

Sword of Gímshai

Sheena - Queen of the Jungle

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Alone, Bob Reilly would have been easy prey for those fierce marauding Bambala tribesmen. But fate had sent him stumbling into the camp of Sheena, the jungle-woman. Sheena—who already had written in Bambala blood the great legend of the warrior-queen.

Chapter I

SHEENA lay unmoving on the bed of fragrant grasses, her hands clasped behind her blonde head. A gentle southeast wind blowing through the open door of the tree house touched her with caressing fingers, whispered of a jungle long awake and busy.

But this morning the murmurous jungle noises held no interest for Sheena. A feeling of oppression and loneliness had gripped her from the moment of her awakening.

A dozen times since sun-up her pet ape, Chim, had left his noisy pursuits in nearby tree tops to peer worriedly in the door at a mistress who would lie abed on such a wonderful day. Similarly, in the clearing below, the great elephant, Tamba, stirred restlessly, impatient and puzzled because the girl he looked upon as his own private pet hadn't appeared for the ceremony of swimming, eating, and playing over which he regularly presided.

For the first time, though, her animal friends weren't enough. The usual joy she took in teasing, rough-housing and lecturing them was gone. Even the familiar, deep cough of the powerful, black-maned lion, Sabor, coming at intervals from across the river failed to excite Sheena. She had raised Sabor from a cub, and though he would wander away for days at a time, he always came back, as he was doing this morning after an eight-day prowl, to dog her footsteps for a time and cause trouble with the other pets through his dangerous jealousy.

The jungle girl had probed without success for some explanation of her depression. She knew that black men often were sick and for a time she wondered if that could be her trouble, though the only illness she had ever known was the stomach ache from eating too enthusiastically of unripe fruit.

She had been laid up a few times with hurts suffered in life and death battles with jungle beasts, but her feelings on those occasions were totally different from the way she felt now.

Sheena's hair was blonde and long, her eyes a deep and startling blue, her full lips as richly red as sunstruck rubies. Her skin was tanned a soft, golden hue and she had the proud, lithe carriage of a truly beautiful woman.

And yet actually Sheena had no understanding of beauty in the terms a civilized woman thinks of it. Her body was pleasing to her, yes, because in its firm, supple sleekness and sculptured lines, she recognized the same qualities she admired in the great cats and the arrow-swift antelope.

But as to whether she was attractive to men never entered her mind. That basic feminine criterion of looks, the response of the male, was a yardstick as

yet unknown to her, for up to now Sheena had never known a man of her own kind.

When she was younger the indistinct faces of a white man and woman sometimes had come to her in her dreams, faces that were familiar and yet somehow beyond the reach of her memory. Her earliest memories were of the Abamas, over whom the old witch woman of the tribe, N'bid Ela, had predicted that Sheena would one day rule. To prepare her for that task, N'bid Ela had taken her into the jungle and brought her up apart from the black children as though she were a high priestess in training. But for many moons now, N'bid Ela had been dead and a great, lost loneliness grew in Sheena.

Formerly, there had been no blacks in Sheena's section of the jungle, for the Abamas lived five suns to the south and they continued to obey the dead witch-woman's taboo against invading Sheena's privacy. "She will come to you when she is ready," N'bid Ela had said.

But five moons ago the warlike Bambala had come suddenly from the north and settled near her. In her first encounter with them, Sheena had barely escaped capture. Since then, the blacks had made sporadic attempts to hunt her down. Not wanting to cause a tribal war, Sheena hadn't told the Abamas of her trouble, and more recently now, the Bambala had left her alone and she had noticed that on one of those infrequent occasions when she encountered a hunter, it was the black who turned and fled.

BUT Sheena did not think of these things now as she lay despondently on her bed of grasses. She thought of little except that life was no longer good and exciting.

In the clearing below the treehouse, the elephant, Tamba, trumpeted impatiently for her. Hardly had the ear-splitting noises of his summons died away when her pet ape, Chim, landed with a loud thump in the door of the house, scampered across the floor and thrust his wizened, old-man's face close to hers.

Chim chattered softly, sympathetically to her at first. Then getting no response, he fell silent, peered more intently with his little button eyes. He turned away heartbrokenly, making sad sounds in his throat as he plodded toward the door.

"Oh, all right," Sheena muttered wearily. "I'll get up if it will calm you wild dingos down. By the red eyes of Gimshai, why can't you and Tamba tend to your own business for one day and leave me alone?"

The jungle girl spoke the rapid, musical speech of the Abamas. At the sound of her voice, Chim whirled, an almost human look of delight wreathing his black little face. He began to bound up and down like a rubber ball, chattering with wild animation.

Sheena stood up, smoothing and straightening her leopard skin shorts and halter. She took her sheathed knife from a wall peg, belted it on. Then she picked up a full quiver of arrows, fastened it and a bow so they rested comfortably between her shoulderblades. She scowled at the ape, and then with sudden animal quickness, she mimicked him exactly, even to the sound of his voice.

The ape froze, his mouth open, his head inclined forward so that he peered at her like an old man looking over the top of his glasses. Then shrieking with

pleasure, he turned and whipped through the door, as if meaning to tell Tamba, the elephant, of the wonderful joke.

Sheena came out on the small platform which served as a porch for the treehouse. Two purple and gold virini birds whirred upward from a nearby branch to the harsh scolding of a parrot. Ten yards away in a great slanting column of sunlight, a cloud of butterflies wheeled in an endless, dizzying dance.

The jungle girl looked down through the gently swaying pattern of branches to where Tamba, with ponderous solemnity, was scratching his tough hide against a tree. At the edge of the platform lay a coiled length of liana, one end of which was tied to a heavy branch.

With a sigh, Sheena nudged the rope into space with her foot. She leaned over, caught the vine with her hands, and swung off the platform. The swift, sure agility with which she shimmied down the liana bespoke an unusual strength for a woman.

As her feet touched the ground, the elephant was waiting for her. Tamba looked down at her from his great height, shifting his ears like mammoth fans. Then he snaked his trunk about her, and lifting her, swung toward the river twenty yards away.

"No, no, Tamba," she protested irritably. "Let me down. I don't want to go swimming this morning."

The bull was at the edge of the water before he realized Sheena was in earnest. He set her down, peered at her with the remarkably intelligent eyes of his kind, seemingly trying to discover what was wrong.

His look gave Sheena a twinge of conscience, and trying to hide that fact even from herself, she turned away, stared stiffly downstream. She immediately gave an exasperated grunt. Her glance had lighted on a heavy, black-maned figure carefully working its way over the river by using a low limb as a bridge. It was Sabor, the lion, coming to make more trouble for her.

"I'm not going to put up with it," she said fiercely. "What do these animals think I am, a slave?"

With a toss of her chin, she started across the clearing toward the jungle. She heard Tamba shift his feet, knew he was considering following her. Off to her right, Chim came somersaulting out of a tree, landed on his feet and scampered to catch her.

"Leave me alone!" she cried. And suddenly she was running, fleeing from her animal friends as though devils pursued her.

She sped into the cloaking green underbrush, careless of the branches lashing at her. She ran on and on, halting only when her breath began coming in hard gasps.

When she stopped and collected herself, she felt foolish and ashamed. She shook her blonde head, a momentary wetness in her eyes. What was wrong with her? Had she somehow caught the strange madness which sometimes came upon animals, driving them off to live in the bush alone, nursing a crazed anger against the whole jungle?

SHEENA glanced around to get her bearings. She hadn't paid any heed to the course she was taking and was surprised now to find how far outside her usual hunting ground she had gone. Though there certainly never had been any agreement made between them, there was a vague line of demarcation between her own range and that of the Bambala. The blacks themselves had more or

less drawn the imaginary line in the past few months and seldom penetrated beyond it.

Ordinarily, Sheena would have turned back immediately to the safety of her own lands, but in her mood today she didn't care about danger or anything else. She sat down heavily on a fallen tree and put her head in her hands.

The sun crept to nearly midway in the sky before the jungle girl finally got up. A hunger pain knifed through her, reminding her she hadn't eaten that day. She was still standing indecisively, when an errant breeze brought her the scent of ripening fruit.

In her life in the jungle, her sense of smell had become almost as keen as an animal's. She went straight to the stand of trees, heavy with large blue-skinned plums. When the taste of the plums palled, she wandered on to some nut trees and finally topped off her effortless meal with a yellow panyanox pear.

Just as she threw away the pear core, Sheena heard a distant, echoing roar like a small blast of thunder. The sound was a completely new one to her and she listened, frowning. Then twice more the muted thunder came, seeming to roll close along the ground.

Abruptly, all about her the jungle was listening. The small rustlings in the underbrush, so faint and continuous that one grew almost oblivious of them, suddenly stilled. The harsh voices of the parrots, the trilling, liquid notes of the song birds ceased in one velvet clap of silence.

The forest listened, weighing the danger in the alien sound. Then as the noise blasted thrice again and still nothing happened, like a music box slowly beginning to play, the activity of the little creatures resumed. The strange thunder was ignored and then forgotten by each animal or fowl the moment it decided it personally wasn't threatened.

But because of that odd, restless quirk in the human mind, call it a thirst for knowledge, or insatiable curiosity, or a plain contrary urge to meddle, Sheena reacted quite differently from the jungle animals. What did this new and different sound mean? What caused it? Could it be there was something in the jungle she didn't know about?

Eyes bright with interest, Sheena began running in the direction of the continuing blasts of noise. She moved with an antelope's grace, seeming to pick the quickest and easiest path by instinct. There was no resemblance between the flashing drive of her long, beautifully modeled legs and that knock-kneed, ridiculously aimless attempt of a civilized woman to run.

In a matter of minutes, she came to a broad trail burrowing like a dimly-lit tunnel through the choking growth of trees, shrubs and vines. It was one of the ancient elephant tracks which serve as the highways of Africa. The echoing blasts were very close now and coming rapidly closer to her.

She started to step out on the trail, but her ears picked up the sound of pounding feet. She drew back out of sight, and sensing for the first time that she might be running headlong into danger, she leaped high, caught a limb and drew herself up into a tree. She found a perch in the middle branches, where she commanded a clear view of the trail but would be hidden from sight herself so long as she lay flat in a nest of vines.

A dark figure sprinted around a far curve in the path. A second later, two more runners burst into view. Then a whole clot of jostling, clawing bodies was pouring around the turn.

Sheena's eyes narrowed, her body suddenly taut. As the blacks swept closer along the shadowed dimness of the trail, she realized they were strange tribesmen, not the Bambala, her enemies. They were obviously terror-stricken, each man fighting to get ahead of the others.

None of them had the look of warriors, though the three men in the lead were armed with spears and shields. Most of the natives had heavy packs strapped on their backs, and as they ran, they were tearing free of the carrying straps and letting the packs shatter on the ground. Out of sight around the turn, the explosions were sounding sharper and clearer now, each blast shocking the fleeing natives to greater speed.

Sheena couldn't imagine what horror the panting, straining natives fled from. Then, abruptly, when the stampeding blacks were no more than a short spear throw away from both sides of the trail erupted the dread Bambala war cry, "*Babalo Aka N'Koto!*"

That frenzied cry repeated over and over with hysterical shrillness brought back to Sheena in a rush of memory that grim morning when they first tried to capture her, swarming out of ambush, a hundred jackals against one unarmed woman. But in her they had met a raging, tearing leopard instead of a fear-stricken victim. And on that day Sheena had killed for the first time, had written in Bambala blood the first lines of the legend of the warrior-queen which month to month from that time on was to grow more fabulous.

"Blood for N'Koto!" Blood for the evil god of the Bambala! Blood for that hideous, swollen idol before which the Bambala groveled and prayed before they went out to hunt down innocent, helpless victims.

