

Sargasso of Lost Safaris

Sheena - Queen of the Jungle

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Chapter I

THE LION had Sheena cornered. An old lion, scarred and shaggy, his yellow eyes flat and still, and only the tip of his tail moving; an old lion but still dangerous. He held both Sheena and Chim, the monkey, at bay in a triangular niche in the rock.

Chim stirred whimpered a little, and Sheena, without taking her eyes from the lion, said, "Quiet. Be still."

She spoke calmly, keeping herself rigid.

Sheena, of course, hadn't quite foreseen this emergency. She had crossed a clearing, on her way to a water hole where she might find antelope for food. There had been lions in the tall grass about a hundred yards away, hardly a thing to trouble Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. She had walked right past them, downwind. It was late afternoon, and by late afternoon most lions have full bellies, especially when they lie quietly in the sun.

But the old lion had not yet fed.

"Run—this way!" she'd cried to Chim. There was a kopje ahead; a rocky hillock perhaps thirty feet high.

She might have loosed arrows at the beast then and there, but she knew that the slim shafts would be uncertain loosed so quickly, and at a moving target. Possibly they could climb it in time to leave the lion behind. Or at the very least he would hesitate, be still, and make an easier target before he entered the niche.

The lion, however, came right along, and the moment she was in the niche she realized there was no time to scramble upward. She whirled and faced the beast.

Now it took a step forward, and Sheena saw that it was a limping step. She glanced at its left forepaw and saw the porcupine quills and the nasty swelling. She understood, then. A lion never learns about porcupines and is unable to resist them; then, with a paw full of quills he is unable to chase the swifter beasts. This is when he seeks the weaker, two-legged creatures.

Sheena smiled just a little. She began to make a soft, purring noise. The lion cocked its head, puzzled. Slowly, deliberately, she slipped her bow of nahete wood from her shoulder. She reached across the other shoulder and plucked an arrow from her quiver.

The shot would have to count. The small arrows hadn't the shocking power of a spear or bullet and the first one would have to pierce the heart. If it didn't—well, there was one more chance; she would use, then, the ivory hilted Arab poniard at her side.

These were Sheena's weapons, these and her quick senses and her jungle wisdom. With these the orphaned daughter of a white explorer had grown up among the beasts and natives of the steaming Congo to become undisputed Queen of the Jungle. She was already a familiar sight to many tribes and wild things. They saw her as a tall, slim, bronzed young goddess, striding through the lion grass with her head and shoulders held high, or making a golden blur against the green jungle as she sped through the treetops. Her leopard-skin clung to her torso, showing every graceful curve. Armbands, earrings and light

bracelets of pure gold were her decorations, although she would have been beautiful enough without them.

Now she laid the arrow carefully to the bow. The lion's eyes flickered: in the next instant it would spring.

Sheena drew the bow quickly and effortlessly until the head of the arrow touched the wood. There was a dull snap. It wasn't at all the sharp twang of the arrow flying away—the string had broken. The arrow dangled limply in her hand.

Chim, in terror, cried out: "Chee-chee-chee-chee-chee!"

The lion sprang.

Sheena leapt, too, twisting herself violently in mid-air. She came down upon the lion's back, facing forward. She whipped the long Arab knife from her side.

Holding the knife with thumb and forefinger she began to plunge it into the beast's ribs just behind its left shoulder. She was striking for the heart—if only she could hold on long enough. The lion plunged and clawed and made terrifying screams of rage, but she hooked her knees around its body and held firmly to its mane with her free hand.

The lion, bucking wildly, slammed into the rock wall of the niche just as Sheena had her knife drawn back for another blow. Sheena's hand struck the rock. The tip of the knife was caught for an instant against the granite, and as the lion came down again the weapon was knocked from her hand.

She grasped the lion's mane quickly with her other hand and hung on even more tightly. She glanced at the lion's flank and saw that it was stained with blood. Perhaps in a moment he would tire, and fall to his knees. Perhaps his heart had already been pierced.

GLANCING from the corner of her eye she saw that Chim had scrambled to the top of the kopje now and was standing there jumping up and down and chattering. Then she saw her fallen arrows there in the point of the niche.

"Chim!" she cried. "The arrows!"

The monkey chattered and jumped up and down again.

Sheena pressed her lips together. Sometimes Chim would understand, and sometimes he wouldn't. And then if he did understand, like as not he'd forget what he started out to do before he was halfway there.

"Arrows, Chim! Arrows!" she cried again. She released her hold long enough to point to them.

Chim glanced down, then up again. He looked puzzled.

The lion tried to bite and claw the two-legged thing on its back. Sheena yanked its mane in the other direction each time it did that. Yet she knew she couldn't keep this up forever. The powerful king of beasts would probably have more endurance than even Sheena, whose smooth, spring-steel muscles could carry a full-grown man up a ngoji vine and into a treetop.

"Arrows, Chim!" she called sharply.

Chim scratched his head, scrambled half way down the rock face, then stopped, then looked at the arrows that had fallen from Sheena's quiver during her twisting leap, then looked up at Sheena again.

There was a sudden twang!

As if by magic an arrow appeared in the lion's flank, inches from Sheena's own shoulder. The beast whipped about viciously to bite at it. His legs became suddenly unsteady. He stumbled.

Sheena whirled her eyes toward the top of the rock; the arrow had come from that direction. She saw no one. She frowned. She had, in this moment, a curious flash memory of another time when someone had saved her life by shooting an attacking lion—only that had been with a bullet, not an arrow. She had been facing this charging beast with only her knife, a rifle had cracked twice, and it had died in midair. Then a white man had stepped into view; he had called himself Rick Thorne. Not like other white men she'd known: he was tall, and his hair was black as the wing of a raven, and his eyes were gray mist. He had awakened a strange feeling in her. Since then she had roamed many jungle trails with Rick Thorne, but at the moment he was in the far Bilina country taking the tribe's yearly bag of ivory tusks back to civilization for them. It seemed he had been gone much too long, and lately Sheena had been wondering whether or not to head in that direction.

Then, abruptly, the lion fell and rolled to its side. Sheena leapt free. The beast shuddered, its hind legs twitched several times and after that it was dead.

Chim, chattering for all he was worth, and grinning with peeled lips, came running to Sheena with one of the fallen arrows in his hand.

She shook her head sadly, trying not to grin. "I don't need it now, you fool," she said.

She remembered the arrow out of nowhere then and glanced quickly at the top of the rock. A head came slowly over the edge and into view. It was grinning. It belonged to a black man with huge cheeks like ebony apples and three or four fat chins. He wore the claw headpiece of a sub-chief.

Chim saw the newcomer and immediately set up a racket.

The black laughed. It was a rich, deep laugh that came from his immense depths. He pointed to the monkey. "The white girl," he said, "has more courage than her little brother!"

There was no malice in the remark. A joke like this meant friendly intentions. Sheena smiled back and said, "Chim is not afraid. He only means to protect me from strange-looking creatures that appear!"

The fat man roared with laughter. He slipped heavily over the edge of the rock and with many grunts and groans began to let himself down.

Chim began to imitate the grunts and groans.

"Quiet, Chim," said Sheena. Then to the black, "You speak the tongue of the Bilina."

He was facing her now, and still grinning. "It is so. I am K'ando, sub-chief of the Bilina. And you are Sheena."

She raised an eyebrow. "How did you know?"

He waved his fingers, which were fat but nevertheless tapered and graceful, and said, "Even the waves of the two far oceans know Sheena."

Sheena smiled then. "And you have saved Sheena's life. Sheena owes you a debt."

"There is a way to pay that debt," said K'ando. "In fact, I sought the Queen of the Jungle in many kraals before I was sent this way."

"Oh?" said Sheena quietly, and waited.

K'ando dropped his eyes. "There is great trouble among my people, the Bilina." He half-chanted in his rich, deep voice as he talked. "Do you know of the Spirit Men?"

She thought. She had heard rumors of the Spirit Men from time to time, although she had never actually met them. They were a secret group, with

members scattered at odd places, something like the Leopard Society that once terrorized all of Africa. They were supposed to know all the secrets of magic. "What of the Spirit Men?" she asked.

"They are among us," said K'ando gravely. "The son of our chief, Poko Na, returned from a long visit to far places where he learned some of the white man's ways, but also found the evil of the Spirit Men. Now he and the warriors of the society take much tribute, especially in ivory. As you know the Bilina's lands have long since become fruitless of grain or cattle, and the tribe lives only by its ivory, the finest of any. Because of the Spirit Men, many are weak, many starve among the villages."

"But what can I do to help?" asked Sheena.

K'ando frowned. "I have no plan. Yet, the name of Sheena is known to my people, and they think of Sheena as a white goddess—one of magic, herself. Perhaps in some way we can make the magic of Sheena stronger than that of the Spirit Men."

Sheena had a sudden thought. "The white hunter, Rick Thorne; has he left the country of the Bilina, yet?"

"He was waiting for the ivory to be gathered when I left," said K'ando. "There was but a small carry this year, and he remarked upon it."

Sheena looked up for a moment at the hot, endless sky and the high clouds.

"Sheena thinks," said K'ando.

"Yes." She nodded slowly. "Sheena thinks that some magic, perhaps, is the work of spirits. Not that of witch doctors, of Spirit Men, but the magic of the jungle itself. Sheena has seen strange things. Sometimes there is a strange feeling in one's stomach, and this feeling seems to warn not to take a certain journey."

"Sheena has such a feeling now?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "It is very difficult to know." And then abruptly she smiled and tossed her blonde tresses and said, "I will go with you, K'ando. Together we will see what we can do about these Spirit Men."

Chapter II

RICK THORNE moved through thick jungle, taking a short-cut to the broad river that few white hunters would have dared. He had found a game trail that most eyes would have missed—it was merely a place where the jungle was a little less tangled. A big Tawani black of his safari moved ahead of him hacking the way with a bush knife. About twenty porters trailed along behind. A dozen of these carried ivory, a tusk apiece. The tusks were all huge and magnificent, hard and white to the core, such as the famous Bilina ivory was always known to be. Each year at this time the Bilina sent a shipment of ivory to the coast, trusting only Thorne to deal with them, and then put the proceeds into the tribal funds. They were paid partly in money, but mostly in trade goods, and with these they bought food and cattle and other necessities from their more fortunate neighbors with better land.

The Bilina country was on a long, arid slope that climbed to a mountain range; it was difficult to find, even more difficult to traverse and only white hunters such as Rick Thorne had ever seen it. Most of Rick's fabulous jungle

craft, as a matter of fact, had been developed on long treks with Sheena. He looked around him a bit, and half-wished that the Jungle Queen were along right now.

It was too quiet, Rick was thinking. The rustle of the breeze in the treetops had stopped; the homing parrots were no longer squawking; it seemed as if the very insects had stopped buzzing around his head and shoulders.

He turned, glanced at the blacks, and saw that they were staring about them uncomfortably, too.

"Hurry. Faster step!" Rick called to them easily. He hoped to make a certain swampy watering before dark. He was only two marches from the head Bilina village now, having left early that morning, before the worst heat of the sun. A few hours beyond the village he had entered the jungle: it was hot and damp here under the trees, but at least the direct rays of the sun didn't beat down upon the head and shoulders.

The head boy turned around, swept his bush knife at the trees and said, "Juju bikitelo, bwana!"

Rick felt like smiling but he didn't. Nor did he chide the black for saying that spirits and magic were gathering; he'd long since learned not to scold or scoff at such feelings. He agreed instead. He said in the same Congolese dialect: "Aiee, the magic gathers. But if we are fast we may escape it before nightfall."

The others whispered about this among themselves for a moment or so, and then decided to push on. The head boy began hacking at the brush again.

Rick kept looking all about him, staying alert—but he did this easily and with little motion so the others wouldn't be alarmed. He had to admit that he, too, felt something odd in the air. Something more than the heavy quiet—something that wasn't seen or heard, but made the backs of his hands prickle. Not spirits, of course, but perhaps just as worthy of attention. Rick had walked the bush long enough to know that there are such things as instincts and premonitions.

The trail thinned out presently. The columns of sunlight came through the mottled jungle roof at a sharper slant, and the life of the jungle took on the unreal quiet of the late Congo afternoon. Suddenly, almost without warning, the small safari entered a swampy patch where the trees were less thick and grew from patches of black water. A startled frog, the size of a small dog, leaped from a rotting log with a great splash, and a dark brown watersnake slithered out of the way inches from Rick's foot.

