

The Monkey God

*Savage Rites of the Pygmies and Mysterious Jungle Murder
Confront Jeff Westman and Scotty Macrae in
the Weird Depths of the Congo*

A Complete Novelette of African Adventure By
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CHAPTER I

Sudden Death

AT the same instant, Kilimi, the giant Wambuba black, and the white man, Jeffrey Westman, in the lead of the safari, froze in their tracks. The ivory hunter was a veteran of the sinister Ituri forests. The Congo jungle was dangerous territory, full of lurking death. He knew it. Behind them the porters crouched instinctively, tense and alert.

The two leaders looked at each other in silence. The same sound, harmless to the ordinary ear but unnatural to their keen senses, had startled them both—an approaching rustle of dank leaves, the crackling of tangled vines. The faithful black turned his glowing face to his master.

"*Watu!*" He breathed the word in Swahili and plucked his precious tarboosh from his head. Then he said again in a tense whisper: "*Watu, bwana! People.*"

Westman nodded. Kilimi, sensing danger, tucked his red fez for safekeeping into his monkey-skin belt. In silence he snapped the heavy gun he carried from "safety" to "ready" and exchanged it for the light Winchester the ivory hunter carried.

"Quick, Kilimi! *Pesi-pesi!*"

Kilimi darted from the trail, swift as a flash of vanishing light. Westman gestured with his free hand to the frightened blacks of his safari. A

moment after their ears had caught the first warning of danger, the elephant trail was completely deserted.

In the dense growth, Kilimi crouched by the side of his master. Two flaps of his cartridge belt were open now, ready in an instant to feed fresh shells to the gun Westman held in his hand. The rustling came closer, like the slithering progress of a snake. They could see nothing. Suddenly a piercing shriek shattered the stillness of the jungle.

Kilimi tensed. The white man clutched his ebony arm restrainingly. Behind them the Wambuba porters grasped their spears more tightly, white eyeballs rolling.

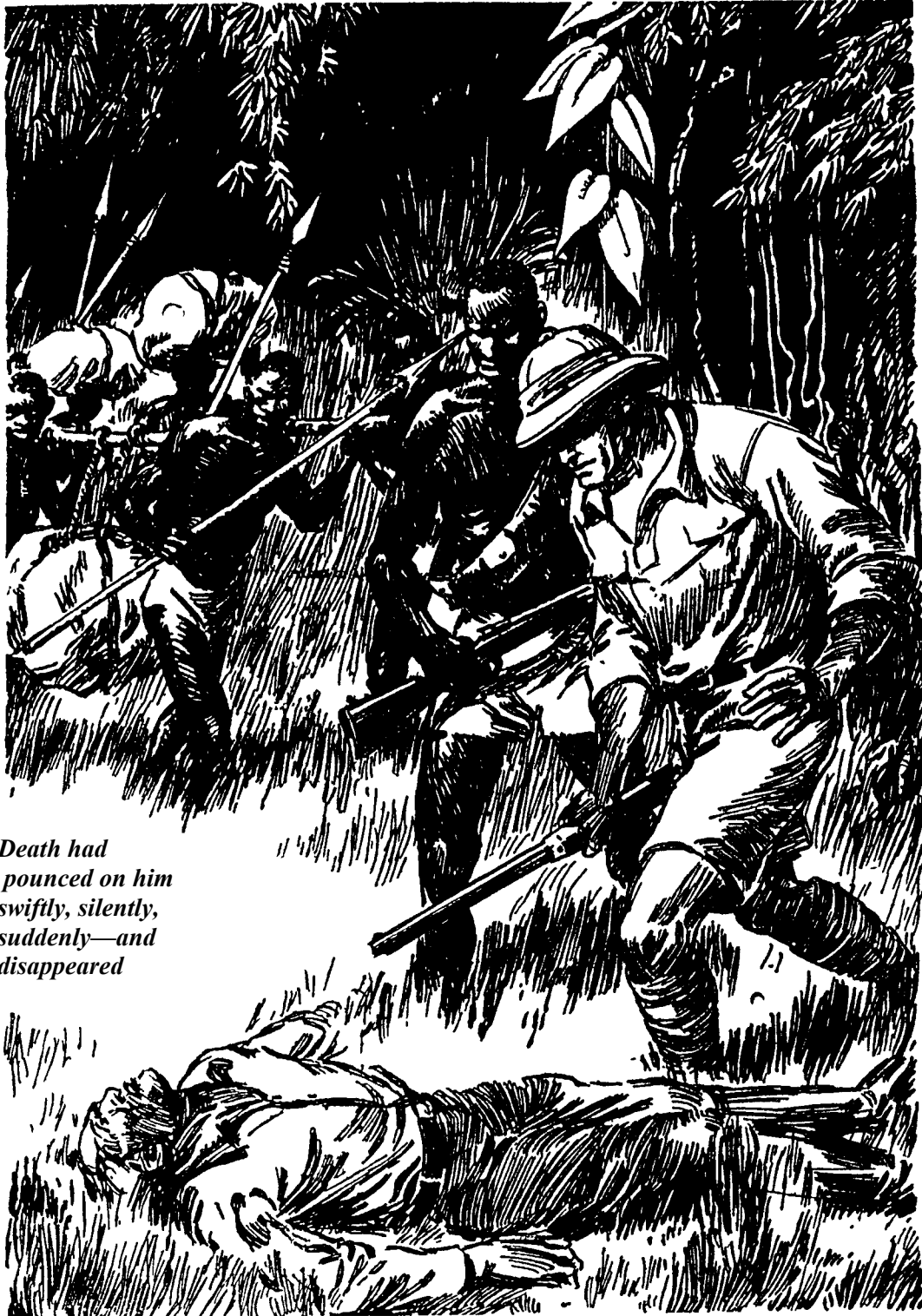
Again it sounded, a blood-curdling human shriek of terror that ended in a horrible gurgle. It mingled harshly with the enraged chattering of monkeys—and then died to a dreadful silence.

