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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Dead Dog

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*'A huge black dog it was, with but one reason for existence:
to avenge its dead master*

"Dead dogs may bite the careless feet.—
Umbundu proverb.

THEY brought the rebel chief Kafatala out of the jungle to Father Labossier's mud-brick house, brought him in a *tepoia* because he still limped from a Portuguese bullet in his thigh. Twenty black warriors, clicking their spears respectfully, followed the hammock-litter and formed a row outside the stockade as Kafatala dismounted and hobbled up the path.

Springing from his seat on the porch,

Father Labossier walked swiftly to meet his old friend. The chief was lean, taller by a head than the sturdy priest, and black as basalt save for a gray scar across his proud face from eye to nostril. The two men said the requisite *Kalungu* greetings and sat on a log under the broad-leaved fig-tree. Then Kafatala spoke:

"Your advice came to me in my hiding. I cannot hope to win against the Portuguese soldiers; now I must surrender and save my people further punishment."

"That is wise, Kafatala," nodded Father Labossier, smiling. Nine years in west Africa had not dulled the missionary zeal that had stirred him from a pleasant curé of souls near Antwerp, and moments like this repaid him for long toil. "The white man's Savior, of whom I told you," he continued, "will make your sentence a light one."

The scar darkened on Kafatala's face and his wide lips tightened. "My people will suffer no more, that is all. Rodriguez, the Portuguese captain, will kill me."

The priest held up a hand in protest. "Not all Portuguese are cruel. It is true that Captain Rodriguez's heart is sick; he was sent here because he had sinned against the laws at home——"

"However he came here, he will kill me." Kafatala fairly jerked out the words, then apologized for interrupting. "Good-bye, my father. We shall meet again."

Still Father Labossier argued. "A power will save you, Kafatala."

"A power may avenge me," was the bleak reply. "That is all."

Father Labossier brought notebook and pencil from his pocket and scribbled a note as he sat.

"This asks that you be treated kindly," he explained. "My fastest servant will bear it to the fort ahead of you."

The chief thanked him courteously, and rose. "One favor before I go."

"Name it."

Kafatala emitted a chirping whistle. At once something black and swift sped from behind the row of warriors, dashed through the gate and up the path—a huge, shaggy hound, as black as thunder. It was as large as a calf, and its eyes shone with an uneasy greenish pallor. Yet it seemed gentle, thrusting its long, ugly head under the chief's hand.

"Will you keep my dog for me?" asked Kafatala.

"Until you come back," agreed Father Labossier.

"I do not come back," insisted the other, and Father Labossier changed the subject by asking how the beast was called.

"Ohondongela," replied the master.

That word means "revenge" in the Umbundu, and Father Labossier, eyeing the dog, thought it as fierce as its name. Black, rough, lean, powerful of jaw and long of fang, it had something of the forbidding wild about it, almost like a forest beast; but all dogs were once forest beasts, at the beginning of time. . . .

Kafatala again excused himself for cutting the visit short, spoke commandingly to Ohondongela, and smiled when the brute curled himself obediently at the feet of Father Labossier. Then he stumped to the gate, crept into his *tepoia* and gave the signal for the march to continue.

THREE days later Father Labossier was wakened before dawn by the dismal howling of Kafatala's hound. He grumbled sleepily, then reflected that a man of God must not think unkindly, even of a beast. He rose, took an early breakfast, potted among the lettuces in his garden and at noon read a marriage service over a giggling young couple that wanted white man's magic for good luck in its new household. Afterward he wrote letters to a favorite nephew, to a group of fellow-priests at home, and to the Dutch trader who sent him supplies from Benguela. At about four o'clock in the afternoon a chorus of shouts from his servants betokened a stranger coming up the trail.

It was a runner, bare-legged and wearing a faded khaki shirt, who advanced to the porch, saluted in clumsy military fashion, and offered a parcel sewn in rice-sacking.

"From the fort," the runner told him. "Captain Rodriguez has sent it."

"Thank you." Some answer, of course, to his plea for mercy to Kafatala. But why a package and no letter? There must be a note inside.

Producing a clasp-knife, the priest ripped the sacking.

A face looked up at him through the ragged hole—a black, dead face. Upon it a pallid gray scar ran from eye to nostril. Kafatala had been right; Captain Rodriguez had made short work of him, and thus was answering Father Labossier's recommendations of mercy.

Again rose the doleful wail of Ohondongela the hound. And just before sunset the great beast lay down and died, quietly, quickly and inexplicably.

THREE moons had waned and waxed again, and the same runner from the fort met Father Labossier just outside his stockade. It was midafternoon, as on the runner's previous appearance, and again he had something from Captain Rodriguez—not a package this time, but a letter.

The priest took the envelope and gazed for a moment at the almost indecipherable characters that spelled his own name upon it. They had been set down by a shaking hand, a hand that he knew as the captain's. He had written to Rodriguez on the same day that he had received Kafatala's head; he had stiffly indicted the officer as a cruel and cowardly murderer, and had sent a duplicate of the letter to the governor at Loanda. Nobody had replied—was this a belated acknowledgment of his message, perhaps a justification of Rodriguez's action or a further sneer at the priest?