He turned. He smiled and held up his hand for the halt. "We have made good speed. Here we rest for the night!"

The porters, grinning back, started to dump their tusks.

A shot and ricochet knifed into the thick silence. A chip of bark flew from the tree just beside Rick at the level of his head.

"Down!" Rick yelled at the porters.

He followed his own advice. He threw himself flat in the next instant, and in the same motion arced the Mauser rifle to his shoulder. He rolled so that it pointed in the direction of the shot. Across the swamp, where the jungle came again to its edge, he could see a feather-scarf of gray smoke drifting. He held his sights firmly waiting for something to move.

But instead of seeing anything, he heard something. It was a loud, high-pitched voice and it spoke English with a trace of some accent he couldn't quite place. "Sorry, old man!" it called. "Didn't see you with the beggars at first! May I show myself?"

"Who are you?" Rick called angrily.

"Lavic's the name. Ferdinand Lavic—just hunting through here." And then a tall, barrel chested man in bush khakis stepped out from the trees. He held a bench-made Mannlicher-Schoenauer diagonally across his front. He wore a rakish South African felt with the brim fastened to the crown on one side and his laced cordovan boots were polished like mirrors even here in the deepest jungle. He was perhaps forty years old. His face was rough-hewn, reddish and pock-marked; he wore a sandy mustache brushed upward at the ends, and his eyes were a fierce, bright blue.

Rick got up. "You should be more careful where you shoot that fancy gun of yours," he said.

Lavic, coming forward now, laughed. "Forgive me, my friend. This jungle has been getting on my nerves. We haven't seen any game since we left the river."

"We?"

"The Countess Narcissa and myself," said Lavic. He tilted his head. "We've a small camp a mile or so from here, where there's a little stream. I should be honored if you would share dinner with us. And your name, sir?"

"Rick Thorne," said Rick. He kept looking at the man who called himself Lavic. He had decided that the man was either a hopeless roineck in the bush, or here for something other than hunting. This wasn't game country, at all; a man was lucky to find water buck for his porters in this part of the jungle. Rick said, "I can't delay very much. I'm anxious to get down-river before the rains set in."

"I assure you, Mr. Thorne, we won't delay you. We have some boxed India tea that might tempt you. And—"

The newcomer stopped talking suddenly. His restless eye had caught sight of the tusks lying on the ground.

"Ivory," said Rick, with faint sarcasm.

"Yes, I should say it is!" Lavic's eyes had widened. He stepped forward, knelt, ran his hands over one of the tusks and whistled.

"You seem to know good ivory when you see it," said Rick.

Lavic stood up and was all smiles again. "Oh, I dabble in collecting things, you know. I've a surface knowledge of ivory and jewels and that sort of thing."

Rick smiled. "You know your jungle pretty well, too, I'd say. You can tell those other people to come out of the bush and stop covering you, now."

Lavic's smile disappeared. His face fell. It was as though a mask had dropped—for just an instant there was evil etched deeply in that expression. Then once more he became affable. He made a half-bow. "I must congratulate you on remarkable eyesight, Mr. Thorne. No offense, of course, just ordinary caution." He turned back to the spot where he had appeared and called, "All right, Narcissa."

A WOMAN, accompanied by three blacks stepped into the clearing. This time it was Rick who felt like whistling. She was perhaps twenty yards away, but even at that distance he could see that she was remarkably beautiful. She was dark; her skin was olive. She had jet black hair pulled tightly around her head and fastened in the back. She wore a felt like Lavic's, with a soft veil of mosquito netting hanging from one side and swept under her chin to the opposite shoulder. Her loose khakis couldn't conceal her lithe form and graceful, almost catlike way of walking.

"Narcissa," said Lavic, half-bowing again, "permit me to present Mr. Rick Thorne. Mr. Thorne, this is the Countess Narcissa."

"How do you do, Mr. Thorne." Her voice was deep, throaty, and she was coming toward him with her hand extended. She wore dark red fingernail polish. It reminded Rick of a leopard's talons stained after a kill. "Please forgive our excessive caution, Mr. Thorne. We shot because we glimpsed only your blacks, and thought they might be hostile natives." Her voice had even more of an accent than Lavic's, but again, Rick couldn't tell just what sort of an accent it was.

"That's all right," said Rick. "It's one of those things." He took her hand, and it was firm, but ice cold. She smiled provocatively as she withdrew it.

Lavic said, "You will have supper with us, then?"

"Yes. All right," said Rick. "And thanks." He would have preferred the company of his own blacks and the jungle, but these were, after all, other whites, hundreds of miles from nowhere and it seemed courteous to accept.

"Look at the extraordinary ivory Mr. Thorne has acquired, my dear," Lavic said to the Countess.

She swept toward one of the fallen tusks. She knelt and stroked it. Rick half expected her to purr.

"It's not my ivory," Rick said. "I'm just taking it in for the Bilina. They make a yearly shipment of the stuff, and that's the only way they exist."

"The Bilina?" said the Countess. Somehow, her tone struck Rick as a little too innocent.

Rick said, "I'll tell you all about them on the way. We might as well head for your camp now. It gets dark quickly around these parts."

"Yes, of course," she said, smiling.

Rick turned to his porters and gave them the new directions. They frowned, as they shouldered the heavy tusks again, but as usual didn't question a decision of Bwana Rick's. Behind him Rick heard Lavic muttering to his own three blacks, but he didn't pay much attention to that just then. Moments later the whole party was swinging along a second game trail, with the big Tawani hacking the way in front, and Rick was telling Lavic and the Countess about the Bilina, and their yearly ivory shipment which they got from some mysterious source.

They hadn't been walking for five minutes when Rick noticed that only two of Lavic's natives were present. He frowned. "Where's your other boy?"

"Other boy?" said Lavic, innocently.

"There were three when the Countess came into the clearing—"

"Oh, yes, quite. Of course." Lavic spoke hastily now. "I sent one ahead to announce our coming. Warn the camp guards, you know."

Rick looked at Lavic sharply but the man's face was blank. Rick couldn't quite decide whether he was very shrewd or very foolish. He walked through the jungle with a kind of military stride—shoulders thrown back and bristling mustache thrust forward—and there was a suggestion of decadent aristocracy in his manner. Only it wasn't quite real; it didn't quite ring true.

Rick had dropped back a little now so that he paced along beside the Countess Narcissa. She smiled warmly at him. "I should think, Mr. Thorne," she said, "those huge ivory tusks would be a temptation."

"You mean to steal them from the Bilina?" He laughed. "Even if I wanted I wouldn't be able to sell them. The government regulates that."

"But there are ways to go beyond regulations, yes?"

"I suppose there are. I haven't made a study of it. I've spent most of my time in the jungle."

"Ah, then perhaps you have seen the elephants from which these tusks came. They must be tremendous beasts!"

Rick shook his head. "I doubt if any white man's ever seen them, or ever will. As far as I can gather they're in some sort of a hidden valley that only the Bilina know about."

"Yes, I think I had heard a rumor to that effect," said the Countess. Rick glanced at her and saw that she was looking ahead with a deeply thoughtful expression. She looked at him abruptly. Her dark eyes flicked back and forth, searching his face. She lowered her voice. "It is possible, is it not, that a man such as yourself, who knows much of the jungle, could find this hidden valley?"

Rick shrugged. "I might get to it. I don't mean to try, though."

"But with wealth like that you could have everything you wanted in the finest cities of the world. Perhaps you might want to form a—a partnership with someone amusing and pleasing to you. I am not unattractive, am I?"

This time he looked at her in slight surprise.

She laughed at him. "Why be shocked? I may be a countess but I have to live, like anyone else. I prefer to live well if I can. I am not above using any natural charms I may have in order to do it—"

At this point Lavic dropped back a little bit, possibly suspicious of the Countess's lowered voice. He grinned at her wolfishly, and then at Rick. "The Countess," he said, "always finds new guests interesting."

She ignored him and strode along with her face perfectly blank.

Rick sniffed campfire smoke in that moment. The trail widened here. Ahead he could see the pyramided sticks and gasoline drums converted to kettles that always marked a safari stop. He noticed vaguely that Lavic had moved to his side and was pressing closer. A sudden chill of instinctive warning went through him. This, too, wasn't quite right, not any of it—

Deafening volleys came suddenly from the foliage on both sides of the trail. It all happened in an instant. There were scattered blossoms of flame, each throbbing for a moment against the deepening jungle gloom, and there were rolls of gray smoke across the trail. Rick whirled and saw his porters dropping and catching themselves. He knew, in this same split second, that Lavic was responsible for the ambush.

He whirled toward Lavic. The big man, at the first sound of the shots, had already jumped at Rick, and now he grasped the Mauser rifle with both hands and attempted to wrest it away. Rick twisted it violently but Lavic hung on. He pulled the fancily dressed hunter off balance, so that they slammed together. Lavic was heavy and hard. It was Rick who stumbled backward. He bent his knees suddenly, and Lavic sailed over him, but the rifle was wrenched from both of them and fell with a thud to one side.

RICK leapt to his feet and turned, and saw that Lavic, behind him, had done the same thing. The two men faced each other now, looking for an opening. Lavic's mask of friendliness was gone and there was a cold, concentrated greed in his expression. Both men wore sidearms, but there was no time to draw. In the moment before Lavic rushed, Rick glimpsed the natives who had fired upon them and were leaping from the foliage into the trail now. He saw that they were

dressed in shorts and singlets, like askaris, and that each one carried a cheap carbine and an ammunition belt slung crosswise over his shoulder. Lavic, then, had brought his own little army into the Bilina country. Men didn't bring armies with them just to do some big game shooting.

Lavic came swinging. His arms were like massive cranes sweeping through the air. Rick ducked under the first blow and sent a hard jab to Lavic's midsection. There was slabbed muscle there; Lavic withstood the blow easily. Rick tried to slip a quick uppercut at the man's jaw but Lavic drew his elbows in and blocked it.

Then one of those wild swings landed. It struck Rick on the side of the head, making flashing lights appear before his eyes; making the jungle rock back and forth. Rick stumbled, and was going to rise again, but saw another sledgehammer blow coming his way and barely managed to dodge it. He slammed his shoulders into Lavic's knees then. Lavic went down. Rick scrambled to a crouching position and leapt, coming down upon Lavic spreadeagled. He straddled Lavic, braced his knees, and began to hook and slug, feeling the shock of his own blows in his wrists and knuckles as they landed. Lavic began to get glassy-eyed.

Suddenly, strong, rough hands pulled at Rick's shoulders. He turned. Several askaris apparently had finished their slaughter of the porters and were turning to him now. He tried to tear himself away, tried to pull from their grasps and get to his feet again to face them. It was no use. They snatched him from Lavic as if he had been a rag doll and worried him to an upright position.

Rick kicked and struggled like a madman. At one point he did actually break free, but they closed in on him again. Moments later they had him pinned to the ground. It took four of them to hold him there.

Lavic loomed over him now. Lavic was smiling, but not pleasantly.

Rick looked at him levelly and said, "So you're nothing but an ivory poacher, eh, Lavic? You don't think you'll get away with this, do you?"

"But of course I will get away with it, my friend," said Lavic, laughing. "No one but us will ever know it happened. You see, it's a kind of insurance. I'm not certain I will find this hidden valley where the huge tusks come from, but at least I can return with this little shipment of yours. It will pay for some of the trouble and expense I've undertaken."

So that was why Lavic was in the Bilina country, thought Rick. Somehow he must have heard of the hidden valley, and the giant elephants there, and reasoned correctly that if a man could bring back as few as fifty of those tremendous tusks he would have a sizeable fortune. And Lavic, as the Countess had suggested, probably knew how to market them without running afoul of the authorities. There was only one puzzling question. "How did you know the Bilina had a hidden valley where their ivory came from?" Rick asked.

Lavic smiled. "When one knocks around the world as I have done," he said cryptically, "one makes friends."

"And enemies," said Rick, staring at him flatly.

"Perhaps. But I'll not worry about you, Mr. Thorne."

"If you're thinking of killing me," said Rick, "I wouldn't advise it. A lot of people know me in the territory. If I don't show up on schedule with that shipment of ivory a lot of people are going to start looking for me. If I'm found murdered they'll hunt you down wherever you are."

