



The Nganga Nkissi shrieked, lunged at Roberts with a murderous, stabbing spear.

Blood-Flame For The Judu

By AL STORM

A white judu ruled the jungle, and three men died. Carson Roberts stalked their trail of blood—a trail that led to flaming doom at the hands of his best friend and the girl he loved.

THERE was no sound... no movement. Nothing of life showed in the vine-choked brownish gloom of impenetrable verdant undergrowth. Even the sluggish river which bore the Moshoma dugout seemed stilled, thick and currentless as the stinking muck of the stagnant jungle pool.

Slowly Carson Roberts let his uplifted hand of warning drop. But blue orbs searched the Congo jungle with keened wariness. He could detect nothing alien, but intuitive warning pulled at the nerves of his lean-jawed, whisker-stubbed face.

Burui, his Fulani boy, whispered uneasily. "Bwana, you... ugh!" The whisper was cut short by a hollow 'thock' of terrible driving velocity.

The stricken Nigerian reared convulsively, jerking upright to his full stature, and then toppling stiffly forward into the chocolate flow of the turgid stream. The dugout rolled threateningly. And even as Roberts' startled gaze caught sight of the bright red-feathered arrow nock pinned tight against Burui's ribs, a blaze of fire cut across his own breast bone. The dug-out rolled, and Roberts felt the uncomfortable slime of the tropical stream suck him deep down.

Instinctively the jungle-man drew his knees up tight against his arrow-gashed chest, wrapping his arms into a compact knot about the ball of his body. He sank like stone into the protective waters, but no outflung arm or trailing leg offered hold for the bone-cleaving jaws of crocodiles already jarring the stream with their threshing.

With the first touch of cold ooze bottom, Roberts unleashed his legs in a driving kick that sent him toward the far shore in a long low slant. Concussion pounded his ear drums as Burui's body was torn to bits by the blood-crazed crocs. Then Roberts' groping hands touched gnarled mangrove roots and he inched himself around the tree and into the slimy reeds of the marshy shore.

Lips writhed back in futile anger, Carson Roberts wormed furtively through the stinking muck. Burui was done, but the pang of loss was buried beneath surging rage against the hidden bowman. Squinting over his shoulder, Roberts suddenly noticed the bubbling wake knife through the water toward him. Others followed the blood-scent of his fresh wound, and the white man scrambled to his feet. Hunkered low, he scrambled for the comparative safety of higher ground where the crocs wouldn't follow. An arrow snapped into tree bark bare inches from his slime-plastered head, and Roberts dropped flat, wallowing

feverishly aside into a matted creeper growth.

The arrow jutting from the mahogany bole caught his eye, and Roberts' lips pursed in a soundless whistle. Cautiously he reached up and wrenched the deadly missile free... a polished cedar shaft tipped with dyed turkey feather! And as though flaunting the fact that it was a white man's arrow, he saw a name stencilled in gold just behind the murderous steel barb—Wm. Stewart.

"I DON'T have to warn you that this mission is dangerous," the Governor General had said four weeks back. "Three men have gone into the lower Congo Basin... they haven't yet come out!"

And Carson Roberts hadn't needed the Governor to warn him. The fact that Brad Filters, experienced deep-country man, hadn't made it was warning beyond the eloquence of ten thousand well-meant spoken words. Something strange and ominous was terrifying the Congo, something that had even the *goudougoudou* silenced.

Snarling, the white man snapped the murderous shaft in his fingers. The tiny, gold tracery glinted with treachery. Bill Stewart... former classmate and friend, now renegade murderer, and God only knew what more!

Thick hot silence hung like a sweltering blanket over the vast steaming jungle basin. Not a monkey cried out. No parrot screeched. But as his hand felt of his empty pistol holster, Carson Roberts knew well that the tense, brooding silence brooked ill for any who might be unwary enough to ignore its ominous warning.

