

# **JUNGLE STORIES**

Spring 1952

*featuring*

# **KI-GOR JUNGLELORD**

*in*

**NIGHT OF THE**

**WASULI DEATH**



# NIGHT OF THE WASULI DEATH

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

Africa was arming for War! From the Zulu plains to the heart of the Congo they flocked to the blood-red banner of Iban Byzof. And first to be trapped in that rising tide of revolt was Ki-Gor, son of the jungle, and his bewitching, flame-haired mate, Helene.

**K**I-GOR'S gray eyes followed the graceful, golden figure of his flame-haired mate, Helene, as she climbed into the middle branches of the great tree nearest the river

When Helene reached the limb which they used as their highest diving board, she paused and looked down to where her mate



sat as though to happily remind herself that his full attention was focused on her. Although she tried not to let her delight be too evident, she believed that her efforts to domesticate K1-Gor were beginning to bear fruit at last.

He had lazed about the pleasant clearing for three full days now, seemingly quite content, even to the extent of performing the innumerable worrisome little tasks which wives throughout the world store up against the times when the male relaxes his guard about the home. The most unbelievable happening of all had been K1-Gor's calling off of a scheduled leopard hunt with the pygmy chieftain, N'Geeso.

Why only that morning when Helene had reminded him that he would have to go hunting if he wanted meat for the evening meal, he had said he would much prefer to catch a few plump fish from their river bank. Helene could have remembered that only a few days before he had commented that he was growing weary of fish, but she didn't.

Helene smiled as she stared down at the great-shouldered man sitting with his back against a tree-trunk, his strong, bronzed face tilted upwards toward her. A fish net lay piled on one side of him and on the other were scattered a variety of bone-handled knives he was sharpening.

"You've already repaired the net, haven't you?" called Helene.

"Yes," K1-Gor answered.

"Well, those knives should be sharp enough by now," she decided, "so why not go swimming with me."

The big man known throughout the Congo as the White Lord of the Jungle very deliberately put down the knife and whetstone he had been holding. "You really mean you've finally run out of things for me to do?" His voice was teasing. "I thought my strength would give out before the jobs did. Wah! No Arab ever drove a slave any harder than you drive me!"

"The very idea!" Helene said.

"I believe N'Geeso's right when he says you can't bear to see a man—any man—doing nothing," K1-Gor went on, "He says the moment you set eyes on him you begin thinking up ways to put him to work. He says you're a very bad influence on the women of the jungle."

"That N'Geeso!" Helene said derisively. "He's strong enough to track game for days on end through the thickest bush but when you ask him to build a lean-to or weed a vegetable patch suddenly he gets

fainting spells and terrible pains in his back."

K1-Gor stroked his chin reflectively.

"He says the gods met in council long ago," continued the White Lord, "and apportioned the work about the kraal to women and hunting and fighting to men. He says anyone who goes against that decree risks damning his soul to walk in eternal horror and that for this reason he fears greatly for you."

"Oh, he does, does he?" declared Helene. "Well, if you ask me, Mister K1-Gor, I think you put that shiftless little imp up to most of the mischief he causes me. Now do you want to swim or do you want to sit there and talk about N'Geeso to yourself?"

K1-Gor seemed to consider the matter unhappily. "I'm really too worn out to swim," he complained, "but I guess I haven't got any choice in the matter."

Helene tossed her head. "Pooh! You should be ashamed, fussing because I ask you to do a couple of things. I wish I could just take three days off and loaf whenever I wanted to without a worry in the world."

She turned and walked sure-footedly out along the limb. Under her husband's tutelage, she long since had lost all fear of heights. She walked the swaying tree-paths with as much assurance as any city woman strolling along a down-town sidewalk.

K1-Gor chuckled good-naturedly, watched her slim, graceful figure until he was certain she didn't mean to turn around and lecture him further. And in that moment when he was secure from her gaze, his face abruptly changed.

His gray eyes, warm and laughing while he teased Helene, went suddenly hard and cold. His square jaw set hard, his mouth drawn into a thin, grim line. He lifted his head, listening.

Though he had been too clever for Helene to notice how he was reacting, it wasn't the first time that day when her eyes had strayed from him that his face had grown hard and dangerous as he strained to hear the faint, intermittent throb of a distant drum.

She, too, had heard the drum, but its ragged, faltering beat, its many hesitant repetitions and long pauses were so obviously the work of an amateur, a rank beginner, that she paid the sound no attention. Why would anyone listen to the stumbling practice of some unknown native youth who aspired to be a drummer?

That she was being deceived was no reflection on Helene. Except for K1-Gor and the cunning little

brown men commanded by N'Geeso, no one in all the vast area over which the drum could be heard read any significance into its sound

**F**AR from being a novice, the most skilled of N'Geeso's drummers was sending out that stumbling, erratic beat. Long ago the pygmies had learned that for little men to survive in a world of big men required the utmost cunning. And this secret drum-code, which not even the trained ears of the big natives could detect, was but one of the many tricks by which the pygmies outwitted their larger enemies.

N'Geeso could lounge about his kraal, seemingly a picture of innocence, a trusting, indolent little man who didn't suspect he had an enemy in the world, and yet all the time he would be maneuvering and transmitting orders to a far-flung network of scouts and warriors.

For three days and nights now, N'Geeso's men had been shadowing a heavily armed force of fifty strange warriors which had suddenly and mysteriously materialized in Ki-Gor's section of the jungle. But for the fact that the pygmies were the White Lord's self-appointed protectors and kept watch along the borders of his own lands as well as their own, the strangers would have escaped detection entirely.

A keen-eyed pygmy scout had discovered them making camp in a dense stand of bush at dawn. He backtracked their trail, found that indeed they had been traveling during the night hours. And with that, the scout was off like a frightened antelope to report to N'Geeso. Armed warriors who trek by night and hide by day aren't up to any good.

By mid-morning the "novice" had begun his practicing on the drum. As soon as N'Geeso was informed, he scented trouble—trouble not for himself, but for his friend Ki-Gor. Hastily dispatched scouts raced along the backtrail of the intruder, learning that the strangers had stealthily skirted wide about the pygmy lands to enter Ki-Gor's area. So it was that the pygmy chieftain started the drum talking to the White Lord, informing him of every new development as it came in.

Fragment by fragment N'Geeso's men accumulated evidence. The warriors were not of any tribe familiar to the pygmies. From their actions, apparently they weren't men of the jungle at all. N'Geeso's guess was that they were of some veldt tribe from far away to the south.

They seemed to know the general area in which

the White Lord lived, but they had no idea as to the exact location of his camp. By the afternoon of that first day, feeling that in Ki-Gor's own lands they were safe from the prying eyes of the pygmies or any other tribesmen, they abandoned their practice of moving only at night. Breaking into groups of five, they began to comb back and forth over the tangled trails, obviously searching for a fresh spoor which would lead them to the White Lord.

"Like hungry jackals, they sneak along the paths hunting you," N'Geeso told the White Lord by drum-talk. "They come as enemies, holding their weapons ready. You and the Golden One stay where you are. I am putting a wall of men about your camp."

So not wanting to disturb Helene and yet anxious to learn more about the intruders, Ki-Gor had become a home-body suddenly. He loafed about the camp, saying nothing and keeping a protective eye on his mate. When his pygmy friends had learned all they could about the strangers or when the searching band came too close, then he would have to act. But in the meantime he felt that the wisest course was just to wait and let the big warriors expose as much of their hand as they would.

On the second day, N'Geeso had grown restive and had sent a man to Ki-Gor's camp, ostensibly to inquire about their proposed hunting trip, but actually to ask Ki-Gor's permission to sweep in and wipe out the raiders.

The White Lord had forbidden the attack. "These blunderers are more valuable to us alive than dead," Ki-Gor had declared. "Only a powerful enemy would send so large a force a long way to do harm to me or mine. If we kill these men or capture them, probably others will take their place. Let us therefore use them without their knowledge, making them lead us to the one who commands them."

Ki-Gor had thought long on how he could trick the raiders and had decided that the best way was to convince them that they had successfully completed their mission. He must make them believe they had killed him.

He instructed the pygmy messenger to have N'Geeso prepare two figures which in dim light would look roughly like Helene and him, figures soft enough to absorb arrows or spears about as human bodies would. The task was simple enough for the pygmy witch-doctors, who were skilled at producing all types of figures, masks, idols and costumes as part of their trade.

And since Ki-Gor wanted Helene out of harm's

way in case anything went wrong with his plans, he asked N Geeso to invent some pretext urgent enough to make Helene hurry immediately to his kraal. The same pygmy warriors who smuggled the dummies close to the camp could bring the message summoning the jungle girl.

So on the afternoon of the third day, the White Lord sat waiting for his plans to mature. The dummies had been completed during the night and were on their way. The messengers were due at almost any time now. And the drum to which Ki-Gor listened as Helene balanced for her dive told him the raiders at last had discovered the trail to his camp.

The drum told also that N Geeso reluctantly was pulling his protective force of warriors away from the jungle man's camp. In obeying this final order, the small chieftain was going directly counter to his own desires, but he had learned through experience that the most foolish soundings of Ki-Gor always turned into good, hard sense.

**T**HE last labored message of the drum said the raiders were moving very slowly and cautiously and couldn't possibly reach the camp before nightfall. Apparently, the strange warriors knew something of the White Lord's reputation even though they were unfamiliar with his haunts.

For the present there was nothing further he could do. He could merely wait and hope that matters worked out as he wanted. Most men in his position would have fretted and paced, endlessly reviewing their plans for fear they had overlooked some vital point. But after living every day of his life with danger, the White Lord knew the folly of wearing out his mind and strength in fruitless, unproductive worrying.

When danger threatened he worked out the best course of action he could devise and then calmly went on about his affairs until the moment came to effect the plan. The one thing that disturbed him now was a feeling of guilt about deceiving Helene, yet he felt he was acting for her best interests.

She worried about his being so constantly embroiled in trouble and sought to keep him from being drawn into new dangers. As a wife, Helene naturally felt that others should do more and Ki-Gor should do less in the hard and usually thankless task of enforcing peace in the jungle.

But in truth Ki-Gor had worn the mantle of leadership too long and it fitted too well for him to doff it now. And he had fought the evil forces of

the jungle so long that they automatically regarded him as their primary foe, the major stumbling block in the way of their cruel and greedy designs. The peace-loving tribes, the weak and oppressed looked to him for protection. It was their trust in the legendary White Lord which made them bury their age-old feuds and cooperate for the common good in times of peril.

No other man in the jungle had the prestige and ability, let alone the desire necessary in the difficult job of coaxing the touchy and suspicious savages to cooperate. And it took great courage and military skill to defeat the thronging spoilers who sought to destroy whatever progress Ki-Gor made. It was to the advantage of the slavers, the gold and ivory hungry white adventurers, the predatory tribes who lived by pillaging weaker neighbors, the power-hungry chieftains and witch-doctors to keep the jungle peoples weak and divided.

So it was that Ki-Gor tried to spare Helene as much worry as he could, and man-like, his way was to stave off telling her about any new trouble as long as possible. Perhaps the matter will not be as serious as it appears, he thought. Or perhaps it can be quickly settled.

Ki-Gor sighed, then abruptly pushed his troubles out of his mind, his eyes lighting admiringly as Helene sprang outward from the high branch in a perfect swan dive. He watched her slant downward, her slim body gathering momentum, grace and beauty in every perfect line of her youthful figure.

Not by the least sign did Ki-Gor reveal any intention of joining Helene in the water until a fraction of a moment before she knited beneath the surface. Then, knowing she couldn't observe him, he suddenly bounded to his feet and went racing toward the river.

One unacquainted with Ki-Gor would have been surprised by the cat-like speed and liteness of so large and powerful a man. Yet it was his incredible quickness joined with his immense strength which had enabled him to survive the unending perils of the jungle. He was as much a part of the wild as any of the great carnivore. He too had been born to the jungle and his only tutors in youth had been the forest beasts.

In that pitiless environment the first lesson he learned was that the weak and slow die young. With his man's brain to drive him, he had worked tirelessly to perfect those abilities and attributes which would give him a winning edge on the

fanged killers who stalked him and the fact of his survival was evidence of his success

He sped now toward the water, his bronzed body naked except for a leopard-skin loin cloth. Despite the lashing power of his long, ground-eating strides, he ran with a controlled, easy smoothness that belied his weight.

He had marked the angle of Helene's dive, guessed the point where she would surface, and as he reached the bank, he leaped outward in low, flat racing dive aimed toward that spot. Like a shot arrow, his hard body skimmed down along the surface, cleaving twin curtains of jeweled spray. And when Helene's head broke out of the water, she was startled to find herself looking directly into Ki-Gor's face.

"Oh—you!" she exclaimed, and with an expression intended to be fierce, she lunged to duck him.

But the laughing White Lord slid away under her reaching fingers, and twisting like an eel, arced downward through the crystal clear water. When it came to swimming, though, Helene was almost his match and she was quickly on his trail. Like playful children, they carried on their game of underwater tag, scattering the nervous little schools of multi-colored fish as they skimmed along the shimmering whiteness of the gravel bottom or shot upward like suddenly loosed projectiles for a quick gulp of air.

They had romped in the water for about an hour and were floating idly for a moment, breathless and laughing, when the White Lord abruptly motioned Helene to silence. She followed his glance, watching it flick through the trees and she wondered briefly at the seriousness of his expression.

Then she realized that his animal-keen senses had detected a change in the normal jungle sounds and in the actions of both the birds and monkeys who long ago had learned to ignore Ki-Gor and Helene. The warblings of the songbirds had ceased and the monkeys had moved higher into the great trees. Contrary to the belief of city dwellers, the African forest is filled with a small bedlam of sound, and when that noise ceases, some danger usually threatens.

Ki-Gor's first thought was that the strange warriors somehow had outwitted N'Geeso, slipping a small force past the pygmies while the main body maneuvered far out in the jungle. He had no time to reach his weapons on shore.

"Head for the far bank!" he said with swift decision.

HELENE was bewildered by Ki-Gor's urgent tone. It was unlike him to be so jumpy at his own camp. "It can't be anything, probably some animal roaming past," she said.

"Don't argue!" he snapped.

But before they began to swim, a liquid bird call sounded loud and clear in the silence, ending with an odd little trilling finish. Ki-Gor grunted, the tense set of his jaw relaxing.

"It's all right," he said, catching her shoulder to stop her. "That's the call the pygmies use."

"Well, I told you it wasn't anything to be alarmed about," Helene pointed out, noting that he looked slightly embarrassed.

"It doesn't pay to take chances," he said defensively, wanting to kick himself for almost giving the show away. Let Helene get suspicious and it wouldn't be anytime until she had pulled the whole story out of him.

"I'm not arguing," she declared. "You're quite right."

But Helene was beginning to look thoughtful and Ki-Gor was relieved to see six pygmy warriors trot noiselessly from the forest into the camp. Quickly seizing on the distraction, the White Lord called out a formal native greeting, "I see you, O Great Stalkers of Elephants! May the earth groan under the weight of your ivory and may the curse of Gmshai rest on your enemies!"

The wiry, yellow-skinned little men drew up on the shore, unable to keep the disapproval from their faces as they watched the jungle couple swim toward them. If it was possible for their adored White Lord and his mate to do anything wrong in their eyes, this infernal bathing that the jungle couple insisted upon came the nearest to being that thing.

As their chieftain, N'Geeso, had explained on many occasions to Ki-Gor, not only was it unwise and unhealthy to bathe, but it was also a direct affront to the gods, who would have equipped men with gills and the fins of a fish if they had meant them to swim in water. As any self-respecting pygmy knew, for abundant health and a scent exciting to the opposite sex, one should keep himself well greased with rancid hippo fat.

"We see you, O Lord Ki-Gor and your daughter of the Sun!" they proclaimed in unison. "May your days be unending and your happiness as great as your boundless fame!"

Even if they had seen these same little pot-bel-

lied men on the previous afternoon, the greetings would have been as formal and flattering. Ceremony holds an important place in the lives of primitive peoples.

The leader of the six pygmies was N'Teka, one of N'Geeso's grizzled veterans. Two jagged scars where a leopard's claws had once caught him extended from his left ear to the corner of his mouth and his chest and arms were marked with a dozen old battle wounds. He was as wise as he was brave, and Ki-Gor knew Helene would be safe with him by her side.

The White Lord vaulted easily from the water and then with a quick movement swung Helene up beside him. N'Teka gave him a knowing, reassuring glance and thereafter, for a good fifteen minutes, devoted his attention to Helene, asking about her health, her opinion of whether the rains would come early or late this year and whether she didn't think the kunna flies were more numerous than they had ever been.

He discussed a hundred such meaningless subjects before ever approaching the real reason for his visit. According to native etiquette, it would have been unpardonable bad taste immediately to launch into the subject on his mind.

But finally at the time appropriate according to the rules of the game, Ki-Gor broached the subject by delicately suggesting that perhaps there was some small thing they might be able to do for N'Teka.

The pygmy vigorously denied that there was anything in the world that he desired or needed from them. So they talked on, with the White Lord taking the lead this time, emphasizing how many wonderful favors the pygmies had done for Helene and him, how greatly they esteemed N'Teka and often thought how they did not show their friendship for him enough.

**T**HUS, at last N'Teka under pressure was able to recall that there was a small favor which he believed they could do for him.

"Now that you mention it," he said, "my youngest wife, Ibole, approaches her time. As is often the way with women on their first-born," he continued with the air of an older husband slightly embarrassed at being so indulgent with a young wife, "she gets rather foolish ideas."

Ki-Gor and Helene both nodded understandingly, encouragingly, as though they themselves had reared as many children and dealt with as many

wives as the durable N'Teka.

"She speaks very longingly of having Helene with her at the time," the pygmy admitted. "She feels no trust in the witchdoctor's paramount wife who usually attends to such matters. She says that Helene knows much of the ways of the great white witchdoctors and she would feel better in her heart if the Golden One were there to supervise."

Helene was immediately all sympathy. The request was not an unusual one, for she worked steadily among the women to make them demand better care for themselves. She had to go slowly, so as not to antagonize the witch-doctors and old mid-wives too much, but gradually among their superstition-ridden rituals and practices she was forcing them to include elementary standards of hygiene. N'Teka's young wife knew that Helene's presence would guarantee that she and her child would receive the best care.

"You are a good husband, N'Teka," the jungle girl said. "Of course, I'll go."

N'Teka continued to mutter apologies at such a senseless request, but he was visibly pleased. Actually, his young wife's time wasn't too far off and he wanted Helene there as much as Ibole did, though it would be unseemly for a man to show concern over such matters. One couldn't expect a young wife to be too sure about such matters, so Helene would have no way of knowing that she deliberately had been called ahead of time.

"Visiting the pygmies will give you something to do too," Helene told her husband. She had become very businesslike. "If you keep lying around the camp the way you've been doing, you'll be getting lazy."

Ki-Gor smiled. "If I go away from the camp of my own accord, I don't take enough interest in my wife and home," he said. "If I stay at home, I'm lazy." He shook his head helplessly. "There is no understanding these women, N'Teka."

"True, true!" the pygmy captain hurried to agree. "The lot of man is a hard thing to bear." He sighed wearily, his eyes twinkling.

Ki-Gor started off as though to get his spear and bow. Then he stopped suddenly. He was as good an actor as any native.

"Look, Helene," he said, "it just occurred to me that this is the time for me to make a quick trip to the Masai Tembu. George has been promising me two fine new spears. I could pick them up and be back before you're through."

Helene frowned. She hated to be separated from



Ki-Gor for even a day That big, gray-eyed man was the sun and the moon and the stars to her and she wasn't reluctant to admit it But after all she would be occupied with the women so it would be selfish of her not to let him visit Tembu George

"I guess that would be best," she decided Then as an afterthought, she added, "But mind you, you're not to let them drag you off on any of their hare-brained adventures Those Masai just sit around and try to think up ways to get into a fight "

Ki-Gor put a brawny arm around Helene, kissed her playfully on the lips "One would think you didn't trust me," he complained

"I don't," she said

Ki-Gor stood with his bow and a full quiver of arrows strung across his back, his heavy spear in his hand, to wave goodbye to Helene a few minutes later when she left the clearing with the pygmies As soon as she was gone, though, he leaned his weapons against a tree, and after a short wait, followed their track to the stand of young bamboo where N'Teka had whispered that the two dummies were hidden

Ki-Gor eyed them critically They didn't look very life-like in broad daylight with their painted clay heads, their wigs of coarse, dyed zebra tails and their bodies of straw-filled cloth The proportions of the two figures were right, though, and the pygmies had realistically clothed the female figure in leopard-skin shorts and halter and the male figure in a breechcloth of the same skin

He picked them up and carried them back to the camp, where he covered them over with a pile of uncured animal pelts From a distance at night with only the uncertain illumination of a dying fire to light them, the figures would look life-like enough to draw the fire of nervous assassins

There remained only the problem of making certain that those assassins didn't come so close or linger around the camp so long that they would discover the hoax being played on them And to handle that situation, the White Lord would need the help of his huge pet, Marmo

Ki-Gor had heard the joyous trumpeting of the elephant earlier that afternoon as the bull bathed in his favorite spot upriver Like an old man adjourning to the neighborhood tavern every afternoon for a glass of beer and a game of checkers with his cronies, Marmo followed about the same schedule every day that he was in residence at Ki-Gor's camp After his bath, he would go south down a pleasant game trail, leisurely munching his way from one

plot of succulent elephant delicacies to another until he reached the grove of giant baobab trees where a herd of his wild cronies gathered to rest and scratch their sides against the pleasantly rough bark and sway thoughtfully in the cool shadows

Thus, within an hour the White Lord had found Marmo and cut short his visit with his untamed fellows Marmo took the interruption in genial good grace as he took everything that the jungle man imposed on him In the great bull's mind, Ki-Gor was a very interesting pet, rather than the reverse situation being true, and Marmo took a fond pleasure in indulging the whims of this man he owned

By the time Marmo had carried the White Lord back to the river camp, the swift African dusk was sifting purple and deep over the jungle

**K**I-GOR attended to his preparations rapidly He added wood to the smouldering coals of the fire which was never completely allowed to die while he and Helene lived at the camp Then he cut several arm-loads of long grass from the jungle's edge, used them to make a soft, green pallet some eight paces from the fire He covered the pallet with antelope skins and placed the two dummies side by side on the primitive bed

He pressed the figures down so it would look as if their weight had forced hollows in the soft grass Then he walked to the opposite side of the fire and studied his handiwork critically He grunted doubtfully and stroked his chin in thought

Suddenly, he smiled, remembering the mosquito netting which a white hunter had given him The netting would be perfect It would allow the figures to be seen, yet it would blur their features He and Helene never used the netting because they slept on a platform of woven liana ropes high in the trees where the night winds kept them free from the annoyance of insects But if these strangers who stalked him didn't even know the location of his home, they would be ignorant of his sleeping habits and it would seem natural enough to them to find their prey on the ground near the fire In the jungle, mosquito netting was one of the badges of a white man

It was no more than a few minutes work for Ki-Gor to strip several saplings and erect a flimsy, square framework over which he draped the cloth Again he retreated beyond the fire, studied the figures beneath the netting With the amazing quiet of the elephant, Marmo came up beside him and stood slowly flapping his vast ears

"You think I'm crazy, don't you, Old One," Ki-Gor said. And indeed as Marmo surveyed the jungle man with steady, red-streaked eyes, he seemed to be pondering the immense capacity of men to busy themselves with inconsequential matters.

