

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark brown color, framing the central text. The border is composed of repeating motifs of leaves, scrolls, and small circular accents, creating a classic, elegant frame.

Killer"s Kraal

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By James Anson Buck

Fierce and unswerving was the Jungle's allegiance to the wing-footed white goddess—all but Yamo Galagi, famed earth-shaker of the ancient Kalundas, who bowed to no law but his own insidious ju ju.

I

SHEENA dropped from the branches of a gigantic, spreading baobab and started to climb the rocky krantz, leaping lightly from boulder to boulder. She was so well balanced that she appeared to flow, without particularized motion, in whatever direction her energy proposed; and she moved with incredible swiftness, her bronzed limbs flashing in the sun, her golden hair streaming behind.

On the top of the hill she unslung her bow and quiver, looking around for a place to rest. She selected a spot where a mimosa grew out of a grassy cleft and, with feline grace, stretched out flat on her belly in the black pool of its shadow. With her chin cupped in her hand she looked toward the first bend in the river.

The jungle was the same, standing dark and endless across the river. The river was the same, sweeping its mass of reddish waters westward toward Sao Vincente and its final tryst with the Father-of-all-Rivers, as her people, the Abamas, called the Congo. Beyond the green expanse of the jungle Tula Mbogo, the Buffalo Mountain, lifted its horned peaks, and a cushion of white clouds made of it a seat for a lazy god. Truly, the jungle and the river were as they must have been for a thousand years. Only people changed, outwardly and inwardly, and these subtle changes made them see things differently, even act foolishly.

It must be so. If it were otherwise she would not be here, daydreaming beside the river. Why, when the drums had told her that Rick Thorne was on the river, had she come so far to meet him? Why had she not remained in her forest sanctuary and sent Ekoti, the Abama chief, to turn him back? Such had been her first impulse but she had not obeyed it. Why not?

Frowning, she communed with herself and soon found an answer less disturbing in its implications. She was here because she knew that he would not turn back at Ekoti's bidding. He was a reckless fool. He might even venture to set foot on the forbidden trail to her sanctuary, and pursue his folly to his death. Oh yes, it was because she felt sorry for him. It was a great pity that one so young and brave should waste his manhood in searching and straining for fruit beyond his reach. Somehow he had to be made to understand that, though her skin was white, she belonged to the jungle and the Abamas; while he belonged to the mysterious world of white men which she had never seen, and had no wish to

see. He must be made to understand that she was not for him. Her kiss was the kiss of death for any man who dared to defy the strong taboo of her foster-mother, Ebid Ela—a taboo made inviolate by a bristling boma of Abama spears.

So, here she was, listening to the drums—a pulsing now near and now far, but always articulate, incredibly accurate. But nothing now, just the gossip of the jungle. She let her mind idle. Her mood changed again, and her thoughts became less definite and merged with the blue haze. Across her line of vision birds flew with tails like a burst of flame; others, over-balanced by huge red beaks, flapped awkwardly from tree to tree. A tall, grey heron stood in the shallows and, when gorged, rose heavily to light on a bough above her head—only to rise again with a squawk of panic as Chim, her pet ape, sleeping on the bough, suddenly awoke to scold the intruder.

As the blue-toned view faded, and the sun melted into the clouds and brought them to a glow, the distance became more intimate, more revealing. She was vaguely aware of the tension building up within her.

It stirred up memories of her last meeting with Rick and suddenly she was re-living it all again, every work, every gesture as if it had happened yesterday. And with the vision came poignant yearnings which half expressed themselves to her awareness, and then were overwhelmed by the strong excitement which had been the core and magic of that hour.

And suddenly she was afraid. For her there was danger in this meeting. He would not listen to her. No! He would look at her with that disconcerting gleam in his eyes. He would smile that slow slow smile, and he would dare—. She would not stay! She would send Ekoti. She sprang to her feet.

And just then the booming notes of a drum broke the silence—“Boom-tack-tack-boom! Tack-tack-boom-tack—”

The Jungle Queen stood tense, listening, her expression changing rapidly from concentrated interest to annoyance, and finally to settle into one of profound puzzlement. She never failed to locate a drum by its tone, but the voice of this one was as elusive as the code was strange to her ears.

“Boom-tack-boom-tack-boom-tack—” The indecipherable message came from everywhere at once—far off, diffused, a rippling cascade of sound seeming to spill out of the clouds immediately above her head, and yet each note distinct.

And then silence, with not a twig or a leaf in motion. For at sundown the wind dies and a moment of absolute quiet comes to the jungle. The reed-buck stands spellbound beside a pool. The cruel claws of the leopard are sheathed, its spring arrested as if by magic. The song of the birds is hushed, and the melody of running water swells like an organ in fortissimo, and a paen rises to the high mountain-seats of pagan gods.

No village drum answered the mysterious call. It was as if the booming notes had filled the jungle with evil tidings, shocking all to awful silence. The effect of all this was so strong that the Jungle Queen stood utterly motionless, her gaze fixed upon the Buffalo Mountain, her sudden impulse to flight forgotten.

Slowly the sky lost its blood-red glow. A thunder-mutter rolled behind the mountains. A cool breeze came sliding down their slopes, and the tall reeds along the river banks whispered and quivered in sudden trepidation.. And it seemed to Sheena, as the area of shadows deepened, that the mountains became phantom shapes whose aspect took on something of aloof secretiveness, and something of menace.

A whimper from Chim broke the spell. She looked up and spoke softly to him, as was her habit:

“So, you do not like this strange voice in the jungle, little one?” Chim grimaced at her, and swung to a higher branch. But she clapped her hands, calling him down. “Come!” she called. “We must cross the river before dark.”

A short distance below the krantz the river entered a gorge, roared for a mile between rocky pinnacles, and came out to spill, feather-white, over steep terraces of rock. A native tie-tie bridge, as delicate-looking as a spider’s web, spanned the gorge at its narrowest point. Sheena knew that Rick would camp below the rapids. Also she knew that he would abandon his heavy dugout there and push on to the first Abama village above the gorge to trade for another canoe. It occurred to her that she could block his further progress into Abama country by simply telling the villagers not to trade with him. And the more she thought of this new idea the better she liked it. She could avoid meeting him face to face, and yet, if he attempted to force a path through the jungle on foot, she could put all manner of obstacles in his way. Truly, she thought with an amused smile, such a trek would test the strength of his desire. Oh yes, he would soon come to cursing the day that he had set eyes upon Sheena, Golden Goddess of all the

Jungles.

As sure footed as an ape she started across the lagging bridge. She was swaying fifty feet above the rapids, when, faintly above the roar of the water, she heard a shot, then another, and another. The echos were still bouncing from one side of the gorge to the other, when she reached the opposite shore, and went flashing down the steep trail like a golden streak.

Around the first limit of sight she saw the peak of a tent, gleaming white amid the low bush of a small clearing. Without pausing in her stride she leaped for the low branch of a tree. Then, with the effortless ease of a monkey, she went through the close-packed foliage which surrounded the clearing, sometimes leaping from the branch of one tree to another, sometimes swinging through the air on vines as thick as her wrist and as tough as a wire cable. She heard shouts as she came to stand on the gnarled limb of an ajap tree. Her lofty perch gave her a clear view of the camp, and her eyes took in the scene below in one swift, all-inclusive glance.

Rick Thorne was fighting for his life, beating off the attack of a half-dozen natives who kept circling around him and rushing at him, now one, now another, to thrust with a spear, or to strike with a heavy knobkerry. He was armed only with a club, which he evidently had wrested from one of his attackers, and he was fighting with the last-ditch ferocity of a wounded leopard. But they were slowly forcing him back to the high river bank. There were three tents in the clearing, but none of his servants were there to help him. Soon he would be driven over the bank to plunge to his death on the rocks below.

The Jungle Queen unslung her bow. But even as she notched the arrow she saw Rick go down under a terrific blow from a club that smashed through his pith-helmet with a dull, sickening sound. The striker, a squat, powerful-looking fellow with a queer headdress of turcan feathers, uttered a yell of triumph, and whirled his club around his head to strike again. And then Sheena's bow twanged, and the strange warrior fell across Rick's body with the arrow between his shoulders up to the feather. His companions, yelping and rushing in for the kill like wild dogs of the veldt, were suddenly silent and motionless, like wooden men holding weapons poised to strike. There was a moment of gaping wonderment, then the deadly twang of the bow again, and another of their number gasped, clutched at the shaft in his breast, staggered back and fell over the bank with a long-drawn shriek.

For a short time the others stood, half crouched, looking around with their mouths agape, their eyes roiling like white balls in their sockets. They could see no enemy; and, as winged death out of nowhere struck a third man, they made a frantic rush for the cover of the bush.

Wise in the ways of the forest people, Sheena did not come down at once. Long ago she had learned that when danger stalks in the jungle no creature is ever caught off guard twice. She waited until she saw a dugout shoot out from the river bank and go lurching dangerously downstream to the uneven paddle strokes of its panic-stricken occupants. Then she dropped to the ground and ran across the clearing to Rick. She dragged the dead native from his back with an amazing display of strength, then rolled Rick over and fell to her knees beside him.

II

HIS DARK curls were matted with blood, his breathing so faint that at first she was sure that he could not live for more than a few minutes. But when she put her ear to his breast and heard the strong beat of his heart, she knew that his helmet had absorbed the shock of the blow, and that his skull was not broken. She deemed it safe to move him, and soon had him under the mosquito netting on his canvas cot.

Leaving Chim to watch Rick she went to gather the leaves of the baobab, the root of the mebila and other herbs. Back in the camp, she made a paste of these as Ebid Ela had taught her to do, omitting only the incantations the old woman had been wont to mutter over her bubbling pots. Rick did not open his eyes as she cleansed and poulticed his wound. When she had finished it was dark, and she went out to look around the deserted camp.

The half-cooked food in the pots, and the fact that everything had been left behind, told her that Rick's servants had left in a great hurry, probably at the first sight of trouble; and, since they were sure to be men from one of the coast villages, that did not surprise her. She shared the Abamas' contempt for the cowardly coast people. Uppermost in her mind was the question: Who were these warriors who had dared to attack a safari on her side of the Kwango? Whence had they come? Certainly they were not neighbors of the Abamas. They had looked like Kalundas, a once powerful people who lived beyond the mountains, but whose stock was now debased by cross-breeding with the dwarf-people who ranged the jungles between the Kwango and the Buffalo Mountain. But she could not be sure of this, because only once had she ventured into the Kalunda and seen one of their villages, and that from a great distance. Their huts, she remembered, were not placed in a circle as was the style among the Bantu-speaking people, but in long, straight aisles, and it was said that they were maneaters, sometimes even eating their own dead. For this reason the Abamas would have nothing to do with them.

