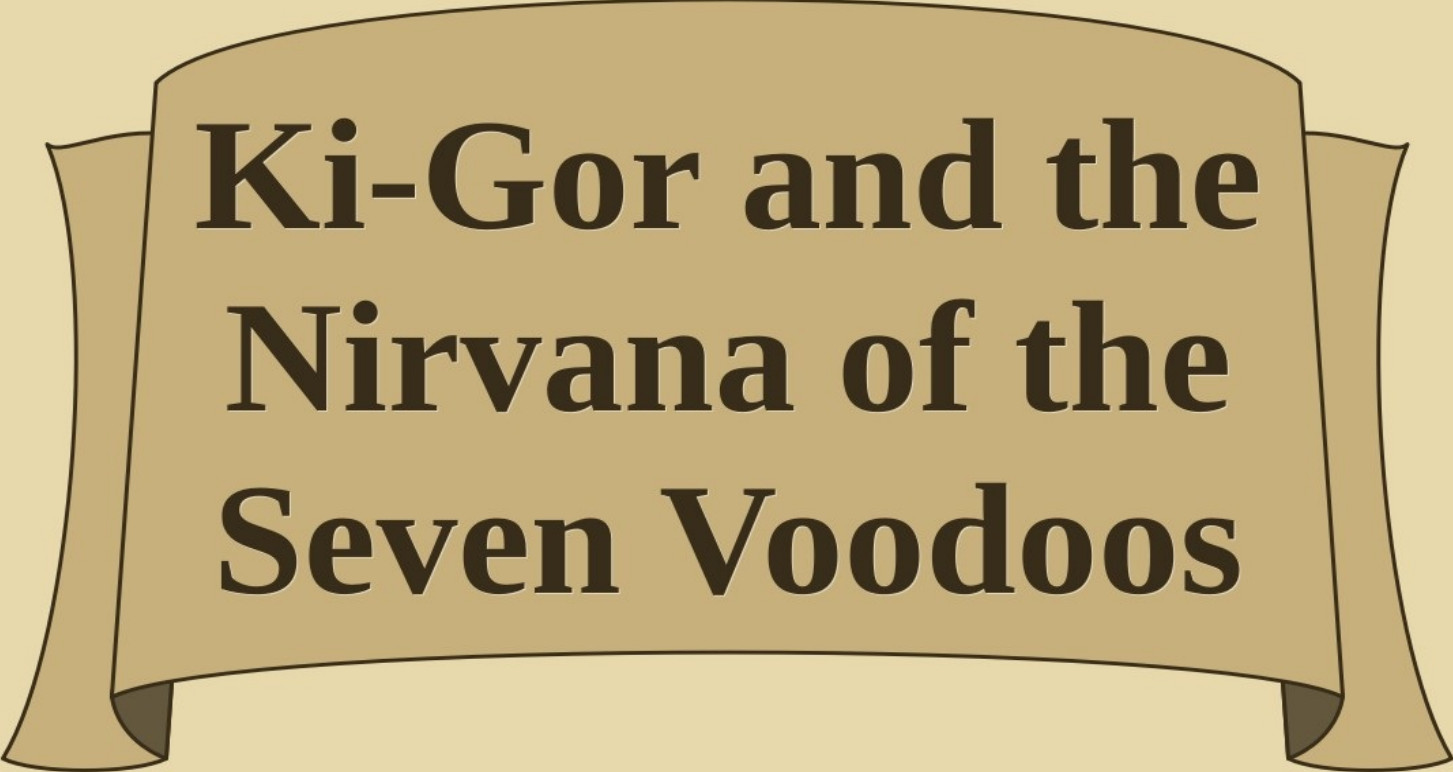




Ki-Gor and the Nirvana of the Seven Voodoos

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CHAPTER I

THE GORILLA MEN STRIKE

Inch by inch, the giant figure in the leopard skin crept forward through the waving prairie grass. The fierce tropical sun beat down mercilessly on the mighty shoulders, but a fresh easterly breeze cooled the bronze forehead. Ki-Gor froze momentarily and hugged the ground, as a chorus of snorts and the thud of many sharp hoofs stamping the turf told him that the quarry he was stalking was getting uneasy. Ki-Gor cursed the inadequate little spear beside him, his sole weapon. It was a small, flimsy assegai the Pygmies had given him, and it was all but useless in the important business of hunting game. Not heavy enough to throw, not strong enough to kill anything bigger than a jackal.

But, weapon or not, game had to be killed today. Ki-Gor was hungry. His nostrils twitched and his mouth watered as the breeze bore to him the scent of his prey, the herd of white-throated wildebeests—the giant antelope of the East African plateau. With infinite caution he raised his head and peered through the swaying grass tops. Fifteen

feet away, a young, full-grown buck stared suspiciously upwind toward the rest of the herd. He was nearly five feet tall at his thick shoulders, and the coarse, matted hairs of his mane fell over but did not conceal the cruel horns that dipped downward from his forehead, then upward and outward.

It was going to be no easy task to subdue this creature barehanded, but Ki-Gor was desperate. He and Helene had not eaten meat for over a week, ever since they had left the friendly back of Marmo, the elephant, at the edge of the Congo jungle to trek on foot, ever eastward through the grassy uplands of East Africa. There had been game in plenty, but Ki-Gor had been remarkably unlucky in his hunting. Five times he had patiently stalked plump gazelles, only to be cheated out of his prey at the last minute by roving packs of wild dogs. On two other occasions, he had lain hidden, after dark, beside water-holes, hoping to make a kill undisturbed by the dogs who would be asleep. But each of those times he had found himself dangerously close to a half dozen lions, who apparently had the same idea. That many lions was too much competition, and Ki-Gor had gone back to Helene empty-handed, and with a very empty stomach.

Hardly breathing, Ki-Gor slid forward another six inches through the grass. He must get that buck. For if he and Helene did not eat pretty soon, they would be so weakened from fasting, that they, too, would fall prey to some prowling carnivores, and their bones would bleach on the wind-swept veldt. Closer and closer to the gnu, the jungle man crept. If only I had a fire-stick, Ki-Gor thought—rifles, Helene calls them. They have a potent magic which kills at incredible distances.

But he had no rifle, only the toy spear of the Pygmies, so that he must be close enough to the gnu to be able to reach it in one spring. Once the herd discovered him, even his powerful legs could never overtake them.

Closer and closer, Ki-Gor crept, muscles tensed for action. Suddenly, the herd upwind of him grew ominously silent. Something had disturbed the gnus. Was it he? Had they discovered him? Again, he raised his head to peer through the grass stalks. No, it wasn't he the antelopes were worried about. They were all facing away from him, muzzles raised, testing the air. A few does danced about nervously, ready at any second to break into a headlong gallop. Ki-Gor decided it was now

or never.

Gathering his feet under him, he crouched on his haunches for one precious moment. Then, noiselessly, he sprang. As he did, the entire herd jumped forward. Ki-Gor's leap carried just short of the young buck's back—and the buck was going away. Desperately, Ki-Gor clutched at a flying hind hoof, and held on for dear life. The buck went down with a crash. Instantly Ki-Gor leaped for its head and seized a horn with each hand. The buck lunged upward, sharp hoofs scrambling. They were levers in Ki-Gor's hands. Using all his mighty strength, he twisted the shaggy head viciously around. There was a tearing sound, and a snap. The gnu sank to the ground trembling—its neck broken.

“Wa-a-aghrr!” shouted Ki-Gor in triumph. At last! Here was food—meat a-plenty.

“Wa-a-aghrr!” came an almost identical roar from behind him.

Ki-Gor whirled around and beheld a huge, grey-maned lion crouched not twenty feet away. Its dull eyes and gaunt, mangy sides showed it to be a very old lion, slow-moving and probably toothless. Back home in the

jungle, the aged beast would have presented no problem to Ki-Gor. But here on the veldt, there was no cover, and Ki-Gor's only weapon against those great raking claws, was the Pygmy spear.

The brute looked hungry. Evidently it had been unable to knock down any of the gnus as they galloped to safety, and now it intended to take Ki-Gor's prize away from him. Stealthily Ki-Gor picked up the light spear and gripped it. Hungry man and hungry beast glared at each other across the fallen body of the gnu.

Then, with a strangled roar, the old lion sprang. Ki-Gor poised—waiting. And, as the lion hit the ground in front of him, Ki-Gor

jammed the spear down the red, gaping maw. At the same time, he made a twisting leap, just missing a murderous swipe from a heavy front paw.

The lion thrashed its great head in agony, and quickly snapped the slender haft in two. But the spearhead remained imbedded far down the beast's gullet. A torrent of blood poured out of the lion's mouth, and it staggered away, coughing and shaking its head.

Ki-Gor watched it until it disappeared in the tall grass, then he turned his attention back to the motionless form of the gnu. He knelt

down with a smile of satisfaction. It was a fat young buck. Its meat would not be tender, eaten fresh, but it would have a fine flavor, and it would be nourishing. Ki-Gor debated with himself whether to attempt to carry the big antelope back to the camp where he had left Helene, or whether to cut it up on the spot. A foreleg in each hand, he tested the weight of the animal. He shook his head. Strong as he was, it would be too great a load to carry the distance of over a mile.

Suddenly, the smile of satisfaction died off Ki-Gor's bronzed face, to be replaced by an expression of troubled concern. How was he going to cut it up? He could have used the blade of the Pygmy spear to carve off some slabs of meat from the gnu's flanks, but the blade of the Pygmy spear was far down the throat of the dying lion!

Ki-Gor kicked petulantly at the body of the gnu. After all his patience and his care in bringing down the antelope, he was now to be cheated out of eating it. So near, and yet so far.

His lips drawn back in a snarl, Ki-Gor reached down and once more seized the animal's forelegs. Whether he could cut it up or not, he wasn't going to leave it behind for the dogs or the lions to eat. He

heaved upward and rolled the animal over. As he did, he saw something glint in the antelope's thick mane—something which reflected the sunlight. A brown hand swiftly explored the thick, matted hairs behind the horns. With a shout of triumph, Ki-Gor extricated a flat piece of metal. It was the wide, shovel-shaped blade of a Bantu assegai. A few splinters of wood in the hollow socket at the rear end told the story. Some black hunter had had much the same experience as Ki-Gor had had with the lion. Except that in this case, the blade of the spear, instead of piercing the thick hide of the gnu, had merely become caught in the thick tangle of hair in the creature's head. The antelope had got away, carrying the spear in its mane, and eventually the haft had worked loose, or broken off.

Ki-Gor wasted no time conjecturing about what had happened to the haft of the spear, however. He whetted both edges of the broad blade, energetically, on a smooth stone, until he had them razorsharp. Then he set to work skinning the antelope, after which he began carving great strips of meat from its sides. As he cut each slab free, he placed it on the spread out hide. When he had finished, he gathered up the ends of the skin, slung the bundle over one shoulder, and headed across the veldt toward a thin column of smoke which represented his

camp. In the antelope-hide bundle there was over twenty pounds of meat.

Helene Vaughn looked up with a quick cry, as Ki-Gor walked into the little thicket where she was crouching over a little fire. She was carefully feeding it twigs to keep it alive.

“Ki-Gor!” she exclaimed. “You brought home something!”

“Yes,” said Ki-Gor, subduing a complacent smile that rose to his mouth. “See? Meat. Antelope.” And he dropped the bundle on the ground beside Helene.

“Oh! Ki-Gor, that’s wonderful,” she said, in heartfelt tones. “I can hardly believe we’re actually going to eat meat again. Did you have much trouble?”

“No trouble” said Ki-Gor loftily. “It was easy. There was a lion, but it was a very old lion.”

“Oh, dear!” Helene sighed. “I suppose if I stayed in Africa long

enough, I'd get used to the casual way you eat leopards and lions and things. But right now, it scares me out of my wits just to think of it."

"I'm strong," Ki-Gor said, simply, as if, that explained everything.

"You certainly are Ki-Gor," Helene said, with an appreciative glance at the jungle man's magnificent shoulders, "but just the same, I'm glad you have agreed to come back to your own people with me."

Ki-Gor got up abruptly and busied himself with preparations for the long-deferred meal. He didn't like to be reminded of his promise to leave the jungle and go with Helene to find some outpost of civilization, whence they could be guided to the coast and eventually to England. Up till a few weeks ago, Ki-Gor's world had been peopled only by the wild animals, the savage Bantu tribes, and the occasional Pygmies of Africa's Equatorial Forest. He knew that he was somehow different from the black men and the Pygmies but as far as he knew, he was unique. Only the dimmest memory of his missionary father remained to him, and through childhood and youth he had defended himself single-handed, and by his strength and intelligence, survived.

