them—or even fought them with the knife still at his side perhaps. But if he leaped to the attack now, he could only engage several of them, the rest would pounce upon Helene and Talker Watkins. If they tried to run for it they would surely catch one, maybe two of them.

Jungle bluff, perhaps, thought Ki-Gor. Suddenly and startlingly, he straightened, threw out his mighty chest, pounded it, and roared at them, as a

defiant lion might roar.

They jumped, startled—in the way of cats. Their eyes widened. They stopped moving forward, and they became more cautious as they crouched.

"Skittery beggars!" breathed Talker Watkins from behind Ki-Gor.

Ki-Gor waved backward with his palm for the Australian to be silent.

The cat-men glared, they began to move from side to side, inching closer with each few steps.

"Hi, Ki-Gor!" whispered the Talker suddenly. "Maybe I can fascinate these beggars. Put on a show for 'em, so we can I walk pahst! 'Ere—let me take your knife 'ere!"

The Talker sidled to Ki-Gor, covered his own movements from the view of the cat-men and slipped the blade from its gnu-tail scabbard at Ki-Gor's side. Then he took another step forward.

"Hi, nah, you bloody tabbies! Look! Presto-change, you beggars!"

TALKER WATKINS had his arms outstretched, his palms showing, and his fingers stretched out. The cat-men stared expressionlessly with their greenish eyes. He flicked his wrist and fingers suddenly on his right hand, so that they blurred in the air, and in the next instant he was holding Ki-Gor's jungle knife lightly by its haft.

"Out of the blahsted air, that's what!" he chattered at them. "'Ere—look! You'll go a long way before you see a bit of juju like this!"

He flicked his fingers and the knife disappeared again. He kept his right hand extended, stared at it, wiggled the fingers, and then abruptly the knife appeared in his left hand. The heads of the cat-men switched over in astonishment. Then Talker pulled his piece-de-resistance. "Now, watch, you blahsted mooches!" he said. He took the knife from his left hand, carefully tucked it back into Ki-Gor's scabbard and, while they still watched, suddenly plucked it from the air again with his left hand, as though it were a second knife.

He repeated the process. He stood there, while their astounded eyes clicked back and forth, and to all intents and purposes kept grabbing knives from thin air and handing them to Ki-Gor. "Hi—it makes me home-sick for fair to do this!" he sighed to Ki-Gor and Helene. "I was once known as the Great Caligula before I took to bottom dealing and six-ace-flats!" He looked at the cat-men again, "That's right, keep watching, you bloody clowns! You'll

not figure it out in a million years, you won't!"

The psychological moment had arrived, then. In common with Ki-Gor the little Australian sensed it. A quick glance passed between the two men. Ki-Gor nodded slightly. Then both began to walk forward slowly, Watkins waving his hands mysteriously and keeping up his running chatter. Helene moved along behind them. The cat-men, still staring, moved back.

Three on each side. Ki-Gor, Watkins and Helene passed quietly between them—one or two even shrank away with a kind of primitive fear as they passed. They went around the pile of boulders from which the guards had appeared. There were trees here, the beginnings of a jungle patch. Ki-Gor was already swinging his head about, finding his jungle sense of direction. He made a sweeping, circular gesture to show that they should plunge into this patch of jungle, and then come about in a more southerly direction. The others nodded.

They slipped into the jungle then. It was twilight outside, it was night in the jungle. They were surrounded by thick, bottle-green gloom. Watkins and Helen could just barely see the lighter bulk of Ki-Gor's back ahead, as the jungle lord led the way. He set a stiff pace—almost a trot.

And they moved forward like that into the very bowels of the jungle, with the leaves and vines clawing at them as they passed and the lower branches of the trees slapping and stirring every once in a while with the sudden passage of some arboreal creature.

"You think they'll follow us?" Watkins whispered to Ki-Gor.

"If they do," Ki-Gor said, "we won't hear it. They move silently—so do the leopards they will bring with them."

Naturally, that didn't help at all, Talker Watkins stared at the dark, stuffed silence of the jungle all around him and began to see new terrors in the vague shapes of things—take new fright from each rustling, each whisper of moving foliage.

He put it both literally and poetically. "Ow!" moaned Talker Watkins, "we're not out of the woods yet, we're not!"

## VIII

**J**ASON BRILL WAS THANKFUL for nightfall. Not that it made his basic situation any better—but at least it put an end to that

awful, slogging jungle heat. They had been marching through it most of the day—ever since Ki-Gor's escape and the disappearance of that little fool, Talker Watkins.