Pushing his way back into the vine-twisted undergrowth, Roberts struck out savagely. A narrow game trail opened before him, and he fell into an easy, ground-covering jog. Somewhere down river would be the answer to the Governor's problem, and somewhere down river would be Burui's skulking slayer. Roberts grinned mirthlessly as he hurried toward that rendezvous. He was alone and unarmed, his weapons lying at the bottom of the river. But the jungle has many ways of taking life, and Carson Roberts was driven by a burning determination to utilize any and all of them.

The twisting game trail suddenly emptied into a treeless lawn that sloped down to the water. Beyond the stream, high shooting gray palms speared into the cloudy sky. And tending fish-traps along the far bank were nearly a dozen blacks. Carson Roberts faded back into the trees but not without being seen.

A tall, ochre-and-ashes-bedaubed black, naked but for an apron of leather thongs, suddenly grunted, his copper armband glinting in the fading light as he gesticulated excitedly toward the open glade. Dark visages turned as the other natives stared.

“Stay clear, bwana!” a guarded shout reached Carson Roberts; and the waning afternoon sun shone from a visage obviously white despite its weathered mahogany color.

THE blacks jabbered in wild excitement and faded back into the jungle. Vultures and marabous swung in wide circles over the trees, betraying the proximity of native kraals. Roberts cursed the luck that had sent him bounding into the open like any jungle-novice. Now his presence was known. The blacks would reappear in force and... That guarded warning puzzled the jungle-man, but he had little time to ponder its significance. Soon the *goudougoudou* would start resounding and all the Congo basin would know of his presence. Grabbing lianas as large as his wrists, Roberts drew himself upward into the massed leaves above the trail. The blacks would be expecting him to run for it.

But the afternoon sun waned into murky gray twilight that turned the river into a smoothly slick oil and still the talking drums remained mute. No natives stealthily cat-footed along the game trail or charged screamingly into the glade.

Darkness blotted out the towering palms and the formless smear of dense jungle. The white man's nerves grew jumpy and tension-knotted and he cursed softly. Somewhere in the night a big cat coughed nervously, sensing the peril that stalked the shadows. A bull crocodile roared. And then the night was still.

Stripping off his blood-soaked shirt, Roberts beat at the mosquitoes as he moved stealthily toward the stream. The water was warm as fresh blood against his legs. Then he was swimming silently toward the other shore. His senses felt of the night for sound or sight of danger. But the darkness was a rustling murmuring flow of tropical quiet. He edged forward onto the narrow mud bank, back muscles tight with intuitive warnings he could not name.

Glaring light suddenly speared into his eyes, blinding him. Crouched motionless in his helplessness, Carson Roberts waited for the finish arrow or the whirring bite of bone-tipped spears. But second followed nerve-racking second

without sound, and still the sword-blade of brilliance stabbed into his eyes. Then a rifle barrel shoved forward into the light beam and jerked upward with imperious order.

Roberts tensed, knowing his fate if he should surrender and be turned over to outlaw-native torture. The rifle jerked upward impatient.

“You win, Joe,” Roberts said wearily. “I won't argue this hand when you hold a full house.”

Getting to his feet, Carson Roberts spread his fingers wide to show that he was unarmed, careful to keep relaxed so that no knot of bunched muscle should betray his tensivity.

“Smart boy,” a thickly nasal tone mocked derisively. “But not smart enough to stay clear of the river.” The tone suddenly grew brittle and harsh with venom. “Who warned you this afternoon—native or white?”

The question jarred Roberts, but he only shrugged his shoulders. From the darkness close beside him a voice snarled savagely and was immediately silenced by an equally savage command. The night became alive with furtive sound as many men shifted impatiently. A native voice shrilled inquiry from back in the dark jungle.

“You'll watch innocent men die one by one until you talk,” the nasal tones snarled. “And if we've got to put you to the torture stake to get you to talk, we'll do that too. Now, spill your guts about what you're doing coming from the Mitumba mountain country. Tell us what the Governor General knows and you'll live to walk out of here.” When Roberts still stood obstinately silent, the voice spat, “Head toward that light... and don't try ducking into the jungle!”

