

*The beast beat its breast
with unholy desire.*



BRIDE OF THE APE *by* HAROLD WARD

I lay paralyzed as my adorable Betty, her dewy maidenhood unconcealed, was stretched on that altar of primordial desire . . . while that stone-age monster played a passion prelude—to the consummation of the flesh's unholy command!

IT was dark—abysmally dark. There was not even a star in the heavens to relieve the fathomless blackness that surrounded us on all sides—a blackness intensified a thousandfold by the fierce wind howling down from the mountains. It bit into the very marrow of our bones chilling the blood in our veins, benumbing us, making every step a torture.

And behind us, its stealthy movements hidden by the ebony curtain of the night, was *the thing*. For the past hour it had dogged us, spying on our every

motion, stopping when we stopped, always keeping just outside our range of vision. Yet we could hear its soft padding; it was always in our rear regardless of what way we turned.

Once it coughed hackingly. I whirled on my heel, my gorge rising, for the sound seemed right at my elbow. My swinging fist touched only empty space. I caught a momentary gleam of its phosphorescent eyes as it leaped back into the darkness. My cigarette lighter was in my pocket; I held it in my benumbed fingers and snapped the

flint. The flame was only for a second; then the raging wind extinguished it, but it brought a low, menacing snarl from the thing behind us—a bestial, half-human growl of anger.

It was our wedding journey. Married only the day before, we had started by automobile for the home of Betty's uncle in the mountains. Either the attendant at the filling station back in the little village through which we had passed had given us the wrong direction or we had misinterpreted what he had said. The coming of nightfall had found us in a narrow, tree-bordered lane apparently far from any human habitation.

Then, to make matters worse, a spring had broken, rendering the car completely useless.

We had not passed a house since turning into the side road five or ten miles back; by the law of averages, there should be one ahead. Averse to leaving Betty while I sought for help, I had allowed her to accompany me.

Since then we had wandered miles, it seemed, without sighting a sign of life. Meanwhile the weather had changed; the wind was howling down through the canyons of the foothills in a perfect hurricane, freezing us to the very bone. We had lost all idea of direction, for even our senses were becoming deadened under the strain; only the fact that the trees and underbrush had been cleared away kept us on the road.

THEN, from behind, came the soft pad of feet heralding the approach of the accursed thing that was now following us. The constant menace acted as a tonic to our jaded nerves, quickening our muscles, putting us on the *qui vive*.

Along the long, bleak trail, I stumbled across a rough club. Picking it up, I brandished it in my hands. The feel of it strengthened me and gave me renewed courage.

Dimly, through the swaying trees, we saw a light. Taking Betty more firmly by the arm, I quickened my footsteps. The narrow lane brought us to a fence. Skirting it, we approached the house from the side.

There was nothing eerie or particularly forbidding about the rambling old structure that loomed like an uncouth spot of blackness in the frame of the starless night a hundred yards away. The light gleamed from a single window on the lower floor, casting a sickly beam through the heavy foliage. Yet a chill of apprehension swept

over me that left me colder than the mountain wind. Betty shuddered, too. Involuntarily my arm sought her waist and I drew her closer. Some subtle sixth sense told me to flee; I fought it back, for to remain outside exposed to the constantly increasing cold for the remainder of the night meant but one thing—death. Had it been the howl of a ghoul in the midst of a graveyard, I would have welcomed it on Betty's account.

It was the fence, I told myself, that was bothering me. Yet I could see but little of it by the light shining through the single window. Fully twenty feet in height, it was made of tightly meshed wire fastened to high posts from the top of which extended cross pieces overhanging the interior and also tightly wired. It reminded me of a prison enclosure I had once seen.

BETTY'S hold on my arm suddenly tightened. "Listen!" she whispered hysterically.

At the same moment my toe struck something and I sprawled forward on all fours, my hands extended to break my fall. For an instant my fingers touched dead flesh.

I leaped to my feet with an exclamation of horror, groping in my pocket for the cigarette lighter. I snapped the flint. The flame flared up for a second, flickered in the howling wind . . . died.

Yet in that heart-stopping flash I saw what caused me to reel backward, a shriek of terror on my lips. The naked body of a woman lay before me—a weird, misshapen creature, her form twisted and warped, her lips drawn back over her fangs in a grimace of horrible malignancy. Her throat was torn—ripped as by some wild beast in a frenzy of demoniacal anger. Even her breasts, huge, pendulous—were slashed and smeared with gore.