Sheena snarled like an angry cat, her lips shearing back to reveal bared teeth. Out of the underbrush along the trail, the Bambala swept in two great waves. The ambush had been perfectly planned. At point-blank range they hammered their spears into their prey, and then ripping free their swords, they charged in to complete their grisly work.

As the painted warriors fell upon the terrorized bearers, Sheena's hand darted to her bow. All thought of her own safety was gone. Rage, red and flaming, seared over her. It was but the work of a moment to tug loose the slip-knot securing the bow across her shoulders.

With the flashing speed that comes from long practice, she snapped the bow-string taut, She leaped upright on the limb, as perfectly balanced as though her feet rested on solid ground. With nerveless precision, the jungle girl began feeding arrows into the tightly packed attackers.

A Bambala warrior threw up his arms, and screaming, dropped to his knees. Another pitched forward and was trampled underfoot. Two more collapsed suddenly like puppets whose strings have been cut. The fifth bent double, an arrow hammered completely through his middle, and began to run in circles like a dog with his tail on fire.

Sheena had concentrated her fire on the Bambala nearest to her, those blocking the flight of the bearers. When she knocked those five men out of the uneven battle, it was like stabbing a knife into a water-filled bladder. The crazed bearers who had survived the initial onslaught came spurting through the opening she had created. In a blind, heedless stampede they drove out of the trap and flung off at all angles into the forest.

The mass of Bambala splintered apart, groups of three to five warriors taking out after each of the frightened human rabbits. The attackers were raging more wildly than ever, now that an easy slaughter had turned into a difficult chase.

But the warriors nearest those men dropped by Sheena's arrows didn't join the pursuit. Some of them had seen the arrows rip into their fellows, and jabbering excitedly, they pointed out to the others that the attack had come from a new, hidden foe.

Then one of them, considering the angle at which the arrows had struck, suddenly spotted Sheena standing wide-legged high up on a swaying limb. He stabbed his finger at the slim, white figure outlined against the deep green leaves.

"Tioto Nomi!" he cried. "The Forest Woman!"

A low, hoarse, shivering sound, like the rush of wind through a deep gorge, broke from the Bambala. There was fear in that sound, and hatred, too. This was the woman they had hunted innumerable times without success. For all their numbers, all their weapons, all their wiles, she made fools of them.

Clearly, no mere woman would be able to outwit warriors. And there were other things that showed she was no ordinary flesh and blood human. For instance, hadn't she been seen talking with fierce jungle beasts, or hunting and playing with them. She had demonstrated that she was immune to the curses and spells of the witch doctors, to the proven juju which would wither and kill a black man in a matter of days.

And yet at the same time, many happenings in the Bambala kraal, such as the unseasonal windstorm two moons ago which tore off the roofs of half the huts or the strange overnight invasion of snakes after the last rain, could only be attributed to the evil magic of someone like the Forest Woman. Surely, she was the spawn of demons, endowed with a powerful personal juju, else the jungle devils themselves would long ago have devoured her.

Fear does different things to different men. Most of the warriors were momentarily paralyzed, stunned by the knowledge that Sheena for the first time openly had invaded their lands and attacked them. But one squat, bull-chested native was galvanized into action.

"Save yourselves!" he screeched. "Strike before she kills us!"

He tugged a spear from the body of one of the murdered bearers, his eyes distended, his mouth a rubbery, gaping hole. He ran forward two steps, hefting the spear for the cast.

Chapter II

SHEENA'S arrow took the spearman in the throat, threw him flopping backward like a beheaded chicken. But the man's action broke the spell which held the other Bambala. They went scrambling for spears among the dead bearers.

Swift as she was, there wasn't time for Sheena to escape, and against a massed spear attack her bow couldn't save her. Too late she realized her deep-seated hatred of the Bambala had betrayed her into fatal recklessness.

Then, at that moment, as death reached for her, three men came fast around the far turn of the trail behind the warriors. Two of them were husky blacks

wearing faded khaki shorts. They clutched rifles in their big hands, nearly empty cartridge belts slapping their waists as they ran.

The third man was white, a tall, broad-shouldered fellow with the driving, high-stepping gait of a football fullback. A rifle was gripped in his hands, a pistol belted about his lean middle. He was hatless, his black hair tangled and unruly. And though strain and fatigue lined his square-jawed face, giving him at first glance a deceptive look of maturity, a more searching inspection told that he was in his very early twenties.

The two blacks faltered, broke stride, when they saw the Bambala milling among the dead and dying bearers. Both of them, eyes suddenly gleaming white, cast fearful glances over their shoulders. The white man's voice lashed them, drove them on a few slowing steps further. But the same panic that had overtaken the bearers was fountaining up in the two guards.

As though invisible ropes had snared them, the guards stopped, making futile little turns and twists without ever actually stirring from their tracks. The white man's voice whipped them again, angry urgency in it.

One of them shook his head violently, saying he wouldn't charge the Bambala. The other gave no sign he even heard. For a desperate moment the white man hesitated, then his mouth twisting bitterly, he plunged forward alone, triggering his rifle from hip-level as he ran.

His shouts to the guards had jerked the Bambala warriors' attention away from Sheena. They gave cry like a dog pack when they saw the three new victims. Two of them, spears lifting high, leaped to meet the oncoming white.

Then the white man's rifle was bucking and jolting in his rigidly straining hands. At that range even unaimed shots couldn't miss. The crash of the explosions echoed and reechoed, sound piling on sound, in the cavern-like trail.

One of the charging spearmen seemed to run into a stone wall. In mid-stride he slammed against the unseen barrier, went reeling backwards in a twisting fall. By the time he hit the ground, two more men in the cluster of natives behind him were going down and a third was screaming with a shattered arm.

These were tough, hard-bitten warriors, but this was their first experience in facing gunfire. That terrible roaring firestick was as awesome as a herd of charging elephants. Fearful magic was in a weapon which in, some unexplained way spat death through the air.

And the best measure of the firestick's magic was the way the lone white man ran straight at them. Only a man who knew he couldn't lose would fling himself against overwhelming odds. Aye, flesh and blood couldn't combat the magic of that firestick.

The Bambala didn't guess the colossal bluff the white man was running on them. It took iron courage to drive at those blacks, triggering the last of his rifle cartridges, realizing he was finished if they didn't break before he reached them.

It wasn't lunatic bravery that dictated his action. The jungle behind him was alive with Bambala. The main force had attacked his safari from the rear, overwhelming over half the bearers before he could bring his guns into play, stampeding the rest into this second ambush. He knew he wouldn't have a chance against the jungle-wise blacks if he turned off into the underbrush. The trail ahead offered the only avenue of flight.

He had seen in the first moments of battle that the warriors were gun shy. By fighting a fierce rearguard action, he and the two armed blacks had tried to buy

time for the bearers to escape. But when their ammunition ran low, they, too, had been forced to run for it.

Thinking of their nearly empty rifles, the guards' nerves had broken when they rounded the turn and saw their retreat cut off. The white man had gritted his teeth and plowed on. He had kept his wits enough to realize that a bold front might panic the small group of natives blocking the path.

And if his bluff failed?

Well, he would only be dying a few seconds sooner than the two fear-stricken guards.

But his bluff didn't fail. Like jackals charged by a lion, the Bambala suddenly took to their heels. In a trampling rush, they headed into the underbrush, leaving the path clear.

Sheena stood frozen on the limb above the trail. She was as startled by that thundering firestick as the natives, but she was even more stunned by the fact that the firestick's master was white-skinned. She didn't fear him. After all, he had saved her life. His reckless charge had turned the Bambala spears away from her in the nick of time.

It didn't occur to her that he could be anything but a friend and ally. She judged men by the only rulestick she knew, the ways of the animal world. Among the jungle creatures, like ran with like, instinctively sharing the same hatreds, hungers, and habits.

Early in life, Sheena reluctantly had concluded that she was a creature alone, doomed to spend her days without ever knowing the company of others like herself.

And now suddenly, unbelievably, she was seeing one of her own people—a male of her own kind!

That he was a male, she had no doubt. His square-jawed face, his broad shoulders, deep chest and lean hips, his deep voice and wild, fierce manner of fighting, all bespoke his maleness.

He braked to a stop almost directly beneath her, and swung about, hands busy with the firestick. The thing that had stopped the white man was the hideous upthrust of Bambala cries on the trail behind him. As he turned, fumbling in haste to jam the last of his cartridges into the rifle, he saw black warriors pouring around the turn and washing out of the jungle on both sides of the two guards who had lagged behind him.

He jerked the rifle up, slammed five deliberate shots into the swarming mass. But a score of marksmen couldn't have saved the two men. The Bambala were on them like lusting beasts, literally tearing the guards to pieces with their hands.

As the clawing, screaming mass closed over the two, the white man's finger automatically kept working the trigger. But the five shells had been his last and the hammer snapped futilely against an empty chamber. When he finally realized what he was doing, his right hand snaked for his pistol, his clean-cut face gone white with anger under his deep tan.

Then with the pistol half out of its holster, he came to his senses, realizing the uselessness of trying to challenge that overwhelming force. He spun abruptly, and still gripping the empty rifle, went pounding down the trail.

His action broke the spell which had held Sheena motionless. She had seen him feed five glittering metal tubes into the firestick, had heard it spit thunder five times and then emit only empty clicks. The five ejected cartridges lay on the

trail where he had stood. Her quick mind fitted these facts together and suddenly she realized the firestick's magic was used up.

The Bambala, already starting the pursuit, soon would also realize the gun's magic was exhausted. And once the caution engendered by their fear of that gun was gone, they would make short work of the white man.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Sheena aloud. "I can't let them get him!"

With flying fingers, she dropped the arrow she held back into the quiver, secured the bow on her back. Then with the sure agility of one of the tree people themselves, she started through the middle branches.

It was through this trick of tree travel that she had so many times mystified the Bambala, apparently vanishing into thin air just when they thought they had her cornered. As a lonesome child, she had begun imitating the monkeys and apes as strictly a matter of play, and through endless practice gradually she had become breath-takingly expert at aerial acrobatics.

In pursuing the white man, Sheena veered off to the left through the jungle, remembering that the trail made a leisurely arc. Despite his considerable lead on her, she would be able to intercept him by making the shortcut.

When she reached her destination, she saw him a hundred yards away, coming fast towards her. The Bambala weren't in sight yet, but the clearness with which their chilling cries could be heard told that they weren't far behind.

Sheena gripped a dangling length of liana, balanced to swing down onto the trail. And then, with the actual moment of meeting this strange male at hand, an overpowering shyness gripped the jungle girl. She became aware of the rapid pound of her heart, the swift rise and fall of her breast, and in her legs and the pit of her stomach, she had an odd, quaky feeling.

She hesitated, bewildered by these new and utterly unexpected sensations. Then angrily, she told herself, "You fool, don't cling in this tree like a frightened lizard while death races up on that brave man."

And with that, she leaped clear of the limb, went swinging down onto the trail. Just before her feet touched the ground, she turned loose of the vine and hit running.

As the man saw a figure hurtle out of the tree, he came to a sliding stop, tearing his pistol from its holster. His eyes flew wide as Sheena hit the trail, took three long running steps and halted, facing him. His gun arm seemed to wilt, slowly dropping back to his side.

"Good lord!" he said quite audibly. "A white girl!"

Sheena heard his startled exclamation, and though she didn't understand the words, the sound of his voice was pleasant to her. She saw too that her appearance had greatly confused and upset him. She couldn't know that in addition to his shock at finding a white girl in the midst of nowhere, he was suddenly frantic with the thought that the responsibility for her life was being placed in his hands when he couldn't hope to take care of himself.

His face was tragic as he stared at her fresh, young beauty. In his mental turmoil, details such as her unusual dress or the odd manner in which she had appeared didn't immediately make an impression on him. His mind was too filled with the horror of the Bambala attack for him to think logically. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen and it sickened him to realize he was helpless to protect her from the murderous blacks.

