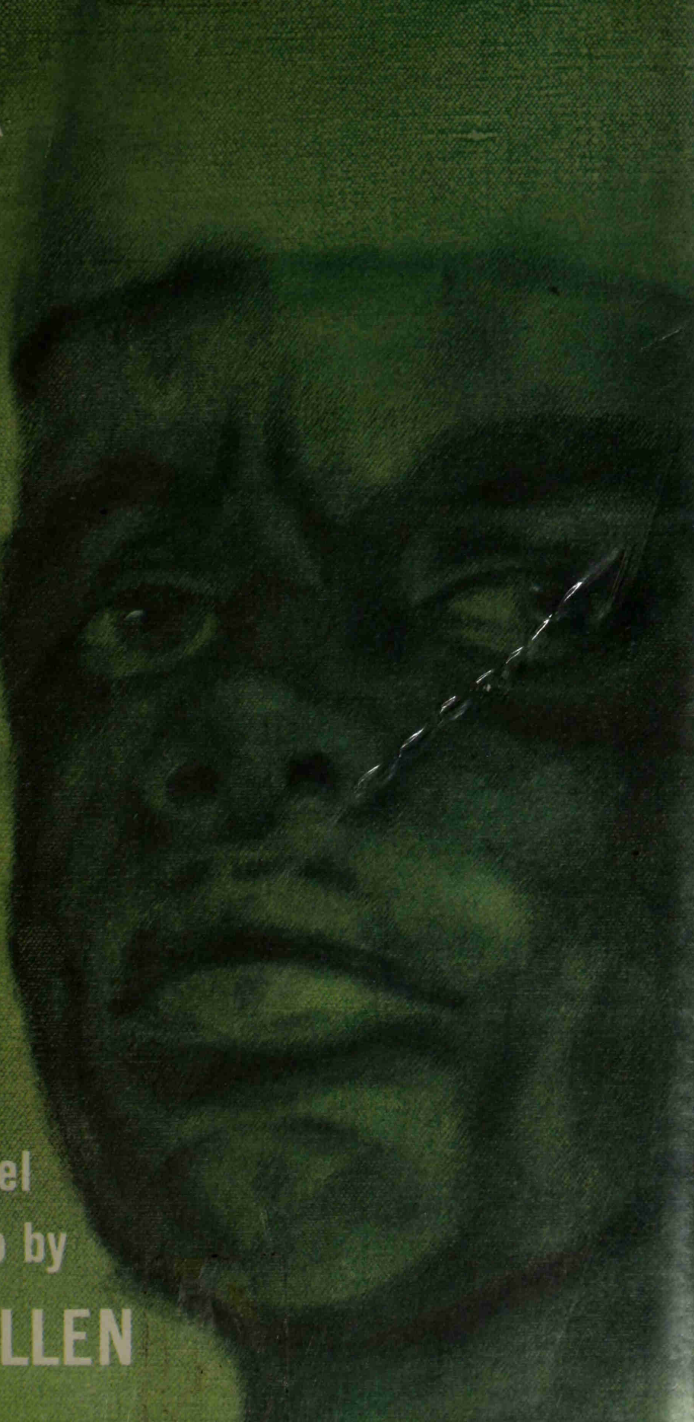


**ASK
THE
NAME
OF
THE
LION**

A Modern Novel
of the Congo by
RALPH ALLEN



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Title: Ask the Name of the Lion

Date of first publication: 1962

Author: Ralph Allen (1913-1966)

Date first posted: Jan. 10, 2024

Date last updated: Jan. 10, 2024

Faded Page eBook #20240116

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Books by Ralph Allen

ASK THE NAME OF THE LION
ORDEAL BY FIRE
PEACE RIVER COUNTRY
THE CHARTERED LIBERTINE
HOME MADE BANNERS

Ask the Name of the Lion

RALPH ALLEN

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC., GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK, 1962

All of the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Printed in the United States of America
First Edition*

FOR BIRDEEN

Ask the Name of the Lion

Chapter 1

“With luck they’ll stop to finish up the whisky before coming on.” Chartrand partly turned his head so that the three passengers in the back seat could hear him. He tried to keep the exasperation out of his voice; it might be a long and difficult journey, and it was best to start on the best terms possible. “How much was there left by the way, *Monsieur le Docteur*?”

“Just what there was on the table,” Grant said. “Unless, of course Señor Sierra happened to have any in his bag. They’d be sure to find that.”

“No,” Sierra said, “I’d only been counting on staying until the next plane out.”

“Too bad.” Again Chartrand found his annoyance was strong enough to need concealing. The more so because, in this particular at least, both the others were so clearly and completely blameless. It was not their fault that the Congolese army was full of fear, suspicion, caprice, and sometimes hate laced with alcohol. No, it was not the two new visitors’ fault at all. Everything they and their like did or failed to do was done or not done blamelessly—and yet, might each of them pay for it in hell, everything they and their like and—all right, he and *his* like—had done or not done for the last year and more had turned out to be wrong.

He braked swiftly to swing around a pothole in the dirt road and the roof of the car grazed against a moonlit anthill. The Gombe girl beside him stirred, snuggled instinctively toward him, and murmured drowsily, “*Mbote*.” “*Mbote*,” he replied soothingly. And still in Lingala, “Go back to sleep, Astrid.”

Ah well, after they were through searching the hospital, they’d be sure to go next to the ranch. At worst they’d waste a good half hour prowling around the house and the barns. There was, unfortunately, no drink to detain them there. Nor, if Sergeant Tshibangu was in charge, would they pause for wholesale looting. So long as it could be defended, however vaguely, on the grounds of military duty, Tshibangu was brave enough for murder. But he was not brave enough for unlicensed theft, not at least till the murder was safely over and done. Chartrand had known the Sergeant personally for three

years, employed him for almost two as a foreman on the ranch, seen him in drink, seen him in lust, seen him fearful, seen him boastful, seen him with one bare foot in the tribal world of his Gombe village and the other stretching out warily but hopefully to try on an Oxford made in Brussels. After seventeen years in this Equateur town, Chartrand felt he knew only enough not to be sure of anything. Still, it was often necessary to make the best guess one could. His guess was that with the ten or fifteen minutes start they had had to begin with and the halts the Sergeant and his detachment would make at the hospital and at the ranch, he could count on his station wagon ultimately being almost an hour ahead of the jeeps of the ANC.

The Gombe girl beside him stirred again and put a warm brown hand on the bare thigh below his shorts and began half stroking and half patting him, like a mother caressing a beloved child. He took one hand off the wheel and put her firmly but not rudely aside.

“*Dormez,*” he ordered softly.

Uncaring of the three men in the back seat and of the white lady on the other side of her in front, she put her fragrant little face up to his ear and whispered playfully, “*Tu m’aimes?*”

He pulled her head over so that he could whisper back in mock schoolmaster severity, “*Astrid Cleopatra Lolita Mahamba: je vous command—dormez!*” The Astrid was genuine and baptismal, a tribal salute to the memory of a Belgian queen, a memory left over from *les temps*, left over from the true-blue days *avant*. The Cleopatra and the Lolita were his own improvisations, half in mild self-ridicule for a fifty-year-old man’s lonely folly, half in tender apology to her. He had explained the two names to her, humorously but affectionately, in the hope she would understand that they were almost as good as the outright and explicit confession of love she kept trying to coax from him, the nearest he could bring himself to returning her *tu-tois*. (And after all it was not as though he was the only man she had known in her fifteen years; or was it fourteen? Between the morning she danced into town from her village to celebrate the Independence and the evening she picked him up in a bar of the hotel more than eight months had passed and much money, much raiment, and many trinkets had changed hands.)

“You are a good girl, Astrid Cleopatra Lolita Mahamba, but you must go to sleep now. The road is very difficult and I must watch it carefully.”

“*O.K., Monsieur le chef, monsieur le boss, monsieur le roi de toutes les Belges.*” She gave his thigh a final squeeze and put her head on his shoulder.

They had now been on the red-earth jungle road for fifteen minutes and it began to occur almost simultaneously to the three men in the back seat that their journey had as yet no more order or design than the towering veined shoulders of trees and vines that shrugged them darkly on. Richard Grant had kept silent deliberately. His only responsibility was to Miss Kelvin, because she was his nurse; to himself, for reasons endemic in the human condition; and to the three hundred patients in the hospital, because he was a doctor and had undertaken to care for them as best he could. It was true that until they were interrupted just before dessert the other five passengers had been his dinner guests—only four of them really, for Chartrand’s little tart had certainly not been invited and he’d have asked her to leave if he hadn’t known her presence would be less distasteful than the scene that was certain to accompany her departure.

In any case they had all ceased to be his guests some two minutes after Jules, the head male nurse, burst into the improvised dining room, trembling like a man in a malaria seizure. “*Monsieur le Docteur!*” he cried. “They’re coming again! I was at the hotel. This is payday and the hotel got a new supply of whisky on the morning plane.”

Grant waved his guests to go on with their meal and hurried Jules out into the corridor.

“Spies again?”

“That is what they say again.”

“Are you sure they’re really coming?”

“I sat near them. They drank for two hours, talking about the two strangers who got off the morning plane from Coq. Yes, one, the one who called himself Sierra, was supposed to be the head of *Onee* for all Equateur. Yes, the other, the man who called himself Songolo, was supposed to be a minister of the government. Yes, they were said to be together on a mission to investigate an outbreak of sleeping sickness. But why, they kept saying, would such great men really come all the way up here? Why would such men come in an ordinary Air Congo aircraft instead of a private aircraft? Why would the *Onee* man be given permission to come at all, when the *Onee* troops were driven out just five months ago? Why would a bodyguard not accompany a minister of the government from Leo?”

“They’re always talking that way,” Grant pointed out.

“*Monsieur le Docteur,*” Jules grabbed Grant’s two arms and thrust his terrified eyes up close. “There were three men at the hotel, one of them the

Sergeant. Just five minutes ago, the Sergeant ordered one of the men to drive back to the barracks and then return to the hotel with three more men and another jeep.”

“Thanks, Jules.” Grant stepped back into the room.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I must tell you something very quickly and we must make some very quick decisions. Twice since I’ve been here the troops from the barracks have burst into the hospital looking for U.N. spies. Drink, imagination, and their constant fear that *Onee* is plotting to take away their arms again and seize the airport. Fortunately each time I was the only stranger on the premises except the patients in the wards and their relatives. So all they did was break a few windows, nudge me with their guns, and then go away. But this time we have a larger gathering and they’ll be here again nearly at once. It seems to me we have one immediate question to decide: can you, Señor Sierra, or you Monsieur Songolo dispel these peoples’ suspicions before they start shooting or”—his eyes barely flickered toward the pale Miss Kelvin—“before they start grabbing? Can you singly, or between you get them under some land of control?”

Ramón Sierra’s craggy, sunburned face was thoughtful but unperturbed. He might have been a local magistrate back in Valencia. “I can promise nothing,” he said in his unaccented English. “I’ve dealt with cases far worse than this and usually successfully. But there has been someone at least half educated to speak with and I’ve had U.N. guns and soldiers either right behind me or in the offing. Of course I wasn’t allowed to carry a weapon on this trip.”

Felicien Songolo, slender, elegant, and darkly patrician in his Brussels-cut suit, white shirt, and thin, polished brown shoes, was a little less terse, but just as calm. The accent was largely Cambridge, tempered by Louvain and a special African softness. “For reasons I need not explain I am mildly in the doghouse with the president. My credentials are in good enough order, but there’s not much fanfare in them considering I’m a minister of the Republic. The soldiers at the airport were afraid to question me too carefully, for fear I might turn out to be real after all, but they were plainly suspicious. If they ever work up enough nerve to accuse me of being a secret enemy of the government or a fugitive from it they will assume, as a corollary, that my papers are forged. If anything serious comes up right now, I’m afraid I’ll be a liability to you, rather than an asset.”

They had all risen from the table, not yet certain where they were going, but tacitly agreed they must go somewhere at once.

Chartrand summed it up: "I've lived among these people nearly half my life. I know at least three members of the local army detachment personally, a connection that for the time being is of no more advantage than Señor Sierra's position or Monsieur Songolo's position or the work Dr. Grant and Miss Kelvin have been doing for them here in the hospital." If the others detected the edge of mockery and rebuke, their intent faces did not show it. "For the next few hours and perhaps for the next few days," Chartrand went on in the same cool, almost offensively objective tone, "we must act precisely as though two of us were guilty of spying against the Republic, two others were guilty of harboring spies and two others of associating with spies. We, the members of an evil conspiracy about to be apprehended, must flee from the forces of law and order. *Allons!*"

And with that they filed out into the moonlight night, not in panic but in a decent hurry, although all but the little black girl were just a little ashamed to show it.

Now, a few miles down the road with not a scrap of property among them except the car, the clothes they had worn to dinner, and the two-gallon jug of water Sierra had thought to take on the way past the kitchen, it was growing more and more apparent that they still had no agreed plan and no agreed leader. The heavy night air was dead and silent, suffused and half suffocated with punctilio and civilized hostility.

Grant perceived the trouble, but it was not his place to correct it. Who was the senior man? In this situation it probably should be Chartrand. But how could Sierra, the United Nations head of mission for the entire province, defer to a private settler? A Belgian settler of all people; under the Security Council resolution the few Belgians who hadn't already left were supposed to be minding only their own private business, and the less of that the better. And for Songolo, a minister of the government, a pillar and a beacon of the Independence, to surrender his authority to a Belge would be not only unconstitutional, it would be treasonable. Since this was clearly an international situation, could Sierra, the U.N. man, default *his* authority to the Congolese? And since this was Congolese soil how could Songolo, the government man, yield one millimeter or milligram of his nation's sovereignty to the frequently useful but menacingly officious U.N.?

Grant, hoping as a representative of the Red Cross to be recognized as a neutral, concluded that it would be least awkward if he tried to break the ice himself and then subside for good.

"Do we have a destination?" he asked of no one in particular.

Songolo waited for Sierra and Sierra waited for Songolo. At last Chartrand spoke from behind the wheel. His voice was diffident, warily hedging against a rebuff. "I know something about the roads and the country ahead. I'd be happy to tell you what I can."

Songolo and Sierra were attentive, but still silent.

"Please do," Grant said.

"We're about a hundred and fifty kilometers from the Ubangi River and the French Congo." Chartrand was still driving as hard as the road would permit, but his tone showed no more sense of haste than a Cook's guide at the start of an all-day bus tour. "I come up here several times a year to buy cattle or look for strays and do a little shopping across the river in Bangui. The road's about like this all the way to the river and then it branches both ways, upstream and downstream. There's no regular ferry anywhere near and the river's between two and four kilos wide. But there are always a few fisherman or crocodile hunters around with pirogues. A big pirogue with two or three paddlers can carry seven or eight people."

Now that the question of precedence had been safely evaded, Songolo and Sierra both joined in.

"I cannot say yet whether I personally will cross the river," Songolo said in his soft Afro-Cambridge English. "But for the rest of you that is quite obviously the best and most sensible thing."

"Yes," Sierra said. "These affairs sometimes flare up and die down in a matter of hours, but it is not safe to depend on it. I'm sure Monsieur Songolo won't mind the observation that some of his countrymen are sometimes rather volatile."

"Who knows better?" the African replied urbanely. The atmosphere was noticeably more agreeable.

"Whether any of us go across or not," Sierra ventured, "it does seem sensible to keep heading in that direction."

Chartrand had temporarily deferred his part in the conversation to the other two. "There are a few other matters," he remarked, when he was sure they were finished. Grant was not certain whether there was a trace of sarcasm or not. "There are two army checkpoints between here and the river. We should, of course, get through them without undue difficulty. I myself have passed them regularly."

The Belgian's faint challenge to the U.N. man and the African man was not wasted. Songolo turned toward the window. Sierra leaned forward as if to say something, but then leaned back again.

"Of course," Chartrand went on, "the soldiers at the checkpoints might, like those in the town, be confused by our heterogenous nature. It is possible they would delay us long enough for the soldiers behind to catch up."

"How far from the river are the checkpoints?" Sierra asked him.

"The first about twenty kilos, the second about five."

"Well, we all have good shoes at least." Sierra was showing signs of taking charge in spite of the presence of the Congolese cabinet minister. "I understand the jungle gives way to savanna not far ahead. Couldn't we leave the car and bypass the checkpoints? We might get halfway in what's left of tonight. Find some shade tomorrow, conceal ourselves there through the day, and go on to the river tomorrow night."

It was only now that Grant began to remember the fables of Sierra's career as a guerrilla general in the Spanish war. From another man this assured and easy talk would have sounded fatuous, theatrical, and phony. What other man would have made so implausible a suggestion so casually? What other man would have acted as though the hazards did not exist: as though the rough savanna, with its high sharp grasses and its endless miles of burnt-out anthills were a tailored downs in Surrey? Who else would have ignored the fact that they had no food and very little water; who would have ignored the heat, the insects, the animals, and the possibility of an encounter with unfriendly tribesmen; ignored the uncertainty of arranging a crossing of the river even if they reached it; ignored the dangerous hunting party behind and the two trapping parties ahead; ignored the palpable fact that their rate of progress must be no more than the heart and endurance of a blond nurse so newly out from Canada that she wasn't even properly sunburned.

But Chartrand now mentioned a new hazard that no one could ignore.

"Unfortunately," the Belgian said. "The first of the checkpoints cannot be bypassed. It is true, as Señor Sierra says, that it is nominally in the savanna and can, in theory, be circled on foot, even by people not accustomed to the country or equipped for it. But, alas! this first checkpoint lies in one of the last little bulges of jungle this side of the river. There are at least three kilos of very bad bush and swamp on each side of the road. Even the monkey hunters seldom leave the road at this place. We could, if lucky, walk around the second checkpoint and strike the river a few kilos

downstream from the road and without doubt find a pirogue there. But there is only one way past the first barrier. That is straight ahead.” He finished on just the merest wisp of challenge. *What next, you smart Onee bastard?* he seemed to add.

“I wish everybody would stop calling me Señor,” Sierra said testily. “I am a naturalized American citizen. Have you any weapons in the car?”

Songolo broke in before there could be a reply.

“No one here will use a weapon against any Congolese unless we are first attacked.”

Sierra leaned across Grant so that Miss Kelvin would not hear. He addressed their Congolese seat companion in a rasping whisper.

“Am I right in my impression of what you are proposing?” he demanded. “You wish us to surrender to the sentries an hour’s drive ahead and remain unprotestingly in their hands until the soldiers an hour’s drive behind arrive to shoot us? Am I correct?”

“I am perfectly capable of speaking for myself and I see no need to whisper,” Songolo snapped back angrily. “We cannot be sure, in the first place, that the sentries will not recognize our papers and let us through at once. Even if they don’t we cannot be sure that the soldiers from Ngubdja will do us actual violence.”

“Then what the hell,” Sierra asked him scornfully, “are we running away from? What are you doing in this car, *Monsieur le Ministre*, if you have so much confidence in your countrymen and in your authority over them? Did you or did you not tell us back there before we left the hospital that you couldn’t control them?”

“I said I could not promise,” Songolo replied with firm dignity. “And since ladies were involved, I thought it would have been folly to remain. But whatever happens I forbid any person in this car to open fire on any Congolese. *For any reason, real or imaginary*. I speak as a member of the government of the Republic and I call on each of you to witness exactly what I have said.”

Before the stubborn finality of Songolo’s words had fully registered, Chartrand made another interjection of still greater finality. “There are no weapons in this car,” he said, “and therefore there is nothing to dispute about. It is a year since I carried even a sporting rifle. We few Belgians in this part of the Congo have been rather lonely since our countrymen departed. We have grown even more lonely since the United Nations elected

to protect us and then also—departed. Since the Independence it is more dangerous to be armed than unarmed.”

For the first time Grant became consciously aware of their helplessness. At first he felt only sick and ashamed—and for all he could tell for certain, rather frightened—but he was not altogether sorry. For the last seven months his thoughts about the Congo, about his profession, his life, and himself, had been something like the great river itself—muddy, and full of strange illogical currents and whirlpools, an opaque and endless mystery on which islands of bright hyacinths floated toward the sea while devouring reptiles lurked along the banks.

He had been flattered, but not unduly so, when the Red Cross asked him to come out to Equateur for a year. He was not particularly vain, but by the time he had completed his essential studies at Manitoba and later at McGill, it was no more than a statement of fact that no one in his year, anywhere in Canada, had a better record behind him or a more promising future ahead. It had been his ambitious plan to become a great surgeon, to practice for twenty years until he was fifty and self-sufficient and then to spend another twenty years in research and teaching. From the age of thirteen, his first year in high school, there had never been a year when he hadn't won at least two scholarships or bursaries. He had worked summers in the Canadian bush and mines, and his father, a not overly prosperous corner druggist, had never had to pay a penny toward his tuition or keep at college. In his final year at McGill—when he won two excellent fellowships in addition to graduating at the head of his class—his classmates nicknamed him Clark Kent. For a day or so he was puzzled. Then one afternoon two girls in biology passed him on the campus. One of them said to the other, meaning him to hear. “That’s the well-known Clark Kent.” “But look!” the other girl called, “It’s Superman!”

He looked it up in the weekend paper. As he inspected the paper he had to admit that his thickish glasses, his short black hair, and his undeniably boyish face did give him some resemblance to the man in the comic strip. He was on good terms with those he studied beside and decided to accept their invention as a compliment. Compliment or not, it would be forgotten long before it could do him any harm in the dignified world of real medicine just ahead.

He was not at all displeased when he learned that Valerie Fraser had discovered his nickname too. He had been going with her off and on for several months before he found out that she was one of the two daughters of McDonald Fraser, the banker, and he had the wistful feeling that she knew no more about his background than he had known of hers. She knew he was

in medicine—she was in third-year arts—but it was his guess that she pictured him as spending all his time cutting up frogs and memorizing the symptoms of German measles. One night when he called for her at her sorority house she greeted him with the respectfully affectionate little cry, “Why look! It’s Superman!” He didn’t mind a bit. He had sense enough not to bore her with his inner reflections on what being a doctor meant to him, much less with a *précis* of the kind of work he was doing now and hoped to do later on. It was enough, for the time being, that his girl had learned he wasn’t going to be an ordinary doctor.

It was not until after their engagement that Valerie Fraser invited him up to the fourteen-room apartment on the mountain to meet her father. McDonald Fraser, as befitted a conscientious trustee of the university, already knew far more about Grant’s record and prospects than his daughter did. They talked together amiably and knowledgeably for half an hour or so—mostly about Grant’s most recent fellowship and about his ideas for expanding the research grants at McGill—and Fraser said, “We’ll be delighted to have you in the family. It’s high time somebody in this outfit got to amount to something.”

It was just a week before he finished the last year of his internship that the Red Cross asked him to go to the Congo. “We’ve promised to supply several medical teams,” the man from the Red Cross said. “At first, if you take this on, you’ll be a one-man team working with a handful of Congolese male nurses, a Congolese administrator and a couple of Belgian nursing sisters. Frankly, it’s the toughest single job the Canadian Society can offer. You can take it as a compliment or an insult, but after checking on most of the medical schools and hospitals in the country, the committee agreed unanimously that you’re by far the best man for the job. It’s no place for an old man, not even for a man over forty. It’s no place for a man who isn’t in first-rate shape physically or for a man who’s had time to get set in his ways. The hospital is just one degree above the equator, in real Tarzan country. It has three hundred beds, most of them in very dirty barracks-room-type wards. The Belgians left a good new clinic, a good new laboratory, and a good new operating room, but you probably won’t be able to use them, because you won’t have the technicians or the power or equipment and God knows what else. Yours will be the only hospital in an area of a hundred thousand square miles inhabited by two hundred thousand natives. You’ll be short of anesthetics, drugs, and oxygen; there’ll be times when you may not have any at all. The political situation is uncertain and occasionally dangerous. Right now there’s a small detachment of United Nations troops in the town and in the event of trouble they’d give you what protection they

could. But it's only fair to warn you that in the political and military sense this place hasn't much strategic value. The U.N. might withdraw voluntarily at any time or allow the Congolese to kick them out. As to the general health conditions in the area, I can leave you a stack of reports. They can be summarized in one word. Terrible."

"You make it sound very attractive," Grant said.

"Just the same we think a man like you could do a lot of good. Not just for a few individual patients; not just for the general health picture, but for the whole notion of—"

"Yes." Speeches, especially worthy speeches, had always embarrassed him. "Yes, I know what you mean."

"We don't expect a decision right away. But we'd appreciate it if you'd think it over for a few days."

Think what over, Grant asked himself. He had never considered himself a political or social animal, but even as a fifteen-year-old boy trying to grasp the headlines of Hiroshima he had come to one fifteen-year-old's conclusion, which he had seen no cause to alter. In its purgatory the world was a thousand worlds, but when it went to hell it would go as a single world. Think it over; think what over? If you had to think it over, you had to say no.

"I'll go," he said.

Valerie Fraser's response to his news had at first touched and pleased him. Her lovely black eyes had widened in alarm. "But I won't let you!" she cried, leaning close toward him. "I won't!"

He drew her all the way close and kissed her full on the lips. "Thanks, Val," he said, trying not to be too sentimental. "But this has nothing to do with our personal feelings, except the dismal business of being apart for a year. It's part of my life and part of yours. I have to go along with it and so do you."

She drew away from him and for the first time she showed him a streak of her father's civilized, St. James Street coolness. Her first explosion could not possibly have come from the same wise unruffled woman who took his hand now and looked at him so steadily. He could not believe she was angry and if she had been hurt she had too much dignity and self-control to show it.

“I don’t accept it, Richard,” she said calmly. “I don’t want you to go to the Congo. I want to be married to you in the spring. I don’t want you to waste a year of your career in the jungle. I want you to begin it here in Montreal. I’m ambitious for you Richard, because I love you. But it’s too soon to argue about it. Let’s both think about it and then discuss it next week.”

They had gone on to a not unpleasant evening watching *Les Compagnons* and Molière. Later they went to the Ritz for drinks and dancing with some friends. When one of Valerie’s sorority sisters asked about his immediate plans he said, “I haven’t quite decided.” But he had. He had given his promise, for one thing; for another thing he didn’t regret having given it. The only thing he regretted was Valerie’s disappointment, and he was sure he could talk her out of that.

On the Sunday afternoon, he had a telephone call from Dr. Stephen Galway. Besides being the country’s most distinguished and expensive surgeon Galway was an occasional lecturer at the university, an influential member of the university senate, and a frequent adviser to the board of trustees. It was common knowledge that his research on metabolic diseases of the spinal column had twice made him a near also-ran for the Nobel Prize; in a medical community with a tradition as notable as Montreal’s his name was often mentioned with Osier, Penfield, and Selye.

When he told her Galway had asked him to come around to tea, Valerie said at once that their swimming date could wait. It was with a sinking heart an hour later that he heard what Galway had to say. The two men were by no means strangers. Just before his graduation, Galway had generously told Grant that he’d met only one better student in his twenty years of teaching. Often, during Grant’s internship, Galway had gone out of his way to have him present, either as a minor assistant or a spectator, during a particularly interesting operation.

Now, without preamble, Galway offered to take the young intern into his practice. He had been a notorious loner all his life, had never had a full-time assistant, much less an associate or a partner. If a man held in such awe could seriously be charged with having a weakness, the one charge that had been made against Galway was that it seemed to cost him a spiritual wrench even to call in a consultant.

Grant had the feeling that he had been paid as staggering a compliment as though he were a young writer being asked by George Bernard Shaw to

help him out with his manuscripts and take over his by-line when he was gone.

“I won’t press you to make your mind up now.” Galway’s youthful iron-gray head was bent over the teapot. Almost exactly what the man from the Red Cross had said. “I won’t press you now.”

Why did they all assume that hard decisions became easier the longer you permitted them to torture you? Who was responsible for the superstition that if you couldn’t tell the difference between black and white in broad daylight, the answer would come blindingly in the middle of a sleepless night?

Grant mumbled a few words about his gratitude, and then said, doing his best to conceal his misery, “I’m going to the Congo for the Red Cross.”

Galway showed no surprise. “Then you’ve decided.”

“You know about it?”

“Knew they’d been talking to you. Didn’t know you’d made up your mind. It *was* one lump wasn’t it?” Galway handed him back his cup. “Frankly I hadn’t intended to talk to you myself for a week or so, but when I heard you were considering this Congo thing I thought it only fair—just as fair to me, by the way, as to you—that you have the two things to put side by side and look at together.”

“I gave them my promise two days ago.” Grant felt like a man pronouncing his own death sentence.

“Oh, good Lord!” Galway’s face sagged. “Good Lord!” he repeated. “What a mess I’ve made of this! Look, Richard,” he went on earnestly—it was the first intimation Grant had ever had that the older man even knew his first name—“look, I hope I don’t have to tell you this conversation would never have taken place if I’d known that you’d already made a commitment.”

“Of course, sir,” Grant said. He had risen to go, for the interview had become as painful to Galway as it was to him. He paused at the doorway. “I wonder if you’d mind helping me straighten out one thing. Why wouldn’t the Red Cross have told you I’d already made an oral contract with them?”

“My information didn’t come from them.”

“Oh.” Grant hesitated again. “Do you mind if I tell one person about this, sir? My fiancée. She’s Valerie Fraser. You’ve probably met her through her father.”

“Yes, of course.” Galway seemed rather doubtful. “Talk to Val about it by all means if you want to.”

Galway detained him for another moment. “I can’t give any firm undertakings. I do need an assistant fairly soon, but I hadn’t even thought of a second choice. It’s barely possible I might be able to make the offer again when you get back. Congratulations and the best of luck.”

Grant took a taxi straight to the Frasers’ apartment, determined to have it out with Valerie in one furious scene. He could forgive her and her father’s duplicity and meddlesomeness this one time, he would tell her, but only this one time, and only because he knew the depth of her scheming was the depth of her love.

But somehow he found himself on the defensive. “Val,” he had begun, trying to sound reproachful but indulgent rather than too impossibly right. “Val, darling, you had no business getting mixed up in this and your father had even less.”

“Just what do you mean, Richard?” she asked evenly.

“Mean? Surely you know what I mean.” He took a moment to make sure of saying exactly what was in his mind in exactly the way he intended. “Before I say any more tell me if I’m right in these assumptions. You told your father I was going to the Congo. He agreed with you that the whole idea was foolish. Might interfere with our marriage or at least set back my career or possibly even put me in danger. So, knowing that his friend Dr. Galway was already interested in me and knowing that a chance to go into Dr. Galways’ practice was a chance no young surgeon could resist—knowing this your father suggested to Galway that if he really wanted me he ought to talk to me right away.”

“Of course, Richard. All that is true. You sound rather upset about it. Why, for goodness sake?”

“Because the one thing that didn’t get through to Galway was that I’d already not merely discussed the Congo with the Red Cross, but had given them my promise to go. Who held that back from him? You or your father or both of you?”

“You’re splitting hairs, Richard. If it’s important, I don’t recall that I mentioned anything to father about what you call your promise. Actually I had no idea that anything had been signed.”

“What does *that* matter for God’s sake!” It took a long period of absolute silence before he could be sure of resuming a conversational tone. “Val, the

fact that nothing has been signed makes it all the worse. If anything had been signed it would have been impossible for me to weasel out. As it is, I could have gone back on my word without anybody but me and you and two or three people from the Red Cross knowing about it. And they'd hardly have been so unkind as to spread it around. They'd be merciful enough to appreciate how strong the temptation was."

"Richard," she spoke with genuine incredulity, "it can't be that you've turned Dr. Galway down?"

He went on as though he hadn't heard. "And think of the position you put Galway in. He was led to believe he was making an honorable offer to a man who had no commitments elsewhere. In fact, he was inviting me to come into his office as a welsher."

"You *have* turned him down, then." The tears might have been of hurt or disappointment or anger; they were not tears of contrition.

"Val, Val!" Now that he had said what he had to say, he desired nothing so much as to put it all behind them. He pretended to no special knowledge of women, particularly of women in love, and still more particularly of this woman in love with him. Perhaps the only thing to do in a case like this was to acknowledge that there were some things a woman in love was not capable of understanding. "Let's forget it, darling. After all there's no harm done. The only reason I brought it up," he concluded magnanimously, "was to clear the air once and for all."

"But you *have* turned him down, haven't you?" she repeated through her stubborn tears.

"Yes, Val, of course." He faced her earnestly. "Look, darling, I'm no Albert Schweitzer. I don't want to pose as one. For all I know there was as much hypocrite as Hippocrates in me when I said I'd go to the Congo. I'm vain enough and just naïve enough to hope a little bit of the old-fashioned country doctor was behind me, pushing me into this sleigh in the dead of night and reminding me there wasn't a thing in it for me. But I also know myself enough to be sure the chance to get five years tough experience in one was pushing too. I wouldn't want you to think I'm just going out for the Eagle Scouts. I'm going for a surgeon."

"And the Eagle Scout is throwing away a chance the surgeon will never have again. Is it absolutely final, Richard?"

By some freakish suspension of reason, *he* was now apologizing to *her*.

“Galway said his offer might conceivably be open when I get back,” he told her lamely. He moved toward her. “Val, I love you.”