He opened the letter and read it, his kindly face spreading over with wonder. For Rodriguez was praying for help and comfort in the name of Christian mercy

and priestly compassion. The last phrase, in particular, was out of character: "I know I have sinned, yet ask for the aid I do not deserve."

The priest lifted his eyes to the waiting runner. "Go back and say that I will come tomorrow."

The native paused, embarrassed, then replied diffidently that his master was in dreadful case and that there was no white doctor to do magic for his healing. Could not Father Labossier come at once?

"It will be an all-night trek," demurred the priest. Then he thought better of his hesitancy, and added, "But a moon will shine. I shall go with you."

He changed into flannel shirt, walking-boots and a wide hat. Upon his shoulder he slung a canteen and a musette with medicines. In his pocket, were prayer-book and Bible. From his little arsenal he chose a hunting-rifle, for lions might be hunting along the night trail. Then, placing his oldest servant in charge of the house, he set off with the man from the fort.

IT WAS a wearying tramp by moonlight, and an eventful one. At sunrise he came to the fort, where, brooding in his quarters over untasted food, Captain Rodriguez waited for him.

Father Labossier was shocked at sight of the Portuguese. When they had last met, four months previously, Rodriguez had been florid, swaggering, vigorous. Now he sagged shrunkenly inside his dirty white uniform. The face he lifted was pale, its eyes wild, and his once-jaunty mustache drooped.

"Father," he mumbled hoarsely, "I am ridden by devils."

Father Labossier took the captain's hand. It trembled in his grasp. "I do not doubt you, my son," he replied gravely. "Yours has been an evil life."

Rodriguez grimaced in doleful accept-

ance of the reproof. "Come, let us sit on the porch—in the blessed moonlight."

Outside, they took canvas chairs. Rodriguez sighed as if in exhaustion, gazed for a moment across the bare drill-ground toward the barracks of the native soldiers. Then:

"My sins crouch beside my bed at night."

The priest waited for a moment. When his companion did not continue, he said tentatively: "Seek forgiveness from the Lord."

"If I could!" Rodriguez leaned toward him, and his breath in Father Labossier's face was the breath of a sick man. "A Christian God cannot be invoked—only a savage devil, to spare me."

Father Labossier fingered the silver cross that hung from his neck. "That thought is a transgression, my son. Unsay it."

The captain clutched his face in wasted hands and his shoulders shook, as with sobs. Finally he forced himself to speak of what lay upon his soul.

Three nights before, he had retired, as usual, to his lonely bedchamber. He spoke of his habitual preparations; the examination of the windows to see if their gratings and mosquito nets were in place, his locking of the door against possible night prowlers, his placing of a service pistol beside the water glass on his bedside table. Nothing untoward had happened during the day; it had been even tiresome. His thoughts before slumber had taken the form of an idle review of his work and a wistful consideration of his chances to be forgiven certain indiscretions and called home to Portugal. Then he had dozed off, to wake suddenly and in fear.

At this point in his narrative, he hid his face again and shuddered uncontrollably. Father Labossier laid a hand on the

captain's arm, and strength flowed from him into that shaken frame.

"I looked toward the window, and there I saw it. Blood of the saints, I saw it! By the window—a great dog!"

"Dog?" repeated the other, leaning forward in his turn. "What sort of a dog?"

"Large—black and shaggy. It was sitting up, and its head and shoulders rose above the window-sill, making a silhouette against the moonlight. Its eyes, like green lamps of hell, stared at me. The hate in them!" Captain Rodriguez's face twitched with the memory.

"I see. And then?"

"I screamed, a thing I have not done since I was a baby. A moment later, my orderly was pounding and calling at the door; and the dog—had gone."

"Gone!" echoed the priest.

"Yes, vanished like a candle-flame snuffed."

Father Labossier clicked his tongue. "Was it not a dream, that?"

Captain Rodriguez laughed, but not merrily. He had thought that very thing, he admitted, though he was too nervous to sleep any more that night. In the morning he had forced himself to forget the adventure and had gone about his duties with a heart that grew lighter as the day progressed. By nightfall the nervousness returned, and he lulled himself to sleep with a bromide.

"Again—mark me, Father—again I saw to windows, mosquito netting, lock. I put from me the troublesome vision of the night before. I slept."

Father Labossier took a cigar from his pocket. "The dream——"

"It was no dream, I say. When does a dream come twice in two nights?" The captain's lips twitched, showing teeth that were set as though to hold back a dreadful pain. "The dog returned. I woke in

sudden instinctive fear, and there it was as before. No, not as before."

"What do you mean?" asked Father Labossier, biting the end of his cigar.

"It had been at the window the first time. Now it was at the foot of my bed, nearer to me by half the floor's width." Rodriguez laid his fist to his lips, as though to crush their trembling. "It was so large as to look over the footboard at me. Its green eyes burned into mine."

Father Labossier said, very quietly, that a real dog could not have looked Rodriguez in the eye.