The mud underfoot gave way to moist humid slime as the light backed into the jungle. Stench of fetid rotting vegetation was nauseating. Mosquitoes settled in swarms on Roberts' naked back. Then his feet felt the packed earth of a beaten trail. Hoarse breathing and muffled exclamations filled the blackness alongside the unseen path, but Roberts' light-blinded eyes showed him nothing of the natives his nose revealed as being lined along the trail. He slowed his walking and a stabbing rifle barrel jammed into his back with brutal force, tearing skin and flesh. Snarling in pain, Carson Roberts spun around.

A second rifle gouged the flesh along his ribs and staggered him.

“Bwana—” a native voice shouted angrily.

Instantly there was a meaty splat of a heavy blow, a moaning intake of breath—and for an

instant the light caught the figure of a black sliding limply down into the path, his features gleaming with blood. Roberts bunched his muscles for a dash into the jungle, but the natives remained sullenly silent. Back turning warm with his own blood, Roberts was prodded ahead. He stepped across the limp native and walked his gauntlet with fists knotted until the nails cut into his palms.

The path wound through the trees and entered a foliage-canopied clearing, lighted dimly by small electric lights.

Five degenerate whites stood ringing him in with readied rifles, utter ruthlessness stamped plain in their dirty, unshaven, insect-bitten features. Around the edge of the glade, eyeballs and white bone ornaments gleamed as sullen natives looked on. Roberts recognized the Masai from the lakes region, manly fighting men of a proud, strong tribe.

A Nganga Nkissi, grotesquely bedaubed with ashes and dried blood, leaped toward the captive, shaking his spear and howling his mad fury. Roberts suppressed a shudder as the witch doctor jabbed the spear within bare inches of his eyes. The Nganga Nkissi spat into the white man's face, then raked long dirty fingernails across the white's torn flesh. Low mutterings began filling the clearing as the superstitious natives watched the writhing figure of the witch doctor. The ruffians with the rifles cast apprehensive glances into the dark. One of them swore. Then a sandy-bearded renegade waved the Nganga Nkissi away.

A tall, clean-shaven white entered the clearing closely followed by a greasy, squat man in a sweaty pongee shirt. Carson Roberts took an impulsive step forward, countenance twisting in startled recognition.

"Bill—Bill Stewart!"

THE squat man turned quickly and stared at Stewart. The rolls of unhealthy purple flesh grew rigid and tight across his jowls.

"He knows you?" the squat white man snarled. "After we trusted you to..."

Stewart stared angrily at Carson Roberts, his slack pendulous underlip quivering with emotion.

"I never saw him before in my life," Stewart whined. "How could he know me?"

The squat man shrugged and slapped the butt of a pistol that jutted from his belt. "We'll find out," he snarled. "And we'll find out who yelled at him. And what he's doing coming from the inside instead of up river from the coast. Yeah, we'll find out."

Slapping in annoyance at the mosquitoes, the squat man turned. For a brief moment Bill Stewart hesitated, staring haggardly from the sweaty renegade to the bleeding white prisoner. Then he hurried away. Gun barrels jarred into Roberts' back and he fell into line, ugly glints sparking in his blue orbs as he stared at the man who had denied ever having known him.

The clearing was ringed with small electric lights as was the maroro lined pathway along which they moved. As he walked Carson Roberts could see unmistakable evidence of where a portion of Jacob Henry Stewarts' millions had gone. Bill and Anita Stewart had only to wire Kansas City and Uncle Henry could come through with unlimited funds. It had been that way in college. It had been that way after, when Carson Roberts had tried to vie with the lure of adventure, for Anita Stewart's attentions. But the Stewarts had sailed to a big game hunt in the Dark Continent. Roberts had followed but never quite caught up with them. Then years had passed and Roberts had stayed on, almost forgetting the Stewarts until Burui had died under a Stewart archery arrow.

Hoarse agonized screaming wrenched Roberts' bitter thoughts back to the present. His skin prickled and sweated cold as the soul-scraping sound rose higher and higher beyond the limits of human endurance, finally to collapse in abrupt surrender. The jungle silence returned then, dark and damp with the untold horrors let loose.