They had been marching with the rough lead-vines of the B'Wahai once more about their necks.

During most of it Nyra had berated him. He minded her sharp tongue almost as much as the heat and the insects, and he wondered how the B'Wahai stood her, even though they couldn't make out the meaning of her words. Even now she was chattering away. "Had to be smart, had to be tricky, didn't you, Brill? Had to pull one of your fast angles out here in jungle. If you'd stuck with that Ki-Gor, he would have found a way to get us out of this—now I'm sure of it." She tossed her head and straggly blonde hair, which now had long dark roots as the original color grew into it. The jungle moisture had washed off most of her make-up and she looked very plain—very hard—now. "Now what's going to happen to us?" she went on. "These savages are going to make us slaves, that's what. You know what it is to be a slave, Brill?"

"Nyra, shut up!" Brill growled wearily. He pushed on. He was still a big man, padded with muscle and thick red hair across his chest—but this only gave him more weight to carry. He stumbled. He swore. He had been stumbling too much in the last hour.

"It was your idea to come to Africa in the first place," continued Nyra. Her voice was nasal and harsh. Unrelenting. "Virgin territory, you said. Huh! I wish I'd never even met you, and I'll bet the Talker does, too, wherever he is! I could have been an actress back in the states, that's what I could have been. I'd already had a good start in burlesque before you came along. And you—you lousy, four-flushing heel, you—"

Jason Brill could stand it no longer. He whirled suddenly and slapped Nyra across the mouth with his knuckles. Hard.

She opened her eyes wide and stared. She became white as the underside of a crocodile. She ran the edge of her finger across a small trickle of blood on her chin, then stared at it. Then she looked up. Her voice became tight, hoarse. Yet strangely calm. She said, "Some day I'll kill you for that, Jason Brill."

"Agh, shut up," Brill said, and slogged forward again.

There was a commotion up ahead. The tall B'Wahai chief with the hooked nose and the stork-

legged witch-doctor were calling back for a halt, and then shouting and pointing to something in the trail ahead Brill had an idea they might be arriving at the B'Wahai village But then he saw that another party was on the trail, coming toward the B'Wahai The chief had already raised his hand in salute Some of the warriors ahead, who could see down the trail were beginning to chuckle and nudge each other with their elbows

The newcomers came around a bend of foliage Brill stared at them, and in spite of the heat and his dizziness, and the itching insect bites all over him, he almost chuckled, too

**W**HAT JASON BRILL saw was an almost perfect representation—in ebony—of Mutt and Jeff The larger black was huge and barrel-chested, built like an obelisk He wore a circlet of teeth about his forehead, and by his dress and his bearing, was clearly a chief of some kind The smaller one was built like most pygmies—slightly pot-bellied, wrinkled of face, and pop-eyed The big one was silent, the little one chattered

Brill, of course, could not understand the long palaver in Bantu which followed But he could get an idea of the running emotions of the men talking from their broad gestures and facial expressions The pygmy, and the stork-legged B'Wahai witch doctor did most of the talking The huge man with the pygmy followed it all silently and rather grimly, moving his eyes back and forth as each speaker spoke And neither Brill, nor any of the B'Wahai had any way of knowing that deep in his heart and stomach Tembu George was—frankly—just a mite anxious about the outcome of all this

Tembu George listened carefully to all the words that passed back and forth His lips were dry, but he dared not moisten them or show any other signs of nervousness He had very little fear as far as his own bodily safety was concerned—Tembu George, as chief of the Masai, and as a friend of Ki-Gor, lord of the jungle, had risked his neck too many times to worry about it any more But he did want to remain whole and alive for the completion of his mission—the rescuing of Helene, wherever she might be at this minute He blamed himself bitterly for allowing Helene to cross the vine bridge over the gorge ahead of him He had done the only thing he had been able to think of—summoned N'Geeso, the pygmy, the chattering one, who alone would be permitted to pass through the country of the fierce and savage B'Wahai

He listened now to the *bakamo*—the opening palaver of each side

The B'Wahai chief's fierce eye twinkled, and his deep voice rumbled forth as he spoke to N'Geeso "What does the hopping monkey man seek this time in the land of the B'Wahai? Captives? Slaves, perhaps, to gather his nuts from the trees while he stays below in idleness with the most beautiful of concubines?"

N'Geeso cackled right back "This one has no need of slaves when Tembu George, strong of back, but weak of mind accompanies him!"