A snarl and a sudden flurry of sound out in the bush sent a tingle down her spine. Jackals, with the smell of the dead in their nostrils. She did not want them howling around the camp all night, and went to roll the bodies over the bank and into the river. She was moving back to Rick's tent when her eye was caught by the glint of steel amid the grass. She bent to pick up a knife which evidently had

been dropped by one of the men who had attacked the camp. The blade was double-edged, curved, and twice the span of her hand in length. It had an ivory handle, most cunningly carved, and she took it over to the fire to examine it more closely.

Figures were carved on the handle, men dressed like Rick, but with funny, thin legs. And there was a strange, prancing buck, with a beard like a goat and a single horn sticking straight out from between its eyes. And something that looked like a canoe with tall trees growing out of it—strange trees, because all the branches grew across the trunks without a twist or a downward bend. She thought it was strange that one who could carve men with such skill should make such a poor likeness of a tree. Any child could do better. But it was a good knife.

She was sliding it into the band of leopard skin about her waist when Rick called her by name. But when she ran into the tent and bent over him, he did not know her. He kept shouting her name, and then tried to get up, and it took all her strength to hold him down. She spoke softly to him. Her voice seemed to reach into the darkened chambers of his mind; for he ceased to struggle and lay quiet again.

She did not know what else she could do to help him, and she rose and looked down on his handsome face with troubled eyes. Her foster-mother would have said that he was possessed of a devil, and she would have made a magic to cast it out. But long ago something deep in Sheena's nature had rebelled against the darker practices of her people. She had faith in their simple remedies, because she had seen them heal; but she had no faith in witchcraft, because too often she had seen it fail. And besides, Ebid Ela had taught her many a fraudulent trick.

On the following day at sundown, as before, she heard the drum again; but she was too concerned over Rick to be more than vaguely aware of it. It spoke again on the third day, and again the Abama villages gave ear in silence. No answering call, no clue to the message the great drum cried out to the rim of the horizon. And it flashed into her mind that the drummer must be using some fetish-code, known only to the witchdoctors.

Minutes later when she went into the tent it was to look deeply into the gray eyes of Rick. They were very bright, and it was not only the effects of his fever that made them so; for he lifted himself on his elbow, and the slow smile came to his lips.

“It’s been a long trek—mbali sana, sana!” he said in Swahili. “But I did fight my way through all those black devils. I did get through to you.”

“Truly,” she said softly. “It was a hard fight, and now you must rest.”

He passed his hand over his eyes. “A little dizzy yet,” he muttered; then: “You did not send your Abamas against me, Sheena?”

“No—no!” She was startled into a too vehement denial.

“Ah” His eyes probed her. “But you knew I was coming, the drums would tell you that You came to meet me, Sheena!”

“I have not said so! And you must go back to the coast when you are well again.”

He made as if to rise, then fell back with a sharp intake of breath. In a moment she was on her knees beside him. “Be still! Be still!” she pleaded. His hand wound her hair into a golden twist, and drew her lips down to his. His weakness was his strength. She dared not pull away for fear of hurting him, and it was neither unpleasant, nor dangerous to yield just for a moment when there was no strength in him.

“I came a long way for this,” he said at last, and sank back on his pillow. She stayed with him until he fell asleep, a smile still on his lips, his breathing deep and regular.

On the following morning he ate all that she gave him, and begged for more. When he had eaten enough for two men he sat up on the cot, pressing his head between the palms of his hands.

“No pain,” he announced with a grin. “Good solid bone clean through.”

“You remember what happened now?”

He was silent for a moment, frowning slightly; then: “Yes,” he said. “My boys, six Lobitos, were cooking the evening meal. I was on this cot, and a drum—a big drum—was talking somewhere back in the jungle. I was nearly asleep, and it was some time later when I became aware of the quiet. The boys were not jabbering as usual. I went out, and there was not a man in sight. I shouted. Got

no answer, and so I fired a few shots into the air. And then those fellows jumped me from behind. My gun was knocked from my hand, and they were all around me. The next thing I remember is seeing you, and I thought—”

“They were Kalundas, I think,” she interposed. “One of them left this behind him.” She drew the knife from her waist band and handed it to him with an unflattering comment on the artist’s ability to carve trees.

“They are not trees,” he said, after turning the ivory handle in his hand for some time. “It is a very big canoe, perhaps big enough to hold all the warriors Ekoti could muster. And from these poles many dotis of cloth were hung so that when the wind was blowing it would move through the water. See, one of the men wears a crown, and this buck is called “unicorn” in the speech of my people.

And it tells us that this ivory was not carved by a Bantu craftsman. The knife is old, three times as old as I am, I think.”

“Then the man must have traded for it at the coast,” she said with quick comprehension,” and it can tell us nothing about them.”

“True,” he agreed. Then he leaned toward her and asked: “What brought you here, so far from Ekoti’s village, Sheena?”

She saw the tell-tale gleam in his eyes, and quickly stepped out of his reach. “I came,” she told him coldly. “That is enough for you to know. And as I have said, you must go back to the coast.”

“I like it here,” he said.

The Jungle Queen was not used to defiance, and she sensed that there was much of that behind his slow smile, and a hint at something else, too. Doubtless, he was remembering the moment when she had yielded to his weakness—thinking, perhaps, that the weakness was hers, and that he could have his way with her again.

“There must be an end to this folly,” she said angrily. “If you will not go willingly, then Ekoti will take you down river. I have spoken!” And with that, she left him.

Rick let her go without a word of protest. He was a wiser man than when he had

first come up the Kwango, nearly eight months ago. And most of that time he'd spent searching the old records at Benguela in a vain attempt to lift the veil of mystery which shrouded this lovely girl whose intelligence was of the highest order, but whose knowledge of the world outside her jungles would scarcely equal that of a five-year-old white child. But, though his researches had yielded no clue as to Sheena's identity, he had uncovered much concerning the Abamas that had given him food for thought.

According to record, the Abamas had fled the terrors of Chaka's bloody rule nearly seventy years ago, and had trekked north under the leadership of Yamo Galagi. Unlike the Zulu, Dingaan, Moselekatse and other generals, this chief was accustomed to lead his impis in person, and his march along the higher reaches of the Zambesi had been an Odyssey of battles, privations and sudden changes of fortune. Nevertheless, he had finally succeeded in overcoming all opposition, and the capture of countless herds of cattle had enabled his people to resume their pastoral life on the lush veldt between the watershed of the Zambesi and the Congo.

Then, Yamo Galagi, a born leader of men and one of the strongest personalities in African history, turned his attention to the organization of his kingdom, and ultimately pushed its boundaries across the north-flowing tributaries of the Congo as far as the Cuanza.

His government had been despotic, ruthless and cruel, but strong and efficient. From his capital, Massumba, the Great Encampment, his caravans had worked their way down to the Portuguese port of Benguela. At the height of his power he had commanded no less than three thousand warriors armed with flint-lock muskets, and three times as many bowmen. Once he had visited the court of the Portuguese king at Lisbon; and, thereafter, the chronicles styled him, Dom Joao da Silva, Count of Lunda. But some obscure quarrel had brought the black nobleman to rebellion against his overlord. He swore that he would drive the Portuguese into the sea, and he might well have succeeded had not a bullet put an end to his bloody career before the wall of Sao Salvador.

Upon the death of its strong man the Lunda kingdom, essentially feudal in character, had quickly broken up into warring factions. But Yamo Galagi had inaugurated a Golden Age, and the Bantu had not forgotten him. His name lived in tradition and fable. He was a truly admirable man, they said. A man so brave and of such infallible cruelty that a command beaten out on his great drum was

speedily fulfilled. But the drum spoke no more now—for who should beat the drum of so great a man? Surely his hand would shrivel and become the hand of a dead man. And at the voice of the drum so many would remember and grieve. Or, perchance, their hearts would grow strong again, for did not the Old Ones whisper among themselves that when the drum was heard again it would be the ghost-voice of the Galagi calling his warriors to battle and the Bantu to greatness?

And to this day Portuguese governors kept their ears tuned to such talk. More than one of them had spent much treasure and not a little blood in vain attempts to get possession of Yamo Galagi's drum. Ever present in their minds was the fear that some aspiring chieftain, less superstitious than his fellows, might unearth the fabulous drum, or a working facsimile thereof, and fill the jungles with its seditious clamor.

And there was a feature of the constitution of the old, Lunda kingdom that held peculiar interest for Rick. It was the queen-consort, the Mateyenda. The odd part about this female ruler was that she was not the king's wife, but a member of the royal line possessing her own court and her own income. Moreover she had the power of deciding the election of a new Galagi, as the petty chiefs who now held all that was left of the Lunda kingdom were now called. It appeared that she was allowed to marry, but her husbands were called "wives", and, generally speaking, had no influence at all. Thus the kingdom had had two heads in existence at one time which had been neither mutually exclusive, nor in mutual hostility.

From what Sheena had told him of her past, Rick reasoned that Ebid Ela had at one time been Mateyenda of the Lunda kingdom, and that the old woman had bequeathed her high office to the white foster-child she had cared for from infancy. This would account for the extraordinary influence Sheena had over the Abama clans.

Thinking about it all, Rick had come to a better understanding of what he was up against in the lovely person of Sheena. But it had not had the effect of cooling his ardour, or of weakening his determination to take the girl back to the coast with him someday. He was merely willing to concede that it would take longer than he had anticipated when the idea had first occurred to him. Though usually he walked where the angels feared to tread he could be as timid as a dik-dik when caution was indicated, and he had lived among Africans long enough to

know that it was wise to speak softly in the presence of their gods.

“Take it slow and easy, young feller, he counseled himself. “She is as wild as a cage full of cheetahs, and twice as dangerous. Just let her get used to seeing you around. It might take ten years but it’ll be worth it.”

There was no fresh meat in the camp, and before sunrise Sheena was ghosting along the game trails that threaded the forest, and by sunup she was back in the camp with a fat bush-buck. The morning air was bland with the odor of roasting meat when Rick came out of the tent to sit on his heels on the other side of the fire. She gave him a sidelong look and asked:

“Your head is better now?”

“As good as new. And now it is in my heart to say—”

“What is in your heart does not trouble me,” she checked him quickly. “What is in your head does. Tomorrow I leave this place. When do you start downriver?”

“Too much for one man to carry,” he said. “I have no porters.”