The lushly perfumed pathway turned right, skirted the kraal of native huts, and led to the screened veranda of a long low cement house. The squat white man and Bill Stewart turned without hesitation. A woman stood stiffly at the edge of the wide veranda, her hair a reddish halo in the blue suffusion of generated light. Carson Roberts shrank back at sight of her.

"Keep walking!" the squat white man barked over his shoulder. "I want to hear you make some talk."

A rifle barrel prompted him, but Roberts stubbornly refused to be paraded before Anita Stewart. Multi-colored lights blazed brilliantly about his ringing head, and he fell to his knees, blood streaming warm and dark from his lacerated scalp.

Bill Stewart turned at sound of the commotion, but he stood woodenly without offering sympathy. The woman stared, her eyes widening in horror. Then she was running forward.

“Carson! Oh, Carson, you... you...”

THE squat man shrilled a string of curses. “Carson, is it? That would be Carson Roberts. First it’s Brad Filters and now its Carson Roberts!” The renegade snarled and slapped his pistol in rage. “It’s getting out,” he raged. “Word’s getting out. We stopped them damned talking drums, but word’s leaking out anyway. Next thing you know, the Governor General will be sending in troops and then...”

Carson Roberts was jerked to his feet, his face strained and ugly as he glared at the squat renegade and at the weasel-faced Stewart. Anita Stewart was stopped short by her brother’s arm, her shapely lips knotting into a colorless ring of stark horror.

“Your sister knows him,” the squat renegade hissed. “And if she does, that means you probably do. And it was you who yelled at him. For that nice little double-cross I won’t hold to my promise not to...” The renegade’s beady eyes swung avidly toward the woman.

Bill Stewart swung about, his bony shoulders hunched high. The renegade had been waiting for the move. A pistol flashed into his thick fingers, Stewart froze, eyeing the gun.

“Emu went to the stake because you lied,” the renegade teased. “But you heard him give up and die, so the stake is now ready for another. And that devil-devil doc has been...”

With the screech of a cornered rodent, Bill Stewart threw himself at the outlaw. The pistol spat flame. Anita Stewart’s scream rose shrill in Carson Roberts’ ears as he watched his traitorous one-time friend crumple. The renegade laughed and grabbed Anita Stewart’s wrist, forcing her toward the sumptuous mansion.

Still prodded by the merciless rifles, Carson Roberts was shoved on through the verdant grounds of the Stewart mansion. Behind the house, in an ornate garden, a log hut covered with flowering vines confronted them. Roberts was shoved inside and the heavy door slammed. Darkness closed him in, hot fetid darkness.

Roberts rolled swiftly and scuttled aside. He had no way of knowing the horrors in store for him, but he was filled with a burning determination to go down fighting. But stealthy prowling soon revealed that the hut was empty. Faint light began to sift in from latticed ventilators.

Somewhere in the night outside Bill Stewart lay limp with a renegade bullet in him. And inside

the ornate mansion Jacob Henry Stewart’s millions had created—Carson Roberts snarled soundlessly and tore his thoughts away. This was the adventure the Stewarts had sailed around the world to find; let them taste the fruits of their own planting. But the man’s bitter hatreds could not survive whenever his thoughts touched upon Anita Stewart.

In school he’d laughingly called her plumpness ‘cuddly’, but now she had developed into a little winsomeness that started his yearnings anew.

Getting to his feet again, Carson Roberts padded about the tiny hut restlessly, his fingers endlessly exploring for any means of making a fight.

The door was wrenched open suddenly and Bill Stewart’s body jolted to the floor. Then the door was shut. Stewart’s shoulder was sticky to Carson Roberts’ exploring hand, but his heart thumped steadily.

The traitor was still alive, but for what!

The silence grew heavy and barbed with horror as Carson Roberts waited for the next move in the renegades’ game of death. Stewart gasped for breath and moaned softly. The prisoner-white man listened to the groaning and cursed. That lily-livered pup had caused a good many men to groan.

Finally Stewarts’ broken whisper sounded: “I—I had to do it, Carson. They’ve been fairly decent to Anita since I do as they say, keep the light plant running, and...”

