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# Juju

Murray Leinster

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## CHAPTER I. AN AFRICAN NIGHT.

From the juju house the witch doctor emerged, bedaubed with colored earths and bright ashes. The drums renewed their frantic, resounding thunder. The torchbearers capered more actively, and yelled more excitedly. The drumming had gone on all day and its hypnotic effect had culminated in a species of ecstasy in which the blacks yelled and capered, and capered and yelled, without any clear notion of why or what they yelled.

With great solemnity, the witch doctor led forward a young native girl, her face bedaubed with high juju signs. She was in the last stage of panic. If she did not flee, it was because she believed a worse fate awaited her flight than if she submitted to whatever was in store for her now.

Two men stepped forward and threw necklaces of magic import about her neck. Two other men who upon occasion acted as the assistants of the chief witch doctor seized the girl's hands. The shouting mass of blacks formed themselves into a sort of column.

At the front were the drums, those incredible native drums hollowed out of a single log, and which come from the yet unknown fastnesses of the darkest interior, far back of Lake Tchad. Behind them came the torchbearers, yelling a rhythmic chant and capering in almost unbelievable attitudes as they passed along. Next came the witch doctor, important and mysterious. Behind him came more torchbearers, yelling hysterically at the surrounding darkness. Then came the two assistants, dragging the young girl who was almost paralyzed with terror. And the entire population of the village followed in their wake, carrying flaming lights and yelling, yelling, yelling at the eternally unamazed African forest.

The tall, dank tree trunks loomed mysteriously above the band of vociferous natives, with their thumping, rumbling, booming drums sounding hollowly from the front of the procession. The lights wound into the forest, deep into the unknown and unknowable bush. The yelling became fainter, but the drums continued to boom out monotonously through the throbbing silence of the African night. Boom, boom, boom, boom! Never a variation from the steady beat, though the sound was muted by the distance it had to travel before reaching us.

I glanced across to where Evan Graham sat smoking. We were on the veranda of the casa on his plantation, four weeks' march from the city of Ticao, in the province of Ticao, Portuguese West Africa. From the veranda we could see through the cleared way to the village, a half mile away, and the whole scene of the juju procession had been spread before our eyes like a play.

It puzzled me. I knew Evan made no faintest attempt to Christianize his slaves—and the villagers were surely his slaves—and yet, white men do not often allow witch doctors to flourish in their slave quarters. And the girl who had been led away—I had no idea what might become of her. Voodoo still puts out its head in strange forms in strange places. It might well be that some hellish ceremony would take place far back in the bush that night.

Whatever was to happen had been planned long before, because I had arrived some four hours previously from a trip up beyond the Hungry Country, and the drums were beating then. I looked curiously at Evan to see what he thought of the open practice of juju by his slaves under their master's eyes. His expression was inscrutable. I knew better than to ask questions, but I could not help wondering what it all meant. Evan was a queer sort, at best, but to allow his natives to practice black magic—as was evidently the case here—before his very nose was queerer than anything he had done before.

He was not taken by surprise, I know. I had heard the drums that afternoon, long before I entered the village. They were beating with the rhythmic monotony that is so typical of the African when he is disturbed in spirit and wants to be comforted, or when he is comfortable and wants excitement. Either way will do.

My "boys," wandering along in a more or less listless fashion with the conventional forty-five pounds on their backs, had heard the drumming and became more interested. My caravan did not close up, however. It was spread out over anywhere from a mile to a mile and a half of the old slave trail that goes down to Venghela, and those in the rear hastened by precisely the same degree as those in front.

According to instructions, the foremost pair halted while still half a mile away from the village and waited for the rest of us to come up. For three months I had been back inland, a part of the time back even of the Hungry Country, where the grass is bitter to the taste, and all the world is half mad for salt. For three months I had been moving quickly and constantly.

Having quit the country—I fervently hope for good—it will do no harm to admit that my constant moving was due less to the demands of business than to a desire to be elsewhere when the Belgian officials arrived. The Belgian Kongo is just north of the province of Ticao, and I had been skimming its edges, buying ivory and rubber from the natives across the line. The colonial government does not encourage independent traders, and it would not have been pleasant for me had I been caught. In Ticao, of course, I was not molested. A small honorarium to the governor of the province made him my friend, and my conscience did not bother me. I paid ten times the prices the natives usually got and I imposed no fines or contributions on the villages. If you know anything about the Kongo, you will regard me as I regarded myself—as more or less of a benefactor.

After three months of that, though, and two or three close shaves from a choice of fighting or

capture, I was glad to get back to civilization, even such civilization as Evan Graham's casa. Away from Ticao, Evan Graham would have been shunned for the sort of man he was. In Ticao, one is not particular. There are few enough Anglo-Saxon white men of any sort—the two consuls, half a dozen missionaries, and about three men like myself, who take chances in the interior. The rest of the population is either Portuguese or black, preponderatingly black, with a blending layer of half- and quarter-breeds.

Evan was a cad and several different kinds of an animal, but he was a white man, he talked English such as one hears at home, and he had a pool table and civilized drinks all of four weeks' march from the city of Ticao. I always stopped overnight with him on my way back from the interior. I knew that he had bribed the governor to overlook the law which prescribes that no white man shall settle more than forty kilometers from a fort, because he wanted to have a free hand with his natives. I knew, too, that he had no shred of title to the land he tilled, or to the services of the natives he forced to work in his fields. He had come out there with four or five of the dingy-brown half-castes that are overseers for half the rocas in Ticao, had frightened or coerced the inhabitants of three villages into signing the silly little contracts that bind them to work for a white man for so many years at ridiculous wage, and now had a plantation that was tremendously profitable.

I never had understood just how he made the blacks serve him so well. He seemed to have them frightened nearly to death. Most plantations have the slave quarters—the blacks are officially "*contrahidos*," or contract laborers, but in practice they are slaves—most plantations have the slave quarters surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, and let savage dogs loose outside the fence at night, but Graham allowed his natives to live in the villages they had occupied before his coming and seemed to take no precautions against their running away.

This open practice of juju before his eyes and apparently with his consent was of a piece with the rest of his queerness. My own boys always seemed to be glad to get away from the neighborhood of his plantation. I had heard a word or two passed among them that seemed to hint at a juju house in some secret clearing near the village. I had thought it possible that it was by means of some mummery in that temple that he kept his natives in hand, but juju is a dangerous thing for a white man to meddle with.

In any event it was none of my business. I was sitting on his porch, one of his drinks at my elbow, smoking one of his cigarettes especially imported from London, and it behooved me to display no curiosity unless he should choose to speak. He looked over at me and smiled quizzically.

"I wonder what those poor devils think they get by all that juju palaver," he said ruminatively.

"I don't know," I admitted. "My own boys are constantly at it, of course. There's a witch doctor just outside of Venghela who'll be rich when my caravan gets there, for his services in bringing my bearers back without falling into the tender hands of our neighbors."

My carriers were free men, whom I hired and paid. It would have been cheaper to adopt the *servaçal* system and buy contract slaves for carriers, but being free men they served my purpose better. For one thing, they gave the Kongo natives more confidence in me, and for another, they traveled faster when there was danger of pursuit. A slave would merely have changed masters if I had been caught, but these men had something to lose.

"I'm going to stop this juju sooner or later," said Graham lazily. "My brother Arthur has come out and is up after a gorilla in the Kongo—probably around where you've been—and he's been asking me to hold on to a real juju doctor for him to interview. When he's through, I think I'll stop all that. Queer old duck of a witch doctor here."

He clapped his hands and one of the house servants came out with a siphon and bottle of gin. The man was trembling as he stood beside his master's chair. Graham snapped two or three words in the local dialect and the man's knees threatened to give way. He fled precipitately into the house and came out again—trembling more violently—with limes.

"Never can train blacks properly," Graham grumbled, as he sliced a lime in half and squeezed it into his tumbler. "Now, a Japanese servant is perfect."

He poured his gin and the seltzer fizzed into the glass. He lifted it to his lips and drained it.

"Japan?" I asked. "I've never been there."

"I have," said Graham morosely. "Been everywhere. England, America, Japan, India. All rotten places."

"No rottener than this," I said disgustedly. "I had three weeks of fever up in the Kongo, with a Belgian Kongo Company agent after me the whole time. I'm still shaky from it. When I can go back to white man's country again——"

I stopped. Graham was lighting a cigarette, and I noticed that the flame wavered as he held the match. There are some men who are cold sober up to a certain point, and then what they have drunk takes hold of them all at once. Graham was such a person. When he spoke again his words were slurred and sluggish.

"White man's country," he repeated uncertainly, and then made an effort to speak clearly. "I'm goin' back some day. Got dear old home, family servants, broad lawn—everything. Not mine though. Younger son. Had to win hearth an' saddle of m'own. Arthur's got it all, damn him. Always was lucky beggar. Got all family estates, all income, I got nothing. Then I liked girl. Second cousin. Arthur got her, or goin' to. Engaged. Damn lucky beggar. Always was lucky chap. Steady and dependable. Damn stodgy, I think. Told him so. Called him a —— an' he kicked

me out. All because I got into trouble and signed his name to somethin', to get out."

"Easy there, Graham," I warned. "I don't want to hear anything, you know."

"You better not," he said suddenly, in a clear voice. He turned beastlike eyes on me. "If anybody tries to pry into my affairs, they don't get far."

I blew a cloud of smoke over the railing of the veranda and said nothing. Through the moonlit night the throbbing of the drums came clearly to us sitting there. They beat on steadily, monotonously, hypnotically. There was something strangely menacing in the rhythmic, pulsing rumble. The cries of night birds and insects, and occasionally an animal sound, seemed natural and normal, but the muttering of those drums with that indescribable hollow tone they possess, seemed to portend a strange event.

"Juju," said Graham abruptly, "is the key to the African mind. I don't give a damn for the natives. All I care about is what I can get out of this country, but I say that juju is the key to the African mind."

I smoked on a moment in silence. "I'd rather not meddle with it," I remarked. "Sooner or later it means ground glass in your coffee of a morning. Just before I left Ticao, Da Cunha found some in his. He shot his cook and then found it was another boy entirely."

"I'd have whipped him to death with a *chiboka*," said Graham viciously.

"That's what Da Cunha did," I informed him mildly. "But the governor's made him leave Ticao for six months. He's over in Mozambique."

"My boys'll never dare try to poison me," declared Graham. He leaned toward me in drunken confidence. "They believe that if they did——"

"The procession has started again," I said, interrupting him. "I hear the yelling."

It was so. The drums still beat monotonously and rhythmically, but beneath their deep bass muttering, a faint, high, continuous sound could be heard. The procession seemed to be making its way back to the village.

"I'm goin' to bed," announced Graham sharply. "You go t' bed too. Don't sit out here an' smoke. Go to bed."

He stood up and waited for me to enter the house. Puzzled, and rather annoyed, I went inside. I heard Graham walk heavily and uncertainly through to the rear and heard him speak to several of the servants. The contrast between his rasping, harsh tones and the frightened voices of his servants was complete. They were very evidently in deadly fear of him.

The sound of the procession grew louder and louder. Something about it perplexed me for a moment, but then I realized that it was not making direct for the village. It was coming toward the house. I frowned a moment, and looked to make sure that my automatic was handy and in proper working order.

The procession was very near. I looked out of the window and saw the twinkling lights of the torches through the bush. The drums were thunderous now, but the beat was not the war beat. It was purely ceremonial. The yelling was high-pitched and continuous.

The head of the procession emerged from the bush and advanced across the clearing about the house. It swung and headed for the rear of the house, and the long line of capering, torch-bearing humanity followed it.

The witch doctor came into view, and the girl. Her panic had reached its pitch now. I have never seen such ultimate fear as was expressed on that girl's face, outlined by the flickering light of the torches. The procession moved until the end had passed beyond the rear corner of the casa, then turned, and evidently turned again.

I saw it moving back toward the village. A pregnant fact impressed me. The native girl was missing. She had evidently been left behind somewhere about the rear of the house. The yelling mass of black humanity capered and shrilled its way down the cleared way to the village and gathered in front of the juju house.

Then some dance or ceremony seemed to begin. What it was, I do not know. I was very tired and presently I went to sleep. But the drums beat steadily, all night long. They entered the fabric of my dreams and made my rest uneasy. It could not have been long before morning when I awoke with a start and found myself sitting up with every nerve tense. There was no sound, but I had a feeling as if I had been awakened by a scream, somewhere about the house.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE SEEKER OF VENGEANCE.

The consul listened gravely while I told him about it. He had asked me to give all the information I could about Graham. We were on the porch of the consulate and the whole city of Ticao was spread out before us. The sea pounded restlessly against the low bluffs upon which the city was built, and surged angrily about the peninsula on which the fort is situated.

"I woke in the middle of the night," I concluded, "feeling that there had been a scream somewhere in the house, but not another sound came. I couldn't get to sleep again, and in the morning I noticed that the girl who had seemed to be the center of interest in the juju procession had been installed as a servant at the house. Another one of the servants had vanished. The new girl looked pitifully scared, perpetually panic-stricken, though the rest of the servants look frightened enough, in all conscience. That's all I know."

The consul tugged thoughtfully at his mustache.

"Now why——" he began, and stopped. "The mail boat dropped two Englishwomen here on her last trip, a Mrs. Braymore and a Miss Dalforth. Charming women, both of them. They are calling on the governor's wife this afternoon. They came to me and asked me to assist them in getting up to Graham's plantation. They told me he was Miss Dalforth's cousin."

I nodded, frowning. "He said that his cousin—second cousin—would possibly turn up. His brother is up in the Kongo somewhere trying to bag gorillas and is going to come from there on through and stop at his place. Miss Dalforth is probably the second cousin and is engaged to the brother who is hunting."

"Hm." The consul looked somewhat relieved. "I see. But why on earth should two women want to go up there? Do you think they'd be safe?"

"I don't know," I said dubiously. "There's no fort anywhere near, and the natives are scared stiff. They might bolt, but Graham seems to have them thoroughly in hand. If the ladies once reached the plantation, they'd probably be safe enough, and Graham's brother could bring them down to the coast again. The plantation is a queer place, though. I think there's juju in the air. I'd discourage them from going, if I could."

"I've tried," said the consul. "I've informed them what sort the Portuguese traders are, and told them I simply wouldn't let them go up alone, or with one of those chaps as escort. I didn't know anything about Graham. They inquired around for an escort, and one of the missionaries mentioned you."

