KWA AND THE APE PEOPLE

By

PAUL REGARD
(Perley Poore Sheehan)

Kwa #2

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KWA and the

A Complete Book-

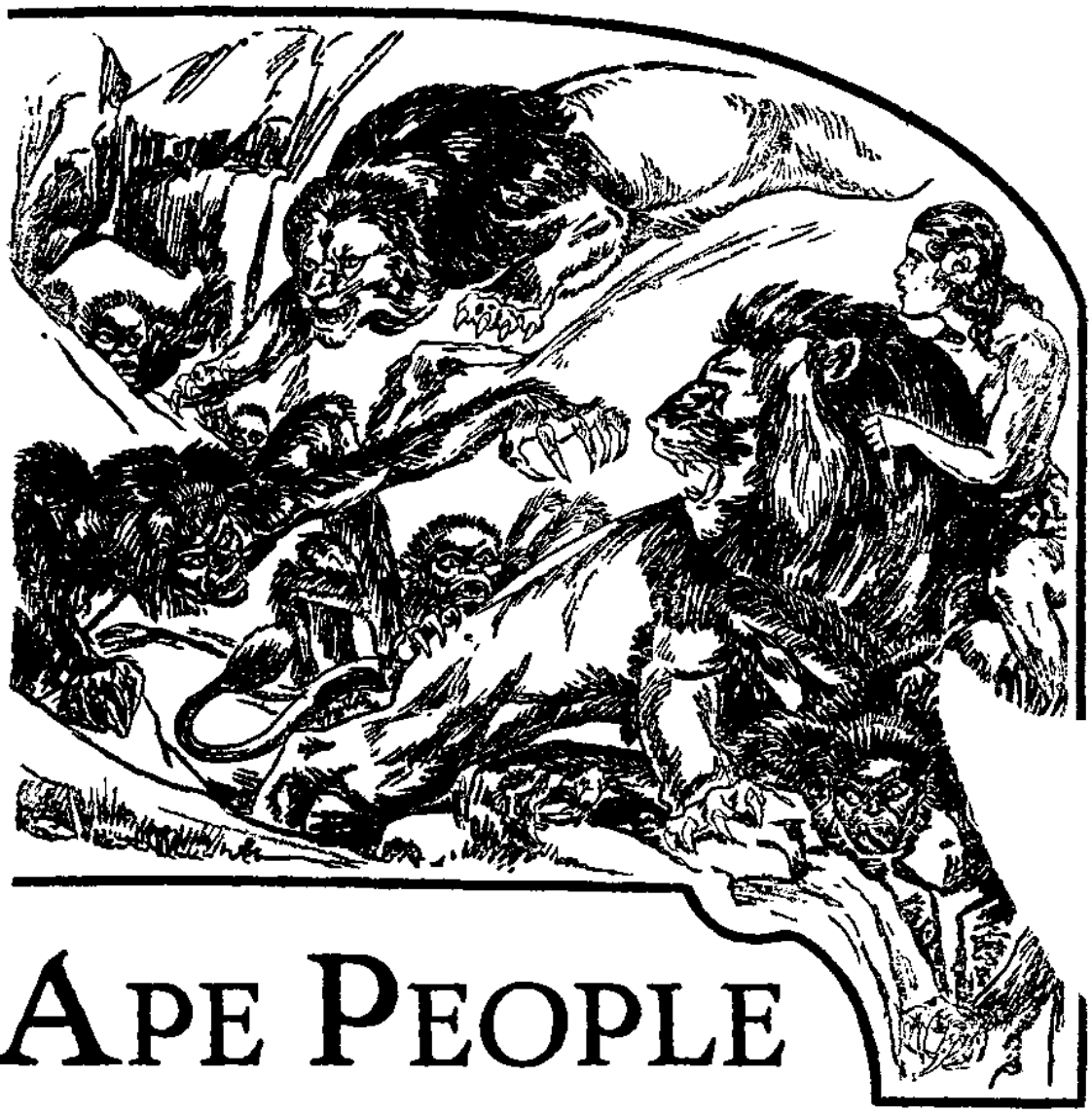
By PAUL

Author of "Dev Sefid,"

CHAPTER I
Lurking Death

THERE where Sobek, the crocodile king, lay in his muddy cave, it was dim and silent. But Sobek slowly raised his head and listened. In the heavy twilight of the place his eyes shone like dim green lanterns. These eyes of his were all of two feet apart, set high in the barge of a skull that had the length of a man. His body was like a fallen tree.

Whatever it was he heard—or felt, through the faint and ever-singing vibration of the earth, which to him was a sort of wireless—Sobek decided to investigate. Those short and crooked legs of his—looking comparatively skinny, at that—lifted his huge body as lightly as if it had been a mere dummy made of paper-maché, and



APE PEOPLE

Length Novel

REGARD

"Jungle Joss," etc.

he began to walk. His walk was awkward, but it was swift and springy. His enormous tail, trailing behind him, was as quick and alive as the tail of a cat.

The entrance to the cave was a shimmering weed-bearded slide into green water. Sobek took it with the stealth and silence of a snake.

Not a ripple nor a sound, either, advertised his presence when he came up to the surface in the open air. He had chosen his place. He was still in deep water; but under a shelving bank where the thick jungle over-hung him.

The big crocodile didn't recognize at first the thing he saw. Sight of it brought to him a faint preliminary spasm of fear. For whatever it was he saw was white—the gleam and flash of a white body, appearing all the whiter against the dark green of the surrounding jungle; in the

green dusk it was almost like a white flame.

Throughout Africa, white is a fetish color, with something sacred and ghostly about it, for animals as well as men. White figures are often to be seen at night going their way through dense black forests. And maybe these are nothing but whisps of vapor from a bog; or maybe they're more than that. In any case, animals crouch and watch them pass the same as men.

There was something else that may have occurred to Sobek, the crocodile king, just now. This was that vast region of Equatorial Africa known as the Devil Bush. Whether he knew of the name or not, or what it signified, Sobek must have known that this was a region famous for its ghosts. Most animals see ghosts far more readily than men. In all the years Sobek had lived in the marsh he'd seen many ghosts, seen no men, white or black.

SOBEK was very old. He had traveled far—all the way across Africa, from the great swamps at the head of the Nile.

There now crept into his memory a glint and a sensation from that Far-Far time before he'd made the long trek. He had killed and eaten men. One of these men had not been as other men. He'd been a white man—white, the fetish color; and it was this that had made Sobek a king among his kind. It had made him a sort of crocodile god. It had awakened still older memories in his racial brain-memories of a time, perhaps, when there had been crocodile gods in Egypt.

Sobek was no longer afraid. He remembered. He'd killed and eaten a white man. This was a white man, over there.

All of this had transpired, so far, with the lightness and swiftness of so much of jungle action—where creatures appear and disappear as swiftly and easily as glints of sun and shadow, where death is so often a matter of a fleeting second.

Just above the place where Sobek lurked while making this survey and reaching his conclusion that here was food fit for an immortal, there was a small blue kingfisher sitting on the tendril of a vine.

The kingfisher had spotted the presence of Sobek at once and had watched him. Now as the crocodile became an all but invisible shadow sliding swiftly under water in the direction of the white bather the bird gave a chattering note of alarm. It was across the pool like a flash of blue flame.

The note was somewhat like that the bird would have made had it discovered a snake robbing its nest. It struck through the dead silence of the jungle with the effect of a shattered pane of glass in a haunted house. This was "sun-time"—the heat of the day—when nothing stirred. But instantly the alarm had spread.

There must have been something different in that cry.

A mile or so away, a herd of elephants had been rocking and dozing in the heavy green shade. At once, the old bull was awake and alert, flinging out his ears, curling up his trunk to test the air. Without a sound he started off in the direction of the pool, the whole herd drifting after him.

It was like that when the kingfisher's alarm reached a herd of tinga-tinga—swamp buffalo—nooning in a bamboo swale more than a mile downstream below the pool. The buffalo also were off in the direction of the call at their sliding trot, which can be so swift and at the same time silent.

THROUGH the trees there was a sudden movement of monkeys, birds, and snakes.

Sun-time; the noon hour of the jungle; when animals in general are less occupied with the hard, driving business of life, just as it is with the crowds of big cities at a similar time. A time of let-up in the daily grind. And now, all the inhabitants of the Devil Bush within sound of the kingfisher's alarm were on the run, knowing that this was something special, wanting to see what it was all about.

The elephants may have guessed. They were a people of long memory and wide acquaintance. Their own private radio, known as "the elephant whisper," was one that spread its invisible network over Africa.

THE buffalo also may have guessed. They'd heard queer rumors from among their own kind of a white man who'd lived in the Valley of the Mu and there learned the speech of animals among the Furry Tribe, the Ape People, the Men Who Were Not Yet Men.

Among that flitting, ghosting, charging army of jungle peoples, birds and beasts, all headed for the pool, there was one old ape woman, an Engl-eco, a chimpanzee. And it was she who hit on the truth and spread it abroad in the universal speech of the bush.

"Kwa!" she was crying. "Kwa! He is here! Kwa of the Ape People!"

Her voice wasn't very loud, but it carried far.

"Kwa!" she cried. "And Sobek would kill him—would eat him—to master the brain and soul of Kwa!"

That was part of the old African, magic, eating that whose virtue you would absorb. It was a magic shared in and abetted by comparatively few of those who heard what the old ape-woman said. But they all understood it.

In response there was something like a soughing of wind through the dense dark forest, although the still noon was airless.

It was the breath of that universal speech of the jungle world:

"Kwa! Kwa! And Sobek would kill him!"

CHAPTER II
Old Wisdom

HE was a white man, all right, and not a ghost—that lone bather in the pool which the crocodile king claimed as his own. But he didn't act like one, either now nor later.

At that first note of alarm the kingfisher uttered, he'd thrust up a sinewy arm to a vine swinging low overhead. By the time the little blue sentinel had flashed across the pool the man was seated in a loop of the vine—composed, at ease, but curious.

He'd struck up a friendship with this bird two days ago, some forty miles back in the direction of the coast. Since then, they'd been following this stream together—deeper and deeper into the forbidden jungle of the Devil Bush.

At first, the man had been wearing clothes. But he'd been quick to take the kingfisher's attitude toward these—and the attitude of such other animals as he met. Clothes were strange. They were the insignia of a murderous magic. They that wore clothes killed for the pleasure of killing.

One by one, the man had shed his garments, until he was as you would have seen him now—wearing nothing but a twist of vine around his middle, the way he'd learned to dress himself among the Mu—the Furry Tribe—the Ape People. They had many names.

The Mu lived in a secret place—in a great round valley. The valley was in the heart of that great mountain mass called by the black people Sango Lobango, meaning "Father of Lies"—and this name had been accepted by the makers of maps, as well, for never had anyone, white or black, been able to find it when they set out to find it. They died on the way. The Devil Bush killed them off—"wet jungle," all of it, for hundreds of miles in every direction.

The Devil Bush, meaning haunted. No wonder the black people called it that. Killing blacks and whites indiscriminately. "Foul jungle," as it used to be marked on the old maps of the slave and ivory smugglers. Dense forest rising in festooned masses over bottomless quagmires and razor-edged rocks tricked out with deceptive ferns and mosses.

BUT Kwa would find his way. Pure white; but born in the Valley of the Mu, the Ape People, the People Who Were Not Yet Men.

They'd reared him as one of their own. But they'd named him Kwa, which, in their language, meant the Golden One, or, again, the Sun-Born; not only because his parents had crashed in an airplane—what the Mu called "a sky canoe"—but because his color was golden.

He sat there now in the loop of the vine just over the pool, with that single vine garment about him, and golden in fact, rather than white. With something leonine about him in both face and build. That vine about his waist, moreover, served as a belt to carry a knife in a sheath. So he wasn't wholly unarmed.

The little blue kingfisher was now chattering just over his head. Kwa listened to it attentively, then surveyed the pool. He could understand what the kingfisher was intending to convey, all right; but he was a little puzzled. He had tested the pool for crocs before starting to bathe.

Crocodiles lived on flesh, any kind, wherever and whenever they could snatch it. No use throwing temptation in their way. Not unless there were friendly hippos or elephants about to keep the crocs in order.

But there was no mistaking what the kingfisher meant. The warning reached Kwa with something more than the understanding with which a woodsman listens to his dog.