This time Lavic laughed hugely. He turned to the Countess and said, "He underestimates me, does he not?" The Countess was frowning thoughtfully. Lavic looked at Rick again. He shook his head. "No, my friend," he said, "I'll not be so crude as to shoot you. That would be messy, no? What I have in mind is very simple. I will tie you firmly to one of these large trees with rawhide. You will starve, or perhaps fall prey to some marauding beast. But by the time you are found the rawhide will have rotted away—it doesn't last very long without care in the damp jungle. Thus you will simply, be found dead and with no evidence that you were forcibly detained. What do you think of that? Rather clever, is it not?"

Rick didn't answer. Nothing to do now but save his strength, and hope for a break of some kind.

Lavic turned abruptly to his askaris and barked a series of harsh orders.

A moment later they had propped Rick against a thick-boled bambo tree and were winding strips of rawhide firmly about him. Rick said nothing. Not even when the rawhide bit more tightly than necessary here and there did he make a sound.

The Countess stepped up to him, looked at him for a moment, then shrugged. "I am sorry," she said. "Ferdinand is right, of course. It is necessary we have your ivory in case our other plan fails. Too bad we must leave you like this but that is the way things sometimes happen, eh?"

Rick still didn't answer. Or change his flat expression. But now that he could no longer depend on the Countess having change of heart or mind, he felt that his last slim hope was suddenly gone.

Chapter III

IT WAS near sundown when Sheena, Chim and the fat sub-chief, K'ando, entered the main village of the Bilina. The shadows behind the huts and stakes of the stockade were long; the light over everything was reddish and faintly unreal. The Bilina warriors were drawn up in ranks on either side of the central clearing, for the drums had told of Sheena's and K'ando's approach, and the Bilina had made ready to welcome them.

Sheena strode, as always, with her shoulders thrown back and her head held high. There was queenliness in her every step. The warriors she passed sensed this somehow, and held themselves a little straighter. They were tall warriors, these Bilina; magnificently formed and without the usual scars and tatoo marks to mar their fine bodies. They carried shields fashioned of strips of the famed Bilina ivory; their spears were broad-bladed, glistening and sharp; they wore plumed headdresses that added another foot to their height.

At the end of the clearing another tall native sat in a kind of insolent sprawl on a hassock covered with leopard skin. Even at this distance Sheena could see that his eyes were steady upon her. They were deep-set coffee-black eyes, and they seemed to lurk in caves cut into a face chiseled out of black granite. This man wore two sidepieces of miniature ivory tusks which started at his headband and curved down along the sides of his cheeks like sharp fangs.

K'ando, only a step behind Sheena, whispered to her. "It is Poko Na—head of the Spirit Men who waits to greet you. This is bad. Only the Paramount Chief should greet Sheena—"

Sheena nodded, strode forward a little more and then abruptly Poko Na lifted a hand, palm outward. His voice was shrill but penetrating. And to her surprise he spoke English, clipped, Oxford English that sounded doubly incongruous coming from this barbarously decked savage. "Sorry," he said. "You'll have to stop and kneel. Proper sign of respect, and all that. Quite necessary to maintain my position with these savages."

Sheena took only a moment to raise her eyebrows in surprise, then recovered herself quickly. With subtle contempt she answered in Bilina dialect, rather than English. "Sheena," she said, "asks no one to bow to her. Nor does she bow to anyone."

Now Poko Na raised his eyebrows. "Dear, dear," he said. "I'd hoped you wouldn't be stubborn, you know. I'm afraid I must insist. And if you refuse—" He glanced toward the warriors lined up on either side.

For an answer Sheena kept walking forward.

"Kaa-ti! Lai-e-te!" Poko Na barked at the warriors. His command was directed to four exceptionally tall blacks who flanked him.

They jumped toward Sheena. Sheena moved so quickly that she was but a blur. She leapt forward and met the first of the warriors before he was halfway to her. He never had a chance to raise his spear. She bent swiftly, slammed her shoulder blades into his middle and then, grasping him by the legs and neck, swung him up on her shoulders. She spun three times, her feet twinkling gracefully as in a pirouette. At the end of the third spin she let the big warrior fly from her shoulders and slam horizontally into the next two, bowling them over.

The fourth warrior stood there, surprised, hesitant. In a half-hearted way he raised a spiked club, as if to throw it.

Sheena scooped the first warrior's fallen spear from the ground. She grasped it near the blade with her hands slightly apart, took a few running steps and chunked the haft into the ground. Her own momentum carried her up and forward, as in a pole vault. She swung her feet forward as she sailed thus through the air, and her heels, close together, slammed into the fourth warrior's jaw, making an audible crack!

He staggered backward, then fell.

Sheena dropped lightly to her feet, whirled, and raised both of her arms. All of it had taken only several seconds, and the remaining warriors were gaping in surprise. "Hear, Bilina warriors!" she cried. "Sheena comes only to help, and never in anger! A great magic protects Sheena. There is only death and sorrow for any who would harm her!"

The blacks looked at each other nervously and several muttered among themselves. Sheena turned to face Poko Na again. He was smiling. "Very good, indeed, Sheena. Let us say you have won—this round, at least. I don't choose to make an issue of the matter right now."

"You show wisdom," said Sheena, with just an edge of sarcasm.

Poko Na turned to the left and clapped his hands. Several blacks went scurrying off to the area behind the huts. "You must be tired from your journey. We will feast. Then you may tell me why you have come to call. Although—" and here he glanced at K'ando—"I daresay I can guess."

Another leopard-skin hassock was brought for Sheena and she sat there, waiting patiently, while Chim hopped to her shoulder and glared at Poko Na to whom he'd evidently taken an instant dislike. A moment later women and older men began to appear from behind the huts carrying long handled dipper cups made of hollowed bamboo trunks. Each of the warriors was handed one of these—and Sheena noticed that they drank avidly. They gulped the stuff, then threw the cups away haphazardly for the women and old men to pick up.

Poko Na saw her watching and smiled. "Kaffir beer, you know, such as you find at any kraal. But with a slight difference. I spike the stuff with millet alcohol. They're forbidden to go near the little distillery I've set up out there in the jungle. They think I've some magic power that makes the beer into a 'drink of courage' as they call it. Clever, what?"

Sheena met his eyes. "Yes. I suppose it is clever. And I suppose there's a reason behind it."

"There might be," admitted Poko Na cheerfully. "Hardly your affair, though, is it?"

"What happens to the Bilina, or any other tribe, is always Sheena's affair," she said levelly. "K'ando's told me how you've organized a group of Spirit Men within the tribe, and how they exact tribute from the others. I don't like that."

"You are rather meddlesome, aren't you?" said Poko Na, meeting her stare. "I'd heard of Sheena before I returned—some rather foolish missionaries provided for my education, you know—but frankly I didn't expect this sort of interference."

"Speaking of interference," said Sheena, "where's the paramount chief?"

Poko Na looked pious. "He met with a most unfortunate accident in the jungle. Leopard, we believe."

"You murdered him," she said flatly.

Poko Na smiled, but didn't answer.

"And who becomes chief now?"

"Nominally, your friend, K'ando," Poko Na said. "But he can't receive the kaross of his office until the next full moon."

"That will be in a few days."

"Yes. Quite. And, of course, quite a lot can happen in a few days, can't it?"

"I see," said Sheena. One of the women set a steaming bowl of maize pudding before her, but she made no move to touch it. She kept looking at Poko Na. "Another question. What of the white hunter, Rick Thorne, and the tribe's shipment of ivory? Has there been any word?"

"A messenger will return here and report when he reaches the river," said Poko Na. Then he smiled just a little mysteriously and said, "If he reaches the river."

IT WAS clear to Sheena by now that much was going on behind the scenes; some of it she could guess, and some of it she could only wonder about. That Poko Na meant to rule the tribe in one way or another was pretty evident. Apparently, while the paramount chief still lived, he had been unable to stop the shipment of ivory that he was to take to the coast. But Sheena was convinced that Poko Na had no intention of letting that ivory reach the coast, and the tribe derive the benefits of its sale. It was her guess that Poko Na meant to get for himself all the wealth of the tribe, and then leave the jungle and return to civilization with his new fortune.

While Sheena was thinking of these things there was a sudden clamor at the gate of the stockade yards behind her. The warriors all turned their heads that way and Poko Na rose. Sheena turned. Two old men who acted as gatekeepers were swinging the big portals back, and as they did so a tall warrior, glistening with perspiration staggered in. He was panting. He made his way directly to Poko Na, knelt, spread his hands out before him and kept his head down.

"Speak!" Poko Na commanded.

"White men approach, O Spirit Chief!" said the black. He pointed to the northwest. "We saw them from the Hill of Drums, followed by porters and askaris, crossing the Yellow Plain."

"They come this way?" Poko Na was frowning.

The black shook his head. "They move toward the sacred mountains."

Poko Na swept his eyes over the clearing, his brows still knotted in thought. Finally he looked again at the messenger and said, "Tonight I ask the spirits. They will advise."

Sheena and K'ando at this point traded glances. Something wrong here—normal behavior would have been for Poko Na to form a war party and investigate the newcomers immediately. Sheena herself glanced momentarily at the open gate and then when she looked at K'ando again she saw that the fat sub-chief had read her mind. He, too, obviously thought an investigation of this white man's safari would be a good idea. Only it was probable that Poko Na for some reason might not care to have Sheena leave and make such a reconnaissance.

She decided not to wait for Poko Na's permission.

Just as the messenger was rising to back away respectfully Sheena moved. She sprang from her hassock almost too quickly for the eye to follow—certainly too quickly for the warrior's brains to react. She snatched a spear from one of Poko Na's personal guards, raced the length of the clearing, her blonde hair streaming out behind her, and Chim clinging precariously to her neck. The gatekeepers recovered from their surprise in that moment and started to swing shut the big bamboo portals. Sheena, still running, threw the spear. It passed between the closing gates, frightening the gatekeepers and making them pull away to either side. She heard Poko Na's harsh voice calling out behind her: "Close it! Fools, close the gate!" But it was too late. She had already reached the gate and was passing through the slim aperture. Spears fluttered in the air. The edge of the jungle was just ahead, and only a few steps away a hanging ngoji vine led to the leafy heights of a giant tree.

She sprang, curved gracefully through the air, and grasped the vine. Using her hands alone she sped upward, Chim still hanging on for dear life, and a moment later disappeared in the thick foliage. She raced through the treetops then, leaping, swinging, running along the sturdier branches, and a few minutes later the shouting of the Bilina warriors, the Spirit Men, was far behind.

But another sound caught up with her. Before another minute had passed she heard the excited pock-pock-pock-pock of war drums? and then, ahead of her, another sort of drumming, low and rumbling thunder. She glanced several times through clear spaces in the treetops and saw the boiling cloud ahead, rising high over a patch of jungle. It was one of those swift evening thunderstorms that begin just before rainy season. She saw that she would have to pass through it to make her way to the sacred mountains.

RICK felt the first cold splashes of the rain on his cheeks and he raised tired, heavy-lidded eyes and looked up. He could see only mottled patches of the sky through the leafy roof of the jungle, but he saw now that these mottled patches were gray. The sunlight shafts had disappeared. It was becoming darker. Lightning flashed suddenly, throbbing in a great ghostly sheet for only an instant, then disappearing again. Seconds later the thunder came. It crashed and rocked like a stampede of giant buffalos through the jungle. Rick raised his lips hungrily to the rain. They were parched and cracked by now, and his tongue was swollen. He had spent a long night, and then a hot, steaming day lashed to the tree here. Through the night, and during the first few hours of the morning he had managed to stay awake, keeping himself as still and calm as possible and conserving his strength. He knew it was hopeless to struggle in his bonds. Hanging on to consciousness, and to life itself, was the only thing he could do.

Before the morning was half gone, however, the grayness and then the blackness had descended. At one part of the day the moving sun had sent a baking shaft of heat down upon his head, making it throb so painfully that he awoke for a while.

But here was water—life-giving water—pouring upon him. His head cleared. New strength surged through him and his vision stopped being fuzzy.

He heard an insane laughing sound to his right. He whirled his head in that direction. Hyenas. The ugly, striped beasts were feeding on the bodies of the porters Lavic's ambush had shot down. They would rip and tear at the dead flesh, snarling, quarreling with each other, and gorging themselves as if they would never have another meal in their lives.