"As a respectable person?" I asked with a smile.

The consul nodded, matching my smile. "They have quite decided that you are to escort them to Graham's plantation. I don't think you'll refuse," he added, when I shook my head. "Miss Dalforth impressed me as a young woman accustomed to having her way. She saw the governor and smiled at him, and he agreed that you would be the best possible person. In fact, he said he would ask you himself."

"I'm not leaving for a month," I told him. "I've had enough of the back country for at least that long, and my carriers need a rest."

"We'll see," said the consul ruefully. "I'll wager she has you setting out in a week."

He was nearly right at that. I was introduced to the two of them, and Miss Dalforth was all that he had said. I had to give my bearers a rest, however, and it was two weeks before we set out.

It was a hindrance, having women with me. They traveled in an ox cart, and at nearly every stream the wheels had to be taken off and a tarpaulin fixed about the body of the wagon to make it into a raftlike float, in which they were ferried across. Had Miss Dalforth—or Alicia, as I heard Mrs. Braymore call her—had Alicia been less charming, or less anxious to cause as little trouble as possible, I would have cursed them nearly the entire time. As it was, I bore the delays with equanimity.

They were delighted the first day when we went up the trail to Venghela. I showed them the street lamp at which the great slave trail from the interior ended, and they looked dubious. When I showed them the Padre Silvestre's mission, with its three villages of redeemed slaves, they grew a little bit white and quiet.

The padre tried to persuade them not to go on, but as luck would have it, a runner came in on his way to Ticao with a message from Graham. His brother had arrived from the interior. That strengthened their resolution. We continued the journey.

While on the trail I could not speak to them, being busily engaged in the supervision of my caravan. At night, however, we conversed. It was good to hear cultivated white women talk again and talk about something besides the slave traffic, the missionary women's sole topic when they find a listener who can be trusted not to repeat their views to the governor.

The natives are kidnaped or captured far in the interior, brought down to the coast, and frankly sold. Then they are interviewed and, after making a mark upon a bit of printed paper, are considered to have made a contract to serve a white man for four years at one milreis—about a dollar—a month.

To call it slave traffic is highly insulting to the Portuguese, but to call it the *servaçal* system is

inadequate. They are *servaçaes*, or *contrahidos*, which means contract laborers, in theory, but in practice they are slaves. They never see their native villages again. The slave trail from the interior is littered with the manacles used to confine them, and there are gruesome relics all along the way, of those natives who were unable to bear the hardships of the journey.

I told them of these things. I told them of how the Padre Silvestre sacrificed his very soul to keep his villagers from being sold again as *servaçaes*, how the blacks rose on Da Vega's plantation and sacked it, and all I knew of the whole disgusting system. I had no intention of making myself a hero—and my conscience still hurts me when I think of some of the things I grew absolutely accustomed to—but I did allow myself to show my feelings on the subject of Portuguese government.

Alicia listened, and one night when I had explained to them precisely what it means for a black to be sent to the island of San Felipe or Gomé, she held out her hand to me very gravely.

"I think it is very brave of you," she said, "to stay here and do what you can to help the poor blacks."

I stared at her, tempted to laugh. "My dear young lady," I told her, "I am an outlaw, practically, who trades with the Kongo natives and attempts to elude the Belgian officials as much as possible. I'm tolerated here in Ticao because I bribe the Portuguese. I'm no hero. To the Belgians I am practically what an I. D. B. is in the Transvaal. And you know what an illicit diamond buyer is considered."

"I don't believe it," she said firmly. "I think you stay here to help the poor natives."

She was so beautifully sincere in attributing the noblest motives to me that I could not laugh at her. Her blessed incomprehension made me forbear to kick Mboka, who is my official gun bearer and lieutenant, when he lost the bolt of my best rifle and threw away the weapon to conceal his misdoing. I had to kick him twice over the day following for the lapse, when he took advantage of my lenience and stole half of my jam.

She was a charming girl. Mrs. Braymore was suffering in the journeying and stoically relapsed into silence to conceal her emotion, but Alicia was perpetually lively and eager for new things of interest.

She soon grew to adopt a tone of frank friendliness with me, and I had to remind myself more than once that she was engaged to Graham's brother, and that it would not do for me to fall in love with her. It was odd about her engagement, though. She spoke of her fiancé quite simply, but without any excess of affection. In fact, she confessed that she thought of him more as a brother than anything else. All three of them, Graham, his brother and Alicia, had been raised together and were very much like brothers and sister.

I told myself sternly that, no matter how she felt about her fiancé, she was engaged to him, and I had better forget that she was delightful to look upon and an amazingly good companion. I could not manage it, however, and the last week of the trip was not easy for me. I had to be friendly and no more.

In a way I was very glad when we saw two khaki sun helmets coming toward us, though I was much depressed at the thought of parting from Alicia. I had sent a runner on ahead, and Graham and his brother met us some four miles down the trail. I was pleasantly surprised at the sight of Graham's brother. Years before he had been at a little English seaside resort where I was spending the summer and we had grown very friendly. He kissed Alicia in a brotherly fashion and shook hands with me.

"I perpetrate a bromide," he said quizzically. "The world is a small place."

"Arthur Graham!" I exclaimed. "I knew you in Clovelly six years ago."

"You're right," he said cheerfully. "How are you now? Then you were flirting mildly with a buxom Devon lassie."

"And now we meet in darkest Africa," I said, smiling. "Let's move on."

We went forward again, Alicia, in the ox cart, gayly retailing to the two brothers our adventures on the trip up. I was rather surprised to notice that both of them were heavily armed, and it bothered me a little. It looked as if there were trouble with the natives. Each of the two brothers carried a heavy repeating rifle besides an automatic pistol in his belt, and Arthur looked decidedly worn, though I saw that he was trying to conceal it from Alicia.

My suspicion was confirmed when I observed that, though he tried not to let Alicia see it, he was keenly searching the way ahead of us with his eyes. He seemed particularly worried when we passed near a tree and his grasp on his rifle tightened. Even after we were well away from it, he looked back nervously.

We passed around the village and reached the casa by another route, Alicia chatting cheerfully with all of us from her seat in the cart. Evan Graham seemed quite at ease and entered into her talk with real interest, but Arthur—who as her fiancé should have been overjoyed to see her—was nervous and preoccupied. His rifle was never far from a position in readiness to fling it to his shoulder, and his eyes roved restlessly about with a species of dread in them. I walked close to him.

"Arthur," I said in a low tone that Alicia would not catch. "You're nervous. Natives?"

"They're acting queerly, but it's worse than that," he said in the same low tone, glancing at Alicia



to make sure her attention was elsewhere. "I'd give anything I possess to have Alicia somewhere else. I'll tell you later. Just keep your eyes open and, if you see anything, shoot quickly."

Evan did not seem to be worried. He was strolling leisurely along, using his rifle as a walking stick, talking casually to Alicia. His manners were very good and his voice was soft, very unlike the rasping snarl I had heard him use to his servants. Looking closely at him, I could see unmistakable signs that he had been drinking heavily of late. He seemed quite sober to-day, though. The contrast between his careless attitude and Arthur's worried air was striking. We saw one or two natives on our way to the house, and they promptly hid themselves in the bush. Arthur paid no attention to them. Whatever the trouble might be, it was not the blacks that he feared, though he had said they were acting queerly.

He led me aside almost as soon as we reached the casa. I told Mboka to pile and count the loads, and sent the carriers to the quarters they would find ready for them. Evan was inside the house, installing Alicia and Mrs. Braymore in their rooms, and showing them the servants who would wait on them. Arthur came over to me with a worried frown.

"I say, Murray," he told me nervously. "I'd ask you to take Alicia back to the coast to-morrow if I dared, but she's here now, and it would be just as dangerous for her to go back."

"What's the matter?" I demanded. "It isn't the natives. What *is* the matter?"

He looked about anxiously. "I shot a female gorilla up in the Kongo," he said jerkily, "and her mate got away. He's followed my caravan ever since, up to two weeks ago. Then I hit him with a lucky shot, but he escaped. You know they will try to kill the slayer of their mate."

"I know," I replied. "One of them followed me for three weeks once, until I bushwhacked and killed him."

"I shot this female," said Arthur quickly. "I shot her through the hip and she screamed for her mate. She couldn't get away. He came crashing through the trees, and I fired at him. I thought he'd vanished and went up to the female. I finished her off, and then the male came for me. I shot him through the arm and he made off. All that night he moaned and shrieked around my camp. My boys were badly frightened. Next morning he dropped from a tree inside the camp, knocked the heads of two of my carriers together, and crushed in their skulls. I rushed out with a gun and he disappeared. Three days later he dropped straight out of a tree almost over my head and made for me. One of my boys was cleaning a spear, directly in the path of the gorilla. He tried to run the beast through, but it stopped long enough to break his neck and by that time I'd got a gun. The gorilla disappeared again. From that time on it haunted me. If one or two of my boys strayed from the camp, they didn't come back. The beast has killed six of my best carriers and my gun bearer. And I never got a fair shot at it! I fired at it two weeks ago and I found blood where it had been, but no sign of the beast itself. Since then I've been left in peace."

"The animal may have dropped the trail, or it may be dead," I commented thoughtfully, "but I don't blame you for wanting to be careful."

"The thought of that huge ape perhaps lurking outside, perhaps about to drop down at any moment, with Alicia here," said Arthur desperately, "it's enough to drive a man insane. You know they carry off native women sometimes. We've got to protect Alicia. If it kills me, it doesn't matter. Evan won't believe it's around. He's going armed to humor me, but the beast is near; it's somewhere about."

I felt myself growing pale. A monstrous ape, lingering about the place with malignant intent, and Alicia laughing unconsciously inside the house, was enough to make me feel squeamish. I unconsciously tightened my grasp on my rifle. Alicia came out on the porch at that moment and beckoned to us.

"We'll not mention this—yet," said Arthur, as we went up.

I nodded. Alicia was all enthusiasm about the comforts Evan had managed to put into his house so far inland, and when we sat down to dinner, the bright silver and white tablecloth did give an effect of civilization. When one looked at the black faces of the servants who waited on us, and at the tattooing and nose rings that disfigured them, however, the illusion vanished at once.

I was a long time getting to sleep that night. The next morning would see me going on my way into the interior, and I would in all likelihood never see Alicia again. When I at last fell asleep, I was uneasy, and when I woke, it was in a strangely silent house. Evan Graham's voice aroused me. He was calling me to get up. His ease of manner and absence of worry had vanished. Arthur, over his shoulder, looked even more apprehensive than before.

"Get up," said Evan briefly. "The servants skipped out during the night. Your boys have gone, too. There's juju business going on. And the oxen that pulled Alicia's cart have been clubbed to death in their stalls."

The servants had fled from the house. There was not another white man within a hundred and fifty miles. All about us were natives who might fear Evan Graham but certainly hated him, and somewhere in the woods, we had reason to believe, a monstrous ape lurked, awaiting an opportunity to wreak his bestial vengeance upon the slayer of his mate.

## CHAPTER III. EVAN'S SORTIE.

We explored the house first and came upon a surprise. The native girl I had seen conducted to the house by the juju procession two months before crouched in one corner. She was too much frightened to give any coherent account of the other servants' leaving.

They had simply gone, she said. No one had said anything to her, and she had been left behind. The oxen lay in their stalls, their heads beaten in with blows from a heavy iron bar that lay bent on the ground beside them. Even my own boys had vanished. That struck me most forcibly of all, because I had treated them well and had thought I could count on as much loyalty from them as any white man can expect from the average native.

Mboka's defection really bothered me. I had believed well of him and was in a way genuinely fond of him. He had gone with the rest, though. The loads of the carriers lay in a huge pile. Small and precious possessions of my boys lay about them. That was perhaps the queerest part of the whole affair. In leaving secretly in the middle of the night, the servants had not stopped to steal, or even to take with them what was their own. They had apparently risen and stolen away in shivering fear.

We went back to the house from the servants' quarters full of rather uneasy speculations. Juju was obviously at the bottom of whatever was happening, and there is no telling what may enter the head of a juju doctor. Passing through the rear rooms, Evan paused to order the solitary native girl to prepare food for us. We went on to find Alicia and Mrs. Braymore up and curious. They were on the front porch when they heard us, and Alicia came inside to smile at all of us and ask questions.

"Where are all the servants, Evan?" she demanded. "We had not a drop of water this morning. And what's happened to the native village? On the way up here we saw lots of villages, but none of them were quite like yours."

We looked down at the squalid huts of the village. Not a sign of life could be seen. Not one of the usually innumerable tiny fires of a native village was burning, and the single street was absolutely deserted.

"We'll take a look at it," said Arthur grimly. "I don't like this business. Murray, you'll come?"

I picked up my rifle and moved forward. As we walked across the clearing before the casa, Arthur turned to me.

"Don't forget about that big ape, either. He's probably waiting for a chance to drop out of a tree on top of us."

It was a pleasant prospect. If we went down the cleared way toward the village, we would be perfect targets for bowmen or spear throwers from the bush on either side. If we went through the bush, we ran an amazingly good chance of running up against the gorilla. And the gorilla had learned cunning, too, and would not expose himself to a shot if he could help it. He would wait patiently until the chance came for him to rush upon us and crack our skulls together without our having time to raise a firearm, or else, until he could reach a hairy arm down and seize us—

I have seen iron bars bent and twisted by the hands of those big apes. A sudden thought came to me. The iron bar in the stables, with which the oxen had been clubbed to death!

We made our way cautiously down to the center of the cleared space, searching the bush on either side with our eyes, but affecting an unconcerned air in case hidden watchers saw us. We came to the village and strolled inside. It was absolutely deserted. Not one man, woman, or child remained within it. Their possessions were undisturbed, save that all their arms were gone, but cooking pots, carved stools, skin robes, ornaments, minor fetishes, children's toys, everything else lay as it had last been used by its owners. Only a few native dogs skulked around the silent huts. There was not a single sign that gave a hint of the reason for the mysterious exodus of the natives.

"I've not been out here long," said Arthur crisply, "but I've learned that when natives do inexplicable things, juju is at the bottom of it. What do you say?"

"I agree with you. I wish I could see some signs, though. I can read some juju palaver. But there isn't a sign. No charms, no *spoor* whatever. We'll go back to the house and talk it over with Evan."

