

Tangor's Pastiche and FanFiction
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FACE IN THE TREES

James D. Bozarth



THE FACE IN THE TREES

By

James D. Bozarth

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PART 1

THE CHASE HAD BEEN a long one, but soon it would be over. The Phantom stopped and scanned the jungle before him. Thickly overgrown, it was almost impenetrable; however, the three fugitives with their prisoner had opened a path for him in their three month long rush to escape. Still, it would be foolish, if not deadly, to follow blindly where they led. He had not survived so long in the jungle by being careless. He had no desire to become the ghost they thought him to be.

Seeing no fresh sign of them he set out again, heading south along the west coast of Africa. Even though it was far from his native Bangalla, the jungle was as familiar to him as his own. He pushed aside a frond of leaves and stopped dead in his tracks. In front of him, where he never expected to see one, was a log cabin. He slipped back into the jungle and

peered at the structure. He could see no movement, but he was in no hurry to announce himself to anyone within. He waited a while, scanning the area. He noted the general air of disuse and decay. However, some small things puzzled him. The door was open but it looked like it was still functional and could close.

The hunter circled the cabin and found the tracks of the three fugitives leading away from the cabin. He should go after them and not waste his time on the deserted cabin, but he had to see inside. Approaching the door, he noted it had been unlatched and not broken as he had expected. Inside the single room was sparsely furnished. He saw the skeleton of the man first and then the one of the woman on the bed, if the clothes it wore were of any significance. Beside the bed was a crib which held another skeleton. This one was of a baby. It was obvious the place had been deserted for years. After all a human being would have at least buried the bodies. Vowing to return, the hunter stepped out of the cabin and latched the door. That would keep out any animals.

In a moment, he was back on the trail, calculating how many miles the fugitives had gained on him during his investigation of the cabin. He figured he would catch up to them late in the afternoon but well before dark.

Several hours later he slowed his pursuit. The fugitives could not be far. He sharpened his senses and moved on.

A limb on a tree next to the trail was bent and broken. The manhunter stopped short. This was a danger sign. He had followed their spoor easily for miles without ever seeing a branch broken. The white slash of exposed wood screamed of a trap. He looked left and right. He saw where one of the three had turned aside and was probably hiding in ambush just ahead.

Taking a step to the side, the hunter disappeared into the foliage without a sound. Despite the skin-tight, purple suit he wore, the man was now almost invisible. He looked again and saw a slight movement in the brush ahead. One of

the fugitives was hiding there, no doubt, his spear close to hand.

A grim smile split the hunter's ivory-brown face, revealing even white teeth beneath the black domino mask. A quick glance around sent him into the tree above him with scarce a rustle of leaves to mark his passing.

He swung through the trees from branch to branch with the ease of one jungle-born. Trained from his youth for the job at hand, the manhunter quietly positioned himself above the fugitive.

Below him the native sweated, sending up a scent it was impossible to miss. It was fear. Good, the hunter thought. It would serve him in good stead if it came to a confrontation.

Leaving the ambusher behind the hunter searched ahead for the other two. He found them in a small glade nearby. They sat together, back to back with the princess between them. Their frightened eyes searched the jungle around them for their enemy, not knowing he was but a stone's throw away.

He backtracked to the other fugitive and looked him over again. The man was obviously settled in for a wait. Nodding silently, the hunter moved off and found some fruit. He would have preferred meat, but he was not prepared to shoot anything and alert the fugitives to his presence. The fugitives might harm or kill the Princess. The Singh Pirates would not pay as well for the head of the princess, but he was sure they would still want proof of her death if they could not have her. He would eat the fruit and then return to the fugitives. He would hunt later.

Having satisfied his hunger, the hunter settled himself into the crook of a tree. He was too much of a jungle creature to attack the other two men in their present position. And to take the one at the trail too soon would warn the others of his presence. Night would come soon and he would take them all then.

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Elmo leaped from one branch to another with the care-free abandon of a child. Even though he looked every inch a grown man, his young body had not reached twelve years. Bronzed to a nut brown by years of life in the open, he blended into the jungle like the rest of the Great Apes. Kala proudly watched her son at play with the other ape children. Even though he had been so small and weak when she had found him in the wooden cave, he was now as strong as any of the apes his age. He was also tall and straight. His face and body had no hair, his mouth was small, his teeth puny and insignificant, but he had the shiny tooth. She wondered why he put the strange covers on his body and the feathers in his hair, but he was her son and no one would dare tease him or they would incur her wrath. A grub poked its head out from under the rock she was turning over. In a moment her every thought was on the food in front of her and not on her son.

Elmo screeched again as he leaped to another branch, accurately gauging its strength and suppleness. He grabbed it in one hand, allowing it to spring him up and out to another branch. In this way he travelled from tree to tree, leaving the tribe behind him. As soon as they were out of sight, Elmo stopped his screeching and swung silently through the jungle towards his wooden cave. He was bored. He needed something to interest him, but he knew not what. There was always something new to be discovered at his wooden cave.

Reaching the cave he found it disturbed, his books were scattered across the floor and the cabinets opened. Nothing had been taken, but the very fact that someone had been inside angered the boy.

He sniffed the air and discovered the scent of four men and a woman. Three of the men were Gomangani as was the woman but the fourth scent was unfamiliar. It was similar to the Gomangani but different somehow. Still, it did not matter. They had violated his house and they would pay for it with their lives.

In a rage, he took his bow and followed the intruders. He would find them and kill them for invading his place.

The Gomangani were clumsy and left a trail even Manu the monkey could follow, but the other was well versed in jungle craft. He left scarce a trail, but, even though it was small, Elmo had no difficulty following it. He found the first Gomangani hidden off of the trail. It was but the work of a moment to drop on the man and plunge his knife into the man's heart. Elmo threw up his head and gave forth the victory cry of the bull ape, before disappearing into the verdant jungle.

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The Phantom woke with a start. He had fallen asleep after his meal, but always with one ear open and one eye slit. But the scream was as loud as it was unexpected. He leaped to the ground and rushed back to the trail. He found the ambusher dead with one wound in him, a stab wound that went straight to the heart. There was no sign of a struggle. The wound could only have been made by a knife, but how could someone have reached the victim and stabbed him so hard as to leave the impression of the guard on the skin? The Phantom slipped back into the trees as the other two pirates came crashing up to the slain man.

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They jabbered to each other and rolled their eyes as they huddled in superstitious fear. Elmo recognized the word for demon and ghost, but understood little else of their speech. He watched as the two blundered away, trailed by the other. He followed them all and nocked an arrow. He circled them and let the two Gomangani pass and then shot the purple demon. It struck true and square in the belly, but bounced off. In an instant the demon had disappeared. Elmo sat stunned. He knew he had not missed, but the arrow had not

penetrated. He wondered at the powers of the demon and decided to watch. He was not afraid, but even Numa the lion avoided Tantor the elephant. It was not bravery to fight another too powerful to kill.

The Phantom hid in the brush, his gun in his hand. The arrow had nearly knocked him off his feet. He rubbed his aching stomach. It was a lucky thing the arrow had struck his broad buckle. He thanked his forefathers for their incredible foresight in designing a costume that had something of a shield built into it. He examined the buckle and found it dented. Whoever had shot him was a very strong man. He retrieved the arrow and put it in his belt. He searched the trees and saw a small white spot in a tree about forty yards away. It was the face of a child. The boy had a scar that ran from his hairline to his eyebrow. It was inflamed now. Perhaps in anger, the Phantom thought.

All of a sudden the Phantom was plunged into a fight for his life. It happened thus—

The fugitives had returned and seeing their comrade lying dead, were positive the Phantom was planning to kill them. In a rage of despair they raised their spears and charged flat out at him, hoping to kill the "Ghost Who Walks", the "Man Who Cannot Die" before he killed them. The Phantom realized he was in a bad spot. He could shoot one of the men, but not both before they were upon him.

The still angry Elmo shot at the Gomangani. Those at least he could kill. His arrow pierced the first one in the throat. The man threw out his arms and sank to his knees before rolling onto his side. Elmo had scarce nocked another arrow to shoot the other Gomangani when he heard the noise of thunder. He looked at the cloudless sky, puzzled, then down at the demon whose hand smoked like a green fire.

The Phantom had raised his gun and fired at the same time as Elmo shot the first man. Both fell as one. Elmo and the Phantom stared at each other for a moment before Elmo disappeared into the trees.

Puzzling over the presence of the boy in the jungle, the Phantom collected the Princess and began the trek home. He promised one day to return and discover the secret of the face in the trees.

Elmo watched from the jungle as the demon and the Gomangani woman walked away from the cabin. As long as the demon left him alone, Elmo was satisfied.

PART 2

THE MUSEUM WAS NOT MUCH by European standards, being but two stories high and housed in an old barracks building from the colonial days. The history of Bangalla contained inside its brick walls was mostly from the colonial times but some of it was of more recent origin. Still, it was a plush post for a new graduate patrolman from the Jungle Patrol. Private Briggs was proud to have been chosen out of the graduating class of twenty patrolmen. He paced his post with back ramrod straight and eyes forward. Unfortunately, this passion for his job was what killed him. Had he been a little more relaxed he might have seen the shadow move in the darkness, little more than a restless jerking of a nervous hand as it caressed a black-bladed knife. As the trooper turned at the end of his posting, his heels clicking on the pavement, the killer leaped from the shadows and a hand curled around the guard's throat, cutting off his victim's cry before it had a chance to leave his lips. His dying eyes bulged as the hand tightened on his neck. A sharp knife slipped between the ribs of his back just under the heart. The blade angled up and pierced his heart, which burst in his chest. Private Briggs was dead before his body slid to the ground.

After a quick glance around to see if anyone had heard the nearly silent scuffle, the shadow entered the museum and left it a few minutes later with nothing more than an old

journal curled in its arms, leaving the gold mask of the king and the jade necklace of the queen behind undisturbed.

Minutes later the shadow crept up the gangplank of a three masted yacht tied up to the quay. He tiptoed forward on the polished deck endeavoring to keep quiet. He passed an open porthole in the white washed wall, pausing to look inside. The massive form on the bed stirred slightly. The terrified shadow cringed until the sleeper settled back, resuming the deep breathing that signified sleep. Sighing silently, the furtive figure crept forward and into the crew's quarters.

Inside the cabin, the sleeper raised his head and smiled in the darkness before resuming his disturbed slumber.

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Colonel Flynn woke up from a sound sleep when the Sergeant barged into his room shouting that one of their own was dead. In moments Flynn was aware of the details, sketchy though they were, of the robbery and murder. A minute later, after dressing quickly, Colonel Flynn was at the radio set calling the Commander of the Patrol to report the bizarre incident.

The commander had only one question: "What was taken?" When told it was the 20 year old journal of the Kidnapped Princess, the commander grunted. "Carry on," was all he said before signing off.

Corporal Thoms turned to Colonel Flynn. "What did he mean, Sir?"

"Call the Officer of the Day to my office. I'll need to speak with the patrolman in charge of the investigation."

The corporal confirmed the order then asked, hesitantly "Colonel, just who is the Commander?"

Flynn smiled wryly, "Don't ask, corporal, it's best you do not know."

The colonel left the puzzled signalman behind as he returned to his own office. What he dared not let his subordi-

nate know was that he himself did not know the answer to the soldier's question. No one knew who the commander of the Jungle Patrol was. The rumors were preposterous. The commander was a Phantom who had lived for 400 years. Even the origins of the Patrol were lost in the mists of time. Some said the Patrol was founded by a pirate crew the Phantom had subdued, winning the captaincy of their ship by beating their captain in single hand-to-hand combat. Flynn did not know who was the commander but he was glad the man was there.



The Phantom sat back in his chair, his brow furrowed in thought about the robbery. Something was familiar about that particular journal. His father had been the rescuer of the Princess. Shortly after his return he had been killed by pirates. His son had returned to the jungle and donned the costume of the Phantom, continuing their 400 year fight for justice.

The Phantom leaped from his chair by the radio and strode through the Skull Cave to the library. The walls of the room, carved from the living rock centuries ago, were lined with volume after volume of the Phantom Chronicles, the history of the line of protectors which descended from the cabin boy of Christopher Columbus. Selecting a volume, the Phantom sat at the table in the center of the room and began to read.

His father had chased down a band of ten men who had abducted the Princess for the Singh Pirates. Their mission was to take her to the pirate base and deliver her to the leader of that vicious pack of jungle wolves. However, the Phantom had caught up with the boat and had boarded it during the night. In the ensuing fighting he had dispatched five of the pirates, but five had gotten away, fleeing south across the desert into the jungles of the west coast of Africa. Two of the fugitives had died in an ambush gone awry shortly after the band had reached the jungle. The chronicles did not describe the fighting but the Phantom knew without the need for words that

the killers and his father had fought hard and violently. The rest had fled further south in an effort to escape from their nemesis. He had caught up with them just after finding a log cabin built in a small inlet on the coast. The cabin had held three skeletons: man, woman and child. His father had vowed to return to the cabin and discover what had happened to the family living there, why they had been stranded where no white man had ever been before. In the hours that had passed following the discovery of the cabin, he had been shot by an arrow which had bounced off his belt buckle. One of the abductors died mysteriously, stabbed through the heart without a trace of violence on him except the small hole where a large knife had penetrated his heart.

Later, the other two had attacked his father without warning. The chronicle related the elder Phantom's belief that certain death nigh since there was no time to fire upon both, but at the same instant his father shot and killed one man the other fell to the ground clawing at an arrow protruding from his neck.

The Bowman was a man-sized child of approximately twelve years, though developed with the muscularity of a god. The chronicle remarked upon a livid scarlet scar on the boy's forehead—briefly seen before the youth disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared.

The Princess was found safe and all that remained was the journey home. The Phantom smiled as he closed the volume, for that trek had been an adventure in itself. His father had discovered a ruined city full of fabulous treasure, fought jungle animals and, after various trials, delivered the Princess to her people weeks later.

The Phantom frowned below his domino mask. His father had not been a gifted map maker so the only way to discover the location of the lost city would be from the Princess' journal.

Returning to the radio, the Phantom called Colonel Flynn ordered him to ready a patrol car to take a "Mr. Walker" to the morgue to examine the evidence.

Calling to his pygmy warriors he had them saddle his horse Thunder. He rode to the edge of the jungle with a band of Bandari. At the rendezvous point he put on a trench coat and hat, covering his eyes with dark glasses.

The two patrol men who came to the meeting sat nervously as they were surrounded by the Pygmy Poison People. The Phantom smiled grimly, "Don't worry, they know you are friends." As the car disappeared around the bend, the Bandar disappeared into the jungle, taking Thunder with them.

Less than an hour later the Phantom was in possession of all of the evidence he needed. A smear of a mixture of tar, oil, brass polish and grease told him the perpetrator was a seaman who worked on a sailing ship.

Colonel Flynn confronted Mr. Walker as he left the morgue. "What can you tell me about the theft, sir?"

A grim smile broke the half-hidden face, revealing even white teeth against the dark skin. "I can't tell you much more than that the killer was a seaman on a sailing ship. How many ships left port today?"

Flynn scratched his chin. "The only ships that sailed are the *Mombasa*, a freighter heading to India, the *Carnarvon*, heading to China, and the *Swiftwind*, heading to Marseilles, France."

"Who owns the *Swiftwind*?"

"I believe it's registered to an Achmed Shaw."

The Phantom grunted. Achmed Shaw, one of the Singh Brotherhood. "I need passage on a fast ship to Marseilles at once. See to it, Colonel."

The soldier saluted as the Phantom left. He wondered who the man was and why he instinctively obeyed the man's commands. Was he the Commander? Shrugging, he hurried to the shipping office at the port authority.

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The seaman woke to the rough shaking of his shoulder. "What is it?"

"Mr. Shaw wants to see you."

The seaman looked up to see the hulking form of Mr. Shaw's personal bodyguard. He shivered with an unnamed apprehension as he rose. The deck swayed under his feet. That meant that the ship was at sea.

Moments later he was escorted into the august presence of the owner of the *Swiftwind*, who sat at the table, a sumptuous breakfast spread before him. Daintily raising a tid-bit to his full, pendulous lips, he stared at the seaman, examining him like a particularly unappetizing morsel which one had to swallow. He chewed the food quietly, watching as the seaman began to sweat. Finally he wiped his lips with a silken napkin which he threw on the table.

"Where is it?"

"Where is what, Sir?"

At a nod from the immaculately dressed owner, the bodyguard swung a ham-sized fist into the side of the seaman's head. The seaman struggled to right himself, but only succeeded in rolling over before Mr. Shaw placed his foot on the man's neck. "I am not a fool. Last night you took the Journal. Where is it?"

The seaman moaned the location. After a few strained minutes the Journal rested in the owner's hands. He flipped through the pages, frowning as he tried to read the writing. It was in a language foreign to him. French, he thought. However he would have it translated. He saw the map in the middle of the book, noting the location of the treasure and of what looked like a cabin on the coast.

A groan from the man on the floor brought him out of his reverie. "Throw that scum to the fishes," he said.

The doomed man screamed. His screams continued as he was dragged out of the cabin and thrown over the side of the ship and only ended after the sharks had closed in.

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The Phantom signed the register at the Savoy Hotel in a firm hand, "Mr. Walker, Mawitaan, Bangalla."

He had followed the *Swiftwind* from Bangalla across the water until it reached France. He had lost track of the Journal shortly after arriving in Marseilles, but he was certain he would find it soon.

After a short rest in his room, the Phantom slipped out the window of his suite and travelled along the ledge until he reached the fire escape. Clambering down the ladder was the work of a minute and he slid into the shadows.

Less than an hour later a powerful form looked down on a dark alley watching two men stagger down the pavement. One slipped behind the other and swung a blackjack at the other's head. As the first man was rifling his victim's pockets a massive forearm encircled the throat of the denizen of the Rue Morgue who was kneeling over the unconscious body of his robbery victim, cutting off the scream that formed in his throat before it could break out. The Phantom was becoming impatient to have his answers this was the fourth crook he had waylaid tonight. The frightened man held suspended by the corded muscles of the arm around his neck heard a harsh voice whisper in his ear. "Why did Achmed Singh come to Marseilles?"

The Frenchman struggled in vain, clawing at the arm. The vice around his throat tightened until he slumped weakly to the ground. "Do not try my patience. Answer the question."

"He had a journal he wanted translated. The Rat translated it for him."

"Where is Achmed Shaw now?"

"He is not here. He left for England yesterday."

"Where is he going?"

"He is going to see John Clayton, Lord Greystoke. The Rat could not find a certain place the map inside the journal showed. He owns property in the area."

Powerful hands grasped the Frenchman's collar and raised him to his feet. Pushing him against the wall, the Phantom held the man high so only his toes touched the ground.

