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FANTASTIC

Novels

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No. 4

Novel

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Strange was the toll that summoned him across the frozen wastes to unknown Sardanes, and stranger still his mission. . . . For only he, of all the world, knew the secret beyond the Southern Pole—a gem brighter than eternity, colder than the stars—and more dangerous to possess than the Rose maiden. . . .

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Cover by Finlay. Inside illustrations by Paul and Finlay.

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Murder, madness, death, were in the jungle tom-toms' warning beat—but Van Dam meant to have the gigantic carcass of the sacred gorilla in spite of witchcraft or the she-devil that dwelt within his quarry herself. . . .

FOR eight months no word came from my friend Van Dam.

Those of us in his debt virtuously assured ourselves that we had intended to pay him back at once, and tried to bear up; others who wished to borrow were naturally somewhat resentful at his absence. As usual, he had given no intimation of his fitting, and all who called at his diggings—so he designated the enormous top-story apartment where he dwelt among his countless trophies and collections—were

forte is large allegorical canvases, though Van thinks differently—but never having had any money, I developed an appetite for it and painted all who paid. My most lucrative commission had just come to me, a portrait for a political club of one of its most prominent—and worst—members, and it was giving me a great deal of trouble. To begin with, the man would not sit more than fifteen minutes at a time, and his face was simply horrible.

I painted it first, nearly from memory,

THE WHITE GORILLA

By Elmer Brown Mason

met by the always smiling Jap with the information, "Mr. Van Dam, he will be back—oh, quite soon some day."

This same phrase had excused a two years' disappearance of his master in the interior of Borneo. Gradually we ceased to think of him, and each little life traveled around its own restricted orbit as though the absentee had ceased to exist.

My own affairs were going rather well and orders simply poured in. This halcyon state was due to a Hercules, for which Van had provided me with an extraordinary model, and a Pittsburgh millionaire bought because it was the image of a fellow steel worker he had known in his undollared youth.

These orders, however, were entirely for portraits, which I do not like doing—my

in all its brutal reality of low forehead, eyes set far back, and enormous jaw development—a positively bestial thing. And it looked not the slightest like the original.

Then I conceived the idea that a soul was shining through this fleshy mask and put the light of holiness in the eyes, the curve of renunciation at the corner of the lips. When my man called, his own face made its painted counterpart look like the delineation of some kindly saint. That day I devoted myself solely to the hands—veritable Gargantuan paws they were—and after he had left, very discouraged, started to scrape and turn the face. Just as I had eliminated all but chin and forehead the phone rang.

"Hello!" I said crisply into the transmitter with the intonation I have adopted



The girl swayed, as people do in a cataleptic state,
at the same time raising her arms. . . .

since I consider myself a successful artist.

"Come to dinner, painter-man," drawled Van's voice over the wire. "I have something to show you."

"I'm very busy," I answered loftily, "but I'll try to manage it if you'll tell me beforehand what we are eating."

Van has one idiosyncrasy that is positively ghastly. He is always cooking the most awful, uncivilized dishes concealed in such delectable sauces that you can't help liking them till you find out what they are. At his table I have eaten a lizard creature tasting exactly like delicate chicken, and a savory dish of what appeared to be roasted oysters and was really the larvae of the black palm weevil.

"What are you busy with?" came over the wire. "If it's a Vulcan, I have a good model for you."

"I'm trying to paint a baboon," I snapped, "and no model will do."

"Surprising," he answered in really animated tones. "I can furnish you with a gorilla, and I have a young cannibal here to go with it."

"Am I to act as a meal for your guests?" I began, but he had hung up.

VAN and I dined luxuriously on what I took to be very young lamb and afterward adjourned to the den, on the walls of which are ranged the cases containing his albino collection; the traditional white blackbird, the enormous, glittering, white toucan, the snowy raccoon, the white panther, and that last acquisition in a huge case by itself. There was a roaring wood fire, and before it, partially covered by a snow-leopard's skin, twitched, while he slept, the coffee-colored slim cannibal boy. Once he reached up a long, bare foot and scratched his ear exactly as a dog attends to a flea.

There was a livid, five-inch scar on Van's cheek, and while he talked the blood would pulse to its top, run down underneath the skin, and disappear exactly as an electric advertising sign lights and flashes out.