We started slowly back toward the house. I was walking on ahead, puzzling over the oddities of the situation and trying to piece together a meaning in it all when Arthur stopped short. His voice reached me, little more than a whisper.

"Murray," he said sharply, "that pongo is trailing us."

I listened, but could hear nothing. One would hardly expect a white man's ears to detect a gorilla taking special pains to be quiet. Arthur seemed to hear something, however. He quietly raised his rifle. I followed the direction in which he was pointing, but could see nothing. He fired. A branch swayed slightly where his bullet had grazed it, but aside from that there was no sign.

"I didn't see a thing," I remarked.

Arthur shook his head. "It may be nerves," he said quietly. "That damned beast has haunted me, but I think I saw it."

We went on up to the house slowly. Just before we reached the porch Arthur looked at me pitifully.

"I heard it following us all the way," he told me. The perspiration was standing out on his forehead. "It *is* there, and it *is* waiting for a chance to revenge itself on me. And the beast has learned cunning! We must look out for Alicia."

I nodded. Evan was waiting for us.

"Find anything?" he called down. "What did you shoot at?"

"The gorilla," said Arthur in a low tone. "It's there and it's determined. We'd better warn Alicia and Mrs. Braymore."

Evan looked dubious. "Did Murray see it?"

I shook my head.

Evan frowned thoughtfully. "Arthur, old chap, it may be just nerves. The women have enough to worry them with the way the natives are acting, anyway. We'll keep a sharp lookout, of course. I'm going to hunt up those natives, though."

"They're your natives," I said, "but I question whether that's a wise move. If it's just native foolishness, they'll come back. If not, they're liable to be pretty—well, reckless."

"They're my natives," said Evan angrily. "I don't intend to humor them. I'll throw a scare into them that will last them ten years. If I know anything of juju—"

"What?" I asked.

"They'll never dare breathe without permission hereafter," Evan said grimly.

He seemed to be in a cold fury. Remembering the abject fear in which his slaves seemed to be all the time, I wondered what he might have in store for them. I opened my mouth to protest against his trying to look for his natives, but stopped. That juju house at which my boys had hinted, concealed in some hidden clearing near the village, might hold a secret by which he controlled them. In any event, he knew his own natives best.

We went into the house and sat down to breakfast. We must have made a queer sight, sitting there before that spotless table, our clothing disheveled and hastily donned, our rifles leaning against our chairs. Neither Arthur nor myself could eat more than a little, but Evan's appetite seemed undiminished. The native girl waited on us, the lurking panic in her eyes never very far from the surface. It seemed nearest when she looked at Evan.

I was most worried about my own boys. It was decidedly queer that they had deserted me, especially Mboka. He had been with me for all of a year, and I had really grown to trust him. He had gone with the others, though, and the very mystery of his disappearance seemed to add somewhat to the menace of the silence that surrounded us.

When I thought of it, however, it was no less odd that Evan's overseers had vanished. From the nature of their position, they would be hated by the other and full-blooded natives, and it was singular in the extreme that they had gone with them.

Then I remembered a tale I had once heard, of a mystic voodoo worship that was spreading secretly over the whole of West Africa. The story ran that an attempt was being made to band all the natives possible together in this voodoo worship, and then at a given signal they were all to rise. The Indian Mutiny would be repeated. Every white man on the West Coast would be rushed by the nearest blacks, and the dominance of the white race made a thing of the past, in Africa any rate.

I felt cold at the thought that the attempt—which I had thought dead these many years—might have been secretly and insidiously winning converts all this time, and that all the blacks between us and the coast might be risen and only waiting for courage to attack us. We were the only whites in a hundred and fifty miles anyway, and if the strange behavior of the natives meant mischief, we were probably doomed as it was. It gave me a sickish feeling to think that the other might be true, though, that a second mutiny was in progress.

As if to confirm my belief, at just that moment, drums began to beat, far off in the bush. To the south of us they began their monotonous, rhythmic rumble. Boom, boom, boom, boom! Never a pause, never skipping a beat, never altering in the slightest the hypnotic muttering. We stopped eating and stared at each other. The drums throbbed on, sullenly, far, far away. Evan grew angry at the insolence of his slaves. I looked at Alicia and made a mental vow that my last cartridge should be saved for her. Arthur listened with an air of detachment, and then went on with his breakfast.

The first drums had been beating for perhaps fifteen minutes when, to the northeast, more drums took up the rhythmic pounding. Evan's eyes narrowed. He went to a window and looked out. As he moved, he passed close to the native girl, and she shrank back fearfully. While he stared out across the clearing, a third set of drums began to beat—to the northwest, this time. We were ringed in.

Evan came to the table with a grim expression on his face. "The black fools!" he said furiously. "They dared not come to me! I'll go to them and put a stop to this!"

"Evan!" exclaimed Alicia, frightened. "You'll stay here with us!"

"This is no time for caution," said Evan grimly. "If we leave them alone, they'll hold a juju palaver

until they've gathered nerve to rush us. I'll walk in on their council, and we'll see what happens."

"I'll go," said Arthur, quickly sensing the psychology of the move Evan proposed to make. "I'd better go."

"It would be suicide!" Alicia exclaimed again. "One white man among all those blacks. They could kill you in an instant."

"That is precisely why they would be afraid to," I interposed. "The mere fact that a white man dared walk into their palaver and order them about, would frighten them. No negro would dare do it, and they would not understand how a white man could. It's quite possible that a sheer bluff may win out. Of course we've got to do something. I think I'd better go, though. My boys are in that crowd and they're rather fond of me, I believe. I'll have some of them halfway with me at the start."

Evan shook his head. "Your boys are in that crowd," he said curtly, "but the very fact that they're fond of you will make them kill you that much quicker. You know natives. Now *my* natives hate me like poison, and there's not one of them but would kill me like a shot if he dared. They'll be afraid when I drop in on them. I'm the one to go and I'm going. Besides, I know the local dialect. You don't. You'll hear one set of drums stop in half an hour."

He picked up his rifle and went out of the door. Alicia watched him leave, her face utterly pale.

"He's going to his death!" she said in a whisper. "Stop him, oh, please stop him!"

"We're all in just as much danger as he is, dear," said Arthur tenderly. "He's taking the one chance that may bring us out of this without fighting. He'll go into the middle of that bunch of natives and by sheer nerve frighten them into doing as he says. If all three of us went, we'd be rushed on sight."

Alicia's lips trembled, and Arthur tried to comfort her. I went to the door and stood looking after Evan. It was illogical, but with all of us very probably facing death, and certainly a siege, I was struck with a pang of jealousy when I saw Arthur put his arms about Alicia's shoulder to comfort her. Mrs. Braymore was white to the lips, but gamely tried to be casual and cheerful. She came and stood by me as I looked out of the door.

"Quite frankly," she asked me quietly, "what are our chances?"

"I don't know," I told her gloomily. "We don't even know what the natives are up to yet. Those drums do not sound well. They may mean anything and they may mean nothing."

Mrs. Braymore looked at me searchingly. Any one could see that she was frightened, but she was doing her best not to show it.

"And if they mean—anything?"

"There is a Portuguese fort a hundred and fifty miles away," I answered grimly. "They might send soldiers to lift the siege on us if they hear about it. I'm assuming we'll be besieged. Things look that way. Evan must have treated his slaves worse than usual. Usually they simply run away. It's not often they try anything of this kind. I don't like the sound of those drums. That means organization and purpose. All I can say is that I hope Evan succeeds with the natives."

Mrs. Braymore blanched a little more, but smiled as bravely as she could.

"Well," she said quietly, "I know Alicia well enough to promise you that we'll be as little of a drawback as possible. If you decide to try anything drastic, such as attempting to escape through the bush, we'll do our best to keep up. And I think both of us are fairly good shots."

"I'm hoping there'll be no need for anything on that order," I said with more respect than before in my tone. "We'll try to stick it out here. My boys are loyal, I think, at least they've been loyal up to now, and even if we are besieged, one of them will probably take a message to the fort."

I had little enough hope of that, Heaven knows, but I did not want Mrs. Braymore to worry more than was necessary. She seemed to realize that I was speaking more from my hopes than my beliefs, because she shrugged her shoulders.

"There's really no need to soften things for me," she said, "Alicia and I won't——"

She stopped and caught her breath. A shot had sounded, off in the bush from the direction in which Evan had vanished. A second's interval, and another shot. Then there was a horrid outcry, and a maniacal shrieking.

"The gorilla," I snapped, and started down the steps with my rifle at full cock.

We heard a second outburst of the same beastlike sounds and a crashing in the bushes. I raised my rifle. A figure showed dimly through the bush. I fired vindictively. *Evan* stumbled and fell in the clearing, just out of the jungle!

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## CHAPTER IV. THE FIRST VICTIM.

In a second he was up again, and ran desperately until he reached my side. Blood was flowing down his cheeks from five deep scratches.

"The pongo," he gasped. "Nearly did for me. Jumped me, but I got in two shots. Then he grabbed for me but I got away. Stumbled just as you fired. Damn lucky."

I stood still, facing the menacing jungle, but not a sound came from it except the monotonous, rhythmic beating of the drums from three sides, where juju priests worked their followers into a frenzy of hatred against the white men. Evan went slowly up to the house, exhausted and shaken by his narrow escape from death.

We held a council immediately. The drums on every side of us meant evil brewing. So much was certain. For a white man to attempt to stop the juju councils would be perilous in the extreme, but it was our only chance. On the other hand, for one of us to get through the jungle to take that desperate chance meant eluding the watchfulness of the hate-mad gorilla, whose cunning was increasing.

"I don't know how he got to me," said Evan, still shaking from the unexpectedness of the whole affair. "I heard a snarl, and he was coming for me not ten paces away. Startled, I pulled the trigger without aiming, and he came on. I got my rifle halfway to my shoulder, when he reached me. One of his great, hairy paws grasped the muzzle as I fired the second time, while the other reached for my throat. When the rifle went off, he started back and burst out in his screaming. It must have burned or injured his paw. I turned and ran, but he had done this to me in the meantime."

His coat was half torn from him, and the deep scratches on his cheek showed where the claws had just grazed his face.

"I don't mind facing natives," Evan admitted in conclusion, "but I'll tell you frankly I don't care to go through that jungle again while that beast is in it."

The eternal menace of the drums came to our ears, borne to us through the open windows. Arthur began to pace up and down the room, cursing under his breath. Alicia bit her lip and tapped nervously on the floor with her foot. Mrs. Braymore carefully began to fold and refold her handkerchief. Quite suddenly, I noticed that it was falling into shreds beneath her fingers. Struggle as any of us would, our nerves were badly worn.

The strain grew worse during the day. There were two or three dogs about the place, and it was curious to see them puzzled over our abstraction. They kept alertly out of Evan's way, but they were obviously disconcerted by the absence of the servants who usually attended to them, and they looked at us with perplexity in their eyes. They could get no attention from the solitary native girl who remained. She had withdrawn into panic-stricken silence, serving us when necessary, but spending most of her time in the room to which she had been assigned. We had ordered her to leave the servants' quarters and stay in the house itself.

All the morning the drums beat rhythmically. During lunch they continued their hypnotic muttering. And all afternoon they kept on, kept on, until it seemed as if we would be crushed by their regular, pulseline, ominous rumbling. Far off in the bush, where we could never reach them, we knew juju councils were going on. Weirdly painted and tattooed witch doctors whirled in their mystic dances and inflamed the minds of the blacks against us.

Men beat upon the drums and yelled and yelled, closing their eyes and surrendering themselves to the ecstasy of the rhythm until they became all but unconscious of the words they reiterated. Slowly and surely the blacks were nerving themselves to lift their hands against their masters. Given time, a drum and a rhythmic phrase, a native can convince himself of anything simply by pounding on the drum and yelling over and over the phrase that contains the idea. He will luxuriate in the rhythm, he will hypnotize himself by the monotony of the drum beats. He will go into an ecstasy, simply yelling over and over the one phrase.

Dinner that night was a repetition of breakfast and lunch. We sat down to the table, our rifles by our sides, our movements jerky and uncertain from the strain of waiting for we knew not what. The dogs lay about on the floor, watching us anxiously. The single servant waited on us, her face dull with apathy, though flickers of panic lighted her eyes from time to time. And always we heard the drums beating far off in the bush. I caught myself sitting with a fork full of food in mid-air, listening to their sullenly menacing rumble.

Arthur, Evan, and myself divided the night into watches. I took the first, and waited tensely until after one o'clock. I heard nothing but the muffled drumming to the northeast, northwest, and south. The moon shone brightly down and made the clearing about the casa like a lake of molten silver. I heard the noises of insects—the loud-voiced African insects—and the cries of the night birds. I heard nothing else. The night was quiet and peaceful, save for the ceaseless throbbing of the drums all about.

Evan relieved me. He came out on the porch and lit a cigarette.

"That drumming gets monotonous." He yawned. "I wish they'd come on and have the suspense over with."

"If they come," I remarked, "we're done for."

"Not necessarily. If we hold them off for a week and kill enough of them, they'll get tired and go away."

"That wouldn't help us much. I hardly see how we could make a hundred and fifty miles through the bush with two women and no carriers."

"We might try, anyway. Some of us would get through. You've heard nothing?"

"No," I replied. "Just the drums."

I went indoors and lay down to sleep. When I surrendered myself to the rhythm of the drumming, it put me quickly into a deep slumber. I knew what the sound meant, that naked savages yelled and danced themselves into a frenzy of hatred against us, but if one allowed it to become so, it was very soothing.

At one time I half started from my sleep. Some sound within the house aroused me, but a moment later I heard Evan's footstep on the veranda and recognized the sound of his shoe soles on the flooring. He was humming a little tune to himself. I was reassured and slept again.

I heard when Arthur relieved Evan, too. Their voices came clearly in to me as they exchanged greetings.

"Nothing new?" asked Arthur nervously.

"No. I say, Arthur, the natives are taking a deuced long time to get worked up to the sticking point. I had them pretty thoroughly frightened. Perhaps they'll hold a big palaver for several days, yell and dance themselves into exhaustion, and let it go at that. I've known such things to happen. Our primitive ancestors used to hold hee-hee councils and work off their surplus emotions in the same way. If this juju festival lasts two days more, I think it will peter out and wind up in a palm-wine debauch. Then they'll come back and be good!"

"It's the gorilla I'm worried most about just now," said Arthur grimly. "The natives are men, and you can anticipate their moves, but there's no telling what an animal will do, particularly a pongo."