"Well, I'm not," continued the White Lord. "This is important, understand. And I'll need your help to make it work."

Marmo expelled his breath through his trunk with a bemused "whoosh." The sound of his man-friend's voice was good, though the words were not the familiar commands he knew, so he did not listen too closely to them. He did not like the fire, for in his experience it was an evil thing which could sweep through the forest in a yellow wave of death, but Ki-Gor seemed to know the secret of keeping the flames in a small, round ring, so all in all Marmo was content.

Marmo watched benignly as Ki-Gor laid a sword inside the netting beside the larger figure, placing it so the firelight would plainly reflect on its gleaming surface. Then on the ground outside he placed one of his shovel-bladed Masai war spears.

For his own use, he picked up his favorite spear and bow and a full quiver of arrows, caught up his sheathed knife and strode out of the firelight toward the river. "Come, Old One!" he called back to Marmo and the elephant swung in a circle about the flames and followed him.

The White Lord halted about ten paces from the water at a tree whose slanting trunk and great gnarled roots formed a breastwork which would shield him from view.

And behind that barrier in the velvet darkness, Marmo's bulk would become an indistinct gray blur. Actually, Ki-Gor didn't care too much whether Marmo's presence was detected by the raiders. It was his own person that he must keep hidden.

And so began the waiting. Ki-Gor sat where he could peer through a break in the roots, commanding a clear view of the area lighted by the fire. He didn't sit hunched in a tense knot, his eyes glued to the opening. He relaxed comfortably, taking an occasional glance at the camp. After all, Helene was safe and if his hoax failed to work he could drop into the dark river and swim to safety.

Marmo was the restless one. As time passed, he grew hungry and wanted to wander off in search of more rewarding food than tasteless dry tree leaves. His vast body required almost constant stoking with green stuffs and he saw no point in standing on a bare patch of ground when there was plenty to eat a

few strides away.

But each time the bull started to leave, Ki-Gor would call him back, talk softly until he quieted. Then Marmo would doze in the shadows until the empty rumblings of his stomach started him fidgeting again. Ki-Gor's purpose not only was to keep the elephant close at hand, but the jungle man knew that the hungrier Marmo grew, the more belligerent and quick-tempered he became.

The White Lord was beginning to think he wouldn't be able to hold the elephant any longer when Marmo suddenly straightened his ears like two great fans, lifted his mammoth head, the trunk curling upward to test the breeze. The heavy rumbling of the bull's stomach abruptly ceased.

Ki-Gor, too, heard the danger signals which alerted the gray giant. The crazed laughter of a hyena which had been lurking near the camp cut off in mid-note. A night bird gave a sudden trill of alarm. A moment later came the sound of some small, clumsy animal thrusting headlong through the underbrush and as Ki-Gor peered through the break in the roots he saw a grotesquely ugly warthog break into the clearing, veer sharply to the right as it saw the fire and then race upriver to disappear in the darkness.

ONLY the stealthy and unexpected approach of men would set off such a series of alarms. The stupid and surly warthog wouldn't flee in such utter panic from an animal foe. No, the strange tribesmen were sneaking near their goal at last. Ki-Gor could visualize them freezing in their tracks now, silently cursing the hog.

Ki-Gor knew the native mind, could chart the tribesmen's next action as well as if he were making it himself. They were approaching along the well-traveled main trail to his camp, were close enough to smell the smoke of his fire. For fear that the warthog might have roused their victims, they would crouch unmoving for long minutes. Not until they felt the White Lord was once more asleep would they attack.

In Marmo's long years, black men had hunted him many times. Under Ki-Gor's tutelage, he had learned that the pot-bellied little men who smelled of rancid hippo fat or the big men who smelled of lion skins were his friends. But Marmo was wise enough to know that neither the pygmies nor the Masai ever approached the White Lord's sleeping place in this manner.

The great elephant was no longer a worry to the

jungle man. Except for an occasional quick shift of his ears, Marmo could have been carved from stone. He could be trusted not to make a sound until either Ki-Gor or the enemy provoked him into a charge. He had fought beside his master in more than one battle.

Ki-Gor stood up, slid the quiver of arrows over his right shoulder into the position where he could draw the missiles rapidly. With practiced skill, he put a strong new string on the bow, automatically tested it with a few practice pulls. He kept behind the tree trunk, concealed himself and yet was able to see.

It was perhaps two minutes later that he saw the first shadow-like figure creep from the underbrush. Only the softest touch of firelight fell on the crouching warrior, but the White Lord's keen eyes made out the man's motion as he turned and waved others behind him forward.

Like slow, squat beetles, the black forms crept out of the bush. Slowly, slowly they came, making no sound, inching out along the edge of the clearing in a ragged line.

Ki-Gor's eyes were narrowed slits, but their caution made a faint, grim smile flicker for an instant on his lips. In a perverted way, the skulking jackals were paying him a compliment. Their numbers and their stealth accurately gauged the respect with which his enemies regarded him. It was ridiculous that so many men should come in the dead of night to slay a sleeping couple.

Nervelessly, Ki-Gor watched the preparations for his own supposed execution. The strange warriors were ranging out in a wide half-moon, their broad, shovel-bladed spear points glittering wickedly as the shifting firelight struck the burnished steel. They meant to encircle the sleeping man, thus ruling out even the remote chance that their victims might make a break for either the river or the jungle.

Ki-Gor tried without success to imagine who had gone to such boundless trouble, had planned with such extreme caution, to kill him. Why should his death be of such importance? The person or persons behind this plot had tried to obviate any possibility of failure.

And except for the secret vigil kept over him and his lands by the pygmies, the plot might have succeeded.

Ki-Gor waited until the ring of steel about the sleeping place was almost closed before stepping close to Marmo. It was time for him to intervene.

He wanted the assassins to make their casts, but he didn't want them to make a close inspection of the dummies. He could use Marmo to accomplish both ends.

"Speak your anger, Old One!" the White Lord commanded. "Speak!"

Marmo's master had trained him for battle, taught him to trumpet and charge only on order. Few sounds are more fear-some than the thunderous trumpeting of an enraged bull, particularly to primitively armed tribesmen who know all too well the murderous destructiveness of the earth's greatest beast once it goes berserk. And since a wild elephant, unlike the man-tutored Marmo, only sounds that ear-splitting blast when ready to attack, Ki-Gor knew the first instinct of the raiders would be to scatter for cover.

Marmo needed no second urging. He had scented Ki-Gor's anger as the men crept into the camp, which was enough to confirm for the wise old giant that the strangers were definitely enemies. And now by his low, taut command, the White Lord had lifted all restrictions from the bull.

As suddenly as if the lid of hell had been torn aside, the gray giant's trumpeting ripped the silence asunder. To the human ear the sound of a thousand screaming devils could have been no more terrible. The air splintered into stabbing particles of pain that seemed to cut through the very flesh of a man, shredding the innermost fibers of his strength and infecting him with a searing terror.

The reaction of the raiders was much as though the ground beneath their feet all at once had turned red-hot. Where they had been hunched low, skulking into their circle of intended death with infinite caution, now they leaped up like suddenly released jumping jacks, whirling and bounding as they sought in all directions simultaneously for the maddened elephant.

But the captain of the marauders kept his head. Either the reward promised him for Ki-Gor's death was so great or the penalty for failure so terrible that he was less easily shaken than his men.

"Strike, you dogs!" he roared. "Strike or our chance is gone forever!"

And even as he spoke, the black leaped a long step forward and hammered his spear at the larger of the forms beneath the netting. Under the lash of his words, the warriors steadied for a moment. The circle tightened, regained form. Dark, sweat-glistening arms whipped high and then from every side of the long, shovel-bladed spears drove in toward

he sleeping place

No warrior was farther than twenty paces from the target. It was virtually impossible for any trained spearman to miss at that range. The rain of spears ripped through the netting, literally riddling the figures.

And the force of the shafts collapsed the flimsy netting frame, dropping the white cloth down over the dummies like an obscuring shroud. "Haneel! The thing is done!" screeched the leader in triumph. "Quick now—sever the heads! They will be proof to spur our master's generosity."

He jabbed a pointing finger toward the dump of still quivering spear shafts which stabbed upward from the hidden dummies like some monstrous, many-branched growth. A half dozen of his blacks whipped free their swords and started forward, echoing his triumphant yell.

But Ki-Gor had no notion of letting them reach the figures. In the time it had taken the tribesmen to cast their spears, he had guided Marmo out of the shadows behind the huge tree, jabbed him with the end of his bow and hissed the command to charge.

## CHAPTER III

**W**ILD and terrible thundered the great bull's trumpeting. With the cunning of his kind, he saw that the enemy man-things had thrown away their spears, the only weapon they possessed which could do him serious injury. He could be among them before they could recover the weapons! It was what his friend, Ki-Gor, wanted him to do.

His gargantuan body exploded into action. Immense legs pounding, he lunged out of the night, rocking the ground with the hammering might of his strides. He charged with his huge head lifted, trunk curled out of danger, tusks gleaming like two murderous ivory rams. And his eyes flamed blood-red with the surging wrath that beat through him.

He came with the speed and power of an avalanche, cleaving straight to a path that would plunge him into the midst of the raiders. He was the personification of brute, beast power. And as the blacks heard his battle-scream reach a crescendo, felt the ground tremble under his more than five tons of weight, they knew with sudden terror that they had delayed their escape too long.

Fear held them rooted for a moment as they beheld for the first time the fabled devil-bull

that served the White Lord. They had known of Marmo's existence, had been warned to avoid him, for their master had briefed them on every fact he knew concerning Ki-Gor and his way of life. But they hadn't taken too seriously the stories about the elephant. It was difficult enough to swallow the tales about the White Lord.

Now when it was too late, they realized it was true that Marmo was a giant among giants and that he was totally without fear of men. He stood as much above his own kind in strength, courage and intelligence as Ki-Gor did above most men.

The cannonade of Marmo's driving feet shook the campfire, crumbling the burnt centers of logs, tumbling the unconsumed ends into the embers. The flames reached upward in a fierce and sudden blaze of light. Every feature of the stricken warriors' faces was starkly revealed in the brightness.

But what was more important, Marmo himself was revealed in all his savage immensity. And with the flare of light, mindless panic burst over the raiders. Like chickens skittering in squawking terror before the swoop of a hawk, the warriors fled pell-mell for cover. Each man thought only of his own precious hide, left the grisly taking of their victims' heads for some more foolhardy comrade to accomplish.

And no one of them was foolhardy enough for that undertaking. Not even the brutal threats of their captain could have held them then. But their captain wasn't trying to hold them. He was running full speed in the van of the rout, holding his own person more valuable than those of his men.

Their wildly pumping legs were no match for Marmo's six and a half foot strides. He hurtled in among them like an express train running amok. He smote right and left with his gleaming tusks. One crumpled, red-spurting form catapulted ten feet in the air, another ripped nearly half in two was thrown backward completely over the rampaging beast.

Never slackening his pace, Marmo pounded through a clump of fighting, clawing blacks, leaving two of them ground into a sickening pulp and a third with a shattered abdomen screaming his last in a blood-gushing delirium of pain.

Marmo was in front of the natives then, between them and the jungle. In a careening turn, he swung to the left, cutting over half of them off from their goal. As he smashed into the fleeing blacks, they went utterly berserk with fear, running blindly in every direction, colliding, beating at each other,

smashing into trees

And the hideous, mindless shrieks that ripped from their throats cut upward even through the sky-shaking thunder of Marmo's trumpeting. Unless one knew elephants, the great war-trained tusker's speed and agility would have seemed unbelievable.

In a matter of seconds, though it must have seemed an endless eternity to the blacks, the bull had zig-zagged a bloody path through the confused mob. Five more crushed and lifeless forms were added in that brief interval to his score of victims. And another half dozen of those who managed to get away would bear forever the marks of his attack.

Outward into the jungle in all directions the raiders fled, tearing through thorn and bramble with their bare hands, thrusting through stifling barriers of undergrowth, fighting insanely against tangled nets of liana. And Marmo raged into the darkness after them. The sound of his pursuit was enough to keep the blacks running until utter exhaustion overtook them.

The grim-faced White Lord, wary as any leopard, stood watchful and listening until he was certain none of the marauders had lingered near the camp. Then he moved silently into the center of the clearing, pausing to stare into the death-twisted features of first one dead warrior and then another.

Finally, he wrenched a spear from one of the riddled dummies with which he had fooled the raiders. He stared at the broad, shovel-bladed point. Only one tribe—the warlike Masai—used this distinctive type of spear.

But the raiders had not been Masai! They had carried those distinctive spears for the sole purpose of making it seem that he had been slain in his sleep by his own supporters. The assassins had planned to leave those spears buried in their victims, knowing such damning evidence would confuse the whole camp of Ki-Gor's followers and might well plunge the pygmies and the lesser tribes into open war with the indignant Masai.

Dreadful jungle wars had been fought for far less cause.

And now that he had studied his dead foes closely, Ki-Gor was more puzzled and worried than ever. No wonder N'Geeso's scouts had been unable to identify the strangers. These warriors had come from far beyond the range of pygmy wanderings, from nearly a thousand miles to the south. Long before his marriage to Helene, Ki-Gor had trekked to that far land of the great veldt and had encountered

tall, fierce men like these.

They were the dread Zulus, distant and hated cousins of the Masai. Of all the dark peoples of Africa, their empire had been perhaps the most powerful and warlike. Their iron-disciplined impi had even held the white men and their modern arms at bay for many years. But the British finally had defeated them and to insure that they would never rise again had dispersed them on various reservations where they could be watched and supervised. The power of their king had been destroyed and their chieftains made into little more than impotent figureheads. The chilling cry, "Kill—kill!" of charging Zulu impi was now little more than a faint, uneasy memory.

Yet here in the heart of the deep jungle were Zulus on the war trail, Zulus who had reverted to the old and savage ways of their fathers.

How had they managed to get here? And why was their first move an attempt on the life of a man they had never seen? Ki-Gor was confident that the murder try was considerably more than a spiteful foray meant to cause the Masai trouble.

He sensed the gathering of dark and powerful forces against him and his friends. Before they learned that he still lived, Ki-Gor hoped to pierce to the heart of the mystery.

THEY made an odd pair, those two men who sat in the shade of a zebra-skin canopy watching the impi drilling in the broiling sun. In color, shape, temperament and backgrounds, they were utterly dissimilar. But ruthless ambition is a bond stronger than all others. It can make and keep strange partnerships so long as the association is mutually profitable.

Such was the association between the renegade Zulu leader, M'Gola, who claimed the blood of kings, and Iban Byzof, who pretended to many things, but who, if he knew anything of his forebears, had never been moved to mention it.

"There's no reason to worry," Byzof was saying, though the remark seemed uncalled for since neither of them had spoken for over five minutes. He squirmed uneasily in the weather-beaten canvas camp chair, his mismatched eyes—one was pale brown, the other an even paler blue—sliding toward the vine bridge which provided the only entrance to the camp.

"No reason at all," he went on in the oily, overly-hearty voice. "He's dead by now! No doubt of it. And not a breath of suspicion to point to us."

His short, fat legs pawed unsuccessfully for a better purchase on the ground "When Iban Byzof makes a plan, it works Hasn't every single thing transpired just as I said it would Well, so will this! Almost any time now our men will be coming back with the good news, so just be at ease "

M'Gola's hard eyes flicked away from the marching warriors, stared with momentary distaste at the soft, shapeless obesity, the dirty, sweat-soggy linens, the greasy, dripping features of Iban Byzof He didn't like little men to begin with, especially soft, bloated jackals like Byzof who lived by stealth and treachery, who stayed safely hidden in the background while others took the chances and did the dirty work for them

"My men!" M'Gola corrected harshly "Those Wasuli curs of yours nearly shook themselves to pieces when they heard this K1-Gor was to be slain One Zulu woman would make a better warrior than any ten of them " He spat contemptuously "And I'm not the one worrying! What I command, my warriors do "

Byzof made an attempt to shift around in his chair, short legs pawing at the ground, but he succeeded in doing little more than shifting a few layers of sagging fat in the black leader's direction

An anthropologist would have found his face an interesting puzzle He had a square, heavy, Teutonic head, the puffy-lidded, faintly slanting eyes of an Oriental, high cheekbones and a predatory, beaked nose His skin, until dissipation blotched it with gray and yellow patches, had been light brown His mouth was too small and too red, and the lips were a ways wet and glistening His surprising weak, receding chin slid away into rolls of fat The top of his head, now hidden by a battered straw hat, was sparsely covered by oily strands of long, black hair

"My friend," Byzof said softly, ingratiatingly, "you are too touchy with poor old Byzof Are not our fortunes bound together in this thing? You would quibble about a few blades of grass when there are whole forests to be shared between us "

M'Gola grunted fiercely, his mouth drawn in a stern line He was a huge bull of a man, well over six feet in height, his broad shoulders, deep chest and powerful legs girded with layers of rock-hard muscle

After all, you don't hear me reminding you," went on Byzof, "about my part in this thing I don't harp on the fact that I conceived of the plan from beginning to end, that I selected you as my partner

when there were many others who would have leaped at the chance to join me "

From somewhere in the recesses of his disordered clothing, he hauled a dirty, sodden length of cloth and mopped his dripping features

"I don't say that it took me, my money and my connections to smuggle you and your warriors away from the preserve where you were cooped up like a bunch of slaves," he said softly "I don't mention that it cost me plenty to set up a system so your men could be dribbled up here in small groups without being noticed "

He blew his nose on the rag, dabbed at his face again and then returned the cloth to its hiding place

"And it cost plenty more to get the Wasuli chieftain to assign us a thousand warriors and give us this well protected place in his lands to get organized in," Byzof continued "Maybe they do look kind of ratty beside your men and maybe they are scared to death of K1-Gor, but they'll flesh out our army and once they know they don't have K1-Gor to worry about, we won't have any trouble with them "

Byzof paused for a moment, probed at his discolored teeth with a pudgy finger Seemingly satisfied that he had dislodged the food particle that was bothering him, he wiped his hand on his coat and resumed

"No, it isn't my way to point out that I'm practically handing you a kingdom, giving you a chance to finish the Masai off and make your name as great as that of any of the old Zulu kings I don't do it because we're partners, friends, brothers-in-arms And you should feel the same way, instead of blowing up because I innocently say 'our men' about a few of your Zulus "

**M**'GOLA scowled The fat little hypocrite had done all he said and had been cunning enough to make the Zulu leader go through the ceremony of blood brotherhood with him before he would make a move Since no warrior, however despicable, would violate the rite of blood, Byzof never had to fear that M'Gola would betray him or harm him That is, unless Byzof himself first violated the code, thereby freeing the Zulu

But M'Gola wasn't so naive as to be taken in by the fat man's pointed remarks or to be fooled by the seeming amiability with which they were delivered

"Pfaugh!" he snarled "Don't play the generous

benefactor to me. The cost to you in gold will be more than matched by the cost to me in Zulu blood. And where the exclusive trading rights you demanded in everything from slaves to ivory quickly will return your gold many-fold, there will be no replacing of the warriors I lose."

The black leader jabbed a thick, blunt forefinger toward the drilling warriors. The violence of the movement set the heavy copper bracelet about his wrists to jangling.

"Don't take me for a fool!" he cried. "You needed me as much as I needed you. Without Zulu steel to shield them, these Wasuli curs wouldn't march."

Abruptly M'Gola shoved up from his lion-skin covered chair, began to pace back and forth beneath the canopy, heavy muscles rippling beneath the gleaming black skin.

"Imagine all this delay, this sneaking and planning and hiding," he exploded, "because of one man. Even you turn pale when the name Ki-Gor is mentioned. Bah! White Lord, indeed! You have the hearts of jackals, all of you, to be bluffed by one stinking white man."

Byzof folded his small, soft hands over his paunch. He looked like an evil Buddha trying to achieve a benign smile. It pleased him to see the Zulu prodded into anger. It was good for the black savage to strain against the leash. An angry, edgy bulldog fights better in the pit.

"One of the reasons for my success," Byzof said complacently, "is that I never underestimate a foe." After a brief pause, he added, "And another is, that I never venture an opinion until I am certain of my facts."

Stung by his words, M'Gola whirled to confront him. "Does this Ki-Gor command a tribe?" he demanded. "No! Does he command even a hand of hired guards? No! Is he a man of great wealth, with huts of ivory and slaves to wait on him? No!" He smacked his clenched right fist into the open palm of his left hand. "I know these lecherous, drunken white outcasts. If you had let it be known that Zulus hunted him, he would have run like a rabbit. Push aside their tricks, lies and empty threats and you find them all bluff."

"Very interesting," Byzof commented. "I almost regret that you'll never come up against Ki-Gor. You see, though I've never matched swords with him personally, a round dozen of my best slave-gatherers have to their everlasting sorrow. Until he came into the picture, I took between three and four thousand slaves a year from this area."

His mismatched eyes glittered wickedly and he tapped his chest with a pudgy finger.

"When Iban Byzof must come personally to deal with a matter," he said, with a sudden acid edge of his voice, "you can be sure it is quite important. If you want a kingdom, I advise you to let me do the thinking. There'll be fighting enough to keep you occupied."

He lifted his head, raised his slanted brows quizzically.

"That was our agreement, wasn't it?" he asked softly.

The big black glared at him, and for the space of a few breaths it seemed that he might tear apart the bloated little schemer with his bare hands.

But then Byzof added, even more softly. "I believe you swore to that arrangement when we took the vows of blood." And M'Gola slowly, reluctantly, relaxed, his face grown sullen rather than dangerous.

"I keep my word," the Zulu grated, "but I warn you to keep yours. I'm not entirely ignorant of your history. Try to double back on your trail with me and there'll be no vows to protect you."

For a moment, Byzof was utterly still. One was somehow reminded of an ugly beetle left naked and surprised by the sudden lifting of a rotten piece of wood. Then he began to laugh, short, shrill little brays of forced laughter.

"By the bowels of the prophet," he declared, "why should such a ridiculous idea ever come into your mind? We're brothers! I wouldn't double-cross you under the pain of death. You must not be well, my friend. Iban Byzof has been accused of many things"—he wagged his lead sorrowfully—"but never of betraying his sacred word!"

M'Gola snorted, his eyes coldly knowing. The Wasuli women had not found him unhandsome. They contested for the favor of this tall, arrogant warrior before whom their own men quailed. And one of the ways in which M'Gola found their company rewarding was in the kraal gossip they brought him. Little chat went on among their men-folk escaped their notice.

"Then I wouldn't drop hints," M'Gola said, "to Babongu, the Wasuli chieftain, that once the righting is done that he, rather than your friend, M'Gola, will find himself king of the conquered lands. No. I wouldn't make such promises."

He was looking out at his men, his face like granite. A roar of sound broke from the warriors' throats as they launched a mock charge. He waited

until the sound subsided

"Nor would I, in your place," he growled, "even consider smuggling two hundred rifles to the Wasuli as a guarantee that they, not the Zulus, will rule once all other enemies are destroyed"

Byzof had himself under perfect control now. He registered first consternation at M'Gola's suspicions, then a kind of helpless mirth.

"So that's it!" he cried. "I wondered what was eating you. Name of a pig, my friend, you are a child indeed when it comes to matters of diplomacy and intrigue."