"Of course you know, painter-man," he began, "that I am in touch with people throughout the world whom I pay to keep their eyes open for the albino phase in animals and birds. The mail daily brings me offers of specimens or word where they may be procured, but, for the most part, they are of species I already have or else out-and-out fakes—I have been offered scores of white elephants. You see, among savages, the abnormal in nature is very often an object of direct worship.

"Contrary to our ideas of religion, the untutored savage has the delicacy not to inflict his beliefs on strangers, and does not, so to speak, wear his god on his sleeve. It is, therefore, hard to get reliable information regarding animals that are white when they normally should be quite a different color.

"It was, as a matter of fact, the very indefinitiveness of the data that sent me on this last expedition. From Libreville, in the French Congo, an Englishman wrote me it was common talk among the Mpangwe, who had recently been driven out of the region at the headquarters of the Gabun River, that their conquerors worshiped and sacrificed to a white woman who walked on her knees and elbows and was covered with long hair. A Dutch trader sent word from Booue that the Fan tribe of cannibals had an old, old man for chief who walked on all fours and was fed entirely on human flesh. A French rubber exploiter in the Sierra de Crystal told one of my agents that there was a large, white monkey in the Ogowé division of the Fan cannibals which was held sacred and accompanied them to war.

"The very meagerness of this information and the improbability of collusion between its widely separated sources gave me something on which to theorize, and I sailed for Libreville. The building of my theory was simplicity itself. The third informant had distinctly stated that the creature was a white monkey. Monkeys are regarded by many tribes in Africa as only slightly modified human beings.

"The final link in my reasoning came from the statement that it walked on its elbows and knees. The gorilla walks, or rather swings itself along, on the backs of its hands—and often turns the toes of its feet under. In short, I hoped for an albino gorilla, and my theory was strengthened by the knowledge that gorillas, when caught young, are docile and easily tamed, in spite of the unquestioned ferocity of the wild, old males. As a matter of fact, we know little more about this largest of all primates than has been vouched us from the fertile imagination of Paul de Chailu.

"There are current, in Africa, tales of men snatched from the ground to die a horrible death in the tree-tops; of an African tribe that kept a huge, old male for executioner until it was killed by an Englishman about to be sacrificed, who noticed a swelling over its heart and struck it in this vulnerable spot. At any rate, I had never seen a gorilla in the wild state,

and the adventure promised many thrills.

"From Libreville I made a short expedition among the Mpangwe whom the more warlike Fans had driven from the interior. Savages, I have found, Mr. Painter-man, belong to two categories; those that are honest, trust-worthy, and truthful, and those that are the exact opposite.

"The Mpangwe belong to the latter class. They were the worst liars I have ever met, and told me only what they thought I wanted to hear. The hairy woman was endowed with wings and made to lay eggs that hatched into serpents, and when they found it was a monkey I was after, they agreed to a man that she always assumed that form at night.

"There was nothing to be learned from these swindling natives, and I made up my mind to follow rumor to its source and go up the Gabun River into the gorilla country where dwelt the Ogowé Fans. The local French government, not without a warning against its unsettled state and the absolute lack of positive knowledge of the region into which I proposed to penetrate, finally gave me a permit for a scientific exploring expedition.

"They even went further and provided me with a guard of twenty soldiers—so, you see, I traveled rather *en prince*—and helped to collect the rather large caravan which I required.

"A trip of this nature to one who has been through the same kind of thing before, contrary to the general idea of you city dwellers, is remarkable only for the length of time it takes to reach a given point. There was, of course, the usual revolt of the porters for higher pay, which had to be summarily quelled; the leopard that blundered into my tent-ropes one night, and the killing of a man by a wounded buffalo; also an ill-advised attempt to assassinate me. These are only the incidents one expects in jungle travel, however, and, on the whole, it was rather a dull journey, and a very hot one.

"As we neared our destination the country became rugged with open but shady and damp forests, and there were interminable thickets of scitamines and tree-ferns, on the fruits of which the gorilla feeds. All along the route I made guarded inquiries about my quest, and, from what I could *not* learn, fully made up my mind that a white gorilla, or at least some extraordinary animal, its existence well known to the natives, was in possession of the Fans. I came to this conclusion because every approach to the subject, no

matter how indirect, instantly inspired fear, and those interrogated either became dumb or lied wildly.