Evan laughed. "I had a start just now," he said. "I heard a queer sound in Biheta's room." Biheta was the native girl. "She gave a queer gurgle. I didn't know what was up, and I went and peered in the door. She was lying there quite still, evidently sound asleep. She must have had a nightmare, but it gave me the creeps for an instant."

Arthur seemed to pick up his rifle.

"Well, I'm going indoors to get some beauty sleep," said Evan with a yawn. "Cheer up, Arthur. There's a damn good chance that the natives will just yell themselves hoarse and come peaceably back to work. As long as the drums stay at a distance, we're all right. But wake all of us if they stop."

He came into the house and went into his own room. I dozed off again. When I woke, it was well after daylight. Evan had stuck his head inside my door and was grinning cheerfully.

"Get up," he ordered. "Breakfast will be ready in a minute or two."

I rolled out of bed and heard him go to the rear of the house. He rasped out an order in the local dialect, but there was no reply. He spoke again, harshly. There was still no reply. I heard him fling open a door. Then he exclaimed aloud.

"Arthur! Murray! Come here!"

We went quickly, and into the room in which he was. It was the room assigned to the native girl. Evan was standing over her couch, looking grimly down at the figure lying there.

The dull features of the girl were twisted into an expression of the most horrible fear. It was appalling that such ultimate terror could show itself upon a human face. The eyes were wide and staring, the mouth was drawn back in a voiceless shriek of utter, despairing fright. The hands were clenched so that the nails bit into the flesh of the palms, and the head was oddly askew. The girl was dead.

Evan lifted up her shoulders and the head fell back.

"Neck broken," he said laconically. "The gorilla!"

"Great Heaven!" said Arthur desperately, white as a sheet. "What next? How did he get in here? Alicia!" He ran from the room and called hoarsely.

Alicia's voice answered instantly. "What's the matter?"

"The native girl's dead, killed by the gorilla during the night. Are you safe?"

Alicia appeared in person and proved it. She was pale, but composed.

"Where? What—?"

I lost the rest of her question. Evan and myself were searching for the gorilla's means of ingress and exit. The flimsily screened window was intact. The door had been unlocked, but Evan remembered that he had found it closed and had closed it again after peering into the room during the night.

Was it possible that the monstrous animal possessed the cunning to unlatch the door gently before entering, and then the diabolical forethought to latch it again on leaving? It seemed impossible, but what other explanation was there?

"He's been in the house," said Evan grimly. "Where is he now?"

I went out and got one of the dogs. We brought it into the room and it sniffed at the dead body. Then we led it about the house. Once we thought it showed some excitement. It sniffed at the door of a room that was used as a storeroom.

With our rifles at the ready, we flung open the door. No sound came from within. The dog, bristling, walked slowly into the room. Cautiously, we followed. Boxes and bales were scattered all about, but there was no sign of the animal that had killed the native girl. The dog growled, and moved about, stiff-legged, but soon grew puzzled and sniffed perplexedly all over the place. He could find nothing.

We explored the room thoroughly, though with our hearts in our mouths. Three men and a gorilla in a small store room would be unpleasant for the men, armed though they might be. We could find no niche in which the beast might have hidden, nor any evidence of his presence. After a time the dog gave it up, and lay down on the floor with his tongue lolling out.

"Do you suppose it could be a black that killed her?" asked Arthur suddenly. "A native would have known about the latch. One of them might have crept into the house and killed the girl in punishment for her having stayed behind when the rest left."

"If he did," I remarked grimly, "it's safe to say we'd better not touch any of the food he could have got at. Those voodoo poisons are deadly things, and you can bank on it he was prepared to use them."

"Hardly likely," said Evan.

"It must have been a native," insisted Arthur anxiously. "No animal would have had the cunning to creep in, kill the poor girl silently, and then creep out again. It must have been one of the blacks."

"Gorilla," said Evan, shaking his head.

Arthur suddenly looked up.

"I've got it! We'll take a photo of the girl's eyes. I saw a cloudy form on the retina. I've got an insect camera in my luggage, and can make sure what it was that frightened her that last moment of her life."

The expression on the girl's face had been one of terrible fear. Whatever it was that had killed her, she had seen it before she died—seen and known it for a deadly and horrible thing.

"Try it," I urged. "We can't be sure otherwise. If it was a native, our food is poisoned for a certainty."

Arthur went to his room and presently appeared with the queer camera. It was a long box, and evidently the lens was one of great focal length. It took Arthur a long time to adjust it properly. He proposed to take advantage of the fact that the eye of a dead person will retain for from twenty-four to forty-eight hours the impression of what it saw last while living. A great many people think that the shining image on the outer surface of the eye retains that picture, and wonder at it. As a matter of fact the picture is kept on the retina, in the inside of the eyeball. It is extremely difficult to photograph the retina without dissecting the eye, but it can be done—as Arthur proceeded to prove.

I went outside and searched around the house for possible footprints. After a preliminary search, I got Evan to help me. We could find no single sign of tracks leading toward or away from the house. There had been a heavy dew, and the top layer of the earth was dark and damp. Footprints would inevitably have been shown. When we had completed our search, we stared at each other. Whatever or whoever had killed the native girl must be still in the house. There were absolutely no signs of his having left.

We went inside. Beast or man, *something* had been in the house, moving quietly and undiscovered despite our watching. It had entered the room occupied by the native girl and had awakened her. She had seen it, and it had been a thing she recognized as frightful. Her horror-stricken face was proof of that. It had been cunning enough to latch the door of the room after the killing. That meant a native. On the other hand, it had broken the girl's neck, a feat that would require incredible strength. That spoke of a monstrous animal. We heard Arthur shuffling about in his improvised dark room, and the clink of the dishes in which he had mixed his solutions.

How had the creature—man or beast—reached the house? How had it made its way silently through the rooms at midnight, with one of us awake and on guard? Could it be that one of the servants had remained, hidden in some secret place while the others had left, and now prowled about at night while the rest far off in the bush yelled and howled, drummed and danced, and gradually became ripe to attack us?

Arthur came out of his dark room with a glass plate in his hand. His face was pale.

"Look at this," he said quietly. "If you'll hold it so the light strikes it diagonally, you'll see it in its proper lights and shades, instead of reversed."

The plate was still wet, where he had just taken it from the fixing bath. We looked. We saw, running aimlessly here and there, curiously like the branches of a tree, little dark lines. Those were the blood vessels that nourished the eye. We gave no heed to them, however. The sight that made both Evan and myself gasp was the strange picture that we saw amid all those little blood

vessels.

There, distorted and hideous, menacing and terrible, we saw the cause of the native girl's death, and of her terror. We saw the head of a gorilla, with its horrible, discolored fangs protruding from blackened lips in a grimace of unspeakable ferocity.

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## CHAPTER V. AS BY MAGIC.

"And it's in the house," observed Evan grimly. "A full-grown beast will weigh three hundred pounds, and he'd leave plenty of sign when he walked. There are no tracks leading away from here. Murray and I looked."

Arthur was ashen as he stared at us. I felt rather shaky myself. The thought of a creature like that in the same house, with Alicia exposed to its insane rage at any moment it might choose to emerge from its hiding place, was appalling.

The two ladies were in the large front room. I went in and remained with them, my rifle in my hand, while Arthur and Evan went over the house again. They had the dogs with them, and they went into every room and every corner, ready at any instant to face what is possibly the most terrible of all wild beasts at close quarters.

A full-grown gorilla has easily the strength of six or eight men, and in a confined space firearms would be almost useless. I heard the dogs pattering all through the house, sniffing eagerly everywhere they were taken, but finding nothing. Again they seemed excited at the door of the storeroom, and again they gave up the search after they had entered.

Arthur rejoined me and Alicia with discouragement on every feature.

"He isn't here," he said wearily, "and he is here. He was here and he wasn't here. I don't know where he is!"

Evan slumped into a chair, though it was noticeable that he kept his rifle in his hands. Through the window came the menacing rumble of the drums from all sides.

"I think," said Alicia, with a ghastly attempt at a smile, "I think a fit of hysterics would be a relief."

She looked as if she meant it. All of us looked thoroughly on edge. To have hostile drums beating all about you and to realize that a hundred and fifty miles of jungle lie between you and the nearest help is bad enough in itself. When you add to that the consciousness of having hidden in the same house with you a beast almost human in its cunning and fiendish in its hatred, with the face of the devil and the strength of seven men, hysterics seem excusable. She did not give way, however, though we all felt on the verge of hysteria from the strain.

That day was one of the most terrible I have ever spent. It was not that anything happened to make it terrible. The strain came from the fact that nothing happened. If the beast were hidden about the house, it did not show itself, but we did not hear a board creak or a curtain swish against the window without turning with a start, prepared to face anything and to fire vengefully into a hideous, furry form.

The bush outside the casa seemed to take on a threatening aspect. The house was built on a small elevation and we looked for miles over the tops of trees, broken here and there by gaps which meant the existence of clearings and open fields. The treetops were dancing from the heat. The sun beat down with fierce intensity. Blasts of hot, humid wind blew upon us and scorched us, but we paid no attention. And always, from the mysterious, unknown and unknowable bush all around us, drums beat and beat and beat tirelessly and ominously.

When one of us went back to get food for the rest, he went with an automatic held ready in his hand, and the other two were prepared at any instant to hear a shot or the snarl that would mean the reappearance of the gorilla. We were doubly besieged, by the natives without and by the gorilla within. For fear of the natives in the bush, we kept to the house. For fear of the gorilla in the house, we kept to the one room.

Toward evening insensibly we relaxed. No one could keep to such an intensity of attention as we had maintained during the day. We ate a sketchy meal at nightfall and dragged two cots into one of the rooms adjoining the large front one in which we had stayed all day. We explored the room thoroughly, and Alicia and Mrs. Braymore went in to lie down.

None of us thought of taking off our clothes. We three men prepared for a night-long vigil. One of us would keep thoroughly awake, and the other two would snatch such sleep as they could.

Long hours passed. We felt sure that some time during the night the beast would make his appearance. I sat alertly by a window, a dog at my feet, listening to the night sounds outside and the ceaseless drumming that meant the juju councils were debating whether the blacks were sufficiently worked up to attempt an attack.

Arthur and Evan reclined in their chairs and tried to doze, but there was little rest for any of us. We could think of nothing but the animal we felt sure would make some attempt upon us during the night.

At one o'clock Evan took my place by the window with the dog at his feet. I sat in one of the easier chairs and tried to relax, but it was impossible. I was suddenly conscious of the overpowering heat and humidity. I was bathed in perspiration.

"I've got to have a drink," I said abruptly. "I need it."

Arthur looked up wearily.

"We all need a drink," he said. "It's in the back of the house, isn't it?"

We looked at each other uncertainly.

"I'll go," said Arthur quietly.

I interposed. "We'll both go. Here, in the light, Evan can see to shoot if necessary. We'll use a flash lamp."

It was curious that neither of us cared to walk through three rooms and a hallway inside a house we had been in for days. That animal had fretted our nerves badly.

Slowly and cautiously we made our way through the dark rooms, searching before us with the flash light. I can't speak for Arthur, but my breath was coming quickly, and I heartily regretted having expressed a wish for a drink. I would not back out now, though.

We went cautiously and slowly out to the rear of the house. I was in the act of reaching for the siphon of seltzer when we heard the dog scream in pain and a shout from Evan. We rushed madly for the front, our hearts in our mouths, and cursing our absence at such a critical time. When we burst into the room, Evan was dashing out on the veranda, and Alicia was in the act of emerging from the room into which she and Mrs. Braymore had retired. Alicia had an automatic in her hand and, though her face was full of dread, she was evidently prepared to face anything.

Arthur and myself were quickly by Evan's side and found him staring about the darkness, his rifle half raised.

"What is it?" Arthur demanded quickly.

Evan's breath was coming in gasps. "I heard you two moving," he said sharply, as one whose nerves are strained to the breaking point. "I heard a noise from your direction. I turned to look at the door and caught a movement at the window by my side. I jerked back and the dog screamed. A long, hairy arm had reached in the window and seized him. He was drawn through the window before I could lift my rifle, and the arm vanished. It's the gorilla!"

We listened, but the house was still. A faint moan came from the courtyard, and I flashed the lamp down. The dog, flung bodily from the porch, stirred feebly and stiffened. Its neck was broken. There on the shadowed veranda, with the bright African moon shining pitilessly down upon the hot, dank, fevered earth, the three of us swore nervously while we stood with our rifles pointing in as many directions, hoping, even praying for that monstrous ape to rush upon us.

"He must have gone somewhere!" said Arthur despairingly. "Where *did* the beast go?"

"Into the house, no," said Evan crisply. "Under the house, perhaps. The roof, perhaps. We'll see."

My legs crawled as I descended the stairs to the ground. The house was raised from the ground on piles, and I could look clear underneath it. The moon was shining down whitely, and I saw the pillars silhouetted against the brightness on the other side. Half a dozen steps convinced me that the animal was not beneath. It would have shown as a dark outline. I tried to see up, over the roof, but could not. The roof slanted just a little and I could not see the center. The house being on an elevation, moreover, prevented me from backing off and getting a clear view of the top. I called up to the other two on the porch.

"He's not under the house, but I can't see the roof. He must be there."

The tree trunks of the forest all about us echoed my words strangely. I could see dim white blurs where the faces of the two brothers showed their position. One of them moved oddly, and in a moment I saw that Evan was swinging himself up the pillar before him. He grasped the edge of the roof and drew himself up. In a second he dropped down again. He spoke quietly enough to Arthur, but I heard his voice.

"He's there, squatting on the ridge pole. Lord! What a monster he is!"

"We must get the women out of the house," said Arthur sharply. "He may tear up the roof and come inside. Alicia!"

She had heard and came quickly out, Mrs. Braymore following her. We built a small fire to keep insects away from them, and sat them on chairs while we patrolled the area about the house. The drums still beat on all sides of us, but they had been relegated to a minor position now. We subconsciously counted on their remaining a potential menace only, until they stopped or drew nearer. The moon made the whole world bright and shining. We could see clearly and distinctly. Nothing the size of a rabbit could escape across that stretch of sward without our observing it.