Once one of the larger beasts turned his head, curled his bloody lips and bared his fangs for a moment at him. He knew he would be safe as long as the feast there in the jungle trail lasted.

He shuddered at the sight of their shoddy manes and ugly, hump-backed bodies. Then he felt a queer, soft movement of the bonds holding him to the tree. Puzzled, he glanced down. The rawhide was beginning to be slippery with the rain that soaked it.

Sudden hope surged through him. The rain would stretch the rawhide—maybe enough for him to work himself free. The bonds seemed somewhat looser already. He strained against them with his whole body, bracing his back and heels against the tree, and they did slip a little—but not quite enough yet to release him. He had to get out of them somehow, now, because if he stayed here after the thunderstorm went away the rawhide, drying, would shrink with a steel grip and crush him to death!

He renewed his efforts. He was weak and numb, but somehow he made himself press with a demon's strength on the rawhide encircling him. He groaned once with the pain of the effort. He bit his lips and blood trickled down his chin.

Again one of those insane, hysterical barks of a hyena. Rick looked that way. The big beast who seemed to be the leader of the pack had taken several steps toward him and was staring at him quizzically. His ugly black nostrils were twitching. The animal's remarkable sense of smell had detected the fresh blood on his chin. Watching the beast's eyes, and its very movements, he could almost read its mind. Here was something with the hated smell of the man

thing wounded, which didn't move. Which seemed to be helpless and might be eaten. But still, the man-smell meant always that there should be caution.

Rick became suddenly as still as possible. The hyena moved forward a few steps more, cocking its head and snuffling softly this time. Its belly was already distended with food, but the hyena is one of the few jungle beasts who will gorge himself whenever possible, even to the extent of eating himself into a stupor. Rick tried to breathe so easily that the rise and fall of his chest wouldn't show. This was difficult, with his heart pounding at his ribs. For Rick had a plan: a long chance that might or might not work.

The rain was still falling. Beyond the thickness of the jungle it came in a steady downpour, but under the leafy roof it came in scattered streams, where leaves and branches caught it and sent it pouring. The rawhide was definitely stretching now. Rick could feel the circulation returning to his wrists and ankles, prickling painfully. Now, as he watched, the hyena's snout came forward and sniped at the rawhide. Rick didn't even dare move his eyes.

Abruptly a faint sound came to his ears. It was muffled, and partially blanketed by the hushed roar of falling rain, but it seemed to come from the treetops somewhere to his left, and it was, he swore, a sound he had heard before. A familiar sound. To most ears it might have been simply a cry of a jungle crane. Certainly it was intended to sound like one. But there was an individual tone to this cry—one that Rick, if he heard rightly, recognized. It was Sheena's call; she used it to summon Chim without announcing her own presence.

Hu-eeeeee—weeeee! He heard it again, louder, nearer, and unmistakably Sheena's.

At this moment the hyena slashed viciously with its fangs. It bit deeply into the rawhide, weakening it. Rick made a sudden effort, straining until his temples throbbed—and the bonds parted. He fell away from the tree. His feet and ankles were numb and he was completely unable to stand.

At Rick's first movement the hyena had been startled, so that it jumped back with the sparse hairs on its humped back bristling. Now it glared at the helpless man-thing and laughed hideously. Saliva drooled from the corners of its mouth. It edged forward again. Others of the pack, seeing their leader, trotted over too.

Rick lifted his head. From his lips then came the shrill cry of a jungle crane: Hue-eeeeee—weeeee! The beasts retreated again, but only for a moment. In that moment there was the sound of the rain and the thunder now distant—but no answer to Rick's signal.

The hyenas came forward once more.

"Get! Go on!" Rick shouted at them; this time they paid no attention. They kept coming. "Hueeeeeee—weeeee!" He made the cry again—a little desperately now.

THE largest of the hyenas was already upon him. He could feel its fetid breath, hot in his face. He struggled to rise, but his legs were without strength, and the needles of blood returning to circulation were sheer agony. He knew he wouldn't be able to get away. His hands, too, were stiff from the tight rawhide that had held them to his sides for so long, but now the only thing left to do was to try to use them. He raised them, to clutch at the hyena's throat. The

other hyenas started to gather around, snarling and making hysterical, yapping noises.

A slim, tawny figure came down from the treetops abruptly. Sheena! Her limbs glistened with the jungle rain and even as she struck the ground she began to slash about with her Arab poniard.

The hyenas screamed, and tried to scuttle away. Sheena picked up the largest of them bodily and threw him at the others. Seconds later, the carrion-eaters had disappeared completely, and only then did Sheena turn to Rick.

Sheena did not have the civilized habit of wasting words. She smiled just a little, knelt quickly by Rick's side. She searched Rick's smoky-gray eyes and said, "Tell me what happened?"

Briefly he sketched in his adventures since leaving the Bilina village with the load of ivory and Sheena's eyes roamed about as he talked, seeing the rawhide strands, and the spoor all about, and confirming his report by sight. She nodded when he had finished. She told him then how K'ando had come to her for help, and how they had found Poko Na in power at the village. "When the safari was reported—and that would be your friends, Lavic and the Countess," said Sheena—"he failed to call for a war party. There was something wrong in that."

"Yes." Rick was frowning thoughtfully. Chim had appeared by this time and was at the moment greeting Rick by nibbling softly at his ear and mussing his hair. Rick chuckled and stroked the monkey. Then he looked at Sheena. "Lavic seemed confident he'd find the hidden valley where the big tusks come from. He wouldn't be that sure unless he had some help in the tribe itself."

Sheena nodded. "This was also my thought."

"We can't let him get away with this, Sheena. There are some things in the jungle that are best left hidden. If we allow one man to invade, others will follow."

"True." Sheena nodded again.

"Besides," said Rick, "I've got a score to settle with that fellow Lavic." The feeling was returning to his limbs now and he was able to rise shakily. The thunderstorm had passed, but darkness was falling. In the very tops of the trees some of the leaves were turning a soft yellow in the light of the fat, waxing moon rising over the forbidden mountains to the east.

"Lavic crosses the Yellow Plain now," said Sheena. "I was on my way to look upon his safari, to see what I might learn."

"We will do it together then," said Rick. "Only I'm afraid I'd better eat first—"

Sheena smiled briefly, then rose abruptly and said, "Wait here." Before he could answer she had turned and disappeared as if by magic into the jungle. A minute later he heard the sharp twang of her bow. And the minute after that she appeared holding a small antelope by the hind legs.

When Rick had eaten and felt stronger they set out through the jungle toward the big plain, using the method they had employed on a hundred forest trails. Sheena led the way by the treetop route, calling from time to time to keep Rick in touch, and Rick pushed through on the ground, taking to the treetops himself only when the underbrush became too thick for passage. The moon was already far above the horizon when they finally emerged upon the sloping plain that led to the jagged mountains.

Here Sheena climbed a high tree and looked all about. There was enough moonlight so that her sharp eyes would detect any moving thing larger than a

jackal upon the plain. When she came down again she was wearing a puzzled frown. "Rick," she said, "there is no safari in sight."

"That's strange," he said. "Maybe they've already reached the mountains and found a camp for the night."

"They haven't had time to reach the mountains. If they had struck a camp their fire would be visible."

Rick scratched his head. "Well, they were real enough when they ambushed me and slaughtered my porters."

He was standing by a large bush which had long-pointed, reddish leaves and from which hung a bulbous, pale yellow fruit. He reached for one of the bulbs absent-mindedly, plucked it, and brought it to his mouth.

Chim started abruptly to chatter madly. He leapt at Rick. He knocked the fruit from his hand, then jumped up and down excitedly on his feet and knuckles.

"Hey! Chim!" said Rick. "Don't you want me to have desert?"

Sheena bent swiftly and took the fruit from the monkey's hand. She glanced at it, then up at Rick. She smiled a bit. "You'd better thank Chim," she said quietly. "He's just saved your life."

"What!"

She handed the fruit to him. "Karatonga. Quite a bit of it grows around here. Witch doctors slice and dry the bulb, then make powder they use to poison their enemies. Chim, like all monkeys, has an instinct for these things. Long ago, when I could still be lost in the jungle, I made a habit of following tribes of monkeys and baboons and eating only what they touched—"

Rick, smiling, turned to Chim, bowed and said, "My apologies, old boy." Chim grinned by peeling his lips back over his teeth, hopped up and down again and said, "Chee! Chee! Chee! Chee! Chee!"

"Well," said Rick, turning to Sheena again. "I guess the thing to do is cross this plain now and make a good search for Lavic and his slinky girl friend."

Sheena looked thoughtful, shook her head and said, "There's a better way. K'ando knows every inch of this country. He told me that as a boy he even found the way into the hidden valley. This may be where Lavic and his safari has disappeared. We'll do best to get K'ando now and then look for these people in the morning."

"Lead the way," said Rick.

Before they were within a mile of the Bilina village Sheena and Rick knew something was wrong—very wrong. They could see the red light flickering upward from the stockade, tinting the sky above it, and they could hear the throbbing of a symphony of drums. The smaller drums made a swift patter, which played against the slower, heavier booming of the signal logs.

"Go slowly and keep to the shadows," Sheena warned Rick.

Chapter IV

SHE left his side abruptly and swung into the treetops, with Chim scurrying after her. Moments later she squatted quietly at the crook of a branch in a towering jungle giant overlooking the stockade. Here the drums were sharp and savage in her ears. Several huge fires in the center of the clearing threw

everything into a flickering crimson light. The Bilina warriors were in two shuffling lines, dancing hypnotically back and forth to the drums. But tonight, instead of wearing mere warrior's dress, each was clad in a rough imitation of some animal: there were jackal capes, leopard heads, buffalo horns, elephant tusks—the variations were endless. Poko Na, a sarcastic smile on his thin lips, sat again on his hassock at the end of the clearing.

The warriors were chanting softly. Sheena caught just enough words to understand that this was a ceremony of the Spirit Men, and that the spirit of the animal he imitated was supposed to dwell in each warrior. As she watched, the drums stopped again and frightened women made haste to dip the bamboo cups in the vat of kaffir beer by the main hut. They ran with their libations to the warriors, who gulped, and then continued to dance.

She whispered to Chim, "He's not exciting them like that without reason."

Chim didn't understand, but he nodded and grunted just as if he had.

Her eyes darted all around the clearing now, searching for K'ando's bulky form. It wasn't anywhere. And then she saw the two guards standing before the entrance to a small hut on the other side of the village, near the plaintain grove. She could guess the rest. K'ando would oppose Poko Na in whatever he was up to—and Poko Na had taken care of that by imprisoning K'ando, probably on some flimsy excuse.

There was the soft chirping of a tree frog below her and Sheena knew Rick had reached the spot under her tree. She scrambled down again. "K'ando's been imprisoned," she said softly and quickly. "Here's what we'll do." Swiftly she outlined the plan.

It was most strange, that which happened in the village of the Bilina that night. Poko Na, Chief of the Spirit Men, suspected the cause of it all—but he couldn't very well air his suspicions to the others. That would have shaken their faith in him.

It started when the Leopard Warrior stepped into the clear space between the two shuffling lines to do his solo dance. No sooner was he in the clear, and scarcely had he taken three steps when the unearthly scream of a leopard came from the quiet, dark jungle.

The drums stopped; everyone stared in the direction of the cry.

"Play! Do not stop!" Poko Na roared at the drummers.

They started again; the Leopard Warrior finished and stepped back into line.

The Buffalo warrior came forward. He began to shuffle. This time it was the bellow of a wounded buffalo that sounded, startling them.

Again the drums stopped, and again Poko Na shouted for them to continue. But by now the warriors were staring fearfully at the jungle beyond the stockade.

When the coughing roar of a lion greeted the Lion Warrior's appearance it was just too much for them. And for Poko Na, too. He was clearly shaken. He stood, pointed to the jungle and said, "Hunt the beasts! Hunt them down!" The warriors gripped their spears and poured from the stockade and began to beat the bush noisily. In a high tree, Rick lowered his cupped hands that he had used to make the lion cry, and grinned.

On the far side of the stockade there was a swift blur against the dark jungle green and a slim figure clinging to a ngoji vine sailed gracefully over the pointed logs and dropped into the village. The two guards at the door of the prison hut

barely had time to turn and see Sheena. They opened their eyes in surprise—and she was upon them.