"Look at me. Remember me. If you have lied to me I will return and do more to you than this." With those words the Phantom's fist moved in a short arc and impacted on the Frenchman's jaw.

In the morning the gendarmes found the robber lying, trussed with his belt, beside his victim, the stolen money stuffed in his coat pocket, an unusual bruise on the man's chin. The discoloration looked like a skull. To the thief's eternal dismay it never wore off or healed.

A steam locomotive train left Marseilles that morning carrying "Mr. Walker" to Calais. He would gain almost twenty-four hours on his prey.



John Clayton put the newspaper down with relief. Even after all these years, he still was uncomfortable getting his news from paper and not from his own senses. The gathering clouds of war plagued his thoughts as he looked at the butler who entered following the diffident knock on the door to the library. "Yes, Henry, what is it?"

"A man to see you, my lord. He says it is about a journal of a trip down the west coast of Africa."

Raising an eyebrow, Lord Greystoke nodded his visitor in.

A huge man, immaculately dressed in evening clothes entered the book-lined room. Like a bear pushing its way through the brush he stopped just inside the doorway and stared at the lord of the manor.

He was surprised at the size of the man in the finely cut suit. From his black shoes to his equally black hair, he stood well over six feet tall, though he was so symmetrically muscled he appeared normal-sized until one came face to chest with him. Even Achmed Shaw had to raise his eyes to him. This disturbed the pirate more than he dared reveal, so he pasted a smile on his face and raised a hand to his host.

Taking the hand in a firm grip, Elmo asked, "To what do I

owe this honor, Mr. Shaw?" He had smelled the slight fear on the other man and smiled inwardly. He did not like this man particularly, but he could find no reason for his dislike except for his jungle trained instincts, Instincts honed to a razor edge where a mistake could—and often did—lead to death.

The pirate's brow broke out in a sweat because the hand gripping his own was slowly crushing it. He had unwisely tried to impress the giant with his power. Suddenly, he felt the pressure lessen and Elmo loosed the hand.

"Lord Greystoke, I understand you are familiar with the west coast of Africa."

"Somewhat."

"I have a journal I would like you to see. If you could translate it for me, I would appreciate it."

Elmo was about to refuse this man but he found himself asking, "Do you have it with you?"

Opening the briefcase Achmed Shaw removed the Journal.

Elmo moved over to the window and opened the book. Turning the pages so fast it seemed he was not reading, Elmo read about the terrible ordeal the Princess had endured.

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The Phantom left London on the first train north. He hired a cab at the station and soon was approaching an inn near the Greystoke Estate. He stepped down from the taxi and paid the cabman to wait for him at the pub. Taking the generous tip, the driver agreed to wait.

The Phantom asked directions to the estate and left the inn at a mile-eating lope. He could run for hours at that pace but he had travelled less than fifteen minutes when he saw the ivy-covered hall rising above the lush grounds surrounding it. Circling the edifice the Phantom saw Shaw's vehicle outside the front door. Continuing around the hall he discovered a tree that grew a little too close to the house. He had shinnied up the tree trunk and had gained a large branch that

grew towards the open window. Looking inside he saw Achmed Shaw and a stranger discussing the book. He settled to await developments, he did want to find out what was so important about the Journal to interest Achmed Shaw.

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Achmed Shaw became agitated as the pages turned swiftly. The giant stopped at the map and traced the trail of the pursuit and the trip inland. He recognized the story and the place. It was he who had been the face in the trees, the twelve year old child. The cabin was his ancestral home on the dark continent. A low growl escaped his lips as he realized what the man behind him intended.

"Where did you obtain this tome?"

"From my mother. Why do you ask?"

"I am surprised you would admit to having a Negress for your mother."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this book was written by an African Princess about a terrible trip she made when she was kidnapped by Singh Pirates."

"How do you know it was a nigger who wrote it?"

"I was there. I saw her."

"I do not believe you. How could you know?"

"I was born there. The cabin was my white parent's home. Where did you steal it?"

"How dare you? Give the book back to me."

"No, I think not. I will have it returned to the Princess' heirs. You may go."

Elmo turned slightly to toss the book on the table behind him. That error almost cost him his life, because the moment his eyes left Shaw, the man's hand slid inside his coat and whipped a gun out. It was drawing level with the Ape-man's chest when an explosion outside the room heralded the end of Achmed Shaw's life. A bullet was not in-

tended to kill the pirate; unfortunately it struck the cylinder of the gun and ricocheted upward into the man's throat. Bubbles of blood burst from Shaw's lips as he struggled to drag breath but the bullet had done its grisly work. Achmed Shaw, villain, expired on Lord Greystoke's Indian carpet leaving a stain that would require a lengthy explanation to Lady Jane Porter Clayton when she returned home.

At the instant the explosion heralded Shaw's death, Elmo spun to look out the window. He saw the masked face of the demon of his youth, the one he had tried to kill with an arrow! The shadowy form disappeared in the foliage. For a moment Elmo thought to clamber out the window and chase down the man, for he knew it was no demon, but even as he had a leg over the sill ready to leap for the swaying limb the servants had rushed inside the room. Pandemonium reigned supreme.

Elmo quieted the servants and issued instructions to call the local constabulary. By then the "demon" was long gone. Were he in his native jungle the ape man would have immediately begun a search, no matter how lengthy, but he was in civilization and a body on the carpet required certain considerations in a lawful society.

Besides, Elmo thought with a grim smile, he did save my life. Let him leave in peace.

Representatives of the Home Office arrived early the next morning to collect the Princess' Journal. Soon it would be returned to its rightful place in the two-story museum in Mawitaan, Bangalla.

PART 3

Most days Diana Walker enjoyed her job with the UN Human Rights Abuses Task Force in Bangalla; however, today she was very unhappy.

Mrs. Walker brushed raven black hair away from her face as she pored over reports of Human Rights abuses that recently came to her attention. Of all the degraded acts of which she could conceive, human rights abuses were the worst—starvation, death squads, drugs, extortion, slavery, rape—the list of atrocities perpetrated by humans upon other humans, for whatever reasons, was endless. Hatred for others because of their race, tribe or sex were common and always to be despised. No one had the right to harm others.

She clicked on the desk intercom as she continued to read the survey team report just filed from the west coast of Africa. She called, "Send in Ian Hunter, please."

A moment later a tall, thin man, immaculately dressed in a crisp white shantung silk and thin black tie, entered the room. He carried a thick manila folder close to his chest. Hunter, his sun-dark Mediterranean face drawn in deep lines around a thin slash of mouth beneath overhanging brows said, "Good morning, Diana."

"Ian, is this true?" Diana tossed a report with a picture of a gaunt child, paper-clipped to the front, across the desk.

His voice was somber. "Yes, Ma'am, I'm afraid it is." Opening his folder, Ian Hunter produced a dozen similar photos of emaciated children—flies buzzing around skeletal heads and crawling on distended bellies. The miserable little eyes pleaded for rescue of any kind.

"Actually, it's worse," Hunter continued. "The local government denies any starvation in the region and has stonewalled our best efforts."

"Any proof other than these photos? Eyewitness accounts—personal statements?"

"We were detained at the border. Our luggage was searched—*thoroughly*. Armed guards and customs officials confiscated everything, including a thousand dollars I had intended for a private safari. I managed to smuggle this set of photos taken by hidden camera—in my belt buckle." At her frown, the man shrugged. "It seems underhanded, but in view

of what happened to the other pictures—and the written and recorded statements—it seems justified."

"We have to go back and get sworn statements before we can bring this to the World Court."

Ian Hunter hid a small smile at her concerned response. *She is ready for the next phase of the operation. Do-gooders are so easy to manipulate. A picture has them crying—two pictures set them on the warpath.*

"Yes, but I don't see how we can—as members of the UNHRA Task Force. The land owners and their government cronies are obviously on to us. I suggest a different cover, a legitimate reason for being on the land."

Diana nodded, coal-black hair swirling around her face. "I hate sneaky dealings, but you are right. It may be the only way to get the information. But, what cover can we use?"

Ian paced up and down the office for a moment then snapped his fingers. "The Mawitaan Museum is displaying some research on the Kidnapped Princess. Legend states she was taken through that area of Western Africa many years ago. We go as an archaeological team, tracing her movements—strictly historical and absolutely on the up and up. Much of the research based on her Journal has been unverified for over forty years. I thought *our* investigations were complete and have tried to set up an expedition to find the truth of the legend. I have been fascinated by her life for many years—almost all my life it seems."

Diana smiled. The Kidnapped Princess was real. In 1901 Princess Udara had been rescued from a band of evil men demanding ransom. The Legend was that her rescuer was The Phantom—The Ghost Who Walks—and of the terrible things which happened to the bandits at his hands. The real-life history of Udara is that her country was swallowed by Bangalla and no longer existed; the princess then in her twenties, went to America to study medicine and returned to Africa in 1912. She took residence in Mawitaan in 1914, establishing a medical research facility which trained many desperately needed

doctors and nurses—and gave Africa a wonderful new drug which saved the lives of hundreds of thousands suffering from West Niger sweating fever. She never married. And, after she had been accused of lying about her tribulations, of exaggerating her experiences, of fabricating events just to make herself important, of including the Phantom in her story to make it *seem* more believable, she *never* spoke about her ordeal at all. If questioned, she would quietly and politely, leave the room and never admit the questioner into her presence again. A few had been persistent, but her continued rebuffs finally paid off. No one asked about her journey. If she had not already donated her Journal to the Mawitaan Museum, no record of her travels would have ever seen the light of day.

All Bangalla turned out for Udara's funeral in 1955—attended by Diana Walker the previous year. That event had revived a renewed interest in the Kidnapped Princess. Mrs. Walker had studied the Phantom Chronicles. She knew her husband's grandfather, the Phantom of that era, had recorded his part of the rescue. He had remarked in passing on a 'Golden Treasure', strewn across the landscape, of immense value which was not as it seemed.

But Diana could never reveal her knowledge without jeopardizing her husband's secret identity. However—Hunter's expedition was a perfect cover!

"Contact the Mawitaan Museum and see if we can obtain a copy of the Journal. Gather a team. We set out day after tomorrow. Meanwhile, I'll get our cover story cleared through President Luaga."

"I'm sorry, I cannot. That thousand dollars was to pay for the safari."

"That's all right. I'll authorize the expenditure for the safari."

Ian Hunter gathered his folder and paused at the door as Diana Walker lifted the receiver and dialed the presidential office through the private line.

Phase one begun! The dark man said to himself, closing the door behind him. *And she's paying for the privilege.*



James Dunnett of Dunnett Expeditions, Limited, opened the door to the Office of President Lamanda Luaga. The head of state for Bangalla was a tall, graceful black man of middle-age. Grey tinged Luaga's temples, but his body still had the compact might of a trained athlete. The president offered his hand in greeting.

"James! It is good to see you. I heard your father broke his leg last night? How is he?"

"A bit embarrassed his dancing skills are not equal to his jungle skills. He is fine, Mr. President."

"What can I do for you, my boy?"

James Dunnett did not look like a "boy", being six-foot, broad-shouldered, and well-muscled. "A Professor Ian Hunter booked an archaeological expedition seeking proof of the Kidnapped Princess legend. My father cannot go. The expedition will be canceled and I'll have to return the retainer, unless—" James stood, wide-brimmed hat in hand, "—unless I can obtain a temporary license to lead the expedition."

President Luaga chuckled. "And you thought an old friend of your father might help grease the wheels?"

"Well—in a word—yes," James grinned shyly.

"This is an *archaeological* expedition?" Luaga frowned.

"On my word. No hunting. No trophies," James drew an "x" across his chest. "Cross my heart and hope to die."

"No long guns?"

"Just the safari askari and myself. The only side arms are for personal defense."

Lamada nodded. "I have known your father for many years. He speaks highly of you and that college education." The President of Bangalla narrowed thoughtful eyes upon the earnest young man. "So be it."

The president clicked the intercom. "Sandandra—issue a temporary license for James Dunnett of Dunnett Expeditions,

Limited. He'll wait." Lamanda Luaga raised his eyebrows in question.

"Yes, Sir," James grinned. "Thank you, sir!"

"That will be all, Sandandra. If you please."

"Yes, sir," she clicked off.

James Dunnett thanked his father's friend, answered a few more questions about his father's health, then went to the front office. James sat in one of the chairs on the south wall of the office. Sandandra Muviro, the personal secretary to President Luaga, had rolled the license into the typewriter. She banged the keys with proficiency, consulting the folder containing information about the Dunnett company when necessary. Within minutes she rolled the form back down and looked up at the expectant young man. "What is your full name?"

"James Daniel Dunnett."

She stroked a few more keys and whipped the form from the typewriter. "Sign here." He did. Sandandra blew the ink dry, examined the signature, then nodded. "Just a moment. I will get this signed and be right back."

James watched as Ms. Muviro swayed into the president's office. He smiled wryly. Sandandra looked *exactly* like her twin sister Charlandra, but there was something about Charlandra that intrigued him. If only he hadn't been such a jerk...

Sandandra returned. She separated the form parts and gave James the top copy.

"Thanks, Sandy," he called as he trotted out the door.

"Don't call me Sandy!" she exclaimed in annoyance. James waved cheerily.

The phone rang. Sandandra stalked to her desk and answered. "President Luaga's Office," she intoned in a professional voice. "How may I help you?"

"Sandandra, Diana here."

"Diana, how are you? And how is Kit?"

"My husband is fine, our two children, too."

"Well, then. What can the office of the President do for the UNHRA Task Force?"

"I need to visit Lord Greystoke's West African estate. I would like for your boss to assist."

"Why would you need to visit Lord Greystoke?"

"I've already said more than I should have. Will you, please, put me through to the President?"

Scowling, Sandandra toggled the intercom switch. "Mrs. Walker, UNHRA, Mr. President, about the Greystoke Estate."

Picking up the receiver, Luaga greeted his old friend with a cheery "Hello, Diana." After a few words from her, he frowned.

"This is dire news indeed, *if true*. I have cleared an expedition headed by James Dunnett to the same location. Perhaps you can sign on?" Luaga explained.

"Is this the Ian Hunter expedition?"

"Yes, it is."

"Mr. Dunnett does not need to know our real purpose. Yes, that might work!" Diana added her intent to investigate the Kidnapped Princess as well.

"Excellent! As to this other thing—do you have proof? This is a serious accusation against one of the finest families in Africa."

"I have reports, unverified, that someone in the government is covering up—and Lord Greystoke might be involved. My team was searched and the information taken as well as money."

"This is disturbing news! Young Dunnett is a good man and, if he's anything like his father, is very professional. I will have my office contact him to allow you to piggy back on the Hunter safari if Hunter will agree... how many in your party?"

"Just me."

"Keep me informed." He paused, then added, "Make sure you complete the archaeological investigation. For my office that is your primary task. To assist I will send an archeologist. Your investigation—it must be done—but I am a man of my word."

Remember, I have authorized only the archaeology. I, at the very least, would like to know how much of the legend is true."

Diana said, "I will remember, Mr. President. Goodbye," and rang off.

With a frown, Luaga spoke into the receiver. "Sandy, my office, please." The silence on the phone suddenly buzzed with a dial tone.

Sandandra peered around the door. Luaga indicated the chair before his desk. She sank into the upholstery, the image of a girl caught in a misdemeanor.

"Sandy, you grew up in the general area of the Greystoke estate, didn't you?"

He had known she listened in! She sank further into the chair. "I grew up on the estate."

"You're not in trouble, child. I have a great favor to ask of you." He said: "I want you to be my personal liaison on this safari. Will you do it?"

"Thank you, Mr. President." She smiled, "But I believe my twin sister would be a better liaison than I. She is a college graduate in Pre-Med and she Majored in History. Her Graduate thesis was on the Kidnapped Princess. She works for the Mawitaan Museum—I majored in secretarial skills and political science." She hesitated a moment. "I'm sorry to have listened in, Mr. President."

"Sandy," he returned. "The moment I heard it concerned your home I knew you would listen. Besides, it does me good to know I can never know who monitors my telephone conversations. It keeps me honest."

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The Jeep pulled to a stop in front of the Mawitaan Museum. James was thrilled, for the first time he was a licensed guide even if only temporarily.

The two story building dated from colonial times and stood in majestic serenity, surrounded by magnificent gardens

of native and imported plants. James Dunnett smelled the sweet fragrance of *Adenium Boehmianum* Pink Roses mixed with the stronger scent of the dark-yellow blossoms of *Udara Gold*, a ground covering flower—named in honor of the Kidnapped Princess—brought to Mawitaan when the Kidnapped Princess returned from America. The combined scents always reminded him of the dusky-skinned woman who worked inside.

The door of the Mawitaan Museum released a waft of blessed coolness from the air conditioned building. Dressed in the whites that passed for casual clothing in the tropical country, Dunnett's rugged face broke into a smile as he perceived the chocolate colored woman inside the teakwood-walled office. French doors with large panes of beveled glass allowed afternoon sun to light the ample chamber. He entered and perched a hip on the desk where Charlandra Muviro, the Curator's personal assistant, sat. Her dark face creased into a frown as she surveyed the intruder. His broad shoulders filled out the jacket and the deeply tanned face above the open collared white shirt glowed in sharp contrast.

"Hi, Charlie," he quipped. "How's the old man?" James let his eyes rove over her oval face with large, dark, almond-shaped eyes that snapped at him with familiar irritation. Her dark hair was pulled back in a neat bun. He hid his dismay at her continued avoidance as she answered.

"Busy," she responded stiffly. "Go away, Mr. Dunnett." The emphasis on the honorific in front of his name wasn't lost on the explorer and safari guide. Well, he had earned her scorn. But he vowed to show her he wasn't such a bad guy after all.

"Don't be such a bear, Charlie. I need to speak with the Curator about getting some research papers for an expedition."

"Why?"

"A Professor—" James drew a folded paper from his breast pocket and opened it—"Ian Hunter from America has hired me to lead an expedition to do research on the Legend

of the Kidnapped Princess. Apparently he has also asked for help from the UN—and the safari has the endorsement of the Bangallan Government. Professor Hunter requests copies of the Journal, translations and any maps of the area."

"Why can't they let the grand old woman rest in peace?"

"Dunno, Charlie," he said. He broke into an infectious grin which failed miserably to impress Charlie. "As long as they pay me, I couldn't care less. Besides," he continued, "I haven't been in that part of Africa yet."

"Just full of wanderlust, aren't you, Mr. Dunnett?"

"For the moment, Charlie. But I *could* be persuaded to settle down."

Charandra Muviro was annoyed by the small thrill those words provoked. Charlie pushed the button that rang the Curator's office. "A Mr. James Dunnett to see you, Mr. Carter."

The deep voice, a trademark of the Curator, rang from the console, "Send Mr. Dunnett in."