For a moment horror robbed me of the power to move. I heard Betty's breath come in a scream—a shriek that was cut off in the middle as a huge shape plunged out of the darkness and seized her in its powerful arms.

Again she gave voice to her terror as the diabolical thing pulled her away from me back into the darkness. I caught a momentary glimpse of a bloated, spiderish body with short, stubby legs and long muscular arms, its enormous shoulders surmounted by a shaggy head, the matted hair of which hung over glittering, bloodshot eyes.

For an instant I was paralyzed with fear—unable to stir hand or foot. It lifted Betty bodily,

holding her with one arm against its barrel-like chest; with the other it tore at her clothes. She shrieked wildly. Her voice galvanized me into action and I leaped forward. The accursed thing appeared to have the power to see in the dark, for it struck me a stinging blow on the head that sent me to my knees, my faculties benumbed.

It leaped backward into the pocket of blackness, chuckling harshly. Betty screamed again and again in a frenzy of fear. I gained control of my shattered senses and charged once more. Hampered as it was by Betty's dragging weight, I caught up with it and crashed the stout hickory club down upon its shaggy head with all my strength. The beast roared with rage and flung its huge bulk forward, my loved one still fighting futilely against its nauseating embrace. I dodged its mad rush and struck again. The stick broke across the monster's skull. Wild with anger, it hurled Betty aside and leaped at me, its teeth grinding together in a paroxysm of madness. Again I managed to dodge it.

"Run . . . Betty!" I gasped. "The house . . .!"

The accursed thing was upon me. I sprang away from it . . . but too late. Its club-like arm struck me a wild, swinging blow that sent me crashing to the ground a dozen feet away. It was upon me before I could pull myself to my feet. I felt its stubby fingers twisting themselves about my throat. Its face was close to my own, its fetid breath fanning my cheek as it snapped at me with its gnashing fangs. I threw my arm upward in a futile gesture of self-preservation. The movement was a lucky one, for the jagged end of the broken club crashed into the bestial face. The beast's own weight, rather than my puny strength, drove the sharp point to the bone.

It leaped away from me squealing with pain. Through the darkness I could see it clawing at its face as it strove to pull the weapon from its flesh. I dragged myself to my feet and, turning, raced after Betty. She was already on the tumbledown porch, her tiny fists pounding a frenzied tattoo on the wooden panels of the door.

"Help! Help!" she shouted.

The door was jerked open and a man stared out at us; the rays of the lamp suspended from the ceiling brought out his tall, gaunt figure in bold relief. Despite my excitement, I noted that he was wearing a tattered dressing gown, the front of which was stained as from acid or chemicals.

"What is wanted?" he demanded.

I halted him with a gesture. Leaping inside, I dragged Betty after me and, hastily slamming the door, I plunged home the bolt.

"Attacked by . . . wild beast!" I managed to ejaculate pantingly. "Drove it off . . . may be following us . . ."

HE turned and looked at us curiously. His eyes were sunken, his face so emaciated as to give his countenance a skull-like appearance.

"Beast?" he exclaimed. "You say that you were attacked by some sort of animal? What do you mean? There have been stories . . ."

He led the way into a small study. It was the room, through the window of which we had glimpsed the light, for the shade was partly raised. The walls were lined with built-in bookcases, filled to overflowing. In the center of the room was a large table upon which were piled other books and manuscripts over which he had evidently been working when we made our precipitate entrance.

He motioned us to chairs and turned to us wonderingly.

"I do not understand . . .?" he mused. "There have been strange tales, as I say. I have discounted them as silly rumors. You are certain . . .?"

I pointed to Betty's torn garments—to my coat ripped by the creature's sharp nails as if by a knife.

"Our appearance bears out my statement," I snapped. Then, as he seated himself at the desk, I hastily sketched what had happened—the breaking down of the automobile, our long tramp through the chilling cold and darkness, of the thing that had trailed us for hours, the discovery of the dead woman among the underbrush and the sudden attack of the fur-coated monster a moment later.

The old man stared at us questioningly, his glance shifting from one to the other. Taking a huge pipe from the desk, he stuffed it with tobacco and, lighting it, took a short turn about the room.

"It seems fantastic . . . unbelievable," he said finally, stopping his restless pacing for a moment. "Yet, as you have said, your appearance bears out your statement. If you will pardon the assertion, I have been wondering if the cold . . . and your privations . . . have not . . ."

