

The Ebony Ju-Ju

Kíngí Bwana, #2

by Gordon MacCreagh, 1886-1953

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Chapter I

THE tall brown man walked—prowled, rather—like one of the greater felidae, up and down the length of the sumptuous room. Brown from sun, he was; lean and hard from inquisitive interest in everything outdoors in all of Africa; and his eyes were narrow and puckered from long gazing over heat shimmery veld. One sinewy hand hung by its thumb from the belt of his riding breeches; the other swung a hippo hide whip from a thong. The soft soled bush boots made no sound as he stalked the polished floor, stepping over the strips of rich carpet as over obstacles.

This was King—hunter, trader, guide, prospector; anything that came along and remained out of doors. He was announcing as he prowled—

"I just can't take up your proposition."

The elderly, grizzled man watched him with head on one side, a wry smile under his clipped gray mustache. One hand drummed on the mahogany desk while the other toyed with a thin gold watch chain. He was dressed in the full formality of morning attire, which sat him with uncomfortable dignity.

This was Sir Harry Mountjoy Weldon, Governor of Kenya Colony, British East Africa. The sumptuous room was his office in Nairobi. He turned from watching the tall man and raised an eyebrow at a rather scandalized secretary. The immaculate young man immediately withdrew. The governor exhaled a breath, and with it let dignity out as from a balloon.

"Now look here, Kingi *bwana*," he said. "Think this thing over. There's some devilry hatching up there and we've got to find out what it's all about and stop it before it comes to a killing."

King, too, relaxed from his nervous prowl.

"Governor *bwana*, I can't do it. Not but what it's a whole man's job that I'd like to look back on and feel that I'd pulled off. But, gosh almighty, I'd have to write a hundred page report about it and I'd have to make out an expense account down to the last cent and a daily mileage list and—Who's your man up there? Why can't he handle it?"

The governor smiled wryly again.

"Man called Fawcett. Assistant commissioner. A good youngster—maybe a couple of years behind you. But he's had only six years of Africa."

"Six years!" King exploded. "All I've had in the country is eight."

The governor smiled—wisely this time.

"Yes, but—you've had a different training. It takes some time to adapt Oxford to Africa."

King's grin cut two hard lines from his nose, past his mouth, to mark out a chin designed by a cubist sculptor.

"Sure is some handicap. Gosh, when that lad was writing Greek verse I was skinning mule back in the Dakotas and getting regularly swindled by an old Sioux medicine man on pony deals."

"That's exactly what we need," said the governor. "A man who has been swindled by crafty Indians in pony deals and has learned his experience out of it to adapt it to crafty African spellbinders. A man who knows natives like you know them; almost like I know them."

"Lord, Governor *bwana*—"

King stalked the room again. Not that he was hesitating, but that he did not know how to temper his refusal.

The governor tried again.

"If you would take government employ as a special temporary agent I could wire to Entebbe and my colleague there would make some allowances for you. But—"

"Yes, *but*— That's just it," King shot back at him, pointing with a long forefinger. "I'd still have to wrap myself in a gaudy silken cocoon with sacred red tape. Gosh, I'd suffocate."

The governor sighed. He could understand this restless man. He was not one who had been born to the splendor of colonial administration; he had won his way along the line from the long ago days of the Boer War.

"That's the damned American of you," he growled. "If you wouldn't be so bally scornful of necessary authority you'd find some of our youngsters to be jolly decent chaps and this driveling red tape wouldn't bother you. But you're too dashed much like a leopard to change your spots. Well, if you won't, I suppose you won't. I'll have to see if I can find one of our more experienced officers to fill the job. But remember, not a word outside. This thing is an official secret as yet."

King grinned.

"Governor *bwana*, how many years have you been in Africa, that you talk of secrets?"

The governor smiled whimsically.

"Oh, well, of course there's nothing hidden in Africa for those that have ears to hear. I suppose you'll pick up a lot of underground talk. If you hear anything real I would be glad to know about it."

King chuckled.

"Anything that your blawsted British officials are too high up to hear, yeah? Sure thing. I'm going upcountry after some ivory that I've heard about, and if I happen on any bush telegraph I'll pass the word *pronto*."

The bush loper left; the secretary returned; and dignity fell over the office once more. The governor sat long and made holes with a pencil in his spotless blotting pad. A worried frown puckered his forehead; then the wise smile spread slowly.

"Ivory?" he mused. "I wonder just where— By Jove, I wonder whether maybe we won't have to detail anybody up there?"

FROM Nairobi a lumpy railroad track straggles northwestward to vast Lake Victoria, which only sixty years ago was Livingstone's Heart of the Dark Continent. Two weeks after his interview with the governor in Nairobi King sat in this train and damned its dreary rattle, bang, crash.

It is about two hundred and fifty miles from Nairobi to Kisumu, the port on the great Kavirondo Gulf of the inland sea. A day and night run if one is lucky, but to weary travelers it seems like a week. Mile after crawling mile of burned brown veld and sparse, flat topped *acacia* and countless dry *dongas*—the bridges over which make African railroad building so expensive; and every now and then antelope or zebra in the distance; and dust. Over everything dust. Fine white dust; over the lumpy coach cushions, in the food, sticky around one's collar, smarting in one's eyes.

Quite one of the most unpleasant railroad journeys in the world. Yet since it can cover in two days a distance that a *safari* could hardly accomplish in twenty, one travels perforce by the train and curses it as one doctors one's eyes against infection from the pestilence of flies.

From this train King alighted at Kisumu and cursed it with mechanical finality. A big, strongly built native grinned all over his face at him. He was dressed in an old khaki shooting coat and the scantiest possible loin cloth. Below each sinewy knee and above the right elbow was a garter plaited of monkey hair leaving a flash of white tuft. He carried a long, beautifully polished stick, which was really a spear with the head removed, since the regulations of well policed Kisumu town did not permit natives to go armed.

But King knew very well that the two-foot long, razor sharp blade of that spear was somewhere not far from the shaft, for a Masai and his weapon do not part company. King was too judicious to inquire.

"*N'kos bwana*," the man greeted. "*Maleff?* Train this time good?"

"Ha, Barounggo. Never good. *Dak* bungalow. And after bath time come and tell me what the talk is in Kisumu."

King gave the man a baggage check and was away while the rest of the tired passengers still fussed with bundles and gun cases and extra hats and all the cumbrous mess that collects in an African railroad coach.

One of the first men King met in the screened veranda of the bungalow was Raynes, Africander and trader. Raynes bellowed a joyous greeting.

"Hello, Kingi *bwana!* Hel-lo—boy, one long chair and a whisky peg— Heard you had a job with the government. Howzat?"

King grinned wearily.

"Yeah, most of Nairobi heard that one. What's talk on the lake?"

"Nothing at all. Locusts at Jinja; navigation company boat aground on Lolui Island; some yarn about gold in Western Province somewhere; lions bad at M'bale—eating up a couple villages; and trouble brewing up by Rudolf. Usual stuff—new leader with mysterious powers going to put the white man out of Africa. It's a big government secret. Nothing new at all; country's as dead's a convent and only half as wicked. What you doing upcountry?"

King grinned again. This trouble brewing had been the important and very private matter about which the governor had wished to speak to him. But he knew and Raynes knew that there were no secrets in Africa which didn't leak throughout the country faster very often than the white man's telegraph.

"Me—" he told Raynes his business frankly—"I've got hold of a talk about some buried ivory up Elgon way and I'm going look-see." Then, musingly, "Trouble about

these little bush troubles is that they usually bump off a couple of white men before the colored gent gets walloped out of his rampage."

"Well," Raynes said, "that's a chance the white man takes when he comes here; and he comes for his own profit, so he's got nothing to complain about— That tall fellow your boy? He looks 's if he wants to make plenty *indaba*. My bath time, too. Come to my table for chop when you're clean."

King nodded to his man Barounggo to approach.

"After bath time, Barounggo, I said."

The Masai raised his stick in the sign that was salute as well as deprecation.

"Yes, *bwana*, talk is for after bath. But there is a gift and—maybe some talk goes with the gift."

He opened a grass basket and showed two beautiful melons, luscious luxuries in that parched season just before the rains.

"Ho, good! What friend sends this gift, Barounggo? And what talk should there be about a gift of two melons?"

"*Bwana*—" the man hesitated and looked up and down the long veranda and uneasily about the compound planted with laboriously cultivated shrubbery.

King's eyebrows flickered and he, too, shot a glance along the veranda. It was deserted; all guests had gone to their baths in leisurely preparation for their dinners. King stepped down to the veranda stoop and seated himself on the edge. He knew his man. The Masai, besides being the most warlike, are some of the most intelligent of the African peoples. Barounggo had been with King for many years and King knew that he was no wild goose chaser.

"Tell me this talk that belongs to two melons. All the talk."

The Masai glanced about the compound once more, poked with his stick into a couple of nearby clumps of palms and bamboos, and came nearer.

"*Bwana*, there is talk, first, that trouble is growing up among the jungle men of the North."

So the great official secret was all over the bazaar? Of course it would be. But what had trouble in the Rudolf province to do with melons, King wanted to know.

"*Bwana*, the trouble is a young tree as yet; but it has a strong rain in the words of a new witch doctor. This *amatagati* has a strong witchcraft. A new *juju* has come to the land."

The Masai, like the Zulus, love to orate. If given a chance they will declaim all round and about a story in order, as they say, to wrap it with meat before they come to the bone. King stopped him.

"Melons," he said simply.

Barounggo resigned himself. He had a most gorgeous story to wrap with rich meat; but he knew that King was wise, so he came to the point as directly as his innate sense of drama would permit him.

"The talk is, *bwana*, that we have taken service with the government to go up and stop that trouble."

"The hell!"

This time King was startled. Though not accurate, this was the fastest bush telegraph that he had known. Barounggo, with the air of one who has distinctly scored a point, pulled a wooden plug from the end of his spear shaft and tapped a pinch of snuff on to his thumb nail.

"Melons," King reminded him.

"Yes, as to the melons," Barounggo agreed. "A Kavirondo savage came to me in the bazaar and said he was the servant of that Banyan trader Khoda Bux who has the garden and who remembered you with a full heart and sent these melons as a salaam."

That seemed innocent enough. King had indeed done some service to the East Indian, and a delicate compliment of a small gift was an Oriental custom. But he knew that more lay behind that innocence.

"But," continued Barounggo, piling in his swift climax, "that Banyan has been dead a month and that savage lost himself in the throng of the bazaar."

"O-ho! And so?" King was interested more than on the surface now.

"And so, when talk is of trouble," said Barounggo sententiously, "the wise man looks for trouble. Therefore—" he cast a fierce glance round the compound once more, came nearer and lowered his voice—"observe that melon, *bwana*. This one; here. And consider that this is the *limbwa* melon which the white men say is spoiled by the taste of a knife, so they but score the skin and break it open in their hands."

King looked closely and saw that a clean round hole had been punched in the fruit just over the stalk indentation and that the plug had been neatly replaced. He whistled a thin, tuneless rhythm through his teeth.

"O-ho! It is possible, Barounggo, that you have been very wise. Now what trouble, think you, can come into a melon through a round hole?"

"Many troubles, *bwana*." Barounggo was whispering. "A good witch doctor, such as that one where the trouble is, who might wish that we should *not* go into his country, could put a strong devil into it. A fool could put a poison into it."

"Or," King supplemented softly, "if he were a white man, some kind of a contact bomb. It won't be a bomb; still, precaution would suggest cutting this interesting melon with a longish knife." He looked at the imperturbable Masai.

"If we had a knife now, Barounggo—a long blade, say, on the end of a long stick—that would be safe, wouldn't it?"

He looked at his man fixedly. The Masai tried to appear not very interested; but King's gaze bored him through. Finally, with another of his fiercely cautious looks around, Barounggo reached his hand behind his neck and, apparently from out his spinal column, he produced two feet of shining steel. The great blade fitted sweetly on to the end of his stick and he handed the weapon to King.

"If a man of the poh-lis should come, this thing is a toy that I have brought for *bwana* to purchase."

"Quite so," agreed King seriously. "A toy for a small child. Now lay that melon over there; make a hollow so it won't roll. Stand clear now and we shall see what we shall see."

Carefully, gingerly, for who could tell what might be the meaning of a plugged hole in a melon pretending to be sent by a man who happened to be dead, at full spear's length King sawed at the fruit with the keen blade. The denouement came with sudden swiftness. The fruit split softly open and fell apart disclosing its pale yellow inside which ought to have been speckled with large, dirk purple seeds. Not a seed was there. Instead an incredibly swift watch spring thing, colored bright red

with a thin black stripe down either side, wriggled free and coiled in compact but deadly menace.

"God!"

Almost as swift as the brilliant coiled death, King lunged the great blade at it. The steel buried itself in the ground a bare inch from the vibrant thing, and it, like a watch spring again, flashed once in the sun and was gone.

"*Whau!*" from Barounggo. "A *limpo'-olu!* The snake whose evil is as great as his belly is small. But, *tck-tck*, a pity. *Bwana* lacks practise with the spear. Had I held my—the toy that I brought for *bwana* to see, its one wicked tooth would even now be cleft from the other."

King was breathing hard through his nose, still looking at the spot where the beautiful death had coiled. Mechanically he tugged at the spear shaft, thinking, muttering to himself:

"Hm. There must be a heap more to that fuss brewing up there than even the governor's outfit thinks. Still, none of my funeral—as soon as they quit connecting me up with it." Then, aloud:

"Barounggo, you have shown wisdom. I am pleased. There will be a blanket with stripes as brilliant as that snake. Make no talk with any man. This trouble is not our *shauri*. We make *safari* to the Elgon Mountain. We go fast before all the water holes dry up and we come out fast before the big rain. Six *shenzis* are enough for the going. For the return the number depends upon luck."

Chapter II

WITH the morning of the third day King was striding out of Kisumu at the head of six porters who carried bundles on their heads, Barounggo, who carried only his ever present stick, and a wizened, monkey-like Hottentot who carried an extra gun and the splendid name of Kaffac'-enq'uamdhlovu, which in his queer, staccato language had something to do with the slaying of elephants.

Old-timers who knew King cocked their eyes and wondered what big venture he was set upon with all that equipment. Others, accustomed to seeing the mountainous impedimenta of rich sportsmen, wondered how far this rangy looking fellow thought he could go into the interior with that insufficiency of food, and how long he hoped to keep up that speed.

As a matter of fact King proposed to keep up that speed until eleven-thirty, when he would camp under an umbrella *acacia* to let the heat of the sun pass over. There was nothing surprising in the proposal; but there was surprise in its accomplishment—to those six *shenzis*. Four miles per hour had been the pace set; and the porters had swung along easily enough. Experienced sportsmen's porters they were, all of them.

Presently, they knew, this white man would wander off into the veld and would tramp a few miles in order to shoot some buck or other; and in the meanwhile they would lie on their backs and smoke and wiggle their toes in the good dust; and when the white man got back he would be tired and would not go much farther and they would make early camp and there would be meat for them. It was

a good, easy business, this portering for white hunters, and the government saw to it that their pay was twenty-five cents a day with *potio*.

But this white man did not wander off to shoot anything. At a steady four miles an hour he stalked ever toward the horizon of brown, burned plain. The porters gabbled among themselves. It was just as well to establish their rights at the very beginning. It was not that they were tired or that they couldn't keep up that pace. When upon their own business they would carry heavier loads and would keep it up from dawn till dark.