James swiftly rose and entered the inner sanctum of the Museum curator. Mr. Carter rose as James crossed the floor to shake hands.

"I just got off the phone with President Luaga. You are leading a historical, fact-finding mission concerning the Kidnapped Princess," the curator commented.

Dunnett frowned, but hid it immediately. In his short life things did not quite happen so rapidly. "Yes, sir. A Professor Ian Hunter from a New England college wants to ascertain if the legends attached to the Kidnapped Princess story are true. My father was to lead the expedition but he broke his leg last night."

"Really? How?" James explained and they both had a laugh. Mr. Carter gestured for the young man to sit. "I suspect Jim will avoid dance floors in the future. At any rate—cigar?" James waved it aside.

Carter leaned back in his upholstered chair. "Very few facts are truly known about the kidnapping. Our only written record of her ordeal is Udara's journal, most of which seems

wildly exaggerated. She is celebrated because the truly legendary Phantom is supposed to have rescued her. Her story of finding a cabin—a log cabin, mind you, as in the wild west of America—in the jungle with three skeletons in it is pretty far fetched. But she then describes a fight in the forest with a twelve-year-old naked white boy shooting the Phantom. Of course, he failed to kill the Ghost Who Walks."

Carter spread his black hands and raised his brows. "Udara further describes a battle in a lost city in which the Phantom destroyed the city and drove the population away from an unspecified but massive golden treasure. She wrote that she brought out 'small seeds' of the treasure. The last half of her journal appears to be in a code no one has been able to break. The sentences do not make sense. The words are not of normal usage. Only two words are clearly written: *Took Gold*. Ms. Muviro has studied these entries for several years and is our resident expert on the Kidnapped Princess." Carter flipped the switch on his intercom and called Charlie to come to his office.

James whistled in awe of her accomplishments. Her education had apparently far outstripped his education. Charlie opened the door as James' whistle petered out. Her face grew rigid. *Uh, Oh*, he thought, *I goofed again*.

Carter continued, "Charlandra Muviro will accompany the expedition, Mr. Dunnett, that is, if she is willing." Carter immediately explained the meeting and the expedition, and President Luaga's desires. "Can you go, Ms. Muviro? You would be the Museum's liaison with the expedition."

Charlie Muviro narrowed her eyes, yet there was a surge of excitement in her breast. "What do you mean by liaison?"

"You will provide support to the mission, and at the same time gather information and archeological evidence as regards the Kidnapped Princess. You would be the Museum's eyes in the field. Interested?"

Charlie glanced at James Dunnett's wide grin, then considered the opportunity which had been offered. There was

no doubt of her reply. "Thank you, sir. I'd be happy to represent the museum."

Carter smiled beatifically. "Well, you two co-ordinate your activities. I'm off for lunch."

"I guess you don't hate me that much, Charlie—"

"I don't hate you,—" she replied. "I *despise* you!" She turned to the door and strode out with determined steps.

James stood stunned. It was worse than he feared. No way was she ever going to warm up to him.

Charlie leaned around the door. "Come along, James, we'll have to make copies of the Journal and the maps."

James Dunnett followed the imperious girl through bright-lit corridors. *At least she didn't bite my head off! And she called me James!*



Diana Walker left her office, taking the customary Jeep ride through Mawitaan to the jungle edge. There she met two sharply-uniformed Jungle Patrol Officers holding the reins to her horse. In the shadows under the Deep Forest was a troop of the Poison Pygmy People—the Bandar, long friends of the Walker family and protectors of the Phantom's secrets.

Mounting the spirited horse, Diana led the swiftly running pygmies into the jungle, past Skull Cave—which, for many years, had been her home until she convinced her husband to build an enormous tree house for their growing family.

Diana entered the tree house via the elevator. In the main room she dropped brief case and purse on the table near the door. Two children, Kit and Helen, rushed into the room and into her arms. Shouts of "Mommie's home!" echoed through the house.

Her husband appeared, leaning on the door jamb with his arms folded, one ankle crossed over the other. Even after all these years the sight of Kit Walker caused her heart to

beat faster. And her presence did the same to him, though he rarely displayed emotions. With a slight smile The Phantom opened his arms. Diana rushed forward. Kit enfolded her in massively muscled arms, gently squeezing the breath out of her.

Diana nuzzled her face against the knit cloth of his grey uniform—the uniform of the Phantom. Skin-tight grey cloth molded arms and massive torso. A pair of blue and black diagonally striped briefs snugged his hips. Grey-clad legs were encased in knee high, black leather boots. The strangest part of his costume was the grey, skull-tight cowl covering his head. Only his face was visible, but even then, an angular domino mask covered his eyes. Only his smile kept masculine features from looking grim in the warm lamp light.

"Hello, Darling," he murmured into her ear and nuzzled Diana's nape.

Shouted chants of "Daddy's kissing Mommie," broke them apart with sheepish grins. "Later," he promised.

She smiled, but a bit sadly. "I'm going away for a while."

"Is it Uncle Dave?"

Diana loved how this strong man really cared for those near and dear to him. "No, he's fine. The UN has reports of Human Rights Abuses on an English Estate in Western Equatorial Africa. I'm going to see if the reports are true."

"That could be rather dangerous."

Diana laughed lightly. "Not really, I'm using the Kidnapped Princess as a cover."

"Surely, not the one my grandfather rescued?"

"Is there another?"

"Well, yes, the Phantom Chronicles mention several, but only one in Western Africa."

"Still, the legend will give us a good cover, looking for proof the Princess really found the mysterious 'Golden Treasure' in a lost city will give us access to the territory."

"According to my grandfather's records they did find a lost city but his mention of a 'Golden Treasure' indicated it

was not as it seemed. I doubt there was any gold found, but, then again, grandfather wasn't with Udara all the time. Being a gentleman, he never read her journal."



Ian Hunter crossed the threshold of the green door that led into the squalid interior of the dilapidated saloon near the docks. He peered through the miasma of smoke and other foul odors, carefully cataloguing the riff-raff which lounged in diverse states of inebriation. A number of the patrons covertly nodded to him. They were not incapacitated. The drinks in front of them only smelled of alcohol. Each of the ruffians knew that such consumption would mean death.

Hunter returned the nods with a slight—an ever so slight—nod of his own. His silk suit was out of place in the rotten den of iniquity, but he knew he was safe from the inmates of the boozehall. Hunter, the name he used in America and when dealing with UN officials, crossed the room, fastidiously sidestepping the begrimed saloon inhabitants. At the far end of the room lay a staircase. Hunter ascended and turned left down the upper corridor. A door lay at the end of the short hall. The pirate knew his every movement was watched by armed guards. One false move and he would be gunned down. He knocked on the door of the office. At the gruff invitation Hunter opened the door, stepping into an entirely different environment.

Plush carpet covered the floor from wall to wall. Chairs and sofas, covered in fine silks, dotted the spacious room. Sumptuous drapes shut out prying eyes. A gigantic desk dominated the middle of the room. In such a room one might expect a spider to lurk, holding the strands of an immense web in its fingers, manipulating the fates of all who came in its grip.

Such a man was Ahmed Singh, grandson of the esteemed Achmed Singh, the man who tried to get the 'Golden Treasure' of the Kidnapped Princess, but who had been slain

in England in the house of Lord Greystoke. The vendetta against the English Lord had lain unfulfilled for decades, as other labors had intruded on the time of Ahmed, but, now, as reversals in far-flung enterprises accumulated, the need for operating funds the treasure could provide was paramount—the vendetta had been revived.

Ahmed Singh was thin to the point of emaciation. His voice as withered as summer grass. "Mahmoud Singh," he whispered to the man called Ian Hunter. "Has the plan properly begun?"

"Yes, Brother," the man called Hunter replied.

"Details, Mahmoud, details." The raspy voice grated across Mahmoud Singh's skin. It had always been so, even when they were small boys.

"The Walker woman has fallen for the deception. Her eager desire to interfere with the karma of others has led to pursuit of Lord Greystoke for Human Rights Abuses. She has accepted the ruse to research the legend of the 'Kidnapped Princess' to cover her investigations. The elder Dunnett's "accident" has left his clueless whelp in charge of the expedition. We have several brothers hired by Dunnett as porters and I will be there. We *will* take the fabulous treasure of gold and, doubtless, jewels from the lost city. Meanwhile, a second party under Rasheed's command, one hundred well-armed men, will follow our safari. At the right time Rasheed will swoop down and destroy or enslave the Dunnett safari—we will take the treasure. I will continue my guise as Ian Hunter as long as necessary."

"Slaves—good thinking, Mahmoud. The cursed Phantom has interfered with too many of our works of late!"

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The west coast of central Africa was now in its third year of drought. The Greystoke estate lay in the middle of that arid area. Normally green trees were sparsely decorated with a dusty mix of

drab olive and yellow leaves. The grassy veldt was sere in the sun, brown tufts emerging from the dry, cracked soil.

The sun beat down harshly as Diana Walker stepped out of the Land Rover halted before a large Colonial house surrounded by a wide veranda on all four sides. The last hours of the trip had wilted her khaki suit and uncurled her hair. Mrs. Walker gently mopped her forehead with an already sweat-moist handkerchief. The rest of her team's safari rolled to a stop behind her. From the shadows of the veranda a number of natives rose, abandoning whatever tasks they had been doing.

The door of the plantation house opened, revealing a black-haired giant who descended the steps to greet her. The clothes he wore could not hide the sleek muscles that rippled beneath smooth, browned skin. His hard chiseled face, which bore scars which seemed to add to his masculine appearance, was pleasant, though not gushing. "Mrs. Walker? Commissioner Davis told us to expect you."

"Yes. Thank you, Lord Greystoke."

"Please, call me 'John'—I prefer it to the title."

"Thank you, John." Others approached from the safari. "This is the representative of the Mawitaaan Museum, Charlandra Muviro."

"Hello, Charlie, long time no see. How is your schooling going?" Greystoke embraced the black girl with a grin. Mrs. Walker frowned at the familiarity.

"I graduated last year, Uncle John!" she replied.

Elmo held her at arms length. "You have grown up quite a bit, goddaughter. And your sister?"

"President Luaga's secretary. She is full of herself these days." She would have said more, but James Dunnett thrust himself between them, his hand extended for a handshake.

"James Dunnett, Lord Greystoke. I am the safari guide."

Charlie rolled her eyes and twisted her mouth into a disgusted moue. Elmo released her and grasped the young man's tanned hand. "I have heard good news about you, Jim."

"My *father* is Jim. My name's James."

"That's a relief," Elmo smiled. "If you were your father you'd be remarkably young. I suppose you'll want to see to your people. That field is near the well-head. Plenty of water. Help yourself. Make camp. You're welcome to come to dinner."

James thanked Lord Greystoke, and also sensed he'd been dismissed—something to think about as he raced off to organize the safari encampment to his father's specifications.

Ian Hunter introduced himself as the historian from America and extended his hand. Elmo hesitated before accepting the grip. Hunter's sleeve rode up the arm and Elmo's keen eyes saw a tiny spider tattoo, in a circular web, on the inside of the forearm. The grip tightened.

Hunter noted the look and, seeing the exposed tattoo, swiftly withdrew his hand, tucking it in his pants pocket with sudden, studied nonchalance.

Elmo noted the mysterious movement. Why did Hunter wish to conceal the tattoo? Elmo's jungle-trained senses sent a warning frisson up his back. The man was obviously hiding something, despite his cool demeanor and smile.

Elmo no longer killed his enemies before they tried to kill him. Jane had taught him that not every stranger must be treated as threat to life and limb. He would wait and see what threat—for threat he knew it was—this man might present.

Diana Walker either did not witness that silent exchange, or dismissed it as unimportant. "Shall we go inside?"

Elmo laughed. "Yes! The sun is a little hot today, as it has been for a few years. Or would you prefer the shade of the verandah?"

"Either, Uncle John!" Charlie laughed, slipping her dark arm beneath his and leaning against his hard body.

The survey team ascended the steps to the veranda. Greystoke led the way into the spacious front hall. "Sit. Dust off—no, dust off outside then sit! Jane would have my hide for getting that backwards." Elmo called for refreshments.

The chamber was light and airy with tall windows and doors open on three sides to let the warm breeze flow through

the house. Retro-fitted ceiling fans hummed slightly, forcing a downdraft that, in the shade, was more than sufficient to counteract the heat.

Diana noted several unusual aspects of the room. There were no stuffed animal head trophies or animal skins. Wall paintings of landscapes, many of England and America, were offset with portraits of people, some famous, almost like a museum. Only one weapon hung on the walls; an old hunting knife of the kind called a Bowie knife. No other weapon was displayed in readiness for use. No gun safe was in sight either.

"What is this?" Diana inquired.

"That is my father's hunting knife. I found it where he died. It saved my life many times when I was growing up. I almost lost it several times. I use another knife now."

"You are not a hunter?" she asked.

"But I am," Greystoke replied.

"Why are there no trophies on the walls?" Diana inquired. "I have been to many African estates—it almost seems *de rigueur* to have taxidermy examples."

Greystoke frowned. "What I hunt, we eat. But there are trophies..." Elmo said. He indicated a small shelf in the corner. Several silver and gold cups sat in solitary splendor. "Some belong to my son, some to my grandson—"

Diana heard the pride in his voice, then ignored the chain of thought when an emaciated black, gaunt and white with age, wheeled a trolley full of cakes and biscuits with tea, both iced and hot into the room.

After serving each in turn, the servant bowed to Elmo and departed as Lord Greystoke nodded his head. Diana's lips turned down at the corners as she saw the subservience of the old man. Did he have to grovel to ensure his job? Was this Lord Greystoke truly a beast as some men had told her? His next words surprised her.

"Please, forgive old Muviro. He's been with me for many years. I cannot break him of the old ways. I've tried to relieve him of the household duties but he refuses. My wife and I

have no heart to break his heart. Muviro is the hereditary chief of the Waziri. His tribe and his family live at Greystoke Estate as free citizens. I admire them greatly.

"Oh," he continued, glancing at Charlie, "Your sister called a few hours ago. She spoke to Muviro. He has some questions for you. Have you been a bad girl?" Elmo wagged a finger at her.

"Uncle John!" Charlie responded with a laugh. "May I be excused? I *would* like to visit with my grandfather."

"Charlie, you know that in this house you do not have to act on ceremony—even if old Muviro *thinks* he must. My house is your home after all."

Diana's face crimsoned with both amused and illuminated chagrin. This man was certainly *not* the monster portrayed. But one could never tell; some monsters led spotless lives in the sun but were depraved devils at night.

Elmo escorted Charlie to the door then resumed his chair. "Now, Mrs. Walker, Mr. Hunter, what can I do to help you?"

Diana put on her professional face. "A little more than fifty years ago the Kidnapped Princess—are you familiar with the legend?"— Elmo nodded, his mind flashing back to his youth —"was taken through what is now your property. She died last year, a famous and generous woman... Almost as famous as that other legend of Bangalla, the Ghost Who Walks. Most of her story is legendary, no doubt exaggerated and completely unconfirmed, except for what was written in her Journal. She refused to talk about what happened before her death. The Bangallan government would like to see what part of the tale is truth and what part fabrication."

Elmo's eyebrow lifted, "Fabrication?"

"Yes, for example, half of the story concerns her rescue by The Phantom. She described him as being an all grey man—except for his hands and his face."

Elmo arched a brow. He encountered just such a man in his youth who had trespassed on Elmo's childhood home. The twelve-year-old boy had tried to kill the man with one of his

poisoned arrows but the shaft had bounced off the man's belt. To Elmo's then child's and uneducated mind, the man had been a demon and—because the arrow had not killed him—invulnerable.

"I have heard of this Phantom. He is supposed to be immortal. But, isn't he from another part of Africa?"

"Yes," Diana replied, repeating the cover story that she, and all the wives previous, had uttered. "He is 400 years old. They call him The Ghost Who Walks." She, however, generally called her husband: *Darling* or *Kit*.

"The Phantom is the man who rescued the Kidnapped Princess from the Singh pirates," she continued.

Elmo set aside his twelve-year-old memories. He had other encounters and memories more accurate and less filled with superstition. He also read newspapers and, from the native side, talked to the people of the jungle. He had an idea of what the Phantom was about, and he was not about Elmo's business. Greystoke crossed his leg and folded his scarred hands across his flat stomach, fingers interlaced.

"I'm afraid I cannot help you with that, Mrs. Walker. Is there something else?" Elmo inquired.

Diana put her tea cup into the saucer then blotted her mouth with the napkin, pleased to have broached the Ghost Who Walks and getting the reception she desired. "What we do know is that pirates, reported to be Singh, kidnapped Udara to extract ransom. In part they were thwarted, whether it was this Phantom or other forces we don't know. They fled west, entering lands now owned by you. Udara remarked upon—and this part is considered the least exaggerated—a cabin in the jungle near a lagoon. Inside were three skeletons, a man, a woman, and a child. There is also a story of a white boy who lived like an ape, naked, in the jungle."

Elmo, feeling a bit reckless, smiled. "Those parts are true."

Ian Hunter leaned forward, "How would *you* know?"

The man's question irritated the ape-man. Elmo controlled his speech, and restrained the instant urge to sink teeth

into the man's throat or break his neck, but the scar on his forehead flushed scarlet. "I'm not at liberty to tell, but it is true."

"Can you lead us to the cabin?" Ian breathlessly pursued.

"That is out of the question," Elmo replied with absolute finality.

"Why?" Diana queried.

"Personal reasons. *No one* sees the cabin."

Mrs. Walker sensed something in that reply, something that touched her heart. Something that made her wonder as to these reported human rights abuses. "Personal?"

Hunter interrupted, leaning forward, a trace of eagerness on his dark features. "Mrs. Walker, perhaps it would be best if we simply ask Lord Greystoke for knowledge of, or his consent to lead us to, or allow us to seek, the lost city."

Elmo raised an eyebrow at this remark. "City? I am quite familiar with the territory hereabouts for miles around, and I am not aware of any cities near here."

"Actually it is a lost city," Hunter added.

The ape-man's eyebrow descended. "Oh, another one of those. Tell me where this 'city' is located."

Diana's brow furrowed as Hunter took over the conversation.

"We do not have the exact location. We do have Udara's journal which describes her trip to the city."

Hunter brought out the Journal. Diana's eyes widened: *What was he doing with the original Journal? They were only supposed to have the copies.*

Elmo blinked when he saw the book. It was the same as once brought to the England Greystoke estate years ago—by a man who had stolen it from Bangalla museum. The man had been so inept at manipulating Elmo to reveal the Journal's secret that Elmo had refused to help.

