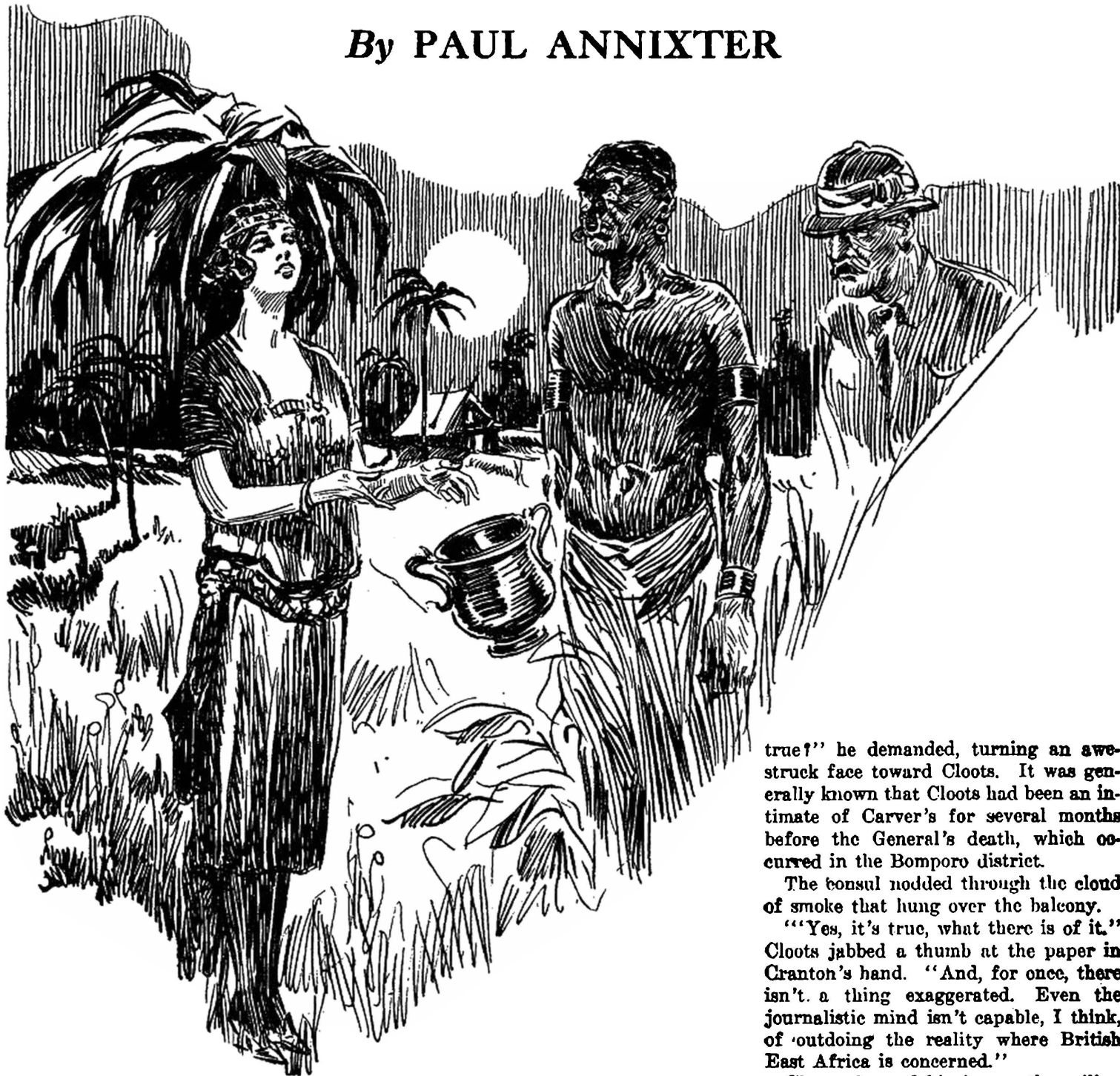


A "Goose-Flesh" Tale of
African Mysticism

BLACK SORCERY

By PAUL ANNIXTER



FOUR white men sat on the upper balcony of the Palace Hotel in Mombasa. It was early in the evening, a hot and sticky night of the kind which abounds on the African East Coast.

There was Cranton, a young subaltern, only six months out from Canada; Cloots, the consul, down from Bompoto, lean as a cheetah, and tanned to the color of yellow-bronze; Behring, the fat

government clerk of the Mombasa office; and little Watts, an ivory-trader from the Interior. Young Cranton had just broken the after-dinner silence with an ejaculation over the month-old follow-story of the strange death of General Carver, the eminent British ethnologist, which filled almost the entire front page of a Liverpool paper that had come in that afternoon.

"You mean to say that all this is

true?" he demanded, turning an awe-struck face toward Cloots. It was generally known that Cloots had been an intimate of Carver's for several months before the General's death, which occurred in the Bompoto district.

The consul nodded through the cloud of smoke that hung over the balcony.

"Yes, it's true, what there is of it." Cloots jabbed a thumb at the paper in Cranton's hand. "And, for once, there isn't a thing exaggerated. Even the journalistic mind isn't capable, I think, of outdoing the reality where British East Africa is concerned."

Cloots elevated his feet to the railing wearily, and exhaled a cloud of cigarette smoke. Down below them, Mombasa; city of strange delights and moral obliquities, teemed with night-life—streets full of queer hotels, queerer shops, strange faces and tongues. Overhead the punkahs creaked softly and the talk along the gallery ebbed and flowed.

There were all manner of people from back home—youngsters like Cranton, just starting out, with all of health and

life to squander; old East Coasters, many of them going home, with the final goal either won or lost; a few officers' wives wilting in the humid heat. Cloots paid no heed to the life about him. His eyes were lost for a space on the deeper blackness that was the palm-fringed shores of the mainland, less than a hundred yards from the promenade that loomed below them.