Alicia and Mrs. Braymore watched the fringe of jungle while we posted ourselves so that not even a cat could escape from the house without being seen. I leaned on my rifle near the two ladies, my eyes fixed on the edge of the roof, straining to catch a glimpse of the beast that squatted up there. When I thought of it, it seemed stupid of us not to have suspected that as a hiding place before. True, it was in clear view of the sky, but a beast cunning enough to creep about the casa at midnight as he had done, might possess the intelligence to reason that there was the ideal hiding place for him.

"Do you think there is any real danger from the natives?" Alicia inquired hesitatingly.

"When natives do inexplicable things, it is usually juju," I said grimly. "And where there is juju there is usually danger. There is one thing that can be said, though. While a native is making a noise, he is rarely dangerous in bulk. As Evan pointed out, they may simply exhaust themselves in yelling and dancing. I do not think it would be wise to count on that, however."

"Wouldn't it be the wisest thing to do, to simply try to make our way secretly through the jungle to the nearest fort?"

"It would be impossible," I told her frankly. "You don't know African undergrowth. We might make four or five miles a day, with luck. And at any moment in the twenty-four the natives might trail us. We'd have to make a new trail, or use the native ones. Making a new trail, we'd be followed and probably speared, besides the fact that our animal friend would be haunting the treetops overhead, waiting for a moment when one of us would be off our guard."

Alicia shuddered. "But would you three try that if we weren't here?" she insisted.

"I think we'd wade into one of those juju councils," I remarked vindictively. "I know I'd gladly join such a party. We'd probably appear as suddenly as we could and start shooting. We might stampede them, and a show of boldness would be our best play in any event. Of course, if they rushed us, we'd be out of luck."

"You mean——?"

"There would be four or five hundred of them, and we might get ten or perhaps fifteen apiece. They'd overwhelm us if they tried, but the psychology would probably make us win out. The fact that we were hunting them, instead of their hunting us, would frighten them."

"Couldn't you do that now?"

I shook my head. "Not with our friend the gorilla about. And we wouldn't expose you two to the possibility of our failing. There'd be nothing left for you but your own pistols."

Alicia relapsed into silence. I saw her brow knitted as she tried desperately to work out some plan by which we might fight the incredible circumstances in which we found ourselves. Overhead, the broad moon sailed serenely across the sky, shedding its rays impartially down upon us, upon the shaggy, beastly ape squatting like some demoniacal creature upon the ridgepole of the roof, and upon yelling, capering blacks about the great fires they would have lit for their juju ceremonies.

Behind us, the busy, secretive life of the bush went on—all the feedings and drinkings and matings and killings, all the comedies and all the tragedies of the jungle. Things went on, sublimely indifferent to our petty frights and fancies. The jungle attended to its business, ignoring alike our strained attitudes as we sat in the moonlight and waited for the sun to rise that we might slay a malignant ape, and the yelling of self-hypnotism of the blacks as they danced about their juju fires, working themselves into a frenzy of hatred against the white man.

At last the moon dipped down toward the west, and the stars that had watched our vigil in mild, blinking surprise grew pale at the signs of dawn. The sky grew gray, then white. A high pallid veil hid the deep-blue arch of the night, and turned slowly to golden yellow as the sun rolled up.

The mist curled aloft from the treetops as the first rays of the morning swept across the land. We became aware that we had been cold and that we now were warm. We waited eagerly until we should see the roof of the casa, and be able to pick off with our rifles the beast that lurked there.

Morning had barely come when Evan clambered cautiously to the roof of the servants' quarters behind the house itself. We had left several of the dogs shut up in the house during the night. We knew that if the beast came down into the place, they would make an outcry before all were killed, at least. They had made no sound, but now one or two of them came out on the veranda, wagging their tails amiably.

Evan clambered to the roof of the servants' quarters, and Arthur passed up his rifle. Evan stood erect and raised the weapon. Then he stopped. From the ground, we saw him looking blankly at the roof of the house. From where he stood, he could see it clearly. His expression was at once amazed and apprehensive.

The beast had not left the house, or we would have seen it. It had not crossed the clearing. It had not entered the house, because the dogs were unalarmed. It had not in any discoverable fashion escaped from its position astride the ridge pole, but Evan told us and we immediately verified the fact that it was no longer on the roof. It had not escaped to the jungle. It had not secreted itself in the house; yet the monstrous ape had vanished!

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## CHAPTER VI. THE FORM THAT CREPT.

Again we searched the house from top to bottom. Again we led the dogs into every nook and cranny. Again they sniffed anxiously in the storeroom, but gave up the quest after a moment or so. In our search of the greater part of the house the dogs had seemed more bored than anything else. We had led them to the dog that had been killed, before attempting to enter the house, and they smelled at his neck cautiously and drew back with low growls. If the gorilla had been in the house, they would surely have scented him and warned us. The only time they gave any indication at all of interest, far less of excitement, was when they sniffed at the storeroom door. Once inside, they moved about aimlessly.

We debated our next move. The gorilla simply could not be in the house. With his ferocity, he would surely have made a move to attack one or another of us during our searchings. At last Arthur found a sign that reassured us as to his absence without lessening in the least the mystery of his means of escape. Something had led him to scout around the edge of the clearing surrounding the house. He straightened up with a shout.

"Look here!"

We ran to him and looked where he pointed. There, on the earth, just beneath the overhanging limb of the first of the jungle trees, were the prints of strangely handlike toes.

"Here's where he jumped for the lowest limb there," said Evan excitedly. "See?"

Directly above us a heavy limb spread out from the trunk of the tree. Evidently the gorilla had leaped from that spot. How he had run across the moonlit lawn under our very eyes remained inexplicable. Thinking back, however, I remembered that once or twice wisps of infrequent cloud had temporarily obscured the moon. Could he have seized one of those moments of darkness? It seemed impossible, but there was no other explanation that could be made.

Somewhat reassured, we entered the house again. One of us stayed out on the veranda, however, and watched to make sure the beast would attempt no daring daylight rush on our stronghold. We planned to tether several of the dogs that night to the piles which raised the house from the ground.

Evan was on the porch. He peered in at the window suddenly.

"I'm going to take a look in the servants' quarters," he said abruptly. "It's just occurred to me that the beast may have hidden in there and made his break for the jungle from there. That would shorten the run he would have to make."

He moved away. I went back and tried to help Alicia prepare some food for us all. We had had nothing since the night before and all were ravenous. Arthur was sitting in the big front room, his head buried in his hands, his rifle leaning on the arm of his chair. I put my rifle against the wall and began to open the tins of preserved food, while Alicia donned an apron and with a quaintly housewifely air lighted a spirit lamp and heated water for our tea. Mrs. Braymore was gravely tasting the tinned butter and making a wry face. It is poor stuff until you get used to it.

As I worked, I watched Alicia appreciatively, and far back in my mind a little germ of hope sprang up. It suddenly occurred to me that she had never shown that intense affection for Arthur one expects a woman to show for the man she is going to marry. She appeared fond enough of him, but she seemed nearly as fond of Evan. I remembered what I had been told, that the three of them had been raised together as children so they were little less than brothers and sister.

That was Alicia's attitude. She treated Arthur as an elder brother of whom she was immensely fond, but she did not treat him as a lover. It was queer that, with drums beating rhythmically night and day in the bush all around us, and in momentary danger from a monstrous gorilla, I should stop and think of romance and the peculiarly trivial shades of affection Alicia might show.

She turned and smiled at me just then.

"You look like a sword," she said mischievously, "a sword beaten into a can opener."

Mrs. Braymore joined in her smile. I suppose I must have looked rather queer. A heavy cartridge belt was slung about my waist, and two dull-metal automatics were stuck rakishly into it. I had not shaved for three days. Every moment was too full of suspense to allow for thinking of such minor things as shaving.

"Well," I remarked amiably, "since it looks as if our friends in the bush are going to do as Evan has suggested and yell themselves into exhaustion without bothering us, and I shall soon revert to peaceable pursuits, that doesn't matter. A sword is only useful on occasion, but a can opener links us with civilization."

"It would seem odd," said Alicia, "to have some one bring one's mail in the morning, or to use a telephone."

"There's a mail once in two weeks at Ticao," I said, "but it's four weeks from England usually and often six."

Mrs. Braymore joined in the conversation. "I should like to receive an invitation to tea," she said wistfully. "I should like to go somewhere to tea and have people talk interestedly of poetry, and the approaching marriage of somebody's daughter, and what the curate said about the possibility of repairing the parish house."

We all laughed at the idea. I set down one of the tins of potted meat and reached for another.

"For myself—" I began and stopped short, every muscle tense.

On the veranda outside the house I had heard a sound, the creaking of a board as a heavy weight was put cautiously upon it. There was something infinitely furtive in the sound. I listened and heard nothing more, but was oppressed by a sense of danger. The sound had come from the front of the house. I drew an automatic from my belt and silently passed it to Alicia. She had heard nothing, but my expression warned her and she took it quickly. Mrs. Braymore took the other. I picked up my rifle from the side wall and tiptoed through the house toward the front. I heard an almost unbelievable slight sound again from the porch. The door into the front room was standing open. I slipped silently up to the threshold.

Arthur had heard. He was still sitting in the chair, but he was alert and ready. His eyes were fixed on the window some fifteen feet from him, and he was slowly and carefully bringing his rifle to bear. The sun was shining from without and struck upon the curtains that hung inside. Evan had made his house ready for the visitors he expected, and every window was curtained.

There was a moment of breath-taking suspense. Arthur, still seated lest the sound of his rising alarm whoever or whatever was outside, was bringing his rifle to his shoulder. I slipped into the room and came to his side, my own rifle ready. Our eyes were fixed upon the window. Then the slanting rays of the sun flung a shadow upon the curtain. The thing was not yet before the window, but its shadow moved on before it because of the position of the rising sun. We saw, cast in perfect clearness upon the flimsy cloth, the silhouette of the head of the gorilla! Its small ears lay back, its jaw protruded in that fearful ferocity of the anthropoid tribe, and we saw it peering from right to left in suspicious cunning. I held my breath, waiting for the moment when we could fire.

The head turned sharply, and I thought I saw the nostrils quivering. Then, abruptly, it vanished, and a dog burst into frantic barking and hysterical yelping on the veranda. Another instant and the dog screamed in terror. There was a crash against the wall of the house, and the yelping became a moan.

Arthur and I had dashed for the door and now rushed down the veranda with hearts thumping madly. One of the dogs was writhing in agony on the floor. It had been flung against the house with terrific force and now lay with broken ribs and backbone, dying. The gorilla had vanished.

Evan appeared with his rifle ready, out of breath. "What's up?" he demanded. "The beast again?"

Arthur swore hysterically. "The damned beast is here!" he cried. "It's *here*! It's hiding somewhere about!"

We were all thoroughly reckless by now. We went after the huge ape with the temerity that would have made the blood of any of us run cold in a sober moment. We penetrated every corner of the house. We went over every bit of the grounds. We clambered upon the roof and searched there in foolhardy indifference to the danger we might be in if we only located the animal.

"I think it was hiding in the servants' quarters," said Evan grimly. "I saw signs of its having been there. It must have grown shy when I explored the place and it probably slipped off toward the house to escape me. I don't see why it didn't make for the woods, though."

None of us understood, but we went about our search as before. We found absolutely nothing. At last we stopped and stared at one another.

"We would have killed it in another moment," said Arthur despairingly, "but the dog saw it and yelped. Then it ran."

"Could it have made the woods before we got outside?"

"Heaven only knows," said Arthur wearily. "I begin to believe the natives have bewitched the thing to kill us all."

"How many dogs have we left?" asked Evan suddenly.

There were four or five of Evan's animals, and one or two of the village dogs had begun to lurk about the house in hopes of food. There was none left for them in the deserted village.

"We'll tie up the dogs," said Evan. "We'll fasten one on the veranda at the front, and another in the rear of the house. We'll put two on the ground below, tethered to the piles, and spread the others in the rooms here. Then the beast will have to kill them before it can get at us, and we'll have some warning."

We began to improvise collars for the native dogs and scattered the others about as Evan had suggested. When we had finished, as far as we could see there was absolutely no way for the gorilla to emerge from his hiding place—if he were hiding in the house—without being instantly detected by a dog. Certainly, he could not reach the house from the bush without discovery and an alarm being given.

With a dog in every room, dogs on the veranda, and others underneath the building, we should have felt safe, but did not. There was something uncanny in the appearances and disappearances of the monstrous ape that left us apprehensive even when we had taken every possible precaution to provide for its instant discovery if it made another attempt to reach us.

The pertinacity of the beast was appalling. To think of a colossal anthropoid with the cunning of the devil himself, the strength of seven men, and all the malignant hatred that possessed this one, to think of such an animal lurking about seeking an opportunity to wreak vengeance on one

of our number was horrible. And it would not stop with one of us if more than one were within its reach. Once in a killing rage, a gorilla goes mad with blood lust. It would tear and rend, would crush and utterly destroy.

We were white and nervous from the strain long before. Now we went about with something akin to hysteria just beneath the surface. There was nothing we could *do!* We had to wait for the beast to reappear, knowing that when it did, its coming would be cautious and cunning, its patience infinite, its strength colossal and its hatred fiendish. Any or all of us might expect at any instant to be gripped by a hairy arm of incredible power, to see the bestial face of that demoniacal animal grimacing at us in utter malignance. And we had before us the picture of the vision that would confront us in such a case. The picture taken from the native girl's retina was warning. Little, evil eyes glittering fiercely, flat, horrible nose above a terrible mouth parted in insane rage, and discolored fangs showing above the blackened lips.

Action of any sort would have been a relief. We went through the morning, making desperate efforts to stave off hysteria, and aware that at any moment one of us might crack beneath the strain.

Noon came. We ate mechanically. Evan was standing up better than any of the rest of us. Alicia was quiet and still. Her eyes alone showed the tension she felt. We were all keyed up to an almost unbearable pitch. Queerly enough, in our absorption in the threat of the gorilla, we had almost forgotten the drums that resounded on every side of us from the bush. It was Mrs. Braymore who called our attention to them.

"I wonder what's the matter with the drums?" she said wearily. "I've been noticing them for the last ten minutes."

We listened. The monotonous rhythm was still going on, rolling through the hot midday air in muffled waves of sound. The drums seemed louder than they had been.

"They're beating more rapidly," Evan remarked in a puzzled tone. "They were going along slowly. Now they're quite fast."