"ONE day's journey from our destination I sent ahead runners with gifts to the sorcer (so is designated the local priest) and to the chief. Of course word of my coming had long ago preceded me, and, partially through curiosity, partially through respect for my guard and my large caravan, they sent back friendly messages.

"The next evening, to the monotonous beat of tom-toms, I pitched camp on the edge of the valley in which dwelt the Ogowé Fans. These savages were quite different from any I had met in Africa. They were not black, but coffee-colored, well made, with thin lips, intelligent faces, and were tall and, according to our standards, excessively slim.

"Best of all, their language was a slight variation of the great Bantu tongue, as spoken by the Zulu Kafirs, and with which I am thoroughly familiar. The women, who were quite handsome, worked in the manioc-fields, while the existence of the men was made up of war and hunting. To a high degree they were both truthful and honorable.

"Savages love ceremony, and our mutual greetings took up all of three days, on the last of which there was a feast with wild dances and much palm-wine. I was not at all sure of the bill of fare, and, in order to be on the safe side, pretexted a vow of fasting, an expiatory rite which they practise, and so understood. My rôle was that of a sorcer who had come to study their birds and beasts, but most to consort with my brother priests to our mutual advantage, and I was accepted at my own valuation.

"A liberal gift insured me the privilege of dwelling in their country as long as I pleased, and so well did I get on with my hosts that finally, with the chief, I went through that not unpoetic ceremony of mysterious origin which they call blood-brotherhood. This practical adoption into the tribe so reassured me as to my safety that I sent back my guard of soldiers, much to their horror, and in spite of their protestations, and with them the greater part of my porters, retaining only a few in whom I had implicit confidence.

"I've lived with savages before, Mr. Painter-man, and I must say there is no pleasanter or easier life. To a very great extent every man does exactly as he

pleases. Food is the only real necessity, and is largely furnished by the labor of the women.

"Moral and ethical considerations are never personal, but the affair of the high priest (better called sorcer), and are left entirely in his hands.

"In spite of ideal conditions for happiness, it was distinctly wanting among the Ogowé Fans. There was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction running through the tribe, and an atmosphere of mental discomfort. Quarrels were frequent, and there were several cases of absolute insanity, the victims of which were promptly put to death, tribal law permitting of no mental or physical deficient.

"In my assumed character it was naturally the sorcer that I saw the most of, and we found much in common. As a matter of fact, the priest among savages represents not only the highest mental, but what we must characterize for want of a better definition, as scientific attainments of the race. My confrère of the Ogowé Fans was a shrewd, middle-aged man, leaning toward asceticism, and a real fanatic in his beliefs.

"He had one daughter, and if you can imagine such a thing as a soft, brown rose glowing in the tropical jungle you will have a fairly accurate picture of her. The Fan faith was a kind of Pan-deism with just a dash of sun worship, interwoven with superstition, its manifestation interpreted by the sorcer from the actions of various sacred animals. There was also an additional and very unusual way of learning the wishes of their deity.

"The priest was master of a crude but nonetheless effective form of hypnotism, which he practised on members of the tribe, but principally on his daughter. Through her, while she was 'possessed of the spirit,' otherwise in a cataleptic state, he unconsciously impressed his own will on the tribe.

"I give him absolute credit for attributing divine origin to the words that she uttered, which made him only the more determined in his purposes, in the same way that a man with an honest belief is much more likely to be successful than one who must admit in his own heart that he is a faker.

"The girl was so completely under his mental control that a few moments' gazing into a large crystal, which had been roughly rounded and held a thousand lights, made her mind blank and instantly receptive of any impression from him. This

crystal was a very sacred thing, and it was the duty of a different warrior each day to rub at the inequalities with fine sand with the purpose of finally bringing it to a perfect roundness.

"The sorcer was enough of a man of the world to appreciate the awe he might inspire by means of a few chemicals I gave him and the—to savages—startling tricks I was able to teach him. As a matter of fact, he ruled these frankly cannibal warriors through fear alone, and so great was his mental dominance that, at times, it seemed to me, he held half the tribe in a semihypnotic state. There was a bitter feud between him and the temporal chief.