Then the girl was beckoning to him, dire urgency in her gesture. He dropped the pistol back into his holster. He saw by her manner that she was thoroughly

aware of the pursuing blacks, but she didn't show the least sign of fear. He tried to frame what he should say to her, wondering whether to tell her right out how scant were their chances or whether to lull her with a false sense of security.

But before he could speak, she ran forward impatiently and caught him by the hand. For the merest instant, her blue eyes stared directly into his gray ones, seeming in their electric intensity to search deep within him. She turned then, and gripping his hand with surprising strength, tugged him into a run.

She kept a step ahead of him and he could no longer escape seeing the bow and quiver of arrows tied across her shoulders. He frowned, his mind struggling sluggishly with the fact that the bow was polished by long usage; the primitive doeskin quiver worn with much handling. His glance went to the long knife riding the curve of her hip, noted that the ivory handle was shaped for a woman's grip instead of a black warrior's broad, thick fingers.

And abruptly, a host of disturbing details about her began to drop into place. He felt again the strength of her grip, watched the supple play of firm muscles beneath her velvety skin, saw the golden tan which covered her body. He noticed her leopard skin clothing, which though worked to a beautiful softness, was yet crudely cut and sewn. Her feet were bare and she wore not a single ornament.

From the first few steps he took in following her, he could sense she wasn't leading him in blind flight. There was a confidence in her movements that assured him she had a definite plan figured out. This wasn't what he had expected at all. Instead of being a frightened woman seeking protection, she had taken calm command of their escape.

She led him some fifty yards down the elephant track and then swerved to the right into what appeared to the white man an impenetrable wall of vegetation. But she wriggled with sure speed through the vine-choked bush, twisting and turning right and left as if by instinct to find clearance. Twenty paces off the main trail he already had lost all sense of direction.

He abruptly realized the going was easier and found that she had brought them to a tiny, winding game path. She turned loose of his hand and began to sprint along the narrow way like a running doe.

Branches slashed at his face, caught at his rifle as he tried to keep up with her. Bushes gripped his legs, roots snared his booted feet. He felt like a blind bull threshing through the jungle, growing angry with himself as he saw how easily she threaded through the undergrowth ahead of him.

He strained to the outermost limits of his strength to stay up with her. Sweat poured from him in a drenching flood. His legs grew unsteady and his straining lungs ached with effort. And to add to his humiliation in being unable to match the girl, he finally stumbled over the roots of a baobab tree and fell sprawling full length in the path.

With the breath knocked out of him, he was too weak for a moment even to get to his knees again. When he raised his head, he saw the blonde girl had turned back and was staring at him, a questioning look on her face.

"I'm all right," he growled sheepishly. "Blasted clumsy boots are hard to run in."

She cocked her head at his words, but didn't say anything. He realized she hadn't spoken a single time, and suddenly wondered why. He heaved to his feet and managed a grin. He didn't want her to think him ungrateful.

His weak grin immediately brought an answering smile from her. She gestured to him to get started, and as if to reinforce her warning that he must keep running, the savage howls of their pursuers rose along their backtrail. He saw how swiftly the sound of the pack erased her smile and knew the Bambala were dangerously close.

His own features sobered. "Go on," he said, motioning her ahead. "You mustn't lag back because I'm so damnably slow. By yourself you can outrun them for sure. Forget about me and let me make out for myself."

Sheena studied him thoughtfully, puzzling out his meaning. Then setting her lips firmly, she marched forward and caught him by the arm. It was obvious she had no intention of leaving him.

"Ohhh," he said despairingly, "all right, I'll go. You'd stand here until they ran over us. But you're being plain foolish."

She started off again, this time adjusting her pace to his ability to stay up with her. It angered him to realize this, to appear a flabby weakling in her eyes, and he drove himself unmercifully in an effort to crowd her, but always she kept the same distance ahead of him, seeming to float effortlessly along the difficult path.

He did his best, but it wasn't good enough. The measure of his inadequacy was the growing speed with which the Bambala began to overtake them. But lacking Sheena's animal-keen hearing, he didn't realize how desperately close a handful of the swifter blacks had come behind them.

Sheena knew that these warriors, the best runners of the tribe, had long since outdistanced the pack. Only the confused winding of the path concealed them from view; otherwise, they would have been in easy arrow range.

She had doubled back onto the trail she had followed in first entering the Bambala area, hoping that once she crossed the vaguely defined border between her lands and theirs that they would abandon the chase. But she had failed to take into consideration the white man's difficulty in following her through the bush.

Because of his slowness, the blacks had cut away their lead. The Bambala could tell from the white man's spoor that he was staggering with exhaustion. With their prey almost in their grasp, the frenzy of the chase submerged their hazy fears of Sheena. They plunged across the border without hesitation, confident they could make a quick and easy kill and get back to their own lands before any harm could come to them.

When the warriors failed to turn back, a sudden chill touched Sheena's heart. The man was doomed. Despite all she could do, this black-haired, fair-skinned male of her own kind would be slain.

It would still be an easy matter for her to get away from the Bambala. But all her jungle cunning was useless to help this man. She heard him reel and clutch at a tree for support.

She stopped, turned back. His head was dropped forward on his chest, his face contorted with the struggle to breathe. He sagged against the tree for a moment, looking as though his legs were going to give under him. Then through the wetness of his shirt she saw his back and shoulder muscles tense and he shoved himself away from the tree, came weaving toward her. She sensed the effort of will behind that action.

Her blue eyes were dark with the decision she made. She put out her arms and halted him. He swayed under the suddenness of her grip.

Then slowly she stepped away from him, staring bleakly along the way the Bambala would come. He wheeled about, watching her as she reached for her bow.

Abruptly, understanding came to him. This strange, magnificent girl, rather than abandon him to his fate, was preparing to face their pursuers with no other weapon than her primitive bow.

The hoarse protest that burst from his lips was drowned by a lion's ear-splitting roar. Before his amazed eyes, a huge, black-maned lion burst from a stand of shoulder-high grass to crouch facing them in the path. The beast was a giant of his kind, a steel-thewed male in his very prime, his narrowed, yellow eyes blazing with deadliness.

For the merest fraction of time, the white man was shocked into immobility. It was as though a searing electric current stabbed into him from the cat's yellow eyes. Then with a wild, warning yell to the girl, his right hand dove for his pistol.

Chapter III

BOB knew as he went for the gun how small a chance he had of stopping the lion. But his instinct was to protect the girl, and if nothing else, the shots would draw the brute's charge to him.

Suddenly, bewilderingly, the blonde girl plunged at him, fought his hand away from the pistol. A part of his mind dazedly registered the fact that she was screaming at him in the Abama tongue, not English. He understood the words easily for he had just come from a long stay with the Nubutus, blood cousins of the Abamas, who lived a month's trek to the west.

"No, no!" she said. "Don't harm Sabor! He's my friend! I can control him."

He thought either he had gone crazy or he was dreaming the granddaddy of all nightmares. Over the girl's shoulder he could see the cat slink forward in slow, crouching steps, the unblinking eyes riveted on his face. The realization came to him that the lion was making no effort to charge the easy target made by the girl's back, but was holding back, waiting with coiled muscles for her to move out of the way.

He was the one the lion was after, not the girl!

The girl had wrestled him back against a tree. It was suddenly all too much for the confused, bone-weary man. He quit struggling for the gun, sagged back against the rough bark. At that moment, he no longer cared whether he lived or died.

As soon as he relaxed, the girl spun around to face the black maned cat. Keeping between the man and the slowly approaching beast, she began to talk in a calm, firm voice. The lion's ears shifted to catch her words, and after an interval, his glance flicked from the man to the girl.

When she had the cat looking at her, Sheena went up to him. The lion allowed her to stroke him, the deep-throated snarls changing in tone, becoming complaining rather than chilling. She scratched him behind an ear, slid her arm about his neck, and with gradual pressure, turned the giant cat completely about on the trail. Still keeping her arm around the brute's shaggy mane, she began to walk, leading him away from the man. Before she had gone five steps,

the first of the pursuing blacks burst into view on the trail. The warrior rounded a turn at a terrific pace.

The native had abandoned his spear to achieve greater speed, feeling his sword and bow were weapons enough to handle the two whites. He leaned forward as he ran, arms pumping, eyes glued to the trail.

Sheena stabbed a hand toward the warrior, pygmy words spilling from her lips. The huge lion beside her stiffened, his great head lifting. Abruptly, the cat's tail lashed, a tremendous roar smashed from his throat. Then with the blinding speed of a thunderbolt, he shot down the trail toward the warrior.

The black's head jerked up as he heard the roar. His eyes seemed to triple in size, his face blanching a dirty gray. With a wild flailing of arms and legs, he managed to whip around and start back toward the turn.

But at that moment, five more warriors running in single file sprinted into view. The fleeing black hammered into the line of his fellows, screaming, "Simba, Simba!" and clawing for his sword.

His cry of "Lion, Lion!" was no warning. All he succeeded in doing was to send the first three men sprawling over him in a confused tangle. The last two blacks did manage to keep their feet, skidding to a stop just in time to make perfect targets for the charging lion.

Sheena's savage pet shot completely over the fallen men and landed with demoniac fury on the rear two warriors. Sabor's tearing claws and fangs had ripped the blacks to shreds before he had borne them to the ground.

The great lion wasted no time on his first victims. Barely had his feet touched earth when he reared about and dove directly on the fallen mass of men. He seemed to understand that he must strike before the warriors could bring their weapons into play.

The watching white man was never to forget that awful scene. The natives screams cut through the bloodcurdling snarls of the maddened cat. The black-maned brute was everywhere at once, leaping, twisting, spinning, striking down the terrorized warriors before they could flee.

And suddenly it was over and the bloodstained lion stood among the torn things that had once been men and cried his kingly rage to the jungle. His one loyalty was to Sheena. Baring his fangs and tossing his head, he roared defiance at all those who would harm her.

The white man rubbed a hand across his eyes, muttered, "—unbelievable—that devil obeying her—fighting for her—" But it was only the first of the astonishing experiences in store for him.

The girl's whole being had changed. Her eyes blazed with excitement. She was no longer a person resigned to death. She ran up to him, momentarily forgetting that he had spoken in a strange tongue.

"Come!" she said exultantly in Abama. "They'll never catch us now! Tamba is bound to be close by. Nothing but jealousy would have made Sabor follow me this distance. He was afraid Tamba would get me off to himself and he'd go to any lengths to keep that from happening."

"I don't know who or what you're talking about," he answered hoarsely, "but I darn sure don't want to stay here with that lion."

SHE was pulling him down the path then, her darting eyes searching the jungle about them. It was a full minute before she realized that, except for a few

strange words like "darn," he had replied to her in the Abama language. She looked at him, a smile like a burst of sunlight curving her full lips.

"You do speak as I do," she said happily. "My heart sank when first I heard you speak in a strange tongue, for I thought you were different from me. But we are the same—the same skin, the same language, the same blood."

Uneasy wonder at the mystery of this strange jungle girl stirred the white man again. She had the beauty of a goddess, the ways of a wild creature. She was undoubtedly white, but spoke Abama as her native language and seemed to have no knowledge of her own race at all.

And this Tamba she spoke of, who was he? Another lion? Or was he some hulking brute of a wild man. The thought of her belonging to some man hadn't occurred to him before. He found he was oddly disturbed.

"Are you sure this Tamba person will welcome me?" he asked.

"Tamba?" she said, surprised. "He won't mind."

The white man wet his lips. "Uh—is he your husband?" He had to ask it.

She repeated the Abama word for husband under her breath as though she were unsure she had heard him aright. Then suddenly a peal of delighted laughter burst from her throat.

"Oh, no," she said, her voice husky with laughter. "The sly old lazybones has practically moved in with me and thinks he owns me, but he's hardly the type for a husband."