Kilimi swayed his giant torso on his heels. Westman peered through the mangroves. His lips were set in a hard bar.

"*Chui!*" the Wambuba whispered fearfully.

The ivory hunter shook his head grimly. "The forest leopard does not hunt in daylight, Kilimi!"

He gestured with his hand. His heavy rifle in readiness, the pair crawled through the tangle of growth in silence, Kilimi's naked feet and Westman's mosquito boots making no sound as they circled to come upon the clear trail, ahead of



*Death had
pounced on him
swiftly, silently,
suddenly—and
disappeared*

whatever danger threatened.

Suddenly the Wambuba sprang to his full height. He flung one arm out.

"Bwana, look!"

In the center of the open trail lay the body of a man. His disfigured face was upturned to the brassy Congo sky, his arms outstretched at his sides, one hand still tightly clutching a rifle. The

shape lay motionless, with sightless eyes opened. Jeffrey Westman did not need to be told the man was dead. Yet he was armed—and they had heard no shot fired in his own defense. Only that shriek of horror; then silence and death.

A SHUDDER swept Kilimi's giant frame, for a man does not let himself be killed with a loaded rifle in his hands unless—Tribal superstitions and dread of *dawa*—the jungle magic—was strong in his aboriginal soul.

"*Wazungi!*" he whispered in awe.

The ivory hunter nodded. There could be no question of it. The dead heap there was a white man. Death had pounced on him swiftly, silently, suddenly—and disappeared. The jungle swallowed all things.

In grim silence Westman stepped into the open. The blazing Congo sun had yet an hour in the heavens. But in the depth of the great Ituri forest the feverish African dusk was already deep on the ghastly festoons of interlacing creepers; and the age-old elephant trail was splashed with weird shadows. The throb of signal drums started, faint, distant, and invisible—the mysterious heartbeat of the land.

Westman, tall and powerful and youthfully erect with his .475 elephant gun in the crook of his arm, had pressed through the jungle from Murumwa at a speed that showed plainly that this time he was not in search of that eternal dream of the ivory hunter, the father of all the elephants, whose tusks trail the ground. The summons of his friend, Scotty Macrae, of the Congo Concession Company, had been as imperative as it had been enigmatic.

Macrae was not a man to scare easily, yet he had sent a black runner through the jungle to his friend in Murumwa. And now death met this friend as a sinister proof. Westman's sun-scorched face showed his anxiety in drawn jaw-muscles.

Staring down at that fellow in the middle of the trail, he saw a face lacerated horribly and twisted in the agony and the terror of his death. They had heard his death shriek not more than a few moments before. His rifle was still in his hand. He had not fired so much as a single shot in his defense. Murder had leaped upon him mysteriously, swiftly.

The ivory hunter's trained eye passed quickly

over the ground, then along the wall of the jungle for some sign, animal or human, to betray the cause of death and its perpetrator. He saw nothing. What did it mean?

JEFFREY WESTMAN dropped to one knee. The flesh of the dead man's face was torn, bleeding, the blood not yet coagulated. And as the ivory hunter bent closer, he cursed softly under his breath. It was George Craig, a Congo Concessions man sent out recently from Boma as Scotty Macrae's assistant.

Westman had met him once in Murumwa before the man went into the jungle to join the Scot on the smelling back creeks of the Ituri River. There was no mistaking his identity. There was the strong, stubborn jaw and the shock of dust-colored hair. Westman hadn't thought himself so close to Macrae's compound.

What was the fellow traveling the jungle alone for? That in itself was suicidal. Was it a warning to him, Westman? By whom? And for what reason? What had caused Craig's sudden swift death? Men don't just drop dead that way. And sudden and violent it had been, there hadn't been time for him to so much as fire a single shot in self-defense!

The ivory hunter's brow contracted in a frown. Very carefully he turned the body over. As the back came into full view, Westman's teeth ground together.

Between the shoulder blades were several slashes.

Native spears? He dismissed the thought instantly. There was no spear anywhere about, and native killers *threw* their weapons. These slashes were clean stabs. One of them had penetrated to poor Craig's heart at the first thrust. No native weapon could have made them.

In spite of his flame-red hair and the scorched skin of his face, Jeffrey Westman, Congo ivory hunter, was a young man. But a veteran to the jungle. And studying every sign, he knew at once that those thrusts in the back that had brought death to George Craig could have been made only by a razor-sharp blade of civilized steel.

But a white man's knife in the heart of the Ituri jungle must have a white man to wield it! Yet other than Scotty Macrae, there were no white

men within twenty miles of the Congo Concession's gold and diamond workings on the crocodile-infested streams of the Ituri Valley.

WESTMAN came quickly to his feet, barking an order in Swahili to his men to remain where they were without stirring. Carefully, with his eyes glued to the ground, he went over the terrain of the clearing, working slowly from one side to the other, back and forth. Meticulously he searched. He found—nothing. There was not so much as a single track of man or beast other than a single trail made by Craig himself. Bordering the elephant trail his trained eye spied broken vines and torn creepers. The dying man had clutched at these, no doubt, in his brief agony. But on the ground itself there was—nothing! Yet even a leopard leaves a track.

Baffled, Westman dropped again to one knee beside Craig's body. The shock of sand-colored hair seemed in spots to have been literally torn by the roots from the scalp. Jeffrey's gaunt face frowned. He recalled for a moment the gruesome tales he had eked out from the lips of Scotty Macrae's runner, the black who had brought to Murumwa his plea for Westman's help. Tales of mysterious, unaccountable deaths; of the dread superstitions that swept the natives like wildfire; of jungle magic.

AND now, almost under his very eyes and not a mile from Macrae's compound, without any explanatory tracks or marks on the soft jungle floor, George Craig lay stabbed to death!