She grabbed the first by the wrist, spun and threw him over her shoulder. He struck the ground with a hard thud, knocking the breath from him. The other drew his spear back to thrust it. Sheena slipped in under the spear, grabbed it, and twisted it out of the man's grasp. She kept her hold near the blade and swung the weapon. The haft struck him in the temple, knocking him down.

There was no time to undo the rawhide knots that held the door of K'ando's prison. Sheena slashed them with her knife. She kicked the door in and saw the fat sub-chief standing there in the middle of the hut, gaping at her in amazement.

"Come!" said Sheena.

He followed her, still half-bewildered. The ngoji vine still hung limply at the stockade wall. Sheena somehow managed to help K'ando take his huge bulk to the top of the wall, grasp the vine and swing to the other side. He tossed it back to her then, and she climbed it swiftly, then dropped lightly to his side.

She led the way and a moment later both of them disappeared into the jungle.

The Spirit Warriors, some time later, returned empty-handed from their hunt, and found the dazed guards and the open prison. Poko Na was forced to agree that it was probably the work of dark forces, and invisible things of the jungle night. But now he had resolved that Sheena, when he caught her, would die. Such an able adversary was much too dangerous to have around.

K'ando lost no time in explaining to Sheena and Rick what had happened, and what he had now learned of Poko Na's plans. After his rescue, and after the warriors had returned to the stockade the three of them, with Chim, set out for the sloping plain and the sacred mountains again. In deference to K'ando they took the route that circled the jungle. He puffed along beside them, moving quickly and with surprising grace on his fat little legs, and his endurance never seemed to waver.

"He spoke freely with me, since he was sure I would die," the fat chief told Sheena. "First he claimed that by bringing Sheena I had angered the spirits, and that was the cause of the white man's safari invading the land of the Bilina. Thus, I was imprisoned until there should be a sign of guilt or innocence. Later, he talked to me in the prison hut. Poko Na cares not for the tribe—he wants only to have white man's riches so that he may return to the white man's civilization and be powerful."

"I suspected as much," said Sheena.

"His plan is to take all of the Bilina's ivory from the hidden valley that he can have carried. I know not exactly in what manner. But he has made a pact with the white man you call Lavic, who even now descends into the hidden valley."

Rick understood enough interior dialect to get the meaning of K'ando's words and he said to Sheena, "That might explain how the whole safari disappeared so quickly."

"Poko Na, himself," continued K'ando, "would be unable to sell the ivory without having the government men ask many questions. Lavic has greater wisdom in this matter, therefore he is necessary to the scheme. Poko Na told Lavic the way here and the way into the valley—the way you will also see presently. It is arranged that Poko Na will lead the Spirit Men in a false attack upon Lavic, and allow Lavic to escape with whatever ivory he has stolen by

then. In this way, none will blame Poko Na for the white man's raid. That was why Poko Na made the dancing and the drinking of the magic liquid longer tonight. Thus, Lavic will not be attacked too soon. And when the attack does come, the warriors will be both tired and drugged."

Rick glanced at Sheena dryly and said, "A man of Poko Na's talent ought to do well in civilization."

They pushed on in silence for a while after that. Sheena frowned thoughtfully all the time and Rick, who had been about to speak to her on several occasions, kept silent. He knew from experience that she was planning their next move now.

The walk through the grassy plain which was broken by flat-topped camel thorn and little hillocks here and there, was long and monotonous, and when the moon had reached mid-sky, Sheena suggested that they halt and rest. "There will be many things to do tomorrow," she added cryptically.

THE next morning they marched again, before the sun was high and while the mists were still streaming from the lowlands on their left. They had been moving diagonally across the plains all this time, so that they had been ascending gradually, and were now nearer the jagged mountains that grew like a vast crocodile spine along the land.

They came presently to a low kopje that was crowned by a rock outcropping which resembled an elephant's head with the ears spread.

"This is the entrance to the hidden valley," said K'ando, stopping.

Rick looked around. "Where?"

K'ando smiled, then scrambled with remarkable agility up the side of the kopje until he came to the outcropping. He beckoned to Rick and Sheena. They followed and then saw that a narrow cave entrance was in the rock, artfully concealed by scrub thorn and a hump of ground before it.

K'ando led the way. A long, dark passageway was before them and presently even Sheena, whose eyes were used to the jungle night, couldn't see their guide ahead. She followed the sound of K'ando's soft footsteps. It seemed that they descended as they went along, but Sheena knew this was an illusion of most tunnels. After a while a spot of light showed ahead. They moved on, and the spot grew and then Sheena saw that it was the other end of the tunnel.

They came out on a small rock platform perhaps half the size of a planter's porch. Sheena stepped to the edge of it, looked down and then drew in her breath sharply. She was atop a cliff that dropped away for about a thousand feet.

She looked around behind her and saw that a thin ridge of mountains blocked this place from the sight of anyone outside. She knelt and stared again into the deep valley. There was lush foliage below; it covered the floor of the basin like a thick carpet and the color of it was a curious bright, poisonous green, not quite like the dull green of ordinary jungle. Mists rose, too, and here and there she caught the reflection of swampy water.

K'ando was examining the ground. He called to Sheena and when she came over to him he pointed silently. The footprint of a heavy boot was clear in the yellow earth. "The white man has passed this way," said K'ando.

Sheena looked around. "But where has he gone?"

K'ando smiled then and waddled quickly to the other side of the platform. He beckoned, they followed and presently saw a sturdy bamboo contraption set in

the ground behind a boulder. It was a windlass, fashioned to hold a tremendous coil of vine-rope. The rope led over the edge and Sheena saw that it was knotted at intervals. K'ando said, "It is the only way in or out of the valley. By this we descend, and by this we haul the tusks to the top. The swamp below breeds huge elephants: many die and their bones are found in many places. It is not as necessary to hunt and slay them."

Rick, bending over the edge, looked down and frowned. "I can just barely make out the bottom. Lavic and his pals don't seem to be around."

"Exploring the valley, probably," said Sheena. "This would be a good time for us to descend. If we can perhaps block their way out of the valley we may be able to keep them from taking the Bilina ivory." She turned to the chief. "Lead the way, K'ando."

He shook his head then. "It would be best if I return and watch the village. From there I can spy upon Poko Na, and know what move he is about to make next."

"Very well, then," said Sheena, nodding. "But Rick and I shall return to help before another nightfall. How shall we find you?"

"In the second village toward the place where the sun sets there will be those who know my whereabouts," K'ando said. Suddenly he brought his head up, then cocked it in an attitude of listening.

"K'ando listens?" asked Sheena.

He frowned wrinkling his mighty brows. "It seems that the drums draw near. I cannot be certain." Then he smiled and shrugged again and said, "Go now, my friend. K'ando will greet you again and share meat."

When he had disappeared into the tunnel again, Sheena led the way down the face of the cliff. Rick followed and Chim chattered along behind. Chim didn't need the rope all of the way. Several times he swung over and clung to sheer wall itself, chattering and grinning, while Rick stared at him in amazement.

Sheena might have descended a little more swiftly but she held her pace for Rick's benefit. When they were several hundred feet below the edge the rope began to sway perilously with their weight. "Hold tight" said Sheena.

The wind suddenly moaned and whistled along the cliff face and tugged at Sheena as she clung to the knotted rope. But in spite of the wind the air was warmer now. It was heavier, more sluggish, and there was the beginning of a strange, thick smell, a blend of rotting vegetation and stagnant swamp.

And now the mist thickened and they passed through a thin cloud layer, and after a while they were at the level of the treetops. Sheena looked around. The trees were unlike any she had ever known: they didn't grow with solid trunks and sprouting branches, but rather in thick clusters of fronds that spread out as they reached upward. In effect they weren't trees at all, they were giant ferns.

The earth was spongy and moist, so that it gave slightly under Sheena's weight, and about a hundred feet out from the cliff she saw that most of it was covered with swamp water. Here also the jungle of great ferns began.

They heard the chunking of a bush-knife and the chatter of askaris and porters some distance off to the left.

"The swamp," said Sheena, pointing.

She led the way down the short talus slope at the foot of the cliff and into the thick growth of curious trees. There were little ridges and islands of soft loam that provided places to walk. The three of them faded into the dim, perfumed

miasma of the place, crowded behind one of the trees, whose trunk was covered with crosshatched scales rather than bark. From here they watched silently.

An askari came to the foot of the cliff first; the green-stained bush-knife in his hand showed that he had been hacking the way. He was followed by a line of fearful-eyed porters, each one staggering under a tremendous tusk. It was clear that Lavic had found the Bilina cache of dead ivory.

Now the askaris in their sketchy uniforms came along. Even they were carrying tusks. As each tusk-bearer came to the foot of the cliff he dumped his load with obvious relief near a large wicker basket that was attached to the rope from the top.

Lavic and the Countess Narcissa were last. They were flushed, smiling: this was a moment of triumph for them. Sheena's eyes narrowed a little when she saw the Countess. With more than passing interest she regarded the woman's lithe walk, her dark, smooth skin and olive eyes, and the way she managed complete poise. Sheena glanced at Rick and knew from his careful stare that he found the Countess of more than passing interest. Her woman's instinct told her that any man would. Sheena felt, without quite understanding why, an intense desire to be locked in combat with this tigerish woman—to battle by both wit and strength to overcome her.

But she pushed back that feeling and made herself concentrate on the business at hand.

Lavic—his polished boots glistening wherever the mud of the swamp hadn't touched them, strode to the pile of ivory, gestured with a coiled whip and barked commands. The porters lifted two tusks and placed them crosswise in the basket. Lavic pointed upward then and called to another two. Immediately they sprang to the rope and began to climb, one after the other.

Sheena whispered to Rick. "He will lift the ivory to the top with the turning handle, then the rest will follow and leave the valley."

Rick said, "Suppose we attack them."

"No attack," whispered Sheena quickly "I've a better plan." Easily and silently she slipped the nahete wood bow from her shoulders and fitted an arrow to it. Then she turned and peered into the greenish swamp behind them. She pointed, "You and Chim must go further back so they won't find you if they start looking."

"What are you going to do?" Rick asked.

She shook her blonde tresses. "No time to explain now. Move quickly."

Rick shrugged, took Chim by the hand, and picked his way for another hundred feet or so into the swamp. Glancing back before he moved off he saw that Sheena was clambering swiftly up the tree with the scaly trunk. A few feet further on she was out of sight. But there was another tree here in the swamp that seemed easy to climb, a twisted, spiraling growth that was like a giant vine. Rick mounted this, beckoning Chim to follow. In the upper branches that bent and swayed under his weight, he found he could see Lavic's party and the pile of ivory by the basket elevator, and he could see the tree near the edge of the swamp that Sheena had climbed.

There was a faint movement in the foliage to Rick's right. He turned his head and found himself looking at a reptilian head swaying atop a long, undulating neck. It was bigger than a horse's head. Sharp teeth, like a crocodile's, overlapped the folds of its mouth. Its eyes were small, cold and beady.

Rick's jaw fell. He couldn't quite believe it even as he saw it there in front of him. It was unquestionably a saurian monster that should have been extinct for several million years!

The monster's jaws parted, showing double rows of sharp, jagged teeth and the feverish pink lining of its mouth.

Chapter V

FERDINAND LAVIC straightened his shoulders a bit and smiled very slightly, so that he himself could enjoy the smile without seeming to show the weakness of good humor to his porters and askaris. He looked at the first two tusks which had been loaded in the basket, and then at the larger pile of tusks beside it. Magnificent tusks. Most of them at least twice as large as the best teeth of even the Tala Forest in Rhodesia. Scattered along the coast, and in the ports of North Africa, there were crooked Greek and Arab dealers who would rub their hands over this contraband.

Lavic turned to the Countess. He used his thumb to brush up the ends of his mustache; a gesture that had now become second nature to him. "I've been thinking, my dear," he said, "about this cheap medicine man, Poko Na."

The Countess smiled. "I suspected as much. I daresay you began wondering how to double-cross him from the first minute he told us about the ivory."

Lavic chuckled. "We understand each other." He picked up her hand, patted it, and then frowned a little at the quickness with which she drew it away. His eyes narrowed. The Countess, apparently, was getting tired of him. He had no illusions about her. Given a chance she would double-cross him as quickly as both of them double-crossed everybody else. But on the whole, it was better that way: where there were no foolish expectations from friends, there were also no disappointments.