She was on her feet. “I love you, Richard,” Valerie said coldly, “but after all one doesn’t want to have one’s children sired by a congenital idiot, does one?” Her face and voice were as perfectly controlled now as the banker’s face and banker’s voice of her father. She was no longer crying. She was tugging almost absently at the second finger of her left hand. “I can’t get this God-damned thing off right now,” she had said. “I’ll mail it to you.”

The car swayed into another narrow clearing in the jungle and sped past a clump of moonlit huts. For a moment he was in the present tense again, but his humiliation and defeat still came on in dogged pursuit. How pompous and priggish and sanctimonious he must have sounded that day to Valerie Fraser. Was it altogether bitterness that had made her call him an idiot? Or was it intuition?

Had the two men in the Memling Palace bar meant any less? On his first and only night in Leopoldville he had been quite at home and almost at peace. In jet time, not counting stops, he was less than twelve hours away from Idlewild. So far as his immediate surroundings were concerned, he might have been in one of the carefully atmospheric restaurants adjoining Rockefeller Plaza. Behind the bar a long cageful of tropical birds chattered and flitted above a resplendent, reassuring array of Gordon’s Gin, Cinzano, Campari, Black and White, and Dewar’s. Just beyond, in the open courtyard, a huge fountain threw a silvery bouquet of cool water almost to the level of the second floor. He thought with pleasant anticipation of the spacious, balconied air-conditioned room in which he’d showered and left his flight bag; it was a considerably better room, he reflected under the benign encouragement of his second gin and tonic, than the Waldorf had given him the night before last.

The white-jacketed Congolese barman brought back the change from his hundred-franc note and asked softly, “You got dollars?”

Without waiting for a reply the barman shoved a slip of paper toward Grant’s drinking hand. Grant turned it over.

It said: Un dollar 80 fr.
100 dollar 8000 fr.

The young man on the stool beside him said, in English, “Whatever he’s offering, don’t take it. You can do better at the beach.”

“The beach?” Grant asked curiously.

“The Brazzaville ferry. Albert here is probably starting at eighty and he’ll go to eighty-five. The bidding is brisker at the beach. You can get ninety or ninety-five there.”

A United Nations officer on the other side of the American joined the conversation. “My driver got ninety-two this afternoon at the beach.”

Grant passed the paper back to the barman. “No dollars,” he said. But then—now fleeing down the lonely road toward the Ubangi River, the memory of his ostentatious display of high-mindedness made him wince again—he had had to set it straight for the two strangers. He had just changed a fifty-dollar travelers’ check at the front desk at the official rate of fifty Congo francs to the dollar; he had an urge to make it clear he wasn’t interested in dealing in the black market, either here at one rate or anywhere else at a better one. The long ride had tired him, the drinks had lifted him too quickly, and perhaps this whole excursion into local arithmetic had reminded him unpleasantly of the calculating realism of Valerie Fraser.

“I didn’t come out here to play with an abacus or make money,” he said rudely.

Curiously, the American showed no resentment. “Don’t worry,” he said, “the way the franc is slipping you’ll never show a profit. All you can do is avoid letting your U.S. bucks evaporate at fifty or sixty cents.”

He introduced himself and the U.N. officer beside him. “Greg Percival of World News Service. This is Johnny Dawson.” Percival looked at the U.N. man’s shoulder. “Three pips. I can never remember whether that’s a captain or a major.”

“Captain.” The soldier passed his hand around the drinks.

“I’m a Canadian too,” Grant said, returning the introduction and stating his business.

They dined together in the hotel restaurant. To start, cannibal sandwiches, which turned out to be good, small tartar steaks. (“Jokes?” the American said. “These birds got a million of ’em.”) Then a good *minestrone*. Then Grant’s introduction to *moambe*, a fiery, currylike chicken dish served with rice, the tender green leaves of the manioc plant, and a blistering *petipeti* sauce of red pepper and palm oil. Beaujolais to go with it and, to finish, strong black Congo coffee and *mengués*, bursting with their cool sweet juice.

Grant's fellow Canadian, the captain, was waiting for the next U.N. plane back home. His six-months tour of duty was ended and he'd be gone in a day or two. "Gone but not forgotten," he said sardonically. "One ANC soldier has got my watch. I imagine the Thysville garrison is still shooting craps for the three thousand francs they took away from me when they rode us out of Matadi. I'm sure I left the imprint of my skull, not to mention the contours of my ass, on several of their rifle butts the day they dragged me and my driver out of our jeep right here on the edge of Leo, and made us run the gantlet barefoot to the guardhouse."

Grant remembered having read newspaper accounts of several "incidents" involving the scattered detachments of Canadian Army signalers who had undertaken to restore communications in the Congo after the flight of the Belgians.

"I guess I'm plain stupid," he said, "but I find it hard to understand how, when you're so obviously here to help them, they could turn against you like that without at least some sort of provocation."

"You'll never understand," the correspondent broke in. "None of us will ever understand. But I suppose you're aware that there are thousands of people still living in this country, some of them right here in Leo, who have seen their parents murdered and their villages burned because they didn't meet the quotas of palm oil or ivory or rubber old King Leopold II set for them when the place was his private preserve. People who have watched with their own eyes while their aunts' and uncles' hands were cut off on the orders of the white man. You ever read Roger Casement or E. D. Morel? No? Well they said and made it stick that Leo's local concessionaires once got sick of seeing their Force Publique raiding parties come back from the burnt villages with baskets of women's and children's hands. *Get the men*, they said. *Show that you are men by getting the men*. So old Leo's soldiers started reporting back with baskets full of full-grown male genitals and hanging them out to dry around the trading posts. Hung them on stakes where everybody could see them."

The correspondent stopped to order a round of cognac. "This didn't happen in the dark ages. It happened in this lifetime, in this century. The Congolese Army got its rules from the Force Publique. The Belgians got their idea of how to treat the natives from that pious, mattress-bearded old hood, old King Leo. And the natives got their ideas about the white man from the Belgians."

“To hell with that,” the officer interrupted. “I never cut off their uncles’ balls. They were still awful rough on me.”

“How would that go in a textbook?” the reporter wondered, waving for the brandy again. “*Où sont les balls de mon oncle?*”

“Very funny,” the officer said sourly. He turned to Grant. “You asked about provocation. Richard Halliburton or Lowell Thomas here has just told you part of it. The rest is even easier. All the provocation they need is that they’re drunk, doped, diseased, illiterate, or crazy, and sometimes all of them at once.”

“Also scared,” the reporter added. “Also suspicious. Also full of natural hate. They don’t just hate us. They hate each other.”

“Their mammy done tole ’em,” the officer began chanting, “their chiefy done tole ’em. Their witch doctor tole ’em *so*.”

“If I didn’t know better,” Grant remarked lightly, “I’d say you gentlemen might be a bit prejudiced.”

The reporter turned serious. “I’m from Alabama. Three months ago my kid sister got beaten up and jailed for joining some nigra kids in sit-in at a white restaurant. She’s eighteen and her head is full of nothing, but I’m proud of her. The last letter I had she was talking about joining some more nigra kids in some harebrained exercise called a freedom ride. I sent her five hundred bucks to cover legal expenses.”

“Nothing personal,” Grant said.

The reporter was still extremely earnest. “These ANC soldiers aren’t drunk and doped and illiterate and crazy and full of hate *because* they’re black. They’re all those things *and* black, that’s all. Being black doesn’t make them that way. But don’t kid yourself, Doc; it sure as hell doesn’t prevent them being that way either.”

“As a fellow Canadian,” the officer broke in, “I wish I could stick with you, Doc. You’ll be going through here again—with luck—in, what’s your tour? six months?”

“A year.”

“Too long. All right, you’ll be going through here in a year. You’ll be talking just like Hemingway here and me. Only if you’ve really been a year in the bush you’ll be saying it louder.”

“What a TV series you could do, though.” The reporter had turned sarcastic, as though ashamed of his moment of solemnity. “Young Doctor Malone Meets the Ape Men.”

“He’s right, you know,” the other Canadian said. “If either of us said it back home we’d get expelled from the Bible Class, the Big Brother Movement, and the Junior Board of Trade. But even if these people were white, yellow, or God-damned emerald green they’d still only be a step ahead of the baboons.”

Suddenly Grant was fed to the teeth with the whole discussion. “Got to catch an early plane,” he said, paid his share of the check, and took a strained farewell.

In his first days at the hospital he was grateful for the gloomy briefing his two chance acquaintances had given him. Without their caveats he’d have found things considerably worse than he’d expected; as it was they were slightly better. The physical plant was about as the Red Cross had described it to him. The patients were crammed into half a dozen long, narrow brick wards. The only bedding on the rusty cots was what they brought with them, often no more than a filthy loin cloth. Their only food was the starchy, glutinous manioc root or maize or bananas or dried fish their resident families cooked in the open compounds or, when it rained, under the porches of the wards. If they brought no food or relatives who had some food they simply starved; the hospital had no means of feeding them. A detail of convicts from the local jail came regularly to clean the grounds and, occasionally, the wards. As Grant had been warned before he left Canada, there was an acute—usually a total—shortage of anesthetics, drugs, oxygen, and bandages. The two Belgian nuns personally scrubbed the little maternity ward. But with the exception of an eager, young head nurse named Jules, the half-dozen Congolese ward attendants seemed hopelessly lazy, indifferent, and ill-trained. In his first week there Grant, near exhaustion after a fourteen-hour day in the steaming heat, gave Jules a severe and public reprimand for a piece of negligence that turned out to be someone else’s. Unfortunately it was another full day before he discovered the truth and then his apology didn’t quite come off. Jules lowered his big, wounded, uncomplaining eyes and from then on did only what he was told—and that so deliberately and uncertainly that Grant was soon convinced his first brief show of energy had been either an accident or a sham.

For all these professional hazards he had come prepared. For the human hazards—the hazards of the patient-doctor relationship—he discovered gratefully, he had been overprepared. In spite of what the reporter and the

soldier had tried to tell him over their moambe and drinks seven hundred miles away in Leopoldville, he felt an intense kinship with his patients from the start. Though many of them had to endure surgery on a handful of aspirins and two or three grunting male nurses to hold them down, he seldom heard one of them cry out. Their contorted faces told him time and time again that this was not dumb, animal stoicism or the result of some freakishly high threshold of pain. He came to admire their patience and their fatalistic courage as much as he came to pity their condition. Here, on the equator, he soon discovered even a “healthy” man could have two or three chronic ailments: tuberculosis, malaria, yellow fever, hepatitis, any one of a dozen parasitic diseases, anemia, or any one of a dozen forms of malnutrition. One person in twenty had leprosy, or it could be sleeping sickness, typhus, cholera, bubonic plague, syphilis, yaws, or d.t.’s or cirrhosis of the liver or even a fashionable Madison Avenue ulcer or a case of hardened arteries.

In his first report to Montreal, Grant wrote: “I’m beginning to wonder if at least some of the problem out here isn’t a psychiatric problem. I have far better luck with the few patients who can understand my French than with those I have to get through to with an interpreter. They’re scared, always have been, always had good reason to be; scared of the crocodile, the leopard, the snake, the next tribe, the white man, the black man, the witch doctor; scared of sickness, scared of torture, scared of murder, scared of too many bosses and now that the Belgians have gone, scared of the lack of bosses; scared of the U. N. Army, scared of the Congo Army. Scared of the Christian god of the missionaries and scared of their own idols, all of which they try to serve and pacify.”

Only the smallest children, running naked and bright as crickets in the compounds and through the wards, were free of the universal burden of woe. His pity grew each day, nor did it diminish when the red-eyed garrison of the ANC broke down the windows and threatened to destroy his pitifully meager work and—briefly, and probably not altogether seriously—him.

Until Mary Kelvin arrived, he had had the feeling, nevertheless, that he was learning a little bit, but accomplishing scarcely anything. For weeks the Red Cross in Canada, Geneva, and Leopoldville had been trying to get permission from the Congolese government to fly in a special plane-load of supplies. Once, after a long period of suspense during which his only communication with the outside was through Air Congo’s twice-a-week DC-3, he received a message to expect a special United Nations relief plane on the following Thursday. He made elaborate arrangements with the local

Congolese army commander for its reception and clearance. It was agreed that the plane must not carry the markings of the United Nations, but must be painted on each side with a large red cross. No member of the crew must attempt to leave the aircraft. The Congolese were to have a maximum of ten armed soldiers on the airfield at the time of the aircraft's arrival and none should approach closer to the aircraft than the edge of the runway. One Red Cross official, in civilian clothes, but identified by a brassard, could land to supervise the unloading, but he would not be allowed to leave the landing strip. The Congolese could search the cargo for military supplies after it was unloaded, but would not interfere with medical supplies.

Grant spent two anxious days—at first prayerfully and at last profanely—waiting in the grubby, sweltering, fly-infested shed that served as the airfield's waiting room. At last the ex-Sabena employee who was acting as Air Congo's local traffic manager relayed a message that had come through with one of the commercial airline's pilots. Tribal fighting had broken out again in the Baluba country. The sovereign war lords of Katanga and Orientale were once more threatening to liquidate each other and every U.N. plane was standing by for military emergencies.

In this unpredictable climate the arrival of Mary Kelvin should not have been even a mild surprise. Nevertheless it was. Mary came completely unannounced in the rear of the local butcher's truck, bearing in triumph a quarter ton of excess baggage.

"I've been trying to get here or some place like it for two weeks," she told him. Grant was prying feverishly into the little Golconda of ether, oxygen, morphine, plasma, sutures, sponges, and bandages.

"Well, you'll have to go back on the next plane," Grant said absently, deep in a mental calculation of how long the ether and the oxygen would last and on which of his two-dozen critical cases it would best be risked.

"When Dr. Bouvard got word they had room for five hundred pounds of supplies on the regular plane I was the only spare body around the office to send with it. Luckily the American military attaché was going as far as Coq on the same plane so Dr. Bouvard put me in his charge and this stuff here in mine. He said I could stay if you said I could."

"Well," Grant said, admiring a package of intravenous needles, "I say you can't. You'll have to go back to Leo."

"But I don't want to go back to Leo. I might as well be in Vancouver or Pasadena."

“I know.” Grant straightened up and looked at her for the first time. His tone was kind, comradely, and understanding, even though the words were not. “You’re looking for the real Africa. Well, this is the real Africa and it’s no place for a probie from Saskatoon.”

“You know perfectly well probies don’t get sent to Leo,” she protested. “It’s seven years since I was a probie and it wasn’t Saskatoon, it was Sudbury.”

He looked at her again. She was indeed older than he had first surmised. Her gray eyes were far from hard, but they were also far from innocent. Nights over coffee back at the Royal Vic, this was one of the girls the interns would have decided knew her way around. They’d have made mind bets whether her wheat-colored hair was natural, chemical, or bleached by the summer sun. Interns being notoriously evil-minded about nurses, they’d have wondered how much her trim hips and breasts owed to nature and how much to the cunning of the garment industry. Discussing her coolly handsome face they’d have concluded rather uneasily that she was both a good girl and a hep girl, a combination not to be taken lightly.

“Are you sure they said you could stay?”

“I’ve got a letter, Doctor.” She opened her handbag.

“I’ll see it later,” he said. “Well, God knows, we could use you. The nuns are damned good, but all their time is taken up in maternity and what they can do in pediatrics. None of the natives are any use at all. I’m sure you realize I can’t guarantee your personal safety.”

“I could have stayed at home.”

“I suppose. As a matter of fact, I doubt that we’ll have much more trouble here. Every time a patient goes out of here dead his local witch doctor puts in another knock against us. But every time one goes out alive we get a gold star. Our stock in the villages is going up. You can’t really tell about the Congo Army, but they seem to have given up the hope of finding a secret nest of fifth columnists here or a secret cache of booze; I was never quite certain which they were really looking for. I might find some coffee.” He led her around the corner into the kitchen.

“From what they call the security angle there are certain advantages to a backwater like this,” he said. “I suspect it’s safer here, two hundred miles from nowhere, than it is at, say, Coq on the edge of nowhere. The tribes are small, scattered and loosely organized. The district has no military or economic value. So long as the U.N. and the native politicians keep out

there's nothing much to fight about and hardly anything worth stealing. Sure, I guess you can stay if you really want to."

She was efficient and hard-working and, better still, sensible. She was excellent for the hospital, excellent for the patients, and excellent for Grant's morale. After she asked the two Belgian nuns if she might move into the vacant room between them, their suspicion of her subsided and all but disappeared. She made friends, in French, with the head nurse, Jules. With the help of Jules' Lingala she taught two of the other male nurses to take pulse and temperature readings and mark them on the flyspecked, soggy, paper bed-charts.

The oxygen ran out during a particularly hot spell and in spite of Grant's agonizing attempts at mouth-to-mouth respiration, three new babies died in a single morning. "I'm through for the day," he told Miss Kelvin harshly as he stumbled through the desperate noon heat to his room. "If anybody wants a doctor tell them not to call me, I'll call them."

An hour later she knocked at his door. He was a third of the way through a bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label. She paid no attention to his defiant invitation to join him.

"The man you operated on for the hernia has torn out the stitches. I think he may bleed to death."

"I said not to call me. I can't do anything."

"You can try, Doctor," she said.

"I know the case, damn it! It's not a patch-up job. It needs another cut. I should have done it in the first place."

He made an elaborate, overdisgusted shrug, calling her attention half to the bottle and half to himself. "Right now I couldn't sharpen a pencil."

"I've sent him to the operating room," she said. "Come down and tell me what to do."

Thus she postponed for him the inevitable and tragic moment when every man of medicine must know that through his fault alone, through his avoidable fault, his fault of cowardice or ignorance or self-indulgence or weariness, through his sole, exclusive, and wholly unshared fault a human life that might have been spared has been lost. She made a rather appalling mess of the rather simple operation, but her hands and nerves were good and with his foggy coaching she did bring it off. When it was over he almost said to her, "You got two for the price of one that time." But after all he was

in charge and it was best that he retain the authority and self-respect he had been so close to throwing away.

Without asking his or the Congolese administrator's permission, she put up her own chart beside the master chart in the main office. Where the master chart listed hospital population, admissions, discharges, deaths, births, and other details of impersonal clinical arithmetic, her chart had only three categories.

*Died and
should have.*

*Died and
shouldn't have.*

*Should have died
and didn't.*

In a real hospital it would have been an act of intolerable flippancy. He ordered her to take it down, but it was the Belgian nuns who persuaded him to leave it. "We, too, need to be given heart sometimes," old Sister Marie-Bernadette begged him. "Let it stay for our sakes if not for your own."

Mary kept the chart faithfully and arbitrarily. Shrewdly and knowingly, too, Grant soon found himself admitting. Even though she was a tough referee and called all the close ones against the hospital, the balance came out better than he'd have thought. The "should have died and didn'ts" consistently outnumbered the "died and should have" and the "died and shouldn't have" by four or five to one. Like the nuns, he realized how much he had needed to be given heart.

Now he contemplated the back of Mary's fair head, held stiff and upright in the front seat of Chartrand's station wagon. She alone of the six passengers seemed to be by herself. Chartrand was intent on the dark road ahead. His little Gombe mistress was drowsing on his shoulder. Grant and his two companions in the back seat were wedged close together, and every time the car took a turn or veered around a bad piece of road there was a reassuring sense of proximity. He reached ahead and touched Mary's shoulder. "You O.K.?"

She turned her head slightly, not enough to let him see her face. "Yes, thanks." He had no way of telling whether she was frightened or not. He sat back and began exchanging quiet small talk with Ramón Sierra.

Chapter 2

They tried atomic Disarmament, Charles de Gaulle, Mickey Mantle, *Irma la Douce*, Zero Mostel, and even the weather. Nothing caught on and both men were soon silent again.

Sierra's thoughts were turning on a lifelong companion, a fellow wayfarer called *I*. He did not altogether neglect the others in the car. There was room in his thoughts for a decent chivalry toward each of them, but it was this timeless, war-scarred, beloved, and inconsistent *I* that nevertheless engaged the most important part of his attention. And if he knew this *I* well enough to recognize its vanity and occasional foolishness, he also knew it well enough to recognize its worth.

The *I* had taken him away from the family estates near Valencia and made him a soldier at nineteen and a general at twenty-one. The *I* had made him an exile from each of his first three homes: from Spain, from the Roman Catholic Church, from the Communist Party. The *I* had shouted at him all his life that he was not as good a painter or composer as he ought to have been. At the same time it had begun to involve him far too deeply for his good in what an old comrade of the fighting in Spain had described in one of his books as *Man's Fate*. The *I* had shunted him, after the initial war was lost, a fifth of the way around the world. At last it had won him the right to live—not as an exile, but as a freeman and a voter—in the very Prado, the Cathay and Xanadu of his early dreams, the blessed isle of Manhattan.

Obtaining this right had not been easy, but he had not, after all, ever been an actual member of the Party and his lawyer had been able to argue, accurately enough, that he had not gone willfully to fight beside the Reds, but had only stayed in the land where he was born and fought to hold it at the side of anyone who would fight beside him. From the blessed isle of Manhattan he had gone to war again, as a private soldier of the United States Infantry. He came back a full Colonel, with two Purple Hearts, a Silver Star, a DSC and a DSM, and a face lined and cragged in the mint of danger, but still glaring with ultimate faith in Ramón Sierra.

The painting and the music had deserted him and for a little while after his second war he went a little hungry. He painted one good picture and almost twenty disappointing ones and his most ambitious symphony was such a sad and lovely failure that he could not subject it to the judgment of a stranger. He burned it.

His third war was in Korea, where he rose from first lieutenant to brigadier general and achieved two more decorations. He returned to Manhattan, lost his savings through buying a small art gallery, and again went a little hungry for a little while. During all these tiny buffetings he had learned the value of learning and so he got a safer, salaried job managing another man's store in the East Fifties. Though his strong views on the postimpressionists sometimes forced him to be rude to the store's patrons, it was an unaffected, natural rudeness, not put on for show or for the sake of becoming a character. He did well and was soon able to move into a pleasant apartment near the East River. Not long after his fortieth birthday he met and married a splendid girl from Dublin. She being a practicing Roman Catholic and he still being, in spite of the unpleasantness in Spain, a Catholic in his heart, it was no surprise to anyone that they produced three handsome children in their first three years. Now nearing fifty he was a happy man, as indeed he had always been except during his adjustment to the fact that he could never go home again.

But he could not go on forever selling other people's pictures, particularly when so many of the pictures were so bad. He had fallen into the habit, occasionally, of strolling the half-dozen blocks along First Avenue to the United Nations when there was a night meeting; the swirl of tongues and races, the angry shouts and waving fists, and the furious, fateful marches called across the years to the hills of Valencia, the woods of the Ardennes, and the iron triangle of Pyonggang, called to the restless and relentless *I* of Ramón Sierra as the calling of a bugle. I must be part of this, too, he told himself. The history they are making here is bad history, but bad history has one advantage over bad art. It is better than no history at all.

One day he saw a United Nations advertisement in the *Times* asking for a Spanish interpreter. He got the job of course, for his departed father had insisted that he learn English, French, and German as well as four of the Spanish dialects.

His career as an interpreter was short-lived. One afternoon, in the middle of an angry debate over a new trouble in the Caribbean, he sat in his booth overlooking the Assembly and decided that the translation he had to make in the next three seconds might be the most important act of his life. The relentless *I* of Ramón Sierra ambushed and overpowered the anonymous, unseen functionary.

"Señores," he said into the microphone of the Spanish band, "I am not sure I can give you the exact meaning of what was just said. The American delegate has used the English word destroy, which he believes is the correct

rendition of what the Albanian delegate said in French. I offer you the choice of *matar*, *herir*, or *prejudicar*; kill, wound, or hurt. *Pardon.*”

So the United Nations fired him as a translator, but took a longer look at his background and his experience of the world and the world’s strife and sent him to the Congo as a civilian trouble-shooter. With his accumulation of scar tissue he was by now impervious to surprise or disappointment and therefore ideally suited to his task. He was not in the least disenchanted by the discovery that, having become the world’s third largest bureaucracy as well as its greatest arena of combat, the United Nations had lunged into the Congo bearing not only the tattered shreds of its high ideals but its own jungle of cynicism, confusion, incompetence, and sloth. Nor was he in the least shocked to discover that, at least at the level of their tribal and political leadership, the simple, innocent Congolese of the legends were more attracted to homicide than to schoolbooks, serums, and swamp drainage.

Yet Ramón Sierra never doubted that he was engaged in good and necessary and hopeful work. He never doubted that the auspices under which he worked were not only the best auspices possible but the only ones possible.

“I have been reading again *L’Eglise des Temps Barbares* by Daniel-Rops,” he wrote his wife one night from Stanleyville. “I think you can now get it in English and I recommend it to you. If, may your Irish saints forbid, you should ever be afflicted by uncertainty about the Church’s political conduct, this may be your antidote. Who knows, a third reading might even induce me to forgive her trespasses and beseech her to forgive mine.”

It was the last long letter he had written her. It might conceivably be—now, in the fleeing station wagon he savored the instant of self-dramatization—his last letter to anyone.

“As you will have detected,” he had written on, “I am basking in sentiment and booze and I am lonely and it is late at night. These are conditions that always bring out a good man’s spirituality and lust. Today I have come through a terrible ordeal. Eight young Belgian paratroopers wandered across the border from Ruanda-Urundi and I took it upon myself to dissuade a Congolese general from executing them on the spot.

“At first I got a very cool reception. There was no question of my making a demand for I had no authority to do so and no time to ask for instructions. Besides, they outnumbered us five to one. Thanks to the Russians they had artillery and we had none. They had mortars and we had none.

“Then I thought of *L’ Eglise des Temps Barbares* and Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Pope and Clovis the emperor and Benedict the saint and Charlemagne the soldier and just for a moment I saw my new church, the United Nations, in the same way I had once seen my old churches—the Catholics and the Communists. For this short moment it again became my belief that it was enough to be right.

“So,” he had gone on in this rambling mixture of information and philosophy, “I decided I must do, in whatever way I could, all that I could to save these poor lost children. Poor lost children standing there in their foolish, wasted camouflage clothes three thousand miles from home. The general who had captured them was still hostile to them and unsympathetic to me, their only defender.

“I saw only one chance. I decided to be devious and Congolese. ‘These men are in the wrong,’ I said to the General. ‘They have done a very bad thing. But they meant no harm to anyone. They were only trying to protect their own people.’ Now I played my trump card. ‘Besides,’ I said, ‘their lives are worth nothing to you. You are fully entitled to impose a fine on them—a very heavy fine. Fine them ten million francs, twenty million francs, and their government will have no choice but to pay.’ I thought this would do it and it did do it, but in a different way than I had imagined. Instead of grabbing at the bribe, the general looked me in the eye and said, ‘We do not barter lives for money. If we spare these men they will go free absolutely and no money will change hands.’ By being devious and Congolese I had unwittingly forced the Congolese general to be noble and Spanish. I hated myself bitterly for deserting my noble Spanish nature. Still, although the eight Belgian paratroopers are still in prison they also have some hope of survival.”

A most desirable advantage. Freedom, as the great Lawrence of Arabia had written, is a pleasure only to be tasted by a man alive. And as Lawrence had also said, guerrilla war was far more intellectual than a bayonet charge. The thinking man’s war no doubt.

The little war, the *illa* war, the war the Spanish furnished with its very definition. He remembered some other words of Lawrence, remembered them in his bones, from a time before he had even read them, remembered not from their reading but from their living. “Man’s breaking point was life and death, or better, wear and tear.”

He, Ramón Sierra, had no sense of wear and tear, and he had never been further from the breaking point. But it was still comforting to reflect upon

the things he already knew. *The greatest commander is he whose intuitions most nearly happen. Nine-tenths of tactics are certain, and taught in books; but the irrational tenth is like the kingfisher flashing across the pool and that is the test of generals.*

He did not need all this, for his mind would have been made up without it. He had no intuition, nor did he feel like the kingfisher flashing across the pool. His one certainty was that he was far from ready to die and if he did have to die it would be in a manner more close to his own choosing than any in prospect here.

He leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

“How far are we from the checkpoint, monsieur?”

“Perhaps ten kilometers,” Chartrand answered.

“Perhaps twenty minutes?”

“Perhaps.”

“Do you have any idea, monsieur, how many soldiers might be on duty?”

“At this time of night, one,” Chartrand replied more agreeably.

“And the guardhouse or barracks. How far is it from the sentry post?”

“Oh, a long way. Six hundred meters, perhaps.”

They were all listening. Songolo leaned across the doctor and spoke to Sierra in his soft Afro-Cambridge voice. “No one will attack any Congolese. Do you understand that?”

“Of course, of course,” Sierra assured him. “Dr. Grant, I wonder if you’d be good enough to change places with me?”

“Would you mind sitting forward a little?” Sierra said to Songolo after they were resettled. “We are in accord, but I don’t think you heard me fully.” *An opinion can be argued with, as Lawrence had said. A conviction is best shot.*

The edge of his hand had become distressingly soft through soft living and when in the darkness he saw the right place on the side of the black man’s neck, he yielded to the temptation to strike too hard. Songolo fell forward like a dead man. Sierra pulled him back and propped him in his corner of the seat.

“Please stop the car, monsieur,” he asked Chartrand.

“It is my pleasure, monsieur.” Chartrand had heard the sound of the blow and the ensuing silence.

He pulled up unfussily.

“Thank you, monsieur,” Sierra said. “Perhaps you have some rope in the trunk.”

“But certainly.”

“Be so good then, as to give it to me.”

Chartrand got out and obtained the rope, a large thin coil he carried always for general emergencies around the ranch. Sierra pulled a clasp knife from his pocket, cut off two lengths, and tied the still unconscious Songolo’s legs and arms. His quick movements brushed and strayed against Dr. Grant, but all Grant said was, “I hope you haven’t killed him.”

“No. There is not the faintest chance.” Sierra was securing the last knot and had to speak over his shoulder. But the voice showed the tiny bruise to the *I*, the hint of a slight against his competence.

“Turn out the lights,” he said to Chartrand. The stilled and darkened car lay quiet for a moment under the weight of the night, the heat, and the deep shadows.

“I am now how far from the checkpoint?” Sierra asked. He spoke as though he were not requesting but demanding and the Belgian’s moment of liking for him was gone.

“You,” Chartrand replied, furiously resenting the “I,” “are as far from anywhere as any of us.”

“This is no time for dialectics,” the Spaniard snapped back. “How far?”

“I will tell you,” Chartrand answered him with angry magnanimity. “A kilo and a half.”

“Good. Who has a watch?”

The nurse, whom everyone had supposed to be either asleep or paralyzed with fear, announced, “Two minutes past eleven.”

“Good. Please listen to me most carefully, all of you,” Sierra said. “Dr. Grant, I leave this gentleman in your custody. Keep him quiet. Do not argue with him and do not, for the time being, argue with me. Keep him quiet.”

“Go on,” Grant said.

“I am leaving the car now. Give me a start of twenty minutes. That is the time I need to reach the barrier and have it opened.”

“Yes,” Grant and Chartrand said almost together.

“Twenty minutes exactly,” Sierra added. “Your watch now says, mademoiselle?”

“Four minutes past eleven.”

“Good. Then at eleven hours plus twenty-five, the car will come slowly down the road to the barrier, with the lights off. If the barrier is raised, as it surely will be, stop and pick me up and we will proceed together. If the barrier is down, go at your highest speed and break through it. Is the barrier of wood, Monsieur Chartrand?”

“It is wood.”

“If I am not awaiting you and the barrier is still lowered do not stop. Do not stop under any circumstances. Someone may shoot at you but do not stop. Go right through it.”

“*Bon chance*,” Chartrand said, partly in envy and partly in reluctant admiration.

“It is unlikely that I shall need it,” Sierra said back. He held the handle of the door and closed it noiselessly, and then he was off down the road in his noiseless desert boots.

He condensed and contracted his mind and expelled everything but the task directly ahead. Expelled the splendid girl from Dublin, expelled the houseful of radiant, tumbling boys. Expelled the paintings he had never painted and the music he had never written or even heard except as a faint lost cry.

He expelled the people his duty and instinct now called on him to rescue. Expelled the righteous minister of the Republic and the unrighteous Gombe girl. Expelled the surly Belgian, the careful Canadian, and the half-frozen lady with the watch.

Sent them all away and saved his whole attention for the unseen, unknown sentry. Black as night and scared as night and in the black scared night the proprietor of a gun. He went on with the appraisal, went on with the guessing. Sometimes the guesses had worked and sometimes not, but just the making of them helped ease the fearful loneliness. Five feet six, a hundred and forty pounds. Fair ears, good eyes, not much muscle, not much

strength, but still the gun. Should have a helmet, but might have taken it off in the heat.

He had managed a dozen more formidable sentries before. He expected no difficulty here, but it was a handicap that he could not take this one's life. It was fitting enough, but it was still a handicap.

In another part of his mind he was counting his footsteps, counting them separately from old habit. His night eyes grew sharper and picked out the edges of the road when the moon broke through the thick and heavy trees. He walked on the edge of the road in a careful hurry, putting his cushioned feet down in short, measured paces. Five hundred gone. A thousand to go.

He tested the side of the road. The jungle yielded a tempting yard or so and clasped him toward its vines and moist fragrant branches. He returned to the road and made what haste he could without creating sound. At thirteen hundred paces he turned a bend and saw the barrier ahead in an eddy of moonlight.