“I have not forgotten that when a white Bwana treks he must have his servants to cut a path for him,” she said with gentle derision. “You will have porters, never doubt it. And they will see to it that their Bwana does not mistake his direction.”

“Sheena must be obeyed,” he said with a faint smile. And she gave him a sharp look. Quiet submission was not what she had expected. It was not in his nature, and she felt uneasy. Then it flashed into her mind that he might not be as well as he said he was. She smiled and said:

“You would do well to rest here until the moon changes.”

“Six day’s grace, eh?” said he.

III

SHE FROWNED over the saying. There were many words in Swahili speech that had no meaning for her, because the Abama dialect had no words to match them. “What is ‘grace’?” she asked.

He was silent, balancing an answer in his mind. “It is ze minga,” he decided. “A thing given, as when the Abama sacrifice for rain, and the rain comes.”

“So? But I have given you nothing.”

He gave her a long, steady look, then: “I think so. I am thinking of a certain night in the garden of Sleman bin Ali.

“I gave you a knife wound also!” she reminded him sharply. But under his steady gaze she felt the blood rise to her head and pulse in her ears. To hide her confusion she got to her feet, and as she did so a deep-toned voice shouted her name. She turned quickly to see Ekoti come running across the clearing, the tails of his leopard-skin kroos whipping about his black, muscular legs. He came to a stand before her, his great chest heaving as he fetched his breath. As Rick got to his feet the young chief’s keen eyes came to focus on him. Stern disapproval was written on his face, and his greeting was coldly formal:

“I know you, Bwana!”

“I know you, Chieftain!” Rick returned.

“I did not think to find you still here,” Ekoti said, but looked to Sheena for an answer.

“Kalundas attacked his camp,” the Jungle Queen told him. “He was wounded in the fight and could not trek.”

“Ah—so!” Ekot looked relieved, then: “I sent Leta to your dwelling place in the forest. She could not find you, and when she came back she said she was sure that the young Bwana had taken—”

“Your wives chatter like parrots!” the Jungle Queen, interposed sharply. “And if

you wanted me why are your drums silent?”

Ekoti’s eyes became uneasy. He looked up at the sky and then down at the ground. “I came to speak of this thing,” he said at last. “Our drums are silent because the witchdoctors say that no drum must talk after sundown now.”

“What witchdoctors? Who dares to silence my drums?” Sheena was furious, and Ekoti looked as if he expected the earth to open and swallow him.

“All the witchdoctors say so, Sheena,” he rumbled. “Surely you have heard the drum?”

“I have heard it. What more?”

Ekoti looked grave. “There is much more and it is all bad, Sheena. When the drum first spoke the witchdoctors went to a secret meeting place, and when they came to their villages they told the people that the drum was the ghost-voice of Yamo Galagi. It was a great magic, they said, and that all the young warriors must make ready to trek into the Kalunda country.”

“So? But you did not let the young men go, Ekoti?”

The chief took his time about answering, and that the worst had yet to come was made plain by his hesitation and the way he shifted from one foot to the other. “I tried to stop them,” he said at last. “I called the Elders to council, and it was made taboo for any man to go more than a day’s trek beyond his village. But the call of the drum was stronger than our taboo. When it spoke again a few young men stole away when all were sleeping. On the next night a few more. And so it has been every night. Aie truly, it was as if a ghost walked into the villages, touched each man on the shoulder as he lay on his bed, and said: ‘Follow me!’ Soon there will be no young men left to hunt and watch our cattle, and I have come to ask you what I should do about this thing.”

“The witchdoctors lie!” the Jungle Queen flashed at him. “It cannot be the Galagi’s drum. It was buried with him and no man knows where.”

“It may be that they speak the truth, Sheena.” Rick, who had been listening with keen attention, held out his hand.

“So!” she said caustically. “The white Bwana believes in ghosts also!”

“Let me see that knife again,” he said quietly. She gave it to him, and he examined the ivory haft with a frown between his eyes. Then he nodded his head with a grunt of satisfaction and said: “Now I know the meaning of these carvings. They tell a story of bygone days. Listen—”

And then he gave her a full account of all he had learned of the Abamas at Benguela. At first Sheena could not understand how he could know so much about her people, never having lived among them. But as he got deeper into the story she was remembering certain things Ebid Ela had told her, so long ago that she had forgotten them until this moment. And once Ekoti, his eyes big with wonderment, broke in: “True, true I have heard the old ones speak of such days. It is said—”

Sheena silenced him with a quick gesture and Rick went on: “See, the carvings tell the story of Yamo Galagi’s visit to the Portuguese king. It may be that the man who dropped it got it in trade,” he concluded. “But I do not think so. No, the drum calls the Abama warriors to Massumba, I think.”

Sheena was silent for a moment, turning it all over in her mind. Her keen brain was quick to grasp the significance of what Rick had told her.

“If this be so,” she summed up. “the drum speaks of much evil that is brewing at Massumba. It must be silenced, Ekoti,” she added, turning to the chief.

Ekoti looked down at his feet; then: “The Abamas will not help you, Sheena. The witchdoctors have frightened them, and I fear—”

“Have I asked for their help, Ekoti? If you are not afraid of ghosts, we two will go to Massumba—”

“We three,” Rick put in quietly. And she turned to look him up and down with an amused smile.

“It will be a hard trek for you,” she told him. “There will be no servants to carry Bwana’s tent, to fetch his water and to cook his food.” She saw a muscle tighten in his jaw; but in a moment his slow smile had relaxed the tension, and he said:

“Anywhere you go, I can follow.”

Now, it flashed into her mind that, with the Abamas worked up, excited by the

fetish-call of the big drum, she would not be able to get porters to take him to the coast. And there was a meaner thought—it might be well for him to learn that to trek with a safari was one thing, and to trek with Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, quite another thing. Truly, such a trek would put an end, once and for all, to any notion he might have of living in the jungle with her. She laughed softly and said:

“So be it, Bwana. Follow me, then!” She picked up her bow and quiver, gave him a dazzling smile, and then sped across the clearing without a backward glance.

Rick’s lips rounded to an oath, and he would have started to run after her had not Ekoti caught his arm.

“You could not catch her, Bwana,” the chief told him. “No man could. Always she will be in the trees ahead of us. You and I, we will follow on the ground, as real people must.”

Rick looked up the game trail, into the misty green of which Sheena had already vanished, rubbing the nape of his neck with his hand. He muttered something under his breath which would have made the Jungle Queen’s ears burn had she heard it, then he turned to Ekoti and said gravely:

“It will be good to trek with the chief of the Abamas.”

“It will be good to trek with the slayer of the Bearded One,” Ekoti returned with a flash of white teeth. Then he looked down at Rick’s empty holster and asked: “But where is the Father-of-Six?”

“Must be around somewhere,” said Rick and started to look around the clearing for his Colt. Ekoti soon spotted it, gleaming in the the grass where it had been knocked from Rick’s hand. He picked it up and gave it to Rick.

“If I had such a gun, and could shoot as quickly and as straight as you do, I would fear no man,” he said.

“There is such another in my tent,” Rick told him. “When I was at the coast I thought of my friend Ekoti, and I bought the gun for him. I will teach him to shoot with it.”

“Truly?” the young chief’s eyes bulged.

“Truly,” said Rick, and went to his tent to get the gun. But when he came back the Abama chief’s face was set in stern lines. He said:

“There is a thing in my mind, Bwana. It will be good to speak of it before I take your gift I know what is in your heart. Sheena’s skin is white, your skin is white. It would be good for you to mate with her, you think. It may be so. But I tell you now that if you try to take her to the coast with you this spear will drink your blood!”

For a time black and white, both perfect specimens of their race, looked deeply each into the other’s eyes. Rick said:

“The Abama chief speaks plainly as a warrior should. I will speak as plainly. I will take Sheena to the coast with me, but only when she asks me to do so. Meanwhile, I wish to be your friend. Freely, I give you this gun, and I will teach you to shoot with it, even though the first bullet you fire finds my heart.”

“Aie!” exclaimed the chief and his dark eyes came alight with a gleam of appreciation. “You are a man, Bwana, a fit mate for Sheena!” Then he added with a deep chuckle, “But if you wait for her to do the asking, as you say you will, I think we will be friends for a long time. Oh yes, we will be too old to fight then!”

“Maybe you’re not far out at that!” Rick muttered with a wry grin, and then went to make up his pack.

IV

FROM a projecting point of rock which dominated a broad expanse of tumbled uplands that had known the rack and twist of volcanic convulsion, Sheena watched Rick and Ekoti weaving their way between huge boulders and clumps of thorny mimosa bush. They were deep in the Kalunda country now, but far off still the head of the Buffalo Mountain stood against the sky in lines of vapory blue. In the middle distance there were strange formations of crumbling sandstone, banded with the spectral white of quartz, queer piles designed by the gods in sardonic mood. To the north there was a great fault through which the river wiggled, its banks lined with thickets of thorny bamboo more impenetrable than any barbed-wire entanglement. Beyond rose the banks of the ever-green jungle, tall resin trees linked by fantastic creepers or spiky rattans.

Only once before had Sheena ventured into this country. In this valley, she knew, lived the dwarf-people, the Kobi, woolly-haired and entirely naked. But they were meat-eaters, maneaters, who hunted with tiny, poison-tipped arrows. She judged that the young men of the Abama clans, trekking for Massumba would swing wide of this stretch of jungle on that account, and this meant that, by following the river, she could be at Massumba at least two marches ahead of them. But it would be necessary for Rick and Ekoti to camp here and build a light raft.

With this settled in her mind, the Jungle Queen's attention was drawn to Rick's battered topee bobbing above a patch of bush, and her eyes were clouded by a troubled look. Though, for the past two days, she had set a hard pace, her attempt to discourage him seemed to hold forth little hope of success. On the contrary, he had clung to her heels with the tenacity of a cheetah on the trail of a wounded buck, showing powers of endurance and a jungle-craft not inferior to her own. His persistence annoyed her, and yet she was not insensible to the high tribute this determined pursuit paid to her womanhood, nor to the faint stirring of pleasure that came with the thought.

"It was cruel to taunt him, little one," she murmured to Chim as he bounded to the rock beside her. "And it was foolish, because I cannot send him back alone now."