As he rose deliberately to his feet, Kilimi bent eagerly toward him. "You find marks, *bwana*?" he whispered softly in Swahili.

Westman shook his head. "No marks, Kilimi."

"*Dawa lutala. Watu lutala.* The magic of the accursed people!"

Jeffrey looked at him sharply, reclaiming his Winchester from the shaking hand of the giant black.

"Nonsense, Kilimi!" he barked shortly. "Kilimi no run away! Understand? We fight together before, no?" he went on levelly in guttural Swahili. "We fight together again."

For an instant the black's eyes wavered to the body lying at their feet and darted swiftly to the

blackening walls of the jungle on all sides. Then he squared his splendid shoulders. His free hand came up clenched, and he struck his bare black chest a mighty thump.

"No," he growled, "Kilimi no run away. My master fight—Kilimi fight!"

"Good man," Westman replied simply. "Tell your Wambubas to make a litter for the dead *Wazungi*. We camp tonight with Scotty Macrae in the ancient village of death. You remember, Kilimi?"

The black's face split in a savage grin of pleasure at the remembered battle in which he had partaken at that place Westman called the village of death.

"*Ndio, bwana*," he growled. "I remember."

Westman and his faithful gun-boy took the lead again. With their grisly burden coming directly behind them, the little safari pressed onward through the dark ominous jungle.

CHAPTER II

"The Accursed Magic Again!"

THE westering sun dove abruptly beneath the jungle fronds in a bombshell of color and light. Several moments later Westman heard the cries and noise of many men crashing toward them. Dominating the native clamor, he recognized the periodic bass hail of Scotty Macrae.

"Craig! Darn ye, where are ye? Craig!"

A bitter smile flitted across the ivory hunter's face at the Scot's naïve manner of search. In a moment Westman and his safari burst upon the rim of a large clearing.

To the right the short, stocky form of the Scotsman could be seen, returning at the head of his search party of half-naked blacks.

The huge compound was entirely surrounded by a high stockade. Behind the pointed stakes and through the open gates the wattled native grass huts reared their cones. Ahead of Westman rose the administration building, a rough hut of thatch with a narrow *stoep*; and directly behind it a gigantic banyan tree sent its drooping creepers weaving ghostily in the twilight.

Suddenly Scotty Macrae spied the newcomers and, mistaking the Wambubas for his

own blacks and the white man for the man he was in search of, he let out an angry bellow:

"Craig! Ye bloody fool! Don't ye know better'n to run off at night into—"

"It's not Craig, Mac."

The Scot, coming forward on the run, stopped dead in his tracks. Then he let out a joyous shout.

"Jeff!" He sprang forward eagerly, rifle in hand. "Westman! God, and I'm glad you're here. Didn't even know whether my black'd ever live to reach you in Murumwa."

"Your runner came in five days ago. I left at once."

"Knew you would, Jeff."

"He brought some pretty gruesome tales with him, Mac. Now what's all this black magic nonsense?"

The stocky Scot sobered instantly, letting his huge hand come away from Westman's which all the while he had been clasping in hearty welcome.

"**I**T—it's a rotten mess, Jeff," he bit off between clenched teeth. "Talk it over later. Right now I'm worried about that kid they sent out from Boma. Went off by himself into the jungle an hour ago and—"

"Craig?"

"Yes, he—"

"Don't hunt him any more, Scotty."

"You— What do you mean, Jeff?"

"He's dead."

"Dead!"

"My Wambubas have got him on that litter. Stabbed through the back. Kilimi will bury him, Mac," the ivory hunter went on quietly, "like one of his own tribe. Standing upright with his rifle at his side like a warrior ought to be buried."

"My God! Another!"

The Scot said this with savage bitterness. For a moment the two friends stared at each other. Then in silence Macrae led the way to the administration building. Behind them the door flap of *kasai* cloth fell back in place without a flutter. Outside, Westman's Wambubas mingled with Macrae's blacks, Kilimi growling orders, his brilliant Mussulman tarboosh the envy of all the savages.

Scotty Macrae fell wearily to the rattan settee and turned up the grease lamp. In its light his

square face showed itself set in stony ridges. Westman dropped to a camp stool facing him, his long legs before him. For a moment the pair listened intently to the faint, maddening beat of distant signal drums; until suddenly the Scot's clenched fist came down with a thump on the narrow teakwood table. He swore savagely.

"**I** TELL you, Jeff, it's enough to drive a man crazy out here. Blackness—the jungle—clammy heat and snarling blacks. Them drums going all night long. Death ready to jump on your back any minute!" He leaned forward.

"Westman," he barked fiercely, "I can stand the sight of blood drawn in a clean open fight as good as any man. I'm not squeamish, God knows. But this stinking back-sticking! It sends shivers up my spine. They don't know what a man's up against here, them company directors on the coast at Boma.

"Gold and diamonds, that's what they want! And they send a poor kid like Craig out here. Why, he didn't have a chance! I'm beginning to think I haven't, either. But I tell you this, Jeff!" His fist pounded the table again. "I'll get to the bottom of this if it—"

"Suppose you tell me about it," Westman interrupted him softly.

"You saw as much of what it's about as I know, Jeff," the Scot replied, more soberly, "when you found young Craig."

"Who—"

"I don't know."

"What was he doing in the jungle alone?"

"**I** VE warned him a hundred times, Jeff. But he was a kid, full of fight. Only he didn't know how to fight—out here. He was looking for a black who skipped out with a few raw diamonds from the diggings."

"Has that happened before?"

"The blacks making off with the stuff? Yes, before I sent for you, Jeff, half a dozen lit out." The Scot leaned forward, his eyes ablaze. "And every one of them was found murdered in the jungle! Every one!" he repeated. "Stabbed and lacerated and torn, those we were able to find, with handfulls of their kinky hair yanked out by the roots as if—"

"What?"