He kept on walking in the shadows. He walked another hundred paces, quietly but swiftly. He picked out the dark figure of the sentry sitting on the bench beside the barrier with his back to the road and his eyes and his thoughts on the moon.

He stopped and opened the front of his shirt and took out the rest of Chartrand's rope. Then he went on again, but reduced the length of his paces. There were no stones or pebbles on the road and this added to his almost total confidence.

When he was only a dozen steps away, he made the tiniest of missteps in a tiny rut. It was the smallest of sounds, but the drowsing sentry leaped erect, peering in terror first to his left and then to his right into the abyss of jungle.

The sentry did not in these first instinctive movements even think of the road, and so Sierra was able to strike him easily and without hindrance. He tied him up with the rope and gagged him with leaves. Then he sat down to wait for the sound of the car behind.

Chapter 3

Chartrand had left the car stopped in the exact middle of the road.

“Would anyone care for a cigarette?” he asked. Grant began to object. “No, no,” the Belgian said, “they won’t hear or see us from here. This is not,” he assured them with a trace of condescension, “the land of James Fenimore Cooper. The sounds and sights do not carry far. There will be no snapping of dry twigs.”

The murmurs of appreciation did not materialize. It was a poor audience. Astrid Mahamba was still dozing on his shoulder. Grant was watching the bound and still-unconscious Songolo. The white woman, after her brief show of bravado in announcing the time, appeared to have subsided once more into a state of inertia.

“Would anyone mind, then, if *I* smoked?” Chartrand challenged them. It was, to his surprise, the white woman who replied. “I have some Pall Malls from Brazza. Would you like one for a change?”

“With pleasure.” Chartrand prepared his lighter for her.

When she took her first puff she studied the orange tip in the darkness. For a moment it looked steady enough.

“I’m sorry,” she said as quietly as possible, “but I’ve dropped it on the floor.”

“No harm.” Chartrand retrieved it, and then whispered in a more friendly tone, “What time now, please?”

“Fifteen past.”

“We’ll start in eight minutes. I don’t think you remember my name. It was a hurried introduction.”

“But I do.” She plunged into a barrage of half whispers. “I am very odd on names. I never miss the names of people I haven’t met before. I always get them and hang on to them for days. But then with people I’ve known for ages I go blank and call George Herbert and Marjorie Margaret.”

“I don’t mean to be stubborn,” Chartrand persisted. “I’m really only inquisitive and vain.”

“Well then, your name is Jacques Chartrand.”

“Marvelous. For an American you are astonishingly clever.”

“Canadian,” she said.

“Even more astonishing.”

“If we’re trying for records—” her voice still betrayed her fear, but foolish and wavering as it was it carried a forlorn comfort to her. While she was talking she was still in being.

“Ah, you wish me to say what you *appele* yourself,” he replied. “I am not so expert at remembering first introductions as you. However—”

“However?”

“Your name is almost surely Bertha or Bessie or Victoria or one of those other Anglo-American atrocities. In your world they always give the most attractive women the most awful names. I am a gallant man with gallant observing eyes, and I would rather think of you as Freda or Natasha or something Nordic or Oriental or at least girlish.”

“So would I. I chance to be Mary Kelvin.”

“Console yourself, mademoiselle. You are not, after all, a Smith or a Scroggins. Think what a disaster that would have been.”

She tried a subdued laugh. “I feel like Mary Scroggins or even Bessie Scroggins.”

“How’s that?”

“Scared and out of place,” she said.

“Yes, yes, others may feel that way too. It is no distinction.”

“Do you think we’ll get through?”

“There is no doubt.”

“The man ahead, the Spanish one,” she tried to reassure herself, “seems very brave and capable. But what can he do?”

“I know him well by reputation. He is said to be most resourceful. As you say, he has courage too.”

Astrid Mahamba stirred between them. “Don’t fidget,” Chartrand said to her. “*Dormez.*”

Mary looked at the luminous dial of her watch. They had to go on in three minutes.

“I suppose it would be an imposition to tell you the story of my life?”

“I should be delighted. Has it been interesting?”

“Not very. Oh God, what a coward! I just can’t shut up.”

“You are behaving quite normally and charmingly. There are many reactions to fear and if our friend the doctor were not engaged with our friend the minister, he would give us a more scientific opinion than I can. But I can vouch for some things. One reaction is to talk more than usual. One is to sleep more than usual.”

“I had a child,” she began impulsively to tell him, then stopped. She began asking him about his life in the Congo, his ranch and his cattle and when he had last been in Belgium. She shut herself behind a palisade of murmured vacant questions and empty unheard answers and offered him another cigarette.

A kindly girl, her father had called her. It was her first memory of being singled out for a special description. She did not have any idea of the meaning of the word, but she clung to its strange appealing sound and when, the next summer a whole year later, she asked him to explain it his astonishment and delight that she had remembered had been almost too much for him to contain.

They had been waiting, the whole family, on the porch or peering out the front window of the big white house when the man from the city swung up in his long blue car. There was something feudal in the scene, her mother in a fresh house dress, her father in a pressed plaid shirt, his high bush shoes unexpectedly free of mud and pine needles, her four brothers in school trousers still smelling of their twice-a-year laundering in the unique way of corduroy mingled with Fels-Naptha. But there was nothing obsequious in the greeting. Her father was a government forester and a very good one, with no need to assert his independence. The man from Queen’s Park had been invited to spend the weekend at their home and must be welcomed not as a superior but as a family friend.

Donny and Peter and Jack and Malcolm all stepped up and shook hands handsomely. But Mary took fright at the visitor’s gold watch chain and his queer half-shoes with his ankles sticking out above them through funny checkered socks and his tiny, nearly white hat dangling threateningly in his hand, and she ran to hide behind her mother.

“Don’t mind her,” her father had said. “She’s really a most kindly little girl.” As the years passed she grew accustomed to this sort of thing. Her

father took too much joy in his family to be cursory or offhand about them. He wasn't the sort of parent who automatically calls his children cute in infancy, sweet at one, irresistible at two, spoiled at three, difficult at four, talented at five and so on up the hackneyed totem in which grownups pretend to study children and merely admit that children are too young for serious study. Even when he was first initiating her in the mysteries of the Ontario woods, she never knew her father to say anything as banal as, "Look at that beautiful stand of evergreen!" It was taken for granted that any stand of evergreen was beautiful, provided it was in good health; the questions deserving thought were whether it was first or second growth, hemlock or spruce or pine, and if spruce whether white or black and if pine whether white or red; whether the moose had ranged this far south last fall; where the deer runs were; how far from the old logging trails; how dry the underbrush, what the danger of fire. The first time she caught a decent trout and brought it home to him he studied its coloring and, not without a trace of boyish vanity, named the precise, six-foot pool—in a stretch of water two miles long—in which it had been taken. "Only place where there's a cedar-muskeg bottom," he explained. He was aware of the special quality—to use an expression less favored then—of the lack of conformity in everything that lived. And thus Mary grew up considering herself as kindly rather than cute, and looking back she was inclined to believe there was something in it.

It was a virtue much cherished in that masculine household, the more so after her mother's death in the spring of Mary's fourteenth year. There was no excessive mourning—her father had too much respect for the wisdom of nature to allow the tears to linger beyond the first hard day—and they all got over their solemnity rather sooner than the neighbors all thought fitting. They made a special point that year of holding their annual Easter fishing trip up the watershed of the Ottawa to their nearly-secret stretch of a difficult feeder stream. Mary rode in the middle canoe, in her mother's old position, paddling bow for Jack. Donny and Peter were in front, with the biggest boy, Malcolm, in the wide twenty-footer with their father, the three tents, the hardware, and some of the food.

Mary had supervised and bossed the provisioning herself and done all the preliminary baking, working from the master list her mother had brought up to date the spring before: two eight-pound roasts of beef done in the afternoon, steaks and chops wrapped in clean butcher's paper, two sides of bacon, a half bushel of potatoes, twelve loaves of fresh-baked bread (reduced from fourteen), and six green apple pies (reduced from seven), plus condiments, canned milk, and tea and coffee; everything almost but not exactly as before and no maudlin nonsense about the empty camp-stool.

When Mary, having been deemed suddenly too old to sleep with the boys, said good night on the evening of their arrival, her father had suggested, "You'd better come with me in the morning." It was a tremendous honor and, she could not fail to realize, a tremendous sacrifice on his part. His fellow employees of Lands and Forests, the senior game wardens, and the rangers and the pilots who dropped in sometimes for a meal, had recognized him years ago as the fussiest fisherman in his whole district. Fishing a stream—he never fished a lake except for meat, and fishing for meat, he often said, was like breaking up a Stradivarius for firewood—fishing a stream he always searched out the most inaccessible, overgrown, and boggy stretches, seeking not self-punishment but privacy. If, as he made his painful, ecstatic way upstream, he chanced to see another human being, he would clamber in polite disgust back to the bank and seek solitude in some place even more impossible and remote.

During each of the last ten years he had, however, allowed his wife to fish with him on opening day. After a long apprenticeship she had learned the imperatives of quiet, cover, a leader no less than eight and a half feet long and tapered to no more than 2x, and the absolute avoidance of drag.

They fished slowly, three hundred yards apart, using different patterns by agreement and both working the stream as much as possible from the left bank to the right. She went ahead, carefully and considerately, leaving only as much disturbance behind as was absolutely unavoidable and sometimes, by changing his patterns more frequently than she, he was able to take a good trout that she had neither attracted nor disturbed. Except when he was teaching them, he never willingly worked a stream within half an hour of any of the children, and once when the Premier came for a day Angus Kelvin turned him loose with proper tackle and proper advice on the best stretch of water, and then disappeared until it was time to go home to dinner. He was not a selfish fisherman; but there were three miles of good cover upstream from their customary camping place and four miles downstream and unless you were happily married to a woman with a light foot and a soft roll-cast, the only really endurable companion for an angler was himself.

Thus, when he invited Mary to share the top mile with him—the most difficult stretch of all—she knew her father wasn't being merely sentimental or charitable. She had been using the fly herself for six years (it was a family rule that you had to give up worms after your seventh birthday) and except for a tendency to hurry the backcast she was already a good deal better than any of her brothers except Jack. She took it for granted that it was

confidence in her, rather than compassion—this and perhaps some unspoken need of his own—that prompted him to make the offer.

They walked for more than an hour through the awakening bush, through great stands of pine and clumps of budding aspen and willow and the last shaded remnants of the winter's snow. When they turned into the stream to begin, her father stood on the bank for a moment, looking the water up and down like a man studying the conformation of a race horse. They were at the edge of a wide shallow with rapids leading into a slow dark pool a hundred feet ahead. Through the shadows of the overhanging trees the early morning sun dappled and caressed the pool, the white rapids above and the amber shallow below; their design was like gold leaf shining between the leads of a stained-glass window.

“A various stream, Mary,” her father said. “I’ll guarantee there isn’t a more various piece of trout water anywhere in the world. Swale-, swamp-, gravel-, weeds-, riffles-, fat old pools-, deadfalls-, barring chalk I guess there isn’t any kind of trout water you could name that you couldn’t find in this six miles. There’s holes in here that God himself couldn’t get a fly to, and the fish will live forever.” He waded cautiously to the middle of the stream and reached down and stroked the water as though he were gentling a half-tamed animal and praising it with his hand.

“Do you mind if I try just this one pool ahead of you,” he asked her. “Your mother raised a real brute here last year, but hit him an eighth of a second too soon. She turned him hard and put him down for the rest of the day and kept him unfriendly for the rest of the week. I gave her so much hell she said I could have first whack at him this year. Unless you’d rather,” he added anxiously.

“No I’d rather watch you,” she said from behind a huddle of birch trunks, not of course needing to be told to keep out of sight.

He rose the fish on the second cast and it was a brute, but it wasn’t taking, just looking. He changed flies half a dozen times with no better result, and then sent her on ahead.

The next year the big trout was gone. “He’s just moved,” her father said. “He’s too big for a cormorant or an otter to handle. He must have found better feed somewhere else. Perhaps we’ll catch up to him on the other side of the rapids.”

They never did. Her father fell dead of an unsuspected heart condition that summer in the middle of a long, battering fight against a forest fire.

Mary quit school with her senior matriculation and set out to keep house full-time. There were no serious financial problems. Their father had left his group insurance and another policy for ten thousand dollars to Mary and with the exception of Donny, who was in his freshman year in mining engineering, all the boys were working, Malcolm at the big mine at Copper Cliff and Jack and Peter in Lands and Forests.

Much as she missed her parents at first, Mary was still content in the shelter of this reassuring male world. When it dissolved around her there were a few months when she despaired of finding a substitute for it. Malcolm was blown up on the sixth of June, 1944, leading a platoon of the Queen's Own ashore at Bernières-sur-Mer. Donny graduated and took a job at Kitimat. Peter was promoted to district ranger and transferred to Kenora, where he shortly married. Jack re-enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and although he had come home with twenty-four destroyed and three probables and two bars to his DFC, a nervous student pranged him on his very first flight as an instructor and it took eighteen months to patch him up.

She sold the house and moved to Trenton to be near, she told Jack wryly, the only one she could still catch up with. Her daily visits to him in the Air Force hospital did not wholly fill the huge and sudden void in her life, but they evoked the tender pain of being needed again in a world of needful males.

She liked the efficient bustle of the hospital and envied the nurses for being so perpetually busy at such crucial and varied tasks.

"Jack," she said one day, "I think I'll be a nurse."

"Don't rush it," he said. "You're still not quite eighteen. Why not take a shot at university first?"

She moved to Toronto and tried it for a year. But nothing interested her particularly. She wasn't particularly good at anything but French, and her childhood in the bush and mining country of the north had already given her a good idiomatic grasp of that anyway. Her brother withdrew his faint objections and she began training at the Toronto General when she was still a few months less than nineteen.

She liked the work almost as much as she had expected to. She would never, she realized wistfully, recover her original roots, but she felt new ones going down. The world of institutions could never be the same as the world of families, but it too was a recognizable, definable world in which there were boundaries and rules and tangible obligations and rewards on both

sides. Her feeling of loneliness and superfluity gradually passed away. By the time she reached twenty-one she was, as her neurotic and resentful roommate once taunted her, as normal and contented as a God-damned Dago woman with her seventh baby. “I’ll bet all you think about except this stinking place,” her roommate accused her, “is getting married.”

“Not a bad guess,” Mary conceded cheerfully.

“I’ll bet you even think of him as Mister Right,” her roommate added vindictively.

Mary went on brushing out her blond hair, but turned to grin appreciatively.

She had two brief, careful, antiseptic affairs, one with an intern and one with a young staff biochemist. They were both pleasant enough, but they left her untouched. It was not until she blundered into the way of the eminent Dr. Sigurd Jonson that she experienced again the mingling of awe and affinity in which, as a girl, she had regarded the overwhelming world of males.

In years Sigurd Jonson was about halfway between her oldest brother, Malcolm, the D-Day brother, and her father. She had worked with him in the operating room perhaps half a dozen times, but she was always hidden behind her surgical mask when he bustled in to take charge of a stage already set for him. He did not see her face until one morning she dropped a scalpel at a not particularly critical stage of a not particularly critical operation. He felt it his duty to remain behind after they had taken the patient out and administer a formal rebuke. “Ah, on second thought,” he said when he saw her burning cheeks, “I have nothing to say to you after all. Some of these scatter-brained kids think it doesn’t matter as long as no one gets hurt. Run along now. Lay off that cheap booze the interns buy and maybe your hands will be steady next time.”

To her surprise he recognized her even behind the mask when they met again over another operating table. From then on—as she was able to console him later with a kindly absence of rancor—her eyes were “perfectly open.” His reputation in the nurses’ residence was almost as legendary—and except among the matrons almost as much admired—as his reputation in the operating rooms and the professional universe outside. In both cases, he assured her later at what he appeared to regard as a crucial stage of the preliminaries, the reputation was much greater than he deserved.

“Let’s not worry about that,” she had said. “I’m not jealous—and by the way I’m not promiscuous either. I just happen to like you.”

After her first two pallid and bloodless affairs she had been left wondering—a little uneasily though without any great sense of calamity—whether she might be frigid. Sigurd cleared the point up more than satisfactorily and she coasted through a whole blissful winter in the certainty that the rents and splinters and excavations in her life were being steadily mended. She still intended to be married, sometime, somewhere, and to someone else. Sigurd was loving, bossy, solicitous, and discreet—just what she needed now, but only now, she kept reminding herself. They were both sensible enough to know that the difference in their ages made it impossible to go on forever; besides he already had a wife.

And then, in an instant of passionate carelessness, the whole lovely interlude was undone. Mary made it her own secret until she was certain. She thought of going away, perhaps to another country, to shield him from his share of the guilt, which she knew instinctively would be greater and even harder to bear than her own (she was, she recollected, still a kindly girl even though a frightened one). He rejected the suggestion angrily and went at once to talk to his wife. The wife refused stolidly to make any sort of bargain with her rights. “I’ve never done this before,” the eminent and respected Dr. Sigurd Jonson told her miserably, “but I guess I’ll have to take the baby away from you.”

“Not you, Sigurd!” she protested. “Not you personally.”

“Yes, Mary dearest.” His face was gray with its tragic struggle. “Me and me only.”

“There must be someone else,” she said.

“I couldn’t ask anyone I respect,” he said. “And as for the quacks—”

She turned up promptly, trim and deceitfully cheerful, at his office that night. To her astonishment there was a trace of gin on his breath. He detected her start of detection. “Just a small one for steadiness,” he apologized. And then, begging for some word of comfort, “I know it’s terribly hard on you, Mary, unforgivably hard, senselessly hard. Please, dear, remember it’s also hard on me.”

“I know,” she said quickly, eager to get on before her own fear became less easy to control. “Please tell me what to do.”

When she came back to consciousness, borne on the long sea-rollers of slowly fading ether, he was sitting beside the bed, with one hand resting on her forehead and the other cradling a glass of white liquid that she guessed would be a larger gin. He seldom drank at all, it was of course perfectly

natural now, now that it was over. She closed her eyes and waited for the last rollers to subside while she put her recollections in order.

“That’s you, Sigurd? Is it all right?”

“You’re all right.” The echo of the final rollers made his voice seem more distant than it was. “You’re all right, Mary.”

“And the—” what could she call it? The baby? The ex-baby? The future baby? The ex-future baby? The—the—operation?

“Mary,” he said, still distant but bewildered, “are you sure it was only four months?”

“Why, yes.” She had a new pang of alarm. “I’m quite certain.”

“Not five months?” he asked anxiously. “Or even six? Here, just let me wet your lips. Don’t swallow. Now rest.”

She closed her eyes and fought off another onslaught of the echoing surf. “Then it didn’t work?” she whispered.

“Your bone structure is very deceptive. I should have had someone with me. It didn’t work, Mary. You’ll have to have our baby, Mary. Ours. We’ll find some way to treat it as such. We’ll find some way.”

Her next thought was so fearful that in all her previous permutations of fear it had never occurred to her. “Sigurd, could the baby have been—harmed?”

“You mustn’t worry. Try to rest here for a little while, and then we’ll go away for a few days.”

“But can you be sure?”

“Mary,” he said sadly, “you can never be sure in medicine or surgery especially when an—an operation like this has been tried and failed. But I think our baby will be a healthy baby. Now please try to rest.”

She had the baby in a very good place in Maine. Sigurd took her there and sat in a waiting room like any other expectant father. The baby had been damaged by the attempted abortion after all. It was blind and, it became apparent within a month, hopelessly retarded as well.

Now, on this dark jungle road in Africa, on the edge of a different kind of fear, groping for rescue in a confession booth by General Motors, she

realized how close she had been to pouring all this out upon a total stranger. All this and more.

She would not have withheld the final chapter. “I kept the child for four and a half years, with Sigurd’s help of course. The child and I lived in British Columbia. At last Sigurd persuaded me it would be best to put the child in a home. He also persuaded me to go back to Toronto and take up nursing again. We had been on a platonic basis ever since the evening in his office, but he still had some quixotic notion of keeping a fatherly eye on me.

“But there was too much to live with back there—not least of all the sight of Sigurd prowling through the corridors, grown into an old friend and almost an old man. I needed more and harder work, something I’ve always needed, a lot of people to do a lot for. When they asked for nurses for the Congo I knew they’d take me if only because of my French.”

“I had a child,” she had already blurted to the stranger at the wheel, before she stopped herself. She could see he was waiting for her to go on and she realized how inane the unelaborated remark must sound, left lying there. “As you say, one reaction is to talk more than usual. Needless to add, I am not married or the matter would not have been worth mentioning.”

“I will not enter into a competition with you, my dear mademoiselle,” he replied softly, “for it would be most unchivalrous and unequal. In a contest of guilt I would defeat most people. I was a captain in the Belgian Army when the Germans broke through our great Fort Eben Emael. Broke through this great fort as though it were an overripe round of Brie. Not one man in my company fired a shot in our defense. Not one. Right there, in that very moment, my country fell again into slavery.

“No, no, a moment please.” He broke in on her interruption. “I have a wife in Bruges, a wife as fair and young as you, God help her and me. She left at the Independence with our two daughters. Left by this very road, and that may explain why I know it so well. I took them across the river and promised that I would follow within the month. But I have eight hundred Kohomae cattle, a big house, a bank account of more than a million francs and”—his eyes passed briefly over the Gombe girl between them—“many, many friends. Do not, pray, compete with me in self-rebuke.”

“You are kind to tell me all this. Thank you.” She meant it, for she found his words inexplicably comforting.

“I think it must be time to go on,” he said.

She looked at her watch. “Yes, it is time to go on.”

Chartrand drove slowly and very expertly, picking his way as though by instinct through the shadows. When they had turned the last bend he caught the waiting figure of Sierra beside the raised barrier. "Please open the door," Chartrand said to Dr. Grant, "and admit our friend."

The Spaniard had no time for greetings. As soon as he was settled and the car was in motion he leaned forward again. "At the next barrier, monsieur? Please say again exactly what must be expected there."

Chartrand replied in the same vein, with the least waste possible. "A good-sized detachment. Perhaps eight men. Either one or two will be on duty at the barrier. The rest will be in the guardhouse right beside, within six or seven meters."

"Then we must leave the car and go around?"

"Unless," Chartrand said, "you happened to obtain the last sentry's gun."

"I might have. But I did not."

"Then you have accepted Monsieur Songolo's conditions? We will not defend ourselves?"

"You have asked two questions, monsieur. Which do you want answered first?"

"As you yourself pointed out"—Chartrand's voice had a note of genuine admiration for the other man, but he still did not disguise the barb—"this is no time for dialectics. Since we do not have a gun there is little chance that we will use one."

"Exactly," Sierra rasped back. "Now if you will be good enough to slow down briefly, perhaps the doctor and I can restore our friend the minister."

"Certainly." Chartrand cut the car to its lowest speed.

"He has almost come to already," Grant said. "Shall we untie him?"

"Yes," the Spaniard said.

Songolo sat up abruptly and looked around with an air of surprise and speculation. It took him only a moment to find his bearings.

"I see," he remarked in his pleasant Cambridge-Congo accent, "that I am still among—how shall I describe you—colleagues?"

"You have my personal apology, monsieur," Sierra said. "No doubt in the fullness of time my regrettable assault on you will be carefully investigated by the General Assembly, the Security Council, or one of the

committees or perhaps a special commission and your government will receive a more formal expression of regret. Our immediate problem is, happily or not, somewhat more rudimentary.”

“I agree,” Songolo said. “The only thing I must ask is whether you have during my—shall we call it absence—killed or wounded any of my countrymen?”

“I immobilized the sentry back there and had to leave him immobilized. But I did him no more permanent harm than I did to you.”

“In that case,” the African suggested, “let us forget these little mishaps and return at least temporarily to being colleagues.”

“A most felicitous proposal,” Sierra said. “Monsieur Chartrand has described the next checkpoint. He advises against trying to get through it. It is his feeling that we should abandon the car in a few minutes and try to proceed to the border on foot as best we can.”

“This is my first trip to this part of Equateur province,” Songolo said. “In matters of geography I defer entirely to Monsieur Chartrand’s judgment.”

“And what,” Sierra asked, not challenging but seeking information, “if we should encounter hunters or herdsman or tribal raiding parties beyond the road? What are the latest reports to the government in Leo? Have you any recent information?”

“Monsieur, I see by your conduct and your questions that this sort of situation is not new to you,” Songolo replied. “So I can only repeat what you surely know yourself. We Congolese are no more uniform or predictable than anyone else. You cannot go to New York or London or Paris and expect to know whether the taxi drivers will all overcharge you or the waiters all be polite or the ladies all accommodating. They are far from the same and even within what sameness they have they change from season to season. The only generalization I will venture is that this is a particularly uncertain season here. A year ago most of us here could have gone into most villages in the Congo and been treated as gods, or at least as awesome devils. Four of you because you are white, which is a synonym for *Belge*. Even I and the young Congolese lady because of our pretty European clothes. Now we might be destroyed just because of your whiteness and just because of our pretty European clothes. I do not deplore the sudden change; I would be a traitor if I did. But for the next twenty-four hours we might as well remember that there has been a change.”

Chartrand was still driving slowly but listening.

“For fairly obvious reasons,” he said. “I *do* deplore the change.”

“Yes,” Sierra acknowledged from the back seat. “Most things have their deplorable aspects. However it seems to be settled that we must leave the car, set off across the savanna and try to avoid being seen or intercepted by anything, man or beast, that moves.”

Chartrand slowed to a crawl and then stopped. “From my memory and the speedometer I believe we are now only a short distance from the barrier.” They had emerged from the edge of the jungle into the rolling, hummocked plain of the savanna, where the grasses stretched out endlessly among the hut-sized anthills and occasional trees.

“In which direction,” Sierra asked, “do you recommend that we proceed?”

“To our left, to the west,” the Belgian answered. “In that direction the bend of the river brings it slightly closer and there is as good a chance of finding a pirogue in that part as anywhere.”

“Excellent,” Sierra said. “Do you not agree that it then would be best to drive the car a few yards off the road on the right-hand side and leave it there? When those behind us find it they may think we have gone the other way.”

“It can assuredly do no harm.”

The others dismounted. Chartrand took only a moment or two to barge his station wagon across the little ditch beside the trail and leave it hanging halfway up an anthill. “You have the water jug, monsieur?” he asked Sierra when he rejoined them on the other side of the trail.

“Yes. We might as well proceed.”

“Should we be on watch here for animals?” Mary Kelvin asked. It was the sort of question her father might have asked in unfamiliar country, although on second thought he probably would know.

“We will hear jackals and hyenas and some may follow us in curiosity or hope,” Chartrand said. “They will not trouble us. There might conceivably be a roving leopard or two, but they will hardly interfere either.”

Chartrand added that it was almost impossible to miss the river, but thought that with the help of the stars he could find the shortest route. He

and the agile African girl set off in front with Dr. Grant and Mary Kelvin behind and Sierra and Songolo still further back in the rear.

Although their path around the anthills and past the occasional clumps of trees was a winding one and the low changing grade made fast walking difficult, they were able to begin at an encouraging pace. It was not unpleasantly hot and beneath the warm starred sky the little cries of insects, birds, and small animals gave the night a companionable feel; everything seemed to offer a reminder that the universe was truly universal and, except when some temporary and pressing need demanded a lapse from its good manners, a place of infinite good will.

“I tried not to eavesdrop,” Grant said quietly to Mary as they walked along. “But I couldn’t help it.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she said. “Not tonight anyway. I don’t mean what happened—that will always matter—I mean your knowing about it.”

“The reason I brought it up was to say it doesn’t matter to me either. Or at least in the conventional way. I felt the sadness, but not the scandal.”

She took his arm as though they were walking together down Portage Avenue or St. Catherine Street. “You’ve got me talking again. But now we’re in the open air, I don’t think it’s only because I’m scared. In fact I’m not sure I’m scared at all. I’ll tell you a little more about it, if you’ll listen. Then, if we get across the river I’ll probably be so remorseful I’ll never look you in the face again.”

“Don’t say *if* we get across the river. We will.”

“Doctor, I told you I’m not a probie. I’m not a child. And at the moment, if only for the moment, I’m truly not scared.”

“All right. But we have a damned good chance and don’t forget it.”

“That’s not what we were talking about. I won’t tell you the man’s name although you’d likely know it. He is a doctor and a fine, decent man. I don’t in the least regret what happened between him and me. The only thing I regret is what we allowed to happen to the baby. There was nothing fine or decent there, on his part or mine.”

He reached across and pressed her arm with his free hand. “Mary,” he said persuasively, “I don’t want to sound like Norman Vincent Peale, in this place least of all. But surely anyone in a spot like this—and since you won’t believe otherwise I’ll admit I think we’re in a spot too—surely anyone in a spot like this needs no special dispensation or license to think about the

good things in his life too. It's not a matter of self-justification or even divine forgiveness. It's just a matter of good medicine or psychiatry. We've all got enough troubles right now without torturing ourselves with the ones we used to have."

"It may be good medicine theoretically, but you damned well know it doesn't work that way in practice." But she sounded a little more cheerful and they walked on in silence, listening to the unknown but friendly sounds of the African night.

Chapter 4

“We still have some, Joseph?” Sergeant Tshibangu turned from the wheel to the smaller man at his side.

“Yes, Albert,” the smaller man giggled. “Oh yes, yes indeed. You wish some more now?”

The sergeant’s rejoinder began as a chuckle. Then as an afterthought he became stern. “It is better that you call me Sergeant, since we are on duty.”

Corporal Joseph Nijili cackled in shrill delight and he slapped the Sergeant’s knee. “Yes, Albert,” he shrieked. He turned to face the three soldiers in the back seat. He had some difficulty at first in engaging their attention. Remy Okito was passing a huge jar of palm wine to Alphonse Mpolo. Gregoire Ilunga was puffing dreamily on an *Indian* cigarette.

“*Yoka! Yoka! Yoka!*” Joseph sprayed them in a fountain of hilarity. “Listen! Listen! Listen! Albert demands to be called Sergeant.”

Albert Tshibangu jammed the brake. The car skidded half off the road. The jar of wine banged noisily against the back of the front seat, but providentially did not break. Emile Kwange brought the second jeep of the two-vehicle convoy to an uncertain stop just in time to avert a collision. The Sergeant leaped to the road. He was a big, well-muscled man, unusually so for an Equateur Congolese, almost six feet tall, almost two hundred pounds. He raced around the front of the jeep to the other side, brushing the hood with his elbow and adding to his rage.

“A jest, a jest, a harmless jest!” Joseph Nijili cried in terror. The looming Sergeant dragged him from the jeep, held him erect, and struck him a massive blow full in the mouth. The Sergeant did not trouble to observe in what manner or direction the smaller man fell.

“Put him in the second jeep behind Emile,” he ordered. “If he were not a friend I would leave him for the jackals.”

As the two jeeps set off again, the Sergeant suddenly became the most amiable of men.

“Come, Alphonse,” he said. “Come and sit beside me.” Alphonse Mpolo, a smaller man too, quickly clambered from the rear into the empty seat in front, dragging his gun behind him by its barrel.

Changing into second gear, the Sergeant said heartily, “Let us have a sip of wine, Albert. I hope no accident has befallen the wine.”

“No, no, Sergeant!” Remy Okito and Gregoire Ilunga cried in alarm and almost perfect unison from the rear. When it had been passed forward the Sergeant took several deep long pulls, balancing the round jug in the crook of his arm as naturally as a nursing mother. He passed it over to his new seatmate.

“Now if you would prepare a cigarette we could share it while we proceed.”

As the jeep lurched along the trail the Sergeant, with one hand on the wheel and the other on the cigarette, grew suddenly expansive.

“You were with us at the Independence, Alphonse?”

“Indeed, indeed, Sergeant. May I have a sip of wine?”

“Better still have a puff or two.” The Sergeant passed the cigarette.

“Yes, yes you were with us. I remember clearly. Oh, what days! I remember better now,” the Sergeant went on with increasing respect, “you were the one who had the woman of the Commissioner.”

Alphonse Mpolo hesitated. “So it has been said,” he replied woefully. “The saying of it has given me great honor and regard. But I will not deceive you. The woman of the Commissioner kept crying to me on that morning. *Ngai moninga na bisa—kenda! She kept crying I am your friend—go!*”

“And you did go?” the Sergeant asked in disappointment.

“She *had* been my friend,” Alphonse Mpolo apologized. “Once, in the times of the Belgians, when my small brother was dying she came to our village in her own automobile and took him in her own arms and carried him to the hospital and there he lived.”

“Do not mourn,” the Sergeant consoled him. “There will be other times. Let us have another sip of wine.”

They both soon put aside their brief melancholy.

“Perhaps before this night is over the other times will begin,” the Sergeant said.

“You mean the woman from the hospital?” Alphonse Mpolo asked.

“No, no,” the Sergeant replied. “That is a small matter. A pleasant matter but a small one. I think of matters much much larger.”

“I know this, as I know the sun,” Alphonse replied, covering his uncertainty with hearty adulation. “We must intercept these spies and plotters. We must punish them.”

“What we do with *them* is of little consequence,” Tshibangu decreed grandly. It was only in that instant that he came to the full realization of his own destiny. “What we do with them is of small account. It is what we do with ourselves that will count. We shall save the district of Mgonga.”