But white men, they knew, were beyond reason; if a foolish man should once show that he could do a certain stint of labor the white *bwana* would imagine that he could do it again. So they began to blow long moaning whistles between tongue and teeth and to sigh high pitched sighs, and to straggle out till half a mile separated the last of them from the tireless white man.

King wasted no breath in futile admonition, or even the energy to turn round. When he came to a shady mimosa he sat quietly under it, lighted his pipe and fanned himself with his sun helmet. The porters judged this to be the time to come up with lagging footsteps and with great heaving groans of relief. When the last of them had arrived, King rose. He spoke only to Barounggo—reflectively, almost impersonally.

"Does it not seem to you, Barounggo, that some of these *shenzis* think we have arrived in this land but yesterday?"

The Masai grinned.

"All *shenzis* are the offspring of porcupines," he said. With deliberate enjoyment he reached his great hand behind his neck and drew forth the rest of his polished walking staff. Lovingly he fitted the blade into position and fixed it with an iron pin. "In my country," he murmured, "we fatten our dogs upon *shenzis* before we sell them to the bushmen for their corn planting feast."

Kaffa, the little Hottentot, rolled on his back and cackled like a chimpanzee whose feet are tickled. This was a recurrent joke with him and the humor of it never lost its savor.

"Hee-hee-hee-ee! The father of all the *shenzis* was Mek the turtle. Not till the half hour before noon does the *safari* stop, O porter men."

And so it was. At eleven-thirty King found a suitable umbrella tree, and the caravan, right at his heels, was within its shade almost as soon as he was.

"Three hours rest. Let any man sleep who will. But first, in that load are mealies, already parched. Each man gets a half portion of *potio*."

The surly looks of the porters altered with African light heartedness to grins. This wasn't so bad after all. This white man was not one to be made a fool of; but on the other hand, he knew what other *safaris* never seemed to understand—that food was good at any time.

PROMPTLY at two-thirty King rose.

"Three hours trek," he announced briefly.

The porters took up their loads. There was no murmuring. Three hours of steady going saw the party on rising land twenty-eight miles from Kisumu town. Good going; nearly twice as far as the cumbersome sporting *safaris* made in a day's trek.

To the northward, miles and miles away, a pale cone of ghost gray without any tangible base stood up out of the dust haze. Almost transparent it looked at that distance. It might almost have been a freak of cloud; but the cool wind that blew from it even at this distance established it as the snow mass of Mount Elgon; and the water beside which King proposed to camp was snow water on its way to feed the Lake of Victoria.

There was a little more than an hour of sunlight left. Just time enough to make camp in comfort. Four of the shenzis under the direction of Barounggo King told off to cut thorn bush and build the customary *boma* against lions. An hour allowed just time enough to build an impregnable circle of some fifteen feet across and eight high and to stock it with sufficient firewood to last the night through. Kaffa, without bidding, scratched together a few sticks and commenced cooking; the circle would grow around him. The other two *shenzis* King astounded by saying—

"Go and fetch in that bushbok; the young one under that small tree."

The men stared at him with the ape expression of their kind. The little herd of red-brown antelope were feeding between four and five hundred yards away. How were they, not hunters but porter people, to carry out this peremptory order? They stood therefore and stared dumbly.

This was another never failing joke for the Hottentot. Over his half started fire he chuckled and clucked till he blew bubbles instead of breath at his feeble members.

"Heh-heh-ho-ho-ho—ahuu-uu! Go, turtle footed ones, go when my *bwana* says it. Else the *elmoran*, the Masai, will show you how the sun glints upon his great spear when it strikes. Go. Perchance that buck will wait for you. Indeed it will wait for you if the *bwana* says it."

So the men went. Theirs not to reason why or what foolish things the white men said; particularly this white man. They set off, looking back at every few paces expecting they did not know what.

"And," King called after them, "bring it back whole; without disemboweling it."

This was another foolishness that was beyond understanding. One always cleaned game where it fell. Why carry useless weight? The men with quick African superstition began to be uneasy about all this mystery—which was just what King wanted.

He smiled thinly to himself as he watched them go. Then leisurely he walked to a little knoll, sat and kicked himself comfortable heel holes for a steady position. Carefully he wiped the day's dust from his rifle and blew sharply through the peep sight. He used the precise Lyman .48 and the little sums that went with its use came to him automatically. One point subtended one inch at one hundred yards, was the basic rule. Two inches at two hundred, and so on. For open veld shooting he kept his gun sighted in for point blank at three hundred; he knew his ammunition trajectory to drop three and a half inches between three and four hundred and four inches between four and five hundred.

Very well, four-fifty; six points would just about do it; and the little breeze that persisted was not of sufficient strength to figure. No old fashioned guesswork about this. All that was required was the ability to hold steady. Good eyesight, unshakable nerves, and taut muscles. King had all the requirements.

Taking it easy and without hurry, he fired. The young buck leaped high in the air and fell, and the rest stood staring stupidly at the distant report. Not till the *shenzis* began to approach did they up-tail and race off.

The little Hottentot, who noted everything with a monkey-like curiosity, pretended to be engrossed with his fire. Squatting as no white man can, with his knees up behind his ears and between violent blowings of the flame, he ventured the question:

"*Bwana*, for what purpose must those *shenzis* bring the entrails? There will be meat enough without."

King smiled grimly.

"For magic," he uttered momentarily. "There will be a witch smelling this night."

"*Aho! Wo-we!*"

The Hottentot tended his fire in silence. His master, he knew, had many mysterious powers.

And since King had not expressly ordered to the contrary, this news communicated itself to the little camp before ever the *boma* was finished. The men, as they worked, looked at him with uneasiness. The gloom deepened. The *boma* was completed; all but the entry way, before which lay a thorny sapling ready to be shoved into place.

Meat was broiled on sticks and eaten in gloomy discomfort. King sat wrapped in black silence. The *shenzis* squatted apart and whispered to one another. The last of the day disappeared and the tropic night swept over the land. The atmosphere was full of apprehension. King sat without motion and let it all soak well in.

SUDDENLY he lifted his head and glared across the fire at the huddled *shenzis*. Upon his forehead they could discern, marked in white, an oval with a spot in its center.

"Aho, look! It is the eye! The eye that sees within!"

They muttered to one another and huddled closer. This was witchcraft such as their own witch doctors practised.

"Bring those intestines!" King's voice exploded into the uneasy gloom.

Kaffa scuttled forward with the mass. Not without a certain disgust King pored over the offal.

"A young buck," he mumbled. "Without horns, without guile, one that had not yet learned the way of lies. The truth unwraps itself."

With his forefinger he made a vast pretence of tracing out the windings of the intestines. With meticulous care he followed the thin tracery of the fatty tissues that surrounded the paunch, bending forward with eagerness, starting with *ahs* of surprise and *ohs* of conviction, breaking off to glare across the fire at the wretched *shenzis* who watched with the fearful fascination of the African for gruesome mystery. This was divination of the surest sort. Only the best of their witch doctors could work this magic. And that this white man should know it too! *Whoora-alu!* This was fearsomely horrible.

The slow moving forefinger traced the fatty nodules and thin windings of veins.

"This is the house of the evil one," intoned the magician. "This the road that he follows. Here is the fate that awaits him. I smell him out. I see the evil in his heart."

Nothing is hidden. Ha, it is finished. I make the test—the test of truth. His death sits in his shadow and is ready."

With that he sprang up and stalked before the wretched *shenzis* who rocked themselves on their hams and gave vent to moaning misery. In King's hand appeared six white pellets—aspirin tablets.

"Up!" he shouted. "Stand up and take the test of the magic that does not lie! The guiltless ones will grow strong from it; the one with evil in his heart—his belly will swell with his own poison that he carries and he will surely die. Up and open your mouths and let the guiltless have no fear."

With something like relief the men stood up. They knew all about this kind of ordeal. Their own magicians always smelled out wrongdoers that way. And it was true, the innocent ones never suffered; and if one did, why, there was proof of his guilt. The thing was infallible.

The first man opened his mouth obediently. King muttered mumbo-jumbo and popped an aspirin into it. The man gulped and waited, half uneasy in his conscience for past wrong doings, though innocent enough in the present instance. Feeling no sudden cramp in his vitals, he began slowly to grin his relief.

"Good! The first man is clean of evil and he will be strong. But the evil one knows that his ghost grins behind him. Let the second man show his innocence."

The second *shenzi* took the test with flying colors. The third. But the fourth man in the row was gray with terror. His eyes rolled white and the sinews of his neck distending dragged down the corners of his mouth in a horrible grimace. Suddenly, while the third man was still awaiting the verdict of his stomach, the fellow gave an inarticulate howl and bolted out into the night through the opening in the *boma*—which King had not closed with thorns for that very purpose.

"Whau!" from the men.

Even Barounggo and Kaffa were impressed. It was a real magic. This had been a true witch smelling and the evil one had fled rather than take the test which would have swelled his belly and killed him in agony.

"So," said King portentously. "His wickedness turned his heart to water. Let him go. Let the ghosts of the night eat him up."

To himself he ruminated:

"Hm. That was a good hunch and the bluff worked. I figured damn sure that that Rudolf crowd, if they thought I was important enough to stop with that melon trick, would have sense enough to work a man in with my porters. Must be a slick bird running that rumpus up there. Glad it's none of my worry. Wonder just what this goof's plan was? Arsenic, I suppose. Wish I could have searched him. Just as well he ran, though. I'd have had to do something pretty horrid to make my bluff good about swelling him up. Well, if the lions don't get him a tough night in a thorny tree will be right good for him."

And then his ruminations were broken in upon by the remaining two *shenzis* who came diffidently, yet as with a right, and wanted their share of the magic pills which would make them strong because they were innocent. King, laughing at the eternal childishness of the African and which was ever cropping up in some new phase, gave each one a five-grain tablet of aspirin.

THREE days found the little *safari* on the northern slope of Mount Elgon.

From there King had to pick up old trails. The information that he had gathered about this cache of ivory was sure and accurate; there remained only the exact locale to trace. The story that had come to him about the ivory was an alluring leftover from the days of the great scramble for Africa. Great Britain, Belgium, France, were all playing the vast game of intrigue for control of Central Africa. Nominally they were great trading companies who were just trying to open up business. But the trading companies were supported by troops of employees who knew how to salute smartly to young clerks who openly carried the titles of lieutenant and captain. Besides the business of stealing marches upon each other, these "business men" were faced with the always treacherous opposition of the Zanzibari Arabs who had got into the country before them.

The most infamous, perhaps, of all these traders, was Tippoo Tib who, nonetheless, under the urge of business policy, was appointed governor of Stanley Falls by no less a personage than Stanley himself, who, though an American citizen, was acting nominally for the Khedive of Egypt, but with funds supplied by the president of the British-India Steam Navigation Company.

The whole situation was a scrambled mess of intrigue and counter-intrigue, with vast interests jockeying for control. It can be imagined what a glorious time was had by such a man as Tippoo Tib. A clever organizer unhampered by any inhibitions at all, he sent his raiding parties north and south and east and west. The trail of slaughter and pillage that they left in their wake has been written into the annals of African history.

Their methods were simple and effective: to rush upon sleeping villages, shoot down all opposition, torture the survivors into confessing the local store of hidden gold and ivory, and then carry them all off, men, women, and children, as porters for the loot, and eventually to serve as slaves. Livingstone reports such a caravan of more than five hundred shackled men, each carrying an ivory tusk, and some two hundred women with wrapped bundles of other loot.

Sometimes one of these raiding parties never came back. Fate or weather or desperate natives overcame them. The Buganda, a tribe of a surprisingly advanced state of civilization, who lived along the shores of Lake Victoria, put up an organized resistance to these raiders. The story that had come to King was of a large party who had ravaged the country for a year and had amassed an incredible amount of loot. And then the Buganda hordes came upon them. The raiders swiftly buried their loot, murdered the workmen in approved fashion, and moved out into the best fighting position they could find—and were there very properly wiped out by the Buganda.

Only about fifty years ago, this had happened. Old men lived who had seen that fight. The locale was known. King had checked up descriptions of it from more than one source. What he hoped to find now was some old man who had survived the slave chain and who could perhaps give him some clue as to where all that ivory had been buried before the battle.

When King required information he always went to one of two basic sources: missionaries or witch doctors. Both, he maintained, were excellent people and had many points in common, the most useful of which was that both had more downright accurate knowledge of their people than the most scientific observer could ever acquire.

He made inquiries, therefore, for the oldest witch doctor in the north Elgon district and put himself out to make friends with him. Nothing clumsy or patronizing about his method; he knew the jealousies and vanities of all people who controlled their less intelligent fellows through superstition.

He had met his hundreds of white men whose religion and conviction it was that the African must be dealt with only from the position of lofty dominance. It was a good rule, and he knew all of the arguments and citations with which it was so uncompromisingly supported. But King knew, too, where to make the isolated exception. So he sent Kaffa to the old rain maker's hut with a present of tobacco.

KAFFA knew his ambassadorial duties as well as any diplomat. First he told the old man how good he was; then how good his own master was—a brother of the craft, no less; and that he sent a gift to express his admiration of the other's powers. Thus properly appreciated, the old magician, instead of secretly opposing the superior white man's every move, sent him back a goat, and the way was open for social amenities. So King paid a call and sat on the three-legged stool of honor before the doorway of the hut festooned with bones and dried snake skins and claptrap, and took snuff with the old faker while the uninitiated common herd of the village squatted in a wide circle out of earshot to let the two wise ones discuss the inner mysteries.

The mysteries consisted of the local gossip and the previous rainfall and the movements of game and the chances of a good mealie crop—all around the block and back again for an hour before King broached the question that was uppermost in his mind. He had drawn a lucky number at his first venture. This old man knew all about that battle of Elgon and all about the ivory, too. But there was disappointment in the very definiteness of that knowledge.

Oh, yes, the ancient said, it was all true. He had not seen the fight himself because he had been serving his novitiate in the village of another witch doctor far away; but the ivory had been buried, all right, and the Buganda, having foolishly speared every last Arab, had not been able to find it and had gone away. But some information had somehow remained alive; for after some seasons had passed—he could not remember how many seasons—a strong war party of the Tappuza, who were a branch of the great Elgume tribe, had come down from the north and had dug it all up and taken it away. He had seen it himself; a vast treasure; many hundreds of tusks—thousands, in fact. The warriors of the Tappuza covered the plain and each man carried a tusk; and there were many loads of gold besides.

Aha, what a looting that had been! And the Tappuza were now the strongest of the Elgume peoples because—this was a secret—they had for some time past been carefully trading ivory for rifles which the Armenian and Greek traders smuggled down from the Sudan. Still, there must be an immense treasure left, because it was difficult to get guns; the Inglesi were so stringent about such things. But all the same, the Tappuza were a strong people. And thus and so on for a garrulous hour.

King came away from that interview and was thoughtful. Not because that buried ivory had been removed; as far as that went, one hole in the ground was as good as another. Not because the Tappuza tribe who now had it were a "strong people",—he had dwelt with many a strong tribe before now. Not because these

people had it and recognized its value; that merely made a trade proposition of the deal rather than a treasure hunt.