The swarthy man, who claimed to be the son of the Kidnapped Princess, was indignant when Elmo remarked the Princess was a Negress. Elmo had then taken the journal from the man and ordered him to leave. The man tried to shoot

Elmo in the back, but a face in the trees outside the room, a figure in a mask and a grey skintight suit, had shot and killed the pirate. The man in grey was the same man, by all appearances, whom Elmo had tried to kill some twenty years earlier. But, to his jungle-trained senses, it was not the same man. They smelled similar, like relations sometimes did, but his savior was not the invulnerable man at the cabin.

Elmo suddenly stared at Diana Walker—the difficulty of a dead body in the English Greystoke mansion had been taken care of by a Mr. Walker, a representative of the Bangal-lan government. Elmo never met Mr. Walker personally, but Walker's efforts on Lord Greystoke's part had been gratefully received. He pondered the coincidence of names as he took the book Hunter offered and began to read it again.

"Charlandra has an English translation, John," Diana offered.

The ape-man waved the document aside. "No, thanks. That is unnecessary. I learned to speak French before learning English; in the meantime I have accumulated a few other languages. If you need anything inquire of Muviro. He will see to you needs. I will examine this document." Elmo retired to his study.



James stared at the ten crates still stowed in the last truck. Each was the size of a coffin, wrapped in grease cloth to make it waterproof. Dunnett leaned out of the truck bed and called for Hunter's head porter. The man trotted up.

"What is in these boxes?" James inquired.

"Not know. Bwana Hunter say not needed now."

James did not know this man. He came with Hunter. The professor's head porter was not a local boy.

James shrugged off the affair. It was not his to understand why the historian had sealed boxes, his duty was to deliver them. He parked the truck near the encampment offered by Greystoke. Satisfied his men were performing properly and that the tents were erected, he went in search of

Charlie. He wanted to see her for personal reasons, but there were a few professional as well.

Dunnett found the dark-skinned girl sitting cross-legged on the verandah. Her grandfather was with her. James hesitated to interrupt what was seen to be an animated discussion. The two black faces were somber; their voices low. He heard part of Muviro's conversation:

"—come home based on two lies?"

Charlie gasped. "I come to seek Udara's history! That is *not* a lie! All my life—" Charlandra Muviro closed her mouth. She reached out and took her grandfather's hand. "Diana Walker is UN. She thinks Big Bwana is abusing our people."

"Surely you do not believe this?"

"Uncle John? My godfather? *Certainly not!* Uncle John has never been anything but kind to all."

"Ah, Charlandra," her grandfather said. "I remember many years ago when he was not so kind, but times change and so has he." The old man pulled at his chin. "There is more to this than these old eyes can see. I will speak to Elmo tonight—when our guests are at rest. I—"

Old Muviro saw James, shifting from foot to foot, and motioned him to join them. "Come, young man. Join us."

Charlie turned her head. She frowned as James hesitantly approached, turning away, but not so far as to be overtly rude in front of her grandfather.

James settled down on the floor. Old Muviro said, "You came with Charlandra from Bangalla. Do you work with her?"

"Grandfather, he came with the safari."

Muviro noted the venomous look in his granddaughter's eyes and nodded, a small smile on his lips. "I see—"

Charlie saw what her grandfather saw, and it irritated her! "Do not be deceived by his good looks. James Dunnett is a wastrel and womanizer."

Charlandra rose. "Has father returned from the fields?" She left the veranda before an answer could be given and strode toward the stables.

Muviro laughed. "She is a good-looking woman."

Unconsciously, James nodded, then caught himself. Was his interest that obvious?

Though wracked with rheumatism and age, Muviro's eyes were bright with life. "Why does she not like you?" murmured the old man.

James repeated her last comment. "I am a wastrel and a womanizer."

Muviro chuckled. "That is what she says, but that is not the answer."

James found a twig on the veranda floor. He picked it up and twisted it between his fingers. "We met last year in college. I tried to chat her up. Dummy me, I had no clue she was a Chief's daughter and fresh from the farm.

"Her grace and charm—that cultured accent—trendy clothes and big-city friends confused me. I thought she was in the know. I insulted her right off the bat with my big mouth and brainless advances—" He watched as a tall Waziri in khaki shorts and white t-shirt swept the woman off the ground.

"She was not who I thought she was," James finished. He glanced at her grandfather. "She was *so much more*."

Muviro glanced at his granddaughter and her father in happy reunion.

Muviro said, his voice strong though his body had gone weak with age, "Charlandra was raised on the Estate and educated by the best teachers. Lady Jane's father brought in teachers in the schools established by Big Bwana. Charlandra practiced her English on Big Bwana and Lady Jane, as did I."

James threw the splintered remains of the twig out into the sun. "She's a treasure, all right," James admitted. "I just wanted to get to know her."

"Be patient, my boy," the old man said. "Be patient."

• • • • •

Diana wandered about the estate searching for signs of abuse, but, whenever she spoke to any of the servants, they all had nothing but praise for Lord Greystoke. To her ears, however, the praise was too unanimous. However, there were no signs of the secretiveness and terror that abusive behavior induced. Diana was confused. She saw the old man called Muviro; she intended to interview him.

The Waziri chief watched her approach.

"Greetings, Mrs. Walker." Muviro bowed his head from where he sat on the porch.

Diana sat on the edge of the verandah. "How are you, Chief Muviro?"

"These old bones rest well, lady." He sighed. "What may this old man do for you?"

"You could answer a few questions."

He waited.

"How long have you worked for your master?"

"I have no master. I am the chief of the Waziri. My sons are chiefs of the Waziri. All this land, as far as the eye can see, is Waziri land."

Diana frowned. "It is owned by Lord Greystoke. He pays your wages. You work for Lord Greystoke."

"He is a chief of the Waziri chiefs. That honor was given many years ago for his services for us. His name holds the land in trust for the Tribe of the Waziri. We work together for the good of the Waziri. He is a good chief."

Diana wondered at the old man's tone. It was as if he were chastising her.

• • • • •

Elmo read through the handwritten journal. He carefully noted the landmarks given and the rough placement on the maps which accompanied the journal. The journal was written in roughly two parts. The first half dealt with her kidnapping and rescue. That part was written in pure French. The second half dealt with a safari

she made with porters and askari ten years later after her college education in America. This section of the journal was written in a sort of code which resisted his quick attempt to decipher it. Only one entry was in clear English: *Took Gold*.

Late in the afternoon Elmo rose and set the book aside. He returned to the den. Hunter was in the room, still sitting in the same position. Though Elmo did not like the man, he engaged him in conversation.

"I know where this 'Lost City' must be. I can lead you to where the journal says it lies. I'm afraid 'The City' will be a great disappointment."

Ian Hunter nodded, "I'll *take* that chance."

Diana, wandering past the door after leaving Muviro, wondered at Ian Hunter's choice of words.

Later, Diana saw Ian in serious conversation with one of the porters he brought to Dunnett's expedition, but did little more than note it; old Muviro interrupted her thoughts by saying dinner was an hour away and would she like to refresh herself in the guest room provided. Mrs. Walker retired to bathe and change for dinner.



The Phantom wandered about his home, missing his bride. A day had passed since she had left. A small dispute in the Llongo village had filled the day with activity as well as the care of his children, but, now, long after dark, he missed his wife's arms. Idly passing the desk, where she worked when at home, he glanced at the stack of folders precariously balanced on the edge of the desk. He could imagine her irritation if they were scattered before she returned. Just as Kit reached to nudge the stack onto the desk, the folders slipped out of his fingers. Trying not to disturb the order of the pictures, he noticed one had the word "Waziri" stamped on the base. He frowned. The children were wearing the traditional dress of the M'butu tribe and *not* the Waziri.

The Phantom settled into the desk chair and read the file. Short moments later he was both quietly angered and swiftly agitated then—finally—completely furious. His wife was searching for starved and abused children in the wrong country!

Leaving the files scattered on the desk, the Phantom strode out of the door.

• • • • •

"Enter!" Muviro followed his knock into the Big Bwana's bedroom. Elmo shared this place with his beloved wife and mate, Jane Porter Clayton. Feminine touches relieved the austere chamber's lines. The large bed was Jane's domain. The thickly padded mattress was too soft for Tarzan's taste and he had a pallet set in a corner for his rest. He still wondered that she abandoned the soft mattress to sleep many nights on the hard pallet with his arms wrapped around her lithe and supple body. Elmo smiled in sweet memory. *She is a woman to contend with.*

"What is it, Muviro?" Greystoke asked. "With guests in the house, I must dress for dinner." The Greystokes usually dined at the big kitchen table with the rest of the housekeeping staff.

"Charlandra has told me that Diana Walker is also an investigator for the UN Human Rights Abuses Task Force. The woman thinks *we* are mistreating *our* people." The Waziri Chief's voice shook with anger.

Elmo placed a hand on his old friend's shoulder. "*We* know better, O wise and powerful Chief of the Waziri. No one is denied comfort and safety, if we have knowledge of it."

"They use the legend of the Kidnapped Princess to hide their evil. The American, this Ian Hunter, is no historian—unlike Charlandra who knows *everything* that is known about the Kidnapped Princess—and she says Hunter knows nothing of the legend and *even less* about America!"

Elmo finished his tie and cuff-links. "I like Mrs. Walker. I do not like Mr. Hunter. Perhaps she has been deceived. We will wait and see what comes next."

Muviro nodded, trusting the ape-man with the fate of his people. Moving to the bed, he grasped the white coat and held it as Elmo shrugged massive shoulders into the finely-tailored dinner jacket.

During that dinner in the great house one of Hunter's "porters" disappeared from camp—heading west to rendezvous with the pirate warband.

• • • • •

At dawn Elmo and Diana set out for the 'Lost City' at the head of a fair-sized safari. They traveled by Land Rovers for the first twenty miles on well-kept roads. Diana's camera snapped constantly. Her questions, in each of the small communities they passed, were non-stop. She noted the happy greetings of the people when Lord Greystoke arrived, and the farewells when they departed. She saw that each hut was well-maintained, that handpumps brought forth water, that the small fields were irrigated and fruitful. She compared her knowledge with those reports and was confused.

That first twenty miles was accomplished in six hours, due to the stops where Greystoke had off-loaded some supplies in each community, both medical and dietary. The next twenty miles took another six hours as the roads became tracks and were merely savannah trails to the great forest ahead.

The jungle was reached a few hours before dark. Tents were erected, fires made, and dinner prepared. Before the party retired Greystoke, who had changed for dinner, but into a loin cloth, scabbard knife at his waist and nothing else, flared his nostrils while gazing into the heavens.

"I smell rain. Might even reach this camp. Sleep well."

That night a rainstorm ended the drought on the Greystoke Estate and eradicated the trail of the safari. All the jun-

gle rejoiced and celebrated the renewal of the primeval forest and the cultivated fields. The reservoirs filled. The storm followed the safari but did not catch up to them then.

• • • • •

Lady Jane Porter Clayton landed her small aircraft on the muddy airstrip. The slush and mush was sufficient it required all her flying skills to land and safely taxi the aircraft to the small hangar. Before she shut down the engine a half-dozen men had pushed the single-engine aircraft inside the hanger.

Jane stepped out into the humid air, greeting the men. One gloved hand brushed blonde hair out of her eyes as she looked around for her husband. He always heard the plane before anyone else and was usually on hand to meet her. True, she was not expected until next month—

Old Muviro came out of the house and walked toward her. "Lady Jane!" he cried in surprise. "We did not expect you so soon."

She smiled an affectionate greeting and asked, "Where is Elmo?"

"He has gone on a safari with a group from Mawitaan that say they want to find a 'Lost City'."

"Another one?"

"No," Muviro said. "The safari is not of searchers after history. Diana Walker is looking for mistreatment of the Waziri on the estate."

Jane frowned. "Is my husband aware of this?"

"Yes," Muviro nodded.

"Then we must trust him to take care of himself." Jane grimaced and strode into the house. Hungry, she followed the delicious scents of the cooking breads. In the kitchen she slipped off her shoes and socks, rubbed sore feet, then broke her fast wriggling her toes in extacy.

• • • • •

The Phantom picked up the shortwave microphone in the Skull Cave. His call to the Jungle Patrol was received by a Patrolman on duty 24 hours a day every day of the year. Any signal on the Commander's wavelength was reported without delay to the Colonel of the Jungle Patrol.

Colonel Worobu, his napkin still tucked in his collar from a late dinner, raced into the radio room. The radioman handed him the headset.

"Colonel Worobu here, Sir," he said.

The deep voice of the Jungle Patrol's commander sounded in the soldier's ears. "Colonel, book a charter flight for the jungle compound of Lord Greystoke. The passenger will be Mr. Walker. He will be at the airport in one hour. Out." The voice stopped speaking.

The radioman looked at the Colonel. But he was looking at the back of the senior Patrol officer as he disappeared down the corridor and around the corner. The unknown commander of the Jungle Patrol had spoken and things began to happen.

The Phantom slipped into his traveling outfit. When not in the Jungle, he wore long pants, a uniform coat, a heavy ascot scarf, a fedora hat and dark glasses. The Bandar saddled the Phantom's horse. He mounted at a run, riding out of the hidden fortress for the airport. In just under an hour he reined in the horse. A plane stood on the runway, its engines idling. The pilot buttoned up as Mr. Walker entered the cabin.

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Mahmoud Singh's troop of 100 Singh pirates and porters crossed the border to the Greystoke estate. Led by Rasheed, Mahmoud's younger brother, the gang of pirates paused to take their bearings using the map from the Mawitaan Museum. They camped at the juncture of two streams that formed a small river. Rasheed raised his hand.

"Look, Fahd," Rasheed commanded. "We are here." He pointed to the map he laid across his knees. "We are to wait until my brother sends us word where we are to go. Set up camp and post guards. No one must know we are here."

Fahd nodded his head. He shouted orders. The gang proceeded to establish what they thought was to be a semi-permanent camp.

At dawn the messenger from Mahmoud Singh arrived. The message was delivered. Rasheed called Fahd to his side. "Sadi brought a message from my brother. We head east from here until we arrive there." He indicated a formation on the map which resembled a large bird's head. He waved a command with one swarthy hand. "Break camp!" he yelled.

Much grumbling met the order. The men had worked late into the night in anticipation of several days rest—and had little sleep after the work had finished. Rasheed applied a liberal lash to slackers and noisy complainers, thus it was a silent and sullen group that began its march through the jungle.

The vanguard slashed new trails through the underbrush. The scouts silenced a few lone hunters they encountered. They avoided established trails. Anyone who discovered them was summarily killed.

Fahd complained. "Why do we kill everyone we see? Our orders are to collect as many slaves as possible."

Rasheed turned on his lieutenant. "We do not have enough men to control slaves at the moment. If even one escaped do you think the natives will just let us walk through unmolested?"

Fahd could not disagree, but resented Rasheed's insulting tone.

• • • • •

Five year old Teela, forgetting her father's strictures, wandered too close to the jungle and was the first to see the

troop of pirates. She screamed and ran for the village, but she had barely begun her flight when a bullet ploughed through her shoulder. She lost all sensation in her body and her feet, which hooked each other, spun her around. She dropped in her tracks and lay on her back. Her father saw the assault. "Teela," he cried as he grabbed a steel-tipped spear and ran to rescue his daughter. Rasheed allowed the farmer to approach the prostrate child before shooting the man dead.

The entire village roused into vengeance, but their bravery could not match the massed destruction of the pirate gang. The fight for the village did not last more than twenty minutes before all the men, old women, and smallest children were dead. A few young captive girls suffered degradation through the night. Native village beer disappeared down the throats of pirates and encouraged the depraved men to even more despicable barbarism as the long night wore on. The screams of the girls did not disturb Rasheed's rest.



By evening the next day the Phantom's plane splashed down on the air strip at Greystoke Estate. In his guise as Kit Walker, the Phantom stepped out of the cabin and surveyed the area.

He saw a handsome woman who looked about twenty-five. She was dressed in casual clothing which fit her slender form well. Her blonde hair whipped about a youthful face.

The Phantom raised his right hand in greeting. "My name is Kit Walker. I have come in search of my wife, Diana, whom I heard is visiting Lord Greystoke."

Jane returned the gesture. "I am Lord Greystoke's wife, Lady Jane Porter Clayton. Sorry, but I have just arrived home myself. I understand Elmo has gone on an expedition with your wife and others to look for a lost city in the jungle."

"Which direction?" Walker's sunglasses scanned all horizons. "I believe she is in danger."

"Believe me, Mr. Walker, my husband is a match for any danger out there."

Kit Walker cursed quietly under his breath. What was he to do now?

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The way to the city led north of the area Diana wanted to examine. However, none of the abuses, the starvation, or the killing fields seemed to exist. While the area was undergoing a drought, the fields were irrigated, and though the yield would be smaller than normal, there would be enough to feed everyone adequately. Smiling workers had nodded as the party passed through the dry country on their way to the mountains beyond.

The morning after the first camp, Elmo spoke to Dunnett who was breakfasting with Mrs. Walker. "Head north-east for three days and then camp," Elmo instructed. "I travel faster alone. I will confirm the map and best route to reach the city."

In a flash Lord Greystoke swung up into the trees and vanished! "Extraordinary!" Diana Walker breathed. Dunnett, still a bit startled, said, "I'll have the porters break camp."

Hunter—talking to his accomplices in the safari crew—did not see Lord Greystoke depart.

• • • • •

Teela, the young girl who had first seen the pirates, listened to the sounds of the fighting. Her father died as the pirates rushed past. Rasheed stopped at her body. He raised a heavy pistol, cocked it, and pointed it at the motionless girl's head. The gun looked huge in the tattooed hand. She lay still, breath held, eyes unblinking. She was so scared, she could not move. Around the killer's wrist a spider wove a deadly web.

The splash of blood and gaping exit wound on Teela's chest saved the girl from a second bullet. Rasheed ran toward the massacre.

Rasheed thought her dead, but he was wrong.

Teela lay in the hot sun waiting for darkness. She painfully crawled into the jungle shadows before rising to stagger south to the Big Bwana's house. Lady Jane would protect her—or Elmo.



Elmo, independent of the safari, could travel up to six times faster. In three days he reached the area where the lost city theoretically lay. He rested on a ridge overlooking a narrow, tree-shrouded valley, similar to the one Udara described in her journal. The three boulders, stacked in a triangle against the east wall of the entrance to the valley, matched the description. No trace of a city or populated area of any kind was visible from the height. Elmo swiftly descended into the valley, leaping from rock to rock or branch to branch with the surety of mountain goat or chimpanzee.

Reaching the valley floor, the ape-man wandered through the middle terraces of the verdant forest—south to north—until mid-day. A glint of reflected sunlight below indicated water. He swiftly dropped to small stream-fed pool to slake his enormous thirst.