Then, in a moment, Kwa saw the coil and pause of that lurking shadow below.

There flashed through Kwa's brain a mist of pictures—not only of what might have happened to himself but of what had happened to uncounted friends of his—most of them young, all of them taken by surprise. There were other pictures, all in that swift and graphic visualization that serves so much for speech and thought in the jungle.

Sobek! The crocodile king. Living here alone. There'd been no other crocodiles in this pool because Sobek would tolerate no rivals in his hunting. Sobek had a chain of pools, most of them miles apart. When the animals became wary of one—the deer and the apes, the wild hogs and the okapi—Sobek would move on to another pool.

For a time Sobek had tried to establish himself even in the Valley of the Mu—

Kwa dropped.

IT was just as the great head of Sobek was passing beneath him—under perhaps two feet of water; Sobek's front legs, or arms, drawn slightly back and relaxed.

Kwa dropped with the concentrated purpose of a stooping hawk. There'd been no real premeditation in his action—just that timeless, spaceless unreeling of a thousand swift pictures, culminating in the one that he was enacting now. This was a matter of his destiny as much as destiny springs a young mongoose to the attack of his first snake. And the same sort of risk was there, yet the same sort of science.

Perhaps not in a hundred years had Sobek ever been attacked. The attacker had always been himself. He'd stolen the calves of hippos, buffalo, and elephants; yet always with such cunning that he'd avoided the enraged parents. Each year, in season, he spent a few luxurious days and nights, crushing, holding on, then crushing again, the leg of some would-be rival he'd taken by surprise.

Now it was he who'd been taken by surprise.

Swift as Kwa's action had been though, it had come within an ace of not being swift enough.

To Sobek there'd come this jolt of a shadow from above, then the vibration of the water just above him that was like the shock of an electric current. He already had a good momentum, swimming with his tail. Galvanized, his tail swung instantly into a stronger sweep, throwing his head out of line of the impending danger.

But Kwa, out of some occult ocean of wisdom older than himself, had somehow foreseen this move. Throughout all that followed, it was always as if the next second had already been the second before. He'd

spread his legs and twisted slightly at the moment his feet were touching the water. Miscalculation of a hair's breadth—of the split shaving of a second—and he'd be minus a leg, minus life; muddy and maimed he'd be headed for Sobek's den and there be allowed to rot.

THE old cuisine of the crocodiles. Their meat must be tender, for they can crush but they cannot tear or masticate. Their food must come away in chunks that can be swallowed whole.

Kwa's legs and hands—and, for that matter, body and brain—acted together. In atoms of time blown big and stuffed with action. His knees were now behind Sobek's jaws. He was in the one position where Sobek couldn't reach him with that lashing and armor-plated tail. He'd dropped forward along Sobek's head and taken a double-handed grip on the closed front of Sobek's murderous mouth.

One hand would have been enough to hold Sobek's mouth closed—once it was closed; while, open, that same mouth could have clamped through a log. But Kwa knew what was coming next. It was like getting caught in a waterspout as Sobek started to roll.

Over and over they went, churning the pool to a lather.

CHAPTER III
Big Brother

ONE of the strangest galleries in the world had gathered to see one of the strangest battles in the world.

There was hardly a creature present who didn't know who Sobek was. But who was Kwa? What was Kwa?

Kwa was a word from the universal speech which the Ape People, the Furry Tribe, used when communicating with their friends. The Mu were friends of all animals. The Mu dated from that time in the history—or "pre-history"—of the world when all animals, all things, still lived in peace—united in a certain common understanding.

Kwa was of the sun. Kwa was of the golden light. He was of the earth the sun shines on.

Sobek was of the underworld. He was of the ooze and darkness. He belonged to a world of the time before the sun, before that first great Truce of which the Mu were the only real guardians on earth today.

The Mu never fought. Yet Kwa fought.

"Our fight!"—and that was the elephant whisper, breathing about. "The fight of all of us!"

The elephants were friends of the Mu. Of all the jungle peoples, perhaps, the elephants came closest to living up to the ideals of the Mu. Yet the elephants would fight on occasion.

THE old bull leader of the herd, another Tembo, stood there now on the edge of the jungle clearing at an end of the pool. His great ears were extended to a width equal to his towering height. His tusks gleamed like a pair of sharp new moons.

The rest of the herd clouded about him, half-hidden, half-seen. The tinga-tinga were there—the swamp buffalo; they'd come up like a cavalry charge and were still in movement wanting to do something, but irresolute.

Leopards slinked about. They stopped to spit and slap at each other. But no fight lasted—only that one out there in the middle of the pool.

The Tembo had said it: "Our fight! The fight of all of us!"

For, no matter how men may regard themselves as creatures apart, of a different order, animals have never regarded men as such. Animals have always regarded men as merely one more species in the world of animals—sometimes pleasant, sometimes hellish; willing to accept men on terms of tolerance or even friendship when men show an inclination to do as much.

Kwa was almost drowned. But he'd ridden Sobek through that first wild flurry. Sobek ceased to roll. Instead, he was off on a heaving, zigzag race. Again—and yet again—he was half out of water. He writhed like a speared eel. The muddy lather of the pool was curdled with branches and clots of brush Sobek had carried away with the lashing of his tail.

A black panther grimaced and hissed. That was the smell of blood. There wasn't an animal there—except certain of the birds, perhaps—that didn't know that tragic smell and react to it in a way. The apes, the monkeys, large and small, responded to it as if they'd been touched with a cold breeze. A knot of wild pigs squealed and were off into the jungle; but soon they were back again. The elephants swayed closer. The buffalo held steadier now—staring, straining.

THERE was no telling, at first, whether the blood was that of Kwa or that of Sobek, the common enemy. Only one thing was certain—blood, the smell and taste of the blood, would be stirring the big crocodile now to the last extremity of murderous frenzy.

In ordinary times, in ordinary rivers, just a hint of blood and all the Sobeks for a mile would come streaking in.

Sobek heeled over in a swirl, bringing one of Kwa's legs into sight. It looked as if the leg had been cut to ribbons. Even in that flashing second it could be seen that Sobek, was doing murderous play with those clawed fingers of his. If this went on, Kwa would have no legs left.

The old ape woman chattered from that vine where Kwa himself had swung:

"Kwa! Kwa! Big brother!"

There was hysteria in her voice; yet a certain joy, an unmistakable hope. To all animals death, after all, is merely something incidental to living. The living's the thing. Kwa was still alive.

His position had hardly shifted from the very beginning of the fight. You could see the same muscles straining in his back, the same bulges in his shoulders and upper arms. He rode like a cowboy in a rodeo and the horse he rode was a killer, an outlaw of outlaws.

But then it was seen that his right arm was no longer engaged in merely holding on. With his left hand he still kept his grip on the lethal snout of the big saurian. Not once had Sobek been able to slip that hold, shake itself free. But now with his right hand Kwa was otherwise, engaged. His right arm jerked and jerked again.

Slowly, Sobek was seen to yield his head—fighting, bucking, lashing; but turning up at last the yard-wide pallor of his throat. And only then could the watchers see that the throat was cut, that it was pulsing blood.

In a final flurry, Sobek whipped the pool into a geyser of bloody froth—so thick and high that Kwa completely disappeared. He was gone—for a second, then another, of straining suspense.

While Sobek, meantime, spun in a tightening whirlpool.

It was the small blue kingfisher that discovered Kwa first. Kwa may have been flung for a long dive under water.

IN any case, he'd come up out of sight of most of the gallery. He was still in deep water, but he was close under one of the banks where there was a considerable scour; and where, at the same time, there was a heavy overhang of brush and of broad-leaved creepers.

Kwa was pawing at this growth in an effort to pull himself out and was making poor play at it when the kingfisher set up her racket again. First to Kwa, then up and around, clamoring that help was needed now if it ever was.

As by an inspiration she was drawn to the big Tembo standing there. To the tusker she may have been, at that, like a messenger from some higher plane. The kingfisher flashing about him—scolding him; telling him what to do—the elephant chief lumbered forward into the pool.

The water was deep. It was getting deeper. But the bottom was sound. The elephant bent his trunk at last under Kwa and supported him.

Down at the other end of the pool, by this time, the buffalo were crowded up, pawing and snorting, while they watched that which had been Sobek stranded on a sandbank.

There were already a dozen jack crows—the jungle undertakers—on a nearby snag—

By and by, Kwa found himself seated on the edge of the little river above the pool. He wasn't sure how he'd got there. But there he was, and his scarred legs were in the healing water where they ought to be.

All around him, on both sides of the stream, which was narrow here, he could sense the presence of much company.

Kwa spoke up—in the language of the Ape Men, the Mu.

"Wah!" he said. "I am Kwa. Kwa of the Ape People. Do you know me?"

There was a whisper: "You are Kwa. You are our big brother."

CHAPTER IV
Menace

IT was good to rest here in the shade of the jungle at the side of the little river and renew acquaintance with the jungle tribes.

Like most of the streams coming down from the vast and complicated folds of that great mountain-mass known as Sango Lobango, this stream was warm; and the water of it, while palatable, had curative qualities known to the dwellers in the Devil Bush since the world began.

Deer that had been wounded by a poison arrow would race miles against death to find the healing water. Buffalo, elephants, antelope, leopards—gored and otherwise lacerated in the annual mating festivals—would come here to lave their wounds.

Kwa knew this, as did all the friends of the Mu—the Ape People. Kwa kept his wounded legs in the little stream. The wounds would be healing fast.

Meantime, there was an abundance of food. The old ape-woman—the Engl-eco, or chimpanzee—saw to that. Her name was a faint whistling sound, soft as the lisping of a young honey-bird just learning to sing. So "Faint Whistle" was what Kwa called her in his thought. She was his nurse—bright-eyed, concentrated, understanding.

In jungle interchange, almost all animals, of the more highly developed strains, had two forms of speech. One of these would be tribal, articulate and often noisy. But, underlying the tribal speech, there was always that other, mostly silent, or soft as the stir of a breath in the branches. This was the oldest speech of all—the universal speech—the speech that went back to the first great Truce of the world when the Mu—the Ape People, were the leaders—and the hope—of the world.

KWA spoke and understood this older speech. In a general way he also understood most of the jungle dialects—of birds and cats, of grass- eaters great and small—from elephants down to the tiny dik-diks, the antelope people no larger than rabbits; of fruit-eaters and other vegetarians, from the great apes—the Engl-ecos, who were chimps, and the Engl-enas, who were gorillas—on down to the tiny "tree-rabbits" whose only form of tribal speech sounded like the ringing of a little bell—

The elephant and buffalo mothers furnished milk from unstinted fountains. There were piles of wild bananas, pawpaws and custard apples, leaf-cones of wild honey.

The black panther even showed up with a white heron it had caught—so delicately—and so delicately carried, that the bird was still alive and strong.

"I'd do my share in feeding you," the panther grinned.

THERE was always a suggestion of the tempter among the lesser cats. Kwa released the bird. He put out a hand and touched the panther's head of black plush. Kwa looked into the panther's jade-green eyes.

"You also come from a race of killers," the panther said.

They used the purring and the sometimes silent universal speech.

"Some are killers and some are not," said Kwa.

"I kill to live," the black panther said.

"Some day," said Kwa, "this may not be necessary."

"Here in the Devil Bush," the black panther went on, still holding Kwa with its jade-green eyes, "there are spirits that live on blood and still others that live on the breath of certain trees. Who can say which are good and which are evil?"

"Who can say?" Kwa replied, while his own blue eyes held steady.

"Your paw kills. So does the skyfire."

"So does your steel-claw of a knife," the black panther said.

In a way, the conversation was getting nowhere; but it served the purpose of promoting thought, which, after all, was something.

To Kwa, at any rate, it served the purpose of recalling the principal reason for his being here.

The jungle peoples came and went. There was a business of the jungle as pressing as that of the peoples of any great city. It was a business of every day. The business of life. Food. Shelter. Sleep. Eternal vigilance. Here in the jungle there were no people living on their incomes. There was no leisure class. There was a rhythm that seemed at times as leisurely as that of the tides, or the rise and movement of the stars, yet driven by forces no less compelling.

Still the jungle peoples found time to come and linger, to listen and wait and watch, while Kwa—Kwa of the Ape People—watched his wounds close up and felt his strength come back.