"The latter wished to move on to new conquests; the priest held firm that they remain where they were for a year until expiation had been made by endless religious ceremonies for the 'blinding of the eyes of piety,' a phrase which meant nothing to me then, but which I now understand.

"I WAS, of course, more or less affiliated with the chief, since, with him, I had gone through the blood-brotherhood rite, but my closest friend was his son. He was a youth of some twenty summers, and the most marvelous hunter and tracker I have ever known. Ikstu—that is as near as I can Anglicize his name—accompanied me on all my collecting expeditions, and, what was of the greatest importance, since I was supposed to know them instinctively, told me the birds and animals that were sacred and not to be molested.

"Chief among those tabu were the gorillas, and they throve and were quite unafraid under such treatment, though naturally retiring beasts. In the manioc-fields, which the women cultivated, toward evening I have literally seen dozens of them. The males would wander out from the jungle with their two or three mates and family, or sometimes I would come upon a solitary old bachelor, grayish-white, and a very dangerous animal to approach.

"Some would run away, screaming with fright, in a tryingly human manner, but there was one old fellow who never gave a step until I myself retired.

"He was fully six feet tall when standing braced against a tree-trunk, his hands hanging below his knees, the hair on his neck and head erect with rage, and the ruff under his chin quivering. Two great canine teeth protruded from each side of his snarling mouth, and beneath their enormous protuberances his little eyes

blazed red in his coal-black face. I learned to hate that animal, and, as he hopped away on all fours, his legs swinging out beyond his arms, I longed to turn and put an explosive bullet in him.

"Policy, that was even a question of personal safety, held me in check, however, and I wisely refrained. Ikstu, who feared nothing else in the world, was deadly afraid of these old males, but, even more than he feared them, he hated the sorcer.

"As we became better acquainted, and I gained his confidence, the reason for this was apparent. I noticed that on several occasions we found two purple orchids, their stems crossed, lying in the narrow trails through the scitamines thickets, and each time this sign appeared I lost my companion for the rest of the day. The connection was obvious.

"The daughter of the sorcer-priest always wore these orchids in her hair and as a garland—in fact, they formed by far the greater part of her wardrobe.

"Always, however, she was back from these love rambles at her father's hut before sunset, and, after he had made her gaze for a few moments into the sacred crystal, she would hurry off into the jungle with a basket of manioc and fruit of the scitamines on her arm. You may well believe I was curious in regard to these expeditions, but I kept this curiosity to myself. Once I tried to pick up her trail in the morning, and was very nearly impaled in a leopard-trap. That afternoon I received a warning from the sorcer of the presence of a very sacred and awful spirit in the direction I had gone.

"My excuse for lingering in the neighborhood was wearing thin, and the priest was beginning to look on me with unconcealed suspicion. Meantime, there was no hint of what I sought, and the whole tribe was humming with an undercurrent of politics that would have done credit to Tammany Hall during election.

"My time had not been entirely wasted, however, for I had the skin of an albino thrush (it proved new to science), and also a large, white spider of the trap-door variety, the first absolute case of albinism I had ever found among the *Arachnida*. My camp was ready to be abandoned and my porters to travel, and I made up my mind to start for the coast the moment I had solved the problem of the girl's nightly trip.

The crisis came sooner than I expected. In spite of the objections of the spiritual power, the chief made a raid toward the

sea and returned with heavy spoil and ten captives. There was much rejoicing in the tribe, though the sorcer was very angry, and the captives were closely guarded and well fed, so that their ultimate, gruesome disposal was only too obvious. The war party gained in strength, and it was decided the matter of moving on to new conquests be finally decided at the Feast of the Gorillas, when the moon was full.

"My position was now not only very uncomfortable, but positively dangerous, and I kept exclusively to my own camp, my only connection with the Fan village being through Ikstu. Time hanging heavy on my hands, I hit on an expedient that I should have thought of long before.

"Through a pair of powerful field-glasses I spied the girl's route each evening until I finally traced her down to her destination, a rocky amphitheater hardly a mile distant from the village.