“Who is Emu?” Roberts probed brusquely, thrusting aside Stewart’s attempt to explain.

Stewart shuddered and dropped his haggard face into the palm of his uninjured hand. Roberts’ lips curled disdainfully. For long moments they sat close together in the murky darkness, yet separated by an unfathomable gulf of loathing and hatreds.

“Who are they and what are they doing on the Congo?” Roberts asked suddenly. “And when did the Masai start making war in this country?” He reached out and gripped Stewart’s shoulder. “What’s your stake in this murder-game, renegade?”¹

Stewart whimpered but made no struggle. What Carson Roberts called him was undeniably true.

“I found some diamonds... nearly fifty,” Bill Stewart offered meekly. “But I’ve never found the pipe, the hole that let them reach the surface. Then Carl Sprag and his bunch came drifting in. They gave the witch doctor some poison to use, and the

Nganga Nkissi works with them in keeping the blacks from rebelling at their harsh treatment. The Nganga Nkissi has even worked a protective judu so that no native dares stand up against Sprag and his thieves. Why...."

"Not even you, eh?" Roberts mocked tightly. "You'd let that bunch of cutthroats turn the whole basin into a bowl of blood. You'd..."

"They'd have turned me over to Nganga Nkissi's torture, man!" Stewart flared. "Like they did Emu tonight. They'd..."

Carson Roberts laughed thinly. "So that was Emu I heard screaming, your friend Emu!"

Stewart looked away, his face pale and working in the half-darkness. The stark, grim brutality of Roberts' hatred was a solid clashing force in the craven darkness. Presently Stewart moved.

"What—what can I do?"

"You know this district and you know the natives," Carson Roberts pointed out. "Only what happened to Emu won't recommend you to them much now."

"They fear the Nganga Nkissi," Stewart whined. "And Carl Sprag has spies in every kraal. They wouldn't listen to me. They—they'd kill me!"

"Maybe the Masai would hear me," Carson Roberts mused. "I know their talk. If only I could..."

The door was suddenly slammed open and Carl Sprag stood in the doorway, a triumphant smirk twisting the cruel lineation of his porcine face.

"You're coming into the house where I can watch you," he smirked. "And that proud hussy will want to watch her brave hero beg on his knees." Sprag slapped his pistol with an eager beat of his thick fingers. "Tomorrow she will get the chance. And old devil-devil doc will show those damned black-skins what happens when a man gets too proud to kow-tow to Carl Sprag." The man's cruel power stood stark and naked in his shrill words of bloody promise.

THE two men were marched across the garden and into the house. Anita Stewart stood with her lithe frame pressed tight against one side of a wide, black stone fireplace. She was pale and tall, her small face lined with unvoiced apprehension as she watched the triumphant Sprag and his cohorts prod the two hapless captives. Carson Roberts kept his head erect, his eyes staring stonily straight

ahead.

Like two blood-stained automatons they crossed the large room and were ushered into a book-lined study.

"Try the window any time you want to die quick," Carl Sprag taunted.

Then he closed the study door and his hard heels made a hollow rapping noise on the stone flagging as he strode away. Presently his mocking tones reached through the rattan-woven walls of the study. Anita Stewart began weeping.

Carson Roberts snarled at his helplessness and strode to the narrow window. A floodlight was fixed just above the opening, bathing the vicinity in brilliance marred by a thousand dancing insects. The sandy-bearded renegade stood with readied rifle and gloated at him.

"Have they touched her yet?" Carson Roberts barked as he turned suddenly. His voice was rough and burred with emotion.

Stewart looked at him keenly, wonderment showing in his flaccid features. "You love her," he whispered. "In spite of everything, you love her."

Carson Roberts stared at the skinny callow man as though at a stranger. "Damn it man, answer me! Have they harmed Anita?"

Awed by the raging demon in Roberts' demeanor, Bill Stewart shook his head. "Not yet," he husked. "Sprag was holding that over my head to make me play ball with him and keep the blacks digging for diamonds. I..."

"You played ball with him," Carson Roberts snarled. "Even to killing white men who were coming in to help you. Even to killing my black with your damned cedar arrow. You..."