He stopped in the middle of the sentence, allowing the remainder to go unsaid.

"But we will not quibble now," he smiled. "The young woman is almost spent. Let me offer you

some refreshment. My name is Bixby—Professor Bixby—a poor scholar come to this old place to work out certain theories. I wanted a place where I might have solitude. I can offer you but little, yet I do not want to appear un hospitable. I—”

Betty screamed.

“The window!” she gasped. “The . . . *thing!*”

She leaned forward, her face twitching with excitement, her eyes filled with terror.

Bixby whirled as I leaped to my feet. Pressed against the glass was a flat, hairy face, the thick lips drawn back over fang-like teeth, the matted hair hanging down over a tiny forehead. The creature’s eye—bloodshot, flashing with anger—glared at us malevolently. Bixby gave a sudden exclamation and took a step forward. The diabolical creature leaped backward; we heard the crash of its body as it dashed through the underbrush.

For an instant the old scholar appeared petrified. Then he rushed to the door opening into the hall and clapped his hands together in a sort of signal.

“Jarbo!” he rasped excitedly. “Come . . . quickly!”

The summons was answered by a huge black—a powerful, broad-shouldered creature with a tiny head and a face almost as evil as the accursed thing that had glared at us through the window. For an instant his glance hovered over us appraisingly, shifted to Betty’s slender form—then turned reluctantly again to the old man. Bixby was addressing him rapidly in some foreign jargon. At the finish of the speech the black nodded and, with another glance at Betty, shuffled out of sight.

“Jarbo is an Algerian and speaks but little English,” our host explained. “He is absolutely fearless. I have told him to go after the creature—he will be armed, of course. Meanwhile I have sent him for refreshment.”

He resumed his restless pacing, stopping again and again to glance at us. A question seemed on the point of his tongue—a question he seemed averse to giving voice to. The big black came back into the room carrying a tray on which was a decanter of wine, some bread and cold meat, thinly sliced.

Bixby apologized.

“We eat sparingly, Jarbo and I,” he said as the black deposited the tray on the table. “When a man reaches my age, he is apt to overstuff himself.”

Again I noted the quick glance of the black man rest on Betty’s slender loveliness. Bixby muttered something to him. He grunted an unintelligible

reply and shuffled out. A moment later we heard the front door slam. Bixby scowled, then waved his hand toward the meager fare.

“Help yourselves, my friends,” he said. “I dined hours ago.”

We lost no time in accepting his offer. Despite our weariness, we were very hungry, for we had not eaten since noon and our strength had been sapped by the hardships we had gone through. The wine dissipated the chill that had permeated our bones, racing through our veins like molten metal, filling us with a delicious warmth that was succeeded by a feeling of lassitude.

In spite of my efforts to control myself, I caught myself yawning and a great desire for sleep swept over me. I glanced at Betty; her curly blond head was pressed against the cushion of the chair and her eyes were closed. From the rise and fall of her breast, I knew that she had given way to the stupor I was fighting against. Bixby was watching us, his saturnine face twisted into a grin of triumph. I tried to speak to him; my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth . . .

Then consciousness left me.

I WAS in a great pit from which I was struggling to escape. Time after time I almost reached the top; my fingers reached up to pull myself out, but I always slipped back again . . . down . . . down . . . never reaching the bottom. Sometimes I floated on thin air—a gossamer, wraith-like thing of feathery lightness; again I was stone-heavy, sinking like a plummet.

Someone was screaming—shrieking wildly for help. I knew subconsciously that it was Betty calling to me—that I was fruitlessly trying to get to her. I tried to open my eyes. The lids seemed glued down. Again and again I almost succeeded, only to sink back again into that bottomless pit of abysmal blackness from which I was struggling to escape. I was unable to move hand or foot; I wondered in a hazy, impersonal sort of way if I was paralyzed.

Something within my brain suddenly snapped and I was awake, pulling at the bonds which held me. Somewhere in the distance Betty was screaming. This time there was no hallucination—it was real. As consciousness swept over me I realized that I was bound; I was lying in the darkness, trussed like a fowl for the market.

And Betty—my wife of a day—was appealing to me, begging me to come to her assistance.

“Bob! Help me, Bob! Please . . . *please* help me!”

The inertia was dragging me down again. I fought it off and struggled to collect my scattered faculties. A tiny buzzer in my brain kept telling me to wake up—to go to her rescue. Yet I was unable to move a muscle. It was an effort to even think. She screamed again as if in pain. I jerked at my thongs with a desperation born of despair. Something gave way and I felt myself dropping. . . .