Tembu George almost answered the barb, but then remembered that this was a taut situation, and that he had better let N'Geeso do the talking

The B'Wahai chief frowned "The monkey-man showed little wisdom in bringing this other to our land"

"Nay—it was the other way around," said N'Geeso He made an appropriate gesture of reversal "The big ox brought *me* here We come without warriors, meaning no harm to any B'Wahai,"

"The B'Wahai would scarcely tremble were the forest black with warriors of other tribes"

"The B'Wahai are brave as the lion, strong as the water buffalo, fleet as the antelope," admitted N'Geeso, then he looked crafty and said, "And I have told my large and clumsy friend, Tembu George, that they are also as wise as the wisest of forest gods"

The hook-nosed chief roared with laughter "Wise enough, at any rate, to see through the shriveled one's flattery!"

N'Geeso grimaced and hopped about and did a little dance This made them laugh more Tembu George scowled—he understood that the pygmy was playing the fool for a purpose—still, he could hardly approve His was a stronger way, yet he knew well enough that this situation called for cleverness, not brawn

And now N'Geeso said, "Then the B'Wahai are also wise enough to know that it is good for them to do anything which helps the white lord of the jungle who calls himself Ki-Gor"

Their laughter stopped abruptly They switched white-ringed eyes back and forth and they muttered to each other in low tones

N'Geeso took a chance "Perhaps the B'Wahai have already met Ki-Gor"

The tall chief nodded gravely In his deep voice he said, "His juju is strong" He pointed to the

captives then, and told N'Geeso and Tembu George what had transpired. He finished by saying, "The one called Ki-Gor disappeared into the trees. He may be still in the jungle. He may have met with the people of Mau—we were about to bring these white slaves, the woman and the red-haired one, to the people of Mau. It is agreed, thus, the ones of Mau take no B'Wahai as slaves, and the B'Wahai guard their land and bring captives to them."

Now Tembu George spoke to N'Geeso. "Hear, small one," he said quietly. "Ki-Gor would be one to return to free the red-headed one and the woman. Thus may we know that something has happened to Ki-Gor. Perhaps he has already found Helene." He used the language of the Pygmy so that the tall warriors would not understand. "Helene would be with the people of Mau. That is where we must go. Your skinny friends, the B'Wahai, must guide us there."

N'Geeso nodded. Then, still clowning, he placed himself defiantly before the B'wahai chief, spread his legs, puffed his chest out, made a commanding gesture. "The B'Wahai will guide mighty N'Geeso and his stupid friend to the kraal of the people of Mau!"

But something went wrong. The B'Wahai were through being amused. Perhaps it was the talk of Ki-Gor and the memory of his recent escape that stirred their blood again. The B'Wahai chief's eyes blazed along his hook-nose as he looked down at N'Geeso. "Aiee!" he rumbled. "We take you indeed to the kraal of the cat-people—but as slaves and captives, like these others!"

**K**I-GOR was the first to notice the deepening of the jungle silence, and he, of course, said nothing about it to Helene and Talker Watkins. They had been making their way as quickly as possible in the darkness, and through the thick foliage which was almost a wall in some places. Ki-Gor dared not hack at it with his knife, because of the noise that might make. He slipped through and around and over it, instead, leading the others, and finding passageways almost purely by his jungle instinct. They had been going a long time. The moon was already up from the horizon and it sent pale flecks of light through the speckled jungle roof occasionally. Clear spaces had appeared, and if these had been small enough, or afforded grass cover, Ki-Gor had crossed them. Otherwise he had kept to the jungle. There, at least, he would have something of a chance with a pack of fighting leopards, in the open

the big cats would overtake the fugitives in a trice.

But this queer, intense silence. A hard thing to describe, physically, ordinarily the jungle was thick, dormant, oppressive. The silence now was the silence of a taut bowstring before it was released with a twang. The distant tree-frogs had ceased to whistle. The birds rustled no more. Not a monkey chattered in the treetops, and even the upper limbs themselves seemed to move silently with the breeze—if they moved at all.

Ki-Gor knew well enough what this kind of silence was. He had hunted by it—he had used it at times to tell him that a jungle prowler was about.

"Ow—don't this blahsted bush never end?" complained Talker Watkins in a whisper.

Ki-Gor shushed him to silence. They pushed on.