“I agree!” Alphonse Mpolo echoed even more vaguely than before.

“I have decided,” the Sergeant announced, casting the butt of their cigarette carelessly to the road, but drawing new inspiration from it still, “that Mgonga must be an independent state.”

“I agree!” Alphonse Mpolo’s response was now completely bewildered, though still full of admiration.

“I thought at first these men from the south were only ordinary spies and schemers. Particularly the man who says he is from *Onee* and the man who says he is from the Boulevard Albert. Now I see two things. They are either imposters or they are truly from *Onee* and Leo. If the first is true it is bad. If the second is true it is worse. They are trying to enslave our people again. They are trying to take away our guns and return us all to bondage. Pass the wine.” The large and muscled Sergeant’s voice was thick, but it did not waver.

“I could not help hearing, *Monsieur le Sergeant*,” Gregoire Ilunga interrupted from the back seat, where he and Remy Okito had concealed and occasionally partaken of a reserve jug of wine. “Mgonga must be independent!”

Sergeant Tshibangu swept on. “Mgonga *shall* be independent. Orientale is independent. Katanga is independent. I am an educated man and know these things.”

“This is a renowned fact,” one soldier applauded.

“What fact more renowned?” added another.

“None,” the third said tearfully.

“For four years I have attended the schools of *les Belges*,” the Sergeant said. “Ask me anything.”

“What shall we ask?” Gregoire Ilunga requested timidly.

“Anything!” the Sergeant repeated imperiously. “Ask!”

Their questions, forced and hurried by befuddlement and fear, piled up and emerged almost as a chorus.

“Is it bad or good to be eaten by a crocodile?” asked Remy Okito.

“Who are most dangerous, *les Belges* or *les Casques Bleus*?” asked Gregoire Ilunga.

“Is it true that Coquilhatville is nearer to the sun than Leopoldville?” asked Alphonse Mpolo.

“To an educated man all these problems and a thousand thousand more are child’s play,” the Sergeant declared. “I will satisfy your curiosity later.”

“It is good to be educated,” Remy Okito sighed from the back seat. “I have learned the French.” He shook his fellow private Gregoire Ilunga. Ilunga, half comatose with dope, sat up and grinned at him.

“Ask me the name of *Nkoi*,” his friend commanded.

“*Nkoi*. Do not be foolish,” Gregoire’s reply was sleepy, but nevertheless full of certainty. “*Nkoi* is *Nkoi*.”

Remy grasped him by the shoulders. “Ask me,” he demanded, “the name of *Nkoi* in French.”

“The name of *Nkoi* in French? Ah, I see.” Gregoire gave himself a further shake. “Ah, I see. Remy I do not know, you will have to tell me the name of *Nkoi* in French.”

“*Léopard*,” Remy responded proudly.

“Without doubt,” his companion said, preparing to drift off again.

Remy tugged him upright. “Ask me the name of *Nyoka*.” Gregoire was growing impatient. “What is the name of *Nyoka*?”

“*Serpent!*” Remy cried triumphantly. “Have a sip of the wine, Gregoire.”

“The French is so difficult,” Gregoire sighed after he had drunk. He became more co-operative. “I once tried it, but found it beyond me.”

“One must be unusually clever,” Remy consoled him. “Ask me the name of *Nzoku*.”

“What is the name of *Nzoku*?” Gregoire demanded obediently.

“*Eléphant!*” Remy shouted. “*Eléphant!* Aha! You thought you would fool me, but it is *Eléphant*.”

Suddenly the car stopped. The hulking figure of the Sergeant, towered over them and overwhelmed them like a night-blackened Braculbea tree.

“Silence!” the Sergeant thundered.

They were at once so silent that their silence could almost be heard.

“Ask me the name of *Nkosi!*” the Sergeant thundered now.

“What is the name of *Nkosi?*” Gregoire quavered.

“*Lion,*” the Sergeant replied.

The two men in the back seat sank back in relief. But they were jolted up at once.

“Ask the name of the lion!” the towering treelike figure bellowed down on them.

Remy and Gregoire implored with their frightened eyes, each begging the other to take the risk of speaking first. The only name for lion they knew had been said already and each feared falling into some awful and cruelly punishable error.

“Ask me the name of *Nkosi,*” the Sergeant roared insistently. “Ask the name of the lion!”

There was still no sound from the back seat but the stifled lack of sound.

“Pah!” the Sergeant spat at them. “*Mbwa* does not know the name of *Nkosi*. *Busu* does not know the name of *Nkosi*. *Nkema* does not know the name of *Nkosi*. The dog does not know the name of the lion. The cat does not know the name of the lion. The monkey does not know the name of the lion.”

Still none dared interrupt or applaud.

“Then I will tell you,” Albert Tshibangu said majestically.

“The name of the lion is Albert Tshibangu.”

“It is truly so,” Remy Okito quavered in sudden relief. “Without doubt!” cried Gregoire Ilunga. “Only the lion knows the name of the lion,” added Alphonse Mpolo.

“It is more than a question of words,” Albert Tshibangu informed them forgivingly. “It is more than changing the Lingala to the French. How shall we save the district of Mgonga? How shall we rescue our sacred home?”

“Alas, how?” Gregoire Ilunga was drowsing off again.

The Sergeant's voice rose up and towered anew. "How shall we rescue our fathers and our mothers?" His words rebounded from the corridor of the jungle.

"My mother is already dead of a snake," Remy Okito told them sadly.

"Be silent! How shall we rescue the district of Mgonga?"

"It will be most difficult," Gregoire Ilunga ventured sleepily, feeling surreptitiously on the floor for the reserve of wine.

"The lion will rescue. Tshibangu will rescue." The Sergeant gathered strength from his rhetoric as a warrior gathering strength from the earth. "I shall proclaim Mgonga to be a separate state. All shall be free. All shall be serene. I will be the president."

"I agree!" said Alphonse Mpolo.

"Did not Patrice Lumumba once command all the Congo?" the Sergeant declaimed. "Does not Joseph Kasavubu command it now? Do not Antoine Gizenga and Moise Tshombe and Albert Kalonji rule the lands of their ancestors? Has not Joseph Mobutu, a sergeant even as me, been lord of them all?"

"All this is most true," said Alphonse Mpolo, and none offered dissent.

"This will be the greatest rising of all," the Sergeant promised them. "The hunters and warriors will rush behind us, rush ahead of us, rush as the highest wind. The oldest man will take up his spear once more, the youngest boy will grasp a bow. My father is the headman of a village. My father and my village will be in the forefront with me."

"My uncle is a headman!" shouted Gregoire Ilunga from the back seat. "My uncle has four brothers and eight sons. All will be at our side."

"My father has killed twelve leopards," shouted Remy Okito. "He has killed three mighty men of the Bwaka."

"In the years far gone," Alphonse Mpolo boasted, "two Banza men stole a goat from my village. The men of my village crept upon their village at night and killed and burned all that was there, all the huts, all the people, all the goats and chickens and cattle. *Les Belges* sent three soldiers to my village and they too were killed and burned. At last *les Belges* sent forty men with great guns and cars of steel, but the men of the village had stolen into the jungle. There was nothing for *les Belges* to do but ask foolish questions of the women."

“That is what we shall require,” the Sergeant said. “We require brave men and clever men, from brave and clever tribes and villages. I appoint you Alphonse Mpolo, as premier.”

“Let us toast the premier,” said Gregoire Ilunga, raising the reserve jar of wine.

“But first let us toast the president,” Alphonse Mpolo interjected carefully.

Chapter 5

Felicien Songolo had felt a half-guilty respect for many white men; none stronger than for the one walking beside him, easily and noiselessly across the rolling plain.

They were a yard or two apart. Songolo moved closer to make himself heard. "We met as enemies and will no doubt part as enemies," he said in his weirdly smooth and donnish English.

"I never regret my enemies," Sierra said, not quite seriously. "Sometimes my friends, but never my enemies."

"A fair enough point."

"Besides, you're being presumptuous. I've had a lot of good enemies in my life and I don't take on new ones carelessly. State your qualifications." Even in the unknown night, proceeding across the strange, billowing land-sea toward an uncertain morning, the indestructible *I* of Ramón Sierra was as active as ever. Songolo still found himself drawn to it.

"My qualifications?" the African said. "How else can I begin except by stating just the simple fact that I am black. Oh, I know you're too sophisticated to let that count in any conscious way, but it's just as much there with you as with me."

"Maybe. I've never been sure, but maybe."

"And yet you've taken it on yourself to run our poor backward country in your own rich, enlightened way."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. Look, Songolo, if you get through the next twelve hours alive it will be my fault, not yours. That's what I'm doing here."

"No doubt we shall see," Songolo replied with dignity. "Perhaps if you get through it will be my fault."

Sierra missed the note of hurt and rushed on angrily. "It's too God-damned bad we couldn't thresh this thing out while we were picking the onions out of our glasses at the Waldorf or in the Delegates Lounge in New York. Right now I have no taste for philosophy. I just want to get around this next anthill."

Songolo drew away again and walked on through the night in solitude. His life had been full of self-reproach and he did not lack for it now. The

rebuff by the man from the U.N. had been clearly earned. How was the man from the U.N. to know an African's great and special shafts of fear, the special need for discourse. To tell this man, outright, of the three ritual murders he had seen in person would have been an act of boastfulness or disloyalty. It would, nevertheless, have eased the passage to the dawn. But the opportunity was gone and Felicien Songolo was once more alone.

In his village they had always said, laughing mischievously but without malice—indeed admiringly—that a Belge had known the mother of his mother. Sometimes in the clean little stream that ran past the village on the way to the Congo, the other children had teased and coaxed him to look for the sign of the *Belge*. There he had often studied his image, but he had never been certain; one day hoped, another day feared.

When the Capucins came he was still not sure. But his studies went so well, he was so far in advance of the other children, that he wondered again if there was something different in him.

He went to Brother Bernard, a vast and important but kindly man in a tan bush hat and greasy once-clean gown. Brother Bernard appeared in the forest clearing only once a week and to obtain his attention was not easy.

The friar made a solemn inspection of Felicien's solemn eight-year-old face. "Not a drop of *Belge*," he pronounced. "You are a true and total Congolese."

Felicien burst into tears. "Then I can never have the learning."

Brother Bernard comforted him. "You can, you can."

And then Brother Bernard looked at him again and made the vow. "The world is hard, Felicien, but it is not impossible, and you are a very intelligent boy—if you will work, I will see that you obtain as much learning as I have obtained myself. Yes, as much and more."

Brother Bernard proved to be a brilliant and indefatigable nag. By being imperious with the boy and difficult with the authorities he got Felicien into Lovanium in Leopoldville. Then to Louvain itself in Belgium. Felicien made Cambridge largely on his own efforts.

At the Independence he was one of the famous seventeen. Of the perhaps fifty million natives who had passed through the Belgians' hands since the time of old Leo, only seventeen had been through university and he, Felicien Songolo, was one of them.

In the last years of the Belgian times he, Felicien Songolo, had come to enjoy—*enjoy* was the exact word, he admitted in his moments of self-recrimination—a special place in the rising times of the Congo. He became secretary of one of the young political parties. When he was offered the position of Assistant Commissioner-General of Public Works, an unheard-of honor, he fled to his village and then to the nearby mission and Brother Bernard. He did not know for certain whether he felt proud or foolish in his pants from Selfridge’s and his shirt from a bargain store in Antwerp.

Brother Bernard was now gray and both his beard and his paunch had thinned. Felicien’s awe of him had, of course, diminished since their first encounter twenty years before, but his love was unimpaired.

“So now,” the old friar said, “—no doubt your Cambridge training will have made you familiar with the expression—you must decide whether to lick us or join us.”

“The hell of it,” Felicien said, “is that I don’t really want to lick anybody.”

“But you’re afraid of this job, just the same. You’re afraid it will seem you’ve joined us.”

“When you put it that way you make me seem like a cheap opportunist,” Felicien bridled. “There are great advantages, I’ll admit, to being an *evolué*. In the entire history of this country, I suppose I am the only man born here who has attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace, seen both the cathedrals of Chartres and Salisbury, talked to the Crown Prince of Belgium, read Keats in manuscript, seen Hamlet played in Brussels, and slept with a peroxide blonde from Soho. There are, however, some drawbacks. The very word *evolué* smacks too much of Darwin; I’m a little fed up with being introduced to visiting members of Parliament, journalists, and commissions as a product of the new, progressive policy toward the new, progressive savages.”

“And possibly—just possibly—wary of the ultimate consequences for yourself?”

“I knew you’d get around to that,” Felicien said almost eagerly. “That’s why I came to you. I suppose I do want it both ways. But even settling for only one is no cinch.”

“I’d quit torturing myself,” the friar said. “Toss a coin if you like. If you take this job you can do a great deal of good for your people, not so much in the job itself as in showing you can do it. You can also do them some harm,

for you'll always be a little suspect and a little vulnerable and your later use may be damaged.”

“Exactly,” Felicien said unhappily.

Brother Bernard found a bottle of Campari and they relaxed a moment before Felicien left. “You’ll do the best you can.” When they parted he seemed no less melancholy than the young black wanderer.

Songolo had accepted the Belgian job, not quite trusting his own motives. What both he and the friar had foreseen took place. At the Independence he found himself at first thrust into one cabinet post and then into two. In one of the *coups d'état* he held, briefly, three. There was one wild period of almost a week when the leaders of three main tribes and two main provinces were simultaneously urging him to seize the presidential palace.

He sought Brother Bernard again. “Since last Sunday eight of my best friends have been brutally killed by six of my other best friends. I have come to the conclusion that the survivors who don’t ultimately kill each other will ultimately kill me. I wish I could stop worrying about this, but at least I accept it. So what shall I do in the time that is left?”

“I refused to advise you before,” Brother Bernard said. “Now I will. You are one of the gentle creatures, Felicien. You are not tough enough or cruel enough for these tough and cruel days. Guide them if you can. Don’t try to command them. And you’re likely right. They likely will kill you. Still, man is immortal only in the soul.”

“Yes, but the way our people do it, it hurts.” The remark would have gone better in one of his more detached and civilized homelands, better, probably, in England than in Belgium, but better in either place than here. Brother Bernard’s smile was not wholly appreciative.

“I don’t much admire your jokes, Felicien,” the friar scolded him. “But I will never lose faith in you yourself.”

He decided to do what his instinct told him; what, he was certain, Brother Bernard had been telling him to do anyway. Conserve his courage against greater emergencies to come. He would remain a little in the background for now. He would wait and defend the Congolese most vigorously when they most needed defending and when he was still fresh and strong and not impossibly frightened.

But how, for God’s sake, how? How he yearned for the simple clash of Tours and Agincourt and Flodden Field and Gettysburg, where spears and

bows and claymores and muskets collided in a clearer kind of air. The barricades in this wild and lovely land were so hard to find and stake out. Protect the Congo against the world; wage war for the Congo against all who came. But first—oh, sadly, first—wage war for the Baluba against the Lulua, the Tumba against the Bolia, the Walengulo against the Mituku. Where would a Lincoln or a Charlemagne plant his standard here? The Lincolns and the Charlemagnes had at least a single goal and adversary.

Sierra, the Spaniard, with his finely chiseled causes and clear-cut wars behind him could afford to make epigrams about his friends and enemies. Yet Songolo still felt a great yearning for the other man's regard. He would be a good man to fight beside, if fighting was necessary. A good man to hear a new symphony with or discuss the plays of the Greeks, a good man to introduce to Brother Bernard. But none of these things was possible and so, like the doctor and the nurse ahead of them, these two walked on in silence.

Further ahead Chartrand and his girl had stopped in the shadow of an umbrella tree. When the others had caught up, Chartrand said in a low, unhurried voice, "Astrid has just heard a shot from the direction of the road."

"How far away?" Sierra asked.

"She thinks an hour by foot, ten minutes by car. It's hard to judge for she can't be sure how many trees it may have come through. But she says she undoubtedly heard a shot and her ears are very good."

Astrid beamed on them through the lustrous shadows. She had, on the whole, been enjoying the adventure and she enjoyed it all the more now that, in a sense, she had become the center of it.

"Yes, messieurs," she said in rather officious French, claiming the right to speak for her ears herself, "the Gombe hear best in Gombe country, and I have undoubtedly heard a shot."

Indubitablement. It was a tour de force. She would not have dared to try it had the effect of her two predinner drinks not still lingered, but it came out well and confidently. She sensed their surprise and was momentarily a good deal more pleased with her rendition of the word than with her hearing of the shot.

She had, thus far, no sense of fear and this gave her another temporary advantage. She was not certain of the man from *Onee*, whose demeanor was that of a chief but who might still, as chiefs sometimes did, betray a secret, last-minute cowardice when they came to put the knives upon him. Her

grandfather had been one of these—as stern, mighty, and unassailable as the summer sun. The tribe that seized him had obliged her, as a seven-year-old granddaughter, to watch. On that long day she lost him twice: once the lean, proud body, once the strong, proud heart.

If the man from *Onee* was frightened he had concealed it. As for the others, she could scent their fear and their vain suppression of it as surely as the jungle scents just left behind.

The one she felt the greatest compassion for was Monsieur Chartrand. He had been good to her, better and more generous than any of the others she had known. For a white man, he was as manly as could be expected. She was pleased in this moment that he had called on her for what help she could give them all. For herself, she was in her own country and had no cause for nervousness. Even the men pursuing them, most of them at any rate, were of her own tribe.

She had kicked off her thong sandals shortly after they left the road. It was good to be barefoot again, even though her soles had lost a little of their toughness and the grass was not as easy on them as it once had been.

It was on these same bare feet that she had come into the town to celebrate the Independence. Who could say how old she was? Who could know? Her mother was a good woman, but would a good woman waste her life on counting?

In the joyous, ringing street, a soldier had grasped her wrist. “Come!” he commanded.

“I cannot,” she had said. “I must return to my village.”

She never returned to her village. She met several other soldiers of the Congolese National Army, and then a white merchant or two, and then Jacques Chartrand.

Monsieur Chartrand took her in his large Europe-smelling car to his large empty house. He showed her all around it, showed her the rows of books and told her she could read them at will, showed her the bright pictures on the walls, showed her the miraculous implements in the kitchen, the machine that made ice, the one that made fire without even seeming to.

When he took her to the big soft bedroom she knew at once that it belonged to another woman. She had not yet been instructed in jealousy, but she still had her curiosity and she asked.

“Yes,” Monsieur Chartrand had said. “But she has been gone several months. It may be that she will return and it may be that I will go to her. But for now stay here and attend to me and I will attend to you.” He did not order, he asked. In the months since he had never ordered, except in a gentle coaxing way he used when he called her Astrid Cleopatra Lolita Mahamba. He had been good to her when she was frightened and now that he was frightened she was determined to be good to him.

She admired the way he concealed his fright. He was cool and haughty, as her grandfather had been; but remembering the changes that had so soon come over her grandfather, she pitied him and guessed what lay beneath.

“I do not think they can come across the plain in the cars,” she told them reassuringly. “And I know they have no good tracker with them.”

“Might it be that they would find a tracker in one of the villages?” Sierra asked.

“Yes.” She spoke deliberately, savoring her new seniority and acknowledged wisdom. “It could be done. But to track at night on the plains is very slow. If we go quickly they cannot keep up with us on foot, at least not until daybreak. Besides,” she added scornfully, “these are rich men behind us. The army pays them six thousand francs a month and puts their feet in great stiff boots. These rich sore-footed men will not desert their automobiles.”

Sierra chuckled. This would have been a good girl to have in Spain. He turned to Chartrand. “Monsieur?”

“I believe she is right. Why the shot was fired, who can tell? Perhaps some kind of warning when they found the sentry at the first checkpoint. Just as likely one of them left his safety catch off and shot himself by accident. Or perhaps one thought he spied a plump monkey in the trees. All we have discovered for certain is that they are still in pursuit and about ten kilos in our rear and almost surely still on the road.”

“Then there is no reason to change our own direction?”

“Not that I can see,” Chartrand said. “They surely do not know where we are at the moment, but just as surely they will know we are trying for the river. We must still hope they will try to intercept us upstream rather than downstream.”

“Then let us move on,” Sierra said. “I suggest we accelerate our pace.”

The shot had been quite unintended and Sergeant Tshibangu regretted it as much as anyone else.

The two jeeps had made a stop of convenience and the Sergeant had walked down the road to see to the state of Joseph Nijili. He had been thinking in the interstices of his larger planning that he need not have struck Joseph so hard. They had had many good days and nights together and even though Joseph had required to be struck, the Sergeant wished he could undo the original blow and repeat it more lightly.

He was pleased when he reached the rear jeep, to see Joseph sitting upright behind Emile Kwange, the driver.

“You are better now, Joseph?” His voice was truly solicitous and kind, not in the least chiding or sarcastic.

Joseph’s only answer was to put the back of his hand to his still-bloody face.

“You should have called me Sergeant, Joseph.”

“Yes, Sergeant,” Joseph replied full of bitterness and feigned deference.

“Joseph, I am no longer a Sergeant.”

“No, Sergeant.”

“Joseph, I am the President.”

“The President?”

“The President.”

“Yes, Monsieur le President.”

“Of all Mgonga.”

“Of all Mgonga.” Joseph like many small men, had always had a bad, unforgiving streak. The Sergeant tried again.

“Joseph, you shall be one of my army commanders.”

“One of your army commanders.” Joseph spat a little blood on the floor of the jeep.

“With a Cadillac and a chauffeur.”

“With a Cadillac and a chauffeur.”

“Like Kasavubu. Like Mobutu. Like Tshombe.”

“Like Kasavubu. Like Mobutu. Like Tshombe.”

It was unfortunate that Emile Kwange was within hearing. Otherwise they might have left the matter for settlement on a day when the Sergeant's blood was not so high and Joseph's not so sullen.

The Sergeant grasped his friend by the shoulders and dragged him to the road. Then he struck him another deadening blow full in the face. "Give me your gun," he said to Emile Kwange. He lurched a little as he bent down to fit the muzzle to Joseph Nijili's temple.

When the trigger had been pulled he stood up. "They shall pay, Joseph," he promised. "We will find them and they shall pay."

Chapter 6

They were walking so quietly across the savanna that when Mary fell she was on her feet at once and going on.

Grant had caught her arm.

“No harm,” she said, but in another twenty steps it was apparent there was. She had no real sensation of pain, but the hurt leg would not work. Her steps on it grew shorter and more useless.

How noble people could be when there was no real call on their nobility. She'd have settled this predicament easily in an essay for the Canadian Girls in Training or the Brownies or Girl Guides. *Your boat is sinking, et cetera, et cetera. Whom do you save? Or let me go et cetera and rescue those you can.*

In spite of Grant's help her ankle was becoming more troublesome by the second. “Oh, God,” she sobbed, “I can't walk. Don't leave me!” Gone were the Canadian Girls in Training, gone the Brownies and Girl Guides, gone the nobility and the splendid essays. Gone the reliant, reliable, brave daughter of a reliant brave father. Gone the staunch sister of staunch brothers.

“I won't leave you,” Grant said. She knew he meant it and took some comfort.

They had had to stop and Sierra and Songolo caught up again.

“Put your arm across my back and put the other across the back of Dr. Grant,” Sierra commanded.

They went on a little more slowly. The two backs against her arms were hard and strong.

“I believe you said at dinner, mademoiselle, that you were born in the West. Calgary, was it? I know your country slightly.”

“The North. Sudbury.”

“Ah, well. It is not as if it were a matter of choice.”

“What will they do to us?”

“Nothing,” Sierra said. “Nothing at all. Nothing whatsoever.”

“Then why—”

“We must pay them the compliment of running. They would be offended if we didn’t. By morning they will have forgotten what it’s all about. But for now we must observe the niceties.”

She hobbled on between the two hard strong men.

One of the consolations the equator denies to those who must live beside it is a short night or, if they prefer, a short day. The nights and days divide precisely. The sun swoops up and crashes down at six o’clock and in each case the warning is very short.

The dawn arrived on them with merciless haste. They had made good time through the remnants of the night. They finished the water; Sierra thought this was no time for saving luggage, and Chartrand said they would find more ahead. The men took turns in helping Miss Kelvin, whose foot was now swollen and loggish. Once when Chartrand stumbled on a protruding root his girl rushed across and took his place at the other woman’s side.

Songolo had been on the other side and he remained there and for a while Mary was assisted by the two Congolese. They would not speak to each other. It had been apparent at dinner that Songolo was ashamed of the girl and she could not conceal her awe of him and her resentment of her awe. It seemed ridiculous to think that the awkward dinner was going on, and Mary had no gift for table conversation anyway; but the need to hear and be heard would not be quieted. At one side the Gombe girl was as lissome as a thong and so full of life she could not be ignored.

“I think”—Mary broke stride on a ripple in the ground—“they said your name is Astrid.”

“Astrid,” the girl echoed as though sharing a pleasant discovery. “Yes, Astrid. Your foot goes well?” she added.

Mary could not know whether her little note of patronage was being returned or not. She stiffened a little and limped on.

Soon the wiry girl beneath her arm reopened the conversation, full of friendly curiosity.

“You smell well, madame,” the African girl announced.

“Pardon?” Mary inquired.

“It is not often that Europeans smell well,” the girl resumed. “Perhaps you would tell me the name of your essence.”

“Essence. Oh yes. It is a Langevin, I forgot exactly which.”

“Langy-vin. My friend has me apport myself in one called Channel. Yours is more pleasing.”

“Thank you,” Mary said.

“One would scarcely know, in the darkness, that you are a European. Do you find the doctor agreeable?”

“The doctor?”

“I have had among my friends a doctor from France. He was not agreeable in the least.”

“Dr. Grant is not my friend,” Mary said primly.

“Do not despair, madame,” the Gombe girl consoled her. “I observed him studying you at dinner in a most amiable way.”

Songolo, helping on the other side, had not been able to avoid hearing and his sense of outrage and disgrace overcame his reluctance to interrupt.

“I have no doubt, mademoiselle,” he broke in, “that you are familiar with the works of Jean-Paul Sartre.”

“Well, in a way,” Mary said.

“It is unfortunate that nothing of this level has been produced in Belgium. Is that not your feeling?”

“I am truly not an authority,” she apologized. She turned to the Gombe girl, hoping the simpler, more interesting subject might be reopened.

They went on across the savanna.

“In my opinion,” Songolo said, “there is nothing retrograde in Sartre.” The Gombe girl was now expelled, but only briefly.

“I have just heard another shot,” she said.

Chapter 7

Astrid had not heard a shot, for after the first there had been no other one. But it was still a brilliant inspiration.

Songolo spoke to her for the first time.

“You are certain?”

“*Absolument.*”

It was the second big French word she had used and it sang as handsomely as the other.

But in a while the shots did arrive. Sergeant Tshibangu came upon the bound sentry at the checkpoint and released him in a mounting rage.

“This discloses!” he cried in a fury of excitement to his premier, Alphonse Mpolo. “It discloses everything.”

“Yes,” Alphonse Mpolo echoed. “Everything.”

The Sergeant bundled the sentry back to freedom and rushed again into the leading jeep.

As they drove away the Sergeant fired his gun three times into the nearby trees. He also kept his jeep in second gear, making it as noisy as possible. “They will know!” he shouted to Alphonse Mpolo above the motor.

When the sounds reached them Sierra hurried ahead and took Chartrand’s arm. “Do you think they have left the road?” he asked.

“I still do not think they will leave the road. As Astrid has said they are rich and have confining shoes. At the moment I think they are only offering us some harmless terrorism.” Sierra dropped back again and in a few minutes Songolo rejoined him.

The day was awakening, flat and hot. In the first intimations of its torpor the life around them was falling to sleep or going to ground. The stars vanished and the sun shot up its first cruel signal pennants.

“What is your belief, monsieur?” Songolo asked. “Should we take cover for the day or try at once for the river?”

“The Belgian tells me we can reach the river in two hours. We must continue. Tomorrow will not do. There will be too much heat and thirst.”

Ahead Grant and Chartrand were now assisting Miss Kelvin. Her steps had grown more labored, but she still refused to falter.

“We shall be at the river by eight hours,” the Spaniard assured the Congolese.

“I have decided not to cross with you,” Songolo said.

“It would be advisable.”

“At the same time,” Songolo said in his gentle Cambridge voice, “I have other things to consider.”

“What are you aiming for?” Sierra asked him with a trace of cynicism.

“Not what you think. At least I hope not.”

“You are positive?”

“All I said was I hoped. You think all that would keep me here is ambition. All I say is that I hope not.”

“Then cross the Ubangi with us.” In the little, unplanned instant of affinity Sierra spoke with warmth.

“No. It is harder to return than to leave.”

“It depends on what you’re leaving.” But Sierra’s heart was not in his words. His very bones ached from the old and desperate climb across the Pyrenees and his heart ached for the last look he had had more than half a life ago when he began the descent to Perpignan. It had been a high clear sunset that last night and below the final range of the mountains two towns gleamed on their separate heights as white and silent as ancient ravished virgins.

He had had a fresh wound in the upper thigh and when he left his country he was reduced to using his old and empty musket as a crutch. He paused on the last great ridge. The man who had been his driver in the brimming days when they had a car as well as bullets paused beside him.

“Do you think, Ramón,” the driver asked the General, “that we shall traverse this pass again?”

The General had leaned on his musket and looked once more on the great crags and valleys beneath.

“It is hard to say.”

“It is even hard to think about.”

“There will be time to think,” Sierra said, and they began the long slow walk down into France.

Now he turned to the African. “What after all is a country? I have lost mine. You will lose yours.”

“Not willingly.”

“Nor did I.”

“What was it O’Casey said?” the African mused. “Many an institution has a right and reason to be proud of many a man, but no man has a right to be proud of any institution.”

“Damned nonsense,” Sierra said.

“O’Casey gives you something to argue about.”

“So you’re half accepting his argument and half refusing it all at once,” Sierra said. “You’re proud of your institution, prouder than of yourself.”

“It is a great mischance that we cannot find a convenient log on which to ponder this,” Songolo reflected. “I am not, by the way, a my-country-right-or-wronger.”

“But you’ll stay here, stay here and let some hoodlum—”

“Not a hoodlum,” Songolo interrupted. For all its sarcasm there was an underlying note of defiant earnestness and yearning. “A fellow member of our new society.”

“I won’t brag,” Sierra said. “At least I won’t brag any more than I can help. But when they started chasing me out of my country I had the guts to keep on going. It wasn’t easy.”

“Ah,” the African said. “There you had the advantage of me. You had a country to leave.”

“Do you really feel that this place has the makings of a country?”

“Look at it and draw it into your lungs.”

“We are all running out of sense. You look at a place and draw it into your lungs and it becomes your religion. Then you start another war. All right then, not just you. We. Everybody. The God-damned Spaniards. The

God-damned Congolese. Those God-damned Canadians up ahead. The God-damned Russians and the God-damned Americans and the God-damned Germans and the God-damned Japs. Everybody. Geography becomes God and in its holy name we start another war.”

“Here,” Songolo answered, with a sorrowful half laugh, “it is not so complicated. We start another war just because the old one is over.”

“And that is why you’re staying here?”

“One of the reasons. Not the sole one, but one of them. There is a faint and fleeting chance that at last my people’s quaint lust for blood will end. Perhaps I could help to end it. Perhaps they are not yet too civilized to learn.”

“Perhaps I owe you an apology,” Sierra said.

“Conserve it,” Songolo replied. “It has not been earned as yet.”

“We have no log,” the Spaniard said, “and no time to sit on it anyway. It may not be long before we meet your compatriots.”

“Yes, my compatriots,” Songolo acknowledged. “I will take my chances with them, however slim.”

“God-damn it, I had no choice. None at all!”

“I know that. But I still have a choice.”

Sierra put his hand on the African’s arm. “Come with us,” he urged. “You can be back in a week. We’ll cross the river and make our way to Brazza and then to Leo.”

“What you say about the folly of substituting geography for God may be true,” Songolo said. “Just the same, I will not be driven out of my own country by my own people. I have too great an investment in it. My great-grandfather was dragged away from the coast as a slave. My great-grandmother was eaten by an enemy tribe. Two of my great-uncles were butchered by the Belgians. I have been pushed off many sidewalks.”

“And this,” Sierra reflected, “is how patriots and nationalists are made.”

“In your case it was different?”

“Not much,” the Spaniard admitted.

“It would be of interest to know what the Canadians ahead there feel,” Songolo suggested.

“The same as us no doubt. They too see sanctity in lines on a map.”

“Why, after all, not?” the African speculated. “It is always the big tribe that lectures the small tribe on the sins of tribalism. The big tribe seldom lectures the small tribe on the costs of vassalage.”

“I never thought I belonged to a tribe,” the Spaniard said. “I thought I belonged to an idea.”

“Oh, don’t think for an instant the tribe is failing in ideas,” the African counseled him. “The beauty of the jungle, the valor of the jungle, the endlessness of the stars, the wisdom of the father, the love of the mother . . . we have ideas. They are said to be primitive ones, but whose are better?”

“I had better go and see if the young nurse needs more help,” Sierra said.