HE'D come from a Far-Far country. Why? This was his We-Country—his native land—it was true. But he had another. He'd told them so. It was a land of Great Magic. He had told them so. In this Far-Far country, beyond the Black Water, over beyond where the sun went down, the people of the tribe to which he belonged could make thunder and lightning; they built sky-canoes; the voices even of their children could carry around the world.

Tembo, the great tusker, whispered from the green shadows: "They are, then Baobasi; makers of peace and happiness!"

Kwa said nothing.

But all this time he was thinking of the errand that had brought him here. It wasn't peace and happiness that the Far-Far country promised to send to the Devil Bush.

So early one evening, as soon as he was strong enough—when there was a good moon and more than the usual number of jungle people were on hand, Kwa said:

"Lo, I will do a dance!"

THIS wasn't a regular or ordinary dance. The only music was that furnished by the crickets and the frogs—especially the frogs. But, as anyone may know by listening, there is a cadence to this music. It has a beat—one that sounds complicated at first, but which sings and throbs into a regular pattern.

Kwa, standing erect, but with his head bowed, and with no other preparation than a twist of fresh vines about his loins, raised one bare foot, then another.

He'd found that rhythm of the invisible, million-pieced orchestra of the Devil Bush. One could have said that the orchestra was now setting its time to Kwa's own movements, as a concert-orchestra might when following the lead of a prima donna.

Kwa swayed. He stepped about. The moonlight showed the play of the muscles under his shining gold skin, and all these muscles were dancing as if of their own accord in perfect time with the stroke and throb and

shiver of the silver music.

"Wah!" he said. "Yes, I come from the land of the Great Magic. But I come as a herald of disaster. Unless we, my brothers, act together. There, I had news of a great prince. The great prince had learned something concerning the place of my birth. He is curious about the Ape People, the Furry Tribe, the Not Yet Men. He is coming to seek them. Some he would kill. Some he would take alive. He is powerful He will come with many men."

There is one thing about the radio of the bush—the wireless of the jungle. Everyone—from cricket to vampire-bat, from black panther to the white spirits of the trees; everyone!—is eternally tuned in.

And now this dance and song of Kwa's—although coming unannounced—was, as you might say, "on the air," traveling far, circling wider and wider, all the time that his moonlit audience swelled and swelled.

CHAPTER V
Prince Otto

A SCANDINAVIAN prince; a pleasant fellow, young and clean and healthy; blue-eyed like Kwa. A Prince Otto, connected by blood-lines with practically all of the royal families of Europe. But with a confessed preference for various things American. At least, so he pretended.

It may have been this, or it may have been that; but he'd spent a winter at Palm Beach and there become acquainted with a youth of his own age named Nathaniel Rahan—Nathaniel Rahan, 2nd, to be exact; since the original Nathaniel Rahan was young Nat's grandfather, millionaire and former big-game hunter.

The prince was something of a big-game hunter himself. On a specially conducted tour into the Belgian Congo he had shot—and killed—no less than seventeen gorillas; not to mention those he may have more or less painfully wounded.

He would admit to this with a certain playful shyness. He was a modest young man. Yes, seventeen! Gorillas! Young and old, male and female. The gorillas—some of them, at any rate, had been furious. They had shaken their fists at him. They had howled and shrieked. Some of them had moaned—had pointed to wounds of their own or of the very young and had quite manifestly tried to argue.

But a shot from a high-powered modern magazine rifle, followed by another and another—bang! bang! bang!—and the beasts would be off again into the thick of the jungle—where, most likely—they had been munching wild celery and bamboo shoots on a sort of family picnic.

The prince had recounted his hunting experiences, with many a laugh, to the elder Rahan—Nat's grandfather—and had tried to draw the old man out.

Curiously—that is, for one who'd been able to send rare specimens to half the museums of America and Europe—old Mr. Rahan hadn't cared very much to talk about his own shooting in Africa. He seemed, as a matter of fact, a little ashamed of that red twenty years he had spent shooting things. He dropped a strange remark.

"Nowadays," he said, gently and politely, "I prefer to do my hunting without a gun—in what you might call a social way."

"I do not quite follow," said the prince.

"Animals," old man Rahan explained. "Animals are people!"

AND then and there, in spite of himself, the old man told more than he'd really intended to about how that grandson of his, as the result of an accident, had been born among a strange tribe who were neither men nor apes.

The prince was listening open-mouthed.

"Neither men nor apes, Meester Rahan?"

"Neither, or both," Rahan had replied.

"Savages!"

"Less savage than we," Rahan declared. "We could tell them much of benefit, perhaps.

They could tell us more."

"You must explain, Meester Rahan," Prince Otto urged.

Nathaniel Rahan, a fine old gentleman—rendered so, like fine gold, by much tough treatment—took on a touch of poetry.

"I don't know," he said; "but the human race, it seems to me, is a good deal like paper money. I don't mean merely that it's quick to get dirty, thin, worn out. But that back of it, somewhere, there has to be a gold reserve—pure gold—perhaps as yet unminted—gold as good in Sweden or France as it is here in the United States. Where shall we look for this human gold reserve? Perhaps hidden away in some lost valley—like the Valley of the Mu—"

Beyond that, Prince Otto wasn't able to get very much from the elder Rahan. He was able to extract even less from Nathaniel Rahan, 2nd, when—politely, not too directly—he tried to extract from him additional information about the Valley of the Mu.

STRANGE game. Creatures who were neither apes nor men. There'd come seeping into Prince Otto's imagination already certain pictures of himself not only as an intrepid big-game hunter but as a famous scientist as well. A great explorer. Prince Otto—"just back from the Valley of the Mu." "Swedish Prince discovers missing link!" There are a whole lot of things that even princes are crazy to get. A fame like Einstein's, for example. A reputation like Marconi's, or Peary's, or Scott's.

An obscure Belgian professor goes sailing up to the roof of the sky, and some prince says: "Du lieber! Why didn't I think of that?"

The fame that had come to Prince Otto for having shot seventeen gorillas on a single, occasion had been heady enough while it lasted. But it hadn't lasted long enough. It had quickly evaporated, leaving him merely with an increased thirst for more.

Those gorillas he had shot had all been mounted. You could see them now in various museums, made to look very fierce even when enclosed in glass, and each of them ticketed as having been donated by H. R. H. Prince Otto, and so on; but the fame—like the specimens—was getting a little moldy.

Prince Otto, like the world in general, was looking for something new.

BUT Prince Otto, although he found young Nat Rahan charming and all that, wasn't able to get much out of him either about the Ape People or the exact place where these might be found. This, however, merely stimulated the prince's purpose.

Everything that he learned from this time on increased that stimulation. For, if neither Nat nor his grandfather cared to talk about that African experience, it was different with practically everyone who knew the Rahans, not only in Palm Beach but Newport.

For example, there was that well authenticated story of how Nat's father and mother had crashed in an airplane while flying over a bit of Equatorial Africa marked on the maps as Sango Lobango.

There was that other story of how Nat had quelled a circus-panic by talking to the animals in a language that the animals seemed to understand. There were other stories in this same connection about how the two Rahans were known to be the most expert animal tamers in America—maybe in the world—either amateur or professional.

The first that young Nathaniel Rahan, 2nd, knew about what the prince was up to came to him in a full-page story, richly illustrated, appearing in a Sunday newspaper.

The story bore a heading, seven columns wide, that read:

ROYAL GORILLA HUNTER OFF
TO SEEK MISSING LINK

And there was a picture of Prince Otto in a sun-helmet. There was a dramatic drawing of him blazing away at the breast of a giant

gorilla—beating its chest and showing its fangs—on the edge of a bamboo thicket.

Prince Otto, it was explained, was organizing a scientific expedition into one of the least-known sections of Equatorial Africa—a place as yet practically unmapped. It was a region of dense forest from the center of which arose that almost legendary mountain mass known as Sango Lobango.

It was here—so said the article—that according to tradition there lived a strange race that was neither animal nor man—the Ape People—the Mu. And the prince was hopeful of bringing back a number of specimens, either alive or fit to be mounted with his gorilla groups.

CHAPTER VI
Even as Gods

"BAOBASI"—that word that the old elephant-leader had used back there in the Devil Bush. A word meaning, really, gods; the makers—when they happen to be in the mood for it—of peace and happiness.

The word, or thought, in some form or other, must have been in the minds of many as the great white Nahan yacht, the *Faustina*, especially built for tropical waters, once more pushed her graceful stem into African waters.

Ragged or stark naked mystics on ancient sailing craft; black Kru boys on rusty red tramps bound in for the Guinea Coast—the old Slave Coast, Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, the Bights. Some of the ships that tilted on the glazed blue sea as the *Faustina* passed were little better than dugout canoes; there were others that trailed behind them a stench that might have belonged to the old blackbirders.

And from all these craft, and later from the shore-boats, and then from the shore itself—that endless line of surf and jungle that means West Africa—there came looks of envy, awe, speculation.

SURELY, the people who traveled on a yacht like the *Faustina* must be all same for one "Baobasi"—even as gods.

But the white yacht poked her way carefully into a bay of the Cameroons. She would be running down to the Congo later. Back of the Cameroon Bay there was a dark river up which the elder Rahan and his grandson would find a plantation devoted exclusively—or just about—to the raising of memories.

This had been the plantation founded by the son of the old man and the father of the younger. Here the old man would linger, while the son of his son went on that strange mission of his to the hidden country of his birth.

There'd been ample confirmation of that earlier report concerning Prince Otto. It had been decided, all right. Preparations were about completed. Prince Otto was going to "lead" an expedition into the Devil Bush in search of "the missing link."

The expedition was purely scientific, of course; but there'd be enough guns and ammunition among the stores for a small-sized army. The prince, moreover, was not going solely on his own. Half-a-dozen other ambitious young big-game hunters were going with him—boys, or men, who'd already shot hippos and giraffes, gazelles and antelope; and tigers and lions even—all with the utmost guarantees of perfect comfort and safety.

The Rahans, Nat and his grandfather, had talked things over.

YOU couldn't stop the prince by ordinary means. Could you? He was a prince. He had practically the entire diplomatic corps of the world ready to jump through the hoop at his slightest gesture. You couldn't shoot him. Although Nat proposed this—knowing gorillas as he did and remembering what the prince had done to his friends.

Nor were the Rahans in a position to organize an expedition of their own. That would have meant right away too much

publicity. And publicity was the one thing they most wished to avoid.

There was such danger of publicity that the nature of their visit—the real purpose of it—couldn't be discussed, even, once they had established themselves up the dark river on the Memory Plantation.

There was a brick house here—really a sort of bungalow, of only one story, but perched on high brick piers, with wide verandas. And here the two of them had settled down, ostensibly for a period of study and quiet recreation, with such servants as they needed, black and white, from the yacht, from the "bush."

Then quietly, in a way prearranged in such a manner that there would be no alarm, young Nat had slipped away—

Like gods also, young Prince Otto and his friends came down to Africa. They came by the fashionable way, through Kenya, over on the East Coast, where there could be incidental polo, tennis, golf and dances, before the caravan of motor-trucks could roll off with these white gods and their black attendants into the blue.

They were to make their way by easy stages up to the foothills of the Ruwenzori Range—the old Mountains of the Moon; called after the moon, because the tops of them were moon-colored, white, the fetish color, and so, somehow sacred still.

Then, along the Mountains of the Moon toward the west. Here there would be gaps in the mountain chain. And one of the last broken and separated links of the chain would be Sango Lobango, the two of which was also moon-colored—and fetish—such times as it came into view.

There'd been a lot of talk of late about "Brightest Africa" instead of "Darkest Africa."

THAT was all right for those who stuck to the motor-safari trails, the railroad and steamboat lines, the aerial mail-routes of England, Belgium, France.

But "Darkest Africa" was still a fact.

Prince Otto and his friends began to discover that the further they pushed on into the great forest belt—"north of the Congo and south of the Soudan"—and kept on westward.

This was drum country. Drums could be heard every night, and it was night soon as the sun went down. The drums were talking and were saying—what?

Prince Otto and his friends could find no one who would—or could—tell them what.

"Gri-gri" country—a country of old magic that mostly had to do with lost and wandering souls.

For more than a thousand years, this part of Africa had been the red hunting-ground of slave-and-ivory raiders. Time and again it had been reaped of its harvest of men and elephants until it had become like a haunted graveyard. To control these errant spirits, hurt and angry, some pretty strong measures had come into use.