They came suddenly to another margin of the jungle. There was a big slope ahead this time, an open plain that climbed gradually almost to the horizon. This was the ascent from the basin in which the land of Mau lay. Ki-Gor darted his eyes back and forth and could see no other patches of jungle, which would take them in their desired direction. There was nothing else to do then, but take to the open this time. The jungle would not hide them very long from night-eyes and keen scents of the hunting leopards. He looked at Helene, and saw her eyes watching him closely in the moonlight and knew that she was as aware of the problem as he. She smiled faintly, and he knew also that she would follow wherever he led.

Ki-Gor smiled back then, with just a brush of a smile on the edges of his lips. He gestured forward—on to the plain, up the slope—and once more led the way.

**T**HEY MOVED perhaps two hundred feet into the tall grass, and among the boulders and camel-thorn. Ki-Gor's giant figure was ghostly in the moonlight, pausing now and then with uplifted arm to test the quiet air with sensitive ears and nostrils. It was during one of these moments that he motioned sharply for silence.

Suddenly, faint sounds—the mutter of distant voices, and the popping of underbrush—came from the jungle wall ahead of them, across the grassy plain. The three fugitives froze in attitudes of intense listening. They could see nothing yet, and Helene and Talker Watkins could tell only that there was disturbance, commotion of some kind in the trees, there.

"It's those blarsted tabbies," moaned Talker Watkins. "Now we're goners for sure!"

But Ki-Gor's jungle senses were already picking the sounds apart and putting them back together again. He formed almost instantly a loose picture of what was happening. There were many men—a score, perhaps—and they were not cat-men but B'Wahai, judging by their peculiar shuffling gait and the faint rattling of bone ornaments. Then Ki-Gor caught a thin overtone to those muttering voices—a piping, complaining voice, which the jungle man knew as well as his own. Ki-Gor seldom showed surprise—but this time his eyebrows arched upward. He motioned for the others to duck into the cover of the tall grass and then did so himself. He peered over the tops of the stalks, at the moon-splattered jungle ahead from which the sound came.

The B'Wahai—for it was indeed they, Ki-Gor saw—fled from the jungle's edge. They carried their white-painted shields, and their head plumes waved starkly in the gloom—they looked like a company of disjointed ghosts floating from the darkly matted jungle wall. They reached the straggling edge of lion grass, halting there in full moonlight to regroup, and Ki-Gor and his companions had an excellent view of the lean blacks—and of their captives. A pygmy shrilly maligning all B'Wahai at every step, a tall, barrel-chested black, silent and probably simmering, though Ki-Gor could not make out his expression at this distance, also Jason Brill and Nyra the Charmer.

"It's N'geeso and Tembu George!" breathed Helene. "And two white people—are they the ones you told me about, Ki-Gor?"

The Jungle Lord nodded thoughtfully. Brill and Nyra, he saw, were hobbled and tied, wrists to ankles, scarcely able to walk, but N'geeso and Tembu George, presumed to know better than a white man the futility of trying to outrun an assegai, had been left unbound. The beginnings of a plan took shape in Ki-Gor's mind. Silently turning to Helene and the Talker, he took each by an arm and pulled them close so they might hear his whispered words. "Stay here. Hidden. The B'Wahai don't know we are here. I will attack them quickly—the surprise will scatter them."

Talker Watkins's arm trembled under Ki-Gor's grasp. "Hadn't we better run for it instead?"

Ki-Gor shook his head—the little Australian had no way of knowing that N'geeso and Tembu George were friends for whom he would gladly give his life and had often risked it, and the jungle man didn't bother explaining. Time was short. The B'Wahai and their captives were already starting across the grassy plain, directly toward the three who crouched

in hiding.

"Wait here," he repeated firmly. "It will be easy to rescue N'geeso and Tembu George—they are free and can run. The darkness and the tall grass will help." He turned to leave, then added as an afterthought, "I'll take some weapons too, and set the white man and woman free. Even *they* don't deserve the cruelties of the cat-people."

He had just finished the words when another sound came from the jungle's edge, but from behind them this time. It was a piercing and chilling sound—it was a chorused cry, and the voices were human, but as much as anything it seemed the sudden, concerted scream of a den of cats.

**K**I-GOR snapped his stare in that direction. The hunters of Mau were gathered at the jungle's edge, some on the ground, some crouched cat-like in the lower branches of the trees. The tall figure of Tirin, the princess of Mau, was standing in the lion grass, slightly ahead of the others. And bounding away from them, across the plain—grimly, silently—came the loosed pack of hunting leopards, both spotted and black.