As the pair came into plain view she waved to them, indicating the trail she

would take down to the river, and then made her way steeply through the pale green of the stunted mimosa. Following a game trail she came to an open sandy patch, glistening with mica in the sun. Here the river rippled over a pebbly bed and curved into the bank to form a large water-hole. Bamboo grew everywhere, their white-ringed, green stems protected by great shields of bark around the base. They arched gracefully over the pool, their leaves quivering in the air and veiling the light. Two elephants stood on the far side, a mother and her calf, flapping their ears and waving trunks and tails to keep off the flies. Here and there great, solid marula trees rose above the tangled mass of greenery, and some of their trunks, at her own height above the ground, were all scratched and furrowed with cruel rents; for these were the trees used by the big jungle cats to stretch their paws and to sharpen their merciless claws after their long sleep through the heat of the day.

The elephants went rumbling into the forest as soon as they got her wind, and black monkeys went running up the opposite bank with their tails straight up in the air as Chim came bounding into the glade, grimacing ferociously and snarling a challenge to all.

“Quiet, little one!” she chided. “You are very brave, I know. But it is bad to frighten such little folk.”

She had a fire started, and the shadows were deepening when Rick and Ekoti came into the glade. Rick’s face under his black beard, she noted as he came down the steep bank, was blotchy and swollen with mosquito bites. His knees, exposed by his shorts, were like lumps of raw meat where he had scratched them. His shirt was torn and showed many scars, some fresh and bleeding, where the hook thorns had cruelly torn his flesh. She was conscious of a sudden twinge of remorse. What had made her treat him so badly? Truly, she must be possessed by Nakoloshi, as the Abamas called the mischievous spirit who crept into the beds of their women and turned them into shrews overnight.

He rested his rifle against a tree, unslung his heavy pack, and turned to face her. Impulsive words, warm and full of contrition shaped themselves in her mind—and there it was again, that slow smile, tormenting, always challenging, always hinting at things that were best forgotten. She swallowed the words with a gulp of air, and merely nodded her head in return to his greeting.

Ekoti was moving down to the water hole to drink. She turned to speak to him,

and just as he dropped to his knees she saw what had looked like a black stick suddenly coil and transform itself into hissing death. Even as her warning cry rang out the snake struck and plopped back.

Rick's Colt roared as Ekoti jumped to his feet. The heavy bullet slapped into the snake's coils, but did not kill it. Ekoti's eyes rolled, following the serpent's swift, slithering retreat into the bush, and then he looked down at his leg, and when he lifted his head to look at Sheena his face was that of a man doomed. There was a pleading look in his eyes, and she knew that he was thinking that she had the power, the magic to heal. She stared at him dumbly, her mind refusing to accept what she had seen. It could not happen—not to Ekoti who had been her playmate, her friend for as far back as she could remember. A queer sound came from her constricted throat. And then the Abama chief remembered his manhood. His back stiffened and his jaw snapped shut. Then he said:

“It is good for a warrior to die of a spear thrust. But it does not matter when or how he dies if he dies well.” Then he moved to a tree and sat with his back to it, to await the inevitable with the calm dignity and fatalism of his breed.

With a cry of anguish on her lips Sheena snatched up a burning brand, ran across to him, and dropped to her knees. But before she could apply her lips to the two deadly little punctures in Ekoti's leg Rick's hand forced her head back. Anger welled up in her, and she would have struck at him, but he thrust the haft of a knife into her hand and said coolly:

“Heat the blade until it is red.”

Then she saw that while she had been standing, helpless, he had unstrapped his pack, and that the box of medicine he always carried was open on the ground beside him. And then she remembered that it was his skill that had saved Aku, Ekoti's uncle, from a gunshot wound.

“Save him,” she cried impulsively, “and then ask what you want of me!”

Rick nodded his head absently while he tightened a tourniquet above the affected part. That was a sheep-killer, one of the colubrines, he was thinking. Poison affecting the nerve centers and giving rise to paralysis. Antidote? Antitoxin and adrenalin to stimulate heart action and prevent collapse. Incise to promote bleeding, cauterize—yes it was all clear in his mind. One hundred percent effective in most cases. Further proof of the value of that course he'd taken at

Benguela. Damn it, if he had to choose between a loaded rifle and a hypodermic loaded with antitoxin, it would be the hypodermic every time! The minor terrors of the jungle were the most deadly, a man never got a chance to draw a bead on them. Now, a little anesthetic—

While he worked Sheena watched his every move with keen concentration in her blue eyes. Ekoti braced himself as the red-hot knife blade came down on his flesh, and then his jaw sagged open, and he gasped:

“Bwana, my leg is already dead! I feel no more than the prick of a thorn.”

“Soon you will wish you did not have a leg, warrior,” Rick told him as he finished. “But when it starts to hurt I will make it sleep again.”

“Truly, all white people are magicians!” said Ekoti, his voice dropping to the deep tones of absolute conviction.

Sheena followed Rick. to the fire. She watched him carefully cleanse his instruments, and refill the hypodermic from one of the many little bottles in his leather case.

“He will live?” she asked suddenly.

“Never doubt it,” he assured her, and sat on his heels to strap his case. “His leg will swell, but in two days he will be able to walk.”

There was a long pause, and then she asked almost inaudibly: “What do you want of me?”

Rick looked up at her, and his eyes clung to her surperb figure. Slow and easy—remember? He cautioned himself, and became absorbed in the lashings of his pack. He put his knee to it and jerked the straps tight before he answered: “Nothing—nothing at all.”

“So?” murmured the Jungle Queen, and fell silent, a frown on her face.

Night came and the stars burned through the leafy roof overhead. Under his tree Ekoti was sleeping soundly, and Rick was flung out on the ground beside him. The Jungle Queen was more used to spending her nights in the trees, and she felt strangely uneasy, sitting over the fire, listening to the lascivious gruntings and

snortings that came out of the forest. In the aisles, between the trees the fireflies wove fantastic patterns until the moon rose and dimmed their dancing, and spread a gauze of silver over the sandy glade. The shadows were in rhythm with the swaying bamboos, and the noise of the river was as insinuating as sleep, shutting out all other sounds. Sheena's golden head sank down to her arms folded across her knees.

She awoke with a start, every sense instantly alert. From the branches of a nearby tree came soft, persistent clucking sounds, and she knew that Chim had seen or sensed some danger. With the fluid, noiseless ease of an animal she rose and began to circle the fire; and like an animal she stood without moving at all, sniffing at the wind. Above the gurgling of the river she could hear no sound; but, borne on a sudden puff of wind, the unctuous scent of sweating bodies was very strong, and she had a fleeting mental picture of little men moving through the darkness all around her.

Her first impulse was to spring for the nearest branch. At any other time she would have been out of danger in an instant high in the protecting arms of the trees. But Instead she hesitated, then moved swiftly to Rick's side. He awoke at the first touch of her, hand, and she whispered:

"The Kobi attack us. Do not stand up. Crawl down to the river. We can cross before they rush upon us."

Rick rolled over onto his belly with a low word of assent. She stepped over his prone body, and just as she bent to touch Ekoti's shoulder a man dropped on her back from out of a tree. The sudden, overwhelming weight of him flattened her out on the ground, and the impact of his bony knee in the small of her back drove the air from her lungs in a gasping cry. Rick's gun exploded close to her ear, and for a moment she was utterly without strength.

She caught her breath in a painful gasp, and then her lithe body writhed and twisted as if in a convulsion, and like a jungle cat she fought with tooth and claw.

The man was on his knees, straddling her body, trying to pin her arms down. He was grunting with exertion, and he was very strong. No dwarf-man. She arched her back, lifting him, and then with a quick twist broke his grip upon her wrists.

He yelped and jerked his body backwards as her crooked fingers raked his face,

and in the next moment he was on his back. Instantly steel flashed in the Jungle Queen's hand, and he died without a cry as her knife was driven downward under his left armpit.

She was on her feet in a flash. The glade was full of shouts, and moonbeams winked on brandished weapons. Shadowy figures, locked in combat swayed through a pool of moonlight, Rick was fighting there. And then she saw Ekoti, standing with his back to a tree, beating off the attack of four men with his long, leaf-bladed spear. He saw her and roared out the Abama war cry. She bounded toward him, but even as her knife flashed up in a deadly arc a thrown war-club struck her on the base of the skull. She fell, rolled over onto her back, saw a patch of starlit sky whirl and become a dazzling wheel of light, and nothing more.

V

SHE AWOKE with sunlight in her eyes. It came through a mesh of boughs and palm leaves which had been woven into a flimsy shelter without sides. No bounds restricted her first tentative movements, and she sat up. A man stood looking down at her, but the seived sunlight stabbed at her eyes like knife points. She could see nothing clearly, and felt dizzy. There was the sound of voices and movement all around her; and, as her vision cleared, her eyes came to focus on the man.

He was a squat, flat-featured warrior, certainly not a Kobi. His spine was as straight as the spear he held in his hand. He wore a headdress of egrets' feathers and beaded bands crossed his deep chest to support a kind of kilt and a belt with a knife with a long, curved blade thrust into it. Muscles rippled under his black skin as he lifted his hand in salute, and she thought that his eyes held a worried look.

"I know you, Sheena!" he said in a voice that gave a queer, purring sound to the Bantu words.

She did not answer at once, but looked around the camp. At a glance she saw that she was in the same glade where they had camped the night before. Twenty, or more, black, oval shields lay on the grass, long spears thrust into the ground beside them. In the shadows there was the glint of light on copper bangles where their owners—all squat, heavily muscled warriors—squatted and talked in voices over their morning meal. Rick and Ekoti sat by the tree, hemmed in by a half-dozen warriors with spears held at the ready. Her eyes came to rest on Rick, lingered on his face until he looked up and grinned, and then came back to the man before her. The worried look had become more pronounced during her long silence, and he said:

"I am Sibitane, induna of the Black Shields. And I ask pardon for the violence that has been done to you. The man who struck the blow will strike no more."

"Who is your chief?" she asked coldly.

The induna's expression became puzzled.

“Yamo Galagi,” he told her.

“What does he want with me?”

Sibitane’s puzzlement deepened, and he answered with a question: “Have you not heard my master’s drum, Mateyenda?”

“Truly, I have heard it.”

“Then it must be known to you, Daughter of Ebid Ela, that Yamo Galagi is re-born, and that the day of his election to the seat of his fathers is at hand. Also, it must be known to you that all hear and obey his drum. All the young men of the Abamas gather at Massumba. Soon their numbers will be as many—”

“This I know,” the Jungle Queen interposed with a faint smile. “But I do not know this man who calls himself Yamo Galagi re-born. And I do not believe that the dead are re-born. I think that your master is a great liar, Captain of the Black Shields!”