"Well, then," she said finally, "have you decided what's to be done about Poko Na?"

"Yes. Rather ingeniously, too, I think you'll admit." He stroked the mustache again. He spread his boots as he stood, posturing. Lavic always vibrated with energy, and even charm, and he was well aware of this, and knew how to use it to his advantage. He kept talking, enjoying the sound of his own voice. "As you know, the original plan was for Poko Na to join us after we had marched several days away from his country. He's clever enough not to trust us alone with the ivory, of course. He was also clever in organizing the warriors of his tribe into that secret society of Spirit Men, or whatever it is. That gave him enough power and control to keep them from interfering with our little operation here. It also provided him with something of a bodyguard in case we should decide to get rid of him the quick, easy way."

"It sounds to me," said the Countess, "as if Poko Na has covered himself admirably. How are you going to get rid of him?"

Lavic smiled. "The quick, easy way. Naturally."

"Oh?" She raised thin eyebrows.

"Do you see the cleverness of it?" He brushed imaginary dust from his bush jacket. "Poko Na, with his Spirit Men there to protect him, feels secure. His guard is down. The last thing in the world he will expect will be a direct attack

on his village by my askaris. Therefore I have the advantage of surprise. We'll move tomorrow morning, while it's still dark, upon their main village—"

She frowned. "You're certain this will work?"

"It will have to," said Lavic, laughing. "I've already given the askaris and porters their instructions in the matter."

SHEENA, crouching among the bright green fronds of the swamp-tree, heard this conversation. She smiled to herself as she did. She held her bow and a ready arrow; she held the bow lightly, and not yet drawn, and she glanced upward, with Lavic, and saw the two tiny doll figures of the porters clinging to the rope high above. Some of the mist had cleared and the top of the cliff was faintly visible. Sheena's jungle-trained eyes could see the porters disappearing over the top. Now they would work the windlass and the elevator basket with its cargo of ivory would begin to rise.

She glanced at the cliff-face appraisingly, re-checking her plan. It was sheer, smooth rock, reddish in color and faintly translucent, like alabaster. There were few breaks or ledges that could be called foot holds. As far as Sheena had been able to tell, the rope was the only way out of the valley—and K'ando had confirmed that. At any rate, her plan depended on this fact.

The rope tightened suddenly and began to move slowly upward, rocking and twisting a little as it went.

"There it goes!" the Countess called to Lavic.

The basket swayed heavily, clearing the ground by one foot, then two, then three. It began to rise steadily, as the porters above worked the windlass with a smoother rhythm. The rest of the porters and askaris stared at the rising container silently: in spite of the fact that they had already seen the windlass it still seemed somewhat magical to them to watch the basket move.

Sheena drew her bow. She raised it, tracking the rope carefully. The elevator had picked up speed now: ten, fifteen, twenty feet above the ground. She aimed for a spot in the rope itself, just over the basket. Thirty feet high now.

Sheena's arrow nicked the rope precisely where she had aimed. No sooner had the bow twanged than she had reached across her shoulder, selected another arrow, fitted and drawn it, all in a continuous motion. Twang! The second arrow nicked the rope, too. Twang! Twang! A third and a fourth—

The strands parted, spinning the rope a little. The heavy basket of tusks hung precariously. The four arrows had come so swiftly that only now did Lavic and the others react. Lavic shouted and ran toward the swinging basket. At that moment the rope broke; the basket came down with a crash. Lavic leaped out of the way, and it barely missed him.

The soldier of fortune whirled then, facing the treetops from which the arrows had come. His pistol was drawn. He lifted it furiously and emptied it into the foliage; the shots echoed heavily against the smooth cliff face.

Sheena heard the slugs slap through the leaves and branches all about her, and as she backed away to climb down the other side of the tree she heard Lavic call out desperate orders to his askaris.

She was still smiling. Lavic and his party couldn't get out of the valley without that rope. It would take hours, or even days for the blacks at the windlass to find another one. But Sheena knew how to get out. And as soon as these people had calmed down a little she would bargain with them.

She reached the soft, loamy ground and turned to move further into the swamp and find Rick. In that moment there was a long, weird screaming noise, something like the rage-cry of a crocodile but twice as loud and ten times as horrible.

RICK, for all his jungle-hardness, had been momentarily frozen when he first turned to find the huge reptile staring at him, then opening its jaws. In the next instant, as his powers of reflection came back, he realized that freezing like that had probably saved his life for the moment anyway. The monster closed its jaws again. Its head swayed back and forth, brushing lightly against the foliage. Its blank, pupilless eyes studied Rick.

Minutes passed, and they seemed like hours. Rick was beginning to get stiff from his cramped position in the tree. Still he didn't dare move for movement was the one thing likely to attract the monster, likely to make those jaws open again, come forward and snap.

His fingers, holding to a branch, began to be numb now. Something made them hold on—not muscle certainly, but something that was part will power and part sheer luck. He remembered then that Chim was in the same tree, somewhere behind him, and he hoped fervently that the monkey wouldn't take it into his head to move, or make a sound and attract the reptile. The only chance now was to keep the thing puzzled like this—if that dim reaction could be called puzzlement.

No sooner had this idea occurred to him than there was a rustling behind him. The monster's head stopped moving again. Its beady eyes cast about; the pits halfway along its snout began to dilate. An oily shudder went down its neck and into the sluggish body below.

"Chee-chee-chee-chee-chee!" came Chim's voice.

The head snaked forward, barely missing Rick. Rick heard the jaws snap. It was like the sound of an axe striking hard mahogany. Rick moved quickly, throwing himself on the back of the saurian's neck. Here he clung with every ounce of strength in him.

The monster screamed. The scream was terrifying. Rick felt the shrill vibration in the long neck to which he clung.

The monster began to thrash about in the thick foliage, knocking huge ferns and bushes flat with its broad, heavy tail. It screamed again as Rick felt his fingers slipping a little on the smooth, clammy neck. He renewed his grip.

Sheena was just coming into sight when she heard this second scream. She had sped toward the sound of the first one, not bothering to go around the swampy patches but clearing them in tremendous leaps and now, as she beheld the thrashing monster with Rick clinging to its neck, she slipped her bow from her shoulder again.

Twang! twang! twang! She loosed three arrows in succession, her movements a blur.

Each sank to its feathers in the monster's body—but they had no effect. It was doubtful that he even felt them.

"Don't let go, Rick! Hang on!" She called that brief bit of encouragement to him. Then she looked up into the trees. "Chim!"

Two ferns parted and the monkey's head appeared. He looked so desperately bewildered that under other circumstances Sheena might have laughed. She

bounded into the tree that held the monkey. "Chim!" she gestured. "Do what I do. Over there. And there." Chim seemed to understand.

He chattered, squawked, swung over toward the thrashing monster and then began to yammer loudly to attract its attention. The huge lizard bellowed: a moment later it spotted Chim. Now, for an instant it seemed to forget the strange creature clinging to its neck. Its head lunged forward. The great jaws snapped, and Chim danced out of the way. But not entirely out of the way. He stayed in sight—still moving about, still making noise and attracting attention.

Sheena meanwhile, found a hanging creeper. She slashed at it with her poniard, then pulled it to her and working with swift fingers fashioned a slip loop on one end of it.

"Now this way, Chim. Draw him over this way!" she called.

CHIM took a running start along one of the heavy fronds, then leapt and sailed through the air. The saurian's head swung, tracking him. For just a second it was in the clear, free of the surrounding growth. Sheena swung her loop. It settled over that long neck. She drew it tight and quickly fastened the other end to the tree.

It was as Sheena had suspected. The monster was too small-brained to associate the slender creeper with the new tight feeling on his neck. He pulled the other way and the loop tightened. Then he tried to turn his head to snap at it, and after that he began to lash his tail again; frightened, annoyed.

Rick started to leap from the monster's neck.

"Not yet!" cautioned Sheena. She called to Chim again: "More, Chim, more!"

The monkey began to hop up and down and jump through the branches. He kept up his mad chattering. The lizard lunged and snapped at him again. Sheena found another creeper, hacked it and put a loop in it the same way. She waited until the saurian's head was free again, then threw this second loop.

The monster was caught from two directions now. The creepers, similar to the liana of the ordinary jungle, were green and strong. It tried to bellow again, thrusting its head high, but that only tightened the nooses. The bellow was cut short.

"Now!" Sheena called to Rick.

Rick leapt, and barely made a nearby tree. He swung himself into it, moved over into another tree and then dropped to the ground again. Sheena and Chim met him there. She touched his arm for just a moment, and at the same time searched his gray eyes. Just a faint smile on her lips. That was all that was necessary to show her deep affection in this instant.

"We'd better get out of this swamp," Rick said. "Lavic and his girl friend must have heard that reptile scream. They'll be here in a moment—"

"Let us wait for them," said Sheena.

"But—"

Rick was unable to finish. A fusillade of shots broke out a short distance to their left, where the monster, snagged by the looped vines was still thrashing. Looking through the trees, Rick glimpsed the moving bodies of the askaris, and presently the tall form of Lavic. The Countess's graceful and slender figure appeared a moment later. Shouts and cries as they killed the reptile.

And then Lavic stepped into the small clearing where Rick and Sheena stood. His rifle was leveled. He showed surprise, utter surprise for just an instant. Then he recovered himself.

"It would seem," he said smoothly, "that this place is full of surprises."

"Yes, so it would seem," said Rick. He had to force the words through tight lips. He could barely keep from rushing Lavic and slugging it out—and never mind the fancy rifle Lavic held at the ready.

The Countess came up alongside of Lavic and the askaris stepped into view, ranging themselves on both flanks. Now, besides Lavic's rifle, six carbines were pointed at Rick and Sheena. Rick glanced at Sheena anxiously. Lavic's eyes were moving up and down now, as he looked at Sheena. The Countess glanced at him, and didn't miss that. Rick saw the quick cloud cross her brow. Then Lavic spoke again. "I suppose you must be Sheena, yes? I've heard of you. I must confess I didn't really believe you existed, but you seem real enough. And—uh—attractive enough, too, I would say. Was it you who cut the lifting rope with your arrows?"

Sheena said, "Yes. Can you guess why?"

"I am at a loss." Lavic half-bowed. He had assumed an artificial gallant manner now—an automatic manner that came on whenever he faced a beautiful woman.

"You can put those guns down," Sheena said pointing. "You don't want to shoot us. If you do you'll never get out of this valley."

"And why not, may I ask?" Lavic lifted an eyebrow.

"There's no other way out. K'ando has told us that. Your porters are up at the top of the windlass. But they still can't lower the rope enough for anyone down here to reach it. I don't think they'll be able to find more rope to attach to the end. At any rate, you can't afford to take the chance that they will."

Lavic's smile faded a little. "But may I point out that you and Thorne are not able to leave the valley, either?"

Sheena shook her head. "We will all be able to leave the valley. But only I know the way to do it. That's why you don't dare shoot."

The Countess, angry-eyed, stepped forward. "She's bluffing!"

"Be quiet, Narcissa," said Lavic, with annoyance he couldn't hide. He kept looking at Sheena. "What is this way out of yours?"

"It is simple." Sheena looked down at the monkey at her side. "None of us can climb the cliff wall. But Chim can. We will gather enough vines to make a long line. Chim will carry this to the top, fasten it to the big rope, and then we may pull it down again." Her eyes came up. "But there are conditions. First: you must take no Bilina ivory with you. Second: you throw all of your weapons into the deepest water of the swamp."

"What?" spouted Lavic.

Sheena shrugged. "It is your choice."

Lavic glanced at the Countess but she was looking at Rick. Lavic finally turned to Sheena again, spread his hands in a gesture of resignation and said, "We'll do as you say."

It took them the better part of a half hour to gather all the creepers necessary for a second line. Sheena supervised this part of it and Rick went with Lavic and several of the askaris to dump the weapons; Rick kept one rifle for himself. Nearly an hour later the neatly-coiled and tightly-knotted line was ready. Sheena tied it about Chim's waist. Chim stared at it, puzzled.

She knelt beside him, spoke swiftly and pointed to the top. Then she pointed to the line itself and went through the motions of tying.

"But can he do it? Will he know how to tie a knot?" asked Rick.

Sheens said, "He's done it several times. Let us hope he can remember when he reaches the top."