The white man nervously cleared his throat, his face grown more somber than ever. He failed to see any humor in the situation. It was only further proof, he told himself, of how desperately little he really knew about women.

He stared darkly at the ground, the trees, the leaf-obscured sky, anywhere so he wouldn't have to look into those dancing blue eyes. A damnable crime, he boiled silently. A young and beautiful girl like that. Looked like the picture of innocence, too. Another tragedy of environment, but probably it was far too late to do anything about it now.

Her glad cry broke into his thoughts. "There he is! There's Tamba! I knew he wouldn't be far away."

He looked grimly in the direction she pointed. For a moment, since he was prepared to see a man, his glance registered nothing but green shrubs with a huge, gray, rock-like mound vaguely visible behind them.

Then the mound moved, shoved through the undergrowth with amazing speed and quiet toward the girl, and with astonished eyes he recognized a mammoth elephant.

"That is Tamba?" he sputtered. His face reddened as he became aware of her laughing regard.

"We must hurry," she said, grown suddenly serious. "The Bambala will be slowed down by the sight of those bodies and Sabor may pick off another one or two, but so long as they have a spoor to follow they'll stay after us."

The elephant had stopped a few paces away and was regarding her with first one keen little eye and then the other.

"Here Tamba, lift him up," she commanded. The white man retreated a step. "He won't hurt you," she said in an aside. She reached out and patted the man on the shoulder for the elephant's benefit.

"I don't feel like I can move," he said tensely, "but if it is all the same to you I'll take walking rather than this." He took another backward step away from the forest giant.

She beamed for the elephant, and said in a whisper, "Don't be foolish. He's as gentle as a baby rabbit."

"Well, why are you whispering then?" the man demanded.

"I don't want him to get the idea you're afraid," she declared. "He might not respect you."

"Oh, great!" he said. But under her serious, half-pleading look, he found himself standing stiffly while the gray giant approached, suspiciously investigated him with his trunk. The man thought of a burly cop efficiently frisking a shady character. Maybe it was imagination, but he also thought Tamba gave the girl a rather aggrieved look.

"Hurry up, Tamba," snapped Sheena, "I'll explain everything to you later."

THE next thing the man knew, the elephant's trunk had snapped gently but securely about his waist and he was being swept high in the air. By the time he had scrambled to a safe perch on Tamba's back Sheena was settling herself on the broad head, slipping her long, shapely legs down behind the beast's ears.

She drummed her heels, spoke a quick command, and the elephant turned and went at a surprisingly fast gait down the path. The girl sat the forest giant as though she were glued on, but the man jounced, slipped and slid all over the swaying back. His first experience with the ancient art of elephant riding couldn't be termed a successful one.

For what seemed an eternity, he struggled to stay on that lurching back. He was too busy trying with only two hands to hold onto his rifle, clutch the rough, loose skin and block out the branches that lashed at him with diabolical aim to pay any attention to where they were headed.

When Tamba did stop, the white man's head was whirling dizzily in one direction, his stomach in another.

The soft, little clucking sounds of sympathy Sheena made as she helped him climb down touched his masculine pride. "Isn't this a fine thing," he told himself angrily. "Here I am acting like a maiden great-aunt, and she's as fresh and strong as when this nightmare started."

She solicitously maneuvered him to where he could sit down and rest his back against the tree trunk. He felt almost as bad as he had once when he was sea-sick and he sat with his eyes closed until she suddenly was holding a gourd of cold water to his lips. He took a few cautious sips of the water and used the rest to bathe his face.

He immediately felt better. He lifted his head to thank her. A small black face with brilliant, glittering black eyes hung upside down in the air not four inches from his own startled features.

"Uuugh!" he exclaimed and slammed himself back against the tree.

"Oh, I'm sorry," apologized Sheena. "It's only Chim. He wanted to get a good look at you."

And shame-facedly, the man realized the strange apparition was nothing more than a small ape hanging from a limb by his feet.

He looked about at the pleasant, tree-shaded clearing, the tree-house high above him, the cool, clear deeps of the river.

"You live here?" he asked unbelievably. "And all alone?"

She nodded enthusiastically.

Chim, apparently tiring at long last of his upside down position, loosened his grip on the limb, turned a quick flip and landed in a squatting position in the white man's lap.

"I can't imagine how you manage," he said, trying not to notice the monkey's stern, unblinking scrutiny. "How long have you lived this way?"

"Why, always," she said matter-of-factly. "Doesn't everyone live about the same way? Of course, I do live in a tree-house, whereas most natives build on the ground. There's plenty of game and plenty of water here. I don't think anyone could find a more perfect home."

HE THOUGHT of the great crowded cities of America, the unnumbered kinds of stores, services and establishments, the huge manufacturing plants, the giant utilities, the layers upon layers of governing bodies. And this slim, wide-eyed, blonde girl asked him if everyone didn't live about the same way she did. An existence such as hers, let alone a happy, healthful existence, had become inconceivable to the white races of the world.

"Surely, you remember your family," he ventured.

A shadow seemed to pass across her face. "No," she said. "They died while I was a baby. The Abamas found me, but they can tell me nothing except that my parents were of the Tribe of God." The expression was one used by natives to describe white missionaries.

Grown suddenly moody, she bit her full lower lip, stared off across the river. A wave of sympathy swept over the man. But the girl's mood swiftly passed. She turned back to him, as bright and vivacious as ever.

"You haven't told me how you are called," she said shyly.

"Great Scot," he exclaimed in English, "I really am the boy for manners."

She blinked at him. "That is your name?"

He laughed. "No, no. My name is Bob Reilly."

She pronounced it after him cautiously, like a child learning a new phrase. Then as if she had made a startling discovery, she asked, "Why do you have two names?"

Without thinking, he returned, "Why not? Most people have three."

She looked troubled. "I have only one—Sheena," she confessed in a disturbed whisper. "I guess it is a bad thing to have only one name?"

It dawned on him that she wasn't joking. In her first tentative brush with civilization, he was unwittingly making her feel certain "lacks" in herself. He sought to reassure her.

"The main reason for a name is so you'll be known and remembered," he said. "As lovely a girl as you doesn't need more than one name. There would never be a chance of your being confused with any other girl. No matter how many Sheena's there were in the world, once a man saw you, the name Sheena would never mean anyone but you."

She gravely considered his words. It was the first male compliment she had ever received. It hadn't occurred to her that how she looked might have any effect on a man. She pursed her lips, trying to figure out his exact meaning.

"You mean," she picked her words slowly, "that you find it good to look upon me?"

Bob Reilly went through a considerable process of throat clearing. He should have remembered that women were quite unable to view any matter in the abstract. They dealt with everything on a purely personal basis. He noticed how

she leaned her head forward and frowningly looked herself over as though wondering what there could be that was particularly pleasing about her.

"Anyone would say that you are unusually beautiful," he said with enforced calm. There, he had avoided the personal angle quite neatly.

She smiled. You could see the pleasure grow in her. "I—I feel quite different," she said, "from your saying that."

He found himself watching her apprehensively, and it was with a distinct sense of relief that he saw her turn away, walk to the river bank and lean over to study her reflection.

The monkey still squatted in his lap. He hadn't thought one of the little varmints could stay quiet so long. Maybe the frozen-faced devil was trying to hypnotize him. Bob stole a glance at Sheena, and certain she wasn't watching him, he made the most vicious, menacing face he could at the monkey.

Chim registered absolutely no reaction. He didn't turn a hair.

Bob lifted his hands to his ears and waggled them in the universally insulting gesture of brattish children. Chim's hard little eyes didn't so much as move. Bob bared his teeth, made ugly croaking sounds deep in his throat.

Then with insulting slowness, the monkey raised his own hands to his ears, twisted his black little features into a leering grimace, and mimicked the man's gestures with a brazen exactitude. When he had finished, Chim made a sound suspiciously like a horse laugh, leaped to the ground and went skittering off across the clearing in high good humor.

Chapter IV

BOB leaned back against the tree and closed his eyes. Too much had happened to him in too short a time. "If I don't pull myself together," he told himself, "I'll be going off my trolley permanently." His conscience was hurting him because he was deliberately pushing away thoughts of the ambush and of what his next move must be. But he realized he was too confused and beat up to plan logically. The son of one of America's wealthiest men, Bob at twenty-three, with a hat full of scholastic and sports honors and an eagerness to get out and prove himself in the world, had found himself faced with even more sterile, needless years of study. His stepmother, as a means of getting him out from underfoot, had convinced his father it would be well to send him abroad for advanced schooling.

And the long submissive Bob finally rebelled. In an ugly scene with his angry, desk-pounding father and coldly scornful stepmother, he steadfastly asserted his independence, and ended by stalking out of the house in a white fury.

Imbued with a desire to get away from everything representing his old life, he recalled an expedition being organized by one of his old professors to record and study native African languages. He had demonstrated an unusual aptitude for languages in school, and that talent along with his general record of scholarship and the publicity value of his name, made it an easy task for him to get on the expedition as an assistant.

After three months in the bush, the elderly professor's health broke down and he had to return home, leaving Bob in charge. If anything, the work went better under the younger man's direction, and he began to feel he was going to

show his father that he wasn't the only Reilly who could pull his own weight under difficult circumstances.

But his desire to include the more primitive and little-known tribes in his study drew him into the trackless depths of unexplored territory. He had known there was danger and had taken what he considered were adequate steps to protect his safari. But in his inexperience, he failed to realize the vast difference between the fighting qualities of his long subjugated coastal blacks and those of the fierce, marauding tribesmen of the interior.

His guards and bearers were boastful enough about their fighting prowess until trouble came. Then they fled in panic, abandoning both packs and weapons. And so Bob's attempt to stand on his own feet, to do something striking enough to impress his father, ended in utter disaster.

"I've botched the whole thing," he told himself. "I'm a failure. No expedition will give me a chance after this, and now my parents will expect me to come crawling back to them. And I'll have the blood of those murdered men on my hands the rest of my life."

It was these torturing thoughts that Bob tried to push away from him as he sat in Sheena's clearing. At last his very weariness came to his rescue. His chin dropped forward on his chest and he slid away into a deep sleep.

Night had fallen when Bob awakened. A great silver moon lay low in the sky. The moonlight washed the river with beauty, painted shifting patterns on the ground beneath the tall trees. The weird night chorus of the jungle rose all about the clearing.

Bob sat up in alarm, unable at first to identify his surroundings. A fire, burned down to red coals, glowed in the center of the clearing. He smelled the savory scent of a joint of meat grilling slowly over the fire.

"Where the devil am I?" he muttered, hurriedly reassuring himself that his pistol was still in its holster.

Nothing moved in the clearing. It seemed utterly deserted. Then his glance caught on a dark bulk hunched not thirty feet from him in the shadow of a tree trunk. He caught his breath and waited. The dark bulk moved, and abruptly, two slanting yellow eyes burned wickedly at him from the shadows.

A huge cat lay crouched there, watching him!

That sight swept the cobwebs from his brain. He remembered Sheena and her savage pet. If Sheena had wandered off and left him alone with that beast, he wouldn't have a chance. He felt cold sweat trickling down his face.

What should he do? If he called out or moved, that devil might charge. He recalled the stories he had read about intrepid hunters playing dead when through some accident they had found themselves at the mercy of a lion.

But even as he thought of these storybook heroes, he saw Sabor flatten himself on the ground, creep forward a good two-feet on his belly. He didn't feel the least bit intrepid at that moment.

"SHEENA!" he called loudly. "SHEENA!"

"Here I am." Her voice came from the direction of the river. "What's wrong?"

"Get this blasted lion of yours away from me! He's ready to spring."

"Oh, is that all," she said, obviously relieved. "Don't worry about Sabor. He wouldn't hurt you now for the world."