Ki-Gor did not reason out his next move—there was no time for thought. Jungle instinct rose up powerfully. There was one answer. Action. He might die, he might go down under raking claws, or the stabbing assegais of the B'Wahai, but in the way of the jungle he managed to keep that idea from being uppermost in his mind.

He shoved at Helene, his mate—hard. She went backward, stumbling, and sat down in the tall, concealing grass. "Stay here," he hissed. "Don't move—don't breathe. I'll draw them away from you."

He heard something drop softly into the grass beside him, he took one glance and saw that Talker Watkins had once more fallen into a dead faint. Then the Jungle Lord was standing at his full height, in plain view of the great cats that came silently bounding toward him. And from his lips came a spitting, snarling cry—a caterwauling yowl that imitated very credibly a leopard's challenge to battle. The sound attracted the baleful, greenish-glowing eyes of every leopard in the pack unwaveringly to his tall form. The next moment, Ki-Gor was running.

The B'Wahai had heard these sounds—they had halted and were peering across the tall grass toward Ki-Gor's racing form. They didn't seem particularly perturbed, except that long-pointed assegais were lowered to the ready. To Ki-Gor, their reaction

was apparent the masters, the hunters of Mau, had cornered human prey, the slaves, the B'Wahai, would be happy to assist with the kill

The jungle man's strong legs almost blurred beneath him, so great was his speed. No man can outrun a leopard for any length of time. Ki-Gor's hope was that he might for about ten seconds. He threw a swift glance over his shoulder and saw that the pack, totally oblivious to scent when presented with a moving target, had swept past the spot where Helene and Talker Watkins crouched in the grass. To that extent, his plan had worked well. But he saw also that one leopard—a large and magnificent male—was far ahead of its mates, gaining on the jungle man with remarkable speed. His forepaws passed between his hindpaws with each sweeping bound.

**S**INCE BOTH Ki-Gor and the one huge leopard were gaining on the pack as a whole, Ki-Gor decided to put the inevitable battle off until the last possible instant, when his chances of escaping the others would be best. He concentrated on running.

Ten yards through the tall, rustling grass—another ten—another. He heard the silken panting of the leopard almost at his heels, the soft, somehow pig-like squeal of breath each time its forepaws struck the earth.

Suddenly, vaguely, he could sense movement ahead, as vaguely he knew that the B'Wahai had sensed his plan and were hastily preparing to defend themselves. He could hear startled shouts of fear, and could see that a mighty, barrel-chested figure had whirled, wrested a heavy assegai from a B'Wahai warrior and was laying about him with it, like an axe. At the tall black's side there was a tiny, hopping, chattering figure, already pouncing upon a spear dropped by a felled B'Wahai.

Ki-Gor noticed all of this in the way that he reasoned danger—almost with a separate compartment of his mind. For he knew the time had come when he must fight the leopard or be dragged down from behind within a very few more steps, and his main being was focussed on the fighting task at hand. His muscles, his very nerve-ends were relaxed, and yet alert. He was a fighting creature, now, he was the end product of the jungle, which began when slimy things first stirred in primeval muck. He veered to his left and whirled, his knife suddenly in hand.

The great leopard had made its final bound. It came, elongated, outstretched, like a three hundred

pound arrow in the air. Ki-Gor was not in the trees this time. He had no advantage of height, nor of surprise. He suited his action to that. The leopard was in mid-air and its paws were level with Ki-Gor's head. Ki-Gor, with the speed of river lightning, threw his own feet forward and slid under the flying cat. As it passed over him, his knife raked its white-furred belly down the very center.

Ki-Gor didn't suppose the wound would kill the leopard. It would injure him terribly but its total effect would be to make him even angrier.

The cat lit and reversed itself in its own length. Thin, red froth gathered at the sides of its mouth, making the long, bared fangs seem even whiter and more deadly. It charged again immediately, this time on the ground. Ki-Gor sidestepped. The leopard, whipping its spine, whirled to meet him. Ki-Gor leaped, twisted in midair, and came down upon the cat's back. He had no time to encircle its neck—he dug one hand into its fur and plunged the knife into its side. The beast screamed and clawed. It spun in circles, it twisted and snapped at the thing on its back.

Ki-Gor stabbed. He knew that this was probably the last of it. The cat was tough—it would take too long to die. Other cats would leap upon him even as he clung here plunging death into the ribs of the pack leader. And then suddenly, beneath him, he felt the muscles of the leopard jerk and convulse. He glimpsed red foam, thickly red now, dripping from its mouth. It seemed unlikely that his blade had reached the leopard's mighty heart effectively in these few seconds, but he could hardly waste time wondering about that. He continued to stab.