The old wounds were hurting now with an intensity he had not felt since he was little more than a boy. “*Long live death! Down with intelligence!*” The cries and slogans, the endless sea of faces—eager faces, stunned faces; sainted faces, evil faces; brave faces, cowardly faces—they were all in full pursuit of him again in this threatening dawn. Guernica and Barcelona, Granada and Valencia and Catalonia and the river Ebro followed him across this new and desperate plain. So did so many old friends and enemies, Gil Robles, Quepo de Llano, de Rivera, Franco, the stoneward woman called La Pasionaria.

And better by far than all of them a petal-soft woman called Consuelo. She fought with him and lived with him and, of course, slept with him, but had to die without him. It was, in the technical and literal sense, unavoidable, for there had been no way that morning for him to escape the duties of command. Just the same she died without him. Once he told the Irish girl about it, long after they had had their first child. “Don’t forget her,” his new wife said. “Don’t forget me either.”

He had thought until that very morning that they still would win. It had not been going well, but it had not been going impossibly. The soldiers—including, he regretted, his Consuelo and himself—were not totally clean. They were not as well fed as would have been desirable, but they were fed. They had not succumbed and they had some arms.

When they brought her body to his command post he said only, “Bury her!” Then he turned and gave an order to his artillery officer. Within a week he was on his way across the Pyrenees, forever.

“May I help?” he said politely when he caught up with Miss Kelvin. Grant and Chartrand were now assisting her.

At once he felt that she now was in pain, for he had walked in this way himself and helped others do the same.

“Doctor,” he said to Grant, “we have still at the least six kilometers and two hours ahead of us. We all need a rest.”

They sought shade behind an anthill. It was growing hotter by the instant. Mary put her drawn face between her knees, trying as well as she could to conceal her agony and despair. The Gombe girl uprooted a broad leaf of shrub and sat beside her and began fanning her.

Sierra beckoned the other three men to one side. “I believe we must somehow contrive a litter.”

“How and with what?” Chartrand asked practically.

Sierra pointed to a little oasis of higher vegetation almost a mile away. “If the heat continues it will soon be impossible for any two of us to carry her,” he said. “Let us take an hour now.”

Chartrand spoke a word of explanation to Astrid Mahamba and the four men set off together. In the clump of trees they found, not without some difficulty, four good branches and an assortment of vines and with the help of Sierra’s and Chartrand’s clasp knives they built a crude stretcher. By the time they were back the sun had gained a full hour on them.

Grant helped Mary to the stretcher. It was not easy going, for in their uncertainty and haste none had stopped to bring a hat. Astrid insisted on taking her turn at one of the four rough handles and it soon became so apparent she was standing up to the heat better than any of them that their masculine objections ceased. Songolo, the other African, was the only one who had started out in a jacket and tie. He showed no sign of discarding either of these badges of his estate, although he had loosened the tie. As he toiled on with the others he, too, was drenched and glistening with perspiration and his breath, like theirs, was running short.

At one of their pauses to change the handles on the litter, Mary insisted on getting down to try her leg again. She took one step and fell. She turned helplessly to Grant.

“Oh, God, Richard,” she said, “I can’t let you go on doing this.”

And yet she knew as well as the others that she could and must. If only they had silver bullets here, she thought forlornly—and insincerely, she was

obliged to remind herself as she lay at the core of their collected misery. She had had so little courage to begin; to have had it tried so fiercely and abruptly was a grotesque injustice. She lay down again and tried to shield her face from the morning sun.

They went down another rise of ground and up another and began passing a small glade of trees. The sun danced hotly on its edges and there was no chance to see what lay beyond.

In a few more steps, without the slightest sound, two bare figures appeared at the edge of the trees, as startled and frightened as they themselves. One was as gnarled and ropy as a drying vine, an old man of—what? fifty, sixty?—an old man beginning to wilt to the ground, but still stubbornly determined to stay erect. His rib-creased trunk and his bony shoulders were thrown a shade behind the perpendicular as though he knew his next concession to gravity and eternity would be his last. His only garment was a slender loin cloth. A recently killed monkey was hung around his neck by a leather thong and he held a bow in one hand and a few arrows in the other. His face was shrunk and flattened and eroded by years of heat and leanness, but he held his head as upright as he held his body.

The second man was younger. He too carried a slung monkey and a bow and arrows. After the first frozen instant of meeting, each of the hunters flung an arrow into his bowstring and the two took aim.

Sierra put down his corner of the litter.

“Remain!” he commanded over his shoulder. Then he took four or five unhurried steps ahead. His strong hard chest swelled a little under his faded khaki bush shirt and he presented it with seeming confidence to the bowmen.

“*Moninga*,” he said almost conversationally. “*Moninga na biso*.”

The hunters lowered their arrows a fraction of an inch and the Spaniard went ahead again, not hastily, but not in the least uncertainly. “*Moninga*,” he repeated reassuringly. “Friend.”

The hunters still did not put their bows down and Sierra now stopped and began to parley from a dozen feet away.

He would have preferred it if there had been no one behind him and no need to parley and—alas! no years since 1937. When he was younger and unencumbered it would have been easy to make a sudden lunge to the young

man's bow hand, break his arm, and twist him in front of the old man for a shield. But even if they were still agile enough, men of his seniority and position were no longer allowed to fight, nor to invite new danger to those behind. *L'Eglise des Temps Barbares*. In its barbarian times his first church had had fewer inhibitions.

He would parley if he could.

He counseled the old man to have no fear of them. To explain their presence and nature to these Equateur hunters in any rational terms was out of the question. Mary was trying to rise from the litter; Grant was bending over her; Songolo and Chartrand stood beside the two handles they had put on the ground and Astrid Mahamba stood a little to one side, as interested in these new developments as a curious small gazelle.

"The Belgian woman," Sierra told the hunters, "is my woman. She has been stricken very badly by the fever. We must get her somehow to the river and—"

Neither man replied.

"The other *Belges* are friends also. The two Congolese have consented to show us the way."

The older of the hunters made a gesture and the two disappeared into the glade as silently and mysteriously as they had come.

Sierra walked back and stooped to take the empty handle of the litter. But before they went on, Songolo drew him and Chartrand to the edge of the trees. "I don't pretend to know the tribes up here," Songolo said.

"These I think, are Gombe, or perhaps Sudanese. Before the Independence and before the United Nations"—Chartrand looked in open challenge from Songolo to Sierra—"they were among the most peaceable of all the tribes. But now, of course—" he went on more briskly, "they have gone back to their village to talk or perhaps consult the witch doctor or get more men. It would have been much better if they had not seen us. We must go a little faster."

"If the rest of you can manage the litter," Sierra suggested, "I shall go on ahead and watch for them. I suppose," he added, "I have Monsieur Songolo's permission to defend us if I must?"

Songolo put one sleeve of his soaked brown Dacron jacket across his eyes and blotted up a rising stream of sweat. "I cannot either give or withhold permission. If it's a question of consent the conditions are the

same. Do what you must if you can prove you must. But be sure there is no alternative.”

Sierra gave a fractional nod, disdaining to show his contempt. “I will stay in view, when I can. If you see a wave or any strange movement from me or from my direction take what cover you can.” He turned to Chartrand. “Do you know the village?”

“Not from this approach,” the Belgian said. “But it cannot be large and it is sure to be on our right, at or near the road. If the villagers decide to intercept us they might try on the road, where the soldiers are.”

“But they’ll likely come across this way.”

“Almost surely.”

“We can’t return to the road. We’ll keep on in this direction.”

Sierra started off.

“One moment.” Chartrand hurried a few steps after him, then reached and handed him his own heavy clasp knife. “I noticed that mine is better than yours,” he said. “Let us exchange.”

“A good idea,” Sierra replied.

His confidence had been a little shaken by the advent of the two hunters, but after the instinct of a good general he had done his best to keep his misgivings to himself. He was still, however, self-assured, or perhaps a better word would have been vain. Barely two months ago he had stood in a glade far more forbidding than this and talked a band of Lulus and a band of Balubas into a species or at least a counterfeit of peace. His whole life had been entangled with and ceaselessly jeopardized by the lives of aliens—aliens in his native home, aliens in Manhattan and Washington, in France and Holland and Germany and Korea, aliens in bureaus and committee rooms and spacious chambers, aliens in mountain passes and dark forests and burning plains. Some had repulsed him, but none had defeated him and he had no intention of being defeated here. He opened Chartrand’s good clasp knife and held it open in his hand. He did not expect to use it, but it was best to have it ready.

He perceived now that he had allowed the man in Leo to cut his hair too short. It was still strong hair, the black-gray color of pepper sand when the surf is running, and there was still enough of it, but it was not giving him enough protection from the sun. As he hurried to gain a lead on the others,

he had a tiny spell of faintness. He tried to ignore it as he always had tried to ignore his weaknesses and soon it passed.

He looked back and saw the others toiling after him, Chartrand and the Gombe girl at the front of the stretcher, Songolo and the doctor at the back, and the nurse huddled almost out of sight on top.

How, he wondered, as the faintness passed, would these have fared on the longer, earlier flight to Boulow? How at Bilbao, Guadalajara, Malaga? How at Madrid? There had not been time to make a proper guess, but in the few hours since their departure from the hospital there had been time to begin a guess. The doctor, he thought, would fight to the limit of his bravery and endurance, but not beyond. If the judgment was correct nothing either favorable or unfavorable attached to it. Most men fought to their limits and only a very few could go beyond. He had seen some do so and once or twice he had done so himself, but only when he was much younger. He saw no need either to applaud or reproach the doctor.

The nurse had not done well, but no doubt she was, indeed, in extremity. Besides, he reflected, it was unrealistic to expect much of the pale people of the world, of the Nordics and Anglo-Saxons. They were stalwart, but not very daring. They were good endurers, but bad adventurers. Who found their greatest stronghold, sailing boldly across the rim of the world? One of ours. Who inherited it? Theirs. The pale people in their chaste pilgrim clothes, with their chaste diluted pilgrim souls. Good endurers, but the pale people lacked the joys and hurts of passion.

He had struck Consuelo only once in their long year together. Then he himself had been stricken so badly with his shame and the sin against his love for her that he lowered his head. She came to him and lifted it again with her own brown hands. Her mouth was still bleeding.

“Do not grieve Ramón,” she said. “We all must be angry sometimes. I will be angry later,” And so she was, magnificently so, almost four days later when they had succeeded in disengaging from the enemy and found shelter in a cave. And then for an hour she was magnificently loving. It was not reasonable to expect such feats of passion from the pale people.

The active part of Sierra’s mind was concentrated on the little swells of ground, the anthills, and the clumps of growth in the savanna. He saw little cause for stealth, for if anyone ahead was watching there was no way to avoid being seen. The knife in his hand had a good heft to it and his meditations were almost as pleasing as a long argument with good arguers in the Delegates Lounge.

He was loading the argument against the pale people. Where is your Goya? Where is your Velasquez? Where is your Picasso? “Why, my dear sir, allow me to call your attention to the splendid landscapes of Mr. Turner, R.A. Not to mention Mr. Landseer, also R.A.”

Aha! And where are your poets?

“We have Mr. Tennyson. We have Mr. Longfellow. We have even Mr. Yeats and Mr. Eliot.”

Aha! And where are your composers?

They would fall certainly into the trap.

“Mozart,” they would say.

Aha! All mind and fingers, no heart and fists. He made a note to read more about the American Civil War. His own first war had been ghastly and unforgivable, but at least it had been a thorough Latin war, uncluttered by politeness and forgiveness.

So much for the nurse. She would have made an excellent wife for Mr. Turner, R.A. With the sweat now pouring down his face, Sierra grinned at his own circuitousness and tasted the hot salt on his lips. The doctor, he thought again, would be all right. All right, but that was all, and of what special use was a doctor anyway? If they had trouble there would be no occasion or opportunity to set up an operating room. The doctor would have to function as a man, devoid of his degrees and artifices.

His speculations were foolish, he knew, a striving for a womb grown dry and barren. But it was a hot, hard day and he was not sure how or even if it would end and he continued to indulge himself as he led the way over the savanna. Despite his ruminations his eyes, his ears, and his knife were open. He had to suppress an outright, happy laugh. Once in the mountains his lovely, earth-stained and forever departed Consuelo had laughed as happily at another aphorism. “Never mind that about keeping the bowels open. Keep the fly open.” The Nordics never talked like that. Consuelo often did, and so, sometimes did the Irish girl, the mother of his children. But the pale women—unthinkable! never!

He slowed a little to survey another glade. He could not be sure what was hidden within, but there was no choice except to proceed. In a moment he resumed the pastime of making an inventory of his companions. He had come to a good opinion of the Belgian. In this strange assemblage the Belgian was the only honest primitive. If he searched his family tree he would no doubt find at least some subsidiary link to the primitive colonizer,

old King Leo. Of all of them perhaps only the Belgian knew precisely who he was and where he was and what he was prepared to do about it. He had a personal stake here and the toughness and the ingenuity to sell it dearly. He had Chartrand's knife and Chartrand had his knife; if this could not make them friends it could make them fellows. In the older struggles, to give your knife or gun away was as important an act as to give your woman away. There would, Sierra concluded, be no real chance to fight, but if one should arise the Belgian would not be a disappointment.

He dismissed the Congolese girl as an innocent camp follower. Songolo, of course, was more complicated, he had begun to realize. What a pleasure it would have been to sit down and really twist wrists with this man over a platter of *cosa-cosa* and a bottle of decent Beaujolais. What a—in spite of the staggering heat he nearly laughed aloud at the incongruity of his thoughts and the Madison Avenue word—what a *challenge* to dine with him and thump tables in the discreet night air.

“Songolo,” he'd have said, “I don't give a damn how good you are on Keats or Walt Whitman or how closely you've been following C. P. Snow. What are you doing right at this place, right at this minute?”

“Well,” Songolo would have to say, “I am protecting the interests of the Congolese Republic.”

“Good,” Sierra would have to say. “How?”

“Well,” Songolo would have to say. “I am (a) trying to see that none of my countrymen injures you, (b) that you injure none of my countrymen, and additionally and quite as importantly (c) that no one of any nationality whatever injures me.”

“A good platform,” Sierra would be able to say. “When you become head of the government I hope they make me U.S. ambassador.”

They had more in common than at first became apparent. They were both displaced persons in a sense—one the intellectual made captive by the men of action, one the man of action made captive by the intellectual. He, Sierra, the born and trained musician, had not written a scrap of music in more than twenty years; he was too busy fighting wars. The other man, the born warrior and hunter, had not been near a war or a hunt for even longer; he was too busy filling up his head. Here was the longhair with his barbarous blade of steel. There was the savage with his Jermyn Street shoes and his Bond Street suit and the Regent Street haberdashery. Not a bad world to be in, just the same, for both of them. In order to stay in it Sierra

had been under many kinds of duress and had shed some blood and he still meant to stay as long as he decently could.

He was still walking with care but some speed, pausing every now and then to turn and make certain that the others were continuing too.

He descended into a small dip in the ground and came out before a few Mgonga trees. His watchfulness might have been impaired by the thunderous heat. As he came up the little rise he found that in utter silence half a dozen bowmen had sprung from amid the trees. Two were the old man and the young man they had met before. There was no uncertainty in them now. All six were within a dozen yards of him, with their bows held high, forming a ring. The stretcher party behind were in plain sight and the old native African waved them imperiously in. Chartrand was on one side of the front handles and his voice carried clearly across the two hundred yards of flat and tepid air. "*Ca va rien*," he could be heard to say as he tightened his hold on the litter. "We might as well."

When they reached Sierra the six tribesmen stood back. Chartrand, Astrid, Songolo, and Dr. Grant put the stretcher down. Mary Kelvin pulled herself partly up and looked around through her private, special haze of heat and pain.

The six bowmen closed in until they were like the stakes of a little compound. Astrid Mahamba's eyes were wide and gleaming. Chartrand moved toward her. Mary, on the litter, turned her head away. Grant took her hand. Songolo stood a little apart, quite erect. The bowmen drew back their strings a little, waiting for the command.

With the sudden agility of an animal, Sierra made two incredibly swift leaps with his knife held high. The old Congolese man's startled arrow went over his head and then Sierra was behind the old man with his knife at his back and the old man's body between him and the other bowmen. He had the old man's bow hand clasped and twisted up against his spine.

"Now!" he shouted to the other five, all of them with their bows still aimed, but frozen by shock. "Now!" Sierra shouted. "Now! Now you want killing. Let us have it then!"

The chief's bow fell into the dust and he gave a quavering order to the other bowmen. They lowered their bows. "Put them on the ground," Sierra commanded. The chief spoke again. His five companions dropped their weapons and stood staring at each other, abashed and wholly confused.

Sierra's voice was like a trumpet. "Tell your men to go back to the village. Tell them to remain there. Tell them to speak with no one. Tell them we are not their enemies and tell them you will be allowed to return to them in safety and honor. Tell them too that if anyone should die here you will be among them."

The chief spoke again.

"Tell them, too," Sierra commanded, "that it is of no use to try to surprise us later with poisoned arrows. As you have seen I am not slow and my knife is very sharp. Whatever happens you shall live a few seconds less than I."

"Yes, yes," the old chief said.

His fellow tribesmen melted away into the Mgonga trees. Sierra took the chief by his naked arm. He did not make a display of the knife, but the chief was fully aware of its presence. They proceeded together step by step, with the others behind them.

With each of their steps Sierra felt the gaunt and ropy old man's humiliation; this man would never again be what he once had been, either in his own eyes or in the eyes of his village, and his heavy despair burdened his every movement.

"Father and brother," Sierra said, "I am your friend."

The other man turned his eyes away in self-hatred.

"Father," Sierra said in a comforting voice. "How many leopards have you slain?"

The old man lifted his eyes for an instant. "None."

"You have slain a hundred."

"None."

The older man was weeping. "You have slain many leopards," Sierra reassured him, putting a kindlier pressure on his arm.

"I would not be able to slay a leopard."

"You have," Sierra said.

After awhile, as they crossed the plain, Sierra's captive said, "I have slain more than a hundred leopards."

"A great number," Sierra said to him.

The chiefs head came up a little. “A great number,” Sierra said. “A very very great number.”

From the direction of the road there was another distant sound of noisy motors.

“We must advance more quickly,” Sierra said, and tugged the old man on as gently as he could.

The next time he looked behind the litter had fallen. The white girl was half erect on it, weaving and groping under the weight of heat. The doctor was on his knees in the grass, returning to his feet. Chartrand, Songolo, and the black girl were beside him.

Sierra turned quickly and went back to them, with one hand on the chief’s arm.

“It’s all right.” Grant was upright again and ready to take his place at the corner of the litter. “I hurt my ankle, but it’s all right.”

“It’s not,” Chartrand said to him.

“It is.” Grant stretched to prove he could stretch, but his sweat-washed and overburdened face betrayed him.

“We have still a considerable journey,” Sierra said. “We must all be sure how far we can go and how fast.”

“This is the handle I will take,” Grant said. “My ankle will be all right.”

Within twenty feet Grant stumbled and fell again. Only Songolo, perspiring in his London clothes, saved the stretcher and Mary from falling with him. And then again, from perhaps two miles away, there were two more warning, intimidating shots.

Chartrand called ahead as quietly as he could and Sierra came back to them with the desolate chief on one side and the open knife on the other.

They went aside.

“We shall have to go much more slowly, monsieur,” the Belgian said.

“Then it would be better to stop and go on when we can.”

“In my opinion,” the Belgian said, “we must reach the river today or risk not reaching it at all.”

“You have no thought,” Sierra asked him, “of leaving anyone behind?”

“Withhold your insults until a more appropriate time,” Chartrand answered.

“Then what do you propose?” Sierra asked.

“It will explain itself,” Chartrand said.

He beckoned Astrid Mahamba to him. “Astrid,” he said to her, “you must find your way quickly to the road. You must cross the road and return to it from the other side. You must be discovered by the men of the army coming from that direction. You must tell them that that is the direction in which to search for us.” He put his arm around her. “You must delay them as long as you can. You understand it is your life as well as ours?”

“I do.”

“Then go, dear Astrid,” he whispered. “Go, Astrid Cleopatra Lolita Mahamba. We shall be reunited soon.”

He touched her fondly and fleetingly on her fine hard rump. She smiled over her shoulder and was off toward the menace of the road, a printed blue and orange dress and a flash of swift black legs.

Songolo followed the disappearing girl for a moment, and then crossed the few yards to grasp the Belgian’s shoulder.

“What have you done? What have you dared to do?”

“What is necessary, monsieur,” Chartrand said. “And if I were you I’d take off that God-damned tie.”

Chapter 8

Astrid had seen at once the logic of Monsieur Chartrand's directions. As she ran barefoot across the savanna it did occur to her that she could return unhurt to her own people. But Monsieur Chartrand had been good to her and she preferred not to leave him in trouble. Besides it would have made her uneasy to disobey him. Independence or not, it was still against all habit to disobey a *Belge*.

She was accustomed to the crashing heat here. This, nevertheless, was one of the worst of days. She paused and pulled off her dress and threw it aside. She hurried on adorned only by her clean black skin, a figurine of damp and gleaming ebony. The soldiers will be as glad to see me this way, she assured herself.

She could hear the jeeps cruising up and down the road and once there was another warning shot. They were, she perceived, rushing the few miles to the river and then rushing back again, creating as much disturbance and terror as they could in the manner of warriors sure of their superior numbers or weapons. But she had made up her mind to do what she had been told to do and she sped on.

Astrid was one of the fortunate ones. She had no disease or disability and her clean young legs continued to bear her clean young body with smooth and easy haste. Near the road she paused and shrank behind a cluster of reeds. The jeeps went past. She did not lift her head. The jeeps went past again, the other way. Astrid raced across the road to the far side.

In a few minutes the jeeps passed a third time. She sprang to the side of the road in all her lustrous unclothed beauty.

The jeeps slammed to a halt and the Sergeant jumped out and grasped her by the arm. His big hand was determined, but not hostile.

"The white men have taken off my clothes," she said. "They are the worst of brutes."

"Yes," the Sergeant said, still holding her arm. "They shall pay." She pretended reluctance as he took her across the ditch into the shelter of the anthill, but not enough reluctance to force him to use his strength. "It is not becoming to boast," he said, as he pressed her to the grass, "but I am the new president of Mgonga province."

She opened her hard and glistening legs, for there was after all no choice. As she succumbed she could see through the reeds the eager waiting faces of Alphonse Mpolo, Remy Okito, Gregoire Ilunga, and Emile Kwange. When the Sergeant was finished she accommodated each one of them in turn. It was not long, for they were all ardent. She rose at last and stretched her young and gleaming body.

“Come and place yourself beside me,” the Sergeant said as they returned to the jeep. “I may make you one of the wives of the president.”

“That might be most enjoyable,” Astrid responded politely.

“It may be,” the Sergeant said, “that in time I will be president of all of the Congo. It may be that even then you shall be among my wives.”

Astrid leaned back against the seat of the jeep and sighed with only partly feigned anticipation.

“Perhaps,” the Sergeant added magnanimously, “the first of them.”

She sighed again.

“You have been to Leo?” he asked her.

The chance to boast without being caught was almost too tempting to resist, but she was still a little frightened.

“No, I have not.”

The Sergeant hesitated and he too decided not to lie. “I have talked to many who have been there,” he said. “The river is so wide you can scarcely see across it and the avenues are as wide and long as the river. The buildings are like high white mountains. There are places to drink and places to dine and places to hear strange music. There are white linen places where one makes love. Someday I may take you to Leo.”

She smiled dreamily.

“But for the moment,” the Sergeant resumed, having recovered his concentration, “we must deal with our enemies. Tell me which way to turn.”

Drowsing and weary from her recent exertions she was half under the spell of his body and half under the spell of his tongue. In her languor and absent-mindedness she almost told him the truth. But she remembered the kindnesses of Chartrand even though the thoughts of his strength had dwindled. The white lady too had asked her name, not in a white-lady way, but in the way of one who wished to know. Had there been a way to betray

her lofty white-acting countryman, Songolo, without betraying the rest, she would have done so immediately. But she continued in her deceit.

“They will come out this way, upon the river road,” she said. “You will discover them within two kilos of the place where the two roads meet. They will be in the direction from which the river flows.”

The Sergeant rested a hand on her. He signaled over his shoulder for the jar of palm wine, took four or five massive gulps and handed it to her. Then he lifted his gun from the side of his seat and fired a shot above the top of the jeep. He raced on as loudly as he could, in first gear, with the other jeep on the dusty road behind.

In a few minutes they reached the junction of the roads and turned upstream. A mile away the Sergeant waved the jeep of Emile Kwange to a halt. Then a mile further on he stopped himself and ordered the three men in his own jeep to dismount and take up watch at the side of the road.

They waited for almost an hour in the mounting heat. They could see for nearly a mile across the glaring plain, but there was no sign of movement.

“You are quite certain it was this way they came?” the Sergeant asked with a trace of suspicion.

“Oh yes,” Astrid said in some alarm. “Altogether certain.”

They sat on overlooking the plain. At last the Sergeant signaled his other three passengers to return to the jeep. He looked at Astrid again.

“If you have not told the truth this is your last opportunity.”

“It is the truth.”

“You are a good woman to have, but I will kill you.”

“You will find no need.” Astrid bent her head a little and her voice had become less steady.

“Not with my gun. With my hands.”

“It is the truth.”

They sat for another fifteen minutes. Then the Sergeant turned the car around. “We shall try the other way in case you have been so unlucky as to make a mistake.”

He put the car again in first gear to extract its maximum noise. When they passed the second jeep the Sergeant stopped to give new instructions to Emile Kwange.

“I am very tired,” Astrid whispered to the Sergeant. “It would be most pleasant to rest for a while beneath the trees.”

“I have duties,” the Sergeant said sternly.

She grasped his near hand and placed it on her firm round stomach.

“Let us rest awhile,” she whispered again.

“Come then,” the Sergeant-President said. “But it cannot be for long.”

In a moment she kissed him in the way Chartrand had taught her and the Sergeant gave a surprised, delighted cry. In awhile she whispered, “It went well?”

“Yes,” he said. “It went very well. You shall be my wife.”

“I am content.”

“But if you have lied to me—”

“Why would I lie to one such as you?”

He was halfway to his feet, rearranging his trousers. She reached up to him and held him to her side.

“Stay with me,” she urged him, and pressed her bare and wet and shiny body hard against him.

He put one hand on the ground and began to raise himself once more. But she would not release him. She held and stroked him at his knee. They were sheltered by a tree and despite the burning heat there was a certain fragrance in the silent morning.

“You have said I am your wife.”

He sank back. His big hands crushed her ribs, pressed her little breasts, caressed her gleaming bottom, and held her by the face. She kissed him once more in the manner Chartrand had shown her and he cried aloud again.

When his last convulsion was done she stroked his drenched forehead. She put her hot arms over the thin fabric on his chest and pressed him again. “You are the largest and most splendid man I have ever known. Let us remain here on the soft and pretty ground.”

But now he was fully sated. He wrenched her to her feet and dragged her to the jeep. Alphonse Mpolo, Gregoire Ilunga, Emile Kwange, and Remy Okito were awaiting them, trembling with impatience. Mpolo rushed ahead and seized Astrid by her slender waist.

The Sergeant pushed him off so hard that he fell to his knees. “This is not our woman any longer,” the Sergeant said. “She is my woman only.”

Mpolo still could not retreat from Astrid’s body. He kept one hand on her back and his eyes ran up and down, up from the tough little feet, up the curved legs, up the round thighs to the moulded breasts, up and down again and they rested on the place where he had been before and must go again or be an unfinished man forever.

“I have to have her again,” Mpolo said to the Sergeant. “She is mine as much as yours.”

“Where is Joseph Nijili?” the Sergeant asked. “Did he not have an accident?”

“Please, please, I have to have her.” Mpolo had stood away from Astrid, but from a distance the slender round shaft of her body was still more irresistible.

“I, too,” said Remy Okito.

“And I,” said Gregoire Ilunga.

“It is not the same with them,” Mpolo cried. “Let me have the girl once more. I will be your friend forever. Let me have the girl.”

“This is my wife,” the Sergeant said. “I will not let you have my wife.”

“But you did,” Mpolo cried. “Ask her if she was not as pleased as I.”

“I had not then taken her for my wife.”

Mpolo looked at Astrid one more time. She stood calmly with the Sergeant’s big hand on one satin leg. She showed no hostility toward the raging other man; rather, an hospitable interest.

Mpolo, drunk with wine and passion, made a reckless lunge and grasped her glistening waist. The Sergeant struck him to the ground and kicked him senseless with his heavy shoes. Astrid watched, contemplating again the queer miracle of rich men in boots.

When the smaller man lay still, she said admiringly to the Sergeant, “You are very strong.”

“As strong as anyone,” he boasted carelessly.

She took his hand. “Would you then care to rest once more?”

“Yes,” he said.

Afterward he allowed her to lie for a minute on his shoulder.

“What do you call yourself?” he asked.

“Astrid.”

“The name of the queen. Perhaps I shall make you a queen.”

“And yours?”

“Nkosi. The name of the lion. I once was known as Albert Tshibangu, but most men call me ‘Nkosi.’ ”

“Nkosi!” she said, and kissed him again in the way Monsieur Chartrand had taught her.

“But I must arise and find those spies and traitors,” he said.

“Nkosi,” she ventured, “I do not think they are a danger.”

“What!” he growled. “You said they stole your clothes and ravished you.”

She kissed him again. “But not in an unkind way.”

“Where are they?” he demanded. “Now that you are my wife I command you again to tell me the truth. I shall not punish you, for you are a good wife. But you must tell me the truth. Where are they?”

“I have lied to you twice,” she said disarmingly. “They did not harm me and I also lied about where they are. Let us forget them, Nkosi, and return down the road. They are of no consequence.”

“I am the judge of that,” he said. “Do not forget yourself.”

“Please let me be heard,” she said doggedly and daringly. “The doctor and the nurse you know about.”

“I only know what they pretend to be. They are our enemies. A woman cannot tell these things.”

“The Belgian—” she began.

“I know about the Belgian,” he said bitterly. “I know about the Belgian and about you. Do not speak of him.”

“He—”

“Speak another word of him and I will put you away.”

“As you order me, Nkosi,” she answered prudently.

“And what of the man who says he is from *Onee*?”

“He is a brave strong man, Nkosi. Not as brave and strong as you, but all the same brave and strong.”

“We shall discover more about that soon.”

“If you must destroy him,” she implored, “do it quickly.” She still had the memory of her grandfather’s unspeakable last agony and the terrifying collapse of his valor.

“The women watch. The men decide,” he reminded her. “And what of the African?”

“I cannot say.”

“No. He comes here in his mighty clothes waving mighty papers. Where is his mighty body guard?”

“I do not know, Nkosi.”

“Once we had Lumumba here. His whole plane spilled out soldiers who held their guns ahead. Once we had Mobutu, who had four planes of soldiers and once Kasavubu, who had two. Now this other one comes saying ‘here I am, a big officer from Leo.’ And who is there to greet him, who is there to guard him, who is there even to carry his valise?”

“I do not know him. But the others deserve your mercy.”

“Where are they?”

“Must I say?”

He put his big hands on her tender throat. “You are my wife but I must know.”

Her soft eyes closed. “They are on the other side of the road.”

“You should not have deceived me,” he said.

“I regret it.”

“In this search I have had to rid myself of one of my own men and nearly be rid of another. If I do not find those I am seeking it will not be an easy matter to explain.”

“That is so,” Astrid said. “I am sorry.”

“A lying woman, however good to be with, is not easy to put up with.”

“That, too, is so. But when I lied to you I was not truly your woman.”

He eased his touch on her throat.

“Place your hands where they should be.” She moved them down to her warm and silky flanks.

For the first time she heard a laugh from him.

“You will make a good queen, I won’t need many more.”

“It is not probable,” she admitted with demure pride, pressing his hand closer to her leg. “Tell me more, Nkosi, about Leo.”

“Ah,” he said, resting on one elbow above her, waving one hand spaciously to the trees. “The things they say of Leo are hardly to be believed. There are women striding down the streets as white and silvery as the moon. A man like me or a woman like you can walk down the same streets. We will drive down them together in our United States Cadillac.”

“Put your hand nearer.”

“Only for a moment.”

“Tell me how you have acquired so much knowledge of the world.”

“It is the education. You have observed my French.”

“It is much better than mine. It is a valuable gift, but not an easy one.”

“Who taught you?” he asked, with a trace of jealousy. “The Belgian?”

“Only a little,” she reassured him. “Mostly it was the fathers and brothers and the nuns.”

“You are pressing my leg very hard,” he said, “I believe it is now the fifth time. Are you attempting to humble me?”

“No, no, you could never be humbled.”

He sank back from his elbow and put his head between her round breasts.

“You were speaking of the education,” she said.

“A wearing thing, but one who hopes to advance must have it.”

“You have no doubt read many books.”

“Many, many. Eight, ten, a dozen, perhaps even twenty. Learning does not come easy.”

“Lie here for a while,” Astrid suggested. “It is very hot. I will not trouble you.”

“It is not right to be wholly unclothed, even for a woman such as you.”

“It could not be avoided. Do you find my dress disagreeable?”

He hesitated. “It is agreeable, but not altogether suitable.”

“I shall obtain something at the first opportunity,” she said obediently.

“That is for me to do,” he announced. “In Leo I shall buy you pants of the whitest, finest lace, lace so fine you will not feel it. Above will be a golden dress, as golden as the sun.”

