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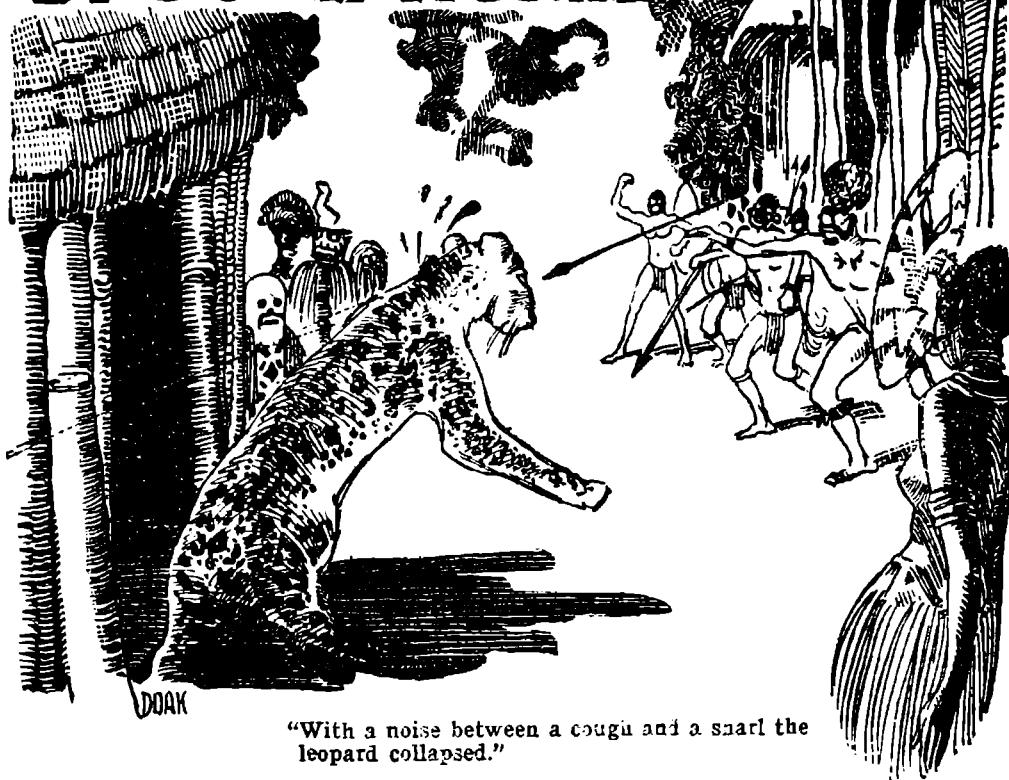
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The SPEARED LEOPARD

BY JOHN HORNE



"With a noise between a cough and a snarl the leopard collapsed."

BRUCE FALKNER of the K. A. R. surveyed a group engaged in the sundown occupation of talk with drinks at the end of the club veranda. There was no mistaking the broad back of the district police commissioner—known to his intimates as "the Policeman"—flanked, as usual, by the rotund figure of "Fatty" Gordon, and the thin one of the airman. A trio of unfailing gayety, but tonight there was something repellent about the East Coast and all its works, and of course they would talk of nothing else. Falkner was about to pass on, but already they had seen him; or, to be precise, Gordon had.

"Hullo, Bruce," he called; "you're the very man we want."

Falkner hesitated. To anyone else he would have made an excuse, but he liked Gordon, who in spite of his bulk was a good sportsman and very efficient at his job, which job was "closes." Besides, Gordon had worked with G. P.

"Come on," insisted the others; "we won't talk shop."

Falkner smiled unbelievingly, but moved toward them. "If that's a promise," he said, "I'll bet drinks all round that it will be broken within the next ten minutes."

"As a matter of fact, we were right

away from Africa," remarked the airman. "Fatty tried to start about his precious island, but we sat on him mercilessly."

"What do you think they wanted to talk about?" asked Gordon in an aggrieved tone.

"No idea," said Falkner.

"A rotten film our highbrow airman dragged me to in London when we were on leave. He's mad about it. Wild animals in Burma or Siam, with a few natives running about—the whole thing faked, of course."

"Pay no attention to him," laughed the airman. "It's a unique film, and a perfectly straight one, with wonderful pictures of monkeys and bears and tigers, not to speak of a herd of elephants."