Such things as giving the dead a chance to live again; ceremonial eating of the dead; *obeah*.

Obeah dealt with poison; all sorts. You could poison a man or poison his ghost; you could do this by contact or do it from afar—

THERE was a night when Prince Otto awoke in a cold sweat and wondered why. He'd had an excellent dinner of antelope steak and asparagus tips, washed down with as good a Burgundy as ever came out of France. To grace the princely table there had been other delicacies not always associated with an African safari—caviar, French pancakes, Vienna coffee, Bosnian cigarettes.

The prince lay there for a while in the dark. There was no one else in his tent. Through the double screen of mosquito netting and canvas he could make out the glow of a campfire. He could hear some of his men still talking. So it wasn't possible that a lion—for instance—had crept into camp.

Yet that was the feeling that came to him—that something was dangerous and near—something that stared at him with baleful intent.

It couldn't have been anything that he'd eaten. His digestion was perfect. He hadn't eaten too much. The cold sweat persisted. It was becoming the icy grip of panic. He switched on a light.

There seemed to be a big spider in the tent, suspended from the ridge-pole—a spider grotesquely big. It faded. It disappeared.

Obeah—which is perhaps the great-grandmother of voodoo, the serpent cult—has a Spider God.

CHAPTER VII
Spider Doctor

IT WAS strange how the memory of that spider he'd seen—or thought that he'd seen—came back to the prince the next morning the moment he left his tent and saw a strange black man seated near one of the cook-fires.

Or what had been a cook-fire. For the fire was now deserted by those who ordinarily would have been there. The cook-fire crowd were around another fire, evidently but recently started; and they were now making a pretense of getting on with their work. But it would have been manifest to anyone with half an eye that their attention was secretly—when not openly—fixed on that savage stranger near the fire they had left.

Prince Otto looked at this man.

There was something about him suggesting great age, also a sort of stiffness and a grotesqueness hard to explain.

At first glance, he seemed to be all legs and arms; although this impression dissolved on closer scrutiny. So did several of those earlier impressions. Like that impression of age, for example.

He had a fuzzy mop of hair that stood on end, but crinkly. And this was a dirty gray; only the gray seemed to be more like an effect of ashes, or of some silvery white powder, rather than the natural gray of old age.

Under this mop of hair there was a face that was rather handsome and—all things considered—remarkably brilliant and young. It was a face in which the eyes especially were noticeable. These were behold and intelligent, fixed yet elusive, like a pair of faceted black diamonds. The rest of the face, moreover, jet black, was partly covered by a sparse beard, a crinkly silver, like the hair.

The stranger was long-limbed, it was true; both as to legs and arms—long-jointed and straight and slender; so slender that the body appeared a little stooped and pot-bellied by comparison. Such clothing as the stranger wore consisted mostly of rags and wild-cat tails.

ALL of this accounted, to some extent, Prince Otto decided, for the association in his thought of this man and that nightmare spider he had seen—spidery arms and legs, beady eyes, a body, mostly paunch, and that body covered with a nondescript gray bristle.

"Who him?" the prince asked Doomy, the black interpreter.

Doomy was more or less West Coast, of Kromantin stock, who'd been but recently taken on for this part of the trip.

"Him," said Doomy, rolling his eyes; "him—him oganga."

"Witch-doctor, eh?"

The prince's translation of "oganga" was substantially correct, but Doomy's look intimated that there was something more implied. The prince stood there looking at the figure seated by the fire. Once more, compellingly, there came to him the impression of a great spider seated there—shriveled from man-size yet huge. He brushed this impression from his mind.

"Him say," Doomy expounded, "him hear drum talk in the bush. Him come for stay."

"What for? What does he want?"

"Him savvy Devil Bush. Him savvy Sango Lobango."

"What's his name?"

Doomy, the black interpreter, caught his

breath. The name came out in what was unmistakably a frightened whisper:

"*Anansi!"*

The prince looked at Doomy. "How you say?"

"Anansi!"

"All right. Anansi!" the prince laughed a little. "Me think so," he said, "you one big fool man, Doomy. You act all same you too much frighten."

All during the time of this little palaver, the man they were talking about had been sitting there by the fire and apparently paying no attention at all to what was going on around him. Someone had given him a bowl of mush, or some such food, and he was eating this with his fingers. His motions as he did this were peculiar—not fast, but with occasional clicks of speed; and bringing both hands to his mouth at once, with a dribbling, incessant movement of his fingers.

There was something repellant about the spectacle—and this also was hard to explain. The prince turned away. His own breakfast was waiting.

THERE were now only four white men in the party—the prince himself and three others. One of these was the young Count Willy Schwerinvik, who had been with Prince Otto on his gorilla-killing picnic—monocled, dapper, and himself a killer of parts; Major Hind, an old army man and Afrikander, who was really there at the behest of Prince Otto's family to keep an eye out for the safety of the younger men; and Professor Carl, who'd written books on African dialects and folklore.

The three others were already seated at the camp-table—breakfast was served in the open—when the prince came up. They arose and saluted with pleasant greetings.

But they had barely seated themselves again before the young Count Schwerinvik jumped up with a curse. He'd overturned his coffee cup.

"Why, Willy!" cried Prince Otto. "What's taken you?"

"THERE was a damned spider," Willy explained, beginning a laugh. "I almost drank it. Right in my coffee cup."

"We must be in a spider district," said Major Hind. "I've been seeing them, too. We should move on. They can be worse than ants."

The prince made no reference to that thing he'd seen—or thought he'd seen—in his tent. Professor Carl was beginning to speak.

"Hah," he said, "spiders! Very interesting! The large part they take in native beliefs. They rank quite with the serpents and the leopards. I might say almost that they rank about them. In the North, we have the tradition of the Kraken, the great sea-spider; supported by what we know of some of the giant crabs still infesting certain waters. Here in the South, it is the legend of the great land-spider that persists—the spider that can become a man—or the man that can become a spider." He paused. He pronounced a name: "The *Anansi!"*

Prince Otto, listening, suddenly lost interest in his breakfast. He remembered that name that the interpreter, Doomy, had given the stranger at the fire. He remembered many things—the fear that Doomy had shown, the aloofness of the other blacks, the haunt he'd seen in his tent. He turned and looked away.

He saw the stranger still seated at the side of the fire. He was hunched and gray. He seemed, somehow, to be all legs and arms. You could imagine him seated at the center of a web, eating something with an incessant play of fingers.

"Ach!" he said. "Anansi! So! A spider that changes into a man; a man that changes into a spider! In Maylasia, it's the tiger. In old Rome, the dog. In France and Germany, the loup-garou, the werewolf."

He tried to laugh it off, but he couldn't.

"Africa," the professor said, "is like the ocean. Unknown! Unexplored! Who knows but some day we may still find the unicorn, as Sir Richard Burton was inclined to believe; and if

not the unicorn, why not, anyway the Anansi?"

Major Hind broke in, tersely, as was his usual style.

"I've heard those Anansi stories," he said, "and I believe them."

"We have a new guide," Prince Otto spoke up. "I think we keep him. His name also is—Anansi!"

CHAPTER VIII
"Bad Place Too Much"

FOR two days and two nights—off and on in the way of jungle travel, yet traveling steadily enough—Kwa had worked his way through the outer fastnesses of the Sango Lobango country. A maze of sharp pinnacles and deep clefts, all jungle covered; steaming from fires and waters in the depths of the earth. The earth was like a thing alive. The breath of it was moist and hot. The jungle was a smothering green blanket.

He was never alone. Buffalo and elephants, chimps and gorillas, a band of okapi; a changing cloud of lesser creatures; leopards—they ghosted in, they lingered, they ghosted away again.

Most of the creatures who'd been with him at the pool were never far away. The old-lady chimp he called Faint Whistle in his thought was with him always. She'd adopted him, or he'd adopted her.

When he went to the Far-Far Country, she said, she'd go with him if he cared to take her. If she cared to go, he said, he'd take her. Then, with some premonition of trouble in his mind, Kwa had given her careful instructions how to reach the bungalow on the dark river, at the Memory Plantation. She'd be safe with his father, if anything happened.

The chimp-mother searched his face with her sad bright eyes.

"You know?" she said.

"I know," said Kwa, "that even you jungle people are nervous in this country that we are passing through. Are there devils in the Devil Bush that even Tembo and his people are afraid of?"

"There is a devil of the old time. He was gone. The whisper comes that he returns again."

"Who?"

"The spider god. The whisper goes about that this is his country. The whisper goes round that he is jealous of your coming—that he is angry."

It was another sort of whisper that had reached Kwa already, a number of times. It had reached him in the form of so much Krumouf—trade-English—of the Coast: "Bad place too much!"

YET the animals hadn't deserted him. They were moved by some ancient dread—by a prehistoric wisdom, perhaps—for who will ever know the truth that lies back of any old dread in the way of what is called superstition?—and yet they hadn't deserted him. They had seen him battle and kill one usurper, Sobek, the crocodile. Sobek had been like one of the gods come down from Ancient Egypt. Yet he had been mortal. Now, this other.

Kwa had heard rumors enough, off and on, ever since his earliest infancy, about a spider god—or devil.

"Tonight," he told the old chimp mother, "I shall dance again."

He looked about him. There was a wild banana growing near. He cut and rolled a leaf of this into a trumpet ten feet long.

At first, when he blew into this—with a movement of his swelling throat that should have resulted in words or notes—there seemed to be no sound. No sound at all. If anything, it seemed rather that his efforts were, if anything, intensifying the silence of the world about him.

To ears finely attuned to the jungle silence there'd been a stir of movement all along—a slithering, scattering murmur of scale and foot and wing, never louder than the flow of quiet water, but always there. This stopped.

Then, in its place, there was a pulsing

drone—it would have been a bellowing if it had been louder—such a bellowing now as might have been heard from cattle many miles away.

PRESENTLY, Kwa held the leaf trumpet aside and listened. Through the dead silence there came a faint stir and tremor of responsive sound—it was as soft as a breeze, and yet it seemed as big, as wide and high and penetrating. It flowed in like an echo of his own trumpet call.

"You heard my call," Kwa said that night.

It was late, for he'd waited for the moon. And he was in a small elephant park, which was like a mere well in the jungle, so the moon had to be high to shine into it.

The place was crowded; and no animal fearing another because it had become a law that where Kwa was, there the Ancient Truce held good. It would have been strange, for anyone not accustomed to it, to see pythons coiling and swaying from branches where birds were quietly perched; to see the big cats disregarding goats and monkeys and these in turn disregarding the cats.

Tembo, the great tusker, was there. He'd brought strange elephants with him. No lions were present. Lions couldn't live in these sunless green chasms, but some of the leopards ran almost to lion size.

"YOU heard my call," said Kwa, and as he threw back his head, one would have said that he was addressing the moon. "Oshu is white"—Oshu was the moon—"and I am white—and I am the little elder brother of you all. Oshu fears no devil. I fear no devil. Hey, you, devil! Spider devil. Anansi!—"

There was something equivalent to a gasp. There was a sort of shuddering whisper in that all but toneless and soundless universal speech:

"*Anansi comes!"*

Kwa saw it. All the animals were seeing it.

They saw it silhouetted at first against the white disc of the moon—the semblance of an enormous spider suspended on high in its web. The spider seemed to descend, leisurely—a stop and an instant of speed, then a leisurely movement of descent again.

The animals were spellbound.

Tembo and some of the other elephants had raised their trunks, slowly, in a form of salute or merely as an expression of awe and solemnity. The smaller monkeys were shivering and crowding together. The leopards were shifting about. The wild pigs were off at a rush. But they'd be back again. They were always doing that. Just nerves rather than a lack of courage. The pigs were as brave for their weight as elephants or lions.

Kwa, after his own first gasp of surprise, felt himself go steady. He'd called on the moon. It was as if the moon were now giving him a bath of cold white light. Queer things the moon had looked down on since the day of her birth.

"Yet here I am," Oshu seemed to say. "These things I see pass and come again—cold battlefields, men or ghosts, ghosts of animals or men. Take what comes. Don't be afraid."

There was a magic, Kwa knew. This was magic. Africa was full of magic. It always had been, ever since the days of Moses. And before. Moses must have learned his own magic from someone else. But magic didn't kill. Not nowadays. Poison killed. Fear killed. But not just magic. The thing was—not to be afraid!