Lavic, frowning, stepped forward and started to say, "Look here—"

Sheena whirled upon him. Her hands moved so swiftly that in the next second she held an arrow across her bow, pointed at Lavic. "You're not to come near, any of you, do you understand?"

Lavic glowered and stepped back again.

Sheena repeated her instructions to Chim once more. The monkey glanced upward this time, scratched his head, hopped up and down a bit, and then tugged at the creeper about his middle. Patiently, Sheena told him what he must do a third time. Now, finally, he seemed to understand. He scurried to the foot of the cliff, found a hand-hold, and began to pull himself upward. His fingers found tiny nicks and irregularities in the otherwise sheer rock—a human being would have been unable to support his weight with so little purchase.

After a little experimental fumbling Chim began to climb away more swiftly and surely. The others stared upward watching him disappear.

Chapter VI

POKO NA, prince of the Bilina, and leader of that tribe's organization of Spirit Men, stared from the gloom at a pair of blacks who, partly concealed by a boulder, were working a large bamboo windlass.

Poko Na turned to the warrior behind him, raising his eyebrows to form a question. The warrior, who had a zebra-skin kaross about his shoulders shrugged. He knew not these strange blacks.

Poko Na frowned, stared at them again, but this time there was a tiny smile on his lips. He knew well enough that these strange blacks were members of Ferdinand Lavic's safari, and that Lavic and the others were down in the valley. The agreement had been, of course, that he was not to interfere, except for a token attack after Lavic had procured the ivory and was already on his way back to the river. But the appearance of Sheena, and then her escape, had changed matters a little. Poko Na had thought everything over carefully by now. It was clear that he had better investigate, and that was his purpose here. He had brought with him only a half dozen warriors for if they should stumble upon his scheme in any way he could find a way to rid himself of such a small number.

At the moment the best thing seemed to be to follow a course that would appear natural to them. Poko Na pointed silently to the two porters, and nodded. The warrior in the zebra kaross nodded back, whispered something to the man behind him, and then the advice was passed along.

A few seconds later all seven of them moved silently from the mouth of the tunnel and crossed the little ledge with catlike steps. One of the porters turned an instant before Poko Na was upon him. Poko Na saw his frozen surprise, stood upright and swung a heavy, knobbed club with all his strength. The porter, his temple cracked, dropped away. The other one spun around. Two of the Spirit Men leapt, pinned his arms behind him and held him.

Poko Na loomed over the porter: his own shifty, coffee-black eyes stared down into the native's white-ringed orbs. The native's lips moved as he tried to speak, but no words came out.

"What do you here?" snapped Poko Na. He spoke river Congolese, the language the black would be most likely to understand. The warriors wouldn't understand it, of course, and thus no matter what the black said about Lavic, they wouldn't learn how Poko Na intended to deceive his own tribe.

"The white man sent me here," the black finally stammered in a weak voice.

Poko Na grinned. He would bait this ignorant native: that would be amusing. "You help the white man steal the Bilina's ivory, is it not so?"

"No, no, no. By the forest spirits, I swear!" lied the native, shaking his head in panic.

Poko Na gripped him by the throat. He squeezed until the black's tongue came out, until his eyes seemed ready to pop from their sockets. Then abruptly he let go again. The black gasped for breath. "Now," said Poko Na, "we will have the truth. The white man means to steal ivory, does he not?"

The black waggled his head, the Congo gesture for "Yes."

"The white man would steal as the jackal, quietly, and leave before he is seen. Is this not true?" Poko Na's expression was fierce, but he was chuckling inside.

This time the native said, "No."

"What?" Poko Na grabbed his throat again. "You would lie more?"

"I swear it. I swear it, great chief! The white man will not leave in darkness, but instead attack the Bilina village, and—"

"What? Say this again!" Poko Na was no longer amused. His fingers tightened on the black's throat.

The black tried to talk, and couldn't.

Poko Na let go once more. "Speak, jackal!"

"Spare my life, great chief, and I will speak—"

"Speak!" roared Poko Na.

The black swallowed the dryness of his own mouth. "The white man will attack the Bilina village at dawn. It will be burned. All in it will be slain."

Poko Na turned to the warrior in the zebra skin and held out his hand. "Your spear." The warrior handed the weapon over. Calmly and with no change of expression then, he turned once more, put the point of the spear to the porter's middle, and while the black was still looking at it, he thrust it forward. The porter fell, kicking and screaming and holding the wound. The warrior in the zebra skin silenced him with a vicious club blow upon his head.

"Now," said Poko Na. "We wait." He pointed to the edge of the cliff. "Presently whites and other river-jackals will appear. When they have gathered here we attack. But you will not move until I give the signal."

The other warriors moved immediately back into the gloom of the tunnel's mouth, and Poko Na joined them there.

They waited. They squatted silently, still as black granite, and kept their eyes on the spot where their prey would appear. They breathed so softly and with such control, that there was no sound of it. The eagle, passing by, wouldn't have seen them without looking directly at them, and possibly not then.

In spite of Poko Na's hard, motionless expression he was roiling with emotion inside. He should have known better than to trust Lavic, the white man with the clever tongue and the too-ready smile. He should have relied in the first

place upon his inner feeling, which was to hate any and all white men. It was the white man who, babbling piously, had taken him from the jungle and sent him to a missionary school near the coast: his father had not only permitted it, but even urged them to do it. And then the head of the school had taken a liking to Poko Na. Because he was bright, quick with words and numbers. Such a boy in Poko Na's tribe would have been mistrusted, and possibly even executed as someone filled with evil spirits—but to these things the white man took a liking. There had been a scholarship, and Poko Na had gone further in school, then traveled to the white man's cities, wearing the white man's clothes.

Well, he was through with all of that now. Never, never again would he enter into any scheme of importance with the white man, although he would still try to find a way to live in the white man's civilization and comfort, which he preferred. As far as the Bilina ivory was concerned, he would find others to dispose of it. In the coast towns there would be Syrian dealers, Arab traders, American derelicts, Greek adventurers; there would be others he could use. But he would keep even more careful tabs on his partner this next time.

As he watched, a monkey's head appeared over the lip of the cliff.

It surprised Poko Na; it surprised him in spite of himself. The surprise was like a quick sheet of lightning, and then, when it had gone, he remembered this creature—he remembered the lithe, blonde jungle goddess who had brought it into his kraal. The warrior behind him touched his arm and nodded at the monkey, and Poko Na put his thumb to his lip for silence. He would continue to watch for the present.

THE MONKEY acted unlike any other he had ever seen. Its behavior was almost human. As Poko Na stared, the creature began to haul in a thin line made of creepers that was attached, Poko Na saw now, about its waist. And as soon as it had enough slack it hopped to the windlass, found the end of the big knotted rope and proceeded to tie the line to it.

Poko Na turned. He glanced at his warriors behind him. Their eyes were fearful—this was strange magic when the furry creature of the treetops could do things like this. He considered for a moment explaining that the jungle goddess must have trained the animal, but decided against that. They might fear even more a white woman who could accomplish that much with a jungle creature.

But now, with its task finished, the monkey disappeared over the edge of the cliff again. A second later the windlass began to turn, paying out the knotted climbing rope.

Once more Poko Na and his warriors waited patiently. But the warriors stirred a little this time; they glanced at each other, frowned, and then looked at Poko Na as if waiting for an explanation. Poko Na felt that saying nothing would be the wisest course for the moment. Later, at the village, he would distract the warriors with a ceremony, and dull their wits with spiked kaffir beer. That would keep them from asking too many questions about his relationships with Lavic.

As Poko Na sat there waiting, Sheena was far below, starting the climb out of the valley. The rope had been repaired, and Sheena had directed that she would climb first, then Lavic and the Countess and the natives of his safari, and finally Rick. In this way Lavic's party would be guarded at both ends.

She felt a strong sense of caution as she sped upward, hand over hand. Lavic had been very quiet; several times she had caught him trading glances with the

Countess. As for the Countess herself, she had been much too interested in Rick to return all of Lavic's glances. The woman in Sheena could see this easily enough.

She outdistanced the two whites and the askaris and porters climbing behind her; she reached the top of the cliff when they were still swaying on the rope far below. She scrambled on to the level platform lightly, not expecting trouble of any kind. She glanced downward, saw that everything was still going according to plan, and then turned toward the tunnel by which they'd first reached this place.

There was time for one tingling warning along her spine. It came from something beyond the ordinary senses—jungle instinct, perhaps—because she saw or heard nothing untoward. Just the dark mouth of the tunnel, and the sun beating down on the sand and rock a few feet from it. Yet something made her move; something made her spring suddenly to the right.

A heavy-bladed spear came hurtling from the tunnel. It might have impaled Sheena through the chest if she hadn't dodged. As it was, it scraped her shoulder, then sailed over the cliff edge and fell away in a long arc. She felt the sharp bite of pain, yet knew it was only a flesh wound.

Even as Sheena leapt, and as the spear grazed her, she was reaching for her bow. By now only three arrows remained in her quiver. She slipped the bow from her shoulder, twisting slightly to do so. Her right foot, moving backward a little, suddenly had nothing below it. She tried to throw herself forward, away from the edge of the cliff, and regain her balance, but that right foot plunged downward and the sickening sensation of a fall made a sudden, sharp pang in the pit of her stomach.

In that same blurred instant she saw Poko Na's tall form emerge from the tunnel: saw the dark, nervous eyes glaring at her from either side of that slightly hooked nose, and all of it framed by the tusks along the side of his head.

Sheena, dropping her bow, grabbed for the edge of the cliff as she fell past it. Her fingers slipped a fraction of an inch, then held; she pressed with all her strength to hold herself there. She moved her legs against the cliff face, desperately seeking a foothold. There was none. She pulled then, chinning herself upward with a tremendous strength belied by the supple muscles of her arms and shoulders; she came again to the level of the platform and slid forward over it.

She meant to spring upward then, but she never had the chance. Strong black arms came down instead and yanked her to her feet.

It was if every nerve and muscle in Sheena's body had suddenly exploded. She tore from their grasps, whirled, plunged, turned, kicked and struck out. She was a lioness surrounded by jackals. She struck the zebra-warrior on the point of the jaw with her fist: the blow was swift and accurate rather than smashing, but nevertheless it sent him reeling backward. Immediately she swung her arm the other way, clipping another warrior across the bridge of the nose with her heavy gold bracelet. A third warrior was behind her, lifting a knobbed club. She sensed his presence. She kicked out behind, caught him in the middle and sent him tumbling over the cliff edge. His howl of terror faded as he fell away—

It surprised Poko Na and his bodyguard considerably. They had come to capture a woman and found a wild thing in their midst. A demoness, whose

movements could scarcely be followed with the eye and whose strength was that of a thousand devils. There was more than surprise here, there was bewilderment, too. In a moment or two Sheena might have broken away from them completely. But in their very bewilderment at least three of the Spirit Men were swinging their knobbed clubs aimlessly. There was a loud crack, loud but dull, like the sound of a bush-knife biting into bark. Sheena heard it as a queer, far-off explosion and at the same time saw a cascade of colored flashes before her eyes.

After that, deep blackness and the sensation of floating in cold, endless space.

SHE heard the drums and the strange, shrill music long before she opened her eyes. Even in this state of semi-consciousness her jungle instinct told her to be still.

A moment later the smell of rotting vegetation and woodsmoke told her that she was in the main Bilina village. She opened her eyes and waited for them to focus. The first thing she saw were the bamboo stakes all about her: they were driven into the ground, and then a top was lashed on making a kind of cage. She was lying on the floor of it. She turned her head cautiously and saw that the other cages had been fashioned beside hers? other captives in them? Lavic standing at the bars of one, looking disheveled and wild-eyed now? the Countess just beyond, and she, oddly enough, still seemed unruffled, poised. Rick in the furthest cage. Rick was sitting on the floor of it with his arms clasped about his folded knees. He might have been taking a moment's rest on a long safari. His eyes, though, were not missing anything.

Now Sheena glanced toward the clearing. Lavic's porters and askaris were nowhere to be seen, and she could guess that they had probably been slain quickly before the whites had been brought here. At any rate, out there in the clearing, Poko Na and the Spirit Men were gathering for what was obviously a ceremony of some kind.

They were drawn in two lines, flanking the clearing. Among the thatched huts beyond them other villagers stared out in quiet terror—mostly women, older men and children who hadn't yet reached warrior age.