The leopard abruptly gave a terrible shudder and then stumbled forward, dead.

**A**S KI-GOR LEAPT to face the next assailant he suddenly realized what had happened. He remembered the karatonga bulb he had sliced with his knife. He remembered that the plant had been of a slightly different variety, and was probably even more virulently poisonous than the ordinary variety used by witch-doctors. At any rate, its bite had killed the leopard in a very few heartbeats.

And now Ki-Gor saw why the other cats hadn't joined in the fray. He saw—and deduced—in a sweeping flash, as his eyes traveled in a swift azimuth.

The hunting cats of Mau must have been trained to hunt and slay on a sort of bonus system—whichever



beast finally cornered and bore down the prey of the competing pack, got it all to himself—as reward.

Too, the fury and confusion of the present chase, the bloodlust aroused by a quarry that snarled at them and kept so stubbornly just out of reach, had had its savage effect upon them, well-trained as they were. All they could have known was that they were supposed to overtake and kill some species of man-things—and then suddenly, here were man-things, milling and shouting and moving about before them.

The result had been what K1-Gor had hoped for. Leaving the jungle man's opponent to its supposed kill, the rest of the pack had swept on to attack the B'Wahai.

The B'Wahai were roaring and lancing frantically at the cats. They had formed a ragged circle, facing outward, beneath the trees at the jungle's edge. Some had already fallen, leopards were clawing and batting their dead bodies cat-fashion. Tembu George and N'geeso stood back to back in the center of the protective circle, fighting the handful of desperate B'Wahai that were not occupied with the leopards.

Now the hunters of Mau came running across the moonlit plain from the far jungle wall. Tirin, the princess led them, brandishing a curved sword. They were calling in confused voices to the leopards—'Chala! Chala!' This wasn't the way they had planned the hunt at all.

Some of the cats obeyed and slunk back to their masters. Others went right on tearing and clawing at the B'Wahai. Tirin, K1-Gor saw, ran swiftly toward one huge black leopard who was standing on a fallen white shield, clawing at the mangled warrior beneath it. She called to it a sharp, confident voice. It turned its head, glared at her, and then went back to its project.

K1-Gor's next move, compared to his efforts of the last few minutes, was absurdly easy. The hunters of Mau had raced past the jungle man, ignoring him in their attempt to halt the bloody carnage between their great cats and the B'Wahai. And now K1-Gor, silent as the darkness that cloaked his movements, made a wide circle around the battleground and drifted toward the jungle wall, stopping only once to snarl menacingly at a pair of yellow-green eyes that glowed at him from the darkness. The eyes blinked, and then the leopard spat and backed off. K1-Gor reached the trees without further encounter. He felt a liana brush his shoulder in the darkness, tugged at it, found it firm, and went up hand over hand.

Ten seconds found him crouched on a strong, thickly foliated limb that arched over the very heart

of the battle that raged below. Coiled in his hand was a stout vine, the one he had climbed. Hastily, in the concealment of the wide, dark leaves, he tied a large knot at one end. He was no longer particularly interested in the progress of the fighting—his main concern was to get his friends safely out of it, and to this end, he moved along the branch until it began to bend beneath his weight, then he dropped to encircle it with his legs.

**K**1-GOR KNEW he was now exposed to the gaze—and assegai—of any B'Wahai who should happen to look up. But it was an outside chance—the B'Wahai were busy fighting for their lives. Shaking out the coiled vine to free any kinks, he gave the low, piercing cry of a jackal. He saw Tembu George's head snap toward him, and saw the big Masai chieftain's expression of utter surprise.

K1-Gor lifted the coil of vine, shook it. Tembu George grinned and took one last swipe at a nearby B'Wahai with his captured assegai, neatly hamstringing the man into the path of a charging leopard. Then he took a long stride, picked up N'geeso and thrust the astonished pygmy under a brawny arm. K1-Gor dropped the vine, knotted end downward, and Tembu George's great fist closed on it just above the knot.

The next few seconds were a nightmare of dread and suspense. K1-Gor standing upright on the limb now and pulling for all he was worth on the vine and its dangling, dead weight, was a helpless target for the murderous blades of the B'Wahai. And Tembu George and N'geeso, clutching the knotted vine, were an even more attractive mark. K1-Gor, at least, had the added measure of height.