There, standing straight in the moonlight, and that grotesque apparition of a monstrous spider growing bigger with each passing second, Kwa shook his two fists at it. He danced. He laughed at it. He taunted it. He dared it to come within his reach.

Under his taunting the thing faded. It disappeared.

But later, when the moon had passed, and Kwa had swung up into a tree to sleep, the old chimp-mother came to him with a branch of bitter leaves which she made him chew and swallow. He knew what they were—those leaves—both antidote and prophylactic for spider poison.

He was glad of this before the sun came up.

CHAPTER IX
Men Like Spiders

HE'D learned to sleep as so many of the jungle people sleep—he'd slept like that since earliest childhood—with the thinnest possible partition between sleep and waking. He'd sleep and wake. He'd listen and sleep again. Instantly awake. Instantly asleep. No twilight-zone between the two.

Several times during that remnant of the night that was left after he'd climbed into the tree, he'd been roused from his snatches of oblivion to a consciousness that there was a stir on the floor of the jungle.

The elephants were gone. The buffalo had moved off with a suggestion of stampede. At this there had been the glint of a thought. There was always that speculation in his thought of the difference between men and certain others of the animals. Animals stampeded. Men didn't. When men stampeded they ceased to be men.

The thought—and the occasion of the thought—were still there when he awoke again and knew by a thousand signals that it would soon be light. There was enough light now—from some high reflection in the sky—to fill the forest here on the edge of the elephant park with a hint of day.

WHAT had stirred? What had happened? He listened. He caught the sound of a breath somewhere below that he couldn't identify. It might have come from a wounded animal. Had some renegade leopard broken the truce? That couldn't be it. There would have been an outcry. The leopard would have completed its kill. He tested the air. His gift of scent had returned since he'd put away his clothes and begun again the life of the bush. No, there was no scent of blood.

There was a vine-growth against the bole of the tree. With a hold on this he slipped over lightly from the twisted branches that had been his bed and let himself down with long, smooth reaches to the ground. He would look about and learn where that breath had come from.

Then, not far away, there was the trickle of a waterfall and a mossy basin where it would be good to bathe.

HE'D just stepped into the misty dim light of the open elephant park when he saw what he took to be animals—and animals that he couldn't identify—push into the park a dozen yards or so to his right. They were black. They were still in heavy shadow. Whatever they were, they'd seen him at the instant he'd seen them. Or before!

Several things occurred to him at once.

These creatures had been startled at sight of him. They were strangers. They weren't animals at all. And yet they hadn't the appearance of men. They were men disguised. From one of these had come that breath he had heard. Four—five—there were five of them—and possibly more in the background. And this was why the elephants had slipped away—the buffalo had gone with a hint of stampede.

All this, like the quick and unreasoned promptings of instinct.

Then there had come a pang in his shoulder, another in his breast.

If there had been any lapse of time from his first discovery of the prowlers it was one that would have had to be measured with a stopwatch.

With that double sting barely recorded in his brain he'd charged. He'd charged without a word or preliminary signal of any kind. Yet, in some inexplicable way, there had been premeditation.

He'd seized one of the figures by the throat and rolled over with it to the ground. He knew now who his attackers were. These were spider-men; priests—God save the mark!—of Anansi! He'd heard of them.

They carried poisoned darts—little throwing darts no bigger than arrows. The points of these were poisoned with the venom of a little gray spider called "Friend of the Flies," because it killed all sorts of creatures,

from toads to a nesting duck or a gorged python, around which flies would later gather, and on some of these flies the spider itself would afterward feast.

Kwa dragged his captive over. It was a question as to who would stab first.

AS a matter of fact, they both stabbed at the same time—the spider-man with one of his poisoned darts, Kwa with his knife. From the poisoner there came a gurgling squeak, then an explosive cry as if his very life had exploded—shrilling—gulping to silence; and all so swift that the cry had become nothing more than an ugly memory and an echo before it was fairly registered.

Spider-men; but with black monkey-fur framing their faces, ringing their arms and legs; gri-gri pouches around their necks instead of ordinary ornaments. Selected men, members of a fraternity as tight and secret as the crafts of the old Nile gods.

That shriek had awakened the forest like the bang of a gun. From stillness there had come a splash of sound, a spreading ripple of panic retreat; other noises—the screech and flapping of birds, a snapping kiyi and snarling of wild dogs, a crash of heavy cattle not picking their way.

Kwa, sure of himself but with a prayer in his heart for Faint Whistle and that bitter medicine she had given him, was reaching out for another assassin before his knife was free. He struck from the ground and opened a body as he would have split a melon; swinging over—as he thought—to avoid the blood; but, having started his swing, discovering that he couldn't stop himself.

Falling—falling! And this was the poison getting to his brain.

He fought it off. He gasped the resolve. He simply would not give in. That bitter medicine would work.

A jolt revived him for a little while. An enemy had fallen on him and was trying to smother him. He stabbed again and struggled to free himself before he recognized that this was the enemy he had just slit open.

All in the same moment he was conscious of a cry from the trees. There were chimpanzees up there—the Engl-eco people, first cousins to the Furry Tribe the Mu, who had reared him. He let out a call of his own—in the universal speech. But the cry was one of warning for them. It was the poison-cry. Danger! Stand clear!

HE came up reeling, with the sensation that he was meshed—softly, silkenly, as a fly is meshed by the gossamer of a spider after the spider has poisoned it. And this would be worse than death. To be held alive like this. To be drained of his life, his soul. This was what they'd been after, these spider-men, followers of Anansi. He was white. He was fetish. He was great medicine for those who could keep him alive yet drain him of his life.

There was no illusion in his brain. This was no outer, material web that was being spun about him. It was merely the spreading web of paralysis woven about him by the spider venom.

He remembered his appeal to the moon—to Oshu, who also was white. He remembered what it was that differentiated men and manlike animals from the lesser brethren. They that were men didn't give way to panic. He was fighting again. He hadn't even paused.

Another fetish was coming up. The day was rising. It was getting light.

With all that he had of resolve, of purpose, of inherited will, Kwa flung himself forward and struck again.

CHAPTER X
Leo

IT WAS the end of the battle. But whether or not it was his own finish also, Kwa had a slipping moment of doubt. The reflex of the doubt stopped him, gave his straining arm a

twist of sharp withdrawal.

There had come a difference in the mass ahead of him. It was a scattering. It had been like the explosion of a tawny bomb, with a crunching explosion of sound—not very loud—but charged with a power that meant an end of existing things—of things that just now were but forever afterward were not.

The change had outstripped thought.

Then he was face to face—through the still dim and eerie light of the rising day—with the great mask of a lion. The mask was full-maned, close, incredibly large. He had seen this mask contorted with lines of slaughter. But even while his gaze was becoming steady again—in the second or so after it had been like a shaken lamp—he saw the expression of the lion's mask change.

There was satisfaction in it, a return to calm, a hint of majesty; and yet always with that hint of finality also, as in the face of the great Egyptian sphinx.

Panting, still half paralyzed by the poison in his veins, Kwa relaxed.

"Friend!" was what he said, in the universal speech.

"Friend," came the answer from the lion. And then: "I come from the Valley of the Mu."

The big lion hadn't come alone. Kwa could see other lion-shapes back of the great lion-chief in front of him. There had never been lions in the Valley of the Mu, because of the Truce there. Yet lions had come and gone on special occasions. And they'd kept the truce while there and were highly thought of.

Kwa asked no questions. He was reeling in his tracks. There was a stench of blood in the dawn-mist rising from the damp earth. The immediate surroundings were a shambles. Kwa himself had accounted for at least three of the spider- priests. Leo, and his companions, perhaps, had struck down the others.

"My heart," said Kwa, "is already in the Valley of the Mu. I shall follow it."

"When?"

"Now. I was hoping for a lift from elephant or buffalo. But they were troubled by the Spider Magic. I could tell it. They could give me no exact knowledge of the Valley of the Mu."

"Anansi," said the lion, "has forbidden them the place."

KWA supported himself with a hand against a tree. There was a message of disaster in an answer like that. Had the Ape People, his people, been wiped out? The bloody mist was mounting around him.

Leo read his thought. More than half of the jungle speech was intuitional—what among men might pass for telepathy.

Leo now spoke in the grunting tribal language of his kind.

"Brother," he said, "you need a lift and if you take it you will still be in time. Will you accept the offer of my back?"

"You'd carry me?"

"MANY a time," the lion purred, "I've leaped a hut-high thorn fence with a full-grown bullock on my shoulder."

"*Lungela!"*

Kwa had breathed the word softly—"So be it!"—and stumbled forward. Almost he'd fallen. But the lion was under him with a movement as deft and silken as that of a house-cat playing with a ball of twine. As if he weighed no more than a ball of twine, the great cat shifted Kwa into a better carrying position. Kwa's arms were sunk in the heavy mane. His relaxed body was moulded closely, then more closely still, to the great shoulders. Kwa could feel the ripple and twitch of the muscles as the lion—still as if unconscious of his weight—lightly adjusted him to a position of comfort for them both.

For an interval Kwa's eyes had closed. It was only when a gust of clean air swept across him that he realized that the lion was already running with him and was gathering speed.

The little old ape-woman who'd mothered Kwa and given him the medicine against the spider poison had been a spectator of this mixed

drama of the jungle floor. With other chimpanzees she'd watched it from the high branches where they'd slept. In the dim light it had been little more than a shadowgraph. But this had merely added to the ghostliness of it, the element of the supernatural.

It had been for the chimps what it would have been for men to see a corner of Armageddon—that ultimate battle of devils and angels. More terrifying even than the battle, had been that spectral intervention of the lions. This wasn't lion country. Never before had lions been in this part of the Devil Bush. Were they lions? Or were they something else that had merely taken on the appearance of lions?

The king of the specters had carried Kwa away.

The little old ape-woman let out a quaver of lamentation. It was a thin and shaky bleat that anyone could have understood. It was a cry repeated over and over again.

Kwa! Kwa! It was as if she'd mothered a god and now had lost him.

But as the old ape-woman went about the business of the day she remembered what Kwa had said about his father.

THE run of the lions with Kwa had begun—and for a long time lasted—at a gliding, crouching trot or pace. This had been necessary because of the nature of the ground and the absence of a trail. Up over sharp ridges and along fallen trees; then down again some moss-smothered cliff as steep as a wall. Without ever a stop; never a pause; with a perfect precision of movement whatever sort of an obstacle was met and an undeviating gait as smooth as the flow of a python.

How far he was carried by the lion, Kwa would never know. Kwa was fighting the poison in his blood. Time and again, he felt the invisible web of a complete paralysis tightening about him. There were intervals when even the light in his brain seemed to be on the point of extinction, like a flame in a globe deprived of air. But he fought off the feeling.

If it hadn't been for the medicine he'd been given, he must have died.

At the same time that he emerged from one of these periods of trance, the lion—and those that followed him—emerged from some thickness of the forest, and Kwa knew that they had entered an elephant trail. They'd but entered the trail when there was a challenge that came like the blast of a steam siren.

Kwa knew that cry. It was the stop-and-answer challenge of an elephant leader.

The lions had stopped. But in those tireless shoulders under him Kwa could read some sort of a similar challenge. It was a flexing of muscles, a play of nerves that were ready for anything.

Kwa slipped from his place and came to his feet. One of his hands was still in the mane of the lion that had carried him. A second lion had slipped forward and stood at his other hand.

Before them, bulking huge, was that great Tembo of the crocodile pool.

CHAPTER XI
Lions and Elephants

DOWN through the ages lions and elephants had gone their separate yet parallel ways. There'd never been war between them. Nothing but harmony.

Until the coming of the Utangani, the White Man, the lions had been as shepherds to the great flocks of the plains—the myriad gazelle and antelope; herdsmen to the uncounted zebra. The lions had been like those other great shepherds, the old patriarchs of Canaan—feared but respected; living off their flocks, it is true, just as the patriarchs had done; but, like them also, entrusted with the keeping of an ancient Law.

The elephants, for their part, had been more like some race of ancient mystics; not killing at all, keepers of some Ancient Wisdom that already existed before the Law came down from an African Sinai.

The two races, Lion and Elephant, Shepherd King and Primeval Mystic, had been and were still, as different as sun and moon. But like sun and moon they'd swung down the long life of the world in perfect harmony.