Young Cranton read the last part of the follow-story aloud, and emitted a long-drawn whistle. General Carver was known at least by sight or hearsay, to each of the four. The manner of his death was in violent contrast to his staid and bigoted life. The General had sacrificed himself on the altar of knowledge, so the paper had it; his decease following a slow mental break-down caused by overwork and a touch of tropical sun-stroke. This, however, was hardly compatible with the queer rumors that had leaked out.

"Of course," Behring led out, turning to Cloots, "it wasn't sun-stroke, was it? You know the whole story. I suppose. If you don't mind, old man, we're all deuced curious."

"Oh, I'll tell you," Cloots said, a bit savagely, "thought I do want to forget the whole thing. It won't hurt me to speak—once. Perhaps it will help me forget; relieve me of some of the responsibility."

Watts and Cranton drew in a bit closer, expectantly. The consul lay back in his chair a few moments, puffing reflectively, as if he would gather in the trailing strands of memory.

"I have always thought it was fate that first brought old Carver to British East," he began. "I felt it from the first, and I was in a position to feel it, being part of the web of circumstance into which he was flung. If it wasn't fate, why should he have chosen Bompore, of all places, to write a scientific treatise in? What else, too, could have possessed him to bring that beautiful daughter of his out here to the Bush, to run the risk of sleeping-sickness, black-water fever, and the bite of a thousand and one flying and crawling things, to say nothing of the black sorcery of the Coast?"

"Of course, you all know what brought Carver down here originally. Government sent him out to study the primitive savage in his native environment, to investigate his rites and habits, photograph him, study his talk, and measure his skull and toes—in a word, to give the joggling British public some ethnological data on their benighted jungle children.

"Four books in all he made, of what could have been done in one small volume. And of all the drivel ever concocted about the Dark Continent! Such genius for blundering into the very arcana of the romantic and the esoteric and failing to read any but the superficial into them, has perhaps never been known before. I think if Carver had come upon the center of all mystery he would have tried to analyze it in terms of science. The world is full of Carvers—all your prying little investigators are off the same block.

"Back home, he occupied somewhat of a pedestal, as you know; was rigid, irreproachably orthodox, and given to public philanthropy and the like. His main trouble was that he never could see Africa as anything but an extension of Chatham or Kensington. He should have been protected for his daughter's sake at least, but Carver's kind develops barriers, integuments of the brain that repel all friendly intercession. So all-sufficient they imagine themselves, these little intellectualists, and yet so puny in their aloneness. But it's not for me to hack up his memory now. Peace be to his bones."

CLOOTS paused to light another cigarette as a mosquito guard.

"Let me give you a picture of Bompore where I've been stationed for the last two years," he went on, after a moment. "It's up on Tortuga Bay, a hundred miles north of here. It really isn't a bay, just an overgrown cove—so that the town is a sizzling little Tophet, shut off from the real sea sweep, hemmed in on three sides by the Bush, endless and smothering.

"It affects the settlement—barring all the finer things. You know what I mean—a white man there is engulfed, as a polyp engulfs its food, by the predominance of the blacks. Everything on the reverse, the touch of Europeanism only adding decadence and complication to the otherwise simple animalism of the native.

"I said that Carver's death was fate; and I say that Bompore's throw-back is also fate—dating back to the days of the Portuguese slave-trade. There are remnants of the old slave baracoons there still, all along the rotting beach, and the feel of them is terrible. You get it by night especially, and the niggers won't go near them after dark. They have tall tales of cries that are heard there in the dark hours. God knows what manner of bloody work was enacted there in the old days.

"Try to imagine this barbaric back-water as the stopping place for a beauti-

ful English girl like Jane Carver, fresh from the glowing limelight of half a dozen London seasons. Carver must have been mad, or drunk with his idea of the all-powerfulness of British suzerainty.

"I was the only white there at the time. I had a dozen or so Hausas to keep up a semblance of order, and a couple of nigger clerks, that was all. The nearest white woman was a hundred miles away, the nearest white man perhaps eighty. Plenty of half-whites, but they are worse than the blacks.

"I was down to meet Carver and his daughter when they came ashore. They were just up from Zanzibar. I remember vividly our walk up Bompore's only street that day. It took four carriers to manage Carver's boxes and paraphernalia.

"Carver was about fifty, partly bald—bulky and choleric, a fine product of the generation that is passing, his very presence associated itself in the mind with English beef and plum pudding. His manner was bombastic, and he apparently radiated health and vigor, but it was the sort you can buy from a masseur, as any man of the open could have seen. His kind of constitution usually spells dropsy or quick wasting-sickness for the tropics.

"The daughter was of a different stamp, but no woman was ever meant for the East Coast. The two of them treated their coming as an outing. I remember the glint of eyes peering out from behind lattices, the throaty chuckle of African women as we passed along, and Miss Carver's shudders at the looks turned upon her. I reassured her as best I could, telling her not to blame the 'yellow boys'; they hadn't seen a white woman for years.

"Of course, they had to put up at my bungalow. Carver spread himself proprietarily over about two thirds of the place the first day, in his characteristic way. The whole of that evening we talked, or rather I listened to him talk. I had exactly the feeling a clerk in a small branch might have on receiving a visit from Headquarters. A voice—raised in continuous and unvarying hortation—that is my lasting impression of him.

"He talked of ivory and rubber and other mammoth projects in the interior; of Empire and 'our colonial possessions,' leaning back in his chair, head cocked to one side with a heavy, judicial calm that was astounding, appalling. But mostly he talked of his work—his treatises. He was not to be shaken off; but I could stand it, for I had spoken with no one from the outside for a year.