Thus it was with gusty sighs of relief and a moment or two of delighted horseplay that Tembu George and the chattering N'geeso finally scrambled onto the limb beside K1-Gor. The jungle man, perspiring profusely, began immediately to tie one end of the vine to the limb. He was looking stonily downward, at the figures of Jason Brill and Nyra the Charmer, still bound and huddling together in the center of the ragged circle of desperately fighting B'Wahai. The pair seemed to have screamed themselves out. K1-Gor had heard their wails during the past few minutes but now they were dumbly silent, bedraggled, staring at the bodies about them, the leaping, snarling leopards that fought closer to them through the weakening B'Wahai.

K1-Gor's lips twisted. "Wait for me," he told his

companions "I said I would, and I shall"

Before either N geeso or Tembu George could question him on the cryptic utterance he was halfway to the ground

**J**ASON BRILL looked up as the jungle man approached and suddenly found his voice again His heavy face wasn't stolid now, it sagged into jowls and pouches "Cut me loose!" he screamed "Get me out of here!"

Ki-Gor ignored him He searched the confusion surrounding them for sign of immediate danger anything man or beast that would require his knife for a purpose more immediate than that of slicing bonds

The B'Wahai were decimated bodies were scattered about literally in shreds The few that remained alive were cut off without hope of retreat for the leopards surrounding them had at last reverted utterly to their primeval blood lust They were beasts of carnage The cat-people danced about shouting shrill commands, trying desperately to snap leashes onto the gem-studded collars As Ki-Gor watched one tall B'Wahai threw away his assegai screaming madly and threw himself on the ground The leopards closed in Nyra and Jason Brill were bound with strips of tough fiber Ki Gor swiftly freed the woman hands and feet Up to now she hadn't said a word She'd just stared, stunned at Ki-Gor Brill the leopards

Now free to move she too found her voice again She shrieked words many of which Ki-Gor did not understand Turning her mad gaze on Brill she snatched up a fallen assegai and drove it with lightning speed at the man's abdomen "Cut YOU loose! What about me? What about me you dirty heel!"

Ki-Gor plucked the assegai from her hand and threw it away She sobbed with rage Brill was shouting words too— shouting at the top of his voice He threshed in his bonds "Cut me loose too, damn you! I'll show her! Try to kill me, will she?"

Ki-Gor decided that the scene was attracting too much attention The nearest group of leopards surrounded a frantically dancing and thrusting B'Wahai some thirty feet away, but the jungle man saw baleful eyes flicker in his direction, read both hesitation and temptation in the lashing tails, the uplifted paws More commotion might draw enough of them away to make serious trouble Ki-Gor put one hand over Brill's mouth and shoved Nyra the Charmer roughly toward the dangling vine with the

other "Wait for me," he snapped "I'll carry you up Brill will climb himself!"

Ignoring her then, he bent to slash the fibers that bound the man Brill staggered to his feet, raving with fury Ki-Gor wheeled toward the vine, expecting to see Nyra She wasn't there—the jungle man caught a glimpse of the woman's back as she plunged into the brush at the jungle's edge He started to face Brill again his mouth opening to command a dash for the vine He saw the blow coming, but it caught him off balance Brill's heavy fist caught him on the shelf of the jaw and spilled him over backwards, breath exploding out Brill was cursing wildly "I'll get her, I'll get her for that if it's the last thing I—"

He stooped for Ki-Gor's knife Ki-Gor still on the ground braced his elbows and kicked the man in the face Brill spun away with an anguished howl And for once Ki-Gor's rather placid temper nearly boiled over—he leaped to his feet and took a long trembling stride toward the bulky man, hands outstretched and widespread to grasp Brill ran He turned on his heel with a terrified bleat and vanished into the brush nearly at the spot where Nyra had disappeared only a few moments before

The B'Wahai warrior who had fought so valiantly and futilely thirty feet away was down No longer did the leopards of Mau respect one another's kills The man was a rag doll tossed and flung limply about by a dozen of the beasts Others crowded out, were making for Ki-Gor

Ki-Gor Lord of the jungle feeling more palpably disgusted than ever within his memory took to the vine, swung lithely up to join N geeso and Tembu George

**T**HE BARREL-CHESTED Masai and the pygmy though long familiar with Ki-Gor and his ways had never quite adjusted with delight to tree travel particularly at night It was difficult for N geeso, with his small reach—and big, stocky, slow moving Tembu George was always frankly unhappy at the prospect So, as soon as was feasible, Ki-Gor dropped from the trees and commenced leading the pair away from the jungle, across the dark, grassy plain toward the spot where Helene and Talker Watkins waited Behind them, the sounds of battle took on new fury—the voices that had been shouting commands suddenly screamed with pain and terror The leopards, in their blind blood-lust, had turned upon the hunters of Mau!