Then one day, Helene Vaughn fell out of the sky practically at his feet. Her red hair, white face, and strange clothes were just as incomprehensible to him, as the red monoplane which she was flying, and which had cracked up. But, instinctively he protected her, even though he didn't know quite why. Gradually Helen's conversation had brought back the English he had once spoken as a little boy, before his father had been slain by a tribe of Bantu. With the bridge of a common language established, Helene had explained to him the astonishing facts that there were many people in the world like him, that they lived far away across the water, and that he belonged to the tribe called English. After days of argument and pleading, Helene had persuaded him to go to his own people, although he was mightily distrustful of the idea, and would have much preferred to stay in his jungle home—provided, of course, that Helene stayed with him. But, in a weak moment, he had given in to Helene's pleadings, and now here they were, camped in a little copse on the veldt—on their way to his own people.

The setting sun hung low as Ki-Gor held strips of antelope meat on a forked stick over the little fire. He was already a little homesick

for the dark, brooding jungle. A man knew where he stood back there, with great friendly trees to climb, and yards of strong vines to swing on from one tall trunk to another. Out here there was only the thorn boma, and the fire to protect them from the nocturnal prowlers, and with sunset there came an uncomfortable chill in the air.

But the meat was good. Ki-Gor and Helene thrust strip after strip in the open flames, and devoured them hungrily. Finally, Helene gave up with a happy sigh, and lay back feeling stuffed. But Ki-Gor kept on. He was making up for a lot of meatless days, and like all men of the jungle, he gorged himself.

The sun had long since set, and the sudden African night had settled down over the veldt, when he reluctantly discovered that he couldn't eat another mouthful. He got up with an effort and scoured around collecting a supply of fuel to last through the night. It was an ominous night, moonless and even starless. Even his keen eyes, were unable to see far into the inky blackness outside the ring of firelight. The back of his neck crawled uneasily. It was a night to be especially alert for unwelcome visitors, and yet his eyes were uncontrollably heavy. Drowsy though he was, he arranged the thorn boma

with great care, and stocked the fagots close to the fire. Helene was already sound asleep. He stood for a moment looking down at her upturned face. He recalled an English word she had used several times, when together they had watched a rosy sun come up in the east and shed its warming rays over a calm world. She had said it was “beautiful.” Then you, Helene, Ki-Gor said to himself, you are beautiful—like the sunrise.

He squatted on his haunches beside her, and tried to keep himself awake by whittling a handle for the assegai blade. Presently, in the middle of a stroke, his head nodded and fell forward. Still squatting on his haunches he fell into a deep sleep.

He woke up with a guilty start and stared around him into the impenetrable blackness of the night. What had made him wake up, he didn't know. But a deep-seated sixth sense within him told him that somewhere in the darkness, some unseen danger was lurking. The little fire was almost out, only a few embers left glowing redly. Without relaxing his watchful glare, Ki-Gor reached out and dropped some dry fagots on the coals. In a few seconds a rewarding flicker of flame mounted and lighted up the ground enclosed by the boma. Helene stirred

and turned her face away, but did not wake up. With the increased light, Ki-Gor peered carefully in all directions but could see nothing. He tested the still night air with his sensitive nostrils. He thought he caught a faint whiff of a familiar smell, but he was inclined to disbelieve the evidence of his nose. It was gorilla-smell.

It couldn't be gorilla, Ki-Gor told himself. The only place he had ever seen gorillas was far away on the West Coast. And during the last ten days, as he and Helene had trekked eastward toward the great mountains of East Africa, he had not come across the slightest evidence that pointed to the presence of the giant apes. He tested the air again, but the elusive smell had gone. Ki-Gor stood up and stared out into the night.

Suddenly his keen eyes caught a faint glitter of reflected light. Somewhere out there, a pair of cruel eyes were watching the boma. Quickly, Ki-Gor piled more fagots on the fire, and as the flames leaped higher, he strained forward trying to make out the outlines of the creature that belonged to that pair of eyes. After a few seconds, he was able to distinguish a huge mass from the surrounding darkness. Whatever the animal was, it was enormous. Suddenly the mass moved, and

slowly approached the fire. The blood ran cold in Ki-Gor's veins. It was a gorilla!

Ki-Gor reached down, shook Helene's shoulder roughly, and seized the blade of the assegai. He wished with all his heart that he had finished making a haft for it.

Slowly and purposefully, the gorilla moved forward, until he stood right at the edge of the boma. As the firelight illuminated his hairy outlines, he looked to be by far the biggest gorilla Ki-Gor had ever seen. And then suddenly it struck Ki-Gor that this was no ordinary gorilla. This hulking creature looked man-like, and yet at the same time, subtly more bestial than a true gorilla. His little eyes glittering wickedly, the man-ape seemed strangely unafraid.

A frightened gasp from behind him told Ki-Gor that Helene was awake.

"Ki-Gor!" she whispered. "What does that monster want?"

"I don't know," Ki-Gor muttered, "but don't be afraid. Maybe he wants antelope meat."

Ki-Gor bent down without taking his eyes off the gorilla-man, and tossed a slab of meat past his head. The gorilla-man paid no attention. And then as Ki-Gor straightened up, the fang-toothed beast deliberately picked up one of the loose thorn bushes that made up the encircling boma, and flipped it expertly aside. As Ki-Gor gazed in astonishment, another bush went the same way, and the gorilla-man shuffled confidently through the opening straight toward the fire.

His spine prickling, Ki-Gor stepped back a pace and shifted his grip on the assegai blade. Then, with a wild yell, he leaped high into the air and forward. He launched a mighty kick with both of his powerful legs straight at the gorilla-man's murderous face. The gorilla-man grunted with the force of the pile-driver blow and rocked backwards on its heels.

Ki-Gor landed lightly on his feet and instantly struck with the assegai blade in his right hand. It was a lightning thrust, the sharp blade slashing at the monster's throat. The gorilla-man backed away with a growl and swung a thick, hairy arm with incredible speed. But Ki-Gor dodged the crushing blow, and countered with his blade at the

vast abdomen. The beast howled with rage and pain and backed out of the boma. A thin trickle of blood began to flow from the folds of its throat.

Stealthily, Ki-Gor reached down and seized one end of a long fagot, the other end of which was blazing in the fire. With a swift motion, he flung the burning brand straight at the gorilla-man's head. Again the cruel-faced beast gave ground with a howl, and frantically brushed off the flaming fagot.

As he did, Ki-Gor charged him. Twice the sharp blade bit deep into the hairy arm, and again Ki-Gor dodged out of reach. But the man-ape appeared to have had enough. Growling horribly, he retreated to the edge of the ring of light shed by the campfire. There he stopped and slowly beat his breast. Ki-Gor walked coolly toward him, and the gorilla-man turned and ran out into the darkness.

Determined to be rid of the beast for good, Ki-Gor gave chase. But the gorilla-man was amazingly fast, and before he had gone very far, his massive body was swallowed up in the inky blackness of the night. Ki-Gor stopped about a hundred yards from the camp and stood listening. A

distant thudding told him that the beast was still running.

Ki-Gor turned reluctantly, and started back to the camp.

Suddenly a wild scream rent the air. It was Helene.

“Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor! The gorilla!”

A hundred yards away, by the light of the campfires a mammoth figure was carrying the struggling girl out of the boma. A wave of sick horror swept over Ki-Gor, and he sprinted toward the campsite. How could I have been so stupid! Ki-Gor thought bitterly. Apparently the gorilla-man had circled away in the darkness, and returned to kidnap poor helpless Helene. Faster the jungle man’s feet flashed over the turf. The man-ape was running too, in the opposite direction with a terrified, shrieking Helene under a hairy arm.

Sobbing with rage, Ki-Gor put all his strength into an effort to catch up with the brutish abductor. But the man-ape had a few seconds head-start, and by the time Ki-Gor flashed by the campfire, was out of sight in the velvet blackness of the night.

Ki-Gor drew up short and controlled his panting long enough to listen. Ominously, Helene had stopped screaming. But the sound of feet drumming over the ground gave Ki-Gor an approximate direction the beast was taking. He plunged forward.

Full fifteen minutes Ki-Gor ran, stopping now and then to listen and to sniff the air. But the thud of the gorilla-man's feet seemed to come from different directions each time, and the still air, heavy with the rank apes smell, gave no clue as to which way the monster had gone. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, to find anything in the pitch dark of the plateau.

Finally, Ki-Gor had to admit that the gorilla-man had—temporarily, at least escaped him. He sat down on the grass, for a moment, to think.

What was to be done? And what was happening to Helene? Why had her screams stopped so abruptly? Was it because—Ki-Gor hardly dared ask himself the question—was it because the giant ape had killed her? Ki-Gor ground his teeth, and growled savagely, deep down in his throat.

Suddenly, a tiny puff of wind caressed the hair at his temples. Ki-Gor

sprang to his feet, nerves taut, and sniffed it avidly. Faintly, there came to his nostrils a woodsy smell, the smell of trees. More faintly still came the gorilla-smell. Ki-Gor loped upwind. He knew he was going north-east, toward a towering range of mountains, whose slopes were covered by the only trees in any direction. Ki-Gor had noticed that before the sun had set. Undoubtedly, the man-ape was traveling that way. It was the type of high open forestland that gorillas liked.

Ki-Gor pushed on steadily and swiftly through the night, following the elusive apes smell. But, as the minutes went by, he seemed to come no nearer to the object of his pursuit.

Gradually, the outlines of a mountain range began to take shape, ahead of him and to his right. Almost imperceptibly, the sky began to grow a little paler, and the darkness all about, to dissolve. Ki-Gor found that the grass was giving way to tall shrubs, and that here and there, tall trees reared skyward. He kept on, upwind and upgrade.

After a while there was enough light for him to see the ground fairly clearly. The jungle man then turned abruptly to his left, and began a wide circle, eyes to the ground, studying out possible gorilla tracks.

For an hour he traveled that way without discovering the spoor he was searching for. He returned to his starting place and commenced another wide circle to the right. Still, there were no gorilla-man tracks, and Ki-Gor hurried his steps, sick with disappointment and apprehension. His mind was so clouded with fear for Helene's safety that he almost didn't see the twig broken off the flowering shrub close to the ground.

But, all of a sudden, the slight gorilla smell seemed to increase. Ki-Gor stopped and studied the ground around him. Then he saw the broken twig, and dropped to the ground beside it. A moment later, he stood up, his upper lip drawn back off his teeth in a silent snarl.

Unquestionably, the gorilla-man had passed that way.

Swiftly the jungle man followed the spoor, eyes glued to the ground, nostrils flared. In a very short time, he realized that not one gorilla-man had made that track, but two!

That was how Helene's kidnapping had been accomplished! The first ape had decoyed Ki-Gor away from the camp long enough for the second one

to rush into the boma and carry off the girl. The jungle man gripped the blade of the assegai, vengefully, and hastened on.

The sky was rosy with approaching dawn, and the upgrade was getting steeper, when Ki-Gor halted. He had made another uncomfortable discovery. The trail of the two gorilla-men had separated, going each in a different direction. The jungle man was face to face with a horrible dilemma. One of those two half-human animals was bearing the limp form of Helene—but which one?

Ki-Gor could do no more than guess which trail to follow. He chose the one which went straight up the mountain side, and quickened his steps.

CHAPTER II

MR. ROBERT SPELVIN OF CINCINNATI

He was rewarded, in a short time, by a noticeable strengthening of apesnell in the air. Apparently the giant gorilla-man had grown careless of pursuit, and was loitering along, picking nuts and fruit along the way. Ki-Gor raced uphill in an agony of suspense. Would he be in time? Was Helene still alive? Was this the man-ape who had kidnapped her?

The sun was coming up red, as Ki-Gor halted on the edge of an open space on the mountain side. His heart sank. Upwind of him, sitting in the middle of the open space was a gorilla-man. But nowhere was there any sign of Helene. He had followed the wrong beast.

A burning desire for revenge swept over Ki-Gor. If this shaggy monster had not actually abducted Helene it had at least assisted in the operation, and Ki-Gor determined that it should die for it.

He crept closer to the great man-ape, unnoticed.

The gorilla-man was sitting, shoulders hunched apathetically, licking a forearm. The coarse hairs of its chest and abdomen were caked with dried blood. Evidently it was the same animal that Ki-Gor had fought the night before. Relentlessly, Ki-Gor crept forward, until he was behind the gorilla-man, though still down-wind from him. Then, silently, he sprang.