Sibitane gasped, and shock and horror were stamped on his flat features. He edged back from the Jungle Queen as if he expected to see her blasted on the spot. But as nothing happened he made a slow recovery, gulped and said:

“Aie, it must be that you wish to test my loyalty. Yes, yes, I see that it must be so!” he reassured himself. “The Mateyenda knows that none but those in whose veins the blood-royal flows dare beat Yamo Galagi’s drum, or surely their hands would shrivel and become like a dead monkey’s hands. But the spirit of Yamo Galagi has taken possession of my master’s body. He makes the drum talk and no harm has come to him, as you will soon see, Mateyenda”

Sheena’s smile was dangerous. “So,” she said, “you have come to take me to Massumba. Perhaps it is in your mind to bind me also, Sibitane?”

“No, no!” protested the induna, and looked shocked again. “It is my master’s will that you be treated with all the honor due to the Mateyenda of Lunda.”

“To send his servants to attack my camp is a strange way to show honor, Sibitane?”

Inward distress showed on the induna’s face. “The fault is mine, Mateyenda. I

thought to take you without a fight. But that fool—”

“Why did you come as an enemy in the night?” Sheena demanded.

He spread his hands in a despairing gesture. “Mateyemda,” he said, “I am a simple captain of an impi. The Great Ones speak, I obey. I cannot tell what was in my master’s mind. I only know that he sent men into your country to bring you to Massumba. But you slew three of them, and when he heard of it he was very angry. Then he sent me.” He shook his head. “I hope that you will not make trouble for me because of what that fool—”

And just then the rumble of Yamo Galagi’s great drum came quivering over the tree tops. It had been silent for two days, and at its first booming notes the Jungle Queen’s poise became tense. Her head was lifted and turned toward the mountains, her hands were tightly clenched at her side and her blue eyes took fire as her pulse beat quickened to the challenge of the drum. It would not be easy to deal with this man who called himself the Galagi re-born. It was a powerful hand that had reached out from those mountains to pluck her out of her own jungles, and it was a cunning brain that had so cleverly combined the traditions of her people and their deep-rooted superstitions. By merely beating a drum he had broken Ekoti’s authority, and had given it to the witchdoctors who would now prey upon the fears of her people, like the spiritual buzzards they were! Worse, she herself was now entangled in his subtle web of lies. She must go to Massumba; because as the Abamas saw it, she was the Mateyemda and it was her right and her duty to affirm or deny this new-born Galagi’s claim to the kingship of, all the Abama clans.

And what did he want of her? Did he see in her, the foster-daughter of Ebid Ela who had once possessed the king-making power, a useful tool? Oh yes doubtless he thought that he could bend her to his will. Ah, but he would soon learn that between them it was war to the knife and the knife to the hilt!

A sharp command from Sibitane broke in on her racing thoughts. One the Kalunda warriors ran to a small drum which stood near her shelter. As the voice of the big drum died in quivering echos, the induna spoke to the drummer in a dialect unknown to Sheena. And then the hollow voice of the slotted log repeated his words under the measured beat of the drummer’s sticks.

When silence came to the glade again Sibitane said: “My master grows

impatient, Mateyenda. If it pleases you I will give the order to march.”

Sheena’s eyes came to rest on Rick and were clouded with thought. “I am eager to look upon the face of your master,” she said, after a long pause, “but I do not think that it will please him if a white man sees so many warriors gathered at Massumba. What the young Bwana does not see he cannot tell the Portuguesa.”

The induna’s eyes jumped, and his hand tightened on the shaft of his spear. “True!” he breathed.

Sheena gave him a dazzling smile. “I have forgotten what happened last night, Sibitane” she said.

A look of infinite relief came to the induna’s face. “Mateyenda,” he said warmly, “I am your true and faithful servant!”

Again Sheena’s eyes came to rest on Rick, and she said: “The Abama chief has been bitten by a snake, and it will be good for him to return to his own village. Make a litter for him, Sibitane, and let six of your warriors go with him. The white Bwana knows nothing, so let him go with Ekoti. But it may be,” she added, and a gleam of humor changed her eyes, “that the Bwana will not want to go. If you do not want trouble, seize him quickly and bind him.”

“I hear and obey!” Sibitane turned and shouted guttural orders at the men guarding Rick and Ekoti. There was a moment of hesitation then, as one man, they dropped their spears and flung themselves upon Rick.

The attack was so swift and unexpected that Rick was flat on his back and pinned down before he had a chance to strike a blow. Ekoti let out a bellow of surprise and rage and made a grab at a spear one of the guards had dropped. But a sharp word from Sheena checked him, and he flopped back against the tree, his face almost comical in its expression of complete bewilderment. In a matter of minutes Rick was utterly helpless, bound hand and foot. Sheena glided over and stood looking down into his angry eyes.

“You have nothing to fear,” she told him. “There is much that you cannot understand. I do this, because I know that you would follow me to your death. So, do not be angry.”

“You—you—” His rage choked him, and his face became charged with blood as

he strained at his bonds. Then words came crackling from between his white lips. They were strange, harsh-sounding words, but his blazing eyes and vehemence made her feel the sting of them. She knew that she had hurt him deeply, slashed his pride, and was suddenly ashamed. She did not want him to think so badly of her; and, thinking to sooth him, she favored him with the sweetest of her smiles and said softly:

“Perchance we will meet again at the Abama village soon.” But her words did not have the desired effect, indeed it only served to increase his rage.

“We’ll meet again,” he gasped. “And when we do you’ll pay for this, and it won’t be in peanuts you—you she-devil!”

“She-devil!” she echoed. She felt her own anger rising to match his. “Did I ask you to come back?” she cried passionately. “No, I did not. But I see how it is with you. I am she-devil because you cannot have your way with me. Now, I tell you, if you wait for me at the Abama village, in very truth it will be a she-devil who’ll come to meet you there!” And with that she turned and ran swiftly across the glade to where Sibitane was marshalling his men. She went flashing past the induna. He stared after her for a time, then shouted an order and, a moment later, the impi moved out of the glade in compact formation on the heels of the Jungle Queen.

The jungle was windless, sunless and vociferous, its stridence compounded of the rasping of minute insects, the low moan of the meat-hunters and the queer monkey-whinings which came out of the steaming green. This stretch of jungle was the strongest Sheena ever had seen. It would have taken the impi many days to cut a path through it, but for the fact that a herd of elephants was moving in the same general direction. The herd was headed for the mountains where the young bamboo shoots were now succulent and green, and their going was irresistible, the path they trampled through the tangled mass of bamboos and spikey vines as broad and as firm underfoot as a village road.

On the second day of the trek they came out into a scorching glare that was dazzling after the semi-dark of the forest, searing after its coolness. The country they traversed now was flat, but with walls of shattered rock picturing the chaos as it was left after the rending of some bygone upheaval. The land did not heave and roll itself up into foothills as they approached the Buffalo Mountain, for in this weird upland country the mountains grew out of the veldt like gigantic

anthills. Soon they were marching through native fields, neglected and irregular gardens with the flowering vine of the calabash trailing everywhere.

Impatient of delay, Sibitane swung his impi wide of a meager-looking village—the only one they had seen so far—but the people came running out with offerings of milk and food. There was much shouting and laughter. And yapping dogs and naked children eager for another glimpse of the strange golden-haired woman and her ape still raced on their flanks long after the village was hidden by the cloud of dust rising from under the feet of the fast-moving impi.

They were marching in the shadow of the cone-shaped mountains before sundown, and Massumba loomed black against the skyline. One of the cones looked as if it had been sheared off close to the base to form the foundation of the old, Lunda stronghold which huddled on top of it. The caravan road swept around it, but it was overgrown with grass and vines and no longer resounded to the tramp of marching feet. Yet the citadel seemed to be watching for the caravans richly laden with tribute and the spoils of successful war, not knowing that they were no more. The crumbling walls looked grim, life-less—or living only in the mind of the false Yamo Galagi who dreamed of power and glory amid vine-covered ruins.

A spiral path, which slaves had crudely torn from the mass of sandstone, with rocks dropping away in huge, broken steps led steeply up to the walled plateau. At one point there was a refuse dump, and here the rock ledges were white with the guano of carrion birds, and lank, half-starved dogs snarled and fought over the offal of an unclean people and their animals.

And Sheena thought that if there was a place in Africa where stench reached its highest magnitude, the distinction must belong to Massumba, the once proud capital of Lunda.

A broken-down gate gave into a narrow lane between square, thatched houses. People came to stare in the doorways, shouting and pointing. The tumult grew and died in passing, and as they went Sibitane's Impi melted into the cross lanes, each man making his way to his own house. Sheena and the induna were alone when they came out into an open square.

Houses enclosed it, and their flat, contiguous roofs supported crumbling ramparts of sun-baked mud and wattle. At one time the whole extensive area had

been covered by a roof, but fire had destroyed; for the stumps of charred pillars made an aisle across to a broad, flight of steps which led up to a wide terrace of stone and a squat, square tower. This Sheena guessed was the high seat of the Galagi, and, as seen from across the compound as the light changed with the angle of the sun and shadowed out its sharp, square lines, its windows looked like eye-sockets, its square doorway like a black maw, and the whole became strongly suggestive of a human skull.

In silence Sibitane led her across the compound and up the steep flight of steps. The cavernous mouth yawned before them, and they stepped into the half-light of the tower's interior. A few paces beyond the entrance Sibitane stopped outside a doorway curtained by a mat of woven grass.

"Wait," he said in a hushed voice, and then, bending almost double, ducked through the curtain. Time passed while from within came the low mutter of voices. At long last Sibitane's arm swept aside the curtain, and Sheena stepped into a chamber fragrant with the scent of burning incense.

A shaft of sunlight streamed in through a high, round window and, bathed in its golden glare, the Galagi sat cross-legged on a kind of dais under the symbol of African royalty—a big umbrella of striped cloth fringed with red and yellow tassels.

VI

HE WORE a tight-fitting cap of leopard skin, with a long stem attached to it which sprouted a spray of white feathers like the papyrus reed. His robes, encrusted with bead-work, were voluminous, completely covering his person, but his heavy jowls, loose mouth, and the pudgy hand he raised to check her closer approach suggested a bulky man of middle age. At his feet sat a woman, a very old woman. Her withered features showed darkly under the veil of gauzy white which covered her from head to foot, and her eyes seemed to burn through it as she leaned forward to peer into the Jungle Queen's face. The Galagi was the first to speak:

“By the gods, Sibitane, you did not lie!” he exclaimed in a high-pitched, sibilant voice. And the greedy vitality of his stare made Sheena feel as if something were crawling all over her. His loose mouth twisted into a repulsive smile as he went on: “Mateyenda, when I was first told of your beauty I could not believe the eyes of my servants. Now I cannot believe my own!”