Westman barked his interruption fiercely, coming abruptly upright in his chair.

"The savages hide the small stones in the kinks of their hair. You know that, Jeff. Some one's laying for them out there in the jungle. Whoever it is, after murdering 'em he hunts their scalps for the looted stuff. It's bestial, I tell you! Doesn't just pick the pebbles out of their hair. Blast him, he fairly rips the scalp off! Why, what's the matter, Jeff?"

Westman relaxed slowly. "Mac," he breathed, "that's exactly what I noticed about Craig's head when I found him."

"You—"

Macrae stopped short. A moment of silence fell between the two friends.

"Are there are any other whites around here beside yourself?" Westman asked at length.

"Not for twenty miles, Jeff." The Scot shook his head. "Not till Lulatala, an old slave-trading village far up the river. Trader called Joe Swango lives there. Comes down the trails once a month for me with supplies. Decent sort, only close-mouthed."

"THESE blacks of yours, Mac, who ran off and—died. How'd you find 'em?"

"Riddled through the back with spear holes."

"And their own *assegai*? Were they flung? Was there ever signs of a fight?"

"Never, Jeff! Their spears were still in their hands. Too yellow to show fight."

"Would you call young Craig yellow, Mac?"

"Good Lord, no! He'd fight ten wildcats twice his size."

"Well, *he* never put up a fight, either."

"What—!"

"His rifle was still in his hand, without a shell fired. And the rottenest part of it is, Mac, that he was killed not more than five minutes before we got to him. And there wasn't even a bootmark or the track of a native's foot to show who did it!"

"Tommyrot! You must be wrong. What do you think killed him? Black jungle magic?"

"That's just what Kilimi thinks, Mac," Westman said softly.

"Bah! You, too? Some savage leaped on his back and speared him for the diamonds he thought he had."

"Impossible! If it was a Wambute forest pygmy—their spears are always poisoned with datura lily extract. The wounds swell blue and they don't bleed! It wasn't a spear at all. The holes are too clean, not like the wound from the broad paddle of a black's spear!"

"But for the love of God, Jeff, what was it then that—"

"A white man's long steel dagger. Nothing else makes wounds like that."

"But there isn't a white man between here and Lulatala, I tell you!" Macrae gasped incredulously.

"Except this Joe Swango you tell me about," Westman reminded him.

"That's a wrong trail." The Scotsman shook his head. "Joe's no angel, but he hasn't the nerve for that. If you saw him, you'd know. Besides, he can't kill blacks and murder Craig a mile from my compound—while he's in Lulatala twenty miles away. Half these blacks were murdered when runner boys of mine swear they were talking to him the same night in Lulatala. It's a band of savages, I tell you!"

Westman shook his head. He leaned back against the wattled wall of the hut, his hard, grey eyes half closed.

"WRONG, Mac," he mused. "Blacks don't work that way and you know it. What chance would a black have of disposing of looted diamonds? Suppose he came to a post and offered raw diamonds to a trader? They'd jump him so quick he wouldn't know what struck him. There's something more sinister and a blessed sight more dangerous about this than a band of stray savages or Wambute forest pygmies." The lean hunter straightened slowly in his chair. "You remember Abd el Hussan, Mac?" he asked quietly.

"I'll say I remember him! Didn't I have a time getting the Governor General to send the approval you wanted, so that black boy of yours, Kilimi, could mummify the swine's head for his collection of post decorations!"

Westman grinned slightly at this. Kilimi cherished those bizarre and ghastly relics of his hunts with his master. But the smile vanished from his angular face almost at once.

"Well, Mac, I was wondering," he mused on. "You remember the Arab was digging here for

raw diamonds before you and your company ever knew the deposit was here? I'll wager some one in Lulatala knew about his pretty game before we broke it up six months ago."

"But Abd el Hussan is dead, Jeff."

"Sure he's dead. But he's not the only crooked trader in the Congo."

"Well, I don't mind admitting I'm stumped, Jeff," Mac conceded wearily. "Unless this killer flies through the night like a bat! All I know is there's murder stalking around this place till it's got me balmy. When I told Joe Swango about the way the blacks died he grinned and said something was wrong with their face dye if it wouldn't keep off the jungle magic. They smear their faces with white *ngula* dye for night travel, you know. It's supposed to scare off the evil devils of the forest." Macrae shuddered. "I can't help thinking of poor Craig."

WESTMAN nodded understandingly and seemed to be listening to the moan of the dank night breeze through the swaying creepers of the ancient banyan. At last he stood up.

"We'll both think clearer after a sleep, Mac."

"Aye, Jeff," the Scot murmured from his seat.

The ivory hunter turned away. But he never reached the curtained doorway of the sleeping room. At the instant his hand touched it a piercing shriek stabbed the night outside. Westman whirled. Bellows of terror sounded outside now; hoarse native growls; the swift patter of naked feet racing for shelter.

Then that single blood-curdling shriek sounded once more, and ended as if a savage hand had instantly clutched the throat. Outside the door-flap Kilimi's unmistakable bass sounded anxiously.

"*Bwana, bwana!*" he cried; and, waiting for no summons, he tore aside the curtain and stood crouched in the opening with blazing eyeballs. "Come quick! The accursed magic again!"

He stood there trembling slightly, sleek muscles rippling under the dark skin polished with castor oil. Macrae leaped to his feet. Westman sprang forward, plucking up his Winchester as he went.

"Come along, Mac!"

One after the other, they plunged into the night.

CHAPTER III

White Man's Weapon

"DOWN, Mac! On the ground!" Westman warned the Scot.

At the foot of the *stoep* of Macrae's hut, Kilimi had already fallen prone on his stomach, the ivory hunter at his side. For a moment, still blinded by their sudden dash into the dark clearing from the lamp-lit room, they could see nothing. Then gradually monstrous forms and waving shapes materialized amid the black tops of the jungle.