AT THE sound of his mistress' voice, Sabor stood up and looked toward the river. The instant those yellow eyes were off of him, Bob was up and around

behind the tree against which he had been leaning. Once out of sight of the cat, he streaked for another tree, further away. When he reached it safely, he began to work his way toward the water with all the care of an infantryman under heavy fire.

He reached the bank muttering. A hasty glance over the moon-swept water failed to reveal any sign of her. He looked over his shoulder. Sabor was moving toward him with slow steps, pausing every few feet to sniff the night air.

Bob turned back toward the river just in time to see Sheena's head break the surface of the water. Of all the cold-blooded women, he thought. She amuses herself by swimming around under water while her man-killing pet stalks me.

She saw him in the moonlight. "I was beginning to think you never would wake up," she said. "Come on in the water. It feels wonderful. The meal won't be ready for awhile yet anyway."

With Sabor stalking him, there was no room in Bob's mind for the proprieties. In nothing flat, he had tugged off his boots and stripped to his shorts. Cats, even big cats, didn't like water. He would be safe in the river.

Bob took two running steps and drove out over the water in a racing dive. He drove out toward mid-stream with a smooth powerful stroke, leaving a frothing wake.

"How swiftly you go," she exclaimed as he swam up to her. "Like the finny ones themselves! Oh, if only I could swim that way! I've studied every animal I could, trying to learn better ways of swimming, but none of them can match you."

He had meant to lecture to her about Sabor. But he found himself saying almost moderately, "You've got to do something about that lion. Didn't you realize he was creeping up to kill me?"

"Faugh," she said mildly. "On the trail—yes—he would have killed you. But now he understands you're my friend. He's been lying there looking at you since long before dark. After all, he never saw a white man before and he's kind of interested."

"I tell you he even came creeping after me down to the river," insisted Bob. "I don't like him and he doesn't like me."

Sheena laughed. On the shore the black-maned lion coughed irritably. Both the man and the girl glanced toward him. He was standing with his head high, staring out at them over the water.

"Well, Sabor probably thinks we would be better off without you," she confessed, "but I told him you belonged to me and to leave you alone. And he'll do it!"

Bob's mind had stopped dead on the words, "I told him you belonged to me." He was suddenly puzzled. What was going on in the head of this wild, young, pagan girl?

The next thing he knew she was swimming so close to him that he could feel the touch of her bare leg against his as she treaded water.

"I've been thinking about what you said to me this afternoon," she suddenly declared.

Her eyes were disturbingly large and luminous in the moonlight.

"What was that?" he asked.

"About you finding me good to look upon," she explained. "That made me very happy. I couldn't really understand what you meant at first," Sheena went

on. "I've never been around any men of my own kind, so it hadn't occurred to me that—well—that they might like me or not like me."

"Yes. Quite so," Bob said uneasily. "Don't you think you should look at the food?"

Sheena's face was instantly sympathetic. "Oh, I forgot," she said. "I'm not used to having visitors. You must be starving."

Before he could move, she had thrust her feet against the river floor and stood up. He realized for the first time that she swam unclad and her suddenly revealed beauty made his breath catch in his throat. Her bare body was a picture of Aphrodite rising from the sea.

Sheena waded to the bank. With a child's innocence, she stood there smoothing the glistening drops of water from her body with her hands. After leisurely donning her halter and shorts, she walked across to the fire, inspected the joint of meat cooking over the crossbars.

When Sheena called him to eat, Bob dressed hurriedly in the shadow of a tree and joined her near the fire. The food was delicious and he ate huge quantities of it, but actually he hardly tasted it or knew what he was eating.

Never in his life had Bob felt such conflicting emotions about anyone as he did about the jungle girl. He kept stealing glances at Sheena as she moved back and forth from the fire, waiting on him, or while she sat cross-legged beside him, eating with unconcealed enjoyment. She shone with happiness.

And suddenly he realized that he was happy too. By all rights, he felt he should have been wallowing in the depths of despair. He was lost in the depths of an untracked jungle, hunted by murderous tribesmen, left without any adequate means of protecting himself. Yet never had he felt so vibrantly alive as he did now.

Chapter V

THE raucous argument of parrots on a limb above him awakened Bob in the morning. He had slept near the fire, using a zebra skin thrown over freshly-cut grasses for his bed. The moment he sat up, his eyes went to the tree house high above him.

He realized that his first thoughts were of the blonde-haired girl. "This won't do," he warned himself. "I'm supposed to be a serious, intelligent adult." He got up and began to pace the clearing, forcing everything out of his mind but his wrecked expedition. He had to decide what to do.

He could be a quitter, write off the expedition as a total loss and concentrate on trying to get out of this scrape with his own skin whole. Under the circumstances, that didn't seem too illogical.

But Bob kept remembering that a good part of the records of the expedition were in those packs abandoned by the bearers. The Bambala were certain to gather up the packs, cart them back to their village as loot. Until he knew those records were definitely destroyed, he felt bound to try to recover them.

Then, even though the cowardice of his blacks was the real reason for the debacle, he considered it his duty to go to the help of any who had survived the attack. The Bambala wouldn't have slaughtered them all. Once certain their

victims were too terrorized to fight back, they would have begun taking prisoners.

And after an hour of pacing and fretting, he made up his mind. He wouldn't be able to live with himself if he didn't make a sincere attempt to free the surviving bearers and retake the records he had so painstakingly gathered. Yet even as the resolve was formed, he felt himself doomed to failure.

How could he, with a handful of pistol cartridges and an abysmal ignorance of the jungle, hope to strike any kind of a blow against the savage Bambala?

Bob was surprised to see Sheena suddenly stride from the jungle. He had thought her still asleep in the tree house. She leaned her spear against a tree, walked over and stirred the fire to life.

"I left early," she said. "I thought it wise to check on the Bambala." She knelt, placed four fresh sticks of wood in the flames.

"The Bambala didn't turn back as I had hoped," she said abruptly. "They are searching for us now."

SHE loosened a leather pouch belted about her slim waist, laid it on a clean rock beside the fire. Then, after selecting a long, pointed stick from a collection held in a large gourd, she reached in the pouch and drew out a freshly cleaned and dressed bird. She held it up for him to see before she spitted it on the stick for cooking.

"I thought these birds might please you for the morning meal," she said. And so he would understand they were something special, she added, "I hunted for them quite awhile."

The girl utterly baffled Bob. She seemed to have dismissed the black warriors from her mind. After learning those murderous devils were searching them out, how could she calmly go hunting and then come back to enjoy a leisurely meal.

"The birds look wonderful," he said without enthusiasm. "But frankly, Sheena, shouldn't we be getting out of here instead of thinking of eating?"

"Leave?" she said, surprised. "This is my home!"

"You can't fight off a whole tribe," he told her.

Her eyes flashed. "I can cause them enough trouble to make them wish they hadn't come. I've done it before."

"But they'll come back, Sheena," he said gravely. "And they'll keep coming back until one day they'll catch you."

She fitted the spitted birds onto the forked supports which held them over the fire. She stood up, brushed her hands. The merest shadow crossed her face.

"Death must come to every living creature," declared the girl. "I will not be afraid when my time comes." She spoke with the fatalism of those to whom danger is a constant companion.

"Is there a way, Sheena," he asked suddenly, "for me to circle around these warriors and reach their village. I'd guess that most of the able-bodied men are hunting for us. This might be my best chance to slip into their village and try to free any of the bearers who were captured. If there are enough of them and they'll help me, maybe I can even recover my records."

Sheena turned in alarm. Though she had talked calmly enough of death in regard to herself, she now exclaimed, "Are you trying to kill yourself? You must be mad to speak of such a thing!"

He blinked at her, taken aback by her reaction. She paced rapidly back and forth in front of him.

"I haven't the least desire to get anywhere near that village," he admitted honestly, "but it is my duty to do it."

"Duty? I do not know this word!" She was like an aroused leopard, lithe and quick, with a wildness in her eyes. "I will not have you put yourself in danger. I will not have it, you understand!"

Bob scratched his head and frowned. He hadn't anticipated anything like this.

"It's all right for you to play dangerous games with the Bambala, but not me. Is that it?"

She gave her long blonde hair a savage toss. "I am different," she snapped. "I am Sheena!"

She reached him with quick steps, shook a finger in his face. "Put this notion from your head. You are not to go anywhere near that kraal of dangos."

"You saved my life, Sheena," he answered gently, "and I'm deeply grateful, but I'm not a new pet who will meekly do your bidding. There are some things a man must do if he is to live with himself."

And he tried to explain to her then why he had to make a stab at helping the bearers and recovering the work of many months.

"You owe those men nothing," she told him with harsh, feminine logic. "They did not value their freedom enough to fight for it. As to this work you talk of, I do not understand about it too much, but it can't be important enough to lose your life over."

"Nevertheless, I must go," he said firmly.

She was very close to him. The changeful blue depths of her eyes softened, losing the storminess of a moment before. The warm, girl scent of her came up to Bob.

He watched the curve of her full, red lips. Her teeth were small and fine and white. He had never known any woman who stirred him as she did.

Suddenly the tight control he had exerted over himself snapped. Before he knew what he did, he reached his arms about her and pressed his mouth to hers.

The startled girl's eyes flew wide. She stiffened as though either to fight or run. But she let him draw her into his embrace, made no attempt to take her mouth from his.

Abruptly he released her, but he could not move away because she held him with the rigidity of her arms about his neck.

"I'm sorry, Sheena," he mumbled, "I shouldn't have done that. I—I didn't mean to do it." He was embarrassed and angry with himself. "I only meant to tell you that though I wish I never had to see another Bambala, I have to go to their village."

Sheena slid her arms from his neck and stepped back. The strange, startled expression was still on her face. Her right hand came up to touch her mouth.

"Why did—what did you do?" she faltered.

Bob frowned, momentarily puzzled. Then he was more embarrassed than ever. Sheena had no idea what a kiss was.

"I kissed you," he said. And then he didn't know what to say next.

"But why?" she demanded.

"Uh—well, I just couldn't help myself." His face reddened. "Among our people, when a man?" That didn't sound right. "It's a custom. It—it means—no, that's

not what I want to say." He bumbled on in a growing confusion of unfinished sentences.

"You mean," Sheena asked, "that among people with white skin it is like when a native man rubs noses with a girl?"

"Yes," he granted uncomfortably. He considered how swiftly feminine instinct had taken her to the heart of the matter.

"I have seen them," she said thoughtfully. She touched her lips with her fingers. "This is a strange thing, this 'kiss,' very strange." Then slowly, she smiled and nodded her head. "But it is far better than the natives' custom. I think our people must be very wise. First, there was the firestick which kills at a distance, then the superior way of swimming, and now this matter."

"Then you aren't angry with me?" ventured Bob.

She contemplated him gravely. "No," she said softly. "I should like you to do it again, now when I wouldn't be so surprised."

Bob swallowed heavily. "Not now," he declared. His breath came very fast. "No, not now." He might have proved himself a sorry kind of man by making a mess of his expedition, he told himself, but he'd be damned if he was sorry enough to take advantage of Sheena's innocence. She had saved his life. The least he could do was to behave himself.

SHEENA sighed, tapped a forefinger against her teeth for a few moments.

"Do not worry, Bob. If you must go through with this Bambala foolishness," she said in unexpected capitulation, "Sheena will make you a plan. You sit here and rest. Fretting is not good for you."

He was relieved to know she wasn't going to continue her opposition, though he didn't take seriously her easy assurance that she would provide a plan. She was an unusual girl, but a foray such as he contemplated was rather out of a woman's line. He was amused by her swift shift from the role of a naive, young maiden to that of a wise elder mothering a child.

But later, after they had eaten, when he still hadn't laid hold of the vaguest notion of how to carry through his project, she calmly and confidently told him how the job could be done.

She said, "This will work—if anything will. I know the Bambala, how they think. And fortunately for us, only women and old men will be in the kraal."

