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With a single bound the creature was upon him. The man shrieked. The brute wrenched him from the body of the boy. Great fingers sank into his flesh. Yellow fangs gasped close to his throat—he struggled futilely—and then they closed, and the soul of Alexis Paulvitch passed into the keeping of the demons who had long been awaiting it.

The boy struggled to his feet, assisted by Akut. For two hours, under his instructions, the ape worked upon the knots that secured his friend's wrists. Finally they gave up their secret, and the boy was free.

He cut the cord that still dangled from the ape's body. Then he opened one of his bags and drew forth some garments.

His plans had been well made. He did not consult the beast, which did all that he directed. Together they slunk from the house, but no casual observer might have noted that one of them was an ape.

primeval savagery, harmonizing with the background of tropical jungle and accentuating the squalid hideousness of the white man's pioneer architecture.

The boy, leaning over the rail, was looking far beyond the man-made town, deep into the God-made jungle. A little shiver of anticipation tingled his spine, and then, quite without volition, he found himself mentally gazing into the loving eyes of his mother and the strong face of the father which mirrored beneath its masculine strength a love no less than the mother's eyes proclaimed. He felt himself weakened in his resolve.

The task of lowering the boy's grandmother over the side to a waiting canoe was rather difficult. The lad insisted on being always at her side, and when at last she was safely ensconced in the bottom of the craft that was to bear them shoreward her grandson dropped catlike after her.

So interested was he in seeing her comfortably disposed that he failed to observe the little package that had worked from his pocket as he assisted in lowering the sling that contained the old woman over the steamer's side, nor did he notice it even as it slipped out entirely and dropped into the sea.

Scarcely had the boat containing the boy and the old woman started for the shore than Conlon hailed a canoe on the other side of the ship and after bargaining with its owner finally lowered his baggage and himself aboard. Once ashore he kept out of sight of the two story atrocity that bore the legend "hotel" to lure unsuspecting wayfarers to its many discomforts.

It was quite dark before he ventured to enter and arrange for accommodations.

In a back room upon the second floor the lad was explaining not without considerable difficulty to his grandmother that he had decided to return to England upon the next steamer. He was endeavoring to make it plain to the old lady that she might remain in Africa if she wished, but that for his part his conscience demanded that he return to his father and mother, who doubtless were even now suffering untold sorrow because of his absence, from which it may be assumed that his parents had not been acquainted with the plans that he and the old lady had made for their adventure into African wilds.

Having come to a decision, the lad felt a sense of relief from the worry that had haunted him for many sleepless nights. When he closed his eyes in sleep it was to dream of a happy reunion with those at home, and as he dreamed, Fate, cruel and inexorable, crept stealthily upon him through the dark corridor of the squalid building in which he slept—Fate in the form of the American crook Conlon.

Cautiously the man approached the door of the lad's room. There he crouched, listening, until assured by the regular breathing of those within that both slept.

Quietly he inserted a slim skeleton key in the lock of the door. With deft fingers, long accustomed to the silent manipulation of the bars and bolts that guarded other men's property, Conlon turned the key and the knob simultaneously. Gentle pressure upon the door swung it slowly inward upon its hinges. The man entered the room, closing the door behind him.

The moon was temporarily overcast by heavy clouds. The interior of the apartment was shrouded in gloom. Conlon groped his way toward the bed.

In the far corner of the room something moved—moved with a silent stealthiness which transcended even the trained silence of the burglar. Conlon heard nothing. His attention was riveted upon the bed, in which he thought to find a young boy and his helpless, invalid grandmother.

The American sought only the bankroll. If he could possess himself of this without detection, well and good, but were he to meet resistance he was prepared for that too. The lad's clothes lay across a chair beside the bed.

The American's fingers felt swiftly through them—the pockets contained no roll of crisp, new notes. Doubtless they were beneath the pillows of the bed.