"It sounds good enough," said Falkner, "but to tell you the truth, when one has lived among wild animals as much as I have, they never seem quite right on the screen."

Gordon burst out laughing: "You infernal old big game hunter! Never content away from your beastly jungle! Now, what interested me—"

"You couldn't have been interested," interrupted the Policeman; "there were no pictures of Pemba."

But Gordon was not to be drawn. "What interested me," he went on, "was the leopard."

Falkner looked at him curiously. "Why the leopard?" he asked.

"I don't know exactly," Gordon replied. "There was only one picture of it padding through the long grass, but it made me feel uncomfortable—reminded me of the tales G. P. used to tell. He was with me in Pemba, you know—agent for Binney & Pomace, the Eastern trading people."

"There he goes again," exclaimed the airman in jubilation. "Arrant shop—and within three minutes; that's three and a third drinks!"

"I only saw G. P. once," said the Policeman when the laughter had subsided, "and he seemed a very intelligent sort of fellow."

Gordon nodded. "Intelligent! I should think he was!—but the wrong kind of intelligence. I lived in the same bungalow with him, so I ought to know. He frightened me sometimes."

"Poor old Fatty!" said the airman. "What did he do?"

"Things you'll never do if you live to be a thousand," retorted Gordon. "In the first place he could drink a bottle of whisky most nights, and wake up in the morning as fresh as a daisy. I can see him now, standing outside my mosquito-net at the first streak of dawn and puffing away at his pipe with the face of a cherub, while I felt like nothing on earth."

"Morning in Pemba!" announced the irrepressible airman, but Falkner remained serious. "What frightened you?" he asked.

Gordon finished his drink, and when he spoke there was a change in his manner. "It's hard to explain," he said. "For one thing, although G. P. was very young—barely twenty-four, I think—and had only been three years in the country, he seemed to have forgotten that England ever existed, just like those queer old-stagers one hears about. He was a bit of a poet, too, with a way of describing things that held me spell-bound. Nothing very hair-raising about that, you'll say, but it was only the beginning. He got very keen about studying the natives. Those were his good days. With the whisky bottle beside him, and his eyes shining through the smoke of his old Dunhill, he would talk for hours about the different tribes and their languages—most of which he spoke fluently—and their customs and witchcraft and medicine men; and as to juju, there was nothing in the whole outfit he didn't know. Then there was his habit of going away for days at a time—disappearing clean off the map, nobody knew where—and returning without a word of explanation. Once he stayed away a week, and came

back absolutely exhausted. 'Thank goodness, I've got it to work at last!' was his only remark. And when I asked what he meant, he replied, 'The charm of invisibility, old man. It takes it out of you.'"

"Invisibility!" echoed the airman, "What nonsense!"

Gordon nodded. "That's what I tried to think, but G. P. wouldn't let me. He explained how he had made friends with a witch doctor—done him a good turn of some sort—and out of gratitude the fellow had been teaching him magic for months, increasing the dose till at last he knew how to make people believe they could not see him. Of course the natives do perform tricks of that sort, but G. P. declared that he had actually been able to attend a meeting of the most secret of their sects, where discovery would have meant certain death. It may be all nonsense, but it got on my nerves."

"Did you ever see him make use of the magic he had learned?" asked Falkner.

"Only once, to my knowledge. We had been discussing the native method of hypnotism, and G. P. declared he could put a man into a trance as well as any of them. According to him, it was easily done with such weak-minded people. I pointed to a coolie, and he looked at him and began to concentrate, or whatever one calls it. Well, at first nothing happened, but after a few minutes the man suddenly flopped down and went fast asleep. Nothing I could think of would wake him, and G. P. refused to give the show away by doing so himself. 'Leave it to the natives,' he said. So they fetched the women, and one of them covered the man's face with some white paste, and spat on his eyes till he came to."

"I've seen that," said the Policeman. "At Tabora one of my men went into a trance. The others said he was bewitched, and brought certain women who treated him in exactly the same way. It's curious

what an important part the women seem to play."

The airman chuckled. "That fact isn't confined to African tribes. Why, in India I knew a woman—"

"Oh, shut up!" protested Gordon. "We've heard about her before. This is a different kind of tale. . . . Well, I was going to say that the only people G. P. seemed to fear were these witch women. He declared they used magic far beyond his knowledge and that some of them possessed the rare power of dual personality."