Bob listened in amazement. Never in a thousand years would so unorthodox a scheme have occurred to him. But, by George, it might work. It was bold and dangerous, yet properly executed it could so stun and frighten the tribesmen that he would have time to free his bearers and gather up his records before a hand was raised against him.

Then his face suddenly fell. Tamba was the keystone of the whole plan, which he realized on second thought meant that Sheena was counting herself in on the raid.

"Oh, no," he cried. "You're taking no part in this. The plan won't do. I'm not risking your life on business that just concerns me."

Sheena regarded the determined set of his jaw and smiled.

"You're mistaken," she said mildly. "The fight is entirely yours. I mean only to help you get ready for it and guide you to the village. If I order it, Tamba will do your bidding well enough to get you through."

Bob subsided. "Well, that's different," he said. "I won't have you running any more risks on my account. Look at the trouble I've already caused you."

Throughout the day, Bob kept worrying that they should leave the camp, but Sheena refused to be hurried. After several trips into the jungle to gather a strange assortment of bulbs, roots, and dank, yeasty growths, she had settled down to mixing a white, glue-like substance.

"Chim and Sabor are keeping an eye on the Bambala," she told him. "They'll let us know when the dangos get too close."

Bob didn't share her confidence in the two pets. And the fact that Chim would get bored about every two hours and return to camp to see what Sheena was doing didn't help his nerves. After the jungle girl had chased the grumbling ape back to his post for the third time, she made a further confession to ease Bob's tension.

"I laid enough false trails this morning to keep the Bambala busy until nightfall, unless they should get very lucky," she explained. "And scattered along each trail are unpleasant little surprises to discourage them from hurrying."

She didn't go into detail about the surprises and he didn't ask her to, for her grim tone brought crowding into his mind the variety of murderous traps he had seen black men use in hunting: camouflaged pits, drawn bows released when a vine in the path was touched, tiny, poisoned bamboo splinters set in the earth, snares that would jerk a grown bushbuck eight feet in the air and break its neck, bent saplings that would hammer a lion into pulp.

But the revelation of how she had occupied the early morning shook him as badly as had the realization that Sabor, far more than a pet, was a deadly weapon she employed against her enemies.

When he looked at her now, he saw a young, mild, soft-voiced girl, anxious to please, quick to laugh. He felt at ease with this girl. In truth, he felt pleasantly superior. Then abruptly, she would shatter this mould into which he had fitted her, revealing by some action that she was more a sister to a tawny, dangerous lioness than the conventional being he tried to believe her to be.

How could he reconcile the shy, soft-mouthed girl he had held in his arms for a moment that morning with the Sheena who could meet and best the black warriors at their own savage game?

It made him almost afraid of the girl. You couldn't guess what really went on in that head of hers or predict how she would react in a given situation. How could he be sure she wouldn't turn on him, if he made a move that rubbed her the wrong way?

Sheena was too busy to notice any change in him. Not until late afternoon did she plug up with a stopper of wadded leaves the last of five large gourds of the thick, whitish liquid. She glanced at the low-lying sun and then came over to where Bob sat, then stretched out on her side on the ground beside him.

She smiled up at him, her head cushioned on her right arm. "The night ahead may be long," she said simply. "I will rest until Chim comes. He would never forgive me for leaving him behind."

She closed her eyes, took a few slow, deep breaths and was immediately asleep. Bob blinked in amazement. "That's not human," he told himself. "She even sleeps like a cat."

He set his jaw firmly and looked away into the jungle. But in less than a minute his gaze had crept back to the sleeping form beside him. He studied the way the long, blonde hair tumbled about her face and shoulders, examined the

long lashes lying heavy against her golden skin, watched with something more than scientific interest, the manner in which her red lips pouted in sleep.

The daylight was nearly gone when Bob realized with a start that Sheena's eyes were open and that for some time she had been silently watching him.

His confusion wasn't lessened when she said, "Chim grows impatient with my laziness."

As though ear plugs had been drawn from his ears, he suddenly heard a monkey chattering and grumbling in the tree above them. How long the little devil had been there he didn't know, but apparently for a considerable period. And though Chim had made enough noise to rouse Sheena from sleep, Rob hadn't even been conscious of his presence.

"It was nice to awaken and find you sitting beside me," she said, putting a hand on his arm. "But I couldn't help but wonder what you were thinking that made you frown so."

He got up quickly, avoiding her gaze. "I was thinking of the raid," he lied.

"Oh," she said quietly. And he had a queer feeling that she was smiling inwardly.

WHILE they waited for it to become full dark, they ate a light meal of fruit and nuts. Then Sheena called Tamba, tied the gourds on him so they wouldn't rattle or spill. Like the low, distant rumble of thunder, came the roar of a lion. After a brief interval, answering cries from widely separated points in the jungle could be heard.

"The Bambala are close, but they won't do much more traveling tonight," said Sheena grimly. "That first roar was Sabor's victory cry, telling the jungle he had made an easy kill. Every cat within hearing will head for that area. I think we can move safely now."

And so in the pitch blackness before the moon rose, Tamba carried them along secret trails past the Bambala patrols. Bob, who had worried about the nervous, talkative Chim going along with them, noticed that the monkey huddled in front of Sheena and never uttered a sound. He was about ready to believe that the jungle girl's pets did understand what was going on.

It was after midnight when Sheena halted the elephant in a moonlit glade. "We'll do our work here," she said. "The kraal is within arrow shot."

She unfastened the gourds, detached two of them, lowered the others carefully to the ground.

"I'll paint his head and back," she told Bob. "You take care of his legs and stomach."

A half-hour later the patient elephant had been smeared completely over with the thick, white liquid brewed by Sheena. But in the darkness, the liquid revealed a property not discernible during daylight. It glowed with an eerie, phosphorescent light.

Bob stood off and looked at Tamba. "By Harry," he exclaimed, "he's the most unearthly-looking sight I ever hope to see. And that hazy, bluish glow makes him look twice as big as he is. A creature like that looming out of the night would frighten anyone."

"The Abama witch woman who brought me up used it in her magic," explained Sheena. "I often helped her gather the materials and mix it."

Bob looked at his hands, glowing with light from the mixture he had smeared over the elephant. "I believe it may work," he excitedly declared, "if the Bambala are as superstitious as you say."

"Let us hope so," the girl said quietly. "There will be danger enough at best."

Sheena had picked up the vine rope which had been used to tie the gourds on Tamba. As she talked, she idly toyed with it, forming loose coils on the ground with one end, twisting and gathering the other end in an odd pattern.

"Well, this finishes your part of the job, anyway," said Bob. "You've been wonderful to help me."

He tried to tell her how grateful he was, but he seemed suddenly clumsy with words and his voice took on an unnatural brusqueness.

He finished lamely by saying, "I'd better paint myself up now. And then as soon as you get me started off on Tamba, I want you to get away from here—and stay away. You've taken too many chances on my account already."

Sheena didn't look at him. She kept her head down, her fingers nervously working with the rope. "Yes, Bob," she said.

She seemed small and feminine and terribly forlorn in the moonlight. The sight of her caught Bob's heart and twisted it. He had been a rotten, miserable heel to think of her as he had that afternoon.

He couldn't leave her this way. He had to take her in his arms, tell her how he felt about her. He took two steps towards her. "Sheena," he said hoarsely, "before I go—"

As though her mind had been turned inward and she hadn't heard him, she suddenly interrupted. "The paint, Bob—it must be dry before you mount Tamba. Hold out your hands and let me see if it is drying properly."

Her taut, businesslike tone, so out of harmony with the mood that had swept over him, stopped Bob in his tracks. Almost angrily, he shoved out his hands for her inspection.

As to what happened next, he was to try many times afterwards to recall exactly how it did occur. But he was never to be entirely certain about any of it.

Sheena leaned as though to inspect his hands. The next thing he knew the vine rope she had been idly fingering snapped about his wrists. "What the devil?" he exclaimed.

Before he could realize what she was about, Sheena leaped backwards, the rope running through her hands with the speed of a striking snake. Then she flipped the rope, gave a powerful tug—and Bob's feet shot from under him.

One end of the vine was lashed about his wrists, the other about his ankles. There had been careful planning behind all her nonchalant handling of the rope while they talked. The loops she had thrown on the ground with seeming carelessness were those she flicked upward to lash his ankles, send him crashing to the ground.

Despite the stunning force of the fall he took, Bob lashed out wildly, trying to break free. After darting in to snatch his pistol from its holster, Sheena stood a safe distance away, watching him struggle. He fought like a maddened beast, his sanity momentarily splintered by the terrible shock of her treachery.

But the bonds held, and at last he lay gasping, his muscles trembling from the violence of his efforts. Only then did he look at her, letting the bitter acid of his wrath spill out in words.

"And to think I believed in you, trusted you," he snarled. "I should have known you'd turn on me like an animal if it were to your advantage."

His mouth was a vicious slit, his eyes narrow pools of hate. His gun made a dull thump as she dropped it at her feet.

"You fooled me, though," continued Bob. "I swallowed all your hocus-pocus, never suspecting that you'd use me to buy your own safety. Very clever! You hand me over to the Bambala and thereby buy them off of your own trail. They were getting too close for comfort. And you got to worrying that if I did raid their kraal and did some damage, they'd never forgive you for helping me."

Sheena smoothed her hands nervously over her midriff, her face expressionless except for the eyes which seemed to glow in the night. Finally, her right hand slid to the knife riding the curve of her hip. The blade gleamed coldly as she lifted it from the sheath.

Chapter VI

BOB was abruptly still as he saw the bared steel in the jungle girl's hand. Then with withering contempt, he said, "Don't lose your head, my precious. The Bambala won't pay as much for me dead as they will alive. They, too, enjoy the pleasure of killing!"

A deep, pained frown cut Sheena's forehead. She had foreseen everything in her planning except Bob's reaction. The awful bitterness of his words took her by surprise.

"Yes, I play a hard trick on you," she said evenly. "But I play it to save your life, not take it away."

She turned her back on him. The gray trunk of a dead tree stood at the edge of the clearing some thirty paces in front of her. She covered half the distance to the tree with quick steps. Then Sheena lifted the knife, sent it glittering through the air to drive point-first into the dead wood.

Bob had lifted himself with difficulty to a sitting position. He watched her fling the knife into the tree and hurry back to where Tamba waited.

"What did you mean about saving my life?" he demanded.

She picked up the remaining half-gourd of phosphorescent paint, literally poured it over her head and shoulders, saving back enough to douse the protesting Chim. Then she painted both her spear and bow.

"I meant I am going in your place!" she snapped, rapidly smearing the paint evenly over her. "Foolish one, Tamba would never take your orders, and besides, I know far more about handling the Bambala than you do."

He stared at her aghast as she signaled Tamba to lift Chim and her to his back. "You intended this from the beginning?"

"Of course," she said, "if your men and packs can be wrested from the Bambala, I will do it. If I fail, then you will still be able to save yourself."

"No!" he burst out indignantly. "I won't allow it!"

He was working clumsily with his fingers to loosen the bonds on his ankles. Since Sheena had tied his hands in front of him, he had no trouble reaching his feet.

"I tied you so you'd have to allow it," she said calmly. "And don't waste your strength trying to undo those knots. You'll need my knife to get free. By the time you work your way over to that tree and get it loose, it will be too late for you to interfere at the kraal."

Sheena lifted her pet ape, dropped him to the ground,

"However, on second thought I'll leave Chim to help take care of you. The noise he's making would work me harm, but his voice and looks should protect you from anything less than a rhino."

She tried to force a light-hearted gaiety into her tone, but the attempt wasn't wholly successful. "I go now!" she said abruptly, lifting her spear in an odd, quick salute.

Then Tamba was moving past Bob, bearing Sheena into the jungle. He pleaded with her not to go, nearer in his utter helplessness to tears than at any time since his early childhood. Sheena, sitting ramrod straight, didn't look back.