He gave himself over to laughing for a few moments, but for all the crinkled merriment of his face, no hint of humor lightened the cold watchfulness of his eyes. M'Gola was not amused.

"Do you not wave a carrot in front of a balky jackass to make him follow you?" asked Byzof jovially. "Ah, no, perhaps the example is not so clear to you as would be this one. In the matter of women, have you not found that subtle hints of gifts, favors—perhaps when necessary a veiled suggestion of marriage—has an amazing effect in promoting their—ah—understanding. Well, it is very much the same matter with our greedy but rabbit-hearted comrade, Babongu. I must give him a few dreams to occupy his mind so that he will not be fussy about doing my bidding now."

He chuckled, lifted his eyebrows, archly.

"Afterwards, Babongu will find himself in exactly the same situation as a deluded maiden." Byzof said. "And like her, it will be far too late to do anything about it."

## CHAPTER IV

M'GOLA glowered thoughtfully, paced a few steps away and returned. If Byzof felt any tension, the only way he betrayed it was in the manner he leaned forward awaiting the Zulu's retort.

"So you hold out the same reward to Babongu as you do to me?" said M'Gola hoarsely. "You speak the same words, make the same crude joke, laugh in the same way about me to that Wasuli jackal! Perhaps when the dirty jobs are done it is I who will be the deluded one. Yes—perhaps that's what is really in your mind."

"Ridiculous!" shouted the little fat man. "I'm bound to you, not Babongu. We need him, that's all! Once he's served his purpose, you can do what you

want with him. That weak old sister couldn't hold an empire together five days running."

Byzof pawed his way out of his chair. He looked like a sagging, pear-shaped caricature of a scarecrow beside the powerful black warrior.

"And if you want another reason, he's crooked as a snake," he rushed on. "He wouldn't keep a bargain with his own mother a minute longer than he had to. You think I want to do business with a man like that?"

M'Gola's cold eyes bored into him. "Why should you mind," the Zulu said grimly, "I'm doing business with one like that."

Byzof sputtered protests, trying to look shocked. Momentarily forgetting the hiding place of his handkerchief, he dug first one place and then another in his disheveled clothing as he talked.

"I warn you, though," snarled M'Gola, "I'll not be cheated. I've told you this so you'll know I'm watching your every move. You'll not get a second warning. For instance, the arrival of a single one of those rifles will release me from my vows."

Byzof furiously swabbed his jowls. His complexion seemed paler, more mottled.

"The Wasuli aren't going to get any rifles," he protested. "If I could get even a handful of guns I'd give them to you. But there aren't any to be found."

"You could get them if you wanted to turn loose of the gold," said the Zulu. "But you'd rather spend black men's lives than your precious gold pieces. When the fighting is over you don't want my impis to be too strong." He smiled grimly. "However, since I will command the attack, I will see that those Wasuli cattle are the ones who take the heavy losses."

The fat man waved his arms distractedly.

"I don't care. I don't care," he wailed. "Kill them all off. Do whatever you like, but get those crazy suspicions out of your head. If we start quarreling now we'll both be ruined!"

Byzof began to shuffle about under the canopy, muttering to himself. But now that he had spoken his mind, M'Gola seemed calm and unperturbed. In the way of a soldier, he surveyed the lay of the camp for well over the hundredth time since his arrival.

His fat companion had done a good job in selecting the position. The camp lay in a "V" formed by smooth, high bluffs. The open mouth of the "V" was protected by a broad, crocodile-infested river which flowed along the shadowed edge of the jungle. The entire site on the camp side of the river



was grassy, open land, perfect for the training maneuvers in which M'Gola was drilling his warriors. Forbidden all military drill by the British, the Zulus had to learn from the beginning the disciplined tactics which had brought so many victories to their fathers.

The single way into the camp was over a suspension bridge, a crude affair of woven vines anchored to raised wooden platforms on either side of the river. Though the camp was located in the least traveled portion of the Wasuli lands, M'Gola kept a guard of warriors at the bridge night and day. And when as now, the warriors were drilling, he posted sentinels further out in the jungle to guard against surprise.

His zebra-skin canopy was placed on a rise of ground deep in the "V" so he could survey the entire area. His particular concern was that the presence of Zulus shouldn't be discovered until Byzof's plan of conquest was in motion. Therefore, he refused to allow his men to build themselves huts, insisting instead that they establish their living quarters in two huge caves which opened into the cliffs.

He had wanted to force the thousand Wasuli warriors which had been placed under his command to share the same regime. But the Wasuli lacked the stoical nature and the hardness of the Zulus, and their complaints to their chieftain about M'Gola's harshness and about being crowded into the damp caves had forced him finally to allow them to build twenty large thatched barracks where they could cook and sleep to themselves.

"My men have no need to hide in their own lands," Babongu, the Wasuli leader, had spat in his surly manner. So for fear he might have to give up command of the warriors altogether if he resisted the spitefully jealous chieftain, M'Gola had acceded to the Wasuli demands. His mouth tightened, though, every time he looked at the thatched huts.

A high, wavering cry of warning from one of the sentinels at the bridge suddenly brought both Byzof and M'Gola swinging about, their eyes narrowed against the glare of the sun.

A double file of men moved out of the jungle across the river. They came at a dogged trot, obviously, worn with long, hard travel.

"It's them!" cried the fat man. He rushed a few waddling steps out of the shade of the canopy, shading his eyes with his right hand. "They're back!"

M'Gola said nothing. His face was expressionless. The men had reached the vine bridge, slowing and spreading out. It wouldn't do for too many of

them to be on it at once and weary legs would maintain balance better at a walk.

"By all the devils," Byzof exploded, "why don't they hurry. Why don't they give us a sign?" His breath came in gasps. "Haven't they any brains, dawdling at a time like this. Maybe they've failed. Maybe that's it."

He jerked about for a look at M'Gola, his face carved with alarm.

"DON'T you understand," he shrilled, "if they've failed, the whole game may be up."

M'Gola gave him a contemptuous glance. "They would be lying dead in the forest, not coming back here, if they had failed."

"You're living in the past," blurted the fat man in his excitement. "These aren't the Zulus who marched off bluffs to satisfy their king's whim. If they were such lions, they would have died killing Englishmen a long time ago."

M'Gola's face contorted with wrath, but before he could reply, the warriors who had now crossed the bridge abruptly stabbed their gleaming swords high, shouted three times in unison. "Honor to M'Gola!"

The black leader relaxed, a smile creasing his hard features. "Hear them," he said triumphantly. "They salute me with the cry of victory. The white dog, Ki-Gor, is dead!"

Byzof expelled his breath in a whistling burst. His demeanor changed with startling swiftness, but instead of showing chagrin or embarrassment because of his outburst, he suddenly was radiantly and deliriously happy.

"Good boys—good boys!" he shrieked, completely reversing his attitude of a moment before. "They've done it. I knew my plans couldn't fail if they followed them."

He began to dance about on his stumpy, ludicrous legs, the great jelly-like expanse of his paunch wagging and jouncing with a violence that threatened to upset him.

M'Gola watched him mockingly for a bit. "For all his evil," he told himself, "he's really no more than a fool. I'm silly to worry about his outwitting me. If he could get as frightened as he's been about this Ki-Gor, then the thought of making enemies of me and my warriors would utterly paralyze him."

Tasting his first triumph, M'Gola felt for the first time definitely superior to Byzof. His warriors had quickly accomplished what the Wasuli

had feared even to contemplate. They had proved his faith in them. His impis were a mighty weapon shaped to his hand. With them he would become the scourge of the jungle, a conqueror who would rank in greatness with the old Zulu kings.

In this mood, he easily forgave the foolish fat man his stupidities, saying with a touch of contempt, "Compose yourself! This is hardly a fitting way for war leaders to meet with their men."

Thus they were again seated in their chairs by the time the returning warriors reached them. They heard, with only a minimum of chortling from Byzof, the captain's report how he and his warriors had riddled Ki-Gor and his mate with spears in the face of an attack by an immense, enraged elephant.

"But I wanted proof of his death," complained Byzof. "I told you that."

"Their word is proof enough," M'Gola told him flatly. "You said yourself that elephant was a devil. Their losses were too heavy so that it was. Would you have had them all killed so that you could have a rotting hand or skull to admire?"

"I didn't mean that," soothed Byzof. The obvious fact of their losses made it unwise for him to pursue the matter. "It was just that I wanted something definite to show the Wasuli, but we really don't need it."

M'Gola sniffed, then turned to praise his men rather more highly than he would have otherwise.

When he finished, they saluted him and turned to go.

"Umm—ah—there's one other thing," broke in the fat man. "About the pygmies—did you run into any of them?" He didn't like to intimate that the Zulu captain might have omitted anything from his report, but Byzof trusted no one to tell the truth, since he himself so seldom told it. And though he could find no reason for it, he had a vague feeling that the whole thing had gone off too smoothly.

The Zulu captain for his part sensed that he was not wholly trusted by the little man, and secure in the approval of chieftain, he answered more shortly and definitely than he would have under other circumstances.

"No one saw us!" he declared brusquely. "Those miserable monkey-men didn't suspect we were within a hundred days' trek of their lands. Ha! I would say they are in no way as wise and clever as you imagine."

M'Gola nodded in vigorous agreement, though he'd never seen a pygmy himself, and motioned the man to leave and answer no more questions.

"Well?" he addressed himself to Byzof. "Are you ready to pay the call you planned on the pygmies?" His tone intimated that now that the time had come for Byzof to act personally, he half-expected the fat man to weasel out of the assignment.

Byzof pursed his lips, his eyes squinted and thoughtful. Then he smiled his false, fatuous smile, ignoring the slur.

"But, of course," he said. "I alone could manage a delicate thing like this. I'll leave as soon as I've had Babongu send word on the drums to the pygmies that an important white b'wana has passed through his kraal on the way to seek a meeting with Ki-Gor."

He shoved out of the chair, chuckling hoarsely at the cunning of his plan.

"Mark my word!" he boasted. "I'll have those mangy little curs at the throats of the Masai inside of a week."

**N**'GEESO, chieftain of the pygmies, and his veteran warrior and friend, N'Teka, sat cross-legged in the dust beneath the great tree left growing in the center of the pygmy kraal.

A smiling little woman brought two gourds of bitter native beer. N'Geeso took them from her, nodded his head in thanks. He thrust one of the gourds at N'Teka.

"I am pleased, naturally," N'Geeso said, "for your wife to present you with a son." Then he frowned and his voice unconsciously sharpened. "But it does seem to me that she could attend a little more closely to my wishes. She leaves me in a pretty fix with her haste."

N'Teka sniffed the pungent odor of his beer eagerly, then recalling himself, he assumed as grave a look as his scarred face would allow and lowered the gourd untouched to his knee.

"I did what I could with her," he said unhappily. "She claimed there was nothing she could do about the matter." He mused a moment. "She's always been a good, obedient wife before, so perhaps she really couldn't help herself."

N'Geeso frowned unseemingly at a group ofurchins playing about a hut across the way.

"With the child born, I'll never be able to keep Helene here," he said worriedly. Then with an abrupt gesture he lifted his beer. "Ah, well, what's done is done. There's no need gnawing a meatless bone." He smiled winningly. "May your son be as great a warrior as his father!"

The two men drank off the beer without a pause.

for breath N'Geeso carelessly cast his empty gourd away

"And I am seeing that the young one has a few goats to start him in life " he added

"Ho!" exclaimed N'Teka joyously "You are the most magnificent of men " To the jungle peoples, goats represented solid wealth and N'Geeso's gift was generous

But N'Geeso wasn't allowed to enjoy his role of a benefactor for long Helene suddenly appeared across the compound and headed toward him with a purposeful stride He ducked his head, hoping she would think him occupied with important tribal matters which she shouldn't interrupt

N'Teka saw her also, and clearing his throat nervously, muttered that he must be getting back to his wife Before N'Geeso could halt him, the warrior was up and walking rapidly away, leaving his chieftain defenseless For a bare instant, the little chieftain thought of fleeing himself, but of course such an action was beneath his dignity, so finally he sighed and resigned himself to the inevitable

He stood up to greet the red-haired jungle girl, and charlatan that he was, managed to force a delighted smile

"I sent word I wanted to see you earlier today," she began abruptly "Now that Ibole's baby is born, I want to get to the bottom of this business about K1-Gor's whereabouts "

N'Geeso looked apologetic "The burdens of a chieftain " he murmured, indicating with vague gestures that great waves of troublesome business had been assailing him all day "You understand never can I call my time my own "

In English, Helene said, "Poppycock!"

The pygmy did not understand the word, but the twist of the girl's expressive red lips conveyed its general meaning

"I suspected something was wrong," she continued "After all, I've been here ten days and in that whole time you haven't looked me straight in the eye But Ibole was the one who innocently gave you snakes away N'Teka should have warned you that she talks in her sleep Every time she has dropped off the past three days she's muttered about how you and N'Teka would be angry with her if she let me leave "

Like an already none-too-substantial fort that is subjected to a swift and mercilessly accurate artillery barrage, N'Geeso was left with his defense shattered and gaping with holes

He darted his eyes left and right He wet dry

lips with an equally dry tongue "You— you would accuse me, your old and trusted friend, of such a thing," he stumbled, straining desperately to think of what he could say "Why, did I not three days ago, and again yesterday, alert my most distant outposts to send word the instant K1-Gor is sighted returning from the Masai lands?"

Helene stood with her hands on her hips, her shapely legs firmly planted on the ground, her shoulders grimly squared

"It is strange," she said, "that the great drum, the one means by which we could easily contact the Masai, should become broken the very day I want to send a message to K1-Gor I don't remember that drum ever being broken before "

She tapped a small but surprisingly menacing foot

"And it is equally strange that you should advance so many unconvincing reasons as to why I shouldn't return alone to my own camp "

But N'Geeso barely heard this latter remark The word "drum" which she had spoken had exploded an idea in his mind like a star-shell lighting a midnight blackness He cursed himself for a blind jackal act to have thought of the ruse before By the fiery breach of the god Gimshai, it not only would solve his trouble with Helene for a few more days but it would also offer a solution to the other predicament which had been worrying him

A SURGE of confidence filled the mercurial little man Surely, K1-Gor must be finished with his investigation by now If only he could stall Helene a while longer, everything would turn out all right He had no notion that he was doing anything wrong in deceiving the jungle girl He merely wanted to keep her from worrying and keep the White Lord out of trouble

"Aahee!" he wailed "You read suspicion into my every word, my every action! Even if you bear me no affection yourself, how can you use such a serpent's tongue on your husband's best friend?"

"You're a wicked, deceitful little man," Helene declared firmly "I know it and so do you!"

A picture of hurt and reproach, he drew himself up to the full of his unimposing height

"Very well! Rush away to your camp like a surly rhino," he said "It would not interest you to know that an important white bwana is expected to arrive here tomorrow for the sole purpose of conferring with K1-Gor

"No, you would rather be off at your camp alone

when the White Lord comes to meet him "

"What?" exclaimed Helene

"I've been trying to tell you," he said righteously "but every word I try to say you jump down my throat The meeting has been talked all over the jungle by the drums

"You can imagine my feelings at having my own great drum silent at such a time "

Actually, N'Geeso could have had the pygmy drum working within ten minutes at most

And as to the white man, he had been praying that the stranger would lose his way or turn back, anything to keep him away from the kraal It was bad enough trying to keep Helene quiet and happy, let alone some officious personage, when he had no notion himself when Ki-Gor would return

Helene began to look a little sorry about the attitude she had taken Though inwardly she felt that N'Geeso was somehow covering up for the White Lord, it was impossible not to accept at face value what he said

Of course, what he failed to say was another matter

"Perhaps I was too hasty in my remarks," she apologized Then she frowned, remembering Ibole's mutterings "But Ibole distinctly said "

"Bah!" scoffed N'Geeso, brushing such silly feminine fancies from view "Who can read the uneasy dreams of a tired, frightened girl at such a time?"

He turned easily then to the matter of entertaining the white man and making him comfortable, anxious to occupy Helene's attention before she could inspect his story and his behavior of the past few days too closely

"You must advise and help me," he said—he, who liked advice from no one, "Actually, until the White Lord gets here, the burden is yours to assume "

The white man did not arrive on the next day, or the day after that N'Geeso had known all the while that he wouldn't But on the morning of the third day, when Helene's suspicions of the little chieftain were on the rise again, the white man came with a safari of thirty shifty-eyed Wasuli

As befitted his station, N'Geeso, surrounded by the elders of the tribe, did not go out of the kraal with the pack of mongrel dogs and naked children to greet the newcomer, but waited instead in the central compound Helene chose to delay her meeting with the white man until after the hubbub had died down

The supposedly important white bwana, of course, was none other than Iban Byzof Since walking for a man of his bulk was next to impossible in the steaming African heat, he was borne into the kraal in a make-shift sedan chair carried by eight sweating blacks He was all smiles as he arrived, nodding and beaming to right and left, though up to a minute before he had been cursing and snarling at his bearers for their clumsiness

He had had the good sense to stop a few miles outside the kraal to change to clean white clothes, knowing that natives linked the puzzling habit of fresh linens with the upper-bracket British colonials But untidiness was so much a part of his nature that it didn't occur to him to change his floppy, disreputable hat And by the time he reached the village, though his suit was still reasonably clean, great wet circles and streaks were spreading under the arm pits, across the back and along his thighs and knees

## CHAPTER V

N'GEESO regarded him with considerable surprise, hissed under his breath to the men about him, "Except that the white elephant knows how to smile, I would say that so huge a lump of useless flesh must surely be the highest of all British officials " The elders grunted appreciatively at the irreverent remark

When the Wasuli bearers joltingly lowered the sedan chair, Byzof climbed out with an alacrity amazing in one so bulky While one hand dived in search of his handkerchief, the other gestured impatiently for a pack-laden Wasuli to come forward

"Open it, you witless pig!" he growled in a low voice Then he whirled beaming, to confront N'Geeso He lifted his hand, palm outward, in the universal sign of friendship and greeting

"Could it be, revered leader of warriors, that the Wasuli tongue is not foreign to you?" he asked, knowing full well from Babongu that the pygmy leader spoke the Wasuli dialect fluently "In shame, I must confess that the beauty of your own language is a thing I have yet to learn "

Intrigued by the fact that Byzof's eyes didn't match, N'Geeso was slow to collect himself, but at last he admitted to a meager knowledge of the Wasuli tongue The pygmy also was taken aback by Byzof's shortness It was a welcome pleasure to find one of the white lords of creation that he didn't

have to look up to

N'Geeso glanced about to make certain Helene hadn't appeared yet. Then, reassured, he called over his shoulder, "Beer! Beer for our honored guest!" Then, apologetically, he explained to the white man, "The splendor of your person has caused my serving people to forget themselves. It is our ancient custom that every truly important visitor drink a gourd of beer with the chieftain. It is a mutual pledge of goodwill."

N'Geeso lied in his teeth. He had learned long ago that most white men shuddered at the mere smell of the bitter beer brewed by the pygmy women, so it was his private joke to offer them a gourd of beer under such circumstances that it would be a breach of etiquette for them not to drink it.

However, when the beer was brought out, Byzof smilingly seized the gourd, drank of the nauseous mixture with as much pleasure as a pygmy. The small yellow men looked at one another, gaping. Never before had such a thing occurred. Even the White Lord scorned their beloved drink.

And before N'Geeso could recover from his surprise, Byzof was pulling gifts from the opened pack, spreading them on the ground before him with a generosity unbelievable in a whiteskin. Lengths of shimmering cloth, brilliant reds, yellows, oranges, purples, rolls of bright, gleaming copper wire, a round tin object that made a ticking noise and had two slender black sticks moved round and round on a white face, and treasure of treasures, a squat, brown magic box with a whirling disc on it that spat forth reedy ghost rhythms from a big horn.

N'Geeso looked dazedly at the gifts spread in magnificent array on the ground before him, watched as Byzof added a sack of salt, a cluster of metal arrowheads, two hunting knives, a sack of glass beads with holes ready for threading.

The whiteskin was the father of all rich men or else he was insane. He gave as though he were the very brother of the great king across the seas whose magnificence was known to be beyond all belief. Like a man in a dream, N'Geeso saw the last of the presents laid out, heard the flowery presentation which Byzof made to him as a chieftain among chieftains, as the greatest and most trusted friend of the renowned Ki-Gor.

For one of the very few times in his life, N'Geeso was rendered speechless. He had not wanted the white man to come. He had been prepared to dislike him. He had thought him, and, in

truth, still did, most unpleasant to look upon. Yet in a space of minutes the white man had showered him with wealth, treated him with honor, snubbed none of the arrogant disdain with which his kind usually met the pygmies.

To cover his confusion—and also because his whole body hungered for the precious crystals—N'Geeso picked up one of the gift knives and slit open the bag of salt. He measured a small, exact mound into his left hand, taking care not to spill a single grain. Hungrily, the eyes of his followers rested on him.

He straightened up and ate the salt like a child devouring candy. Then when his palm was clean of every last crystal, he jerked his head about with sudden fierceness, "Is our guest to be left standing forever? Bring stools and platters of choice fruits and beer from the gourds cooling in the spring!" He swung angrily to glower at the women clustered thick behind the men. "And is our guest to go hungry? Why are the cooking fires not lighted, the choicest cuts of meat not ready for roasting?" He spoke in the Wasuli tongue so that the fat man would be certain to understand what he said.

Then after the stools had been brought and the two men were seated in a ring of pygmy warriors' who were solemnly passing the bag of salt from one to another as one would a box of candy, N'Geeso regarded the white man with a calmer head. Despite all the evidence laid out around him, suspicion twisted and grew within him. Whenever white men gave, they sought something in return, something of greater price.

Well, he might as well get the truth. He smiled in his most genial manner. "Perhaps there is some small thing we might do for you? You are interested, say, in ivory? Or perhaps you look for men to work a plantation or make some dangerous safari?" He paused, his eyes watching for any reaction to his questions. "Or could it be you would like permission to hunt in our lands for the yellow metal which white men deem so precious?" He sipped a fresh gourd of beer.

Byzof blinked at him like some great featherless owl seemingly surprised.

"Want!" the fat man said. "I—I don't understand. I want nothing, absolutely nothing! Dear me, no." He took off his disreputable hat, began to fan himself placidly. "Except with Ki-Gor of course. I have a most important matter to discuss with him."

**B**YZOF, granting with the effort, leaned over and took a square quart bottle from the open pack beside him. He twisted the metal cap open, sniffed the contents appreciatively. A few drinks of raw, strong traders gin on top of the native beer would make the simple-minded savage putty in his hands.

"Now you must drink with me," he said cheerily. He handed the bottle to N'Geeso. "A drink for chieftans! Pour as much in the gourd as you like."

After N'Geeso had choked down two searing gulps of the gin and Byzof had pretended to drink himself, the fat man sat for a time fanning himself and smiling at the ring of warriors. A situation like this gave him a satisfying sense of power. These little men were feared in the jungle almost as much as the dread Masai, yet here he was moving them about as if they were no more than inanimate chessmen.

"I rather expected to find Ki-Gor with you," Byzof said, "knowing what close friends you are. I'm most anxious to see him. Perhaps it would save time if you'd take me to his camp."

N'Geeso could feel the electric fire of the white man's drink spreading out from his stomach in tingling waves. He felt somehow larger, stronger, more sure of himself. He took a long pull at the gourd and this time he didn't cough.