As he scooped water in his palms, Elmo froze into immobility. A face peeped from the low-hanging tree branches opposite him. Elmo did not frown, but he did wonder that he had not smelled the other, nor heard movement—then did frown as the weirdly distorted physiognomy became apparent. Eyes which did not move—nor did any of the features. Strangely configured hands pressed the ears—

Elmo realized he gazed upon a graven image with a mouth slashed across the cheeks, with the central orifice pursed into a circular shape. A dribble of greenish algae

draped from the mouth, like a long tongue, into the small pond where Elmo knelt. Senses suddenly alerted, he lowered his nose to the water in his cupped hands. A sniff was enough for Elmo to throw his hands wide and let the tainted water return to the pond. He swiftly scrubbed his hands on the grass to remove any moisture and algae from them.

He was *glad* he had not drunk from the pool!

Elmo now noticed that no beast tracks led to or from the water; that meant even the animals knew the water was poisoned. One moment of inattention could be fatal in the jungle.

The ape-man did not linger. He withdrew to the other end of the valley where he found clear water in a stream which started high on the valley walls. He drank and hunted. Bara, the deer, soon became Elmo's meal.

The ape-man ate in the ruins of a small stone building, one of perhaps a dozen. The ruins were without roofs. Each had a narrow opening in one side wall, obviously a doorway. The ancient walls were eroded to between four and five feet in height. As night descended, Elmo placed pebbles on the top of the walls of the building he selected, to warn him of anything attempting to climb over the ragged barrier. He stacked underbrush into the doorway to discourage entry by that venue. He slept inside the ruins on a bed of dark-yellow flowers that seemed to spring from the rocks.

• • • • •

James Dunnett squatted by his tent and wrestled with his frustration. James cursed his lack of luck in getting Charlie to warm up to him. No matter how hard he tried to please, she had rebuffed every advance over the past week of travel.

He glanced at Charlie, sitting by the campfire, gazing at the glowing embers. Dunnett walked to the fire and gripped the coffee pot and a cup. "Want one?" he asked.

Charlie looked up, frowned, then smiled ruefully. "Thanks," she said, sipping the coffee.

Charlandra Muviro detested Dunnett's advances, yet she could not bring herself to make undeserved rude noises, thus she remained silent as he sat on the fallen log she used as a stool.

James said nothing. He could find nothing to say; she had already made clear she had no use for him. Sudden inspiration struck: "Charlie—tell me about the lost city and the golden treasure."

Charlie ignored him.

"If I am to be useful, I need to know what we are looking for. Keeping me in the dark because I made an ass of myself when we first met is not going to help."

Charlie looked at James for a long time before she said, "Do not expect much when we find the city. According to Udara's journal, the city was smaller than most think. The exaggerations, based on the exploits of The Phantom distorted everything. The city became a metropolis and the treasure grew to gigantic proportions."

"You don't sound impressed with the Phantom."

"He is just a man."

Charlie rose and entered her tent. James stared at the fire. He was just a man himself.



Muviro's still keen old eyes were the first to spot Teela's crumpled body in the dust of the road. He called his son: "Basuli! In the road! A girl!"

Basuli, caring for Lady Greystoke's horse, dropped the curry brush and hastened to the pitiful figure. Basuli gathered the wounded child into his arms. A crowd of excited natives met him halfway to the great house. He pushed through them. "Call for Lady Jane," he cried. "This girl has been shot! Hurry!"

Jane met them at the door. She ordered a bed be prepared for the girl.

Kit Walker peered through the doorway as Lady Jane bathed the girl's wounds. Teela moaned and opened her eyes. Sudden fear widened her eyes. "Pirates!" she screamed. "Pirates in white robes and spiders! They killed my father. *Everyone!*"

Kit Walker straightened in shock. *Spiders?* Kneeling at the bedside, he took the girl's little hands in his. "What do you mean by *spiders?*"

Teela stared at the dark glasses covering the strange man's eyes, but she felt comfortable with him, as though he would protect her—and bring justice to her father's spirit. She pointed to the inside of her right forearm. "The man had a spider here."

"Was it a real spider?"

"No." She shook her head. "It was a drawn one."

Kit Walker rocked back on his heels. "Singh pirates!"

"Singh pirates?" Jane inquired.

"An undercover organization that operates worldwide, dealing in piracy, kidnapping, slavery, narcotics, smuggling—almost any form of criminal activity imaginable. Somehow they have tricked Diana into leading them somewhere." Kit Walker ground a clenched fist into his palm. "We must find them quickly—before the pirates can—" Words failed the worried husband.

Jane comforted the girl and gave her over to the women of the Waziri.

"Muviro—?" Jane called.

Muviro appeared at the doorway.

"Where has my husband gone?"

"To the lost city of the Kidnapped Princess."

"Where is that?"

"I do not know—for sure. Big Bwana left before the rains came."

"After a heavy rain like that every trace of tracks will be completely obliterated. So there is no way to track them," Kit mumbled. "If only we had a clue to where they are going."

"Mrs. Walker mentioned Big Bwana's cabin in the jungle." Muviro volunteered.

"Did it have three skeletons in it at one time about sixty-five years ago?" Kit asked.

"Yes, bwana," Muviro nodded.

"Do you know where this cabin is?" Kit asked Jane.

"Yes, I do."

"That cabin is one of the landmarks noted in a history I have of Udara's trip." Kit Walker, also known as the Phantom, could not reveal too much about his family—the existence of the Phantom Chronicles was a closely guarded secret. "Once there, I can find the general area of the city from landmarks and descriptions."

"I will lead you to the cabin."

"That will be unnecessary. It will be dangerous."

"My husband is in danger, Mr. Walker, and I am more familiar with this jungle than you. Though my husband is a mighty warrior, not even he can see the unknown troop following him until too late. Besides, you will reach the cabin faster if I show you the way. Excuse me—I have a safari to arrange."

Lady Jane Porter Clayton pushed past Walker and Muviro, every inch the confident, self-assured lady of the house. "Muviro, bring my express rifle. Basuli—porters and supplies for two weeks. No, make it three."

Kit Walker smiled in rueful admiration as Jane stirred her household into frenetic activity. Walker gathered his own gear and, in less time than he thought possible, a safari of thirty stood ready beside two battered, but quite serviceable stake-walled, flat-bed trucks. The tanks were filled with petrol. The engine fluids were checked.

Kit Walker reached for the driver's door latch of one of the trucks. "No," Jane said. "Other side. I'll drive. Basuli! Load up!"

Walker closed the door as Jane trod the starter. She glanced at him, the wide brim hat shadowing her face, but

not her bright eyes. "The first eighteen or so miles is the easy part."

Three hours later, and two mountain passes and three river crossings, they pushed on the next twenty miles until they reached the point where the trucks could not go. Twenty minutes later the party, shy two who were to drive the trucks back, marched into the jungle—twenty-eight stalwart Waziri warriors armed with rifles and traditional weapons—and two whites equally as well-armed. Each carried a full pack. Several carried poles for the tents.

By nightfall the Greystoke-Walker party had reached the ancient cabin. Jane let Kit Walker look through the vine-covered window, but would not let him enter.

"Family shrine," she explained—though he had not asked.

Walker watched Jane walk away from the rude cabin, struck by an emotion which consumed her. Jane stood in silent prayer beside three graves marked with carven stones. The first bore the name of John Clayton; the second, Alice Clayton; and the last, Balu.

Kit Walker said, "Your husband's parents?" He looked at the third grave, the tiny one. "Balu is a most unusual name."

Seeing the somber look on Kit Walker's face, Jane almost burst out laughing. But, she held her mirth. "*Balu* means *baby* in the language of the region." She did not say the language was primarily grunts and other odd sounds made by the *Mangani*, the great apes who raised Elmo from a baby. Balu was the ape infant which died accidentally, and which Kala—Elmo's adoptive ape-mother—had dropped into the crib when the white human baby cried in hunger.

Basuli efficiently made camp. Canvas lean-tos were erected as the thick clouds suggested more rain during the night. A quick dinner from canned goods was made and consumed. Jane sought her blanket and went to sleep.

Kit Walker lay awake a short time, listening to the night sounds. He worried about his wife and planned what he would do when the sun rose.

In the morning, he thought, I will take Jane along the path of my grandfather—the path taken by the Kidnapped Princess.

He turned over and slept.



Rasheed roused his men at dawn. The men held heads large with hangovers with trembling fingers. Rasheed lashed them awake. "Rise, you lazy hyenas. Break camp. *Move!*"

The pirates grumbled, but silently, giving Rasheed no excuse to exercise his whip. Bitter thoughts echoed in their aching brains. The porters, who had not been allowed to share in the loot and debauchery, fared better. Soon, the pirates continued their murderous journey to Bird's Head Peak.



Elmo, as always, reveled in the freedom of traveling the middle terraces. He listened to the chatter of the monkeys as they fled before him, complaining he disturbed them at their rest. The ape-man laughed at their antics.

As he did every half-hour on his way back to the Dunnett safari, Elmo swung to the top of a forest giant to take bearings from the distant mountains. Goro, the moon, rose in solitary majesty, a bright silver sphere peeking over the horizon in the darkening sky. Night travel in the African jungle is dangerous at best—and deadly at other times.

Elmo had no fear of the jungle, but he was not a reckless man either. Sheetah, the leopard, hunted at night, and often hunted in the trees. A big cat, though much smaller than Numa, Sheetah was one to avoid, if possible. Seeing that he would not be able to reach the camp before late night, the ape-man decided on one more night of freedom in his jungle. Elmo dropped to the lower terraces where fruits and nuts grew in plenty. He gathered an armful and sought a place to eat and to rest for the night.

Elmo, curled in the fork of a tree, high enough, and thin-enough, that it would sway violently should Sheetah catch his scent and attempt an attack. The ape-man chewed silently, peeling the rind from another fruit, then immediately froze as he heard two men approach the tree. There was some leaf between his vantage point and the ground, but not enough to provide full concealment. His only protection was immobility.

The two were slavers. At the mention of his name the ape-man's feral ears grew keen and his sense of smell sharpened.

"When Mahmoud Singh makes the signal we will attack the safari."

"You say the truth, but remember, we await the others with Rasheed. In any event, Lord Greystoke must first return with the map."

Elmo thought of the map which lay at the bottom of his quiver.

"Then we take over the safari and push on to the enrichment of the Singh Pirates."

"When will Mahmoud Singh bring us our orders?"

So, thought Elmo, *They are waiting for their leader to meet them*. He settled in the crook of the branch to wait for the leader to arrive. The tree limb groaned under the shifting weight.

"Wah!" One of the pirates looked up and caught sight of Elmo.

"What is that?" the shorter man cried. He clawed loose a pistol and aimed at the ape-man. The short slaver barely had time to regret attempting the murder, for Elmo leapt in silent attack instead of attempting escape!

The ape-man's heavy body crushed the slaver to the ground. Elmo's animal growl roared loudly in the slaver's ear. The other man—sure that the naked giant was engrossed in killing his accomplice—attempted to stab the beast clothed in a white man's skin. But, with a humanly impossible flash of speed, a terrible grip crushed the wrist bones of his knife-bearing hand and strong teeth savagely tore at his throat. The

killing lust of all of the ape-man's primitive ancestors swept over Elmo and erased the thin veneer of civilization. The man had time, and breath, to utter one shriek of terror then—

Elmo was too busy killing the pirate to hear Ian Hunter sneak up and clout him on the head with an automatic pistol.

Even as consciousness left him, Lord Greystoke was puzzled... the other pirate had been knocked out... *who struck...* then blackness.

Ian Hunter stood over the inert form of Lord Greystoke. He lifted the pistol and struck the prostrate man in the head a second time.

Breathing heavily, the smaller pirate staggered erect—massaging badly wrenched arms and back. "Sahib! Rasheed found there are two safaris heading to the City. He and half of the men went to attack the other safari."

Short as it was, the scuffle had disturbed a hunting lion. A heavy feline cough froze both men in the moonlight.

"Lion!"

Hunter frisked Elmo and found the map in the quiver. The way to the city was clearly marked with Elmo's handwritten notes.

The lion coughed again, nearer this time. Hunter narrowed his eyes, thinking rapidly. "Strip the bodies. Take everything. Leave them for the lions and hyenas. It is time to unwrap the gun cases. We attack the Dunnett camp tonight and take over."

Numa coughed again. The two pirates shuddered at the eerie, heart-stopping sound and swiftly stripped the inert body of Elmo and the pirate and hurriedly withdrew.

As they passed into the jungle, Ian Hunter saw a lion emerge from the darkness and sniff at the giant form of the man Hunter had struck down. The pirate did not wait for the lion to start eating Lord Greystoke. The white fool's fate was sealed!

• • • • •

Diana, after the third day in the extended camp, turned a disappointed face to Ian Hunter. "We should have gone south when Greystoke went north. We are no closer to documenting the abuses *you* reported, Ian. We can take two or three porters and—"

Hunter shook his head, reminding Diana: "It would look bad to turn back now. Remember, our research of the Kidnapped Princess comes *first*."

James Dunnett, supervising two men butchering a deer brought down during the morning hunt, watched the animated discussion between Mrs. Walker and Mr. Hunter. He was far enough away to not hear most of the conversation, but he did hear "... our research of the Kidnapped Princess comes *first*."

The two talked for several minutes then separated; rather, Hunter stiffly turned and walked between tents into the jungle, and Mrs. Walker stamped a small boot then entered her tent.

James wondered what Hunter meant when he had said *first*. Then he was distracted as Charlie entered the main camp, carrying a camera and notebook. Her tall, slim figure held his eyes, and his thoughts.

At the evening meal, Diana sought Ian Hunter out, determined to have one more discussion with the man. At the camp edge, but still within the perimeter guard of askari, Mrs. Walker spoke firmly.

"We are *beyond* the limits of Greystoke estate. There were no signs of abuse taking place through the part we traveled. I have seen *no* evidence that this place is not a well-run and humane operation. Have you *lied* to me about the abuses? What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning, Mrs. Walker," Hunter crooned in his soft velvet voice, "is we have heard of the golden treasure of the Kidnapped Princess. The brotherhood wants that treasure—and we will get it."

Diana was stunned. A deep, bone-chilling foreboding swept over her. "What brotherhood?"

"The Singh."

Diana felt a deep rage build in her. The Singh Pirates were her husband's sworn enemies. "You *used* me. You *lied* about the abuses."

Hunter shrugged. "We both lied to get what we want. You, to get evidence against Lord Greystoke; me, to get rich. We are the same, Mrs. Walker."

"We are *nothing* alike. *We* turn back tomorrow. *You* may do as you see fit, Mr. Hunter. You are one man and completely outnumbered!"

Confident her orders would be followed in the morning, Diana turned toward her tent. She stopped and turned back, "By the way, Mr. Hunter, *you're fired.*"

Hunter stalked off.

Approaching the fire, Diana informed James Dunnett of her decision to turn back.

"Hold on, Mrs. Walker. I work for Mr. Hunter. He hired me, not you. I don't know what's happened between you, but I can't just up and abandon the expedition. I don't get paid if I don't provide. I'm legally-bound to continue. You have no say in the matter."

Had Hunter heard James' argument with Diana, he would have postponed the attack. After all, with Dunnett in charge, any *accidents* could be blamed on a convenient head—but he did not.

Hunter supervised the opening of the gun cases. The pirates pulled out the rapid-fire Kalashnikov guns. Clips of ammunition were distributed among the porters—all of whom were Hunter's men.

The camp settled for the night with a half-dozen askari on guard. The main party slipped into their tents after supper.

Alone, Charlie stripped and slid a diaphanous nightgown over her shapely figure. She knew it was silly to wear a nightgown, but she loved the feel of silk on her body.

James kicked off dust-caked boots and whipped off his shirt. He was worried, a divided safari was never a happy sa-

fari. His father had warned him about the dangers of contention. If there were to be any camp emergency caused by that division, he'd need to move fast, thus that was the extent of Dunnett's disrobing.

Diana paced the floor of the tent by the glow of moonlight on the top canvas and the dying embers of the central camp fire. James Dunnett was right, she had no legal rights in the expedition. She had been manipulated into ceding the lead to Ian Hunter and came aboard as supercargo. Yet, she hoped Hunter made no overt move against her authority. She resigned herself to a long treasure seeking journey. Perhaps Lord Greystoke had found nothing! Yes, there was that to hope for! Diana tossed restlessly on the cot until she fell into a troubled sleep.

Mahmoud Singh, the man known as Hunter, also paced the floor of his tent, but not restlessly. He paced like a caged tiger waiting to be unleashed.

The fires burned low and a quiet settled over the sleeping camp. No one noticed Hunter's furtive troop of porters-in-disguise as they slithered between the tents to predetermined places. The pirates waited for the signal to attack.

Hunter/Singh left his tent an hour before dawn. He moved silently through the camp. He entered Diana's tent and exited moments later. He carried something dark and heavy in his hand. Keeping to the shadows until he reached his destination—the gate to the boma—the Singh pirate raised Diana's pistol and fired at the guard's back. At that moment Ian Hunter disappeared forever. In his place stood Mahmoud Singh, lieutenant of the Singh pirates. Mahmoud Singh had just given the signal to attack the camp.

The explosion destroyed the silence of the night. Even as the shot echoed in the darkness the pirates swarmed through the camp and engaged in the slaughter of the askari.

Too late the camp roused. Men screamed; bursts of rapid-fire shots echoed as the pirates overran the encampment, pausing only long enough to point their Kalashnikovs

and shoot their victims. Over and over the guns bellowed as the defenders died.

James rolled out of his cot and jammed feet into boots. He grabbed revolver and cartridge belt and knelt on the tent floor. His ears stretched to their limit as he tried to make sense out of the pandemonium. He sought to lift the tent flap, but before he could reach his goal a hand swept the canvas away. A rifle barrel, followed by a swarthy face, entered. The pirate fired a burst of deadly projectiles into the fluffy pillow and blanket-tossed cot. James, from an unexpected place, fired almost instantly. The shots sounded as one—the pirate fell in that final repose from which no one arises.

James dragged the dead pirate into the tent and stepped outside. The assault was nearly finished. Only a few widely-spaced shots sounded as defenders were hunted down and mercilessly shot to death. *Apparently, Dunnett thought, Ian Hunter wants no witnesses to brutal, bloody massacre!*

The lead porter ran to Diana's tent and sprayed the canvas with a long burst of automatic fire. James shot the murdering scum. The young man swallowed hard—*she must be dead!* No one could survive such a concentrated burst of gunfire.

Crouched beside one of the packing crates, James saw a swarthy pirate drag Charlie toward the jungle. The man's evil grin was all the proof Dunnett required to know the villain's intent.

James Dunnett ducked between tents, trying to keep Charlie in view. The fighting was all on the other side of the camp, thus no one saw him give chase.