"The greatest of all their secrets," said the Policeman with growing interest, while even the airman grew grave.

"What is dual personality?" he asked.

Gordon hesitated. He did not care about theories, and felt that the discussion was getting beyond his depth. "I was never very clear about it," he said at last. G. P. used to talk by the hour, but he got so excited that I could hardly follow him. It appears, however, that some natives—especially the women I just mentioned—can turn themselves into animals. They take the form of a leopard for choice, and do a lot of damage among the livestock of neighboring tribes. Sometimes they even kill men, but more often women, though I don't know why that should be."

"I think I do," said the Policeman. "You see, the women continually go into the jungle or to the river to fetch wood and water."

"That's true enough," agreed Gordon, "but the curious part is that when the leopard has finished killing goats or people or whatever its victims may be, it becomes a woman again and returns innocently to the village."

This statement was too much for the airman's composure. "Cut it out, boy," he ordered derisively. "We're not in the dark ages—even on the East Coast—and anyhow, these extraordinary tales never seem to get beyond hearsay. Now, I want to see."

The Policeman raised his hand in protest. "You'll never do that up in the clouds," he declared. "In Africa you must walk on your flat feet if you want to see. Go on, Gordon."

"There's nothing more to tell," said Gordon, "but you must see that the whole thing got on my nerves. If not, try a few months in Pemba with a man who practises magic all day and drinks whisky all night. The marvel was that in spite of everything G. P. never neglected his firm's business. I'll give him full marks for that, though in other respects things were growing worse when I came away. His one idea was to find a leopard woman and learn her secret, and he talked of Nagomba, in the wild country this side of Tanganyika, as the place to try. If ever he gets there you'll hear something sensational. By the way, does anybody know where G. P. is now?"

During the discussion Falkner had remained silent. Magic! Witchcraft! In the tropics the border-line between reality and fantasy grew blurred more easily than most people cared to admit, and it was a bad business when a white man crossed it. He drew a bundle of letters from his pocket. Possibly their contents had been meant for him alone, but to reveal them might save other adventurers from disaster.

"I can enlighten you as to G. P.'s whereabouts," he said quietly. "At the present moment he is on his way to England."

"Home!" exclaimed Gordon in surprise. "That's news. I didn't know you had met G. P."

"I've known him since he was a boy," replied Falkner. "You mentioned Nagomba just now. Well, he wrote these letters from there. I'll read them if you like. As to being sensational, you must judge for yourselves, but they certainly carry on Gordon's story."

There was a murmur of assent, and Falkner unfolded the letters. "They

start on June 30th," he said, "and follow each other like a diary:

"**D**EAR BRUCE—This is a God-for-saken place; in other words, I am the only white man within a hundred miles—and my supply of whisky has gone astray in the jungle. Pambu is with me. He's my boy, a wonderful factotum and absolutely devoted. You will wonder why on earth the firm sent me here, but as a matter of fact they didn't. I came on my own, for reasons—tremendous reasons—that the firm will certainly fail to understand. Gordon used to think me mad in Pemba, though he was too decent to say so. I wonder what he would think now? Leave is due in a month, but I doubt if I'll take it.

"P. S. The whisky has turned up. "July 1st. Letters are a rotten means of communicating one's ideas, but I want you to have these, in case I don't come back. For one reason, though, I am glad to write. You and Gordon can not try to dissuade me, as you would do if you were on the spot, for I'm determined to discover the truth about this dual personality—zoomorphism is its highbrow name—the power of a human being to take the form of an animal and return to human form. I've mastered much of their infernal juju, but this is a mystery unfathomed by any white man. Think of what it means—for I'm convinced that it exists—the power of living the life of the jungle, of sharing its joys and dangers. Why, it's simply evolution, backward and then forward, doing in an instant what Darwin imagined to need millions of years. Can't you see the fascination of the problem—to know whether an animal can have a human mind—whether memories can come back from the other state?

"There are gruesome rumors, of course. One makes it essential to bring a still-born child to life, and when it opens its mouth, bite off its tongue. There's black magic for you!"

But I do know that women are the greatest adepts. They are called leopard women, because that is the form they generally take, but nobody knows who they are; in fact, it is taboo even to discuss the matter.

"Pambu has just informed me that the Nagos are cannibals, periodically, you understand. He also said that there had been no victim for a long time, so I hope they won't take a sudden liking to me! Thank goodness, I can depend on Pambu if there is trouble.