"But the daughter—"

Cloots paused a moment; a softer note crept into his voice, and his eyes were lost in the shoreward blackness. The fat Behring noted the tone and was about to make a jesting remark, but refrained at the new look in Cloot's face.

"The daughter was a true thoroughbred. I shall never cease to marvel at her. From the first I did not look upon her as kith or kin of Carver's. She was twenty-five, tall and rather cold, as to approach, I thought, but there was a lot of sheer caliber to her and I was not long in finding it out. She had a cameo-like beauty of the sort that hurts a maverick like me deep down, the first glance—it's so perfect. Tranquil was the word for her; eyes of a fighting blue, deep and level of gaze. I suspected that she was like her mother.

"I did not take to Jane Carver at first. I doubt if anyone would have. But later, the father having dwindled about as far as he could for me, I began to see the depths in her. I read steadiness in her distant manner; endless surpassing in her noncommittal silences. You couldn't remain blind to the handicap that twenty-five years of life under Carver's wing would entail upon one, and it didn't take me long to see that that seeming sullenness of hers was caused by knowing too much about the particular lares and penates of her father's house.

"After the General had settled down to gargantuan labor on his final treatise—the greatest of the lot—each new one was to be greater than all the others—Miss Carver and I became very well acquainted. It came by slow degrees, an impersonal, comradely relation. Before, I had had little chance to speak with her, for when Carver was present no one else conversed except in stilted and unnatural phrases. But out from under his wing, I found her unexpectedly human and companionable. She was a person of really splendid and vital emotions and strong personality, all of her suppressed through a delayed youth. Naturally, as she opened up, she began to have a most potent charm for me.

"The first few days she told me how Africa had always called to her—how she had known for years that she would come here; how she loved it. The Old Mother, she called it. She didn't seem to see the squalor and nigger-litter of Bomporo; her imagination was away, compassing the country in all its untameable vastness, its ruthless savagery. She had a little dream about Africa's being the original cradle of us all, the fount of races, and believed that civilization had its first beginnings here. And dashed if there wasn't something to it.

Look at Egypt, Carthage, Lemuria. Wasn't it Pliny who said, 'All things have come out of Africa?'

"She knew our history better than any East Coaster I ever brushed up against. When she talked, it wasn't of little wars and incidents; she was steeped in the ancient lore of the land; she dreamed of the days of Arab Kings and black-skinned Timoors: of the ancient walled towns of the desert, full of savage luxury, falling under the Mohammedan tide from the North. She made me see that there were other Africas than this steaming coast of ours, and that they were all a romantic and composite whole. She had an intense yearning to penetrate the Interior. She wanted to know, to see all this for herself. There was something almost shocking about her fierce intensity on these things.

"As I have said, she had delved into a lot of ancient writing; had heard, most of it exaggerated, of the great secret societies of the desert, of the esoteric rites of the Dahomans, and the Senoussi, and of the mysteries of bush fetish. She was full of the dreams and she wanted the tangible proof, and I guess you know the danger of that sort of thing to a neophyte in the country."

WATTS and Behring emitted knowing murmurs of corroboration, and young Cranton tried to look wise.

"There was little I could do," Cloots went on, "except to warn her. I could only hope that old Carver would get his fill and leave—before the virus got too far under her skin.

"There are ways and ways in which Africa claims her title of the hated invaders. Drink, women, black-smoke—those are only the lesser devils. It's the deeper, subtler ways that are deadly. They begin invariably with that craving to penetrate her esoteric side. Your average Britisher, with his armor of smug complacency and his ideas running in fixed grooves, is generally safe; but let a man be too psychic, too open on the imaginative side—then look out.

"I had been on the inside of too many cases like that, so the first week, much as I hated to, I went to her and begged her to go out, to get back to Zanzibar or Mombasa.

"'I don't care what you say,' I argued with her. 'This is no place for you, Miss Carver. Your father had no right to bring you.'

"'And I don't care what you say,' she would answer. 'I'm going to remain. I don't see how you can dictate to me. You men preempt all the adventures!'

"'There's just this,' I would counter. 'I've been down along this coast for ten years, and I know that no white woman or child should stay in Africa a moment longer than they can help it—especially when they feel as you do, Miss Carver.'

"There really wasn't anything more to be done. No use trying to make the General see it.

"The days drifted by, and while Old Carver ground out his canned knowledge, the girl and I progressed most famously. We did the town, after her inhibition had worn away, and the detachment with which she braved the scornful looks and the poisonous emanations of hatred from the black women, was a thing good to see. There was a native boat moored down at the end of the beach, and in it we penetrated for miles up a jungle estuary that crawled down to the sea.

"Sometimes we had the evenings together, too, when Carver didn't victimize us with his latest dredgings on the craniology of the Kroo. You fellows will appreciate just what it all meant to me—a chain of uninterrupted days with a young woman of proper age and attainments—after two years of life-in-death down there."

"Right-o," said Behring, with emphasis.

Cloots paused for several moments; and when he resumed it was with a sort of biting terseness.

"Everything might have been all right, had not trouble turned up one day in the shape of a Kroo medicine man from the Interior. The first I knew of his presence in the vicinity was when Wafa, my personal boy, came back from town one night with a new charm done up in a little skin bag and fastened to the hole in the lobe of one ear. He was grinning all over and explained to me that the charm was to ward off devils and bring about his speedy marriage with the high-priced and much-coveted daughter of the village head man. He had paid a month's hard-earned wages for it, to Channa, the 'big, big ju-ju of the Setta-Kroos,' who was encamped in the jungle just outside the town.

"I knew what that would mean, for I knew Channa. I had seen him before. The man was dangerous, an adept in the original and primitive black-art of which Africa is the home. His reputation extended even to Korobed, on the edge of the desert. Channa was and still is, what might be called the big political boss of British East. He wielded more power than a chief or a governor.