"That night darkness came so quickly I could not see what she did, but the next evening the secret of her expeditions and, at the same time, the end of my quest were revealed to me. From the crotch of a great rubber tree I watched her set down her basket and, swaying slightly as people do in the cataleptic state, raised her arms above her orchid-crowned head evidently calling. Twice she did this, and then, from a cleft in the rocks, an unbelievable object swung slowly out to meet her.

"Never have I seen so beautiful and so repulsive an animal. It was an enormous female gorilla with fur long and white as that of an Angora goat. Even in a crouched position, practically on all fours, its jet-black face was above the girl on whom it looked down from eyes that seemed, through my field-glasses, milk white.

"One mighty arm rose and rested on the girl, the other groping in the basket at her feet, and thus the two figures stood while the fruits were crammed into an enormous mouth. Then the girl lifted, with both hands, the great paw from her bare shoulder, and before the quick tropical darkness shut them from my sight, I saw her catch the wreath of purple orchids from her own neck and throw it over the brute's head.

"At camp, with his chest bleeding from a knife wound, I found Ikstu waiting for me. Without giving him time to explain his own errand I told quickly what I had seen. He was in no way astonished, and I doubt even if he heard half I said, so full was he of his own troubles.

"The sorcer had somehow learned of the meetings with his daughter and was keeping her in a continual hypnotic state, so that, quite unconscious of what she was doing or saying, she had actually stabbed him at their last rendezvous and even threatened him with 'the blind eyes of plety.'

"His simple request was that I should take him and the girl away with me after he had killed the sorcer during the coming feast. I consented without the slightest hesitation, bargaining only that he should tell me, in return, all he knew of the white gorilla.

"Gradually, though, it was apparent he feared a celestial thunderbolt. I dragged the story from him. The beast, under the care of the sorcer, had been the fetish of the tribe ever since he could remember, and figured in every religious ceremony. At the beginning of the Fans' march toward the coast the gorilla had always gone into battle with them, and, maddened by a great beaker of the potent palm wine, proved a terror to their enemies. Then, to the lasting grief of the sorcer, during a night attack it had lost the sight of both eyes from a firebrand.

"Formerly it had been a docile and friendly animal (when not inflamed by the palm liquor), with the unrestrained freedom of the village, but this accident changed it into a she-devil that dwelt morosely alone and could only be approached by the sorcer's daughter, and that only when under her father's hypnotic influence.

"IT'S a wild tale, painter-man, and sitting here before the fire one can hardly believe it actually happened. In the jungle, though, with the blackness of the tropical night wrapped around us like velvet ribbons, the squeak of the vampire bats, the far-away roar of a male gorilla, and the cough of a leopard circling the camp, it seemed perfectly natural and fitting for me to be conniving, with a cannibal, at what was nothing but a cold-blooded murder.

"Besides, I wanted the skin of that albino primate, and I was going to have it at any cost. I believed every word of Ikstu's story, even to divine attributes with which he credited the brute and of which I have not told you—you see, I had seen it, and alive."

Van Dam snapped on the electric lights and turned in his chair to face the glass cabinet which contained his latest acqui-

sition. My eyes followed his and I shuddered to the very depths of my city-swaddled soul. The great monkey had been mounted bending slightly forward, its hands swinging between and far below its knees. In its immense paws it held a pear-shaped crystal larger than an ostrich's egg, which caught and imprisoned the light.

Beautiful, long, silky fur, white as silver, clothed the enormously powerful body, and beneath the low forehead, deep in the black face, were set, in lieu of eyes, two round milky-white agates. The mouth was curled back in a fixed grin revealing the broken, yellow, doglike fangs, repulsive beyond belief by contrast with the beauty and power of the rest of the animal.

"Go on, Van," I said, "you couldn't make me disbelieve anything about that thing. For Heaven's sake, out with the lights, though. I don't want to look at it."

The blood showed at the top of the scar on Van Dam's cheek, slithered down its ragged length, and winked out leaving it livid white. He switched off the electric current and we were left again with only the light of the fire.

"I gave Ikstu no advice as to his killing," Van Dam continued, "because I felt that he was quite competent to carry out his private vendetta in his own way. However, since the next evening was to see the beginning of the Feast of the Gorillas, I moved my camp a mile toward the coast and prepared everything for immediate flight. In the afternoon I made Ikstu guide me by a roundabout route, to the very edge of the rocky amphitheater above the beast's den, and ensconced myself, within easy hearing and seeing distance, in the thick top of a scitamines bush.