“Once,” she said wistfully, “I had a red dress. But I have never had a golden dress.”

“Where did you get the red dress?”

“From an official of the Belgians.”

“The one over there?”

“No—another.”

“You should not have taken it.”

“It was the first dress I ever had.”

“We will put that in the past. From now on you will accept no dresses except from me.”

“Yes, Nkosi.”

“And you will remove no dresses except for me.”

“Yes, Nkosi.”

“What a warm and lazy day it is,” he smiled, ridiculing himself with another unexpected touch of humor. “Not a good day to become a president.”

“No,” she agreed.

“Still, I have my duty to perform and I shall perform it now.”

“Can you not spare them?”

“I cannot and will not.”

“It was they who sent me to you.”

“That only makes them worse. I do not discuss political and military matters with women. Get to your feet and come.”

His subordinates were waiting sullenly in the two jeeps, but the wine had held out. The Sergeant took a massive dose from the neck of the jar and passed it on to Astrid.

From the back seat Gregoire Ilunga again eyed Astrid's darkly luminous body and took in its wet and lovely scent. "Is it still not allowed," he asked the Sergeant hopefully, "to have her once more?"

Astrid half turned her head and said graciously, "I believe not."

"By no means," the Sergeant confirmed.

As the Sergeant started the jeep Astrid leaned back. She scratched a place beside her navel. She had done what she was capable of doing and she could do no more.

Chapter 9

They had had to stop again with the stretcher. Sierra and Songolo were on the front handles, the Canadian and the Belgian at the back. The gnarled chief stopped just ahead of Sierra, who still held the open knife in his hand, a foot away.

The chief turned his face. It had filled again with his crushing shame. The solace of remembering the hundred slain leopards was gone.

“I must depart now and rejoin my family.” It was not put quite as an announcement, nor was it put quite as a petition.

“Remain with us, father,” Sierra said.

“I have many, many children.”

“You shall see them all again. But for now remain with us.”

The chief turned directly to Songolo. He raised a trembling, defiant arm. “I see that you have the appearance of an important person. You are one of the new chiefs from the south. You are one of the new chiefs of the Independence. Order these Belgians to release me.”

Songolo thought a moment. “You know, monsieur, I think perhaps you ought to.”

“And I,” Sierra said, “know I won’t.”

“Suppose I demand it?”

“On whose authority?”

“On mine.”

“You are not quite as experienced as I,” Sierra said. “But this is your country and we all have things to learn. Perhaps I can learn from you. Give me your guess of what would happen.” They were talking English, more hurriedly than was possible in either of the other two tongues they shared.

“It is not easy to be sure. But the old man would be free.”

“Free for what?”

“Well, free.”

“Free to prepare another and better ambush for us. No.”

“I believe he would be grateful enough to leave us.”

“And if your belief turned out to be wrong?”

“You take a great deal on yourself.”

“Monsieur Songolo,” Sierra said to him. “The debate is ended. We have a short day ahead of us and a great deal to do. Unless you have picked up that pole within ten seconds I will carve you from your gullet to your groin. It may create an international incident, but you will not be testifying.”

Songolo bent down. “I would still like to meet you under more civilized auspices,” he said.

“And I to meet you. But it is a short day and let’s get on.”

They toiled in silence and growing exhaustion for another long half-kilometer.

“We’ll rest again.” Sierra was no longer asking for suggestions. “Come and sit upon the ground,” he invited the old chief in Lingala.

“It does not translate well, monsieur,” Songolo cut in, resentful on his countryman’s behalf. “Besides, I doubt that your hostage is familiar with Shakespeare.”

“*Our* hostage!” Sierra’s insistence was edged with fury. But a hard apprenticeship in curbing his temper—all the harder because it had been so late in beginning—enabled him to make a partial recovery. “Our hostage, monsieur, and kindly don’t forget it.” He went on coldly, “Believe me, I was not trying to mock the old man. I intended sympathy and nothing more. The allusion goes a long way back and is my own business.”

“And do you not grant that anything here is my business?” Songolo rose to his haunches, towering thinly in the strange, soaked elegance of his Bond Street clothes over the sprawled and glowering Spaniard. “Perhaps my point of view is a rather special one,” he went on acidly. “This party of six, in the Congo, has included three Congolese. One has a white man’s knife at his back. Another”—Chartrand was lying on his face, a little apart and apparently oblivious to their conversation—“was as much a prisoner of the white man until you freed her for a purpose of your own.”

Sierra began to rise, shaking with anger.

“No, let me finish. And the other? I am the other. I am said to be the fourth in succession to the presidency of this country—my country, a

country of fourteen million people. But you, a stranger and an alien, deny me the sovereignty over so much as one frail old man.”

“It was your government that asked us to come and put an end to anarchy,” Sierra reminded him. “Besides, in what way have I denied you anything?”

“You have the knife, monsieur.”

Sierra looked at him. Then he tossed the open blade at Songolo’s feet. “Now it’s yours,” he said. “Let’s see what you will do with it.”

Songolo hesitated. “Go ahead,” Sierra urged him. “Let the old man go. You will be able to defend us when he returns. No doubt you have some means of your own for using this weapon against a score of bows, machetes, and spears.” Grant and Chartrand were staring tensely at the two men and at the knife on the ground between them and even Mary raised her head a little from the stretcher.

“Go on!” Sierra rasped. Songolo did not move. “Go on! You’ve made your point.”

“Stop this, you bloody fools!” Chartrand lurched unsteadily to his feet and stumbled over. “I don’t suppose either of you has done much traveling in this part of the country. Well, I have. I’ve ranched in this kind of country for fifteen years. The cover doesn’t look very good, but it’s quite passable for those who know how to use it.”

“Yes, monsieur?” Sierra waited with exaggerated politeness.

“In the last half hour I have seen at least a dozen armed tribesmen behind us, in front of us and on our flanks. At this moment there are at least that number within five hundred paces.”

“Why did you not tell me?” Sierra demanded.

“To what purpose? You have been doing all that could be done. And there was mademoiselle to consider.”

Sierra turned again to Songolo. “Well?” The Congolese was staring past him with scared and widened eyes, staring toward the ripples of heat shifting over each distant swelling in the ground, seeking the borders of each clump of trees and elephant grass, searching the tops of the round, tufted anthills, each grown suddenly as ominous as the top of a lurking giant warrior’s head. He wetted his lips and reached out with his tongue toward the rivulet of salt on his upper lip. Songolo was no more scared than the rest of them, but he was at a disadvantage; he was the one they were all looking at.

With a painful though not altogether unsuccessful attempt at dignity, he grasped the knife by the blade and held the handle toward the Spaniard. "Please take it back, monsieur, along with my apology." His voice was not unduly humble, but it was earnest enough. "I have spent too much time at Lovanium and at Louvain and Cambridge and the debating halls of Leopoldville."

"And not enough in the places where the hair grows short and the spears grow long." Sierra was suddenly amiable, as full of sympathy for the routed intellectual on one side as for the shrunken savage on the other. "It was not by choice that I have, to some extent, avoided this particular disability. I would gladly exchange the total of my three wars for one more stroll through the Prado or for the chance to play one more concert with Casals. We'd better get moving."

He rose and went to the stretcher. As an afterthought he went to a small clump of high coarse grass and cut off several handfuls. He brought them back, gently moved Mary's linen-sheathed arms away from her burned wet face, placed the grass carefully on top, and then returned her arms. "It is not far now, Miss Kelvin," he said to her. Her reply was so faint and muffled that it was not possible to be sure whether she was weeping or not.

"Do you really believe we'll get through?"

"I believe we will." He added gently, as though under a mandate of conscience, "But if you are religious, it can do no harm to pray."

He picked up the left-hand corner of the litter, with Songolo at his side and Grant limping beside the Belgian. He signaled to the forlorn, dejected old hunter to stay beside him.

It was now late morning and the heat pursued them with growing fury. Songolo and Chartrand, both watching constantly toward the menacing distance for new signs of movement, stumbled often on the uneven ground. In spite of their difficulties Grant could feel, or perhaps only imagine, that they were both waiting for him to be the first to collapse. If one fell now, they must all fall. Only the first to fall would need an excuse. One failure would give absolution to all subsequent failures and gather up and absorb the total of their guilt. He clung like death to his grip on the pole and each time Songolo or Chartrand recovered from a false step he felt a fresh twinge of despair. As a doctor and, he had never hesitated to admit to himself, a fairly vain one, he had always made a systematic effort to keep in good condition; but for the accident of turning his ankle, he protested, he would have been capable of outlasting either of his rivals for the disgrace of being

first to fail. Not the unfaltering, unflinching Spaniard, perhaps; but then the Spaniard obviously represented some rare geological fault within the total mass of human bedrock. But to have his endurance melt away in the presence of the other two, along with his tiny stock of heroism, was like being stretched on the rack and letting go the dregs of life to the sound of hideous jeers.

The Belgian was glancing his way, half in stealth, every few steps.

“Keep your God-damned eyes to yourself!” Grant commanded him venomously.

From the road and much closer there was another shot and again the racing of motors. No one spoke, but they were able miraculously to quicken their pace.

And, quite as miraculously, the first saffron glint of the river lay ahead, just a glimpse of it beckoning behind a rise in the ground and a sudden strip of jungle. Here the trees were much thicker, fighting thirstily toward the river like convention delegates before a bar. “A furlong!” Sierra was apparently as strong as ever. “A furlong and we are there.” He found a fisherman’s path through the final jungle strip and somehow Grant lurched and staggered with them. He even managed to set his handle down with the others before he dropped, panting, on his side.

Chapter 10

In a moment, though, he raised his head. Sierra stood at the edge of the river calling across a hundred yards of water to a pirogue standing off the bank. An old woman stood at each end, holding the long dugout canoe steady in the broad, sluggish stream by leaning on a long pole. Their fishing nets lay on the bank and their abandoned cooking fire still smoldered beneath a black iron pot.

“*Kenda! Kenda!*” the old woman in the rear of the pirogue was screeching. “*Kenda! Kenda! Kenda!*” Grant was halfway between consciousness and unconsciousness and as though determined to concentrate its shaky powers on one single thing, his mind dwelt wholly on this old woman screeching, “*Kenda! Kenda! Kenda!*”

“*Moninga! Moninga!*” Sierra’s voice called back across the strip of shore water, but it was the old woman who held his attention almost wholly.

“Go away!”

“Friend! Friend!”

“Go away!”

In each voice, in the harsh squalling of the old woman and in the urgent cajoling of Sierra there was the same note of desperate imploring. In the figure of the old woman in the boat Grant caught a fanciful image of Charon. Charon is a woman, an old and ugly dying woman, old and ugly and dying and still all-powerful. “*Kenda! Kenda!*” Charon screeched again, denying them passage to the other side. Charon was almost bald. Her face was gray with leprosy. One hand was bent and stiff. The other bore only one finger and a thumb. Her arms and legs were much less thick than the slender pole with which she held the barge in place and though they were hidden from his view Grant could see in the eye of his experience the almost toeless stumps of her feet.

They were in shade and he was coming back now to full awareness. He sat up and took in the whole of the scene.

“Come, mother!” Sierra was holding aloft a wad of money. “There are many thousands of francs here.”

“I need no money!” Charon, now certain of the unassailability of her position, became a little taunting.

“This money will buy a machine to drive your boat. You can put away your pole and your paddle forever and end your days in comfort. Only take us across.”

“How do I know you will not kill me and steal my pirogue?” Her river French testified to many such debates before.

“Why should we steal your pirogue, mother? It is of use to us for only one journey and you shall take us on that.”

He had at least weaned her away from her mechanical squalling.

She and the other woman lifted their poles, brought the pirogue in a few yards closer, and pinned it to the muddy bottom again.

“At the Independence,” Charon accused him coldly across the water, “my brother had his pirogue near here. A *Belge* gave him many francs to take him and some other *Belges* across the river. When my brother returned the soldiers shot him.”

Sierra turned to Songolo. “You’d better try, monsieur. To her any white man is a *Belge*. She doesn’t like *les Belges* and even if she did she wouldn’t dare get mixed up with them. I’m getting nowhere.”

Songolo went to the river bank and called to the old woman not in French or Lingala but in Ngombe, her own tribal dialect. They called back and forth across the water for what seemed to Grant like an eternity, Songolo alternately imperious and importunate, the fisherwoman alternately malicious, encouraging, coy, and obscenely seductive. She cackled and scolded and grinned and glared and cursed. She caressed her ropy withered breasts with her leprous half-fist and tossed her half-bald head, a woman hard to get, but just maybe gettable.

“It’s no use,” Songolo said at last. “After all, we *are* a pretty suspicious looking outfit, even to anyone to whom suspicion isn’t second nature. The old hunter here happens to be the chief of the village next to hers and she recognized him. I couldn’t think of any better way to explain him than to say he had been bitten by a snake and his voice was silenced by the poison. I said we were trying to get him across to the nearest hospital, along with the injured nurse. For a minute she pretended to believe me and said they’d come in and get us. And then—you heard that awful diabolical laugh—she told me that she knew everything, everything about the army and about the chief. She even boasted that from her pirogue she can see the chief’s

warriors skulking in the trees behind us. As they say back in Cambridge,” Songolo added in a feeble attempt at chins-up humor, “news travels fast in the jungle.”

“I suppose, then,” Chartrand proposed heavily, “there is only one thing left to us.”

“And that?”

“To throw ourselves on their mercy.”

“What mercy?” Sierra’s reaction had a glandular spontaneity. His voice was as hard and peremptory as ever. “If we surrender to the chief here, he will seize his only means of recovering face and have us killed at once, or take us home to do it in style. If we wait and surrender to the soldiers it will be no better.”

“You can still think of something else?” Chartrand whispered, hopefully incredulous.

“The old woman is playing cat and mouse with us and she is enjoying it. Is that not correct, Monsieur Songolo?”

“Yes. It is a great experience for her. It is almost as good as a ritual murder; perhaps better for she is in sole command.” Sierra looked back across the water into the old woman’s malevolent, three-toothed grin.

“She will gladly prolong it?”

“Indefinitely.”

“Good. Keep her engaged. I am going through the trees upstream. I shall swim quietly and as much underwater as I can to the level of the canoe. Then I shall drift down to the far side and board it.”

“Even if you reach the canoe,” Songolo said, “you will be at a tremendous disadvantage. The women of the Congo are astonishingly strong, even the old ones.” Songolo’s stark fear had been replaced by an African fatalism; reinforced by it he was once more able to resume the air of a calm and logical intellectual.

“When I have boarded and taken possession of the canoe,” Sierra went on, “I shall need help. I presume you all swim? Then if I cannot persuade the women to bring it in I shall hold the pirogue stationary. Dr. Grant will take custody of the chief and the knife. Both he and the chief must be fully erect so that the chief’s followers do not mistake the situation and try to rush us.

Then Monsieur Songolo and Monsieur Chartrand will join me at the canoe and we will bring it in together.”

Chapter 11

Sierra had never needed an analyst to tell him that he was at least a borderline manic-depressive. The manic, fortunately, was at its apogee now. As he moved quietly upstream through the strip of trees, keeping out of sight of both the river and the road as best he could, he reviewed his plan with confidence.

He was a good swimmer. For a man of forty-seven he was in excellent shape physically. As for the exertions and the heat of the morning, he had decided some hours earlier that the reckoning of their cost would simply have to be postponed. In Spain and later in Normandy and Korea he had often had to practice a form of hypnosis on his body and drive it to theoretically impossible lengths of endurance. Sooner or later the body had to pay in exhaustion and in shock—once, for him, so heavily that he was only a gulp of brandy and an extra blanket away from death. The important thing now was that payment could be deferred and if his adrenals flowed properly a healthy man could endure what he had to endure.

His mood was almost boisterous. Though he did not contemplate failure, there would be compensations even in that. The one thing that troubled him was the indignity he was about to inflict on the shrill old hag in the pirogue and on her companion. In another day and setting she might have been one of the hellcats of Guadalajara or Madrid defying Franco's imported Moors and the German Condor Legion and the equally detested Black Flames from Italy.

This Congolese crone could not be expected to understand that there were certain political and moral differences in the situation here; what she clearly did understand and had a right to understand was that this was her pirogue, this was her river, and there were some people who belonged there and some who did not. If she prevailed there would be a certain natural justice in it.

But justice or not, he had an overwhelming desire to live and an equal desire to rescue the four people who had been given into his trust. He would try not to harm the two old women, although he knew without Songolo's telling him that the toil-hardened women of the Congo, even the old ones, could be as tough and sinewy as the toughest vine root; he might not be able to dictate the rules or limits of their struggle.

The last thing he did before he slipped into the brown water was open his small sharp knife and put it crosswise between his teeth. The first time he had carried a knife this way, more than half a lifetime ago on the river Ebro, his sense of the ridiculous had almost overcome him. Then, as now, there had been a likelihood of encountering women and some sense of ribald delicacy had caused him, then as now, to leave his shorts on. But now, being much older and a little less vain, he found it less painful to think of his resemblance to a third-rate cinema hero.

Warm and soupy though it was, the water was almost invigorating after the burning steamy air. His lungs were better than he had realized. He had to come up for fresh breath only three times before he was beyond and to the rear of the pirogue and about two hundred yards upstream. The river flowed very slowly in the shelter of a bend in the bank, and he stroked barely enough to keep afloat and hold his legs and body well beneath the surface. In the distance he could hear Songolo wheedling and orating across the water and the old woman goading and promising and yielding and rejecting, mixing lewd invitations with fearful judgments, a fishwife become a sudden queen with absolute powers of vengeance against all the universe. The role had her so much under its spell that he told himself only a chance, unlikely crocodile or a warning shout from the warriors hidden beyond the bank could prevent his reaching her pirogue undetected.

He moved out a little further and tried to gauge the exact drift of the slight current. Then he turned on his back, partly floating and partly treading water, moving his hands just enough to keep his nose and mouth above the surface. He steered by the sound of the old woman's shrilling voice. When he turned carefully to his side he was not twenty feet from the big canoe's black and weathered hull. He drifted slowly down to its middle, where he could try to swing himself aboard exactly halfway between the women. He rested silently, a foot away from the hull and beneath its shelter, gathering his strength and making his last calculations. There was no chance of swamping the heavy craft, even if he had wanted to. But he might be able to rock it sufficiently to throw either or both the women momentarily off balance. If he pulled down hard with his two hands and kicked up hard against the water with his right leg he might for an instant reduce the amount of freeboard from almost three feet to two or even less and throw his left leg aboard in the first co-ordinated movement. It was an interesting problem in muscular dynamics and a difficult physical feat. In his original calculations, even before he traded knives with Chartrand, he had been fully aware that if he failed on the first attempt the women would beat him off and drown him

easily with their poles. Even in this conclusion the manic side reminded him that his would be a better death than that left in store for his companions.

For a moment there was no sound either from the pirogue or from the bank. Everything was so totally still that it seemed impossible the women would not hear some unaccustomed rippling in the water or some hint of his breathing and turn to investigate. But then Songolo's voice came bawling across the strip of water again. The only knowledge Sierra had of the tribal dialect they were using was where it had lent to or borrowed from Lingala. But Songolo's tone and the sinful cackle of laughter with which the old woman responded made the burden of his message all too clear. He had obviously just made a more indecent suggestion to her than any of hers to him. A manly but tragic thing for one such as Songolo to have had to do, Sierra had a split second in which to reflect. It would have meant nothing for him, the Spaniard, or for Chartrand, the Belgian, or even for the young Canadian doctor to meet this outrageous harridan at her own outrageous level. But for her fellow Congolese, emancipated, evolved, educated, and civilized within a short hard twenty years—for such a one as this the descent to and the acknowledgment of their essential kinship, the admission that he still could talk her language in her foulest idiom must have a Dantelike horror, an intimation of permanent reversion and inevitable defeat.

If only his own life had been at stake, Sierra somehow doubted that the aggressively fastidious, hypersensitive, jealously African and self-consciously "European" Songolo would have made the sacrifice. Sierra's earlier reactions to the man from Cambridge had included impatience, anger, pity, and bare tolerance. Now, listening to Songolo's heroic exercise in self-debasement, he felt admiration—mixed faintly with amusement to be sure—but genuine admiration none the less.

"Aiee! Aiee! Aiee!" The old woman's cackle was full of wicked mirth. At the third convulsion Sierra thrust himself upward in the water, grasped the top edge of the pirogue with his two hands, pulled down, kicked with one leg, threw the other over the thwart, and was two-thirds aboard before the two startled women could turn around.

But once they began to move they moved with incredible speed and decision. It was not a reaction, but a reflex. Sierra had surprised many enemies and had learned that, once you got right upon them, there was always, even in the instant of recognition, another instant of paralysis and shock when the habit of reason got in the way of instinct. To this precious instant he already owed at least three of his several lives: one courtesy of a

fellow Spaniard, one courtesy of a Moor, one courtesy of a Chinese sentry near the Yalu.

But the second's delay had been bred out of these jungle women at least five hundred years ago, by leopards, by lions, by pythons, by hostile tribes and Arab slavers. Both were on top of him before he could get to his knees. The older woman took two prodigious hops on her almost toeless feet and flew for his eyes with one two-fingered hand and at his groin with the other. The younger struck him a great blow across the shoulder with her canoe pole and leaped forward to fall on his back, clawing at his neck. The knife had flown unnoticed from between his teeth to lie half a dozen feet away near the far side of the deck. Before their first furious onslaught he flattened himself on the concave log floor, protecting the two most vulnerable points of attack. Still lying flat, he made a swift grab for the claw at his eyes, caught the older woman's thin but wiry arm and bent her whole body away from him. As he lifted his head a little, the other woman, much heavier and more muscular, made a swift lunge for his throat with her sharp, filed teeth. She struck with the dark speed of an animal, but he saw the shadow in time to hurl his neck an inch or two to one side. Her teeth drew blood on the fleshy part, but did not find a hold. He released the older woman momentarily and grasped the more dangerous one by one arm, just above the elbow. When the older one flew at him again he encouraged her to jab for his tightly closed eyes and thus retrieved his grip on her arm with his free hand and bent her away from him once more.

They were now in a state of grotesque stalemate. Each woman had her two legs entwined with Sierra's, pinning him face down on the floor of the canoe. He in turn held each of them face down and firmly secured by the near arm.

Sierra was bleeding from several scratches and the one shallow tooth-bite and his shoulder hurt where the pole had struck him, but the adrenaline was still serving him faithfully and he detected no signs of tiring. The sickly smell of the older woman's decaying body was the greatest of his physical hardships as they lay locked and wary, all three panting and prone on the blister-hot deck. There were more urgent things to consider than physical hardship. He was conscious that the canoe was moving, slowly but steadily, in the sluggish current. He could not allow it to drift far beyond the resting place of his companions. Even less could he allow it to drift to the bank downstream where it would surely be met by the fellow tribesmen of their hostage, the chief.

It was momentarily safe to lift and turn his head without risking the loss of his eyes. He perceived a new danger. The younger and stronger of the women had at last seen the knife lying open a few feet away, barely out of reach of her free hand. And though, because of Sierra's hold on her other arm, she could not use her free hand on him, she could use it to reach for the knife. She needed only to gain another foot or less. If she succeeded, Sierra would become even more their prisoner, even as he would have to make them more his. Their logical course from then on would be to lie locked and immobile, no one daring to make the first move, until events caught up with them.

He tried to bend the stronger woman's pinioned arm up and back toward her shoulder blade and thus break it. But she was much too strong and he had insufficient leverage; he needed a lower grip, below her elbow. But he was certain that if he tried to slide his hand gradually down her sweat-greased arm she would be able to break his grip as he attempted to traverse the elbow. Well then, a sporting gamble. She could have a chance at the knife and he would have a chance at a more useful hold.

He released her upper arm and immediately clutched at her slippery forearm. She threw herself forward and touched the knife. Her arm almost escaped him altogether, but his strong wiry fingers had it again. He snapped it back around her and up to her shoulder blades in a motion as swift and compact as the kick of a piston. The arm cracked like splitting kindling wood. He spun her around, leaped to his feet, thrust a bare heel against the prostrate older woman's jaw, then grabbed the younger by the other arm and broke it too in a repetition of the first ruthlessly economical motion. She sank moaning to the deck. Sierra pulled the older woman to her feet, reached down, picked up the knife, and put it to her breast.

"Pick up the pole, mother." He spoke the order quietly and without fuss, as though there was not the slightest doubt that it would be obeyed at once.

"Yes, yes. Willingly." She stared dumfounded at her crippled friend. The older woman was crushed by the sudden collapse of all her glory, still scarcely able to believe her career as a queen could have ended so suddenly and cruelly.

"Yes, I will pick up the pole," she said, half in a trance. "I will pick up the pole. Gladly. Yes."

"And, mother," Sierra said, "do not lose the pole by accident. It will not go well with you if you should lose the pole, for I see the other one has

fallen into the river already. I will take a paddle and help you and we shall make our way to the bank and meet our friends.”

Reassured slightly, she eyed him craftily.

“I shall still have the money?”

“The money?”

“The money to buy a machine. The money you offered me before.”

“Yes, mother,” Sierra assured her gallantly, “you shall have the money.”

They had not drifted so far as he had feared, not more than a hundred yards. He could pick out their figures clearly between the water line and the line of trees behind, Mary sitting upright on the stretcher, Grant standing behind the old chief, and Chartrand and Songolo preparing to remove their clothing and swim out to help bring the pirogue in. Sierra shouted and waved to them to remain where they were. The canoe was still in shallow enough water for the old woman to reach bottom with her pole. Disappointment was not new to her and now that this latest of life’s rebuffs was firmly settled she accepted it cheerfully enough. They made good time.

When they were within easy hearing range Sierra, still paddling amidships with the knife at his side, began calling instructions to the bank.

“We’ll push off right away,” he called. “We’ll leave the stretcher here. Chartrand, you will please help Miss Kelvin in as soon as I land and put her in the bow. The woman who is there now is injured, but not seriously. Allow her to remain where she is. Put Miss Kelvin just this side of her and then take a paddle. Monsieur Songolo, will you please come up beside me and take another paddle. Grant and the chief will embark last and stand in the stern with the chief as plainly visible to the shore as possible. If the army should materialize while we’re still within range, everyone get down as low as possible, but keep paddling.”

When he sprang ashore to steady the canoe for the embarkation they could not, in spite of the need for haste, refrain from greeting him. Mary gazed in rapt silence; there was no word for the marveling in her weary brown fugitive eyes. “*Mon Dieu, monsieur,*” Chartrand said in total homage. Songolo touched his arm and Grant said simply, so simply that the defect of stiffness was not noticed, “You are a great man, Monsieur Sierra.” Sierra wiped away a little blood with the back of his hand and grinned with unaffected pleasure.

Chapter 12

Sound had carried far in the open savanna. But here, in the slight depression made by the shallow valley, with the intervening strip of jungle, the jeeps were almost upon them before they heard the grinding motors. Then with a crash of shots and a tumult of wrenched-up vines and crunching reeds and a chorus of jubilant shouts, Sergeant Albert Tshibangu and Privates Alphonse Mpolo, Remy Okito, Gregoire Ilunga, and Emile Kwange were upon them. Chartrand had eased Mary past the old woman and was starting to help her to the far end of the pirogue. None of the others had begun to embark.

Sierra called over his shoulder, "You might as well get out again." He brushed a trickle of blood from his eyes and looked to the border of the trees thirty feet away, where the Sergeant and his soldiers had stopped to form a wavering line. In the dappled sunlight their guns made queer, spastic designs in mid-air, circles and arcs and parabolas and slow exclamation points. All the soldiers except the Sergeant were very unsteady on their feet. The Sergeant had his back braced against a tree and his feet planted wide apart. His equilibrium was relatively good and there was murder in his happy eyes.

Grant moved a few steps and helped support Mary on her good leg. Sierra and Songolo were a little apart, looking steadily ahead at Sergeant Tshibangu and his weaving retinue.

The two parties faced each other in silence a dozen yards apart. The Sergeant had never altogether believed that this moment would arrive and now that he was in the midst of it he was a little uncertain how to conduct himself. He signaled to Remy Okito, recently appointed his aide. Okito handed him a canteen of wine. He drank deeply.

"Who is the boss here?" the Sergeant asked loudly, narrowing and focusing his eyes.

"I am." Sierra had stared down many a dangerous Congolese before, but he had never had to do it barefooted, with blood streaking his naked body and the other man almost totally beyond the reach of reason. He set his strong mouth a little more firmly, lifted his jaw a little higher, and prepared to move across the clearing.

Songolo held him back. "No!" he said. Songolo's hand on his arm was cold and trembling and his mellifluous Cambridge voice was choked and

muffled as though it came through some soft heavy cloth. “No!” he repeated. He half cleared his throat in an effort to say something further. It was not really necessary, for what was on his mind could not be mistaken.

“Stay out of the way!” Sierra said harshly. “I’ve handled it so far.”

“No!” Songolo’s very inarticulateness deepened his terrified eloquence. The cold grip of his hand was like a vise.

“Let the boss come forward!” the Sergeant shouted.

“One moment if you please, monsieur.” Sierra’s polite reply sent forth a brief ripple of calm. Songolo retained his grip.

“Don’t be a God-damned fool,” Sierra said less harshly. “You haven’t got a chance with them. The way they are no African would have a chance.”

“That is why—” Songolo could not get his voice above a whisper, nor could he complete the sentence.

“In spite of everything”—the Spaniard’s tone was low but unruffled; he might have been making a *sotto voce* remark during a concert, careful not to disturb those in the nearby seats—“they’re still a little afraid of us *Belges*. If I can get through to him, if I can get through the liquor and the dope, I can still handle him.”

“You have believed—thought it—from the start,” Songolo whispered sadly.

“Thought what?”

“That we—that I—oh, hell”—the words limped and hobbled and leaned on each other like the last stragglers of a fatal retreat—“that we can’t stand up to you without drink or dope. That I am—without—honor. That I am—without courage—and without—without capacity.”

“You have shown me your courage,” Sierra reassured him in the same low concert-audience voice. “You have shown me your honor. I do not doubt your capacity.”

“Then you must let me—let me—deal with them. I am an official of their government—I am their countryman—it is—it is my duty—it is my right—it is—” Songolo’s hand was still cold and trembling, but still it detained Sierra.

A shot from the Sergeant’s gun roared above their heads. “Let the boss come forward!” the Sergeant roared behind the echo. “If he has anything to say let him say it at once.”

“God go with you, my friend,” Sierra said in all tenderness and pity.

As Songolo approached his countrymen his thin shoulders lifted a little. Although the Sergeant was a much heavier man, the difference in their height was not great and Songolo looked directly into his scowling, heavy face.

“You know who I am.” Songolo tried to make it a statement rather than a question. He spoke with a slight tremor and his words still seemed to be coming forced and faintly through a gag. But for a badly frightened man with five gun muzzles executing geometric figures directly in front of his chest and belly, his self-possession was remarkable.

“You know who I am,” he repeated. “You have seen my papers only yesterday at the airport at Ngubdja. You have seen my papers signed by His Excellency the President himself.”

“Your papers were forged!” the Sergeant spat at him. “Does the president send his high officers abroad struggling with their own baggage? Does he send them without warning? Does he send them without escort? Does he send them without arms? Does he send them riding with goats and clerks and sick women?”

“I was in haste. There is an outbreak of sleeping sickness nearby—you have heard of the outbreak of sickness—the President ordered me—asked me—asked the man from *Onee* and I—” Songolo’s momentary calm had begun to desert him and he was becoming weakly excited again.

“For God’s sake!” Sierra called across the clearing to him. “Don’t defend yourself! Attack! Attack!”

“Even if what you say is true”—perceiving the other man’s growing uncertainty, the Sergeant raised his voice and looked around to assure himself of the admiring regard of his men—“even if what you say is true, the man you call president is no longer president here.”

“I do not understand,” Songolo whispered.

“He does not understand.” The Sergeant turned to share the revelation with his men. “The great man from Leo does not understand. The great men from Leo seldom understand. What is your tribe, great man from Leo?”

“I am of the Bakongo tribe.”

“Ah, a great man of the great Bakongo tribe from the great city of Leo!” Alphonse Mpolo, Remy Okito, Gregoire Ilunga, and Emile Kwange howled with laughter. “Well, perhaps you can understand this. We have a new

president here, a president of our own. Perhaps our president will make an alliance with President Gizenga of Orientale or President Tshombe of Katanga or President Kalonji of Kasai. Your president what's-his-name means nothing here, O great man of the great Bakongo from the great city of Leo.”

There was another appreciative burst of laughter from the Sergeant's four subordinates. Remy Okito seized the opportunity to take a long swig from the canteen. “Long live the president of Mgonga!” he cried.

“You have attacked one of our sentries!” the Sergeant had been enjoying himself so much that the temperature of his blood had dropped and he had almost lost track of his purpose. It was necessary to recover his rage. “You have committed treason,” he accused.

“We did not harm him.” If Songolo was not pleading he was reasoning very hard.

The Sergeant, striving still for the return of his anger, struck him twice with his fists, and then pulled him erect as he was about to sink to the ground.

“That old chief there. What of him? We have met men from his village. We have met his hunters. They are here behind us now in the trees and they have told us all. Why did you seize this Gombe chief and take him from his tribe? Why, great man of the Bakongo, did you take the Gombe chief from his people?”