As the dark, green foliage closed behind her, Bob's voice trailed away brokenly. He thought of things he had said to her in anger and was ashamed and miserable. She was going into that village for him and only because of him.

He had called her an animal, immediately attributing the basest motives to her. He remembered the hurt, surprised look on her face as she heard his accusations. Yet she hadn't even rebuked him.

In that moment, the certainty crystallized in him that he would never see Sheena again. She was riding to her death!

In one writhing effort, Bob heaved himself to his feet. He had to get free and catch her. He reeled, his legs so tightly bound he couldn't balance himself.

To keep from falling, he started hopping forward, each clumsy hop swifter and more desperate than the preceding one. But his convulsive efforts to regain his equilibrium were doomed to failure. He got no more than five yards before he crashed heavily to the hard earth.

The fall knocked the breath from him, yet he immediately fought to his elbows and knees. He heard a weird gibberish sounding right at his shoulder. He jerked his heel around and saw Chim crouched on hands and knees beside him. The ape, his eerily glowing face seemingly wreathed with diabolical delight, was trying to assume the same position as, Bob.

The distraught man's temper exploded. "I'll teach you to mock me," he shouted. And he reared up on his knees, lifting his bound arms to knock the ape rolling.

But Chim divined his purpose instantly. With an alarmed screech, the ape bounded backwards and fled off across the clearing like some small, incandescent demon. Bob shook his knotted fists in futile, senseless rage.

CHIM literally flew over the ground, his little head twisting right and left in search of a safe refuge. The gray outlines of the dead tree caught his attention as it had Sheena's when she looked for a place to plant the knife. The ape headed for the tree. He scrambled up the trunk in mad haste, shooting past the knife to reach the bare lower limbs.

Not until then did he pause to look back. His staccato outburst revealed surprise that the man hadn't moved. He fell silent, considering the matter. Then deciding he was quite safe, his whole manner changed and he began climbing slowly down the tree, grandly announcing his outrage at being put upon like a common fellow.

When Chim reached the knife, he suddenly stopped his tirade. He recognized the scent of his beloved mistress. He gave a delighted cry and tugged the knife free.

He beamed on the weapon. It was Sheena's. He would return it to Sheena and she would be pleased with him. She was always very proud of him when he returned some belonging of hers that he found. In fact, if the truth were known, he often stole her belongings so he might return them and have her pleased with him.

His run-in with Bob had slipped as completely out of Chim's erratic little mind as had his memory that Sheena was gone. His head didn't trouble itself very often to try to hold more than one notion at a time.

He dropped from the tree and scampered happily back toward Bob. He was within three yards of the man when he realized Sheena was nowhere in sight. Chim had been too angry about the white paint being poured on him to pay any attention to Sheena's departure, and after that, Bob's antics had so engrossed him that he still didn't realize he had been deserted.

All at once now it was borne in on him that his protector was gone and that the terrible night so feared by the tree folk kept him from finding her. Chim was suddenly frightened. He looked about at the dark trees, imagining fearful enemies staring at him.

Bob had no idea what went on in Chim's mercurial mind. The white man crouched on his knees, his breath coming in hard gasps. The ape had the knife. That was all that mattered.

From the moment Chim had pulled the knife from the tree and started back toward him, Bob had been afraid to speak or move. He had to get the weapon from the little devil. But how? After the way he had treated the monkey, a word or movement from him would probably send Chim fleeing into the forest.

He wet his lips nervously, "Here Chim! Good boy, give me the knife." He uttered the words like a prayer. "Nice boy. I won't hurt you."

Chim, who had hunkered down into a little glowing knot, lifted his head and stared mournfully at the white man. Then he ducked his face and shivered.

Bob kept talking in the gentle, wheedling tone. The monkey wouldn't budge. Bob gathered his courage and edged forward a few inches. Without even lifting his head, Chim edged backward an equal distance.

Bob groaned. He'd never get the knife, never in the world. The little fool understood and obeyed every word Sheena spoke, yet at this moment, when so much depended on it, he wouldn't heed a single thing Bob said to him.

And then abruptly, Bob realized that in his excitement, he had been speaking in English. With his voice trembling with excitement, he switched to the Abama tongue.

Chim straightened, cocking his head to listen. He seemed to feel better immediately. He began to chatter and moved cautiously in towards the man.

Bob was careful to make no sudden moves. Not until the ape had snuggled against him did he gently reach for the knife. To his relief, Chim seemed actually happy to give the weapon up. Bob's face and hands were bathed with sweat and he was shaking as he cut away his rope bonds.

He shoved the knife under his belt, ran to where Sheena had dropped his pistol. Then gun in hand, he raced toward the point where the jungle girl had left the clearing, praying that he would be able to follow her in the dark.

He was in luck for once. Tamba had left a clear trail where he had forced his way through the undergrowth, and within a distance of twenty yards, Bob hit a broad trail, From the angle at which the elephant had slanted into the trail, there was no doubting the direction Sheena had taken.

AS HE started to run, a hysterical jabbering broke out behind him. Chim, refusing to be abandoned, came rocketing out of the underbrush and in an amazing leap, fastened himself on Bob's back. He hugged himself against the white man so tightly, his small heart pounding with fright, that Bob couldn't bring himself to throw him off.

"All right," growled Bob. "You can play Old Man of the Sea until we come in sight of the kraal. Then you're going back on your own!" And with that, he sprinted on down the trail with redoubled effort.

After Sheena left Bob tied in the clearing, she turned her whole mind to the task ahead of her. By the time she reached the Bambala kraal, the final details of her plan were perfected.

The walled village lay silent and sleeping in the waning moonlight. If there were sentries posted, they rested listlessly out of sight, lulled by the long, monotonous hours of early morning. The campfires had died to ash-whitened coals. Sheena had carefully selected this as the most propitious time for her raid.

The jungle girl urged Tamba straight up to the big main gate. In these first few moments, boldness would be her most valuable weapon. When the elephant slowed his pace before the gate, not yet understanding what was expected of him, Sheena drummed her heels behind his ears, drove him head-on against the massive barrier.

"Forward, O Mightiest of Elephants," she encouraged him. "Let these jackals know your strength."

There was a splintering impact. For a moment, the mammoth bull seemed to hesitate. Then the big gate tore free of cross-bars and hinges, fell inward with a mighty crash.

And Tamba, exhilarated by the exploit, lifted his trunk and trumpeted in ear-splitting challenge to all comers as he carried his mistress into the kraal.

Two guards who had been dozing on a catwalk beside the gate, crouched frozen on their knees. Their eyes gleamed out of the darkness like great, circular bulbs as they stared at the ghostly apparition sweeping into the kraal.

"Tremble, you curs," cried Sheena, gesturing toward them with her spear, "for the curse of doom is on you! I, who am the servant of Gimshai, dread god of death, proclaim this doom on Bambala!"

Of all the fearsome jungle deities, the all-powerful Gimshai struck the greatest terror into the hearts of black men. And as every native knew, the servants of Gimshai appeared in a thousand, thousand different forms, struck at their chosen victims in unnumbered ways.

The terror of one of the guards was so great that after hearing Sheena's words he toppled forward senseless on the platform. The other man, quaking in every muscle, jerked upright on the platform. Mindless, nerve-tearing screams ripped from his throat.

He literally dove off the catwalk, hit the ground with bone-breaking force. But fear anaesthetized any physical hurt he sustained, and he was on his feet and running immediately, streaking down the main way of the kraal.

The guard's screams ripped the blanket of sleep from the village. Commands, shouts, the sound of running feet boiled up from the dark clusters of huts. Dazed men and women poured from narrow, skin-hung doorways.

And into the very middle of this suddenly aroused ant-heap rode Sheena. Straight down the principal way of the village she went, looking to neither right nor left, the one completely calm, collected person in all that howling throng.

She and the mammoth elephant seemed enveloped in a swirling, blue-white haze of light. Tamba seemed even more immense than he really was, and the din of his steady trumpeting, inspired by excitement and the scent of the Bambala, was indeed like the sound of doom.

As the blacks, crowding out to learn the cause of the disturbance, saw that white, statue-like figure that was Sheena, the loud furor died away like a fading echo. A low, frightened moan that could have been the keening of the wind over a wasteland swept back and back through the massing natives.

Then Sheena's voice, harsh and savage, was heard. "From the Black Hole of Death, from the Skull-Throne of the Terrible God himself, I bring you the curse of Gimshai.

"Look at me, O members of a jackal-tribe! Look at me and tremble, for I am the Clawed Hand of Gimshai; I am the Net of the Eater of Souls; I am the Sword of the God of Death."

Her words drove into the minds of the Bambala like poisoned darts. Had she rehearsed her speech to Bob Reilly he would have thought it suicidal nonsense. But Sheena knew how to open the floodgates of fear in her audience.

The entire existence of these wild and primitive natives was a web of superstition. Any strange or unexplained phenomena they attributed to gods or demons. And their over-active imaginations seized on every untoward event and embroidered it with supernatural significance.

Even now as they gazed at the strange, chalk-white she-demon, their imaginations swiftly added a variety of details to what they thought they saw. There were some who saw in the whiteness of her face the clear outlines of a death'shead. Others saw her long hair, stiffly encrusted with white liquid, as a mass of pale squirming snakes. Some would say afterwards her eyes were hollow black sockets, others that they were red coals of fire.

It would be said that the spear in her hand squirmed and wriggled like a living thing, that the eerie, elephant-like apparition she rode was no more than a mist through which one could see, that rivulets of cold flame ran outward along the ground where the creature's feet were placed.

Sheena's audience was especially impressionable on this night when practically the whole of its fighting strength was absent. Excited by their triumph of the previous day, every warrior eagerly had sought to join the hunt for Bob Reilly and the jungle girl.

Left behind in the kraal were the untried youths, the men too old or sick for trekking, and the easily frightened mass of women and children.

Sheena had counted on the absence of the real fighting men as a major help in the carrying out of her colossal bluff.

Now as she heard the whimpering of the women, saw the crowd edge backward away from her, she boldly rode into the central clearing, abandoning any hope of retreat. She knew the crowd would mass around the open space, and if she were found out, that wall of humanity would prevent her from ever reaching the gate alive.

After the habit of the Bambala, both the prisoners and the loot gained in their attack on Bob's safari were kept on display in the clearing. The miserable

bearers were crowded into a foul, make-shift pen like animals, and stacked near the enclosure were the packs they once had carried.

The great feast and the ceremony of dividing the spoils which always followed a battle triumph were being delayed until Bob and Sheena were captured.

Sheena headed the elephant toward the pen, wanting to free the prisoners and march them out of the kraal before the stunned tribesmen could collect their wits.

But suddenly two of the large cooking fires in the clearing flickered into life. Yellow tongues of flame reached along the edges of the dry wood which had been thrown hastily on the coals. Sheena understood then the purpose of the commands that had sounded in the first uproar of her entrance, for revealed in the mounting light was a hollow square of armed guards grouped about two men, the two most important men in the tribe.

One was Babuli, the immensely fat chieftain of the Bambala, a brutal, self-indulgent tyrant. The other was Nyag-Nyag, a tall, thin, one-eyed man with a hatchet face and the hunched posture of a crouching weasel.

Nyag-Nyag was the Bambala witch doctor, and more than any other member of the tribe, he had reason to hate Sheena, for time and again the most potent magic he could make against her had proved ineffectual.

Chapter VII

SHEENA instantly was disturbed when she saw the two tribal leaders with the ranks of hard-bitten guards ranged about them. She certainly hadn't counted on their presence. Improvising to meet this unexpected danger, she hastily changed her plans and halted Tamba.

Gesturing contemptuously with her spear, she cried, "Hai! So now I look upon the two chief jackals!"

The elephantine Babuli clearly was more shaken by her ghostly appearance than the witch doctor. "Why—why—have you come here?" he asked weakly.