"He wouldn't be at the camp," N'Geeso declared, and his voice was suddenly louder than usual. "He'll be here soon. Yes, soon."

Byzof stopped fanning. "By the way, when did you see him last?"

The pygmy puffed out his cheeks. What harm could there be in telling this likable stranger the truth? "I heard from him last about three hands of suns ago."

How easy this was, thought Byzof. He straightened up, frowning. "You've heard nothing since then? Why, in that time something might have happened to him. I understand he's a reckless sort of fellow." He eyed N'Geeso darkly. "Frankly, my friend, I'd feel better if we visited his camp. He could be sick, in need of medicine, unable to reach you."

Some of the alarm on the white man's face was reflected on the pygmy leader's features for an instant. Then he shook his head, smiled. "Not Ki-Gor," he said. "Not that sly one. No, he had a matter to attend to, and when it is finished he'll come straight here."

"Oh? And just what matter was that?" demand-

ed a feminine voice suddenly.

Byzof's head jerked up. His eyes widened. Liverish, yellow blotches stood out vividly against the abrupt paleness of his skin. He could see the whole vast structure of his plans toppling inward to crush him.

The long hair like swirling flame. The full, red mouth. The blue eyes. The perfectly chiseled features. The breath-taking beauty of that lithe, curved body. There could be no mistaking the woman. Though he had never seen her before himself, from others he knew her description by heart.

She was Helene, alive and unharmed! Helene, standing there, looking at him without so much as a scratch marring the smooth gold of her skin. Fear held Byzof utterly paralyzed. He couldn't think or breathe or move.

He had been so confident. Everything had seemed to go so perfectly. Yet he had been a rat in a trap from the moment he had entered the kraal. Those treacherous, cowardly Zulus had lied to him. And this hideous little savage, N'Geeso, had been toying with him from the first.

The Zulus had sworn that they had slain Helene and Ki-Gor as they lay sleeping, had riddled them with spears.

Like a fiery rocket spraying up out of the sick blackness of Byzof's fear burst the terrifying thought *Then Ki-Gor lives too!*

Ki-Gor, that dread, gray-eyed warrior whose very name made the blood of slavers run cold. He could be in the kraal at this moment. He walked like a killer-cat, they said.

And struck with silent deadliness. He could be standing behind me right now. Byzof wanted to scream. He wanted to turn his head and look back of him. He wanted to leap up and run. But he was too stricken to utter a sound or move a muscle. He sat crumpled crookedly on the stool, a sodden mass of blubber, the spread of the dark sweat-rings over his clothes visibly accelerating.

But fortunately for Byzof, Helene's accusing glance was fastened on the guilty-looking N'Geeso. And the tribesmen, from N'Geeso to the rawest young warrior, had eyes only for the red-haired girl. She had walked up on the deeply engrossed group unnoticed, had stood listening to the conversation about her husband.

"Well? Go on," she said. "I'm sure Ki-Gor's wife is as interested in his whereabouts as our visitor is, though from all the maneuvers you've gone through to keep the truth from me, no one would

ever guess it "

Like a figure in a slow motion movie, N'Geeso slowly opened his mouth and just as slowly closed it again, without being able to speak a word

Byzof breathed a long, shuddering breath He heard Helene's words as another man would hear a reprieve from death There was no time to figure the whole thing out precisely But, clearly, Helene had no knowledge of any attack on Ki-Gor, and neither she nor the pygmy had seen the jungle man since the day the Zulus had struck

Ki-Gor must be dead, exulted Byzof The Zulus hadn't lied! In the darkness and the excitement, they had made a mistake about Helene being with the White Loid Perhaps some one else had been with Ki-Gor Probably some half-caste wench After all, the man was known to be little more than an animal

That was it He'd packed Helene off to this stinking pygmy village while he caroused with some native girl The pygmy leader was in on the secret, glad to see a white woman betrayed by one of his own color, but having a devil of a time thinking up lies to keep Helene quiet when the jungle man failed to show up

This hasty line of reasoning fit in exactly with Byzof's own debauched character It was the sort of thing he would have done In his mind, no man was truly honorable and decent Some were merely more successful than others in concealing their faults and sins

Then Helene was turning toward him, and though her eyes were searching, there was no suspicion in them, and she was smiling politely

HE introduced herself as he struggled to his feet "Don't misunderstand," she said "N'Geeso and I are good friends, but we've had a running quarrel for some days now Whenever trouble breaks out in the jungle, my husband is drawn into it, and then like a couple of bad boys, Ki-Gor and this little scoundrel try to keep me in blissful ignorance about what is going on Instead of keeping me from worrying, they cause me to worry twice as much "

"Ah, yes," agreed Byzof, making clumsy bowing movements "How right you are The jungle is a place of terrible dangers under the best of circumstances "

He was rapidly recovering himself now He assumed what he believed was his most well-bred, Continental manner, belatedly snatching off his hat

and giving his name

"So you are the lovely Helene," he exclaimed "You gave me a great start When I looked up and saw a white woman I thought the sun had gotten to me at last and that I was having hallucinations " Without taking his eyes from Helene, he smirked in N'Geeso's general direction "The chieftain had given me no warning that I was to have this honor "

Though she thought the man and his artificial manner of speaking both rather ridiculous, Helene in a way was pleased by his compliment Her appearance had seemed to fluster him

Byzof's scheming mind was working faster and faster now He had known that Helene was supposed to be beautiful, but he hadn't dreamed that she was a veritable queen among women She even stirred his own weak, jaded senses, sent the blood pounding in his temples Why, in any of a dozen secret slave marts that he knew she would command a fortune

It was then that he made the first alteration in his plans It was criminal to think of wasting such beauty He wouldn't have thought of ordering her death if he had known she would be like this By the beard of the prophet, he owed himself some pleasure and entertainment while he was in this stinking jungle, and then later, when he tired of her, he could still collect just as good a price for her The old fools with the money would always pay for a jewel like her

He was forming these conclusions even as he said, "I was proposing to N'Geeso that he take me to your husband's camp It seems to me a better idea than waiting here " He paused meaningfully "Perhaps Ki-Gor is perfectly all right " He imbedded the doubt skillfully "No doubt he's perfectly fine, yes he's been away a long time and—well—I think we'd feel better about it "

The faintest shade of concern darkened Helene's blue eyes The fear that Ki-Gor would be hurt always lurked beneath the surface of her mind

"It can't do any harm for us to go," Helene said "I've been wanting to do that, Ki-Gor said he was going to visit the Masai and if he did, then he'll naturally come by the camp on his return "

"Ah," declared Byzof, puckering his mouth thoughtfully "Then it would save time in any event "

N'Geeso understood enough English to follow their conversation He sat hunched on his stool, glowering at the ground The initial effect of the

huge portion of liquor fed him by Byzof had been to produce a fine, heady exhilaration. But as his system absorbed more and more of the powerful alien drink, as so often happens with those of the primitive races, he began to grow sullen and ugly.

He felt himself badly put upon. He reflected that he was trying to help Helene, and yet instead of being grateful, she was so angry that she even made him lose face in front of his own people and this stranger. And conveniently forgetting for the moment the presents given him, he further reflected that he had gone out of his way to welcome this stranger, had done him the signal honor of ordering a feast prepared, yet the white man promptly allied himself with Helene and promoted the idea of leaving the kraal immediately.

And for one of the few times in his life, N'Geeso felt mistreated by the White Lord. He told himself that K1-Gor had no right to load him with such worries and then desert him.

Anger, induced by the liquor, suddenly erupted in him. He leaped to his feet, "Go then!" he cried. "And good riddance, I say." He found that the earth was oddly unsteady beneath him and that the people about him wavered and moved crazily.

Muttering, he turned and pushed into the circle of warriors, shoving them right and left as he plowed through them.

Startled by his outburst, Helene gaped after N'Geeso for several seconds. She had never seen him act in such a way before. Then it dawned on her what was wrong. Her eyes lighted on the empty beer gourd lying by N'Geeso's chair.

Byzof had been narrowly watching her every move. He saw she realized the pygmy leader was drunk. After pouring their drinks, Byzof had dropped the bottle back into the opened pack. While her glance was turned away he pushed his toe under the pack's canvas cover and nipped the cloth over so that it completely covered the bottle.

He was smiling tolerantly when Helene again looked at him. He shrugged his shoulders. "I understand the native beer is very strong," he said. "I suspected he had had quite a few when I arrived and his first act was to call for more." He glanced deprecatingly at his own gourd. "He even insisted on giving me one. Your timely arrival saved me from having to taste it."

"That's not like N'Geeso, though," Helene said, frowning. "He doesn't know what he's doing. I've known him a long time and he's not really a drinking man."

Byzof chewed his fat lower lip thoughtfully. Then in a lowered voice, he said, "That's what makes these jungle people dangerous. For no apparent reason they will change character completely. You never can know where you stand with them."

"Oh, no," disagreed Helene. "The pygmies, the Masai, and a dozen other tribes I could mention are completely dependable."

The fat man shook his head slowly. He looked off into the distance as though recalling sad and terrible events.

"I hope the occasion never comes," he said, "but one day you may have reason to remember my words." Then abruptly he was brisk and smiling again. "In any case, let us be on our way." He chuckled. "I believe we've worn out our welcome."

Helene laughed, too, knowing how ashamed and repentant N'Geeso would be when he came to his senses. She glanced at the sun and saw that they could easily reach her camp before nightfall. Within fifteen minutes after she gave her agreement to the trip, Byzof's Wasuli bearers were filing out of the kraal behind Helene. And it didn't seem to embarrass the white man that the woman walked and led the way while he was carried in the sedan chair.

It didn't occur to Helene to feel uneasy about making the short trek to her home with Byzof and the Wasuli. The white man had come openly, proclaiming to the jungle his desire to confer with K1-Gor. His use of Wasuli in his safari instead of strange natives was further evidence of his good intentions. Though the Wasuli had been the last local tribe to swear to uphold the peace, and the combined might of the Masai and pygmies had been the major influencing factor in bringing about that pledge, still the Wasuli had never broken their word, knowing that K1-Gor cohorts would destroy them if they did.

Since Helene walked in the fore of the safari she had no opportunity to observe the odd nervousness which had come over the Wasuli. And, on those few occasions when she did glance back at Byzof he seemed to be nodding, half-asleep, his flop-brimmed hat pulled low over his eyes.

Had she been quicker and more on guard she would have surprised an entirely different expression on his face. Except when she looked back, his hungry, evil eyes never left off their lecherous, anticipatory feasting on the contours of her body.



## CHAPTER VI

ON THE return from their fancied slaying of Ki-Gor, the picked band of Zulu assassins traveled hard and fast, anxious to report their success to their chieftain. They still adhered to their schedule of night travel, using every trick they knew to conceal their trail.

But if they had known ten times as many tricks of concealment, they couldn't have shaken the grim-faced man who with tireless patience and at a tireless trot followed their spoor through the green jungle.

The White Lord made no effort to stay with them on their nightly treks. He slept instead in the crook of some ancient tree, rising at dawn to pick up their hours-old trail, and then secure in the knowledge that his enemies were lying down to sleep in some hidden spot miles ahead, he followed them in relative security.

So it was that he passed out of his own lands, through the pygmy area and into the Wasuli territory. It didn't occur to him to suspect that the Wasuli were involved in the plot against his life. The tribe had never been noted for trustworthiness, but with the threat of both Masai and pygmies always poised against them, the tribesmen had not dared break the peace. Had he known of Iban Byzof's involvement, a tie-up between the Wasuli and the Zulu raiders wouldn't have seemed so unlikely, for Babongu's followers once had worked hand in glove with the slavers.

Ki-Gor was careful, however, to avoid being seen by the groups of Wasuli hunters who sometimes crossed his path. Politeness would have required him to talk for a time with each group and he wanted to avoid that delay.

On mid-morning of his third day in the tribe's lands he suddenly discovered the Zulus had abandoned their schedule of night travel. He came on their deserted camp, found the scattered ashes of their fire still warm, pieces of fruit and meat from their last meal still uncovered with ants. And just beyond the camp the spoor was startlingly fresh.

His quarry had bedded down at dawn, slept about four hours and then taken to the trail again. He doubted that fear of discovery had made them move, because the camp was well hidden in a dump of thorn bushes. He concluded that the only other thing which would drive the travel-weary Zulus on

was the nearness of their objective. They must be near a meeting with the person who had sent them on their murderous mission.

Ki-Gor's pursuit became more cautious than ever. He would have felt far safer following the tree routes, but since the Zulus avoided the main trails, he had to remain on the ground to avoid losing their spoor as they criss-crossed from one tiny game trail to another. Though he didn't know anything about the guards which the Zulu leader M'Gola had posted all about his jungle hide-out, Ki-Gor reasoned that every step took him into an area of greater danger. He always gave his opponents credit for taking the same precautions which he would have taken in their place.

But in addition to his guards, M'Gola had taken another precaution which was a trick new to the White Lord. This trick, as could be guessed, was actually the brainchild of Iban Byzof. It bore the stamp of his evil genius.

The guards were posted in pairs, and each of them was given an especially trained parrot. The men took up positions roughly a hundred yards apart on a trail leading to their camp. To a high limb of a tree some hundred feet ahead of his position, the man on the upper end of the trail would secure his parrot with a small chain. The man on the lower end would place his bird a hundred feet to the rear.

The parrots were trained to remain perfectly quiet until they saw a human, when they would break into a furious squawking and screeching. With their keen eyesight and from their high elevation, the naturally curious and watchful birds made wonderful sentinels. And best of all, an intruder hearing them wouldn't guess that an alarm had been given, for in the jungle the ill-tempered outburst of a parrot was a perfectly normal sound.

Thus, though Ki-Gor moved along the trail so stealthily that the Zulu guard ahead of him had no hint of his coming, he did not escape the glittering eyes of the bright-plumed bird chained high above him.

The parrot was prying at a piece of bark with its beak when it caught a movement on the shadowy trail below. The green-feathered head shot up, cocked first right, then left, the eyes as bright and expressionless as yellow beads of glass.

For a moment longer, the bird hesitated. All the men used in its training had been black-skinned, whereas this creature below was white. Then, prodded by memory of the choice foods given it during training whenever it properly gave an alarm.

the parrot decided this white man-thing might be as legitimate a reason for squawking as the usual black ones

That interval of hesitation on the parrot's part was what gave K1-Gor a fighting chance to live. In that brief time, his long, swift strides had carried him well past the tree. He heard the squawking outburst suddenly begin behind him, but paid no mind. His eyes continued to rake the trail ahead of him.

The Zulu guard was sitting at the side of the path, his back against a tree, his spear leaned upright against the trunk. A thin screen of bushes shielded him from view.

When he heard the parrot's outcry, he leaped to his feet, his right hand reaching for the spear. Since the bird was so far away from him, he felt he had plenty of time for a quick glance down the path to spot his victim. His head came just above the bushes in which he hid, but in order to see down the trail he had to lean slightly outward past the tree trunk.

**T**HE Zulu carefully thrust his head over the top of the brush, and to his stunned surprise, there was a blond giant not thirty feet away and coming closer with every reaching stride. And what was worse, the white man saw him the moment he showed his face.

A lesser breed of warrior would have been too rattled to act. But battle is in the very bone and blood of a Zulu. As he realized that the easy kill of ambush was impossible, he gave a wrathful scream and plunged out onto the trail like a maddened bull, his spear lifting for a short and murderous throw.

The warrior had seen that the white man had no gun. The savage pride of the Zulus flooded up in him. He didn't fear the shovel-bladed spear the intruder carried. He was confident the white man didn't live who could match his speed and skill with a spear.

Except for the sudden set of his jaw, the nerveless White Lord didn't even change expression when he saw the black's head first push from the underbrush. He saw the man's eyes widen in surprise and knew he had taken him off-guard.

Then like twin pistons on a machine abruptly thrown into high gear, his powerful legs lashed into top speed. As the black in a swift recovery ripped through the screen of bushes onto the trail, K1-Gor plunged straight at him.

The native's spear arm swept back, the black face contorted with effort. At such a range, a blind man couldn't miss his cast. A savage exultance

blazed in the Zulu's eyes as his spear started to drive forward.

The two men at that instant weren't fifteen feet apart. K1-Gor's heavy shovel-bladed weapon was still held at waist level. He had made no move to lift it to a throwing position, pouring the whole of his effort instead into closing with the Zulu.

No enemy with any knowledge of the White Lord would have been so utterly confident as the Zulu. K1-Gor wasn't one to get rattled or gamble rashly with his life. He took chances, as any fighting man must, but he tried to see that the odds were always in his favor. And he was famed for doing the unexpected, the unorthodox, for he had learned early in his trouble-filled life that it is far easier and safer to out-think an opponent than to outdo him with brute strength.

Now in that split-fraction of a second before the Zulu released his spear-K1-Gor's whole body suddenly spun toward the left, his right shoulder and arm lashing about with terrific speed. The great Masai spear in his right hand came around and up like a typhoon-struck boom.

The heavy shaft smashed against the Zulu's spear a foot behind the barbed point. It hit just as the warrior released his weapon. The blow deflected the Zulu's spear, sent it off into the jungle in a harmless, wobbling flight. For the barest interval, the black stood with his arm still raised, his mouth gaping. A miss had been impossible and yet this insane white barbarian had made him miss.

Then an angry bellow ripped from the warrior's throat and he went bounding backwards, wildly clawing for his sword. He suddenly realized that the tables were turned, that it was now K1-Gor who commanded the situation.

K1-Gor had no desire to kill the man. He would be more valuable for the information that could be wrung from him. And after he talked, K1-Gor could leave him tied up in some hidden spot and later, as further confirmation of his findings, could take him back to the pygmy camp.

The White Lord pressed after the man, his spear held ready for a thrust. "Let the sword be!" he cried in Masai, knowing the warrior would understand most of what he said, "You're beaten! Lift your hands and stand quietly and I let you live!"

The words had a far different effect from the one K1-Gor desired. The black seemed to swell with rage. His fingers closed on the hilt of his sword and he ripped it bare of its sheath.

"Filth of a white she-snake," he screamed

"Think you that one stinking trick wins victory from a Zulu? Aaaah! In the brief time you have to live, I'll teach you a few real tricks of battle."

Ki-Gor's lips thinned. He knew what the fool was going to try. It was a last-resort tactic which the more fanatical warriors among the war-loving tribes sometimes attempted. And Ki-Gor also knew the Zulu didn't have a chance to succeed.

With a wild yell, the black suddenly flashed to the left and leaped forward. By his swift move, he had tried to bound past the point of Ki-Gor's spear, make the weapon useless by locking the shaft with his left arm. Then he intended either to tear it from Ki-Gor's grasp or slide forward along the shaft until he was close enough to bring his sword into play.

Again the Zulu had failed to recognize the true mettle of his foe. In addition to an amazing natural ability, Ki-Gor had had more battle experience than any dozen ordinary warriors. And once he gained the advantage, no run-of-the-mill tribesman was going to easily wrest it from him. Like a master chessman, he was always several moves ahead mentally of his opponent.

Despite the speed with which the Zulu executed his maneuver, Ki-Gor moved with him step for step like a partner in a dance. The warrior found himself reaching for a spear which wasn't there. And at the precise moment he reached, the razor-edged blade darted out of nowhere to sever the tendons of his other arm, the arm that held the sword.

The black jerked as though stung by a monster hornet. With the madman's staring eyes, he saw the blade drop from fingers which could no longer grip it, saw the blood wash red and hot from the gaping wound.

"Now surrender, you fool, before I have to kill you," snarled Ki-Gor, his patience at an end.

**B**UT the black had been fed too long on the stories of the greatness which the Zulus once had possessed. He was blind and sick with an arrogance which he was unfitted to support.

Screaming insanely, he suddenly scooped up the sword with his left hand and began darting right and left, back and forth, seeking an opening to leap in on the White Lord.

The icy-gray color of Ki-Gor's eyes grew colder. He had no choice as to what he must do. Already the crazed warrior's screams could be bringing more Zulus. He lifted his spear, not the least rattled by the black's movements.

His shoulder muscles tightened like great cables, suddenly drawn taut. He took a short breath, held it as the Zulu leaped in at him. Then his right arm lashed forward and the shovel-bladed point took the man squarely in the center of the chest. The spear carried him backwards a full ten feet and dumped him on the trail in a jerking mass from which the life already had departed.

With a look of disgust, Ki-Gor wrenched the spear free of the man. He made an angry sound deep in his throat and with quick, hard movements wiped the blade free of blood on a clump of grass. Then he straightened, listening.

That same parrot was still carrying on. Though he had been dimly aware of the bird's continuing trade, his attention had been so riveted to the Zulu that he actually hadn't given any thought to the matter until now. Though parrots were given to frequent squawking outbursts, their ill-temper or alarm usually passed almost as quickly as it began.

Ki-Gor looked back along the trail. His trained eyes swiftly located the bird on its high limb, turning, twisting, spreading its wings, yet never moving more than a few steps from the same spot. He ran back toward the tree, and on reaching it, dropped his spear in the underbrush and sprang up to grasp one of the lower branches. With the sure agility of a monkey, he climbed upward through the limbs until he stood beside the noisy but obviously untrigthened bird.

He saw the tiny chain which bound the parrot to the branch and immediately understood. He reached down, caught the tame bird without difficulty and released it from its bonds. In the halting, labored flight of a fowl that has been kept in captivity, it flew off when he let it go.

The parrot was a detail that made Ki-Gor think it was a clever ruse, made doubly admirable because of its very simplicity, but it wasn't the sort of thing which would occur to the native mind. A native would have supplemented the guard with some fetish supposedly possessing the power to cast an evil charm on an intruder, blind him or render him vulnerable to attack.

Or going to the further extreme, a native would go to vast trouble in preparing a trap of some kind—a camouflaged pit, a noose hidden underfoot and so attached to a bent sapling that it would jerk a man high in the air, or a tiny, waist-high vine which when touched would bring an arrow driving from hidden bow.

No, considered Ki-Gor, there was a white man's

touch in this. A parrot was too much an ordinary, everyday thing ever to engage the criminal imagination of intriguing blacks. If they had to go to the trouble of plotting, black men liked more fanciful and elaborate devices than a mere bird.

The White Lord looked upon the guard's presence as certain evidence that the enemy camp must be near. He decided, therefore, the wise thing for him was to take to the tree routes. It might take longer to locate the camp, since he would be unable to follow the Zulu bands' spoor, but he didn't want to risk another ambush.

He started cautiously through the trees, keeping in the middle branches and staying well to the left of the trail and yet close enough to catch a glimpse of it every ten yards or so. Ki-Gor moved as quietly as a slowly drifting shadow, and with hardly any more suggestion of difficulty.

To him, the broad, strong limbs were easier to negotiate than the narrow, cluttered trail. Across the smaller open places, he either used the lesser branches to swing over on like an acrobat flinging from one trapeze to another or he merely leaped. To cover the larger spaces between easily traveled limbs, he would catch hold of a wrist-thick length of vine and go swinging across to the point he wanted with uncanny accuracy.

Only by the greatest chance would a person on the ground ever catch sight through the shifting curtain of vines and leaves of Ki-Gor. But since he followed the winding trail, before he had gone much over a hundred yards, the second chamed parrot spotted him and began to squawk.

The second guard had heard the cries down the path, but he had been ordered never to leave his station under such circumstances and anyway he didn't doubt for a moment that his hidden comrade would be victorious. So the guard had merely burrowed deeper into ambush, alert for any trouble that might come from his quarter.