He stepped closer toward the sleeper; his hand was already halfway beneath the pillow when the thick cloud that had obscured the moon rolled aside and the room was flooded with light. At the same instant the boy opened his eyes and looked straight into those of Conlon. The man was suddenly conscious that the boy was alone in the bed. Then he clutched for his victim's throat.

As the lad rose to meet him Conlon heard a low growl at his back, then he felt his wrists seized by the boy and realized that beneath those tapering white fingers played muscles of steel. He felt other hands at his throat,

rough, hairy hands that reached over his shoulders from behind. He cast a terrified glance backward, and the hairs of his head stiffened at the sight his eyes revealed, for grasping him from the rear was a huge, manlike ape.

The bared fighting fangs of the anthropoid were close to his throat. The lad pinioned his wrists. Neither uttered a sound.

Where was the grandmother? Conlon's eyes swept the room in a single, all inclusive glance. His eyes bulged in horror at the realization of the truth which that glance revealed. In the power of what creatures of hideous mystery had he placed himself?

Frantically he fought to beat off the boy so he could turn upon the fearsome thing at his back. Freeing one hand, he struck a savage blow at the lad's face.

His act seemed to unloose a thousand devils in the hairy creature, clinging to his throat. Conlon heard a low and savage snarl. It was the last thing that the American ever heard in this life. Then he was dragged backward upon the floor, a heavy body fell upon him, powerful teeth fastened themselves in his jugular, his head whirled in the sudden blackness which rims eternity.

A moment later the ape rose from his prostrate form. But Conlon did not know—he was quite dead.

The lad, horrified, sprang from the bed to lean low over the body of the man. He knew Akut had killed him in his defense, as he had killed Paulvitch. But here in savage Africa, far from home and friends, what would they do to him and his faithful ape?

The lad knew that the penalty of murder was death. He even knew that an accomplice might suffer the death penalty with the principal. Who was there here who would plead for them? All would be against them. It was little more than a half civilized community, and the chances were that they would drag Akut and him forth in the morning and hang them both to the nearest tree. He had read of such things being done in America, and Africa was worse even and wilder than the great west of his mother's native land.

Yes, they would both be hanged in the morning.

Last evening he had been determined to start for home at the first opportunity to beg the forgiveness of his parents for this mad adventure. Now he knew that he might never return to them. The blood of a fellow man was upon his hands. In his morbid reflection he had long since ceased to attribute the death of Conlon to the ape. The hysteria of panic had fastened the guilt upon himself.

Now he turned toward Akut.

"Come!" he said in the language of the great apes. Forgetful of the act that he wore only a thin pajama suit, he led the way to the open window. Thrusting his head out, he listened attentively. A single tree grew a few feet from the window.

Nimble the lad sprang to its bole, clinging catlike for an instant before he clambered quietly to the ground below. Close behind him came the great ape. Two hundred yards away a spur of the jungle ran close to the straggling town. Toward this the lad led the way.

No one saw them, and a moment later the jungle swallowed them, and John Clayton, future Lord Greytoke, passed from the eyes and the knowledge of men.

It was late the following morning that a native house man knocked upon the door of the room that had been assigned to Mrs. Billings and her grandson. Receiving no response, he inserted his pass key in the lock, only to discover that another key was already there, but from the inside.

He reported the fact to Herr Skopf, the proprietor, who at once made his way to the second floor, where he, too, pounded vigorously upon the door. Receiving no reply, he bent to the keyhole in an attempt to look through into the room beyond. In so doing, being portly, he lost his balance, which necessitated putting a palm to the floor to maintain his equilibrium.

As he did so he felt something soft and thick and wet beneath his fingers. He raised his open palm before his eyes in the dim light of the corridor and peered at it. Then he shuddered, for even in the semidarkness he saw a dark red stain upon his hand.

Leaping to his feet, he hurled his shoulder against the door. Herr Skopf was a heavy man. The frail door collapsed beneath his weight, and Herr Skopf stumbled precipitately into the room.