No; King was thoughtful because he believed in luck or fate or whatever it was. In Africa, every now and then, things happened. Without one's own volition; outside of one's knowledge; against one's direct precaution. They just went ahead and happened and one was drawn willy-nilly into the vortex of that happening.

This was one of those happenings. These Tappuza lived up north of the Elgon Mountains. They lived, as a matter of fact, along the western shore of another of the huge lakes of the Great African Rift. None other than Lake Rudolf. That was where King did not want to go; had refused to go. For it was just these Tappuza people about whom the governor of Nairobi had spoken.

Fate; that's what it was. It was too circumstantial to be coincidence. It was just one of those happenings of Africa beyond the molding of mere man. Man proposes and Africa disposes. King felt that he was being pushed up to the scene of smoldering trouble. And that was what gave him thought. Caution never hurt anybody, was one of his rules; another one was: figure it all out in advance and then jump with both feet. That was why he was so seldom hurt.

To be or not to be? There might be profit; there might be danger; for those people who were smart enough to make two attempts to waylay him—

So that settled that little question right there.

"Try to pull their funny stuff on me, would they?" was King's growl.

Well, then, should he go back south to Kisumu, steamer across to Entebbe, see the chief executive there, and go officially with the lavish pay and expenses that the Nairobi governor had offered? He thought of the old Aesop fable about the dog who invited a wolf to dinner; and the wolf marveled at the other's ease of life—comfortable kennel, good food, protection from the constant fear of being hunted, plenty of leisure—until a whistle sounded and the dog jumped up and said he had to go instantly because his master was calling. So the wolf preferred to remain a free lone wolf. King called Barounggo.

"Barounggo," he told him, "from tomorrow we must catch guides to show us the water holes, for that country to the north is bad country and the road is not known to me."

The Masai remained impassive.

"Good, *bwana*. It is moreover a happening of fate that in this village is a Turcana bush dweller who would return to his country. For his *potio* and a present at the end of the journey he will show the good places; so I have engaged him." King flicked an eyebrow at such prescience. The great *el Moran* continued, "It is already known to me that we go north. For three days I have smelled blood on my spear blade."

To which King grunted:

"Humph! Helluva cheerful prophet you are."

Chapter III

THERE is just one advantage to travel over "bad country" in Africa. The quality of badness is contingent by no means upon the roughness of a country; where roads are non-existent, rocks and ups and downs and *dongas*, or steep walled dry water courses make little difference to the man on foot. Badness in arid country is qualified by the distance between water holes and by the degree of foulness of these holes. Animals drinking at water holes wade in very often up to their bellies. A pool, therefore, with rocky or hard pan sides, is a good hole; for it is tainted only by the animals. A bad hole with sloping muddy shores is thick with ooze and trampled dirt as well as dung. Such water must be strained through a cloth before it is fit to drink.

It would seem, then, that there could hardly be any recompensing circumstance in bad country. Yet there is a very outstanding compensation to the traveler. Where water is poor and scarce, game is correspondingly so; and where game is scarce, lions know better than to waste their time. There need be no thorn *boma* built every night; no constant watch against prowling danger.

It was a long trek through bad country to the region occupied by the strong tribe of the Tappuza. In point of distance no more than a good day's run in an automobile; but to a safari traveling on foot, a journey of many parched and thirsty days; so desperately thirsty that one drank gratefully the water of the water holes. But that burned out plain began to give place to rolling higher ground, the beginning of the escarpment of Lake Rudolf; trees other than thorn bush began to appear; seepage of water showed among sheltered rocks; green herbage grew. The country began to be fit for human habitation. Another stiff march and one would come to rain forest.

At the edge of the forest, on the highest available ground overlooking the great lake fifty miles away, to take advantage of whatever breezes might blow; yet no closer, for that again meant descending ground and more heat, was the little outpost station of Lo Bur.

At Lo Bur, for his sins—which he did not know—was domiciled Mr. Sydney Fawcett, assistant commissioner of the colonial administration, and Lo Bur was his headquarters station from which his duty was to rule and keep in order a district as large as Massachusetts, studded with scattered villages of the unrestful Tappuza.

To assist him in this hopeful little chore he had a slim, sallow Eurasian, three babu clerks and a black sergeant and six men of the King's African Rifles. Total pay roll seven hundred and thirty dollars; total expenses, traveling allowances and so on—all regularly disputed by the comptroller of accounts at Entebbe—three hundred dollars. All of which accumulated money was sent up every three months under escort and lay in the office safe until disbursed, a temptation to the whole surrounding district.

The official residence was a large, low roofed bungalow with latticed veranda and a corrugated iron roof, perched high on ten-foot posts. At a discreet distance was a row of adobe cubicles, servants quarters. On the opposite side at a yet more discreet distance, a similar row and a stout, square, iron grilled block of masonry—the barracks and guardhouse. There were a well, a vegetable garden and some scrawny banana trees. The whole was surrounded by a strong barbed wire fence. For a hundred yards in all directions every tree had been felled and all

brush cleared. An austere, cheerless place that dazzled in the merciless sun. Good for defense but ghastly for residence.

AT LO BUR, also for his sins—which he humbly admitted—lived one Father Aloysius van Dahl. He was a member of the Jesuit Belgian Mission and here he had built a mission house from which his hope was to make as many as perhaps fifteen converts in the course of a year, and to win them to his mission settlement by teaching them to grow better yams and mealies and bananas than they knew how to grow before.

To assist him in this almost hopeless task he had Lay Brother Leffaerts and—a new acquisition—D'mitrius Stephanopoulos, zealous convert from the Greek church in Alexandria, who had shortened his name to the form more in keeping with his present affiliations, Stephen. Total payroll of this establishment, *nil*. Total expenses, about thirty dollars a month. All of which accumulated wealth was stored in a wooden box under the good father's bed; and which, incidentally, was turned out of a small profit made on carved wooden beads and plaited baskets made by the converts and exported for sale in Belgium.

The mission station was a long, low barrack built of split bamboo daubed with a mixture of clay and lime, and white-washed. It had a thatched roof and stamped clay floors covered with bamboo matting. It nestled in the shade of great flat leaved *euphorbia* trees, and was protected from the hostile world by tall fences of string beans and a miraculous grove of *papaya* and *guava* trees. A blazing *grenadilla* vine straggled over most of it, usurping its windows and toning down the glare of its whitewash with a delicate pattern of blue shadows. It was an impossibility for defense, but a place of rest for overheated man as well as for countless flashing birds and scorpions and flat toed *gecko* lizards and brown wood ticks.

It is etiquette in African colonialdom for a traveler to call upon the local government authority; a pleasing convention which disguises the harsh necessity of reporting arrival. For where natives are many and turbulent, and white men are desperately few, with, among the few, the inevitable percentage of those who would sell their own treacherous souls for gain, it is a wise administrative precaution to know the who and the why and the where of each newcomer.

In some of the fussier European colonies in Africa the process is brutally direct. One presents oneself at the local police station, is severely inquisitioned, and is registered—and sometimes even fingerprinted—in a huge tome in which all future movements are marked up. In British Africa one pays a polite call and discloses one's business in the process of conversation.

King, therefore, presented a rather crumpled card to the barefoot sentry at the barbed wire gate and followed him in to the shade of the veranda. Dilapidated brothers of that card were known in many parts of Africa. Some men—like the governor in Nairobi, who knew men—were glad to see them. Some others who had heard stories about this strenuous man from the moving-picturesquely wild and woolly West of that uncouth and inexplicable country, America, viewed them with misgiving.

Assistant Commissioner Sydney Fawcett received the card with a feeling of dismay that was akin to panic, which turned to smoldering irritation.

"Good heavens!" He sank back in his chair and frowned while he fidgeted with a carefully clipped blond mustache. "That man here! As if we haven't trouble enough already. There's always trouble where that fellow is. What the deuce brings him up here, I'd like to know?"

The assistant commissioner's statement, on the face of it, was true; though fault could be found with the nicety of his wording. It was not exactly that trouble was where King was, so much as that that restless man was so often to be found where trouble was. Mr. Fawcett pushed his chair back and called sulkily to a boy to bring two whisky pegs out to the veranda and went to meet his caller.

King had been received by district officials before; he had a quite accurate comprehension of what many of them thought of him; he knew that they thought it because he came and went his own way, that he did whatever he did without explaining means and motives, and that he went away again without making clear exactly what he had done. Or, to paraphrase his words to the governor, because he would not write a hundred page report about his doings. Such procedure was disturbing to the peace of mind of district officials whose business it was to read hundred page reports upon what was going on in their districts.

Yet King just could not bring himself to be the tame dog of the Aesop fable. So there remained the inevitable clash between the regulation bound official and the free citizen who had a strong conviction of his inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Mr. Fawcett Received his caller with formal courtesy and made the formal Anglo-Saxon gesture of good will by offering alcoholic stimulant. To which:

"No peg, thanks very much," said King. "Not so early in the day. I'm a confirmed sundowner."

And right there, in the perfectly courteous offer and refusal of a drink, was a source of irritation to a mind already predisposed to antagonism. A little thing in itself; yet a universal cause of hostility throughout the tropics. To any man whose system feels that a stimulant during the sluggish heat of the day is advisable and perhaps necessary, it is a subtle reproof, a never admitted sense of inferiority, to meet a man whose more robust system does not need that stimulant.

Mr. Fawcett was unconscious of resentment; yet this impalpable barrier had been raised. Courtesy could continue to govern all dealings with this foreigner, but there could be no cordiality. Neither could King, for his part, confine himself to the banal preliminaries of polite conversation. He proceeded directly to give the information required by law.

"I report two rifles, Mr. Fawcett; a .457 and .300, and a sixteen shotgun. About three hundred cartridges all told, and two dozen sticks of dynamite."

Mr. Fawcett's jaw dropped to disclose large even teeth and he fussed with his mustache. It was his duty to know, yet he shrank from the barbarous necessity of the direct question. Things just weren't done that way. These matters should always come out in the process of conversation; or, at least, after a decent period of persiflage.

"You, ah—er—are you thinking of prospecting for gold here, Mr. King?"

King felt easier. The stiff preliminaries done with, he felt that he could talk.

"Shucks, no. There's no gold around here—not in the ground, that is; I don't know how much the high muck-a-mucks have got hidden away somewhere—not

as yet. I carry the dynamite 'cause I never know where I may be going; just part of my regular kit. I came up here on a yarn about some ivory."

Mr. Fawcett's jaw dropped still farther. He had heard some disquieting rumors about that ivory himself; but if this—quite clearly trader person should come stirring up ancient legends and if he should discover anything, there would immediately be confusion and argument and dissension about property rights and heaven only knew what else. So he set out to explain to King with great patience all about the difficulties and the secrecy of the people, and the almost prohibitive transport problem—and even a hint about the "little temporary unrest."

King nodded appreciatively.

"Uh-huh, you seem to have quite a bit of underground something on your hands. And I picked up a talk about getting guns in. Sounded pretty authentic, too."

Mr. Fawcett shot a quick look at King. From where did this uncompromising fellow get so much information that was private news known only to the official elect? However, he commented only polite surprise.

"Yeah," King supplemented. "Some sixty, seventy guns, I'm told. Martini-Henry carbines mostly, with plenty ammunition. If as many as fifty per cent of them don't blow up there's still enough to make heap big trouble."

Mr. Fawcett was suspicious. This was damnably explicit. More even than he knew. Was this man trying to pump him? Mr. Fawcett was the unfortunate victim of a tradition which the governor in Nairobi could understand. He had been reared in the knowledge that in every outlying colony might be found a certain class of white man who would smuggle guns and liquor to the natives. No white man of his own class would ever descend to such a despicable business. Here was a white man distinctly not of his own class; therefore potentially he might belong to the other class; and this white man seemed to possess much suspicious knowledge.

As official lord paramount of an immense district, with all its lives in his keeping, it was his duty to protect those lives—even at the risk of his own. This King man, therefore, a man of another caste whose reputation anyhow was one of turbulence, must be—until proven—regarded with official suspicion. Mr. Fawcett set about officially to question the not proven alien.

"Why, er—you make a very definite statement there about the number of guns which you say have been smuggled in. What basis, permit me to ask—"

King sensed the thing immediately, of course, and responded accordingly. There it was again, the same old clash between entrenched authority acting according to prescribed rule and its honest convictions, and the individual with an indomitable sense of personal liberty. King's reaction was always that of the boy who dares to tease the policeman. His expression was one of innocent mysteriousness.

"Gossip, Mr. Fawcett, just gossip. Native village chatter. *You* know natives, of course; and *you* must know how many guns have come into your district; I'm just retailing scandal."

Mr. Fawcett was not at all sure how genuine was this perfectly true statement. King fired a metaphorical sling shot at a wicked chance.

"And I'll tell you another bit of gossip that'll give you a laugh. Your reinforcements from Karamojo are having trouble with the monthly mail truck

and it's pretty sure betting that they'll have to make it on foot; twenty days of foot slog over Africa if they're fast."

That shook the assistant commissioner from his precise reserve. He gagged. Words stuttered in his throat. This man was a devil. How could he know about an urgent appeal for twenty more men—and what did he mean by his certitude of car trouble? If it were all true it would be a condition of desperate seriousness. But he thrust that thought from him. It couldn't be. This unofficial fellow could not know.

As a matter of fact King didn't. He had picked up a story about a runner having been dispatched two weeks ago with a letter going toward the headquarters of the next district. He knew that regular mail communication was by monthly auto trucks, with an escort of two rifles. From this his simple deduction was that news that could not wait for the monthly mail must be very urgent. What urgent need might there be in the existing situation other than a call for help? And the bet about car trouble, then, was no more than a logical sequence. Having his own little experiences about the cleverness of the man, whoever might be organizing this unrest, in trying to keep him out of the game, he felt confident that, if reinforcements had been sent for, the same alert mind would surely plan to delay them; and since their leader would be no more than another native sergeant, he would quite probably succeed.

King left the assistant commissioner wondering darkly just what was his purpose in coming here, and what might be his connection with the smuggled guns about which he seemed to know so much. He chuckled as he went. It was so seldom that the bad boy could put anything over on the policeman. Authority always held all the cards—all the might of government; all the sources of information; all the mutual assistance; and limitless funds. The lone hunter had nothing but his wits and such knowledge as he could dig out by diplomacy. That was what made the game so interesting a contest of skill.

Chapter IV

FROM the formal report to entrenched officialdom King went to make a social call of one white man to another at the mission. There was no card of announcement. Father van Dahl was standing under the long fringe of thatch eave over the door. A slight, pale figure with deep brown eyes, visible above a flowing brown beard and mustache, robed in the prescribed habit of the order, which had once been black but which many suns and many washings had faded to a rusty brown, the priest blended into his surroundings. There was no alien note of color or of newness or of harsh superiority; the quiet low house and the quiet little man belonged in that far African setting.

"Mr. King?" The priest held out his hand. "They told me you had not long arrived. I have heard much of—Kingi *bwana*. You will come in, yes; and the boy will prepare the bath. Very shortly we eat our little tiffin. You will partake with us, no?"

King took the proffered hand that he could have broken easily in his own brown fist and marveled, as he always did, at the spirit that could keep so frail a man in so thankless a place. The cool dimness of the house called to him.