This time Ki-Gor realized instantly that he had been spotted. He froze, fury beating up in him. Then it occurred to him that the Zulu would be looking for him on the trail, and that actually he was almost as well concealed as the guard.

He couldn't leave the Zulu alive to make an early report to his master that an enemy was in the neighborhood and yet he didn't want to waste any time playing hide-and-seek with the black.

He maneuvered through the trees until he had an unobstructed view of the distraught parrot. In a matter of moments, he had slipped his bow from his

back, strung it and notched one of his long, black arrows in place.

Ki-Gor knelt in the fork of a great branch. He drew an unusually deliberate bead for him, not wanting to risk missing or merely nicking the bird. His brawny, muscle-coiled arms held the powerful longbow without a suggestion of a tremor, though it took an unusually strong man to even draw the bow, let alone hold it steady.

Then the bowstring twanged, and like a streaking pencil of death, the arrow leaped down the narrow green tunnel through which the White Lord aimed.

The gaudily colored parrot flung backwards the full length of its chain in a spray of feathers. Then the lifeless bird, silenced in mid-squawk, dropped inertly to hang dangling below the limb. The small cloud of brilliant red, yellow and blue feathers began a slow, gentle descent down past the tiny, twisting body, glowing the more brightly as they sifted with fragile grace through occasional cones of sunlight.

The White Lord didn't know on which side of him the Zulu was hidden, but the strangely abrupt way in which his sentinel bird's outcry had been stopped would force him to make some investigation. The native couldn't know whether the bird had been harmed or whether the intruder had circled out of the bird's view and was perhaps creeping around the post.

Keeping low and taking advantage of all available cover, the White Lord crept into a tree beside the dead parrot. He flattened himself on a limb, cloaked himself with leafy vines.

Then he waited as the slow minutes dragged by, utterly motionless except for his narrowed eyes which darted to investigate every flutter of a leaf, every tiny rustle in the dark green swell of vegetation blanketing the ground beneath him.

It was the scurrying flight of a lizard out of a small stand of bamboo that finally betrayed his quarry. Though the noise was slight, the White Lord's sensitive ears heard the crackle of dry leaves as the tiny creature sped out of the undergrowth in panic, and then stood in the middle of the path in the stupid way of its kind, making nervous starts and stops as it tried to remember what had frightened it.

## CHAPTER VII

**K**I-GOR watched beyond the bamboo where a trailing vine covered with immense, pure-white flowers lay interlaced over the

crowding bushes. In the quiet, dead air of their protected place, the flowers were so still that they had an unreal, waxen quality. Above them a dozen butterflies, golden with red tracings on their wings, fluttered and danced, yet made no effort to alight on the flowers.

As Ki-Gor watched, the butterflies suddenly lifted in their whirling dance and skittered off into the jungle shadows. Then he noted that several of the blossoms, trembled as though a light breeze touched them, but the flowers all about them lay quiet.

The Zulu was inching through the undergrowth on his belly. Ki-Gor traced his path by the tremors disturbing the white blossoms, and a minute later he saw the man's dark face peer from an opening.

The sight of the parrot hanging head down from its limb brought the man shoving half out of hiding, his eyes wide with alarm. Ki-Gor laid aside his camouflage of vines and stood up. His strung bow was in his hands.

The motion caught the black's attention. He stared dumbfounded at the bronzed figure balanced wide-legged on a slowly swaying limb in the leafy heights.

There was no mercy in the White Lord at that moment. He knew what the Zulu's reaction would be as soon as his fanatical mind began to function. It was kill or be killed with these savage, war-made natives.

And as he expected, the Zulu abruptly plunged out into the path, took two running steps to gain momentum, his spear already cocked for the throw.

In a motion almost too rapid to follow, Ki-Gor lifted his bow and shot. For the briefest interval of time there was a sound like the hum of an angry hornet. Then as the arrow hit, there came a quick, hard splat like a ripe melon breaking.

The Zulu toppled back across the trail, his spear still unthrown. A bare three inches of feathered shaft protruded from the center of his chest. The White Lord did not wait to watch him grow still. His face, which until that moment had been cold and expressionless, now wore a look of bitterness, of angry distaste.

He was thinking of the Zulus who had died under Marmo's pounding charge, of these two he had been forced to kill. And reflecting on how pointless, how utterly foolish their dying was, he could not help but feel bitter with the whole greedy, grasping human race. Even the beasts of the jungle did not give up their lives as senselessly as men.

An hour later, after successfully bypassing more guards, Ki-Gor reached the Zulu hideout. Downstream from the vine-bridge and its duster of warriors, Ki-Gor flattened himself on a high limb from which he could command a perfect view of the whole area.

He saw the regiments of Zulu and, to his angry surprise, Wasuli tribesmen drilling endlessly in the sweltering sunlight. The large sections of ground worn bare of grass told him that these intensive war exercises had been in progress for many days. The large huts, the broad, well-defined trails, the vine bridge, all attested to the permanency of the camp.

And there on the highest rise of ground, shaded by a canopy like men of royal blood, sat the ones who had set this vast machinery of intrigue into motion.

As Ki-Gor had suspected from the first, one of the men, the short, immensely fat one, was white. He would be the one with money enough, with evil guile enough to bring Wasuli and Zulu together to do his bidding. So strange a marriage would never occur to a black intriguer.

The tall, magnificently proportioned tribesman with the white man was the Zulu leader. No other tribe in Africa bred leaders with such a look of arrogance and cruelty and overweening self-confidence. He would be a terrible foe to face on any battlefield, for he had the courage of lions and an unquenchable thirst for blood and glory.

The afternoon was fast slipping away, and while Ki-Gor watched, the white man left the canopy, gathered a group of Wasuli and went back into one of the caves in the cliff face with them. Within half an hour, the group came out of the cave prepared for a trek of some distance by the look of their heavy packs and the sedan chair in which the fat man lolled.

"I'm in luck," Ki-Gor told himself as the white man's safari moved briskly down to the river and across and disappeared in the jungle. "They can't trek far before dark. Tonight I'll pluck that albino hippo out of the middle of his sleeping bearers, and take him for a little quiet talk. He's the key to all this. Without him the whole structure might collapse."

Once night came, the Zulu sentinels scattered so thickly over the area would either return to camp or huddle close about their cooking fires. In any case, they would no longer constitute a threat like they did in daylight.

In the meantime, as he waited for the sun to

die, the White Lord studied the Zulu war tactics, counted the size of the force, noted such details as that every Zulu captain wore a lion skin draped over his shoulders. In the event he had to face them in battle, victory might well depend on his knowledge of those details.

He noticed, too, that these warriors without exception were armed with the favorite Zulu weapon, an extremely short, sturdy, stabbing assagai. They looked with scorn on the tribes which used the long, throwing spears, saying they used a coward's way of fighting as contrasted with the Zulu manner of charging in close and stabbing their foes to death.

And suddenly Ki-Gor was remembering that the assassins who had stalked him were armed with Masai spears. He had given little thought to the matter before, but now he saw that in using a weapon so utterly foreign to them, the Zulus had wanted to place the blame for his death on the Masai. Since the white man was involved, more than spite had dictated that maneuver.

A feeling of uneasiness crept over him. He began to sense that there were long and devious ramifications to the white man's plotting.

Spurred by a growing notion of urgency, he had difficulty curbing his impatience until two hours after sundown. Then, feeling the trails would be clear of his foes, he dropped to the ground, worked his way to the trail the fat man had taken. The spoor was easy to follow even in the dark.

He forged steadily through increasingly dense jungle, though there were long stretches where he carried his sword bared and ready.

**I**T WAS at one of these times that disaster struck him from a completely unexpected quarter. He heard a faint impact on the trail behind him and turned in time to see a leopard silhouetted by a thin ray of moonlight. The cat had leaped from a tree, and from the way it froze, it seemingly sensed that it had been seen.

Ki-Gor knew he was in real peril. It was after midnight and the leopard's lean sides told that it had failed to make a kill. The openness of the spotted devil's approach showed that hunger made it reckless, overeager to finish its quarry.

The White Lord's whole mind immediately fastened on the problem of avoiding a dash with the beast. Sword in hand, he began to back slowly down the dark trail. The cat crouched unmoving, its unblinking yellow eyes glowing with soulless evil.

With every backward step he took, the tension

grew in the jungle man. He felt the dampness of sweat suddenly wet his palms and the thrusting beat of his heart rose louder and louder in his ears. Of all things, in the world he wanted least to do battle with that ravenous spotted killer in the darkness, yet any moment could see the beast spring for him.

Back the White Lord went six steps, and though the cat came forward one long gliding stride, still it did not charge. Ki-Gor kept on, three, four, five more steps. Hope came back into him. Perhaps he did have a chance after all.

Then abruptly the ground opened beneath his feet. One foot slashed into thin air and he was toppling backwards before he could catch himself with the other one. He dropped the sword, instinctively clutching for support. His clawing fingers encountered a thin sheath of dirt-covered thatch so fragile that disintegrated under his touch. The fall of his body wasn't even momentarily arrested.

Off-balance, unable to get his feet beneath him, he plunged into a well of inky blackness with terrific force. There was a brief, pain-filled flicker of time when the whole world seemed to explode. Then unconsciousness swallowed him.

It was the leopard's rasping, angry snarls that finally prodded the White Lord out of the smothering limbo which clutched him. In his first sick, flickering awareness, he realized only that he was hurt and that he was in danger. He struggled to sit up, groaning with the pain in his head and right shoulder.

He could feel bare hard earth beneath him, and there was a smell of earth in the air, but wherever he looked he saw the same uniform, impenetrable blackness. For a moment, the idea that he had been blinded trembled in his dazed mind. That terrifying thought shocked him fully awake, and suddenly the shutter of memory clicked open and he remembered the ground giving beneath him.

With a snarl almost as vicious as the leopard's, he grasped the bitter truth: he had fallen into a Wasuh animal trap, a deeply dug pit topped with a flimsy cover of thatch and dirt. And the killer-cat, unwilling to be cheated of its victim, was pawing and growling about the upper lip of the trap.

Ki-Gor realized he had been unconscious for a long time for his body was stiff and cramped. To his dismay, he found that his right arm was nearly useless. He could find no broken bones, but he had apparently hit on his head and shoulder, so straining the muscles that he could barely close the fingers on his right hand.

The injury made his bow useless. That left him

with nothing more than a hunting knife with which to defend himself if hunger finally drove the leopard to leap into the trap after him

He had no choice of action. Escape from the pit was temporarily impossible. He could only back into a corner and wait for daylight, hoping that the cat would leave, hoping that the strength would come back to his arm.

Even in daylight with the use of both arms, it wouldn't have been an easy project to get out of the trap. Beside digging their pits deep, the Wasuli made the rectangular opening at the top far smaller than the floor, enabling them to build the walls with an abrupt inward slant. This pyramid shape made it difficult for a trapped animal to get enough purchase on the walls ever to leap out. It was like trying to run up the inner side of a slanting roof, gravity quickly plucked you off. But as an added safeguard against the escape the whole inner part of the ceiling was planted with knife-sharp bamboo sticks. He waited stoically for the sunrise. As the strange, savage bedlam of the African night began to abate he could hear the restless pad and the snarl of the leopard as it patrolled the trap. The cat must be old or hurt to show such persistence. It was wise enough in the ways of men to be wary of leaping into the trap and yet it was too ravenous to abandon definitely the hope of getting at its cornered prey.

Ki-Gor sat motionless as the light grew stronger, knowing that when the cat could see as well as smell him, it might forget its fear of the trap. Perhaps another fifteen minutes had passed when the leopard abruptly turned from its pacing and thrust its head into the opening.

The hate-filled yellow eyes raked him. The ears were laid flat against the sleek, murderous head. Saliva dripped from the gleaming fangs, the curled lips. The leopard likes to kill better than any other jungle beast.

The cat's deep-throated growls rumbled louder, suddenly shifted to a screaming, raging torrent of sound. The cat crouched, its claws raking at the edge of the pit, muscles rolling and twisting in its shoulders like waves of liquid steel.

**S**LOWLY, slowly, Ki-Gor rose, keeping his back pressed against the earth wall. The knife, held at waist level in his left hand, shone dully. In that moment, he was a wounded animal at bay. There was no fear in his face, only a growing savagery.

The sight of its victim was sweeping away the cat's fear of the trap. Ki-Gor knew the animal meant to leap and he readied himself for a battle he couldn't win. The jungle man was unconscious of the growl which rumbled from his own throat. His teeth were bared like fangs and his eyes were twin pools of gray flame.

Then, thin and unreal behind the deafening sound of the leopard, came human cries. The cat reared back, its head jerking up and around. The beast's scream soared upward with frightful intensity, and abruptly like a streaking shot, it was gone from Ki-Gor's view, charging down the path.

There was a confused tumult above him, commands, shrieks, the pound of feet. Then men were yelling ecstatically.

In the next second Ki-Gor was looking upward into a ring of Wasuli faces, gleeful faces which registered shock and then fear when they saw him.

Low moans broke from the men and they leaped back from the edge of the pit, making frantic signs to ward off the evil eye. Ki-Gor was utterly baffled by their behavior. They had declared themselves his enemies so they should be delighted to get him cornered.

He slid his knife into its sheath. It would be no use against their spears. He folded his arms against his chest, hid his feelings behind an expressionless mask. He sought desperately in his mind for a clue as to why they had reacted so oddly.

Ki-Gor waited through a long interval of muted whispers. Were they planning some particularly fiendish method of killing him? Then three voices broke into shrill, off-key chanting, and that, with the accompanying rattle of gourds and stamp of feet was enough to tell the jungle man that the Wasuli witchdoctors were at work.

Seven times those screeching, leaping dervishes circled the pit in their dance before T'zibula, the chief wizard, finally approached the edge with a great swirling of his tasseled juju gourds. His eyes bulged with strain and excitement, sweat poured from his thin face as he flailed his limbs like a be-headed chicken. In his own mind at least, he was making powerful magic.

He ended by ripping a small leather pouch from his waist, flinging a yellow powder from it into the pit. "He can do you no harm now, O Great Blade Bull of the Wasuli," the wizard called out behind him. "I have woven a spell which will stay any evil powers he might try to use against you."

while you speak with him "

Since when had they decided that he possessed the power of the evil eye, wondered Ki-Gor He must be regarded as extremely dangerous if the attentions of three witchdoctors were necessary before the Wasuli chieftain would even dare look at him Perhaps he might find a bargaining point in this curious business

Babongu's head peeked over the edge of the pit, then ducked back "You're sure," he asked the wizard T'zibula hesitantly, "that it's safe " And though once more reassured, he peeked fearfully a few more times before gaining enough courage to look at the White Lord

Babongu was one of those men who are unpleasant in both looks and nature He was a tall man with narrow, stooped shoulders and wide hips He had a small head, a vicious purple cut of a mouth and a bad left eye that was filmed over with whitish growth His shapeless nose was flattened back against his face so that the large, gaping nostrils stared at one like two extra eyes

His legs were too thick and fleshy for the rest of his body, giving him a clumsy, off-balance look, and this awkwardness was accentuated by the shapeless buttery sag of his lower abdomen His unrestrained appetite was gradually undermining his health He looked far older than his thirty-five years

Babongu had all the instincts of a jackal but in the way of most thorough going cowards who have managed to grasp power, despite the fears that ate constantly at him, he exercised an unscrupulous cunning in maintaining that power He was one man in truth, who would sacrifice his own mother if it would benefit him He rode any horse that promised him gain, and abandoned it the moment it faltered

"Why are you here, Ghost of Ki-Gor?" he said, his voice trembling "Your body lies rotted beside the Silver River, pierced by a score of Zulu spears! Why are you here defying the will of the Dark God Gimshai when you should be riding the Canoe of Death down the endless waters of Kastadi?"

And in a sudden flash, Ki-Gor understood the meaning of these odd proceedings So great was the faith of the Wasuli in their Zulu allies that it did not occur to them that the war party could have failed in its mission The Zulus had killed Ki-Gor, so when they found him here in a trap, cold-eyed and unperturbed the first thought of these ignorant, superstitious savages was that he was a spirit

Their years-old fear of the mighty White Lord conditioned for such an idea

Though the proceedings would have seemed absurd to a civilized man, these primitive blacks lived in a world peopled with good and evil spirits, with gods and demons, magic spells and death-dealing curses Their somber, precarious lives were hedged with witchcraft And a black man who will turn his face to the wall and die because of a tiny amulet pinned on his hut by a spiteful witchdoctor, certainly sees nothing unbelievable about a walking, talking ghost

## CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Ki-Gor made no reply, Babongu spoke again "I bid you go from my lands, O Specter! I was not the Wasuli who slew you, so you have no cause against us And I warn you that the bonds between my wizards and Gimshai are strong, and that at my bidding they will prevail on him to have you dragged back into the Hole of Death to face everlasting torture "

Suddenly a small hope began to warm in Ki-Gor's breast "You should know better than to make threats you can't carry out And you should know, too, that against white men, black men's gods have no power " His voice was strong and confident

The chief wizard heard him and crept near, his thin face twitching The Wasuli warriors heard him and shifted nervously, their eyes rolling whitely

"So you placed your belief in Zulu spears?" asked Ki-Gor His scoffing laugh was like the rasp of a steel file "You're a fool, Babongu, to think that I could have endured the cowardly attacks of enemies such as yourself for these many years if I did not have the protection of the most powerful of all gods, the God of Life not of Death, the greatest of the white man's gods

Babongu's fingers crept to his mouth, pressed nervously there as he darted his glance first to the right and then the left, not wanting to directly meet the jungle man's gaze

"Yes, the Zulus came against me as I slept and drove their spears into me!" cried the White Lord with sudden violence "But you see me before you, don't you? Look closely, Babongu! Am I a mist, a wavering wrath without substance? Is not my flesh as solid as it was before? Does a ghost break through the covering over a trap, however frail it may be? Does a ghost tempt the hunger of a leopard?"



His questions struck into, the Wasuli chieftain like the swift knife stabs leaving him utterly bewildered. But the wizard T'zibula, who by the nature of his trade was less inclined to be gullible, gave little animal grunts after every question posed by Ki-Gor, as though checking and confirming the truth that the White Lord wasn't a specter,

Ki-Gor shrewdly gave them no opportunity to speak or collect themselves. Rapidly, he went on, "You've heard it whispered about the night fires that a personal juju protects Ki-Gor from death. I thought you believed it. Yet in your stupidity you thought Zulus could kill me."

"Well, look at me," he invited, "and know henceforth, that though I may suffer the other failings of men, the hand of the greatest of gods protects me from death. I cannot be killed, for from the stabbing of every weapon, I arise stronger than before. It is a power that all the wizards in jungle working together cannot dim. That is why I can defy you and every other forest jackal."

As he finished, Ki-Gor stood wide-legged, his arms folded across his chest. Babongu, blowing like a winded horse, blundered back away from the pit to get away from those ice-gray eyes.

"That Byzof!" gasped Babongu. "That waddling, foul-breathed dog! He got me into this with his lies. I told him that so king as Ki-Gor lived I'd have nothing to do with his plans. I told him Ki-Gor was not like other men and he smiled and said to leave everything to his, Zulus."

He looked dazedly around him. He bought of the Masai, immense and terrible in their war paint and their plumed headdresses, their dread cry of "kill—kill" echoing in the jungle stillness, as he had seen them sweep against Ki-Gor's enemies. He thought of the pygmies, of how when they marched to do the White Lord's bidding even the wild beasts fled in fear before their murderous anger.

And now that Ki-Gor, this man who couldn't be killed, had found him out, Babongu knew that the Masai and pygmies would be marching against him.

The Wasuli leader's good eye abruptly fixed on his chief wizard. "You—" he said, "you helped get me into this. You advised me to join Byzof. All along you've urged and wheedled me, telling me it was the right thing to do, that the gods favored me."

T'zibulo quivered as though stung by a lash. He knew his master for a coward, knew that Babongu might well turn on him in the wildness of his fear.

For T'zibula's hands were not clean in the matter. He had, indeed, secretly taken gifts from Byzof as the price for influencing his chieftain and he had prattled false prophecies and had pretended to receiving spirit messages.

"Wait, master," said the wizard soothingly. "You misread our position. We have nothing to fear from Ki-Gor."

He smiled his thin, ugly smile.

"I, too, am surprised at finding so strange a quarry in our trap," he went on. "But he is in *our trap*! That's the important thing. He is in no position to do us harm. He's a helpless prisoner. If he'd been able to get out of there, don't you think he'd have been out long ago?"

Babongu frowned, squinting his good eye. He still breathed like a man who has run a long way, but he was listening. And the wizard, realizing that he had struck the right note, began to consider more carefully what he was saying and found that he himself was impressed with it.

"He scoffs at the power of our gods," T'zibulo pointed out. "yet his very presence here shows that our gods are strong and that they smile on us. They've led him here and put him at our mercy. They've deliberately reached out and kept him from rallying his miserable Masai and pygmies against us."

He teetered up on his toes, spread his thin arms triumphantly.

"Hoh!" he cried. "I would say my prophecies are more than borne out. It is us the gods favor, not those strutting Zulus."

"Ummmm," considered Babongu. He sidled closer to the trap, squinted at Ki-Gor. "But Byzof said quite plainly that the Zulus killed him," he reminded the witchdoctor uneasily. "Not even that fork-tongued snake would lie about a thing like that." He screwed up his mouth, moved his hands in vague, restless gestures. Then almost petulantly, he demanded, "What are we to do with a man we can't kill?"

T'zibulo, who was thinking hard now, wasn't stymied by the question. He reminded the chieftain of Ki-Gor's reputation for tricking his enemies.

"I smell a trick in this," he shrilled. "I say let us fill the pit in with rocks and see how long he lives."

Babongu was silent for fully half-a-minute before he muttered, "Ummmm. Rocks. Ummmm. Bury him alive."

**K**I-GOR felt ice gather about his heart. The cruel suggestion was one that would appeal to the one-eyed devil. Yet when Babongu moved to steal another glance at him, the White Lord forced a smile to his lips.

That smile saved his life. Babongu had no understanding of raw, naked courage. To his mind, that taunting smile on Ki-Gor's face could only mean that the jungle man had nothing to fear.

"No," he decided abruptly. "There's no sense in taking chances. The Zulus thought they had killed him and he turns up here. While we sat around here thinking we had him buried he might turn up in the pygmy kraal. Then we would be in trouble."

From Babongu's tone, the wizard knew better than to press the point. He regarded chieftains as being in the same category as hippos, powerful beings but unutterably stupid. One had to use great care in handling them.

"As always," he said, bowing his head, "the Leader of Lions points the way of wisdom. Since even now M'Gola, the Zulu, treks with his 'heroes' to boast to his 'humble' allies of how Zulu valor slew Ki-Gor, let us receive him here instead of meeting him further down the trail as we had planned."

So that was the reason Babongu was up and about so early, Ki-Gor told himself. The arrogant Zulus had sent word by the white man that they were coming to celebrate with their allies the White Lord's death. The truth was, of course, that the Zulus couldn't wait to gloat over the Wasuli, who had displayed such fear of Ki-Gor.

"M'Gola and his 'heroes,'" repeated Babongu, savoring the words. He had forgotten them in his excitement. He began to laugh, a hacking, cough-like sound such as a very old and sick man would make. "Indeed, the gods are with us," he exclaimed with sudden enthusiasm. "By Gimshai, what a wonderful opportunity to prick that inflated Zulu bladder!"