"No, and this was no real dog. It was my gaze that faltered, and I screamed aloud."

"As before?"

"Yes, as before. And my orderly came, bearing a light that shed itself through the cracks of the door. At that beam, the thing was gone, completely and instantly. I rose to let the orderly in—never have I allowed a native to see me so upset."

Father Labossier rubbed a match on the sole of his boot. "And then, my son?"

"In the morning I sent for you. But last night, while you were on the trail—last night, the dreadful dog from hell visited me yet again!"

He flung out a hand, palm vertical. "No farther away than that, it sat at my side. It breathed upon me, I heard the growl in its throat. And somehow I snatched up the pistol from my table and fired into its face—it vanished. But to-night—*it will not vanish!*"

HIS voice had risen to a wail. Again the priest's strong, steady hand clutched his companion's quivering one, calming the frantic shivers.

"You have fancied these things, my son."

"But I swear they are true, by every saint in the calendar. Come, Father, to my room. You shall see for yourself."

Still murmuring set phrases of comfort, Father Labossier followed Rodriguez back into the house. The captain's sleeping-compartment was comfortable and even luxurious beyond military requirements, appointed as he had described.

"See," urged Rodriguez, laying an unsteady finger upon the door-jamb. "This round hole—my bullet made it."

"I see it," Father Labossier assured him.

"And you observe the gratings and nets at the window? The lock on my door? Well, then——"

Father Labossier cleared his throat. He was well-read, and something of an amateur psychologist. "My son, you knew, perhaps, that Chief Kafatala had a great black hound."

"Did he? I never saw it."

"You had heard, perhaps, of the beast. Its name was Ohondongela."

Rodriguez bit his lips. "Ohondongela—revenge." He calmed himself and said that he might have heard of it.

"Ah, then," said Father Labossier, "it has become a symbol with you, my son, of the wrong your heart's core has admitted."

Much more he said, drawing upon Freud and the gospels in turn. Captain Rodriguez listened carefully, nodding from time to time as though he comprehended the argument and was disposed to agree.

"But if this is the truth," he said when the priest had made an end, "what am I to do?"

"You have begun by repenting and confessing," Father Labossier told him. "Tonight——"

"Tonight!" gasped Rodriguez, turning pale.

"Do not fear. Go to bed as usual, composing yourself. I shall sit up in the parlor. If the dream returns, call me—softly. We will deal with it together."

Rodriguez drew a deep breath, as of relief. "I am hungry," he said suddenly. "You, Father, have not breakfasted. Forgive me my neglect, and be my guest."

TOWARD nightfall Captain Rodriguez became nervous, meditative and boastful by turns. Once he spoke of native magic and twice of charms against the devil. Again, forgetting his abject admission of wrong, he loudly argued that he was justified in executing Kafalata. He invited Father Labossier to drink with him and, when the priest refused, drank by himself. He drank entirely too much, and picked up his guitar to sing the sun down with a gay ballad. But as dusk fell he turned solemn once more and threw the instrument aside.

"Father," he muttered, "are you sure all will be well?"

"I am sure of nothing," Father Labossier felt obliged to reply. "I am very hopeful; that is all."

Rodriguez lifted his shoulders, but the shrug ended in a shiver. "Let me sit up with you," he begged. "We will talk."

"We have already talked. The best way to solve this evil is to face it."

Some time later the captain drank yet more, said good-night and went into his bedroom.

Sitting alone in the parlor, Father Labossier examined the bookshelf. It bore several weighty works on military science and tactics, and a row of Portuguese novels. From among these he selected *Rhum Azul*, by Ernest Souza. As he scanned the first page he sighed with relish. It was a mystery-adventure tale, and Father Labossier, though devout, was not disdainful of such fare. Indeed, after the Scriptures

and the writings of the saints, he enjoyed best Edgar Allan Poe, Maurice Leblanc and the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. This story would help him while away the hours. He savored a chapter, a second, a third. . . .

The calm night tore open before a blood-banishing scream of fear and agony.

Dropping the book, Father Labossier sprang to his feet. In three quick strides he crossed to the door of Rodriguez's bedroom. Even as he reached it, the scream rose higher, died suddenly, and a spatter of pistol shots rang out. Then a second voice, inhuman and savage, the jabbering snarl of a beast at the kill—

The door was locked. Father Labossier shook the knob futilely, then turned as a native orderly rushed in from the rear of the house. Together they flung their shoulders against the panel. A second time. The lock gave, the door drove in. The orderly paused to catch up a lamp, and the priest stepped across the threshold.

He shrank back, staring into the gloom. Something dark and hunched was squirming violently upon the bed. Then, as the orderly lifted the light above Father Labossier's shoulder, that shape was gone.

The two men stared and wondered. The gratings and nets were in place. Nowhere along the tight walls could even a beetle find entrance or exit.

But Captain Rodriguez lay still among the tumbled sheets. His throat had been ripped out to the neckbone. One hand clutched his revolver, the other a tuft of shaggy black hair—such hair as had grown upon Ohondongela, the long-dead hound of the long-dead Kafalata.