"Yes to all of them, Padre, and heaps thanks. Exactly what my system needs. I hope that all that you've heard about me hasn't been as bad as some other people have heard."

The priest smiled wisely.

"We who live in Africa," he said, "after we have lived a long time, we understand what to hear and how to hear, is it not?"

He pulled, almost as a bird, at King's sleeve; and the dimness of the house swallowed them.

A native boy who had been squatting under a listless banana tree—the kind of boy who is always to be seen squatting about in mission compounds doing nothing—got up, picked up his shield and light throwing spears, scratched his knee with the toes of his other foot, and trotted off along the well trodden trail that led to the native town.

It was a simple little lunch, simply served by Lay Brother Leffaerts, a tall silent man, and convert Stephen, a rotund little person, sallow skinned, with a pair of keen black eyes, and full of laughter about everything. The meal over and the sonorous Latin blessing pronounced, Father van Dahl rose with the self-conscious smile of a child about to perform a trick, fetched a black box and pushed it toward King. In his eyes was pride of achievement. The box contained no less exotic a marvel than Belgian stogies; long, shapeless, speckled, with a straw built into the thinner end.

"Of our own manufacture," the priest beamed. "One accomplishes little in Africa, yet so much we have reached. Our maker is without skill of hand but our tobacco is much better than of the monopoly in Belgium. With the good smoke we can talk. Much news we expect you to give us."

"News, Padre? There is nothing new in Nairobi except the government secret of an uprising fermenting amongst these Tappuza. It's up to you to give me all the gossip that hasn't got as far as the official secret service yet. What's the lowdown about this new juju that the natives are hanging their courage on to?"

The priest looked troubled.

"So? It is uprising that they in Nairobi talk? I still hope it will not come so far. If only this Mr. Fawcett—But tell me first, my friend, are you—" the hands lifted in a pleading gesture—"there was a story that you had taken contract with the government to come and put down this rebellion."

The ready grin reduced King's eyes to slits.

"Hm, that's a nice flattering one. And the story shows a healthy growth, even for Africa. That would be some contract, wouldn't it? Well, it isn't so, Padre. There was a thin basis for the yarn, but that's all. I came up here on the trail of some old Tippoo Tib loot. Things being as they are, I don't know whether I can negotiate a deal. I'm not going to run guns for them, and I don't know whether they'll trade on any other basis till that madness has been walloped out of them."

The priest nodded.

"Yes, yes, the ivory, is it not? Somewhere there is some. I do not know, but our Brother Stephen will be able to tell you. He was, before he came to us, a merchant of the Nile."

Brother Stephen was all eager to oblige, but King checked him.

"Ivory can wait. The little question of transport will keep that weight comfortably right where it is. What about this *juju* magic? That's more important."

The priest was immediately grave. His eyes were those of a pleading spaniel.

"Yes, yes, that is the most important. They are children, these people; they run to follow a show. This idol, it makes some tricks. The man is clever, and my people leave me. Look, more than a hundred of them I had gathered so slowly with so much care. How many are left? Perhaps twenty, perhaps ten. They have left their good houses, their little plantations that we made with the scientific method; and every day two more, three more, leave off their white clothes and take their spears and go to howl in the night before that devil made of wood. It is the story of Africa. Let Brother Stephen tell it. I will leave you. I still have some small duties left."

Brother Stephen was well informed about the idol. An alert mind with no hallucinations, he dissected the situation with clarity and in fluent English.

THE *JUJU* was an unusually large one carved out of some black wood, apparently ebony; it was probably not new but quite antique, and had been produced from some witch house by its present high priest who was a cunning old high-binder. It stood upon a roofed platform some thirty feet up in a solitary "ghost tree"; it was hung about with the usual collection of bones and offerings; and it did tricks.

What kind of tricks, King wanted to know.

Well, it's most spectacular trick was that it's arms and jaws moved and it ate offerings—some simple system of strings or levers, no doubt, manipulated probably from the tree against the trunk of which it stood. And at certain times, proclaimed in advance with all its attendant hokum, it talked and gave messages to the people. Stage effects, no more, put across by a smart knave; but quite spectacular enough to capture the infant imaginations of the Tappuza savages and to bend them to whatever purpose the high-binder had in view.

King sat with narrowed eyes. A deep straight line ran from his nose up into his forehead.

"There's just two questions come out of that," was all his comment. "The man or men, whoever they are, are playing up to starting a fuss. Why? And the organized intelligence back of it all is more than the common witch doctor has. Who? If Mr. Fawcett knows enough to find those two answers he'll know how to put the skids under the trouble."

Brother Stephen thrust out his hands, palms uppermost, and his round dark face twisted into a grimace that was not complimentary.

"Ah, yes, if he knew but enough. But Mr. Fawcett is of the 'heaven born.' By reason of the very difficult examinations which he passed in London in order to gain his appointment into the government service in Africa, he knows too much about everything native. He thinks that the way to stop this trouble is to confiscate the ivory so that it can not be traded for guns; and he is hoping to find it."

"That," said King with certitude, "would cause an immediate riot."

"Yes. Immediate, at once. But he will never find it. I could—" he checked himself—"If he were not so high and mighty toward a Greek trader I could perhaps help him. He had even planned to confiscate *the juju*."

"And that," said King, "would have meant that you would all have been wiped out. These people have too many guns against his little force."

"Yes, but I—but Father van Dahl agreed with my opinion and persuaded him to do nothing so hastily before he had many more soldiers. So, you see, we stand upon a gunpowder mine. My advice to anybody would be to go away before the mine blows up."

King tapped the ash off his cigar with meticulous neatness. His tone was impersonal.

"Yeah, that would be the *wise* thing for a man to do. But I came up to look into this ivory yarn."

Brother Stephen's hands were eloquent.

"My friend, let me give you my opinion on that matter as a trader of experience. Consider. This ivory is no longer a buried treasure; it must be bought from these people—under government supervision, remember, and the government tax must be paid. If there is not so much of it as you hope—let us say maybe a hundred tusks—the small profit is not worth the distance involved. If there is enough of it to make it really pay, you would need a whole tribe to transport it. Slow travel with the weight; one month's journey to the railway at Kisumu.

"This is not the good old days when you could *dash* a chief a few gaudy gimcracks and have him order his men out. You would have to pay the rate prescribed by a grandmother government; seven hundred men at one shilling a day apiece with *potio* and half pay coming back; and you can figure that out—if the government would ever permit so many men to leave their fields at once.

"The gold in quills—that is to say, if there is any—would be taken in by the government as specie and the face value would be disbursed by the benevolent administration for the benefit of the tribe. No, my friend, I assure you, as a business man, this is not a trade proposition."

King remained in silent cogitation, absorbed in intent examination of the end of his second stogie and in the great rings he blew to enormous distances in that still, warm air. At last he said:

"I think you're dead right in everything you say. And I think I'll go and see if this Fawcett gent is possibly as good an egg beneath his cast iron shell of caste as the old governor at Nairobi."

Brother Stephen's shoulders showed his disapproval.

"I would not advise you to do that, my friend. I assure you he will listen to nothing; he will take no advice—" rising passion darkened the sallow face—"he will but treat you with condescension; he will insult you to your face with his politeness; he will—What do you want to go to him for? You are not interested in this thing, you say; not officially. As a trade it is not possible, I tell you. Then leave the official to take care of his own troubles. Go away before trouble comes to you. It is not your affair."

He ceased abruptly and blinked his round eyes, swallowing to control his emotions. King blew some more smoke rings in silence, then:

"You're right again in everything you say. Dead right. All the same, I think I ought to have a pleasant chat with him. And there's the hundred men to be remembered; it would be a pity to have them led astray by a trick *juju*, the good hundred who have learned to wear white clothes and to grow bigger and better yams."

That apparently forgotten consideration was beginning to dawn in Brother Stephen's fate as King left him.

SO THERE was the whole truth about affairs. Witch doctors and missionaries. Those were the people who always understood the rest of the people and who had the information. King came from the missionary interview even more thoughtful than he had come away from the ancient witch doctor at the Elgon Mountain. He smiled thinly to himself as he walked.

"So that's the answer to the first of the two questions. Clever lad, that; knows quite accurately about everything—" the thin smile stretched to a grin. "Friend Fawcett must have upstaged our Stephanopoulos pretty stiffly at that. Guess I'll take mine tonight after he's had his dinner; he'll be all dolled up and at his best then. I wonder why the Greek doesn't want me to go up?"

At the mission outskirts one of King's *shenzis* met him. He had been sent, he said, by Barounggo, to lead the way through a jungly path to the camp. They had moved from the hasty halt of arrival and had taken possession of a deserted *boma* with a couple of huts in it which they had repaired. It was a strong place.

"Good," was all that King said; and he wondered what his two boys had heard that had induced them to move into a strong place, for there were, so close to human habitation, no animal menaces other than the ubiquitous hyenas.

Arrived at the camp, he asked no questions. That would come in its own good time; it was better for the present to betray no anxiety. He washed up, rested, shaved, ate leisurely; which brought him to the time for his after-dinner visit to the assistant commissioner. He signed to Barounggo to accompany him. The Masai was ready; all that he needed was to pluck his great spear from the ground where it stood upright at the entrance to the *boma* and to stalk behind his master. A thin moon cut black and white silhouettes out of the jungle path. They walked awhile in silence. Then King asked—

"What talk has been this day that you moved the camp into a strong place?"

"A small talk, *bwana*; yet such as I have heard before a letting of blood. Talk was that the Black One of the ghost tree will talk this night."

"Hmh. That is a talk that must be heard by you or by Kaffa, and I must know what is said by this witch doctor."

"Nay *bwana*—" the Masai was positive—"the witch doctor does only the *bonga*, he calls the names and the titles in advance; it is the Black One himself who speaks."

"Hmh!" grunted King again and walked on in silence. Then, softly, "How many men, think you, are following behind us?"

The Masai showed no surprise.

"It has been in my mind that three men come running softly."

"Good," said King. "Now therefore at that bend in the trail where the moon strikes do you step swiftly to the left and I to the right, and we shall see what manner of men come behind us in the night."

Some thirty paces farther the trail took a sharp curve. No sooner round it than both men ducked into the bush and crouched. In a few seconds padding footsteps sounded and the followers trotted into view.

King's eyes narrowed in the dark and he took a quick breath. He had seen this kind of night runner before. Three strongly built savages, naked except for their gee-strings; each carried a short, heavy stabbing spear; their heads thrust forward, the moonlight glinted white upon their eyeballs, distended with excitement, and upon strong white teeth showing between curled lips that panted wide, though not with the exertion of their stealthy running. Killers they were, and the lust of hot blood gleamed from each dark face.

"Well, of all the damned nerve!" King muttered, and hurled himself out of his hiding place in a flying tackle at the foremost runner.

The man crashed down with a startled yelp and King instantly rolled with him into the black shadow of the underbrush.

At the same moment a coughing "*whaugh*," the war shout of the Masai, told him that Barounggo had not hesitated. His own man was a burly fellow who, after his first surprise, fought in ferocious silence. In the darkness King, clinging to his spear hand, found some difficulty in locating the fellow's head, holding it down with his free hand and smashing his knee hard under the ear. The squirming figure went limp.

King leaped from that place, ten feet in one great bound, to another patch of shadow beside the path and crouched for whatever might come. Running feet receded farther up the trail. A tall dark figure stood with his back to a tree, head forward, great spear poised. King was at a disadvantage. He tore his automatic from his belt holster, though under the very shadow of the established law, as it were, he hesitated to get himself involved in any premature blood spilling.

But the dark figure in the half-shadow of the tree did not move. The head hung in the same forward strained position. The threatening spear pointed not at King but curiously horizontal. In the same second King knew. He whistled thinly and pushed his pistol slowly back into its holster. He stepped close softly. The spear was not one of the short stabbing spears of the killers, but the great weapon of the Masai. Four inches of the blade's butt, a hand's-breath wide, showed darkly red before the man's chest. The remaining twenty inches of steel were through him and fast in the tree trunk behind.

KING was levering the blade loose when running steps sounded again. Single footsteps. It was the Masai, eager, face gleaming with excitement. He stood and regarded his handiwork critically.

"*Hau*, that was a good stroke." He began to stamp his feet in a savage rhythm and to declaim his exploit in an impromptu sort of chant.

"A good stroke; a fair stroke. In the dark I smote, yet my blade has eyes to see in the night. A nose it has, a keen nose to smell out the heart of my enemy. Who is the dead dog who lifted spear to me? To me, an *elmoran* of the Masai. His point scratched my breast and I smote. Ha! Where is he? *Hau!* He is gone—"

"Shut up!" King told him tensely. "Cease this bragging. This is a bad business. What of the third man?"

The slayer stopped, balanced on one foot, the other ready to beat the next rhythm. King noted a thin gash in the breast of his khaki coat, the edges of which were tinged with blood. But his wound would be the last thing that the Masai would pay attention to. His reply was in an injured tone.

"That one's ghost sits beside him and moans. My hands were empty and he came at me with his spear. With his little spear like a fool he came, as one who hunts an ape. I have seen many spears. I moved my body—so; and with his own toy I let the cold night enter his breast." Triumph began to possess him again. "Aho, it was a good fight. Swift but merry. Scarce the space of three good breaths that a man may take and three men lie dead. Surely a good little fight."

"Please, great slaughterer," King checked him. "It was not good. And three are not dead. This one in the shadow we must take and bind. It is a bad business. We sit under the very mantle of the *Inglesi serkale*, and much trouble will be made over spilled blood. Sure justice will come in the length of days; but there will be talk and bother and interference at this time when I want no interference with my doings."

The Masai put his balanced foot to the ground and scratched his buttock. The excitement of battle was giving place to penitence.

"That is indeed so," he agreed. "I have seen the *serkale* do its work. Men will come together with many papers; they will sit as do the rock baboons and will make a great *indaba*; they will weigh useless talk as the monkeys weigh rotten sticks and they will throw words to all the four winds for many days. In the end one will pay blood money and go free. Yes, I have known this thing."

King stood frowning at the body of the killer who was still pinned to the tree. A trickle of blood crawled the length of the spear shaft and fell with a plop on to a dry leaf. This was a nasty dilemma. The three men had quite obviously followed them with murderous intent in the third attempt to keep him out of the fermenting trouble. Everything could no doubt be proven and cleared up; but the one certainty of the whole affair was restrictive delay.

The Masai spoke from the shadow where he was tying the unconscious man's hands with a quickly twisted rope of grass:

"*Bwana*, there is a word in my mind. I have many times listened to the talk of the *m'zungu mon-pères*, the white priests who say that their great white spirit who rules all things has put all things into the world for a good purpose. This is a hard talk to understand, but a little is clear to me. For this good purpose has he put these many hyenas into the land. Let me throw these twain dead dogs into the first *donga* and in one hour it shall not be known how they died. And if *bwana* will permit likewise that this third dog who would have murdered us from behind—"

King grunted a short laugh and came to a decision.

"You'd make a swell convert for the good *padre*; you have the faculty of acceptance of fundamentals. Listen now, Barounggo. Thus it shall be. Give these two to the hyenas; this third one take back to the *boma*; bind and watch him well. He must be questioned and we may learn something. I go to talk with the *bwana Inglesi*."