His leer whetted Sheena's hostility. Her smile was frankly contemptuous. “When I first heard that the Galagi was re-born,” she retorted, “I did not believe my ears. And now my eyes are witness to the greatness of the lie.”

His teeth came together with a sharp click, and his heavy-lidded eyes opened wide to fasten on her face in a cold glare. “Speak such words once again,” he said with soft menace, “and I will have the tongue torn from your mouth!”

The Jungle Queen's laugh was soft, taunting. She said: “Soon all the Abama clans will be gathered here, and I wonder what they will do when they call upon their Mateyenda for council—and find that she has no tongue to council them with.”

“They will do nothing!” his voice rose to a bellow. “My drum will counsel them, and they will obey!” But his bluster was a little uncertain, his eyes uneasy. And Sheena, seeing the fear in him, was quick to take advantage of it.

“If you dare to harm me,” she said calmly, “the war-cry of the Abamas will shout down your drum. It will shake this ruin, and bring the walls down upon your head. Do you think that I would have come here alone, if I did not know this?”

The question, brought a scowl to his face, but before he could answer a black, claw-like hand came from under the bundle of gauze at his feet to touch his knee. He bent his head, and the pair consulted in whispers for some time. Then the old woman spoke, and the sound of her voice was like the crackling of dry leaves underfoot.

“Why do you provoke my son’s anger, Mateyenda?” she asked “Why do you deny his birth right?”

The Jungle Queen stood calm and serene, balancing an answer in her mind; then: “Because I see nothing but evil and war in his heart. He would make slaves of the Abamas to rebuild these old walls. He would be a great king, but neither his heart nor his mind is strong enough to rule wisely.”

The Galagi’s mouth was ugly, his eyes blazing. But before he could give vent to the rage that was in him the old woman’s hand touched his knee again, and she said sharply:

“Peace, my son! Leave us—you too, Sibitane.”

The son got to his feet, and Sheena saw that his bigness was not the bigness of fat but of strength. He stood glaring at her for a moment, a tic jerking at one corner of his mouth, then without a word he left the chamber by a door behind the dais. Sibitane salaamed with cupped hands first to the old woman, then to Sheena, and quickly effaced himself.

As they vanished from sight the old woman uttered a cackling laugh. “Men are fools,” she said, “always pawing the dust and bellowing like young bulls when there are women about!” She removed the veil from her head, revealing, a death’s head with skin like ripples of mud in a dry stream bed. Only her eyes seemed to be alive—strange black eyes, bright with intelligence. Looking into them Sheena felt that somewhere she had seen this old hag before.

“Come closer, Mateyenda,” the other invited. “We can talk without anger.” Then as Sheena came to sit beside her on the dais the old woman lifted a knotted stick which was close at hand and struck the floor with it.

“The earth and I—we are very old!” she said. And Sheena’s eyes opened wide with astonishment. The old woman chuckled, well pleased with the effect of her words, then:

◆ You wonder how I know the favorite saying of Ebid Ela, Mateyenda? Well, it was our mother's before we were born. Oh yes, we were sisters, Ebid Ela and I. Our mother was Mateyenda in the old days, and she lived in this tower and she had many children. But of all who were with us then, dancing up and down in the moonlight or the sunlight, I alone remain. The others long since lie sleeping. Truly, I am Neda, once chief wife of Yamo Galagi, and my son is his son. What do you say now, Foster-daughter-of-Ebid Ela?"

Sheena's smile was frankly unbelieving. She said: "Any Kalunda mother might claim the same for her son."

"True!" the old woman admitted with a toothless grimace that was only remotely related to a smile. "But would such a Woman know the secret burial place of Yamo Galagi? Would her son dare to beat my husband's drum? Would he know the fetish-code which even Ebid Ela did not teach you? Who, I say, but the chief wife of Yamo Galagi would know these things?"

Sheena was silent. There was much food for thought here. Who, indeed would know these things but one born of the royal house of Lunda? The old woman's claims could not be silenced by a simple denial. Not while Galagi's drum shouted them into the ears of all the Abamas. But why had the drum been silent for so long?

"If this thing be so," she asked, "why did you not make it known to the Abamas long since?"

Old Neda spat on the floor, and her eyes came alight with a sudden flame of anger. "Ask that of the Portuguesa!" she hissed. "My son was a mere stripling when his father fell at Sao Salvador. But they feared the blood in his veins, and they hunted us down like wild dogs. For a long time they could not catch us but in the end they captured him and sent him to the coast to work in the mines. I lived in a hut near that place. I was not an old woman then, but when they let my son go I was as you see me now."

"But Galagi had many sons," Sheena said dubiously.

"Ah, true! But they were bad times then. Brother slew brother in the struggle for their father's seat. As I have said, of the royal house of Lunda only my son and I are left. We have been so long away that we come back to our own country as strangers. Few there are who know us for what we are. But when all the Abamas

are gathered here my son will show his face to them, the Galagi's drum will speak for him, and they will know him as the Yamo Galagi re-born. Now, I ask you again, why do you deny my son's right? Is there no pity in your heart for the sister of Ebid Ela?"

Again, the Jungle Queen was silent for a long time. Her clear mind had already grasped the fact that the so called Galagi was a mere tool in his mother's grasping hands, so like vultures' talons. She saw all the covetous dreams, and all the hate and lust for vengeance hidden behind Neda's cunning appeal to her woman's instincts, and she was undeceived. She said coldly:

"I will not deny your son's birth, and when the Abama clans are gathered I will not counsel them to join his impiety. I will not do so because I think you will make slave-hunters of them. Also, I know that the Portuguesa will soon hear of your plans. They will send soldiers—"

The old woman's stick struck the floor sharply, and she thrust her face close to Sheena's and hissed: "How will the Portuguesa know? Who will tell—ah, the young white Bwana—he is a spy for the Portuguesa!"

"No!" The Jungle Queen jumped to her feet, swiftly apprehensive. Then realizing that she had betrayed herself, she tried to hide her concern for Rick behind a depreciative smile. But it was transparent, and the old hag demanded:

"What is he then? What is he to you?"

"He is nothing," Sheena shrugged. "I have sent him away—"

"Ah, you think nothing of him then? Ho, ho, but when my son's men attacked him you slew three of them? How is this?"

"He is a hunter," Sheena countered, quickly. "We gave him permission to hunt ivory in our country. Besides, the Abamas are at peace and will not allow strangers to make war in their country."

"So-o-o!" Her strange eyes seemed to punch into Sheena's brain, and on clean through the back of her skull. And then a gleam of satisfaction came into them, and her cackling laughter filled the chamber.

"You lie, Foster-daughter-of-Ebid Ela!" she said, as soon as she had caught her

breath. “I see the young Bwana’s image in your heart—ho, ho, it is a good thing to know!” Then she struck the floor with her stick, shouting for Sibitane at the same time. When the induna came in and salaamed, she folded her hands on her stick, rested her chin on them, and considered Sheena with a malevolent glint in her eyes.

“The Mateyenda has traveled far, Sibitane,” she said at length, “and she wants to sleep. Conduct her to her chamber.” Then as Sheena turned to follow the induna she added: “You will have company to your liking soon, Mateyenda.”

As the grass curtain fell rustling behind them the Galagi came from behind the dias. He threw a look full of hate at the still moving curtains and said:

“A knife in the heart, or a little calabar bean in her food would rid us of all this trouble quickly, my mother.”

Neda’s stick tapped the stone floor impatiently. “She has power over the Abamas, my son. They will obey her and—”

“Obey her!” He spat on the ground, and then struck his chest with his fist. “I am the Galagi. It is I they should obey!”

“True! And you will be a great man soon, my son,” she told him soothingly. “But you are a small man now, a king without slaves, and with but one impi to do his bidding. The Abamas were your father’s strength and shield, and they will be yours if you are patient and listen to me. We need this white Mateyenda’s power to win over the Abama clans, and when that is done they will salute you as their king.”

His eyes came aglow, and he seemed to swell visibly. In his mind’s eye he saw all the Abama warriors marshalled in the great square—Black Shields and White Shields, white and black plumes tossing in the wind; saw the sun flash on a forest of spears, and heard their thunderous shout of acclaim, the old royal salute. “Bayete! Bayete!” swell and roll across the veldt. For a time he stood transported, and then his face lost its rapt expression and settled into a scowl.

“But she will not do it!” he growled. “She says—”

“No matter what she says,” the mother interposed with her dry laugh, “she will do it! Her white skin will betray her. Oh yes, I learned much about white people

on the coast. They are like the monkeys, they take only one mate. Let her see the young Bwana. Let her feel the strength of his arms about her, and she will be like wet clay in our hands.”

“You are very wise, my mother. And it may be as you say,” he conceded dubiously. “But while she lives the power will be hers, and she is young.”

“Did I not say that her white skin would betray her? Have you forgotten the taboo of Ebid Ela, my son? In her heart she carries a seed that will grow until it destroys her. She will give up everything for this white Bwana. Beat your drum, my son. Bring him here. Soon she will want to go away with him, and then we will whisper in the ears of the witchdoctors and—”

“Aie, aie!” The light of understanding dawned in his eyes. “Truly, you are wise! It might be well to let them run away together, then we would have no fear of the witch doctors—”

“Fool!” hissed old Neda. “Let them go and they will run to the Portuguesa and tell all they know! I am old, my son, only the wish to lift you to your father’s seat has kept me alive. Be guided by me and all will be well. But enough now. All this talk has wearied me. I would rest now, and there is much to be thought of.”

“There is not much time,” he said frowning. “It wants but three days to the change of moon.”

“That is time enough. Beat your drum, my son.”

VII

THE CHAMBER into which Sibitane conducted Sheena was at the back the tower. Round air-holes, no bigger than her clenched fist, pierced the thick stone walls. The air was dead and musty. The last of the sunlight filtered through the matting-chinks which screened off an alcove where there was a skin-covered bed. Small rat voices squeaked. A snake hissed in the shadows, and then darted across the floor, a flash of black and orange in the sifted sunlight, and vanished into a gap between the crudely-fitted, stone blocks of the wall.

After Sibitane had gone the Jungle Queen stood in the center of the floor, her attitude tense, expectant. For some time she stood thus, and then the great drum boomed. Crashes of sound flooded into all the empty spaces. The old tower shook to the pulsing rhythm, so that dust and flaked mud fell from the roof above. Sheena stood with her hands tightly pressed to her ears while the drum hurled its message far into the deep silence of the jungle.