Only one of the drums had quickened its beat, however. The others thumped on monotonously. About four o'clock in the afternoon—allowing the length of time necessary for a runner to get from the first village to another—a second began to beat more furiously, and shortly after dark, the third joined in the trilogy. Our dogs were moving restlessly about, chafing because of being tied. We all were increasingly anxious, but this new danger had, strangely enough, the effect of steadying us.

We waited a long time, and at last the two women lay down to try to rest. Through the moonlight night the drums rolled and rumbled. Standing out on the veranda with my rifle in my hands, I listened intently. I saw with some disquiet that the night threatened to become cloudy, but hoped that the dogs would give warning of any danger that might impend. For an hour I stood there, looking and listening. There was no mistaking the new note of the drums. They meant resolution, renewed activity. Faintly, beneath their muttering, I caught a high, sustained ululation. The yelling of the natives had not been audible before. Evidently they were in perfect frenzy. That meant that an attack was imminent.

Arthur came out on the veranda beside me. He listened as I was listening.

"They'll attempt to rush us in the morning, I suppose," he remarked grimly. "They'll hardly try it before dawn, though. Blacks don't like the nighttime."

One of the dogs tied to a pile below the house growled softly. The dog on the veranda echoed the growl. I glanced at him quickly. He had risen and was standing tense, looking toward the edge of the bush. He growled again.

At just this moment, one of the little wisps of cloud overshadowed the moon and left the courtyard in darkness. I moved quietly over beside the dog and felt the hairs on his neck bristling. Finding him staring steadfastly in one direction, I strained my eyes trying to pierce the darkness. The cloud thinned a trifle and objects were dimly visible. I saw a shape coming slowly and cautiously toward the house, a shape that moved hesitatingly and furtively.

Arthur exclaimed softly. "Murray, it's the gorilla!"

The figure was hunched up and apelike. It moved awkwardly toward us. The cloud thinned still more and we could distinguish its location clearly, though it was still impossible for us to see distinctly.

"For the body," Arthur whispered.

We raised our rifles together and aimed carefully. Arthur's rifle flashed, and mine an instant later. We heard a choking, beastlike cry, and the figure toppled and fell.

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## CHAPTER VII. A STRANGE ALLY.

Evan rushed out from the interior of the house, rifle in hand.

"What's up? The natives?"

"We've got the gorilla, I think," said Arthur quietly.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a flash light. The three of us started down the steps and approached the fallen figure cautiously. As we drew near, we could hear it moaning. The moans were curiously human. I glanced up at the sky. The last wisp of the cloud was just passing before the face of the moon, and when I looked down again, the figure was outlined in the pitiless glare of the moonlight.

Evan uttered an exclamation. The moaning figure was not that of the gorilla. It was a man, a black man, in the monkey skin of a juju priest, with all the amulets and charms of his calling strung about him. Evan started forward and shot out a string of questions in the local dialect. I could not catch a word, but Evan's voice was stern and angry. The moaning witch doctor spoke feebly, his voice growing weaker and weaker, and his words interrupted by gasps of pain. At last he choked and coughed weakly and was still.

Evan turned to us in a towering passion.

"Those damned natives are going to try to rush us at dawn! The witch doctor came to put a spell on us so they'd succeed. Oh, when I get at the black animals——"

He burst out into a string of profanity. The slave owner in him had come uppermost, and the news that his blacks were going to attack us aroused his anger at their presumption more than his fear that they might succeed. He stirred the dead figure with his foot.

"They dare to threaten me!" he rasped. "I'll shoot one man in every four of them! I'll whip the rest until they can't stand. I'll——"

My old dislike of the man returned, I could not doubt his courage, but I had never been particularly fond of the *servaçal* system and had their effort not imperiled the lives of the four of us, I would have had the best of wishes for the natives in their attempt to liberate themselves.

"We'd better decide how we're going to stand them off before we decide how we're going to punish them," I remarked. "There are three of us. There are at least six hundred of them."

Arthur suddenly turned with a start.

"Alicia's in the casa," he said sharply, "and the beast may come back."

He started for the house on a run. We heard his voice as he called to Alicia and heard her answer. Evan and I followed more slowly, discussing methods of protecting ourselves against the coming attack.

"There's one thing," I observed thoughtfully, "with the bush about the clearing full of natives, the gorilla will either keep a safe distance away—as is most likely—or else will have to fight his way through to get to us."

"Perhaps," said Evan gloomily, his voice still full of anger toward the blacks. "We'll worry about him when we have to. The important thing is the siege we'll have to stand. If we can stop the first rush, I think we'll be all right."

"We're all right for ammunition?" I asked.

He nodded. "I could outfit a small army from my gun chest and I've ammunition to last a year."

We mounted the steps of the casa.

Alicia greeted us with a white face. "I can shoot," she told us both bravely, "and I shan't mind shooting at these people."

"You shall shoot," said Evan grimly, "if they get a foothold in the house. Otherwise there's no need. You know enough not to be taken alive."

"I know," said Alicia quietly.

The last I saw of her for an hour or more, she was going through Evan's assortment of firearms, picking out a light rifle for her own use and another for Mrs. Braymore. She already had a small-caliber automatic pistol hidden in her bosom.

For an hour or more we worked, moving the bundles Evan pointed out in the storeroom to form a breastwork behind which the women would be safe from stray shots. We tore up a section or so of flooring, too, so we could fire down in case any of the blacks found a refuge from our weapons beneath the house. Bars nailed across the openings at once provided us with assurance that they could not climb up, and that we would not accidentally fall through. We brought supplies of food and water where they would be close at hand.

For close quarters, we were depending on repeating shotguns loaded with buckshot. Three of us with those weapons should be able to stop almost any number of blacks. These lay close beside us. We had our rifles and our pistols in addition.

The drums were beating madly now. The high-pitched ululation that was the blended note of all the frantic yelling came clearly to our ears. When we had finished our preparations I went

outside to listen. I instantly realized that the drums were nearer, much nearer. The dogs were excited and restless.

"We'd better get the dogs up from the ground," I suggested. "They'll only be killed."

Evan went silently down and unleashed them. They were growling and bristling, particularly those near the back. They seemed to realize the imminence of danger.

I looked at my watch. It lacked two hours of dawn. The drums were growing louder and louder, and the yelling more distinct and defiant. From three sides the drums closed in on us, and from three sides choruses of high-pitched yells informed us of the hatred of the blacks for their masters. Evan interpreted as he caught some of the words.

"They say the juju has declared we are to be killed," he announced with a faint smile. "We are to be slaughtered and our flesh boiled down until the fat can be collected, when it will be used to light fires. Pigs will feed upon us, and our bones will be scattered among the juju priests of a thousand villages to tell them to rise and slay all white men."

The drums came up to the very edge of the clearing, and their thunderous voices boomed with a full-throated bellow across the open space in a deafening volume of sound. In the moonlight, we became conscious of darker bodies moving among the bush. Evan sighted from an open window and with compressed lips fired. There was a mocking yell.

"They say our guns have been bewitched so we cannot harm them," he informed us a second later. "Give me a shotgun."

The load of buckshot gave better results. Two or three shrieks of pain announced its arrival. Then the drums boomed forth more loudly. Evan fired again and again. There was a yell of rage at the third shot, when the resonant voice of the huge drum became muted and a mere shadow of itself.

"I was trying for the drum," he remarked. "They were brought from a thousand miles inland, and there's no way to tell what price was paid for that one."

The two other drums hastily shifted their positions, and recommenced their devil's tattoo. Emboldened by the fury of sound, one or two of the more daring spirits ventured to advance a little way out in the clearing to howl maledictions upon us.

Arthur's rifle cracked spitefully, and mine followed. Two bold spirits ceased to yell.

From time to time, as we saw an opportunity and a target in the moonlight, we shot vengefully into the bush, and several times cries of different timbre from the hysterical yelling of the blacks followed our shots. Once or twice, too, I had that curious feeling of certitude that follows some shots, when one is confident he has hit his mark, though no cry came to assure me.

Evan fired again and again with his heavy shotgun, almost every deep explosion being followed by a cry. The range was hardly more than a hundred yards, and the buckshot carried that distance easily. Spreading as it did, it had a daunting effect.

Our object in taking the initiative was solely that of dampening the blacks' enthusiasm. Allowed to cheer themselves with yells, they would make a rush that would be formidable in the extreme, but if we began to inflict losses before their attack began, the edge of their determination would be taken off. They would no longer believe in the efficacy of their juju to compass our destruction, and we would have a fraction of that psychological superiority that the white man must possess in order to handle natives, the complete possession of which enables a single fever-ridden white man to cow and rule ten thousand blacks.

Evan made a tour of the house, to make sure that the natives were equally reluctant to advance on all sides. We heard him fire twice back there, and painful yells followed each shot. He rejoined us.

"I'm going to take the rear," he said briefly. "They're in the bush all around. I'll hold them off easily. They'll make their main rush from this side, so you two stay together."

Arthur's answer was a deliberate squeeze of his trigger. A yell followed.

"At a hundred yards," he commented, looking up, "one can make good practice in moonlight like this."

"Dawn soon," said Evan and went once more to the rear. We heard him settling himself for the rush that we expected.

So far, there had been nothing but yells from the natives. We knew they had some firearms, but ammunition is very valuable in the bush. Natives are never supposed to have arms of precision, and when they possess modern rifles, they have to keep them concealed lest they be taken away by the Portuguese; but now and then a black boy will make off with a rifle and a store of shells, and there are other sources of supply.

At that, though, rifles and ammunition are immensely valuable back in the hill country. Up beyond the Hungry Country, I have known slaves to be sold for three rifle cartridges apiece. In fact, my boy Mboka—now run off in the bush with the rest of them—had cost me exactly six .30-.30 shells. I had found him the slave of a portly Kuloga chieftain who was about to sell him to a half-caste Arab for export to the Sudan.

I had wondered why the house servants did not clean out the gun chest when they ran away in the middle of the night, but thanked my luck that they failed to do so. Half a dozen rifles in the hands of the blacks would have made matters awkward for us at close quarters. Off in the bush we could have disregarded them, as the native custom is to fill the barrel with slugs and fire from



the hip. Anything like accuracy is impossible to them, of course.

When the sky began to pale toward the east, however, they opened up. No less than six firearms began to bellow at us, from an ancient fowling piece of who knows what ancient lineage to a modern smokeless-powder magazine rifle. The slugs and bullets tore through the flimsy walls of the house, or else imbedded themselves with a thud in one of the posts that supported the roof. Arthur and myself began to concentrate upon those weapons. The black-powder arms showed their position at every fire in the now growing dawnlight, and we fired vengefully at the puffs of smoke.

The sky was growing lighter now. The stars above us were paling and winking feebly in an attempt to outshine the sun. The first dim grayness became nearly white. The east turned from pallid luminosity to rich rose and then to gold. The gold, in its turn, faded to yellow, and the first rays of the sun struck the tips of the highest trees about the clearing. The drumming became fast and furious. The fires of the guns in the bush ceased for a moment, and wild yelling began. We heard Evan firing occasionally from the rear of the house. Now his shots came more rapidly.

With a hideous yell, the fringe of bush about the casa erupted black figures. Ancient spears, knobbed and gnarled war clubs, fiercely pointed arrows, and occasional rusted and long-cherished firearms armed the motley throng that ran yelling toward us.

Arthur dropped his rifle and took up the repeating shotgun by his side. I took my stand at a window and opened on the advancing mob. In such a mass it was impossible to miss, and the buckshot was deadly. If we had had sawed-off shotguns, the loads would have spread more and inflicted more damage, but as it was we had merely to pull the triggers to see one or more figures crumple or spin half around and fall. In their state of frenzy, that did not stop the blacks.

Evan's gun was booming from the rear of the house. Arthur's spoke with a shattering roar. My own barked angrily. The drums in the bush were pounding in a mad rhythm that made the universe a place of unbearable sound. The yells, the shots, the cries, and the thunderous drumming created an uproar in which I loaded my weapon and emptied it with a sense of curious detachment. Alicia and Mrs. Braymore were behind the breastwork we had made for them. I cannot speak for Mrs. Braymore, but I glanced once at Alicia and saw her grimly holding her light rifle in readiness.

The blacks came on. The losses we inflicted went unnoticed. They swarmed up the rise on which the house was built. We took heavy toll of them, but from sheer weight of numbers their casualties seemed insignificant. Their yells were deafening as they swept up the last twenty yards. I emptied my shotgun and began to use my two automatics.

A mass of black humanity flowed up the steps, though a gap in the stream widened for a moment as Arthur poured the last shells from his shotgun into them. They clambered the pillars that supported the veranda and made for the windows.

At that distance, barely ten feet, we could not miss. The veranda was a shambles. They could not live there. Arthur and myself with an automatic in each hand swept the place. I heard a shot and a yell behind me. One of the openings in the floor showed the barrel of an ancient musket that was just falling back. Alicia had fired down the opening and undoubtedly saved my life. The musket was aimed directly for my back, and would have torn my head from my body.

There was a crashing, and an antique blunderbuss appeared through a hole smashed in the flimsy side wall of the house. Arthur fired quickly. Then I heard Evan cry out at the rear of the house. Before we could move, there was an outburst of demoniacal, bestial screamings of rage. To one who had once heard that sound, the noise was unmistakable. The gorilla had appeared in a killing fury and was going for the blacks, as their panic testified. In a moment the clearing was dotted with running natives. They dared face our weapons, but the gorilla—

Evan's rifle was silent. There was an instant of almost unbearable quietness. Then came a triumphant, horrible outcry from the beast. It had slain.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### UNMASKED.

The quiet was deadly. Where five minutes before had been the yelling of the natives and the roaring of the drums, the sharp cracks of our rifles, and the bellowing of the native firearms, now there was not a sound.

Arthur and I, shaken by the suddenness of the transition, waited in cold apprehension. Would the door from the rear of the house burst open and the shaggy beast rage into the room, its colossal arms crushing whatever might come within its grasp? Would we, the four in that one room, fire futilely into its barrellike chest, and then be rent and tore in the huge ape's hairy arms, while its great discolored fangs sank into our flesh?

The stillness was broken by a feeble sound, and we quivered, gripping our rifles the more tightly. The tension was terrific. Another feeble sound, a scraping sound. Then two or three faint jars, followed by an uncertain, tottering footstep, and a second. We heard Evan's voice, barely above a whisper, muttering pain-racked imprecations.

The door opened slowly and he limped weakly into the room. His clothes were torn and gory. Blood dripped from a deep cut across the back of his hand. He stared at us uncertainly, and a look of relief came across his face.