He wondered that Charlie did not scream, though he saw, when there was a clear line-of-sight between thick clumps of underbrush, that she fought him tooth and nail. The pirate viciously clipped the girl's chin with a hard fist. The woman went limp.

James Dunnett quelled the roar of rage which filled his throat, conscious of the pirates behind him. He redoubled his

efforts to close with Charlie's captor. The safari guide could see that he was gaining as the pirate slowed a bit from carrying the girl across his shoulder.

Suddenly a dark face above a pale burnoose leapt up in Dunnett's path! The grinning pirate had a knife in his hand, a Kalashnikov in his other.

It was death either way, Dunnett thought, his brain working with a clarity he had never experienced before. The pirate obviously expected the safari guide to stop in his tracks. Dunnett grit his teeth and charged!

James' left arm knocked the rifle from the pirate's grip, his right hand encircled the pirate's right and, before the man knew it, the keen blade was embedded in a putrid heart that beat only a few more times. Dunnett thrust the body away from him. He quickly scanned for the assault rifle, but could not sight it. No matter—speed was of the essence!

• • • • •

Diana Walker sprang up from her cot at the first shot, then fell to the ground an instant later. She hit the floor only moments before bullets flew through the canvas walls and roof of the tent. Had she been standing on the cot, she would have died. Several shots blasted into the footlocker behind which she lay. Without its protection—She shuddered at the thought.

She thanked her husband's teaching—and her own innate caution—for sparing her life. Diana reached for her pistol. It was not where she had left it! Perhaps it had fallen to the floor. Her hands desperately groped for the gun belt.

The sounds of the fighting lessened and finally stopped—except for the piteous moans of wounded and dying men.

A swarthy hand swept aside the door flap. Mahmoud Singh, carried a kerosene lantern. He seemed a bit surprised.

"*Alive?* Amazing! Looking for something? *This*, perhaps?" The pirate raised a hand, displaying a gun belt and pistol.

"Apparently, Hunter, you are not only a liar and thief, but a *murderer* as well."

"Do not try my patience, woman," he growled. "We leave in a few hours. Prepare yourself." He turned to leave, but paused at the doorway. "Do not think to escape. You *may* have some value to me alive, but I will kill you if you become a nuisance. Do you understand?"

He pointed to the guards outside. "There are others at the back and sides of the tent."

Charlie Muviro struggled with her captor, but he ignored her best efforts to kick and strike him with her feet and fists. His great hand twisted her arm up behind her back.

"I have seen you looking at me, woman," the pirate hissed. "I know you have wanted me from the beginning of the safari. Now, you will give me what I want before I send you to the slave market in Mucar. But, if you please me, I may keep you."

But she continued to struggle, so desperately that the pirate knocked her senseless. She did not weigh much, but she did slow him down in the underbrush. He grinned in the moonlight, thinking of the pleasures ahead, before he would have to give her to the slave chain.

The pirate paused, listening. He thought he heard something moving on his back trail. For long moments he breathed shallowly, ears strained for any sound. Not even the insects, normally raucous both day and night, disturbed the silence—which was occasionally disturbed by a now distant gunshot, or a scream of agony.

Nothing!

The girl was beginning to rouse. The pirate ran on another one hundred, two hundred yards—he did not want her screams to be heard by his brethren. No—her screams were for his ears alone!

Judging he was far enough from the camp, the pirate stopped and swung the struggling woman into his embrace. He dropped the Kalashnikov to assault her body with obscene caresses, ripping at her night gown.

In a long life of bad choices and stupid mistakes that was his last and fatal mistake. James' revolver descended on the pirate's head with all the force of an enraged avenger. The pirate's skull shattered with a dull crunch. A deep bloody depression in the scoundrel's cranium was sufficient evidence that life had departed.

The burnoose-clad figure dropped like a stone. Charlandra Muviro suddenly gasped with relief. James Dunnett! She threw arms around his neck, not quite weeping. James returned the embrace.

For a moment Charlie felt safe, but, almost perversely, she quickly withdrew with a grimace. "Let go of me!" she cried.

James arched a brow, showing his already raised hands.

"You're welcome," he said. "We must get away before they come looking for us."

Dunnett stripped the gun belt and cartridge bandolier from the body. A pocket knife and box of matches were found. Satisfied there was nothing else of value, Dunnett rose. Charlandra touched the man's arm.

"What about Mrs. Walker?"

James grabbed her hand. His voice trembled with emotion. "Diana's tent was riddled with bullets. I do not think she survived."

Before the dark-skinned girl had time to fully comprehend that information, James had led the way into the darkness.

• • • • •

The sun glowed brightly overhead. The heat of the day began to swell. A scout returned to Rasheed's band of slavers. He brought news of the second safari.

"The two whites and their safari come down this trail. They will be here in twenty minutes."

Rasheed lit a cigarette with excited hands. Drawing the smoke deep into his lungs, he felt the calming effects of the

heavy tobacco in the white cylinder. He spread his men along the trail.

"Do not move without a direct order. Find a tree or brush to hide behind. Spread out on both sides of the trail. Kill the askari—we will catch them in a crossfire. As for the others, capture as many as possible. We will take the prisoners to Mucar and sell them for great profit." He threw down his cigarette and ground it out.

The slavers settled into comfortable positions. Their trap might have worked well if Rasheed had not smoked his cigarette.

Jane paused in mid-stride as she smelled an unusual odor. It was not an uncommon odor, in fact Elmo was known to indulge, but the scent did not belong in the jungle. *Tobacco*—a particularly offensive blend at that!

At the same instant Kit Walker saw a crushed cigarette in the trail. The tip still weakly smoldered...

Both Kit and Jane cried a warning as one. The safari plunged left off the trail—into the arms of their opponents. Blades flashed and guns roared.

The pirates were not as lucky as Mahmoud Singh's attack; they lost twenty of their men before subduing Jane, who had been effective with the Express, then her automatic pistol. Walker had stepped into a dozen close-bunched pirates, unable to draw a weapon, but his fists were steel and his skill immense. Some at his feet would never rise again, a few had shattered jaws and might starve to death—

"You! *ALL OF YOU!*" a voice came to Walker's ears and those of the battling Waziri. "Keep fighting and *I will kill Lady Greystoke.*"

By using Jane as a bargaining chip, the Waziri, who revered Jane Clayton as like a goddess, were forced to surrender. Kit Walker, however much he liked Mrs. Clayton, fought on with his fists, marking many of the slavers. He fought to escape because the one *he* loved was in danger! He tried to escape into the jungle where he had a chance of winning the

fight, but the pirates surrounded him so close that he could not advance a foot.

Not even The Phantom can fight dozens in close combat. His strength, his wind, his reflexes slowed until he was tackled to the ground and the bore of a pistol bruised the back of his neck. His hands were tied behind his back.

Rasheed's foot slammed into the white man's side which raised the hem of Walker's jacket. "What is this?"

The pirate leader saw the twin holsters peeking from under the jacket. Rasheed eagerly flipped up the back of the Phantom's coat and drew the automatics from their holsters. He did not see the skull buckle on the gun belt. Had he seen the silver deathhead he would have murdered Kit Walker on the spot.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. *These* I will keep for myself." He thrust them into his sash.

Jane thought he now looked what he was—a pirate.

The Waziri were bound at the neck. A body of pirates and porters led the way, a second followed, and armed men marched beside the captives. The band moved north—toward the slave market in the desert city of Mucar, which lay beyond a river gorge ahead and one last mountain ridge.

The weather remained cloudy, threatening rain all day. The light waxed and waned. Rain had fallen on the fore trail, making footing slippery, but rain had not drenched Rasheed's band of pirates and captives.

They reached the river gorge a few hours before nightfall. Some of Rasheed's lieutenants urged waiting until morning to cross the rickety rope bridge, but the pirate leader was adamant.

"We cross!" Rasheed did not repeat his concern that if only one Waziri escaped that warrior could bring more like him, and such wrath upon them—

The leading part of the safari went across, though the bridge creaked and swayed. Another twenty made the crossing. Rasheed considered that group sufficient to control the

captives. The Singh leader prodded that group, and the pirate guards—including Lady Greystoke and the mysterious Mr. Walker—onto the rain-slick rope and wood-slat bridge.

Halfway across one of the Waziri slipped and fell to his knees. Rasheed slashed at the fallen man with his whip. The prisoner went berserk. He managed to slip his neck restraint and struggled with the pirate chief. Other prisoners lashed out, tossing pirates off the bridge and freeing their collars. The slavers tried to subdue the prisoners, pirates on either side began firing, until voices ordered a cease fire. Once aroused, the fighting rage of the Waziri took over and the struggle became general.

Kit Walker watched in horror as one of the suspension ropes, hit by a bullet, frayed into spiraling cords. He threw himself forward, hands seeking a knife in the pirate belt before him. Jane saw his strategy and grabbed a blade from the man holding her tether. With a swift stroke, Mrs. Clayton sliced her leash, and the one binding her to Walker. She thrust the knife into the slaver who grabbed her arm. His convulsive death throes finished what the Waziri had started. The vines holding one side of the bridge broke under the ferocious combat.

All on the bridge were lost in the rampaging water some fifty feet below, including the Singh leader.

Mubinko, grandson of Muviro, had slipped his bonds during the battle. He surfaced and hid in the grass and reeds along the southern shore. To the north the slavers turned away. Above him he heard angry shouts from those pirates trapped on the southern side of the gorge. But those shouts faded away as that band moved on.

Mubinko spent a half-hour searching for Lady Greystoke—or any who may have survived. He found two lifeless Waziri and promised revenge. He saw a spot of muddied white in an eddy and took the dead pirate's sash knife. There was nothing more he could do here. Mubinko gripped the knife between strong, white teeth and scaled the rock face.

He looked into the gorge, saw several more bodies, all pirates, then trotted south to find Elmo—and tell Big Bwana that Lady Jane was dead.

• • • • •

James stopped running. Charlie stopped just behind him. She ducked as Dunnett spun around to survey their back trail. "It appears no one is following us," he gasped. His side cramped from the headlong flight. He glanced at the stately trees that formed a thick canopy which blotted out much of the early morning sunlight.

The sun was rising and the dark shadows grew a little less dense and for the first time James could get a look at Charlie. Her jaw was puffed swollen, making that rage rise again! The girl's night gown was in tatters. Her undeniable charms peeked through rents in the diaphanous cloth.

"Damn!" He spun away, face crimson.

Charlie had expected anything but that! Then wonder changed to outrage when Dunnett pulled his undershirt off. *What entitlement did he think his rescue deserved?*

The fierce daughter of a long line of Waziri chieftains picked up the rifle Dunnett had leaned against a nearby tree, prepared to defend her honor. She stared at the rippling muscles of his broad shoulders as he contorted them to remove his undershirt.

James, face still turned away, extended the shirt behind his back. "If we're going to be alone in this jungle," he gasped to the trees, "you are going to have to cover yourself!"

Charlie looked down at her garment. A hot flush warmed her dark skin. One breast was exposed, a rip in the front rose from the ragged hem to her belly button. Charandra replaced the rifle and snatched the shirt from James' quivering hand.

"You better not peek, Mr. Dunnett!"

"A bit late," he replied. "but I surely won't."

Charlie removed the gown and pulled the shirt over her head. As the cotton passed over her nose she drew in his scent, and that made her feel curiously warm! She smoothed the shirt down and discovered that it came nearly to her knees. She was, at least, fully covered. She picked up her ragged gown. Later, she would make a loin clout to complete her ensemble. She had no shoes, but she was used to going barefoot.

"All right, Mr. Dunnnett. You can turn around now."

James turned slowly, ready to spin back if she was not adequately covered. His memory of the tantalizing flesh made him flush crimson again. He hoped his sun-tan was sufficiently dark to conceal it. Compared to her previous *dishabile*, she looked quite modest—which was a good thing. He did not know how he could avert his eyes at all times. After all he was only human.

Charlie, too, wondered how she was going to survive the sight of his muscular, naked torso. She was only human.

They divided their spoils and equipment. She took the pistol and belt, which required a new notch created by the pocket knife to fit her slim waist. Dunnnett carried the rifle and shoulder-slung bandolier.



Kit Walker managed a lungful of air as he plunged into the depths of the rushing water. His sense of direction was lost in the maelstrom of liquid forces that tumbled him over and about until he was thoroughly disoriented. Afraid to panic, he stilled his flailing limbs and let the water take him where it would.

Suddenly the water ahead grew lighter. He briefly broke the surface for a new breath of air only to be dragged down again. The capricious swirling current put his mouth in atmosphere often enough to breathe before he sank again. Then, however long later, the pull of the water was less and he swam to the surface.

His hands brushed against something in the water. The object was a body. Quickly the Phantom wrapped his legs around the torso. He knew if he lost this body he would not have a chance to get another and maybe finding a knife to cut himself free. There had been ten slavers and forty prisoners on that bridge; to have encountered a body in the raging maelstrom was phenomenal—to find one with a knife was astronomical, but the Phantom's legendary luck did not desert him. The Phantom released the body and it floated away.

The Phantom broke surface again. He drew in a huge gasp of air before submerging again. Awkwardly he sawed at the rope. He surfaced twice more before the strands yielded to the sharp edge.

The Phantom was weary from the exertions and limited infusions of air, and the fight and long march had sapped his immense vitality. Mr. Walker's sodden clothing dragged at arms and legs. The Phantom quickly shed coat, hat and scarf, with immediate benefit as a result. The knife was thrust into his belt. Both hands free and unencumbered by the clothing, he struck out for the southern shore. The water continued to carry him downstream at a violent clip, but Kit eventually dragged himself from the water and staggered erect. Half-bent, gasping for air, The Phantom saw a slaver cowering behind a tree.

Fahd could not believe his eyes. The Phantom *here*? How did he know where to come? Were the legends true? Was this the Ghost Who Walks? The Man Who Cannot Die? Fahd grabbed a stick from the ground.

Before the Phantom had a chance to defend himself the tree branch smashed onto the cowed head. The Phantom fell into the water and sank out of sight.

Fahd stared at the river—then realized *he* had slain the Phantom! The enormity of what he had done swept over the slaver. He fled as if the Phantom were on his heels. He did not stop his flight until he had scrambled up the cliff and stared down into the gorge looking for pursuit which was not there. He fled again.



Elmo woke with a raging headache. The sun burned hot on his naked back. He lay on a path, under a tree, near the body of the pirate he had slain. The corpse was stripped of every item of clothing and valuables, including two gold teeth. Elmo, too, was naked to the skin, but he still lived. Elmo smiled at the stupidity of the pirates to have left him alive. He did not know *why*, but he did know they would *regret* it.

Elmo noted all this in the instant of wakening. He also saw Numa chewing a chunk of the pirate's thigh. The smell of blood had drawn Numa to the dead man.

The ape-man slowly rose and backed away from the feeding lion. The big cat was old, well-past the prime of life. Ribs stood out from mangy flanks. The lion had not eaten in many days. Truly, Elmo smiled, the lion looked too weak to chase its own shadow! Though this particular Numa was past his hunting prime and only men were weak enough to catch, the ape-man did not delude himself the big cat was not dangerous. Lions are equipped at birth with claws and teeth and muscles which Nature has denied the Human; though in compensation an enlarged brain and opposable thumbs had been provided.

Kala, the great ape mother who had raised Elmo from a babe in arms, always said to leave a feeding lion alone. Elmo remembered that early teaching and continued to slowly back slowly. Numa raised his head and growled. He stared at the ape-man—and decided the tarmangani was no threat to his meal.

The cough of the lion sent the ape-man into the trees where he nestled into the crook of a branch. He watched the lion gorge and, while he waited, the ape-man peeled lengths of the plentiful vines and plaited a sturdy rope.

The rope had been Elmo's first weapon—and the most versatile of all. He had caught deer in snares and tripped ene-

mies, both animal and human. Histah, the snake, knew well the sting of the knot in the end of a rope. When flung with Elmo's enormous strength, the monkey fist was a deadly weapon. Sheetah, feared the running loop on the other end.

Suddenly Numa stopped eating, ears erect, nose *whiffing* the air. The beast crouched in the shadows. Elmo, too, sniffed the slow breeze to discover what the lion had scented. There it was—a tarmangani. A clumsy, weak and frightened one by the noise he made. The sour stench of fear flowed from the skin of the running man.

The tip of the lion's tail twitched as he gathered still powerful legs under bent haunches, preparing to spring upon this interloper who would disturb his meal.

The man entered the small patch of clear ground and stood in indecision.

The tip of Numa's tail stilled. With a gigantic roar the lion leaped. The roar usually froze Numa's prey for a split second, normally enough for the lion to reach and catch his prey. But this time the roar was not enough to allow him to reach the man on the ground.

Elmo screamed a warning as he threw a loop of the barely-finished rope about the lion's neck. He took a half-turn around the tree trunk and braced himself against the impact of the full weight of the lion when it reached the end of his rope.

Wham!

The lion tumbled, sprawled askew. Elmo's muscles bulged beneath his bronzed skin as he hauled the lion upright, high upon its back legs before the beast could get traction. The lion snarled and gasped as the noose tightened. The rope, being new and unused, began to stretch, letting the front paws of the lion almost touch the ground before Elmo hauled the growling beast upright again.

Elmo searched about for a way to dispatch Numa quickly. The lion would soon discover it was but a weak rope that encircled his neck and a slash of one paw could sever the

plaited vines. Elmo yelled at the stupid Tarmangani to climb a tree, but the man just stood there, eyes wide and hands shaking as with ague.

The lion's wildly swinging paws finally caught the rope, it gave a little. Numa began to scratch at the lariat with all the vigor of a dying lion which—weak as the beast was—remained incredible.

The lion finally caught the rope with a clean swipe. The strands parted and Numa fell to the ground. The creature looked about for the thing that had caused such suffering. The beast's eyes focused on the man in the middle of the trail. Numa leapt, but in mid leap the lion was crushed to the ground by a heavy weight slamming the middle of its back. Two mighty legs wrapped around the great cat's body and tightened, holding the attacker firm. The lion brought hind legs up and tried to rake the human belt with extended claws.

While Elmo struggled to avoid the attack, he succeeded in obtaining a Half-Nelson under the lion's left front leg and around the back of the lion's head. His another arm joined the first, a Full-Nelson, and tightened. Long ago Elmo had discovered this position kept the natural weapons of the cat immobilized while it afforded Elmo the time to kill his opponent. As a civilized man he knew it was wrestling—and deadly.

The lion's head was forced down. Straining sinews creaked as Elmo bent Numa's head lower and lower, stressing the neck vertebra. Suddenly a dull *crack* sounded in the jungle. The lion sagged limp, never to hunt again.