"I had an idea of what would happen if Carver got wind of the beggar's presence. I knew he'd never rest until

he had witnessed a bit of black man's magic first-hand. I had a bit of power with Channa, and determined to find him at once and keep him off by threats, force, or money.

"Half way down the street I was called back to sit court in a tribal squabble which kept me palavering the rest of that morning. Before I could get away again things had taken the turn I had feared.

"You know how it is up along the coast when delegates come in from the Hinterland for a few days. The jungle wireless gets busy, the tribes for fifty miles around talk to each other in an unknown code with loud boomings of telegraph logs, and there is a tension felt even among the Old Coasters.

"I had heard some of this during the morning, and when I hurried back to Headquarters I found Miss Carver all breathless with excitement. She informed me that her father had just left for the camp of Channa, that he was going to get some real first-hand information on West African Voodooism and ju-ju, and that he would possibly take her to see the witch-doctor later, or try and persuade Channa to make an appearance in town for her benefit."

"GOOD Lord!" exclaimed Behring. "I begin to see it now." There was a depth of understanding behind the words.

"Exactly," said Cloots. "You begin to see what Carver was butting up against—something that represents Mother Africa herself—the formidable side of her that teems with deadly, veiled antagonism against all whites and will continue to do so to the end of time. I saw it all in one evil flash; Carver was the very epitome of the thing that all Africa hates, and Channa was the embodiment of that hatred, its cunning and cruelty. They would clash as antipodal atoms clash. And the girl—

"I am so deeply interested in all this—you could never understand just the way I feel," she was saying. "It's what I've been waiting for, I think. I've seen so much of the surface of things here, all the way down the coast—and nothing of what lies beneath. And all the time the part that's hidden, that means Africa to me—something ancient and pantheistic—has been calling. Do you understand? I can't be satisfied as a tourist is, with just the surface of things. Oh, there is something very deep, like a blood-memory, between Africa and me. When I feel her secret atmosphere, so mysterious and antagonistic, and sense her immense, empty distances, there's

a lump in my throat and I feel a yearning that is wordless."

"Yes, the magic name of Africa had spun a spell about her; she was brave and romantic and adventurous, and the whole of her craved a departure from the commonplace as a drowning man craves air.

"I didn't try to explain to her. I saw that it was useless. I watched for Carver all the rest of that morning, but it was past mid-day before he returned and with him was Channa, the witch-doctor. I saw the two of them coming up the street from the jungle, and hurried down to meet them, full of vague misgivings. Can you imagine them coming along between the rows of grass huts, the pompous and beefy Britisher, side by side with the gaunt and sinister figure of the medicine man; the one strutting and immaculate, the other half-nude and gliding easily with the sensitive footing of the jungle man.

Channa was a full-blooded Kroo from the Uganda country, with the high cheek-bones and narrow, villainous face of his kind. Unknown to consort with a white man before, mistrusted by Europeans and feared by the blacks, his seeming intimacy with Carver gave me a qualm. Channa halted; Carver came forward, bawling out a greeting full of exuberance, yet dignified.

"He explained to me that there was to be a genuine ju-ju show out in the jungle that night, and that he was going out to see it. He must have that at all costs for his chapters on Voodoo mysteries. Hitherto the subject had not received proper attention. He was going to take a camera with him on the chance of getting some choice flash-light pictures, he said. There would in all probability be ghost-dances and blood sacrifices."

"The infernal ass!" cried Watts.

"At that moment I became aware most keenly of the witch doctor's eyes. They were leveled at a point just back of my shoulder, and, turning, I saw that Jane Carver had come up behind us. She was flushed and radiant and had just started to say something to her father, but her words had fallen flat and she stood now as one transfixed, returning the medicine man's stare across the intervening space—which was perhaps twenty or thirty feet.

"For four or five seconds they stood thus, an occult combat of eyes and wills. I felt the force of the thing; Channa's gaze bridged the distance like a physical touch. I felt his damnable magnetism rolling out in waves. I imagined I could see it. It rose and rushed down upon her in a solid wall; I saw her

shaken from head to foot, then she seemed to rally deep down, and struck through the thing, coming out, as I thought, victorious, as I leapt to her side.

"The incident was over; Channa stalked past us and on up the street. He did not turn his head again. Miss Carver was taking short quick breaths and her eyes were very bright.

"I ordered the two of them gruffly to come up to the house at once. Then I took Carver aside. Call it nerves—but I tell you I knew too much about Africa that afternoon, and a weight of dread was upon me as I looked out at the jungle and thought of all that lay concealed beneath it. The two of us had it out, hot and heavy, as I had expected. I told him of men who had gone out into the jungle as he was planning to do and never came back. I threatened to lock him up, threatened him with expulsion by the first steamer, if he persisted in meddling with ju-ju.

"A smile slowly spread over his face as I talked. It broke into a snort of contempt that was the hardest of all the things I had tolerated in him.

"You're a very decent sort, my man," he said, "and you've helped us a great deal, but I don't believe it for a minute when you say these things can't be done. I think, sir, that you've been sitting at your desk in this God-forsaken hole so long that you've lost the knack of tackling a live thing. I'm going out there tonight, sir, with a flashlight camera and a couple of pistols in spite of all the consuls on the Coast. It's a chance in a million; they've promised to let me witness an initiation. In fact, I've already paid over a bally ten pounds for the privilege. Some of these black boys will go along with me."

"With us, father," said a voice at my elbow. "I'm going to go with you."

"Jane Carver had come in and she stood erect and determined, her eyes glowing with that trance-like fascination that those months of thinking and dreaming mystery had bred in her. There she was, defying me, backed by her father and all the force of his bull-headed confidence and ostrich-like complacency. Can't you see it? The unseen finger of Channa was already laid on Carver's pulse. I could imagine him finally allowing himself to be won over, seemingly by the General's impressive words, after long and dignified palaver.