"*July 10th.* There is an important juju house here, or rather it's a compound surrounded by a thorn hedge, with a sacred tree and a big hut in the center. None of the Nagos dare approach the place, except to bring gifts to the spirits who are supposed to inhabit the hut, guarded by a hideous old witch doctor and a priestess.

"Wandering outside the compound, I managed to catch sight of the lady as she took in some offerings. She's young, taller than most of the women, with regular features—rather of the Arab type—and wonderful gray eyes tinged with yellow. I've never seen a native—or European for that matter—with such eyes. In a moment she was gone, leaving me with a sense of attraction, not physical, but something I can't describe.

"Though the place often seems deserted, the witch doctor is always on the watch. He's the most malevolent-looking creature you can imagine, and very wide awake, but I shall find a way to speak to the priestess, whatever the risk. Good old Pambu! His announcement of the whisky's arrival has given me a brain wave. Tomorrow an offering of spirits goes to the spirit of the juju house, and then, unless I'm much mistaken, things will begin to happen.

"*July 12th.* I can hardly believe my luck. She is sitting in my hut, weaving flowers into her fuzzy hair and watching intently while I write. Her name is Ulana, which means 'the

greatest witch', so it really looks as if I were on the right track at last. This is how it happened: With a bottle of whisky under my arm, I went to the sacred compound and struck the drum hanging at the entrance. Of course the chances were against Ulana's appearing alone, but she did, and—curiously enough—my presence seemed to cause her no surprise. For a moment her gaze pierced me through and through as if searching for something, then she asked very quietly what it was I needed. 'Knowledge,' I replied. 'I have traveled many days to seek you out.'

"'The white man wishes to learn of my wisdom?' she said. 'It is well, but not here. When night falls I will come.'

"The eagerness of her consent didn't exactly please me. After all, she is high priestess in a cannibal village, and one never knows what treachery may be afoot; so I tried to explain that there would probably be trouble if she were seen going to my hut. At that she grew thoughtful and whispered, pointing in the direction of the juju house, 'All others I can make blind, but against M'Kulu no charms avail.'

"I guessed that M'Kulu must be her hideous opposite number, and took my opportunity at a run, with a blessing for the man who invented whisky. 'Make M'Kulu drink this,' I said, holding up the bottle, 'and for many hours he also will see nothing.' Once more her eyes met mine, and the gold in them danced as she turned away.

"Of course I realize that for a solitary white man to stand up against a cannibal witch doctor is a risky business, but so far everything has worked according to plan, and M'Kulu is blind to the world tonight, while Ulana sits here, never speaking and never taking her eyes off me. Being watched is usually an unpleasant sensation, but now I find it wonderfully soothing. And there is something else—I never saw her come

into the hut. Believe it or not, she made herself invisible to me. It's all the more strange, because at that moment I happened to be extra wide awake, with a feeling as if some wild animal were prowling round the hut—and then, suddenly, she was there. It's the brink of knowledge. The question is, shall I have the courage to go on?

"July 18th. Her eyes fascinate me. Their yellow glint is like powdered gold falling through water. In bright light the iris dwindles to a pinpoint—like a cat's—and the smaller it is the more it holds me. After the first visit she kept away for days, but she's here again this evening, and I know now that she has the power of zoomorphism.

"I'll tell you what happened. This morning the headman asked me to go out the next night of full moon after a leopard that has been causing trouble. It has carried off several goats and killed a girl at the edge of the jungle, and the people are panic-stricken, declaring it to be a leopard woman. You can imagine my feelings at that bit of news! Of course I accepted—it would have been impossible to do otherwise—though even then I didn't like the idea of shooting the leopard.

"The headman said that after watching for two nights in a tree, he had speared the beast, but the grass was very long and it got away with his spearhead in its left shoulder. Well, just now I was thinking drowsily about all these things and watching Ulana curled up at my feet, when suddenly something roused me into full consciousness. She had come in a sort of mantle of brightly colored grass cloth, which intrigued me because native women don't wear such things, and as I stared at it the mantle slipped down, showing a great wound, still fresh and bleeding, behind her left shoulder. For a moment I was too much surprised to think; then the headman's story—the tales I had

heard of leopard women—my own suspicions about Ulana—came rushing to my brain, filling the blanks like the last pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

"Instinctively I made myself devil's advocate, trying to use every argument against my own conviction. After all, the wound might be a knife wound. A priestess must certainly have enemies, or M'Kulu himself might have attacked her in a fit of jealousy. But no arguments would hold; this was a spear wound if ever there was one—a fresh spear wound in the left shoulder—and the leopard had been wounded in the left shoulder—and escaped!"