Movement to the left attracted Ki-Gor's eye He saw a running figure—a large, broad-shouldered

figure in tattered khaki clothes—break from the brush at the jungle's edge and stare wildly about. Evidently in the mind of Jason Brill, the unseen terrors of the jungle had outweighed the very great, but more tangible, dangers of the battleground. The man began to run across the moonlit plain, into the lion grass, his course at right angles to the one which Ki-Gor and his companions had taken. Ki-Gor was about to shrug. Good riddance. Then another figure rose abruptly from the grass in front of Brill. A woman with a tangled mop of disheveled blonde hair falling about her shoulders. Abigail Wilson, professionally known as Nyra the charmer. She was swaying. Even in the moonlight Ki-Gor could see the dark stain across her shoulder and chest and knew that she must have been wounded by a B'Wahai arrow or assegai. But she had a spear in her hand—one that must have fallen near her.

Nyra the Charmer, who had been brought to Africa by Jason Brill, and who would have been left there to die by that same bulky red-headed gentleman—

The spear in Nyra's hand came forward and Brill ran into it with all the force of his plunging flight. Ki-Gor could see that it emerged from his back before he fell, and before Nyra let go of the spear and fell, too.

He heard a sudden scream. From the right. He jerked his head about again and saw that the black panther had turned upon Tirin. He had one final glimpse of the contorted terror in the cat-girl's slender face, before she fell back into the grass with the black beast upon her.

There was a shuddering sound behind him, and he turned and saw that Helene was standing there, covering her face with her hands. "We—we saw you coming—we came to meet you. Oh, it's horrible—"

Just beyond her, Watkins, pale and shaking, was emerging from the grass. Ki-Gor put his arm about his mate quickly, and swung her away. He gestured to the little Australian. "Quick!" he said. In a moment it may be too late to go.

He pointed forward, to the crest of the slope.

Behind the fugitives, the prowlers of Mau screamed and milled about, fought their own cats, and in the confusion, the B'Wahai, too. Ki-Gor and the others trotted on until the sound became faint behind them, and finally disappeared altogether. Only many minutes later, when they entered the jungle beyond the limits of the land of the B'Wahai, did they stop to rest.

They spoke very little in the first moments of their pause, Teubu George lay flat upon his back,

and his great chest heaved with exhaustion. Helens sat with her back to the bole of a bambambo tree and tried to keep her limbs from shaking with reaction. Talker Watkins flopped down in the middle of the clearing and promptly fell fast asleep.

N'Geeso squatted, half-closed his bulging eyes and grinned at Ki-Gor, looking for all the world like a mischievous monkey. "N'Geeso is mighty fellow," he said blandly. "Save everybody's life."

Ki-Gor grinned back at him. "Speak softer, little one."

N'Geeso struck his chest. "All tremble before the mightier ones of the jungle—but it is N'Geeso who brings trophies to his kraal."

**K**I GOR kept smiling, but shook his head. Then he moved his eyes slightly and gazed back in the direction of Mau, and the land of the B'Wahai. He seemed to look for a moment, through the gloom and through the distance. He spoke in N'Geeso's language—he spoke quietly and with a reflective tone. "There is the way of the jungle. The hunter must hunt for his needs—and not for trophies. If this is not done, the jungle sees that disaster comes. The people of Mau hunt when they do not need to hunt. Before they began this, they prospered. Now they will perish. Their own leopards, who are creatures of the jungle, will still roam the night trails when grass grows over the bones of the people of Mau."

It had been too much thought in one package for the pygmy. He had already stopped listening and was wandering off to the edge of the clearing, investigating the progress of a spindly ground insect. Helene opened her half-closed eyes, smiled at her mate and said, "That was a long speech for you, Ki-Gor. I hope you will remember it next time you go hunting for a leopard skin for me."

But you did need one. Ki-Gor said, then fell abruptly silent, staring at the loincloth and halter she wore. It was not the old one. It was soft and supple and new. "Have you forgotten, Ki-Gor? The last time you killed a leopard for me I made several costumes from the pelt. But I've been saving the good ones for—well, company, special occasions, something like that."

Ki-Gor frowned. "Why not wear them in turn?" He shook his head. "There are things about a woman I don't understand."

"That," said Helene, smiling, "is perhaps the one characteristic you share with men who call themselves civilized."