"Peace!" said Kwa.

"We were coming to warn you," Tembo replied.

"Of what?"

The lion-chief who carried Kwa broke in with a throaty purr.

"To warn him against us?" he demanded.

"Yes."

THE big elephant—any elephant unspoiled by human contact—was as incapable of a lie as a dog.

Leo, the lion-chief, understood.

"You have listened to liars," he proclaimed.

"Death to all liars!" Kwa cried out in the universal speech; and he was suddenly aware that a jungle crowd was assembling with all the rapidity of a crowd in the world of men.

The sun was up. The light of it was slanting in through the jungle cover here and there in bars of misty silver. These revealed a flutter of wings, the scamper and swing of monkeys who must have already heard the news of what had happened at daybreak.

A meeting like this would have been a great occasion in any case. A meeting of elephants and lions. There'd been perhaps a dozen lions back there in that brief battle of the elephant park. There were others now.

With Tembo there may have been a score of elephants when Tembo sounded his challenge. Other elephants had been drifting in—softly as the rolling up of the morning mist—visible only when they passed some slanting shaft of the early sun, disappearing again into the gauze of green shadows.

"I came here for something else," said Kwa, and all were straining to hear. "I came here to warn my people of the Furry Tribe—the Ape People, who are the friends of you all—that certain of the Utangani, white like myself, were coming to the Valley of the Mu to molest them."

"We have already heard of them," there came a responsive breath from bush and branch. "They are drawing close to Sango Lobango even now. They have taken Anansi himself to guide them."

The information sounded so incredible to Kwa that he made them repeat it. Both elephants and lions confirmed the statement.

"But Anansi is a spider!"—Kwa was suffering from a moment of bewilderment.

In response to his wondering protest there was something equivalent to a mob-shout of negation, of explanation.

No! No! Anansi was whatever he willed to be!

THE answer shrilled down in a hundred bird-cries, the chattering of monkeys, the bark and harsh laughter of hyenas.

The lion-chief let out a coughing roar, brief but angry, that silenced the confusion as a shot would have done.

"Speak, elder," said the lion.

And there was only one—Kwa apart—in the present society, at any rate, whom Leo would have addressed like that. Attention flashed to the elephant-leader like a million needle-points of light.

"*Oganga—mchawi!*"

Tembo was exerting care to make his meaning clear. It was as if he'd said: "Medicine man—wizard!" A medicine-man might be a legitimate doctor, no matter how many poisoners and fakers may have usurped the title. "Wizard" was not so good. It meant magic out and out, often of the worst.

THE man who now called himself Anansi—Tembo went on to explain—was a wizard of the worst and most dangerous sort; one who had come into possession of primitive spider secrets—knowledge that spiders themselves had once possessed—and which had made

spiders great—great as elephants and lions—great as Utangani—White man.

Here there was a pause.

Kwa himself was listening with no less interest than any other of those people present, furred or feathered—or leathered, like Father Tembo himself.

But the spiders—Tembo revealed—had abused their knowledge. And so it had been taken away from them and the spiders had become debased. But somewhere—somehow—such things happened from time to time—he who called himself Anansi—the name of the ancient spider gods—had come by some part of the Forbidden Spider Knowledge—and that was why he called himself Anansi.

As Tembo stopped speaking—or whispering, sending out waves of communication that were somewhere about half-way between sound and light—there again came that multiple crackle of comment and information from the surrounding jungle.

Anansi had forbidden to some the Valley of the Mu.

Anansi had committed abominations in the Valley of the Mu.

Anansi was leading the strange Utangani now to the Valley of the Mu to do to them that which he had already done to the Furry Tribe, the Ape People, the Not Yet Men.

Kwa shouted, with the shout of silent jungle speech:

"What has Anansi done to my people?"

The answer came from a thousand sources:

"Anansi has sealed them up in the caves! He has spun the gray curtain over all the ways out from the caves!"

Kwa had forgotten that earlier sickness of his. Excitement or the bitter leaves had finally counteracted the spider venom. His wounds were mere pin-pricks. But now, and suddenly, he felt a stab of fresh sickness.

"We lose time," Kwa gasped. But, in truth, there'd been very little time lost since Tembo had stopped them here in the elephant- trail.

"I'll carry you," said Tembo. There were a dozen volunteers—elands and buffalo, okapi and even a zebra herd-leader—nervous in the presence of the lions—although he and all creatures here knew that this was another Truce.

Kwa turned to the lion that had carried him. "Which?" he asked.

"I can outrun them all," the lion answered. "But this is weight and distance as well as speed. The Elephant Father excels."

Tembo swung Kwa to his place just behind those flapping elephant ears—ears that would have served as doors for a garage.

"Come all who will," Kwa trumpeted, "I go to kill Anansi!"

CHAPTER XII
Strange Guide

MEANTIME, as the animals had reported to Kwa, that group of white strangers had been drawing closer and closer to the Valley of the Mu, under the guidance of the queer black man who'd called himself Anansi.

Anansi! It was a name—so Professor Carl had said—like that of some spider Pharaoh. What the name of Pharaoh was in the history of the early Egyptians, so Anansi was in the legends of Obeah—the Spider Cult of Equatorial Africa.

Those who wish to go to the trouble of doing so may find a slim pamphlet which was written on the subject sometime after Professor Carl's return to Europe from this African tour. The pamphlet is still in manuscript. It has never been printed—it has never received much attention—because it is generally supposed that Professor Carl, when he wrote it, was already out of his mind.

The manuscript was completed not long before his death. He died in a private hospital for the mentally deranged. He'd been taken there immediately after his return from Africa.

From Africa he had returned alone.

ALMOST from the day that Anansi joined the expedition of Prince Otto and his friends the expedition encountered trouble.

First of all, it was the desertion of the porters. There'd been no keeping of those porters at all. They'd slip away, more often than not with no excuse, no demand for their pay.

Doomy, the black interpreter, had only one explanation to offer. It was always the same: "This place, they say, him bad too much!"

After all, Prince Otto and his friends could scarcely blame these people.

There was, in fact, something about the country that the white men themselves could feel that made it "bad too much." Devil Bush! But that wasn't it. "Foul jungle!" But neither was that the trouble. The trouble was something that none of them would explain—or, at any rate, something to which none of them cared to confess.

THEY were all—Professor Carl apart—veterans of the bush. Big game killers. Major Hind himself had begun life as an ivory-hunter—killed elephants wholesale, often slaughtering a whole herd in a single lucky day—and leaving them there to rot and feed the buzzards and hyenas—coming back later to knock out the ivory—unless his Arab rivals had got there first.

It was like that with the younger men, Prince Otto and Count Willy Schwerinvik. Not that they had ever undergone any real hardship in the jungle, as Major Hind had done. But young men, untroubled either with nerves or imagination, seasoned killers.

Wasn't there, after all, something godlike about being able to go about like that distributing death?

Perhaps it all came back to the fact that they seemed to be in a spider country. Spiders all the time. Spiders literally swarmed about the camp—spiders that were big and hairy, curious spiders as gangling and naked as Japanese crabs.

No one was bitten. Yet the continuous presence of the creatures was depressing. The blacks kept drifting away. First the porters; then the askaris—the native police, who were practically soldiers, there on command and not supposed to desert; then Doomy himself, the interpreter.

None of this mattered so much. Anansi was there. Anansi could interpret. Somehow or other, Anansi found bush natives—not many, but some—to carry on.

But this time—when they were deep in the Sango Lobango jungle—Anansi had become practically the whole show. The white men could have done nothing without him.

Anansi was guide, interpreter, tracker, cook.

He excelled at all these branches of the safari trade. He threaded a trail through the towering jungle no one else could ever have found—along deep gullies choked with depths of glossy green, up the sweaty flanks of razor-edged divides. The new bush-people he had taken on obeyed him minutely, while, with the white men, they were merely sullen.

Almost, it seemed, Anansi exerted a similar authority over them. He could go out tracking, it seemed, in the night, and locate whatever was wanted—chimp or gorilla, antelope or buffalo, rare birds—and practically keep the game where he'd found it until Prince Otto or Count Willy could come up for the kill.

Only, those spiders continued to be a curse.

SEVERAL times—this is from Professor Carl's manuscript—the game brought in seemed to have been trapped in powerful spider-webs, although otherwise uninjured, before becoming targets for the guns.

But the spiders became so insistent that members of the party began to dream about spiders, see them when they weren't there, have nightmares about themselves having been caught in a spider web.

All that kept them going was Anansi's positive assurance that they were "close in"—close to the objective of their expedition. They

were approaching the territory of the Ape Man, the Missing Link.

As proof of this, one of Anansi's bush-boys returned to camp one day with what he said was the body of a *manjarooma*—one of the Ape People—he'd been able to kill with a poisoned arrow. Unfortunately, the hunter had cut off the head, the hands and the feet of the specimen. Otherwise, it might have made a magnificent trophy.

THE arms of the specimen appeared to be a little longer than a human being's, yet they were exquisitely modeled along human lines. The body was covered with a sort of golden, silken fur; otherwise it might have been the body of a somewhat small but exquisitely proportioned and graceful child.

Since the specimen, as a specimen, had been ruined anyway, they kept the skin and consigned the meat to the cook-pot.

Which brings the professor to a consideration of Anansi's cooking in general. For the professor, it seems, later became convinced that Anansi was a poisoner.

After all, Anansi: the Spider Pharaoh!

Count Willy Schwerinvik was the first to make the charge. He'd seized Anansi by the throat one day and hit him in the face with his fist. "He knew how to handle natives"—and Anansi, he said, had put "bush in his chop," meaning poison in his food—specifically, this time, powdered spider.

That same day, the young count was seen to leave- the camp alone. The gloomy jungle swallowed him—"swallowed him," the professor wrote, "with a weaving of green fingers, feeding him into the green maw of a spectral spider." No wonder they thought the professor was crazy. In any case, the young Count Schwerinvik was gone.

They tracked him; with Anansi's help, far up through the jungle slopes of Santo Lobango to the mouth of a cave, and here a strange thing happened.

It was here that Prince Otto himself disappeared. Just how, the professor didn't try to explain. For it must have happened during a time of panic—of sheer madness; when they'd seen—or thought they'd seen—spider the size of a man come stumbling and skating from the cave.

Major Hind promptly shot at the thing. But it had fastened on the prince. At its airy, stumbling tread it disappeared with the young nobleman into the green oblivion.

The professor fled. He must have been stark raving mad, just then, at any rate. How he ever got away, God only knows. The professor himself didn't.

He was going to be picked up a month later by a band of roving Wandas. It was miles away from the Devil Bush.

The Wandas could make nothing of his tale, and they took him to the nearest Askari post. The Askaris went out on a search. And they found, at last, the camp the professor told them about. Only, it was a hundred miles south and east of the place where the professor had said it was.

And presently this page also was turned on one more African mystery.

CHAPTER XIII
The Tattered Veil

KWA was hearing fragments of this story all the time that Tembo—son of another Tembo he had known—was rushing through the deep green ocean of the Devil Bush. Jungle as suffocating at times as actual water—yet water that was warm, perfumed; again exhaling a stench of swamp and mephitic springs.

Territory, all of this, from which even the elephants had always remained aloof. A short-cut, though, straight through the jungle from one of the major animal trails to another. Kwa felt as if he rode the spear-head of a hurricane. For the elephants now were making no effort to travel in silence. They were crashing through.

The elephants were followed by a growing army. They were flanked right and left to an unguessed distance by lesser beasts—great runners all.

IT was a shifting army, never quite the same. Now there would be a tawny serpentine of lions streaking through the glade. But a moment later it would seem as though the lions had changed to buffalo.

Always overhead and all around, a flight of wings—flamingos across a patch of sky, flashes of red and yellow through the green. Then a volley of deer across some higher level—so high and swift and fleeting through the intervening branches that they appeared to be flying, too.

And all the time—from above and below and all around—that incessant hum and whisper of the jungle radio, the universal speech in a thousand voices—telling of Anansi.

This was to be the end of Anansi.

They were going to witness the destruction of Anansi.

Kwa had said it—Kwa of the Ape People—Kwa the Golden—he was going to the Valley of the Mu—going to set his people free—going to kill Anansi.