"Right then was the time for me to act, if ever. Yet something withheld me, and I say again that what followed must have been meant. Before I could influence them, the girl, too, had turned the thing into something like an issue of

courage. I saw that no power of mine, short of physical force, could stop her, and that would never cure that craving of hers.

"A swarm of unexpected and unbidden pictures swept through my mind, and with them came a new and poignant pang in my breast. I discovered at that moment just how much that succession of magic days had meant to me. I realized that I'd actually been dreaming of a future in which Jane Carver figured, forgetting my forty years, half of which had been spent mavericking about the world's odd corners. What a fool a man is. Anyway, everything in me wanted to serve her then, and right there I decided to see the thing through, to cure her for all time of that lure-of-Africa thing."

"MISS CARVER was delighted when I volunteered to go along that night with two of my Kroo boys, but the General still maintained his self-sufficient calm. I knew it was going to be a fight; I wasn't kidding myself on that point. But it was the girl I feared for. Carver, I figured, would merely slide over the surface of it all.

"There followed the most damnable hour of preparation. They would have strolled out there, as they were, as if for a lawn party, I think, but after a lot of persistency I got them into cholera belts, and made them down a double-dose of quinine each. Not the least part of my discomfort were my house boys. I knew that they knew, and that the whole town knew, and I could imagine the yapping and nigger-gossip.

"Well, we got started at last. It was one of those still, sultry nights. There was only a thin sickle of a moon, like a paring of a yellow finger nail. As I urged on the Kroo boys who were in lead, the ticklishness of the thing I had undertaken bore down on me, heavier with each yard we progressed. First, we crossed the lagoon, which was merely a broadening out of the jungle river. This was at my order, for I wanted to come upon the camp of Channa from an unexpected angle. Part of my plan depended upon that, for I had a good idea of what we should find.

"There's a grisly sort of earth-shine that hovers over the Bush on a night like that. You've seen it yourselves, no doubt. It's partly vegetal, I think, as if everything were rotting in phosphorescence. Our natives took the lead as we plunged into the jungle. I remember the yellow-white gleam of their eyes, as we passed through an occasional patch where the qucer shine seemed to sift down through the trees. We came to an

interminable stretch that was black as a pocket, where we slid and scrambled through rank growths and over fallen logs.

"I kept close to Miss Carver. In all that journey she did not utter a sound or protest, but gradually I saw, or rather felt, a nameless terror stealing over her. She showed nothing on the outside, but I was keyed to a hair to register her every tremor. I got her sensation of smothering as the vegetation became denser about us. It always takes one's breath away at first, seeming to make the very air thick. Carver cursed occasionally as he stumbled on uneven ground.

"We neared the niggers' camp at last, going mainly by the sounds which we could now plainly hear—thumping of skin drums and high-pitched cries. Then we came within sight of glowing fires. I directed the two natives quietly, in their own dialect, as we crept cautiously nearer. The sounds grew more distinct.

"'No noise, now! Understand, Mr. Carver?' I whispered.

"'Are you all right?' I asked the girl. 'Feeling game?'

"She nodded, biting her lip.

"Then we crept forward again, almost on all fours. The scene in front grew clearer. We reached a last growth of underbrush and parted the foliage. It was as raw and barbaric a thing as I've ever seen. It was the girl's first touch of Africa with the lid off.

"No need of going into detail to you about what we saw. There was the usual circle of yapping blacks, over a hundred of them, fine stalwart fellows from the warlike tribes inland—Gallas most of them. They sat on their hams on the ground in an open glade, while their women squatted just outside the circle, partly in shadow. Two great fires burned in the center, and all about torches were blazing. On a bamboo pole, stuck in the center of the circle was a dried human head and about this a ghost dance was in progress. The jumping light struck oily gleams from the bodies of the dancers and from the broad blades of spears and assegais. The dancers kept time to the rhythmic throb of skin-drums and the low chant of the scant-clad women.

"A few wrinkled old crones crouched about the fires, roasting a body on a rude spit—a long body with paws and a tail still intact—a tail that curled from the heat—curled tighter and tighter until I saw it snap and fall off. It was plucked instantly from the coals and eaten by a mummified old wench.

"'What the devil are we standing here for, like a lot of fools?' It was

Carver's voice and there was a bit of a quaver in it. 'Come on.'

"'Wait!' I commanded sharply. I was not through with them yet.

"Now I saw that a weakness and nausea was coming over Miss Carver—the inevitable Anglo-Saxon disgust. There was a light in her eyes—a light of fascinated horror, and I put out a hand to steady her.

"'Keep cool,' I whispered, but she did not seem to notice me.

"The drummers in the circle beat faster now; the women began joining the men in the mad revel about the pole with its grinning trophy. A veritable clamant nightmare ensued, of leaping, fanatical figures, silhouetted against the screen of writhing branches. Even Carver was stilled.

"Very slowly we pressed closer, until we stood on the very edge of the clearing. Such was the fanatical intensity of the blacks that they had not yet sensed our presence. It was just as I had hoped; I knew we had already seen a whole lot more than Channa had intended.

"Suddenly, above the cries and yapping of the orgy, there came a clear, shrill cry, prolonged, like the lip-ululations of the North American Indian. Instantly the dance ceased, the drumming died to a hoarse rubbing, and into the circle stepped the figure of Channa, the witch doctor. He was the most hideous spectacle I have ever seen. I felt Jane Carver reach out involuntarily and took her hand."

"CHANNA was naked except for some strings of human teeth that encircled his neck and ankles. The head and horns of some animal were fitted tightly over his skull. His face, with its ghastly coating of grey-green, made him look like the traditional figure of Pestilence; and he had put plates in his mouth so that the lips were frightfully stretched apart, showing two rows of gleaming white teeth. Above them the eyes shone horribly. He addressed the assembly in high-pitched Galla.