At the mouth of the native workers' stockade the mob of Macrae's blacks crowded, paralyzed with fright. In the center of the clearing Westman's eight warrior porters crouched beyond the light of their dying campfire, all eyes glued to a single spot in the jungle's wall. Kilimi it was who first raised his hand, growling a tense—

"Look, *bwana!*"

A tall shape staggered into the dim light from out of the wall of forest. It swayed drunkenly from side to side: a stalwart savage, naked, except for a loin clout. His face, streaked white with *ngula* dye, wobbled goblin-like above the jet torso.

"Tamwa," Macrae gasped. "The black who bolted with three stolen 'bort' stones—the one poor Craig was hunting."

He started up from his knees. Westman dragged him back to earth. And the black, reaching the edge of the clearing, let out again a single dreadful shriek of terror. At the same instant a dark shape leaped out of blackness, on to the terrorized savage's back. In the ghastly light something flashed three times in rising and descending arcs.

WESTMAN came to one knee, the Winchester at his shoulder. Sighting carefully, he awaited an opportunity to fire. But the attacker, clinging to Tamwa's back, made a true fire impossible in that weird light. Only once his face was turned toward the clearing for an instant. It showed distorted, bestial, framed in shaggy hair, teeth gleaming between snarling lips.

"*Batwa!* Forest dwarf!" Kilimi growled.

"The swine!" Mac roared in helpless rage.

Tamwa collapsed, his attacker still clinging to his back. Throwing caution to the winds,

Westman pulled the trigger without any attempt at a hit, but more with the intention of scaring off the horrible shape. The flash of fire from his Winchester blinded them momentarily. When the smoke cleared, they caught sight of another short, dwarfed body darting out of the jungle. Once more Westman pumped his gun. It was like firing at dancing shadows.

"Kilimi!" he barked. "Throw wood on the fire. Quick!"

Macrae leaped to his feet. Westman followed. The Scot, enraged beyond all caution, started forward. The ivory hunter dragged him back.

"Don't be a fool, Scotty!" he snapped. "Get a brand from the fire. Kilimi! A torch!"

The black came back with a smoking brand in one hand, his long *assegai* clutched in the other. Behind the stockade a fierce pounding of tom-toms started as Macrae's savages took up the chant of their medicine man's desperate effort to scare away the evil spirits of the jungle devils.

"Come on," Westman bit off shortly. "Fire at the first moving thing you see, Mac!"

He led the way carefully toward the spot. On the rim of the jungle nothing stirred. It was as if everything they had seen had been a hallucination, a nightmare. Kilimi came closer with his rude torch. In the narrow circle of its light, Westman and Macrae inspected the torn terrain closely.

Tamwa's body had disappeared. Only a slight hollow betrayed where he had fallen. Macrae gasped, then caught the ivory hunter's arm.

"Jeff! Look here!"

He stooped quickly. When he straightened up he held in his outstretched hand a long narrow-bladed dagger. It was red with freshly spilled blood.

"You were right, Jeff! It *is* a white man's knife that murdered poor Craig—and Tamwa."

WESTMAN nodded. Taking the wicked looking poniard by the haft, he inspected it carefully. Its point was clean. There was no evidence of poison. Hair clung to the handle. When the ivory hunter handed the weapon back to Macrae and brought his fingers to his face, he caught the unmistakable animal odor of the jungle. Westman turned on his gun-boy.

"Kilimi, you are sure you saw no white man?"

The Wambuba shook his head insistently. "No white man. *Batwa*—forest dwarf!"

"They've dragged his body off, Jeff," the Scot put in awed tones.

"Blast it, Mac!" the ivory hunter exploded in exasperation. "It doesn't make sense. Forest dwarfs don't use knives like this. Wouldn't know what to do with a thing like that if they had one. Spears and poisoned darts from blowguns are their weapons! And look at these tracks." He pointed to the torn earth revealed in the flickering light of their torch.

"One of them stabbed your black. At least another one came to help him drag the body away. But, Mac, aside from the track your black left here, there's only one trail of naked savage feet! I don't believe in magic. Walking men leave footprints behind them on this jungle earth!"

MACRAE shuddered. For an instant they stood stock still on the rim of the clearing. Kilimi watched his master with popping eyes. Then, as they stood there, irresolute, a distant drum beat a single reverberating thump. It echoed loudly on the fevered night air above the dolorous whine of the medicine man in the compound behind their backs. Then it sounded again in a slow characteristic rhythm that gradually filled the entire night of darkness with its monstrous throbbing.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Different from the cadence of signal drums. The ivory hunter knew that. Kilimi knew it, too, for he shrank back a pace.

"That's a sacramental drum, Mac," Westman explained with a strange softness to the Scot. "There'll be a moon soon. Somewhere in the heart of the jungle they're calling the followers of Congo magic for the ceremony. That drum and the black we just saw murdered are bound together somehow, just as surely as Tamwa was killed by the same hand that murdered Craig.

"It's all bound together. I feel it, Mac. I don't believe in jungle magic. Whoever is behind this business is playing for high stakes. He's using all he knows of white man's cunning and black man's superstitions. If we find the drum and the orgy it symbolizes, we'll find—something."

"You mean, Jeff, that—"

"I mean, Mac, that we can't sit here any longer waiting. Any one of us may be next! I mean to follow the sound of that drum and see where it leads to. The moon'll be up soon. We may find tracks—and we may not. But we can follow the sound, Kilimi and I."

"Let's go!" the Scot cut in harshly.

"Dangerous business, Mac," the ivory hunter warned. "If we come on a tribe of blacks in a ceremonial orgy and we're discovered—it's certain death."

"Better than sitting here waiting!" Westman nodded and turned to his gun-boy.