Then silence, and the faint tack-tack of a drum answering the call, or relaying the Galagi's commands, she could not tell. And it did not matter. She knew that the message would reach the Kalundas Sibitane had left with Rick and Ekoti. Also she knew that if the Kalunda party trekked night and day Rick would be at Massumba before the moon was full. And all this because, in an unguarded moment, the prying, shrewd eyes of the old hag Neda had divined a truth that she had tried to hide, even from herself.

Far into the night she paced the floor of her chamber like a caged lioness, At one moment she was telling herself that she was not answerable for whatever might happen to Rick. There wae no end to his folly, and this was the fruit of it. And in the next old Neda's voice echoed hollowly in her ears; "—spy for the Portuguesa!" And the fear that was in her came up into her throat and made her gulp for air.

At last, utterly worn out, she flung herself on the slatted bed, and slept until a bright-eyed Kalunda girl awakened her.

Sunlight was striking through the vent-holes of the tower room and lay on the floor like bright discs of copper. Sheena threw aside her skin coverings and stood up, sweeping the golden veil of her hair from her face. The Kalunda girl, a mere

child, stared for a moment in breathless amazement, and then took to her heels in sudden panic as the Jungle Queen smiled and took a step toward her.

The girl had placed a gourd of milk and some bananas on a mat in the outer room. As Sheena sat on her heels Chim came begging for his share of the meal. She was drinking the milk when Sibitane appeared in the doorway and salaamed.

“If it pleases you,” he said diffidently, “Neda, the Queen-Mother, will speak with you now, Mateyenda.”

“It pleases me,” said Sheena with a faint smile, and rose to follow him. In all these high-sounding titles, in all this outward show of respect, there was hollow mockery, she thought. And yet something strange and sad was brought to life. Something that was loathsome and evil too. Something belonging to the dead, like Neda.

She followed the induna along a dark passage which ended in a narrow flight of steps.

“They lead to the top of the tower,” Sibitane told her, stepping aside to allow her to pass. “I will tell the Queen-Mother that you await her there.”

Sheena went up, and the first thing she saw, as her head came above the level of the stone floor, was the great drum of Yamo Galagi. The tower-top was open to the glare of the sun. A low wall of stone enclosed the square space in the center of which stood the drum under a peaked, thatch roof supported by four poles. It captured the Jungle Queen’s attention at first sight, and she glided across the flat roof to examine it more closely.

It was a hollow log, trimmed to an oval shape, its ends plugged with softer wood. The slot measured about the span of a hand at the wide end, and tapered to a mere slit at the narrow end. It was the difference in the thickness of lips of the cleft along the length of the drum which gave the drummer his two notes—the thick lip which was the man-voice and the thin lip which was the woman-voice. Except for size and the weird carvings that covered its cracked surfaces, It was not unlike the big wardrums she had seen in the Abama villages.

Idly she wondered what the witch doctors would think if she made it speak her nadan, her drum name, and then sent a message booming and crashing over the jungle. On a sudden impulse she put her hand into the slot, feeling for the drum

sticks, but only to drop them back quickly at the sound of Neda's cackling laugh. She turned to see the old woman hobbling toward her, supported by Sibatane and her stick.

"Beware, Mateyenda!" Neda warned her. "Only those of the blood-royal may beat Galagi's drum, and there is not a drop of that under your white skin!"

There was a challenge in the old woman's eyes, and Sheena's expression became thoughtful. Did the old hag really believe that her hand would shrivel if she, a white woman, took up the sticks?

It might be so. Despite their frauds most witch doctors believed in their own magical powers. And then an idea flashed into her mind, and her eyes narrowed as she let her thought fondle it.

Sibatane retired to a respectful distance, and old Neda sat on the stool he had placed in the shade of the thatch for her.

◆ Beat the drum if you dare, Foster-daughter-of-Ebid Ela!" Neda challenged her.

"It is not in my mind to beat it," said Sheena absently.

"That is well for you!" the old woman said with her dry chuckle. "But I have come to speak of another thing. We have caught the Portuguesa spy. The drums say that he will be here on the morning of the full moon."

Sheena shrugged and said: "It is foolish to bring him here. He has many friends at the coast, and if harm comes to him they will soon know it. It is nothing to me, but you make much trouble for yourself, I think."

Neda kept her strange eyes fastened on the Jungle Queen's face, and went on as if she had not heard Sheena's words: "When I was young the enemies of my husband were brought up to this tower after the witch doctors had smelt them out. See-yonder?" She pointed with her stick. And Sheena, looking in the direction indicated, saw a long tree trunk, freshly trimmed, balanced on the stone parapet Its butt-end was lashed to rusty, iron staples sunk into the stone roof, and there was a long coil of rattan rope beside it.

"In the old days," Neda went on with her eyes still fastened on Sheena's face, "those who dared to disobey Yamo Galagi were lowered down to the wild dogs

from a pole like that. I saw many die that way. But never one of them quickly, because the rope held them at half their own height above the rocks, and the dogs must leap up to tear at their flesh. Oh yes, at sunrise many still lived, but with little flesh on their legs.”

The color had left the Jungle Queen’s face. The old woman laughed and went on: “The young Bwana is very strong, Sibitane says. He will live for a long time, I think. Yes, he will die of old age—if the Mateyenda sees in my son a true Galagi.”

Sheena experienced the faint sense of nausea that always comes with the sudden fulfillment of fear, however much expected. Her leg muscles tensed as her impulsive energy prompted her to spring and sink her knife into her tormentor’s throat. But killing Neda would not save Rick’s life, nor the Abamas from slavery. And there was another way. There was always a way.

“What do you say now, Mateyenda?” the old woman’s voice broke in on her thoughts.

“When the moon is full we will speak of this thing again,” Sheena answered with deceptive calm.

The old woman’s eyes struck at her venomously, but she only nodded her head and said: “Good! Talk to the Bwana about it when he comes. We would be your friends. We do not deny your right, and if harm come to your white Bwana it will be by your own hand. Think of this, Mateyenda. There is no hope for him if you speak against my son.”

Sheena’s smile was enigmatical. “Never say of the ajap tree in fruit that it bears nothing but leaves,” she murmured, and then turned away and went down the steps.

Down on the terrace Sheena paused to look over the veldt. One group of Abama warriors was already camped in the shadow of Massumba. There was no wind, and the smoke of their cooking-fires rose straight up in the air, spoiling the view of the caravan road. But through the haze she could see the flash of sunlight on metal, and that told her that another band would soon swell the numbers in the camp below the walls.

Frowning, she went to her chamber and sat on the bed to think out the details of

the daring plan that had flashed into her mind up on the tower roof. As it came clearer, she contemplated it with a kind of shudder of the mind. She wondered what Rick would think of it, and instantly decided that she would tell him nothing. He would know soon enough, and have good reason to call her she-devil after moonrise tomorrow night.

It was late afternoon, and the ghost of a full moon hung over the veldt, when Sibitane came to tell Sheena that Rick and Ekoti had arrived at Massumba.

“If it please you, I will take you to them now, Mateyenda,” he said in his diffident way.

She followed him out onto the terrace. At her first look around she saw that the big drum had been carried down from the tower, and now stood on a platform of logs a short distance back from the head of the steps where it would be in plain view of the Abamas when they assembled in the great square. A faint smile of satisfaction came to the Jungle Queen’s lips as she followed the induna across the terrace to the opposite side of the tower. Two of the Black Shields leaned on their spears before an open doorway. Sibitane stepped aside, salaamed, and Sheena walked into a chamber exactly like her own.

Ekoti was hunkered over the remains of a meal, and Rick came through the curtained alcove as the Abama chief spoke her name. He greeted her with a quizzical smile and said:

“We were to meet at the Abama village but it would seem that you changed your mind.”

“I did not change my mind,” she told coldly. “And speak Swahili. These walls have ears.”

His left eyebrow quirked up. “We’re in some kind of trouble, eh?” But he did not seem to be very worried about it, and that annoyed her and she said sharply:

“If you stay in this country you will always make trouble for yourself—and your friends.”

“Well, I can handle my own trouble,” he retorted.

“Ah, you think so?” Her tone was caustic, and she went on: “That is good, and I

must tell you about this trouble so that you can deal with it quickly.” Then she sat on her heels and gave him a clear and concise account of all that had happened, omitting only the details of her last talk with Neda. It left him only partly aware of his danger, but she could not tell him more of herself than she deemed it good for him to know. When she had finished he looked up at the roof, whistled softly, and then fumbled in his pockets for his pipe and tobacco. Ekoti’s face was set in a black scowl, and presently he gave tongue to the question uppermost in his mind:

“Will you do as this witch-woman says, Sheena? Will you make this dog of a Kalunda chief of all the Abamas?”

“I will not betray the Abamas,” Sheena answered and gave Rick a keen look. But if he felt fear, it did not show on his face. He merely nodded his head in approval, and went on stuffing tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. She liked his calmness, and thought that his beard, black and curling now, improved his looks, gave him a graver aspect and emphasized his virility. She smiled and added as an afterthought: “And I will not betray my friend.”

He glanced up quickly, frowned, then: “You did your best to keep me out of this mess. I’ll have to take my chances from now on. I’ll have a talk with the Galagi. Maybe I can convince him—”

“If you do so, you will make trouble for me,” Sheena interposed hastily. “I ask you to talk with no one, and not to leave this room before moonrise. Promise that you will do this—for me.”

His slow smile came and went “Lady,” he said, “you’ll never have to ask me for anything twice. But you have something on your mind. What is it?”

She threw a significant glance at the open door, and shook her head. Then she held out her hand and said: “Give me a little of your tobacco.”

Perplexity was on his face as she transferred some of the tobacco from the pouch to the bag attached to her leopard skin shorts. She ignored the question in his eyes and turned to the Abama chief.

“The swelling has gone from your leg,” she observed.

Ekoti grinned, stretched out his leg and flexed powerful calf muscles. “There is

great magic in Bwana's little bottles, Sheena," he said. "Always when our people are bitten by the sheep-killer they die. It would be a good thing if Bwana lived at my village for awhile and taught you his magic."

She darted a sidelong look in Rick's direction. So, she thought, he has won Ekoti over to his way of thinking. His face showed only impassive innocence, but, behind his beard, she knew that he was smiling smugly, very pleased with his cleverness. She ignored Ekoti's suggestion and said:

"At moonrise the Galagi will beat his drum, and show himself to the Abamas. Remember, until then, you have promised to talk with no one. I go now."

"One moment!" Rick stepped into her path quickly. "I don't know what is in your mind, Sheena," he went on gravely. "But whatever it is, it may not work out as you think. Back on the trail I called you she-devil, and before you go it is in my heart to say that I am sorry for it."