The weight of his body hitting the gorilla-man's back flung it face-forward on the ground. He pounced on the thick hairy brute, and stabbed at its neck with his spear. The beast reared up unsteadily on its hind legs, heaved and screamed with pain, and reached a huge black hand over its shoulder. Ki-Gor was plucked off and hurled twenty feet away, as if he were a terrier.

He lay stunned for a moment, then began to collect his senses as the gorilla-man slowly reared itself off the ground. The brute stood up unsteadily on its hind legs for a moment, gave a terrible roar, and started toward Ki-Gor's recumbent form. But, blood was gushing from the wound in the neck, and its short legs suddenly buckled. Before it could reach the helpless Ki-Gor, the gorilla-man's evil little eyes

glazed, and it wavered and fell in a crumpled heap.

Ki-Gor picked himself up, made sure none of his bones were broken, and approached the fallen gorilla-man warily. There was no doubt about it, the strange monster was stone dead, its jugular severed. In death it looked more simian than in life.

The jungle man's blue eyes flashed. He uttered a bellow of triumph, and started back down the man-ape's trail. He was going back to pick up the spoor of the other monster, the one who was carrying off Helene.

But his triumph was short-lived. His nose was assailed by a strong smell of Bantu. A moment later he was surrounded by a dozen or more tall, well-formed blacks, armed with broad-bladed assegais.

"Stay, O strange inkosi," said the tallest one in halting Swahili, "and tell us how it is possible that you could thus slay the fearsome brute, single-handed and without a fire-stick."

"Nay, stand aside, black men," Ki-Gor answered. "I have no time for

idle chatter. There yet is another gorilla-man I must slay—a murdering beast that is carrying off my woman. I must find him before he kills her—if he has not already done so.”

“Indeed, inkosi,” said the tribesman, “that is a dreadful story. This other gorilla-man, then, is not far away?”

“That I do not know,” said Ki-Gor. “I must first pick up his trail which I left before sunrise. So, let me pass.”

“Nay, inkosi,” said the tall black, “if the gorilla-man bearing your woman has that much of a head-start, then indeed, you are on a fool’s errand.”

“What do you mean, black man?” said Ki-Gor, sternly. “I will catch him and I will kill him, as you have seen me do with this other ape up the hill.”

“It is this way, inkosi,” the tribesman said patiently, “when you catch up with the man-ape bearing your woman, you will find not one man-ape but hundreds. By now, he has undoubtedly carried her into the

Land of the Living Dead. The entrances to that Land are guarded by hordes of these ferocious gorilla-men. And it is said that these man-apes, furthermore, are not wild man-apes, but trained beasts who obey the wicked commands of some mysterious human.”

“O cowardly black man,” said Ki-Gor, “chicken-hearted Bantu, why do you tell me old woman’s stories like that? There is no slightest word of truth in what you say!”

“I am no, chicken-hearted coward,” replied the tribesman, stoutly. “I am as brave as you, O strange inkosi, and I tell you truth. Many from about here have been kidnapped by these hulking gorilla-men and carried into the Valley on the other side of the mountain. If you do not believe me come with us in friendly fashion, back to our village. Our chief speaks N-glush fluently, and he will tell you of this dread place.”

Ki-Gor stared long and hard at the tall black man, and his heart sank. There was the ring of truth in the man’s voice.

“Lead on,” he said, gruffly.

As the little party wound down the mountain side, Ki-Gor watched the blacks around him, narrowly. They were Bantu, his traditional enemies back in the Congo jungle. But there was a difference. These men were taller, better looking, prouder than the forest blacks. In spite of himself, Ki-Gor trusted them a little.

Although the story of a mysterious Valley guarded by gorillas sounded almost too fantastic to believe, Ki-Gor suspended judgment until such time as he could talk to the Chief.

After a considerable trek, the party neared a good-sized village which was enclosed by a large stockade. They went through a gate and proceeded straight toward a large house that stood in the middle of the village and dominated all the other huts. Strangely, Ki-Gor felt no fear for his safety. In fact, he hardly thought about it. Uppermost in his mind was the desire to hear about the strange valley from the Chief, himself.

The door to the large house was guarded by two warriors with assegais. The men with Ki-Gor spoke rapidly to them, and they turned and

disappeared into the house. A moment later, they reappeared, and behind them towered a huge, bull-necked negro, with alert little eyes, and an oddly humorous face. His clothes, a white shirt and white shorts, set him apart from the others—he was evidently the chief. He spoke at once, in a rolling, rumbling basso.

“Man, it’s sure good to see a white face ag’in-” then he stopped, and his little eyes blinked in astonishment at Ki-Gor’s leopard-skin loincloth. “Say, you is a white man, ain’t you? American? English?”

Ki-Gor in his turn blinked with astonishment. He had never before heard a black speak what sounded like English. He studied the Chief for a moment, then said, “Yes. N-glush. I am of the N-glush people.”

“I thought you-all looked kind of English,” the Chief rumbled.

“Underneath all that tan. Whut-all’s yo’ idea? Back-to-nature stuff?”

Ki-Gor had not the slightest idea of what the Chief was saying, even though he recognized most of the English words. So he said nothing. Then the Chief spoke again, hastily.

“Nem-mind, Boss, let it go. I’m kinda fergettin’ my Southe’n hospitality, standin’ yere askin’ questions. C’mon in an’ have a bite of breakfast.”

He smiled and beckoned the jungle man into the house. Gravely Ki-Gor followed him. He regarded the table and chairs with suspicion, but sat down at the Chief’s invitation.

“Well, now, I’ll tell you who I am,” the Chief began, “‘n’ then you c’n tell me who you are. I’m the headman around yere, but I ain’t been yere but about a year. My name is Robert Spelvin, and I come from Cincinnati. I been a Pullman porter, an’ a ship’s cook. I jumped ship one day in Mombassa, and took myself a little walk. An’ first thing you know, I’m headman of the M’balla. It’s a full-time job, but they’re real nice folks, an’ I like it. Only now and then, I git a little homesick. Tell me where you-all come from.”

Ki-Gor thought for a moment. He was thoroughly bewildered by the flow of English from the Chief, very little of which he comprehended, but he kept a grave face.

“I come from far over there,” he said, finally, pointing to the west, “from the dark jungle. One day a woman, a white woman, came out of the sky in a red birdmachine. She told me I was of the N-glush, and that I must go with her to my own people. So we left the jungle and traveled this way for many nights. Last night, two gorilla-men came to our camp. While I was fighting one of them, the other one carried my woman away. I trailed them through the night, but this morning the tracks separated, and I followed the gorilla-man who did not have my woman.”

“An’ you caught up with him, my boys told me,” said Chief Robert Spelvin, “and really polished him off.”

“I killed him,” Ki-Gor corrected, “and now I must find the other gorilla-man and take my woman away from him.”

“Um,” said Robert, “that’s real bad. I’m sorry to say this, but I’m awful afraid you ain’t goin’ to see your woman, again. There’s some awful queer doin’s over th’ other side of the mountain. I don’t know just what it is. But these yere great big gorilla-men comes around in pairs and grabs people and carries ‘em away and don’t nobody ever see ‘em again.”

“Where do the gorilla-men carry those people?” Ki-Gor demanded.

“Over th’ other side of the mountain is all I know,” Robert replied.

“There’s a story around yere about a queer kind of place over there, where there’s a man who’s kind of King of the gorilla-men. They say the big apes kidnap the people, an’ then they is just slaves in this place for the rest of their lives. They never come out, once they is carried in.”

“Then I must go there quickly,” said Ki-Gor, “and take my woman away. She must not be a slave.”

“Man, you haven’t got a chance,” Robert said, earnestly. “I went over the east shoulder of the mountain, once with some of my boys, and we come out on to the entrance of a deep rocky canyon. The boys told me that was the entrance to the Land of the Living Dead, and there was a whole lot of the biggest gorilla-men I ever seen around there. I just said, ‘C’mon boys,’ an’ walked away from there.

“I once went two rounds with Dempsey ‘fore he was champ, but I don’t

believe in messing around with no gorilla.”

The jungle man stood up, blue eyes flashing, “I am Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle,” he said, “and I am going into the Land of the Living Dead, and take my woman away from the gorilla-men, no matter how many they are. Give me a boy to guide me to that entrance, I am going now.”

“But, Mr. Ki-Gor,” said Robert, “you ain’t got a chance. One man can’t lick an army, no matter how big or strong he is.”

“I will find a way,” said Ki-Gor.

“Say, you must set a great store by your woman,” Robert said, with an admiring shake of his head, “is she English, too?”

“Her name is Helene” said Ki-Gor. “She has a white face and red hair, and she says she is of the tribe of ‘Mericans.”

“An American girl!” Robert shouted. “Wait a minute! That’s different! Hold on, now, we can’t let them apes take an American girl into that awful place.”

“You know her tribe?” Ki-Gor asked, curiously.

“Know ‘em!” cried Robert. “I’m American, myself.”

“But you have a black skin,” Ki-Gor said, blankly.

“Don’ make no difference,” said Robert, stoutly. “I’m jus’ as good an American as anybody else. An’ I suttinly don’ aim to leave another American lay in the Land of the Livin’ Dead, I don’ care how many gorillas is guardin’ the place.”

“You mean you will come with me?” said Ki-Gor.

“I do,” said Robert, emphatically, “an’ moreover, we’ll take my army along. As head man of this yere M’balla tribe I c’n call out about seventy good fightin’ spearmen. I got a rifle and a Luger of my own with plenty of bullets. I’ll let you use the rifle-”

“I don’t know how to shoot a rifle,” Ki-Gor interrupted. “Give me some assegais.”

“Mr. Ki-Gor,” said Robert, “someday when we got mo’ time, I’m going to set down and really ask you-. Right now we better get goin’.”

The huge negro stood up and bellowed some orders. Feet padded out of the house, and a moment later, a great drum began to throb.

“C’mon out an watch this,” Robert said. “I got to give the boys a fight talk.”

Outside, in the open space in the middle of the village, men, women and children were assembling. They came running from all directions, and squatted on the ground, arranging themselves in a wide circle. Into the middle of the circle, Robert strode, carrying his giant frame like an Emperor. The excited crowd ceased its chattering and fell silent under his commanding gaze. Then Robert’s deep voice rolled forth in the rapid dialect of the M’balla.

He had hardly begun before he was interrupted by cries of anguish and terror from all about him. He whirled about and raised a threatening hand, and the crowd quieted down. Then Robert launched into an

impassioned oration.

Presently the crowd began to sway and murmur. As Robert's emotions mounted higher and higher, the responsive murmur grew louder and rhythmic. And finally, when he wound up his oration at fever heat, the men of the Whalla leaped to their feet shouting and brandishing their assegais.

Robert made his way through the howling gesticulating mob over to Ki-Gor.

"Well, I got the ahmy lined up," he said. "They didn't like the idea so good, at first, but I talked 'em around. In about an hour we-all'll be ready to go beat up on the gorilla-men, an' see whut kin' of a place this yere Land of the Livin' Dead is."

Ki-Gor and Robert Spelvin, Chief of the M'balla regarded each other with mutual respect. In spite of the fact that each one was a complete puzzle to the other. Together they went into the Chief's house to plan their strategy.

An hour later, when the little army filed out of the village and

headed eastward toward the mountain, each warrior, at Ki-Gor's, suggestion, carried a long, throwing spear, in addition to the short stabbing assegai. Ki-Gor's reasoning was that if they met gorilla-men in any quantity they could do considerable preliminary damage with the throwing spears at long range, before they closed in on the powerful brutes.

Robert carried his rifle in his hand and the Luger holstered on a belt. Over each shoulder he had draped a bandolier with ammunition for both weapons. Ki-Gor wore a long knife in a scabbard strapped around his waist, and in each hand he carried a broad-bladed M'balla assegai.

After a half a day's brisk climb, the swift African dusk caught the party still several miles short of their destination. They made camp on a bare shoulder of the mountain, taking care to build many bright fires, and detailing plenty of sentries. They had no intention of allowing themselves to be surprised by a night raid of gorilla-men.

The night passed without incident, and before sunup the little army was on its way again, climbing once, more. Ki-Gor noticed that many of the strapping M'balla warriors seemed to be less than enthusiastic

over the expedition, as they drew nearer to the high, mountain gateway to the Land of the Living Dead, and its dread defenders. But if Chief Robert noticed it he gave no sign of it.