"Well," he said slowly. "They've gone."

Alicia, for the first time, gave way. She burst into sobs, against which she struggled bravely.

"The gorilla!" I snapped, fearful lest I too give way.

Evan shook his head. "The blacks had crept up to and filled the servants' quarters during the night. I suppose that's why the dogs were restless. When they made a rush, they dashed out from there and I couldn't stop them. They were inside, and I was just about gone when the gorilla appeared from nowhere. I dare say I shouted, and then the beast made for the blacks. I suppose it was as frightened as they were, but it charged them, screaming with rage, and they ran. It got one of them. The poor devil is out there now. I'd been knocked down and one of the blacks was just about to finish me off when the brute appeared."

"Where is it now?"

Evan shook his head again. "I don't know where it went. It was going for the blacks."

Alicia stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth and tried desperately to get a grip on herself again.

"We'll go and look out at the back," said Arthur grimly. "You stay here, Evan."

We went cautiously out toward the rear. There lay one of the natives with his neck broken, an expression of infinite horror on his face. Others lay in twisted attitudes about the place, gaping wounds from the buckshot at close range showing how desperately Evan had fought. Of the gorilla there was no sign. We searched the place thoroughly, but found nothing.

We returned to the others, a curious lethargy settling upon us. We had been at such high tension for so long that it was impossible to keep keyed up. I, for one, felt an almost-overpowering desire to sleep. Alicia had recovered her composure by now and was trying to bandage Evan's hand. He was indifferently submitting, but after she had finished, he looked at it and took the bandage off, substituting a mere strip of adhesive for the many turns of the cloth.

"I can handle my rifle like this," he said dully.

Mrs. Braymore made coffee and we drank it in silence. Presently Arthur motioned to the women to leave the room and began to tug at the bodies lying on the floor. It was absurd for us to think of trying to bury them. He dragged them to the edge of the veranda and dropped them over the edge to the ground below. He moved jerkily, almost like a man asleep.

"No need to do that," said Evan suddenly, a little while later.

Arthur stopped and looked at him questioningly.

"We'll have to start for the coast," Evan explained uninterestedly. "We can't stick it out here. The natives won't bother us now. The fight's taken out of them."

"But the gorilla?"

"Have to chance it," said Evan slowly. "There's nothing else to do."

"He'll get us within the first ten miles," I remarked, speaking with difficulty because of the peculiar lethargy that affected us all. "You know how he trailed Arthur."

There was a moment's silence, then Arthur automatically resumed his task. Alicia came into the room and silently gave us something to eat. Arthur stopped dumbly and began to chew on his food, forgetting the grisly labor he had been performing but a moment before.

"We can't start to-day, anyway," he said after a little. "We've got to rest. We're all in bad shape and we've two weeks' travel before we reach another white man's house."

Evan made some reply, but I did not catch it. I fell asleep with food in my hands and slept like a dead man for hours. Alicia waked me at noon to eat again.

All that day we were possessed by a peculiar indifference, the result of the reaction from the

tension at which we had lived for so many days. I woke with a start at three o'clock, hearing the dogs bark. Evan came slowly into the room.

"I let the dogs loose," he said, noticing my expression. "They were whining."

"We'll need them to-night, in case the beast comes back." I rose stiffly and went back to douse my head with water. It roused me a little and, after a cup of coffee, I joined the other two. We were all languid and tired, but thoroughly awake now.

"Of course we can't stay on here," Arthur was admitting, "but we wouldn't have one chance in a hundred to make it through the jungle with that ape following us. You've seen how it manages to reach the house here."

"I've figured," said Evan thoughtfully, "that it was in the fringe of bush, and when the drums began to close in from three sides, it was flushed out and came on to hide here in or about the house. It had hidden here before."

"Probably," Arthur agreed. "But that doesn't say how we're going to elude it during a journey of a hundred and fifty miles without carriers."

Evan threw out his hands. "But what are we going to do?" He appealed to me. "What do you think, Murray?"

"If we stay here," I reasoned, "either we'll get him or he'll get us. If we go, he'll probably get one or more of us and we may get him. But we can't stay here. The only thing I can think of is that we had better try for him to-night. With the dogs to warn us, we'll have a better chance than before. If he doesn't come to-night, try to-morrow night. Hang on here as long as we dare and then, if we must, try the trail. If we could strike a caravan coming down from the Hungry Country, now——"

Evan shook his head. "I haven't been very hospitable to the Portuguese traders," he remarked. "They steal my slaves and sell them in Ticao. They don't turn off the main slave trail to my villages any more."

We were, silent for a moment or two.

"Are there any of the rest barricades any short distance away?" asked Arthur. "We might reach one of them and wait for a caravan to come."

From time to time along the great slave trail from the interior, you will find big inclosures made of tree trunks and filled with grass huts. They were originally built for halting places for the caravans that go up and down from beyond the Hungry Country. Of course they are in ill repair because of the attacks of insects and rot upon dead timber in that climate, but the carriers feel safer in them after nightfall, and the slave traders find them convenient to avoid possible attempts to escape off the part of the "voluntary labor recruits" they are escorting to the coast.

"We might try," I said doubtfully. "Frankly, I think the beast would have as much chance at us there as here. If we happened on a caravan right away, though, it would help."

"Why doesn't the damned thing go away?" Arthur looked at us with something of dread in his eyes. "I shot its mate four hundred miles away, up in the Kongo. It trailed me those four hundred miles, making attempt after attempt on me. I wounded it once, and got a fair shot at it two weeks before Murray brought Alicia and Mrs. Braymore here. I thought I had killed it then. It went off through the trees as if it were badly injured. I'd made sure it was dead."

He began to pace up and down the room nervously.

"I've never known one so far from Kongo before," I said, in an attempt to encourage him. "You know what animals are. They'll stick at a thing for an amazing length of time and then will drop it like a shot. He may get a touch of homesickness any day and swing off to the north again."

"If he only would!" Arthur burst out. "I'm beginning to feel that he's going to get me yet. Something tells me he's going to get me."

"Nonsense," said Evan heartily. "Get a grip on yourself, old man."

"If he killed me," Arthur muttered morosely, "he'd be satisfied. I'm the one he's after. If he killed me, he might go off and leave the rest of you in peace."

"Don't be an ass, Arthur," I told him sharply. "The beast can't distinguish between white men. He'd be just as apt to try to wipe out the lot of us, and I have a strong objection to being wiped out."

Arthur walked out on the veranda and stood there, leaning against the side of the house and staring moodily off into the bush. Evan looked at me significantly.

"Nerves," he said quietly. "I feel the same way, but I'm trying not to show it. I'll go and round up the dogs. I have a feeling that something is due to happen to-night."

I went out to the back. Alicia saw me passing her door and joined me, leaving Mrs. Braymore behind.

"Have you decided on your course?" she asked in a low voice. "You know both of us are willing to do anything you think wise. You mustn't hold back for fear we may not be able to stand hardships."

I shook my head. "The only thing we can do," I said wearily, "is hope the beast turns up to-night and that we kill him."

Alicia put out her hand and let it rest on my shoulder in comradely fashion.

"Please don't be discouraged," she said urgently. "We've stood so much, surely we can endure a little more."

I tried to smile. "We'll stick it out. It must be much harder for you and Mrs. Braymore."

"Don't worry about us." Alicia shook her head decidedly. "It's the waiting for the beast to come that worries you. We're growing accustomed to grisly sights, but you'll never be used to just waiting. Why, I've got so I can look at those poor natives and not even shiver."

My eyes followed her glance. I smiled wryly. "It isn't pleasant for me to look at that particular native," I remarked. "He was one of my carriers. I bought and freed him when he was to be used for food—a tribe in the interior. All my boys joined Evan's blacks."

Alicia looked at me with her large eyes. "Let's go and talk to Arthur," she said suddenly. "He needs cheering as much as you do."

The veranda of the casa went all the way around it. Arthur, when I had seen him, was leaning against the wall before the main door. Alicia and I walked around the outside.

"I didn't thank you for shooting down the hole in the flooring——" I began, then quickly snapped my hand to the pistol at my belt.

From inside the house had come a snarl! Before I could take another step, I heard a queer, gurgling gasp and a sickening crack. In a second I had bolted around the corner of the casa, rushing madly, my automatic in my hand. Arthur had been leaning against the wall near one of the windows. Now he was crumpling limply to the floor, while the curtains behind him were still fluttering where the arms that had broken his neck had beat jerked back. I dashed through the door, absolutely desperate and utterly reckless. A dark form was bounding down the hall that led to the rear. A frightened cry came from the room in which Mrs. Braymore had been left. I ran down the passageway, furious and desperate, I heard a door slam shut—the door of the storeroom! I made for it, stumbled, and fell into the room on all fours.

Evan Graham was in the room, trying to stuff a furry something into an open box! As I sprawled on the floor he whirled and saw me. From his lips issued the identical snarl I had heard five seconds before, and he raised his automatic pistol and fired!

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## CHAPTER IX. THE GORILLA'S SCREAM.

I came slowly back to consciousness, feeling weak and giddy. I essayed to move and found I could not. I opened my eyes. Despite the gathering darkness, I discovered that I was seated in a chair in the large room of the casa. A second attempt to move disclosed the fact that I was tied tightly.

Alicia stared at me dumbly from an opposite chair, and Mrs. Braymore sat in one corner, her face white and set and her eyes full of horror. Evan was standing at his ease by the doorway, smoking with evident enjoyment.

In one of his hands he held a shaggy object that for some seconds held, weakly, my half-focused attention. It was a baglike object, that yet seemed to contain a framework. Not yet awake to full consciousness, I saw that it was strangely animal. It was a mask in the perfect, horrible likeness of a gorilla.

Evan turned and saw my eyes open. "Well, Murray, old top," he said amiably. "You caught me, didn't you?"

My throat was dry and parched, and my shoulder ached abominably. "What the devil?" I croaked weakly.

"Give him some water, Alicia," said Evan cheerfully. "He's thirsty."

Alicia gave me water. "He has my pistol," she whispered despairingly as she bent over me.

Full consciousness returned with a jerk. Evan had shot me. Evan had snarled at me as he fired. Evan—why Evan must have killed Arthur! He grinned approvingly as he saw me straighten in an instinctive effort to break my bonds.

"Ah, feeling better," he commented. "I'm sorry you caught me. I'd have liked to take you back to Ticao and hear you tell the tale of this week's work of ours. You always were a great one for telling tales, Murray."

He puffed luxuriously at his cigarette and looked at the gathering darkness outside.

"You're a connoisseur of tales, Murray, so I think I'll tell you one. I'm going off to get in touch with my natives in a little while, as soon as it's dark, but I've a few minutes to spare and might as well be pleasant during that little while. I'm afraid I'll have to be unpleasant later on, you know."

"I didn't know."

I have never found that losing one's head is an advantage under any circumstances, so I prepared to make an effort to keep mine. Evan waved his hand airily.

"Oh, I'm going to be put to the unpleasant necessity of disposing of you and Mrs. Braymore. No one could regret it more than I do, but the necessity is there. You see, I was the gorilla." He indicated the gorilla mask. "And it wouldn't do for you to tell that story about."

"I can believe it," I admitted. My head was spinning, but I tried to follow what he was saying in the hope of finding something therein to my own advantage.

"You understand, of course," said Evan cheerfully, "that I don't mean that I was the beast whose mate Arthur so inconsiderately shot, or the one who followed his caravan all the way here from the Kongo. That was another gorilla altogether. I simply happen to be the one that hung about the house here. Arthur shot the other one two weeks before you came. It got away, but he must have wounded it fatally. Otherwise it would have turned up long before. I'll admit that I was a little nervous about the animal at first, but I soon realized that it must be dead. I saw to it that Arthur was not similarly convinced, however. I had already made more or less of a plan. You know about my slaves?"

"No," I said rather weakly. I had lost a lot of blood.

"I'd knocked about the West Coast for quite a while before I came here." Evan stopped and drew up a chair. He sat down comfortably. "I had learned the secret of controlling natives. As you know, that secret is fear. I knew that if I could get, say, a village full of them thoroughly afraid of me, they would be to all practical purposes my slaves. Normal means of frightening them would have the disadvantage of not frightening them too much to invoke juju to get rid of me. And juju, invoked against a white man, means poison. The obvious solution was to frighten them by means of the very juju they would use against me."

"Poison?" I asked. My head was spinning, but I tried not to show it.

"No." Evan puffed casually upon his cigarette. "Poison would be the result of the juju. I went at the fountain head. Kongo natives are deadly afraid of gorillas, but just a little way from gorilla country, the natives fear them vastly more than where familiarity has had time to breed, if not contempt, at least some measure of accustomedness. The natives here would be horribly afraid of them. I made my preparations accordingly. Having bribed his excellency the colonial governor, and having had this mask made and learned how to imitate to a fair degree of perfection the cries of the beasts, I came out here. Have you seen my mask?"

He held it out for me to see, even going so far as to strike a light so that I might examine the thing more closely. He held it before my eyes and turned it about. It was an amazingly perfect bit of work, perhaps larger than a normal skull of one of the beasts would be. For all their size, their skulls are comparatively small. It was lifelike to a surprising degree. The disgustingly human, and

yet unhuman ears stuck out against the skull. The jaw protruded in truly simian fashion, and the caked, black lips were drawn back from discolored fangs in a grimace of almost unimaginable ferocity. The broad, flat nostrils were distended in rage, and the eyeholes of the mask sank deep back below the low and beetling forehead. If small, glittering eyes had shone evilly from those now blank holes, I would have been tempted to believe that a live beast was before me.

"Good work, isn't it?" asked Evan. "I came out here with my four overseers, wandered into the village, and metamorphosed myself before the villagers' eyes into a gorilla clad as a man, which at one moment spoke with the voice of a man, ordering them to obey, and the next screamed at them in tones of one of the monstrous apes of which they were in such dread. I built myself this casa, demanded tribute of gums and produce, started a small juju house off in a small clearing, and in a couple of weeks had established myself as a deity, demanding to be worshiped and sacrificed to, exacting all sorts of tribute, and so on. Very profitable, I assure you.

"They soon believed that I could change myself into a gorilla at will and respected me immensely. I took care to throw a few scares into them. In Japan, some years ago, I learned a small and very elemental jujutsu trick which requires very little strength to break a man's neck. A few broken necks, a few snarls, a scream or so of rage, and they'd no more think of crossing my will than they'd think of jumping into the fires of hell."