Elmo rose from his kill, shaking the strain from his arms. The thrill of the kill was upon him. He rejoiced in the hunt! As he had done many times before, he placed his foot on the lion's neck and raised his head to the skies to utter the piercing challenge of a victorious bull ape. The trees echoed with the eerie sound—and the rest of the jungle grew quiet in the wake of that cry.

Lowering his eyes, Elmo turned his attention to the disheveled tarmangi before him. His clothes were torn in sev-

eral places and he was bleeding from numerous small wounds on his arms and face.

In turn, the man stared at the bronzed giant. The man was naked—yet, he stood as self-assured as any who appeared before the English House of Lords.

"Who are you?" the man asked.

"Elmo. And you?"

"Fahd."

"What are you doing on the Greystoke Estate?"

"I'm lost."

"What are you doing on the Greystoke Estate?" Elmo repeated.

"I was with a hunting safari. The whites in the safari wanted to cross a rope bridge. It broke. We fell into the river. Only I survived."

The story was thin, but plausible. The man smelled of river and sweat and fear. Nevertheless, Elmo had no time to waste with this man.

Losing interest in the conversation, Elmo coiled the rope, what remained of it. Elmo nodded to the west. "That way—you will find civilization in three days."

Elmo thrust his head and right arm through the coiled rope. He stood—unconscious of his nudity—and began to circle the clearing searching for some spoor which would send him on the trail to find Diana and Hunter. Like one of the hounds at the Greystoke Estate the man followed him. Elmo eventually found the scent he desired and began to move off.

"Take me with you! You cannot leave me here to die. That—that would be *inhuman!*" Terror quavered in the small man's throat.

Elmo paused. Jane would not forgive him for abandoning a human being in the jungle. And know it she would. Sometimes the ape-man thought she was telepathic. She always knew if he had something to hide. Lord Greystoke had learned there was such a thing as woman's intuition. He sighed in resignation.

"Keep up, or I will leave you." Elmo set off down the trail at, for him, a moderate pace. Fahd had to run to keep up.

Elmo settled into that running step which he could maintain for hours without fatigue, yet it was not hours before they reached the broken rope bridge that was now only two ropes, one above the other. The bottom rope had boards twisted into it. It was obvious that one side of the bridge had failed. Fahd looked down at the raging river and shivered. Elmo was satisfied that this much of Fahd's story was true.

Elmo quickly spanned the gorge. Fahd followed more slowly.

On the other side, the ape-man found the spoor of two parties of men. One headed due north and the other, the one with his guests, headed northeast. The two parties had missed each other by several hours. Elmo set off after his friends.

There had been rain most of the day. Most of the details of the tracks were obliterated, leaving only vague outlines in the mud, and Jane's scent had been washed away. If Elmo of the Apes had detected that wonderful scent nothing on heaven or earth could have prevented him from following it.

• • • • •

The Phantom woke with a splitting headache. He jerked up, sitting on wet grass a few yards from the river. The ground was soft and the thick grass springy over a very damp mud.

"Your head is as hard as my husband's. The cowl apparently helped soften the blow."

Turning his head was painful. Between the battle with the pirates and the one with the river, and that cowardly blow on his head, it would be some time before—but he was used to pain and shut it out of his mind. His eyes took in the obvious: Jane had pulled him from the water, and not long ago—their clothing was still damp. Rasheed's body lay in the

shallows at the water's edge. The Warziri warrior the pirate leader had been beating lay with his dead arms entwined with his persecutor's legs—and the bullwhip which bound them together.

"Timba fought well. I will sing praises to his family." Jane stopped shaping a branch with a knife and gazed upon the black man. "We are free because of him—and the others." She firmed her lips, nodding to two dark shapes beside him. "'I found your automatics in his belt.'" Jane indicated the slaver's body.

The Phantom retrieved his pistols. The specially made automatics were waterlogged. He removed a small oilcloth from a watertight compartment behind one holster and began to clean them, field stripping first one and then the other. A small can of oil from the other holster finished the work of renewing the guns.

Jane had set a trap for food as she waited for the Phantom to wake. A startled squeal from the brush indicated they were the possessors of a small pig.

The Phantom made a fire. Jane, richer by the slaver's knife, efficiently butchered the pig.

"Interesting costume, Mr. Walker."

He could not deny it, after all, he had shed the disguise in the river—but he belatedly realized he had revealed himself with the pistols. She sensed his thoughts.

"Your secret is safe with me," she said. "I know who you are."

The Phantom narrowed his eyes behind the diamond mask, searching for a joke, but saw she was deadly serious.

"In my line of work, if I am to have a family life I—"

Jane raised a hand, brushing his explanation aside. "I often wish Elmo had a secret identity. It would make life so much easier... then again, there are benefits to being the wife of an English lord and what that position and his office can do for hundreds, or even thousands of people. There's a lump on your head. I couldn't figure out how to remove the cowl or the mask. That probably saved your life, I suspect."

Jane turned the sticks, searing the other side of the meat. "I met you nearly 45 years ago. You were so much taller then."

"Indeed," the Phantom muttered.

This woman appeared to be no older than her late twenties. "You look well for one so..." How was he to finish that sentence without offending?

Jane laughed, deep and throaty. "Why, *thank you*, Sir," humorously allowing her native American Southern drawl to emerge. "I believe you are looking for the word 'preserved'. My father was Reverend Archimedes Q. Porter of Baltimore, Maryland. He helped bring education to the Bandar Pygmy People in the Bangallan jungles."

The Phantom stared at her. His grandfather had written about Professor Porter, his wife, and an adolescent daughter who spent nearly a year in the jungle with the pygmy Bandar.

"Back then," she continued, "You looked about ten feet tall."

"I didn't feel that tall," The Phantom replied, remembering he had not been born then.

Jane turned to him and said, "You also look 'well preserved' for someone who is 400 years old."

The Phantom was silent. He recalled that his forebears had played on native superstitions to increase their fear—and respect—of The Phantom. Each son followed in his father's footsteps, donning the mask and costume at his father's death. Over twenty of his forebears were buried in the crypts beneath Skull cave. That legend of immortality had saved his life many times over.

"Good living, I suppose," he remarked. "And you, what is your story?"

"Nothing remarkable," she replied, accepting his longevity because of her own. "My famous husband is not just John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, he is also Elmo of the Apes." She leaned over and stirred the fire, adding a small bit of fuel, bringing the flames into flickering life. "Long ago—nearly

eighty years, I think—my husband and I were given some pills that were said to promote long life."

Jane's answer was a truth by omission of details: The Kavuru pills did extend life, but at a terrible cost. Young women were sacrificed by a mad society to make the pills. Elmo put an end to the filthy practice. However, Elmo, Jane, and their companions in that adventure shared the remaining pills.

"They seem to have worked." The Phantom was amazed. He knew the jungle had many secrets.

Jane continued, "I ran out of the pills long ago, but I seem just as young as when I first took them. I wonder if the effect does not need to be renewed by periodic doses—or is it that I, being a woman, gained the effects permanently? I don't know."

The Phantom had experienced many strange things in the jungle, including vastly extended lifetimes, so he let the conversation lapse.

"Well," her companion said, "What shall we do now?"

Jane's response was instant. "We seek our loved ones. Have you any idea where we are?"

"Not from here. After we climb to the top we'll have a better chance finding out where we are."

Jane handed the Phantom a stick of roasted meat and said, "Then, let us eat and sleep, then climb the cliffs."

The Phantom nodded. He sank strong teeth into the succulent meat. But before he had a chance to chew, the rains came—sudden and torrential. They gathered their meager belongings and raced for the cliffs. Jane located a shallow cave some distance above the river that protected them from the rain. The two bedraggled figures crouched on the dirt and moss-covered floor and mournfully chewed their soggy dinners.

• • • • •

James Dunnett stopped. He was lost. He hated to admit it, but there it was staring him in the face. The sun stood high

overhead, casting deep shadows under the trees, but James had no idea in which direction he was leading them.

"We need to stop, Charlie," he said. His head drooped as he leaned against one of the large trees that surrounded them his hands braced upon his knees.

"Why?" she asked sharply.

Before he had a chance to think he blurted out, "Because I'm lost."

"Lost?" she laughed. "The great African guide *is* lost?"

"No— *I'm* lost." He laughed with self-deprecation. "The great African guide is my *father*. He's forgotten more than I'll ever know. I'm a fraud. This was my first safari; I never led a Boy Scout troop—much less a full expedition. I left my compass in the tent when I ran for my life. I have no map. Then I forgot everything about jungle lore and how to survive when I saw you in trouble. You're lucky I grabbed my gun."

He looked at her bleakly. "My God, if you only knew what I thought when I saw you in his hands... as he dragged you...into the forest... Even after I rescued you I fled in fear."

Charlie turned away from the raw emotion in his voice. She did not want his love! She did not want to hear his shaken voice.

"Well, if we're going to stop," she said, "I want to have a little shelter from the storm that's coming."

Her tone broke through his depression. "How can you tell there's a storm coming?"

"I can smell the moisture in the air. Uncle John taught me."

James sniffed the air. Yes, he could smell the excess moisture. That was something his father had never told him. He also smelled the odor of a slow-moving river off to his left and said as much.

She looked around. "Where is the river?" she asked.

James pointed to his left.

"Then, let's go," she prodded.

It was not long before the weary guide noticed Charlie managed to subtly herd him toward the river. He grunted

sourly. She had known where the river was long before he had.

To be learning woodcraft at my age, he thought. And from a girl! Well, he mused, why not? After all this is her native land and she had been taught by the most expert of jungle explorers, Elmo of the Apes.

Her kindness was galling, though welcome. He could never have found the easy way through the forest primeval, although easy was not the word he would use to describe their path—the underbrush was thick and overgrown. He wondered that they made any headway through the entangled detritus.

They found a stream and drank. The water was cool because the day was overcast. They followed the flow, crossing the stream to the north side. He followed. From then on Charlie led the way. She had the grace to blush.

At last they broke cover near the edge of the river. The junction of stream and river was covered with tall reeds, many as thick as James' wrist.

Charlie set James the task of helping gather two dozen large reeds and twice that in lesser thicknesses. There was a clearing nearby but the black woman shook her head. "If it rains, the river might rise. Up there..." She pointed.

The knoll was perhaps fifteen feet higher, mostly small shrub and no trees. She helped clear the brush from a twelve foot circle then pushed the largest poles into holes she dug with James' knife. Charlie tied the tops together with strings of liana, making a low dome and began circling the uprights with reeds connected laterally, laced in and out between the poles. James got the idea in a hurry and assisted. Soon the skeleton was complete and the two companions covered the sides with bunches of long, broad leaves stripped from the surrounding bushes and overlapped to shed water. Charlie left a small hole in the center of the roof.

James gathered dead fall wood which he set just inside the door. Charlie was not there, but she had not called out and, from time to time during the construction, she had been

out of sight. He was not worried until he had a small fire burning using the matches he had taken. Just as James was about to search for her, Charlie returned from the direction of the river—with two fish strung through the gills by a knife-sharpened stick.

"Hungry?" she asked.

"Yes!"

The expected rains fell. Laughing, they tumbled through the small, low door and lay by the fire. For the most part they had wrought well. Charlie had to shift only a few leaves to shut out all of the drip. James smiled in wry humor. She was a better woodsman than he.

She scaled the fish, gutted them, then mounted each on a stick to hold over the fire. As the fish roasted, James winked. "You are quite the Girl Scout!"

"I am not a *girl!*" she retorted angrily. How dared he think of her as a *girl*? She was a woman, fully grown.

"Quite true, Charlandra," he apologized. "A Girl Scout—in America—is taught to be self-reliant and," he waved his hand to indicate their shelter, "to make camps like this one. My father always traveled with tents and bearers who carried the supplies. I never made a rough camp before. Nor traveled without a compass or a map."

Muviro's granddaughter frowned. Unlike some men he was at least *honest* about himself!

• • • • •

Elmo hurried after the stolen safari. He could smell the rain in the air and wanted to make as much headway on the trail as possible. However, his new companion was a drag on his speed. Unfortunately, Jane had taught the ape-man that men did not leave the helpless in the jungle. Although Elmo knew the safari's destination, he wanted to overtake them on the trail where stragglers were easy prey. But fate planned a different ending to this part of the chase. The rains came, but

not a steady downpour which would not have bothered Elmo at all. No, the rain was driven by a storm which lashed the trees bare of leaves and even felled mighty forest giants past their prime. Elmo had the misfortune to be passing one such as Ara, the lightning, struck. The tree fell—and Elmo fell beneath it.

Fahd, who had not quite managed to keep up with the ape-man, came upon the scene. Seeing that Elmo was trapped, Fahd took his knife in his hand and crept up on the still form under the tree—murderous intent writ plain upon his face. His arm rose and fell.



Mahmoud Singh cursed the weather. He was no nearer to the 'Lost City' than he had been three days ago. The storm kept him and his band in the tents. He was cold and miserable—and when he was miserable Mahmoud Singh took those frustrations out on his followers. By the time the storm passed the pirate leader was thoroughly enraged.

Diana Walker was saved from Mahmoud Singh's foul passion only because of her value as a slave. He intended to sell her in the slave market at Mucar for many gold pieces—or whichever currency was presently stable.

The pirate stepped out of the tent. He saw the male slaves and the former askari, who had suffered through the storm without shelter of any kind. Several were dead from exposure.

"Cut them loose and break camp," Mahmoud Singh bel-
lowed. "We will leave in an hour."

Diana raised her head as the pirate leader reentered the tent. He did not trust his men not violate her. She was much more valuable unmarked. Her arms and legs were tied because she was determined to escape and nearly succeeded one night. He had had the foresight to slip a string around her ankle after she had gone to sleep. Her stealthy move-

ments would have guaranteed her escape without that precaution which jerked him awake. Had she known about the string... ah, but she had not.

Her immediate subjugation had been swift but arduous. He had initially enjoyed her struggles against his superior strength, but tenaciously, she fought in silence with greater desperation until he finally called for help. With two other pirates he subdued and bound the wildcat in woman's form.

She lay still and silent. Mahmoud Singh was sure he had broken her spirit. Little did he know that Diana Walker was far from subdued. She bided her time, certain a chance to escape would come... or her husband would come... and then the pirate would be punished as he deserved.

The pirate cut the ropes that bound her legs and feet. "We are leaving," he said. Diana nearly cried out as sensation returned to her numb limbs.

Mahmoud Singh set two of the guards to watch her as the camp was reassembled into the boxes and cloth packs the captives, roped as they were, were forced to carry. With hands full and backs laden, they were less likely to cause trouble.

Pirates grumbled at any manual labor they had to do. It was beneath them unless it was to their profit; however few grumbled that the captives took some burdens, relieving them!

Mahmoud Singh looked at his slave chain. The Waziri men were tall, superbly muscled and strong. High prices would be offered for such as these!

The safari left decamped and followed the directions on the map. They made good time to the northeast and entered a valley. In the distance was a curiously shaped headland: Bird's Head Peak! This was near the end of their journey. Mahmoud led the way, eager to find the lost city and the treasure. His greed dulled his caution until—quite suddenly!—he saw a face peering from the trees *straight at him*.

A sepulchral voice cried, "Free your captives and turn back or face the wrath of Elmo of the Apes. This is your last warning."



After the rains stopped, Jane and the Phantom set out north for the 'Lost City'. They found their original camp and turned northeast. The Phantom now led their two-person safari. While they traveled Jane made herself a primitive bow and arrow in the manner of the Waziri. Old Muviro himself taught her how to make the bow strong and limber, the arrows straight each fletched with feathers from a small bird brought down by a well-thrown rock. She made the archery set at night when they were camped. The Phantom made a spear for each of them. Armed as they now were, they felt little fear against the beasts of the jungle. It was only man they feared.

That was the reason they hunted without the use of the Phantom's pistols. The report of the weapons would carry for miles in the humid jungle. They did not want to alert their enemies that two determined avengers pursued them.

They found a path that was extraordinarily wide. Knowing their prey must be several days ahead of them, the two companions were not as alert as they should have been. Nature has a way of tricking the unwary and so it was this time.

A rutting boar burst from the brush at the side of the path. Horta turned an ugly tusk-armed head towards the pair. Beady, blood-red eyes focused on them and charged without warning. Only the fact that the two humans jumped away from each other saved them. The confused boar could not choose which to charge and thus passed between them.

The Phantom turned as swiftly as the boar and was ready as the animal charged again. His spear took the boar in the chest, but the impetus of the raging porker threw the Phantom from his feet as the animal slid down the shaft towards the helpless man.

Jane stood to the side and calmly sped two arrows into the side of the boar. Which weapon, spear or arrow, pierced the beast's heart did not matter. The animal lay dead on the

ground before them. The awful tusks resting no more than a finger's width from the Phantom's hand.

The two spared no thought for the danger they had met. Death was a constant companion in the jungle. Dinner was before them and they took it. Jane sliced off choice cuts of meat while the Phantom rigged up a carrier for the extra meat which they would smoke that night.

They continued on until they reached the bridge, crossing over carefully. Memories of their earlier attempt at crossing the gorge made this one fraught with danger.

The Phantom paused on the other side and consulted his memory of his grandfather's chronicles. His grandfather had not been a cartographer; he had been more of a storyteller. His description was strong but his directions were vague. And so, the Phantom took the wrong path, following the slavers toward Mucar.



Charlie snuggled deeper into the soft and warm cushion under her head. Sleep had come hard after a long, restless night. She wondered at the cold on her back as she nestled into the warmth. Lazily she opened her eyes and saw a beard-stubbed chin.

James kept very still. He lay on his back with Charlie beside him, her arm thrown over his chest and her leg curled up between his knees. He had awakened to the feeling of blessed warmth on his chest and right side. It was Charlie, no, Charandra. She preferred her full name—Charandra. He should have awakened her, but the warmth of her against his skin had sapped his resolve. He had lain with arms outstretched, so as not to touch her, but it had been a pleasant agony to mentally explore—and fully admit—his feelings for the Chief's granddaughter. He was not sure just when he had fallen in love with her. He had been attracted to her from the first—at the college mixer—but his desire to make her his personal goddess came sometime later.

Charlie shrieked and rolled away. "What are you doing, Mr. Dunnett?" She sat erect, drawing away, indignant with rage. "*What are you doing in my bed?*"

"Charlandra— *I am in my bed.*"

Charlie looked around. Her bed was on the other side of the shelter. The fire was out. The cool night air made her shiver. Or was it the air? Somehow she had crawled across the hut and sought the warmth of his body in the night. She blushed. What had possessed her? What attracted her to him—even though he was rough and uncouth?

"What are we going to do, Charlandra?" James asked, raising himself to one elbow.

Charlie noted that James had begun to use her full name. For some reason that bothered her. He was quieter, more subdued. He watched her intensely, but without the insouciance of former times. He studied her every move. He imitated what she did. He had made a spear just from watching her.