BROUGHT up with a thud, my head crashing against some solid object that stunned me for a second. The realization swept over me that my bindings were a bit looser. I twisted my body; every movement sent a twinge of pain racing through my muscles, but each jerk added to my freedom. Finally I managed to get one hand free. I reached out exploringly. My groping fingers told me that I had been tied to an ancient iron bedstead, the rope was looped around the head posts. In my struggles I had pulled the rickety affair apart.

It took me but an instant to untwist the thongs with which I had been bound. I dragged myself out of the wreck and stood swaying in the darkness, my head spinning like a gyroscope. A feeling of horrible nausea swept over me and I toppled forward. My outstretched hand brought up against the wooden panels of a door. I slid to my knees, my fingers twisted around the knob. The door opened at the touch; I stumbled, face downward, into a dimly lighted hallway.

For an instant I lay there, too sick and weak to move. Then, as my breath came back to me, I dragged myself to a sitting position.

Betty was shrieking madly.

“Please . . . oh, please!” she sobbed. “Please . . . for the love of God, have mercy! . . . Oh, Bob . . . *come!*”

The sound came from a room a short distance down the hall. The terror-stricken voice of my wife pleading for mercy went through me like an electric shock, galvanizing me into action. I shook off the nausea and, pulling myself to my feet, charged like an angry bull.

The door of the room was open, the light streaming out into the hallway. I halted at the threshold, my faculties paralyzed for an instant at the unholy sight which met my horrified eyes.

It was a huge room into which I gazed, made, it appeared, by tearing the partition from between two

smaller rooms. Fitted as a laboratory, painted a spotless white, the walls were lined with shelves overflowing with bottles, beakers and test tubes.

In the center was a low divan. Upon it Betty was stretched. She had been nearly divested of her garments. Her slender white arms were drawn above her head. There was scant concealment of any secret of her slim body. Beside her, fastened by a long rope attached to a leather girdle about its middle, was the creature that had attacked us in the darkness. I saw now that it was a monster gorilla.

The rope, attached to a ring in the wall, held it away from her. Its hair-covered, stubby fingers reached out for her—tried to caress her smooth, satiny flesh—tried to fondle her in a diabolical and unholy embrace. It whimpered appealingly, its tiny, bloodshot eyes gloating over her youthful beauty as it strove with all its gigantic strength to stretch the rope which held it from her.

At a table close beside them stood Bixby, a long white smock clothing his emaciated form. He hovered over the delicate apparatus, his long, skinny fingers darting here and there, his cavernous eyes glancing gloatingly at the terrible scene that was being enacted before him.

“In a moment,” he crooned soothingly to the whining monstrosity at the end of the rope. “In a moment, my pet. Then I will wield the knife. Her blood will be in your veins and your rich, red corpuscles will go charging through her slim, white body, mixing with her blood. Then . . . then she will be yours . . .”

The accursed thing whimpered understandingly. It turned its shaggy head to him for an instant and whined like a dog.

Bixby selected a slender knife from the glittering array on the table. For an instant he held it aloft, examining its razor-sharpness. Nodding with satisfaction, he took a step forward and bent over the nude form on the divan, his sunken eyes searching for the vein he was about to open.

Betty screamed again. In her agony, she turned her head. Her eyes met mine. In them was a look of pathetic appeal. She sensed my weakness—knew that there was but little I could do to save her. Yet her movement broke the spell that seemed to have been cast over me and I charged forward with an angry bellow. Bixby turned as my hands reached for his scrawny throat. The blade dropped from his fingers and he lunged for the revolver that lay in an open drawer beside him.

Betty screamed.

“Bob! Watch out!” she shrieked.

I whirled. But too late. I caught an indistinct glimpse of the huge black as he struck. His great fist crashed against my head and I went down like an ox.

I WAS out only for a second. Yet the single blow paralyzed my nerve centers, making it impossible for me to move. Things happened with kaleidoscopic rapidity. As in a trance, I saw the big black leap forward and claw with feverish rapidity at the bindings which held Betty to the couch.

“Jarbo’s . . . she is Jarbo’s!” he snarled. “No give to ape-man this time.”

Bixby’s saturnine face was flushed with anger.

“Leave her alone, damn you!” he roared. “She is the first that he really seemed to care for. Do you think, you fool, that you are going to spoil my great experiment . . . now?”