"'Ulana!' I cried, catching her by the arm, 'how did this happen?'

"She drew away and covered her shoulder, but I had seen enough. . . . I knew now. 'A thief came in the night,' she answered. 'His knife was sharp.'

"'A thief's knife?' I said. 'Say rather the headman's spear. Where were you two nights since, O Ulana?' My idea was to show that I had guessed her secret, but the question was useless, for she only smiled with her eyes fixed on mine.

"I don't know how long we had been looking at each other in silence—it seemed an eternity—when suddenly a deep-toned drum began to beat in the distance, and Ulana sprang to her feet in terror. 'The temple drum!' she whispered. 'M'Kulu seeks me in vain. . . . In the forest . . . I will come.' And before I could speak she was gone."

FALKNER paused for a moment and looked up. The expression on the faces round him showed neither conviction nor disbelief, but rather an expectant tolerance of the adventure of G. P. and his leopard woman. In Europe these would be considered the fantastic product of a mind unbalanced by climate, drink, and over-study of the occult—with stress upon the second reason—but in Africa

people learn to respect what they can not understand, and so three Englishmen sat silent while Falkner took up the last of the letters.

"This one has no date," he said, "but it was written the evening before I reached Nagomba, that is to say on the 26th of July."

"The 26th!" exclaimed the airmen. "Why, I flew over the place that very afternoon, a good deal lower than was safe, too, with nowhere to land within fifty miles. There was a great fuss going on, one of those big ceremonial dances—you know the kind of thing—an endless chain of men painted white and women with grass kilts like ballet skirts, twisting and turning in a mad sort of follow-the-leader. You must have been quite near."

"I wasn't far away," said Falkner, "fortunately . . . but you'll hear about that presently. First listen to G. P's letter."

He resumed reading:

"I'm making an effort to put everything on paper before—well, while I can. Last night was full moon, and I went into the forest with the headman and several others—and of course Pambu. As we left, the big drum in the juju compound began to boom slowly, just as it did on the night when Ulana was here—just as it is doing now. Will nothing stop the cursed thing? I think I'll go mad with its measured thud hammering into my brain. Mad! Why don't they try that drum in America? It would be a splendid idea for the third degree. . . .

"We went on and on—I don't know how far—till at last the headman stopped at the edge of a curved open space surrounded by dense undergrowth, and helped me up into the last tree of a group that stuck out from the rest like a cape. There was a platform among the branches, just big enough for me and my rifle, and so placed that it lay in shadow with bright moonlight on three sides. I

wanted to keep Pambu, but the headman said it was the custom to watch alone, so I didn't insist. Then they all went away, leaving me with only the faint drum beats—you know what a distance they carry—for company.

"Suddenly the drum beats stopped. At first the silence seemed a relief, like a weight lifted from my brain, but soon I began to realize that silence in the jungle is far worse than any drumming. Of course I had read about it and been told how awful it was, but no description could come anywhere near the horror of reality, with its dead emptiness working on every nerve. Through what seemed ages of torture my only thought was of Ulana. Would she come, as she had promised? Would a leopard come—a leopard with a spear wound in its shoulder? In spite of all that had happened, the thing seemed incredible, yet something told me that it was true and that my own strength of mind—my absolute belief—must prove it.

"With throbbing brain I watched the moon move slowly across the open glade, touching new places with shafts of light that pierced the wall of foliage till at last, from a spot of darkness no moonbeam could penetrate, two eyes like great burning opals looked out. Mechanically I grasped my rifle, and as I did so the brightness of the eyes faded and a big leopard moved into the open.