The line of march lay down hill for a while, down the eastern slope of the great mountain. But still in front of them was an even higher mountain, or rather, range of mountains. High up in a niche between two peaks, Robert said, was the Gateway. Soon the M'balla army skirted a rim, and started on the final upgrade. A nervous silence settled down over the party, and the rate of speed noticeably slackened. As they toiled higher and higher up the mountainside, the vegetation began to thin out a little. Tall trees gave way to more stunted growths, and odd-shaped bushes, twisted by high winds.

And a hot, dry west wind baked the bent backs of the M'balla.

Suddenly the party came in at right angles on what appeared to be a well-worn trail. It was a strip of bare, hard-packed ground, six feet wide, that twisted up the slope, flanked on either side by high banks. Ki-Gor crinkled his nose.

“Gorilla!” he said, laconically.

Robert nodded and detailed two of the M’balla to go up the trail as scouts, in advance of the party. Then, he growled an order over his shoulder and led the little army forward.

They had not proceeded far, when the two scouts came tumbling down the path, faces gray with fear. They immediately started babbling about gorillas, but Robert hushed them with a stern command, and with Ki-Gor, took them off to one side, out of earshot of the rest of the

M’balla. Then, he listened to the scouts as they described what they had seen. The Gateway, which was hardly more than a thousand yards away, up the trail, was fairly swarming with gorilla-men. They had evidently scented the approaching M’balla, and reinforcements were pouring out of the narrow opening in the natural rock bastion.

“You have done well,” Robert commented, and turned to Ki-Gor. “This ain’t goin’ to be so easy, Mr. Ki-Gor. I think you-all better take this yere Luger. There ain’t no trick to usin’ it. Jest point it like you’d point your finger at somethin’, and squeeze this yere little thing. And when it stops goin’ ‘bang,’ jest give it back to me, and

I'll reload for you."

Then Robert wheeled and strode back to his army.

"Follow me up the bank," he said, in the M'balla dialect, "we will ambush the men-apes from above as they come down the path. Do not throw your spears until you hear the order. Have no fear—you are being led by your invincible chief, and by Ki-Gor, the Gorilla-man Slayer."

The M'balla looked at each other fearfully, but loyally followed Robert up the bank. The giant American Negro led the way cautiously through the twisted brush, one hundred yards, two hundred yards. Then he halted, abruptly, and pointed. Ki-Gor, beside him in instant, followed the pointing finger with his eyes and felt the hairs on the back of his neck stiffen.

CHAPTER III

LAND OF THE LIVING DEAD

They were standing on the edge of the brush cover. Before them a wide strip of rubbly, rocky ground sloped gently up to a natural rock palisade. There was no vegetation of any kind on the desolate stretch of shale and rubble, and beyond, the line of low cliffs marked the crest of the ridge. Directly in front of them, there was a cleft in the rock barrier—a narrow cleft that looked to be no more than ten feet wide. Through that cleft, a seemingly endless line of huge black gorillas was moving out to the open ground. And the open ground was already occupied by at least fifty or sixty of the monsters. A low murmur ran through the M'balla.

Robert whirled, eyes flashing.

“There are your enemies!” he hissed, “the filthy beasts who have terrorized your neighborhood for so many years, who have carried your relatives and friends into a horrible, unknown captivity. Let every man look to his throwing spear.”

Slowly the gorilla-men began moving down toward them in a disorganized mob. The M'balla, grim-faced, crouched down in the bushes behind Robert and Ki-Gor. There was something hideously menacing about the way the mass of man-apes ambled down over the rubble. They made no sound, but came on with a sort of contemptuous calmness.

When they were less than a hundred yards away, Robert fingering his big express rifle, clutched Ki-Gor's arm in glee. The gorilla-men were turning away to the right.

They were going down the path, directly beneath the ambushade!

Robert waited until the ravine below them was choked with the black monsters, then he drew a bead on one of them, and bellowed a command.

A shower of spears rained down on to the seething mass of hairy bodies. The instant they struck, Robert fired.

Then pandemonium reigned in the ravine.

With screams of pain and rage, the great man-apes milled around trying

to pluck the spears out. Robert kept on firing into their midst as fast as he could reload.

In five minutes, full half the gorilla-men lay dead or dying. But as they had originally outnumbered the M'balla by two to one, that merely evened matters up. For the brutes quickly discovered the source of their death, and started clambering up the side of the ravine.

But the M'balla, encouraged by the initial success of the ambush, stood confidently on the edge of the bank. Into their midst, Ki-Gor stepped, an assegai in each hand. After he had emptied the Luger, he had returned the weapon in disgust to Robert, and had gone back to what seemed to him the more satisfactory method of fighting.

A titanic gorilla-man more agile than the rest, reared its head over the bank at Ki-Gor's feet. The jungle man thrust viciously downward, and impaled the monster by the throat. The beast gave a gurgling bellow and fell backwards.

"Hai! Hai!" the M'balla yelled, and they cut and stabbed as more of the gigantic apes gained the bank. All along the line, huge hairy

forms poised for seconds on the brink, great arms thrashing, only to waver and plunge downwards, pierced by a dozen assegais. Here and there, single gorilla-men gained a momentary foothold, crushing out M'balla lives with sledge-hammer blows of their mighty arms.

Desperately the tribesman swarmed around, thrusting and hacking. And wherever the M'balla were forced to give ground, Ki-Gor flashed in, muscles rippling, and tawny mane flying.

The fighting was so close now, that Robert could no longer use his rifle, so he, too, waded in to the combat, the Luger spitting in his left hand, an assegai lifting and dipping in his right. But the rifle had done its job. The monstrous gorilla-men, terrifying as they were, were clearly outnumbered. The struggling line along the bank swayed back and forth, and finally a handful of surviving gorilla-men broke away and leaped down through the shaly gravel to the path below.

But the blood-lust of the M'balla was up, and they followed relentlessly. As Ki-Gor and Robert leaned panting on their assegais, the tribesman hunted down the dozen or so remaining gorilla-men, ringed each one with a bristling wall of steel, and cut them down.

One-half hour after Robert had fired the first shot the gorilla-men were completely annihilated. But it was a costly victory.

Among the heaped up dead on the bank, thirty-one M'balla tribesman lay crushed and dying. High up in the sky, the vultures began circling downward to their grisly feast.

The sun was hanging low as the little army, having buried its dead, climbed with Ki-Gor and Robert up to the Gateway. However, their steps lagged a little across the stony ground. For one thing, they were undergoing a natural reaction from the shock of the battle. For another they felt a nameless dread of what they might find on the other side of the Gateway. They were courageous warriors, as shown by their behavior against the gorilla-men. But gorilla-men, fearsome though they were, were tangible enemies that could be faced and beaten in combat. And this cleft in the mountain bastion they were approaching was the Gateway to the Land of the Living Dead. The fear of the Unknown clutched at the stout hearts of the M'balla.

Ki-Gor's finely tuned senses made him aware of this situation in the ranks of the little army. If the truth be told, he felt a little

uneasy himself. But far overshadowing any fears for himself was the determination to penetrate into this awesome place, and find out what had happened to Helene. And if Helene were alive, he would probably need the assistance of the M'balla to rescue her. Therefore he felt a responsibility in maintaining the morale of the army.

So when the little force reached the cleft in the rock, Ki-Gor touched Robert lightly on the arm, and stepped in front of him. Then looking neither to right nor to left, he marched boldly through the opening.

A broad path lay before him, winding off downhill to one side. Sheer cliffs towered on either side of the path, so that Ki-Gor could not see beyond the first bend, which was about fifty feet away. But as far as he could see, there was no sign of life anywhere on the path. He shouted encouragingly over his shoulder and went forward.

As he did, he felt a noticeable drop in the temperature, and saw that the sun no longer shone around him. Looking up he observed a pall of mist or clouds stretching eastward from the crest of the ridge. But he pressed on down the path, grim-faced, and the M'balla, quaking with superstitious dread, crept silently after him.

It seemed to grow colder and colder, and darker and darker, as they descended the narrow mountain gorge. But still they saw no signs of life. Gradually, the cliffs on either side began to flatten out and disappear, and here and there they saw patches of vegetation, bushes and dwarf trees and stringy vines.

But it was the most extraordinary vegetation any of them had ever seen, and the farther they went, the more extraordinary it became. The bushes were wildly luxuriant, with hundreds of branches, wide leaves and long cruel thorns. And the trees had gnarled trunks, twisted into the most fantastic and grotesque shapes. An eerie silence hung over everything, broken only by the whistling of the chill wind as it whipped shreds of mist across the path.

It was getting so dark, now, that Ki-Gor was unable to see very far. The strange bushes and trees loomed up in terrifying shapes in the gray gloom. The M'balla huddled as close to each other as they could and still walk. From time to time, they peered fearfully around them, and the pace of the march slowed down to a crawl, even though the path sloped downhill.

At the head of the party, Ki-Gor picked his way cautiously, an assegai held ready in his right hand. Although he wouldn't admit it—even to himself—he was feeling extremely uneasy. The supernatural spookiness of the surroundings was having an effect on even his stout heart. And besides, the visibility was so poor that he couldn't tell what kind of a trap he might be walking into. His bare body, too, was chilled to the bone with the clammy, gusty wind.

Shivering, he reflected that a good hot campfire would not only revive the sagging spirits of the expedition, but would furnish some valuable protection in this strange and desolate situation. He turned to Robert just behind him, and suggested that they halt for the night as soon as possible. He agreed to the idea with alacrity, and immediately bellowed a command to the M'balla.

A murmur of relief swept through the column, and the tribesmen eagerly bunched up on the path touching shoulders to regain their confidence. A few braver than the rest spread out and began hacking at the bushes with their assegais for fuel.

When some fagots had been piled up, Robert squatted on the ground to start the fire. Ki-Gor bent over him, watching. The flames were slow in coming. The wood was damp, and the wind increased. Suddenly, Ki-Gor's scalp began to crawl as he heard a sound from the outer darkness.

“Listen!” he hissed, clutching Robert's shoulder. But Robert had heard it, too, and so had the M'balla. They stood transfixed, eyes rolling.

It was a kind of soft, melodious wail that rose and fell with ineffable sweetness. It seemed to come from all directions, or from no direction. There was an almost-human quality in the sound, and yet no human ever made a sound like that. Mournfully sweet, it hung on the air and died away, as if some sad, disembodied spirit were wandering disconsolately through the darkness, crooning a tuneless song.

The M'balla looked at Ki-Gor and Robert, and Ki-Gor and Robert looked at each other. No one said a word. Then the wind blew strongly on their faces again, and again the ghostly voice rose. This time there were two voices! Another melancholy wail, pitched lower than the first, sang out in perfect harmony. Then a third—a fourth! And

finally a whole choir of unearthly voices rose and fell in a terribly sweet, terribly sad hymn.

“Ghosts!” a tribesman blurted out. “Living Ghosts!”

At that moment there was a distant, menacing rumble, and the ground under their feet seemed to tremble. The rumble grew louder, and far away to one side, the sky grew pale. Starkly outlined against it was a conical mountain peak. Little tongues of green and yellow flame licked upwards from the mountain top, shedding a ghastly light over everything. Underfoot, the ground trembled more violently than ever. The wind blew harder, and the ghostly voices rose to a felonious shriek.

The horrified tribesmen swayed against each other for a moment. Then, with a wild yell, they broke and ran headlong, back up the path.

Robert roared at them to stop, but they didn’t even hear him. He ran after the howling, frantic mob, and fired in the air twice, but it did not the slightest good. The M’balla had had enough.

Trembling, Ki-Gor stood and watched his allies until they disappeared

from view. He was badly frightened himself, but it never occurred to him to run. He stood glaring about him, assegai ready. Very soon the ground ceased to shake, and the light from the mountain peak dimmed and died out. The wind lowered and the ghostly voices faded away to a sorrowful moan.

Ki-Gor squatted on the ground and collected his thoughts. So far, he was unharmed in spite of the spectacular and terrifying phenomena that had occurred. But the sturdy little army which was to invade the Land of the Living Dead with him, and help him rescue Helene had vanished into the night. So now, if he was to rescue Helene, he would have to do it himself.

A pebble rattle up the path, above him. He started up, and took two stealthy steps in that direction when he was arrested by the sound of a deep voice speaking very softly.

“Is you there, Mr. Ki-Gor?”

Robert Spelvin had returned.

“I am in front of you,” Ki-Gor whispered. “How many are with you?”

“They ain’t nary one with me,” Robert answered dolefully. “I is all by myse’f, Mr. Ki-Gor. Them po’ bush negros is still goin’ to be runnin’ this time next week, I guess. They was reely scared.”