"No need of my repeating the riddle to you fellows. It was the regular line-up of ju-ju mummeries, most of it senseless and only designed to instill the assembly with fear. Of course there was to be a sacrifice, for he, Channa, had divined through his sorcery that one of the Galla tribe had broken the *tabu* of the black lodge. The fellow was an accomplished actor as well as a skilled hypnotist, as are all your genuine priests of *fetish*.

"It was uncanny to see the effect of his stuff on the assembly. I saw the

circle of blacks swayed as a field of grass under a wind by his primitive galvanisms. Channa cried out with sudden sharpness that he sensed the guilty one was among the assembly, that this was the night for the punishment. The great ju-ju himself called for blood, blood, and until the sacrifice was made, the tribe would be harassed, their numbers decimated by war and sleeping-sickness, their women stolen. He was drawing on the core of that unclean thing from which the spiritism of all ages has sprung.

"Call it fancy, but to me there has always been a malignant entity that hovers over the lands under the Equator. It has its source in the jungle's choking fecundity, and the fear and death it hides in its smothering heart. I think it is the thing that the first fakir of all time played upon to mould primitive minds to his will.

"There followed the usual Sorcerer's dance of divination, a rigmorole of sheer, calculated cruelty. Round and round the lighted circle Channa cavorted in a sort of hellish gambol, his eyes glowing with a fiendish satisfaction as they searched the ashen faces of the negroes turned up to him.

"Suddenly he stopped dead. You know how the thing always ends. The chosen sacrifice was a woman—a huge sooty creature, crouched down among the back ranks. I remember her throaty cry of horror as his finger sought her out and how she tried to jerk herself away into the bushes.

"The niggers were upon her in a black wave. It was then that I heard a cry from Jane Carver and I saw her face—a glory of anguish. She had been a psychic sponge for all that damnable tableau. For all her strength of mind and purpose she was the absolute feminine, negative and psychic to the core. I could have shot myself then for allowing her to come at all.

"Carver's voice broke the silence, bringing out all the stored-up hell left in my system.

"The camera, boy; quick!" he bawled. "I must have this." Already he held a match ready to light the flash.

"Stop!" I yelled, with all the threat I could put into it. "Back, I tell you, back!" I staggered over to him, with the girl a dead weight in my arms—intending to stamp out his infernal fuse. The blacks had jerked that gibbering wench to her feet now. I saw the flash of upraised knives, and what followed was like a picture out of hell.

"I never reached that fuse. Before I got to Carver's side, it flashed out, a blinding white flare.

"Good God!" groaned Carver at the same instant. "Good God!" His eyes were popping, and the camera he held clattered to the ground. I think he had imagined it was all a bit of realistic mummerly up to that moment.

"You're not in Shropshire now," I cackled at him. "This is one of the habits of the primitive black at close range. Come here and give me a hand with your daughter."

"He saw her condition then for the first time, and emitted a sort of choking sob. It was flooding into him now that there was devilry in this thing, devilry in everything he had been seeing for weeks, and that he had never suspected it. 'My girl,' he faltered, 'my girl!'

"The negroes stood paralyzed for a moment, after that flash of powder, the yellow-whites of their eyes rolling with fear. Above all else I was conscious of the gaze of Channa in that moment, picking us out where we stood. Dead silence had fallen. Then a mass of blacks suddenly surged upon us, with mad yells.

"A sharp swish of an assegai and one of my black boys fell with a gurgling moan and didn't get up. Carver's automatic as well as my own were in action now, and that held them in check until we gained the denser jungle. Then behind us, as I had expected, I heard the shrill, imperative voice of Channa, calling them back. He had recognized us and saw that his game with the General was up. He had too much sense to buck up against the Administration.

"We heard the yelling gradually die away behind us. I don't know how we ever reached the boat again. Miss Carver seemed to be dying; her face, was deathly white and we half carried, half dragged her along in our flight. She fell into something like a sleep, but at intervals of a few minutes would revive and stare about her with an expression of horror that I have never seen equaled. Old Carver was lumberingly useless; he limited himself to delivering a characteristic admonition as we crashed along: 'Be brave, my girl, be brave.'

"It was not until we were entering the town that she regained her bodily control. A remarkable change came over her on the instant. Her soft willowy body became tense and vibrant; the dull luster dropped from her eyes, leaving them gleaming with that shivery, clairvoyant glare I had seen in them before. Then I noted the effect of her attitude on our black carrier.

"A moment he stood frozen in position, studying her face with an expression of peculiar intensity mixed with dread. He fell behind after that, show-

ing the whites of his eyes, and seeming ready to bolt. The girl's lips were very red and moist, and parted slightly; her big eyes became eloquent with an inexpressible expression of fear, longing and expectancy. The whole of her seemed strained and listening—listening into the silence of the bush from which we had come.

"Between us the General and I spurred her on again, speaking quietly and soothingly to her. Something premonitory was breaking in my brain; an insidious canvassing that I could not shake off. I had heard tales of the Evil Eye and of the various spells cast by fetish priests.

"Again she stopped dead. She was looking down with horror at her body, at her hands, as if they were foreign to her. She tried to lift them; they came up slowly, falteringly, to her breast, then dropped leadenly to her sides again. I had to turn away. I was growing cold all over, yet I feared to do anything lest it loose some dark force that seemed hovering over her, ready to shoot down a groove and annihilate her. My skin prickled.

"What is it? What is it?' she was saying, in the dazed sort of way I have heard fever patients talk.

"Hurry," I urged. "It's all right; we're almost there."

"I felt her shivering all over, and heard the small chatter of her teeth.