She gave him a long, steady look, then: "If you did know what was in my mind you would not be sorry, I think. You do not know me well yet, Rick Thorne." And with that and a faint smile she left him.

Back in her own chamber the Jungle Queen took the tobacco from the dacca bag, and with a wry mouth chewed it into a moist wad. Then she took some of the milk she had saved in the gourd and placed it close to the gap between the stones into which she had seen the orange-colored snake disappear. Then she moved back several feet and sat on her heels, to wait. Chim bounced from the bed to her side. He pulled her hair and ran to the door; but when she did not follow he jumped up and down, scolding her.

"Quiet, little one!" she told him. "I know you do not like this place. We will go soon. Quiet now!"

Chim grimaced at her, and went to sulk on the bed. Minutes passed, and then the snake came out of its hole and slid slowly toward the milk. Sheena pursed her lips and began to whistle softly—three, high pitched notes repeated again and again. Presently, the snake lifted its arrow-shaped head, its forked and quivering tongue darting in and out of its mouth. Soon it was swaying like a reed in the wind to the rhythm of the peculiar notes and Sheena cautiously approached it. Then with feline efficiency her hand shot out to grasp the serpent by the back of the neck, and as quick as a flash she spat tobacco-juice into its hissing mouth.

It was an old trick that Ebid Ela had taught her, and one which, when performed by a skilled witch doctor, never failed to fill his audience with awe; for the effect of the nicotine was almost instantaneous, the snake's muscles knotted into lumps and the creature became rigid. Whereupon the witch doctor declared that he had changed it into a stick. And then after a time, to the complete and utter amazement of the spectators, he would rub the snake between the palms of his hands, restoring it to a state of infuriated and deadly animation.

There was a cold light in the Jungle Queen's blue eyes as she carried the paralyzed snake to her bed and covered it with one of the skins. Truly she was a she-devil, she thought. But guile must be matched by guile, and evil fought with evil.

For the rest of the day she sat on the bed in moody silence. She did not speak when the Kalunda girl brought in her evening meal, and she did not touch the food.

Once she got up to squeeze a little more tobacco juice into the snake's mouth when it showed signs of recovering from its torpor.

When Sibitane came for her she lifted the skin from the bed and threw it about her shoulders like a native kroos. No sign of the inward tension she felt showed on her face as she followed the induna out onto the terrace.

A big, cold moon had climbed out of the veldt. It flooded the great square with an abundance of light and winked on the spear heads of the Black Shields who stood shield to shield, rank above rank, on the stairway before the tower. Their spears made a bristling barrier holding back the excited Abamas crowded into the compound, and now pressing forward to get a better view of the king-making ceremony.

A great shout went up as Sheena glided across the terrace and came to a stand close to the drum. Soon Rick and Ekoti came out, escorted by Sibitane and a half-dozen Kalunda guards. The induna halted them on the opposite side of the terrace, and then stood, as straight and stiff as a spear-shaft, looking toward the main entrance of the tower.

Silence came as the Galagi stepped out into the moonlight, a splendid figure in his feathered headdress and beaded robes. He was closely followed by Neda, looking like a ghost in her gauzy, white veil. Her eyes sought and found Sheena,

and she came bobbling over to the drum. Leaning on her stick she looked up into the Jungle Queen's face, and said in a sibilant whisper:

“The time has come, Mateyenda, for you to say whether the young Bwana lives or dies. Look upon him, Foster-daughter-of-Ebid Ela! Aie, aie, he is tall and handsome. Kill him and his face will haunt you forever!”

Looking down into the old hag's eyes, Sheena thought that she never had seen a face more evil, or ever had set herself against a spirit more unyielding. The strange eyes seemed to be possessed of a quality of resistance that made it useless to oppose, and for the first time doubt struck at her resolution. She shivered as if chilled by the night air, and under her skin cloak she appeared to rub her arms. Watching her closely, old Neda said with her dry chuckle:

“In the arms of the one who stands yonder you would not be cold, Mateyenda.”

The Jungle Queen's eyes caught and reflected the moonlight in a cold, blue flame.

“You smell of death, old witch!” she flashed. “Stand back from me!” She made a quick movement as if to strike, and the old woman stepped back with amazing agility.

And just then the Galagi raised both hands above his head. His commanding figure held the attention of all, and when silence came he sent his voice far over the heads of the crowd in the square:

VIII

“MY CHILDREN, I have called you to Massumba at this holy time so that you might look upon the face of your king. I am the Galagi, the son of the Elephant, the Earth-Shaker. The Son of Yamo Galagi who made you great in war and rich in cattle and slaves. His spirit is mine. His voice is in this drum. You have heard it, and the witch doctors have told you that these things are so. Yet among you there may be those who cannot believe their ears. But no man is so foolish as not to believe his own eyes. So tonight, in the presence of all, I will make the drum speak the fetish-code of the Galagi.” He paused to give his words time to sink in, and then went on:

“It is well known that the Galagi put a curse upon his drum. Also it is well known that only he in whose body dwells the spirit of Yamo Galagi may beat this drum and live. If there be one among you who doubts this, let him come forward and beat the drum!”

A murmur like the wind in tall reeds arose from the massed Abamas. But no man moved or lifted his voice to answer the old challenge of the Lunda king. And then Sheena threw her cloak across the drum and glided to the Galagi’s side. Her voice rang out, clear and distinct:

“Abama warriors, he speaks the truth! It is as he says, no one but one worthy to command you may beat this drum. I have travelled far to counsel you about this thing. Hear my council, then: If this man who stands before you beats the drum and no harm comes to him, salute him as your king. Now, let the Galagi beat his drum!”

Old Neda sidled up to her son. “Ho, ho!” she cackled. “Did I not say she would do it! This is your hour, my son. Beat the drum—beat it, I say!”

Sheena kept moving back in the direction of Rick and Ekoti. She paused, and her lips tightened, as the Galagi threw aside her cloak and reached into the drum for the sticks. In the next instant he let out a shriek, and staggered back staring at the back of his hand.

All eyes were fastened upon him, and in awe-struck silence all watched him sink to his knees, moaning in his fear. Sibitane, the guards, Rick and Ekoti—all stood

like men suddenly turned to stone. And then Neda's scream rang out, shrill and piercing. The square was filled with a sudden commotion, and calamity was on the loose.

Sheena was close to Rick now, and like a flash of light she hurled herself at Sibitane. The unexpectedness of her attack sent the induna reeling back to collide with one of his men, and then Rick and Ekoti awoke from their trance. Rick felled one of the guards with a terrific punch. Ekoti smashed down another and, snatching the spear from the man's hand as he fell, gave tongue to the Abama war-cry and plunged it into the breast of a third. And now old Neda was pointing to the ground and shrieking:

“It was a snake—see, see! A trick! Kill her—kill!”

Sibitane and two of his men rushed upon Sheena.

She leaped backwards to avoid the thrust of their spears, tripped over the body of one of the fallen guards, and fell sprawling on her back. She saw Sibitane's spear flash up, and then Rick came charging to hit the induna in the stomach with his lowered head. He recovered quickly, and with the light of battle in his eyes, stood between her and the Kalundas' spears. Barehanded he beat off their first rush, giving her time to regain her feet. As she straightened up Ekoti came roaring into the fray, and the two Kalundas went down under his flashing spear thrusts.

In these moments of shock and confusion the success of the Jungle Queen's carefully worked out plan hung in the balance. None knew better than she the power of imagination working on superstitious fears. At any moment now, panic would scatter the Abamas, leaving Rick and Ekoti to the mercy of Neda and Sibitane's Black Shields.

For an instant she stood irresolute, and then went flashing across the terrace to the drum. An instant later its great voice boomed out her nadan. The effect upon the Abamas was like magic. They saw their golden Mateyenda, knew her danger, and heard the Galagi's drum speak her commands. They answered her call with the Abama war-cry, and then charged the steps. The Black Shields broke under the fury of their onslaught, and the Abamas came roaring up the stairway in a black wave, driving all before them. Neda and her son stood directly in the path of the now panic-stricken Black Shields, and when the tide of battle swept on

across the terrace, it left their trampled and broken bodies in its wake.

Driven into a corner with their backs to the tower, the Black Shields threw down their spears and begged for mercy. Ekoti came striding back to where Sheena and Rick stood beside the big drum.

“What is your will with these Kalunda dogs, Sheena?” he asked.

“Let them live,” said the Jungle Queen. “We came only to silence this drum, Ekoti. Let a fire he built under it, and then assemble your warriors in the square. I have words for them.”

As he went to carry out her orders, her eyes became fixed on some distant object and she said softly:

“It is well for me that you came on this trek, Rick Thorne. But for you Sibitane’s spear would have sent me to the Black Kloof.” They moved off as two Abamas came to set fire to the drum, and he did not answer until they stood in the shadow of the tower. Then:

“I had some speech with Sibitane after you left us,” he said carefully. “I think that, but for you, I would be food for the dogs before long.”

Dismay widened the Jungle Queen’s eyes, and put a slight stammer into her speech. “You promised—you—what more did he tell you?”

He folded his arms across his chest and looked up at the moon. “Nothing,” he said. “Nothing at all.” But the smile was there, provocative, challenging. She asked:

“You will go back to the coast now.”

“That is not in my mind,” he said complacently. “I will go back to the Abama village with Ekoti and his people.”

She looked at him sharply, wondering how much Sibitane had told him. But his face was blank and told her nothing, and before she could pry deeper Ekoti came to tell her that the Abamas were now waiting to hear her words.

The Galagi’s drum was burning brightly, crackling and spitting sparks. Sheena

came to stand in the light of the flames, and in respectful silence the Abamas waited for her to make her will known.

“Abama warriors,” she told them, “you have done well. A great evil grew here at Massumba, but you have rooted it up with your spears. Now, you will go back to your villages in peace. If you be wise, you will tell your women to drive the witch doctors who deceived you from your villages with sticks. Go now, my people, and may the gods who watch over the river-crossing make the homeward trek swift and easy for you. I have spoken!”

There was a moment of absolute quiet, and then the royal salute burst spontaneously from the Abamas:

“Bayete! Bayete!”

Spears flashed upward, and again the thunderous shout of acclaim shook the old wall of Massumba.

The elegant Jungle Queen stood bathed in the ruddy glow of the burning drum, her head lifted her blue eyes alight—a golden Goddess wrapped in a flame of pride.

And seeing her thus, Rick stared and wondered what it was that made him think that this superb creature, who had a thousand spears at her command, would ever stoop from her high place to follow a poor, white hunter to the coast.