Kwa knew well how that wave of information was spreading over this part of the world. Now that he was with them, the jungle people seemed to have lost their fear, to have cast off all caution.

They were telling him and each other stories of Anansi.

The Spider Chief had changed himself into a spider and cast his net about first one young member of the Untangani camp, then another. After fanging them with his poison darts, he'd carried them off into a cave of the Sango Lobango, where he'd absorbed—as a spider drains a fly or a humming-bird—the strong fetish of the White Man—.

Kwa heard all this with a shudder at his heart.

He knew who it was of whom the jungle people spoke. Prince Otto was dead—or trapped—and longing for death, perhaps. The young nobleman with Prince Otto had been poisoned—spun about with the subtle paralysis of the spider people.

Would he himself have any better luck? The memory of this morning's fight with some of Anansi's followers quivered in his thought.

There was much talk of Anansi's magic.

In the jungle there were eyes everywhere. All things were seen. All things were known.

There had been witnesses to that final scene when Anansi had rushed from the fetish cave looking like a man-sized spider. So like a spider had Anansi looked that other spiders themselves would have taken him for such. It was this spider that the third man (Major Hind) had fired at before the spider killed him. Well, the next time Anansi, the man, had shown himself he was suffering from a gunshot wound—

THEY'D forged through a final strip of woods that still Kwa did not recognize and into a high gallery that might have been the avenue of an abandoned city.

This Kwa recognized. It was part of the great game trail that for uncounted centuries all sorts of animals had traveled in their migrations back and forth, to and from the Valley of the Mu. Migrations that had, in a way, been pilgrimages. The Valley of the Mu, the Valley of the Truce, the Mecca, the Jerusalem, of the Jungle Folk.

It was as if an invisible hand, kindly but terrible, had reached through the cage of Kwa's ribs and was closing about his heart. His We Country! Here where he had been born! Here where a people who'd come down from the dawn of the World, bringing something of the beauty of that dawn with them, had reared him, taught them their ways—the Ape People—People who were animals—animals who were People.

Where was the frontier between animals and men? There was no such frontier. If there

was such a dividing line, it was one that had been traced by man himself—as artificial, as provocative of robbery and murder—as the boundaries men drew on maps—

THIS was the great road leading to what was known as the Elephant Gate, that only entrance to the Valley of the Mu. An actual gate was what it looked like—hugely walled with rock and forest.

The rock was there and the forest was there—unchanged; Kwa saw the remembered contours. But even while they were at a distance, there was something about the Elephant Gate suggestive of death and ruin, of abandonment and desolation.

It was just an impression and he wasn't sure where this impression came from—perhaps it was just a touch of ghostly imagination. But it made his heart sink, then quicken.

Tembo, with a final rocking pace, had come rushing up to within fifty yards of the gate and there had halted. The halt was long enough for some of the laggard animals to catch up.

There was a universal cry of, "You see, Oh, Kwa?"

Tembo himself had launched that overwhelming whisper: "You see, Oh, Kwa?"

Kwa saw.

Across the height of the gate from a towering mulberry tree to a pillar of rock there was a festoon of liana that had always been there. But now this had become the support of a gray curtain—a tattered gray veil. The stuff of the veil was like an ancient cobweb—strings and tatters of gray crepe.

Kwa was so impressed by the sight that he lifted himself from where he sat. He stood upright on the elephant's head—Tembo holding steady as a rock. Kwa looked and looked—chest heaving like a bellows, and this bellows blowing up a shining fire in his brain.

"I see!" he said.

And his voice struck silence through all that mixed horde of jungle people.

"I see! And hear ye all!" he shouted. He raised one knee, then another, in the ritual dance of the Mu. "I declare I have a greater magic than Anansi's. For this—this is *Shauri Munga*! This is the business of God!"

CHAPTER XIV
Judgment Day

THERE was, as a matter of fact, a powerful magic in that particular phrase that Kwa had used—"*Shangri Munga!"*—when used in a particular way. And, unconsciously or consciously, this was the way that Kwa had used it.

The animals recognized that fact. So did Kwa himself. There was that inexpressible equivalent of a cheer that went up from all these jungle people. It was like a curious swirling magnetism—call it that; but a wave-length perhaps somewhere between sound and light, audible in a way and visible in a way.

A swirling cloud that lifted and dissolved and spread out across the Valley of the Mu; yet multiplied itself like a sort of music broadcast, starting up vibrations in places that had gone silent and heavy as if under a pall of death.

Tembo, at a hint from Kwa, had paced forward and stretched up his trunk like a straight but supple ladder. And up this Kwa ran to a shoulder of rock.

He was Kwa again—Kwa of the Ape People—whatever the White Magician he might have so suddenly become. For in a moment he was running out onto the festoon of vines, kicking away the webs that supported that funereal curtain. It fell in rags. It drifted away in shreds that dissolved in the sun.

The half-silent music of the shouting spun and became curling currents of energy that sped the work that Kwa was doing—

Far away on the further side of the great round valley where Kwa had been born and the Furry Tribe had continued to live since the

Dawn Age, those swirling vibrations washed their way along the cliffs and found their way into the secret places of the rocks.

ONE of the largest of the caverns over there was the great Fire Cave of the Mu, the place where Kwa had spent so many of his days and nights. It had always been a sort of cathedral, not only for the Mu themselves but for all of the jungle world. A place that was large as Noah's Ark must have been, for here also the beasts had assembled—not only in pairs but by families, clans; eaters of grass and drinkers of blood. They lay down side by side. This was the place of the Truce. And this was the place of the Fire.

In the center of the cavern the sacred fire had burned. It had burned there, so it was said, ever since Sango Lobango had lifted itself from the bottom of the sea.

THE animals would stand or lie about in the spaces of the cavern and observe this mystery of Fire. They would listen to the stories of the Mu, as told by Moa, a name which meant Father-of-Them-all; or Wami, the wife of Moa, she who had been the foster mother of Kwa and who shared with Moa the headship of the Furry Tribe.

The great cave had been, perhaps, the oldest and greatest cathedral in the world. With the advent of Anansi, the Fire Cave had become a prison.

The coming of Anansi had been so swift and subtle that the curse was upon the Mu before they were aware of it. For Anansi had come in the shape of a spider. Already he'd been aware, no doubt, that the Mu were non-fighters, that they never killed. And had he tried to come upon them as a man, they would have been forewarned by their friends of the jungle tribes—the elephants and buffalo, particularly—who were the closest allies of the Mu.

Anansi had spread his poison. He'd garnered the young of the Mu as a miser would have garnered so many golden ingots.

These children were beautiful.

Where in the world could beauty be found equal to the beauty of these children of the Mu? Nowhere! Not anywhere, at any rate, that Anansi had ever heard of.

Lithe bodies, as capable of aerial movement as butterflies; clad in a silken fur that shone like gold in the sun; yet each with a twist of flowering vine about the waist—like a *diggo*—like a loin-cloth, the cloth, the clothing of men.

The Mu, the Furry Tribe, the Not Yet Men, themselves keepers of some of the oldest magic in the world, as proven by the beauty of their children.

Anansi's power had grown; it had fattened as a spider may fatten. He had changed the great temple of the Mu, the Fire Cave, into a prison, into one great spider-trap. And here the Mu had been kept in a gray trance that was neither life nor death.

It was Aya who, thus far, had been the savior of her people.

AYA was Kwa's sister in a way. She had been reared as such. She had been born, when Kwa was born; and Wami, Aya's mother, had reared them both. Side by aide they'd fed at Wami's breasts. Side by side they'd roamed the Valley of the Mu—riding the buffalo, climbing with the monkeys, swimming in the pools under high cascades.

Until, at last, Aya had become less like her parents than she was like this strange brother of hers—

Aya crept through the shadows of the Fire Cave to where Moa and Wami sat. She stirred them from their trance.

"I tell you," she said, "that he comes!"

"The gray fog!" moaned Moa, the old chief, her father.

"Kwa comes!" the girl persisted.

Wami, her mother, Kwa's foster mother, raised her head.

Through the still air of the cave there came

a whirling current, still very faint, yet which had about it something of the qualities of both sound and light, of music and color.

Wami threw back her face and clasped her hands against her breast.

"I knew it!" she said. "I knew it! There's a greater magic—"

The lion-chief had said it—there was no one who could run, as he could run, when the distance wasn't too great. There may have been something else that made the lion want to carry Kwa on that last wild charge of his across the Valley of the Mu.

The Lions, like the Hyksos, the Shepherd Kings, had carried on some tradition of the Law. They were the Keepers of the Law. And this was a fighting business in a fighting world.

As Kwa dropped down from that business of his of tearing away the mourning-crepe from the gate to the valley, the lions were there.

"Brother," said the lion-chief, "I'm the steed you'll want at present!"

Queer sights had been seen in the Valley of the Mu, great processionals of the Jungle Peoples in time of truce, children of the Ape People—and flowers in their hair—riding the wild antelope, hustling the buffalo children for their turn at the milk. But no queerer sight—it would be a safe bet—than that charge now of the lion cavalry across the broad meadows of the valley; and all the lions riderless, except that one who kept the lead.

A maned and undulant living arrow, with a living golden image on his back.

The animal army swept across the plain—an invasion of new life into what had almost become a valley of death.

Anansi, hidden along a cliff, watched that deluge of invaders. He wasn't afraid. He'd nourished his strength on Utangani medicine. His fetish was stronger than ever.

For one more Utangani, he decided, this would be—Judgment Day!

CHAPTER XV
Armageddon

KWA had sprung from the back of the lion and run up a well-remembered path. It was a path leading to the Fire Cave of the Mu. He saw the entrance to the Fire Cave and of other caves where he'd waived and played as a child—shrouded now, as the Elephant Gate had been shrouded, with thick gray webs.

He slit the nearest web with strokes of his knife. The rags of it he tore away with his hands.

"Wami!" he called. "Moa!"

A faint answer reached him. It would have been inaudible—it would have been imperceptible—to ordinary perceptions. But his foster-parents were answering him.

Then Kwa heard a louder call, and there was his foster-sister, Aya. She seemed all eyes as she stumbled toward him from the darkness of the Fire Cave. In a moment, he had put his arms about her. He stroked her head and her face. She put her own hands to his face with a caressing movement. There was a quick interchange between them in that all but inaudible speech of the Mu.

The speech was as natural to Kwa as English would have been. For this moment it was as if he had never been away from the valley. To him there was nothing strange about Aya, except that she was more fragile than he could ever have imagined her, she who had always been so strong.

ANYONE would have found her beautiful—a human animal of the Dawn Age, member of that race which even the animals called the Not Yet Men. Lightly furred, after the manner of some of the Apes; yet human; with an altogether human look—in the eyes, especially; and yet also with that hint of hidden understanding in her eyes—of a knowledge not possessed by man—which all animals have.

"I have come to save you," Kwa said. "Go

spread the news."

His heart was in a riot of revolt and pity.

"Anansi!" she said. "His magic is too strong!"

"I'm Kwa!"

"Anansi has killed others of your race. That is the only reason that we are still alive."

"I'll kill Anansi—as I killed—as you and I killed together—that other Big Spider."

IT was a reference to Kwa's first great battle here in the Valley of the Mu, when he'd killed Mok, the renegade gorilla.

A whirl of warning cries came from a thousand directions—even from the air, where birds were hovering and circling, but mostly from the valley floor.

Aya clung to Kwa a little, but he pushed her gently away. He was telling her not to be afraid, that he was Kwa. He was the fighting animal again. He was the creature of the fighting race. Not in all the long and varied evolution of the tribe inhabiting the world—evolution through a million variations toward a million goals—had there ever been evolved a fighting creature equal to the white man.

Aya knew this. There wasn't a living thing in the Valley of the Mu this day who didn't know it.

With the exception, perhaps, of that black magician, Anansi himself.

Kwa saw that grotesque figure headed in his direction as he started Aya safely back, then ran toward Anansi along a wide ledge. As Kwa did so, he shrilled a call to his animal friends also to stand away. This was to be his fight.

His call had been one of defiance to Anansi also. It was a defiance he repeated. He shouted it aloud:

"I am Kwa! I will kill Anansi!"

But the spectacle of Anansi was like that of some creature out of a nightmare. He was like something dropped from another world.

He was the spectacle of a spider, huge—grotesque and hairy. He was larger than a man. His size seemed to vary, like the dark shadow of a man cast against a wall by a shaking candle—with all of a shadow's quick and eccentric movement.