"They attacked the house," I remarked, trying behind my back to wriggle one of my hands free from the bonds that held it fast.

"They'll suffer for that." Evan was smiling, but there was something in his tone that made me feel slightly cold. "They'll suffer for that. I told my juju priests to take the people off into the woods and keep them busy with a juju council until I had finished my business with you. They forced your boys to go with them. They simply got out of hand, that's all. The witch doctor you and Arthur shot was coming to tell me that they were out of control. If I had gone and appeared among them, wearing my gorilla mask, and snarled at them once, they would have been like lambs. I simply couldn't, get away from you people without making you suspicious."

"But what was the object of it all?" I demanded. I had found it impossible to free even one hand.

"Arthur was my elder brother," said Evan amiably. "Consequently, being English, he had all the money in the family. I do not like West Africa. If I disposed of Arthur, I could go back to England and live with some comfort. I thought of shooting him and calling it an accident, but people would talk, you know. When he came here with his tale of being followed by a gorilla, I saw the possibilities. When I heard you people were coming up, I saw I would have witnesses. My idea was to convince you of the presence of a gorilla, break Arthur's neck precisely as I did this afternoon, and return to England. I rather thought I would be able to comfort Alicia, in time."

Alicia shuddered. Evan grinned at her.

"I shall comfort you, Alicia, but presently. My people will return, Murray and your estimable chaperon will be disposed of, and you and I will escape precariously to Ticao, telling the tale of hairbreadth escapes during the uprising of my natives and during the trip."

"Never!" said Alicia desperately.

"Oh, yes." Evan was polite, but there was evil determination in his tone. "You never cared much for Arthur, and I more than suspect you're in love with Murray. You'll do as I say for his sake."

There was mute interrogation in my expression.

"Not to save your life, of course, Murray," Evan hastened to assure me. "I really can't allow you to spread tales of what happened up here. She'll be pleasant to make sure that you depart this life, er—comfortably."

Alicia looked at me in despair.

Evan glanced out the window. "Not time for me to start off yet," he remarked. "They'll have to go down and worship me when I turn up in this little fixing." He indicated the gorilla-head mask in his hand. "Is there anything that isn't clear to you?"

"I don't understand anything," I said.

"I'll begin at the beginning, in your own fashion. Let's see. Biheta. You remember you were here the night she was installed in the casa? One of my servants had been insolent. I sent word to the village that Biheta was to be sent here to take the other's place. She was frightened, and the juju ceremony you saw was for the purpose of heartening her for the time she would spend in proximity to my godlike person. When the other servants left, by my orders, she was too stupid to go with them. She was perpetually frightened, anyway. You see, she saw me dispose of the servant that had been insolent. Jujutsu is useful. I'll show you how to break a neck." He started to rise, then sank back in his chair. "Come to think of it, I need you to convince Alicia that she had better do as I tell her. You will depart this life to-morrow. As I was saying, Biheta stayed behind when she should have cleared out with the others. So, in the middle of the night, while on guard, I went into her room, wearing my mask. I made a noise, she woke, saw me—and that was the end of that. The photograph of the retina of her eye showed the face of this mask. Rather clever idea, don't you think?"

"Very," I admitted.

"Thanks." Evan smiled sarcastically. "Well, Arthur just imagined he heard the beast following him through the trees. He shot at nothing, when you and he went down to explore the village. My own 'encounter' with the animal when I started off in the jungle alone was purely imaginary. I

scratched my own face and jabbered like the gorilla myself. Like this——"

He emitted a succession of incredible sounds, so beastlike and ferocious in their tones that I could hardly believe it was not an animal uttering them. There was a peculiar echo from the bush outside.

"The dogs were excited in the storeroom," Evan went on easily, "because they could smell the fur of the mask I kept in a small box in there. When I told that wild tale of a hairy arm reaching in at the window and dragging the dog out, to fling it with a broken neck into the courtyard, I need not say that I had done the killing. And my 'seeing' the gorilla on the roof was more fiction. Of course he wasn't there at dawn. I was laughing in my sleeve at you people all night long, while we patrolled the courtyard. The silhouette of the gorilla's head you two saw on the window curtain was the shadow of your humble servant. I had decided that the play had gone far enough. The presence of the gorilla had been proved. The three of you, my present audience, would corroborate my story of the gorilla's having killed Arthur. I was on my way to break his neck. You nearly got me that time, and I had to kill the dog to get away. Then the natives got out of hand. I could have stopped them by a simple appearance, but you people would have missed me. I waited until they were near the house, then rushed out in my mask, snarling and raging at them, and they ran. After that I hid the mask quickly and pretended to you that I had been knocked down. It was really very simple. With the natives quieted for a few days, I simply carried out my plans to dispose of Arthur. I'm sorry I'll have to put you two out of the way, but Arthur's dead, I'm his heir, I'm going to marry Alicia and become a country gentleman in England, and I can't let you two people talk."

"You'll never dare take me to England," said Alicia, desperately white.

"You'll marry me, Alicia," said Evan coolly. "You won't split. When you see the preparations my natives will make for the entertainment of Murray and Mrs. Braymore, you'll swear to anything, and you'll marry me when we get to Ticao. You'll corroborate my tales of a slave uprising, too. You don't know what can be done to Murray, and will be done before he dies, unless you do as I say."

Alicia moistened her lips. I saw her half close her eyes.

Evan laughed. "It's about time for me to call on my natives. This will be our wedding night, Alicia. One of the local witch doctors will marry us, and the ceremony will be repeated when we get to Ticao. Murray and Mrs. Braymore will be kept alive until to-morrow lest you refuse to go through with the ceremony. If you hesitate, I dare say I'll be able to make up your mind for you. Too bad I'll have to kill the other two, though." He strolled over to the door. "I'll call up my natives. You'll hear the gorilla again."

Derisively he opened his lips and from them issued a strange cry, that I had heard once before. It was the challenge of a bull ape to battle. And—good Heaven! *It was answered!*

There was a snarl behind him. He turned with a gasp. There on the veranda, leaping toward him, he saw, not a masquerading white man, posing as a jungle god, but a colossal gorilla in actuality, gnashing its teeth in rage, and with its huge, hairy arms outstretched.

I shall remember Evan's shriek when the beast seized him, to the end of my days. Sometimes, even now, I start up at midnight with the echo of it in my ears. For one instant the two figures were outlined against the fading light of the sky. Then the ferocious fangs buried themselves in Evan's throat and the beast leaped clumsily to the ground, bearing the still-struggling body in its immensely muscled arms.

We heard the sounds from the courtyard, sounds at whose meaning I do not wish to guess. And then our ears rang with the horrible, incredible, terrifying scream of a gorilla that has made a kill.

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## CHAPTER X. AT THE PADRE'S.

We passed through the night somehow. Alicia, half dead with terror, managed clumsily to release me, but weak as I was from loss of blood, we dared attempt nothing that night.

In the morning the great ape was gone. I might as well say now that I believe that it was the same animal that had trailed Arthur, and which Arthur had gravely wounded some two weeks before our arrival.

For three weeks it had hidden while the wound healed, and then came cautiously toward the casa again. It heard Evan's first beastlike cries, and its response was probably the queer echo I had thought I heard from the bush. It crept forward, and when Evan derisively uttered the challenge cry of the monster anthropoids, it had leaped to the attack.

Limited as is the intelligence of the creatures, it would never distinguish between white men. A white man had killed its mate. It had killed a white man. With the blood lust sated, by now the shaggy brute was doubtless swinging rapidly through the treetops toward its Kongo hunting grounds.

That is my explanation. I know I never saw any other sign of the huge gorilla either then or at any later time. I have told the tale on different occasions to many different people, and my surmise has always been accepted as correct.

Our predicament was not entirely done away with by the disappearance of the gorilla that had come to our deliverance so unexpectedly. We were still a hundred and fifty miles from another white man or woman, absolutely without carriers, and I was abominably weak from the wound Evan had inflicted. Our chances looked slight indeed until nearly noon of the next day.

A very much ashamed, and a very apologetic black figure emerged from the bush on the side farthest from the village. It was followed by about forty other similarly ashamed and apologetic figures. I recognized Mboka, my gun-bearer in the lead and had to struggle to restrain an impulse to jump up and shout aloud to Alicia that we were all right at last.

Instead, I sat impassively on the veranda until Mboka stopped humbly in the courtyard before me. I paid absolutely no attention, but smoked indifferently as if his presence or absence were a matter in which I had no concern. He waited and fidgeted, scraping his bare feet embarrassedly on the ground, until at last I looked down and inspected him impersonally. I looked away again. Presently, looking off through the bush as if he were the most insignificant atom in the universe, I remarked:

"Pig!"

Mboka beamed. It is the custom in West Africa for the lower in rank, the inferior, to speak first, but Mboka was too ashamed to presume. He stood there uneasily and tried to look apologetic while I informed him that he had put me to some inconvenience, that he was to go and never dare appear before me again. I added that I would see to it that no other trader ever dreamed of employing him for any purpose whatever.

It does not do for a white man to admit himself in any degree dependent on a black. I told him that he need never come to me again and resumed my stare into the bush. He may have had some idea of trying to bargain with me, but my attitude put him back. He hesitatingly and humbly told me what I already knew quite well, that he and the others had been forced to accompany Evan's natives off into the bush.

One or two of the carriers had been swept away by the fervor of the juju council and had joined Evan's folk in their attack on us, but the others had now fled to put themselves under my protection. They begged that I would receive them again and assured me of their undivided loyalty, if I would take them again into my service.

I kept them waiting for an hour while I went indoors and ate a leisurely breakfast. When I came outside again, I seemed to have forgotten them. My indifference completed their subjugation. They were abject in their pleadings for me to take them back. When I finally consented, it was with the scornful statement that I was going to take them to Ticao and discharge them from my service forever.

They burdened themselves joyfully with the loads they had brought up from Ticao and waited anxiously for me to announce my readiness to start. Alicia and Mrs. Braymore would have to walk, as their ox-cart was useless. I began the journey on foot, but could not keep up. I was too weak.

The second day I had to be carried in an improvised hammock, and the third or fourth day I found myself in a raging fever. Alicia worked over me bravely, but I lapsed into semidelirious feverishness in which I was of no use whatever.

I must credit Mboka with a great deal more faithfulness than I had expected of him. He kept the carriers under an iron rule, and Alicia told me later that the length of the journeys was stretched to the greatest possible distance every day. With nothing but the scantiest of medicines—as my own drug chest had been accidentally left behind at Evan's deserted casa—she fought off the fever, but when we arrived at the Padre Silvestre's mission, I was in very bad shape. The padre doctored me, however, and in two weeks I had not only ceased my delirium, but could move about a little. I remember the first evening I was allowed to sit up.



The padre, Alicia, and Mrs. Braymore had celebrated my recovery at dinner that night, the padre making one of his graceful little speeches on the subject. I am not of the padre's faith, but we are great friends, and after dinner he announced that I might sit up. With great ceremony they got me into a chair and made a great to-do over me. Then they helped me to a chair on the little screened-in veranda of the padre's house, where I could look out at the perfect African night and see the small mission church, and farther off the village in which the padre's converts live.

Mrs. Braymore went back indoors to discuss with him some aid she proposed to give the mission. She was an Episcopalian, but she had seen the work the padre had done, and a difference of creed had long since seemed unimportant. The main thing was that the natives needed aid. Alicia and I on the veranda talked for a long time, disjointedly.

"What will happen to Evan's plantation?" she asked presently, naming the place with reluctance.

"The natives will move away," I answered thoughtfully, "and a tradition will grow up, making the casa the abode of a devil-god who will destroy all comers. Slave caravans passing down the great slave trail will make offerings to appease the evil spirits in the house, and a juju house will appear, where the witch doctor will grow rich and fat on the contributions he will exact. The casa itself will stand untenanted and deserted, while tall grasses grow in the courtyard, and at last the house will fall in shapeless ruins."

"It was terrible there," said Alicia with a shudder. "And Evan—it is almost unbelievable that he should have done what he did. He was always a black sheep, but that—"

I was silent for a moment. "He was planning to force you to marry him," I said presently. "Not thinking of how you might feel for Arthur."

"Arthur was like a brother," Alicia said sadly. "I was very, very fond of him. We were engaged, but we had nearly agreed that we did not care for each other enough to marry. I was very fond of him, though. I could not have cared for him more if he had really been my brother."

The great white African moon was silvering the whole earth with its pale rays. From the village came negro voices, singing the native words to an old, old devotional melody. From within the house came the rustle of papers. The padre and Mrs. Braymore were going over the details of the small hospital she proposed to erect for the mission. The padre is an old man, and more than forty years of his life have been spent at his little mission station, trying to help the natives despite the Portuguese and the *servaçal*. Now, at last, he was to have adequate equipment through Mrs. Braymore's generosity.

She was going back to her beloved England, where she would go to her five-o'clock teas and discuss the neighborhood gossip and hear the curate talk about the possibility of repairing the parish house. I knew she was glad that she could again sink into the pleasant rut of well-to-do English country life. Alicia would go too, and I would see her no more. It suddenly seemed unbearable that she should leave me.

"I shall be leaving Ticao soon," I said abruptly.

Alicia turned. Her face was grave and sweet in the half light.

"Why? I thought—"

"This is an evil country. White men denigrate and black men are like beasts. I am sick of the place. I shall go back somewhere in the States and see what I can find to do there."

"I'm glad you're leaving Ticao," she said slowly. "I should not like to think I would never see you again. We have grown to be very good friends."

I waited a moment or so and then said quietly:

"When Evan was explaining to us after he had shot me, he said that he would force you to do as he said by threats of my death by torture. You remember?"

Alicia nodded silently.

"He said that he believed you cared a little for me. I have been hoping very much that he was right. I'm more or less of a ne'er-do-well, but if there's any hope for me, I'll try hard to change."

I waited breathlessly for her to answer. She looked out at the moonlight for what seemed an age-long time. At last she turned again to me. I had a moment of panic, and then I saw that she was smiling.

"Why, Murray," she said in a flash of mischief. "I may call on you to change after a while, but for the present, say for the next ten or twenty years, I think you're perfectly all right as you are."

I had not thought myself so strong, but when I saw her smiling at me with her face close to my own, my fever weakness left me and I reached out my arms. Alicia was quite considerate of me. She struggled only a very little.

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