Looking for all the world like a gouty giraffe, he began to prance about, already envisioning M'Gola's humiliation. M'Gola had ridden roughshod over him, practically calling him a jackal to his face, sneering at his inept and undisciplined warriors. Now he'd be able to rub it back into those smug, superior Zulus. This little incident would take the wind out of them for good.

And so it was that M'Gola the Zulu found the one-eyed chieftain waiting for him a short way in front of the trap. Babongu had grouped his warriors

around the dead leopard, which was ostentatiously laid out across the path so it would appear to be the explanation of why the welcoming committee had progressed no further to meet the Zulus.

M'Gola, who liked to show off his immense strength and endurance, approached at a dead run. He raced at the head of an escort of ten warriors, all men selected from the group which had stalked Ki-Gor. It seemed for a moment that he might run head on into the Wasuli leader, and Babongu actually tensed his muscles, ready to leap aside.

But M'Gola stopped abruptly three paces, in front of the Wasuli. He stabbed his short assagai skyward in greeting, and as though their bodies were linked to his brain, behind him his ten warriors also lifted their spears.

Then as he stood there, huge and arrogant, his breathing still deep and regular after hours of exertion, with one mighty, booming voice his escort shouted, "M'Gola, the Great Zulu Elephant—M'Gola, the Ever Victorious—M'Gola, the Leader of Lions—M'Gola, King of the Zulus—is come. Fortunate are those who tremble before M'Gola!"

That greeting, which violated every principle of jungle etiquette, was a measure of the Zulus' contempt for their allies. They were eleven meeting nearly a hundred Wasuli, yet they acted as though they were conquerors meeting a beaten foe.

Yet, for once, no sullen anger showed on the Wasuli faces. Babongu merely smiled and nodded his head as if in agreement. M'Gola, his head thrown back, noted this from between narrowed eyelids, but not for an instant in his immense self-confidence did he suspect that anything could be wrong.

The jackals have heard the news from Byzof, thought the Zulu, and are ready to bow to their superiors.

**"I**BRING great news," M'Gola barked suddenly. Though they had heard it from a thousand sources, the scum would still listen respectfully while he rubbed it into them. "My lions have done what you Wasuli feared to try—what you bleated could not be done. Hola! Listen and know henceforth that all men are no more than rabbits when M'Gola the Zulu looses his warriors to harry them."

And like a great buffoon, Babongu listened to the whole of the story, twisting up his face, making little clucking noises, bending forward tensely as though he could not wait for the next word. He

listened to it in its bragging entirety, and when it was finished, he stood shaking his head in simulated admiration

"A marvelous thing," he cried "A very marvelous thing And to think that these are some of the very men " He squinted around M'Gola, looking at the chesty Zulu warriors "And there, I suppose, is the lion who captained them "

M'Gola permitted himself a pitying smile "To you," he said, "I know it must seem marvelous, but to Zulus it is nothing Had there been a hundred whiteskins frightening you—nay, a thousand—I would have swept them away as easily "

Babongu gave every evidence of being, overwhelmed He continued shaking his head and clucking

"Had anyone else told me on this particular morning," the one-eyed leader said hesitantly, "that they had killed, or for that matter, even wounded K1-Gor. I—well— I would have told them they lied "

M'Gola stiffened, his bull neck swelling, anger flickering in his eyes like heat lightning

"Oh, don't misunderstand," Babongu hastily added "I'd never in the world doubt your word on anything I know about Zulu honor A Zulu would die rather than speak an untruth "

He held up his hands placatingly A deep, ugly rumble issued from M'Gola's throat and the knuckles on the fingers gripping his spear were gray with strain

"No I'm only deeply relieved," Babongu rushed on "Come and look in this trap and you'll understand Then you'll see what a great favor you've done me "

He turned and lumbered toward the pit M'Gola, his face taut with rage, hesitated a moment and then stalked after him

The one-eyed chieftain reached the trap first and pointed down into it as he moved on around the edge to get out of the Zulu's reach

"You see," Babongu said, his voice gone shrill with excitement, "some of my men thought this was K1-Gor But of course since your brave men killed K1-Gor, this can't be him That's why I'm so relieved "

M'Gola stood frozen at the side of the trap, his eyes visibly bulging, a sudden nervous tic jerking one corner of his gray lips There in the bottom of the pit, lounging at ease on one elbow, was a blond white man leisurely whittling a stick

He had heard too many descriptions of K1-Gor

from Byzof not to realize instantly that this was, indeed, the White Lord of the Jungle And yet as the blood pounded in wild, swirling flood through his head, he still cried out, "*You—you—who are you?*"

Though K1-Gor well-knew what was transpiring above him, until M'Gola yelled he hadn't even looked up Now slowly, his knife held poised for another leisurely slice at the wooden stick, he raised his head and stared at the Zulu chieftain

K1-Gor's lips twitched into a thin, bleak smile, a smile that would turn and twist in M'Gola's thoughts until the day he died

"I am the man who one day soon will kill you," the White Lord said softly "I am K1-Gor "

The words were spoken into an utter stillness, for both Wasuli and Zulu warriors were standing transfixed, eyes glued on M'Gola And for the space of five heartbeats the huge chieftain stood transfixed

The whole gigantic, heavy-timbered structure of the Zulu's honor was thundering down in ruin about him No physical torture could have equaled the awful anguish that splintered and tore at his brain He lived by his lion pride and now in front of these leering jackals that pride had been irretrievably destroyed

He could see the story being carried from tribe to tribe, could hear the laughter of those despised inferior peoples as they heard of his humbling The story of this day would follow him forever Though he bathed the jungle in blood, he could never silence all the tongues The sniggering tale-tellers would multiply like maggots, distorting, stretching, making it worse, so that the mark of this day would be even on his sons and their sons

M'Gola had none of the cunning humor with which a weaker man might have saved his face He had no notion of how to turn the incident off, how to slide from beneath the responsibility and let the burden of blame fall on his men

That great bull of a man whose god was violence took the whole full blow as his own He regarded himself as the focal point of Zulu honor And savage animal that he was, his mind not disciplined and strong enough to contain and conquer the raging madness that pounded through his brain, he sought the only release which his kind knows

He spun about, his face unrecognizably distorted His escort had shoved up close behind him "Dogs!" he screamed "Lying dogs to dishonor M'Gola—to spit in the faces of our fathers this

way!" A terrible trembling shook him, jerking even the iron-taut sheaths of muscle that armored his deep chest and flat, lean belly

His warriors blanched before him, conscious of some terrible guilt, though not having seen into the trap, they thought it must be some misunderstanding for it was impossible for Ki-Gor to be alive

"Filth! Scum! You're not Zulus! No Zulu was ever a cowardly liar!" His blazing, insane eyes seared the escort leader, the same man who had captained the murder party, the man he had brought along to display triumphantly as a model Zulu warrior

And as though driven by an explosion within him, M'Gola's left hand shot out suddenly and clasped the captain's throat. With an inhuman surge of strength, he literally lifted the man from his feet, and turning, flung him forward to the edge of the pit

"Look upon him, liar!" he bellowed incoherently

M'Gola slashed his short assagai down in a vicious, calculated blow, ripping the warrior open from ribs to crotch. The man screamed in agony and sagged with the awful spilling of life from the monstrous cut

M'Gola didn't even step back to let him fall. He stood there almost against the man, glaring hatred at him as he sank slowly to his knees and then fell over on his side. The captain fought against the hurt that was so swiftly killing him, drawing up his legs in a futile effort to hold in his life

"We did—we did," he sobbed in a weak hysteria. "I—do—not—lie—"

It was for these last pitiful words that the black had struggled to keep his hold on the dimming world. With the strange fanaticism of the Zulu he did not protest the cruelty of his monarch, for the man who leads Zulus is regarded as a near-god and in the way of the gods he can mete out death as he pleases without meriting criticism. The captain merely protested that he died with honor intact

**B**ABONGU, crouched at the end of the trap like a huge, ungainly vulture, had followed the whole drama delightedly up to the time that the dying captain spoke. Then his single good eye widened in alarm and he fell back two steps from the pit, shaken and afraid

To his mind, the dying warrior had confirmed Ki-Gor's boast of deathlessness. No man with Gimshai's hands already upon him would say such

a thing unless it were true. Abruptly his pleasure in humbling M'Gola was gone and he fearfully was wrestling the problem of what he could do with the White Lord

But the captain's words were as nothing to M'Gola. His lips bared in a sneer, he bent to dig his assagai twice more into dead clay at his feet. He struck the blows with lightning speed, and then whirled like a great black, lithe beast and in two reaching bounds was in among the gray-faced stiffly erect warriors of his escort

His thick-shafted assagai churned up and down as he struck, and struck ever again, in a wild, roaring madness. It was a sight as sickeningly terrible as any of the bloody and senseless mass killings of the old Zulu tyrants. And in the same way that their fathers had accepted death whenever the crazed whim of their king decreed it, these warriors stood like ramrods, never raising a hand to defend themselves. The thought of escaping didn't seem to enter their minds

And M'Gola, uttering the sounds of an enraged beast, cut them down, mercilessly destroyed them as though he saw some hideous infection bursting from them. He struck until the barbaric splendor of the last of those savage young bodies was bloodied and broken into ugliness

He turned then, panting, to survey his work. A thick redness dripped from his spear, ran wet over his right forearm, splattered in ugly stains over the sweat-glistening blackness of his skin

"There!" he roared. "There! Their rotten strain is ended, and I shall pluck out the others who were with them just as swiftly when I return to camp. That is the justice of M'Gola."

He glared about him, his eyes as red as the blood that stained him. Though they would tell joyously of this happening when they returned later to their kraal, the Wasuli watched M'Gola now with a kind of awed fascination

"But before I go," the Zulu went on, "I'll do what I sent those weaklings to do, I'll kill this white snake, Ki-Gor, who fills so many bellies with fear. Yes, I'll kill him and be done with him for all and good."

"Oh, no," cried Babongu. "You Zulus had your chance and failed. The honor of taking him is mine. I'll not give him up to you or any other man." Standing well across the trap out of M'Gola's reach, with his warriors clustered all about him, the odds were so comfortably in his favor that Babongu could afford to defy the Zulu

M'Gola snarled deep in his throat at this added salt rubbed in his wounded pride but he could do naught for the moment but turn on his heel and stalk furiously away By every rule of the jungle the cursed white man was indeed Babongu's property Yet somehow, somehow he swore to himself he'd get possession of Ki-Gor and then he'd murder him with his bare hands

He had scoffed at Byzoff and Babongu for letting Ki-Gor seem so important to them, and yet now suddenly the White Lord bulked every bit as large and hateful to him Ki-Gor was the symbol of his humiliation Thought of the man was pressing everything else from his mind He kept remembering, for instance with a queer uneasiness, how Ki-Gor had looked up at him with those chill, piercing eyes, eyes utterly barren of the least doubt or fear, and had said so softly that no one else could hear that he was the man who one day soon would kill M'Gola

And the angry M'Gola left behind him another worried leader for almost before the Zulu was out of sight, Babongu's elation over his victory was submerged by the problem of how to deal with the White Lord

Calling the chief wizard to him, he retired a safe distance from his warriors to discuss the matter He hastily explained how he had heard the Zulu captain die swearing that he and his men had slain Ki-Gor

"We can't take any chances" he declared hoarsely "A dying man wouldn't lie And in the same way Ki-Gor wouldn't have anything to gain by making such a boast if it wasn't true"

He hawked nervously, held up his hand imperiously when T'zibula started to talk The witchdoctor sighed and swallowed back his words

"I wouldn't put it past him to want us," Babongu continued, "to cut his spirit free, so he can get clear of us like he did the Zulus He'd float off somewhere out of our reach, take on new flesh, and then we would be in trouble" He scratched the fallen mass of his abdomen "Now what do you suggest we do?"

The wizard's face brightened with sudden inspiration

"I think he lies, Master" T'zibula said "If a simple trap can hold him, he can't possess much magic" Then hurriedly, before Babongu could rebuke him, he added, "But as you say, we won't take any chances, so I suggest we tie him up, carrying him to the Hill of the Dead and shackle him with slave-irons to two deep-set posts We'll feed him just enough barely to keep him alive And since that

is a tabu area no one would ever think of looking for him there"

Babongu beamed immediately, already convincing himself that the idea was his own "I'll keep him there forever" he crowed, "and no one will ever be the wiser Just enough food to keep him alive, but no more—hah!" His face sobered momentarily "Since the Hill of the Dead is tabu to my warriors, you and your assistants will have to guard him"

T'zibula chuckled "Never fear, master It will be a great pleasure to guard that one His lips drew back to reveal his yellowed teeth Though he'll get little enjoyment from it"

"I'll come up often myself to join in the fun" promised Babongu

He walked eagerly forward to direct the work of tying up the White Lord

## CHAPTER IX

**I**BAN BYZOF liked to handle everything in the same way that he played cards He was quite good at cards, crooked cards, that is He played with a marked deck, so that he always knew precisely what his opponent was holding

He also played with a murderous, short-barreled revolver stuck just out of sight in his waistband That was a perfect system, he felt If one was clever, and Byzof was clever, he practically never had to use the gun

But if something did go wrong, if the opponent wasn't deceived by the marked cards and the friendly, almost-sympathetic manner, then Byzof was swift to use the gun to take what he failed to secure by guile He didn't mind using the gun at all but it was much easier and much more fun to win by deception if you could

The fat man was using this same system against Helene Since he had dealt the hand, he knew precisely what cards she would pick up when they reached her camp If she accepted the cards without argument, swallowed the deception as he wished, then there would be no need to use force in getting her to the Wasuli kraal and gaining her help in inflaming the pygmies against the Masai

It was near sunset when they reached the camp beside Silver River As she led the safari, Helene was the first one into the pleasant clearing beneath the great trees Byzof, still well back on the jungle trail in his sedan chair, heard her sudden, frightened cry

He permitted himself the luxury of a smug little smile. Then calling to the bearers to lower the chair, he climbed out, picked up the loaded rifle which had lain at his feet and waddled hurriedly down the trail and into the clearing.

He rushed into the camp, his rifle held at ready, his face fierce with the resolve of a heroic rescuer. "What is it, my dear?" he cried breathlessly. "I heard your cry!"

Helene had dropped her light spear and stood with her hands clenched and trembling.

She was utterly ashen in color. Her reaction was identically that of a person opening their front door to find their home a grisly shambles of grinning skeletons and rusty weapons.

Except that it was evident there had been a murderous struggle in the camp, there was no longer any clear clue as to exactly what had transpired. The scavengers, who appear from all sides, from the earth and the sky, almost before a body grows cold in the jungle, had done their usual thorough jobs.

The bodies were long since stripped of flesh, and the new, white-gleaming bones were scattered helter skelter over the cleared area. And spears and swords were strewn about in meaningless confusion.

"Oh!" exclaimed Byzof in a tone of great shock as he came to a stop beside Helene. "Oh, my. So I was too late after all." He bit his lower lip, waggled his head sorrowfully. "My main purpose in coming was to warn him, but I was too late."

He shifted his rifle to his left hand, reached out with his right one to gently pat the jungle girl's shoulder. He was thoroughly into his role now and feeling extremely pleased with himself.

"What a dreadful tragedy, my dear," he said. "What an awful thing to happen to a young wife. It just proves what I told you at the pygmy kraal, that you can't trust any of them. They're nothing but animals—and like all born killers they'll turn on you when they get a chance."

He seemed as upset as Helene, except that he kept talking, whereas she hadn't managed another sound since her first shocked cry.

"But you can be proud of him, my dear," he went on. "He dearly made them pay for their treachery. It's plain that he died fighting like a lion."

Helene looked at him—a puzzled frown on her face. "What do you mean?" she demanded. "What are you trying to say?"

"The whole reason I was in such a hurry to see

Ki-Gor," lied the fat man, "was to warn him that the Masai had turned against him. I heard of the plot from the Wasuli chieftain. It seems in the past he had had some troubles with Ki-Gor. Those miserable Masai had some notion of bribing him to do their dirty work, even offered to form an alliance with him. They were furious when he refused and they made terrible threats as to what they would do if he betrayed them."

The Masai, Byzof said, were chafing under the restraints laid on them by Ki-Gor. They wanted to go back to their old ways, warring on weaker tribes, taking slaves to do their work, taking by force whatever wealth and food they wanted.

"Babongu was wise enough to know that once Ki-Gor's protection was gone," explained Byzof, "the Masai would plunge the jungle into war and that his tribe might very well be the first attacked by those mad dogs. That's why he talked to me about it."

Helene stared at him dumbly. "No," she protested. "I don't believe it. The Masai worship the ground Ki-Gor walks on."

With velvet cruelty Byzof corrected her softly. "The ground he once walked on, you mean. You must face it, my dear, he's dead—murdered. These weapons and these big-boned bodies tell the story of who is responsible."

Helene covered her face with her hands. Now she will cry, thought Byzof, now she will go to pieces and I'll have no trouble handling her.

"You can count on me, my dear," he said forcefully. "Those black devils won't get away with this. I can't bring Ki-Gor back to you but I can do what he would want done."

The hard, tearing sobs he expected hadn't come from the girl yet. Maybe it was just plain stupidity on her part. He had a weak man's contempt for women, the contempt born of repressed feelings of fear and inferiority. Well, in any case, he told himself, he could handle her.

"Now my first responsibility is to protect you," Byzof declared, again patting her with his pudgy hand. "Until the situation clarifies, I believe the best thing would be to get you to my camp at the Wasuli kraal as quickly and secretly as possible. It's quite probable that they'll be after you next."

He cleared his throat importantly. He judged his manner and tone of voice to be exactly right.

"I'll go back and talk to the pygmies, line them up to help us," he said. "We can count on the Wasuli already. Then, by moving fast, I can recruit some

other odds and ends of warriors. We'll hit the Masai before they know anything is afoot. They'll pay dearly for this crime, I promise you!"

His voice rang with bitter outrage. Seemingly, as an afterthought he added, "Uh— by the way— perhaps you should give me some little message to take back to N'Geeso—you know just something to let him know you want him to cooperate with me." He hesitated. "If you don't know the sign language, one of my Wasuli bearers could write it out for you."

HELENE slowly took her hands from her face. Her expression wasn't at all what he expected. Though she was still unnaturally pale, she was dry-eyed; the rigid set of her features surprisingly stern. She looked at him as though he were an odd apparition which had materialized suddenly out of thin air.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded. His words seemed only then to be trickling into her consciousness. "The Masai warrior doesn't exist who wouldn't tear his heart out with his own hands rather than see any harm come to K1-Gor."

They had been standing side by side, but now she turned to face him, moving away from the damp softness of his hand which had lingered on her shoulder.

Helene continued, "I know you mean well and I appreciate your desire to help, but all these conclusions you've jumped to are completely wrong. You forget that I've lived with these people. I know them. And to be perfectly frank with you, I don't in any way share your feelings about the natives."

Iban Byzof's fat, greasy face arranged itself in an expression of utmost sympathy. "You've suffered a very terrible shock, my dear," he said in the tone of a person comforting a hurt, bewildered child. "It's hard to think clearly, to digest harsh truths at such a time. Even I, who never had the good fortune of knowing your husband, am upset and sickened by the knowledge that his remains lie here among these anonymous—" He didn't actually pronounce the brutal word "bones", but he left no doubt as to what he meant.

Byzof's sadism was intentional. He was beginning to grow angry with the red-haired wench. The fun was gone out of the game. He was willing to employ any device, however despicable, if it would break her down, turn her into a sobbing, hysterical fool whom he could easily handle.

"However the facts must be faced," Byzof said,

his voice growing more high-pitched. "Your husband has been missing a long time. As I understand it, the Masai and pygmies are the only ones allowed to pass unchallenged through this region, and I believe they are about the only ones who know the exact location of your camp."

"Only members of those two tribes could make a surprise attack. The weapons are indisputably Masai! These are the skeletons of unusually large men, which also make them indisputably Masai, because no other tribe in this whole part of the Congo approaches them in size."

By this time, Byzof was making abrupt peremptory motions with his left fist as though forcibly driving home every point he made.

"All right, then," he snapped. "How much more complete must the picture of your husband's murder be? I might add that there are those in the world who might begin to wonder at this point just what kind of woman you are. I tell you a filthy crime of this kind cannot go unpunished. If a white man as important as K1-Gor can be slain by the Masai without even his wife raising a hand in protest, then certainly none of our kind will ever be safe again in this jungle."

Anger flared in Helene's blue eyes, yet still she held on to her control. "I think you've said quite enough, Byzof," she said icily. "K1-Gor left to visit the Masai at the same time that I left for the pygmy kraal. I think they would have found it much easier to kill him there if they were the murderers you seem to believe rather than come back here to do the job."

Beneath his flop-brimmed straw hat, Byzof's pale, blotched face reddened and the mask of friendliness slipped from his eyes, leaving them narrow and mean.

Helene was still talking, "I'm not convinced K1-Gor is here. And as to exactly what did happen, I'll reserve judgment until I get N'Geeso and Tembu George to go over every inch of the camp. They can read signs that would escape anyone else. It could well be that K1-Gor is still with Tembu George."

She shook her head emphatically.

"No, we'll do nothing rash. I don't propose to throw the jungle into a bloody war because of a few unexplained bodies found in my camp."

Byzof's ponderous, unwieldy body suddenly seemed to swell larger. Fury pumped through him as he saw that this slim, cold-voiced woman was in no way impressed by the act he had thought so clever.

His thick, loose lips worked in and out with his swift, hard breathing. In a wabbling surge of soft flesh, he swung around like a moored blimp turned by a heavy gust of wind. His Wasuli had come into the clearing and gathered close behind him, awaiting his orders.

He jabbed one fist at them, so furious that for a moment his voice refused to come. Then shrilly the words erupted. "Tie the cursed fool up. Jump, you dogs!" When the Wasuli hesitated, Byzof's rifle swung up to reinforce his command. The blacks surged forward in a solid pack to overwhelm Helene

Helene had known that she had angered the fat man but the last thing she expected from him was violence.

Before she came to her senses the blacks were on her. She fought with ferocity worthy of the jungle lord's mate, kicking, scratching, biting, uttering no word of fear or pain. But she was but one woman against many men and they soon held her helpless, tying her wrists and ankles with rawhide thongs

Byzof watched sourly as the last knot was roughly tied and the blacks scrambled up, leaving Helene stretched on her side on the ground. She was too spent from her wild struggles to raise herself to a sitting position, but her eyes glared hot hatred at the fat man.

"Now the playing is over, you stupid wench," he snarled, and he told her who he was and what her fate would be. "I'll not make the mistake of trying to use kindness again. From now on you'll do as you're told and you'll obey instantly or I'll beat you within an inch of your life."

"You fat hog, you've signed your death warrant," Helene panted. "I advise you to take that rifle now and blow your brains out. At least, it will be quick and easy. You won't die that way, I promise, if you want to be hunted down."

Byzof laughed. With Helene tied at his feet, he was beginning to feel good again. The smug, self-satisfied feeling of power was returning, the feeling of superiority over all these stupid fools whose ruin he planned.

So he laughed and told them not to count on any rescue by Ki-Gor. Gloatingly, he told how he had planned and directed the White Lord's assassination.