Bill Stewart shook his head. "I didn't shoot that arrow," he protested. "Sydney Carter, that rat-faced little runt with the knife scarred ear, was archery champion of England once. He's taken my archery sets."

Carson Roberts slammed his huge bulk into a bamboo chair and stared helplessly at the tiny room. Native ornaments hung on the walls, carved bone nose plugs, ear and lip rings, even ocelot capes. But no weapons, not even a spear head or...

"They evidently haven't worried about you much," he said, turning suddenly. "Have you a knife?"

Stewart dug into his pocket. "Just a pen knife I've had for years," he said, extending a small, gold handled knife.

Carson grabbed the fragile knife and pulled the bamboo chair into the corner nearest the

window. He pared and carved at the thick bamboo chair legs, cursing savagely at the infinitesimal prowess of the tiny blade. But time passed slowly and gradually he converted the squared legs into sharp, needle-pointed spikes.

Anitia's weeping became louder, and Bill Stewart moaned. Turning, Carson Roberts saw tears flowing from the youth's misery-filled eyes, and he realized that Stewart's anxiety was as great as his own. Only Stewart lacked the backbone to make a fighting protest; he could only wail and suffer his torment.

"Stand with your back to the window and keep moving back and forth so that sentry can't see in," Roberts said more gently. "We'll take a chance that he won't notice this little present for Carl Sprag."

Stewart placed his back to the window and Carson Roberts wedged the whittled chair above the one door to the room, the dagger-like chair legs pronged downward. Then he moved stealthily about the room gathering up the heavy tomes of learning that had been Anitia's joy in life. Twice he filled his arms and piled the weighty volumes in the chair seat. Nearly eighty pounds of books were finally stacked on the precariously balanced chair.

"Now," he said. "When I stomp my foot twice, shove your knife into that lamp socket. And keep your fingers crossed!"

Stewart looked blank, but Roberts hadn't the time to explain the feeble chances his desperate plan presented. He strode to the window and leaned against the mosquito netting. Instantly the renegade was standing with poised rifle just before him.

"Nice weather, Joe," Carson Roberts murmured casually. "Nice for a murder!"

The renegade glared balefully, his thickish lips curling away from heavy square teeth. Smiling blandly, Carson Roberts lifted his foot and stomped twice. Stewart's fumbling hands jabbed the steel blade deep into the electric light socket. There was a faint sputter, a tiny spiral of curling blue smoke. Then came a flooding darkness as the fuses were blown.

Carson Roberts hurled himself through the window.

THE abrupt transition from blazing light to darkness stunned the renegade. He was still staring toward the window as Carson Roberts' plummeting body struck him. The outlaw grunted and whimpered, twisting feverishly to bring his

rifle into play. Roberts jerked up one hard knee. At the same time his elbow jammed hard into the renegade's throat. Then his fumbling hands found the knife in the man's belt. He jerked it free and buried the blade twice.

There was no sound within the house, but hoarse yells sounded from the darkness around the sprawling mansion.

"Shin out, Stewart," Roberts ordered softly.

Bill Stewart climbed out the window, clumsy and moaning as his injured shoulder brushed the window casing. For a brief moment Roberts hesitated, waiting for the door to open and his lethal man-trap to spring. But the cagey Sprag was too crafty to barge into the darkened room. The hoarse queries grew closer, and the two captives faded into the jungle darkness.

Sensing the drama unfolding in the night, native dogs set up a shrill clamor. Gruff voices began shouting. Women screeched excitedly. Excitement spread its contagion swiftly and threw the kraal into a furor of sound and confusion. Carl Sprag's renegades cursed and called reassurances to each other.

Roberts led the way, feeling his way through the lush tropical vegetation of the Stewarts' garden. Once his foot slopped into a fish pool, and Roberts cursed. Instantly a rifle spat flame almost into their faces. Roberts lunged with the knife he had taken from the sentry guarding their window. The steel slid easily until Roberts' fist thumped against a man's shirt front. Wrenching the knife free, Roberts felt around until he located a second rifle. Handing the gun to Stewart, Roberts again led the way, scuttling low through the underbrush crowded tight against the Stewart garden.