He leaped forward, his talon-like fingers grasped around the butt of the gun.

The crazed black pushed him back with a sweep of his huge arm. The old man crashed against the table, upsetting it; the apparatus tumbled over the floor in wild disarray. He dropped to a crouching position, the gun raised, his thin lips drawn back over his teeth in a snarl of anger.

“Leave her alone!” he snapped.

The big black took a step forward, his huge fists doubled.

“Jarbo’s!” he growled.

Bixby fired. The black staggered back as the leaden slug sunk into his vitals. Then he gathered his huge body together and hurled himself forward. His fist crashed against the old man’s jaw, bringing the head back with a sudden jerk. Then his great fingers closed around the scrawny throat. There was a snap of breaking bones.

Raising the form of his victim above his head, the burly black threw the old man across the room. Then, turning, he leaped back to Betty.

The ape-man gave vent to a wild, insane roar. He lunged forward, maddened at the sight of blood and the death of his master. Its terrific lunge broke the rope. Jarbo turned to meet the mad rush. They went down together, the ape and the black, clawing, biting, in a battle to the death. The sinewy fingers of the gorilla sought the other’s throat—found it. I saw the black’s eyes bulge from their sockets under the terrific pressure.

All this, I say, transpired in less time than it takes for me to tell it. Dazed though I was, Betty’s frightened scream brought me to my senses. The revolver had fallen almost beside me. I seized it and, jamming it against the hairy head of the horrific monstrosity, pulled the trigger. The ape-man’s death grip on the black’s throat relaxed. He kicked spasmodically, then rolled over . . . dead.

There was a crash as the front door was forced open. Then a squad of state policemen charged into the room, guns drawn. With them was the attendant at the oil station.

“One of my men found your abandoned car an hour ago,” the sergeant in command told me as he assisted me to my feet. “When the attendant at the filling station identified it, we lost no time in getting here. There have been several women missing of late and all clues have centered on this locality. We were just outside when we heard the shots . . .”

I picked up the surgeons’ knife from the floor and cut Betty’s bonds. Then, wrapping a cover about her trembling form, I assisted her to a chair. It took me but a moment to tell the officer what had happened.

“That explains the disappearance of the women—up to a certain point,” he said thoughtfully. “On the other hand, there are a lot of things I don’t understand.”

“The black’s still alive, sergeant,” one of the men who had been prowling through the room, interrupted.

The sergeant bent over the wounded Algerian and called for a first aid kit. As it was brought, he poured a bit of liquor between the thick mutilated lips. Jarbo stirred . . . opened his eyes.

“Master dead . . . ape dead,” he gasped, his eyes turning on me. “Pretty soon Jarbo die. You keep woman . . .”

D YING, the big black wheezed out his story to the officers while Betty and I sat in the background shuddering at our narrow escape.

Bixby, a scientist of renown, had been dismissed from his post at one of the great universities because of his fantastic theories and radical experiments.

An anthropologist and biological chemist, Bixby had been obsessed by the idea of fusing blood of powerful lower animals with that of white women—to build up the racial stamina, weakened

by the artificialities of modern life.

If there'd been any basis of fact for this obsession, the secret had died with him. But it was known that if the transfusions had proved successful, Bixby had intended selling the discovery to one of Europe's madmen, so that the blood of the jungle would aid the mothers of a dictator nation to produce more cannon fodder.

Finding the old house in the foothills, he had purchased it and, by means of advertisements in metropolitan newspapers, had attracted several girls to the isolated spot under the guise of housekeepers. Once they were in his power, he had gone ahead with his diabolical schemes. All had died under his experiments save one—a half-witted creature little above the animals herself. It was she the gorilla had killed; then escaped from the enclosure with the body, throwing it in the woods where Betty and I had found it.

Bixby had given up all hope of recapturing the

ape when our sudden arrival and its unholy desire for Betty had drawn the creature back to the house, where Bixby had trapped it. Our wine had been drugged and Bixby, fired by the thought that we might be trailed, had decided to rush the experiment that very night.

Only the sudden lust for Betty on the part of the black himself had halted the diabolical crime.

SEVERAL years have passed. Betty and I are very happy. But the horror of what we went through on our wedding night is still implanted in our minds. At night, when the wind howls, I note that my wife draws a bit closer to me, although she says that she is not frightened. Her uncle writes us that people still talk in whispers of the insane scientist who lived in the old mansion in the foothills. Betty and I never discuss our adventure. We want to forget.