“And you?” said Ki-Gor. “Aren’t you afraid?”

“Well, I don’t feel so awful good. Seems like they’s an awful mess of han’ts around these yere parts, and I don’t like han’ts, no suh!”

“Why did you come back?”

“Man, they’s an American girl down yere and somebody’s got to git her out. An’ if I cain’t bring muh ahmy, I c’n bring myse’f. I don’ know if the two of us pull off this rescue, but we c’n try awful hard.”

“Robert, you are a brave man.”

“Well, Mr. Ki-Gor, tha’s a real compliment when you say it. Cause I guess, when it comes to bravery, you wrote the book.”

Ki-Gor ignored the returned compliment, mainly because he didn't understand it and got down to business.

"This place is not good for a camp," he said. "Let us go farther down the trail."

"You said it, Mr. Ki-Gor," said Robert, heartily. "Le's git on away from yere. Oh My Lawd there goes them ha'nts again!"

The jungle man shivered as the mysterious, mournful voices began their lament again. Silently, he offered the butt end of his assegai for Robert to hold, and the oddly assorted pair moved slowly down the path.

Enough light from the stars filtered through the clouds to illuminate their way, though very dimly. It was enough, at any rate, to bring Ki-Gor up with a start after they had only gone about fifty yards. The trail suddenly narrowed. On one side—the uphill side—a sheer cliff wall rose and lost itself in the misty darkness. On the other side was—a drop into nothingness! Cautiously, Ki-Gor and Robert crept down

the trail, hugging the cliff. It was a long and terrible night for the two invaders of the Land of the Living Dead. Inadequately dressed as they were, they nearly perished from the cold winds that whistled against the cliffs. And the almost total absence of light made their progress along the hazardous trail extremely slow. But with the coming of daylight, they found an improvement in their condition.

They were down among trees, now, tall trees that rose from gently sloping parkland, free from underbrush. The constant fog and cold winds were left behind, and the two companions hurried along the smooth, hard-packed trail to restore their circulation. The first slanting rays of the sun were pouring through the trees, when they reached a clearing in the forest. It was evidently an open bluff on the mountain side, as they could see the tops of trees peeping up on the other side of the open space. They ran forward to the edge of the bluff, to see what the surrounding country was like. What they saw made them gasp.

They were looking down on a broad, fertile valley that was surrounded on all sides by great mountains. The valley floor was entirely cleared, and looked to be one great green pasture. It was dotted with

snow-white cattle grazing peacefully, and through the middle of it ran a placid stream. At the far end, on rising ground, a score or more of buildings was grouped in a symmetrical arrangement. They stretched out on either side of a large, palace-like structure, which seemed to dominate the whole group.

The architecture of all the buildings was uniform. They were all one story high, except for the palace, which had three or four floors. They were all startlingly white, and had large, flat, overhanging roofs, also white. As Ki-Gor and Robert watched the scene, fascinated, the sun's rays touched those roofs. Instantly, they seemed to catch fire. The rays were caught and reflected by billions of tiny diamondlike surfaces that dazzled the eyes of the two men on the bluff.

But, except for the buildings themselves, there was not a sign of a human being.

Suddenly Ki-Gor's nostrils flared and he glanced sharply around.

"I smell gorilla," he stated.

“You do?” said Robert startled. “My glory, I sho’ wish I had a’nuh ahmy around.”

He moved down the face of the bluff several feet and peered into the base of the trees.

“Man, your nose don’t tell you no lies,” he called back, “these yere woods is full of gorilla-men. Le’s you an’ I get outa yere!”

Robert scrambled back to the edge of the bluff. Then he and Ki-Gor rapidly retraced their steps across the clearing. Suddenly Ki-Gor halted.

An immense gorilla-man was standing in front of them at the edge of the trees.

Robert raised his rifle, then lowered it again. A second gorilla-man was coming through the trees to join the first one. And another one, and another one-. A rapid glance around the clearing showed the two men only too plainly that they were completely surrounded by at least

thirty of the great man-apes.

“Man, we sho’ walked right into a spot,” Robert grunted.

“They were hiding,” said Ki-Gor, “waiting for us.”

“Whut we goin’ to do?” said Robert, “we cain’t lick this many. Kill a few maybe, but when I stop to reload, the rest of ‘em will come and git us.”

Ki-Gor did not answer for a moment, but stood fingering his assegai, and watching the gorilla-men. He was puzzled by their attitude. The great men-apes were not attempting to come any closer to the two men, but merely stood quietly around the edge of the clearing.

“Let us go slowly in the direction of the valley,” Ki-Gor said, finally, “and do not shoot until they attack us.”

CHAPTER IV

LORD OF THE LIVING DEAD

Ki-Gor moved cautiously downhill across the grass, and Robert followed, his rifle held ready. As they approached the ring of gorilla-men at that point, the shaggy brutes silently gave way to either side, making room for the men to pass. They still showed no inclination to attack. With a fast-beating heart, Ki-Gor stepped past the gorilla-men, his eyes darting from side to side. The oddly human brutes remained motionless.

Not until the two men had gone twenty paces or so, did the gorilla-men move. They then, very deliberately, began to follow at a safe distance to the rear.

“Mr. Ki-Gor, I think you-all got the right idea,” Robert muttered. “I truly b’lieve them big fellers wants us to go this way.”

And so it seemed. Ki-Gor and Robert went unmolested down through the forest, and emerged on to the valley floor. Behind them was a silent

procession of giant man-apes.

The two men hesitated a moment, and then Ki-Gor said, "To the houses."

Apparently it was what the gorilla-men wanted. They continued to follow at a respectable distance as the jungle man and his Negro companion traversed the long fields to the dazzling white houses.

The valley had an extraordinary beauty. The grass was lush and unbelievably green. Here and there, wild flowers, brilliantly colored, grew in profusion. And in every direction, mountains reached majestically to the sky.

As the adventurers approached the houses, the gorilla-men behind them spread out fanwise and one of them uttered a great roar. Ki-Gor and Robert whirled about. Was it the sign for a sudden attack?

Apparently not, as none of the monsters came any closer. It was a signal, though. From every direction of the valley, and from the houses, hordes of gorilla-men came running. Ki-Gor and Robert stood back to back bewildered, as hundreds of clattering brutes gathered and formed a vast ring around them. Still there was no hostile move.

Just then, a piercing whistle shrilled from the direction of the houses. Immediately the man-apes on that side of the ring separated from each other, and formed a broad avenue straight up to the steps of the palace. And at the head of the steps stood a man.

Wonderingly, Ki-Gor and Robert walked between the two lines of gorilla-men to the foot of the steps where they halted and scrutinized the man standing above them. He was an erect, handsome man, dressed in white flowing robes. He was middle-aged, judging from the long, gray mustache and the long gray hair that fell to his shoulders, framing an aquiline, brown face. But the most remarkable feature about him was his eyes. They were large and luminous, and had a disturbing penetrating quality. He smiled down at the two adventurers and spoke.

“Welcome! thrice welcome, Ki-Gor,” he said, in perfect English.

“Welcome to Nirvana. I expected you sooner than this, and I expected that you would come alone. Who is this black man?”

The tone was friendly, but Ki-Gor didn't like it, for some reason. And how did this King of the Gorilla-men know his name? Then it came to

him. From Helene of course! Eyes flashing and fists clenched, Ki-Gor moved forward a step and spoke. As he did, the man-apes stirred restlessly.

“Where is my woman? Is she safe?”

The King of the Gorilla-men made a discreet motion with his right hand. “Your woman is unhurt,” he said, quietly. “She was tired and a little hysterical from her long journey so I put her to sleep. You will see her soon. In the meantime, let me warn you against making any threatening gestures. These large, hairy creatures are my subjects. They adore and reverence me, and if they ever got the idea that you meant to do me harm, I could not be responsible for their actions.”

“Well, jes’ a minute now, King,” Robert broke in with a careless drawl. “I’m pointin’ a high-powered gun right straight at your guts. You jes’ better be responsible fer the way these yere babies act, or you-all jes’ ain’ gonna live very long.”

The King’s eyelids flickered ever so slightly in surprise.

“You are an American black,” he observed. “How very interesting. I was going to send you to the mines, but I will reconsider. I will ask you to come into the Palace with Ki-Gor. Very interesting.”

The King gathered up one side of his robe and stepped down the white stairs with immense dignity. When he reached the ground in front of Ki-Gor and Robert he extended his right hand, and inclined his head, eyes half-closed.

“Let us not talk of fighting and shooting,” he said, gently. “Believe me, if you kill me, my subjects will destroy you instantly. No. Let us be friends.”

As Ki-Gor watched suspiciously, the King looked at Robert sleepily, and smiled. Suddenly, the huge brown eyes flew open and glittered at the big Negro.

“You are very tired,” he said, in a low voice. “You are extremely tired from your long march. You need to rest—rest. Just relax all your muscles and—rest. You need to sleep more than anything else in the world. Sleep. Why don’t you go to sleep? Just close your eyes and

sleep. Don't try to hold your eyelids open. Let them fall, and go to sleep. Go to sleep on your feet standing up. Go to sleep."

At those last words, Robert swayed like a tree in a high wind. Ki-Gor, in amazement, saw the big Negro was fighting to keep his eyes open. The King backed up the steps slowly, and Robert staggered forward after him. Suddenly, the King's right hand flicked out, seized the lowered barrel of Robert's rifle, and wrested it away. As Ki-Gor leaped forward, the King sprang agilely up the steps and leveled the rifle at the jungle man's breast.

"Carefully, Ki-Gor," said the King. "I now have the gun."

Ki-Gor stood bewildered. He couldn't understand what had happened to Robert, that he should allow himself to be disarmed so easily. The big Negro groaned beside him and shook his head.

"Look out for the King," Robert croaked. "Man, he sho-nough almost had me laid out cold. I ain't never been hypnotized befo', but I nearly was this time."

Ki-Gor reached out to steady Robert, thinking fast. He didn't know what "hypnotize" meant, but he had seen Robert almost go to sleep on his feet, and he felt a sense of terrible danger from the cool, composed person of the King. More than ever, he wanted to find Helene, and see for himself whether she was safe. The King's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Now, shall we be friends?"

Ki-Gor and Robert looked helplessly at the man in the white robe, and nodded slowly.

"Then, be so kind as to follow me into the Palace," said the King, "and we will start getting better acquainted."

He reached the top of the steps and backed across the wide portico, gun still leveled. Then he pulled a whistle from the folds of his robe, and blew two shrill blasts. It was evidently a signal of dismissal to the gorilla-men, and the vast crowd of them began to break up and move away. Ki-Gor and Robert hesitated a moment, then leaped up the white stone steps after the King.

He was standing at one side of a wide doorway, and; with an ironic smile, he waved his two prisoners through the doorway ahead of him. They proceeded through a spacious hallway, and at the King's command, turned to the right, through another doorway, and found themselves in a large, high-ceilinged room. The white walls of the room were unadorned, but a deep, rich looking carpet covered the floor, and low tables, chairs and divans made up the furniture.

Ki-Gor pivoted on his heel and addressed the King humbly.

“Helene!” he said. “My woman. Where is she?”

“She is coming to join us now,” the King replied with an inscrutable smile. “In fact, here she is.”

At that moment, Ki-Gor's heart leaped within him as Helene walked into the room at the opposite end. He started down the room toward her, but stopped half-way with a thrill of horror.

It was Helene, all right, but something was terribly wrong. She was

clothed in a white robe, sandals on her feet. Her face was deathly pale, and her eyes looked straight ahead, unfocused on anything in the room.

She walked carefully around the furniture without seeming to see it.

“Here is Ki-Gor,” said the King. “You may recognize him, Helene.”

Helene swayed a moment, uncertainly, then she turned a perfectly blank face to Ki-Gor.

“Hello, Ki-Gor,” she said in a hollow voice.

“Helene!” cried Ki-Gor in anguished tones. “What is the matter? Are you all right?”

There was a dreadful moment of silence. Then the King’s voice broke in gently.

“Tell him, Helene,” he said. “Tell him how you feel.”

Monotonously, as if she were repeating lesson, Helene said, “I am all right, Ki-Gor. I am very happy here in Nirvana—happy to be with Krishna, King of the Living Dead.”

Ki-Gor swung around, his face contorted in an uncontrollable snarl. Disregarding the rifle aimed at him, he sprang at the King. So sudden and so swift was his movement that the King had not time to pull the trigger, before the jungle man was upon him.