"Where's that Nganga Nkissi hang out?" Roberts breathed. "I'll bust his judu charm wide open, and..."

"You can't," Bill Stewart whispered. "Those Masai would go berserk."

"You damned cowardly whelp!" Carson Roberts suddenly raged. "White men can die in droves trying to keep order in this fever-ridden hellhole so guys like you can dig out diamonds and gold. But when it comes to doing some fighting of your own, you cave like a rabbit."

"All right! Lay down! Let that renegade have Anitia. But I'm making a fight for it! And I'm counting you a renegade like the rest of those whimpering rats!"

Some flicker of manhood was fanned into flame, for Bill Stewart's harsh voice snarled,

"Easy, Roberts. I've got a rifle too now."

"Then use it," Roberts snapped. "With luck those renegades won't spot our trail before dawn. They'll try routing out the Masai, but those blacks won't do much in the dark."

"I'm going after Anita," Stewart said suddenly. "I've got a gun now. And I'm going."

"You're going to the Masai kraal," Roberts countered roughly. "Find out where that Nganga Nkissi hangs his paint. I'll stick around for a pot-shot at Sprag."

A DISTANCE-THINNED white man's scream echoed sharply through the thick trees, the sound thin and cutting as a steel blade. Then a deep reverberating pulsation began to make itself felt as the native drums took up the alarm.

"That Masai!" Stewart breathed. "They've..."

But he was alone in the darkness. Carson Roberts ran lightly toward the house. In the thick darkness he blundered into a black palm and reeled aside. Then caution took over and he slowed his going. He could see nothing, and to blunder through the jungle would be to attract fatal attention.

The fetid jungle odor became streaked and layered with lush perfume, and Roberts knew that he was nearing the Stewarts' garden. Rifle shots rattled, mingled with a shrilling clamor of native voices. Then it was again, silence, with an edge, watchful, waiting quality. Roberts crept into a long row of maroro bushes and knew that he had reached the path.

On all fours the sweating white man scuttled along the thick vegetation that hedged the trail.

There was a shot, then a half a dozen more, from the kraal. Roberts froze, listened intently for indication of what had happened. Another report echoed through the trees, farther away this time.

A *goudougoudou* began driving echoes across the vast jungle basin. War—War—*war!*

Roberts' hand touched a bare ankle. He lunged aside and thrust the dead renegade's rifle upward to parry the expected spear slice. But no boiling flurry of motion came. Cautiously Roberts extended exploring fingers. He touched the ankle, followed the coarse skin down across a broad, calloused, spreadtoed foot.

Realizing that he was crouched over the body of a Masai black, Roberts peered anxiously into the night pressing down against him. Natives and renegades alike were roving the night, eager to kill, and any of them would shoot him down upon sight

if they found him crouched over a dead black.

Shivering, Carson Roberts wriggled hurriedly away, shoving toward where he thought the Stewart mansion to be. Then suddenly the lights all came on, bathing the twisting trails and open glades with merciless illumination. Roberts dropped flat in the dark shadows close behind the hedge. Long minutes strained at his nerves before he dared raise his head and peer around. The lichen-crusting cement house stood just beyond the path.

Creeping stealthily forward, Roberts saw that the window shutters were wide open. Within, Anita Stewart was standing close beside Carl Sprag, her lithe form held as a flesh-and-blood shield against him. Two other whites held a fuming Nganga Nkissi prisoner under their rifles.

"I give you powerful poison to make you chief-man of all Congo," Sprag was raging. "You promise me that Masai men stay here and work. You promise me they not sharpen spears. Now they've killed one of my men!"

The Nganga Nkissi rolled almond eyes in the grotesque mask of his painted face. His protective judu had failed to turn the knife of an outraged Masai warrior, and finding the judu was powerless before them, the long smouldering fury of the Masai men was flaming high.