"After that things happened so quickly that much is blotted out of my memory. I remember standing on the ground beneath the tree while the leopard came nearer and nearer, watching me with its yellow eyes—Ulana's eyes. I hadn't got my rifle—it must have been left in the tree—and somehow I didn't care. It was as if my mind had ceased to work, leaving my body incapable of movement or fear or any sensation. But when the beast was almost within reach, an irresistible impulse arose in me to feel its shoulder for the spear wound and

prove that Ulana had kept her word. For of course the leopard was Ulana. How, otherwise, could I be standing there unharmed? To need further proof seemed shameful, but I simply had to do it—want of faith—the old story. And now the game's up—for my hands were stretched out and had almost touched the silky coat, when suddenly M'Kulu ran out of the undergrowth and stood with his hunting-spear poised to throw.

"Like a fool I raised my arm to stop him, thinking that he wanted to save me from the leopard, but I paid the price of my foolishness, for in a second the shining spearhead had made a silver streak against the black wall of trees and buried itself in my side, while the shaft quivered and then dropped, tearing the twisted barbs upward in a great gash—like the one on Ulana's shoulder—like—well, it's no good worrying—I'll never know now. Perhaps—if I had kept my rifle—but, as a matter of fact I would never have used it, for at the very moment the spear struck me the leopard sprang at M'Kulu, and his scream of terror rang in my ears as I fainted.

"I'm not delirious, but everything is all muzzy—from my wound, I suppose. Oh, hell take that drum—and the stamping of the dancers! They have been at it all the afternoon, coming closer each time they pass round the hut. I know what that means—you'll never get this letter—but I must go on with it all the same.

"Pambu has disappeared. I haven't seen him for hours. Goodness knows how he got me back here, but he did, for when I woke up he was squatting by my bed. And now even he is gone—a rotten show, for I trusted Pambu. Perhaps they've done him in, as a sort of *hors d'œuvre*—pleasant idea!

"Something keeps prowling about outside. It makes no sound, but I know it's there. Bruce, old man, this is the end. When the thing comes I'm going to write down—"

FALKNER folded up the letters and replaced them in his pocket. "That's the end," he said, "so far as G. P.'s story is concerned. Now for mine.

"Pambu reached my camp on the evening of the 26th, in a state of abject fear, jabbering away incoherently, and, I think, on purpose, for as soon as my Nayassas and Wanyamwesia had been sent out of earshot, he suddenly calmed down and said that the Nagos were going to kill his master next morning. Then he shut up like an oyster, and neither threats nor promises could get another word out of him. Poor Pambu! As it turned out, he had good reason to be afraid, but I only realized that to reach G. P. in time I must be quick.

"Twelve miles through jungle at night takes some going, but just before dawn we were outside the village. For nearly two hours the drum had been throbbing in the distance, and I agree with every word G. P. says about it. That particular beat, I discovered afterward, is only used on occasions of human sacrifice, but even without that knowledge its effect on my nerves in the hot darkness was decidedly unpleasant.

"The huts at the edge of the jungle appeared to be deserted, and, fearing the worst, we hurried on to the big open space in the center of the village, where a silent crowd—the same white-painted man and grass-skirted woman the airman told us about just now, with the addition of a group of witch doctors with hideous masks—squatted on the ground with their backs to us, glistening like silver in the twilight. Beyond them a semi-circle remained empty in front of one of the huts, to which Pambu, who had never left my side for an instant, pointed excitedly. I didn't need to be told that the hut was G. P.'s, and from the appearance of the crowd he was probably still inside it.

"The next few seconds were like a football scrum. I had just given the

order to get round and occupy the hut from behind, when the sun rose, and with it every man in Nagomba. Brandishing their spears the white-painted warriors rushed forward, while the witch doctors yelled like fury to the accompaniment of drumming that had doubled time at the same moment.

"To try and reach the back of the hut now seemed hopeless, so we charged with the rest, and—though it may sound incredible—they were so intent upon the business in hand that we were in the front line before they noticed us. And then it didn't matter, for suddenly the whole crowd stopped dead, and a drawn-out gasp rose from its ranks as a leopard stalked slowly out of the hut and stood facing us.

"I was as much taken aback as anyone, though in my case fear for G. P. soon swamped every other thought, while the witch doctors must have raged at the probable loss of their victim. However that may be, a shower of spears were on their way when I fired, but luckily my bullet got there first—through the neck and lung—a dead shot. With a noise between a cough and a snarl the leopard collapsed, lay absolutely still for perhaps ten seconds and then, to my intense amazement, rose with a supreme effort and disappeared in the doorway of the hut. Ordering my askaris to keep the crowd back at all costs, I dashed after it, expecting—goodness knows what I expected, but it certainly was not the sight that met my eyes.