THE ASSISTANT commissioner sat in his veranda in solitary after-dinner state. King could see the pale glow of his shirt front, a white splash in the deep shadow, long before he reached the steps.

Like any other man, he had grown up with certain traditions, himself. One of these was that to wear anything white was a foolish invitation when trouble was abroad. The formal greeting concluded, the formal drink accepted, King ventured a well meant warning.

"Mr. Fawcett, you ought to be able to step out there and look at yourself once. You've no idea what a target a boiled shirt makes for any sportively inclined coon who's got one of those Martini-Henry's."

Mr. Fawcett's reply was stereotyped, as one expounding a creed.

"Oh, I suppose it is visible at quite a distance. But then, Mr. King, one can not drop all the conventions of decent civilization just because one happens to be posted in a savage country."

King, dressed in breeches and shooting coat, and with frayed cuffs at that, grinned to himself in the darkness. He had met this same thing all over Africa. It was the proper thing to do and it was therefore done. Tradition again; and unswerving faith to it.

But he had come to talk, not to quarrel with another man's religion. He approached his subject placatingly.

"Will you let me ask you a few questions, Mr. Fawcett—and let us look at question and answer quite impersonally?"

Mr. Fawcett inclined his head.

"Well, then," began King, "have you formed any idea of what is the real bedrock reason for this unrest here?"

Mr. Fawcett weighed his answer.

"I don't mind answering that question, Mr. King. And I say, no, I do not know. I believe it to be the work of a crazy witch doctor inflated with a sense of his sudden power over his superstitious people. And in turn, I would ask you why you are interested in this unrest?"

King weighed his answer in turn.

"I'm interested only, as I told you, Mr. Fawcett—that is to say, I was interested—only in so far as it affected this ivory story. But—" the eyes narrowed to the same hard thinness as the mouth—"some nervy gent connected with this fuss is so interested in me that he's begun to warp my judgment. But let's continue to be impersonal for awhile yet. Let's suppose, for a moment, that everything was quiet here and a man should locate this hoard and deal for it legitimately, would you sanction his hiring porters here?"

"That would depend," said Mr. Fawcett judiciously, "upon how much ivory he wanted to take away."

"Well, suppose that man should tell you that there were seven hundred tusks; what would you say?"

"I would say first, Mr. King, that I don't believe there is any such fortune of ivory in the district; next, that that man knew very much more about this secret than I do; and finally, that I would refuse to sanction any such number of porters. Why, my good man, that would be a migration. You have no idea what such a tribal upset would mean."

King nodded.

"Well, leaving out the ivory, suppose a man should tell you that somewhere in the tribe is a store of gold in quills. What would you say to that?"

Mr. Fawcett was positive.

"I would tell that man, first, as an officer of the government, that he might as well forget it; because the government would not permit the tribe to be exploited. That gold would have to be paid for at its face value. And secondly—" Mr. Fawcett's tone was pointed—"I would demand from that man how he knew so much about the ivory as to be able to state its quality and so much about the gold rumor as to know that it was put up in quills? I would regard that man, Mr. King, with suspicion, and I would watch his every move. In fact, I would cease to regard the question as impersonal; and I ask you flatly, Mr. King, as the administrative officer of this district, how you come to have all this information which has not even been reported to me?"

King laughed shortly.

"I have not all that information, Mr. Fawcett. I don't expect you to believe me, but I repeat, I'm following a thin trail of a story and I'm guessing. But I have one piece of information now which I will tell you. I'll tell you the rock bottom reason that's back of this unrest."

King pointed his statement with a long forefinger.

"This whoever it is who is stirring up trouble is aiming to bring about an uprising—it don't matter how quickly suppressed or who pays the piper afterwards."

Mr. Fawcett permitted himself a smile.

"Uprisings are always possible in Africa when the natives are excited about something; but you ascribe an unusual intelligence to the agitator. Why, Mr. King, permit me to ask, does this witch doctor wish to have an uprising? What would be his possible gain as against his very sure future punishment?"

King pointed his forefinger like a gun.

"Suppose, Mr. Fawcett," he said slowly, "that it isn't the witch doctor who is the bedrock. Now then, this man who's supplying the brains wants to get the administration out of the way for just a little while—no, let me finish please. He wants to get it out of the way so that he can make his own dicker with whatever nigger will be the big chief. He will arrange with the chief for porters at about four cents a day. He'll fix up to snaffle all that ivory and that gold, to pay for it in trade trash, and to make his getaway before the government can restore order and come back to control things."

THE ASSISTANT commissioner gasped. The statement was too audacious. That the unrest might develop into an uprising he knew only too well; but that the whole thing should be a deliberate plot, so diabolically clever—and going on right under his nose—that was more than he could assimilate all at once.

Revolting from its acceptance, his mind searched for difficulties in its conception. He found one almost immediately and it was so conclusive that he was afforded a laugh.

"That is a very ingenious theory, Mr. King. But you forget an important point; I might say a prohibitive point. Admitting for a moment that this Machiavelli of

yours should succeed in temporarily dislodging the administration of this district—of *this* district mind you—where could he go with his loot? The jolly old transport problem, don't you know? He couldn't upset all of British Africa, could he? And one can't *safari* several hundred men with elephants' tusks hidden about their person; or even a few men with gold in quills, for that matter.

"To the northeast across the lake is Abyssinia, where they would take everything away from him in the first day's trek. To the north and northwest is the British Sudan and desert. Not a single water hole in many hundred miles. All the rest around us is British Uganda or Kenya Colony—not upset by your intriguing genius. And, dash it all, we do know what is going on in the country. So where, Mr. King, would your man go?"

"That," admitted King, "is the big hole in the argument. That's what maybe I can find out. But let's suppose for a little bit longer. Suppose that that is the plan, how could you stop the trouble before it came to an uprising and a white killing?"

Mr. Fawcett's triumph in the argument had put him in a more tractable humor. He was willing to disclose a corner of administrative policy.

"That is at present a problem, I don't mind confessing. You know, of course, that all these African disturbances are the work of some single dominant personality who understands how to excite the monkey mind of the herd. These poor fools have nothing against us; they are infinitely better off than they ever were before, and if they would stop and think they would know it. But the excited African can not think. Some dominant mind is exciting these people by an appeal to their superstitions. Eighty per cent of the African wars have been started that way.

"We do not know the person in this case. But it is obvious that his instrument of excitation is this blasted *juju*. The people's courage is being bolstered upon their belief in its magic powers. Unfortunately—the missionary here has convinced me—any overt action against it will be the signal for an immediate riot. As soon as my reinforcements come I shall confiscate the bally thing and that fact in itself will blow up its whole prestige. It would blow up if I dared to confiscate it now; but since you seem to know about the guns that have been smuggled through from somewhere I may as well admit that I'm not strong enough just now to risk the ensuing riot."

There spoke Africa. King understood and nodded. He knew the old story by heart. Here was this stiff necked official sitting, as the Greek had said, upon a powder mine; yet the thought never even came to him that he might desert his post—or, to put it diplomatically, that he might temporarily retire and come back with an adequate force. Nor did that thought occur to the missionary. Nor, for that matter, to King. That was why the white man dominated Africa.

"So the question boils down," said King slowly, "to who gets there first; the dominant mind with this uprising, or your reinforcements."

"Well, er—I suppose that is so, Mr. King, since you put it that way."

"And believe me," said King. "Your reinforcements are going to take a long time getting here."

The assistant commissioner was immediately belligerently suspicious again.

"What do you know about my reinforcements, Mr. King? There again you display an unwarranted knowledge. I have a right to know your source of information, and I demand to know."

King held up disclaiming hands.

"I don't know a darn thing, Mr. Fawcett. I'm guessing. You don't believe my guesses. When I know anything definite I'll tell you. Good night, and thanks for your information."

The assistant commissioner listened to the crunch of King's retreating footsteps on the gravel—the khaki coat and breeches had melted into the darkness.

"I wonder," Mr. Fawcett cogitated. "I wonder whether that fellow is all right after all?"

King walked back through the moon streaked jungle path alone, alert with ready gun, but not unduly anxious. The dominant mind, the dispatcher of the three killers, would hardly have had time yet to ascertain the result of the mission and to have made new preparations.

"Gosh," King thought to himself with a certain heat, "this high-binder is sure asking me to horn into his game and bust it up."

But he did not devote much time to indignation. His mind was engrossed with other things. Thoughts flew from point to point in his brain; guesses formed, worked themselves out or remained as reckonable possibilities. Certain things adhered together in an as yet intangible train which he voiced to himself.

So friend Fawcett would regard with suspicion a man who knew that there were seven hundred tusks and that the gold was put up in quills. I wonder. And the Greek doesn't think of himself in his own mind as a missionary, but as a man of business, a trader. I wonder—Still the hole remains. Where could he go with the stuff if he got it? Wonder if the commish has a good map?

At his camp *boma* he inquired about the prisoner. The man had been put into one of the huts with thumbs bound behind his back and was safe. He would keep till the morning. King turned in to sleep, for he intended to devote the next night—when the *juju* would talk—to wakefulness.

Chapter V

MORNING brought an interview with the prisoner—entirely unsatisfactory from every angle. King had to look at the man's face but once to know that there was little hope. It was a brutish gorilloid face with wide cheek bones and prognathous jaw. Had the fellow been white he would have been a gunman. Dull witted enough to take orders without asking why and animal enough to be callous and physically courageous.

He knew nothing. He had been told to go out and do a job, and he had gone accordingly. He was to have received a piece, two and a half yards, of print cloth in payment. He did not hesitate to state the name of the higher up who had given him his orders—a certain Umbale, a native of the village. It meant nothing. King had never hoped that the guiding genius would have been foolish enough to deal with his stupid tool directly.

And that was about all that the man did know, King was convinced. He knew better than to try to extort further information under threat of death. It is only the civilized mind educated to dread of after torment, that fears death. Primitive man lives in too close contact with sudden death to be terrified by its imminent threat.

"A spear and the *donga*," Barounggo growled.

"Shut up," said King. "Put the fool back in the hut. Feed him and hold him safe. If he cries out drop sand in his mouth for a lesson. Perhaps later we give him to the *bwana Inglesi* for justice."

King went to the official residence and requested to be allowed to look at maps. Permission was granted readily enough, though with unmistakable suspicion as to his motives. A *babu* clerk took King down to the office and turned over to him an enormous map roll, the familiar "Kitchener Survey." King spread it out on a table, weighted the corners and pored over it.

What Mr. Fawcett had said was true. Except for a little corner of Abyssinia abutting on the lake, the rest was British territory. Miles upon thousands of square miles colored pink. Good Lord, they seemed to own half of Africa, these British! And it was true, too, their far flung territories were well administered. Any large *safari* movement would be reported and quietly checked over at some point by some outlying resident white official; most particularly if the word had gone out that something bulky was being smuggled out.

No, it was impossible. Except—King strained his eyes over the map and visualized roads and ways and means. *Safaris* could not just disappear into the uncharted wilderness; they were confined to certain definite trails by the inexorable circumstance of water holes. Kenya Colony? The sinewy brown finger trailed off hundreds of miles in a wide north-east-south arc. Uganda? Westward clear to the Belgian Congo. All of it quietly, efficiently policed. Up to the northwest there were no water holes at all. The Tappuza wooded country gave way to desert. Four hundred miles of blazing sand and rock and rubble to the mud village of Rejaf on the white Nile. Not a water hole, not a tree, not a blade of grass. An empty, deadly, barrier.

Yet—an idea began to grow. Desert. That meant no water. No water meant no rain. No rain meant no *dongas*; no steep sided washout ravines criss-crossing the country. That meant level, or at most, rolling ground; sand dunes. No nourishment for man or beast. But—the idea flashed to climax. What was four hundred miles to an automobile truck? Had not a French Count Somebody-or-other crossed the Sahara with a train of trucks?

King whistled his tuneless melodies through his teeth and his eyes contracted to almost sightless slits. Was there any hole in that idea? Rejaf? The Nile? Too far up for regular river steamer traffic; but native boats plied up and down all the time with a worthless assortment of upriver trade. Dried mud fish; papyrus reed; pottery. All kinds of junk. Miles of barren, uninhabited stretches above and below the mud town. Many ivory tusks could be loaded into the bilge of a native boat, covered over with any kind of junk and could keep going without question until doomsday.

King removed his weights and the map rolled up with a conclusive snap.

"Hmh!" muttered King. "That fills in that hole. I'm ready to bet on question *why*. Remains question *who*."

He went to have tea at the mission. He talked with the good missionaries about nothing in particular; the gossip of interior Africa. People and tribes and local customs and railroad developments and isolation of distance and *safari* travel and autos and airplanes. Airplanes would be the salvation of the interior. All agreed to that. As to automobiles which had opened up the rest of the world—the trouble with automobiles, said Brother Stephen, was the prohibitive expense of bridging the countless *dongas*. If it were not for that, there were many makes of cars that would stand the rough going over the veld.

And Brother Stephen was able, out of his experiences of his trading days not so long ago, before—with a flashing smile—before his reformation, he was able to name some of these cars and discuss their merits.

King came away mumbling to himself.

"He has the knowledge. I wonder if he has the nerve?"

Away to his left he could hear a steady drumming. He knew the rhythm. It was the notice of an *indaba*. It would continue all day, and that night the *juju* was going to talk. Decidedly both Barounggo and Kaffa would have to go and hear that talk. He told them so once again; and they were only too eager; as eager as white folks to go and see a mystery play. So were the six *shenzis*. Good; he gave them all leave to go.

WITH the beginning of dusk they went. King lounged in indolence till full dark—till no possible watcher could note his movements. Then he too got up with the eagerness of one who contemplated a show. First he went to the prison hut and assured himself that the captive was safe. Then he opened one of his *safari* bundles; one of his secrets that even his own servants must not know. From a cloth roll he took a fat black stick and proceeded to make a black face of himself.

More than once before in his experience he had found that the glow of a white face in the dark was almost as noticeable as the glow of a white shirt front; and he was going where a white face would be a swift passport to a particularly horrible death.

The ghost tree stood alone, a giant wild fig with enormous horizontal limbs and wide, buttressed roots, between some of which one might have pitched a tent. Half of the spreading base had been built up with crooked sticks and thatch to form a witch house. Bones, human skulls, dried monkey mummies, snake skins—all the horrors dear to the African mind hung about in gruesome suggestiveness.

For fifty yards around the tree was a clearing, stamped hard by the pounding of many hundreds of naked feet. The dark clearing was packed just now with naked, shuffling, heaving bodies; and they all stamped a dull rhythm on the hard ground. A sweaty odor of goat pens eddied in the hot night air over the human mass.

Back of the clearing was a treeless scrub of tangled bush and stunted thorny mimosa. In the scrub King lay on his belly. It was pitch-black in the shadow, for which he was properly thankful. This was as near as he dared to come; he had no hallucinations about any sleuth ability to disguise himself so that he could mix in with the crowd. A white man detected in that hysterical mob would be torn apart by clutching blunt fingernails and big white teeth.

From where he crouched King had a clear view of the *juju*. Halfway up the giant tree was its platform—high enough for the hocus-pocus of manipulation to pass

muster. At either corner of the platform a smoky wick in a saucer of oil lighted the awesome idol; a squatting figure carved with all the savage talent for the bizarre; a huge grotesque of jutting angles and vast opaque shadows. High lights glittered blackly from the knobby, drawn-up knees, from the curve of a great pot belly, and reflected out of the higher gloom from the outlines of a bushel-basket mouth and glaring eyes. A clever stage effect of a voodoo horror.