"Hardly was I comfortably settled when the sorcer and his daughter, both heavily laden with baskets, appeared beneath me.

"I don't think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the girl. Of actual clothes she wore only a white loin-cloth, but her hair was braided full of the purple orchids and garland on garland of the same flower hung from her neck and covered her lithe, brown body.

"The sorcer was hideously painted in crimson and white and his face was made up to simulate a gorilla, the hair drawn far back and two extra, white eyes daubed on the forehead.

"Immediately the girl, sitting with crossed legs, began to beat a tiny tom-tom, while the sorcer built a small fire and busied himself with the baskets and three other articles. I recognized them as a

leopard skin worn by one of the under chiefs, a mat from a hut, and Ikstu's favorite spear.

"When the fire was going well the girl stood up and called. The third time her voice rose the white gorilla emerged slowly from its den and hesitatingly hopped and swung down to her. Then, before my eyes, took place the most remarkable performance I have witnessed.

"The man cast some herb into the fire and the girl led the animal into the thick, scented smoke. Time and again it broke from her and rushed to its rocky refuge, time and again it came back to her call. Herb after herb, each with a different odor, went into the flames, and gradually the movements of the great beast became slower, lethargic, till it finally stood swaying, its blind agate eyes turned to the sorcer.

"Once the girl faltered and seemed to be awakening from a trance, but her father held the crystal to her eyes till they went blank and she again mechanically did his bidding. Now he transferred the sacred stone to the gorilla's paws and began a chant. The words were not of the Bantu tongue but from some language older than the hills. I don't know what they mean, but I remember the sound, mixed with the beat of the tom-tom, as well as though I were now hearing it.

"Nala (*bong*) Nala (*bong*)
Nala impi (*bong, bong, bong.*)
Nala (*bong*) Nala (*bong*)
Nala impi (*bong, bong, bong.*)
Nala (*bong*) Nala (*bong*)
Nala impi (*bong, bong, bong.*)"

Intoned to the sullen beat of the drum till the world seemed to go to sleep and the brain reach forward for the next repetition.

"The great brute began to move slowly in a swaying dance, keeping time with the rhythm. One by one the girl held the leopard skin, mat and spear against its flat nostrils while, for each separate article, the sorcer pressed a hot coal to the slowly shuffling feet. At every burn the beast reared, and raising the glittering crystal, to which its paws seemed glued, dashed it down on the object before it.

"Extraordinary as was the idea, I recognized at once that, for the usual passes and crystal gazing used in hypnotism, the sorcer had first substituted the scent of herbs and then the chant, and actually held the frightful beast in control by that thin thread of sound.

"Still beating on her tom-tom with measured strokes the voice of the girl took up the mysterious words, and the sorcer grew silent crouched over the fire. Night was coming fast. I slipped from my hiding place as the forest shadows blackened the cliff and silently slid down to the very cleft whence had come the gorilla. There I lay in the darkness peering at the three figures before the fire.

"First one tom-tom, another, a third, till their number seemed countless, awoke in the village. There was a high, shrill scream of agony from far away, then the voice of the whole tribe raised in a great chorus, the words growing distinguishable as they grew nearer.

"In English they would go like this:

"The sun, oh, the sun, from the rising of the sun,
We go through the jungle aisles until the moon is high.
There's blood within our footsteps, and every warrior one
Lifts up a limp, dead body unto the bleeding sky.

"Always before goes the white one.
(Piety, Piety thou!)
Leads us in the path of the sun.
(Piety, Piety thou!)
Judge at the feast when the red blood runs free
Leading the Fans to hot, cruel victory,
We come for thy judgment, again come to thee.
(Piety, Piety thou!)

"MEANWHILE, under the roar of voices the girl sang her monotonous strain and beat her tiny drum.

"The whole tribe defiled into the amphitheater, chiefs first with the leopard skins, which they alone are privileged to wear—a custom that links them with the Zulus—then the warriors with the prisoners in their midst, now significantly reduced to nine, and last the women and children.