At the far end of the village a native orchestra was gathering. There were drums of different sizes, xylophones of ebony and ironwood lying flat on the ground, and reed flutes both tiny and huge.

Poko Na was in the middle. He wore a leopard-skin kaross now, and a circlet of claws about his head. His shoulders were thrown back and he kept his hawk's nose high and arrogant. He turned toward the largest of the huts—the council hut—and chattered sharply. A group of woman there began to dip cups of hollowed bamboo joints in a huge vat that stood by the corner of the hut. This would be the kaffir beer that Poko Na had made into a drink of courage for his warriors. Each woman, when she had dipped a cupful, ran into the clearing and passed the portion to a warrior. The warriors drank quickly, some in one gulp, and when they had finished they tossed the cups aside haughtily. The women scurried to retrieve them.

Sheena rose to her feet now. Her head throbbed, but she made herself ignore the pain. Lavic, in the next cage, saw her come to life and his shrill voice, no longer smooth and confident called out to her. "Sheena! You—you must talk to them! You must get us out of here! I'll pay anything—I'll make you rich—"

The Countess cut him short. "Oh, be quiet you fool," she said wearily. "Die with courage now—that's the least you can do."

Sheena ignored both of them. She called instead to Rick in the farthest cage. "Rick, are you all right?"

He grinned back at her. A little shakily—but he grinned. "So far," he said, "if that's any help."

"Where's Chim?"

"I don't know, Sheena. He disappeared in the mix-up. He may—"

The drums cut Rick short. They started with a slow, broken beat. The warriors straightened their line and then began to follow the drumbeat by striking their spear hafts on the ground. They shuffled their feet sideways, taking several steps, dipping, reversing direction, all in unison.

The instruments came in. Tinkling? wailing? a curious, hypnotic melody coiled like a snake around the line of the drumbeat. The Spirit Men began to chant: "Yo, yo—Mani sokayo. Yo. Yo. Mani sokayo." Sheena recognized the death chant.

The villagers, half-hiding themselves among the huts, continued to stare.

The chanting went on monotonously for perhaps twenty minutes. Suddenly Poko Na stepped into the center of the clearing, held up his hand, and cried out another series of orders. The dancers stopped. A second time the women ran out with cups of kaffir beer. This time the warriors held their cups stiffly instead of drinking right away. A single drumbeat sounded. Poko Na raised his spear in one hand, his shield in the other. "The spirits of the wild things enter our hearts!" he cried.

"Yo!" chanted the rest, and drank.

"The brave spirit of the lion, the cunning spirit of the leopard, the swift spirit of the antelope, and the strong spirit of the elephant!"

"Yo!" They drank again.

This was repeated several times with variations. When they had drained the cups they again threw them away contemptuously and allowed the women to gather them up. Once more the dancing was resumed.

Sheena guessed that this ceremony was likely to continue for some time. The sun was already low in the west, tinting the yellow haze over the jungle orange and red. They would dance after the sun had gone, they would dance far into the night. And one by one their captives would die—

Two warriors broke suddenly from the line and stalked in long, purposeful strides toward the cage that held the Countess Narcissa.

"No!" screamed Lavic, gripping the bamboo bars of his own cage until his knuckles were white.

The Countess held her head high. She faced the approaching warriors and said nothing; only a slight paleness of her cheeks gave any indication of how she felt. She crossed her arms over her chest, and walked out firmly when they opened the cage, ignoring completely their firm grips upon her arms.

Poko Na called another command. The warriors formed a circle about thirty feet in diameter and raised their spears. Darkness was falling now and the women began to throw wood on the scattered fires in the clearing, sending the flames higher, so that red reflections danced in the broad spear heads.

The two warriors moved the Countess toward the circle of spears.

She jerked from their grasp suddenly. She had been too calm until this moment, and they hadn't expected that. She broke loose, then started to run

for the jungle. But she was foredoomed—and Sheena suspected she must have realized this all along. The Countess ran perhaps ten strides before the first of the spears came whistling toward her. Three struck her in the back at the same time; one pierced her entirely. She ran for several additional stumbling steps before she fell.

Chapter VII

THE WARRIORS ran to surround the dead woman and to plunge their spears into the body over and over again. And when they had tired of that, Poko Na called for more of the filled bamboo cups.

It was while they were drinking the ceremonial draft again that Sheena heard from the nearby jungle the chattering of a monkey. To anyone else it would have sounded like the chattering of any monkey—but to Sheena the voice was as familiar as her own. Carefully her eyes swept over the jungle wall where it stopped at the edge of the village. She cocked her head and listened.

Now a cautious whisper from the other side of the wall behind her cage came to her ears. "Sheena!" The voice was deep and rich—and hearing it she could almost see K'ando's huge, resonant bulk behind it.

"K'ando!" she called back. "Yes, I hear you." She didn't turn toward him, but looked out into the clearing where the warriors had begun to dance again, and where the sound of music and drums kept them from hearing this conversation.

"I heard that Poko Na had brought captured whites to the village," whispered K'ando. "I came here, and then Chim dropped from the trees to greet me. He is with me and shakes with fright."

Sheena said, "Listen carefully, K'ando. It is impossible for you to enter the stockade. You would be seen immediately. But there is one who may enter. Chim is small. He may climb the wall and keep to the shadows."

"Aiee," said K'ando, "but the furry one has not the strength to overcome so many spears—"

"Strength will not be needed," said Sheena quickly. "Only something from the jungle. You should be able to find it very quickly. When you do, you will instruct Chim—"

Sheena talked swiftly, outlining her plan. As she did so the music crescendoed and the drummers increased the fury of their beat. Night had descended fully now: the sky was deep black and the stars were hard diamonds crushed and thrown across it. The flames of the village fires leapt high, vying with the dancers. Black bodies and white paint glistened; shields and spears flashed in counterpoint to the dance.

After a while Sheena was no longer able to tell how long it had been going on. For once, her sense of time was dulled—the hypnotic effect of the music. She saw now that there was madness in the eyes of the Spirit Men, and even Poko Na, ordinarily strong-minded and cynical, was feeling it. He, at this moment, was dancing more furiously than any of them.

But Sheena's eyes were fastened on a place near the council hut across the clearing. Here stood the huge vat of kaffir beer, and near it the women with the cups who served the warriors. But the women weren't watching the vat—their

eyes, like all others in the village, were on the wild dance, gripped by the evil fascination of it.

Abruptly a small, furry figure appeared from the plantain grove beyond the council hut. He looked about cautiously for a moment, then quickly scurried toward the vat. He had something in his hand, and he dropped this into the vat, then ran back and faded into the grove again.

The music and dancing continued and Sheena, every nerve almost to the breaking point, held herself still and waited. The shadows of the warriors were leaping ghosts on the jungle foliage beyond. The death chant sounded over and over again: "Yo, yo, mani sokayo? yo, yo, mani sokayo?"

Suddenly, as if by a strange, silent command, the music stopped. The dancers became still. Poko Na lifted both arms. "We will drink of the magic waters again!" he cried.

The women hurried to dip the bamboo cups.

Sheena's voice, firm and strong, suddenly sounded across the clearing. "Now the vengeance of the forest spirits comes to the Spirit Men!" she called in Bilina dialect.

It startled Poko Na, then infuriated him. He whirled toward Sheena's cage. He pointed at it. "Take her!" he roared. "She shall suffer the death of spears next!"

Two warriors had been enough to take the Countess from her cage, but eight of them came forward to bring Sheena. She surprised them by making no struggle. She went with them easily and quietly to the center of the clearing.

Poko Na raised both arms again in the ceremonial gesture. He kept his eyes on Sheena. "The spirits of the wild things enter our hearts!" he chanted.

The women brought the bamboo cups to the warriors now. Again, each dancer drained his portion in a gulp, and tossed the cup behind him.

Poko Na did not drink. He kept looking at Sheena. There was triumph in his look, but a slight undercurrent of uncertainty, too, and Sheena didn't miss this.

She raised her own arms suddenly. "Now Sheena's magic begins!"

It was timed perfectly. No sooner had she spoken than strange things began to happen. One of the Spirit Men suddenly clapped his hands to his stomach and groaned. Others stared about stupidly, puzzled, bewildered. A warrior in a lion's mane cried suddenly, "Water!" He began to run toward the council hut, then abruptly stumbled and fell.

Some of the warriors now began to make choking sounds. Others were grabbing desperately at aching throats. One raced, screaming for the plantain grove, fell and then began to kick himself in a flat, spasmodic circle on the ground.

Before another minute had passed not a warrior was standing.

Except Poko Na. His initial surprise had gone. He was staring at Sheena now, beginning to suspect a little of what must have happened. But Sheena had the advantage of surprise in this moment, and she meant to keep it. Coolly, right before Poko Na's eyes, she picked up a bush-knife that one of the fallen warriors had dropped. She walked over to Rick's cage.

Rick grinned at her through the bamboo bars and said, "I knew all the time you'd do it."

She smiled fleetingly, chopped the rawhide cage fastenings apart, and Rick stepped into the open.

"Sheena! You cannot forget me! You must release me, too, Sheena!" screamed Lavic.

Sheena looked at him in disgust—but nevertheless walked over to his cage and cut the thongs.

Poko Na suddenly roared a terrible sound of anger and frustration. He raised his spear and narrowed his eyes at Sheena. She whirled toward him. There was no time to rush him with her bush-knife, nor was there time to scoop a fallen spear from the ground.

"Look out, Sheena!" Rick cried. It distracted Poko Na for a moment. He turned his eyes toward Rick and in doing that he saw Lavic again. He saw him as if for the first time. His brow clouded even more, as if with a new gust in a rainstorm already raging. His close-set eyes glittered in their deep sockets: this was the man who had brought all of it about; here was the man who had tried to make a fool of him.

Poko Na's spear arm racked back.

Lavic had just enough time to widen his eyes and cry, "No!"

The spear came forward in a slight, almost imperceptible curve, streaking across the distance between the two men. Lavic tried to dodge. The heavy point caught him, with a sound like a knife striking a rotten apple, in the left breast. The force of the thing slammed him against the cage he had just left. He leaned there for a moment looking stupidly down at the weapon in his body. Then he sank slowly, his eyes still open, and a second later he was sitting there, dead.

Sheena lost no time as all of this happened. She pounced on another fallen spear, then faced Poko Na, holding the weapon lightly and ready to throw.

He turned and stared at her. His eyes were filmed over; in them was the hopelessness of a man who has lost everything. Yet he was not afraid; he squared his shoulders and stuck his chest forward, waiting for Sheena to strike.

There was a sudden clamor at the stockade gate and women ran to open it. As they watched, K'ando entered. The big native was dressed in the ceremonial costume of a full chief of the Bilina. He walked slowly across the compound with his curious fat man's grace. He held a spear, too. He stopped twenty paces from Poko Na and kept his eyes on the usurper. Then he glanced at Sheena for a brief instant. "Give him a spear, too, O Sheena."

Sheena understood. By the code of the tribe it was necessary for K'ando to kill Poko Na with his own hand—and by choice K'ando was offering him an equal combat. The Bilina would long remember how their rightful chief acted in this matter.

"Do as he says. Pick up a spear," she said to Poko Na.

He moved slowly, and with his eyes still on K'ando. Holding their weapons then, the two men faced each other—one long, sinewy and nervous; the other fat, but tapered and graceful.

"Hai!" said Sheena abruptly, giving the signal.

Poko Na hurled his spear desperately and with an arcing motion of his long body. K'ando barely seemed to move. The tall black's spear hurtled by K'ando, just missing his shoulder—and K'ando's spear struck the leader of the Spirit Men in the very center of his torso.

It was three days later. Three people stood at the edge of a great forest.

"And now the trail parts," said Sheena.

K'ando nodded, and pointed northwest: "In this direction Rick takes the Bilina ivory—" and southwest: "while Sheena returns to her own forest. Sheena departs and takes her magic with her."

Sheena laughed. "Sheena's magic is only that of the jungle. For only the jungle has magic. The jungle knew from the first that the white man, Lavic, came to steal from it, and thus he was doomed. Poko Na, who went against the way of the jungle, was also marked for death. The jungle has all it needs to perform its magic—such as the poisonous karatonga which you were able to find, and which Chim was able to drop in the vat of kaffir beer."