“Mr. Ki-Gor!” cried Robert. “Don’t kill, him! Don’t kill him yet! He’s got the woman hypnotized, an’ she won’t ever recover until he snaps her out of it.”

But Ki-Gor had the King on the floor choking the life out of him in a blind rage. The powerful Negro bent over and wrenched him away from the supine figure in the white robe.

“Now, hold on, Mr. Ki-Gor,” Robert sputtered, as the jungle man spun out of his grasp. “If you kill the King now, tha’s just the same as killing Miss Helene, yere.”

Ki-Gor hesitated, eyes blazing.

“What do you mean?” he cried, hoarsely.

“Jes’ whut I said,” replied Robert. “He’s done put her into a hypnotic trance, an’ he’s the only one c’n bring her out of it. If you kill him, she jes’ ain’ never goin’ to wake up.”

Ki-Gor whirled around at Krishna, King of the Living Dead.

“Wake her up!” Ki-Gor said savagely.

Krishna drew himself up to a sitting position, and brushed the long gray hair out of his eyes.

“I will release her,” he said, with a cool smile, “as soon as you two hand your weapons over to me.”

“Now, listen yere, King,” Robert bit out. “I wouldn’t kid you-all. Don’ go tryin’ to drive a bargain, because you’ll never be closer to dyin’ than you is, right this minute. You better wake her up, and wake

her up quick, or Ki-Gor'll kill you, and he'll kill you slow."

Krishna's dark face grew paler. He reflected a moment, then smiled again.

"Very well," he said, pleasantly, "I will do as you say."

"You better do a smooth job," Robert warned, as Krishna got to his feet and approached Helene, "because if she comes out cryin' an' hysterical, they's no power on earth could stop you from bein' beaten to a pulp."

Krishna nodded, and passed his hand over Helene's eyes.

"I am going to release you from my control," he said quietly. "You will wake up, and you will remember nothing of what happened while you were asleep. Now. You are no longer under my control. Wake up!"

He stepped backward and watched the girl. Helene's eyes were tight shut, and she held herself rigid, Krishna paled.

“Wake up!” he said, sharply, and reaching out a hand, snapped his fingers beside her ear.

Helene shivered. Slowly her eyes opened. She stared uncomprehendingly about her, and then saw Ki-Gor. She gave a glad cry and rushed into his arms.

“Ki-Gor!” she exclaimed. “You came after me! Oh, I’m so happy! I’ve never been so frightened in my life as when the gorilla-man snatched me away from the camp. But he didn’t hurt me at all. And when he brought me here, Krishna was so kind. I think this is a heavenly place, don’t you?”

Ki-Gor held her tightly to him for a moment, without speaking. Then he released one arm and pointed to Robert Spelvin, one-time Pullman porter, ship’s cook, and Chief of the M’balla.

“This is Robert,” said Ki-Gor. “He is a Bantu, but he is a brave man, and he is our friend.”

“Pleased to meet you-all, Ma’am,” said Robert, with a grin. “I may be

a Bantu, but fust of all, I is an American, an I's real proud to be your friend."

Before Helene could express her astonishment at meeting an American Negro in this fantastic corner of Africa, Ki-Gor took command of the situation, again.

"This man," he said grimly, and pointed at Krishna, "is not our friend. He is bad. We are going away from here quickly.

"Krishna? Bad?" said Helene, puzzled. "I don't understand. He has been very kind to me."

"He is bad," Ki-Gor reiterated, "and we are going away, right now."

"If you will pardon me," Krishna broke in, with a sleepy smile, "it is not a question of whether I am good or bad. It happens that I am the ruler of this valley, which is sometimes called the Land of the Living Dead. My own name for it is Nirvana. You see, in the Hindu religion, and Nirvana is an ancient conception of the Ultimate of human desire. It is not like the Christian Heaven, exactly, it is merely a removal

from the world, a complete absence of desire, of illusion. I removed myself from the outer world many years ago, and found a kind of Nirvana here in this secluded valley. Thus, I took the name of Krishna, one of the Hindu supreme deities. Here I remain until I die. But this Nirvana, unlike the spiritual Nirvana of the ancient Buddhists, is somewhat concerned with matters of the flesh. I like beauty and comfort and good food. At the same time, I require solitude when I feel like it. My solution was to come here and be served by slaves, and remain undiscovered by the outer world. Human beings built this palace and the surrounding buildings. Human beings grow my food, tend my cattle—I have also discarded the Hindu taboo on beef. My soldiers, however, are these curious man-apes. They are considerably more trustworthy than any human warriors I have ever known.”

“But, Krishna,” Helene interrupted, “how can you be sure that one of your human slaves won’t escape, someday, and reveal the secret of your Nirvana?”

“For one thing,” Krishna replied, “I hypnotize them. For another if any attempted to leave the Valley, he would immediately be killed by my soldiers. You see, these are no ordinary gorillas. You may have

noticed that they are astonishingly human in some ways. They are the product of highly intensive selective breeding.”

“Selective breeding!” Helene exclaimed. “I thought that was impossible. I thought that gorillas could not reproduce in captivity.”

“The original specimens which I brought here from West Africa years ago, were given the illusion of freedom. They had the run of the valley. But they learned to eat food which I left out for them, and frequently the food was drugged. In that way I had opportunities to observe them closely, control their mating, and sometimes to experiment with their ductless glands. The second generation was more tractable. From then on, I bred them for size, intelligence and docility. These giant creatures you see around here are the result.”

“Good Heavens!” gasped Helene. “Where did you get your education?”

“At the University of Cambridge,” Krishna smiled, “and later at the University of Bonn. It was at the German university that I became interested in racial evolution and, what might be termed, constructive anthropology. Some bullet-headed Prussian students were busy with a

racial theory concerning their Aryan origin. That was vastly amusing to me, who come from the only true Aryan race left in the world—the high-caste Brahmans of Northern India. The appearance of those Prussians indicated to me that they were more likely to be descended from Neanderthal Man. And from that, I conceived the idea of trying to create modern Neanderthals. Hence the experiment with the gorillas. The experiment is not yet complete, but my man-apes are many times more intelligent than their original progenitors. And the one thing they have learned thoroughly, is that anyone may enter the Valley, but no one may leave! That is one of the voodooos I have placed upon this land. There are six others.

“The first is that my will is the supreme throughout this land.

“The second is that all who live within it must be made my slaves.

“The third that anyone may enter my domain, but none may leave.

“The fourth that all women here belong to me.”

Here Helene blanched and Ki-Gor’s eyes narrowed.

“The fifth that my gorilla-men guard stand guard day and night.

“The sixth that I be obeyed absolutely.

“The last that death shall be the lot of all who oppose me.

“You know,” Krishna smiled mockingly, “I sometimes call my home the Nirvana of the Seven Voodoos.”

“You mean we are prisoners here?” said Helene.

“For the rest of your lives,” said Krishna, simply. “And, as I have already told your companions, it will do no good to kill me. Because whether I am alive or not, the man-apes will not permit you to get out of the valley. And with me dead, their master, the probabilities are that they would destroy every human being they could find.”

“Oh!” Helene shuddered with loathing. “I thought you were so charming at first. I can’t believe that you are such a monster.”

“I am not a monster at all,” Krishna smiled. “I am just a very practical man who does the things that please him. In this comfortable domain of mine, I let no wish go ungratified. My own happiness is my chiefest concern. Surely, that is not a monster, is it?”

Helene made no answer, and for a while there was an electric silence. Finally Robert broke it.

“Man!” he said, heavily. “We sho’ly caught ourse’ves a cold fish!”

“You know,” said Krishna, “there is no reason why you should take this situation so gravely. Only technically, will you be prisoners. In a sense you will be freer than you could ever be outside the boundaries of my Lotus Land. By the time you have been here six months, I am quite sure you will feel not the slightest desire ever to go away.”

Helene cast a frightened glance at Ki-Gor, who, up to now, had taken no part in the conversation. The jungle man frowned and spoke abruptly.

“How is it that you are master of the gorilla-men? How do you do

that?”

“I drug them, my dear Ki-Gor,” Krishna replied, candidly, “with a rare substance which I distill from a rare plant that grows in this valley in great quantity. The drug puts them into a deep sleep, and when they wake up, they are especially susceptible to hypnosis. I then hypnotize them. I have hypnotized so many of them so often, that the merest suggestion that they prevent people from leaving acts now as a perpetual command to all of them. In the meantime, of course, they have become strong addicts of this drug, and I have to give them a daily portion of it. If this sounds hard to believe, just come out with me now and I will arrange to give them their ration for the day. You may see with your own eyes that I am telling you the truth.”

“No funny business, now, King,” warned Robert.

“There would be no purpose in my doing any funny business,” Krishna replied, blandly. “I could have you killed, but I don’t want you killed. I want you alive. You see, I have many hobbies, of all kinds. And, for a time now, I intend to make a hobby of you three. You interest me. Therefore, instead of sending you to work my mines, which

is my usual procedure with newcomers, I shall keep you near me in the palace. No, there will be no funny business. Besides, you have guns which you might be foolish enough to kill me with. Follow me now, and you will see a strange sight.”

Krishna stood up and walked briskly toward the doorway. Robert followed him closely, covering him with the rifle. Ki-Gor dropped back with Helene and whispered into her ear.

““What does ‘hypnotize’ mean?”

Helene thought for a moment and shook her head.

“It’s a little too complicated to explain right now, Ki-Gor,” she said. “Wait until we are alone, and I’ll try to straighten it out for you.”

Krishna led them out of the palace, down the white steps, and across the great square of the settlement to a long narrow building, which had small, heavily barred windows along its length, and two doors, a small one and a large one, at one end. Several gorilla-men appeared

from other buildings, moved over to the large door and stood there, hopefully.

“This is my drug laboratory and dispensary,” Krishna explained, as he led the way to the smaller door. “Slaves gather the plants and bring them here where I extract the drug and produce it in crystalline form by a formula known only to me.”

He opened the smaller door with a small key and motioned them to follow him.

“Then more slaves,” Krishna continued, “place quantities of the drug tablets in a long trough on one side of a corridor which extends the length of this building on the inside. I open the large door and the gorilla-men file through and pick up the drug tablets as they go along. And here you see some of the slaves preparing the feast for my simian warriors.”

Helene, Ki-Gor, and Robert found themselves in a long room which looked like a chemical laboratory. A dozen or more blacks moved slowly around emptying sacks into a long bin that stretched along the inside

wall.

“The tablets fall through a slit in the wall into the trough on the other side,” Krishna explained. “In that way, the anthropoids get all they need of the drug without having access to the source of supply.”

But Helene hardly heard him. She was staring in horrified fascination at the slaves. They were every one, unbelievably gaunt and emaciated. They moved with dragging steps. Their eyes were lackluster, and they seemed to be walking in a stupor.

“In heaven’s name, what is the matter with these poor men?” Helene cried. “Are they victims of a disease?”

“Oh, no,” said Krishna, matter-of-factly. “They are drug-addicts. Everybody in the valley, except myself, is a habitual user of the drug. For some reason, it seems not to have any ill-effects on the gorilla-men, but it destroys human tissue inevitably in course of time. That is why I need constant replacements for my slaves, and have to send my man-apes out of the valley on kidnapping expeditions.”

Robert Spelvin exploded.

“Man, you is jes’ plain bad an’ nothin’ else!”

Krishna smiled, blandly.

“You are the most interesting black man I have ever seen,” he said.

“You are going to provide me with a fascinating subject of investigation. You have something, a quality I have never seen in a Negro before.”

“Well, I’ll tell you this,” said Robert, and his voice had a dangerous edge, “I ain’ awful good slave material.”

“No, I can see that,” Krishna replied with an amused glance, “compared to these specimens in here. But, perhaps I should explain that these men are the dregs of the valley. They are so far gone in the drug habit, that I put them in here where the work is light, and where they can eat all they want of the tablets. They die off very quickly, after they come in here.”

“Oh!” Helene cried, impatiently. “I can’t understand why your slaves haven’t long ago rebelled or run away.”

“Only because of my incorruptible apes,” said Krishna, imperturbably. “Here, I will give you an example.”

He called to one of the slaves. The creature crawled over to him on hands and knees and looked up dully into the King’s face. With a careless wave of a hand, Krishna quickly threw the slave into a trance. He got up slowly on his skinny legs and tottered to the door. Mechanically, he opened it and walked outside.

“Come and watch this,” said Krishna, “it’s great sport. I have hypnotized him with the suggestion that he try to escape from the valley.”

With faces expressive of the dreadful premonition in their minds, Helene and Robert went to the door and looked out. After a minute, Ki-Gor joined them.