"Suddenly she screamed: 'My God! What is the matter with me, what is the matter with me?'

"With a frightened yell, the black boy who had been coming along behind, turned and bolted with a gasping admonition: 'Brinnie, taku; Brinnie, taku!' (Chief, look out!)"

"WHAT followed shook any beliefs I have ever had about life down here being charted for us. As we rushed the girl between us up the path to the consulate, there came a wild, mad laugh from the jungle, like that of a crazed man, or one in the last stages of hashish breakdown. It made the skin creep along my spine. I thought instantly of a hyena, but knew as quickly that it was not that.

"Then, to my horror, the sound was repeated. It rose, shivering to a high crescendo, and burst in a hysterical gasp almost at my side. So inhuman was the cry that it was a moment before I could realize that it came from the lips of Miss Carver herself. But suddenly she had broken from the General's grasp and sped away with the fleetness of a wild thing.

"We flung ourselves after her, the General and I, but she seemed suddenly possessed of a strength and agility that was superhuman. Straight through the town we pursued her. All the niggers were up and stirring; they fled away on all sides with cries of terror and vituperation, as if we had loosed some loathsome thing in their midst. 'Mother of God!' I heard old Carver moan as he ran, and my heart went out to him in that moment. Something of the genuine man in him was coming out at last.

"We overtook Miss Carver at the jungle fringe. She struggled like a panther in our grasp and it took the strength of the two of us to hold her. I saw that she was utterly possessed, in mind and body, by that vile force that had its source in the jungle glade. She scratched and panted, giving vent to horrible cutting cries. Her great eyes blazed at us without cognizance; her nostrils flared and contracted, and I saw that face of beauty becoming utterly demoniac before my eyes.

"She used her nails and teeth on us, and twice she almost wrenched herself free. Even as we struggled I was acutely aware of someone or something skulking in the nearby bush—and it was that something which she was struggling to reach—some damnable undercurrent that flowed between them.

"I shall never forget the agony of that situation as I strained with all my power to hold that soft body I had come to love, a body suddenly become charged with a strength that was unbelievable. Her every muscle jerked and twitched as if possessed by a separate and perverse life of its own. My heart was torn between compassion and a sick horror. It was like a battle for a soul. I tell you I saw her true spirit departing from her body.

"No living thing could have kept up those violent convulsions for long. She sank back at last, utterly still in our arms, but it was the stillness of a wild thing, waiting for a moment's laxness to spring away.

"Carrying her between us, we got her back to the consulate. I looked at old Carver's face under the lamp-light, and what I saw erased a good deal of the contempt I had been harboring for him. He was gray as death.

"'What in God's name is it?' he asked, and his voice broke.

"'It's Channa!' I snapped at him. 'Perhaps after tonight you will let matters of ju-ju worship alone.'

"An old black mammy who helped keep order about me, entered at my call, her eyes popping from her head. I knew she had seen many things in her years.

"'She is mad,' I said in the woman's ear.

"'She is possessed of a devil, Inkoos,' said the woman with a queer fatalistic gesture of avocation.

"The words seemed to take me back a thousand years, to the days of necromancy and black-art. I saw ancient Africa as she had simmered for centuries, full of sinister dreams, under the dread shadow of her fanatical and misunderstood religions.

"I called for alcohol and had her body vigorously rubbed and her head and throat bathed with it. I was clinging to the hope that it might be no more than an extreme nervous breakdown. We tried holding ammonia under her nose. It had no more effect on her than water.

"'It is no use, Inkoos,' the negress repeated. 'It is a very powerful devil. Soon he will either kill her or abandon her.'

"My sense of utter helplessness angered me. My eyes met those of Carver who was kneeling beside the girl. I think he was being reborn at that moment. Veins stood out on his temples and his mouth had narrowed to a thin tight line. I knew that nothing but exorcism would avail.

"I clapped my hands. Wafa appeared on the threshold.

"'Wafa, go get Channa, the witch-doctor,' I commanded through clenched teeth. 'Bring him to me.' I was playing the one last card.

"The boy stood shifting from one foot to the other; his eyes rolled with fear, and his face had turned gray under its black.

"'Inkoos, I dare not,' he chattered. 'There is much medicine in the jungle tonight. Channa make much, much magic. It would be death—'

"I heard a stifed curse from Carver. I advanced on Wafa with clenched fist. I was trembling, and I remember I swore horribly.

"'Go find Channa!' I cried again. 'Tell him Cloots wants him. Understand? Cloots wants him quick—quick, and if he doesn't come I'll have the whole Government down here to blow him and his devil tribe off the earth. Savvy? Scot now!'

"I turned back to the cot, and it was not until a minute or two later that I saw that Carver had disappeared. I guessed then where he had gone, and I knew that I should never have allowed him out of my sight again that night.

"You can imagine the horror of the next hour as I sat there waiting, damning myself for all that had come of the night's work. I held myself responsible for everything, and the self-crucifixion

I underwent would have atoned for a sin against the soul.

"I heard a stealthy shuffle of feet on the veranda at last, and quietly reached up to the shelf above the cot to where my automatic lay. The door opened and Channa stood on the threshold. Some of his hideous paint had been removed, and his lean body was wrapped in a robe.

"Jane Carver sat up suddenly with a terrified shriek.

"'There's nothing to fear,' I soothed, placing my hand on her shoulder. 'You'll be all right in a minute.'

"I had Channa covered now, and I began speaking. I had to keep a strong grip on myself or I should have annihilated the beggar at once, for I have never felt such abomination for a living thing.

"'Come here,' I said to him. 'This is some of your work.' I pointed to Miss Carver.

"He grinned sardonically, keeping his calm exterior. I brought the pistol slowly down until it was directly in line with the fellow's solar plexus. It's a queer fact that a man can usually look down a leveled gun barrel more or less calmly, but let the barrel be lowered to the region of the abdomen and there'll be results, and quickly.