"Kilimi," he said quietly in Swahili, "we go to avenge the death of a black man and a white. We need Kilimi, the good hunter. You lead us into the jungle to the noise of the big drum?"

IN the sputtering light of the torch, the black's face was a study in emotion. Superstitious dreads, fear, faithfulness struggled visibly on his jet countenance. Only for an instant he hesitated. Then he drew himself to his full magnificent height.

"*Bwana* go—Kilimi go," he growled shortly.

"Good man, Kilimi. Go pick four Wambuba men with strong hearts and long spears. Then come, too."

The black turned toward the fire where his men stood anxiously waiting. Westman and Macrae followed soberly, intent on inspecting rifles and filling cartridge belts for their perilous venture. The Scot raised his square face in undisguised admiration to the young ivory hunter.

"How in the world do you do it, Westman?" he asked softly. "That black of yours is scared to death and he hasn't a thing to gain—yet he'd follow you into the jaws of hell if you told him to!"

"Pride, Mac," the ivory hunter muttered, almost to himself. "I've taught Kilimi to be proud."

CHAPTER IV

Worshippers of the Monkey God

AS the little party moved warily along the tangled trail, Kilimi and Westman, in the

lead, guided their direction by the booming sound of the single drum. Macrae and the four blacks followed. For perhaps an hour, through tangles and festoons of jungle growth, they traveled the heart of the Ituri jungles, the deep, dull-throated boom of the drum beating ever closer and louder. Suddenly it ceased entirely.

The startling silence froze Kilimi in his tracks, his body tense as a tiger's set for the spring. For a full minute the drum remained silent. Then it started again on its repeated, single note like the beating of some gigantic heart. Kilimi's head came back on his shoulder.

"*Karibu, bwana,*" he whispered. "Very close."

He dropped to his hands and knees now. Crawling forward, he parted the vines and peered through. Then he signaled with his free hand. With a silent gesture, Westman ordered the others to the ground. He led the crawling advance himself to the spot Kilimi commanded. At his side Macrae let out a low hissing of breath between his teeth.

Directly before them—in a slight depression of the land—the worshipping savages were revealed.

The narrow clearing lay bathed in ghastly moonlight. In its center stood a raised dais formed naturally by the rent trunk of a gigantic tree. Some of its dead limbs still reached weirdly upward from its sides. Upon it stood a naked dwarf savage before the great drum. With his clenched fists he pounded it in a maddening rhythm.

At the other end of the platform stood a huge cage of bamboo stakes. In it something black and fantastic, a shaggy creature, danced in a frenzy, chattering insanely with bared teeth. Besides the cage stood a man—giant by contrast with the Wambute pygmies—clothed in dirty white drill trousers; naked to the waist; his face covered entirely by a black cloth.

Below him and all about the riven tree trunk that served as their grisly sacrificial altar sat hunched on their heels the tribe of dwarfs. And these swayed backward and forward to the maddening beat of the sacerdotal drum.

In the pallid light of the ascending moon their hairy torsos looked brown and red skinned rather than black, their faces imp-like and bestial. They were the savage forest dwarfs of the Ituri.

MACRAE, crouching beside Westman, tensed angrily.

"That man!" he growled in a fierce whisper. "The tall one by that cage. He—Jeff, he's white. Look at his chest. What's he wearing that black mask for? Westman, he—"

"Quiet, Mac," the ivory hunter cautioned.

"*Shenzi Nzombi!*" Kilimi's whisper was half dread and half a snort of rage. "Worshipers of the Monkey God!" And he spat disdainfully to show his disgust—a frightened disgust, for he knew their terrible fanaticism.

Tense and anxious, they watched. Suddenly the white man below them dragged upward what appeared to be a human form. This he trussed by means of a rope creeper to one of the jutting limbs of the tree. There it dangled directly before him, a shapeless bundle with a grisly white-dyed face. From his thigh he whipped out a dagger and raised it on high. Above his head its steel blade caught all the light there was in a fierce and wicked gleam.

Macrae's rifle snapped to his shoulder. The next instant he would have fired. Westman grabbed the barrel and barked out a low command.

"Stop it. You want that whole mob at our throats?"

"Good God, Westman! You gonna sit here and let—"

"Don't be a fool, Mac. Look at the thing. It's a dummy. Sacking stuffed with grass and a white face painted on it. Look."

MACRAE gasped. His rifle came slowly down from his shoulder. There was no mistaking it now. The beat of the drum ceased abruptly. The swaying mob of pygmies leaned forward eagerly. In the silence the brutal senseless chattering of the thing in the bamboo cage rose with horrible clarity as it danced about in mad frenzy. The next moment the masked white man plunged his dagger downward into the grass-stuffed dummy. Again and again he buried the flashing steel blade.

At the sight, the watching savages beneath him let out a series of loud, whining wails. With a final savage thrust the white man came upright, cut down the dummy and flung the blade he had been using into the cage that stood close beside

him. Instantly the beast behind the bamboo bars pounced upon it, bawling loudly and clawing the stakes of his cage with legs and arms, the steel blade clenched between his bared fangs.

"Great God, Jeff! It—it's—" Macrae broke off and clutched the ivory hunter's arm. "Look! The black they're dragging up there now! It—look at his face—dyed white with *ngula* dye. By God, it's Tamwa! The black we saw murdered at the edge of our clearing."

HALF a dozen of the hairy dwarfs were dragging the black up on the dais. His limbs twitched occasionally. Life was still in him. The white man with the mask lifted both his arms toward the cage and started a weird, chanting wail. The surrounding worshipers took it up instantly. The air was filled with its frightful sound. Inside the cage the beast snarled and raved, pulling in a fury at the bars.

Westman turned his head. There was loathing and grim bitterness on his face.

"Worshipers of the Monkey God," he growled in a low, husky bass. "No question of it. That blasted renegade in the mask will pull the door open in a minute, Mac. That sacred ape in there—he's on a braided rope. He's been trained to make their sacrifices for them by watching the white swine knife dummies. When the cage opens—stand ready. Kilimi, do you hear? And you Wambuba men?"