Outside, the gorilla-men were massing in the square, waiting for the

door to open to admit them to the supply of the drug they craved. The wretched slave was picking his way through the crowd. They looked at him uncuriously and seemed to pay little attention. But when he emerged from the crowd on the other side and walked slowly out on the green pasture, two hulking man-apes were following him.

Farther and farther, the doomed creature went across the lovely green valley floor. And behind him, inevitably, stalked his sinister escort. When the slave was about a quarter of a mile away, he suddenly broke into a staggering run. And as Helene gasped, the man-apes started after him. The first one overtook him in ten steps, seized him by the arm, and flung him high in the air. As the poor creature landed, both gorilla-men pounced on him. Helene closed her eyes to the rest of the spectacle.

“Ah! that is excellent sport!” Krishna exclaimed, eyes gleaming. “Now, you see, perhaps, why nobody tries to leave the Valley. And why, you three will never leave the valley.”

“We will leave the Valley, Krishna,” said Ki-Gor, quietly, “and when we do, you will be killed by your own gorillas—torn to pieces like

the slave out there.”

“Your optimism is delightful, Ki-Gor,” replied Krishna. “You forget that the gorilla-men regard me, and me alone, as the source of the drug that they crave. Step outside the door with me, and I will demonstrate the truth of that statement, too.

“

The throngs of ape-men crowded eagerly around Krishna as he strolled over to the large door. Avidly their little eyes watched him insert the big key, and when he swung the door open, there was a concerted dash for the corridor. Krishna stepped back with a smile as the gorilla-men jammed themselves into the doorway.

“How do they get out?” Ki-Gor asked.

“They go out the other end of the building,” Krishna replied. “The door at that end swings outward under the pressure of their weight and springs back into position afterward. There is no handle on the outside of it, and it cannot swing inwards. So they have learned always to go through the building this way.”

Ki-Gor grunted, then was lost in thought for a moment. Abruptly he asked another question.

“How soon do they go to sleep, after they eat the drug?”

“Almost immediately,” was the answer. “They walk out of the door at the other end, find some spot of ground they like, and lie down and sleep for about four hours.”

Again Ki-Gor grunted and bent his head in thought.

“If you are planning,” said Krishna, with a sardonic smile, “to strike at me while the gorilla-men are asleep, you may abandon the idea.

There are always latecomers to the feast—gorilla-men, who come down from their posts on the mountainsides. I shall lock this door before they get here. So that while most of the anthropoids will be in a stupor, there will still be plenty around here in full possession of their faculties—more than enough to protect me.”

Ki-Gor appeared not to have heard the warning. He drew Robert aside and talked to him in low tones. Krishna gave the pair a narrow look,

and then shook his head with a pitying smile.

“Fools!” he said, contemptuously, to Helene. “It is doubly stupid to contemplate escape. For not only is it impossible, but it should be highly undesirable. Life here is extremely pleasant, and also very interesting. I have, by no means, confined my scientific activities to the creation of gorilla-men. Besides this laboratory, I have three others, and in all of them, I am conducting fascinating experiments.

At the moment, I am especially absorbed in a study of the endocrines—the ductless glands. As a matter of fact, I have wished for a new subject of experimentation for a long time. One like yourself, a lovely white woman. With what I already know, I could change you in two weeks’ time, from a fair lithe Nordic, to an obese, swarthy Latin type. I could make your hair fall out. I could grow a beard on your smooth face. And, I assure you the operations would be completely painless to yourself. The only thing I am not quite sure of yet, is whether, after making these changes in you, I could change you back to your original self. That is what we will find out.”

Helene shrank back against the wall of the laboratory, eyes dilated with horror, and unable to say a word in reply to the grotesque

suggestions she had been forced to hear. Krishna calmly turned his attention the gorilla-men.

CHAPTER V

CHOICE OF DEATHS

The crowd of them around the doorway was rapidly growing smaller, as more and more of them filed through the corridor of the building. Off to either side, other gorilla-men could be seen wandering aimlessly around, on their faces, fatuous expressions of sleepy ecstasy. One by one, these dropped to the ground, curled up and went to sleep. Krishna moved toward the door cautiously. There was only a handful of the man-apes left, now, clamoring to get into the dispensary. Krishna waited, his hand on the door, until there was room enough for this rear-guard to get inside. His eyes swept the green fields, and a crafty smile came over his dark face, as two little knots of latecoming gorilla-men could be seen running in from the mountain slopes. As the last man-ape in the square crowded into the dispensary, Krishna slammed the door, hid the key in the folds of his robe, and walked toward Ki-Gor and Robert, smiling.

But the smile died on his face, as Ki-Gor swung around and started for him. He looked around wildly, but the late-arriving gorilla-men were still a hundred yards away out in the field. His hand fumbled for the

cord at his throat on which the whistle hung. He ran two steps, blowing a shrill blast, as Ki-Gor hit him.

Frantically, Krishna tried to fight off the jungle man, but he was over-matched. Ki-Gor slung the screaming King over his shoulder and ran back to the doorway of the laboratory. One or two of the drugged man-apes tried to sit up, then fell back in drowsy disgust.

Helene was holding the laboratory door open and Robert was standing beside her, rifle held ready. Ki-Gor flashed through inside with his struggling burden, and Helene and Robert ducked in after him. Robert slammed the door shut and bolted it just as the fresh gorilla-men thundered into the square.

The gaunt slaves shrank back against the wall of the laboratory as Ki-Gor flung Krishna crashing to the floor. Outside a dozen gorilla-men hammered against the door.

“Fools!” Krishna screamed, struggling up from the floor. “You have signed your death warrant by this action! The minute I open that door, my warriors will come in and tear you to pieces!”

“But you will not open the door,” said Ki-Gor.

“Somebody will have to open it, some time or other,” Krishna shouted,
“or do you intend to stay in here until you starve to death?”

“No,” said Ki-Gor, with lowered brows. “We will not stay here long. We will go away and you, Krishna, will go with us!”

“You are mad! Absolutely mad!” Krishna yelled.

“Watch him,” Ki-Gor directed Robert, and walked over to one of the slaves who was holding a sack full of the drug tablets in his hand. The jungle man took the sack from the unresisting hand of the slave, went to one of the barred windows, and began throwing handfuls of the tablets out between the bars.

It took the gorilla-men outside the door a very few minutes to discover that the coveted tables were being dispensed in an unusual way. With glad cries they pounced on the little white cubes and stuffed them into their huge mouths.

Krishna turned gray, as the full consequences of the stratagem were borne in on him. He staggered back, then flung himself at Robert. The big Negro swung his left hand at Krishna's chin, and the King of the gorilla-men fell inert to the floor. He did not move.

Outside the barred windows, the gorilla-men finished up the drug tablets, and stood around, gaping expectantly. Ki-Gor obligingly threw another sackful out, and a few minutes later, not one of the man-apes in the square was left on his feet.

Swiftly Ki-Gor set to work, knotting several of the sacks containing the drug together on a piece of rope. As he was finishing this task, Krishna groaned and opened his eyes.

"Stand up," Ki-Gor commanded, "we are going now. We are leaving the Valley and you are going with us."

Krishna fell to his knees.

"Ki-Gor," he pleaded, "it is sure death. You are bound to run into

more gorilla-men along the trail. They will kill you even if I am with you. Not even my commands could save you if they catch you leaving the Valley.”

“We are wasting time talking,” said Ki-Gor, sternly, “get up and walk out of the door or Robert will shoot you through the head.”

Whimpering, Krishna picked himself up under the watchful eye of Robert and walked slowly to the door.

Ki-Gor slung the sacks over his shoulder and paused to address the forlorn slaves in Swahili.

“O miserable ones,” he said. “You are free. Go and collect your fellows, and join us. We will take you out of this accursed Valley, and once more you may see your homes again.”

There was a heavy silence. The slaves looked stupidly at one another, and looked back at Ki-Gor. Finally one of them spoke.

“A thousand thanks, O Madman,” he said, haltingly, “but this is our

home, now. We know no other place. If we went away, how would we find a supply of the drug which we must have now, or die? Go, Madman, hasten, and may luck attend you-”

Ki-Gor stared at them incredulously, and spun on his heel.

“So be it,” he said. “A thousand pities that we cannot spare the time to stay and persuade you out of this mode of life, which is but a living death. But we must go. Farewell, O miserable ones.”

Robert snapped the bolt back on the door, swung it open, and pushed Krishna out ahead of him. Then Helene and Ki-Gor followed and the journey out of the Land of the Living Dead was begun.

They threaded their way among the recumbent bodies of the snoring gorilla-men, and struck out across the great pasture. They headed straight for the edge of the forest, and when they reached it, skirted it until they picked up the broad trail which led up the mountain.

As they turned on to the trail, Krishna once more rebelled.

“This is madness!” he cried. “I tell you if we meet any gorilla-men, and we will, I can’t save you. They will not obey me!”

“If we meet any gorilla-men,” Ki-Gor retorted, “and they do not obey you, Robert will shoot at them with the rifle. But he will shoot you first.”

Krishna gave the jungle man a long look. Then a crafty gleam came into his eyes. He raised his hands, palm upward in resignation, and said, “Very well. I have warned you.” And the strange quartet began the ascent from the Valley.

It was a long, nerve-wracking climb. At any moment a great hairy monster might rise up in the path and challenge the way. Ki-Gor’s normal alertness was doubled, his keen eyes searching the surrounding forest ceaselessly. And Robert held the rifle ever ready.

But hours and miles went by without incident. The trees grew less tall, and the air grew cooler. Now and then the travelers could look up through openings in the foliage and see above them their destination—the rocky ridge, partly obscured by its perpetual mists.

It was late afternoon, and the travelers were climbing into the region of weird vegetation, when they first ran into danger. Some sixth sense prompted Ki-Gor, who was in the lead, to look backwards as he rounded a bend in the trail. A huge gorilla-man was shuffling rapidly up the path behind Robert who was bringing up the rear. There was hardly time to warn the big Negro, and give him an opportunity to swing around with the gun.

Automatically, Ki-Gor ripped one of the drug-sacks loose from the rope on his shoulder. He shouted at Robert to duck, and then flung the sack full in the face of the charging man-ape. As the sack hit, it burst and spilled its contents all over the path. The gorilla-man staggered momentarily, and uttered a smothered roar. It started forward again, but suddenly caught sight of the familiar little white cubes, and halted. A hairy arm reached down and scooped up a handful of the drug tablets. As the man-ape crushed them into his mouth a foolish expression of ecstasy came over his savage face. And as the travelers watched, the gorilla-man completely harmless, sat down on the spot and proceeded to eat all the tablets he could find. In a very few minutes the hairy brute fell over backwards in a stupor, and the travelers

resumed their journey.

“You wasted a valuable quantity of the drug,” Krishna commented. “Six of those tablets are enough to subdue one of the man-apes, and you threw a whole sackful at him. If we meet more of them in any large numbers, you will only have five sacks left to deal with them.”

Although Ki-Gor wouldn't admit it, he was worried about that very thing. But there was nothing to be done about it. It was the only way he could have saved Robert's life. And aside from the fact that Robert was a powerful friend and ally, Ki-Gor had come to regard the burly Negro with a strong affection. Ki-Gor hoped fervently that they would meet no more gorilla-men.

In a short while they climbed in to the mists, and Ki-Gor called a halt as they arrived at what appeared to be a fork in the trail. He did not remember seeing the fork on the way down, although, he reflected that it had been so dark that he could easily have missed it.

“Which way?” he asked Krishna.

“The way to the right is the way you came in,” was the answer. “Just above here it gets very narrow for a short distance as it crosses the face of a cliff. After that it goes on up to the Western Gateway, the cleft in the rock.”

“And the way to the left?” said Ki-Gor.

“It is a perilous trail which the gorilla-men don’t bother to guard, for the reason that it leads you to the crater of an active volcano. Once you traverse that crater, you are safe, but your chances are a hundred to one against crossing it alive.”

“Volcano, huh?” said Robert, coming up. “So that’s what all that spooky rumblin’ was, and earthquakin’, and fire shootin’ up out of the top of the mountain. Hoo-wee! An’ we thought it was ha’nts! But still that don’t explain the singin’.”

“Singing?” said Krishna.

“Yeh, they was a whole mess of banshees all wailin’ together.”

“Oh, yes,” said Krishna, “of course. I once had a set of Aeolian harps set up in a particularly windy spot. I thought that the peculiar quality of the instruments might set up superstitious dread in the minds of unwelcome visitors.”