The thick arms which hung between the splay feet moved jerkily. The heavy jaw chattered on a hinge like a ventriloquist's dummy. For a space the thing confined itself to these antics while the crowd below shuffled and milled in suspense.

An overwrought savage, nerves taxed beyond endurance by the awe-inspiring suspense, screamed a high pitched hyena laugh, slavering through blubber lips, and fell to the ground. He writhed unnoticed. His howlings were smothered out in horrid gurglings under hard feet. The mob moaned in minor keys and closed over him. He screamed once again and was silent. Shoulders heaved; heads tossed like cattle before the break of thunder; eyeballs glared white like those of the *juju*.

King crouched in his shadow, tense. He knew the danger of Africa in that temper. This was more than he had come prepared to see.

The looming idol tired of its chatterings and its jerkings. It yawned cavernously to show inset bone teeth as large as dollar pieces.

The packed crowd shivered. The thing was going to speak.

The jaws clicked woodenly. A hollow megaphonic voice issued. King could make out most of its mumblings; for the Tappuza dialect was an offshoot of the Masai with a sprinkling of Kiswahili. The message was meat for the attendant congregation. It flattered their strength; it praised their courage; it promised them wealth, and above all indolence. There would be nothing to do except sit in the shade of their huts and eat. And soon, soon, soon, would all these good things be forthcoming. Tomorrow it would eat offerings—King grinned grimly at the inevitable priestcraft—and soon would come the sign.

Africans do not cheer. The crowd seethed and its grunts of ejaculation rolled back and forth like summer thunder. King was grave. This matter was closer to bloody riot than even he had guessed. The *juju's* trick was most dramatically impressive. Its great jaws opened once more and commenced on another harangue on the wrongs of the black man. King listened, and wonder dawned upon him. He thanked his various heathen gods that he had come. Never would his Barounggo and his Kaffa have been able to report the important essence of this speech. His suspicions crystallized. This talk made everything clear; everything possible—and infinitely more dangerous.

THE VOICE that mumbled from above was an unmistakable African voice; but the claptrap that it dispensed was pure bolshevism. The African in himself has no inherent sense of his wrongs; he has not evolved to that state. If he is starved, and if he is beaten and robbed, he resents it with dull apathy. If the starving and beating and robbing reach a point beyond human endurance he will rise in a howling mob and will rend and slaughter everything within his reach.

He will rise and slaughter for other causes, too. But, of his own volition, never because some intangible authority claims to own the land upon which he lives, which his fathers reclaimed from the jungle; nor because he has to pay a tax to that intangible authority for the privilege of growing yams upon his own land; nor

because that authority prevents him from killing his neighbor if he doesn't like him, and if he does kill that neighbor, relentlessly executes him.

The primitive African is not convinced that he is an oppressed proletariat. But if he is told that he is; if he is told it carefully, in words of one syllable; and told often; and told the same thing again; and with all the force of awesome skullduggery to back up that telling—then the possibilities of the primitive African are devastating. No witch doctor could think those thoughts; they would be beyond his ken. But any African spellbinder could put those thoughts across to the herd if some more sophisticated intelligence, which knew how potent such rhetoric was to inflame the primitive mind, would coach him along.

King's lips framed to a soundless whistle. The intelligence behind this cunning propaganda—the same intelligence that had guided three attacks upon his own life—was indubitably a white man, or men. It was white intelligence that could see a huge profit in all that ivory and gold if it could *dash* the jubilant local chief a present and make a getaway—maybe by automobile—across the otherwise impassable desert.

King's blood chilled. So that was the seed of that plot. A perfect plan, carried out with devilish cleverness. Inexorable in its progress, and certain, from present indications, of success. And the little white community that would be obliterated by the first wave of that mad orgy sat helpless. What if King should tell the government authority all that he knew and all that he suspected? What if the authority believed every word of it? Authority sat with empty hands, with a black sergeant and six soldiers against who could tell exactly how many fairly modern guns? What could it do? Apprehend the guiding spirit? Who was the guiding spirit? If, acting in desperation upon suspicion it should succeed in arresting the evil genius, had not the deluge already gained sufficient momentum to carry it blindly forward? Authority could watch it come; but lacked sufficient force to stem it.

Authority could also run away. But King laughed silently. The same tradition that made authority wear a boiled shirt for dinner in the wilderness would make it stick through hopeless odds and against all reason to the end. Kingi *bwana's* night prowling had given him much to make him very serious indeed. So he laughed again out of a crooked mouth.

Suddenly he stiffened. His never dormant hunter's instinct made him aware of a presence near him. Something breathed in the black shadows, softly, cautiously. It was not an animal; he knew that at once; this was no sniff-sniff-snuffle of any beast. It was the slow, careful exhalation of a human under the exertion of moving in dead silence.

King cursed himself for a fool. Not because he was there, but because he must have in his absorption, in craning for a better view, made some noise to have betrayed his presence. Some sharp eared savage must have detected something in the bush and was crawling to investigate; some unusually nervy fellow to go prowling about in the outer dark when magic was afoot.

King had been through too many violent experiences to have any hallucinations about any sort of certitude in the matter of a fight. It was only in the motion pictures that the intrepid hero could be sure of seizing an adversary and choking him into instant silence; and silence was desperately necessary to King. A single

cry, a scuffle, and that hysterical mob only a few feet in front of him would hurl itself, screaming and fighting one another, to lay clawing hands upon the intruder who had cared to spy upon their black mysteries.

King had seen a dog once torn into little pieces of rag by the infuriated males of a troupe of rock baboons. He had no foolish shame of flight. He rolled softly over from his stomach, and over again. His legs felt the prick of a thorny stem. Carefully he drew them up and clear and rolled again. He listened. In the clearing the crowd still shuffled and murmured. From where he had just been his straining ears fancied they detected the click of a breaking twig.

On his knees now. How he thanked his stars for those days of his youth when he had played Indian with real Indian boys from the reservation and had labored so earnestly to vie with them in stalking the hostile brave. He had to feel his way, reaching with cautious hands to locate bush and overhanging branch and to sweep dry twigs from his path. For a moment he thought he had lost his skulking follower; then a soft scrape of thorn upon cloth came to him.

HE WRIGGLED under a bush, breathing hard. Curse his foolishness in getting into such a trap! The man was good. King himself was far from a clumsy stalker; but this fellow managed to keep right on the trail. Could he smell him? King wondered uneasily. He had heard many natives claim that a white man's smell was strong and unmistakable. Was this fellow following him by scent? He rolled with drawn up knees through another opening—and stopped in the middle of the turn.

To his left, farther away, sounded another swishing of disturbed foliage. Good Lord, was the bush full of silent stalkers in the dark? And why so blood chillingly silent? Why didn't they yell an alarm and call the howling pack? But this was no time for questions. King scrambled hurriedly in a right angle direction. His hand came down hard on a two-inch mimosa thorn which immediately pierced clear through the heel of his thumb. His tortured nerve responses forced a hissing intake of breath. He lurched on through the passage into an apparently more open place—and the presence was there.

It breathed heavily. Soft pats indicated a groping hand. Something touched his boot. He snatched his foot away. Leaves rustled above; a straining grunt; a swish; and a soft chuck in the ground where his foot had been.

King scuttled desperately from there; he didn't know where; and the noise he made seemed to him appalling. There was no mistaking those sounds. He might almost have seen the action in broad daylight. That had been the vicious stroke of a knife. Limping on two knees and a hand, King contrived with his teeth to get a hold on the broken end of the thorn. Its drawing out seared like a hot needle. A tangle of thorn barred his progress. He wormed to the left of it. A bristly stem radiated low hanging arms. Farther to the left. More thorns. He was in a cul-de-sac. Beyond him sounded the rustle and crackle of the other stalker. This fellow was not so skilful. Behind him came the stealthy crawl of the expert with the knife. It was a trap.

King was unarmed, to all intents and purposes. He had his automatic, of course, in his belt holster; but, as well as use that, he might stand up and shout his presence. The only weapon to this situation would be a piece of soft lead pipe.

King reached out a cautious hand and groped the ground for a stone; something to give weight to an empty hand. In this hope his luck was with him. The groping fingers closed on a large oval that fitted nicely to the hand. King crouched on knee and one hand and waited.

Before him, skyward, the far glow of the *juju's* footlights showed blurry patches of foliage in silhouette. Around him the shadows were black. The very blackness took form and swelled and shrank and shifted. It was hopeless to try to discern anything there. King's heart thumped and he took long inhalations to still its pounding. Stillness was the most difficult thing in his life.

Suddenly out of the black a hand pawed his face. King, shaken from his nervous tension, nearly yelled. In the next second the other would yell his discovery. A faint odor clung to the hand; not of goat, not of sweat, not of plain African dirt—but of sandalwood perfume!

All that came to King out of that startling discovery was the flash that it explained why a knife and not a spear. He visualized the knife again, heaved up for the instant stroke, and not, this time, at where a boot had been. The issue depended upon swiftness of decision; upon which of the two would recover first from the momentary shock of actual contact. King judged his distance and direction, heaved his shoulder and swung his long arm over with all his might. There was a hard thuck as the stone struck; a stab of excruciating pain where an overreaching fingernail had impacted; and a soft, knuckly sound of subsidence.

Out in front the *juju* mumbled gutturally; the crowd shifted and stamped. This thing had been as silent as the best talking picture could have wished. To the left sounded the scuffling of the other, less skilful, stalker, clearly in a tangle himself. King began his precarious retreat from the trap into which he had crawled. A certain elation filled him. He had discovered much. The exhilaration of having gotten out of a desperate trap was with him. That other clumsy stalker worried him not at all. He left him fumbling in the dark and felt his own way out from the so nearly fatal scrub.

Chapter VI

KING sat in his tent, without light, thinking. So it was established that the directing intelligence behind all this trouble was white. A knife and sandalwood perfume were not native attributes. And that explained, too, why the stalker had not settled the issue by simply giving the alarm. However friendly with a more intelligent chief or witch doctor whom he directed from behind the scenes, he would be, as a white man, just as forbidden as King himself to a voodoo ceremony of the herd. And the herd, further, should it be known that a white man was directing operations, would with natural suspicion be less amenable to the spellbinding of their leaders.

Yes, he was a cunning devil, whoever he, or they, were. He overlooked nothing. King supposed that he had hidden himself in the scrub to overhear whether his lessons were being put across properly and to supplement omissions in future lectures. Clever. Not a mistake anywhere, except—King scowled into the dark—

except the mistake of starting hostilities against him. Three times; three attempts on his life. Somebody would have to pay damages for that.

If—there was always that terrible *if*—the trouble did not break before King could, or the assistant commissioner could, or somebody somehow could do something. The situation was very near its climax. The directing genius would never have been so foolish as to announce a practical declaration of war unless he knew for certain that no reinforcements would suddenly arrive out of the south to spoil his plans. All that was needed now was the last straw; the final match. One good manifestation of the *juju*—some spectacular miracle—and the blue flame that glowed just beneath the dark crust of banked fuel would blaze out in an orgy of destruction. Let almost any little excitement start, and that insensate herd would stampede to the kill. To stab and thrust and mutilate long after the last white man had been killed. That was the history of Africa.

Yes, the situation was bad. And no bright ray of hope in the immediate future either. Well, anyway—King was able to bark a short laugh—there was one crafty plotter, who, just about now, was carrying a horribly sore head in a sling; he would remember that for awhile.

King's men came home jabbering in awestruck tones about the wonder they had witnessed. He sat still and said no word. Thinking. Once, long after the men's chatter had died down, he got up, fumbled among his duffle, carefully made up a packet in wrappings of trade cloth, and returned to his thinking.

"Slim chance," he muttered. "But the only one I can see—if the *padre* will cooperate."

With earliest morning he went to visit the mission. He knew that missionaries got up at an appallingly early hour to commence their meticulous labors of the day. Father van Dahl met him, frail, quiet, smiling a welcome through tired eyes.

"So early, my friend? It is nothing of seriousness I hope."

King was forced to smile in return to the greeting, but the smile quickly left his face.

"Pretty bad, Padre. I've come to make *indaba*. I took in the *juju* show last night."

"So? That was, no doubt, difficult—even for Kingi *bwana*, no? Myself, I have never seen this; nor any other white man."

"Hm! Don't be so sure, Padre. Your—er—are your people up yet? Lay Brother and Brer Stephen?"

"Oh, yes; certainly, yes. Even Brother Stephen." The priest smiled indulgently. "Though he finds it not so easy as yet. He has been not long with us; and our devotions, yes, they come earlier than those of one who has been in the trade world."

King's eyebrows flicked wide. He had somehow expected after last night's encounter in the bush that Brer Stephen, as he now tabulated him mentally, would be—but he didn't know exactly what he expected. Why should he have connected Stephanopoulos with anything at all? And just at that moment Brother Stephen himself appeared. He was passing the door; full of health without a care in the world. He flashed his ready smile, bustled in, shook hands, remarked cheerily on the early hour, and bustled out murmuring something about morning duties.

King was nonplused. He had been building a theory upon a suspicion which he thought had been clinched last night. Had it been correct, Brer Stephen—Brother Stephen, he amended himself—would have been a sick man this morning; very sick indeed.

The priest was talking with fond benevolence.

"Yes, he is a great comfort. He has a way most wonderful with the natives; his great experience as a trader—yes, it was a firm making much money; Stephanopoulos and Righas. Perhaps you have known the name, yes? Already we consider him as one of us, though he is not really a lay brother as yet; but the appellation pleases him; and he is a great help, a great comfort."

King's brows contracted.

"Righas," he muttered. "Righas. No, I don't know the firm; they didn't operate in Kenya anywhere."

"No, no, not in Kenya. In Egypt and the Sudan. They were well known and were making much money—and he has given it all up for our work."

The Sudan. That resumed a persistent train of thought. But King had come on a more important errand than one of vague speculations. He told the priest all that he had witnessed; the impressive performance of the *juju*; the temper of the crowd.

The priest was very grave. He nodded with understanding.

"Yes, yes. That is bad. That is very bad. I did not know; I hoped— Yes, at any time now it may come. My poor people."

King spoke swiftly, trying to put conviction into an argument that he knew was hopeless.

"But there is still time, Padre. You're not tied down. You're not a government official glued down to his job. And one can't reason with that bird, anyhow. But you can get out. Grab your valuables and go. You haven't much to carry and enough of your converts remain to act as porters."

Father van Dahl smiled slowly, nodding.

"Yes, yes, you are a man of the world; I you do not understand. *You* can go while you have opportunity. But I—have I not also my duties? More even than Mr. Fawcett. My people who for the moment have been misled—"

King was impatient.

"But, Padre, have some sense. In a couple of months it will be all over. You can come back and—"

The priest interrupted in turn.

"In a couple of months? In one day, my son, my people will have lost their confidence in their pastor. My hundred whom I have so slowly won. Shall the shepherd desert his flock?"

King swore, and made no attempt to apologize. He had known it would be so. Let battle and murder and sudden death come or let it pass, the priest was just as much an inexorable fixture as was the government official. That, too, had been written into the history of Africa.