Sheena was silent for long, ominous moments. Then like the crack of a whip her voice lashed him. "I come to take your soul to ever-lasting torment! Even now, Gimshai wrathfully awaits your coming!"

The mammoth chieftain stumbled back a step, his great belly quivering. The harsh confidence with which she spoke turned his blood to ice.

"There is some terrible mistake," he quavered. "Never by word or deed have I shown disrespect for Gimshai! Aaiiee, he is the greatest of gods! In all the jungle, no one has sent him more souls than Babuli."

"It's too late to lie," Sheena said grimly. "You honor but one god, N'Koto, god of war, and it is he who has led you to your downfall. Two suns ago you made a cowardly attack upon the safari of one who holds the special favor of Gimshai. The Taker of Souls reached out his hand and saved this white man, saying for the destruction you had wrought you would pay with your life. And so I have come to exact payment!"

Babuli seemed to be choking. His eyes stood out like round, red marbles. Poisoned by a lifetime of superstition, he felt that already the life-force was being sucked from his body, that the fluttering in his throat was his soul struggling to escape.

"Talk to her! Appease her!" he gasped to the witch doctor. "You know more of gods and demons than I do. Promise anything—anything—if she will let me be."

With his one good eye, the witch doctor had been glaring at Sheena. He was not as naive as Babuli, nor as superstitious as the other tribesmen. He had practiced too much trickery and deceit, pawned off too much humbug as magic, to be taken in easily by Sheena's tricks.

He sensed something familiar in this ghostly intruder, noted also how she sought to keep back out of the firelight. It seemed to him that every time an especially high leap of the flames lighted her mount that its eerie blue-white glow disappeared.

Yet because he was both a cunning man and a coward, Nyag-Nyag proceeded with care.

He pushed through the ranks of warriors, picked a blazing stick from the fire. He lifted the torch high as though to clearly light himself for Sheena's eyes.

"Hear me, O One Who Walks the Night," he said in a false, fawning voice. "I make no plea for my worthless, unimportant self, but I do plead for the noble Babuli."

He edged nearer to Tamba as he talked, narrowly watching the effect of the torchlight on the elephant's glowing whiteness.

"Never would Babuli knowingly offend the dread Taker of Souls," he continued. "If a wrong has been done by Babuli, he stands ready to make any gifts, offering or sacrifices the god decrees. Intercede for us, O Great One, and the Bambala will honor you endlessly. Help us to right our unmeant wrong! You have only to speak."

Relief surged through Sheena as she listened to Nyag-Nyag's abject beseeching. The feeling that she had triumphed lessened her wariness, so that she failed to divine the witch doctor's purpose in coming so near.

"Gimshai is merciful, as are his servants," she said haughtily. "If you have the courage to accompany me into the Black Hole of Death to plead your case before the god himself, you may do so—remembering that if you fail, there can be no return."

Nyag-Nyag seemed to debate before muttering, "I have the courage."

Sheena stared at him. "But you must approach Gimshai with clean hands." She gestured at the imprisoned bearers and stacked loot. "You must give up the spoils of your cowardly attack. You must free the bearers and give them back their arms and you must furnish men to carry these packs to their destination."

The huge-bellied chieftain, who had been bathed in sweat as he waited for Sheena's answer, literally shouted his acceptance of her terms. He was concerned with his own safety only, and cared not a whit that he might be sending a large group of his followers to their death.

"All shall be as you say!" Babuli shouted hoarsely, not wanting to give the witch doctor time to back out of his bargain. Then he turned to his guards in the same frenzied haste, crying, "Release the prisoners! Gather men enough to carry the packs! Quickly, you curs!"

But even as the chieftain spoke, Nyag-Nyag sprang back away from Tamba, swirling the torch about his head. "No!" he roared. "Let no man move."

BABULI was so aghast that it took him a moment to find his voice. His body quivered in outrage at this treachery. "I am chieftain here," he croaked.

"You're a fool, Babuli," snarled the witch doctor, "as blind and stupid a fool as all these others!"

It was in Nyaya-Nyag's mind that after tonight he would never again have to bend his knee to the fat chieftain. What he was about to do would make Babuli a laughingstock at the same time that it enhanced his reputation as a wizard.

"Because I amuse myself by toying with this faker," the witch doctor said, pointing at Sheena, "don't take my acting seriously. She is no demon, no servant of Gimshai."

"What are you saying?" squeaked the chieftain, seeing his chances of salvation being shattered before his eyes.

Nyag-Nyag laughed, thinly baring his yellow teeth. "I'm saying this supposed demon is merely Tioto Nomi, the Forest Woman. I'm saying it takes more than children's tricks to fool the jungle's greatest wizard."

Dismay had wrenched Sheena stiffly upright. But her reaction was no different from that which shook Babuli and his tribesmen. The witch doctor's words had exploded with the violence of a thunderbolt.

"You madman!" wailed Babuli. "You'd get us all killed. You know as well as I that our warriors are pursuing Tioto Nomi far across the jungle."

Nyag-Nyag had backed close to the guards. He tossed away his torch, took a spear and shield from one of the blacks. Then he ran out into the open space between Sheena and the warriors.

"Watch this test, my simple Babuli," he sneered. "And you need not faint from terror, because the risk falls on me alone." His whole manner was supremely confident. "A thousand shields would not protect me from a servant of Gimshai, because such a servant would be able to kill with a glance—a sign—a thought."

The ugly laughter bubbled from his lips again. After tonight, his name would ring through the jungle.

"But one shield is protection enough against Tioto Nomi," he said, "because her only weapon is her spear. She has no magic powers. Watch while I prove it! And stand ready, guards, to strike her down when she betrays herself by trying to use her one, puny weapon."

Sheena sat stupefied, a knot of panic growing and spreading in her breast. The cunning, one-eyed dango had trapped her. She sought in futile desperation for some means of escape, knowing full well that the game was played out.

Nyag-Nyag was leaping and dancing in front of her, always careful to protect himself behind the thick, heavy shield of rhino hide. "Quickly, Tioto Nomi," he taunted, "loose your terrible magic. Kill me with a look! Kill me with a thought!"

A stifling hush gripped the kraal. In the shadows around the central clearing, black men crouched, afraid to breathe. Babuli leaned forward, his face like gray paste, his mouth hanging loosely open.

"Come, O Would-be Demon," the prancing wizard jeered, "I wait for you to strike. Why do you hesitate? You try my patience, make me weary of this farce."

Sheena's mouth was dust-dry. The death she had sought to save Bob Reilly from was to be hers. And now he was to be lost to her finally and forever.

As ominous muttering stirred the watching blacks. Nyag-Nyag's ridicule was having its effect. Already the guards were edging forward, their hands tightening on their spears.

Sheena's own spear arm tensed. Her bluff was finished. At least, she would take a few of them with her. She gritted her teeth, prepared to send Tamba charging into the guards.

Nyag-Nyag's gloating laughter rang high. "Hear me, Tioto Nomi," he shrilled. "I spit on you and on your fathers! What greater insult can one give?"

His prancing and his high-pitched screams were too much for Tamba. The huge bull elephant lifted his trunk and trumpeted with ear-splitting violence. The very air shivered with the raging sound.

Nyag-Nyag looked up startled. Then a very strange thing happened. The hatchet-faced wizard gave a queer backward leap as though he had been struck a powerful blow. His face twisted in agony and he staggered.

He let the spear drop from his fingers, and the weight of the shield slowly drew his left arm down to his side. His stringy muscles began jerking and twitching.

His single eye bulged with terror. Then his long thin legs started to buckle. All at once his mouth strained wide and a great wash of blood rushed from his lips.

That was the end. Nyag-Nyag toppled forward on his face and lay still.

Tamba fell silent at almost that same moment. It was unbelievable that a native kraal could be so still. And in that profound hush, you could feel terror sweep like a black wind over the stunned natives.

Sheena was as shocked as the tribesmen. She stared blankly at the dead wizard. She hadn't moved a muscle to harm him, yet there lay the hated Nyag-Nyag, stiffening in death.

What miracle was this? What invisible power had reached out in her hour of need to strike down that human dango?

But the jungle girl was given no time to dwell on that mystery. Babuli's hysterical screams jolted her alert. The hog-fat chieftain had crumbled to his knees and was beseeching her not to kill him, not to blame him for Nyag-Nyag's blasphemies. Tribesmen all about the clearing were groveling in abject terror.

They thought she had slain the wizard!

SHE moved swiftly to take advantage of the situation. Though so upset herself that she could barely keep her voice from trembling, Sheena sternly repeated the demands she had made before. And this time the prisoners were immediately freed and Babuli's disarmed guards hurriedly loaded themselves down with the stolen packs with no thought of opposing Sheena.

Babuli collapsed in a blubbering heap, but Sheena delegated four of the bearers to prod him to his feet with their spears. The remaining bearers she placed along both sides of the pack-laden Bambala.

"Now trek," she shouted. "And any man who causes trouble will join Nyag-Nyag in his ever-lasting torment."

Her threat sent the column through the kraal at a stumbling trot. All idea of resistance was gone from the Bambala. As she urged Tamba after the bearers, the natives pressed their faces in the dirt, afraid to look at her.

Once outside the kraal, she forged to the head of the column, leading it back along the trail toward where she had left Bob Reilly. But before she had gone very far, she heard a frantic chattering, saw an eerie, glowing little figure come skittering down the dim path toward her.

"Chim!" she cried in surprise, and with a quick command, she had the elephant swing the little ape up beside her.

Chim bounded into her arms, fairly sputtering with delight at finding his mistress again. Then Sheena's keen ears heard another sound. She looked up to see Bob advancing out of the darkness. Her initial thought was that he might still be angry at her.

But there was unutterable relief, not anger, in his voice as he exclaimed, "Thank heavens you're out of that place at last! You were crazy to take such a chance, but it was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen."

"You mean you saw what went on in the kraal?" she asked, surprised.

"I not only saw—thanks to Chim, not you," he said, "but I took a small part in the proceedings. I'll frankly admit that I could never have pulled off the bluff you did."

He told her then how when he reached the kraal the witch doctor had just begun to taunt her. Since the natives were all concentrated in the center of the village, he was able to enter the gate unobserved. He had sneaked close to the clearing, climbed up on a pile of wood stacked beside a hut.

With his pistol, he had blasted Nyag-Nyag. The sound of the shot had been covered by Tamba's wrathful trumpeting. And the unholy fear that had struck into the Bambala when they saw their witch doctor die, had kept them from suspecting that any hand but Gimshai's had slain Nyag-Nyag.

"So you were the one who saved me," she said wonderingly.

Bob laughed. "I believe I could say the same for you."

They were a mile further down the trail and the false dawn was graying the sky when Sheena halted the elephant.

Bob sat behind her on the forest giant's back. "What do we do now?" he asked.

She gave him a long, searching look. "You will take Babuli and his guards with you and see that they are punished. You'll have no more trouble with the Bambala, so you can easily reach white man's country with your records."

"You—you—aren't going out with me?" Bob was surprised and confused.

"This is my own land," she said, gesturing toward the dark jungle with her hand. "There are many things I can do to make it a better land. I have found myself tonight, as the old witch woman once prophesied I would."

Her head lifted and she looked up at the brightening sky.

"But you can't stay here, a lone girl," said Bob. "I've grown very fond of you, Sheena. I want you to go with me. I thought that you and I?"

"Even if I wished it," she interrupted him gently, "I could not go with you. I am a priestess and more to the Abamas. They have been awaiting the day when I would be ready to lead them. And now I am ready. It would mean your certain death if you tried to take me away."

And so it was that a frowning, unhappy man a few minutes later watched Sheena ride away alone toward the Abama kraal. He stood there with the soft warmth of her good-bye kiss on his lips, vowing that Abama warriors or not, he would be back as soon as his trek to the coast was finished.