"We hear, *bwana*," the faithful black whispered softly.

Westman turned forward again. The white renegade had the door-trip of the cage in both hands. Suddenly he yanked it clear and leaped aside.

A wild shriek of savage joy sounded from the throats of the worshipers as the beast leaped out of its prison, stopped short in its spring only by the restraint of the rope that fastened him. Whipped to a frenzy, it crouched on all fours, snarling. Then, spying the supine body of Tamwa, it let out a throaty chortle and seized the dagger from its teeth by the haft.

The white-smeared face seemed to enrage it beyond all measure. And as it leaped upon the unstirring black, the crouching dwarfs shrieked their insane pleasure at the expected blood orgy, goading the beast on with their gibberish.

WESTMAN snapped his gun from safety and brought it swiftly to his shoulder. Carefully he sighted down the sleek barrel. Only a moment he hesitated—then pulled the trigger.

The reverberating shot echoed like a clap of thunder on the fevered jungle night. Whether he had scored a hit or not it was impossible to say, for the beast had leaped at the very instant of firing. It struggled ferociously now on its rope. The dwarf at the drum leaped in panic from the platform. Below them the mob sprang to their feet at the startling report, screaming and milling in terror.

On the raised dais the white man with the masked face bellowed orders. Turning, he plucked a rifle from a corner. The dwarfs whirled about, blowguns at their mouths. A whizz of poisoned darts, like a flight of angry gnats, flew toward Westman and his hidden party.

“Let ‘em have it, Scotty!” the ivory hunter cried as he pumped his Winchester. “Careful of those darts.”

The man on the dais emptied his weapon at the darting tongues of flame that leaped at him from the rim of the jungle. Kilimi and the Wambubas strained at their own enforced inaction like hounds on the leash. Suddenly the man on the dais, his gun empty, sprang side-wise toward the beast before its cage. It still chattered and snarled in bestial frenzy.

Feverishly he undid the animal’s restraining rope and leaped instantly clear. The freed beast let out a single inhuman snarl and sprang for the nearest tree, the gleaming knife-blade showing dazzlingly white between its teeth.

“Now, Kilimi!” Westman roared.

The black leaped to his feet, *assegai* in hand, an ancient Bantu war cry on his lips. Behind him his Wambubas followed, roaring the gory battle cry of their native tongue. Macrae staggered upright, ramming fresh shells into his gun. Westman dragged him to earth.

“Leave be, mon!” the Scot bellowed angrily, the blaze of battle in his eyes. “Do ye think I’m sitting here while your blacks do my fighting for me? Leave be, mon!”

“Mud—dirt,” the ivory hunter answered inexplicably. “Smear it on your face, Mac. Quick!”

His rifle momentarily at his side, Westman

was clawing at the soft, wet earth at his feet. This he smeared thickly on his face, masking his sun-scorched countenance until its white texture was totally covered. The Scot looked at him in utter amazement.

“Are ye mad?” he shrieked.

“Mad or not, you Scottish fighting fool, do as I tell you. Smear this mud on your face if you want to come out of this alive.”

HE fairly thrust Macrae’s face into the soggy earth. Then, leaping to their feet, they followed the charge of Kilimi and his battle-crazed Wambubas. The blacks were far in the lead now. The air was filled with the blood-curdling bellow of their age-old Bantu war cry. Westman and Macrae fired as they raced forward.

The white leader of the bestial orgy had vanished into the jungle. At his disappearance the scattering Wambute dwarfs screamed in terror. On the edge of the clearing they made their last stand. Arrows and darts from blowguns whirled through the air: But they had lost heart. Their magic gods had deserted them. Suddenly the last remnants of them turned tail and fled squealing from the shambles. Kilimi and his Wambubas took up the pursuit.

Westman bellowed at his gun-boy. Hesitatingly the giant black let off the chase. Panting and exulting, the party collected about the base of the tree platform. But the mystery of it still showed plainly on Macrae’s face, all smeared with blackening mud. There was little time then for explanations.

“Two of you make a litter for Tamwa here,” the ivory hunter commanded in a snapping voice. “Back to the diggings, Mac. Fast as we can make it. I’ve a hunch that’s where we’ll find that filthy renegade—whoever he is. Quick! We’ve got to cauterize any wounds from those darts and arrows, or it means the finish.”

In feverish haste the blacks worked under Kilimi’s direction. Not five minutes later they were trekking back for Macrae’s compound at a quick dog-trot. They flung all caution to the winds now. Speed was what was wanted.

CHAPTER V

Big Stakes

A FIERCE terrorized wailing greeted them as they crashed from the jungle to the edge of their own compound. The camp-fire was totally deserted. Every living soul had crammed into the space enclosed by the tall stockade. From behind it issued the agonized shrieks of the superstition-ridden blacks. Only a few braver souls peered fearfully from the opening.

Smearred with the mud Westman had so inexplicably ordered, Macrae stopped in his tracks, panting. The Wambubas dropped their burden and flattened on the ground. Kilimi alone sprang to the ivory hunter's side.

"Look, *bwana!*" he cried "*Shenzi Nzombi!* The Monkey God!"

Directly before them, behind Macrae's grass hut, in the towering branches of the banyan tree, a weird struggle was being enacted. A human scream sounded, blood-curdling. It was answered by an angry chattering. The creepers of the banyan swayed and danced a grotesque dance.

"*Shenzi!*" Kilimi bellowed again.

A WHITE shape hurtled from the tree to the ground, bellowing in abject terror. It was the white renegade of the orgy they had witnessed not half an hour before. But the black mask was gone from his face. His bared chest was gory and dripping with blood. Following him from the branches of the banyan another shape came pouncing savagely downward. It landed squarely on the renegade's back, squealing frenziedly.