“It is well known,” Songolo said, “that the Bakongo and the Gombe are friends. We have not harmed the chief. We took him away because—because it could not be avoided.” Songolo lowered his head and allowed a mouthful of blood and a fragment of broken tooth to dribble down his chin. “It could not be avoided.”

“For God's sake!” Sierra implored him again from across the clearing. “Stop apologizing. Accuse *him* of something. Threaten him with something!”

But Songolo was sealed in a Kafkalike vacuum cell, where the only other presence was the looming Sergeant and no sound could penetrate from the outer world. The Sergeant went on stoking his rage while his friends encouraged him with chuckles and little cries of admiration and anger.

“You like well the Belgians, great man of the Bakongo from the great city of Leo?”

“I have accepted help from the Belgians only in order to help our own people.” It was a simple sentence, proffered in a low and reasonable voice, and even as he spoke it Songolo realized its lack of relevance or effect. If only there had been time to discuss the matter properly with the Spaniard, to explain properly and completely that it was not just snobbishness or ambition and certainly not a desire to change his skin. He did not like to take his leave of the Spaniard while the Spaniard held a wrong impression.

Where was the Spaniard now? He had gone to find the pirogue. No—more than that—he *had* found the pirogue and they were all on the way to the other side of the river, all but him. In the heat and the crashing of reeds and vines and bullets and shouts the Spaniard and all else had melted away, leaving him here alone with his own blood upon his face and guns glaring all around. And where was Brother Bernard now, the best of teachers and of friends? Where was the village now, where his father and his bent mother, where the glowing fire in the compound and all the children ringed around it to hear the nighttime stories? There seemed to be nothing left at all.

“*Sale espion!*” The Sergeant took a step forward, seized his carbine by the barrel, and struck Songolo to the ground.

It was a very heavy blow and at first Songolo did not think he would trouble to get up. But it spun him around and on his way to the earth he saw, tossing in a billowing yellow glare, the faces of the Spaniard and, a little apart, the doctor, the nurse, and the Belgian. Which was the hallucination, their desertion of him or their continued presence, he was not certain. He pushed himself to one knee and then, weakly, to his feet.

“There were three white men with me and a white woman,” he gasped into the stone executioner’s mask. “They are all good *Belges* not even real *Belges* except the one and he’s not Flemish no not Flemish the bad ones are all Flemish but there are no Flemish here any bad that has been done tonight done today was done by me not them if you find them send them away in peace they have done much good for the Congo much much good—”

“I sentence you to death!”

“—much much good—”

“Shoot him, Gregoire and Emile,” the Sergeant commanded.

“—you must send them back you must take them back they have done much much—”

Even at such short range the aim of Gregoire Ilunga and Emile Kwange was faulty. It took a dozen shots, including four for good measure, before

they could be satisfied.

At the Sergeant's signal they pointed their weapons now at the four white people.

Sierra strode across the clearing. It was only a few paces, but the Spaniard made each one a kind of parade, slow and measured and solemn. His face was crusted with his dried blood and he was still unclothed except for his scarlet underwear shorts. He was not a big man, much shorter than Songolo and less bulky than the Sergeant, but his muscles were clean and hard under his brown skin and his gaze held firm upon the Sergeant's, wasting not the slightest fragment of his attention on any of the five cocked guns. He might have been Achilles striding fully armed and fully armored before the besieged and luckless walls of Troy. He had thrown away the knife.

He stopped a few feet away. "I arrest you in the name of the United Nations!" he said imperiously, in French.

The Sergeant blinked.

"I arrest you for the murder of Felicien Songolo of Leopoldville, Minister of Health in the Congolese Republican Government. I also arrest you for threatening homicide against"—he called matter-of-factly over his shoulder to his three companions—"what are your first names?"

"Jacques."

"Richard."

And a tremulous, "Mary."

"—for threatening homicide against Jacques Chartrand of Ngubdja, rancher; against Mary Kelvin of Canada, nurse of the Canadian Red Cross; against Richard Grant of Canada, doctor of the Canadian Red Cross and against Ramón Sierra of New York, senior representative in the Province of Equateur of the United Nations Organization in the Congo."

Sierra held the Sergeant's perplexed and startled eyes, but made no attempt to draw closer. He could feel the uneasy stirring of the other four soldiers, all waiting for their signal, but he continued to stare straight at the man directly before him.

"You have comprehended what I said?" he asked. "Do you comprehend the French?"

“I comprehend very well the French.” The Sergeant was a little haughty, a little sullen, and, for the moment, thrown quite off balance.

“Then you will have no trouble in comprehending what I shall tell you now. Put down your gun, turn your back to me, and raise your hands. Instruct your comrades to do the same.”

With an effort the Sergeant tore his eyes away for a reassuring glance at his gun. But Sierra’s swift words drew him back.

“Put down your gun.”

“You are a spy,” the Sergeant said doggedly, but it was plain the remark was mainly for his own comfort and reassurance.

“If you do not obey me at once,” Sierra said, “you may find it difficult to obtain clemency.”

“Clemency?” the Sergeant asked suspiciously. “What is clemency?”

“Prison instead of death!” Sierra said, Achilles calling a fearful ultimatum to the trembling towers.

“You are not from *Onee*!” the Sergeant assured himself, but it was still more an expression of shaken hope than of conviction. “You are a spy like that other one. And if you are from *Onee* it is not your right to take away our guns. *Onee* took away our guns before and was made to give them back.” The Sergeant waited for some encouragement, but his men were distressingly quiet. Again his rage had deserted him and again he sought to recover it. “You are all spies and saboteurs and enemies of the Congo,” he tried again, but the words were limp and tepid, without sinew or heat.

“I have five hundred men at Coq,” Sierra told him coldly. “I have two hundred men at Libenge. I have twelve machine guns at Boende. I have a full battalion of Gurkhas armed with their Gurkha pangas at Lisala. The Gurkha panga is a special panga from India; it is said to be far more terrible than any African panga. If my companions and I are not delivered safely to the airport at Ngubdja within six hours all these troops will begin to march at once.”

“That cannot be,” the Sergeant said uneasily.

“It can be and is.” Sierra went on bluffing. “I left messages behind. What is more—” he added on the spur of inspiration, “this man you have slain *was* a high officer of the Congolese Republic. You mocked him as a great man from Leo. Unfortunately for you, you were right. Do you think the other

great men from Leo will leave him forgotten here for the hyena and the vulture?”

“They would not know who to seek,” the Sergeant said anxiously. “They do not even know my name. You do not even know my name.”

“They all know your name!” Chartrand’s voice, prompting instantly from the far side of the clearing, borrowed some of Sierra’s resonant omniscience. “Your name is Albert Tshibangu.”

The Sergeant’s face fell and the muzzle of his gun drooped momentarily. He had abandoned the attempt to conceal his nervousness.

“No,” he protested. “My name is *Nkosi*.”

“Your name,” Chartrand said, “is Albert Tshibangu. You once worked on my ranch and that is why I know your name is Albert Tshibangu. Your name is already known to the *Onee* commanders in Coq, Libenge, Boende, and Lisala. It will soon be known to all the commanders of the Congolese army, in every corner of Equateur, in all of Orientale, in Kivu and Katanga, in Leopoldville itself, in Kasai. Already you have no refuge, no hope but the hope of clemency. Surrender to the man from *Onee*, Albert Tshibangu.”

“No.” The Sergeant appealed mutely to his silent men once more. “My name is *Nkosi*.”

“Well, *Nkosi*,” Sierra said with solemn wrath. “Get those guns on the ground or your roar will not reach tomorrow’s sunrise.”

The Sergeant turned again to his men, but their confidence had been shaken more severely than his own. Emile Kwange, who also had a little French, offered a suggestion. “Let us hear more about this clemency, Sergeant.”

“*Nkosi!*” Alphonse Mpolo hissed loyally.

“Let us hear more about the clemency, *Nkosi*,” Emile Kwange corrected himself.

“It can do no harm to listen for a moment, *Nkosi*,” Gregoire Ilunga added.

“Perhaps you are right,” the Sergeant granted. “We must give all a proper hearing.”

He returned his regard, expectantly, to Sierra.

Sierra said nothing. A trickle of blood ran from his forehead across one eyelid. He made no attempt to brush it away, but kept his eyes riveted on the last traces of the Sergeant's disintegrating scowl.

"What do you propose?" the Sergeant asked nervously.

"I can propose nothing until you put down your guns," Sierra said coldly.

The Sergeant pondered a moment. "Very well," he said in his most commanding tone. "We will put down our guns, but only while we confer with you. We will not turn our backs, however. And you will not attempt to pick up the guns."

Sierra pretended to think. He had now reached the critical point where everything depended on maintaining the unwritten rules of parley. He must make it possible for his adversary to surrender while still appearing to obtain a victory.

"You drive a hard bargain, *Nkosi*," he said doubtfully.

"It is my duty," the Sergeant said. "I have the honor and safety of my men to consider."

"To apply for clemency it is usually necessary to submit completely to arrest."

"*Nkosi* does not submit," the Sergeant ventured.

"Then," Sierra said with what passed for reluctant admiration, "I shall have to yield to you on the point of giving your guns to me."

The Sergeant turned to his followers again, beaming in triumph. "It is agreed then, *Nkosi*," Sierra said. "Put your guns on the ground and we shall discuss as man to man whether it may be possible to spare your lives."

In that instant, with the last remnants of the Sergeant's will dissolving, with the muzzle of his gun already lowered, Sierra heard a warning shout from Chartrand. "God-damn it," he thought angrily, "he'll smash the whole thing!" Any sign of movement or flinching on his part now and the spell would be gone. He would be exposed for what he was, a defenseless, naked, wounded, tired, frightened, and encumbered man of forty-seven, a man traveling on his nerve and his adrenal glands and even those near to playing out on him. He did not move a muscle.

He heard Chartrand shout again, but still he remained as still as a statue, waiting for the Sergeant to lower his gun all the way to the ground. And

then, in a sudden blaze and roar his head exploded like a shrapnel burst in the black of night, a blinding flower with cruelly lashing orange petals flying off into the darkness while giant boulders crashed down from an unseen mountainside.

He felt the hot earth against his mouth, put his hands on the ground, and lifted his head and shook it slowly from side to side. The first deep roaring in his ears was reinforced by a shrill, horrifyingly familiar screeching. His eyes cleared. Towering above him like a tattered gray-black skeleton was the old woman of the pirogue, raising her pole to strike him another blow. She was shrieking in wild, malevolent ecstasy and dancing around him on the toeless stumps of her feet. She brought the pole hurtling down toward his head. He warded it off with one flung arm, but the blow flattened him once more. The old woman was now flinging obscenities at them all, at Sierra and the soldiers alike.

“Have no fear, you stinking jackal!” she squalled at the Sergeant. “Go and hide among the dung heaps! I will save you!”

Sierra floundered to one knee and grabbed the pole away from her. She tottered backward, her black knob-ended legs jabbing stiffly at the ground like upside-down blackthorn walking sticks.

He began to pull himself erect; it was a slow business, for one shoulder was broken and his left arm would not move and the orange petals were still lashing furiously to escape from some black cavern between his temples. He searched again for the Sergeant’s eyes, seeking instinctively to reassert his authority and recreate his aura of power and menace. But the Sergeant had raised the muzzle of his gun again and as Sierra lifted his head that was as far as he got and as much as he saw.

He fell across the body of Felicien Songolo. His good arm came to rest across Songolo’s thin, still shoulders.

Chapter 13

Now that it was done, the brief misgivings of Emile Kwange and Gregoire Ilunga were at an end. “O Sergeant,” Emile cried devotedly, “that is better than to confer.”

“His name is truly *Nkosi!*” Alphonse Mpolo’s shout of jubilation brought a sharp glance from the Sergeant. “His name was always *Nkosi,*” Mpolo elaborated hastily. “Now it is *Nkosi* even more than ever.”

“Give *Nkosi* a drink,” Mpolo commanded, and Remy Okito, the bearer of the canteen, hurriedly uncapped it and thrust it in the Sergeant’s hands. The Sergeant drank slowly, regarding his handiwork with a mixture of incredulity, awe, and pride.

Alphonse Mpolo called into the trees behind them. “Come and hail the lion!” he cried. “Come, warriors, and hail the lion!”

The trees parted and, one by one, a dozen bowmen and spearmen glided into the clearing. They went straight across to where the old chief stood apart, not quite certain what to do. “You are well, O father?” one of the younger warriors asked him.

“I am well,” he replied, somewhat aloofly.

“Come friends!” Alphonse Mpolo called with a trace of impatience. “Come and be greeted by *Nkosi*. Do not fear *Nkosi*. Has he not saved your chief? Has he not saved us all? *Nkosi* will not harm you. Even with our mighty guns we will not harm our brothers.”

Astrid Mahamba had stolen out of the trees behind the last of the warriors. She looked toward Chartrand, Mary Kelvin, and Grant, but they had not noticed her; she remained at the edge of the group of soldiers and hunters, now milling around excitedly and exchanging cries of wonder and congratulation.

“Give the chief something to drink,” the Sergeant commanded.

“Ah, that is good,” the chief sighed when he returned the canteen to Remy Okito. Okito shook it politely and apologetically to show the other hunters and warriors it was almost empty.

“The chief was no doubt glad to see *Nkosi!*” Alphonse Mpolo shouted boisterously. “His heart must have leaped to see *Nkosi*. In time, in time,

barely in time, but still in time.” He turned to the surrounding tribesmen, expecting a general shout of gratitude.

The chief frowned a little. “They were evil men,” he said.

“Now their evil is ended, thanks to *Nkosi*,” Mpolo reminded him. “Soon *Nkosi* will end all evil in all the district of Mgonga. With the help of all loyal and grateful tribes, *Nkosi* will—”

“I could have destroyed them all myself,” the chief interrupted, frowning thoughtfully. “Destroyed these two”—he nodded half apologetically at the bodies on the ground—“and destroyed the other three over there.” One of the warriors had appointed himself a sentry over Chartrand, Mary, and Grant, but otherwise they were temporarily forgotten. “I could have destroyed them all,” the chief repeated.

“But,” he went on solemnly, “they had a juju. The most powerful juju I have ever seen. I could have destroyed them easily, but I could not destroy the juju.”

The warriors cried in wonder.

“*Nkosi* destroyed the juju,” Alphonse Mpolo boasted. “No juju is too strong for *Nkosi*.”

The Sergeant broke in graciously. “Ah, but it was difficult. Very difficult. The chief did well. Only a mighty chief could have avoided death from it. It was, for me too, the most powerful juju I have ever known. It made me hold back my bullets. It made me lower my gun. Perhaps you saw.”

There was a general chorus of clucks and ejaculations.

“Perhaps,” the Sergeant proceeded, “you wondered why I lowered my gun, why I did not deal at once with the man who says he is from *Onee*. It was the juju. The juju spoke through him before I cast it off and overcame it.”

“The juju made me, too, lower my gun,” Gregoire Ilunga echoed.

Emile Kwange joined the chorus. “The juju seized me also and turned my heart to jelly.”

There was a burst of indulgent laughter.

“I could have destroyed them easily except for the juju,” the chief said again.

“Ah yes,” the Sergeant agreed graciously. “That is so.” Full dignity had been restored to everyone. There was honor enough for all and fresh and mighty tales for the campfires.

“There are still the other three,” Alphonse Mpolo reminded the Sergeant. “Shall we dispose of them now?”

“Wait,” the Sergeant said. “I must think.”

“Silence!” Mpolo commanded the chattering warriors.

“No,” the Sergeant said after a while, “we will not dispose of them as yet.”

“Ah,” Mpolo speculated, grinning, “you wish to retain the woman?”

“For a time no doubt,” the Sergeant replied absently. “I will continue my thinking later on.”

The old chief had been listening. “Give me the men,” he pleaded. “Keep the woman for yourself, *Nkosi*. But give me the men for my village.”

The Sergeant reflected.

“Give me the men,” the chief pleaded once more. “My tribe has had no captives since the week of the Independence.”

The Sergeant thought again.

“Give me at least one of the men. There will be a great celebration in my village tonight because of the return of the chief. But what is a celebration without a captive? In the old days it demanded at least three. And I have seen as many as ten. Ah, but you are from a village, you are of us also. This you know already, *Nkosi*. Give me one captive for my village.”

“It is to be regretted,” the Sergeant decreed at length. “But I cannot. I may need them for hostages. It may be that the spy from *Onee* was not lying altogether. There may be hostile soldiers coming soon. If they should come you will be better not to have had a captive. I will be better for having them, the more the better.”

The chief shrugged in disappointment and led his warriors away through the trees. The old woman of the pirogue silently retrieved her pole, gathered up her now cool cooking pot and her fish nets from the bank, embarked again in the long black craft, and began poling her crippled friend downstream, toward their village.

When Songolo had first gone forward to face the ring of guns alone, Grant had turned Mary away. Her back was still toward the Sergeant when he strode across and spoke to Chartrand.

“So you know my name?” he said.

“Yes. Do you not remember working on my ranch?”

“I work for no *Belge*. What is my name?”

“Albert Tshibangu.”

The Sergeant struck him backhanded across the mouth.

“My name is *Nkosi*. Say it! Say it now!”

“All right,” Chartrand said wearily. “Your name is *Nkosi*.”

“What is wrong with the woman?”

“She has an injured leg. She cannot walk. We have been carrying her on that stretcher.” He nodded toward the water’s edge.

The Sergeant pointed to the opposite side of the clearing. “Do you know her?” he asked. Chartrand gave a start of relief and pleasure at the sight of Astrid Mahamba, standing shyly at the border of the trees, dressed only in the shadows but apparently unhurt.

“I know her,” Chartrand said.

“Too well, monsieur,” the Sergeant said portentously.

“Too well?”

“She has told me everything,” the Sergeant said. “Everything. You forced her to accompany you. Do you deny it?”

“Of what use to deny it?” Chartrand said.

“You tore off her clothing, you and the other white men. Do you deny it?”

Chartrand shrugged.

“You seized her. One by one you violated her before she escaped. Do you deny it?”

“Of what use to deny?”

“You know there are penalties now?” The Sergeant struck Chartrand again across the mouth. “You know you can no longer take our women at your will?”

“Yes,” Chartrand said diffidently.

The Sergeant thrust the muzzle of his gun against Chartrand’s chest.

“Have you anything to say before I shoot you?”

“Nothing.”

“Would you not like some of this magical clemency your friend was speaking of?” the Sergeant asked sarcastically.

“If you wish to give it to me I will accept it.”

“But you will not ask for it?”

“No. I will not ask for it.”

“Did you overhear the request of the chief just now? Did you hear him ask to have you for his prisoner? Did you hear him ask to have you for his village, for the celebration in his village?”

“I heard.”

“You have lived long in the Congo?”

“Very long.”

“Then you know about the nature of the celebrations. It is not too late for me to reconsider the request of the chief. His village is only a few kilometers away.”

Chartrand shrugged again.

The Sergeant turned away in disgust. “Perhaps before the day is over you too will reconsider. Put the white woman on the stretcher. You take one front end. Tell the other Belge to take the end beside you. My men will attend to the other two. Emile! Remy! Here! Alphonse, you and Gregoire fall in behind.”

“*Nkosi!*” If there was an edge of irony in Chartrand’s voice it was too slight to be detected.

“You have something to say now? Something perhaps to request?”

“Yes. Only I am a *Belge*. You know the other two are from the hospital. I wish to remind you that they are not true *Belges*. They are from a far-off country called Canada. They have taken nothing from the Congo and they want nothing from the Congo. They have come here only to heal the sick. And the doctor did not molest the Gombe girl.”

“They have given a refuge to spies. They have conspired with the enemies of the people.”

“Come, *Nkosi*.”

“Silence!” the Sergeant shouted. “Put the woman on the stretcher.”

As they moved off into the pathway to the road, the Sergeant summoned Astrid Mahamba with his hand and she fell in beside him. She turned her head to exchange a glance with Chartrand, but caught the Sergeant frowning at her. She gave the Sergeant a timid smile and went on beside him with her eyes straight ahead.

The Sergeant stopped in a moment to let the litter pass, and then walked on beside his chief adviser and confidant, Alphonse Mpolo. Their brief conversation was not in Lingala or Ngombe, but in a mixture of Sudanese dialects. They spoke at a normal conversational level, obviously not expecting to be understood by anyone but each other and not caring greatly if they were.

Grant’s bad ankle had gone almost numb and he was faring a little better with it. There seemed to be no prohibition against their talking between each other and after the Sergeant had hurried past again to join Astrid Mahamba at the head of the procession, he asked Chartrand in English, “Did you get any of that?”

Chartrand turned his head toward the litter with a quizzical expression on his dark stubbled face. Mary was lying still with her arms cradling her eyes and pressing against her ears. She might have been unconscious or she might have been trying to convince herself that she was unconscious.

“Nothing she hears will make it any worse or any better for her.” Even he, Grant perceived, was being driven into some kind of shell by the horror of the night and morning; he might have been delivering a professional opinion and nothing more. Well, at least it was more useful than pity and not much of that remained anyway. What had been left over from the night lay with the African and the Spaniard, adorning their open dusty bier as foolishly as an undertaker’s flowers. Perhaps, he reproached himself, he had done it backward; he should have saved his compassion for the helpless woman and spent his utility on Sierra while he was still in reach of help.

“Why,” he spoke aloud, but the question was meant only for himself, “couldn’t one of us have grabbed the old woman from the canoe before she reached him?”

“I’ve been asking myself the same thing.” Chartrand had taken only one small sip of their now vanished supply of water during the long night and morning and his tongue was growing thick and abrasive against the roof of his mouth. But the urge to talk had come upon him again. “Inertia, perhaps,” he speculated. “Fatigue, stupidity, shock, the instinct to survive, an old-fashioned lack of valor. I wonder too, but I don’t blame myself, nor should you. It could have done no good. One move by either of us in their direction and all their guns would have gone off in all directions and the tribesmen would have been upon us too. Sierra nearly brought it off. He *was* bringing it off, by God. To interfere would have been as clumsy and senseless as to leap on the podium to the rescue of a great conductor just because one of the violins was out of tune.”

“You knew he was a conductor once?” Grant had little breath to spare but he could not withhold the exclamation of surprise. “I read it somewhere in a U.N. paper, but had no idea he was well-known.”

“I heard him conduct in Brussels when he was little more than a boy and I was in my last year at Louvain. He was already on the brink of fame, already on his way back home to the brink of oblivion. He carried himself then as he did just now. Too sensitive to be afraid, too proud to show it, a man of steel and held-back tears.”

Grant did not reply.

“Perhaps I should have told him when we were talking this morning. Music once meant a great deal to me too—which is why I attended his debut in Belgium. He was, you will not be surprised to hear, somewhat inclined to favor the horns and the percussion section. But no, I didn’t mention it to him. On a day such as this everyone has a right to select his own memories. Pardon: I have forgotten to extend the same courtesy to you.” They labored on a few more paces in silence.

“Don’t you think you’d better tell me what the soldiers were talking about?” Grant panted.

“Besides,” Chartrand went on in his almost flawless English, “he didn’t like me. Or, just as accurately I suppose, I didn’t like him. Everybody out here is so damnedly jealous of his rights and—what do you say, prerogatives and prejudices?—the U.N., the *Belge*, the *evolué*, everybody from the hungriest cannibal to the fattest politician. I resented Sierra’s being here and he resented my being here. Songolo either had to go on being a nationalist or write himself off and write the glorious Independence off as either obsolete or a hoax. So he was obliged at least to pretend to resent Sierra as well as

me. Well, God go with them. They've both paid their full share of *l'addition* and paid it without haggling."

"What were the soldiers talking about?" Grant persisted.

"Still," Chartrand went on, "they did know what they were for and what they were against, at least in some vague and general way. There are some who have lacked even that consolation. Take, for example, the living anachronism, the good *Belge*. In the times of the Belgians, a good *Belge* in the eyes of the Belgians was by definition a bad *Belge* in the eyes of the Congolese and vice-versa. A good *Belge* in Belgian terms kept the Africans in their place—off the sidewalks and out of the schools and that sort of thing. Left their women alone except when they could be had alone and in the greatest secrecy.

"But conversely a good *Belge* in the eyes of the Africans was a bad *Belge* in the eyes of the Belgians. To encourage the barest and most distant thought of equality was to encourage revolt. It was very complicated until the matter was solved by declaring all *Belges* to be all bad, from all points of view. We are anathema to the United Nations. We are anathema to the Congolese, all of those except the handful who stayed behind to lead them in their tribal wars. It is an interesting and instructive experience, *monsieur*, to see oneself changed overnight from a demigod to an untouchable."

Grant's ankle was again hurting him badly. These compulsive speeches sounded like the beginning of some perverse delirium, half put-on for the sake of pity and attention. The Belgian's ostentatious command of English made them all the harder to bear, as did his ostentatious display of stamina and his transparently counterfeit stoicism. The waves of hostility lapped between the stretcher poles, just as they had done back in the savanna.

"I don't think you're following me," Chartrand said.

"For Christ's sake man! What did they say?"

"All right," Chartrand said. "If you see any chance at all to break away, take it. It will have to be within the next half hour."

Grant limped to the inside of his pole, changing his grip on the move.

"All they've decided," Chartrand said, "is to finish it without witnesses. They're getting scared now that the drinks are running low. It's their notion that if they can finish us quietly and get rid of the evidence they can say, if they're caught, that they've got us holed up alive somewhere in the jungle."

"And Mary?"

“Not immediately.”

“Even if I saw a chance I couldn’t leave her behind.”

Chartrand was suddenly livid. “Oh you God-damned pious, psalm-singing, self-righteous Episcopalian British bastard!” He spoke in a flat monotone, like a midway barker or a priest reciting a prayer, and for a moment Grant thought he was merely off on another disjointed cry of personal anguish.

“Don’t think I don’t know you!” Chartrand said. “My grandfather was one of you. You posturing fools with your pompous Code borrowed from your idiot poets! What good can you do this woman by dying before her eyes? Recite her a few last lines from Henley? Buck her up with a bit of Kipling?”

Grant could think of nothing better to say than, “Take it easy.”

But Chartrand raced on, his spate of fury all the more terrifying because of its lack of inflection.

“You took the cream off the colonial racket, you British bastards, took it off and then—”

The four soldiers behind were amused, but not deceived.

“I hope you are not quarreling, messieurs,” Remy Okito called ahead to them in French. “It is much too hot to quarrel. And besides the days on the equator are so short.” His comrades did not fully comprehend his witticism, but it still provoked a storm of general mirth.

“—took the cream off the colonial racket and then got virtuous.”

“By the way, I’m Canadian,” Grant interrupted feebly. “It’s not quite the same. We used to be a colony ourselves.”

“It’s wicked, you said. And when you decided to get out of the colony racket, everybody else had to get out too. Right away, whether it made any sense or not. You shamed my country into abandoning it too, bullied us into following your timetable. You and the Russians and the Americans! *and* the blacks and whites and the yellows! *and* the communists and the imperialists and the nationalists! all of you egging each other on. If there was one thing you could all agree on it was that Belgium had to give up the Congo and right away. And so you tricked us tricky Belgians into trying to trick you back and we left the place in chaos. You wonder why I’m bitter? I’ve seen both my countries go to hell under the goading of you Episcopalian British bastards and your sanctimonious American friends. Seen it and tried to

endure it. But just for today and what's left of today I can't stomach your fake heroics any more."

Grant tried to close his mind to the sound and think of other things. He tried pretending he was in church, listening to a reading from the Book of Common Prayer and thinking of the goalkeeping problem of the Montreal Canadiens.

"I'd be blackballed in any decent club, wouldn't I?" Chartrand was untiring and relentless. "Oh, I'm not wholly uncivilized. Dear old grandfather put me up for Harrow the day I was born and saw that I went for a term and a half before I succeeded in getting kicked out. I never really assimilated."

He was half soliloquizing. "I'd still be blackballed in any decent club. Take, for example, the little Gombe girl. Shouldn't have had anything to do with her in the first place, should I? Just isn't done, is it? And then sending her off into the blue like that. Shocking form. Shocking. Thoroughly un-British. Should have clasped her to my manly chest and all that."

Now he spoke in agony, almost in supplication. "But she's alive and you're alive and the white woman is alive and even I'm alive. Even I, the unprincipled cad from Belgium. Is that," he asked earnestly, "of no significance at all?"

For the first time Grant felt a stirring of genuine sympathy. "I guess it is."

Chartrand did not speak again for almost half a minute. When he did it was in complete quiet and reasonableness. "If by some miracle one of us could get away it would at least confuse them for a while. It might help her and it could not possibly do her any harm.

"If you could only," he went on more intensely, "forget your lifelong brainwashing and suspend your comic-opera Code. Damn it all, man, you're not back at prep school rehearsing *St. George and the Dragon*. You play this place by ear, the way the Spaniard did. You—"

"Have you any ideas?" Grant interrupted.

"Then you're willing to try?"

"If I see a chance." For all the throbbing in his ankle and the growing despair in his heart, he could not hold back a delayed retort. "It wasn't so much what you said as the way you said it."

"They have stopped quarreling," Remy Okito announced noisily.

“It is good to see them friends again,” Emile Kwange applauded. “A faithful friend is the greatest of comforts.”

“Even if it looks no better than a thousand to one”—Chartrand urged again—“take it. I intend to do the same. If one of us is at liberty they’ll think twice about what to do with the other two. And Grant?”

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry I lost my temper. I’ve had that penned up for a long time.”

They had been on the road for two or three minutes and now they were beside the two ANC jeeps. The Sergeant directed the two white men to help Mary into the front seat of the first of them. Then, with the help of his carbine, he nudged them to one of the facing rear seats. The soldier he called Gregoire got in behind the wheel and the one he called Alphonse sat on the seat opposite the two men with his gun cocked and aimed across the narrow aisle at a point halfway between their chests.

The Sergeant and the other two soldiers mounted the second jeep. The two vehicles turned around and moved slowly up the road, with the Sergeant driving the one behind.

Grant was still absorbing, none too successfully, the shock of the killings. Mixed with his shock there was a wave of genuine sorrow. Not altogether selfless sorrow, however, for with it went a great sense of his own deprivation. When they left the hospital, he remembered, he had been assuring himself that his involvement was only accidental, temporary, and superficial. He was merely being prudent, largely on Mary’s behalf. He had half expected to be back in the wards by now. In this passionate but weary land, he had learned, human rage erupted and subsided as suddenly as the cymbal clashes of dawn and dark. It spent itself as swiftly as all things spent themselves here, sometimes as swiftly as a lie; one moment a raging fever, the next a sigh of total exhaustion and abandonment.

By now he might have been in his dark and steamy little office, writing a stiffish report to Toronto, with a carbon copy to Geneva, about the continuing shortage of medical supplies and now this fresh example of the total lack of security.

“Needless to say,” he would have written—as Chartrand had pointed out just now, the Code was pretty inflexible—“I intend to finish my own tour of duty. But unless the hospital can be guaranteed at least some minimal protection against the vagaries of the tribal population and the undisciplined

Congolese National Army, I shall have to insist that my female nurse, Miss Mary Kelvin, return to Leopoldville at once.”

Even when the unusual durability of this new nightmare had first begun to be apparent, he had fallen unconsciously into the role of a concerned onlooker rather than a direct participant. For him and his nurse this queer violent and essentially insane country—and above all their own entanglement with it—ended at the edges of the hospital compound. Up to the last he had expected the intruders to come to their senses and go away, as they had done before, and allow him to return and carry on his work.

Allow the others, the U.N. man, the government man and the Belgian, to go back and carry on their work too, of course, and if he could be of any help in arranging this, ordinary humanity would compel him to do everything he could. But they were men of politics, of business, and to a degree of war, and their affairs had nothing to do with his affairs, which were the affairs of medicine. And come whatever violence, in whatever mad unbridled forms, he and Mary would still be granted their immunity under the Red Cross. The *Croix Rouge* was far older, even in the villages deep in the bush, than all these new conflicts and confusions. It was above and apart from them all, and even in madness or in drink, the natives could not for long mistake or forget the nature of its errands.

Grant realized now that, without consciously meaning to, he had been coasting on Sierra's courage and ingenuity—doing so, moreover, with the thought half-buried in the back of his mind that if Sierra failed there was a special private escape-hatch still open to him and Mary. In mourning Sierra—and less profoundly, Songolo—was he mourning the loss of a great and indomitable man or the loss of a bodyguard? The answer would have to be postponed. He was in charge of his own fate now, he and he alone, and he made a less reassuring bodyguard than the Spaniard had made.

A thousand to one would be good odds to take, Chartrand had said. But how did you figure the odds on a proposition like this?

In his days as a medical student in Winnipeg he had done a good deal of gambling. At one time he had known the precise mathematical probabilities against the hard four, against the easy ten, against the natural, against filling an inside straight, and even—just for the fun of knowing—against a perfect cribbage hand or a Yarborough in bridge.

How did it go against the shooter coming out for a point? He had forgotten and there was no use asking Chartrand. If he gambled at all it was probably one of those Frenchy games like pique or baccarat.