"Channa made a nasty grimace of fear and tried to side-step.

"'I'll give you exactly half a minute . . . ' my voice broke a bit. . . 'to bring her out of that.'

"'Why call me, Inkoos?' he asked, opening his palms to signify that his mind was blank on the matter. 'What can Channa know of this madness?'

"'Channa knows overmuch of it,' I snapped, and my finger fairly trembled as it curled about the trigger. 'Come, I am in no mood for fooling, I'll give you to twenty.' And I began to count.

"Channa was thinking quickly.

"'Leave us, Inkoos,' he clicked, but I saw cunning in his eye.

"'Nothing doing,' I said. 'Get busy now, or by heaven I'll spatter you all over the room!'

"He threw off his robe then and stood before the girl. She screamed again horribly, and it was all I could do to hold her.

"'Listen. It's all right. We're going to fix you up—' I cried, but my words beat vainly against her dinning consciousness. She clung to me in a frenzy.

Channa thrust his narrow head forward to within a foot of her face, his eyes glittering with a concentration that seemed to beat down and overcome her fear, her will, her power of movement. The glare began to leave her eyes and

she emitted little choking sobs like a child in fear of punishment. Suddenly in a shrill voice, Channa poured forth a torrent of livid words in a dialect I had never heard; then he ceased as abruptly as he had begun and cried out in English:

"Who are you?"

"I am Lejara," she answered, and why or whence the name came, I have never been able to make out.

"Thou liest!" shrieked the witch-doctor. "Thou art a devil and a beast! From whence do you come?"

"I saw the girl's eyes protrude, her fingers opening and closing, in her tremendous effort to break away from the relentless will back of those eyes. Channa stamped with rage.

"Whence comest thou?" he repeated.

"I had to turn away as she screamed and gritted her teeth together; that wild thing again gleaming in her eyes. She struggled with incredible energy. The witch-doctor howled in his pantomime, and his eyes darted fire.

"I am burning up," I heard her moan at last. "A drink, a drink and I will tell all." Her head sank back as from exhaustion.

"The whole thing was apparently the sheerest nonsense; but I had heard much of the strange practices of these sorcerers and held my patience.

"Channa became calm now. He seemed to reflect a moment quietly, and his mood moulded the girl's mental processes into the channel he wished. He was gradually super-inducing his own sanity into her. There was the devil's own subtlety in it.

"Very well, devil," he said presently. "You shall have a drink—a very fine drinkee-yah." He made a loud smacking with his lips. The girl was now showing every sign of extreme thirst. Her lips were parched and dry and her skin had a feverish burn.

"A bowl, Inkoos, and some water," said Channa, in a low voice that seemed to escape her altogether.

"I hurriedly brought in a bowl brimful. Channa snatched it from me and

took it to a corner of the room, where he squatted over it, sucking in his breath and giving vent to uncouth ejaculations of greed, the while going through an outlandish pantomime of secrecy. I saw him reach surreptitiously into the skin bag he carried at his side and drop something into the bowl. It looked like some sort of dried herbs and I remember the fear that leapt into my mind, of poison or worse. But he had us there; there was nothing to do but trust him, though I held my automatic ready to squeeze at the first proof of trickery. Presently he had a queer-looking concoction stirred up, and set the bowl down upon the floor.

"Drink, devil," he leered at the girl. She strained forward eagerly in our arms and at a sign from Channa we promptly released her. She sprang forward like a wild thing and, stooping, drained the contents of the bowl with the avidity of one dying of thirst. When it was empty she straightened up queerly and let it fall; it shattered to pieces at her feet, and there she stood for a moment staring piteously about her, bewilderment taking the place of voracity in her eyes. I put up my automatic on the instant and sprang forward. She collapsed into my arms with a tired sigh that caught in her throat, and her eyes closed.

"I lifted her and carried her back to the cot. She opened her eyes once and murmured in a plaintive voice:

"Dear God, I am so weary, so weary! Let me sleep!"

"I do not pretend to understand the thing," Cloots finished abruptly, "though I have pondered it ever since that night. The girl had been worse than a maniac; in an instant, she was cured. When I looked around for Channa, he was gone. I have never seen him since."

YOUNG Cranton poured a drink and pushed it toward Cloots across the small table.

"And old Carver?" someone asked after a minute.

"I did all I could," Cloots answered wearily. "When he didn't come in toward dawn, I went out with a search party, but we found nothing. The niggers had gone, moved on in the night. We had a hard time to find even the glade again, for they'd covered all trace.

"It was nearly a week before we heard anything of him—a story that came from away up in the Batu district about a lost white man who had staggered into a native village, over eighty miles up-river. They took him in, but he died before the party I sent out ever reached him. God alone knows how he ever got up there, but his end must have been horrible, by the look of his face when they brought him down. I have always laid it to Channa. The investigators put it down as sunstroke, and I let it pass as that. There was nothing to prove otherwise."

"And the girl—I suppose she went back?"

Cloots nodded. "Of course. We had a long talk after she was herself again and she saw things right. She made no protest at all when I arranged for her passage north the following week. I think she was cured."

He flicked the glowing stub of his cigarette over the railing and watched it describe a long red arc to the black water below.

"What a fool a man is," he laughed shortly. "I remember our last words at the steamer. I remember how my every nerve tingled when she asked me if I was coming back. I told her I would as soon as I'd finished a certain little fight I had here with myself, and, of course, we promised to get together back there. For days I built each hour toward that meeting. Of course, it was only dream stuff."

"But you will go back sometime?" said Cranton.

"Back?" repeated Cloots wearily. "I don't know. Fifteen years out here—I wonder if a chap ever goes back after fifteen years."

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