The man staggered, struggling vainly. Steel flashed in the night before either Macrae or Westman could bring a rifle to their shoulders. Upward and downward it came in savage swinging arcs. The blade buried itself each time to the hilt between the man's shoulder blades.

Westman's gun spat flame. Three times he fired in rapid succession, his lips set grimly. The two gruesome shapes collapsed to the ground beneath the waving creepers of the banyan tree.

"My God!" Macrae gasped in awe.

Westman led them forward in silence. To one side of Macrae's hut lay the two shapeless heaps. The white man was on his back in a pool of dark blood, his glazed eyes staring sightlessly up at the

purple velvet of the Congo sky. Beside him the sacred monkey writhed in its last agonies, Westman's lead slugs through its heart, the glistening steel blade still clutched convulsively in its paw.

"What—what is it, Westman?" the Scot managed to gasp.

"The finest specimen of an Ituri Colobus ape I've ever seen," the ivory hunter replied. "That, Mac," he went on with grim quiet, "that was your murderer."

"It—it's uncanny, Jeff. It's almost as bad as jungle magic."

"The Congo *is* uncanny, Scotty," Westman agreed softly. "Who's the white man? Know him?"

THE Scot nodded. "Joe Swango—the trader from Lulatala."

"White? He's a quarter-breed. See the kinky hair; the high, negroid cheek-bones, and the puffy lips? He—" Westman broke off. "God, what a game he played!"

"It don't make sense to me, Jeff," Macrae insisted, in frank puzzlement. "Swango couldn't have done the killings. I tell you he was in Lulatala on the night most of my blacks were murdered. And why—"

"Don't you see it, Mac?" the ivory hunter went on quietly. "He wanted to scare you and your blacks off. The Colobus ape is highly intelligent. Swango trained it, the way we saw, to pounce on the back of every white-faced man it saw. Taught it how to use a white man's dagger. Swango himself could be in Lulatala—and the murders still be done miles away.

"That's why we never found any tracks after the killings. The ape didn't *walk*. It swung along through the trees. And this Joe Swango knew that any black traveling at night from your compound would smear his face with the white dye. I had you and myself smear our faces with mud in the temple of the Monkey God for that reason, to cover the white of our flesh.

"But Swango, thinking his beast would attack us because our faces were white, came flying back here. He knew the minute he heard our rifles back there, who we were. He traveled fast to get here first—and lost his black mask. But the ape didn't see any white faces back there, so he followed his

master. When he did see a white face—you saw what happened. The white face was Joe Swango's."

"But, Jeff. Why the orgy? Why did he turn king of a tribe of savage dwarf pygmies? Why want us out of the way at all? It don't make sense. Didn't he get what he was after when he trained the monkey to kill the escaping blacks and pluck out the diamonds they had hidden in their hair? He—"

"No, Mac, he was after bigger game. What he wanted was to get rid of you entirely—scare you away. As for his tribe of pygmies, he intended to use them as his final alibi. The Belgian government would have put the whole thing—if you and I had been murdered—to his pygmy tribe, while he went scot free with his loot."

"His—what?" the Scot burst out incredulously.

"Pry loose that lead-covered box he's clutching in his dead hand. You'll see what he was after, Mac, I'll warrant."

IN silence, the Scot obeyed. It was a small loblone box of teakwood, covered with pounded lead as protection against decay and the ravages of the dread Congo ant, that the dead man held in his nerveless hand. This he had apparently rescued from its hiding place in the recesses of the banyan tree before the ape pounced on him. Macrae opened it slowly. As the lid came off he gasped aloud.

"Diamonds, Jeff! A rajah's ransom in raw diamonds! Look at that top one. Look at the size of—"

"Exactly, Mac," the ivory hunter cut in dryly. "Diamonds. You forget that before Abd el Hussan died he had already been working this diamond field of your Congo Concession Company, for no one knows how long. It wasn't until after you and I got here some six months ago that we even knew there was blue diamond ground here. At that time your company was simply prospecting a gold placer.

"Abd el Hussan never shipped the stones away from here. It was too dangerous. Yet he must have mined them before we broke up his

little party. So they were still here. That was Joe Swango's logic. And somehow he discovered they were cached in that banyan tree. He meant to have them before you discovered them. Another week of his black magic and he'd have scared every black of yours away. And you'd have followed. You couldn't have stayed on here alone. That was what he wanted."

MACRAE looked at his friend, the ivory hunter, for a long time in silence. Then, still without a word, he turned and led the way to the *stoep* of his hut. The precious box was in his hand as he vanished behind the curtain of *kasai* cloth.

Inside, by the light of the fire, Westman and Macrae dressed carefully with antiseptic from their kits the wounds of the Wambubas. At length the two white men were alone. The tall, gaunt ivory hunter rose, a little wearily.

"I NEED sleep, Mac," he growled. "Been on the go ever since I got your message in Murumwa. Better turn in now."

"Jeff, you—I—" The Scot sputtered, then went on in a husky growl: "I'll have to hang on here until the company engineers come up from the coast, Jeff. Then I'm heading for Boma. I'll sure tell the directors about this—and about you. You deserve—"

"Yeah; all right, Mac. You always did have a touchy conscience. You think I need pay to come along when a friend like you—"

"Then what in blazes do you want, Jeff? You're a queer bird. Trekking the jungle. What for? What do you want?"

"Sleep right now." Jeffrey Westman grinned wistfully. "I saw some mighty fine elephant spoor out there, Mac. Tomorrow, me and Kilimi will have a try at finding the father of all the elephants an ivory hunter always dreams about. Some day I'll bring him down, Mac, the tusker whose ivory drags the ground."

He smiled again, pensively, with his strong lean face a deep red-brown against the grease-lamp light. "It gets into the blood, Scotty, elephants and the jungle."