"What do you mean?" she inquired suspiciously. Visions of his arms tightening around her danced in her head.

"We're lost in the jungle. We don't know where our friends are. Diana is dead. We have only so much ammunition. You're wearing nothing but a t-shirt and a loin cloth made of silk." He stuttered to a halt, his face red as an apple. Charlie thought his embarrassment cute. "I'm sorry. What I meant was that we are ill-equipped to go anywhere or do anything."

"Nonsense," she replied. She hefted her spear. "We are well-armed, both of us. You did well with your spear. It is as good as any made by my father, Basuli. I also know how to find out where we are. We just follow the river upstream until we come across the rope bridge. From there we can find the 'Lost City'."

"How?"

"You forget, James," she said. "My graduate thesis was on the Kidnapped Princess and on the journeys she made. I have practically memorized the entire journal. She wrote the last half in a sort of code which I can decipher. It is based on a

local dialect which very few people can understand. I know all her secrets. I can follow where she has gone."

"Do we really want to?"

"Having come this close, I *must* see the legendary 'Lost City'."

James nodded. Where she went, he would follow.

• • • • •

Fahd was so certain that the ape-man was unconscious and trapped beneath the tree that he grew careless and stupid. He approached the fallen man from the front. Mahmoud Singh wanted this man dead. After slaying the Phantom, killing this man should be easy.

Elmo, neither unconscious nor trapped, watched through slit-eyes as the murderer approached.

His assailant's hand rose and fell, but the blade did not encounter yielding flesh. The ape-man twisted on the ground and his iron hands grasped both the pirate's wrist and his windpipe. Both hands squeezed until the knife dropped and the neck broke. Fahd had no time to regret his attempted murder.

Elmo crawled out from under the fork in the branch which had saved him. The dead body was of no import to the ape-man, but his knife was. Searching the clothes for more information, Elmo found a letter in an oiled leather case. Elmo removed the belt from the other's waist. The belt fit the ape-man's lean waist but only in the last hole. Elmo sheathed the knife which had so nearly taken his life. He had need for it. Fahd's clothes were too small to fit Elmo's giant frame, even if they had not been ragged tatters.

Elmo moved off into the jungle, away from the body which would attract the carrion eaters. Elmo did not fear the beasts, but he also did not want to deal with them either. The dead man was not his food, but theirs.

Elmo found another place to wait out the storm. While he waited for the winds and rain to subside, he made a bow and a dozen arrows.

When the storm passed Elmo took to the trees. A few hours later he emerged into the valley of the 'Lost City'. He soon came upon the slow moving safari.

Elmo carefully surveyed the ragged column of men. He saw Diana Walker, her hands tied, with a rope that led from her neck to the hand of the man he knew as Ian Hunter.

One of the pirates lagged behind the safari. He had stopped to relieve himself. Though the man was in sight of the safari, none saw a loop of rope encircle his neck, or heard the dropped Kalashnikov, or noticed his feet disappearing into the leaves above the trail. Nor was the dead body observed when it hit the ground a moment later, with a broken neck. It was rare that Elmo missed in his aim; he had wanted to question the pirate, but the pirate's struggles had broken his neck.

Quietly, like the beast he was, Elmo circled the safari. He did not see James Dunnett nor did he see Charlandra Muviro. He wondered where they were, but they were not his priority right now. He wanted the release of Mrs. Walker.

As he circled the safari, Elmo slew three more pirates from ambush. He dropped on them from the trees and sank Fahd's knife deep into their hearts while his other hand choked off their screams. He felt no pity for the murderers.

Elmo placed himself on a branch directly in the path of the oncoming safari. He rose to his feet, showing his face through a hole in the leaves. He noted with satisfaction the sudden recognition and fear in the eyes of the leader.

Elmo's sepulchral voice cried, "Free your captives and turn back or face the wrath of Elmo of the Apes. This is your last warning."

Waiting but a moment for the effect to register, the ape-man leaped to one side just before the pirates sent a volley of automatic fire into the tree. Leaves fluttered down as the screams of monkeys fled from the thunder.

Mahmoud Singh stood stunned. How could the Englishman be alive? *Surely, the lion must have eaten him.*

Elmo's voice rang out again. "Free your captives and turn back." A swift arrow followed the echoes, and one pirate dropped his assault rifle and clutched at his throat. He fell, dead from the moment the arrow entered his carotid artery. Even without the poisoned arrows he was used to using, Elmo was a deadly marksman. He rarely missed, with any weapon, although he thought the gun to be an abomination.

"Turn back," the ape-man cried and shot another pirate. The men milled about, some throwing bursts of wild shots into the trees. Another pirate died. Then another. Elmo targeted only the men with the Kalashnikovs.

At this rate all of his men would be dead! Mahmoud ordered those pirates nearby to point their rifles at Diana.

"Shoot again, ape-man, *and she dies!*"

• • • • •

The Phantom and Jane swiftly overtook the slavers. They were afraid they would have to wait for a chance to free the captives, but the first night showed the slavers were too arrogant and foolish to hold onto their prey. The slavers had stacked their guns next to their sleeping blankets. The Phantom saw only one guard. He outlined his plan to Jane. She agreed. The Phantom slid away into the darkness.

This part of the plan was fraught with danger. If Jane's arrow was to miss killing the guard and he should sound an alarm, the rescue would end in horrible failure. Jane dried her sweaty palm on her thigh. She raised the bow, drawing the arrow to her cheek. She held the arrow until its point steadied on his throat. She drew a deep breath and let it out gradually until she slowly rolled the string off her fingers. The arrow flew with a whispered *whoosh* and buried itself in the guard's throat, killing him instantly. He fell with a small gurgle that blended with the night time sounds. Jane stared at the body. As necessary as his death was to the saving of the Waziri, she still could not help but regret his death.

The Phantom crept into the middle of the sleeping slavers, wrapping a loop of twine about each of the three stacks of rifles. The shadow clad in grey crept through the camp, edging to the sleeping captives.

One of the slavers shifted in his sleep. The Phantom held still a moment to be sure the man slept again. He started on but the man suddenly sat up with a gasp. The gasp turned into a gurgling death rattle as Jane sent an arrow into his throat. The Phantom paused to look back to where Jane stood. He could see nothing. *Good. She was hidden.*

Jane nocked another arrow to her bow. Five more arrows stood point down in the dirt in front of her. Another waking slaver received swift and silent justice from Jane's bow. The strain of holding an arrow at full draw showed in her shaking hands. She eased up, resting her arms. She kept track of the Phantom's movement through the camp, but did not neglect the rest of the slavers. Another man shifted. Quick as Ara, the lightning, she drew and shot. The slaver sank down. Jane did not know how long she could stand the strain of waiting and killing.

The Phantom slithered amongst the captives, silently waking each of them. His knife sliced through the ropes about their hands and necks. He motioned for the Waziri to surround the slavers. The Phantom rose to his feet, shouting, "Now!" At his command Jane shot her three remaining arrows and the Waziri rose against the slavers.

The confused slavers woke from a deep sleep and grabbed for their guns, only to find them roped together and unusable. They jerked mightily at the rifles, pulling each other off balance. The captives fell on the pirates, rending knives and pistols from the confused slavers and turned the weapons on their erstwhile captors. The slavers died almost before they were awake.

The Phantom crossed to where Jane stood gripping her bow with white knuckles. "It is done."

Jane nodded. "I don't like killing. I don't like it at all. But sometimes—this time—it needed to be done."

The Phantom looked down upon that riot of blond hair under the African moon and marveled. "Men are *brutes*," he said. "Women are *why*—if that makes any sense."

Jane slapped him. "You and my husband! Damn you!" She leaned into his strength, letting the tension ease from her body. The Phantom stood silent as she wept silently for the Waziri dead; yet, she had killed pirates without mercy, without remorse. Even now she felt nothing for those evil men.

The Waziri policed the camp, seeing nothing.

Lady Greystoke controlled herself. "We need to find our spouses! I—I—"

"Do not apologise. My wife has done the same—a most endearing trait. It means she cares."

Discovering the captives were their own safari, Jane and the Phantom raced back towards the bridge. This time they found the right trail. They came upon the tableau in the forest. Quickly they surrounded the pirates. The Waziri porters, their captors all engrossed in the scene before them, struggled to free themselves. The Phantom swept in and cut their bonds, cautioning them to silence. Silently, the porters escaped, arming themselves with weapons provided by their brother Waziri, weapons brought from the slaver's camp or picked up on the trail from beside Elmo's victims.

The Waziri warriors crept up on the pirates. Elmo, high in the trees, saw the rescue party approach. The men readied themselves to attack. They awaited the Phantom's signal.

Elmo sought to keep the pirate's attention centered on himself. "If she dies, Hunter, you die," he cried.

"I'm not leaving without the treasure. Come down or I will carve her face into ribbons." Mahmoud Singh's voice was filled with greed and rage, and a trace of hysteria. Spittle fairly flew from his lips as he gesticulated wildly. Mahmoud Singh raised his knife to Diana's cheek.

The scene held in montage for a frozen moment. Mahmoud Singh's eyes grew more crazed. His well-laid plans were falling apart—but he would have his revenge on the ape-man

by mutilating the woman's face. Too bad it was not the hated ape-man's wife! But this woman would do. Mahmoud Singh raised the knife to drag the keen blade across Diana Walker's unblemished cheek.

At that moment many things occurred at once. The Phantom cried, "*Down, Diana!*"

Hearing her beloved's voice, Diana swiftly dropped to the ground, then kicked Hunter in the groin with all her strength.

Elmo shot Hunter. The Phantom shot Hunter. Jane shot Hunter. A number of Waziri shot Hunter. No one would ever know who killed Hunter/Mahmoud Singh, but killed he was. Jungle justice is swift and deadly.

Diana lay motionless as a sudden melee swirled above her prostrate form. Bound, she had done all she could.

The rescue party fell upon the pirates surrounding Diana. Savage war cries mixed with discharged firearms. Men died. The pirates, who once all faced toward Diana, had no defense against the furious avengers. Many scores, old and of long duration, were settled on the battlefield that day.

Ignoring the carnage around him, the Phantom raced to his wife. His strong hands made short work of removing her bonds.

She threw herself into his arms. "I just *knew* you would come! Hunter was a Singh pirate and after a treasure hidden in these mountains."

The Phantom looked at the body at his feet. "He will gather no treasure ever again—Mrs. Walker." Diana understood his meaning and stepped back, thanking him again.

Elmo dropped from the trees and folded his mate into his arms. "Nice shooting," he kissed her cheek. Jane punched him, then kissed him soundly. Happy tears flowed from her eyes.

Further discussion was set aside as the aftermath of the battle intruded. A number of Waziri were wounded, surprisingly few had perished. Jane established a rude infirmary. The

injured, both native and pirate, were carried there. She and Diana performed rough first aid.

Elmo split the remaining warriors into groups to set up tents, establish a perimeter guard, and police the bodies—burying them away from the camp. Soon, fires blazed and succulent foods were served to the delight of all.

Later, the two couples gathered around one of the fires. Elmo wore a pair of pants taken from one of the dead pirates. Other than that he still wore nothing. The gesture of modesty was for Mrs. Walker, as Jane knew her husband had no tabu regarding nudity. He did this out of courtesy, "After all," he winked, "my other leopard loincloth is neatly folded in the dresser drawer back home."

Lord Greystoke then turned to his wife. "Jane, what are you doing here?"

Jane thrust her chin out. "Did you think I would just sit barefoot in the kitchen waiting for my lord and master to return from his pleasures?"

"This was no pleasure trip."

"I know. The Phantom came to warn you and Mrs. Walker that a devilish trick had been played. The accusations of abuse were just a ruse to seek a treasure in the 'Lost City'."

"I knew that."

"Yes, Muviro told me." Jane smiled coyly. "But, did you know that a hundred Singh pirates were following you with the intent to steal the treasure from you, if you found it?"

"No, I did not." Elmo shook his head in admiration of his mate's courage, then laughed heartily, "There is no treasure."

Suddenly a low pitched voice from the darkness said, "*That's where you're wrong.*"

• • • • •

Charlie and James followed the river, keeping to the highlands. Some hours later they crossed the rope bridge. Charlie pointed the way and they sprang forward. Their pas-

sage was swift. Both were young and strong. James had no trouble keeping up with Charlie, and she admired his strength and stamina—but neither complimented the other on their abilities. In fact, they rarely spoke at all.

The path before them was broad and well-defined by the passage of two separate safaris. Both had passed a short time earlier. By jungle standards the safari track was a super highway: it was wide enough for three men to walk beside each other.

At a clearing, James glanced to the sky. Night would fall soon. They debated stopping, but then smelled cooking fires.

By mutual consent they used a slow approach. They did not want to alert the pirates, if such they were. Charlie heard the murmur of voices and recognized the familiar voice of her godfather. She rose as he said, "There is no treasure."

She announced their presence by saying, "That's where you're wrong."

The whites spun quickly at the sound of her voice. Two ragged wanderers—armed with spears and guns—entered the campfire's light.

The Waziri, seeing the granddaughter of their chief, set up a rousing cheer to celebrate her arrival. *She was alive!* Impromptu dance and chanting broke out. Charlie raised herself up, displaying her spear overhead. For a moment she looked every inch a royal jungle princess.

James received an overwhelming enlightenment in that instant. *A gal like this could never be interested in a guy like him.*

The whites saw what looked to be two ghosts. James' pants were stained and torn in places; his torso browned by exposure. Charlie stood in her ragged t-shirt and gun belt. The collar of the t-shirt slipped off one shoulder. Both articles of clothing were much the worse for wear although the gun belt was intact and serviceable. The t-shirt, however, was rent in several places exposing dark skin to the horrified eyes of the women.

Jane and Diana both rose at the sight of Charlie's clothes. Before the men had a chance to react, the two ma-

trons swept Muviro's granddaughter into a tent. Some moments later they called for hot water and towels. Diana raced out of the tent and came back in minutes with clean clothes bundled in her arms.

James, glad of the hot coffee in his hands, related their adventures from the attack on the camp, leaving out his embarrassment at finding Charlie nearly naked in the forest and of learning how to build a waterproof hut out of reeds and leaves and of waking with her in his bed and of her schooling him how to survive like a native and how much he loved her. All in all, James had very little to say and was soon finished.

All eyes turned as Charlandra Muviro, escorted by Jane and Diana, freshly scrubbed and dressed in khaki shorts and shirt, returned to the fire.

James Dunnett moved aside so the women could be seated. He noted the adoration on the dark faces of the Waziri. He noted her ease with Lord and Lady Greystoke. There she sat with a U.N. administrator and the Phantom! *She really was royalty!*

—And he was a poor boy from Mesquite, Texas. What place had he among such legends and notables? *None.*

Dunnett wasn't missed as he backed into the shadows. He grabbed a towel and basin of hot water. One of the Waziri handed him his kit and James drew a razor over his chin and washed up. Though his body was refreshed and his clothes were clean, there was nothing he could do for a broken heart.

Charlie had watched James slip away, but she couldn't follow him—her grandfather's warriors crowded around and refused to allow her leave. She did not have the heart to deny them the celebration they craved. They had suffered too much. This celebration was the reward for their loyalty.

The revels lasted into the night. James Dunnett listened from his tent, happy she was safe and with her people—if not with him.

• • • • •

The next day Elmo led them to the 'Lost City', which wasn't much, and warned them about the waterhole with the carved face peeking out of the trees.

"No more than 300 people—at best—could have lived here." *This is no Opar*, he thought, *brimming with treasure and peril of life and limb*.

The Phantom knelt by the stream and examined the carved face. "They must have left when the water supply became contaminated." *Did my grandfather poison the spring? Did he divert the water flow?*

Diana gasped, "This is no more than the ruins of a... a village that must have been abandoned decades ago. So many have been sacrificed for this?" *More had died getting here than ever lived in the lost city*.

"No trace of the race or the history of the inhabitants has survived the dissolution of the settlement," Elmo said. *The jungle keeps its secrets close*.

"But, where is the treasure, Charlandra?" James asked.

Fed up with his recently acquired meekness, Charlie turned on him. *"Don't call me Charlandra!"*

James Dunnett, now truly confused, lowered his head. "Sorry, Ms. Muviro."

"And don't call me that either!" She stamped her foot. "Call me Charlie!" She threw herself into his arms. "Grandfather was right. You *need* someone to look after you!" When she had come to love him she did not know. But she did.

After a suitable cuddle and kiss, Charlie and James separated. "As for the answer to your question..." she continued.

"What question?" James tried to orient himself in this wonderful new world he inhabited.

Charlie scowled for a moment then, realizing his confusion was real, kissed him on the nose. "The treasure is over here," Charlie skipped away, dragging James by the hand. The others followed. Charlie showed them the 'Golden Treasure'. She waved a shapely arm at the field of golden blossoms.

"The *flowers* are the treasure. The Kidnapped Princess, educated as a botanist and familiar with native cures, discovered a rare flower that has certain medicinal purposes. She harvested seeds from the flowers and took them with her when she left. She experimented with the seeds in America while she trained in medicine. She made a second journey to retrieve more seeds. This time she kept the journal in a code she invented. Just before she died she gave the key code to me—possibly because I was the only one who believed her."

Charlie caressed one of the dark-yellow blossoms and continued in a softer voice. "She planted the seeds in Mawitaan upon her return—where these flowers now grow in abundance. It is the national flower of Bangalla."

"*Udara gold—Udara's treasure!*" The Phantom whispered.

"Yes!" Charlie said. "Some, but not many, remember her name, achievements, education, and self-less dedication. Most just remember her title and the Legend of the Kidnapped Princess. But, she was a real woman."

The next morning Elmo and Jane set out for home. The Waziri marched the few remaining pirates to the authorities. The Phantom had disappeared during the night.

Mrs. Walker said, "I think the Phantom went in search of my husband." She did not mention handing her darling Kit the clothes and sunglasses he needed to "find" Kit Walker.

While they waited for Walker's return, Charlie snapped photographs of the valley, the flowers, the poisoned stream and the terrifying face in the trees. James followed her around, drawing maps, holding cameras, admiring Charlie. This time, she determined, there would be pictures, maps, samples—everything needed to prove the legend was true.

The next morning Kit Walker was discovered sipping coffee beside the fire. Diana hugged her beloved. With very studied nonchalance Kit drawled:

"Some very nice chap, dressed all in grey, practically dragged me here. Said some charming ladies needed my assistance."

Thus Kit and Diana Walker, with Charlandra Muviro and James Dunnett, traveled in company to Bangalla.

Ever the historian, Charlie had a new Post-Graduate thesis to write: *Udara and the Golden Treasure, the true story of the Kidnapped Princess*.

James vowed to help do the research.

The End