“Come, we must go,” said Ki-Gor, “and we will take the right fork. The smoking mountain is more dangerous than gorilla-men. We cannot give white tablets to a mountain.”

A few paces farther on, the trail narrowed, and Ki-Gor hesitated before embarking on the passage across the face of the cliff. The wind in their faces swirled the mist around the rocks terrifyingly.

All of a sudden, through some freak of wind currents, the mist lifted. The travelers could see four or five hundred yards ahead, past the cliff, above which the trail broadened again as it climbed toward the crest of the ridge and safety.

And there, less than four hundred yards away, a company of at least forty gorilla-men was standing.

As yet they were unaware of the presence of the travelers, but Ki-Gor shivered a little as he thought of trying to pacify that many of the brutes with the limited supply of the drug that remained. But it had to be done, somehow. The idea of crossing the crater of the volcano was unthinkable.

As if he had read his mind, Krishna came up and stood beside the jungle man.

“Unless you give them the tablets by hand, six at a time,” Krishna said, “you will not have enough to go around. And if you get close enough to give them the tablets by hand, they will kill you.”

“Then what are we going to do?” said Ki-Gor.

“There is only one thing to do,” said the King of the Gorilla-men.

“Give me the drug and I will walk on ahead and feed it to them by hand. I, alone, have the authority to go among them unmolested.”

“I do not trust you Krishna,” said Ki-Gor, “you are an evil man.”

“Very well, then. Die,” said Krishna with a shrug. “As soon as they see you, they will come down here and kill you. And I could not stop them.”

“Mm,” Ki-Gor bit his lip. “All right. Take the drug and give it to every gorilla-man. Robert will be watching you with the gun, and he will kill you if you do not do as you promise.”

“Give me the sacks,” said Krishna, and bent his head to hide the light of triumph in his eyes.

The mist stayed lifted as Krishna, King of the Gorilla-men, set forth on the narrow path across the face of the cliff. Over his shoulders he carried the sacks containing the drug tablets. Silently, Ki-Gor, Helene and Robert watched him gain the other side of the cliff and hesitate. A tall boulder stood beside the trail where it began to broaden again.

With a quick movement, Krishna slipped the sacks off his shoulders. And before the watchers down the trail realized what was happening, be

tossed the sacks over the edge of the cliffs, and dodged behind the boulder. Ki-Gor shouted, and Robert fired, but not in time. The bullet ricocheted off the protecting boulder, and a second later, three shrill blasts of a whistle were heard.

“He’s betrayed us!” Helene screamed. “He’s commanding the gorilla-men to come down and kill us!”

“We’ll have to run!” Robert shouted. “I haven’t got enough ammunition left to hold em, off. Well have to go across the crater of the volcano!”

“But there’s only one chance in a hundred of our making it alive!” Helen cried.

“Well, we ain’t got even one chance, if we stay yere,” Robert replied.

The gorilla-men were swarming down the trail, moving incredibly fast. The whistle kept summoning them from behind the boulder.

“You run back to the fork,” Robert shouted, “and I’ll try, an’ hold

‘em, back long enough fo’ you-all to git up to the crater.”

“No!” said Ki-Gor. “We three are friends. We stay together.”

The gorilla-men had reached the boulder, and Robert drew a bead on the monster in the lead. But before he could fire, there was a shrill scream of terror. It was the agonized voice of Krishna, the King of the Gorillas. He had transgressed his own Law, and his subjects were visiting the familiar punishment on him. Two great simians appeared around the boulder. Each had one of Krishna’s arms as he struggled between them, peeling shriek after shriek. Then each gorilla pulled...

Even Ki-Gor’s hardened nerves quivered, as the mist descended, drawing a veil over the scene.

“Come!” said Ki-Gor, in a hoarse whisper, “they may not have seen us. Let us run for the volcano crater, while there is time!”

The three turned and fled down the path. Ki-Gor hesitated a fraction of a second when they reached the fork, then plunged up the volcano trail.

It was rough going, and steep, and after a while, Helene stumbled and gasped. Ki-Gor picked her up like a baby, and the flight was resumed. Soon the mist lifted and they found themselves hurrying over black laval rock. The ground underneath their feet trembled constantly. Eventually, even Ki-Gor's tremendous endurance sagged, and they paused to get their breath.

Robert clutched Ki-Gor's arm and pointed. Not far down the bleak mountainside, the gorilla-men were patiently climbing after them.

The big Negro lifted his rifle and sighted down the barrel. But his first shot had no effect. The difficult downhill angle had resulted in the bullet going over the head of the target. Robert lowered his sights, and a moment later the gorilla-man in the lead toppled over.

Still panting from the exertion of the uphill flight, the three fugitives wearily continued their climb over the rough lava. They were about a half-mile from the top, the rim of the crater. The pursuing gorilla-men were less than a quarter of a mile behind them. How long, thought Helene with a sob, could she and her protectors stay ahead of

the relentless man-apes?

Up and up they struggled. Robert paused every now and then to pick off a gorilla-man. But the rest came on resolutely, and slowly the gap between pursuers and pursued narrowed. Robert had killed nine, but several of his bullets had missed, and his precious supply of ammunition was running dangerously low. There were still twenty-six of the monsters left—many more than there were bullets left in Robert's pouch.

“If we—c’n jes’ make it—to the top!” the big Negro panted. “Maybe we c’n hold ‘em off fer a little while.”

They were a hundred yards from the top now, but the gorilla-men were getting closer and closer. Ki-Gor lifted Helene up in his arms, and, calling on his last reserves of strength, sprinted desperately up the steep incline. This can't be true, Helene thought dully—this is a nightmare. If the gorilla-men don't get us, what will we do when we get to the crater?

Four gigantic man-apes, slaving with rage were only ten yards

behind. Robert whirled and fired point-blank. A scream of pain died out in a gurgle, and Robert fired again. A second gorilla-man fell. Despairingly, Robert pulled the trigger again. It was his last bullet. It reached its mark, but the last gorilla-man closed in on the Negro. Robert eluded a swinging blow of the giant arm and pumped his aching legs uphill. Above him, Ki-Gor was just gaining the crater's edge. The jungle man shouted down a warning. Robert threw an agonized look over his shoulder. The gorilla-man was almost upon him.

Gripping the rifle far down on the barrel, the Negro whirled and swung the gun like a baseball bat. The butt crashed into the gorilla-man's black face, and the monster reeled back. Lungs fighting for air, Robert staggered toward the top, still gripping the shattered rifle. He looked once more over his shoulder and groaned. He knew now that he was never going to make it.

One more brute had come up and was reaching an immense arm out toward him. Robert struck at it feebly with the rifle barrel, but the monster bared its fangs in a horrible grin. Robert wanted to close his eyes to death, but he couldn't.

Suddenly Ki-Gor was beside him, hacking and stabbing with the assegai. Blood spouted from the gorilla-man's neck, as the jungle man struck with, the strength of a demon. The monster roared and lurched back. Then slowly and heavily it toppled over.

Ten seconds before the rest of the gorilla-men could reach them Ki-Gor and Robert struggled over the rim of the crater. With Helene, they poised on the edge of a sharp declivity for a moment. Then with hardly a glance before them, ran, slipped, and slid down into the crater of the volcano.

But that glance had been enough to show them that the volcano was momentarily inactive. When they reached the bottom of the slope, Ki-Gor looked back. Twenty gorilla-men stood in a row on the rim above them. But not one of them made a move to follow.

"They are afraid!" Ki-Gor shouted exultantly. "They are afraid to come down here after us!"

The three fugitives stood for a moment, dazed. It didn't seem possible that they were, for the moment, safe. Around them stretched the black

desolation of the crater floor. Here and there thin columns of smoke spiraled up from black cones—new little volcano craters within the crater. The ground vibrated uneasily under them. But they were safe from the gorillas!

“I can’t believe it,” Helene said, tremulously, “but we had better hurry across this place before the volcano starts to act up.”

“I don’t know,” said Robert, “if you dead, you dead. Don’t matter if a gorilla-man kill you, or a volcayno. Hey, and this yere ground is sho’ hot, too.”

Already, Ki-Gor was dancing on the hot dried lava.

“Over there,” he pointed to a break in the rim, half a mile across the crater. “We go there and get out through that opening. Let us hurry.”

“Wait a minute,” said Robert, and ripped off the once-white shirt he was wearing. Quickly, he tore it into strips. Then he bent down and wrapped Ki-Gor’s bare feet in the strips. He, himself, was wearing shoes as was Helene, and he knew that Ki-Gor could not long stand the

heat of the crater-floor without some kind of foot covering.

With that operation over, the fugitives set forth. Behind them on the rim, the gorilla-men were still standing. Robert made a last derisive gesture and turned to follow Helene and Ki-Gor.

The ground continued to mutter, and the columns of smoke still stood up from the little cones scattered about the crater. But that was the limit of the volcano's activity. It was as if the mountain had a personality, and was deliberately holding its fires until the weary travelers could safely traverse the crater. Now and then, they had to dodge jets of steam and boiling water that spouted up from cracks in the lava. But by hastening their steps, they made it across the shaking crater floor in a short time, and climbed safely up through the wedge-shaped opening in the opposite side of the rim. Far back on the other side, the gorilla-men were still standing in a baffled row.

Safe at last!

They were standing on the eastern slope of the volcanic peak, looking eastward at a magnificent panorama of endless ranges of mountains.

Behind them the sun was setting in red glory. Suddenly the volcano gave a menacing rumble. A dozen of the little cones in the crater burst into action, shooting flames and black mud high into the air. The trio looked at each other. A few short minutes before, they were walking through the very spots where, now, molten lava and flaming death we're raining down. Ki-Gor stood up.

EPILOGUE

An hour later, the travelers were a safe distance down the mountainside, looking for trees big enough to spend the night in. And the next morning, greatly refreshed after a long night of undisturbed sleep, they breakfasted on fruit, and headed eastward down the mountain.

Late in the afternoon, they stepped out of the forest onto the sandy shore of a vast blue lake.

“Oh! how beautiful!” Helene gasped. “I wonder where we are!”

But Ki-Gor was gripping her shoulder and pointing up the shore.

“What is that?” he exclaimed.

“I be dam’ if that ain’ a young battleship!” Robert cried. “Hey, let’s hail ‘em.”

Coming toward them, quite close in to shore, a long white-hulled boat

was gliding. Smoke poured from its single tall funnel.

Robert ran up the beach, shouting and waving his arms. As the boat came abreast of him, several startled figures appeared on the single deck. The water churned under the stern of the little vessel and it slowed down. The deck swarmed with men in white, and a small boat was lowered away. Ki-Gor watched fascinated as the gig, propelled by four oarsmen, moved rapidly toward shore, and slid up on the beach.

A tall, blue-eyed young man in a white uniform stepped out of the stern holding an automatic in his hand. An expression of bewilderment came over his face as he beheld the white girl in tattered white robe, the tall bronzed man in leopard-skin loincloth, and the huge Negro.

“Lord in Heaven!” said the stranger in English. “Who the deuce are you, and where have you come from?”

Helene felt tears of relief coming into her eyes, and her voice was unsteady as she replied, “We have come a long way. My name is Helene Vaughn and this-”

“Helene Vaughn!” the young man shouted. “The lost American aviatrix! Oh, I say, dash it all—this is extrawdnry! You’ve been more or less given up for dead, you know. Oh, I say, this is a bit luck! I’m Sub-Leftenant Tiverton of His Majesty’s Sloop ‘Rhododendron,’ on duty here on Lake Victoria. You must come aboard immediately and we’ll make arrangements to get you out to the Coast.”

“Thank you,” said Helene with a misty smile, “and will you take my companions aboard, too? This is Ki-Gor. And this is Robert.”

“Ki-Gor? Robert?” said the young officer, passing a hand over his bewildered eyes, and staring first at one and then the other.

“Yassuh, Cap’n” said the Negro. “Robert Spelvin of Cincinnati, U.S.A. An’ I sho’ could pile into some civilized vittles right now.”

“Extrawdnry!” Sub-Leftenant Tiverton muttered. “Extrawdnry!”

Ki-Gor moved forward and touched the dazed young man on the shoulder.

“Are you N-Glush?” he said, shyly.

“N-Glush?” replied the young man, stupidly. “Oh, English! Oh, yes! Rather. You know, I’m awf’ly sorry, old man, but I don’t think I quite caught your name.”

Ki-Gor stepped back without answering. A smile lighted up his bronzed face. He liked the looks of this blue-eyed young man. And yet even then he knew he would never go back to his people. His home was the jungle, and there he would stay.

THE END