One summer Grant had done well at Polo Park pursuing the theory of the overlay. If you saw a horse going to the post at eight to one and your judgment told you it shouldn't be more than four to one, that was the horse to put your money on. The odds board had no effect on the horse's chances of winning (unless of course there was some hanky-panky going on in the stables or the jockey room), but it did affect your chances of getting a fair price. In theory. By fall the sad truth came home to him that picking overlays was just as uncertain as picking winners, and the track and tax percentages would break you sooner or later either way.

There was no tax to buck here, so if you could establish a natural price and compare it with the going price, the price on the board, then the theory of the overlay might be worth taking another shot at. But how did you read the board, where did you place your bets? Remembering the days when he had found an exotic, college-boy pleasure in the language of the race track, he felt an impetuous urge to tap Chartrand's shoulder and say out of the side of his mouth, "Hey, Mac, tell me where I can get a piece of that thousand to one."

The house, he observed, changing the metaphor a little, wasn't giving the suckers any the best of it. The Sergeant kept less than fifty yards behind, with Astrid Mahamba—the last tribute and apology Grant could offer her was the courtesy of her full name—upright on the other front seat. The two remaining soldiers were tense and eager on the two rear seats, their guns across their knees and their eyes gleaming with anticipation.

By God, he thought, they *are* just down from the trees. What an incredible joke they've played on all us do-gooders and come-to-Christers and eggheads and mission-banders and bleeding hearts and God-sees-the-little-sparrow-fallers!

What a laugh Valerie Fraser and her old man will have when they hear about this. How happy those unpigmented ghouls I met in the Memling will be to remind themselves they told me so. They *were* right. It's true enough; it's all a waste; it can't lead anywhere but back to Conrad and the Heart of Darkness.

And let's not have that crap about old King Leo and the Yankee blackbirders. I never cut off anybody's hands, not even on an operating table. Mary never cut off any hands. Even this half-crazy Belgian never cut off any hands. None of us ever ran a slave ship out of the river mouth into New Orleans. We've all tried a little bit to repair the sins of the past, sins not our own, and here's how our grateful black brothers reply.

The black brothers have just killed Sierra, a good, brave man, for trying to lend his services to the brotherhood. They've killed Songolo, another good, brave man for trying to rise above their chapter of the brotherhood and lift the chapter with him. Of the six of us who left the town last night the only one who'll get back is Astrid Mahamba and that's only because of the happy coincidence that she is both black and a good lay. I wonder if they'll find Mary a good lay too? It won't matter in the long run because she's white and too dangerous a witness to allow to stay alive. Astrid Mahamba, poor lucky kid, will just fade back into the jungle and keep mum. I wish I'd had the gumption, he thought sadly, to try finding out about Mary for myself. She likely is.

They had not passed a village for three or four miles. He would have to make his move very soon or never.

The river side of the road was at his back. He did not dare turn to look at it lest the movement set off a reflex in the trigger finger of the nervous soldier sitting opposite him and Chartrand. But he guessed there would still be a strip of reeds and a narrow roadside ditch between them and the river. He peered ahead for the crossroad he knew could not be more than a kilometer or so away.

"The second we're past the crossroad," he said softly to Chartrand, "I'm going to kick this black bastard's gun upward. You grab it and I'll go for the driver."

Alphonse Mpolo made a quick threatening gesture with his carbine, commanding silence.

For a moment he seemed to be at the eye of a mirage of which he himself was a part. The sun was straight above, an enemy bomb-sight dead on its target. Over one shoulder he could see the road ahead, quivering torpidly like a mortally wounded brown snake. The jeep behind floated weightlessly on land half-turned to liquid.

He turned his head a safe sixty degrees, watching still for the crossroad. His mind had settled on it as a crucial place, a punctuation point just because it was the one road they had traveled before, the road that led back. The convoy was traveling very slowly, as though even the vehicles were taking some inanimate pleasure in the deed ahead, and when Grant first saw the wider clearing at the top of the crossroad there were still a few seconds to think.

A few seconds to think and a few seconds to live. He pressed his toes against his desert boots to make sure the sudden access of weakness had not paralyzed his legs. For now his ankle did not matter. It was his legs, it was the first lunging kick at the gun barrel three feet from his chest that must decide whether he would die fighting or be slaughtered like a dumb animal.

He felt Chartrand stiffen beside him. He drew a quick, long breath.

Then, in a bewildering instant of fission, the whole mirage exploded. The jeep slammed to a halt. The carbine that had been staring at him and Chartrand for the last half hour clattered abruptly to the floor of the jeep. The soldier who had held it threw his arms above his head so swiftly and violently that they cracked against the canvas canopy like the snap of a bull whip.

Almost before he had finished his furious braking the driver leaped into the roadside, his hands up too, his startled red-white eyes full of dismay and disbelief. Chartrand dove for the dropped gun and Grant made a headlong lunge to shove Mary to the floor in front just as she began to turn and look. From behind, in the vicinity of the second jeep, there was one short burst of Sten-gun fire, mixed with a tumult of cries and oaths above which rose a single commanding bellow. "Stand fast everywhere! Silence everywhere!" Then utter stillness all around.

It happened with such speed—not, strictly speaking, in sequence but all at once—that only now did Grant exhale the last of the long deep-diver's breath he had taken before it began. His legs and arms had become entangled like a fisherman's backlash with the legs and arms of Chartrand and the soldier in the back seat and with Mary and the narrow gap between the two seats in front. He freed himself clumsily and looked toward the river on the left and the other jeep behind.

The first thing he saw clearly was a picket fence of African soldiers in the *Casque Bleu* of the United Nations. Some were kneeling at the edge of the trees between the road and the river and some were standing with their legs spread wide apart and diagonally, for balance and ready movement. All had submachine guns pointed straight at one or other of the two jeeps.

His eyes swept down the menacing line again. At one side of the jeep behind, the soldier he had heard them call Remy lay face down in the roadway, his carbine clutched at the end of one outstretched arm. Behind the jeep, ringed by half a dozen *Casques Bleus*, the Sergeant and the other Congolese soldier stood with their arms held high while another *Casque Bleu* went over their web equipment and through their pockets. Astrid

Mahamba was leaning against the hood of the jeep, doing something with her hair.

Grant freed a trembling but fully conscious Mary from her own entanglement of clutch pedals and gear levers. Just as they were about to dismount, a blue beret thrust itself into the entrance beside them. It was supported by a pair of blue eyes, a bad case of sunburn and a sweeping bleached moustache that could only have belonged to an English officer between the ranks of lieutenant and full colonel.

“Dr. Grant I presume?” the presence beneath the beret boomed. “Haw! Got you there, what? Only defense against a bad joke is to tell it yourself before the other blighter can. Been practising this one since dawn. How-do-you-do Miss Kelvin. You all right? No need to be baffled. We had your nominal roll in apple-pie order at four o’clock this morning. That’s one thing about good old *Onee*. The minute it gets eight feet away from the *Royale* it gets lost or beaten up. But on paper work it’s right up there with Whitehall.”

He got into the vacant driver’s seat and piloted their jeep toward the crossroad. As they turned down it, in the direction from which they had come originally, he waved toward a tracked machine-gun carrier, a Land Rover and two troop-carrying trucks. “Expect you’d like a dash of brandy,” he said, still not having heard the sound of any of their voices. “I’m Major Michael Chesterton, late Coldstream Guards, now Fourth Nigerians. Those were my boys you saw back on the other road.”

Without interrupting himself he signaled to the driver awaiting them beside the Land Rover. Almost instantly they were all holding little silver-plated drinking glasses and the driver was pouring tots of cognac. Grant couldn’t help noticing the label said V.S.O.P.

“Sandwiches in a jiffy. Just ham and cheese, I’m afraid.” The Major’s monologue rumbled agreeably on. “Shouldn’t be too flattered if I were you. Haw! It was those other two poor blokes we were really sent to get. Chap you really owe our timely and dramatic et cetera to is that nurse fellow back at the hospital, Junius or Jules. I stopped to check the maps with him on the way through from the airport. Good man. The minute you took off and these Congo blighters after you this Junius or Jules hustled down to the airport and got the *Belge* dispatcher to get a signal through to Coq and on to Leo. It was you that your Junius or Jules was worried about, but the dispatcher fortunately knew which side was up and when the signal got back to Leo it read something like, ‘Felicien Songolo, Ramón Sierra and three European civilians in imminent danger capture and death by ANC detachment at

Ngubdja. Party believed fleeing toward Ubangi River and French Congo but little chance survival without immediate help.’ ”

Grant broke in at last. None of them had touched the brandy. He held out his silver cup. “We couldn’t trade this for some water, could we?” he asked weakly.

“Of course, of course, how stupid of me,” the Major apologized. The driver appeared with a clay jug and a single tin cup. “Just one round for now,” the Major said, as he handed the first cupful to Mary. “Another in half an hour. As I was saying if it had only been Mr. Sierra and three white civilians the Congo government would probably have made the appropriate noises, but if precedent means anything nothing much would have happened. And if it had only been Songolo and three white civilians the U.N. would have started firing off protests every hour on the hour and getting nowhere. But with one each of their biggest brass in the same bag the Leo government and the U.N. for once saw dead eye to eye and, even more miraculously, got going in step. I understand Songolo wasn’t too popular with the president—a bit too popular with certain other people. But casual homicide seems suddenly to have become non-U out here. All liquidations of important persons are supposed to go through channels. Can’t have just anybody chopping up the cabinet ministers; gives murder a bad name and plays the very devil with the system of political patronage. Haw!”

The water had reached Grant. The Major relieved him of his brandy, drank it down, allowed a decent interval for interruptions, and when none occurred, resumed. “Your nurse-chap’s message reached Leo at twenty-three hours last night. There were frantic meetings and alarums on the instant; never heard of anything moving so fast this side of Gib. I got my marching orders at o-one-o (thank God it was one of my nondrinking nights). By o-two-o the U.N. had whacked up two DC-3S. By o-three-o we were airborne. And at o-seven-three-seven our wheels were down at Ngubdja. The Congo chaps had the airport cleared for us and in case of any fuss about sovereignty or red tape they had sent a special platoon of ANC along with us from Leo. Nominally they’re the senior force and the commander of this whole expedition is a *Belge* captain. The minute we were safely past the airport he and I reached a quiet agreement that he’d make a wide encircling movement with his Congo chaps and lose them. Haw! Right now they’re away down river chasing crocodiles. Good enough men no doubt, but inclined to rage and rattle and racket all over the place, just like those wretched psychos who’ve been giving you a time. I know what they did to Sierra and Songolo, by the way. One of our patrols was there five

minutes after you left. Miracle of wireless. That's why we were so sure of meeting you here. Never get taken in by that rot about the tom-toms. Wireless beats it every time."

The Major relieved Chartrand of his brandy. "No questions then? Oh, one of my own. What about the dusky little maiden? Can't seem to fit her into the picture. She one of theirs or one of ours?"

To spare Chartrand whatever embarrassment might have been involved in answering the question himself, Grant said, "One of ours. If she hadn't been, your time would have been wasted."

"Good," the Major said. "I'll need the details later for the sextuplicate chaps at the *Royale*. Junius or Jules back at the hospital said there was a Congo girl with you when you went exploring. Wondered what had become of her. There was no mention of her in the briefing they gave me at Leo."

"There wouldn't have been," Chartrand interjected. "They naturally wouldn't think her worth counting."

"And who are *they*, monsieur?" the Major asked mildly.

Who, indeed, Chartrand wondered, wishing he hadn't spoken. By *they* he had not intended to offer a definition, but only a cry of protest. *They* were authority, they were all authority; they were the girl's own ruthless war lords; in spite of its antiseptic, impersonal, statistical clearing of swamps and restraining of war lords they were, in a sense, the United Nations, the devil-god called *Onee*. They were, in another sense, his own people, the imperious, haughty, bloodstained slave masters of almost a hundred years.

And they were also—the Major's soft question was like a contemptuous slap.

In spite of the momentary ease his outburst against Grant had given him, the memory of Astrid's swift little figure disappearing into the savanna had not been disposed of. She was a pawn of *they* and as the English Major had said, it was fair to demand their names, their exact names.

"I guess you have me," Chartrand said dully. "They are Jacques Chartrand. Not him alone, but him as much as anyone. Does this admission please you?"

"Didn't mean it that way at all, old man." Perceiving how much harder he had scored than he intended, the Major turned and spoke to his driver. "Go and get the little Gombe girl and bring her up here. Tell the Corporal to load all the prisoners but their Sergeant in one of the troop carriers. Put

handcuffs on the Sergeant and sit him in a jeep just ahead of my car, in case of trouble at the checkpoints. We'll move off in fifteen minutes."

Astrid came down the road, shy in her nakedness for the first time. Chartrand went to meet her. "You go ahead," he said to the Nigerian soldier escorting her. They were just beyond earshot of the other jeep. In full view of the Major and the Major's driver Chartrand kissed her on the forehead. "You are a good girl, Astrid Cleopatra Lolita Mahamba."

"Yes," she admitted demurely.

"You are a brave girl, Astrid."

"It is too bad I am without clothing."

He peeled off his long khaki bush shirt and put it around her. She gave a small happy chuckle, thrust her hands deep into the two lower pockets, and made a half pirouette. "See how it becomes me!" she cried. She smiled in mock boastfulness. "Now it is I who am monsieur le chef, monsieur le boss, monsieur le roi de toutes les Belges."

"They molested you, no doubt?" Chartrand's tone was grave and honestly solicitous and to his faint surprise rather jealous.

"Yes."

"All?"

"All."

"Often?"

"Mostly the Sergeant."

"They shall pay."

"Yes."

"You are injured?"

She frowned slightly, not certain whether to take the question as an insult or a compliment. "No, I do not think so."

"Then," he consoled her, "we shall forget it."

"Yes, we shall forget it."

"It shall be as though it had never happened."

"It shall be," she agreed dreamily, "as though it had never happened."

Chapter 14

Grant, Mary, Chartrand, and Astrid rode back to the town in the Land Rover with the Major and his driver.

There were some sedative pills in the car's first-aid kit and Grant made Mary take two of them. Outwardly she had been the calmest of them all throughout the ordeal, but her pulse and her eyes warned she might be on the edge of serious shock.

She went to sleep on his arm in a diminishing series of shudders and smothered sobs. Grant himself was very weary and soon fell asleep too. As though in belated respect to the need of the others to straighten out their private thoughts and make such obeisance as they desired to their various gods, the Major had at last fallen silent. He was pretending to sleep too.

Only Chartrand seemed unable to share the balm of exhaustion and release. He let his head rest against the back of the seat and stared stonily at the roof of the car trying to reflect on what, if anything, the last twenty hours had meant in the life of Jacques Chartrand, rancher, of Ngubdja, District of Ubangi, Province of Equateur, Republic of the Congo. And, just as painfully, what it had meant in the life of Jacques Chartrand, late of Tournai, Province of Hainaut, Kingdom of Belgium. Nothing; less than nothing; worse than nothing.

For each of the others—even for Astrid, he sensed—some transition had taken place. Each of them had reached or perceived some kind of an ending. Sierra and Songolo had gone through the last doorway and knew at last what lay beyond. The doctor and the nurse had been turned back at the threshold, but the trail they would now retrace was firmly blazed. They had another world to return to, another life to resume, a place of decent and respectful burial for these raw, stark, brutal memories.

For him there were no blaze marks pointing the way back, no fresh signposts pointing the way ahead. His heart, his fortune, his youth, his very life were irretrievably committed to this land. He could not leave it—leave for what? His father-in-law had a barely solvent little restaurant just off the Boulevard du Nord and might find employment for a fifty-year-old waiter. He pursued this line of dismal speculation no further. Since the Independence he had been reviling as cowards and quitters all his old neighbors who had fled to the safety of the old country; they would be as

delighted to see him and remind him as would be his prim and righteous, bloodless wife.

No, he could not leave and yet only a blind man could fail to see how nearly impossible it had become to stay. He had failed as a god and failed as a devil and his life stretched out like a dark tunnel, twisting endlessly, but without either an entrance or an exit.

She might have heard him cry out, for Astrid Mahamba, drowsing at his side, stirred a little and whispered, “*Mbote.*”

This time he did not order her back to sleep but only smiled sorrowfully to himself and touched her almost timidly at the satiny meeting place between the bush shirt and her knee. She neither withdrew from the caress nor responded to it.

The hot afternoon was in its last throes. They were coming back to a more settled area now and occasionally when they passed a roadside mud village, the unaccustomed blue berets were greeted with cries of consternation and alarm. The villagers scattered for their lives with their scrawny goats and chickens, but the soldiers in the troop carriers and the occupants of the Land Rover remained somnolent, torpid, and indifferent.

Soon the sun dropped out of sight like a bronze millstone and the headlights carved an eerie channel through the darkness. In the faint reflection from the dash light the African girl looked at Chartrand’s face. There had been no sign of age on it before; as the lives and lifetimes of her people went he would have been accounted young in appearance, but very old in years. Now, with the troubles newly behind and—who could be certain?—the others waiting newly ahead, his youth and confidence seemed suddenly to have departed. “*Mbote,*” she murmured, but he did not hear.

Her eyes moved to the jeep a few yards ahead, where Sergeant Albert Tshibangu sat handcuffed in the back seat beneath the Sten-gun of a Nigerian infantryman. She could see only the shape and general aspect of his head, which was bent and brooding. Without volition her mind filled with a traditional death lament. *Albert, Albert, okende malam, bisu tokolanda, yo na nsima.* Albert Albert, go ahead, it is well. We will follow you after. *Liwa ezali mpo na biso banso.* Death is to be for all of us.

Ah, a cruel man. A cruel Gombe man. A cruel Gombe man who cared nothing for a woman but to grasp her with his mighty arms and have his way with her and then cast her aside or not, whichever he chose. A foolish cruel man, cruel and foolish enough to shoot down a great chief from

Leopoldville and a great chief from *Onee* all in the passing of a few swift moments. Foolish enough to set himself above the white protector of Astrid Cleopatra Lolita Mahamba, above *Monsieur le chef, monsieur le boss, monsieur le roi de toutes les Belges*. To set himself above *Monsieur le Docteur* of the very *Croix Rouge* and have his woman too, if so it pleased him. *Okende malam, busu tokolanda yo na nsima*.

The others, the white ones, were not cruel and foolish. They did not throw you to the ground; they whispered and touched you eagerly but gently and gave you money. They did not shoot or spear their enemies or cut them up with knives and cries of joy and thanksgiving; they talked softly with them and gave them presents.

Ah well, it would not always be so confusing. Tonight she would rest and tomorrow night she would be in the European block of the town again, safe in the Hotel Prince Baudouin and it would be the same as before. A few white men would be playing cards, noisily, on the terrace. The gramophone inside the little bar and dining room would be playing French cha-cha-cha even more noisily. Inside the front door the same colored posters would tell of the same motion pictures to be seen across the road: *Houdini* avec Janet Leigh; *Tant Qu'il y Aura des Hommes* avec Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift, Frank Sinatra et Donna Reed. The paddle-bladed electric fan would still labor against the still night air. The Philco refrigerator would groan in spasms, never resting, never winning. On the wall above, an American cowgirl on a palomino horse would guard the days of the year and bid all good Congolese to buy McQuay Leak-Proof Piston Rings.

She would sit beside Monsieur Chartrand for a while to bring him luck. If she succeeded he would buy her a Campari or a Cinzano and, if she succeeded very well, perhaps a Vat 69. If not, he would shoo her inside to talk to Madame la patronne who, alas!, spoke little but Portuguese and disliked the Congo almost as much as she had disliked her recent home in Angola. (Her husband's head had been cut off there recently and the unmentionable authorities would not even release their joint bank account.) Perhaps a Congolese clerk or a leftover Belgian civil servant would make a suggestion to her. But knowing of Chartrand's curious wish to have her altogether to himself she would only smile and say, "Perhaps some other day." In time the card game would end and Monsieur Chartrand would summon her to join him and two or three of the other players in a glass of whisky and some of Madame's weak moambe and fiery *petipeti*. Then, with the cha-cha-cha playing them out and the girl on the palomino reminding them that another day would soon be upon them, they would drive back to

the ranch and the wide European bed of Jacques Chartrand, *Monsieur le chef, monsieur le boss, monsieur le roi de toutes les Belges*.

The first white man who had taken her into the Hotel Prince Baudouin and up the giggling creaky stairs had told her that a whole new world lay ahead of her in this glorious new world of *l'Indépendance*. "*Vive l'Indépendance!*" she had cried under the magic of two large gin and limes and then thrown herself flat and outstretched on the first white bed she had ever seen. (This was not, of course, her first adventure with a male; she was past thirteen and her village did not lack for strong young men, men who could not always be eluded.) In the gay months since, the French she had learned from the Capucins at the mission school had very greatly improved. *Dans les temps* she might by now have been called an *évolué*; her half-innocent, half-sophisticated mind was quite capable of grasping and framing the irony and smiling over it.

Even before the Independence she had felt herself drawing away little by little from her father, her mother, her brothers, and the village and the tribe. The days of playing naked in the clean hot earth before the hut were now already half forgotten. So were the great tales of hunts and wars and witchcraft that the elders told before the fireside. Half forgotten too was the memory of being allowed one festive night to eat one of the roasted fingers of a brave but unlucky warrior brought back from an Azande village a few kilometers away.

One of her first white men, a coffee planter *très sympathique* had told her that it was best to forget these things in their entirety. "Why grieve, little one?" Her grief on this occasion was aggravated by the gin and was very severe. "What was awaiting you the other way?" the sympathetic one had consoled her. "You would belong to a man who had many other wives. Now you belong only to yourself and can have many husbands. Who beats you here? Who hurls you to the floor of the hut at sundown and then forgets you until the next sundown? Who makes you carry his firewood, gather and pound his manioc, go into the jungle for his bananas and pineapples while he sits in the shade? Who makes you bear a child each year? Who will make you a crone at thirty and see you die at forty?" His tongue was so soothing and her worldly wisdom so uncertain that she had found no reply. It was, indeed, as he had said. The world of strangers was better and more gentle.

She thought again about the cruel Sergeant, who had struck Monsieur Chartrand with his fist and made him say "*Nkosi!*" and could have killed him had he wished, killed him as an insect is killed. She thought about the

overpowering, wicked Sergeant, who had taken her not with whispers and an arm about her neck, but with a wild cry and a hand of steel upon her throat.

She turned once more to the slumped Belgian. “*Mbote*,” she said again in her softest voice, trying to rekindle her affection and faint awe of him. But her mind would not expel the cruel Gombe Sergeant.

It was wholly dark when they reached Chartrand’s ranch. Astrid accepted his hand and went part of the way to the house with him. But first she asked the Major, “Will you wait a moment, monsieur, if you please?”

She stopped the rancher under one of the palm trees in the front yard.

“I shall not remain,” she said.

“I thought as much.” His voice was full of sadness, but without surprise. Then he added, impulsively but hopelessly,

“Astrid, do you understand why it was never possible for me to say ‘*Je t’aime*?’ ”

“It would not have been suitable.” There was no mockery or bitterness in her voice, only an echo of her sorrow.

“Did he,” he asked, looking toward the jeep that held the manacled Sergeant, “did *he* say ‘*Je t’aime*?’ ”

“That is not our way,” she said. “If it had been our way he would have.”

“But it’s our way and I didn’t. Astrid, you’re not very understanding after all.”

“I fear not. But I must go on.”

“Where?” he asked.

“I shall go back to his village.”

“You will never see him again.”

“Perhaps not. I shall go back to his village and wait until there is some last news.”

“There will be no news. If there is it will be bad.”

“I heard the talk of clemency.”

“There will be no clemency. It was talk.”

“I must wait,” she said.

“But where will you live?”

“Why,” she said, showing surprise at his questions for the first time, “I will live with his other wives.”

“His other wives?”

“Yes. He made me his wife also. I must go and await him with his other wives.”

Chartrand put his hand against her for the last time. “Then au ’voir Astrid.”

“Au ’voir.” She repeated the farewell more tenderly in Lingala, in the memory and hope of better times. “*Otikala malamumu.*”

“*Kenda malamumu.*” Chartrand walked to the door of his darkened home.

Chapter 15

At the hospital Jules, the head nurse, greeted them with tears of happiness and relief. His nerves had suffered as badly as anyone's. The Major found the V.S.O.P. again and the cook produced some leftover moambe and a fresh pineapple. Mary awakened overbright and too animated, but Grant guessed gratefully that she had some hidden, stoic strain of blood or background that might see her through the next few days without serious damage after all. After she had eaten and taken two more pills the two elderly nuns from maternity came and helped her off to bed.

"I'm off for now too," the Major boomed in his train-announcer's voice. "My Sergeant has the men billeted in the schoolhouse. My *Belge* commanding officer has just got his Congo chaps back from their crocodile hunt and he and I are going to have a drinking contest and then collapse for the night at the hotel. Looks like an absolute mark but these foreigners can be damned deceitful. Don't fret, can't fly tonight anyway. Long trip tomorrow though, and we'll have to stop a couple of hours at Coq. So if we're to make Leo by night we should be mobile tennish."

"We'll be ready," Grant said.

The Major left the heel of the bottle behind and Grant invited Jules to his room for a nightcap. He had never had much real contact with Jules, and now discovering himself so heavily in debt to him he felt singularly awkward. A day before Jules had been one of the appurtenances—not to put too fine an edge upon it, one of the afflictions—of a place crammed and dank and reeking with things that didn't quite work. He was another part of Chartrand's all-embracing, non-embracing they, a thing that came out you or I if you took the risk of looking at it too closely. Still, sentiment and gratitude could never release Jules from the dismal truths of his dismal life. He was the best of the native nurses, but he was not a very good one. He was badly trained, he had only the vaguest understanding of the importance of hygiene, he was perfectly capable, in moments of emergency and strain, of falling back on the dogma of the witch doctors. Where, though, did his native, bred-in ignorance and superstition leave off? When could he plead nothing worse than old-fashioned Western-style slowness and incompetence?

They both unbent with the brandy. Jules' French was no worse than Grant's, so there was no insuperable barrier to communication, or rather to

its pretense. “That was a great thing that you did,” Grant said, hating his pomposity, but not knowing how to do it better. “It was the sort of thing my people give medals for and build monuments to.”

Jules said, “You are leaving then, for certain?”

“For certain, Jules,” Grant said. “I can do nothing of any real good here. Your people are not ready for us. Perhaps we are not ready for them.”

“It is possible,” Jules said.

Grant changed the subject. “How are things in the wards?”

“Not very well,” Jules said. “Since you have gone we have had five deaths. But fourteen new patients. So we are still a little more than full.”

“How many of the new ones have you diagnosed?”

“I think nine,” the nurse said, not without pride. “Two malaria, two tuberculosis, one kwashiorkor, three anemia, three filiarasis, two sleeping sickness, two yellow fever. That doesn’t add up,” he added unnecessarily, “but some of them had more than one. Then there were some that didn’t need diagnosis. One with d.t.s and probably cirrhosis. Two machete wounds, two pregnancies, one woman beaten up by her husband, one boy with snake bite, a little girl a leopard got at.”

“Are any of them making any progress?” Grant asked, mostly in polite curiosity.

“Some of the wounds are starting to heal themselves. I hoped the planes that came in would bring some drugs and ether and oxygen but they had no time to lose. Monsieur le Docteur?”

“Yes.”

“A very bad thing occurred last night, in the middle of the night, when you were away.” Jules’ worry plainly eclipsed the usual clinical worries.

“Yes?”

“A man fell from a palm tree. He fell on his machete. He broke his hip and his leg and his arm and he was badly cut up inside. The four other nurses held him down while I tried to put casts on the breaks. I think I got the arm set, but the hip and the leg were too much for me. I did not have the skill. And I could do nothing for the bleeding inside. The man would not stop screaming. The administrator could not understand why I did not make him be quiet. When I said I had no drugs or ether, the administrator ordered me to put a gag on him. But his moaning through the gag had a more awful

sound than before. The other patients began to wail and cry with him. And the people in the compounds gathered outside the wards too. ‘They are torturing him!’ his wives outside began to cry. ‘The white doctor has gone and now the black doctor is making bad magic.’ This is what they cried and soon all were crying and shouting, inside the hospital as well as outside. In a few more minutes there would have been panic and then a great riot. I hurried to the administrator once more. He was more frightened than I was. ‘Quiet this man,’ he ordered me. ‘But how?’ I asked. ‘Quiet him,’ he ordered again. So, Monsieur le Docteur,” Jules hesitated over the final declaration, “I quieted him.”

“You did right, Jules,” Grant said. “You did exactly what I’d have done.”

“Oh yes, monsieur,” Jules said. “But you are already a doctor. What of me? If this becomes known can I ever become a doctor?”

“Do you really want to be a doctor, Jules?” Grant asked.

“I have been here in the hospital for three years,” Jules said with unexpected impatience and determination. “Dr. Beaubien, who was in charge *avant*, used to teach me in the free hours of his evenings.” If any direct reproach was meant Grant could not be sure of it, but his antiseptic, impersonal, indifferent, ungenerous attitude to this shining young man suddenly became one of the great shames of his life.

“Dr. Beaubien used to speak of having me sent to study at Lovanium,” Jules went on wistfully. “And then I would go on to Louvain, in Belgium. But of course Dr. Beaubien left after the Independence and I have not heard from him since.”

“How old are you, Jules?” Grant asked him.

“With us it is seldom known exactly. Probably twenty-one or twenty-two.”

“Perhaps there is still time.”

“Perhaps,” Jules said tonelessly. “Shall I see you again in the morning?”

“But certainly. Good night, Jules.”

Grant slept soundly for the first half of the night. But the keening of a night bird woke him just after midnight and until dawn he tossed in a phantasmagoria half of dreams and half of memories. Valerie Fraser’s lovely, knowing, banker’s-daughter’s face: “I love you, Richard, but after all

one doesn't want one's children sired by a congenital idiot, does one?" Inevitably the knowing men in the Memling Palace: "Baboons you know. Call me Blimp. Call me Faubus. Baboons just the same."

A fragment of a childhood song:

I went to the animal fair,
The birds and the beasts were there,
The big baboon by the light of the moon
Was combing his auburn hair . . .

Dr. Galway: Well, good luck. I can't promise, but if you're back within nine months . . .

Sierra and Songolo pitting their hopeless courage against the windmill. Perhaps Chartrand too in his own sad, half-mad way. So many windmills to ride against here, so many faltering Rosinantes to carry so many Quixotes to such pathetic, ludicrous, and inevitable defeat. Maybe when he got home he would forgive Valerie Fraser after all. It took a big man to forgive a woman for being right.

The big baboon by the light of the moon
Was combing his auburn hair.
The monkey he got drunk
And fell on the elephant's trunk,
The elephant sneezed and fell on his knees
And that was the end of the monk . . .

In the morning, as he finished his packing, Jules knocked at the door and thrust an ivory carving at him. It was fully a foot in height and a foot and a half in length. It had two figures, a massive hunter in loin cloth and tribal headdress, standing erect and dauntless, facing a leopard just about to spring. The effect was massive, majestic, overwhelming. The human figure, with its short spear poised for the combat, was unlike any living Congolese he had ever seen; it bore no relation to the weak, diseased, braggartly, and half-starved tribesmen he had known and yet it was as relevant to their condition and their dreams as is the hidden god that dwells in every man.

"My father made it," Jules said.

"But Jules, I cannot take it. He must have worked on it for years."

"No. Three months only. When I first told him of you, monsieur, he said, 'Good. I will make him a carving. Give it to him when he leaves so that there will always be good memories.' "

“Damn it, Jules, I haven’t done *anything*.”

“My father thinks you have,” Jules said doggedly. “Take it.”

The cook had carried Mary’s luggage to the patio and Major Chesterton was waiting in the Land Rover. An impossible pallor had come over his sunburned face. “How do you say ‘Ouch!’ in Lingala?” he moaned through the window.

Mary looked well rested, trim, and cheerful and on the verge of commonplace prettiness in a cream linen suit and natural-straw hat. Grant went to her and put an arm around her back. It seemed as normal and clearly indicated as shaking hands with an old friend. “You look like a million.”

“You talk like Sudbury. Thanks.”

“All aboard?” the Major moaned.

Grant helped Mary into the rear seat. “I’m not going,” he told the Major.

“Not? Did you say not?”

“Not. I’ve changed my mind.”

“But look old boy. If there’s any question of authority for leaving or orders for leaving or any of that, it was all taken for granted. My instructions from U.N. were to rescue Sierra, Songolo, Grant, and Miss Kelvin and return them immediately to Leopoldville.”

“I have no orders,” Grant said. “I’ve decided to stay.”

“Well,” the Major said. “Takes all kinds. God bless.”

Mary leaned out the rear window. He went to say good-by. “I know it’s no use asking if you’ll let me stay too,” she said. “But when I get back to Leo can I apply to come here again?”

He thought a moment, looking down at the ridiculously heroic ivory figure he still held in his hand. “If you still feel like it and if your medical check is O.K. and if things have settled down here—yes. I’d like you to come back if you want to.”

“Well then, good-by for now.”

“Good-by for now.”

“Cheers,” the Major said.

When the Land Rover turned the corner toward the airport, Grant picked up his flight bag and started back inside.

“Come on, Jules,” he said. “Let’s go down and see what’s doing in the wards.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Ask the Name of the Lion* by Ralph Allen]