"G. P. sprawled on a camp bed against the further wall, and, stretched on the floor beside him, head between paws like a great dog guarding its master, lay the leopard. So extraordinary was its position that I moved forward with caution, but it was dead right enough. At first I thought G. P. must be dead too, but found to my relief that he was breathing very faintly, with the sweat rolling off him as it does when fever is

going down. There was a horrible wound in his side, so inflamed that poison seemed the only explanation; anyhow it sent me back to the doorway, shouting for my medicine chest.

"Then came the second shock of that eventful morning. With the exception of my men not a soul was to be seen. The crowd had vanished and the drum had ceased beating, leaving the place deserted and silent, with something in its steamy emptiness that made me want to get out of it quick.

"An askari came with my things, and as he put them on G. P.'s table I caught sight of the letters. You've heard what he wrote, so you can imagine my feelings, with him lying there unconscious, and his leopard—or was it his leopard woman!—taking her last guard at his feet. The whole thing seemed a mad brainstorm, and yet—

"Pulling myself together, I bent down and felt the animal's left shoulder, and there was a wound, a long jagged gash—healed over, but otherwise exactly as G. P. had seen it on Ulana's shoulder. It may sound absurd, but it was all I could do to conquer the fear creeping over me—fear of the place, of the silence, of dabbling in things white men should let alone. Action was the only remedy, and I clung to that like a drowning man.

"I sent for the headman and told him that he must produce M'Kulu, dead or alive. He said nothing, but led the way into the forest, with four of my men round him to see that there was no hanky-panky.

"After about two miles we came to the open glade, which I recognized at once from G. P.'s description. His rifle and cartridges were still on the platform in the tree, and when I had taken them the headman pointed to the half-devoured remains of a hideous old black lying at the edge of the scrub. 'M'Kulu,' he said, and I knew that he spoke the truth.

"'And Ulana?' I asked.

"Instantly every vestige of expression left the headman's face. 'Ulana?' he repeated, staring at me stonily. 'Ulana died . . . today . . . at sunrise.'

"The words were spoken deliberately, without the least feeling, but their effect upon me was to revive every doubt I had tried to stifle. You see, I killed the leopard at sunrise—and G. P.'s letters lay fresh in my pocket. Coincidence, of course, but mighty strange coincidence. For a moment I wanted to question further—to try and convince myself that the man was lying—but what was the use? The curtain separating black from white would only become more impenetrable than ever. No, I had to realize that my years of experience led no farther than G. P.'s daring, and that the mystery of the leopard woman must remain—for somebody else to fathom.

"The askaris could not understand why I refused to let them skin the leopard for me, and I don't blame them, for it was a perfect specimen and beautifully marked; anyhow, we left it where it lay.

"An hour later I got G. P. away in a litter—he was still unconscious—and had just reached the jungle when that damned drum started beating again, with frantic yells and shouting from the juju compound. Only then I noticed that Pambu was missing, and at once guessed what must have happened. It was a rotten situation. I knew that to go into the village a second time with my tiny force and G. P. on my hands would have been madness, and besides, it was too late

to save the victim. The only thing was to carry on, which I did.

"Of course nothing was ever proved, but from evidence that reached me afterward, I'm sure the Nagos did get Pambu—spirited him away somehow during my absence with the headman. It's curious that I never missed him, nor could any of my men remember when he had last been seen. Poor wretch! He saved G. P.'s life and paid for it with his own."

"**A** NEAR thing," said the Policeman, after a pause. "Home is the only cure for a case like that—a long spell of home. I suppose he didn't tell you what came into the hut—after he had stopped writing?"

"No," replied Falkner. "He asked if I got the letters, and in his state of weakness I thought it best not to question further. By the way, there was no poison in his wound, and I think I know the reason. You see, poisoned meat would have been no good to the Nagos."

The Policeman nodded. "Everything seems to have worked to save G. P.'s life. Lucky devil!"

"Yes—if he keeps off juju," said Gordon. "It's an extraordinary adventure, though to my mind the evidence about the leopard woman seems far from conclusive."

For a moment there was silence. Then the man who flies above jungles—and juju—broke it.

"You amaze me, Fatty," he remarked profoundly. "Haven't you learned that in Africa nothing is conclusive? What about another drink?"