Father van Dahl laid a thin brown hand on King's knee.

"And you, my friend, I do not perceive you making preparations to go, is it not?"

King swore again.

"Padre, there's just one chance—a slim chance, if I get all the breaks. And since your damned hundred nigger men whom you've taught to grow bigger and better

bananas than the rest of the savages are more important than your life and your assistants' lives—though I never heard you asking them—I'm going to take my hat off to you and I'm going to take the chance.

"Now, listen. Wasn't there some prophet in the Old Testament once whose people were sliding out on him in favor of an idol that pulled magic stuff? Baal, wasn't it? And the prophet called miraculous fire from heaven and burned the *juju* up along with a batch of its priests and so cut the sticks from under the opposition prestige and won his crowd back?"

Father van Dahl perked his head in bird-like query. He could as yet see no analogy. King continued with totally unconscious lack of reverence.

"Well, now, you give out that you're going to do a miracle and set a magic fire to this idol; and if my luck works, your people'll come crowding back on you so fast—"

The priest held up his hand.

"My son, my son, do not blaspheme."

King jumped up. He had never any patience with matters or sentiments unpractical.

"Gosh almighty!" he stormed. "How can I get you to have some sense and understand? It'd take all day—and then you'd have some inhibition about it. Listen, Padre, I've got no time to argue. Things are buzzing right along in these backwoods. I'm going out to take a long chance; and I'm going to prophesy the miracle for you. If it works you win—we'll all win and save our scalps. If it flops you'll be past worrying."

He stamped out; and behind him came the priest's urgent entreaty that he refrain from the awful sin of blasphemy.

IN KING'S *boma* the boys waited expectantly; children anxious to relate all the wonders of the show they had seen. King sat on a camp stool and listened with exaggerated boredom. Not the most spectacular of the marvels moved him, even when embroidered by African imagination. He flouted the super-*juju* powers of the idol.

"That is not such a great witchcraft. I have seen many better. This is but a little jungle *juju*. Thus does it move its arms, thus its foolish mouth, and the words that it talks are winds." King imitated the spasmodic antics of the thing and its megaphonic voice.

"*Aho! Wo-we!*" The boys were impressed. How did the white *bwana* who could not have seen know these things?

"I had heard much talk of this toy and it wearied me. I slept and sent my spirit to look while I rested."

"*Arra-wa!*" Yes, that might well be true. The greater of the witch doctors could do this thing, and the white *bwana* surely had this magic too.

Barounggo stood up. He had a speech to make and he required space for action.

"If this is but a little witchcraft, *bwana*, then it is well. For that Black One of the Ghost Tree—" King noted that even the Masai hesitated to name the thing—"the Black One makes an ill talk; a talk of the slaying of all the *m'zungu* in the land. Now it is in my mind that we in this *boma* could make a proper fight. We three alone; for these *shenzi* six will run as do the dogs when the lion speaks—"

King could not but admire the loyal fellow's cheerful insult of the porters and their meek acceptance of it. The Masai gave himself over to declamation:

"A very proper fight. Or, perchance, in the wire *boma* of the *serkale*, a better fight; for these soldiers of the Raifuls are true men; I have spoken with them. Yet these Tappuza dogs are many and in the end their spears will be red. Therefore, *bwana*, if the Black One is not so strong as he says—"

King yawned carelessly.

"It is nothing. It is a small matter. For us it has no interest. But I have told the *m'zungu mon-père*, the white priest, of these babblings and he has said it is enough! I have given him a small witchcraft and he will burn up this little *juju* with magic fire. Tomorrow, perhaps; maybe today. It is nothing."

"Aho? A magic fire?"

The men were awesomely impressed. It was sufficient. King knew that this planted seed of a counter magic to the Black One would sprout and spread throughout the community faster than the civilized magic of the telephone.

Kaffa, the little Hottentot, had a word to say. He squirmed uneasily making his request.

"That is good. The *mon-père* will make a magic and the Black One will burn up and die. *Bwana* has said so and it is without doubt true. Yet—" he writhed in his abashment—"suppose that the *mon-père* does not work his magic right; suppose that the Black One does not die. An offering, a small gift—today he eats offerings—a gift today might well be counted in our favor when trouble comes."

King chuckled. It flashed upon him that maybe his luck was beginning to work. At the same time the everlasting adherence to type of the African held his attention. On the one side the Masai, the fighting man, loyal to the death, facing the imminent danger with a fierce nonchalance. On the other the Hottentot, the bush dweller, loyal, too; but as cunningly full of caution as a monkey. Maybe this caution was playing right into King's hand.

"What is the manner of this eating of offerings?" he asked.

"It is a strong witchcraft, *bwana*. Those who give place their gifts upon a flat basket. In full daylight then a servant of the Black One ascends a ladder of bamboo with the basket, at no time touching the gifts, and places the basket before the Black One's feet. The servant retires and the Black One takes up the gifts in his own hands and eats them up. It is a great magic."

King laughed outright. He quoted in English a familiar patter:

"Nothing in my hands, gentlemen; nothing up my sleeve; at no time, you will perceive, do I touch the card—Gosh, what children! But it works. It works every time."

Kaffa was emboldened by the laugh.

"Therefore, *bwana*," he pleaded, "I would ask an advance against my pay. A piece of cloth; a small gift, *bwana*. On behalf of these *shenzis*, too."

King held himself to pose in judicial contemplation, controlling his impulse to whoop. Then he announced in a matter of fact tone:

"Good. I will give you a piece of cloth. But it is a waste; for the *mon-père's* magic will surely burn up this little jungle *juju* this very day."

He went into his tent and there he pounded his fist into the other palm. Lord, his luck was running strong! He had been racking his brain to think of a means to

introduce his miracle plan to the *juju*, and here it came to his hand. He took the little packet he had made overnight and unwrapped it.

"Two sticks ought to be a plenty," he uttered. "But these detonators 'll stand some doctoring."

He proceeded to "doctor" accordingly, and his tuneless whistle broke out. His plan was simple; as simple as are most great strategies. He knew from his youthful experience of Independence Day that torpedoes were a lot cheaper to make than to buy. A pinch of fulminate and a little fine gravel wrapped in a paper ball provided the most delightful material to explode at other boys' heels and to send girls screaming down the street.

With a certain cynicism he translated all his percussion cartridges into giant torpedoes; and he began to feel that he had an almost foolproof miracle. The *juju*, he reasoned, from his observation of its movements, whether actuated by strings or by internal levers or whatever it might be, would pick up these offerings and would drop them through its cavernous mouth into its hollow interior. The figure squatted at least five feet high. King knew from experience that a drop of less than that was ample to detonate a fulminate bomb. With a dozen oversize bombs and two sticks of dynamite surely something ought to happen. At about four o'clock that very afternoon, then, the predicted miracle might be counted upon to disintegrate the *juju's* death laden prestige into a great many very little pieces of hardwood.

King chuckled. He would have to witness that miracle. He wrapped his surprise packet carefully in a gaudy strip of trade calico, tied it with string carefully against monkey meddling, and came out from his tent and told the Hottentot:

"Here is your gift. A good gift. This order only do I place upon you. Carry it with care. Do not drop it, on your life. Place it softly in the gift basket. And return and report to me that it is done. Later you may all go and watch the eating."

The Hottentot took the packet gingerly. Already it was becoming imbued with the sacredness of sacrosanct property. King turned in to snatch some sleep.

Chapter VII

WITH early afternoon he gave his men leave to go and watch the eating of the offerings. As soon as they were well out of the way he took his field glasses and set out himself. He was going to watch this show too, if from a distance. His way took him past the government *boma*. He had not intended to stop in; but a soldier ran after him. The assistant commissioner wanted to see him. That gentleman was in a condition of bewilderment, and in his predicament was much more cordial than before. Something had happened that had given him a considerable measure of respect for King's judgment. He came to the point without preamble.

"Mr. King, a very extraordinary thing has happened. I am taking you into my confidence because—er—you seem to know a great deal of what is going on. A man was picked up this noon in the bush in front of this *juju* thing. The natives would not touch him—some nonsense about witchcraft. My men brought him in—a white man."

King's eyes flickered. He held his surprise with an effort. He had not expected this.

"So? A white man, eh? He was—"

The assistant commissioner nodded.

"Yes, dead. Killed by a blow with a club. There's the usual secrecy, of course. Nobody knows anything about him; never heard of him; and everybody is ox dumb. And as for me, I didn't even know that any strange white man was in the district. Where could he appear from? What could he be doing?"

King frowned into space without answering. So the man who had stalked him in the bush was dead. At mention of the man having been killed with a club he impulsively squeezed his blackened middle fingernail into the palm of his hand and winced with the pain. He had hardly expected that. At most he had thought of a very sore head. Well, the man had not been exactly stopping to consider whether he would perhaps be hurting somebody with that murderous knife.

But even that was not exactly what was occupying King's mind. What he was cogitating was whether the death of one guiding genius would undermine the trouble at its source. Was there only one? Who had been the man in the bush with him at night? Native? White man? Partner, possibly, in the great plot. It was a big thing for a single man to tackle. Damn it, if only the fellow had been captured alive! He was a white man, not an African; he could have been made to talk.

At all events there was definite proof now of some of his theories. With a certain triumph he asked the assistant commissioner—

"Well, doesn't that begin to fit into what you called my fantastic theory about a guiding genius behind this trouble?"

"It does, Mr. King. I admit it. Otherwise why did the fellow not come up straightforwardly and report his presence? In fact I don't know from where any white man could have come through without some report coming to me."

King smiled thinly. He thought, if the rest of his theories were correct, that he could guess from where a white man—who had perhaps a sturdy automobile—could come without passing through a populous and well patrolled country. But Mr. Fawcett was asking another embarrassing question. The law training essential to his studies for his appointment had rendered him adept in picking the holes in any situation.

"All the same, Mr. King, if this man were, as you suggest, the guiding genius of this unrest, he would be obviously *persona grata* with the natives. Who, then, would kill him?"

King did not feel that he could enter into explanations and delays. Time was passing. During the last minute conviction had come upon him about more than one of his cogitations. The death of one man, one wheel in the carefully built machine, would not stop the progress of its function. Not at this stage. It had gained too much momentum. There remained at least one other wheel which, to insure its own safety, *must* now carry on. And there remained the *juju*, potent source of hysteria and latent slaughter. He turned the subject.

"Any sort of identification? Name? Business? Where from?"

"Not yet—" Mr. Fawcett made a face. "I dislike that sort of thing myself. My men are looking him over in routine form."

"Well," said King, "I'll look in later. I've got to hop along and see the Reverend van Dahl's miracle do its stuff."

The assistant commissioner raised his eyebrows in interrogation; but King was gone. He was aiming for a scrubby little knoll which he had noted before as being suitable for his purpose. From it a clear view of the ghost tree could be obtained and it was there that he proposed to plant himself with his glasses. The small delay at the government office had not made him too late. At all events he had heard no explosion, so he would be, he hoped, in time for the performance.

He was. He selected with instinctive habit a bush which screened him from casual observation. Under it he stretched himself luxuriously on his stomach and took his glasses from their leather case. Far away from the direction of the ghost tree the confused, sublimated thunder of drums sounded. This was no call to an *indaba*, to hear a speech. This was just noise; *fiesta*, sideshow about to commence. King grinned in anticipation.

"Guess they'll get a bigger show than their tickets entitle them to. It's not every day that these frisky coons see a white man's miracle."

HE WIPED the lenses of his field glass and leisurely adjusted focus. It was one of the newest Zeiss eight-power hunting glasses; the kind that showed the approximate range of the focused object. Instinctive habit once again made him note it. Between seven and eight hundred yards. Well, that was plenty near enough to see everything that went on. Many a time had he observed the intimate movements of game at a greater range.

He could see the ebony figure clearly; its inset shell eyes; its thick jointed arms; even the white tips of the big teeth between loose sagging lips. The drumming boomed distant thunder and faded out to nothing as the hot breeze eddied about. It rose to a crescendo and mingled with a sudden volume of far shouting. Something was going to happen. Either the servant of the Black One was about to climb up with the basket, or, if that had been done, the magic performance of eating was about to commence. Then King noted that no ladder stood against the platform. He grinned again—cunning precaution that no overwrought worshipper should climb up to present himself as a Juggernaut offering and so discover the hoax.

Good; the thing would soon move then. And it did. A furious howling came on the wind and the juju's jaws chattered in anticipation. King was keenly interested in the mechanism. Elbows firm on the ground, he held the glass motionless.

The thick right arm moved. With a slow clumsy motion the thing groped at the basket between its feet. It seemed that the thumb worked on a hinge against the rest of the hand; a sort of lobster claw movement. Presently the claw found a hold on a small bundle. Stiffly the arm heaved up; the jaws fell open; the bundle hung between the big teeth, then was sucked down. The jaws champed wooden appreciation.

King was troubled. From the nature of the movement he guessed that the mechanism was man. A man within the hollow figure worked a hollow arm and then, when the offering was between the jaws, just took it in.

"Poor devil," he muttered.

But he was consistently practical. Better, a hundred times better, the immolation of one malignantly scheming savage—or, for that matter, of a dozen men—than the rebellion of a whole tribe that would mean a slaughter and its aftermath of blood in the reestablishment of control.

A further thought troubled him; a more awful thought. The man might not be immolated. The jaunty cocksureness left him. With growing anxiety he watched each offering in turn lifted clumsily to the gaping mouth, and disappear. With his glasses he could distinguish various packages of colored print cloth take their turn with carved wooden bowls and painted gourds and ax heads, but at that distance he could not identify his own prize package.

With each gaudy packet he tensed. Would it come? Would a sudden explosion tear the sky? Or, since quite obviously the man inside took each bundle in his hand and presumably laid it down, would he jar it sufficiently to set spark to any one of the fulminate torpedoes?

For a long dragging hour the thing ate with gusto. Nothing happened. It remained full of health and horrid appetite. The last of the offerings disappeared. The crowd howled; the drums roared. The miracle of the eating had been accomplished. No counter miracle as threatened by the white priest had occurred.

King hovered for a moment on the verge of panic. His fool proof plan had failed. Nothing stood in the way of revolution. One white man was dead; but he was surely not working single handed on so ambitious a scheme. His associates, so near to success, would carry the cold blooded business through. Everything was ready. The very threat of the priest's counter miracle, by its failure, would enhance the prestige of the *juju* and raise the courage of the natives to a howling frenzy.

King bit his teeth together till they hurt and forced himself to calm thought. What would happen now? What would be the next step? The *juju* man would obviously have to remain in hiding till dark. Then he could slip out. King thought that the ebony figure stood close enough to the tree to enable an undetected retreat. It must; the trick could never be worked otherwise. But the packages? The offerings? Would they be smuggled out at the earliest opportunity so that the greedy priest could look over what he had drawn; or would they remain till a more favorable time?

"One chance," King muttered. "One thin chance left."

HE CRAWLED from his shelter and sprinted through the bush for the home camp. Then as he ran and his thoughts raced ahead he slowed down. After all, the thin chance that remained depended upon the lighting of the footlight lamps on the *juju* platform. There was to be another speech that night. Possibly the last one; who could tell? The carefully planted rumor about the white man's counter miracle might be the last straw, the match that the blaze of riot awaited.