"These bore fagots which they piled in the center and a large fire was soon blazing. The ceremonies began, to the music of the inevitable tom-toms, with a furious dance by the warriors.

"It was a wild scene, the nearly naked savages brandishing their spears and whirling around the fire; the prisoners conscious of the horrible fate awaiting them, cowering in the background; the crouching figures of the great, white gorilla, the hideously painted sorcer, and the exquisite brown girl intoning her endless chant.

"As a proper stage setting the heavens

began to grumble, lightning flashed across the sky, and a few, big, hot drops of rain fell.

"The dance and the tom-toms ceased with such startling suddenness that the voice of the girl cut sharp as a knife through the murmur of the multitude. The priest faced the great white brute and spoke:

"Piety, against whom the Ogowé Fans have sinned, before we ask thy judgement for the tribe, select from us in expiation. Let the sacred crystal gleam red in thy honor."

"He raised a close-woven basket full of palm wine to its nostrils, and, while it still held the crystal pendant in its paws, tipped it till it was drained of the last drop.

For a moment the white gorilla staggered, then hopping forward balanced at its full height before the chief. While the girl's song and the beat of the tiny drum alone broke the silence, it circled to the right, bent with distended nostrils above the chief whose leopard skin was in the sorcer's possession, and, quicker than I can tell it, the great paws rose and the crystal came crashing down on the doomed man's skull. Resolved to end the scene then and there, cost what it might, I raised my rifle to my shoulder and then lowered it again at what I saw

"Sinuous as a snake, stealthy as a leopard, Ikstu, a knife in his hand, was creeping up behind the sorcer. Warned by some subtle instinct the priest turned barely before the spring. One hand shot out, the finger pointing straight at the boy, and their eyes locked with nearly an audible snap. It seemed as though invisible bonds held the would-be murderer. He struggled in vain to raise the knife, to go forward.

"The pointed finger described a slow circle, Ikstu's head followed it. Faster it swung and faster. With a great burst of strength the sorcer snatched the sacred crystal from between the gorilla's paws and held it in the boy's face. For a breath Ikstu swayed away from the glittering lights, then his head went forward, and, eyes glued to the shining thing, he sank with it to the ground.

"The sorcer silently faced the breathless multitude, then deliberately picked up Ikstu's own spear and turned toward him. There was a great crash of thunder and the gorilla, still swaying to the girl's music, groped blindly forward. The priest raised the spear. The girl broke off in the middle

of a note, and quicker than light, covered her lover's body with her own.

"Released from the spell of the chant, though suddenly animate, the white gorilla tore the priest into his terrible arms and bore him to the ground. A blinding flash of lightning split the heavens as I fired.

"Catching the outline of the gorilla I pulled the trigger again, and sprang down into the arena. Every savage had fled save the chief, who stood, spear poised, between the lovers and the struggling man and brute. With a back-hand sweep of his long arm the gorilla ripped open my cheek at the very moment I sent a final bullet through its forehead.

"The sorcer was quite dead, practically every bone in his body broken by the awful clutch of those hairy arms. The white gorilla still feebly moved though the mushroom bullet had carried away practically the entire back of its head. The girl, the chief, and I alone were alive and sane and until morning, in the hot rain, we labored to strip the skin from that great carcass.

"Then, the girl leading Ikstu by the hand, and the skin swinging between us on a pole, we struck out for my camp. The chief, in silence, watched his son depart, and did not do anything to hinder us.

"Perhaps he was thinking of the fate of those among the Fans who were found mentally wanting, and, in addition, there was the sacrilege of the attack on the priest."

Van Dam lay back in his chair and carefully lit a cigarette.

"That isn't all?" I asked after a moment's silence.

"That's all," he answered.

"But what's the end of it? What became of the girl and Ikstu?"

"The girl died on the way out. Ikstu lies there before the fire; his mind never came back to him. I have hopes, however; he has taken to worshipping the beast in the case and bowing down to the crystal. Interest in anything is an encouraging thing."

"You have a pleasant way of entertaining your guests," I said, for want of something better. "Cannibalism, murder, madness, everything but starvation."

"We had about come to that, too," Van answered carelessly. "On the way back, when we ran into a great migration of spider monkeys. They make very good eating, we just had one for dinner."