Before him lay the greatest mystery of his life. Upon the floor at his feet was the dead body of a strange man. The neck was broken and the jugular severed as by the fangs of a wild beast. The old lady and her grandson were gone. The window was open. They must have disappeared through the window, for the door had been locked from the inside.

But how could the boy have carried his invalid grandmother from a second story window to the ground? It was preposterous. Again Herr Skopf searched the small room. He noticed that the bed was pulled well away from the wall. Why? He looked beneath it again for the third or fourth time. The two were gone, and yet his judgment told him that the old lady could not have gone without porters to carry her down as they had carried her up the previous day.

Further search but deepened the mystery. All the clothing of the two was still in the room. If they had gone they they must have gone naked or in their night clothes.

No boat had left the harbor in the meantime. There was not a railroad within hundreds of miles. There was

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CHAPTER IV.
Herr Skopf's Mystery.

The killing of the friendless old Russian by his great trained ape was a matter for newspaper comment for a few days. Lord Greytoke read of it and, while taking special precautions not to permit his name to become connected with the affair, kept himself well posted as to the police search for the anthropoid.

As was true of the general public, his chief interest in the matter centered about the mysterious disappearance of the slayer, or at least this was true until he learned several days subsequent to the tragedy that his son Jack had not reported at the boarding school, en route for which they had seen him safely ensconced in a railway carriage.

Even then the father did not connect the disappearance of his son with the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of the ape, nor was it until a month later that careful investigation revealed the fact that the boy had left the train before it pulled out of the station at London and the cab driver had been found who had driven him to the address of the old Russian that Tarzan of the Apes realized that Akut had in some way been connected with the disappearance of the boy.

Beyond the moment that the cab driver had deposited his fare beside the curb in front of the house in which the Russian had been quartered there was no clue. No one had seen either the boy or the ape from that instant, at least no one who still lived. The proprietor of the house identified the picture of the lad as that of one who had been a frequent visitor in the room of the old man. Aside from this he knew nothing.

And there at the door of a grimy old building in the slums of London the searchers came to a blank wall—baffled.

The day following the death of Alexis Paulvitch a youth accompanying his invalid grandmother boarded a steamer at Dover. The old lady was heavily veiled and so weakened by age and sickness that she had to be wheeled aboard the vessel in an invalid chair.

The boy would permit no one but himself to wheel her and with his own hands assisted her from the chair to the interior of their stateroom—and that was the last that was seen of the old lady by the ship's company until the pair disembarked. The boy even insisted upon doing the work of their cabin steward, since, as he explained, his grandmother was suffering from a nervous indisposition that made the presence of strangers extremely distasteful to her.

Among the passengers there was an American named Conlon, a blackleg and a crook, who was "wanted" in half a dozen of the larger cities of the United States. He had paid little attention to the boy until on one occasion he had seen him accidentally display a roll of banknotes. From then on Conlon cultivated the youthful Briton.

He learned easily enough that the boy was traveling alone with his invalid grandmother and that their destination was a small port on the west coast of Africa, a little below the equator; that their name was Billings and that they had no friends in the little settlement for which they were bound. Upon the point of their purpose in visiting the place, Conlon found the boy reticent, and so he did not push the matter—he had learned all that he cared to know as it was.

At last came the day that the steamer dropped anchor in the lee of a wooded promontory, where a score or more of sheet iron stacks, making an unsightly blot upon the fair face of nature, proclaimed the fact that civilization had set its heel. Straggling upon the outskirts were the thatched huts of natives, picturesque in their

Before Him Lay the Greatest Mystery of His Life.

no other white settlement that the two could reach under several days of arduous marching, accompanied by a well equipped safari. They had simply vanished into thin air, for the native he had sent to inspect the ground beneath the open window had just returned to report that there was no sign of a footstep there, and what sort of creatures were they who could have dropped that distance to the soft turf without leaving spoor?

Herr Skopf shuddered. Yes, it was a great mystery. There was something uncanny about the whole thing. He hated to think about it, and he dreaded the coming of night.

It was a great mystery to Herr Skopf and doubtless still is.

(Continued next week.)



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