"You're lying," Helene said, but her voice, her look, betrayed her. With his words she died inside.

"And the Masai won't help you because they will be dead in their village, slaughtered by the

Zulus and Wasuli and your beloved pygmies—yes, the pygmies who will think they are carrying out your wishes and avenging Ki-Gor."

He snickered, savoring the stricken look which she could not keep from her face.

"And you can't count on the pygmies to help you," he went on, "because there will be a great feast for those who survive the battle, plenty of food and drink. The pygmies will sleep heavily that night. In fact, none of them will ever awaken."

He bared his yellow teeth. His eyes had the glittering, glassy look of a person who has taken drugs.

"Then, my dear, I'll have plenty of time to devote to you," he said. "I regret that I must put business before pleasure, but you must be indulgent for the moment and I promise to make it all up to you."

Byzof explained that he was sending her down the river that night in one of Ki-Gor's canoes. He was in such high good humor that he used bribes instead of threats to persuade four of his bearers to make the night trip. By using the river, he could get her safely past any pygmy patrols, before daylight.

**N**'GEESO awakened long before dawn. His mouth was dusty-dry and his head throbbed painfully. He was filled with shame as he remembered how he had acted to Helene. He had made a fool of himself

He got up and fumbled in the darkness for a gourd of water. As he drank, he thought of the colorless liquid with the taste of fire which the fat man had urged on him. It came back to him how sparingly the fat man had drunk from his own gourd.

Then the stranger had known the power of the pale liquid, but he had let N'Geeso drink it—nay, had urged him to drink it—like beer. N'Geeso was a proud man, and the thought that he had been made to lose face before Helene and his people angered him. He was angry mostly at himself for being taken in by a white man's gifts and a white man's show of friendship, but he felt an anger toward Byzof.

By the time dawn had come N'Geeso had combed back and forth over his unfortunate actions many times, his feelings of remorse and self-condemnation steadily deepening. He had botched everything. He had done wrong to let Helene go off with only that untrustworthy fat man and a handful of scurvy Wasuli to protect her. And what was worse, there was no telling what conclusion she might draw from the signs of battle in her camp.



He decided he would go to Helene, make a clean break of what Ki-Gor was doing and apologize for his own behavior. Then, even though she would be mad at him, she would, come back to his village where he could watch over her. It wasn't a thing he wanted to do, but he saw no other way out.

But human-like, N'Geeso found it difficult to go out and face his people. Thus, inventing one excuse and then another, he delayed, in his hut. He had not yet emerged when Iban Byzof, who had taken the trail before dawn, made his hurried entrance into the village.

Above the hubbub, N'Geeso heard Byzof crying shrilly in the Wasuli tongue: "I must see your chieftain at once! Lead the way, some of you. A matter of great importance. *Ki-Gor is dead, murdered, and Helene sends me to ask your help!*"

Utter consternation blasted N'Geeso. He forgot the hesitancy which had tethered him in the hut. With a horse cry, he burst through the doorway and ran up to Byzof as the fat man was climbing out of his sedan chair.

Byzof seemed terribly distraught, puffing and blowing, waving his hands about. "Helene sent me," he repeated loudly when he saw N'Geeso. "She said out of all the jungle, she could count on you. It means war. I tell you. We'll wipe those murderers out, that's what we'll do. I'll give the last drop in my body to see this crime avenged. By Allah, they'll never turn on another friend!"

"What is it? What's happened?" stammered N'Geeso.

Byzof mopped furiously at his face and neck with blackened handkerchief. "Let's go in your house where we can talk privately," he said.

Inside the hut Byzof poured out his story about the bodies littering the river camp, about how he had hurried to warn Ki-Gor of the offer made by the Masai to the Wasuli chieftain. He even leaped up and plunged his head out the door, shouting for a parcel of the rusting Masai weapons to be brought for N'Geeso's inspection.

But N'Geeso's fright was gone in the first few seconds of the fat man's tale. He knew all about the bones in the camp. His scouts had inspected every inch of the place after the White Lord's departure. Yet the pygmy chieftain gave no sign that he knew anything different from what Byzof told him.

There were a number of reasons for the pygmy's attitude, not the least of which was his plain dislike of the man. Also, Byzof's disclosure that the Wasuli were somehow involved didn't prompt the little man

to any confidences. N'Geeso despised and distrusted Babongu, the Wasuli leader, and it suddenly came to him that perhaps the lying old one-eyed cheat had a hand in the plot against Ki-Gor.

And, furthermore, as he studied Byzof with a sour realism, he found himself thinking on several puzzling points. For instance, it seemed to the pygmy that Byzof was entirely too upset about the death of a person he didn't even know. It wasn't a natural reaction.

It also was out of character for a white man to show his emotions so nakedly before tribesmen. As part of their pose of being the infallible lords of creation, they hid their emotions, kept their plans to themselves, and they commanded rather than asked.

"I'll tell him nothing," N'Geeso decided. "Let him sweat and fume for a few days. It won't hurt him. Meanwhile, I'll explain to Helene about Ki-Gor and see what I can learn about Babongu's part in all this."

Letting none of his thoughts show on his hard little face, N'Geeso abruptly asked where Helene was.

"Why, she went to rouse the Wasuli," Byzof said. "She said she knew she could count on you, but that it would take some talking on her part and a guarantee of your participation before Babongu would take up arms against the Masai."

N'Geeso frowned, pulled at his lower lip. That didn't sound in the least like Helene. There was something wrong here, badly wrong.

"She mentioned nothing about talking with the Masai?" he asked.

Byzof's fat cheeks puffed indignantly. "Talking with those murderers?" he exploded. "I should say not! The evidence was there before her eyes. They'll be after her next, and probably you—since you were his best friend. She said we must strike and strike fast!"

Helene wouldn't believe such a thing of the Masai in a thousand years, N'Geeso told himself. He said aloud, "So your idea is a surprise attack?"

"That is Helene's idea," Byzof corrected. "She knows what will happen to the jungle if those mad-dogs get loose."

## CHAPTER X

THE PYGMY sensed that Byzof was beginning to watch him too closely, so he muttered, "Yes. Indeed, yes." Then after a

pause, he added, "But we must not let anger blind us to the facts. The Masai are a strong people, both in numbers and in individual prowess. The cost of attacking them will be high. What did Helene say about that?"

"She said you must stand by your vows of friendship to Ki-Gor and her," cried Byzof. "She said you must gather every man who can hold a spear and tell him to win or not come back."

That was where Byzof made another error. He thought that because of Helene and Ki-Gor's position in the jungle that it would be only natural for them to deliver such an ultimatum in an hour of need. N'Geeso knew better.

"Doesn't Helene know that the Wasuli will break like a pack of curs," the pygmy said. "I've seen a few hands of Masai send a hundred of them fleeing."

"They'll not break this time," Byzof assured him. "By good fortune, I happen to have a large force of my own men in the neighborhood. They're big men, big as the Masai, and twice as tough. I brought them in to do a difficult mining job. They are traditional enemies of the Masai, so they'll be glad to fight, and I'll put them in behind the Wasuli to make sure they don't break."

He hadn't meant to tell N'Geeso about the Zulus until they gathered for the attack, but when the pygmy kept talking as though the odds against his people were too great, he thought he'd better show him that he would have reliable allies.

N'Geeso pricked up his ears as the white man continued to describe the Zulus. This was the type of information the sly little chieftain had been fishing for, something definite to back up his growing suspicion of Byzof. He knew immediately that the Zulus were the ones who had stalked Ki-Gor and that Byzof was the one who had given the order.

"Ah, good," said N'Geeso. "You may count on me." His fingers fondled the knife at his waist as he thought what a pleasure it would be to open this great hog's belly for him. "It will take some days for me to gather my men. While they are gathering, perhaps I should go to Helene and settle on a definite plan of attack—or will she be coming here?"

"She wants you to stay here where you're needed," declared Byzof firmly. "She mentioned that specifically. You have only six days to organize your men and march them to the Masai border." He mentioned the place where the armies would meet, "And Helene will be too busy with the Wasuli to see you before then, but don't worry, we'll have a good

plan ready for your inspection then."

The fat man mopped furiously with his handkerchief. He could not entirely hide the triumphant gleam in his eyes. The stinking little dwarf had swallowed it hook, line and sinker. He'd really expected the little beggar to be more upset than he was, but then these savages prided themselves on hiding their emotions.

"Well, I'll be going," Byzof said. "I'm pressed for time even worse than you are. I've got to lend Helene a hand and get my Zulus together."

He asked if it would help if he spoke to N'Geeso's warriors, "fired them up a bit", as he put it. But the pygmy leader declined his hopeful offer, saying grimly that the hot fire of his people's wrath against those who had harmed Ki-Gor would need no stirring.

"We will meet soon then," said Byzof from the door.

"Yes—soon," answered N'Geeso. And to himself he added silently, "Sooner than you think."

And before the sweating fat man was well out of the kraal, N'Geeso was calling his captains to him, summoning his swiftest runners, fury making his voice crack like a whip.

His first move was to send messengers by three different routes to tell Tembu George of Byzof's plotting. Then fully armed and surrounded by his war leaders he stalked out to address his people.

He did not spare himself. "I have done a terrible thing," he said. "I have failed Ki-Gor and I have failed you. In my blind stupidity, I gave Helene over to our enemies."

No slightest sound came from the pygmies as he tersely unfolded the story of what he knew and what he suspected. He told them that his one hope of making up even partially for what he had done was to take a few warriors, trek secretly to the Wasuli kraal and attempt a surprise rescue of Helene.

Then it was that a great roar broke from his warriors. "Let us march with you!" they demanded. "Let us spread death among the jackals!"

But N'Geeso explained that the movement of a large force on the Wasuli kraal would be immediately detected. "They must not know we suspect anything is wrong. They are capable of torturing Helene before our eyes to hold us back from their village walls. So they will think they have fooled us, you will arm and march as though to join them in attacking the Masai. That will give me at least six days to rescue Helene—six days before you and the Masai catch the cowards between you and shatter

them like a rotten nut ”

The little chieftain left his trusted war-dog, N Teka in command Then with fifteen of his most daring warriors at his heels he sped into the jungle, resolved to free Helene though it took his life to do it

**A**FTER his capture K1-Gor was kept on display in the Wasuli kraal for three days Though the chieftain Babongu, was anxious to have the jungle man out of his sight and safely shackled on the Hill of the Dead, T'zibula the wizard had different notions

It pleased T zibula to strut about the bound and heavily-guarded K1-Gor shouting taunts for the benefit of the gaping tribesmen calling him a fake and a bluff He was intent on making the tribe believe that it was his magic which had brought the White Lord low

‘Look offal of a monkey I spit upon you,’ he would shout ‘Where are your great powers now? Ha! The spell of T'zibula was more than you bargained for What the boastful Zulus couldn't accomplish I the greatest wizard of the jungle, did without even leaving my hut

He would grin knowingly at the watching tribesmen who were still vaguely fearful of the White Lord Then suddenly he would snatch a spear or a knife from a warrior and raced headlong at K1-Gor as though he meant to plunge the weapon through him

Always though, the sadistic wizard deflected the weapon at the last moment The White Lord never flinched in the face of these attacks never dignified the flood of insults with a reply K1-Gor was smart enough to know that the more gullible Babongu had given strict orders that he was to be done no injury for fear that he might die and thus escape the Wasuli

T zibula was able to delay the jungle man s removal to the Hill of the Dead because in that tabu area the work of preparing K1-Gor s shackles naturally had to be done by his assistants He kept putting Babongu off by saying that the magic signs and portents had to be just right for the cutting and sinking of the two heavy wooden shafts to which the jungle man would be chained

But when after three days he found that he couldn t crack the shell of contempt with which K1-Gor faced him, his rage against the White Lord exploded into open fury and he drove his assistants all night long to make them complete the piece of

bondage

The next morning, amid all the trappings of a Wasuli funeral, K1-Gor was taken to the Hill of the Dead The idea of the burial rites was T'zibula's He wanted both to torture K1-Gor and impress on the tribesmen that the jungle man was being permanently removed from the world of the living

K1-Gor was lashed to a litter and a death mask forced over his face, half-choking him Eight brawny blacks lifted the litter to their shoulders The low, dull beat of the funeral drums began The chief wizard and his understudies, huge grotesque masks covering their features and strings of human bones clinking and rattling from their arms and waists, started a slow, hopping dance

As the litter moved out behind the wizards, the entire tribe, men, women and children, fell in behind For the brief period of the ceremony, T'zibula lifted the tabu which ordinarily barred them from the funeral site

Babongu, grinning like an idiot now that K1-Gor was to be safely disposed of, was the first to lift his voice in the traditional death chant The long, winding line of blacks took up the eerie chant as the procession moved slowly into the dark jungle

In some prehistoric time, a mighty volcano had lifted its bulk on this place that the Wasuli called the Hill of the Dead But in final, cataclysmic eruption, the whole upper portion of the volcano had been blown away, leaving a low hill with a broad, bowl-shaped declivity at its top

A tangle of thick jungle vegetation grew almost up to the lip of the hill, but within the bowl-shaded depression no single green thing grew The declivity was floored with solid rock where a lake of bubbling, molten lava had lain after the mountain top blew off As the upper surface of the lava had cooled now jets of molten rock had pushed up through the crust to freeze in strange, stone figures, queer ridges and formations

It was this lifeless place, so different from the too-fertile jungle, that the Wasuli had chosen for their burial ground Many generations had used the site, and every niche, every ledge, every raised place was littered with bones Since the dead were placed uncovered in the open, the hill was intested with jackals and great, wicked-looking rats at night, with squads of squawking, fighting vultures by day

**T**'ZIBULA had found a crevasse in the center of the depression and had had his assistants drive two long, heavy timbers into the opening. Then he had had them fill the crevasse in with gravel and clay, pounding down each successive layer of filler so that the timbers were so solidly held that not even an elephant could have pulled them free.

When the funeral procession reached these posts, the wizard had Ki-Gor jerked from his litter and the bonds cut away from his numbed limbs. Then with warriors holding him he was shoved between the uprights, shackled by both his wrists and his ankles with heavy slave irons to the posts.

He was chained in such a position that he had to remain standing all the time, his arms lifted just above shoulder height. T'zibula had seen to it also that the chains were too short for him to bring his hand together, though they did allow him enough play to be able to shift position, easing his muscles enough so that they wouldn't get too cramped. The wizard didn't want his prisoner to collapse immediately.

Ki-Gor's shackles were left over from the old days when the Wasuli had hunted slaves for the Arab traders. The clumsy locks which secured the wrist and ankle bracelets were so heavily made that no amount of hammering or prying could force them open. Since it would have been a slow and cumbersome affair to chain or unchain slaves if each lock required a different key, a single, rusty iron key carried by the slave master fitted all the locks.

T'zibula carried this key on a copper chain around his neck. After shackling Ki-Gor, he held the key up for all to see.

"From this day on," he said, "this will be all that is left in the living world to remind you of Ki-Gor. He has boasted that he cannot die—a boast I do not believe—but it really does not matter because from this moment he is dead to all except himself.

"You never need fear him again," the wizard continued. "He's a corpse hung between two posts. He'll hang here until the end of time. I say to you that his power is broken. You are free to ravage the jungle, to take what you wish.

"Go forth, I say, to greatness. The Masai will be as nothing against you. And when the Masai lie dead in their burning kraal, we will turn on those little monkey men, the pygmies, and slaughter them in their turn."

A vast, echoing roar broke from the listening

Wasuli. The words of the wizard struck home exactly as he intended them to do. With Ki-Gor out of the way, the superstitious Wasuli were at last ready to fight.

On that note, T'zibula dismissed the elated throng. Ki-Gor had not spoken a word. For three days the wizard had been unable to wrest a single sound from the jungle man. The White Lord had held himself coldly aloof, in some miraculous manner maintaining an intimidating dignity despite his helplessness.

The wizard delegated two of his assistants to stand watch over Ki-Gor and sent the others back with the tribesmen. Then he walked up to the jungle man and roughly jerked away the death mask.

"You are my charge now," he hissed. "That fool Babongu with his fears about killing you won't be able to soften your lot. For instance, you won't be so well fed."

He laughed evilly.

"I mean to feed you only when I feel like it," he said, "and then I'll feed you as I would a mangy cur, throwing you scraps to catch in the air. You'll learn to catch them, too, because as you'll soon learn, when they fall on the ground you can't reach, them. Everything you miss the jackals and vultures shall eat before your eyes."

He scratched under his arms, chuckling. His bracelets of human bones gave off brittle, clicking noises.

"Even if you learn to sleep a little standing up," he said, "I wouldn't advise you to sleep too long or too soundly. You find the scavengers, especially the rats, will close in on you whenever you relax your guard."

Suddenly, without warning, T'zibula smashed his fist into Ki-Gor's face. Even if he had been on guard, the jungle man couldn't have protected himself.

"And you'll get a lot of that," the wizard said. "I mean to beat you so often that at the mere sight of me you'll start screaming. I'm going to turn the great White Lord into a whimpering, slobbering creature that not even his own wife would recognize."

He turned away then and started toward the village, laughing uproariously.

"I'll be back later," he flung over his shoulder. "Wait for me, will you?" He was still howling with delight at his own quip when he disappeared from view.

Ki-Gor stood between the two posts, seemingly

immovable untouched by either insults or blows. But in actuality rage hung like a wavering curtain of flame before his eyes so that the dead world about him danced in a vague redness.

He was beaten. T'zibula had beaten him. He realized it the moment they had chained him to the huge timbers.

An awful hopelessness engulfed the White Lord. In his turbulent life he had been in countless tight spots, but always he had been able to find some way to outwit his enemies. Now there was no way out, not even the coward's way of suicide.

To his personal torment was added the greater agony of feeling that by his failure he had betrayed his friends. He had learned that the Zulus and Wasuli meant to overwhelm the Masai in a surprise assault and then turn on the pygmies and wipe them out. After that, there would be no power left in the region strong enough to withstand the brutal conquerors.

**A**LL day the White Lord stood in the blazing sun without food or water. Vultures circled the sky above him, the bolder ones occasionally skimming down to huddle on nearby rocks. The scavengers had begun their vigil, seeming to know that the mark of death was on Ki-Gor.

The two guards lounged in the shade of a ledge, one dozing while the other watched. At times they munched lazily from a hamper of food or drank noisily from a large water gourd, afterwards cooling themselves by liberally wetting down their heads and chests. Like the vultures, on this first day the two blacks merely watched the jungle man, never approaching him or speaking to him.

Frustrated rage swelled within Ki-Gor like a monstrous abscess, yet still he fought to maintain outwardly his look of being untouched and untouchable. Once the witchdoctors broke his protective shell, he would know no peace. They would be on him like dogs harrying a wounded animal.

At last, the awful eternity of that first day dragged toward an end. The sun slid beyond the rim of the hill, dipped down into the black line of the horizon. Ki-Gor drew a great shuddering breath of relief, looked up at the sky where billowing cloud masses drank deep of the fading light.

"At least, T'zibula did not keep his threat and return," Ki-Gor told himself. "At least, I've been spared that."

But even that faint measure of relief was denied the White Lord. Barely had the thought formed in

his mind when a halloo sounded from where the trail from the Wasuli village entered the burial place. The African dusk closes in fast so the cluster of figures that appeared could only be vaguely seen, yet Ki-Gor recognized that hail as coming from the sadistic chief wizard.

It was completely dark by the time the group wound through the rock formations and reached the two guards. Ki-Gor could faintly hear their low excited conversation, ending in a loud burst of cruelly-edged laughter.

Then T'zibula left the others and walked toward him. "Ah, and how is the mighty Ki-Gor?" he asked mockingly. "You had a pleasant day, did you not, you and the vultures?"

He muttered to himself:

"I meant to bring you water," the witchdoctor said, "but somehow I forgot. Ah, well, you'll just have to wait until tomorrow, I suppose, and hope that I won't forget it then, too."

T'zibula waited expectantly for some reaction from Ki-Gor. When none came his voice abruptly hardened.

"Still not ready to beg me for mercy, uh?" he snarled. "I think you'll be ready to in a moment when I show you the visitor I've brought. We'll see if you don't find your tongue awfully quick."

He turned, shouted to his companions to light torches from the gourd of coals they had brought with them. As the bundled faggots ignited, the torch holders stepped apart and thrust high the yellow blooms of light.

As though picked out suddenly with a spotlight, Helene was revealed behind them. She stood among the blacks like an animal at bay. Her wrists were bound behind her. Her long red hair was disheveled, cascading loose about her white shoulders.

She could do no more than look with tragic, stricken eyes at the plight of her beloved mate. T'zibula, thinking of everything, had gagged her with a dirty rag so she couldn't give away prematurely his sadistic little surprise.

And the White Lord, momentarily rooted with horror, saw that a rope was tied about her neck so that she could be led like a dog. The hideously grinning wizard, standing just in front of Ki-Gor, held the end of the rope in his hand.

Out of all the vicious things he had expected from the Wasuli, this was one which hadn't so much as entered his mind. It had been beyond his comprehension that they should even want to mistreat his Helene.

"Our good friend, Byzof, sent her in this morning," gloated T'zibula "Made a fool of both her and that stinking monkey, N'Geeso The Fat One means to amuse himself with her for a time, then send her east to the slave marts "

As though brutal, invisible hands had reached out to grasp his features and twist them, K1-Gor's face contorted slowly, horribly A terrible racking sound, something between a sob and a guttural cry of agony, was wrenched from deep within the White Lord

T'zibula's eyes glittered evilly His grin widened so that his thick lips yawned back to reveal his broken discolored teeth and dirty gums He had found his victim's jugular vein at last

"Come, filth of the jungle!" he commanded, jerking the rope to make Helene come nearer Helene staggered and almost fell from the sudden, tug "Hee-hee-hee-hee!" the witchdoctor giggled

He began to prance about as though gripped by a veritable paroxysm of delight, dancing forward and backward and then to the side, watching his chance to pull the jungle girl off balance again

Helene fought against him, willing to be choked rather than bend to his will Her resistance pleased and excited him for he knew how he was torturing K1-Gor

"Ho!" he exulted "You'll soon learn to lick the feet of any man who beckons Come here, you stupid cow, before I choke you to your knees "

## CHAPTER XI

**H**ELENE strained backwards, her features growing dark and swollen from the constriction of blood, the rope cutting tighter and tighter into her neck The muscles of her braced legs trembled from pain

T'zibula's assistants crouched about her, jeering and laughing, egging their master on with crude sallies They had expected to have fun but this was far better sport than they had hoped for

The giggling, prancing chief wizard leaned forward, took a firm grasp on the rope with both hands "This will bring you here!" he cried and he suddenly leaned all his weight into a vicious pull

But the maddened girl turned the tables on him At the very instant he heaved on the rope, she threw herself forward so that all the power of his pull met only slack rope

T'zibula plunged backwards, a silly, surprised

look on his face He had deliberately come close to K1-Gor while he had been prancing about and tormenting Helene It took him a stunned fraction of time after he toppled off-balance to realize that he was falling directly onto his chained captive

An abrupt look of fear blasted the silly expression from his face He writhed half-around in a wild effort to throw himself to the left, his arms flogging, legs pistoning He saw it was impossible to miss hitting the White Lord

Then he screamed And well he might, for K1-Gor's face was the face of a madman, the face of a giant gone insane with the lust to rend and tear and kill

K1-Gor had seen his chance and was ready He retreated between the two posts as far as his chains would allow When T'zibula smashed against him, K1-Gor's right leg came up with terrible force in the wizard's crotch

The black's arms froze in the instant of starting to pummel the jungle lord A scream of sheer agony ripped from his throat as K1-Gor surged forward, lifting the man with his knee like a rubber ball, driving him upward along his own body to where the straining fingers of his chained right arm could close over the scrawny throat

The short chains prevented K1-Gor from getting both hands around the man's throat But in his berserk fury the White Lord needed no more than one hand to throttle T'zibula No steel vise could have gripped yielding flesh more mercilessly than K1-Gor's broad fingers

K1-Gor roared like an animal in his mindless rage He lifted the paralyzed black completely off the ground, shook him as another man would a chicken He smashed T'zibula's head and face against the post repeatedly as he choked him, beating his cranium into a pulpy mass, but still, he did not release the wizard until he felt the neck snap in his hand

When T'zibula had started to fall against K1-Gor, his leaping, shouting assistants were so intent on Helene that they didn't immediately realize what was happening to their master Then, like a set of puppets swung by a single control, as the wizard's scream blended with K1-Gor's berserk roar, they spun to face the two locked figures

They couldn't have been more stunned if a lightning bolt had smashed out of a cloudless sky to explode at their feet They stood like statues, bodies and minds alike frozen by shock And fleeting though that total paralysis was, it was long

enough to seal the wizard's fate

By the time the first black had rallied his wits and sprang forward with a frenzied scream to help his master, the red-haired jungle girl was ready to do some fighting on her own. Plunging in from the side, she hit the native in the midriff with her shoulder, throwing him around and down.