THE uncanny uncertainty of size and movement about him was augmented by his surface appearance of black and quivering bristles, also by his gait—a scrambling progress, buoyant and awkward.

Anansi had come out of a deep cleft in the cliffside further along the valley wall where all the animals could see him—sending a shiver out over the massing herds and groups like a premonition of storm. Just when he was in full view he had paused there—all spider and yet elephantine, spectral; in a sort of seated position, the front part of him reared, two of his big front arms or legs, black and thorny, thrown up in an attitude of Satanic blessing—or anathema.

The watchers in the valley milled and were ready to stampede. Yet their terror also held him. What would have passed for hands or feet on the specter's arms were like clusters of curved black daggers. At sight of them, even the lions were slinking about—bodies to the earth—their topaz eyes fixed in awe, their own claws withdrawn, their tread but a velvet that wouldn't have scared a lamb.

After that, and the spider-monster had seemingly fastened its attention on Kwa and Kwa alone.

Kwa, headed toward the thing, saw its face. It was an impression etched in gray and black. The only features of it were eyes and mouth—both of a demon out of hell.

To Kwa there came up a sort of voiceless cry from the valley floor. It was a mixed cry—of warning, encouragement, despair.

Without turning to look, Kwa knew that terror was distilling again in the uncounted hearts down there. A few would be brave, but most would fear. Would he be able to drive away this fear? Not unless he himself was fearless.

Watchful, knife ready, his feet well

planted—for there could be no telling when Anansi might begin his rush—Kwa stooped and with his left hand found a sizable splinter of rock. He had always been able to use his left hand and arm as deftly as his right. He flung his rock with a whirling speed that made it sing.

The effect was other than he expected. He hadn't missed. He was sure of that. In a general way he had aimed at the ferocious eyes, the gaping blackness of the mouth. These he had missed; for, quicker than the flying rock, there had been a twitching aside of the target. But the rock had struck—it had as if been swallowed into the black thicket of that spiny wallow of legs and claws—yet there'd been no quiver of recoil, no show of pain.

Almost on the same instant, there was something else to think about.

FROM somewhere above him, up the broken and shelved face of the cliff, other spider-shapes had appeared. They may have been smaller than the monster just ahead of him. At their appearance there had come a fresh gust of alarm from the straining, quivering and sometimes milling jungle people. In the midst of this—in one of the breathless seconds with which all this was being timed—Kwa felt the sting of fresh poison in arms and side.

So that was it! Those were spider men! Not spiders but men—the same as those priests of Anansi's he'd fought back there in the elephant park!

He stooped for another rock. Anansi, the spectral, had shot forward a space at that ambling, airy gait of his, then paused again—the spider god—all spider!

CHAPTER XVI
Old Fires

KWA sent his second rock humming at Anansi's head. It checked the rush of the spider chief. There was satisfaction in that. Something of the haunt that was forming in Kwa's own mind—the feeling that he was fighting against something supernatural—left him. In an instant it was as if something supernatural had been infused into his own heart and brain.

It may have been a thought prompted by something else that happened just then. For a moment Anansi was beset by another enemy. There was a rush of many black wings and a flock of ravens had spun around Anansi's head. At the same time they were shrilling out in their tribal speech—cries so filled with human meaning that almost anyone could have understood them. They were telling Kwa to run—to save himself while they created this diversion.

Kwa uttered a cry of his own, warning them away.

Anansi, quick as any spider might strike, thrust out a black arm and fanged one of the birds with his terrible hooked fingers. The bird came down a huddle of black feathers.

Kwa knew that his own hope of victory lay only in keeping out of Anansi's reach. He'd thrown two more rocks in that brief interview—one at Anansi, one at the lurking, scampering enemy above him on the higher ledge.

From where he stood, he saw there would be no chance of disposing of the spider men before Anansi would attack. Instinct was telling him not to allow his attention to be distracted from Anansi for an instant.

Yet the dilemma was there. He was caught between two fires. For the moment he'd found the partial shelter of a boulder.

Kwa foresaw what his end would be unless he countered that attack from above. He'd had experience with the spider poison. There was a memory of the weblike paralysis he'd known at daybreak—a memory that was in his skin, rather than in his brain. A premonition—a warning! He saw himself paralyzed, down, and that crawling, jumping horror of the spider-god already smothering him—fetid with the living-death it fed on, the black mouth already at his throat.

He sent the next rock also singing at the enemy above, then once again seized another to meet Anansi's rush. Anansi had made another gliding, skating spring but had stopped again. Kwa knew, however, that the final clash was coming. He was alone, outflanked, outnumbered, outarmed, with nothing much but spirit and one strong knife to see him through.

NO, there were other allies. So had the lions remembered that battle in the morning mists of the elephant park it seemed. Leo, the lion chief, had evidently remembered it at any rate. And these sunlit cliffs were a natural fighting-place for the lion people. This was no dank and gloomy forest.

There'd been a yellow streaking charge from the valley floor. A score of lions perhaps—young males and old—who followed their leader. They flattened themselves to the rocky, precipitous trail. They became a narrow, winding, quick and tireless river of death that ran uphill. For, whatever Anansi was—god or devil—those that followed him, served him, were men—animals. So Kwa had already revealed to the lions and so the lions had already proven for themselves.

Master-killers now, the lions.

Above the ridge which had become the fated battleground for Kwa and Anansi, there was the explosion of the slaughter-sounds as the lions struck death about them. Down to the ledge where Kwa stood, one black and broken body fell, then another—like human ravens. Kwa stepped around them to the clear.

As Kwa did so, there came to him a flash of revelation.

It may have been due to some sudden failure of Anansi's magic. For all magic is a subtle thing. In a moment it escapes, it turns against the user of it. There must have come a shock to Anansi's assurance when he knew that the lions were attacking and killing his men. He may have seen in those falling bodies a portent of his own defeat.

IN any case—master hypnotist or whatever he was—suddenly his power had slipped.

Suddenly, Kwa had seen that the shadow cast by the huge specter of a spider was nothing but the shadow of a man. Even as Kwa rushed, he could see the spider-haunt as if dissolved. Before him there was nothing but a black wizard such as might have dominated any native village—wicked, powerful, skilled in dangerous knowledge, doubtless, but mortal.

Kwa struck, right and left, with knife and splinter of rock.

Anansi—the man—twisted, reeled, and, dead before he fell, lurched headlong down the cliff.

THIS moon had to die and another one be born before the real work of purification could be considered accomplished in the Valley of the Mu. But considerably before that time, the thing had been brought to pass in a purely material way. No carrion, that is, was left in the valley. The valley was again by way of becoming the Eden that it had almost always been since the beginning of the world—an Eden hidden away in the heart of that great mountain mass known as Sango Lobango.

The valley lay almost under the equator, yet at such an elevation that the climate, the year round, was like that of a Northern June. Down from the snow-peaks that shut it in, pure streams came down in misty cascades. While here and there, from openings in the wall-like cliffs, other streams that were hot and medicinal pulsed like open veins from mountain's heart.

Of the people of the Mu whom Kwa had known, many were dead. But, toward death, Kwa himself had accepted the attitude of his friends of the jungle world—and of the Mu themselves: Death, after all, was a mere incident of living, something to be accepted, like the sinking of the sun; and no more to be feared than that, with another day assured.

But there were also children of the Furry Tribe whom Kwa had never seen and in whom he now delighted. They were like any other

children—a little longer-armed, perhaps, and covered with a golden fleece that shone like floating yellow silk in the sun. These children were infinitely graceful. They chased the wild goats in play along the cliffs and often caught them. They swung far out over dizzy heights on ropes of vine and frolicked through the cold cascades.

It all reminded Kwa of the time when he was one of them—making him wish that he was one of them again.

Then, on the night of the new moon, the great Fire Cave once again became the cathedral of the Furry Tribe and all their animal friends—all who could find a place in the dim vastness of the hollow mountain—elephants, buffalo, lions, the great apes and all their lesser kindred, birds.

Such a gathering as only Noah might have seen—outside the Valley of the Mu.

The sacred fire burned clear again in the center of the cave.

And there Kwa started to tell them of some of the things he had seen in that other We-Country of his—over there and beyond where the sun went down.

But gradually he was as if lifted on the wings of his story and he began to dance. The old ritual dance—a slow stepping around the sacred fire to some secret rhythm.

The timid breathing of the watchers became a music.

"Wah!" he intoned. "I am Kwa, and it is I who am the Missing Link. For I am brother to all animals. And yet, who will deny that I am also man?"

CHAPTER XVII
Full Moon

FAR OVER on the western edge of the Devil Bush where a Nathaniel Rahan, Jr., had once started a plantation and which was now nothing but a Memory Plantation for Nathaniel Rahan, Sr., the old man had watched two new moons come and go. It seemed more like two eternities to this lonely grandfather of him who was known to the jungle-world as Kwa.

After all, he had been brought up in a different world—in one where parents, especially grandparents, are given to worry. The elder Rahan wished that he hadn't let young Nat go away like that, into the jungle, alone.

Once the jungle had been cruel. It had taken an only son, Nat's father. Was it going to be cruel again—refuse now to give back this other and even dearer son?

The old man spent desolate days in and about the brick bungalow on the edge of the jungle.

Then one night, in response to a scratching at the door, he got up and opened to find a chimpanzee there—a little old chimp-woman who looked up at him and as if announced herself with a faint whistling sound, modest and charming.

The elder Rahan was enough of an animal man by this time to understand that, in some way, she was a messenger, that she had brought him news of some sort from young Nat. He took her hand and made her welcome. He offered her fruit and milk, which she accepted gladly, for she'd been traveling far and fast and hadn't been paying much attention to either fatigue or hunger.

About all that Mr, Rahan could get out of her that night was that she trusted him and that she had come, in fact, from Kwa.

"Kwa!" she said.

She took the old man's hand again and led him through the bungalow until she found Kwa's bedroom—found his cot. She jumped on this. And, since she was tired, the elder Rahan gave her a blanket. And finally she pulled this over her head and went to sleep.

But the old man spent a haunted night, remembering the sympathy he had seen in the chimp-lady's wrinkled face.

He never did quite get the message that she tried to give him. But she was sad and so was

he. About that there was no doubt. For almost a week. And the old millionaire was beginning to think that he would end his days here in Africa with no other intimate companion than this when the chimp—who'd been off on one of her endless scouting tours into the neighboring jungle—came scampering back to the bungalow at her tumbling run.

Good news, this time.

She danced. She chattered.

OLD RAHAN danced with her, hopping about and holding her hands. If—when!—Nat did come back, the old man swore he'd make the boy teach him jungle-talk.

There were a dozen servants about the place, white and black. All of them were trained men, carefully selected as trustworthy where animals were concerned. It was just as well. Their services were needed. For now the plantation began to take on the appearance of a zoological park. Only this was a zoo where the animals came and went. Strange animal guests every day—pythons and leopards, yet who showed no disposition to evil—as if they were there under a flag of truce; elephants treading far out into the open and "whispering" there for maybe an hour; other chimps, in family groups, remaining a day or longer and manifesting friendship but never abusing the privilege; swarms of lesser monkeys, flocks of strange birds.

And gradually, almost imperceptibly, this excitement grew.

Until one night it grew to such a pitch that the old man couldn't sleep. And as the wind was unfavorable to mosquitoes he was able to sit out on the broad veranda without discomfort. He sat there smoking his pipe.

A night of full moon, and the jungle now pulsing with a rhythm of life primeval—a rhythm that might have been time to the beating of a drum, the original jazz, as the old man reflected.

When suddenly there was a silence. And the old chimp-woman, who'd been huddled at the old man's side trying to tell him things that he couldn't understand, let out the equivalent of a shout.

"Kwa!" was what she said. "Kwa!"

And not the heart of a mother—a white-woman mother, and a grandmother, at that—could have thrown more feeling into the cry.

Old Mr. Rahan had started up.

AWAY across the clearing through the misty moonlight Mr. Rahan saw a white figure emerge from the jungle. Ghostly! He had a moment of chill. But it was for a moment only.

It was Kwa—Nathaniel Rahan, 2nd, to his American friends. He came on the run, dressed in nothing but a twist of vine.

"I had to come at night," said Kwa. "I didn't want to shock the natives."