Sight of the angry Sprag sent a torrent of rage surging along Carson Roberts' frame. Raising his rifle he sighted carefully. Then he lowered the gun. He wasn't familiar with the weapon and a poor shot might strike Anita Stewart. Then Roberts noticed something startling about a runty member of the renegades, a knife carved ear. Cursing his unsteadiness, Roberts again raised the long gun. The barrel steadied as he sighted on Burui's slayer.

The runt went down as though slugged. Again Roberts' rifle slammed out its pencil-thin point of flame and noise. The second renegade stiffened, his arms jerking convulsively.

Startled, Carl Sprag drew his pistol and pressed the muzzle against Anita Stewart's throat.

"Throw down your guns and come in here!" he screeched, his face flushed with bestiality. "Hurry or I'll fire!"

FOR a long moment the world hung suspended. Carson Roberts moaned softly, knowing that he had lost. Rifle fire smashed and snarled from direction of the Masai kraal but he paid little attention. Then Anita Stewart's lids fluttered and she slumped in a dead faint. Caught by surprise,

Sprag let her sag. But he hunkered low behind her limp form, his pistol still tight against the warm flesh of her lovely throat.

"I'm coming in, Sprag!" Roberts snarled.

He climbed the veranda from one side and suddenly leaped into the large room. For a moment Sprag seemed not to recognize the tall, blood-smeared man with the cold mirthless grin. The Nganga Nkissi shrieked and lunged at Roberts with a murderous stabbing spear. Roberts parried swiftly and fed knife steel into the black's evil-smelling throat.

Carl Sprag lined his pistol. At that moment Anita Stewart came out of her feigned faint. Her long muscular arms whipped about the renegade's arm, blocking his fire. Snarling, Sprag lashed out with his left fist. The vicious blow dazed the woman and she crumpled.

Working the bolt even as he sprang, Roberts leaped at Carl Sprag. They slammed together like bull rhinos. The pistol went clattering. Then Sprag kicked out, his hard heels catching Roberts low in the back. For a moment the jungle-man was paralyzed, and in that moment of opportunity, Carl Sprag rolled clear. Running frantically, Sprag jerked open the nearest door and stepped through.

A book-weighted bamboo chair plummeted down, the sharpened chair legs stabbing into flesh and tearing life away from the thick carcass.

Flinging Anita Stewart across his bare shoulder, Roberts ran out into the resounding night.

"The canoes?" he panted. "It's our only chance—"

"Turn this way," Anita Stewart whispered. "And let me down. I know the way."

Roberts dropped her lightly to her feet and they ran toward the river. Suddenly Anita Stewart stopped.

"Bill—" she gasped. "Where's Bill?"

As if in answer, rifles began sounding from back in the jungle folds. Then a faint pinpoint of torch light showed flickeringly.

"He's at the cistern," Anita whimpered. "Carl Sprag's men must have him trapped."

The flickering light swung down and disappeared. For a split-second it was dark, then a red-blue-yellow gust of flame exploded across the Congo basin. The rifle fire was blotted out. Long tongues of flaming explosion leaped up from the trees. And even the *goudougoudou* was hushed before the titantic fury of the blast.

"What was it?" Roberts asked in a shaken voice. "I didn't know he..."

"That was the cistern," Anita Stewart sobbed. "He must have thrown all the gasoline that we had for our light generating plant into the cistern. Then the torch when Carl Sprag's renegades got close..."

Taking the sobbing woman by the hand, Carson Roberts led her toward the river. If one final act of heroism can balance a ledger, then Bill Stewart's score was even. And maybe, with time—his fingers closed tightly about Anita Stewart's soft hand.

Roberts shoved the dugout into the stream and wielded the leaf-blade paddle. Then the darkness began to pulsate with a deep reverberating sound.

"What is it? Anita whispered fearfully.

"Masai going home," Carson Roberts read slowly. "Bad white man kill the mighty Nganga Nkissi. Then honorable *bwana* bring fire demons from bowels of earth to kill bad whites. Masai bow low to honorable *bwana*. Now they go home."

"Now I go home," the white woman whispered softly.

"Now we all go home," Carson Roberts said. "And leave the Congo in peace."