The red-haired girl, unable to aid herself with her hands, fell, too, but she managed to fling herself in the path of two more natives as she went down, dropping them onto their fellow in a cursing tangle.

Kicking like a maddened zebra, Helene tore free of the tangle of men, desperately intent on doing her limited best to keep these savages from reaching Ki-Gor.

But the whole group of natives was now galvanized to action. T'zibula was being killed before their eyes as Ki-Gor smashed him into the post again and again. Blacks sprinted past Helene on either side, ready to tear Ki-Gor apart with their fingers.

Helene threw herself in the path of one burly native. He leaped back, avoiding her lashing legs. Then his face twisted with hate and he leaned, suddenly and snatched up a great, jagged rock. Using both hands, he lifted the huge stone above his head.

Helene read death in his face. He meant to crush her with the rock. She was trapped, helpless. His barrel chest swelled, his arm muscles jerked into rigid outline.

Then his face went queerly lax. His features seemed to sag and run together. His eyes rolled, wildly and without coordination, and then abruptly turned upward in his head so that only the whites showed.

His knees gave and he began to fall backward, carried by the weight of the stone which he was suddenly too weak to support and yet which his convulsed fingers refused to release. He hit flat on his back, the heavy rock dropping full on his face. One single great spasm shook him and then he was still.

**W**HEN she knew she was safe, a moment of sick blackness gripped Helene. But the thought of Ki-Gor exploded in her mind, brought her struggling blindly to her knees. She had to help him. She couldn't let them kill him.

Then all at once she realized that utter silence

gripped the Hill of the Dead. She lifted her head, blinked the vagueness from her eyes. She saw that the two torches lay flaming on the ground, too newly fallen to have begun to smoulder even.

And in the flickering yellow light, she saw sprawling from where she was up almost to Ki-Gor's feet the bodies of the Wasuli. Many of the bodies still twitched and moved in that first uneasy embrace of death.

Helene thought for a moment that her senses had deserted her. It was a fantastic, unbelievable sight. It simply couldn't be.

But then Helene looked at Ki-Gor. He stood between the two posts, an expression of utter bewilderment on his face as he stared at the bodies before him. Since he sees it, too, it must be real, she told herself.

That seemingly miraculous wave of death which had engulfed the Wasuli had sobered Ki-Gor abruptly. The lifeless T'zibula lay crumpled at his feet where the White Lord had dropped him.

Before either Ki-Gor or Helene shook free of their astonishment, a vague figure materialized at the outer edge of the torchlight. The figure paused like a wary wild thing, ready to disappear instantly at any sign of danger.

It moved forward a step, then another step. Then with sudden decision, it started in a swift and utterly soundless run toward Helene.

Ki-Gor's breath, stopped. He shoved forward the full length of his chains, every muscle in his body taut. Then as the running figure was wholly revealed in the torchlight, his narrowed eyes widened.

"N'Geeso!" he cried, his voice hoarse with relief. "By all the gods, it's N'Geeso!"

The pygmy chieftain threw him a look, his little face strained and fierce, but he did not break his stride. He had tucked his blowgun under his left arm and unsheathed his knife by the time he reached Helene. With lightning speed, he cut away Helene's gag, and freed her hands. Another stroke of the knife and the rope fell from her neck.

"Go, Golden One!" he said, pointing toward the darkness from which he had come. "My men wait there. They'll get you to safety, while I work to free Ki-Gor. His chains may take a long time and I can take no chances on your being recaptured."

It took Helene a moment to catch her breath. Then to N'Geeso's utter surprise, she readied and caught him by the shoulders, saying, "N'Geeso, you're the most wonderful, the most beautiful sight

I ever hope to see!"

A quick, shy smile briefly cracked the tenseness of his face. She forgave him. She wasn't angry with him. Part of the tremendous load of guilt which had burdened his small shoulders dropped away.

But immediately the crackling tension enveloped him again. He pulled away from her, pointed toward his hidden men. "Go—go!" he commanded.

"I'll go when K1-Gor does, not before," she said, unshakeable finality in her voice. And whirling away from the pygmy, she sped toward her husband.

N Geeso darted after her, had almost caught her as she reached the White Lord and flung herself against him. "Make her leave," he appealed to the jungle man. "It's too dangerous here. My men are waiting to take her to safety. She must be insane to think she can stay here."

"No more so than you," snapped Helene. "You're staying."

K1-Gor cut off the pygmy's sputtering answer by saying, "It's all right, N'Geeso. It won't take a moment to free me." He prodded the dead wizard with his toe. "The key is around this jackal's neck." He smiled for the first time in many days, touched by Helene and the pygmy's devotion. "Anyway, no one is likely to surprise us. This place is tabu to everyone but the chief wizard and his assistants and you seem to have taken care of them very nicely."

N'Geeso's chest expanded at the compliment. He set to work freeing the White Lord, explaining while he worked how he and his fifteen men had skulked in hiding about the Wasuli village all day, watching for an opportunity to get Helene. Then near sundown he had seen the wizard and his helpers lead Helene out of the village and enter the jungle.

Because there were too many natives crowding back to the village from all directions as night neared, he couldn't follow the jungle girl until it was completely dark. Then he had led his men hurriedly along the trail T'zibula had taken. N'Geeso and his men had crept over and around the bones of the dead, whipped on by the outcries of the witchdoctors. Under the cover of the noise, they had slipped up to the very edge of the light just in time to halt the charging Wasuli with a rain of poison darts.

Three hours later the jungle couple and their pygmy escort were far from the Wasuli kraal. On the Hill of the Dead they had left a grisly puzzle for the Wasuli to solve. They had locked the wizard,

T'zibula, in the chains in K1-Gor's place, and after plucking the poison darts from the bodies of his assistants, had ranged them in neat rows of three in front of him. After the scavengers had been at them for a few hours no one would ever guess the cause of their death.

**N**'GEESO had told the jungle man that Byzof would get back to the Wasuli kraal either that night or early in the morning and had related also the fat man's plan to crush the Masai.

"He's gone too far to turn back now if he can possibly keep the Wasuli from deserting him," decided K1-Gor. "He'll have to strike, and strike fast, because with Helene and I loose he'll know that time is running against him."

K1-Gor sent N'Geeso back to his own kraal with instructions to start moving his warriors toward the Masai kraal at once. Then after a meal of fruit and nuts and a few hours sleep, he and Helene at dawn set out through the trees of the Masai village.

Byzof, in the meantime, had arrived after dark at the Wasuli settlement. The blacks, already wildly exultant about the capture of Helene and K1-Gor, cheered him like a hero when he related how he had tricked the pygmies into turning against the Masai. Now utterly confident of victory, the war lust swept the tribe like a burning fever. Since they felt they could not lose they at last were as ready as the Zulus to fight.

Byzof made his announcement as soon as he entered the village and then went into the chief's house to confer with Babongu. The first thing the one-eyed chieftain told him was of the Zulu's failure to assassinate K1-Gor and how he and his men had captured the White Lord.

The fat man went dead white at the news. "You fool!" he shrieked, forgetting his oily diplomacy for once. "Haven't you even the sense to see that that white devil is a threat to us every moment he lives. He's the one and only threat. By Allah, if he could escape the Zulus don't you realize he can twice as easily escape these blundering dogs who serve you?"

Byzof's hands trembled and his breath came in asthmatic gasps. K1-Gor would have learned all about him by now from these boastful blacks. He was terrified at the thought of what the White Lord would do to him if he broke free.

"Get T'zibula in here," he commanded. "He'll dispose of K1-Gor quick enough. He knows there is



no sense to that blather about K1-Gor being unable to die ”

Babongu grew sullen immediately He had been very proud of himself and now this arrogant white dog insulted him He angrily told Byzof how and where K1-Gor was chained, added with conscious malice that the wizard had taken Helene up to the hill to torture the White Lord

“I’ll go up there then, myself, and finish K1-Gor,” Byzof decided abruptly “I’ll settle this ”

The one-eyed chieftain leaned forward, growled, “You’ll settle nothing That is tabu land and no one can set foot in it without T’zibula’s permission ”

Byzof saw he had gone too far Even with the chieftain’s connivance it would have been dangerous to violate the tabu, without it, he would be committing suicide

So he stamped away to his quarters and settled down to uneasy hours of waiting for T’zibula to return with the girl He dozed off, sitting upright, long after midnight The sun was well up when he awakened T’zibula still hadn’t returned, but the stubborn chieftain refused to let him go to the Hill of the Dead

**B**Y MID-MORNING it had been noticed that vultures in greater numbers than any man ever remembered seeing before were flocking to the hilltop from all directions

At noon, M’Gola, the Zulu chieftain, arrived to confer with the fat man about his success with the pygmies and to demand that K1-Gor be turned over to him The Wasuli chieftain was beginning to grow worried himself by then, and an hour after the Zulu and Byzof went to work on him he agreed that the three of them would forget the tabu in the emergency and would go together to the hill to investigate The tribesmen were willing for the tabu to be forgotten, though none of them would accompany their chieftain

The grisly scene which greeted the three investigators confirmed Byzof’s worst fears

Babongu fell moaning to the ground Byzof, after a long, stricken look, staggered like a drunken man to a rock ledge and leaned against it, his vast belly heaving in uncontrollable sickness Only M’Gola the Zulu seemed unmoved

He strode forward, scattering the vultures with his spear Ghastly as was the thing that hung in chains, enough of it was left to confirm without doubt that it was T’zibula, not K1-Gor And though he tried with unbelievable patience, the Zulu could

not discover from the sickening fragments that were left any hint as to how the wizard’s assistants had died

When he was finished, M’Gola made no effort to hide his contempt for his companions He silently herded them out of the crater and over the lip of the hill Then he shoved them down on an outcropping of rock, stood over them

“I think we shall talk a bit before we go back,” he said grimly “So the two white dogs are gone? So a few gourd rattlers are dead? What difference does it make?”

He stared fiercely at the two bedraggled men and answered himself

“None at all to me,” he snarled “And if you want to leave this hill alive, you won’t let it make any difference to you I’ve been against this endless bother over K1-Gor from, the first, this endless planning and sneaking and tip-toeing about because of one stinking man ”

He hawked angrily, spat almost on Byzof’s feet

“One more white man doesn’t change the odds against us,” he declared “Now listen to me,” he said, jabbing a finger at Babongu “Those jackals of yours are finally ready to fight—and they are going to fight! They are to know nothing of K1-Gor’s escape We’ll tell them all is well, that Helene has been chained up beside her husband, and that the witchdoctors are staying up there to guard them ”

He pointed out that if they were so afraid of K1-Gor that they should realize it would be suicidal to sit around moaning and doing nothing

“Give him time and he’ll raise every tribe in the area against us,” M’Gola said “Everything can be exactly as we planned, if only we act swiftly We must march immediately against the Masai, smash them, and then turn on the pygmies ”

Both men realized they had no alternative but to do as M’Gola directed There was no other way out A sweeping victory on the battlefield would put them in a position where K1-Gor could not harm them

That very afternoon, reassured by the false reports given them by their masters, the Wasuli and the Zulus began their march into the Masai lands The new timetable would send them into battle a day earlier than the time Byzof had arranged with the pygmies The morale of the Wasuli was so high that M’Gola, who, of course, was supremely confident of his own troops’ ability, anticipated no difficulty in carrying the Masai stronghold

M'Gola let the warriors continue to believe that they would be backed up by the pygmies "We can always tell them they are on the way," he said cynically "By the time they realize the pygmies aren't coming, the battle will be won Then their rage against the pygmies will be just twice as great when I send them against the little monkey-men "

## CHAPTER XII

**B**Y USING the swifter tree routes, Ki-Gor and Helene arrived at the Masai kraal far in advance of the invading army The Masai were overjoyed to find that they were both safe The huge chieftain, Tembu George, and his men were looking forward to the battle, knowing that with the pygmies coming to reinforce them they were certain to win

The second night after Ki-Gor's arrival, tired Masai scout s came in to report that the force under M'Gola was still a full day's trek away An hour later a pygmy runner sprinted into the kraal to advise the White Lord that N'Geeso was only a half-day's march away

"That makes it certain that the pygmies will get here ahead of those jackals," Tembu George announced "We have nothing left to worry about We can sleep well tonight "

But Ki-Gor and the Masai leader underestimated M'Gola's battle cunning He had guessed that he would be spied upon He let his men sleep only three hours, and then knowing no eyes would be watching him during the darkness, he roused them and resumed the march toward the Masai kraal

Thus, in the early morning, the Masai were surprised to find the Wasuli and Zulu impi suddenly upon them

The Masai kraal was surrounded by open grassy fields which the tribesmen had cleared to provide grazing for their sheep and cattle M'Gola's warriors poured out of the jungle on the west side of the clearing and ranged themselves in battle order, the more numerous Wasuli forming themselves into a long rectangle on the left, the Zulus into a separate and smaller rectangle on the right

Two-man teams in the front rank of the rectangles held the native version of ladders, ten foot sapling, with the branches cut off a foot from the trunk These would be braced against the village walls for the warriors to scramble up

As within the kraal, the Masai were hurrying to

their battle stations, Ki-Gor watched M'Gola stride up and down in front of the warriors, haranguing them, calling them that one swift charge now would shatter the outnumbered Masai

"We will repulse them," Tembu George promised, his jaw set grimly, "even if we have to call on our women to fight at our side But that Zulu lynx has outsmarted us By the time N'Geeso does arrive my brave ones will have suffered terrible losses and we will have lost all chance for a clear-cut victory "

Ki-Gor stroked his jaw thoughtfully His mind, sought desperately for some way to delay the joining of battle But he still sought in vain when the enemy troops began moving at a disciplined walk toward the kraal

The White Lord and Tembu George had been standing at the main gate, observing the invaders through the small, round sentry peepholes, used for recognizing visitors before admitting them to the kraal Now both men, their faces stern, left the gates and hurriedly climbed to the warrior-crowded platform which extended around the inside of the stockade walls

The two men moved slowly along the platform, checking weapons, giving instructions The Masai, greatest fighting men of the jungle, waited impassively, unshaken by the numbers they faced

Across the plain, Babongu had placed himself at the head of his warriors He wanted to savor the glory of leading them into battle, savor it so long as there was no danger, that is As soon as he came within arrow range of the Masai he would fade back through the ranks, confining his participation to exhorting the others to bravery He would leave to M'Gola the actual direction of the attack

It was then, as the lumbering, ungainly Babongu was imagining himself to be grand and fearsome as the Zulu leader, that the first of his men spotted Ki-Gor Against the ebony bodies of the Masai, Ki-Gor's lighter skin shone like a beacon light

The realization that Ki-Gor headed the forces against them struck the Wasuli with shattering impact They had been assured he was locked beyond any hope of escape on the Hill of the Dead with a whole corps of wizards to watch him night and day

**F**RIGHTENED cries broke from the Wasuli The rigid, disciplined ranks wavered, halted and began to dissolve into confusion They had been, children playing at the grown-up game

of war, and now suddenly it was the real thing and no game

M'Gola had marched their legs off of them, had even refused to let them have their morning meal because he was so anxious to join battle. They had been promised the help of the pygmies in their assault, yet were being sent to the attack without that help. And on top of all this, they found the dread White Lord of the Jungle here before them, waiting to visit unimaginable horrors on them with his awesome magic.

The one-eyed Babongu whose sight was none too good at a distance was so intoxicated by his own vain-glorious fancies that he was several moments in discovering that all at once he alone of the Wasuli was advancing.

He turned around and gaped stupidly at the disorganized throng milling behind him. He couldn't imagine what had gone wrong. Then out of the confused jumble of voices he made out the fact that Ki-Gor was on the walls with the Masai.

And suddenly Babongu looked very ill. Great beads of sweat came out on his forehead. He looked first one way and then another, knowing he must do something, but not knowing what to do.

When Ki-Gor first realized what was occurring, he was almost as astonished as Babongu. All about him, the Masai became utterly still and silent, puzzled by the strange spectacle taking place on the field. In the silence, the cries and protests of the Wasuli could be clearly heard by the men on the walls.

"By all the gods," exploded Tembu George, "the Wasuli have balked because of you!" He looked at Ki-Gor open-mouthed.

The White Lord grinned sheepishly. It was true, and for a moment he felt like a fool. He watched M'Gola halt his Zulus run toward the disorganized mob of Wasuli in a towering rage. It was ridiculous. The jungle would rock with laughter at this story.

On the platform, the hard faces of the Masai were creased with grins. Ki-Gor studied these faces with sudden seriousness, looked out to see Byzof's squat, fat body waddling from behind the Zulus. Byzof was hurrying to help M'Gola with the Wasuli.

And Ki-Gor saw that this was the chance he had prayed for. A single, swift, bold stroke could bring the Masai victory. Like a great cat he dropped from the platform to the ground.

"We strike the Zulus!" he cried. "We can be on them before they know what is happening.

Overwhelm the Zulus in one battering charge and the Wasuli will run like antelope."

Quickly and quietly, the eager Masai warriors formed up within the kraal. Then the huge gates were thrown wide. Like unleashed black leopards the fierce warriors burst out of the kraal and drove across the sunlit plain at their ancient enemies.

They charged in utter silence, wanting to wring every last bit of advantage from their surprise move. The astounded Zulus stood and looked at them. M'Gola, raging and shouting at the Wasuli, didn't realize they even were out of their kraal until the ashen-faced Byzof fell upon him, screaming and pointing in horror.

M'Gola seemed to go insane. He leaped in among the Wasuli, roaring and beating at them in a vain attempt to make them attack. But a hundred M'Golas couldn't have offset the effect which the great-thewed White Lord running at the fore of the Masai had on them. The fact that Ki-Gor had left the comparative safety of the kraal proved to them beyond any doubt that he knew he was unconquerable.

As the Wasuli fell back before him, M'Gola finally realized he could never make them fight. He leaped about, his face unrecognizably contorted, and raced toward his own men.

But even as he began to run the Masai swept against the braced ranks of the Zulus. And in that first reeling impact of battle, the superiority of the long, heavy, shovel-bladed spears of the Masai over the short, stabbing spears of the Zulus was murderously apparent.

The Masai, instead of throwing their spears, held them extended before them like lances. The Zulus were helpless against that wall of spears. They were impaled before they could come to grips with the Masai. They died like wheat before a mower and their useless spears dropped unblooded from their hands.

The Zulu ranks buckled and the rectangle of men began to break apart. Fanatical as they were, they could not stand against a superiority of both arms and numbers. And the Masai, wild now with the battle lust and scenting victory, pressed home their attack with mounting fury.

M'Gola drove in among his men, trying desperately to hold them, but he was too late. Faster and faster they fell back, and then suddenly they were no longer a fighting force, but a mob of fleeing, fear-stricken men.

And when the Zulus broke, a vast, animal bel-

low sounded from the watching Wasuli and in a clawing, fighting frenzy they, too, stampeded toward the jungle.

**M**'GOLA alone did not flee. His face was a mottled yellow and his breath came in great, wracking gasps. For a fleeting instant, he stood like a cornered bull, his legs braced and his head lowered. His rolling eyes and froth-flecked lips told that all reason had left him.

Then in a sudden, pounding run, he charged at the man who had wrought his ruin. There were Masai between him and Ki-Gor and they leaped to block his path, but there was no halting the berserk giant. His assagai had a shaft of solid iron, thick as a strong man's wrist, and with it he hammered aside the reaching Masai spears.

Ki-Gor saw M'Gola coming, shouted to the Masai to stand away from the berserk Zulu. Then calmly, with the Zulu pounding straight at him, the White Lord lifted his spear and threw.

The shovel-bladed point took M'Gola in the chest, threw him completely around and dropped him on his side dead.

Ki-Gor turned away to watch the main body of the Masai who were pursuing the fleeing Wasuli and Zulus. His keen eyes quickly picked out the tall figure of Tembu George rapidly overhauling the fat, clumsy Iban Byzof who had been abandoned and left behind by the fleet-footed Wasuli.

Tembu George caught the fat man and spun him around. The Masai chieftain's sword flashed once in the sun. The head that had been so filled with evil schemes rolled like a ball across the ground. Before Byzof's headless body had fallen over,

Tembu George was racing after the Wasuli again.

Ki-Gor didn't join the pursuit. He wasn't needed. In the jungle, the Zulus and Wasuli ran headlong into the pygmies. Caught between the Masai and

the pygmies, they had no choice but to surrender or be slaughtered.

The Masai and pygmies marched their long files of stumbling prisoners back to the kraal. Though he had had a full share of glory, N'Geeso was furious that the main battle had been fought before he arrived. And though he had slain Babongu in the forest fighting, he was incensed because Tembu George had cheated him of Iban Byzof.

But finally Tembu George quieted the little savage down by telling him how the Wasuli had reacted when they saw Ki-Gor on the stockade walls. He told the story as he walked into the kraal with N'Geeso and the White Lord.

"Ho!" exclaimed N'Geeso admiringly. "Is he not a friend to have? The whole jungle trembles before him."

"It is so," declared Tembu George fervently. "No one will dare stand against him after this."

Hardly had he finished speaking, when Helene blocked their path. She eyed all three of them a bit narrowly. "You're finished, aren't you?" she addressed Ki-Gor. "You are not needed any longer?"

"Why, yes," he said hesitantly. "It is all over."

She tossed her red hair back and her blue eyes snapped.

"Then it is time we had a little talk, Ki-Gor," she said. She indicated with a sweep of her hand that he was to go into a nearby hut. "I haven't forgotten how you got into all this. There's a little matter of keeping me in the dark I want to discuss."

She wheeled on N'Geeso and Tembu George.

"Later, I'll have something to say to you two," she said. "about men who help husbands get away from their wives and get in trouble."

And as the slender, red-haired girl stalked off, the White Lord, the man whom the whole jungle feared, wet his dry lips and nervously and meekly followed her.