Still, there was a dim gleam of hope in the forthcoming speech. The crowd would begin to gather early, before darkness set in, and the opportunity for the magician to remove the day's loot from the belly of the idol would be unfavorable. The explosive packet might well remain there for awhile. In that hope lay his one chance. King decided that he would have time to stop in at the government *boma* to urge the assistant commissioner to be prepared for anything and to make arrangements, if necessary, to bring the missionaries in by force.

Mr. Fawcett thanked him coldly for advice that was neither asked nor needed. Everything for defense had been done as far as might be. But there was an item of information. The search of the dead man's clothing and pocket effects had revealed the fact that his name was Theophilos Righas.

King stiffened. His eyes narrowed to the characteristic slits and in spite of his anxiety, the thin grin seamed his cheeks.

"So-o? Righas, yes-s?" That fitted exactly into his guessed theories. That was the last crooked key piece to the jigsaw puzzle. With assumed carelessness he asked:

"Ever hear of the firm of Stephanopoulos and Righas?"

The names conveyed nothing to Mr. Fawcett, though King's tone told him that something ought to connect somewhere.

"Mm-m, no," he said. "They didn't operate anywhere in Kenya or Uganda—Wait a minute, though. There's something about—" he turned a key in a confidential steel file case and flipped over the cards. "Yes; here's a report that a firm of that name bought a hundred rifles from Daniel Leroux and Company in Port Said a year ago. That's French administration; we can't control those sales."

"Mm-hm; in Port Said?" said King. "And from Port Said up the Nile to the extreme limit of the Sudan and to your borders; how about that?"

Mr. Fawcett considered for a moment.

"It could be done," he said. "That is to say, except for that strip of desert."

"Then," opined King, "if this Theophilos Righas who bought a hundred guns in Port Said got bumped off in Tappuza district where somebody has sold guns to the natives, somebody did a pretty good job, no?"

Mr. Fawcett was aghast at the untold treacheries that this train of reasoning opened up. Indignation and disgust shook him like a fever.

"I think the scoundrel received no more than his just deserts," was his unreserved official opinion. "Why, what a foul thing! Unspeakable hell hound! What a bestial cunning!"

King was not listening to any confirmation of what he knew. Another confirmation outweighed everything else. There *was* another partner then. Equally cunning, equally callous; who must now push the thing to its desperate climax. Perhaps the more cunning of the two; he had certainly played a bold and brilliant part. Possibly the brains of the outfit.

This was no time to dally. Unceremoniously King left the still raging Fawcett and ran.

Straight to his camp he went. Only Barounggo squatted in the *boma*. The rest of the boys had gone; scuttled off without leave to see the *juju* show again. And since, after all, they were but small boys mentally, King could not be very angry. To Barounggo he gave a short word of commendation and told him to run off to the circus. Barounggo was eager. But he waited to say a word.

"This is an ill talk that will be this night, *bwana*. It has been said—all men have heard it—that the Black One will give word for a war."

King forced himself with an effort to nonchalance. It was the white man's creed in Africa never to show anything but confidence before a native.

"There will be no war, Barounggo. The magic of the *m'zungu mon-père* will burn up this jungle *juju* with a great noise and a fire this very night while it makes its monkey chatterings. Go and watch it. And tell all men that it will happen."

Barounggo was impressed with his master's power. He lifted his great spear in salute and departed.

King looked after his broad shoulders melting into the dusk and his face twisted in a wry grin. He wished he could be one tenth part as confident as he had bluffed. A chance there was that he might avert disaster; but the chance was a thin one.

IT WAS his rifle that he had come home to fetch. Very soberly he took it, flipped its sling over his shoulder with familiar certainty, and started out. His objective was his observation post of the afternoon; the mound from which he had obtained a clear view of the *juju*; the knoll between seven hundred and eight hundred yards distant. Nearly half a mile.

It was dark by the time he arrived. He sat down and set slowly to kicking heel holes at the exact places for a comfortable rest. He had never been able to accustom himself to the Army sharpshooter's prone position; the sitting rest for him every time; and who, after all, since it was results that counted, could argue with him?

The distant drone of voices came to him from the ghost tree; but the lamps had not been lighted yet. With methodical habit he wiped off his sights. By meticulous feel and by ear he turned the little micrometer screw and clicked off the required elevation.

Between seven and eight hundred yards. Well, that was easy enough and no guesswork. All he had to do was to count the clicks correctly; the elevation rule was absolute. A certain glow of contentment began to come over him as he worked. This was something he knew. He commenced to thrill to the test of his skill, of the surety of his hand and eye and nerve. His thin whistle broke from between his teeth.

Eight hundred yards, call it. There was nothing to be alarmed at in that. If an Army marksman could be expected to hit a bull's-eye at that distance and even greater, surely the squat *juju* was a mark large enough; and it would be nicely centered between two lights.

And that was one little worry. Suppose the lights were not set in the regular positions? To an African a foot or so one way or the other would make no difference. But the main cause for anxiety was the conjecture whether the offerings had been removed from the belly of the *juju* or not. If, by God's grace and good luck, *not*—a hard grin split the hard face—well, a bullet carefully planted anywhere near the middle of that bulk would jar that fulminate off like a bolt from heaven.

And since the dynamite would explode upward none of his men looking on would be hurt. King didn't want to hurt any of those poor fools unless it were necessary. Nobody would be hurt, unless perhaps a chunk of falling *juju* should hit somebody on the head. King whistled some more. From his pocket he took a little bottle of radium paint and spotted a careful bead on his front sight. He squinted through the peep at it. Good, that was not too big.

Wind? Wind was in his face and therefore negligible. Perhaps one point of elevation. Click. He was ready. The issue depended upon his luck. King began to feel confident. His luck had been running with him. Surely it would continue.

A point of light began to crawl fitfully up the wall of distant blackness. A swelling hum came downwind. King shuffled his heels into secure position. The point of light mounted interminably; it moved horizontally; became two lights; moved again; became three lights. The swelling hum became breakers on a rocky shore. The first light descended and left the two horizontal ones.

King tried his glasses. Just dimly, he thought, he could discern the ebony bulk between its illumination. It looked to be middle. Good. Luck had held that far; and King felt that he was not asking too much of the wayward goddess in hoping that the offerings had not been removed from the *juju's* belly. On the contrary, it would have been difficult for anybody to remove them between the eating and the after-dinner speech. That was all that King asked. If his bomb were there he would hit it, or near enough to it.

Distance worried him not at all. With modern weapons and sights there were hundreds of men who could pump seventy-five per cent, of a string into a bull's-eye at eight hundred yards. Darkness troubled him hardly any more. There stood those providential twin lights; two sharply marked sighting points with the added advantage that, in the dark, there was no intervening heat flicker above a scorching veld.

Only one question caused any anxiety. Exactly where was the inner floor of that *juju*? Where did the offerings lie? The thing was a squatting figure some three feet wide. Its inner hollow would be, say twenty-four inches. Since it was about five feet high and since a man had crouched within it, it was reasonable to assume, King hoped desperately, that it was bottomless. The carving, the hollowing out, would naturally have been done from that end; the open shell, therefore, probably stood upon the platform itself.

Well, if that were so—King raised his rifle and squinted critically through the sights—if luck would admit him but that much accuracy in his reasoning, his bomb would be lying amid a jumble of hardwood and iron and some cloth—damn the cloth—within a rough circle of some twenty-four inches in diameter and upon the floor of the platform, level with the lights that stood on the same platform.

HE WOULD have to shoot middle and about six inches up. If he missed—well, he wouldn't miss the target—but if his bullet did not smash through near enough to his bomb to set it off he could shoot again. A one hundred and eighty-grain bullet arriving into that assorted mess of hardware—even with a few packages of cloth—would disrupt things quite considerably. It was just a matter of his luck how many times he would have to shoot.

At that distance with wind against him, and the crowd howling, nobody would be likely to hear anything. And if one did, what matter? It would be no more than a foolish *m'zungu bwana* shooting at a hyena or something in the dark. If his first shot struck right nobody would hear anything because a high velocity bullet arrived at eight hundred yards quicker than sound, and the explosion would occupy everybody's attention for quite the next few days.

King snuggled his cheek down to the stock and held his breath. This was to be the supreme test of his skill, of his judgment, of his luck. He was cool and unhurried. Evenly he pressed on the trigger. He felt the final small resistance, steadied to the last little fraction of immobility, and pressed it home. Instantly with

the shot, stock on shoulder, his right hand shot up to the bolt, slammed it out, in again, ready for the next shot.

But before that lightning maneuver was one half accomplished a yellow glare split the sky before him. It winked once like an enormous eye and closed down on empty blackness. A roar hurtled downwind in a furious hurry and was gone. And after the roar came a prolonged yow-wow of shrill yelpings—the cry of Africa in its terror.

King whooped once and let the remainder of his pent breath escape in a long hiss.

"Phee-ee-ew!"

He wiped his forehead. His immobility had vanished. He found a tremor shaking his whole body, and at the realization a dry laugh croaked from his throat. Then he scrambled to his feet in a panic and raced for the home camp. It behooved him to be innocently within his tent when his men arrived with the portentous news.

The *boma* was silent. He went into his tent to await the boys. Suddenly he remembered. In one of the huts the killer was still a captive. King flashed a match in the man's startled face and looked him over; he was securely tied to the hut's center-post. With his hunting knife King cut the cords.

"You can't do any damage now," he told the man in English, which he could not understand. He held him by the back of the neck and pointed him at the door. "Beat it, you poor fool. And the next time you go gunning for a white man make sure he's not one of those pestiferous Americans. Shoo! Git!"

He kicked the man hard; and like a thankful rabbit the fellow bolted. King chased him across the *boma*, got in one more kick, and then the night swallowed him.

King lay on his cot and laughed. Laughed till his belly muscles ached. Reaction from nervous tension and the exhilaration of success were upon him. His luck had held good—he attributed it all to his luck; the consummation of the white priest's miracle would thoroughly cow the natives—must already have; the effect would be instantaneous. Not the most unscrupulous scoundrels would stir this tribe up again as long as the memory of that wonder lived.

He was forced almost to admiration. Clever devils, those two. That had been a slick scheme to take cover under the mission and work right under the eye of the administration. An almost perfect plot the precious pair had hatched. A queer thing, fate. If they hadn't overreached themselves in their anxiety and tried so hard to get him disposed of he might never have come there. Yes, he would, though. It *was* fate. It was one of those "happenings of Africa."

The wandering thoughts clouded with a tinge of regret. Since he had come; since he *had* taken the risk and done the job, he might just as well have taken up the governor's proposition and have done it at government expense.

But, no—a million times no. He would have had to write a report about it. Many driveling pages of explanation and detailed repetition of something that had already been finished. No, that would be unthinkable. Sufficient was the satisfaction of having done a job that would put stiff necked officialdom under an obligation to him—an obligation which he would never permit it to repay.

And better satisfaction still in that the good old priest would be a veritable prophet in the land. Ho-ho! How that backsliding flock would come crawling back

to its bigger and better yam patches, and would bring a lot more with them to boot. That was the way to civilize the savage—appeal to his belly. All the same, the *padre* would reprove him sadly and would pray for his soul for having called the thing a miracle. Well—

King's ruminations were broken in upon by his returning boys. They trooped into the *boma* jabbering in awestruck whispers. King let them chatter for awhile; they discussed whether they should wake the *bwana* to tell him the wonder. They decided that it was a matter of sufficient importance. Barounggo stood at the tent flap and rang his spear blade like a bell.

"Well?" King called sleepily from within. "Has it happened? Some sort of noise I heard. Was it the *m'zungu mon-père's* magic?"

"*Awo, bwana*, we do not know what happened. From the sky came a fire as of a lightning; only more fierce; and the Black One was eaten up."

King chuckled silently.

"And that, if I remember rightly, was just about how that Baal miracle happened." And to the men, carelessly, "I told you that thus it would happen. It was a good magic. Let one man light the lantern and go before me. I go to the *mon-père's* house to give him joy and to bring back my magic that I gave him."

WITH the morning King was at the assistant commissioner's office, grinning all over his rough carved face like—well, like a *juju*. Mr. Fawcett, for the first time in their acquaintance, met him with a smile—a rather twisted smile of inquiry, hands in pockets, head on one side. These miraculous happenings had passed beyond the pale of official reserve.

"What in hell, Mr. King, have you been doing?" the assistant commissioner wanted to know.

"Nothing, Mr. Fawcett, nothing," said King. "Er—I did a little shooting last night; damn good shooting, and I'm proud as all heck over it. But I've come to talk business. I've located this ivory at last. In a couple of weeks, I take it, this flurry will have settled down to normal; and so I want to ask if you'll let me have six hundred men for porters?"

Mr. Fawcett was pained. He felt in some vague way that King had done something commendable. He did not understand the whole of it yet; but he disliked having to refuse. But administrative regulations were adamant; decision was not in his hands.

"I told you before, Mr. King, that I could not sanction such a migration. And why six hundred men? I thought that your very accurate information had made it seven hundred loads?"

King grinned; he had played for just that question.

"Oh, I can get a hundred men from the mission; I require your sanction for the six hundred only."

Mr. Fawcett shook his head.

"Government regulations, Mr. King. I would have to apply to the governor in council for so great a local upset, and it would take weeks to get action. Under no circumstances may I permit so large a body of men to move more than one day's journey out of their district."

King was satisfied.

"That's quite all right, Mr. Fawcett. All I need is half a day out into the desert side."

Mr. Fawcett looked his amazement.

"I have many proofs, Mr. King, that you are anything but insane. I am prepared to find further proofs at any moment. So why not sit down and explain the joke or the catch or whatever it is in this thing?"

"No catch at all, Mr. Fawcett," King assured him. "I've got an auto truck out there. A Rugby six-wheeler, all comfortably stowed away under a canvas cover and weighed down with stones. Brother Stephen tells me it's an excellent car; and, believe me, that boy knows trucks."

"Brother Stephen?"

"Yeah; he sold it to me. I've got a map how to find it, and I was careful to get a bill-of-sale—Stephen knows all about the business intricacies of these things—and my man Barounggo ought to be well on his way to sit on the property till I can get over."

King produced a paper upon which, sure enough, was scrawled a correctly worded bill-of-sale. And it was signed D'mitrius Stephanopoulos.

"Of the late firm of Stephanopoulos and Righas," King explained.

Mr. Fawcett began to see light. With stolid British control he withheld himself from evincing any undignified curiosity or ignorance of happenings. Time would come for explanations later—over the dinner table would be appropriate. Yes, over the cigars and whisky peg King would talk. Just now he asked only—

"What sort of services?"

"Negative, Mr. Fawcett," said King. "Mostly negative. His chief appreciation seemed to be that I didn't twist his filthy neck for making three attempts to bump me off. I had a mind to, too; but I allowed that a good truck would balance the annoyance."

"Humph," said Mr. Fawcett. "Perhaps I shall do so officially."

"Maybe, Mr. Fawcett, maybe," agreed King. "But I'd almost bet against it. Brer Stephanopoulos went out into the dark some time last night, and I'll bet that boy is melting into the African landscape right smartly. But to come back to the point. Now that I've got a fine new truck and a map to the Nile, how about those porters for seven hundred tusks of ivory?"

"Well," said Mr. Fawcett judicially, "I suppose you've earned them."

